Journal of Humanities and Cultural Studies
ISSN: 3080-986X (Print), ISSN: 3080-9878 (Online) | Vol. 2, No. 3, 2026

Exploration of Aesthetics of Violence in Cross-media Works within the Context of Visual Culture

Runze Zhang

School of Art, University of Edinburgh, Scotland EH3 9DF, United Kingdom

Abstract: Nowadays, people primarily obtain information through images rather than text. Visual culture is increasingly shaping how we perceive the world. Aesthetic violence first emerged in film and television production. Later, as media environments evolved, it gradually spread into animation, online games, and short videos. With the breakdown of boundaries between different media, the ways in which aesthetic violence tells stories, expresses emotions, and spreads have undergone significant changes. Drawing on visual culture theory, this article reviews relevant literature and analyzes specific works to explore what aesthetic violence looks like across media platforms, how it translates between different forms, and discusses its aesthetic value and communication challenges-offering insights on how violent elements can be used more artistically.

Keywords: Visual culture, cross-media communication, violence aesthetics, visual narrative, aesthetic alienation.

1. Introduction

In this era, the rise of visual culture is one of the greatest cultural changes. Images have gradually pushed out text, and people mainly rely on looking at pictures to perceive the world and search for information. In this broader context, the early violent aesthetics that emerged from film and television production also expanded their territory in response to the changes in the media environment. From the earliest gangster films and action movies to later animations, games, and short videos, the forms of violent aesthetics have become increasingly diverse, and the number of people watching them has also grown.

Cross-media dissemination has opened up new avenues for violent aesthetics, but it has also brought about many problems. Violent scenes are fragmented and spread everywhere, and people only seek sensory stimulation [1]. The original artistic connotations and humanistic values of violent aesthetics can easily be eroded. There are many academic articles discussing violent aesthetics, but most focus on the analysis of texts in a single medium. From a cross-media perspective, a systematic review of what it looks like, its aesthetic value, and its potential risks in dissemination is currently rare.

This article, from the perspective of visual culture, sorts out the literature and analyzes the works, aiming to clarify the following questions: In the cross-media environment, what has violent aesthetics become? How is it translated and adapted between different media? Where is its aesthetic value mainly located? And what are the potential risks? Discussing these issues can not only deepen our understanding of the theory of violent aesthetics, but also provide some references for literary creation and media governance [2].

2. The Core Connotations of Visual Culture and Cross-media Violent Aesthetics

For the audience to still find beauty in scenes of violent conflicts, it is crucial that the formal language filters and transforms the raw intensity of violence. The creator uses artistic means such as composition, lighting, color, and music to transform the originally rough confrontation scenes into aesthetic objects that can be appreciated. This transformation is the fundamental difference between violent aesthetics and simply showing violence. Nowadays, society is filled with visual symbols, and technological progress is constantly changing the way people perceive things. Looking at pictures is even more important than reading texts. In this aesthetic environment, violent aesthetics gradually developed its own unique aesthetic form [3].

How violent aesthetics develops and changes is always tied to the changes in the media environment. When there were fewer media types, it mainly created and disseminated in the field of film and television, and the ways of storytelling and camera language were relatively fixed, with limited creative space. With media convergence, this situation was broken. The boundaries between literature, film, animation, games, and short videos became increasingly blurred, and copying each other became the norm. The overall environment of visual creation also changed a lot. Traditional media showed violence by telling linearly chronological stories, and the audience could only passively watch. Cross-media creation combined the advantages of different media to develop various aesthetic forms such as immersive, participatory, and fragmented. During this process, the artistic spirit of violent aesthetics was retained, while also constantly adapting to new communication scenarios [4]. The basic pattern of modern visual expression was gradually formed in this way.

