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Syncretism and Symbolism in the Language of Contemporary Art: an Invitation to Scholarly Debate

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Abstract. Art evolves in parallel with the evolution of human cognitive processes. Contemporary art utilizes a unique language reflecting the laws of cultural-historical thought. The language of contemporary art exists in the context of interdisciplinary and intercultural counterpoint. A defining characteristic of the language of contemporary art is syncretism. Contemporary syncretism creates the conditions for the emergence and interpretation of the meaning of a work of art. The process of creating meaning is determined by the author of the work of art. The consciousness of the listener (viewer, reader) creates an aesthetic image by comparing the identified syncretism with the main, guiding idea of the work of art. The guiding idea is based on lofty ideals, and the chosen artistic means are focused on an aesthetic response. The syncretism of contemporary art takes into account potential differences in stimulus modality and allows the respondent to choose the most compatible stimulus type. Contemporary art, at its best, is symbolic. The nature of a symbol lies in its polysemy, cultural variability, and the need for intense intellectual activity. The syncretic language of contemporary art determines the dominant position of syncretic art forms. Cinema, in particular, defines specific standards for the transmission of information, as well as standards for the aesthetic perception of modern man. The subject's specific intellectual development and aesthetic Literacy transform the perception of a work of contemporary art into a creative process, a search for meaning that reveals the individual's inner world.

Keywords: contemporary art, language of art, syncretism, main idea, symbolism, intellect, aesthetic response, image, syncretistic artistic forms.

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Синкретизм и символизм языка современного искусства – приглашение к спору

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Резюме. Искусство развивается вместе с эволюцией познавательных процессов человека, полку искусство является особым языком, отражающим законы культурно-исторического мышления. Язык современного искусства существует в условиях межвидового и кросс-культурного контрапункта. Отличительной, ведущей характеристикой языка современного искусства является синкретизм. Современный синкретизм создает условия для возникновения условий для рождения, понимания субъектом смысла произведения искусства. Процесс создания смысла задается автором произведения искусства. Сознание слушателя (зрителя, читателя) создает эстетический образ в процессе соотнесения выделенной синкреты и главной, ведущей идеи произведения искусства. Ведущая идея базируется на высоких идеях, а выбранные художественные средства ориентируются на эстетическую реакцию. Синкретизм современного искусства учитывает потенциальные различия модальности стимулов и оставляет возможность для респондента выбрать ту модальность стимула, которая является для него наиболее комфортной. Современное искусство в его лучших произведениях является искусством символическим. Специфика символа в том, что он многозначен, культурно подвижен и требует большой интеллектуальной активности. Синкретический язык современного искусства определяет ведущее положение синкретических форм искусства. Кинематограф определяет специфические эталоны передачи информации, а также эталоны эстетического восприятия современного человека. Современные книги написаны таким образом, чтобы тексты легко вызвали зрительные образы, которые могут двигаться, звучать и пахнуть. Специфика интеллектуального развития и эстетической подготовленности субъекта превращает восприятие произведения современного искусства в творческий процесс, поиск смысла, раскрывающий собственный внутренний мир.

Ключевые слова: современное искусство, язык искусства, синкретизм, основная идея, символизм, интеллект, эстетический отклик, образ, синкретические художественные формы.

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Introduction

When we begin to discuss art, the fundamental concept of aesthetic activity immediately comes to mind: "beauty"

(Demuth & Demuthová, 2023). However, further consideration of the goals of art leads to the understanding that art is not a beautiful, embellished reflection of reality.

Historically, art has captured and processed information relevant to many people. The result of this process has been artistic structures that embody not so much an ideal of beauty as a profound, highly generalized symbolic representation of everything encompassed by the concept of "humanity" (Awa et al., 2024). Ultimately, the entire history of art has been an unwavering mission to remind people that they are human.

The contemporary landscape of aesthetic practice reflects the development of social intercultural dialogue, which requires each participant to embrace a conflict-free, cosmopolitan interaction among diverse movements, aesthetic theories, artistic languages, and even artistic forms. It must be acknowledged that how we create and appreciate art is connected to how we relate to each other and organize our collective lives. Artistic artifacts have created a cosmopolitan network formed by individuals whose creativity compels respect for any other aesthetic practices that fall within this space (Gingerich, 2025).

