

Communication Models in Contemporary Art

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Abstract. The object of research is the communication features of contemporary art. The aim is to reveal these features based on a review of the literature. The paper discusses the concept of communication in contemporary art; describes the characteristics of contemporary art as a medium; defines communication models in contemporary art. Communication and its features are manifested in many fields, one of which is art. To discuss the concept of communication in contemporary art, the levels of verbal and nonverbal communication are distinguished. Image forms, colours, lighting, lines, motifs, body language, sound, as well as the written or unwritten language of verbal communication about a work of art, can serve to recognise the communicative properties of a work of art. Types of intrapersonal and public and mass communication are applied, communication process models are based.

Keywords: *communication, contemporary art, participation, spectator.*

Introduction

Relevance of the article

At the end of the 20th century, Lithuanian fine arts underwent a breaking point. After the restoration of the independence of Lithuania, artists acquired opportunities to freely and directly participate in the international art area. They could freely choose creative topics and means of expression as well as ways of self-positioning in the art market. Young artists started looking for ideas by taking interest in the new Western arts, participating in exhibitions abroad, and bringing new creative topics to Lithuania. Their works are characterised by a new approach, execution techniques, ideas that promote the goal to convey relevant topics and engage the spectator in the process of communication with a work of art.

In Lithuania, contemporary art and its manifestations became popular: object, installation, performance, video art, new photography and postmodern painting (National Gallery of Art, 2019).

Today we notice that creative processes reflect the interaction between art, science and technologies as well as the possibilities for their use. Artists integrate various methods, strategies, knowledge and new technologies whose appearance expanded the possibilities, creative processes, aspects of people's engagement and interest. Now art is not only observed there is a need to explore it, see new meanings, learn and obtain information. Umberto (2004) claims that all cultural objects gain meaning during the process of their perception, consumption and interpretation.

Scientific problem. Why is the process of art communication between the author and the spectator important and what should the model of contemporary art communication be?

Object of the article – communication model of contemporary art.

Aim of the article – to create a theoretical contemporary art communication model.

Objectives of the article:

- 1) To conceptualise the concept of communication in contemporary art.
- 2) To analyse the processes of communication between the author and the spectator.

Methods of the article: Comparative analysis of scientific literature.

1. Communication contemporary fine art

Art of the end of the 20th century–the beginning of the 21st century is characteristic of experimenting. The emergence of technologies, the spread of science and knowledge, communication, phenomena of diffusion changed people and artists' consciousness, there was a goal to look for new forms of art thus expressing opposition to the old-established system: for example, the Fluxus movement, performances, Dadaism, land art, *arte povera*; they reflected resistance to the government and economic and social problems.

As technologies improve, their symbiosis with art occurs, there are more installations that use projections, video and audio syntheses, interactive works, various chromatic and audio effects; software is also used to create and disperse art.

The new reality brought new creative means, engaged in new contexts and raised new goals (Gataveckas, 2016). Jablonskienė who studied the most prominent changes in Lithuanian fine art in the 90s of the 20th century also emphasises this and distinguishes the following postmodern types of art: Object, space-specific installation, art and performance created based on new technologies (Jablonskienė, 1999). Such terms as *installation*, *land art*, *body* were unknown and incomprehensible to the society then. Nomeda Urbonienė and Gediminas Urbonas were ones of the artists that introduced new aspects into Lithuanian art. Happening, performance, actionism, readymades, borrowed objects, quotes, texts and documents, social sculptures, collective actions – this was the new vocabulary of that time (Michelkevičius, & Šapoka, 2011). In this way, at the end of the 20th century, with new forms of art, contemporary art phenomena, the existing concept of fine art became too narrow. Art study specialist Aleksandravičiūtė claims that today, both of these academic terms appear inaccurate because they do not match the specificity of existing art processes and creation principles (Aleksandravičiūtė, 2011). Art study specialist Andriuškevičius states that the term *contemporary fine art* is controversial, and, analysing works of art in his book *Lietuvių dailė: 1996–2005* (Eng. *Lithuanian Fine Art: 1996–2005*), the author uses the term *contemporary art* as a synonym (Andriuškevičius 2006: 8). In the *Oxford English Dictionary*, the term *contemporary* is defined as “belonging to or occurring in the present” (English Oxford Living Dictionaries, 2019). Contemporary art is created in real-time; it can be momentary art that does not have a definition and set limits: modernity is the most obvious feature of the existing world image that encompasses its most prominent characteristics starting with the interaction between people and the atmosphere that creates cultural diversity and reveals the ideological image of global politics and the inside of the individual existence (Smith, 2014). Contemporary art is also called media art. Art study specialist Šukaitytė studies experimental media art created by the young generation at the end of the 20th century–the beginning of the 21st century that is characteristic of the artistic language experiments, the interaction between technologies and art, and interactivity. In her article “Media Art as a Scientific-Experimental Space”, Šukaitytė claims that media art can be rightfully treated as an intensive experimental space where new cultural/social interactions and communication techniques are created and tested by applying interdisciplinary research principles, various competencies and collective experiences (Šukaitytė, 2008).

