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Urban Art Practices in the Vision of Projective Aesthetics¹

Abstract: Modern urban art practices (public art, street art, flash mob, performance, etc.), are engaged in a radical aesthetic transformation of everyday life. The problem of projective aesthetics is taken as a variant of the praxis of modern aesthetics. Projective aesthetics suggests that one should mark out art projects which are created in the real aesthetic experience and which represent topical cultural issues in daily human life. Being the subject of projective aesthetics, the main examples of that kind are the projects of actual art in the urban environment. It is a group of artifacts at the border of art and everyday life that is called urban art practices.

This article is devoted to the study of the features and possibilities of projective aesthetics in relation to contemporary urban art. Interacting with the developing practical aesthetics – environmental and urbanistic – the projective aesthetics allows us to include in the philosophical discourse the urban culture where actual art practices work.

In the relations between urban art and projective aesthetics a special place is given to the idea and practice of *potentiations* (Epstein's concept). According to this concept, the potential of the contemporary city is revealed by means of art for creating a polylogue for intertwining various aspects and forms of city life and for developing a rhizome of urban culture.

City art practices, being a phenomenon of everyday life, represent in a single image all aspects of everyday life – from political, ethnic, national, and regional to aesthetic and artistic meanings.

Keywords: art practices; culturronics; projective aesthetics; urban art; urban culture.

Introduction

Contemporary aesthetics, as well as the entire sphere of knowledge in the humanities, including philosophy, is in a state of evident paradigm shift. It is connected with socio-cultural, mental, artistic, and aesthetic transformations that are headed towards the future away from Classics and Post Classics. St. Petersburg University

¹ The reported study was funded by Russian Foundation for Basic Research (RFBR) according to the research project No. 18-011-00977.

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professor Moisey Kagan, one of the prominent representatives of Russian aesthetics, analyzed the development prospects for aesthetics as a philosophical science in a condition of bifurcation, in which culture found itself at the turn of the millennium. In his study, he considered the “aesthetosphere of culture” as a new subject of aesthetics.² We will agree on that with him: concerning the prospects of the development of our science, the “cultural aesthetosphere” notion precisely expresses the mental and practical expansion of the subject of contemporary aesthetics, overcoming the borders of traditional aesthetics and setting new challenges for it.

It was the very first artistic avant-garde in the beginning of the 20th century that performed a radical aesthetic transformation of the cultural world, its total aestheticization that correlated with equally radical socio-cultural transformations. By the turn of the millennium, this cultural reformation resumed, bearing the nature of total transformation.

Correspondingly to this situation, aesthetics is expanding its methodology through dynamic interaction with theoretical, historical, and practical culturology. The philosophical methodology of classical aesthetics is transforming and being complemented with contemporary socio-cultural methodology. It helps to understand the peculiarity of radical change that is happening to contemporary art, its forms, language, methods of identification, and operation. A considerable expansion of the subject of science towards practical aesthetics is equally reasonable and explainable, considering the appearance of “another”, alternative – actual art that goes beyond the traditional artistic reality into everyday life.³ It is especially important to understand the significance of marginal artistic phenomena called art practices.

It is not a coincidence that they have become a subject of study for environmental aesthetics in the context of urbanism. Urban studies include an analysis of art in the city environment as in the special area of artistic artifacts.⁴

In today's Russia, the focus on culturological methodology and contemporary philosophy of artistic culture is connected with such names as Mikhail Bakhtin, Yuri Lotman, Moisey Kagan, Arcady Eremeev, Victor Bychkov, Mikhail Epstein, Lev Zaks and their colleagues at Russian aesthetics. However, moving forward is also important.

² M. S. Kagan, *O perspektivah razvitiya estetiki kak filosofskoj nauki /Estetika v interparadigmnom prostranstve: perspektivy novogo veka. / Materialy nauchnoj konferencii 10 okt. 2001g. Tezisy dokladov i vystuplenij, [Aesthetics in interparadigmatic space: perspectives of the new century. In Proceedings of the scientific conference. Theses of reports and speeches]* (St. Petersburg: Publishing House of the St. Petersburg Philosophical Society, 2001), 4–5 (in Russian).

