

COMMENT ON “PERCEPTION OF LIFE RHYTHM – AESTHETIC PHILOSOPHY IN MUSIC EDUCATION”

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Music is an art form full of emotional expression, often referred to as “the vocabulary of emotions” and “the art of the mind”. In the teaching of music education, how to help students more deeply experience the connotation of music, especially those inexpressible, subtle emotions, emotional connotations, has always been a high concern of educators, and this paper is also concerned about the problem. Xu (2024) combines the artistic aesthetic theory of the philosopher Susanne K. Langer to study this problem.

Susanne K. Langer is an important American esthetician in the 20th century, whose main contribution is to construct a relatively complete theoretical system of symbols, and to construct her theoretical system of artistic aesthetics around the theory of artistic symbolism, the theory of artistic intuition, the theory of artistic illusion and the theory of life form. In the *Philosophy in New Key* and *Feeling and Form*, Langer has repeatedly mentioned the concepts of “life” and “the form of life”, and she regards the life form as the root of the expression of artistic symbols.

Langer believes that when a work of art contains feelings, the work of art has vitality or shows a “life form”. Langer sees works of art as images of felt form, and images have a unique power to make us aware of the wholeness and comprehensiveness of objects, actions, and facts. Thus, the expressiveness of works of art can rise to all aspects of the spirit and human personality, and the study of art and works of art can construct a biological theory of

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feeling, which can logically lead to the concept of the mind and all the phenomena contained in the mind. A work of art is a form of expression of the symbol, which embodies every mode of life and feeling. These forms cover the whole of life and can reveal a constant change between physical and spiritual reality. Thus, the symbols of art constitute a realm of “pure representation”, a realm of whole symbols, and art shows, in the form of symbolic projection, how the tensions of life, emotion and intelligence arise, that is, how they are felt, which gives us the key to conceive of life itself.

Rhythm is one of the important characteristics of life forms. Langer points out that when we talk about rhythm, we tend to think of it as cyclical repetition, because there are many examples of this pattern in life, such as the repetition of breath, the beating of the heart, the pace of daily progress, the ticking of the hands of a clock, and so on. For Langer, however, rhythm is the preparation of a new event immediately following the completion of a previous event, rather than the mere repetition of a periodic pattern. As an expressive symbol with common characteristics of life forms, music also has the characteristics of rhythm. Langer believes that rhythm is the establishment of new tension when the old tension is relieved. The so-called “tension” refers to a feeling of tension.

Music is characterized by rhythm, and what Langer called the establishment of new tension at the time of the dissolution of old tension means that the logical relationship between musical sounds is full of continuous generation and elimination of tension. On the whole, a piece of music shows the characteristics of rhythm both in the structural design and as a symbol of the meaning of life. Take the form of sonata as an example, the composer’s transformation of tonality is not random, but planned. From the shift in tone to the final return, the process is full of rhythm, designed to create and release tension. When listeners enjoy a musical piece in the form of a sonata, their perception of the main key is interrupted when the key changes, creating tension. With the return of tonality, this tension will disappear, and the listener will experience the release and relief of tension.

The inner life of the music also requires coherence and wholeness, otherwise the experience may become fragmented and become a series of disconnected sounds during the listening process. From the detailed analysis, the logical connection between the notes in the music can be reflected by the pitch, volume, rhythm and timbre. In a complete musical composition, these elements constantly build and release tension. For example, the different interval spans and the harmonies they constitute will create a tendency in the listener’s mind, and when this tendency is resolved, one will feel the release of tension. On the other hand, if there is a constant or repeated sound logic relationship in the music for a long time, such as continuously strong or short notes, this will lead to the accumulation of tension, causing anxiety, confusion or tension in the listener. On the contrary, when the intensity of the music

is reduced and the time between notes is extended, the listener will feel a calm, stable and relaxed mood.

Rhythm is the basis of life, but it is not unique to life, and there is such a real rhythm in non-organic nature. This rhythm of the inanimate world is a sign of the living form, because the contrast between the behavior of life and the inorganic structure highlights the appearance of life, which is abstracted by man’s intellectual intuition as a “natural sign” of rhythm. People not only need to understand the natural symbols, but also need to elaborate forms of expression, so as to reveal new meanings in various ways. In music, the dominant form of a musical composition contains its basic rhythm, which becomes the source of its organic whole and overall feeling, and we can understand the whole musical composition through the rhythm. Because in Langer’s view,

[...] “regardless of the specific mode or emotional connotation of the work, the rhythm of life in subjective time is always permeated as an internal logic with complex and multidimensional musical symbols, which intimately and explicitly links music and life (Susanne and Gao, 2013, p. 135).”

Once the music has acquired organic characteristics, it expresses the self-regulatory form of the work, and its governing form is the grasp of this organic wholeness and individuality, which enables the composer to realize a long chapter under the influence of an initial inspiration, and becomes more and more complete with the continuous influx of new music.

Langer not only ponders music creation, but also analyzes music appreciation. She believes that the appreciation of music is a talent, a special intelligence of the ear, and therefore it is not something innate, but like many skills comes from practice. A person who is accustomed to listening to music will have no difficulty in understanding long pieces of music, while a person without much musical background, even if very talented, will find it a chore to listen to music for long periods of time. In Langer’s view, only by first experiencing the concept of musical emotion, then adding associative imagination, and connecting with more specific cognitive and social content, can we further experience higher levels of emotion. Similarly, when leading students to appreciate music fragments, it is necessary to first guide them to experience the emotional concept of music expression, and then combine the creation background of the work, the life experience of the composer and other content to stimulate students’ association and imagination, so that they can obtain a higher level of emotional experience containing cognitive and social components.

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