

ART, MASS COMMUNICATION AND UTOPIA**

SANAT, KİTLE İLETİŞİMİ VE ÜTOPYA

Doç. Dr. Nazan Alioğlu**

ABSTRACT

In our day that the end of history, end of art and death of socialism are declared, we need new dreams of happiness more than ever. At this point, what is the role of art? The topic sense of art that produces dreams of happiness, in other words, union of art and politics, may be evaluated over Walter Benjamin's "The Work of Art in the Age of Technical Reproducibility".

After 1960s, the course of plastic arts has changed. The inferior part of art has become politicized art especially for the sake of ruling the masses. And the high part of art has been taken into the public relations activities of large corporations and serve in that direction. Demystification, auralessness and the lack of philosophy accompanying these has made art additionally a means of public relations and publicity, that is to say, art strengthens the marketing, sales relations of multinational companies.

Under the guidance of Benjamin's powerful article, this paper investigates the conceptions mentioned above by means of art's serving the political mass culture with the collaboration of mass media or the hegemonic power of art and again art's serving the global capital with public relations and publicity purposes will be discussed within the context of Benjamin's understanding of art-aesthetics and utopia; relationship of art and mass; mass art and hegemony; relationship of art and communication; within the context of aura again, philosophy and art.

Key Words: Aura, Art, Mass Communication, Utopia, Politics.

ÖZ

Tarihin sonu, sanatın sonu ve sosyalizmin ölümünün ilan edildiği günümüzde yeni mutluluk hayallerine her zamankinden fazla ihtiyacımız var. Bu noktada sanatın rolü nedir? Mutluluk hayallerini üreten ütöpik sanat anlayışı diğer bir ifadeyle sanat siyaset buluşması, Walter Benjamin'in "Teknik Yeniden Üretilbilirlik Çağında Sanat Yapıtı" üzerinden değerlendirilebilir.

1960'lı yıllardan sonra plastik sanatların seyri değişmiştir. Sanatın düşük kısmı özellikle kitleleri yönetmek adına politize edilmiş sanat haline gelmiştir. Sanatın yüksek kısmı ise büyük şirketlerin halkla ilişkiler faaliyetlerine dahil edilmiştir. Gizemden arındırma, aurasızlık bunlara eşlik eden felsefesizlik sanatı bir de halkla ilişkiler ve tanıtım aracı yapmıştır, yani sanat çokuluslu şirketlerin pazarlama, satış ilişkilerini güçlendirmektedir. Umut içermez, kurtarıcı değildir. Kısacası auralı ya da aurasız sanat her durumda kitle iletişimiyle genişlemektedir.

Bu makalede yukarıdaki düşünceler doğrultusunda, Benjamin'in güçlü makalesinin rehberliğinde sanatın kitle iletişim araçlarının işbirliğiyle siyasi kitle kültürüne hizmet etmesi ya da sanatın hegemonik gücü ve yine sanatın küresel sermayeye halkla ilişkiler ve tanıtım amaçlı hizmet etmesi Benjamin'in sanat-estetik anlayışı ve ütopya; sanat ve kitle ilişkisi; kitle sanatı ve hegemonya; sanat ve iletişim ilişkisi; yeniden aura, felsefe ve sanat bağlamında ele alınacaktır.

Anahtar Kelimeler: Aura, Sanat, Kitle İletişimi, Ütopya, Siyaset.

INTRODUCTION

Utopias revive the hopes for salvation of humanity in times of despair. The "socialist utopias" of Saint-Simon and Charles Fourier and the communism of Marx and Engels are like this also. In utopias life is lived like art. Therefore, leadership of social revolutionary thoughts are granted to artists. These utopias define art and the artist as "avant-garde" for the first time.

According to an understanding, utopias do not just produce promising models for the future but at the same time they criticize the era being lived. Then, starting from the criticism feature of the utopia concept, does the art of our day exist as "criticism" and does each of these works offer an utopia? Or else, is art one of the means that enable the post-Fordist capitalist system to reproduce itself?

