

A Contemporary Matter on Art: Modernism

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Abstract

Modernism and modern art are contemporary concepts which have been discussed for decades, but impacts of modernism on art have been less evaluated. Whereas modernism changed many materials, instruments and approaches about art and formed art in a different way. Today, situation of individual workshops and art galleries emerged after modernism are being discussed. Modernism influenced all components of life since it began to appear among people and also brought new styles on different areas. Classical styles became outmoded after modernism provided economic incomes and revealed new styles in architecture, clothing and even in sense of amusement which dominated on people's lives. Authors, artists and researchers were influenced by modernism as well and they began to prefer attractive approaches of modernism. In this context, needless to say, art has been naturally affected by modernism, so it changed its form and content due to inevitable alterations and innovations appeared by means of new mentality of the century. This study includes the assessment of modern art and discusses the influences of modernism in art along with the various descriptions of modernism.

Keywords: Modernism, Tradition, Art, Technology.

1. Introduction

Industrial Revolution has caused numerous changes in all around the world in terms of economy, culture and social structure of communities. People living in rural with their traditional cultures moved to urban and began to live in different conditions after Industrial Revolution. People met a brand-new life in urban including varied occupations, facilities, techniques, concepts and even language, so they tried to adapt those which are dramatically different from their previous life in rural regions. As a consequence of that case, people fell into a cultural crisis, because they suddenly gave up rural conditions and did not have any experience about the new one.

People initially tried to survive their traditional experiences, but then they realized that they have to adjust their life styles on urban conditions. They met urban components in course of time and they even produced urban styles to live in safety in urban and created new requirements so as to utilize them in both their social and cultural lives. The necessities of human have changed because of radical changes which were brought by new technologies and innovative mentalities. Perception of many fields in life such as architecture, urbanization and environmental organization, also other intangible concepts such as art, traditional behaviors and even mentality of entertainment have changed through the rapid alterations especially after the middle of the 20th century. This century has witnessed many social and cultural movements, also numerous progresses in technology and naturally in industry. Technology helped people to live in comfort in rural by easing their lives and provided them many facilities. By the help of technology, people began to think and feel different. Their styles and naturally their lives changed once again by technology. Younger generations who were born in rural mostly forgot their traditional culture and embraced urban culture by technology. While people had a modest life and engaged in livestock and farming in their

rural life, they dealt with office works in closed interior venues in their new lives. Furthermore, they wore spectacular clothes, used more expensive things and they were interested in splendiferous arts in urban; it was modern art (Butler, 1994).

All these changes happened globally, because communities began to become a whole with the globalization. Today, standing apart from aforementioned togetherness is accepted similar with breaking off from all over the world. Technology also plays a crucial role in this sense. Countries are now directing their both energy and cultural policies in accordance with the new approaches brought by technology and globalization. As a consequence of that, numerous innovations have come forward in context of both industrial and social alterations which most of them are attributed to modernism. Human nature has always been liable to novelties which can take him to other worlds in his imaginations. So, he easily got used to modernism which presented a life style that he expected and brought him organized cities, spectacular but unconventional buildings, reputable things, different occupations, arrogant clothes and amusement arts. As a result of this attractiveness, people firstly perceived modernism as a colorful dream and thought that modernism would take them to a peaceful world.

Modern art came to people's lives as art nouveau and began to be discussed because of its unfamiliar character, but it attracted many people with its amazing features. As a concept, modern art had various debates in many fields, because its impacts appeared in many areas, so people approached modern art via different dimensions. Modern art was adopted especially in industrialized areas in Europe and then all the world (Theiding, 2006). Modern art provided people to feel themselves more peaceful because of its relaxing effect due to its independent character.

2. Modernism, Modernization and Modernity

The word "modern" which is based on movement of enlightenment has been derived from the Latin word "modernus", furthermore, "modernus" has been derived from the Latin word "modo" which means "right now" (Aslan and Yılmaz, 2001). The first use of the word "modern" as "modernus" (in Latin) is dated to 5th century (the time period in which that word was used to separate the Christian world from the past of Roman and Pagan (Kızılçelik, 1994). Notion of "modernus", being basically a concept of time, has been brought out against the past and antiquity (Therborn, 1996). The idea of objective and universal science, also universal morality and probability of law (depending on the former) are the basic parameters in the project of modernism which is described as the "Enlightenment Project" (Şaylan, 1996).

