



## Aesthetic and Sociological Imagination in Contemporary Visual Culture

Çağdaş Görsel Kültürde Estetik ve Sosyolojik İmgelem

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**Abstract:** *This study aims to examine the relationship between aesthetic and sociological imagination within the framework of the characteristics of visual forms (art/media images) in the environment of contemporary visual culture and to make a theoretical assessment of the importance of these imagery structures in art and art education. These assessments were carried out from a perspective based on the relationship between art and society. As a result of these assessments, it was found that the relationship between aesthetic and sociological imagination is intertwined within the scope of the production, distribution, and consumption processes of visual forms in the postmodern process, and in parallel with this situation, the importance of teaching activities and curriculum arrangements for the integration of both imagination structures in art education has been encountered. It has been understood that pedagogical activities focused on developing sociological imagination will provide a sociological perspective to the aesthetic imagination of individuals; thus, it will help to provide a conscious way of thinking about the cultural and social characteristics of visual forms.*

**Keywords:** *Sociological imagination, Aesthetic imagination, Sociology of art, Art education, Postmodern art*

**Öz:** *Bu çalışmanın amacı, estetik ve sosyolojik imgelem ilişkisini çağdaş görsel kültür ortamında yer alan görsel formların (sanat/medya imgeleri) özellikleri çerçevesinde incelemek ve söz konusu imgelem yapılarının sanat ve sanat eğitimindeki önemi hakkında teorik düzeyde değerlendirmelerde bulunmaktır. Söz konusu değerlendirmeler sanat ve toplum ilişkisini temel alan bir bakış açısıyla gerçekleştirilmiştir. Bu değerlendirmeler sonucunda, estetik ve sosyolojik imgelem ilişkisinin postmodern süreçte görsel formların üretim, dağıtım ve tüketim süreçleri kapsamında iç içe geçtiği görülmüş; bu duruma bağlı olarak sanat eğitiminde her iki imgelem yapısının bütünleştirilmesine yönelik öğretim faaliyetleri ve müfredat düzenlemelerinde bulunulmasının önemiyle karşılaşmıştır. Sosyolojik imgelemi geliştirmeye odaklanan pedagojik faaliyetlerin, bireylerin estetik imgelemine sosyolojik bir bakış açısı sunacağı; bu sayede görsel formların kültürel ve toplumsal özellikleriyle ilgili olarak bilinçli bir düşünme biçimi sağlamaya yardımcı olacağı anlaşılmıştır.*

**Anahtar kelimeler:** *Sosyolojik imgelem, Estetik imgelem, Sanat sosyolojisi, Sanat eğitimi, Postmodern sanat*

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## Introduction

The 21st century is seen to correspond to a period in which the prevalence and effectiveness of visual culture forms in daily life are increasing rapidly depending on the development of digitalization and technology. We are witnessing a process in which we feel the effects of visual culture forms in daily life in the most obvious way, especially during the pandemic of Covid-19 we are in. This prevalence of visual images in daily life emerges as a feature that increases the value and importance of research on visual culture in visual arts, art education and social sciences day by day. Current pedagogical research on visual culture<sup>1</sup>, approaches based on visual communication<sup>2</sup> and culture-based studies<sup>3</sup> reveal the indicators of the social change and transformation in the domination of visual forms. Also, these studies reveal the importance of multidimensional examination of the concept and the effects of visual culture.

The concept of visual culture is a concept that comes to the fore with the developments in the production and distribution structures of visual forms through tools such as camera, video camera, television, computer and mobile devices, etc. In this context, “visual culture may be described as the many different ways in which a culture may make its values and beliefs visible...”<sup>4</sup> This research mainly focuses on the scope of Malcolm Barnard’s definition of visual culture within the scope of Aesthetic Intent: Art.<sup>5</sup> From this perspective, it is seen that the concept of visual culture was expressed by Barnard “in this case, it would be anything that was produced or created to be perceived visually”.<sup>6</sup> Although visual culture forms are produced in an aesthetic understanding, it is also seen that some visual forms that appeal to the eye in the contemporary visual culture environment are produced by design understandings that reject or ignore aesthetics. Again, relations of visual culture forms with sociological issues such as gender, status, authority, ideology and critical sociological functions also require questioning visuals within the scope of art sociology. In this context, the research focuses on the relationship between aesthetic and sociological imagination and draws attention to the role and importance of art education on the subject.

This study aims to examine the relationship between aesthetic and sociological imagination within the framework of the characteristics of visual forms (art/media images) in the environment of contemporary visual culture and to make a theoretical assessment of the importance of these imagery structures in art and art education. The research is thought to be important in terms of discussing aesthetic and

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<sup>1</sup> See Paul Duncum, “Visual culture: Developments, Definitions, and Directions for Art Education”, *Studies in Art Education*, 42/2 (2001), p.101-112. Paul Duncum, “Clarifying Visual Culture Art Education”, *Art Education*, 55/3 (2002), p.6-11. Kerry Freedman, “Social Perspectives on Art Education in the U.S.: Teaching Visual Culture in a Democracy”, *Studies in Art Education*, 41/4 (2000), p.314-329. Kevin Tavin, “Wrestling with Angels, Searching for Ghosts: Toward a Critical Pedagogy of Visual Culture”, *Studies in Art Education*, 44/3 (2003), p.197-213. Kevin Tavin, “Opening Re-Marks: Critical Antecedents of Visual Culture in Art Education”, *Studies in Art Education*, 47/1 (2005), p.5-22. Kevin Tavin and Jerome Hausman, “Art Education and Visual Culture in the Age of Globalization”, *Art Education*, 57/5 (2004), p.47-53.

