

## Collapse of Authenticity of Artistic Work

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**Abstract:** The epoch in which we live is the collapse of authority. Postmodernism and its synonymous terms is the condition which covered the western civilization in the second half of twentieth century. This condition has challenged all the authorities before itself. Authenticity of the artist work is also an authority which is broken in this period. The study tries to show that the present epoch is the collapse of grant-narratives including the artistic work. In this period, the following grant-narratives are challenged and refused: “human” as the subject of episteme, authenticity of artistic work, author, reason, reality, “truth”, matanarratives, modern religion and morality and theory of progress. The research dominantly focuses on the refusal of authority of the artist work which is appeared in parallel to the collapse of other authorities. In his famous article “the Artistic Work in the Age of Mechanical Reproduction”, Walter Benjamin tried to link the cultural avant-garde and new Mass Media and put their emancipator power in the opposition point of traditional myth of “autonomous” artistic work. He coined the “Mechanical Reproduction” term to refer to any form of cultural production the trait of which is partly widespread reproduction of the cultural artifacts through machinery technologies in which each copy or a version is not less or more “authentic” than the other copies. In this case, the real problem is not merely technology because the mechanical reproduction even transforms the nature of aesthetic experience. Benjamin argues that a huge part of aesthetic power of traditional artistic work is originated in its position as incomparable and unique object. In this field, he applies the term “halo” in order to refer to the composition of authenticity, authority and uniqueness in the artistic work and he believes that the three traits have been tied inseparably. Now, the artistic work-which was a unique available version-is no more unique and the incomparable “versions (Monaliza) are generally available with excellent quality. The author tries to show that the mass media has removed the holiness and solemnity of the artistic work in our contemporary times.

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### Introduction:

The world before the postmodern condition is the world of authorities and certainties. In each epoch, there is a centre for authority based which a system and narrative, which contains and defines all aspects of life, is constructed. This basis, consequently, become a social norm and protected by people and the ruling power not only protects it but also achieves its own power based on this source of authority. This source of authority was once the myth and superstitious narrative, human, religion, again human, reason, science.

In the end of each era, the center of authority becomes marginalized and another phenomenon becomes the center of authority. This tradition, until the emergence of postmodern condition in the previous century, has been practiced for thousands years approximately across the world, but this systematic, dynamic, certain and disciplined form has merely been observed in the west because the developments has not taken place so quickly and carefully. Refusal of authority, for example, for human in this form was only in Greece and modern Europe and refusal of

authority has not occurred in some societies including in our society and seemingly it will occur soon.

Art is not only the social showing but also a dependent phenomenon to the society. In a society which turns around the authority of human, reason, religion or science the art also has formed based on this authority. Similarly, in a society the authority of which is God the religious art is formed and its basis is divine authority and it is the actual and formal representation of religion. The art is product of social conditions and human thought. Being or not being art is dependent to the social conditions; therefore, it is necessary to perceive the social condition and thought of a period as well as its predecessors if we intend to understand the art of the period.

Perception of drama condition in each epoch is associated to the perception of human's condition of the epoch which emerges in the frame of drama hero as well as the author and audience. In dram, the hero's perspective about its society depends on the human's position in the existence of its own period. In other words, if human has a transcendental position in the existence, more motivations and probably abilities of the hero, in confrontation to the challenges of the

world of drama, are observed and vice versa. Thus, we must investigate the human's position in each period if we intend to achieve a better understanding of the dramatic hero of the period. Is the human the mighty king of the world or only an earthworm? What is the relationship between human and world? Is the human centre of the world and the goal of creation or he is an incident whose importance for the world is not more than a bit of soil. Is the world's relationship to the human friendly, non-friendly or the world is essentially indifferent to him?

#### **Method:**

The research is based on the library studies in which the foreign, local books as well as internet sites are used.

#### **Definitions:**

##### **Authority of Myths:**

Before emergence of Greek philosophers, cosmology was a kind of divinity and the world was controlling by the gods who were administrating it according to their own science and style. Hasid and Homer's works, for example, are full of these thoughts. Each part is controlled by a god; Zeus is the god of lightening, Dionysus god of drunk, Poseidon of sea... They are responsible for doing orders. Because human narrates a story for what he does not know in order to justify it and the myths are the storied justification of the natural incidents. The times of the myth, superstitious narrative, and magic authority continued for thousands years and possibly it is still dominant in some countries.

