

The Role of Art in Mental Decolonization

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Abstract : *The philosophy of art is an attempt to understand the essence of art and the foundations to our experience of beauty and the aesthetic realm of the human experience. Throughout the history of the subject matter everlasting questions of what is art, beauty and the nature of the aesthetic coupled with specific issues of the role of art as a form of cognitive dimension and its role in our lives have been developed. Through a thorough discussion of the nature of art and its role as an inescapable dimension of the human experience, I will try to analyze the role of art for societal progress. By critically articulating the concept of art through the contending perspectives of art for its own sake vs. realism, and art as a source of mental colonization vs. societal progress and emancipation, this article argues that art and philosophy of art could cultivate a fruitful role in the following ways. Accordingly, (1) in order to utilize art as a positive force and tool of transformation, a general process of deconstruction and reconstruction needs to be carried out, and (2) a realist art that contains both descriptive and normative elements needs to be cultivated.*

Key words; *Art for its own sake, Realism, Deconstruction and Reconstruction.*

1. Introduction

The word art is very common to our lives. Still, whenever a serious intellectual attempt is made to understand the essence of art, perplexing issues of what is art, are art and the artistic experience objective or subjective, is art an expression of the basic beliefs and values of a society or a privileged activity, in which the artist contemplates independently of societal values, are usually raised. For Morris Weitz the question what is art is as old as the history of aesthetics and that because of the ambiguity of the word art, some philosophers concentrated in the process of creation (artistic creation), while others on the product (work of art) [23]. In trying to raise questions regarding factual and logical difficulties in the attempt of stating defining properties of art, Weitz claims that “art as the logic of the concept shows, has no set of necessary and sufficient properties, so a theory of it is logically impossible

and not merely factually difficult” [23] Here he is trying to show us the impossibility of an aesthetic theory on the ground that based on the logic of the concept art, we should emphasize on recognizing, describing and exploring art instead of trying to grasp a hidden form. Furthermore, Weitz specifically argues that most aestheticians are interested in developing an artistic theory which explicates the essence of art and a normative division between artistic and non-artistic works. Thus, “philosophers, critics, and even artists, who have written on art, agree that what is primarily in aesthetics is a theory about the nature of art” [22] Still, such an everlasting quest for theory fails to understand the fact that art cannot be defined in any theory since it lacks any determinable and sufficient attributes that could be described.

Having briefly discussed the question what is art, now let’s move to another big issue, what is aesthetics. And when and where did man begin philosophically reflecting in the arts. According to Dabney Townsend “philosophers use aesthetics to refer to discipline of reasoned discourse like ethics or epistemology. The subject of aesthetics may be an intuition, feeling, or emotion, but aesthetics itself is a part of and is subject to the same demands for evidence and logically controlled argumentation that characterize all philosophy” [19] Here one could characterize aesthetics as a philosophical reflection on the arts and trying to find the foundational presuppositions of our artistic taste. One thing that might be raised here is, is there a difference between aesthetics and philosophy of art? According to Townsend “philosophers did not began to use the word ‘aesthetics’ until the eighteenth century. Then, it began to appear as a term to describe the whole area of feeling, as opposed to reason.” [19] Beardsley on the other hand maintained that “as to terminology, I have no quarrel with those who wish to preserve a distinction between ‘aesthetics’ and ‘philosophy of art’. But I find the short term very convenient” [6] Still, when and where did men began philosophically reflecting on the arts?

E. Baldwin Smith doubts the idea of Egyptians developing an aesthetic attitude towards art. Accordingly, “though the Egyptians appreciated fine craftsmanship and flowers, their sculpture, and painting were seldom located for the

benefit of spectator, and most of it was a way in the darkness of tombs” . [6] Here the conviction is of not separating philosophical and religious attitudes from our responses to art. When we come to the Greeks, Beardsley maintained that, they achieved this distinction. Here Beardsley relies on Bosanquet who in his ‘history of aesthetics’ uses Homer as one of the earliest aestheticians. As such “ on the shield of-achilles, made by Hephaestus, says Homeric speaker, ‘the earth looked dark behind the plough’ and like to grained that had been ploughed, although it was made of gold, that was a marvelous piece of work” [6] Here profound questions about appearance and reality are raised. For Karl Marx, the idea of philosophizing on the arts belongs to man in general and is embodied on the essentially creative nature of man. Thus, “Marx found in aesthetics, a strong hold, as well as an essential sphere, of human existence. If man is creative, he cannot keep from aestheticizing the world that is, assimilating it artistically without renouncing his human condition” [20]

