

Aesthetic Representation of Cultural Slow Modernity Turn in the Post-epidemic Era

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Abstract. At the beginning of the twentieth century, modernity came onto the scene with various masks. Modernity characterized by accelerated movement and speed echoes the art of the heyday of European aesthetic modernity. But on the other hand, the rapid development of modern industry blurs the perception of the present, and the public is immersed in the pleasure of speed, thus losing the ability to feel the multi-dimensional, appealing and communicating power of the current momentary emotions. The arrival of the epidemic forced this speed to a certain degree. People began to "gaze" at their own era, breaking through the boundaries of learned perception and individualistic thinking. Based on this, Kopnik puts forward the aesthetic point of "slowing down", indicating that a new turn has begun to appear in the accelerated development of the society, that is, through the movement and interaction of the subject in the space in the diversity of time. Momentary flow. Reflected in the field of literature, the state of "slowing down" also allows creators and literary workers to re-plan aesthetic choices, and to carry out a deep sorting and writing of such an important epidemic moment in human history.

Keywords: Post-epidemic; Slow modernity; Slow aesthetics; Aesthetic representation.

1. Introduction

Slow living requires as much deliberation and effort as a fast-paced, chaotic life. It goes against its own speed, pursuing the multiple possibilities of perception and experience in real life. The emergence of the epidemic provides an opportunity to reflect on the past. The fast pace of life has removed so much personal connection to the world that the human touch is like a rusty knife, unable to rub up against life. But now, in *Slowing Down*, Kopernik suggests, "Slowing down is never about escaping the present, but about exploring what contemporary accelerated culture has allowed us to ignore."¹ That is to say slowing down aesthetics does not teach escaping from fast-paced life, but rather entering into it and redirecting one's energy. Here, slow aesthetics does not completely detach itself from the speed of modernity, but rather engages with it, opening up another space of experience. In the realm of literature, too, the emphasis is no longer solely on how quickly the most realistic can respond quickly, but rather on forming works of quality that participate in the construction of the human spiritual world and remind people of the passing of history. The influence of the slow aesthetic permeates all aspects of life, but only those who are willing to face the endless flow and intermittent shock of the pace of modern life and urban modernity can truly recognise the pleasure and excitement of slowing down and living slowly.

2. The "high speed" direction of cultural modernity

What modernity seeks is the value of the speed of modern culture. Modern culture speaks of the tensions and confusions of the modern mind in its various manifestations and serves as a source of various modern aesthetic ideas. The promoters of the various collars indulge in the euphoria of acceleration, seeking to jolt the numbed masses of modern society into a state of constant development. In order to increase speed control and keep people on track, the "speed of development" is constantly increased, leaving no time for leisurely

reflection or feeling of the present. Adolph Huxley said in 1931: "It seems to me that speed provides a real modern pleasure."²

While this was celebrated by many artists and intellectuals at the height of European aesthetic modernism, for some critics, the rapid compression of the contemporary into a spatial relationship, where events are juxtaposed in the same temporal stream, has led to an extreme inflation of the present moment; more choices in a too short window of time erodes our patience with the complexity of memory and the length of time. In this way, the present greedily swallows up the remainder of time, dissolving a necessary sense of history and erecting an invisible glass wall between aesthetic culture and life, unable to touch the meaningfulness of real reality. From the point of view of realistic triggers, the remarkable quest for speed stems from the rapid development of modern industrial technology. From the nineteenth century onwards, the modern quest for 'speed' swept across the European landscape, with the invention and use of the steam engine taking on epochal significance, ushering in an era in which time and space were compressed by speed. The Industrial Revolution accelerated society at mechanical speed to the use of optoelectronics as a medium, launching a revolution in communication that gave wings to the speed of social development.³ Nowadays, "accelerated development" has become a common perception of cultural modernity. In such a social environment, which runs forward at an "accelerated pace", people are often distracted and overwhelmed by a jumble of information, fragmented knowledge and enormous expectations, and they become mentally numb to the emotional depths and "hidden meanings" implied in certain moments. There is a tendency for new forces to emerge from the many facets of social life that are constantly diverging.