Contemporary art is developing at a rapid pace. Its evolution outpaces the achievements of modern scholarly reflection. We propose discussing the distinctive features of the contemporary language of art and the significant theoretical and analytical foundations that should be considered in the study of contemporary art.

This study is based on the following assertions:

1. The general trend in the development of art is subject to the logic of cultural-historical thought. Since the second half of

the 20th century, a new type of logic has emerged, the "logic of culture", a product of a specific type of thinking— design and construction thinking (Bibler, 2020). This approach is characterized by the active interaction of advances in various fields of science, a desire to search for new structures, as well as an active appeal to the achievements of other civilizations and the interaction of diverse cultures. In fact, this active, mutually reinforcing collaboration of all human achievements has led to the emergence of a unique phenomenon—the Metaverse (Stephenson, 2000), which not only defines the modern human environment (shaping new forms of communication) (Castells, 2009) but also influences cognitive development (for example, by expanding the repertoire through the emergence of new standards of perception) (Cruz & Oliveira, 2024).

2. The art world is becoming an arena of conflict and a field of interaction between contemporary artistic endeavors and the cultural heritage of all Eras. This makes the process of creating a work of art, as well as its perception (the role of the reader, viewer, and listener is expanding), an active process of intellectual co-creation. It is precisely this intellectualism—the constant presence in a work of art not only of a contemporary context, but also of numerous connotations, references, and direct quotations from historical heritage—that makes contemporary art so complex to perceive. Understanding a work of art becomes an act of self-knowledge in the context of "Great Historical Time". Intellectualism currently serves as the dividing line between pop art and high art, an "artifactual event". Since the time of

Aristotle, there has been a tradition of studying any object in relation to its role in human life: what it represents now, what its function is, embedded in words and concepts, and how it arose historically. An object becomes a real event when formal, final and efficient causes coincide, creating a situation of possible interaction between a person and an object (Evnine, 2016). Perceiving art as an active human interaction with a work of art has ceased to be a mere pastime—contemporary artists strive to penetrate the depths of the soul. Sometimes it prompts a reaction similar to Gertrude in Act 3, Scene 4: "O, speak to me no more. These words, like daggers, enter in my ears... Thou turn'st mine eyes into my very soul..." (Shakespeare, 2021).

3. The extraordinary power of this impact is achieved through the unique, syncretic language of contemporary art. The language of art is a communicative system created specifically to influence the respondent, activating their intellectual potential and emotional experience in the crucible of understanding. Understanding becomes a process of constructing Individual meaning from the perceived information. While social and historical context are certainly significant, the more important aspect is not socially approved interpretation, but personal impressions and evaluations. Artists deliberately construct their own communicative systems, utilizing established artistic tools, citing historical techniques, and inventing new ones.

4. Syncretic forms, such as cinema or contemporary, "directorial" opera, are emerging the leading modes of contemporary art. These forms of artistic

social communication create emergent structures that shape the contemporary subject's perception, which becomes a complex, immersive process of intellectual decoding and encoding (creating symbolism), as well as aesthetic experience.

The method of this study is a cultural-historical analysis conducted within a semiotic framework

Syncretism of the artistic language of contemporary art

The term "syncretism" describes the communication systems of societies in which the formation of individual languages has not yet been completed. In art psychology and art criticism, syncretism is an important characteristic of early, ancient art. In ancient syncretic art, the core meaning of an artifact, its "communicative message", is created through the interaction and mutual complementarity of words, gestures, clothing, face paint, the sequence of ritual actions, location, and other elements of social communication.

