

Study on formalism of cultural propaganda in Iranian graphic since 2001 to 2011

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Abstract

Formalism in graphics has a different definition compared to the other branches of art. With regard to knowing graphics unlike other arts separate from two parts of form and content, formalism in graphics is known with superiority of form over content in the initial definition. Effectiveness and misperceptions from formalist view are contradicted with definition for graphics. This improper insight which caused undermining has been regarded as one of the most important functions of advertising especially commercial advertising graphics, i.e. transmission of message. With regard to the relationship between form and content existing in formalism school and comparison of this concept with misperceptions from formalism in graphics, the present research intends to specify the relationship between form and content in cultural formalistic propaganda in Iran during 2001-2011 by collecting data via library and field method and analyzing and defining a series of works as statistical population with the purpose of examining extremism and lack of the graphic designers' awareness from background of formalism and expression of the relationship between formation and the process governing the formalism of cultural propaganda in Iranian graphic. In this regard, to sum up the relationship between form and content in formalism of cultural propaganda in Iranian graphic at the mentioned period in most of cases can be determined as an intelligent, systematic and creative relationship with an aesthetic insight. This relationship indicates the insight far from extremism by the designers at the mentioned period to proper meaning and definition of formalist at visual schools.

Keywords: cultural propaganda, formalism, Iran graphics

Introduction

Beginning of the formation of formalism in graphics dates back to the Russian formalist movement, which was formed by modernist youth and considered as an art literary movement. This movement in accordance with existing social conditions and modernist trends as well as function of poetry and literature proposed the theories. Formalists have known the art separate from life in their theories and found art value of works in hard understanding of the works. This insight is witnessed today in some of graphics works and such treatment in graphics regarding the differences between poetry, literature and graphics as well as main function of graphics which lies on transfer of message raises ambiguity or removal of message and meaning.

If the schools which are recognized as the first formalists (Suprematism, Constructivism, Bauhaus, etc.) in graphics, maintaining the primacy of form over content has many fundamental differences with the theories of Russian formalist and some graphic works at contemporary age. Mentioned schools have similized art to an efficient machine and used main forms and colors for simple understanding of the man's mind, i.e. this is despite Russian formalism. At the first outlook, this study aims to identify this contradiction in the definition of formalist; in a more comprehensive outlook, the main purpose of the formalists' background at modern age as a proper standard is a

formalist and superiority of form to content to measure the works under discussion in the present research.

Research method

Descriptive-analytical method has been used as the research method; at first a series of 80 works of the cultural posters published in books of authentic festivals and exhibitions held during the period under study have been collected via field method. 16 works during 8 years (2004-2010) and 2 works of 80 works have been selected in random and then each of works has been analyzed separately. In this research, two samples of 16 works in accordance with the result of research will be mentioned.

The basis for analysis of works has lied on the backgrounds mentioned in the Russian Formalist School of literary as well as visual schools at modern age; a summary of the features and theories of the mentioned schools can be known as the relationship between form and content, superiority of form to content, text in service of transfer of message, form in service of transfer of message, visual system in expression of content, geometric system, communication with the Russian formalists, use of the stimulating colors that eight mentioned standards have been used in table represented with analysis of works and final conclusion. Data collection instruments include observation, scan and taking notes (books, articles, theses) and Site; data collection method include combined method(library, field and internet) and data analysis method include quantitative and qualitative method. It can mention the works below in study on literature review and related works.

Ahmadi(2003) in the book “reality and beauty in contexts of philosophy of art” has explained the trajectory of the relationship between philosophy and aesthetics and their relationship with the reality with modern approach. In the meantime, introducing the outlook of the schools with modern outlook to form such as formalism and constructivism is considered in this article. Farzad Adibi(2003) in formalism in modern graphics of Iran has examined emergence of a new outlook in area of contemporary graphics and expressed the reasons to raise such outlook among designers of contemporary graphics. Maryam Haghparast(2010) in the critical language to design of graphics has stated that the main purpose of the present research is to raise a problem concerning concept of criticism and its relationship with design of graphics due to lack of awareness about place of criticism in design of graphics.

