

About the Essence of Beauty

Yu Zuxin

Arts and Crafts Society of Sichuan Province; China National Arts and Cr

Abstract

Key words: beauty, essence, art

What is beauty? And what is the essence of beauty? For this question, at all times and in all over the world different people have different opinions. As for me, beauty is objective information that conforms with subjective aspiration.

Text

Our era needs beauty, and so does our life. All men search for beauty. So, actually what is this “beauty”?

What is beauty? And what is the essence of beauty? For this question, at all times and in all over the world different people have different opinions. Combining with the author’s own practice of creating beauty, this paper is focusing on the author’s view on the question from the perspective of an art and craft worker:

As for me, beauty is objective information that conforms with subjective aspiration.

Subject means human beings and all animals with mental activity. Conscious activity guided by thinking is the fundamental symbol that makes human beings different from other animals. Therefore, as the aesthetic subject, human beings have an essentially different sense of beauty from other animals. The subject can be an individual, or a group (such as group, class, rank, nation, country, community, human beings, etc.).

Object means all objective realities except subject, which is regarded as aesthetic object. It includes things existing in the natural and social world. The natural object is referred to as the first object and the artificial one as the second object.

Information is a kind of stimulation to the subject’s nervous system. This stimulation can convey the object’s properties to the subject and enable the subject to sense its contained meaning.

Aspiration belongs to the scope of psychology. Human’s vital movement and social practice constantly generate needs, and aspiration just comes from these needs. Aspiration is a kind of thinking that “the

brain's highest decision center" wishes to achieve a certain aim. Some aspiration finds expression in conscious mind and some hides in the subconsciousness. Animal's aspiration reflects their instinctive needs (namely desire). While human's aspiration may be influenced by their faith and emotion, which reflects physical and spiritual needs under certain social, political and economic conditions and indicates the direction for solution. For example, in Du Fu's poem "My Thatched Cottage Was Broken by the West Wind", there is a sentence "Seeking for a great mansion with thousands of rooms where all the poor on earth could find comfortable shelter" which reflects Tang Dynasty's political and economic conditions after An Lushan Rebellion. At that time, people were driven from pillar to post. No matter Du Fu or others, they all cried for housing. The combination of the need of house, Du Fu's concern about his country and the people and the Confucianist belief for benevolent government generated the above lofty aspiration.

Brain is the commanding organ of human body. Its extensive and complex activities, and multilevel- and multisystem-structure require a highest concentrated unified command agency. In accordance with research on modern psychology, the conscious mechanism which locates in frontal lobe of the brain can control the other psychological functions. "The highest command agency" I mentioned is just the core of this system.

I think this definition is like a big sack. It can hold all beauties in the world. However when it is turned over, except a variety of beauties, nothing has left.

Let us take an example!

Currently people love to dress up as their living standard has improved. So what is the essence of costume's beauty?



Costumes are created for human to wear, so it is the external form of human. The form shall reflect the content, so firstly costumes shall fit the dresser's age, figure, body type, complexion, occupational identity, personality and so on. In other words, costumes should convey information. Secondly, costumes are shown in public. The dresser becomes the object, and the appreciator becomes the subject. As an object, its information shall fit the subject's aspiration. So the tenue shall accord with the nation's condition and suit most people's aesthetic sense and custom. There was a time when people disliked bare-chested women, long-hair men and

bright-colored shirts, as it didn't conform with the national condition of the day and couldn't suit most people's appreciative custom. After decades of reform and opening, people have changed their idea, and naturally the accusatory words disappeared. Thirdly, human beings are self-conscious animals. They consider themselves as the appreciated object and simultaneously as the subject performing appreciation. They may look themselves up and down in mirrors or often take a look at their pictures. This



is self-appreciation. Therefore, as their own information, costume shall meet their own aspiration. A thin person may usually wear loose clothes with cross stripes. He just wishes to make use of illusion to perfect his look so as not to be too thin in other's eyes.

So costume's essence of beauty is that as objective (dresser) information, costume shall meet the subject's (individual or social) aspiration.

What is the beauty of Guilin's scenery?



