

A turning study of art criticism based on Danto's art history narrative

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Abstract: *The development of art criticism changes with the development stage of the art era. American philosopher and art critic Arthur C. Danto divided the history of art into three sections and corresponded to the art criticism system: The first stage of art criticism in the era of traditional imitation is based on visual reality. The second stage is the era of ideology. The structure of art criticism is a kind of criticism that oneself strives to get rid of. The third stage is the post-historical era. Art criticism presents the separation of methods between art and philosophy, with pluralistic comprehensive criticism as the main focus. Art criticism has developed Vasari's modernist art criticism system from the disciplinary branch of art history, Frye and Greenberg's formalist criticism theory, and then to pluralistic art criticism.*

Keywords: *Danto, art criticism, formalism criticism, pluralism*

1. Introduction

Different from art history research, art criticism has changed with the development of art and is updated rapidly. It focuses on art works or artistic phenomena in the past ten years^[1]. The Art History Section was first established and is mainly divided into art history, art theory and art criticism. At this time, art criticism was still regarded as a branch of art history. Art criticism has developed independently since the 19th century. Through nearly a century of development in the subject field, in the early 20th century, British art historian and art critic Roger Fry objectively analyzed the work content of artists in a relatively strict and systematic disciplinary paradigm. This marks the establishment of the theory and method of art criticism paradigm. Art criticism has gradually become an independent art research discipline. Its writing methods, principles and theories have been continuously improved and matured, and a variety of art criticism methods have been derived, forming a rigorous art criticism system.

The objects of art criticism refer to those works of art that have just been created, and critics use their experience and intuition to describe, analyze and judge them^[1]. In historical development, art criticism has become a part of art history, which stems from the influence of critics' comments on the development of art at that time. The most direct example is that some critics' comments have become the names of certain artistic styles or artistic movements, such as "Impressionism" and "Fauvism". Art criticism has also taken on different critical paradigms with the changes in art history. Art critic Danto pointed out that the grand narrative of art history is divided into three narratives: the early stage of art history was an era of traditional imitation, the second stage was an era of ideology, and the third stage was a post-historical era. All three eras are characterized by a different structure of art criticism^[2].

2. Artistic criticism at the stage of traditional imitation

The first stage, the period of traditional imitation, art is embodied in grand narration, imitating nature and reality. The artistic criticism of this period is based on visual reality. Art criticism at this stage was represented by Giorgio Vasari, the father of modern art history during the Renaissance. Art criticism against the Renaissance was concentrated in the book "The Biography of Famous Painters, Sculptors and Architects". Later, Gombrich's critical theory on modern art gradually developed visually authentic art criticism into contemporary forms.

2.1. Imitation and reproduction model during the Renaissance

The art of painting during the Renaissance was an art of imitation, and the history of painting art was expressed as the history of making art. In the process of making art, artists are dominated by perceptual

reality, which is the inheritance of the ancient Greek and ancient Roman concept of "art imitating nature." Renaissance artists pursued to create better paintings to surpass their predecessors. Their works aim to reproduce external nature and reality in a more realistic and accurate way. Under the artistic narrative of the traditional imitation era, they transformed the visual representations of the real world into pictures through their mastery of painting techniques such as perspective, thus affecting the viewer's visual system. This gradual process not only demonstrates the artist's skillful control of visual representations and control methods, but also reflects the in-depth understanding and expression of art's influence on external reality. The Renaissance painting model was a painting production system that learned to reproduce objects more and more accurately. Vasari divided the Renaissance into three periods in a progressive form. In the first period, Giotto and Cimabue opened a painting model that imitated reality, breaking the rigid painting style of the ancient Byzantine period. In the second period, Brunelleschi, Donatello and Masaccio eliminated the rigid and unbalanced characteristics of early paintings, sculptures, and architecture, making art more and more close to accurately reproduce reality. In the third period, the emergence of the three heroes of the Renaissance as a symbol, Michelangelo, Da Vinci, and Raphael reached their peak in imitating nature and recreating reality.

