Communication of Atmosphere in Folk Dance Performance – Take "Roulianxiang" as an Example

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The Kyoto Conference on Arts, Media & Culture 2023 Official Conference Proceedings

Abstract

Reproducible folk performances are a treasure trove of historical and cultural achievements. This type of folk performance serves as more than just artistic expressions of past ways of life; instead, they transform these traditions into something that modern audiences can appreciate. The transformation turns the original productive meaning of these performances into a ritualistic and evocative experience. By utilizing Gernot Böhme's concept of atmosphere as a medium in the communication process, the atmosphere allows folk dance performances to retain their authenticity in modern communication. In this paper, there are two major processes during communication: reproduction and perception, using the traditional folk dance "Roulianxiang" from Lichuan City, Hubei Province as an example. Firstly, by expressing the experiences of the participants and designing the stage space, the atmosphere is reproduced during the performance. Additionally, the crucial role of the audience in the communication of atmosphere should be highlighted. Through their physical perception and aesthetic experience, the audience actively engages with the performance, further reinforcing the bond with traditional folk culture. These two aspects enhance the authenticity from people's experiences. The communication of atmosphere allows people to approach the past in a meaningful way. By considering atmosphere as a medium, people will immerse themselves in the atmosphere, both participants and audience will gain a deeper understanding of folk performances while preserving the essence of the culture.

Keywords: Communication of Atmosphere, Folk Dance Performance, Authenticity, Traditional Folk Culture

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Introduction

"Atmosphere" as a concept in aesthetics should link up with people's daily life. Böhme (2016) argued that atmosphere is "the peculiar intermediary status of atmospheres between subject and object." Atmospheres are experienced as an emotional effect, which means that people stay in a specific space, perceive and be experienced by their emotions. So aesthetics of atmosphere deals with atmosphere not only from the perspectives of both subject and object, but also from the perspectives of aesthetics of reception and aesthetics of production. During the process of communication, as long as there are individuals or groups of people who feel emotions in a certain space, it enters the realm of the aesthetics of atmosphere. Böhme (1993) prefers to analyze the aesthetics of atmosphere in city buildings and stage sets. This is why the aesthetics of atmosphere is now widely used in architecture in western countries, especially in Europe. The most representative research is Swiss architect Peter Zumthor, in his book Atmospheres: Architectural Environments, Surrounding Objects (2006), examines the relationship between light, sound, and temperature, among other factors, and the creation of architectural atmospheres, arguing that architectural atmosphere is our "first impression" of a building based on intuition and spontaneous emotion. While in eastern countries. Aesthetics of atmosphere was translated into Japanese in 2005 and developed quickly, and Japanese scholar Takao Aoki(2020) used the theory of aesthetics of atmosphere analyzed the nature, which means that he believes this concept belongs to environmental aesthetics. In China, there are many scholars who have compared this theory with Chinese aesthetics "Qiyun" (Liu, 2022). Recently, this theory is applied to interdisciplinary studies. Wang (2021) used this concept in research of muesum and considered the relation between object and audience.

In this paper, atmosphere is applied to the field of communication, and the communication of atmosphere in folk dance performance can be separated into the creation and perception of atmosphere. Folk culture is a collection of intangible cultural heritages fostered by local communities, integrating distinctive resources, traditions, and customs handed down from generation to generation. With rapid societal evolution and the impact of modernization, the sanctuaries of traditional culture dwindle, causing folk activities that have thrived through oral traditions to lose their domains. Herein, folk dance performances become a new way for the public to get in touch with these traditions, which gives people more opportunities to immerse themselves in diverse folk customs. In this way, the atmosphere is generated during folk dance performances and helps the communication between performers and audience. This kind of communication augments the authenticity of people's encounters with the national culture. This helps to build people's awareness of and appreciation for the folk dance and helps it flourish, fostering the vitality of traditional culture.

