
Socio-Philosophical Critique of the Global Public Art's Visual Order: The Context of National Self-identity

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Abstract: Today a necessity has arisen in a critical socio-philosophical analysis and the development of such a theoretical framework for contemporary globalization that will consider this latter as a visual and ideological impact of cognitive biocapitalism on the collective consciousness of nations, which manifests itself as repressive pressure in the form of Aesthetics of Globalization. This distorts the art system, distorting the fundamental freedom of creative expression of artists, critics and academics, as abstract mass hybridization of professional thought in the context of global public art's visual order is implanted by the cultural-industrial logic of the transnational art market ruled and managed by globalized capital, which has transformed the art, the artist, and the analyst into merely trivial commodities. Since the millennium, commodified art production in the world is perceived exclusively as a business integrated into politics and economics, but the capitalization of the arts ignores the national interests of unbiased processes of culture-creation, unifying artistic expression, depriving it of spiritual need for self-identification. This latter needs to be further researched, in particular in the context of the development of Ukrainian image-formation practices, which devalues its potential in the new socio-political conditions. Therefore, the article emphasizes the need to return to the Ukrainian socio-cultural dimension of the evaluation criteria of transcendental aesthetics, especially since cordocentrism and Christian kalokagatia have historically formed the basis of Ukrainian culture and mindset.

Keywords: Global Public Art, Contemporary Art, Ideology of the Culture Industry, Massification of Commodity Art, National Self-identity, Transcendental Aesthetics, Aesthetics of Globalization

1. Introduction

The last 15 or 20 years of Ukrainian cultural and artistic life have demonstrated a sharp shift in the trajectory of art epistemology from the paradigm of transcendental aesthetics towards the mass aesthetics of globalization, which operates judiciously instrumentalized consciousness in the coordinates of a simplified “paradigm”, which is spread around the world by adherents of Western European and especially American versions of multiculturalism. It was the latter that Bourdieu described as a “screen discourse” that baffles young people and the short-sighted creative elite of economically dependent countries. The subtle mechanism of sociopolitical manipulation of the latter was described by Frances S. Saunders in the late 1990s, that's how we know, for instance, that “the new American art was secretly promoted under a policy known as the “long leash” — arrangements similar in

some ways to the indirect CIA backing of the journal *Encounter*, edited by Stephen Spender” [29]. But even this literal description of the ties that existed between what we now call contemporary art and state-backed structures (secret services and suchlike), has not prevented Ukrainian artists from the kind of uncritical adaptation of external mainstream artistic and cultural brands and trends that has become normal for Ukrainian art scene in the last dozen or two years – and the logic of and possible reasons for this adaptation is one of the questions to be addressed below. The existing situation, in turn, leads to the loss by culture-formation practices of their essential quality of national self-identification, so that in particular the modern image-formation practices in Ukraine substitute their own essential experience with commodified designization and gestural reflection on current socio-political events. This is the problem to be addressed in the article, since what stands

behind “technoid”, in the words of Hans Sedlmayr, design objects, is the abstractly-reified concept that does not contain either the individual essence of the artistic message of the artist, who no longer seeks spiritual self-improvement, or opportunities for the recipient to transcend into the absolute time of *aletheia*. The important concept that every such object or project claims to be based on is in fact a pastiche of the “zombified” by culture industry anti-art. *Allodoxia* threatens with collapse to the nation that cultivates self-forgetfulness. The symbol of the lost past of the nation is reproduced by “Button” by V. Levis and E. Emelyantsev, installed in 2021 in EcoPark3020 in Lviv region: it is not only nostalgia for the authors’ childhood, it is the nation’s sadness for real art, it is the content left behind by attention of artists, but it is emanating secretly from the ideology of the art market, being inspired by the semio-universe, according to Juri Lotman, as if smuggling the spirit that appears despite the filters of globalized aesthetics of the phenomenology of things. As rightly pointed out by Marina Vishmidt, who is examining current socio-cultural changes in urban life presented by self-organized political and cultural elements around bio politics of city life, the commodification of aesthetic theory and art practices cannot be considered the only possible model of the era of “re-invention of global cities as sites for knowledge, culture and wealth-transfer” generating “billions of “surplus” populations coerced into “self-valorization” at the pain of death”, even if it seems “that it is not possible to ‘live differently within capitalism’”. However, “this logic of commodity and spectacle permeates oppositional as well as cultural phenomena that could be described as ironic-affirmative” [35]. One of the questions to be addressed in the article is exactly this “ironic-affirmative” character of a number of artworks by contemporary Ukrainian artists, and the way their supposedly critical stance is, in fact, built into the variety of culture industries of the very same commodified society they claim to criticize.

The significance of the problem to be discussed cannot be overestimated since it is all about more or less plausible strategies of artistic resistance to the commodification practices that are so characteristic of the society of “late capitalism” and after, to use F. Jameson’s famous term.

