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CONTEMPORARY ART IS A DARK SPOT OF AESTHETICS



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Abstract. This article addresses an important question for both aesthetics and art: can aesthetics critique contemporary art? The answer is provided from two perspectives: Russian and Chinese. The overall diagnosis is as follows: on the one hand, contemporary art is not the subject of aesthetic critique. On the other, aesthetics that ignores contemporary art's assessments loses artists' interest. The authors recognize that dissatisfaction with aesthetics is as old as aesthetics itself. Nevertheless, this dissatisfaction has had its own unique roots in every era. The authors examine the current state of aesthetics in terms of its relationship to art. The specificity of this era is determined by the fact that today, art critiques aesthetics more than aesthetics critiques art. In the previous era, aesthetics, if it addressed contemporary art at all, never examined a specific work, but addressed art as a whole. Contemporary art evoked not only the figure of the curator, but also his invariable attribute – a clearly formulated concept of art – which brought the curator's position closer to the philosophy of art. The research methodology utilizes topological reflection – a concept developed by V. Savchuk. In the spirit of A. Schlegel's diagnosis of the obscure word "aesthetics", the article analyzes the concept of "practical aesthetics", designed to address the emerging problems of aesthetics. The inherent contradiction of this concept is explicated as follows: when aesthetics criticizes a specific work, it either forgets itself, losing touch with the categories of "beautiful" and "ugly" that define its discipline, or, remaining at the level of the universal, fails to come any closer to understanding the specific work. This, once again, leads it to self-annihilation. Practical aesthetics, in turn, is a form of self-deception, for contemporary art defines itself through the destruction of the boundaries and norms established by dominant aesthetics. The authors demonstrate how similar tendencies are refracted in the very different contexts of Russia and China. Important here are the concepts of hybrid identity, postcolonial trauma, and self-destructive gestures in contemporary art. The final conclusion is that the concept of "practical aesthetics" is false not in itself, but rather the method, methodology, and attitude that holds the researcher captive to the old aesthetic paradigm. The critical potential of aesthetics has yet to be fully realized, and its movement toward concrete criticism and evaluation will be realized if it is capable, freed from paternalism and arrogance, of conveying to viewers what no critic, curator, or art theorist can convey about a specific artist's work. In this way, it will be able to transform the obscurity of contemporary art into a platform for profound and precise understanding, undeniable by any known discourse.

Keywords: aesthetics, contemporary art, art criticism, poetics, philosophy of art, practical aesthetics, aestheticization, philosophy, aesthetic autonomy, crisis of aesthetics

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АКТУАЛЬНОЕ ИСКУССТВО – ТЕМНОЕ ПЯТНО ЭСТЕТИКИ

Аннотация. Статья посвящена ответу на важный вопрос как эстетики, так и искусства: может ли эстетика критиковать современное актуальное искусство? Ответ на него дается с двух перспектив: российской и китайской. Общий диагноз таков: с одной стороны, актуальное искусство не является предметом критики эстетики. С другой – эстетика, игнорирующая оценки актуального искусства, утрачивает интерес художников. Авторы осознают, недовольство эстетикой старо, как сама эстетика. Тем не менее в каждое время недовольство имело свои особые корни. Авторы исследуют актуальное состояние эстетики в аспекте ее отношения к искусству. Специфика времени определяется в том, что сегодня искусство критикует эстетику более, чем эстетика искусство. В предшествующую эпоху эстетика если и обращалась к современному ей искусству, то никогда не исследовала конкретное произведение, но обращалась к искусству в целом. Актуальное искусство вызывало к жизни не только фигуру куратора, но и его неизменный его атрибут – внятно сформулированный концепт искусства, что сближает позицию куратора с философией искусства. Методологией исследования выступила топологическая рефлексия – концепт В. Савчука. В духе диагноза А. Шлегеля о невразумительном слове эстетика, в статье анализируется концепт «практическая эстетика», призванный решить обнажившиеся проблемы эстетики. Имманентное противоречие данного концепта эксплицируется следующим образом: когда эстетика критикует конкретное произведение, тогда она либо забывает себя, утрачивая связь с определяющими ее дисциплину категориями «прекрасное» и «безобразное», либо, оставаясь на уровне всеобщего, ни на йоту не приближается к пониманию конкретного произведения, что в очередной раз ведет ее к самоаннигиляции, а практическая эстетика является формой самообмана, ибо актуальное искусство самоопределяется в разрушении границ и норм, задаваемых господствующей эстетикой. Авторы показывают, как сходные тенденции преломляются в столь разных контекстах России и Китая. Важны здесь концепты гибридной идентичности, постколониальной травмы, аутодеструктивных жестов в актуальном искусстве. Сделан заключительный вывод, что концепт «практическая эстетика» ложен не сам по себе, а ложен тот способ, та методология и установка, которая держит исследователя в плену старой эстетической парадигмы. Критический потенциал эстетики еще не раскрыт, а ее движение к конкретной критике и оценки будет реализован, если она будет способна, избавившись от патернализма и высокомерия, донести до зрителей то о конкретной работе художника, что не может дать ни критик, ни куратор, ни теоретик искусства. Тем самым она будет способна темное пятно актуального искусства превратить в собственный плацдарм глубокого и точного его понимания, не редуцирующегося ни к одному из известных дискурсов.

