

THE NOTION OF BEAUTY IN A GLOBALIZED AND TECHNOLOGY-DRIVEN WORLD

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Abstract This paper concentrates on beauty as the great ideal of human striving in the modern digital age. It provides refreshing philosophical background to our presentday understanding on the subject of beauty. We attempt to shed some light on how the concept of beauty may be reframed in the current century, and thus, remains essential to the human experience and, of course, to human survival.

We are all aware of the fact that the concept of beauty has a completely different role, namely, it has become mostly a technical matter. In the age of digital technologies, where computers and the Internet predominate in different aspects of our lives, the question is how to perceive the ideal of beauty in the same way as in previous times. But, despite constantly changing world, even in the light of technological advances, beauty should remain fundamental to our existence.

Keywords: beauty, globalization, digital technology

INTRODUCTION

In this paper we attempt to shed some light on how the concept of beauty may be reframed in the current century, and thus, it remains essential to human survival. Namely, the paper discusses the importance of beauty as the great ideal of human striving in the modern digital age.

Regarding the concept of beauty, we must change our views and perceptions by the technological revolution. In view of this, a notion of beauty, as an aesthetic value has vanished in contemporary art world.

With a deepening appreciation for the beauty, it is clear that in the age of digital technologies, where computers and the Internet predominate in different aspects of our lives, the concept of beauty has a totally different role, and the question is how to perceive the ideal of beauty in the same way as in earlier times.

Or must it constantly be defined anew, because people's taste changes, or perhaps – and this goes deeper – because people's manner of experiencing changes? (Bohme, 2010).

THE IDEAL OF BEAUTY

Dealing with the paradigm of beauty as appearance requires us to examine Gardner's words: "Why should we care about the beautiful (the true and the good)? Such caring is fundamental to our condition as human beings, and has been so for thousands of years." "If there is anything worth living for, it is to behold beauty" (Platon). He thinks that "beauty is the only thing worth living for", but it is not supported in modern times when attempts are made to give priority to aesthetic values.

Considering different approaches to beauty, Kant focuses on the subjective approach to beauty and takes place within the mind like Mothersill (1984). Experiencing pleasure is derived from the aesthetic experience. "The classical paradigms of beauty have been simply devalued. But we see them in a new way, we have new expectations of them; they practically have to prove themselves once again in experience" (Bohme, 2010).

An insightful view of the experience of beauty is expressed by Armstrong: 'The kinds of connections we find in beautiful objects have a deep human significance. They correspond to the profound needs we have - to discover meaningful connections and to unite ourselves with others' (Armstrong, 2006).

BEAUTY IS A CURRENCY SYSTEM

In this contemporary time "beauty had disappeared not only from the advanced art of the 1960s, but from the advanced philosophy of art of that decade as well" (Danto, 2003). Further, he argues how the anti-beauty revolution has been born, and how the new wave of modernism has removed beauty from its throne.

Today, we can discover beauty everywhere, in the art world, in the design work, in nature, and in the virtual world of digital media. As Bohme (2010) explains, the only important thing is the quality of the impression.

Bearing modern technology and the digital media in mind, it is obvious that people today are exposed to physical beauty, the images of the ideal body shape. By the beginning of this new uniform global age, the beauty industry has been constantly moving upward. A new era has brought the question: What is the notion of beauty? The beauty, as an aesthetic value has disappeared in modern works of the digital art. “We are losing beauty, and with it there is the danger of losing the meaning of life” (Scruton, 2012).

As far as the ideal of a perfect beauty is concerned, Wolf (1992) states that the myth of beauty is the way women have created a notion in their mind. Today, the focus is on physical attractiveness, so, people constantly attempt to achieve perfection. We are witnesses of the tyranny of the beauty myth and its oppressiveness in today’s age.

Applying Wolf’s (1992) approach to the value of beauty, we quote her words: “The qualities that a given period calls beautiful in women are merely symbols of the female behavior that that period considers desirable. The beauty myth is always actually prescribing behavior and not appearance.

By giving a clear insight into how the concept of beauty has changed, Baker (2000) argues that we should reconsider beauty and define it again. A beautiful woman makes the best of her physical appearance but what is more important, her internal qualities are more attractive.

IS BEAUTY GLOBALIZED?

In this new context, Gardner (2011) argues that the age of postmodern society and the digital media have changed our lives a lot. This era has brought changes of something new, as forms and functions, activities, such as actions and reflections (Freire, 1997).

As Gardner (2011) comments, “beauty as the classical virtue needs to be reframed, and reframing it entails rethinking how to educate on this virtue”.

The current century has brought totally different look on the ideal of beauty, namely, beauty, as the highest aim of art, stopped being of great significance (Scruton, 2012). On the other hand, the aesthetic liberty assures us that we will observe art as beautiful, however ugly it appeared (Danto, 2003).

In addressing new concerns of beauty, the result is that beauty has been given another look. However, “the resulting discussion is often confused, with arts pundits sometimes seeing beauty as a betrayal of the artist’s authentic role, other times working hard to find beauty in the apparently grotesque or disgusting” (Danto, 2003).

The concept of classic notions of beauty must be changed itself. A contemporary version of beauty, or what it has come to mean, has searched for new questions in this globalized and spectacular technological changes, where computers and the Internet have shaped our perceptions of beauty.

