

AESTHETIC MANIPULATION:
BEHIND THE NAME OF BEAUTY

The pursuit of beauty has a deep-rooted history in human culture. In our quest to achieve aesthetic satisfaction, we have consistently manipulated our surroundings and ourselves. However, the omnipresence of manipulation has led society to view it as normal, causing us to gradually become desensitized to its effects. A possible reason for this social blindness is the broad interpretation of the term “design,” which encompasses the construction and manipulation of objects by humans, allowing us to rationalize and even glorify our aesthetic manipulations. Our world is saturated with design, prioritizing aesthetic satisfaction over practicality.

We need to confront and scrutinize our actions to understand the deep-seated, subconscious desire for beauty. By analyzing both historical and contemporary instances of aesthetic manipulations, we can gain insights into how aesthetics evolve alongside societal developments and why humans persistently pursue novel aesthetic experiences, even when the line between beauty and monstrosity becomes blurred.

Throughout history, humans have used manipulations to achieve aesthetic gratification. Conversely, aesthetics may serve as a mere veneer for manipulation, concealing darker motives behind it. Failure to acknowledge aesthetic manipulations can lead to hidden harms and an uncertain future.

Understanding the essence, underlying causes and societal impacts of aesthetic manipulation can help us better be aware of and deal with similar problems happening today. With the advent of new technologies, this research may inspire a path toward less destructive and more sustainable aesthetic pursuits in the future.

What drives humans to find fascination in elements that might be considered monstrous and deformed, pushing the boundaries of aesthetics even when beauty is not the primary concern?

What are the underlying motives and hidden agendas behind the pursuit of aesthetics, often used as a facade to conceal manipulative actions and intentions?

In the contemporary era characterized by the dominance of the aesthetic economy, how does mass media influence and shape our aesthetic preferences and perception, what are the implications of this influence on society?

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INTRODUCTION



Five years ago, during a visit to Zhongshan Park in Beijing, I encountered an intriguing goldfish exhibition at Yuyuan Garden. Yuyuan adopts a traditional Chinese cloister-style architectural structure, but unlike the lattice windows on the walls of the ordinary corridors, Yuyuan uses inlaid showcases which contain water and raise live goldfish. Although I have kept goldfish as pets since childhood, I have only raised the most common species. Therefore, it was the first time I had seen so many different varieties of goldfish, with a total of 34. However, unlike the wonderful scenery expected, almost all the goldfish were mutilated or sick. Perhaps because of the off-season and poor management, I saw blind goldfish, overturned goldfish, goldfish that had lost their eyes, goldfish that couldn't stand upright, goldfish whose scales almost fell off, goldfish with skin diseases... All half dead. I lost interest in taking photos and felt both horrible and disgusting. I couldn't understand the significance of such a goldfish exhibition, prompting deeper exploration into the motivations behind human-driven aesthetic manipulations.

1 Paul Robinson, "Against Domestication," The New York Times, February 10, 1985, <https://www.nytimes.com/1985/02/10/books/against-domestication.html>.

After further research, I found that goldfish are an extreme example of manipulation for aesthetic reasons. Over a thousand years, the rare red crucian carp mutant that originally appeared by chance has evolved into a wide variety of exotic goldfish species with significant characteristics and stable breeding. Human preferences for certain genetic traits in goldfish have driven selective breeding, shaping the mutated features that, in turn, influence aesthetic preferences. However, these characteristics are rare precisely because they are expressed by defective genes, making survival challenging for these mutants. Originally, only the fittest could survive natural selection. The phenomenon reflects a reversal of natural selection, where the pursuit of aesthetic ideals overrides evolutionary fitness.

Goldfish are not the only one, nor are they the most extreme. A similar and more common example is the pet dog. In addition to specific physical features, humans also pursue purebred blood, which leads to more serious health problems. If we broaden our horizons, we will find that such aesthetic manipulation exists not only in other animals, but also in humans, and it's not even rare. Ancient dignitaries could bring all kinds of things that satisfy their aesthetic preferences to the eyes with a single command, then gradually form a widely popular social fashion. In addition to plants and animals, women and children are also common objects of manipulation. These puppets must strive to move closer to the specific standards of beauty, and endure the pain it brings to please the powerful.¹

As society evolves, the democratization of aesthetic taste through consumerism has made aesthetic manipulation

more pervasive. We can freely choose the goods we want, and pay special attention to the aesthetic value of goods, although we may end up buying things we don't need.² The development of technology has also made aesthetic manipulation easier. Whether it is the increasingly popular cosmetic surgery, or the perfect figure and stylish outfit constantly pushed on social media, humans are constantly influenced by advertising, and the pursuit of beauty has intensified more and more.

Therefore, aesthetic manipulation is far more pervasive than we think. Humans need to break free from the inherent mindset under the influence of customs and advertising, and realize how aesthetic manipulation, which has long been ingrained in our culture, is constantly causing more and more serious damage to societal relations. Although aesthetic manipulation cannot be eradicated, we may find a more balanced and symbiotic approach from understanding and analyzing.

2 Graciela Batlle Cestero, "You Are What You Buy: The Aesthetics of Consumerism on Campus," The Michigan Daily, December 8, 2022, <https://www.michigandaily.com/opinion/you-are-what-you-buy-the-aesthetics-of-consumerism-on-campus/>.



METHODOLOGY

This article uses qualitative research methods to study core issues through my subjective observations of the real world and a large amount of literature reading. In order to better allow readers to understand the universality of aesthetic activities, this article first conducts a philosophical analysis of the concept of beauty, including the controversy of whether beauty is objective or subjective, which is mainly based on the *Stanford Encyclopedia of Philosophy* and Ye Lang's *Foundation of Aesthetics*.³ I studied the evolution of human views on the nature of beauty in a longitudinal time range, as well as the similarities and differences between Chinese and Western aesthetic views. In the following two chapters, I analyze the two main underlying causes of aesthetic manipulation: power and money, which I summarized by combing through examples of aesthetic manipulation in history. In the power part, the views in Yifu Tuan's book *Dominance and Affection: The Making of Pets* coincide with mine, and therefore provide a lot of argument support.⁴ I also used a similar classification method as in the book. In terms of money, both Gernot Böhme's "Aesthetic

Economy" theory and Olivier Assouly's *Aesthetic Capitalism. An Essay on the Industrialisation of Taste* had a profound impact on me.⁵ They both discuss the important influence of aesthetics in economic activities. Through the analysis of the two major causes and related examples, I further summarized the possible harm caused by aesthetic manipulation and divided it into four categories according to different groups. I conclude with a speculative description of possible future forms of aesthetic manipulation.

Furthermore, I designed an archive of aesthetic manipulation cases using the form of cards. These cases are partly overlapped with the examples mentioned in the paper. Each card shows a case, with one image drawn by myself, name, and time of invention on the front side, as well as a basic introduction and problems behind the manipulation on the back side. The name and time were printed on white paper, cut, and stuck to the card, to give the impression of biological specimens. Each card is placed in a plastic sleeve for easy preservation. The categories include plants, animals, women, men, and groups. Through this archive, I hope to convey the profound impact of aesthetic manipulation on society more effectively and intuitively to a wider group, hoping to arouse people's attention to the sustainability of aesthetics.

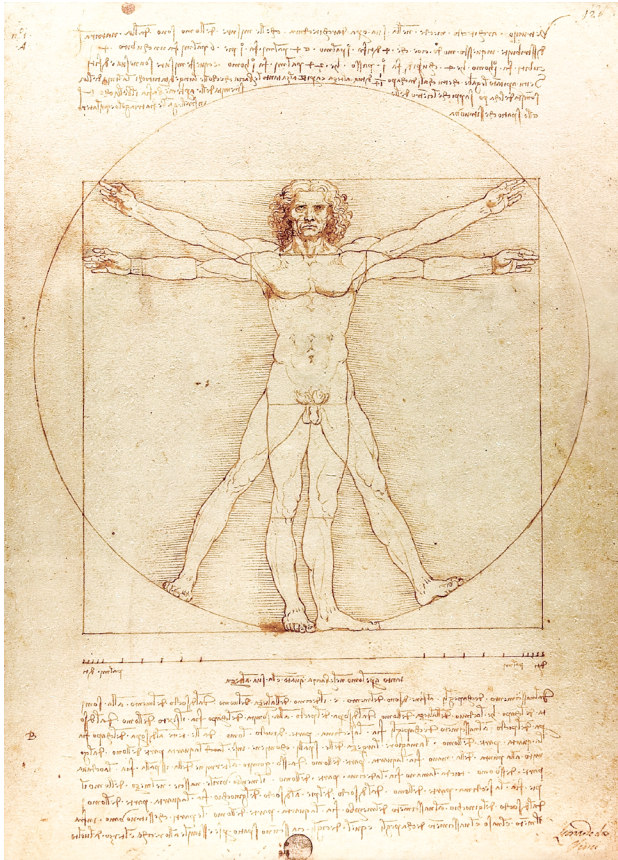


3 Stanford University, "Stanford Encyclopedia of Philosophy (Summer 2022 Edition)," 2022, <https://plato.stanford.edu/archives/sum2022/index.html>; Ye Lang 叶朗, Meixue yuanli 美学原理 [Foundation of aesthetics] (Beijing: Beijing daxue chubanshe, 2009);³⁶ Nancy Stalker, "Flower Empowerment: Rethinking Japan's Traditional Arts as Women's Labor," *Rethinking Japanese Feminisms*, ed. Julia C. Bullock, Ayako Kano, and James Welker (Honolulu, HI, 2017; online edn, Hawaii Scholarship Online, May 24, 2018), 105, <https://doi.org/10.21313/hawaii/9780824866693.003.0007>.