Amir Nasiri and Marzieh Ali (2013) in Kandinsky's position in the conflict between form and content have examined formalist and intrinsic aesthetics and analyzed the Kandinsky's ideas and elaborated the Kandinsky's special position in the struggle between form and content.

What's form?

The formal aspect of a work of art lies on how the work is shaping that provides the viewer with important information; since form is the most authentic communication ring between works of art and their related style and sine there is a wide range for this term, it requires explaining it more(Avakian, 2014, p. 19).

Definitions

1-form, in the strictest sense, is synonymous with the term.
 2-form implies special type or form of anything. The form of painting has the same meaning.
 3-form refers to visual elements which develop a work and the relationship between these elements and gives special appearance of a work of art to it (Avakian, 2014, p. 21).

Formalism

Formalism in graphics unlike other fields of art has a different definition. If graphics is not assumed like other arts separate from two parts of form and content, as a result it can know

formalism in graphics with superiority of form to content in the initial definition (Adibi, 2003, p. 1). After the transition of a period in the twentieth century, the concept of “design language” and the composition formed concurrently with it, i.e. theories of visual communications were appeared with common compositions among professionals and used widely in the texts and curricula of graphics design. This approach had numerous common assumptions with modern approaches in the field of the visual arts. Specifically both have incentives to create a global system to express truth in the form of formal and visual composition.

Creation of a clear visual system which was formed in expression of text like what appeared in Bauhaus school and by figures such as Joseph Olbers- a significant and effective figure among others-has been a peremptory demand in the world of design, i.e. a demand which induces the world of designers to a defined and professional direction. This systematic approach could have been formed under this assumption that a system of visual and form-based rules can work out in design better than traditional design which has been dependent on the conditions and requirements developed in the place and time context. These rules which formulated the relation governing visual forms has been being considered absolute and defined the relationship between visual elements in a general scheme such as formulation and analysis of natural language of other semiotic systems. Effect of analytical philosophy, mathematics and formal logic at the early decades of the 20th century caused the formalist methods are taken into account in creation of visual art works and graphics design as well as study and analysis of works (Hagh parast, 2013, p. 69). In study on how such outlook develops, introducing the Russian formalist literary school as an unrestrained outlook in primacy of form over content and then some of the schools at the modern age as the founders of theories of visual communications and the design language in form of the geometric-based rules is worth noting.

Literary school of Russian formalism

New-oriented young people were the founders of this school (Ahmad, 1994; 39); in beginning, this name (formalist) was the name called by the critics; in other words they knew themselves morphologist, and subject of movement was known not just as the work of art but what reflected in it, not accepted the common concept of form or form of work of art (Ahmadi, 1994, p. 42). Formalists try to consider nothing than the text itself and formalists know scientific, historical, biographical, neurological and psychological research on the sidelines, because they believed that their style can be detected only at current situation. Further they tried to express the constructive elements of meaning with form of work and achieve what reflected in the work (Ahmadi, 1994, p. 43). Further Shklovsky(1923) stated that art has been always separate from life and its color is not related to the colors of the flag that has been knocked on the gate and Jakobson in defense of this theory stated that assuming art and life is similar to work of those viewers of Ta'zîeh at middle ages who wanted at the end of performance to punish the actor in the role of Judah(Ahmadi, 2003, p. 299).

Origins of Russian formalism

Their question has been in this way: What is the distinction between literary text and any other text? Or in other words what is the Literature of text? Formalists can be summarized in two main characters: 1-emphasis on main essence of the literary text, i.e. they considered the work and strived to express constructive elements of the meaning with the form of work and achieve what reflected in work; 2- they respected those theoretical and literary outcomes obtained from study on the work rather than study on the historical contexts and recognition of the personality and character of the author of the work, i.e. they strived to considered just the text(Ahmadi, 2003, p. 298).