As the nature's information, firstly Guilin's scenery is singular. You can hardly find the same elsewhere. Human have the aspiration for knowledge, so they are eager for the novelty. Guilin's scenery just fit people's aspiration for novelty. Secondly, it is picturesque, an ideal place for living. People live on nature and Guilin's scenery is beneficial to physical and psychological health so it suits people's aspiration for living. Thirdly, there are lots of historical sites and fairy tales about it which can be connected in our mind, enrich our knowledge, and make people get educated. More often than not, people travel with an aspiration for expanding their horizon and improving physical and psychological health. The information offered by Guilin's scenery suits their aspiration, so in their eyes Guilin's scenery is beautiful.

When information from the first object conforms with the subject's aspiration, it is called natural beauty, and when the information from the second object conforms with the subject's aspiration, it is artistic beauty. Guilin's scenery has both natural beauty and artistic beauty, so there comes the saying that "Guilin's scenery is the best in the world".

Why do young fellows pay so much attention to the beauty of their girlfriend?

As beauty is the information from the girl which can help the young man to know her nature. Elegant manners represent fine cultivation. Ruddy complexion and fine and smooth skin show her well-developed youth...

And beauty accords with the subjective aspiration. Who doesn't have a good aspiration for his dream girl? When information from the girl meets

his aspiration, the young guy would feel pleased, which tends to bring up natural emotion. So beautiful girls can easily make guys fall in love with them at first sight.



How to explain the Chinese old saying “Beauty is in the eye of the beholder”?

First, since he or she is a lover, there will always be some information conforming to each other’s aspiration. Since they both have such kind of information, they may feel pleased, which will cause more attention from both sides and thus they may find more aspiration-fitted information. Meanwhile, more attention means consciousness inclination (a kind of psychological property which can concentrate the limited energy on the main target). The reception of aspiration-fitted information is strengthened and relatively the reception of the unfitted is weakened. So there comes “Beauty is in the eye of the beholder”.

So does aesthetical standard boast objectivity?

Of course it does. The objectivity is that aspiration is generated on the basis of the needs under a certain political and economic condition. Therefore people with the same faith and needs may have common aspiration. The social aesthetic standard is based on people’s common aspiration in which the social leading group plays a determined part. In the hierarchical society, due to the intervallic living conditions, different hierarchies have different aspirations, so different aesthetic standards appeared. Just as Chernyshevsky said, “in the mind of common people, ‘good life’, or ‘life for granted’ shall be adequate food, good housing, and sufficient sleeping. In the view of peasants, they cannot live without labor, which would be annoying to them. Hardworking but not exhausted, such kind of abundant life makes young peasants or farm girls look really ruddy and florid – in the eyes of common people, this is the first condition of beauty. But in the upper class, living without labor is their aspiration. So delicate limbs, which symbolize life without physical labor, is considered as beauty.”^① People ranking differently in society have different aesthetic ideas, but these ideas all generate on the basis of the needs in life, which demonstrates the objectivity of aesthetic standard, but it is a social objectivity.

There are so many examples in life. Let’s just leave it for a second! Beauty and art are always tightly bound to each other. Let’s explain the artistic phenomena with the above-mentioned opinion on the essence of beauty, to see if it can direct artistic creation.

Tolstoy said, “Art is a means of communication out of a multitude between human... This kind of communication is different from the one through language. One person conveys his thought through language, but people convey their emotion to each other through art.”

“Arousing the once experienced emotion in one’s heart, and then conveying such kind of emotion through images expressed by actions, lines, colors and speeches to make others experience the same emotion -- this is art activity.”^②

Actually in these sentences, Tolstoy has already indicated that art is a kind of social information system that conveys emotions to each other through images, but not explicitly proposed the concept of “information”.

Plekhanov disagreed with Tolstoy's viewpoint. He said, "Art not only represents human emotion, but also their thought; not abstractly, but vividly through images. This is art's dominant trait."