Ключевые слова: эстетика, современное искусство, художественная критика, поэтика, философия искусства, практическая эстетика, эстетизация, философия, эстетическая автономия, кризис эстетики.

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Introduction

Over the past fifty to sixty years, we have witnessed the inability of aesthetics to evaluate contemporary art. Some aestheticians call this the

«separation of beauty and art» [Jiménez, 2010: 26-27],

arguing that aesthetics is concerned only with beauty as the essence of art and aesthetic activity, while contemporary art no longer accepts beauty as a standard of value and, naturally, falls outside the purview of aesthetics. However, over the past two decades, the pursuit of beauty has truly become equated with outdated, superficial criteria of art. Today, we find ourselves in a rather contradictory situation, where beauty largely stands in opposition to objective reality and is incapable of engaging politically and critically, which is crucial for contemporary art; and aesthetics has not yet transcended the traditional framework of notions of beauty (see fig. 1 and fig. 2). For example, Joseph Kosuth, the founding father of Western conceptualism, repeatedly reiterated that he turned to new art forms in the 1960s because painting (even in its most radical manifestations) had become irrevocably mired in commodity-money relations. Before his eyes, a painting rapidly transformed from the result of an artist's artistic and intellectual quest into a decoration and adornment for the homes of wealthy collectors, an object whose meaning largely boiled down to the ability to buy and then sell it.

To resist the market and prevent the imposition of market logic on the logic of art, he proclaimed that true art is not so much an object created by the artist's physical efforts as a concept, an idea that

