Metamorphosis of Aesthetic Visual Culture, an Aftermath of War

Mamoona Khan

Professor

School of Art & Design

Rawalpindi Women University, Rawalpindi

mamoonakhan@gmail.com

Abstract

Creative brains are kept only by sensitive creatures, and the most empathetic are of those associated with visual arts fields, affected even by a minor stir in their surroundings, which is reflected in their creative endeavours. They sub consciously interpret their time. Unpleasantness of war or situations analogous to war have always left a negative mark on their aesthetic interpretations. History is replete with such examples. But the most stunningly heinous transgressions were exercised by modern mechanisms of war that violated ethics par human perception. The era shattered beliefs of man on humanitarian values. It also caused transformation in the field of aesthetics which is beyond human comprehension. The metamorphosis was so rapid that it brought aesthetics and beauty at antithetical stages, which led the French artist Paul Duchamp to display a urinal as a piece of sculpture in an art exhibition. Hence, weirdness replaced beauty; logical delineations substituted the abstruse, and crafty ousted the artistic, still protected under the umbrella of art. It is labelled as modern, subjective or abstract but not viewed as a repercussion of war trauma. The paper will be exploratory research to probe reasons behind the apparently unreasoned transformations delineated through art. Modern art specimens of post-war era along with those resulted from a few chaotic situations will be analysed to draw conclusions. It will be based on deductive methods of reasoning to scrutinise history, psychology and the field of art in order to comprehend the impact and reactions of war trauma on sensitive souls of artists that led them to transform the entire visual field of aesthetics.

Keywords: Aesthetics, Beauty, Modern Art

Introduction

Man by instinct is creative, most creative is his abstract language of signs and symbols through which he is able to communicate with his fellows, and also keeps record of chronicles. No other species on the globe is bestowed with such a gift. But the abstract symbols, known as alphabets of a language, are understood by some limited community of people; others may or may not be familiar with them, for having certain different signs of their languages. Besides all, a global language persisted from antediluvian times, which is non-verbal, yet more widely understandable around the globe. It is the language of art. Most amazing aspect of this language is that it was generated by the primitive dwellers of caves. They, at that time lived like the beasts of jungle, and yet felt the need to communicate with their fellows for being social creatures. This language is not required to be deciphered because it is easily understandable by all, for its pictorial signs. It is complete in every respect, provides clear glimpses of its time, defining rituals, customs or ways of living of the people. No other species on the globe ever got able to produce such pictorial symbols to transmit their apprehensions. It is because of this language that we can talk with confidence about primitive and prehistoric cultures, and even many ordinary accessories ignored by historians to be discussed or recorded are subconsciously delineated through this language. Similar is the case of those ancient civilizations whose writings have not been deciphered yet, such as Indus Valley Civilisation. We can have clear idea of those people, their religion, and other customs only through the artefacts produced by them.

On the other hand, in contemporary times, a transformation occurred in the modern visual language, bringing an altogether change in the aesthetic field, where representational content was lost in the guise of modern and thus occult. It led the Nazi Leader Adolf Hitler to coin, in 1937, the term “Degenerate Art” for Modern Art renditions (Beckett 1994). There are many facts that are considered responsible for the rapid change in the visual vocabulary of art. But this paper will concentrate upon the instability caused by the Great Wars or by analogous conditions, in the context that changes in the visual culture in Modern and Post-

modern Eras are so conspicuous that had never been before. These are not ordinary changes but have altogether transformed the visual vocabulary of art.

The non-verbal language of art had never been stagnant; it went on evolving from time to time, either through changes in the illustrated contents or by adding and subtracting new aesthetic symbols. Prior to the modern era, its progress was very smooth, always aimed at capturing reality with utmost perfection by taking novel moves each time. In this pursuit the artists adopted objective stance of representation, got subjective at times, or turned metaphysical in their representations, but without breaking its link with perceptible reality. Even mythologies were personified to make inconspicuous perceptible, always attached with the artistic because aesthetics and beauty are synonyms. Presence of one assures persistence of the other; even heinous of the contents was enwrapped in the guise of artistic. But a real metamorphosis in the aesthetic domains is discernible in the modern times when interpretation of beauty is challenged too. Although, a succinct definition that could be representative of all specimens of beauty or aesthetics is yet to be evolved. It is better to have a proper comprehension of aesthetics, and thus of beauty through the conceits of a few western philosophers, before scrutinising the metamorphosis of modern aesthetics of the field of art. Their adages cover the domains of objective, subjective or metaphysical, the three possible stances of representation in the art field.

