

Evaluation of Intertextuality Concept in Photography Through Ugo Mulas's Artworks¹

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Abstract

This research is a summary of the existence, transformation and development of the concept of intertextuality in the contemporary photographic art, which has been talked about in recent years in post-modern thought. In the context of this study, reflections of intertextuality on the photography art is investigated. Italian contemporary photographer Ugo Mulas, who use intertextual approach successfully in photography, has been examined through his works, especially "Verifications" photography series. Mulas's intertextual transactions, that he used his works, are explained and his works are analyzed in terms of context and style.

Keywords: Photography, Ugo Mulas, Intertextuality, Art, Post-modernism

1. Introduction

When the history of art is examined, it can be seen that most of the artworks, which produced throughout history, were influenced by political and social factors. And different understandings and forms were preferred at every period. Therefore, a unique expression form has been developed in each period of art history. Especially postmodernism is impressed many artists and art forms in our era. According to Jameson (2011: 29), postmodern thought emerged in the late 1950s or early 60s. In other words, the concept of postmodernism began to use for analyzing and characterizing of artistic developments as in other fields in the second half of the past century.

In the postmodern thought, the individual became increasingly important. During this period of work, it can be seen that the artists have adopted a regressive style that makes the audience's knowledge and experience active.

As Zeka (1994: 83) has stated, nowadays the stylistic ideology has collapsed, and "the past" has become the only source that can be used by culture producers. Postmodernism is an imitation of dead styles, as Zeka (1994: 83) says; it is conceived as a speech through all the masks and voices that are exhibited in the imaginery museum of culture that covers the whole world. With postmodernism, works in past art movements are emerging as a text interpreted by differentiation rather than combination.

Accordingly the concept of 'Open Work', that Eco was used to tell there is no more pure discourse and genuine work, has taken a fundamental place in postmodernism. As Barthes (2016: 29) states, "once we have gone out of the way", there are no distinctive moments or places: a centerless, uninterrupted text confronts us and it leads us to the concept of intertextuality.

2. Text and Intertextuality Concepts

2.1. Text Description

Text can be defined as whole of words that compose a writing with its form, narration and punctuation features (TDK, 1945).

¹ This paper has been derived from Fulya Betes's thesis titled "Fotoğrafta Metinlerarlık Kavramının Ugo Mulas Çalışmaları Üzerinden İncelenmesi" prepared under the supervision of Ph. D. Lecurer Ugur Kutay at Yıldız Technical University, Social Sciences Institute, Art and Design MA Program.

After briefly mentioning this general definition of the text, it is necessary to emphasize the definition of a new text after the studies on the literature in the first quarter of the original 20th century.

According to Barthes (1998:64);

"Text means Tissue; but whereas hitherto we have always taken this tissue as a product, a ready-made veil, behind which lies, more or less hidden, meaning (truth), we are now emphasizing, in the tissue, the generative idea that the text is made, is worked out in a perpetual interweaving; lost in this tissue-this texture-the subject unmakes himself, like a spider dissolving in the constructive secretions of its web. Were we fond of neologisms, we might define the theory of the text as an hypology (hypophos is the tissue and the spider's web)."

2.2. Concept of Intertextuality

While Russian critic Mikhail Bakhtin explains to the concept of intertextuality, he focuses on the concepts of discourse and speech in text analysis.

According to Bakhtin;

"A text is a knit of discourses and utterances, and these discourses and utterances are not definitely the first, they are in a way speaking in a text. This way of speaking add plurivocality feature to the text. Bahtin, moving from the semantic and historical interactions of the words stated that no text can be 'pure', saying 'there is no word lacking in the dimension of dialogue' (Aktulum, 1999:40)."

Julia Kristeva is another important name that develops the concept of intertextuality likely to Bakhtin's ideas. According to Kristeva; "Each text occurs like a quotations mosaic, each text is a mixture and a transformation of another text in itself (Aktulum, 1999:41)" Concept of intertextuality that means a text influence, giving reference or transformation of another text in literature, it is also used in the other branches of art with the meaning of a singular artwork influences another artwork.

3. Intertextuality in Photography

In today's postmodern era, the artworks that were woven with intertextual relationship mentioned above and as in other branches of art, photography is also fed from these intertextual connections.

As noted by Roland Barthes (2000: 47), photography itself can not exist alone and it has a homogeneous structure. For example; In Mapplethorpe's photographs, he represented a lily's stalk, just as an Oriental painter's style. Today, the function of representation of photography is the source of intertextual transactions.

4. Analysing of Intertextual Transactions in Ugo Mulas Artworks

The Italian photographer Ugo Mulas (1928 - 1973) is one of the most successful and influential artist that practised the intertextual approach in photography. Along with that in the early stages of postmodernism, he adopted intertextual approach consciously. All of these reasons make Mulas even more valuable in this study.