4 YI-FU TUAN, *Dominance and Affection: The Making of Pets* (Yale University Press, 1984), <http://www.jstor.org/stable/j.ctt1cc2k24.10>.

5 Gernot Böhme, "Aesthetic Economy," *International Lexicon of Aesthetics*, 2019, https://lexicon.mimesisjournals.com/international_lexicon_of_aesthetics_item_detail.php?item_id=66; Olivier Assouly, *Le Capitalisme Esthétique : Essai Sur L'industrialisation Du Goût*, 2008, <https://ci.nii.ac.jp/ncid/BA87441643>.

THE NATURE OF BEAUTY



When we refer to the concept of “beauty”, what do we mean? We may think today’s sky is beautiful and the puppy we meet on the road is beautiful. However, what is the nature of beauty?

In fact, the nature of beauty has always been a basic issue in Western philosophy that has been widely discussed and has yet to be settled. If you have just tried to think about the common connection behind all these things that are considered beautiful, you may embark on the road of finding a standard of beauty that can cover and explain everything. It is in this way that the most primitive concept of beauty in Western philosophy summarizes from beautiful things the objective attributes and characteristics that can represent and define beauty. Therefore, “beauty consists of an arrangement of integral parts into a coherent whole, according to proportion, harmony, symmetry, and similar notions.”⁶ This standard of beauty was first born in Pythagoreanism, which was deeply influenced by mathematics. They believed that beauty is the proportion and harmony expressed in numerical relationships.⁷

6 Crispin Sartwell. “Beauty,” Stanford Encyclopedia of Philosophy, ed. Edward N. Zalta. (Metaphysics Research Lab, Stanford University, 2022), <https://plato.stanford.edu/archives/sum2022/entries/beauty/>.

7 Aiste Celkyte, “Ancient Aesthetics,” The Internet Encyclopedia of Philosophy, accessed October 16, 2023, <https://iep.utm.edu/ancient-aesthetics/>.

8 Aristotle, "Metaphysics," trans. W. D. Ross, The Internet Classics Archive, Massachusetts Institute of Technology, accessed October 16, 2023, <https://classics.mit.edu/Aristotle/metaphysics.html>, Book XIII, Part 3.

9 Ye Lang, 2.

10 Plato, Symposium, trans. Benjamin Jowett (Project Gutenberg, 2008), <https://www.gutenberg.org/files/1600/1600-h/1600-h.htm>.

11 Ye Lang, 31.

12 Sartwell, "Beauty."

13 Sartwell, "Beauty."

Aristotle also put forward a similar point of view, "The chief forms of beauty are order and symmetry and definiteness, which the mathematical sciences demonstrate in a special degree."⁸ It can be seen that mathematical characteristics such as "order", "proportion" and "symmetry" are the essential issues of beauty that proponents of this view focus on.

As the first philosopher to discuss aesthetics from a philosophical perspective,⁹ Plato believed that the nature of beauty is "beauty absolute, separate, simple, and everlasting, which without diminution and without increase, or any change, is imparted to the ever-growing and perishing beauties of all other things."¹⁰ The similarity between Plato's ideas and classical aesthetics is that they both believe that beauty is objective, but unlike the specific features that classical aesthetics summed up from existing objects such as paintings, buildings, and figures, Plato explained the nature of beauty from the perspective of objective idealism. Plato believed that beauty exists before what is beautiful in the real world, and there is an absolute, abstract, sacred, and eternal objective idea of beauty.¹¹ Plotinus also put forward a similar point of view. He believed that beauty is the source of unity between different things, a perfect unity.¹² This objective spiritual noumenon is expressed in Shaftesbury's theory as the beauty of God.¹³

However, the limitations of the objective view of beauty are obvious. If we admit that beauty is completely objective, it means that beauty can exist without the perceiver and is the same in anyone's eyes, which is contrary to common sense. In fact, people often argue about whether something is beautiful, and even the same object in the eyes of the same person may

change the judgment of beauty with the passage of time and the change of mood. Therefore, some philosophers believe that beauty is subjective, and they try to explain the nature of beauty from the subjective psychology of the viewer. For example, in the 18th century, Hume argued that "Beauty is no quality in things themselves: It exists merely in the mind which contemplates them; and each mind perceives a different beauty."¹⁴ Kant also believed that the judgment of beauty is based on personal experience, and varies from person to person.¹⁵

Nevertheless, Hume and Kant found that there are problems with viewing beauty as a purely subjective state. If beauty is only related to individual experience, then it loses its recognized value.¹⁶ But in reality, people believe that there are high and low tastes, and try to make others change their judgments through convincing reasons in the debate on beauty and taste. Moreover, our judgments are generally consistent to a large extent. Taste judgments have a built-in "universalization" that "anyone similarly situated ought to have the same experience and reach the same judgment."¹⁷

Therefore, we cannot adopt either of the two completely pure and absolute positions of "beauty is objective" or "beauty is subjective". Taste, or the ability to discover beauty, seems to be both subjective and objective. To resolve this paradox, modern Western philosophy has attempted to establish more refined theoretical views to distinguish subjectivity from objectivity, or to integrate subjectivity and objectivity by introducing new concepts. For example, Crispin Sartwell proposed that beauty should be attributed not only to the subject and object, but also to the relationship

14 David Hume, "Of the Standard of Taste," *Essays Moral and Political*, (London: George Routledge and Sons, 1894), 136.

15 Sartwell, "Beauty."

16 Sartwell, "Beauty."

17 Sartwell, "Beauty."

18 Sartwell, "Beauty."
19 Sartwell, "Beauty."
20 Ye Lang, 37.
21 Ye Lang, 78.
22 Ye Lang, 53.
23 Ye Lang, 78.
24 Ye Lang, 79.
25 Ye Lang, 38.
26 Ye Lang, 64.

between them and even to a broader context.¹⁸ Alexander Nehamas argued that the experience of beauty is to connect the observer with the object in a community of appreciation.¹⁹

By drawing on the ideas of traditional Chinese culture, Chinese philosophy has also found a new way of aesthetic thought. Similar to Sartwell's point of view, but as early as the 1950s, Zhu Guangqian proposed that "beauty is neither entirely in things nor entirely in the mind, but in the relationship between mind and things."²⁰ Zhu advocated that beauty is the unity of subjectivity and objectivity, which goes beyond the traditional Western dichotomy of subject and object. As a matter of fact, the reason why we feel that there is a contradiction in understanding the nature of beauty is that, under the influence of epistemology, we are accustomed to viewing the world with a dichotomy of subject and object, and regard all things as objects we know or use.²¹ This prompts us to absolutize the materialized self and regard the relationship between things as opposed to each other.²² In spirit, people are confined to the limited space of the self.²³ Beauty transcends not only the substantiality of things, but also the finiteness of the self.²⁴

Ye Lang further summarized Zhu's aesthetic viewpoint as beauty lies in "Yi Xiang".²⁵ Yi Xiang is not exactly the same as the image in Western languages. It does not refer to the concept of image in the fields of epistemology and psychology, but is closer to the concept of image in Western modern poetry and French philosopher Sartre.²⁶

The implication of "Yi Xiang" (image) is <<mingling emotion with scenes>>, in which "emotion"

relates to "Yi", meaning "coming from man">>, while "scenes" relates to "Xiang", that indicates something coming from nature. "Yi Xiang" is a precise summary of the aesthetic relationship between man and nature.²⁷

Ye Lang expressed the nature of beauty in a more poetic and Chinese-cultural way. Beauty, that is, the world of images, is a complete perceptual world full of meaning and interest generated in aesthetic activities. It is also a real world where man and all things are integrated. Beauty allows us to return to the original state of existence of humans and nature, to the spiritual realm of freedom. Beauty is not only the unity of subjectivity and objectivity, but also the unity of transcendence and reversion.²⁸

27 Gu Feng and Dai Wenjing, "What Is the Aesthetics in China?," DOAJ (DOAJ: Directory of Open Access Journals), December 1, 2017, <https://doi.org/10.13128/aisthesis-22414>.

