

The Crisis of Theatre Criticism in the Twenty-First Century: Navigating Through the *Argus Gaze*

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Abstract

This study focuses on the crisis discourse surrounding early twenty-first century theatre criticism, discussing the challenges faced by criticism as it confronts its own existence. Criticism practices have become increasingly unsustainable within the framework of conventional discourses of *authority* in a rapidly changing world. In this process, criticism has become a practice that interrogates its own existence through a metacritical approach, and it has turned into a narrative of crisis. In the study, American art critic James Elkins' *Hydra* metaphor, originally used to describe the state of art criticism in the twenty-first century, is adapted to theatre criticism. By adopting Elkins' approach of using a mythological metaphor, the *Argus Gaze* is proposed as a new model that offers an inclusive and pluralistic perspective on the future of theatre criticism. This model embraces diversity and polyphony, aiming to transform theatre criticism into a more flexible and dialogic practice that aligns with the dynamic changes of contemporary culture.

Keywords: Theatre criticism, Crisis of criticism, Metacriticism, Art criticism, Future of criticism.

Yirmi Birinci Yüzyılda Tiyatro Eleştirisinin Krizi: *Argus Bakışıyla İlerlemek*

Öz

Bu çalışma, yirmi birinci yüzyılın ilk çeyreğinde tiyatro eleştirisinin içinde bulunduğu kriz söylemine odaklanır ve eleştirinin karşı karşıya olduğu zorlukları tartışır. Eleştiri pratikleri, hızla değişen dünyada konvansiyonel *otorite* söylemiyle sürdürülemez durumdadır. Bu süreçte eleştiri, metakritik bir yönelimle kendi varoluşunu sorgulayan, yeniden biçimlenmek durumunda kalan bir

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pratik haline gelmiş ve giderek bir kriz anlatısına dönüşmüştür. Çalışmada, Amerikalı sanat eleştirmeni James Elkins'in yirmi birinci yüzyılda sanat eleştirisinin durumunu betimlemek için kullandığı *Hydra* metaforu tiyatro eleştirisine uyarlanır. Elkins'in mitolojik bir metafor kullanma yaklaşımı benimsenerek tiyatro eleştirisinin geleceğine yönelik kapsayıcı ve çoğulcu bir perspektif sunan *Argus Bakışı* yeni bir model olarak önerilir. Bu model, çeşitliliği ve çok sesliliği benimsemenin yanı sıra tiyatro eleştirisini çağdaş kültürün dinamik değişimlerine uyum sağlayacak biçimde daha esnek ve diyalojik bir pratiğe dönüştürmeyi amaçlar.

Anahtar Kelimeler: Tiyatro eleştirisi, Eleştirinin krizi, Metakritik, Sanat eleştirisi, Eleştirinin geleceği.

Virtually every scholar examining the landscape of early twenty-first century theatre criticism -whether beginning with broader reflections on art criticism or focusing specifically on theatre criticism- encounters a consistent emphasis in diverse sources. This widespread focus reveals the global scale of discourse surrounding the *crisis* in criticism and highlights the need for a *metacritical* approach.² Such an approach is increasingly recognized as essential for addressing the challenges and transformations that shape contemporary criticism.

This recognition exists alongside an inability to reach a unified understanding of the crisis itself, as extensive debate on its origins has failed to produce a clear consensus. Furthermore, the nature, scope, and purpose of criticism have remained subjects of ambiguity, shaping discussions throughout history and continuing to influence them today. However, there is general agreement on one point: criticism, particularly in its role of extracting meaning from art -what Noël Carroll (2009) includes "symptomatic meaning, out of artworks" (p. 5)- is no longer seen as a static authority. Instead, it is now understood as a dynamic practice, one that must constantly adapt and redefine itself within shifting social, cultural, and aesthetic contexts.

