

Transforming Narratives with the Art of Revealism

In the ever-evolving world of art, new strategies frequently surface, each challenging our views and introducing new perspectives. An innovative approach promises to use contrasts and contradictions to bring forward hidden or untold stories and suppressed voices. Before diving into its intricacies, the essence and meaning of this innovative strategy called “Revealism” will be discussed.

What is Revealism?

Revealism seeks to shed light on untold stories or emotions that are often overlooked or intentionally obscured within society. It arises from a recognition that many narratives remain marginalized, unexpressed, or suppressed due to various societal, political, or personal reasons. The meaning behind this strategy is to amplify these hidden voices through art by challenging and disrupting conventional narrative forms. As a strategy, Revealism focuses on using contradictions and contrast to reveal and highlight hidden narratives of suppressed voices. It explores the dynamic interplay between individual stories and societal forces. It often confronts false or unfair narratives imposed on individuals by external forces, offering a means to break free and reclaim truth through artistic expression. Moreover, it aims to shed light on serious topics in society that deserve more recognition. Central to this approach is the idea of taking elements that are traditionally seen as negative or constraining and transforming them into tools of empowerment and expression.

In practical terms, Revealism is implemented in art through a deliberate focus on elements that are typically marginalized or suppressed. Artists adopting this strategy might choose subjects, themes, or voices that are often ignored or underrepresented, bringing them to the forefront of their work. They often employ techniques like juxtaposition, irony, and recontextualization to challenge and subvert the viewer’s expectations.

The strategy, Revealism, is characterized by several key aspects that collectively aim to uncover and highlight hidden or suppressed stories. One of the aspects is **Contradictory Use of Language**, where negatively perceived words or phrases are recontextualized to diminish their harmful impact, thereby changing the narrative. **Juxtaposing Opposites** is another technique, which involves placing contrasting elements side by side to emphasize differences and reveal underlying truths. **Irony or subversion** challenges existing narratives and stereotypes by underscoring absurdities of societal norms. Additionally, **Visual or Verbal Paradoxes** create seemingly self-contradictory scenarios or statements that, upon deeper exploration, reveal greater truths. These paradoxes are powerful as they encourage viewers to look beyond the surface and engage more deeply with the artwork, leading to a more profound understanding of the themes and stories being presented.

This new art strategy stands apart from art movements like Social Realism and Expressionism in its nuanced approach. While Social Realism directly depicts socio-political realities, often with stark realism, Revealism takes a more layered approach. It utilizes subtle irony and thoughtful recontextualization to show and transform reality. Expressionism, with its focus on intense emotional expression, differs from Revealism’s technique of intertwining emotions with broader societal narratives to reveal suppressed stories. In essence, Revealism is unique in aiming to not just expose but to empower and reclaim narratives through art by using contrasts.

Now that revealism has been elaborated upon, this paper will discuss four different artworks that fit into this strategy. The analysis of these artworks aims to offer a deeper understanding of the context of Revealism and how it is applied in practice, showcasing its impact across

various artistic mediums and themes. An artwork within this strategy may focus on one or more of the discussed aspects to align with the principles of Revealism. The strategy is flexible and adaptable, depending on the artist's intention, the subject matter, and the used medium.

“They shut me up in Prose” by Emily Dickinson

They shut me up in Prose –
As when a little Girl
They put me in the Closet –
Because they liked me “still” –

Still! Could themselves have peeped –
And seen my Brain – go round –
They might as well have lodged a Bird
For Treason – in the Pound –

Himself has but to will
And easy as a Star
Look down upon Captivity –
And laugh – No more have I –

Text from “Poetry Foundation”

(<https://www.poetryfoundation.org/poems/52196/they-shut-me-up-in-prose-445>)

retrieved on: November 5, 2023.

