

The Aesthetic Connection: Exploring the Link between Molavi's Poems and George Simmel's Theories

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Abstract

The reflection on beauty and aesthetics holds significant importance when considering the noble and original works of Persian literature, necessitating a comparative analysis with Western aesthetic theories. It is imperative to possess a comprehensive understanding and familiarity with the disparities in the underpinnings of aesthetics between Western and Eastern cultures. This is because even within the Western context, artists' perspectives on existence, art, and aesthetic methodologies exhibit notable variations. For mystical poets such as Jalal al-Din Muḥammad Balkhi (Molavi, Molana, and Rumi) art and beauty represent a chapter in which beauty assumes the form of a vibrant and unparalleled verity, facilitating mankind's proximity to the divine essence. Additionally, art and aesthetics serve as a method for self-discovery, facilitating the attainment of comprehensive understanding and the pursuit of absolute perfection. Conversely, the philosophical and ideological foundations and concepts of this mystic artist within the realm of art and aesthetics predominantly revolve around divine and religious themes. Molana, a poet known for his profound insights, has imbued non-artistic discourse with artistic and aesthetic significance through the use of aesthetic functions and imagery in his poems, thereby effectively expressing his innovative and mystical ideas. George Simmel, a prominent German sociologist, has also contributed to the discourse on aesthetics. According to Simmel, the aesthetic form is regarded as a profound and fruitful phenomenon within the social order. Conversely, the sociological principles that establish order are the creators of aesthetics. According to Simmel, the complete possession of our souls is exclusively granted to the God we believe in and the art we derive pleasure from, as they are inherently endowed with this capacity from the outset. The objective of this study was to examine and compare the perspectives of a poet thinker, and sociologist regarding the concepts of art and beauty and also to elucidate the diverse sociocultural dimensions inherent in Masnavi, and draw comparisons with Simmel's sociological and aesthetic theories. This study employed a descriptive, analytical, and library-based approach to investigate the aesthetic expressions found in the poems of Rumi. Specifically, a comparison was made between these expressions and Simmel's theories, to identify both their shared characteristics and divergences. The aesthetic consensus between these two individuals is tantamount to their shared spiritual, ontological, and sociological encounters that converge on the fundamental nature of beauty.

Keywords: Masnavi-ye-Ma'navi, Molana (Rumi), George Simmel, Aesthetics, Sociology

Introduction

The exploration of art and aesthetics holds significant prominence within the realm of literature. Consequently, it becomes imperative to scrutinize this matter through an analysis of original Persian literary works, as well as by referencing other aesthetic theories related to this subject. Masnavi-ye-

Ma'navi, authored by Molana Jalaluddin Balkhi, is a remarkable Persian literary work that possesses both aesthetic and spiritual qualities. This masterpiece serves as a valuable resource for comprehending the essence and purpose of beauty, while also offering insights into mysticism and education. The appreciation of beauty and aesthetics holds significant importance within Persian romantic and mystical poetry, and Rumi is no exception in this regard. Rumi posits that every divine creation possesses inherent beauty, as each is purposefully and intentionally brought into existence. Moreover, he asserts that beauty extends beyond physical attributes, and these various forms of beauty serve as guiding forces, leading individuals toward the ultimate beauty that resides within the divine gaze. The examination of Molavi's works and ideas proves valuable in elucidating the theoretical underpinnings of art and aesthetics that are culturally, religiously, and artistically relevant to this region. Furthermore, this exploration establishes connections with contemporary aesthetic knowledge. Mysticism exhibits a stronger correlation with artistic expression as opposed to scientific and philosophical domains. The mystical perspective and mode of thinking transcend the constraints of time and space. Hence, it encompasses the disciplines of world history and geography. The examination and discussion of aesthetics in Persian literature's prominent works, alongside a comparative analysis of global aesthetic theories, holds significant importance.

Despite the limited scope with which the founders of classical sociology approached the topic of aesthetics, George Simmel emerged as a notable figure who challenged this narrow scope and made modest advancements in the study of art. Regrettably, Simmel's contributions to academic sociology have been somewhat overlooked. George Simmel, a German sociologist, is characterized by a relative lack of recognition compared to his contemporaries among the classical theorists of sociology. Simmel engaged in the examination of subjects such as the historical development of philosophy, and the interplay between art and aesthetics within the context of sociology. He placed significant importance on the aesthetic form as a profound and generative phenomenon within the social order. Additionally, he posited that the sociological principles of order play a concealed role in shaping aesthetics within art, rather than being external determinants.

The absence of a dedicated chapter on art and aesthetics in Rumi's works can be attributed to the fact that Rumi's aesthetic perspective is intricately intertwined with his ontological framework. According to Rumi, beauty permeates all realms of existence. Consequently, a stimulating and captivating discourse can be fostered by scrutinizing the ideas and poems of this literary mystic in conjunction with George Simmel's sociological theory on aesthetics.