The ongoing self-reflection, so central to the current crisis in criticism, finds an expression in Namwali Serpell's (2024) article, *Navel-Gazing: Criticism as "crisis-ism"*. Serpell illustrates the field's struggles with a metaphor: *navel-gazing*. Originally rooted in the ancient practice of *omphaloskepsis*, a term once associated with meditation, navel-gazing has acquired a more self-absorbed connotation in modern discourse, signifying an obsessive inward focus (pp. 21-22). In many ways, this metaphor encapsulates the core of the issue: criticism today appears trapped in this inward-looking cycle, questioning its

² At this point, this has been deliberately chosen not to reference specific sources, given the vast body of literature surrounding the crisis in criticism and the need for a metacritical approach. This includes books, academic articles, blogs, and various critical essays. The widespread nature of this discourse across many fields highlights its significant impact on contemporary critical thought. In the later sections of this study, it will be engaged more in detail with these sources where relevant and explore how these discourses have emerged across different media. However, it's important to note that there is far more material on this crisis discourse than can realistically be covered within the scope of this paper.

own existence. While this introspection is crucial for reevaluation, it also reveals the struggle of criticism to redefine and reclaim its significance and relevance.

The discussion about the crisis in criticism tends to revolve more around arts criticism than theatre criticism. As Duška Radosavljević (2016) points out: "A need for metacriticism seems to have arisen at the turn of the twenty-first century as a result of a specific kind of multi-faceted 'crisis.'" (p. 5) This insight serves as a guiding principle for this study, emphasizing that the challenges faced by theatre criticism cannot be addressed in isolation. Instead, these issues must be examined within the broader context of the crisis in arts criticism, which provides a more comprehensive and meaningful perspective for understanding theatre criticism's struggles.

A significant example of the current challenges facing criticism is found in *The Crisis of Criticism*, edited by American art critic Maurice Berger (1998). The title itself highlights the struggles confronting the field. In his chapter Berger underscores how "the critic's voice rarely holds the central estimable place it is accustomed to in most artistic disciplines and communities" (p. 6). He points out that, much like the arts, criticism is increasingly experiencing a process of decentralization (p. 6).

In a similar way, American art historian Gavin Butt (2005), in his introduction to *After Criticism*, opens with an observation: "Recently, it has become apparent that criticism is in trouble" (p. 1). This statement, along with the discussions that follow, highlights an ongoing crisis in criticism, one shaped by shifting cultural priorities that challenge longstanding beliefs about the authority and purpose of criticism. Rather than being the result of a single analysis or critique, this crisis is understood as emerging from varying instances and registers that, together, reflect broader changes in how we view criticism's role in art and culture (p. 1). These accumulating changes signal a growing need for the discipline to reflect on itself more thoroughly, expanding its focus beyond just evaluating artworks to include the historical and participatory dimensions of criticism itself (p. 2).

American aesthetic philosopher Noël Carroll (2009), in *On Criticism*, argues that contemporary criticism has become more superficial, which reduces its social importance (p.5). To address this, Carroll stresses the need to reshape criticism as a humanistic discipline, distancing it from post-humanist approaches (p. 7). However, he does not support an idealized version of criticism based on abstract theory; instead, he advocates for a practical approach that respects critical intuition and makes the practices more coherent (p. 3). Carroll suggests a hierarchical framework where evaluation is central, with other critical activities supporting it (p. 9). This approach aims to restore the importance of criticism and shows that metacriticism is necessary to address the internal challenges of the field.

Australian literary critic Ronan McDonald (2007) takes the crisis discourse to a more radical level in *The Death of the Critic*, where he pronounces *the death of the critic* - a figure

that Butt calls “the transcendental figure of the Enlightenment” (p. 3) - and presents it as a lost cultural authority. This declaration recalls Elinor Fuchs’s pronouncement on the death of the dramatic character and Roland Barthes’s famous assertion of the death of the author. However, McDonald’s perspective on the critic’s death differs from poststructuralist *death* discourses influenced by Nietzsche. Rather than embracing this transition, McDonald approaches it with a sense of nostalgia and a hope for revival.

