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CREATING A NEW CINEMA REALITY: “BAD MOVIE REVIEW” GENRE

Arina Medvedeva

ABSTRACT:

This article, supported by the grant of the RSF 18-18-00007, describes the method of visualization of the critical function used by the blogger Evgeny Bazhenov, the author of the Bad Comedian YouTube channel. The article is devoted to the analysis of videos in the genre of “bad movie review” on the Russian YouTube channel “Bad Comedian”. This channel was chosen due to its influence on the society: because of the devastating reviews from Bad Comedian, checks were made on the expediency of using budget funds to create domestic films. With the help of media esthetic analysis, the main artistic techniques were revealed that allow the blogger to create a new reality instead of the existing one in the framework of the analyzed film. This is reflected in the copying of cinematographic techniques used in the film itself, or the appearance of a blogger in the plot. We believe that the use of such techniques are fundamentally parodic and contribute to blurring the line between criticism and the object of analysis. An important fact is the fact that an increasing part of the audience creates impressions of the film with the help of a review, rather than watching the movie itself. Thus, the criticism does not complement the impressions of the film, but completely levels its main idea, offering instead a new one – with parody and absurd.

KEY WORDS:

media esthetics, video blogging, visualization, YouTube

1 Introduction

YouTube as a communication field based on social and network interaction of users, creates the conditions for the flourishing of hybrid forms of communication, where pragmatics are constantly changing their focus. For YouTube content, an important component remains precisely an entertainment trend with the aim of attracting a mass audience. Film critic, on the one hand, has been developed in the format of video essay, or reasoning on the material of mass films (and sometimes vice versa, elite). On the other hand, we are dealing with the phenomenon of journalism genre transformation, when a separate self-sufficient genre of “bad movie review” grows on the basis of a film review. We can observe such transformations on the Russian YouTube-channel Bad Comedian. We believe that the actual review ceases to perform the functions of review and criticism as such. So the original formula of

commentary to the already given reality of the art-object turns into a parody genre. Following the thought of Keti Chukhrov, who interprets the work of Clement Greenberg, writes that for the emergence of new methods in art and culture, a radical decrease in the value of something is necessary, but also the preservation of this aesthetics,¹ we can say that in the case of YouTube culture the importance of genre traits in general is being reduced with the aim of reconstructing them, creating a new genre on their basis, which is essentially a parody, a remake of the formerly sustainable genre.

A pioneer on YouTube in genre «bad movie review» is blogger Doug Walker, who, together with his brother, launched the project Nostalgia Critic, where old and poorly made films became the subject of review. Within the framework of this project, the basic techniques were also born, which were subsequently used not only in the film review, but also in any version of the review. Such can be considered the use of segments from other films (in the future becoming independent memes), expressive speech and cultural references, mainly manifested in the format of sketches within the review. In Russia, the “bad movie review” genre was largely based on the Nostalgia Critic format, but it has undergone significant changes. The main change is connected with the analysis of not only the film, but also the modern realities of the country. The analysis of the film becomes a reason for criticism of modern laws, changes in social life. At the moment, the most popular blogger working in this genre is Evgeny Bazhenov, author of the Bad Comedian channel. He was involved in a number of cases where his videos as a result not only formed a certain opinion from a regular audience, but also directly influenced the creators and sponsors of films that became the subject of his criticism.

2 Media Esthetics as a Condition for the Transformation of a Journalistic Genre

As we have said, in the case of the Bad Comedian channel, we can observe the transition of a review to the category of an independent genre, where film reality becomes the object of parody. In this connection, we observe an interesting phenomenon, when watching the film to watch the review on it becomes unimportant. The viewer does not need to watch

1 CHUHROV, K.: *Estetiki nikogda ne bylo, ili Adorno vs. Krauss*. [online]. [2019-04-29]. Available at: <<http://moscowartmagazine.com/issue/19/article/270>>.

a movie that the blogger will review. So the task of the video blogger is to save the viewer from the director's vision of the film and criticize him. The only danger is that instead of taking the director's vision, the viewer fully adopts the opinion of the blogger and transmits it to the film. Due to a number of comments under each Bad Comedian review in the spirit of "I didn't watch the movie, but I liked the review very much", we can assume that such prevalence of the blogger's opinion over any alternative one is still present. There are a number of precedent cases when the criticism of a film for the viewer becomes more convincing than the alternative opinion formed during the course of watching a film. This example can be the situation with the movie "Moving up". After the release of the review, the fans brought down the rating of the movie on Kino Poisk (Russian platform for movie rating). We can say that the negative reaction to the film is associated exclusively with the negative review of the film. There is no comparison between the opinion of the blogger and viewer's own impression of the film. Therefore, the original function of the commentary is transformed into the prevalence of the blogger's opinion over the opinion of the recipient and, by the way, over the director's vision itself. Under such conditions, the question naturally arises: how did the commentary genre transform into the genre of a full-fledged self-contained statement?

