



Aesthetic resources of social survival and sustainable development: the beauty in Culture

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ABSTRACT

The aim of this article is study of the phenomenon of beauty in culture and aesthetic resources of social survival in changing world. In the broadest sense, beauty is a category indicating complete harmony in an object, based on an ideal correspondence of form and concept. Liberated by beauty, man recovers his lost link with nature and extends the boundaries of his existence. Aesthetic manifestations are very important resource of overcoming of crisis and social trials. Focusing on the character of phenomenological essence of beauty in culture the study outlines how aesthetic means influence on cultural process and how cultural process determines the art-creativity. Based on ideas of F.Dostoevsky, V. Solovyev, A. Camus this article develops the phenomenological view at nature and social mission of beauty in culture. The beauty and ritual-mythological creativity are saving lighthouses for the rebellious spirit and crisis-ridden consciousness in the changing culture. Moreover the aesthetic process we can define as the special strategy of culture's survival and as cultural paradigm. It allows us to understand also how to exploit the crisis points and transitional situations in culture.

KEYWORDS: *beauty as concept, history of culture, myth, ritual, art-creativity, transformation, survival.*

1. INTRODUCTION

Since Culture has existed, a great multitude of words have sprung from men's lips, a huge variety, simple and complicated, sonorous and so-so: but probably none of them can compare in force, profundity and inherent sense with the concept of beauty.

Anyone who has ever tried to capture the sense of beauty has floundered or sunk into aria pedantry. As one of the ancient Chinese wise men was warning: "Approach [beauty] from where you will, from before or behind, you will see neither a beginning nor an end" [Cited in Tkachenko 1990, p. 212]. The surest way to put anyone to shame in the face of the truth is to allow him to report on the subject of beauty. Beauty cannot be proven: it must be seen, heard, felt, for it is itself a demonstration. The paradox of beauty has silenced even the most talkative. This is what that ancient Chinese tradition by Lao-Tsi of tells us (Cited in Tkachenko 1990, p.212):

*Begin to analyze a five-colored ornament –
your eyes will be dazzled,
Begin to distinguish the sounds in five-toned music –
your ears will buzz,
Start to tease apart the five senses –
you will be torn apart.*

But the temptation of the handsome is too great, and will always prompt people to analyze. It could scarcely be otherwise, for this is a topic that deserves to be talked about, even at the risk of scorching one's wings on the way to the sun.

The history of world culture is a history of a thorny way of man looking for freedom, order in the world and social harmony. Ideal beauty is the embodiment of the order in the world. The factor of beauty has always been an extraordinarily significant accompaniment of the cultural and historical process. It strengthened the fundamental basis of cultural life. The necessity of beauty showed itself especially brightly on historical overbanks, and in the situations of changing of vital cycles of culture. Saving force of beauty often retained culture from disintegration and exposed the hidden possibilities of its spiritual revival and self-developing. Beauty is a powerful, but, unfortunately, still not enough realized resource of cultural practice and multicultural teaching. The history of beauty is a school of thought and culture of peacemaking, the cleanest source of philosophy of kindness, love, peace, nonviolence and tolerance. And that is why turn to beauty is an important factor of development of cultural policy, in general, and multicultural creativity, in particular. Actually, all the historical experience of humanity shows that exactly in beauty or in 'the imaginative

absolute', as J.E. Golosovker would say, there is spiritual nucleus of the cultural identity of different people, peoples and generations (Golosovker 1987).

2. BEAUTY AS CONCEPT

A short look at beauty in a dialogic space of culture and in the context of philosophical-anthropological comprehension of aesthetic opinions and cultural-historical landscapes of different epochs is exposed in this article. Thus, I tried to generalize estimations and interpretations of beauty as the phenomenon of culture and artistic paradigm, existing in the history of social thought. The maintenance of category of *wonderful* in the history of world culture opens up by the example of different artistic traditions.

It becomes more and more obvious, that in the basis of artistic myth creating there is the fundamental man's orientation on beauty as a strong point of culture in world transformation and in strategy of survival of humanity.

It should be noted that the look at beauty represented in the article, is just a look, and it's sure not complete understanding of *wonderful*. It's just a look, as we presumptuously suppose, at the rootage of culture. In fact there is too much noise on mobile branches of cultural life, in order to hear a quiet voice of the truth, even if this voice speaks to us in language of beauty.