The State of Criticism, edited by James Elkins and Michael Newman (2008), examines the changing role of criticism during a time of significant upheaval. They explores the challenges and shifts within the field, focusing on how conventional roles of criticism are being questioned, and new functions and frameworks are being debated. Elkins (2003) states: “Art criticism is in worldwide crisis” (p. 1). This statement highlights the ongoing challenges contemporary art criticism faces.

While the crisis in criticism is most clearly seen in the early twenty-first century, its origins go back to ongoing discussions that started in the mid-twentieth century. These discussions have focused on the authority and credibility that shape critical practice. The 1967 Brandeis University symposium, *Art Criticism in the Sixties*, is an early example where critics, especially from Artforum, discussed the social role of criticism and its shifting relationship with art (Moonie, 2021, pp. 2-7).

The concept of crisis, which affects art criticism, finds a parallel when viewed through the lens of theatre criticism, where a similar discourse emerges. Among all the arts, theatre criticism has had a unique influence, largely due to theatre’s direct and interactive engagement with its audience (McDonald, 2007, p. 9). However, theatre criticism now faces its own crisis, reflecting the broader challenges in criticism overall. This situation increases the need for a metacritical perspective that can address both the specific characteristics and changing demands of theatre criticism. At a turning point, theatre criticism must renew itself by re-evaluating its methods and redefining its role in the public sphere.

The evolving landscape of criticism reveals a growing sense of fragility, emphasizing the need for reflection and adaptation in response to current challenges. In this climate of uncertainty, several important questions arise: What are the root causes of this crisis? Is it a global issue, or does it vary across cultural contexts? Will this crisis threaten the present and future of theatre criticism, or could it signal a transformative opportunity? How has the rise of digital media and changing audience behaviors influenced the format and relevance of theatre criticism? These questions highlight the necessity of a metacritical approach to theatre criticism that addresses both its immediate challenges and potential paths forward. In the following section, it will be explored James Elkins’ Hydra metaphor as a framework for examining how categories of crisis in art criticism might resonate within theatre criticism in the twenty-first century.

Adapting James Elkins' *Hydra Metaphor* to Theatre Criticism

The ongoing crisis in theatre criticism is rooted in a complex array of cultural, economic, social, and structural shifts, creating a landscape marked by diverse and, at times, conflicting theories and perspectives. Scholars examining this issue have offered varied explanations, each emphasizing different aspects of the crisis. Duška Radosavljević (2016) attributes this erosion of theatre criticism's conventional authority to a shift in both the nature and perceived role of criticism itself, pointing to a transformed landscape that increasingly undermines its conventional influence. Drawing on Maurice Berger's insights, she highlights key factors Berger identified in his chapter *Introduction: The Crisis of Criticism*, such as:

[D]e-professionalization, decentralization of both the arts and criticism (through increasing diversity), the profit-driven mentality of American culture, academization of criticism (specifically the use of jargon leading to a decline in the quality of writing), and perhaps the 'gravest' problem: the tendency towards insularity and provincialism (i.e., critics not responding to political changes that lower the status of the arts in the public domain). (p. 5)

While Berger (1998) identifies these factors as the causes of the crisis in criticism (pp. 1-14), Michael Newman (2008) offers a different perspective by shifting the focus from the internal structural issues of criticism to a broader concern about the public sphere. He states:

I honestly believe that if there is a crisis of criticism today, it is not because critics are writing badly, nor because of journalistic pressures, nor because of the academicization of criticism, but because this crisis is linked to the problem of constituting a new public sphere. (p. 370)

The core of the crisis is not about the quality of writing or external pressures, but about the lack of a cohesive and adaptable public space. Conventional public forums for criticism have weakened, and there is a growing need for new spaces where criticism can interact more dynamically with audiences. Without these renewed public spaces, Newman (2008) suggests that criticism risks losing its relevance and its ability to shape broader cultural conversations (pp. 368-370).

