

The Syntax and Semantics of Modelling Exhibition Spaces: A Case Study of the Hryhorii Skovoroda National Literary and Memorial Museum, Ukraine

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The Syntax and Semantics of Modelling Exhibition Spaces: A Case Study of the Hryhorii Skovoroda National Literary and Memorial Museum, Ukraine

The aim of this article is to analyse the exhibition semantics of the exposition of the H.S. Skovoroda National Literary and Memorial Museum (Ukraine, Kharkiv region). The authors substantiate the concept of dearchaisation of Skovoroda's image by means of modelling the syntax and semantics of the exhibition space. According to the authors, exhibition design cannot ignore symbolism, as the principles of cultural consumption of "places of memory" function in the stream of consumption of a work of art. The viewer does not come for the subject, but for emotions and experience. Therefore, design should go beyond the physical properties of objects, subjects, compositions, and so on, and the content of any design should ultimately be the conditions for gaining new experience. The relationship between the material (object) and the imaginary (interpretation) is projected at the intersection of exhibition syntax and semantic modelling.

Keywords: museum, design, museum exhibition, semiosis, representation and signification

The importance of this small preamble to our article is due to the fact that the Hryhorii Skovoroda National Literary and Memorial Museum no longer exists. On the night of May

7, 2022, it was destroyed by the Russian military during shelling. Along with the building, the museum's exposition space burned to the ground.

Scholars say the humanities are in no hurry. Like any academic field, it requires time, balanced interpretations of sources, and a certain distance between researchers and objects of analysis. However, the war in Ukraine did not ask for our consent. Today is not our time. At the same time, researchers need to reflect on events that are usually the focus of art critics and journalists. We are convinced that our proposed analysis of the model of exhibition symmetry will be a reliable source for a new concept of the museum's exhibition space, which will certainly take the place of the destroyed institution.

The urgency of the problem

Hryhorii Skovoroda (1722–1794), a Ukrainian wandering philosopher and writer, has long passed the stage of historical and biographical classification. The story and philosophy of his life is firmly embedded in the world's existing cultural hierarchy. Currently, the UNESCO Executive Council has made a decision regarding the list of new commemorative dates in 2022–2023, where the 300th anniversary of H. Skovoroda is defined as a significant cultural event.

Within this context, it is important to analyse how the biography and philosophy of H. Skovoroda are represented in the context of a museum exposition. Our research was based on one of the prominent places of memory of the philosopher, located in the village of Skovorodynivka in Kharkiv region.

The Hryhorii Skovoroda National Literary and Memorial Museum has been sponsoring artistic and cultural initiatives for almost half a century. Creating an exhibition design for personalised memory locations is not an easy task. This is due to the fact that the biography of the hero, and the cultural and historical contexts of its consumption, have a constant impact on all aspects of museum representation. The phenomenon of “biographical pressure” has a separate history in Ukrainian museum design, within which the exhibition of H. Skovoroda's biography is certainly one of the central themes.

Thus, it necessary to identify the most typical features of the exhibition representation, which has a significant impact on the symbolism of Skovoroda's creativity.

First of all, the historical convention on the role and place of the philosopher is of central importance in Ukrainian and world culture, where the Soviet ideologeme of the “people's” cultural hero has long dominated. Within this convention, H. Skovoroda represents the symbolic space of the Ukrainian past, which is beyond modernisation.

Secondly, the symbolism of H. Skovoroda's persona is represented by the parameters of his cultural and artistic life and the symbolic meanings already acquired in this field: philosopher, influential writer of his time, author of the *Kharkiv Fables*, and so on. This figurative construction, along with many other derivatives of it, is difficult to ignore in the narrative sense. In the form of real symbolic “knots”, it represents a significant part of his personal historical and cultural context, which, as a consequence, is extremely verbal. In this sense, Skovoroda is, first of all, a word, a text and a book. The journalistic rhetoric of the image of the wandering philosopher has a wide range of interpretations, along with all the other contexts of his life – as a composer, as a didactic pedagogist, and so on. Add to this the fact that the literary aspects of his work were used to promote the synthetic image of him as a national cultural leader in the first half of the nineteenth century, in the days of the romantic search for “ethnic roots”.

All this together can explain a certain repetitive monotony that can be observed in the design of museum exhibitions dedicated to H. Skovoroda. Symbols associated with the established image of the philosopher as, above all, a scribe, a “man of the word”, again and again provoke a return to the previously exploited model of “book – picture – object”.

Finally, but no less important for the typology of modern museum design, is the fact that many semantic meanings and points of view have been expressed (and are being expressed) on behalf of Skovoroda. We tend to consider this phenomenon as “semantic noise”, which, for authors of exhibitions, appears primarily in the form of a visual challenge. Today, in the culture and history of Ukraine, the image of H. Skovoroda exists on the scale of true iconography. Within its limits, the tradition of the usual image of Skovoroda is more important than academic considerations. In essence, the model of Skovoroda’s visual “consumption” in certain pre-understood and delineated parameters (a slender wanderer in a *zupan* (traditional jacket), with a stick in his hand and a book in his purse) is a clichéd form of personalised “memory space”. This phenomenon is not difficult to explain in the context of the romantic era of “invention of tradition”, but it is unacceptable to continue to consume within the museum symbolism of the twenty-first century.