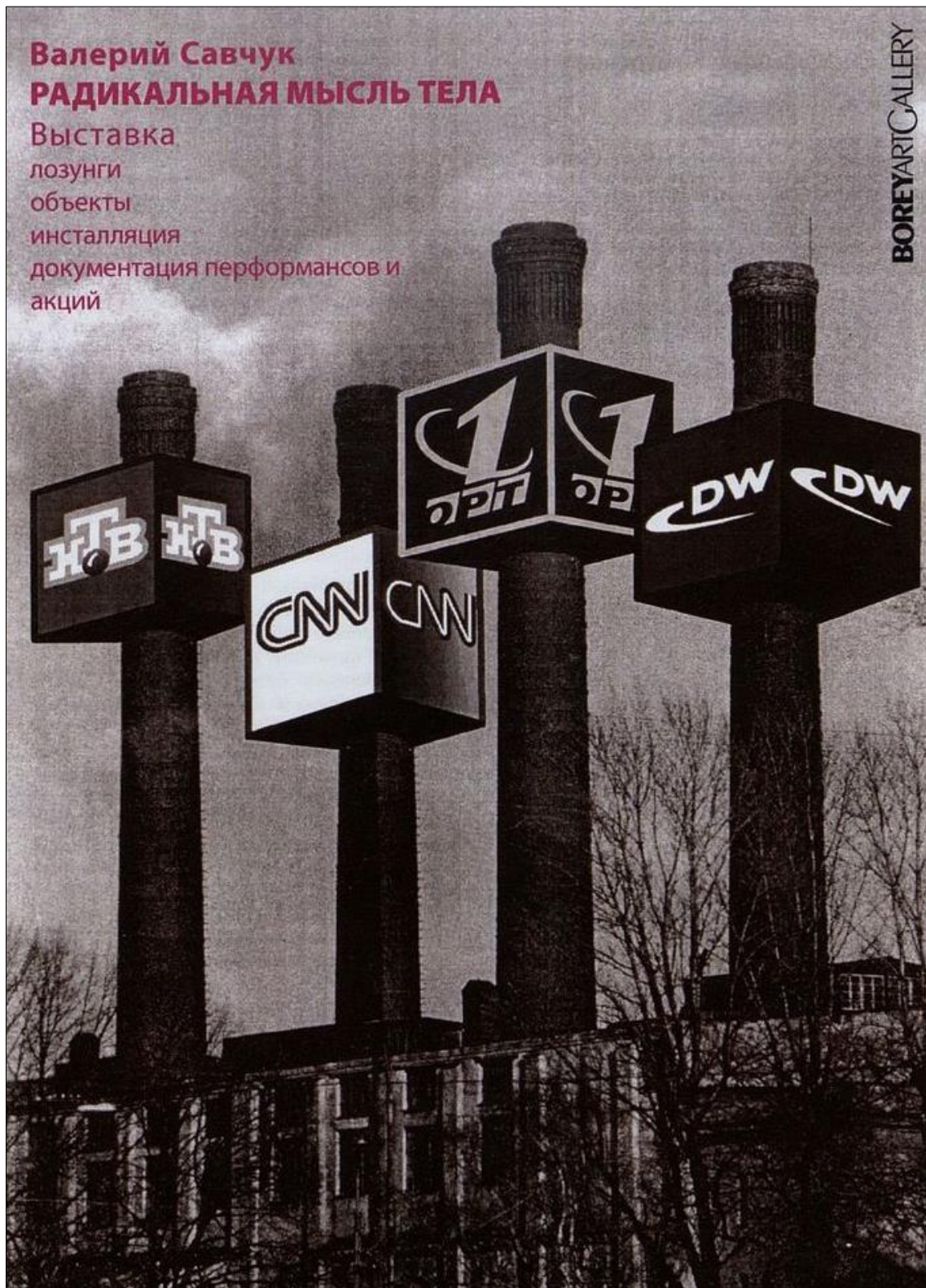


Fig. 1. Valeriy Savchuk. "Radical Thought of the Body". Installation, documentation of performances from May 1, 2014. Exhibition poster. Image freely available on the platform: http://mediaphilosophy.ru/wp-content/uploads/2014/04/Afisha_01_05_2014.jpg



Fig. 2 Datong Dazhang (大同大张). «Condole» (吊丧) Performance on February 5, 1989, at the exhibition “Chinese Contemporary Art”. Image freely available on the platform: https://vk.com/wall307570171_502

anticipates the creation of the work [Arutiunova, 2015: 16–17]. This example proves that while aestheticians are still immersed in contemplation of the essence of beauty, contemporary artists are already using their projects to resist the dominance of the market in the artistic sphere.

Moreover, the essence of contemporary art lies primarily in promoting the affirmation of a value system appropriate to the times, as, for example, in 1992, Fred Wilson presented the project “Undermining the Museum” in Baltimore, which meant that artists adopted the anthropological model of projective art based on

fieldwork, using institutional critique [Foster, 2016: 726]. Institutional critique revealed that the institution of art is not only a physical space, but also a network of discourses (including art criticism, journalism, and advertising), which intersects with other discourses and, therefore, with other institutions (including the media and corporations). Thus, the territory of art and art criticism expanded to "cultural studies," where culture is understood in an almost anthropological sense. Mary Kelly, in her projects "Postpartum Documents" (1973–1979) and "Interim Time" (1985–1989), used a quasi-ethnographic fieldwork method to describe patriarchal conventions in language, school education, art, and attitudes toward aging. In the 1980s and 1990s, artists and critics had already explored desire, death, AIDS, and homelessness as numerous themes for artistic projects. These examples demonstrate that contemporary artistic practice is evoking new critical discourse beyond the confines of traditional aesthetics.

Thus, compared to contemporary art, aesthetics is experiencing a far more serious crisis: the object of its study is becoming increasingly narrow, being reduced to "study the history of aesthetics," which limits the scope of research to the analysis and clarification of aesthetic concepts¹. In this regard, many philosophers are attempting to rescue aesthetics, restore its relevance, and restore its critical power. This is manifested, among other things, in the "aesthetic revolution" [Rancière, 2009: 14], the purpose of which, according to Jacques Rancière, is to restore aesthetics based on the practice of contemporary art, and in the "reconfiguration of aesthetics" [Welsch, 1997: 85], proposed by

¹ See author Savchuk's review of aesthetics "Fantom estetiki v mediafilosofii" [Savchuk, 2018: 170].

Wolfgang Iser. Analyzing the current state of the crisis of aesthetics and its causes, authors' attitude is pessimistic about the future path of aesthetics, arguing that the crisis of aesthetics cannot be resolved at the theoretical level. The crisis of aesthetics is currently worsening, forcing us to rethink the relationship between aesthetics and art in the contemporary art regime.

The main reason for the crisis of aesthetics is the inability of aesthetics to fully engage with contemporary art, since the latter, focused on issues of globalization and personal identity, decisively rejects the idea of beauty as part of a conscious struggle against the assertion of any universal narratives. Contemporary art differs from conventional art in general, as well as from modernist and postmodernist art, in the following characteristics: firstly, contemporary art rejects "grand narratives" [Danto, 2015: 26–41], recognizing that all works of art exist in a certain context and implicitly express a certain point of view, thereby helping. reveal hidden social problems such as poverty, inequality, or domination (see fig. 3).

