

Reflection on "Aesthetic Standard of Daily Life"

A Critical Interpretation of Current Consumer Society

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Abstract—As a universal existence of consumer society, "aesthetic standard of daily life" has always been criticized by theorists. In view of the traditional value coordinate and the division of the discipline system, they regard the aesthetic standard of daily life as the depravity of aesthetics and the arrogation of daily life and deny it. However, as to any social situation, it's improper to make conclusions based on its appearance, but should go deep inside, examine its generating mechanism, and give an objective judgment. Therefore, this paper attempts to start from the logical basis of "aesthetic standard of daily life" and reflect on it according to its appearance and development trend.

Keywords—daily life; aesthetic; logical basis; reflection

I. INTRODUCTION

"Aesthetic standard of daily life" is a general situation of consumer society. The flourishing cultural industry and design industry are the best illustration of this phenomenon. "Aesthetic" and "daily life", which had no intersection, became inseparable in the consumer society. As the "aesthetic standard of daily life", and "aesthetic daily life" boom, how to understand "aesthetics"? Is it a state of sensibility free from thought, fixed and unalterable? Or is it a product of history, relevant to human understanding and its times?

II. THE LOGICAL BASIS OF THE STATUS QUO OF AESTHETIC STANDARD OF DAILY LIFE

In modern society and before modern society, "daily life" and "aesthetic" are two distinct fields. Western society has had a clear distinction between them since ancient Greece. For example, in the division of knowing, feeling and meaning in ancient Greece, Baumgarten created "aesthetics" based on emotion and sensibility. And the difference between *The Critique of Judgment* and *The Critique of Practical Reason* among Kant's three critique. This shows that the value judgment and disciplinary division between the two have long history and clear stipulation that the two belong to different categories of functions and cannot be mixed. "Aesthetics" belongs to the realm of metaphysics. It is a kind of spiritual activity with transcendental character. Most of it is a kind of understanding of the meaning of life and the pursuit of value, which can make people extricate themselves from daily life. In contrast, "daily life", as

Heidegger said in *Being and Time*, is a state of "mediocrity". "Man is thrown into the world". Therefore, man is in a falling state in the living world, which Heidegger called "depraved".

In the post-modern society, namely the consumer society, the relationship between aesthetics and daily life has changed. They are no longer a strict separation and distinction between metaphysical and physical, spiritual and material, thought and practice, economic foundation and superstructure, but "mixing together", expressed in term "aesthetic standard of daily life" or "aesthetics enters the basic field". Such "entry" not only enables the mutual exchange and infiltration between the aesthetic and the field of daily life, but also enables all disciplines, all fields and all social things to be covered by and stained with aesthetic colors, as well as the interaction and penetration between disciplines and fields to achieve this aesthetic goal. As Baudrillard puts it, "everything is sex, everything is politics, and everything is aesthetics."¹ And such "aestheticization" has not only changed the basic survival landscape of human culture — the emerging things such as fashion, real estate, tourism, entertainment and theme parks around people's lives, but "fundamentally changed the social landscape and appearance of human aesthetic culture."² Aesthetic activities have evolved from traditional emotional activities: poetry and novel reading, classic music and painting appreciation, and mountain climbing, to newly-emerging aesthetic activities in the consumer society: fashion, cars and karaoke. The appearance of human aesthetic culture has shifted from the traditional elitist and spiritual aesthetic to the consumption-oriented and daily-oriented aesthetic.

Faced with such aesthetic standard of daily life, theoreticians are "distressed", trying to "turn the tide", and eager to correct the position of aesthetic. They criticized the phenomenon of "aesthetic standard of daily life", criticized the emerging cultural things and landscape, either as a kind of capital manipulation, or as an ideology, which is in line with Marx, Frankfurt School, Baudrillard, Jameson, and

¹ [German] Martin Heidegger. *Being and Time*, translated by Chen Jiaying, Wang Qingjie, collated by Xiong Wei [M]. Shanghai: SDX Joint Publishing Company. 2012 edition, 206.

² Jean Baudrillard, *After the Orgy, the Transparency of EVIL on Extreme Phenomena*, trans. James Benedict, London, New York: Verso. 1993, 9.

Heidegger. The most classic saying is that people are "safely immersed" in "the gaze of an increasing amount of matter/symbol"³, and there is no longer a binary separation between spirit and reality. "Beauty" has "abandoned the pursuit of 'absolute' or truth claimed by art, and been redefined as pure pleasure and satisfaction". Popular cultural landscape is filled with a "inferior" erotic genre painting⁴, and so on. Therefore, critics have occupied a "high ground" and viewed the phenomenon of "aesthetic standard of daily life" from a perspective, denouncing the aesthetic daily life as "depravity" and strongly denying it, in an effort to pull the aesthetic back to the metaphysical position and restore such a traditional value division.