2.2. Vasari's artistic criticism

Artistic criticism during the period of traditional imitation and reproduction was also based on visual reality. Vasari's artistic criticism focused on the transformation of painting styles and how one form gradually transformed into another. By analyzing the works of many artists during the Renaissance, Vasari proposed that the artistic development during the Renaissance showed a gradual pattern and came to the conclusion of "artistic progress." This "progress" is not only a transformation in each painting technique and style, but also reflected in the artist's further understanding and expression of nature and the real world. The standard of the art of imitation and reproduction is that the visual world constructed must correspond to what reality itself presents. Art criticism points out that the art of reproduction can be described, elaborated and judged from the internal development of the accuracy of reproduction^[3]. Hegel and Panofsky emphasized the importance of "perspective" in the history of art. Panofsky believed that perspective is not only a painting technique, but also a symbol of the "Renaissance" philosophy of man and the world. Perspective is a way of organizing space, through which artists build a bridge from three-dimensional to plane. It is also the research object of Panofsky's iconography. Vasari pointed out that the excessive pursuit of perspective by Renaissance artists, such as the artist Paolo Uccello, would deplete inspiration and lead to a rigid style. The irrational aesthetic quality-the concept of "elegance" is proposed in art criticism of the Renaissance in Vasari's "The Legend of Celebrities", Baldasar Castiglione's "On the Beauty of Women"^[4], Elegance involves the essence of beauty, which can refer to a concrete image style or the artist's personal style. Vasari believes that elegance should be combined with the skills of imitation and reproduction to reflect elegance and lightness in artistic creation.

3. Artistic criticism in the ideological era

The second stage is the ideological era. After entering the era of modernism, ideology-imitating reality appears. Modernist art began to adopt the form of declarations to construct its own artistic narrative and pursue its artistic essence. At this stage, modernist art builds its own artistic narrative through the form of declarations and deeply explores the essence of art. The structure of art criticism during this period manifested itself as a critical model that sought independence, characterized by its taking the distinction between art (real) and non-art as the cornerstone of building its philosophical concepts. Art criticism during this period was represented by Roger Fry and Clement Greenberg.

3.1. Narratives of art history from imitation and reproduction to expression

Under the traditional imitation and reproduction model, post-Impressionism painting forms cannot be called real art, but with the rise of modern painting schools, the traditional imitation and reproduction model has been challenged. Modern art schools since Manet no longer blindly pursue "perspective" and reproduction of nature and reality, but have begun to pursue innovation in art forms, artistic connotations, etc., and create new visual realities to influence and change the audience's visual system. The direction of artists' narration has changed from accurate reproduction of nature and reality to philosophical reproduction of the essence of art. This change has formed the freedom of artistic construction and expression from vision to emotion, from imitation to expression, and has also added new artistic criticism discourse. As a result, the method of art criticism has changed, and the narrative structure in Vasari's art

criticism system is no longer suitable for modernist art. Kahnweiler wrote in 1915. A new way of expression, a new style in art often seems extraordinary-as Impressionism in its era, is now Cubism: Unaccustomed visual impulses do not cause memory images in some viewers, because associations can only be formed when 'writing' finally becomes a habit, and after frequent viewing of these paintings, they form such associations^[5]." Kahnweiler pointed out that the new symbol system has replaced the old system in response to changes in modernism, but this does not mean that it is the development of art. Frye and Kahnweiler believe that the characteristics of early paintings imitating reality and nature concealed the essence of art. In modern art, although the disguise of imitation has been torn off, new art is created through subtraction-subtracting imitation and transforming imitation of reality until it is no longer visible to be art^[6].

