From the surface of painting to architecture space: Cloud image

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Abstract

In the act of acquiring knowledge, as it is in many other fields of life, the ability to use technology has taken the lead in the world of education as well. Engineering education is one of these areas. The increasing dependence of people on technology is alarming. In this study, it is examined that how students at the Faculty of Engineering evaluate their visual perception change and the point of view to the arts and arts education after they receive plastic arts education at a basic level. Written opinions were gathered from 150 students who took the elective course 'Plastic Arts Education' at the Faculty of Fine Arts at Hacettepe University. 14-week syllabus is used in this course including one theoretical hour and two practical hours each week. This syllabus covers two or three dimensional applied studies, the research and examination of art and its movements, artists, works of art, and exhibition and museum visits. Results show that students have chosen this course since they fed up with their theoretical courses, or the workload of courses, realize they have a bias towards art thinking that it merely and simply requires ability, and they are excited to recognize the difference between 'look' and 'see'.

Keywords: plastic arts, art education, engineering students.

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1. Main text

Sometimes, clouds may help us to envisage a poetic and mystical realm and move beyond the reality by stimulating our dreams or through the medium of their associations shaped in our minds. In our childhood days, we all used to take a deep and intense pleasure in observing the clouds in the sky and associate their shapes with the objects in our lives. When we look at them, we may have seen the faces of people around us, animal figures, mountains, seas, scary giants, monsters and supernatural creatures that are well imprinted in our childhood memories. However, we used to know the truth: They were only clouds. We all fantasized flying and running through the clouds and even catching them. Even though we were aware of the reality, it would give us a sense of particular delight to play with them drenched in joy and fear. Similarly, we rejoice in the representations of artworks, which are indeed replacements for the reality! On the basis of this assumption, can we claim that they are all results of an urge to change?

What we traditionally see in artworks is not the reality itself but rather a representation that can act as a replacement for the reality. For instance, painting is regarded as a reduction of three-dimensional reality into a surface (a two dimensional reflection). In this context, art is a representative description –mimesis- based on senses, which is the imitation of objects' images. As a first impression, this reflection creates an illusion of reality, though it is only a reflection. It is not only an illusion, so to say, creating a fake sense of existence but also a reflection that does not consist of the same material with the real.

The clouds we see in the paintings are actually the depictions referring to the original and they are shaped in our minds with the help of a material - paint- that is different from the original. For instance, in the Western art, the cloud image linking the celestial and mundane is a crucial space element that symbolizes the holiness in the depiction of mythological and religious themes such as the ascension and souls leaving the body. In the progress of time, in addition to its symbolic holiness, artists have begun to use the cloud as a significant object reflecting the beauty of nature. For example, in the landscape paintings of Camille Corot, John Constable and impressionist painters, clouds reflect the naturalness of the sky. Well-known painter of German Romanticism, Caspar David Friedrich's endless and poetic landscape paintings stretching to the depth of inner-world, we witness that the clouds are actually the reflections turned into aesthetic perception objects of the outer-world.

Similar to Narcissus' reflection on the water, the cloud existing in the reality is reflected on the painting's surface with the help of a paint material, which means that the reflected image's reality is the clouds in the sky. The cloud, as a reflected image on the painting, is similar to the real clouds in the sky or an imitation of them. However, they both carry the same meaning. The cloud image substitutes and represents the original; it becomes a symbol. Still, the similar one cannot be regarded as the real one. The similarity or distance between the art and reality is an element influencing and even determining the artwork perception. But what would happen if the object as an artwork is made of the same material with the real and looked identical? Does the representational role of the art disappear?

2.   From the Art Representing the Real to the Art That Is Real

The relationship between the reality and representation emerged in Renaissance is brought into question with modernity. Hence, the object-space relationship and the depiction of the reality in space undergo a change. Particularly, with Cubism, the understanding of artwork depicting the reality disappears when the tradition of representation in art collapses. In 1910's, Picasso and Braque incorporated the reality itself directly to the artwork by drifting away from the understanding of artwork referring to the reality with paper collages.

In accordance with the way of life in modern age, we witness a shift in the understanding of art: On one hand, there are futurists claiming that*, "Transference of the real objects on canvas is a skillful reproduction art"* and on the other hand, there is Suprematist movement supporting the idea that

"Painters should not deal with the topic and the objects so that they can be pure painters." (Harrison & Wood, 2013) However, after an abstractionist understanding minimizing the form**,** with Dadaist surrealist movements, the artist exceeds the limits of traditional aesthetic experience with variations and uncertainty. Art perception ignoring the priority of topic moves away from the depiction and imitation of the outer reality with the help of abstraction. But in fact *"An anti-representational art does not stop representing. Instead, it is not restricted by the tools of representation and the objects that will be represented."* (Ranciere, 2012)

