

Postmodern Condition: Origin of Absurd DramaYousef Afarini ¹, Mohammad Shoalehsaadi ²¹Department of Art and Architecture, Sepidan Branch, Islamic Azad University, Sepidan, Iran.²Department of Art and Architecture, Sepidan Branch, Islamic Azad University, Sepidan, Iran.sepidanfaculty@gmail.com, yafarini@yahoo.com, mshoalehsaadi@yahoo.com

Abstract: Postmodernism is a condition which contains the western civilization in the second half of 20th century. This condition was the refusal of the modern and traditional conditions of the church and anterior autonomy. Postmodern is dominantly defined as refusal of the autonomy of everything without any other autonomous alternative. We must regard the autonomy as the essence to define the new conditions. Postmodernism, as an important university movement, returns to the 1970s, namely publication of Lyotard's Postmodern Condition. [Yousef Afarini, Mohammad Shoalehsaadi. **Postmodern Condition: Origin of Absurd Drama**. *Journal of American Science*. 2012;8(6):180-186]. (ISSN: 1545-1003). <http://www.sciencepub.net/american>. 22

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1. Introduction

Postmodern was the condition which contained the western situation in the second half of 20th century. This condition took place in opposition to the modern and traditional conditions of the church and anterior autonomies. Postmodern can be traced before the two world wars, although they were resulted in its real emergence finely.

2. Materials and Methods

The method of the article contains the analytic study of the thinker opinions in the age of uncertainty (religion authenticity, namely middle Ages and reason authenticity or modernity) and corresponding it to the theater items of the age as well as analytic study of the thinkers opinions in opposition to certainly, namely the age of authority collapse which is the age of postmodern. Also we deal with considering the postmodern condition, namely the condition which emerged in the second half of 20th century in the west as the origin of absurd drama as well as consideration of the way of absurd drama formation in this condition. The research method is a library and comparative method which is based on the works and translations in the field of postmodern and absurd drama. The study tries to consider the relationship between the postmodern philosophy and the dominant condition on the society in the postmodern and absurd drama which is originated from the condition. The character of absurd drama is analyzed and discussed and the radical principles between the character and of previous drama are shown. In the article, Nietzsche and Freud's ideas are regarded and the dramatists as Becket and Junoesque are considered.

3. Results and Discussion**Postmodern Conditions**

Postmodern, in one sense, means "to be posterior." St. Frantz Fehr writes "like other similar notions as post industrial and post revolutionary society and post structuralism, postmodernism defines itself based on its anterior facts not on the present." But what was postmodernism very anterior phenomenon? Actually it was modernism. "Modernism" word is essentially a general word in the art and it contains all art movements, which challenged the essentially realistic principles of European art in the 19th century, in the beginning of the 20th century.

Although Realistic Arts aimed conformity of the real life, the modernist art intended to praise its own materialistic existence as art and consequently its distance and difference with the reality. Some modernist movements includes: Impressionism, Expressionism, Futurism, Dadaism, and Surrealism. The exact date of modernism beginning is not quite clear. Although some university texts have recorded it 1980, Virginia Wolf believes it was in 1910.

But it is clear that modernism movement, in art, was in the beginning of 19th century, namely in the time in which modern condition reached its transcendental climax and resulted in modernism emergence as well as its decline as Sisyphus Slate. Consequently, the art, in parallel to this condition, started its opposition to it as if it regarded the refusal of modern values as its principles.

Although philosophers skeptically considered the modernism values and principles, the main characteristic of this approach to modernism took place in the area of aesthetic and art. As the central topic of modernism, Humanism was challenged by Ihab Hassan so: "after five hundred years, Humanism is getting its end, because it has been transferred into

something which should be disappointedly named post humanism.

Nietzsche, Marx, and Freud after World Wars, for example, seriously challenged the reason, technology, its alienation, and the modern which tried to be an alternative for timeworn Christian. Among them, Nietzsche's influence was, seemingly, more than the other. It is because we can analyze post modernity, which was found out about one hundred years after his silence, based on his philosophical ideas.

