

A Critical Discourse Analysis of the Construction of Artists' Reputation by Online Art Magazines

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Abstract : The construction of artistic reputation has been examined within sociology, philosophy, and economics but, barring a few noteworthy exceptions its discursive aspect has been largely ignored. This is particularly surprising given that contemporary artworks primarily rely on discourse to construct their ontological status. This paper contributes a discourse analytical perspective to the broad body of literature on artistic reputation by providing an understanding of how it is discursively constructed within the institutional context of online contemporary art magazines. This paper uses corpora compiled from the websites of e-flux and ARTnews, two leading online contemporary art magazines, to examine how these organisations discursively construct the reputation of artists. By constructing word-sketches of the term 'Artist', the paper identified the most significant modifiers attributed to artists and the most significant verbs which have 'artist' as an object or subject. The most significant results were analysed through concordances and demonstrated a somewhat surprising lack of evaluative representation. To examine this feature more closely, the paper then analysed three announcement texts from e-flux's site and three review texts from ARTnews' site, comparing the use of modifiers and verbs in the representation of artists, artworks, and institutions. The results of this analysis support the corpus findings, suggesting that artists are rarely represented in evaluative terms. Based on the relatively high frequency of evaluation in the representation of artworks and institutions, these results suggest that there may be discursive norms at work in the field of online contemporary art magazines which regulate the use of verbs and modifiers in the evaluation of artists.

Keywords : contemporary art, corpus linguistics, critical discourse analysis, symbolic capital

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