

## ART WORK AS ARCHIVE

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When I was attending my first AICA conference in 1991, a young Bulgarian interrupted the row of lectures to announce with rapturous joy: the first democratic government had been elected in Bulgaria. His enthusiasm carried everyone away. Since the second free elections, I haven't heard of him. But a colleague of his held a lecture in Budapest this year, which suggested that from the alternatives of now advancing towards the West and now withdrawing from it, characterizing the whole 20th century history of Bulgaria, the latter is taking place now.

At that time, Hungary was long past her first free elections, and now she is long past her second. The first was preceded by a rapid sequence of events (open declaration of differentiated opinions, emergence of parties, opening up of the western frontiers of the country to the East Germans, reform communism, the first steps to put an end to Soviet occupation, etc.), underlying which the collective memory was activated: in honour of the Hungarian revolution of 1956, which had been officially hushed up and treated as a counter-revolution for over 30 years, memorials began to appear in villages, at times listing the names of victims similarly to the commemoration of the senseless death of their sons of the communities in the First and Second World Wars. A competition was also called by a newly established foundation to design a public memorial for the victims of the revolution. Earlier, the winner György Jovánovics had never had a chance to make a monumental work in Hungary. His "only" publicly set up work is in the Olympic sculpture park in Seoul. His memorial could also be the symbol of the democratic transformation the whole nation was hoping for, in the course of which never-seen public sculptures appeared in the country to remind of the volleys massacring the revolutionaries. Some of them were half-abstract form-centric compositions always vetoed earlier (Pál Deim, in Győr), while others blasted the form in concord with the commemorated event, and the ideas of conceptualism, postulating the form as illusion, as something pseudo (the "skin-work" of Gyula Pauer in Mosonmagyaróvár with half-forms and without inner spaces).

Jovánovics's monument is an ensemble of classical, archaic and primary (funeral) memorials, an architectonic and sculptural, ritual space around an elevated sarcophagus. The space begins with a negative form (mass grave), a negative triumphal column in it; it has its apotheosis in an obelisk, while in a narrow, catacomb-like passageway one gets to a simple quarry-stone. Eclecticism? Reality and ideas, the natural and spiritual essence of the revolution, the upsetting and elevating character of its memory are present together with the complex social demand, manifold expectation which were jointly present both in the revolution and then in the democratic transformation closing the '80s. It is a monument of the idea of a democratic Hungary and the memorial of the victims of this idea; according to the models of social psychologist Alessandro Cavalli, the collective memory revealed the future it anticipated for itself by selecting this of the competitive works. This is one reason why it is so varied, and the other is the combination of different conceptions of art which can be characterized by the faith of classical modernism in the eternity of form (in removing it from the temporal) and by the late-modernist (Heideggerian) concept of the work of art as the manifestation of truth. The former is represented by the individual forms, the latter by the complexity and self-revelation of the composition with the paths



of the creative process being made physically retraceable, converting the perception into a ritual, and transforming remembrance into a rite as well.

The outbreak of the '56 revolution was declared to be the national holiday of Hungary in 1990. The monument on the new resting place of revolutionaries (communists and non-communists opposing the dictatorship) exhumed from the collective graves has become the venue of public rituals. In the meantime, the socialist monuments of the previous 40 years, witnesses to selective memory working on commission, dictated by directives, have been removed which were political or ideological rather than artistic, instruments of a strategy of forced forgetting imposed by the ruling stratum upon society (or self-imposed by society itself).

The place they have been assigned has becoming more and more elegant and monumental at increasing costs during the last years. And the present prime minister of Hungary after the 2nd free elections is one of those men who hunted for the revolutionaries after the victorious days of the revolution in '56. Collective oblivion? While thus in an article Pierre Restany can list at least three new monumental works (Arman's, Christo's, Cézair's) in the world in which the working of truth can be perceived with universal validity - which, in my view, is equally attributable to the operation of the collective and the artistic memory -, in Hungary, what one encounters is not only the loss of a national identity, but also that of a general (existential) identity possibly as a result of the sudden surge of bilateral international colonization supported by domestic power abusers. In the middle of a Europe of free nations built on the humanist tradition, the idea glowed up for a moment in this nation safeguarding this tradition, but the political and economic cynicism of the contemporary world penetrating the country in the name of the same tradition unsettled the awareness of where the nation belonged in the world, the nation which celebrates its millicentenary of its European existence this year. Of course, the citizens immediately react to this process by putting up statues without permission and at the expenses of private donors, just as at the beginning of the history of public monuments in Hungary in the early 19th century. These new variants are not memorials of political heroes or martyrs, but of those people whose life, soul and spirit were ruined by the decades of hard and soft communism.

