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Research on the "Super-Real" Trend and Subjective Dilemma of AI-generated Images from the Perspective of the Landscape Society

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Abstract: The widespread application of generative artificial intelligence technology has transformed AI-generated images from auxiliary creative tools to the core carrier of landscape production. Their "hyper-realism" has shifted to reshaping the contemporary visual cultural ecosystem. By using Guy Debord's theory of landscape society as an analytical framework, it can be observed that AI-generated images, through data-driven collaboration, symbolic construction, and large-scale dissemination, make the representational features of landscapes extremely obvious, resulting in a phenomenon where the simulated system of the real prototype is separated. This shift not only completes the paradigm shift from "reproducing reality" to "constructing reality" but also leads to multiple predicaments, such as the decentralization of the creative subject, the alienation of the cognitive subject's senses, and the distortion of the cultural subject's memory. The research aims to study the internal logic and manifestation form of the "hyper-realism" shift of AI-generated images, reveal the mechanism of their dissolution of individual subjectivity, and explore the possible paths for the reconstruction of subjectivity in the technological context. This is to provide theoretical references for understanding the alienation and breakthrough of visual culture in the digital age based on the landscape society theory.

Keywords: Landscape society; AI-generated images; Hyper-realism; Subjectivity; Visual alienation

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1. Introduction

Guy Debord had already predicted the visual turn of modern society. As "the distorted representation of social existence", landscapes penetrate and control daily life through image exhibitions. After the deep integration of generative AI and image production, AI-generated images, with their efficient creation, realistic effects, and wide dissemination, have become the new dominant force in landscape production and dissemination. It breaks free from the constraints of the real prototype, forming a "more real than real" hyper-real landscape,

blurring the boundary between reality and fiction, and disintegrating individual subjectivity. The logic of "representation surpassing reality" in landscape society is thus confirmed. How this hyper-real shift deepens the alienation of landscapes, impacts various subjects, and how individuals reconstruct subjectivity are the core issues that this paper aims to explore based on the landscape society theory, combined with practice.

2. The "hyper-realism" shift of AI-generated images: From reproduction to construction paradigm transformation

2.1. The generation logic of the hyper-realism shift

The "pseudo-real world" predicted by Baudrillard has become a reality in the development of AI-generated images. The hyper-realism shift of AI-generated images is not an accidental occurrence but the result of the synergy of technological logic, capital logic, and landscape logic. Technically, the iterative upgrade of algorithms continuously enhances the degree of realism of AI-generated images, moving from the imitation of real images to generating scenes that conform to physical laws but do not exist in reality, achieving the leap from "reproducing reality" to "constructing reality." At the data level, massive training data enables AI-generated images to have diverse symbolic materials, allowing them to complete the construction of hyper-real landscapes that are detached from the real prototype through the recombination and innovation of symbols.

The promotion of capital logic provides sufficient impetus for the hyper-real shift. The efficient production capacity and wide dissemination significance of AI-generated images make them a new tool for capital accumulation. Capital uses the control of AI model development, the collection of training data, and the operation of dissemination platforms to transform AI-generated images into consumable visual commodities, stimulating users' desire for viewing and participation. Under the dominance of capital, AI-generated images continue to pursue the pursuit of the most extreme realistic effects and the widest dissemination range, further strengthening the trend of the hyper-real shift [1].

The infiltration of landscape logic gives the hyper-real shift a cultural soil. In the landscape society, visual experience assumes the dominant sensory experience, and individuals' cognition of reality is gradually restricted by visual representations. The hyper-real features of AI-generated images align with this visualization need, completing the construction of "perfect" pseudo-real scenes through optimized visual effects, more closely matching individuals' expectations for realness. This supply-demand alignment makes the hyper-real shift of AI-generated images widely accepted in society and has become the mainstream form of visual culture at present.

