

Merleau-Ponty's Aesthetic Thought and Intangible Cultural Heritage Translation Design

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Abstract: This paper explores the intersection of Maurice Merleau-Ponty's aesthetic philosophy and its application in the field of intangible cultural heritage (ICH) design. Merleau-Ponty's phenomenology emphasizes the embodied experience of perception and the inseparability of the subject and the object, offering a unique lens for understanding and valuing ICH. The abstract argues that ICH design, grounded in Merleau-Ponty's aesthetics, can enhance the sensorial engagement and emotional connection with traditional practices, crafts, and performances. It suggests that designers should prioritize the lived experience of ICH bearers and communities, fostering a deeper appreciation and continuation of cultural heritage through innovative and sensitive design interventions. By integrating Merleau-Ponty's ideas into ICH design practices, this approach aims to preserve and promote the richness and diversity of intangible cultural expressions in contemporary society.

Keywords: Merleau-Ponty, Intangible cultural heritage (ICH).

1. Overview of Merleau-Ponty's Aesthetic Thought

Merleau-Ponty, a French philosopher of the mid-20th century, left profound impressions in phenomenology, existentialism, and structuralism, as shown in Figures 1 and 2. His aesthetic thought, as a significant part of his philosophical system, offers a unique perspective for understanding art, perception, and existence. In Merleau-Ponty's view, the body and perception are the core of aesthetic experience. He advocates that our interaction with the world begins with the body, and perception is our most direct and primitive way of accessing the world. This experience transcends the confinements of language and concepts, representing our raw touch with the world. Therefore, art and aesthetics should focus on this bodily and perceptual experience, rather than merely remaining at the superficial level of words and concepts. Art is not merely replicating appearances but expressing the depths. He rejects the traditional aesthetic viewpoint that regards aesthetics as a criterion for aesthetic judgment, emphasizing instead a deep exploration and reflection on existence. The creativity of perception is not only embodied in artworks but also manifests in our daily lives.



Figure 1. Merleau-Ponty

2. Organization of the Text

2.1. Perceptual Phenomenon

In Merleau-Ponty's perspective, perception and the world are intimately interconnected and permeable. Our perception is not merely a simple reflection of the external world but a deeply intertwined experience with it. Through perception, we establish a dynamic and interactive connection with the world, continuously exploring and comprehending its mysteries. The body occupies a pivotal position in Merleau-Ponty's phenomenology of perception. It is the primary medium through which we interact with the world, the foundation of our perception and experience of it. The posture, movement, and touch of the body provide us with valuable perceptual information, enabling us to interact with the world more directly and vividly, experiencing its vitality and diversity. Perception is not a passive reception of external information but an active and creative process. In the process of perception, we filter, process, and integrate external information using our experiences, memories, and emotions, creating our unique perceptual world. This creativity is not only reflected in artistic creation but also permeates our daily lives, adding infinite possibilities and charm to our world.

Merleau-Ponty further explores the relationship between perception, language, and meaning. While language plays a crucial role in our cognition and communication, it is our perceptual experience that truly endows the world with meaning. Perception is the foundation of our understanding and experience of the world, the source of its meaning and value. Through perception, we can directly touch the essence of the world, feeling its unique charm and value.

2.2. Corporealism

Merleau-Ponty's theoretical framework emphasizes the central role of the body in cognizing the world and shaping consciousness. He posits that the body is not just a bridge for our interaction and cognition with the world but a medium for us to enter and deeply connect with it. The body, far from being a mere physical existence, is the habitat of

consciousness and the vehicle for expressing the inner world. According to Merleau-Ponty, the body is neither purely material nor an abstract spiritual concept but a blend and unity of matter and spirit. The body possesses a unique intentionality, always inclined to establish connections with the external world and actively interact with its surroundings through perception and movement. This intentionality is manifest not only in the body's dynamic expressions but also rooted in its perception of the world.

Under the framework of corporealism, Merleau-Ponty introduces the concept of "flesh." Mind and body are no longer separated but coexist in the "flesh." This flesh encompasses the material aspects of the body and its sensations, perceptions, emotions, and consciousness. It is a bodily and spiritual existence, the true subject of our interaction and cognition with the world. Reversibility exists within the flesh, where perception and movement are interconnected and convertible. We perceive the world while also influencing and changing it through bodily movements. Merleau-Ponty likes to use the analogy of hands touching: "When my left hand touches my right hand, my right hand feels the touch of the left, and the left hand feels the touch of the right. These two sensations are confused and indivisible. Here, the two parts of my body are subjects and objects for each other, and my body reveals itself to itself, achieving a state of internal and external intertwining."

