

Identity and Construction in Postmodern Context of Art Film *Blue is the Warmest Color*

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Abstract

This paper focuses on the aesthetic ideology and aesthetic style embodied in the work of 'Blue is the Warmest Color' to dissect it and examine the identity and construction of identity as a minority group in a postmodern context. *Blue is the Warmest Color* is a film that focuses on homosexual emotions in adolescent development, showing the budding love and emotional orientation of a 15-year-old girl's adolescence, and the ecstacy and torment that comes with an awakened consciousness. The evolutionary process of the characters' emotional orientations is dissected, pointing out that the central theme of the film is the concern for fluid identity and self-identity. Through the narrative and the setting of the characters' emotional patterns and the "Body Writing" of women, this paper further examine the typical variability and fragmentation of postmodern identity, and interpret in detail the content, messages and effects of the characters' dialogues in the film to illustrate the way in which the work expresses class and identity differences. The research method is based on textual analysis and theoretical research.

Keywords: Art Film, Postmodern, Identity, Body Writing, Emotional Orientation

1. INTRODUCTION

Blue is the Warmest Color is an art film that expresses the "author's" personal ideas and the pursuit of intellectual depth. The themes and narratives in the film show an "Ethnic Films" or "Identity Film" with independent ideological character, which emerges from the post-modern and complicated stylized films. That's why I chose *Blue is the Warmest Color* as the masterpiece of postmodern film.

Post-modern thought shows that any kind of ontology can be deconstructed and puts the phenomenon into an open field, forming all kinds of post-modern thinking and aesthetic schools and concepts. Since the second half of the 20th century, the postmodernist characteristics held by art cinema have become more and more obvious, and film creators prefer to use film as a means to achieve artistic communication. As a result, art cinema in the postmodern context has led to a pluralistic development of film culture forms, giving the general public more opportunities to appreciate and encounter diverse subject matter, and they themselves have even become participants and co-creators. At the same time, the constantly following themes and creative methods also brought about reflections on society and examinations of the changes of the times.

Manuscript received: November 24, 2021 / revised: March 1, 2022 / accepted: March 8, 2022

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In Chapter 5 of *Poetics of Cinema*, "The Art Cinema as a Mode of Film Practice," David Bordwell summarizes the characteristics of art cinema by first pointing out that art cinema opposes the classic narrative model with loose causality; art cinema stimulates narrative through realism and authorial expressiveness, showing real scenes, focusing on real problems, and shaping realistic characters [1]. "Postmodern should be a situation that no longer derives comfort from perfect forms and no longer shares the collective remembrance of nostalgia with the same taste. Postmodern seeks new ways of expression, not to find enjoyment in them, but to convey our awareness of the 'unspeakable'. Postmodern artists and writers often arrogate to themselves the status of philosophers; the texts written and works produced are not subject to prior rules and thus cannot be categorized by ordinary classifications of texts or works, much less evaluated according to deterministic judgments" [2].

2. SUMMARY OF THE WORK

The film is based on Julie Maroh's comic book "*Le bleu est une couleur chaude*" (Blue is a warm color), with a script written by the director and Ghalia Lacroix. The comic was released in 2010 and won the public prize at the 38th Festival international de la bande dessinée d'Angoulême (International Festival of Comics in Angoulême) in 2011. The director eventually changed the name of the film, not using the title of the book, and named it after the heroine. As the line in the film goes, Adele means "justice" in Arabic. The story of the film is a fusion of the profession of teaching and comics, documenting the feelings of the heroine Adele from her adolescence in high school to her new adulthood as a kindergarten teacher.