The leaves of life move too much, and they don't allow us to see what lies at the basis. All that lies at the basis is unattainable, and all the unattainable can not be grasped by a sense, its destiny is different - to be a guide-book in the gloomy distances of human life. Attractive power of beauty as a spiritual force of culture shows up exactly in the fact that the world of *wonderful* remarkably incarnates the triumph of life in its untiring opposition to death. In culture the beauty is a life-asserting ideal, saving lighthouse, the sense of which is in the process of the constant approaching to him, but not in his conquest.

Surely, we should confess that the manifestations of beauty in this world are exceptionally many. We find the beauty in nature, in people, in culture... But what is it that makes us consider that so many different phenomena are equally beautiful? What is beauty?

The scrutinizer we try to analyze beauty in detail, the less of it we see. Analysis and comparison are only the methods of cognition, but they are not the knowledge itself of subject of our reflections. Analysis breaks up the wholeness. We can see the truth only in distance from us, but not nearby. To understand the truth does not mean to see it in details. The closer we get to the beauty, the less of it we notice. It is better to look at it from a long way off. Beauty is

best seen against an ugly background. It is the ugly and unsatisfactory that makes us notice beauty.

If we enter the world of beauty, we do not notice it, because we are inside it. We watch at beauty when we are standing on unbeautiful side, i.e. when we much strongly need beauty. The beauty is way of harmony and reconciliation in culture. Every art-manifestation presents re-integration and admiration of beauty. Music is integrity of diverse sounds, poetry is integrity of words, dance is integrity of motions, painting is integrity of images and colours, and sculpture is integrity of shape and space.

It seems that while creating beauty, a human being creates his own environment of survival. The more beauty surrounds him, the more living completeness it becomes for him. Maximum beauty is maximum genuine life. Thus, beauty is life itself.

It is another question concerning the sense of beauty. Why we are opening the beauty in ancient figures, for example the armless Aphrodite of Melos (2nd century BC), whereas modern armless statues seem ugly to us? Why the ruins of Athens' Acropolis are magnificent for us, but ruined, semi-destroyed or unfinished modern houses are ugly for our perception? Probably, there are several reasons:

1. Beauty is always perceived as wholeness, in context of time and space. Lost antiquity is archaic in its sense. And its artefacts (the remains of matter) must correlate with its archaic essence (the remains of historical time). The amount of object's shape and material depends on that of the epoch, preserved. Living history and the spirit of the epoch are seen in those artifacts, while modern shabby or old-fashioned things break up the wholeness, correspondence and order of our days, thus becoming ugly.
2. There is another reason as well. We see the creative living side of the artifacts, no matter how damaged they are, because everything that can be destroyed is destroyed and only pieces of life have remained. It is they that we percept as an archaic wholeness. The archaic things are integral due to their vivid power prevailing over death. Life and death merge there, making up a binary opposition. That is why they are so distinctly seen for us.

Any an archaic thing, even it if broken, revives our knowledge of the epoch (i.e. it revives the historical spirit/sense). On the contrary, every a modern broken thing decreases this knowledge. The last pieces of object express the death, destroy and chaos. Besides, an archaic thing does not need to be utilitarian or functional, whereas a modern thing should be one. Seeing a modern broken thing, we see its harmful and destructive side, as it breaks the integrity and

real order. Any damage ousts it from the functional context of life, opposing it to life. Beauty is always benefiting. However, not every benefit is beauty always. Thus, beauty is not bound within a thing, its shape etc. If Aphrodite of Melos were our contemporary, we would hardly think her to be beautiful.

Thus, we can determine the beauty (in the broadest sense) as a category indicating complete harmony in an object, based on an ideal correspondence of form and concept. As Vladimir Solovyev put it, "we must define beauty as the transformation of material through the incarnation in it of another, transcendent principle" (Solovyev 1990, p.358).

In general we can also distinguish three types of beauty: (1) emotional; (2) physical, and (3) spiritual. Of course, no one kind of beauty can exist separately. We can only speak of one or another manifestation of beauty being dominant. But the highest form of beauty is the union of the three in one. In Christianity, this is reflected in the famous Trinity: God the father, God the son and God the Holy Ghost.

The existence of beauty is bound up with such universal human values as truth, love and goodness. Truth shows itself through beauty, beauty shows itself through love, love shows itself through goodness, goodness shows itself through truth. This is the path to human salvation, the "bridge leading [man] from the kingdom of necessity to the kingdom of liberty" and true harmony.

Dostoevsky says, "Beauty is always useful". "The need for beauty develops when a person is at odds with reality, in disharmony, in conflict, in other words, when he is most alive" (Cited in Stolovich 1994, p.344-345). Liberated by beauty, man recovers his lost link with nature and extends the boundaries of his existence.