The term aesthetics, derived from the Greek word *aisthanomai*, stands for “perception by senses”, was first used in 1735, by the German philosopher Alexander Gottlieb Baumgarten. It was to interpret poetry as a source of concrete knowledge, transmitted in sensory form. He was the first to consider aesthetics as a subject worthy of independent study and labelled it as a science of sentient knowledge, equivalent to logic, linking it with perception and feelings. He discerned it as a science of clear thinking linked with higher faculties that is intellect. Eventually, it became a common term for philosophical studies of all arts (*E. Britanica* 1986). Critical thinking is generated through philosophical inquiries, because science is linked with empirical testing while critical

thinking can be generated through philosophical probing, where role of imagination is important too. Philosophy transcends the empirical path to unravel mysteries beyond the factual limits. So, aesthetics was objected as a science on the grounds that sensuous knowledge is a vague term and highest attainment of clear thinking is Truth, while maximum perfection of sensuous knowledge is beauty. Baumgarten actually gave awareness of the phenomenon of beauty when he defined aesthetics as “philosophy of the world presented to our senses” (Gupta 1999).

In the semantic interpretation, beauty is defined as anything charming, delightful, admirable, exquisite, lovely, etc. In the terms of aesthetics beauty is defined as a value, merits of which are subjected to aesthetic discourses. Besides the usual parlance, the abstract nature of the phenomenon of beauty is hardly explicated, as standards of beauty vary from person to person, region to region and time to time. So, no one has yet been able to devise a comprehensive theory of beauty, in other word, of aesthetics, because of its overwhelming aura. But all agree that perception of beauty or its appreciation is though, a subjective experience but an object of beauty arouses feelings of pleasure, enjoyment or satisfaction. It is logical that an aesthetician would never concentrate upon an aesthetic object if it does not stir pleasing aroma in his mind. The very reason that the term metamorphosis is coined for the evolution of the aesthetics of modern art because the modern culture totally transformed the standards of beauty.

The Greek philosopher Plato considers harmony as the key element of beauty that incites grace, and for him, it is the “twin sister of goodness and of virtue”, the main measures of beauty. He opines, if souls of creators grasp that virtue, they get able to define true nature of beauty, while souls deficient to grasp principles of harmony, cannot become poets or artists (Jowett 1976). Aristotle solidifies the imitative content in art. For him, it is not the beauty of object that brings delight to the observer, but the act of tracing analogies of the objects of beauty, that is artefacts or art works, with their originals present in the real physical world, that evoke pleasure. It is the very reason that even repulsive objects represented in art, arouse similar delight when their analogies are

traced from the real world through the process of reason (Burger 2004). So, it is not the beauty of the object but beauty of similitude that conjures pleasure in the observers. For tragic representations Aristotle uses the word catharsis, as a substitute of aesthetic pleasure. It is not that terrible event, represented in a piece of art that evokes pleasure but its mimetic aspect, because aesthetic pleasure is not an ordinary experience but it is based on transforming observation from trivial to the aesthetic. His concentration is not on the tragic pleasure but on the aesthetic pleasure materialised through artistic means (Schaper 1968). In this way, Aristotle views catharsis aesthetically.

The German philosopher Immanuel Kant (1724-1804) elucidates that aesthetic judgment is not subservient to certain rules, concepts or characteristics, to be used to analyse an object of beauty (Budd 1998). On the contrary, the objects which appeal to one's senses serve as stimuli to cause delightful sensation that gives insight of beauty to the observer.