As a result of the distrust against the representational beauty of the object stemmed from a shift in the worldview and the understanding of art, quest for the ordinary reduces art into a fictional reality based on the technology and rationalism. The artists, enchanted by technology and mechanics depending on the scientific developments, use ready-objects, particularly the industrial ones, in their artworks. After Duchamp's ready-mades questioning the artwork and art perception, it was complicated to determine the fields related to art concepts, critics and history. Therefore, with the shift in art perception, the action itself supersedes the image and the artwork. The artwork is turned into a concrete form through the medium of installations reaching over the painting and extending in the space, hence the perception of the artwork changes. Art and the artwork are almost converted into a visual performance! The boundaries between art and what is not art start to blur with a particular emphasis on the series of surprising actions that can arouse astonishment among the viewers. Being away from the illusion and artificiality, the concrete one and the reality is appreciated in the "art that is not art" approach that is far-stretching beyond the art. George Maciunas "… opposes not only the artificial separation between the artist as a creator and the viewer but also between the art and life itself. He is against the artificial forms and patterns, the art techniques full of form and meaning. Anti-art is the life, the nature and the reality itself." (Harrison & Wood, 2011). Both the form-meaning relationship and the artificial separation of life and art are ignored.

3.   Meets Technology and the Artwork Art

Anti-art approaches and the idea suggesting the inadequacy of the traditional methods are contemporary. A ready-made object, consumption objects and the casual one, which are not individual creations, can be presented as art. With a particular emphasis on the concreteness and the technique, art itself may turn into a kind of show or entertainment derived from science. It is well- known that, as a consequence of scientific and technological developments in our time, changes in the way of life have also brought along a shift in mentality. In their works, artists reflect not only themselves but also the mindset, societal consciousness and the psychology of their times. From this point of view, emotional and mental fluctuations of the individual caused by technology addiction are common in today's art world. Well-known with his Nimbus series, Berndaut Smilde's artificial clouds created with the help of technology are examples for the art meeting technology.
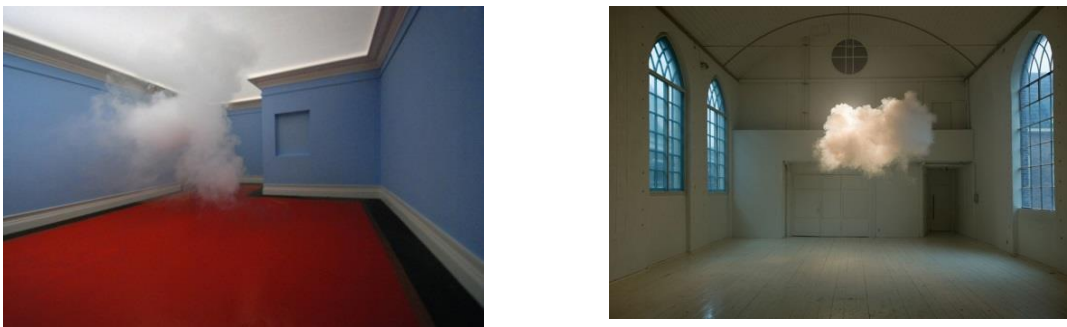

Figure 1. Berndnaut Smilde, "Nimbu

"Smilde prefers creating these artificial clouds indoor spaces such as churches, castles and dungeons. He performs his art with a fog machine invented by himself (It is listed as one of the best inventions of 2012 by Time Magazine.) Smilde meticulously adjusts the temperature, humidity and light of the space. He uses aerogel, a material known as frozen smoke that is 99.8% air. "(Tinsley, 2012)

Smilde's workshop gives an impression of laboratory producing artificial clouds. The artist records his artificial clouds produced by a fog machine with high-speed cameras to get the best result since the clouds disappears literally in seconds. In this way, he immortalizes his artworks. It is also obvious that he perpetually tries to create the immaculate cloud and get the best shot.

Figure 2. Artificial Cloud-Making Machine

In fact, it is known that scientists use artificial cloud-making machines to facilitate artificial rainfall against drought, climate change and various environmental conditions. However, the crucial point is the differences between the meanings of these artificial clouds. Even though their forms are similar, they are different in terms of content. Then, how can we explain the distinction between "nature, technology and functionality" and "nature, technology and artwork"?

Could this distinction actually be a result of our viewpoint or purpose? Although the natural clouds in the sky or the artificial clouds produced for a functional use are not considered as an art object, an artificial cloud created for artistic concerns in another space can be displayed as an artwork. How can the presentation of an artificial cloud as an artwork with no functionalist concern shape our art perception and appreciation? What is the difference between the aesthetic perceptions of these two artificial objects that are identical to the real clouds in the sky? This is a critical question; since one of these objects is created for artistic concerns and the other for functional use. Arthur Danto suggests that *"embodied meaning"* (2013) is one of the qualities identifying an object as piece of art and that what makes an artwork art is its visible qualities rather than invisible ones.