Scientist Jablonskienė distinguishes the main value of contemporary art, i.e., individuality, in art: contemporary art allows a person to be individual, to think and make decisions by themselves, and it liberates from any group formation and its impact. In this respect, contemporary art promotes individuality, and this is a great value (Kajėnas, 2015). We can compare contemporary artists to scientists that immerse in a topic, study it, cooperate, look for information, and later encode messages using various techniques and forms of art and provide them to the spectator. Art studies specialist Dapkutė sees a problem in the spectator’s maturity to consume contemporary art in her article *New Art and Education* (Lith. *Naujasis menas ir edukacija*) claims that space-specific art, incomprehensible explanatory texts, conceptuality, temporariness of a work, necessity of documentation, live art, eroticism, the need for equipment. <...> there is a need for a certain theoretical preparation (Dapkutė, 2001). In order to understand the relationship between the creator and the spectator, figure out what a certain image created by an artist means, and what is the impact of them on the spectator, it is not enough to just have general knowledge, i.e., one needs deeper, analytical thinking when decoding a message encoded in a work of art by means of symbols and signs.

Artists promote the spectator to react to a work of art and become a co-author. Contemporary art includes interactivity, participation and engagement, which is inseparable from the characteristics of media that have entered the key processes of art creation (Šimbelis, 2009). These features reveal what is progressive, creative, related to changes, new technologies. Thus, the concept of contemporary art is controversial and difficult to define, i.e., it is art created in real-time which integrates new methods, new technologies; it intertwines and connects with other branches of art thus gaining new forms: contemporary art has become a social phenomenon and a tool of communication. It is

meaningless to compare it to what we knew before because it depends on the consequences of globalisation that we are only beginning to reveal and whose impact is still difficult to evaluate. (Navarra 2008: 15). An object of intellectual, political and financial speculations – art and its diversity – triumphs against the bluntest indifference and charms ones, while provokes others, and some become included in passionate discussions (Smith, 1996). Society lives in a period characteristic of global nature, quantity of knowledge and information flow, various technologies, change of political, social, cultural phenomena that have an impact not only on society but also on its reflection, i.e., created art.

2. Concept of communication in art: encoding the artist's message and relationship with the spectator

Communication emphasises the goal of art to be visible, comprehensible and interpreted. The word *communication* originates from the Latin word *communicare* which means *to share, to make common*; it is a derivative from the Latin word *communis* that means *general* (Nevinskaitė, 2011). Communication is interaction, i.e., a process that encompasses the following simultaneously occurring processes: mutual understanding (social perception), exchange of information (communication), interaction (social interaction) (Haselwood et al., 2005). The concept of communication has been widely analysed in foreign and Lithuanian publications (Shimanoff, 1980; Goss, 1983; Seiler, 1992; Neuliep, 2000; Barkauskaitė, 2001; Ukanienė, 2003). According to Pfister, & Tierney (2008), communication is the art and science of interaction. Fiske claims that communication of the utmost importance for the existence of our culture, i.e., without it, any culture should die (Fiske, 1998). The theory of communication provides tools to describe specific communication events and their relationship, and to determine their commonalities thus making them systemic (Kirtiklis, 2014). In this context, we expect to find signs of division in art. As communication is a complex phenomenon, it is necessary to find out which level of communication this art is the closest to when relating communication to art. This would help to understand how the process of communication occurs between the author, work of art and spectator.

