University of Pécs Faculty of Music and Visual Arts

Doctoral School

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Recalling mediums

Transmedial tendencies of the millennial contemporary Hungarian painting

Synopsis of the DLA thesis

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Introduction

The following thesis focuses on contemporary Hungarian painting reflecting to the mediums of technology. In the light of the experience I gained during a brief historic summary of the interactions between painting and other mediums, though the work of certain artists, I analyzed the connection between millennial and post-millennial contemporary Hungarian painting and digital mediums, and also the medial transformations occurring between them. My research puts a strong emphasis on the interviews I conducted with many contemporary artists representing the Hungarian scene in 2014 and 2015. Painting by using technology, apart from raising important philosophical questions, resulted in a new painting phenomenon in the post-millennial Hungary: the technorealism. This thesis also analyses the debates related to this movement and follows the painting aspirations reflecting to technological mediums during a good decade and a half after the millennium. Primarily I was interested if painters analyzed in this thesis created medium imitations after being inspired by sceneries already represented digitally or with some analogue technology. On the one hand, viewers meet the essence of scenery filtered through many mediums in these creations, and this phenomenon is existing and relevant with no regard to the will of the creator. On the other hand, these creations are especially about the medium(s) many times, so mediatory medium of them becomes a major player.

A piece of art considered as a medium reflecting to itself is a common phenomenon of modern theory of art: the issue was addressed by both Greenberg and McLuhan, although by different means. Greenberg reduced painting to mediums reflecting to themselves (paint, sculpture) (Greenberg, 1965), McLuhan addressed mediums as the message in his famous phrase. Despite the fact that Greenberg dogmatically insisted to pure painting (painting remaining within its own boundaries), the artists of pop-art ignored these boundaries and they were able to transfer their creations from medium to medium without limitation, often making mediums the theme of their creation. Since then, operations between different types of mediums loosened the boundaries between traditional types of art, while at the same time they prompted painting to redefine itself again and again and to justify its traditional system of tools. Thus,

painting did not disappear in the ocean of digital media surrounding it, but it was able to implement and use the scenery of it, and they are in a constant dialogue. Painting exhibitions of the new millennium regularly address this question: Painting 2.0 of Munich and Vienna was the latest exhibition examining the role and position of painting in the age of information (Fehér Dávid, 2016).

Gesture and effect

All of the image creation systems have a recognizable character and set of motions or effects. Pastose brush strokes and spots mean the same thing for painting that blurring and graininess means for photos, homogenous color surfaces and disposition means for screen printing, and image noise and effects mean for digital photos. A kind of approach represented by the certain medium is added to all of this. Painting involves these effects into its inventory and it often imitates or recalls "manufactured" scenery (manual mimesis). While scenery and gestures are digitalized by new image creation tools, the manual imitation of digital scenery (as a parallel phenomenon) appears in fine arts. Moreover, the "dispossessed" digital effects do not become only manual, but sometimes they become to a signature, as a gesture reflecting to the creator. In addition, image noise and technical fault becomes an effect, a semiotic and aesthetic phenomenon, a synonym of uniqueness.

Examples for the interactions between painting and other mediums from art history

The transmission of pieces of art from medium to medium was a common phenomenon from the beginning of art. Looking over the course of art history, studies portraying nature are harder to find than copies and paraphrases of other pieces of art. The prefiguration is often the creation of an other branch of art: sculpture of a painting, painting of graphics, photo of a painting, etc. From the nineteenth century, interactions between different image creation techniques and branches of painting were increased. Realism and impressionism shows the effect of photography. Alongside having a scientific background (optical color mixing), pointillism shows visual relationship as a painting technique with raster engraving

(Novák László, 1928), a photographical process developed then. In the twentieth century, this interaction was common through collage, montage and readymade, and through using technologies of applied arts, industry and mass communication in fine arts (Weibel, 1995). Pop-artists considered new mediums as themes: Raster dots of the comics of Roy Lichtenstein, readymades of media and mass production of Warhol, raster image details of Sigmar Polke, and the torn poster surfaces of Mimmo Rotella; the medium became the message. Op-artists also addressed technological scenery, for example through pixel images of Yvaral Vasarely. Despite the fact that painting got far from other mediums for a while during the postmodern era (transavantgarde, Neue Wilder), "recalling" the scenery of other mediums became a characteristic tendency in the 90's again. Many previously non-existent effects appeared with the development of digital technology and impregnated contemporary fine arts where these effects appear as themes or references, and obviously technically too. Manual mimesis of "manufactured" scenery was typical of many painters. Digital effects became signatures, image noise became an effect, and moreover it became something with the functions that patina used to have. Faults, "noises" and low resolution gained an aesthetic and semiotic role in arts, in parallel to the mass adoption of high resolution scenery (for example the JPEGS creations of Thomas Ruff). Accordingly, I started to address artists who deliberately connected painting to other mediums. For example David Hockney, who stimulated his images by using polaroid images and faxes, and "painted" by using iPhones and iPads from the beginning of the 2010's (Jonquet, 2010).

