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## Potential of Art as a Form of Social Experiment

**Alexandr V. Medvedev\***

*Ural Federal University named after B.N. Yeltsin  
51 Lenina, Ekaterinburg, 620083 Russia*

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*Experiment as a method of scientific cognition emerged in the early modern period. However, science is not the only field for experimental research. Cognitive potential of art has been repeatedly pointed out in the history of aesthetic thought. Art could be seen as a form of social experiment, due to the fact that the work of art is constructed according to a specific logic which could be described as "what would happen, if..." The object for experiment in art can be reality itself as well as other works of art. Artistic experiment increases the cognitive potential of culture, enabling us to imagine not only the objective reality, but the potential reality as well.*

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Art accompanies the humankind throughout the entire history. We could not find any epoch, or any ethnic group which would be unfamiliar with artistic activities. Art accompanies not only the history, but also the life of each and every human being from birth to death. One meets art while he is still unconscious, enjoying mother's gentle lullaby; one meets art when he is not able to perceive anything anymore and his corpse is being carried out to the mournful sound of the funeral march. One meets art even not striving to meet it, for every moment of the human life is full of art.

Art is extremely diverse; it has many faces. The problems of its essence, its place in the life of society and personality, its functions became a subject of contemplations back in the era of mythological thinking: remember the ancient Greek myth of Apollo Musagetes. A number

of definitions of art were elaborated during the centuries of its theoretical comprehension, and in spite of all the variety, divergences and contradictions, everybody acknowledges that art is crucial for the integrity of the society, as it has its own specific functions. The nature of this function could be and is defined in many different ways, depending on the historical context, the ways of art's being, worldview and philosophical views of the thinker. Here we shall consider only one view on art.

Epistemological power of art was emphasized in the tradition of aesthetical thought. From the antique notion of art as imitation of nature, Renaissance metaphor of art as of mirror of life, Hegel's notion of art as of sensuous expression of the Idea (*Idee*), to the Enlightenment idea of art as of guide to life, the view on art as on a method of life cognition has been established.

However, knowing life involves not only plain recording of everything that appears existent, but also investigating the possibilities of being and creating new patterns of human behaviour.

Cognitive potential of art was considered back in *Poetics* by Aristotle. Speaking of differences between history and poetry, the Greek philosopher emphasized that a historian speaks about things that did happen, while a poet speaks about things that could have happened, owing to possibility or probability. History deals with the established, fulfilled reality, which could not be a subject of change, while art imagines the potential variety of each and every moment of existence and of a human being.

Lotman pointed out that “there is no real situation, no matter how common or outstanding, that could fulfil all the possibilities, hence all the actions, revealing human potential. True human essence cannot unfold in the reality”. (Lotman, 1992, p. 234) But the notion of the completeness of possibilities of both history and personality is crucial for the self-consciousness of culture. In order to acquire this completeness, culture produces the phenomenon of art, which transforms the non-artistic reality into the artistic one using the logic “what would happen, if...” This enables us to speak of art as a form of social experiment. Experiment has been an intrinsic feature of science since the early modern period. It was based on the assumption that nature could be generally investigated as given objective reality, which could be estimated and predicted; it means that objectivity of existence of the estimated probable can be calculated. Therefore, experiment is defined as a crucial way to present everything that exists or could exist.

Experimentality is typically viewed as an intrinsic feature of scientific knowledge. But we presume that it could not be localized exclusively in the field of science; it is inherent as well to art as a method of cognition. In this area experiment

appears as a method of detection of the probable and estimated on subjective and psychological basis.

The aim of art as experiment is to fulfil the highest number of possibilities which potentially exist in every moment of human history and human behaviour. In this regard art is conceived as “a laboratory experiment” (L. N. Tolstoy): artist constructs a situation, then “lets inside” a certain personality and leads him through the twists and turns of the fictional world to find out his possible reactions and their consequence. Psychologist S. Rubinshtein described this characteristic feature of art; according to him, artist makes his characters live and act in situations, intentionally created to reveal the true depth of their personalities. (Rubinshtein, 1940, p. 17)

Art was examined from the psychological point of view by famous Russian psychologist L. S. Vygotskiy, who emphasized the ability of art to research moral and social consequences of characters’ actions, increasing the possibilities of knowing and understanding reality, increasing the human experience itself.

Meanwhile art holds unlimited potential to analyse the variety of possibilities, as well as to inquire into the impossible. Thereby B. Markov underlined the unique functions of art in culture. He wrote: “Fictional characters play a unique role in culture; maybe the one which could not be performed by real, historical people. The ways of life they live, the language they speak, reveal the anonymous structures of everyday life, and that is the first condition of deliverance from its depressing effect”. (Markov, 1991, p. 23)

In reality only one possibility is fulfilled, which means that the other possibilities are dead. When we review history retrospectively, it appears to be a series of rigorous cause-and-effect relationships. This approach excludes the mode of freedom from history: an individual turns into

a puppet, deprived of the depth and completeness of his very existence. Experimental nature of art is capable to overcome this reduction; art becomes the area of freedom, enabling individual to analyse his own behaviour and the depths of his own spirit under the condition of the freedom of choice.