In Ukraine, the real challenge for dearchaisation the language of exhibition design has become the tradition of “linear” symbolism, which has been actively exploited for many years in a large number of museum projects. We constantly observe this concept in Soviet and post-Soviet museum design.¹ Its content can be represented as a consistent “linear” narrative, where the visual (both object and image) is based on the text and acts as its “illustrator”. The design of this kind of exhibition is “animated”, because it does not contain its own tasks and “speaks” the language of the exhibition plan – a cyclic text narrative.

This problem is present in the organisation of Western European museums, where quite often, according to Verity Platt, “texts try to rationalize the visual and material power of privileged objects in verbal form, while asserting the text’s importance as a guide (or even replacement) to the viewing of such objects.”²

Thus, the high semantic reputation of H. Skovoroda continues to determine the museum-exhibition forms of production of its symbolic status and iconography. Within these limits, the issue of museum design is not so much a question of coexistence with the symbolism of Skovoroda as its overcoming and rethinking as a sign-symbolic challenge. It is obvious that:

- a) the current historical convention addresses the history of Skovoroda to the achievements of the past
- b) the personality of Skovoroda as a philosopher represents him through word, text and book, which often forms stereotypical forms of “consumption” of his history; and
- c) existing iconography imposes stereotypes on the visualisation Skovoroda’s personality rather than deepening its interpretation.

The purpose of this article is to analyse the exhibition semantics of the exposition of H.S. Skovoroda National Literary and Memorial Museum, and to substantiate the concept of dearchaisation of Skovoroda’s personality by means of modelling the syntax and semantics of the exhibition space.

¹ LEGKODUH, V. K. Museum development in the Ukraine. In: *Museum International*, 19(3), 1966, pp. 142–151.

² PLATT, Verity. Art history in the temple. In: *Aethusa* 43(2), 2010, p. 213.

Historiography of the question

Among the studies that, in our view, are the most representative of the issue in the title, it is worth noting those that focus on the analysis of various forms of exposition syntax. The variety of approaches and points of view, which are expressed on the basis of extremely diverse museum material, allows us to identify two important trends.

The first is to rethink the ways in which the various forms of historical experience museums exhibit interacts.

The problem of institutional representation of the past is the focus of the research of S.A. Crane. Her article analyses the interaction of two types of museum memory: that of the viewer, who often finds him/herself in an expositional context with preconceived assumptions and forms of personal experience; and the institutional position of the institution, which regulates its version of historical experience and its own (often very material and concretised) forms of memory. For our study, the author's conclusions are interesting primarily as an example of the analysis of the interaction of these two opposite effects of perception of a common historical past, which are represented by the museum environment through expositional norms and taboos.³

Analysis of the elasticity of exhibition design and the limits of its involvement in direct forms of reproduction of historical images is extremely relevant for a number of museum concepts in contexts where the past contains traumatic experiences. For example, N. Stead's article on Holocaust museum exhibitions raises the issue of needing to maintain a certain historical distance between events and their representation in the museum, due to the inability to present traumatic experiences and the importance of avoiding inappropriate theatricalisation. In the context of exposure design analysis, this adds important considerations to the problem of "establishing a new balance between history and experience".⁴

In recent years (since 2015), there has been a growing tendency in exhibition design towards the study of "audience-centred design". The focus of researchers is primarily on the problems of the consumption of design and the practice of gaining various forms of artistic experience. For example, at first glance, K. Tzortzi's highly specialised study is mainly devoted to the movement of the spectator through the museum space. The author focuses on the correspondence between the location's programmes (the design and the curator's point of view) and the perception of objects (the spectator's position) in the museum or gallery. However, Tzortzi touches on more fundamental problems that arise in the process of immersing the viewer in the exhibition environment, in particular the multiple effects of exposure perception.⁵

In contrast, the central theme of Marianne Achiam's article is the analysis of exhibition design as an imaginary structure that is formed, exists and is represented by the efforts of the spectator's artistic experience. From the author's point of view, this creates a major paradigm axis in the organisation of the exhibition space, which is essentially the result of the collective efforts of the producer and consumer of cultural products.⁶

K. Floyd considers an important issue in her thorough article analysing exhibition of photography as one of the most common means of representation of artistic and historical

³ CRANE, S. A. Memory, Distortion, and History in the Museum. In: *History and Theory* 36(4), 1997, pp. 44–63.

⁴ STEAD, N. The ruins of history: Allegories of destruction in Daniel Libeskind's Jewish Museum. In: *Open Museum Journal* 2(8), 2000, p. 13.

⁵ TZORTZI, K. Movement in museums: Mediating between museum intent and visitor experience. In: *Museum Management and Curatorship* 29(4), 2014, pp. 327–348.

