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DOCTORAL THESIS
Performativity of artworks created in nature

-abstract-

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ABSTRACT OF THE DOCTORAL THESIS

Introduction

Choosing of the subject

The theme of the thesis is the performativity artworks created in natural environment. I started to deal with this theoretical problem when I deepened my research on contemporary art in Transylvania, focusing on such artists that were part of the MAMŰ group, the AnnART festival or other contemporary artists like Pál Péter, Erőss István, Péter Alpár, Berze Imre and Éltes Barna. Researching the works of the artists mentioned, I came to the following conclusion: There are too few theoretical researches about these artists. About the MAMŰ group, for example, I have found writings that relate about generalizations¹, but I haven't found any concrete analysis of the works. About the AnnART festival we can find writings from Ütő Gusztáv², and the majority of the works are archived by the ETNA Foundation³, but this also did not result in a detailed theorization of the artworks. And if we take in consideration the artists that work today, we can find articles in the press, but these are also partial, and don't debate complex theoretical issues. These facts led to the beginning of my in-depth research.

Throughout the research, I compared the works mentioned above with those of the works artists from the west. Thus, I found many similarities, but also differences between the artworks. I have noticed that local art, besides being inspired by local folk culture, has influences both from the East and from the West. I have concluded that I can write about Transylvanian contemporary art, unless I deal with some aspects of art in global parameters. For this reason, I have also researched the environment in which the contemporary art of the West, but also the one in the East developed, and the way in which art approaches the natural environment. I wrote about European, Chinese painting, and I studied the art of European and Japanese gardening.

With the development of my research, I asked myself: what role can the natural environment fulfill in the process of artistic creation? For example, the artists of the MAMŰ

¹ Novotny Tihamér, Chikán Bálint etc. wrote more essays about the MAMŰ group, that can be read on the group's website. URL: <https://mamusociety.wordpress.com/about/>, date: 2017.02.16.

² Ütő Gusztáv: *Adalékok az akcióművészet történetéhez Erdélyben és Székelyföldön*. DLA értekezés, Budapest, Magyar Képzőművészeti Egyetem Doktori Iskola, 2012.

³ Etna Foundation archive. URL: <http://www.c3.hu/~actio-ts/eng/annart.html>, date: 2017.02.16.

group had a totally different motivation to work in natura, than the artist from America. The question may be asked: What kind of relationship develops in such a situation between the natural environment, the artist, the work of art and the spectator? How does the natural environment differ from a gallery or a workshop? If there was not a spectator, then who or what could have taken this status (in the case of works before 90)? What kind of spectator roles would develop? What kind of role does the natural environment take in its relation with the artwork? What is the difference between the art created in a natural environment in the West and in Transylvania?

As a result of my research, I have come to deal also with the art created in nature in western cultures. It was easier to debate my findings if I compared transilvanian art to other artistic practices.

From a theoretical point of view, I started to research the performative in an artistic environment, because the term is rarely used in the artistic discourse, although in the field of theater it is quite common. Dorothea von Hantelmann, art historian, has introduced the term of performativity in the artistic field. She is saying that it is based on the ability of the artwork to have an effect on the viewer, so it is based on the relationship between the artwork and the spectator. Based on her theory, I developed this term, referring it to the artworks created in a natural environment. I have defined a unity that I use in my analysis: creator, creation, nature, spectator. Depending on the presence or absence of one or more elements, different situations arise, resulting different issues for debate.

In my thesis I used mostly terms that belong to the field of theater, and I used them, or I developed new meanings that can be applied in the field of visual arts. I considered the necessity of this because I noticed a lack in this matter in the theory of visual arts. The meaning of many terms used is at the borderline between the two artistic fields. To exemplify some terms: performative, performance, performative space, spectator, aura, atmosphere, site specific art, etc.

As an active artist, I have always been interested of the effect that a work of art can produce. It is crucial for an artist that his work not only provides a visual experience, but that it also captures and transmits the artist's state of consciousness. For example, Chinese painters have worked hard to capture the energy of the universe in their works. In the 20th century, art began to focus more on creating experiences, rather the offering images. I am inspired by nature, but I do not create landscapes. They can rather be called interior landscapes. Because it is of great

importance to me the effect that a work of art can convey. Nature and the relationship of art with nature inspires me, thus it was somewhat natural to choose the theme of the doctoral thesis.

Structure of the thesis

I divided my research into two large chapters. In the first chapter I developed the theoretical part of the thesis, and then in chapter two I illustrate the theoretical definitions by the analysis of artworks.

In the chapter called *performativity* I defined first what the difference is between the terms *performativity* and *performance*. I define the terms so that I can fit them either in the field of visual arts or in the field of theater. Dorothea von Hantelmann considers them to be different, but defines performativity in the field of visual arts, where performance also belongs. Erika Fischer-Lichte believes that the two terms are related, and she considers them to be from the field of theater, because they are based on an action, and the terms come from the word “to perform”. So if we take into account the first approach mentioned, then we associate the terms with the visual arts, but by the second definition we associate them to theater. In conclusion, we can conclude that they belong to both fields.