The lack of consensus regarding the causes of the crisis in criticism is evident in the diverse interpretations offered by scholars. While some approaches consider broad structural issues, others narrow the focus to specific fields or behaviors within criticism itself. For example, Michael Brenson (1998) identifies journalistic art criticism as the primary field in crisis (p. 100). On the other hand, Karen Fricker (2014), in her blog post titled *The Crisis in Theatre Criticism is Critics Saying There's a Crisis*, argues that the real crisis may be the constant declarations of crisis by critics themselves. She suggests that such repeated emphasis on decline could actually destabilize the field. Instead of continually reinforcing a crisis narrative, Fricker believes that experienced critics could make a positive difference by mentoring younger critics, embracing new approaches, and

encouraging inclusive dialogue across different critical practices. Supporting new voices and being open to innovation in theatre criticism are crucial to maintaining its relevance and resilience in today's cultural landscape.

The complexity surrounding the causes of the crisis in criticism underscores the need for a framework that can navigate these multifaceted challenges. Understanding the future of criticism requires us to recognize the current landscape (Fricker, 2015, pp. 49-53). By mapping out the state of theatre criticism in the twenty-first century, we can create a guide for metacritical discussions. To this end, it can be directly engaged with James Elkins' metaphor of the multi-headed Hydra, which critiques the state of contemporary art criticism, and adapt it to the field of theatre. By bringing Elkins' critiques into the conversation, the aim is to show how a similar crisis discourse is developing in theatre, revealing the structural challenges and internal tensions that critics face today. This approach offers a framework to analyze the crisis-prone nature of the field, ultimately calling for a rethinking of its purpose and relevance in a changing cultural landscape.

In *What Happened to Art Criticism?*, James Elkins (2003) suggests that if he were to describe twenty-first century art criticism, he would use the metaphor of Hydra (p. 16). The Hydra, a multi-headed water monster from Greek mythology, is known for its ability to regenerate two heads for every one that is cut off (Coleman, 2007, p. 504). According to Elkins, the first head of the Hydra represents catalog essays, which are often created specifically for commercial art galleries. Elkins points out the common view that these essays are not considered genuine art criticism, asking, *If these writings are not art criticism, what exactly are they?* The second head represents academic theses, which include complex intellectual and cultural references ranging from Bakhtin and Buber to Benjamin and Bourdieu. The third head stands for cultural criticism, where fine arts blend with popular culture, reducing art criticism to just one element in a wider cultural conversation. The fourth head represents prescriptive discourse, where critics adopt a conservative approach, prescribing how art *ought* to be. The fifth head includes philosophical essays that examine how art aligns with or deviates from specific intellectual concepts. The sixth head is explanatory criticism, which focuses more on sparking enthusiasm and guiding readers toward art they may not encounter otherwise, rather than making judgments. Finally, the seventh head represents poetic criticism, where the writing itself becomes the main focus. According to a survey conducted at Columbia University, poetic criticism is now one of the most common goals of art criticism, and Elkins argues that it has become a primary objective in contemporary art criticism (pp. 16-17).

Elkins' choice of the Hydra metaphor is not only due to its potential for categorization through its multiple heads. The Hydra also has the ability to grow a new head each time one is severed, meaning it is not limited to just seven heads. While the heads are categorized as described above, this does not imply that they cannot be rearranged or redefined for other purposes. These heads often overlap or intermingle with each other. In

any case, the seven-headed Hydra analogy proves useful for understanding art criticism (Elkins, 2003, p. 17).

The Hydra analogy captures the complexity of theatre criticism, offering a categorization of its current forms. In this context, the Hydra's first head could represent writings created for promotional brochures or playbills for theatre productions. These pieces often lack critical depth, serving more as advertisements than genuine criticism. By imagining this first head as a twin head - as an adaptation enabled by the Hydra analogy's flexibility- we might also include promotional articles in newspapers or online publications. Such pieces, while accessible to a wide audience, tend to offer only superficial praise aimed at attracting viewers, rather than providing meaningful critical insight.

The second head could represent the intellectual and canonical references, from Aristotle's *Poetics* to Brecht's *A Short Organum for the Theatre*, which encompass the legacy of formalized critical thought in theatre. This type of criticism roots theatre in its historical foundations, drawing on influential texts that have shaped the discipline for centuries. However, it risks limiting its perspective by often prioritizing established voices over contemporary ones, which can restrict critical engagement with modern innovations and diverse viewpoints that could enrich the field.

