

## Unrepresented and ethical value in contemporary esthetical paradigms

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### Abstract

It is not a new question whether art is an ontological field or an ethic value field. But when this question is asked, it is understood that it is closely related with several parameters such as what art and artist do and do not represent, ethics and readability of representation. Especially, whole art history made art works, artists and style of eras dependable on how to read what they represent and/or represented. All this representation character in some instance requires the implemented relation of art with reality and meaning to be dealt with both formal and ethic value. In this study, modern esthetics which is purely ontological and autonomous field with elitist behavior is criticized; an essay containing contemporary discussions is done on new paradigms and their representation formats which developed a new esthetics on what they do not represent through ethical value within the frame of historic dynamics.

Keywords: Contemporary Esthetics, Ethical Value, Unrepresented

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## 1. Introduction

According to some approaches, the quality of artistic representation is considered as pure ontological field without considering ethic values. The representation understanding of modern art was established on the resemblance of reality and its expression of traditional art. The new representation understanding that fundamentally demolished the modern one and transformed it into a material form field, took the question of whether or not the art was an ontological field into the agenda. While Ranciere (2010) investigates the logic of representation, he describes the representation in traditional art as a “resemblance regime”, in modern aesthetic as an “inappropriate resemblance”, and claims that art is transformed into material forms in terms of autonomy of art. Therefore, together with modern art, meaning in representation, understanding of art, being and value that form the meaning, spontaneously appear. Yet the problems of modern art belonging to itself and to the society could not been solved, contemporary art practices starting from Dada and then coming from 1960’s up to now, and fundamentally changing the representation understanding of modernism has entered to the rhetoric of creating a new aesthetic by using new technique, material, thought and facilities. The contemporary art containing the socio-politic and socio-cultural history of West and premises of this history within its transition period and mostly come to the front by postmodern culture theory, displayed a basic counter posture against modern art which was elitist and disconnected from the life. Contemporary art claims to close the gap in between art and daily life, and gathered around especially conception of identity which can be dealt in a wide category such as ethnicity, sub and top identities, ego, sex, body, otherness, and around both interests of daily life and in general frame of political criticizing category which cannot be thought independent from mentioned category such as geography, borders and time-space. Contemporary art practices in culturally not developed countries have been displayed within the mentioned frame of problematic since 1980’s.

Since dynamics, particular conditions and priority problematic of every country can not be handled in a single pot, it is expected to see their effects on visual representation fields of social development through parameters such that art work, viewer, artist and art market. As in other representation fields, in art field as well, representation can be established relatively more effective and less censored in democratic climates, and it can be thought that such a climate can supply the bridge between artist and viewer in Western societies which provide a common cultural infra structure. Kahraman’s (2013) briefing socio-cultural opening of 1980’s and 1990’s as “tradition within modernism”, and mentioning that facing with serious trauma in cultural area and even establishing postmodernism without fulfilling modernism displays our chaotically developing socio-cultural structure. This similarity is to be the result of today’s globalization facts attached to art with its many parameters.

Sonmez (2006) emphasizes that local colors and events in early 1980’s can not be an issue today. This emphasis presents globalization of art in 1990’s, and art becomes monotype almost everywhere by globalization effect to multinational art activities. In art, if it cannot be talked about the local color and local geographic data of facts, it can be said that this similarity is in technically, formatically, eclectically systematically fictious, far from a certain merit and aim system, or connected to a merit system of economic value system of new world order.

Not only today, but from its starting time, the critics came to the agenda on congestion and uniformization of inclusive, transforming and liberating dynamics of contemporary art in spite of its instruments (video, photography, text, installation, body, etc), interdisciplinary structure, unlimited technical and technological availabilities, global circulation, and commercial facilities. While Stallabrass (2010) mentions about today’s so much ever commercialization of art, he outlines it as art of 90’s was a monotype art and its reason was mutual fostering of art works and texts. While Tapies (2014) describes European art of 1970’s, he defines impossibility finding a hint that art might have a tie with life. Kuspit (2010) characterizes postmodern art not as a challenge to daily life, but culturally entering to the details of daily life. Ranciere (2010) specifies contemporary art samples such as internal space photo installations, produced advertisement films, and all these art mechanisms indeed were doing nothing except turning around itself and consuming undecidability.