3.2. Frye's art criticism

Frye organized two post-Impressionist exhibitions, and in 1912 he wrote in the preface to the second Post-Impressionist exhibition: "For the first time, the British public became fully aware of the existence of a new movement in art, and how different it was in its manner, not only from the subject matter accepted by the public, And contains a sense of purpose as well as the method of painting, plastic arts of painting to rethink ^[7]." Frye's art criticism strategy is formalistic, aesthetic and emotional, and has a dual nature. Frye's theory of formalist criticism was the beginning of modernist criticism, changing the situation of Ruskin's dominant literary criticism of visual art, breaking the subjective art criticism of romantic literature, and making art truly concerned with art itself for the first time^[8]. Frye is both an esthetician and a literary theorist. In literary criticism, he put forward the theory of archetypal criticism, which also influenced the development of the theory of art criticism. Frye's art theory has a dual nature, one is the theory of formalism criticism, the other is the theory of cultural criticism. Frye advocates a formal analysis of art, revealing the cultural meaning behind art forms through the relationship between the form composition of art and the social and cultural context in which it is located. Frye's art criticism focuses on painting. He criticized the traditional model of imitation and representation science, and argued that the value of painting lies in the new visual concept, that is, the expressiveness and unity of elements such as color, line, block surface and structure, as well as the relationship between them. Unity is reflected in the integrity of the visual elements and the harmonious balance of the visual center in the painting, and the continuity of unity is reflected in the sense of order generated by the visual changes of the elements of the picture, such as the long scroll of Chinese scatter perspective. The elements of unity in the picture constitute "meaningful form" and "expressive form", that is, beauty lies in form. Frye's objective art criticism paradigm insists on the order of line and color arrangement. Get unified, balanced and diverse experience^[9]. Frye's formalistic art criticism emphasizes the relationship between the formal composition of art and its social and cultural background and social context. The social and cultural context includes psychological, historical, ethnic, political, economic and other aspects. These factors form a comprehensive social discourse force that jointly affects the whole process of artistic creation. Only by putting art in the social and cultural context can art criticism make a relatively correct judgment^[10].

3.3. Greenberg's art criticism

Greenberg's formalist art criticism and modernist art theory are developed by inheriting the formalist criticism of Fry and Bailey. Greenberg combined formalist art criticism with modernist art, paying more attention to modernist painting with a sense of form and abstract meaning. Greenberg summed up avant-garde art in 1939 in the Avant-garde and Kitsch: "In the process of exploring absoluteness, avant-garde art moved towards' abstract 'or non-objective art... Content is completely dissolved into form, and therefore, Art or literature cannot be reduced in whole or in part to anything other than itself ^[11]" Avant-garde art, as an art form, has blurred the boundary between reality and art, but the meaning of its expression has not completely broken the shackles of traditional narrative. Therefore, Greenberg proposed that abstract art should abandon descriptive themes, Attach importance to the formal expression of works and the medium characteristics of painting ^[12]. In 1955, Greenberg demonstrated in "American Style" painting that abstract expressionism conforms to the principle of "form simplification" and established the legitimacy of abstract expressionism in art history. Greenberg praised Pollock as "the most powerful painter in contemporary America, the only one who can become an important painter." The maturity of the formalist criticism system was marked by the publication of Greenberg's Modernist Painting in the early 1960s, which raised the formalist criticism from the level of methodology to the level of art philosophy. The theoretical basis of Greenberg's formalist art criticism comes from Kant's "self-criticism", and modernist painting also follows the principle of "self-criticism" and returns to the

essence of art - purity and flatness. Danto pointed out that "the modernist era is an era of self-criticism, and every modernist painting will become a pure painting critique: a painting in which one can derive the principle of the particularity of painting as a painting paper"^[13]. Modernist painting aims to reveal the essence of art. When the question of what painting itself is raised, the self-consciousness in painting will also be acquired, and the process of painting will become a process of philosophical exploration of the essence of art. Every practice of painting will also become self-criticism of itself, and therefore every art will become 'pure', and 'pure' means self-definition. Here is not only a pure criticism of the artwork, but also a reflective criticism of the artistic medium involved.