In the chapter *The Art of Experience* I describe the more detailed characteristics and definition of performance art, but my thesis is mostly based on the question of the performative.

In the first chapter I base my definitions on the theory of Dorothea von Hantelmann. She defines that any work of art is performative, because it has an effect on the viewer, eventually changes its reality. Based on this definition, I try to define what kind of relationships can be develop between nature, artist, artwork and spectator. What kind of performative relationships can there be defined in these relationships? I analyze more possibilities: Can the natural environment be a performative space? Can the artwork in relation to the natural environment have an effect on the viewer? What relationship can arise between the work of art and nature? Are they completing or destroying each other? Can nature become the co-creator of the work, if this is assumed by the artist's intervention in nature? In the next chapter I analyze these questions, where I am dealing with the positioning of the viewer in the 20th century arts. This chapter is based on the theories of Nicolas Bourriard and Jacques Rancière. Can nature

become a viewer, or an active participant of the artwork, as redefined in the 20th century, if the work of art requires this?

Furthermore I analyze the terms of aura, atmosphere and spirit of the place based on Walter Benjamin, Gernot Böhme and Mircea Eliade. The precondition of performance is to create an effect, produce an influence. But the question may arise: what creates this effect, what influences the spectator? What is that invisible but perceptible aspect of this relationship? What can this be in nature?

Site specific art is defined by Miwon Kwon, who claims there are several types, definitions of how a work of art can be connected to a place or a theoretical idea.

In the chapter dealing with the relationship between man, nature and art, I discuss the problem in a Western context, but also reflect on the eastern point of view. I research the subject in history, and then I debate the phenomenon in the 20th century. It is important to know this data, because the artistic manifestations that interact with nature were born in this cultural context. After these, I present how the art of the 20th century began to focus on the creation of experiences, on the action included in the work of art, instead of venerating the art object itself. How a new kind of perception of nature developed in the artistic field, and how this all came to reflection in the contemporary art of Transylvania.

In the second large chapter, I exemplify those defined previously through selected artworks. I divide this chapter into several parts by the presence or absence of some or more of the components defined: Creator, Creation, Nature, Spectator.

In the first part, all four elements are present: Creator, Creation, Nature, Spectator. As an example I use the actions and performances of artists from the AnnART festival. I debate some theoretical aspects on their basis, like: the problem of the performative space, the condition of the site specific art, and the possible roles of the spectators.

In the second part, the spectator is missing from the defined unity. I analyze the works of the MAMŮ group, as well as land art from the West and works from local, contemporary young artists. Here I also discuss the question of the performative space, the manifestation of the spirit of the place in the works of art, and last but not least, how the site specific art is linked to its place of creation.

In the third part, I discuss the situation when the artist is not present. I'm analyzing situations created by land art. I debate the possible situations of the spectator. What effect does

nature have on the viewer, in relation to the work of art? What kind of performative relationships can be developed in this context? How can the spectator become an active participant in those works?

In the fourth part I analyze the situation in which only nature and the work of art is present. As examples, I use both local and western works. The question is, what kind of performative relationship develops between nature and human intervention? How can nature become the co-creator of the artwork, if the artistic conception demands this?

In the last part, nature is taken into the gallery. In this situation, how does the performative space manifest itself? What functions do spectators fulfill? How are these works related to the environment?

As a conclusion, in the first part I develop the theoretical bases of the thesis, after which I exemplify in the second part my affirmations with works from the 20th century art from the West and from Transylvania.

CHAPTER I.

Performativity

The terms *performative* and *performance* come from the English word "to perform", which means doing something, presenting something. Because the two terms resemble each other, they are often used with similar meanings, but differences can also be defined.

Performance is an art movement in the second half of the 20th century. The performative is a term that was introduced in the theoretical discourse by J.L. Austin, after which John Searl and Judith Butler further developed the term. Dorothea von Hantelmann has defined his applicability in the field of visual arts.

Lohn. L Austin first used the term performance in 1955 in his book, entitled *How to do things with words*.⁴ He defined: the spoken word may be constative or performative. After saying some words, they can change a situation. So words have the power to change reality, like vows, condemnations, etc. But if it does not have a social or institutional support, then it can be

⁴ Austin, John L.: *How to do things with words*. 1955, Great Britain, Oxford University Press, 1962.

considered invalid.⁵ In 2010, Dorothea von Hantelmann wrote a book titled *How to do things with art*. As the title suggests, he relied on Austin's theory. It has defined new aspects of the term performative, and how it was influenced by the development of the experience society. In the arts, it has led to the creation of experiences. The experiential turn⁶ led to a shift in arts, that ment, that no longer the focus of art was the creation of artistic objects, but rather the offering of experiences through art.