2.2. The manifestation forms of the hyper-real shift

The hyper-real turn of AI-generated images presents multiple forms of manifestation, with the core being the triple transcendence of symbols over reality: substitution, shaping, and tampering. The most prominent aspect of symbol substitution is the complete separation of AI-generated images from the real prototype and the establishment of a self-circulating symbol system. Modern AI image large models can generate scenarios that do not exist in reality but are in line with human cognitive logic. These scenarios, through technological means, achieve a high degree of realism, making it impossible for individuals to distinguish between virtual and reality, and ultimately using symbol substitution for reality as the standard of cognition.

Symbol shaping is mainly manifested in the reverse construction of individual cognition by AI-generated

images. The “perfect” simulated symbols constructed by AI-generated images through technological refinement have become the “anchor points” for individuals’ perception of reality, affecting their perception and judgment of the real world. After long-term contact with the hyper-real landscape, individuals will unconsciously use the simulated symbols as standards for evaluating the real world, causing deviations in the cognition of reality. This reverse shaping turns the real world into an “inferior copy” of simulated symbols, further consolidating the dominant position of the hyper-real landscape.

Symbol tampering is particularly prominent from the perspective of collective memory and cultural identity. AI-generated images can use simulated technologies to reconstruct historical scenes and replicate cultural symbols, integrating false elements into real history and culture. This tampering is not simple forgery, but uses a highly realistic visual presentation to give false information a real appearance, thereby distorting collective memory and cultural identity. When AI-generated “historical images” are widely disseminated, real history gradually loses focus in the hyper-real landscape, and the foundation of cultural identity also becomes vulnerable.

2.3. The landscape effect of the hyper-real turn

The hyper-real turn of AI-generated images intensifies the alienation effect of landscapes. Firstly, it exacerbates the separation between reality and appearance. Hyper-real landscapes, with their more extreme simulation effects, completely conceal the real social existence, and individuals are no longer confronted with the real world but rather with the symbolically constructed objects generated by AI. This separation prevents individuals from accessing real social relations and their essential needs, leading to an illusionary cognitive predicament.

Secondly, it strengthens the control mechanism of landscapes. Hyper-real landscapes have stronger sensory attraction and penetration power, bypassing human rational judgment and directly exerting influence in the sensory domain, forming a “visual is real” cognitive inertia. Individuals gradually lose their critical thinking ability in immersive visual experiences and willingly accept the dominance of the landscape. The black box operation of algorithms intensifies this control, and those who master the technology use the content and dissemination of AI-generated images to implicitly guide individuals’ thoughts and behaviors.

Finally, it makes the globalization and homogenization of landscapes more obvious. The dissemination of AI-generated images is not limited by time and space, allowing hyper-real landscapes to continuously spread globally. Individuals from different regions and with different cultural backgrounds can be immersed in the same visual landscape, gradually eroding cultural diversity.

3. Subjective dilemma: Alienated scenes in ultra-realistic landscapes generated by AI

3.1. Decentralization and alienation of the creative subject

In the process of traditional artistic creation, the core creative subject is enabled by individual emotional expression and thought accumulation to complete the work, highlighting a unique artistic style and subjectivity. However, the generation of AI-generated images has disrupted this individual creative model, causing a change in the decentralized characteristics of the creative subject. The creation process of AI-generated images involves multiple participating subjects, including users who provide initial ideas and engineers who develop algorithms, enabling the establishment of a distributed creative network.

This decentralization blurs the boundaries of the creative subject and undermines the traditional identity of an artist. Users, in the capacity of "prompt engineers", join the creation process but cannot obtain complete creative sovereignty. Their creative expression is limited by algorithm logic and training data. The dominance of engineers in algorithm development is often driven by capital demands, preventing them from achieving pure technological innovation. The alienation of the creative subject is particularly prominent in this distributed collaboration, where individual creative labor is simplified to a single step in the technical process, and subjectivity is dissolved within collective collaboration and technical logic.