³ V. V. Prozerskij, *Ot estetiki ejdosa k estetike sredy [From aesthetics of eidosa to aesthetics of the environment] / Estetika v XXI veke: vyzov tradicii? (Sbornik statej)* (S.-Pb: Sankt-Peterburgskoe filosofskoe obshchestvo, 2008), 64–70 (in Russian).

⁴ Yang Shuo, *The research of public art as media in enhancing urban culture / Proceedings of ICA 2016 “Aesthetics and Mass Culture”*, published by The Korean Society of Aesthetics (Seoul National University, Seoul, Republic of Korea, 2016).

Methodological basis

In this regard, we would like to emphasize such an important peculiarity of studying contemporary culture as *culturonics*. In his research Mikhail Epstein relies on culturonics while suggesting a methodology that expresses the orientation of culture towards the future. Culturonics is an urgent necessity of innovative dominance for sciences that use the socio-cultural methodology.

Considering the radical turn of contemporary culture away from Post ..., Post ..., Post ..., Epstein speaks of the importance of projectivism of contemporary discourse in the humanities. In his *Proyektivnyi filosofskii slovar'* [*A Projective Philosophical Dictionary*] M. Epstein distinguishes contemporary culturology from culturonics. The latter is “[...] a construction of new forms of activity in culture, new methods of communication and cognition, new patterns of perception and creativity. While culturology thinks in **projections**, which are symbol systems of various cultures, culturonics thinks in **projects**, which are symbol systems that haven't yet become practices or institutions of any culture, and form a plan of possible transformations of the whole cultural field.”⁵

In the culture of postmodernity, which is connected with the end of the 20th century, a fundamental change-deconstruction of all traditional cultural values took place, and the shift itself set the projective direction for changing culture. Postmodern culture gave rise to the domination of contemporary, topical project activity and projective methodology in its theory, though it did not develop much.

However, nowadays the main vector of the future is projectivism and, correspondingly, projective aesthetics, and actual art practices are the creative material of today.

The main philosophical and aesthetic methodologies, which allow specifying contemporary or, to be more precise, actual art, are closely connected with the main paradigms of mentality in the humanities, from Classics to Postclassics, but to a greater extent with a new paradigm that can be called Protoclassics. However, while classical and post-classical methodologies are still trying to rely on interpretations within the limits of analytics, systematics, hermeneutics, and deconstruction, fundamentally new protoclassical methodologies, such as schizoanalysis, conceptivism and projectivism, allow going beyond the boundaries of previous interpretations of art and understanding contemporaneity as such.

Considering further intellectual development of socio-cultural methodologies in the study of contemporary art, new orientations of culturonics and its projective thinking turn out to be consonant with projective aesthetics, which regards the post-non-classical, constantly changing the subject of aesthetosphere as a base for new aesthetic projects of human existence.

⁵ Mikhail Epstein, “Proyektivnyi filosofskii slovar'. Novye terminy i ponyatiya,” 2003. http://www.emory.edu/INTELNET/fs_potential.html, acc. June 6, 2020.

The concept of *projective aesthetics*

In this regard, we introduce the concept of *projective aesthetics*, and add that its conceptual marking is not so much important as its trend towards grasping the peculiarities of a *new discourse*.⁶

It allows us to understand it *practically*, that is, in the aspect of *aesthetic engagement*.⁷ Unlike classical *aesthetic disinterestedness* (Kant) and *analytics* in this regard, Arnold Berleant, building mainly on John Dewey's pragmatism,⁸ drew attention to the inclusion of aesthetic experience in everyday human life and its potential in this connection.

The idea that the interest in praxis is now particularly important for our aesthetics has revealed itself through thoughtful analysis not only of what is now highly topical in the methodological field but also of the very object of aesthetics, the interpretation of which directly depends on its functionality.