The absence of a dedicated chapter on art and aesthetics in Rumi's works can be attributed to his belief that aesthetics is intricately intertwined with his ontology. Rumi perceives beauty as permeating all levels of existence. Consequently, an exploration of Rumi's ideas and poetry, juxtaposed with George Simmel's sociological theory on aesthetics, promises to generate a stimulating and captivating discourse.

Literature Review

Aesthetics has been the subject of numerous studies, including the books listed below:

Truth and Beauty (2001) by Babak Ahmadi

Generalities of Aesthetics (2005) by Benedetto Croce

Aesthetics in Art and Nature (1984) by Ali Naghi Vaziri

There is a limited number of studies that have investigated and analyzed the discourse on aesthetics in Masnavi-ye-Manavi. For example:

"Introductions about the mystical principles of art and beauty in Islam concerning Masnavi-ye-Manavi" by Shahram Pazuki (2003): This article discusses the expression of mystical elements, beauty, and art

in the Islamic world through the lens of Masnavi-ye-Manavi. It explores the interplay between two distinct art forms, namely poetry and painting.

"The Picture of the moon-like faces and the Imagination of Mystics" by Hassan Balkhari (2008): This book examines the concept and nature of imagination within the context of Islamic wisdom and philosophy, with a specific focus on the writings and viewpoints of Rumi. The analysis encompasses three key domains: epistemology, cosmology, and the formative guardianship of the God saints.

Furthermore, a substantial body of literature and scholarly research has been dedicated to the study and publication of Masnavi. Nevertheless, there has been a lack of scholarly inquiry specifically examining the aesthetic correlation between Molavi's poems and the theories put forth by George Simmel.

Definitions of Beauty and Aesthetics

Aesthetics, as a discipline within philosophy, is concerned with the fundamental inquiry into the essence of beauty and taste, in addition to the philosophical exploration of art. Aesthetics refers to the scholarly and rigorous examination of the concept of beauty. Discussions on the nature of beauty, the reasons behind its comprehension, and the examination of various facets of beauty within a given phenomenon or organism.

Aesthetics refers to the capacity to enhance comprehension of both natural perceptions and human phenomena, including poetry, music, painting, sculpture, and other forms of artistic expression. This capacity elicits alterations in an individual's mood and attitude.

However, the concept of beauty has expanded its definition to encompass various other concepts, including truth, love, life, death, God, humanity, sin, and even subjects such as politics and space. Indeed, the delineation of beauty per se can significantly influence the breadth or restrictiveness of the discourse. Furthermore, certain individuals have endeavored to explore the concept of beauty within a realm of objectivity, focusing on various forms of artistic expression, human beings, inanimate objects, nature, and other phenomena. (Fastergich, 2022: 7)

In this context, it can be argued that the discourse surrounding aesthetics has roots that extend back to the inception of human cognition. Conversely, aesthetics can also be regarded as a relatively nascent field of philosophy that emerged during the eighteenth century. Nevertheless, regardless of the parameters we establish to delineate the domain of aesthetics, its significance remains unaltered. Regardless of whether the focus of our discourse pertains to the historical aesthetics of existence or the aesthetics of a rudimentary, human-created environment, it is evident that a profound inquiry is underway, and its comprehensive examination holds significant significance.

The study of aesthetics not only facilitates comprehension and evaluation of artistic works but also can direct the cognitive processes of artists during the creation of artistic works. Based on an aesthetic theory, it is plausible that our perception of the entire world may undergo a shift, potentially leading to a transformation in our understanding of ontology and theology as well. (Ibid: 8)

The term in question was initially introduced by Alexander Gottlieb Baumgarten within the pages of his seminal work entitled "Aesthetics." However, the historical discourse surrounding this matter spans as far back as the inception of philosophy itself.

Aesthetics, a longstanding discipline within the realm of philosophy, experienced notable flourishing during the 17th and 18th centuries. There is a consensus among numerous contemporary philosophers that beauty is a subjective phenomenon that defies effective communication. The process of creating music and crafting impeccable lyrics remains elusive to individuals. Moreover, a prevailing inclination exists toward the viewpoint that love is not contingent upon rationality. (Holling Dale, 2005: 79)

The dictionary of technical and critical philosophical terms defines aesthetics in two distinct senses:

1. Aesthetic encompasses all aspects of beauty and serves to delineate the essence of beauty.
2. Aesthetics is a science that examines and presents judgments about the distinction between what is beautiful and what is ugly. (Ahmadi, 1401: 25)

An aesthetic experience is a pleasurable and desirable event that gives life value and significance. This experience is based on introspective meditation, which enhances the subject's understanding of his surroundings. It is an experience that, among all people and at all times, necessitates a concentration on some aspect of the encompassing environment and, possibly, the human self.

