THE DEATH OF EXPERTISE AS INDICATED THROUGH DONALD BARTHELME'S *THE BALLOON*

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Abstract
Literary criticisms state stable theories, while meanings nowadays push people to interpret opinions, assumptions, and common discourses as this is the age of The Death of Expertise as supported by Tom Nichols. The Balloon is Donald Barthelme's short story that tells a balloon that suddenly appears in New York. Experts and governments are trying to get rid of it but none could do anything. People try to understand that by own understandings since it is open for meanings. This paper aims to analyze death of expertise on the story of The Balloon. Through qualitative method on cultural studies, this paper results to conditions of the balloon, incapability of experts, and responses of common people towards that. Barthelme asserts how everyone has own meanings to understand based on own experience. Theories matter, but more of them are needed to understand aspects of an event. In conclusion, Barthelme tends to show how an event could bring in flexible meanings through experience alongside with rigid definitions through analytical theories. Nichols underlines that experts approach through exact theories, but flexibility could only be found through experience.

Keywords: *Cultural Studies, Donald Barthelme, The Balloon, The Death of Expertise*

INTRODUCTION

Literature not only contains imagination but also states everyday language between tight definitions and loose meanings(Barker, 2012, p. 106). While definitions work to limitprecise attributes to explain something, meanings indicate wider surrounding labels. That tension is reflected in Donald Barthelme's short story *The Balloon* that tells sudden appearance of inflating object in New York (Barthelme, 1985, p. 92). It covers several blocks of the city and colors the area for days. No one really quite understands the exactcondition of the balloon. The experts and bureaucratic people,with their legitimate power to define such thing, could not totally cope with or even eradicate the status of the balloon. Interestingly, common people acknowledge the object through their own subjective experience. Opinions and assumptions are flourished as scientific

knowledge could not understand the wholeness of the balloon(Barthelme, 1985, pp. 91–92). Meanwhile, Tom Nichols released his book entitled *The Death of Expertise* showinghow experts are told to be have over-confidence(Nichols, 2017b, p. 5; Suter, 2017, p. 960). They can no longer be corrected as they live too distant from common people and reality. This situation results to people become ignorant of the scientific findings from research of the experts(Lalwani & Winter-Levy, 2017; Nichols, 2017b, pp. 6–7).

This paper's analysis emphasizes how the death of expertise is indicated on Donald Barthelme's *The Balloon.* Comparing those two sources are crucial as an analysis to English short story. Barthelme's story was released in 1968 but the condition still relates to situation nowadays. Relating both Barthelme's story and Nichols' book present more understandings about past literature analyzed through recent concepts of knowledge. People used to find answers by not depending solely on experts. The rising age of information as supported by Nichols' book accentuates this matter forward. While the death of expertise points ignorance of people, Barthelme indicates more open situation that correlates fluctuating definitions. This is an era of postmodern where knowledge is abundant and its distinctions are relevant to its condition of being rigid and flexible. The aim of this research also founds epistemological matters today. On a hand, abundant information pushes people to understand more knowledge. On the other hand, the expertise is eroded gradually as answers are provided online instantly. Inclining quantities in reality do not increase in line with its better qualities.

There are three previous studies related to study of Barthelme's short story and Nichols' book. The first one is written by S. Z. Abbas in 2019 entitled *Postmodernism, Postmodernist Fiction, Apocalypse, and Fantasy*(Abbas, 2019). This study refers Barthelme's story as matter of fantasy and supernatural. It relates to fantasy since no one really knows the form and the definition of the balloon. It also regards being supernatural as it is not such magic but beyond any normalcy at that time. The second study is asserted by N. J. Michel in a thesis named *Designing Fictional Spaces: Questionable Architecture that Supports Sustainable Design*in 2020 (Michel, 2020). This research is related to engineering studies in

