

Section: Social Science

The Political Dimension in Arab Contemporary Art through the Marcuse Aesthetic Theory: A Descriptive Analytical Study

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Abstract:

This paper discusses the political dimension in Arab contemporary art based on the Marcuse aesthetic theory. The researchers believe there is a high correlation between Arab contemporary art and Marcuse aesthetic theory when the three main axes of this theory are tested and reflected on contemporary Arab artworks (study sample). This study attempts to describe and analyze the artworks (study sample) and link this analysis to Marcuse theory. The study sample contains three Arab contemporary artworks from 2010-2015 to clarify the political dimension in Arab contemporary art in accordance with the Marcuse aesthetic theory. The findings prove strong correlations between Arab contemporary art and Marcuse aesthetic theory.

Keywords: Political dimension, Marcuse aesthetic theory, Contemporary Art.

Introduction:

Danto (1997) confirms that there is a transformation of the form of contemporary art and its role in the presentation of contemporary political and social issues. He states, "The art found its significance through the philosophical and cognitive issues and out of the border and the framework, and it must express political and social issues." While Marcuse noted that art was essential in contemporary societies, and he confirmed the revolution of this art and the role it played in the contemporary issues in its community without matching the reality (Spens, 2013).

Contemporary Arab communities are living a transitional stage and experiencing unrest. Which make change the core issue for Arab people. Some characteristics of the Arab life are changing quickly and unexpectedly while other communities stay without change resisting undesirable changes. These days, the Arab world is living a state of partition in community and politics which led to

losing its control upon its recourses, life and faith. This state of chaos and instability create a class society that has a huge difference between poor and rich people. Therefore, most people in the country are poor. The Arab governments kept their authorities on the ruling system and put their permanence as the main concern by suppressing people and they didn't use convincing tools, so that people lost their liberty of self-determination (Barakat, 1986).

Danto (2005) states that contemporary artists have started to feel the need to respond to political crisis in the world. Many artists are currently within the politics because of the situation around them. They feel it is significant to interact with the issues surrounding them and achieve art works that discusses the situation resulted from the impact of politics. In Spens (2013), Marcuse, noted that art was essential in contemporary communities, and he confirmed the revolution of this art and the role it

played in the contemporary issues in its community, without matching the reality. This is what we have seen in many of current artworks of Arab artists. They have tried to present political and social situations as a rejection and criticism to these situations with new styles. This is consistent with Marcuse aesthetic theory.

Marcuse points out that radical subjectivity of art and its revolutionary rhythm became an essential request in modern society. It is characterized by alienation which lead to more distance between the artist and the society. That's what directed Marcuse to advocate the individual and the subjective to face administrative conflicts. He tries to use art in the sake of politics and damp its revolutionary energy (Abdelrahem 2010).

Abdelrahem (2010) maintains that the Marcuse philosophy presents a new approach to transcend the formal tendencies which looked at the aesthetic shape as separate from the political and social reality. It is considered a new approach because it does not neglect the concept of the aesthetic shape but understands it in terms of its effectiveness and ability to influence the reality. Marcuse also says that art plays a sensible role in changing the reality because it has the roots of true liberation, and its characteristics do not exist in any other political, social or religious dimension.

As discussed above, it is obvious that there is a strong relationship between art and politics throughout history. Art has also interacted with human issues in general and political issues in specific. It is clear that politics has a clear effect on art, too. Political circumstances and obstacles that the Arab world has lived for a long time have subsequently influenced art. The researcher believes that Marcuse aesthetic theory has a relationship with contemporary Arab artworks in terms of its three main axes.

