Research on the Reading Comprehension and Aesthetic Experience of Poster Design Based on Gadamer’s Philosophy

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Based on Gadamer’s philosophical viewpoint, the research scope starts from the domain of philosophical interpretation and extends to the field of poster design communication and aesthetics. In this paper, on the one hand, the author explains that art and beauty are basic ways of existence, and artistic experience surpasses the natural science method and is close to philosophical experience and historical experience; On the other hand, the paper clarifies and explains the understanding and being understood in poster design, as well as the understanding characteristics of aesthetic experience and artistic experience. While analyzing some hermeneutic phenomenon, this paper discusses the aesthetic function of art, and applies the combination of this function and aesthetic perception to the category of design. In consideration of the relationship between the two, this paper studies and discusses how to enhance the effect of poster design through effective methods, which would only deepen viewers’ understanding of the work, but also enable viewers to enjoy the beauty of different degrees, so as to achieve the purpose of promoting information exchange and emotional communication, and further deepen the design connotation of the work. The communication function of poster design works needs to be realized in the application and appreciation, and its content expression needs to be realized in the subject understanding activities. Designers need to feel the unity of the meaning and form of the works in the poster design practice and experience, and explore the purpose and intention of the works of poster design in the aesthetic experience of art, thereupon then get the understanding of reality and the perception of the future of design, and then achieve the lofty pursuit of artistic aesthetics.

Keywords: philosophical hermeneutics, horizon fusion, poster design, aesthetic experience

Gadamer (Hans-Georg Gadamer, 1900-2002) is a contemporary German philosopher and aesthetician, and one of the founders and main representatives of modern philosophical hermeneutics and hermeneutic aesthetics. His main philosophical ideas are respected and cited for reference by many disciplines including art. In his main work *Truth and Method*, taking the experience of art as a breakthrough he tries to start from the experience of art in order to understand the artistic experience and spiritual science beyond self-consciousness. These propositions and viewpoints can inspire our artistic thinking and design practice. Gadamer regards aesthetics as a part of philosophical hermeneutics. He thinks that art reveals our existence, and art and beauty are basic ways of existence; Artistic experience transcends the method of natural science, and is close to the category of

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philosophical experience and historical experience, so, art becomes the starting point of hermeneutics. The language of art is established through the following facts. It makes dialogue with everyone’s self-understanding, and it always makes dialogue with the help of its own simultaneity in the present way. “Symbol does not simply abandon the confrontation between the conceptual world and the perceptual world. In other words, symbol also reminds people of the disharmony between form and essence, performance and content” (Gadamer, 2004, p. 101).

“Whether an artistic work has the nature of language” is still a question of understanding: can artistic language be understood? Poster image reading is based on visual culture. As people understand and review a design work, they would obtain their own perspective and focus. Such reading is a kind of creative reading. With the advent of the era of picture reading, image has become one of the important means for people to gain information. Gadamer raised the aesthetic experience of image to the height of philosophy, which helps us to abandon the dependence on absolute truth and treat traditional text and vision with a pluralistic and open attitude, including poster design.

1. Horizon Fusion: Image Form and Connotation Translation of Poster Design

We all know that all expressions of world experience are delivered by language. The first thing to express meaning is to show language. Any rational explanation that can be understood must have language feature. Obviously, what philosophical hermeneutics studies is still a kind of language event, that is, the problem of translating one language into another. Therefore, what philosophical hermeneutics studies is how to deal with the relationship between two languages. Of course, the translation here is based on the comprehension. As a kind of communication art, poster design works convey its content and significance to viewers in a special language form. In design works, the material of artistic language is diverse, and the meaning of expression is multiple. The language of poster design expresses rich, multiple and specific meanings. The dialogue between people and poster images is generally placed in a world of dialogue and hermeneutics. The difference between the artistic language of design and the general written language is that viewers can get infinite meaning in visual reading. The understanding of artistic works is a process of “fusion of horizons”, which is the fusion of the horizons of the aesthetic subject and the works of art itself. This fusion creates a new horizon beyond the two. The difference between artistic language and general concept lies in its infinite meaning. Gadamer believes that the language of art means the overload of the meaning of the work itself. The difference between the language of art and everything that can be translated by concept rests with its finiteness, which is also based on this overload of meaning.

