

Role and Functions of the Art Criticism in Kyiv Contemporary Art World in the Late 20th - Early 21st Century

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Abstract: The history of the art criticism origin and development testifies / shows the significant influence of the new art practices emergence and socio-cultural transformations on the art criticism changes, on the evolution of its concept and functional specificity. Similar transformations are noticeable in the Ukrainian visual art space of the late XX - early XXI century. In the new socio-political circumstances, along with the transformations of artistic life, the modification of the media, the art criticism also undergoes certain changes; these facts encourage us to study it much deeper, particularly to comprehend its status in the sociocultural space. It was discovered that during the late XX - early XXI centuries the art criticism is undergoing significant transformations caused by local and global factors. Among the global factors that influenced the change of epistemological principles / attitudes (change in the interpretation of truth, its criteria and reliability of knowledge) are the aesthetic guidelines of postmodernism. They, together with the development of the multimedia technologies, the Internet lead to the blurring of boundaries between the subjects of the artistic process and to the change of the relationship between critics, artists and viewers. Local factors influencing the activities of art criticism are active involvement in artistic life and the growing role of art market representatives, who perform functions related to criticism, but, in contrast, are guided by business rules and interests. It encourages critics to expand the boundaries of their activities, turning to curatorial and editorial work, which partially ensures the importance preservation of their role in the sociocultural sphere. However, the “partylike” existence principle of the artistic environment in Ukraine, marketing factors and the laws of the art market cancel the growing importance of sociocultural influence of unbiased, professional criticism. A significant reduction of serious unbiased materials expressing the independence of their authors (thorough analysis and professional interpretation of artistic processes) leads to the active filling of this niche with amateur publications and non-critical genres, art journalism, which creates controversy / contradictory in treating criticism as a definitive key to the artistic practices validity.

Keywords: Art Criticism, Sociocultural Space, Contemporary Art

1. Introduction

The end of the XX - beginning of the XXI century in Ukraine is a period of global social (modulation of the industrial stage in social approach to informational), political (gaining the independence by Ukraine) and cultural (rethinking of the aesthetic criteria / values caused, inter alia, by the concept of postmodern art, democratization of art, intensification of intercultural influences and artistic mindset change) transformations. Together with the emergence of gallery and curatorial activities and the gradual strengthening of the art market influence, they led to the revival of artistic life, changes in visual art, transformation of the

representation principles applied to an artwork, increase of the significance not only of artefact, but also an art brand, based on artist's name.

Peculiarities of the sociocultural context of the time also influenced art criticism, leading to the emergence of its new variable forms, changes in the role and features of functioning as a “field of cultural production” [1]. Therefore, the relevance of the research topic is due to the need to form a holistic picture of the art criticism development in Kyiv in the late twentieth – early twenty-first century based on determining the degree of its own functions implementation into the sociocultural field of the time. As communicative, axiological, aesthetic and other functions as system-forming

elements of this field allow the artwork / practice to exist in the society's view (through the formation / creation of their meanings comprehension). Thus, the analysis of the functional and role aspect in the art criticism functioning in Kyiv of the XX – beginning of the XXI century as dominant in revealing the degree / range of its influence on the sociocultural field is the aim of the article.

2. Presentation of the Main Message

At the end of the XX-beginning of the XXI century there is a gradual levelling of the usual for criticism function of public orientation by providing the evaluative judgments to which work is worthy the “artistic” definition and which does not correspond to this concept. Art theorist and criticist B. Groys also expresses this: “Traditionally, the criticist <...> is an informed representative of the public and tells them what is good and what is bad. It seems to me that this function is not particularly relevant today <...> The criticist stops to be a carrier of taste” [2].

The reasons for the current state of affairs lie in factors of both global and local nature.

