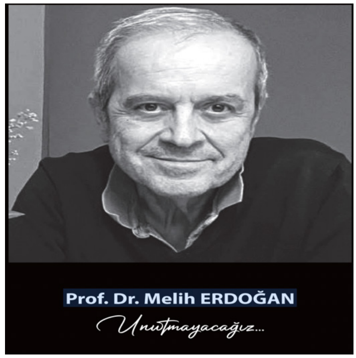

END OF ACCOUNTING

Andy Warhol gained fame in the 1960s as a Pop Art artist who shook the art world with his mastery of mass-producing images of products and celebrities based on marketing and promotion. Warhol represented an American ideal that he aestheticized rather than criticized.

In 1964, Warhol opened an exhibition in New York. The exhibition featured rows and rows of Brillo boxes made by Warhol, identical to the Brillo brand soap boxes sold in the market at the time. This study aimed to eliminate the perceptual differences between art and reality. According to art critic Danto, this meant the end of art.

To better understand the meaning of the exhibition that shook Danto so deeply and made him think that art had ended, we should go quite far back in history. Throughout the ages, art has been produced through "representational" painting, which in Greek is called "mimesis" or imitation. The Renaissance marks the beginning of making art as art and is based on the understanding of mimesis. This understanding was institutionalized for almost five hundred years.

The tradition of modernism, which emerged in the 1880s, was based on dismantling a concept of art—mimetic art or academic art—that had accumulated over nearly five hundred years. By the 1960s, modernism had established its own aesthetic canon. However, although painting ceased to be representation-oriented, it continued to exist for a long time without severing its ties with representational painting. With the inclusion of Warhol's Brillo Box within the context of art, this entire historical narrative was severed.

According to Hegel's famous thesis, when the true philosophical nature of art is discovered, this means the end of its own history; in other words, art is extinguished in philosophy. This means the end of art. In fact, what makes something art is its invisible features. This leads us to ask: What are the features that can distinguish a work of art from a non-work of art when there are no significant "perceptual" differences between them? The problem, therefore, is to explain why these boxes are art. The invisible features in question can be explained through the "aura" of the work of art.

Of course, it is not art itself that is coming to an end. Rather, it is the established narrative of the history of Western art that has ended. All of this suggests that a new era for art has begun, that art has been freed from the oppression of its entire history and tradition, and that we are now living in the era of "Contemporary Art" or "Global Art."

Within this historical development, accounting, from the moment it emerged, has been doing for the economy what art does through visualization: imitating and representing it through symbols and numbers. Accounting transforms economic life into symbols and numbers, establishes relationships among them, and provides information through a form of objectification, just as one gains access to the information or image conveyed by a painting.

The entire strategy of accounting is based on making this representation accurate, complete, and free from fraud. When art fails to produce the expected representation, it is regarded as being outside the boundaries of "taste"; when accounting fails to produce the required representation, it falls outside the boundaries of "approval." Auditing in accounting is also based on the possibility that this representation may be inadequate. Whereas the fundamental and constant perceptual criterion in art is "perspective," in accounting this constant is "mathematics."

Progress and transformations in the history of art cannot be independent of general historical progress. Social and economic transformations always find their reflections in art in one form or another. We cannot characterize these changes and transformations merely as new art movements; rather, they express radical changes in social understanding. If all these historical periods progressed together with artistic transformations, it would be entirely unrealistic to suggest that accounting is independent of this history.

In the new global world in which we live, we must recognize that accounting has reached an end, just like the end of art. If established narratives in art and, for example, in architecture, industry, medicine, and physics are coming to an end with the changing age, accounting will also come to an end.

Accounting has represented life for thousands of years, just like art. Although it has made valuable breakthroughs in recent years, such as Integrated Reporting, these and similar endeavors will be taken over by technology, and improved versions will be developed by artificial intelligence. The narrative of accounting is coming to an end.

The question now is: What has brought accounting to an end at the conclusion of its history, and how can a new beginning be made? A new beginning must be made.

For thousands of years, the structure that we have followed as an accounting technique has been in complete harmony with the economy. Today, however, as a result of technological developments, accounting has ceased to be a structure that progresses in parallel with the economy. It has begun to be embedded within technological structures, has become increasingly invisible, and its language has gradually begun to transform.

Accounting is increasingly integrating its existence with technology or "transferring" itself to technology. Like Warhol's Brillo Box, accounting is becoming the digital reality of the "thing" that it imitates and is becoming ontologically questionable. This means that accounting will lose its language very soon. It has no other option. Just as art has been absorbed by philosophy, accounting will be absorbed by technology.

For a new beginning, we need to identify the aura at the point where the reality of accounting and digital reality meet, and even create the aura of accounting. The aura of accounting is the "public interest."

Conclusion: After the End of Accounting

Like Warhol's Brillo Box, accounting is transforming into the digital reality of the "thing" that it imitates and is becoming ontologically questionable. Perceptual differences are gradually disappearing. It is precisely at this point—where, as Danto argues, the reality of accounting and digital reality become identical—that we need, without wasting time, to identify the aura, or even create the aura of accounting.

The aura of accounting is the "public interest" that it undertakes—or should undertake—to protect. To achieve this, we must begin not by asking how we will live, but by asking how we want to live.

Modern democracies are united by the ideal of enabling their citizens to live in freedom, solidarity, and equality. Democracy also means constantly fighting for these values and for their implementation. Only democracies can cope when major problems, such as climate change and inequality, present humanity with new challenges. Democracies are open to change, and therefore we can continue to develop them in the future.

Accounting should emphasize its public character by demonstrating, through its principles, impartiality, transparency, and accountability, that it is a democratic institution, that it is open to change, and that it is capable of contributing to democracy by supporting this development.

Accounting should establish an institutionally autonomous structure and maintain its distance from the institutional structures of both the state and the private sector. The reinterpretation of accounting's ethical principles, independence, and objectivity is important in the formation of its aura.

We must recognize that accounting needs a change of language and that it must reorganize its language on the basis of a public understanding (Erdoğan, 2023). Accounting should avoid being perceived as a technical infrastructure institution. By intertwining with superstructural institutions such as science, philosophy, and art, it should ensure that it is perceived as a superstructure institution.

As we have attempted to emphasize, progressing through technology rather than science means that accounting will transform into technology and disappear. However, if accounting can further strengthen its superstructural ties and create a new perception, it can make a new and promising beginning. The bond with science is fundamentally a public bond and plays a central role in creating the aura of accounting.

The subject of art is the artist, and the subject of accounting is the accountant—and the auditor. Accountants must now prepare to perform this task on an entirely new plane or face extinction. The aim should be to equip accountants not only with professional knowledge but also with intellectual knowledge and to transform their profile substantially while preserving their credibility, reputation, and prestige in society.

For a new beginning, the situation must be understood, evaluated, and accepted correctly. Most importantly, it is necessary to have an "open mind." The two greatest obstacles at this point are the political authority's perception of accounting as an instrument for regulating the field and the conservatism of the profession and academia.