Gadamer’s philosophical hermeneutics holds that the real understanding is the “horizon fusion” between the text and the viewer. This fusion will produce a kind of historical truth and the truth of historical understanding, so as to reach the degree of historical validity in understanding, namely “effective history”. In all poster design languages, because of the identity of purpose conveyed by image, text, color, theme, carrier and other elements, posters have the most direct experience of this “effective history”. Formed by the interaction between viewers and understanding objects, the fusion of horizons promotes the works to generate new meanings constantly. With the continuous expansion of viewers’ horizons, the meaning of art breeds infinite possibilities. Facing an artistic work, the general understanding only focuses on the subject’s objective understanding of the object, while Gadamer regards understanding as the two-way interaction between the subject and the object. This means that the understanding of poster design language is no longer the unilateral mapping of the subject to the object, but a
kind of understanding in a broad sense, which is the mutual infiltration of the ideas of people and works, and then achieve the “fusion of horizons” as Gadamer said. It also shows that readers’ understanding of the language of poster works is open and inclusive. It should be noted that in order to avoid the deviation and misunderstanding of the viewers in the image interpretation, the designer should take into account the differences in cultural background, world outlook, nationality, language, cultural form and dialogue relationship. Designers need also to pay attention to the reading comprehension in the way that focuses on images of the visible world, and focus on the image meaning in different viewers’ perspective with the language way of invisible factors considered. Only in this way can designers fully understand the real demands hidden in a series of works, and express reasonable logic through metaphor behind the images of different propositions. Although some logics are non-realistic reflection, they are all image languages in line with visual logic.

Furthermore, in design, we often regard the object of understanding as another subject in the dialogue with “I”, which really makes hermeneutics break through the traditional epistemology—just as Gadamer expressed in *Truth and Method*: “tradition is not something we inherit, but something created by ourselves, because we explain the process of tradition, and we’re involved in this process, so we further limit the tradition” (Gadamer, 2004, p. 363). Traditional epistemology often assumes that there is an eternal essence behind the phenomenon of being recognized. Gadamer makes us re-understand tradition that tradition is no longer regarded as a dead past, but as a living and real process taking place in us. Cognitive subject should abandon its subjectivity completely, and pay attention to the object being recognized in the attitude of pure spectator, so as to achieve the objectivity of knowledge insistently. As the object of understanding, poster has been transformed into mutual understanding among subjects in hermeneutics; In epistemology, no matter how the subject understands the object, it will not change the object; But in hermeneutics, the subject and the object have an interactive effect in the dialogue. This kind of serious dialogue always makes both sides change, and finally reaches the fusion of horizons.

2. The Mirror Image of Language: Image Reading Comprehension and Experience Generation

In essence, any artistic work has language characteristic, which is the basis for all artistic works to be understood and the reason for all artistic works to exist and spread. “All art conventions are the conceptual forms of creating and expressing some kind of vitality or emotion” (Langer, 2013, p. 40). The creation of poster images can be regarded as the transformation and symbiosis of words and images. This kind of creation embodies a series of relationships between the subject and object, visual symbols and meaning, such as reproduction, meaning indication and graphic information transmission. Among them, the words and themes are signifiers. In the connection with images, images assume the role of speakers. Although the language ways of words and visual figures are different, we can get inspiration and harmony from the indication of signifier. In semiotics, the relationship between words and ideas, discourse and thought, all revolve on the same hinge, which connects symbols with index images, arbitrary codes with “natural” codes (Mitchell, 2012, p. 72). The understanding of graphic image is also included in the category of psychology. Wittgenstein once explained hieroglyphics with the mode of linguistic image theory. Gadamer said: “if I want to create a kind of philosophical hermeneutics, then its prehistory has shown that the science of ‘understanding’ constitutes its starting point” (Gadamer, 2004, p. 380). In addition to the science of understanding, a hitherto unknown thing also needs to be added, that is, the
experience of art. Art, like all the sciences of history, is a way of interpreting with experience, through which we directly participate in the understanding of the form, content and theme of posters.

Experience, named Erlebnis in German. According to Gadamer’s research, although the word “experience” began to appear in the works of some writers and theorists after the 1830s, it became a concept different from “experience” after the 1870s. Generally speaking, in the creation of posters, we often associate the expression of graphics with literary language. No matter in what style and theme, the main expression language of poster works depends on visual graphics or words. As a language way of information expression, the motivation of visual graphics in posters to be experienced and interpreted must be clear and accurate, and the effective interpretation can be achieved between the transformation and presentation of meaning. Gadamer believes that understanding is a part of universal human experience and takes place in many fields of human life. “If something has not only been experienced, but also has the significance of continued existence, then it belongs to experience. What becomes experience in this way completely obtains a new state of existence in terms of artistic expression” (Gadamer, 2004, p. 079).

