

Swinging between Vision and Touch

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Every time I see Mu Boyan's sculptures, I always have the urge to touch them. This reminds me of JG Herder on his classical discourse of that the sculpture is the art of touch. Herder was against the sensory of rank order which was established by Aristotle, in this order, vision status is the highest while touch is the lowest position. Conversely, Herder advocates the supremacy of touch because touch is closely related to rationality. Animals have no rationality, so they can have well-developed vision, but not sensitive to touch. Herder cites Denis Diderot's discussion about the blind in his article, which the blind have the most well-developed sense of touch. If the Herder has further inference, he would get the point "sculpture is blind arts" from "the sculpture is art of touch"

However, Herder did not make this inference. Who made this inference is the Chinese sculptor Sui Jianguo after two hundred years. During the creation of "Blind Portrait" series sculpture, Sui blindfolded his eyes with black cloth, only by the sense of touch to complete his work. Perhaps blindfolded is unlike the real blind, and acquired blindness might differ from congenital blindness. Although the difference between them is also important, it is far behind the importance of the difference between blindfolded eyes and open eyes. Only blindfolded the eyes can create out the sculptures which evoke touch impulse?

When I am thinking about the relationship between touch and vision in sculpture, Bruce Beasley came to Peking University for lectures. Beasley repeatedly stressed that all of his sculptures are gradually squeeze out and does not really know to where the feelings take him before the final shape appears. However, Beasley also stressed, the touch sense of sculpture can be done by vision, without having to use the real touch. Because of this, Beasley can design by computer recklessly, using 3D printing to create his sculptures. A problem caused by Beasley is: can visual sense really replace touch to work?

If Sui Jianguo presents the Thesis of sculpture, then Beasley proposed the Anti-thesis of sculpture. One positive and one negative, can they possible to reach Synthesis?

On an exhibition in St. Petersburg this fall, I had the opportunity to witness the entire process of body painting by Mu Boyan. Different from Sui Jianguo, Mu Boyan did not cover his eyes; and different from Beasley, Mu Boyan didn't have his hands tied. In the process, what I saw is the constantly switching between the eyes and the hands, is the constantly swinging between vision and touch. Mu Boyan completed Syntheses between Thesis and Anti-thesis in a simplest way. The reason why Herder considers the sculptures as art of touch but no further considered as blind art perhaps is that he noticed the switching and swinging. However, living in the 18th century, Herder had no proper theoretical weapon to clearly explain them.

In the contemporary theory of mind and body relationship, we can find the theoretical weapon to explain the kind of switching and swinging. The tacit understanding between mind and body provides

an explanation to the switching or swinging between vision and touch. This theory has once again been verified in the practice of sculpture by Mu Boyan. The ultimate value of art may be going to provide the right practice for the switching swinging or collaboration between body and mind. Unfortunately, that piece of body painting mud draft by Mu Boyan stays in St. Petersburg, and its fate is unknown.

As I am feeling sorry that the evidence is likely to lose, Mu Boyan creates his “still life” series sculptures, and intends to do an exhibition in the title of "Practice" in AYE Gallery. I think this exhibition not only provides a good opportunity to the audience to practice the swinging between vision and touch, but also provides a good case for theorists to study the switch between body and mind.

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