

## Original Research Article

## The Concept of Manifestation in Traditional Arts and its Confrontation with Mechanical Reproduction\*

Fereshteh Pourahmad<sup>1\*\*</sup>, Seyed Reza Hosseini<sup>2</sup>

1. PH. D Student, Faculty of Art Research, Department of Art, Shahed University, Tehran, Iran.

2. Assistant Professor, Department of Art, Shahed University, Tehran, Iran.

Received: 23/07/2023 ;

accepted: 07/11/2023 ;

available online: 21/01/2024

### Abstract

**Problem statement:** Traditional arts have been approached differently in terms of theoretical aspects. On the one hand, traditionalists believe in specific components of traditional arts. On the other hand, one of the important topics for contemporary theorists and art researchers is the theory of reproducibility and mechanical reproduction of art. Among the concepts, Manifestation is explored, and expanded from the perspective of thinkers, leading to challenging discussions between two schools of thought.

**Research objective:** The aim of this article is firstly to explore the concept of manifestation from the perspective of traditionalists and Walter Benjamin, and then to identify and explain how this concept is confronted with mechanical reproduction. Therefore, this research answers the question of “how the concept of manifestation in traditional arts and its confrontation with mechanical reproduction can be articulated?”

**Research method:** This article employs a descriptive-analytical approach and a comparative study, along with a library-based examination of data and qualitative analysis, to clarify the concept of manifestation in the face of mechanical reproduction.

**Conclusion:** Based on the coding and analysis of the perspectives of five traditionalist thinkers and Walter Benjamin's famous article, the constitutive components of manifestation and mechanical reproduction have been identified. According to the performed categorizations, the categories of mechanical reproduction are comparable to the categories of manifestation's concept, which are opposite to each other except for two components. Therefore, the similarities and differences between them have led to the identification of the components of manifestation in the face of mechanical reproduction. During this process, it became clear that the concept of manifestation has two dimensions and approaches; one is related to the traditionalist perspective and Benjamin's view, and the other is related to mechanical reproduction. Consequently, considering the comparison between the main categories of these two concepts, it is possible to distinguish the manifestation of mechanical reproduction from the manifestation envisioned by traditionalists and Benjamin, which has taken on a new form and is unavoidable.

**Keywords:** *Manifestation, Traditional arts, Mechanical Reproduction, Traditionalists, Walter Benjamin.*

\* This article extracted from Ph.D. thesis of “Fereshteh Pourahmad” entitled “The Concept of Manifestation in Traditional Arts and its confrontation with Mechanical Reproduction” that under supervision of Dr. “Seyed Reza

Hosseini” which is doing at Shahed University, Department of Art, Tehran, Iran in 2023.

\*\*Corresponding author: +989123270811, rz.hosseini@shahed.ac.ir

## Introduction

By studying the topic of the traditional arts, the concept and definitions of traditional arts are discussed by traditionalists at the beginning. These thinkers have attributed various components to traditional arts, including the concept of manifestation. The existential nature of the concept of manifestation, like other aesthetic values of traditional arts, is a topic of discussion in the present age, particularly in the face of mechanical reproduction. While reproduction has undergone various non-mechanical processes in different eras, in the present age, with the presence of existing technologies and the possibility of mechanical reproduction, changes have occurred in the way the components of traditional arts manifest. However, the reproducibility of traditional arts has highlighted the importance of their visual nature. Therefore, today we observe a specific interpretation of the principles of traditional arts, including the concept of manifestation. Although traditionalists have extensively discussed the presentation of this concept and its characteristics in the field of traditional arts, there has been little research on the connection between these theories and their various aspects in the present age. This is because contemporary traditionalists, as Orientalists, do not represent the theoretical foundations of art in traditional civilization and are also devoid of structural and logical flaws. Therefore, examining the theoretical position and how traditional arts confront the issue of mechanical reproduction is one of the necessities of research in this field. According to the importance of traditional arts, in this research, it is necessary to update the position of traditional arts in the present era by reviewing and examining attitudes. In this study, the perspective of traditionalists and the German philosopher Walter Benjamin, a member of the Frankfurt School, has been used to achieve the research question and the defined objective in the section on mechanical reproduction. In the examination of Walter Benjamin's theories, the focus of the researcher has been on the components

related to the subject of this research, extracted from his famous article titled "The Work of Art in the Age of Mechanical Reproduction<sup>1</sup>". In his article, Benjamin refers to components such as the "aura", which signifies manifestation in artwork, in addition to addressing the challenges of art in the age of mechanical reproduction. Although it should be acknowledged that there is another perspective in the Frankfurt School by "Theodor W. Adorno", it has not been addressed in this article due to not being central to the subject of this research. Given these considerations, and by considering the research objectives, the most important of which is the position and manner of confrontation between the concept of manifestation and mechanical reproduction, the research try to answer the question of how the concept of manifestation in traditional arts and its confrontation with mechanical reproduction can be explained?

## Research Background

The components of traditional arts, such as the concept of manifestation, have been examined by various researchers, including traditionalists and Benjamin. It has been found that no research has been done on the subject of this article until now. In most cases, research has been conducted on the theoretical framework and concepts of the article, and a precise and focused confrontation with the concept of manifestation in traditional arts has not been studied in the age of mechanical reproduction. However, some studies have been conducted that have a general and partial relationship with the article and are noteworthy in the research literature. For example, Imani (2011) briefly examines some artistic components and concepts, including the sacred aura, from Benjamin's perspective in his thesis "Iranian Painting in the Age of Technology and the Influence of Mechanical Reproduction on it," and he believes that these components have changed when confronted with technology. The author considers the reproduced form of painting to still possess a sanctity but does not delve into

the nature and characteristics of this sanctity. Walter Benjamin's book "Illuminations" (2007) includes the article "The Work of Art in the Age of Mechanical Reproduction," which has been translated and rewritten multiple times. One of the main issues addressed by Benjamin is the impact of modern knowledge on the concept of art. Benjamin examines the effects of mechanical reproduction on art with both positive and negative perspectives and focuses on this aspect. In this research, it has been clarified that one of the artistic components that has changed with the introduction of technology is the concept of the aura of an artwork.

## Research Method

This research is qualitative and in a descriptive-analytical manner. To answer how the concept of manifestation in traditional arts confronts mechanical reproduction, a comparative approach has also been used. To this end, in addition to Benjamin's perspective, five of the most important traditionalist thinkers, namely Guenon, Coomaraswamy, Schuon, Burckhardt, and Seyyed Hossein Nasr, have formed the theoretical foundations of the article. Therefore, after collecting the data through library research and to saturation, and using modern tools such as the internet for data extraction, coding,

conceptualization, and categorization, a new perspective has been applied to explain the concept of manifestation in the present era. The stages that have been taken in this research as the process of data collection and analysis and the formation of theoretical foundations in the realm of the concept of manifestation are presented in (Fig. 1).

