

The Construction of Emotional Aesthetics in Slow Variety Shows of Healing: a Case Study of China's First Voice Interactive Reality Show Welcome Back to Sound

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Abstract: Welcome Back to Sound is a voice interactive reality show. As China's first live radio + reality TV show, it takes emotional healing as the core appeal, constructs special emotional aesthetics through the exquisite design of the program, and brings unique audio and visual enjoyment as well as emotional comfort to the audience. Based on the theory of aesthetics and TV art, this paper analyzes the mechanism and path of constructing emotional aesthetics in this variety show from four aspects: program concepts, situation settings, the link design and audio-visual presentation.

1. Introduction

With the rapid development of modern economic society, people's pace of life is accelerating. The slow pace of life has become the pursuit of more and more people. China's TV variety shows have experienced the development of “carnival supremacy” for decades. Now the innovation and development of slow variety shows are the requirements of the era. In 2017, *Back To Field* was officially launched on Hunan Satellite TV, marking the beginning of slow variety shows in China. Subsequently, the emergence of programs such as *The Chinese Restaurant* and *The Inn* set off an upsurge of slow variety show production in China. [1]

On February 19, 2020, Mango TV and Happy Sunshine made China's first original voice interactive reality show, *Welcome Back to Sound* officially, winning both public praise and ratings, with a score of 8.5 on Douban. On the basis of visualizing the traditional radio station, the program takes emotional healing as the core appeal, and integrates elements of reality show of stars. It constructs special emotional aesthetics through the all-round exquisite design.

Zehou Li, a famous aesthetician, divides aesthetic pleasure into three levels: pleasing to the ears and eyes, pleasing to the heart and emotions, and pleasing to the mind and spirit.[2] *Welcome Back to Sound* not only pursues the aesthetic pleasure of “pleasing the eyes and ears”, but also focuses on “pleasing the heart and mind” and “pleasing the mind and spirit”. The main content of the program is to record the whole process of setting up a radio station and producing radio programs. Hosts include Jiong He, Na Xie, Jackson Yee and a number of flight guests. In a warm and healing atmosphere, the program brings unprecedented spiritual comfort to the audience and causes strong emotional resonance.

2. The Concept of Program is in Line with Emotional Demands

Welcome Back to Sound takes “listening and accompanying” as the program concept. It collects and shares life stories in the most traditional way of voice interaction. In the complicated world, it is eager to accompany every lonely soul through listening. As Arnheim said, “taking art as a practical way to cure the disease does not come from the requirements of art itself, but from the needs of patients and people in trouble”. [3] In the information age, it is not difficult for users to interact with each other. However, relying too much on the Internet can separate each other's hearts, which leads

to a strange circle of deepening loneliness. *Welcome Back to Sound* takes the form of radio station, which is in line with the public's special emotional appeals like “hoping that someone can listen to me seriously”.

3. The Situation Setting is in Line with Emotional Expectations

Around the concept of “listening and accompanying”, *Welcome Back to Sound* satisfies audiences' emotional expectations in aspects of character settings and environment settings, and meets audiences' expectations for interpersonal relationship and lifestyle.

3.1 Character Setting

The members of the program are Jiong He, Na Xie, Jackson Yee, two cats and two flying guests in each issue. Jiong He is a gentle and sentimental man with rich experience, playing the role of an intimate “elder brother” and controlling the overall situation in the program. Na Xie is lively and warm, symbolizing the image of a “sister” and responsible for creating atmosphere. Jackson Yee is quiet and introverted; he complements the temperament of the program and plays the role of an intimate “younger brother”. The three people have different ages, different personalities and different experiences; they can complement each other. The details of their daily communication also add a lot of highlights to the program. The setting of flying guests brings uncertainty to the program, effectively harmonizes the overall narrative rhythm of the program, and enables the audience to obtain a special aesthetic experience in the change of emotions.

3.2 Environment Setting

According to Susanne K. Langer's theory of art symbol, art (the symbolic form) and universal emotions (the content) should be unified. That is to say, the internal structure of art presents an organic form, and there is a sacred agreement between constituent elements.[4] The design of broadcasting station in *Welcome Back to Sound* is a vivid embodiment of the unity of this symbol and emotion. The broadcasting station is located in a big villa in Changsha. It is near to a lake and has a big garden. The simple style, together with the beige color, creates a relaxed, comfortable and peaceful atmosphere. Old objects such as the tape recorder and telephones are placed inside the broadcasting station, which not only conforms to the “retro” style of the radio station, but also has the sense of age when “everyone has the broadcast”. As Zehou Li mentioned in his book *Chinese Aesthetics*, “time emotionalization is a fundamental feature of Chinese literature and art and Confucian aesthetics, and it is the highest level of internalizing the world.”[5] The traditional radio station and those old objects can produce emotional beauty of time when they are placed in the long river of time.

4. Design of Links Arouses Emotional Resonance

As a variety show which combines live radio and reality TV, *Welcome Back to Sound* is mainly composed of two parts: the live radio and the star reality show. Through the real recording and artistic processing of these two parts, the program brings strong emotional resonance and unique aesthetic enjoyment to the audience.