Chinese ancient pottery pattern

In my mind, Tolstoy's definition defined the distinguishing features of artistic content. But it is not comprehensive enough. Plekhanov redressed his words. He pointed out that art represents thought and also emotion. It is right. But Plekhanov denied the difference between artistic language and general language in the respect of content. In our mind, art mainly represents some kind of thought which reflects people's aspiration. And language expresses all thoughts of human. Language is the direct reality of human ideas. And art is the direct reality of human aspiration. Aspiration is a kind of thought, but it is a thought that commands the intentionality of emotion, and it mixes



Ancient
Greek sculpture of Venus



Works in Qi Baishi China

philosophy, ideological level and emotion together, but not simply reflects the cognition of things' truthfulness. So sometimes it can only be sensed, but not expressed in words. People have various emotions but in all there are nothing more than two categories. One is aroused when aspiration is met, such as pleasure, happiness, joy, gladness, love, etc. The other is aroused when it is unmet, such as sadness, sorrow, grief, pain, anger, hate, etc. (of course there are also some neutral emotions, like composure, equanimity, etc.). Emotion is a form of aspiration. Art focuses on expressing emotion with the purpose of showing aspiration.

Plekhanov said that art is mainly featured by images. It is not comprehensive enough either. According to his viewpoint, a common picture equals to a piece of art work. According to his viewpoint, science and art are not different in content but only in form. If art is mainly featured by images, as a kind of art, music is really inferior. Although there exists the so-called "musical images", compared with painting, after all it is much vaguer.

As for the formal characteristic of art, it is better to define it as information symbol with emotionality and direct sensibility (features that can be directly received and distinguished by sense organs as emotion carriers) than images. Images are the feature of optical information. When light passes the object's surface, some is absorbed, and some reflected. Eyeballs can sense the object's line, color, texture after receiving the reflected light wave, and then the contained meaning of the object is concerned.

This is image. Sound is different. It is sensed through sound wave when the object vibrates. Acoustic intelligence firstly reflects the object's nature. The concept of image only comes into being when associative action of sensation works. We can conduct an experiment. Let's put a metal sheet and a board with different shapes in the distance, and then knock on them. Which do you distinguish first, the nature or the shape? I guess everyone would say the nature. Therefore, sound can directly reflect the object's nature and also represent people's aspiration. So acoustic intelligence has its own unique aesthetic value and constitutes an independent art system, and it does not need to totally rely on images to express emotion or aspiration. Certainly making use of sensational associative action to strengthen artistic effect is another thing.

So what about literature and art?

The second signal system specifically owned by human can create conditioned reflex after receiving verbal stimulus, so language can arouse emotion and make people sense the special information. Words are the symbols of this kind of information, but to some extent abstractly. But vivid description in literature strengthens its emotionality and direct sensibility. No matter abstract art or figural art, as a kind of information symbol, they all represent emotions. After all they should be able to be received and distinguished by human organs. Usually, when specific feelings are conveyed, representational techniques

French Picasso works

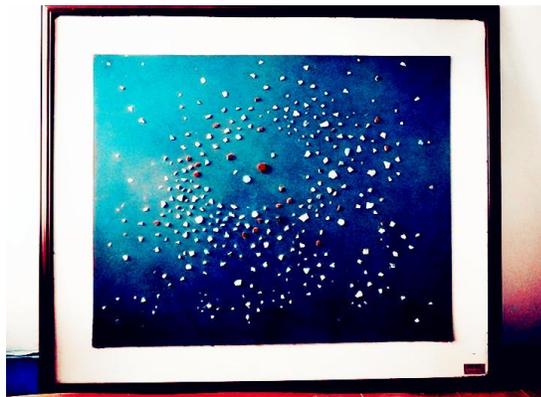


will be a better choice, and abstract techniques suit obscure thoughts and emotions more. The direct sensibility of information does not equal to its concreteness.

Thereupon, we get such definition that art is a social information system made up by imitative symbols with the purpose of conveying emotions. It is the tool for human to express their aspiration. For example, body art in renaissance era is intensely alive and lifelike. It conveys the thought information in the period when the bourgeoisie started to rise, and represents their eagerness for natural and individual emancipation. “Outlaws of the Marsh” is a piece of famous classical literary work of our nation. Impressively it depicts 108 hero images with intense emotionality and direct sensibility. It conveys the information of peasants uprising in ancient times and expresses people’s aspiration to fight against the cruel oppression of the ruling class. “A Dream in Red Mansions” vividly portrays the declination of a big feudal family. It conveys the information of feudal society’s downfall and delivers people’s aspiration to resist the ruling of feudal society. So comrade Mao Zedong often said that we should read “A Dream in Red Mansions” as a mirror of history.