According to the Norwegian playwright Henrick Ibsen; modernism which emerged as a result of the conditions appeared between world wars was a response against the capitalist innovations that have become common among the nobility in cities, thus Ibsen perceives modernism as a protest against the non-egalitarian and commercialized forms of life (Özdemir, 2009). Famous painter Cezanne has associated modernism with the way of achieving the beauty by using wisdom, intelligence, intuition strength and realization, additionally; Cezanne's modernism understanding which creates a bridge between Impressionism and Cubism sometimes requires ignoring the traditional principles (Şahiner, 1999). Atonal music of Arnold Schoenberg, who is shown as the pioneer of modernism in music, is claimed as the highest point of musical modernism, and Schoenberg, being also influenced from classical musicians, is remembered with the innovations he brought to rhythm and melodies (Begam, 2007). When the thoughts of significant artists who are related with modernism, it can be assumed that modernism has generally been perceived as a response and innovative approach which are used to get rid of stress and sovereignty.

The concept of modernization is defined in different ways. Despite all these various definitions, the common feature of the phenomenon of modernization depicts a transformation from a routine structure to a

dynamic structure. While the former depends on traditional agricultural production and small-scale handicrafts, latter is consisted of industrialized and urbanized societies which also have a high literacy rate and advanced mass communication and transportation tools. The dominant feature here indicates the transition from a social structure based on agriculture to a social structure based on industry. In this context, modernization which brings a pronounced differentiation and specialization in society means re-designing of people with abstraction from old styles and values (Aslan and Yilmaz, 2001).

Modernity characteristically can be referred to a post-traditional, post-medieval historical period, and its origin can be based on industrialization, secularization, feudalism, rationalization, capitalism, the nation-state and its constituent institutions and forms of surveillance (Barker 2005). Briefly, Mentality of modernity can be attributed to secularism, but its original parameter is the sense of “unrepeatable time”, and the idea of modernity can be dated to Christian Middle Ages (Călinescu, 1987).

Modernity is associated with modernism which includes radical changes in terms of literature, art and daily life, yet it has some differences in sense of concept and historicity. Modernity also includes tendencies to intellectual culture (especially the movements intertwined with post-industrial life and secularization). It has been evaluated together with cultural and intellectual movements of 1436–1789 and extending to the 1970s or later (Toulmin 1992). Today, as a consequence of all aforementioned descriptions of the movements arising from the word “modern”, there is a period defined as the total and result of alterations and innovations brought by modernism. This is called “postmodernism” which is still being discussed by many scientists, authors and commentators.

3. Postmodernism

Phenomenon of postmodern deals with each cultural discipline such as law, medicine, architecture, forestry, politics, zoology, sexuality, philosophy, geography, history, literature and all the arts, but it can be assumed that it seems like a shapeless entity (Docherty, 1995). Because, it has numerous meanings for different cultures, especially if it is thought that postmodernism has been source of many debates in context of both its contents and its approaches, also if it is different form modernism or not. For instance, postmodernism rebuts methodological reconciliations, obfuscates any version of truth, rejects the epistemological assumptions, disregards policy proposals and resists the claims of information (Rosenau, 1998).

Postmodernism can be liken to a pinnacle of a transition period in which there is strictly no another alternative for deficiencies occurred by loss of functionality and principles of modernism in ideological, cultural, social and economic history (Aslan and Yilmaz, 2001). Understanding of postmodern is not a movement that is directed by rules which contain principles and pedestals with certain limits, in this sense; it expresses the transition period that stands against principled attitude and practices of modernism in socio-cultural, economic and ideological history, but does not suggest any alternative (Adair 1994).

Although the first effects of postmodernism have emerged in America, French philosophers have been the pioneers who specified the meaning and content of postmodernism (Baudrillard, Lyotard, Jameson and Foucault are accepted as the leading philosophers of postmodernism) (Altinkale, 2001). Some names that come to mind in context of postmodernism are Lynch (cinema), Ventur and Senchs (architecture), Baselit, Kieper, Rauschenberg, Warhol and Schnabel (art), Derrida, Baudrillard and Lyotard (philosophy), Sherman (photograph), Pynchon, Barthes and Barthelme (literature), Artoud (theater) (Sarup, 1995).

4. Character of Modernism

Rising of modernism was sometimes associated with past and traditions, but it is still being discussed. Modernism is perceived as a phenomenon itself and it placed as contemporary process in the

lives of people (Bradbury, 1987). Modernism had many equipments and approaches in comparison with traditional techniques and opinions, and this was the first attraction of modernism at the beginning. As a new life style, modernism was perceived as a totality of novelties by somebodies, but inversely some others perceived modernism as a degradation of classic life style. People who thought that modernism was degradation worried about traditional values and classical accumulation. But on the other hand, modernism was greeted as a revolutionary against invalid institutions and approaches by some others (Paredes, 1995). Modernism even became a hopeful way of innovators and reformists.

