



Research Paper

The Aural Narrative and Decay of Story-Telling: The Impacts of Reproducibility in Don DeLillo's *Cosmopolis*

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Abstract

The present paper seeks to investigate Don DeLillo's *Cosmopolis* (2003) under the light of Walter Benjamin's concepts of aura, storytelling, and reproducibility. In his seminal article "The Work of Art in the Age of Mechanical Reproduction" (1935), Benjamin heavily criticized the deplorable influence of the modern discourse and the new technology on the lives of the masses. Benjamin maintained that the emergence of new technology not only had drastically changed the function of works of art to the contemporary audience but also had inevitably led to a sharp decline of the aural aspect of those artworks. According to Benjamin, the concept of storytelling was diminished by both the act of dissemination of the novels and the information. By focusing on the central character Erick Packer, DeLillo's *Cosmopolis* vividly depicts the decay of aura due to the replication of works of art; it also demonstrates the significance of storytelling by providing a rather detailed analysis of one of the significant characters, Benno Levin. The novel also illustrates the concept of reproducibility mainly through the reproduction of Erick Packer's favorite songs, which led to the devaluation of those artworks.



مقاله پژوهشی

روایت هاله‌ای و افول قصه‌گویی: تأثیرات بازتولیدپذیری در رمان جهان‌شهر اثر دان دلیلو بختیار سجادی (نویسنده مسؤول)

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چکیده

این مقاله، رمان جهان‌شهر (۲۰۰۳) اثر دان دلیلو را در پرتو مفاهیم والتر بنیامین درباره هاله، قصه‌گویی و بازتولیدپذیری مکانیکی بررسی می‌کند. بنیامین در مقاله بنیادین خود «اثر هنری در عصر بازتولید مکانیکی» (۱۹۳۵) به شدت از تأثیر مخرب گفتمان مدرن و فناوری‌های جدید بر زندگی توده‌ها انتقاد کرد. او معتقد بود ظهور فناوری‌های نوین نه تنها کارکرد آثار هنری را برای مخاطبان معاصر به طور اساسی تغییر داده بلکه ناگزیر به زوال شدید جنبه هاله‌ای این آثار انجامیده است. به گفته بنیامین، مفهوم قصه‌گویی نیز با گسترش رمان‌ها و اطلاعات در عصر مدرن تضعیف شده است. دلیلو در رمان جهان‌شهر با تمرکز بر شخصیت اصلی، اریک پکر، زوال هاله را در اثر به روشنی به تصویر می‌کشد؛ همچنین با تحلیل دقیق شخصیت مهم بنو لوین، اهمیت قصه‌گویی را نشان می‌دهد. پژوهش حاضر به روش توصیفی و تحلیلی به تأثیرات بازتولیدپذیری در رمان جهان‌شهر پرداخته است. رمان، مفهوم بازتولیدپذیری را عمدتاً از طریق بازتولید تصاویر، صفحه‌نمایش‌ها، داده‌های مالی و آثار فرهنگی (از جمله آهنگ‌های مورد علاقه پکر) به نمایش می‌گذارد که به بی ارزش شدن و از دست رفتن اصالت آن‌ها منجر شده است.

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1. Introduction

Written in 2003, the celebrated novel *Cosmopolis* portrays the life of the billionaire asset manager, Erick packer, who travels across New York City in his limousine to get his hair cut. Don DeLillo convincingly demonstrates in *Cosmopolis* the devaluation of works of art in the age of modern technology. Throughout the novel the central character Erick Packer loses a considerable amount of money due to the unstable economic condition. During his one-day trip to the city he sees his wife Elise Shifrin, and have breakfast together. He also meets some friends and his doctor in his expensive car. Meanwhile Torval, his chief bodyguard, warns him that he is in danger. At the end of the novel Erick realizes that his former employee Benno Levin, whose real name is Richard Sheets, is the real threat. Benno Levin attempts to take revenge and it is not evident whether Eric is alive or dead.

DeLillo's novel is a fertile ground for examining the influence of the new technology on the lives of significant characters. In *Cosmopolis*, DeLillo dramatically depicts the dependence of Mr. Packer on the new technology. Mr. Packer has isolated himself from the outside world and lives in his limousine, where he holds his business meetings. His doctor also visits him in the car. He listens to his favorite recorded songs in his programmed elevator. Ruth Helyer accurately argues that "*Cosmopolis* suggests a world turned full-circle where the sophisticated technology of voice-activated guns, mobile offices, and constant surveillance, rather than enhancing life, mitigate against its full and satisfying development" (2008: 135). The novel depicts technology as a master who controls and shapes the life of Eric Packer. Nonetheless, the representations of this modern technology have little significance in solving his problems.

