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**New Epistemological Meaning of the
World and its Reflection on Art**

*İsmail Tunalı, Professor of Philosophy,
Turkey*

Human and world dilemma takes a special relationship style in the history. Because of this, each historical era's world becomes a unique world for that period. Also, each era's understanding of existence, philosophy, science and art have the basic character structure of the era they were born in. In this respect, for instance, worlds of an antiquity man, a medieval man, a Renaissance man and a modern man are different from an epistemological point of view. This difference concretizes in their existence interpretations, object comprehensions and related to this, in their philosophies, sciences and arts; in other words, in the epistemological meaning of their worlds.

The era we live in also has an epistemological meaning. How type of a meaning this is? Answer of this question can be comprehended by looking at the epistemological manner of the 19th century. Because, our era's epistemological characteristic is shaped in this period.

In the second half of the 19th century, all natural sciences, especially physics and biology gained a new acceleration. This revision in sciences is based on the principle of turning them into positive sciences. This means sciences are based on experimental data and laboratory studies. The model science of the era becomes physics since it reaches to certain natural rules and all the other sciences enter into a radical innovation process according to physics model. For example, psychology is founded as psycho- physics by Weber and Fechner. Auguste Comte, who founded sociology calls it as physic- social, in other words as physics of social events. A. Comte also brings forward the famous hypothesis of three phases law. According to this hypothesis, human mind passes from three phases: theological phase which created religion, metaphysics phase which created philosophy and positive phase which created science. At the end of these intellectual formations a new epistemological world view, a mechanist world view which works according to mechanical rules emerges. There is the understanding of reality of this movement in the basis of this mechanist world map. Accordingly, reality is only the reality of sensual data. Parallel to this epistemological formation in sciences, an understanding of art based on the reality of sensual data, in other words positivist principles. This understanding of art is impressionism.

According to E. Mach, the philosopher of the era, existence is a complex of senses. Sensation is a structural element which forms both the physical and spiritual existence. Object, substance, material, colors, sounds and etc. consist of sensual elements. Accordingly, the world is a mosaic of sensations and knowing means to comprehend this mosaic of sensations.

Understanding of impressionist art completes such an epistemological picture. According to this, what the real is the appearances conveyed by our senses. Appearance is a complex of instantaneous senses or impressions. This complex of impressions is the only reality. It is the epistemological existence picture of a positivist age.¹

Positive natural sciences, which gained a new acceleration with the positivization tendency in the second half of the 19th century, enter the 20th century as mathematic positive natural sciences with a new understanding of reality. This new understanding of reality surpasses the epistemology that has existed for centuries and puts forward a new knowledge picture.

Scientific epistemological picture, which appeared with Renaissance, expresses an understanding based on sensual elements. This understanding deconstructs the monist reality approach in science and builds a new reality based on science and philosophy. For example, "quantum" approach of Max Planck, "relativity" of Einstein and "uncertainty relation" of W. Heisenberg become the structural elements of this new epistemology. This new reality approach materializes on "big reality" and "big abstract" identity of the era. In other words, "reality" and "abstract" is integrated through this. As a result of this, epistemology reaches a new world picture with this new reality approach. For example, rationalism and empiricism in philosophy, abstraction and naturalism in art loose their categorical values in this new reality approach.

Such a universe is expressed most clearly in phenomenology philosophy. Phenomenology, "parenthesizes", "assumes nonexistent" the entire nonexistent sensual world with "phenomenological manner" and "phenomenological reduction" and heads towards "essence", "eidos", "essentia". When the sights and senses are assumed nonexistent there is an absolute, doubtless reality to be reached: World of essences that surpasses the senses. Such a world is an absolute existence that is not bound up with time and space. This is a new epistemological reality. We observe the same manner in the art of the era. This is the abstract art, which starts with cubism, continues with non-figurative art and reaches up to today. Abstract art also seeks such an absolute existence, essence, a basic being. For example, Theo van Doesburg, one of the theorists of abstract art, explains this as follows: "The aim of art is to reach the essence with the tools of art." Naturally, this art will be an "arte metaphysika".

21st century brings a new epistemological world picture and a new epistemological meaning of the world as it starts as an information age. The term "information age" expresses such an epistemological meaning and the epistemological reality that it is based on. Now we can ask this question: What is this new epistemological meaning?

For centuries, the conflict between humans and the world, two contrasting existence areas and knowledge phenomenon, is considered as the comprehension of the world, which is also a development that has a conception in mind. Existence and reality approach of classical epistemology takes form in this conflict. However, the new century transforms the individual consciousness into a universal mind, and the world, which is an individual consciousness correlate, into a universal world. Now epistemology conceives the reality as a global world reality that is comprehended by the universal mind. Universal mind is an existence of individual subconscious concepts, intellectual categories. Global world is not a correlate of the universal mind, but it's the universal mind itself. A new knowledge cosmic is born from such an identicalness of world and mind. This new cosmic structure is a virtual structure. Hence, it has the paradox of being a virtual reality. This is the reality

