

# *The Nihilistic Future of Post-internet Era: Analysis of the Production Mechanism of Core Aesthetics*

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**Abstract:** In the post-internet age, Core aesthetics emerges as an artistic response to the evolving societal values and challenges inherent in the human experience. This essay explores the essence and significance of Core aesthetics, focusing on its attributes of fear and nostalgia. Core aesthetics utilizes elements such as amateur editing, low-quality imagery, and thematic compositions to evoke resonance among viewers, blurring the boundaries between self and the external world. It delves into the production background, highlighting the impact of the post-internet era, centralized internet management, and the formation of virtual communities. The essay examines the psychological and societal factors driving individuals towards self-indulgence and escapism within the confines of reality, resulting in weariness and a struggle for meaning. It also explores the influence of the internet as a production medium, democratizing art creation and challenging traditional notions of authorship and subjectivity. Looking ahead, Core aesthetics is expected to evolve and adapt to technological advancements and cultural shifts, empowering individuals to express themselves authentically and challenging established norms. However, questions surrounding authorship, personal agency, and the impact of digital influence on identity will persist. In the future, Core aesthetics will reflect and navigate the complexities of the times, offering a lens through which we can explore and understand profound changes and challenges. It has the potential to inspire dialogue, foster connection, and provoke introspection, contributing to a richer understanding of our shared human experience in an increasingly complex and interconnected world.

**Keywords:** Core Aesthetics, Internet art, Post-internet era, Psychoanalysis, Philosophy

## 1. Introduction

In the post-internet age, the interaction between individuals and internet intelligence gradually transitions into a phase of reciprocal exchange. Under the relentless progression of the physical world, people, whether seeking escapism or a means to express their emotions, opt to immerse themselves in the virtual realm as an extension of their reality, divulging their authentic selves on the internet. It appears that there is no greater reliance on the internet than in this very moment. Various forms of internet art have become conduits for people's ideologies. It is noteworthy that over the past five years, trends like Y2K, Mcbling, and the Core aesthetics, which will be scrutinized in this paper, have emerged. All of these trends revolve around themes that stem from the current reality, utilizing the internet as both a creative instrument and a medium of articulation, giving rise to these artistic

movements within the post-internet age. They have garnered considerable attention, even attaining the status of popular trends. In this paper, the deductive and hermeneutic methods will be used to analyze the essence for the existence of Core aesthetics. Furthermore, in terms of the topological production mechanism of Core aesthetics, starting from a single motif, relatively comprehensively understanding, and mastering its principles, and then deconstructing it until it is connected to the universal public perspective, the phenomenological philosophical method of "individual- universal" is completed as well. Starting from content, characteristics, production media, and production background, and show how the internet subculture reflects the nihilistic dilemma of the post-internet age.

## 2. Literature Review

The main content of the literature review will explore the artistic characteristics of Core aesthetics and the general network phenomenon in the post-internet age separately. Previous relevant literature will choose to study the social significance or personal emotions carried by Core aesthetics and surreal internet art and directly analyze and observe net phenomena separately rather than considering them from an aesthetic point of view.

From a historical perspective, the article *"European Plastic Art in Anthropological Dimension: From the Classics to the Postmodernism"* offers an insightful analysis of the paradigms of plastic arts and their transformational evolution over time. The article delineates how classical Greek art celebrated the human form as the ultimate artistic expression, wherein the entity was a derivative recreation of the body's beauty. Subsequently, religious domination in a different historical epoch led to rejecting and nullifying the human body or entity, thereby losing its meaning and purpose. Therefore, the evolution of art underwent a paradigm shift, transitioning from merely simulating the human form to forging the beauty of the inner spirit, ultimately resulting in painting's emergence as the most popular art form. The advent of painting offered a vast playground for artists to explore diverse colors, thereby unlocking new realms of artistic expression that were previously unattainable. Furthermore, the expressive tension of distortion, denial, and destruction of forms in the modern context attests to the dynamic nature of art and how it continuously evolves to reflect the current zeitgeist of society [1].

In contemporary times, there is a tendency among artists to dehumanize art and deviate from the norms of beauty. The intermediation of the artist's landscape metaphorically represents the process of the generation of appearances, and the so-called "work" can only reflect its artistic value after the recognized art genre, and artistic standards reveal its essence. The ontological sense of art also states that a Core aesthetic work cannot exist stably and permanently as a public being, and it does not possess physical substance like sculpture or painting. However, it is the artistic product of the intentional activity of the producer. A highly abstract and overflowing aesthetic paradigm is formed in the online platform, akin to a network virus.