The fast-moving fashion brands, with their low production costs, unique designs and attractive prices, have accelerated the rate at which consumers change the "contents" of their wardrobes, and their aesthetic sense of clothing has evolved with the iterations of style; the experience of Gordon Moore, one of the founders of Intel, is known as Moore's Law in the

electronic information world, and its essence. It reads that the number of transistors on an integrated circuit increases exponentially over a given period of time. In other words, the performance of a processor will increase over a certain period of time. Although not a law of natural science, it is possible to extrapolate from this to the rate of progress in information technology. Coupled with the demand for fashionable, fast-moving brands with low production costs, unique designs and attractive prices caused by the rise in people's standard of living, the rate at which consumers change the "contents" of their wardrobes accelerates and their aesthetic sense of clothing evolves with the iterations of style; the experience of Gordon Moore, one of the founders of Intel, has been the essence of what is known as Moore's Law in the electronics and information world is that the number of transistors on an integrated circuit increases exponentially over a given period of time. In other words, the performance of a processor will increase over a certain period of time. Although not a law of natural science, the rate of progress in information technology can be deduced from this. Together with the demand caused by the increase in people's standard of living.

Since the 20th century, as a result of the development of modern society and the emergence of a civic culture, there has been a sharp division in literary production. In the twentieth century, as a result of the development of modern society and the emergence of a civic culture, there was a sharp division between popular literature and popular culture, which was mainly for the civic class, and refined literature and refined culture, which was for intellectuals.⁴ Especially after the mid-twentieth century, the advent of the post-industrial era has made electronic information such as radio, television and the Internet the main means of cultural communication, and culture has shown a tendency to be commodified. The Frankfurt School, represented by Adorno, introduced the concept of the 'culture industry' to refer to mass culture and literature under the capitalist system. The cultural industry follows the ideology of commercial consumerism, transforming cultural products into commodities that can be mass-produced, standardised and homogenised. The consequence of the mass production of industrial cultural commodities is that the needs of cultural consumers are standardised and individual aesthetics are manipulated by the 'invisible hand'. "Fundamentally, while the consumerist believes that the cultural industry can satisfy all his needs, on the other hand, the consumer believes that these needs he is satisfied with are socially predetermined and that he is always only the consumer of the predetermined needs."⁵ The acceleration of society has led to a thinning and convergence of people's ways of perceiving, the dilution of individual uniqueness, and the absorption of traditional forms of popular culture by new forms of media, all of which have enabled the integration of economy and culture, assimilating any discourse of resistance and reinforcing capitalist forms of social control. In 1889, Henry Bergson wrote in his book *Time and Free Will*: "Joy is usually in the state of consciousness towards the future, while sadness and mourning are due to the forced suspension of development towards the future, thus producing a sense of failure in the physical and psychological."⁶ Bergson's explanation of joy, with its emphasis on the exhilarating effects of speed, acceleration, shock and sustained movement, hits the nail on the head in terms of the modernity of the European phase of maturation.

3. The "slow down" turn in epidemic culture

As a cultural sign of the turning point of modernity in time, the world was forced to slow down by a global pandemic of a new coronavirus. During the epidemic, most people were isolated at home and their daily social life was suspended in response to the requirements of the epidemic. This invisible 'shackle' has suddenly disrupted the pace of life. Large gaps began to appear in the normally packed schedules. In order not to be eaten up by the boredom, apart from following the daily news about the epidemic, many people started to look for new breakthroughs in their lives, focusing on their current situation and reflecting on their life trajectory.⁷

For example, some of those who were too busy with work to care about their families' emotional feelings began to spend more time and energy with others, while others began to care about food and vegetables and whether the basic needs of human survival could be met, while others took a break from the tedium of reality to think more philosophically about life's problems. In this way, "slowing down" means starting to pay attention to the present and not being trapped in the "Morbid Circle" of speed.