⁶ ACHIAM, M. The role of the imagination in museum visits. In: *Nordisk Museologi* 1, 2016, pp. 89–100.

experience in the museum and gallery space. She emphasises the multiplicity of exhibition semantics, which are primarily aimed at forming the artistic and emotional experience of the audience.⁷

S. Hoffding, M. Rung and T. Roald consider the phenomenology of aesthetic perception of an exhibition project. Their focus is on the issue of aesthetic motivation of the viewer of the art exhibition, who should simultaneously comprehend the informative and ideological nature of the project, perceiving it as a whole.⁸

In general, the historiography of exposition design in the context of exhibition syntax is, in our opinion, one of the most dynamic problems. Its academic weight and fairly stable relevance among researchers confirms its systemic nature, which acts as an acute “reflective” tool for correcting the genesis of exposure.

The concept of the exhibition: H. Skovoroda as a cultural hero

The semantics of the museum exposition is determined primarily by the importance of the symbolism of the “place of memory” that is directly related to the life and work of H. Skovoroda. The museum is located on the territory of the estate of the Kovalivsky family, which patronised the literary and educational activities of the philosopher. Therefore, today the museum space is a landscape park, which has a separate trajectory of exhibition points, and directly the garden pavilion, built in the eighteenth century. It is the only part of the estate complex that has survived to this day. Since the wing is believed to contain the room where the philosopher died in 1794, the memorial of the “place of memory” is gaining historical and biographical significance (Figure 1).



Fig. 1:
The museum exposition is located in the eighteenth-century Kovalivski family estate.
Author: Victor Severin, 2021

⁷ FLOYD, Kathryn M. *Exhibition views towards a typology of the installation shot*. Instituto de História da Arte, *The Exhibition: Histories, Practices and Politics*. 2019, №. 14. Faculdade de Ciências Sociais e Humanas. Universidade Nova de Lisboa.

⁸ HØFFDING, S., RUNG, M. and ROALD, T. Participation and Receptivity in the Art Museum: A Phenomenological Exposition. In: *Curator: The Museum Journal* 63(1), 2020, pp. 69-81.

According to Naomi Stead, this is a typical case of the formation of “a complex and sophisticated overlap between the roles of museum, monument and memorial”. This coincidence provokes many interesting effects. However, the most dominant is the importance of the museum for the “embodiment and saturation of memory with material content”. Thus, to outline the nature of the symbolism of the exposition, “the line at which the architecture (building) stops and the museum apparatus begins” is extremely necessary.⁹

In our opinion, such a revision of the architectural space of the monument is the southern facade with a typical provincial classicist portico. It is used by the authors of the exhibition as a point of entry into the historical and cultural context of Skovoroda’s biography. As noted above, the symbolism of travel, specific “traveling” life and “nomadic” literary pathos of the philosopher, forms a fairly well-established expositional imagery, which can not be rejected and difficult to ignore. The inscription on the grave of H. Skovoroda (“The world tried to catch me but could not”) is not only one of the most famous rhetorical formulas of the philosopher, but also evidence of the importance of the memorial content of the complex. Skovoroda’s biography of events and travels, which is rich in events and travels, has an extremely wide geography with a large number of local “memory contexts”, but they all converge in the symbolic capsule of the burial place.

Thus, the exhibition space in its symbolic focus becomes the only true reality of past historical events. In essence, the curators of the exhibition have been delegated the authority to compose a visual narrative on behalf of the hero of the exhibition and at the same time on behalf of his acquired historical memory. Such a perspective gives the authors grounds to “talk” to the audience primarily in the language of symbolism, because both the designer and museum curators are aware of how the historicity of H. Skovoroda’s personality dialogues with the artistic strategy of his story within the exhibition space and available exhibition opportunities.

Symbolism of space, movement and exhibition logistics

(a) Structuring visitor circulation

The structure of the museum’s exhibition space is designed in the stream of “soft design”, which does not assume the dominance of physical (material) features over the natural properties of the landscape and the historical content of the architectural monument. As Ipek Kaynar Rohloff rightly points out, “structuring visitor circulation is a major issue in museum design”¹⁰ (Figure 2).



Fig. 2: *The structure of the museum’s exhibition space is designed according to “soft design” principles.*
Author: Victor Severin, 2021

The Kovalevsky Garden Pavilion has an ordinary rectangular layout which covers the interior with a radial trajectory. Thus, the spectator who finds him/herself in the spatial aura of the exhibition moves within the perimeter route.

⁹ STEAD, N. The ruins of history..., p. 2.

¹⁰ KAYNAR, I. Visibility, movement paths and preferences in open plan museums: An observational and descriptive study of the Ann Arbor Hands-on Museum. In *Proceedings of the 5th International Space Syntax Symposium, Delft, The Netherlands*. 2005, June, Vol. 1317, p. 190.