Just because art is a tool for people to express their aspiration, it permits imagination, and it can be exaggerated, transformed, concentrated, accepted and rejected to achieve the standard of beauty. This is just the difference between science and art. Also this is the difference between a common picture and photographic art. Scientific information shall reflect the object’s nature of reality as precisely as possible. The only method of it is to seek truth from facts. Philosophy and history also belong to this category.

c It is because art is a kind of information system for people to express their aspiration and beauty is the objective information which conforms with the subject’s aspiration, that appreciating successful art can create aesthetidelight and, art and beauty are always tightly bound to each other. Goethe said, “Successful art is beauty.” Croce,B. said, “Successful expression is beauty.” Hegel said, “The unity of content and form, the unity of sensibility and rationality is beauty.” As for artistic beauty, these perspectives are all right, but we cannot put it backward as these are the total definitions of beauty.



Wide universe Ceramic pattern Yu Zuxin make

Beauty is subjective; objective; or the unity of the subjective and the objective. ?

The debate on this issue in our country has been more than half a century. 2010 the 18th World Congress of aesthetics after commenting on my work wrote: took more than Zuxin "beauty is what" a book, the beauty is in line with the wishes of the subject object information. Compared with the essence of beauty is subjective, said the essence of beauty is an objective, obviously progress, but compared with the beauty is subjective and objective of unity, but there is no qualitative difference..... Visible the far-reaching impact of this topic.

Readers of this review, also caused me to repeat the question. I write the results of thinking, and have a discussion with interested friends.

Since the essence of beauty is a kind of information, in accordance with the information science: material, energy and information is the three elements of the objective world. It exists in the difference between things, is the representation of the form of the movement of things, there are three basic information of the state. The first is the primary state of information. Seconda recorded state, the third is the processing state. So, said the essence of beauty is objective, in fact, refers to the essence of beauty as a kind of information of the native state. Said the is s essence of beauty subjetive, refers to the processing of information state, said the essence of beauty in the subjective and objective of unity is to refer to the information in the record state. The essence of the essence of beauty the three argument has a certain accuracy, but it is not so comprehensive. Due to different perspectives, the entry point is different, the application range is not the same .



Peace and Development

Ceramic pattern Yu Zuxin make

Some people say: Western philosophy emphasizes the two points, while the Chinese philosophy emphasizes the harmony between man and nature. Western aesthetics focuses on the essence of beauty, and how Chinese aesthetics. I think this is actually a problem in two aspects. Just because of the different historical circumstances. Differences in political, economic, and cultural conditions make different choices at different times. There is no point, which has the combination? Vice versa. The "Three Kingdoms" begins,

the world trend, long hours. "A dream of Red Mansions", said, "a thousand miles to take a long shed no casual banquet". It is said that a long time! So the two points of heaven and man and the theory of harmony between man and nature can not fully grasp the essence of beauty. Because beauty is a kind of information, it is the intermediary of the subject and the object. Aesthetic standards are formulated by the subject, and some of the nature of the aesthetic object belongs to the object. While the information is spread through the media, source, channel and destination. The three form an information transfer system which can not be separated. The beauty in the relationship between theory and practice aesthetics is a bit of a spectrum is that it defines the beauty exists between the subject and object. But it is not pointed out that what is the link between them, so that people feel vague and lack of maneuverability.

In ,Whether aesthetic theory binary oppositions or two yuan integration can not be complete and accurate to reveal the essence of beauty. Fundamental reason is that "the essence of beauty" is the middle term exists in the form of a message, it has the of the carrier material and spiritual contact with connotation the subject and object. Belonging to the third element.



Author Introduction:

Senior Craft Artist of China, well-known ceramist, Director of the second term of China National Arts and Crafts Society, and Vice-president of Sichuan Provincial Arts and Crafts Society.

Contact Information:

Yuzuxin@hotmail.com

Notes:

※ The first draft was published in "Sichuan Arts and Crafts" 1986 I, originally named "About Aesthetics of Information Theory". In 1996, it is renamed as "About the Essence of Beauty" and got Excellent Paper Award of Sichuan Association for Science and Technology. This edition has been slightly amended.