The syncretism of the language of contemporary art represents a distinct phenomenon. Art has already undergone significant development, creating a large number of artifacts, some of which have acquired a symbolic, timeless character. These works of art have become symbols, highly generalized and deeply meaningful phenomena. They pass from century to century, migrate from culture to culture, and sometimes even lose their original purpose, acquiring new meanings, connotations, and random associations. Of course, the core of the artistic culture of a given historical period is created within a

specific cultural-historical system, enshrined in uniform rules of creation and decoding. However, for contemporary art, there is no concept of "classic" ideal, or exemplary, since for many art forms, the dialogue "author-viewer (listener, reader)" becomes a polylogue: "author-performer (director)-viewer (listener, reader)-social context". And each participant in this creative process actively contributes to the creation of meaning. Of course, the first, original text is created by the author, but their presence is like the presence of a ghost or spirit - sometimes it clearly appears, sometimes it disappears (Summers, 2025).

Any communication system, any language, like the syncretic language of contemporary art, has structural elements, systemic connections, modality, syntax, and principles of formal organization. The nature of the syncretic language of contemporary art dictates the need to go beyond a single artistic practice (for example, painting or music), which has created beautiful aesthetic concepts, and to seek a more general, fundamental scientific paradigm capable of investigating how a specific response to a work of art is formed in the respondent's mind. This will help to study the variability and psychological complexity of contemporary art perception and to analyse the potentially chaotic and individual nature of aesthetic response. Numerous previous studies in neuropsychology and art psychology have collected a wealth of data on how our brain processes complex information (color, sounds, rhythm and movement imitation, etc.). However, the process of meaning formation remains a pressing issue in art psychology (Minissale, 2013, 15).

An element of syncretic language is defined as a syncrete. But what is a syncrete? What makes an element of established artistic language a syncrete? What is necessary for a given element to function as a syncrete?

Our engagement with a work of art is a cognitive process of perception that requires certain conditions to be met. We must be able to identify the individual elements of the perceived object; their existence must be logically permissible and fit within our model of the world. However, the process of perception is the sequential unification of elementary particles into a holistic image, which is determined by our understanding of the surrounding world, in which the perceived object has a specific relationship to us (the perceiver). The concept of a holistic image, in turn, allows the particles to unite. Thus, the process of perception represents an interplay between the transition from a syncretic to a holistic image and the reverse transition from a structurally and textually defined image to a syncretic one.

The author provides an original reference point — a kernel of understanding, a syncretic element, a specific component of the artistic text that nudges the respondent in the author's intended direction. The holistic image in contemporary art is defined by the cosmopolitan space of the modern world.

For example, Ursula Biemann's film *Acoustic Ocean* (2018) presents an aesthetic concept for depicting ocean spaces from the perspective of underwater animal communication. However, the underlying idea is the unity of the unique deep-sea environment and the life of the indigenous

world – all living beings: humans, animals, and plants. The beauty and fragility of underwater sound demand environmental justice, limiting modern technology's sensory access to the ocean space, and finding unobtrusive ways to interact with the underwater world (Curtis, 2024).

Another example is the architectural idea of Antoni Gaudí (Antoni Plàcid Guillem Gaudí i Cornet), embodied in Park Güell (Catalan: Parc Güell; Spanish: Parque Güell).

Despite the park's natural beauty, where plants serve as an artistic medium and organize space beyond purely ecological characteristics (Daglio & Kousidi, 2023), and despite the sophistication of the architectural structures, the primary semantic syncretic element is "Gaudí's rosary" – rounded stones laid sequentially throughout the park. They organize the visitor's perception of the park space similar to the process of counting beads, a serious, focused stringing together of one impression after another. The pinnacle of the park's beauty is a small mountain with crosses, Golgotha, a metaphorical end of the journey. The view from Golgotha is boundless – the park, the city, the sea, the sky, and beyond, into boundless space. The architect created the conditions for the experience of limitlessness, the infinity of beauty – this is the crowning achievement of the park's exploration.

Syncretic language and symbolism of contemporary art - managing perception

Modern research shows that there are significant differences between the three leading artistic media of poetry, music, and visual art. The vividness of the images

evoked is a significant predictor of the aesthetic appeal of poetry, emotional valence is the most powerful stimulus in the perception of music, and complexity and unfamiliarity can become a barrier to the perception of visual art images (Mehl et al., 2023). The syncretism of contemporary art takes into account potential differences in stimulus modality – the syncretic series allows respondents to choose the stimulus modality that is most comfortable for them. And with the intellectual and aesthetic readiness of the listener (reader, viewer, etc.), each perception of a work of contemporary art becomes a compelling search for the semantic content of the artistic text.

