

Time Based Arts

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PhD Thesis Summary

At the base of my PhD thesis *Time Based Arts* have been a number of factors that include the continuation and development of the project approached in my master studies, finalized by a dissertation entitled *Sound and Image in Contemporary Art* (2009), my double qualification as an art historian and musician, coordinator of The Renaissance Music Ensemble Nomen Est Omen, materialized in a series of intermedia projects (performances, multimedia installations, video art) and especially a suite of thirty seminars and presentations on the subject of time based arts, between 2014 and 2019 at the Department of Sculpture and the Faculty of Decorative Arts and Design of the National University of Arts, under the aegis of the project *Time Based Arts@ Time Factor(y)*, coordinated by lecturer Dr. Reka Csapo Dup. This latter activity was the main motivation of my initiative.

The preparation of these didactic activities put me face to face not only with the debated issue, but also with a first-hand specialized literature, guaranteed by editors and cultural institutions and the artistic and scientific community. Beyond the physical or electronic purchase of several hundreds of books, reference articles and catalogues, some of them recently published (including the current year, 2019), I noticed that none of the materials I had access at in this stage of research, or about which I found out, does not deal with the issue of which I am interested in terms of time as an active dimension in visual arts, other than theatrical or cinematographic arts.

Moreover, time-related arts are addressed in works based on historical, geographic, monographic, morphological, theoretical or individual (performance, body art, video, multimedia, and so on) criteria. In all these, the subject under my research can be mostly found in highest scientific quality sources interwoven with other subjects, depending on the structure of each of them. This fact led me to expand the bibliographic list, a time-consuming and energy intensive operation, if I add to the mentioned aspect the lack of stylistic unity of the sources.

Often, I found the same information written in different ways and partly intertwined with the various criteria of the authors.

In line with the above, as a single example, I have edited my worksheets on Yves Klein from books about art, anti-art, neo-dada, monographs, catalogues, books on universal or European art (from certain periods or times), about books on French art or immaterial art, about sculpture, performance, feminism, about blue color, Extreme Orient thinking, and even about judo (the latter due to the journey to Japan and Klein's affinities for this martial art). As mentioned, the operation of extracting and unifying information related to time as an active dimension in art has meant overcoming more obstacles. If we add to the aforementioned aspect that my research brings together several hundred important names (without being a purpose on itself), we can consider that this endeavor has, or can have its usefulness.

The subject is extremely current, both at the theoretical level, the views and approaches changing with the passage of time, all the more so as the history needed to settle a series of events to have a vision as a whole, and thanks to the synchronization of the "time based arts" with cutting-edge technology. The highly prolific literature of the last few years has constantly changed the viewpoints until recently non-negotiable. Recent information and recoveries continually alter perspectives. On the other hand, multimedia, digital or web performances, virtual dances (man-hologram, or man-robot), computer assistance of many forms of art are just a few examples of technological applications that determine new types of consciousness, at a time when reality transcends any attempt to inventory.

An approach of the chosen subject can only be interdisciplinary and transdisciplinary. I have called in my research upon professional sources and implicitly sociological, economic and even political points of view. For example, an important part of the books and studies I have related to in the present research (and found in the critical apparatus) belong to professionals in other branches than art: Jacques Attali - economist, sociologist and political analyst ; Philip Auslander - literacy, media and communication specialist; Theodor Adorno - philosopher and sociologist; Jian Kang - architect (university professor); Dieter Schnebel - musicologist and theologian, etc. Between 20 and 30% of the bibliography belongs to art related fields.

Given the epic dimension of the researched field, I have attached great importance to the selection act since the beginning of my approach. The main problem in such a situation is not so much what needs to be addressed in the paper, but what should be left out. In this idea, I have

operated a double selection, very rigorous: first of the artists through which I can express what proposed myself, then of their artistic events or works. Moreover, I narrowed the short list as far as I could in order to say as much as possible with a minimum of examples.

Independent of content, the proposed morphological criterion as a research development line, and found in the title, is a useful filter for potential readers who will know exactly what they can and will find in the work from the point of view of the subject. Its coverage is exclusively based on the number of pages to be counted. The critical apparatus and bibliography may be useful shortcuts to potential research work undertaken by those interested in this field.