2. The Populist Aesthetics of New Visual Order

The culture and art of the globalized society of the late capitalist era require careful analysis, and this applies to Ukraine as much as to the economically developed G7 or G20 countries. Examples of the aesthetics of globalization, which has emerged exponentially in the national art space in the last decade, confirm the urgency of this critical work as design projects and performative activism are becoming too absurdly obsessive. One example of this could be the fall of 2021, when the Kyiv Art Center M17 loudly presented the project “It was forbidden to swim in the water area of the plant”, demonstrating the concept of gentrification, which

had been thoroughly studied and criticized by Gregory Shalette, who made it obvious that capital invisibly follows artists into abandoned areas of industrial zones and receives profit [31]. Or another example, when global public art is transformed into a post-public configuration of a hermetic abstract form devoid of any meaning apart from the one that is randomly read into it by the artist or curator upon the completion of its creation. What is being referred to is a temporary exhibition of contemporary art objects installed on October 21, 2021 in Kyiv’s Theater Square and that belong, according to the official website of the Kyiv City State Administration, to Mykhailo Deyak (Figure 1), a young, promising and “the most expensive artist of Ukraine according to Forbes” [34], a graduate from the landscape studio of The National Academy of Arts and Architecture of Ukraine under the supervision of prof. Vasyl Zabashta. Deyak, as it might be claimed, is an artist that has succeeded in popularizing design objects of commodity art by copycatting Western models. This latter fact is important as in the summer of 2021, such mobile interventions in the social space of cities around the world were made by a Swiss Urs Fischer, who took the scandalous object “Big Clay #4” to different cities in different continents, and which was actively discussed on social networks by domestic curators and artists. Not surprisingly, the goal of the Ukrainian artist was also to provoke public attention with a certain form of plastic expression, under the pretext of “as many people as possible being able to touch contemporary art live”, according to the Official portal of Kyiv. However, few have pointed out that this case, relevant to the one that Tommaso Durante described as a populist aesthetic challenge to the gestalt of the social whole and as a mixture of “visual globalization, political theory and national populist ideologies” [9], only confirms the dangerous trend of the manifestation of biopolitical Global Consciousness in its pastiche version as local-provincial “echo-chambers” with a post-colonial inferiority syndrome, as the casuistic activism of the abstract-anarchic aesthetics of the ugly in the last 20 years has acquired the status of a visual order not only at a global scale. Indeed, it also is true in relation to the Ukrainian artistic space, and it is so, first of all, because here contemporary artists have lost all understanding of the importance of the spiritual dominance of the universal ideal and cultural development of the nation as a historical and essential basis of essential self-identification of Ukrainians, which was defended by famous classics, including Dmytro Chyzhevskiy, who underlined the importance and relevance of the national philosophy: “each nation is only a limitation and one-sided elucidation of the human ideal. But it is only in these limitations and one-sided realizations that the universal ideal is alive”, “therefore, the romantic view of the nation does not lead to national exclusivity” [7]. In a similar way, M. Kushnir, during the 1960s, argued that “any action aimed at bringing people closer to beauty is inextricably linked with the struggle to revive the whole culture”, because only common spiritual feelings shape the nation, not banal information or propaganda. However, when a human being

becomes a commodity and poisons the sources of creativity, “in this rape of needs and their adaptation to the demands of production lies one of the sources of a dangerous cultural pattern, and the slavery of the consumer becomes one of the most acute and dangerous forms of slavery” since “productivism reduces the idea of creativity to the level of merely reproduction...” [21]. History has proved the truth and ever-relevance of those words.



Figure 1. M. Deyak. *Unpredictable circumstances* Kyiv, Ukraine. Metal, 2021.

3. The Critique of the Instrumentalization of Creative Consciousness

As early as the 1960s and 1970s, neoliberal capital started to influence culture and the arts, and auctions began to sell works of contemporary art alongside historical ones, negotiating with large multinational corporations, banks, and manipulating prices. The control of the sphere of public relations improves the scheme of massification of the collective consciousness, honed by Edward Bernays, and strengthens the dominance of the culture of cognitive biocapitalism. Artists are losing real freedom of creativity, working in a globalized art market, which in the 1990s confidently led the development of world art, imposing instrumental thinking and fetishization of fashion brands; “Taylorized” art, like artists themselves, becomes a commodity, hence critical thinking, as M. Vishmidt says, should not confuse the “instrumentality” as a way to create product according to a certain technical way of expression, with the instrumentalization of consciousness as a massification of reason (“and without losing the capacity to tell instrumentality from instrumentalization”) [35]. Nevertheless, Ukrainian sculptor Lyuda Malyarenko (Figure 2), for instance, being a fighter for gender rights of women, contrary to Slavoj Žižek’s opinion that an activist either agrees to play by the rules of the system or opposes it,