28 Ye Lang, 82-83.

PARADISE: THE EMBODIMENT OF POWER & DOMINANCE

The word Paradise comes from the Persian word for garden, where everything in the garden is for the pleasure of the master, and only the master has the freedom to enter and exit.²⁹ Paradise, as a gathering of natural elements, is the ultimate embodiment of power control in the name of beauty. Only by peeping into the mystery of the garden can we realize the dark truth hidden behind the seemingly perfect, innocent, and harmonious appearance.

29 YI-FU TUAN,
"Children and Women," *Dominance and Affection: The Making of Pets* (Yale University Press, 1984), 126.
<http://www.jstor.org/stable/j.ctt1cc2k24.10>.



ROCKS & STONES

30 Graham Parkes, "The Role of Stone in the Chinese Rock Garden," *The Bloomsbury Research Handbook of Chinese Aesthetics and Philosophy of Art* (Bloomsbury Publishing, 2021), 277.

31 Department of Asian Art, "Chinese Gardens and Collectors' Rocks," *The Met's Heilbrunn Timeline of Art History*, October 2004, https://www.metmuseum.org/toah/hd/cgrk/hd_cgrk.htm.

32 Patricia Buckley Ebre, "Rocks and Mountains," *A Visual Sourcebook of Chinese Civilization*, accessed December 11, 2023, <https://depts.washington.edu/chinaciv/home/tgarrock.htm>.

Rocks form the basic framework and important focal point of classical Chinese gardens.³⁰ Chinese gardens seek to evoke a sense of being in the larger natural world in a small space, so the composition of rocks often symbolizes immortal mountains and towering peaks.³¹ For example, in front of the Barrier of Clouds Hall in the Garden of the Master of Nets, there is a rockery made of stacked single stones, which reminds people of the mountain retreat favored by Taoists.³² Some rocks are arranged at the edges of artificial streams and ponds, making the artificial landscape more like real nature.



Monolithic boulders are also an important decorative element in gardens due to their symbolic significance in shape. Ancient Chinese loved stones with strange and twisted overall shapes that appeared to have many penetrating holes.³³ They are reminiscent of caves that are believed to contain abundant natural energy (qi, the Taoist concept of energy). A typical representative is the Taihu stone produced in Suzhou, where the limestone on the lake bed has been eroded in an irregular way due to years of water wave impact and the chemical composition of the lake. Such stones are so expensive that wealthy families would even pay for promising-looking lumps and deposit them at the bottom of the Taihu Lake for decades to produce the appropriate degree of erosion.³⁴ In gardens, they stand like sculptures, symbolizing lions or dragons.³⁵



33 Ebre, "Rocks and Mountains."

34 Maggie Keswick, *The Chinese Garden* (London: Frances Lincoln, 2003), 176.

35 Peter Blundell Jones and Jan Woudstra, "Social Order versus 'Natural' Disorder in the Chinese Garden," *Studies in the History of Gardens & Designed Landscapes* 34, no. 2 (2014): 161, <https://doi.org/10.1080/14601176.2013.842066>.

36 "The World of Scholars' Rocks: Gardens, Studios, and Paintings," The Metropolitan Museum of Art, accessed March 26, 2024, <https://www.metmuseum.org/exhibitions/listings/2000/world-of-scholars>.

37 Department of Asian Art, "Chinese Gardens and Collectors' Rocks."

38 "Scholar's Rocks," Asian Art Newspaper, April 27, 2022, <https://asianartnewspaper.com/scholars-rocks/>.

Smaller rocks are placed on literati desks. Its main aesthetic criteria are the same as garden stones, including "thinness (shou), openness (tou), perforations (lou), and wrinkling (zhou)."³⁶ This means that scholars prefer vertically oriented stones, usually with a top-heavy shape; full of voids and holes; and rich in texture, with wrinkles, dimples, or stripes.³⁷ Rocks with these characteristics made it easier for literati to enter imaginative meditation and were used to inspire the creation of poetry and paintings.³⁸ Therefore, they became highly coveted objects to be collected by the literati class and were particularly appreciated.



FLOWERS

The flower arrangement was introduced to Japan from China along with Buddhism in the 7th century, and gradually developed into a different genre of ikebana art in the 14th century with the rise of the samurai class.³⁹ Originally limited to elite Japanese male practitioners, it was not until the Meiji era (1868-1912) that the government's commitment to compulsory education for women caused the gender ratio in ikebana to completely reverse in just a few decades.⁴⁰ At that time, the idea of "good wife, wise mother" (ryōsai kenbo) was popular in Japanese society, while ikebana conformed to the gender stereotypes of women's demure and servility, helping them create a pleasant family environment. By the 1930s, ikebana had become a necessary household skill for all prospective brides in Japan, otherwise, it was considered shameful.⁴¹ However, the law almost prohibited women from innovating in ikebana in any significant way.⁴² TUAN even argues that ikebana, invented by men and taught to women, was to enable women to "without speech, express her sentiments to her lord."⁴³

39 Diccon Sandrey, "Ikebana: All You Need to Know about Japanese Flower Art," Japan Objects, May 9, 2022, <https://japanobjects.com/features/ikebana>.

40 Nancy Stalker, "Flower Empowerment: Rethinking Japan's Traditional Arts as Women's Labor," Rethinking Japanese Feminisms, ed. Julia C. Bullock, Ayako Kano, and James Welker (Honolulu, HI, 2017; online edn, Hawaii Scholarship Online, May 24, 2018), 105, <https://doi.org/10.21313/hawaii/9780824866693.003.0007>.

41 Stalker, "Flower Empowerment," 106.

42 "History of Ikebana," Sogetsu, June 28, 2019, <https://www.sogetsu.or.jp/en/columns/19842/>.

43 TUAN, "Children and Women," 122.

44 Gwyneth, "Could Ikebana Be Your New Creative Hobby?," *Flowers by Gwyneth* (blog), October 8, 2021, <https://www.flowersbygwyneth.com.au/ikebana-as-a-creative-hobby/>.

45 Sandrey, "Ikebana: All You Need to Know about Japanese Flower Art."

Interestingly, although ikebana means living flowers, fresh-cut flowers are used for a duration of about a week.⁴⁴ In order to create powerful shapes of plants that are still thriving, people use various methods to bend stems and branches: using candle flames to heat and bend, cutting cuts with scissors to create sharp bends, pulling with thin wire...⁴⁵ Ikebana uses artificial techniques and ingenuity in design, only to achieve the ultimate "natural beauty".



46 TUAN, "Fountains and Plants," *Dominance and Affection: The Making of Pets*, 60.

If ikebana is a fleeting beauty obtained through human manipulation, then bonsai attempts to freeze-frame that beauty as best it can. Bonsai is a unique miniature landscape art form in Southeast Asia, represented by China and Japan.⁴⁶ It mainly includes rocks representing mountains, plants representing trees or forests, and water representing lakes or seas.

Bonsai can even include mini pavilions and statues to reflect the characteristics of a miniature world.⁴⁷ In the 6th to 7th centuries, bonsai was introduced to Japan from China and gradually became a leisure interest of the upper-class samurai. To maintain the specific morphological appearance, bonsai plants must be regularly pruned to reduce expansion, including pruning branches and roots as well as picking leaves.⁴⁸ In addition to dwarfing trees, bonsai also pursue extreme modifications of vegetation, such as "corkscrew twists, weird angles, and folds in branches."⁴⁹ These practices are not only a manifestation of human domination over nature, but also related to the desire for immortality.⁵⁰ Curbed and twisted vegetation is like an old man hunched over, symbolizing a long lifespan.

47 TUAN, "Fountains and Plants," 61.

48 Prasann Kumar and Padmanabh Dwivedi, "Bonsai: symbol of culture, ideals, money and beauty," *International Journal of Agriculture, Environment and Biotechnology* 4, no. 2 (2011): 118.