However, this standard will not be able to distinguish contemporary art from postmodern art. Secondly, according to critic Hal Foster in his work "Against Pluralism," contemporary art also rejects the limitless deconstruction or destruction of postmodernism, thereby avoiding the complete destruction of the meaning of works of art through nihilism or their degeneration into simple intellectual games [Foster, 1999: 15]. In this sense, contemporary art is not, as Arthur Danto suggests, "anything goes" [Danto, 2015: 26–47], but rather must adhere to certain stylistic

principles. What about aesthetics under this situation? As Foster said, criticism does not seek theoretical or historical practices, but

«seeks new political connections and creates new cultural maps, acting as a critical intervention in the complex (generally reactionary) political and economic status quo» [Foster, 1999: 3].



Fig. 3. Liu Jianhua (刘建华). «Research in Yiwu» (义乌调查), 2006, mixed media, dimensions variable. Image freely available on the platform: <https://aaa.org.hk/tc/collections/search/archive/individual-file-liu-jianhua/object/yiwu-survey-exhibition-view-19549>

A new aesthetics will take seriously the power of the sensory image, restore its critical capacity, and re-create productive collaboration with contemporary art.

The universality of aesthetics and the uniqueness of the artwork

As a discipline within philosophical studies, aesthetics appears to be thriving at the present time. A large number of aesthetics articles

are published each year, and related academic conferences are also active. There are many contemporary areas of aesthetics research worldwide: practical aesthetics, neuroaesthetics, body aesthetics, and so on, which are actively discussed at conferences [Wilkoszewska, 2014: 9–12]. Many of these, such as practical aesthetics, applied aesthetics, and everyday aesthetics, are also represented in Russia [Prozerskii & Golik, 2011: 794–795]. For example, a number of conferences on aesthetics were held in Russia: “Aesthetics: Past, Present, Future” (Moscow, 2005), “Methods, Concepts, and Communication in Contemporary Aesthetic Discourse” (Moscow, 2008), “Boundaries of Contemporary Aesthetics and New Strategies for Interpreting Art” (Moscow, 2010), “Aesthetics Today: State and Prospects” (St. Petersburg, 2000), “Aesthetics in the Interparadigmatic Space: Prospects for the New Century” (St. Petersburg, 2001), “Strategies of Ethical and Aesthetic Reflection” (St. Petersburg, 2005), “Horizons of Culture: From Mass to Elite” (St. Petersburg, 2007).

Scholars from the Institute of Philosophy published collections of articles “Aesthetics at the Turning Point of Cultural Traditions” (Moscow, 2002) and “Aesthetics: Yesterday. Today. Always” (Moscow, 2005, 2006) [Prozerskii & Golik, 2011: 794]. Moreover, in 2025, a thematic issue on practical aesthetics was published in the International Journal of Cultural Studies [Radeev, 2025: 6–19]. However, aesthetics seems to have forgotten art, since none of the numerous schools of contemporary aesthetics addresses contemporary art. At the same time, the crisis of aesthetics is becoming ever deeper.

As Rancière said:

«Aesthetics has a bad reputation. Hardly a year passes by without a new book proclaiming either that its time is over or that its harmful effects are being perpetuated. In either case the accusation is the same. Aesthetics is charged with being the captious discourse by which philosophy, or a certain type of philosophy, hijacks the meaning of artworks and judgements of taste for its own benefit» [Rancière, 2009: 1].

We will put forward a more radical thesis: the intention to restore philosophical aesthetics to its former glory in light of irreversible changes in all spheres of sensibility and the sphere of art that relies on it is doomed to failure.

The crisis of aesthetics reflects the crisis of philosophy and the humanities more broadly, since, as S. Khoruzhy notes, after the era of modernism, philosophy

«underwent a series of reassessments» and «lost its productive core» [Khoruzhii, 2008];

accordingly, aesthetics became an outdated method of thinking about art and revealed its main flaw: the abstraction of the sensory.

Rancière believes:

«Aesthetics came to be seen as the perverse discourse, which bars this encounter and which subjects, works, or our appreciations thereof, to a machine of thought conceived for other ends: the philosophical absolute, the religion of the poem or the dream of social emancipation» [Rancière, 2009: 2].