Millennial phenomena of contemporary Hungarian painting

Contrary to the dominance of transavantgarde painting in the 80's, pieces of art created by using technological mediums gained more and more significant role in the 90's. Many painters started to address video, print or computer image creation, at least with experimental intentions (L. Molnár Mária, 2004).

Pre-digital paintings: computer effects, manual implementation

In the framework of a tender, József Bullás, László Mulasics and other artists have already been invited in the middle of the 80's to participate in the computer graphics experiments of MTA-SZTAKI (The Hungarian Academy of Sciences Institute for Computer Science and Control) as painters. At the beginning of the 90's, Bullás already created virtual spaces and abstract compositions with a 3D animation software, in parallel to his manual painting (Bullás, 2002). This ambivalence, the duality of illusion of the virtual scenery created by optical effects and material-shaped manual uniqueness, is also typical of later painting. Scenery of technological mediums also inspired other Hungarian artists from the 90's. András Braun imitated the scenery of technological image creation manually, just like Bullás. Abstract paintings and collages created precisely with sophisticated technology are recalling the scenery of photograms, raster offset prints and multi-layer computer graphics spiced with effects. Layers appeared in the paintings of figure painters in the 90's. András Koncz combined figure motives with ornate patterns, and Dénes Wächter randomly painted his popular culture quotations above, below or to one side of each other. In both cases, the reference of their layered image motives is mostly the scenery of technical mediums (photo, reproduction, poster, etc.), and the layering itself is a part of the pop-art (montage, decollage) spirit recalling mediums.

(Photo)realistic renaissance of the 90's

The interest in figure and photorealistic painting was increasing internationally (and also in Hungary) in the second half of the 90's, and a new movement also appeared: a movement focusing on the relation between painting and other mediums, and having a strong characteristic of medial transformation.

Generally, (figure) painting was able to gain a role more important than it had in the previous years. Amid video and computer games, screens and overwhelming commercial scenery, newer generation of painters had a vision of the world different from the older colleagues'. In addition, in Hungary there is a strong demand to give a context and legitimate painting in contemporary art with the help of science and art philosophy; and also to resolve previous confrontation with intermedial arts. It was a

common trend of the fine arts of the turn of the millennium to analyze the connection between art and science and technology, the exhibitions *The Butterfly Effect (A pillangó hatás)* (Műcsarnok, 1996) and *Sight (Látás)* (Műcsarnok, 2002) organized in the Műcsarnok then were good examples of this phenomenon. Young painters examined the creations of Peter Weibel, Vilém Flusser and Roland Barthes or the biological process of sight as a theoretical resource for their painting agenda, in order to demonstrate their resultant modern concept in a medium of traditional painting.[1]

Fine arts trends of the second half of the 90's were presented by the group exhibition *Crosstalk (Áthallás)* organized in the Műcsarnok by Zsolt Petrányi during the summer of 2000. The approach basis of the exhibition was popular culture, with the participation of young artists who approached questions about art by using the icons, tools and image forms of popular culture. The increasing presence of painting also attracted the attention of Petrányi. He considered the diverse examination of image mediums, and the reinterpretation of the reality of technological mediums by using the tools of traditional painting as the role of painting. (Petrányi, 2000).

New painting approach combined with traditional skills and technological apparatus (projector, graphic software, etc.) which became easily accessible, influenced by technicist cult movies of the millennium and cyber philosophy, resulted in the creation of the technorealist phenomenon of painting. The figure wave of arts which cannot be considered as a coherent movement was named technorealism[2] by Sándor Hornyik after the millennium (Hornyik, 2003). A longstanding debate was carried out of the phenomenon in Műértő during 2003 and 2004, and an exhibition called *Technorealism – In addition to a debate (Technoreál – Egy vita margójára)* was organized by Zsolt Petrányi in the exhibition area of ICA (Institution of Contemporary Arts) of Dunaújváros during the same year.

