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# EVOLUTIONARY AESTHETICS AND THE ALIENATION OF HUMAN BEINGS

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**ABSTRACT.** Evolutionary aesthetics postulates that human traits considered as “beautiful” are a product of natural selection. Human beauty is accounted an indicator both of good health and of good genes. The appreciation of beauty is a biologically determined behavior. Therefore, beauty indicates which couples are the most indicated to mate with, because an offspring derived from aesthetically attractive individuals will increase fitness.

I sustain that evolutionary aesthetics is a pseudoscience that pretends that human beings are naturally alienated from their capacity to decide about what is considered aesthetically attractive. According to this pseudoscience, such a capacity does not correspond to humans, inasmuch what actually decides about their actions is not culture, but biological interests. Evolutionary aesthetics contributes to naturalize sexual and love relations as private property and submission exchanges, all of which are naturalized with the veil of scientific “neutrality” and “objectivity”, both inexistent in this case.

**KEY WORDS.** Aesthetics, evolution, Darwinism, alienation, Biologicism, dialectics, sensitivity, love, sexual selection.

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## INTRODUCTION

All the modalities of biological determinism emitted since the second half of the nineteenth century accept the neo-Darwinist theory that the whole characteristics of human beings, including morphological, physiological, psychological, behavioral and cultural ones, are the result of natural selection. For the supporters of biological determinism, the behavior of all human beings has one and only one ultimate purpose: reproduction. Being so, the range of behaviors, conducts and culture will always be restricted to that final objective.

Upon applying these principles to humans we conclude that, just as no individual has the ability to choose his/her skin or eye color or his/her ability to synthesize one or other hormone, nor would he/she is free to

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decide regarding behavior, values, principles or cultural practices. These are “decided” in advance by one’s genes, as postulated initially by sociobiology<sup>1</sup>, by the epigenetic rules, which are a reiteration of that genetic determinism<sup>2</sup> or by the structure of the mind, as established by evolutionary psychology<sup>3</sup>. Subjects do not intervene to decide what they can or cannot do. Their decision capacity has been extracted, given that it pertains in fact to the entities considered “essential” to all living beings. Dawkins<sup>4</sup> certainly expresses this idea most bluntly: “We are survival machines—robot vehicles blindly programmed to preserve the selfish molecules known as genes.”

In other words, according to the vision defended by sociobiology and by evolutionary psychology, we humans have been alienated in our capacities, and this alienation is a process determined by our biological composition.

Evolutionary aesthetics, as part of evolutionary psychology, support these theses and attempts to prove that evaluation of beauty merits among human beings is, actually, a form of behavior in which the best partners are sought to achieve a higher fitness for their descendants.

In the present study we will show precisely that among the problems presented by this biologist thesis is that of alienating humans from their will and their critical capacity to decide regarding human beauty criteria.

#### 1. BIOLOGICISM AND FETISHISM

The thesis upon which biological determinism studies of aesthetics are based presents itself with the merit of universal validity. Rhodes and Zebrowitz thereby begin their work regarding facial attraction with words that illustrate their biologist orientation:

The last decade has seen an exciting change in our understanding of what makes a face attractive, and why we have the preferences we do. The old idea that beauty is in the eye of the beholder, with preferences varying idiosyncratically from person to person or culture to culture, has been challenged by recent evidence for close agreement about which faces are attractive, both across and within certain cultures. These findings raise the question that some preferences may be innate<sup>5</sup>.

They later continue expressing the general idea of evolutionary aesthetics:

One suggestion is that our preferences evolved as an adaptation to the problem of mate choice. On this view, attractive traits signal aspects of mate quality such as fertility, youthfulness, or health, and so the preferences evolved because they enhanced reproductive success<sup>6</sup>.

For their part, Tooby and Cosmides categorically affirm:

In essence, to attribute the perception of sexual attractiveness to culture is to deny implicitly that human beings possess specialized psychological mechanisms underpinning this perception; that is, it is to deny that this perception exist as an independent psychological phenomenon with its own distinctive rules and principles <sup>7</sup>.

A first consideration regarding this type of statements is that human beauty exists separately from the subjects who perceive it and from their will. This is accepted by supporters of evolutionary aesthetics, who do not consider beauty to be a result of human activity.

According to Tooby and Cosmides <sup>8</sup>, attractive traits are an objective and unavoidable necessity in the search for a mate. These authors reaffirm a rigid and monistic conception of the human condition, as they part from the premise that the psychological mechanisms that produce sexual attraction, and beauty criteria function in a genetic-physiological plane. They deny that a certain level of complexity and of organization of the matter and comprehension of the world may be sufficiently plastic, such as to originate other levels in which, while the laws of the primary level are respected, others qualitatively distinct are generated. In other words, they deny that there is a specific subjective and socio-cultural level which confers the subjects the capacity to play an active role in construction of their psyche and therefore of their culture, with value judgments, such as the aesthetic, absent in other levels of relation of the matter. The conception of the world founded on the denial of this multiplicity of forms of interaction does not correspond with reality. It does not allow knowledge of this reality in autonomously linked fields. It does not comprehend the combined and simultaneous processes of dependence-independence that exist in humans. In an effort to simplify reality, everything is funneled into a scheme in which the epistemic possibilities are restricted and create an important conflict between that epistemic restriction and human ontological and behavioral diversity.

