



DOSSIER: FRENCH CINEMATOGRAPHY: FROM THE LUMIÈRES & MÉLIÈS TO VR & AI

“Cinema was becoming more real”: From the French New Wave to the Vertical Screen Aesthetics of Mobile Short Video

“El cine se estaba volviendo más real”: de la nueva ola francesa a la estética de pantalla vertical del video corto móvil

“O cinema estava se tornando mais real”: da Nouvelle Vague francesa à estética da tela vertical do Mobile Short Video

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Received on: May 28, 2023.

Approved on: Jun 19, 2023.

Published on: 11 out, 2023.

Abstract: This study examines the historical legitimacy, aesthetic potential and limitations of the vertical screen image through two dimensions: cross media comparison of the New Wave of French cinema and the creative practice of the vertical screen image in the complex new media environment of today. This study follows the principle of unity between history and logic to explore in detail the influence and inspiration of the narrative aesthetics of French New Wave films on the creation of short videos in the vertical screen era, starting from the four dimensions of “telling” and “showing”, as well as narrative time and narrative space. Through the media archaeology of film history, it is easy to find that many features of short video creation coincide with the creative concept advocated by the French New Wave.

Keywords: french new wave film; vertical screen; narrative aesthetics.

Resumen: Este estudio examina la legitimidad histórica, el potencial estético y las limitaciones de la imagen de pantalla vertical a través de dos dimensiones: la comparación de medios cruzados de la Nueva Ola del cine francés y la práctica creativa de la imagen de pantalla vertical en el complejo entorno de los nuevos medios de hoy. Este estudio sigue el principio de unidad entre historia y lógica para explorar en detalle la influencia y la inspiración de la estética narrativa de las películas de la Nueva Ola francesa en la creación de videos cortos en la era de la pantalla vertical, a partir de las cuatro dimensiones de “contar” y “mostrar”, así como el tiempo narrativo y el espacio narrativo. A través de la arqueología mediática de la historia del cine, es fácil encontrar que muchas características de la creación de videos cortos coinciden con el concepto creativo defendido por la Nueva Ola francesa.

Palabras clave: película francesa de la nueva ola; pantalla vertical; estética narrativa.

Resumo: Este estudo examina a legitimidade histórica, o potencial estético e as limitações da imagem da tela vertical através de duas dimensões: a comparação *cross media* da Nova Onda do cinema francês e a prática criativa da imagem da tela vertical no complexo ambiente das novas mídias da atualidade. Fundamentado no princípio da integração entre história e lógica, este estudo explora detalhadamente a influência e a inspiração da estética narrativa dos filmes da Nouvelle Vague francesa na criação de videos curtos na era da tela vertical. Isso é abordado a partir de quatro dimensões: “contar” e “mostrar”, bem como tempo narrativo e espaço narrativo. Através da arqueologia midiática da história do cinema, é fácil descobrir que muitas características da criação de videos curtos coincidem com o conceito criativo defendido pela Nouvelle Vague francesa.

Palavras-chaves: filme francês new wave; tela vertical; estética narrativa.



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Introduction

The French New Wave film movement is of great significance to the history of world film art. It changed people's traditional view on film, and reformulated traditional aesthetic thoughts and artistic techniques of film, which made an important contribution to the development of film art. The New Wave film catalyzed subjective realism, and further enriched expressive means of film. Leaders in the New Wave film movement fought against the obsolete regime overweighted on so-called qualifications, and gradually formulated the theory of "author film", announcing that of film, the most important is to let them become film creators, and film production and shooting is nothing but the process to achieve this. Image language evolved continuously during the movement, long shot as a photography method was an extraordinarily admired and jump cut as an editing skill was commonly used in that period. The innovation of photography and editing techniques in the New Wave film brought out a totally different visual experience for audience, compared with the past film.

In today's self-media era, some people use online video platforms to create original videos. Vertical images usually refer to images with height greater than width in general. Under the long-consolidated aesthetic paradigm of horizontal screen and the media environment where vertical screen is incompatible with the industry standard, vertical screen images are usually regarded as non-professional creations. According to Scientiamobile's Q4 2018 report, 82.5% of smartphone users hold their phones upright while watching videos (Scientiamobile, 2019). Zena Barakat, a former video producer for The New York Times, said, "Viewers don't care what format the video is presented in, they just care if it's comfortable to watch" (Slade-Silovic, 2018).