Although some philosophers as Huber Mars tries to reject the certainty of post modernity, maybe postmodern is not something for agreement or opposition... Postmodernism is a kind of cultural space and thought conditions, of political fact and life style. This phrase means "dominant culture" in Fredric Jameson's works and a kind of "feeling structure" in Williams terms. On the whole, postmodernism means the dominant culture in the western world after the war.

Undoubtedly, the postmodern art is the product of the collapse of the borders and differences: the difference between the superior and inferior, elitism and popular. The border or distinction between them, like any other distinction, will be eradicated in postmodern culture. Lyotard believes that doubt in metanarratives or grant narrative, which contains both the metanarratives of science and politic and art as enlightenment, is inevitable in postmodernism. Therefore, the art is not the equivalent of enlightenment and it can not claim its superiority over the mass culture. Budria believes that "the main characteristic of post modernity is the disappearance of the aesthetic and the transcendental values in the bombastic and splendor world of reality... and disappearance of the history and reality in the mass-media world."

As an important university event, postmodernism returns to the late 1970s, namely publication of Lyotard's postmodern conditions, but the notion was not a novelty. In other words, Lyotard's discussion was consciously based on the framework of the North American's discourse as Lyotard put it so: "postmodern word... was currently used by the socialists and critics of American continent." Therefore, he does not claim the discovery or coinage of the word. Lyotard adds that "postmodernism is a program for eradication of all borders, refusal of any distinction between the ego and external world, male and female, subject and object, and mind and body" [1].

In his work "postmodern condition, Lyotard recognizes the modernity and modernism characteristic as the simultaneous presence of the science and a set of grant universal and legitimizing

narrative which have their roots in the enlightenment. He believes that these metanarratives lost their legitimizing power after the World War (II): In the contemporary culture and society namely postmodern culture and post industrial society the metanarratives... have lost their validity, ignoring the way of extension, either speculative or emancipation metanarrative."

Lyotard believes that postmodernism refusal of any grantnarrative, either in aesthetic or science and policy, has the root in the grantnarrative itself which moves from skepticism toward plurality. The central point of binary opposition of modernity and postmodernity is the decline of the certainty which is originated from the certain and firm hierarchy of values.... This opposition, also, is based on the transition to the condition the characteristic of which is co-existence or cease-fire between the values." Jameson's writes: "the fact is that aesthetic production..., in general, has been integrated with the good production." Therefore, postmodernism is essentially commodity culture, and its distinction line from the previous modernism is as "perfect confirmation of the market as the existence of any other distinct style." The same is "Populism" of its aesthetic: "one of the main features of postmodernism consists of eradication of the old border (and essentially modernist) between the transcendental and mass or commercial culture and emergence of the various kind of the text full of the varieties, categories, and contents which is imposed by the culture industry, that is, what is condemned by modern ideology. Therefore, postmodernist art is fond of this all over humdrum scene, namely the scene of the rubbish and the works, television serials, advertisements, club night shows, and second degree movies of Hollywood."

"As the other codes and systems of thoughts, Ideologies are not, in a particular form, determining... the role of ideology... in the continuing and reproduction of the system has been ended." Training the sciences and mathematics must be refined from their characteristic of elitism and autonomy and they must be enriched by inserting and accepting the feminist, homosexual and cross-cultural theories and localization." The science is not something but a myth, narrative or a social incident with the myths and narratives and other social incident."

All these declaration which contain the dominant and clear Marxist elements, have ignored an important point which is the influence of Nihilism on the postmodern condition without any relation to disappointment. Indeed, the happy Nihilism, which is dominantly presented, abrogates any dictated and imposed value. Despite of this abrogation, the values

become personal and their value is not a pre-given and determined if they have any general and public value. But, after the struggle of the happy and free human who gives the positive answer to their instincts and recognizes their health in their attention to the worldly life not in refusal of it, their values will be possibly universal, if they discover the same values, although its occurrence is not quite clear and certain. We live in this world and we have to try and each movement makes the existence of an origin necessary.

