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"Journalistic text in a new technological environment:
achievements and problems"

**TRANSFORMATION OF FILM CRITICS: AESTHETICS OF “BAD
MOVIE REVIEW” GENRE**

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Abstract

This article, supported by Russian Science Foundation 18-18-00007, discusses the transformation of film critics in the format of a video blog using the “bad movie review” genre as an example. The subject of the analysis is the domestic YouTube channel BadComedian. Using qualitative and quantitative content analysis, as well as applied media aesthetic analysis, we identified the main aesthetic features of the channel, as well as the logic of the blogger’s critical argumentation. We identified the following functions of aesthetic tools in the BadComedian reviews: 1) acting as critical arguments; 2) enhancing the emotional impact on the recipient; 3) forming a collage aesthetics; 4) enhancing the comic component in the videos. The original functions of film critics preserved, but in a distorted form. The entertainment function in this genre interacts with the critical one. In addition to the analysis of the movie itself, the author of the domestic YouTube channel BadComedian also addresses the modern issues of the country, criticizing Russian problems. The movies in the “bad movie review” genre tend to create a semantically oversaturated video verbal text due to the interaction of various moduses with the goal of finding ways in which the audience responds to critical blogger theses.

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Keywords: YouTube, mediaaesthetics, bad movie review, criticism, video blogging.



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1. Introduction

When we mention critical discourse, explicitly expressed in the “bad movie review” genre, we should pay attention to the expansion of the subject of its own criticism. In addition to the analysis of the movie itself, the author of the domestic YouTube channel BadComedian also addresses the modern issues of the country, criticizing Russian problems. The subject of criticism is, for example, the Russian Orthodox Church (the law on insulting the feelings of believers), the work of the Cinema Foundation, the imposition of the country's cult in domestic cinema. Thus, the critical discourse expands and goes beyond the scope of the initial subject of the review itself – cinema. However, since the YouTube content is mainly focused on the mass audience, the critical discourse interacts with the comic discourse. As Rozhkova (2013) notes, the pragmatic functions of using comic discourse are reduced to “revitalizing” the original discourse (the article deals with political discourse), increasing the speaker’s charisma (proximity to the audience) and expanding the semantic context.

Blogger Yevgeny Bazhenov performs all the above functions in a critical discourse by introducing comic elements. The “tradition” of their use goes back to the first blogger on YouTube in the genre of “bad movie review” Doug Walker, who actually one of the first started to use all the main comic techniques in his show Nostalgia Critic. These were, for example, excerpts from famous films (later used as a meme type), expressive speech (using obscene vocabulary), and various author sketches within the review. These techniques are also inherent in Evgeny Bazhenov’s show, who noted the influence of the show Nostalgia Critic on his own.

1.1. Literature review: user-generated content

A turning point for online video can now be seen tools for creating and distributing it online are widespread, and video sharing sites encourage a full transition to user-generated content (for example, monetizing videos on YouTube, encouraging bloggers work and refusing of any other activities).

If we talk about video sharing resources, then the first and most significant will be YouTube. YouTube may be a common trademark for online video, but naturally there are many other resources with similar functionality (for example, RuTube). Culture of YouTube video is the subject of analysis of scientists from different fields for several years. The book “YouTube: Online Video and Participatory Culture” notes the interaction of commercial and personal goals when a blogger’s creativity is confronted with the need to take into account the interests of a mass audience (Burgess & Green, 2018, p. 75). Cunningham believes that YouTube-culture represents the opposition to classical media systems, forcing the latter to change the conservative strategies for working with content (Cunningham, Craig, & Silver, 2016, p. 377). The Hondros's (2018) book provides an analysis of video maker networks and the relationship between them. There are studies on parody as the main tool for critical commentary on YouTube, which is explained by the hybridity of its culture (Boxman-Shabtai, 2019).

User-generated media influenced the culture of the world in a various field, especially because of their self-sustaining nature and constant attention from the audience.

UGM can be traced to sites like Yahoo and AOL in the 1990s. Over time, they have spread to the blogosphere also. Although UGMs are of different types, all of them can be attributed to new media, the content of which is made publicly available via the Internet, reflects a certain amount of creative effort and

is created outside professional procedures and practices (Wunsch-Vincent & Vickery, 2006). Thus, the media from a purely professional sphere go into the field of amateur performances of different levels of quality.