In a world characterized by a growing emphasis on visual elements, the notions of aesthetics and visual perception hold significant importance. They are not merely theoretical concepts but rather serve as standards that shape the essence of design practices across several fields. These concepts are indispensable in the evolving realms of design and architecture in the 21st century.

Sociology of Art

It is a branch of sociology concerned with the social aspects of art and aesthetics.

Sociology of art throughout history is the study of the social history of art, or how various societies influenced the emergence of particular artists. (Dinhard, 1970: 4)

The central tenet of the research program in the sociology of art posits that the historical development of art does not solely entail the internal progression of artistic styles, but rather encompasses the narrative of various groups and discourses engaged in a struggle to attribute identity to certain works while withholding such identity or labeling from others. These conflicts invariably transpire within the confines of a given region, serving as the catalyst and foundation for the artistic realm in which the concepts of art and the individuals known as artists are brought into being. (English and Hogson, 2020: 12)

Molana and the Basics of Aesthetics

The appreciation of beauty and aesthetics holds significant importance in Persian romantic and mystical poetry, and Rumi exemplifies this principle. Without a doubt, Molavi is widely regarded as a highly significant and influential intellectual figure in both Iranian and global history, particularly within the realm of mystical philosophy. Masnavi-ye-Ma'navi is a remarkable and captivating literary and spiritual masterpiece that holds significant value in the pursuit of understanding the essence of beauty. Throughout history, this particular work has consistently garnered critical attention and extensive analysis due to its status as a remarkable masterpiece.

It is important to note that the concept of "philosophy of art" was absent in the perspective of ancient societies, analogous to the contemporary realm of scientific inquiry. The theological discussions have touched upon various aspects of "Elm al-Jamal: Aesthetics," albeit in a fragmented manner. Specifically, the issues of "Nizam Ahsan: divine justice", rational beauty and ugliness, truth and creation, soul, connected and unconnected imagination, as well as poetry and music have been explored. Hence, the task of ascertaining the perspectives of prominent figures in Islamic and Iranian history about art and aesthetics poses a considerable challenge. Therefore, it is advisable to thoroughly scrutinize the ideas espoused by Rumi in his literary works, as they serve as the underlying assumptions of aesthetics and art. This approach enables one to actively engage with Rumi's perspectives on aesthetics and art.

Human and Beauty

Rumi believed that although man has a dual human and animal nature, his primary nature is dependent on his cognitive process, which is connected to his sentiments and emotions, which are its results.

O brother, you are that same thought (of yours);

As for the rest (of you), you are (only) bone and fiber. (Masnavi, Book 2: 277)

One of these feelings is a propensity for beauty and art. Rumi held the opinion that everyone has an innate desire for beauty. Nobody can help but be moved by the beauty of the natural world. According to him, when one is exposed to beauty, even the hardest of hearts will experience a wax-like softening of their inner stone:

Thou hast limned some letters of writing:

Rocks have become (soft) as wax for love of them. (Masnavi, Book 5: 310)

He compared the components of the human visage to letters that, when placed in their proper positions, produce a unique painting and a mind-boggling symphony.

Thou hast scribed the nún of the eyebrow, the sád of the eye, and the jím of the ear, as a distraction to a hundred minds and understandings. (Masnavi, Book 5: 311)

The simile of faces to letters and words comes from the words of revelation, which referred to the universe as being composed of divine words:

By those letters of Thine the intellect is made to weave subtle coils (of perplexity): write on, O accomplished Calligrapher! (Masnavi, Book 5: 312)

Rumi believed that as man is the best creation and the caliph of God on earth, so divine qualities and the exquisite beauty of God's essence must also be instilled in him. According to Molavi, the organism's beauty from the inside is what matters most. Beauty and beautification should be an internal state and quality. Rumi's ontology starts with existence and progresses via knowledge to a comprehension of beauty.

He is beautiful and a lover of beauty,

How should a fresh young man choose a decrepit old woman? (Masnavi, Book 2: 79)

I said: "If He should become naked in (thy) vision,

Neither wilt thou remain nor thy bosom nor thy waist. (Masnavi, Book 1: 139)

Whatever we gave, we saw this time

This world is a curtain and that world is eye. (Masnavi, Book 6: 353)

Molana believed the exterior world is a reflection of the inner world. The unseen universe is the creator of nature, and the same holds for the human interior and exterior. The human body is the soul's shadow, and the soul is the body's creator. Therefore, the exterior is nothing but the shadow of the interior, so the interior is primary and the exterior is secondary. In the third book, Rumi addresses this crucial aspect of the narrative of the Sufi man's meditation. He stated:

One of the Sufis sat in the garden for spiritual growth and began contemplating. A man who was fatigued by her meditative state asked the Sufi, "Why are you sleeping?" Get up and take in the garden's trees and vegetation. Sufi said, "All beauty is in the heart of a person, and all beauty in this world is a reflection of it, but the common people believe that the manifestations of the worldly appearance are inherent, so they are captivated and enchanted by it." (Masnavi, Book 6: 353)

He replied, "O man of vanity, its marks are (within) the heart: that (which is) without is only the marks of the marks."