With regard to the condition in which there is not any pre-determined and original point, it puts forward plurality of principles and multiplicity of meaning and glossing of self-invention. After domination of Nihilism, pluralism and Ritualism, clearly the systems are lost, the public ideology and ideal will be rejected, and the good value as the product of the master is disavowed. Commodity is the instrument as the piece which is expected to do something and get erosion and send to a wastebasket. Therefore, Magic World view is meaningless. Instead of it, there is a television which will be replaced by a more advanced sample. Everybody, even the lowest class of society, has it. This condition is extended to the artistic commodity (stuff), because human as carrier, owner and omniscient of the truth has lost its validity and autonomy.

Nietzsche tries to overthrow all sources of autonomy that is why he analyzes all the value and anti-value again and challenges all the values and anti-values by his own hammer which reminds the mallet. He says:

“Reverse of idols (namely all ideals in my view) is my job and profession. They annihilated the value and notion of the reality when they established the ideal world based on the lie. The “world of being” and “representation” are the worlds of lie and reality. Ideal lie has been crushed by the reality and ever it has deceived human being up to its own lowest instincts and misled it, namely it has moved to the borders of the more reversed values than what exists as if these new values have guaranteed its future, pride, and sublimity right toward the future [2].

Therefore, we should remember the wondering claim of Nietzsche: “infinite delay (postpone) of meaning in its edge.” New Hermeneutic! For everybody, each signifier signifies thousands, millions and milliards signified. Therefore, the value and autonomy and importance of everything are

violated and it belongs to everything. It means refusal of autonomy, namely relativism.

As stated, postmodernism is defined by refusal of autonomy more than any other thing: refusal of autonomy of everything without any autonomous alternative. We should put the refusal of autonomy in the heart of the discussion if we want to achieve a definition for this new condition. As Thomas Cohen uses paradigm (imposed model on the thought) and Michel Foucault uses Episteme (transformation of knowledge in each time), if we review the history of man’s thought, we will perceive that there is something as the central concern which becomes the essence of autonomy and its autonomy would be refused in the next times and it would be replaced by another autonomous phenomenon.

As we see, Aristotelian view (before the pre-Socratic cosmographers) was in a period the criterion for human understanding of his surrounding world which is observed in Homer and Hesiod works. In the other times, philosophy (from Socratic to the middle ages) was the criterion and the official God of church (middle Ages) was the criterion. Finally, we saw (Descartes) autonomy of reason and rationality became the centre and criterion of everything. At present time, postmodernism tries to collapse all autonomies.

Postmodernism features are different in the view of the philosophers and they have not agreed up to now, although we can refer to some common features. In postmodernism, some notions as “reason”, “truth”, “tradition”, “logic”, “religion” and “morality”, which determine the way of human life and give it meaning and have caused the centrality of the dominant episteme, have lost their meaning and their autonomy has been refused. By five important features, postmodern has caused the new definitions in the political sociology. The five definitions are in the close relationship with the items of globalization:

- 1- Opposition to the epistemology and more attention to the ontology. It means; to be more interested in the forms of knowledge influence on the life than the life appearances for the real causes of belief.
- 2- “Concerning infinite meaning as the source of construction of the identities and structures.”
- 3- “Decentralization of society, that is, belief in the notion that social structures are constructed during the processes which happen in the space and place, and they are not determined in a scientific way. There is not any central institution (as government) and any meaning (as truth) around which the various aspects of social life are organized in a fixed status.”

- 4- "Refusal of essence; in the political sociology influenced by postmodern, identities and structures are assumed as the phenomena which are constructed in a particular social background and they depends on the particular historical conditions.
- 5- The effects of the views by which the social life is considered. Through this view point, there is not any universal and excellent value and truth which is shared and accepted by all members of society [3].

