EXPANDING THE CONCEPT OF AURA IN THE FRAME OF ART ONTOLOGY THROUGH NEUROPHILOSOPHY, STAGES OF HUMAN THOUGHT, AND PEAK EXPERIENCES

Author: CAN SARIÇOBAN, PROF. DR. NİYAZİ KAHVECİ

Introduction:

The concept of aura is often perceived in the realm of art as an invisible and energetic presence that surrounds artworks (Franco, 2018). Throughout history, the notion of aura has been imbued with different meanings. The term was first used in the field of art in the early 20th century by renowned German philosopher and cultural theorist, Walter Benjamin. It was utilized to describe a unique and mystical quality associated with a work of art's uniqueness, originality, and physical existence. Benjamin, in his 1936 publication "The Work of Art in the Age of Mechanical Reproduction," contended that the proliferation of mechanical reproduction techniques (photocopying, photography, film, etc.) weakens and even eliminates the auras of art pieces.

In this Master's thesis, the concept of aura will be examined from a multidisciplinary perspective, and its place in the ontology of art will be explored. The origin, evolution, and various interpretations of the aura in art will be studied from a broader perspective, thereby speculating whether it's possible for the aura to disappear as Benjamin claimed, in its expanded sense.

Throughout the stages of human cognitive development, the concept of aura in all its senses will be scrutinized. Relationships between the aura, art, and Maslow's peak experiences will be investigated. Furthermore, the approach of neurophilosophy to this issue will be explored, and hints about what kind of future research could be conducted on this topic will be acquired.

The Etymology of the Concept of Aura and Its Areas of Use:

When discussing the etymology of the word "aura", one of the most common sources is Latin dictionaries due to the word's Latin origin. The Oxford English Dictionary states that the word "aura" means "wind" or "breeze", clarifying that the word has a Latin origin (Oxford English Dictionary, 2023).

Art Ontology and the Concept of Aura

Art ontology concerns the examination of the existence of art works (Groys, 2008). It is also a field of philosophy that explores the fundamental structures and characteristics of art works (Davies, 2008). This field takes into account the physical, historical, and cultural contexts of works while attempting to understand the nature of art works (Carroll, 1999). By focusing on the features that determine the value and meaning of art works, art ontology aims to achieve a deeper understanding of art.

The Concept of Peak Experience: Theories, Characteristics, and Applications

The term peak experience refers to a concept that denotes the highest and most fulfilling moments encountered in an individual's life. This concept was introduced by American psychologist Abraham Maslow in the 1960s and plays a significant role in the process of self-actualization (Maslow, 1964).

When the concept of peak experience is synthesized with art ontology, it could be suggested that artistic experiences and creativity are among the highest and most satisfying experiences encountered in human life (Maslow, 1968). This synthesis argues that art can assist in creating a deeper sense of meaning, connection, and satisfaction in an individual's life, and that artistic experiences may play a significant role in achieving peak experiences (Csikszentmihalyi, 1996).

The concepts of peak experience and aura can be grounded in the view that the energetic field of an individual, along with certain artistic experiences, are among the highest and most satisfying experiences encountered in human life. This synthesis proposes that individuals' energetic fields and artistic experiences may play a significant role in reaching peak experiences, and these can aid in fostering a deeper sense of meaning, connection, and satisfaction in their lives (Csikszentmihalyi, 1996).

Individuals experiencing peak experiences tend to have a better understanding and appreciation of the meaning and value of their lives (Maslow, 1964). The aura of an artwork can accelerate and deepen the emotional and mental transformation an individual undergoes during this process. Therefore, it can be suggested that the aura of artworks and peak experiences are interrelated.

Artists create the aura of their artworks as a unique atmosphere and value that expresses the originality and uniqueness of the piece (Benjamin, 1968). The peak experiences that artists go through can contribute to the formation of this aura, thereby enhancing the energetic and emotional depth of the work. In this context, the peak experiences of the artist and the created aura can be considered as factors determining the effect and value of the artwork on the viewer (Dewey, 1934).

NEUROPHILOSOPHY

Neurophilosophy is an interdisciplinary field of philosophical thoughts and research on mind, brain, and consciousness (Churchland, 1986). This field has emerged from the combination of disciplines such as philosophy, neuroscience, psychology, and computer science. The integration of traditional philosophical problems with neuroscientific data assists in a better understanding of the fundamental nature of mental processes and consciousness (Dennett, 1991).

