
CONCEPTUAL ARTWORK AS A POLYCODE TEXT

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The present article analyses a conceptual artwork as a polycode text whose perception requires interactions of multiple sensory channels of an individual. It emphasizes relationships of all artwork's components in different perception levels. It also describes artistic method of famous conceptual artists as an intellectual practice inspecting its own language development.

Key words: polycode text, creolized text, artwork, conceptual art, verbal and nonverbal components, icon

Conceptual art is one of the most questionable movements in contemporary art. The term was coined in the 1961 by the artist Henry Flynt. Now we can use it talking about the art based on ideas or concepts instead of the materialistic representations. One of its main branches can be summarily described as the result of putting image and text on the same level.

“To interpret a text is not to give it a (more or less justified, more or less free) meaning but on the contrary to appreciate what plural constitutes it” [5. P. 4]. Contemporary cultural researches suggest different methods for producing various kinds of knowledge and discussion. The most part of them requires a multidisciplinary approach. In Roland Barthes's view there is a big difference between a Work and a Text. “The difference is this: the work is a fragment of substance, occupying a part of the space of books (in a library for example), the Text is a methodological field” [6. P. 74]. Therefore, one can consider contemporary or even modern artwork as a Text, possessing certain properties. Among them are intertextuality, literariness, informativity, modality, address, sustainability, entirety, coherence, auto-semantics, hypertextuality etc.

We can apply almost all these properties to the artwork analysis, thereby some of them are more essential for our inquiry. Swiss linguist Charles Bally's research indicates that a sentence consists of two fundamental parts known as dictum and modus. The first one is defined as impersonal content, meaning of context, and the second one expresses author's attitude towards the expressed statement. For conceptual artworks interpreting this division is essential. According the conceptual art ideology the idea of artwork is a dictum, and its representation is a modus. Consequently, studying the modus apart from the dictum enables us to gain depth in artwork understanding. Modus is the basic conception for modality of the text, which means the way in which subject or idea exists or is done. It is quite certain that, the concept of modality in conceptual art can be criticized, because of abstraction factor in the conceptual artistic approach and notorious death of the author. But we have to insist on its existence, while modus is aligned with context of the speech and personal experience of the author even if he denies it.

By way of example, hypertextuality becomes really important part of contemporary artistic method without any references to art forms. Each viewer can form new interpretation and meanings. He is a sort of co-author, collaborator or more accurately — a contributor, weaving his own ideas into the artistic sight. All alterations of meanings occur because of the circumstances, personal experience, exhibition forms, and, thanks to the multiple transmission channels used by contemporary artist. Therefore, taking the artwork (more accurately — conceptual artwork) to be the text we can interpret it using semiotic methods and models: at first Ferdinand de Saussure's two-side model of sign, using to analyze all kind of relationships between different levels and parts of the artwork. The more complicated analytical model is the triangle of reference or triangle of meaning. Conceptual artworks are the best way to explain this semiotic triangle that describes form of relationships between the author as subject, a concept as object or referent, and its designation.

According to linguistic theory conceptual artworks can be described as “creolised”. The term was adopted in 1990 by Yuri Sorokin and Evgeni Tarasov. Some researchers use term “polycode texts” or even “semiotically complicated texts”. As defined the term describes different kinds of texts that consists of two non-homogenous parts: verbal and non-verbal. Polycode text coherence appears in verbal and non-verbal components' coordination, and presents in substantial, lingual, compositional levels. Art of the twentieth century differs from the art of earlier times. The first part of the twentieth century marked the end of the traditional perceptive art. Technical innovations influences, social and political circumstances, creative activity inspiring by new way of life triggered the mechanism of contemporary art and radical artistic ideas. One of that ideas was to create metatext involves use of texts messages, icons or even real life objects. By contrast with traditional research, focused on the icon as a second semantic system, we will try to analyze the inverse process of text incorporation into the visual artwork.