In his view, aesthetics always attempts to abstract certain qualities of works of art and deify them as the essence and truth of art. This essentialist philosophical approach to the search for the "essence of art" or the "essence of beauty" has become a consensus in the discipline of aesthetics and appears as the main theory in

textbooks [Nikitina, 2012: 37]. For example, I. P. Nikitina in her work "Aesthetics" emphasizes that

«historically, two main problems have always been at the center of aesthetics: the question of the nature of the aesthetic, which was most often understood in terms of beauty, the beautiful, the sublime, and the question of the originality of art» [Nikitina, 2012: 37].

Nikitina notes that the definition of aesthetics as the "science of beauty" is obviously erroneous and

«absolutely does not correspond to the practice of contemporary art» [Nikitina, 2012: 17];

however, she only begins to argue that the subject matter of aesthetics is multifaceted, and beauty is only one of them, but does not extend his critique further, to the level of essentialist methodology [Nikitina, 2012: 16].

The German postmodernist philosopher Welsch did recognize the shortcomings of the abstraction of the sensory and offered a profound critique. Welsch analyzed the neglect of the sensory realm by traditional aestheticians from the perspective of the history of aesthetics, from Baumgarten to Schiller, and showed that throughout the history of aesthetics, there has always been a demand for the "sublimation" of the sensory, which is in fact hostile to it as a lower sensory experience that must be regulated by reason [Welsch, 1997: 65–66].

As Welsch says:

«traditional aesthetics, which has become a cultural authority for asserting the necessity of sublimating the sensory, faces a major dilemma due to its paradoxical hostility to the senses» [Welsch, 1997: 65–66].

For Welsch, the various versions of modernist theory are united by their belief in a certain utopian aesthetic ideal, while art, on the other hand, was viewed by Welsch as a revolutionary force, destroying the grand narrative of the dictatorship of modernity and establishing a new order:

«art made its contribution in the first decade of the twentieth century; the concept of art was broken down into a multitude of different paradigms, and unprecedented experiments fruitfully practiced pluralism <...> postmodernism is not an invention of dreamers, but an inevitable result of this scientific and artistic revision» [Welsch, 1997: 108].

We should criticize the tendency toward abstraction of the sensory in aesthetics, believing that aesthetics in the time of A. Baumgarten was opposed to the excessive rationalization of epistemology. When the task of "educating the senses", "forming taste" was realized, aesthetics began to see in a work of art only that which corresponds to beauty, which was interpreted as a stage in the development of the absolute spirit. But over time, these judgments lost their historically justified context and, as a consequence, the interchangeability of the concepts of "artistic" and "beautiful" lost its force. Historically, aestheticians were not interested in criticizing specific works of art; they spoke about the nature of the concept of art or about art in general only at the level of generalization, and neglect of specific works hindered the understanding of art by aesthetics (see fig. 4). The perspective of "art in general" or "philosophy of art" ignores the only traditionally consecrated possibility of the encounter between philosopher and artist – "at the point of theoretical thought about art"².

² For more details on this argument, see author Savchuk's article "Filosof kak khudozhnik" [Savchuk, 2002: 424–425].

Moreover, the backwardness of aesthetics voices is heard everywhere about the crisis of aesthetics, incapable of involving new regions of aesthetic experience in the subject of its analysis. The so-called "new subject" refers to rapidly changing contemporary art, which is spoken of in an overwhelming, but not yet legitimate desire, realizing the need for provocation, rebellion, challenge, creativity.



Fig. 4. Zhang Nian (张念). «Wait» (等待) Performance on February 5, 1989, at the exhibition "Chinese Contemporary Art". Image freely available on the platform: https://vk.com/wall307570171_502

In fact, classical aesthetics, based on the philosophical contemplative method, was backward from the very beginning – "classical" aesthetics was born in the era of modern times, and this contradiction fully proves the backwardness of aesthetics. Let us recall

Hegel's famous statement: philosophy is like the owl of Minerva, it flies out at night, philosophers are always one step behind [Hegel, 2001: 20]. We believe that aesthetics only deals with legitimate, accepted art – that is, art that has already been appreciated by critics, curators, and collectors – and, naturally, is unwilling to risk evaluating art that has not yet been recognized. Based on these arguments, we draw a conclusion: The speed of change in the artistic sphere contradicts the self-sufficiency of academic aesthetics, which preserves its normatively classicist image.

Aesthetics in captivity of illusions

In the context of aesthetics' crisis, many philosophers have attempted to rescue it, to restore its relevance and critical ability. Similar practices can be found in Rancière's "aesthetic revolution" [Rancière, 2009: 14] and Welsch's "undoing aesthetics" [Welsch, 1997: 85]. The strategy of saving aesthetics is associated with the "father" of aesthetics, Baumgarten, in whose discourse aesthetics is understood as "the science of sensory cognition", that is, as the study of a multitude of sensory experiences to form a primary understanding. Following this tradition helps to overcome the tendencies of abstraction of modern aesthetics, as Welsh emphasizes:

«towards the end of the book 'Aesthetics' Baumgarten suddenly takes a completely different note. This new aesthetics now openly rebels against traditional ideas about perception. Aesthetics will henceforth be the defender of the individual» [Welsch, 1997: 40].