<sup>2</sup> See John Berger, *Ways of Seeing*. New York: Penguin Books, 1977. Nicholas Mirzoeff, *An Introduction to Visual Culture*, New York: Routledge, 2009.

<sup>3</sup> See Malcolm Barnard, *Art, Design and Visual Culture: An Introduction*, New York: St. Martin’s, 1998. James Elkins, *Visual studies: A Skeptical introduction*, New York: Routledge, 2003.

<sup>4</sup> Barnard, *Art, Design*, p.8.

<sup>5</sup> Barnard, *Art, Design*, p.16-18.

<sup>6</sup> Barnard, *Art, Design*, p.16.

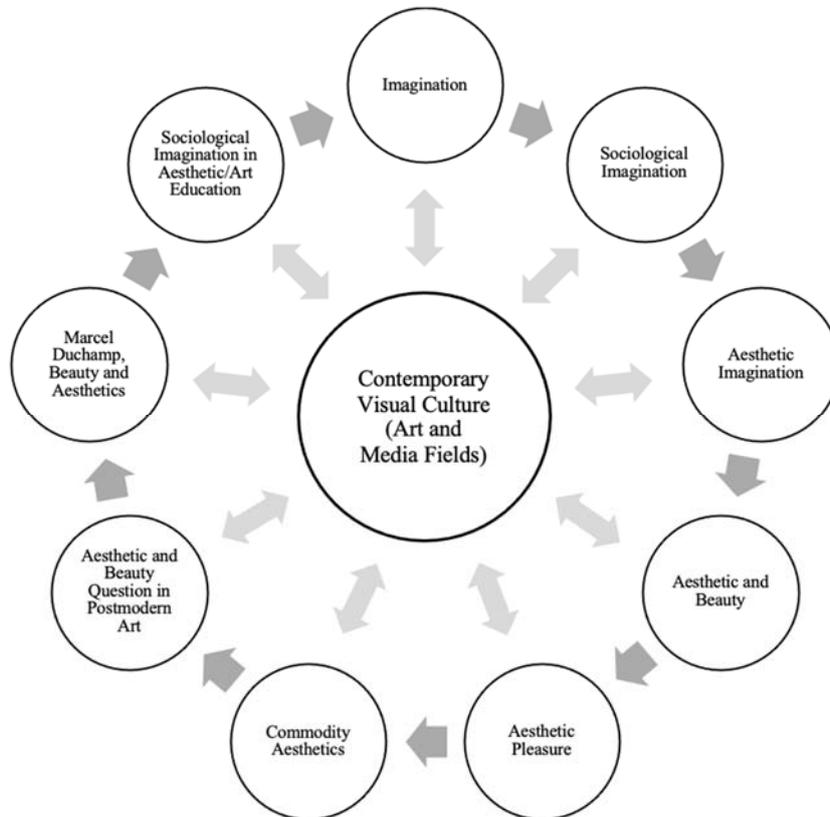
sociological imagination relations within the scope of art and art education.

**Method**

In this study, the relationship between aesthetic and sociological imagination in contemporary visual culture was examined in the context of the relevant literature, and these concepts were interpreted, assessed, and discussed on a theoretical level. The interpretations and assessments carried out in the research serve to reveal the relationships between the concepts of the aesthetic and sociological imagination and to contribute to the deficiencies observed in the literature on the subject. Information on the subject of the research was obtained through a literature review. In this context, it can be stated that the literature review used in the research shows historical review and integrative review features. The historical review, which is one of the mentioned reviews, is “a specialized review in which the author traces an issue over time. It can be merged with a theoretical or methodological review to show how a concept, theory, or research method developed over time”<sup>7</sup>. Integrative review, on the other hand, is

A common type of review in which the author presents and summarizes the current state of knowledge on a topic, highlighting agreements and disagreements within it. This review is often combined with a context review or may be published as an independent article as a service to other researchers.<sup>8</sup>

Figure 1. The Integrative Review Cycle of the Theoretical Framework of the Research



<sup>7</sup> William Lawrence Neuman, *Social Research Methods: Qualitative and Quantitative Approaches*, Boston: Pearson, 2014, p.127.

<sup>8</sup> Neuman, *Social Research*, p.127.

It can be stated that the literature review conducted in the research shows historical review in terms of enabling to discover the origins, uses, and meanings attributed to the concepts of aesthetic and sociological imagination; and that it shows integrative review in terms of presentation of literature information on these concepts, attempts to establish a relationship between the concepts and efforts to present an independent pattern that can serve as a reference to other researchers. The following ten principles were used in the literature review conducted in the research regarding all these situations:

- (1) Define a topic and audience, (2) search and re-search the literature, (3) take notes while reading, (4) choose the type of review you wish to write, (5) keep the review focused, but make it of broad interest, (6) be critical and consistent, (7) find a logical structure, (8) make use of feedback, (9) include your own relevant research, but be objective, (10) be up-to-date, but do not forget older studies.<sup>9</sup>

### A Brief Introduction to the Concept of Imagination

The imagination, which is the product of a mental process and competence, emerges as a psychological, philosophical and sociological concept that can be shaped depending on individual and social features. In general, imagination can be defined as thinking and designing through images and setting to work with creative potential. Regarding the imagination, San states in her study that “we also call ...the ability of images to establish a connection with each other or to be established as an imagination”.<sup>10</sup> Similarly, “in the simplest terms, we can define the imagination as the process of an abstract object that does not exist, the form that is considered in the human mind”.<sup>11</sup> “The imagination is the vividness of the utopia and hopes that man mentally carries in general, and an unreal and imaginary world”.<sup>12</sup> Known for his work on aesthetics, Timuçin and Türer define imagination as “the ability of perception to create an image that is a material or intellectual presentation. The ability of the mind to make presentations or to revive the images of previously perceived objects”.<sup>13</sup> Within the scope of this research and based on all these definitions, the concept of imagination refers to the features related to the intellectual competencies and potentials of the individual in thinking through images and creating a visual culture form within the contemporary visual culture environment.

