

Empathy: Modes of Narrative in Contemporary Jewelry Art*



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Abstract

The objectives of this research were to: 1. examine theories related to empathy and narrative in jewelry; 2. examine the role of empathy in driving the development of jewelry narratives; 3. analyze, through case studies, the mechanisms contributing to empathy in contemporary jewelry narration; and 4. explore the significance of empathy in the creative process of narrative in contemporary jewelry. The authors believe that any successful art form should have a narrative function, and that any successful work should be able to evoke empathy in the audience. Based on this perspective, a series of narrative jewelry works inspired by the traditional Chinese shadow play "The White Snake" is introduced in this paper, illustrating how the author explores the narrative function of jewelry. Additionally, the author combines other jewelry cases to study the mechanisms of generating empathy in contemporary jewelry narratives and elaborates on the positive significance of empathy in the development of narrative in contemporary jewelry art. This research examines the relationship between empathy and narrative in contemporary jewelry, analyzing how empathy drives jewelry narratives and using case studies, including a series based on "The White Snake," to demonstrate its significance in the creative process.

The research results were found as follows; 1. According to theories related to empathy and narrative in jewelry, it is imperative to consider empathy in the narrative of contemporary jewelry. 2. The role of empathy in driving the development of jewelry narratives has become the primary element. 3. The empathy is a link to realize the connection between emotions and feelings of people. 4. The empathy utilized in the contemporary shadow narrative jewelry "The White Snake" is well embodied in this work and enables contemporary jewelry to far exceed the artistic appeal of traditional jewelry. In conclusion, empathy is essential in the narrative of contemporary jewelry, serving as a primary element that connects emotions and enhances artistic appeal, as exemplified by the contemporary shadow narrative jewelry based on "The White Snake."

Keywords: Narration; Contemporary Jewelry; Empathy

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Introduction

Empathy is a common aesthetic and psychological phenomenon in traditional art forms. In contemporary jewelry art, artists have focused more on individualized expression and have not devoted enough attention to empathy-based narratives. However, empathy has gained increased scientific understanding (Davis, 1983). As contemporary jewelry, the conveyance of information such as content, emotions, and perspectives, involves empathy as a crucial phenomenon and outcome. In the development of contemporary jewelry, there have been comparisons of jewelry to movable paintings, wearable sculptures, and movable architecture (Yoon, 2017). In addition, narrative is also an important prerequisite for the realization of empathy. Narrative in mainstream art is always full of values and emotional orientations. Therefore, empathic narratives are a necessary element in the development of mainstream art. However, the development of jewelry art inevitably seeks to expand on its narrative function. Moreover, empathy is an important link to realize the transmission of emotions and feelings between people. Contemporary jewelry narratives need empathy to ultimately achieve their creative purpose (Strauss, 2007). As a specific application of empathy in the contemporary shadow narrative jewelry "The White Snake", the entire series uses the materials, techniques, and visual characteristics of shadow puppetry, while partially preserving the playfulness of shadow puppetry and embedding its natural narrative attributes into contemporary jewelry. Examining the role and significance of empathy in contemporary jewelry narrative can assist contemporary jewelry artists in better understanding and crafting narratives that resonate with the audience. To address this issue, attention should be given to empathy theory, along with theories related to jewelry narrative, the history of jewelry art development, and cognitive psychology.

Objectives of the Research

1. Examine theories related to empathy and narrative in jewelry.
2. Examine the role of empathy in driving the development of jewelry narratives.
3. Analyze, through case studies, the mechanisms contributing to empathy in contemporary jewelry narration.
4. Explore the significance of empathy in the creative process of narrative in contemporary jewelry.

Research Methodology

1st Step: Select cases that best exemplify the intersection of jewelry narration and empathy for in-depth analysis, and gather information about each selected case, including the designer's intent, the story behind the piece, and the emotional response. It aims to evoke to

identify specific examples of contemporary jewelry that effectively combine narrative elements and empathy.

2nd Step: Study the problems in the development of contemporary jewelry narratives in the context of the history of jewelry development through historical and comparative research methods to understand the evolution of jewelry narratives and identify challenges faced in contemporary practice.

3rd Step: Explore the role of empathy in contemporary jewelry narratives in relation to an analysis of the author's use of empathy in the contemporary narrative jewelry piece, *The White Snake* by considering design elements, symbolism, and the emotional impact of the piece to analyze how empathy is employed in contemporary jewelry narratives.

4th Step: Identify supporting references and theories in the domains of contemporary jewelry, narration, and empathy by analyzing a comprehensive review of existing literature in contemporary jewelry, narrative theory, and empathy.