successfully combines both vectors: using gender as a requirement to be included into the number of participants of domestic symposiums, she, at the same time, successfully replicates the branded objects of techno-design, for example, reproducing at the symposiums the recurrent theme of the meander in different materials, sizes, dimensions. Lyuda Malyarenko fully approves of servile work on the cultural-industrial market, where “given that political ideologies are all about symbolic systems, aesthetics can be understood as a defined form of political thinking relevant to political theory”. Hence, it is not surprising that contemporary aesthetics is used by neoliberal capital as a “political style” of transnational populism, thanks to which “a new global gestalt, a new perception of the global social whole” [9] is being shaped. The Ukrainian case of spreading global public art as a new visual order only proves Slavoj Žižek’s rightness in that certain movements for the rights of women or sex minorities, or multicultural and ethnic issues, which “do not affect social totality”, exist merely to camouflage in the life of society the main source of all troubles, i.e. the problem of social structure, because transnational business is not interested in anything as much as it is interested in the endless accumulation of “primary” capital [38]. The capitalist technological boom actually slows down the development of spiritual creativity in free time, and art, having lost its unique self-identification qualities, loses its transcendent dimension, receiving in return advertising PR and market price as a commercial commodity that functions as social information. Technologies have deformed the very way of artistic vision and feeling, so “labour” as something alive is replaced by dead, commodified “work” [3]. Accordingly, Deyak, using manipulative public relations strategies, claims that in his project “Unpredictable circumstances” he explores “how each of us can rethink what is happening around” by rethinking the space around the National Opera theater via paying attention to his project that is exploring “subtle relationship” of “music and sculpture” and “past and present” through locating “large deconstructive objects” throughout the area, which results in the formation of a new space around them. This, he claims, “is an attempt to provoke the viewer to rethink the space in which he is, and look at what is happening from a different angle. Because sculptures have abstract forms, their appearance forces the viewer to think about some questions, and at the same time look for answers to them” [34]. Therefore, this article offers a “different angle” on critical considerations, and in it, the starting point and the first thing that one notices is: almost the same general words, devoid of specific meaning, are articulated by a lot of other Ukrainian contemporary artists (e.g., Anton Logov, or Vasyl Tatarsky), and everyone loves integrating repressive designization into urban spaces and even landscape eco-parks, as it was, say, in the fall of 2021 in Bila Tserkva, or in Zakarpattia, where participants in sculptural symposiums due to mass appropriation replicated global brands simulacrum. It must be added regarding the abovementioned “repressive designization” that it was described by P. Bürger as a “failed project of the neo-avant-garde”, when “the form content

dialectic of artistic structures has increasingly shifted in favor of form" [6], and H. Foster compared the total designization of nowadays consciousness to a crime, because it contributes to a new kind of narcissism until the annihilation of the subject [13]. In general, the geometry of fragmented collages of design objects, which, for example, is shown by the Aswan International Sculpture Symposium, or Israeli or Ukrainian symposiums, presents a superficial simplified form that is indifferent to the inner evolution of the human spiritual world and is destroying cultural potential of nations, which fully corresponds to the warning by Stanisław Ignacy Witkiewicz, who was, a century ago, feeling a metaphysical unrest over the tragic situation when art was on the verge of death, because society became too eager for "violent" impressions of the "dissolution of art": "Artystyczna perwersja to jedyna forma, w jakiej ginąca dawna ludzkość zaznacza w pewien sposób tragedję swego końca" (Artistic perversion is the only form in which the dying humanity in some way marks the tragedy of its end) [36]. Abstract cultivation of the "paradigm without paradigm", or sculpture messages "nothing-about", finding the meaning for which becomes the confused viewer's challenge, today is considered quasi-fashionable. It is well paid by the market, such objects are quickly and without much creative torment reproduced technologically since one does not need to invest soul, emotional empathy, intellectual reflection, or strive for a high level of embodiment of the idea, which would contain a dialogue of eidos — khōra — material, e.g. something that ancient Greeks put into the concept of "techne". Thus, we are reaping the consequences of a century-old cultural crisis that, according to Nikolai Berdyaev, carries a barbarization of the spirit, and as Albert Schweitzer testified: "... it is only a matter of discrediting individual thinking in any way. Everything happens according to the biblical saying: "He who does not have, he will lose even what he has." <...> The spirit of the time contributes to the skeptical attitude of modern man to his own thinking, making it more receptive to authoritarian truth" [30], and in our case — to the repressive logic of the art market, which has turned a human being and its creative potential into a corporate advertisement. Therefore, professional activity that contains intrinsic spiritual objectives and principles is replaced by deskilling, and, as noted by Julian Stallabrass, M. Leger, or F. Wrublewski, all of whom seem to agree with the theory of cultural industry by T. Adorno and M. Horkheimer, the artist, who yesterday was considered a bohemian outsider, today is a pinnacle of success and fame, like a show star in post-Fordist economy, "And so the principle of art's uselessness becomes an increasingly visible anomaly" [32].