Although the concept of imagination appears to be a subject of interest in the field of psychology, special importance is attributed to this concept in the fields of sociology and philosophy. C. Wright Mills which draws attention to the fact that the individual’s internal and social position can be interpreted through sociological vision depending on historical conditions by approaching the concept of vision from a sociological perspective<sup>14</sup> and Jean-Paul Sartre, on the other hand, discusses the

<sup>9</sup> Marco Pautasso, “Ten Simple Rules for Writing a Literature Review”, *PLOS Computational Biology*, 9/7 (2013), p.1-4.

<sup>10</sup> İnci San, *Sanat ve Eğitim: Yaratıcılık, Temel Sanat Kuramları ve Sanat Eleştirisi Yaklaşımı*, Ankara: Ütopya Yayınları, 2008, p.30.

<sup>11</sup> Serap Yıldız İlden and Mervenur Birinci, “Resim Sanatında Yaratım Unsuru Olarak İmge”, *Vankulu Sosyal Araştırmalar Dergisi*, 0/6 (2020).

<sup>12</sup> Mukadder Çakır, *Görsel Kültür ve Küresel Kitle Kültürü*, Ankara: Ütopya Yayınevi, 2014, p.122

<sup>13</sup> Afşar Timuçin and Sabahat Türer, *Estetik Sözlüğü*, İstanbul, Bulut Yayınları, 2018, p.107.

<sup>14</sup> C. Wright Mills, *The Sociological Imagination*, New York: Oxford University Press, 1959.

concept of image in imaginary and asset dimensions by approaching the concept of vision in a philosophical approach can be given as an example to this subject.<sup>15</sup> Discussions on aesthetic imagination emerge mostly under the discipline of art philosophy. At this point, the art philosophy approaches of Plato, Aristotle and Kant are the most prominent.

### Sociological Imagination

Sociological imagination is a concept that reveals the close relationships of sociology with the fields of psychology and pedagogy. Sociological imagination refers to the ability of the individual to think sociologically about the phenomena and events he/she encounters around him/her.<sup>16</sup> Similarly, it is seen that this concept is evaluated as a capacity that help to understand and comprehend the components of society.<sup>17</sup> It is seen that this way of thinking is important in terms of evaluating the events and phenomena that the individual encounters in daily living with a sociological perspective and what kind of purpose, duty, role and effect he/she has on the social setting. In this regard, Giddens and Sutton showed how a sociological view of coffee consumption, which can be described as an ordinary behaviour of daily living, can be made sociological evaluations on the example of coffee consumption to the individual.<sup>18</sup> Similarly, it is possible to carry out sociological evaluations through visual culture forms. In this sense, the subject of sociological imagination is considered as the ability to comprehend the sociological characteristics of visual culture forms and to evaluate the social orders created by visual forms in the social structure within the scope of this research.

Sociological imagination is a thinking competence that helps to establish a connection between daily life and the social. Sociological imagination is needed to gain an idea about the social structure through visual culture forms that surround our daily lives. It is known that visual culture forms, which are one of the indicators of society, contain visually qualified information about the social structure. In this sense, it is thought that the sociological view of visual culture forms will help the individual to obtain information about the social structure through visuals. Such an approach to visual culture forms reveals the relationships of sociological vision with the aesthetic imagination.

### Aesthetic Imagination

It is thought that aesthetic structures (reflective, formalist, expressive and functional) presented to the audience through visual artworks in the historical process shape the aesthetic image of the individual and guide the artist in designing a new image. Again, the audience's reaction to a work of art (like or dislike) is also related to the aesthetic imagination structure of the audience. In this regard, Immanuel Kant pointed out that the judgment of appreciation for whether something is beautiful can be reached through the ability to the imagination.<sup>19</sup> Based on Kant, Kula draws attention to the role of imagination power on the appreciation.<sup>20</sup> In another

<sup>15</sup> Jean Paul Sartre, *İmgelem*, trans., Alp Tümertekin, İstanbul: İthaki Yayınları, 2017.

<sup>16</sup> Anthony Giddens and Philip W. Sutton, *Sosyoloji*, trans., Mesut Şenol, İstanbul: Kırmızı Yayınları, 2016.

<sup>17</sup> Mills, *The Sociological Imagination*, 1959.

<sup>18</sup> Giddens and Sutton, *Sosyoloji*, 2016.

<sup>19</sup> Immanuel Kant, *Yargı Yetisinin Eleştirisi*, trans., Aziz Yardımlı, İstanbul: İdea Yayınevi, 2011, p.53.

<sup>20</sup> Onur Bilge Kula, *Kant, Schiller, Heidegger - Estetik ve Edebiyat*, İstanbul: Türkiye İş Bankası Kültür Yayınları, 2012, p.40.

respect, “imagination is the source of creative activity. Although art seems to realize its creativity in the determinism of the mind, imagination plays a decisive role in this effort.<sup>21</sup> Considering that human behaviours and thoughts change and transform concerning the cultural features of the society in which the individual is lived, it can be assumed that the aesthetic imagination structures for visual culture forms are shaped by the cultural features of the postmodern process. In this context, it is thought that a comprehensive examination of the global effects of the postmodern process in the visual culture environment in art theory and art education researches will contribute to the aesthetic imagination capacity of individuals.