Research results

1. Empathy Theory

The 1st objective is to examine theories related to empathy and narrative in jewelry. From the research result, it was found that:

1.1 Origin and Definition

Empathy, derived from the German word "Einfühlung," initially emerged as an aesthetic concept. In 1897, German psychologist and philosopher Theodore Lipps introduced the term the word from aesthetics to psychology, describing the individual experience related to empathy. In 1909, American psychologist Edward Titchener coined the English term "Empathy" to replace "Einfühlung," stating that empathy is the process of an individual actively and effortfully entering another person's inner world.

Many scholars have profound insights into the relationship between emotional resonance and artistic expression. Artworks are the externalization of the artist's inner emotions. Through perceiving the artwork, the audience triggers a resonance of their own internal emotions.

1.2 The Content and Formation of Empathy

Davis proposed a comprehensive view of empathy as a complex structure comprised of multiple components, including at least four dimensions: perspective-taking, empathic concern, fantasy, and personal distress (Davis, 1983). Chinese scholar Zhaolan Meng identified four primary ways in which empathy is formed: (A) direct association, (B) mimicry, (C) representational association, and (D) role marking (Zhaolan, 2009). These theories provide diverse perspectives on the formation of empathy, revealing shared aspects.

In summary, empathy, evolving as both an aesthetic concept and a universal aesthetic phenomenon through developments in philosophy and psychology, has gained



increased scientific understanding. As contemporary jewelry, being an art form, inherently incorporates aesthetics, the conveyance of information such as content, emotions, and perspectives involves empathy as a crucial phenomenon and outcome. It is imperative to consider empathy in the narrative of contemporary jewelry.

1.3 Narrative Theory and Jewelry Narrative Development

- Definition of Narrative

Narratology is the science of narrative, which focuses on the nature, form and function of narrative. Narrative is the symbolic reproduction of a series of events linked in time and causality. Thus, narrative includes not only novels, but also films, plays, comic strips, newsreels, diaries, chronicles, and jewelry.

1.4 Main Modes of Jewelry Narration

- Visual Symbolic Narration

Narration arises from the need for communication. Painting, sculpture, drama, and other mainstream art forms have rich narrative themes and methods. In contemporary jewelry, narration is primarily realized through visual symbolic techniques, creating or employing ready-made visual symbols for storytelling.

- Bodily Narration

In contemporary jewelry narrative theory, the wearer's body plays a crucial role. A French philosopher Maurice Merleau-Ponty, using phenomenology, transcends the traditional mind-body dualism of academic philosophy, considering the body as the unity of the creative subject and object (Min, 2020). In contemporary jewelry narration, the body is both a narrative tool and subject. This is because it is challenging for special objects like jewelry to completely detach from the wearer's body.

In the development of contemporary jewelry, there have been comparisons of jewelry to movable paintings, wearable sculptures, and movable architecture. From this classification perspective, the body is considered a display platform and is secondary. However, in contemporary jewelry narration, it is imperative to regard the wearer and the jewelry as an integral narrative structure. Contemporary jewelry narration must incorporate the body and wearer into creative considerations, as "humans" or other living beings are the most common narrative subjects in all art forms, serving as direct or indirect mediums for emotional transmission and, importantly, empathy. This is one of the critical issues to be emphasized and discussed in the following sections of this paper.

2. Empathy narratives as a catalyst for jewelry development

The 2nd objective is to examine the role of empathy in driving the development of jewelry narratives. From the research result, it was found that:

Narrative is also an important prerequisite for the realisation of empathy which has always played an important role in the cultural heritage of mankind. Whether it is the dances that express the creation legends of communities, the murals that record great wars, or the

nursery rhymes that spread morals and rules, narrative has been a major part of it. In addition, almost all artistic narratives contain a clear sense of purpose, e.g., good versus bad, admiration versus degradation, love versus hate, etc. However, when the research vision is placed in the field of jewelry, it will be found that jewelry does not have a complete and mature narrative system, which also directly contributes to the absence of jewelry in the mainstream art form. Therefore, contemporary jewelry needs to be more narrative and empathize more with the audience in order to become a more mainstream art form. This is the author's main point in this paper.

2.1 Empathic Narratives in Pre-20th Century Jewelry Art

Jewelry arose almost together with human society, from the shell string ornaments found in Qafzeh Cave in Israel 120,000 years ago, to the sorcerous jade artifacts unearthed in China's Liangzhu civilization, to the ornate jewelry of the Baroque period. Jewelry has not been absent from all periods and cultures, and it is fair to say that the entire history of jewelry is the history of human civilisation in microcosm, recording and recounting the story of the origin and development of human civilisation.

