



A Study on the Interaction between Modern Aesthetics and Life Experience of Urban Street Graffiti

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Abstract: Urban street graffiti, as an art form born on the streets and alleys, has undergone decades of development and has gradually evolved from being seen as a “graffiti behavior that destroys the urban environment” to an important carrier of modern aesthetic meaning and individual life experience. This article takes urban street graffiti as the research object, focusing on the interactive relationship between its modern aesthetic characteristics and life experience. Starting from the aesthetic evolution of graffiti art, the construction of modern aesthetic language, and the life experience contained in graffiti art by creators and viewers, it deeply analyzes how the two permeate and shape each other, revealing the unique value of street graffiti in the contemporary urban cultural context, and providing a new perspective for understanding the relationship between modern urban art and individual life.

Keywords: street graffiti; modern aesthetics; life experience; interactive relationship; urban culture

1. Introduction

In modern cities constructed with reinforced concrete, street graffiti is like a “flowing artistic symbol”, quietly appearing on mottled walls, abandoned factories, and deep alleys. It breaks the boundaries of traditional art being confined in art museums and galleries, and integrates into the daily space of the city in a free and vivid manner, becoming an indispensable part of the urban cultural ecology. For a long time, street graffiti has been labeled as “rebellious” and “chaotic” due to its “unofficial” and “spontaneous” nature, but the aesthetic pursuit and expression of life behind it have gradually attracted people’s attention with the development of the times. In modern society, individuals’ desire for self-expression, competition for urban spatial discourse power, and pursuit of diverse aesthetic forms have transformed street graffiti from simple color painting to an artistic practice that combines visual aesthetics and life experience. Creators paint their emotions, thoughts, and experiences on the wall, while viewers awaken their life memories and emotional resonance through visual dialogue with the graffiti. The interaction between creators and works, viewers and works, is essentially the interweaving of modern aesthetics and life experience. Therefore, in-depth research on the interactive relationship between modern aesthetics and life experience of urban street graffiti can not only enrich the understanding of street art, but also explore the deep connection between individual life and artistic expression in modern cities[1].

2. The Modern Aesthetic Evolution of Urban Street Graffiti

2.1 From ‘Single Symbol’ to ‘Multi Visual Language’

Early street graffiti was mainly composed of simple letters, numbers, or abstract symbols, with a single color and casual composition. Its core purpose was to be seen, not appreciated. For example, in the 1960s, the New York graffiti artist “Taki 183” only drew his initials and the number of his residential block on the streets. This graffiti form had no aesthetic design and was more like an individual’s “shout” to find a sense of existence in the city. After entering modern society, the visual language of street graffiti has become increasingly diverse[2].

Creators began to draw inspiration from the expressive techniques of painting, illustration, comics, and even installation art, combining concrete images with abstract elements to construct rich visual narratives. For example, Brazilian graffiti artist Romero Britto blends the vibrant colors and geometric shapes of Pop Art with the free-form forms of graffiti. His works are full of exaggerated character images, blooming flowers, and jumping lines, with strong yet harmonious color contrasts. They retain the vitality of street graffiti while also possessing the aesthetic quality of modern art. In addition, some graffiti artists incorporate the unique features of urban space into their creations, using the concave and convex textures of walls, the shape of windows, and the direction of pipes to create a visual effect that blends graffiti with urban space, creating a “site-specific” visual effect. This creative approach breaks the limitations of traditional painting’s “two-dimensional plan” and makes graffiti an organic part of urban space, expanding the dimensions of modern aesthetics[3].