David Hume (1711-1776), a Scottish philosopher strengthens the conceits of Aristotle, when he says that representation of tragedy is not pleasant but it can evoke aesthetic pleasure by inducing value to a work of art, by concentrating upon the artistry with which the event is delineated. In this way even the horrible appears to be delightful (Graham 2005).

Fig.1: Greek Goddess
Aphrodite

G.W.F Hegel (1770-1831), another German philosopher elevates metaphysical stance, giving cognitive value to art, as a source of knowledge and understanding. He stresses on the inner or subjective and outer or the objective selves of man, with the inner elevated in cognitive faculties that is feelings and thinking. Hegel does not view beauty in the outer but opines that physical when combined with an idea, becomes truth and

truth is beauty. When sensuous is spiritualised, he holds, there is both cognitive revelation of truth and exhilaration of the inner-self of the beholder (Graham 2005). He views aesthetics in modern terms of meaning, as not limited to evoking pleasure but thought-provoking judgments based on correspondence between “contents and the means of expression”. As he says; “Art invites us to reflect, not in order to produce more art, but in order to arrive at a scientific understanding of what art is” (Bungay 1987).

Friedrich Wilhelm Nietzsche (1844-1900) gives an altogether different point of view and elevates instinctive over philosophical. All creativity, he believes, is because of dual nature of man that is dream and existence. He places science and philosophy as illusions of human mind that cause the creation of an organized and orderly world of arts, stimuli of which are trivial and meaningless experiences of life. Here stimulus is provided by science and philosophy which he places in the category of the senseless. Life, he believes, can be studied only on the aesthetic basis and not in terms of the scientific. He elevates the pre-Socratic vision by promoting Greek tragedy but places the deceptive tactics of human mind as the place of emanation of tragedy. He further stresses that tragedy proves that “wisdom is a crime committed on nature” (Fadiman 1964), because he questions about any wise tactic that can guard against tragedy. The entire aesthetic discourse of modern art is relevant to the statement of Nietzsche. Trauma of war challenges wisdom, when after so much progress animal instinct of man remains untamed and active; it doubts the role of wisdom. Its impact can be viewed on the transformed aesthetics of the Modern

Fig.2: Roman Goddess
Venus

Fig.3: Birth of Venus, Botticelli

Art. But in order to comprehend the metamorphosis of aesthetics of Post-War specimens, the Pre-War standards of beauty must be concentrated upon first

Fig.4: The Last Judgement, (1536-41), Michelangelo

Fig.5: Augustus, Roman Emperor

resemblance with nature. For rendition of the biblical stories too, aesthetics of the artists' traced similitude from their surroundings,

Fig.6: Marcus Aurelius, Roman Emperor

Modern standards of beauty had already been maintained in the Classical Greek Era, these can be viewed in the proportions of *Aphrodite of Greeks*, fig.1, *Venus of Romans*, fig.2, or *The Birth of Venus of Botticelli*, fig.3, of the Renaissance period. Ideal proportions of male and female figures were devised by Greeks and Romans, and adopted by the Renaissance artists. In other words, the artists of these eras adopted objective stance, stressing on likeness or

in other words, their analogies in the physical world were maintained as standards of beauty. For instance, *The Last Judgement* by the Italian Renaissance artist Michelangelo (1475-1564), fig.4, represents Doom's Day on the altar of the Sistine Chapel in the Vatican City, with over three hundred figures. It is

Fig.7: Four Tetrarchs

a marvel of aesthetic delight in its representation. Though, a subject related to the eternal accountability of man, that accompanies uncertainty, horror, chastisement or the like. Still, it arouses aesthetic euphoria within the observers because of the imaginative perfection and dynamic representation of its imaginative contents.