The syncretic language of contemporary art is not a coherent, defined, or static entity. For many works of the second half of the 20th century, the system of artistic language is constructed by the artist exclusively for each individual work. This trend is becoming dominant in the 21st century.

In contemporary art, not only elements of visual and artistic means enter into a mutually complementary or debatable dialogue, but also holistic constructions, formed images that act as symbols of the meanings of human existence in the world.

Symbolism is the ultimate end of the intellectual and affective experience of a particular phenomenon. Symbolism in contemporary art is a gateway into the crucible of broad semantic content. However, despite its perceived finality, symbolism has great potential for acquiring meaning, supplementing, expanding, and changing, sometimes to the point of metamorphosis.

The central image upon which a work of contemporary art is built, in order to become central to the process of meaning-making, must address a fundamental question of modern cognition: if humanity has already accomplished so much in scientific, intellectual, and aesthetic pursuits, why do real practices continue that contradict long-established concepts such as good and evil; life and death? Any pressing contemporary problem or timeless, eternal question of human existence, whether explicitly or implicitly present in public consciousness, is again and again embodied in contemporary art.

A single image or an entire work of art often becomes a symbol, regardless of its author's artistic intent, ideology, or aesthetic position. In many works of art, the author's intent may coincide with the image perceived by the modern viewer, but without information about the author's intent, how can we judge this?

This is true of artistic artifacts of the past that have become symbolic embodiments of a particular idea, such as the diptych the Melun Diptych (Kemperdick, 2018) by Jean Fouquet. The history of the conception and creation of this image contains many unknown facts. Who is depicted as the Madonna and why such means of representation were chosen remain a mystery. We know nothing, yet the impact of this artistic artifact is enormous. The enigma of the central image coexists with the absolute accuracy of historical details. For example, the realistic depiction of a hand axe in the saint's hands becomes an argument in favor of the artifact's attribution in archaeological research (Key et al., 2024).

The process of perceiving a work of art is like solving a riddle, searching for meaning—this is also true for contemporary art, where the artist's original intention may differ significantly in content from the images evoked in the public. For example, the symbolic, barbaric act of burning a piano is one of the emblematic images of the late 20th and 21st centuries. In art, this symbol has become quite familiar, appearing in musical works by Annea Lockwood (Davis, 2003) (who seems to suffer from a pathological hatred of the piano and has repeatedly addressed the theme of musical instrument destruction), Yōsuke Yamashita, Diego Stocco, and Michael Hannan, as well as in installations (Chiharu Shiota, Arman). Finally, Douglas Gordon created a video installation with the explanatory title *The End of Civilization* (Grosenick, 2005).

Certainly, the theme of the destruction of everything connected with the essence of the "divine spirit", as that which constitutes the essence of man, is a tragically constant theme in art (one can recall Dante Alighieri and "*Götterdämmerung*"), but the means (a burning musical instrument), chosen for direct impact on the subject living in the modern world, have a destructive anti-aesthetic effect.

From the very beginning of experimental research into the processes of perception, the specific nature of the perception of works of art has been highlighted (Leder & Pelowski, 2024). Excessively shocking naturalism leads to the rejection of the entire idea. The rejection of aesthetic generalization and convention, "the trivialization" (Krauss, 2000) and

reduction of artistic language to the mundane, do not lead to greater "intelligibility" of the aesthetic idea.

The issue of blurring the boundaries between reality and contemporary art, reflections on the loss of artistic autonomy (Scheller, 2024) as a way out of the closed world of the pedagogical province (Hesse, 2012), from the framework of the conventional game into the expansive field of everyday life, has ceased to be controversial at the present moment.

With the recognition of the Metaverse as a valid metaphorical description of the modern social context, a clear understanding has emerged of the existence of a demarcation line between the real and virtual worlds in the subject's worldview, the permissible possibilities for representing these two realities, and the specific modality of the virtual world's media. Virtual reality offers the opportunity undergo experiences and modes of existence that, for various reasons, everyday life cannot provide (Burrows, 2022).