① See "Life and Aesthetics" in "Selected Works of Chernyshevsky"

② See Tolstoy's "Art Perspective", People's Literature Publishing House, 1958

③ See Plekhanov's "About Art" -- A Letter Without Address, Sanlian Bookstore

4. The relevant photos in addition to my works are from the network, the author thanks.
5. Most computer-based English translation of this article, if ambiguous subject to Chinese version

附件：中文原文

关于美的本质问题

余祖信

中国高级工艺美术师、著名陶瓷艺术家、第二届中国工艺美术学会理事、四川省工艺美术学会副理事长。

关键词：美 本质 艺术

摘要

美是什么？也就是美的本质是什么？这是一道古今中外众说纷纭的难题。

我认为：美就是符合主体愿望的客体信息。

正文

我们的时代需要美，我们的生活需要美。爱美之心，人皆有之。那么，这“美”究竟是什么呢？

美是什么？也就是美的本质是什么？这是一道古今中外众说纷纭的难题！作为一个工艺美术工作者，本文结合自己的创美实践，谈谈对这个问题的看法：

我认为，美就是符合主体愿望的客体信息。

主体——指人及一切有心理活动的动物。以思维作指导的意识活动是人类区别于其它动物的根本标志，因而作为审美主体，同其它一切动物所感知的美有本质的区别。主体可以是单个的，也可以是群体（例如集团、阶级、阶层、民族、国家、共同体，人类等等）。

客体——主体以外作为审美对象的一切客观存在。它包括自然和社会中存在的事物。我们把天然的客体称为第一客体，人造的客体称为第二客体。

信息——是对主体神经系统的一种刺激。这种刺激能够把客体的性状传达给主体并能使主体感悟其蕴意。

愿望——是心理学的一个范畴。人的生命活动和社会实践不断地产生着需要，愿望基于需要而产生，它是“大脑最高决策中心”希望将来能达到某种目的的一种想法，有的表现于显意识，有的蕴藏在潜意识中。动物的愿望反映本能的需要（即欲望）。而人的愿望受信念与情感的影响，它反映一定社会政治、经济条件下物质和精神的需要，并且指示解决需要的方向。比方说：杜甫在《茅屋为秋风所破歌》一诗中表达了“安得广厦千万间，大庇天下寒士俱欢颜”的愿望，这是安史之乱后唐朝政治经济状况的反映。当时人们流离失所，不论是杜甫还是人民都迫切需要房子，这种需要和杜甫的忧国忧民，主张仁政的儒家信念相结合，就产生了上述崇高的愿望。大脑作为一个人体的指挥机关。它的活动内容广泛而复杂，结构是多层次、多系统的，这就必然要求有一个集中的最高统一指挥机构。根据现代心理学的研究，大脑中的意识机制能够对其它心理功能起到统驭作用。它的部位就在大脑额叶。我说的“最高决策中心”就是指这个机制的核心部分。

我觉得，这个定义就像一只大口袋，它能装完世界上所有的美。然而当把这只口袋倾翻出来的时候。除了各式各样的美以外，其它什么也没有。

让我们举例来说吧！

当前人们的物质生活水平提高了，都爱穿着打扮，这服装美的本质是什么呢？



服装是穿在人的身上的，所以它是人的外在形式因素。形式应该反映内容，所以服装美的第一个要素就是穿着要与本人的年龄、身材、体型、肤色、职业身份、性格等方面相适应。也就是说服装要起到传递信息的作用。其二，服装是要穿到社会上去的。穿者成了客体，社会上的欣赏者是主体，服装作为客体的信息要符合主体的愿望。

这就要求服装样式符合本国的国情,适合大多数人的审美观念和习惯。曾经有一段时间女的袒胸露怀,男的留长

发、穿花衣，受到大家的反感，就是因为不符合当时中国的国情，不适合那时大多数人的欣赏习惯的缘故。经过十多年的改革开放,人们的观念进行了更新,指责的语言就自然消失了。第三，人是一个有自我意识的动物。他要把自己当作欣赏的对象又当作欣赏的主体，在镜子面前端详一下，经常看看自己照片，就是一种自我欣赏的表现。那么服装作为本人的信息就要符合自身的愿望。一个瘦子，往往衣服做得宽松些，还增加一些横向线条，他的愿望无非是想利用错觉改善一下外观，免得给人太瘦的感觉。