Y.V. Osokin, a contemporary researcher, admitting the importance of the modelling function of art, emphasizes another aspect of the subject. He claims that it is not the particular form of experiment in art that matters, but the informational differences, the specific aim, inherent in art and nowhere else.

Art that already exists may be subject to artistic experiment, as well as historical facts. We all remember the last time when Onegin sees Tatyana Larina, one of the most poetic images in Russian literature, and she utters her famous words: "But I am given to another now, and I will eternally keep my vow". This is the last chord that completes the image of the character's morals. Of course, Tatyana's choice is predetermined by her background and social environment. But what would have happened, if she had responded Onegin's call? We don't find the answer in the poem, but we can find it in "Anna Karenina" by L.N. Tolstoy. Anna Karenina is Tatyana Larina who chose another way. We may disagree with Tolstoy who tells us that Anna's choice brought her to a dead end; however, together with Pushkin's version, it gives us more knowledge on solving the particular problem and, probably, brings us to the conclusion that freedom is always paid for.

The history of art is not just a fixed set of knowledge; it is a way for culture to increase the degree of self-cognition.

By exposing the variety of possibilities and revealing their consequences, art provides the experience of the possible, which influences the way we approach life, mostly when we plan our future. The diversity of forms and genres

of art reflects the diversity of forms of artistic experiment produced by culture. This diversity itself is determined by the endless necessity to experiment. Each form of art has its own limited set of media; therefore its possibilities are limited. This limitedness contains both strength and weakness for every form of art, as well as need for another artistic medium.

Art as a phenomenon of culture, a sensuous and artistic form, which shows us the way to the essence of being. This is the strategic mission of art. Art is the voice of culture which turns the invisible into visible and the transcendental into perceptible.

As an independent area of spiritual life, art is a body consisting of separate works of art, between which some complex relationships are established. Artistic dialogue is the essence of the relationships established between different works of art, individual creative manners and artistic methods. Dialogue is a consequence of the specific nature of art, which is a qualitatively defined phenomenon of culture. Every single work of art contains its own inner world, time and space, historical, social, psychological patterns. The core of a work of art is an original artistic worldview. You can accept it or not, but once it is created, it exists as long as art itself exists. Existence of different artistic conceptions is crucial for the existence of art as a whole. "Sing in your own way, even if you sound like a frog," S.A. Yesenin exclaims. This characteristic of art makes dialogue its essential feature throughout all the stages of creation. There is no such thing as an absolutely original work of art, for it is always a result of a dialogue with other works of art and their authors.

There are different forms of artistic dialogue: polemic dialogue, agreement dialogue, variation dialogue, ensemble singing dialogue etc.

Dialogical relationships between works of art unfold in perspective and retrospective

connections. Perspective connection is the relation of a previously created work of art to a new one. The work of art that already exists may be the source of a new one, it predetermines and organizes its conception, specifies the mode of the dialogue.

Retrospective connection is the relation of a new work of art to the one that already exists. If the previously created work of art specifies the mode of the dialogue, retrospective connection defines its quality and substantive trend. Retrospective connection actualizes the previously created works of art, highlights their artistic importance and reveals their connections to the contemporary life.

Creative work is characterized by uniqueness and originality. E. Baratynskiy once warned us: "Do not imitate: the genius is original and great in his own greatness." Actualisation of one's own self, of one's true identity, the desire to express it in a creative way, brings us to the need to communicate with others, for their

very existence is necessary to accentuate the differences.

Even speaking his own language, an artist adopts the elements of the Other's language, pointing out the recipient of the dialogue. The ways of involving the Other's language are diverse, for example, dedication, reminiscence, various forms of quoting, stylization, epigraph, resemblance of titles, using fixed semantic units etc. This enables the reader to perceive not only the artist's monologue, but also the speech of the Other, involved in the artistic dialogue.

Dialogue between artists expands the area of experiment, providing us with the wide range of solutions for numerous problems we experience. The social status of art in culture as a whole could not be reduced to its experimental nature. However, art appears to be necessary to increase the cognitive potential of culture; by doing so it contributes to the process of accumulating knowledge on maintaining integrity of the society and its further development.

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## **Потенциал искусства как формы социального эксперимента**

**А.В. Медведев**

*Уральский федеральный университет им. Б.Н. Ельцина,  
Россия 620083, Екатеринбург, пр. Ленина, 51*

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*Эксперимент как средство научного познания формируется в культуре Нового времени. Но наука не является единственным пространством культуры, в котором осуществляется экспериментальная деятельность. Искусство, познавательный потенциал которого отмечался на протяжении всей истории эстетической мысли, является формой социального эксперимента, оно выстраивает свое произведение по логике – «что было бы, если...». Объектом эксперимента в искусстве выступает как самая реальность, так и другие произведения искусства. Художественный эксперимент увеличивает познавательный потенциал культуры, поскольку дает возможность представить не только наличное бытие, но и потенциальное.*

*Ключевые слова: искусство, эксперимент, потребность, формы и жанры художественного эксперимента.*

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