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## The study of Artist's Role in Traditional Iranian Glass Factories by the Approach of Giddens' Structuration Theory\*

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### Abstract

**Problem statement:** The current traditional Iranian glass making is done in factories around the suburbs of large cities like Tehran. This industry has survived with minimal changes like post-industrial revolution era. Contemporary artist needs to visit traditional glass factories and interact with them to use glass in their works of art.

**Research objectives:** This article studies the artist's role in glass factories based on Giddens' structuration theory to answer the following questions, "What is the role of the contemporary artist in interacting with traditional Iranian glass factories in creating his/her artworks?" and "is this role given to the artist as a result of the interaction with the governing structures or rules, or should these structures and rules be changed?"

**Research method:** This article is a qualitative research and is done in a descriptive-analytical way. Resources are used include Library resources and field studies and authors' observations.

**Conclusion:** Evidently, the interaction between the artist and glass factories is based on dominant rules and conditions of glass art and traditional glass making and out of artist's choice. This study with sociological approach examines relationship between traditional factors in glass making (as structure/ rules) and artist (as actors/resources). The results show that according to the theory of the structuration any change in the rules and resources of human activity will change the overall system. Accordingly, the development of contemporary glass making art requires changes in the relationship between the artist and the glass factories

By changing the whole system, the artist can interact with the structure. In fact, it may be better for the artist in the process of making his/her own artwork to look for a suitable structure rather than interacting with the structure that is governed on the glass factories. The question of the structure of glassmaking studios is a subject of another research.

**Keywords:** *Structuration, Glass Artist, Traditional Glass Factory, Traditional Glass Making.*

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## Introduction

Today, traditional Iranian blowing glassmaking factories are located in the suburbs of Tehran. In this study, the relationships between the structure and the system governing traditional glass factories and human factors are considered as the main actors and applicants for the production of these factories. "The deep and inseparable link between social issues and art has caused art criticism to be incomplete without regard to sociological issues. In other words, it is not possible to deal with the concept of art and its complex aspects without understanding the social items involved in creation of works of art" (Sarsangi, 2013, 7). Thus, because of the importance of a sociological perspective in informing, disclosing false beliefs, expanding ideas, and finally opening new perspectives on the behavior of active actors in systems, this research has sought to analyze and evaluate the interaction between the artist and glass factories. In addition, study of status of traditional arts in contemporary era is essential. It should be mentioned here that description and analysis of Iranian contemporary glass making have been addressed in few studies and this increases the significance of this study. The present study addresses the artist's role in glass factories to approach the dominant frameworks of interaction between artist and glass factories from a sociological perspective. It reveals and criticizes the positive effects and probable damages of the interaction. The main problem of present study is concerned with artist's contribution and his role in traditional glass factories. The main purpose of this study is to evaluate the reasons that contemporary artist interacts with traditional glass factories became a design artist. In this study, artist's association with glass factories is described based on interaction between action and structure of Giddens' structuration theory to criticize the effects of such interaction.

The main question of the present study is to know "what is the glass artist's role in traditional glass factories?" In other words, what contribution has been defined by the structure and rules of today's Iranian glass factories for the contemporary artist? And has the artist adapted to the conditions and accepted the role in interacting with this structure? In this study, the assumption is that the conditions governing contemporary glass art force the artist to accept the role of the design artist and works with the glass factories in order to create his/her artwork.

## Literature Review

In regard to previous studies and the sources of the present study, it can be mentioned that Giddens and other authors have published comprehensive theoretical information over his structuration theory.

The book, entitled "New rules of sociological method" (1976) was among the first sources in which Giddens described his theory of structuration. Giddens' "The constitution of society" (1984) is the latest work in which he details the elements of his theory of structuration. Parker in "Structuration" (2000) reviews contemporary theorists' approaches in the field of structuration. In a part of his book, Parker discusses Giddens' approach to structuration and criticizes his theory of structuration. The large number of translation works about Giddens' theories, especially theory of structuration, helped authors discuss the theoretical aspects of this study. However, there are very few studies in Iran concerning documentation of structure and sources of Iranian contemporary glass industry that most of them are belonged to graduate and post-graduate dissertations. Since this study is concerned with current condition of traditional glass manufacturing, the required information was collected based on authors' experiences of glass art, in-depth and direct observations in

addition to the interviews with those working in traditional glass factories.

