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“Discontinuity” as a Concept that affects today’s Art Practice

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Abstract

It has been experienced an alteration which has affected the art environment as in every single area of our lives through the last quarter of the 20th century. When reviewing the artistic works of that time, we encounter “discontinuity” as a fundamental concept in which the philosophers such as Foucault and Baudrillard have constructed its philosophical basis. Discontinuity is defined as the opposite of the “continuity” notion. It corresponds to an environment at which the understanding of continuity predominated on a certain period of time is interrupted and disrupted. This way of thinking also has identified the way of action of artist. Many of contemporary artworks that have a command of a structure devoid of continuity are individually indicators of the altering environment. It is aimed in this study to form an analytical medium on how the discontinuity concept establishes the ground for creating contemporary artworks. As a method, it will be initially determined the extent of the discontinuity concept and then examined within the scope of this concept how selected contemporary artworks have been formed.

Keywords: Contemporary Art, Discontinuity, Alteration

Introduction

“No two categories, and no two kinds of experience are more fundamental in human life and thought than continuity and discontinuity”.

Anthony Wilden

It is necessary to determine the effects of developments in science and technology to be able to make a healthy reading of contemporary art. The conditions which we are in and required to express as "Information Age" should be determined and discussed of their effects in the art world. Therefore, explaining and querying the concepts and phenomenas related with contemporary art with traditional tools and methods without defining the situation that modern technology has come will put the issue into a narrow perspective.

Today's lifestyle corresponds to a period which based on technology, and that digital technologies and digitalization have covered all field of life. The life without computer, phone and internet doesn't seem possible. In this case, today's art world has undergone great change and transformation as a result of digitalization. Certainly, as far as the positive aspects of this change, there are also negative sides. Here, however, without mentioning the debate referred, "continuity" and "discontinuity" of the concept of art has been studied to examine. On discontinuity, like thinkers Jean-François Lyotard, Jean Baudrillard; Kubilay Aktulum opined, as well. The ideas that Kubilay Aktulum put forth in his pieces "Fragmentation / Discontinuity / Disconnection" and "Discountiunity in Narrative and Some Functions" (Aktulum, 2008) give important clues for understanding contemporary art enviroment.

"Discontinuity" As a Concept

That transfer is important on continuity and discontinuity, "continuing and continuing action" whose Latin root extends to 'continuar' covers the meaning 'to persist in space', 'to sort elements repeatedly in time', 'to combine ends in a form creating the whole' 'to maintain something started' and 'to extend'. There is a temporal and spatial use of continuity. This is the opposite of the meaning of discontinuity, and it carries the meaning of a discontinuity disconnection, shelving, being heterogeneous and repellent; according to the temporal of view, the moment, intellactually, took the location of time in discountinuity. Discontinuity which was taken from Latin verb 'discontinuar' is used to mean 'to make transient', 'to interrupt the continuity', 'to smash', 'to split' and 'not to maintain'."(Aktulum, 2005).

"In Latin language 'dis' prefix has meanings 'seperation, suspension, opposite direction and reverse'. Discountinuities defined in this way, bears the idea of negation, and expresses an attitude of rejection. The negation is to confront the collectivity and the idea of the integrity" (Aktulum, 2005).

Revolution in Art

According to İsmail Tunalı, until the the Baroque period, understanding of Western art perceived the art as a closed system. However, art works were freed from thought of closed system thanks to the mechanical universal concept which has been brought about by positive natural sciences developed after the Renaissance. This starting

point has affected the understanding of contemporary art. As a result of this, the idea of modern art has occurred. Although, classical art described artwork as closed and organic system, modern art perceived the artwork as 'wide-open' field (Tunali, 2008:120).

