

Title: Metaphor and Contemporary Art

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Abstract

In my dissertation I present arguments for the validity of the aesthetic conception of art (a conception based on the notion of aesthetic experience) also in relation to the development of art movements in the last half century. I do so on the basis of an interpretation of the aesthetic dimension of art through art theory as an extended concept of metaphor. I argue that it is the living metaphor that functions in works of (not only) contemporary art as their aesthetic model. I elaborate this idea through the interconnection of three convergent and currently influential concepts: Paul Ricoeur's hermeneutic theory of living metaphor, Martin Seel's aesthetics of appearing, and Alva Noë's theory of art as a strange tool. I lay out the key conditions and characteristics of the process of the emergence of metaphorical meaning and then relate these to the characteristics of artistic appearance. In the perspective of art as living metaphor, the myths and misunderstandings between aesthetics and artistic practice caused by the transformation of artistic production, especially with the advent of the neo-avant-gardes, persisting to the present day, can be redefined. This misunderstanding can be expressed in two main issues. The first issue is the connection between aesthetic theories and the assumption of media essentiality of artworks. I will show here that contemporary (post-conceptual) art is post-media art, and that an ever-present intermediality has always rested at the core of artistic practices. Similarly, metaphor is inherently intermedial, linking different perceptual modes and synthesizing meaning, senses, and emotions. Its initial structure is not medially determined, but always emerges as a new constellation of elements in a specific context. The second issue is the myth of abandoning artistic autonomy and the aesthetic function of art in favour of political, cognitive, or heteronomous practices. Such a debate has been brought about primarily by the new forms and strategies of conceptual art. If we establish the living metaphor as the aesthetic model of art, and at the same time take a critical look at stereotypical interpretations of conceptual strategies, then it becomes clear that the experience of art necessarily and productively contains a tension between autonomy and heteronomy. It brings about an aesthetic experience (synthesizing cognition, emotion, and perception) precisely by entering the space of the world of 'as if'. I therefore conclude that contemporary art is metaphorical, and its aesthetic function is manifested precisely by its metaphoricality.

Keywords: contemporary art – aesthetics experience – living metaphor – Paul Ricoeur – Martin Seel – Alva Noë – intermediality – imagination