

Repression and Redemption: Adorno on Natural Beauty

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Abstract—Adorno hopes to explore the redemptive function of art through the clarification of the expressive essence of natural beauty, and finally realize the equality and harmony between human and nature in understanding. Things have their own language as well as human beings. Natural beauty is the expression of nature. Art is an imitation of natural beauty. Through this kind of imitation, people can correctly understand the mute expression of the oppressed nature and the nature itself. The non-identified philosophy can correctly explain the natural beauty and art language.

Keywords—*natural beauty, art language, repression, redemption, Adorno*

I. INTRODUCTION

Natural beauty is a core theme in Adorno's aesthetic theory. Adorno's reinterpretation of natural beauty not only is important in Aesthetics, but also provides a possible model for understanding and changing the relationship between human and nature. In Adorno's view, natural beauty is the expression of nature, the language of nature, and this expression is a natural statement to people. Art is an imitation of natural language (natural beauty). Through this kind of imitation, human can correctly understand what nature wants to express and nature itself, thus realizing true human understanding and ultimately achieving reconciliation between human and nature.

Adorno and Horkheimer discussed in detail the relationship between human and nature: Initially, Man is a part of nature, then man fears nature, finally, man dominates nature in turn[1]. Nature will express the repressed suffering, but this expression is mute. In this expression, it shows a representation transcending the natural material—natural beauty. It is not so much that art is imitating nature, but rather imitating natural beauty, that is, imitating a natural expression. Since the expression of nature is silent and the natural beauty is undeterminable, art presents a characteristic of enigma—art is the expression of the inexpressible. “Art beauty is the enlightenment and disenchantment of natural beauty, and art is to make natural silent language become good at expressing.” [2] By imitating the expression of nature, art redeems the oppressed nature, and art is therefore eloquent. Art is good at expression, but this kind of expression is still speechless. Therefore, art needs philosophy to explain. Below, we describe at length the

natural beauty as an expression of nature and the art of imitation as a natural beauty.

II. NATURAL EXPRESSION AND HUMAN LANGUAGE

Adorno accepted Benjamin's extensive view of language which language has the essence of expression of and things have the languages [3]. Adorno hopes to imitate or translate the language of things through art. In this imitation process, the relationship between human and nature is not a relationship of subjugation and oppression. It is a harmonious relationship. In the end, people get knowledge of things and nature through this kind of translation.

Adorno believes that nature has the desire to express, and also has its own language, although this language is silent. With the development of instrumental reason, human language has gradually descended to a tool for transmitting information, oppressing objects and nature. However, art language is a human language without reification, retaining the expressive and imitative functions of primitive human language. This is because art language is the translation and imitation of nature language which appears as natural beauty, namely the imitation of natural beauty.

Traditionally, natural beauty is either regarded as a subjective feeling caused by an objective appearance or as a representation of the subjective spirit.

The former is represented by Kant. For Kant, natural beauty is not a certain beauty idea or quality in nature. Natural beauty is a human's aesthetic activity to nature, because some appearance of nature can initiate our aesthetic judgment. Aesthetic judgment to nature, just like the aesthetic judgment to art, is an apriori ability of human beings, the free play of human imagination and understanding [4]. However, Adorno believes that this kind of aesthetic judgment is not apriori, but has its social factors. There is no pure and fixed form in nature that can trigger human aesthetic judgment. Any natural form is a historical sentimentary accumulation.

In art philosophy of Hegel, natural beauty is regarded as an inferior representation of absolute spirit. "The most shallow existence of the idea is nature, and the first beauty is natural beauty." [5] In Hegel, everything is the representation of the objective spirit. When this objective spirit is absolute, it is actually a ubiquitous and extremely expansive subjective spirit.

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Adorno criticizes Hegel for sacrificing natural beauty for a subjective spirit [6]. For Adorno, the deficiency of the natural beauty that Hegel criticized—the individual nature cannot be conceptualized—is actually the positive aspect of natural beauty, which is an expression of natural opposition to conceptualization [6]. Art is not because of the spiritual instillation of the mind, and created by the subjective spirit which Hegel has said, art is precisely the imitation of objective natural beauty, which is an imitation of natural expression.

The repressive relationship between nature and human beings has been reflected in the language. Benjamin believes that nature is indiscriminately named by human beings, and mourns under the violence of human language. Adorno further emphasized that it is precisely because there are things that cannot be expressed in nature, so nature needs to be expressed, and then natural language appears. These inexpressible things are the unidentified that are suppressed by the concept and universality. Natural beauty is the expression of the unidentification, that is, the expression of nature itself.

Natural beauty is the expression of nature to human beings, but Adorno believes that natural beauty cannot be reduced to a subjective sensibility, and that nature (that is object) is primary, and this is also the implement of the philosophical principle of its object primacy in aesthetics.

Natural beauty is a kind of appearance beyond nature, but this representation is actually what the natural language wants to express. This kind of content is endowed by the historical dimension of natural beauty, and it is the echo of historical sediment in natural beauty. The original natural expression is not beautiful, but a fearful natural force. In order to suppress this fear, people imitate the language of nature, and thus create art.