The question is whether it is entirely reasonable to criticize "aesthetic standard of daily life"? Does aesthetics, or specifically aesthetics, have only one state or one value? In the era of consumer society, why does the phenomenon of aesthetic standard of daily life appear? What is its logical basis?

From the perspective of traditional value division, critics' criticism on the phenomenon of aesthetic standard of daily life is not unreasonable. Aesthetics belongs to the spiritual field, which is different from daily life. It belongs to a higher level and plays a leading role. Now, aesthetics enters the field of production and becomes an element of productivity, which has no difference with life practice. This means the collapse of the traditional value system, "the disappearance of unity" and "the end of a priori". So it is understandable that theorists should be strongly critical. However, if a criticism, regardless of time and space, does not follow the specific situation of social development, but blindly divides the existing living state with the attitude of elitism and the concept of value, then such criticism must be blind. The same is true of the criticism of aesthetic standard of daily life. "They hold a high value position, and their theoretical expressions are difficult to be accepted outside the circle of their peers, so they tend to develop a closed vision of bitterness, paranoia and self-appreciation. This closure can lead to a blind eye to the new sensibility that society thrives on and where it needs to make positive discoveries and statements."⁵

There should be more than one state of being in aesthetics, that is to say, there is not only traditional spiritual aesthetics, but also consumer aesthetics and even other aesthetics. In other words, the understanding of aesthetics must be historicized. It is a product of the discipline conventions of each era, not a fixed myth. "It is not free will in a state of sensibility, but a discipline. That is to say, like the whole discipline system of modern western learning, it is only a historical institution of knowledge." Therefore, "it is obvious that people should never hold the metaphysical fantasy that the discipline of modern western learning is truth,

and aesthetics should not be regarded as the universal knowledge style beyond times and culture".⁶

Then, why does the consumer society have such widely "aesthetic standard of daily life", aesthetic expansion, cultural industry, design industry, and many other emerging things? People can't avoid it, let alone deny it, but should explore the generating mechanism behind it, clarify thoughts so as to better grasp and systematize it. Therefore, logical basis and theoretical background analysis is the key.

Different from the production accumulation in modern society, the consumer society has "overproduction". This is a great transformation, it shows that the need for the use value of goods is no longer a problem, this is an era of overproduction, and how to sell goods in large quantities is the biggest problem. However, the establishment of "citizenship", a "universally effective identity"⁷ in the consumer society, makes such sales can only be completed according to the free purchase of consumers rather than the authoritative system. In an increasingly homogeneous production technology, it is one factor — culture/aesthetics — that separates products from each other. It can form a distinction and difference, create "atmosphere", and form new life taste, emotional appeal and style. Therefore, whether the design and implantation of cultural/aesthetic elements can achieve a wide range of consumer and product sales becomes "the primary issue that all commodity production and economic strategies must consider".⁸ Here, aesthetics is no longer a purely spiritual or metaphysical thing, but a factor of production, a part of the productive forces, and a universal part of the internal management mechanism of commodity production. Aesthetics enters the field of production or daily life. In the era of consumer society, the relationship between aesthetics and practice has been transformed, blended and permeated for the first time.

The most important modern principle of modern society is the "theory of human justice", that is, the basis for legislation based on human beings. Different from the traditional legislation based on the integration of god, religion and morality, the "theory of human justice" is rationality without the protection of external principles, which can prove itself through rationality. It requires that all social things must be tried by the rational court in order to obtain their own legitimacy. Such rationalization requirements, on the one hand, form the specific practical level of the society to rationalize/legalize, get rid of the traditional "theodicy" fuzzy, chaotic, superstitious and authoritative way of handling things, and promote a more efficient, democratic and just social system. On the other hand, this rationalization also caused the bureaucracy, that is, differentiation. Such differentiation is the most obvious

³ Yu Hong. Introduction to Aesthetic Culture [M]. Beijing: Higher Education Press. 2006, 146.

⁴ [French] Jean Baudrillard. Consumer Society. Translated by Liu Chengfu, Quan Zhigang [M]. Nanjing: Nanjing University Press. 2001, 226.

⁵ [United States] Fredric Jameson. The Cultural Turn, translated by Hu Yamin [M]. Beijing, China: China Social Sciences Press. 2000, 131.

⁶ Wu Xingming. The Age of Consumption or Globalization: A New Opportunity to Revitalize Aesthetics [J]. Chengdu. Modern Literary Magazine. 2004(06), 13.

⁷ Wu Xingming. The Vanishing Utopia — on the Disintegration of Aesthetic Vision and the Autonomy of Literary Theory [J]. Beijing: Literary Review. 2003(03), 88.