In defining human, Heidegger rejects his essence completely by proposing "Dasein". Human is not a pre-determined object. Human has two border lines: "a condition to which he has been thrown" and "condition which is the result of his own choice." That is these two border lines which define the Dasein. Definition of human by the terms as speaker animal or subject is an essence that is imposed upon human so that he/she has to be in that way. In Aristotle language it consists of a set of talents which should be activated and practiced and flowered and they are determined. Heidegger's Dasein is not predictable. It is in a condition (has been thrown into it) in which he has not had any role in it and it has the possibility of the choices and selections which are not predictable. Moreover, each choice constructs a new possibility for him and he/she can change whatever which exists.

Refusal of any essence for human causes the refusal of everything and everybody, because the essence of the other things is something which is perceived by human and human perception is related to his condition and human condition is related to his choice. Consequently, with regard to the condition of human, his perception also changes and this accompanying of perception and condition, and the condition and choice and the choice and will make the human essence and the things under his understanding unknown and new unpredictably.

Postmodern Condition and Absurd Drama

Let's consider the condition of Art. Refusal of autonomy of structure, model, idea and opinion which are the instruments of our discussion causes the essential changes in theater. Drama's character is neither hero nor anti-hero. In other words, it is neither protagonist nor antagonist. The reason is quiet clear. Human has been thrown into the postmodern condition, he/she does not believe in any ideal, unlike protagonist Hamlet who draws his sword after proving the truth, and even he/she does not believe in any certain thing so that he/she tries to prevent the hero as antagonist Creon.

The hero of postmodern drama, even he/she is Nietzsche's super human based on the imposed fascist description, he is uncertain whether attack or not if he/she draws his/her sword.

Such characters as "Tedy" in "Return to the House", "Branze" in "Rhino", Gogo and Di Di" in "Waiting for Godo"... wandering and perplex for the value of losing all values and they, of course, does not suffer for it, because suffering is the result of believing in an exterior value. But the philosopher of "Happy Doctrine" school has recognized the spree as an alternative for any suffering and harmful pain for his/her health.

Considering the history of civilization, we understand that human life and though have been accompanied by centrality of "grant narrative." It means that all aspects of people life has been determined according to these grant narrative and any opposition to it has been followed by seriously and heavy penalty. Centralization of a narrative and giving autonomy to it was resulted in the emergence of a mono-dimensional world which could not endure the emergence of any other thought in each period and it was raising the human with the dogma belief and rude-temper who was protecting a unique ideal (murder in scholastic times, the execution of thousands Mazdakian in Iran, Hitler's genocides, Stalin's murders in Russia and his tortures in Syria, Iranian wars, Guantanamo prison, Vietnam's, Chili, Yugoslavia, Afghanistan, Iraq murders and, in general, the death of many innocent people as well as exceedingly imposed pressures on human being by the other human being are the results of these crude temper).

As soon as the belief were refused and collapsed by the opposition, it would be replaced by the other metanarrative as the central and autonomous criterion.

A reason for construction of metanarratives was human's weakness in encounter with the exterior world. Freud refers to this important point. He believes that there was the father-assassination in the beginning of history in abundance and it was resulted in emergence of metanarratives namely brothers make the unity of brothers to appropriate the other women as well as refusal of totalitarian father; consequently, they murder the father and do incest with their mother. After their incest the effects of super ego is appeared and it is exactly at this moment that the exceedingly sinfulness feeling captures the brothers by the question of why do they do it? This feeling does not release the brother even one moment until they establish the taboo of incest (what Freud recognizes as the origin of law) and they use their father shirt (Totem) as their flag and they worship it as symbol of their tribe. In Freud's view, this

Totemism is the origin and beginning of metanarratives.

Freud is one of the critiques of reason and recognizes the reason without autonomy and in the clutch of sexual shocks. The important point in Freud's thought is that he expresses the emergence of law and rules in the frame of this myths analysis. The focal point is that a person who is not able to live alone, he/she legislates the rules for co-existence and these rules try to express all aspects of people life in the beginning. Possibly, totalitarian rules are necessary, because of primitive civilization and low public information and improvement in the rational dimension of human, social development gradually signifies the necessity of independence, freedom and individuation. Each rule imposes its own particular limitation; the other rules have not the legitimacy of determining the duty for all positions of people life. If the rule is necessary, it should not be public and contain all positions, but it should make the minimum necessary limitation of social life not the maximum. John Lock and after him Rousseau clearly in "social contracts" expressed this issue. Some decades after them, it was confirmed by the public.