In the modern special context, as noted in the article *"The medium changes art,"* the role of media in art has gained unprecedented weight in the post-internet period, and it is decisive in determining the classification of art. The medium is the most significant basis for the category of art, and the characteristics of the medium have determined the essential features of the internet conveyed. For instance, this paper had high requirements for content simplicity and compactness in the printing era, while television gave fragmented internet and intermittent speech in later times [2].

The concept of fleeting and dispersed art in modernity, as described by Charles Baudelaire in *"The painter of modern life,"* is also evident in the expression of Core aesthetics. Thus, exploring Core aesthetics provides a glimpse into the actual manifestations of the Internet age, where art exists in various forms and mediums, including the digital space. The production mechanisms of Core aesthetics are also worth exploring as they reflect contemporary artists' creative processes and

techniques. By analyzing the Dreamcore branch of Core aesthetics, this paper aims to comprehensively understand its creative essence, characteristics, and production mechanisms, contributing to the broader discourse on Core aesthetics. The examination of Dreamcore will delve into its inheritance and transcendence of liminal space and defamiliarization, offering insights into the creative possibilities of Core aesthetics in the post-internet age. Overall, this article provides a unique perspective on the creative potential of Core aesthetics, highlighting its relevance and significance in contemporary art discourse [3].

The notion of the cancellation of the future has been a central concern in contemporary discourse, particularly in the book *"Ghosts of My Life: Writings on Depression, Hauntology and Lost Futures"*. This text notes that the organization of work and leisure has undergone a significant transformation with the emergence of post-Fordism, characterized by globalization, pervasive computerization, and the casualization of labor. The ubiquity of the Internet and mobile telecommunications has transformed everyday experiences, making them increasingly unidentifiable. However, there is a growing sense that culture has lost its capacity to interpret and make sense of the present. In fact, the present may no longer be discernible or demonstrable in any meaningful way [4]. The current zeitgeist is characterized by nihilism and diaspora, and there is ongoing debate regarding the haunting essence of twenty-first-century music. This cancellation of the future is also evident in Core aesthetic works, giving rise to elusive, nebulous creative features that resonate with and are widely discussed among audiences. As such, this paper will argue that Core aesthetics are reflective of the zeitgeist of the post-internet age, capturing the sense of loss and uncertainty that characterizes contemporary culture.

The above literature provides a solid theoretical foundation for the analysis of Core aesthetics. Nevertheless, to fully understand the production and reception of Core aesthetics, it is necessary to explore the interaction between the aesthetic style and the social and cultural context of its emergence. This paper aims to examine the dynamic relationship between Core aesthetics and the characteristics of the post-internet age, highlighting the originality of the aesthetic style that arises from the distinctiveness of the era, as well as its ability to reflect the spirit of the times.

### 3. Production Content

The essence of Core aesthetics lies in its core attributes of fear and nostalgia. Its composition includes fundamental elements like amateur and rough editing, low-quality photographs or image compression, all striving to emulate and restore the ambiance and tools of the turn of the millennium [5]. The photographic compositions deliberately converge upon the scenes entrenched in the collective memories of a community, with the intention of eliciting profound resonance among the viewers. These elements overtly expose the underlying theme of nostalgia. While Core aesthetics can be categorized in various ways, another prevailing concept is to instill a sense of fear in the audience, whether through fragmented and abrupt visual transitions (known as "Weirdcore"), hazy and recognizable old settings ("Dreamcore"), or the psychological and physical anguish ("Traumacore"), all of them are fundamentally composed of elements of strangeness and peculiarity [6]. The human presence is seldom encountered in most Core aesthetic works, as the focus predominantly revolves around antiquated architectural structures, vast liminal spaces, or the natural world. Through this deliberate manipulation, the ultimate objective of these photographs is achieved: the dissolution of human subjectivity and the subversion of the human-object relationship. Architectural structures, as the outcome of human activity, are transformed into enigmatic subjects that gaze upon humanity within these images. They detach themselves from their practical purpose of providing shelter, perpetually and serenely captivating viewers with an alluring danger, as if on the verge of supplanting human existence (echoing the sentiments towards artificial intelligence to some extent).