Reading *Cosmopolis* in terms of Walter Benjamin's critical thought opens up perspectives to a better understanding of the novel. The thought-provoking doctrines of Walter Benjamin are flourishing. Martin Donougho properly argues that "Benjamin's importance as a critic, philosopher of art and pioneering media theorist is now universally recognized" (2013: 148). The present article focuses on the fact that how modern technology and

mechanical reproduction shape the lives of the characters and draws attention to the pivotal influence of modern technology on the aura of works of art. The research results in diminishing the aura and traces the changes that the decline of the aura has brought to the life of the main characters. We can discern the concept of aura mainly through Erick Packer's collection of significant paintings. The concept of storytelling can be distinguished based on the detailed narrative of Benno Levin. Furthermore, the concept of reproducibility is represented through the replication of Erick Packer's favorite songs.

The current study selects a qualitative literature-based method towards both the novel and the theory. The present article consists of five sections: the first section is the introduction, which provides a concise summary of the novel and the critical theory of Walter Benjamin about the negative influence of modernity. The Literature Review section focuses on the previous researches that have been conducted on the novel, *Cosmopolis*. The section on Theoretical Framework addresses the central ideas of Benjamin and his concepts of aura, storytelling, and reproducibility. The core part of this study includes the following sections: the deterioration of the aural art, the significance of story-telling, and the consequences of reproducibility, analyzed through the way the major characters in *Cosmopolis* are represented. And finally, the concluding section is derived based on the analysis of the novel.

2. Review of Literature

Since its publication, DeLillo's *Cosmopolis* drew the attention of different researchers. The following section is the review of the most significant examinations and researches that have been done on the novel. In their recent article Bahareh Bagherzadeh Samani, Hossein Pirnajmuddin, and Behnoush Akhavan argue about the novel *Cosmopolis* and its demonstration of everyday life in New York City. They claim that in the novel there is a parallel between Mr. Packer's luxury car and the city since both of them are related to postmodern life. They maintain that DeLillo in his novel depicts the influence of technology on shaping the daily life of people. They focus on the viewpoints of the French critic Paul Virilio through his primary concept of dromology and the ideas of speed

and technology. They claim that “DeLillo in *Cosmopolis* is much more concerned with Eric’s technological environment rather than his interest in money” (2018: 5). They hold that *Cosmopolis* not only mirrors and focuses on the role of the new technology in the postmodern era but also it attempts to depict the problems of the emergence of the new technology in New York as a postmodern city through the principal character, Eric Packer.

Haydon Hughes explores the concept of Flaneur based on the significant character, Erick Packer. Focusing on the two bodyguards Torval and Danko, Hughes claims that although they are walking through the streets of the New York City, they “do not embody the Flaneur figure in any other way” (2017: 81), since they act just like an obstacle between Eric Packer and the people. He develops his notions about the barriers between Eric Packer, Flaneur, and the people as the target of his sight. He provides examples of Erick. Packer, the central character, including putting on his sunglasses or when he is in his car because those “windows of the limousine offer a barrier between Packer and the outside world” (2017: 82). It appears that the act of observing people and the modern view of the city is not in line with Walter Benjamin’s Flaneur, on the other hand, he asserts that we can recognize the character of Eric Packer as Flaneur through his critical looking at the people and the buildings that make him an astute beholder.

Gabriel C. Sudibyo in his research pays particular attention to the satiric aspects of the novel. Through the lens of the Marxist theory, he analyzes in the novel the problems that the major characters in a capitalist society deal with. The researcher focuses on the three concepts of Marxist approach; False Consciousness, Alienation, and Class Struggle. He claims that Don DeLillo demonstrates “Eric Packer as his main satirical protagonist against capitalism [...]. Packer is satirized into a bourgeoisie but also experiences proletarian’s struggles” (2014: 12). He argues that the author of the novel is successful “to create a believable situation where the young bourgeois takes a great fall into his destruction within one day of this novel’s journey” (2014: 12). He holds that DeLillo’s depiction is compelling through portraying in detail the character

of Eric Packer and by choosing New York City as the setting of the novel.

Mathias Nilges explores the ways that our thoughts and opinions have been drastically influenced by the financial problems mostly caused by capitalism and. He argues that culture and especially literature help us in “probing the limits of such a form of thought” (2014: 33). In his study of the novel *Cosmopolis*, he claims that for the characters, “Capitalism means to live in the future: the future is now” (2014: 37), as characters are living in the future because they are breathing in the age of capitalism.