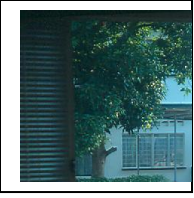
that is both the mind the world; it is a digital reality, a product of the computer technology. Most concrete examples of this reality are the images in the internet. These images are virtual but also real at the same time. This paradoxical quality integrates these uncompromising antinomies of these images in transcendental virtual reality. Such a reality approach will also affect the art. In other words, the concept of art since Renaissance will change completely. Even in 1950s, H. Read and W. Adorno have very clearly indicated that such a change would occur in a very near future. For example, H. Read was saying that art of machine age would take the place of painting stating, "The only real artist we want is nothing more than a worker with the capability of designing."² In the same decade, T.W. Adorno tries to explain the meaning of art in the new reality of the work within a new concept. This concept is the notion of "culture industry."³ "Culture Industry" concept covers this new art and is synonymous with the concept of "mass culture". However, it is basically different than the art produced by masses, such as folk art. "Culture Industry" involves "the products that are produced partly and completely according to a plan and determined mostly by the consuming masses. They resemble each other in terms of structure and build up an almost perfect system together. And the tools of contemporary technique provide it to them."⁴ As a natural result of this, concept of art will change while the autonomy of the art in the cultural scene will disappear. The difference between fine arts and applied arts will also disappear and art will have a presence in the "culture industry" only as "art."⁵

This change, foreseen by H. Read and T. Adorno almost fifty years ago, is coming true in our century. This change is based on the change of reality into a virtual reality. Category of virtual reality has quiet rich art works today. This also consists of a virtual time and space. This art type is named "ars elektronika" with the concepts such as "cave" and "bubbles". "Ars elektronika" will develop more with these examples and become an original art of the new epistemological universe picture. Here, naturally some questions appear. What will be the position of conventional art that existed up to now, against this new universe picture? Will art continue to exist with the same familiar sense and within the same categories? Or will art also start to search for new forms and new directions and concepts within this changing epistemological existence picture and virtual reality? "Ars elektronika", as mentioned above, gives us some clear hints about the future of art.

Art of the information age will surely be a digital design tool adequate for this age and technology, especially the computer technology. Some basic characteristics of this art will probably take form as follows:

Art of the information age will develop outside of traditional naturalism and abstract art dialectics that existed since Renaissance. In this sense, art will be an anti-conventional new art. All practices will be according to a universal appreciation alternative to universal mind, not by an individual creation. Installation and conceptual art movements that aroused in the last decades of the last century and ars elektronika which is in its rising stage today, can be seen as the first movements of such an art understanding.

Art of the information age will gradually lose its traditional local and national identity within an integration of a universal mind, a global world and a universal taste. However, art had developed in these concepts for centuries. We can see the indications of today's art especially in architecture and music. The information age will continue to discuss the locality and nationality of art, which has been discussed for centuries, but mostly as a nostalgic problem.



Despite these changes, art will not lose its importance for humans in the information age, but it will continue to be a cultural axis with its original characteristics within the new epistemological categories of the era.

¹ İsmail Tunalı, *Felsefenin Işığında Modern Resim* (İstanbul: Remzi Kitabevi, 1997).

² İsmail Tunalı, *Tasarım Felsefesine Giriş* (İstanbul: Yapı Endüstri Merkezi: 2002).

³ Max Horkheimer, and Theodor W. Adorno, *Dialektik der Aufklaerung*.

⁴ Ibid., 60.

⁵ Ibid.

İsmail Tunalı. (Ph.D., Philosophy, Psychology and Art History from Vienna University). Worked for the foundation of the Atatürk University in Erzurum; Member of the Supreme Council of the Ancient Ruins and Monuments between 1963-74. Taught in Tublingen University in 1966; Lectured in Vienna University for the Philosophy and Aesthetics Classes between 1978-84 and presented seminars on Aristoteles and Wittgenstein in Konstanz University in 1984. Director of the Institute of Social Sciences of Mimar Sinan University between 1987-88; The Grate Honour Decoration "Commendatore" by Italian Government in 1978; The First Degree Science Honour Decoration by Austrian Government in 1982; The Golden Book Award in 1997; The Honorable Doctorate Award by Mimar Sinan University in 1998. His books include, Greek Aesthetic (1st edition in 1963 and 4th edition in 1996, Istanbul), Art Ontology (1st edition in 1966 and 6th edition in 2002, Istanbul); Introduction for B. Croce's Aesthetic, Istanbul in 1973; Philosophy (1st edition in 1966 and 10th edition in 2003, Istanbul); Marxist Aesthetic (1st edition in 1977 and 3rd edition in 2002, Istanbul); Aesthetic (1st edition in 1978 and 7th edition in 2003, Istanbul); Modern Painting under the way of Aesthetic (1st edition in 1962, Erzurum and 6th edition in 2003, Istanbul); Aesthetic Admiration, 1983, Istanbul; Understanding of the New Painting based on Art Ontology, 1983, Istanbul; Contemporary Philosophers, 1994, Istanbul; Introduction for Design Philosophy (1st edition in 2002 and 2nd edition in 2003, Istanbul).