

***America a videopoem* and Concept videopoems** by Tom Konyves

Regarding *America a videopoem* – my Manifesto presents at least two approaches to begin interpreting the work: (1) does the work, contain the constraint of text (displayed or voiced) and (2) which category best represents the work? The "captions" or displayed text – *bang* and *click* – affirms that the work does contain the constraint of text; the category that best represents the work is Concept or Conceptual Videopoems. (The conceptual category was literally an afterthought. The five categories found in my Manifesto had been firmly established in my mind but I had the feeling that there was still something missing. It was only after wondering obsessively about the relationship between conceptual art and videopoetry as manifested in your works like, "In Memory of Jack Donovan Foley" and "Nihilism" that I realized what it was.) Thanks to you here's that insertion into the Manifesto made before publishing it:

Concept videopoems

Concept or conceptual videopoems focus on the materiality of language, exclude narrative and tend to hold little of intentional semantic value; "meaning" is attributed to the process of presentation, which follows a pre-conceived formula (the idea), often executed in a methodical technical manner. The dominating element is text; its content is gathered from sourced information: found phrases, statements, lists, etc. The text element in these works is strong on context but stripped of emotive value. The viewer may not perceive development or change of perspective throughout the work, as heightening or diminishing effects are superseded by the intention to present an object of examination – the process of presentation – in a pure self-referential state.

America a videopoem emphasizes two different readings of the work. The political reading points to guns in America and, by extension, gun-control laws, the NRA, and public opinion on the topical issue. As such, the title directly references a contemporary debate. Like Duchamp's title for his urinal, *America* suggests an additional layer of meaning, an addition intended to simultaneously deflect and direct attention to an unexpected meaning. While the instruction between the segments – *again* – can be seen as an ironic commentary on the 2016 campaign slogan, it also links the repetitive segments, an ambiguity taken up by the "repeated" presentations of an act/scene (itself self-referential in the representation of "shots"). Pulling the trigger 3 times on an empty chamber (*click click click*) could be construed as the administration's relentless efforts to "finish off" the viewer, the Other, in "cold

blood", attributed by the liberal left to represent the hate-mongering rhetoric of Donald Trump's nationalist, divisive politics.

Reiteration defeats the originary intent, the originary articulation, by demonstrating that there is no real point of real origin, only the given possibility of meaning without meaning. - Vanessa Place

In its conceptual reading, three iterations of a "shot" - a cowboy pointing his gun at the camera, pulling the trigger nine times, 6 shots and 3 "clicks" - questions and (as the Formalists would suggest) "lays bare the device" of the action presented for appreciation. Attention is brought to the three constitutive elements, Text, Image and Sound, revealing "sound" as the dominant element.

The first iteration presents sound as text displayed on the screen (*bang bang...click...etc.*), the second as diageitic (synced with the image), the third with no image (black screen). On first viewing, it appears that the performed act/scene/shot is stripped simply to "lay bare" the elements. In his 2008 "In Memory of Jack Donovan Foley", Sutherland similarly experimented with shifting text and sound elements over a repeated series of 5 stock footage shots. There is also the possibility that the first iteration refers to videopoetry (text superimposed over image), the second to conventional film (synced sound), the third to sound poetry (Sutherland's practice).

Evaluating such work will depend on whether the viewer can accept two variant readings and, if so, whether the challenge of sustaining a political "meaning" with a conceptual method has been met. The very fact that the "problem" presented by this work is complex - with the possibility that no real meaning is "possible" because there is no additional information to be had, no change to follow each caption announcing "*again*" - signals that an artistic vision is present, that an aesthetic experience is there to be had if one works at it, and is a pleasure most worth having.

Tom Konyves is a Canadian poet, video producer, educator and a pioneer in the field of videopoetry. He is videopoetry's principle theorist and the author of *Videopoetry: a manifesto*.