In this context, art and everyday life create a unified field of meaning, but employ distinct means of expression. Artistic means are modally linked to the field of aesthetics, and the study of the specifics of their impact on the subject is possible using the full range of methods of modern psychology (Punch, 2022) and cognitive science. This evolution of scientific knowledge about art represents a shift in the art historian's role from that of a mediator facilitating viewers' interaction with art (Krauss, 2025) to that of multidimensional, interdisciplinary empirical research and high-level

generalization, which will enable the creation of a new science (Specker, 2025) of humanity in its subjective, group, and mass manifestations.

From syncretic language to syncretic artistic forms

The artistic language of contemporary art is syncretic and symbolic (Wilson, 2025). A new stage in the development of artistic media is taking place in cross-species collaboration and cross-cultural counterpoint. Enormous technical capabilities, a wealth of information representing not only descriptive but also theoretical and practical materials on historically established trends, styles, forms, and compositional techniques, and a context of existence characterized by cross-cultural, cross-national, and cross-species interaction have determined contemporary art's quest for complex, fundamental forms and profound themes. This has led to a veritable feast of all kinds of festivals and other forms of popular art. Cinema has firmly established a dominant position, offering its potential for preserving and prolonging the life of temporary art forms (such as music) in new forms.

Cinema is one of the most syncretic forms of modern art, as its artistic language integrates the achievements of all forms of aesthetic practice. However, there is another form of popular art, opera, which is currently becoming less elitist and more intellectual. Throughout human history, theater has always been a place of mass communication, and opera has always been distinguished by a certain aesthetic sophistication and social elitism. The development of the contemporary opera is

determined, in our opinion, by the following trends of the modern global world:

- Knowledge of opera and its technical terminology functions as a marker of intellectual community. In particular, the metaphor of the transition from one type of opera to another was used by physicians to describe the evolution of surgical research in The United Kingdom (Hutchinson et al., 2023). This technique elevates the surgical profession to the level of high art, which takes on the meaning of a compliment.
- Opera is recognized as a genre for the general public, since it is not only a specific mode of aesthetic experience, but also because opera has historically developed and evolved, and is one of the conditions for the formation of national identity (Wilson, 2025).
- Every year, growing interest in national cultures is driven not only by aesthetic searches for new texts and distinct melodies, but also by new heroes. The formation of a transnational culture draws diverse and highly compelling operatic works into the global sphere. This is evident in productions such as "football opera" (Bateman, 2014) and attempts to develop completely different interpretations of the operatic genre, such as Chinese opera (Liu, 2025). Cross-cultural interaction does not lead to the destruction of national operatic traditions, but rather facilitates the transformation of classical European forms within

Eastern culture (Asatryan, 2025) and the emergence of new, multilingual dramaturgy (Lech, 2024). In this situation, art historians contribute to the interest of opera house intendants and festival directors in works and national schools unknown to the general public (Abe & Falusi, 2025).

- Attending opera is becoming a prestigious and socially significant event. The opera industry is keeping pace with modern trends in commercial success: opera festivals not only showcase captivating, engaging, and often simply stunning performances, but are also commercially successful. Festivals' focus on both the generally accepted "elitism" of the opera genre and strategic financial goals is currently yielding excellent results. An ever-wider audience is falling under the spell of opera staged by contemporary directors, and the world is being introduced to an ever-wider range of musical heritage and new works. This trend can be explained by the results of modern empirical studies, which reveal two different dimensions of aesthetic experience: involvement and confusion (Lee et al., 2025). Modern audiences recognize that opera is a complex art form. However, a contemporary director's concept offers a vast field for historical, political, and other connotations, revealing not only the composer's original intended meaning but also triggering an active process of reflection and intellectual activation.

Thus, the director's conceptual vision replaces the psychological premise of complexity and potential misunderstanding with a different, familiar and understandable (which does not mean simple) cue that conveys to the listener a framework that facilitates understanding of the syncretic text. This is entirely consistent with the theory of predictive information processing, which is increasingly used as a basis for explaining the mechanisms of artistic understanding (Frascaroli et al., 2024).