因此服装美的本质也就是服装作为客体（穿者）信息要符合主体（个人、社会）的愿望。

那么桂林山水为什么美呢？

桂林山水，作为大自然的信息，一是奇特，其它地方很难看到。人有求知的愿望，故有猎奇之心。桂林山水符合人们追求新鲜事物的愿望。二是桂林山水山清水秀，是理想的生活环境。人是靠大自然生活的，桂林山水有益于人的身心健康，所以符合人们的生活愿望。第三，桂林山水有很多古迹、神话，能够牵动我们的联想，使我们增加知识，受到教育。而游人出游，大抵上总带着开阔眼界，增进身心健康的愿望的。桂林山水提供的信息能够符合他们的愿望，所以他们就觉得美。



那么小伙子找对象为什么十分讲究美呢？

因为美是对象的一种信息，能够帮助了解对象的本质。文雅的举止是很有修养的一种信息。脸色红润，肤色细腻，身体丰满青春发育良好的一种信息……。美又是符合主体愿望的。谁找对象没有一种良好的愿望呢？对象的信息合乎自己的愿望，心里就很愉快，于是就容易产生自然的感情。所以美的对象容易引起“一见钟情”。



中国有句古话叫“情人眼中出西施”，应该怎么解释呢？

首先，他(她) 既为情人，总是互相有合乎愿望的地方给对方以信息，既然双方有合乎愿望的信息，心里就会产生快感。由于快感双方都会加强自己的注意，从而互相发现更多的信息符合自己的愿望。同时，由于注意的加强也就出现了意识的偏倾性（意识的偏倾性是一种心理特性，它能把主体有限的精力集中到主要的目标上）。那些合乎自己愿望的信息接收被加强了，而那些不合乎自己愿望的信息接收被相对的削弱了。这就出现了“情人眼中出西施”的情况。

这么说，审美标准有没有客观性呢？

当然有客观性。它的客观性就在于愿望是一定政治经济条件下，基于需要而产生的。因而具有相同信念相同需要的人们就会产生共同的愿望。社会的审美标准是以人们共同的愿望为基础产生的，社会的主导群体要起决定的作用。在层级社会中，由于生活条件的悬殊，不同的层级有不同的愿望，审美标准也就不大一样。正如车尔尼雪夫斯基说的：“在普通人看来，‘美好的生活’、‘应当如此的生活’就是吃的饱，住的好，睡眠充足。在农民看来，生活而不劳动是不可能的，而且也是叫人烦闷的。辛勤劳动、却不致令人精疲力竭那样一种富足生活的结果，使青年农民或农家少女都有非常鲜艳红润的面色——这照普通人的理解，就是美的第一个条件。而在上流社会的人看来，不靠双手劳动过活才是他们的愿望。所以纤细的手足，即没有体力劳动的生活标志，他们就觉得美。”^①不同层级地位者有不同的审美观念，但都是基于生活的需要而产生的。这本身就说明了审美标准具有客观性，但这是一种社会的客观性。

生活的例子太多了,咱们暂时不谈吧！美和艺术从来都结下了不解之缘。用上述关于美的本质的观点来解释一下艺术现象，看看能否指导艺术创作。

托尔斯泰说：“艺术是人与人之间交往的手段之一……。这种交往和通过语言的交往有所不同。其特点在于一个人使用语言向别人传达自己的思想，而人们使用艺术互相传达自己的感情。”

T

“在自己的心里唤起曾经一度体验过的感情，并在唤起这种感情之后，用动作、线条、色彩以及言辞所表达的形象传达出这种感情，使别人也能体验到同样的感情——这就是艺术活动。”^②

在这里托尔斯泰实际上已经指出艺术是一种以形象为符号相互传达感情的社会信息系统。只不过没有明确地提出“信息”概念而已。

普列汉诺夫不同意托尔斯泰的看法，他说：“艺术既表现人们的感情，也表现人们的思想。但是并非抽象地表现，而是用生动的形象来表现。艺术最主要的特点就在于此。”^③

”



舞蹈纹图



人面鱼纹图

中国古代彩陶图案

我觉得，托尔斯泰的定义讲出了艺术内容的显著特征。然而不够全面。普列汉诺夫纠正了他的话。指出艺术既表现思想也表现感情，这是对的。然而普列汉诺夫却否定了艺术语言同一般语言表现在内容上的差别。我们说，艺术主要表达反映人的愿望的某种思想。而语言则表达人所有的思想。语言是人的思想的直接现实。艺术是人的愿望的直接现实。愿望也是一种思想，但它是统率情感的意向性思想，

