

The Transcendent Power of Art: Aesthetic Experience, Cultural Heritage and Social Criticism

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Abstract: This article aims to explore the transcendental power contained in art and conduct an in-depth analysis from three dimensions: aesthetic experience, cultural heritage, and social criticism. The article will first examine how art touches human emotions and perceptions and inspires wisdom through unique aesthetic experiences; secondly, it will analyze the key role that art plays as a carrier of cultural memory in inheriting culture, building identity, and conveying values; then, it will focus on how art, with its keen perspective and social care, criticizes and reflects on social phenomena and promotes social change; finally, the article will explore the new challenges and new roles that art faces in modern society. Through the exploration of these key dimensions, this article hopes to reveal the deep value and transcendental power of art, and call on all sectors of society to pay more attention to the important role of art in the development of human civilization.

Keywords: Aesthetic Experience; Art; Human Civilization

1. Transcendence of Aesthetic Experience: Emotion, Perception and Cognition

The most direct and universal way for art to touch people is through the aesthetic experience it evokes. This experience is not just sensory pleasure, but also a complex psychological process involving emotion, perception and cognition. Through its unique media, form, structure and content, works of art evoke emotional resonance in viewers, expand their range of perception, and trigger their deep thinking and understanding. It is this multi-dimensional and deep aesthetic experience that gives art a powerful power to transcend everyday experience.

1.1. The Uniqueness of Aesthetic Experience

Aesthetic experience is significantly different from other types of experience we go through in our daily lives:

Unlike utilitarian or cognitive experiences, aesthetic experiences have intrinsic value and pleasure: Most of the activities we carry out in our daily lives have a clear purpose, such as working to get paid, eating to survive, and studying to gain knowledge. However, aesthetic experience

itself is a purpose, and its value lies in the pleasure and satisfaction brought by the experience itself. The core driving force of appreciating a painting, listening to a piece of music, or reading a poem is often not to obtain some practical utility, but to feel the unique emotional and intellectual stimulation brought by art [1-3].

Emphasis on sensory involvement and emotional resonance: Artworks trigger aesthetic experiences by appealing to our senses – sight, hearing, touch, and even taste and smell (in some art forms). Artistic elements such as color, line, sound, rhythm, texture, etc. act directly on our senses, evoking specific feelings and emotions in us. More importantly, excellent works of art can often touch on common human emotions, triggering resonance in viewers, making them feel joy, sadness, anger, love and other emotions, thus generating a deep connection and understanding.

1.2. The Emotional Dimension of Aesthetic Experience

Art is a powerful vehicle and trigger of emotions:

How art can evoke and express various complex emotions, such as joy, sadness, anger, love, etc.: Different art forms and styles can express and convey various complex emotions in unique ways. Music can evoke different emotions in the audience through changes in melody, rhythm and harmony; painting can express the artist's emotional state through color, composition and brushstrokes; literature can arouse readers' emotional resonance through the exquisite use of language and the ups and downs of the plot; drama and film can vividly show various emotions through the performance of actors and the comprehensive use of audio-visual language.

The role of emotional resonance in art appreciation: When we appreciate works of art, if we can feel the emotions expressed in the works and resonate with them, then the aesthetic experience will be more profound and meaningful. This emotional resonance can not only bring emotional catharsis and satisfaction, but also help us understand the emotional world of others and expand our humanistic care and empathy.

Art as a way to vent and heal emotions: Art can not only express the artist's emotions, but also be a way for viewers to vent and heal emotions. When we appreciate works of art that match our own emotional experiences, we may feel a sense of comfort from being understood and accepted. The symbolism and metaphor of art can also help us process and express complex emotions in an indirect way, thereby achieving psychological balance and healing.

2. The Transcendence of Cultural Heritage: Memory, Identity and Values

Art not only stays at the level of individual aesthetic experience, but also plays a vital role in maintaining culture, inheriting memory, shaping identity and conveying values at the collective level. Artworks are like the cultural genes of a nation or a group. With their unique symbols, images and narrative methods, they pass on historical experience, social customs and spiritual beliefs from generation to generation, thus building a collective sense of identity and guiding the direction of social development. This cultural inheritance function of art gives it a lasting influence that transcends the life cycle of an individual.