As Gordon Graham (2005) puts it, art as a realm of the human experience is investigated by thinkers from various fields and as such, invites an interdisciplinary analysis. Still, it’s philosophical analysis and the philosopher that inquire into both the essence and pragmatic aspects of art. Here, an attempt is made to explicate the essence and foundations of art, and what qualities must be fulfilled for an object to be considered as an artistic work. Graham remarks “ under the general label ‘aesthetics’ philosophers have been engaged in many different things, but it is the pursuit of a distinguishing definition that has dominated philosophical aesthetics”. [9] For Kendell Walton the nature of aesthetics as a part of philosophy cannot easily be deciphered as a part of philosophy, for its close relationships with the other parts of philosophy, still leaves a space for understanding its nature as a unique aspect of philosophy that problematizes the nature of artistic creations and the aesthetic experience. Conventionally it is assumed that aesthetics is a part of dealing with values related to our experience of art and beauty. Still, this doesn’t recognize the multifaceted nature of the inquiry and the various issues that it deals with. As such, for Walton “it would be a serious distortion, now, to characterize aesthetics as a species of value theory.” [21]

Alongside these lines, Jacques Ranciere argues that instead of aesthetics being abstractly conceived as a search for ultimate values related to art or an aspect of the human experience, one should recognize and attention must be given to its emergence within a specific historical period, serving practical interests, intertwined with human destinies, and determining what counts and does not count as an artistic work and of creation.

Alongside such lines the aesthetics for Ranciere should properly be understood as a ‘poetics of knowledge’ where the ultimate unity between artistic and factual elements is recognized and the aesthetic is seen as a conscious aspect of the human experience being involved in creating relations of hierarchy. [15] Here Simon O’Sullivan claims that art serves a purpose of revolutionizing our reality than explaining the world, and illuminating the various aspects of the human experience than serving a cognitive function. As such, rather than representing the object of the aesthetic experience the focus should be on “ attending to the specificity of an art work”, how art develops in a particular context, its innovative possibilities and the unique experience it generates. [14] An attempt to inquire into what psychologically impels individuals to be attracted to the artistic aspect of the human experience is found in Helmut et all.(2004) Here, it was observed that hitherto investigations on psychological motivations do not take into account the reality of the modern world.

Furthermore, the aesthetic experience is related to an acquaintance with the artistic world, a subsequent motivation of the audience to develop a particular response and adapt to such an experience. Accordingly “exposure to art provides the receiver with a challenging situation to classify, understand and cognitively master the art work successfully”. [13] As such, in the attempt to characterize the artistic process Charles Bingham and Alexander Sidorkin argue that it’s the ability of the artistic work to create different contexts and pose a possibility for diverse interpretations that matters most. Thus, artistic creation is both a conscious undertaking where an endeavor is made and also a stage for various possibilities in forms of diverse responses to a given work of art. Here, “in the artistic process, back-formation creates an unexpected autonomy in the life of the work” [7]

The article starts with introducing art for its own sake and realism as the two major contending perspectives in understanding the nature of art, artistic creation and its relation to the immediate environment. This is followed by a critical exposition of the role of art in the life of humanity, in terms of mental colonization and distortion of reality and progress and emancipation, in the second and third sections respectively. Finally, in the fourth section I will try to demonstrate the role of art for societal transformation in terms of undertaking a general process of deconstruction and reconstruction coupled with the cultivation of a realist art that exposes the human condition while simultaneously posing emancipatory ideals.

2. Art for its own sake vs. Realism

Having discussed preliminary issues regarding art and aesthetics, we will now move to

describing two major attitudes towards art, i.e. art for its own sake vs. realism. The issue I am going to discuss here is related to art, society and the individual status of the artist. One view tries to show us that art and art works are separated from other values, and hence there is autonomy on the side of the artist, while the other profoundly claims that art is highly rooted on the basic beliefs and values of a society, and thus particularized. The former advocates idea of art for its own sake, while the latter, a realist orientation.