##### **Authority of Human:**

Pre-Socratic's philosophers (Tales, Heracles, Parmenides, Ansiguras, Anksimander, ...) tried to distance from the mythic world-view. But there was the world-view of myth authority which gave the sentence of destiny certainty. Even Socratic, who was the last great Greek thinker, became executed because of his skeptical view about the myth. According to the myth, the gods decisions are certain on human's destiny and he has not any will by itself. The ritual plays in Greece represents this theme.

The great philosophers of Greece wanted to think by their wisdom and seek a model collecting the existence distinctions and the authentication of rational-personal analysis caused the replacement of authority from myth to human.

Human is the criterion for every thing, "criterion for being of the thing which exist and not exist"<sup>1</sup>. Probably, the statement by Protagorus is the best evidence for centrality of human in the ancient Greece.

##### **Authority of the Church:**

The next certainty is the church. Authority of the church, in the medieval ages, causes the formation of a new age in the certainty. The Medieval ages began from the fall of Western Roman Empire and it was

since 476 BC to the 15<sup>th</sup> century (conquest of Constantinople), that is, for 10 centuries. The art of medieval ages, which is a Christian religious art, approximately was continued and gradually developed.

In the church world-view, human is a creature who is the heir of original sin (Adam's sin) and as a sinful creature he only achieves his salvation if he accepts the guidance and leadership of the St. Father (Pope and his represantives). In this age, human, in comparison to the classical humanistic view (Ancient Greece) has been humiliated, because the classic Greek assumed the human as criterion of every thing and every body was the criterion of his/her own knowledge.

##### **Authority of Subject:**

The forces which caused the fall of medieval ages culture were influential in the renaissance birth: fall of Feudalism, development in urbanization, resistance against the doctrine of church, development of humanism school are the causes in the emergence of Renaissance. Along with these developments, art also was transformed and got a position among people more than the past. Worldly happiness and enjoyment were replaced by the fear and punishment of the spiritual world; therefore, the art returned to the society more than any thing. Regarding the art of theater, for example, "the most important consequence of Renaissance was to put aside the theme of holy history from the theater scene,<sup>2</sup> although this movement was not performed completely, the exclusively method which has centralized just the religious issues as the theme of theater was eradicated". After the ancient Greek, the age after Renaissance was the humanist golden and theater ages. In the beginning, the biblical and theological argumentations (Middle Ages) were replaced by the ancient Greek characters and the development in the humanistic thought of the writer and artist caused to show attention to dramatic values of classic play, that is, limitation of the classic works.

In the collapse of religion authority, the thinkers as Galileo, Coupler, Darwin and eventually Bacon and Descartes played an important role. In fact, it was the scientist who got the authority from the religion and gave it to the subject (acquainted subject). The dramatic hero also took his own authority from this acquainted subject. By "I think then I exist", Descartes centralized human and the modernity was started.

##### **Some principles of modernity include:**

Trust in ability of human's reason and science to treat the social diseases.

- Emphasis on the concepts including: development, nature and direct experiences.
- Overtly opposition to religion (particularly Christian theology)
- Humanism and expression of society and nature in the form of humanism

- Emphasis on the Empirical Methodology
- Positivism as Modernism methodology

Possibly the outbreak of the world wars was the end of modernity.

*Postmodernism and Collapse of Authorities:*

- Refusal of Authority from "Human" as the Subject of Episteme

During the three recent centuries, human's authority has been attacked by the three deadly strikes:

- Through Copernicus's revolution on the centrality of his house in the universe.
- Through Darwinism by its new genealogy which has broken his confidence.
- Through psychoanalysis which unstable him/her and overthrown his thrown of absolute sovereignty on existence.

In the middle ages or medieval centuries, human is defined in a new way. According to the church world-view, human is the heir of original sin (Adam's sin) and he achieve his/her own salvation if he/ she lives as Christ. Of course, such a life (as Christ) is possible only under the shadow of guidance and direction of St. Father (Pope and his representatives). Although in this world-view, the Christian human is assumed as God's son, he has been humiliated in comparison to the classic humanistic perspective (ancient Greece). Because the classic Greek assumed human as the criterion of every thing and every body was the criterion of its own knowledge. But the human, in church perspective, is an instinctually sinful person who just achieves his/her own salvation through the church training.

Postmodernism is a condition which covers the western civilization in the second half of twentieth century. The condition has been formed in opposition to the modern and traditional condition and challenged all predecessor authorities. In the "postmodern condition", Lyotard recognizes the modernity and modernism as the simultaneous presence of science and a set of universal and legitimizing grant-narratives which are originated from enlightenment. In his perspective, the grant-narratives lost their legitimizing power since the World War II. The main centre in opposition of modernity and post modernity is the decline in certainty.