After that (before the approval of worldly convention of human right) the autonomy of metanarratives was skeptical because of the thinker opinions, historical incidents, and social conditions until the emergence of a German philosopher and his followers. Nietzsche said: "a single interpretation of the world is impossible, although it has wasted a huge force, and it awakens the mistrust that we think that all interpretation of the world is wrong. [4] Although Francis Backen, also, has said it in another form; Nietzsche's "death of God" announced the death of any autonomy. By his famous hammer, he fought the dying metanarratives and destroyed them.

Many years after his silence in 1889, many philosophers believed that it is the end of metanarrative epoch and decline of absolutism. Against them, nowadays, it is our small narratives which determine the meaning of our life: the autonomy which belonged to the myth in a period and to human in the other period, to the religion, and finally to the reason or science. But in our contemporary period, the autonomy has been taken from the modern condition which is the human's reason autonomy, and the last source of human autonomy up to now, the autonomy has not been given to any other thing, that is, postmodernism.

Actually, refusal of autonomy of the science and reason, which was the last source of human autonomy, is taken into account as the refusal of whatever has been the source of autonomy; therefore, some thinkers who relay on the opposition of post modernity to modernity and try to present a

traditional interpretation of postmodern thinkers opinions, their interpretation is misleading and wrong. For example, we can refer to those who reread the Heidegger's thoughts with mystic interpretation based on Ibn-Arabi.

In postmodern condition, however, it is impossible to give autonomy to something else, because of post modernity nature which refuses any autonomy.

A main point which is regarded by thinker in critique of western modern thought, it is the mono-dimensional a aspect of modern thought, in particular, it presents an especial definition of rationality. Consequently, it measures everything based on this criterion and divides the society into rational and irrational. In other words, whatever which matches this criterion it is normal if not it is abnormal and removes abnormal to the margin. Based on modern man, a person who commits an action which is against the criterion, he/she is abnormal, mad and insane.

Michel Foucault, the contemporary French thinker, discusses this issue well. His first book, which falls in the scope of postmodern thoughts, is "the History of Madness." For Foucault, "madhouse" is the product of modern autonomy. In the traditional society, the mad are in the society and they are not out of the social context. But, modernism has defined a criterion for all aspects and position of life based on its restricted and defined particular rationality and those who cannot think or act in the scope of this criterion will be recognized as insane and made. Based on the man-made criterion, human was going into the madhouse.

Possibly, Nietzsche assumes non-centrality after his theory, when he declared "Death of God." He says; "where is God? I will say you; we have killed him-me and you. All his murderers... the greatest murderers, how can we get our condolence and peace? The holiest and most glorious wealth of the world has been kind by our knives: who will wash this blood from our hands? ... Do we have the capacity of this action?" [5]

Now, human can create its own narratives around this "non-centrality" or ignores the mistake of modernity and grantnarrative and achieve the multi-view of the world of post modernity. The world and narrative which are partial forever and occurrence of a new narrative is possible. But Lacan adds this important point to the postmodern thought and view that what urges human to make the permanent new narratives around this "non-centrality" is his eternal struggle in the scorch of the lost paradise or "lost Idealistic." A search which is never ended and causes the new interpretation and narratives about this lost ideal, love, truth, reality and faith by human and he

always does a dialogue with the “other” by a new language and view; therefore, the writing and creation is never ended [6]. The problem of modern view is that it has been captured by grand narratives as legitimacy of science and objective reality. But the Death of God converted the truth and reality as transformable (changeable) interpretation and discourse.