Quality of modernism has been discussed much more than its meaning and it is a matter of researchers if modernism is truly enlightenment or not (Abu and Queder, 2008). Many societies met modernism and it was adopted more than a fashion in most of them. Additionally, modernism was perceived as a life style with its contents and also with its terminology. So, it has not been seen nonsensical for especially people who got bored of traditional and old-style arrangements implemented in their lives. Modernism which was perceived as a novelty against obsolete traditions brought a new culture to people and changed lives of people from their daily lives to their opinions. Rhythm and purpose of life changed with modernism for many people and people re-planned their lives in conditions of modernism (Kohn, 2008). This indicates that modernism have been found attractive by many people because of its simplistic and amusement character.

Particularly children and young people liked modernism much more than others because of its entertaining facilities and its colorful content. Modernism presented numerous innovations which were also equipped by technology. Children and young people who did not want to use classical techniques and forms were interested in these novelties of modernism (Wilson and Thompson, 2007). Most of people, with the time, had showed a tendency to modernism due to its attractive theme, and modernism gained a powerful supremacy on almost all over the world depending on interests of people.

5. Impact of Modernism on Art

Life is a complex complement with its various components such as from living creatures to elements and from genes to behaviors. Any event can influence all life in the world because of totality. For instance; Renaissance began in Italy and its impacts spread to whole world, and Industrial Revolution began in Europe and influenced all humanity as well. Modernism is a movement which feeds contemporary components and has different uses of opportunities and resources, also provides facilities in producing which are different from traditional ones. On the other hand it has various meanings for different cultures. In context of mentality of the communities, modernism can vary due to people's traditions and also art comprehension. Thus, modernism naturally has different characters in different societies such as in developed or underdeveloped dimensions. In developed societies modernism is perceived as a development and applied on a base of consciousness. Contrarily, in underdeveloped societies modernism is perceived and applied as an affectation and a fashion; therefore many people do not know contents of modernism in underdeveloped societies (Schnaiberg, 1970). Despite modernism is a trend, it is also a practice of life.

Modernism was perceived as a revolution in terms of art and it was hoped that it would work with art in more contemporary conditions by some artists (Hartshome, 1986). Effects of modernism seemed appropriate for artists in terms of used materials and techniques they implement in art. So, artists thought that modernism included all expectations of them. Because of modernism was perceived as a revolution, not only artists but also other people had hopes for their present and future life. In this sense, modernism, in its life style, presented people new figures and new heroes for their culture and it created its own culture in a little while. Clothing, vehicles, tools, methods, techniques, ideas and many other components of life changed

with modernism process in lives of people (Sayre, 1989). Impacts of modernism also brought many novelties and many new materials and tools for art works.

Modernism enclosed social and political norms and also ethics and art, it was really a reform. It changed many styles from family life to state rules, and educational data were also changed throughout the aforementioned alteration, meanwhile, visual arts became more valuable and some branches of business such as architecture began to use new and complicated concepts by taking the advantage of modernism (Encyclopedia Britannica, 2012). People who looked for a solvent way in cultural distress adopted modernism rapidly and easily.

Art always includes protest, and protest is one of purpose of art in a philosophical approach. Modernism emerged in a protest process and naturally influenced art in formal and also in contextual dimensions because of protest character of art. Many artists thought that modernism was a way for art to develop (Birnbaum, 1968). By modernism, many art forms and artistic approaches changed and people met various new artistic opinions. Modernism has the meaning of being variation for human, so people interpreted modernism by themselves to find its impacts (Goldhagen, 2005). Art had different meanings in different periods and also different names such as Roman Art, Greek Art, Byzantium Art, Renaissance Art, Ottoman Art etc. Modern Art which is consisted of contemporary approaches and techniques differs from old experiences (Hutchinson, 2001). It was a great novelty in urban life of people with its aesthetics approaches and urban components which do not match with previous ones.

While some people believed that modernism ignored many rules about life, believes, approaches and art, modernism is described as a reaction against conservatism that restricts some freedoms of man and it was perceived as an exit to freedom. Modernism presented more free approaches for art and expanded area of art and broke many frames, because it provided flexible materials, approaches and multifunction tools for art. Artists found a wider and elastic art world by modernism's modality.

6. Modernist Art

In accordance with the definition of modernity, modernist art show similarities with aforementioned descriptions in terms of its mentality, phrase and implementation. Mentality of modern art and aesthetics became dominant in all branches of art from visual arts to music and literature between 1860 and 1960 (İskender, 1998). Keser (2009) has mentioned about "modernist art" in her book entitled "Dictionary of Art". Some notes cited from author's book are given below;