### On Aesthetics and the Beauty Subject to Aesthetics

Art is a social action that evokes emotions that can be described as beautiful on the consumer/perceiver. The phenomenon of beauty in the structure of the object of art appears as one of the most basic features that enable the individual to enjoy art. This attractive force in the structure of the object of art emerges as the intense mood that the subject acquires as a result of perceiving the aesthetic object and establishing a sensory relationship with it. At the same time, this intense mood obtained from the work of art is thought to be very important for the individual to understand and discover his/her human features. This situation, which occurs as a result of the communication of the audience with the work of art, is related to the aesthetic features of art.

Aesthetics has emerged from the Greek word *aisthesis* (sensation/perception/feeling). Essentially, aesthetics is a discipline that deals with the concept of beauty and beauty in art. The works of the famous German Philosopher Alexander G. Baumgarten called *Aesthetica* play an important role in the recognition of aesthetics as a discipline. In his study, Baumgarten defines aesthetics as “the science of thinking about beauty with the information obtained from the senses”.<sup>22</sup> While aesthetics is seen as a specific branch of science by some authorities, it is seen by others as an area evaluated in philosophy.<sup>23</sup> It is known that the concept of beauty that aesthetics is interested in has a subjective structure that varies from person to person or from culture to culture. The sentence *de gustibus non est disputandum* comes from scholastic, which means the indisputable word of tastes and pleasures, emphasizes the structures of tastes and pleasures that vary from person to person.<sup>24</sup> In direct proportion to this concept, the beauty in art presents an individual and social value judgment that varies from person to person, from culture to culture.

The concept of beauty of aesthetics in the classical sense has evolved into an artistic understanding that abandons/rejects this classical approach with the possibilities of expression of postmodern art. In the postmodern process, it is seen that the theoretical metaphor under the work of art is tried to be emphasized by rejecting the traditional meaning of the concept of beauty in most of the conceptual art movements that developed especially after 1950-60. In such artistic tendencies, it is quite difficult to draw attention to the concept of beauty in the traditional sense. Regarding all these issues, it is seen that aesthetics in classical and contemporary understandings is evaluated as follows:

<sup>21</sup> Timuçin and Tüner, *Estetik Sözlüğü*, p.107.

<sup>22</sup> Yusuf Baytekin Balcı, *Estetik*, Ankara: Gündüz Eğitim Yayıncılık, 2005, p.11.

<sup>23</sup> Balcı, *Estetik*, p.11.

<sup>24</sup> İsmail Tunalı, “Estetik Beğeni Problemi”, *İstanbul Üniversitesi Felsefe Arşivi Dergisi*, 15 (1964), p.57.

In the classical sense, it can be defined as the branch of philosophy that is interested in answering the question of what aesthetic beauty is. In this sense, it is a product of the understanding that aesthetic beauty and art are identical. Contemporary aesthetics denies this understanding that has been going on since Ancient Greece. Therefore, contemporary aesthetics, which developed in the 20th century, do not try to research the question of what beauty is. Art is no longer just an act of describing beauty. Today's aesthetics has adopted this new understanding and has become an effort to explain an art that mostly uses a historical method by moving away from the definitive and doctrinal attitude in the past.<sup>25</sup>

Postmodern art does not mean the rejection of aesthetics. It is seen that art movements such as Neo-Expressionism and Photorealism, which are included in the scope of postmodern art, consider the aesthetic structure and keep alive traditions related to artistic production in the classical sense. However, when we look at the attitudes that postmodern artists undertake differently from modern and classical era art understandings, they show us that aesthetics can be given less importance in art. When we look at the visual production understanding of aesthetics in the media in the postmodern process, it is seen that the attitude preferred by the art field shows the opposite feature. For this reason, it was thought that comparative examination of the sensations obtained by the audience from visual culture forms for postmodern works of art and media will help to expound the aesthetic imagination.

### **Aesthetic Pleasure Felt by the Audience in Visual Culture**

Visual works of art and digital visual culture forms become meaningful objects if they are sensed by the audience. The sense of pleasure acquired by the audience from the interaction with visual culture forms is one of the effects of the image on the receiver. In this respect, the concept of aesthetic pleasure emerges as a valuable concept in determining the artistic behaviours and reactions of the audience. Aesthetic pleasure can generally be expressed as the excitement or appreciation that the subject, who is interested in and understands art, gets from art as a result of interaction with the artwork, in other words, the aesthetic object, and establishing a relationship with art. "...Aesthetic enjoyment is objectified self-enjoyment. To enjoy aesthetically means to enjoy myself in a sensuous object diverse from myself, to empathies myself into it".<sup>26</sup> We feel pleasure from many things in everyday life. What we will enjoy can be a work of art, or a meal we eat, a drink, a person we talk to, or a place we visit. This means that it is possible to feel different pleasures from different things through our five sense organs. From an aesthetic point of view, the concept of pleasure focuses more on the pleasure we get from the aesthetic object with the sense of sight and hearing. Aesthetic pleasure is a joy that can be obtained from both nature and art.<sup>27</sup> Tunalı, who stated that aesthetic pleasure is related to the feelings of the subject against the work of art, expressed this concept as "the most basic emotion the subject feels against the work of art is aesthetic pleasure".<sup>28</sup>

<sup>25</sup> Metin Sözen and Uğur Tanyeli, *Sanat Kavram ve Terimleri Sözlüğü*, İstanbul: Remzi Kitabevi, 2011, p.102.