As early as the 1930s, Benjamin prophetically used the term 'speed' as a central reference for understanding modernity. Benjamin argued that it was the development of transport since the nineteenth century that had compressed time and space, preventing people from being able to sit back and observe, but only getting lost in the perceptible changes in data.

Now, during the epidemic, the subject's senses take on more meaning in the present landscape of experience. Desires are rapidly stratified and sensations become the "front runner," with the most basic needs of survival being valued. On the mental side, the persistent discomfort with fear, human self-righteousness and weakness at the same time become very clear. A new awareness of and deeper dependence on family and friends, for example, was confirmed during this period. It is this opportunity to think about the current situation and to think about "slowing down". What is clear is that people have been aware for a long time that they are unable to enter into the flow of the mind and enjoy the long-lasting pleasures of a good story, a thoughtful conversation or a beautiful video clip. Most people realise that their attention is like an off-target sword, scattered far from the bull's-eye, leaving more vague impressions, activities and stimuli in their minds. In this context of the times and the common reflection of social groups, a new turn has therefore been taken in modernity, which originally sang of 'speed'. This turn makes 'slow' a medium through which we are rescued from the whirlpool of speed and the subject is boldly exposed to the superimposed space and time to gaze at the present.

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Slow modernity is not just a stagnation in the direction of

time's progress, but also a profound reflection on the context of the 'past' of modern speed, not in order to obscure the history of the 'past', but in order to 'experience the present as a complex transit point for experiencing the present as a complex of memories and expectations that confront each other, as well as stories that are about to be remembered and those that have yet to be told.'⁸ This 'staging post' thus becomes a place where we can negotiate the meaningful relationship between the past and the future in time. That is to say, in slow modernity, the present is treated as a space containing multiple trajectories and possibilities, integrating spatial differences into a unified temporal sequence, and sensing and expanding the flow of multiple temporal streams in the present moment. In this concept, space is seen as a dynamic, collegial and constantly shifting narrative of dissonance, while time is seen as a dimension that emphasises change, within which there is a constant interaction between dispersion and actors. This is best exemplified by the emergence of 'grassroots movements' in the last decade or so. Whether it is the promotion of local ingredients or the celebration of the excitement of longer meals, it is an attempt to alleviate the pressures generated by the acceleration and compression of time.⁹

While "slowing down" implies questioning the pleasures of movement and the passage of time, in fact slow modernism, far from inviting readers, viewers and listeners to wander through passing traditions, rhythms and identities, emphasises the simultaneity and indeterminacy of space and time. Its goal is directed towards breaking the excitement and thrill of modern movement. Slow modernity does not completely sever itself from the traditional understanding of speed modernity, for it does not abandon the speed characteristic contained in modernity, but rather uses modern movement as a form of communication and association that reinforces the subject's perception of the present. The isolated life allows the public to focus more on the bull's-eye of the "present", to fuse more feelings of space into the temporal sequence of the present, to feel the multidimensional coexistence of time and space, to make life take on multiple dimensions, to think deeply, to question the modular manipulation of the present, and to look into the future This unpredictable realm.

4. Contemporary Representations of Aesthetic Slow Forms

The core meaning of the contemporary aesthetic form is the aesthetic experience of slowing down, of seeing the present as a place that holds multiple streams of time, multiple possibilities of the past and the future, of gazing at the memories of the unerasable past, of contemplating the expectations of the future, of pointing to the richness and diversity of the present, of freeing the present from the burden of constant acceleration and obsession with the past, and of deriving a present that transcends the established framework of meaning. It is not only a reminder that everything changes in a fluid space-time, but also an inexhaustible drive to understand and explore, politically, psychologically or cognitively, as a way of breaking through the boundaries of habitual perception and individualistic thinking. This is just as Filippo Tommaso Marinetti, in his Manifesto for Italian Futurism, praised the power of speed as an essential feature of modern life. With a "tonal, polyphonic revolutionary wave"¹⁰ in a way that encourages the reader to make a radical