2.1. *Global Changes Affecting the Functioning and Role of Art Criticism*

Among the global factors is the active spread of the dominance in the postmodernist concept of art (in Ukraine it became widespread in the 1990s), according to which the understanding of the true knowledge variety through postmodernism perception of the subject of knowledge as a self-sufficient component of sociocultural space. T. Pykhtina also emphasizes this, pointing that “in postmodernism the emphasis is on the freedom of the subject, so the idea of pluralism of worlds prevails. Accordingly, the world of each subject corresponds to its own truth <...>. Since the subject proceeds its own interests - its understanding of the text (world), the truth acquires the character of pluralism <...>. If we take into consideration that the subject changes itself, creates itself, then the loss of the status of certainty and finitude is clear.” [3]. The outlined situation leads to the fact that “each text can be interpreted differently, and there is no criteria that unequivocally indicates the only correct interpretation” [4] and creates an awareness of the impossibility of the truth objectivity. As a result, critical remarks are characterized by tolerance of artistic expression, a reduction in the polemic component, a degree of reasoned persuasiveness, which threatens to lead to indifference and a significant narrowing of the sense / contents range of criticism to “a certain system of dialogues” led at certain time or just professional talks about one or another occasion” [5].

The shift of emphasis in the critical expression to the interpretive component led, according to P. Shmagalo, Dr. habil. of Arts, to the fact that “postmodernism has developed interpretive criticism as a continuation of the work's artistic effect so much that criticism loses the work itself” [6]. It creates in the circle of art theorists and critics the need to comprehend the issue of the limits / extent for critical

interpretation in the interaction with artistic expression. Thus, the critic and writer S. Sontag outlines that interpretation should not replace a work, its content, because “the function of criticism is to show what makes an artwork as it is, and not to explain what it means” [7]. Consistent with this position is also the opinion of art critic A. Pidlypska, who emphasizes that “criticism should only demonstrate the qualities of the artwork” [8].

The pluralism of postmodernism in the art practice understanding gave rise even to the rethinking of the art criticism essence. Following J. Beuys's thesis that anyone can be an artist, the idea that anyone who gives their comments / interpretations to the manifestations of contemporary art can be a critic is becoming more and more popular.

The essence of the “interpretation” concept is comprehended quite broadly: as the hermeneutics with an emphasis on the logical-analytical component, the scientific approach (which allows to avoid the dominance of a substantial degree of subjectivity in providing reasoning / argumentation about the significance of messages and semantic field in artistic gesture / event), and as the essayistic critics (where individual, subjective impression, categoricity and expressed emotionality, which often replace a reasonable proof, is positioned as a sufficient / exhaustive condition for the perception of truth / authenticity of the statement). Therefore, publications on the contemporary art events vary from qualified to amateur texts (depending on the depth of work understanding and the type of interpretation, the quality of argumentation, scientific evidence, the logic of the study, etc.).

It is worth to specify that the peculiarities of contemporary art projects, which are often based on certain philosophical systems of views, have led to the fact that opinions about the events of modern art life (hence their adaptation to the sociocultural context) are expressed by the art critics along with the representatives of related professions. As a result, the following tendencies are noticeable: coverage of the artistic life events in accordance with art history is lost in the diversity of considerations expressed by representatives of the above areas, blurring the concept of expert opinion, levelling the importance of professionalism.

Therefore, public opinion about creative intentions, their value and uniqueness in the broad socio-cultural context is formed by a fairly diverse circle of representatives of the art scene, where observers of art life with art education, professional criticism, balanced assessment play far not the leading role.

Another global factor that does not work in favour of strengthening the socio-cultural influence of art criticism, its communication with a wide range of viewers, is the merging of the figures of the artist and the theorist. These processes, on the one hand, threaten to narrow the role of the critic to “explain the position of artists and instruct the public on how to understand their works” [9]; on the other hand, the critic's desire to decode the messages embedded in an artwork as the reflection of a certain author's theory can lead to the addition of meanings / interpretations, which makes it difficult for

public to read the work. This is also noted by V. Kreminskyi: "We have a kind of "senses game" here, and the "artist-interpreter" connection acquires autonomy and disinterest in the broad masses of the art products consumers, as professional artists work taking into account the opinion of a narrow layer of the professional interpreters. This entails the absolutisation of the art phenomenon" [10].