which the author realizes fantasy of Barthelme's story into 3-D models. The author would like to show that such fiction could be so multi-disciplinary that involves literature and even architectural engineering. By creating such model, the author would like to enrich matter of space in which any fiction could always be rational and makes sense. The third research is done by H.Hopf, A.Krief, G. Mehta, and S. A. Matlin in 2019 entitled *Fake Science and the Knowledge Crisis: Ignorance can be Fatal*(Hopf et al., 2019). The authors underline expertise has been degraded in post-truth era today. People find information online yet it delivers more fake science out of any ethics and integrity. Ignorance of the truth is coming together with declining truth towards expertise as also shown by Nichols' book. Abundant news have become so evidence informed that refuse any further validation from any comparable source.

Those three studies above analyze the Barthelme's story and Nichols' book, but do not use both aspects as the object and the tool of analysis at once. This research then finds its novelty through the analysis of classic short stories from perspective of new perspective. The story is classic but its theme is never old, out of date, or even obsolete. It is proved by the story's point of view is in line with Nichols' book. The inability of experts to define things results to subjective approach of people regarding ownexperience. The problem stays the same from time to time; definitions are never enough to capture infinite meanings.

Moreover, the novelty of this article is also seen through its main emphasis on conditions of the balloon, incapability of the experts to this, and responses of common people towards that. While literary criticism is used by literary experts to analyze, Barthelme asserts how everyone has own meanings to understand based on own experience. Theories matter, but more of them are needed to understand aspects of an event(Barker, 2012, p. 107). Barthelme tends to show how an event could bring in flexible meanings through experience rather than rigid definitions through analytical theories. Experts may approach through exact theories, but flexibility could only be found through experience(Highmore, 2016, p. 16; Lalwani & Winter-Levy, 2017). This paper would like also to suggest an alternative of perspective besides those two concepts stated by Nichols. While

Nichols says that *The Death of Expertise* may easily result to ignorance of the people, the everyday concepts of cultural studies speak otherwise. The open interpretations as seen in opinion and assumptions of people are nature of everyday life(Highmore, 2016, p. 19). It is flexibility of understanding that actually is lived by people through ideas of inventiveness.

RESEARCH METHOD

By using qualitative approach, certain concepts and written data are analyzed to answer the question in this paper. Written through descriptions, online and offline scripts are used to explain correlations between Donald Barthelme's *The Balloon* released on 1968 and Tom Nichols' *The Death of Expertise*published on 2017 alongside with literary concepts and cultural studies idea. Online and offline scripts are derived from books and journals to understand shown matters.

The data analysis includes attaining sources, reading sources carefully, comparing with other issues, quoting into paper, and writing down in references lists. The research data comes from both Barthelme's short story and Nichols' book. Each of them are read then broken down into its every particular element. The plots and settings of the short story are mainly involved to point significance condition of the balloon. The premises and logics used in *The Death of Expertise*are also drawn to underline causes of impacts of the declining matter of roles experts. The following analysis then include how knowledge is positioned in the short story regarding the expertise matter. Here, the short story is the object while the Nichols' book is a tool to analyze. More elaborations that relate to the opposite analysis are also provided in addition furthermore.

RESEARCH FINDINGS AND DISCUSSION

The Production and Consumption of Meanings in *The Balloon*

The plot of Barthelme's story of *The Balloon* relates to matter of the inflating object itself and how people respond to it. It is suddenly there, so metafictional that plays offers more nature to symbolic points(Fabre, 2015, p. 2). No one knows where it comes from or how it could blend and contrast with its surrounding. It is known that "*there were no situations, simply the balloon hanging there-muted heavy grays and browns for the most part, contrasting with*

walnut and soft yellows."(Barthelme, 1985, p. 91).It is considered as outstanding as people never sees such object in the city. The writer even states that its beauty is so real, not universal, but particular. It colors the history of the city as well. It does not make people to be so hysteric, yet people are so calm in responding to the balloon. The writer states "*Some people found the balloon "interesting." ... the suddenness of its appearance over the city; on the other hand, in the absence of hysteria or other societally-induced anxiety, it must be judged a calm, "mature" one*."(Barthelme, 1985, p. 91).