<sup>26</sup> Wilhelm Worringer, *Soyutlama ve Özdeşleyim*, trans., İsmail Tunalı, İstanbul: Hayalperest Yayınevi, 2017, p.16-17.

<sup>27</sup> Özkan Eroğlu, *Plastik Sanatlar Sözlüğü*, İstanbul: Tekhne Yayınları, 2013, p.71.

<sup>28</sup> İsmail Tunalı, *Estetik*, İstanbul: Remzi Kitabevi, 2002, p.47-48.

In classical and modern period art movements, the concept of aesthetic pleasure appears as the expression of aesthetic imagination structures that serve purposes such as fascinating the aesthetic subject and evoking admiration. In art movements with the postmodern understanding of the 21st century, unlike classical and modernist art movements, there is no specific goal to influence the aesthetic subject in terms of pleasure. Although it is known that some artistic tendencies (Neo-Expressionism, Photorealism, etc.) within the scope of postmodern art are familiar with aesthetic and beautiful subjects in the traditional context, it is thought that postmodern art attaches more importance to conceptual thought, which constitutes the infrastructure of the work of art than traditional aesthetic understandings. The foundations of such artistic tendencies are based on Dadaist artist Marcel Duchamp by many researchers and art historians. Regarding the subject, Duchamp's artistic action was very effective in the theoretical foundations of the forms of expression that we can call neo-avant-garde art movements after 1960.<sup>29</sup> Today, it is seen that art has become a form of thinking that reflects, criticizes and questions the products of society; it has become a conceptual-based medium such as New Realism, Pop Art, Minimalism, Conceptual Art, Fluxus, Poor Art, Body Art, Land Art, Feminist Art and includes artistic movements that try to get away from traditional aesthetic concerns. In this context, it is pointed out that postmodern artists tend to move away from aesthetic traditions in modernism.<sup>30</sup>

### **Aesthetic Structure Presented to the Audience with Visual Media: On Commodity Aesthetics**

The prevalence of visual culture forms in everyday life increases depending on media tools. It is known that visual forms presented to audiences with visual media tools serving popular culture and industrialization are designed by aesthetic understandings based on directing and encouraging audiences or consumers to a specific purpose. This situation reveals the design understanding that targets the appreciation and enjoyment structures of the masses. Such an audience-centred approach requires ignoring the principles of artistic autonomy and uniqueness in the process of designing the visual culture form and focusing on mass acceptances. At the same time, it is thought that the systems related to the production, distribution and acceptance of the designed image swiftly shape the aesthetic image of the designer in the direction of commodity aesthetics before the design. This situation indicates an aesthetic and sociological imagination structure that contradicts the autonomy of artistic production.

It is necessary to examine the aesthetic structure presented to the masses through the culture industry in the consumption culture within the scope of commodity aesthetics. Because "the concept of cultural industry underlines the phenomenon of industrialization of cultural products in its broad sense, creation based on economic profitability, and commodification of cultural and artistic products with industrialization".<sup>31</sup> Besides, the cultural industry encourages the masses to direct to

<sup>29</sup> Ahu Antmen, *Sanatçılardan Yazarlar ve Açıklamalarla 20. Yüzyıl Batı Sanatında Akımlar*, İstanbul: Sel Yayıncılık, 2013, p.194.

<sup>30</sup> Terry Barrett, *Sanatı Eleştirmek: Günceli Anlamak*, trans., Gökçe Metin, İstanbul: Hayalperest Yayınevi, 2012, p.57.

<sup>31</sup> Ali Ergur, "Chapter 12", *Kültür Sosyolojisi*, eds., Ali Ergur and Emre Gökçalp, Eskişehir: Anadolu Üniversitesi, 2012, p.226.

and consume the commodity.<sup>32</sup> At this point, it is seen that commodity aesthetics is used in the presentation of the commodities to the mass. Commodity aesthetics is an aesthetic structure that creates sensations that will meet the desires and requests of the individual by removing the audience from criticism. It is possible to associate this aesthetic structure with the hegemonic effects of ideology and politics. In the postmodern visual culture environment, it is seen that commodity aesthetics is used extensively in advertisements. Because, “publicity is the culture of the consumer society”.<sup>33</sup> Baudrillard also considers advertising as one of the most effective mass media of the consumer society.<sup>34</sup> In this sense, within the scope of aesthetic and sociological vision relationship, it is seen that advertising images offer sensations about commodity aesthetics to the audience through visual media organs. At the same time, Çakır, who approaches the concept of imagination in terms of free thought, stated in her study that “the imagination finds its real living space in the field of art. The conditions of the captivity of the imagination in the field of mass communication are partially demolished in the world of vision of art”.<sup>35</sup> In this sense, it is thought that the images produced in the media are the products of aesthetic thinking styles designed for a functional purpose rather than the products of their free thoughts.