Before the world wars, Nietzsche, Marx and Freud challenged the reason, instrumentalism, and alienation of technology, hypocritical and decadent morality of modern which tried to be an alternative for the effect Christian religion.

On the whole, postmodern condition is the dominant culture in the west after the war. Undoubtedly, postmodern art is exactly product of eradication of the borders and distinction between the high and low, elitism and popularism. Such distinctions or borders, like any other distinction, are

disappeared in the postmodern culture. Lyotard tries to show that the doubtfulness in the meta-narratives or grant-narratives in the postmodernism contains grant-narratives of science and policy as well as art as enlightenment, and if the art is not the equivalent of enlightenment, it cannot claim its superiority over the mass culture.

Nietzsche tries to overthrow the all sources of authority; therefore, he re-investigates all norms.

**Refusal of "Human's" Authority as the Subject of Episteme**

**Refusal of Author:**

Considering the position of author in the present century, Ronald Bart says "writing is the destruction of each fame and origin. Writing is the inactive, complex and crisscross space in which our subject and all identities are lost and the first lost identity is the author's. The birth of the reader must be in the price of the author's death.

At first, human assumed the truth as a hunting thing that was possible only by him. But the west thinkers doubted in the truth and human's ability to discover it.

For Marx, the truth in our contemporary was what the industrialist wanted to be manifested and they exploited art, religion, culture, policy and the set of what is called in Marx's term ideology to show their own demand as truth; therefore, truth is not something but the favorite of the industrialist and its opposition is false.

But Nietzsche is the thinker who reduced the truth into illusion, false and error. Regarding the truth, he says: "truth is not something but instinct, tendency, madness and insane!"<sup>3</sup> Also he says: "truth is a nice word which is not exact and it is a signifier that does not refers to a certain signified. What is truth? It is the moving army of metaphors, metonymies and various analogies by human's imagination. In short, a set of mankind's relations which have been intensified, transformed and decorated poetically and rhetorically and, at present time, after a long and continuous applications it seems as a stable, lawful and obligatory order for human. The truths are the illusions the illusiveness of which has been forgotten. They are metaphors which have been disabled because of their excess application, the coins the design of which has been eroded and they are taken into account as just metal piece not as the multiplicand coin."<sup>4</sup>

Michel Foucault is another influential thinker who refuses the authority of truth. In his book "Power and Knowledge" Foucault says: truth is neither the reward of the liberal souls nor an advantage for those who have emancipated themselves, but it belongs to this world and it is produced in the various forms of obligation and coercion.

**Emergence of Relativism and Multiplicity**

In the end of the fifth century B.C, a group of thinkers, who did not assume to seek and discovery of truth necessarily, were appeared.

In his book "Beyond good and bad", Nietzsche puts forward the point that we should escape from dogmatism in the philosophical thought. He challenges Plato's absolute truth and rejects the absolute truth and weal. In the absence of absolute truth, relativism and multiplicities emerge. Relativism, which was started by Nietzsche, was eventually resulted in the schools and thoughts including Hermeneutic, critical thoughts and Frankfurt school, poststructuralism and postmodernism. Nietzsche's relativism thoughts about truth and reality were represented, in a radical form, in the views of the postmodern thinkers as John Francois Lyotard, Jacques Derrida, Gilles Deleuze, Michel Foucault and Jean Baudrillard.

### **Refusal of Grand-narratives**

John Francois Lyotard (1924-1998), philosopher, theorist and the author of "postmodern condition", by his recent works has put forward postmodern discourse as a legitimized and current discourse. He produced his primary and very influential formulation about postmodern in his famous book "postmodern condition" which was published in 1979. He says: "the issue of legitimization is collected and produced in the various forms and interpretation in the contemporary, postindustrial society and postmodern. Grand-narrative, regardless it's applied method of universality and whether it is a theoretical or emancipative narrative, has lost its validity"<sup>5</sup>.

In a famous way, he defines the postmodernism as "refusal of grand-narratives".

"Once the Sophists remembered the exceptions logic, eventually we have understood that this logic is correct and (the logic of unique truth) is useless. This unique truth is not something but one of the possibilities of the exceptions logic."<sup>6</sup>

### **Refusal of Authority of System**

The thought is in the stage which cannot endure any system. In Gilles Deleuze's (1925-1992) view, instead of attention to the notions of unity and identity according which the west thought are centralized, we should deal with the concepts of multiplicity, becoming, difference and heterology. Therefore, he established the philosophy which is based on the concepts of multiplicity and difference.

