

Analysis on the Hierarchy of Works of Art from the Perspective of “Ingarden's Literature Hierarchical Theory”

Zeming Liao

Arts College, Sichuan University, Chengdu, 610000, China

Zhang Daqian School of Fine Arts, Neijiang Normal University, Neijiang, 641000, China

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Abstract. Generations of aestheticians and art theorists have paid attention to the analysis on the hierarchy of artistic works. Among so many opinions, the viewpoint of dividing the artistic works into two hierarchies (content and form) has the greatest impact. However, the modern aesthetics and arts have raised doubts about the binary view of structure, but consider that the structure of artistic works should be multi-layered. Of which, Ingarden adopts the method of phenomenology and gives a most detailed analysis on the hierarchical theory of literature, which has greatly promoted the thought of hierarchy analysis on artistic works to be mature and systematic. On the basis of referring to the Ingarden's Literature Hierarchical Theory, this paper summarizes the hierarchy of artistic works into four layers, respectively are layer of modeling element, layer of symbol and schema, image and abstract layer, implication layer.

Introduction

It is unavoidable to analyze the hierarchy of artistic works while discussing about the aesthetic beauty and artistic works. Many aesthetics and artistic theorists have talked about such a problem. Besides, as opinions vary, no unanimous conclusion can be drawn. Of which, the viewpoint of dividing the artistic works into two hierarchies (content and form) has the greatest impact, which occupies a leading position in the literature circle. Therefore, to explore the hierarchy of artistic works, it is unavoidable to talk about the binary viewpoint of content and form.

In Ancient Greek, Plato differentiated the theoretical world, sensory realistic world and artistic world. According to his opinions, the artistic world comes into being by simulating the realistic world, the realistic world just comes into being by simulating the theoretical world. These two latter worlds are sensory, which cannot exist independently. Only the theoretical world can exist independently, which is eternal. In addition, the two lower worlds originate from the theoretical world.^① It vaguely implies that some factor of binary form and content is the germination of binary content and form in the later period.

Since the modern times, the content and form have fatherly become differentiated and contrary. Hegel is the typical representative of binary form and content, who divides the artistic works into two layers, respectively are “external factors” and “connotations”.^② Moreover, he considers that, as the perceptual existence, artistic work is just one “form”. Behind that, the “content” is the origin of world—“absolute idea”, which is the ontology of the content and higher than its manifestation pattern.^③

Formalism has appeared in the modern art and art criticism, such as the aesthetics of form in the field of visual art advocated by Clive Bell, Russian formalism in the literature, Anglo-American New Criticism and French structuralism aesthetics. All these are binary thought based on content and form, which abandon contents but just explore the “essential” things in the artistic form or literary form. Bell considers that, the common nature of all visual art is “the meaningful form”. To distinguish whether a piece of artistic work is good or not, people just need to check whether it creates a meaningful form or not. He considers that, “To appreciate an artistic work, we cannot bring any other opinion, but the knowledge of sense of form, sense of color and three-dimensional space”.^④ Right

here, content has no relation with the aesthetic appreciation, and people just need to pay attention to the form of artistic work.

With the increasingly deeper researches on the structure of artistic works by the western contemporary aesthetics and artistic theories, many scholars have raised their doubts about the view of structure based on the binary content and form. They think that, no element can be considered as the pure “content” or “form” in many artistic works. So-called binary structural theory of “content” and “form” is merely the logical presuppose, which lacks of a truly reliable foundation. Therefore, many contemporary aestheticians and artistic theorists abandon this binary and opposite scope, but make more practical and deeper exploration of the artistic work’s hierarchy. Of which, people especially need to attach importance to the exploration of artistic work’s hierarchy on the basis of phenomenology. Whether the artistic work is the reflection and representation of the objective world, or the manifestation of the subjective world, whether it is the form or content, the phenomenology “puts aside” those problems, but just directly faces the ontology of artistic works. Moreover, it considers that, the artistic work is neither the practical object nor the conceptual object, but “purely intentional composition” between those two, which has greatly promoted the hierarchical analysis on the artistic work as an ontology to be mature and systematic. “So far, there is no doubt that Ingarden—Poland phenomenological artistic theorist, has the most detailed, systematical, rigid and orderly hierarchical analysis on the artistic works.”^⑤ By adopting the method of phenomenology, Ingarden makes detailed and systematic analysis on the ontology of artistic work. In the work of *On Literary Works*, he divides the literature into four layers: “layer of speech body”, “layer of meaning unit”, “layer of schematized aspect” and “layer of represented object”.^⑥ According to Ingarden, these four layers are interdependent and none is dispensable. It can be said that, the characteristics of Ingarden’s theory almost avoid any metaphysical assumption, but just construct his own theoretical system by the intrinsic speech, vocabulary and sentence of the product itself, and also the correlation of sentence.