2.2. A local Situation That Affects the Functioning and Role of Art Criticism

Among the local factors reducing the effectiveness of professional criticism as a form of socio-cultural influence, it is worth mentioning economic and marketing factors. Criticism can develop only under favourable circumstances. They are a developed economy, art market, and full governmental support of culture. All these factors stimulate the development of contemporary art and involvement of the general public (one of such support traits is the creation of the contemporary art museum, educational programs for children and youth that will contribute to the understanding of strategies for the contemporary art development). The improper functioning of these factors allows the increase in the share of commercialized materials, engaged assessments, superficial interpretations and subjective-essayistic considerations in specialized consumer or popular science periodicals and adhere to market principles of activity. This leads to the authority and credibility gap in criticism; the transfer of the prerogative to define / set "fashion" in the art environment to the representatives of the art market. Another consequence of this situation is the actualization of artistic intentions exclusively in accordance with the local situation. Whereas critical texts are expected to interpret the meaning of an artistic gesture / event, the layers of its comprehension and the disclosure of their meaning / value in the socio-cultural context of the local and global levels. Analysis that provides a detailed review of a particular phenomenon and the contexts, which it communicates with, "the selection of individual structural parts of the work and their qualities, in order to study their specifics" [11] and, consequently, sound assessment is not dominant. It is worth noting that the lack of materials in art discourse, which adequately and comprehensively reveal the picture of contemporary art life, calls into question the possibility of successful development of the art system as a whole.

At the same time, the non-specialized media, focusing on obtaining financial benefits from the sale of publications, is guided by the requests of a wide audience (which determines the demand and, consequently, the financial success of the publication) and compliance with the thematic focus of their media. Therefore, their pages do not often publish articles that has substantial review, systematisation and analysis of the certain artistic phenomena and trends by a specialist. Instead, journalistic materials on artistic life are often a statement for a certain event and are limited with informational and advertising functions. It is worth to specify that there are not enough specialists who are ready / interested in presenting materials that would be written

sharply, fascinatingly and clearly for the general public and at the same time express an unbiased and reasoned assessment in comparison with newspapers and magazines.

Serious arguments and breadth of views, which illustrate the critic's ability to recognize, distinguish and generalize current artistic processes in the context of global trends, provide reasoned ideas / understanding of the true value of the particular intentions and demonstrate the author's ability to "see the artistic phenomenon as a whole, in the social-cultural context of time and not in the separate fragments" [12], is now more moving to specialized scientific periodicals. It encourages agreeing with the idea that there is an approach between criticism and academic science [13].

To make the role of art criticism more solid by strengthening its cognitive and regulatory functions there are attempts to expand the platforms for thorough reviews on the current art process by art historians and critics in approach to the editorial matters as the basis for full art criticism and creating / establishing professional dialogue.

Among such periodicals it is worth mentioning the "Kurier muz" (Courier of Muses) (1990-1993) informational publication on the issues of Kyiv's culture, the which editor was the theatre historian and theatre critic S. Vasyliiev. The columns of the "Vernissage", "Accent", "Profiles" magazines, whose writers were art historians and critics S. Yarynych, K. Stukalova, G. Skliarenko, O. Sydor and others, made it possible to overcome the communicative limitations of the "art-critic-recipient" links, adapting the artistic intentions of Ukrainian artists and art unions of the late 1990s (representatives of abstract expressionism, transavant-garde, etc.). It happened due to the revealing the conformity of aesthetic principles in worldview and artistic trends, to which artists addressed, the cultural situation of the late 20th century (local and global levels); comprehension of the coordinate system and the latest forms of the contemporary Ukrainian art representation, the process of which formation began in the mid-80's of the 20th century.

It is worth to point out that the newspaper materials provided an opportunity to understand the most distinct ways of the artists' approach of that time. Thus, S. Yarynych's publication outlines and systematizes the directions of postmodern searches, where tangible commentary, play with historical styles, appeal of some artists to work with space (A. Savadov and G. Senchenko, V. Tsagolov) are felt; distinguishes a group of artists who developed plastic issues of painting (the columnist outlines the work of M. Geik, P. Kerestei, O. Zhyvotkov, M. Kryvenko). Publications by I. Gryshko and G. Kozachenko covered the rear-guard line, which was developed by M. Weisberg, O. Zakharov, O. Burian, M. Solohubov and others.

The published articles are one of the first attempts to comprehend and outline the approach vectors not only of that current art life, but also the art criticism state of the early 1990s, which, according to the abovementioned factors, faced the need to reorient their own criteria and methods. In this context, the considerations by M. Kostiuhenko deserve attention, who quite rightly notes that "The axiological aspect

of criticism <...> does not seem to be in demand. Neither commercial success, nor the pretentiousness of the theoretical reasoning of the artist's own work, nor the artistic quality of art can become a separate basis for evaluation <...>. It is ridiculous to talk about commercial success, the theoretical basis is eclectic. It is even more difficult with an artistic quality that constantly tries to get rid of itself in order to avoid reproaches in archaism, non-postmodernity" [14].

