

DOI: 10.31866/2410-1311.35.2019.188785  
UDC 75.036:316.647.6

## THE ELUSIVE MEANING OF NONCONFORMISM. COMMENTS ON THE CONTEXT OF CONCEPT FUNCTIONING IN UKRAINE

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### For citation:

Smyrna, L. (2019). The Elusive Meaning of Nonconformism. Comments on the Context of Concept Functioning in Ukraine. *Issues in Cultural Studies*, 2(1), 58-67. doi: <https://doi.org/10.31866/2410-1311.35.2019.188785>.

### Abstract

The purpose of the study is to carry out a conceptual and categorical reconstruction of nonconformism in the context of the concept functioning in Ukraine. The research is based on the interdisciplinary integration of a number of methods, united by a conceptually summarized interaction between the material being studied and the researcher, who, in order to achieve this goal, recourses to an interpretative approach. Equally, there are both objective and somewhat subjective methods. In particular, it is a historical-genetic approach that allows one to trace the development of the category of “nonconformism” during the existence of the phenomenon outlined by these categories; the reconstruction method, which is involved for the feasibility study on recombining stable iconographic elements of Ukrainian artistic nonconformism within the reinterpretation of their context, and the method of diachronic analysis of socio-historical reality aimed at studying historical and cultural processes, i.e. changes of cultural reality as opposed to synchronous (simultaneous) analysis, which is designed to explain the essential and spatial nature of this historical and cultural reality. Conclusions. Thinking on the nature of the concept of “non-conformism”, which, strange as it may seem appear, are not yet fixed in Ukrainian art, have a labyrinthform, which is caused, on the one hand, by the presence in time of the art pieces, which, at this time, should not be due to its other ideological guidelines, on the other hand, the presence of the artist’s inner need for artistic expression, which cannot but be “conflicting” in relation to the time in which he or she exists, if he or she is a true innovator, and natural towards oneself, as an artist finds oneself as an innovator. The Ukrainian experience of presentation of the nonconformity of our artists’ works abroad in the 1970s and 1980s with elements of ethno-identification makes it possible to assume that since this time the concept, content, and essence of “nonconformism” have occurred, which have been reaching its permanent conceptual form.

**Keywords:** nonconformism; unofficial art; underground; sixties; Igor Tsyshkevych’s work

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The article was received by the editorial office: 06.10.2019

## Introduction

The top issue for researchers trying to conceptualize the essence of nonconformism is the lack of a clear understanding not only of the path to the set goal, but of the subject matter itself. Most people use this expression without bothering to explain the elusive content, giving it a convenient ad hoc meaning. An awkward situation arises: nonconformism has become a label that can be applied to almost anything, providing it with the necessary, and partly opportunistic overtone. Such a condition requires an explanation of the essential characteristics of nonconformism as a socio-cultural phenomenon to denote the way out of the state of conceptual confusion before the “conditions and consequences” clearly generated by the totalitarianism time, the state experienced periodically by the researchers of modern culture. We will try to identify this simultaneously discredited and mythologized concept, the content of which slips away in infinite flows of interpretations.

The works, which use the latest integrative methods of interpreting artistic processes (or masterpieces that represent these processes) in the course of the formation and development of nonconformist art, are of fundamental importance for the research topic. These are the works of art experts K. Andrieieva, E. Barabanov, K. Bobrynska, K. Dohot, V. Lievashov, A. Rosenfeld, O. Sviblova, N. Stepanian, M. Tupitsyna, V. Tupitsyn, A. Kharytonov, A. Yakymovych.

