



# **The Aesthetic Function of News Reporting and Photography: Sublimation of Physical and Mental Healing**

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**Abstract:** Journalism and aesthetic education are inseparable, and the typical features of photojournalism works have the significance of physical and mental healing. In this paper, we will take the award-winning works of feature photography and breaking news photography of the Pulitzer Prize for Photojournalism in 2024 as an example to analyse the aesthetic commonalities in the works, so as to explore the aesthetic function of photojournalism works, help further combine journalism and aesthetic education, and enhance the quality of physical and mental healing.

**Keywords:** Journalism; social aesthetics; physical and mental healing

## **1. Historical Review: Aesthetic Achievements Advance Physical and Mental Healing**

The Chinese nation, with its excellent cultural traditions and national spirit, has always emphasized the role of goodwill and solidarity in teaching and educating people, and there are countless good sayings about pro-social behaviour that have been passed down to the present day, such as: 'There is no greater virtue in a gentleman than to be good to others' and 'Flowers need help from the leaves, and people need help from others'. have been passed down to this day.

Through the appreciation of art, the realization or creation of an atmosphere of pro-social behaviour or an atmosphere of empathy can influence the culture of the whole society, gain social support, relieve stress, and strengthen the acquisition of empathy and pro-social behaviour. Typical experiences include: learning to think differently about other people's thoughts and ideas; learning to empathise with other people's emotions; and as a result, interacting with other people and the society will be friendlier, and it will be easier to realise altruism and get social support.

In physical and mental healing, empathy is the process by which an individual can both observe and mentally perceive the emotions of others. Empathy does not stop at the verbal 'I

understand you', but rather enters into the inner world of the other person without judgement, fully accepting and respecting the experiential understanding of the other person's inner world. The whole process of aesthetic expression carries out empathy and plays a great role in healing the body and mind.

## **2. Zeitgeist: journalism and aesthetics go hand in hand.**

Journalism and aesthetic education are inseparable. Although the operation mechanism of news seems to have nothing to do with beauty and art, both focus on the excavation of typical images and have aesthetic requirements for the output. News reports need to be typical, typical people, typical deeds, etc., the purpose is to arouse people's inner resonance, so as to facilitate the audience to heartily accept and absorb the information, is an objective reflection of all aspects of people's production and life. As a kind of highly generalised, highly realistic artistic image, aesthetic works, compared with the general artistic image, have more real characteristics than the real, and can comprehensively reflect people's productive life. Therefore, the two have proximity.

As a kind of photography, photojournalism has the characteristics of both artistic aesthetics and authenticity of news. Photojournalism works should follow the law of beauty, and the meaning conveyed by the works should be able to attract social attention and reaction. Pulitzer Prize-winning photography has always been condensed suffering, solidarity and other human emotions, with sublime, tragic aesthetic characteristics. These award-winning works often follow the law of Bresson's 'decisive moment', in line with the requirements of photographic aesthetics. At the same time, behind these photos, coincidentally reflect the human desire for peace.

It is of practical value to explore the typicality of Pulitzer's photojournalism and the meaning of education in the works. For the society, it helps to improve the quality of photojournalism works and enhance the aesthetic quality of the public. For individuals, excellent photojournalism works help to stimulate people's inner emotions and promote the development of a sound personality, something worth thinking about at a time when the relationship between people and people, and between people and nature, is relatively estranged. For the cause of social aesthetic education in China, photojournalism works, as important materials for social aesthetic education, are of great help in broadening the path of social aesthetic education.

## **3. Action research: the critical impact of the Pulitzer Prize for photojournalism.**

The Pulitzer Prizes have been awarded annually since 1917 and currently comprise 15 awards for journalism, 8 awards for creative writing and 1 special recognition award. The Pulitzer Prize was established in accordance with the wishes of the American newspaper magnate Joseph Pulitzer, and has since developed into the highest honour in American and international journalism, known as the 'Nobel Prize in Journalism'. 2023, the world's production and life order gradually restored to normal, the main theme of the international community is still war and peace. While the Russia-Ukraine conflict continues, the situation in the Middle East is also volatile, especially the large-scale escalation of the conflict between Israel and Hamas, which has triggered the attention and actions of many countries in the region and even around the world. Against this backdrop, Neil Brown, co-chair of the

Pulitzer Prize Committee, said, 'The news that won awards today is relevant to everyone. Through their reporting services to communities large and small, journalists provide insights and reveal uncomfortable truths through exceptional storytelling in times of conflict and chaos. The Pulitzer Prizes are critical to celebrating the value of this.'

The 2024 Pulitzer Prize for Journalism is based on the theme of War, Justice and Society and covers a number of related stories including war and wounds, hate crimes and criminal justice, corruption and impunity, immigration and labour, the alienation of technology, and the spread of artificial intelligence. The war in Gaza was the focus of the Pulitzer Prize committee's attention this year, with three awards, including the International Reporting Award, going to journalists from the war zone. A reporter from the New York Times won the International Reporting Award for his real-time coverage of the Hamas attacks in southern Israel; Reuters won the Breaking News Photography Award for its graphic capture of the scene of the Hamas attacks; and another Special Recognition Award was shared by all journalists covering the Gaza War. In the following, I will further analyse the aesthetic and healing orientations of the winning entries.

#### **4. Typical examples: Pulitzer's journalistic aesthetics and mind-body healing.**

The sublime is an important word in the category of aesthetics as evidence of aesthetic education. The first aesthetician to make an in-depth study of the sublime was E. Burke. In Burke's view, 'all that is regarded as fearful by the eye is sublime', and all sublime will cause people to be amazed at the emotion, and give people the conception of danger, horror, force, rape, pain, etc., which are due to the 'vastness of the magnitude', 'universal nothingness', and the 'vastness of the magnitude', 'universal nothingness', and the 'vastness of the magnitude', 'universal nothingness', and 'universal nothingness'. 'Universal nothingness', and the sublime phenomena of emptiness, darkness, solitude and silence.