2.2 From ‘rebellious expression’ to ‘cultural reflection and emotional resonance’

The aesthetic expression of early street graffiti is often associated with “rebellion” and “rebellion”. Creators often express their dissatisfaction with social reality and resistance to mainstream culture through graffiti. Their works are filled with sharp symbols and radical words, and their aesthetic style tends to be “rough” and “impactful”. For example, in the 1970s, American graffiti artists often incorporated criticism of racial discrimination and social injustice into their works, and the combination of text and images was full of opposition. At this time, graffiti aesthetics were more of a vassal of “emotional expression” rather than an independent aesthetic pursuit. With the opening up of society and the development of multiculturalism, the aesthetic expression of modern street graffiti is gradually shifting from “rebellion” to “cultural reflection” and “emotional resonance”. Creators use themes such as environmental protection, cultural heritage, human care, and the meaning of life to convey their thoughts on society and life through graffiti. Their aesthetic style also places greater emphasis on “infectiousness” and “empathy”. For example, French graffiti artist JR takes “large-scale street portraits” as the core of his creation. He goes deep into slums and war-torn areas around the world to take portraits of local residents, and uses projection technology to draw huge portraits on building walls. These portrait works do not have exaggerated colors or complex compositions, but move viewers with real character expressions and storytelling eyes, making people pay attention to those overlooked groups. The aesthetic value of JR’s graffiti works no longer depends on visual impact, but on the humanistic care and respect for life contained behind the works. This is a kind of emotional resonance that can trigger viewers, making graffiti a bridge that connects different groups and conveys warmth[4].

3. The expression of life experience in urban street graffiti

3.1 Creator: Visual Narrative of Life Experience

For street graffiti creators, graffiti is not purely art, but a process of transforming their life experiences into visual language. Every graffiti artwork is a “visual narrative” of the creator’s own experiences, emotional states, and reflections on life. Firstly, graffiti is the creator’s exploration and expression of their ‘self-identity’. In modern society, individuals generally suffer from “identity anxiety”, and graffiti provides creators with a path to find themselves and establish their identity. Many graffiti creators will choose their own “tag name” Tag and apply this tag name to each graffiti. This tag name is both the creator’s “artistic symbol” and a symbol of their self-identity. For example, British graffiti artist Banksy, although he has never been named, has a distinct personal style in his works - satirical images, criticism of social reality, and concern for vulnerable groups, all of which together form his “artistic identity”. Behind this identity is his unique understanding and experience of the world and human nature. He hides his identity behind his works through graffiti, but through his works, viewers feel his existence and thinking, achieving a unique expression of his own identity. The fast-paced life and high-intensity pressure of modern society always put individuals in a state of emotional suppression, and graffiti provides creators with a free outlet to express their emotions. When creators pick up spray paint, paintbrushes, and paint colors and lines on walls, various emotions such as joy, sadness, anger, confusion, and so on are also integrated into their works.

3.2 Viewers: Awakening and Resonance of Life Experience

Street graffiti is not only an expression of the creator’s life experience, but also a process of awakening and resonating with the viewer’s life experience. Unlike traditional art, street graffiti exists in public spaces in cities. Viewers do not need to specifically enter art museums or galleries, but only encounter graffiti by chance during their daily travels. This “accidental” encounter is actually more likely to evoke genuine emotional resonance among viewers. Street graffiti is often created in the daily spaces of cities, which themselves carry the viewer’s life experiences and memories. The themes and scenes depicted in graffiti works are often closely related to the viewer’s daily life and can trigger the viewer’s “memory association”. For example, a graffiti artwork depicting an old neighborhood or shop may remind viewers who have experienced similar life scenes of their childhood and hometown, awakening their deep “urban memories”; A graffiti artwork depicting urban transportation and workplace life may resonate with viewers in fast-paced cities, reminding them of the fatigue of commuting and the pressure of work every day. This awakening of “urban memory” and “life experience” allows viewers to feel “self seen” through interaction with graffiti, thus creating emotional connections. In modern society, individuals are often in a state of “loneliness” and “anxiety” in their lives, and the care for humanity and respect for life conveyed in graffiti works can touch the emotions deep in the viewer’s heart, triggering reflection and empathy towards their own life state.