Characteristics of postmodern process can be considered in opposition to the last autonomy, namely modern reason, scientific and technological advantages of modern man, skeptical consideration of new reason and science universality, of common horizon of meaning between the author and reader, of the style and way of new life, of the proportion between media and addresser. Seemingly, Hangington is one of the recent thinkers who refer to modern metanarratives. He believes that, after the cold war, the civilizations as autonomous metanarratives and influential categories will be put forward in determining the international terms. For example, he refers to western, Confucius, Japanese, Islamic, Indo, Orthodox, American, Latin, Buddhism, Hinduism and African.

As the cultural showing which is a subordinate of the social condition, theater, in postmodern condition, has not a certain and monolithic form, because of uncertainty, relativity, and multiple-meaning. Its evident characteristic is deviation from classic and modern principles of theater and doubt in its authenticity. In other words, as post modernity is merely defined by “uncertainty” without any results, postmodern theater has, also, skeptically considers all theater norms without proposing any new norm or as Descartes’ skepticism, any certainty and determination (the thinker I).

Although postmodern man does not believe in modernity, he has not any alternative for it. He refers to the religion autonomy, but he does not alter and replace it with a new autonomy. Postmodern man is alone, nobody sees him. He is rootless and dangled and without any criterion; therefore, he does not reject or accept anything. To reject all anterior belief, namely desolation of the church basis, modern man (Descartes) has the great criterion of “I think then I exist.” But postmodern man as if he is dangled and plunge in the vacuum and he has not any place for staying. This condition can be seen in postmodern drama: dangled, alienated, away from any firm belief, people who are components of production and consumption cycle. Without this production and consumption, they are nothing, and their being gets its validity merely under a number which is the sign of the turn of their production or consumption. The characters in “Waiting for Godot” are not valid without the hen bone, carrot and turnip, and:

Waiting” as the production or confirming the “autonomy” of Godot. The characters in “Return to the House”, also, have not any existence in the production and consumption cycle which is planned in the frame of sex.

Postmodern human has paid the penalty of faith in Ideologies; therefore, he does not reject or prove something. Postmodern drama’s hero, also, does not fight for anything or defend any ideal. Postmodern drama’s hero, as if, is a superhuman who has come beyond the values. In “Waiting for Godot”, the hero does not even provide a struggle. He even assumes that the current situation is not too bad. There is not any controversy as well as any opposition, because there is not a certain belief for fighting. Vladimir says Stragon “why is not there any certain thing, when you are besides me? [7]. When all previous autonomies are destructed without any alternative; therefore, there is not any certain thing. Uncertainty which is abundant in the new drama is the characteristic of postmodern condition. The hero, who is released from any certain belief, seems tranquil and carefree.

In the postmodern condition in which there is not any centre or centrality in all previous forms including: myth, religion, Ideology, human reason and science, the hero is not the seeker or in the search of truth as Hamlet or Oedipus and he/she cannot act and he/she is always hesitated and skeptical. He/she always doubts that his/her action is good or evil and finally confused without any criterion for measuring; therefore, the “antagonist” and “protagonist” are dangling. Possibly the antagonist or protagonist are good or evil, useful or harmful because there is not any unique truth according which the hero’s action can be measured.

Collapse of autonomous and totalitarian belief resulted in the meaninglessness and absurdity of the hero’s action. The hero tries for an aim which is based on a necessary and certain ideal. In absence of Ideal and certain aim, the hero’s action is aimless and absurd. Refusal of an autonomous thought with a clear centrality and emergence of multiple meaning, “infinite delay (defer) of meaning, in the sources of thought” of hero, make the hero as the wandering creature who is eternally captured by doubt.

4. Conclusion

In the postmodern condition, which is the dominant condition on the west in the second half of 20th century, absurd drama like any other art is originated from the society condition. Theater is like the dominant thought, art, and literature of the society. In the condition which is the refusal of any authority as well as domination of relativism, absurd drama contains these features. Actually this drama

embodies the postmodern condition and reflects its own age. The hero, in the absurd drama, does not believe in any ideology. S/he is isolated, passive and he hesitates to do any action. In other word, S/he believes in nothing.

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