Modern era corresponds with a period which has output points like scientific accuracy, adherence to the rules which the Renaissance, the Reformation and the Enlightenment movements give direction to. The modern era experienced the initial shock by giving place to Einstein's "relativism" theory and quantum physics's 'possibility of occurring more than one possibility at the same time' in the fight that it began as an ideal community projects with science-based approach. The followed wars led people to the idea that modernism brought about destructions rather than happiness. The actual collapse of modernism was after the Second World War. Now, in postmodern era; the dominant belief is not uniqueness but majority, not certainty but possibility, not continuity but moment, not integrity but fragmentation, not order but chaos, and not the belief that art reflects the reality but art will not be able to reflect the reality. According to them, disintegration, chaos and discontinuity control the society, therefore, it is impossible to create determinative social theory.

Breaking from Reality in Art

According to Jale Erzen, with enlightenment, art becomes independent from daily life and also from other fields such as science and ethics. Art was no longer a phenomenon that serve the religion and with the development of photo; the obligation of expressing imaginary illusion of reality was also eliminated (Erzen, 2011:103). With the coming forward of industrialization, a plurality of formats which, before, could be produce only by dexterity have been started to be mass-produced by machine. Thus, it is entered a period in which the relation between the format and the content was cut off and which the format lost its value. With reproduction, the uniqueness of art was broken like Walter Benjamin emphasized in his work called "Work Of Art In the Age Of Mechanical Reproduction". The continuity too was broken as a requirement of replication or repeatability. According to him, uniqueness and continuity are related with distance, transience and reproducibility are about to closeness. With general expression, reproduction has a dimension which destroy the reality.

"It is the first time in the history of the world that mechanical reproduction recover the artwork from being dependent to a ritual. Reproduced artwork, an even greater extent, is becoming a designed artwork for reproducing. From a photographic negative, for example, can be large amounts of printing, so there is no sense to ask for 'the authentic' printing. But the moment that the criteria of authenticity is interrupted from being applicable to artistic production, the overall function of art is reversed. Instead of relying on ritual, he, started to be based on another practice which is politics." (Benjamin 1993: 82-83).

Roland Barthes explains in his article entitled "Rhetoric Of The Image" which he penned that image word comes from imitare word and on the basis of every visual arts a copy case lies, therefore, the image is not trusted and picture is thought just as a copy (Erzen, 2011: 25).

Erzen is thought as a something which turns the life into material things about the image he defined as a representation, making the dead alive again according to many thinkers, making them eternal, freezing them in time, mummification them or taking the image of their face with a mask like in ancient civilizations. In this context, the idea of that visual arts are only copies of a copy is dominant. Absolute essence of any entity can exist only mentally, a reduction is a question when it turns into a substance. For example, when we say red, we need to think about an ideal red; but at the moment that it becomes a red coat or a flower, it loses its ideal state. In this perspective of subject it is believed that in many metaphysical approach; it is broken the relationship with reality when image is on the carpet (Erzen, 2011: 25). The thing expressed in this context is that art move away from the structure which comes out from its own internal necessity and turn to copy and imitation. Baudrillard fixed the issue with followed statement: "On the horizon of simulation, the real world not only it is lost but also the question about its itself existence has lost its meaning " (Baudrillard, 2012: 36).

Aktulum stated that collage was one of the fundamental concepts of art which created the effect of discontinuity, and was used in plastic arts at the beginning of the 20th century (Aktulum, 1999: 222). In collage, the surfaces on the same plane but in different identities are brought together. In particular, the collages of Picasso which once appeared with experimental searching, became a concept which was discussed about new possibilities of expression by Surrealist and Dadaist. After World War II collage has become a way of discussing new possibilities of expression with orientation that Fluxus, Pop Art, Conceptual Art concept induced. With 70s, with artists such as Chuck Close, it was left in environment questioned about the effects of digital technology to art field. Nowadays, many new media art understanding which technology-based and is offering solution instances with numerable datas has emerged. It is concerned that it is available in the core of all styles containing collage impacts a devastating, shredder and transitory structure. There were some artists that transformed the collage method to the way of style in their works. One of the best examples of this artists is Robert Rauschenberg. His work called "Retroactive" which was produced in 1925 is a good example of the concept of collage. Rauschenberg, in this study, applied oil painting, pencil, wood and metal on canvas surface. He made the following statement about his understanding of art: "Working in the space between the life and art."