The concept of *deskilling* has been debated in the art space since the 1980s, with the spread of readymade, when "industrial object from which all artisanal (manual) process has been banished as the work of art" and "the collective production of the serialized, mechanical object took the place of the exceptional work crafted by the gifted virtuoso", with it considered "a concept of considerable importance in describing numerous artistic endeavors throughout the

twentieth century with relative precision. All of these are linked by their persistent effort to eliminate artisanal competence and other forms of manual virtuosity from the horizon of both artistic production and aesthetic evaluation" [12]. The hybridization of art with politics and market deepens the massification of creative consciousness, and hence the crisis of theories and practices that serve exclusively corporate interests. Isabelle Graw cites an interesting marker: while in the 1990s Larry Gagosian's auctions and activities were criticized for outright mercantilism, in the 2000s they were similarly universally respected and admired, so auction houses even created contemporary art departments on which the lion's share of their turnover depends [15].



Figure 2. L. Malyarenko. *Stairs to Heaven*. Bila Tserkva, Ukraine. Metal, 2021.

However, at the end of the twentieth century, Ukrainian art exhibitions, especially those organized by Ukrainian diasporas, still retained the synergy of the unique Ukrainian character, distinguishing its metaphysicism with cordocentrism and Christian kalokagatia, "where the individual's relationship to God, the universe and neighbor is expressed clearly — with all principles and aesthetic directions revealed in many ways in poetry and in subtly felt works of art"; and those qualities were combined with some traits of "true Europeans: eternal restlessness in the search for the individual in truth and beauty, which is what transforms an individual into an individuality, a unit into a personality" [37]. This assessment was made by Volodymyr Yanev in his account of the 1987 art exhibition at the Ukrainian Free University in honor of the 60th anniversary of its foundation, emphasizing the harmony of the respect for tradition and the interest in innovation, as opposed to "sclerotically frozen

inheritance typical of the so-called “socialist realism” of the Eastern Bloc countries”, and “fruitless experimentation of the West, which often seems to mock common sense”; that is, resistance to the meaningless emptiness of ideological work was based on preserving the spiritual essence of European and Ukrainian art, filled with “the atmosphere of its own genius loci”, despite the “diversity of technical and stylistic means and forms of expression” [37]. However, after the turn of the millennium the situation has changed in the most radical way. It is significant that since the criterion of quality work has been abolished, international sculpture symposia are attended by many amateurs and students producing low-quality products, a sad example of which is the modern sculpture park in Ayia Napa on Cyprus. Creative reduction is a natural consequence of the crisis, the crisis of post-culture art, which I analyzed in the monograph “The art of post-culture” [27], because commodity globalization and the digital age intensified instrumentalized consciousness, which influenced the perception of technology as a way of existence. This last act, among other things, has contributed to a current situation when deskilling is affecting the so-called “white-collar professionals”, e.g., teachers, lawyers, analysts, bankers and pilots, all of whom had previously maintained a relatively steady level of skill share [11]. The lack of a substantial filling of the form with the new visual order of public art is compensated by the increase in the size of objects, so that gigantomania returns, demonstrating the exponential growth of the politicization of quasi-consumer art. This is demonstrated by Changchun World Sculpture Park in China, which is a model, along with British parks, for domestic Ukrainian landscape design, although this practice proves the correctness of the position of Žižek, who exposed the vulgar understanding of multiculturalism: “That is to say, the relationship between traditional imperialist colonialism and global capitalist self-colonization is exactly the same as the relationship between Western cultural imperialism and multiculturalism: in the same way that global capitalism involves the paradox of colonization without the colonizing Nation-State metropole, multiculturalism involves patronizing Eurocentrist distance and/or respect for local cultures without roots in one’s own particular culture. In other words, multiculturalism is a disavowed, inverted, self-referential form of racism... Multiculturalism is a racism which empties its own position of all positive content (the multiculturalist is not a direct racist, he doesn’t oppose to the Other the particular values of his own culture), but nonetheless retains this position as the privileged empty point of universality from which one is able to appreciate (and depreciate) properly other particular cultures — the multiculturalist respect for the Other’s specificity is the very form of asserting one’s own superiority” [38]. Therefore, contemporary artists seeking to join the cohort of the world’s most successful artists are adapting the art market ideology of global public art, renouncing the self-identification of art expression, betraying the spirit of cordocentrism and Christian kalokagatia. One might argue that this is the hidden scenario that Adorno in the last century called “the jargon of authenticity”. Therefore, as M. Léger rightly points out,

