

On Ugliness as an Aesthetic Category

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Abstract

Ugliness always exists in comparison with beauty. Traditional aesthetics only takes ugliness as the “Opposite”, “Foil” or “Exception” of beauty while exploring the essence of beauty from a philosophical perspective. The relatively independent aesthetic value of ugliness in modern aesthetics has been paid more and more attention. There is a complicated process in the transformation from advocating aesthetics to accepting or even participating in the establishment of ugliness.

Keywords

Aesthetics; Beauty; Ugliness; Category.

1. Introduction

As an aesthetic category, ugliness always appears as the opposite of beauty. Jiang Kongyang once described beauty and ugliness as follows: “Beauty goes to the top, constantly raising and sublimating the power of human nature, so that it goes beyond general feeling and understanding, and forms an unattainable state of greatness and holiness in its objects. Beauty goes down to the lower and lower level, so that the essential power of man is suffocated and repelled, while the essential power of non-man comes into our aesthetic field with a magnificent appearance.” [1] At this time, what it shows in the object is not beauty, but ugliness, ugliness is always compared with beauty.

2. Aestheticians on Ugliness

According to the Aristotle, beauty is the arrangement of the various parts of the organism, and ugliness is the disharmony of form. In discussing drama, he used the term “Funny mask” as an example, saying that although it looks ugly, it can arouse aesthetic pleasure, because it’s an artistic imitation of something ugly. Thus, Aristotle is aware of the difference between natural ugliness and artistic ugliness, as well as between aesthetic ugliness and moral ugliness. He also noted that the most annoying animals or dead bodies are ugly in appearance, but these ugly objects are copied by artists into elaborate paintings and are appreciated for their success, he seems to have been aware of the content and form of the art of ugliness as a subject matter of contradictions. These views lay a foundation for the exploration of the essence of ugliness in western aesthetics.

If Aristotle focuses on the formal characteristics of the aesthetic object to discuss the ugly, then modern aestheticians such as Baumgarten, Benedetto Croce and others from the subject to discuss the ugly. “A perfect appearance... is beauty, and a corresponding imperfection is ugliness,” Baumgarten said. “Therefore, beauty itself makes the viewer love it, ugliness itself makes the viewer hate it.” [2] Benedetto Croce believed that, “Ugliness is the expression of failure, and it is good to say, as far as failed works of art are concerned, that beauty is now one, and ugliness is now many.” [2] these remarks clearly maintain the clarity of the theory, but it also makes itself closed and conservative.

In Hegel's system of aesthetics, ugliness is not systematically dealt with separately. Hegel argues that ugliness always contains distortions, is associated with incorrect characterizations, and is at odds with successful characterizations. "We think of certain animals as ugly because their form is different or even the opposite of what we see," he says. In Hegel's aesthetic system, ugliness is rejected as something that impedes the pure manifestation of ideas. However, the dialectics expounded by Hegel provides a scientific method and means for Western aesthetics to further understand the dialectical relationship between beauty and ugliness.

Nikolay Chernyshevsky discusses the aesthetic value of ugliness in terms of the unity of content and form. Nikolay Chernyshevsky inherited and developed Hegel's aesthetic thought, pointing out that ugliness is the expression of disharmony between content and form, and defining ugliness from the perspective of aesthetic mind. According to the Nikolay Chernyshevsky, there are roughly two stages of dissonance between content and form. The first stage is the content is bigger than the form, break the form. This is because the content is not fully manifested in the form, so the object of the subject's imagination appears to rape, causing people's fear, panic, the subject will forget the object's ugly, it is sublime. The second stage is the form is greater than the content, humble, trivial things through the perfect form of harmony, because its existence without foundation, will cause people to laugh at his desire, it is ugly, is comic. According to Che, ugliness includes both distortion of content and sublimity as an aesthetic form, as well as what Hegel calls the coarse form of symbolic art.

To sum up, in spite of the tendency to expand the scope of ugliness, aestheticians still limit it, regard it as a synonym of farce, and try to find a place for it in the Kingdom of beauty, which is a strict and scientific attitude. But a good attitude also takes a long time and the right moment to work. The same is true of the development of ugliology from hidden to visible, from edge to center.

3. From Aesthetics to Ugliness

At the end of the 19th century, Western aesthetics turned to the negation of beauty and ugliness, which was the historical starting point of the development of aesthetics and art at the beginning of the 20th century. How can ugliness be an aesthetic? The confusion of ugliness leads us to answer, in Plato's fashion, that ugliness can be difficult.

Western modern and contemporary society is an open ugliness, is to teach people to judge the big classroom ugly. The two largest wars in human history both broke out in the supposedly civilized Western world and soon brought disaster to the whole world. The two flywheels of modern Western society are the science and Technology Industry and the International Commercial Trade, and the disasters and happiness brought by the progress in these aspects are always the same. As early as the beginning and middle of the last century, people with insight have felt the great power of alienation of human beings in scientific and technological business activities. The enlightenment elevated rationality to the status of the deities in the past, but it is this kind of rationality that erodes the real existence of man by purpose and utility, by utility mechanism and instrumentalism, and sweeps away the holes of Man's natural home.