Hantelmann argues that the sign, as well as the word, can define, change reality, so it can be considered performative.⁷ She considers that „It makes little sense to speak of a performative artwork because every artwork has a reality-producing dimension.”⁸ Rather, it defines a shift in arts focus: that it concentrates more on effect, rather than on visual representation, that is, quoting Austin, a shift from "what it says" to "what it does".⁹ „What the notion of the performative in relation to art actually points to is a shift from what an artwork depicts and represents to the effects and experiences that it produces—or, to follow Austin, from what it “says” to what it “does.” In principle, the performative triggers a methodological shift in how we look at *any* artwork and in the way in which it produces meaning. Understood in this way, it indeed offers a very interesting and challenging change of perspective. Used as a label to categorize a certain group of contemporary artworks, however, it makes little sense.”¹⁰ Hantelmann defines the term "experiential turn," as it develops in contemporary art. It is obvious that any work of art creates an effect, but in recent decades art has focused on creating experiences. No more is it important for the artist to express his artistic self, but rather to create spaces with which the audience, the spectator interacts.¹¹

⁵ Ibid., 28.

⁶ Hantelmann gave the title for her essay „The experiential turn” referring to the theory of Gerhard Schulze sociologist, who wrote about the concept of the „experience society”. In: Schulze, Gerhard: A Német szövetségi Köztársaság kulturális átalakulása. 1992. In: Wessely Anna (ed.): *A kultúra szociológiája*. Budapest, Osiris Kiadó, Láthatatlan Kollégium, 2003, 190. German title: *Strukturwandel der Öffentlichkeit. Untersuchungen zu einer Kategorie der bürgerlichen Gesellschaft*

⁷ Hantelmann, Dorothea von: The Experiential Turn. 2014. In: *On performativity, Walker Living Collection Catalogue*. URL: <http://www.walkerart.org/collections/publications/performativity/experiential-turn/>, date: 2016.07.02.

⁸ In: Hantelmann, Dorothea von: op.cit.

⁹ Austin, John L.: op.cit.

¹⁰ In: Hantelmann, Dorothea von: op.cit.

¹¹ Hantelmann, Dorothea von: op.cit.

Hantelmann also discusses Butler's definition.¹² Based on this, she claims that performativity has nothing to do with performance. Butler argues that the performative act produces a reality, but not by intent, but rather by some social conventions that are supported by repetition. These actions become comprehensible to others, only if they are carried out in a conventional context. Performance, on the other hand, just wants to break these conventions. So Hantelmann claims that the terms are not related, on the contrary, they are in contradiction to each other.

Erika Fischer-Lichte argues otherwise. She believes the two terms have the same roots. She also uses Butler's theory, in which she claims that man acts with his body, uses it as actors do.¹³ But this definition can't be used for all contemporary artistic movements, such as performance, because it is no longer possible to speak of staging of the script, rather we are dealing with unique and unrepeatable artistic actions.¹⁴ So she has redefined the term of performativity so it can be used in relation to contemporary artistic phenomenon as well.

As we have seen, the two terms may have both opposite and similar definitions. In my definition, the two terms have more similarities than differences. I define this similarity by the fact that in works of art made in nature (performance, land art, landscape intervention, etc.) all contain in one way or another an action or a happening.

The natural environment, through its effect on man (artist), can urge him to act (create). In the case of an action based work we can talk about performance. But when we deal with a land art, landscape intervention etc. the artist's action may be also part of the work. Furthermore, this work can urge the spectator to an action. So we can deduce that although this kind of work (land art, landscape intervention) is not centered around human action, they still contain a certain form of action that comes from the creator or the spectator.

And besides all this, if we do not take into account the human presence, then we can define the relationship between the work of art and nature as a kind of action, happening: because it changes the reality of another. All the processes through which a work of art made in nature changes, and how the natural environment changes through the work of art, all can be regarded as actions, so these works contain action, without human presence.

¹² Butler considers that we aren't born with our sexual identity, but we learn it through the social norms and examples.

¹³ Fischer-Lichte, Erika: *A performativitás esztétikája*. Budapest, Balassi Kiadó, 2009, 33.-34. German title: *Ästhetik des Performativen*

¹⁴ *Ibid.* 34.

Tarnay László argues that everything that is a communicative action can be considered a performance. So all works, even if they aren't performances, can be considered as similar, because it implies some kind of action or happening. I further define the term of performativity based on the debated works.¹⁵

So we can conclude that the terms performativity and performance are related and are at the borderline between visual art and theater.

Performativity of nature

Dorothea von Hantelmann stated that the performativity of the 20th century art can be defined as no longer offering an image, but creating an effect, changing the reality of the viewer.¹⁶ If we think of works created in a natural environment, we can see that if the work of art is placed in nature (whether made of materials from nature or foreign material placed in nature) sooner or later they will be destroyed by natural processes. Nature changes the reality of the work, so it is a performative relationship. And we can state that the artwork changes the reality of the natural environment, if the concept of the work, the human intervention requires this. If the intervention is of great proportions, such as the first land arts in America, the work of art, and not the natural environment, is the active pole of performative relation, the work produces the change, the effect. So we can state that through different interactions between the artworks and nature, we can find different kinds of performative relations. An interesting situation can also be defined from this point of view: when nature becomes the co-creator of the work, by the artist's intent. He conceives his work in such a way that nature ends the creative process.