The (real) orchards and verdure are in the very essence of the soul: the reflexion thereof upon (that which is) without is as (the reflection) in running water.

In the water, there is (only) the phantom (reflected image) of the orchard, which quivers on account of the subtle quality of the water.

The (real) orchards and fruits are within the heart: the reflection of their beauty is (falling) upon this water and earth (the external world). (Masnavi, Book 4: 760-764)

Furthermore, Rumi posits that in the absence of ugliness, the concept of beauty would be rendered devoid of significance. The absence of Judas in Da Vinci's painting would prevent the attainment of its utmost aesthetic excellence. The presence of evil is a determining factor in the assessment of beauty. Throughout history, artists and philosophers have recognized the inherent principle within God's creation and artistic endeavors, whereby the presence of goodness in any artwork is only truly appreciated when contrasted with the revelation of ugliness. According to Rumi, a person's ability to tell the difference between the beautiful and the ugly depends on whether his heart's mirror is clear of rust and turbidity.

*The mirror of the heart must be clear,
so that you may know therein the ugly form from the beautiful. (Masnavi, 2:2062)*

Dost, thou know why the mirror (of thy soul) reflects nothing?

Because the rust is not cleared from its face.

Thou go and clear the rust from its face,

If though desire to understand that light. (Masnavi, 1:34-35)

God: The Source of Beauty

Mystics believe that there is only one true existence and that there is no other existence in the world. According to their interpretation, the verse "He is the First and the Last, the Manifest and the Hidden" demonstrates conclusively that the opinion of philosophers who believe in "beings" and consider God to be the cause of the actions of beings is invalid.

Mystics reject "causation" because they believe in an actual being that is the essence of the All-Powerful God. According to them, "beings caused by God is not right", but they are manifestations of God. That is, entities and creatures are God's shadows and reflections.

Rumi has repeatedly addressed this topic in his writings. In his view, nature is low and the universe is lofty, and everything in nature is either a manifestation of God's grace or God Himself.

The (real) orchards and verdure are in the very essence of the soul: the reflexion thereof upon (that which is) without is as (the reflection) in running water.

In the water, there is (only) the phantom (reflected image) of the orchard, which quivers on account of the subtle quality of the water.

The (real) orchards and fruits are within the heart: the reflection of their beauty is (falling) upon this water and earth (the external world)

If it were not the reflection of that delectable cypress, then God would not have called it the abode of deception.

This deception is (consists in) that: i.e. this phantom (the external world) exists (derives its existence) from the reflection of the heart and spirit of the (holy) men.

All the deceived ones come to (gaze on) this reflection in the opinion that this is the place of Paradise. They are fleeing from the origins of the orchards; they are making merry over a phantom. (Masnavi, 4:1364-1369)

Rumi believed that everything that exists in the natural world is a symbol and evidence of higher worlds.
That you may know that in non-existence there are suns, and that what is a sun here is (only) a small star yonder. (Masnavi, 5:1017)

Rumi views the entire beauty—the world of divine names and characteristics, a ray of which has appeared in the material world and produced all this beauty—as signs and evidence of the total beauty in his incredibly endearing words.

From that hidden goblet (of Thine) Thou hast poured out of the cup of the noble (prophets and saints) a draught over the dusty earth.

From the draught thereof there is a trace on the locks and cheeks (of the fair): hence kings lick the earth (of which the bodies of the fair are made).

'Tis the draught of (Divine) beauty—(mingled) in the lovely earth—that thou art kissing with a hundred hearts day and night.

Since the draught, when mingled with dust, makes thee mad, think how its pure essence would affect thee! 375

Everyone is tattered (torn with emotion) in the presence of a clod that has received a draught of Beauty. (There is) a draught (poured) on the moon and the sun and Aries; (there is) a draught (poured) on the Throne and the Footstool and Saturn. (Masnavi, 5:372-377)

Rumi holds that all divine creatures are beautiful and that each was made with a specific purpose in mind. He also holds that beauty extends beyond the physical body and that these other forms of beauty direct man toward the beauty that is pleasing to God. He believed that all creatures' actions and desires are directed toward achieving perfection and uniting with absolute perfection.

Rumi believed that the human soul and spirit were the pinnacle of heavenly beauty and the creature that was most similar to divine perfection and beauty.

The Spirit is perfection and its call is perfection: Mustafá (Mohammed) used to say, "Refresh us, O Bilál! (Masnavi, 1:148)

Every mote is in love with that Perfection and hastening upward like a sapling.

