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### The dematerialization of art: Critical Analysis Essay

The dematerialization of art is an article written by Lucy R Lippard and John Chandler in the 1960s, a time in history which gave rise to the Civil Rights Movement, the Vietnam War, the Women's Liberation Movement and the Counterculture. The 1960s was an environment of social unrest focused on freedom in every sense and breaking away from any kind of cultural confinement. The article is a culmination of social, cultural, and political events that led the society to contest the definition of art and how it is perceived and the article acknowledges this dematerialization of art as an object to an extent where the object becomes wholly obsolete. The emergence of conceptual art is an occasion characterized by lack of order and chaos that created a new utopia by visualizing a novel world where art is meant to reflect, inspire and explore what lies beyond the surface. The dematerialization of art refers to the subversion of the traditional definition of art where the object becomes secondary, and the emphasis is on the non-visual/idea/process that in turn opens infinite possibilities instead of narrowing them down. Lippard and Chandler map the emergence of conceptual art from two directions: art as idea and art as action.

The authors perspective elaborates on the topic of conceptual art and draws comparison of its understanding with the conventional way in which art existed and was perceived by an audience, where the process/idea becomes the focus of interest over the end object. Open-ended, ambiguous and idea driven in its approach, this physical evolution of art has resulted in what Lippard and Chandler describe as a "disintegration of art", and "abstraction and liberation of the idea." The idea is paramount, and the material form is

secondary, bridging the gap between verbal and visual, the writer and the artist, establishing the idea of art as an experience with an underlying intellectual schema, inducing it with cerebral qualities to achieve more with less. The article challenges how much less 'nothing' can be.

### **The intrinsic nature of conceptual art**

In "The dematerialization of art", Lippard and Chandler state: A highly conceptual art, like an extremely rejective art or an apparently random art, upsets detractors because there is "not enough to look at," or rather not enough of what they are accustomed to looking for.

Conceptual art is conceptual in its heavy reliance on the idea/process as paramount with the belief that articulation of an idea suffices as a work of art. The underlying intellectual schema is of utmost value, while visual aesthetic considerations are subordinate, and often fueled by indifference. The idea supersedes the form in its importance and aims to draw a possibility of a different relation between the audience and the interpretation.

Conceptual art demands more participation and time from the viewer despite its lack of detail on the surface in order to fully experience and adsorb its true essence. Lippard and Chandler support this point by describing how conceptual art invites the audience to spend more time experiencing and interacting with something that appears detail-less and has the quality of stretching time psychologically. Consider that time spent looking at something that is visually empty results in feeling that time is passing slowly in comparison to the quickened elapse of time spent engaged in a visually-charged piece of work in terms of its form.

## **The underlying meaning of dematerialization**

Lippard elaborates on conceptual art, drawing focus on how dematerialization attempts to simplify the form of art whose core shifts from being perceived not only just in its form (syntax) rather the perception of what is truly, inherently meaningful (message). Conceptual art serves as a medium for a continuum of conversation with no intentions of becoming the message itself. According to Lippard, conceptual art is by no means the final phase of art but an opening up of multiplicity of ideas reminding us what the value of art truly is. "it will be content with less and achieve more" (Lippard 50). Art can be everything in its nothingness but that does not determine how less of something that takes the form of art qualifies to be nothingness rather the meaning of conceptual art is ever evolving, oscillating between the polar ends of all-encompassing understanding.

## **Conclusion**

In "The dematerialization of art", Lippard and Chandler conclude:

We still do not know how much less "nothing" can be. Has an ultimate zero point been arrived at with black paintings, white paintings, light beams, transparent film, silent concerts, invisible sculpture, or any of the other projects mentioned above? It hardly seems likely.

The article successfully emphasizes that conceptual art is boundless, devoted to making ideas the central focus of its existence and since ideas come with no boundaries, so does the art that represents them, it is a vehicle for the continuing critique on different aspects of the world. Conceptual art paves the way for an emerging information economy where the true substance lies in the ever evolving meaning, an expression through semantic content, intellectualizing the visual, forming an interactive process and an eternal anticipation of social evolution.

Citations

Lippard, Lucy R. and Chandler, John. "The Dematerialization of Art." *Art International*, 2 Feb. 1968, pp. 31-36.