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## Genre and Style in the Action Art Studies

Leonid A. Menshikov\*

*St. Petersburg Rimsky-Korsakov State Conservatory*  
*St. Petersburg, Russian Federation*

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**Abstract.** In the context of the postmodernist project completion the development of an art-historical methodology for the studying of the action art as one of the characteristic practices of the contemporary art becomes relevant. Combining genre-stylistic analysis with the principles of post-structuralist aesthetics is an important task in the study of the practices of neo-avangard art. Methodological foundations of stylistic and genre studies considers in the article. Particular attention is paid to the peculiarities of the chronotope of actionist practices, which determine their originality in the system of contemporary art. Style analysis is considered within the framework of the classical art history paradigm of combining formal and contentual research of common and specific features of a large array of artistic facts. Genre analysis is applied to the description of the structures of existence of actionist practices in culture, which can be described in terms of the morphological approach. Conclusions are drawn about the expediency of considering actionist practices in the context of genre style studies as the intersection of style and genre phenomena in art.

**Keywords:** neo-avangard, action art, action, postmodernity, poststructuralism, genre-stylistic analysis, genre, style, morphology of art, performance.

Research area: theory and history of culture, art.

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## Жанр и стиль в исследованиях художественных практик акционизма

**Л.А. Меньшиков**

*Санкт-Петербургская государственная консерватория*

*им. Н. А. Римского-Корсакова*

*Российская Федерация, Санкт-Петербург*

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**Аннотация.** В условиях завершения постмодернистского проекта актуальным становится разработка искусствоведческой методологии изучения акционизма как одной из характерных практик актуального искусства. Соединение жанрово-стилевого анализа с принципами постструктуралистской эстетики составляет важную задачу в исследовании практик неоавангардного искусства. В статье рассмотрены методологические основания стилевых и жанровых исследований. Особое внимание уделено особенностям хронотопа акционистских практик, определяющего их своеобразие в системе современного искусства. Стилиевой анализ рассматривается в рамках классической искусствоведческой парадигмы совмещения формального и содержательного исследования общих и конкретных черт большого массива художественных фактов. Жанровый анализ применен к описанию структур бытования акционистских практик в культуре, которые поддаются описанию в терминах морфологического подхода. Сделаны выводы о целесообразности рассмотрения акционистских практик в контексте исследований жанрового стиля как пересечения стилевых и жанровых явлений в искусстве.

**Ключевые слова:** неоавангард, акционизм, акция, постмодернизм, постструктурализм, жанрово-стилевой анализ, жанр, стиль, морфология искусства, перформанс.

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The artistic and aesthetic practices of the second half of the 20th century are currently a historically completed project. This allows us to consider them from the point of view of classical art history methodology as forms of art, as complete facts of its history. In particular, the artistic practices of neo-avant-garde action art, which include interconnected and interdependent actionist and object forms, positioning themselves in the history of art as fundamentally anti-artistic and denying the possibility of their description in the context of the consistent development of artistic forms and styles that did not find a place within the usual sections of art history, represent a number of systematic forms of

artistic activity and have a pronounced stylistic affiliation, due to their position as a transitional art form, containing the features of avant-garde and postmodern art.

The theoretical and methodological foundations of this approach require the involvement of scientific works in the field of aesthetics and general theory of art, theory and history of avant-garde and postmodern art, theory and psychology of artistic creativity, theory of styles and genres, and force art history to turn to interdisciplinary, integrative methodology. Its foundations are the awareness of contemporary art as a fundamentally special phenomenon in the history of artistic culture, opposed to the

entire previous history of art, the interpretation of contemporary art in terms of «antiart» and «antiaesthetics» in the works of T. Adorno, T. Binkley, B. Buchlo, A. Danto, I. Hassan. Such an attitude forces us to interpret action art as a combination of trends in avant-garde and postmodern art, which have genre and style certainty, expressed in the peculiarities of their existence as artifacts of a dual spatial and temporal nature. The most adequate methodological program for the study of such forms of artistic practice would be genre and style analysis as a fundamental approach in art history research, which makes it possible to highlight the essential features of specific historical forms of artistic phenomena.

