

Cezanne's Doubts

Express the Invisible Perceptual World

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Abstract—"Cezanne's doubts" is the article of Merleau-Ponty's earlier discussion about painting. Although the article involved a large number of contents of Cezanne's painting creations, but what Merleau-Ponty really wants to talk about is the thinking about body, perception, existence and other philosophical problems. This paper examines the painting of Cezanne from the perspective of Merleau-Ponty's phenomenology of perception and considers that Cezanne's perception of the world comes from his whole body's perception of the world. He uses depth, color and other methods to express his own perception of the world, and restored the real world of "what is it". The article believed that Cezanne's doubts, in fact, is also the doubts for phenomenology of perception, that is, how to re-understand the world, express the doubt for invisible world.

Keywords—Cezanne; Merleau-Ponty; body; perception; expression; existence

I. INTRODUCTION

"Cezanne's doubts" is Merleau-Ponty's earlier article about painting, published in the early 1945 in the "spring" magazine, later collected in his essays "Meaning and meaningless". This article seems talk about the artist and his artistic creation, but in fact it is the embodiment of its philosophical thought. In Merleau-Ponty's articles and writings, he often uses Cezanne and his paintings as an example to discuss his own thoughts about body, perception, existence and so on. This article which directly comment on Cezanne did not place the foothold on painter's work, style, technique analysis, Cezanne shared the same thought for the painter how to observe the world, and how to express the natural thinking with Merleau-Ponty's thinking for how does human understand the world and how to express the objective thing's existence of "as it is", Cezanne's difficult painting process and his doubts in fact are the doubts which phenomenology of perception restore and express.

Cezanne's doubts first lies in how the painter should see the world, as classical artists do, follow the contours of objects, structures and scientific perspectives under light exposure, or follow their own perceptions and feelings; the second is how to express the world's doubts, should they

follow the classic painting to reproduce the nature under the light with a fixed point of view and scientific perspective method, or to learn from Impressionist painting to express the moment feelings and atmosphere which naturally brought to vision under the light, or "et a small piece of nature" through the body's perception. In other words, Cezanne's doubts in fact is about to only express the world that eyes can see through light or the world that eyes can not see but our body can perceive. This is actually also the doubts of phenomenology to restore and express. We understand the world of appearance in accordance with experience and habits, or restore through phenomenology, suspended scientific, historical, life experience, and thus return to the origin of things, understand the world of "as it is". Merleau-Ponty through this article and his writing "Perceived Phenomenology" from the same period, explains that the main body of human to understand the world is our "body" rather than the mind, and use body to perceive and understand the world, which brought us a renewed understanding of the world. As Merleau-Ponty described Cezanne in the "Cezanne's doubts": "He speaks like people speak for the first time; he painted like no one has ever painted before."¹ Cezanne and Merleau-Ponty all take the initiative to let body become the subject of watching and understanding the world, which subvert the concept of knowledge since Plato and Descartes, so that to find a new breakthrough for modernist painting and phenomenology to re-understand and express the world.

II. SILENT I THINK: UNDERSTAND THE WORLD WITH BODY

Merleau-Ponty in the book of "Phenomenology of perception", uses "Silence of my thinking" in response to Descartes' "I think" in "I think therefore I am" and revealed the difference between the two in epistemology, Descartes considered body as unconscious body on the basis of

¹ Merleau-Ponty. Liu Yunhan Translation: Cezanne's doubts. Contained in the eyes and heart - Merleau-Ponty's collection of Phenomenological and Aesthetics[M]. China Social Science Press .1992.2. P53;

physical and mental dualism, and he believed that only the mind has a cognitive function; But Merleau-Ponty believed that "Spiritualization of body " makes the body to become the main body for us to understand the world.

Descartes's "I think" represents its meaning with a kind of language and a cultural existence, and as a concept of "I think", it is based on the body and soul of Descartes, and on the basis of sensibility and rational duality, deny the cognitive function of body and its sensory activities. In Descartes's view body and mind are the existence of binary opposition, body is the outer form, mind dominant body, body is only the intermediary which mind to understand the world, mind can understand the world but body can not.

Merleau-Ponty's "Silent I think" is the I think as my own experience, "belongs to the silent world sequence of former expression and former reflection ... is a more original and more basic layer under the contrast of (Descartes') I" think "concept", the difference between these two is actually the "I think" concept and "I think" experience. Merleau-Ponty's "silent I think" is based on his body theory, and he criticizes Descartes' idea of body and mind separation, pointing out that body has "ambiguous", the ambiguity is because body is able to be seen and can be seen at the same time. As the one is able to be seen, body is the subject of visual and cognitive activities; as the one can be seen, body is the object of visual and cognitive activities. The reason why body will become the object of visual and cognitive activities is because the material that constitutes body are the same with everything in the world, so body has become an integral part of the external world. On the other hand however, body has the ability to watch, which makes it different from other things. Merleau-Ponty called this phenomenon "Spiritualization of body", the reason why body is able to produce images of the world is because it has a similar function like mirror. About the mirror function of body Descartes also discussed it, he summed up vision sense as a kind of mechanical function, that is, external light acting on our eyes, so that formed a certain image on the retina, in this way the formed image is just a copy of things. Although Merleau-Ponty also confirmed body's mirror function, but he believed that visual activity is not carry out with just eyes this isolated organ , but is the reflected activities with our entire body, that is, when we see things, it is not isolated see with eyes, but see and perceptive with the whole body. Cezanne said: "Art is a kind of apperception", the physical watch is also a kind of apperception, we could see not only the outline of things, color under the light, but also could feel its weight even smell. Therefore, the real secret of visual activity is not in the eyes but hidden in our bodies.

