



The French industrial designer Roger Tallon, sitting on a chair he created in 1967.
The chair 'César' is part of his series of portrait seats.

The famous clown Grimaldi goes to the doctor, for treating his insurmountable streaks of depression:
'Not a problem', says the doctor, 'just go see a show by the famous clown Grimaldi.'
'But I am Grimaldi', says the clown.

Tautology is the use of two different or the same words, that together express the same thing twice. In logic, the concept refers to a statement that is always true: 'Drama is drama', 'a working mom', 'remaining relic'.

Symbolist poets engaged with tautological linguistic forms to avoid showing *the thing*. Acting as epiphany, the symbolist word was intended to appear from nothing: 'I say the rose, and the rose is there, not because it is a represented referent, but because it is the effect of an act of my voice. It is the effect of a pragmatic displacement of expectations'. Meaning did not derive from representing the visual appearance of a preexisting reality, but as an effect of sounds.

About a century later, in the 1960s, conceptual artists aimed for a similar displacement of referentiality: 'Works of art that try to tell us something about the world are bound to fail... The absence of reality in art is exactly art's reality'. Against the backdrop of spectacle, with advertising as its most prominent example, 'it was either art without the aesthetic, or the aesthetic without art'. To distinguish itself from the newly established middle class and its assumed aesthetic identity, art was supposed to withdraw from the senses. Conceptual Art aspired to a realm of mere cognition, that corresponds to language as a neutral anonymous structure. This meant expression through language beyond sensibility, subjectivity and chance. Instead of superseding the visual with the auditory, as the symbolist did, language was at the same time attributed with total authority and a total lack of contribution. But in a tautological sense, the idea fell through. The artist's intention was meant to be conveyed through a linguistic act that does not add anything, but rather forwards it unmediated. In its waywardness, however, language itself became an author. While the authority of willful artistic intention failed at claiming strict neutrality, it succeeded in blurring subjectivity.

-Jana Dormann