2.1. Art as a Carrier of Cultural Memory

Art is an important carrier of human collective memory. It records and preserves the imprint of history in various forms:

How do works of art record historical events, social customs, and collective experiences? From ancient murals and sculptures to medieval religious paintings and epics to modern photography and film, art records important historical events, social life scenes, and collective emotional experiences in an intuitive or symbolic way. For example, China's "Along the River During the Qingming Festival" vividly depicts the prosperity of Bianjing in the Song Dynasty; African oral traditions and sculptures record tribal history and rituals; documentary photography and film after World War II record the cruelty of war and human suffering. These works of art are not only witnesses of history, but also important windows for future generations to understand the past.

The role of oral tradition, folk art and material cultural heritage in the inheritance of cultural memory: Before the emergence of writing or when writing was not widely used, oral tradition (such as myths, legends, folk songs) and folk art (such as paper cutting, embroidery, and clay sculpture) played an important role in the inheritance of cultural memory. They maintained the cultural identity and historical consciousness of the community through narrative, performance and production skills passed down from generation to generation. Material cultural heritage, such as ancient architecture, artworks and handicrafts, directly presents the cultural features and technical levels of the past in their material form, becoming a bridge between the past and the present [4,5].

How the symbolic meanings and cultural symbols of art are passed down from generation to generation: Artworks often contain rich symbolic meanings and cultural symbols. These symbols have conventional meanings in a specific cultural context and are passed down from generation to generation over time. For example, the Chinese dragon symbolizes power, dignity, and auspiciousness; the Western cross symbolizes Christian

faith and salvation; a certain color, pattern, or musical melody may represent a specific cultural tradition or social value. Understanding these symbolic meanings and cultural symbols is the key to understanding and inheriting cultural memory.

2.2. Art and the Construction of Cultural Identity

The arts play a central role in shaping and maintaining cultural identity:

How do national art, regional culture and community art shape collective identity: Unique national music, dance, painting, literature and architectural styles often become important symbols of the cultural identity of a nation or country. Regional folk art and traditional customs embody the collective memory and cultural identity of local residents. Specific communities, such as religious groups, professional groups or interest groups, often use their unique art forms (such as religious music, industry songs, community logos) to strengthen their internal identity and sense of belonging.

The role of art in cultural exchange and integration: With the development of globalization, exchanges between different cultures are becoming more frequent, and art has become an important medium for cultural exchange and mutual understanding. By appreciating the works of art of other cultures, we can understand their history, values and lifestyles, thereby promoting cross-cultural understanding and respect. At the same time, artistic exchanges between different cultures may also produce new art forms and styles, promoting cultural integration and innovation.

Art as a force to resist cultural hegemony and maintain cultural diversity: When facing cultural hegemony and cultural homogenization, local art often becomes an important force to resist and maintain cultural diversity. By adhering to and developing its own traditional art forms and creating contemporary art works with local characteristics, a nation or community can maintain its unique cultural identity and resist the erosion of foreign culture.

2.3. The Transcendence of Cultural Heritage

The cultural inheritance function of art transcends the limitations of individual life and connects the past, present and future:

Connecting the past, present and future, maintaining cultural continuity: As a carrier of cultural memory, works of art pass on past experience and wisdom to people today, and leave valuable cultural heritage for future generations, thus maintaining cultural continuity. By appreciating ancient works of art, we can feel the weight of history and the accumulation of culture, and thus better understand our own cultural roots.

Give individuals a sense of belonging and history:

Shared culture and art can enhance individuals' sense of belonging and collective identity, making them feel that they are members of a specific cultural group. Understanding and identifying with the artistic traditions of one's own nation or region can give individuals a stronger sense of history and cultural self-confidence.