2.2 Primitive period

As mentioned in the literature, jewelry in the primitive period was first and foremost a vehicle for recording the process of productive labour. It was mainly a record of the results of the process, for example, wearing leaves, wearing animal teeth, etc.

2.3 After primitive societies and before the emergence of contemporary jewelry

The first change from the primitive period was the desire to use jewelry to express more specific images and events, which led to the introduction of painting and sculpture elements into jewelry, and to a significant advance in jewelry techniques such as enamelling and casting. Another change was that as class divisions took place and wealth began to gather towards the few, jewelry became more and more elaborate and expensive. Symbols aimed at narrative began to withdraw from jewelry and a number of single visual images began to dominate jewelry.

2.4 Empathic Narratives in Contemporary Jewelry

After the 1940s, jewelry gradually came to the attention of artists and the contemporary art jewelry movement began. Contemporary jewelry formally opened the era of artistic expression, and began to break through the limitations of traditional jewelry, the volume and size of the jewelry has been expanded, providing more space for narrative; secondly, contemporary jewelry more into the gallery, and like series of paintings, series of jewelry on display in the same space has become the norm. In addition, the material threshold of contemporary jewelry has expanded greatly, no longer limited to precious metals and stones, paper, plastic, fabric and readymade products can all be used as materials for the



creation of contemporary jewelry. Correspondingly, the reduced economic value of jewelry means that jewelry artists can be more daring in their experiments in jewelry creation.

In the process of contemporary jewelry's development towards art, the transmission of emotions, feelings and opinions has become the primary element. Compared with those cold, shiny and expensive decorative jewelry, contemporary jewelry is more "warm", and this kind of "temperature" undoubtedly refers to the following Empathy. It can be argued that jewelry narratives are an important underlying condition for empathy, and that people's empathy with jewelry has increased as the capacity and scope of contemporary jewelry narratives has expanded.

3. Mechanisms of empathy generation in contemporary jewelry narratives

The 3rd objective is to analyze, through case studies, the mechanisms contributing to empathy in contemporary jewelry narration. From the research result, it was found that:

Empathy is an important link to realise the transmission of emotions and feelings between people. After analysing and summarising, they can be roughly divided into the following four types.

3.1 Symbolic association-based empathy

Contemporary jewelry firstly needs to grasp the symbolic identification in the work. Once the symbols of a piece of contemporary jewelry have been identified, the viewer will reconstruct these symbols in his or her own consciousness, and then reach a self-understanding of the relationship and logic between the symbols, and the "narrative" of the work will be nearly complete at this stage.

Relationships, places and memories are of particular importance in the vast array of readymades that can be seen in the jewelry work of contemporary jewelry artist Jack Cunningham (Cunningham, 2011). The associations between symbols allow his work to tell a better narrative than a separate fragment could.

3.2 Empathy based on emotional assimilation

Beyond symbolic associations, contemporary jewelry needs to focus on the assimilation of emotions. The so-called emotional assimilation means that the emotions expressed by the author can mobilize the same or similar emotions in the audience. This requires the artist not only to make the symbols recognizable, but to try to create jewelry with symbols that stir strong emotions in the viewer, and to choose elements that have universal values and timeless themes.

The Victorian Mourning Jewelry mentioned above is a category of jewelry based on emotional assimilation and empathetic narratives. Mourning jewelry of this period often chose portraits of the deceased, hair, and other related objects to evoke feelings of mourning for the deceased.

3.3 Empathy through personal experience

Carl Rogers, the famous American psychologist, emphasised "personal experience" when discussing empathy, and classical Chinese aesthetics also advocates "situational integration". With the development of contemporary jewelry, the form of jewelry has begun to make a big breakthrough. Jewelry with a sense of experience and interactivity has gradually begun to appear, and people can participate in it when wearing jewelry, so that they can get the experience of personal participation that traditional jewelry does not have.



Figure 1: Jewelry which can be moved by finger controlling. Zhihu. (Yoon, 2017).

Korean jewelry artist Dukno Yoon's mechanically deformable jewelry, as well as Kest Schwartzman's guillotine rings, allow the wearer to stimulate the study of the mechanics involved. The wearer will be able to make associations and reflections while manipulating the jewelry, completing the narrative that the author wants to convey.

