



# The Connotation and Contemporary Value of Art Philosophy

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**Abstract.** As an important theoretical structure under the discipline of artistic theory, art philosophy is the study of the spiritual phenomenon and psychological process of art and it puts people's creative activities under the control of artistic spirit and the relationship between aesthetic consciousness and the environment in an important position. In the context of the integration of multiple disciplines and media innovation in contemporary society, the deep relationship between technology and art is one of the issues of high concern to art philosophy. Solving many problems in art requires the art philosophy to connect with other disciplines of artistic theory and fully integrate and share results with other disciplines in different categories such as psychology, sociology and communication, so as to jointly promote theoretical progress and cultural innovation.

**Keywords:** Art philosophy · Spirit · Discipline integration

## 1 Introduction

Philosophy is a science about spirit, a subject that explores the relationship between consciousness and environment, thinking and existence. The term art philosophy comes from the West, “produced in the process of the development of classical aesthetics in the late 18th and early 19th centuries”, “originated by Schelling and formed by Hegel” [1]. Hegel believed that the research object of aesthetics and art philosophy is not limited to the beauty of art, so he called it “art philosophy” [2]. Zhu Guangqian believes that “the beauty of art is the most concentrated expression of beauty, so aesthetics must mainly become the theory of literature and art or ‘art philosophy’” [3]. Aesthetics not only includes the beauty of art, but also includes the beauty of creation and other aesthetic activities in society, and has a closer connection with social material life. Although the main point of study is also derived from human aesthetic abilities and senses, the inner rules of the overall activity of art, as one of the expressions of beauty, need to be treated more precisely. Art is an initial and most basic thinking activity and is the soil on which other thinking activities can grow [4]. In Arthur Danto's *The Philosophical Disenfranchisement of Art*, he believes that the artistic consciousness in the 1970s has changed in a certain way, and philosophy has unknowingly intervened in art and has become a part of the art world [5]. Art philosophy urges human beings to understand themselves and society through understanding art, understand the social function of art, and improve the development of people's spiritual and material levels.

## 2 Art Philosophy is a Science Studying the Spirit

“Art philosophy is different from the psychology of art and the sociology of art. It is a science that studies the spiritual way of art” [4]. Art philosophy takes the spiritual process of art as the research object, takes philosophy as the research method, and uses the achievements of sociology, psychology, history and many other disciplines as references and examples, trying to solve the problems existing in art from the essential point of view. It combines and influences disciplines such as art aesthetics and art history and studies art activities in the human social environment with different focuses. Whether in ancient China or the West, on the basis of the understanding of man and nature, man and society, the philosophical thinking about art obtains the truth along with the exploration of the relationship among religion, ethics, law, etc., and presents a system of laws based on different philosophical value systems in different times.

The object of art philosophy is the spiritual activity related to art. In *Art Philosophy*, Liu Gangji believes that the research content of art philosophy is the part that focuses on philosophy in the phenomenon of artistic thinking, [6] including the relationship between art and reality, intuition, emotion, desire, will, and spirit. It also includes the relationship between imagination and art, the nature and process of artistic creation (including various spiritual factors related to artistic creation), the content and form, and style and genre of works, the relationship between beauty and art, the various forms and types of art and beauty of art and the law of their evolution, and the purpose and meaning of art. He emphasizes that such questions should be philosophically pondered, rather than “statements of empirical phenomena lacking inherent inevitability” [7]. Lu Xiaohua believes that a complete philosophical system of art should study three major issues: the relationship between subject and object in art, the basic way of thinking in art, and the relationship between art and human life [8]. The research object of art philosophy is logically narrower and more specialized than aesthetics. Yu Xilin pointed out that “although artistic aesthetics has become the aesthetic object of human beings because of its materialized existence, it first belongs to the category of spiritual activities as a concentrated reflection of human aesthetic consciousness. However, the aesthetics of daily life belongs to the category of social existence with its materialized aesthetic objects. Therefore, artistic aesthetics cannot replace or be equal to the aesthetic relationship between human beings and reality. The difference between the aesthetics of life and the aesthetic mechanism of art is the difference between self-experience and external care” [9]. He also opposes the “art-centered theory” on aesthetic objects advocated by Jiang Kongyang, Ma Qi and other scholars in the 1970s from the perspective of research objects, and believes that the research objects of aesthetics include a wide range of social practice activities other than art and reflect the broad relationship between human beings and all aspects of society. “Art contains the truth pursued by contemporary people and through its practice, discovers the principles and spirit of this era” [10]. Wang Defeng believes that art philosophy takes “practical aesthetic consciousness” as the research object and is a kind of “perceptual science” in terms of survival.<sup>1</sup> However, neither the

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<sup>1</sup> Wang Defeng: *Yishuzhexue*, Fudan University Press, 2021, p.18. To distinguish the relationship between art philosophy and aesthetics, it is necessary to first distinguish the relationship between art and beauty.

art philosophy nor the aesthetics can talk about concepts in isolation from reality. In particular, in today's society, the definitions of the two categories of art and aesthetics are becoming more and more blurred and it is necessary to properly discuss them from the issues of disciplinary value, research content and the existence of the two.

