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失真的图像，迷失的社会：弗兰克·兰特利基亚的《意大利女演员》

Attack on the Image Society: Frank Lentricchia's *The Italian Actress*

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Abstract

The image society, featuring the new culture of modern media and consumerism, radically changes the patterns of social communications and connections as well as conceptualizes the constructions of the self. The mediated images add spice to people's life, but meantime, more relevant problems arise and tend to be aggravated. In *The Italian Actress*, Frank Lentricchia expresses his concerns with the unreal images emanate from the modern media. The thesis thus attempts to probe into the novel from the perspective of Narrative techniques, New Historicism, and the myth prototype of Muse, to demonstrate how the unreality, immorality, illegality and commercialization of the images are revealed by the author and how the society, traditional literature, and the construction of the self are influenced by visual culture.

Chapter One deals with the narrative techniques to reveal how time, space, and unreliable narration are adopted to build the framework for the general narrative structure. The adoption of order, duration, and frequency, indicates the haunting power of Jack's past on his present life and his struggles between art and life; the shifting of spaces, from Volterra to Rimini and from Rimini to Volterra, represents Jack's pursuit for art and the doomed failure of his video that has been polluted in the commercialized image society; and the unreliable narration in the novel indicates the dilemma Jack faces in the image society: he is both attracted and repelled by the commercialized modern media to which he is exposed.

Chapter Two analyzes the outer influences on the creation of the novel through the theory of Historicity of Texts to help readers better understand the image society historically and culturally, and explores the three stories of Rimini under the theory of Textuality of History to illustrate that people's ambition for fame is long-existed through history yet infinitely amplified by the modern media and advance consumption.

Chapter Three centers on the romantic relationship of Claudia and Jack with the

story of Muse as the mythological archetype. The Claudia in the photos and films is the traditional Muse, who is materialized, perfected, and sanctified by Jack and who, representing emotion, inspires and guides him in his artist career, while the traditional Muse is subverted by the Claudia in life in the novel, who is living, imperfect, and secular and who, representing reason and morality, guides Jack from art to the conventionality of life. Both Muses fail in guiding Jack, because Jack is addicted to the forever youth and beauty of Claudia that are actually commercially overstated by the mediated images.

Chapter Four discusses the form and content of the video in the novel in terms of its immorality, illegality and commercialization and the negative influences of modern media on the society. People, especially the young, may be encouraged to imitate the sex, violence, and death highlighted by modern media; worse still, they may become inured to and indifferent to real violence.

By writing *The Italian Actress*, for one thing, Lentricchia expresses his self-reflection on himself and on his being a theory critic, fiction writer, and film teacher; for another, he discusses people's confusion and ambition for fame and obsession with youth and beauty communicated by the image society. Since no research on *The Italian Actress* can be found, the thesis will hopefully fill the gap and propel the readers to examine themselves and their life styles in the image society and thus to find a way out.

Key Words: *The Italian Actress*; the image society; modern media; virtual reality; commercialization

摘要

在以媒体和消费为表征的图像社会里，人们的社交方式和自我构建模式均发生了根本性的改变。形形色色的图像丰富了人们的生活，同时也带来相关的社会问题。在其小说《意大利女演员》中，福兰克·兰特里齐亚表达了他对现代传媒主导下图像社会的隐忧。本文致力于从叙事技巧、新历史主义、缪斯神话原型等角度剖析小说，指出作者如何揭示图像的虚假性，不道德性，非法性以及商业性，同时探讨视觉文化如何对社会，传统文学，以及自我构建产生影响。

本文第一章探讨小说的叙事策略，揭示叙事时间、叙事空间、和不可靠叙事如何构成小说的整体叙事框架。首先，作者对叙事时序、时距、和频率的安排，既突出小说主人公杰克的过去对现在的影响又展现其在生活与艺术中的困境；其次，作者对空间转换的安排—杰克离开沃尔泰拉前往里米尼，最后又回到沃尔泰拉—象征杰克对艺术的追求以及其被功利污染的视频必然以失败告终的结局；最后，作者通过运用不可靠叙事，使杰克的形象更加生动，同时表现他既排斥现代媒体又被其吸引的矛盾心理。第二章先从新历史主义理论的“文本的历史性”分析了作家生活的文化大环境和自身经历对其小说主题创作的影响。不仅作家笔下的人物，甚至连作者本人也在无奈或者无意识中被功利化的图像社会所掌控。论文接着从“历史的文本性”分析了三段里米尼的历史故事，揭示人们对名利的欲望在历史的任何一个阶段都存在，然而这种欲望却在现代媒体和商业化的推动下愈演愈烈甚至被无限放大。第三章借助缪斯女神的神话原型集中分析杰克和克劳迪娅的爱情关系。传统的缪斯是黑白照片中静止的克劳迪娅，她被物化，被神圣化，被完美化，代表感性，给予艺术家杰克创作灵感，并帮助他在色情电影事业中找寻艺术的至臻境界；被颠覆的缪斯是小说中现实生活里的克劳迪娅，她是有生命、有思想、有世俗欲望和缺陷的普通老太太，代表理性与道德，指引杰克从艺术回到生活。传统的缪斯和被颠覆的缪斯均未完成对艺术家杰克的引导职责，因为杰克深深迷恋着影像中的克劳迪娅那被媒体宣扬夸大的永恒青春和美貌，不可自拔或不愿自拔，而克劳迪娅却坚持不懈地打破杰克的幻想。第四章分析小说中视频的呈现形式和内容，批判影视艺术在追求收视率的诱惑下放弃了本应遵循