Their haste is (saying implicitly) "Glory to God!" They are purifying the body for the sake of the spirit. (Masnavi, 5:387-389)

According to Molavi, there is more than meets the eye when it comes to praising God for natural phenomena. He transforms the ugly into something beautiful by attributing everything to God, whose primary quality is beauty and the capacity to create beauty.

*I will see all your beauty when I open my eyes,
I will drink all your wine when I open my lips. (Masnavi, 5:65)*

According to Rumi, art deals with ontology, and the difference between a mystic and an artist is that the latter gives the newly discovered beauties a physical form. Although beauty is not inherent in things, it is a manifestation of God's beauty that He has made apparent in them according to their capacity for existence.

Abandon the cups, namely, the (phenomenal) forms: do not tarry! There is wine in the cup, but it is not (derived) from the cup. (Masnavi, 6:3708)

Rumi included dance and music among the forms of art. The praises of Rabab, Reed, and Sorna in his poems are just a few examples of references to music. Rumi is like music since it contains a sip and a drop of music from all around the world (that universal trumpet.).

But his object in (listening to) the sound of the rebeck was, like (that of) ardent lovers (of God), (to bring into his mind) the phantasy of that (Divine) allocution;

(For) the shrill noise of the clarion and the menace of the drum somewhat resemble that universal trumpet. (Masnavi, 4:731-732)

Similar to how the depictions of Israfil can revive deceased entities, the harmonies of spiritual music likewise induce motion and vitality.

Hence philosophers have said that we received these harmonies from the revolution of the (celestial) sphere,

(And that) this (melody) which people sing with pandore and throat is the sound of the revolutions of the sphere;

(But) the true believers say that the influences of Paradise made every unpleasant sound to be beautiful. (Masnavi, 4:733-735)

The dance of Molana Sama holds significant importance within the realm of mysticism and its associated aesthetics, making it a subject of great depth and breadth in the field of dance.

The cosmic nature and its association with the divine realm of auditory perception have been substantiated in the contemplations of numerous mystics and scholars specializing in this domain. The voices emanate from a divine source, resonating into the depths of human consciousness, bridging the gap between the individual's innermost being and the divine realm. According to Rumi, individuals have the potential to derive advantages from celestial sounds as well as sounds that align with their present disposition and innate characteristics.

In the presence of Malana, Sama experienced a heightened sense of spirituality. Rumi's perspective diverged from perceiving dance and ecstasy solely as expressions of passion and pleasure, instead viewing them as spiritual practices that encompassed both discipline and reverence. According to him, dancing was not merely a form of worship lacking structure and decorum, but rather a physical manifestation of prayer that transcended self-interest. The lyrical composition possesses a subdued quality, yet it is replete with profound emotional and intellectual depth. (Ref.: Zarinkub, 2005: 7-8)

Dervish has another drink,

When he was listening to the Sufis.

Listen to the expression on this Sama melody.

In the presence of another intellect.

*Another roar emanates from the throne,
Indicating that they have extra ears. (Masnavi, 1:133)*

The theologians and mystics perceive the attitude towards Sama as a metaphorical ladder that facilitates the process of ascending towards the spiritual realm and the divine kingdom, while simultaneously serving as a tool to detach oneself from worldly desires and sensual attachments.

Rumi believes that true happiness lies in sadness, not in happiness and comfort:

Pleasure is (concealed) in pains: the track has been lost, and the Water of Life has been taken away into the (Land of) Darkness. (Mathnawi, Book 6: 1157)

In the subsequent verses, Rumi posits that genuine happiness can be attained through the renunciation of material and sensory gratifications. The individual who forsakes such materialistic happiness invariably draws spiritual gratifications towards their being.

If there is delicious food and drink in the world, (yet) his pleasure (in them) is (only) a branch of (derived from) the extinction of (worldly) pleasure.

Although he was unaffected by (worldly) pleasures, (yet) he was a man of (spiritual) pleasure and became the recipient of (that) pleasure. (Masnavi, 4: 404-405)

The genesis and fundamental basis of all genuine happiness resides within the human psyche and soul. Physical pleasure, insofar as it remains intertwined with spiritual happiness, is seen as desirable and gratifying. The degree to which an individual is aligned with spirituality and intellectual pursuits directly correlates with their capacity for enjoyment and comprehension of beauty. The further an individual deviates from this established framework, the more limited their comprehension of aesthetics will become.

"Beauty is what gives us the greatest pleasure," says Hamster Huis about this. "And what gives us the greatest pleasure is something that provides us with numerous ideas in the shortest possible period. The best knowledge a person can achieve is the joy that comes from beauty. (Tolstoy, 1971: 55)

Georg Simmel

Among the cohort of classical sociological theorists, Simmel's perspectives have arguably retained a lesser degree of recognition compared to his contemporaries. Due to his socialist beliefs and Jewish heritage, he was prohibited from obtaining a professorship for the majority of his career, resulting in his consistent position on the periphery as a theoretician until just before his demise. Furthermore, during the late 19th and early 20th centuries in Germany, sociology was characterized by a very low institutional standing as a scientific discipline. Simmel's works and lectures encompassed subjects that are now associated with distinct academic disciplines, including the history of philosophy, aesthetics, epistemology, and sociology (Etzkorn, 1968).