Performativity of space

The natural environment can therefore become a performative space because it can have an effect on the artist, through it on the artwork, and last but not least on the spectator. According to Hantelmann's definition, we can claim that the natural environment can be a source

¹⁵ Tarnay László: Performansz és az újmédia. In: Di Blasio Barbara (ed.): *A performansz határain*. Budapest, Kijárat Kiadó, 2012, 81.

¹⁶ Hantelmann, von Dorothea: *How to Do Things with Art, What Performativity Means in Art*. Zürich, JRP Ringier, 2010. 13 – 14.

of inspiration for the artist. This is how the work of art is born, and thus the performance is manifested before the act of creation.

Erika Fischer-Lichte defines performative space in a theatrical context. She claims that any space that is used for a performative purposes, in turn, becomes a performative space. Not space itself is performative, but is manifested by what is happening in it.¹⁷ If we think of a natural environment, we can define that any natural space, which is used as a location for any kind of performative action, this space becomes performative.

The spectator

Jacques Rancière argues that in contemporary theater, the spectator must become active, learn through interaction, and not be passive. He defines two ways how the attitude of the audience can be changed. First of all theater can show something that makes the spectator think, pulls it out of its comfort zone. Second of all performance can include the spectator in its action.¹⁸ Although Rancière states these about the theatrical environment, we can use these concepts also in the visual arts. In the last decades the boundaries between visual art and theater are being blurred more and more. Especially in the case of performance art we can find difficulties in defining it as being theater or visual art. So everything that Rancière claims can be understood as valid for visual arts as well. Performances include the spectator in their actions, urge them to act, shocks them, makes them to think, so the spectator becomes an integral part of the artistic creation, becomes a participant.

The spectator in Transylvania before 1990

In Transylvania, before the 90s, unofficial art had little publicity, only artists, friends, family, etc were present on artistic manifestations. Modern art was forbidden. It was a time when one-day exhibitions were organized, where sometimes artists presented performances. Many times artists escaped into nature, where they weren't under the supervision of the authorities. So their actions took place in nature, but they were not necessarily land art. They can be defined as

¹⁷ Fischer-Lichte, Erika: op.cit., 150.

¹⁸ Rancière, Jacques: *The emancipated Spectator*. London, New Left Books, 2009, Gregory Elliott (transl.)

something between landscape intervention and performance art. The natural environment is the space in which they unfold, but what they often created were also based on human action.

In that time the desire of artists to express themselves was greater than their aspiration for any kind of fame. Fame could have brought more harm than good to them . For this reason, the documentation of the works was neglected in many cases. Of many artworks we have information only through the accounts of those present at the moment of their creation, or we can obtain information from their creators.

Nature as a participant

The question may be asked: If there is no human presence, can we talk about a finished work of art? If the work of art is not seen by man, then did it reach its ultimate goal? As I defined earlier, in the 20th century, the role of the spectator is crucial for the artworks completion. He can be a co-creator, participant, or at least a viewer. Can this role be taken over by nature?

Through the following research it can be understood how nature is capable of reaction. Masaru Emoto has researched the different types of formation of water crystals according to some external factors. The effect of words, music and positive or negative thought can be seen in their structure. The positive effects created perfectly geometric crystals, but in reaction to aggressive, negative words the crystals became amorphous. He also experimented with water from various sources: polluted river, spring water, etc. in these cases he also discovered enormous differences.¹⁹

Cleve Backster in the 1960s with a machine used by the CIA (lie detector, polygraph) measured the reaction of plants to external stimulating factors. They responded differently to cutting than to watering for example. Further, if the same action was only executed in thought, the plants would have the same reaction as for the committed act itself.²⁰

¹⁹ Emoto, Masaru: *Hidden messages in water*. David A. Thayne (transl.), New York, Beyond words. URL: <http://www.masaru-emoto.net/english/water-crystal.html>, date: 2016.05.23.

²⁰ Flatow, Ira: New research on plant intelligence may forever change how you think about plants. PRI, URL cím: <http://www.pri.org/stories/2014-01-09/new-research-plant-intelligence-may-forever-change-how-you-think-about-plants>, date: 2016.01.10.

So it can be seen that nature is capable of reaction. Just as a man can react to a work of art, one can assume that nature can also have a reaction. There certainly are changes in the natural environment when the artist interferes with his creation in the unity of nature, but this reaction can not easily be perceived.

As we have previously defined, the natural environment and the artwork placed in it are in interaction. In contemporary art, the artistic conception involves an active spectator. In this way, the artist can conceive his work in such a way that he urges the natural environment to interact. So the natural environment can fulfill all the roles assumed by the modern audience: it can be a passive perceiver, as we have seen from its ability to react, but it can also be an active participant, but this must be imposed by the creator, by man.

Aura, atmosphere and the spirit of the place in researching the effect created on the spectator

The basic condition of performance is to produce an effect. But one can ask the question, what is that invisible but perceptible energy that helps to achieve these relations between the elements of the creative act?