If we turn to the history of aesthetics, the main question here is not one of its object or even methodology, but the question: *why do we need aesthetics?* Without getting into details of this complicated story, let us put forward a hypothesis that states as follows: if the object of aesthetics in some advanced version should coincide with its transition to the variant of praxis, it turns out that its focus on the *aesthetic and artistic* sets its main trend of functionality. In this regard, the main thing from the perspective of its purpose is the *aestheticization and artification of being* at some other level but in the direct connection with the aesthetic and artistic. If by the 'aesthetic' and 'artistic' one understands the whole experience of this type, then the *aestheticization and artification* can be understood as something that at least contributes to making this experience meaningful and vital, and in a unique, individual, free, genuine way – i.e., in the stratagem of existential modus of being. The problem of projectivity of our being can be solved only by ourselves when we try not only to find the meaning of our life but to suggest a solution that has aesthetic and artistic projectivity of being. Anyone who philosophizes on aesthetic themes is already, willingly or unwillingly, in this *discourse*.

Thus the main thing is not only a question of what is beauty or what is art, but how to bring, for example, beauty or artistry in your own life?

The most important question here concerns the criteria of what is *aestheticization and artification* as the limit of meaning, which is associated with philosophizing on the "aesthetic interpretation" of our being. Put simply, we are talking about for what they are needed in praxis and what should be done with them so that they would allow implementing the practical transition from the rank of theory to the rank of praxis, that is, to the *engaged aesthetics*.

⁶ Boris Orlov, "Projective Philosophy of "The Artistic," in *Practising Aesthetics*, ed. Lilianna Bieszczad (Krakow: LIBRON, 2015), 43.

⁷ Arnold Berleant, "Aesthetic Engagement," in: *19 International Congress of Aesthetics. Aesthetics in action. Book of abstracts* (Krakow: LIBRON, 2013), 10.

⁸ John Dewey, *Art as Experience* (New York: First Perigee Painting, 1980).

Apparently, the ultimate aesthetic meaning of our being is in the *pleasure* [*taste*], and the artistic meaning is in the *otherbeingness* [*potentiation*]. Their absence means the absence of meaning – meaninglessness, which has no prospects for further development of being and, therefore, alienation. And so, the meaning of *aestheticization and artification* is to saturate our life to the maximum (or, at least, to the minimum) in this practical connection, and by means of peculiarities of its activity. An ability to aesthetic taste and potentiate being is peculiar to projective aesthetics.

Conclusions: projective aesthetic theory and practices

Aestheticization and artification (or, more euphonically, *aesthesis and arthesis* in their interconnection and, firstly, not just in the functionality, but also in their ontologic entity) assume an existential projection. So to say: this is an *aesthetic design*, which will be the *final project* in the situation of here-and-now philosophizing “on aesthetic themes” for someone who is immersed in this experience right now. The theme of the *final project* is very important and directs the theme of Sartre’s *initial project* towards the future. The “final” here is what one can do now, self-performing transformations of one’s being on the basis of one’s existence, one’s “initial project”. This is not only a verbal discourse but also an attempt to make a real statement in terms of going beyond the marginal limits (transgression) towards creating a symbolic reality. And it is not just a culture that is treated like an aesthetic sphere, it is rather a transculture and the unconscious, not only personal or collective but *transpersonal*.⁹

If we come closer to praxis, then we will be talking about attempts to transform a sensational reality by means of our own possibilities into something that is close to us as *aesthetic and artistic senses* of our being (*aesthesis-and-arthesis*), thus, into something existentially significant to us, into something that will let us experience the *taste and opportunities* of life in the *most appealing way* while aesthetically transforming our being.

The aesthetics of projectivism involves a number of projects, relating to the sphere of theory and to actual projects. The aesthetics of the environment,¹⁰ everyday aesthetics,¹¹ somaesthetics,¹² the art of life,¹³ urban art practices,¹⁴ and so on suggest projects

⁹ Stanislav Grof, *Nadlichnostnoe videnie: Celitel'nye vozmozhnosti neobychnyh sostoyanij soznaniya* [*Impersonal Vision: The Healing Possibilities of Unusual States of Consciousness*] (Moscow: AST, 2014) (in Russian).