### **Theory of Progress and Refusal of Authority**

Historical progress is a religious idea which continued its life, after marginalization of religion from Renaissance, in a new framework. Religious idea believes that the world regards the weal and happiness and God's will guarantees this happiness and weal. Belief in a savior in all religions is a proof for this claim that the savior will emerge and he justly modifies the

world which has been dominated by vice, even though it is during the last day of the world. After In the Renaissance, human's reason was making this utopia. English Renaissance thinker, Francis Bacon argued that science is what increases man's domination over world; therefore, modernity recognized the history as the history of progress which is certain in the modern era by modern reason.

### **Refusal of Authority the Artistic Work Authenticity:**

Walter Benjamin (1891-1940), a member of Frankfurt School, in his famous article, "Artistic Work in the Age of Mechanical Reproduction" (1935), tries to connect the cultural Avant-garde and new mass media and put their emancipative power in the opposite point of traditional myth of "autonomous" artistic work. In this article, he puts forward a new point. In the new middle of nineteenth century, the visual art is reproduced because of improvement in technology, reproduction and mechanical reproduction of artistic work and physical art as the printing industry reproduces the writing text. Emergence of photography art was the promise of these times which was perfected by invention of the Cinema industry. By mechanical reproduction of artistic works, characters have lost their main characteristic and they are not taken into account as the unique and univalent who seem immortal, while keeping the distance from the audience (listener and spectator), or as holy objects. Thus, the artistic work becomes without authenticity and it has not any more a ritual value. "That is why the mechanical reproduction; which is, at first step, associated to the physical art; gradually influences the artist and audience's view on the artistic work in all branches of artistic production, and inaugurates a new phase of creation and perception of the artistic work."<sup>7</sup> He invented the "Mechanical Reproduction" to mention to any form of cultural production the characteristic of which is the widespread reproduction of cultural manufactures through machinery technologies in which each copy or version is as "authentic" as the others. The issue is not merely the technology because the mechanical reproduction even transforms the nature of aesthetic experience. Benjamin argues that "a huge part of aesthetic power of the traditional artistic work is resulted from its position as unique and incomparable objects to the individual. He applies the term "halo" to refer to the combination of authority, authenticity and uniqueness in the artistic work; moreover, he believes that the three characteristics are inseparably interconnected. He argues that "possibility" of quickly and abundant reproduction of the artistic work has changed the essence of art and removed the halo [holiness] around it through obliterating its qualities of "oneness" and "unavailability". In Benjamin's view, the main origin



of the “halo” is the notion that the artistic work has a position in the cultural traditional field the historical origin of which is traced in the religion ceremonies: “therefore, the art holiness is resulted from the holiness of the religious and magical ceremonies. Exactly, that is this holiness which is obliterated in the age of mechanical reproduction”<sup>8</sup>.

Now, the artistic work-which was available only as a univalent version-is not unique and alone; ritual value of such a work has been lost. Now, the versions (Monalisa) with high quality are available for everybody. In our contemporary times, the mass media has destroyed the holiness and awe of artistic work. Benjamin takes photography as an example. By emergence of photography, we can print the picture as many as we like and we cannot recognize any picture as the “authentic” one. As a result, the ritual value of artistic work has been replaced by its dramatic value”<sup>9</sup>. For Benjamin, the mechanical reproduction and non-halo art provide the primary backgrounds for creation of the phenomenon which can be resulted in cultural democracy. Benjamin always hopes a kind of cultural policy which was simultaneously avant-garde and popular.

“Significantly, such a process, for Benjamin, is not negative; but – and against what Adorno thinks about culture industry – cause a promotion in the art rank. Now, people – common audience of artistic work – can democratically and freely express their views about them”<sup>10</sup>. According to Benjamin, the mechanical reproduction of artistic work “is a component of process of culture democratization.”<sup>11</sup>

In such a process, Benjamin seeks the political meaning and shows his attention to the politicization of aesthetic. But this study tries to show the relationship between Benjamin’s consideration and postmodern thought. Scot Lash seeks such a concept in the meaning of halo decline. The similarity of Benjamin’s critical perspective and postmodern culture is in this concept; because the cultural face of post modernity is [also] lack of this halo.”<sup>12</sup>

By application of “halo decline”, Lash considers the postmodern culture forms in the above mentioned conditions and in his consideration – with regard to Benjamin’s work-regards the avant-garde in 1920s and surrealist movement and takes into account it as the beginning of post modernity; because it is regarded as a radical attack to the autonomous and halo of aesthetic. So, Lash declares that Benjamin’s aesthetic is approximately the postmodernist aesthetic.”