The French philosopher of technology Jacques Ellul proposed the "theory of technological autonomy" (Jacques, 1964), which argues that there is an internal logic and rules for technological development. Jacques also laid special emphasis on the interplay between various technologies,

which drives technology as a whole to move forward, leading to social adjustment and industrial transformation. As media production shifts from paper, radio, and TV channels to digital platforms and mobile apps, the contemporary media environment is characterized by "mobility," instant media (Grainge, 2011), and what Jenkins calls "communicable media" (Jenkins; Thorburn, 2003). According to the 90-9-1 formula (Nielsen, 2006), there is an inequality in participation on the Internet, with only 1% of people creating content, 9% editing or modifying content, and the rest 90% viewing content without active participation. However, short-form video production in the age of intelligent communication challenges this formula. The "creator & viewer" and "active & passive" dichotomy cannot drive screenwriting forward because it is shaped by the traditional broadcast mindset and vertical screen media production structure.

In the era of mobile vertical screens, the overall production process of short videos is amateurish, despite the fact that they are often "defined" as not advanced or elegant, as opposed to true cinematic techniques. But Snapchat, Periscope, China's Douyin, and Kuaishou are among the many corporate organizations that have been using vertical screen structures to create marketing content for cell phones. These companies have blurred the line between amateur and professional media, often generating vertical screen content simultaneously by individual self-publishers and commissioned creations.

In the virtual space created by the Internet, there is no longer a clear boundary between professional and amateur cinema. Even this virtual space is no longer just a spontaneous user activity, and user-generated and uploaded content has begun to be accompanied by commercial capital intervention. However, in the new visual environment of the mobile vertical screen era, the content of plays is constantly reconfigured to match the changing screen size and parameters. This does not mean, however, that passive consumers are bound by the norms imposed by the platforms. Rather, these users of technology

are motivated to generate media content in this space in the same way as the other producers' work interacts with amateur, professional, and specialty media, according to their description in this study. The visual value provided by technology support for short videos reflects user interaction and the burgeoning vertical screen paradigm and the changing mobile media landscape. In other words, the vertical screen paradigm influences the distinction between user-generated and corporate-run mobile media content. Social media platforms in the vertical screen era underscore the intensification of consumer labor in the 21st century. Companies such as Shake and TikTok have become sites of dynamic and urgent relationships between market and non-market, social and economic. Moreover, TikTok, like YouTube, has seen the rise to the top of the general consumer's desire to become a star and a Netflix star, with a large number of commercially ambitious short-form video producers emerging to capitalize on the "grassroots". The popularity and authenticity of these videos have become attractive. Most of the screenwriters who are gaining prestige or profit on the emerging live and short video platforms have mastered how to use localized narratives to tell the simple life in reality as well as construct characters, plot reversals, and values in less than 3 minutes' length and simple plots.

This study starts from the narrative strategy of French New Wave films. Based on the summary of Bazan's film theory, this study uses cross-media comparative research, theoretical interpretation and work analysis, and follows the principle of unity between history and logic to explore in detail the influence and inspiration of the narrative aesthetics of French New Wave films on the creation of short videos in the vertical screen era, starting from the four dimensions of "telling" and "showing", as well as narrative time and narrative space. Through the media archaeology of film history, it is easy to find that many features of short video creation coincide with the creative concept advocated by the French New Wave.

The similarities between vertical short video and the French New Wave

The French New Wave is a famous aesthetic school in the history of world cinema, and the development of modern cinema has been deeply influenced by its unique cinematic aesthetics. The French New Wave films are marked by shooting in real scenes, using non-professional actors, special use of camera, breaking the "fourth wall", and "author films".

Real scenes

Italian neo-realism had the slogan of taking the camera to the street, and the French New Wave also inherited this documentary aesthetic. Due to the war, the studios were destroyed and most of the French New Wave films were shot on real sets. At the same time, this way of filmmaking also truly showed the reality of life at that time and better reflected the realism of cinema.

