

Conference Paper

Movements and Remediation: Lack of Site-Specificity in Modern ArtWorks

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Abstract

The article analyzes the works of contemporary art, taking into account the features of their functioning. The main goal is to determine what changes have taken place in the basis of a work of art, which allows us to designate this object as an object of contemporary art. The results obtained lead to the conclusion that one of the features of a work of art is the lack of site-specificity. The specificity of the site is the affiliation of the work to a specific place and time: when the affiliation changes, the relations of the object, context and viewer also change. The level of site-specificity of works of art relates to their cultural circulation. Works of modern art are the result of a strategy of figurative saturation defined by a series of constant movements and remediation. The works of contemporary artists are marked with the transition from individual or serial discrete objects to manipulating populations of images using various methods of selection and "reframing".

Keywords: work of art, contemporary art, site-specificity, remediation, figurative saturation

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1. Introduction

Art is a special mechanism for understanding the world that has developed in culture and has gone along with humanity throughout the entire period of its existence. This is a spiritual acquisition of reality (associated with an axiological attitude to the world), as well as practical mastering, since any artistic activity involves a material result, which is the final piece of a work expressed in an object or in a conceptually formed action.

The peculiarity of the interpretation of works of art is that the meaning included in them turns out to be untranslatable into the language of concepts. This confirms the idea of the intrinsic value of art. The paradox is that it is able to satisfy an artistic need when it acts not as a means, but as a goal. Revealing its distinctive and unique nature, art becomes an excuse for itself and confirms the need for its place in human life.

Despite a long history of understanding, art remains open to definition, requiring constant attention from researchers. Is it possible to determine exactly what art is, with

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just one explicit formula? How can contemporary art be defined as it is (taking into account communication with everyday life)? Why do we mark some objects as artworks, while others exclude from this area?

“The designation of the boundaries of this phenomenon is a separation from the historical, so-called “grateful” art, as it would cease to be a problem after naming the latest artifacts of “art practices”, “contemporary art”, but the identification of signs that allow non-artistic artifacts remains debatable” [1, 165]. To answer the abovementioned questions, it is necessary to return to the work of art as the fundamental object of aesthetics and determine its structural and functional specificity, first of all, taking into account the features of modern art and, secondly, taking into account those interpretations and “developments” about art and a work of art, which were collected by aesthetics and other artistic studies in the XX–early XXI centuries.

The object of this study is the work of contemporary art. The subject is its structurally functional specifics. The key objective is to define what changes happened in the basis of the art work allowing of marking the object as a subject of contemporary art.

2. Methods

The major research approaches are as follows:

- The methodology that defines the philosophical understanding of the phenomenon of culture

The *ontologization* method becomes the key method. It is noteworthy that contemporary art appears to be the system of references. Peter Weibel calls this the “universe of different references” [2, 138], where obvious or symbolic references are enough to highlight the meaning of the picture. Since the term “contemporary art” (due to the overproduction of conceptual representations) can have different meanings, approaches based on the study of linguistic constructions turn out to be indefensible. Apparently, it is effective to conduct research not through linguistic constructions, but through ontological schemes which are formal representations/models that express the unique character of objects with respect to things that are not them. The *epistemological approach* also becomes significant, since the purpose of this study is to define and, at the same time, to know a work of art as a special object of artistic reality.

- General scientific methodologies

The study is based on a *systematic approach* intended to streamline the basis for delimiting the structure of artwork. To study the system, the *structural- functional (structural)* method is applied, which is built on the basis of distinguishing stable relations and connections between elements in integral systems. Under the structure is meant something invariant (constant) under certain transformations and a function is an assignment of each element of this system.

For researchers who make attempts to give a definition to art, it was important to understand what constitutes the criteria according to which art can be distinguished from other things which are not art. Given the essence of the criteria, the theories of the art can conventionally be divided into three groups:

1. Theories that sought to find distinctive features in subject peculiarities (for example, these are formalistic, structuralistic, phenomenological concepts);
2. Theories that define the art through functions in relation to the subjects of artistic communication (these are psychoanalytic and other concepts);
3. Theories that define art through the context in which it appears and functions (for example, institutional theory).

To expand the definition of art, it seems necessary to consistently examine the object of study from the perspective of the above criteria and try to combine the results in a single model. However, in this work, we will provide an analysis of the works of contemporary only through their functional aspect.

3. Results

As a form of correlation with the world, art is a mechanism and semantic resource of artistic culture. In turn, artistic culture is a system-generator that allows storing and broadcasting the achievements of artistic activity in the form of individual results of spiritual and material mastery of the world. The form of these results is a work of art.