Artists are true representatives of their time. Pleasant or unpleasant circumstances automatically influence

their representations, affecting their aesthetic visual language, usually in an implied manner, about which they are not conscious. Numerous specimens are witness to this statement. Taking into account a few sculptures from the Roman Art, one finds that circumstances captivate aesthetics of its times. The sculptures of the two Roman emperors; *Augustus* (1st century), and equestrian statue of *Marcus Aurelius* (2nd century), *figs.5-6*, are specimens of anatomical perfection, portraying psychological insight into the personalities of these two individuals. The feeling of air and space is marked through their gesticulating postures. These are specimens of skill of the Roman artists at its meridian and also reflective of the stability and strength of the empire. But a few other Roman Sculptures of a later date are contrary to that aesthetics. When power of the ruler was enervated with conversion of maximum population into Christianity, insecurity deliberates upon their art. The sculptures of *The Four Tetrarchs* (4. CE), and of *Constantine* (4. CE), *figs.7-8*, are reflective of those circumstances. Colossal head of Constantine, *fig.8*, is lifeless and dead and similar is the case of the *Four Tetrarchs*. Artists or their

manual dexterity as sculptors cannot be questioned here because previous examples bespeak their technical virtuosity. But the impact of instability and melting strength of the empire is automatically delineated here. At the earliest, greater persecution of Christians was committed by the ruling monarch and then with the emerging strength of new converts, power of rulers was challenged. Chaos, grief, desolated the ambience of that time, found expression in their works too. Unpleasant circumstances have definitely moulded the character of art of that era but the transformation in the aesthetics of modern times is beyond comprehension. *The Four Tetrarchs* and the *sculpture of Constantine* reflect uncertainty, and dread of the situation but one cannot get unsympathetic to the pieces of art because the universal language of aesthetics is not yet lost. These works address their era, and communicate the unpleasant and chaotic situation of their times with the observers. In the modern specimens of art such means of communication are lost.

The pictorial symbols of the non-verbal

Fig. 8: Constantine

Fig.10: The Slave Ship, W.J.B.Turner

: The Fountain by
amp

language of art took anomalous turn in the modern times. It shattered the power of visual communication along with the aesthetic value, so much so, that at places, it became difficult to differentiate between art and non-art objects. Excessive materialism smashed the link between art and beauty. It led Paul Duchamp (1887-1968), the French painter to display *Urinal* as a piece of sculpture and labelled it *The Fountain*, fig.9 (Rathus 2004). It shocked general public along with aestheticians because in the entire history of visual art such a philistine act happened for the first time. In reality it was immediate reaction of the artists against atrocities of the 1st World War.

Fig.11: The Raft of Medusa by Gericault

Many times, in the history of mankind, artists faced revolts, social unrest or wars, and they took the subjects of tragedy as worthy of artistic discourses. Pictorial interpretations of these subjects were actually their aesthetic discourses that kept on changing but never deviated from their value of beauty. It reminds Aristotle's conceit that it is not the subjects of tragedy that evokes euphoric sensation about pictorial arts but tracing their analogies in the real world instigates aesthetic pleasure in the observer (Schaper 1968). The English landscape painter, W.J B Turner (1775-1851) painted *The Slave Ship* in 1840, actually entitled: *Slavers throwing overboard the Dead and the Dying-Typhon coming*, fig.10. It depicted a heinous incident of 1781, when captain of the ship *Zong* ordered to through hundred and thirty-three slaves overboard just to collect insurance payment, a highly tragic and inhuman incident, but it was romantically conceived and artistically represented by Turner. At first glance the painting seems to be of a sea storm in deep red sunset, and ship is placed in the far of distance with its red masts.

But closer view reveals that the dead bodies are floating and hands and feet of the dark-complexioned corpses are chained. Minute analysis reveals the presence of sea-monsters and large fish

Fig.12: Liberty Leading by Delacroix

preparing to engulf the bodies. Seagulls too are flying over for their prey. But the general view is of sunset and approaching typhoon, masterly delineating dynamic powers of nature. The hide and seek of the drowning slaves indicated through trivial symbol, but beauty, and colours of the natural forces are so captivating that causes

aesthetic euphoria that defines value of the art work. Similarly, *Raft of Medusa* (1894) by Gericault (1791-1824), and *Liberty Leading* (1830), figs.11-12, by Delacroix (1798-1863); both French Romantic Realist painters, are delineations of war and revolt but romantically conceived and realistically rendered by the artists. These paintings communicate the historical incidents, perfectly defining human tragedy but through artistic means, keeping the aesthetic value intact. These are so captivating in their representations that an observer can get involved for hours.