The above-mentioned evaluation is by no means a simple description of the phenomenon of alienation. What these facts summarize is the custom map of the western people's ugliness, reveal the deep reasons for the uglification of Western society, and analyze the psychological state of the Western people's spirit distortion, without this, we can not understand the transformation from life is beauty to life is ugliness. Without this, we can not understand why the ugliness is rising, the ugliness is operating, and the ugliness is changing the world, just as the aesthetics once played the role in the last hundred years. "Ugliness should complement the omission of aesthetics, balance the bias of aesthetics and correct the mistakes of human beings in the field of perception." [3]

In this dissimulation, the 20th century created an opportunity for the expression of ugliness, which led ugliness from its negative position to its due position. That is to say, ugly to the 20th century, attracted people's attention, in the literature and art has been the performance. For example, *Catch 22*, written by the black comedy writer Joseph Heller, states that the hero, Yossarian, can fly forty times in a war, but rule twenty-two states that the pilot must obey his superiors, or there will be consequences. That way, the battalion commander could order him to fly indefinitely. At the same time, it says that only a deranged lunatic can request a ground stop, but he also says that if you request a ground stop on the grounds that you're sick when danger strikes, you're not crazy and you have to keep flying. In the face of the insuperable absurd military regulations, people fall into an endless trap and enter a world of "Alienation" which can not be extricated. In the alienation of real life, ugliness can be displayed.

4. Aesthetic Value of Ugliness

Ugliness is not only ugly, so that its status can be highlighted, it is accompanied by beauty, and the United States played a duet of human joy and pain. When it comes to the aesthetic value of ugliness, different theorists have different distinctions and descriptions. From the perspective of human aesthetic activities, he zhipu divided ugliness into formal levels, image levels and metaphysical levels to explain.

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The first is the hierarchy of forms. He Zhipu put it this way: "Ugliness is more obvious at the level of form. It includes the ugliness and strangeness in Nature, the Ugliness and simplicity in all art forms, and the ugliness in comedy art. It is the level that the aesthetic subject's perception first pays attention to." Ugliness in nature refers to the violation of the law of formal harmony, "The stone is ugly, ugly to the extreme, is beautiful to the extreme," said Liu Xizai in the art of the Qing Dynasty. Natural things tend to be more incongruous appearance, the higher its aesthetic value. This disreverence for the law of harmony is shown as crude and simple in primitive art, which, though simple and immature, radiates a strange radiance, revealing the primitive people's attempt to grasp the world, to give the world a message of order, which still fascinates artists today. The clown in the dramatic art is also from the form, its aesthetic value also lies in its form "Distortion", does not respect the traditional formal beauty rule, can make the traditional, rational, with heavy living environment of the atmosphere of some temporary relaxation, but not to harm the serious purpose of life. Such as "Notre Dame de Paris" in the beggars, they do not conform to the traditional rules of formal beauty, but it can adjust the audience's psychology of appreciation, the same brings a new sense of unconventional. People's spirit is always pursuing to break away from the limited aesthetic field in the past to open up new aesthetic field. In this process, ugliness as a spiritual value is transformed into beauty.

Next is the image level, it is the content and the form not harmonious performance ugly. It adds the content of ethics, including the content of beauty in the form of ugly and ugly content in the form of beauty in two forms. The content of beauty takes the form of ugliness and does not include the distortion of content, such as Zhuangzi's endless forms, Auguste Rodin's sculpture the old prostitute, etc. Ugly content in the form of beauty, such as the "Plum in the Golden Vase" in a large number of villains are such a situation. In Art, ugliness can have aesthetic value, because it can show the characteristic of the free activity of subject spirit, in the free activity, it negates the existence of ugliness, makes the human spirit surpass, and makes ugliness obtain

aesthetic value. Human Spirit should be transcended not only in the level of good, but also in the level of evil. It is also an important part of the spiritual needs of the aesthetic subject, its existence can make the subject's mind experience the whole range of human emotion, such as sour, sweet, bitter and spicy. In this experience, it can obtain a kind of pleasure, a kind of mind's liberation, and achieve a kind of harmless release of over-strong emotion.

Third, the metaphysical level. The metaphysical level needs a kind of aesthetic understanding ability, which grasps the "Being", "Truth" or its essence and implication, and is the ontological explanation of the aesthetic value of ugliness. In Life, ugly is ugly, it shows people its utilitarian level, in Martin Heidegger's words, it is still a "Being", but the persistence of its reality, has not yet been able to open its world to us, it has a direct utilitarian relationship with people's lives, so it can only cause our ethical feelings, but can not bring us into the aesthetic field. However, in art, because of the artist's hard work, the object gives up its "Being" form and opens its implication to people, and its own world has eternity. Like Auguste Rodin's the old whore, it is the irrationality of the prostitution system behind the old prostitute, the cruelty to women, not the reality of the old prostitute. That is to say, the ugly thing reposes the clearance of the world, then can cause people's aesthetic emotion, this kind of aesthetic emotion, as a kind of spiritual value, can widen people's vision, purify people's mind, it makes people break the finiteness of the existence of space-time and have a sense of transcendence.

5. Conclusion

Traditional Aesthetics only discusses ugliness in its philosophical exploration of the essence of beauty, and only regards ugliness as the "Opposite", "Foil" or "Exception" of beauty. Because of the alienation of the society and the alienation of the art itself, the relatively independent aesthetic value of ugliness has been paid more and more attention. Luan Dong summed up the aesthetics after a hundred years, and outlined a hundred years of the clues of the ugly. There is a complicated process in the transformation from advocating aesthetics to accepting or even participating in the establishment of ugliness.

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