We believe that such a transformation is associated with the aesthetics of immersiveness. We are used to the fact that in the media this means 360 degree shooting, virtual reality glasses and so on. However, the aesthetics of immersiveness may involve the use of hybrid forms, especially on YouTube. Johnston noted that [many] YouTube stars use direct interaction methods, so, although it seems like a blogger sounds and looks like a viewer, the values of video production influence the perception of a YouTube star by the viewer as a significant person, that is the blogger transcends celebrity status, transforming into a person that the audience fully trusts.² In addition, Berryman and Kavka formulated the importance of getting close access to the life of the YouTube user and a huge impact on it.³ This is largely due to the stereotype that bloggers work for ideas, not earning money. YouTube became the object of a study

2 JOHNSTON, J.: Subscribing to Sex Edutainment: Sex Education, Online Video, and the YouTube Star. In *Television and New Media*, 2017, No. 18, p. 85.

3 BERRYMAN, R., KAVKA, M.: "I Guess a Lot of People See Me as a Big Sister or a Friend": The Role of Intimacy in the Celebrification of Beauty Vloggers. In *Journal of Gender Studies*, 2017, Vol. 3, No. 26, p. 307-320.

by L. Hollebek, who considered two strategies for user interaction with medical content: based on clicks (participation) or simple viewing and reading (consumption).⁴ Video hosting initially provided an opportunity for self-expression of any kind, however, with the influx of audience, the requirements for content provided on the channel also increased. The resource has long gone beyond entertaining, more and more educational channels appear, a lot of analysts of various directions (cinema, books, philosophy, etc.). An important point is the fact that the bloggers themselves have to take into account the interests of the mass audience, since this directly affects the number of subscribers on the channel. Thus, even if a blogger sets himself an educational task, he is in one way or another inclined to include in his videos an entertainment component that will attract new viewers. YouTube is a form of media (so-called user-generated media, where content is generated by regular users, not by professionals). When we talk about aesthetics, we are more accustomed to thinking about objects of art: painting, cinema, literature. However, in the past century with a sharp jump in the development of media, there was a need for a closer look and other forms of expression of aesthetic impact. It is important to understand that now many media have become a means of not only communication, but also aesthetic communication. The media has its own aesthetic style and its own aesthetic strategy. Media convey not only information, but also experience, emotion, idea.

The concept of aesthetics undergoes changes associated with the emergence of the media, the Internet, etc. J. Dewey's classic work "Art as an Experience"⁵ examines the aesthetics of pragmatism, arguing that art and life (in a broader sense – the experience of mankind) are inextricably linked to each other and do not constitute opposition. J. Dewey believed that any sphere of production under appropriate conditions generates artifacts, turning into the field of art (the boundary between production and art, outlined by V. Benjamin,⁶ is erased). In this logic, we can consider YouTube as a production sphere whose task is to generate aesthetic objects. In order to increase the impact and guarantee that the thesis gets into the consciousness of the audience, the blogger uses different ways

4 HOLLEBEEK, L.: Exploring Customer Brand Engagement: Definition and Themes. In *Journal of Strategic Marketing*, 2011, Vol. 7, No. 19, p. 555-573.

5 For more information, see: DEWEY, J.: *Art as Experience. The Later Works of John Dewey, 1925 – 1953*. Illinois : Southern Illinois University Press, 1987.

6 See: BENJAMIN, W.: *Proizvedenie iskusstva v epohu ego tehnikeskoy vosproizvodimosti*. Moscow : Medium, 1996.

of presenting the same information. Serious statements with rigorous arguments, analogies from culture in the form of memes or sketches, and frankly comic playing around of plot situations from the film can be used as arguments in order to bring any film-making mistake to the absurd level in order to level its possible significance for the viewer. That is, if we understand aesthetics as a form, a package for a concept, a sense, then in the case of Bad Comedian, aesthetics packs meanings, but the sublime aesthetic understanding of beauty is reduced to absurd, parody and satirical aesthetics, the essence of which is not to hide meanings (forcing recipient to search for truth), but in order to use the greatest number of ways so that the blogger's thesis becomes obvious to the recipient, so that he can understand and accept it exactly.