3.2. Sensory dependence and diminishment of cognitive subjectivity

The ultra-realistic landscapes generated by AI images utilize extreme visual experiences to construct a cognitive mode of "sensory substitution for reason", causing sensory dependence and dulling of the cognitive subject. The ultra-realistic landscapes can align with human visual preferences, leveraging refined colors, compositions, and lighting effects to provide a more attractive visual experience than the real world. Through prolonged immersion in such immersive experiences, individuals' senses constantly adapt to the stimuli of the ultra-realistic, reducing their perception of the real world [2].

The rational judgment ability of the cognitive subject is weakened in the ultra-realistic landscape. AI-generated images, through technological means, no longer use rational thinking but directly act in the sensory domain, causing individuals to form a cognitive inertia of "what is seen is true." When the AI-generated realistic content is presented before them, individuals no longer habitually verify the source or conduct logical verification, but make judgments based on sensory experiences. This change in cognitive mode makes individuals prone to being misled by false information, losing the ability to distinguish between truth and falsehood, and experiencing cognitive dilemmas.

Sensory dependence further distances individuals from real life. AI-generated ultra-realistic landscapes provide individuals with an illusionary sense of satisfaction, causing them to immerse themselves in visual pleasures and be reluctant to confront the complexity and contradictions of real life. Social activities of individuals are increasingly carried out through online platforms, with real face-to-face interactions being replaced by virtual interactions mediated by the landscape. This estrangement prevents individuals from forming sound social and self-awareness, and subjectivity gradually dissolves in the gap between the virtual and reality.

3.3. Memory distortion and identity blurring of cultural subjects

The ultra-realistic turn of AI-generated images has had a profound impact on cultural subjects, mainly manifested as the distortion of collective memory and the blurring of cultural identity. Collective memory is an important foundation for cultural inheritance and identity recognition. However, AI-generated images, by tampering with historical images and reconfiguring cultural symbols, have disrupted the authenticity and continuity of collective memory. When the false historical scenes generated by AI are widely disseminated, real historical events and cultural traditions are obscured and forgotten in the ultra-realistic landscape, damaging the foundation of cultural subjects' memories.

The construction of cultural identity relies on stable cultural symbols and value systems. However, the reorganization and innovation of cultural symbols by AI-generated images make their meanings fragmented and uncertain. AI-generated images can randomly replicate and restructure elements of different cultural

symbols, forming a mixed visual landscape. This abuse of symbols leads to the dissolution of the original meaning of cultural symbols, and the differences between cultures gradually blur. When individuals encounter these fragmented cultural symbols, they find it difficult to form a clear cultural identity, leading to confusion and bewilderment regarding their cultural identity.

More seriously, through AI-generated images, capital and technological forces promote a uniform "AI aesthetics", threatening cultural diversity. In the hyper-real landscapes spread globally, the symbols of disadvantaged cultures are marginalized, while those of dominant cultures occupy a dominant position, forming a new form of cultural hegemony. This cultural alienation causes the cultural subjects to lose their ability to make autonomous choices and creations, becoming passive recipients of a single cultural landscape, and their cultural vitality and creativity are stifled.

4. Subjectivity reconstruction: Criticism and breakthrough in the technological context

4.1. Establishing the leading position of the creative subject in value

In the process of responding to the decentralization and alienation of the creative subject, the key to subjectivity reconstruction lies in establishing the leading position of human beings in the creative process. The technical attributes of AI-generated images make them always be regarded as creative tools rather than the creative subject. Artists need to reposition their own roles, transforming from mere creators to "creative initiators", "aesthetic gatekeepers", and "thought integrators", using the setting of issues, selecting training data, and improving the generated results to present personal thoughts and humanistic concerns in the creative process.

Strengthening the copyright awareness and ethical consciousness of the creative subject is also crucial. Creators need to actively strive for copyright protection of AI-generated works, clarify the legality and rationality of the use of training data, and resist data exploitation and infringement. Additionally, creators need to adhere to the bottom line of artistic ethics, refusing to generate content that violates public order and good morals or spreads false information, using responsible creative attitudes to help AI-generated images achieve healthy development.