Most of the current short video creators are also self-funded, and most of them do not shoot in professional studios due to the problems of funding, manpower and experience. In addition, most of the audiences of self-published short videos have the mentality of "eating fast food", watching videos just to have some fun after work and study, unless it is a special video to show the scene type, most of the audiences do not pay much attention to whether there is a professional scene setting. Most self-publishers are more willing to put their time and energy into content creation than scene setting. How to create under the existing and limited resources is an important question that short video creators need to think about first.

"Take the camera to the street" was a guiding slogan in those days. In the 21st century, cell phones became a popular tool, and due to the convenience of cell phone recording, people could take out their cell phones and shoot on the street, and everyone who walked on the street with a cell phone could create a scene. Instead of showing the elaborate stage, presenting the beautiful scene in the imagination, we turn to reality, this act of turning the camera from "stage" to "life" can bring

people a different experience, it tells people that life is not only the beautiful side, and not only it tells people that life is not only beautiful, and not only beautiful is real life, it makes people look at real life when watching the film.

Non-professional actors

The Italian neo-realism also put forward the slogan of "return to the common man", and the French New Wave also used mostly non-professional actors in casting their roles. The French New Wave films were more concerned with casting non-professional actors who fit the personality of the characters than with professional actors who were sweet looking. The lack of professional training allowed non-professional actors to have more sincere expressions and more dynamic eyes, and the lack of absolute lines and acting forms gave non-professional actors more room to play. In addition, the choice of using non-professional actors also avoids the audience's familiarity with professional actors and actresses.



Figure 1 – The male and female protagonists in *La Pointe-Courte*

Source: IMDb website.²

In the pursuit of maximising entertainment, short videos make full use of the audience's curiosity and love of "spectacle" performances to create a large number of highly personalised characters, which has made the diversity of actors even more mature than the art of film. Some of the actors in mobile short videos have received professional acting training, but a large portion of them are non-professionals who create and shoot videos in

their spare time.

Breaking the "fourth wall"

At the end of *The 400 Blows*, the opening film of the French New Wave, the protagonist Antoine runs all the way to a beach, where Antoine slowly turns around and approaches the camera, and then the scene ends with him facing the camera and looking at the audience. This scene is considered one of the classic shots in the history of cinema, it breaks the wall between the characters and the audience, when watching this scene the audience will be "he is looking at me? Oh, he's looking at the camera". The actor looking at the camera is something that is deliberately avoided in traditional films because they want to immerse the audience in the world of the film, and this practice makes the audience aware of the camera and thus aware that they are watching a film. But the act of breaking the "fourth wall" gives the audience a dominant role, and it allows people to accept the fact that they are watching a film with openness, an act that is considered respectful of the audience.

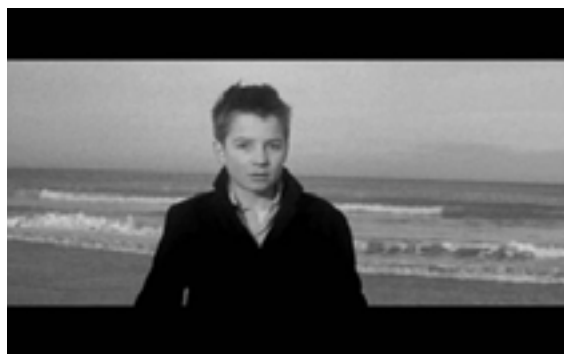


Figure 2 – The end of *The 400 Blows*

Source: IMDb website.³

This breaking of the "fourth wall" is a common occurrence in short self-published videos today. Unlike traditional movies, where the audience has no chance to know the people behind the scenes, the world in the movie is difficult to relate to the real world of people. In most cases, short videos are more like face-to-face conversations,

² Available at: https://www.imdb.com/title/tt0048499/mediaviewer/rm3984428801?ref_=ext_shr_lnk. Accessed on: Aug. 29, 2023.

³ Available at: https://www.imdb.com/title/tt0053198/mediaviewer/rm2104863233?ref_=ext_shr_lnk. Accessed on: Aug 29, 2023.

in which they are more like someone who really exists around people.

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Os textos deste artigo foram revisados pela SK Revisões Acadêmicas e submetidos para validação do(s) autor(es) antes da publicação.