2.1 Art for its own sake

The doctrine of art for its own sake is a defense of the intrinsic worth of aesthetic experience and also declaration of aesthetic independence for the artist who alone makes that experience. One question we can ask here is where does this notion of valuing art intrinsically originate? Here we can mention Beardsley who attributed the origin of these ideas as being one of the earliest themes of romantic thought, and thus appearing in the German romantics of the late eighteenth century. Accordingly, “at first, the concept of alienation came from the romantic artist’s sense of his divine mission, and special endowments... Later there was added the sense of being rejected by society, as superfluous in a political and economic system running by its own hand and self-sufficient laws” [6]

We can also trace the idea of art for its own sake in Kantian aesthetics. In his critique of judgment, where Kant tried to reunite the worlds of nature and freedom, we find a theory of autonomy of aesthetic values. Kant tried to give a sphere of autonomy for art by a way of separating it from axiological, epistemological, moral and political values. Thus, “the aesthetic object is something utterly different from all utilitarian objects, for its purposiveness is without purpose, the motive that leads to its creation is distinct and independent of all other” [6] Here we can see a kind of withdrawal from social obligations and the idea of using art as a tool of reflecting or changing society. There is an aesthetic enjoyment and creation for its own sake. As such, “in this judgment, we need to conceive the inner unity between the subjective and the universal, not the application of universality. Here, the objects is evaluated without considering any concepts, but it is evaluated, in its sensational subjectivity; and even though we evaluate it based on our subjective feelings our evaluation is a universal one” [2]

2.2 Realism

On the previous section, we have briefly tried to discuss the idea of art for art’s sake where there is usually an artistic creativity independently of utilitarian values. Here we will move to its direct contrast, named realism. Monroe C. Beardsley used

the term realism to express various tendencies which advocate the idea that art and art works are reflections of the given values of a society, and thus should be used as tools of change and understanding. The main idea here is that art is rooted on the social, political, economic and diverse values of a society, and that the role of an artist is both as ‘an informant’ and ‘change agent’ by reflecting on this reality. It’s hard to trace this tendency only to a given school or philosophical orientation, so instead we have various approaches like social realism, socialist realism, Marxism Leninism and so on.

2.2.1 Social realism vs. socialist realism

In his work, *Social realism: Art as a Weapon*, where he tried to show the development of social realism in the United States; David Shapiro claims that “social realism attempted to use art to protest and dramatize injustice to the working class- the result, as these artists saw it, of capitalist orientation” [16] Here we can see the use of art as a medium of reflecting the concrete lives of the society and also as a way of inspiration. Social realists tried to analyze what happens to art within an age of capitalism. Here, by adopting the Marxist notion of the fetishism of commodities, they claimed that under capitalism art had become a commodity like any other commodity on the market, and that the artist had sold himself as well as his works in such world of fierce competition. By allying themselves with and sharing the ideas of workers, social realists believe that socialism is the tool of transforming art and also life of the artist and society at large. Thus we find two types of art and artist. Even though both groups work within a capitalistic world, the former submitted their work to the capitalist market thereby turning themselves and their products into a commodity, while the latter i.e. social realists, adopt a kind of critical Marxian orientation, believing that art can be used as a tool of understanding and transforming a given society.

According to Shapiro, there is a difference between social realism and socialist realism. As such “social realism opposed to the ruling class and its mores, predominantly selects as its subject matter the negative aspects of life under capitalism ---, socialist realism as it has developed on the Soviet Union, supports the ruling class and the form of government. It selects as its subject matter the positive aspects of life under socialism” [16] Here we can see a clear difference between the two orientations since one aims at exposing the brutalities of the existing situation, while the other tries to support the status quo. Social realism tries to take a critical stance against the existing system thereby exposing its brutalities, while socialist realism of the Soviet Union tries to legitimize the status quo.

2.2.2 Marxist aesthetics

In Marxist aesthetics, high attention is given to analyzing the kind of relation and closeness that exists between a given work of art and social forces and contradictions that exist at the time. By looking at art and art works within the context of production, Marxian aesthetics claimed that under capitalism there was a kind of transformation of a work of art into a commodity. Consequently, a kind of radical opposition between art and society appeared here. The societal members who are blinded by the fetishism of commodities, i.e. notion of a producer not realizing that it's their labor that gives commodities their values and 'reification', thinking that humanly created social structures are natural, universal and unchangeable, become opposed to the artist who still tried to maintain his creative will and represent the denied aspects of humanity. Here "the artist refuses to integrate his work on the abstract, quantified, and banal universe of bourgeoisie society-without being fully conscious of his abysmal separation from it, the artist radically opposes bourgeois society simply by remaining faithful to his creative will" [20] Thus for Marxian aesthetics, one cannot separate art and society, and all works of art are socially determined.

