

New Trends and Issues  
Proceedings on Humanities  
and Social Sciences



Volume 6, Issue 4 (2019) 001-007

[www.prosoc.eu](http://www.prosoc.eu)

ISSN 2547-8818

Selected Paper of 8th World Conference on Design and Arts (WCDA 2019) 27 – 29 June 2019, Tirana International Conference Centre, Tirana, Albania

## All that is solid is being digitised

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### Suggested Citation:

Isitman, O. (2019). All that is solid is being digitised. *New Trends and Issues Proceedings on Humanities and Social Sciences*. [Online]. 6(4), pp 001–007. Available from: [www.prosoc.eu](http://www.prosoc.eu)

Selection and peer review under responsibility of Prof.Dr. Ayse Cakir Ilhan, Ankara University, Ankara, Turkey.

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### Abstract

This article entitled 'All that is solid is being digitised' will discuss on the basis of the field of art in the uncertainty, insecurity and unsafety context of the post-truth period and the dynamics which make it exist. Today all that is solid is being digitised. We are living in the post-digital period in which the experiences in the digital world complement the experiences in real life and the borders in-between are blurred and create a new meaning. In Baudrillard's (2011) words, we are somewhere beyond the hyper-reality where fiction is more real than the reality. In some place where everyone distorts everything according to herself/himself and determine her/his own reality, in a place which is uncertain, insecure and unsafe. In such a world, Art needs to make a choice, now. It will either redefine its sphere of freedom, or it will adapt to the system by being drawn into the wheels, the whirlpool of the post-truth world.

**Keywords:** Post-truth, post-modern, post-humanism, post-digital, truth, virtual, millennials (Generation Y), freedom.

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## 1. Uncertainty, insecurity and unsafety

*‘Humanism may be coming to an end as humanism transforms itself into something one must helplessly call posthumanism’.*

*(Ihab Hasan; 1977<sup>b</sup>)*

The solid that melts into air in the modernity of Marx was every kind of value which distances people from one other as well as bringing them closer. What shaped (!) the human were laws, rules and traditions. They were sins, shames and bans. Once all these evaporated and melted into air, the human would be freed and left on his/her own. S/he would then understand that the aim of all these values which s/he determined was in fact this state of being on her/his own. For Bauman (2007) what would provide this was not evaporation but fluidity, everything that was solid was and would be in a state of fluidity. What was solid was modernity but since both continuity and change were at stake, postmodernity was fluid. It was speed and loss of flexibility and sharpness. According to Bauman, the outcomes of this would be uncertainty, insecurity and unsafety.

While the answer to Bauman’s question of how human would stay moral and successfully adapt to such a world was being sought, all that was solid started to be digitised. Even though solids’ gaining of existence in a sphere which does not physically exist may seem closer to Marx, in fact, there was nothing melting into the air or as Bauman stated flowing and merging into one another. All that is solid was digitised and started to be transformed arbitrarily and be indistinct by being normalised in a place which does not exist. However, even though the security of digital data is disputable, a datum which is once formed digitally will never be lost. But what was going to provide liberation of human? Evaporation and liquefaction of everything that is solid. How did all that was solid prevent the liberation of the human? With shames, sins and bans. What did the digitisation of the solid provide? It made all these sanctions vague, transform but provided that they were not lost. And for all the sections which constituted the society, shames were no longer shames, sins were no longer sins, bans were no longer bans; they were transformed and legitimised. Reality was displaced, lie was equalised with truth and what is fictive became legitimate. Even though the beginning of this legitimisation process dates back to World War II which ended with the self-destruction of humans, it started to be visible in the 1990s. As hard-power left its place to soft-power<sup>c</sup>, cultural imperialism and technological developments and digitalisation that came afterwards were opened to discussion with post-humanism and trans-humanism which question the ideology that centralises the human and dethrones ‘the human’. The value loss of the human, in which fiction replaced reality and lie replaced truth, was legitimised with the post-truth discourse.

## 2. It’s not me, it’s you

Postmodernism came to an end with social networks that bring societies together in a centre, planning (!) generation theories, globalisation, opening to non-Western cultures, and knowledge productions such as exhibitions, fairs and biennialisation. The changing perception of reality and truth since the 1990s broke the tie between object and image. ‘According to Kevin Robins who states that the postponement of the object by its image and the rejection of the object is a postmodern

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<sup>b</sup> Attributed Wikipedia; Hassan, I. (1977). “Prometheus as Performer: Toward a Postmodern Culture?”. In Michel Benamou, Charles Caramello (ed.). *Performance in Postmodern Culture*. Madison, Wisconsin: Coda Press. ISBN 978-0-930956-00-4.