The first reception of Simmel's theories within the English-speaking sociology community during the 20th century appears to have primarily emphasized the sociological aspects of his work. These aspects include topics such as interaction, conflict, the structure of inequality, and domination. However, the current resurgence of scholarly attention towards his literary contributions might be partially attributed

to his notable focus on aesthetic concerns. This resurgence may be seen as speculative anticipation of significant postmodern theoretical topics, albeit potentially deviating from conventional interpretations (Frisby 1981, 1986; Weinstein and Weinstein 1993). Both approaches can be seen as misrepresenting Simmel due to their current perspective. In both approaches, the consideration of aesthetic matters is regarded as superficial. The reductionist inclination within sociology perceives aesthetics as a secondary concern, characterized by superficial expressions that are driven by the underlying forces of economic and social determinism.

According to postmodernists, who have been influenced by the structuralist theory of language and culture, the pursuit of an underlying reality is seen futile as they contend that only superficial manifestations exist. Simmel posits that the aesthetic form holds significant importance within the social order, serving as a profound and generative phenomenon. Additionally, he contends that the sociological principles of order play a pivotal role in shaping aesthetics, existing as concealed producing elements within art rather than external determinants.

Georg Simmel's Aesthetic Interpretation

Simmel's aesthetic interpretation establishes a connection between a transitory and unstable being and an eternal and stable entity, as well as between the proximate and the distant. He argues that the artistic approach and depiction aim to emphasize the significance of minor details, the unpredictability of random events, the essence and significance of superficial and fleeting objects, and so on. Sufficient attention, coupled with genuine affection and curiosity towards that which may initially seem apathetic, detached, mundane, or repugnant, might enable us to perceive it as a beam of light and a testament to the fundamental interconnectedness of all phenomena.

Simmel displays the aesthetic world in the context of daily life and social interaction. Simmel argues that because the aesthetic realm is made up of so many different and overlapping frameworks in interaction, it does not always take the shape of our immediate sensory awareness in daily life. According to Kanti's approach, it is important to note that the aesthetic field has a strong relationship to the problem of circulation, leisure, and exchange of objects as products; it is thought to be a preoccupation of the focus of late postmodernism concepts. But if we adhere to Simmel's objectives and purposes, we may observe how his investigations into particular subjects reveal the aesthetic aspects of daily life. The comprehension of the entirety of this spatial concept relies on the significance of fragmented matter, encompassing notions of symmetry and asymmetry. It involves an examination of the formative processes, as well as the contrasting aspects between artwork that serves a purpose for the viewer and artwork that exists for its own sake. Additionally, it encompasses the role of the photo frame and the act of framing, along with the profusion of styles prevalent in the contemporary era, which can be likened to the presence of a hijab or a curtain that establishes a certain level of separation. (Sharbatian, 2015: 10)

The distinction between the aesthetic values of different things will vanish if we continue with this aesthetic revelation. Because each element contains the potential to lead to an aesthetic meaning, worldview becomes the unification of aesthetic existence. Every aspect of the world's beauty and purpose can be seen by those with trained eyes. (Vanderberg, 1997: 19)

Man and Beauty

Simmel's intellectual development was significantly shaped by the philosophical ideas of Nietzsche and the neo-Kantian school of thought prevalent during his time. He exhibited a profound fascination with the reciprocal dynamics between life and form, as well as the intricate interplay between energy and the patterns that both mold and constrain it. (Davis, 1973:27)

Similar to Weber, Simmel believed that the growing autonomy of economic activities is a constituent element of a broader phenomenon wherein many cultural domains, such as art, science, and social interactions, progressively attain greater autonomy. According to his perspective, a key characteristic of modernity was the growing imbalance between the "mental culture" of the individual and the "objective culture" of social and cultural domains.

Various domains, including economics, politics, art, and science, are progressively gaining autonomy and exhibiting self-organizational tendencies. The increasing prevalence of objective culture poses a potential threat to the preservation of mental culture. According to Simmel, it is posited that objective culture imposes contrasting demands on an individual within each of its many realms. Additionally, as a result of this, educational goals have also altered; now, rather than molding "man" "as a personal inner value," education is mostly instrumental and professional, with each having a definite practical purpose. These undermine the individual's integrity as a value unto themselves. ((Simmel, 1907: 449)

Simmel thinks society can be viewed as an aesthetic construct. Simmel's sociology emphasizes the aesthetic aspects of society and social interactions to the point where one of his pupils claimed that Simmel believed society to be a work of art in its own right. (Frisby, 2007: 19)