- Video recordings (with varying degrees of proximity to the art of cinema) make it possible to preserve and broadcast interesting performances, thereby expanding the number of potential opera fans.

Contemporary opera directing – two examples, two masterpieces

Contemporary opera is a complex, syncretic genre, the central element of which is symbolism. The director creates this magical unity, resulting in a powerful aesthetic experience for the audience.

A contemporary opera production is impossible without a director. For the full palette of syncretic language to speak, for individual melodies, lyrics, sets, and other elements of the operatic genre to merge into a symbolic embodiment, a unified artistic and organizational intellect is essential that can embody lofty ideas and musical masterpieces using modern technical and scenographic means. The musical essence of an opera requires the conductor's high professionalism and musicality, but the director ensures the

powerful impact of the entire opera score, taking into account all modern technical resources (Cannon, 2012).

It should not be forgotten that the modern viewer is being shaped as a film viewer; for them, cinematic (Sheppard, 2005) (although it would be more accurate to define this in light of our practice of interacting with various digital media) digital realism has become the leading strategy of perception.

Modern research shows that subjective assessments of singing and the characteristics of the human voice are based not on the acoustic properties of the voices themselves, but on how these properties are perceived by listeners (Bruder et al., 2024). Directing has the ability and means to control this perception process, which determines the success of a director's decision.

As an example, we propose to consider two great works: the production of Carl Maria von Weber's opera *Der Freischütz*, directed by Philipp Stölzl at the 2024/25 Bregenz Festival, and the monumental mythological saga of Richard Wagner's *The Ring of the Nibelung*, directed by Dmitry Chernyakov (Staatsoper Unter den Linden), 2022.

According to the librettist, the action of C. M. Weber's opera *Der Freischütz* takes place in Bohemia following the Thirty Years' War (in 1690). However, the opera was written and performed after the end of the Napoleonic Wars, in which the German-speaking states found themselves on opposite sides of the conflict. In his production, Philipp Stölzl chooses the timelessness of the aftermath of any armed conflict—death, decay, and darkness—as

the leading syncretic motif. Throughout the performance, a clock on a leaning, dilapidated tower is present on stage, its hand rapidly turning, sometimes forward, sometimes backward. The action itself, on the one hand, maintains a historical connection to the legend and horror of the Thirty Years' War, while on the other, it establishes direct analogies and references to the first half of the 19th century, precisely at the time of the opera's completion, when vast swathes of European lands lay empty, littered, and poisoned by corpses as a result of the Napoleonic Wars. The stage itself, located on the shores of Lake Constance (Bodensee), helps the director create an apocalyptic picture of disaster and destruction.

The director's concept intersects and establishes semantic and figurative parallels between the historical contexts of the two wars. This aesthetic generalization was applied to the creation of Benjamin Britten's *War Requiem*, a lament for the losses of World War II. The text of *War Requiem* is based on poems by Wilfred Owen, written during World War I (Penner, 2025). Through the temporal juxtaposition of the two contexts, the fallen soldiers emerge as protagonists, and their corpses, in varying states of decomposition, play a significant role in creating the terrifying atmosphere of the Wolf's Glen in Weber's opera.

The protagonist, who leads the narrative and serves as the central thread of the entire performance, is Samiel, the devil's assistant, a "black" archangel. Samiel's costume and the overall design of his role are more reminiscent of Till Eulenspiegel,

but without the traditional owl and mirror. He resembles the evil, ironic, and cynical hero of D. Kehlmann's modern version of the Till legend (Kehlmann, 2017). As Samiel lacks vocal themes, his natural speech does not function simply the connecting narrative as is typical in a classic Singspiel. Instead, Samiel, as a figure of eternal evil, rises above the situation, governing, directing, tempting, and immediately reflecting ironically.

The director also includes Samiel in other episodes of the opera. For example, it is he who, perched on the clouds, performs the famous cello solo. After the hermit's famous intervention, it is revealed that the omnipresent Samiel Had been hiding under the luxurious, carnival-like robes of a holy man. This, on the one hand, explains the invisible force that redirects the enchanted bullets toward Kaspar. On the other hand, Samiel becomes not simply a servant of dark forces, but a symbol of triumphant evil—strong, ironic, utterly cynical, and, therefore, all-conquering.