2.2.2 Bewaji

In his work *Beauty and Culture* J.A.I Bewaji tried to see the impact of artistic expression in relation to ontological, cosmological, epistemological, methodological, axiological, personal, social, political values and morality. Here Bewaji tried to show that in traditional African societies, art was part of other aspects of life and that it didn't exercise autonomy. By criticizing Kant's notion of the autonomy of the aesthetic judgment where art is separated from all societal values, Bewaji claimed that the concept of art for its own sake does not make sense. In relation to the ontological and cosmological beliefs of a society, Bewaji claimed that "the fundamental beliefs of a society regarding the origin, nature, existence, nonexistence, matter and non-matter, being, reality, etc. In the universe affect for good or ill, all aspects of the life of members of society." [5] For Bewaji the theories, assumptions and models on which our lives are based show and are determined by the understanding of what constitutes reality. Our basic beliefs regarding the natural and supernatural are seen on the activities and beliefs on which daily life is based. Our ontological and cosmological beliefs are also observed in the area of the arts. Thus the notion of art is part and parcel of the life of the people, and hence shouldn't be treated separately.

The impact of the immediate environment on artistic expressions is also witnessed in relation to epistemological foundations and methodological approaches. Here Bewaji maintains that "the

knowledge base of the people in various epochs dictate the material culture that they develop, as well as the materials that they use and the methods that they employ and adapt in creating the 'architectonic system' that are evident in their artistic and cultural production" [5] Here by knowledge base what is referred to is the accumulated tradition, beliefs and values of a society that is passed down from one generation to the other. This knowledge reflects the immediate reality on which the culture grows out of as well as the influences from the outside world. The material aspects of the culture and materials used in day to day life are reflections of this knowledge base. This architectonic system is also found on artistic and cultural productions playing a role of giving images and justifying a given structure. Generally by exploring different dimensions like ontological, cosmological and epistemological aspects of the life a society, Bewaji tried to show that art is an integral part of the life of the society.

3. Art, mental colonization and distortion of reality

3.1 Art as a colonizing agent

There is no doubt to the fact that Africans were colonized by the Europeans and that this was devastating to the continent. Still there are diverging views in relation to the type of colonization that was used in order to subdue the colonized. Many scholars focused on the type of forceful colonization that was used to subdue Africans physically, while others mainly claimed that a type of mental or psychological colonization was used to justify the ideology and supremacy of the Western world. This group argues that mental colonization was used to justify the rule and conquest of Europeans and that it had an aim of making the colonized people inferior and of deserving domination. Some scholars who raised the issue of mental colonization involve Wiredu who argued for a need of conceptual decolonization, Ngugi that centered on cultural colonization and Ehiedu Iweriebor who focused on the psychology of colonialism.

Although according to many, African states begun to gain independence and hence the era of colonialism started to end following the Second World War. As such for some there is only a change in the mode or type of colonialism and that colonialism didn't really end. What's raised here is the issue of mental colonization. As Ngugui Wa Thingo puts it "Berlin of 1984 was affected through the sword and the bullet. But the night of the sword and the bullet was followed by the mourning of the chalk and the black board. The physical violence of the battlefield was followed by the psychological violence of the classroom. But where the former was visibly brutal, the latter was

visibly gentle” [18]

Many argue that various mechanisms and methods were used to facilitate the mental or psychological colonization of Africans. Ngugi identifies language as the most important vehicle, Wiredu argues of colonization through religion, language and custom, while Ehiedu Iweriebor “identifies cultural imperialism as the general ideological framework through which the psychological colonization was implanted and propagated in Africa. The specific mechanisms of this domination included the falsification of African history, colonial education, missionary religious imperialism and social stratification” [11] When we come to the factor that caused the establishment of relation between different cultures for mental colonization to be imposed, colonialism was identified. Accordingly, “colonialism has caused widespread involuntarily intermixing of western and African intellectual categories in the thinking of contemporary Africans” [17]. According to Wiredu because of involuntarily contact with Europeans there was intermixing, and as a result program of conceptual decolonization is required. Currently the western art is being transmitted through art works like movies, mass media and the big networks. Alien ideals are being imposed through art causing mental colonization. Iweriebor maintains

Colonial books, comics, and films generally portrayed Africans and African countries as primitive, uncivilized and backward. African audiences exposed to the constant reiteration of such views about their societies were again programmed to despise their societies and to accept the superiority of the west and the western colonizers. For African audiences, therefore the western model becomes the idea they pursued. [11]

The alien images posit that the culture from which they originated is superior. These images that are usually being accepted without a critical appropriation, are highly determining our lives.