For the purposes of the study of action art, the definition of style can be taken in its classical art history understanding as «the unity of the laws of correlation of: object and subject, general and particular, logical and sensual – in a word, laws of all aspects and moments of form and content» (Kushnaryov, 1934: 26). This determines the dialectical structure of the methodology of the study of action art, which should be oriented towards a simultaneous double-sided analysis of the content and formal aspects of artifacts, which are «considered as a relationship between the signified and the signifier» (Mahlina, 2000: 419). Therefore, the research of action art should begin with the study of artistic practice as a set of various facts and gestures that have developed within the framework of contemporary art and exist as a single «artistic style», that is, «a semiotic object that arises on the basis of works united by the integrity of the outlook, which has become a signified style, inextricably linked with its signifier as system of expressive means» (Medushevskij, 1979: 31–32). This methodological setting allows us to consider various manifestations of the artistic practice of action art in a unified semantic space.

The principles of style analysis are based on the definition of style as «a characteristic unity, a commonality of features inherent in a certain set of individual objects» (Mihajlov, 1981: 43). Classical art criticism asserted the impossibility of carrying out the creative process outside the stylistic factor, as a result of

which any created artifact turns out to belong to stylistic direction: «Outside of style, not a single work exists and cannot exist, regardless of its artistic value. It inevitably bears the stamp of creative thinking, characteristic of both a historically specific period of development as a whole, and its individual manifestations... The expression “this work is devoid of style” in a strict logical sense is unjustified» (Mihajlov, 1981: 44). This methodological setting is also relevant for the analysis of avant-garde and postmodern phenomena, which try to declare their neutrality in relation to the category of style. Style analysis begins with the fact that «style features as an expression of the commonality of a certain set of individual phenomena... repetitive, invariant moments» (Mihajlov, 1990: 50) are to be identified. To identify them, it is necessary to study and compare a large array of similar phenomena belonging to a single cultural and historical space for the existence of art; only on the basis of their comparison, by identifying common features that are repeated in a significant number of works, it turns out to be possible to reconstruct stylistic features, since «style features... become observable only in a specific text... The process of style analysis... starting from visual single phenomena (texts) to the reconstruction (modeling) of the system that unites them» leads to the fact that as a result of the study a style is formed as «an intuitively emerging ideal of an objective phenomenon that can be analyzed» (Mihajlov, 1990: 67). The course of research in the case of stylistic analysis proceeds «from the disclosure of unity in the multitude with a conscious abstraction from the individual characteristics of individual objects (works)» (Mihajlov, 1990: 69). Therefore, the main thing in the application of this methodology is the modeling of common features of artistic phenomenon, to the greatest extent corresponding to the nature of the cultural and historical situation in which this phenomenon was formed – «in the establishment and subsequent description of real factors that serve as an objective basis for the subjective representation of unity» (Mihajlov, 1990: 72).

The leading general scientific methods which it is possible to implement this meth-

odology are generalization and abstraction, through which «achieved by an intuitive way preliminary idea of the analyzed style» (Mihajlov, 1990: 73) is created. This procedure can be carried out by going through two stages of style analysis. At the first, there is a «comparison of various directly perceived texts that have common features» (Mihajlov, 1990: 75). This can be done on the basis of the study of theoretical texts created by artists. In the second, the identified common features are analyzed for their universality in terms of the degree of prevalence in works of art from the two aspects – formal and content – through a consistent «comparison of the stylistic features each other in terms of the degree of expression of the quality of commonality» (Mihajlov, 1990: 75). The duality of the content and formal aspects of style must be emphasized, since, as D. S. Likhachev noted by analyzing the structure of a literary text, «style is not only a form of language, but it is a unifying aesthetic principle of the structure of the entire content and the entire form of a work» (Mihajlov, 1990: 32). Or, as M. S. Kagan explained this connection, «style is a certain system of forms in which the results of creativity are fixed, or the “law of form”» (Mihajlov, 1990: 442–443), and at the same time «a unique artistic structure that grows from the root of artistic content, adequately expressing it and inseparable from it» (Mihajlov, 1990: 443). Therefore, stylistic analysis is aimed at identifying the most common unity manifested in the totality of artifacts, since «style... is the highest form of artistic unity» (Skrebkov, 1973: 10). In accordance with this principle, the basis of stylistic research is to show the unity of a number of common artifacts as a kind of artistic phenomenon.