Moreover, the officials do not really know how or why it appears in the city. Its normalcy is out of any topic. Bureaucratic definitions could not catch meanings of this balloon. Its inflatedness escapes any understanding; "*becausethe surface was so vast that the authoritiescould not determine the point ofentry-that is, the point at which the gaswas injected-a degree of frustration wasevidenced by those city officers intowhose province such manifestations normally fell."*(Barthelme, 1985, p. 92). The quotation shows how officials could not find its source as well. It is the same with the expert that could not find any idea behind this balloon. Scientific ideas could not search for the reality behind this situation as the engineer has seen it(Barthelme, 1985, p. 91). It is still fluctuating as the inflating balloon keeps existing on.

Interestingly, people start to relate the balloon to their own experience. They try to understand the condition based on their own situations. Indeed, imagination is so thick in their understandings since they could only approach it through their own matters. The imagination then flourishes into fantasies; "*Others engaged in remarkably detailed fantasies having to do with a wish either to lose themselves in the balloon, or to engorge it*."(Barthelme, 1985, p. 92).People do not really care how it starts or finishes as they focus only on the meantime in seeing the object. Then, since opinions of the people are not unified, there are dissenting ideas between them; "*It was also argued that what was important was what you felt when you stood under the balloon: some people claimed that they felt sheltered, warmed, as n ever before, while enemies of the balloon felt, or reported feeling, constrained, a "heavy" feeling.*"(Barthelme, 1985, p. 92).Their arguments collide

one to another as they begin to accept the condition of the balloon. Its meaning is unknown, even according to officials, so people should fill it with their own opinions. Some people call it as abnormal and monstrous pouring, while other says it as warm but being stated as such lazy joy and catastrophe(Barthelme, 1985, pp. 92–93).

The balloon is told by Barthelme as a potential of everything; "*It was suggested that what was admired about the balloon was finally this: that it was not limited, or defined."*(Barthelme, 1985, p. 93).It is always open for understanding. It is not only the death but also the life. It relates to everything; lost by definitions but filled by meanings. As the balloon dissolves in twenty-two days, its existence results to the awe of everyone; "*The balloon, for the twenty-two days of its existence, offered the possibility, in its randomness, of mislocation of the self, in contradistinction to the grid of precise, rectangular pathways under our feet.*"(Barthelme, 1985, p. 93).The writer also states his own position in seeing how it relates to own experience. It is not a noun or even adjective, nor is it more than a verb. It is matter of spontaneous response as an original one; "*The balloon, I said, is a spontaneousautobiographical disclosure, having to dowith the unease I felt at your absence,and with sexual deprivation, but nowthat your visit to Bergen has been terminated, it is no longer necessary or appropriate.*"(Barthelme, 1985, p. 93).

The balloon can be seen as both literally and figuratively removed from life; it is a balloon both as metaphor and as concrete (or imagined) reality. Everyone is left with the same internal contradiction about the meaningful, or even meaningless, nature of experience itself(Hasan, 2017, p. 18; Pennycook & Rand, 2021, p. 388).It speaks especially for society's blind need for truth. The author probes the problems, if not the impossibility, of discovering meaning both in the external world and in one's own consciousness. Words, he seems to conclude, are our only connection with the inner and outer worlds, but they are seductive in making us believe we can traverse the gap between question and knowledge(Pennycook & Rand, 2021, p. 389).

