| **RESEARCH ARTICLE**

The Postmodern Aesthetic Style of the Film "A Pigeon Sat on a Branch Reflecting on Existence"

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| **ABSTRACT**

Postmodern aesthetics, as a product of postmodern culture, shows resistance to traditional aesthetic values, subverts the cognitive logic of rational and absolute concepts, and has a profound impact on contemporary films. Swedish director Roy Andersson's representative work, "A Pigeon Sat on a Branch Reflecting on Existence", embodies obvious post-modern aesthetic features. Its images attempt to subvert traditional authority, the narrative is broken, the audience interacts with the depth of field lens, and the interpretation is returned to the audience. The highly copied characters and scenes show the absurdity of contemporary people's existence and the desolation of spirit and issue sharp satire to the post-modern society, Presenting a profound philosophical reflection.

| **KEYWORDS**

| **ARTICLE INFORMATION**

1. Introduction

Roy Anderson is a famous Swedish director and advertising man; in 1970, his first debut film," En Karleks Historia," won the Swedish National Film Award and successfully entered the Berlin Film Festival, receiving wide acclaim. In 1975, his second film, "Giliap", was controversial, and the film's word-of-mouth and box office were both frustrating; Roy Anderson then turned to an advertising career, accumulated their own funds and experience, after twenty-five years of silence, created the "Life trilogy", which condensed the essence of Roy Anderson's entire film creation career. The last film in his "Life trilogy", "A Pigeon Sat on a Branch Reflecting on Existence" (2014), presents many postmodern aesthetic features, meaning is flattened and reconstructed, authority is dissolved, and traditional aesthetic concepts are subverted. Roy Anderson's images pay more attention to the living state of individuals, and ugliness moves to the center of the screen, where the present and history are intertwined. It presents the aesthetic characteristics of historical segmentation and fragmentary collage.

2. Dissolving Authority and Fragmenting Narrative

Influenced by Plato's (427-347 BC) theory of ideas, traditional philosophy pursued the beauty of ideas, and Kant (1724-1804) also took "transcendence" as the theoretical premise, believing that beauty was "purposeless and purposeful" and excluded the utilitarian nature of art. According to postmodern aesthetics theory, traditional Western aesthetics draws a clear line between art and non-art with absolute transcendental beauty, and its essence is to create distinction and opposition as a means to obtain the legitimacy of its own existence through the suppression of non-art and create meaning in the space where there is no meaning. In fact, they are playing word games and moving towards the trap of metaphysics. The world evolved from ideas, and the closer it is to ideas, the more beautiful it is, but the world of ideas can never prove its existence. The ideological edifice built on the absolute supremacy of ideas is like a castle in the air, without any foundation or practical basis. Therefore, when Nietzsche shouted, "God is dead", the philosophical system that supported the West for thousands of years gradually collapsed. The Second World War (1939-