However, focusing the newspaper's attention exclusively on the Kyiv art scene left a niche for a magazine that would cover more regions of Ukraine and a wider range of contemporary artistic intentions and reduce the risks of isolating Kyiv critics purely on the local situation. Such a periodical was the theoretical magazine on the new visual art "Terra Incognita" (published during 1993-2001), founded by art historian, critic and artist G. Vysheslavskii. Unlike the previous edition, where information from the artistic life was only part of the content, "Terra Incognita" focused entirely on current issues of contemporary art and was important for understanding the state, prospects and strategies of contemporary art in different regions of Ukraine and worldwide. Due to its structure, which consisted of the theoretical part and a section devoted to current art projects, exhibitions, events both in Ukraine and abroad, the publication provided a comprehensive approach to the topic of the issue. It should be noted the magazine's intention to present the reviews (often opposite) of several observers of artistic life to the same event in the artistic life in Ukraine, which indicates the orientation of the publication to establish controversy and create a full picture of the Ukrainian contemporary art.

Among the authors of the magazine were the Ukrainian specialists (O. Sydor-Hibelynda, O. Soloviov, L. Savytska, K. Stukalova, A. Zavarova, V. Burlaka, V. Sakharuk and others), as well as foreign theorists, artists and curators. Their publications got familiar with the trends of the contemporary art in Ukraine, France, Poland, Russia, its individual representatives and reflected the diversity of considerations regarding the vectors of development and the existing problems of artistic life in these countries.

The publication became a platform for unbiased evaluations and is now one of the sources for studying the progress of art criticism in Kyiv in the 1990s, its comprehension of the contemporary artistic situation in Ukraine. It's important to mention that the magazine, in addition to print edition, still exists in an online format, which helps to attract the widest possible audience. However, the focus of the majority of articles on the professional community significantly limited the reader circle. It indicates that "the impact of professional criticism on the understanding / acceptance of certain artistic practices, its ability to influence the minds of a vast number of recipients, their initiative in the social sphere, was indirect / through the influence on the personality of the artist, which is reflected in his further intentions" [15].

The magazine "Gallery" (published since 1999), edited by art critic O. Tytarenko, also belongs to the circle of the

above-mentioned art periodicals. The magazine presented critical reports on the Ukrainian and foreign exhibitions, review materials that revealed the peculiarities of the artistic situation in our country, current issues of the Ukrainian contemporary art approach, in particular the absence of the Contemporary Art Museum. Art historians and critics G. Vysheslavskiy, K. Stukalova, O. Soloviov, L. Lysenko, O. Sydor-Hibelynda and others were writers in the magazine.

The tendency to reduce the share of professional critical texts in the periodicals, and thus to weaken its socio-cultural influence is partially compensated by the critics approach to curatorial practice, which, compared with the usual ideas about the functioning of criticism in the late XX - early XXI century in Ukraine was a relatively new form of its activities. Let's state that it is an independent curatorial practice, which provides full autonomy of the author / curator of the exhibition / project on the selection of works / artists, creation of an exhibition for presentation, disclosure of the topic or issue. Such activities can be considered as an alternative to the marketing factors, the market system, on which the Ukrainian art space is becoming increasingly dependent (although this critical activity grants a certain artist access to the art market, performs the promotion function as it reveals their artistic practice, works to other art market participants). Such curatorial projects (logic of their visual embodiment / creation, realisation of a certain concept / idea) represent a certain synergy of the curator and the artist / artists. It does not only "help the artist to exhibit the work in the most favourable, correct context, revealing it through the exhibition of the secret meaning or the general meaning very broadly and fully" [16], but also allows critics to penetrate the sociocultural realities, help identify, generalize and illustrate current issues, practices / names, new trends, form the art scene, art discourse. These processes, in turn, affect the artist, his perception of the artistic process realities, to some extent, help guide the public in the vectors of the contemporary art development, and actualize the practices, present sensitive issues of current artistic life for audience. This form of critical activity corresponds to the opinion of the American art critic R. Krauss that "careful / meticulous peering into the future and the search for new phenomena is part of what has always been associated with the activities of the critic <...>. The critic not only describes but also creates" [17]. So, the expansion of professional criticism through appeal to the independent curation, that is a synthesis of analytical strategy and practice, under the current conditions / rules of existence of contemporary art, is perceived as the best option for real influence of art criticism on artistic processes, as art critic displaying certain theory, own curatorial concept, forms art discourse, sets standards, implements integrative, regulatory, communicative, aesthetic and axiological functions. V. Sakharuk, G. Vysheslavskiy, O. Avramenko, K. Taylor, N. Matsenko and others turned to curatorial activity in the field of contemporary art.