Daniel Shank Cruz scrutinizes the violent actions that have been demonstrated in the works of Don DeLillo. He analyzes the novel *Cosmopolis* among other novels such as *Players*, *Mao II*, and *The Names*, claiming that the common characteristic among these texts is that they have been written before the 9/11 attacks and depict violence. He defines terrorism “as acts of violence perpetrated by groups against civilians for the purpose of causing public fear” (2011: 138). The researcher follows a simplistic and limited definition of terrorism since he overgeneralizes this concept by attributing any action which causes disturbance among people to terrorism. He puts emphasis on the novel and argues that Erick Packer ignores the violent protests against the economic situation, and he does not think of them as a potential danger. He claims that when “a group of eco-terrorists tries to shut down midtown Manhattan, Eric finds himself enjoying their actions [...]. After the attack, [...] he has respect for them because of the creativity of their attack, which includes spray paint, banners, and live rats” (2011: 139). He concludes that readers do not feel hatred toward the protesters since they are no real threat, and they fight for their cause against the dominant power.

In his thesis, Benjamin Bird scrutinizes the role and the action of the human mind and its influence on “Subjectivity” (2005: 188) that takes a mysterious aspect in DeLillo's fiction. He focuses on the novel *Cosmopolis* in Chapter 7 of his thesis “Matter as Mind: Root Identity in The Body Artist and *Cosmopolis*.” He carefully explores “the psychological and conceptual journey that accompanies his dramatic seemingly voluntary descent from a

commanding position in the world of stock and currency trading to impotence and abject poverty” (2005: 291). By focusing on the protagonist of the novel, and examining his last day’s journey in the streets of New York City, Benjamin Bird vividly depicts the unstable economic situation of Mr. Packer that leads to his downfall at the end of the novel.

3. Theoretical Framework

3.1. Aura and Post-Aural Art

Benjamin defines aura in his essay “Little History of Photography” (1931). In his most-quoted text, “Work of Art in the Age of Mechanical Reproducibility” (1939), he elaborates more on the concept of aura by giving an example from nature: “If, while resting on a summer afternoon, you follow with your eyes a mountain range on the horizon or a branch [of a tree], you experience the aura of [them]” (2003: 222-23). In this example, Benjamin lays considerable emphasis on the point that the distance is of little significance when considering the aura. The concept of aura is in close affinity with history and is rooted in the tradition to which it belongs. Gershom Scholem, his lifetime friend, accurately claims that for Benjamin, the concept of aura is “buried in ...history” (1989: 29). Benjamin brings an example from ancient Greece about a statue of Venus and claims that it had aura because it was unique and had authenticity. Even though in different times from old Greece to the Middle Ages people confront it differently, it had aura because it was unique and had authenticity.

For Benjamin, “the unique value of the authentic work of art has its basis in ritual” (2003: 224). The ritual kept the distance between the audiences and the work of art, and this artwork has been in the service of cult value from the very beginning of its production. With the appearance of some technics of reproducibility we can recognize the transformation from cult value toward exhibition value of the artworks and therefore, there happened a significant shift toward the domain of “politics” (257). In the domain of photography, cult value is surpassed by exhibition value, which has led to the reproduction of a work of art in high number, which in turn, has led to the declining process of the artwork’s aura.

The emergence of the art of photography in modern times has led to the disappearance of aura through the process of replication of photos in unlimited copies, and as a result, the authenticity of the photos has become meaningless. Howard Caygill argues that for Benjamin, "The authentic element of a work is not reproducible" (1998: 100), which means that the concepts of authenticity and uniqueness are the major characteristics of the works of art that have lost their meaning through the arrival of photography and their inevitable reproduction. Both concepts are closely associated with aura which means that when a work of art loses its aura, it is not authentic and unique anymore. After the reproduction of artworks, it will be difficult, if not impossible, to recognize the authentic works of art from their inauthentic duplicated versions.

Benjamin contends that the concept of aura is in close affinity with the actor of a play. For instance, he provides us with an example and claims that "The aura surrounding Macbeth on the stage cannot be divorced from the aura which, for the living spectators, surrounds the actor who plays him." (2003: 260). Comparing the audience of a movie to that of a play, the former watches everything through the lens of the camera, and it is therefore the camera that takes the role of the audience. In other words, as Benjamin asserts, the aura diminishes not only from the actor but also from "the figures he portrays" (260). An actor on the stage is entirely alone during the performance and there is no interruption in their acting, on the contrary, an actor in a movie has the opportunity to pause or stop the process of film making and to continue it later so that their performance is artificial and loses its aura.

3.2. The Function of Story-telling

Benjamin argues that the art of storytelling is declining as people have lost their tendency to "share [their] experiences." (2002:143), since those experiences are of little value to them. One of the primary reasons for the devaluation of the experiences goes back to WWI when thousands of soldiers came back from the war and were not willing to communicate with others and to exchange their experiences. After the deadly war, many books were published and attempted to depict the atmosphere of the war. Nevertheless, they all

lacked in one feature and that is the fact that the genuine experiences of the war by the actual men who were in the battle remained isolated and were not mutually shared among people. Benjamin claims that “Experience which is passed on from mouth to mouth is the source from which all storytellers have drawn” (144). For Benjamin, a true story is in close affinity with the oral tradition. In other words, closer the written tales be to the oral sources, he maintains, the more authentic, valuable, and significant those tales will be.