This tranquility, however, is also an unbearable reality for individuals living in the post-internet age. The rapid development of the internet inundates people with an endless barrage of irrelevant

internet, rapidly consuming their leisure time and hindering introspection. The authentic historical narratives are eroded, and the path to actively suspend attention is persistently obstructed. Consequently, individuals experience an unprecedented dearth of mental and emotional stimulation. Once individuals manage to liberate themselves from the ceaseless influx of the Internet and genuinely calm their minds, they are disconcertingly confronted with the void within fragmented and blurry memories, and unfamiliar and distressing thoughts. Thus, they seek even more Internet to assuage the emptiness within, thereby embellishing their spiritually destitute inner worlds [7]. Core art functions as a mirror, meticulously crafting an environment characterized by desolation and, at times, even futility, enabling individuals to confront their own vulnerable and dispossessed souls amidst boundless tranquility. Individuals project their own perplexity onto the photos they generate, and these images, while posing inquiries to the audience, also proffer their own solutions: namely, seeking an escape route through the prism of the past. In other words, they find solace in self-indulgence through the prism of nostalgia. Nostalgia frequently arises from discontentment with the present reality; however, owing to the irretrievability of the past, individuals are prone to becoming ensnared within the realm of imagination, mired in the morass of disillusionment, and finding it arduous to disentangle themselves, as they struggle to ascertain alternative trajectories [8]. The Core aesthetic astutely unmasks this status quo.

#### 4. Production Background

The post-internet era, characterized by a centralized and tightly regulated social structure subject to the control of both corporate entities and government bodies, has witnessed the emergence of the novel Core aesthetic [9]. In this contemporary post-internet age, the internet offers numerous platforms for individuals to share their personal privacy, such as TikTok, Instagram, and RED. Herein, driven by the desire for external validation, the notion that "true pleasure lies in being exposed to the gaze of others," individuals opt to share an idyllic and unattainable daily life, perpetuating their yearning for such an idealized life model [10]. Notably, users often experience existential anxiety when confronted with unpredictable globalized threats within the online realm, which is considered an extension of reality. This anxiety often gives rise to the formation of virtual communities grounded in shared fears or empathetic connections. These virtual communities foster a sense of belonging and identity among their members, while also serving as platforms for political figures or influencers to become the aspirational goals and advocates within the lives of virtual users, providing them with a sense of purpose and direction.

Simultaneously, advertisers astutely target these aspirations, creating a sense of "incompleteness" in individuals' lives, whether it manifests as an inadequate nasal bridge or an unsophisticated toilet. People, driven by the ideology of consumer capitalism, willingly succumb to the belief that by indulging in the products and services produced by the capitalist machinery, they can satisfy the desires dictated by their superego. However, due to various real-world constraints such as financial limitations, familial obligations, and societal expectations, individuals find their desires unattainable, leading to a transformation of their proactive desires into passive driving forces. Subsequently, individuals find themselves deeply entrenched in a state of self-doubt, resulting in weariness. Some may even choose to entirely negate existing symbolic systems and enter a state of existential nihilism, akin to the "Goblin mode" that prevailed in 2022, seeking solace in self-gratification within the confines of reality. Nevertheless, these negative coping mechanisms represent a struggle within the established symbolic order. Regardless of the chosen path, the ultimate destination remains the existential predicament of nihilistic existence.

In the context of shifting societal values, characterized by a heightened pursuit of uninhibited desires and absolute freedom, the unwritten primal Father transcends the written legal Father assuming the position of ultimate authority. This transformative process encourages individuals to

surpass the limits of the symbolic system, engaging in acts considered taboo by the system, thus subverting its norms. At this juncture, the sublime superego and the libidinal id intertwine, resulting in the marginalization of the ego, which traditionally acts as the mediator. The authentic self, in turn, becomes attached to the superego, while the homogenous self succumbs to its dominion. This mechanism is often referred to as "Repressive Desublimation" [11].

Within this framework, the subject objectifies their personality and corporeality, compelled by the encouragement of unbounded consumption and the pleasure derived from transgressing the symbolic system. Paradoxically, these indulgences are perverted, as Lacan astutely observed, "the subject locates himself as the object of the drive, as the means of the other's jouissance" [12]. Such desires stem from the influence of the Big Other.

Essentially, the pervert's pursuits are not driven solely by personal pleasure, but by the satisfaction derived from fulfilling the Other's enjoyment. This instrumentalization becomes a source of pleasure in itself, as the pervert finds fulfillment in working towards satisfying the Other's desires. Consequently, the spirit of the era becomes one characterized by anguish, a perpetual state of groaning, weariness, and perverted desires. Individuals tragically become reduced to mere instruments of pleasure, serving as tools for the gratification of the dominating Big Other.