variable creative capital in the person of the artist today actually contributes to the enrichment of the neoliberal art market, increasing competition and annihilating aletheia: “There is no question that we are today witness to some of the most authoritarian excesses of liberal ideology to date and the attempted restoration of class power. Because of this, contemporary cultural workers have to accommodate the new patterning of work, the privatization of work relations and the silencing of critical thought, in particular, in the form of class analysis and the critique of capitalist relations”; “In Horkheimer and Adorno’s writings, the factor that makes the culture industries effective in the process of capitalist integration is their organization of free time and everyday life in accordance with capitalist abstraction, and with culture as amusement, which is itself a coping mechanism for the prolongation of the conditions of work. One major shift from the time of *Dialectic of Enlightenment* to our day is the shift from the post-war welfare state to post-Fordist market economy. <...> As part of the shift to neo-liberal governance, cultural and intellectual work has become the focus not only of ideological efforts to discredit social democratic concepts along with professionalism but of new policies that seek to enforce the privatization of services and the commodification of culture” [22]. Léger agrees with Chris Harman and Isabell Lorey in that under the conditions of strengthening of the power of capital, in part through the creation of a new class of precariat (to which artists have joined) in the context of biopolitical control of the masses, when “real people” passively consume simplistic narrative culture, without due attention to national identity, “self-precariatization appears to cultural workers as a choice, a normalized “economization of life” associated with liberal ideals of individual autonomy, lifestyle choice and even deviance or freedom from institutions. <...> Operating according to the logic of the capitalist conquest of the new, the creative industries come to rely on symbolic provocation while at the same time converting political speech into relations of difference” [22].

Thus, artists’ understanding of their creative work as supposedly “free activity” is in fact a well-established ideology of the cultural industry, and consciousness is automatically guided by globalized capital that controls local and transnational art businesses, where the artist seeks to earn and be successful, while symbolic cultural value of artworks is translated into economic. And all this has nothing to do with the national self-identification of the artist, nor with the independent artistic evolution in absolute time, because art serves the interests of globalized capital and “neoliberal statehood” (M. Foucault). Oleksiy Bosenko, a Ukrainian philosopher, emphasized that a human being is built into the production mechanism of capital like a variable standard part, the period of time of whose activity grows quantitatively and is “inversely proportional to the reduction of everything that is human in a human being”, so that a person in the field of design, advertising, or IT industry, representing a society where “we consume each other in a subtle form of cannibalism”, “rapidly degrades and loses its intellectual ability”: “Analytically dismembered man with his

abilities reduced to elementary operations is machine-integrated and can be easily copied (including formal thinking that is simulated by the machine...); “Value is becoming a formula for social wealth — and it is flexible and ruthless. It changes the formula of blood”, and art degenerates, because artists become zombified by fake aspirations and goals, in full accord with the fact that “modern thinking requires sterilized, torn, false brains, ersatz thinking, standard and tolerant consciousness” [3].



Figure 3. V. Protas. *Sirena. Lviv. Granite. 2020.*

4. Global Public Art as Hysteresis Versus Self-identification

With the fall of the Berlin Wall and the collapse of the USSR, many artists and analysts — as, for instance, Thierry de Duve — decided that with the triumph of the capitalist system, resistance to this structure melted away, and globalized art ushered in a new era, where glocality became a new atmosphere of a unified cultural broth of “post-ethnic identity”, as “Originality, once expected from the artist’s self-expression, has become a way to take position in contemporary issues”. The quote belongs to Hans Belting, who recalls that 2007 Dubai’s first Global Art Forum proclaimed that “the term global art was simply used synonymously with today’s contemporary art”, and the following year *The Financial Times* “stated bluntly that “art is a business”... Thus, the Gulf States provide a test case for art’s globalization as an economic project”, with the result being “a dangerous and far reaching de-contextualization of art” [1]. The capitalization and simplification of global art has provoked opposition from other analysts who are

modernizing the critical episteme of the first generations of scholars at the Frankfurt School of Social Philosophy to free art from hysteresis. Therefore, it is too early to talk about the end of the history of art, as well as the end of art criticism, which was heard in the discussions of the early 2000s, in particular from Benjamin Buchloh and Hal Foster, even in the current unfavorable hybrid conditions: “Whereas culture was once associated with national identity, with local traditions, communities and forms of solidarity, under neoliberalism culture begins to operate as an adjunct of capitalism with a human, transnational face” [23]. Thus, Léger emphasizes — “we are in a world of biopolitical governance”, where “the agenda that is set for culture is informed by the operations of global capital and ... this has become a new master narrative”, and adds that he completely agrees “with Alain Badiou when he argues that certain sequences and events cannot be limited to specific dates”; “By the same token, if autonomous art has been falsely sublated into culture industry, as Bürger says, we can nevertheless find avant-garde forms of resistance to capitalist domination that are not on the same order as the postmodern politics of representation”; and despite the attempts of cultural theorists “to wish away the problems associated with economic globalization, least of all its implications for neoliberal policy, and bring the focus back to culture”, in particular “on the idea of pluralism: difference, hybridity, transnationalism, multiculturalism, diaspora, cosmopolitanism”, we must clearly understand that what “we have today is an ascendance of petty bourgeois allodoxia in which the lifestyle concerns of an international class refuses all determinations in matters of identity and so we have a clear shift from national culture to global petty bourgeois culture” [23]. Perhaps that is why in recent years the question of national identity in the context of globalization has become more acute, as Jared Mason Diamond emphasized, referring to history as a useful instructive experience: there are many lessons, but “a universal lesson can be learned from this: small countries, which are threatened by large countries, must be vigilant... Ukraine ignored it during its last threatening confrontation with Russia”. However, if “young countries need to create their national identity”, “countries with ancient history may need to reconsider their national identity and, perhaps, fundamental values” [8]. Therefore, in order to avoid a total crisis of global public art, Ukrainian image formation practices need to reconsider the issue of self-identification, paying attention to the evaluative criteria of transcendental aesthetics, as sociopolitical twists of performative art-activism ultimately dissolve any creative activity into capital-sanctioned biopolitical activity of art precariat, which presents itself at World Biennales as exhibitions of capitalized goods of the post-Fordist era. The global public art, integrated into the reified problems of life, annihilates the aesthetically disinterested spiritual act of creation, destroys the traditions of art, structure and functions of art, and digital technology only enhances the instrumentalization of creative consciousness in the dead time of market valorization. The weakness of the self-