Benjamin argues that the art of storytelling is in stark contrast with the novel, and the birth of the novel is the death of the art of storytelling. For Benjamin, the novel is written in isolation and will be read in isolation, while in the art of storytelling the tale is told in the presence of the audience and will be heard in the throng. The novel widely developed through the emergence of the printing press and was not associated with the oral tradition, whereas the art of storytelling is rooted in the oral tradition and is entirely depended upon the presence of the audience.

Benjamin addresses another factor that is associated with the decline of the art of storytelling: the information. Nowadays, people are not interested in stories that come from a far distance; on the contrary, they favor the information that is new and is about the issues that are happening around them. He maintains that the information is connected to the present time, and “It lives only at that moment; it has to surrender to it completely and explain itself to it without losing any time. [While] A story is different [and] it does not expend itself” (148). On the other hand, the art of storytelling is permanent and is not depended upon the present moment and due to its essence, it will last for a long time.

3.3. Reproducibility in Modernity

Benjamin, in his seminal essay “The Work of Art in the Age of Mechanical Reproduction” (1935), brings various examples to stress the differences between manual and mechanical reproductions. He also focuses on the historical changes that have led to the disappearance of the aura. For instance, he claims that in ancient Greece, “Bronzes, terra-cottas, and coins were the only artworks they could produce in large numbers” (2003:252). By the advent of woodcuts for the first time, we observe a drastic change

in the graphic arts which led to their mechanical reproduction. The emergence of the lithography and later the photography have fundamentally changed the function of artworks in the modern age. Although we can notice that the act of replication of the artworks has continued from the old times toward the 19th century, not only they had been reproduced manually but also in limited numbers.

Benjamin admits that a work of art will be reproduced for various reasons from the moment of its production. However, the main problem arises with the appearance of mechanical reproduction. Howard Eiland holds that for Benjamin, the “reproducibility [of artworks] shatters its aura” (2014: 515). Mechanical reproduction was asymptomatic of the fading of aura away from the domain of art and the realm of tradition. The original artwork has an essential characteristic which is its authenticity. It means that a work of art must have a unique time with a specific date of creation and a particular place for spectators to confront it. An original work of art has authenticity with a unique history which will not change by passage of time. Since a replicated work of art is not authentic and unique, it is of little significance and does not matter how similar it is to the original one.

Benjamin argues that through the replication of artworks, the “technological reproduction is more independent of the original than is manual reproduction” (2003: 254). A manual replicated work of art is produced in a more limited number and is created by a master with great care and full attention. On the contrary, in the modern age a reproduced work of art is created in unlimited numbers and is detached from its tradition. Furthermore, a duplicated work of art is not necessarily in a close affinity with the original one. Consequently, it cannot be unique and is omnipresent. Another feature that a replicated work of art lacks is its inability to be examined through a physical and chemical process, which is only possible for the original one, and through this analysis we can unravel its originality.

4. Reading *Cosmopolis*: A Benjaminian Treatment

4.1. The Decay of Aural Art

Benjamin argues that through the reproduction of artworks in the modern age, we can observe a severe deterioration of some

significant features such as authenticity, uniqueness, and particularly the aura in those works of art. Erdmüt Wizisla correctly claims that for Benjamin, “the aura is decomposed by the reproducibility of the artwork” (2009: 169). In *Cosmopolis*, the process of the disappearance of the aura is mostly associated with the major character Erick Packer. One of the examples is provided here:

He walked through the apartment, forty-eight rooms [...]. The art that hung was mainly color-field and geometric, large canvases that dominated rooms and placed a prayerful hush on the atrium, skylighted, with its high white paintings [...] He liked paintings that his guests did not know how to look at. The white paintings were unknowable to many, knife-applied slabs of mucoid color” (2003: 2).

After getting confused about his plans for having a haircut that day, he puts on his expensive clothes and walks in his large apartment with forty-eight rooms. After checking his dogs, he goes to his big screening room for checking his monetary investments and examines the stock market. The rise of Yen was against his expectations and it was about to put his company in a terrible condition, and he became worried about it. The catastrophic event of losing millions of dollars was darkening his life. There were big paintings with different shapes and colors in his rooms. It was a hard task to capture the essence of those painting without having the eyes of a scholar. The idea of knowing some facts about the paintings that his guests were not mostly aware of them cheered him up. The price of the paintings was extremely exorbitant and was not affordable for ordinary people.