The Internet is a powerful information and communication platform, a resource capable to realize the ability of art criticism to provide publicity with its own statements, to

encourage recipients to polylogue, and so to be an effective form of sociocultural influence at the beginning of the XXI century. The researcher L. Saenkova confirms these considerations, noting that during a multilateral exchange of views “the narrow framework of individual acknowledgement is overcome, which provides the ability of critics to influence the renewal and improvement of culture, development of society” [18]. In this aspect, the reasoning of philologist A. Sadovnikov deserves attention. Exploring the peculiarities of the criticism functioning in the context of online discussion platforms, the scientist notes that the polylogue on the Internet as an innovative type of dialogue allows “readers to conduct a group professional-critical analysis <...> of the work content, impossible for individual amateur judgment. So, in polylogue there is a collective receptive analysis, and the critical system acquires the Emergent property” [19]. At the same time, A. Sadovnikov emphasizes that the success of such a polylogue is achieved through the interaction of a professional critic with the audience. Therefore, at the beginning of the XXI century, the online network is considered as a field where art criticism can fully realize its own functions, forming a field around cultural and artistic events that will implement the meanings embedded in them from different angles.

It is worth looking at another important aspect of the existence of art criticism - its demand in our country. In Ukraine, the circle of people interested in critical publications is quite limited and mainly consists of art critics, scientists of related professions, curators, and sometimes collectors and artists. The latter seek serious and balanced criticism, considering / understanding it both as a communication that promotes positive qualitative change and as part of a dialogue / discussion that provides and encourages the artist to reflect and progress. The almost complete absence of such interaction makes possible a situation in which the artist and art critic in their work are more guided by the logic of market relations.

Other segments of the population outside the artistic sphere need encouragement, creation of internal necessity for interaction with contemporary art (comprehension of its manifestations). It is possible to fulfil by interpretation of its significance and relevance in modern society, popularization by critics / experts of the importance of being aware of / involved in contemporary art as the reflection view of the modern world and global cultural situation peculiarities. Obviously, the so-called “popular content” does not meet these requirements, nor place the important emphasis needed to understand the meaning / value of a particular practice for today.

3. Conclusion

During the late XX - early XXI century, art criticism undergoes changes caused by changes in epistemological principles / attitudes (changes in the interpretation of truth, its criteria and the validity of knowledge). Under the influence of socio-cultural transformations, active influence on the

artistic life of art market representatives (who perform related functions to criticism but, unlike it, are guided by business rules and interests in art), criticism, seeking to maintain the importance of its role in socio-cultural sphere, expands their activities. However, the growing importance of socio-cultural influence of unbiased, professional criticism is levelled by the “partylike” principle of the current artistic environment in Ukraine and marketing factors, the art market laws, as mentioned by most researchers. It creates a contradiction in the thesis that criticism has the leadership in legitimizing artistic practices and influencing the artistic process.

Summing up, it must be noted that criticism is an element of the cultural system, so its current state reflects the state of culture, is its consequence. Therefore, the violation of the proportional balance between the skilled analysis of the artistic process, its outstanding events and engaged, promotional, subjective and essayistic considerations in favour of the latter leads to the profanation of the artistic process as a whole (forms its closed nature) and reveals the disadvantages of this system.

Further work on this topic can be carried out in the direction of comparing the art criticism works (their structure and genre range) on the Internet and in the newspaper and magazine periodicals of the socio-political nature, designed for the general public in the context of sociocultural influence. It is important to identify the ability of art criticism to promote the renewal of artistic and cultural processes, the degree of influence on society, the social environment.

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