Evolutionary aesthetics forces reality to be explained within a rigid system of rules pertaining to the supposedly simplest level of reality, and since that level is different from the human subjects, given their complexity, it therefore must be explained in entities such as neurons or genes, which, conceived as "the simplest," obligate the subject to behave as they—naturally selected—determine. This essentialist conception traces a continuum from that most "simple" level to the most complex one. Everything that is originated must have its foundation in that level, not as relation, but as linear determinism. In accordance to this approach, the part is ontologically previous to the whole. The whole is constructed as a simple

arithmetical aggregation of “essential” parts, and its properties are always the same as those of that “essence.” The part is separated from the whole, and to that ontological division of the universe corresponds an epistemological division: the whole is not comprehended except through comprehension of the essential part. The whole is left split from the part. This is the foundation of the individualist conception of the world, typical of the bourgeoisie <sup>9</sup>.

It is within these conceptions that we find the ideological-naturalizing and alienating bases of human behaviors.

Wolf <sup>10</sup>, detractor to these visions, affirms that beauty is a social construction and also is a commodity system determined by politics, whose purpose is to preserve the *machistic* domination system. Following to that premise, beauty does not exist independent of human appreciations and decisions. Etcoff, adherent of biological determinism, dissents from this opinion, affirming that beauty plays a role in human life beyond the sphere of mere ideas <sup>11</sup>. According to this viewpoint, genes are what control aesthetic sensations and evaluations:

If, as Darwinism informs us, beauty is in the eyes of genes, what genetic self-interest is served by finding long trains of colorful tails beautiful? If we can crack this problem, then perhaps the basis of human physical beauty can be understood <sup>12</sup>.

It is also asserted that if beauty judgments were genetically controlled, it would confirm that sexual preferences are adjusted by evolution to foster mating with partners “of high genetic quality,” which would coincide with numerous empirical studies <sup>13</sup>. According to this position, the evaluation or judgments regarding attractiveness means that there is a correspondence between two simultaneously-operating genetic determinations: that of the possessors of certain physical traits aesthetically positive, and that of the subjects evaluating them. At the same time that they possess certain qualities of their own, the subjects must have the capacity to judge those of others. It is a co-evolutionary process on which its adherents offer no hypothesis to explain how it might have occurred. The same authors tell us that if there were no genetic determination, even if the diversity were explained, “it would be impossible to know what to pay attention to and what to learn <sup>14</sup>,” and in their conclusions affirm that “evolution of genetically determined facial attributes as well as cultural traits is likely to be influenced by receiver bias <sup>15</sup>.” Bias is a mysterious force, which remains undefined in the discourse of the authors cited and appears possessing an existence of its own, which causes it to respond positively to certain stimuli, with no explanation as to how their relation with the genetically determined attributes takes place. The result is that the aesthetic value of

a given trait, having an existence and a meaning of its own, acts as stimulus, awakening the predisposition of the receiving subject, which also has life of its own. The relation between two subjects who aesthetically evaluate each other is left to be explained by what is impossible to explain: predispositions to attraction.

These opinions attribute a nature of their own to genes or mental structures, explaining them to hold inherent properties, dispossessed of any relation. All of this leads us to refer to the fetishistic character of objects, looking back to Karl Marx's analysis of the fetishistic character of commodities. Marx posed the following idea:

A commodity is therefore a mysterious thing, simply because in it the social character of men's labour appears to them as an objective character stamped upon the product of that labour; because the relation of the producers to the sum total of their own labour is presented to them as a social relation, existing not between themselves, but between the products of their labour<sup>16</sup>.

He went on to explain:

In order, therefore, to find an analogy, we must have recourse to the mist-enveloped regions of the religious world. In that world the productions of the human brain appear as independent beings endowed with life, and entering into relation both with one another and the human race. So it is in the world of commodities with the products of men's hands. This I call the Fetishism which attaches itself to the products of labour, so soon as they are produced as commodities, and which is therefore inseparable from the production of commodities<sup>17</sup>.

And concluded with the following note:

To the latter [the producers], therefore, the relations connecting the labour of one individual with that of the rest appear, not as direct social relations between individuals at work, but as what they really are, material relations between persons and social relations between things<sup>18</sup>.

These theses on the fetishism of commodities extend to all aspects of capitalistic life, given its character of exclusive producer of exchange values. For political economics, the material forms of production are derived from the innate natural properties of things, not from the concrete social forms of their production<sup>19</sup>. This and concrete capitalist activity lead to the formation of a world vision eternally crisscrossed by monetary and commodity operations in all aspects of life. With that, all relations are transformed into commodity relations, in which each commodity appears to possess those mysterious qualities which make it sellable and buyable.