Article by Shao (2009) argues that the appeal of UGM can be analyzed using the theory of use and gratification (UGT). It is assumed that the audience consciously chooses an environment that could satisfy their needs, and that they are able to identify specific reasons for choosing certain media. First of all, UGT can be decomposed into three components: consumption, participation and production (Shao, 2009, p. 9). Consumption refers to people who only watch, read or browse, but never participate. Participation includes both user interaction with the user, and user interaction with the content (for example, content ranking, adding to playlists, sharing with others, posting comments, etc.). This does not include actual production. Production includes the creation and publication of personal content, such as text, images, audio and video.

1.2. Literature review: multimodality of video

When analyzing such a complex “text” as the author's video, we should pay attention to certain components of a video, such as sound, image, etc. However, we can conditionally designate such formation by “text”. The current state of understanding of the text involves three of its varieties: linguistic (verbal), extra-linguistic (non-verbal) and mixed. The latter kind of text can be attributed to the definition of blogger videos on YouTube. When we speak of a mixed text, we mean first of all the introduction or addition of the verbal mode by some other (or several moduses). Among foreign researchers, such a complex formation is denoted by the term “multimodality”.

In the Russian scientific field, this term is known as the “polycode text” (Omelyanenko & Remchukova, 2018; Gavrilova, 2016). The functioning of comic elements in multimodal texts is considered in the work by Scherbakova (2017). Among foreign researchers, the term “multimodal text” is commonly used (G. Kress, T. van Leeuwen, C. Jewitt, M. Bednarek, J. R. Martin, E. Ventola, E. Adami, F. Serafini, M. Walsh, etc.). The development of the theory of multimodality was associated with the dominant role of the verbal component over others. Criticizing previous research, foreign scholars insisted that the central position of the language is more irrelevant (A. P. Baldry, J. Callaghan, C. Jewitt, G. Kress, T. van Leeuwen, K. O'Halloran and others).

In the aspect of multimodality, the word is no longer the main mode of information transfer. The theory of multimodality recognizes such a right for the visual range.

There is also a socio-semiotic approach to the definition of multimodality (G. Kress, T. van Leeuwen, R. Hodge, K. Juit, R. Aydema, and others). It is based on the concept of semiotic mode – a set of tools for representing values from several non-verbal systems (Adami & Kress, 2014). Semiotic mode is able to produce a certain cultural value. Kress (2010) defined the semiotic mode as “socially shaped and culturally given semiotic recourse for making image” (p. 79). When analyzing video bloggers, there is a certain problem of interaction between moduses, primarily due to the fact that the meaning is formed rather in their totality and interaction, rather than separately.

In the aspect of multimodality, BadComedian's reviews appear as complex video verbal text (Mishina, 2007), in which different moduses complement each other to enhance perception. Multimodality became the basis for creating “iconic situations” (Kohn, 2018), which are formed in the new media. Online

videos on YouTube have their own aesthetics, media aesthetics, the functioning of which in the scientific community is primarily associated with researchers Zettl (2011) and Mitchell (2015).

2. Problem Statement

In the conditions of high popularity of the blogosphere in our time, including video blogs, the question of the transformation of classical journalistic and journalistic genres is particularly acute. The media has always focused on the mass audience, although they had a conditional division into elite and mass approaches. In the modern YouTube-space, this border is erased, moving into the category of middle culture, where bloggers have not yet left the attempts of intellectual development of the audience, but the dominance of comic elements and entertainment component become really important. The main aspect remains the popularity of video bloggers, who several years ago in the media began to be called “opinion leaders”, and the Ministry of Culture of the Russian Federation, in addition, gathered all known bloggers to a meeting to discuss cultural education of young people (although a number of bloggers were disappointed with this suggestion). In the case of BadComedian, it is worth noting such important examples as checking by the Ministry of Culture of the Russian Federation the appropriateness of spending budget funds for the film “Hack Bloggers”; the scandal with a sharp drop of the rating of the movie “Moving Up” after the blogger’s review on this film; public apology of the rapper Basta after Bazhenov criticized his view on the need for pension reform. All this suggests that the creativity of video bloggers goes beyond the scope of the online sphere, directly influencing the sociocultural environment of the country. In fact, the work of individual bloggers has become a massive phenomenon, each of which should be studied to understand the current state of the country's culture, as well as to identify tools for influencing the recipient.