Visual presentation and the consistent logistics of the exhibition can be adjusted within the structure of the room, but the construction of individual exhibition areas “nudges” the viewer (mostly through visual and plastic means) towards a particular model of movement. Within the exhibition space, exhibition objects and their generalised expositional rhetoric acquire the properties of an imaginary “text that projects symbols and is meant to be read, interpreted or perceived”.¹¹

As Sheldon Annis notes, unlike other verbal or verbalised forms of artistic communication (for example, film, literary work, or plastic art object), “museum symbols are available in many ways (literally) and in almost endless succession and combinations.”¹²

This is why the choice of the method of “movement among stationary symbols” is of primary importance for the acquisition of a symbolic context and, most importantly, its comprehension.¹³

(b) Exhibition acupuncture: basic and alternative ways to promote the exhibition space



Fig. 3: *The expositional narrative is subordinated to the basic geometry of the room, but importance is given to the spectator’s ability to chose how they move through the space.*

Author: Victor Severin, 2021

The authors of the concept of exhibition acupuncture adhered to the idea of open choice for the audience. Within the exposition, according to Fulko Treffers, museum objects are presented as a kind of “exhibition acupuncture”, in reference to the presentation’s semantic “nodes”, but this does not stand in the way of alternative ways to promote free movement within the exhibition space.¹⁴

For example, the designed linear-planar structure of the exhibition narrative is organised in the form of a rectangle. The exposition narrative is subordinated to the basic geometry of the room, but at the same time is open in the nature of the content of the presentation. Its rhythm is not solely formed through the visual arrangement of the forms of movement of the spectator or the effects of perception of the exhibition point – but great importance is also attached to the possibility of such a choice (Figure 3).

In general, the exhibition takes into account the spatial possibilities of communication, which have an obvious “narrative potential”.

¹¹ ANNIS, Sheldon. The museum as a staging ground for symbolic action, in Kavanagh, G. (ed.). *Museum Provision and Professionalism*. Routledge, 2005, p. 20.

¹² Ibidem.

¹³ Ibidem.

¹⁴ CAVALLO, R. Stadsvernieuwing: een kwestie van kansen Ontwerpprojecten voor AmsterdamOost. In: *OverHolland* 14/15, 2014, pp. 5–30.

Within it, the exhibition narrative is able to “structure the sense of space and spaces can ‘hold’ or ‘carry’ narrative”.¹⁵ Ultimately, this provides an opportunity to generalise the most suitable way to symbolise the area by manipulating the physical and interpretive properties of the room and the exhibition. These symbolic “nodes” become a means of narrative transmission, based on the experience gained and accumulated by the viewer. Thus, the question of its determination is a problem of the variability of the exhibition space, which should not prevent the viewer from gaining aesthetic and intellectual experiences in its natural sequence (in many cases, asymmetric and non-linear).

For example, the arched passage “The Wandering Philosopher at the Gates of Life”, located in Hall No. 1, was built as a museum installation (Figure 4). Within the exposition, the gate of the passage, at first glance, is perceived as a means of zoning the room. However, as an independent spatial object, the arched passage, first of all, separates the life story of the viewer from the semantic pathos of H. Skovoroda’s biography. Passing through the gate, the viewer finds him/herself in the connotations of a literary narrative, where the conventionality of material and symbolic presentation is reproduced according to other narrative norms. In a sense, the viewer is immersed in the social role of the hero, getting involved in solving his life’s conflicts and problems of choice.



Fig. 4: Arch passage “Wandering philosopher at the gates of life”, located in Hall No.1.
Author: Victor Severin, 2021.

The semantics of the exposition in front of the arch passage orients the viewer to the cultural and historical context of the chronotope of Skovoroda’s biography. This is a conditional territory of the subject narrative of the eighteenth century, where almost all everyday items

¹⁵ MACLEOD, S., DODD, J., & DUNCAN, T. New museum design cultures: Harnessing the potential of design and “design thinking” in museums. In: *Museum Management and Curatorship* 30(4), 2015, pp. 323–324.

are at the same time bearers of ritual and everyday symbolism. It is important to emphasise that Skovoroda's philosophy is imbued with a call to the "world of simple things" and the commonality of "divine" symbols.

(c) Symbolic "nodes" of the exhibition within the principle of individual perception of objects and space

We think it is important to emphasise Kali Tzortzi's ideas on the "tension of intentions" created by museum design within almost any exhibition concept, be it consistent or flexible. The design of the space is concretely related to the didactics of choice and flexibility in the retransmission of exhibition information. Referring to the works of M. Brawne, Tzortzi points out that, first of all, "navigation in museums is related to an *intent*";¹⁶ and these intents are always in a narrow range of "sequences that are deliberately manipulated" and 'mosaic' of presentation, which constructs the seriality of the exhibition model and declares the freedom of perception of space".¹⁷

It is within this true "network of spatial links, and ... route choices" that the most fundamental pattern of museification of places of memory and biographical narratives becomes apparent: "Each visitor experiences the objects in an individual way" without losing the general sense of the narrative¹⁸.

For example, the exhibition contains a large number of objects that characterise the context of Skovoroda's biography. At the same time, some of the exhibits are directly related to the everyday life of the philosopher and his travels, or were among his personal belongings. And although the latter group is not numerous due to the extremely complex verification procedure, the very fact of its existence testifies to the direct presence of Skovoroda's history in material "traces" and "signs".

In the first exhibition hall, the viewer is offered a symbolic retransmission of H. Skovoroda's biography through interaction with the iconic "points" and "places" of in his life which later formed the general image of the wandering philosopher. "Nodal" symbols represented through the utensils of the late eighteenth – early nineteenth century, help the viewer to immerse themselves in the atmosphere of "objecthood" regarding the life and times of H. Skovoroda (Figure 5).