Art arises within the framework of primitive culture. For a long time, the mimetic principle has been dominant in art. Even in antiquity, Heraclitus formulated the basic principle of painting, music and verbal art. This is imitation. Art was presented as a work of man created according to the principle of "reproduction" of objectively existing reality. Despite many particular ideas, often diametrically opposed, art always had a common set of basic characteristics generalized by a single semantic field: art is a doubling of reality.

The basic for change was the neo-Kantian distinction between nature and culture. So, Heinrich Rickert, in his work *The Science of Nature and the Science of Culture* divided all sciences into two types. According to Rickert, the "nature sciences" are characterized by a nomothetic (generalizing) method, focused on establishing principles. For the "science of the spirit", or historical and social sciences, this is an idiographic (individualizing) method, focused on the establishment and description of facts / events of reality, unique in their individuality. The discovery of the second (along with nature) ontological reality -- culture -- meant a refusal to understand it as an activity aimed at realizing the natural essence of man. According to one researcher, "consequently, a systematic qualitative transition to this new state of culture and its qualitatively new role in the life of mankind took place" [3, 71].

It is noteworthy that, despite changes in understanding culture, the art of the beginning of the XX century continued to retain some features of naturocentrism: "Having abandoned the pictoriality and vitality, avant-garde modernists of the first decades of the XX century, by their very nature, remained faithful to the mimesis as a principle, although they understood the latter in a completely different way, and to naturocentrism as its world outlook" [3, 44]. An example of this is *The Ladies of Avignon* (1907) by Pablo Picasso. This work is associated with the emergence of cubism. This work of art marked a radical break with the tradition of the Renaissance. The main thing for artists is no longer an authentic reflection of reality, but its recreation.

"When the first avant-garde opposed the ideal (figurative) double repetition of the world of the radical deformation of the image, its elements or connections (as in surrealism and the theater of the absurd), the construction of a fundamentally different ideal reality (the final version of which is artistic abstraction, meaningless "pure" forms), the post-war avant-garde, on the contrary, took a step towards the "first reality" -- the reality of objects. On the one hand, it began to work with literal, "naturalistic" images-similarities of objects (like Warhol or Roy Lichtenstein, or hyperrealists). On the other hand, it generally preferred to avoid using the ideally-figurative (mostly pictorial) language" [3, 48]. With their works artists pushed the boundaries between art and the surrounding reality, developing non-traditional art production strategies. Works began to be created from materials introduced from everyday life, which were supposed to improve the perception of the recipient and cause a wider semantic polysemy in it.

In the early 1990s, artists began to increasingly interpret, reproduce, re-exhibit and otherwise use artworks created previously. This period can be described as "the art of post-production".

It is important to note that the prefix "post" has no meaning of denial or overcoming. The main question is not "what can we create", but "what can we do with the existing one". The task in this case is no longer the manufacture of the object, but its selection from the available ones and its further use or change in accordance with the plan. Artists set themselves the task of mastering all cultural codes and making them work. They offer the perceiver to learn how to use forms which means to adopt them and to adopt in them. Peter Weibel notes that with the help of an allusive narrative technique, "every viewer already has a library of visual experience stored in his head. <...> It is enough to casually mention topics, places, objects, and the viewer will immediately understand what is being discussed" [2, 138].

Thus, this technique forms the viewer's experience and allows his thoughts to develop along a given route, but without an endpoint "through affective understanding, each of which arises from an act of gaze" [4, 28].

The definition of "modern" has become a marker of cultural periodization for what is happening now in art. The term "contemporary art" has become the common name for postmodern art, which appeared in the 1990s. Terry Smith in his work *Thinking Contemporary Curating* identified three trends of contemporary art [4, 26]:

1. Remodernism, retro-sentimentality, spectacularity in unity (prevails in the Euro-American artistic environment);
2. Art created with an emphasis on national characteristics, identity and criticism (this is the art of transnational mobility, which arose in contrast to the art of paragraph No.1;
3. The third trend is small-scale. This is interactive art and the products, partially possessing the qualities of art, based on ontological experiments with time, place, relationships and affects.

Three streams are united by a common value. This is the definition of culture as the main factor that constantly roots a person in the cultural world of images, texts, messages. Such a multiplication of the role and power of culture in society has turned it into the main reality for people. In art, this process began "with a radical transformation of all means of expression in avant-garde and modernism of the first half -- the middle of the XX century and reached its climax by the end of the XX -- beginning of the XXI century by the way of creating fundamentally new methods of creativity". That is why we can talk about new artistic objectivity, the sign of works of art, which, in turn, determines the possibility of a new system of artistic and communicative conventions formed in the structure (and by structure) of modern artworks [3, 45].