"Roulianxiang" is a form of folk dance in Enshi Tujia and Miao Autonomous Prefecture, Hubei province. It is characterized by a unique physical performance in which the hand-palms pat the forehead, shoulders, face, arms, elbows, waist, legs and other parts of the body, making rhythmic sounds. Due to its limited geographic distribution, the captivating history and development of "Roulianxiang" written history has no longer been preserved despite several popular stories in folklore. It is clear that "Roulianxiang" held practical significance from its inception. According to legend, to commemorate the city god's birthday, people wipe their cheeks with mud, pat their chests, clap their hands, and revel on the street as they imitate the small ghosts to celebrate (Editorial Committee of Traditional Sports of China's Minority Groups, 2017). In accordance with the memories of the elderly Pan Zhaocheng, Mou Laixiang, who lived in the townships of Lichuan County, it was common to

see beggars on the street with their faces, hands, and heads covered in mud. These beggars would perform on the onlookers by using their hand palms to pat every part of their body to make rhythmic, energizing sounds (Wang, 2006). Zuo (2007) believes that "Roulianxiang" differs from other Tujia traditional dances and has roots in the Tujia military dance of the past. Wu Xiufu, a Tujia elder, played a crucial role in finalizing the current dance form in the 1980s (Wu, 2015). He revolutionized "Roulianxiang" by combining performance with fitness and entertainment. This innovative approach gave a new meaning to the dance, introducing diverse body positions to relax and activate muscles, and ultimately turning it into a dance similar to aerobics. Through inheritance, the dance form retains its most primitive characteristics of patting the body, and with the rhythmic movement and melodious singing, Despite various interpretations, the traditional dance's straightforward expression of emotion provides an invigorating and pleasurable experience for participants and spectators alike. Wu Xiufu's apprentice, Liu Shouhong, then actively promoted the traditional dance into a fitness dance in schools, the police, communities, villages, professional teams, and so on. His performances have been played on many digital platforms to introduce "Roulianxiang" and spread the culture of the Tujia minority group widely.

Through an interview with Liu Shouhong, the author explores the creation of atmosphere during performances based on the master's personal experience and inheritance. Simultaneously, combining the author's own experiences of observing the performance, using the the perception in the aesthetics of atmosphere to analyzed authenticity from practical experience, and proposed the point of view that atmosphere as a medium can communicate the core of culture.

Communication of Atmosphere

The German philosopher Gernot Böhme (2016), starting from phenomenology and using the philosophy of the body as a basis, defined "atmosphere" as an aesthetic concept and an object of cognition, which he considered to be a space of mood between subject and object, co-constructed by various attributes and characteristics. The atmosphere studied by Böhme is based on Schmidtz's definition of "atmosphere" (2019), which stresses its spatial properties and sees it as being affixed to the object like a halo, while Böhme(2016) argues that atmosphere is instead produced by people, objects, or a combination of the two rather than being either subjective or objective. When objects convey their presence, the atmosphere belongs to those objects, and when people's presence is what causes an atmosphere to be felt, the atmosphere belongs to the subject. Böhme proposes the possibility of making atmosphere and emphasizes the embodiment of atmosphere in various types of practical knowledge in his theories, which address both the subject and the object of perception. Applying this concept to the field of communication, aesthetic products are not only the makers of atmosphere, but also the disseminators of information in the process of cultural communication. Through different materials and based on different practical knowledge, it is possible to create a specific atmosphere for the corresponding content and disseminate the cultural connotation.

According to McLuhan (1994), everything in the world can be a medium or has the potential to be a medium. This means that the content carried by any medium always refers to other types of mediums and that the medium itself is the message. He argues that the medium itself is the message, independent of the content it conveys. McLuhan also suggests that media are extensions of ourselves, enhancing human capabilities and broadening our field of perception. Media are an externalization of the organs that enable people to broaden their field of perception and provide the motivation for the development of human society. By

considering the atmosphere as an extension of our senses, we can understand its potential role in communication. McLuhan's theory of media offers the possibility of applying atmosphere in communication. Communication of atmosphere considers the things or the activities in which human beings are involved as communicators, and the atmosphere emanating from the activities and products is the medium through which the cultural content is communicated. The audience actively perceives people, things and environment, which means that the audience participates spontaneously in the cultural activity, thus completing the process of transmission of information.