It is really important that the text had been used in artworks long before this. The history of art is full of examples of artists who used it in different ways. Russian Constructivist artists created images with combinations of different printer's types to actualize new social meanings attempting to form a new type of utilitarian art. Dada, Cubist or even Futurist artists appropriated the collage techniques, presenting cut-and-pasted text fragments and illustrations in one artwork. That was kind of a new visual language used to glorify advanced technology and urban modernity.

Nevertheless, many Conceptual artists used the text in place of their usual means of production. One of the originators of Conceptual art, American artist and theoretician Joseph Kosuth has created a lot of text-based artworks since 1960s. His piece “One and Three Chairs”, made in 1965, became an icon for all the art movement. “Since no form is intrinsically superior to another, the artist may use any form, from an expression of words (written or spoken) to physical reality, equally” [9. P. 82]. Kosuth's artwork is an installation that consists of wood chair, photography of a chair and a copy of dictionary definition of a chair. It is a perfect presentation of one object using three different forms of representation: an image, an object, and text. “There are many elements involved in a work of art. The most important are the most obvious” [9. P. 83]. The artwork gives insight into relationships between text (or language), display image and object. And this is the way in which contemporary art develops nowadays.

The main Kosuth statement was: “The art I call Conceptual art is such because it is based on an inquiry into the nature of art” [8. P. 40]. Conceptual art is a kind of intellectual practice inspecting its own language development. “Works of art are analytic propositions. That is, if viewed within their context — as art — they provide no information whatsoever about any matter of fact. A work of art is a tautology in that it is a presentation of the artist’s intention, that is, he is saying that that particular work of art is art, which means, is a definition of art” [1. P. 165].

Kosuth’s method partly resembles French surrealist Rene Magritt’s work. He also constructed visual and logical antinomies, such as “The Treachery of Images” (“This is Not a Pipe”) in 1928—1929 to analyze the nature of art. Proposing us visual representation of the subject (a pipe) and its verbal negative assumption (the negative statement) he created a mind trap, motivating us to accept only one pose: of the spectator or reader, but not both of them. The mentioned artwork is a kind of metatext. It turns visual artwork into a means to speak about itself.

The word became an important part of artwork creation in contemporary art. In the beginning was the Word. Such theological references generate unique meanings and metaphysical reasoning to conceptual artworks’ creation. “If words are used, and they proceed from ideas about art, then they are art and not literature; numbers are not mathematics” [9. P. 83].

In 1971 American conceptual artist John Baldessari created “I Will Not Make Any More Boring Art” — piece used the text instead of the image. The first its version was created at Nova Scotia College of Art and Design without artist’s presence. “As there wasn’t enough money for me to travel to Nova Scotia, I proposed that the students voluntarily write “I Will Not Make Any More Boring Art” on the walls of the gallery, like punishment. To my surprise they covered the walls” [13. P. 188].

Baldessari provided the students with direction on main idea, but they had some space to perform it. Therefore, the question of traditional author’s role has been risen or according to Roland Barthes’s theory — the question of the death of the author was placed. But the main idea of his art was the power of a Word transmitting into the visual artwork, which could be interpreted in different symbolic levels.

In conceptual art a viewer and an artist both are active makers of meaning. “Signs, therefore, are clues with which the speaker “furnishes” the addressees, enabling them and leading them to infer the way in which the speaker intends to influence them. Signs are not [...] containers used for the transport of ideas from one person’s head to another. Signs are hints of a more or less distinct nature, inviting the other to make certain inferences and enabling the other to reach them” [7. P. 90]. This relationship is dynamic and in Roland Barthes’s view depends on cultural level and multiple sensory channels of each of them. The viewer uses his learning and understanding channels for translating and transferring verbal and nonverbal artist’s signs into the personal experience. At the same time “a work of art may be understood as a conductor from the artist’s mind to the viewer’s. But it may never reach the viewer, or it may never leave the artist’s mind” [9. P. 82].

It is commonly known that polycode text or creolized one can consist not only of the text and the image, but also can be presented in other sensation levels. In the history of

contemporary art we can find new art forms such as video art works, new performative practices, happenings and installations. All this modern forms based on conceptual art ideas that explored author-artwork-spectator possible configurations.