Samiel orchestrates and directs the actions of the living. However, the opera's score and the director's palette give a huge role to the dead warriors, who emerge from the water wearing horrific makeup and clearly identifiable costumes associated with the participants in the German campaign of 1813 (Befreiungskriege). Various uniforms are presented, recalling the Landwehr, the Landsturm warriors, and the heroic history of the Lützower Jäger. Yet the warriors themselves are no longer on anyone's side; they have lost their lives, becoming cadavers hostile to humanity.

The most powerful scene, as the ideological culmination and embodiment of the performance's central idea, is the wild hunt scene. A horse skeleton, engulfed in flames, emerges from the water and is harnessed to a cart in which the fallen warriors are heading off to a joyful picnic. This is a distorted image of the perverted joy in Männertag, which is driven by evil itself.

The rest of the action unfolds under the sensitive guidance of Samiel, who is having a blast: the devotion of Agatha's friend, Anchen, is explained by lesbian love. Prince Ottokar, the judge of purity and honesty, arrives in the company of three mistresses. The opera concludes happily, accompanied by Samiel's mocking laughter— yes, people are notoriously naive fools, testing the value of life time after time, century after century, and never stopping. Well, until next time!

Philipp Stölzl's production is stunning – the music sounds absolutely contemporary, every element is meticulously considered, and the director's technical vision is astounding. The opera is becoming a highlight of the Bregenz Festival, and thanks to the cinematic version, a remarkable phenomenon of contemporary culture. Everything has been done to maximize the target audience without losing the musical's aesthetic value: alongside horrific scenes of destruction and a bloody attack on a village, presented through shadow theater and red light, there are idyllic scenes with mermaids, performed by synchronized swimming specialists, and skating motifs

that, on the one hand, blend into the set and evoke the paintings of Pieter Bruegel the Younger, while, on the other, softly illuminate the souls of figure skating fans.

The 2022 production of the monumental cycle *The Ring of the Nibelung*, directed by Dmitry Tcherniakov at the Staatsoper Unter den Linden, offers an original solution that links all parts of this mythological saga into a single, coherent context.

The story describes a scientific experiment conducted by scientists (gods) using human subjects in order to study human behavior. This predictive information processing is established from the very first moments of the opera – a floor plan of the E.S.C.H.E. (Experimental Scientific Center of Human Evolution), where the experiment is taking place, hangs on stage. The opera's characters move from one floor to another, passing from a public meeting hall or from the Scientific Council auditorium to an experimental laboratory. The path to the human behavior laboratory passes through an animal testing facility, where rabbits sit in large glass boxes, melancholically munching hay. All of this relates to a series of "horrible psychological experiments", most notably as the Stanford Prison Experiment¹ and attempts to replicate its findings (Reicher & Haslam, 2006).

Each element of the opera is symbolic and opens up the possibility of new meanings. For example, the abbreviation E.S.C.H.E. means "ash tree" in German, and "spear" in Old German. In Norse mythology, the giant ash tree is the sacred

¹ Stanford Prison Experiment [Electronic resource]:
URL: <https://www.prisonexp.org/>

tree Yggdrasil. This tree connects the nine worlds. The enormous ash tree grows through the building of the scientific institute, connecting all levels of scientific activity.

Time, the constant experimenter and controller of human history, becomes the central syncret. The director structures the events of Wagner's tetralogy over the lifespan of a single generation of the experiments' ideological inspirers and organizers—scientists under the direction of Wotan. The historical context is reconstructed through photographs, video footage, and the changing styles of the subjects' costumes and domestic environments. Dmitry Tcherniakov deliberately addresses the most tragic and morally complex periods of history, the memory of which resonates with pain in the soul of every German. For example, the appearance of Siegmund and his meeting with Sieglinde takes place against the backdrop of the tragic, acute political confrontation of the Rote Armee Fraktion era, when the political struggle of ideologies turned into a struggle of generations.