In this study, the folk dance "Roulianxiang" serves as the subject of analysis. Communication of atmosphere is related to the authenticity that is experienced by people, which can be separated into the making of atmosphere and the perception of the audience. The author aims to understand the process of creating an atmosphere for participants and the relationship between the perceived atmosphere and the authenticity experienced by the audience.

The Making of Atmospheres

The ability of participants' expression is a key component of making atmospheres for folk dance, which entails performers progressing from studying to practicing and from understanding to producing. Through a performance, the performer communicates to the audience the connotations of traditional culture and emotions. With the help of Böhme's theory, this content is divided into facial expressions, costumes, and stage design.

In traditional physiognomy, an internal and external dichotomy is often reflected, as Hegel (2018) defines physiognomy: "The body is an outer sign of an individual's inner life. Indeed, since we cannot literally peer inside the mind of a person, we rely on the body and its activity (facial expressions, speech, and so on)." Liu Shouhong himself is a native of Lichuan, so he is full of love for this land, for the Tujia people living here, and for the traditional Tujia culture. This also reflected in his performance, where Liu Shouhong carried out the dance performance with big smiles and exaggerated facial expressions, using energetic movement and delivering a cheerful atmosphere throughout. The new physiognomy proposed by Böhme(2018) argues that physiognomy is not only an interpretation of a person's inner nature, but also the relationship between external features and effects from the atmosphere. Physiognomy enables the audience to perceive the presence of a particular character, through the person's external facial features, facial expressions, and even postures. "In the performing arts, knowledge of physiognomy is intentionally set in. Features are presented to the stage through 'character masks', and emotions and moods become clearly understood through behavior and gestures." It's hard to say that all of Liu's apprentices have the same affection as their master, however, they are just to be grasped as something generated, and they allow a certain character to be felt in the phenomenon. In the process of the performance, the performer's purpose is to show traditional Tujia culture and convey a mood of joy, so that audiences can feel the performers' characters and can still learn some authentic information.

In the aesthetics of atmosphere, the thing and its ecstasies mean "In this way the thing is not thought of in terms of its difference from other things, its separation and unity, but in the ways in which it goes forth from itself." (Böhme, 1993) At this time, the object refers to the unique atmosphere formed by its divergence and penetration. The traditional costumes which are dressed by the body of performers with their dance movements show a certain state of objects to the surrounding environment, which belongs to the thing itself, and affect the surrounding environment in a specific way, and then is perceived by the audience.

Goethe's theory of colors deals with the "sinnlich-sittliche effect of color" which is interpreted by Böhme(2016) as the material has a certain atmosphere belonging to a certain way of life, which means that the material has social characteristics. The traditional minority costumes worn by the dancers are made up of bright colors such as red and yellow, using plain and rough materials and unique patterns from the Tujia people. The colors of red and vellow, especially in Chinese society, symbolize warmth and passion, which help to enrich people's feelings through the communication of emotions. The costumes play a significant roles not only due to the color, but also because of the performers' movements. The sounds made by patting the body, snapping fingers, or wearing hand or foot bells are used instead of beats to inspire people and cheer up their emotions. The participant's dance movements take the material, clothing, out of its innate properties and make its presence palpable, This trait is perceived by people through the atmosphere, contributing to their experience and feeling. "Aesthetic work consists of giving things, environments or also the human being such properties from which something can proceed. That is, a question of 'making' atmospheres through work on an object." (Böhme, 1993) Folk dance is the expression of the characteristics and traditions through the unique costumes, accessories and props worn by the body. Although these performers sometimes need to complete more than one performance a day, as long as they mobilize their emotions and actively participate in this process, mechanical repetition can also spread their emotions. On the one hand, the atmosphere is generated based on materials, including the color of the costume and the sound made by accessories. On the other hand, dance movements bring out the thing's ecstasies, and communicate an atmosphere that carries the performer's emotion.