In spite of all its variability and facility, when these critics and predictions on contemporary art practices are considered together, it is seen that daily art is face to face with crisis of representation. The reasons forming this crisis are not sourced from only ontological status of art itself, it can be said that it is formed by the influence of more global dynamics even independent from the local geographic, socio politic and socio cultural dynamics as mentioned above. When briefly looking through these dynamics, it is seen that the most fundamental character comes from the profit mechanism conditioned by the new world order where neoliberal politics come to the life. This fundamental aim and by adding art and culture fields to this aim leads art to be displaced from where it should be for its own aims and values.

The emphasis of “now” that formed by exterminating the cultural accumulation of art in both public and vital fields, nihilism and insignificance of postmodern theory hold big share in this. Insignificance, in the other words the problematic of no ability in producing any value and meaning regarding life resulted contemporary art to face with the problem of both the daily life to be monotype and serious inability in producing any value and meaning. Representation crisis, through going far from the values to be represented, mainly brings the transformation of presentation into an image under the weight of only form, technique and technology. This stable and ambivalent status of contemporary art can again be explained by its receding from social and criticizing ethic value system.

## **2. Unrepresented Value in Daily Art as Ontological and Ethic Value**

Separation of ethic and ontological ones in art is shown as one of the most important problems not only of modern art but of contemporary art as well. Art as from the beginning being an ontological field is not an obstruction to be separated from the field of ethic value. To be either in ontological field or in ethics field, the main problem here, whether the things that art wants to represent or not are dependent of any system of values, or dependent of which system of values. Because, representation takes its main power from the represented values and aims. Therefore, the real effectiveness and force of artistic representation lay down at the background in the system of aim and values, more than its artistic form or content.

Separation of ontological and ethic value fields in art, extracting art from ethic value field and making it an ontological being independent from anything and out of all values can be defined as “self being”. The most important determination in this definition is the fiction structure of art. But art is put in communication by art work against its fictitious structure, and is a real ontological field in the life by owning such a sociality. When the value added by external reality is extracted from the daily life, it stays a neutral being by only itself. In a field with no ethic value, neither meaning nor critics can be expected.

Art as a self being an ontological field by tearing up from the values, requires to be positioned by aesthetic values of images within itself of just this being. On the other hand, being and value conceptions are at the same time related with knowing and interpretation. Because, being is the main object of knowing and interpretation even though it is far from any value. Therefore, art even if as a just field of being, can not be broken from knowing and interpretation. But value is determination or interpretation of being in opposite poles (good-bad, beautiful-ugly, etc.) by its qualitative and quantitative characters. Therefore, art practices indeed ontologically take place not only within the field of knowledge but at the same time within the ethic values.

Representation power of art appears in the stress of these references of ontological and ethic values. Artist, like all other people, can not see the world as independent field of being without added values. Because, being requires definite interpretation, decision and actions in a meaningful production field. These interpretation, decision and actions are realized within the system of certain values. On the other hand, the artist as a producing person is a laborer at the same time. Out of the ethic and philosophic concepts, labor and value conceptions are sociologically are closely related.

“Labor and value are different ways of the same complement. Value, within its general social form, is materialized labor” (Ollman, 2008). This material and social dimension of value as out of its ethic and philosophic dimension is identified with the value of work that artist produces by his labor.

Within this conceptual frame, to understand what and why contemporary art does not represent, it can be started from its own arguments of contemporary art. First of all, it must be looked through how reality and value concepts are dealt in contemporary art since being and value can not be broken from the reality. Reality perception of contemporary art in postmodern texts and in Baudillard (2011) stated that expression as perception of reality turns into simulation. Thus, the value that contemporary art produces on the basis of its own reality perception is a simulation. Simulation is an image. When reality is broken from outside reality and becomes a simulation, the value of outside reality is either vanishes or hides beneath the image. The image is variable, slippery, attractive but a powerful illusion at the same level. On the other hand, the reality that contemporary art deals with it as an image can change anytime. Francalanci (2012) specifies that attention has increased more on form related sides of reality in contemporary art than content related ones. When reality itself is perceived as an image then content becomes an image as well. If so, today, most of the contemporary art practices are not able to represent outside reality even as covered, or avoid to represent. It realizes only presentation of simulation that means image.