Postmodern theories have led to heterogeneity and pluralism and created the conditions for revolutions in aesthetics. At the same time, the revival of aesthetics requires attention to art. According to Welsch,

who condemns the “aesthetic conquest” of art, philosophy and art are always in competition with each other, which can be seen as evidence of their mutual equality [Welsch, 1997: 125].

Welsch’s idea of revolting the traditional aesthetics offers a way to restore aesthetics’ concern for art, encouraging aesthetics to go beyond its theoretical barriers, stop limitless reflection, and develop its relevance. But this task is not easy, since aesthetics constantly assumes an arrogant position: the inappropriateness of traditional aesthetics turns into hubris, forcing aestheticians to behave as if ‘disgusting’ genres of art do not exist. Few aestheticians like Welsch – interested in art (even at the level of generalization) – and attempt to save aesthetics from its crisis: now aesthetics has nothing to do with art. Aestheticians either absorb new philosophical approaches and attempt to reconstruct the philosophical foundations of aesthetics, or continue to academicize aesthetics and purify it into a simple study of the history of aesthetics.

While artists and critics have emerged hand in hand from the old aesthetic system and entered the new era, aestheticians have chosen to retreat into a corner, becoming increasingly stubborn. We must criticize the conservative position of aesthetics: the fusion of art and life, coupled with new forms of art, stimulates a new approach to the traditional position of aesthetics, which, without exaggeration, has always been retroactive or reactionary. Aesthetical reflection has become abstract, completely forgetting poetics and the evaluation of the artistic merits of a particular work. Its indifference to the current development of new forms of art is especially regrettable.

The linguistic turn of the 1960s introduced textual analysis into philosophical research, and aesthetics followed suit, incorporating a number of new philosophical trends, such as semiotics and

structuralism, and shifting the focus to writing and textual structure. According to Khoruzhy,

«beginning with Barthes, strengthening with Derrida, nourished by Bakhtin, and reaching, perhaps, a dominant position in American thought, a broad channel runs through which the task of philosophy becomes primarily the study of the phenomena of text and writing, the structures of poetics. Here, the 'quintessentially philosophical element' is completely merged with the aesthetic, 'philosophy enters its aesthetic turn'» [Khoruzhii, 2008].

In light of Khoruzhy's discussion, one can understand what he means by "aesthetics": text, writing, poetic structure <...> but not a work of art. He mentions Bakhtin's important statement about the text: "text" in general refers to words, and only "text in the broad sense," i.e., "an integral symbolic complex" [Bakhtin, 1979: 281], can include works of art. A noticeable tendency toward abstraction persists: the specificity of a work of art is abstracted into a "text," which, even in the best case, is no longer unified, but a polysemic, "polyphonic" text, the sensory power of which continues to be ignored. A new aesthetic paradigm was also formulated in the work of A. A. Gryakalov: it is necessary to consider modernity as a special kind of work and analyze its aesthetic structure [Gryakalov, 2004: 9], but, as we suggest, the evolution of aesthetics as a field of sensory perception to aesthetics as a stage of cognition, and then to aesthetics as the perception and production of beauty in art, and then to the perception of aesthetics outside the ethical dimension, outside the 'artistic' nature of works of art, has led (in every sense) aesthetics in structuralist and post-structuralist models to self-annihilation.

Practical aesthetics as the last hope

The contemporary art system is closely intertwined with the art market and cultural capital, under these conditions, the principle of disinterestedness of classical aesthetics can hardly be maintained. A new aesthetic trend is currently emerging – practical aesthetics – which is directly linked to the aestheticization of everyday life. The main goal of this school is to expand the boundaries of traditional aesthetics and include popular aesthetic cultures, such as design, jewelry, plastic surgery, fashion, and media advertising, which were previously excluded, in the object of aesthetics. Discussing the “aestheticization of everyday life,” Welsh summarizes the aforementioned phenomenon of pop culture as “superficial aestheticization” [Welsch, 1997: 2], which has occupied the public space through advertising and mass media, and the “aestheticization” itself seems to have turned into “decoration” [Welsch, 1997: 2]. As Welsh writes,

«today we live in an unprecedentedly glorified real world, where decoration and fashion are everywhere <...> the current aestheticization has reached its peak even among people» [Welsch, 1997: 6].