Fig. 5: *Subjects of the late-eighteenth to early-nineteenth century, representing the context of life and work of the philosopher. Author: Victor Severin, 2021.*

¹⁶ M. Brawne, cited in TZORTZI, K. Movement in museums..., p. 328 (emphasis in original).

¹⁷ Ibidem, p. 329.

¹⁸ Ibidem, p. 346.

Symbolism of compositional and plastic relations in exhibition design

In this section we consider compositional and plastic relations in the design of exhibitions. Compositional relations refer to the integrity of interaction among elements within the constituent system. The nature of compositional relations determines the features of the type of interaction, which can have various means of expression (for example, dynamic, static, variable). In exhibition design, compositional relationships are one of the most important means of building exhibition semantics. Plastic relations are a set of interactions that arise between the exhibition space and the morphology of the objects located within it. The shape of the object affects the nature of its location and its coexistence with other objects.

(a) The plurality of subject symbolism

In the study of compositional and plastic possibilities of exhibitions, it is necessary to pay attention, first of all, to the “multivocal” and “polyvalent” aspects of subject symbolism, which allows museum objects to “speak with many meanings and in many combinations”.¹⁹

For example, exhibition planes play an important role in the system of symbolism in the compositional design of an exposition. Its organisational essence is to form a holistic structure of representation that regulates the modes of interaction with the contexts of the museum narrative (especially the modes of entering and exiting a particular story). As the general concept of the exposition is built within the perimeter route, the elements of the exposition located near the wall (information stands, exhibition points, installations, etc.) acquire a special semantic meaning.

The vertical plane of the exposition is designed for the traditional system of perception, focusing on the typical angle of visual contact by visitors. Kathryn M. Floyd calls this a “typical installation shot’s point of view”.²⁰ The horizontal plane, on the other hand, sets the mode of perception from top to bottom, forming the effect of the depth of the narrative and the need to “immerse” one’s self in the inner space of the narrative. So, the vertical is a conversation of equals with equals, while the horizontal is an immersion in history, a step into the middle of the narrative. Between these two exhibition planes there is a central idea of the organisation of the rhythm of the narrative. This involves periodic changes in the effects of exposure perception. It allows the viewer to choose contexts, sequences and points of view, while also regulating the “depth” of viewing modes.

(b) The symbolism of iconography of Skovoroda as compositional and plastic rhetoric

A separate problem for the compositional-plastic organisation is the symbolism of the work of art, which in one aspect or another becomes a participant in the object exhibition (stand) or exhibition narrative (story).

According to our observations, the use of an author’s works of art in the exhibition concept provokes a specific model of perception which can be conditionally defined as the exhibition’s semantics of “intentionality” (Figure 6). This problem, as a kind of challenge to traditional museum design, is not new in the study of iconic paradigms of exhibition technology. In this regard, Kathryn Floyd believes that in the exhibition, regardless of the specifics of its

¹⁹ ANNIS, *The museum as a staging ground ...*, p.19.

²⁰ FLOYD, *Exhibition views ...*, p.95.

typological or genre status, exhibits which are themselves works of art acquire the meaning of “images, pictures, paintings, compositions”²¹.



Fig. 6: *The exposition includes in its structure many authors' works and remarks.*
Author: Victor Severin, 2021

In our case, this role of artistic “capsules”, which have their own artistic program and are regulated and self-sufficient compositional manifestos, is assigned primarily to paintings and sculptures. The exposition includes several original works and replicas (in particular, the famous twentieth-century Ukrainian sculptor Ivan Kavaleridze), as well as works by contemporary artists (artist Oleg Lazarenko, sculptor Peter Mos, etc.).

Works of art play an important role in the organisation of the exhibition's thematic complexes. They are actively involved in arranging the narrative presentation and act as an illustrator of the subject's biography. The formation of such a parallel artistic interpretation is a well-known technique in exhibition design. In this case, we pay attention to the special symbolism of the plastic arts, which offer a route to the artistic analysis of Skovoroda's work without violating the autonomy with which audiences perceive it. The works of art presented in the compositional whole of the exhibition have no documentary status. These works of art artistically generalise reality, offering parallel authorial considerations that should complement the viewer's experience and encourage him/her to consider things anew.

(c) Representation of Skovoroda's literary and philosophical ideas through a system of compositional and plastic solutions

As an example of the compositional-plastic syntax of the exposition, let us analyse the symbolism of the mirror, which, outside of its material nature, is an extremely common artistic image in the literature and poetry of the Enlightenment. In H. Skovoroda's philosophy, it

²¹ Ibidem, p. 94.

acquires special significance as a “reflection” of truth and the search for its divine meaning (which are, in fact, systemic ideas in Skovoroda’s epistemology).

Within the exposition, the mirror not only serves its natural purpose, but also acts in an emblematic context. Reflection allows the designer to add adjacent planes and objects to the exhibition narrative, creating an illusory spatial geometry of the room and complementing the perception of the subject environment. The viewer, who falls into the intersection of reflections, acquires a new experience of an “exchange of identities”.²² Self-determination (actually, self-identification) is a process of gaining a variety of experiences, which are often rooted in the life stories and creative achievements of prominent figures of the past. This allows the viewer to consume the “cultural hero” as a number of potential identities.