When conducting a style analysis, several significant aspects must be taken into account. The first is that style is not limited to the features of the commonality of works, it also necessarily includes unique artistic qualities, or, as A. F. Losev noted, «style expresses the artistic power of a work» (Losev, 1994: 219).

Style simultaneously emphasizes commonality and sets boundaries that separate a certain set of works from the rest of the array of artistic culture. In this sense, its defining fea-

tures represent a certain spectrum of various manifestations of essential qualities in different, but having a stylistic unity, works. Therefore, within the framework of stylistic analysis, special attention is paid to the embodiment of the general features of style in its specific vivid incarnations.

The second aspect is related to this thing that makes difficult to analyze the art of the second half of the 20th century, since it is often denied art significance. This happens because the possibility of the existence of style in the art of the 20th century is denied, and, as V. M. Polevoy writes, «it is not possible to define a certain common unified style of world art in the 20th century and place all the artistic movements that make it up in a single series of stylistic evolution» (Polevoj, 1983: 253). Therefore, such global task should be abandoned, but this does not prevent us from discovering a greater or lesser commonality of stylistic features of individual phenomena. This attitude should be understood as a justification for the need to abandon the search for a «great» style in the art of the 20th century, but not at all as a statement about the fundamental alienation of stylistic phenomena for the artistic practices of contemporary art. Also, the rejection of the stylistic approach can occur because the denial of stylistic patterns in the art of the 20th century as extends to individual phenomena of it, for example, according to V. G. Vlasov, «postmodernism cannot be considered as artistic direction, trend and style, it rather, a certain historical period in the development of art, which has a fairly clear chronological framework» (Vlasov, 1995: 428). At the same time, one cannot deny the possibility of the emergence of stylistic phenomena within the framework of postmodernism or under its influence as a reflection of a commonality of artistic phenomena, due to their unity arising from arbitrary reasons. Finally, there is a definition of contemporary art, according to which its stylistic understanding is impossible in principle, as A. S. Migunov points out, «art is born, about which there was simply nothing to talk about» (Migunov, 1991: 29), since, as V. G. Vlasov pointed out, «there is a style collapse» (Vlasov, 2009: 26). But even this thing does not prevent the possibility of

identifying commonality in these facts, since it exists, even if it is non-artistic, since «post-modernism is not an art so much as a type of thinking» (Migunov, 1991: 30). The definition of postmodernism as a type of thinking suggests that it combines a certain set of similar phenomena, thereby setting the stylistic principle for their perception. The same principle of typology can be applied to characterize action art as a manifestation of postmodern tendencies.

The third aspect is related to the need to combine stylistic analysis with cultural and historical research, since the definition of style is possible only through consideration of the context of the emergence and existence of art works, since only «in the system of techniques that we call style is revealed thing that can be conditionally called the spirit of epoch» (Zhir-munskij, 2004: 424). The manifestation of this spirit in postmodernist artifacts occurs in an unsystematized manner, so that «specific difficulties arise in working with an art work – its form and content, its style and stylistics. It is clear that a single approach to analysis... does not exist» (Gulyanitskaya, 2014: 11). Therefore, the identification of certain stylistic features in the case of postmodern artifacts occurs every time in unexpected levels of form and content of a literary text; this happens when, according to N.S. Gulyanitskaya, «by comparison, one can establish – based on the stylistic analysis of works – the essential features of the individual author’s style, which, of course, must reflected in the “style of the time”» (Gulyanitskaya, 1984: 13). In the case of postmodern artifacts, one has to identify stylistic features, each time relying on individually manifested signs of unity, so that, unlike the classically understood paradigm of stylistic analysis, in the case of both avant-garde and, especially, postmodern art, «the center of gravity of the stylistic analysis of a work should consist in revealing the principle to which the semantic movement of the text is subordinated» (Mukarzhovskij, 1996: 358). That is, every time – a unique principle of constructing a work. This principle should be taken into account then studying the art of any epoch (since, as V.D. Leleko pointed out, «turning to history shows that art has