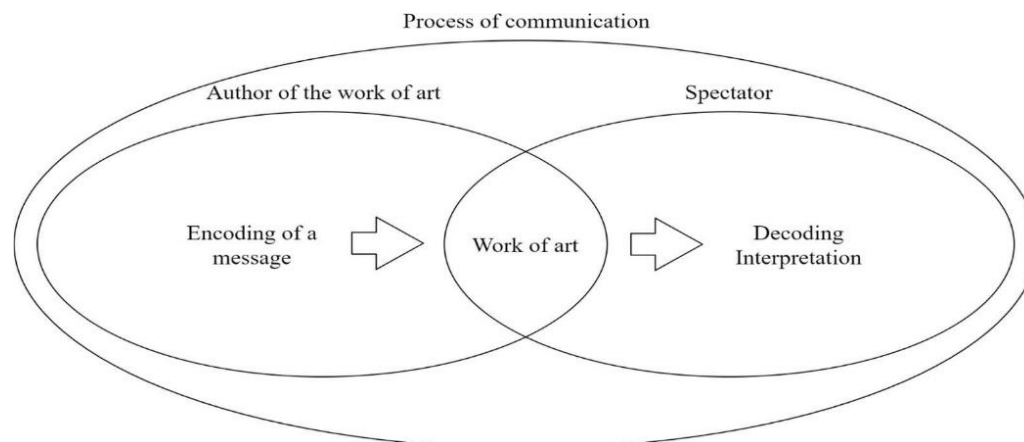
Based on the context and situation, communication is divided into the following types: intrapersonal, interpersonal, group, organisational, public, mass, intercultural, political, etc. (there are more types) (Infante et al., 2003). Based on the elements of the communication process, communication is divided into the following: sender, message, channel, receiver, noise and feedback (Infante et al., 2003).

When observing a work of art that explains its communication messages, first of all, intrapersonal communication takes place – with oneself (Monginaitė, 2010), it is described with itself as the movement of information in a person. When we talk to ourselves in our thoughts or think in voice, we are trying to find formulations of answers or solutions in our memory, we hum a melody or sing out loud to ourselves – all this is intrapersonal communication. We can also define it as a process of information sharing (exchange) between consciousness and subconsciousness (Puodžiūnas, 2013). This type of communication is the basis of all other processes of communication and because of it a person perceives him/herself, recognises his own feelings and can communicate with others; therefore, this type of communication is important in decoding the messages encoded in a work of art by the author as well as the receiver's primary reaction when receiving the message firstly in the consciousness and subconsciousness, and only later the further process of communication can occur. A work of art created by an artist must be accessible to receivers of its message; thus, it is important to choose a communication channel; this can include a gallery, exhibition, museum, online space as well as other dissemination means that spread the news about the work of art: during communication, the information transmitted does not spread in a vacuum. Since this process occurs between at least two subjects, the form of information (in any shape) must be expressed in a certain real space (Puodžiūnas, 2013). Thus, an exhibited work of art becomes the result of public or mass communication (aimed at reaching a bigger audience). When exhibiting a work of art or introducing it to society, a gallery and curator play an important role. Because of these components, a work of art becomes accessible to a wide audience: public communication is the most obvious space and opportunity of social activity; therefore, the institution where the work is exhibited and individuals who visit the institution and

spectate works of art are important in this process (Puodžiūnas, 2013). It is difficult to define the concept of communication because it is multi-faceted and depends on the context in which it manifests. When studying the messages encoded in a work of art by the author, time, space, environment, content, channel, receiver's engagement, message decoding and feedback are important.

The linear model is more clearly and thoroughly complemented by the communication process model created by Post, Baird, Mahon (1989). They claim that generally, every communication process model consists of message encoding, decoding and interpretation (Baršauskienė, & Janulevičiūtė-Ivaškevičienė, 2005).

Analysing the communication process in contemporary fine art (Figure 1), the sender is the creator, and the receiver is an individual interested in art: in the semiotic theory of communication, contrary to the process, the receiver plays a more important role.



Source: created by the author based on Post, Baird, & Mahon (1989).