3. Research Questions

First of all, we are interested in the features of the “review of bad cinema” genre as a modern transformation of film critics. In connection with the above problem, our study poses the following questions:

- How exactly is the genre of film critics transformed into modern realities?
- What tools does a blogger use to convince recipients in his point of view?
- Is it possible to determine a separate aesthetic orientation of reviews in the genre of “bad movie review”?

4. Purpose of the Study

The goal of our study is to describe and analyze the features of the “bad movie review” genre as part of the work of Evgeny Bazhenov, the author of the “BadComedian” channel.

It should be noted that the main “consumer” of the content of YouTube-channels comes for the relaxation and laughter. Media aesthetic tools attract the viewer from the first minutes and make him to watch the video further (even if its duration exceeds an hour, which is typical for the latest Bazhenov’s reviews). On the other hand, comic elements expand the semantic field of blogger’s critical statements. In most cases, they are used to parody certain images (for example, the creators of the film or individual

elements of the movie), and also become a tool of open irony, sarcasm or parody. In critical discourse, comedy techniques turn into a kind of “arguments”, one way or another illustrating and confirming the theses of the author.

In the framework of multimodality, BadComedian reviews appear as complex video verbal text in which different moduses complement each other to enhance perception. Media aesthetic tools (expressive speech, quoting other films and author sketches) are most often found in blogger reviews, forming not only a comedy component, but also a critical one.

5. Research Methods

In connection with the following questions, we used next research methods. First, we used applied media aesthetic analysis to identify the main aesthetic tools of a blogger and its possible functionality. Secondly, the methods of qualitative and quantitative content analysis were involved. The first one allowed us to determine the semantic component of blogger’s aesthetic tools, as well as to identify the main features of his work. Quantitative content analysis was used to calculate the critical arguments and the ways in which they were represented within the framework of the review, on the basis of which the corresponding table was made.

6. Findings

A rather interesting fact is the preservation of the tradition of leaving the most critical process beyond discussing only the subject of the actual criticism. In other words, when BadComedian analyzes the movie, it invariably turns to the analysis of the modern realities of the country. For example, during the review of the film “The Attraction”, the blogger mentioned the problems of Russia 17 times (using various modes and aesthetic tools to convey this information). The aesthetic tools used in the applied function of critical arguments are also used by the blogger to criticize the realities of contemporary reality.

6.1. Aesthetic features of the genre “bad movie review”

The use of excerpts from other films is most often found in many types of reviews on YouTube. For Evgeny Bazhenov, this is also a characteristic feature, with the help of which he, first of all, introduces a humorous and incriminating context in his video. Their obvious function is the recognition for the viewer, so that he can decipher the meaning given by their use. In addition to the use of already recognizable (which have become memes) excerpts, the blogger introduces new ones, including in his review’s excerpts from the national cinema. For example, there was a case with the final scene from the film “Phobos. Fear Club”, where the actor Vorobyev in a hysterical voice shouts “Happy End!”. Subsequently, this insert was used by Bazhenov every time when the happy ending of the film looked artificial and illogical.

Expressive speech and its linguistic features are purely verbal reception. Expressiveness is used to make a catharsis. Seeing another director’s mistake (or a manifestation of laziness in the form of logical holes in the plot or a fake actor’s game, which the blogger points out), the viewer should experience anger emotion, and this emotion gets its expression in the blogger’s poisonous manner, filled with a mocking manner. For Yevgeny Bazhenov it is typical to use metaphorical saying (“the image was turned inside out,” “How do filmmakers say: About the dead we told nothing, or some bad stuff in order to earn money”, “Only

now you can't take the fresh label off Belov. Because he died"), sarcastic questions ("the accents are somehow shifted, don't you find it?", "Maybe this happened in reality, and the creators had to insert it into their logical movie?"). Often, the verbal component leads to the emergence of becoming a meme. This happened, for example, with the phrase "For myself and for Sasha!". Yevgeny Bazhenov comically summarized all the motivation to the victory of the USSR basketball team, expressing it with this phrase. Subsequently, the statement "For myself and Sasha!" went beyond the scope of the review itself, received its own comic strip and in fact began to denote any absurd motivation.