All the spiritual communication of people is closely related to the space world in which they are located. How these connections work and how to trigger people's aesthetic feelings and creative desires are very important. The production and state of being of the spirit of art are inseparable from the artistic practice and environment. The author believes that the dialectical and reality-based research method is the fundamental method that art philosophy needs to adopt and it is also the value of paying attention to human activities in a Marxist ontological way. The concept of art philosophy originated in the West, indicating its inner thinking about art along the metaphysical level. To clarify the scientific connotation of the art philosophy is helpful for people to explore the philosophical thinking about the spirit of art in the ancient Chinese traditional philosophy from this angle. For example, in Confucian musical aesthetics, "feeling something and touching the heart" is an opportunity for people to enter the art world, and it exists in any stage of human development. "The production of all music originates from people's hearts. The activities of people's hearts are the result of being influenced by external things" [11]. Foreign objects stimulate the spiritual activities of art and promote the occurrence of aesthetics. The ancient Chinese art philosophy is rooted in the soil of traditional Chinese culture and has unique value that is different from that of the West. The study of Chinese art philosophy should include comparative study and independent study, [12] combine the specific historical situation of the past dynasties, make full use of and fully grasp the content and significance of the aesthetic literary theories of the Chinese dynasties since the pre-Qin period, at the same time critically refer to the rational and speculative elements in Western classical aesthetics, and obtain inspiration from its different development stages of "primitive rationality", "enlightening rationality", "modern rationality" and "irrationalism", [13] in order to accumulate rich experience and lay a solid foundation for people to connect with the context of the times and comprehensively explore the philosophical issues of Chinese modern and contemporary art.

### **3 Contemporary Art Philosophy Focuses on the Relationship Between Technology and Art**

The most concentrated problem that art philosophy faces in modern and contemporary society is to explore the relationship between man and science and technology. The contemporary society is a society with the rapid development of science and technology, and new media have integrated into or even replaced the traditional art media, creating a rich variety of art forms. Although sociological research methods can make people understand the operation of art in modern society more accurately and intuitively, they tend to draw practical laws that tend to be specific and often ignore ideological and spiritual exploration and reflection. Secondly, the material enrichment of art production and the superficial filling of the human spiritual world by popular culture are not enough to explain the deep interaction between human beings and such environments. How

people's thoughts participate in modern art activities, the changes in people's existence caused by the change of media reform to art, and the impact of the rapid progress of the mechanical industry and electronic industry on people's subjectivity need to be raised to the height of philosophy.

The problems of art and technology are concentrated in the physical and spiritual aspects of the artistic subject. The creation and appreciation of works of art are closely related to the presence of the human brain. Human activities create an objectified world and at the same time shape human beings, including people's capture, tone setting, classification and judgment of aesthetics. However, the subject and spirit of modern and contemporary art are seriously threatened by passive elimination caused by technological development: the new technologies relying on electronic computers and the Internet have greatly improved the speed of data processing and information dissemination, resulting in the speed of information dissemination far exceeding the speed of the audience's acceptance of knowledge, resulting in passive and blind receiving activities.. Faced with the impact of much information with mixed content, when the audience cannot independently choose and use their own effective learning methods and cannot effectively filter useless information, it is easy for them to waste time and consume energy, and may lose the ability of abstract thinking and self-transcendence, making them fall into a state of mental anxiety, confusion or depression, and become affiliated to technology.

The highly developed technology also puts the user's body at risk of "amputation". This situation makes a person suffer a double challenge in physical and mental activity. While the skills of manual labor are gradually losing their usefulness, people are more dependent on the operation of technology when they give their ability to technology, give up and lose their practical ability, creativity and appreciation, and become a mechanical and passive recipient under the monopoly and domination of technology developers. The technicalization and informatization of art form and content are also gradually dispelling art itself. Playing film and television works at several times faster, watching trailers of movies, etc. greatly compress the details of works of art and simplify them into simple reception of information. People tend to absorb less artistic and desire-satisfying works while simplifying their own thinking and feedback process. Marcuse once hoped to solve the problem of human spiritual deficiency through artistic means. However, as an important part also affected by high-tech means, the question of whether art itself can maintain a constantly renewed vitality so as to arouse people's creativity and learning motivation is a problem that needs to be reflected and tried to solve from a philosophical perspective.