In his artworks, Mulas focused on the relationship between photography and the other works of art. In the "New York The New Art Scene" series, Mulas had the opportunity to take photographs of many famous artists of his time, such as; Marcel Duchamp (see Figure-1), Helmut Newton, Andy Warhol (see Figure-2) and Roy Lichtenstein.

Because of the fact that he preferred to take photos of artists with their artworks or during the process of the artwork production. His photographs can be defined as character portraits. Therefore, the photographs in his series go beyond the ordinary understanding of portraits. The portraits of this series give some tips to the audience related the art movements to be involved, the artworks to be produced from model and the model's artistic attitudes.



Figure-1: Marcel Duchamp, 1965.



Figure-2: Andy Warhol, New York, 1964

"Ossi di Seppia" project that includes the interpretation of Italian Poet Eugenio Montale's poems via photography is another successful example of intertextuality in photography. In Figure 3, Mulas interprets Montale's following lines:

"It flares in the chile
the vast expanse, ripples, then blends smoothly
and mirrors in his vast heart this poor issue
troubled life.

Or my trunk that you add,
in this late ebrietudine,
every reborn aspect with the flowering shoots
on your hands, look." (Pirelli, 1965:67)

In Figure 4, the following lines of Montale are interpreted by Mulas:

"Oh then tossed
like the cuttlefish bone from the waves
fade away little by little;
become
a wrinkled tree or a stone
smoothed by the sea; in colors
merge with sunsets; disappear meat
to bring out drunken source of sun,
from the sun devoured ..." (Pirelli, 1965:69)



Figure-3: Per "Ossi di Seppia", Monterosso, 1962.



Figure-4: Per "Ossi di Seppia", Monterosso, 1962.

"Verifications (1968-1972)" that is the last photography series of Ugo Mulas, before his death, is completely based on the use of intertextual transactions in photography. Mulas has tried to draw attention to the importance of masters in the history

of the art and photography in his own art and subjective view. In addition to many photographers, Mulas also expressed his gratitude to the artists who produce works in different branches of art such as Duchamp in this project.

Ugo Mulas describes the artistic perspective and intertextual relations in the series Verifications that dedicated to artists that are the inspiration sources of his art, shortly before his death as follows:

"I have called this series of photos Verifications because they were meant to clear the meaning of those operations I have been repeating for years, hundred of times a day, without ever stopping to consider their inherent value and always seeing only their utilitarian side. I have dedicated the first of these photographs or verifications to Niepce. ...But my remarks have only one aim: to reconstruct and understand the things I was reflecting upon some years ago when I started thinking to this photograph and non photograph which is my work dedicated to Niepce. ...The unused, unexposed roll which has been only developed, fixed and printed, loses its utilitarian meaning and produces a series of reactions whose outcome is the group of photographs I gathered under the title of Verifications." (Mulas,2015:145,147).

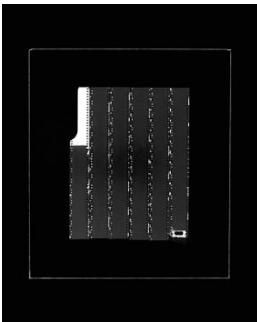


Figure-5: Homage To Niepce,1969.

Mulas (2015:145) devoted the first photograph (see Figure-5) in this series to Niepce. Because the film and sensitive surface were found and developed by Niepce. Therefore, his photography adventure started with film that is based on Niepce lithographs.

With this work, Mulas offers his respect and gratitude to Niepce. For this reason, this photograph is just a medium format film negative that does not represent anything other than itself. This work consists of a developed roll film which was not exposed. There is a small starting piece of the film. A small initial part of the film, which is exposed by light after being placed in the camera, is used in the artwork and it is a photographic reality.

Mulas wanted to protect the end that ties the film to the spool, as well as a small piece that is exposed to the light. This piece is never used, no light comes to this part and this piece is always discarded before it is used. Emphasizing this little piece is to take the exposed film out of the camera and emphasize the moment of taking it to the laboratory. It means closing. This is also a photographic existence because it is connected with glue and the light can not pass to this point. This work represents disappearances or rejections of 36 photographs.

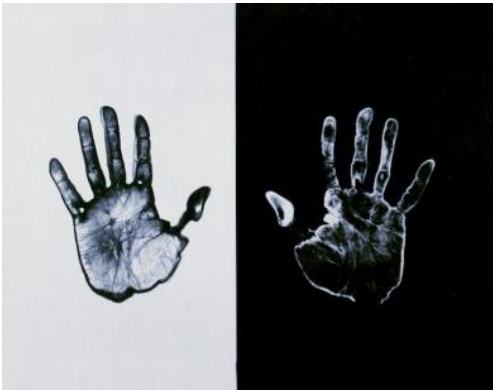


Figure-6: The Laboratory, A Hand Develops, The Other Prints To Sir John Frederick William Herschel.