## Theoretical Foundations

Since this research has two theoretical sections, the first section focuses on the traditionalist theorists' perspective, followed by Walter Benjamin's perspective. Considering the importance of the theories of these two groups, their common interpretations of the concept of manifestation and the related theoretical approaches to mechanical reproduction have been considered.

Traditionalists: in the face of the phenomenon of modernity, a group called traditionalists or the Eternal Sophia emerged to understand the tradition accurately and revive the spiritual truths of religious traditions in the West. Furthermore, based on historical order, the main perspectives of five of the most important thinkers in this group have been presented.

Rene Guenon: As the first traditionalist, Guenon distinguishes between traditional civilization and

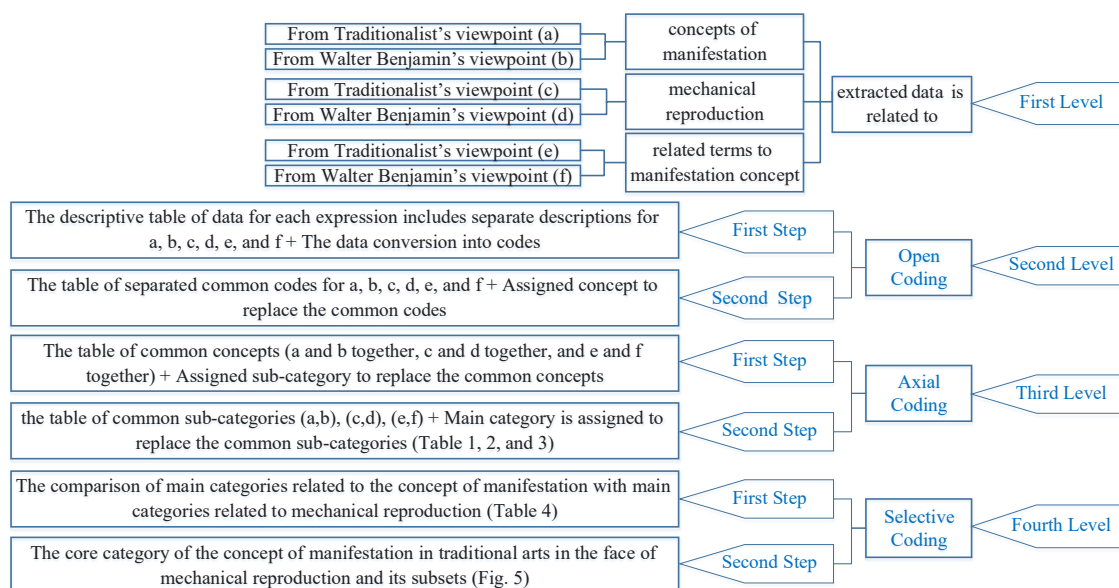


Fig.1. General Structure and operational model of the research. Source: Authors.

modern Western civilization (Khandaghabadi, 2001, 13), criticizes the fundamental foundations of the modern world, and addresses the consequences of the modern situation from a religious perspective. Alongside purifying misleading sources related to Eastern teachings, he discusses metaphysics and cosmology from a traditional point of view, including various traditional intuitive teachings. Therefore, his works are one of the most important interpretations of the theoretical dimension of the sacred in the modern era and a major step towards rediscovering the sacred order and reviving tradition (Nasr, 2017, 90 & 92). Fundamental symbols are one of the most important topics for Guenon, as he attempts to describe the intellectual content of traditional symbols present in religious art (Stoddart, 2007, 5). He acknowledges the concept of symbol as a manifestation and expression of divine intellect (Guenon, 2020, 27).

Ananda Kentish Coomaraswamy: His interest in artistic forms and consequently tradition led him to bring Eastern art to the West. Compared to Guenon, he emphasized more than the destruction and devastation that industrialization had brought to Eastern and Western handicrafts and patterns of life (Nasr, 2017, 93 & 94). Therefore, he delved into the study of the principles and wisdom of traditional art (Burckhardt, 2010, 19). Furthermore, his writings in the field of metaphysics, cosmology, and the foundations of traditional mythology and symbolism played a major role in this path (Nasr, 2017, 92 & 94). In the book "Traditional Art and Symbolism, "Coomaraswamy's (2010) discussions on the concept of manifestation are evident in his thoughts on the combination of aesthetics and theology. The use of Sanskrit terms equivalent to the concept of manifestation and discussions related to Shaker are noteworthy parts of this thinker's writings in relation to the subject of the article. He believes that complete craftsmanship and the divine craftsman consider the root of all manifestations to be in the divine essence and acknowledges that reproducing ancient works only creates superficial cultural phenomena.

Frithjof Schuon: In the theories presented by this

philosopher, discussions on beauty, aesthetics, and symbolism in art and nature are highlighted (Binaye Motlagh, 2003b, 105). Schuon believes that the primary essence of all religions is the Absolute (the Word of God) which manifests itself in various forms (Binaye Motlagh, 2003a, 54). Based on Schuon's writings titled "Principles and Criteria of Art" (2015), traditional art, sacred art, and non-sacred art of the machine age are important topics. He subtly criticizes and denies the modern world (Stoddart, 2007, 6) and seeks to complete, revive, and present traditional teachings in the contemporary world (Nasr, 2017, 95). Overall, Schuon emphasizes the spiritual path and the explication of metaphysical concepts (Burckhardt, 2010, 19).

Titus Burckhardt: As Burckhardt's intellectual orientation and practical way of life belong to Islamic mysticism, he has researched various aspects of Islamic teachings and art and provided an inner and esoteric interpretation of Islam and its culture (ibid., 18 & 22). His works encompass a wide range of topics including mysticism, cosmology, traditional sciences, critique of modern sciences, and art (Farzan Yar, 2020). Quoting from the book "Fundamentals of Islamic Art" (2007), according to Burckhardt, the essence and nature of sacred art lie within every form of traditional art. He considers art as a reflection of the highest levels and believes that inner truth can manifest through art. Additionally, in the book "Traditional Cosmology and Modern Science" (2010), Burckhardt discusses technocracy and sees modern science as dominant in the material realm, with mathematics reducing qualitative matters to quantitative ones.

Seyyed Hossein Nasr: Nasr, in his book "Knowledge and the Sacred" (2017), discusses the stages of Western human degeneration from the Pontifical man to Promethean man and thus follows an aspect of the process of desacralization. From this perspective, contemporary humans are in search of the sacred and the rediscovery of the Pontifical man. Among the topics Nasr addresses in this context is the concept of manifestation, including rationality, knowledge,

pre-eternal truth, traditional human (Pontifical man), logos or word or universal intelligence, religion, tradition, the sacred, and the discussion of beauty. Manifestation in the description of the pontifical man is the manifestation of the human as the light of the divine throne. In fact, the body is the same sacred throne place where the divine presence or divine light manifests itself. Moreover, from his perspective, the belief in the traditional world, especially in the East, is that truth alights to the rank of humanity accompanied by an aura of beauty that shines from its presence and display. In examining the meaning of tradition, Nasr does not separate it from the sacred and acknowledges that tradition extends the presence of the sacred to the whole world. However, tradition is inherently opposed to modernism and seeks to destroy it. Therefore, he considers the scientific revolution as a background for these degenerations that even mechanizes the concept of human.