Technorealism

Sándor Hornyik used the term to refer to painters who reflected to technological mediums in their paintings. Technorealists were generally inspired by popular

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[1] Cf. Lucza Zsigmond: Skype interview with Adrián Kupcsik. 27 November 2015, see Annexes

[2] The English-language term "technorealism" was born at the end of the 90's, and it originally defined a rational attitude between the techno-opportunist and technophobic extremities. For more information: http://www.technorealism.org/faq.html

culture: by the world of mainstream movies, comics and commercials, and they also remixed this scenery. The term mentioned was mainly associated with the then painting of Adrián Kupcsik, András Király, László Győrffy, Szilárd Cseke, Dénes Ghyczy and Attila Adorján. Surely popular, commerce compositions of iconic media images transformed into oil paintings, many times the effects themselves, the blurred or even the grained scenery became the real themes of paintings.

The debate on technorealism

The emerging trend of painting had such a great importance in the Hungarian fine arts scene after the beginning of the 2000's that there was an increasing demand to the theoretical reflection on it. However, as technorealism was an immature and incoherent phenomenon, theoretics were not able to find any weak spots of it. Katalin Aknai was the first to write about the phenomenon defined as a "sharp phenomenon": figure painting inspired by technological boom (Aknai, 2003). The main question of the debate arising from her article was that if figure painting had any chances against digital culture in the age of market economy. Opinions of Sándor Hornyik and Gábor Lajta were at the opposite ends of the scale where other opinions were placed – with these two opinions as reference points (Hornyik, 2003) (Lajta, 2004). New realism was approached from the direction of theory by the former, and from the direction of painting praxis and paintings created from materials by the latter. This duality was referred to as the "two kinds of logic of image nature" by Katalin Aknai (Aknai, 2004).

Relations between painting and technological mediums in the contemporary Hungarian scenery

By the middle of the 2000's, Matrix effect started to lose its importance in the world – and someway in Hungary too. Amid many trends of fine arts, painting reflecting to technological mediums became less relevant as a movement. The majority of painters labelled as technorealist considered the period when they reflected to technical mediums as an episode or experiment afterwards, but the phenomenon did

not disappear entirely at all. Reflecting to technological mediums may be observed in the case of many other painters, in parallel to, but independently from technorealists. In Hungary, this was not the goal itself, it was simply a mean to visualize their message in a modern way. As this effect became general in the Hungarian fine arts during the 2000's, the Hungarian Electrography Association suggested a series of exhibitions called *Digital effects in Hungarian contemporary arts*. Judit Szeifert, curator of the first exhibition organized in Danube Gallery during 2008, published her study *Trans-effects (Áthatások)* in connection with the exhibition, about the interactions between Hungarian contemporary painting and electrography. (Szeifert Judit, 2014). Andrea Bordács was the curator of the second exhibition of the series called *Agora in Digitalia (Agóra Digitáliában)*, organized in Olof Palme House during 2009. Multiple types of fine arts and the creations of 37 artists were presented there. In her publication about the exhibition, Andrea Bordács referred to the world of digital image creation as Digitalia. She pointed out the fact that digital image creation technologies were widely involved into the Hungarian fine arts (Bordács, 2009). She justified the presentation of "traditional" panel painting pictures, alongside other pieces of art mostly created by technological mediums, by the fact that "they were reflecting to the scenery of digital technology, just like the creations of András Kapitány, István Stark, József Bullás and Gábor A. Nagy." (Bordács, 2009).

A newer wave of young painters

At the end of the 2000's, some university painter students put digital scenery on their agenda again. They created table pictures independently of each other, but generally they were inspired by the scenery of technological mediums. Domonkos Benyovszky-Szűcs and János Brückner – yet independently of each other and because of entirely different impulses – both addressed the painting transformation of digitally damaged image scenery. (Brückner, 2012). In the case of the Hungarian new abstract trends of the 2010's, the conclusions of the essay *Painting Beside Itself* by David Joselit are undoubtedly confirmed: painting exceeded its own boundaries and became a part of a complex network (Joselit, 2009). New abstract paintings of Róbert Batykó recalling images of video game screens, readymade printing creations

of Gábor Kristóf or installations of Zsófia Keresztes are analogue reflections of the digital image era created by post-technological painting techniques (Fenyvesi Áron, 2017).

Summary

Different technological mediums always had a considerable effect on the development of painting. Photography, raster printing processes, movies, videos and digital tools and scenery inspired it too, but they also continuously challenged painters as (more) modern image creation technologies, and many of the painters involved the scenery of the mentioned tools into their paintings. The depicted theme was only a reason to envision other mediums in the form of paintings. The analogue (pop art) and later (from the 90's) the digital scenery of the overwhelming amount of images generated by mass production and consumer society resulting from it forced painting to a continuous reflection. The relation existing between painting and alternative technological mediums of image creation was one of the most important factors of the development and self-definition on painting during the millennial decades, which prompted painting to the continuous reinterpretation of the boundaries of it. In my thesis, I analyzed the Hungarian aspects of this phenomenon.

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