If something is known as experience or evaluated as an experience, the accumulation of its own meaning will make it form a unified meaning whole. Gadamer said: “the relationship between life and experience is not the relationship between something general and something special. The unity of experience, defined by its intentional content, exists more in a direct relationship with the whole or totality of life” (Gadamer, 2004, p. 086). There are different kind of experiences, and the experience here is the continuous existence of the subject and a present progressive tense. It is direct, or a “direct giving”; It gains and absorbs in directness. At the same time, its “directness is prior to all interpretation, processing or communication, and only provides clues for interpretation and materials for creation” (Gadamer, 2004, p. 382). We understand that the theme of a poster can have many ways of thinking and visual ways. Although the graphics on each poster have its basic visual schema, its creative motivation or language mirror can be interpreted through the viewer’s viewing and thinking, which requires us to expand our divergent thinking on the graphics as much as possible when facing the theme and function. And then in this way, we choose the accurately expressed language way that can elicit people’s deep thinking and touch their heart, as well as inspire a kind of symbolic meaning through the connection between things. This kind of association can be associated with life experience, accumulation of knowledge, or direct connection and indirect reasoning.

3. Synchrony and Relevance: Implicit Narration and Meaning Reconstruction

The meaning expressed in an artistic work not just equals to the meaning that the artist wants to express in the process of creating the work. We can’t restore the expression of an artistic work to what the author actually thinks in the work. Gadamer believes that artistic works is an organic unity, which also has its own timeliness. Vision itself is a collection of various experiences, including image experience, psychological experience, perceptual experience and life experience. The world has wrapped our visual and psychological perception with various experience systems by means of images. The formal language and narration of posters are a system of meaning. As a structurally rich visual whole and logical statement, it constitutes the discourse and spiritual direction of images. James Elkins, a famous American art historian, believes that “pictorial symbols are believed to carry meaning and have a clear internal structure of symbols in narration and as a whole” (Elkins, 2020, p. 87).
For Gadamer’s philosophical hermeneutics, the reason why the way of understanding art is so special and important lies in its simultaneity and contemporaneity. He thinks: “perhaps the intention of the author of an artistic work is to convey creative ideas to the public of his time, but the real existence of an artistic works lies in the meaning of the work itself, which fundamentally transcends any historical restrictions. In this sense, works of art have a kind of immediacy that is not limited by time” (Gadamer, 2004, p. 394). Among them, the way of statement is sometimes explicit, sometimes implicit. Gadamer’s discussion on the essence of art is from the perspective of ontology. The essence of artistic works has the characteristics of time and randomness, which is the specific significance of the works to the specific aesthetic subject in a specific environment. He believes that art is closely related to human existence and self-understanding; As a kind of game, art opens a free world for us; The continuous openness of art makes the relationship between art and reality more prominent. It is reasonable that art is higher than reality but not divorced from reality. In any case, when we say that poster design works tell us something, so it belongs to the embryonic form of something we must understand, then our conclusion is not a metaphor. On the contrary, it has effective and arguable significance.

Common sense refers to such well-known things that all people can see in their daily life. They are combined into a complete collective, which is related to truth and statement, as well as the way and form of statement. (Gadamer, 2004, p. 035)

Art that only focuses on appearance can only produce lies under any circumstances, because visual gaze cannot observe the material state in depth, let alone penetrate the mental state completely, and the things covered by world representation are far beyond what it reveals. (Ascott, 2012, p. 082)

So, what is aesthetic experience? In short, aesthetic experience is an internal state that has been integrated and transcended, which is composed of the aesthetic subject and the object. “Before we get experience, we must first enter into such a naked vacuity. This kind of experience can’t be conceptualized… Having aesthetic experience means passing through the domain of cognition and entering the domain of power” (Gadamer, 2004, p. 089). Experiencing art and understanding art belong to the same process in essence. This process consists of three links or stages, namely, from perception to appearance, from appearance to the destruction, and then from destruction to the reconstruction. Everyone’s interpretation of an artistic work contains his own personal knowledge and experience. The pre-structure of understanding, or prejudice, demonstrated by philosophical hermeneutics, is more applicable to artistic experience. Therefore, it is a kind of self-encountering to understand what artistic work tells. However, artistic experience, as an encounter with reliable things, has a surprising familiarity. It is a kind of experience in authentic meaning which must constantly recover the task contained in experience: integrating this experience into people’s overall understanding of the world and self.

