

Uncanny and Failure —Paradoxical Failure as a Methodology for Conceptual Art

Zhi Han

Lancaster University, United Kingdom

ABSTRACT

This research aims to explore a paradigm of conceptual art practice grounded in paradox and to examine how artworks can present the 'real' within this framework. The paper addresses two key issues: first, it investigates the ontological question of how viewers experience the 'real' as revealed through art, focusing on the uncanny sensation and analyzing this phenomenon through a psychoanalytic theory, particularly Lacan's concept of the Real and its paradoxical nature. Second, it focuses on the methodological challenge of constructing a research paradigm that generates the uncanny experience while preserving the paradoxical essence of conceptual art, drawing on a Hegelian dialectical approach, with 'failure' as a central theme. This paper primarily employs Lacan's psychoanalytic theory and Žižek's interpretation of the Hegelian dialectic to explore, from both ontological and methodological perspectives, how paradoxical conceptual artworks, by maintaining the uncanny within them, can present the 'real'—revealing the emptiness of symbolic structures and, simultaneously, the subjective gesture inherent in this emptiness.

Keywords: the Uncanny, the Real, psychoanalysis, conceptual art, paradox, dialectic, failure