的艺术美感和社会责任，甚至毫无底线，假借艺术之名，做着违反道德，违反法律，违反人性之事。视频中宣扬的暴力、色情与死亡不仅会诱导好奇观者，尤其是青少年的模仿，更严重的是引发全体社会对暴力的漠视与包容，甚至人们期待更加暴力的画面来满足逐渐麻木的感官。

小说的艺术效果主要在于作家写作的自省性，以及调动读者参与诠释作品的积极性，启发读者对于这些困惑的思考；小说对主题的探讨则表现了生活在图像社会的人们对美，名利，青春与年老，艺术与道德等的困惑和痴迷。

关键词：《意大利女演员》 图像社会 现代传媒 虚拟现实 商业化

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Introduction

Frank Lentricchia (born in 1940-) is a prominent Italian American literary critic and novelist who has made valuable contribution to the study of poetry, modernism, and literary criticism and who shares the same reputation at Duke University as Stanley Fish, Eve Kosovsky Sedgwick, and Henry Louis Gates Jr.. Lentricchia was born to working-class parents who are the children of immigrants from the South of Italy. His parents were not permitted schooling beyond the 8th grade for they had to work to support the family. Fortunately, his parents attached great importance to the education of Lentricchia, which to some extent intrigues his earliest enthusiasm for reading. In 1962, he graduated from Utica College where his passion for literature was further enhanced by inspiring professors who warmly encouraged him to acquire graduate education. Lentricchia at Duke University received his MA in 1963 and his PhD in 1966. During his PhD candidacy, Lentricchia was greatly influenced by his supervisor, Bernard Duffey, a scholar of modern poetry; consequently poetry became Lentricchia's main interest as well. Not only his first two academic books naturally centered around poetry, but his later fictional novels feature lyrical sentences and structure. After that, Lentricchia's interest began to focus on the study of literary theories.

Lentricchia's literary theories evoke both admiration and resentment from the literary circle, especially his left-wing politics severely attacked by neo-conservative polemicists. In 1980, he published *After the New Criticism*, concerning which *Philosophy and Literature* first included and published review article in 1985 and after that *After the New Criticism* is oft-cited and became "a roadmap for the uninitiated and a tome for the expert" (Tinari 16). In 1983, he published *Criticism and Social Change* and this time "his insistence on blurring the line between scholarship and politics were excoriated by the Reagan-era cultural right" (18). In 1988, *Ariel and the Police: Michel Foucault, William James, Wallace Stevens*, the last piece of his

critical trilogy, was published and what shines through the book is “an obsession with the act of writing over and above its philosophical significance”(20). The book also provides a hint that Lentricchia was going to shift from litcrit to fiction writing. His critical books gave him “renown as a figure of cultural discord”(18) and gained him the nickname as “Dirty Harry of contemporary literary theory” (18).

In 1994, Lentricchia’s shift from litcrit to novel writing was announced by the publication of his first novel, or rather memoir, *The Edge of Night*. Reasons for his switch to fiction are rather complex. As stated by himself,

Many things had to do with the switch. My disenchantment with the academy; Father Leonard Cunningham at Mepkin Abbey’ DeLillo’s fiction; the feeling that I was finished as a literary critic; and a stint as an actor—the immediate cause, I’d say—because the assuming of roles is what we do when we make consciousness other than our own. And then there are all the subterranean causes I’ll never know anything about. Those might be the most powerful ones. (DePietro “Frank Lentricchia: An Interview by Thomas DePietro” 156)

As a fiction writer, Lentricchia works ceaselessly and till now, besides his memoir, he has published nine novels: *Johnny Critelli* (1996), *The Knifemen* (1996), *The Music of the Inferno* (1999), *Lucchesi and the Whale* (2001), *The Book of Ruth* (2005), *The Italian Actress* (2010), *The Sadness of Antonioni* (2011), *The Accidental Pallbearer* (2013).