3.2 Art in the process of alienation and distortion

Karl Marx is one of the most influential thinkers in human history. Marx is known for propounding his idea of socialism and exposing the brutalities of the capitalist era. With an overall aim of developing his dialectical materialism, Marx discussed various issues like property, class conflicts, alienation and fetishism of commodities. Here I am going to give an emphasis to showing how art is contributing to distortion of reality and alienation with in the current context.

Marx’s conception of fetishism of commodities was rooted in his materialist orientation with its focus on the productive activities of individuals. The basis of the process is the labor that gives commodities their value. For

Marx, in their interaction with nature and other actors, individuals produce objects that they need for survival. These objects have use values and cannot achieve independent existence because they are controlled by actors. But in capitalism workers start producing for capitalists and the products has exchange values i.e. instead of being used immediately they are exchanged in the market for money that is used in the final analysis to acquire other use values. Thus in capitalism, the role of individuals in producing commodities and their control over them becomes mystified. As such, “Marx views the relationship between man and his products in capitalist society under two aspects. While commodities of man become his master, man as a worker, becomes an objectless being--- once the objects cease to be an object of human activity and become independent beings, subjects into themselves, man himself remains devoid of objects and realization.” [3]

Marx’s idea of religion is based on Feuerbach’s view of religion as a projection of human needs and wants. Feuerbach saw in “speculative philosophy from Spinoza to Hegel as an attempt to liberate man from the alienation immanent in religion. This accords with his general view of religion as projection of human wants on the imagined figure of God.” [3] For Marx the idea of religion is that of creating something and then being controlled by it. In art also we create images and after sometime become controlled by them. What happens is that, initially we create images that essentially reflect and manifest our concrete lives and also wants needs and fantasies. With time, these images will determine our lives having an autonomous existence.

In order to see how art leads to the process by which we become alienated from our products and reality, we need to take a look at the Marxian notion of alienation. For Marx workers are alienated from the object they produce, their creative activity, other workers and finally from their sensuous being. Here “the object produced by labor---now stands opposed to it as an alien being as a power independent of the producer. The product of labor is labor which has been embodied in an object and turned into a physical thing: this product is an objectification of labor” [3] Similarly what happens in relation to art is that, we are the one that produce and gave value to a work of art, but the product becomes independent playing a regulating role in our lives. Thus we are not only alienated from our product but are also controlled by it.

Here we need to acknowledge the difference between a worker and an artist; this can be seen in terms of awareness. The worker is not conscious of what he is giving value by his labor, but the artist does. The most important point is that once created

and given value, the product assumes a separate and objective existence, playing a great role in our lives. Just like the case of the fetishism of commodities, we fail to realize that we are the ones that create and give value to these things.

4. Progress and the aesthetic dimension

In this section I have an intention of showing how art can also be used as a decolonizing agent. Although the decolonizing tendencies of art cannot be traced on a given work of art or works of a philosopher, one should look for various tendencies found in diverging philosophies and works of art that basically try to give us an insight into how we can fight the mental colonization, alienation and distortion that's been effected through art these days. Some of these tendencies include, an art being critical towards both the culture that led to its creation and the outside environment, and also a work of art giving us an insight into the foundational structures of a society thereby facilitating critical appropriation. I will try to trace these decolonizing tendencies in the works of Wole Soyinka, Richard Bell and George Lukas.

4.1 Wole Soyinka

Soyinka is one of the most influential writers of Africa. Soyinka used art to enlighten the society and also suggesting many alternatives that are rooted in the beliefs and values of the people. The idea of organic revolution occupies a central place on the thoughts and works of Soyinka. He contrasted this idea with the kind of neo colonial practices that Africans absorbed from European imperialism. Thus, what we find in Soyinka's idea of organic revolution is acknowledgment of the past influences like colonialism and their influence on the current context. The decolonizing aspect in Soyinka is found in the use of art to enrich the life of the people and giving them an insight into the past. Here Soyinka is helping us to understand past impositions, current implications and the idea of building a new era that's particularly based on the past achievements. Thus by employing a critical and reflexive art that's rooted on the life of the people, Soyinka is enlightening us to understand the dynamic aspect of art.