The views of Russian formalism

Concept of defamiliarization or alienation is the most important issue mentioned in Russian formalism. To Shklovsky, founder of formalism, use of alien words instead of familiar words increase the considered concept as much as possible and cause creation of new meaning and feeling, because our sensory perception become accustomed (Ahmadi, 1994, p. 48). defamiliarization has been used with two meanings in works of Shklovsky: 1- a way in composition which is achievable willfully at any work of art, appeared with the absolute form of expression which this concept has been rooted in the literary theory about use of virtual elements in texts, i.e. this use notifies mind about the new meanings and devalues the familiar meanings. 2-another method lies on the texts that the author has used them to alienate text in view of the addressee and used alien words instead of familiar words so as to increase the mentioned concept as much as possible and use it to create a new sense.

Visual schools

In following, a number of effective schools at modern age as the main indices in creation of a modernist method on how to use form in art works will be introduced:

Suprematism

Suprematism is to create the problem of nothing, because nonsense has existence (Moshtagh, 2009, p. 233). Before the First World War a huge ferment was on Russia; in 1913, Kazimir Russian Malevich (1878-1935) influenced by the Cubism created Suprematism movement in which attention to the form of work like formalists has been the main basis. Malevich believed that geometric forms (Square, circle, triangle, cross) besides the pure colors can stimulate feelings. He believed that perceptual effect of color is the basis for art experience (Krieg, 2011, p. 131). Some, like Malevich and Wassily Kandinsky (1866-1944) believed that art should be basically a spiritual activity separate from the self-interested needs of society. They have not cared social or political role for art and believed that the only purpose of art is to understand the visions of the world through the creation of forms in time and space (Bimagz, 2014; 316).

Constructivism

Constructivism has been a three-dimensional method which was formed in Russia. Despite Suprematism and Malevich, 25 artists under leadership by Alexander Rodchenko (1891-1956) and Vladimir Yevgrafavich Tatlin (1885-1953) disagreed this belief in 1921 and denied the art for art so far as the Russia put efforts to industrial design and visual messages and applied arts in service of new communist community in Russia (Bimagz, 2014 ; 317).

Alexander Rodchenko

has been one of the Vladimir Yevgrafavich Tatlin's students who was the theorist at Constructivism style, remained in minds with several painting works; the most important works include Three Pictures with pure yellow, pure blue and pure red, who announced the death of art of painting by displaying them named with "end of painting" and then he invoked to photomontage when he decided to create visual works (Moshtagh, 2009, p. 253). In 1922, soviet disagreed with the leading art. The professional artists were called with capitalists of the country and painting style "social realism" was granted with support. Future developments in this creative art were continued in west and the innovation in design of graphics in the Constructivism was continued during the 1920s and later.

Distil

Distil movement was formed at the late summer in 1917 in Netherlands. This style by considering an abstract geometry seeks the harmony in world system, Mondrian's paintings and visual forms in Distil movement. This movement puts emphasis on use of square as a static form and use of direct lines and perpendicular angles.

H.P. Berlage, believed that geometry not just has the most use in creation of art form but it is an absolute need (HOLZHER, Chavst, 1983, p. 163). Mondrian, Van Lake and Van Doesburg have diminished their visual words under use of the early colors (red, yellow and blue), neutral colors (black, gray and white), horizontal and vertical direct lines and flat surfaces limited to rectangular and square (Bimagz, 2014 ; 324). Other elements in Distil's style lie on how the horizontal and vertical arrangement of text appears in the margin of paper which obliged the reader to rotate the page so as to read the text (Hollis, Richard, 2006, p. 69). Distil's movement has been advocate of acquisition of leading art at applied arts, so far as the spirit of art influenced the society through architecture, design of goods and graphics.