### Theoretical Framework

Theory of structuration is one of the major sociological theories of the second half of the 20<sup>th</sup> century. In fact, structuration theory turned Giddens into one of the major contemporary sociologies. Giddens suggested that the key to understanding the changes of social changes is dealing with association between human action and social structure. In other words, any study in the field of social sciences address the association between subjectivity and structure in some way or another. The classic sociological theories usually support one of these two notions and take the other notion as determining factor. Based on Giddens' argument, "sociology is primarily concerned with study of social institutions which are products of industrial changes within the past two or three centuries" (Jalaeipur & Mohammadi, 2015, 371). As a result, he raised his theory of structuration.

In order to organize his theory, Giddens suggested new definitions of main elements of social theory. So that these elements help to understand and apply this theory. It is also useful for analyzing the contemporary artist's interaction with traditional glass factories. In this section, therefore, the main elements of Giddens' theory of structuration are discussed.

#### • Structuration

Giddens does not presume that people are completely free in their choice of actions. Although he starts significant theoretical propositions with discussions of action, he does not ignore structure. "In fact, association between action and structure is the primary part of Giddens' theory of structuration. His argument is summarized in the term of 'duality of structure' as it implies that although people make up the society, the society limits them"

(*ibid.*). In other words, despite of the fact that action and structure are usually taken to be opposite concepts they are actually two sides of the same coin and none of them can be analyzed without the other. In other words, subjectivity obtains a significant form through "generative schemes" of structure. On the other hand, structures are maintained and changed by action.

#### • Structure or System

In structuralism, structure plays an interpretive role since it is related to the notion of transformation. Maybe, it is better to study the association between structure and system. Although both of these terms are used in works on structuralism and pragmatism, distinction between them is not a sustainable distinction as they are consistently intertwined. Ferdinand de Saussure used "system" instead of "structure" to refer to the set of interdependencies between lingual elements. Introducing the term of "structure" by Hjelmsle and Prague group made it not a complementary notion for "system" but substituted it (Giddens, 2016, 161). In fact, structuralism suggests that one of these two terms is redundant since their applications are often overlapping. System is often used as characteristic of "structure". From pragmatists' viewpoint, structure could be used to point to patterns of social relationships while system refers to real application of such relationships (*ibid.*, 161). Giddens distinguishes between structure and system. "By using the term system, he refers to constant patterns observable in mutual actions. This implies that systems exist in 'time-space' and we can see them in specific times and places. However, he regards 'structure' to be rules and sources which act as collective interpretive schemes in a specific social system" (Jalaeipur & mohammadi, 2015, 373). In Giddens' opinion, the term "social constitution includes two elements which are obviously distinguishable from each other: modeling of

interaction which deals with association between agents and continuation of interaction in time (Giddens, 2005, 70). As a result, social systems are structural based. Structures do not exist in time-space, expect for the moment of building social structures. In all of above interpretations, completely layered practices which make up social systems are the mentioned institutes.

#### • Rules and Sources

Social systems include regular bonds of mutual dependency between people or groups. In fact, they can be properly analyzed in terms of repetitive social practices. Social systems which are considered as the systems of social interaction. These systems include contextualized activities of human subjects and they accompany each other in the course of time. In this glossary, systems have structural properties but they are not the same as structures. The structures are essentially elements of systems or communities and they are described through 'absence of subject'. The study of structured social system signifies the methods by which system is produced and reproduced through application of rules and sources in a text of unwanted messages during interaction (Giddens, 2005, 74). "For Giddens, the social structure is made up of rules or systems of rules that create recognizable patterns of interaction. These patterns exist as long as there is 'vital necessity' or are used by individuals in interactions. However, these patterns cannot be reduced to interactions" (Lopez & Scott, 2018, 151).

According to Giddens, structure is a sum of "rules and resources, organized as properties of social systems" that exists only as structural properties" (Giddens, 2005, 74). This is because the meaningfulness of rules and sources is conditional to the actors' use of his/ her actions. The rules and resources are not considered as dual concept of constituting and regulating rules, but they have the two characteristics both together and they contribute to or intermediate

in their production and reproduction (Giddens, 2004, 169).

"In order to understand the dual nature of human subjectivity and structures, it is better not to consider either of institutes or actors as principles. This is why the notion of duality of structures emphasizes both of them equally and truly" (Wolf, 1993, 152).

#### Methodology

This study was conducted through descriptive-analytical method and based on the collection of library resources to describe and analyze the data acquired by deep and direct field observations. Based on the nature of subject in this study and the experiences of authors with traditional glass manufacturing industry, the information collected and presented in the section of "research findings" is based on observations and interviews.