The idea of using past values in the current context is also found on Soyinka's notion of reevaluation. Here, "an African philosophy, on its narrative aspect should translate the inherent or stated viable values of a social situation into a contemporary or future outlook--- this transition is what he calls the reevaluation of traditional values and this reevaluation requires the selective lifting of the deeper traditional values of a community and recasting them to meet today's realities" [4] Soyinka especially focused on moral and metaphysical concerns of African people that are expressed on their narratives. Thus the most

important elements of Soyinka's works that contribute to the idea of using art as a way of mental colonization are the critical and reflexive elements that try to raise the awareness of society by suggesting emancipatory ideals which are rooted on a given context.

4.2 Richard Bell

In his book *Understanding African philosophy* Richard Bell tried to understand the various tendencies and developments in African philosophy. One way he used to understand African philosophy was based on the conception of how one should understand others. In trying to understand a particular culture and its ways of being, Bell tried to look at the practices, languages, values and other concerns like geographical location. One way through which Bell approached African philosophy is based on the narratives and aesthetic consciousness of a given people. Narratives are like stories we tell which manifest the social, political, religious and other aspects of our lives. As Bell claimed "as primary source of conscious self-expression, such narratives have significance of enabling us to see and hear the realities that are Africa; narratives are an aesthetic entryway to the African experience as it is" [4]. The crucial aspect of approaching a society from this point of view is that we are not trying to depend on outside descriptions. By using narratives we will be able to know about the foundational presupposition on which the society rests, past influences and also current implications. For Bell, the narrative texts of Africans that possess a philosophical significance are found in oral tradition, recent literature, and art and can also be associated with the village palaver and local democracy under the narrative of a people. We also find its aesthetic consciousness being expressed through iconic forms. This iconic tradition is a primary and reflexive mode of expression that's philosophical in nature.

One form in which narratives are found is oral. For Bell, the participants in oral narratives are not just having a regular conversation like describing a phenomenon in the social setting. There are in fact critical and dialogical elements that are found in oral narratives. Here by invoking Socratic dialogues, Bell claimed that the conditions which forced dialogue for Socrates were narrative situations common to ordinary life and that in Africa we can associate such an encounter with the village palaver. Thus, "the village palaver or council mode in many parts of Africa is a model of free discourse for purpose of making good judgments and for doing justice---each dialogical situation has earmarks of the Socratic enterprise, each is formative of the values and characteristics of that community, each reflects the existential texture of human life" [4]

The fictitious narratives describe the different

aspects of the life of the society. The authors because of their aesthetic consciousness try to go beyond these basic descriptions into adopting a critical outlook towards their society and also participate in suggesting alternatives. Generally Bell's idea of aesthetic consciousness and narratives is significant in going really deep into the lives of the people, understanding how they made sense of the world and identifying elements of their aesthetic consciousness that are philosophical and reflective. Bell's approach is in a sense opening up a way for present African authors and philosophers to use the elements of the past which are embedded in the culture of a given society which in turn could facilitate mental decolonization.

4.3 Georg Lukas

In his work *History and Class Consciousness* Lukas presented a collection of essays that emphasized Marx's transformation of Hegelian concepts, leading to a new theoretical stance towards labor and alienation. One of the things he discussed in this book is 'reification and consciousness of the proletariat'. This idea is rooted on Marx's analysis of the fetishism of commodities. The fetishism of commodities involves the process by which actors fail to recognize that it is their labor that gives commodities their value. The market takes on a function in the eyes of the individuals that in Marx's view only actors can perform the production of value.

Reification is basically the process of coming to believe that humanly created social forms are natural, universal and absolute things. According to Bary Katz's interpretation of Marx, "under the domination of the commodity structure, phantom objectivity is conferred upon human relations, transforming social relation onto relations between things; subjectively the consciousness of individuals comes to reflect and reproduce this system of domination, giving it the character of a second nature." [12] Thus the concept of reification implies that people believe that social structures are beyond their control and unchangeable. Lukas believed that art has a power to break through this process. Art for Lukas was one by which we can grasp reality. It is a way through which we make sense of the world, and the greatest type of artistic creation is one that enables us to do this is a realist one. As such "all great art is a realist art, this has been the case since homer's time because it reflects reality and this is irrefutable criterion for all great periods of art, even if the means of expression varies intently" [20] Thus, in relation to overcoming reification, art plays its role by projecting a utopian vision.