identification position of globalized artists is proved, among other things, by the fact that calls of opponents of repressive capitalization, including Mikkel Bolt Rasmussen and suchlike, to boycott private galleries and auctions remain unheard, as mercantile success is more important for artists than the pursuit of culture-related and creativity-centered goals. This happened in Ukraine in 2004, when naive hopes for “new faces” in politics failed to become reality, which, in turn, mirrored in art, when the first “Winter Sculpture Salon” presented by the Ukrainian House, which was supposed to be a manifestation of real creative freedom, finally announced the total victory of the cultural-industrial ideology of art business. Needless to say, all subsequent Salons confirmed and repeated that scenario. Surprisingly, only one sculptor, Volodymyr Protas (Figure 3) refused to take part in the PR of that commodified business project, while the number of other participants increased significantly. Once, the avant-garde historical project failed precisely because of the surrender of the resistance to capital and the substitution of the transcendent essence with mass public art, which nowadays borders on both kitsch and the aesthetics of ugliness.

There is another side to the problem, though. Post-imperial countries, preserving the syndrome of cultural trauma, as defined by Piotr Sztompka (“The vocation of the idea of trauma as applied to society starts with the realization that change itself, irrespective of the domain it touches, the groups it affects, and even irrespective of its content, may have unfavorable effects which will bring shocks and wounds to the social and cultural part”) [33], copycatting models of developed capitalist countries and imitating secular transculturalism (although Tariq Modood assures that in the 21st century “multiculturalism is most timely and necessary” [26]), actually carry out self-colonization, in the words of Alexander Kiossev: “The concept of self-colonizing can be used for cultures having succumbed to the cultural power of Europe and the west without having been invaded and turned into colonies in actual fact.... The result might be named “hegemony without domination” [20]. In this way, the soft power of the global capitalization of national cultures is adapted and manifested. Ukrainian contemporary artists, in this context, attest to their “second-ratedness”, voluntarily creating the situation mentioned by Sneja Gunew, citing the testimony of Myrna Kostash: until the middle of the last century, Ukrainians in Canada were not considered “white”, they “were designated “black” at various historical stages”. Hence, “multiculturalism may also sometimes be invoked as a way of signaling divergence from a notional mono-culturalism <...> and here it overlaps significantly with postcolonial concepts and debates” [16]. Fortunately, in Ukraine there are still analysts — in addition to the already mentioned O. Bosenko these are V. Wozniak, P. Denisko, M. Shkepu, O. Yudin, who criticize and do not support the simplified paradigm of the new visual order. There are artists, such as V. Lypivka, O. Ruban, V. Kochmar, who express opinions, related to the position of the Western publishing house Zero Books, with the principle of this latter being that “in the unthinking, blandly consensual culture in which we live, critical and engaged theoretical reflection is more important than ever before”: “Contemporary culture has

eliminated both the concept of the public and the figure of the intellectual. Former public spaces — both physical and cultural — are now either derelict or colonized by advertising. A cretinous anti-intellectualism presides, cheered by expensively educated hacks in the pay of multinational corporations who reassure their bored readers that there is no need to rouse themselves from their interpassive stupor. The informal censorship internalized and propagated by the cultural workers of late capitalism generates a banal conformity that the propaganda chiefs of Stalinism could only ever have dreamt of imposing” [23].

