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# The Origin of Art after the End of Art

## Introduction

This article develops a series of reflections about the post-modern condition as the prelude to the death of art, a phenomenon manifested in the face of the individualization processes a hyper-media-conscious society is subjected to, conditioned by the experiences of simulationism and consumerism typical of late capitalism.

Thus, art the end of art is a moment revealed by the subjection of history, myth, and the role of institutions in the face of creative artistic freedom, upon questioning the antiquated definition of art, now disconnected from society.

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## Postmodern Society and the Individual as Narcissus

After the second half of the twentieth century, it would seem that after the individual found him/herself facing a war and the crises that led them to the problematics of an existential quest, he/she once again finds him/herself facing a call to order to explore a new reading of his/her present.

This phenomenon is what modernity restrictedly calls postmodern society, when it develops a period bursting with eclecticism that leads to automated production, hyper-individualism, reflected in market research that allows for mass production. This is distinguished by a diversity of “almost” personalized styles and projects. This situation is analyzed and proposed with the individual’s

renewed vigor, which, although it annihilates culture and democracy, leads societies to reformulate human values through an awareness of the death of the great narratives, like art.

We are in a moment of social upheaval, given new process of socialization and individualization, “considering that the universe of objects, of images, of information, and hedonist, permissive, and pseudo-psychological values have generated a new way of controlling behavior.”<sup>1</sup> We are experiencing a permanent revolution of the day-to-day and the individual, which results in the erosion of identity, the abandonment of ideology, and the destabilization of personality, more akin to an individualist revolution than a process of personalization.

Postmodern society is the society of indifference, in which the masses have no idols or taboos and banalize innovation as a way of personalizing lifestyles centering on the figure of Narcissus, the result of an individualistic economy that responds to personal needs. However, it is postmodern society that questions itself about the existence of art and truth as absolutes, as well as the way to construct the concept of humanity and freedom, formulating the question: Is there a continuity or a discontinuity of free humanity?

It would seem that the pronouns “we” and “they” have been replaced by “I” as the determining assignation of power. It is at this point that Narcissus emerges as the result of a quest for the individual’s own satisfaction, resisting his/her own finiteness and who becomes open and flexible in the face of a new relationship of the object with the subject.

In the course of that resistance, the body enters into a phenomenological state of desire and communicability produced by the media democracies. The figure of Narcissus blossoms in the individual ruled by the logic of desire. It is hedonistic capitalism opening up the possibility of existing through pleasures and discrepancies. The individual experiences “I am because I am.” Thus, language is for the social system a reiteration of the symbols that

produce it. The prevailing hedonistic values have led the individual to fear not enjoying life, and he/she therefore uses consumption as a compensation, a self-confirmation. In this vein, Michel Foucault approached knowledge as a series of his/her material relations within it, as the justification of his/her own existence and functioning, critical of institutions, their mechanisms and regulatory activities.

In postmodern society, media culture brings art closer to mass culture and empties it of content, since the signs born of this consumer society end up being devoured by another symbology, reflected in a society that seems to want to want kitsch. Media culture is the generator of the signs born of this consumer society, which are re-signified using another symbology as a reflection of a society that seems to want the diverse, but at the same time the standardized, in its quest for breaking up the modern horizontal existence.

The systems of fashion and the ephemeral are ruled by this becoming that alienates the individual, which turns



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reality into the illusion of the present and the accelerated expiration date. It is the triumph of a frivolous economy that makes human beings doubt about the origin of the world, in the face of the conditioning of a technical age that is headed little by little toward a post-human condition.

The origin of our current society is the conclusion of the industrialization of the late nineteenth century. It is the result of three cycles of economic development, beginning in 1750 and ending in 1960, and of a project of enlightenment, the product of a breakdown of the system and a social readjustment of capitalism reflected in new modes of production and division of labor in each era, making it the sustainable model for modern industry, which gave rise to the “man-machine.”

The third phase of the industrial break brought with it the institutionalization of consumption, that is, the creation of artificial needs, in which everything is at the service of the ruling classes. This is the ideology of satisfaction and prolonged survival, reorganized by the seduction of the present moment and the aforementioned accelerated expiration date.

### After the End of Art, the Origin Of a New Narrative

U.S. American art critic Arthur Danto is the one who initially put forward a reflection about the death of art, as a conclusion of the stories that validate it as a phenomenon immersed in history. This makes this definition a mere tautology, too open to the actions and intentions of the artist and at the same time with an existence that is walled off and one-dimensional.

The post-historical nature of art questions the discourses that sustain the existence of modern art, beginning with Édouard Manet, according to Clement Greenberg, up until the strength emanating from the avant-gardes that emerged in the early twentieth century. Among these are the continued stylistic influence of fauvism, the formalist relevance of cubism, the innovation and strength of both expressionism and abstractionism, as well as the presence of the different manifestos as a source of legitimation through philosophy.