never been stylistically monolithic» (Leleko, 1989: 122)), but for postmodern art it acquires a comprehensive and mandatory character. So it is typical for contemporary art to endow style with instrumental qualities, which are expressed in the fact that «style is an expression of the quintessence of the creative activity of the subject; style is a replicable model, the law of repetition» (Ustyugova, 2003: 4), as E.N. Ustyugova noted. This understanding sets the principle for analyzing stylistic features by identifying recurring features in a large number of artifacts. Moreover, this repetition may not have semantic certainty, but be set by random factors, nevertheless giving the space of the artistic text an orientation in accordance with some vectors that can be called stylistic.

This approach is predetermined by the methodological principles of postmodernist art history, since, as V.G. Vlasov showed, «post-structuralists denied the systemic nature of art as an object of study» (Vlasov, 2009: 21) and proved the point of view according to which «art studies do not study the object of reality, but only its interpretation, and there are many such interpretations; research in the field of humanitarian knowledge is metaphorical in nature and belongs to the genre of literary essays; definitions of art history have a symbolic meaning; they are mythologems (artistic and figurative analogues of phenomena)» (Vlasov, 2009: 21). According the poststructuralist principles, classical stylistic analysis is corrected if it is applied to the artifacts of postmodern art, there «style is not a stable community, but a dynamic integrity of content-formal elements, constantly changing over time» (Vlasov, 2009: 30). Thus, stylistic analysis makes it possible to identify the features of the artistic experience by people who create works, and can be applied by comparing the features of the epoch and the worldview of artists for whom «the category of style is synthesizing in its inner nature» (Vlasov, 2009: 32), that is, it allows to identify commonality. Thus, stylistic analysis in relation to postmodern artistic practices, including those of an action art, should be reduced to a description of their diversity, which should be followed by the identification of stable content models and by the identification of stable form

elements, without explaining their conditionality by any semantic grounds, as well as building recurring formal and content phenomena into typological series without endowing these relations with any obvious and stable semantic characteristics.

Style analysis continues in genre analysis. The methodology of genre analysis was laid down by M. S. Kagan, who considered it necessary to study of the «internal structure of the art world», at the basis of which he «placed an ontological criterion – how works of art really exist in material reality – physical space and time» (Vlasov, 2009: 35). For M. S. Kagan, «genre... denotes modifications of the structure of a species, caused by internal causes, similar in all species, but manifesting themselves in each species in a peculiar way» (Kagan, 1997: 367). Therefore, genre analysis involves the allocation of special types within the framework of artistic forms, combined in one species as a type of works that use a common expressive means. In the case of action art as a phenomenon in the art of the 20th century, it is required to identify its features as a species and the embodiment of these features in various types of art forms. The author of the morphological theory of art showed that «in our time... it is pointless to raise the question of the genre of the work, because all the differences between the figurative structures are erased, and the work appears before us as a fragment of an amorphous flow of creative energy» (Kagan, 1997: 368), but at the same time he noted, building a dialectical contradiction that «the creative process presupposes a certain genre self-determination» (Kagan, 1997: 368).

From these prerequisites a methodological conclusion follows that although now there is no established system of genre forms, it is possible to analyze the current artistic process as a process of formation a system of new types of genre forms in the works of contemporary artists. By analogy with stylistic analysis in the formal sphere, the process of stylistic relations fixing can go further, to acquiring the character of a genre formation process, within which randomly repeating forms of activity can be fixed in the permanent genre