What makes me mention all this in the introduction is the wish to call attention to the ontological and existential significance of remembering in an age which - to quote the book of Pierre Nora - is tending to kill memory by archiving on a global scale. On the other hand, it was a Hungarian philosopher of art at the turn of the century who pointed out that memory had a distinguished role in art and life. In the following, I should like to clarify, as much as it is possible, what role memory may have in artistic creation today.

At the turn of the century, increased attention was paid to the working of man's inner world in both science and art. That was the basis for the period's psychologism, Bergson's metaphysics and Dilthey's scientific theory, which were decisive for the study "The role of memory in the work of art" by young Lajos Fülep. It was put up for debate in Florence in 1911, in a meeting of Circolo de Filosofico. Originally intended as a critique of Croce's *Estetica* (1903 and 1908), it eventually became a philosophy of art.

Although Fülep was living in Italy where he had already submitted a synthesizing evaluation of Nietzsche - the first of its kind in the vast literature on Nietzsche - for discussion, around this time he launched with George Lukács *A Szellem* [The Spirit], a periodical aligned with the trend of the



Geistesgeschichte, in Budapest. Their cooperation rested on precedents like Lukács's art criticism entitled *The Roads Diverge* and Fülep's study *A new artistic style* (1908), in which Fülep outlined the foundations of a new art and a "philosophy of art history" starting out from the criticism of academic, naturalist and impressionist art and relying on the art of Cezanne, doing this in a cultural atmosphere which can be hallmarked by the name, for example, of their contemporary Béla Bartók.

In the period between the metaphysics of the turn of the century and the later evolving ontology of Heidegger, it was Fülep - also absorbing the propositions of the Viennese art historical school adopting the approach of the *Geistesgeschichte* (Riegl) - who created a theory of art with his paper on the theory of creation in which he worked out a genetic definition of art by involving the concept and working of memory. The psychological notion of memory was a key to the opening of the two systems (art and philosophy) into each other, and to raising ontological questions. In Fülep's view, memory is the motivating force of artistic activity, it is a forming force in this activity, and by means of form, it ascribes the character of eternity to the art work and is the source of esthetic emotions. In the course of his argumentations, Fülep always differentiated everyday, general memory and artistic, individual memory (in the selection of intuitions, in shaping, imagination, expression, language, etc.). In philosophical terms, he regarded art as one of the objectifications of the soul and as such, a cognizable spiritual creation in which laws evolved according to a specific logic, by the inner needs of specific "facts". These laws, logic and facts he clearly regarded as aesthetic, but he laid special emphasis on observing them without self-interest, and on the emotions this implied. Thus a work of art has its own time (at an equal distance from present and past), being the contraction of realities and possibilities in one form. The metaphysical concept of art elaborated in Fülep's paper implies the ontological significance of artistic memory by the work of art rising in the above-mentioned way from the plane of being to that of "existence", from the temporal to the "eternal" in the dimensions of space and time.

Let me note that in the 1910s, Fülep's colleagues were attracted to the science-methodological and structural, neo-kantian analysis of other spiritual objectifications (e.g. of aesthetics by Arnold Hauser in 1918), and Fülep's pupils in the '10s only drew on his philosophy for their art historical works later, e.g. John Wilde in England and Charles de Tolnay in Italy. Art itself, however, anarchistically chose to wipe out memory (dada), in terms of Fülep's tenet that in the course of artistic remembering, a row of memories are excluded and the work itself is the liberation of the artist from his memories (hence freedom itself). Referring to the far later emergence of dadaism in science theory (Feyerabend), the Hungarian art theorist László Beke downright declared in a sequence of theoretical ideas in 1984 that the possibility of freedom is implied by forgetting.