Aura

Walter Benjamin has defined the aura, in relation to the work of art. He was the first to write about this term. He argues that the aura of the artwork lies in its originality, which can't be reproduced.²¹

In artistic movements, that are based on ephemerality, originality, the uniqueness of the work, and the fact that it can't be repeated, is of major importance. It is a general debate if a happening, fluxus, performance can be reproduced. These actions can be lived only in the moment of their happening. The happening has a decisive role. Impulses of the moment open infinitely many ways in which such action can unroll. The aura of the work, as defined by

²¹ Benjamin, Walter: *A műalkotás a technikai reprodukálhatóság korában*. Kurucz Andrea (transl.), 1936. Adresă URL: http://aura.c3.hu/walter_benjamin.html, date: 2016.09.17. English title: The Work of Art in the Age of Mechanical Reproduction 1935

Benjamin, can't be recorded, and can't be repeated, reproduced after the finalization of the performance. If we are dealing with a re-make, it can't be considered identical to the original: If the action is exactly the same, then it loses its spontaneity, and if only the concept remains, and the unrolling of the event is left to chance, then it does not require a lot of explanation for why the action does not become identical to the original. But the remake also will have his unique aura.

Atmosphere

Walter Benjamin stated that aura exists, but Gernot Böhme²² defines what it is. He calls it atmosphere. He claims that it doesn't belong to the artwork, nor to the viewer, but to the common reality of both. He finds that there are many kinds of atmospheres, but the history of art has not yet defined them all. Both theoreticians deal with a phenomenon, but do not detail its characteristics specifically. I would add that the natural environment has its own energy, which exerts its effect on the one who is in it. This way it has an the effect on the artist (inspires him), who under its effect creates his work of art. But how does that energetic relationship develop? In the creative process, the energy that comes from the artist, comes from the outside and passes through him, is imprinted in his work. The one who resonates with this energy that is emanated from the artwork, can assimilate this energy, and in some cases this can change and transform him. This is a relationship that has existed since the beginnings of art between artist, art and receiver. This process has long been defined by Chinese painting, and the 20th century art theory also is beginning to deal with these definitions. If we think of an artwork that has been created in nature, the energy of the natural environment also contributes to that energy of the artwork. Different places have different energies, and therefore different artworks will be born on each site.

²²Böhme, Gernot: Atmosphere as the Fundamental Concept of a New Aesthetic. In: *Thesis Eleven*, no.36. SAGE Publications, 1993, 113. URL cím: <http://journals.sagepub.com/doi/pdf/10.1177/072551369303600107>, date: 2016.04.03.

Energy

Each place has a distinctive energy characteristic to it. We know places where we feel different even today, these places have a special energy. It simply changes our mood if we stay in these places. In these kinds of places with a special energetic vibration, the people that lived there in ancient times built their sacred buildings and sites.

The following research demonstrates the validity of my previous statements. In 1983 Charles Brooker²³ measured with a magnetometer the energy of a place considered to be sacred since ancient times. Here some megalithic stones are placed that form a circle. They are called the Rollington circles. Here he measured high and low frequency energy fields that are related to the location of the stones.

Sacred space

Mircea Eliade has defined that for the religious man space is not homogeneous: there are sacred places, which represent the axis of the world for the person. Eliade defines two types of spaces: sacred and profane. Sacred space is a fixed point through which reality can be experienced. On the other hand, the profane space does not provide a fixed point, everything is homogeneous and thus confusing.²⁴

Sacred places must be found, as Eliade defined. But can the artist create a sacred space, defined by him? These can be viewed as self-defined spaces in contemporary art. The artist may have several reasons for seeking or creating a sacred space in the monotony of the world: escape from reality (MAMÚ artists escaped from the regime, as well as AnnART artists, who were looking for a place for free speech). It may be a kind of self-seeking, or a desire to restore a relationship with nature. Eliade claims that man can't define sacred places, he only has the right

²³ Brooker, Charles: Magnetism and Standing Stones. In: Kenward, Michael (ed.): *New Scientist*, London, New Science Publications, January 13, Vol. 97, no. 1340, 1983, 105. URL: <https://books.google.ro/books?id=mUu6o7SiSZ8C&pg=PA105&lpg=PA105&dq=Charles+Brooker.+Magnetism+and+Standing+Stones,+New+Scientist&source=bl&ots=S11V2UxsYx&sig=iGKpbHCniBp2N4EZugOgY11luJQ&hl=en&sa=X&ved=0ahUKEwjv0ejUudPPAhXMHJoKHe2ZBLgQ6AEIMjAD#v=onepage&q=Charles%20Brooker.%20Magnetism%20and%20Standing%20Stones%2C%20New%20Scientist&f=false>, date: 2016.11.22.

²⁴ Eliade, Mircea: *Szent és profán*. Berényi Gábor (transl.), Budapest, Európa Könyvkiadó, 1999. English title: The Sacred and the Profane

to find them through signs.²⁵ As I said, for the MAMŰ artists the sacred space was the Vizeshalmok hills, near Târgu Mureș, and for the artists of the AnnART festival the sacred space was St. Ana's Lake. One can ask whether these spaces were found by artists as being from the start sacred, or were they just defined by them?

Lake St. Ana is a religious place today. We can find a chapel there, where the Catholic ritual of St. Ana's celebration is held annually. But in ancient times it was a place of sacred rituals. So it can be concluded that because it has been used as a sacred place for a long time, it is probably a place with a special kind of energy, so it is a found sacred space, and not just recently defined a group of artists.

