

Aesthetic Experience and Its Profound Interaction with the Self/Ego

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Summary

In recent years, aesthetic education in Taiwan has received abundant government support. To implement aesthetic education effectively and make aesthetic experience widely appreciated by the general public, some solid theoretical foundations are needed. However, in the art field, the anti-aesthetic turn leaped onto the scene in the late 20th century, which objects to the traditional admiration of aesthetic autonomy and, instead, focuses on the semantics of art rather than the experience induced by art. This anti-aesthetic movement also completely separates the aesthetic experience that is not triggered by art from the experience that is. In the field of arts education, the bulk of related research has been conducted from the perspective of visual-cultural studies in both the US and Taiwan, while few studies have been concerning aesthetic experience. The researcher believes that it is necessary to reexamine and reflect on aesthetic experience, by sorting out and delineating its content, value, and relationship with individuals.

To confirm the enduring value of aesthetic experience to an individual, this research first outlines the types of aesthetic experience found in existing discourses on aesthetics, and then examines various categories of aesthetic experience based on the wide-ranging incentive contexts. As guided by this goal, this research discusses the differences between two main types of aesthetics in traditional discourses: beauty and sublimity. This research also differentiates the “art-aesthetic experience” from the “aesthetic experience not induced by art.” The former comprises the “aesthetic experience triggered by art pieces” and the “aesthetic experience triggered by creative activities,” while the latter encompasses the “aesthetic experience triggered by nature” and the “aesthetic experience triggered by the everyday life.” There is one thing to note about the scope of this research: Given that the aesthetic experience may vary with the cultural environment

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within which an individual is situated and that it is beyond the scope of this research to canvas all the different aesthetics formed in different cultural environments, this research focuses on the Western aesthetics and mentions only briefly the Eastern aesthetics where appropriate.

Based on the discourses on aesthetics that are outlined in the above, this research focuses on aesthetic experience as well as its effect on individuals, and examines the related literature. The researcher further sorts out five dynamic dimensions of self/ego generated within aesthetic experience: “self/ego-fulfillment,” “self/ego-dialectic,” “self/ego-integration,” “self/ego-actualization,” and “self/ego-transcendence.” The order in which these five dimensions are discussed is based on the degree of individuals’ involvement in their aesthetic experience, e.g., from limited to deep involvement, from passive to active involvement, and from the nascent to transcendental stage. We may be discussing the aesthetic experience of an individual at a particular moment or a successive process that echoes a journey in which the individual is transformed from feeling highly satisfied to feeling selfless through a deep reflection and complete awakening. Here, self/ego-fulfillment refers to the satisfaction, as inspired by artistic objects, of an individual’s desires and the experience acquired during infancy. Self/ego-dialectic prompts individuals to inquire about and challenge who they are, as triggered by aesthetic experience. Self/ego-integration refers to the process in which aesthetic experience inspires an individual to realize a more stable self. Self/ego-actualization refers to the realization of an optimal self through aesthetic experience. Self/ego-transcendence occurs when individuals morph from feeling self-centered to feeling altruistic through aesthetic experience.

Based on the literature review and analysis, we arrive at the following conclusions and reflections for the educators: (1) Aesthetic experience can lead to limitless possibilities. Hence, for the academics in the field of art education, the approach of rational and critical examination can be augmented by a better understanding and exploration of the actual aesthetic experience, as more attention has been paid to the visual culture or multiculturalism in recent years. In terms of the actual teaching, the multiple facets of aesthetics can serve as interdisciplinary interfaces to integrate various subject areas. (2) Aesthetic experience can open the door to internal reflection and self-integration. Hence, aesthetic appreciation can further mobilize the life and character education which has gained attention in the field of education in recent years, by infusing aesthetic elements into the related course design and educational activities. (3) Aesthetic experience enhances sensitivity as a valuable quality in life. To foster this, teachers should develop professional skills that embrace the positive dimensions of emotion. (4) Aesthetic experience harbors the potential for self-fulfillment and self-transcendence. To ensure the purity of disinterested pleasure, more

emphasis should be placed on an aesthetics education that is not purposive by reducing the use of performance indicators designed for particular outcomes, so aesthetic transcendence can be realized.