Tacitly though, but Fülep was a source of the union of art and ethic in Hungary by the way he thought about art, by the purity of his concept of art, although - unlike his friends and pupils who emigrated, he went into inner emigration (from 1920) as a protestant pastor in the countryside and only did sporadic theoretical work later.

Although the current concepts of art differ from Fülep's based on Cezanne's aesthetic concept of art, it seems that contemporary art gives salience to memory as if 20th century modern art had neglected this activity apart from associative and analogical memory, or it were in need of correction. The cognitive sciences e.g. cognitive psychology, however, cannot propose anything different about the significance of memory than Fülep: there is no direct road to the world, what



one knows of reality is mediated, not only by the senses but by complex cognitive systems which interpret and reinterpret the sensual information. These include memory as well. In the course of interpretation, spatial and temporal relations different from reality arise (Ulric Neisser). The question therefore is whether memory is well suited to cover the creative process in contemporary art.

Art-related remembrance is evident in cases when memory is programmatic in a work such as in the case of the monuments, "des lieux de mémoire", or the so-called museum works and religious works of art. The former are generally predominated by collective (historical) memory, as we saw in the introduction, the latter are governed partly by collective, partly by individual memory. The basis in every case is of course memory as a constructive mental activity. (Fülep said that "our past, our memory interferes and unites with each of our intuitions and perceptions, without which we could not realize them; each of our intuitions and perceptions - however brief it may be - lasts for a time and consists of moments strung by the thread of memory".) In the types of museum art, several modes of remembering can be discerned which resemble the forms of thinking: logical-purposive and intuitive-purposeless. Compared to the traditional materials of art museums, both are contextual. Yet their stocks are different in that the former looks upon art/museum as its theme and hence refers to collective memory, while the latter is based on individual memory, so its theme can be anything. Both are, however, exploratory in nature, the subject-matter of both being memory, cognition via memory and its interpretation.

Museum art is a contemporary art type. Its roots go back to the works of conceptualism investigating the concepts of art and museum, to the neo-dadaist cult of the "found object", as well as to new subjectivity (new sensibility, trans-avantgarde). Their works are not individual objects but ensembles of objects filling the rooms and spaces.

An example might be the museum works of Joseph Kosuth, who had been active in this art form since the early '80s. From the angle of the social context, Kosuth refuses to accept artistic memory resulting in aesthetic quality, in artistic forms, as authentic, since the art work does not construct reality, so the reality presented by museums is not authentic either. He resorts to the aesthetic (in installing) - not as the outcome of the form-creating activity of remembering Fülep defined, but as a tool, so no emotion (meaning) is associated with it. At the same time, he considers meaning creation to be his goal: he defines structures as the precodition of meaning, relying on the formalist idea of structures carrying presumed general meanings. The structure is derived from contextualization: he creates situations among canonized museum objects and with other objects inserted into their canonized systems (or at some other time, by attaching other texts to literary passages as in the Hungarian pavilion of the '93 Venice Biennale) in which meanings that remain unmentioned in the history of art can be formulated (The Play of the Unmentionable, 1992, introduced by David Freedberg). In this way, he corrects the memory and the collective truth content of the "places of remembrance". The creation of the contextualizational structure is a logical step of late modernism relying on formalist linguistics (on Bakhtin's and Jespersen's observations concerning the dialogicality of language and the place-determined meaning of grammatical elements): it reckons with the interaction of individual objects within the structure, with the interplay of the culture of ages, societies, social strata on the basis of, and through, the iconographic correspondences. Kosuth thus complements artistic memory with a present-time temporary (contextualizing, interactive) activity. The conceptualized meaning is represented in the simultaneous presence of "linguistic units" in his art-related exhibitions conceivable as works of



art. (A special variant of this type is the rearrangement of the permanent collection of the Museum of Applied Arts in Vienna on the basis of the creative and interpretative activity of contemporary artists.)