Indeed, collage, due to the incremental nature, includes the will of signification of the space. Rauschenberg created an incremental structure by combining many different elements such as paper, robe and fabric pieces which are daily using objects. He, often,

intervened with paint to three-dimensional objects after he pasted them into the canvas surface. The main reason of such stylistic development of artist is to desire to break the traditional concept of painting and create a distinctive language.

Art Searching itself in Pieces

In the period after Second World War, tendency to collage has increased extensively. In this period, the idea of the traditional art was discussed more deeply. Discussions focused on artist, artwork, art perception and art object. Art orientation that we called its name as a conceptual art, is a result of those discussions. Conceptual art can be explained as a changing direction of art event from practical existence towards mental/conceptual existence. Now, conceptual approaches are important in art production and concept-based insights are adopted. The boundaries between painting, sculpture, music, theater, cinema and engineering fields are removed and it is began to try experimental searchings extending to interdisciplinary approaches. Because of this feature, art completely broke the traditional understanding of continuity and formed a discontinuous field.

Joseph Kosuth is one of the most important representatives of conceptual art. "One and Three Chairs" which was produced by Kosuth, in 1965, has discontinuous dimension as a structure. In this study, Kosuth, used a real wooden chair, a photo of the chair and a paper on which is written dictionary meaning of chair. These elements which are quite different from each other in terms of structural characteristic are substantially indicators which formed the concept of chair imaginatively. Kosuth, have questioned the relationship between image and language in his works. Indeed, conceptual language has structure which differs according to the cultural and psychological structures of audience. The conceptual content of product which is reflected with different indicators isn't always understood in the same intensity in the opposite side. One of the another methods of combining events and facts in the discontinuity approach is installation. Installation is a concept frequently used in media art forms. Its origins goes back to the enlightenment period. Installation is the process of bringing together elements which are independent from each other and as a method it greatly contributed to the development of photography and cinematography. Grete Stern, gives the first example of the installation work. Today it is one of the fundamental features of the world of art and technology. In media field, elements which are independent from each other are combined by this method and it can be made different operations on the document. For example, a movie whose shooting finished can not released in movie theaters before its installation stage is completed.

DJ is one of the music methods that discontinuity understanding dominate. The word for of DJ in english is disk jockey. DJ's origins goes back to 1970s. DJ have different meaning like making music thanks to discs or making music by combining different musics or making one of the known music 'MIX'. DJ entertains the audience with music in entertainment venues. The important thing for them is exciting and

entertaining the audience with the music they did. Mostly, they create the music with improvisation techniques. Nowadays the development of digital music has increased the possibilities of expression of DJ. Music stored on the digital codes are great resources for DJ. It became easy to handle with the logic of "cut-copy" a piece selected from memory. This process correspond to a completely discontinuous understanding when their integrity thought.

Result

Artistic journey which began with cave painting which are accepted as the first works of art kept on until today by changing its style features. It will be displayed that sometimes the idea of continuity and sometimes discontinuity idea dominated when this historical heritage is examined. Artists who lived in the same period and even the members of the same trend have different stylistic features. In fact, this is a natural result, since even twins have different personality traits.

When contemporary art environment is examined, a period that we can call it as a "chaos" is dominant. Now it is an ambiguous issue what is art and what is not. There is no doubt technology has a great role for this case of today's art. The images world pumped by mass communication tools continues to reach out everyone's memory from small child to adults. In this situation adults are affected by this sound and images bombardment, which spreaded all over the world, it seems unlikely that tiny children show resistance to this structure. Now simulacra replaced it instead of the true one. In today's society the glory of imitating object, naturally, brought about kitsch case. Some advanced countries in the world put kitsch art works to the museum and it means the glorification of a structure that creates and consumes kitsch. In this situation, it seems that the situation of continuity and discontinuity like day and night will keep on to engage the agenda.

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