forms, which, once having happened, then begin to influence the emergence of new ones, but similar and adjacent artistic phenomena. The emergence of genre forms can occur on the basis of any signs of commonality, which are both non-obvious and completely non-artistic in nature. In this series, the emergence of meta-genre and mega-genre phenomena is natural, they have the ability to emphasize and fix a wide range of similarity among individual artistic practices than that manifests itself at the formal level. Thus, classifying tendencies arise in the process of the historical movement of the practices of action art, they force us to consider their diversity from a systemic point of view. Such classification can be based on the principle that «two genre series are formed in the cognitive plane of the artistic and figurative assimilation of reality, one of which is due to qualitative differences in the cognizable fragments of reality, and the other due to quantitative, volumetric ones» (Kagan, 1997: 369). M. S. Kagan noted that «this principle of genre formation also operates in new types of art» (Kagan, 1997: 370), according to which the actual forms of creative activity are classified on the basis of qualitative (ontological) and quantitative principles, so «the objective qualitative definition of the genre is a structural art form modifications» (Kagan, 1997: 375). For actionist forms an essential fact is the significant manifestation of the genre style, the transfer of the features of the leading genre of the art trend to other genres (or «the introduction of features of another genre style into one genre» (Sohor, 1968: 70)), as a result all genres of the art trend acquire a common character.

Actionist practices have demonstrated an ambivalent relationship to time and space, which can be understood as the idea and basis of a postmodern aesthetic attitude. The task of action art was to transform the time and space of art: «To master reality, avoiding the rules by which reality is customary to master, to get not a programmed professional result, but everything at once» (Sohor, 1968: 147). This «everything» set the «totality» or genre and style uncertainty of this art.

The quantitative characteristic of genre relations is associated with a special chronotopol-

ogy, which determines the existence of actionist practices. In the artistic practice of action art («the anti-capitalist international that lived in the 1960s as a total political performance» (Andreeva, 2007: 146)), an understanding of the chronotope is being formed, which had a significant impact on the genre and style nature of postmodern art, especially intermedia artifacts.

The time of the action is short and finite, but at the same time it is endless and limitless. Each postmodern movement as an artistic movement has a beginning – the time of the release of the manifesto and the holding of the first actions – but at the same time there is no beginning, since the live stream of artists' activities includes all previous and all subsequent artistic phenomena, includes the entire life of world civilization in its purpose as a subject of criticism, which forms a kind of totality of time, in which it is impossible to single out individual moments of the artistic and historical process. The action as a work of art (the spectacle as «anti-performance») has just as indefinite time limits. These are the boundaries of one action – a few minutes, within which one can carry out one pseudo-theatrical action that contains hidden absurdity. Another time – uniting actions into a coherent and at the same time mosaic «performance». Actions within it are created by different authors, performed by different artists, thereby making time discrete, but together they give a single artistic process that expresses the general direction of art as an act of sociomachy. Further, there is a union within the time frame of the festivals, which have an interconnection and continuity within the boundaries of the existence of a particular artistic group and the lifetime of its ideologues and inspirers, but do

not break off after the completion of these two lengths. As a result, a complex temporal continuum of the fact of art is formed – three substantive times, five formal times – all of them intersect in each action, opening its structure to the world of culture.

The space of action art is just complexly organized, it is a kind of bridge connecting the real space of life and culture, the space of contemporary art and the space of art history, the space of the work, the space of creativity and spectator participation. Action art is formed as the intersection of these spaces. If any of them is beyond the scope of artistic perception, then the action loses its integrity and falls apart. This sets the totality of the space of culture and artistic activity. This space appears distorted, since it must remain free from violent interpretation, and any unification that comes from outside (except for the formal unity of the action, performance, festival) deprives it of effectiveness. The next level of space – connection with other areas of artistic culture of the second half of the 20th century – action art is fundamentally open to them, its task is to free them from the conventions and restrictions imposed by the artistic form. Finally, the last space is the space of the incessant change in life, art and culture, attempts to capture which in art problematize action art. Such a space is indefinitely and permanently changing, it cannot be fixed, it cannot be represented in frozen forms that distort and spoil it.

Action art forms a new space of art – a space of constant change and uncertainty, which does not know the concepts of «work» and «monument», but which methodologically lends itself to classification within the framework of spatio-temporal relations, projected in the form of genre-style coordinates.

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