1945) led to the further desolation of the human spiritual world, the cognition based on reason, meta-narrative, and logocentrism was subverted, the philosophical foundation and framework on which traditional aesthetics existed were broken, and postmodernism came into being in the 1960s. "Postmodernism strives to liberate art from the bondage of form, from the ivory tower and emphasizes the artistry and aestheticization of daily life: the 'omnipresence' of aesthetic ideas" [1]. In contrast, postmodern films oppose the whole, rationality and traditional authority discourse, dissolve the boundary between art and non-art, and create privilege and opposition to the elegant art of postmodern films, becoming the object of exclusion. Popular art gradually replaces the elegant art of the spring style. For example, Duchamp brought a urinal to the exhibition and named it "Spring", which caused great controversy.
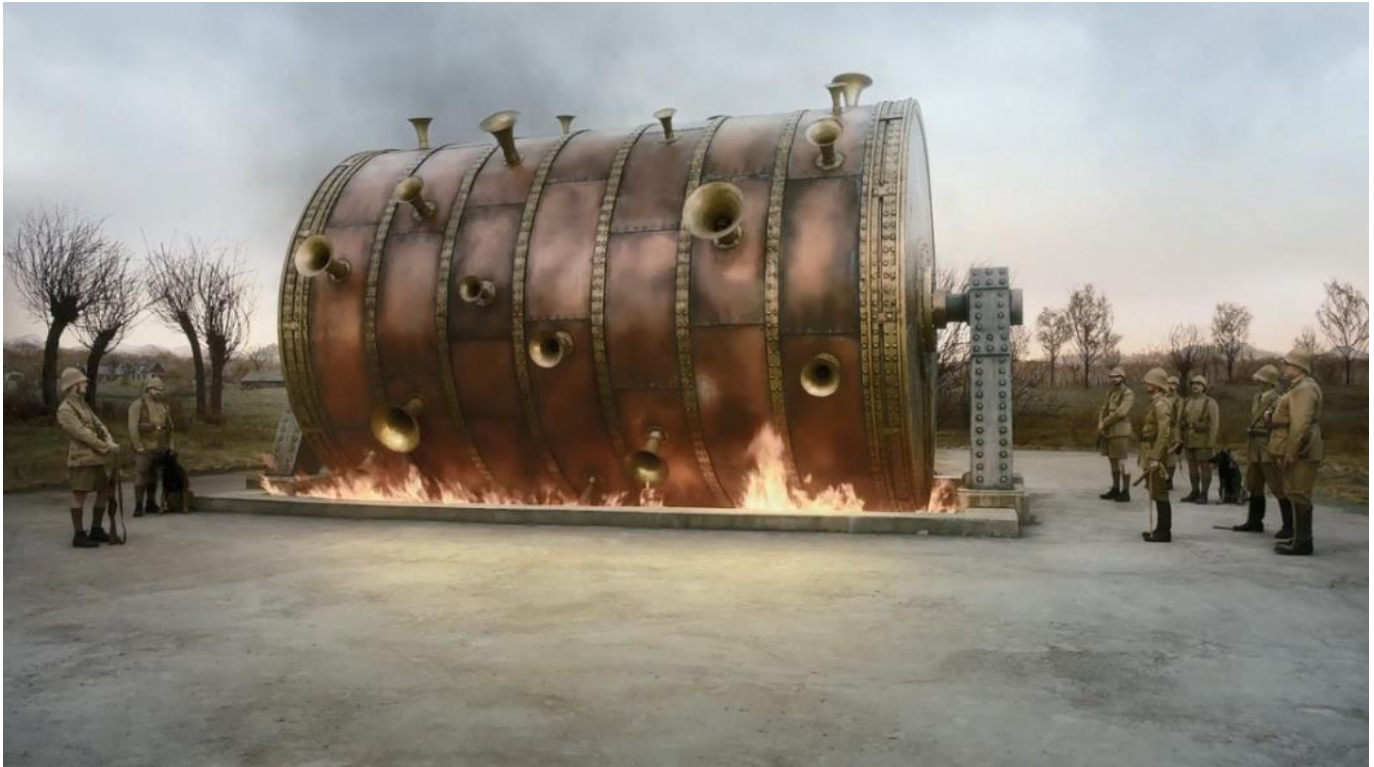

Figure 1 - "A Pigeon Sat on a Branch Reflecting on Existence" (2014)

Roy Anderson, who was born in the 1940s, was influenced by postmodernism in his youth, and his images were full of post-modern rebellious characteristics. His research on history made him well aware that aristocratic art was the representative of power, while European feudal aristocrats waged countless wars and did many evil things, so Roy Anderson attempted to subvert the authority of traditional elegant art in the film. In the film "A Pigeon Sat on a Branch Reflecting on Existence", a group of black slaves are driven by soldiers into a huge copper drum, which is roasted by a raging fire. The slaves couldn't stand the heat inside the drum, so they pushed the drum to turn. As the temperature rises, the screams keep coming, but they are transformed into elegant music by the loudspeakers outside the drum. As the camera turns, the glass door that reflects this cruel scene is opened, and a group of white-haired noble people enjoy it all. The scene of "Burning Black Slaves" (Figure 1) implies that European aristocracies committed various crimes during the age of great voyages; the elegance of classical music is expressed in extremely cruel ways; the film accuses the harm caused by the antagonism and division created by the ruling class; in fact, high art is based on the exclusion of the lower class and popular art. The purpose behind the division of art and non-art is also to ensure the legitimacy of its aristocratic rule. The surreal picture of the film reveals the truth of art and reality, and the beautiful art at the top is defeated by the bloody reality.

After the authority of the absolute concept is subverted, postmodern aesthetics no longer pays attention to wholeness, and the concept of "whole is greater than part" held by Gestalt psychology is inverted. In postmodern aesthetics, part is greater than the whole, and part exists separately from the whole, showing a fragmented state. "The film loses its complete structure and reproduces the phenomena of reorganization, piecing together, and accidental acquisition, resulting in fragments or parts replacing the whole" [2]. The film consists of 39 scenes, each of which exists independently, and the cancellation of any segment will not affect the whole film. One by one, the history and life are recombined in a fragmented way, from the dying white-haired old woman who refuses to let go of the property to the indifference of middle-aged couples whose husband has heart attack. The wife doesn't know it,

and the unhappy salesman is trying to sell funny toys. The concept is subverted, and the story presents a fragmented state, which often leads to nothingness and confusion, resulting in the proliferation of absurdity. However, the film splits the complete life into countless fragments and presents the various aspects of life on the screen in a fragmented way, which can examine the lives of ordinary people from multiple perspectives and form a new collage narrative structure. This is what the traditional aesthetic emphasis on narrative continuity and integrity can not do.