4. The Interactive Mechanism of Modern Aesthetics and Life Experience in Urban Street Graffiti

4.1 Life experience provides a “source of content” and “emotional core” for modern aesthetics

The modern aesthetic of street graffiti is not created out of thin air, it originates from the life experiences of creators and viewers. The selection of graffiti themes, the construction of visual language, and the formation of aesthetic styles all require the support of life experience. From the perspective of theme selection, the aesthetic themes of modern street graffiti mostly come from the creator's life experience and reflection on social life. Creators write graffiti themes that depict the joy, pain, confusion, hope, and reflections on social issues such as environmental protection, cultural heritage, and human care in their own lives. These themes themselves have rich life experiences and are the “source of content” for modern aesthetics. For example, a graffiti creator who has experienced natural disasters may have graffiti works with the theme of “disaster and rebirth”. The works may include images of broken houses, struggling lives, blooming flowers, etc. These images are not only visual impacts, but also contain the creator's experience of the fragility and resilience of life. This life experience endows graffiti themes with profound connotations and gives modern aesthetics an “emotional temperature”. From the perspective of visual language construction, the selection of visual elements, color matching, and composition methods in modern street graffiti are also deeply influenced by life experiences. Creators choose appropriate visual language based on their own emotional experiences and life perceptions. For example, if a creator wants to express a positive and uplifting life experience, they will choose bright and vibrant colors such as red, yellow, orange, and smooth, flowing lines; And when creators want to express repressed and painful life experiences, they will choose dark and deep colors such as black, gray, deep blue, twisted and broken lines. The choice of these visual languages is not purely an aesthetic orientation, but a “visualization” of life experience, giving modern aesthetics an “emotional directionality” that can guide viewers to understand the creator's life experience.

4.2 Modern aesthetics serve as the “carrier of expression” and “channel of dissemination” for life experiences

Abstract, internal life experiences require concrete, external visual forms. The diverse visual language formed by modern street graffiti, including colors, lines, images, and compositions, can express abstract life experiences into intuitive visual images, allowing viewers to clearly perceive the emotions and thoughts of the creators. For example, if a creator wants to express the dimension of “longing for freedom” in their life experience, they can draw visual images such as birds spreading their wings and flying, vast and boundless skies, etc. These images themselves have modern aesthetic beauty and carry the creator's life experience, allowing viewers to understand the creator's longing for freedom through these visual images. As a public art, street graffiti has a wide range of dissemination and rapid dissemination speed. With the continuous innovation of modern aesthetics, such as the integration of new media technology and the addition of popular culture, the dissemination influence of street graffiti has been further expanded. For example, some artists post their paintings on online platforms through videos and photos, quickly gaining the attention and dissemination of a large number of netizens through their unique modern aesthetic style. The life experiences contained in their works are also perceived by more people. In addition, some cities also hold graffiti art festivals, graffiti exhibitions, etc., introducing street graffiti from the “street” to the “exhibition hall”. Through more professional display methods, more people can appreciate the modern aesthetic value of graffiti, and at the same time, the life experience contained in graffiti can be widely spread.

5. Conclusion

After decades of development, urban street graffiti has transformed from a “street sign behavior” to a “modern art carrier”, and has completed a deep interaction between its modern aesthetics and life experience, constructing its unique artistic value and cultural significance. From the perspective of aesthetic evolution, graffiti breaks through the single symbol and rebellious expression, with diverse visual languages and humanistic care as the core, forming a modern aesthetic system that combines artistic quality and emotional warmth; From the perspective of life experience expression, creators explore their own identity, express emotions, and question the meaning of life through graffiti, while viewers awaken memories through accidental encounters and interactive participation, generate empathy, and achieve the integration of individual and collective life experiences. Life experience injects a source of content and emotional core into modern aesthetics, freeing it from hollow visual forms; Modern aesthetics provides visual carriers and transmission paths for life experiences, allowing abstract life perceptions to be seen and resonated with. This interaction not only endows graffiti with value beyond art itself, but also makes it a bridge for individual dialogue, cultural inheritance, and emotional connection in modern cities. In the fu-

ture, with the continuous innovation of aesthetic forms and the further tolerance of multiculturalism by society, street graffiti will be more deeply integrated into urban ecology, continuously carrying individual life experiences and cultural memories of the times, and becoming a vibrant organic part of urban culture.

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