Cezanne used body's apperception to watch the world, what kind of watch is this? Western traditional epistemology make "watch" as a kind of control and possession, it believes that watch something means possession of something. This kind of watch is under a natural state, see with non-reflective

and inadvertently. We thought we know and possessed with something but in fact this kind of know only sealed itself, we only saw the appearance of things but can not deeply inside the internal area. Merleau-Ponty said in the article of "Eyes and heart ": "Valery said painters" provide their body". In fact, we can not watch how a mind can paint. It is when they lend his body to the world, painters turn the world into a painting. In order to understand this variant, it is necessary to retrieve the current working body, which is not a corner of the space or a link of a ring, it is a bond between vision and movement."³ The painter's watch we talk about here is a receptive watch with its own body as the subject, this watch is reversible, as Merleau-Ponty invokes Andrei Marché's words: "In a forest, there are several times that I think it is not that I am watching the forest. There are a few days, I think those trees are watching me and talking to me ... I'm listening there ... I think the painter should be seen through by the universe, not expect to see through the universe".⁴

The painter does not watch and understand things according to the concept of things or scientific experience, but let the images spontaneously from his body. This visual activity is two-way but not one-way, painter and object observe and communicate with each other. Through this kind of original watch, it makes the world of the painter's eyes becomes a "true existence" world of consciousness, which is distinguished from the world known only by reason and discipline.

III. DOUBTS OF EXPRESSION : VISIBLE AND INVISIBLE

There are two ways of expression in the world we see and know, one is the language; one is painting, through these two ways, we can express our understanding and thinking of the world. But painting seems to be more suitable than the language in perception expression, because when we use language to express perception will be transformed by consciousness, and it will be given a certain degree of prescription and description - in this way the described perception is no longer the original kind of real and full perception. And the painting has no fixed form, so it is more able to express the original perception and emotional experience, which is why Merleau-Ponty paid special attention to painter's creations. In his later writings, Merleau-Ponty called the world expressed through language and thought as a "visible world", while the origin of perception world is "invisible world" , "invisible world" is in fact the "existence" of human in the world, the ontology of this kind of "existence" is perceptible, but it is not able to be described or be seen. The world Western traditional painting expressed is a "visible world", face the object painters according to the perspective rule which is everything looks small in the distance and big on the contrary, and looks wide in the distance and narrow on the contrary, they fixed themselves

³ Merleau-Ponty. Liu Yunhan Translation: Eyes and heart contained in eyes and heart - Merleau-Ponty's collection of Phenomenological and Aesthetics [M]. China Social Science Press .1992.2. P128;

⁴ Same as above, P136;

² Ning Xiaomeng: Expression and Existence -Study on Merleau-Ponty Phenomenology [M]. Peking University Press .2013.5 P289;

as a lens similar with camera, so that to express the object in accordance with established experience principles, but are the objects on their images really as they are depicted? Did they see and describe the object itself?

The difference between traditional painting creators and Cezanne is that the former watch the world with the eyes and express the world with experience, what they saw is the shadow of objective things that under the reflection of the light. And for Cezanne, "it required at least a hundred times work to draw a still life painting, and the character posture must be changed a hundred and fifty times to paint a portrait". The difficulty of Cezanne painting lies in the fact that "this brush should" contain the air, light, painting object, the picture, the characteristics and style of the painting". It is an eternal task to show the existence."⁵ Cezanne was not willing to follow traditional experience and methods to watch and express the object, he had doubts to the scientific perspective rule and traditional painting methods, he believed that such method can not express the object itself "as it is", so he tried hardly to expressed the completely perception that the body for the object on the painting. The perception of body for the world, in addition to vision, it also includes the sense of touch, smell, hearing, etc., and the objective object texture, weight, smell, and the feelings of both invisible and difficult to describe brought by the object, only can be perceived through our body. How to reconstruct the invisible perception world into visible by light, light and shade, shape, color, lines, depth, movement and so on has become the problem which troubled Cezanne. In Cezanne's paintings, the shape and outline of the object are no longer the focus of his concern, and "depth" and color these two artistic elements seemed more suitable for the expression of this kind of apperception of body.