God is the Source of Beauty

According to Simmel, the acquisition of our soul's total possession is exclusively bestowed upon the God we have faith in and the art that pleases us since they are inherently provided from the outset. When an individual who holds religious beliefs experiences a profound connection with their deity solely due to their existence, or when an individual who is moved by a piece of art perceives it as an inherent necessity, it is no longer their attributes that hold significance, but rather the fundamental aspects through which they achieve complete existence. (Simmel, 2014: 156),

If religion has disavowed art, this cannot be just attributed to austere rejection or a mere absence of aesthetic culture. Rather, it suggests that the soul has reached a state where art is no longer necessary. The artful expression and artistic manifestation of the soul can be observed in the existence of unique spiritual states, such as humility, prayer, and the fervent passions associated with prayer. These aesthetically pleasing and artistic states are characterized by complete surrender and a deep immersion of the soul into tranquility, ultimately evoking a profound sensation of fervor and enthusiasm, culminating in a singular, innermost, and essential point. (Ibid.: 158)

Art and Beauty

Simmel posits that art and beauty possess a distinguishing characteristic that sets it apart from life. This distinction arises from the act of representation or imagination, wherein objects are depicted in their absolute form. As a result, art becomes liberated through the process of confrontation, rendering any connection with our reality unattainable, regardless of subjective recognition. However, the mere observation that the substance of our being and our creative faculties are detached from us in this manner implies that they are brought into closer proximity to us than in their sensory manifestation. In the realm of tangible existence, various elements and resources are encompassed as essential components for sustaining our livelihood. However, the domain of artistic creation stands apart, maintaining a distinct separation. Simultaneously, it offers a means through which we can establish a profound connection with another individual's soul, so fulfilling our innate yearning for inter-soul communication. (cf. Simmel, 2014: 70-72)

Also, Simmel believes, the characteristic of things in the final analysis depends on whether they are of wholes or parts. That a being is self-sufficient and closed to itself and is defined only by its essential law, or that it is a member of a relational whole from which it derives its strength and feeling, this is what distinguishes the soul of everything that is material, a free being from a being that is only social, as well

as a moral person from a person who is a slave to his carnal desires. It is also what separates the work of art from nature. Because everything as a natural being is a point of passage of energies and materials that flows continuously, it can only be understood with its previous causes and it is meaningful only as an element in the set of natural processes. On the contrary, the essence of a work of art is the totality of being substantive, a totality that does not need to establish a relationship with the environment. It is unlike natural things, whose limits are the place of internal and external mutual influence and impression with their environment. (Vanderberg, 2007: 71)

Suffering and Art

According to Simmel's theoretical framework about religion and art, he posits that religion can transform qualities that are inherently negative within other domains of human existence into positive ones. The act of renouncing material property and all tangible entities is not alone a gesture of liberty. This action not only eliminates the barriers that impede the soul's pursuit of its everlasting fate. On the contrary, this act of transformation holds inherent value. The aforementioned entity holds significant value within the realm of the human psyche. This endeavor might be considered as an integral component of the metaphysical progression of the soul, rather than a mere act of discarding a load during its trajectory. Furthermore, the practice of moral adherence and self-denial includes more than simply adhering to objective moral ideals that contradict greed. The concept might be seen as the immediate elevation of the soul. (Zimel, 2014: 156).

While these factors may elicit suffering among individuals, it is important to acknowledge that suffering constitutes an integral component of religious existence. The kingdom of God is compelled to engender suffering during its initial manifestation in our world and its encounter with the rules and forces of mortal existence, ultimately leading to salvation.

If suffering is merely one of life's sources of drinking water, it is in opposition to the celebration of life that art portrays. The capacity for art to transcend suffering and serve as a constructive force in life is contingent upon its ability to surpass the confines of suffering and assume a positive motivational role. Religion has recognized the inherent aesthetic worth of suffering and has attributed theological significance to it through the utilization of descriptive language. ((ibid: 159)

Hence, art serves as a means by which the soul can merge disparate realms, perceiving itself as a unifying entity. It possesses the capacity to nourish and interconnect these distinct streams, as they both emanate from the fundamental essence of the soul. (Ibid: 161)

Analyzing Commonalities and Differences

According to Rumi, there exists an inherent inclination in people towards beauty. He posits that as the organism must possess inner beauty, the attainment of knowledge necessitates the presence of beauty and aesthetics as internal states and qualities. Given that the exterior world is derived from the internal world, it can be posited that the aesthetic qualities inherent within an individual serve as the progenitor of the aesthetic qualities observed in the external world. Moreover, the concept of beauty derives significance when juxtaposed with ugliness, hence leading to a state of conflict and engagement between individuals and their environment.