Bauhaus

Bauhaus is called to the school of art which was established in 1930-1919, with these purposes that architecture is assumed once again among arts, i.e. originality of architecture has grounded on feature of its efficiency; further majority of artists, engineers and owners of industry collaborate to make a great work of art (HOLZ-HER, Chavst, 1984, p. 162). In 1928, Aldous Huxley wrote that it is clear that machine has governed here and all the warware of William Morris and Tolstoy cannot remove machine, thus we should take a step to use it in creation of beauty, a modern beauty (Mohajer, 2006, p. 13). The enthusiasm to photography and typography by Moholy-Nagy, an artist of Bauhaus school, became the origin for Bauhaus's tendency to visual messages, resulted in important experiences in unity of photography and typography. He called objective integration of the word and image for fast transfer of message "modern visual literature". In 1923, he wrote that objective display of realities by means of photography can release the viewer from interpretation by others. In typography, he advocated the use of color and put emphasis on clear messaging without the predetermined aesthetic assumptions (Bimagz, 2014, p. 338). Bauhaus tried to discard the restriction between beautiful art and applied art and approach the art to life by means of design which was considered as a means for cultural revitalization and social changes.

Visual communication

Communication refers to an Arabic term which is used in Persian language as bond, association and relationship (HOLZ-HER, Chavst, 1984, p. 11). Arasto has mentioned communication as influence on others, stated that communication at any way tends to influence the addressee.

The term "communication" which is used in science of communication includes various concepts such as transfer and dissemination of ideas, creation of bond and public collaboration. In other words, one of these definitions is transfer of theories, emotions, skills and so forth using the symbols, terms and images which are called communication (HOLZ-HER, Chavst, 1984, p. 9). Vision is the most important sense through which the man has enabled to achieve communication. When the man felt needing for transfer of his thoughts and ideas through speaking, he used sense of vision for further transfer and understanding of visual concepts. Exchange of concepts through speaking has been completed through visualization and display of image and used all the visual facilities, under which the term "visual communication" is used in our country for a field entitled "graphic", i.e. visual works which are used to facilitate communication (Hosseini, 2009, p. 10).

Two schools in theories of communication

There are two schools in theories of communication; the first which can be called the process school is a type of approach to subject which considers the main communication processes. This school puts emphasis on networks and media through which the messages are transmitted and the senders and receivers of message engage in encoding and decoding, i.e. establishment of an analytical model considers the efficiency and accuracy (Noble, Y, 2013, p. 161). The second school “Semiotic school” considers the message as the interpretation of symbols and makes meaning through mutual communication with addressees. This intellectual school knows communication as an interface in the semantic exchanges and interpretations and does not consider misunderstanding as the sign of failure in communication by use of the terms such as connotation. Advocates of this model argue that various interpretations which rise in the process of communications will raise more validity to multiple and unstable status of nature of message and the dependence of addressees’ impression to social and cultural areas (Noble, Y. 2013, p. 162).

Analysis of works

In following, analysis of 2 works among the works during 8 years (2004-2010) has been considered. The basis for analysis of works in this part includes visual schools at modern age; a summary of these features refer to attention to geometric system and/or grid system, flat surfaces, leading geometric forms, use of new techniques of photography at modern age, special outlook at arrangement of words, different treatment in design of words and connection in elements of image with the considered concept. Further, attention to concept and definition of formalist at visual arts which is the primacy of form to content will be taken into account in analysis of works and conclusion.

Sample No. 1



Figure 1: Bahram Hamidi, we are from nature and nature from ours, 2008

Description of work

Background of this work has been covered with blue color that lines in green color have been centered at the background, formed an oval which is connected from right side and above third

fourth side and this form has continued at center in a rectangular form and turned to left by a little rotation and connected to bottom of box. At the low part, the lines in green color have formed a rectangular and the title of poster in two Persian and English languages has been set in little distance to the bottom edge of box in a straight line.