<sup>c</sup> It is American political scientist Nye (2017) who brought ‘soft power based on cooperation’ instead of ‘hard power’ to the international relations literature. According to him if it can be provided that what is desired is also desired by the other country then military power will not be necessary to realise what is desired. While the effect of hard power is threat and fear based on brute force, soft power’s effect is admiration based on image and attractiveness. The primary aim of the cooperation that will be established in order to provide this is culture. (*Ö.I. Everything Started in the 1990s, Korea-Turkey Art for Peace Exhibition Catalogue, November 2017, Ankara.*)

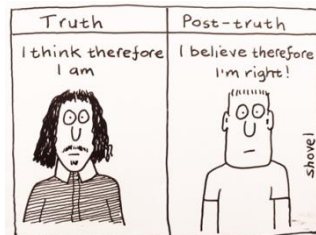
discourse, this break is an outcome of the progress of the image from mechanical production to digital originality and copying. This break, for Terry Eagleton, is not only between the image space and the objects. According to him, even a word said in postmodernism is cited from others' words. The repetitions of what is done, said and seen, what is lived and consumed before, the copies of the existing things ...' (Isitman, 2018) are lived. The period when what is fake and copy was considered a shame and banned is already over. Despite the fact that they lose their originality, fake and copied lives and existences are legitimised now.



Kevin Carter, *Child and Vulture*, 1994 Pulitzer.

Yet, not long ago, in 1994, Kevin Carter who won the Pulitzer Award with the 'Starving Child and Vulture' photo committed suicide upon the criticisms for not helping the child and leaving after taking the photo. But today no such thing is expected to be lived because in the post-digital age which we live in, majority of the population of the post-truth society is constituted by the millennials, the generation Y; a generation who determine their own reality. For Ataç, this generation is a generation who 'think themselves lost without the Internet, mute without SMS, blind without a screen and deaf without headphones...'<sup>d</sup>. As Ataç quotes from Simon Sinek, "it is a generation who do not have self-respect, who are narcissists, have low credibility, are impatient, cannot establish a relationship, who wander around saying 'give that to me, I deserve it' with a smartphone in their hands". 'For Simon Sinek, generation Y do not have a fault. It is not their choice to end up in this condition'. It is the way the millennials (generation Y) who do not value shame, ban and sin are, there is nothing to do about it. This way, what this generation did and what they will do is legitimised as well.

It is stated in resources that the keyword of the millennials (generation Y), the motto of whom is 'always already' is 'reality'. However, let's accept that today whether anything is real or not, whether anything reflects the reality or not has lost its importance and lie and truth are equalised. Fiction replaces reality and fiction is elevated to the level of what is more real than real. What is meant with the concept of reality for the millennials should be freedom. With everything which can encumber human being transformed and the vanishing of all obstacles, a rather considerable space of freedom has been created. Despite the fact that its originality is questionable, in this area of freedom 'What is important is that you decide how you would like the reality, the code of which will be written meticulously for you' (Isitman, 2018).



<sup>d</sup> Osman A. Ataç, Millennials (Y Kuşağı) <https://www.dunya.com/kose-yazisi/millennials-y-kusagi/379734> ET:22 05 2019; 13:15.



The development of the information industry made information no longer a scientific endeavour but a commodity which is bought and sold. While the amount of information was rapidly increasing, the reality was ignored and the quality of information worsened. It is known that so much more information than the previous day is produced everyday but it is not known how much of this is qualified information because it is again known that the reality can be reconstructed, manipulated and

spread fast through communication networks and new technologies according to the expectations of the people who are in power. The word post-truth which refers to the state of emotions and personal opinions being more influential than rational realities in shaping public opinion on a specific subject started to be used exactly for describing this period. To put it simply, post-truth defines a world in which reality is defined by the people themselves. The suffix post- is not in the sense that something takes place after a certain event but delineates that it belongs to a time when the concept behind it is considered as unimportant or unnecessary. Post-truth defines especially the state of the transformation of manipulative information which is rapidly circulated in social networks into a kind of reality, a time when truths, realities, phenomena lose their importance, the present time. While all that is solid is being digitised a legitimate sphere of freedom (!), in which the reality of oneself is determined by the self, is formed. A sphere of freedom where every kind of value is distorted. In a period when it is not known whose reality is more real and which causes a loss of memory, lie is also erased, the post-truth epoch has devalued both lie and reality. As the word post-truth which defines the context of uncertainty, insecurity and unsafety which Bauman sees as outcome of liquefaction of solids is included to the Oxford dictionary, the distorted reality or lie is normalised and legitimised. Humanism which considers human as the only and highest value in the universe and aims to develop and exalt the human being is basically a question of what non-human is, a question about what differs human from the other. In this age, in which radical changes are experienced, this question is again in the agenda. While a digital and algorithmic culture is being created with artificial intelligence technologies, it is not known yet how to position human in this culture. The fact that human does not have any rights to destroy nature or put himself/herself at the centre of life as the determinant of the world and the meaning of being a human are questioned and discussed both through post-humanism and trans-humanism. While trans-humanism is based on a utopia of after-human or after-humanism and the development of physical and cognitive abilities of the human by machines, post-humanism discusses whether artificial intelligence can take the place of the inborn intelligence of the human. Post-humanism which unsettles the understanding of the human that puts himself/herself at the centre in relation to what is evolutionary, ecological or technological progresses through the limits and fallibility of human intelligence. What is at stake in post-humanist thought is to subject the superiority discourse which the human ascribes to herself/himself and becomes widespread with the humanist thought to criticism, make the relational existence perceivable and highlight the ways of being related to and ways of solidarity that will make coexistence possible. This way, the self-destruction process of human which began with the World War II is on its way to its ending with the dethronement of the human.