The third head represents a form of criticism that, while combining fine arts and popular theatre imagery into a diverse mix, reduces theatre criticism to a single *flavor* within the broader cultural *stew* of tastes. In this context, theatre criticism often gets overshadowed by popular cultural criticism, losing its unique voice and becoming just one commentary among many. This head reflects the challenge of maintaining theatre criticism's distinct identity and methodological rigor in the face of overwhelming popular culture, where the nuanced analysis of theatre risks being diluted by the demands of mass appeal.

The fourth head represents a conservative form of criticism that prescribes specific rules for how theatre should be, often drawing from conventional interpretations of Aristotle's *Poetics*. This type of criticism tends to favor conventional, text-based productions and may resist innovations in postdramatic or experimental theatre, limiting the potential evolution of the art form. It highlights the tension between preserving theatre's classical heritage and embracing transformative, boundary-pushing practices that reflect modern sensibilities.

The fifth head includes philosophical essays that examine how theatre aligns with or deviates from various intellectual concepts. This form of criticism delves into abstract ideas, viewing theatre through lenses like phenomenology, existentialism, or semiotics. While philosophical criticism can provide deep, conceptual insights into theatre, it risks alienating general audiences, as it often assumes familiarity with complex theoretical frameworks that may not be easily accessible to all theatregoers.

The sixth head represents explanatory criticism, which aims to inspire enthusiasm and transport audiences to theatrical works through imagination, rather than focusing on critical judgment. However, this type of criticism has its drawbacks. The lack of analytical depth in explanatory criticism can result in a superficial treatment of a work's thematic, structural, or technical aspects.

Finally, the seventh head represents poetic criticism, where the writing itself is valued as an art form. In this form of theatre criticism, the critic adopts a poetic style, emphasizing aesthetic expression over analytical insight. Poetic criticism encourages readers to see the critique as an art form in its own right, turning it into a personal and aesthetic experience. However, this strong focus on aesthetics can sometimes diminish the critical depth and structural analysis, potentially overshadowing the substance of the work itself.

The landscape of criticism within the Anglo-American sphere, both historically and in contemporary practice, differs in various ways from that in other regions -Türkiye, for instance- where theatre criticism has yet to fully establish itself as a formalized discipline. However, even in non-Anglo-American cultures, we can still observe many of the Hydra's metaphorical heads in various media forms, such as newspapers and magazines. This raises an important question: Does the crisis in theatre criticism show up more intensely in places where the field is highly institutionalized, perhaps amplified by standardized expectations and pressures to conform? Or does the lack of institutional support create its own set of challenges for independent critics? Amanda Campbell (2016), in her article *Criticism in Crisis: Theatre Reviews in Atlantic Canada*, provides an example of how the lack of institutional support creates challenges for independent critics. In Halifax, Nova Scotia, where there is limited institutional backing, Campbell highlights the difficulties faced by critics working outside established markets. Unlike Toronto, where a strong theatre culture supports extensive sharing and audience engagement, Halifax lacks these mechanisms. While the smaller but supportive theatre community in Halifax allows her to focus on dramaturgical criticism, Campbell emphasizes that economic pressures remain a constant obstacle for independent critics. This shows that in less institutionalized environments, critics face financial instability and limited visibility, which presents unique challenges compared to places where the field is more formally established (p. 33).

The goal is not only to understand the current state of criticism and the causes of its crisis, but also to envision a way forward that addresses both the challenges and complexities of the current landscape. In this regard, as Glenn W. Most (2015) points out in *Crisis and Criticism*, both *crisis* and *criticism* share the ancient Greek root *krinein*, meaning *to discern* or *to decide*. This shared origin links the idea of a critical turning point, which we associate with crises, and the act of evaluation and judgment, central to criticism (Crosthwaite, 2011, p. 1). This connection suggests that criticism, particularly in times of crisis, is inherently forward-looking, assessing what will remain relevant and what may fade away. Crisis acts as a defining moment that shapes future events, while criticism works to

determine what will be useful going forward and to distinguish it from what is outdated or merely habitual (p. 607).