In the aesthetics of production, the atmosphere is made through stage design. Böhme (2016) suggests that the work of aesthetics lies in the making of atmosphere and argues that there is a knowledge of atmosphere in the practical knowledge that scholars cannot explained by traditional aesthetic theory. The essence of folk performance is actually to stage people's daily lives and make them more dramatic, in which the role played by stage design is not only to shape the stage space, but also the appreciation of daily life. So that the events occurring on the stage in a special light are revealed, along with the rendering of the sound effect. The art of stage design is not only limited to the stage itself, but also spread to the audience and the entire space. The space of sound and light created puts everyone in it, and this type of shaped mood space is exactly what the atmosphere is.

In the performance of "Roulianxiang", Liu Shouhong mainly mentions three design spaces: a kindergarten, tourist attractions and well-prepared stages. Most of the performance is aimed at daily life, including communities, villages, campuses and so on. Regardless of where as long as the music and participants are in place, then the place becomes the stage, and these different scenes also make their own space to generate atmosphere.

These three stages have different designs and equipment, but light and music both play an important role in making atmosphere. In the kindergarten managed by Liu Shouhong, through the combination of light and sound, the playground is transformed into a stage, where the light and sound create a scene for the performance. The light for the outdoor playground does not only illuminate, it gives the place a lively atmosphere for all the people in the space. Children will understand that light and music illustrate the atmosphere in which the performance is about to begin, representing their awareness of the changing use of the space they are in. Tenglong Cave is an important tourist attraction in Lichuan City, reflecting the characteristics of the Tujia people's living area. Inside the cave, there is the largest original cave theater in China, where songs and dances are performed every day, showing the

hardships and difficulties experienced by the Tujia ancestors during their migration, and "Roulianxiang" is one of the parts. The space and facilities in the cave are covered by light and sound, which creates a deep, ancient and mysterious atmosphere, mobilizing the audience's emotions. The combination of song, dance and light makes the stage space extend from the scene itself to the audience and expand to the cave, which will also make more visitors hear the sound and see the light from afar, and be attracted by the atmosphere. "Roulianxiang" on well-prepared stages is always a complete set of choreographed programs, with dialogue or drum beats or music, and some requiring the performers to shout loudly. The sound and light effects are far superior than the previous stage designs, it is not just the actual space, but has various forms of extension into the audience. Stage design not only allows the audience to see the program, but also creates a suitable atmosphere for the program through the co-maker of various elements on the stage. The elements that make up a stage do not act as symbols referring to that scene, but directly create it(Böhme, 2018). The atmosphere created on stage is even more inseparable from the role of sound and light, which is simpler and more direct in the process of communicating cultural content, and more superficial to the audience.

As Böhme (2018) puts it, "A public circle that is supposed to experience this stage in almost the same way must have a certain homogeneity, must be culturally socialized into certain definite ways of perceiving." The significance of these stages is to help the stage construct a cultural image belonging to the Tujia people, which tells the origin of the Tujia people's suffering and proves the hardship of the environment in which the Tujia ancestors lived and how this culture developed, so that the audience can get more empathy. This atmosphere is mutually understood by the audience, which means, each audience can get similar feelings in this scene. People can enjoy the charm of Tujia songs and dances, the atmosphere is sometimes warm and strong, sometimes cold and sad, which shows that the atmosphere is transformed through the joint effect of sound and light in the stage design practice. "Roulianxiang" in the real scene is particularly different from other performances, due to the special mood obtained in this atmosphere from other performers, the performer's mood is also more impassioned and excited. In the background of Tujia culture, the atmosphere conveyed by the cultural content has been further deepened.

Through the comparison of these three stages, it is easy to realize that the essence of "Roulianxiang" lies in the fact that each stage is constructed through the sound made by the performers' patting their bodies, the physical presence of the performers in the space creates a rough, strong, courageous and joyful atmosphere. Performances in kindergarten are the closest to the original meaning of dance. The atmosphere reproduced is the most reductive; The performances in the real scene, together with other folk performances, shape the cultural meaning behind them, creating and restoring the scenes of the primitive life of the Tujia ancestors; The well-prepared performances are out of the original environment, and face a variety of different cultural backgrounds, as well as those who have no knowledge of "Roulianxiang", or even the Tujia culture, the use of sounds and lighting attract people and make them feel the mood in the atmosphere. Therefore, the making of atmosphere in folk dance performance is not only to restore the scene of folk events, but also to re-understand and re-interpretation of folk culture. The atmosphere as a kind of media made by performance and transmits to the audience is a dispensable part of the communication.