Provide cultural resources and spiritual support for social development:

The cultural memory, values and aesthetic experience contained in art provide rich cultural resources and spiritual support for social development. It can inspire national pride and cultural innovation, build consensus for society, and provide inspiration for future development directions.

3. Transcendence of Social Criticism: Reflection, Resistance and Change

The transcendent power of art is not only reflected in its enhancement of individual aesthetic experience and inheritance of collective cultural memory, but also in its role as a keen social observer and profound critic. Artists often use their unique perspectives and expressions to reveal the contradictions and problems of social reality, challenge existing power structures and ideologies, and inspire people's desire and actions for social change. This social critical function of art enables it to transcend pure aesthetic or entertainment value and become an important force in promoting social progress.

3.1. Art as a Reflection and Criticism of Social Reality

Art, with its unique medium and language, reflects and criticizes various social phenomena:

How art can keenly capture social problems and contradictions, such as the gap between the rich and the poor, power oppression, environmental pollution, etc.:

As a member of society, artists often have keen observations and deep feelings about the social reality around them. Through various art forms such as painting, sculpture, literature, drama, film, music, etc., they present the gap between the rich and the poor, power oppression, gender discrimination, racial discrimination, environmental pollution and other issues in society, which arouse public attention and thinking. For example, realistic paintings often depict the difficult lives of people at the bottom of society; critical realist literature exposes the dark side of society through vivid narratives; documentaries directly record and present the true situation of social problems.

The role of different art forms (painting, literature, drama, film, etc.) in social criticism: Different art forms have their own unique critical power. Painting and sculpture can directly express the artist's attitude towards social phenomena through their visual impact and symbolic

meaning; literature can reveal the root causes and impacts of social problems through delicate descriptions and profound analysis; drama and film can trigger the audience's emotional resonance and moral thinking through the comprehensive use of performance and audio-visual language; music can convey the voice of resistance and change through its melody, lyrics and rhythm.

3.2 Art inspires social reflection and change

The critical nature of art does not just stop at exposing problems, but also inspires social reflection and promotes change:

How art can arouse public attention and discussion on social issues: Artworks with social criticism can often attract the public's attention and arouse their attention and discussion on social issues with their fascinating form and profound content. Artworks create a space for public dialogue and promote exchanges and collisions between different viewpoints.

The enlightenment of art prompts people to re-examine existing concepts and systems: Excellent social critical art can often challenge people's accustomed concepts and systems, forcing them to re-examine the rationality and fairness of social reality. By showing different perspectives and possibilities, art can stimulate people's critical thinking and break the inherent cognitive framework.

Art as a force for social progress and justice: Throughout history, many works of art have had a positive impact on social progress and justice. They have promoted important social changes such as the abolition movement, the women's movement, and the civil rights movement by awakening people's conscience and inspiring their actions. The power of art lies in its ability to touch people's hearts and inspire emotions, which can then be transformed into a driving force for changing society.

4. New Roles and Challenges of Art in Modern Society

Entering the information age and the era of globalization, the creation, dissemination and reception of art have undergone profound changes. The advancement of science and technology has provided art with new media and ways of expression, and the wave of globalization has led to the mutual blending and collision of art from different cultural backgrounds. At the same time, art is also facing the challenges of commercialization, the impact of popular culture, and the change in the status of traditional art forms. Understanding the new role of art in modern society and the challenges it faces is crucial to grasping the direction of future artistic development.

4.1. The Impact of Technological Development on Artistic Creation and Dissemination

The rapid development of digital technology has brought unprecedented opportunities and challenges to art:

The rise of digital art and new media art: New art forms such as computer graphics, digital painting, sound design, interactive installations, virtual reality art, and augmented reality art continue to emerge, expanding the boundaries of art and blurring the boundaries of traditional art categories. Artists can use digital tools to create, explore new visual and auditory experiences, and interact with the audience.

Changes in the way art is produced, reproduced and disseminated: Digital technology has made the production, reproduction and dissemination of works of art more convenient and efficient. Digital images, music files and videos can be quickly disseminated around the world through the Internet, and works of art are no longer restricted by the limitations of physical space. This has also raised new issues about copyright, originality and artistic value.