Blue is the Warmest Color is very French, but it is also all about everyday life in 21st century France, including politics, school, food, wine and sex. The story is about a 15-year-old girl, Adele, who discovers her sexual orientation, finds true love and loses it step by step, showing the complexity of adolescence and a passionate same-sex love, and using same-sex love as a bearer of the most beautiful and sentimental feelings of human first love. The film is more than half full of close-ups of the two main characters, as well as large long shots. 3 hours long, but not boring. The whole story is like a flower blooming and returning to the confusion, but also full of various erotic elements, in the sexual content of the amazing bold. *Blue is the Warmest Color* is a French romantic film, although the whole work revolves around the lesbian love between Adele and Emma, a blue-haired girl, but it does not adopt a radical tone, no radicalism towards homosexuality, only the love story of two.

The director Abdellatif Kechiche is an expatriate French director who is passionate about showing the lives of French expatriate teenagers and their search for self-identity. Regarding the choice of actress, the director said he sensed something when he first met Léa Seydoux (as Emma), "I noticed that Léa had something we could call 'Arab', an Arab soul. She told me later that she had Arab half-brothers. lea had a way of living that was fully aware of everything that was going on. It is also a way of accepting the changes in life. It has to do with nomadism, wandering, melancholy, what is also called 'mektoub'" [3].

Nature and improvisation. In Cossissieux's films, as well as in Adele's life, nature almost completely replaces play. Therefore, improvisation is a very important part of the film, which takes a long time to shoot, often involving many hours of shooting, and the director tends to reach the "truth" of the film. Taking the collective scenes as an example, the director explains: "I had difficulties with the rhythm of the script. When I'm on set, I need to break the principles of the script, which must be followed at all costs. I prefer to open up to people with my dialogue. During the shoot, the aftermath dies down and the writing continues. (These) scenes are always being recreated to allow the actors to react together." In addition, we only see "Chapters 1 and 2" in the film's subtitle, but the director doesn't seem to be finished with the heroine's series of adventures, saying, "Chapters 1 and 2' because I don't know the other chapters yet. know the other chapters. I wish Adele

would tell me what happens next” [4].

3. AESTHETIC IDEOLOGY

In the 1980s, gay/lesbian theorists and feminists strongly recommended the challenge to the “queer” identity, and Michel Foucault's works and their deconstructive discourses became prevalent, and the post-structuralist discourse on ontology and social relations began to heat up. Poststructuralism advocates a rethinking of traditional concepts such as "meaning, truth, subjectivity, freedom, and power," often associated with a gesture of "rejection" or a critical stance against the logic and goals of classical humanism. Judith Butler and Monique Wittig argue that heterosexuality is a very complex discursive and institutional norm that is normalized in our cultural consciousness, understanding, and experience due to specific patterns of relationships, lifestyles, and identities, so that heterosexuality is really just a "real effect" of a discursive-intellectual-power system that is now dominant. "Lyotard criticizes grand narratives and the logic behind them, accusing holistic or universal discourses and practices of removing the grounding of difference, complexity, and indeterminacy; Foucault also refutes the "repression narrative" in *The History of Sexuality* and argues in *Discipline and Punish: The Birth of the Prison* that the way in which grand narratives (normative discourse) construct difference is only established through the degree of distinction from normative goals. Post-structuralists such as Foucault assert that "so-called objective, universal truths do not exist; what one sees are merely particular forms of knowledge and the results of their production and 'naturalization' through a particular cultural or historical approach. It is this post-structuralist logic that gives a basis for the legitimate existence of homosexual representations that deviate from the norms or ideal goals of heterosexual behavior." [5] As a result, Foucault's anti-essentialist views became popular, and gay/lesbian theorists and feminists cited and recommended theories of homosexuality with vigor.

With theoretical support, many films reflecting homosexuality emerged in the post-1980s. From the perspective of art cinema, the director's concept of "authorship", filming techniques, expression of emotions and presentation of community identity have made some of the gay films more alternative. At the same time, the discussion of the topic of homosexuality gradually moves from the marginal to the center, and the emotions of this group are revealed in the film, which is a kind of aesthetic discussion about the essence of art, and a reflection of the position of the director and the audience.