The above-quotation fully discloses the concept of aura that the famous works of art, like paintings, lose their aura when being duplicated. Benjamin acknowledges the manual reproducibility of works of art, as this process has frequently occurred throughout history. Nevertheless, the modern age witnessed the mechanical reproduction of these works of art which was entirely new and was also in direct contrast with the manual reproduction. In the modern period, through mechanical replication, one creates unlimited copies and the concepts of authenticity and uniqueness are thus

absent in the reproduced works of art. Benjamin lays critical emphasis on the fact that “The authenticity of a thing is the quintessence of all that is transmissible in it from its origin [...] to the historical testimony relating to it.” (2003: 254). The concept of authenticity is rooted in history where a work of art has been located. For instance, a famous statue that belongs to the Greek gods has authenticity since it has its own time and history and is not detachable from that context.

In a capitalist society the disappearance of the aura can be recognized through the emergence of new technology as it devaluates the sacred rank of works of art. As demonstrated in the following sentences from *Cosmopolis*, Erick Packer is talking to his friend Didi Fancher and is attempting to buy some paintings that are located in a small church. Benjamin argues that in bourgeois society, those who are in power have isolated the artworks and the masses have been deprived of them:

I’ve been thinking about the chapel [...]. How many paintings in his chapel? I don’t know. Fourteen, fifteen [...] If they sell me the chapel [...]. In my apartment. There’s sufficient space [...]. But people need to see it. Let them buy it. Let them outbid me [...] But the Rothko Chapel belongs to the world. It’s mine if I buy it. (2003: 11)

In this quotation, Didi Fancher and Erick Packer are talking about buying some paintings in the Rothko chapel. She suggests that he should examine them since they look fantastic. She mentions that there are fourteen to fifteen paintings in that chapel. Mr. Packer has a strong desire for the paintings and he wants to buy the whole chapel, including all the paintings. Ms. Fancher harshly criticizes him for depriving other people of the opportunity of watching those artworks. Mr. Packer, symbolizing the upper class in a capitalist society, claims that everyone is free to buy them if they can afford it. However, it is not clear at the end of the novel that whether he buys them or not.

Albeit we do not have the reproduction of artworks here, we can still notice the disappearance of aura. Richard Wolin argues that for Benjamin, “As an object of religious veneration and worship, the work of art acquires a sense of uniqueness, and authenticity”

(1994:187). In the modern age, the revered paintings have almost lost their sacred status for many beholders in a bourgeois society since they are over-replicated and omnipresent. In the past, the paintings of the saints had a sacred place for the beholders in churches and were authentic. Likewise, those sacred paintings were fully respected by people and were never considered as objects that could be traded. Nonetheless, the mechanical reproduction of artworks has changed our viewpoint toward them.

Even though Walter Benjamin mostly argues about the works of art, such as paintings, and movies we can develop his ideas into the domain of music and focus on the decline of aura in that field. The reproduction of artworks is not an isolated incident as it occurs in different moments and situations. In *Cosmopolis*, after the death of Brutha Fez, different people, friends, and fans gather together in his honor. An instance of the decline of the aura is provided below:

The dead man's amplified voice sounded from farther back in the procession, singing in slow hypnotic syncopation, accompanied by harmonium and hand drums [...] The dead man's voice was louder now as the sound truck approached [...]. The clapping spread from the recorded track to the people in the limos and the crowd on the sidewalks, and it brought an evident emotion to the night. (2003: 57-58).

Public announcement of the death of Brutha Fez deeply shocked Mr. Packer and he decided to join his fans to pay respect to him. Mr. Packer always listened to his songs even in his elevator. They carried his body in a car full of flowers while his songs were playing via gigantic speakers. Some people were singing those songs, and some others were shouting and clapping as he was taken to the cemetery. Mr. Packer and Fez's fans had his songs duplicated in unlimited copies, and by reproducing his songs in facsimile, they could frequently play those songs and listen to them.

The quotation reveals the destructing role of the replication in the domain of art. Benjamin argues that there is a striking contrast between an original work of art and a reproduced one. Although the real singer is dead and he is not anymore among people, his reproduced songs are still played repetitively. When one is in a live

concert, the aura of the place and that specific moment surrounds him. Moreover, one pays attention to the singer and the song. Accordingly, by a full concentration on the song, one gets the meaning and the essence of that music. Mr. Packer “was eating [...] and listening to ecstatic rap on the sound system, the voice of Brutha Fez, with a Bedouin fiddle as a sole accompaniment” (2003: 33). In this example, he is listening and eating at the same time and he does not have concentration. That is why the artworks are devaluated through their reproduction in modern times. Since one gets prepared to listen and watch an artwork, s/he can become fully aware of the hidden aspects of that work of art. The deterioration of aura is thus what the reader confronts in the process of reading of the novel.