The contextualization of museums and their canonized collections assumes different meanings on other occasions. However, the interaction of old and contemporary art works, art objects and contemporary artists, of various situations, always affects the validity of collective and artistic memory as well as of canonization. Let me mention five examples. In her works such as *Manufacturing the Self*, *Body Self* of 1993, or *Adventure in Technos Dystopium* (sic!) of an earlier date, Orshi Drozdik living in America adds to the instruments (or their photos) of the Age of Reason, which explore the world with a seemingly naive but merciless rationality and are exhibited in museums of medical and technological history, her own objects (the wax copy of her body and poems written to the museum objects), disrupting the evolutive order of science history. Thus, contextualizing life in the museum, and museum in life is done in the concept and structure, but the meaning is somewhere else. Meaning unfolds from the interaction. That is the adventure (the cognition and creation), the temptation: in the course of the interaction of the splendid body and the objects, the metaphores of the love poems endow the objects with life and a mythical-erotic character. They are endowed with a complexity they have never had and they cannot resist. To quote Drozdik: "Intellectual adventure: searching for the meaning of things and their order". The way to do so is: "Digging through the layers of archeological sediment and reorganizing them." In the meantime, "you take pleasure in reordered or chaotic meaning." "This is the most challenging duel, this is the question of survival." The meaning of the work is thus identical with the cognitive creative process, the adventure, the interaction in the course of which one gets an answer to the - ontological, not conceptual - question referring to the meaning of museum ("When is the museum a museum?", instead of "What is a museum?"), and this answer also applies to art works. This meaning obviously also implies the interaction of the female and the dominating and world-explaining male principles. The interaction translated into metaphores encloses the objects in an hermeneutic circle. (The artist being of Hungarian origin, the work also has a specific prehistory [as Katalin Néray pointed out in a preface to a catalogue]: in the '70s the Hungarian poet Sándor Weöres revived a long-forgotten poet, the follower of French Enlightenment and neo-classicism László Ungvárnémeti Tóth as a personality fired by eroticism. This, and his tragedy titled *Narcissus* inspired Gábor Bódy's film *Narcissus and Psyche*, which renewed the language of the film in the early '80s.)

Nedko Solakov's "museum" titled *The Collector* also raises the ontological question of art and the museum, replied again in a conceptual way. The work is a heap of the chef d'oeuvre of European art seemingly deprived of their value in an African hut. Art, the products of artistic memory, and a collection of a non-remembering type and of a non-artistic function, placed in the reversed situation replace the theoretical problem of the relativity of art prevalent throughout the 20th century and also the new theoretical problem of the relativity of the museum by the dialogicality of art/museum. Placed in two different contexts (in a museum exhibition as well!), the chef d'oeuvre of the so-called European primitivism exist and function as both primitive objects and grand art works via the creation of new structures of relations. This meaning evolves in Solakov's work in the course of contextualization and interaction produced as a result of a logical-conceptual game.

It can be said on the basis of experiences gained in the mentioned and other exhibitions in Budapest and East-Central Europe that the museum works include some that function as



alternative museums or archives not bound to a place in any here-and-now. They only exist in the present, in the context of the world, such as the Library of the Slovenian VSSD group (Slovenian abbreviation for Painter, Know Thy Duty). In this, the visitor may ponder about the books displayed or may stay at any table in concord with the rules of the protection of art objects, in a situation reminding of a museum, without receiving the information customary at places like that. The visitor may realize that museum, library, archives exists through him, by life and not by itself alone. The exhibitions of another Slovenian group, IRWIN, consist of objects, themselves assemblages of various collected things, reminding of art works. The objects get reinterpreted in the new context, their new meanings react upon their original contexts, and so on and so forth (as Igor Zabel interprets them). Constantly changing interpretation, as the meaning of the alternative museum, is radically new in a static museum situation (Interiors of the Planit). Both "museums" are part of the so-called P.A.R.A.S.I.T.E. Museum, which does not exist physically, only during exhibitions, and to the collection of which anything may belong.