For Danto, art as a grand narrative finds its pinnacle in modern art given the questioning of its practices of historical legitimation. This is the opposite of the condition

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of postmodern art, characterized by being post-historical and lacking references to past phenomena. One example of this is the use of resources such as appropriation, devised by Andy Warhol, and years later by Mike Bidlo, Sherrie Levine, and Jeff Koons, in which the undoubted aesthetic choice is a palpable condition of the hyper-consumerist society, when it interlinks the trivial and the day-to-day. In Mexico, this is palpable in the representational work of neo-Mexicanism by appropriation artists, who explored new languages, such as Veracruz-born Estrella Carmona (1962-2011), Laura Quintanilla (Mexico City, 1960), and Coahuila-born Julio Galán (1958-2006), among others.

This art, emerging after the end of art, designates the object a vehicle of the concept and discards its substantial link. Now, discourse, as a result of the process of dematerialization of the art work, becomes the fine weave that sustains a new phenomenon in art which is subjected to globalized society.

This phenomenon, the result of the end of art, projects and produces that which cannot be dominated through representation or conceptual, analytical thinking. This is because it is disconcerting and attributes the distortion of thinking to legitimize it, which is supposedly more flexible and contributes to a cultural entropy in a crisis impossible to regulate. It is, in the end, a milestone on the way to globalized eclecticism and cultural relativism.

Art after the end of art is characterized by artists and viewers' complaisance when dealing with topics of mutual and on-going interest because all the uses of art are recognized. Some are resigned to the mere dissolution of the avant-garde and its introduction into institutions, the market, and the circuit. With that comes a continual subjection to the comparison with the historical avant-garde and the modern aesthetic. For this reason, in this new reconstruction of the concept of art, innovation is the reinvention of forms and models of alternative artistic practice. It is more art threatened by *theatrical action, entertainment, spectacle, kitsch, and mass culture*.

And although art after the end of art becomes a place where the irrational is the equivalent of the ephemeral and the frivolous, objectivity turns into spectacle and politics reconciles with seduction. Thus, when the ephemeral invades the day-to-day world, nothing is left that is not ruled by fashion and is not reorganized by seduction, becoming what Lipovetsky calls the modern mythology that disguises a non-existent equality.

Based on this end, it is no longer possible to apply the traditional notions of aesthetics to contemporary art. Rather, we must focus on a philosophy of art criticism capable of shedding light on what is perhaps the most surprising characteristic of contemporary art: "that everything is possible."

The great paradigm of art has been shattered, and the quest for beauty no longer goes hand-in-hand with the quest for truth. Now, it makes way for a consciousness of the true nature of art through its own honesty and not the historicity of the object. As Walter Benjamin writes in *Discursos interrumpidos* (as published in Spanish), it was already possible to divine the dawn of an art that accepted as part of its possible nature its technical reproducibility as well as the loss of its aura and a division between the use of the image in its formal study and not only through tradition, history, and discipline.

## Conclusions

The new aesthetic and artistic experience that post-modern society is subjected to leads us to an individualistic

spiral and to a new, stable liberal society reconstructed every second by the capitalist system, since it possesses qualities in the face of the cultural and democratic annihilation that characterize it.

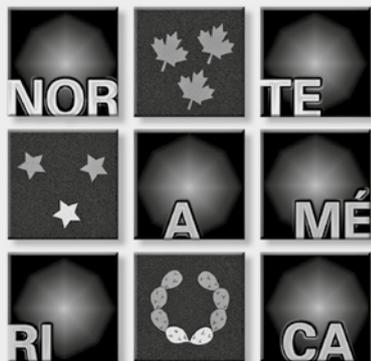
In post-modern society, failure or resistance to the system do not exist; apathy is not a defect of socialization, but a new flexible socialization, rooted in the incessant mixture of unprecedented possibilities and experimentation in the face of the logic of desire.

The this post-historical art that emerges after the end of art, while it questioned the origins of art as a phenomenon that responded to the conditions and rules of the market as a commodity, as it is a reflection of the capitalist system, now renounces its principles and flows in a world that is, simultaneously, present and absent in a global setting.

Art is manifested as the end of the concept and of the object as a work of art, since it is the invisible center that directs a new mode of production and reproduction of art. And it becomes the dissolution of the individual through the object; that is, a new consciousness of the annihilated self, which annihilates through appropriation, simulationism, spectacle, and desire. ■■■

## Notes

1 Gilles Lipovetsky, *La era del vacío. Ensayos sobre el individualismo contemporáneo* (Madrid: Anagrama, 2005), p. 5.



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