4.2. The Significance of Story-Telling

This section addresses the art of storytelling which is falling into decline in the age of modernity with the emergence of the novel. Benjamin argues that one of the primary reasons behind the fall of storytelling is the rise of the information in the modern time. Here, the death of Kaganovich is a sad news for his friends and Mr. Packer. The news and the information about his death are highly significant for our interpretation of the differences between the art of storytelling and the information. The following sentences depict this contrast:

He and Nikolai had been friends [he] watched coverage of the event on several screens [...] The man lay face down [and] shot numerous times [...]. On another screen a commentator made vague references to unsavory business associates, to anti-globalist elements and local wars [...]. It relaxed him, the death of Nikolai Kaganovich. (2003: 35)

Erick Packer is watching the screens and notices the death of his eminent, rich, rigid, and smart friend, Nikolai Kaganovich. They were close friends for a long time, and Mr. Packer always respected him. Through the reports of the TV, he realizes that Mr. Kaganovich was murdered after his return from a business trip. In media, alongside the news about the death of Kaganovich, they focused on various topics, including wars among the local people, the rise and the fall of prices, and the global issues. It appears that

the news and the information about the death of Nikolai Kaganovich has already become obsolete for the reporters and their audiences.

The information and the art of storytelling are in sharp discrepancy. The story is not restricted to the moment that it is told as it keeps its strength permanently and goes beyond the notion of time. As far as the information is concerned, it is quite the opposite since it lives in the moment of its emergence. David Ferris claims that "Benjamin views the newspaper as the diametrical opposite of the story. In this position, it menaces storytelling more than the novel" (2008:113). In the novel, the information about the death of Nikolai Kaganovich was noticeable and exciting only for a short time and by the pass of time, it lost its novelty for the audiences.

The process of storytelling by Benno Levin which is examined below is of considerable significance since his stories give readers a vital perspective about his past life, his family, and the financial problems he has gone through from the moment he was fired. Besides, he reveals the personal life and some hidden aspects of the manners of Erick Packer. Benjamin claims that the stories come from the experiences of the storyteller's daily life since the narrator extensively employs the experiences of oneself and the others for telling the story. The following extract portrays the significance of the art of storytelling:

Allow me to speak for myself. I had a job and a family. I struggled to love and provide [...] I made a phone threat that I didn't believe. They took the threat to be credible [...]. He moved about the city without a pattern. He had armed escorts. The building where he lived was unapproachable [...]. Even at the firm, it was not easy to find his office. It changed all the time. (2003: 24)

Here Benno Levin introduces himself and his past life and the fact that a long time ago, he had an excellent job in the company that Erick Packer was its owner and president. Mr. Levin did his best to keep his job and his family together, though he lost them both. The extract indicates that he does not have a job at the moment of narrating the story due to the personal problems that were attributed to him. He vehemently denies those blames and

asserts that it was Mr. Packer who had personal problems and erratic behaviors. It is implied that Mr. Levin has had a troubled relationship with Mr. Packer and also his coworkers. After getting fired and having no money, he called his company and threatened the life of Mr. Packer even though he did not intend to take any serious action. While he was busy following his target, he came to realize that Mr. Packer used to go randomly to different places. He figured out that it was difficult to find him even during his work time in the company. After losing his job and his family, Mr. Levin isolated himself from others and lived in a miserable situation.

The stories that are told by Benno Levin do not come from ideal conditions or unreal incidents. These original stories are based on his personal life and experiences. In human history, the art of storytelling has been passed from one generation to the next generation and has had a pivotal role in transferring the experiences. However, Benjamin contends that nowadays this art has been faded and “remote[d] from us and [...] is moving ever further away” (2002: 143). The art of storytelling is declining since people cannot communicate their experiences properly in modern times as they tend to spend their time in isolation and stay detached from others. Through communicating with other people, not only we enjoy the experiences of others, but also we use our own experiences and merge them for telling a story. In other words, experiences are the primary source of the art of storytelling.

The following sentences demonstrate the riots of people from different countries against the policies of the ruling class in capitalist societies. It is a political revolution of the lower-class people against the dominant power. In *Cosmopolis*, Mr. Packer is implied to be the symbol of capitalism. Benjamin as a Marxist thinker declares that in a capitalist society, the artist should first inspire the masses through his/her art and later, take some revolutionary actions against the oppressors. The quotation below proves these viewpoints:

Cars were burning in the street [...] in tides of smoke, wandering through the mass of vehicles and bodies, and others everywhere running, and a cop down, genuflected, outside a fast-food shop. [...] They were spray-painting the

car [...] Across the avenue the men were trying to kick in windows [...] There were many arrests, people from forty countries, heads bloodied (2003: 39-40).