Experts have been debating the socio-political turn of art, which changes the status, structure and functions of image-formation, since the turn of the millennium. In Ukraine, one of the opponents of that turn (welcomed by supporters of anti-aesthetics), was my colleague Oleksiy Bosenko (1958–2021), who in all monographs argued for the importance of returning to the evaluative criteria of transcendental aesthetics. He did not consider the dependence of artists on the demands of the cultural-industrial art market to be the norm, but acknowledged the indisputable destructive effect of a deep crisis that leads not only theory but also practice to collapse: “Aesthetics now is the humiliation of the present by means of violence”, and “contemporaries become refugees from themselves, wandering just in case”, because together with the rejected past, the future is lost” [4]. Bosenko’s position intersects with the apocalyptic vision of Chris Harman’s modernity, in particular when Harman states: “It is a world where a billion people feel hungry every day, and the hunger is going to increase. It is a world which is destroying its own environment, and the destruction is going to increase. It is a violent world, and the violence is going to increase. It is a world where people are less happy, even in the industrially advanced countries, than they used to be, and the unhappiness is going to increase. <...> Capitalism transforms society in its entirety as it sucks people by the billions into labouring for it. It changes the whole pattern by which humanity lives, remoulding human nature itself. It gives a new character to old oppressions and throws up completely new ones. <...> It seems to act like a force of nature, creating chaos and devastation on a scale much greater than any earthquake, hurricane or tsunami. Yet the system is not a product of nature, but of human activity, human activity that has somehow escaped from human control and taken on a life of its own” [17]. It is no coincidence that Harman reminded that when it comes to capitalism of the XXI century, which totally commodifies society, few people understand that it is a zombie, indifferent to the goals of civilization and human feelings, which can spread only chaos, although propagandists for years have claimed that the capitalist free market is a self-renewing machine of endless growth, where every seller always finds a buyer. Chaos also exists in art: definitions, boundaries, criteria are blurred, the quality of professionalism is refuted, anything can be art. Even when academic critics neglect art business stars like Damien Hirst and Jeff Koons, they hold the top rungs of auction sales, are invited to competition commissions, and shown respect. And the voice of uninvolved analysts is drowning in the huge noise of commissioned feedback from curators of private art galleries

who are not worried about the cultural future of nations. Manipulations with the idea of a postmodern game that are cultivated by the cultural industry in the XXI century, were revealed by the author of the term “necropolitics” Achille Mbembe, who, drawing a parallel with the theory of carnival by M. Bakhtin, stressed: it is not the people who nowadays use the ambivalent and carnival criticism of power institutions, it is the capitalized art market that uses vulgar grotesque and deviant activism as “zombification”, the entertainment of the daily lives of ordinary citizens who consume a sanctioned interpretation of events created by the government to “dramatize its splendor” and greatness by staging these acts before their subjects as a target, in the words of Michelle Foucault; therefore, “postcolonial relations are not primarily relations of resistance or cooperation, but rather can be defined as convivial relations” [25]. Unfortunately, critical works of analysts are often ignored in Ukraine, which makes it even more important to make efforts to understand the difficult and confusing situation of cultural inversion, while the market always offers a seemingly easy path to success. Herbert Marcuse was right in interpreting a well-known thesis: when history repeats itself as farce, it can be a more horrible scenario than the tragedy from which it all began. That is why Hal Foster, criticizing contemporary art and feeling the coming changes in the last book, did not even dare to look into the nearest “post-Trump” future [14]. However, some curators of Western European biennials, including F. W. Kaiser, who are concerned about the sharp devaluation of the culture of artistic expression and unwillingness to answer the simple question “what is art?”, feel the danger of the triumphing power of capital introducing mercantile strategies of transnational art business [18]. The anti-bourgeois challenge of the historical avant-garde is reshaping the art business at its own expense. The point is not even that Clair Bishop [2] accuses visual performative practices of repeating the mistakes of the historical Proletkult, which denied the true sense of subjective personality for the sake of Taylorized production of political slogans, the point is that art, in order to be art, must remain in the field of feelings, seeking the ecstasy of transcendent freedom of creativity as a conscious commitment, without which the evolution of the spiritual culture of mankind will not take place. And here not the conceptual projects of reason and the phenomenology of things, but precisely the phenomenology of spirit could help, because concepts and knowledge of art are never enough – it is passive capital, like the content of the intellectual attic, which the artist should aesthetically actualize, translating into the language of figurative expression, because only subtle feelings transform the human spirit on the way of self-improvement. Instead, international public art under the bright wrapping paper of titles offers audiences in Ukraine an indifferent suprematism: buttons, circles, steps, biomorphic constructs... It seems that the only thing that is left is to wrap the monument of Independence into textile cloth, following a move by Christo Yavashv, who did the same to the Triumphal Arch in Paris in the fall of 2021 to symbolize an “irrational total freedom”, which he presumably gained by emigrating from Bulgaria to the West, perhaps unaware of the fact that his status of servant remained despite the change of owner. Ukrainian

artists also received the right to capitalize on their activities together with the independence of their state, and here they are lucky with the art market business. But national culture and image-formation practices experienced all the hardships of the newly created art-precariat, whose mind refused the highest act of activity, which according to Hegel is an aesthetic act, where truth and beauty are united in harmony.