In such a manner we can realize French artist Gina Pane's artworks. Her artistic method involved her own body participation. And presented thereby a complex synthetical artwork, consists not only of the action, but also of its photo and video presentation.

In 1973 at the Rodolphe Stadler's gallery in Paris the French artist of Italian origin Gina Pane has presented performance in three parts called "Self-Portrait(s)". In spite of the traditional approaches to defining and analyzing performative practices that was a unique form putting together the action in itself and its photo documentation. This special relationship between an action (or a dictum) and its representation (or a modus) became a key aspect of Pane's work.

All the process was recorded by Swiss filmmaker and feminist Carole Roussopoulos — the first woman in France directed the documentary for portable Sony Portapak camera. She was also well-known for her scandal socially oriented documentaries.

Despite the modern technical capabilities of the media photographic images of the process was more important for Gina Pane. The entire series of pictures taken during the performance were strictly planned by the artist. Together with the French photographer Françoise Masson she worked through all the details of the composition, then she selected the pictures, crop them and arranged in a certain order for the subsequent exposition. Her final goal was to create a photo installation with a focus on viewer reflection and perception.

A great number of her artworks are largely based on biblical stories, lives of saints and legends of the martyrs. Her artworks include different citations of Old Testament scenes, literal references and links to some famous saints and events proposing varying interpretation. In such a manner she has created a unique visual system with a head motif of the Saint (or Martyr) purifying through the prism of his physical pain in the name of the Other. This author's conception is critically conceptualized by new representation in the museum space where the photo documentation of a process instead of the action in itself is placed.

Although we already have scrutinized conceptual artworks as text-based examples, we have not previously thought about their exhibiting or presentation.

In 1968 American art-dealer Seth Siegelaub organized the first exhibition, in which the catalogue, displayed in a private apartment, was the exhibition in itself. That kind of exhibition show became the first example of exhibitions-as-books shows, which were continued later with famous Xerox Book. Siegelaub started his experimental actions to support young conceptual artists. Art-dealer invited American artists Carl Andre, Robert Barry, Douglas Huebler, Joseph Kosuth, Sol LeWitt, Robert Morris, and Lawrence Weiner to create twenty-five-page works on paper to be reprinted as a part of the entire book called Xerox Book. It was not the usual artist's book but the most available and cheapest way to diffuse conceptual art ideas all over the country.

Next year in 1969 after completing the Xerox Book, he organized the most famous group exhibition in which the print catalogue became the main object instead of artworks. The exhibition absence is a perfect example of Barthes's zero sign. A zero or null linguistic

sign is a sign whose signifier is empty. It has some meaning or context, but has not any form. “While the null is bad in real life, it is in fact still important in thought. One cannot think without null” [2. P. 262].

And the absence of exhibition itself means here a new level of perception. It is a some sort of aposiopesis, where the curator leaves his sentence incomplete. By presenting the exhibition catalogue without any real exhibition he proposes us to make our own choice and sits in judgment on new conceptual art and new artistic methods.

This survey covers some current uses of the term “creolized” and “polycode text” applying to conceptual artworks created from 1960s to 1970s. It proposes some new analytical methods using cross-disciplinary approach. Today’s lack of convenient methodological ways to research in the contemporary art field is not surprising, nevertheless new knowledge about contemporary art and relevant methods, which make its understanding more progressive, are critically important.

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ПРОИЗВЕДЕНИЕ КОНЦЕПТУАЛЬНОГО ИСКУССТВА КАК ПОЛИКОДОВЫЙ ТЕКСТ

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Данная статья посвящена анализу произведений концептуального искусства, рассматриваемых как поликодовый текст, чье восприятие требует актуализации и взаимодействия всех каналов чувственного восприятия личности. Исследование определяет отношения между всеми компонентами художественного произведения на разных уровнях восприятия. Также описан творческий метод известных художников-концептуалистов с точки зрения интеллектуальной практики, исследующей развитие собственного языка.

Ключевые слова: поликодовый текст, креолизованный текст, произведение искусства, концептуальное искусство, вербальный и невербальный компоненты, иконический знак

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