Fig. 1. The process of communication

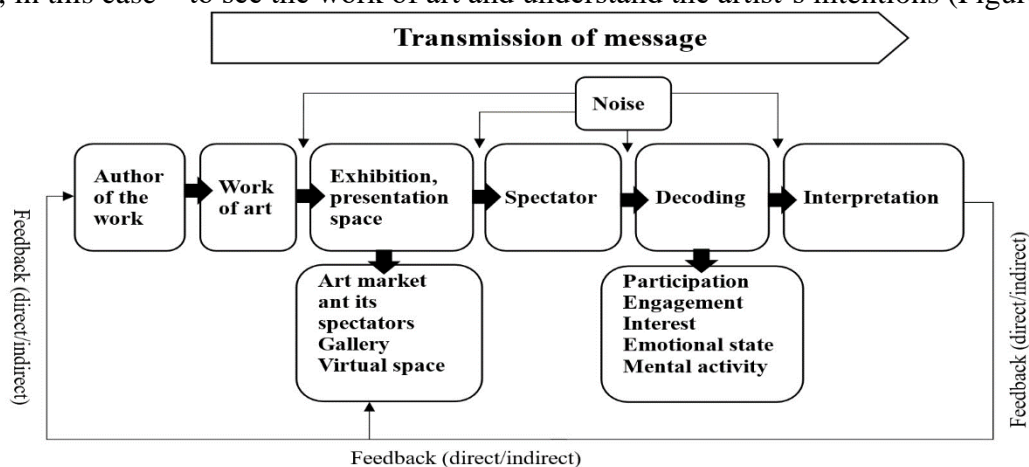
The perceiver (receiver) must be very active and, most importantly, be able to read and understand signs (Puodžiūnas, 2013).

However, the aforementioned models present a very abstract view of the process of communication and are applied when an artist has direct communication with the spectator. The aforementioned models do not include any feedback, i.e., reaction to the message, while the nature of the reaction is one of the most important indexes of successful or unsuccessful communication (Puodžiūnas, 2013).

By providing an artist with an opportunity to present his/her creation publicly, a gallery carries out the function of an "assessor" that determines which artists will be introduced to society, and which – will not in the world of contemporary art (Resch, 2011). A suitable selection of the information sending channel (in this case, a gallery) can help to avoid information distortion, can be widely accessible to society and ensure feedback. The functions carried out by the curator are also important when exhibiting a work of art and communicating with both society and the author. The area of a curator's activities is very wide: sometimes s/he becomes a servant, assistant, sometimes s/he provides ideas for artists about how to exhibit their works; s/he is a coordinator, and in thematic exhibitions – inventor (Ulrich Orist, 2011). A curator is not a "passive" actor of the art field; s/he cooperates with the artist and creates an exhibition. Successful curatorship ensures a smooth process of communication between the artist (encoder of the message) and a spectator (receiver, interpreter). The formula of successful curatorship – a wide area of knowledge and perception, curator's vision, selected artists, goals, work, attracted spectators, managers, communication skills (Vitkauskaitė, 2016).

Encoding of author's message and the relationship with the receiver-spectator in contemporary fine art communication is not a simple process: full and absolutely accurate transfer of information is not possible as many reasons called noise prevent it; moreover, experiences of the interpreter and receiver differ as well – even interpretation of the same signs because the context of information creation is not always clear or the principle of decoding is not accurate (Puodžiūnas, 2013). The process of communication requires effort, engagement, interest, mental activity: in the process of information

acquisition, physical acquisition channels are triggered first; however, complex mental activity soon starts too, and it is the basis of successful acquisition of information (Baršauskienė, & Janulevičiūtė–Ivaškevičienė, 2005). This determines the evaluation of the work of art, its author's acknowledgement; therefore, a receiver is important as well as its engagement into the perception of the work of art using mental activity and senses. This helps the spectator to understand encoded and sent author's messages better. Art critic Gilda Williams in her book *How to Write about Contemporary Art* claims that if the message of a work of art is clear, there is suspicion that it is only an illustration or a decorative worthless object, skilfully done by a craftsman but that cannot be seen as significant (Williams, 2018); therefore, works of art should not be understood from the first sight. They can include noise or it can take time to figure out its communicative message. Thus, noise is that which prevents transmitting and decoding a message; in this case – to see the work of art and understand the artist's intentions (Figure 2).