Walter Benjamin: Benjamin, like other Frankfurt School thinkers and critical theorists, is interested in revisiting the relationship between theory and pragmatism in new conditions. One of his most important theories is the theory of mechanical reproduction, which he discusses in his famous article "The Work of Art in the Age of Mechanical Reproduction". His approach in this article is that not only has there been a transformation in artistic creation in the age of mechanical production, but also in the concept of art itself (Benjamin, 2007, 217). Therefore, in his writings, we encounter an interaction of aesthetic concepts and components with the industrial and technological world. According to Benjamin, mechanical reproduction has progressed continuously and intensively throughout history, to the point where in the contemporary period, reproduction has become an integral part of the work of art. He considers photography as the first truly revolutionary tool of reproduction, as well as the emergence of socialism (Benjamin, 1998, 216-211). Benjamin believes that with the emergence of cinema, photography,

and radio, artworks that were previously centered on rituals and ceremonies have lost their aura and uniqueness, and their ritualistic aspects have faded away. Therefore, "aura" is a fundamental term for the concept of manifestation in Benjamin's thought (Adorno, 2006, 385). He is also interested in what has taken the place of manifestation in the present age. According to Benjamin (1998), his framework for discussing the decline, destruction, and disappearance of manifestation in the modern age. He considers manifestation to be related to concepts of tradition and presence and as a component of artworks in the traditional era.

### **Related Viewpoints on the Concept of Manifestation and Mechanical Reproduction in the Direction of Open-coding**

In the writings of Coomaraswamy and Benjamin, direct references are made to the concept of manifestation. As mentioned earlier, Benjamin uses the term "Aura" along with the concept of manifestation, referring to a halo that signifies absolute beauty. Coomaraswamy also frequently uses ancient Sanskrit words in his writings, which translators have dissected based on the themes of Hindu myths and religion. Among these keywords is "Vyakta/Vyakti", which means manifestation, individuality, and expression, and is usually applied to the manifestation of the soul or deity in a tangible form (Coomaraswamy, 2003, 215). In fact, Coomaraswamy discusses the concept of manifestation with reference to a medieval phrase called "Avatar." Avatar linguistically means descent, fall, and alight; it refers to the descent of the divine spirit from heaven to earth and its manifestation in human majesty or other material forms (Zekrgoo, 2011, 351). In Hindu religious culture, the manifestation and materialization of God on earth is for the salvation of his servants from darkness and their guidance towards salvation. In later Hindu mythology, Avatar is used as a specific term for the ten manifestations of Vishnu on earth



(Coomaraswamy, 2010, 84). Based on the studies and codifications carried out on the statements of traditionalists, they all refer to the concept of manifestation in line with the aforementioned definitions. Additionally, in addition to the two mentioned phrases, some words have been codified in the texts of traditionalists and Benjamin that signify the manifestation concept and have been categorized through open coding and axial coding processes.

To accurately extract data related to the characteristics of the manifestation and reproductive mechanics concept, the perspectives of the thinkers under consideration have been noted meticulously and up to the point of saturation through a part-by-part approach. Therefore, it is possible that some data may not have been available to the authors or have not been published, so all coding stages have been based on the available data. In the first stage, namely, open coding, the data, along with their codes, were compiled in tables; then common codes were identified in separate tables, and conceptualizations were conducted. Thus, the groundwork for analysis and selective and focused coding has been provided. Due to the extent of the coded data and categorized concepts, the inclusion of open-coding tables in the article has been disregarded, and they have been used to identify subcategories and main categories in the process of selective coding.

### **Analyzing and Describing Related Viewpoints on the Concept of Manifestation and Mechanical Reproduction in the Direction of Axial Coding**

In the first step of axial-coding, based on the concepts considered in the open-coding for each expression, common concepts have been categorized and their subcategories have been written; then, in the second step of axial-coding, according to (Tables 1 & 2), common subcategories and main categories have been written. Based on this, in the following, the definitions of both groups

in relation to the concept of manifestation and mechanical reproduction have been presented.

The concept of manifestation: Guenon refers to the highest level of religious and supernatural (Guenon, 2020, 23), where according to Coomaraswamy, the essence of existence is non-manifest (Lipsi, 2010, 565) and Burckhardt refers to it as the throne and the highest rank (Burckhardt, 2007, 20). It is an archetypal world where material directly reflects this spiritual rank (Nasr, 2017, 219 & 228). Benjamin also holds a different view on this matter. According to him, this world is a historical existence the origin of artistic work has its roots in its original place and includes temporality and spatiality. This existence and its manifestation are never completely separate from its ritual function, and the unique value of authentic artwork has its roots in ritual, meaning it has practical value (Benjamin, 1998, 212 & 214). The essence that according to traditionalists is the unique phenomenon, God, absolute existence, supreme soul, and generally the divine, and Benjamin also considers it as something permanent, stable, and steadfast, and sees it as the true aspect of reality. It refers to a phenomenon from which knowledge is transferred and its sacred characteristics. Knowledge that Schuon, Burckhardt, and Nasr respectively refer to as sacred intellect, sacred science, and sacred knowledge, and according to Guenon, "Divine intellect manifests and expresses itself in relation to us through creation" (Guenon, 2020, 27). Therefore, just as Benjamin considers the authenticity of something as the essence of everything that exists in it from the beginning in a transferable form (Benjamin, 1998, 212), Nasr also confirms this belief in a different way and refers to them as celestial patterns that all traditions are their earthly manifestations (Nasr, 2017, 68) and are emitted as numerous rays of light from universal intelligence (Burckhardt, 2010, 64). In this regard, according to Coomaraswamy and Schuon, we witness the complete appearance of the image of God and the presence of the sublime form in humans and the depths within the form; therefore,

Table 1. Relation between subcategories and main categories of manifestation concept in traditional arts from Traditionalists and Benjamin's viewpoint, (second step of axial-coding). Source: Authors.