A rapid transformation, rather metamorphosis took place in the visual vocabulary of art after the World War 1st (1914-1918) and then with the advent of the World War 2nd (1939-45). It was actually a state of disbelief on the rational powers of man, the power of intellect, reason and above all moral values. So, at the earliest the artists took refuge in the subconscious because of the promulgating Freudian theories, actually meant for psychoanalysis. Devastation of the Great War 1st was so immense that almost sixteen million people lost their lives. It was for the first time in the entire history of mankind that so many casualties occurred within days, producing extremely negative impact on the sensitive souls

of creative people. Most immediate reaction was their retreat from the conscious realities through plight into the subconscious, on the grounds, that progress at the cost of ethical values is no progress at all.

The 20th century was a breakthrough in the technical advancement that brought extreme comfort in the life of man. It was considered to be the ideal era in the advanced history of mankind. But the

Fig.14: The Bride Stripped Bare by her Bachelors, Even

visionaries like Nietzsche proclaimed very early that material advancement will erode values and will command brutality (Jacobus 1986). It was proved in the 1st World War, when the death toll reached millions within seconds that blocked cerebrating minds. The two art movements; Dadaism and Surrealism were the immediate reactions of artists against the barbarianism of modern progress. The former was an anti-art movement expressing frustration and rage, when artists were passing through the death throes of their fellows. Life appeared to be meaningless, as the apparent progress proved in reality to be extreme demotion of humanitarian values. Artists were, therefore, in a state of anachronism (Ades 2010), as life appeared lacking significance and so was the formation of aesthetics.

Artists turned ironic; instead of altogether abandoning their creative activities that could have been another reaction. Art being a human instinct, so, the artist became masochistic in the unexpected devastating situation.

Dadaists moved in dual direction; either promulgated nihilism or got ironic, leading to games, buffoonery or masks. In both ways, it was a violent attack on aesthetics of the visual culture. Among numerous examples, the *Bicycle Wheel*, (1913), and *The Bride Stripped Bare by her Bachelors, Even*, (1915-23), figs.13-14, are mere specimens of shattered aesthetics or just a fulfilment of the instinctive need of man to produce art. Art at that time was labelled as a “debased currency”, only a matter of connoisseurs. Jacques Vache (1895-1919), in 1917 wrote ironically and with despair to his friend Andre Breton, “Art does not exist, of course - so it is useless to sing- however! We make art because it is thus and not otherwise. So, we like neither art nor artists” (Ades 2010). Francis Picabia (1879-1953) disdainfully looked at modern art, and compared it with an old pair of trousers that seem new at a glance when brought back from the cleaner. He stressed that, “Artists are cleaners, don’t let yourself be taken in by them. True modern works of art are made not by artists but quite simply by men” (Ades 2010). The fault was not on the part of the artists. It was an aftermath of the war trauma, that, in its most severe form, can cause disorders in Neurobiological mechanisms. Among the post-traumatic disorders, if grey matter of the brain is damaged, it causes difficulty in interpreting sensory information (Comer 2015).

But modern art is a reaction against brutality of the age that led the artists to many different reactions, rapidly growing reprisals, one after the other.