Neuroaesthetics is a discipline that examines aesthetic perception and the experience of art from a neurological and brain-based perspective. Research in this field explores topics such as how art is processed in the human brain, the impact of art on the viewer, and how art triggers emotional experiences. The term neuroaesthetics, which we will examine more in-depth under a different heading due to our subject matter, was first used by Semir Zeki in 1999. Zeki is a professor of neurobiology at the University of London and is considered the founder of neuroaesthetics. He has established this discipline based on research into how the human brain perceives and experiences art.

The synthesis of the concept of aura within the framework of art ontology with neurophilosophy could investigate how the brain and mind respond to aesthetic experiences and the relationship of these experiences with energy fields. In this context, the methods and findings of neurophilosophy and neuroscience can be used to explore the neurobiological foundations of aesthetic experiences and to understand how these experiences contribute to the mind-body relationship (Zeki, 1999). This subject has given birth to the subfield of neuroaesthetics.

Investigating the neurobiological mechanisms of peak experiences can help us better understand their impacts on the brain and consciousness (Dietrich, 2003). For instance, it is important to research which regions of the brain are activated during peak experiences and how these regions are related to the quality and intensity of the experience. Moreover, examining the impact of peak experiences on the mind-body relationship and emotional processes is also important (Taylor, 2017).

Future research could contribute to the development of a synthesis of neuroaesthetics, peak experience, and the concept of aura, and to a better understanding of the neurobiological foundations of artistic experiences. This interdisciplinary approach will aid in gaining a deeper understanding of the impact of artistic and aesthetic experiences on human experience, the mind-body relationship, and their transformative effects in people's lives. Moreover, this approach could also help us understand how the auratic qualities of artistic works interact with people's emotional and cognitive processes and how these processes are evaluated in a broader socio-cultural context.

STAGES OF HUMAN THINKING

Stages of human thinking can be defined as a field that examines how the human mind and thought processes develop at different periods and in different age groups (Piaget, 1972). The stages of human thinking have a significant impact on aesthetic experience and the meaning of art.

Biological thinking, magical thinking, mythological thinking, divine thinking, religious thinking, philosophical thinking, rational thinking, scientific thinking, rational-scientific thinking, logical thinking, digital thinking - each stage corresponds to different forms of cognitive development and ways of making sense of the world.

Biological Thinking and Aura

In the stage of biological thinking, the individual is primarily focused on basic physiological needs and survival. The aura of an artwork might be perceived in a visceral or instinctual way, provoking primal emotional responses (Franklin, 2008).

Magical Thinking and Aura

In the stage of magical thinking, individuals often attribute supernatural powers to certain objects, phenomena or actions. Artworks might be seen as imbued with magical properties, and their aura might be interpreted as a manifestation of these powers (Frazer, 1922).

Mythological Thinking and Aura

During the stage of mythological thinking, stories and legends become central in explaining and interpreting the world. The aura of an artwork could be intertwined with the myths and narratives associated with it, enriching its symbolic meaning (Campbell, 1949).

The subsequent stages of divine thinking, religious thinking, philosophical thinking, rational thinking, scientific thinking, rational-scientific thinking, logical thinking, and digital thinking each offer unique perspectives on the aura of artworks, as the cognitive tools and worldviews provided by each stage enable different modes of experiencing and interpreting art.

A comprehensive exploration of the concept of aura through these stages can illuminate the complex and multifaceted nature of our relationship with art, enriching our understanding of art's ability to captivate, move and transform us.

Divine Thinking and Aura

During the stage of divine thinking, individuals attribute the world's events and their own experiences to the will of divine beings or forces. In this context, the aura of an artwork might be perceived as divine inspiration or intervention, evoking feelings of awe and reverence (Armstrong, 1993).

Religious Thinking and Aura

In the religious thinking stage, established religious doctrines and rituals guide the interpretation of experiences. The aura of an artwork might be interpreted in relation to religious symbols and teachings, potentially offering spiritual or moral insight (Eliade, 1959).

Philosophical Thinking and Aura

In the stage of philosophical thinking, individuals seek to understand the world through abstract concepts and logical reasoning. The aura of an artwork could be seen as a manifestation of philosophical ideas or inquiries, prompting reflection and dialogue (Plato, 380 BCE).

Rational Thinking and Aura

In the stage of rational thinking, individuals prioritize logical reasoning and empirical evidence. The aura of an artwork might be analyzed and critiqued using rational arguments, leading to a nuanced understanding of its aesthetic and cultural value (Kant, 1790).

Scientific Thinking and Aura

In the scientific thinking stage, individuals seek to understand the world through systematic observation, experimentation, and analysis. The aura of an artwork could be examined in terms of the cognitive and emotional responses it triggers, offering insights into the neuroscience of art appreciation (Zeki, 1999).