The short story shows two sides of coin; production and consumption of meanings. Both of them could not be separated to each other but could be understood part by part(Barker, 2012, p. 107). The main focus is the balloon as the topic. Its unknown condition is consumed by people as pre-existing aspect. It is already there and it exists. It is usual for people to name everything as human being used to familiarize everything related to him or herself. The naming process is not static, but dynamic regarding to attributes of the object. Human being could never let go anything without definition, so that any unknown condition must always be known. Then, the production of meaning comes to surface. Since the balloon is situated in the city, it becomes public matter. So, officials and experts should fine the best name as meaning for it. It is used to collect data and properties to shape such actual definition of the balloon. Unfortunately, the officials and experts fail to catch the idea. They are left only with the balloon as its name, but nothing else. They may still focus on producing the definition, but the limit of definitions stop their minds to work.

Meanwhile, the production of meaning is quite clear as common people consume the indication of the balloon as well. The process is shown in the cycle of producing and consuming as it may overlap and being done at the same time(Barker, 2012, p. 108). In this case, people's mind are not bound to definition, yet they play in matter of imaginations and even fantasies. They could freely explore their ideas(Abbas, 2019, p. 4). Indeed, they could only speak by their own experience, but it is still wider since more people saying then more aspects are covered too. People do not understand wholeness, but they speak in particular ideas(Barker, 2012, pp. 107–108; Hasan, 2017, p. 11). This specific opinion then emphasizes everyday understanding as an approach to the balloon. Their opinions may not be specific and perfect, but its richness to express many sides of the balloon could not be undermined either. Here, people's idea towards the balloon is the opposite of officials and experts' findings. While official ones are systematically stiff yet could not define the reality, common ones are fluidly flexible yet able to enrich condition of the inflating object. The officials and experts would like to name the balloon to eradicate it as it has disturbed public

situation. However, common people still let the balloon there while appraising it through examining own experience through particular imaginations.

The Fluctuating Definitions as Stated in *The Death of Expertise*

The Death of Expertise regards the relationship between experts and society. The concept itself discusses about established knowledge and the adverse effects of receiving information in how ordinary people think and get advice from experts(Nichols, 2017b, p. 21). They feel satisfied enough with the information obtained from the media to make decisions without wanting to prove the truth and learn to find out. This is the age of distrust as knowledge is getting more commoditized today(Richardson & Tait, 2010, pp. 88–90; Smith & Nichols, 2017). Such actions seem to throw away knowledge, to undermine practice, and to avoid developing new knowledge. Those are done not only to established knowledge, but also to science and impartial rationality which is the basis of modern civilization(Fitri, 2019, pp. 234–235).

The experts are those who provide explanations;who know something better and can provide enlightenment on what solutions are being sought(Wang, 2020, pp. 145–147). To become an expert, one must go through stages of education that can be compared with certain expertise. The long history of expert conflict is faced with factors that weaken expertise even to the point of death of expertise(Fitri, 2019, p. 231; Lalwani & Winter-Levy, 2017). Among the reasons, there are some ordinary people who do not acknowledge the existence of experts, reject the ideas of experts, feel they know better, and even rejectproper suggestions. Along with the various human achievements in the field of professional knowledge, the contradictions grow sharper.

The problem lies not in indifference to established knowledge, but in hostility to knowledge. There is such denial to abilities of the experts(Anderson, 2017; Richardson & Tait, 2010, p. 89). Between surviving or not surviving at all and the actual death of expertise, those can reverse the long-standing knowledge gathering among people who now assume they know more than they actually know. Ordinary people often do not have the ability to recognize mistakes, by taking a distance, seeing what they are doing, then realizing that they did it

wrong(Nichols, 2017b, p. 61; Wang, 2020, p. 171). Finally, those who are not experts do not realize the shortcomings and mistakes they have made. This is what often causes debate or rejection of experts to never stop.