49 Usha Lee McFarling, "The Art of Penjing," *The Huntington*, October 28, 2020, <https://huntington.org/verso/2020/10/art-penjing>.

50 TUAN, "Fountains and Plants," 62.



SHRUBS

51 TUAN, "Fountains and Plants," 51.

52 TUAN, "Fountains and Plants," 55.

53 TUAN, "Fountains and Plants," 52.

54 "The Maze," Historic Royal Palaces, accessed December 11, 2023, <https://www.hrp.org.uk/hampton-court-palace/whats-on/the-maze/#gs.211gia>.

In the Western world, it is a common gardening practice to obtain thick and various forms of low hedgerow by pruning and restraining. Ancient Romans already regarded hedge pruning as an art.⁵¹ In medieval European gardens, tree modeling was widely used, and it varied with time and place. Some plant sculptures had interesting and gorgeous shapes, while others were constrained as part of architectural doors and windows.⁵² They gave people a strong sense of entitlement, a sense of pride that nature could be manipulated at will.

What can satisfy the owner's interest more is the hedge maze, which allows them to enjoy the pleasure of their guests getting lost in the complex winding paths until they call for help.⁵³ Take the Hampton Court Maze, the oldest existing hedge maze in Britain, as an example, it has many twists, turns, and dead ends, and the tall hedges block people's sight and make them lost.⁵⁴

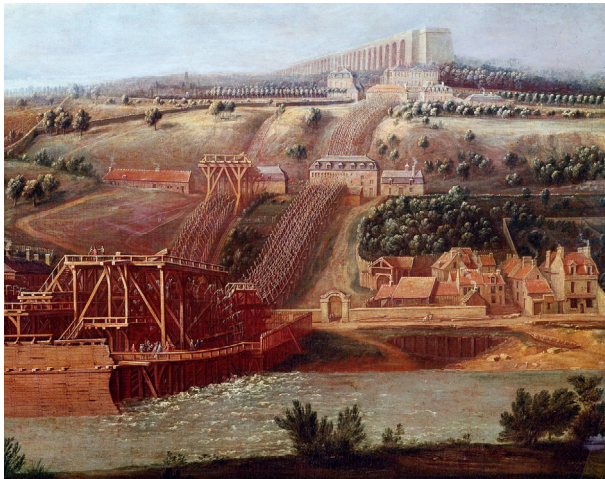


FOUNTAINS

55 Saint-Simon
Louis de Rouvroy, Lucy Norton, and
Nancy Mitford, "Saint-Simon at
Versailles," Internet Archive,
January 1, 1970, [https://archive.org/
details/saintsimonatvers009743
mbp/page/n307/mode/2up?view=
theater](https://archive.org/details/saintsimonatvers009743mbp/page/n307/mode/2up?view=theater).

56 Ulrike Lemmin-
Woolfrey, "The Mechanical Wonder
That Powered Versailles's Fountains,"
National Geographic, August
21, 2020, [https://www.
nationalgeographic.co.uk/history-
and-civilisation/2020/08/the-
mechanical-wonder-that-
powered-versailles-fountains](https://www.nationalgeographic.co.uk/history-and-civilisation/2020/08/the-mechanical-wonder-that-powered-versailles-fountains).

It may be hard to imagine, but Versailles, now the splendid city of waterscapes, was only "most dismal and thankless of spots, without vistas, woods, or water."⁵⁵ Waterscapes were popular at the time and had a certain political role, symbolizing the vitality, power, and wealth of art.⁵⁶ Therefore, in order to demonstrate the power of the king, Louis XIV did not hesitate to spend a lot of money, labor, and life to transport water from the Seine Riv-



er in the center of Paris to the small village of Versailles. Eventually, the fountain became an important feature of Versailles. They not only symbolize mankind's taming of nature, but also extend the sense of domination and control of the castle.⁵⁷ The symmetrical arrangement and repetitive design patterns of the fountains further strengthen the expression of the central power of the French king, symbolizing that he is the only and absolute master there.

In Renaissance and Baroque gardens, a large number of trick fountains were created as humorous mechanical toys.⁵⁸ "Water Surprise" was widely popular, with fountains spraying water on unsuspecting guests at unexpected moments. This childish pleasure is the embodiment of those who exercise power at will for their own entertainment.

57 Christopher
Thacker, "Fountains: Theory and
Practice in the Seventeenth and
Eighteenth Centuries," Occasional
Paper (Garden History Society),
no. 2 (1970): 21, [https://doi.org/10.
2307/1586301](https://doi.org/10.2307/1586301).

58 TUAN, "Fountains
and Plants," 46.

EXOTIC ANIMALS

59 Cathy Newman, "The Epic History of the Humble Goldfish," *Animals*, May 3, 2021, <https://www.nationalgeographic.com/animals/article/history-of-goldfish>.

As a much-loved common animal in Chinese gardens, Goldfish have witnessed centuries of human genetic intervention. Goldfish originated from wild crucian carp, which is usually gray or green. Because of its characteristics of mass reproduction, it has mutations with red or gold pigment cells.⁵⁹ Crucian carp has always been the target of Chinese fishermen since it's a delicacy on the table. In the ninth century, fishermen caught this red and yellow crucian carp mutant but did not eat it because they thought it might be dangerous to eat the rare species; instead, it was placed in the mercy pond of a Buddhist temple.⁶⁰ This



act of release is considered a good deed in Buddhism—an act of self-purification. Better yet is releasing the rare creatures.⁶¹ Therefore, red and yellow crucian carp are protected in the mercy pond and fed by monks. Artificial selection made this mutant gradually evolve into a new species, namely goldfish. Goldfish have been inextricably linked to religion since they first appeared.

Zhao Gou, the founding emperor of the Southern Song Dynasty, loved goldfish very much - so goldfish became a royal pet. Zhao Gou built the Deshou Palace in Hangzhou and dug pools to collect rare goldfish worldwide.⁶² He also set up an official post for goldfish, and the imperial goldfish gradually flourished. New varieties with white and mottled colors appeared for the first time. Under the influence of the royal court, the rich and noble classes also built private fish ponds on a large scale. Since yellow was the exclusive color of ancient Chinese emperors, people outside the royal family were forbidden to raise yellow goldfish.



60 Anna Marie Roos, *Goldfish* (London, UK: Reaktion Books, 2019).

61 Newman, "The Epic History of the Humble Goldfish."

62 Guangtong Xu, *Goldfish of China 1 "The History"*, translated by Lei, YouTube, May 2, 2020, <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=zEit9-0a15I>.

63 Xu, Guangtong 许广彤, Yubashi: jinyu mantang 鱼把式: 金鱼满堂 [Goldfish breeders: full of Goldfish] (Zhongguo qinggongye chubanshe, 2016), 13.

64 Xu, Yubashi: jinyu mantang 鱼把式: 金鱼满堂 [Goldfish breeders: full of Goldfish], 81.

65 TUAN, "Animal Pets: Cruelty and Affection," 98.

66 Xu, Yubashi: jinyu mantang 鱼把式: 金鱼满堂 [Goldfish breeders: full of Goldfish], 110.

At that time, Goldfish were still kept in ponds, similar in shape to wild crucian carp. In the late Ming Dynasty, Goldfish were generally raised in pots, so the activity space of goldfish decreased sharply. Moreover, because the food is fed manually, goldfish's foraging ability is gradually lost. Goldfish have undergone significant changes in body and organs, significantly different from crucian carp.⁶³ For example, in addition to the normal eyes, goldfish also developed telescope eyes, celestial eyes, and bubble eyes. Telescope eyes mean eyes popping out exaggeratedly, while celestial eyes are telescope eyes turning upward at the sky.⁶⁴ Bubble eyes are large round bubbles filled with lymphatic fluid formed in the pouch. These bizarre eyes are easy to be injured and blind due to collision with hard objects when goldfish swim, and may be sucked by another fish.⁶⁵

In the 16th century, Chinese goldfish were introduced into Japan, and until the Edo and Meiji periods, goldfish breeding gradually became popular. Ranchu goldfish, the king of Japanese goldfish, originated from the transliteration of egg goldfish in Cantonese.⁶⁶ According to their aesthetic view, the Japanese have transformed the traditional egg goldfish with thinner head growth, a square head, a more uniform body thickness, and a more straightly spread tail.