Since capitalism's only link with society is the market <sup>20</sup>, all the categories of capitalist analysis, including those of its science, will be expressed in a commoditized language, and the qualities of objects and subjects are forced to homogenize themselves and to be judged in the exchange value dimension <sup>21</sup>. For evolutionary aesthetics, human beings become themselves into things as they are thought as objects for appropriation and exchange; they become exchange values whose price is equal to their biological fitness. Qualitatively distinct concepts such as love, beauty and sexuality are thus quantified and measured in their necessary relation to biological reproduction, always through the language of the market.

Even so, the fact that in the sphere of production the material properties of things are transferred to their price indicates nothing about the nature of those properties. The "fine" and the "common" are not thereby defined by their own virtue, but rather by the specific form of social relation in which they are produced <sup>22</sup>. Expensive and cheap articles are distinguished not by their innate nature but rather by the labor time employed in their production.

For both political economics and evolutionary aesthetics, the "valuable" nature of beautiful objects is attributed as such due to their scarcity, even in the absence of awareness that this scarcity in turn is provoked by the social forms of relation and production of the beautiful. If human beauty were abundant, it would not be coveted. Capitalist commodity criteria prevail in all of this, not an idea of the attractive as social construction, and in this process aesthetic appreciations of the human being thereby become fetishized entities to be judged as properties which pertain to the subjects due to their bodily nature, something separate from existence itself, not because the human has the capacity to consciously construct them, manage them, and modify them. Therefore, humans, unable to control and direct their own thoughts and criteria regarding human beauty, are controlled by the same, once transformed into fetish.

## 2. HUMAN BEAUTY AND PRIVATE PROPERTY

Exchange value exists only while private property exists. It is what allows values to be exchanged, loaned, rented, stolen or given away. And one of the primary characteristics of evolutionary psychology is its presentation of human behavior mediated by property relations. Buss illustrates this in his analysis of what for him are "tactics for attracting and retaining mates <sup>23</sup>." Based on Darwinian theses on sexual selection <sup>24</sup> and Trivers's investments theory <sup>25</sup>, he explains that the most important behaviors for partner attraction include: possession and expenditure of money by the men, clothing, ways of walking, presumption of social importance, and makeup. The behaviors for partner retention are: surveillance tactics,

monopolization of the partner's companionship time, punishment for infidelity, emotional manipulation, elimination of competition, and even violence. Observation of these criteria leaves no doubt that it is literally a relationship of ownership. Wilson and Daly<sup>26</sup> express it as follows: "These considerations suggest that referring to man's view of woman as proprietary is more than a metaphor: some of the same mental algorithms are apparently activated in the marital and mercantile spheres," and that beauty and physical attractiveness are baits cast to trap the chosen partner<sup>27</sup>, always through coercive or objectifying mechanisms, especially against women. In Buss's language, it is literally a question of attracting and retaining partners, making them private property, which is, for evolutionary aesthetics, the distinctive trait of the man-woman relation.

Wilson and Daly eloquently affirm that "... sexually proprietary male psychologies are evolved solutions to the adaptive problems of male reproductive competition<sup>28</sup>." They further emphasize that: "By 'proprietary' we mean first that men lay claim to particular women as songbirds lay claim to territories, as lions lay claim to a kill, or as people of both sexes lay claim to valuables<sup>29</sup>."

Conflicts of interest emerge here, the most evident of which is that people affirm their property rights over other people. According to this idea, it is possible to possess subjects conscious that they are being possessed by others and that all of them exercise an apparently natural right to private property, of inanimate objects and of animals and humans.

Wilson and Daly go on to explain that in men, the combination between parental investment and an "asymmetrical risk of cuckoldry<sup>30</sup>" produces a selective force favoring the evolution of motives that guarantee paternity over progeny. They also affirm:

We propose that these selection pressures have been responsible for the evolution of psychological mechanisms whose adaptive functions are success in sexual competition and cuckoldry avoidance and that men's attitudes, emotions, and actions indicative of sexual proprietariness and the commodization of women are products of the evolved mechanisms in the context of particular historical and cultural circumstances<sup>31</sup>.

This, first of all, reaffirms the sociobiological thesis regarding priority of genes over culture and history in the conformation of human behaviors<sup>32</sup>. Possessive and commoditizing behaviors toward women are found with minor variants in distinct cultural and historic contexts, but the biological foundation is what dictates the general conduct to follow: possession of persons. This possession of the woman by the man is carried out due to the characteristics of reproduction and gestation of the descendents (inside the mother's body and with bi-parental care), all of which are re-

sponses to selection pressures. Accordingly, natural selection will favor the changes and adaptations that in turn favor relations of private ownership of partners. Within this model, biological reproduction is nothing else but the reproduction of market and property relations.

