

Human, Environment and Technology in the Age of Postmodernism

**Ibrahim AYDINLI & Ferruh TUZCUOGLU,
Sakarya University, Sakarya, Turkey**

Key words: *modernism, postmodernism, environment, technology, consumption*

Abstract: Human being has affected and been affected the environment where he has inhabited since his inception. Human being had initially to live in conditions which were not to his taste but in time as a result of the increased needs he discovered new ways of coping with the hardship which they faced. The requirements of the societal life, coupled with the intelligence and the desire of humans led in the 17 and 18th centuries new technological developments. In time mass production resulted in mass consumption and the latter created environmental problems. The new period based on the enlightenment idea paved the way for modernisation in both cultural and societal fields.. However, problems emerged in the second half of the twentieth century have not met the demands of modernism and a new way out had to be found to face the new challenges. In the context of these developments postmodernism has been circulated and a new paradigm has been formatted. The present work has the intention of the deal with the relations of humans, technology and the environment in the process of modernism to postmodernism.

Introduction

Postmodernism that has begun with the enlightenment, scientific revolution and industrialization has come into question with the collapse of modernism that has arisen and reached to peak by the great changes happened in the 20th century. Modernism that has been associated with a lot of economic, social and cultural factors, has emerged parallel with the development of capitalism especially after the middle age. It has introduced scientific oriented understanding instead of church oriented understanding which was dominant in the Middle Age. In this framework, modernism consists of processes of secularism, rationalism and individualism and urbanization (Ozata, zeynepozata.wordpress.com). Modernism denies all kind of idea and authority other than freewill of the people (Kahraman, 2002: 1).

According to enlightenment understanding that is one of the most important paradigms of this period, it is essential to trust forever to the science and reason and the human being can solve every problem by science. In this framework, the ideologies such as Liberalism, Marxism and Fascism founded on the basis of reason are accepted as the great stories of modernism (Sakli, www.sakli.info). This system that accepts the

materialistic development as the main aim, perceives the world as two poled such as subject/object, woman/man, technology/nature and accept the polarization as universal and consistent. Polarized world understanding of modernism, has begun to be argued heavily by the second half of 20th century, in the meantime, notion of postmodernism has begun to develop as a philosophical thought questioning modernism (Ozata, zeynepozata.wordpress.com).

Modernism accepts the technological development identical with good living and social development. Technology is to bring together the raw material, material and machines for development. The value of the technology in modernism is associated to its productivity and its cost to its user. Modernism neglects “why” that expresses an ethical value, by focusing on production style of technology. The aim is to live well and the way to realize that is unlimited production and consumption. In this sense, Technology includes not the subject (producer) and its ethic standards but, the object (product) and its technical components. So, this paves the way for mass production / consumption in which subjectivity is turned to objectivity and become the basis for expansion of industry (Bookchin, 1994: 342).

The inference of modernism on science and technology has caused irreparable problems on human - nature - technology. Live-well in harmony with nature understanding is destroyed because it supported the material scarcity paranoia of modernism and capitalism as well as it dismantled the human-nature completeness. By determining “quantitative” criteria for live-well, ethical, social and political dimensions have been neglected.

When nullity through materializing of human and environment, the rise of science and technology by the lack of the value and ethic principle, are united with the inequality of globalized capitalism, big problems have become inevitable (Esgün, kutuphane.uludag.edu.tr). The gap caused especially by enviromental ethics, has become the most important factor for the inextricable enviromental problems. This understanding which accepts live-well identical with wealthy life, has seen science and technology as an important mean on this way (Bookchin, 1994: 387).

Transition from modernism to postmodernism

Intensified criticism against modernism has directed the human being to new search and induced the birth of postmodernism (Odabaşı, 2004: 20). Postmodernism has emerged as multiheaded and multiaspected trend in opposite areas (Martinez, img.forministry.com). As well as this trend is a theory against the enlightenment values and the nation-state idea produced by these values and modernism, as a society model, also it shows a character of contumacy against enlightenment culture (Kutluay, www.mmoistanbul.org).

Postmodernism is one of the irreconcilable, most debated and unlimitable concepts. As a matter of fact, It is difficult to include a situation, which has clearly determined horizons, to take place in postmodernism, because postmodern ideas are against exact definition and limitation (Toros, kutuphane.uludag.edu.tr). According to postmodernism, As well as there is no natural limits of human thinking, also in reality there is no limit on social and cultural life. For that reason, social and cultural circumstances of human are not monotype in respect of time and place. This cause differences in cultural and social aspect. The diffence in sensing the world causes showing different cultural attitudes fort he same needs. While the universalism understanding of modernism is being criticised, the reality of sharing widespread acceptances and beliefs of different cultures is not denied (Venkatesh, www.crito.uci.edu).