### The Question of Aesthetic and Beauty in Postmodern Art

When we look at the common characteristics of movements such as Minimalism, Conceptual Art, Fluxus, Arte Povera, Performance Art, Feminist Art, Land Art, Body Art, which we evaluated within the scope of postmodern art after 1950-60, it is seen that they differ in many aspects such as artistic production, material, technique and exhibition methods according to classical and modern art movements. One of these differences is the questioning of concepts such as originality, genius and aesthetics, which have special importance in the modernist tradition, within the scope of postmodern art.<sup>36</sup> As Danto states, “modernist art is art defined by taste, and created essentially for persons of taste, specifically for critics”.<sup>37</sup> On the other hand, when the basic dynamics of postmodern art are examined, unlike modern art, it is seen that art categories such as painting, sculpture, graphics, ceramics, textiles, printing etc. disappear, and that cultural, critical, ideological discourses are utilized more than ever and interdisciplinary approach dominates art. On the basis of all these changes, as Lyotard states, there is the postmodern artist’s irregular working behaviour like a philosopher.<sup>38</sup> It can be said that this feature of the postmodern artist makes criticism and conceptual content valuable in artistic production and causes the questioning of traditional rules and aesthetic imagination structures about art. Conceptual-based postmodern studies aim to present social and cultural awareness to the audience.<sup>39</sup> Regarding the subject, Efland states that

<sup>32</sup> Taylan Altuğ, *Son Bakışta Sanat*, İstanbul: Yapı Kredi Yayınları, 2012, p.196.

<sup>33</sup> Berger, *Ways of Seeing*, p.139.

<sup>34</sup> Jean Baudrillard, *Tüketim Toplumu: Söylenceleri/Yapıları*, trans., Hazal Deliceçaylı and Ferda Keskin, İstanbul: Ayrıntı Yayınları, 2013, p.144.

<sup>35</sup> Mukadder Çakır, *Görsel Kültür*, p.122.

<sup>36</sup> Terry Barrett, *Neden Bu Sanat? Çağdaş Sanatta Estetik ve Eleştiri*, trans., Esra Ermert, İstanbul: Hayalperest Yayınevi, 2015, p.300.

<sup>37</sup> Artur C. Danto, *After the End of Art: Contemporary Art and the Pale of History*, New Jersey: Princeton University Press, 1997, p.111.

<sup>38</sup> Jean-Francois Lyotard, *The Postmodern Condition: A Report on Knowledge*, trans., Geoff Bennington and Brian Massumi, Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 1984.

<sup>39</sup> Graham Whitham and Grant Pooke, *Çağdaş Sanatı Anlamak*, trans., Tufan Göbekçin, İstanbul: Hayalperest

“whether they were conscious of this or not, avant-garde artists required an aesthetic of disinterestedness to provide a symbolic veil to cover those engaged in social commentary and criticism in and through their art”.<sup>40</sup> In this sense, conceptual content in movements such as Installation Art, Land Art, Body Art, Happening etc. in postmodern art can be seen as more important and priority than an aesthetic issue. This feature is thought to be the most significant difference of postmodern art from modern and pre-modern period arts. It is necessary to examine the attitude towards the rejection of aesthetics initiated by Marcel Duchamp within the scope of Dadaism to examine the value problem, which is the subject of aesthetics and aesthetics in art, more deeply.

### The Approach of Marcel Duchamp to Beauty and Aesthetic Concepts

Marcel Duchamp appears as one of the most important representatives of the Dadaism art movement. Since he was a Dadaist, he opposed producing beautiful art.<sup>41</sup> In the 1910s, Duchamp thought that modernism had come to a dead-end in the art world, and in these years, he left traditional painting (canvas painting) with great faith.<sup>42</sup> Duchamp has made revolutionary innovations in plastic arts both as the artistic production method and in terms of the aesthetic qualities of art. According to Duchamp, art should have features that affect and attract the audience intellectually, rather than being an object that pleases the audience aesthetically. According to him, the work of art should be neutral, which means it should not be aesthetically pleasing.<sup>43</sup> He brought a critical artistic attitude towards these two concepts to art history, especially with his works called ready-made.

Figure 2. Marcel Duchamp, ‘Fountain’, 1917, Replica 1964, Porcelain, 36x48x61 cm, TATE Collection, London<sup>44</sup>



Yayınevi, 2018, p.80.

<sup>40</sup> Artur, D. Efland, “The Entwined Nature of the Aesthetic: A Discourse on Visual Culture”, *Studies in Art Education*, 45/3 (2004), p.250.

<sup>41</sup> Arthur C. Danto, *Sanat Nedir*, trans., Zeynep Baransel, İstanbul: Sel Yayıncılık, 2015, p.36.

<sup>42</sup> Mehmet Yılmaz, *Modernden Postmoderne Sanat*, Ankara: Ütopya Yayınevi, 2013, p.161.

<sup>43</sup> Donald Kuspit, *Sanatın Sonu*, trans., Yasemin Tezgiden, İstanbul: Metis Yayınları, 2010, p.36. Yılmaz, *Modernden Postmoderne*, p.167.

<sup>44</sup> “Fountain, Marcel Duchamp, 1917, Replica 1964”, TATE, last update 20 February 2022, <https://www.tate.org.uk/art/artworks/duchamp-fountain-t07573>.

Duchamp's concept of ready-made in art history is actually derived from the opposite meaning of the term make to order on a clothing store.<sup>45</sup> With the concept of ready-made, which Duchamp called *Fountain*, he transferred an ordinary object that could be encountered at any moment in daily life to an artistic medium and attributed a deep philosophical view of the concept of beauty in art. In this study, Duchamp presented a perspective that provides a reference to the attitudes of post-modern art movements towards aesthetics after 1960 as a Dadaist. This situation has played an important role in the philosophical structures of postmodern art movements such as Minimalism, Conceptual Art, Fluxus, Arte Povera, Performance Art, Feminist Art, Land Art, Body Art, especially in the artistic and historical process beginning with Pop Art.