In Emily Dickinson's poem, “They shut me up in Prose”, the essence of Revealism is embodied through the use of language and structure that defy the suppression she experienced as a woman and a writer. The poem opens with a vivid metaphor: “They shut me up in Prose—As when a little Girl / They put me in the Closet—”, wherein prose can be seen as a metaphor for the confining structures of society, and wherein the act of being silenced is equated to being confined as a child. This metaphor shows how society expected women to be quiet and obedient, similar to how Dickinson's own unique personality and poetry were limited by the rules of her time. Throughout the poem, Dickinson uses imagery and metaphor to further illustrate the feeling of entrapment. Lines like “still! Could themselves have peeped” evoke a yearning for freedom and subtly criticize the restrictions she faces. This effectively illustrates her personal struggle and also critiques the wider societal restrictions placed upon women.

Moreover, irony is a noticeable feature in the poem. Dickinson discusses being silenced, yet the very act of writing and publishing the poem is a defiance of this silencing. While she speaks of being confined and silenced, the act of writing the poem is a form of liberation and defiance. This ironic stance challenges the imposed silence, as the act of writing the poem itself defies the very suppression she describes. The poem, therefore, serves as both a depiction of suppression and an act of resistance against it.

In “They shut me up in Prose”, Emily Dickinson uses the strategy of Revealism to give depth to her commentary on societal constraints, particularly those faced by women. She highlights the struggle for freedom and self-expression. The poem uses three key principles of Revealism. Dickinson juxtaposes the confinement of prose with the liberation of poetry, illustrating the contrast between societal repression and personal expression. Irony and subversion are central. She discusses being silenced in a poem, a medium of expression, thereby challenging the imposed constraints. The paradoxical nature of the poem, speaking

of silence through an expressive art form, highlights Emily Dickinson's resilience and critiques societal norms.

“because i liked a boy” by Sabrina Carpenter

In Sabrina Carpenter's song “because i liked a boy”, Revealism is used to effectively reshape and redefine the narrative that society imposed on her as a woman in the public eye. The song transforms a personal experience into a broader commentary on societal attitudes, particularly towards women and their choices. Sabrina reclaims insulting labels such as “slut” and “homewrecker”, thereby stripping these terms of their degrading power and neutralizing their impact. By openly addressing and owning these labels, she challenges the narrative using Revealism to not only bring to light the often-unspoken aspect of public shaming and judgment faced by women, but also to empower herself and redefine her story on her own terms.

Furthermore, the song places Sabrina's personal truth against societal judgment. Lyrics like “I'm the hot topic on your tongue / I'm a rebound getting 'round stealin' from the young”, and “Who knew cuddling on trampolines could be so reckless?” contrast her actual experience with the exaggerated public perception by using verbal paradoxes and highlighting the disparity between the two narratives. The juxtaposition is further emphasized by the contrast between the music during the verses and the chorus. The song starts out with a calm, dreamy beginning, giving a sense of fond and innocent reminiscing, but later progresses into more intense and dynamic instrumentation as Carpenter addresses the harsh backlash she received. This shift in music mirrors the difference between her personal experience and the public's perception of it.

In addition, irony is evident in the title of the song, “because i liked a boy”, which intentionally downplays the serious and impactful consequences she faced simply due to her romantic choices. This understatement serves to highlight the absurdity and unfairness of the intense public scrutiny and criticism Sabrina Carpenter received. This way, she subtly points out the disproportionality between her actions and the severe reactions they provoked.

In Sabrina Carpenter's “because i liked a boy”, the four key aspects of Revealism are employed to reshape her personal experience of public shaming and serve as a broader reflection on societal attitudes toward women. Sabrina achieves narrative reclamation by using the art strategy in her song to transform negative societal labels into empowering statements. She highlights the absurdity of societal judgment and reclaims her story through the application of contradictions and contrast. The song and the full lyrics of the song can be found in the [appendix](#).

“The Two Fridas” by Frida Kahlo



Image from “Frida Kahlo”

(<https://www.fridakahlo.org/the-two-fridas.jsp>)

retrieved on: November 9, 2023.