Working with the metaphor of Skovoroda’s literary and artistic heritage brings not only his presented literary ideas but also his visual codes to the exhibition space. In particular, one of the most famous examples of Skovoroda’s visualisation of his own apocrypha is the drawing “Source of Pure Water” (“Fountain”), which was made for his hand-written manuscript by one of his circle of friends during the philosopher’s lifetime (Figure 7). The metaphor of water (wisdom) as the only source that evenly fills nearby forms and containers is no departure from Skovoroda’s poetry and prose. It is not surprising that his periodic appeal to the idea of “the fountain of God’s wisdom” has become a philosophical maxim.



Fig. 7: Example of visualization of H. Skovoroda’s apocrypha on the basis of the author’s drawing, “Source of pure water” (“Fountain”, late eighteenth century). Author: Victor Severin, 2021.

In the exposition this idea is embodied by means of compositional-plastic syntax. The drawing from Skovoroda’s manuscript is presented as an installation. Its scale and spatial organisation are adapted to the general exhibition design for this part of the

museum premises. A review perspective makes it possible to visually capture the completeness of the metaphor. Subject elements (all items included in the exhibition) help us to understand Skovoroda’s philosophical ideas represented verbally.

In general, the semantics of exhibition design is an integral part of the context; it generates meaningful and eventful structures that give both individual exhibits and the overall exhibition visible symbolic meaning. In turn, the visual concretisation of this wide range of meanings is obtained by compositional and plastic means which provoke the plurality of identities of the spectator and the plurality of social roles that the museum can offer the visitor within the “history of Skovoroda”.

²² FALK, J. H. An identity-centered approach to understanding museum learning. *Curator: The Museum Journal* 49(2), 2006, p. 153.

The artistic nature of symbolism: The problem of the artistic language of exhibition design

As we showed in the first part of this study, the symbolism of H. Skovoroda's life and creative output has a broad intellectual historiography and he is the subject of considerable cultural consumption today. It is therefore a fundamentally important task to outline the exhibition's semantic program, with particular focus on its artistic and stylistic nature, where the principle of symbolic accumulation of value is important for the representation of cultural codes. Within its limits, the exhibition acts as a specific and specially designed environment, thanks to which stories become known and accumulate valuable meanings.²³

All this raises the questions: what is the symbolic language designed by the exhibition manifesto, and how do its cumulative properties express themselves?

The problem of the artistic language of exhibition design today is the existence of quite different, although not opposite, points of view. For example, Sharon Macdonald considers the "language" of exhibition design as an inter-media category that outlines the universal field of content: from the physical appearance of the museum object to the system of perception of the exhibition in direct and remote modes.²⁴ Its positive connotation of design language follows from the combination of the concepts of "media, sociality and space" – three categories that determine the contextuality of the exhibition. Thus, multiple models of interaction between the spectator, the exhibition object and the community intersect within a specific exhibition space, which is generally possible only within the framework of joint artistic speech.²⁵

Within the opposite position, the language of exhibition design is considered in the form of a challenge facing the viewer. Let us recall at least the recent discussion about the perception of museums as "intimidating spaces with a language all of their own".²⁶

In our opinion, this issue raises the issue of exhibition "syntax". The language of exhibition design is both a problem of symbolism and a question of the integrity of the consumer's consumption of the exhibition. In many cases, the asymmetry and multiplicity of perception of the exhibition is understood as a solution to a semantic problem.

Within the Skovoroda Museum, artistic and figurative decisions are dictated by both functional and semantic tasks. According to the authors, exposition stylistics are formed as a combination of technical and technological capabilities with design form and compositional-plastic vision.

The first rectangular room, which sets out Skovoroda's biography and focuses on his travels, "transmits" the viewer from one exhibition area to another through the interplay of planes: horizontal (movement along objects) and vertical (rhythmic acupuncture point, interrupting movement, stops the viewer).

In the second room, which is built as a universal space presenting the narrative of Skovoroda's biography in the context of social memory, the wavy lines of the facades of the exhibition equipment envelop the space, modelling multiple and free trajectories within a game of volumes. This exhibition hall is multifunctional, so its general organisation is essentially

²³ GREENBERG, Reesa, Bruce W. FERGUSON, and Sandy NAIRNE (eds.). *Thinking about Exhibitions*. London: Routledge, 1996, p.2.

²⁴ MACDONALD, S. Interconnecting: Museum visiting and exhibition design. In: *CoDesign* 3(S1), 2007, p.160.

²⁵ *Ibidem*, p. 150.

²⁶ HØFFDING, S., RUNG, M. and ROALD, T. Participation and Receptivity in the Art Museum: A Phenomenological Exposition. In: *Curator: The Museum Journal* 63(1), 2020, p. 78.

modular: the point of entry into space forms lines of movement that delineate planes and reveal the functions of the narrative (exhibition objects, exhibits, etc.).