Interpretation of work

It seems that the designer inspired of the motto of work has used the most personal symbol for identification of human identity, finger print, in design of this work which is associated to the relationship between man and nature and put it in a form similar to a tree. It can know integration of these two forms as the effort in expression of the relationship between man and nature, so that expression of this idea by designer is in a way that it can similize the human finger print to a tree. Designer transfers numerous meanings to the addressee's mind through this idea, of which it can refer to the likening human life and the tree as a symbol of nature, effect and role of nature and human on each other and involvement of any person independently in his relationship with nature. It seems that it can consider use of green color by designer in the context of finger print as a symbol of nature, such that the artery of life has streamed in the context of finger print and this outlook by the designer can be a strong reason to the arguments mentioned in advance.

This work can be known as a clear sample of idealization and making a strong relationship in the relationship between form and content, thus no primacy is seen in use of form to content in this work. Despite the relative lack of readability in headline, it can know the designer's treatment in use of small size for the headline font an affair in service of idea; further the existing image can indicate the content in the work to a large extent; with regard to the most important criteria in visual formalism schools, i.e. visual system in the expression of text, transfer of message, and fast relationship which can be observed in design of this poster, this work can be known in line with values of formalism schools at modern age.

Sample No. 2

Interpretation of work

It seems that the designer has used the image of a face which indicates face of an Iranian man well suited to the title of poster "root of soil" which can have bond with roots of culture at Iran territory. Image of face is in red color and in a way that it has not a tangible contrast with the wooden color of the background, which this use of color causes integration between red image of face and image of wooden tray beneath it. Further, the designer has used a symbol such as image of wooden tray as an old and traditional instrument in Iran for the framework of the image for the interface in making bond with people's life. It seems that the reason to use onion can be known in the bond with two words of root and soil; further it can mention it as an image of a common symbol in people's life; with regard to interpretations above, it can mention the image above as an image familiar to people of Iran, indicating the bond between designer and daily life in Iran especially at several decades ago.

Conclusion

It seems that designer has involved in making a new space by means of the composition of form in this work. This work is the exhibition poster named with the root of soil that it can be known as a sample of primacy of form to content in the relationship between image and subject. At this work, the relationship between elements is in a way that the designer has perhaps tried to create a new sense to change the sensory habits and make understanding of expression difficult in addition to significance to transfer of message. In this regards, it can mention this work in line with the mentioned schools in study on this work based on existing definitions in the literary schools of

Russian formalism. The work above cannot be known related to the criteria at the visual formalism schools at modern age, because all of effort in this work is to make a clear system by means of visual elements which results in clear and applied expression. In this method, use of geometry and mathematics is a bridge to achieve the communication and transfer of message and ultimately visual communication. To sum up, it can know the work under discussion in making relationship between form and content of an ordinary work.

Table 1: sample of analyzed posters based on formalist basis

use of stimulating colors		relationship with russian formalist		Geometrical system		clear visual system in expression of text		form in service of transfer of message		text in service of transfer of message		primacy of form to content		relationship between form and content		
no	yes	no	yes	no	yes	no	yes	no	yes	no	yes	no	yes	no	yes	no
*		-		*		*		*		*		-		*		Sample 1
*		*		-		-		-		-		*		-		Sample 2

In table 1, on one hand an outlook in line with formalism schools has been introduced and on the other hand an outlook far from awareness regardless of visual communication has been mentioned. With regard to eight criteria introduced in table 1 as a summary of the backgrounds of the formalist visual schools at modern age and other works studied at this age, it can say in a general conclusion that the relationship between form and theme in formalism of cultural propaganda in Iranian graphic during 2001-2011 refers to an intelligent, direct, expressive and systematic relationship, mentioned with an aesthetic outlook. This style of communication indicates an outlook far from extremism and ignorance of designers at the period under discussion to the proper meaning of formalist, seemed that structure of geometric system and visual system at the age under discussion based on philosophical and mathematical concepts has been influenced of culture and tradition, which can gain concepts of beauty, utilization and reality. In this regards, conversion of idea to an expressive form has been taken into account in visual arts especially at area of visual communication. With regard to what mentioned and the proposed results, two proposed assumptions which are in contrast with existing conclusion have not been approved.

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