Sketches most clearly represent the author's position, being a product of the blogger's own creativity. Basically, their use is connected with the direct parody on 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. When reviewing the Viking cinema, Evgeny Bazhenov included several sketches, showing where "in fact" so many historians came from, confirming the authenticity of the movie (mainly through threats from the filmmakers). Evgeny Bazhenov's sketches are characterised by a certain cruelty of the presentation of blogger's thought and ideas with the explicit goal of exerting the strongest influence on the viewer.

It is necessary to highlight the use of an alter-ego blogger when he is creating reviews. Yevgeny Bazhenov has several permanent images, as well as situational images, which directly depend on the subject of the review (the subject of the film). From the permanent images, we can distinguish parodic images of the scriptwriter, director, "average viewer" (depicted as a middle-aged man constantly drinking beer). A situational example can be called a parody image of director Nikita Mikhalkov, who was used only in the review of the movie "Moving Up", whose appearance was due to the fact that his studio produced this movie.

Another important element of aesthetics is the use of cinematographic techniques in the review. The blogger borrows cinematic visual tools for review in order to demonstrate its accessibility (this is especially true for films boasting high achievements in the SGI field) and to satirize the film itself by bringing these tools to the absurdity level.

The last feature can be called the insertion of the blogger in the film. This is manifested by visually "fitting" the figure of the critic into the plot of the film. With the help of such an insertion, the boundary between critic and work of art is removed. A blogger wedges into the plot in order to change the movie reality itself in order to visually demonstrate to the viewer the absurdity of the plot or characters.

We believe that the above aesthetic features perform the following functions:

- Becoming a critical argument for a blogger.
- Strengthen the impact on the recipient by using different moduses to convey information.
- Form a collage aesthetics.
- They are primarily an instrument of comedy, satire or irony, reinforce the entertainment component of the review.

6.2. The logic of critical argumentation.

First of all, we set our task to calculate how many times the same thesis can be repeated within one review. The results are shown in the table 1:

Table 01. Repeatability of critical arguments depending on the type of representation in the review by BadComedian “Attraction”

	Critical thesis “The improbable plot line of the uprising”	Critical thesis “Purely developed Characters”	Critical Thesis “Bad Script”	Critical thesis “Inadequate behavior of military structures / government”
Representation in the verbal modus	5	14	13	13
Representation by visual modus	2	6	8	4
Representation using the author's sketch	2	1	3	10
Representation by Meme	3	1	4	3
Total	12	22	28	30

Such a frequent repetition of the same thesis in one review, in our opinion, has two main reasons:

- Chronological sequence of the review.
- Striving for semantic supersaturation in the review.

The first reason is explained by the structure of the video. The blogger does not summarize his impressions and critical theses on the result of viewing but broadcasts them to the viewer while watching a movie. This is necessary to create the illusion of spontaneous commenting of the film in the course of its viewing along with the viewer himself. The blogger shows the film in chronological order, without running ahead of the plot. Therefore, he has to go back to the thesis every time when there is a reason for reminding that argument to the viewer.

The second reason is directly related to the modern type of thinking. Modern videos are complex modus-semiotic unit, in which a large number of moduses are tightly soldered to each other. In order to increase the impact and guarantee that the thesis reaches the audience, the blogger uses different ways of presenting the same information. Serious statements with rigorous arguments, cultural references in the form of memes or sketches, and comic representation of plot situations from the film can serve as arguments in order to bring any film-making mistake to the absurd level to destroy its possible significance for the viewer.

7. Conclusion

This study presented a brief theoretical overview of the concepts of UGM, UGT and “multimodality” as the determining factors for the creativity of modern bloggers. Through applied media aesthetic analysis, quantitative and qualitative content analysis, the main aesthetic features of the YouTube blog “BadComedian” were identified, and the number of uses of the same argument in the review was calculated. The study made the following conclusions. Aesthetic tools serve as purely applied functions to create a comedic component, to create critical arguments and to increase the impact on the recipient. The movies in the “bad movie review” genre tend to create a semantically oversaturated video verbal text due

to the interaction of various moduses with the goal of finding ways in which the audience responds to critical blogger theses. The original functions of film critics preserved, but in a distorted form. Especially noticeable is the transformation of the line: the spectator – the critic – the art work, where the distance between them is reduced as much as possible due to the visual insertion of the figure of the critic into cinema space.

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