67 Xu, Yubashi: jinyu mantang 鱼把式: 金鱼满堂 [Goldfish breeders: full of Goldfish], 114-115.

68 Xu, Yubashi: jinyu mantang 鱼把式: 金鱼满堂 [Goldfish breeders: full of Goldfish], 116.

69 Xu, Yubashi: jinyu mantang 鱼把式: 金鱼满堂 [Goldfish breeders: full of Goldfish], 20.

70 Xu, Yubashi: jinyu mantang 鱼把式: 金鱼满堂 [Goldfish breeders: full of Goldfish], 21.

71 Xu, Yubashi: jinyu mantang 鱼把式: 金鱼满堂 [Goldfish breeders: full of Goldfish], 23.

Chinese goldfish were brought to Europe in the 17th century and the United States in the mid-19th century. Because the precious traditional goldfish species are challenging to breed and their morbid aesthetics are not recognized, the grass goldfish are the most popular in both regions. Grass goldfish is relatively easy to produce, has the closest shape to the crucian carp, and is neglected by the Chinese.⁶⁷ At the end of the 19th century, the grass goldfish appeared as a mutant with a long tail fin in the fishpond of the United States government agencies. It was then named the comet goldfish, which became popular in the United States.⁶⁸

In 1911, the Xinhai Revolution broke out, and the imperial system was overthrown. Many goldfish raised by the royal family died out, ending the history of the imperial goldfish.⁶⁹ In the following decades, China's society was in turmoil, years of war, and the people were in a precarious state, entering a low period of goldfish development. A small number of imperial goldfish survived in the folk and re-entered people's lives after the founding of the People's Republic of China. With the development of technology, people have a greater scientific understanding of the genetics of goldfish breeding.⁷⁰ Since the reform and opening up, the government has also begun to pay attention to the development of Chinese Goldfish.⁷¹ Goldfish have quickly gone international and become the mainstream of ornamental fish.



LOVELY WOMEN

72 Henrik Ibsen, *A Doll's House*, Gleditions, accessed November 27, 2023, <https://www.gleditions.com/adollhouse/students/pages.asp?pg=160&lid=201>.

73 TUAN, "Children and Women," 130.

74 TUAN, "Children and Women," 123.

But our house has been nothing but a play-room. Here I have been your doll-wife, just as at home I used to be papa's doll-child. And the children, in their turn, have been my dolls. I thought it fun when you played with me, just as the children did when I played with them.⁷²

The play "A Doll's House," published by Ibsen in 1879, clearly reflects the tragedy of an era in which well-educated women in the middle and upper bourgeoisie were only the doll wives and pets of men.⁷³ Let's leave aside the emotional domination of women at that time, who could at least go out to shop, visit and attend banquets, and enjoy a certain degree of freedom of movement and behavior. However, before modern times, women could only be isolated in their dwellings, with little contact with the outside world, and existed only for the needs and pleasures of men.⁷⁴

In feudal China, for example, men of the middle class and above practiced polygamy for a long time. Women were

trapped in the inner rooms of the family, and their freedom of movement was very limited.⁷⁵ Especially for the emperor of a country, there were countless concubines in the harem. Officials of the Ministry of Internal Affairs searched all over the country for beautiful and talented women and sent them to the palace as gifts.⁷⁶ In addition to the civilian women selected for the palace, court officials also sent their daughters to the palace in order to stabilize their power and win over the emperor. Foreign countries also paid tribute to beautiful women based on political factors. Obviously, for women who entered the palace, appearance and character were the most basic and superficial screening conditions, behind which there were also various power struggles. Once in the palace, they became the private property of the emperor and were confined to the bedroom deep in the palace.

In order to gain the emperor's favor and live better in the deep palace, the concubines tried their best to please the emperor, especially in terms of aesthetics. It is said that in the Southern Tang Dynasty, a court dancer named Yao Niang won the favor of Emperor Li Yu by winding her feet into a crescent shape and dancing in a lotus flower.⁷⁷ Then other palace maids began to follow suit, and foot binding gradually became the identity symbol of the elite.



75 Mark Cartwright, "Women in Ancient China," *World History Encyclopedia*, October 19, 2017, <https://www.worldhistory.org/article/1136/women-in-ancient-china/>.

76 TUAN, "Children and Women," 124.

77 Amanda Foreman, "Why Footbinding Persisted in China for a Millennium," *Smithsonian Magazine*, January 20, 2015, <https://www.smithsonianmag.com/history/why-footbinding-persisted-china-millennium-180953971/>.

After foot binding spread from the palace to the people, it became a way for the lower class to improve their social prospects.⁷⁸ Girls started foot binding when they were only four or five years old, and the cloth strap could not be untied until the adult skeleton was set; the shape of the foot could no longer be reversed. The ideal shape is known as the "three-inch golden lotus", and the pain and difficulty of walking can be easily imagined. Therefore, foot binding further restricted women's personal freedom and strengthened the patriarchal order.



SLAVES, DWARFS, FOOLS

In a complex large-scale society, the common way to divide social hierarchies is to associate differences in physical appearance with brain power, so as to establish the theoretical basis of dominance and obedience.⁷⁹ Beginning in 16th-century Europe, a set of opposing values was gradually established that associated "white" with positive values and "black" with negative values. White skin is the symbol of superiority, while black skin reflects animal nature. Black servants served the same role as pets, and were more exotic, to satisfy the owner's vanity and pleasure.⁸⁰

79 TUAN, "Slaves, Dwarfs, Fools," 133.

80 TUAN, "Slaves, Dwarfs, Fools," 139.



81 TUAN, "Slaves, Dwarfs, Fools," 154.

82 TUAN, "Slaves, Dwarfs, Fools," 155.

83 TUAN, "Slaves, Dwarfs, Fools," 159.

84 TUAN, "Slaves, Dwarfs, Fools," 160.

Dwarfs, now caused by diseases, were once deliberately manipulated for aesthetic and recreational values. In ancient Greece, there was a method of keeping children in cages to hinder their growth because it was profitable.⁸¹ The ancient Romans restrained the growth of children through dietary deprivation, making them dwarfs who could enter the entertainment industry. Dwarfs and fools were raised in bored rich families to amuse them.⁸² In order to make a living, the dwarf often played the role of a fool to entertain his master. The born fool, on the other hand, was trained by special caretakers in the homes of wealthy people, so that his speech and actions could show a kind of stupid wisdom and become an excellent pet.⁸³ The social distance between nobles, dwarfs, and fools was just right, so that disability and dementia provided a satisfactory sense of charity and entertainment rather than sadness and threat.⁸⁴



SUMMARY

The instances discussed throughout this study reflect the misuse of power by nobles, driven by the strong temptation to distort nature and human nature for aesthetic purposes, so that heterogeneous creatures lose their dignity, suffer humiliation and completely become their playthings until they are discarded or die.⁸⁵ In order to better achieve the purpose of domination, aesthetic manipulation usually has the following characteristics:

85 TUAN, "Introduction," 4.

86 TUAN, "Slaves, Dwarfs, Fools," 154.

87 TUAN, "Power and Dominance," 15.

1. Miniaturization: Throughout history, miniaturization has always been the main means of control to show the desire for power. Nature itself has been miniaturized, from bonsai trees to domesticated pets, and even in human growth, such as through restrictive clothing or cultural practices.⁸⁶

2. Devitalization: Humans often seek to confront nature to demonstrate their ability to conquer. While, living nature has its own biological rhythm and will, and cannot be completely defeated.⁸⁷ Only inanimate objects can achieve frozen perfection, so those in power try to turn living creatures

88 TUAN, "Introduction," 4.

89 Emily Anthes, "How Far Should We Go in Shaping Animals for Aesthetic Pleasure?" *Aeon*, March 25, 2013, <https://aeon.co/essays/how-far-should-we-go-in-shaping-animals-for-aesthetic-pleasure>.

90 TUAN, "Children and Women," 122.

91 Sophie Trawalter et al., "Attending to Threat: Race-Based Patterns of Selective Attention," *Journal of Experimental Social Psychology* 44, no. 5 (September 1, 2008): 1322, <https://doi.org/10.1016/j.jesp.2008.03.006>.

into inanimate, mechanical toy-like simulations.⁸⁸ Whether it is animal-shaped plant sculptures, or women and slaves who can only exist on specific occasions and strictly abide by regulations, the predictability of these mechanical toys gives the controller a strong sense of satisfaction.

3. **Rarity:** Rarity means that items can only be obtained by a few people, thus highlighting the special power and status of the owner. On the other hand, rarity can bring fresher sensory stimulation and more unique aesthetic experiences. Therefore, humans crave novelty and are constantly attracted to new, unusual, and rare creatures.⁸⁹ In history, the rich and powerful often enjoyed keeping exotic pets to reflect and consolidate their majesty. With the development of technology, it has been transformed into a desire to create, bringing a sense of omnipotent achievement.