Building a diversified creative ecosystem can provide support for subjectivity reconstruction. Encouraging diverse models of human-machine collaboration, both leveraging the efficient advantages of AI technology and preserving the unique value of human creation. Supporting independent creators and the development of niche styles, breaking the homogeneity monopoly of "AI aesthetics", and providing space for the individualized expression of the creative subject. Through these methods, the creative subject can regain autonomy and dignity in the technological context and achieve the reversion of alienated creative labor.

4.2. Cultivating the visual literacy and critical consciousness of the cognitive subject

To break through the sensory dependence and blunting of the cognitive subject, it is necessary to cultivate the visual literacy and critical consciousness of individuals. Visual literacy education should be combined with the national education system to help individuals understand and distinguish the methods and abilities of AI-generated images, and recognize the technical logic and dissemination mechanism behind the images. Through education, help individuals establish the awareness of "visual questioning", avoiding blind belief in visual representations, and forming the cognitive habit of verifying sources and logical analysis.

Strengthening the responsibility and commitment of media platforms, establishing identification and traceability mechanisms for AI-generated images. Platforms need to use technical means to clearly identify AI-generated images and inform users of their virtual nature, safeguarding users' right to know and choice. Additionally, platforms should strengthen content review and crack down on illegal activities such as spreading false information and fraud using AI-generated images, creating a healthy information environment.

Individuals should actively enhance their self-reflection ability and maintain a critical distance from the hyper-real landscape. While enjoying the visual convenience brought by AI-generated images, they should not be addicted to the illusory visual experience, but actively return to real life and participate in real social interactions and practices. Through reflecting on their cognitive patterns and behavioral choices, they can break away from the implicit control of the landscape, rebuild the connection with the real world, and achieve the awakening and autonomy of the cognitive subject.

4.3. Guarding the memory transmission and diversity of the cultural subject

The key to reconstructing the cultural subject lies in safeguarding the authenticity of collective memory and the diversity of culture. It is necessary to establish ethical norms and regulatory mechanisms for the generation of images by AI, and to prohibit the use of AI-generated images to tamper with history or forge cultural symbols. Strengthen the digital protection of historical images and cultural heritage, and build authoritative cultural databases to ensure the reliable transmission of collective memory [3].

Encourage active participation and creation by cultural entities, and enhance cultural identity. Support the AI innovation application of local cultural symbols, combine traditional cultural elements with modern technology, and create visual landscapes with ethnic characteristics. Promote equal dialogue and exchanges between different cultures, and through cross-cultural communication of AI-generated images, promote cultural understanding and tolerance, and break the monopoly of cultural hegemony.

It is also essential to cultivate the cultural confidence and self-awareness of cultural entities. Guide individuals to deeply understand their own ethnic history and culture, and enhance their sense of identity and pride in local culture. Encourage individuals to participate in cultural creation and dissemination, and express their own cultural experiences and value pursuits through new media forms such as AI-generated images. Through these means, cultural entities can maintain a clear cultural consciousness in the hyper-realistic landscape and safeguard the roots and vitality of culture.

5. Conclusion

The "hyper-real" trend of AI-generated images represents an inevitable evolution in the digital era's landscape of society. It not only promotes the innovation of visual culture but also deepens the alienation of landscapes, causing multiple predicaments for the three types of subjects: creation, cognition, and culture. Essentially, it is the dissolution of subjectivity by the logic of technology and capital. The duality of technology determines that the predicament is not insurmountable. It is necessary to establish the value leadership of the creative subject, cultivate the critical consciousness of the cognitive subject, and safeguard the memory and diversity of the cultural subject. Through the collaborative efforts of multiple parties, a visual ecosystem of human-machine symbiosis can be constructed. Adhering to human subjectivity and critical consciousness is essential to safeguard genuine life and human dignity in the digital landscape, providing insights for the balance

between technological civilization and human liberation.

Disclosure statement

The author declares no conflict of interest.

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