According to Molana, grace may be seen in nature and is a sign of the beauty of God's nature. Additionally, art provides newly discovered beauties with a tangible form. Though it has appeared in them, beauty is not inherent in things; rather, it is a manifestation of God's beauty.

Rumi also views aesthetic experiences that link the soul to the higher world and the source of producing beauty, such as music and dancing, as manifestations of spiritual and lyrical moods. True joy, according to Rumi, can only be found in sadness, and the more joy a soul can have, the more it will be able to appreciate beauty and progress toward bliss.

According to Simmel, the concept of man entails a subjective inner worth that possesses a cohesive and integrated existence. He believes in a reciprocal relationship between individuals and the broader social milieu. He perceives society as an aesthetic construct and a piece of artwork that derives its beauty from humanity and mirrors it back to humanity. Simmel argues that the spiritual connection between humanity and the divine is manifested through the belief in God and the appreciation of art. Simultaneously perceiving the essence of God as intertwined with one's soul allows believers to access beauty and art, which are bestowed upon humanity by God. The soul, in this context, serves as the origin and generator of beauty, particularly when engaged in prayer and fervent contemplation, wherein it submits itself to the absolute and innermost aspect of the universe.

According to Simmel, art possesses the inherent ability to differentiate itself from the realm of existence. Indeed, it is a fact that upon the creation of a work of art, a distinct separation occurs between the artwork and ourselves. However, concurrently, a reflection of said artwork is bestowed upon both ourselves and others, so enabling us to have access to the innermost essence of others through the medium of art. The entirety of the artistic creation is self-contained, in contrast to other entities that engage with their environment.

Simmel, a proponent of Christianity, says that religion has discerned the artistic significance inherent in the experience of suffering. Suffering is deemed indispensable for the religious experience, as it is believed that God intentionally incorporated suffering into the process of human and worldly creation to facilitate mankind's salvation. Consequently, suffering is regarded as an artistic phenomenon, and comprehending its essence entails grasping the concept of beauty.

Conclusion

Rumi's aesthetic framework is grounded in the fundamental ideas of his ontology and epistemology. As a result of his distinct location within the cosmos, humanity possesses the capacity to acquire knowledge of both oneself and the surrounding world. The fundamental requirement for attaining self-knowledge is the process of purifying and nurturing one's inner self, as well as the determination and externalization of the soul. The aesthetic experience encompasses a series of stages, commencing with the first emergence of feelings and influences, followed by the processes of discovery and intuition. Subsequently, the experience progresses to a phase of contemplation, acknowledgment, and appraisal, ultimately leading to its expansion and manifestation. Simmel posits that the interconnectedness of the creator, the artwork, and the audience can be elucidated by demonstrating the cohesive nature of art within the framework of the ongoing cycle of creation. Art remains faithful to its intrinsic nature, but the transcendent origin of beauty and art bestows upon it its public dimension.

Rumi thinks that the external realm is a manifestation of the internal realm. Similar to how the imperceptible realm serves as the progenitor of the natural world, the external aspects of an individual just represent the manifestation of their internal essence. Hence, the aesthetic qualities inherent in individuals are perceived as divine endowments, while the external beauty observed in the surrounding environment serves as a tangible expression of this innate beauty.

Hence, the prerequisite for the audience to comprehend the artistic piece and appreciate its covert and overt aesthetic qualities lies in their genuine and modest engagement, characterized by a true and unclouded heart, a receptive disposition, and a conscientiousness devoid of personal agendas.

Georg Simmel employs the concept of the aesthetic world to elucidate his theory, wherein he explores the interplay between daily life, social interaction, and other frameworks. This approach serves as a crucial tool for comprehending the intricate dynamics of distance and value. Furthermore, the individual perceives the inherent beauty and comprehension of the surroundings and societal constructs through a meticulous examination of even the most seemingly little aspects within the cosmos. This heightened attention to detail enables humanity to be receptive to the profound interconnectedness of all entities, culminating in a comprehensive grasp of the universe as a whole.

Similar to Rumi's perspective on the coexistence and comprehension of beauty and ugliness, Simmel posits that the attainment of a holistic aesthetic encounter can reconcile the seeming discord between aesthetic ideals, leading to the harmonious coexistence of aesthetic life. Each constituent inside its existence possesses the capacity to attain the ultimate aesthetic concept.

Similar to Rumi's perspective on Sama dance as an aesthetic form of art, symbolizing the divine light descending upon a receptive soul and its connection to ultimate perfection and beauty, Simmel also regards the presence of unique spiritual states and fervent prayers as an art form and an aesthetic manifestation of the soul. By evoking pure emotions, this artistic practice aids individuals in attaining the deepest and most essential core of the universe.

The last word is that, despite their distinct backgrounds as a mystic and a philosopher, Rumi, and Simmel share a common understanding of the fundamental interconnectedness of the universe and the intrinsic nature of human beings in their pursuit of beauty and the attainment of aesthetic excellence.

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