But then, by what reason does natural selection has to move in that direction? These authors admit that commodity and private property relations may suffer variations, but at the bottom they are universal, eternal and unchangeable. However, human beings have not always sustained commodity or private property relations. These appeared only with the raising of a permanent social overproduct, tens of thousands years after the origin of *Homo sapiens*<sup>33</sup>. Commodity relations were not generalized until the advent of capitalism. Thus, along all these long periods, culture could not play any role in the imposition of market relations, naturalized by evolutionary aesthetics. However, within such model it is sustained that biology, for a more than mysterious reason, has imposed since the appearance itself of human beings, the mercantile, objectifying and alienating behavior which has only been generalized in the past four hundred years.

In this way, evolutionary aesthetics converts into a discipline responsible for analyzing the sexual behavior of “things-humans,” of humans transformed into things, degraded to the level of things, of exchange-value-things. Human beings, as all capitalist things, are there to be private property, to be possessed after they have been exchanged. They have become property of the partner to reproduce.

Evolutionary aesthetics fails to understand that its language is derived from concrete social forms and their corresponding dominant ideas. Instead, the forms and processes of evolution are interpreted as analogous to the socio-economic processes derived from what political economists assume to be the natural properties of things. They are presented as processes that adopt naturalness in their private property and market relations within the organisms themselves.

According to these theses, biological evolution is the external transformation of what is supposedly essential: the objectified, reified behavior. Genes (or mental architecture) retain this form-thing, this form-exchange value, over the course of evolution. It is a “fixist evolution” because it does not allow the ability to change from this form-value expressed in human behavior. It is the constant foundation of what on the surface changes. It is an oxymoron proper to the capitalist vision of the world, with all that implies in terms of fetishization. The entire structure of commodified society, reproduces the interpretation of the evolutionary process as if it gave way to entities (living beings) with a life separated from the space-time processes which have produced them. The entire universe is left

conformed by this type of fetishized entities or processes. That is why Komesaroff<sup>34</sup> speaks of a fetishization of the whole reality in capitalism.

This includes domination relations derived from market relations. Hierarchies of course exist in these relations. How are they explained? The capitalist vision attributes them a natural and eternal existence considering that the presence of individuals with greater initiative, leadership, audacity and aggressiveness has always been necessary to assure world order and progress. Darwinist theory reinforces this idea: natural selection cannot be explained without competition, and it would have no sense if all competitors had equal abilities. That would lead nowhere, produce no adaptations, and would therefore nullify evolution itself. For Darwin, a condition for change is that of the hierarchization of nature into dominated and dominating individuals. For biological determinists, this hierarchization must have a universal character which includes human beings. There necessarily must be some humans who have these characteristics in greater measure than others, and victory will correspond to those humans in the struggle for existence.

Evolutionary aesthetics takes this fetishization of hierarchies to the extreme. The facial traits aspect is a reflection of the manual and intellectual capacities of individuals. In that line of work Keating affirms:

In humans and other mammals, aspects of facial growth are imbued with social status information. Mature facial traits signal dominance, threat and power. Immature facial features convey submissiveness, appeasement, and receptivity elements of facial morphology evolved as social status displays patterned after developmental changes in facial structure<sup>35</sup>.

And with the idea that facial maturity has been linked to influence and status in young and adult males<sup>36</sup>, Keating continues:

The social status cues approach suggests that the signal value of status messages imbued in facial structures over phylogenetic history may have also contributed to the evolution of human physiognomies and to what humans find becoming in a face<sup>37</sup>.

What is explained here is that facial traits evolved as a way of affirming and imposing the individual's social status in society, as if the status and hierarchy of each individual were something that *had* to exist. Particularly, the terms "maturity" and "immaturity" are associated with behaviors of domination or submission and of possession, and all that is derived there from, especially in terms of their role as means for reproduction and increased fitness, but they are always attitudes and activities of oppression and limitation of human capacities. Dominance, submission, status, and hierarchy must remain naturalized and fetishized in specific forms of facial

organization. More important, all relations of power and coercion appear as something *detached* from human will to explain maturity, immaturity and behavior.

Does that mean that social status, with all the institutions that give sense to it, appeared prior to these ones and prior to the entire structure of hierarchized society? At the same time? If it appeared before, one may ask: What sense is there in the appearance of an adaptive characteristic in a medium which lacks the components necessary for this characteristic to perform some function? If the evolution of facial traits occurred simultaneously to the appearance of all those societal institutions, then we would have to accept the existence of a co-evolutionary process among the institutions, society, production structures, and production relations at least, and of all of this in unison with facial traits. This combination of causes, effects, and factors is not unheard for some authors, who accept that the aesthetic attraction which leads to a romantic relationship involves youth, sexual maturity, expressivity, and cultural adaptation<sup>38</sup>.