rebellion against all that is traditional, static and solidified in a fearless manner. So much so that he expresses it directly in his manifesto: "Time and space have faded away yesterday and we have lived in the absolute because we have created eternity and omnipresent speed."¹¹ Such expressions invariably highlight the speedy, fragmented nature of modernity. The emergence of the epidemic has also allowed speed to give rise to a contemporary aesthetic representation of slowness within the 'self-reflexivity' of modernity. In *Slowing Down*, Kopernik states that "Aesthetic slowness is committed to mapping experiences rich in contemporaneity, which expresses the coexistence of multiple streams of time in our expanded present moment."¹² Similarly, Viktor Bergin describes this contemporary era of global mobility and fast-paced interaction as a confluence of multiple historical trajectories. "that is, they are collections of events juxtaposed in multiple different present moments, with their own independent origins and temporal flows, which do not overlap, but are a kind of historical overlap"¹³. That is to say that the present time in which one lives no longer follows a single narrative trajectory or belongs to a specific confined space. Instead, one lives simultaneously in multiple temporal sequences, and within this contradictory temporal framework, individual streams of time and time can be seen as forces pulling in different directions, and within the web of space-time, one's present feelings are often pulled in different directions at the same time. Ultimately, the aesthetics of slowness transcends the idea of fluid time as superior to space in modern Western society and encourages us to experience the coexistence of multiple strands of difference and contradiction in the vector of time.

In other words, the slow aesthetic uses the present as a window to constantly link the past and envision a future yet to be formed, emphasising the virtual world's airy garden-like construction of the real world. The inner desire of the speed-obsessed person to constantly abandon the present and the past in the name of the future, to chase after the eternal freshness, closes off the space for casting time in its inherent creativity, losing the real identity, the change, the opportunity. "Slowing down" opens up a space at the heart of modern acceleration that can once again facilitate a shift in the conceptual content of change, flow and experience, going beyond the myth of one-sided teleology and goal-orientation. This is just as Hiroshi Sugimoto's photography always hides the viewer in the darkness of the film, where the camera turns into a mysteriously luminous rectangle.¹⁴ If the purpose is to view the life situations of others, it is clear that his work can put the reading in a frustrating situation. These photographs engage the viewer in a shocking negotiation of different temporalities and durations, and in so doing, they refuse to subjugate the viewer's 'vision of expectation' to the narrative flow presented on screen, recreating the joy Baudelaire reaped in front of the urban glass. His photography is a convergence of all kinds, including striking perceptual inversions and transpositions, ironic juxtapositions and unresolved diversity. His cinema series recalls the sanctuary of modern pastimes, not in reference to photography's emphasis on significant rupture and singularity, nor to the pressure of cinema on forward and teleological narrative. Rather, it is a representation of the early 20th century temple of cinema as a variety of places that transport contemporary audiences through different times, connecting with different continuities in the same space. In Hiroshi Sugimoto's slow scenography, the open camera shutter sees always multiplicity

and is presented as a place where diversity coexists. He modifies modern culture as a site of convergence, with a diverse, often ambiguous, often incompatible trajectory of change. As early as 1860, Baudelaire wrote that "what can be seen in the sunlight is not always as interesting as what is seen through the glass window, in that dark or luminous hole where life lives, dreams and suffers".¹⁵ Baudelaire used windows as screens for the flow of imagination; windows do not merely shape reality, they stimulate the imagination. They stimulate the mind's eye, making stories, telling the tales of the world's legends. Hiroshi Sugimoto's work serves as a window into the 'present' when looking at photography, a window through which to see a world of multiple coexistence.