2.3. Intersubjectivity

Merleau-Ponty's theory of intersubjectivity, as one of the core aspects of his philosophy, deeply explores the nuanced relationship between subjects and how they construct tight bonds with the world and others. In his view, intersubjectivity is not a mere cognitive relationship but a deep, permeable state of existence that unfolds in human social interactions. This relationship not only reveals how people co-exist in the world but also embodies the essence of human existence - interconnectedness and mutual understanding. The realization of intersubjectivity relies on the bridging role of the body and perception. The body, as our intimate medium of contact with the world, allows us to integrate into it and establish deep connections through delicate sensations and flexible movements. It is also the bond connecting us with the inner worlds of others, enabling us to discern their intentions and emotions through bodily touch and emotional exchanges, thus constructing a solid fortress of intersubjectivity. In this process, the body not only witnesses the connections between people but also becomes an indispensable vehicle for realizing intersubjectivity.

3. Overview of Intangible Cultural Heritage (ICH)

ICH refers to the various practices, performances, representations, knowledge systems, skills, and associated tools, artifacts, and cultural spaces that constitute cultural heritage. Due to differences in geographical location, historical background, and social environment, each region has its unique ICH. The value of ICH lies in its uniqueness, representing significant stages and historical changes in human cultural development, possessing distinct historical, cultural, social, and artistic worth. For ICH recognition, the standard criteria include transmission through generations by family, apprenticeship, or school for at least three generations, with a history of over 100 years, requiring clear and

unambiguous genealogical records. With the intensifying globalization and accelerated modernization, the survival of ICH has come under significant threat, making its protection urgent. Preserving and utilizing ICH effectively holds immense significance for implementing the scientific development concept and achieving comprehensive, coordinated, and sustainable economic and social development.

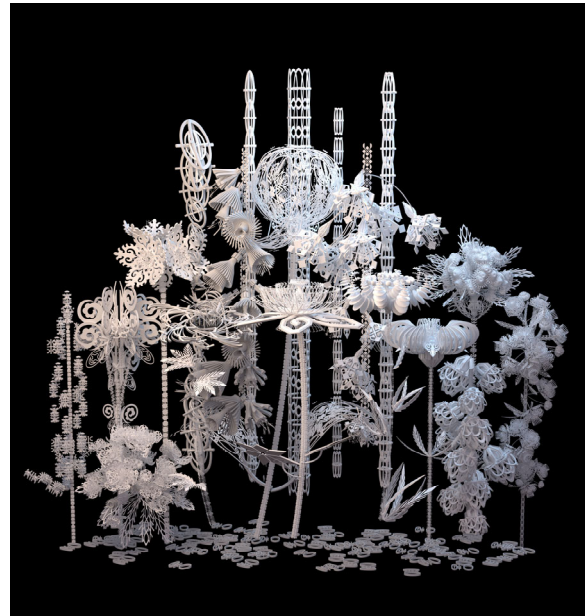


Figure 2. Intangible Cultural Heritage

3.1. The Coupling Relationship between Merleau-Ponty's Aesthetics and Intangible Cultural Heritage Design

The coupling relationship between Merleau-Ponty's aesthetics and intangible cultural heritage (ICH) design is primarily reflected in their shared emphasis on the interaction between corporeality and the world. Merleau-Ponty views the body as a medium for perceiving the world, while ICH design comprehends and applies traditional culture through bodily practices. Both approaches emphasize the fundamental role of perception in understanding the world. Merleau-Ponty underscores the primacy of perception, while ICH design relies on the perception and understanding of ICH elements for modern translation. Both aim to closely integrate art with life, enhancing the aesthetic experience of daily existence. This coupling relationship provides theoretical support and practical guidance for ICH design.

4. Conclusion

Merleau-Ponty's aesthetic thought is closely related to ICH. His emphasis on the central role of the body in perceiving the world resonates with the experiential nature of ICH, enabling people to deeply comprehend the aesthetic connotation of ICH through bodily practices. Meanwhile, his concept of perceptual nature contributes to a comprehensive perception of the aesthetic value of ICH. Emotionality is crucial in ICH inheritance, requiring inheritors to establish a deep connection with ICH through emotional investment and experience. Innovativeness is the key to promoting the development of ICH in modern society, urging inheritors to dare to innovate and create ICH works that meet modern aesthetic demands by combining tradition with modernity.

Merleau-Ponty's aesthetic thought provides important insights for the inheritance and development of ICH.

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