Common subcategories	main categories of manifestation	Guenon	Coomaraswamy	Schuon	Burckhardt	Nasr	Benjamin
- Commitment to the dimension of non-manifest existence - The place of historical temporal and spatial existence of God	Dimension of non-manifest, spatial, temporal, and historical existence	•	•	-	•	•	•
- The being of God (unique existence) - The highest aspect of reality (truth) - The slight distance of the unique phenomenon from us	The being of God in the slight distance from the universe	•	•	•	•	•	•
- Commitment to sacred intellect (knowledge of sacred attributes) - Connection with ritual and religious values and subjects	Connection with ritual and religious values of sacred intellect	•	-	•	•	•	•
- The existence of transferable patterns of God - The Aura of divine rays	Transferable patterns in the form of the aura of divine rays	-	•	•	•	•	•
- The voluntary coming into the world by a transcendent person - Commitment to divine revelation	Divine revelation with voluntary by a transcendent person	-	•	•	•	•	-
- Commitment to the existence of the small world (cosmos) (world of manifestation) - Truths present in tradition	world of manifestation is full of traditions that include truth	-	•	•	-	•	•
- Commitment to art and the artist - Commitment to unconscious understanding - Intuition - Commitment to the naked eye and non-technological tools - Commitment to objective and material forms	Artist's intuition	•	-	-	•	•	•
- Commitment to symbolic application - The importance of forms in human majesty - The importance of sacred personalities and texts	Symbolic objective forms and human majesty	•	•	•	•	•	•
- Commitment to divine beauty (and perfection) - Commitment to the realm of beautiful appearance - Commitment to the integrity of divine attributes and the glory of different aspects of truth - Connection with a higher concept	Presence of divine beauty in the realm of beautiful appearance	•	•	•	•	•	•
- Commitment to attention to quality - Commitment to a powerful form	Attention to quality and powerful form	-	-	-	-	-	•
- Commitment to cooperation with order and mystery	Cooperation with order and mystery	-	-	•	•	-	-
- Diversity of creatures in various and infinite ways - Lack of sense of universal equality of things - Limited and diverse execution	Limited and diverse execution of creatures	•	•	•	•	•	•
- Personal and non-universal function	Non-universal function	-	-	-	-	-	•

Table 2. Relation between subcategories and main categories of mechanical reproduction from Traditionalists and Benjamin's viewpoint, (second step of axial-coding). Source: Authors.

Common subcategories	Main categories of mechanical reproduction	Guenon	Coomaraswamy	Schuon	Burckhardt	Nasr	Benjamin
- Lack of the highest (true) aspects of reality in the artwork	Lack of highest (true) aspects of reality, universal intelligence, and intuition	•	•	•	•	•	•
- Lack of principles and traditional teachings							
- Knowledge without universal intelligence and intuition							
- The production of unconscious divinity	The production of divinity with a lack of symbols and unconsciousness	•	-	-	•	•	-
- Lack of symbol							
- Disconnect between form and meaning	Disconnect between form and meaning	-	•	-	-	-	-
- Limited to the material and worldly work	The importance of tangible, material, worldly, and non-original form	•	•	•	•	•	•
- Representation of tangible and non-original forms							
- Influenced by media, social, and human life changes	Performative, social, and political function in the direction of mass needs	•	-	-	-	•	•
- Emphasis of art on political meaning							
- Non-ritualistic, performative, and social functions of art							
- Connection with mass needs							
- Equalization of the concept of truth and utility	The lack of artist's skills and complete use of tools	•	•	-	-	•	•
- Destruction of the natural order							
- The use of mechanical reproduction tools instead of the artist's skills							
- Non-professional pragmatism with minimal effort	The importance placed on Self-centeredness and pleasure with sensory perception changes	•	•	•	•	•	•
- Grandiosity							
- Self-centeredness							
- The importance placed on pleasure and sensory perception changes	Emphasis on quantity instead of quality	•	•	•	•	•	•
- Emphasis on quantity							
- Disregard for quality							
- Speed in production	Error and lack of precision in discontinuous sections and high-speed execution	•	•	-	-	•	•
- Fragmented and discontinuous sections execution							
- Prone to error and lack of precision and distinction							
- Changeable	Diverse work lacking creativity and with subjects of everyday life	-	•	-	•	•	•
- Diverse creation lacking creativity							
- Portrayal of everyday life	Equalized appearance-orientedness with a lack of beauty and power	-	•	-	-	•	•
- Appearance-orientedness							
- Aestheticism devoid of beautiful appearance							
- Lacking a powerful appearance	Universal equality	-	•	-	-	•	•
- Universal equality							



“all genuine cosmologies are contingent upon divine revelation” (*ibid.*, 33). According to traditionalists, revelation is nothing but the manifestation of the objective sacred intellect (Zamani, 2003, 96). So when that sublime person comes into the world, he becomes multiple and reproduces with his children, in whom the spirit is born (Lipsey, 2010, 571). The world that Coomaraswamy refers to as the cosmos in the description of the Brahma tree and admits that the sublime person is non-multiple in the macrocosm and inverted in the multiple microcosm (Lipsey, 564 & 571). The macrocosm, which according to Benjamin is the place of the original version of the artwork and the source of tradition. Nasr believes that there are truths in a tradition that traditional art presents a formal and artistic expression of them (Nasr, 2017, 214), and this tradition cannot separate itself from its manifestations (Schuon, 2015, 112). In this regard, Benjamin refers to the position of the actor’s manifestation; an artist who perceives and fulfills the role of space unconsciously and without the mediation of technological tools. What is important in this context is the symbolic form. Essentially, any expression, no matter what it is, is a kind of symbol of thought that has found an external interpreter. Symbolism is like a carrier and foundation for the intuition of universal intelligence (Guenon, 2020, 24 & 25), and therefore, the role of traditional art in creating an atmosphere in which the deepest metaphysical truths can be contemplated and intuited is essential and fundamental to understanding the nature of traditional art and its intuitive dimension (Nasr, 2017, 216); thus, human intuitive knowledge must be revived through sacred knowledge (Burckhardt, 2010, 34). In general, divine intellect manifests and expresses itself in relation to us through creation, and its manifestation is its external expression (Guenon, 2020, 27). Therefore, human presence is also important, and as Benjamin says, the value of a person’s face surpasses its performative value over its ritual value. In fact, the more God’s role is manifested in a person, the more God’s birth in that person becomes

apparent, and with the eternal birth of the Lord in a person, we find that his image has reached complete manifestation (Coomaraswamy, 2010, 182). God is a true light that illuminates anyone who comes into the world. The true pre-eternal light emanates from its essence all the radiance of manifestation, which is the beauty of all things. This supra-beauty is the origin of everything, and all things are created for the sake of beauty (Lipsey, 2010, 279 & 280). Therefore, according to Schuon, the source of beauty is the divine truth (Binaye Motlagh, 2003b, 107), so among Christians, Sophia is often manifested as a beautiful heavenly woman, and among some Muslim sages, wisdom is manifested as a beautiful heavenly woman. Therefore, for a pontifical man, beauty is an essential dimension of life and a necessary need for humanity (Nasr, 2017, 23 & 215). This belief can also be seen in Benjamin’s statements; from Benjamin’s perspective, in art, the realm of aesthetic appearance is the only area for its growth and elevation. However, it should be noted that Benjamin’s concept of manifestation is more closely related to a higher concept in sublime<sup>2</sup> and has little relation to the discussion of beauty. The subcategories and main categories related to the characteristics of manifestation are listed separately in (Table 1) after identifying the concepts of manifestation. After specifying the concepts of manifestation, the components of mechanical reproduction are examined.

