

The Interaction of Meaning with Pictorial Motifs (Case Example of Morris Escher's Day and Night Painting)

Abstract

Binary contrasts are among the ruling principles of the material world, and man is a combination of the body and soul. Certainly, these meanings cannot be embodied in human art, including pictorial motifs. Art, now and then, reflects meanings as they are in actual reality and at times depicts them in the form of symbols and signs. Contrasts in visual works of art do not at all times employ conflict as they complement each other and find significance when involved. In order to study the meaning of contrasts in pictorial motifs, it is necessary to select a sample of artistic index; therefore, Escher's most controversial contemporary work of art was selected. The title of this work and its form and content have many contrasts as it is full of semantic and contrasting visual values in terms of shape, expression, structure, color, images and motifs. The present research was conducted in a descriptive and comparative method and based on the data of library sources. The results of this research show that the number of binary contrasts in the Day and Night painting reaches seven examples, and in generalizing them to artistic functions, specifically from the point of view of meaning, it contains binary contrasts of form and action (content and narrative) and can be adaptation to Derrida's theory.

Research aims:

١. Investigating the semantic interaction of contrasts in the pictorial motifs of Morris Escher's painting of Day and Night.
٢. Examining the semantic functions of binary opposition.

Research questions:

١. What is the degree of adaptability of Derrida's theory of binary oppositions to works of visual art?
٢. What are the semantic functions of binary contrasts?

Keywords: interaction of meaning, Jacques Derrida, dual confrontations, visual arts, Maurice Escher's Day and Night painting.

Introduction

Jacques Derrida is a French-Algerian philosopher. Dual oppositions are one of the most important subjects of attention of Derrida and other followers of structuralism; moreover, it was created based on the philosophy that considers the foundation of existence to be based on dual oppositions. Derrida, with the fundamental changes he made in the western intellectual system, also transformed the concept of dual oppositions. According to Derrida's opinion, philosophical-scientific thought was placed in a bipolar prison in the foundation of Western thought and revolved around the axis of dual oppositions. Maurice Cornelis Escher (June ١٧, ١٨٩٧ - March ٢٧, ١٩٧٢), known as Maurice Escher (in English: M.C Escher), was a graphic artist from the Netherlands who created amazing works of wood engraving, lithography, and light shading, inspired by mathematical calculations. Escher is one of the artists of Op Art (perspective art) who belonged to the art schools of the ٢٠th century and the artists of this style attempted to create movement and volume in their works by using bright colors and shades to create a deep sense of field. In other words, with their skill and mastery over the element of color and masterful use of lines, they created paintings that caught the eyes of the viewers. In Morris Escher's works, certainty and absolute concepts seem meaningless. He plays with dual confrontations and challenges its originality. Escher's images are the result of intelligent use of the unlimited field of potential possibilities that make the world of things beyond the order of normal situations (in our view).

The investigation of the background of the research indicates that no independent work has been written regarding dual oppositions in Morris Escher's Day and Night painting based on Derrida's theories. However, some works have been developed to investigate such dual oppositions. Habibi Afratakhti (٢٠١٣) in her M.A. thesis research entitled "Dual Contrasts in Surah Mubarakeh Al-Lil" and in this thesis, the dual confrontations in the Surah Al-Lil and its artistic functions and its contrasts with the inscriptions with emphasis on Quranic manuscripts is presented. It can be concluded that a research paper presenting the various functions of dual confrontations in the painting under study has not be published. Therefore, this paper is a novel and unexplored analytic and descriptive research.

Conclusion

The findings show that a work of art has a wide visual opposition of signs. The symbols in a visual work are actually the patterns of an image and by multiplying their meaning, they display an endless representation. The meanings of the signifiers move in an unknown position that has no end in sight since depending on the viewer of the work and the state of his time and society, at any time and in any place, different meanings are extracted and each is a sign of another. Signs in the state of binary contrasts in a visual artwork, in addition to an explicit and real concept, also have implicit, abstract concepts belonging to the metalanguage of semiotics, and in the content and narrative action, the viewer is constantly faced with patterns that have countless symbols. The binary contrasts of a visual artwork are the result of the performance of different symbolic systems that are manifested in the form of diverse layers of motifs; consequently, the cross-patterns of a visual work have an open concept and embrace meaning until the end. The analysis of binary contrasts in the semiotics of visual arts is completed from the analysis of motifs and it is not possible to examine a sign in isolation.

What seems to be important in this discussion is, firstly, the presence of dual contrasts in the nature of visual elements and visual qualities of Asher's Day and Night painting, and secondly, the presence of form and content contrast of this work. The dual contrasts depicted in the painting of Day and Night are the result of a logical melody in the work, which, by uniting with each other in the form of hidden relationships, has connected the different parts of the painting to each other. Finally, this has strengthened the composition of this work and at the same time contrasts with each other; thus, none of its poles is superior to the other pole, and it has created an eye-catching contrast. This is a modern language and a result of the very precise and intelligent technology of the artist, and the end has created the meaning of the work. A work that, at the peak of simplicity, has used the most important feature of visualization, which is dual contrasts, in the best possible way to be desirable, which makes the artist's mastery of the basics of visual language undeniable. These contrasts are not superior to the other and arise from the special thinking of the artist, which shows the twinning of day and night and the rotation of the days on the earth, which go together and are born from each other. Also, the sky and the earth, which are connected to each other and transform at the same time as the opposition, are released and unconfined like birds, and this is the cycle of death and life or rebirth, and black and white, which is a symbol of war and peace and all the other motifs of this work, show the uncertainty and permanence of life and the return from the

material and earthly world to the spiritual and heavenly world and vice versa. The twin presence of peace and conflict, evil and goodness, and the rotation of day and night, etc., are effective factors and concepts hidden in the contrasts of motifs in this work, which can be interpreted correctly by analyzing these motifs and comparing them with Derrida's dualities.

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