Frida Kahlo’s “The Two Fridas” is an example of Revealism in paintings. In this painting, Kahlo presents two versions of herself sitting side by side. One of them is dressed in a traditional Tehuana costume and the other in a European style dress. This visual contrast directly addresses the theme of dual identity. The painting delves into the complexities of Kahlo’s personal narrative, which was marked by physical pain, emotional turmoil, and a bicultural existence. Both Fridas represent different aspects of her identity. One Frida shows her Mexican heritage and the other shows her European heritage. This juxtaposition can also be interpreted as a way of underlining the differences in her life before and after her divorce from Diego Rivera, depicting both the traditional, loved Frida, that is now heartbroken, and the modern, independent Frida.

Moreover, Kahlo’s painting utilizes visual paradoxes. The two Fridas are connected by a vein, yet they are distinctly separate beings. It’s a powerful visual representation of internal struggle and conveys a deeper truth about the human experience and identity. It seems contradictory because the two separate entities are sharing the same life force. However, it symbolizes the complex nature of Kahlo’s personal and emotional experiences. In addition, the painting portrays the heartbreak she felt after her divorce from her husband. The interconnected hearts and the blood that flows between the two Fridas can be viewed as an emphasis on Frida’s intense emotional distress that reflects her complicated relationship with Rivera, marked by a mix of love and suffering.

Through the key aspects of Revealism, Frida gives meaning to “The Two Fridas” by delving into her complex identity, her emotional struggles following her divorce, and her cultural duality. The painting becomes a powerful expression of her internal conflicts and the intricate relationship between her personal life and cultural background. The painting juxtaposes two self-portraits to highlight her cultural duality and internal conflict, especially post-divorce. Irony and visual paradoxes are evident in the interconnected yet distinct hearts of the two figures. It symbolizes the relationship between Kahlo’s individual suffering and her cultural identity. This visual element in the painting illustrates the nuanced way Kahlo navigates and expresses her internal conflicts and her sense of self. The depiction sheds light on often overlooked stories and emotions by portraying dual identity and personal struggles. It

symbolizes the experiences of many who grapple with similar issues. By candidly depicting her pain and resilience, Kahlo empowers silent voices. This work serves as both a personal expression and a broader commentary on the complexities of identity and emotional struggles in society.

“Non-Violence” by Carl Fredrik Reuterswärd

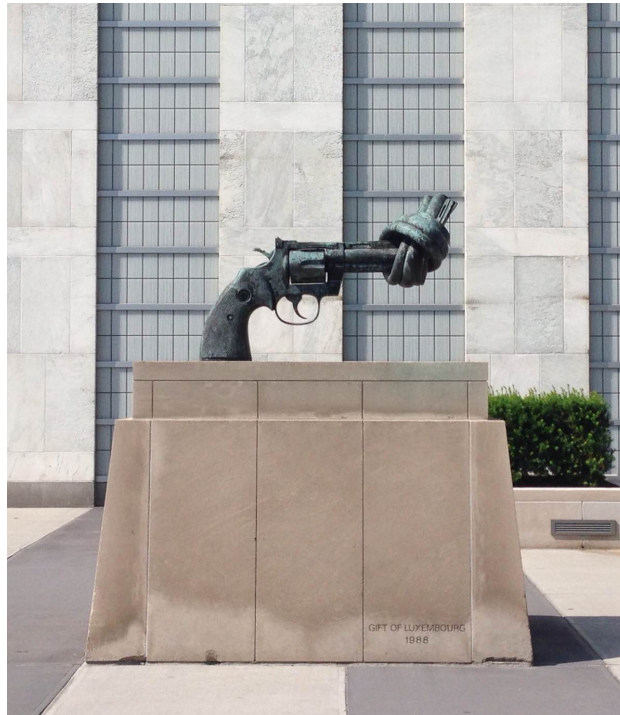


Image from "United Nations Gifts"
(<https://www.un.org/ungifts/non-violence-0>)
retrieved on: November 7, 2023.

“Non-Violence” is a sculpture by Carl Fredrik Reuterswärd created to honor John Lennon’s vision of a peaceful world after his murder. It incorporates the principles of Revealism through its use of irony and subversion. This sculpture, often known as “The Knotted Gun”, portrays a revolver with its barrel tied in a knot, rendering it incapable of firing. This simple yet powerful alteration of a symbol traditionally associated with violence and aggression into one of non-violence is a good example of Revealism in practice.