Fig.15: I and the Village by Chagall

After nihilism, next move was the retreat from conscious realities by taking hideout into the subconscious. Realizing bitterness of conscious truths, artists

took refuge beyond consciousness and entered the surreal world. It is pure psychic automatism, based on thought but completely free from any preoccupation or control of reason, morality or of aesthetics. Art, in other words had become an unbridled horse, came out of the domains of cognitive experiences. The popularity of Freudian theories directed to explore subconscious to reveal inner hidden unfulfilled cravings of an individual that mutely shape his behaviour. Artist was not desired to enter into the domains of unreasoned and unintelligible world of the concealed

Fig.16: Smile of my Blonde by Joan Miro

part of human brain. But the contemptible situation resulted from the Great War, intimidated beliefs of artists and they took retreat beyond the conscious domains. So, artists started painting, meaningless world that can be viewed in dreams only, which they labelled as surreal or super real. Marc Chagall (1887-1985) painted scenes that could be viewed in dreams, his paintings depict figures

and objects floating in the air, upside down figures, images within images, unusual combination of objects. Although objects are taken from the real world but their placing in space is illogical and even out of the bounds of imagination. In his painting, entitled *I and the Village* (1911), *Fig. 15*, all the accessories of a village and activities related to the clime are delineated but their representation is not logical. It is unusual combination of space that can arouse enigma, or a situation of surprise, but not aesthetic euphoria that substantiates authentic judgement of the objects of beauty. Similar is the case of his other paintings.

Creative people of that era also started practising automatic writings or automatic drawings, which may be viewed as productions of the state of muse, when the cerebral powers of brain are at slumber. Joan Miro (1893-1983), painted *Smile of My*

Blonde, in 1925, *fig.16*, which is under the sway of psychic automatism, logic extinct and it has no visual appeal. The element of smile is something to be deciphered from various elements introduced in the pictorial space. It is a combination of unusual elements; parts of human body, insects or lines of cobweb, but the focal point of the painting is brain of a triangular feminine face. Eyes of the queer face are composed of flowers and leaves. This is anomalous representation which is unusual to the senses.

The state of dormant intellect increased further with the eruption of 2nd World War, when the American B-29, dropped a bomb in 1945 on Hiroshima that wiped out 90% of the city, and 80,000 people within seconds. Tens of thousands later died of radiation. It was the most severe blow on the civilized world. The two Great Wars buried aesthetics under piles of ashes and also the aesthetic visual

culture, on which was raised human supremacy. It was shattered into debris. Completely thought out and reasoned practices in art were abruptly converted to fallacious standards, and spiritless apparitions took hold of the entire domain of creativity. A glance at Max Ernst's painting *Of This Man Shall Know Nothing* (1942), *fig.17*, defines nothing but confusion. The upside-down man in unusual posture, held in the air by some delicate strings of thread, and a few other beings rendered in geometric shapes communicate nothing but baffled state of affairs and irritability. It seems that the cerebral powers of the creator

Fig.17: *Of this Man Shall Know Nothing*, by Max Ernst

are locked and with this deprivation he is trying to fulfil his instinct of creativity.

Kierkegaard (1813-1855), the first Existentialist philosopher, based his art and literary criticism on dialectical pluralities of aesthetical or ethical values. He proclaimed that a work of art is solely judged on internal aesthetic grounds, by viewing correspondence to its essential idea, ignoring its correlations with social or ethical attitudes. He opines that human encounter in their lives, the choice of two radically opposing modes of existence; the aesthetic pleasure or the ethical path of moral values (Pattison 1986). The materialism of modern age has put the ethical side at stakes that has brought into being constraints and deficiencies of a purely aesthetic existence, in the sense of Kierkegaard, producing nasty representations of art. Because the avarice of the age has debased ethics and separated it from aesthetics. This is what led Fascists to bombard Guernica, only to test their weapons and analogous are the responses of artists of the time.

A path of louder protest is adopted by Picasso in his *Guernica*, 1937, fig.18. It is an expression of the emotive self of Picasso because his hometown Guernica was devastated by the fascists' bombing. Neither space is logical nor representation of animate beings realistic but the transformed aesthetics is more audible than perceptible. Brutality is expressed through unbearable cries of men along with the innocent souls of animals, both represented in symbolic forms. The howling bulls, howling horse in unbearable pain, enflamed and bandaged tail of another animal, species of which is not defined; either it is back of a bull or of a horse. Dismantled and distorted parts of body, excessively bandaged hands, feet and arms are expressive of savagery, caused by the

Fig.18: Guernica by Picasso

modern development of war culture. Although the painting is expressive of brutal vitality but its analogies cannot be traced from the corporeal world, as defined by Aristotle for the judgement of such subjects of art. It is a by-product of the surreal-retreat of emotional pangs of the artist, expressed through abstract forms of the real world, transformed into diminutive signs of atrocities. It shows that courage of the artist is lost in the unfathomed brutality of the so-called modern progress.