#### • Mechanical reproduction

The first important category in describing the concept of mechanical reproduction is that due to the penetration of all equipment into reality, one aspect of it is displayed that is separate from all equipment and tools (Benjamin, 1998, 220). Seyyed Hossein Nasr also believes in a different way and acknowledges that in fact, the result of external and material sciences in the modern era is the fading of its inner dimension. If the result of applying these sciences includes elements of beauty, that element is derived from a scattered nature and only occasionally manifests itself (Nasr, 2017, 226).

Therefore, the emptying of knowledge from its sacred aspect and the creation of profane knowledge has led to neglecting the intuitive dimension and neglecting the traditional origin (Nasr, 2010, 13 & 14). According to Schuon, new philosophy has no sacred aspect (Zamani, 2003, 94) and lacks true intuition and what is received through revelation and unveiling (ibid., 42 & 96). Therefore, in general, the intuitive view that exists in the sacred is an exceptional phenomenon in the modern world (Nasr, 2017, 69). This trend is due to the fact that, as Guenon states, in modern civilization, the concept of truth has been degraded, and in a world where its desires are only material and sensory, truth has no importance (Guenon, 2020, 18). Therefore, no new spiritual outlook has emerged in the world, and we witness the popularization of hidden truths. What is important is that the more new science confirms the tangible aspects, the more it manifests a fundamental uniqueness of universal intelligence or soul and does so indirectly, unconsciously, and despite itself (Burckhardt, 2010, 38) and with skepticism and alienation towards symbolic expression (Guenon, 2020, 18). This is because the desacralization of knowledge led to the use of language and the relationship of languages with monotheistic patterns, losing its symbolic aspect and becoming one-dimensional, monotheistic, and devoid of many meanings of classical languages (Nasr, 2017, 55 & 56). This also affected the secularization of language over the language of the holy book, and the language that was once a divine gift is now considered suitable for mathematics, the language appropriate for nature (ibid). This is because in the modern world, desires are only material and sensory (Guenon, 2020, 18) and art is considered inherently tangible (Lipsey, 2010, 357). This mathematical selection from the whole reality eliminates secondary qualities of perception and uses what philosophers have called the form (Burckhardt, 2010, 40). Benjamin also confirms this belief and considers the performance of art as a series of visual tests that have become documents for historical

events and have hidden political meanings. It is because according to Nasr, the Promethean man goes towards one of thousands of paths to fulfill his needs (Nasr, 2017, 138). In fact, with the enthusiasm of today's masses to bring things closer to themselves and their tendency to deny the uniqueness of any reality, their desire to preserve the effect at a very close distance and in the form of an image becomes stronger every day (Benjamin, 1998, 213). According to the aforementioned, traditionalists also argue and acknowledge that in modern civilization, the concept of truth, after being reduced to mere storytelling of tangible reality, has ultimately been equated with utilitarianism due to its usefulness, but it has not been actively and practically engaged in the creation of works and has been separate from traditional teachings (Guenon, 2020, 13-18). In fact, technology has come to our homes with little effort to meet our needs, and images appear and disappear with a flick of a hand (Benjamin, 1998, 212). Another aspect of this issue is mentioned in the speech of Seyyed Hossein Nasr, stating that the result of this self-confidence and mechanization of the world is its emptiness from its sacred description (Nasr, 2017, 54-55). However, it must be acknowledged from Benjamin's perspective that there are severe conditions for understanding the changes in human sensory perceptions, which are signs of social transformation (Benjamin, 1998, 213). Another notable category is Burckhardt's statement that qualitative matters are being reduced to quantitative matters. Because due to the fading of the perceptual dimension, sciences are quantified (Nasr, 2017, 140). Thus, one of the distinct features of modern mentality is the democratic mentality, which always sees quantity and overlooks quality (Guenon, 2020, 21). Therefore, innovative artists deliberately ignore the intrinsic and qualitative value of forms and colors (Schuon, 2015, 127). Furthermore, according to Benjamin, the mechanical reproduction of creation and invention is not continuous and unified but rather consists of multiple and separate executions. Executions that have accelerated to such a degree

during the process of reproduction that they are in sync with speech (Benjamin, 1998, 211 & 217). On the other hand, according to traditionalists, unlike the Shaker art, they are not precise and distinct (Lipsey, 2010, 370); because denial or neglect of knowledge, which is based on universal intelligence, is one of its results, all the errors of scientism (Guenon, 2020, 18); even as Burckhardt says, in the modern industry we are faced with the suppression of any creativity (Burckhardt, 2015, 220). Another characteristic that Benjamin addresses is that technology has provided the opportunity for its products to enter the market in bulk and various forms and enable art to depict everyday life (Benjamin, 1998, 211). This statement is also mentioned differently from the perspective of traditionalists, where beliefs are set aside or temporarily invited in this formalism (Nasr, 2017, 146). They are beautiful in some places and sometimes ugly, or they are beautiful in one aspect and ugly in another. As if it can be beautiful for some people and not others (Lipsi, 2010, 278); as Schuon says, the lack of need for beauty is a deficiency associated with the ugliness of the machine age (Schuon, 2015, 106). Therefore, based on the aforementioned data, all the components have been classified briefly in Table 2 and then the words that evoke the concept of manifestation have been examined.

#### • The words that convey the concept of manifestation

In addition to the words “avatar” and “aura” mentioned earlier, it has been determined in the examination of the categories through which the concept of manifestation is understood that some words express the nature of this concept and are presented in (Table 3). Among these, the word “Manifest” used in Nasr’s writings indicates four subcategories with names such as reflection, representation, appearance, and revelation. In the dictionary, “Manifest” means “display, appearance, manifestation, Representation, world display, witness world, created world and nature, non-being display, appearance without reality,

manifest, apparent, visible, radiant, evident, and face” (Dehkhoda, 1998, 22753). Thus, manifestation linguistically signifies “becoming manifest, emerging, becoming apparent, emergence, radiance, light, manifest, appearance, manifestations and the influence of divine lights on the hearts of those who are inclined to meet the truth” (Moein, Vol. 1, 2003, 1031). Also, in Dehkhoda’s dictionary, it is defined as “becoming apparent and revealed, becoming manifest, becoming visible, becoming clear, becoming evident, appearing, clarity, shining, radiance, visibility and display.” The noteworthy point is that Dehkhoda admits that “manifestation signifies the appearance of the essence and attributes of divinity, and the soul is also a manifestation.” Therefore, he believes in two types of spiritual and divine manifestations and considers divine manifestation to have two types: a manifestation of essence and a manifestation of attributes. He has also quoted from Nafae-al-Funoon that manifestation is the revelation of the sun of the truth of God (Dehkhoda, Vol. 5, 1998, 6454).