哲理性、思想性与情感糅合在一起，不是单纯反映对事物真理性的认识。故有时候只可会意，不可言传。

人们情感多种多样，但归纳起来不外两大类。一类是顺乎愿望引起的，如喜、兴、乐、快、爱等。一类是逆乎愿望引起的，如：悲、哀、伤、痛、怒、恨之类（当然还有一些中性的情感，如沉着、镇定等等）。情感就是愿望的一种表现形式，艺术着重表现情感，目的是表达愿望。

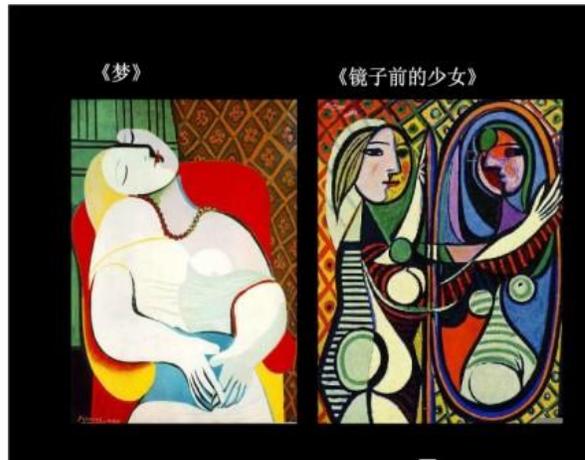


中国 齐白石作品

普列汉诺夫说，艺术的主要特点是形象。这也不够全面。按照他的观点，一张普通照片等同于一张艺术作品。按照他的

观点，科学与艺术没有内容上的差别而只有形式的差别。如果说艺术的主要特点是形象，那么音乐作为艺术就太逊色了。虽说有所谓“音乐形象”，但比起绘画来毕竟含糊多了。

艺术的形式特征与其说是形象，倒不如说是具有情绪性和直感性的信息符号（即作为情感载体感官可以直接接收和分辨的特性）。形象是光信息的特征。光线通过物体表面时，有的被吸收，有的被反射。被反射的光波由于眼球的接收才感觉到对象的线条、色彩、肌理的存在。进而联系到对象的蕴意。这就是形象。声音则不然，它是由于对象振动引起声波才使我们感觉到的。声信息反映的首先是对对象的质。然而由于感觉的联想作用才产生形象的概念。可以做一个试验，把一块金属板和一块不同形状の木版拿到远处去敲，听其声音，究竟是先区别出金属和木头的本质还是先区别出形状呢？我想大家都会说是先区别出材料的质而不是它的形。因此，声音是能够直接反映对象本质并表达人的愿望的。因而声信息具有独立的美学价值而构成一个单独的艺术体系，而不必完全依赖形象来表现。当然利用感觉的联想作用来加强艺术效果，那又是另一回事。



法国 毕加索作品

那么，文学艺术呢？

人类特有的第二信号系统能够接受语词的刺激而产生条件反射。所以，语言是能够唤起情绪并能让人感受的特殊信息。文字是这种信息的符号，虽具有一定的抽象性。但是文学的绘声绘色的描写增加了它情绪性和直感性，无论是抽象艺术还是具象艺术，作为一种信息符号都是情感显现，总得要能为人的器官接收和分辨。通常，传达某种具体的感情，采用具像手法更合适，传达某种朦胧的意念和感情，抽象手法更合适。信息的直感性不等于具象性。

于是我们得出了这样一个定义，艺术是一种由摹拟性符号组成传达感情的社会信息系统，它是人们表达愿望的工具。比方说：文艺复兴时代的人体艺术，生动逼真。它向人们传达了资产阶级上升时代的思想信息，表达了资产阶级向往自然，追求个

性解放的愿望。《水浒传》是我国一部有名的古典文学作品，它鲜明地刻画了一百零八位英雄形象，有强烈的情绪性和直感性。它向人们传达了古代农民起义的信息，表达了人们反抗统治阶级残酷压迫的愿望。《红楼梦》这部小说生动地描绘了封建大家庭内部的破败情况，向人们传达了封建社会走向没落的信息，表达了人们反抗封建社会统治的愿望。所以毛泽东同志经常说要把《红楼梦》当作历史的一面镜子来读。