By referring to co-evolution we understand that all these entities evolved contemporarily and in close relation among themselves. But this relation among all the factors that intervene in the formation of hierarchies and social statuses is of little concern to the above-quoted authors. How does evolutionary aesthetics demonstrate such a relation and intermarriage among different characteristics? Instead of integrally observing this phenomenon as a whole, it is observed fragmentarily. Without explaining genes in a relational manner, they are declared essential and, therefore, all that they determine, like the genes themselves, appears with its own life, with an immanent nature which makes it be as it is. The result is a highly imaginative and audacious working theory, but impossible to be falsified and much less to be corroborated.

### 3. THE MEANS AND THE ENDS

According to this thesis, the genetic dimension is what regulates all behaviors in animals and humans, including evaluating of the sexual partner and the parameters of beauty. According to Trivers<sup>39</sup>, in sexual behaviors the degree of investment in resources is what will condition such behavior, oriented among humans and animals to reproduction<sup>40</sup>.

Evolutionary aesthetics, therefore, sustains the unawareness of the human beings regarding their sexual and affective needs and their aesthetic evaluations, leaving in the genes the choice of partner and eliminating any interests other than the reproductive aspect in the evaluation of the aesthetic. Something detached from human will is what decides about those qualities. Proper to evolutionary aesthetics, a genetic mechanism is what produces beauty "itself."

One of many examples of this alienation of affective and aesthetic-evaluation capacities is illustrated when Palmer and Palmer affirm that: "Being in love ... is a physiological phenomenon that may have evolved to facilitate pair bonding for the purpose of conceiving children and nurturing them... 41." The idea of beauty as bait is implicit in this type of reproductivist characterization of falling-in-love, which is in turn the pretext for reproduction with the partner that guarantees optimal transmission of genes. A confusing aesthetics-love-sexuality-reproduction connection takes place, in which the first three elements serve and are reduced to the last.

In conformity with this reasoning, the relation between ends and means is inverted. The event of falling-in-love is a mental-emotional state in which the individual realizes his/her capacities in all the senses, he/she rediscovers himself/herself, and becomes human. It serves no other purpose because it is the finality itself of existence. One possible way to fulfill that end is to produce biological descendants because one has the opportunity end to realize oneself, as loving, loved, sensitive and suffering human being, educating a descendent in all these senses. The fact that the capacity to love is not developed to the maximum in the majority of occasions is cause of personality limitations and neurotic behaviors that impede the person from knowing how to love and be loved. The social structure and cultivation of counter-values that avert the human being from that possibility are the reasons for that limitation. The society of classes and property relations is what produces this and degrades the love relation by converting it into a relation of possession. A very similar phenomenon to that of mercantile and religious alienations is at play here. In the latter, human beings, with their images of God, does not control the products of their work or their reflection. Images turn against humans dominating them as if they had a life and will of their own. In aesthetics alienation, humans create beauty patterns and stereotypes that turn against them, taking away their creativity. Beauty, like God or a commodity, reverts from created to creator: in feelings, desires, judgments and behaviors. The subject becomes into the predicate of human life 42.

Based on the 1844 *Economic-Philosophical Manuscripts* of Karl Marx, Sánchez Vázquez 43 notes that in the context of capitalist relations, human beings find themselves in an estranged relationship with the product of their labor, which is snatched away from them. Hence, humans, confront themselves with labor and its products as something that does not belong to them. In such a way, human producers confront human beings who appropriate the product of their work, alienating their generic being, which becomes merely a means of individual existence in order to survive. Thus, human existence becomes no longer their own.

As long as human beings maintain relations in which the product of their work is alienated from the producer to be converted into commodity, such human relation is devalued to the point where humans transform themselves into means of their own survival. Human existence is thereby approximated to mere biological survival of beings that are not owners of their lives, but rather only means of life <sup>44</sup>. Life converted into a means of itself, not into human ends, only into market and private-property ends.

Capitalist forms of alienation are not expressed only in material work processes. They extend to other forms of productive work such as science, art, and ideas, to the degree in which their products become into commodities. In spheres such as school and the family, teacher-student or parent-child relations become into commodity exchange relations as well. In this way, the human being is submerged even further in a world of means.

For evolutionary aesthetics, life is the means to achieve survival. But not survival of the whole individual, but rather of alienated individuals who in turn will get going their means to seek their survival. When this is applied to the human being it reveals that the subjects are despoiled of their same existence, which is placed at the service of production of the descendent line. It is an existence over-saturated of means. The end is estranged from the subject. Humans do not find a sphere of realization and integration of themselves, as they only exist and are maintained as vehicles of transmission of hereditary material. This produces a double alienation of generic life, which at its root is one and itself: vis-à-vis the market as “societal essence,” and vis-à-vis survival as “biological essence.” Each behaves as a different version of the same reproduction-survival process. In the first what is sought is reproduction of *commercial* material wealth; the second seeks genetic reproduction to make commodity reproduction possible. Both are explained by themselves within this alienating model.

Therefore, for evolutionary aesthetics, beauty has no other objective than to indicate optimum possibilities of genetic reproduction, converting into an object of possession and exchange, whose utility is the guarantee of elevated biological suitability in the next generation, a generation of humans better prepared for the struggle for existence; in other words, for the struggle to leave more numerous offspring. Serial production of alienation.