It is noteworthy that by the beginning of the XXI century we had a number of new experimental types and genres, which are often called art projects and art practices. The incorporation of reality into art has changed the conditions for its perception. What is the difference between works of art and real things?

An important result here is that works of contemporary art have no *site-specificity*. The specificity of the site is the affiliation of work to some place and time: when the affiliation changes, the relations of the object, context and viewer also change.

The level of site-specificity of artworks is related to their ability to cultural circulation. David Joslite in the work *After Art* identified three paradigms of cultural circulation of artworks:

A) *Migrating object*: a work of art has provenance that lends itself to gradual legitimation as it passes through a chain of owners: collectors/galleries/museums. The cultural value of such a work of art lies in aesthetic power, but legally it belongs as a commodity. It is recognized that the "information" that migrating objects carry is an integral part of their form and does not depend on the place of their origin.

B) *Endemic object*: belongs to a specific place. Although it has aesthetic qualities, its initial value is associated with a certain cultural identity. Endemic objects are absolutely site-specific: moving them to another place is like depriving them of meaning.

C) *Documented objects*: have informational or documental value. According to Joslite, "even when these objects are removed from their place of origin <...>, the knowledge (which they represent) is extracted from them and remains the part of common cultural heritage" [5, 29].

Thus, the issue of circulation of art, whether it is migrating, endemic or documented art, is associated with a different understanding of "site-specificity". Walter Benjamin in his essay *The work of Art in the Age of Mechanical Reproduction* points out to the need to link a work of art to place and time. According to W. Benjamin, the aura comes from the site-specificity of the work of art. On the contrary, the reproduction jeopardizes the "historical value" and "authority of the thing". This eliminates the distance in time and space, making the image wandering.

According to David Joslite, the Benjamin model has lost its relevance to the art of the second half of XX - beginning of XXI century. One of the key features of modernity is related to extracting images from a certain place and placing them within the framework where they are determined by movement (potential/actual) and can change formats, which means a number of movements and remediation. Images are no longer site-specific. Thus, it can be determined that contemporary art is characterized by constant

changes in location and heterogeneity of forms, which means the absence of site-specificity.

Douglas Crimp, the author of the book *On the Museum's Ruins*, notes that such heterogeneity is not "pluralism". According to Crimp, pluralism supposes the illusion of freedom and independence of art from other discourse practices and institutions, freedom from the history [6, 45]. For its part, modernity is characterized by the "dispersion of art and its multiplicity" and by the awareness of the historicity of its practices, generated by certain conditions. "Today, saturation due to mass circulation, which means that being everywhere at the same time and not belonging to the same place, creates the value of images. <...> noise appeared instead of an aura" [5, 35]. Starting from the second half of the XX century, instead of creating individual works, artists began to resort to imaginative strategies of saturation, leading to a whole population of images.

Andy Warhol was the first to start with this strategy. An example is *Brillo Box*. Its appearance became "a kind of Rosetta stone for philosophy, which made it possible to distinguish between two languages: the language of art and the language of reality" [7, 39]. In the strategy of figurative saturation, the function does not belong to individual objects, but to their systemic concentration.

How can we describe the process of figurative saturation? Let us look at the work of Sherri Levin *Collage of greeting cards N°4, 1-24 (2000)*: the work consists of 24 "identical" romantic cards with sea views, placed in frames and posted online. Each viewer must look at a single image at the same time with 23 copies. If a person moves slowly from one picture to another, then the experience of perception remains the same, but different in the sense of time and space. Cards function as a background and as an image.

Thus, the attention of the viewer works in two directions: each individual card "pulls" and at the same time "pushes" so that the perceiver can continue to move and see the next card. Changing the viewer's position leads to inflation of meaning. The "image-background" dynamics is switched from the internal composition of the work of art to vibrations between them and its aesthetic environment.

The Levin strategy of reproduction and repetition illustrates a shift in emphasis in the works of contemporary artists: from individual or serial discreet objects to manipulations with groups of images using different methods of selecting and "reframing" an existing material. As in the case of the "collage", this tactic moves the image to the background to accentuate the relationship between the separate images and their framing network. It turns out that four strategies of figurative saturation can be distinguished [5, 54-59]. They are consistently described by David Joslite in his work *After Art*.