In our day that the end of history, end of art and death of socialism are declared, we need new dreams of happiness more than ever. At this point, what is the role of art? The utopic sense of art that produces dreams of happiness, in other words, union of art and politics, may be evaluated over Walter Benjamin's "The Work of Art in the Age of Technical Reproducibility".

In line with these considerations in the article, under the guidance of Benjamin's famous article, art's serving the political mass culture with the collaboration of mass media or the hegemonic power of art and again art's serving the global capital with public relations and publicity purposes will be discussed within the context of Benjamin's understanding of art-aesthetics and utopia; relationship of art and mass; mass art and hegemony; relationship of art and communication; within the context of aura again, philosophy and art .

BENJAMIN'S SENSE OF ART-AESTHETICS AND UTOPIA

As a modern thinker, Benjamin's status is a little complicated. His intellectual career shows parallelism with the transformation of his philosophical temperament. His intellectual temperament extends from Romanticism and Idealism to Postmodernism (Gelley, 1999: 934). In 1917-18, Benjamin primarily thinks aesthetics as a basic perceptual experience and cognition, and then in its relationship with works of art. Afterwards, Benjamin's studies increasingly focus on the social function of art. Now, according to Benjamin, aesthetics is a profoundly political project; it is not a simple displacement of aesthetics and politics, it is particularly the prerequisite of aesthetics (Gelley, 1999: 936).

As for the classic aesthetic tradition, it can be characterized with three essential components. And Benjamin's stream of thought can be explained by his writings corresponding to these three orientations: The bond of art and philosophy that can be expressed as the ontological status of art , *The Elective Affinities* (1922); The political-pedagogical function of art, *The Work of Art in the Age of its Technical Reproducibility* (1935-36); and the *Arcades Project* (1934-40) focused on commodity fetishism within the context of the

problem of beauty and appearance ” (Gelley, 1999: 938).

To respond to the emergency problems of the era he lives in, Benjamin has undertaken to make the Marxist class theory subject to himself as a duty. The mimetic, naturalist understandings that come since Plato and Aristotle, the theory of art reflecting the social reality (Tunali, 1984) that is to say, the social art that is close with the Marxist understanding of art is used for the purpose of encouraging the collective life to be organized in a rational way in accordance with the principles of the human nature to offer the greatest happiness to the widest mass. Social art should provide a cultural agreement for revolutionary change. Art is the assurance of the reality of a true and orderly society (McWilliam, 2011: 13).

Thus, a purpose of the article Benjamin has written was to make a liberating action map for the proletarian unity of the future (Gelley, 1999: 944). Member of the Frankfurt School, Marxist thinker Benjamin emphasizes the saving power of art at the end of 1940's that the power of influence of the Frankfurt School reached the zenith. Although he died much earlier than the 1960s, he says the thing that draws the boundaries of the work of art is aura and aura cannot be captured by any reproduction. But although mechanical reproduction causes the artwork as a unique object dependent to a specific time and space to lose its aura, originality or status, according to Benjamin, it has a positive side; to rescue the artwork from its dependence to ritual. Especially photograph and cinema reveal this liberation. This situation has opened art to masses more than ever before and made it more flexible. This development is something that the revolutionary Marxists desire (Kul-Want, 2013: 51). It has appeared that art has a political impact that cannot even be dreamt of due to its power of carrying big masses away.

Benjamin, as a Marxist was perhaps seeking the answer of the question ”How will the art of a classless society be?” or was searching for the role of the art policies in fulfilling the revolutionary demands. At this point, a meaningful development was this: ”Photograph which is the first copying means that is really revolutionary has appeared simultaneously with the birth of socialism” (Benjamin, 2014:99). This situation was promising about his utopia coming true.

According to Benjamin, even reproducibility and auralessness extinguish the autonomy of art, which will somewhat continue to exist in the area of creativity because autonomy will be useful in post-Fordist capitalism, decomposition of aura and technical reproduction will enable directing the reality to reach the masses and the masses to reality on the road to revolution (Benjamin, 2014:98). Here, the point at issue is that the understanding of social art takes a role as a course explanatory to art that is to say, as a tool.