To avoid the essayistic or monographic structure, both formulas suggesting comprehensive claims, I resorted to a comparative, synoptic analysis. The first organizational criterion was the morphological one, after grading on genres and styles, and the second one was the historical one, the priorities being set in this order. Both criteria allow the exceptions imposed by a third criterion, that of similarities (such as Bruce Nauman and Marina Abramović hurt themselves on their performances), contrasts (unlike Carolee Schneemann, Laurie Anderson does not resort to nudity in her actions), or anticipations (Hugo Ball and Marcel Iancu opened the way for John Cage's work at Black Mountain College). Thus, a name, a performance or a work will in principle appear on several occasions in the present research, each time in relation to other aspects. Selected operation has supported me in this regard.

The historical criterion was, in turn, selective. I was interested not in a complete history, but in one of those who were the first to change something in their field, who are representative or represented models for posterity. In the alternative, I have intertwined on the timeline, social or political events (the Vietnam war, the hippie movement or performance copyright law) or technological inventions (theremin, tape recorder, monitor, computer), if they have made changes in the arts world.

On another level of research, I have established three theoretical (on subjective but viable criteria) categories of time based arts: that of sound, image and technology (especially the digital one), which I treated separately in a chapter to streamline the reading. The subchapter titles constitute milestones for navigating in the work, which is designed to be of use also at a fragment level. Each subchapter can be considered, to a certain point, an independent text.

The paper is structured in three chapters. The first one represents two-thirds of the work and is dedicated to the main genres, styles, currents, or movements that involve development in

time of works or actions. The chosen and systematically treated categories as subchapters were: happening, performance, live art, body art, electronic art, video art, media art, sound art, soundscapes and sound sculpture. At sub-subchapter level, I approached art history as a history of styles. Thus, I covered performance in relation to historical avant-gardes (Futurism, Dada, Surrealism), Bauhaus, Black Mountain College, Gutai, Fluxus, Viennese Actionism, but also Feminism, and so on.

The second chapter was entirely devoted to theoretical and critical landmarks of time based arts in terms of sound, image and post-human context. The debated issue is found at meta-textual level throughout the previous chapter. I have appealed to this chapter to a number of recognized theoreticians such as Amelia Jones, Peggy Phelan, Susan Sontag, Jean Baudrillard, Roland Barthes, Jacques Derrida, Walter Benjamin, Susan McClary, and Antonin Artaud.

In the third chapter I have proposed myself, besides exemplifying and moving the emphasis in Romanian space, the integration of novel information about artists and events into a cultural fund that I intend to diversify and to expand through future research.

The interferences between the genres, styles and directions mentioned in the first chapter of the research, the largest in terms of content and dimensions, are major. If the boundaries between happening, performance, live art, and even artistic performance in general are fragile and often are only semantic, actionism, feminism and body art are directions that not only do not exclude the categories cited above, but even legitimate with them. Together, the set forth forms are often subjects for video art, supported by technology, in other words, by device art and its various forms, from sound sculpture to image synthesizers and computers. Theater, dance, sound, music, along with the classical forms of visual arts, become parts of the whole, whose finality is revealed with time, not just with the subjective time allotted to their reading.

If in the case of art forms derived from performing arts, the course of time is obvious, we can say (deliberately simplifying) that everything that works with electricity is related to time by default, including when it comes to projecting static images. Once the power source is closed, that image disappears, which is not the case for images made on material support, without the intervention of kinetic or illusionist interventions.

As far as the body is concerned, it represents, by definition, an ensemble of phenomena carried out over time, all that is related to using it becomes, consequently, something temporary. In addition, the body is a universal constant, which can also act in absentia. Physical substitution

of the human body through holograms, robotics, or technology raises interest not in what these are, but in their replacement function or surrogate quality.

On another level of discussion, the critical and theoretical benchmarks concerning time based arts are at least as complex as the issues they are addressing. Specialist literature addresses the phenomenon from diverse areas, from purely technical, to philosophical, sociopolitical, critical, or historiographical. During the chapter, I proposed a typological analysis, from the audio, visual and digital (virtual) perspective, trying to do, if not a critique to the critique of the chosen subjects, at least a comparative presentation of the directions that I considered defining for what I wanted to prove.

Treating sounds as objects, a retreat from music (seen as an art in its own right), and using the musical composition model in immaterial projects seems to me to be the main features of performances and related areas.

I have also identified presence and liveness, with the major development directions of time-based artistic genres along with the models picked up from theater and show arts. I have also pointed out the interferences between body / corporality and performance.

Finally, the virtual in art and life has led to a new type of consciousness, and the process is in full swing. "Posthuman" opportunities are a chapter that does not yet have a history in the true sense of the word, and which develops in direct relationship with technological advances. However, the queries on the being remain the same, despite the possible paradigm shift, which I have tried to capture in my previous lines.