The majority of modern Ukrainian researchers consider nonconformist art as a chronologically local phenomenon of 1960-1980s. In this context, there are works by A. Avramenko, O. Barshynova, T. Basanets, V. Burlaky, H. Vysheslavsky, O. Holubets, B. Horyn, E. Dymshyts, G. Zavarova, O. Zaretskyi, T. Kara-Vasylieva, O. Kotova, O. Lahutenko, L. Lysenko, B. Lobanovskiy, M. Mudrak, T. Pavlova, M. Protas, O. Petrova, O. Ripko, O. Rohotchenko, L. Savitska, L. Saulenko, O. Sydor-Hibelynda, V. Sydorenko, H. Skliarenko, L. Sokoliuk, O. Soloviov, O. Tytarenko, O. Fedoruk. Despite the multidimensionality of interpretations of nonconformist art, art experts haven't proposed yet any generative synthetic model of reconstruction of Ukrainian nonconformist art in the context of: a) the essential nature of the nonconformism concept; b) former nonconformist intentions as a unity of genre, style, meta-artistic and meta-cultural paradigms; c) art-centric position of nonconformism in the Ukrainian culture of the 20<sup>th</sup> century.

## The purpose of the article

The purpose of the article is to carry out the conceptual and categorical reconstruction of nonconformism in the context of the concept functioning in Ukraine.

The research is based on the interdisciplinary integration of several methods, which are united by a conceptually generalized understanding of the interaction between the material under study and the researcher, who uses an interpretive approach to achieve the goal. Equally, both objective research methods and a slightly subjective one are used. Specifically, it is a historical and genetic approach that allows tracing the development of the nonconformism category during the time of existence of the phenomenon outlined by these categories; a method of reconstruction aimed at studying the possibilities of recombining stable iconographic elements of Ukrainian artistic nonconformism within the practice of reconsidering their context at the interpretation

level, and a method of diachronic analysis of the social-historical reality aimed at studying historical and cultural processes, i.e., essential temporal shifts and changes in historical and cultural reality, unlike synchronous (simultaneous) analysis, which is aimed at revealing the essential spatial nature of this historical and cultural reality.

#### ■ Presentation of the main material

1. *The labyrinthicity of the concept field.* The starting point for the reasoning and reflection will be a further specification of the statement, which basically boils down to the following.

Someone may find it possible to call nonconformism a style, tendency, or one of the varieties of a certain artistic movement, which has its own characteristic outlines and deserves an undeniable encyclopaedic definition. It's not like that. First, nonconformism is a *social-artistic* phenomenon that exists outside the style, tendency, movement or temporal and spatial dimensions, has an intellectual-spiritual and deeply national nature, imbued with the philosophy of religion and the essence of being. It can be considered an ideological platform that is "located" outside the official ideology; it testifies to the convincing moral, personalized position of the artist, the individualistic path of the creative personality in culture and the form of self-consciousness in the measurement of historical and cultural continuity (Smyrna, 2017). In other words, every artist is a "nonconformist on his own", if he tries to work in a "non-traditional" way, to struggle against the stream, whatever shade it may have.

In times of totalitarianism, nonconformism should be considered as a silent or loud resistance to established ideological attitudes (for example, a socialist realist manner of visual communication); In democratic times, nonconformism should be considered as a loud resistance to any attempts to introduce something into rational frameworks, if there is a lack of those ideological; in times of transition from a "dogmatic society" to a democratic one, nonconformism should be considered as self-resistance in an effort to transform previous attitudes into those that coincided with the nonconformist attitudes of other artists striving for the same changes together with the artist. Thus, nonconformism is not so much an outward expression of an idea in a work as the artist's inner impulse to resist traditions or attitudes (ideological or extra-ideological, unstable) that dominate society.

Such a labyrinthicity nonconformism as a scientific concept results from the constant general mood of the artist – if real – to search for not so direct ways of deploying one's own talent as the multidirectional (like in Borges's *The Garden of Forking Paths*) variously fuzzy paths, where one can immediately determine what the author wants, on what observations the attention of the viewer is fixed, on what strings he wants to play and what he expects their sound to be.

Therefore, we can assert that the labyrinth as one of the visual images/metaphors of postmodern consciousness and an element in the system of concepts of philosophical understanding of the same Jorge Luis Borges ("*The House of Asterion*", 1949, "*Ibn Hakkan Al-Bokhari, Dead in His Labyrinth*", 1949) and Umberto Eco ("*The Name of the Rose*", 1980, "*Postscript to the Name of the Rose*", 1983, "*Travels in Hyperreality*", 1987, "*The limits of interpretation*", 1990, "*The Island of the Day Before*", 1994) in search of a true essence of nonconformism concept and leads to

the rhizome-like deployment of his main implications through the involvement in the study of the artist's intentions, on the one hand, and on the other hand – the influence of his works on the perception of the time, in which he worked. From this hesitation between “if” and “then” must emerge an understanding of the idea that the artist sought to leave the world behind him.