All of this is inseparable from the problem of the effect of confirmation bias, which tends to only accept evidence that supports what is already believed, accepts facts that only strengthen the explanation and rejects data that contradicts something that has been accepted as true. This confirmation bias can mislead even the most experienced experts(Hasan, 2017, p. 10; Nichols, 2017b, pp. 62–66). In accordance with the acceleration of the information age with the presence of the internet, there are important points for the influence of the internet on experts. The search engine or even application has eliminated people's habits(Fitri, 2019, p. 230; Pennycook & Rand, 2021, p. 389). Those, who usually ask about something they are looking for directly to the experts, have changed. They prefer to look to the search engines because it is more effective and instant. This causes good information to be buried by a lot of bad and even fake information(Carter & Littlejohn, 2021, pp. 80–81; Wang, 2020, p. 171). In addition, it causes social change by breaking the communication interaction between experts and the society. Although it is undeniable that the use of the internet depends on the user, internet is only a place, we determine itfurthermore(Anderson, 2017; Fitri, 2019, p. 231).

The internet has become a means of attacking established knowledge. The internet is a source as well as a means of spreading false information(Pennycook & Rand, 2021, p. 391). People are free to upload anything on the internet, so the public sphere is flooded with unimportant information and half-baked thoughts. '*The internet allows a billion flowers to bloom, but most of them stink, from the whims of blog writers, to conspiracy theories of geeks, to the spread of false information by various groups*'(Nichols, 2017b, p. 77). In cyberspace some of us do not want to test information, discuss and debate in healthy situation, but demean other people's opinions who are different, insult, and attack.

The death of expertise is in accordance with the phenomenon of expert defeat caused by institutional distrust alongside with high cognitive

bias(Pennycook & Rand, 2021, p. 390; Smith & Nichols, 2017). It is also coupled with wide-open internet access so that all information can be spread widely in the seconds. News now spreads more quickly going out with hoaxes that are not in accordance with facts(Carter & Littlejohn, 2021, pp. 79–81; Pulliam, 2018, pp. 35–36). People easily believe it and as daily consumptions resultto misunderstandings. Therefore, experts lose the competition with search engines orin the internet. People seem to have known everything. It also results to the inability to distinguish information which only makes people cynical on their own against established knowledge and still believes that the solution to the problem is by using the internet(Fitri, 2019, p. 232; Yoo, 2018). Everyone is considered equal, coupled with the presence of social media, adding to the dangerous conditions that threaten the role of knowledge. Moreover, it could annihilate terms ofexpertise and erode the ability to live in harmony in the era of modern society.

The situation is becoming more unsocial and confrontational(Nichols, 2017b, p. 60; Yoo, 2018). The position of the expert is considered not to understand the information age. The experts are also spoken to be too obedient to the rules and to insist on knowledge. In addition to education and internet which threaten the death of experts, there are also journalism industries such as television, newspapers, and radio which present competition between one another. Starting from the discussion on television with many programs that make it difficult for people to sort out the news they receive. Somehow, it causes the audience to create their own illusions and to feel satisfied with the information(Carter & Littlejohn, 2021, pp. 79–81; Yoo, 2018). The internet, which we think is a source of unlimited information that can provide enlightenment and a better life, actually has bad sides. The era of technology and information not only creates a leap of knowledge, but also gives way to and even strengthens the shortcomings of mankind.

This is a challenge for experts to face the information age.Technological developments, especially social media and smartphones, make this a necessity. Maybe it would not be problem if everyone just thought they knew something and spread it around. The problem is when the role of the expert is abolished, correct

information is denied, and then ignorance is boasted. However, more knowledge does not mean better quality(Nichols, 2017a; Tridente, 2019, p. 120). For journalists, there is no room to develop their expertise on the subject of news, as well as experts who are often restricted from expressing their opinions. There are things that must be done in order to create a balance between the two; experts to be responsible for recognizing moments or circumstances and for journalism consumers to be more humble and less cynical(Nichols, 2017a; Tridente, 2019, pp. 119–120).