4. Art Criticism in the post-historical period

The third stage is the post-historical period, which is characterized by the separation of methods between philosophy and art, and the narration of art history is replaced by the narration of philosophy history. Danto proposed that in the post-historical period (that is, after the end of art), art after the end of historical narration returns to the primitive, free and non-historical state, and everything is possible. Danto noted: "In postmodernist art, artists who no longer pursue their own unique style gain greater freedom and choice to create art, and present artistic richness unprecedented in any period of history. That is to say, pluralism is the more tolerant state of art"^[14]. Danto put forward the method of "pluralistic comprehensive criticism". Like post-historical art, art criticism is pluralistic and undefined, so that art criticism can get rid of the shackles of the original theoretical system. Get rid of the pursuit of philosophical and historical significance^[15]. The German art historian Hans Bertin wrote in his book *Is Art History Over?* "In an objective sense, art no longer seems to have a progressive possibility for development." Art criticism is the interpretation of a work of art, an artist, or an artistic process, regardless of whether the idea of history is valid (i.e. whether art is finished or not). Art criticism in the post-historical period is itself free from the limitations of aestheticism established in the 17th century, and no one art form is regarded as a standard.

In the post-historical period, the question of what is art or what is the essence of art is no longer asked, and the form of the question becomes: What is the difference between artworks and non-artworks? What accounts for the difference? In the 20th century, pop art emerged in the United Kingdom and the United States, and opened the postmodernism, which made art get rid of the pursuit of shape, line and color and other limited forms, and found a new artistic style in mass culture. In 1964, Warhol exhibited "Brillo Boxes" at the Stebbo Gallery exhibition, ordinary boxes become artworks, while countless Brillo boxes in the supermarket are just ordinary packaging boxes, Warhol raised a philosophical question: "What makes a work of art different from ordinary objects?" Danto addressed this issue in his 1995 Mellon Lecture (published in 1997 as *After the End of Art*) with two rules: a work of art must have content; It must also express that content concretely^[16]. Two seemingly indistinguishable things can belong to different, in fact very different, philosophical categories^[16]. Pop art reopens the daily life that has been ignored by the aesthetic consciousness of art, and the artwork does not need to be presented in a certain way, separating the aestheticism in art from the art. Greenberg's single theory of modernist art criticism is no longer suitable for the era of pluralism, and art criticism will inevitably turn to pluralistic comprehensive criticism. In the post-historical period, art criticism is no longer just based on formalistic judgment, and works of art are influenced by the artist's concept, emotion and imagination as well as the audience's stance and attitude. This change makes art criticism turn to a more diversified direction in terms of the content, subject and mode of criticism.

The art criticism in the post-historical period has turned to the comprehensive art criticism of pluralism. Danto believes that the work of the critic has two layers: one is to identify the meaning of the work, and the other is to reveal how the work embodies the meaning. When conducting art criticism, we should combine form and meaning, pay attention to the environment and the world around the artist, and the position of the artist in artistic creation. In general, art criticism should combine form and meaning, pay attention to the environment and the world around the artist, and pay attention to the status of the artist in artistic creation, which is also a part of the work of art. Only by revealing the hidden meaning of the work, the meaning of the audience watching the work, and the experiential relationship between the work and human characteristics can we make a relatively objective and correct judgment of art criticism.

5. Conclusions

Along with the evolution of art history, art criticism has undergone three major changes from traditional narrative painting to contemporary art, during which many art critics emerged. Vasari, Frye,

Greenberg, Danto and others proposed the direction of art criticism from multiple dimensions such as art history, art philosophy, semiotics, and art itself. The period art criticism of traditional imitation is based on visual reality, because the main form of art in this period is to imitate nature and reality. The structure of art criticism in the Modernist era sought an independent mode of criticism, using the distinction between art (real) and non-art as the cornerstone of its philosophical conception. Art criticism in the post-historical period separated the methods between philosophy and art, and the narrative of art history was replaced by the narrative of philosophy history. The modes of art criticism in different periods constantly evolve and replace, and gradually build a perfect and diversified art criticism system.

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