The hills used by MAMŰ artists have a special energy to. This is stated by anyone that goes there, but the true origin of the hills is not known. Űtő Gusztáv argues that it is a collective tomb,²⁶ but we can neither support nor deny this.

Site specific art

Artistic creations made in nature are linked to the place where they were created. So they have a physical connection with their site. But besides this they can also have links to the symbolic dimension of the place, or they can have conceptual links, as Miwon Kwon²⁷ has defined. In some cases, conceptual meaning becomes more important in contemporary art than the connection of the work with a physical space, the artworks site, because it supports the artistic message.

Natural environment and art in the East and the West

The development of 20th century art and its relationship to the natural environment has been influenced by several factors. Foremost it was influenced by the local culture (religion, art,

²⁵ Eliade, Mircea: op.cit.

²⁶ Űtő Gusztáv: *Adalékok az akcióművészet történetéhez Erdélyben és Székelyföldön*. DLA értekezés, Budapest, Magyar Képzőművészeti Egyetem Doktori Iskola, 2012, 34.

²⁷ Kwon, Miwon: Egyik helyet a másik helyett. Megjegyzések a helyspecifikusságról. Erőss Nikolett (transl.). In: Kékesi Zoltán, Lázár Eszter, Varga Tünde et al. (ed.): *A gyakorlattól a diszkurzusig. Kortárs művészetelméleti szöveggyűjtemény*. Budapest, Magyar Képzőművészeti Egyetem, 2012, 115. English title: One Place After Another. Notes on site-specificity.

stc traditions) but assimilated influences also from other cultures as well. For example, western art has been influenced by eastern cultures. With a little delay, the art of the West, with its influences, arrived also to the Romanian art scene. And it is not possible to define in each case exactly where certain influences came from, or if they are actual influences.

The Art of Experiences

Dorothea von Hantelmann defines that the art of the 20th century is based on the creation of experiences, and the turning away from the art object to effect. She bases her theory on Gerhard Schulz's statements, which define the society of experiences.²⁸ So at the basis of performativitz is the creation of effects through experiences, as I mentioned before. Based on these, I analyze which were those art movements that led to the development of the concept of performativity. These art movements have turned their back on traditional artistic forms (such as painting, sculpture) and on the institutions that represent traditional art (museums, etc.). These movements no longer idolized the artwork, but the object of art became the artist's action, the creation of effects and experiences. They have changed the status of the spectator and, last but not least, the relation of art to the natural environment.

I divided this chapter into two segments. In the first part I deal with those artistic movements that are based on the artist's action. The experience offered to the spectator is achieved through a series of actions, happenings. These works could not be sold anymore, and they were fleeting, ephemeral, which could only be lived when they unfolded. The spectator may become a participant, or a co-creator. The discussed movements are: dada, action painting, fluxus, happening, performance.

In the second part I deal with those artistic movements which have as their basis the creation of spaces that offer some kind of experience to the spectator. And in this case, the spectator can collaborate with the work, by their experience or by an active participation. The experience of artistic space can only be lived through boily presence, so the works can!t be fully

²⁸ Schulze, Gerhard: A Német szövetségi Köztársaság kulturális átalakulása. 1992. In: Wessely Anna (ed.): *A kultúra szociológiája*. Budapest, Osiris Kiadó, Láthatatlan Kollégium, 2003. German title: *Strukturwandel der Öffentlichkeit. Untersuchungen zu einer Kategorie der bürgerlichen Gesellschaft*

understood through photographic reproduction. And these works, if created in a natural environment, are ephemeral. The art movements that are linked are: minimal art and land art.

The history of the MAMŪ group and the AnnART festival

Action based art in Romania is a unique phenomenon. Although seemingly similar to the art movements known from the West that exist since the 1960s, the underground art in Romania has assimilated some elements of artistic language from those, yet we can state that it uses as inspiration unique local subjects. It uses action, much like fluxus, happening, performance art, and creates in nature such as land art artists do. But the reason why art in Romania left the interior space of museums and galleries and turned his back on traditional artistic forms is not the same as the West. Romanian artists sought personal liberty through their rebellious art.

About the history and artworks of the MAMŪ group (Marosvásárhelyi Műhely)

The group formed in Târgu Mureș, and the most active period falls between 1979-1984. The charismatic personality of Elekes Károly²⁹ attracted young artists from around the city. It was important to create the group because it eased their artistic activity. These young people wanted to express themselves freely, and implemented in their art the techniques and the artistic language that has developed in the West at that time. The place where most of their works were created is near Târgu Mureș, the place is called Vizeshalmok (watery hills).

About the history and artworks of the AnnART festival group

It was the first festival in Transylvania that promoted action art, which was organized for ten consecutive years at Saint Ana Lake. Űtő Gusztáv was the organizer of the festival during all this time.

²⁹ More info about the artist: <http://artportal.hu/lexikon/muveszek/elekes-karoly-482>, http://hu.wikipedia.org/wiki/Elekes_K%C3%A1roly_%28fest%C5%91%29 and <http://artportal.hu/lexikon/muveszek/elekes-karoly-482>

CHAPTER II.