Experts cannot avoid their responsibilities as advisers, but still have responsibilities to the citizens so that problems do not occur in the relationship between experts and the public. People may have killed expertise, but absolutely they need them back(Nichols, 2017a). The expert suggests that the public should not be indifferent. People are expected to try to learn from their mistakes as well asseek to find out so that the relationship between the expert and the public is well established(Carter & Littlejohn, 2021, pp. 79–81; Pulliam, 2018, pp. 35–36). There is a suggestion for the expert to always remember that the expert is not the determiner, and if that is the case then it is society that complements by engaging in civic virtue(Shribman, 2019; Tridente, 2019, p. 119). So according of the situation, both need each other, accept each other, and build synergies with each other.

Experts used to make definitions. Those are how things are named, bound, and indicated through certain meanings. They are so closed that no other understanding should vary the idea of definitions. It is out if subjective opinion. It is such product of objectivity that is applied to an event. Somehow, definitions are also in line with paradigms or even theories(Nichols, 2017a). Even paradigm is wider than theory, but its compositions could be understood in the same foundations. It moves from merely ruses of the people to the processed thought founded through scientific identifications. Indeed, definitions are not without flaws(Highmore, 2016, p. 22). Its negative points correlate to how they are so stiff that even reflect such distance to the realities. Its rigidity somehow could explain everything, but its close exploration to various indication could always be

doubted. It is similar to how experts think definitions are so perfect, while meanings could always change from different time and place(Barker, 2012, p. 107; Shribman, 2019).

Moreover, since expertise is seen in its death, its definitions are also impacted. Definitions that is so static becomes fluctuating because of the death of expertise. Then, common people are shown to bring their own meanings to everyday life. While definitions are doubted, meanings come to surface to shape understanding of such events(Nichols, 2017b, p. 19; Pulliam, 2018, pp. 35–36). It could also be said that the death of expertise show how definitions actually could not cover all things indicated in life. Those should always be accompanied and complemented as well with meanings that are more flexible. Its fluctuating conditions of definitions emphasizeeach component of them could stand alone and even shape other meanings as well. It is also due to people's ability to consume and produce knowledge outside of experts' specific abilities. Common people have experience of their everyday life that approach such events with different view than experts'(Shribman, 2019; Tridente, 2019, pp. 118–120). While experts speak in the name scientific identifications, common people underlines understanding of own experience regarding their own feeling about things. Indeed, people's knowledge and experts' science could not be compared as apple to apple as both may still get trapped in information bubble(Goldman & McGrath, 2015, pp. 51–52; Pulliam, 2018, pp. 35–36). Systematically, experts take more advantage in proving names and definitions. Meanwhile, common people get closer to realities as they gather knowledge by embracing experience through their own identities.

Rigidity and Flexibility of Knowledge in *The Balloon*

Barthelme shows how an event could bring in flexible meanings through experience alongside with rigid definitions through analytical theories. Experts may approach through exact theories, but flexibility could only be found through experience(Goldman & McGrath, 2015, p. 52; Verburgt, 2020, pp. 2–3). It is like speaking that curb-eye view supplements eagle-eye view in cultural studies. The analogy is similar to subjective perspectives enrich matter of objectifications of

truth. *The Balloon*is keen to that curb-eye view by underlining imagination of the people according to own experience. It is done without undermining others(Highmore, 2016, p. 39). Barthelme would like to appreciate all things started from below to the top and not in reverse.

The Balloon by Donald Barthelme accentuates matters of knowledge in everyday life. Knowledge are shown in different positions. It is not owned by one side or even several parties as it moves around people(Goldman & McGrath, 2015, pp. 52–53; Verburgt, 2020). It is spoken within matters of individuals, societies, as well as government officials and experts. *The Death of Expertise* by Tom Nichols indeed emphasizes idea of the expert as shown in this short story either. Moreover, the story enriches the book by asserting that the death of expertise underlines the rising knowledge of people. Nichols said that ignorant of people becomes the main cause alongside with the death of experts(Hopf et al., 2019, pp. 1–2; Suter, 2017, p. 960). However, people in this story is not ignorant at all. They mind the balloon and they correlates it with their own experience. Nichols stated in black and white that the death of expertise results to fake science understood and shared by common people(Hopf et al., 2019, pp. 1–3). The Barthelme's story gives meanings to knowledge beyond normal science. *The Balloon* strengthens idea of everyday understanding supported by self's experience.