#### The study of current condition of Structure and actors in traditional glass manufacturing

To study the interaction between artist and traditional glass factories, the current condition of contemporary glass industry will be discussed in terms of subjectivity (rules) and actors (resources) so as to determine the role of each component in this interaction. To do so, artist is initially regarded as a resource and traditional glass factors are approached as rules and social structures of Iranian contemporary glass art. In regard to interaction between these two notions which form on the basis of structural norms and taboos, the reasons and ways of interaction will be studied further.

#### Traditional Glass Factories

Today, traditional glass factories are located in the suburb of Tehran. The factories work as small production plants and try to satisfy daily practical and decorative demands for glass production.

In this part of study, the components of today's glass factories were described and documented by in-depth observation of three factories of Alwan, Malekinejad and Ali Baba Bakhtiari and interviews with their managing directors as well as observations of 15 other factories (Table 1). The dominant rules and structures of glass factories were studied by taking human factors within a group of current structures and rules of glass factories. The elements and factors of glass factories were categorized into three groups of plant-related factors, constant human factors and temporary human factors that each part will be discussed in detail (Table 1&2).

As shown in above tables 1 & 2 currently traditional glass factories have maintained their conventional job division structure, and common glass making terms. The dominant rules and structure of glass factories include constant and temporary human resources beside the structure and equipment of the factory shown in Table 2.

### Artist's Role in Traditional Glass Factories

On the other part of this traditional structure, the products made in glass factories have a demanding community which includes actors or human factors. In fact, they are the main employers of the glass factories that identifying market demands at different levels, making glass in factories, and offering the made products to the target market (Karimi, 2016). The community plays a key role in manufacturing of glass products and it requires further study and classification. Table 3 shows the human factors demanding products of glass factory who are classified as actors or agents.

#### • Glass Artist as Design Artist

The above research findings describe and review the dominant structure of interaction between traditional glass factories and the human community demanding the products made in

these factories. In this section, artist's role and interaction with dominant structure of traditional glass production will be addressed.

The role that an artist plays in glass factories as design artist is not similarly found in other traditional arts which exist at the moment. The design artist decides to obtain necessary skills and make his/her own work of art in space of a workshop. Now, the question is that what happens in structure of the traditional Iranian glass making that an artist become a design artist and assigns the task of creating his work to the glass factory. The terms and traditional crafts in the glass industry continue to shape the dominant structure as the actor has adapted to interact with it.

In this section, a short review of history of traditional craftsmen and artists after the industrial revolution in the world can provide a suitable answer.

#### • Design Artist and First Encounter of Artist to Industrial Revolution

The arts and crafts movement is probably the first attempt of art community to find a share for itself after industrial revolution since its practical demands were satisfied by industrial factories and when Handicrafts industry saw some signs of decline. "The mental elements of the social and aesthetic movement of the second half of the nineteenth century in England were included: The idea of educating handicrafts to people; a wave of dissatisfaction with the quality of industrial goods that arose after the Great British Exhibition of 1851; The increasing appeal to folk art and the praise of medieval products and traditions" (Pakbaz, 2006, 187). The movement's leaders sought to find the artist's share in the world of industrial revolution and revive handicrafts industry in the new era. More than anything, changes of industrial evolution influenced the fields of handicrafts industry (especially, glass industry).



Table 1. Tools and Devices used in Traditional Glass Factories. Source: authors.

Title		Characteristics	Descriptions
Structure and equipment of traditional glass factory	Furnace	Melting tank Furnaces	A furnace for melting raw materials (in some cases, broken glass) up to 1250 °C  The body of furnace should be resistant against mechanical, chemical and thermal stress  Furnace should be consistently operating at 1250 °C. Traditional refractory bricks were used in the body of furnace
		Gloryhole furnace	A small furnace in middle of factory which is a small empty container with temperature of 1250 °C. The heat of this furnace is used for heating of products, re-melting and adding decorations  The furnace is turned on at the time of making glass products and it is turned off after job is done  It is used in glassblowing factories
		Traditional annealing furnace	A chamber made of typical bricks which operates at 500°C. After glass production steps are completed, the final product is placed in the oven to cool down gradually and de-stress
Glassblowing Tools		Blow pipe	A hallow pipe made through Mannesmann process (seamless metal) with total length ranging from 100 to 150cm. In some factories, the pipes are made of refractory steel which is characterized by better quality and higher price
		Shears	A tool for cutting and separating glass from blowing pipe. The same wool cutting scissors are used
		Jacks	A tool for forming the opening and body of product which has three types of wire tongs, knife tongs and feather tongs
		Marvering table	A rectangular plate made of cast iron which is used for forming glass during manufacturing steps
		Footing tool	A plate made of two wooden pieces which are connected together by hinges. It is used for forming bottom of the plate
		Paddle	A rectangular plate made of wood which is used for forming opening and bottom of the product
		Tweezers	One of the efficient tools made of iron and steel which is used for different applications such as pulling glass, holding glass and making a hole in it
		Molds	The molds are of two types. Typical molds are used for making symmetrical functional dishes. Decorative molds are used for making intertwined lines and waves on body of glass  Basically, manufacturing molds are made of cast iron while decorative molds are made of iron plate
		Gaffer bench	Worktable is a bench used for making glass. The glassmaker sits and performs the production steps on the table
		Number of active worktables in a workshop represents the number of devices and tools used and products being manufactured	