Inas Abu Maamar (36) holds the shrouded remains of his five-year-old niece Saly, who was killed in the Israeli attack on Khan Younis, at the Nasser Hospital morgue in southern Gaza on 17 October 2023, after her funeral was held in southern Gaza. (Photo: Mohammed Salem)

A woman holds the body of her five-year-old niece at a hospital morgue in southern Gaza on 17 October 2023, after the girl was killed in an Israeli attack on Khan Younis and a funeral was held for her in southern Gaza. This image was the winning entry in the Feature Photography category. It was shot in a panoramic view with a small depth of field. In the middle of the image, the little girl is wrapped tightly in a shroud, and the older woman has her head bowed and is holding the girl as she covers her face and cries. She is not sitting on a stool, but half squatting. The whole photography is unique in terms of composition and choice of characters. In terms of composition, the background is concise, and the body of the girl as the main figure forms a diagonal line, guiding the eye from the girl's head gradually downwards. In terms of colour, the white cloth contrasts sharply with the woman's coat of black, giving a depressing and solemn feeling. The woman's yellow headscarf echoes the blue plastic of the girl's feet, in a unique 'maiden with a pearl earring' colour scheme. People have an instinctive fear of disaster and war, and this fear and pain is the cause of sublime beauty. Bereavement is an unspeakable pain, especially in war, where civilians are innocent, and the death of a five-year-old girl in the face of relentless artillery fire is regrettable.



Haitian migrants wade across the Darien Gap from Colombia to Panama on Tuesday, May 9, 2023, hoping to reach the United States. (AP Photo/Ivan Valencia)

This photograph depicts Haitian refugees crossing the Darien Strait from Colombia to Panama in hopes of reaching the United States. This work uses a medium field of view with a large depth of field, and the deep space from front to back shows the vastness of the migrant procession. A family of three wades through the water, the lower half of the male and female bodies are submerged in water, the female's eyes reveal panic, the male tightly purses his lips, his head on top of the luggage, firmly looking at the unknown path. The little girl on the woman's shoulder is clutching her mother's clothes to prevent her from falling down, her face revealing confusion and exhaustion. The three of them echo the hand on the far left of the picture. It is as if the place they are looking at is the place of hope. The woman's expression of grief and the child's confusion show the hardship and uncertainty of the immigrant's journey to the fullest, and a sense of the sublime is born from this.

**5. Cognitive reflection: the development of the aesthetic and educational function of photojournalism.**

Experts point out that ‘through the inculcation of typical art, people can have another attitude towards the world beyond economic behaviour.’ Excellent photojournalism, as a kind of art, can reflect a transcendental attitude towards the world. The suffering of war and change exists in real life only as a kind of life experience, which leaves real trauma for those who experience it; while for the bystanders, although it may occasionally arouse a little sympathy, it does not have a great impact on the bystanders' body and mind. When these sufferings are condensed into the works, with more specific and concentrated emotional expression, people will instinctively abandon the consideration of the reality of the interests, and achieve sympathy with others and nature. The attitude of art is a humanistic attitude, with deep feelings for nature and life, and will not treat people as ‘profit-oriented’, ‘no profit’, and will not ask for returns in everything. Excellent journalism can teach people the art of life, soak people's hearts and minds, so that people to the good and beautiful. This emotional cultivation not only allows everyone to develop a sound personality, but also to promote social progress and harmony.

Excellent photojournalism serves as a way to master the world, making it easier for people to accept different types of social events and achieving the utility of social aesthetics. War itself is cruel and at the same time needs to be remembered. When people come to understand war disasters through news platforms, they tend to get objectivised, data-driven casualty information content that is not emotional, and the cold numbers are a test for the social public who receives the information. Just as, the public may be inwardly shocked by the rising number of casualties, they may also choose to ignore the message and avoid taking in the harrowing events because of the tragic casualties.

Based on the above, the sublimity of photojournalistic works has a filtering effect on people's acceptance of social suffering. These works often contain the most praiseworthy qualities of human life, such as truthfulness, solidarity, and confusion in times of crisis, which are beneficial to the emotional bond between people. People in the process of watching the Pulitzer Prize for journalism works, not only through the sensibility of the photo material to obtain information, people can be excellent news photography works from the accumulation of aesthetic experience, so as to enhance the aesthetic ability of the public.

## **6. Future prospects: touching beauty education helps heal the body and mind.**

There is a natural connection between art and news reporting. The Pulitzer Prize for ‘Breaking News Photography’ award-winning works, most of the breaking news reports are major events, and the pictures taken are touching moments, showing the survival of people at the bottom of the society in the catastrophic events and the self-rescue in the violent events.

Generally speaking, photographic images focus on the use of lens language, and the research focuses on composition, light and shadow, scene, modelling and other contents, but seldom pays attention to the social and aesthetic value of the images. To promote aesthetic education and physical and mental healing, we should disseminate the feelings and civilisation orientation of photojournalism works, and call for social civilisation and people's happiness while sharing information.

Based on the action research of photojournalism and aesthetic education, this paper reviews the journey of life, explores the highlights of thoughts and discusses the challenges faced by the society. Looking ahead, aesthetic education should be allowed to play its proper function in the civilised progress of society. Aesthetic education can play a unique role in enhancing physical and mental healing, etc. It can enable people to enter a realm of empathy that transcends human and ego views and merits and interests, and achieve civilised progress. Of course, aesthetic activities will also cultivate people's temperament and promote their physical and mental health and even their overall development.

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