3. The Visual Presentation Characteristics of the Violent Aesthetics in Cross-media Works

3.1. Formal Deconstruction: Weaken the Brutality, Enhance the Visual Texture

In cross-media creation, the artistic quality of conflict scenes is increasingly valued. Quentin Tarantino's "Kill Bill" is a typical example. The film uses high saturation colors, symmetrical composition, and precise editing rhythm to elevate the violent scenes in the revenge story from being a narrative accessory to an independent artistic object with visual aesthetic value. Behind this, the creators consciously weakened the bloody and brutal nature of violence and

strengthened the formal beauty of the images [5]. Unlike the Hollywood style, Chinese animation and games took a different path. They drew materials from Eastern aesthetic traditions, used freehand camera language to smooth out the sharpness of violence, and incorporated the ink-wash artistic conception into the action design, making the confrontation scenes both have a ritualistic sense and aesthetic appeal. These two approaches may seem different on the surface, but the underlying logic is the same - they both remove the realistic destructive nature of violence and allow the audience to focus on the formal beauty and artistic connotation. This way of aesthetic experience gradually replaced the physiological stimulation and became the main content of watching the film [6].

3.2. Medial Transcoding: Adaptation of the Medium, Enrichment of the Aesthetic Dimension

The characteristics of dissemination are different, and the aesthetic of violence also varies in different media. Video games rely on interactivity and change the original viewing relationship. Players are no longer just spectators but directly participate in the plot and confrontation, and the sense of immersion comes from this - you are no longer "watching" violence, but "playing" violence. Short videos take the path of fragmented dissemination, specifically picking the most visually impactful segments to spread quickly. For many people, the first encounter with the aesthetic of violence is when they watch short videos [7]. The expression methods of films and animations have their own characteristics. Films rely on complete narratives and precise camera rhythms to bring the audience a balanced aesthetic experience. Animation uses exaggerated shapes and bright colors to relieve the oppressive feeling of conflict scenes and adds some visual interest [8]. Each of these media has its own advantages, but when combined together, the audience that can be reached by the aesthetic of violence is numerous. No matter how old you are or what style you prefer, you can always find a way to accept it that suits you.

4. The Aesthetic Value and Potential Risks of Cross-media Violent Aesthetics

4.1. Aesthetic Value: Expanding the Expression Boundaries of Visual Art

In contemporary visual art, the aesthetics of violence holds a significant position. Its value lies in two aspects: one is the direct and emotional power brought by visual impact, and the other is the function in narrative construction. In cross-media narratives, the violent scenes that have been artfully processed are not merely decorative elements but carry multiple narrative tasks - they drive the plot development, shape the characters, and convey the main theme of the work. Many works use violent scenes as the entry point for narration [9]. On the surface, it is a conflict and confrontation, but beneath it lies social contradictions, complex human nature, and survival predicaments [10]. The strong visual impact can make viewers start to think and also trigger emotional resonance. The cross-media creative model greatly enriches the expression means of visual art, breaks the limitations of a single medium of expression, and opens up a wider path for the diversified and personalized development of visual culture [11].

4.2. Transmission Risks: Aesthetic Alienation and Value Deviation

The aesthetic of violence has become widespread in mass media, but it has also brought about many issues that cannot be ignored. If you open a short-video platform, you will find that content that specifically clips violent and stimulating segments and pairs them with fast-paced music often has extremely high viewership. The more widely such content spreads, the more the original artistic connotations of the aesthetic of violence are eroded, leaving only pure sensory stimulation. In fact, this is due to the entertainment nature of visual culture at work, coupled with the fragmented dissemination method [12]. The aesthetic of violence tends to deviate as it spreads. Some short videos and casual games chase after traffic crazily, pushing the sensory stimulation of violent scenes to the extreme. Artistic processing and humanistic connotations are all thrown aside, and the aesthetic of violence thus becomes a gimmick to attract attention. Its artistic value is also discounted [13]. Viewers often get lost in such content, and the boundary between artistic fiction and real life becomes blurred. Especially for teenagers, whose minds are still developing and values are still forming, frequent exposure to such content may lead to a duller aesthetic perception, weaker moral cognition, and subsequently affect aesthetic judgment and value orientation. This situation clearly deviates from the original intention of creating the aesthetic of violence and is not beneficial to a healthy mass cultural environment [14].