⁸ Jiang Rongchang. Literature Text of Consumer Society [M]. Chengdu: Sichuan University Press. 2004, 51.

feature of consumer society. For example, the arise of more detailed specialization in society, and professional consultants and experts. In addition to eliminating chaos and forming accurate and effective production, communication and research, this will eventually lead to the infinite expansion of modern society and the splitting of people's own lives, namely "differentiation": The separation of man from himself, from others, from society, from the environment, and even from his own mind. When traditional religion, gods, morals and other integral things are gone from us, what is the basis of consumer society (or post-modern society) for a kind of "undifferentiation"? The answer is aesthetics, as aesthetics is sensibility. It means the liberation of free will of life, which is completely contrary to reason. However, as mentioned above, aesthetics is a metaphysical thing. How can it understand the isolated existence of individual consumers in the era of consumer society and under the "framework" of consumer relations? There is only one way: the aesthetic enters the realm of production. According to the distinction of specific things and spatio-temporal state of commodity production, and thereby ease the status quo of human survival differentiation. Therefore, this is the reason why the aesthetic standard of daily life occurs.

III. THE STATE OF PRESENTATION OF "AESTHETIC STANDARD OF DAILY LIFE"

The exploration of the state of presentation of "aesthetic standard of daily life", on the one hand, is to have a clearer grasp of it. On the other hand, people can have a good understanding of the breakthrough and pioneering role of the "aesthetic standard of daily life" in the traditional system through the process.

Here, people briefly elaborate the presentation of "aesthetics" from three aspects. One is the two-way interaction and penetration between elegant culture and mass culture, or between art and daily life. First, art directly challenges the authoritative academic system and museum system. While the challenge has never ceased in the art world, this one is the most complete. In contrast to the earlier stages of the struggle to express the truth about what is art, this time they wanted to express "what is not art". This was most evident in the experimental creation of dada, surrealism and avant-garde art in the late 19th and early 20th centuries. Duchamp's *Spring* was a hit and was named the most influential work, but it's still a mystery. You don't know how to handle it, when it's a work of art, or when it suddenly becomes the same urinal as your home. Dali and Margaret's works are always full of illusion. The seemingly ordinary life scenes, the waiting hall, the interior, the seemingly ordinary daily things, the fruit bowl and the pipe, however, hide some unexpected and even surprising details, proving that in fact "this is not a pipe". This is especially true of avant-garde installations, land and performance art. Most of their works exist in a broader exhibition space, with more diverse ideas, and the creation process or completion of the creation requires human participation, which is definitely different from traditional art creation. Whether it is dada, surrealism or avant-garde, their participation in and deconstruction of

daily life aims to eliminate the aura of art, challenge the traditional art system and create new art possibilities. Secondly, contrary to the process, daily life began to be close to art/aesthetics, believing that art/aesthetics could appear anywhere and anything, even the lowest consumer goods. This is the consumer society's overwhelming "aesthetic standard of daily life". New media such as mass media and advertisements will simplify and transform art forms, artistic skills and cultural elements to form brand differences and ultimately achieve product sales. A large number of contemporary cultural industries, design industries, and art production come from this.

Second, the artistic/aesthetic lifestyle. That is to say, turn life into art and make it aesthetic. In fact, this kind of artistic lifestyle is a common trend in the consumer society, which is simply "stylized". Baudrillard explained the difference between bourgeois interior decoration and modern interior decoration in his *The System of Objects*. What Baudrillard wants to express is the different arrangement of the thing⁹ reflected the difference of the freedom degree of the thing. And from the perspective of the contemporary household market, they are just different styles. Speaking of "stylization", the Nordic style, Ming-Qing dynasty style, American middle-class style and Japanese style on furniture, the romantic style, literary style, partysu, normcore and LOFT on decoration, ladies fitted, profession, ethnic style, artsy style, French chic, Italian elegance, Korean low-profile and so on. Therefore, in the consumer society, the artistic lifestyle of the consumer masses should be shaped from a broader level. Not just in furniture or clothing, but even in behavior, "tone of voice, style of speech, dissatisfaction with one's body or a sense of quietness."¹⁰ Therefore, the successful transformation of a lifestyle into a style requires a comprehensive shaping. Of course objectively the stylized use of goods is also very important. As for the aesthetic phenomenon of such lifestyle, it should be seen that it aims to create a difference in status and a constant pursuit, but more importantly, it may represent everyone's different life interests, feelings of survival and life expectations.