What could be the invisible differences between the artificial cloud produced for functional use and the artificial cloud as an artwork? Or is there a difference between the real and the imitation of reality? *"The more the intended reality increase, the more we need the guidance of external features emphasizing that this is not reality, but art itself. But at the same time, the less real an artwork is, the less we need to these external features"* (Danto, 2012). Can we see these external features separating the reflected from the real in Smilde's artificial clouds?

Perhaps, what Smilde makes visible in his artworks is the tension caused by indoor-outdoor relationship in the spaces chosen by Smilde. Contrary to the common artwork perception of the indoor displays such as galleries and museum's walls and floors, emptiness of the spaces is highlighted. Therefore, the artist's use of space and the way he reflects the reality are striking. Unlike the clouds we see in the sky, the images of the clouds floating in the emptiness of the indoor space are engraved to our minds particularly with indoor space itself. But, do we memorize the cloud as it is or with the unordinary space in which it floats? The cloud image is transferred into "present" time and we memorize the cloud as an artwork with its unordinary space unlike the natural clouds in the sky. What reveals the artist's

subjective perception is in fact positioning the cloud in a different space from its natural environment, which is the sky, and it is engraved to the viewer's mind with its shocking installation.

The cloud in the emptiness of an indoor space is neither a sculpture or performance nor just a photograph or installation. In a way, it looks as if it encompasses all of them. Unlike the tradition reflecting the reality with a material different from the real, Smilde's clouds are made from the same material with the clouds in nature. If so, why do we perceive the two objects looking identical and made of same material in a different way? The more we raise such questions, the more we need the philosophical approaches. Still, I aim to investigate the artist/technology relationship rather than finding answers to the philosophical questions. Use of technology by artists stimulates the diversification of subjectivity in art. However, when we perceive the artwork as a reflection of artist's soul, then it would be right to suggest that expressing this "soul" unequivocally has been turning into a mechanized action day by day. In other words, abundance of tools between the artwork and artist serves to an end rather than means to an end. If an artist is able to create a work identical to reality, can his/her sense of fulfillment make this artwork art? Or does the artist submit to the technological opportunities? According to Zizek; *"The worst approach is to aim at a kind of "synthesis" of science and art"* (Zizek, 2014). Can we reduce the art into a novelty or an invention? Do the artists have their own ideas considering the techniques they borrow from the science itself?

As the boundaries between the real and artificial look as if they have disappeared, the illusion of no-boundaries may create a shocking reality effect on the viewers. *"The subject who is overwhelmed by the real becomes a powerless viewer of him/herself and her/his world"* (Zizek, 2014). Such a reality enchantment may cause blindness preventing to see the reality. Just like Baudrillard's remarks on the art of cinema: *"The more we get close to the absolute clarity, high definition and the realistic imperfectness of the image, the more the power of illusion disappears" (2010,29). "… As we feed the reality with the real in order to create an imperfect illusion, the illusion diminishes accordingly. … But in fact, an image is the exact abstraction of the world into two dimensions; it is the elimination of one of the dimensions in the real world and activating the power of illusion instead" (*2010). It gets harder to explain the relationship between the reality and the object presented as an artwork since the illusion effect disappears. However, can we claim that the creative illusion of the image reflected in artworks is also present in the artificial clouds created indoors by Smilde? Because it looks as if the illusion of reality in Smilde's works is due to the space of the artwork rather than the artificial clouds themselves. In other words, the invisible difference between the two artificial objects can be explained by the spaces in which they are created.

4. Conclusion

Technology triggering the tension between the inner and outer time changes not only the creation process of the artist, but also formation of the artwork and the perception of the artwork's viewer. It seems as though art has engaged with every technique and field and the artist's talent, mastership, sensitivity and autonomy have been reduced to technicality and experience. Giorgio Agamben identifies the artist's relationship with his time and contemporariness as a *"singular relationship with one's own time, which adheres to it and, at the same time, keeps a distance from it."* He suggests with a critical approach *"Those who coincide too well with the epoch, those who are perfectly tied to it in every respect, are not contemporaries, precisely because they do not manage to see it; they are not able to firmly hold their gaze on it"* (Artun & Orge, 2013). In this perspective, idea suggesting that being in a harmony with technology is not only a must in this age, but also a factor preventing to see the outcomes, gains strength. In order to understand the age, so to say, the observation and questioning should be made from an objective point of view without forgetting that we also belong to that age.

As a result of the deep pleasure of the success reached with the help of technology, lyricism has been replaced with the shocking artificial realities of technology and temporary activities. Even though it seems as if the object reality that has been transferred into the real space with technical opportunities has blurred the boundaries between the art and life, we could still see the differences between them,

because the perception of the reality and artwork changes and this is exactly what makes an artwork art. However, visibility of these differences has sparked a discussion regarding the perception of artwork. As the difference between the artwork and reality diminishes, the soul, timbre, lyricism and imagination reflected in the artwork may turn into a mechanic, superficial and fictional reality.

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