2. *Striking a concept spark.* Nonconformism appeared on the collision of artistic evolution, modern thinking, history of culture and political metamorphosis.

For this reason, this seemingly established term should be understood as unifying in relation to other artistic phenomena (“unofficial art”, “underground”, “sixties”), which should be considered within a certain time frame as something established once and for all.

Curiously enough, the terms “unofficial art”, “underground”, “sixties”, which have long been used by fine art historians, in our view, have a more “niche” paradigm, testify to the “craft” attempts of artists to create new visual forms in spite of the pressure of ideology (“unofficial art”), or testify about the psychologically “comfortable” way of being of the artist in the system of disagreement, and resistance (“underground”).

Thus, the phenomenon of the sixties, although it has a temporary outline, but the aesthetics, philosophy, stylistics of speech, imagery, created at that time, can be seen in the next decades, even up to now.

As we can see, terminological uncertainty often makes it difficult for us to understand certain universal truths, and therefore age-old traditions. Each time we are forced to overload the term with “fresh” conceptual overtones found on the way expressing hidden certainty that maybe some of them will take root in everyday life and science. Leaving aside the question of the invention of new terms and concepts in the fine art vocabulary (this is a separate interesting area for observations and conclusions), it should still be noted that the terms and concepts that already exist are not clearly defined, or the practice of their interpretation requires the development of new terms and concepts, and this leads to the blurring of the fine art thesaurus rather than to its vocabulary consolidation.

Interpretation of nonconformism as a certain *public-intimate phenomenon*, which is defined in situ, in each case leads to the actualization not only of the problem of synthesis of arts as ingredients of nonconformist movement, but also to the problem of self-consciousness of the artist in time. In other words, on the one hand, we are talking about the means of creating a nonconforming artistic product, and on the other hand, about the internal attitudes which led to such an act. Therefore, the space of forming nonconformist intentions should be understood as a unity of genre, style, meta-artistic and meta-cultural paradigms.

Thus, the problem of nonconformism becomes *synthetic in essence and simultaneous in content*, requiring analysis on the verge of research paradigms, cultural practices and verbalization of the artist's creative self-identification.

That is why in the nonconformism concept two lines should be singled out, which can both intersect and exist (and therefore be considered) separately. On the one hand, we are dealing with nonconformism as a model of civic position in society, under threat of ideological violence; on the other hand, with the artistic nonconformism, which is manifested in specific artworks, in their visual language, in the methods of

composition, in hints, allegories, symbols, etc., that is, in everything that the artist absorbed and represented by means of artistic form (Smyrna, 2017).

For an artist, disagreement with ideological prejudices is not abstract, but is always a *situational and concrete* form of resistance in a way inherent to this artist. Even the famous “technological” resistance to the dominant ideology, which was manifested in the form and manner of the artist, caused fierce resistance from the authorities and punitive actions against those who dared to engage in artistic dissidence: mosaics, sculptural complexes, stained-glass windows were destroyed. That is, the authorities recognized such practices of “lonely” artists as dangerous for their existence and thus showed their helplessness and meaninglessness. The artist became not only a master in his field, but also a conscious, cultural and, finally, national-centric person, who by every creative action cherished the heredity of cultural epochs and the continuity of traditions, not least the intellectual ones.

3. *Art-centrism of nonconformism in Ukraine of the 20<sup>th</sup> century: “The Tsyshkevych effect”*. The problem aspect in the labyrinths of nonconformism definition is the legitimacy of using this very concept in the context of art and defending the art-centric position of nonconformism in the culture of Ukraine of the 20th century.