## 5. Production Media

From a psychoanalytic perspective, a meticulous analysis of the afflictions in the post-internet age necessitates a profound exploration that intertwines with the transmission medium of Core art—the "Internet." Imprisoned within the confines of symbolic systems for an extended period, individuals who engage in acts deemed taboo by the system unleash a subversive force that brings them immense pleasure. The subject, shackled by the dominion of the discourse, finds solace in constructing their reality retroactively through nonsensical ramblings, fervent gestures, uninhibited sexual expression, and even contemplation of death. These manifestations serve as a rebellious response, countering the established symbolic systems. Art, in various forms, often emerges as a channel for such expressions.

However, what sets the post-internet age apart is the intensifying grip of centralized Internet management, which has given rise to an elaborate Internet ecosystem. The Internet, with its resounding popularity, interactive nature, and remarkable pluralism, dismantles the conventional notion of "artifacts," enabling the creation of artworks through the Internet that transcends traditional boundaries. In this transformative landscape, art becomes an intricate process where creators purposefully upload images, and the audience's reactions and criticisms play a pivotal role in shaping the final act of the performance. This iterative creative process reinforces value judgments and births the concept of the "prosumer"—virtual users who embody the dual identities of both "producer" and "consumer." These individuals establish a malleable communication environment characterized by heightened collective dynamics and structural complexity, surpassing the limitations imposed by traditional media art and mitigating factors such as national borders and racial distinctions to a certain extent [2].

Initially ensnared by consumerist art forms, individuals harness the power of affordable and convenient network technologies to democratize the production of art. Consequently, (Core) art assumes an omnipresent nature, allowing anyone to forge a mirror that reflects the intricate contours of their tormented inner worlds, which subsequently permeate the vast realm of online databases, open for all to explore. It is imperative to acknowledge that, although the post-internet age emphasizes the interactive nature of artworks, the palpable presence of the author recedes into the background, instigating an inevitable ideological conflict within this era. As digital media and computing technologies reshape human perception and consciousness, subjectivity becomes obscured, consumed by the invisible intricacies of the software and the elusive core of hardware. Humans find

themselves detached from the technological medium, unable to grasp the elusive reality that lies beyond [13].

In scrutinizing the realm of production media, the essence of (Core) art assumes a distinctive temporal essence—an unparalleled realm of operability and interactivity. However, the enigma persists, as reconciling the selfhood of the Internet with the selfhood of the author emerges as an intricate challenge, often entangled within mutual exclusion and contradiction.

## 6. Conclusion

In conclusion, Core aesthetics in the post-internet age serves as a significant artistic response to the evolving societal values and challenges inherent in the human experience. By capturing the essence of fear and nostalgia, Core aesthetics taps into the collective consciousness, invoking a profound sense of resonance among viewers. It redefines human subjectivity by shifting the focus from the individual to the objects and environments that surround us, blurring the boundaries between the self and the external world.

As we venture into the future, it is expected that Core aesthetics will continue to evolve and adapt to the rapid advancements in technology and the ever-changing cultural landscape. The democratization of art production facilitated by the Internet will likely gain further momentum, allowing for greater accessibility and participation. This democratization empowers individuals to express themselves authentically, transcending traditional artistic boundaries and challenging established norms.

However, as Core aesthetics continues to flourish, questions surrounding authorship and the nature of individual subjectivity will persist. The boundary between the self and the technological medium becomes increasingly blurred, raising concerns about the loss of personal agency and the impact of digital influence on our identities. Exploring these complexities will require ongoing introspection and critical examination.

Looking ahead, Core aesthetics is poised to reflect and navigate the complexities of the future. It will serve as a mirror, capturing and reflecting our collective desires, anxieties, and aspirations. As emerging technologies reshape our world, Core aesthetics will likely adapt, embracing new mediums, platforms, and artistic expressions. It will continue to offer a lens through which we can explore and understand the profound changes and challenges of our times.

In this journey, Core aesthetics has the potential to inspire dialogue, foster connection, and challenge our preconceived notions. It invites us to reflect on our relationship with technology, the impact of societal values, and the search for meaning in an increasingly complex and interconnected world. As we move forward, embracing the diverse and transformative power of Core aesthetics can contribute to a richer and more nuanced understanding of our shared human experience.

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