In beauty, everything attains its culmination and acquires its true identity for man: work becomes creation, the output of labour becomes the products of art, feelings become love, duty becomes goodness, need becomes freedom, knowledge becomes truth, form becomes harmony and concepts become humanism (Ionesov, 1999). In beauty man brings the world into harmony. This is why beauty always brings people good health, peace joy and self-fulfillment. In beauty our brain is feeling, our feels are thinking.

3. IMAGES OF BEAUTY IN CULTURE

Human being has always tried to make beauty his companion in life, hoping that it will bring fortune and success and protect him from evil. Hence he gives a new-born child the handsomest name, so that beauty will always be with him. Sometimes a handsome name has awaited as yet unborn owner. The

beauty that the imagination of oriental man has instilled into given names! They are a veritable bouquet of sophistication and brilliance the like of which is hard to find. Here are some examples: *Jamal* is Arabic for beauty; *Kamil* is Arabic for perfection; *Aini-jamal* is Persian for the essence of beauty; *Ainikamil* is Persian for the essence of perfection *Burkhan* is Arabic for beauty qua demonstration, light, protection; *Gulchekhira* is Persian for a face like a flower; *Gulsara* is Persian for the freshest, finest bloom or the flower lying a top the basket, *Saonat* is Tajik for art or beauty; *Nigina* is Persian for a precious stone (Gafurov, 1987).

It is absolutely no coincidence that in the languages of many peoples beauty, love and goodness combine into something integral and indivisible. In Russian culture such words are *blagoobrazje* and *blagolepie*, in ancient Greek *Kalokayathia* in ancient Chinese *shan-mei*, in ancient Iranian (Zoroastrian) *hware-nab*.

It is instructive that all these words trace their birth back to distant historical times. Through them, our ancestors seem to be telling us that beauty must not be dissociated from goodness or goodness from beauty. "And if the ancient trust in beauty leaves us, what will become of us?" writes Averintsev (1988).

The contemplation of beauty is often regarded as admiration or veneration - veneration of a mystery, a miracle, a god, for "beauty is there where God dwells with man", as the "Tales of Ancient Times" say. Thus whenever he contemplates beauty man perceives truth and hence experiences spiritual joy, enchantment and veneration. It is in and through beauty that man becomes truly happy. Beauty is a veritable miracle-working force. It is no accident that in Russian the word "wonderful" is a synonym of "beautiful, handsome fine".

Another representation of beauty in world-wide culture has been light vanquishing darkness and bestowing life and well-being. The ancient East offers the best example:

*My eyes wish to see the sun
I wish to be sated with light!
If the darkness will withdraw,
What radiance there will be.*

- exclaims Gilgamesh in the famous Mesopotamian epic.

The starry sky overhead has since time immemorial been taken as a source of light, beauty, harmony, order and might. The image of beauty was assimilated to that of the heavenly beacon especially clearly in Zoroastrian tradition *Hvarenah*, the bearer of godly beauty, is hymned in the Zend-Avesta as the radi-

ant creation of Akhura-Mazda (the most-high) (*Hymn to Hvarenab*, 19,I,10) (Avesta,1990). The handsome As-hi goddess of fate and fortune, is considered to be Just as radiant, "shining down blessedness on men and giving good glory" (*Hymn to As-hi*, 17,I,6) (Avesta, 1990).

Really, history has unremittingly attuned the human mind to the pure perception of beauty. World history is not only a great poet but also a brilliant artist. Thanks to it we are better aware that genuine harmony in diversity can emerge only in dialogue among the cultures of the widest variety of peoples.

Only through dialogue among diverse traditions, lifestyles and values can the culture of each individual nation assume its rightful place under the sun and thus truly be brought within the reach of all mankind.

Beauty in its ultimate manifestation is always inimitable, while the ugly is characterless just as light enables us to distinguish between things, pinpointing their differences, but darkness neutralizes those differences, reducing them to an absence of character. Consequently, culture manifests in beauty always affirms nations individuality and establishes the colour and ornamentation of that individuality on the palette of universal human values. But any individuality is based on knowledge, of oneself, one's culture, ones heritage and so forth. And knowledge is the comprehension of differences. And any difference is comprehended through comparison. Consequently, the beauty of a culture, its national coloring and attractiveness cannot be enhanced without opening that culture up to the world, without cultural dialogue or comparisons (Ionesov 1999).