Based on the conducted codifications, it seems that both traditionalists and Benjamin’s groups have a similar view and approach to the concept of manifestation. Manifestation occurs in stages according to these two groups, which is briefly shown in (Fig. 2). In fact, manifestation is a process through which transferable patterns are illuminated by divine rays from the holy intellect, which is the place of religious and spiritual values, towards the cosmos (the world of manifestation) at the discretion of the transcendent person. In this world, which is full of tradition, the artist receives that revelation with his intuition and manifests it in tangible symbolic forms and beautiful human dignity. Thus, we witness a process from the unmanifest world towards the manifest world by the unmanifest world. But in the era of mechanical reproduction, this process changes and manifestation takes on a new visible form, which will be discussed in the next section.

#### Analysis and Summarization in Line with the Selective Coding

As indicated in Tables 1 & 2 both groups have

Table3. Relation between subcategories and main categories of the words that convey the concept of manifestation from Traditionalists and Benjamin's viewpoint, (second step of axial-coding). Source: Authors.

Common concepts	Benjamin	Nasr	Burckhardt	Schuon	Coomaraswamy	Guenon	Common subcategories	Main categories
Common concepts	Emergence	•			•		Appearance	
	Creation		•					
	Appearance	•	•	•	•			
	Manifestation	•			•			
	Descent		•	•	•			
	alight		•		•			
	Show		•		•			
	Realization	•			•			
	Presence		•		•	•		
	Display					•		
	To appear					•		
Common concepts	Reflection		•	•			Reflection	Manifest
	Origin				•			
	Rebound				•			
Common concepts	Representation		•	•			Representation	
	Expression	•			•		Revelation	
	Message				•			
	Revelation		•	•	•			
	Conveyance			•	•			
Common concepts	Manifest			•				
	Transmission	•	•		•	•	Radiation	Radiation of Symbolic Embodiment
	Radiation		•	•	•			
	To flow				•			
	Distribution				•			
Common concepts	Dissemination		•		•			
	Materialization		•				Symbolic embodiment	
	Embodiment				•			
Common concepts	Symbolization				•			

acknowledged components that are considered the main categories of the concept of manifestation. Therefore, by comparing the main categories of the concept of manifestation with the main categories of mechanical reproduction, the confrontation of the concept of manifestation with mechanical reproduction can be determined and presented in (Table 4). Based on the comparisons in Table 4 and according to Benjamin's statement, mass

production is a source from which all traditional behaviors towards artworks come out in a new form. Although we witness the destruction, decay, and disappearance of the concept of manifestation, it can be said that the concept of manifestation has not completely disappeared in some cases and has emerged in a new form (Fig. 3). This new form has been influenced by the characteristics of mechanical reproduction. Therefore, it seems that the concept

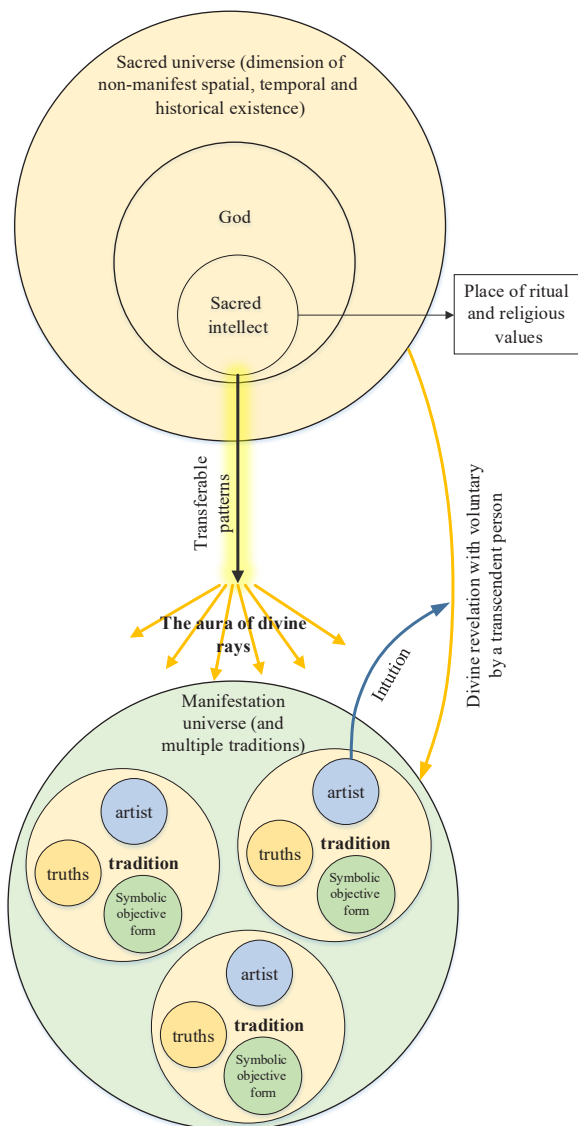


Fig.2. Process and dimension of manifestation's concept from the view of Traditionalists and Benjamin. Source: Authors.

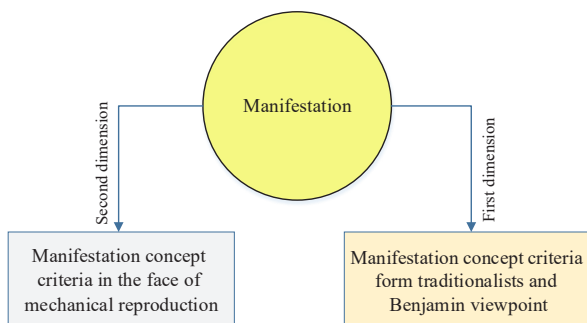


Fig.3. Two dimensions of manifestation's concept. Source: Authors.

of manifestation, as defined by traditionalists and Benjamin, is not part of the essence of mechanical reproduction because even the most perfect

reproduction of an artwork lacks this concept of manifestation. However, this concept, as the main component of traditional arts in the era of mechanical reproduction, has not completely faded away but has undergone a transformation in its quality. In fact, in this era, we are faced with a qualitative transformation of the nature of artworks, including the concept of manifestation. The nature of the concept of manifestation has changed due to its qualitative transformations. From this perspective, the characteristics of the concept of manifestation in confrontation with mechanical reproduction can be briefly observed in (Fig. 4).