III. AESTHETIC ACTIVITIES OF NATURE

In the tool reason society, nature is merely the object of being dominated. The things in nature are human's means of production and materials. The relationship between human and nature is always a relationship between dominating and being dominated. Only in the aesthetic activities can people temporarily put down this utilitarian purpose. Therefore, Kant claims that aesthetics is "disinterested". By giving up interested relations, the aesthetic appreciation of nature makes people temporarily putting down the oppression and control of nature.

Adorno clearly pointed out that because of the aesthetic activities of nature, nature has become a unique appearance. Nature is not the material of labor and the reproduction of life, nor is it a simple material of science. Like the experience of art, the natural aesthetic experience is also the experience of the image. Nature is not observed as an object of action. In the aesthetic activities of nature, people no longer deem survival as the sole purpose, no longer think about how to conquer nature, the fear of nature is temporarily eliminated, therefore, only in an aesthetic attitude, can nature express to people.

For Adorno, natural beauty is not definable. Because natural beauty is a trace of the unidentified, this kind of non-identity cannot exist in a certain way under the suppression of universality. Adorno believes that natural beauty can only be in a dispersed and uncertain state. Similarly, art as an imitation of natural beauty is also indefinite, because it is the expression of

inexpressible things, the utterance of non-identical things, and only in this sense can we truly understand the uncertainty of art.

Different from Kant's emphasis on aesthetic feeling, Adorno believes that the important thing in the aesthetic appreciation process is not aesthetic emotions, aesthetic pleasure and the resulting awe-inspiring do not indicate that people truly recognize the natural beauty. Although nature wants to express, the essence of natural language is mute. The true appreciation of natural beauty is a kind of appreciation in the silence and silent interruption. In this interruption, what we get is not the escape from reality, but the meditation of pain and the memory of suffering. In the aesthetic activities of nature, human beings no longer treat nature with interested purposes, no longer dominate nature, and the history of human dominance of nature has been interrupted. It is through this sudden break that people have the moment to reflect on themselves. Natural appreciation can give you an opportunity to redeem.

Aesthetic emotions seem to be unmediated. It seems that the subject and the object in direct contact with each other in an aesthetic way. In fact, they are mediated by the exchange value of the society. If the aesthetic perception of nature is only aesthetic emotion, then it will lose the critical dimension and the function of critique of society through the comparison of natural beauty and social dominance. This situation is clearly manifested in what Adorno called "tourist industry"[6]. Tourism industry is an industrialized integration form of appreciation of nature. It regards natural appreciation as an exchangeable commodity. The relationship between tourism industry and natural beauty is equivalent to the relationship between cultural industry and artistic aesthetics. In the tourism industry, exchange value is the only purpose, and the perception and appreciation of nature is a commodity that can be exchanged.

The true perception of natural beauty is unchangeable, for this true perception is the perception of natural expression and pain. Adorno pays more attention to the logic and language of aesthetic perception than the easy-to-manipulate and superficial aesthetic feelings. True aesthetic perception is continuous analysis and reflection after the interruption of the image – second reflection. This analysis does not rely on traditional concepts to analyze, which will be concealed by ideology. This analysis relies on an instinct to conduct unconscious, nonconceptual analysis. Adorno asserts that if the analysis is not unconscious, then this analysis will not be able to perceive beauty.

Adorno believes that the true aesthetic of nature is a special aesthetic perception. Firstly, we must break and abandon the ideological aesthetic perception paradigm. Then, we use a true perception state - Memesis - to perceive the expression of nature, to perceive the beauty of nature, and finally, more importantly, we shall analyze and reflect on the hidden things behind natural beauty, to understand what nature really wants to express.

However, Adorno emphasizes the primacy of natural beauty while emphasizing the lack of silent natural beauty. For Adorno, after the separation of human and nature, nature is, after all, a heterogenous. People cannot obtain true freedom only from the perception of natural beauty. What people have to do is not to return to the primitive society, which can only lead to chaos. In

the primitive society, people are dominated by nature and are also not free. The relationship between human and nature should be reconciled and harmonious. There is no suppression of the other party. Only in this way can nature be truly embodied in beauty and freedom. Therefore, what we have to do is not to escape into the natural beauty - although natural beauty can be a reflection of the moment - but through the imitation of natural beauty, to further interpret the natural beauty, to decode the enigmas traits of natural beauty - it is caused by the silent characteristic of natural language. Natural language cannot be revealed and determined by concepts, but natural language needs to be understood. Art translates natural language by imitating natural expression. People rethink art to further interpret this natural language.

IV. IMITATION AND REDEMPTION: ART AND NATURE BEAUTY

Kant emphasizes the natural characteristics of artistic beauty. He believes that the art of beauty must look like nature. Although Kant pays so much attention to the role of nature in art, Adorno points out that Kant's concept of "nature" is still based on a subjectivity. The nature that the subject knows is the nature that is recognized through subjective categories. This kind of nature is still the projection of the subject.