#### **4 The Integration of Art Philosophy and Other Disciplines Promotes Theoretical Progress and Cultural Innovation**

In terms of the disciplinary relationship, both aesthetics and art philosophy belong to the branches of philosophy, and the relationship between the two is the relationship of including and being included. Art philosophy is differentiated from aesthetics and its research objects and research methods are more refined than aesthetics. Baumgarten, the father of German aesthetics, believed that aesthetics takes art as the object and is the science of beauty. For the first time, he regarded aesthetics as a kind of perceptual

knowledge, emphasizing that aesthetics should be devoted to the study of things of feeling and pay attention to the perceptual aspect of human cognition [14]. In *Yishuzhexue*, Wang Defeng mentioned that the traditional art aesthetic theory focuses on the category of beauty and regards beauty as a fixed ruler for measuring art, missing the process of artistic activity and the content of spiritual movement, thus separating itself from the practical activity of art. The view of “humanized nature” put forward by Marx believes that people “realize their own perceptual existence activities” by facing and experiencing their environment [15].

Art philosophy must be crossed with history, sociology, communication, psychology and other disciplines, and through the accumulation of knowledge at different levels to achieve analysis and synthesis, in order to have a more adequate understanding of the essential issues of art in the context of the times. At the end of the 19th century and the beginning of the 20th century, the aesthetics of the art-scientific school represented by Max Dessoir advocated a strict distinction between the philosophy of beauty and the philosophy of aesthetics and art, believing that a scientific, objective and descriptive general art science should be created that was different from traditional aesthetics [16]. Because “Aesthetics is not competent for the study of all artistic phenomena and individual artistic laws require general artistic principles, a new discipline should be established, which should adopt various methods of philosophy, sociology, psychology, ethics and so on. Therefore, it is a bridge from concrete art to art philosophy.” Art philosophy needs to draw general conclusions about truth, while the phenomenon of art activities at the social level needs to be systematically and deeply analyzed by disciplines that are more closely related to reality. The exploration of the laws of art should not only stay in the field of spiritual activities, but should comprehensively contact various social realistic conditions that affect the spirit. The Western evolution of art philosophy also makes people reflect on the theory and history of Chinese classical philosophy involving artistic viewpoints, so as to carry forward the art philosophy in Chinese traditional culture and improve the course categories of art history philosophy under the theory of Chinese art. The rational and speculative elements in Western traditional philosophy should not be completely discarded in any era due to the high emphasis on irrationality. Rational and perceptual methods cannot be completely separated, and the two merge with each other and work together in the process of art activities.

The fusion of art philosophy and other disciplines not only promotes theoretical progress, but also has profound cultural significance. Art mainly participates in the integration of social culture in the form of conceptual transmission and comprehensively mobilizes human senses and spiritual enlightenment in a way that evokes special feelings. Art participates in the specific integration of culture in the form of conceptual communication. “Art reveals the existing value order in a culture in the ‘order’ it creates” [17]. In the field of art practice, various forms such as conceptual art, minimalist art, and art activities that are closely related to social participation and political policies also affect the way members of society accept art and evaluate values to varying degrees. Art philosophy explores how artistic concept participates in art activities and promotes its own continuous development in the process. It also explores how artistic concept affects people’s choices in terms of means, form, and content, how artistic concept participates in the formation of concepts and beliefs, how artistic concept transforms people’s spirits

and stimulates creativity and aesthetic potential, etc. How art intervenes in social culture is an important concern of art philosophy and sociology, psychology, communication, cultural anthropology, etc. It is also an important practical problem that the theoretical discipline of art is committed to solving.

## 5 Conclusion

Philosophy is the cognitive activity of foreseeing and seeing the signs from small things, and so is the art philosophy. Individual value and human destiny are issues of great concern to art philosophy. Art philosophy is to pry into the essence of art and at the same time understand human beings by understanding the feelings, concepts and ideological changes contained in art. Art philosophy, as an important theoretical component of artistic theory, should actively use the research results of artistic theory disciplines and categories of art, be able to combine the experience of different disciplines in other categories, grasp the cause, development status, and development characteristics of art, understand the social function of art, and improve the development of people's spiritual and material levels, which will be not only conducive to making the theory profound, but also have positive significance in cultural practice.

**Authors' Contributions.** This paper is independently completed by Xiangyu Jiao.

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