4. The Call of Order: Aesthetic Experience and Meaning Overload

Gadamer said: “aesthetic experience is not only juxtaposed with other experiences, but also represents the essential type of general experience. The artistic work in this kind of experience category is a self-made world. Just like this, aesthetic experience also abandons every connection with reality. The prescriptiveness of artistic works seems to lies in the aesthetics experience. That is to say, the power of artistic works makes the subject of experience get rid of his life contact and return to the whole of his existence at the same time. In the experience of art, there lies a kind of fullness of meaning, which not only belongs to this special content or object, but also
represents the whole meaning of life. An aesthetic experience always embodies an experience that contains an infinite whole. It is precisely because aesthetic experience does not form an open unity of experience process with other experiences, but directly represents the whole, so the meaning of this experience becomes an infinite meaning” (Gadamer, 2004, p. 090). Every experience is produced in the continuity of life, and is synchronically associated with the whole of its own life. In poster design, as experience deeply enters into the whole of life consciousness, it would immediately dissolve or blend in like ice and snow. In this way, experience realizes a kind of transcendence that surpasses all prejudices and transcends every meaning that people think exists. Gadamer believes that every work of art should be understood, and understanding is the ontological existence of the whole world; The understanding characteristics of aesthetic experience and artistic experience indicate many hermeneutic phenomena.

The aesthetic experience of a work always contains the experience of an infinite whole. Gadamer believes that the artistic works from the past, strange world and spread to our present time not just are the objects of the appreciation of history in aesthetics, and not only indicate what they express at that time, but also demonstrate the thoughts of today. he said: “We can correctly conclude that art will never be satisfied with a ‘pure aesthetic’ way like a flower or an ornament” (Gadamer, 2004, p. 204). Therefore, in the study of works of art, Gadamer transformed the so-called aesthetic problem into the problem of artistic experience. Obviously, what he focuses on in his artistic works is the whole world experience of human beings, not just a kind of aesthetic pleasure and experience. From this perspective to understand the poster design works, we will experience the content of the world we live in.

Through the historical investigation of the concept of experience, Gadamer found that what kind of affinity exists between the general structure of experience and the way of aesthetic existence. Aesthetic experience is not only a kind of experience in all kinds of experience categories, but also reflects the essence of experience itself. Just as this kind of work of art is a self-made world, aesthetic experience is a kind of experience far away from all realistic connections. Artistic works seem to be stipulated as a kind of aesthetic experience, that is to say, the power of artistic works makes people who join in aesthetic experience out of the net of life and return to his whole existence. So is the aesthetic experience of poster design. Poster design activities always initiate from the start of aesthetic experience, but aesthetic experience does not end with the completion of poster design activities. In the sense of reading and appreciation, the final products of poster design activities actually become the beginning of aesthetic experience in another round, or start the possibility of a new round of aesthetic experience. The higher the artistic achievement of a work is, the more aesthetic experience opportunities it generates and expands, and the wider the aesthetic space is. There is always a fullness of meaning in the experience of excellent poster works, which not only belongs to the special content or object, but also belongs to the whole meaning of the reader’s feeling.

**Conclusion**

Experience is the core issue in aesthetics, especially in art aesthetics. Paul de Man once said that the real theme of aesthetics is experience, which is a process. The aesthetic experience of poster design is not only the driving force, but also the hub of art appreciation, criticism and communication. Without experience, the creation of poster design is unimaginable; Similarly, without experience, the appreciation and criticism of poster design is
unimaginable. Therefore, the aesthetic experience in poster design is a spiritual activity throughout the whole process of creation, appreciation, consumption and communication. In the aspect of appreciating poster design works, traditional reading is a kind of individual reading behavior with full autonomy, which is distinctly independent and personalized in each link of the reading process. Maurice Merleau-Ponty once said, “when we are obsessed with the world of deep perception, we are not narrowing our vision, nor limiting ourselves to things such as stones or water. Instead, we have found a proper way to gaze at the autonomous and primary richness in artistic works, discourse works and cultural works” (Maurice, 2002, p. 87). In other words, when people read the poster design works, they will feel what the poster design works are saying and referring to, but this kind of meaning is not always clear and obvious. People always use their own imagination to supplement this meaning and make it a complete meaning. Gadamer believes that “the experience of beauty, especially in the domain of art, is a call for an eternal order that is likely to be restored” (Gadamer, 2004, p. 065). A poster design work achieves its purpose in appreciation application. Therefore, the theoretical significance of regarding the understanding process of poster design work as dialogue goes far beyond the understanding itself. In short, the content of poster design works is actually the meaning realized by the viewer in the subject understanding activities. Therefore, the designer should put his heart and soul into touching, feeling and comprehending the life image and its deep meaning in design practice and experience. In the aesthetic experience of art, only by grasping the unity of meaning and life in poster design, can we grasp the comprehensible content in the perceptual whole, and find the controlling factors in our reaction structure, as well as track the purpose and intention of poster design works, so as to experience a kind of perception of realistic significance and future.

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