Relationship of Art and Mass

In a completely aesthetized world, art can have no critical superiority. And this explains Adorno's melancholy. The grief of Adorno's aesthetic theory is, in fact, the pain felt from the loss of aura. In McLuhan's

Gutenberg Galaxy, Adorno is the last great representative of aesthetical passion. Adorno did not tie himself to technology. Instead, he continued to work on the old beautiful project of aesthetic modernity, to improve it. As to Benjamin, he is entirely different from Adorno (Bolz and Mattson, 1999: 125). According to Benjamin, traditional aesthetic has, generally, belittled the mass culture. Again according to Benjamin, the concepts and logic of aesthetic constitute an obstacle to understand the mass culture phenomenon and the social knowledge ingrained in the time and space of the daily life. Because neither the traditional art nor the idealist philosophy can comprehend mass culture.

At this point, information aesthetic theorizes the aesthetic relevance between art and mass. The larger the people masses that reach the work of art, the greater the art is. Success of a work of art is measured according to the number of audience watching at its scheduled time. This is a crowd (mass) art. How will the message in the work of art be conveyed to the crowd without being distorted? By virtue of contemporary technology, works of art will reach the crowd, not a minority in limited number.

As expressed previously also, the German Marxist thinker Benjamin made important contributions to the arguments about the political influence of art. Benjamin was not a representative of propaganda or socialist realism. One does not become a radical by illustrating poverty and coerciveness. Even the bourgeois means of production and publishing could trigger the revolution. According to Benjamin, the basic method of the bourgeoisie for exercising pressure about art was creating an aura around art (Kul-Want, 2013:87).

Bourgeoisie has turned the object of art with aura into an object of belief, worship with qualifications of uniqueness and originality in a way that will reinforce their class power along with its economic value. However, according to Benjamin, appearance of photography was promising a hope about eliminating this aura condition of the object of art. Mechanical reproduction was going to eliminate these bourgeois values and attitude laden on art. In this meaning Benjamin also has an article named "The Brief History of Photography" that he wrote in 1931.

In socialist art autonomy of the artist is out of question also. A progressivist artist predicates his/her choice on the basis of class conflict and stands by the proletariat. At this point his/her autonomy ends. The artist directs his/her efficiency in the class conflict in a way that can be beneficial for the proletariat.

Technical reproducibility was going to realize Benjamin's utopia, it could have served a revolutionary process or renewal of humanity. However, in the West, capital, not art has implemented "the process of destruction", anyway, according to Jameson, there is close relationship between postmodern culture and capital (Foster, 2014:158). This process had paved the way to a passive consumption of the shows of mass culture, not to an efficient transformation in cultural institutions and social relations. Culture has commodified as a whole.

MASS ART AND HEGEMONY

According to the Frankfurt School which is one of the most important branches of cultural criticism in Western Marxism, center of the post-delayed industrial economies is the industrialization of culture. In an age that meeting the material needs of humanity is no longer a problem, culture has become the main source of revenues. At this point, technology, that is to say, our weapon in the war of liberating us from absences has become a power that makes masses dependent (Cryan, Shatil and Piero, 2012: 133).

After the World War II, by winning out over the traditional left, capitalism created a unidimensional society. Especially in America, political opposition against capitalism came to an end. Masses became unable to find a reason to rebel against a system that satisfies their material needs and provides a reasonable understanding of democratic assurance.

When Adorno and Horkheimer wrote the article "Culture Industry: Enlightenment as Mass Deception" article in 1940, they had objected to the increasing effect of the entertainment industries, commodification of art and the standardizing function of the culture. They had looked at the new media like cinema and radio with suspicion. Moreover, by using the concept "industry" for the culture area, they had heralded that culture has become economicalized (Raunig, 2014:219).

