

LOYALTY TO PLACE. LOYALTY TO COMMUNITY VIKTOR MISIANO

Back in 1993, Moscow philosopher Valery Podoroga once said something I still remember. “I decided to write about Georges Bataille. People in France write their school projects about him, and for me, this will be my first time... So what?! It is me writing! Writing right now! Writing right here!” I remembered this conversation as I did this idea of contextuality of knowledge – an idea which came to me as enlightenment. This was during the first post-communist decade, and the thinking Russian population had already realized how thin its resources were in the face of the formidable train of Western culture and the complexity of the discourse it produced. We soon learned that this situation was usually referred to as the centre-periphery dichotomy (what was unknown at the time, for a while, unfortunately, was the fact that this issue was formulated by post-colonial theorists).

That same year, Moscow witnessed the birth of *Moscow Art Magazine* (MAM), which presented itself as “the new Russian-language periodical about the history and theory of modern art”. The last two words of this definition were a statement; it was a magazine of regional context, addressed to authors writing in its language and to readers reading in it. My twenty-five-year track record of working for that magazine can probably justify why I was invited to introduce this digest with a short contribution.

For both MAM and *Sešit* (*Notebook*), the bet on the region’s language was a sort of an oath of allegiance to the place. And I am even willing to readily assume that this choice was made rationally, without resorting to the rhetoric of the “local against global” confrontation. Without, because, at the very least, the

first post-communist years left inquisitive minds without doubt that the dialectic of the relationship between the centre and the periphery is much more complex and full of contradiction than any straightforward confrontation. This choice was also predetermined by *Sešit*'s institutional preconditions; national academies predominantly think and operate in their official language. But here, I think, other – very specific – circumstances play a part; it is the existence of a specific circle of people living under specific conditions. Any periodical always implies a community. For a magazine to be created, it needs a community of those who want to be involved in its creation and those who wish for it to exist. For them, such magazine is a way of establishing and claiming their existence; it is an expression of their mode of communication, including personal communication. The work and the establishment of the editorial team, its meetings, the dialogue between the editors and the authors etc., i.e. everything that falls under seemingly purely professional routine is, in fact, a way of maintaining a certain circle, its consolidation, reproduction and expansion. And the degree to which such community exists and consolidates itself in the regional context, the language of its publication is the one used in this joint work and dialogue. Primary relationships here are always the direct ones. This is the reason that when actors coming “from the big world” enter communities of such magazines, it most frequently happens not on the basis of their academic and intellectual authority but, rather, face-to-face meetings and direct contact.

This loyalty to place and community pathos has proved to be successful. So many titles designed in the post-communist decades in the East of Europe fully in line with the rulebook of neoliberal marketology, with fancy design, in bilingual version or English-only, failed to survive for long, even the successful ones (where such success was an exception in itself). The business climate and intellectual trends are rather unstable substances, whereas the feeling of belonging to a place and a circle is something that most people nurse for a lifetime.

The fact that a magazine shares its identity with its community does not mean it is isolated as a sect or that editorial policy equals ritual reproduction of topics, themes and authors. On the contrary, a periodical may serve as a tool for onboarding a multidimensional new reality and become a place where it can be discussed and apprehended. Still, just like a good orchestra will change its repertoire but keep its members, a magazine may change its topics and analytics material but it should not change the circle of its authors completely overnight. A community is neither a sect nor a population of a military unit but its strength lies in its recurrent reproduction. A magazine is interesting for its role as a place for meeting and dialogue, both between the authors and the readers and among authors, the meaningfulness of which is guaranteed by the extent of previous meetings and dialogues. From one issue to another, the community creates, specifies and develops its own group picture of the world. This is how the locals create their version of the global. This is how the socio-cultural dimension known as “glocal” is created.

It took *Sešit* ten years to publish its English digest – almost as long as for *MAM*, whose first English digest was born in 2005. Usually, the motivation behind such projects is a hope to bring the knowledge stemming from your community to the world (to avoid repeating the word “global”). However, inflated expectations from such endeavours may bring disappointment. Most frequently, they do not win immediate, overwhelming success; reaction to them grows slowly and sometimes takes a long time. The unexpected, although, in fact, more than expected is that many of those who respond to your publication have already been affiliated with your community in a way, or have been close by anyway. Because even if you agree that the value of knowledge created by you over decades is in its specificity, it is logical that people who will be able to grasp it are the ones whose specificity shares affinity with your own. Mainly those who search for a Close One in Another will be the ones who will demonstrate interest.

This experience brings us to yet another important outcome. Becoming a part of your community, these Close-Others open doors to their own communities, whose specificity may differ

from yours, but not greatly. Through them, your circle can reach out to other communities which are spread around the world and loyal to their place. And it is their infinite chains of links that create a world which we then call global.