In most of the reviews, the definition of the film is considered as a lesbian theme film. Even though there are love scenes shown in the film, a closer reading of the female protagonist Adele's growth path shows that the film is not just bringing up the topic of whether it is appropriate for lesbians to be together, but what it really wants to express is the issue of an individual's emotional orientation in the period of ignorance and how to carry out self-identity.

In the queer space where the two heroines share a space, the soft blue color shows the perfect gay coloring, and the contrast between the aggressive atmosphere of the family and social environment in which Adele grew up. On the formal level, the traditional romantic mode and French style elements, with some close-ups of neo-realistic depictions, show that the film draws on the representational mechanisms of European "art film". But more than the homosexual elements, the film combines the themes of gender and class into a complex story that reflects issues of family, personal growth and social class. There are no clear answers to any of the questions raised in the film, just as the main character Adele's feelings are depicted as inevitably uncertain and ambivalent. The formal structure of the film is similar to Adele's hybrid identity, with a sense of ambiguity, and from the beginning the film emphasizes Adele's "identity" and its unique traces, which makes her oscillate between established rules and marginalized cultures, constantly being She is constantly renegotiated until the line between the two dissolves into an individualistic line that she herself can identify with. The film's concern

with the nature of "identity" is always in the process of construction and transformation, which is inseparable from its self-awareness of the nature of the construction of film discourse. "This is explained by Homi Bhabha's concept of "third space", a new position that arises from the interaction of two or more "original moments". The history of these "original moments" is simultaneously replaced and traced in the different identifications of the subject. Implicit in this (re)construction of one's hybrid 'identity' is the element of freedom of individual choice, which is perfectly illustrated by Iain Chambers' statement that illustrates this, namely that 'different roots are now superseded and transformed into particular routes in the present'" [6]. As a result, the production both asks hard questions that are difficult to answer and figure out, and is filled with compassion underneath the skillfulness of the screenwriters.

4. AESTHETIC STYLE

As a 2013 French romantic film, *Blue is the Warmest Color* cuts across multiple contradictions and tensions and has aroused much controversy and criticism, from the realistic portrayal of sexual orientation, class division, lesbian romance, to the discussion of food and the blue element. The main character Adele's emotional wavering and shyness about her "identity" is the main point the film is trying to make.

Adele meets four people in the film, two women and two men, and it is her third encounter with Emma that is her true emotional experience. From her adolescent ignorance to her return to her real self, the first relationship Adele experiences and the reasons that lead to her breakup with Emma both originate from relationships with men. The two males appear, the former as a way for Adele to force herself to have a mainstream sexual orientation, and the latter as an act of testing herself after she realizes that her inner loneliness comes from her own background and caused by the gap with Emma. The appearance of the second woman strengthens Adele's judgment in questioning her sexuality after ending her first relationship. And it is the appearance of Emma that ignites the desire for sex between people of the same sex within Adele. In the book *Gender Trouble: Feminism and the Subversion of Identity*, Judith Butler points out that biological sex is innate and is the basis of gender; social sex is socially constructed and has a symbolic meaning. "Gender should not be interpreted as a stable identity, or a dynamic field that generates various actions; rather, gender is a fragile identity built in the course of time, established in a superficial space through stylized/programmed repetitive actions. ... More precisely, it is a temporal process of bodily embodiment in terms of gender" [7].

The film's shift between homosexuality and heterosexuality regarding Adele's sexuality as she grows up seems to offer more options for Adele, but it only confuses her further. The constant change remains typical of postmodern identity, and in another way proves the infinite possibilities of self-identity in line with postmodernism. From being confined to a patriarchal family to entering a lesbian family, Adele's self-identity is always a dynamic process, as are the attributes of home itself. In a postmodern world, people are increasingly inundated with fragments of each other, increasingly distracted by stimulating, inflated consumerism and lifestyle choices. While we are already in a disjointed collection, human longings are often expressed in physical, ephemeral, superficial desires. When postmodernism shatters rationality, the notion of a unified self at the heart of modernism is shattered, and the relationship with Emma is experienced through the body. Superficial physical desires hardly become Emma's spiritual companion or fit into Emma's social circle. Thus, her body becomes the primary site of her self-identity. As Stuart Hall points out: "is a matter of 'becoming' as well as 'being'; culture identity is not once- and-for-all. It's not a fixed origin to which we can make some final and absolute return..... Identities are never unified, and, in late modern times, increasingly fragmented and fractured, never singular but multiply constructed across different, often intersecting and antagonistic, discourses, practices and positions. They are ... constantly in the process of change and transformation" [8].