Third, the "aesthetic standard of daily life" is manifested as the transformation of aesthetics/art into images and symbols of daily life. As mentioned above, under the condition of homogenization of production technology, the consumer society carries out cultural mobilization to realize sales of goods, bringing culture into the production field and making it a part of productivity. Thus, culture becomes a symbol or image through mass media and advertising campaigns as well as the presentation of the urban architectural landscape. It distinguishes one product from another, makes a difference, and reproduces people's desires. As Featherstone said, "The consumer society should never be regarded as the release of the dominant materialism, because it also makes people face countless dreams, tells

⁹ Wu Xingming. *The Age of Consumption or Globalization: A New Opportunity to Revitalize Aesthetics* [J]. *Chengdu. Modern Literary Magazine*. 2004(06), 13.

¹⁰ [French] Jean Baudrillard. *The System of Objects*, translated by Lin Zhiming [M]. Shanghai: Shanghai People's Publishing House. 2001, 13-16.

people their desires, and makes the realistic aesthetic illusion and non-realistic image."¹¹ Therefore, the symbolization and image of daily life is not a kind of rootless thing. It's always about people, the transformation of the world that people live in, and need and desire.

IV. THE ENERGY BROUGHT BY THE "AESTHETIC STANDARD OF DAILY LIFE" IN THE ERA OF GLOBALIZATION

Through the analysis of the generation mechanism behind the current aesthetic standard of daily life, the author hopes to view it from a critical or more objective perspective. On the theoretical analysis of "aesthetic standard of daily life", it can be seen that such phenomenon originates from the serious division of the daily world in contemporary society, whose purpose is to eliminate such differentiation, division, and undifferentiation, and to achieve the free and unbundling state on the basis of legitimation required by modern reason.

In addition, it can be predicted that "aesthetic standard of daily life" will be a general trend in the era of globalization, which will bring unprecedented energy to a nation and a country to realize its change in the international position. The era of consumer society is a transition from production-oriented to consumption-oriented, which indicates that everything must be purchased by consumers to obtain its own legitimacy. Thus, the consumption relationship becomes fundamental. "Just as money has become an all-purpose commodity and the 'general equivalent' of value, the consumption relationship has also become an all-purpose relationship and the 'general equivalent' of relationship."¹² That is, it can effectively exchange all relations, including economic relations, political relations and cultural relations. The traditional "identity" gained through military aggression, political prestige and religious domination is completely ineffective in the consumer society. Because the "framework" of consumer society is consumption relation, the competition of economic strategy already surmounted all force and ideology control. In this case, the commodity is the key. The sale, global and general approbation that commodity place obtains is the goal of economic strategy. Culture is the core of the whole commodity production. "Cultural mobilization', such as the spread of cultural preferences, knowledge and beliefs, life interests and so on, has become the internal link and strategic mechanism of the whole commodity production."¹³ Here, "the strategic space of national culture is directly transformed into the strategic space of economy and politics, which is also the strategic space of national survival". American Hollywood, Japanese animation, Korean clothing and so on are the best examples. The growth of these industries has not only expanded their economic space, but also their political credibility, and thus

¹¹ [English] Mike Featherstone. *Consumer Culture and Postmodernism*, translated by Liu Jingming [M]. Shanghai: Yilin Press. 2004, 29.

¹² [English] Mike Featherstone. *Consumer Culture and Postmodernism*, translated by Liu Jingming [M]. Shanghai: Yilin Press. 2004, 98.

¹³ Yu Hong. *Introduction to Aesthetic Culture* [M]. Beijing: Higher Education Press. 2006, 155.

their global survival space. Quite simply, they speak in terms of goods, not in terms of a national ideology. They realize consumers' free purchase and global "cultural identity" by designing products with their own cultural sense. Therefore, it is not surprising that western European countries rejected China's massive export of Confucius institutes in the past few years. People should reflect on the overwhelming former residences, archaized buildings and archaized streets in China in the past two years. In the era of globalization, only commodities are the hard truth: goods that win the audience. What was originally intended to be used for spiritual reflection, such as contemplation and remembrance, can only be knocked out.

In addition, the key to Chinese design or Chinese culture entering into globalization and assuming global identity is to have something unique. Chinese design has been learning from the west for a long time. From Bauhaus to modernism and even internationalism, there is nothing to be said in terms of rigid technology and model, but there is always something missing. The author always feels tired after looking at this design style for a long time and feels that it is not ours. The reason is a lack of culture. Culture is the same in any product. It reflects a nation's memory, survival experience and sense of objects. Chinese people's way of viewing things is different from that of the west, so they have different feelings and grasp of things, which are reflected in different designs.

V. CONCLUSION

In a word, the phenomenon of "aesthetic standard of daily life" should be judged objectively and positively on the basis of an in-depth understanding of its generating mechanism, its logical basis and its theoretical background. At the same time, people should also be aware of the infinite possibilities brought by such phenomenon in the era of globalization.

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