The epidemic enters the era in which it takes place as an unexpected event that changes the course of social development to some extent. It interacts as a single narrative trajectory with other events in the same time, creating a kind of historical overlay. Its significance disrupts the usual perceptions and takes away from the virtual world, prompting the exploration of possible new changes in politics, psychology and life in the context of this new 'thread'. While such a forced slowdown puts human lives at great risk, it is also this 'hiatus' that undeniably holds up a space at the heart of modern acceleration, prompting new changes. Looking at the epidemic from a different perspective, it has a similarity to the 'window' in Hiroshi Sugimoto's photographs. During an epidemic, the perception of time is stretched, and the time held in the hands of the moment gives great scope to explore uncharted territory. The fearlessness of the medical staff, the unity of the people, the solidarity of the community, and the time spent with family and alone, which is unavailable in an era of high speed, are all conveyed in the news, and through the window of the epidemic, life in the present is also seen as a place of constant conflict and heterogeneous time. Through the window of the 'epidemic', life is also seen as a place of constant conflict and heterogeneous flows of time. Through the window of the 'epidemic', life is also seen as a place of constant conflict and heterogeneous flow of time, where various forces intersect and shape the real reality, and where the 'slowed down' state of life brings art closer to the real self of the present.

5. The new aesthetic dimension of "slow reflection" in literature and art

As the new coronavirus sweeping the world follows the tragic experience of SARS, the sense of acceleration in social development is also contributing to the acceleration of our forgetfulness. Although the documentary film "The Ten Sacrifices of SARS" not only reveals the chain of transmission of the disease, but also explains the speed of transmission of the disease in intermediate hosts such as civets and bats, its importance is not only a reawakening of wildlife, but also a questioning of the value of the accelerated operation of the psychological mechanism of human forgetfulness. But inevitably, seventeen years later a similar tragedy is once again unfolding. Documentaries like this one have emerged to deepen the memory and understanding of this outbreak, and many films and documentaries reflecting the reality of this epidemic have emerged to record and portray the real world in the fastest way possible. Allowing the subject to reflect while acting as an aesthetic subject, creating works that reflect the times as they are touched by

the feelings of the moment. But some people think that literature is not really useful when an epidemic is taking place, that the cycle of creation of good literature is indeterminate, and that short chapters do not have a greater impact, and that a piece of literature is far less timely and powerful than a bottle of potion, a piece of common sense, or a film or television production with a strong voice. The slow aesthetic works to resolve a tension between what modernists see as the traditional artistic quest for quiet contemplation and the modern medium's quest for shocking effect and liberating power. Kopernik argues that the aesthetic object of experience requires not only the subject's ability to repress parts of his sensory perception and to bring them to life in certain contexts, but also, at times, the ability to move away from the work of art, to use research and analysis and the ability to immerse oneself in it and re-examine reality in order to propose new reflections in the 'interplay' of time and space. This is also a condition for the creation of great works of art and literature. That is to say, the ability to observe the real movements of the real world, to maintain a calm and objective distance from the chaos of social reality, to draw from the endless stream of existing works, to turn iron into gold, and to develop one's own thinking. It needs to distance itself from events in order to reflect reality from a unique perspective, and it needs constant observation and reflection in order to produce quality and effective works. The way literature takes responsibility is by participating in the contemplation and construction of the human spiritual world through its works. It reflects the reality of life, the times, and is supposed to hold up a mirror to the past, the present and the future.