This stunning lesbian romance won a lot of applause, but it also drew questions from viewers who thought

it was viewed and presented from a male perspective; after all, the film has a lot of close-ups of faces and framed shots of bodies. Some reviews see the work as a struggle of women against male power through the norms of female body writing, claiming that the film interprets “queer” sexuality from Adele's perspective, using Adele's sensory system to observe and experience it as a way to challenge the dominant model of heterosexuality through female body expression. In the first half of the film, Adele deftly balances her infatuation with Emma with her perceived self-consciousness as a desired person. The images also avoid the prolonged exposure of the sexual act itself, employing more subtle, subtly sexual scenes, a quality of mind and spirit to show. "The notion that showing the part rather than the whole signals objectification is well entrenched in some portions of feminist film study, which often argues that the fragmentation of women's bodies is a kind of fetishization that neglects the whole woman" [9].

The Western feminist theory and practice of “Body Writing” is one of the key theories of French feminist/feminist criticism. Women's body writing is to show the real and unique female existence, and to express the pleasure of self through writing about bodily sensations. Whether it is a feminist film in search of discourse or a female film with a queer theme in search of identity, the construction of self-themed identity in a female space is clear for women's gender identity. The film depicts the inner emotions and realities of lesbians from a female perspective to the audience, interpreting homosexuality as a phenomenon in the midst of society with its female perspective at the center. Gilbert writes: "We need to create or find a narrative of experience that allows us to recall what it feels like to discover ourselves in sexuality" [10]. The film allows the viewer to see a depiction of the love of a young queer female and to become aware of the risks that can come with sexual passion, experimentation and expression, a performance that is a paradox of all that is good and dangerous about love.

The whole film's story is about the events of everyday life, plain but not boring. All the plot points can be shown with images, but the delicate relationship between the characters and the information of getting along with each other are expressed with a lot of dialogues. A lot of information about the characters in the film mostly comes from the characters' dialogues, giving the audience a preview of the subsequent development and affirmation of the plot dynamics while watching the characters' relationships. In addition, the dialogues between the two main characters mostly reveal their preferences and backgrounds, their levels of education, etc., which directly lead to the two revealing their class differences to the audience.

When the two first meet at the bar, Emma's background in art studies contrasts with Adele's high school level of knowledge. Emma is a senior art major with a passion for drawing and painting, and her conversation is distinctive, and Emma's friends are all of the same status as her. When Emma's friend asks Emma to go to a party in Belgium, Adele feels a little lost. She originally thought that her communication with Emma could make both parties go further, but she did not expect Emma's social circle to be very different from her own. As two people meeting for the first time, the character dialogue gives an account of both parties' personal situations and points of interest, making an initial distinction between their social hierarchies. In the following first date, Emma draws a character portrait of Adele, and the dialogue between the two reveals Emma's feminist concept, which is fully reflected in Emma's characterization. She wraps herself in the philosophical ideas of French philosopher Jean-Paul Sartre and identifies them as beliefs on the path of her ideal quest. Emma then takes Adele to see a painting exhibition for the first time, after which the two sit together on the grass and eat. The conversation about their eating habits further illustrates the differences in life and class. Two-thirds of the way through the film, the event of Emma's painting exhibition at her home becomes the biggest moment in Adele's heart that widens the gap between the two. The lived experience in Adele's original home space, the powerful patriarchal politics and ideology, prevents Adele from experiencing and acknowledging her lesbian desires, thus making her a sexual minority. There is a great gap between the families and lives of Adele and