For Adorno, the primacy of nature must be emphasized, natural beauty, not nature, is the model of art, and art is summoned by natural language. Art is imitation not of nature but of natural beauty. It is not a language that is objectified as a symbol [6]. The dual characteristics of natural beauty is its enigmaticalness. Natural beauty connects the subject and the object closely. The subject experiences the object, but the object is the primary. The object expresses itself through the experience of the subject. The subject's experience of the object is difficult to define with concepts. This enigmaticalness, and the relationship between the subject and the object, has been introduced into the art through artistic imitation and has become the biggest feature of art. Natural beauty has been introduced into art as a language. This language has not been symbolized, but has become the only authentic language - the expressive language.

Art is the salvation and liberation of nature. It frees the things-in-themselves that are repressed. Art achieves this redemption through the objectification of natural beauty. Adorno inherits Marx's theory of labor and believes that the objectification of art is a process of productive labor, but this kind of labor is not aimed at possessing objects, but to achieve reconciliation with objects in labor. Art is the labor of an artist. This kind of labor, which is not aimed at occupying each other, is an aesthetic activity. Through a figuration of the object, through the imitation of natural language, nature is artistic. Adorno says that artistic beauty liberates itself from a kind of dominance and transforms into an aesthetic attitude. The subject no longer controls the object here. This objectification process is not controlled by the subjective impulse, because this process of objectification actually follows the laws of art and the inner logic, and the law and internal logic of this art comes from the imitation of natural language. So in this process of creation of the subject, the logic of the object is followed. This mode of subject and object is not only a model of artistic creation, but also a reasonable model of human understanding.

Natural language is nonconceptual, and natural language does not judge, but this does not mean that natural language is meaningless, that is, has no truth. On the contrary, Adorno believes that natural language is closest to truth. Because the true natural language is not ideologized. Although nature is close to truth, the original expression of nature cannot be understood by humans.

Art is an imitation of this nonconceptual language, which causes the language of art to be nonconceptual. This conception does not mean that there is no logic. The language of art is logical and organized. This logic also comes from the objective requirements of natural language. Therefore, although art is an objectification of nature, art does not alienate nature. On the contrary, authentic art is the spokesman of natural beauty. Art and natural beauty are the same in resisting identification.

For people accustomed to symbolic language, the natural language of art needs to be further reflected and translated. Therefore, art needs philosophy. Nature needs to be expressed, but it need human's imitation as help to express for it is silent. However, to really make this silent expression to be clarified, it still needs philosophical reflection. So why not directly explain these natural languages through this? This is because the current philosophy is the philosophy of identification, and this philosophy must be transformed, that is, the transformation of the subjective centralism and reified language. Art language can be a model, because while art imitates the natural beauty, human beings have recovered their own lost aesthetic ability--mimesis. Only with this imitation ability can the subject and object realize reconciliation, and the language can be united. Art is the only surviving mode of human authentic expression.

Since human beings have recovered their imitation and remembrance abilities, the reformation of philosophy has become possible. We can continue to use philosophical language and methods, interpret art with modified language and philosophy, and reveal the truth content in art. By understanding the language of art and the sounds of nature, you can truly realize the oppression of nature and eventually move toward reconciliation with nature. Therefore, natural beauty is not a static and passive object accepted by subjective consciousness. Rather, it is the voice of the repressed nature, which requires art to speak and release suffering. While human art imitates the natural beauty, people find the lost imitation function and expressive characteristics in the language. Finally, with this opportunity, the human language can return to the true nature, and the relationship between human and nature will eventually move from repression to reconciliation.

V. CONCLUSIONS

In summary, Adorno hopes to explore the redemptive function of art through the clarification of the expressive essence of natural beauty, and finally realize the equality and harmony between human and nature in understanding. Things have their own language as well as human beings. Natural beauty is the expression of nature. Art is an imitation of natural beauty. Through this kind of imitation, people can correctly understand the mute expression of the oppressed nature and the nature itself. The non-identified philosophy can correctly explain the natural beauty and art language.

However, it should be pointed out that Adorno's theory of natural beauty also has some difficult aspects to be self-consistent: First, Adorno follows the traditional concept of natural beauty, but he also believes that nature is repressed and dominated by instrumental reason, natural language is an expression of repressed suffering. Accordingly, nature should not seem to be beauty, but ugly, then how to explain the natural scene can bring people a sense of physical and mental pleasure. Perhaps this feeling of pleasure is nothing but a projection of the subjective spirit of man or a desire to escape from the real world. However, it is not appropriate to completely obliterate the function of nature as a human sanctuary. Secondly, he believes that art is an imitation of natural beauty. The artist's subjective intention should not be excessively involved in artistic expression. Therefore, it is easy to ignore the initiative of the artist and the influence of factors other than nature on art, such as industry and the technical factors of technology.

Of course, Adorno's theory of natural beauty also leads to the following questions: Adorno hopes that the equal relationship of subject-object drawn from the natural aesthetic activities is still based on the opposition between subject and object, and his theoretical foundation cannot completely surpass the premise of opposition. Adorno believes that nature also has a language, that

is, there is a language of object. Then whether the communication between the objects (inter-objectivity) can also be the theme of research, is this broad language in Benjamin and Adorno also a subjective projection of human language? Adorno only provides us with a new moment to understand nature, and the answer can only be reserved by the followers.

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