“Duchamp managed to condemn pretty much the entire history of aesthetics, from Plato to the present”.<sup>46</sup> According to him, the aesthetic satisfaction offered to the audience by the works of art produced with a reflective (mimesis) understanding has no meaning. Duchamp called such art retinal art and felt a great disgust for it.<sup>47</sup> What Duchamp is trying to do is defy traditional art production and the understanding of beauty. This was especially the view he put forward with ready-made. Duchamp aims at the uniqueness and aesthetic phenomenon of the artwork with ready-made.<sup>48</sup> In this sense, Duchamp's most important contribution to fine arts was to purify the artwork from aesthetics.<sup>49</sup> Regarding the subject, Bürger states that Duchamp opened traditional concepts and institutions on modernist aesthetics up for discussion with the *Fountain*.<sup>50</sup> Again, it is stated that Duchamp attacks the concept of appreciation by insulting aesthetics and beauty.<sup>51</sup> All these evaluations of Duchamp show us that Duchamp is the source of the attitudes towards the rejection of the value and aesthetics attributed to the conceptual content within the scope of postmodern art.

### The Relationship between Aesthetic and Sociological Imagination in Art Education

The prevalence of visuals in social life in the postmodern process requires the visual arts education curriculum to benefit from visual culture. This need, which is shaped as a result of people's intense interaction with visual forms (works of art, advertisements, TV programs, social media images, computer games, etc.), emerges as one of the current topics discussed in art education research.<sup>52</sup> The holistic perspective of visual culture forms related to the nature of the visual form in

<sup>45</sup> Danto, *Sanat Nedir*, p.37.

<sup>46</sup> Danto, *Sanat Nedir*, p.38.

<sup>47</sup> Danto, *Sanat Nedir*, p.37.

<sup>48</sup> Özlem Kalkan Erenus, *Marcel Duchamp: Sanatı ve Felsefesi*, İstanbul: Tekhne Yayınları, 2014, p.104.

<sup>49</sup> Danto, *Sanat Nedir*, p.40.

<sup>50</sup> Peter Bürger, *Avangard Kuramı*, trans., Erol Özbek, İstanbul: İletişim Yayınları, 2010, p.20.

<sup>51</sup> Danto, *Sanat Nedir*, p.38.

<sup>52</sup> See Rasim Başak, “Görsel Sanatlar Eğitiminde İdeoloji Tartışmaları Temelinde Görsel Kültür Kuramı ve Materyal Kültürü”, e-Kafkas Journal of Educational Research. 8/2 (2021) p.198-221. Paul Duncum, “The Theories and Practices of Visual Culture in Art Education”, *Arts Education Policy Review*, 105/2 (2003), p.19-25. Suzan Duygu Bedir Erişti, ed., *Görsel Araştırma Yöntemleri Teori, Uygulama ve Örnek*, Ankara: Pegem Akademi, 2016. Ebru Güler and Suzan Duygu Bedir Erişti, “Güzel Sanatlar Lisesinde Görsel Kültür Çalışmalarının Entegrasyonuna İlişkin Öğretmen Görüşlerine Dayalı Gereksinim Belirleme Çalışması”, *Erzincan Üniversitesi Eğitim Fakültesi Dergisi*, 20/2 (2018), pp.536-557. Nuray Mamur, “Post-Modernizmin Sanat Eğitimine Yansımaları”, *Ahi Evran Üniversitesi Kırşehir Eğitim Fakültesi Dergisi*, 15/2 (2014), p.59-77. Peter J. Smith, “Visual Culture Studies Versus Art Education”, *Arts Education Policy Review*, 104/4 (2003), p.3-8. Arzu Uysal, “Görüntü Üreten Teknolojiler Bağlamında Öğrenci

the fields of art and art education requires establishing a connection between artistic quality and the daily. Regarding this subject, Tavin pointed out that the boundaries of visual arts education cannot be limited to the field of visual arts only and that all kinds of visual forms should be included in art education within the scope of visual culture.<sup>53</sup> Again, in Whitham and Pooke's study, it was observed that post-modern art exhibited similar characteristics with cultural forms such as film, television and advertising and became indistinguishable from these forms.<sup>54</sup> This prevalence and effects of visual forms in social life require a holistic pedagogical approach to aesthetic and sociological imagination structures within the scope of art education.

It is thought that the gains to be presented to the aesthetic and sociological imagination of the students through art education will contribute to the image-oriented thinking skills of the students in the axis of social changes and transformations. Such skills to be acquired by students through art education will provide critical sociological awareness of the design process and visual perception. Regarding this subject, Whitehead suggests that aesthetic imagination can contribute to the artistic awareness of students by including it in theoretical and practical dimensions in art education.<sup>55</sup> It is thought that the image repertoire in the human mind is related to image structures and patterns perceived through observation in social life. In this sense, visual forms are not only expressions of the designer's aesthetic imagination capacity, but also sort of reflections of his sociological imagination.

It is thought that the visuals in artistic and mediatic features presented to the audience in contemporary visual culture environment create aesthetic sensations in various features on the audience. Among these aesthetic understandings, there are structures such as commodity aesthetics, kitsch, reception aesthetics, body aesthetics, etc. Considering that the visuals that the viewers encounter intensely in the visual culture environment are the visuals in the categories such as advertisement, series, film, social media, etc., it is seen that the aesthetic structures presented to the media organs and the viewers are perceived by a wider audience than postmodern artistic works. At this point, Efland emphasizes the importance of visual culture in art education, the commercial effects of visual culture on mass communication and these effects are related to the roles it plays in shaping individuals.<sup>56</sup> Besides, Özsoy states that aesthetic education has a duty to help the individual evaluate aesthetic qualities.<sup>57</sup> In this sense, it should be intended to provide students with an aesthetic, sociological and critical perspective on the images perceived observationally in the contemporary visual culture environment; it should be aimed to contribute to the aesthetic and sociological imagination structures of the students in the axis of social changes and transformations. It is thought that an aesthetic education in this direction will lead students to approach visual culture forms more consciously in the context of theory and practice.