her girlfriend Emma, which is exactly reflected in the two different types of queer identities and constructions of the two protagonists. Adele comes from an ordinary working-class French family, and in the face of pressure from school and family, the timid and shy Adele adopts an avoiding attitude and denies her homosexuality; Emma comes from an upper-middle-class artistic family, a feminist with a firm stance, and uses Sartre's existentialist philosophical view to identify and construct her own identity, and appears relaxed and firm on this point of homosexual identity. Emma invites her friends over, and Adele is ready for all the preparations, including champagne and good food. When she is confronted with praise and encouragement from the gallery owner, she feels flustered. So Emma introduces Adele as a good writer, evoking the desire to read Adele's work, but Adele says, "For the time being, all I've written is my diary." Opening the scented pie celebration, Emma gave a speech in which she said, "First of all, thanks for being here. Thanks for being on time. I'd especially like to thank my muse, my source of inspiration who makes me happy today. Adèle." In response to the crowd's request, Adele's speech consisted of one sentence: "I'm really thrilled to meet you all, and I hope you like it." Throughout the party, Adele found herself unable to fit in with Emma's social circle. She dresses up more like a waitress, preparing food, champagne, and pouring drinks for all the friends who arrive.

Class division is a recurring theme throughout the film in the characters' dialogue, and serves as the root cause of the tragic relationship between Adele and Emma. Emma indulges in her belief in philosophical and pioneering ideas, just as her ego indulges in her love of food in oysters, while Adele's standard working class indulges in spaghetti seasoned with tomato and meat sauce. In the upper-class environment shown in the film, Emma displays a strong feminist stance on her queer identity. Adele, by contrast, is wavering, coupled with the shame she feels from her friends and parents' disgust with homosexuality. So Adele has always felt anxious and conflicted because she could not fully recognize her sexual orientation. On the other hand, the class difference and Adele's identity crisis enable Adele's lack of voice in the characters' relationship with each other, showing the physical sacrifice given to Emma in her upper-class background and her repeated submission under the norms of the heterosexual mainstream model.

5. CONCLUSION

This paper takes the art film *Blue is the Warmest Color* as the research object, combines the relevant theories, and reveals the aesthetic ideas and the expression of film language in the work from the aspects of artistic creation methods and narrative content. First, in terms of narrative subject matter, the film chooses marginalized subjects. The characters in the film are all minority groups, marginalized groups that have received little attention from society. As a reflection of the current situation of minority groups' lives, their needs, and their cries to the outside world, the film adopts such marginalized subjects to represent the gradual consideration of marginal issues in the post-modern stage. As a result, art film works choose their subjects in order to draw attention to marginal subjects and gradually move from the margins to the center.

Second, the subject matter of the story is separated from the central theme. The genre division of the work is obvious from various reviews, which consider it to be telling the story of lesbians. However, from the director's original intention, the choice of subject matter is not the core theme that the director wants to express, thus leading to many "misinterpretations". The narrative of *Blue is the Warmest Color* is about the love between two women, showing the desire for homosexuality, while the director believes that he is only telling the story of love between two people. Therefore, gender is irrelevant, and the focus and core of the narrative is to explore the issue of self-identity of the heroine Adele on her way to grow up.

Moreover, the post-modern art cinema presents a kind of decentered pluralism that opposes traditional concepts, featuring diverse themes, varied techniques, combining popular elements, discrete narrative centers, and promoting individual values. In terms of the expression of ideas in film language, *Blue is the Warmest*

Color adopts close-ups, nude images of the body and dialogues of characters, allowing the work to naturally bring the audience a wide range of imagination and thinking space, ignoring the construction of rigorous film themes and value judgments, satirizing the so-called absolute principles, and devoting itself more to deconstruction and subversion of traditions. Therefore, the works reflect the typical characteristics of postmodern culture and art, also profoundly express the spiritual crisis and the plight of people's survival in postmodern society.

In the future, studies should be conducted to generalize the characteristics of postmodern films for more diverse films.

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