4. **Out of threat and fear:** In the original state of nature, many controlled things have awesome power. To address this existential threat, humans (especially male-dominated) have reversed this power relationship by finding ways to tame and master, and have obtained a dominant and condescending attitude.⁹⁰ Needless to say the unknown threatening power of nature to the ancients, women also posed a threat to men in both natural and cultural senses, because all men were once completely dependent on their mothers, which brought a subconscious fear of returning to the childlike state as an appendage of women. The stereotype of black people as threatening and dangerous still seems to be strong and deep-rooted today.⁹¹

5. **Rationalization:** The aesthetic manipulation of nature by humans is often

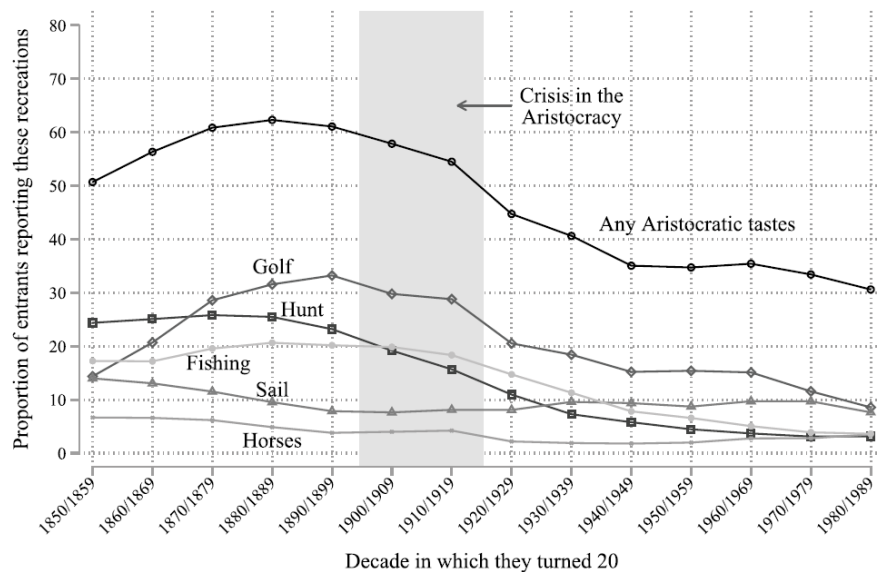
combined with cultural significance to justify behavior and form a social ethos. For example, the feature of protruding eyes in goldfish was not considered abnormal and scary at the beginning of its birth because the ancient Chinese believed this feature was consistent with the eyes of the legendary dragon. Chinese people respect dragons, so they call them dragon eye goldfish. The ruling behavior between groups relies on explanatory myths to make both sides accept inequality and regard it as correct.⁹² For example, Hitler put forward the concept of racial hierarchy and used the word "Aryan" to describe the purest German descent with the characteristics of blonde hair, blue eyes, athletic strength, and tall stature.⁹³ He linked the word "Aryan" with the German "Ehre", meaning "honor", to describe the image of the "honorable people".

92 TUAN, "Slaves, Dwarfs, Fools," 132.

93 "How Did the Nazis Construct an Aryan Identity?," *South African History Online*, February 14, 2020, <https://www.sahistory.org.za/article/how-did-nazis-construct-aryan-identity>.



AESTHETIC ECONOMY: THE INDUSTRIALISATION OF TASTE



In the previous chapter, some examples of power-related aesthetic manipulation in the garden are time-specific. On the one hand, it's due to the change of the power structure and the disintegration of the aristocratic system in modern times. On the other hand, it's because of the awakening of human thought and the pursuit of equality in the world. This includes not only women's liberation, but also the promotion of awareness of protecting nature and animal welfare. At the same time, with the mechanized mass production brought about by the Industrial Revolution, many items that were once restricted by technology and could only be obtained by aristocrats gradually entered the public. As a result, aesthetic manipulation has gradually evolved from a symbol of the power of the upper class to a broader social phenomenon.

In the early stage of industrial development, people bought a large number of daily necessities and the economy grew rapidly. However, this demand for practical necessities would end when it was satisfied, and the market would gradually become

saturated. To stimulate economic development, businesses try to make people consume not just to meet basic needs, but to make life better. Since the use value of the commodity itself is difficult to change, aesthetics gives greater attractiveness to the commodity, leading to greater exchange value. Aesthetics plays an important role in the design, production, and sales of the commodity, and the commodity is no longer produced just for use and consumption. This is the stage we are in, which is called "aesthetic economy".⁹⁴



Therefore, I believe that money is a major reason behind aesthetic manipulation, and it's extremely common in today's society. The first is the design aesthetics used to attract consumers and increase their willingness to buy. The visual perception of external product attributes has a significant impact on users' impressions. Only when the product attracts their attention or emotion, users will consider the product and its price.⁹⁵ Especially when the quality of the product is difficult to judge, the external clues provided by aesthetics become an important basis for consumers to infer the quality or price. In consumers' perception, beautiful products are often associated with good quality. Studies have shown that the proportion of purchase intentions for products with high-design aesthetics is significantly higher than that of products with low-design aesthetics. Design aesthetics can even make up for minor functional defects. Therefore, more and more companies are beginning to pay attention to visual design. Packaging that was only used to meet the needs of early humans for accommodation, storage, and transportation has now become an indispensable part of product design.⁹⁶

More importantly, the unique beauty of design enables the commodity to serve the display of personal lifestyle. This means that the aesthetic quality of the commodity is not necessarily equal to beauty, but the precious characteristics that help to create a specific atmosphere of life. Commodities become effective status symbols, transformed into a new use value that is different from practicality. The original limited needs of consumers have also been transformed into a system of desires that can grow indefinitely. According to Böhme, it's the desire for self-expression. It evolved from the privileges of the feudal class, the

97 Böhme, "Aesthetic Economy*."

98 Ileyha Dagalp and Jonatan Södergren, "On Ads as Aesthetic Objects: A Thematic Review of Aesthetics in Advertising Research," *Journal of Advertising*, March 20, 2023, 3, <https://doi.org/10.1080/00913367.2023.2183286>.

99 Böhme, "Aesthetic Economy*."

court, and the nobility to the privileges of the upper bourgeoisie, and now, step by step, it has become the desire of everyone. When the desires are satisfied, they will be strengthened, so the renewal of commodities is faster and faster, and the popular style is constantly changing.⁹⁷

Advertising aesthetics is also used to promote the ability of commodities to contribute to the atmosphere or mood of certain life scenes, thereby increasing consumption desire. According to Dagalp and Södergren, "advertising aesthetics denotes those elements in an ad that have the potential of providing aesthetic gratification."⁹⁸ "Elements" include not only visual elements, but also the music, textual form, narrative plot, and thematic meaning of the advertisement. "Aesthetic gratification" may be a physiological stimulus to thirst or hunger, or it may be a more perfect picture of life through clothing and the furnishings of houses.⁹⁹ Based on design aesthetics, advertising aesthetics further enhances



consumers' perceived value of commodities by giving them special significance. The reason why luxury brands have a high premium but still have a large and stable audience is precisely because the marketing strategy of luxury brands emphasizes product quality and uniqueness.¹⁰⁰ Brand stories that integrate traditional craft heritage and local culture are also common marketing strategies.¹⁰¹ Cultural and creative products as well as peripheral products also meet the spiritual and cultural needs of contemporary people through the reconstruction and interpretation of art.¹⁰² Therefore, although the price is often higher than that of ordinary commodities with the same function, and some even lack practical value, it can continue to trigger a consumption boom. Children's brands make use of children's worship and trust in fictional characters, and use popular media characters as spokesmen to establish emotional connections, so as to achieve emotional arousal of products.¹⁰³

100 Vicky Sullivan, "3 Luxury Brand Marketing Strategies That Convey Long-Term Value," *Persado*, March 23, 2023, <https://www.persado.com/articles/luxury-brand-marketing-strategies/>.

101 Chi-Hsien Hsu and Wang-Chin Tsai, "A Design Strategy of Cultural and Creative Products on the Global Market," *Lecture Notes in Computer Science*, 2015, 36, https://doi.org/10.1007/978-3-319-20907-4_4.

102 Yang Li and Jie Li, "The Influence of Design Aesthetics on Consumers' Purchase Intention toward Cultural and Creative Products: Evidence from the Palace Museum in China," *Frontiers in Psychology* 13 (July 1, 2022), <https://doi.org/10.3389/fpsyg.2022.939403>.