In the context of multimodality, Bad Comedian's reviews appear as complex text, in which different moduses complement each other to enhance perception. In recent years, interest in multimodal theory⁷ has greatly increased. The theory of multimodality allows you to look at various semiotic resources, such as language, images and music, in their combinations and interactions. The term "modus" is defined as "socially shaped and culturally given semiotic recourse for making image"⁸. Examples of multimodal text types are combinations of images, graphics and text (for example, in newspapers, brochures or on web sites), combinations of speech, gestures and combinations of moving images, speech and background sound in video and movie. We can say that it was the multimodality that became the determining factor in the transformation of the genre. We can say so in connection with the addition of visual modus, first of all. It's one thing to describe, another thing is to visually show, visualize a new cinema reality. As soon as the review has its own aesthetics, it ceases to be just a comment, and claims self-sufficiency.

7 Compare to: KRESS, G., VAN LEEUWEN, T.: *Reading Images: Grammar of Visual Design*. 2nd Edition. London : Routledge, 2006; O'HALLORAN, K. L.: *Multimodal Analysis and Digital Technology*. In BALDRY, A., MONTAGNA, E. (eds.): *Interdisciplinary Perspectives on Multimodality: Theory and Practice*. Campobasso : Palladino, 2010, p. 10-21; BATEMAN, J. A.: *Multimodality and Genre: A Foundation for the Systematic Analysis of Multimodal Documents*. New York : Palgrave Macmillan, 2008.

8 KRESS, G.: *Multimodality. A Social Semiotic Approach to Contemporary Communication*. London : Routledge, 2010, p. 60.

3 Media Esthetic Tools of the Blogger

If we follow the logic of immersiveness, then the important issue for us is the method of including and immersing the recipient into the reality constructed by the blogger. We believe that the main way of immersion is the media aesthetic tools of the review. To create a visual modus, designed to create a new reality, the blogger uses the following techniques: sketches, parody of cinematographic techniques, the introduction of the figure of the critic into film reality. They contribute to the formation of new cinema reality. Sketches most clearly represent the author's position, being a product of the blogger's own creativity. Basically, using of sketches is connected with the direct ridicule of any elements of the plot, the logic of the film itself or the personalities behind the creation of the film. There are many variations of these sketches. They contribute not only to the formation of a new reality, but also to its expansion, the creation of an extra semantic field. That is, the story that the blogger suggests to the viewer appears in a certain background (mainly due to sketches on the subject of creating the film being watched). For the sketches of Evgeny Bazhenov, a certain brutality due to the exerting the strongest influence on the viewer. For example, in a review on “Viking” after cutting the laudatory speeches of historians about the historical authenticity of the film, the blogger shows a sketch where a pistol is held at their mouths and shout: “Carefully treated with historical material, yes? Carefully?!”, to which they get a scared answer “Yes, yes, of course!”. A rather rigid image is necessary in this context precisely in order to illustrate the blogger's idea of pressure from the federal channels on the opinion of the recipients.

Another important element of aesthetics is the use of cinematographic techniques in the review in the form of parody. The blogger borrows cinematic language tools for review in order to demonstrate its accessibility and ridicule the film itself by bringing to the absurdity of individual film receptions. For example, in a review of the movie “Hack Bloggers”, made in the style of screen capture and using computer animation, the blogger himself uses the same techniques to provoke the viewer's question: “Was this movie really worth \$1 million?” A variety of this technique can be called the incerpction of the blogger in the film picture. This is manifested by “inscribing” the figure of the critic into the plot of the film (directly, using graphics or by re-sounding the characters of the film). With the help of this introduction, the “critic-artwork” border itself is eliminated. A blogger wedges into the plot in order to change the

cinema reality itself in order to visually demonstrate to the viewer the absurdity of the plot or characters. The familiar order of things is broken and transformed under his influence, acquiring a new context. What should have been presented as a fact is changing under the pressure of a blogger.

Conclusions

The videos in the genre of “bad movie review” strive to create their own reality. The original functions of film critics, though preserved, but in a distorted form. There is no desire for objectification (although this is a controversial issue in the context of the analysis of works of art) and attempts to respect the director’s vision. Especially noticeable is the transformation of the line “the viewer – the critic – the cinema”, where the distance between them is reduced to the maximum by the visual introduction of the figure of the critic into the cinema space. Within the framework of the “bad movie review” genre itself, such transformations seem logical. The viewer does not come for an objective review, but for the art of criticism in an entertaining way.

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