3.4 Relying on empathy established by the storyline

Although many narratological theorists have opposed the notion since Aristotle that narratives should be plot centered. But it cannot be denied that plot is still an important foundation for the general audience to understand the story and the most important part to build empathy. However, traditional jewelry narratives rarely featured a storyline, constrained on the one hand by the size of the jewelry; on the other hand, by perception. After the emergence of contemporary jewelry, the size and form of jewelry have been expanded, and some works close to plot narratives have begun to appear. Andy Warhol's Times5 Watch realizes a plot narrative about the city through five photographs of his hometown New York, together with the turning of a red time hand.



Figure 2: Times 5. [Bracelet watch] Sotheby's. (Warhol, 1983).

4. The Specific Application of Empathy in the Contemporary Shadow Narrative Jewelry "The White Snake".

The 4th objective is to explore the significance of empathy in the creative process of narrative in contemporary jewelry. From the research result, it was found that:

Contemporary Shadow Narrative Jewelry "The White Snake" was created by the author based on the idea and goal that "contemporary jewelry needs to be more narrative and empathize with the audience in order to become a more mainstream art form". By combining the mature art form of the traditional shadow puppet show "The White Snake" with contemporary jewelry, the author has completed nine pieces of work, such as "Come to the world" and "Go with Xiaoqing". The entire series adopts the materials, techniques, and visual characteristics of shadow puppetry, while partially preserving the playfulness of shadow puppetry and embedding its natural narrative attributes into contemporary jewelry. The author follows the plot of the story itself, extracts visual symbols and forms from it, and utilizes the four mechanisms of empathy mentioned above, combining them with the wearer's body to complete a deconstructed and systematic narrative in the work.



Figure 3: Sketches of "The White Snake". [jewelry] (Author, 2023).

In addition, the author also carries out the narrative through the way of emotional assimilation. For example, in "Broken Bridge", the author adds the element of wooden shackles while representing the bridge, which is used to empathize with people's emotions. When people wear this work, they will subconsciously associate it with the state of wearing shackles, and their emotions will be mobilized. In the storyline, the bridge is the place where the heroine and the hero meet for the last time, and it also symbolizes that the heroine's emotional shackles can not be released, which adds a tragic mood to the work and the whole story.

The author emphasizes the wearer's personal experience of the storyline in the creation of the jewelry. For example, in "Under the Pagoda", the pagoda is the place where the story ends and where the heroine is imprisoned by the gods. This piece of jewelry is larger than the size of a normal piece of jewelry, borrowing and using the form of wearable architecture to cover the wearer's head in its entirety, simulating the state of human captivity. On the other hand, since this tower is translucent, the wearer can experience the state of captivity while also having a blurry view of the world and outside the tower. The work provides a brighter ending to the story relative to the original story. It can be said that empathy is well embodied in this work by way of personal experience, and form and function are perfectly unified, enabling contemporary jewelry to far exceed the artistic appeal of traditional jewelry.



Figure 4: Open a Pharmacy “The White Snake”. [Jewelry] (Author, 2023).



Figure 5: Broken Bridge “The White Snake”. [Jewelry] (Author, 2023).



The New Body of Knowledge

In studying the mechanism of generating empathy in contemporary jewelry narrative, and the positive significance of empathy in the development of narrative in contemporary jewelry art, it is noticeable that the connection between empathy and narrative in jewelry and the story illustrates the possibilities of contemporary jewelry narratives in various aspects. In terms of contemporary jewellery's development towards art, the transmission of emotions is the primary element underlying condition for empathy, and people's empathy with jewelry has increased as the capacity and scope of contemporary jewelry narratives has expanded. The analysis of the mechanisms contributing to empathy in contemporary jewelry narration studies suggests that empathy is a link to realise the connection between emotions and feelings of people, as traditional jewelry narratives are constrained on the size of the jewelry, and by perception. The study of the significance of empathy in the creative process of narrative in a contemporary shadow narrative jewelry "The White Snake" also shows that the integrated contemporary jewelry and shadow allows more possibilities for contemporary jewelry narratives through empathy. Therefore, enhancing the use of empathic narratives and highlighting the connection between jewelry and the wearers will help contemporary jewelry art move rapidly forward into the mainstream art sequence.

Discussion of Research Results

From the research result of the 1st objective, it was found that contemporary jewelry challenges this perspective by emphasizing the symbiotic relationship between the wearer and the jewelry itself, where both play integral roles in the narrative conveyed by the piece. In accordance with Damian Skinner and Kevin Murray (Skinner, and Murray, 2013), they also explored the evolving role of contemporary jewelry as well.