4.4 Art as a power and tool of change

On the last three sections, I've been trying to

discuss preliminary issues related to aesthetics and art, and also the issue of how art is serving as an agent of mental colonization, distortion and alienation on the one hand, and as a tool of mental decolonization on the other. What I am trying to do in the section is trying to carry out a general project of deconstruction and reconstruction with an aim of trying to solve some of the major problems; raised on the previous sections, answering the question what should be the role of art in society and also trying to come up with an idea of art that can serve as a way of empowering the community and being used as an agent of radical transformation. Under the project deconstruction and reconstruction, I will give a special emphasis to the notion of a decolonizing art and also the idea of building positive images and counter narratives against the alienation and distortion the resulted because of art.

(1) In order to use art as a positive force and tool of social transformation, a general process of deconstruction and reconstruction needs to be carried out. In his essay 'African philosophy, deconstructive and reconstructive challenges', Lucius Outlaw tried to show how African philosophy poses deconstructive and reconstructive challenges in light of European incursion into Africa. Accordingly, the attempt of Africans to criticize the main themes and ideals of Westerners has decolonizing aspect, while efforts of coming up with an own African philosophy poses a reconstructive challenge.

In speaking of deconstruction, Outlaw maintained that "one of the objectives of deconstruction is to critique and displace the absolutist metaphysics and epistemology which are thought to identify and provide knowledge of a rational order of axioms, first principles, and postulates that are the foundation of art that is, and of knowing what is "[8] we can apply such ideals in relation to art. The project of deconstruction should be followed (or once the dominant concepts and ideals are deconstructed) there shall be a process of reconstruction that is based upon Indigenous and outside critical appropriation. Indigenously we need to go deeply into the aesthetic consciousness of the people and then pick out useful and critical elements that are relevant to our project. In relation to what we have to appropriate from the outside, there is a need to employ a critical outlook towards different images that came from different corners of the world.

Based on the Marxian concepts of the fetishism of commodities, and alienation I've tried to show how art contributes to the process through which we become alienated from our products, and reality is distorted. The main idea is that just like actors become alienated from their products, fail to realize that they give the values to their products and hence come to be regulated by them, in art

also, images are produced in society but with a gradual process they will become part of a huge superstructure regulating the life of the society. One thing is that we can't prevent images from being produced in art and artworks. The solution is making these images positive as well as critical and reflective. There is also a need to make a new kind of narrative that will gradually replace the dominant images.

Parallel to facilitating distortion and alienation, I've claimed that art also serves as agent of mental colonization. This aspect is related to external images and ideals being effected through art and then causing a conceptual colonization. The mental colonization occurs since the alien images are not neutral. They on the contrary carry various images and notions that are rooted on a particular socio-historical context. The major question here is what we can do against this mental colonization facilitated by art. One thing is that we can't avoid contact especially within an age of globalization where contact among cultures is established through ways like trade, communication, mass media and migration. One thing that can be done is using art to decolonize these images. This decolonizing art have to be rooted on the concrete lives of the society and also has to have a reflexive part that allows for a kind of critical appropriation of foreign ideals. Artists have to play a decolonizing role by reflecting upon and adopting a critical attitude towards both the culture that led to its creation and also the outside world.

Here we have to bear in mind that, the project of deconstruction and reconstruction is related to the realist art, in a way that it opens up a way and possibility to see what's real. After uncovering the images that are the results of alienation, fetishism and mental colonization by a way of deconstruction and reconstruction, a realist art could be developed. Again, art or the works of art should try to offer various ideas or alternatives as to how radical transformation is to be achieved rather than a mere description of reality.

(2) Art is something that's very common to our lives and it's this trait that makes it a crucial mechanism for societal transformation. The kind of art that we need is a realist one that should be able to reflect the sorrows and pains of the society. The artist should both try to express the concrete life of the community as well as try to come up with different alternatives that are capable of transforming the society. Within an age of globalization, foreign contact is inevitable and thus there is a need to build an art that can resist this. This art should initially be based on the Indigenous realities, but it will also appropriate foreign elements. The artist should try to create images that will promote the common good and art should be a channel through which we communicate different

ideas, learn from our past mistakes and posit radical progress. Within the Ethiopian context let's try to locate the idea of art and social transformation within the works of Hadis Alemayehu and Abe Gubegna.