103 Sharon Beder, "Cartoons and Characters," *Business-Managed Democracy*, 2018, <https://www.herinst.org/BusinessManagedDemocracy/culture/consumerism/cartoons.html>.



A more extreme example is POP MART. It's a Chinese toy brand that has swept the world in recent years, and has received a lot of mainstream attention with the production of blind box toy series. Blind boxes are collectibles packed in sealed boxes, and buyers don't know what's inside the box until they open it. The blind box of POP MART has no practical value and can only serve as a mascot ornament. Therefore, apart from the surprise brought by opening the blind box and the collection value of the toy itself, the most important factor for the success of POP MART lies in its innovative design. POP MART has established a large number of cooperation with popular brands and cutting-edge designers, constantly launches new series of designs to attract customers, and focuses on emotional ties with customers.¹⁰⁴



In the process of the popularization of aesthetic manipulation, new media has played an important role. By promoting advertising, new media have a broader impact on people's aesthetic taste. This is reflected not only in the transformation of traditional advertising into all-pervasive pop-up windows in electronic devices, portal websites that companies established to represent the brand image, and convenient online shopping platforms providing numerous choices, but also in the popular social media platform. It can be said that almost everyone with a smartphone has registered an account for at least one social platform. Social media allows everyone to market themselves at almost zero cost. The purpose of self-marketing is to attract online traffic, which can be further converted into advertising revenue, also known as influencer marketing. Brands use the influence of key opinion leaders in social media to improve visibility and purchase decisions.¹⁰⁵ One of the important means of self-marketing is unique style and aesthetics. Unlike other promotion media, social media can present users with a large amount of constantly updated information and real-time hot content. Therefore, advertising aesthetics in social media strives for innovative designs that can lead new trends, or to keep up with popular styles and hot topics.

WHAT'S THE PROBLEM?



Although I've mentioned a little about the two major reasons, power and money, behind the aesthetic manipulations in the previous description, I'd like to classify and elaborate on the harm brought by aesthetic manipulation more systematically, hoping to attract the attention of readers.

"PUPPETS"

106 Bonsai Sanctum, "Is Bonsai Cruel? The Most Common Ethical Concerns," accessed December 11, 2023, <https://www.bonsaisanctum.com/is-bonsai-cruel-the-most-common-ethical-concerns/>.

107 Ferris Jabr, "Fish Feel Pain. Now What?," *Hakai Magazine*, January 2, 2018, <https://hakaimagazine.com/features/fish-feel-pain-now-what/>.

108 Lilian Min, "Even Giant Fish Can't Ignore the Siren Song of Plastic Surgery," *The Cut*, March 28, 2018, <https://www.thecut.com/2018/03/fish-plastic-surgery-proves-beauty-standards-extend-to-all.html>.

109 Nature, "Selective Breeding Problems," September 16, 2010, <https://www.pbs.org/wnet/nature/dogs-that-changed-the-world-selective-breeding-problems/1281/>.

"Puppets" refers to creatures that are manipulated to become "beautiful". Let's start with plants. Both bonsai and plant sculptures use unnatural techniques, but it's believed that plants lack the brain and central nervous system to feel pain, so there is no cruel moral factor.¹⁰⁶ Among animals, fish have long been thought not to feel pain.¹⁰⁷ Therefore, people have been wantonly carrying out fish plastic surgery such as "chin jobs" and "eye lifting" without any psychological burden.¹⁰⁸ However, more and more research results show that fish can consciously feel pain. This has led to problems related to animal welfare. A similar situation is more widely known in modern dog breeds. Due to people's aesthetic pursuit of pure blood, purebred dogs are at risk of a host of health problems, such as dermatitis and immune system diseases caused by high concentrations of disease genes.¹⁰⁹ When it comes to human beings ourselves, how many eras and ethnic groups in history have women been subject to social customs and willing to endure long-term physical pain to achieve aesthetic standards? In order to obtain a slimmer waist, European women used to wear tight corsets for a long

time, which not only restricted breathing and easily caused syncope, but also compressed abdominal organs and deformed thorax.¹¹⁰ In the 19th century, thousands of women died from the dangers posed by the hooking of exaggerated crinolines and the fires caused by crinolines.¹¹¹

Complying with the popular standards of beauty can bring not only physical pain, but also great pressure, which may lead to mental illness. Take patients with body deformation disorder (BDD) as an example, they focus on "an imagined defect in physical appearance or a distorted perception of one's body image."¹¹² BDD patients are preoccupied with insignificant appearance defects, frequently check mirrors, and constantly compare with others, thus disrupting daily activities. Closely related is the addiction to cosmetic surgery addiction, in which patients attempt to repair their appearance defects through repeated cosmetic surgery.¹¹³



110 Susan Isaac, "The Dangers of Tight Lacing: The Effects of the Corset," *Royal College of Surgeons*, February 17, 2017, <https://www.rcseng.ac.uk/library-and-publications/library/blog/effects-of-the-corset/>.

111 "Understanding Underwear: The Victorian Crinoline," *European Fashion Heritage Association*, February 14, 2020, <https://fashionheritage.eu/understanding-underwear-the-crinoline/>.

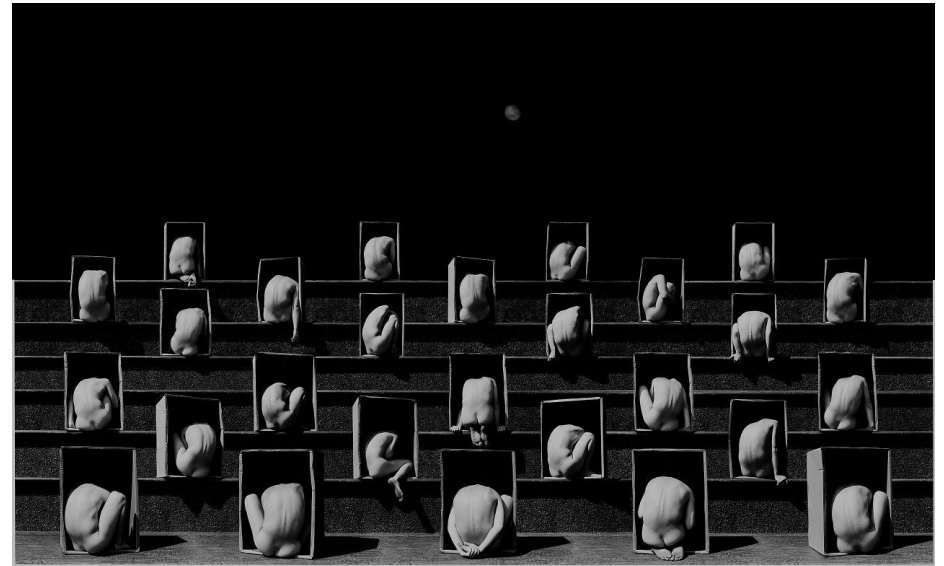
112 Susan A. Higgins and Ashley Wysong, "Cosmetic Surgery and Body Dysmorphic Disorder – an Update," *International Journal of Women's Dermatology* 4, no. 1 (March 1, 2018): 43, <https://doi.org/10.1016/j.ijwd.2017.09.007>.

113 Ahmed Zayed, "Plastic Surgery Addiction: Causes, Signs, and Treatments," *The Diamond*, March 13, 2023, <https://diamondrehabthailand.com/what-is-plastic-surgery-addiction/>.

"COPYCATS"

114 Elizaveta Glushak,
"Trendy Aesthetics Are Killing
Individuality (and Capitalism Loves
It)," Seisen International School,
March 27, 2023, <https://www.seisen.com/student-life/seisen-post/features/-board/seisen-post/post/trendy-aesthetics-are-killing-individuality-and-capitalism-loves-it>.

In addition to individual psychological problems, capitalist-controlled fashion aesthetics will also lead to the collective problems of the mass public. Nowadays, the Internet continues to provide us with new aesthetic terms, new beauty standards, and new concepts of what society considers fashion.¹¹⁴ To look more beautiful and integrate into the group, young people, especially teenagers who are not mature enough to think independently, constantly follow the trend. There are more and more outdated clothes in the wardrobe that haven't been worn much, while less and less money is saved. On the other hand, cookie-cutter aesthetics have become more and more common in the same period. Social media continues to push trendy aesthetics, and bloggers follow the trend to attract traffic and further influence their followers. The final result is not only the aesthetic convergence of the group, but also the killing of individuality.



EXECUTORS

115 "Unlicensed Surgeons – What to Look Out For?," Dr. Adams Plastic Surgery, accessed December 11, 2023, <https://www.dr-adams.com/blog/unlicensed-surgeons-what-to-look-out-for/>.⁵⁸ Anna Marie Roos, *Goldfish* (London, UK: Reaktion Books, 2019).