## Conclusion

The concept of manifestation can be identified and explained in two dimensions and with two different aspects. The first dimension is related to the traditionalist perspective and Benjamin's view, which is not unrelated to traditional civilization; and the second dimension occurs in the face of mechanical reproduction. Everything that appears in the perceptible world has a halo, but what that halo contains is different. Generally, in the traditional era, manifestation is a divine radiance, halo, and sacred effusion, containing a sacred matter. However, in the era of mechanical reproduction, it finds a new face and becomes worldly. According to the correspondences in Table 4, in traditional civilization, this sacred halo or sacred manifestation takes on symbolic manifestations of divine beauty, but in the era of mechanical reproduction, it appears in two non-symbolic perceptible forms. One is in the form of non-symbolic and non-authentic perceptible forms that are evident in all works of mechanical reproduction, and the other is the unconscious and non-symbolic manifestation of divinity. Therefore, the clearest answer to this study is that the concept of manifestation in the face of mechanical reproduction can be identified and explained as a halo of money and politics. Thus, based on the analyses and correspondences conducted in Table 4, as well as the drawings in (Figs. 2 & 4), a systematic



Table 4. Comparison of the main categories of manifestation's concept with the main categories of mechanical reproduction. Source: Authors.

	common main categories	Difference	In common	Selective-coding of Manifestation's concept on confrontation with Mechanical Reproduction
Mechanical reproduction	- Lack of highest (true) aspects of reality, universal intelligence, and intuition			
Concept of manifestation	- Including dimensions of non-manifest, spatial, temporal, and historical existence - The being of God in the slight distance from the universe	•	-	No relation and dependency to the non-manifestation universe
Mechanical reproduction	- Disconnect between form and meaning			
Concept of manifestation	- Transferable patterns in the form of the aura of divine rays - Divine revelation with voluntary by a transcendent person	•	-	
Mechanical reproduction	- Performative, social, and political function in the direction of mass needs			
Concept of manifestation	- Connection with ritual and religious values of sacred intellect - world of manifestation is full of traditions that include truth	•	-	Performative, social, and political function
Mechanical reproduction	- The production of non-symbolic and unconscious divinity	•		
Concept of manifestation	- The importance of tangible, material, worldly, and non-original form - Symbolic objective forms and human majesty	•	•	Tangible form with lack of symbol and worldly non-original. The production of non-symbolic and unconscious divinity.
Mechanical reproduction	- The lack of artist's skills and perfect use of tools - The importance placed on Self-centeredness and pleasure with sensory perception changes	•	-	Importance of technological tools instead of artist
Concept of manifestation	- Artist's intuition			
Mechanical reproduction	- Emphasis on quantity instead of quality - Equalized appearance with a lack of beauty and power	•	-	
Concept of manifestation	- Attention to quality and powerful form - Presence of the divine beauty in the realm of beautiful appearance			
Mechanical reproduction	- Diverse work lacking creativity and with subjects of everyday life	•	•	A lot of equalized Appearance works with a lack of beauty
Concept of manifestation	- Limited and diverse execution of creatures - Non-universal function			
Mechanical reproduction	- Error and lack of precision in discontinuous sections and high-speed execution	•	-	
Concept of manifestation	- Cooperation with order and mystery			

categorization can be achieved to explain the core category of manifestation in the face of mechanical reproduction, which is presented in Fig. 5.

## Endnotes

1. In many Iranian academic texts, the term "reproduction" has been used in the translation of Benjamin's article title. However, one of the most important references, namely the book "Critical Aesthetics",

considers the term "reproducibility" instead of "reproduction". This is significant because Omid Mehregan has based the original German text of Benjamin's article on the foundation and, like other authors, has not used secondary translations of the article. Mehregan acknowledges that the term "reproduction" has not been correctly used in the translations of Benjamin's article title and is aware of this error by French and English translators of this work (Mehregan, 2005, 10 & 11). Nevertheless, in this research, considering that the word "reproduction" is more recognized in Iranian sources, this term has been used in the writing of the article.

2. The discussion of sublimity was a very important topic in the philosophy of the time of Burke. Philosophers believed that sublimity was the result of an

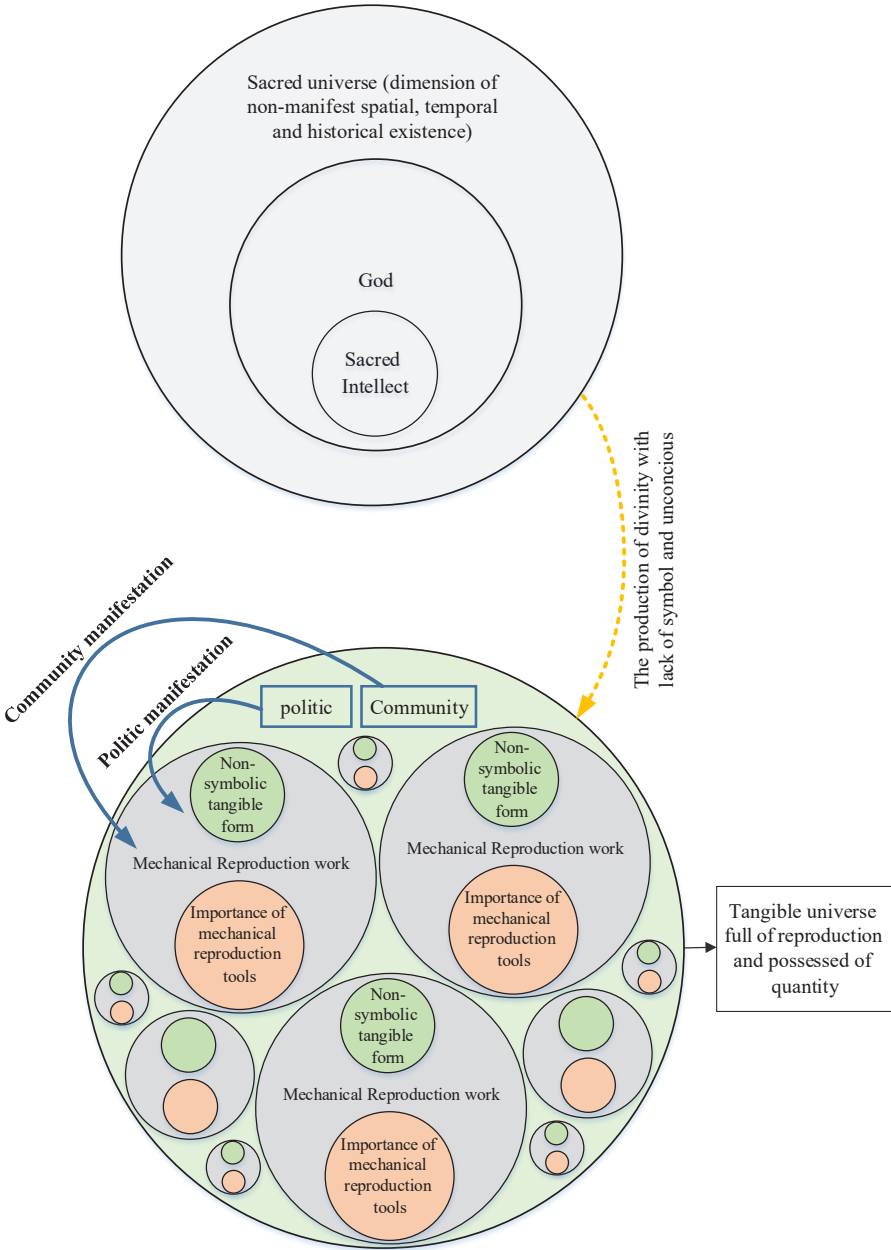


Fig.4. Dimension of manifestation's concept confronted with mechanical reproduction. Source: Authors.