A side effect of the mass culture is the vanishing of the serious or high art, that is to say, the art that can criticize, transform the social reality within the process. In fact, as will be emphasized in the article later, when viewed from our day, it is observed that this art has turned into the means of public relations and publicity of multinational companies. While the mass media encourage the consumption culture, the styles of thinking and acting of the masses are dictated by the controllers of the media. Here, the hegemonic power of art comes out over its collaboration with the mass media (Berger, 2012).

As one of the theorists who revised Marxism, the thing that Gramsci wanted to explain with the concept of hegemony is to show that dominant classes can convince the exploited people that their condition is natural and universal and it will not change. According to this thought, it is not the infrastructure and economic relations that are dominant or that convinces people to accept the status quo, it is the cultural institutions like art, religion, law that belong to the superstructure (Berger, 2012). Today, the main means of establishing hegemony is mass media (Woodfin and Zarate, 2013:124-125). Mass media is based on the "act of copying" to a large extent: to take the photos; to print the newspapers, magazines and books; to record the performances on film and video tapes; to record sounds on various media (Berger, 2012). In other words, with the togetherness of technology and art which Benjamin sees as a saviour, mass media realizes its own hegemony. Art, with the show that mass media stages is evaluated as a hegemonic tool within its relationship with entertainment. Artists, that is to say, culture producers

have each become an employee of the institutions of the culture industry.

Since Benjamin, there was a curiosity about where will reproduction end with the opportunities of technique. Art is already spread everywhere. Aesthetic which is one of the most basic constituents of the human nature has today become a part of the economic production. Labour power in our day has an aesthetic side other than the communication and language dimension. Aesthetic has become an inseparable part of every kind of commodity production.

COMMUNICATION AND ART: ART AS MEANS OF PUBLIC RELATIONS AND PUBLICITY

In modern understanding, the source of artistic value is art. As to the contemporary art, artistic value lies in the whole of connections, discourses, actions, etc. that start off from an object only in a position of a tool, a transition point. An interim situation that remains between art and artistic communication is in question. Here, public art institutions play an important role. The public art institutions, namely, the museums and international exhibitions fulfill a work in the area of both appreciation of the works of art and in relations with the media.

Inclusion of art in the business administration culture is the consequence of the Reagan and Thatcher governments that came into power in early 1980s. In America and Britain companies had never been so dominant over high culture before. Intervention of the business world to high culture was not a never-seen-before fact but it was treated as inappropriate. On the other hand, companies were contributing to the museums of art and culture institutions previously also; but this contribution was requested from them. In this meaning, they were in a passive status. However 1970s the companies that continued these passive contributions started to be participants effective in creating the contemporary culture discourse. While previously companies were only interfering in art and high culture only from time to time and in a limited manner, throughout the past twenty years they started to intervene in all the areas of art and culture. In our day, company intervention in art is a widespread fact (Wu, 2014: 16).

Starting from 1980s, companies began to intensify their art collecting activities. Today's companies which are equipped with their own curators and art departments started to exhibit the collections they created using their economic power at home and abroad. Thus, they entered into intense competition with public museums and galleries. Furthermore, they turned their own art museums and galleries into a tool of publicity. They benefited from the social statuses of the culture institutions. Their establishing art galleries within the company structure, organizing art exhibitions in various venues of the country was creating an impression as if art was an inseparable part of their daily work practices (Wu, 2014: 17). The company elites are creating the image that they are the patrons of art, the Medici family of the modern times through the popular press. These people tour galleries, visit artist ateliers, purchase works of art from auction halls and do all these despite their busy schedules.

In our day it is not the artist who determines what high or serious art is by himself/ herself, it is the art world plus the business world. As early as the beginning of 1970s, George Dickie formulates a ‘‘corporate art theory’’. According to this theory, the work of art is the work that stands as a candidate for the appreciation of certain persons that work on behalf of corporations (Perniola, 2015: 99). These persons try to attract public interest by distributing awards in other words, by awarding artistic effort and to upgrade themselves to the status of experts of art appreciation of contemporary culture. In brief, the influence of the business world has advanced at the moment at every phase of the contemporary art: From its production to its spread and reception.

