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An Idea and an Image : the Iconoclastic Aspect of Conceptualism

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old signs into new ones (secondary signs), they may give them new meanings through manipulation of the context and discover more or less overt mechanisms of encoding signs that are the discourses hidden behind them. Those discoveries became a permanent contribution of conceptual art to contemporary art practice: thanks to them contemporary art appears to be different than art from before a conceptual turn. Its most important consequence, however, is replacing artworks with art documentation.

Maria Hussakowska

What is the Gender of Polish Conceptual Art?

The essay was inspired by Pawel Dybel's book *The secret of the "other gender". Disputes around the sexual differences in psychoanalysis and feminism*, in which he asked a question about the gender of logos. My – less ambitious – attempt was to try to describe the potential of gender in Polish conceptual art. The question is ahistorical, but there are a number of reasons to ask it. Many female artists that were very active during the time of conceptual incitation are invisible. Polish conceptualism which was formed by some artistic couples, historically has lost female faces. Some of these contributors – like Natalia LL or Ewa Partum – we can find out about in the discourse among first Polish feminist artists, but the question of women's input into conceptualism is still open and does not attract enough interest of scholars. Maybe this is because of the fragile and delicate matter of an artistic partnership in contrast with the heroic notion of artistic individuality that is still attractive for conceptual artists. Maybe this is because of dangerous stereotypes about masculinity and femininity and male and female roles in artistic couples. There are very few scholars who are interested in examining the notion of collaboration in its very complex form.

Much of the contemporary discourse on Polish conceptual art has been conveyed through exhibitions. This tactic may be seen as paying respect to the form of an exhibition – a specific, ideal medium to consider works of art not individually, but as they interact with each other. The specifics of conceptual works that were generally visually unattractive in the early seventies has changed, partly because of the most recent generation. The new face of Polish conceptualism is very conservative with regard to the lack of input by women. Unfortunately the belief popular among scholars and curators that women do not do 'serious' work still persists, but fortunately for those women artists who are active and visible – they found a useful label in the discourse. Placing them within the feminist movement, one should not forget their conceptual roots, and should delete the question as to whether their works were serious.

Agnieszka Gralińska-Toborek

An Idea and an Image. The Iconoclastic Aspect of Conceptualism

Conceptualism, as the art of an idea, placed itself beyond aesthetic and sensual experience. As a rule, it did not produce art objects which could be pleasing or that would represent reality. This rejection of an image places conceptualism in a broadly understood iconoclastic movement. When we examine various historical iconoclastic movements (religious and political) we may reconstruct the most important features of iconoclastic awareness and compare them with the essential postulates of conceptualism. The result of this comparison is a striking similarity of both phenomena. To mention just a few linking features of conceptualism and iconoclasm, we may enumerate: a doubt in the adequacy of the relationship between an idea and image, a fear of an idolatrous belief in a material art object, a drive to demystify art and artists, a concentration on a word instead of an image. Iconoclastic mentality can also be characterised by analytic thinking, progressive attitude and irony. However, the question arises if iconoclasm can exist without idolatry; or if conceptualism could have developed without a material object? Even if it rejected it, then the art world (museum, critics, audiences) that shows a progressively stronger tendency to contextualise, flung conceptualism out of "art's orbit into the 'infinite space' of the human condition" (to use the words of J. Kosuth).