Reimagining Theatre Criticism Beyond the Crisis: *Argus Gaze*

James Elkins' use of the Hydra metaphor to describe the complexity of contemporary art criticism is a creative approach. The many-headed Hydra represents the wide and often contradictory roles within criticism, making it a useful tool for understanding the current state of the field. Similarly, for the pluralistic and dynamic demands of future theatre criticism, this study proposes the *Argus Gaze* model, inspired by the hundred-eyed giant Argus Panoptes from Greek mythology. This framework emphasizes the need for theatre criticism to adopt a multidimensional approach that synthesizes diverse perspectives.

In Ovid's (1984) *Metamorphoses*, Argus is described as having "a hundred eyes round his head, that took their rest two at a time in succession while the others kept watch and stayed on guard" (p. 47). He is tasked with keeping Io under constant surveillance, embodying an unwavering vigilance (Ovid, 1984, p. 47). To be Argus-eyed means to be observant and vigilant (Jobes, 1962, p. 123). Argus, with his ability to perceive in all directions at once, symbolizes the capacity to embrace multiple perspectives. Just as Argus could see from many angles, theatre criticism can synthesize a wide range of viewpoints, offering a layered and inclusive analysis.

This multidimensionality of Argus as a symbol finds resonance not only in mythology but also in art and scholarship, further enriching its application to criticism. For example, Paul Barolsky (2018), in his article *The Many Eyes of Argus and the Art of Seeing*, examines Jacob van Campen's painting *Argus, Mercury, and Io*. Barolsky highlights how the artwork, inspired by Ovid's *Metamorphoses*, explores themes of looking and seeing, not looking and not seeing (pp. 225-227). This artistic representation of Argus's multidimensional vision parallels the need for theatre criticism to adopt a similarly multifaceted approach, embracing diverse perspectives to address the current crisis in criticism.

Building on this symbolism, the Argus Gaze emphasizes the potential of theatre criticism to transcend static, unidimensional frameworks. By drawing inspiration from Argus, whose hundred eyes signify persistent observation and adaptability, this metaphor advocates for a critical practice that is equally multifaceted and responsive. The Argus Gaze symbolizes vigilance, coherence, and collaboration within criticism. This distinction reinforces the need for theatre criticism to evolve into a practice capable of accommodating the complexities of contemporary performance.

The Argus Gaze can be understood through two primary formulations. The first is the *collective gaze*, which involves incorporating diverse perspectives on a single work. The second is the *unified gaze*, which embraces plurality within one critical perspective.

In the first formulation of the Argus Gaze, a single theatrical work is analyzed from various perspectives by individuals with diverse backgrounds. This approach emphasizes the value of diverse interpretations, where critics bring their cultural, intellectual, and experiential lenses to independent analyses. By doing so, these perspectives, when published together, not only capture the multifaceted nature of a performance but also create a space for dialogue that bridges gaps between differing viewpoints. An example of the system promoted by this model is the *3Views* (3viewstheater) theatre criticism project. This project brings together three different interpretations for each production, emphasizing diversity in criticism. In this model, each critic's perspective complements, rather than diminishes, the others, fostering a collaborative discourse. Such a framework highlights the interplay of agreement and dissent, where contrasting opinions do not undermine but rather deepen the overall understanding of the work. By creating an environment where different voices interact and inform one another, a dynamic space is created where innovative interpretations can thrive. This approach is not only inclusive but also challenges conventional, authoritative views of criticism, promoting a more flexible practice that expands the intellectual and creative boundaries of the field.

The second formulation of the Argus Gaze focuses on pluralism within a critic's perspective. Just as Argus has many eyes, a critic can integrate multiple viewpoints into a single analysis of a work. By balancing different viewpoints, the critic moves beyond conventional one-dimensional analysis, fostering a more dynamic and reflective practice. Like Argus, whose many eyes observe from different angles, this model values the richness that multiple perspectives bring to a critique. It encourages a shift from an authoritarian view toward a pluralistic, inclusive practice that mirrors the diversity of contemporary audiences.