3. Reconstruction of Meaning: the Transfer of Interpretation Rights and Depth of Field

Danto believes that "interpretation constitutes art"; the existence of art depends on interpretation, but "interpretation" itself implies the prerequisite for the existence of meaning. Postmodern art opposes the exploration of the source, absolute beauty disappears, and the film does not presuppose meaning. Susan Sontag argues that "postmodern cinema itself 'evades interpretation'" [3]. Things that would otherwise be meaningless are cut into the film, and the boundaries of art begin to blur. The two salesmen (Figure 2) in "A Pigeon Sat on a Branch Reflecting on Existence" vowed to bring joy to people, but their products did not make anyone happy and brought a lot of trouble, such as the pressure of product sales, payment recovery, debt collection, funny products as the meaning of joy lost its original connotation, and became only a signifier, whose signified waiting to be reactivated. And it is the audience itself that can activate this reference. The non-utilitarian nature of traditional art makes the audience have to keep a distance and indirectly grasp the connotation of art by viewing it from a distance, while postmodern art shortens the distance and even views it at zero distance, focusing on contact and interaction. The meaning of the premise is cancelled, the right of "interpretation" is delegated to the audience, and the focus of the work is shifted from the author to the audience. Meaning is not presupposed but actively created by the audience.

Figure 2 - "A Pigeon Sat on a Branch Reflecting on Existence" (2014)

At the level of meaning presentation, the film chooses to place the audience in the main position and attempts to make the film contact and interact with the audience through various means so as to stimulate the philosophical thinking of the audience so as to achieve the re-creation of meaning, which is embodied in content and form.

In terms of content, an extremely absurd plot is set to push the contradictions of real life to the extreme. For example, in the first segment of "Three Appointments with Death" at the beginning of the film (Figure 3), the middle-aged man is bored to open a wine bottle, but he falls to the ground convulsive unconscious due to excessive force, while the wife turns her back on her husband and calmly does the dishwashing chores. His wife did not look back; the original romantic candlelight dinner also turned into a helpless silence. In the process of watching, the audience's subconscious is expecting the wife to turn around and find her husband falling down and not waking up so that her husband can be saved, but this is also the plot deliberately arranged by the director. There is no Hollywood-style miracle, and the reality is like a silent tragedy. The audience can only scream silently in the face of the

husband's death in the play, and what cannot be redeemed is the indifferent marriage. Originally love each other, and live together as lovers, but they are full of estrangement. In the second paragraph of "Three Appointments with Death", an old woman dying in a hospital bed clutches a handbag full of jewellery accumulated in her life and refuses to let go. In vain, her children persuade her to let go; she starts to pull the old woman. In the shouting, the abnormal relationship between the two generations is exposed naked on the screen through jewelry, a symbol of money and wealth. The old woman's son said, "You can't take a handbag to heaven." Everyone knows that people can't take their wealth with them after death, but they still can't let go of their worldly desires. Art is a mirror of life, but postmodern aesthetic theory holds that art is not a mirror, and what art creates is not an illusory delusion but reality. "People die for money; birds die for food", money interests blind human eyes, the tragedy of the characters in the drama is our tragedy; it is hidden in all aspects of our lives.

Figure 3 - "A Pigeon Sat on a Branch Reflecting on Existence" (2014)

The form of the film, through the depth of field lens to create a multi-level space, guide the audience to actively observe the picture and produce self-thinking. Andre Bazan believes that the use of montage to randomly group shots will destroy the ambiguity and ambiguity of the lens, and the segmentation lens makes the meaning of the picture single, and the audience can only follow the director without their own thinking. Roy Anderson reduced the montage effect in the film to almost non-existent, and the space was not constituted by camera cuts but by using the perspective of painting to create additional space with depth of field; Roy Anderson also said that in using this technique, he was inspired by European Renaissance paintings, such as Bruegel's Hunter in the Snow (1565). In the eighth shot (Figure 4) of "A Pigeon Sat on a Branch Reflecting on Existence", a soldier outside the restaurant tries to find out why the others have not arrived, while the flamenco student in the restaurant breaks up with his teacher, Roy Anderson stated in an interview: "The parting action in this scene is done in silence and in the background. It's so special, and it's the clearest example of my effort to show what's going on both in the front and in the background." [4] In the same scene, two completely unrelated events occur at the same time, forcing the audience's attention to observe back and forth inside and outside the restaurant. Strangers relate to each other through the depth of field and are connected in different Spaces. Lens 17 also uses depth of field to extend the picture, with up to four levels. They are the lobby of the shop where the toy salesman is located, the inner room of the shop, the road outside the shop and the shop across the road, among which there are three Spaces where events have occurred. This kind of putting all things in the same picture, two or even more events will occur in the same scene at the same time, resulting in the effect as Bazin believes that "the picture structure is more authentic; Asking the audience to think more positively "[5]. Compared with the homogeneity of the picture required by the montage, the depth of field lens used in the montage brings ambiguity and uncertainty of the intention, and the meanings are mixed and changeable. The spatial structure constructed by the montage collapses, and the depth of field lens is used to create a multi-level space in the same picture,