Ely Bielutin, a well-known Russian nonconformist, is clearer on this point, admitting from his own experience that “art is not only an aesthetic category, but also a category of the moral subconscious mind of a person” (Bielutin, 2013, p. 8). That is, it is not so much a question of the “craft” excitement of revealing artistic thought using the appropriate artistic tool, as of a supra-craft desire to interpret this thought through publicity; it is not so much a desire to impress with mastery as with an idea. In other words, the “gulf” between art and society is established not at the art level, but at the level of society and culture, and only with the help of the “nonconformism” concept, this imaginary interval (which does not actually exist as is) can be considered as a necessary condition for the further achievement of a balance between the artist, time and history, or between art as a result of artistic action and the artist’s morality as a means to achieve this result.

Thus, a person is socially, culturally, cosmically conditioned, and then, at different times and in different socio-economic formations, is connected, albeit subconsciously, with cultural, artistic manifestations generated by the nationality-being; a person responds to these manifestations, because he also generates them. Such a person is always in a state of ontological obscurity between one’s own national feeling, power supremacy, and cultural and artistic explosion, which attracts, seduces, embarrasses, but also endows him with self-esteem and makes him at least an illusion of nonconformism, in other words, a hidden resistance to misleading power.

Another factor that forces the researcher to insist on the nomination “nonconformism” as an art of dissent is the actual impossibility of working in the pre-determined art system of socialist realism and, as a limiting case, in the realist art system in general. It is not as much a struggle against society and the state as an insurmountable struggle of an artist with himself, which makes a person an artist and not a representative of any other profession. Maybe he did not want to be a nonconformist, “to resist the state current”, but – no matter how hard he tried – he could not do it. He just can’t. Why not? Because he is a real artist.

There is a legend among artists that it was Lyudmila Yastreb, an artist from Odesa, who began to use the term “nonconformism”, using the word NON inside the painting space.

The language, word, and text became a tool for many artists to enter the undiscovered and hidden when they wanted to think about what they were doing, why they felt not only resistance, but also an understanding that there was resistance both inside and outside of them. Not being able to defeat the inner resistance, they tend to overcome at least the outer resistance.

A fine art expert can only guess about the artist’s internal resistance to himself and the “rules of using himself in art” (A. Puchkov); external resistance is determined by the artist’s direct creative act, remains in the form of an artwork and constitutes the facts of art history (“100-litnii nonkonformizm”, 2019). However, it was with the help of the word that art opened up the possibility of exploring the unconscious mechanics of both artistic and, more broadly, cultural processes.

From a historical background, another factor of expressive legitimization of this term in the Ukrainian context was the exhibition “Contemporary nonconformist art from Ukraine”, exhibited in Europe and the United States in 1979–1982, organized by active participants of this movement – Anton Solomukha and Igor Tsyshkevych.

Igor Tsyshkevych is an elegant young man, a US citizen of Belgian origin, who comes to the Soviet Union in 1977 under the IREX exchange program with his wife, researcher Myroslava Mudrak. Bringing call to memory about this acquaintance, A. Solomukha used to tell: “This arrival made noise within certain unofficial circles. The KGB was keeping close tabs on us and the couple all the time. Even a provocation was being prepared to arrest Igor. Luckily, everything turned out well. In Ukraine, Tsyshkevych has collected many “transportable” artworks of Odesa nonconformists, made on paper and cardboard, and we have realized our joint project: twelve exhibitions of nonconformist art in Europe and the United States (Munich, London, Paris, New York, Philadelphia, Boston and others)” (Solomukha, 2011).

Igor Tsyshkevych, whose figure is underestimated in the context of the history of Ukrainian nonconformism, was undoubtedly the first to present the Ukrainian nonconformist art to the world. The interest of young Tsyshkevych in the “unofficial” art was not accidental. On the whole, his worldview is formed under the influence of Ukrainian socio-political organizations abroad: from the radical “left” to the radical “right” ones. Intellectually free and politically uninvolved, Tsyshkevych arrives in Ukraine in a shocking atmosphere of fear and suffocation.

In 1960–1970 Ukraine became a “testing ground” for punitive authorities against dissidents, in 1977–1983 repressions against those who show even the slightest signs of disagreement with the dominant ideology continued (Ovsienko, 2005). Getting acquainted with the so-called “cross” archives, meeting with cultural and artistic figures, artists, theatre, cinema, music and fine arts specialists introduced Tsyshkevych into the circle of “unofficial” culture. “Myroslava’s and my goal was to investigate and describe the 20s, which were a “closed zone” not only for Ukrainian science, but for the West as well. Here in Ukraine, we were literally chasing information, and fate always gave us the opportunity to meet kindred spirit people” (Tsyshkevych, 2001).