The outrageous riots of the suppressed in a capitalist society are revealed here. A remarkable array of people from different countries are going on the rampage in the city against the policies of the ruling class. They display their protest by setting on fire the cars and the garbage cans and breaking the windows of houses, cars, and shops. Meanwhile, the police attempt to arrest them and people fight them back. The smoke of the burning cars has darkened the sky and some injured people and cops are lying down on the street. The Protesters attack Mr. Packer's car and considerably damage it. They paint and ruin the car completely, though Mr. Packer does not get injured. He looks at them and admires them deep in his heart. The cops open fire with rubber bullets on the protestors. At the end of the demonstration, many people are injured, and the police arrest some.

The words, mentioned in the above quotation, provide us with a vivid insight toward the ideology of the lower-class people against the policies of the capitalist society. Benjamin stresses the fact that the dominant power easily controls and manipulates the masses and shapes their ideas through the dissemination of newspapers. Tara Forrest declares that for Benjamin, "what is problematic about the evolutionary bent of historicism is [...] the choices and decisions made by those in positions of power" (2009: 202). That means that those who are in power have a strong influence on the life of the masses, and this highlights the role of art in changing this condition. The masses are more interested in exciting news and the latest pieces of information rather than finding a solution for their terrible condition in a bourgeois society. Similarly, manipulation of the worldview of the middle class leads to a specific and already determined way of interpreting the incidents in a capitalist society. In *Cosmopolis*, the story of the demonstration and riot against the ruling class is not given any attention and those in power, devalue this rampage by manipulating the news and directing the attention to minor issues.

4.3. Consequences of Reproducibility

The present section seeks to examine the concept of reproducibility in *Cosmopolis*. According to Benjamin, there is a fundamental contradiction between the concept of reproducibility and the concept of aura. When a work of art is reproduced, the critical element which is aura will disappear. In the novel, some characters like Erick Packer, Arthur Rapp, and a group of dancers illustrate the fall of aura through the reproducibility of artworks, especially music. The following quotation uttered by Erick Packer reveals the disappearance of aura:

I have two private elevators now one is programmed to play Satie's piano pieces and to move at one-quarter normal speed. This is right for Satie and this is the elevator I take when I'm in a certain, let's say, unsettled mood. Calms me, makes me whole. Who's the other elevator? Brutha Fez [...] The Sufi rap star [...] Cost me significant money and made me an enemy of the people, requisitioning that second elevator. (2003: 12)

Mr. Packer is talking to his friend Didi Fancher about the significance of money in his life and how the financial issues are substantial for his future. He claims that he can buy and have whatever he wishes. He shows her that he has two elevators that are programmed to play his favorite songs and claims that those songs control and reduce his daily stress. One of the elevators plays Satie's piano, and the other one plays Brutha Fez. By admitting that those programmed elevators cost him a lot of money and made him the enemy of people, he implies that his luxurious and aristocratic way of life is in stark contrast with the hard condition of other people. In other words, he does not show sympathy toward the suffering of others. Mr. Packer talks to his friend and asserts that by spending money he feels alive and living in prosperity helps him face the difficulties of life.

Benjamin acknowledges that throughout history the works of art have always been imitated and reproduced and the duplication of artworks is natural within the domain of art. Nevertheless, through the process of replication the mechanical reproduced works of art in comparison to its manual reproduction is much more

independent from the source. S. Brent Plate claims that For Benjamin, the concept of aura “is built up around the object through history and social conditions” (2005: 88). During the process of replication of works of art, we detach them from their tradition, and this tradition is associated with the artworks’ history. Mr. Packer listens to the copies of his favorite songs in his elevators instead of attending the live concert. Thus, as Benjamin accurately claims, the uniqueness and authenticity of the reproduced work of art have become meaningless here.

The following quotation is about the death of Arthur Rapp who was killed in a live TV show. Mr. Packer has recorded the video of assassination and frequently watches the scene and after reproducing the videos he sends them to different people. The following sentences portray the concept of reproducibility and the decline of aura:

The man down was Arthur Rapp [...] had just been assassinated in Nike North Korea [...] Eric watched it happen again, in obsessive replays [...] he could see it again if he wished, any time, through scan retrieval, a technology that seemed already oppressively sluggish, or he could recover a slow motion [of the film] .He’d listened to the audio account of the assassination [as well] (2003: 14).

The quotation reveals the obsession of Erick Packer with the death of Arthur Rapp, who was murdered in the live program Money Channel. Arthur Rapp was a manager in the International Monetary Fund and Mr. Packer hates him and is happy for his death. In his car, he repeatedly watches the videos of the assassination. There were several cameras in the studio when the murder happened so that they recorded the murder from different angles. Soon there were many photos and videos of the murder of Mr. Rapp available on TV and social networks. Mr. Packer watches different videos, each covering a different part of the studio, even the close-up. The new technology in his limousine provides him with the chance to observe that scene through multiple screens set in his car.