In the Western capitalist democracies of the 20th century, contemporary art, along with the other culture products, function as a tool of intervention that carries both material and symbolic value for companies and the senior management (Wu, 2014:23). News appear frequently on press that the senior managers, these ‘‘elite of the elite’’, and especially the ones who manage big companies cherish a great and even mad passion for art (Wu, 2014:22). Cultural capital which is an effective concept developed by Bourdieu functions as a ‘‘tool of tyranny’’ (Wu, 2014:23). In global capitalism, products of art and culture represent social status and values. Art is under the auspices of the ones who possess power and status in the society for a long time and art products function as status symbols besides being objects that carry market value. The impacts that company sponsorship creates on art institutions are taken into consideration and it is a matter of discussion that these institutions are being used as a tool of publicity by the business world.

In fact, a consensus has been reached against the public between the institution and the critical mediatic artist. In other words, whereas the institution was sharing the public point of view and criticizing the counteractions of the avant-garde art, today institutions choose to support and thrust the infringer, the adversary artist to the forefront. Because scandal will bring a much greater profit to it than it can obtain by adhering to the traditional admiration of people by way of advertisement and taking place in media. Thus, an avant-garde art directly associated with institutions was born. The client of the new infringer avant-garde artist is not the merchant or farsighted collector as in the modern paradigm, but the institution itself (Perniola, 2015:80).

In our day, the break between artistic innovation and public has excessively increased. The public resembles an audience that watches a chess game without knowing the rules of the game at all. Acceptance of the artistic innovation by institutions demolishes its violation or avant-garde effect and turns the whole system of art into a game that only the qualified one can understand (Perniola, 2015:80-81).

AURA AGAIN, PHILOSOPHY AND ART

In America, in the years of the World War II, philosophy departments had opened their arms to some

refugee philosophers whose philosophies are unacceptable by fascism. These philosophers were logical positivist or empiricist and were thinking that philosophy as known for centuries has come to an end in a specific meaning. Time had come for philosophy to leave its place to science (Danto, 2015:176). In short, a philosophy that the positivists were trying to demolish was in question (Danto, 2015: 177).

Warhol wants the price of the works he produces to be paid. In Warhol, the important thing is the thought. Lyotard (1990) evaluates this issue like this: In a world that success is gaining time, thinking causes loss of time. In the postmodern situation, the important thing is to present the work by publicising it. Publicity comes before the work. Now there are artist philosophers. How can philosophy escape from this inferior position it is left against art: By showing itself everywhere madly in media with extravagant production?

Today's art criticism expresses that it can also do without theory. The art critic makes a few fancy sentences when promoting-advertising the artists that he/she likes. In the 20th century art critique is inconsistency and verbosity. In him/her, there is more of an amateur's attitude that voices his/her personal appreciation. "I like this", "I don't like that". Most of the time, the appraisal does not go beyond that (Perniola, 2015:76).

As to the Kantian art critic, when he/she is forced to give an answer to "what good is art", he/she has to evade this question by saying that it reflects a philosophical misunderstanding. The question "What has usefulness got to do with art?" is the answer of the ones who are convinced that art exists solely for aesthetic satisfaction. The Kantian aesthetic has generally served the contemporary conservative art critic to set the desires of the artists to put the art at the disposal of that or this humane benefit, and most significantly to political benefit aside by saying that it has nothing to do with art (Danto, 2014:16).

Kant discriminates the free art from the art made for a price or the commercial art. Again, according to Kant, the mind related with fine arts should occupy itself only with taking pleasure, it should forget everything about money. Because art reveals itself only where there is no economy. Art has no connection with the supply demand equilibrium. It cannot be exchanged. As to craft, it is based on mediocre economy and daily use. Where there is craft, a vulgar realism, reproduction of the same form, or making the "same" object again is in question. However, art is with aura.