It should be noted that the reaction of the Western world to the exhibition was quite favourable. However, some expectations were not met: after the exhibitions of Russian unofficial art, the West expected to see strict abstraction and symptomatic response to political circumstances that would resonate in the works of Ukrainian artists. Instead, the exhibition reflected the conditions in which the artists were living, and the small size of the paintings, simple in their means of execution, testified to this.

Art critic Susan Richards of the Institute of Contemporary Art in London noted the complexity, personal meaning and nostalgia for something elusive, calling the works of Ukrainian artists a reaction against the ideals of collectivism: "Icons of individualism, they must say something important to the West" (Richards, 1980). That's why the concept of the presentation, held in New York, was somewhat modified: it represented a situational-conceptual performative artistic response to the post-totalitarian situation. The exhibitors made stage scenery – on the background of posters with the slogans "Forward to Communism", "Lenin is Eternally Alive", "Our Goal is Communism", "Power to the People" they hung empty frames from the paintings in different angles. There was also an empty easel on the stage on the right. This symbolized the deplorable situation of non-freedom when ideology became a tool to destroy free artistic thought (Tsyshkevych, 2001). The review of the exhibition, published in the Paris newspaper "Liberation", not only contained historical reflections on the Ukrainian avant-garde and boychukism, but also the names of the young generation of Ukrainians, who after the sculptor Arkhopenko and artist Andriyenko joined the ranks of the *nomadic artists*, who were lost forever: "Asking why this happened, the answer can also be found in the desire of many artists to legalize their art as soon as possible, presenting it as a perfect, well-established phenomenon of national culture. Midway between iconography and abstraction, this warm painting highlights, first and foremost, the willingness of artists for precision and a deep desire to get rid of geographical and ideological boundaries as soon as possible" (Feigelson, 1982). Despite the persistence of stereotypes that have shaped the Western world's view of Ukrainian nonconformist art as "ethnic", i.e. peripheral, the presence of Ukrainian artists in exhibition processes in the West has become increasingly visible to the foreign press, which gave an impulse to the active involvement of nonconformists from Ukraine in the European art market.

## Conclusions

Reflections on the nature of the "nonconformism" concept, which, strange as it may seem, is still not a permanent part of Ukrainian art history, have a labyrinthicity nature, which is conditioned, on the one hand, by the presence of artworks in time, in which they should not be present due to its other ideological attitudes, on the other hand, the artist's inner need for artistic expression, which cannot but be "conflicting" in relation to the time in which he exists, if he is a real innovator, and natural in relation to himself, because the artist feels himself an innovator. Only the external manifestation of the artist's inner nonconformity allows us to determine whether the predominance of internal or external factors occurs in the character and creative manner of the master. Therefore, it is possible to draw only approximate conclusions

about the nonconformity degree of specific works by specific artists with all the complexities of their characters and ideological (not ideological) attitudes. The Ukrainian practice of representation abroad of the nonconformity of the works of our artists of 1970–1980s with the elements of ethnic identification allows us to suppose that from this time onwards the concept of “nonconformism” evolves and its content and essence are still moving towards a constant conceptual form.

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## НЕВЛОВНИЙ СЕНС НОНКОНФОРМІЗМУ. ЗАУВАГИ ЩОДО КОНТЕКСТУ ФУНКЦІОНУВАННЯ ПОНЯТТЯ В УКРАЇНІ