Compared with his works in criticism and theories that are well-known in and out of the academy, Lentricchia’s non-critical writings that have been published in the last two decades are not so familiar to readers, yet it is of significance to study his novels. Lentricchia’s literary fictions not only reflect his soaring imagination and thematic concerns: “ethnicity, identity, place, and the nature of the artistic process” (DePietro “Introduction” 9), but also reflect major concerns in his literary criticism: how literature strikes a balance between its text and context, and between its aesthetic value and social value.

So far the study of Lentricchia’s novels is very limited. In 1992, Xu Ben

published *Situational Tensions of Critic-Intellectuals: Thinking Through Literary Politics With Edward W. Said and Frank Lentricchia*. In 2010, Thomas DePietro edited and published *Frank Lentricchia: Essays on His Works*, a book containing several articles commenting on Lentricchia and his different novels. Domestic researches of Lentricchia's novels are lesser. In 2013, Dong Ya wrote the thesis "Construction of a Post-ethnic Society: Frank Lentricchia's *The Music of the Inferno*"; in 2014, Long Chao wrote the thesis "The Bleeding Masculinity: On the Narrative Techniques of Frank Lentricchia's *The Knifemen*". Except the above, few study of Lentricchia's novels was published. The present thesis will focus on his 7th novel *The Italian Actress*, published in 2010, which features the lyrical language that may stem from his previous experience of poetry and wide use of bracket and dash that may stem from his experience of critical writing with the two punctuation marks to interpret or supplement information. Critical essays on the newly-published novel can not be found both at home and abroad.

The Italian Actress, set in Italy, features a has-been Italian American filmmaker Jack Del Piero and his Muse, Claudia. Twenty years ago, Jack is worldwide known as a video artist for his radical experiments in pornography and the beauty of their images, but now, he is stuck in the prolonged dried-up desire to create new experiments in video and serves as an unknown teacher at a small college. At a marginal film festival, Jack for the first time meets Claudia who has got old but is still stunning. Claudia falls in love with Jack, but Jack resists, yet all the while wanting not to resist, because Jack fears the desire and love for Claudia would bring the image of the aging Claudia to him and thus destroy the forever young image of his Muse frozen in the her photos and films. Instead of facing and handling this internal struggle, Jack chooses to avoid reality by leaving Volterra where Claudia lives for Rimini where Jack casts his lot with the so-called Sigismondo (Sigis) and Isotta (Iso), a perverse but compelling couple, who persuade him that he can recover his reputation and success and achieve artistic immortality and eternal fame if he agrees to shoot a rare video starring the two with explicit sex, violence and death. Ironically, after the shoot, Jack immediately returns to Claudia, and after her one-year guidance to bring him to life,

Jack destroys his video and loves and make loves with and even proposes to Claudia, the young Claudia in his fantasy but not the old one in life. Realizing the fact that it is impossible to make Jack normal, Claudia leaves him though she loves him. And now Jack resumes his teaching work and still lives in his limitless fantasy alone.

The novel shares Lentricchia's reflection on the struggles between art and life and the self-enclosing passions for art with his many other novels. What's worth studying in *The Italian Actress* is the author's concern with the effects of the society dominated by the modern media, here referring to non-print media, including telephone, radio, TV, movie, Internet, computer, and other forms of digital media. As the modern media is playing a more important role in modern life, people in the modern world are stepping into an image society where the patterns of cultural and social interaction are mainly regulated and conceptualized by images presented by the modern media.

On the one hand, ethical and commercial problems brought by the moving images and films are what Lentricchia mainly emphasized in *The Italian Actress*. Lentricchia was born in 1940, at the time when photography has become increasingly popular and the popular culture of America has gradually been dominated by images. In fact, "the real watershed event in the creation of a new visual culture was the advent of a new mass medium: film" (Cullen 130). However, the initial motivation of inventors, including Thomas Edison, for the motion picture work is "the lure of a profit-making commercial amusement" (Czitrom 132). Actually, movie, as a representative of modern media, is just part of it. As technology becomes maturer, movies, TV programs, computer, and many other digital media are accessible to almost everyone, yet accompanying a severe threat to the culture posed by various commercial amusements. Commercialized recreation is shaping human's civilization not as it should be shaped but as commerce dictates. According to Hancock and Garner,

Media serve to produce a mass audience through homogenization of ideas, by which the masses absorb all content reflected at them. Media culture caters to the masses in terms of styles, tastes, and images which reproduce

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