Let me add by way of a supplement to the abovesaid the 1995 exhibition, intallation of Belorussian Artur Klinov in Minsk, which was the alloy of a peep-show and a fun-fair. The latter are classical museum-alternatives in regard to the mode of viewing what there is to view (and what there is to view is the alternative to the art objects). These, in a museum context, react upon, and thus create, the meaning. From the lined boxes with peep-holes one could see typical and harshly naive social-realist paintings as the objects of lust (the clandestine pleasure is remembrance itself, and what one sees is actually the reminder). In the other part of the exhibition, anyone could place his or her head in the blank heads of pictures surrounded by balloons reminiscent of the sets of fun-fair photographers. These active modes of the reception of and participation in the art object derive from the specific interactive nature of popular culture characterized by momentariness and physicality, a primitive degree of perception without subsequent mental operations. The art-character of the official, though actually pseudo, "art" meant for the masses (- a stylistic stunt or obligatory work of the artist? -) seen in the peep-show is shed and it becomes a weird, guilty trash through its emphatically private reception, while the publicity of the pop-art-like scenery relaxes the shock of the encounter with the past (recall of memory). This pure and drastic variant of the museum as a show rejects the museum as a false cultural institution.

Memory identified by Fülep with expression, forming, imagination - that is, creation itself, was "transcending reality by forming", in keeping with the art of his age. In his theory, the variety of intuitions are united, arranged into form by memory. Playing or the creation of metaphores as mental and linguistic phenomena (for the latter, see Ronald W. Langacker's cognitive language theory) connect individual elements without changing them by forming. Meaning is produced by creating their connections and possible links, and this, in the course of a play "without interest" creates the simultaneity, identity of cognition and creation, interpretation.

While the alternative museums mentioned above use reminders of the museum situation, they actually deny the museum-type memory. They create continuous transitions between the reality of the memory and the reality of the present, of life, declaring the interactive, contextualizing mode of existence to be creation. Another group of alternative museums, however, are works existing in their own time, with an incessant inner play of memory. Asian Indian Vivan Sundaram's Sher-Gil Archives involving Hungarian references as well, and Estonian Mati Karmin's My Father, are family archives, collections, which were represented in Budapest's Palace of Art. (O. Drozdik's and the VSSD's works were also on display there.) The ensembles of objects are related to historical,



personal memory and to art, but artistic memory transforms them into art objects and museums. In the cooperation of remembrance-creation-interpretation, form and esthetic quality are secondary to the interactivity between objects, between object and artist, and between work and interpreter. A distant relative is Swedish Marianne Lindberg de Geer's alternative "gallery" called "Thinking of Myself", which consists of 400 pictures (photos and reproductions). One face of each picture is replaced by the self-portrait of the artist. The personal artistic interactions, contextualization asserted in the collages create hundreds of metaphors of the self, so the gallery actually contains 400 works as one portrait of a single personality.

These sets of objects are extended in space, which also implies the ritual nature of the process of creation/interpretation. The spatiality and hence temporality of the work is the consequence and exposer of various internal or external connections.

If, therefore, artistic memory exists in contemporary art, it seems to be interactive (metaphoric) rather than selective, thereby contradicting the dadaist, extreme selection in its essentials: it is not directed at estheticism in the first place but has a wider scope, it can be contextualized. It is not operated by the will of expression, but by cognition and the "game". From among Fülep's insights, thus, one is still to consider the thesis which anticipates the significance of the play and the metaphoric manner of creation by seeing the work as the contraction of reality and possibility, declaring the evolution of a work by its own inner laws, thus having its own specific (metaphysical or internal) time and space. In our present-day view influenced, but not exclusively, by the cognitive sciences declaring the interplay of cognition and creation and by hermeneutics, art works differ from the everyday games (interactions, contextualizations) because of the presence of memory, the importance of the ritual.

I hope you will excuse that I relate the concepts of contemporary art and literary theories with memory, that I ascribe salient importance to remembrance in creating and interpreting art works, as well as in society. I do not only do so by reason of Lajos Fülep's philosophy signifying tradition to some extent, but also because in my inherited civilization private and artistic memory had a peculiar, existential significance for a long time: it upheld the individual and national identity, the European awareness of humanist culture.