5. Conclusions

Contemporary art projects prove the catastrophic situation of deep hysteresis of an art dominated by total design, which F. Kaiser recognized as an erosion of differences between art and the luxury industry, as artists offer the recipient only the price tag that, in any case, says more about the buyer than about the artwork itself, which becomes a characteristic feature of capitalized art. Artists and critics who want fame and money are adapting the manipulative ideology of “public relations” [31]. The visual stratagem that has spread in Ukraine has nothing to do with the aesthetic resistance to the cultural industry; numerous oligarch-supported art centers contribute to postcolonial trauma with its feeling of inferiority, promoting passive copycatting of contemporary art, and inviting the western adherents of global public art to give lectures and judge international competitions. Such peripheral passivity of the creative elite of Ukraine does us no honor, because the best analysts in Europe and the United States are resisting the devaluation of culture to the “political economy of design” (Hal Foster), exposing the servility of art projects as merely a trivial franchise, supporting the struggle of artists with the problems caused by total capitalization through the movement of indigenism (or the policy of Westlessness), and explaining the danger of cognitive biocapitalism, the toxins of which, in the words of Daniel Bensaid, must be cleaned from the zombified mind.

This work of overcoming the state of cultural hysteresis in postponed and not yet completed, and its success is still overshadowed by the dominance of destructive visual practices that reject the skills of traditional art vocabulary involving transcendental judgment. But there are more and more calls, such as those by the Polish esthetician Iwona Lorenc, not to abandon essential thinking in the new conditions, and claiming “that in view of the contemporary challenges posed by the processes of fictionalization of reality, tendencies towards autonomization of art and transgression of its boundaries are inseparable from each other”, which is why “in view of the needs of contemporary times, it is worth to return to the important question of foundations and limits of autonomy of art prepared by ancient, medieval, and early modern aesthetics”. In such a way, the concept of art will not lose its general cultural meaning, although it will become dynamic and open to new additions [24]. Meanwhile, the artists of the Kyiv Thin Red Line project, held in September 2021 at the Modern Art Research Institute of the National Academy of Arts of Ukraine, ignore similar problems and easily cross the very red line referred to in the title of the event, reviving the spirit of Leslie Fiedler, “filling the ditches”, burying in the mass graves both the modern and the

archaic. After all, when the essence of art is destroyed, feelings are atrophied, and the mind has forgotten the transcendent truth, excuses are sought in socio-political massive invectives, which are in fact a diagnose of biopower. Reflecting on the socio-political turn of art and presenting the new Field magazine in the spring of 2015, its publisher Grant Kester, referring to Ukraine and Senegal as borders on the spread of performative visualism (“Today we find socially engaged art projects under development around the globe, from India to Ecuador, from Senegal to Ukraine, from Cambodia to Ireland, and beyond”), emphasized: art practices have gone beyond the established definitions of “art”, “politics”, seeking to establish new relationships with other branches of knowledge production [19]. But the socio-political commitment of projects suffers from a “superficial concept of social inclusion”, although participatory activism is not unique to contemporary art in its social version, encompassing a wide range of socio-cultural relations: from political debates of “deliberative democracy” to volunteer or mass movements, or to rapid mobilization of resistance through social networks. It is pointless to deny the importance of the activity of citizens, but it remains to be seen whether this kind of collectivism can contribute to artistic development?

Kester captures two factors of entropy: frustration with engaged art discourse, which devalues due to the manipulative ideology of the culture industry of late capitalism, and cognitive bio-capitalism, which baffles young people who turn their search to a reductionist primitivism of thought, focusing on basic concepts because of the abandoning of past narratives in collective memory. Therefore, the question arises about the use of a comprehensive methodology of epistemological research based on an interdisciplinary approach, which goes beyond the traditional theory of art and criticism, but also contains the scientific optics of transcendental aesthetic judgment. However, the global capitalization of contemporary art continues to spread “uncontrollably from Berlin to Buenos Aires and from London to Lisbon”, strongly linked to powerful global institutions, including “the World Bank, the European Council, the Organization for Economic Co-operation and Development”, all of which can be described as well-known media and philanthropic and educational institutions that serve the legitimization of the cultural-industrial art business [5]. In the 20 years since P. Bourdieu and L. Vacan wrote these words, the situation has not changed, except that the contradictions have become more obvious. Meanwhile, the avant-garde once dreamed of the cosmic consciousness of man in a new society of justice. Today, that impulse has turned into a mercantile desire to become part of the world market of transnational capital, to unify creative individuality by means of massified art expressions. So, whether the socio-political turn of art will be the last in the cultural impasse, or will bring to a new level of spiritually-centered image-formation practices — remains to be decided by contemporaries. However, Mikkel B. Rasmussen’s opinion on the difference between opportunities and consequences in politics and art is worth supporting: no matter how bizarre hybrid forms they get, Ukrainians must draw critical conclusions about that hybridization and illusions, since cultural regression causes

entropy of consciousness of society on a global scale, reflecting in politics.

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