Problem Statement:

According to Abdul Rahim (2010), there is a clear lack of interest in the aesthetic aspect of Marcuse's philosophy in contemporary Arab culture which focuses on the role of art in presenting the political

and social issues. Nevertheless, the Arab region has been witnessing drastic events and difficult political disturbances, and contemporary art attempts have been trying to represent the evolving political and social situations. This study focuses on confirming the political dimension in Arab contemporary art and the relationship between Arab contemporary art and the Marquise aest

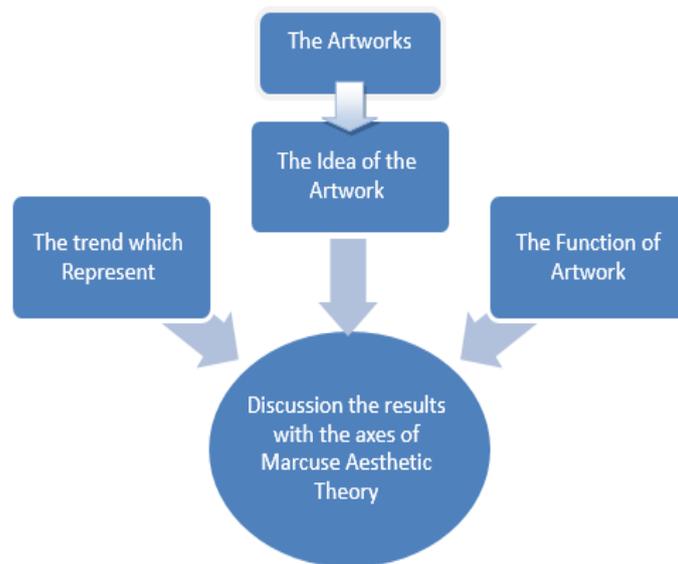


Figure 1: Descriptive Analytical Framework

Through investigating the artwork and the artistic trend which the artwork follows, this study will attempt to describe and analyze the purpose of the artwork i.e. religious, political, etc. and the meaning of the work and the possible interpretations through what has been written about it. It will also discuss the results in contrast with the main axes of Marcuse aesthetic theory:

Releasing the human feelings that leads to the emergence of new artistic imagination and sensitivity.

The connection between technology and art which helped in supporting a new form of technology in its relation to reality (Abdul Rahim, 2010). Marcuse believes that technology, which caused the developments in societies, accompanied repression of the life instinct, and salvation from this repression is represented in the art that will allow for the imagination to cross the technology limitations (Helo, 2015).

Aesthetic dimension domination, as the main dimension in our interaction with reality, will create a new flexible culture that can understand what was considered before as forbidden (Abdul Rahim, 2010).

The results of this study will prove the strong relationship between Arab contemporary art and Marcuse aesthetic theory which emphasizes the political dimension in Arab contemporary art.

Artwork 1

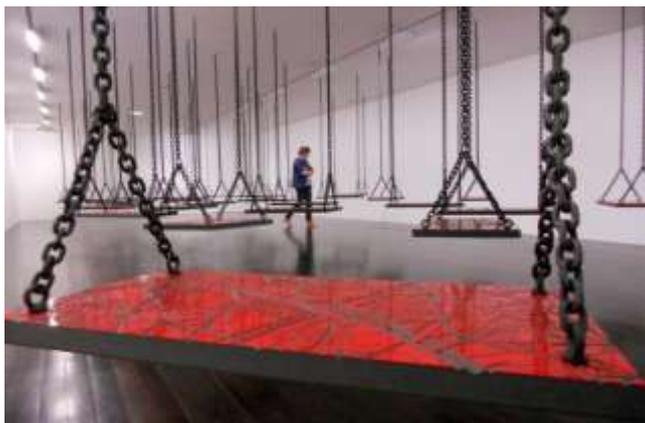


Figure 2. Installation art, suspended by Mona Hatoum (2011). 35 black and red swings and each one of them has a map of a country from the 6 continents.

The Function of the Artwork:

The Suspended installation conveys the political ideas of the artist; the displacement and migration issues which the Arab world is facing (Mathis, 2011).

The Idea of the Artwork:

Suspended artwork illustrates the political and social situations that face the Arab world such as displacement and migration. It points to the continuous flow of immigrants in the world, in general, and the Arab world in particular (Humphrey, 2011). The artist produced the installation to create a feeling of the geographical difference as an alternative of the connection (White Cube, 2011). It makes us think of the instability and fragility of the world, its population and their migrations (Sánchez, 2011). It shows the imbalance and the precariousness of war and the randomness of its victims. It refers to refugees'

displacement from their countries as a result of wars cruelty (Collabced, 2012).