As far as we are concerned, the hierarchy of an artistic work should be respectively studied according to different artistic categories. On the basis of referring to the literary hierarchy theory of Ingarden, and integrating with advantages of structural analysis of artistic works by generations of aestheticians and theorists, we divide the hierarchy of artistic works into four layers: layer of modeling element; layer of symbol and schema; image and abstract layer; connotation layer. Next, some analysis shall be made one by one.

Layer of Modeling Element

The most fundamental layer of artistic work is the “layer of modeling element”. It is the decomposition of artistic work and also the method comprehensively applied in the artistic creation. It plays an important role in creating an artistic image. Formation of any artistic work or creation of any artistic image cannot be separated from the objectified process conveyed by certain material.

This layer is equivalent to the speech body layer of Ingarden, which is almost equal to the layer of “speech” divided by Wang Bi in “speech, image, meaning”. To the artistic works, this layer includes point, line, facade, color, shadow, level, texture, fraction, rhythm, etc. However, these pure modeling elements have no independent or complete aesthetic value or artistic meaning, which cannot achieve the “linguistic function” unless being integrated and arranged by the artists with ingenuity, further to lead to or manifest other layer. For instance, Autumn’s Wild Geese, the painting of Lin Fengmian(Fig. 1), firstly brings basic modeling elements of point, line and facade, black, white and gray to the appreciators. They are the direct objects that people can appreciate the aesthetic beauty.



Fig. 1 Autumn's Wild Geese(1961)

Layer of Symbol and Schema

Layer of symbol and schema is just the form aspect of an artistic work, which contains internal momentum and lets the product to present a more opening and expanding situation. "Artists display their exquisite craftsmanship on the materials, reconstruct, integrate and re-organize it, change its original state and nature of existence, further to let it become "another" existence--the external form of "systematization" contains the "intentional" internal quality, namely the symbol or schema of an artistic work. " ^⑦ From this layer, the "material factor" of product fades away and then the product tries to be "open" to the "inherence" of human. According to the dividing method of Ingarden, this layer is just the meaning unit layer. Anything restrained by pronunciation forms the vocabulary in the correlation with pronunciation, forms the sentence in the correlation with the vocabulary, and then express a complete meaning. However, a word's meaning is not changeless, but a dynamic generation process. "Speech and pronunciation consistently look for combination, cope with shifting events(changeable extended meaning and metaphoric meaning on the basis of original meaning) by sticking to a fundamental principle(basic original meaning)", so as to become 'complete and prototype' " . ^⑧

A pure modeling element or single pronunciation is insufficient of independent and complete aesthetic value or aesthetic meaning, which must be organized through main body's intentional activity by artists with ingenuity, so as to tend to some object as expected. In the painting of Lin Fengmian--Autumn's Wild Geese(Figure 1), artistic symbol and schema also release endless meanings right here. Heads and necks of the wild geese are straightened and lengthened, which become slender wedge from the oval body to the goose's beak. Wings of geese are pulled as full bow, both claws are omitted, for fear of redundancy. The entire goose is just like an arrow to be sent forth, which shows the image that Lin Fengmian are internally anxious to look for a spiritual home. The picture adopts the traverse arrangement, no matter the man body or background scene, they are horizontal. The guest and host are followed by each other, which jointly create a tension structure across the scene. Consequently, the square scene becomes an extended space with meaning beyond. Layers of sandbars, a brush of green hill, mist above the water, layers of clouds in the sky, implicit or explicit, from bottom to top, layer after layer, across the entire scene. A line of compressed transverse flying geese are just like pans in a film, from right to left, promoted horizontally, which fatherly strengthens the visual illusion of widened and broadened painting. Such a form also greatly deepens the vitality of the entire scene, which becomes a part of the overall image world's beauty.