A. Depth

Painting as a kind of space art, is bound to express the location and size of things in space, according to the Descartes' dualism theory, the difference between objective things and consciousness is objective things has extensionality, but consciousness doesn't have it, then the space becomes the objective nature of objective things which has nothing to do with people and people's consciousness. The depth we usually refer to is actually one thing is obscured by other things. According to Descartes' theory, if we change an angle to watch this depth, it becomes a width, and Descartes starts from reasoning of thinking consider space as a space without depth, but the objective things really don't have depth? On the contrary, we can only grasp the objective thing through the depth and thickness, if there is no depth then the objective thing is no longer as it is. According to the subject and object dualism theory it is unable to understand the depth, because the depth is precisely reflects the relationship between body and objective things. Merleau-Ponty's explanation for depth is, "I

see an object covering another object ... depth is calculated by the distance from our body to the object."⁶ In other words, depth is basis of the spatiality of things, such depth does not belong to the thing itself, but precisely decided by the relationship between things and our body. Giaeometti said: "And I, I think that Cezanne's whole life is looking for depth."⁷ Merleau-Ponty believed that, "when Cezanne was looking for depth, he was looking for a sudden explosion of the existence, and it existed in all forms of space and also existed in form itself."⁸ That is to say that when the depth of things is shown to the painter, the painter also grasped the existence of things and their images.

In traditional painting visual sense is obedient to thought, so when express a group of still paintings, the painter in accordance with the principles and experience of traditional perspective rules, believe that the two sides of take which covered by the tablecloth are in the same straight line, such view and understanding is experiential not observed by real vision. When Cezanne observe objective things, he tries to break and hang such experience, and express the objective which his eyes saw and his body felt. In Cezanne's still life painting works, although still using realistic means, but the table seems tilted and deformed, apple is very firm, seems to have weight, but the perspective of the screen in accordance with traditional perspective rules is not correct, Cezanne is not fixed at a point to observe the object, he let himself out of the role of a fixed camera and become a real and free self. When express the depth of objective things, Cezanne comply with the vision and perception of his body, showing the true existence state of objective things. Cezanne is no longer pursuing the external image of objective things, he pointed out that: "The outer shape which is the shell is the second nature, you must break space this shell and replace it, paint what? Some cubes, spheres, cones? There are some pure forms which they could determine their firmness by the law of inner structure."⁹ In this way the object is different from the object taken by the camera, Cezanne and Merleau-Ponty both believe that only the object things we perceived are real existence, as Rodin said: "Artist is telling the truth, photos are lying." After the traditional perspective rule was broken, Cezanne began to use body to perceive objective things, not understand the objective things from the rational way, he expressed the existence of "as it is" through the depth which body perceived.

⁶ Merleau-Ponty. Liu Yunhan Translation: Eyes and heart contained in eyes and heart - Merleau-Ponty's collection of Phenomenological and Aesthetics [M]. China Social Science Press .1992.2. P143;

⁷ Merleau-Ponty. Liu Yunhan Translation: Eyes and heart contained in eyes and heart - Merleau-Ponty's collection of Phenomenological and Aesthetics [M]. China Social Science Press .1992.2..P152;

⁸ Same as above, P153;

⁹ Merleau-Ponty. Liu Yunhan Translation: Eyes and heart contained in eyes and heart - Merleau-Ponty's collection of Phenomenological and Aesthetics [M]. China Social Science Press .1992.2. P153

⁵ Merleau-Ponty. Liu Yunhan Translation: Cezanne's doubts. Contained in the eyes and heart - Merleau-Ponty's collection of Phenomenological and Aesthetics[M]. China Social Science Press .1992.2. P49;

B. Color

In the Descartes' view, lines are first nature, and colors are the second nature, because lines have an advantage in expressing the extroversion of objective things. After Cezanne break the shell of thing's outside shape, lines lost their advantage in expressing the shape of the object, and colors began to get the attention they deserved.

In Western painting it divided the colors of object things as diffuse color, light source color and environmental color three kinds. When classical painting express the real world it often use the "diffuse color", that is, relatively stable object color which given under natural light, which is the most intuitive impression of visual subject to natural color. Since the Renaissance period, European classical paintings all expressed around the concept of diffuse color. Merleau-Ponty rejected this practice and the believed that color is not a property of things, but is a reflection under light, then there will be no so-called "diffuse" color, the idea of color - property is a result of rational reflection, its formation is after our real perception of color. Impressionism uses "light color" to completely oppose the concept of diffuse color, but in the paintings which impression stress on light effect, the rendering of light and atmosphere make the object lost its own weight, there is no real sense, only produce fleeting effect, the empirical subject of Impressionist is irrational, it can only bear the stimulus from the outside and give a definite response, impressionism sacrificed the shape and outlines of the object, thus losing the reality of object.

When Cezanne express color, he also use the light, but his light no longer covered the object, the object seems to be cleverly illuminated from the inside, the light is from its own, which resulting in an impression of reliability and corporality. The solid sense of the object under Cezanne's brush comes from his faith to perception. He did not regard color as an objective attribute of things, nor as a natural reflection under light. There is no visual, olfactory and auditory distinction among our perceptions, so in fact we can not see the outline of the object, for painting, color is the best way to express perception this apperception, the artist could express his overall perception of an object through color.

IV. CONCLUSION

Cezanne found the apperception which stem from perception in the doubts of cognize and express world, perceive the original world through perception, opened up a new direction for the development of modernist art. Merleau-Ponty found a path to understand the world of "what it was" through the study of body-perception, and found the path to express the mystery of existence from painting.

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