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Conditions of Art Criticism in Czechoslovakia in the 1960's

In the center of my interest lies art criticism of the flourishing period, "the Golden Sixties". I hope that art criticism is interesting and hybrid part of art writing, which lies in the field between art praxis and art history or theory. Therefore, it is difficult to approach art criticism as itself, or define its history, so my approach is focused on institutional background, international networks and financial as well as political frame, which allowed art criticism and restricted at the same time.

Art criticism depends on three aspects that are involved in the formation of its discourse. The first aspect is memory – the relevance of critique depends on the critic's memory that is also its external characteristic, being, to some degree, the memory of the art scene and its institutions. The second aspect is imagination, which is once again important on both the personal author's level and as a shared characteristic that is an essential part of the society's culture. It is for this point I began to consider art criticism has a lot to do with the category of artistic research. The third aspect is, I believe, what Jürgen Habermas had in mind in one interview when asked what caused the current absence of intellectuals in the public space: "You can't have committed intellectuals if you don't have the readers to address the ideas to." he replied. In other words, no intellectual production, including criticism, is possible without publication opportunities. Although the necessity of publishing options may seem trivial, should the definition of criticism include publication (and distribution), we could see, for example, the that state of art criticism in Prague Spring in 1968 and its (non)existence after 1970 has the broader context of cultural history of art, communication and cultural policy in general. In short: Creation, transfer and dissemination of information was a major theme in the 1960s.

For the overall context, it is important to note that the 1960's, or more specifically the period between 1957 and 1970, was a very specific period of cultural and political boom following the thaw at the turn of the late 1950s and early 1960s. The climax in 1968 came after a long process (much longer than just "Prague Spring"), which got fortunately a lot of interest from historians in recent years. But on contrary field of art criticism did not get a proper attention within the frame of art history of post-war art.

To the main questions I pose in my project belong these: What was the role of the Communist Party and where did the power of it ends in terms of cultural policy and art criticism in particular? Where were borders of the power structures of the state and should we divide between the official and unofficial culture in the 1960's in Czechoslovakia? Why there had been so many authoritative prescriptions for art criticism?

How did the international networks, which were in the middle of the decade extremely rich (in compare to 1950's or 1970–1980's), actually function and where were their limits? The very prominent place in my project – as well as in the historical reality – has the IX. AICA Congress took place in Prague and Bratislava in 1966. About 200 art critics from all over the world came to Prague to debate on "Function of Art Criticism". There are some of discussed contributions published at the art magazines, so it suggests itself to analyze.

So, the last issue I would like to mention is the methodological one: how should we interpret the interpretation? Is it possible to do it through the meta-criticism (the stated ideas of how should art criticism be like), which were in a special amount at that time? Or is there some other, more suitable methodology, e. g. literal theory and history since we are no more in the field of images but a text? Should we put aside the basic assumption that art criticism is part of art/history?

Upon this all questions the conditions of art criticism are taking shape to be the next part of the mosaic of the socialist period art history, which we still are working on to complete.