Till that a link with the physical world is maintained in one way or the other, but the story does not end here. Schopenhauer (1788-1860), the German Philosopher, predicted earlier that an inevitable doom is eclipsing the modern world (Pattison 164). The transformation of the aesthetic visual culture continued unendingly with the accelerating vicious entangling, known as modern development. The real metamorphosis of aesthetics took place with complete deviation from the physical along with the rapid departure from norms of beauty. Against the age of depression and devastation, when man got assured, that technological advancement has altogether failed to procure political or social progress. It disillusioned the sensitive souls of artists making them so desperate that they urgently searched for some novel or more unusual vocabulary, because a crisis occurred in the subject matter

Fig. 19: Violet, Green and Red by Rothko

too. A complete mutation in aesthetic visual culture is discernible from then onwards. Mark Rothko (1903-1970), introduced colour field paintings, based on flat colours spread on canvases without delineating any form or shape. His painting entitled *No.14* (1960), and another *Violet, Green and Red* (1951), *fig.19*, are saturated

with flat rich colours. It is interpreted that Rothko and his companions focused on the act of painting itself, uninterrupted by any subject, and colours too, are spontaneously spread on the canvases. It usurped the intellectual side of art, devouring its function of visual communication.

Another dimension of a similar type is the works of Jackson Pollock (1912-1956), a forerunner of abstract expressionism, and the pioneer of drip painting, *fig.20*. It is interpreted that he worked in a state of ecstasy. Music is played on, while canvas is already

Fig.20: Convergence by Jackson Pollock

spread on the ground. Pollock then picked buckets of colours and poured these on the canvas while moving on it, or all around it, in the state of rapture. Then painting was touched a little bit, at places with brush.

This was the new aesthetics, emerged as an aftermath of war. Can the state of ecstasy be achieved suddenly by playing music or by pouring paints on a canvas? It seems quite ironical.

Fig.21: Woman-1 by Willem De Kooning

Fig.22: Woman-III by Willem De Kooning

Height of metamorphosis of aesthetics can be viewed in the modern Aphrodites of Willem De Kooning (1904-1997), transformed into apparitions, *figs.21-22*. Women in abnormal figures and features are rendered in the rough slapdash techniques of Kooning, lacking refinement of details or draughtsmanship, apart from beauty. His other works also developed on analogous rough technique of quick brush strokes. It can happen only, when faith on the aesthetics of living is lost. Weirdness replaced beauty with the shattering

belief on values, which hindered the processes of visual communication, a characteristic innate in artefacts, even of the primitive times. Artefacts were considered as the primary sources of information of their times, which continuously functioned on analogous lines but prior to the modern metamorphosis. Metamorphosis is basically a biological term, associated with development of animal bodily structures, subject to obvious physical changes through cell growth. The word, in this context is taken in positive sense of meaning. But here, it is metamorphosis of aesthetic culture of visual arts, resulted from the unexpected brutality, caused by the so-called material progress. It is strange that in the age of reason, artists either took refuge in the subconscious, or adopted spontaneous behaviours, the paths where reason lays dormant. It is more surprising to think that after passing through the long process of manual skill, and after attaining supremacy of perfection, primitive spontaneity has been adopted in the artificial guise of progress. It is ironic that each artist of the time evolved his self-enclosed ethical structure, eliminating both; aesthetics and ethics. All the principals of

aesthetics or beauty and of its judgement are lost in the mist of modern. It compels one to think and question, does art exist now or has it become extinct? In other words, is it art or no art, whether Adolf Hitler was right when he labelled it as “Degenerate Art”? Because beauty is determined as a value, merit of which are subjected to aesthetic discourses. But now weirdness has replaced beauty, spontaneity has taken the place of learnt behaviours; skill has taken shape of trickiness. To be original is the hallmark of modern aesthetics, instead of the strength of its pictorial expressions. Art is now subservient to verbal discourses, losing its power of the non-verbal communication. The confusing multiplicity of visual styles started emerging from the third quarter of the nineteenth century with excessive materialism of the age and reached at its unfathomed culmination in the 20th and 21st centuries.

