

Poeticity in Conceptual Art: Metaphor, Defamiliarisation, and Self-referentiality

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Abstract

As a new form of the visual arts, conceptual art moves beyond the conventional aesthetics of art; it defies the previous aesthetic standards of art and, with its revolutionary and rebellious spirit, alienates itself from concepts such as beauty, form, and material. Such qualities lead to a question: in the absence of beauty, form, and material, what other factors can bind and define conceptual art in the domain of art? This article reveals that in want of conventional components of visual arts, conceptual art tends toward linguistic-narrative arts and recognizes its poeticity. Although poeticity in conceptual arts is different from the orthodox definition of poetry, it connects to mechanisms which create poeticity at a macro level: metaphor, defamiliarisation, and self-referentiality.

Keywords: Conceptual Art, Poeticity, Literary Theory, Metaphor, Defamiliarisation, Self-referentiality

Extended Abstract

1. Introduction

As a new form of the visual arts, conceptual art moves beyond the conventional aesthetics of art. It defies the previous aesthetic standards of art and, with its revolutionary and rebellious spirit, alienates itself from concepts such as beauty, form, and material. Such qualities lead to a question: in the absence of beauty, form, and material, what other factors can bind and define conceptual art in the domain of art? This article reveals that in want of conventional components of visual arts, conceptual art tends toward linguistic-narrative arts and recognizes its poeticity. Although poeticity in conceptual arts is different from the orthodox definition of poetry, it connects to

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mechanisms which create poeticity at a macro level: metaphor, defamiliarisation, and self-referentiality.

2. Methodology

This descriptive-analytical study investigates philosophical-linguistic theories informed by conceptual art and explores their presence in various works of conceptual art. This research aims to exhibit the necessity of theoretical familiarity in understanding new types of art.

3. Theoretical Framework

Even though defining conceptual art is difficult, one can rely on an important distinction, which is opposing the realisation of a work of art as a visual object or enjoying a spatial experience. Artistic modernism relied heavily on the form; conceptual art was a revolt against this excessive formalism. In his "Modernist Painting," Clement Greenberg identifies three main characteristics of visual arts: material objectivity, visuality, and liberty, all of which are rejected by conceptual arts (Osborne, 1392 [2013]: 19-20). By rejecting objectivity (materiality) and visuality, conceptual art severs its ties with other arts and moves closer toward verbal arts.

4. Discussion and Analysis

4.1 Metaphor

The function of art, conceptual artists argue, is to give new meaning to phenomena. Although we objectify our surroundings, these objects are capable of taking new names/meanings and transforming into new phenomena. In this respect, redefining or renaming an everyday object broadens its horizons of meaning, as well as the domain of art; in other words, every phenomenon has the potential to turn into art. In this regard, the integrity of an artist is not bound to creation and terminology but is bound to tagging and displacement of the said phenomenon (Cauquelin, 1393 [2014]: 146-154).

By sliding the object from its semantic or physical position (displacement), conceptual art gives a new phenomenological value to the object. This is in line with Marcel Duchamp's "Fountain" (1917).

4.2 Defamiliarisation

By defamiliarising the object, conceptual artists employ poeticity in their works. Metaphorisation or Duchamp's tagging, is a form of poetical defamiliarisation which is achieved through tagging or displacement. In this respect, a conceptual artist, as a poet, takes up the role of renewing the

phenomenon. In this regard, tagging and displacement are equated with creation. An object is nothing but a name and a word, which is what Kosuth had in mind. In his "One and Three Chairs" (1965), he portrays a chair, a photograph of the chair, and an enlarged dictionary definition of the word "chair." As a result, he shatters the line between language and object and equates them.

4.3 Self-referentiality

Tautology, according to Kosuth (1990), is an important aspect of conceptual art. It is a statement that is true by virtue of its logical form alone; for instance, "I am myself" is a tautology. Consequently, conceptual artists and theorists argue that self-referential works of art must only be defined in accordance with their referentiality, which, in turn, highlights the linguistic importance and value of conceptual works of art. The climax of self-referentiality occurs when a work is nothing but its name. For example, Kosuth's "Five Words in Orange Neon" is exactly five words in orange neon; this is another form of metaphorisation in which the title replaces the work and renders the work nothing but a name (Cauquelin, 1393 [2014]: 250).

5. Conclusion

Conceptual art emphasises the importance of "language" over "form" and "material" and elevates conceptual art to the level of poetry. What draws conceptual art near to poetry is the macro systems of poeticality such as metaphor, defamiliarisation, and self-referentiality. Metaphors, the byproduct of tagging and displacement, reintroduce precedented phenomena under a new identity which, in turn, activates defamiliarisation and creates new meanings. Lastly, self-referentiality is another element of conceptual art and, according to Jakobson, is an important piece of the poeticality of speech.

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