5. The Standardized Development Path of Cross-media Violent Aesthetics

Both aesthetic value and dissemination risks coexist in this complex situation. This makes it necessary for multiple parties to jointly regulate in order for cross-media violent aesthetics to develop healthily [15]. Creators should always uphold artistic conscience and humanistic stance. The use of violent elements must be closely linked to the core theme of the work and should not be haphazardly piled up for visual effects. On the part of the audience, they need to constantly improve their media literacy and aesthetic discrimination skills, consciously clarify the boundaries between artistic fiction and real rules, and actively avoid cognitive deviations caused by aesthetic alienation [16]. On the part of the dissemination platform, it is necessary to further improve the content review and classified dissemination mechanism, precisely distinguish between artistic violent expressions and vulgar violent content, and prevent the spread of bad visual content at the source [17]. Only when the creators, the audience, and the platform all work together can cross-media violent aesthetics truly embark on a standardized and positive development path.

6. Conclusion

Cross-media integration has become an inevitable trend in the development of visual culture. This trend has provided new carriers and spaces for the innovative expression of violent aesthetics, and the boundaries of visual art creation and the dimensions of aesthetic appreciation have also been continuously expanding. However, at the same time, the trend of the generalized entertainmentization of the media environment has also caused a series of problems such as

aesthetic alienation and value deviation, posing an unavoidable real challenge to the healthy development of the industry. The creative field of literature and art should firmly hold onto the fundamental of humanistic spirit, the dissemination supervision system needs to be further improved, and the aesthetic literacy of the audience also needs to be constantly enhanced. The artistic value and humanistic connotation in violent aesthetics should be treated seriously. Only when all parties work together can we effectively avoid its negative dissemination effects, deeply explore its artistic value and humanistic connotation, and thereby promote the continuous healthy development of cross-media visual art.

References

[1] Barker, M. (2012). The violence of sensation: Affect and visceral spectatorship in contemporary cinema. Screen, 53(4), 424–442.

[2] Purse, L. (2011). Extreme violence and the aesthetic image in contemporary screen media. New Review of Film and Television Studies, 9(4), 387–405.

[3] Jenkins, H., & Kelley, S. (2020). Transmedia aesthetics: The pleasure of cross-platform narrative worlds. International Journal of Cultural Studies, 23(4), 541–558.

[4] Shaw, F. (2013). Visuality and violent play: Aesthetic regimes in multiplayer digital media. Journal of Visual Culture, 12(3), 342–359.

[5] Laine, T. (2021). The aesthetics of brutalism: Violence, form and embodied spectatorship in digital game spaces. Games and Culture, 16(7), 890–908.

[6] Van der Ouderaa, S. (2022). Witnessing digital violence: Visual culture and the ethical limits of aestheticized harm. Visual Studies, 37(2), 198–214.

[7] Hight, C. (2019). Transmediating trauma: Visual violence across graphic memoir, film and digital media. Memory Studies, 12(6), 724–741.

[8] Phillips, J. (2018). Monstrous bodies and violent spectacle: Transmedia horror and the remediation of gore. Horror Studies, 9(2), 187–204.

[9] Scott, N. (2014). Beautiful suffering: Violence, aesthetics and documentary spectatorship. Continuum, 28(6), 745–758.

[10] Crang, Z. (2017). Remediating atrocity: Violent imagery across news photography, digital archives and social media. Journal of Visual Culture, 16(2), 164–182.

[11] MacCormack, P. (2015). Aesthetic violence and the nonhuman: Affective bodies in film and digital art. Angelaki, 20(3), 117–132.

[12] Rutherford, J. (2016). Transmedia bodies: Violent embodiment in comic-book adaptation. Journal of Graphic Novels and Comics, 7(3), 289–306.

[13] Öhman, A. (2018). Violent aesthetics and the limits of empathy in interactive media. Games and Culture, 13(5), 486–504.

[14] Lievrouw, L. (2019). Remediation and transmedia: Visual violence as mobile cultural form. Journal of Communication Inquiry, 43(3), 247–264.

[15] Boluk, S., & LeMieux, P. (2023). Spectacle and brutality: Aesthetic violence in AAA video game cutscenes. Games and Culture, 18(4), 412–430.

[16] Chaudhary, S. (2021). Aestheticization of conflict: Visual regimes of violence in transmedia war narratives. Critical Studies in Media Communication, 38(4), 364–381.

[17] Čadež, Š., & Mertelj, A. (2025). Steakhouse by Špela Čadež: Intimate partner (psychological) abuse through tangible imagery and the act of resistance. Studies in European Cinema, 20(1), 54–71.