Image and Abstract Layer

Symbol and schema layer is merely one kind of rough "outline", which is full of hints and uncertainty, thus they cannot present the internal thing clearly. Therefore,

After the organization and "completion" of artists, the artistic symbol or schema form an intentional tending entirety, which represents or shows a certain complete world of object. Such a

layer is equivalent to the represented object layer of Ingarden, namely the imaginary world through linguistic fiction in an artistic work. Ingarden mainly refers to the objectification of imaginary real object in an artistic work, which still cannot include the product with abstract tendency. As a matter of fact, visualization and abstraction are two major methods in artistic creation, which can also be considered as two fundamental formalized methods of artists facing the world of object during the process of artistic creation.

In this layer, artistic symbols(no matter the imaginary or abstract) present lively vitality and vigor with momentum and uncertainty during the dynamic process of tending to the entirety. It usually presents as an instantaneously eternal artistic world, with motion in quiescence, permeating vigor, flying hawk and leaping fish. In the Autumn's Wild Geese of Ling Fengmian,(Figure 1), the painter applies the Chinese ink to draw rolling clouds in the sky. With delightful brushes, the reeds shake slightly in night breeze, a line of white light is left between the water and sky in the distance, thus the entire scene is full of theatricality and compact sense of rhythm. The wild geese coming home late spread their wings against the wind, in such a hurry, regardless of the danger. The painter places his deep emotion on the swiftly flying autumn's wild geese and vast evening scene.

Layer of Connotation

As the artistic connotation in the fourth layer, not every artistic product must contain that. Some recreational, utilitarian or documentary products usually do not have such a layer. "So-called artistic connotations just refer to meaning or implication contained in artistic works, which usually contains ambiguity, fuzziness and obscureness, embodies one kind of philosophy, poetry or romantic charm. Usually, they are not words but meanings, which need appreciators to repeatedly comprehend and understand by heart. To explore and appreciate by heart, it is also the root cause that artistic works possess eternal artistic charms." ⑨ Except for showing the profound aesthetic meanings by "image" or "idea", those immortal masterworks in the art history also possess memorable connotations. It originates from the main body of the artistic works, but is also deeply hidden in the structure. Just as Hegel says, "Connotation is always one kind of more profound thing than the direct image... One kind of inner thing, namely one connotation, placing vigor on the external shape." ⑩ Such a deep connotation is just the "highest spirit" of art, which contains a philosophic reflections on life or universal metaphysical reflections. It is one kind of internal vigor, inspiration, character and spirit.

Connotations of artistic works are different from the contents of theoretical works. The latter is just the object of logical understanding, which must be expressed by logical judgment and proposition. It is determined, thus it is limited. "Connotations" of artistic works are the object of aesthetic invigoration and experience, which can only be appreciated while directly enjoying the products. Thus it is quite difficult to "say" it out in a form of logical judgment and proposition. Connotations which are more profound and deepened than the artistic images are not the entities in the product's structure, but contained in the image of product. Only by relying on the careful observation, taste, appreciation of admirers, can they really understand the connotation. In the Autumn's Wild Geese of Ling Fengmian(Picture 1), the painter depicts the autumn scene of his beloved west lake and takes the flying wild geese as the finishing touch of the scene. It is so naive and nature, which reminds us of the poetry of Du Fu "With clean water and white sand, the flying birds are hovering over the islet in a river". Du Fu depicts the profound and open autumn scene along the river by a concise verse. The style is gloomy and frustrated. Ling Fengmian just resorts the views of west lake hidden in his heart to the scene, expresses the connotation of "a poetry in the scene" by rich words and brings a sense of loneliness and distance to people.

On the basis of referring to the hierarchy theory of Ingarden's literature, the author makes a general analysis on the hierarchy of artistic works. Although the above detailed analysis on hierarchy has been made, but it does not mean that, we must go deep from one layer to another while appreciating the artistic works. Besides, how should people understand the artistic works pursued by some Modernists or Post-modernists, shall we make the detailed analysis on hierarchy as above? All these problems are still needed to be fatherly discussed.

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