In laboratory verification (see Figure-6), the development and fixing chemical steps, that the camera is not included in the dark room, are emphasized. Mulas was devoted this work to the famous chemist Herschel, highlights that everything is done by hand in the laboratory. The paper is taken out, the paper is placed under the enlarger, the focusing is done, enlarger is lifted and lowered, the paper is taken again, the paper is put into the paper developing chemical, washed, reinserted and placed in the fixing bath. In this work, the hands are the main character of the story, and the only subject is a pair of photographs. Artist; He put and pressed his hands on the photographic paper under the enlarger and to divide the paper to pairs two parts.



Figure-7: Caption To Man Ray.

Ugo Mulas dedicated this work (see Figure-7) to the famous photographer Man Ray, Man Ray is photographed while he is pointing at the architectural panel, which is the imitation of the frame on the wall. He shows the empty and framed area that is written "Ça c'est mon dernier tableau" (This is my last tableau). The image reveals nothing. Because Man Ray does not exhibit an aesthetic visual pose or expression. Subject is the words here. Mulas has taken this sentence's photo. It is Man Ray's work and also Ugo Mulas photograph.



Figure-8: End of the Verification. To Marcel Duchamp.

Mulas preferred to finish his series with the first work of this series (see Figure-8). In this work, the artist used the glass item as the different from the first work of this series. Glass has added a new character to this composition physically and visually. Alongside broken glass associated with brings to mind the works of Duchamp (like Large Glass), it is significant that this fracturing process can never be repeated in the same way.

In this work Mulas (2015:172); wanted to draw attention to importance of Duchamp's place in modern art and contribution of his personal art vision. He devoted his work to Duchamp. Because he thinks that if Duchamp wasn't existing his work couldn't be existed.

5. Conclusion

Photography is constantly in the process of transaction with different art disciplines and it moves goes toward in this direction. Various examples have been produced in the art of photography, especially in postmodern thought by using new working styles. Whereas photography has developed as a branch of art, it also influenced to other art branches and trends. When the link with the reality of photography and one of the contemporary art's aim that is to 'remove the separation of art and life' is thought, photography has become an important tool in contemporary art (Barthes, 1993:39).

Before modernism, it was adhered to patterns such as documenting the past, reflecting the truth in the photography art. With modernism, more free and abstract works have begun to be produced. Along with postmodernism, photographers have adopted a new understanding by making quotations from the movements of the past periods. Photography proved that it is more than a technical process, it affects the other art branches and it continues to interactions with different disciplines like painting, cinema and literature. Since the 19th century, it has been seen that there are intertextual relations in the photography. In this direction, it has been observed that intertextuality brings along different aspects of view over time.

One of the important representatives of intertextuality in the 20th century contemporary photography art is the Italian photographer Ugo Mulas. His "Verification" series in particular is an example of intertextuality itself. Photographer was referred to many artists and photographers like Neipce, Talbot, Lee Friedlander, John Frederick William Herschel, Davide Mosconi, Man Ray and Marcel Duchamp in his photo series. In this project, it's emphasized that the work of the photographers' and artists' understanding of art and the contributions of art, mentioned above. All of these artists and their contributions to the history of art have been interpreted and re-examined in Mulas's reflections and artistic standpoint.

In conclusion, the intertextuality that can be indicated in the works of Ugo Mulas gives a chance to look at a work of art from a new perspective and opens the way for a new evaluation of the existing work. Thus, works from previous periods can be quoted and applied to a new form, which can be transformed into a new meaning. By this way, all of these works are prevented from becoming stereotyped and forgotten. However, it is expected that in order to understand the works produced intertextually, the audience should have information about the work or the artist who is referred to. In other words,

it also appears that the viewer has enabled the intellectual accumulation and encouraged the viewer to use this accumulation.

As stated by Eco (2016: 148) artwork of fiction is pointing to some information that the viewer should have. However, surely, it doesn't load with a charge to discovering the whole encyclopedia.

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Figure References

Figure-1: Mulas, U., Solomon, A. (1967). *New York: The New Art Scene*, Canada: Rinehart & Winston of Canada Limited. p. 74.

Figure-2: Mulas, U., Solomon, A. (1967). *New York: The New Art Scene*, Canada: Rinehart & Winston of Canada Limited. p. 308.

Figure-3: *Rivista Pirelli*. (1965). No: 5, p: 67.

Figure-4: *Rivista Pirelli*. (1965). No: 5, p: 69.

Figure-5: Mulas, U. (2015). *La Photographie*.Vérone: EBS. p.149

Figure-6: Mulas, U. (2015). *La Photographie*.Vérone: EBS. p.161.

Figure-7: Mulas, U. (2015). *La Photographie*.Vérone: EBS. p.169.

Figure-8: Mulas, U. (2015). *La Photographie*.Vérone: EBS. p.173.