

Production art as the middle theory: art, production and politic in the 1920s

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The purpose of this article is to study and present the formation and development of Production art in the cultural context of a paradigm shift in Russian art of the 1920s and to try to rethink its role and place in a changing society. The research methodology is the theory of Total art itself, supplemented by the middle theory.

Production art originated in the Russian avant-garde of the early twentieth century, which advocated the rejection of pure art in favor of serving society, conceptually going back to discussions about the “aesthetics of everyday life” before the October Revolution in Russia ^[1]. Following the development of Production art in the 1920s, the theory eventually developed into the idea of the integration of art and work, thereby influencing the formation of the subsequent reorganization of the concept of art education and the ideological concept of work. The program for training a new type of creative artist-engineer, proposed as part of the art education reform, had a direct impact on the formation of the teaching system of the pioneer Russian art school VKhUTEMAS, which laid the foundations of the modern design discipline in Russia ^[2], and then influenced the development of the Bauhaus and all modern design in the 21th century^[3].

Due to specific historical circumstances, the connotations of Production art from the very moment of its emergence were in a state of evolution and differentiation, completely receding in the 1930s as the political situation in the then Soviet worsened. In the modern logic of Western art historical discourse, the development of production art is classified as a Russian avant-garde, depicting it as an object of Soviet totalitarian oppression. However, such a one-sided and antagonistic reading from a Western-centric point of view not only separates it from historical reality, but also implies an implicit construction of ideological criticism ^[4]. As stated by A.I. Mazaev, “Production art” remained somewhere on the sidelines from the real historical path of art ^[5].

The concept of “Total art” arose on the basis of the theoretical basis of socialist realism, created by the Russian-German Boris Groys to study Soviet art in order to overcome ideological bias and the cultural gap between East and West. In his book *The Total Art of Stalinism* (Gesamtkunstwerk - Stalin, 1992), B. Groys revealed the internal continuity of avant-garde socialist realism from the point of view of the equality of aesthetic rights of art and politics, which became a new paradigm for the interpretation of Soviet art ^[6]. According to Robert K. Merton, the middle theory is a theory that lies between the low-level necessary operating assumptions of everyday research and an overarching systematic unified theory that attempts to explain all observed sequences in social behavior, social organization and social change ^[7]. In addition, the middle theory can be related to other theories as a whole and become part of a larger theory, which can establish a dialogue bridge between macro and micro theory and become an effective way to generalize the abstractions of micro theory.

The scientific novelty of this work is as follows. In the context of total art, production art bridged the post-revolutionary gap between art and social institutions, established access at the level of people, objects, technology, society and the political environment, and became the

“middle theory” that made possible the avant-garde, Bolshevik vision of the future society as a whole at the level reality. In this sense, production art as an average theory helps to realize that behind the search for proletarian artistic styles there are forces and intentions of all levels and directions, first of all, the situations and demands of the group itself, which cannot be covered by the will of the state, which was not yet fully strengthened at that time, and negotiations which, with the will of the state, constantly redefine the meaning and practice of art under the conditions of a socialist social system. At the same time, the obscured identity of the individual, society and its limitations existed not only as the antithesis of politics, but also had their own characteristics.

References

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