Only the scientific world remains virtually unchanged. New computer models emerge in the constant chaos of wires in the data processing department. Nevertheless, the rabbits, the academic council meetings, and the indispensable attribute of a research institution—the smoking room (where in-depth information exchanges take place, forecasts are made, and personal assessments of everything happening in the scientific world are formulated)—remain constant. It is there, in the smoking room, that three

institute employees—three Norns, daughters of Erda—gradually age and grow decrepit—weave the thread of fate.

Throughout the opera, the god-scientists age, and in the final part of the tetralogy, Wotan appears as a half-blind, shuffling old man, having abandoned his elegant, expensive suit for old sweatpants with stretched-out knees. However, old age has neither forgotten nor lost its mystical power, nor does it create the conditions for forgetting all past deceptions, thefts, and betrayals. Wotan's legal wife, the goddess of marriage, Fricka, despite her venerable age, cannot forgive her husband's infidelity and interferes with the experiment, leading to the death of Wotan's illegitimate offspring. This inevitably evokes parallels with the Stanford prison experiment, specifically the intervention of Christina Maslach, a graduate student and later Philip Zimbardo's wife. As one of the fifty observers, she spoke out against the study's continuation due to its unethical nature.

The director's titanic work takes Wagner's music, which is considered very difficult to understand (Baker & Mullensiefen, 2017), to a new level of interaction with the audience. The opera's structure is presented in the style of scientific research, where hypotheses are put forward and operationalized, variables are controlled, and experimental situations are modeled. The different stages of the plot are structured like experimental series: one hypothesis is tested, then a second. Therefore, changing conditions and introducing characters are required. However, the scientists are also human, and base passions interfere with the cold

logic of scientific research, tragically compromising the experiment. The obtained results, zettabytes of information that make up Big Data, like the institute building itself, are consumed. The giant ash tree, the tree of knowledge, the tree uniting different worlds, is likewise also perishing. Brunhilde throws down the ring, marking the end of the age of heroes and a return to the void. The world is perishing not in fire, but in emptiness, in the lack of demand for scientific knowledge, in the loneliness of scientists.

Is this a punishment for the gods' inordinate pride? No. It is the result of human passions raging behind the scenes of the scientific community—betrayal, envy, incompetence, malice destroying people, ideas, and the world itself. Is such an end a tragedy? In the context of individual human destinies, which constitute the context of science, of course it is. Yet, in the context of dispassionate scientific research, no, because the end has not been reached, the path to further exploration remains open. Horrific situations can be repeatedly simulated to study what man is capable of, how this manifests itself in his behavior, whether there is a limit to baseness and a pinnacle of greatness. This vicious circle is endless. However, a moment may come when, after the purifying fire, there will be nothing and no one left to restore the burned-out world.

Conclusion

The materials presented allow us to advance the following propositions, which, in the author's opinion, can be adopted as the theoretical foundations for studying

the artistic language of contemporary art and lay the foundation for the creation of a new discipline is a more accurate word here –the Psychology of Contemporary Art. Regardless of the name, it is clear that:

1. Contemporary art establishes a true world without boundaries, an important part of the Metaverse;

2. The foundation of contemporary art is a new syncretism, a fruitful interaction of all artistic languages;

3. The syncretism of language determines the leading position of complex syncretic art forms not only within the hierarchy of specialized vocabularies and theoretical propositions, but also in shaping the perception of art by modern man;

4. The process of perception becomes a complex cognitive, deeply intellectual process of constructing meaning, making any listener, viewer, or reader an important participant in the existence of a work of art. This determines the need for creative scientific collaboration between psychology and art criticism;

5. Contemporary art is symbolic because the process of modern human perception is largely based on symbols, necessitating a qualitatively new stage in the study of symbolism, one that would unite specialists from various fields: historians, art historians, philosophers, psychologists, neuroscientists, sociologists, and others;

6. The laws Governing the modern cultural space determine the presence of the enriching influence of other cultures, therefore the science of contemporary art must be cross-cultural.

CONFLICT OF INTERESTS

The authors declare no conflict of interests.

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Zvonova E. V.: conceptualization; methodology; writing – review & editing, data curation; methodology; investigation; validation; writing – original draft preparation.

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