4.1 Live Radio: Emotional Interaction and Self-Sufficient Happiness

Zehou Li proposed that there are two basic types of happiness, one is the compensatory happiness, the other is the self-sufficient happiness. The so-called self-sufficient happiness means that audience can get self-sufficient experience from the program, and feel the emotional connotation that the program wants to convey. [6] On the one hand, through writing to the radio station and making phone calls, the program can realize the high degree of emotional interaction between audiences and the program and construct the emotional aesthetics. The media users (audience) regard media characters (program guests) as real communication objects. In the interaction, their own emotional resonance can provide the most simple emotional beauty to the

program and help audience to obtain self-sufficient happiness. On the other hand, in the process of watching the program, the subtle experiences about family affection, love and friendship are further magnified through the unique audio and visual means, which stimulates the imagination of audiences with similar experience, and produces emotional resonance inadvertently. This method avoids the aversion of rigid teaching, and effectively establishes the quasi social relationship between audiences and the program.

4.2 Star Reality Show: Real Life and Aesthetic Empathy

The life scenes of guests eating, petting the cat and chatting in the radio station are recorded in real time, which not only satisfies audiences' "desire of peeping others' life" in traditional reality shows, but also reflects the discussion on the interpersonal relationship mode under the social transformation period. It provides an empathy way for the audience to obtain the happiness of "yearning life" being satisfied. The so-called "empathy" refers to the projection of the subject's emotion and personality to the object, so that the object and the subject can reach the emotional agreement. The subject can appreciate his emotion in the process of appreciating the object's emotional expression.[7] This kind of emotional tension and expression runs through the details of daily life, and can be presented by trivial things which seem boring in life. The most authentic feelings of human nature are described; stars become the most ordinary people. The multi-faceted personality can be displayed in every move. For example, in the afternoon of the next day, the sunshine was shining among green leaves; the wind was blowing the curtains. Jackson Yee sat in a corner, reading books quietly; Na Xie and Zhennan Zhou fell asleep on the sofa. At that time, Jiong He came over to cover them with blankets. These series of close-up pictures show the quiet of Jackson Yee, as well as the warmth of Jiong He. Audience can experience the peaceful time.

5. Audio and Visual Presentation Broadens Emotional Imagination

Susan Langer believes that art is the creation of the symbolic form of human emotions. In other words, all art forms are the symbolic expression and projection of emotions; they are full of emotional aesthetics.[8] This variety show *Welcome Back to Sound* symbolizes emotions through the audio-visual language of traditional TV art, which broadens the audience's emotional imagination and mobilizes the audience's immersive audio-visual enjoyment and emotional experience.

5.1 Screen Language

From the content of pictures, most pictures record the daily life of guests. There are also scenes about the broadcasting house, the flickering sunshine and tree shadows, and the heavy traffic at night in the city. These "pictures without characters" have various symbolic meanings, such as healing and life. Under the editing technique of metaphorical montage, they collage the warmth of the broadcasting house and restore the modern city with all kinds of life. It broadens audiences' emotional imagination space.

In terms of camera shooting, the program uses shooting techniques of multiple camera positions, multiple scenes and multiple fixed lens. It mainly focuses on the middle and close-up pictures of characters, which are supplemented by a large number of long-range perspective pictures and close-up views. Special attention is paid to the close-up of characters, such as their tears, silence, and laughter. This not only conforms to the slow narrative rhythm of the program, but also shows the real details of characters through static records. Through the cross editing of fragmented life situations, the program presents the narrative rhythm of "slow but not dragging", and combines laughter with tears. In the plain record, it tells a warm story that several people get along with each other to build a small radio station, bringing warm and healing emotional experience.

In terms of color, warm gray is the main color of the whole program, which makes people feel the warm and beauty in peaceful life. At the same time, the lovely hand-painted animation and the subtitle design add vitality and interest to pictures, make up for the shortcomings of dull daily record, and transfer audiences' expectation for the ups and downs of the story to a certain extent. It

urges the audience to actively think and guess characters' psychological activities, and obtain the immersive emotional experience.

5.2 Sound Language

Broadcasting conveys feelings by sound. Based on this characteristic, the program uses sound symbols to arouse the emotional ups and downs of the audience and create a special sense of companionship. Close your eyes and listen to them, you can gain the peace of mind.

As far as music is concerned, the program records a theme song of the same name, *Welcome Back to Sound*. The rhythm of the song is slow; “grandma's handkerchief”, “a person's growing up” and other lyrics can arouse audiences' emotions, and effectively play the role of sublimating emotion. In addition, the program uses a large number of ethereal and pure Nordic music and background music of classic healing animation like *Unknown Flower Name*. On the one hand, the music creates a fresh and warm atmosphere and relaxed rhythm; on the other hand, it also strengthens the emotional narration of characters. With the familiar music, the audience can naturally combine their emotional imagination with the program thinking, and obtain a higher aesthetic experience.

5.3 Written Language

A large number of healing and warm copy writing plays an important role in the construction of emotional aesthetics. Examples include, “how long has it been since anyone listened to you? Don't be afraid to disturb, we are listening”, “let's whisper”; expressions like “friend's words” are sent to the audience. “You know, there are many people who love you”; “nothing to lose”... The use of healing copy writing fits the theme of the program. Some of them become hot word afterwards.

6. Conclusion

Today's information society is an era of rapid development. *Welcome Back to Sound* is a wonderful program that conveys feelings with sound. It touches people's hearts with listening and accompanying, and restores the true nature of life. Undoubtedly, it fills in the loneliness and emptiness of modern people's hearts, and brings the audience with warm audio and visual enjoyment, as well as high-level emotional healing and ultimate aesthetic experience through the delicate design and the calm narration. Its appearance conforms to the requirements of the times, meets the spiritual consumption of modern people, and realizes the value orientation and social concept that the variety show should convey.

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