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### Анотація

Мета дослідження – здійснити поняттєво-категоріальну реконструкцію нонконформізму в контексті функціонування поняття в Україні. Дослідження побудоване на міждисциплінарному інтегруванні низки методів, поєднаних концептуально узагальненим уявленням про взаємодію між досліджуваним матеріалом і дослідником, який для досягнення поставленої мети вдається до інтерпретаційного підходу. На рівних правах використовуються як об'єктивні методи дослідження, так і дещо суб'єктивізовані. Зокрема, це історико-генетичний метод, що дає змогу простежувати розвиток категорії «нонконформізм» упродовж часу існування явища, окреслюваного цими категоріями; метод реконструкції, що залучений для вивчення можливостей перекомбінування стійких іконографічних елементів українського мистецького нонконформізму у практиці переосмислення їхнього контексту на рівні інтерпретації, та метод діахронного аналізу суспільно-історичної реальності, спрямований на вивчення історико-культурних процесів, тобто сутнісно-темпоральних зрушень і змін в історико-культурній реальності, на відміну від синхронічного (одночасного) аналізу, котрий спрямований на розкриття сутнісно-просторової природи цієї історико-культурної реальності. Висновки. Роздуми над природою поняття «нонконформізм», що, як це не дивно, досі не є сталим в українському мистецтвознавстві, мають лабіринтоподібний характер, що зумовлено, з одного боку, наявністю у часі художніх творів, яких начебто в цьому часі бути не повинно через його інші ідеологічні настанови, з іншого боку – наявністю в художника внутрішньої потреби мистецького висловлювання, що не може не бути «конфліктним» по відношенню до часу, в якому він існує, якщо є справжнім новатором, і природним по відношенню до самого себе, оскільки художник відчуває себе новатором. Українська практика закордонної репрезентації нонконформності творів наших художників 1970–1980-х років з елементами етноідентифікації дозволяє зробити припущення, що саме з цього часу відбувається і становлення поняття «нонконформізм», і його змістове й сутнісне наповнення, що досі перебуває у русі до сталої поняттєвої форми.

**Ключові слова:** нонконформізм; неофіційне мистецтво; андеграунд; шістдесятництво; діяльність Ігоря Цишкевича

## НЕУЛОВИМЫЙ СМЫСЛ НОНКОНФОРМИЗМА. ЗАМЕЧАНИЯ ПО ПОВОДУ КОНТЕКСТА ФУНКЦИОНИРОВАНИЯ ПОНЯТИЯ В УКРАИНЕ

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### Аннотация

Цель исследования – осуществить понятийно-категориальную реконструкцию нонконформизма в контексте функционирования понятия в Украине. Исследование построено на междисциплинарном интегрировании ряда методов, объединенных концептуально обобщенным представлением о взаимодействии между изучаемым материалом и исследователем, который для достижения поставленной цели прибегает к интерпретационному подходу. На равных правах используются как объективные методы исследования, так и несколько субъективизированные. В частности, это историко-генетический метод, позволяющий проследить развитие категории «нонконформизм» на протяжении существования явления, очерченного этой категорией; метод реконструкции, привлеченный для изучения возможностей перекомбинирования устойчивых иконографических элементов украинского художественного нонконформизма в практике переосмысления их контекста на уровне интерпретации, и метод диахронного анализа общественно-исторической реальности, направленный на изучение историко-культурных процессов, то есть сущностно-темпоральных сдвигов и изменений в историко-культурной реальности, в отличие от синхронического (одновременного) анализа, который направлен на раскрытие сущностно-пространственной природы этой историко-культурной реальности. Выводы. Размышления над природой понятия «нонконформизм», что, как ни странно, до сих пор не являются устоявшимися в украинском искусствоведении, имеют лабиринтообразный характер, что обусловлено, с одной стороны, наличием во времени художественных произведений, которых якобы в этом времени быть не должно из-за иных идеологических установок, с другой – наличием у художника внутренней потребности художественного высказывания, не может не быть «конфликтным» по отношению ко времени, в котором он существует, если является настоящим новатором, и естественным по отношению к самому себе, поскольку художник чувствует себя новатором. Украинская практика зарубежной репрезентации нонконформности произведений наших художников 1970–1980-х годов с элементами этноидентификации позволяет предположить, что именно с этого времени происходит и становление понятия «нонконформизм», и его содержательное и сущностное наполнение, до сих пор находившееся в движении к постоянной понятийной форме.

**Ключевые слова:** нонконформизм; неофициальное искусство; андеграунд; шестидесятничество; деятельность Игоря Цिशкевича