Table. 2- Human Resources in Traditional Glass Factories. Source: authors.

Title	Characteristics	Descriptions	
(Owner(s	Owners have capital and they are at the head of a factory's human resources structure. They have a general knowledge of glass production process. They used to work in the factory at first but now they only run it		
Supervisor	Production manager or internal control manager should address problems of production, tools and equipment and divide tasks between workers  The person is in charge of products made by each system based on customers' orders and he/she monitors their quality		
Producer agents	gaffer	A person with high experience and skill which manages the machine and uses available staff to make the glass product  Basically, gaffer is the most experienced and professional person in the factory which has closely been in contact with glass production process for years. He/she has sufficient skills for making any glass product	The number of gaffers or machines in a factory represents the number of varied glass products  Here, machine refers to number of human resources which make a glass product without intervening in its form and color based on demands of customer society  Four workers are the ideal for work-high-production machine with each chine that can be reduced to one person according to the master's decision. In this case, all of these tasks are left to the second person
	Oven Worker	Due to conventional structure of furnaces and lack of thermal screen, the person who is in charge of turning on the oven, controlling the temperature of it and arranging the products placed in it is called oven worker	
	orb Maker	A person who makes the first ball which is used for manufacturing intended products	
	Load Picker	A person who takes a ball of melted glass from the first glass furnace based on volume of intended product	
	Assistant	A person helping gaffer in process of making product, flattening the bottom and other tasks	
	glass Cutter	A person who takes the final product to oven for de-stressing	
	Annealing keeper	Because of traditional structure of furnaces and their lack of thermal screen, a person should be in charge of turning the furnace on, temperature control, and arrangement of product in the oven	
Material Porter	A person Who is in charge of dropping raw materials in the furnace based on their color, etc		
Night-shift Worker	A person who is in charge of monitoring the temperature of furnace when gaffer is not present. The person is in charge of pouring materials in colored furnaces and cooking them as well	Since melting furnace should be continuously on at proper temperature, a night-shift worker should be there to control thermal variations and accidents	

Constant Structure of Human in Traditional Glass Factory

Rest of table 2.

	Title	Characteristics	Descriptions
Temporary structure of Human in Traditional Glass Factory	Furnace Maker	At first, making furnaces of glass factories was done by factory owners. Now, two or three furnace makers are in charge of fabricating furnaces of a glass factory	
	Color Maker	The worker is in charge of supplying and formulation of raw materials of colored melting furnaces of the factory  Under current condition of Iranian glass production industry, color making is solely done by two or three people who are in charge of color formulation for all glass factories located in Tehran	This group of workers were employed monthly, seasonally or weakly. They are among temporary human resources of glass factories. They play a significant role in glass production steps
	Tool Maker	Manufacturing of glass-making tools is usually done by welders with previous experience of cooperation with these factories. In some cases, these tools are made by gaffer themselves	
	Brick Maker	The refractory bricks used for making furnace of glass factories are made in a conventional factory owns by a craftsman with ancestral skills. Since these bricks are solely used in glass factories, owners of glass factories are in charge of brick production factories too	