#### 4. BEAUTY AND HUMAN RELATIONS

This leads to the question: To what point is beauty natural, and is the naturally external to the human being?

Sánchez Vázquez notes: “Man with his naturalness enters into relation with a nature humanized by his work, by production <sup>45</sup>.” Through work,

humans are unified with nature and, at the same time, differentiate themselves from it in order to gain its control, achieve greater comforts, and coexist with it. In the work-process, humans make use of all the components of their biological nature to place them into action together with their own rational capacity.

This point on the humanization of nature is crucial to the problem of beauty. It emerges as something natural when apparently no work is undertaken to modify it, when the natural is projected toward our senses with no apparent mediations, when it appears to be given in the same natural body.

But this, an ideal situation, is never presented in practice. In the mind of the subject who judges and appreciates the beautiful, there is no neutral or empty state. Human activity, i.e., human labor—in a broad sense—produces beautiful objects in an active subject-object relation<sup>46</sup>. Humans transform the object existing in nature and therewith transform themselves as subjects. They do so filling the infinite possibilities provided to them by their universal and omnilateral existence. They carry out a profoundly and passionately creative function. For that reason, neither general beauty nor human beauty exists separate from individuals. Nature is beautiful at times, like the beautiful objects—and the criteria of beauty—elaborated by human beings within their work.

Beauty manifests the universal relation of humans with their surroundings and with other humans. It is a result of human relations, it is production of emotional, spiritual needs; it is a complex process in which biological reproduction needs may intervene, but it comprehends much more than that, and extends to the appreciation of human qualities which emerge rather from spiritual evaluation. Inherent is a process of humanization of certain physical characteristics of persons, which does not eliminate the biological component of the relation, but converts it into a much richer product than that of solely biological composition<sup>47</sup>. In the sexual relation (heterosexual as well as gay, lesbian and bisexual) the natural is enriched by its humanization. Denial of natural carnality in the name of morality reduces the human to an impoverished expression of frustrated and frustrating behaviors. To restrict sexuality to its biological expression reduces it to instinctive, with no creative capacity. Both attitudes are profoundly alienating.

Physical attraction between “opposite” sexes is not an expression of its animal nature, as conceived in evolutionary aesthetics, but rather of a conjunction integrating the biological into the world of the spiritual and rational. Beauty thereby transcends any possible reduction to a certain sphere of human life separated from the rest.

“Traditional spiritualist philosophy<sup>48</sup>” postulates a reason/passion duality that fragments and divides the human being, without comprehending

the profound imbrication existing between the two elements. Proper to this philosophy, the human being strictly speaking is located in the sphere of reason, leaving the components of his/her animal nature, the irrational and the biological, in the sphere of passions<sup>49</sup>. The dialectic overcomes this dichotomy, integrating a conception of human existence without forgetting the existence of both terms. A process of humanization of the senses occurs, and this is part of the process of humanization of both the object and of the subject<sup>50</sup>. The animal, or the instinctive or passionate, is part of human nature, and is integrated to the rational. Nothing to do with vestiges of his/her animal nature.

The vulgarization of the Darwinist evolution theory also leaves these two terms united, but in such a way that all the rational is conceived as lineally derived from the biological nature. In the vulgar evolutionism, the biological integrates in its core the rational and predominates over it, due to reproductive causes. Sexual instinct is maintained as such in the human and his/her senses act in animal form. Instead of conceiving the humanization process as the co-existence of rational and passionate elements, the biologicist conception views the human as simply developed "animalism."

With that biologicist scaffolding, evolutionary aesthetics by conceiving human beauty as a signal of good health and possibilities of increased biological fitness<sup>51</sup>, and by locating persons in the domain of private-property relations for their aesthetic qualities, carries out a qualitative reduction of multiple relations to a unilateral relation of ownership of objects, limiting them to the sense of having and using<sup>52</sup>. But as Pappenheim<sup>53</sup> cautions, the person who confronts the world with a simple acquisitive spirit, with the particular unilaterality of exchange value, cannot really appropriate any object, seeing how it recoils vis-à-vis the subject. In other words, the qualitative omnilaterality and diversity that a human being is capable of developing in his/her relations with objects from the world, fades away until he/her remains at the mercy of a quantitative consideration. This retreat will be even sharper when the relation is between subjects, as in the case of the aesthetic evaluation of a human being, given that the multiplicity, flexibility and dynamism in the forms of relation between two subjects are much greater than those found in the relation between a subject and an object.

Commodity ownership, by reducing the possibilities of interaction among subjects, transforms them into non-possessors of their own humanity, into the losers of their own universality. The distinct and infinite dimensions which can be particular to any human being and his/her aesthetic qualities are thereby converted into quantities for exchange: exchange for reproduction, and reproduction in turn for exchange, and on and on *ad infinitum*.