Finally, the third room, which gathers together the historiography of Skovoroda's work, combines the wavy morphology of horizontal planes (a wall-mounted exposition display) with the active involvement of inter-window space. It functions as a part of the monumental and decorative expression of the interior of the room. These elements are made as semicircular arches, sending the viewer to the symbolism of the Byzantine (actually, ancient Russian) cross-domed church with its specific rounded interior shapes and characteristic arched vaults. The temple, in this case, is a metaphor for the space of memory of the narrative of Skovoroda. This room offers a narrative about the role and place of the philosopher in today's existence of symbols and literary and philosophical plots.

As we can see, the general artistic and figurative complex of the exposition has an obvious morphological orientation. The exhibition's "syntax" builds the imagined conversation through compositional and plastic means, offering figurative and stylistic accents as possible (but not obligatory) trajectories. In this a design system, the viewer is central.

Discussion and suggestions

Exhibition design involves modelling symbolism in all its meanings (visual, textual, imaginary, etc.). The objects of museum design research are usually facts and phenomena of the past that are chronologically distant from the modern viewer. For this reason, the exhibition concept is based, rather, on the idea of "foreign" empirical experience, which is mainly represented by historiographical models and visual conventions (for example, iconography). The formation of one's own viewer experience is carried out with the help of a number of practices, which, in fact, are models of non-existent events, processes and phenomena. Therefore, the creation of historically representative models of expository symbolism is almost the only possible option for the movement towards integrity in the knowledge of various forms of existence of the past.

The semantics of the exhibition involves the creation of an imaginary, detached model of the cultural-historical process (or phenomenon or group of phenomena), the content and features of which are assumed and justified by objectively existing circumstances in the past.

Among the various types of semantic modelling, there are three main ones that are, in our opinion, effective in solving exhibition problems.

The most common type is isomorphic modelling. It is based on the objective property of real phenomena to leave identical (in one sense or another) "imprints" which, when "read" by the viewer, can be used to represent non-existent phenomena and objects. We emphasise that the "imprint" or "trace" is not the object or phenomenon itself, and only its interpretation allows the viewer to compare the former with the latter.

This pattern defines the field of possibilities of exhibition design, first of all, in the mode of interaction with material objects, as the most traditional expression of the representation of the historical "trace". For example, Todd Oakley believes that the "ritual of the museum visit" determines the status of the museum representation of the exhibition per se. Within this, there is a mutual recognition of "more-or-less isomorphic relationship between what the producer intends to be represented and what the interpreter (viewer) understands in return."²⁷

²⁷ OAKLEY, T. Mapping the museum space: Verbal and nonverbal semiosis in a public art museum. In: *Almen Semiotik* 16, 2002, p. 84.

An additional means of representation – the second integral part of the “museum ritual” – is symbolism, which is, in a way, an interpretive addition to the material certainty of the museum object.

Contextual modelling of symbolism is no less common. This is a type of exposition practice that focuses not only directly on the object of study, but also on related processes, circumstances and objects. Contextual properties of exposition-exhibition symbolism have been repeatedly outlined in various aspects of museum design research. For example, Marianne Achiam interprets the context in the context of the concept of “museum representation”, which is designed in three parallel modes of viewer contact with the exhibition space: associations, predictions and assumptions. All three operations require the imagination of the viewer and exist in all forms of time (for example, in parallel in the past and in the future), as well as in a virtual (timeless) context.²⁸

Finally, locus modelling enables the design of so-called interpretive localised spaces – sets of values and qualities that are determined not only by the nature of the object (for example, “black, dirty, rounded” or “white, clean, rectangular”), but also its location in real physical space or in the imaginary space of a work of art. Determining the nature of the interaction of locus environments (sets of objects or phenomena that are part of a certain “range”) is a separate task of this type of modelling.

For example, the typical locus of Hryhorii Skovoroda as a philosopher is outlined for the designer in an already understood range of objects and phenomena, as well as the typicality of historical behaviour. These ultimately, become the main objects of design.

Thus, the design of the exhibition is designed by combining exhibition syntax with semantic models of representation of Skovoroda’s biography (isomorphic, contextual and locus). As we can see, all three proposed types of modelling are aimed at solving a set of problems that are somehow related to the idea of “non-existent” past, which is the subject of exposure within a particular space and through specific material objects.

The semantics of the exhibition are represented, as described in this article, by three main forms of expositional interaction. Within its limits:

- (a) the semantics of space is responsible for behavioural strategies and general perception scenarios;
- (b) the semantics of compositional-plastic solutions determines the specificity, a kind of thinking object; and
- (c) the artistic component of the exhibition is a rhetorical means of interpreting the exhibition context.

The acquisition of symbolic significance by the exhibition space is the final level at which the exposition begins to function as a whole. In the eyes of the viewer, it acquires its own identity and symbolic expressiveness, which not only regulates certain patterns of behaviour, but also offers strategies for interpretation and directions for new experiences.

At the same time, this is not enough when it comes to designing and organising exhibitions. The system of semantic representation which arises in the space of these three forms generates a considerable typology of combinations. Viewers generate interpretations in different ways and in an infinite number of modes of perception. Their patterns of behaviour are influenced

²⁸ ACHIAM, M. The role of the imagination in museum visits... p. 92.

by many factors, including key ones that need to be regulated at the design level.