Source: created by the author based on the linear model of communication by Shannon, & Weaver (1949) (Fiske, 1998) and the communication process model (Baršauskienė, Janulevičiūtė–Ivaškevičienė, 2005).

Fig. 2. Contemporary art communication process

Shannon, & Weaver's (1949) linear model of communication which is applied for a direct relationship between the author and the spectator is complemented by the contemporary art communication mode (Figure 2). In this model, the author of a work of art encodes messages in his/her work of art which is then transferred to the participants of the art market and can be exhibited in a gallery or displayed in a virtual space. After being introduced into the art market, the work of art is influenced by various factors; the process of communication is influenced by the actors of the art market, namely galleries, curators, collectors, etc. When a work of art is presented to the public, the engagement, interest and participation of the audience are important, as it determines the spectator's interpretation and subsequent feedback. Noise cannot be avoided in the contemporary art communication process; it can manifest while conveying the message through a chosen channel which can include a virtual presentation or an art gallery; a successful process of communication also depends on the functions carried out by the gallery curators (Figure 2). Communication noise can interrupt the spectator in the process of decoding and interpreting the message, spectating, interpreting and decoding the meaning of the work of art; also, it can disrupt feedback. Feedback can be direct (with the author of the work of art) and indirect (evaluations, reviews on the work of art, attendance of an exhibition, participant interest, sales, etc.); however, the following factors are important as well: spectator's emotional state, interest, engagement, participation, environment, time, space, content, channel, receiver's engagement, decoding of the message as they can affect feedback which is important for an effective process of communication.

Conclusions

Art of the end of the 20th century—the beginning of the 21st century is characteristic of experimenting. The emergence of technologies, as well as the spread of science and knowledge, communication, diffusion phenomena have changed people and artists' consciousness, there was a goal to look for new art forms thus expressing resistance to old-established regimes. New forms of art emerge along with contemporary art phenomena: artists could freely choose creation topics and means of expression, and the existing concept of fine art became too narrow to define them. The following manifestations of contemporary art became popular: installations, video art, performances. It was found out that the emergence of new technologies in art expanded its possibilities and creative processes. Art created using new technologies is emphasised. Artists promote the spectator to react to a work of art and become a co-author. Contemporary art includes interactivity, participation and engagement. As the forms of art change, the process of communication between the author and the spectator become more complex; thus, it is important to analyse communication models in order to understand the process of communication.

Communication and its features manifest in many areas; art is one of them. To discuss the concept of communication in contemporary art, levels of verbal and non-verbal communication are distinguished. Image shapes, colours, lighting, lines, motifs, body language, sounds like written or non-written language of verbal communication about a work of art, can serve in recognising the communication features of the work of art. Intrapersonal and public and mass communication types are applied as well as communication process models. Models of communication reveal the relation of art communication between the author and the spectator: message encoding, decoding and factors that impact the process of communication.

The linear model of communication provides a clear interaction between two subjects – sender and receiver; however, the process of communication is one-sided and is suitable for direct relation (without agents) between the author and the receiver (spectator). This model is complemented by other communication process models that include feedback that can be direct or indirect in the art process of communication. Feedback is important in order to evaluate the success of the message and how the spectator has understood the message sent by the author. It is difficult to evaluate feedback in art communication; it is often indirect and reaches the author via other channels such as curators of galleries, reviews, publication on social networks, comments, etc.

Noise cannot be avoided in the contemporary art communication process; it can manifest while conveying the message through a chosen channel which can include a virtual presentation or an art gallery. Communication noise can interrupt the spectator in the process of decoding and interpreting the message, spectating, interpreting and decoding the meaning of the work of art; also, it can disrupt feedback; thus, the spectator's effort, engagement, participation, mental activity are important. Feedback can be direct (with the author of the work of art) and indirect (evaluations, reviews on the work of art, attendance of an exhibition, participant interest, sales, etc.); however, the following factors are important as well: spectator's emotional state, interest, engagement, participation, environment, time, space, content, channel, decoding of the message as they can affect feedback which is important for an effective process of communication. The created model of art communication process is important when studying the success of communication message that determines the understanding of a work, spectator's engagement and other participants of the process, their environments that have a direct impact on the process of communication between the author and the spectator. Also, the model reveals the message sent by a work of art that has an impact on art consumers.

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