While contemporary art practices criticize modern art on the basis of solid borders between art and life, it is needed to look at the argument of no border between art and life that it offers. In order to be able to withdraw the border between art and life, first of all, life is to be perceived as an outside reality. In perceiving outside reality, the style of art and artist as its creating element are closely related with how he approaches to this reality and how he will represent it. It is a reality that today contemporary art works on topics within the life such as identity, geography, ethnicity, gender, ecological problems and body, but by turning these topics into giant images through using the facilities of material, technique, and technology, it melts the values connected to those topics within those images. Here, the main problem is the dominating and dictating side of image and its discourse. In other words, art work runs the mind that is equipped with material, technique and technological facilities, to the work as an instrument. Thus, this mind which becomes overwhelming in the art work, puts big distance between reader and art work. Tapies (2014) specifies that materials alone are lifeless, touching power of art work lays down the artist’s ability to add his ideas in appropriate time, a real art work is to result a conscience revision on readers, and to result the need on reader to review his all conception field. On the other hand, the open work where meaning is continuously delayed, offered by Eco (2008) to the reader, is turned to an apparatus with complicated signs. Stallabrass (2010) proposes that so many contemporary art practices offer a sublime and impressive show to readers by over-dozed material and data. The main reason of this show overlaps both life and art gets value with image. This circumstance causes art to hide the representation which is to be represented, inside the image by leaving the values of daily life. In order to show the existing thing, in other words, to stand with natural state again points to an ontological state. Therefore, there is a state definition more than ethic value. Some practices of contemporary art are related with a field of existence that art is solvable in the daily life. Therefore, solutions do not stand against critics of apparent. It is mostly interested with images of apparent and visual and aesthetic analysis of these images. When Gottdiener (2005) explains postmodern signs, he proposes that crusts of signs are marketed by evacuating inside of meaningful signs. This transformation of reality creates the stress between to be represented and represented. Zeytinoglu (2014) specifies that art always has a connection with “what is to be”, what exists is the street and “what is to be” is a mental world. Tapies (2014) emphasizes that systematically trying to hide the value of an art work is in its ideological meaning and in its decision on life and society, is exact and typical cultural fraud, and a discourse has to work with sensible elements to be perceivable. Since contemporary art could not or did not create a value as “what is to be”, the expression of “what is to be” becomes monotype and necessitates form, material and moving object variations and visual impression turn to a show.

Ranciere (2012) mentions two separate concepts in the idea of unrepresented. The first one is impossibility, and the second one is prohibition. From one side the impossibility and immorality of a rough reality such as mortality, pain, torture, starvation, war to subordinate to an aesthetic form, on the other side prohibition and taboo formed by social oppression mechanisms. In case of prohibition, it is possible to read unrepresented as representation of other. As Zeytinoglu (2014) specifies, although the trial to express the other is interested in the artist and critics as a historical duty, it is known that today, this duty is handed over artistic organizations. Even international art organizations that developed independently from self-control of artists are under danger of monopolization. These organizations make unrepresentative prohibited fields to be represented through their own decisions. This situation causes a few artists or initiations trying to represent those to be represented stay in the dark. Therefore, today, most of the contemporary art practices cannot represent prohibited field under the name of other. As Ranciere (2012) says, the main problem is not to answer if it is to be represented or not, but wishing to represent and for this purpose to comprehend which representation style is to be chosen. This comprehension is proportional with the consciousness of social value concept.

### 3. Conclusion

It can be said that art is faced with representation crisis today that artistic forms transform fast material, technique and technology transform constituent subject. Critics that art can not create a social criticizing and freedom field and becomes monotype in spite of technology, material and new expression facilities form the foundation of today's discussions on daily art. Although there are many parameters triggering this crisis, it can be said that the main source is systematically globalization of art and totally connecting to the value system of globalization.

Art is not only an ontological field but at the same time it is an ethic value field. Representation power of art lays down the system of values that formed in the background. This system of values is related with both meaning and readability problem and social responsibility of art. Therefore, along with the history of art, produced works mostly discovers the values of represented ones but also indirectly exhibit unrepresented values. Today, contemporary art practices are oriented to representation understanding with connected international art organizations within the limits that those organizations allow. This understanding causes frequent use of technology and material, and art work transforms to an apparatus with visual and technological mind, dazzling and finally blinding the reader. Especially, contemporary paradigms handling reality as a simulation, and reality of today's simulation is established by technology, formed its own system by breaking the art work from outside reality and turned it to a simulated object. When the art work is broken from outside reality, the meaning and value that constructed on this reality also turn to a simulation. The reason of this crisis that contemporary art in, can be looked for in going far from its own ethic values due to connected international system.

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