It is more correct to express the evaluation of human aesthetic attributes as part of the “appropriation” process, which according to Ollman<sup>54</sup> consists of the constructive use, the incorporation of an object or a subject, in all its dimensions and relations, to the appropriating subject; the full incorporation to a subject of others or of certain worldly objects and subjects. Based on this thesis, Ollman expresses that: “When a given appropriation is significant, it may come to increase our appreciation of beauty to the point at which we see all of nature with new eyes<sup>55</sup>”. In other words, there is an entire form of appropriation directed to aesthetic judgment. For a person to produce a work of art, it is necessary that he/she appropriates its aesthetic perception and representation from the subject or object. He/she must relate himself/herself first with his/her surroundings and humanize them in the sense of giving them a touch, which is product of his/her culture and personality. The appropriation progressively leads to the appropriated occupying a larger and more significant part of the appropriating subject; it becomes part of him/her.

It is not the question of whenever I make something, I constitute it my property, but rather make it an object or a subject of my omnilateral relation with it and in the long run with the entire society. The interaction will be mediated by the level of culture and sensitivity of the interacting subject, which is, in turn, part of the appropriation process. That sensitivity can increase and new interconnections with different capacities and properties can be produced with each new appropriation. That depends, in addition, on the concrete forms adopted by those interactions and appropriations.

Aesthetic sensitivity is one of the most refined forms of appropriation that humans can have, but it is mutilated by the reification prevailing in capitalist society. In that reification, the aesthetic judgment of other humans is a primitive form of their appropriation, which adopts the literal form of possession, in which one *takes* the beautiful person and abducts him/her. Here, the possibility to increase sensitivity capacities is strongly limited, given that the beautiful person is only judged as a descendent-producing *thing*, or a passing source of satisfaction. But that would be a function of the low level of sensitivity and culture of persons educated to think of themselves and others as objects, not as humans. It would not be a product of biological evolution but rather of the culture devoted the sense of having.

This predominance of the sense of having is correspondent with the sense of the scarce, and therefore of relations between need and freedom<sup>56</sup>. Capitalism requires scarcity in order to perpetuate its domination<sup>57</sup>. If the satisfiers of social life were abundant or sufficient to completely fulfill society’s needs, the structure of capitalist and patriarchal domination would collapse. Capitalism requires that individuals satisfy their needs

only in the indispensable level, in order to never escape the sphere of need and to reach that of freedom. This, coupled with the problem of reification, leads scarcity to include reified human beings. As capitalism conceives humans as things, humans can also be presented as scarce, and therefore all that is sought in human beings to satisfy affective and sexual needs will also be scarce. The beautiful is thereby presented as scarce. This is one of the gravest contradictions that emerge in evolutionary aesthetics which, faithful to the more ideological principles of Darwinism, defends a permanent scarcity that lays the ground for the struggle for existence and then for natural selection. But it cannot explain why, after millenniums of struggle and selection in favor of beautiful individuals, there is not even an upward tendency of beautiful or attractive individuals among the population. Even beauty and its search reach that status of scarcity, which submerges the human being into the dominion of need, impeding his/her freedom and alienating him/her. Such is an ideological construction, not an attribute of beauty as something external to the human being.

#### CONCLUSION

Evolutionary aesthetics remains faithful to a tradition within contemporary capitalism to promote "the feeling that life has no sense if it is not endowed with symbols of possession and of status<sup>58</sup>", which gives incentive to some of the human being's natural impulses, but in a deliberately and consciously impoverished and limited manner, thereby identifying sexuality as discharge of emotional tension<sup>59</sup>, and using beauty as a trap for that sexual end.

If sexuality, in its Jewish-Christian version, is nothing but the search for reproduction without any pleasure, for evolutionary aesthetics sexual pleasure and beauty appreciation are only the bait for reproduction in optimal biological conditions. There is little difference between these two visions of sexuality. For evolutionary aesthetics, now with a "neo-liberalized" vision of society and sexuality, what matters is a simple emotional-hormonal discharge, the cathartic function of an objectified sexuality. The affective and erotic relation that does not necessarily lead to the sexual act is forgotten by this one-dimensional conception of the human being. It appears to affirm that "in name of the processes resulting from natural selection, let us eliminate the moralist restrictions on sexuality and therefore the evaluation of beauty; may free rein be given to expression of the same," that in the language of neo-liberalism means giving free rein to the reduced reified human, alienated in property relations, and at the service of the laws of supply and demand. This is a variation of sexuality as means to replace and renovate the workforce that is later to be sold. The affective relation, complex as it is, is not necessary for these conceptions. Nothing

about human contact as end in itself, and nothing about consideration of the partner as another human.

Vulgar hedonism, a product of capitalism sold to the population as the only possible way to find satisfaction and pleasure, encounters in evolutionary aesthetics one of its most alienating expressions. As a consequence of its conception, both evaluation of the aesthetic in the human being and sexuality become into a restrictive, repetitive, and tedious activities, just as those described by Alberto Moravia <sup>60</sup> in his novel *La Noia*. An activity in which the human beings cannot deploy more than a very small part of their loving and erotic capacities, without realizing the limitations which have been imposed on them, and making them to believe that no such limitations exist and that they should feel happy by possessing human beings, taking advantage of them with domination objectives and without distinguishing them in any major way from sex toys.