正因为艺术是人们表达愿望的工具，所以艺术允许想象，还可以夸张、变形、集中、取舍，以最终达到美。科学与艺术的区别就在于此。一张普通照片同摄影艺术的区别也在于此。科学信息必须尽可能精确地反映对象的本质规律，其方法只能是实事求是，哲学和历史也属于这个范畴。

正因为艺术是一种人们表达愿望的信息系统，而美又是符合主体愿望的客体信息，所以欣赏成功的艺术就会产生审美快感，艺术和美也就结下了不解之缘。歌德说：“成功的艺术就是美。”克罗齐说：“成功的表现就是美。”黑格尔说：“内容与形式的统一，感性与理性的统一就是美。”这些观点对艺术美来说都是正确的，只是不能倒过来说这些是整个美的定义。



陶瓷纹片画 余祖信作

广宇

美是主观的；客观的；还是主客观统一？

我国美学界关于这个问题的争论，已经持续半个多世纪了。2010年第18届世界美学大会之后，有人在评论我的作品时写道：就拿余祖信的“美是什么”一书来说吧，美是符合主体愿望的客体信息。较之美是主观说，美是客观说，显然有进步，但是较之美是主客观统一说，却没有质的差别。……可见这个论题影响之深远。读者的这一评论，也引起我对此问题反复的思考。我把思考的结果写出来，与有兴趣的朋友商榷。

美既然是一种信息，按照信息科学的说法，物质、能量和信息是构成客观世界的三个要素。它存在于事物之间的差别中，是事物运动形式的表征，信息就有三种基本的状态。第一种是信息的原生状态。第二种是记录状态，第三种就是加工状态。那么，说美是客观的，实际上指的是美作为一种信息的原生状态。说美是主观的，

就是指信息的加工状态，说美在主客观统一实际上是指信息的记录状态。对美的本质而言，三种说法都有一定的正确性，但不是那么全面。由于视角不同，切入点不同，应用范围也不一样。



陶瓷纹片画 余祖信作

和平与发展

有人说：西方哲学强调“天人二分”，而中国哲学强调“天人合一”。西方美学着重探讨美的本质问题，而中国美学着重怎样审美。我觉得这实际上是一个问题的两个方面。只是由于历史境遇不同。政治、经济、文化状况的差异，在不同时段做出不同的选择而已。没有分，哪有合呢？反之亦然。《三国演义》开头就说：天下大势分久必合、合久必分。《红楼梦》中说，“千里搭长棚没有不散的宴席”。也是说合久必分嘛！所以天人二分和天人合一理论都不能全面把握美的本质。因为美作为一种信息它是链接主体和客体的中介物。审美标准是主体制定的，审美对象的某种性质是属于客体的。而信息是要通过介质来传播的，信源、信道、信宿。三者构成一个不可分离的信息传递系统。美在关系说和实践美学有点靠谱就是它界定了美存在于主客体之间。但没有指出是什么东西完成了它们之间的链接、因而使人感到含糊不清而缺乏可操作性。

总之，不论是二元对立还是二元融合的美学理论都无法完整、准确的揭示美的本质。根本原因就在于“美”是一个以信息形态存在的中间项，它有物质的载体和精神的内涵联系着主体与客体。属于第三元。



作者介绍:

余祖信：中国高级工艺美术师、著名陶瓷艺术家、第二届中国工艺美术学会理事、四川省工艺美术学会副理事长。

联系方式:

Yuzuxin@hotmail.com

注释:

※ 本文初稿发表于《四川工艺美术》1986年第一期，原名《信息论美学初探》。1996年改名为《关于美的本质问题初探》并获四川省科协优秀论文奖。本次发表略有修改补充。

- ① 见《车尔尼雪夫斯基选集》的《生活与美学》一文。
- ② 见托尔斯泰：《艺术论》，人民文学出版社1958年版。
- ③ 见普列汉诺夫：《论艺术》——没有地址的信，生活·读书·新知三联书店出版。
- ④ 有关照片除本人作品外均来自网络，谢谢作者。

5. 本文英文大部分系电脑翻译，如有歧义以中文解释为准。

(完)