It is clear that Nichols said that expertise is always better than everyday knowledge. He stated that in the case of presidential election of United States of America where people no longer believe in objective statements. People tends to think by themselves, to find own justifications, and to share things that only subjectively true(Goldman & McGrath, 2015, pp. 51–52; Suter, 2017, p. 960). The main fault is on confirmation bias problem, which is the natural tendency to accept only evidence that supports what we already believe. The internet then gives room for confirmation bias to thrive(Hopf et al., 2019, pp. 1–3). Because of confirmation bias, people use the internet after deciding what they believe. Compared to that idea, Barthelme's story contains the same idea of the death of expertise but with different elucidations. *The Balloon*founds condition out of

expertise is filled with everyday knowledge of people. The knowledge is so postmodern that beyond good and bad but its existence is crucial in how people embraces any condition in their surroundings(Abbas, 2019, pp. 5–6). People do not make definitions of the inflating object, but they relate it to its mere condition and their own imagination. Here, subjective meanings are dealt as fulfilling hole left by unknown objective definitions by the experts.

On a hand, Barthelme's story could cancel Nichol's understanding in underlining significance of everyday thoughts. Nichols indirectly meant that the loss of expertise could bring in ambiguities that shapes bad effects to truth in society(Suter, 2017, p. 960). Barthelme speaks differently by putting common people's knowledge as consequence that amend the loss of definitions. However, on the other hand, *The Balloon*broadensand deepens the meanings of *The Death of Expertise*. The story departs from the same point that is the end of expertise. Expertise in its definition of job specialization will not go away. But at the same time, with an abundance of information, people can also become experts themselves. Experts are needed by policy makers to help them make decisions. Experts are tasked with giving advice to leaders, while for the general public they are tasked with giving directions, but the meanings are made through public discourse(Abbas, 2019, p. 4). While Nichols' book values expertise and undermines what people thought of, Barthelme's story is being different in appreciating the latter without undermining the former one. Expertise and every day's experience walk together and supplement each other. How people relate the balloon through their own experience is because expertis unable to speak objectively about it. People are not stated as ignorant in the story, but they give effort to understand the object by each own ability to personally interpret it(Fabre, 2015, p. 9; Wesselman, 2013, p. 17).

This paper emphasizes conditions of the balloon, incapability of the experts to this, and responses of common people towards that. Barthelme asserts how everyone has own meanings to understand based on own experience. Theories matter, but more of them are needed to understand aspects of an event(Goldman & McGrath, 2015, pp. 52–53; Wesselman, 2013, pp. 17–18). The story underlines

more to plural condition of knowledge that gets accustomed with any foreign thing including the balloon itself. In other meaning, being plural involves both totality of being objective and fluidity of being subjective. The story urges rigidity and flexibility of knowledge. It does not take sides only to one but appreciating both culturally through reasons that walk together with any wider meaning.

CONCLUSION AND SUGGESTION

The story of *The Balloon* by Donald Barthelme is in line with *The Death of Expertise* written by Tom Nichols. In Barthelme story, no one really knows why the inflating object exists. Even experts surrendered to define that thing. Then, people start to correlate the balloon regarding own experience in everyday life. They try to fill the meanings behind the object by their own knowledge. While Nichols states that the death of expertise indicates the ignorance came from wider society, Barthelme speaks differently by accentuating the story as matter of fluctuating definitions through known meanings of experience. Moreover, the story contains matters of rigidity and flexibility of knowledge. It is true that knowledge is power, but it is not always possessed by several people. Common people with their abundant common senses could have abilities to produce meanings alongside with their empirical and conceptual consumptions of any object in the world.

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