In our day, when looked at the issue of the autonomy of art from the perspective of the autonomy of creativity, creativity is autonomous. For post-Fordist capitalism, creativity will develop in an autonomous way so that post-Fordism will capture it and take credit for it. Post-Fordist capitalism says "go, make music as you like, and then let us commercialize that new music". It is important for creativity to be autonomous. That is to say, capitalists want to capture the intelligence and the forms that are produced autonomously and freely. They want this to produce surplus value, not for people to be free (Lavaert and Gielen, 2014: 184-185).

On the other hand, the aim of the majority of today's art is not to provide aesthetic experience. On the other

side, most of the traditional art and some part of the contemporary art undoubtedly comprise aesthetic constituents. According to Danto, if today's artists would have started to produce works of art whose objective and aim was to present aesthetic experience, that is to say, if there would be a return to the art with aura, the art practice would have entered into a very essential transformation. That would be a real revolution (2015: 116).

The posthuman auraless art of the digital age and the theoryless criticism that supports this art, this means that art will no longer be a progressive movement. The artist, the critic and the curator will be deprived of every kind of autonomy and this threesome will directly be drifted to dependence to economic sanctions.

Advocating the aura of art again, will in our day gain the meaning of a public opposition. Because it will constitute the final defense against the dominance of capital. In return for this, the ones that stand by the communication sector or side by it will do nothing other than speeding up the process of dissolution of the symbolic world of art.

The contemporary paradigm or style of thinking, while on one hand exaggerating the uniqueness of the artist, empties the personality of the artist on the other hand. While offering works to public appreciation, on the other hand it heads towards unprincipled strategies irrelevant with art directed at self-advertising. In these circumstances, the way of defending aura with a traditionalist understanding is doomed to be defeated. Contemporary paradigm does not deny aura, it does not forsake it, but mystifies art with the economic values it appraises to the signatures of the artists that it has introduced through the tactics of the information market, not the art market.

This contemporary paradigm of art takes place among the most exciting aspects of the contemporary culture due to the inconsistent mix of its economic, aesthetic and communication dimension. Within this context, the "contemporary artist" or the "philosopher of art" is contaminated with the uncertainty and inconsistencies of the contemporary paradigm to the extent that he/she cannot reach the art and aesthetic system existing beyond the traditional aura and being purified from technical magic.

CONCLUSION

After 1960s, the course of plastic arts changed. Aura-work-artist, these three elements of art underwent unexpected transformations. Copying and identifying with the seen, heard, touched thing, that is to say, the thing that Perniola called the psychotic reality put an end to Benjamin's utopia. The disturbing aspect of psychotic reality is its having gained wide currency in contemporary aesthetic. In the art area, the traditional structure as art-reality discrimination seems to have collapsed. Some kind of a psychotic reality is born. Art has lost its distance to reality and arts have become the realities themselves that do not even pass by the aesthetic experience, not a simulation of reality any more (Perniola, 2015:42).

And according to Lyotard, the value of a work of art or thought depends upon its capacity to produce future. However, can there be a capacity to produce future for the artist who prefers to sublimate the popular mass arts instead of high art or to render service to the applied pragmatic units of the communication area like advertising, public relations and publicity? Is there any feasibility of Benjamin's utopia left in our day?

The inferior part of art has become politicized art especially for the sake of ruling the masses. And the high part of art has been taken into the public relations team of big companies and serve in that direction. That is to say, the demystification that Benjamin associates with the birth of technical reproducibility puts art to the same level with the most insignificant reality, degrades it to the status of an entertainment and an educational visual pleasure, in other words, it is a tool of hegemony, it is diplomatic or political. It does not contain hope, it is not savior. Demystification, auralessness and the lack of philosophy accompanying these has made art additionally a means of public relations and publicity, that is to say, art strengthens the marketing, sales relations of multinational companies. It does not contain hope, it is not savior. To conclude, art with or without aura intersects with mass communication in any case.

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