In his fiction "*Fikir eska Mekabir*" literally translated as 'love till grave' the famous Ethiopian author; Hadis Alemayehu tried to criticize the existing feudal regime of Emperor Haile Selassie. Hadis basically tried to create a relation between different characters that manifest the social, political and economic relation that exists at the time and then try to criticize this system by making one of the characters adopt a critical outlook towards the societal setting. In this work, Hadis tried to present relations between tenants and landlords, exploitation by the regime and also struggles between nobilities. Amongst the fictional characters 'Gudu Kasa' is given the task of criticizing the existing feudal system. The name of the character was initially 'Kasa Damte' but this is later changed by societal members to 'Gudu Kasa' meaning the 'troublesome Kasa' owing to his odd views. Because he come from a rich and noble background and also was good at his education, 'Kasa Damte' could have gotten a good position in the society, but contrarily his relations with the church become antagonistic when he started criticizing the practices of church leaders. He also started claiming that the society in which he lived is outdated and that uncritical acceptance dominates. Kasa advocated basic changes in his society and that there was a need to build a new system, but most of the societal members saw him as a mad person.

Hadis Alemayehu's idea of using art to criticize the existing system and advocating some basic changes is also found in the fiction by Abe Gubegna called "*Alewoledim*" which literally can be translated as "I won't be born". What makes the work of Abe Gubegna different is that, instead of writing on a particular setting and context, he chooses to widen his scope by trying to point out the brutalities and injustices that are found among humanity in general. In order to do this, Abe Gubegna had to create a character that criticizes this world under the theme of 'I won't be born' beginning from the time he was at his mother's womb. While in his mother's womb, the fetus starts having a dialogue with his mother who was at first shocked by what happened. The fetus asked his mother questions like

(Fetus) *ok, did you have land?*

(Mother) *No*

(Fetus) *Did you have a home?*

(Mother) *No*

(Fetus) *Did you have any education?*

(Mother) *No*

(Fetus) *So, what do you have?*

(Mother) I have nothing

(Fetus) So are you saying that I should be born, so that you can inherit me poverty, disease and ignorance? [1] own translation

The story goes on as the baby is born in a hospital by a surgical procedure after his mother fainted and was taken there. At his stay at the hospital, the main character criticizes the health system for favoring the rich, the church for baptizing a child who doesn't know what he is choosing and journalists for distorting reality by deliberately twisting information. After this the baby was taken to a missionary school, but he quits after sometime when the leaders try to impose their religious views on the boy who doesn't believe in any particular religion except God who created the world. The boy after some time started working in one factory, but then decides to instigate a demonstration after seeing the injustices done against the workers and wage laborers. These injustices include working under dangerous conditions and being paid a low wage.

The demonstration ended when the government decided to make some modifications. But the main character couldn't get any job because of his role in the demonstration, so he decides to engage in farming with a group of friends. Within a time of fifteen years the main character and his friends managed to create a beautiful environment that's beneficial to more than ten thousand people but this is disrupted when one government official claimed that the land belongs to his parents. The character spends little time in jail and after some time a sudden change of government took place by which a military dictatorial government came into power. At this point, in one of the conversations made between this critical individual (the main character) and his friends, we find a critique of the military government, capitalism and socialism, in relation to the idea of democracy. The main character argues

When we see how they are criticizing one another, the westerners claimed that communist state are those in which the people are ruled by dictators, having no control over their personal lives whatsoever, while the communists also say that western countries are those in which few capitalists exploit the masses who are living in poverty, having no jobs and leading a life of crime. Both sides claim to be democratic. [1] own translation

The story ends when after seeing the evils of the new dictatorial government the main character instigates a revolution that overthrow the government. Still the new government imprisoned the main character knowing that he would always stood for equality, freedom and justice. The character is finally brought to court, sentenced to death and killed.

5. Conclusion

I have tried to touch upon some basic concepts in art and aesthetics, having two major goals in

mind. The first is showing how art is serving as a tool of mental colonization, distortion and alienation, on the one hand and also as an agent of mental decolonization on the other. The second one is trying to answer the question, what should be the role of art and what kind of art ought to exist in society. As we have seen the proponents of art for its own sake claimed that art and art works should be separated from the social, political, moral, economic and other values of the society, while realists claimed that art and art works are reflections of the given values of the society and that art can be used as a tool of both understanding and transforming the societal setting.

After arguing that there is a need for a new general project of deconstruction and reconstruction I've come up with the following view; in order to bring radical social transformation in our society, what is needed is a realist art that is situated on the given socio-historical context. Art has to be a way through which the life of the society is reflected as well as radical alternatives are suggested. Art should be weapon through which we can resist mental colonization, and in order to do this a critically oriented art that's rooted on both Indigenous and external realities is needed. The deconstruction and reconstruction will open up the way for a realist art, by exposing the images that are results of reification, alienation and mental colonization and hence coming up with a conceptual apparatus to conceive what's real, i.e. manifestation of the life of the society.

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