That is why Hryhorii Skovoroda Museum uses a model of exhibition semantics that is presented in the form of coordination of two parallel modes of symbolism construction:

- (a) formal, regulating primarily the material content of the exhibition as an artistic whole (space / composition / image);
- (b) interpretive, summarising the historical narrative of Skovoroda's biography as a typology of modelling: isomorphic, contextual and locus (Table 1).

		ISOMORPHY		CONTEXT		LANGUAGE
SPACE	A	key feature	B	minor feature	B	minor feature
COMPOSITION	B	minor feature	A	key feature	B	minor feature
IMAGE	B	minor feature	B	minor feature	A	key feature

Tab. 1: *The relationships between semantic forms and models*

Note that the position of the viewer, as a recipient of exhibition design, is dynamic. The viewer, by definition, has a subjective apparatus of perception. Therefore, the design tools are aimed at forming a conventional (contractual) strategy between what the authors of the concept declare and what the viewer has the opportunity to consume. This conditional convention in presenting H. Skovoroda's narrative is a symbolic construction which is both formed and consumed according to semantic principles.

Thus, the isomorphic model gives the materially outlined accents in the biography of H. Skovoroda a chance to be deciphered correctly and consciously. The exhibition space, saturated with specific museum objects and the subject's background, sends the viewer to the isomorphism of the symbolism of Skovoroda's literary and philosophical "behaviour".

The contextual model provides the visuality and helps represent the circumstances of the life and work of the philosopher. At the same time, we emphasise once again that the exposition "migrates" in the space of colourful narratives, some of which represent the chronotope of Skovoroda's life and some the context of his symbolic "consumption" as a cultural hero. This secondary (acquired after his death) part of his biography has long been "diffused" with his visual and artistic image, and in many fragments of Skovoroda's narrative he works on an equal footing with the proven facts and events of his life.

Finally, all these approaches allow us to state the presence of a symbolic locus of H. Skovoroda. The museum becomes not just a place of memory or a "local" historical territory that outlines a part of the philosopher's biography; in fact, the historical and cultural significance of exhibition design becomes obvious when the viewer sees a holistic picture of his visual and narrative image according to certain features of H. Skovoroda's fragmented biography.

Conclusions

Exhibition syntax is formed between three points of view, where the material (actually, exhibition objects and subject environment) interacts with the interpretive (the viewer's point of view, features of the chronotope and the atmosphere of the exhibition).

First, we have the point of view of space, traffic and exhibition logistics. Together, these outline the specific material nature of the place – a kind of paradigm of exhibition rhetoric. Familiarity with this paradigm allows the viewer to understand the basic possibilities of moving through the space of the exhibition, interacting with the objects and visualised narratives.

The second point of view is the symbolism of the compositional and plastic features of the exhibition, which regulate the scaling, angle and rhythmic organisation. The plasticity of the exhibition narrative is an important element in the interpretation of the project content. Using compositional means as tools, the authors of the concept provide the opportunity to create the effects of perception that are so necessary for the viewer to form their own view of the life story of Skovoroda.

Finally, the third point of view orients the viewer in the system of artistic and stylistic symbolism. Its semantic basis is the disclosure of an author's artistic language for a project. Within these limits, the basic aesthetic norms of the artistic-expositional narrative are determined and the direct formation of attractive interaction with the spectator is carried out.

Today, Skovoroda's image needs to be cleansed of "ideological dirt". At the design level, this process is associated with the production of a representative and, at the same time, elastic space. This approach should help the viewer to get "their" Skovoroda (based on the principle "design for all – consume individually").

Exhibition design cannot ignore symbolism, as the principles of cultural consumption of "places of memory" operate in the stream of consumption of a work of art. In other words, the viewer does not come for the subject but for emotions and experiences. Therefore, design should go beyond the physical properties of objects, subjects, compositions, and so on, and the subject of design should ultimately be the conditions for gaining experience.

From our point of view, design in general and museum design in particular are an example of the importance of the effects of perception, which in their symbolic meaning is the most argumentative tool for organising a museum narrative. The call to narrative or the proposal to obtain a certain life story is only a visible part of the elastic space of the exhibition, which arises as a result of communication between various forms of material and imaginary, artistically concrete and interpretive. In general, returning to the concept of Kali Tzortzi on the "tension of intentions", we must state the inevitability of a combination of relations "between spaces and objects", which ultimately allow "modern museums to form an individual culture of visit" within the typical paradigms of museum and exhibition life.²⁹

The design of the exposition should provide opportunities for multiple interpretations; this is the key to dearchaising the image of Skovoroda. Therefore, the relationship between the material (object) and the imaginary (interpretation) is projected at the intersection of exhibition syntax and semantic modelling. Within these limits, the design is aimed at:

- a) covering all "biographical potential", even within non-academic forms of representation (for example, Skovoroda as the first domestic hipster);
- b) the formation of individual "conversations in conversation" (sub-narratives) that generate "brand" stories against the background of a well-known historical context;
- c) the creation of active contexts in H. Skovoroda's history, which, according to the principles of the "growth point", make modern images of interpretation relevant.

²⁹ TZORTZI, K. Movement in museums..., p. 347

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