In this period, different factors such as high cost of establishing and running traditional workshops and mass production in industrial factories led the production of glass product to move away from traditional workshops and into mass-producing factories. “The tradition of presence of design artists in European factories became a common event in the third and fourth decades of twentieth century and the top art works of these two decades were represented in an international exhibition in Czechoslovakia” (Karimi, 2016, 16). “In 1950s, contribution of design artist was firmly established and glass factories used creativity and technical skills as well as influence of contemporary art to make products. After World War II, while designers attempted to re-interpret the organic forms and automatism in the surrealist paintings and abstract expressionism, glass artists reflected the usual tendencies in painting and sculpture. The novel and non-traditional approaches to

material led to new manufacturing experiences such as glass blowing and making irregular and novel glass works through manual and molding processes (Frantz, 1987, 12). With all of these efforts, artistic glass works turned into an almost exclusive industry in northern Europe as new methods of cold cutting, engraving, sandblasting and painting were used. The activities of design artists in industrial glass factories, who were regarded as pioneers of studio movement, led to development of artistic glass-oriented movements in 20<sup>th</sup> century which will be detailed in the following. First, glass as an artistic medium which goes beyond practical use and decoration drew public attention. The new approach led to development of glass studio. The innovation of pioneer artists of the field such as Rene Lalique and Louis Comfort Tiffany in 1917 led to introduction of glass as a novel art and industry to artists and industrial craftsmen. As a result, second approach developed which was premised



Table. 3-The Community Demanding Glass Products. Source: authors.

Title	Characteristics	Description
Actors or Factory Owners Agents (Human Resources Demanding Glass) Products	A group of products made in the factory is intended to continue production in all hours of the day and to supply constant financial resources to the market. Most of these products are made by molding such as hookah and other commercial items which are continuously sold	The group does not play a role in design of products and it solely reproduces the products already available in the market
Sale Intermediates	A group of beneficiaries and sometimes retired glass producers who are involved in process of distribution and sale of factory products according to customer's demands	The group does not play a role in product design
Design Artist 1st Group	A group of artists interested in glass, who are aware of the limitations and potentials. They design a glass product and order it to the factory	This group designs the glass product based on target market and turns the designs into actual products by using glass factories
2nd Group	A group of visual artists who use glass as a new medium for design and making their works. The group has no choice but to visit glass factories to make their own products	

on close cooperation between designer and craftsman. The third approach was detailed by a group of artists and university professors who made glass works unlike their own designers and produced them in limited quantities” (Karimi, 2016, 23). In fact, above-mentioned approaches were the result of presence of design artist in setting of glass factories. They formed the basis of contemporary glass art movement.

**• Design Artist and Glass Factories: Mutual Interaction for Survival of Structure and Actor**

The current traditional Iranian glass making is approached as a social phenomenon which shows interaction between structure and relevant actors (Fig. 1). Giddens insists that society is produced

and reproduced through human action. He does not consider any form of structural explanation and the existence of society superior and beyond individuals. Any explanation that would give new features to a society, a social system, and a situation that human role is dominant in it, is subject to this Giddens sentence”(Craib, 2010). In his theory of structuration, Giddens regarded explanation of association between structure and actor as one of the most significant tasks of social theory. He endeavored to show action and structure as complementary. He argues that “the ambiguity of structure implies that social structure is constructed both by human agency and, at the same time, the practical factor of construction” (Giddens, 2016, 183). As a