The tendency towards the aestheticization of everyday life has also influenced contemporary aesthetics, because,

«as a reflexive authority on aesthetic phenomena, aesthetics must take into account ‘This new aesthetic construct’» [Welsch, 1997: 82].

Against the backdrop of the boundless spread of aestheticizing tendencies, Welsh advocates for aestheticians to maintain a critical attitude and for the object of criticism to be not only aestheticization, but also traditional aesthetics [Welsch, 1997: 83]. He argues that the practice of creating everything beautiful undermines the essence

of beauty, and universal beauty has lost its identity and degenerated into simple prettiness or simply become meaningless. Universalized aesthetics is perceived as irritating and even frightening, and insensitivity to beauty turns into a survival strategy. Thus, Welsh writes, in place of the strategy of beautifying traditional aesthetics,

«there arises a need for the unaesthetic, a thirst for interruption, fragmentation, a breakthrough through decorativeness» [Welsch, 1997: 83].

In the contemporary cultural environment, continuing to limit oneself to aesthetics is a depressingly conservative prospect. By ignoring the great changes of the times, such aestheticians, whether they meditate behind closed doors or speak out against aestheticization, only add fuel to the fire, failing to help find a new basis for solving aesthetic problems in reality.

Welsh considers art as an avant-garde force in critiquing the spread of aestheticization:

«If there's still a task for art in public space today, then it consists not in introducing ever more beauty into the already over-embellished environment, but in stopping this aestheticization-machinery by creating aesthetic fallow areas and deserts in the midst of the hyperaesthetic» [Welsch, 1997: 83].

Welsh places his hope for the reconstruction of aesthetics in the power of art, which testifies to the inversion of the relationship between them – it is no longer aesthetics criticizes art, but art criticizes aesthetics. Traditional aesthetics is incapable of solving the problems of aestheticization, and so-called “practical aesthetics” is nothing more than the self-deception of abstract thinkers; it lacks the power to

criticize. According to Welsch, the real prospect of aesthetics lies in the creation of a "hermeneutics of art" [Welsch, 1997: 124], that is, a "possible collaboration" [Welsch, 1997: 124] between philosophy and art, which can reintroduce critical power to philosophy thanks to its inscrutable character:

«where 'the work avoids being transformed into meaning,' the philosopher enters the arena of 'criticism'» [Welsch, 1997: 129].

As Deleuze said, philosophy is not reflection, but creativity [Deleuze, 1994: 57]. If so-called "practical aesthetics" focuses only on the aestheticization of everyday life and prefers to turn a blind eye to the surrounding artistic movements, then this too is a kind of escape.