Opportunities and challenges brought by the integration of art and technology: The increasing collaboration between artists, scientists and engineers has spawned many interdisciplinary art projects. Technology provides new tools and possibilities for art, but it may also lead to thinking about the nature of art, such as whether artificial intelligence can truly create art, and whether the dominance of technology in art will weaken human creativity.

4.2. Artistic Exchange and Cultural Collision in the Context of Globalization

The impact of globalization on the art field is two-way:

Art from different cultural backgrounds influences and draws on each other: Globalization promotes communication and cooperation between artists from different cultural backgrounds, and makes art works from different cultures more accessible to audiences around the world. This cross-cultural communication and reference enrich the language and form of art and promotes the innovation and development of art.

The circulation and value assessment of art in the global market: The global art market is increasingly prosperous, and artworks have become an important economic commodity circulating around the world. The value assessment of artworks is affected by many factors, including their status in art history, market demand, collectors' preferences, etc. The operation of the global art market has an important impact on artistic creation and dissemination.

Cultural differences and misunderstandings may cause problems in art communication: Audiences from different cultural backgrounds may have different interpretations of the same artwork, or even misunderstandings. Differences in cultural symbols, historical allusions, and aesthetic habits may affect the cross-cultural communication effect of artworks. Artists and art institutions need to pay more attention to cross-cultural communication and understanding.

4.3. The Tension Between Popular Culture and Elite Culture

In modern society, the tension between popular culture and elite culture still exists and has an impact on the creation and reception of art:

The trend of popularization and commercialization of art: The rise of mass media and entertainment industry has made art more and more popular and commercialized. Popular culture forms such as pop music, commercial films, and advertising design have occupied a dominant position in the cultural consumption market. The commercialization of art has expanded the influence of art to a certain extent, but it may also lead to artistic creation compromising with market demand and sacrificing its artistry and criticality.

The status and value of traditional art forms in contemporary society: Traditional art forms, such as classical music, traditional painting and classical literature, face the challenge of a declining audience and declining status in contemporary society. How to revitalize the vitality of traditional art in contemporary society and attract the attention of the younger generation is a question that art education and cultural institutions need to think about.

How to balance the aesthetic value and commercial value of art: Artists, art institutions and cultural policy makers need to seek a balance between the aesthetic value and commercial value of art. Over-emphasizing commercial value may damage the uniqueness and innovation of art, while completely ignoring commercial value may limit the dissemination and development of art.

4.4. The Role of Arts Education in Cultivating Future Citizens

In modern society, the importance of art education is more prominent:

Cultivation of creativity, imagination and aesthetic ability through art education: Art education can effectively cultivate students' creativity, imagination and aesthetic ability by providing opportunities for practice, exploration and expression. These abilities are not only crucial to the field of art, but also of great significance to students in other disciplines and future career development.

Art education promotes emotional expression, cultural understanding and social participation: Art is an important medium for emotional expression. Art education can help students better understand and express their emotions and cultivate their empathy. At the same time, art education is also an important way to understand different cultures and help promote cultural understanding and social participation.

How to better integrate and value art in the education system: In many education systems, art subjects are often marginalized. How to better integrate and value art education in the education system, improve the professional level of art teachers, and provide students with richer art learning resources are the key to cultivating well-rounded future citizens.

5. Conclusion

Modern society has brought unprecedented opportunities to art, such as new creative media, broader dissemination channels and the possibility of cross-cultural communication. However, art is also facing the challenges of commercialization, the impact of mass culture and the changing status of traditional art forms. In this context, art needs to continue to explore and innovate, and expand its role and function in society. Art should not only continue to provide aesthetic experience and pass on cultural memory, but also actively participate in social criticism, stimulate public reflection, and contribute to the cultivation of future citizens with creativity, humanistic care and social responsibility. Attaching importance to the value of art and supporting the creation and dissemination of art will help us maintain cultural vitality and spiritual pursuit in a rapidly changing modern society.

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