Creator, creation, nature and spectator - Actions and performances at AnnART

In this chapter I discuss the performative space and the role of the spectator. On the other hand, I discuss the situation of site specific art through examples.

The AnnART festival started right after the change of the political regime in Romania. Here artists have found an ideal space for creation. The natural environment has given artists the possibility for experience, and the influence of the spirit of place is also felt in the works of art made at the festival. The lake and the surroundings became the performative space of the festival for those few days. Many works have been designed on the spot, inspired by the spirit of the place. Actions, interventions are linked physically to the site, but they also have conceptual links that also are linked to the place.

I want to illustrate my definitions through a single work: Ütő Gusztáv (1) in 1992 buried the logo of the Etna group (the organizing foundation of the event). They stamped the hands of the participants, then, together with Kónya Réka, danced to the lake. He presented this action, because misunderstandings occurred among the members of the group.³⁰ The action reminds us of a funeral. The event occurred on the same place, where a few years before it all started.³¹ Symbolically a cycle has ended. The action has a ritual character, so it is closely related to the character of the place. But it is also linked physically, considering the nature of the action.

The Space becomes performative, by its use as such. The place condition the action: defines the digging, the space, etc. Besides these, it becomes the location of a funeral.

³⁰ Ütő Gusztáv: *Adalékok az akcióművészet történetéhez Erdélyben és Székelyföldön*. DLA értekezés, Budapest 2012, 64.

³¹ The foundation later reunited, and is still active even today.

The audience is present, it does not act, but it is precisely through this that it engages in action, because at funerals this is the attitude that is mostly encountered. They become participants of the artistic ritual.



1.

Creator, creation, nature - Performative actions and spaces

In this chapter I address the issue from the point of view of the artist. To what extent has the artistic process influenced the natural environment, and how performative space has manifested itself.

The MAMŪ (2) group, due to its specific character, evokes other problems for analysis than Western contemporary artists. The artists in Târgu Mureş could not move large volumes of land or earth because they would have attracted unwanted attention from the authorities. On the other hand, they did not even have the material resources needed for this. So the interventions, their actions were relatively easy and cheap to accomplish from a technical point of view, and they were also spontaneous. Their most beloved place was the Vizeshalmok hills near the city.

For the artists of Targu-Mures, these hills were a sacred place, ritual place, because they were related to freedom. It is impossible not to notice that their shape raises them above the landscape. All the works that were placed on them seemed to be on a huge stage, on a pedestal or on an altar. Thus the works gained importance, they became closer to the sky. That is why I

would name the place in this context as a performative space, because it changes the meaning of artistic interventions. It can also be defined as a sacred (re-) found space, according to Eliade.

The place also has an effect on artists' attitude. Living in the gray city's daily life, on the hills they could become artists, magicians, creators, whatever they wanted, so the works captivated this character. We can define the place as performative in this way to.

The works are linked to their physical place, obviously, but they are also linked conceptually to the sites meaning: that of the freedom of expression of the self.



2.

Creation, nature and spectator - The status of the spectator in artistic interventions in the natural environment

Most of the times, land art, landscape intervention, nature installation etc. are made without an audience being present. In this chapter I analyze how such artistic creation can urge the spectator to interact or even co-create the artwork.

I will exemplify these by an artwork of a Transilvanian artist. Pál Péter³², in his work called *Turn of the Waters I (3)* from 2007, intervened in the landscape through an that is not generally considered to be an artistic act in general. He cut the grass from the hill in a gem-shaped form that visually continue the missing space from the forest on the hill upfront. This

³²Site of the artist: <http://www.palpeter.info/>

geometric form could only be seen from a certain point, otherwise it was seen as only an elongated form on the field, so the work is a gigantic anamorphosis.

The artist didn't put any kind of foreign material into the natural environment, but he intervened in a subtle way. So natural space had to exist prior, so that the creation could manifest itself. The natural environment contributed to the artistic process, this way the natural environment becomes a performative space. On the other hand, the work urges the viewer to act: to look for the point from which the optical illusion can be seen, so in this context it can be called performative, because it has an effect on the spectator.

I find it intriguing how a local, who does not know that he sees an artistic intervention, is would act, what would he think by seeing the portion cut on the field? The cutting of the grass is part of man's work in the village, but this may not make sense to an outsider. The artist, by doing the action for artistic reasons, reinterpreted the action, and redefined it as art, as in the case of a ready-made.

This intervention can be considered as site specific art, because it has a physical connection with the place, but by its action, the artist links his creation to the folk tradition, thus having a conceptual site specificity to.



Nature and creation - the co-creator in natural interventions

In this chapter I analyze the relation of the work of art with the natural environment. In this relationship, they mutually change the reality of each other. The artistic intervention changes the natural environment, alters it, but it can also change it for the better. Conversely, the natural environment can, and will destroy the work, but it can also become a co-creator, if the artistic conception requires it. I have analyzed works in which this interaction is clearly visible.