¹⁰ V. V. Prozerskij, *Ot estetiki ejdosa k estetike sredy* [From aesthetics of eidosis to aesthetics of the environment] / *Estetika v XXI veke: vyzov tradicii?* (Sbornik statej). S.-Pb: Sankt-Peterburgskoe filosofskoe obshchestvo, 2008, 64–70 (in Russian).

¹¹ Yuriko Saito, *Everyday Aesthetics* (Oxford: University Press, 2008).

¹² Richard Shusterman, “Somaesthetics,” in: *19 International Congress of Aesthetics. Aesthetics in action. Book of abstracts* (Krakow: LIBRON, 2013).

¹³ Bohdan Dziemidoc, *Filozofia i sztuka zycia* [*Philosophy and art of life*] (Lyblin: Wydawnictwo UMCS, 2017) (in Polish).

¹⁴ Irina Lisovetc, “Contemporary art and modern aesthetics: urban art practices,” in: *Revisions of Modern Aesthetics: International scientific conference proceedings* (Belgrade: University of Belgrade, Faculty of Architecture, 2015).

that would evidently provoke the creation of *aestheticization and artification* in real life.

Projective aesthetics suggests that one should mark out art projects which are created in the real aesthetic experience and which represent topical cultural issues in human daily life. Being the subject of projective aesthetics, the main examples of that kind are the projects of actual art in the urban environment. It is a group of artifacts at the border of art and everyday life that is called urban art practices.

In this regard, an artistic transformation of the urban environment stands out from the artistic culture of the 21st century. Such art practices as public art, street art, flash mob, and performance carry out this transformation, and exactly these art practices constitute the main body of urban art.

Art practices originate and live in the urban environment, locating themselves in the space of buildings, streets, squares, and parks. The environment, shape, language, and functioning of this form of art are so unusual that the question of whether these artifacts are art is constantly discussed both among the public and in art-related sciences. The very term “practices” is applied to label another – concerning the previous division of art into forms and genres – positioning of these artistic artifacts that does not revoke their quality of artistic merit.

Urban art functions as a visual and notional benchmark in the chaos of everyday life and helps to revalue the present and set prospects for the future. Together with urban design, urban art contributes to the development of a creative city environment. In this regard, a developing philosophy of art gives an opportunity to understand the peculiarity of contemporary artistry and embrace actual art as the most representative material of new projective aesthetics.¹⁵

In the relations between urban art and projective aesthetics a special place is given to the idea and practice of “potentiations”.¹⁶ According to this concept, the contemporary city’s potential is revealed by means of art for creating a polylogue for intertwining various aspects and forms of city life and for developing a rhizome of urban culture.

Considering the practice of contemporary art in Yekaterinburg (in Russia’s Ural region), one cannot but admit a rapid development of street art with its annual festivals, street sculpture, and public art that have changed the city space. In 2015, the multifunctional cultural Yeltsin Center appeared in Yekaterinburg.¹⁷ This center became the place where politics, the historical past and present of the Ural capital, cultural initiatives and life of the contemporary city merged. Located on the Iset river waterfront, the Yeltsin Center organically fuses cultural artifacts, art practices, and

¹⁵ Lisovetc Irina, Orlov Boris, “Estetika proektivizma v neklassicheskoy filosofii iskusstva: aktual’nye art-praktiki [Aesthetics of projectivism in the non-classical philosophy of art: actual art practices],” *Studia Culturae* Iss. 3 (33), 2017, 53–60 (in Russian).

¹⁶ Mikhail Epstein, “Proyektivnyi filosofskii slovar’. Novye terminy i ponyatiya,” 2003. http://www.emory.edu/INTELNET/fs_potentiation.html, acc. June 6, 2020.

¹⁷ Ирина Лисовец, Борис Орлов, Савремени културни мегапројекти у политици: на материјалу Јелџин-Центра у Јекатеринбургу (Русија) [Contemporary cultural mega-projects in politics: Yeltsin Center in Yekaterinburg (Russia)] / СРПСКА ПОЛИТИЧКА МИСАО, №3. 2016, 243-258.

related events. Its central building is a unique aesthetic project itself, simultaneously combining architecture, graphic art, sculpture, video art, and so on.

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Article received: April 25, 2020

Article accepted: June 30, 2020

Review article