At a time of such a major epidemic in human history, it is only right that literature should take up the responsibility of writing about the people or lives of the epidemic. And this writing should be attended to or expressed in a literary way. This literary approach is personal, aesthetic and stylised, and should not be entirely campaigning, collective and propagandistic. Through this focus on the current state of the times, the whole phase of China and the world, the individual or the group, is sorted out and expressed, and the depth of philosophy and humanity is reflected, screened and expressed. In short, literary creation should also, to some extent, absorb the core meaning of the aesthetics of slowness, using it as a medium to liberate the masses from their own closed vortex and expose themselves to the openness and vagaries of time, to reflect on the present as a place of discord, diversity and temporality, and at the same time as a timely negotiation of the relationship between past and future meanings, rather than merely creating films and dramas, lyrical poems and essays at breakneck speed and with the most furious enthusiasm, which end up as mere sketches.

Image theory has been devoted to the study of the relationship between images and the brain, and critics of new media have tried to dig deeper into the specific function of digital media in mapping the activity of the viewer's brain, in order to discover the visible changes in the neural field of aesthetic sensation. And slow aesthetics continues their thinking, with Kopnik arguing that "aesthetic experience lies somewhere between immersive gaze and abstract cognitive capacity, and its occurrence oscillates between our ecstasy of losing ourselves and our seemingly transcendent judgments."¹⁶ In other words, aesthetic experience takes place in the ever-changing present, containing all the fractures, wanderings and heterogeneities within the present moment, and is never a state of calm and harmony. It relies on the

subject's ability to explore different modes of seeing the world with a particular perspective, and to explore the subject's ability to perceive self-experience and the feelings of others, creating a tension, i.e. the withdrawal and confirmation of self-consciousness. This is why the creation of works of art and literature should not be a 'rush' to reflect reality, but rather a submerged perfection, containing a true representation of the real world and a profound reflection on it.

The arrival of the epidemic allows 'slow' as an aesthetic form to gain a deeper experience of the multiple temporalities embedded in the present, reinforcing the perception and understanding of the contemporary accelerated society, allowing us to 'gaze' at our own time, where rapid social development brings convenience to life. At the same time, rapid social development has contributed to the accelerated forgetting of the bloody lessons of history. The sudden outbreak of the epidemic has led to a spatialised understanding of time, using the present as a space for the permeation of thematic memories and emotions, reawakening memories and perceptions of the past. With the help of Baudelaire's imagery of the 'urban wanderer' in *The Painter of Modern Life*, it is possible to see art as a practice of this 'slow reflection'. The "marginal man" is the hero who rebels against the fast pace of time in capitalist society, who finds it difficult to adapt to the noisy traffic in the streets of Paris, and who wanders the streets of the city as a maverick, curiously surveying the array of goods in the windows, or carefully observing every passer-by.¹⁷

Benjamin develops a more graphic account, romanticising the scene of the 'wanderer' walking a tortoise along a busy arcade street around 1840, matching his own walking speed with that of the tortoise's crawling speed, thus measuring the urban space with his own footsteps, projecting his individual emotions onto each of the hurried passers-by, and deeply feeling the novelty of the The artist is able to project his individual emotions onto each and every passerby, and to deeply experience the novel urban landscape.¹⁸ In this sense, "slow aesthetics" is not just about the rhythm of life slowing down to the ticking of time, but about "gazing at the city". It is about "gazing" at one's own time. Like the 'urban wanderer' holding a tortoise, it is based on a spatialised understanding of time, using the present as a space permeated with thematic memories and emotions.

Speed compresses the time of the present aesthetic experience, and forgetting converges on the aesthetic horizon at a faster pace. To remember something means to forget something, or to miss an appointment in the overlap between memory and forgetting, and memories that can endure become fewer and fewer with the passage of time and age. History doesn't obscure, it's just that humans often try to reconstruct themselves. Often, it is like the repetition of pre-modern isolation, medieval witch hunts, and the repeated misplaced prophecies of the post-human century. At this moment, as a possible change and impact of the epidemic's 'state of emergency', some notions of slow aesthetics may be

just an extension of the hidden speed clues in the temporal norm, but they are also enough to characterise the artistic gap between the aesthetic exception and the temporal state, giving the contemplator a comfortable opportunity to inhabit the slow direction of cultural modernity.

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