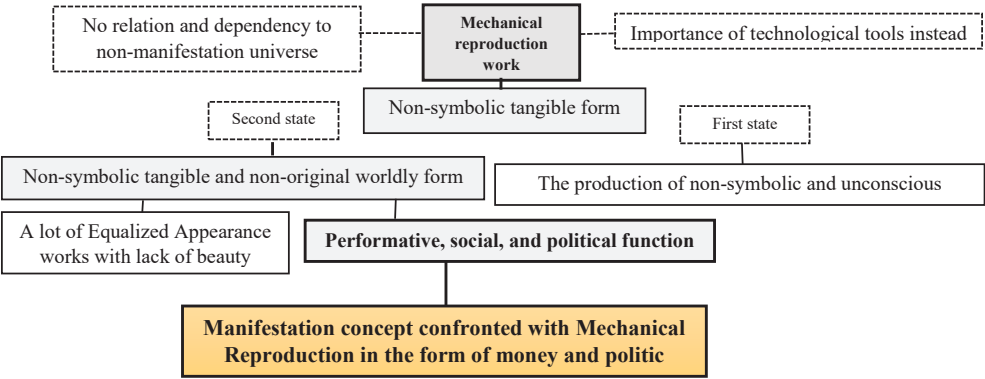


Fig.5. Core category of manifestation concept in traditional arts confronted with mechanical reproduction. Source: Authors.

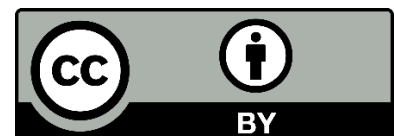
emotional manifestation in humans, which is a combination of wonder and awe of greatness. However, Burke, contrary to this belief of his time, considered sublimity to be the result of multiple emotions. He distinguished between beauty and sublimity and did not consider the latter to be related to love. He admits that things are sublime when they originate from fear, and the most important cause of sublimity is ambiguous cases. It presents unknown dangers, which make the subject ambiguous and sublime. Kant, on the other hand, says that sublimity is being great in a pure and simple way. While beauty is limited and something specific and defined, sublimity is unlimited. Beauty exists objectively, but it cannot demonstrate something sublime. Sublimity is a pure feeling and is great in a pure and simple way; therefore, it is something beyond and superior to any comparison. Thus, according to Kant, sublimity refers not to something external to us, but to a mental state (Ahmadi, 2010, 78 & 90).

## References list

- Ahmadi, B. (2010). *Truth and Beauty Lectures on the Philosophy of Art*. Tehran: Markaz.
- Benjamin, W. (1998). The Work of Art in the Age of Mechanical Reproduction (O. Nik-farjam, Trans.). *Farabi*, 31, 210-225.
- Benjamin, W. (2007). *Illuminations* (H. Zohn, Trans.). New York: Schocken Books.
- Binaye Motlagh, S. (2003a). Frithjof Schuon and internal unity of religions. In holy wisdom of immortal, *Articles collection of the conference of criticism of modernity from the point of view of contemporary traditionalists*, Tehran, Tehran University and Research Institute and development of science human.
- Binaye Motlagh, S. (2003b). Frithjof Schuon and meaning of Beauty. In holy wisdom of Immortal, *Articles collection of the conference of criticism of modernity from the point of view of contemporary traditionalists*, Tehran, Tehran University and Research Institute and Development of Science Human.
- Burckhardt, T. (2015). *Perennial values in Islamic Art, in Art and spirituality* (Articles collection of Art Wisdom, Schuon, Guenon, Coomaraswamy, Nasr and ...) (I. A. Rahmati, Trans.). Tehran: Matn.
- Burckhardt, T. (1999). *Fundamentals of Islamic art* (A. Nasiri, Trans.). Tehra: Haghighat.
- Burckhardt, T. (2007). *Traditional Cosmology and Modern Science* (H. Azarcar, Trans.). Tehran: Hekmat.
- Coomaraswamy, A. K. (2003). *Introduction to Indian art* (A. H. Zekrgoo, Trans.). Tehran: Rozane.
- Coomaraswamy, A. K. (2010). *Christian and Oriental Philosophy of Art* (A. H. Zekrgoo, Trans.). Tehran: Matn.
- Dehkhoda, A. A. (1998). *Dehkhoda Dictionary*, vol. 5 and 14. Tehran: Tehran University.
- Farzan Yar, H. R. (2020). *Titus Burckhardt, Truth and Art, the national conference on thoughts and works of Titus Burckhardt*, Iranian truth and philosophy Research institute, Access date (2022), Accessible in irip.ac.ir.
- Guenon, R. (2020). Fundamental Symbols: The Universal Language of Sacred Science, *Collection of Immortal wisdom* (17) (D. Ghahraman, Trans.). Tehran: Hekmat.
- Khandaghabadi, H. (2001). *Immortal Wisdom, A look at the life and works of contemporary traditionalists*. Tehran: Iran knowledge and research development institute.
- Lipsey, R. (2010). *Traditional Art and Symbolism, Selected Paper by Ananda Kentish Coomaraswamy* (S. Tabatabai, Trans.). Tehran: Matn.
- Mehregan, O. (2005). *Critical aesthetics*. Tehran: Game no.
- Moin, M. (2003). *Moin Encyclopedic Dictionary*, Vol 1. Tehran: Amirkabir.
- Nasr, S. H. (2017). *Knowledge and sacred* (F. Haji Mirzai, Trans.). Tehran: Farzan.
- Stoddart, W. (2007). *Titus Burckhardt and the Tradition School, in Fundamentals of Islamic art* (A. Nasiri, Trans.). Tehran: Haghighat.
- Schuon, F. (2015). Principles and Criteria of art, in Art and spirituality (*Articles collection of Art Wisdom, Schuon, Guenon, Coomaraswamy, Nasr and ...*) (I. A. Rahmati, Trans.). Tehran: Matn.
- Zekrgoo, A. H. (2011). *Traditional foundations of art and life, Reflections on Ananda Coomaraswamy's dance of Shiva*. Tehran: Matn.
- Zamani, M. (2003). Criticism of modern philosophy from Guenon and Schuon's viewpoint. In holy wisdom of immortal, *Articles collection of the conference of criticism of modernity from the point of view of contemporary traditionalists*, Tehran, Tehran University and Research Institute and Development of Science Human.

### COPYRIGHTS

Copyright for this article is retained by the author(s), with publication rights granted to the Bagh-e Nazar Journal. This is an open-access article distributed under the terms and conditions of the Creative Commons Attribution License (<https://creativecommons.org/licenses/by/4.0/>).



### HOW TO CITE THIS ARTICLE

Pourahmad, F. & Hosseini, S. R. (2024). The Concept of Manifestation in Traditional Arts and its confrontation with Mechanical Reproduction. *Bagh-e Nazar*, 20(128), 73-88.

DOI: 10.22034/BAGH.2023.407859.5426

URL: [https://www.bagh-sj.com/article\\_184504.html?lang=en](https://www.bagh-sj.com/article_184504.html?lang=en)