Its apogee is the invisible sculpture of the Italian artist Salvatore Garau, titled: *"Io Sono"* or *"I Am."* He claimed that it is created from air and spirit. It exists in vacuum, which has energy that can be converted into particles, and he sculpted those particles into an invisible shape. He proclaimed that it is like shaping the vision of God. It is sold for almost \$18300. Nothing exists physically but Salvatore insists that it exists within 5x5ft square. In other words, propaganda has replaced physical existence, and artists have completely casted aside the idealistic stance of beauty. It is actually a retort against the materialism of the modern age, where progress and morality have become antonyms. So has become the interpretation of beauty.

Thus, in the modern times the parameters of beauty have been metamorphosised continuously. The process began mutely with eroding of values, caused by excessive materialism of the modern development. It promulgated the Darwinian concept of “survival of the fittest”, as the technologically advanced nations seized lands and resources of the underdeveloped, resurrecting brutality of the primitives. The Darwinian concept celebrated primitivism, leading to reversal of the human aesthetics that had once boosted human status as vicegerent of the Lord. The modern aesthetics emerged as a response against logic and reasoning of the era, promoting

rationality in the irrational, leaving no distinction between weirdness and beauty.

References

1. Ades, Dawn "Dadaism and Surrealism" Modern Art. Ed. David Britt. London: Thams &
2. Hudson, 1974, 1975, 1989, 1999, 2010. 203-252
3. Beckett, Wendy. The Story of Painting. London: Dorling Kindersley, 1994. 341
4. Budd, Makolm. "Aesthetic Attitude." Routledge Encyclopedia of Philosophy. Ed. Edward Craig. London and New York: Routledge, 1998. 51-55, 59-61.
5. Bungay, Stephen. Beauty and Truth: A Study of Hegel's Aesthetics. Oxford, New York: Oxford University Press, 1987. 23-30
6. Burger, Ronna. "Aristotle." Key Writers on Art: from Antiquity to the Nineteenth Century. Ed. Chris Murray. New York: Routledge. 2004. 7-12.
7. Comer, Ronald J. Abnormal Psychology, 9th Edition. New York: Worth Publishers, 2015. 183-192
8. Encyclopaedia Britannica, Vol-1. 15th edition. Chicago: University of Chicago, 1986. 123-125.
9. Fadiman, Clifton P. "Friedrich Nietzsche." Philosophies of Art and Beauty. Ed. Arbert Hofstadter. Richard Kuhn. London: University of Chicago Press, 1964. 496-498.
10. Graham, Gordon. Philosophy of the Art: An Introduction to Aesthetics. 1997. 2000. New York: Routledge, 2005. 3-5, 52-53
11. Gupta, Shyamala. Art, Beauty and Creativity: Indian and Western Aesthetics. New Delhi: D. K. Print world (P) Ltd, 1999. 93-99
12. Jacobus, Lee A. Humanities, the Evolution of Values. New York: McGraw-Hill, 1986. 496-499.
13. Jowett, Benjamin., Tr. "Plato." Philosophies of Art and Beauty. Albert Hofstadter. Richard
14. Kuhns. Eds. 1964. Chicago: The University of Chicago Press, 1976. 3-77.
15. Pattison, George. Nihilism and the Novel, Kierkegaard's Literary Reviews. British Journal of Aesthetics, vol. 26, No 2, Spring 1986. 162-66
16. Rathus, Lois Fichner. Understanding Art. New York: Thomson, 2004. 484
17. Schaper, Eva. Prelude to Aesthetics. London: George Allen & Unwin Ltd, 1968. 111-114.