### **3. What would happen has happened**

*'Ethics today means not being at home in one's house.'*

*Theodor Adorno*

Even though the manipulation of societies—for the purpose of structuring the modern society—has started in the 1900s, it gained speed and spread in the 1990s with the help of communication technologies. During this process, many scholars criticised and discussed the things that were and to be lived but the consequence did not change. What would happen has happened. Not because it was destiny but because it was what it was aimed. If developments which dethrone the human are lived, if the social structure is post-truth, if the majority of the society are millennials and if nothing can be done beyond the repetitions of the things which were previously done, said, seen, lived and consumed and the copies of the already existing things, why would art do something different? It must have done the same thing. Even though it was foreseen and the present day has been reached in an unstoppable way, it would not be easy to talk about originality and freedom of art and the artist particularly in the sphere of art. The fact that today's power is based on the economy does not make the human's escape from this system possible. Seen from this perspective, it is an inevitable ending that the artist is turned into an almost 'aesthetic business manager' in Donal Kuspit's words. In such a

situation to what extent the artist can stay original and free? When all art practices such as art audience, market, aesthetics and ethics are included, the equation becomes even more complex.

While today's art is evolving into a world of 'present time' where there are neither roots nor orientations, neither past nor future, art which interacts with global economic, political and cultural networks is focused on subjects like environment, feminism, multiculturalism, globalisation and technology-human relationship. While Internet technologies are becoming devices of control and surveillance, the artists use the Internet as a tool of uniqueness and freedom. The system forces the artist into this too. While breaking away from the 20th century, the artist is going towards digital narrations of the 21st century with a claim of a completely different narration which will reverse the system with its own weapon. Perhaps, the defined order of modernity is not demolished with postmodernism, new ones are added to the existing ones and a context is created to remake the remaining definitions. We are face to face with countless new terms, concepts and values. With Industry 4.0, an unknown world is being discovered. Perhaps it is because of this that 'for Alain Badiou who claims that it is better to do nothing rather than creating forms that make the things which are already approved by the empire visible, the issue is not discussing freedom and dictatorship, freedom and pressure but discussing these two definitions of freedom'<sup>e</sup>. Freedom should not be regained but be re-discussed and redefined, just as originality, autonomy, art, artist, ethics and others need to be redefined. Certainly, it is also a solution not to make any definitions and everyone does everything as s/he wishes to. However, when it is considered that the point which this elusiveness brings humans and humanity is post-truth, the question of whether there is a way out maintains its uncertainty.

For Connor (2001), the functional distinctive quality of postmodern theory is not the differences' desire of gaining legitimation through 'comprising or identifying with' but the desire of gaining legitimation through 'being oppositional or not identifying with'. It is for this reason that the aim in post-truth thought is not convincing people about the falseness or trueness of something but an effort to legitimise them through perpetuating prejudices. Isn't this also the method of art? It plays with emotions and manipulates. The artist who can be present in the ethical and aesthetic fields of art shatters the obstacles before social and political fields with art practices. S/he addresses art and politics, society and thought and transforms them into representations. On the other hand, this connection strengthens what is already there but not visible and approved and make it visible but by making the unwanted visible, it clashes and should clash with the ones who are in power... Yet, sometimes the visible/lived truth is so blatantly strong that clashing becomes meaningless, there is nothing left to say. What is lived is in a more influential position than what is turned into representation. While what is lived, instead of the artist, pushes the limits, it is necessary to stop more than to produce, it is necessary to watch, comprehend and understand. It is necessary to hear, watch, stop and listen to life with opening up the self completely rather than closing ears and eyes as catastrophes, delusions, deceits, the ones who wash ashore, who freeze, who die, who are tortured and many others are being experienced. It is necessary to produce, produce and produce again. Art, after all, has to make a choice in such a world where the society, the human and humanity have a loss of values or from another perspective gain new values, terms and concepts. It will either adapt to the system by being drawn into the wheels, the whirlpool of the post-truth world or redefine its area of freedom by clashing.

### **Acknowledgement**

I would like to present my thanks to dear Prof. Dr. Refa Emrali, my dearest friend, for her valuable help, critique and advice, and to dear Petek Onur for made a helpful contribution in completing the article, and to my family, who has always been there for me.

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<sup>e</sup> Çağdaş Sanat Üzerine On Beş Tez, 14/7/2013 / skopbülten / Alain Badiou, Çeviri: Elçin Genhttps://www.eskop.com/skopbulten/cagdas-sanat-uzerine-on-bes-tez/1376, Date of access: 31.05.2019.

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