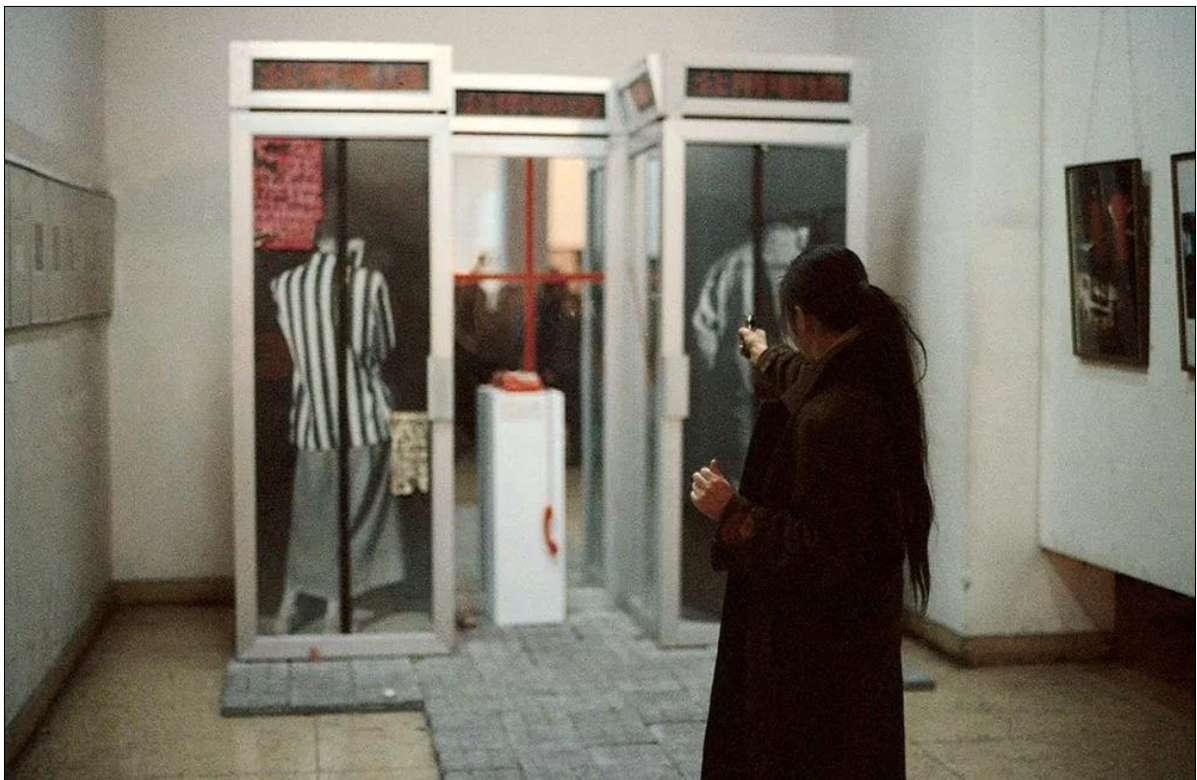


Fig. 5. Xiao Lu (肖鲁). «Talking» (对话) Performance on February 5, 1989, at the exhibition "Chinese Contemporary Art". Image freely available on the platform: https://vk.com/wall307570171_502

Conclusion

The question “whether aesthetics can critique contemporary art?” came to a head in the last decade of the 20th century, unexpectedly became widespread and even provoked, according to Yves Michaud and Marc Jiménez,

«the crisis of contemporary art in France – the phenomenon that continues to expand and metastasize throughout the world» [Michaud, 1997: 7–8].

French aesthetics has undergone a radical shift in methodology (in many ways similar to the “linguistic turn” in philosophy). As is well known, discussion of crisis offers an opportunity for change. Instead of viewing the “crisis” as a problem inherent in contemporary art itself, French aesthetics viewed it as a crisis in the cognition and discourse of both sides of the debate and as a failure of building the genuine “aesthetics of contemporary art.” Consequently, it is necessary to create an “aesthetics of contemporary art.” New aesthetics must emanate from genuine “contemporary art,” embrace greater diversity and heterogeneity, and allow artistic experience to transcend the singular world of the visual arts and, instead, to find a profound connection with all forms of human existential activity. This would put an end to the elitist monopoly on the art world and the dictates of official institutions, create a new cultural path, and open up a limitless space of artistic experience to all who wish and dare to experiment.

Contemporary art outpaces not only the theory, but also the critical capacity of aesthetics, which reveals a new situation: today, it is no longer aesthetics criticizes art, but art exposes the critical limitations of aesthetics (see fig. 3 and fig. 5). Contemporary

art is characterized by transgressing prevailing aesthetic norms and creating new aesthetic tendencies. Thus, Duchamp's Urinal and Andy Warhol's Brillo Box inspired a shift in aesthetic categories and demonstrated the great power of the sensory, becoming the most ruthless critiques of the aesthetic system. Furthermore, since the 1990s, the ethnographic emphasis in contemporary art, beginning with the exhibition "Magiciens de la terre" has deconstructed conceptual oppositions in the political context of decolonization, breaking down binaries such as "First World versus Third World." "Center versus Periphery" or "West versus East" [Foster, 2016: 729]. In contemporary art, the critique of identity and hybridity have become central themes. Postcolonial discourse has sharpened the challenge to traditional aesthetics. For example, Ai Weiwei's 2016 art project "Human Flow" drew increased international attention to the refugee crisis [Bradshaw, 2017], which had not yet attracted the attention of aesthetics (see fig. 6).



Fig. 6. Ai Weiwei's documentary 'Human Flow'. Movie poster.

Image freely available on the platform: https://i.ytimg.com/vi/lzKZ_soiLro/maxresdefault.jpg

Thus, aesthetics' critical force needs to get the practical level, that is, open its own boundaries, embrace contemporary art, actively engage with living images, events, performances, etc., in order to stop running away from contemporary art's practice and thus regain its relevance. As we say, a philosopher, if he is relevant, cannot ignore the present, therefore he is on the same side of the barricade with the artist, since he is determined by the same experience of the artist's pro- and experiential experience³. One can conclude that contemporary art gives rise not only to new critical aesthetics but also to new philosophy of art, as it contributes to the affirmation of a contemporary value system. Therefore, the new aesthetics (or, by other names, such as the philosophy of art) will focus on the "future community of the senses" (in Rancière's words), take seriously the power of the sensory image, restore its critical power, and re-establish a productive collaboration with contemporary art.

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³ For a justification of this thesis, see author Savchuk's book "Rezhim aktual'nosti" [Savchuk, 2004: 24].

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