and the occurrence of many events is flattened in one dimension. From a single point of view, you can see the whole picture, which is an important reason why Roy Anderson's films can have complex philosophical implications.

Figure 4 - "A Pigeon Sat on a Branch Reflecting on Existence" (2014)

4. Replication: the Disappearance of Origin and Individuality

Both Plato's theory of ideas and Aristotle's theory of imitation explore the possibility of origin, while postmodern art is a large number of industrial copies without any origin, which is why it is attacked by aesthetic theorists. However, the postmodern aesthetic theory gives a completely opposite view. According to the logic of the theory of imitation, Duchamp painted a beard on the Mona Lisa, which is indeed an imitation of Da Vinci's Mona Lisa, but Da Vinci's Mona Lisa itself is also an imitation of Madame Mona Lisa in real life, and no modern people have ever seen Mona Lisa, and its authenticity is also doubtful. As a result, Da Vinci's Mona Lisa has become a copy and lost its original nature, so the road to finding the original source is endless and meaningless. Postmodern films abandon the pursuit of the source, and the films present a sense of nothingness and emptiness; the narrative has no main line, and the characters have no center. Benjamin believed that in the age of mechanical reproduction, "works of art are in principle always replicable, and what people make can always be imitated" [6]. The uniqueness of the work is lost, replaced by the mass reproduction brought about by high industrialization. Each copied thing is its own essence, no different from other copied things, which is also the reproduction of the film art from the beginning of its birth. "A Pigeon Sat on a Branch Reflecting on Existence" with obvious post-industrial replication characteristics, the color is the same, all use light yellow cool tone, each scene layout is simplified, like a factory mass production of products, in addition to the necessary items, the venue is large and empty, all the characters in the makeup presented exaggerated pale white, Everyone is listless, bloodless, plain clothes, wearing a uniform, such as work clothes, suits, or light gray casual clothes, as if people are working anytime and anywhere, showing the low desire and indifference of society.

Figure 5 - "A Pigeon Sat on a Branch Reflecting on Existence" (2014)

The effect of this factory duplication is the disappearance of individuality. In the postmodern society, personality is erased, and people are alienated and instrumentalized, no longer looking for the meaning of life but becoming a robot in a factory, repeating the meaningless and boring life. The characters in "A Pigeon Sat on a Branch Reflecting on Existence" are no longer interested in any new things; their eyes are dim, everyone is waiting for something, but no action, looking at everything around them coldly, like a walking corpse, the only thing that can mobilize people's emotions is money, such as the dying old woman who is arguing with her children for jewelry, the salesman who is running around to sell funny toys. He does not care about the fallen stranger but asks how to deal with the food he has bought, and the absurd human nature is infinitely enlarged at this moment, and man no longer has a self but is enslaved by capital and becomes a machine without thinking.

5. Conclusion

As a representative work of Roy Anderson, the subversion, reorganization and reproduction of traditional concepts coincides with the concept of post-modern aesthetics. It gives up the pursuit of the source and focuses on the close "contact" between reality and the audience, reflecting the confused and barren psychological state of modern people, and explores the alienation and inner desolation of people in post-modern society. It has a profound philosophical implication. In the complex post-modern cultural context, Roy Anderson throws out the question of where human beings should go as a drop in the ocean of the vast universe, how to face the cruel and chaotic history of our past, and the nature of human beings, but the film can only put forward propositions but cannot give answers. Just like the meaning behind the name of the movie "A Pigeon Sat on a Branch Reflecting on Existence", a pigeon sitting on a tree reflecting on the meaning of existence, life is like a complicated image; we can only find the meaning of self-existence in the chaos.

Conflicts of Interest: The authors declare no conflict of interest.
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