The Perception of the Audience

In aesthetics of reception, atmosphere is seen as a phenomenon, that is given to the subject as an invasive force, and which has the tendency to bring the subject into a certain characteristic mood (Böhme, 2018). There are two ways for the audience to perceive the atmosphere: the first is the awareness of the presence of oneself, that is, people and things are experienced in the same space; The second is synesthesia. In the perception of atmosphere, synesthesia is not individual sensory characteristics, but due to the perception of the whole space formed in the place, and depends on people's own cultural environment and social common cognition. In the folk dance performance, the social common cognition of folk culture lies in the affirmation of the traditional cultural values and the enhancement of emotional identity.

Atmosphere is the common reality of the perceiver and the perceived. It is the reality of the perceived as the sphere of its presence and the reality of the perceiver, insofar as in sensing the atmosphere he/she is bodily present in a certain way. (Böhme, 1993)

As mentioned above, "the thing and its ecstasies" makes the object not to be confined to the object itself, and the atmosphere it produces can be dispersed and permeated outwards, forming a field of presence, which also emphasizes the presence of the body in the aesthetic activity. On the one hand, it shows the importance of the body as a whole, and on the other hand, it means the change of the body's position in the environment. The perception of aesthetic experience not only refers to the use of the five senses to experience, but also the use of people's whole body as perception. The presence of the body means that the relationship between the body and the environment is constructed, and it is a multi-dimensional perception that is formed by people who obtain emotion through the touching from the performance so as to realize their existence in the space, and realize the holistic grasp of the environment. This perception transcends physiology and emotion, and is integrated and unified.

In performances of "Roulianxiang", there are two types of audience, traditional audience and passing audience. Traditional audiences usually have a prepared participation. Before the performance, the space depicts the life of the Tujia ancestors, psychologically and emotionally constructs the audience's understanding of and identification with the folk culture, which makes it possible to complete the presence of the body in the process of the performance. While the presence of the passing audience is involved, the audience as the subject of perception can be involved in it selectively, including the encounter with "the thing and its ecstasies". People may be attracted by the atmosphere, stop to watch or get closer to appreciate, which is a kind of autonomous behavior of presence, which means that people themselves choose to stay in the atmosphere for aesthetic perception. For example, in the community or various activities of flashmob, community residents or passersby will change their original behavioral activities due to the perception of the atmosphere. The perception of the atmosphere requires the presence of the subject, and presence does not only refer to auditory and visual perception, but also to the changes made by the body in the environment, which embodies the relational construction formed by the complete process of perception.

The multi-sensory participation in the perception of atmosphere is known as "synesthesia". In this way, the synesthesia of the atmosphere is a condition for the presence of the subject. This means that the atmosphere itself is a holistic phenomenon, not just a superimposition of elements, but shaped by the concrete things in the space (Wu, 2019). The same is happening with the perception of man as a subject, while different senses act simultaneously: hearing

sounds, seeing colors, smelling, but not only limited to this, it is a total immersion experience while receiving a variety of information. Just as Liu Shouhong connects folk beliefs with "Roulianxiang" in the interview, he believes that a certain sense of mystery needs to be maintained in the presentation of the performance, but the audience should not be deprived of the ability to decipher it. The sense of mystery comes from a space which is a co-construction of objects, space, sound and light, where the audiences are. The audiences use sight and sound in the ontological sense, as well as utilize synesthesia and the subject's emotional involvement to gain presence. So the making of atmosphere in this performance involves spirits and emotions. Synesthesia makes the audiences emotionally moved when they see the light and hear the sound, and only at this time can the atmosphere extend to the space where the subject is located and gain awareness of the body. In short, synesthesia makes the physical presence of the subject be detected, which invites the audiences stay in the space where the atmosphere is generated by sound and light, and obtains the spatial presence through physical awareness and emotional resonance.