Postmodernism is a concept used for explaining a lof of developments witnessed today and describing new phase of the society compared to modernist period. By emphasizing paradigmatic aspect of the change, it tries to characterize a post-industrial

period. (Şan-Hira, www.elelebizbize.net). Despite “post” prefix means after, postmodernism is a process which has a continuity relation with modernism, originated from modernism and trying to overcome modernism by making it problematic (urlalisesi.k12.tr). According to some, postmodernism is a name of a period, according to others it is a name of a new thought, wording, a new nationalism and discourse. Historical evolution of postmodern process and thought goes as far as the end of The World war II. Especially Poststructuralism, that emerged in France in 1960s, has been background for the theoretic structure of postmodernism.

Generally, postmodernism is evaluated as the epistemological break from enlightenment which is the main reference of modernity. However, disparities appears on definition and evaluation of postmodernism. Critics of modernism like Lyotard, Baudrillard, Jameson, Foucault, Touraine and Bell claim that developed western societies experience a break from modernity and a new period arises. On the other hand, philosophers like Habermas and Giddens define the current period as the further phase of modernity instead of assertion of a new period (Şan-Hira, www.elelebizbize.net).

Postmodernism and consumption

1980s and early 1990s witnessed the postmodern arguments on consumption and behaviour of consumer (Venkatesh, www.crito.uci.edu). The way aiming to live - well is supposed to pass from unlimited production and consumption. So, This paves the way for Fordist style of production and consumption in which the subjectivity is objectified (Bookchin, 1994: 342). While the production and distribution of goods and services are designed according to standard economic rules and supply and demand in conventional economy; culture and consumption are also emphasized as the important factors in postmodernism. According to postmodernism, when the production and distribution, welfare and wealth reach to a certain level, consumption becomes the driving force of the economy. On the otherhand, at the expense of causing fall in production and distribution, the consumption turns to a phenomenon determined by the symbols and brands. Harvey points out this and expresses that in postmodern economy, brand economy highlights the fashion for mass markets in lots of areas of life from garment to decoration, from ornament to esthetics. Also Baudrillard in his research dated 1981, analysed the relationship between consumption-symbol and brand and found out how vital role it plays in daily life. According to him, consumption is composed of change in brand and symbols and in this system goods, services and materials are replaced by the brands and symbols (Venkatesh, www.crito.uci.edu).

Thus, since the consumption is designed according to symbols, brands and fashions instead of real production and distribution in postmodernism, it highlights consumption which is based on show-off rather than “consumption proportional with need”, and this has paved the way for running out of the resources. This characteristic of postmodernism in human nature relation has deepened the environment problems.

Human nature and technology relation in postmodernism

In the period of development process of modernism, freedom has been introduced as the developments in technology, getting the nature under control, highlighting of individual interest and the increasing of consumption by the dominant social values for centuries. As a result of this understanding, environment and natural resources has begun to be seen as an obstacle for increasing of life quality, understanding of unlimited consumption and the freedoms (Demirer vd., 1999: 164).

Contrary to assertion of modernism, postmodernism does not give a dominant status to technology (Segal, 1994: 2). By shaking the basic acceptances of modernism, It does not see technology, science and reason as the powers explaining everything (Saklı,

www.sakli.info). Instead, by abandoning the understanding of unique reality, unique science and technology, pluralism has begun to get more important (Ozata, zeynepozata.wordpress.com). Just as postmodernism in architecture consists of the efforts to catch a new and different esthetics by using opposite elements together, Also in the other fields of life it consists of pluralistic understanding that holds varieties in harmony . What is important is to accept disparities and to be able to stay together in harmony with different ones (Kutluay, www.mmoistanbul.org) postmodernism do not handle the reality in a way that is purified from feelings and social values, but on the contrary, it is based on interactivity, by consisting of fundamentals and nature of knowledge by a holistic understanding, it slides the interest also to other fields such as fine arts, law and social sciences. Since in this understanding it is defended that reality is subjectivity oriented and not universal-objectivity oriented, generalizability, universal reality and predictability are refused (Ozata, zeynepozata.wordpress.com).

Also from the viewpoint to technology, postmodernism shows a fundamental break from modernity (Bookchin, 1994: 387). Modernism has assumed that getting the nature under control, highlighting of individual interest and increasing consumption and technological improvements are the basics for freedom and life quality (Demirer vd., 1999: 164). On the other hand, postmodernism does not grant the same value to the technology. In postmodernism technology and freedom are two phenomenones that can not exist together in life (Bookchin, 1994: 387). Furthermore the idea of “we live in a destroyed world” has become the main resource of technologic pessimism in postmodern age. Technology is not granted with a dominant role in the process of redefinition of individual, society and politics in postmodernism (Segal, 1994: 2).

As well as pessimist view, attribution of positive values to technology is in question. According to postmodernism, a small, soft and middle sized technology can play an important role to transform an authoritarian society to ecological society (Bookchin, 1994: 387). The problem, according to postmodernism, is rather than the point that science and technology has reached, but the use of these. The main factor determining this is economy-politics. Capitalistic production system that tries to maximize surplus value and modernism, have used the scientific and technological instruments for this aim (Demirer vd., 1999: 164).