The first strategy is reframing of material (content) found in space: they are located in different configurations in which the relationship between the objects become more important than the content of each object individually.

The second strategy is the process of capturing content: the process of "re-framing" occurs through the use of various mechanisms (digital photography, video, photocopy, text files and other means).

Processing content into live or "virtual" performances is the third strategy of "reframing": performance is the public creation of an artifact on a synthesis of art and non-art, a kind of artistic "gesture". Here, the images undergo a change in their state by reinstalling events. One of the forms of such alteration is the events: "Initially the events took place in unspecified non-theatrical places -- in warehouses, closed factories, abandoned shops. Events are accurately lined up between the avant-garde theater and collage. Here, the viewer is a kind of collage, that is, it is scattered throughout the interior" [8, 61].

In conclusion, David Joslite points to documenting content through research as another key strategy for imaginative saturation. Documentation is done with the goal of creating archival works that can function as non-narrative materials.

Each of these strategies is not associated with the invention of new content, but with the manipulation of its situational or performative nature.

At the same time, the creation of content remains associated with the concept of "format". According to Joslite, "formats are dynamic mechanisms for aggregating content" [5, 80]. They set a pattern of connections and relationships. It turns out that it is important not to produce new content, but to extract it in the form of understandable patterns using actions to reform, capture, process and document. "An important consequence of this change is that art now exists as a fold, violation, or event in the totality of images" [5, 115], which David Joslite defines as a format.

The end result of the extraction of form is presented in the form. Form is a way of organizing content, as well as a way of its existence, a transfer to an informant and impacting him.

The work is mediated by the art form. Forms of classical art (for example, painting or sculpture) are characterized, first of all, by their symbolic accessibility. On the contrary, contemporary art often exists under the sign of inaccessibility: it can be seen only at a particular moment. An example of such inaccessibility is performance: in the end, all that remains is documentation that does not match the work.

"Form acquires density (and real existence) just then and only when it triggers the interaction between people. <...> through it the artist begins a dialogue" [9, 24]. What

does this dialogue suggest? It is assumed that the essence of artistic practice is the invention of relations between subjects, and "in this case, each work is a proposal for co-existence in a certain world, and the work of any artist is a bundle of relations with the world, which gives rise to other relations" [9, 24].

It seems that the concept of form in the framework of modern artistic practice requires clarification. David Joslite in *After Art* notes that "criticism of new artistic practices usually comes down to denying any "formal effectiveness" or discerning in them signs of "decay of form". In fact, in relation to them, it is more correct to speak not about "forms", but about "formations": <...> contemporary art shows that a form is possible only within the framework of a meeting, that is, dynamic relationship tied by an art project to other, not necessarily artistic formations" [5, 23]. In other words, formation is a "new" way of existence of artwork associated with compiling of content as a result of an imaginative saturation strategy.

Regarding classical art, modernity can be described from two perspectives. We can talk about post-art as the next stage after the completion of a certain art era. An additional element of "post" leaves the object of art intact, although it undergoes transformation or denial. On the contrary, the additional word "after" shifts the emphasis to the effects produced by contemporary art under conditions of circulation, that is, to its power. "After" means strategies for reproduction and reconceptualization. Such art requires continuity, but not a gap.

Describing the result of creative saturation, Nicolas Burrio in his work *Relational Aesthetics. Postproduction* wrote: "The world is saturated with objects, as Douglas Huebler said in the 1960s, adding that he did not wish to produce anymore. While the chaotic distribution of production has led conceptual artists to the dematerialization of the work of art, it has led postproduction artists toward strategies of mixing and combining products. Overproduction is no longer seen as a problem, but as a cultural ecosystem" [9, 153].

The practice of Readymade has become a source of re-framing and reproduction strategy in contemporary art. The term was introduced by the artist Marcel Duchamp to define his works representing the "lifeworld" and raised to the status of a work of art. The Readymade has a new take on things. The object, which ceased to perform utilitarian functions and entered the space of art, began to reveal new meanings and associative movements.

The opposite process was fixed by a "reciprocal" readymade work: through the use of existing artistic elements, they were transferred from the category of works of art to objects of the "lifeworld". An example is a Rembrandt painting, which was used

as an ironing board. Such practices have proved that aesthetic principles are relative. "Artistry" of any form or object now depended not on their immanent characteristics, but in conventions established by the subjects of artistic communication.

4. Conclusion

The results obtained allow us to conclude that one of the features of works of art is the lack of site-specificity. A modern work of art is the result of a strategy of figurative saturation, defined by a series of constant movements and remediation.

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