Authenticity and Atmosphere

MacCannell (1973) first introduces the concept of authenticity to sociological studies. Ning (1999) based on previous research then classified authenticity into three different types: objective authenticity, constructive authenticity and existential authenticity. Objective authenticity is museum-orientated authenticity which is determined by true value of objects by experts (Zhu, 2012). Constructive authenticity illustrates the meanings that are an interpretation of a social construct that can observe the authenticity of things (Reisinger & Steiner, 2006). Existential authenticity as activity-related authenticity, refers to judgment by tourists themselves according to their experiences. People can feel that they are involved in the heritages or attractions which is their own world instead of being confirmed by others. This means that tourists or visitors can gain their own entertainment, relaxation, and recreation during tourism. It also links the authenticity for people to share their experience with others and get cultural exchange in order to build an emotional interaction between others. Communication makes it easier for tourists to make new friends when sharing experiences in the same place (Bruner, 1994). Authenticity not only relies on those toured objects that are judged by experts or have their meanings by people's expectations, but also reflects on the experience both from people's bodies and minds to get pleasure during the process of sharing and communicating. Adams (1996) concluded that both culture and authenticity are constructed by people through their experiences. This authenticity mainly depends on the beliefs, power, preferences, and expectations towards the objects recognized by people. So, the concept of authenticity should be used in cultural discussions, where it is certainly associated with the participants in the culture. Folk dance performances are often questioned: whether the performers actually understand the folk culture, whether this type of mechanical repetition loses its own meaning, and whether the meaning gained by the audience changes, when such performances are no longer a part of their lives but are performed. And atmosphere seems to answer these questions. When the atmosphere is perceived by both the participants and the audience in the process, existential authenticity emerges, and the meaning emerges as well.

During the interview with Liu Shouhong, he talked about whether children could understand the cultural content of this folk dance. Liu believes that in kindergarten, initially children only follow the teacher to imitate the movement, and will not involve more cultural connotations, but the emotions are able to be perceived, and as the child grows up will slowly understand the cultural content of the Tujia minority group. Just as the aesthetics of atmosphere

considers the knowledge of aesthetic practice to be a kind of "knowledge without words" (Böhme, 2018). The communication of such knowledge relies on the transmission between master and apprentice by their bodies, and the lack of explicit knowledge does not prevent the atmosphere from being made in practice. Liu Shouhong mentioned an impressive example, he saw parents sharing a video of their children performing "Roulianxiang" on a social medium, and the words mentioned that the children shared their happy feelings with their parents during the performance. In the comments, many parents have shared similar experiences. It shows that even though there may be a lack of understanding of the culture, the communication between masters and apprentices at the practical level can still complete the expression of their own emotions, and at the same time complete the making and perceive the atmosphere. They have already touched the core of this primitive art form, the expression of an emotion. This kind of knowledge about the atmosphere will not be passed on directly through the master's description, but is a kind of "knowledge without words" (Böhme, 2018). The process of inheriting folk dance involves the communication of atmosphere, without a detailed explanation in words, students can obtain the emotions and feelings through the atmosphere created by the master. This also shows that the inheritance and performance of "Roulianxiang" can form an atmosphere for learners, performers and audiences, and build a kind of existential authenticity, which answers the questions above and becomes the new way to preserve folk culture.

Conclusion

The process of communication of atmosphere in folk dance "Roulianxiang" refers to the atmosphere made by the performers together with the space constructed by sound and light, through which the emotion of the dance is conveyed to further the understanding of the cultural content, and people become the authentic audiences of the information when they obtain the emotional resonance through the presence and synesthesia. Through atmosphere, people share and gain existential authenticity, providing a whole new way of understanding folk dance performance and folk culture. People can comprehend value through the atmosphere without words, which provides support for today's folk performances.

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