Discussion:

If we look at the work of Mona Hatoum through what has been written by critics, we find that the artist has unleashed her feelings towards what the Arab world has been facing of political issues and problems. She expressed it through one of the contemporary art forms: installation art, using non-traditional materials which is swings. The installation carries the political ideas of the artist which criticize the reality. Accordingly, it corresponds to the first axis of Marcuse aesthetic theory.

The artist did not use technological tools overly in her installation, and the aesthetic spirit of art still remains. The relationship between art and technology stayed in the right way. This is consistent with the second axis of Marcuse aesthetic theory.

This installation shows the strong relationship between the artwork and the reality which represents. It signifies displacement and migration issues representing reality throughout installation art. This is seen as an anomaly form from the familiar art in the world. This corresponds to the third axis of Marcuse aesthetic theory.

Artwork 2



Figure 4. Installation art, Arab Spring (2015) by Faisal Samrah. Three sands heaped in the shape of graves and have three balloons on them.

The Function of the Artwork:

The installation (Arab spring) conveys the artist idea about the refusal of the political events that has happened in Arab countries which was called Arab Spring (Haider, 2017).

The Idea of Artwork:

The idea of this installation is that the artist rejects the political events of what is known as “the Arab Spring”. In his point of view, this Arab Spring was not a "Spring" because of the consequences; destruction, war and atrocities (Haider, 2017). The artist used sand in the shape of graves and a balloon on each of them to show the terrible events and the painful reality of the situation. The artist’s intention is to signal the destruction caused by the so-called Arab Spring.

Discussion:

We see that the artist Faisal Samrah expressed his rejection of what's called “ the Arab Spring” and its destructive consequences through a contemporary art form; installation art using non-traditional materials such as balloons. This corresponds to the first axis of Marcuse aesthetic theory.

In regard to the second axis, the artist did not use technology tools in his installation in order to maintain the artistic spirit. He used sand heaps and balloons that represent the graves which conveyed the artist idea successfully, and this is coherent with Marcuse aesthetic theory second axis.

The artist was able to establish a strong relationship between his installation and the reality where he presented it eloquently through sand heaps that represent the graves of innocent children who died during the chaos of “the Arab Spring.” The artist represented the reality through installation art, which is being seen as an anomaly from familiar forms in the art of the world. His work illustrates Marcuse aesthetic theory third axis.

Artwork 3:



Figure 4.14. Installation art, Chair and Signature (2003) by Khalid Al-Hamzah. Plastic chairs, chairs for children and a large chair of light and folded ropes

The Function of the Artwork:

The function of this installation is a criticism of political and social life in Jordan and a confirmation for the role of contemporary art in life (AL-Hamzah, 2005).

The Idea of Artwork:

The idea of this artwork is connected with parliamentary elections and other political events which happened simultaneously with the project. The project is based on some political and artistic concepts and their relationship with culture. The installation includes deep political metaphor about parliamentary elections. The context of this artwork is important in the political and social issues connected with it. The artist's vision represents an increase of awareness of the political situation through art. The artist aims to activate the role of art in society in an untraditional way (AL-Hamzah, 2005).

Discussion:

When examining the artist’s installation, one can understand that the artist expressed his feelings by criticism the political and social life in Jordan. This also confirms the role of contemporary art in the life. The chairs in this installation corresponds to the first axis of Marcuse aesthetic theory.

The artist did not use the a lot of technology tools in his installation, to be the aesthetic spirit of art still remain, through of plastic chairs, chairs for children and a large chair of light and folded ropes. The artist was able to convey his ideas successfully. This is consistent with the second axis of Marcuse aesthetic theory.

With regard to the third axis, the artist was able to establish a strong relationship between his installation and the reality, through the idea of his artwork which is connected with parliamentary elections and political events which happened simultaneously with the project. The artist was able to represent the reality through installation art, which is being seen as an anomaly from familiar art in the world. This corresponds to the third axis of Marcuse aesthetic theory.

Conclusion:

To sum up, the political dimension is clear in Arab contemporary art, and there is an apparent relationship between Arab contemporary art and Marcuse aesthetic theory.

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