The basic idea of the chapter is that the history of time based arts is not conjectural, based on events (happy accidents) that have pushed boundaries further and further away, up to finding viable routes, but have social and cultural determinants, which are more related to mentality than to the arts from which they emerged, of which they have been separated or which adopted them.

Case studies in Romania are part of the used method, being related to currents, artists and international events. The pages dedicated to Romanian space do not represent a local history, nor a suggestion of landmarks, but the presentation in one chapter of events or works made by three artists (together with their collaborators) between 1970 and 2019, each of them with about ten projects, in order to put into the circulation some rigorously documented information about

which there are no public materials or only in a lapidary form. Among them I find myself as a curator or artist.

If in the countries of the former Soviet Union performance was a militant form of action, whose roots can be found in the opening policies that preceded the collapse of the system, in Romania, the main motivations, even when dealing with sensitive themes, were rather of a cultural nature, and related to opening and willing to align with what was happening in the West.

Mircea Florian's actions were based on an ontological privilege, since the artist was informed of what was happening outside Romania at a time when information circulated rather hard on niche corridors, and in the present case, under conditions of censorship. Florian is a flattering exponent of the experiment; he has descended into the world of visual arts through music (otherwise than in the case of Fluxus). Cosmin Paulescu's approach of performance has come amid an international opening of the country, and is an extension of classical visual art activities. His language is extremely coherent and universal at the same time. In his political performances he is quite reserved, adopting rather the observer's positions than activist's one, insisting on creativity. Its actions can be placed at the limit between performance and body art.

As far as I'm concerned, my breakthrough in the field of performance and video art is based on one hand on theoretical benchmarks (naturally acquired over time), on the other hand, on my activity as musician, that linked me through multiple projects, beyond the world of concerts and festivals, with the one of the theater (for which I signed and played live music), the movie and the musical video.

Back in the international field, if we follow the history of performance over a century of existence, we can see that from Futurism to the Second World War, it has been linked through multiple links to visual arts, theater, and literature, that these landmarks also encompass neighborhoods such as dance, circus, scenography, music, phonetics, sometimes technology or pre-electronic art.

Until the 1930s, the performance forms listed above will be repeated in various European variants and trends, dance, scenography, music and mechanical ballet, or the show of any kind polarizing the attention of artists. With the fourth decade, the United States and especially New York became the main theater of action for performance until the '70s. Artists such as Cage, Kaprow, Oldburg, Jim Dine, Robert Whitman, or Al Hansen will focus strongly on live art.

Dick Higgins, Bob Watts, Al Hansen, George Macunias, Jackson McLow, Richard Maxfield, Yoko Ono, La Monte Young and Alison Knowles presented performances at Café A Gogo, Larry Poons' Epitome Café or Gallery A / G. The quoted group, Fluxus, so called by Maciunas, came to consecrate its own event venues, Fluxhall and Fluxshop. A variety of performances around the dance were presented by Simone Forti and Yvonne Rainer, who had worked with Ann Halprin in California, bringing a series of radical innovations.

After 1950, starting with action painting, going through Gutai and Black Mountain College "laboratories," happening crystallizes as a self-contained expression form, then the performance, then in the last decade the digital and virtual technologies take over. In this second part, the body, the artist's personal life and the protest have the main roles, regardless of the subgenres in which they are distributed. Conceptual art and minimalism determine to a large extent the area of performance, as a stand-alone environment. Last but not least, reporting on music, in terms of compositional laws, and notation-like scores, is a major feature of the newer performances.

With 1963, a number of artists, many of them European, have constantly visited New York, and here I remind Robert Filiou, Ben Vautier, Daniel Spoerri, Joseph Beuys, Emmett Williams, Nam June Paik and Tomas Schmit.

The documentation, especially the photo-video and the firm contracts with the institutions in charge of supporting, preserving or exhibiting performances, have led to changes in the interpretation of copyright, as well as to the defense strategies of artists against plagiarism, distortions or undue benefits of third parties.

The most significant flowering of performance took place in the 1960s, after the decline of Modernism and especially Abstract Expressionism, when it found exponents all over the world. During this time, performance focused on the body, being often synonymous with body art, at least, in usual language terms. To some extent, it can be said that the performance in the United States comes from a reinterpretation of action painting, in which art objects are no longer painted on cloth, but on something else, often on the artist's body. Although in action painting the gesture prevails over time, the stakes are not painting, but the event.