From the research result of the 2nd objective, it pointed out that, in contemporary jewelry, the transmission of emotions, feelings, and opinions has become paramount. This suggests a shift towards viewing jewelry not just as objects of aesthetic value but also as carriers of narrative that evoke empathy from the wearer and viewer alike. As jewelry narratives expand in scope and complexity, so too does the potential for empathy to be fostered through them. This is also consistent with Marjan Unger and Suzanne van Leeuwen (Unger, and Leeuwen, 2017) who examines the cultural significance of jewelry, including its ability to evoke emotional responses and foster connections between individuals.

From the research result of the 3rd objective, it can be seen that empathy serves as a bridge connecting the emotional experiences of individuals with the narratives embedded within jewelry. Traditional jewelry narratives may have been limited by factors such as size and perception, but contemporary approaches broaden the possibilities for eliciting empathy through innovative storytelling techniques. We can see through Mary Lee Hu's (Hu, 2009) "The Language of Jewelry Design: From Meaning to Narrative" which explores how jewelry

communicates meaning and narrative, and offers insights into the mechanisms behind emotional engagement with wearable art.

From the research result of the 4th objective, the study of the significance of empathy in the creative process of narrative in a contemporary shadow narrative jewelry "The White Snake" showed that the series effectively utilizes materials, techniques, and visual characteristics inspired by shadow puppetry to imbue the jewelry with playful yet narrative-rich qualities. By tapping into the inherent narrative potential of shadow puppetry and adapting it to contemporary jewelry design, the series fosters empathy by engaging viewers in a shared narrative experience. Mark Fenn and Elizabeth Essner (Fenn, and Essner, 2012) who studied the case studies of narrative-driven jewelry collections, offers insights into the creative process and narrative strategies employed by contemporary jewelers.

Conclusion

As a universal aesthetic phenomenon, empathy plays an irreplaceable role in art narratives. Empathy is a problem that cannot be avoided in the development of contemporary jewelry art narratives, and it is also an indispensable element in the process of becoming mainstream art. The work "The Legend of the White Snake" emphasizes the connection between symbolic semantics and storyline, stressing the unity of the body, jewelry, and story. At the same time, the series of works also shows the possibilities of contemporary jewelry narratives in various aspects.

Besides, enhancing the use of empathic narratives and strengthening the connection between jewelry and its wearer will also help contemporary jewelry art move more quickly into the mainstream art sequence. Because only when more audiences can get the same empathy in contemporary jewelry works as in theater and movie art, they will be happy to appreciate, buy, wear and collect more in their daily lives, and contemporary jewelry as an art form will really have eternal artistic vitality.

Suggestions

From the results of the research, the researcher has the suggestion as follows:

1. The suggestions from the research

Result of the 1st objective, in a contemporary jewelry narration, the wearer and the jewelry play the crucial role as an integral narrative structure. Therefore, the researcher suggests that contemporary jewelry narration should incorporate the body and wearer into creative considerations, as humans or other living beings are the most common narrative subjects in all art forms, serving as direct or indirect mediums for emotional transmission and empathy.

Result of the 2nd objective, the transmission of emotions, feelings and opinions has become the primary element. Narrative in mainstream art has always played an important



role in the cultural heritage of mankind. Empathic narratives are one of the necessary elements in the development of mainstream art. Therefore, the researcher suggests that contemporary jewelry should be more narrative and empathize more with the audience in order to become a more mainstream art form.

Results of the 3rd objective, that empathy is a link to realise the connection between emotions and feelings of people. Jewelry with a sense of experience and interactivity has gradually begun to appear, and people can participate in it when wearing jewelry. Therefore, the researcher suggests that contemporary jewelry narratives need empathy to achieve their creative purpose by utilizing the empathy generation.

Result of the 4th objective, the creative process of narrative in a contemporary shadow narrative jewelry "The White Snake" is well embodied in this work and enables contemporary jewelry to far exceed the artistic appeal of traditional jewelry. Therefore, the researcher suggests that the integrated contemporary jewelry and shadow allows the work to create a more intimate connection with the wearer and the audience, and allows more possibilities for contemporary jewelry narratives through empathy.

2. The suggestions for future research

Future research should involve the following issues:

2.1 To study and emphasize on the empathy theory, along with theories related to jewelry narrative.

2.2 To study the history of jewelry art development, and cognitive psychology.

2.3 To study about the style of empathy in contemporary jewelry narrative to assist contemporary jewelry artists in better understanding and crafting narratives that resonate with the audience.

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