In the age of computers and a virtual world, what do we consider to be beautiful? Can artificial be beautiful? Is natural beauty the same as artificial one?

Owing to the digital media, there is “a chaotic state of affairs” (Gardner, 2011) when we talk about perceptions of beauty. The emergence of modern art creates works using Photoshop. Generally speaking, Photoshop provides excellent results and performance to accomplish our needs. But, you must admit that in this world of Photoshop pictures full of wonderful sights that can be breathtaking there is no real beauty. Photo manipulations offer a realistic view of unreal pictures, unrealistic ideals that we view over and over again.

Compared to the traditional vision of beauty (Matthews, 1997), new forms of beauty, namely, digital art, are put to uses, and have new meanings. So, virtual beauty has been born.

RENEWED INTEREST IN BEAUTY IN THE 21ST CENTURY

Taking into consideration the significance of the beauty when technological revolution has altered our world view, the fundamental question is: Has media altered our perception of beautiful? The answer is positive. The media has constantly changed our perception of what beautiful is. Or analyze the digital media where works of art can be made and remade through Photoshop. Thus, the term beauty has new meaning, and “it seems floating aimlessly in cyberspace” (Gardner, 2011).

Considering the significance of this virtue Gardner (2011) deals with the question of whether beauty is still valued in postmodernism and the digital era. It ought to be underlined that despite our ever-changing world, beauty (together with truth and goodness) should remain cornerstone of our society (Gardner, 2011). He argues how the concept of beauty may be reframed, reformulated in the current century. “We must strive to identify and affirm beauty, while remaining open to revising it in the light of new knowledge. Only through philosophy can one begin to think about

the nature of statements and claims that invoke the terms truth, beauty and goodness” (Gardner, 2011). What about the invitation to revisit? Obviously, it is an invitation to think about feeling again and again.

WITH RESPECT TO BEAUTY

“Beauty demands to be noticed; it speaks to us directly like the voice of an intimate friend. If there are people who are indifferent to beauty, then it is surely because they do not perceive it” (Scruton, 2009).

“Across cultures and epochs, certain scenes are traditionally seen as beautiful – gorgeous landscapes, streams and rivers swell and water rushes over lovely waterfalls, a gorgeous sunset with an amazing array of colors and tones” (Danto, 2003). Beautiful is what is fascinating, exciting, inspiring, amazing, it gives us pleasure, happiness, positive feelings and emotions. With regard to the content, Etcoff (1999) argues that beauty is a universal part of human experience, and “it provokes pleasure, rivets attention, and impels actions that help ensure the survival of our genes”.

As Gardner points out, there are three main criteria of the beautiful, namely, interestingness, memorable form of a work and the invitation to revisit. As far as the first criterion is concerned, those who admire arts discover things that are amazing, interesting, exciting, and consequently, the reaction is positive and we feel a sense of satisfaction with the final result.

Regarding Gardner’s second criterion, it should be stressed that the focus is on the memorable things. Throughout our lives we are unexpectedly faced with unusual things, and they certainly cause interest. We remember them, and identify as memorable (Gardner, 2011).

What about the invitation to revisit? “It is an invitation to think about feeling again and again. Beauty reveals itself in the course of an experience with an object. We are inclined to revisit the beautiful object periodically in order to recreate or even amplify the pleasurable feeling” (Gardner, 2011).

“With respect to beauty, the canon is gone. We have access to all the works of art ever created and we can each form our own portfolio (physical, virtual or just in your head) of beauty. These will be things that we find interesting and memorable, things we wish to revisit” (Gardner, 2011).

The most valuable things we know or can imagine, are certain states of consciousness, which may roughly be described as the pleasures of human intercourse and the enjoyment of beautiful objects” (Moore, 2008). As has been seen, he shows that natural beauty is superior to the value of artistic beauty, because “the emotional contemplation of a natural scene is in some way a better state of things than that of a painted landscape, and it would be better to substitute for the best works of representative art real objects equally beautiful” (Moore, 2008).

Following these views, we cannot but to conclude that “all values are ultimately rooted in beauty, in the sense that they finally rely upon what is desired for its own sake, what is absolutely, and therefore impossibly, desired” (Kirwan, 1999).

Beauty is a real and universal value, one anchored in our rational nature, and the sense of beauty has an indispensable part to play in shaping the human world. (Scruton, 2009).

CONCLUDING REMARKS

The paper discussed the concept of beauty in the era of digital communication and the explosion of social media.

In the light of all the aforementioned, it is important to say that as long as human beings survive on the Planet, “a thing of beauty (is) will be a joy forever: its loveliness increases; it will never pass into nothingness” (Keats). “Try to imagine that you have become immune to beauty” (Etcoff, 1999).

But, “we could hardly survive if we did not navigate through the beautiful (and what is not beautiful). Just try to do so!” (Gardner, 2011).

In view of what has so far been discussed about, it may be concluded that there is one more noticeable thing to consider - “without the ideal of beauty, without the motivation in the human heart (to create, to achieve and to love others), the world may never exist, because beauty is the essence of being, the goal of all things” (Schenk, 1992).

We end our discussion with the beginning lines of Keats’ poem Endymion:

“A thing of beauty is a joy forever:

Its loveliness increases; it will never

Pass into nothingness; but still will keep

A bower quiet for us, and a sleep

Full of sweet dreams, and health, and quiet breathing.”

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