Adapting Elkins' Hydra metaphor to theatre criticism helps to illustrate its complexity, but finding a single solution for each of its heads is challenging, as each head represents a different issue that often overlaps or interacts with others. In this regard, the Argus Gaze offers a way to address some of the problems posed by the Hydra metaphor. One of the heads in Elkins' Hydra metaphor concerns the dominance of canonical texts and conventional perspectives, which often overlook contemporary and postdramatic approaches. The Argus Gaze addresses this by incorporating multiple viewpoints, allowing criticism to move beyond these frameworks. Just as Argus's eyes perceive from different angles, critics from diverse backgrounds bring together both classical and modern perspectives. This balance between past and present enriches criticism, making it more flexible and multifaceted. Another issue highlighted by the Hydra metaphor is the dominance of conservative criticism, which imposes rigid rules about how theatre should be. This type of criticism often adheres to conventional forms and resists innovation. The Argus Gaze addresses this by offering a broader perspective that welcomes experimental, postdramatic, and innovative approaches. Just as Argus's eyes see in all directions at once, this model encourages openness to contemporary sensibilities and new theatre practices, fostering the evolution of criticism.

Maurice Berger (1998) argues that the most impactful criticism directly engages with culture, fostering new artistic practices and creating meaningful connections with audiences. According to Berger, criticism should not merely be an act of judgment; it must also be a dynamic, evolving conversation that provokes, inspires, and challenges (p. 11). This perspective aligns with the Argus Gaze, which transforms criticism into a participatory space, blending analytical rigor with cultural dialogue. In the digital age, where voices are no longer confined to conventional media, the Argus Gaze model can position criticism as an agent of cultural exchange. In this way, theatre criticism can evolve to meet the demands of the digital era, transforming the plurality of voices from a challenge or chaos into an asset. This approach shifts criticism from being merely a tool of evaluation to a participatory space that fosters a more interactive relationship between the artist, critic, and audience, as desired by the scholars referenced at the beginning of this paper. Criticism thus becomes not only a judgmental act but also a collaborative force contributing to the ongoing evolution of the cultural landscape.

Conclusion

The discourse surrounding the crisis in criticism goes beyond merely identifying a situation; it reveals that criticism is undergoing a process of self-interrogation in the present century. Criticism, much like a reflective mirror in a dimly lit room, now gazes inward, seeking not only its reflection but the shadows of its purpose. The figures seated at the roundtable of criticism are directing their attention not to the artworks themselves but to the existence of criticism itself. On one hand, the advantages brought by technological advancements and the freedoms they provide are seen as opportunities. On the other hand, economic and ontological issues highlight the challenges faced by critics, placing criticism on a precarious equilibrium.

In this study, Elkins' Hydra metaphor, originally used to describe the state of art criticism, has been adapted to reflect the state of theatre criticism in the twenty-first century. This multi-headed metaphor illustrates the factors that have contributed to the decentralization and reconfiguration of criticism practices. In this context, the Hydra serves as a useful tool, highlighting the need for theatre criticism to move beyond conventional models and embrace more diverse and flexible approaches.

Drawing inspiration from Elkins' use of classical mythology to categorize the state of contemporary art criticism, this study proposes the concept of the Argus gaze for the future of theatre criticism. The many-eyed Argus, with the ability to see in all directions, symbolizes a theatre criticism that unites and encompasses diverse perspectives. This pluralistic and multi-layered approach reimagines criticism not as a singular authority, but as a flexible, dialogic space that adapts to the diversity of modern audiences. By positioning criticism as an inclusive platform for dialogue, the Argus gaze offers a metaphor for helping theatre criticism move beyond its current crisis, evolving into a practice that reflects and engages with the complexities of contemporary culture. In this

way, the model fosters a more inclusive and democratic space for theatre criticism, resonating with the broader cultural shift towards inclusivity and diversity in contemporary society.

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