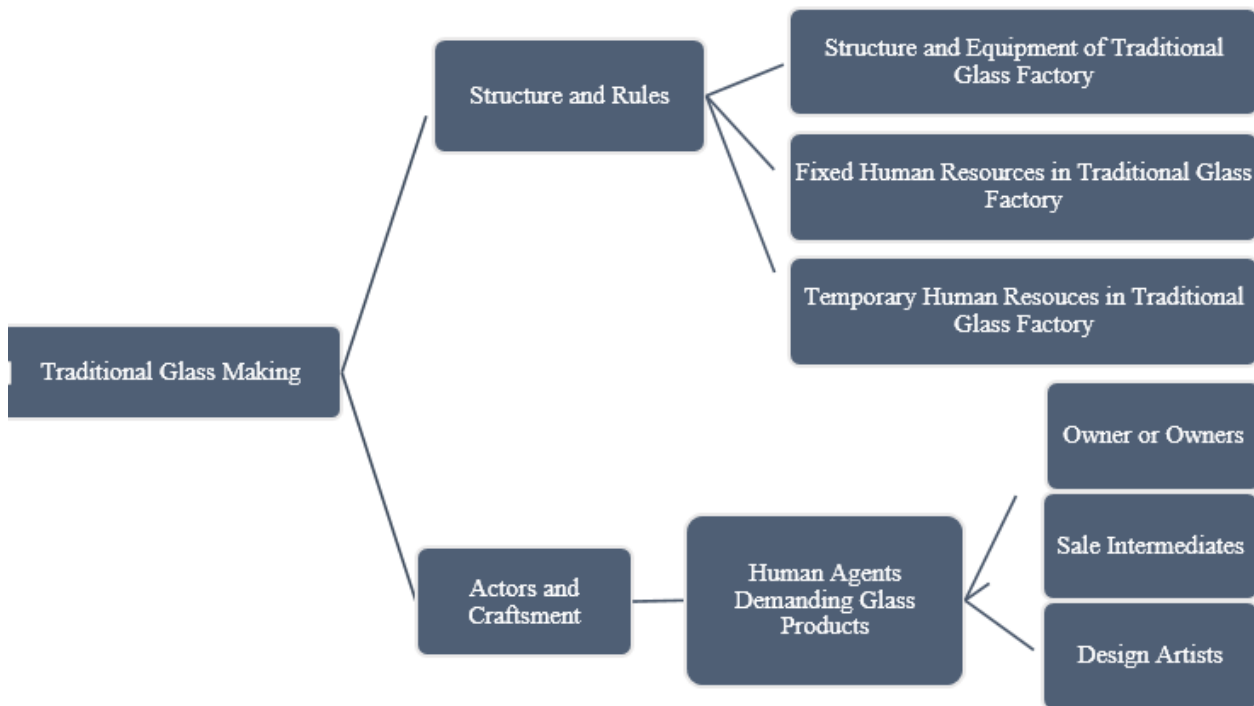


Fig. 1. Structure and actors in Traditional Iranian Glass Making Industry. Source: authors.

result, there is a community of traditional glass making in contemporary Iran which includes structure and actors. They make a whole and they offer new ideas by interaction with each other. Based on theory of structuration, traditional glass factories require a demand community made up of contemporary artists to secure their survival. As a result, artist takes the role of design artist so as to interact with the structure. Based on Giddens' definition of actor's intended action (which includes deliberate and sometimes undeliberate actions which result from cumulative unconsciousness), it is suggested that actor often goes through the process unconsciously and takes the limitations and potentials without knowing about them. According to this concept, the limitations of establishing and running glass factors such as high costs of manufacturing and maintaining furnaces (especially glass melting furnaces) and acquiring constant and temporary human

resources structures provide the artist with the opportunity to create his/her own work of art. The artist's interaction with the structure over time will enable him to take the role of design artist and claim his/her contribution to this social phenomenon.

The notion of "design artist" in traditional glass factories was raised due to the artist's lack of access to methods and skills of making his/her work of art and unavailability of workshop equipment and facilities. In the case of artist's lack of access to methods and skills of artwork creation while they have access to artistic workshop facilities, educational structures and their human resources behind them should pay attention to the subject.

### Conclusion

According to Giddens, the most important key to understanding the changes in the social sciences is dealing with human action and social structure.

In other words, any study in the field of social sciences attempts to discuss the association between subjectivity and structure. He regards explanation and clarification of this association as the most significant task of social theory which uses the structuration term to name his theory. This study used Giddens' theory of structuration to describe and analyze the association between artist and traditional glass factories under current condition of Iran. The significant point that Giddens raises on this subject is that an actor does not necessarily use his deliberate knowledge of structure in his practice and in most of the cases, he/she unconsciously goes through the process and take the limitations and potentials into account without the person being aware of that.

Giddens tries to distinguish between subjectivity and intent. He suggested that a major part of actor's skill is non-argumentative. In other words, objective social experience is mostly unconscious rather than conscious.

Iranian artist cannot create artistic works in current glass factories. Therefore, to embed in the structure, he should gradually take the role of a design artist in glass factories since glass-making process is done by gaffer. In contrast, lack of powerful rules and resources to match contemporary glass industry of the world- which Giddens regards as essential condition for survival of traditional structures in times and places- has caused traditional Iranian glass industry to survive through traditional methods. As a result, it could not adapt to changes of global glass art so as to enter the field of visual arts. Engagement of design artists is the only interaction of traditional glass factories with phenomenon of art. It seems that future changes should be made by actors (i.e. artists) as they need to modify certain structures such as academic and artistic space of workshops to be able to use glass as an accessible medium. In other words, deficient rules and resources accessible for contemporary Iranian glass artists

contribute to their difficult access to resources required for establishing a logical association between past and present actions.

Thus, one may suggest that for contemporary artist to be able to use glass to make his artistic work in workshop setting, he should endeavor to interact with a different structure and pattern than current structure of glass factors. Interaction with these factories can bring about constructive messages to be noted in the structure. Further studies in this area could be embarked on in future studies of researchers.

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