The most important means of dialogue between cultures is art. Through art, culture reveals beauty to us. But, this is a two-way process. Art affirms itself in beauty, beauty affirms itself in art. Beauty and art are as twins. Both are born in the imagination. A lively imagination is always a spiritual force shaping the plenitude of daily existence. Art, as the top of spirituality, is always oriented towards beauty on N.A. Berdyaev (1994). And it is only in art that the spirit apprehends the plenitude and sense - in other words the purpose - of existence. In works of art, beauty looks us in the face, for there "the spirit becomes visible" (*Plotinus Enneads*, 31,3,21 in Henry & Schwyzer, 1982). And that brings harmony to people's lives, a fusion of the spiritual and the material, the hidden and the overt, the finite and the infinite, the temporal and the eternal.

Art is always peace-loving and by its very nature more humanistic than any other thing. A need for high art is often more keenly felt at dramatic turns in history. Not a single historic turning point in the de-

velopment of society has occurred without art and, through art the beauty to support it. All revolutions are nihilistic, but for all their nihilism every one creates its own art since the romance of revolution can exist only in art. Art helps to overcome dread, dread of solitude, dread of the undefined, for it provides what people need what they lack. What soothes them "While we are enjoying something beautiful our entire nature is acting in its indivisible wholeness, integrity," wrote the Russian philosopher N.I. Nadezhdin (2000, p.369). In art, man finds relief from the world's alienation "Art shows us, through art-experience of overcoming, the limits of the possible in life" (Kraus 1991, p.249) and makes of man the true creator of daily existence, cultivating in him, according to Dostoevsky, a "universal responsiveness" (Cited in Stolovich 1994, p.351).

Painting possesses especial emotional and inspirational force. Everything is subordinated to harmony and consonance peace: vanquishes violence; light, darkness; hood, life, death. Indeed, "the art of painting is the ability to hold the whole world in one's hands" (*Dong Qigang*) (Cited in Malyavin 1995, p.187), and when the world founders in confrontation, sometimes only the artist can save it from destruction, as history eloquently testifies.

Who saved the culture of Egypt, ancient Greece and Rome and the civilizations of the Incas, the Maya and the Aztecs for us? Was it not first and foremost the creative artists, known and unknown, whose works, overcoming time, have brought the vivid rays of light down to us? Greedy Time has carried off all it can, but art has proved stronger than Time. History teaches us that life can overcome death if it can turn to art for support.

4. CONCLUSION

Beauty teaches us not selfishness, but brotherhood. Some years ago Albert Camus remarked that "beauty has never yet enslaved a single person. On the contrary, for millennia it has brought comfort, every day, every moment, to millions of the oppressed, and has at times set some of them free forever." He drew a very important conclusion: "Beauty is bound

to help ease man's pains and his attainment of freedom." People increasingly need such help during these transitional stages of their history (Kamyu (Camus) 1990, p.373-374).

Where do we turn in time of trouble? To our imaginations, which make up for foundering reality; to the beauty of an image or an ideal. Beauty, surely, is the embodiment of eternity, of the regular, of order, of harmony. And where else can man turn, given the constant changeability of this transitional era, when the old is everywhere at variance with the new, when all is unstable, all is in flux, all is indeterminate? In saying "to beauty, of course" I make no mistake. In time of disaster, want and fear of the future, the need for art grows deeper and stronger than when life is easy (Kraus 1991, p.245).

The first humans turned to the beauty of nature to save themselves from their physical weakness. The early prophets, Moses, Zarathustra, Jesus Christ and Mohammed in their confrontations with paganism drew on the beauty of the godhead. The artists of the Renaissance drew on the beauty of ancient realism in their struggles against mediaeval dogma. The creators of science drew on the beauty of reason as they steered culture into the technological age. All of us today at twenty-first century draw on the beauty of culture in our efforts to integrate the world anew.

Beauty is directly related to the present-day resurgence of historical and cultural heritage of humankind. The beauty embodied in the architecture of World Heritage of has turned it into an eternal, indivisible city, and at time of global transformations it remains for many, many people a solitary source of comfort and support during the harsh years of change. And when we, reviving culture, turn to beauty I involuntarily recall the words of Dostoevsky: "If among a people there are persisted the ideal of and a need for beauty, this means there is also a need for health, for something regular, and the further development of that people is thus assured" (1972-1990, p.94). Who knew better than Dostoevsky that a return to beauty is the most important condition for the resurgence of the "good reality" and, ultimately, the salvation of the world?

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