Many proofs and reasons can be presented for the Lash claim. But we have selected the halo decline as eradication of the borders between the high and common culture. We intend to discuss the political or aesthetic results of such phenomenon. We only try to show that there are similarities between

postmodernism and the Benjamin’s halo decline. One of the features of postmodernism and particularly poststructuralism is to remove the binary oppositions in the philosophical tradition. “Metaphysic of presence of west has established the basis of its logic on the hierarchy of opposite bi-polar concepts including presence/absence, truth/false, conscious/unconscious, subject/object, form/content, nature/culture, speech/writing, soul/mater....”<sup>13</sup>

Such oppositions have been established based on the superiority of the primary sign and inferiority of the second sign. Post structuralism tries to break such authority structures. By extension, we can perceive that distinction between the high and common culture is a distinction and binary opposition based on a kind of authority which is resulted from a “halo” of artistic work.

Reproduction of artistic work through mechanical reproduction violates such an opposition by removing the “halo”. Moreover, we can perceive that the halo decline and its effect in the avant-garde of 1920s- which was theoretically represented in the Benjamin’s article- are the important conditions in emergence of postmodernism in the human sciences. Although Adorno is a partner for Benjamin’s concerns, he recognizes Benjamin’s aversion from artistic art and interest in the mass culture as prejudice.

What causes the death of value and validity of commodity including artistic and non-artistic is the “death of God” by Nietzsche. The death of God is accompanied by the death of human and author because the death of God is the “death of being God”. The “death of being God”, in the process of transformation and gloss in a short term, gives the authenticity to the commodity, as the artistic work achieve authenticity in the gloss and “Formalism” insists on it, this short term quickly passes and what remains is the simple truth that the commodity, in each form, has a consumer. In other words, the commodity is not in the form of an abstract object that human (subject) recognizes and values it but becomes a tool in the hand of human and its validity is capability of its application and this capability is determined neither by philosopher nor theorist but by interne.

Here, Heidegger emerges and, based on what was expressed, believes in the value of human as applicability. Now, the manufactured thing, in each form, is a tool which determines that it cannot be unique because it must be reproduced as much as the users who are not a part of society who are traditionally assumed as inferior but include all mankind society because human is assumed as the user in this gloss. Meanwhile, the superior and inferior have died by the death of system and narratives.

Considering the authenticity in the reproduced works and ontological similarity between the

reproduced and unique works, P.F Stravson proposes a controversial perspective and believes that we cannot reproduce the painting tableau and sculptures undistinguished from their original versions because of an accidental fact. According to Stravson, there is not an ontological difference between the various kind of executive, reproductive and unique versions. He claims that we can have many evidences (according to the sample/evidence model). Stravson says that the original version of painting and sculpture, like the early manuscripts of poet, except the emotional value and probably the historical and technical importance, were valueless (Stravson, recited by Henfling 1377: 150). Nowadays, with regard to the countless number of reproduced artistic works, we observe the certainty of Stravson's prophesy about the value of original version because, in the case of new arts, the oneness of the work has approximately lost their previous meaning.

### Conclusion:

Postmodern characteristic is different for the experts and there is not any agreement between them up to now; however, we can mention to some common characteristics. In postmodern, the concepts as "reason", "truth", "tradition", "logic" and "morality" which determined the direction of human's life and gave it meaning and every one was once a the basis for episteme formation and essence of dominant model on human's mind, lost their meaning and their authorities were refused. By five important features, postmodern

has caused new definitions in the political sociology. Such definitions are in a close association to the items of globalization:

- 1- "Opposition to the epistemology and more attention to the ontology, that is, interest in the various effects of knowledge on the life more than the life appearances for the real causes of belief."
- 2- "Attention to the infinite meaning as a source for construction of identities and structures."
- 3- "Refusal of centrality from society, namely the belief that the social structures are constructed during the processes which occur in the place and space and they are not determined in a scientific way. There is not any central institute (e.g. state) and meaning (e.g. truth) around which the various aspects of social life are organized in a stable position."
- 4- Refusal of Essence; in the political sociology influenced by postmodern, the identity and structures are the phenomena which are constructed in a particular social context and related to a particular historical conditions."
- 5- "The effect of the perspectives by which the social life is viewed. Through this angle, there is not any universal and transcendental truth and value which common and acceptable between all the society members."<sup>14</sup>

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