The sculpture directly confronts the narrative of power, control, and violence often associated with guns. The knotted barrel is not just a physical transformation but a symbolic one, turning a weapon of destruction into a call for peace. This ironic twist forces the viewer to reconsider their perceptions and beliefs about violence and conflict resolution. Transforming a gun into a symbol of peace, involves the recontextualization technique of Revealism. Reuterswärd takes a familiar, often negatively perceived object and repositions it in a new, positive light. In doing so, he challenges societal norms and expectations about violence, advocating for a world where peace triumphs over destruction.

Reuterswärd juxtaposes a gun, typically a symbol of violence, with a knotted barrel representing peace. This creates a visual paradox that challenges traditional perceptions of

firearms. The sculpture subverts the usual function and symbolism of a gun into a symbol of peace which underscores a narrative of change. Through these elements, this artwork challenges how society views violence and encourages a move towards peace. It shows that art can inspire change and support a more peaceful world. By altering a familiar symbol of harm, the sculpture invites reflection on how we perceive and deal with violence, encouraging a shift towards more peaceful approaches. Furthermore, "Non-Violence" illuminates untold stories and suppressed emotions by symbolizing the impact of gun violence on individuals and communities. This representation goes beyond the typical narrative of violence and power, shedding light on the grief, loss, and suffering often overlooked in discussions about gun violence.

Summarizing Revealism

This paper explored Revealism as an art strategy that mainly uses contrast and contradiction to highlight hidden stories and suppressed voices. Revealism amplifies these narratives by challenging the status quo and disrupting conventional forms, using techniques like juxtaposition, irony, paradoxes, and recontextualization. Four artworks were analyzed to demonstrate how Revealism is applied in practice: Emily Dickinson's poem "They shut me up in Prose", Sabrina Carpenter's song "because i liked a boy", Frida Kahlo's painting "The Two Fridas", and Carl Fredrik Reuterswärd's sculpture "Non-Violence". Each discussed piece demonstrates the key aspects of revealism, reshaping narratives and shedding light on silenced voices. In short, Revealism is an art strategy that illuminates untold stories and suppressed emotions, often overlooked in society, by using contrasts and contradictions. It challenges existing narratives and empowers silenced voices, transforming negative elements into tools of expression and empowerment.

Appendix

Sabrina Carpenter: "because i liked a boy"

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<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=1YUBbF24H44>

I said I wanted thin mints
And you said you knew a guy
You showed up with a boombox
And stars in your eyes
Who knew cuddling on trampolines
Could be so reckless
We bonded over black eyed peas
And and complicated exes

Fell so deeply into it
It was all so innocent

Now I'm a homewrecker
I'm a slut
I got death threats
Filling up semi trucks
Tell me who I am
Guess I don't have a choice
All because I liked -
I'm the hot topic on your tongue
I'm a rebound gettin' 'round
Stealin' from the young
Tell me who I am
Guess I don't have a choice
All I because I liked a boy

I'm not catastrophizing
Everything's derailing
Was only tryna hold you close
While your heart was failing
It's not internet illusion
Just two kids going through it
You said I'm too late to be your first love
But I'll always be your favorite

Now I'm a homewrecker
I'm a slut
I got death threats
Filling up semi trucks
Tell me who I am
Guess I don't have a choice
All because I liked -
I'm the hot topic on your tongue
I'm a rebound gettin' 'round
Stealin' from the young
Tell me who I am
Guess I don't have a choice

All I because I liked a boy

Fell so deeply into it
It was all so innocent
Dating boys with exes
Noli wouldn't recommend it

I'm a homewrecker
I'm a slut
I got death threats
Filling up semi trucks
Tell me who I am
Guess I don't have a choice
All because I liked a boy
And all of this for what
When everything went down
We'd already broken up
Please tell me who I am
Guess I don't have a choice
All because i liked a boy
A boy
A boy
All because I liked a boy