The focus on the performance in the 1960s is sometimes considered a consequence of abandoning conventional media. Some have seen a release, part of the expansion of materials and media at that time, others have wondered if it reflects a fundamental crisis of art itself, a

sign that art has exhausted its resources. The body can be regarded as the physical agent of our everyday experiences, making it the producer of dreams, transmitter and receiver of cultural messages, the creator of habits, the desire engine, the personal archive, and last but not least, the platform of all emotions and feelings. Between biology and society, between instinct and discourse, between biography and history, the body is at the same time a launching pad in overcoming the constraints and norms.

From the 1970s we can talk about reconfiguring the relationship between conceptual art and performance. The curators insist, in the sphere of performance, on the subjective dimension of the artist, but also of the act of interpretation. The concept of an artist as a director is malleable in both positions. The use of one's own body as a subject, especially in photography, but not only, and the work with shock, would be two characteristics of the current time performances, whose background still remains common with those of the recurrent phenomenon, reviewed above, from a short historical perspective.

As in tribal rituals, medieval plays, Renaissance performances, or in the more recent soirees of Parisian workshops in the 1920s, performance proves the artist's presence in society. The history of performance art is one of multiple possibilities of expression, lack of restriction, variable endings, direct or indirect communication with the public. Each artist has its own definition of its proposals. It can be about music, literature, painting, poetry, architecture, dance, theater, video, film, media disciplines or various other manifestation fields, treated as such or in various combinations.

Performance in the second half of the twentieth century relates to the multiple tendencies that emerged with Minimalism and developed plenary in Post-Minimalism. One can observe the common denominator with process art, another central trend of this style. In process art, attention is focused on techniques and materials of artistic production and explores the possibilities of ordinary, repetitive actions. Similarly, many performance artists are attracted by activities involving various assumed tasks, often prosaic, far removed from the traditional, drama and dance performances, heavily choreographic and ritualized.

A conclusion of the above is that performance is a form of artistic manifestation specific to the type of consciousness of the 20th century and not a road accident. The simultaneity of ideas that are compatible with performance, the fragility of its borders, and its openness to any

horizons, as well as the strong common denominator, beyond the strictly formal aspects, demonstrate that mentality generates the type of existence in art and life.

On the other hand, we can see, within the already sketched out frame, a rise of the feminist phenomenon (which the signatory of this research considers the most fertile direction of the last five decades). This fact proves the interdependence between sociopolitical factors and art. Until a coherent militant movement has emerged, with tangible legislative results, the issue of feminist art, for example, could not be posed. I would add the economic factor in question. Museums and art institutions allocate once unimaginable resources for research and development studies, without which the scene of visual arts would certainly have shown otherwise. Marina Abramović could not have taken his actions, at least not with such a popular appeal, a few decades ago or in countries where censorship functioned. Tehching Hsieh, named master by Abramović, did not launch in Taiwan, but in United States. So did Zhang Huan, based on performances made in China, known notoriety over the ocean. Cosmin Paulescu would not throw a Molotov cocktail, in a controlled manner, as he did in a militant (pro NATO) performance in Bucharest during the communist years, without suffering any legal consequences.

In the 21st century, there have been a series of turns. One of the results is that the place of the material artworks has been partially taken up by various non-material, or reproducible mechanically and digitally. Time has become largely an active dimension in many branches of the visual arts.

Just a few decades after its emergence as a standalone genre, classic performance, live or recorded and broadcasted, has notable alternatives in various forms of web performance or digital performance, in which there is no question of physical representation, but just of the idea or the image. Artistic performances today focus largely on the virtual dimension of the projects. One can speak, in the given context, of a dematerialization of art, a phenomenon marked in the present paper. The visual arts frameable in posthumanism have, I can say, a very large weight in the last (two) decades, but there are no clues to suggest that in the near future the whole art and mentality will move into the virtual realm. This change is obviously related to technical progress.

Although the interests of artists focused on performance and related forms of expression have changed from period to period, these genres have been a constant on the visual arts scene,

being widely accepted in museums and galleries, where they were originally excluded. I mention explicitly the meeting of artistic branches with the show, entertainment and advertising industries, regardless of their names (acronyms). This is not negative, but on the contrary: today's forms of performance are not essentially different from ancient theater or gladiator battles.

To summarize, time tends to become an active dimension in contemporary visual arts, introducing the anticipation factor, relativization, and horizon of expectation in the theoretical discourse. Nothing is certain anymore, with every element capable of metamorphosis into everything, including its opposite. The viewer has to wait and follow a whole process to be able to receive the message. What these artistic forms have in common, beyond time, is visual language, often non-textual.