Rational-Scientific Thinking and Aura

During the rational-scientific thinking stage, the methodologies of both rational and scientific thinking are used to understand phenomena. The aura of an artwork could be comprehensively analyzed from multiple perspectives, integrating subjective aesthetic experiences with objective scientific observations (Damasio, 1994).

Logical Thinking and Aura

In the stage of logical thinking, formal systems of logic guide the interpretation of experiences. The aura of an artwork might be evaluated according to its internal consistency and clarity, emphasizing the role of structure and syntax in artistic expression (Russell, 1912).

Digital Thinking and Aura

In the digital thinking stage, digital technology transforms the ways we perceive and interact with the world. The aura of an artwork could be experienced and shared through digital media, questioning traditional notions of originality, authenticity, and presence in art (Manovich, 2001).

Understanding these stages of human thinking and their influence on the perception of aura can provide a rich and nuanced perspective on how we engage with art and how art shapes our understanding of the world and ourselves.

CONCLUSION AND COMMENTARY:

The dynamic and variable meanings indicated by the concept examined in a multidisciplinary manner are striking, just like the unique nature of art itself, carrying different meanings in different geographies and cultures, at different times. Therefore, when examined over a wide range of time and space, the ambiguity in the definition of art shows parallelism with the ambiguity in the definition of aura.

The reason for associating the concept of "peak experience" with art and aura is that these concepts contain data pertaining to a common way of thinking specific to their own times; these concepts meet in a psychological and emotional attitude accepted by the general public. Besides, it has been concluded that there is another significant relationship between the concepts of "peak experience" and "aura". It can be argued that the intensity of the aura in the object related is directly proportional to the possibility of the subject relating to it experiencing a peak experience. Accordingly, for example, the aura of an artwork can affect the viewer's experience and emotional response, which in turn can increase the likelihood of the viewer experiencing a peak experience. This shows that aura and peak experiences are closely related not only to the artwork itself but also to the personal experiences and emotional responses of the viewer. At the same time, it is possible to say that an artist who experiences a peak experience produces an art object with a more intense aura. Therefore, this relationship is bilateral. However, from a critical perspective at this point, although this relationship seems theoretically reasonable, determining and measuring peak experience and aura intensity can be challenging. Both concepts depend on subjective experiences and the individual's unique emotional and psychological state, which moves them away from being measurable and generalizable concepts.

In the thesis for which the paper was written, different stages of thinking throughout human history were utilized to examine the concept of aura from an anthropological perspective. Different stages of thinking were analyzed, and their effects on understanding aura and peak experiences, which we have stated to be closely related to it, were investigated. At different stages in human history, the ways and understandings of people about the world have changed, and these changes have also affected the understanding and experience of aura and peak experiences, just like art. Each of these stages of thinking highlights different aspects of aura and expands these concepts. However, this approach also has its own limitations. Each of the different stages in human history contains complex and varied experiences and forms of thinking, and generalizing each of these stages with a specific form of thinking may overlook this complexity and diversity.

In light of all this information, we can make the new definition of the concept of aura as follows:

"Aura can be defined as a concept that is present in both living and non-living objects, harbors emotional and psychological indicators, and enables the subject to reach peak experiences with its intensity. This concept varies in line with the evolution of art, depending on its specific conditions, historical period, and space. 'Aura' allows for a deep and meaningful connection between a work of art or another object and the subject, stemming from the subject's personal and cultural experiences."

REFERANCES

Maslow, A. H. (1964). Religions, values, and peak-experiences. Columbus: Ohio State University Press.

Benjamin, W. (1968). The work of art in the age of mechanical reproduction. In H. Arendt (Ed.), Illuminations (pp. 217-252). New York: Schocken.

Dewey, J. (1934). Art as experience. New York: Minton, Balch & Company.

Churchland, P. S. (1986). Neurophilosophy: Toward a unified science of the mind-brain. Cambridge, MA: The MIT Press.

Dennett, D. C. (1991). Consciousness explained. Boston: Little, Brown and Co.

Zeki, S. (1999). Inner vision: An exploration of art and the brain. Oxford: Oxford University Press.

Dietrich, A. (2003). Functional neuroanatomy of altered states of consciousness: The transient hypofrontality hypothesis. Consciousness and Cognition, 12(2), 231-256.

Taylor, E. (2017). Peak experiences and the afterglow phenomenon: When and how do therapeutic effects of hallucinogens depend on psychedelic-induced peak experiences? Journal of Humanistic Psychology, 57(3), 389-416.

Piaget, J. (1972). Intellectual evolution from adolescence to adulthood. Human Development, 15(1), 1-12.