116 Chen Xi, "Netizens Call for Tighter Regulation of Cosmetic Surgery Industry," *Global Times*, February 4, 2021, <https://www.globaltimes.cn/page/202102/1215048.shtml>.

Executors refer to the group implementing the process of "beauty transformation". Cosmetic surgeons are the easiest group to think of in the modern context. Lured by high profits, many unlicensed surgeons use radical marketing strategies to take advantage of the unsuspecting public.¹¹⁵ Once falling into the trap of cheap procedures, there is a high probability that customers will face the risk of cosmetic sequelae and even life-threatening surgery. According to the *Global Times*, there were more than 60,000 unlicensed plastic surgery clinics in China in 2019, causing about 40,000 medical accidents every year.¹¹⁶ The victims of these medical accidents not only face irreparable physical injuries, but also fall into the dilemma of rights protection



with huge difficulty and long time span, seriously interfering with daily life.

The executor may also be the victim of aesthetic manipulation. Before modern times, organized manpower had to be used to fulfill the aesthetic aspirations of the aristocracy.¹¹⁷ Taking the Palace of Versailles as an example, the construction of the palace lasted for a century, with more than 36,000 workers participating in the project.¹¹⁸ The lives of these laborers were treated like grass, and if dead, a new batch of people would replace them.

117 TUAN, "Power and Dominance," 12.

118 "Versailles, 'Capital' of the Kingdom, 1682," Palace of Versailles, accessed December 11, 2023, <https://en.chateauversailles.fr/discover/history/key-dates/versailles-capital-kingdom-1682>.

SOCIETAL RELATIONSHIPS

119 TUAN, "Fountains and Plants," 51.

120 Jeroen Vaes et al., "Assessing Neural Responses towards Objectified Human Targets and Objects to Identify Processes of Sexual Objectification That Go beyond the Metaphor," *Scientific Reports* 9, no. 1 (April 30, 2019), <https://doi.org/10.1038/s41598-019-42928-x>.

121 TUAN, "Slaves, Dwarfs, Fools," 135.

The two sides of aesthetic manipulation are in an unequal position. In the relationship between man and nature, this is manifested as a tendency of conquest, confrontation, and objectification. This is somewhat in common with the devitalization mentioned above. People want to play with flowers and fruits at will to create novel wonders.¹¹⁹ To achieve aesthetic purposes, people only value the use of nature as a tool to serve humans, while ignoring the longer-term ecological value. In male-female relationships, objectification is more common and unconscious. Influenced by the patriarchal hierarchies, women often become victims of the objectification process, and are rashly evaluated by men for the attractiveness and instrumental value of their bodies.¹²⁰ Among human beings of different classes or races, the harm of aesthetic manipulation is also manifested in exploitation and oppression. For example, in Western culture, dominance and obedience are established based on appearance and skin color, and slaves are willingly engaged in monotonous and hard work through ideological indoctrination to meet the aesthetic needs of those in power.¹²¹



SPECULATION ON FUTURE DIRECTIONS



With the rapid development of science, genetic modification is gradually replacing selective breeding as a faster means to manipulate species characteristics. Genome editing can transform the long and gradual selective cultivation into an instantaneous process and result expression. In the future, we may use the genetic composition of a species solely for aesthetic purposes. Take the luminous pet Glofish as an example. It's the world's first widely marketed transgenic pet.¹²² Originally zebrafish with genetically modified fluorescent or light-reflecting cells in tissues, they were born in the laboratory and used to detect industrial pollutants in lakes and streams. In late 2003, they were named Glofish and sold in pet stores in states across the United States.¹²³ This marks the beginning of a new era of using biotechnology to reinvent animals. Molecular biology allows humans to push aesthetic preferences to new, sci-fi extremes. Direct genetic modification dramatically challenges species boundaries by offering virtually limitless possibilities for transferring specific genes between vastly different species, making it possible to create chimeras.¹²⁴

122 Tony Gill, "The Atomic Fish: The Rising Controversy of Genetically Modified Pets," Eduardo Kac, September 1, 2004, <https://www.ekac.org/thehumanist.html>.

123 Anthes, "How Far Should We Go in Shaping Animals for Aesthetic Pleasure?"

124 Gill, "The Atomic Fish: The Rising Controversy of Genetically Modified Pets."

125 Anthes, "How Far Should We Go in Shaping Animals for Aesthetic Pleasure?"

126 Gill, "The Atomic Fish."

127 "The Pandora's Box Problem in Science," SCIENCE TALES, October 30, 2020, <https://science-tales.com/new-blog/pandoras-box-science-laa2p>.

128 Anthes, "How Far Should We Go in Shaping Animals for Aesthetic Pleasure?"

The most common objection to Glofish is unnatural, with some even claiming that viewing them causes "aesthetic injury".¹²⁵ In this regard, Anthes' view is that "unnatural" is not equal to "immoral". What is natural is not necessarily good, and what is unnatural is not necessarily bad. I have reservations about this, because the rapid and direct process of biotechnology is not the same as the gradual evolution of selective breeding. Interspecies hybridization will also evoke the collective subconscious of humans with fear, disgust, revulsion, and general anxiety about similar unknown forms of alien civilization.¹²⁶ Furthermore, I think of science as Pandora's box.¹²⁷ On the one hand, the limited knowledge of humans makes the understanding of new technology tend to be one-sided, and it's often difficult to predict the serious consequences it may bring. On the other hand, the difficult regulation has led to the emergence of biohackers. There is no guarantee that new technologies born out of the illusion of creating utopias will not in turn create dark dystopias.

However, I still agree with Anthes that we should consider interfering with animal behavior in the name of beauty based on the impact on animal welfare, and take the initiative to admit and correct the mistakes made in history.¹²⁸ I like the paragraph she wrote:

... aesthetics is just one way in which we imbue the natural world with value. But we should not deceive ourselves into thinking that we're painting a dog's nails because she likes it. We must acknowledge our aesthetic desires, and come to terms with the immense power we have over animal bodies. Only then can we

begin to ensure a beautiful future for our beloved beasts.¹²⁹

In addition to biotechnology, artificial intelligence, augmented reality, and virtual reality will also have an important impact on the development of aesthetics. Without the limitation of real bodies, people may develop more extreme aesthetics in the virtual world. Compared with 2D games, VR technology provides a more immersive experience, making it easier for players to desensitize to violent aesthetics, thus turning to seek stronger aesthetic stimulation, and reduce empathy in the real world.¹³⁰ The aesthetic experience of high emotional intensity brought by VR technology will also reduce players' satisfaction with real life and avoid problems encountered.

129 Anthes, "How Far Should We Go in Shaping Animals for Aesthetic Pleasure?"

130 Raymond Lavoie et al., "Virtual Experience, Real Consequences: The Potential Negative Emotional Consequences of Virtual Reality Gameplay," *Virtual Reality* 25, no. 1 (April 2, 2020): 71, <https://doi.org/10.1007/s10055-020-00440-y>.

CONCLUSION

By analyzing the influencing factors and evolution process of aesthetic manipulation, this thesis reveals the deep-rooted characteristics of aesthetic manipulation in human history. In the current era where aesthetic motives have become the driving force of economic growth, manipulation in the name of beauty has become endless, and has been labeled as “design” that better serves humanity. I'd like to quote a paragraph from the book *Are We Human* to interpret this viewpoint in more detail:

Design always presents itself as serving the human but its real ambition is to redesign the human. ... Humans have always been radically reshaped by the designs they produce and the world of design keeps expanding. We live in a time when everything is designed, from our carefully crafted individual looks and online identities to the surrounding galaxies of personal devices, new materials, interfaces, networks, systems, infra-

structures, data, chemicals, organisms, and genetic codes. The average day involves the experience of thousands of layers of design that reach deep into the ground and outer space but also deep into our bodies and brains. We literally live inside design, ... Even the planet itself has been completely encrusted by design as a geological layer. There is no longer an outside to the world of design. Design has become the world.¹³¹

From this, it can be seen that we attempt to design the entire world while being firmly controlled by our design. Aesthetic manipulation has become a part of us, with no possibility of elimination; But as designers, we should bear the responsibility in mind that our creations reflect our aesthetic senses and have an aesthetic influence on the public. We need to let more people raise awareness of aesthetic manipulation, so as to congregate collective wisdom and find ways to minimize the harm caused by aesthetic manipulation, and to avoid the future of humanity being destroyed by our own designs.

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