In art history, term of "modern" roughly refers to time period between 1860-1970, and it is used to define the works of art, styles and ideologies in that date. Modern art defines the art which disconnected the past and tradition, and has completely innovative, original mentality. Term of "modernism" is preferred to talk about art of modern period and it is used for referring to the philosophy of modern art. The center of modernism was Paris until the 2nd World War. Term of "modernism" generally refers to; "Response to naturalistic colors", "New nature and other materials", "Expression of feelings, thoughts, dreams and fantasy instead of visual world", "Preference for abstraction instead of description of real" and "Art consumers to take a more active role as a commentator". Also some art movements covered by modernism are given as Art Nouveau (1880-1910), Art and Craft (1861-1900), Bauhause (1919-1933), Expressionism (1905-1945), Die Brücke (1905-1913), Cubism (1908-1920), Futurism (1909-1914), Intangible art (1910-), Der Blaue Reiter (1911-1913), Suprematism (1913-1919), Art Deco (1920-1935), Surrealism (1924-1955), Socialist Realism (1930-1980), Avant-garde Art (1945-1975), Pop Art (1958-1975), Conceptual Art (1960-1975), Minimalism (1960-1975) and Neo-Expressionism (1970-1990) (Keser, 2009).

7. Conclusions

Although modernism, being a contemporary concept, is still being investigated, discussed and is still the center of many debates about artistic and social topics, it has a wide use in life, especially in technology and art. So, it can be predicted that people has got bored from old-style approaches, and tended to new and diverse ones. Particularly the variations occurred since Industrial Revolution changed the way of living due to permanent benefits brought by new technologies. As the mentality of life changed, components of life began to show differences in many cultural themes such as architecture, wearing and even languages, because people were always interested in novelties and different styles in their lives and tried to get the newest products in their lives. Human did not completely forget his traditions, but he necessarily changed his life due to contemporary conditions.

Modernism is different from traditional approaches and some of modern approaches are against traditions and form against them. It is mostly perceived as novelty and styles away from traditions but it is still applied source of fashion and did not have a radical base, so modernist approaches are used in many areas in people's lives. Art uses modernist approaches as well and modernist art usually means protestation against pointless rules, incorrect decisions and invalid approaches. Modern art is eventually a way of protestation of primitive approaches and former artistic styles.

Modernism, modernization, modernity and postmodernism were defined in many different ways. The concepts concerned with art, art styles and techniques were generally related to modernism, because modernism is accepted as the artistic movements and their effects. Basically, all of those concepts indicate the same thing; "inevitable change". However, they differ in interpretation of their contents. While one of them is evaluated in sense of ideology, other is related to philosophy.

Berman, in his book named "All that is solid melts into air: The experience of modernity", has mentioned about "modernity" as a type of experience which is shared by everyone in all over the world today, and which is related to experience of space and time, of the self and others, of life's possibilities, and perils. He adds that being modern is equal to finding ourselves in an environment promising us growth, joy, power, transformation of ourselves and the world, but on the other hand, an environment having the potential of destroying everything we have. According to Berman, modern experiences and environments are beyond the geography and ethnicities, class and nationalities, religion and ideologies; so, it can be said that modernity unites all mankind in this context. However, he also likened that situation to a paradoxical unity, a unity of disunity: it pours people into a perpetual disintegration, contradiction and ambiguity. As a result, he claims that being modern is being part of a universe in which, as Marx said, 'All that is solid melts into air' (Berman, 1982).

Although there are various conflicts, debates and disagreements about the changes in social, cultural and artistic lives of communities for centuries, it can be assumed that both being modern and the other themes related with the word "modern" basically create a togetherness including similar meanings. First of all, that word represents the changes and it is not so necessary to differentiate such alterations if they have effective impacts or not on life cycle, because all of them occur as a result of characteristic changes of human. Thus, people feel themselves that they should keep pace with those differences which both generate and direct their lives especially in terms of communication and interaction. All modern themes and approaches have the ability of conveying human to future along with his both old and new traditions, habits and mentalities (of art and science), so as in Berman's book, they give human the opportunity of being a part of the world and universe in this way.

On the other hand, preservation of traditional tissues is one of the most significant matters in this context. There is a very thin line between perception of the word "modern" and implementation of its derivatives. While some societies use the concepts brought by modernity in a controlled manner in almost every field of their lives, some of them unconsciously and rapidly consume all contents of the modern

approaches in sense of art, culture and even science. As a consequence of latter situation, human is becoming a mechanic formation as if he is a robot which is programmed to live in an artificial world. At this point, the importance of traditional and cultural heritages can be realized better. Customs keep the historical and cultural roots of civilizations, so they remind people who they were yesterday and are now. Additionally, the products of those customs such as handicrafts, daily goods and works of art create the basis of knowledge about past civilizations that had the best techniques ever in both art and architecture even in prehistoric times. Therefore, the words “modern” and “tradition” should have a common point reflecting both cultural and innovative features of societies. Also, they should generate a reasonable and acceptable togetherness in order to keep in touch with humanitarian qualifications and to be in cooperation in every moment of life.

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