Also in the context of technology – culture relation, postmodernism claims that New upper identities are built especially parallel to the developments in computer technology. According to Lyotard, even the people who do not know any foreign language is subjected to open to global by “smart machine”s (computers) and beyond national identities, global identities has begun to emerge. According to Lyotard, hereafter, science has become an object of technology. By the technology, the information can be transported from one place to another place fastly and it is becoming an upper identity shared by a great number of people (Kutluay, www.mmoistanbul.org). Postmodernism put forward “the alternative technology” against the technology approach of modernism. Here, rather than a certain system of technician or machines, the approaches about design and usage are put forward. Alternative technology anticipates that technology based problems can be overcome by the radical tuning of technological and industrial basis of the society, but not by partial and reductionist approach. Besides, minimum use of non-renewable resources, minimum intervention to environment, self-sufficiency, prevention of alienation and exploitation are some approaches that postmodern environments argue in terms of human-nature-technology (Dickson, 1992: 61-62).

As it is seen, the approach of postmodernism to human-nature-technology relation is not homogeneous, and consists of different views and does not show an exact clarity.

Conclusion

Gradually increasing post-industrial trends emerged especially in the last quarter of 20th Century have brought different reflections in all fields from economy to politics, from culture to environment. Postmodernism, which is one of these trends and that built its theory on criticism against modernism, includes essential differences on human-nature-technology as well as on all fields compared to modernism. The view of postmodernism that highlights disparity, diversity and local, for technology and its reflections on environment is not homogeneous and as in its theory, differs among different philosophers. Unlike modernism, postmodernism does not glorify the technology, but evaluate it from positive and negative view. Furthermore, symbolic culture, brand and fashion that enabled the postmodernism to emerge, stimulates consumption and causes it to reach mass dimensions. This situation accelerates the exhaustion of natural resources and the deepening of environmental problems.

REFERENCES

- Bookchin, Murray, (1994), *Özgürlüğün Ekolojisi*, (Çev. Alev Türker), Ayrıntı Yayınları, İstanbul.
- Demirer, Göksel N., ve diğerleri, (1999), "YDD" Kışkacında Çevre ve Kent, Ütopya Yayınları, Ankara.
- Dickson, David, (1992), *Alternatif Teknoloji*, (Çev. Nezi Erdoğan), Ayrıntı Yayınları, İstanbul.
- Kahraman, Hasan Bülent, (2002), *Postmodernite İle Modernite Arasında Türkiye*, Everest Yayınları, Melise Matbaacılık.
- Kutluay, Ertuğrul, (2004), "Postmodernizm ve Globalleşme", <http://www.mmoistanbul.org/yayin/soylesiler3/3/index.html>
- Martinez, Maria I., (2003), "Definitions and Expressions of "Postmodernism", http://img.forministry.com/89190031-2018-4852-828838AFB27D78BD/DOC/Postmodernism_02.pdf, (10.01.2008).
- Odabaşı, Yavuz, (2004), *Postmodern Pazarlama; Tüketim ve Tüketici*, Şefik Matbaası, İstanbul.
- Özata, Zeynep, (2006), "Modernizm, Postmodernizm", <http://zeynepozata.wordpress.com/2006/09/17/postmodern-tuketici-arastirmalari/>, (20.02.2008).
- Saklı, Ali Rıza, "Postmodernizm ve İdeoloji", http://www.sakli.info/M_Potmodernizm_ve_ideoloji.pdf, (02.04.2008).
- Segal, Howard P., (1994), "Technology, Pessimis and Postmodernism: Introduction", *Technology, Pessimis and Postmodernism*, Edited By Yaron Ezrahi, Everett Mendelsohn and Howard Segal, Kluwer Academic Publishers, Dordrecht, Boston, London, 1994. ss. 1-10.
- Şan, M.Kemal, İsmail Hira, (2008), "Sanayi Sonrası Toplum Kuramları", http://www.elelebizbize.net/e-kutuphane/mustafakemalsan/Sanayi_Sonrasi_Toplum%20Kuramlari.pdf, (07.02.2008).
- Toros Güneş ESGÜN, (2006), "Postmodernizme Rağmen Aydınlanma", <http://kutuphane.uludag.edu.tr/Univder/PDF/fen-ed/KAYGI/2006-6/M13.pdf>, (11.01.2008).
- Urla Lisesi, (2008), "Postmodernizmin Düşünsel ve Tarihsel Çerçevesi", <http://urlalisesi.k12.tr/dergiler/felsefe/postmodern.pdf>, (20.04.2008).
- Venkatesh, Alladi, (1999), "Postmodernism Perspectives for Macromarketing: An Inquiry into the Global Information and Sign Economy", <http://www.crito.uci.edu/noah/paper/postmodern%20perspectives%20for%20macromarketing.pdf>, (17.02.2008).