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Resimlerindeki İmgelerin Değişim Süreci", *Yedi: Journal of Art, Design and Science*, 4 (2010), p.29-38. Meliha Yılmaz, Uğur Yılmaz and Ece Nur Demir Yılmaz, "The Relation between Social Learning and Visual Culture", *International Electronic Journal of Elementary Education*, 11/4 (2019), p.421-427.

<sup>53</sup> Tavin, "Wrestling with Angels", p.208.

<sup>54</sup> Whitham and Pooke, *Çağdaş Sanat*, p.53.

<sup>55</sup> Derek Whitehead, "The Pedagogical Aesthetic and Formative Experience: Educating for Alethic Imagination in the Fine Arts Curriculum", *Journal of Visual Art Practice*, 3/3 (2004), p.195-208.

<sup>56</sup> Efland, "The Entwined Nature", p.235.

<sup>57</sup> Vedat Özsoy, "Chapter 4", *Kültürel ve Eleştirel Sorgulama Olarak Görsel Sanatlar Öğretimi: Kuram ve Uygulamada Görsel Kültür*, ed., Vedat Özsoy, Ankara: Pegem Akademi, 2007, p.89-130.

## Conclusion and Recommendations

The technological developments of the 21st century encourage individuals and societies to gather in a global area through digital mass media and to serve the formation of common cultural consciousness. Depending on the development of visual media and internet technology, it is seen that the subject of visual culture is at the centre of the cultural structure in question. This situation has brought art, art education, communication and sociology research closer to each other; this closeness has led to current researches shaped under the concept of visual culture. Regarding visual culture, in this study, pedagogical and artistic evaluations were made for the relationship between aesthetic and sociological imagination. The first of these evaluations focused on the similarities and differences in the aesthetic imagination structures of visual forms produced in art and visual media (TV, computer, tablet, mobile phone, billboard, etc.) environments in the postmodern period; the second was made after the evaluation of the relationship between aesthetic and sociological imagination in terms of art pedagogy based on the results obtained from the first situation.

When the results obtained regarding the similarities and differences in the aesthetic imagination structures of the visual forms produced in art and visual media environments are examined, it is seen that the aesthetic imagination structures of both fields show different characteristics concerning the production, distribution and acceptance of the visual form. As a beginning of these differences regarding aesthetic imagination structures, it was seen that the value given to an aesthetic understanding that centres the audience in terms of design. In this context, a decreasing interest in beauty, which is the subject of aesthetics, and aesthetics has emerged in studies with conceptual content produced in the postmodern art environment. It was understood that this resulted from the fact that postmodernist artists were indifferent to an aesthetic imagination structure to fascinate, admire or delight the audience aesthetically. However, this situation has emerged as an opposite feature in the aesthetic imagination structures of visual forms produced in the media environment (advertising, film, series, video, animation, computer game, etc.). With the effects of consumption culture, the attitude of the visual media towards influencing the mass and directing them to the commodities was a decisive element on the subject. It has been seen that the sensations about beauty, pleasure and appeal constitute the basic components of aesthetic imagination structures related to the visual media environment. Also, it has been observed that the targeting of individual and mass pleasures of commodity aesthetics, which has gained prominence in the consumer society, is one of the aesthetic features that we mostly encounter in media imagination. Regarding all these evaluations, it is recommended to increase the value attributed to visual culture in art education; to shape art education curricula with critical pedagogical approaches (e.g., critical visual literacy) under the conditions of the era; and to present theoretical and practical gains to students' aesthetic imagination structures. Such a reorganizing initiative for art education is thought to help students use their aesthetic imagination capacities effectively and efficiently on the axis of sociological phenomena and events.

Regarding the results we obtained within the scope of the research, it was seen that in her study on art education, Van Camp mentioned the need to present versatile gains on aesthetics on the basis of visual culture, including daily life experiences,

cultural perspectives, work of art analysis and historical perspectives<sup>58</sup>; that in Tavin and Hausman's study regarding the effects of consumption ideology on visual forms and audience, they made a suggestion with the sentence of "...teachers can take their students to various places, such as shopping malls, toy stores, and theme restaurants, to explore consumer products, imagery, and the marketing of desire"<sup>59</sup>; that Efland made the assessment of "our educational purpose should be to expand opportunities to enhance the freedom of cultural life, that is, the freedom to explore multiple forms of visual culture to enable students to understand social and cultural influences affecting their lives"<sup>60</sup> in relation to aesthetic experience. In the axis of all these suggestions and evaluations, it is understood that the importance attributed to aesthetic imagination in art education should not be limited to art philosophy and aesthetic education only; that it is necessary to diversify aesthetic imagination with cultural, social and critical approaches within the scope of art sociology. It is thought that such a pedagogical approach will provide aesthetic gains for students' sociological imagination capacities. It is predicted that the sociological view of visual culture forms, which are increasingly integrated with everyday life, will provide a conscious approach to the aesthetic imagination and visual perception of the individual.

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<sup>58</sup> Julie Van Camp, "Visual Culture and Aesthetics: Everything Old is New Again.... Or is It?", *Arts Education Policy Review*, 106/1 (2004), p.33-37.

<sup>59</sup> Tavin and Hausman, "Art Education", p.52.

<sup>60</sup> Efland, "The Entwined Nature", p.250.

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