I exemplify those stated through a work: Tim Knowles, in *Tree Drawings*³³ (4), attaches writing tools to some trees on the endings of the branches. After that he places canvases in front of them. With the help of air currents, the branches move and the trees seemingly are drawing. In this case we encounter a personification of the natural environment, that is unseen before. Nature, through the artist's intervention, is the co-creator of the work. But not only the trees contribute to this process. Without the movements of air all the process wouldn't be possible, so all of nature contributes to the creation of the work. We can say that nature performs an action, a performance. She takes the lead role, but the artist must first set up the situation for it to happen. We can associate this work with the early happenings, where the artist wrote the instructions, and the spectator performed the artistic conception, without the artist controlling the final course of events, as it can be seen here.



³³ Site of the artist: <http://www.timknowles.co.uk/work/treedrawings/tabid/265/default.aspx>.

Nature in the gallery - Site specific art

In this chapter I analyze works that bring natural matter inside the galleries. In this case we encounter a different kind of performative space, and conceptual links of the work with the environment from which the matter comes from.

I exemplify those defined by a work. Péter Alpár in his work titled *Color of the Earth (5)* brings the earth into the gallery. The artist gathers earth samples near the village of Lăzarea next to Gheorgheni. He made homogeneous pigments out of them, and shaped them in balls with different colors. Through this he wanted to present the "nuances" of the place,³⁴ which is specific to that particular place. Thus the work is closely related to the place from which it originates. At the exhibition, he placed the earth balls in the middle of the space, and added on the walls the map of the sites. But even if we didn't know the place of origin of the earth balls, it would still have an effect on us, but by this knowledge the artwork gets another deeper meaning. So the work itself can be considered as performative.



Conclusions

The thesis begins with the theoretical approach of the concept of performativity. In Chapter II. I exemplify those defined chapter I with actual works from artists. In my research I have defined and redefined terms that can be associated with both theater and visual arts. In

³⁴ Site of the artist: <http://peteralpar.ro/portraits/>

Chapter II. I did not include all the artworks of the MAMŪ group, nor with all the works from the AnnART festival, and I did not intend to write an all-encompassing work of this kind of art in Transylvania. I just chose some works that could best illustrate what I defined in the theoretical part.

Throughout my research, I have not encountered theoretical literature that addresses the issues of performativity in relation to artworks created in natural environment. I further considered a lack in the theorizing of the artistic creations in Transylvania, about which I also wrote in the paper. So I'm committed to remedying some shortcomings through this thesis.

From a practical point of view, it was necessary to clarify or define, redefine some terms in the arts and theater, such as: performative, performance, spectator, atmosphere, aura, etc.

First of all, based on the definitions of Erika Fischer-Lichte, I found that the natural environment can be a performative space because it serves as a space for some actions and performances. Nature becomes a performative space when the artist uses it as such, occupying the place by its action and creation. Thus, the natural environment is no longer a geographical place, but it transforms into an artistic space.

From the definitions given by Dorothea von Hantelmann, I have defined several aspects of performativity. I find that the natural environment then becomes a performing space, if it exerts its effect on the one who is in it. Secondly, artistic intervention together with nature can have an effect on the spectator. It can change his reality: it can urge him to become a participant or a co-creator of the artwork. And last but not least, the interaction of nature with artistic intervention is performative because they mutually change each other's reality. Artistic creation destroys or improves the natural environment, and vice versa, nature, destroys the artistic creation placed in it, or becomes co-creator by the artist's intention.

I further define that interventions, artworks in the natural environment have in them the potential of action, of happening. If it is a performance, then the presence of the action is obvious, but if we are dealing with a land art or an art intervention in nature, then the artist's action may be part of the work; furthermore, the work can urge the spectator to act, to do something. And last but not least, the alteration of the art intervention in nature can be considered as a happening by the alteration of the work through the forces of nature.

The status of the spectator has changed over the past decades. I define what roles the human spectator can assume in an artwork that is executed in a natural environment, how can such a work urge the spectator to become a participant or co-creator of the work through a non-verbal, more situational, calling. Further, this status can be taken on by nature if the artistic conception demands it.

Hantelmann has defined that the basis of performativity is creating an effect. Walter Benjamin found that the work of art has an aura. Böhme has defined what it is, and called it atmosphere. Using these terms, I gave an answer as to what these can mean in relation to the natural environment. For this I used the concept of the spirit of the place. In each space we can feel a specific energy of the place. It links everything in this space, and helps the understanding, the assimilation of the artwork. Each place acquires the energy characteristic of it by interaction of the energy of that space with the energy of all the things that are in it.

All artistic creations analyzed in the thesis can be defined as site specific art. They also are linked to the physical place in which they were created, but they also have conceptual, theoretical connections that deepen their meaning and understanding.

After that, I studied the cultural environment in which the modern art movements of the last decades have developed. Afterwards, I analyzed how the art of the 20th century began to focus more on the creation of experiences than on the production of objects in art. These art movements have also reached Transylvania, where they have developed a unique character, specific to the place.

Finding that the works of the Transylvanian artists mentioned by me haven't had much attention in the theoretical discourse, the goal of my work was also to remedy this lack.

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