The illustration of the decline of the aura is depicted as a result of the reproduction of artworks. The existence and the essence of

photography and film, Benjamin asserts, are exclusively associated with their reproducibility. The only way for the dissemination of a film or a photo is through their reproduction in great numbers. Rainer Rochlitz states that for Benjamin, "The technically reproducible work of art [...] no longer has any properly artistic value" (1996: 189). The reproducibility of artworks in the modern age has led to their devaluation as they do not have any history and authenticity. In other words, any argumentation about the notion of the aura is meaningless for those reproduced artworks.

In the following example, Erick Packer and his friend Danko are watching some teenagers dancing with loud music. They know that most of those teenagers are taking drugs. It appears that while dancing, they do not know what is happening around them. Here the concept of uniqueness for music is meaningless since it has been reproduced and devaluated.

The music was cold and repetitive [...]. It was hard work to talk and listen. Finally, they had to look at each other, read lips through the stunning noise [...] Music devoured the air around them [...] The dancers seemed to be working against the music [...] They opened their mouths and rolled their heads [...] There was a remote track under the music that resembled a female voice but wasn't [...] It said things that seemed to make sense but didn't. (2003: 53-54)

Mr. Packer and his friend Danko go to a club and confront many teenagers who are dancing and shouting and most of them are either taking drugs or they are drunk. As a result, the essence of the music cannot be perceived. There are massive speakers in the club and the music is so loud that they cannot hear each other. Mr. Packer could only realize that the singer is a female. Nevertheless, he could not distinguish the words of the song. Mr. Packer believed that the influence of the drugs was so strong that it caused people to be out of control and dance wildly. The loud music is annoying for those who are not drunk or do not take drugs.

The selected quotation portrays the concept of reproducibility and its influence on the devaluation of artworks. Through the reproduction of works of art, Michael Rosen claims that for Benjamin, "the uniqueness of the work of art becomes increasingly

questionable and leads to the decline of its cultic function” (2004: 48). The shift from cult value toward exhibition value diminishes aura as it is in close affinity with the ritual and the tradition in which it has been rooted. Besides, the aura of works of art receives its authentic features from that tradition, consequently, during the process of replication of artworks, we detach them from their history and they lose their authenticity.

In the club, no one is aware of the essence and hidden aspects of the music. It is so loud that it is annoying and most of the dancers are either drunk or take drugs. The quotation, as mentioned earlier, acknowledges the point that “All the menace of electronica was in repetition itself. This was their music, loud, [and] bland [...]. The noise was nearly unbearable, taking root in his hair and teeth” (2003: 54). Those in the club, neither dancers nor the beholders are able to understand the music. That is why Benjamin bitterly criticizes the role of the mechanical reproduction of artworks for the decline of aura and the disappearance of the art of storytelling in modern age.

5. Conclusion

Throughout the novel *Cosmopolis*, the diminishing of aura is observed, mainly based on the everyday life of the central character Erick Packer. He bought some famous paintings for his apartment and this is conspicuously possible only through the reproduction of those artworks. For Benjamin the concepts of aura and storytelling were in sharp contrast with the concept of reproducibility. Also, the significance of storytelling, another Benjaminian key term, is represented in the significant character of the novel, Benno Levin, which was carefully investigated as well. Mr. Levin as the storyteller unraveled some features of the past life of Mr. Packer and also the reasons behind his financial problems. Mr. Levin's descriptions of the principal characters are highly significant for our understanding of their cause of actions. It should be noticed that the dissemination of the newspapers has profoundly changed the condition of the art of storytelling and has led to its rapid disappearance. The principal concept of reproducibility in *Cosmopolis* was explored through Erick Packer. He reproduced the songs of the singer Arthur Rapp and listened to them in his elevators. Erick Packer was with his friend and they were watching some teenagers who were dancing with a song. Meanwhile, no one could understand the meaning behind the song since no one had concentration.

The present study presented the parallel lines between the traditional story-telling mode and the modern literary genre of novel. Whereas nowadays storytelling does not have the popularity it once enjoyed, the modern literary discourse and, particularly, the genre of novel could be considered a more functional alternative in that it includes both the informative aspect and the modern features of form which are much favored by the contemporary audience. The aural fiction faces considerate challenges in the post-aural condition of the contemporary times unless it is contextualized in a modern discourse assigned with formal features that provide it with enduring merit. The disintegration of aura is inevitable due to the reproducibility present in the present time. Literary works in general, and the novel in particular, need to be liberated from the aural context in which the art of storytelling was once positioned, and to move towards a modern literary discourse.

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