Evolutionary aesthetics restricts its interpretation of human beauty to the imposing and repressive margins of the patriarchal and monogamous relation marked by what Wilhelm Reich calls "bourgeois sexual morality <sup>61</sup>." In other words, a type of morality self-qualified as the only existing, and the most natural one, when actually it is a consequence of the patriarchal civilizations, and therefore a transitory social process. In that sense, we can agree with Horkheimer when he affirms that:

The regulation of sexual relations, in the framework of marriage, of the family, also had an economic conditioning, and was in part cruelly imposed. But romantic love, originated in the course of this regulation, constitutes the social phenomenon which can place the individual in opposition to society and even impel him to break with it. The combination of sexuality and gentleness friendship and loyalty, which convert into something natural for men, pertain to the number of those cultural elements which can perform a particular role in determined social developments <sup>62</sup>.

Romantic love, which places emotion, passion and human sensitivity above the interests of cold rational economic calculations and of private property, marks a radical break with the class structure of society, and with the economicism of relations, including sexual and love relations and those based on a commercial evaluation of human beauty.

By prioritizing the human's internal desires and needs for companionship and communication over commodity exchanges and fetishized relations among human beings acting as things, romantic love rescues the human being and impels him or her as a total being. This is opposed to the bourgeois and patriarchal structure of society, to its prevalence of the thing over anything else and of private property, whose reason for being, in the end, must be located in changing and transitory historic needs, not

in mental or genetic structures that exist once and for always, as evolutionary aesthetics intends to sustain.

## NOTES

- 1 Wilson, 1975; Dawkins, 1976.
- 2 Lumsden and Wilson, 1981, 1983.
- 3 Cosmides, *et al.*, 1992.
- 4 *op. cit.*, p V.
- 5 Rhodes and Zebrowitz, 2002, p. VII.
- 6 *Ibid.*, p. VIII.
- 7 Tooby and Cosmides, 1992, p. 142.
- 8 *op. cit.*
- 9 Lewontin, 1991.
- 10 Wolf, 1991.
- 11 Etcoff, 1999, p. 4.
- 12 Cartwright, 2001, p. 42.
- 13 Enquist, *et al.*, 2002, p. 138.
- 14 *Ibid.*
- 15 *Ibid.*, p. 145.
- 16 Marx, 1988 [1867], p. 88.
- 17 *Ibid.*, p. 89.
- 18 *Ibid* English translations taken from: <http://www.marxists.org/archive/marx/works/1867-c1/ch01.htm#S4>.
- 19 Rubin, 1987 [1930], p. 76.
- 20 Luxemburgo 1978 [1912], p. 16.
- 21 Marx, 1998 [1844], pp. 170-175.
- 22 Rubin, *op. cit.*, p. 122.
- 23 Buss, 1992, pp. 257-261.
- 24 Darwin, 1981 [1871].
- 25 Trivers (1971, 1972).
- 26 1992, p. 290.
- 27 *Ibid.*
- 28 *Ibid.*, p. 289.
- 29 *Ibid.*
- 30 *Ibid.*, p. 290.
- 31 *Ibid.*
- 32 Lumsden and Wilson, 1981, *op. cit.*
- 33 Mandel, 1985, pp 26-93.
- 34 Komesaroff, 1986.
- 35 Keating, 2002, p. 153.
- 36 *Ibid.*, p. 159.
- 37 *Ibid.*, p. 175.
- 38 Cunningham, *et al.*, 2002, p. 225.
- 39 *op. cit.*
- 40 Palmer, and Palmer, 2002; Ridley, 1993; Hamer and Copeland 1998 and Fisher, 1994, among others.
- 41 Palmer and Palmer, *op. cit.*, p. 133.
- 42 Bedeschi, 1975, pp. 72-74.
- 43 1982, p. 85.
- 44 *Ibid.*, pp. 83-84.
- 45 *Ibid.*, p. 134, Unofficial translation.
- 46 Marx, 1953 [1845-1846], pp. 141-144.
- 47 Sánchez Vazquez, *op. cit.*, p. 122.
- 48 *Ibid* p. 139.
- 49 *Ibid.*
- 50 *Ibid.*, p. 140.
- 51 Rubenstein, *et al.* 2002.

52 Sánchez Vázquez, *op. cit.*, p. 137.

53 1976, p. 105.

54 Ollman, 1973.

55 *Ibid*, p. 116, Unofficial translation.

56 *Ibid.*, p. 146.

57 Muñoz-Rubio, 2005.

58 Boff, 1996, p. 43, Unofficial translation.

59 *Ibid.*

60 Moravia (1960).

61 Reich, 1999 [1935].

62 Horkheimer, (1998) [1936], p. 87, unofficial translation.

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