HUNGARIAN UNIVERSITY OF FINE ARTS

Images of the Uránia

Theses of the DLA Dissertation

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2023.

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The starting point of my thesis is to rethink the research of the Uránia Science Theatre.

The Urania was a popular science theatre and movement that operated between 1900-1920s. Its unique feature was to stage projected picture performances, which were the first to use the emerging new technique of motion pictures. Urania is not an unfamiliar research topic: numerous publications have been published over the almost 125 years of its operation; therefore, it is difficult to say anything new on the subject. They examined the beginnings of film in Hungary and the aspect of the history of Hungarian silent film. It is regularly cited in the history of the early popular educational and the extracurricular education. Studies from the media history perspective or where the emphasis was on the multimedia elements of the theatre. The wide range of topics covered in the theatre's productions provided an opportunity to highlight a particular play and examine it from the perspective of different disciplines (e.g., social science, photo reportage, village ethnography, First World War impact).
Yet the analyses are missing something. The performances of the Uránia theatre cannot be reconstructed. Most of the texts can be found in the editions; however, the visual part of the pieces, the early moving images and projected images have been destroyed or lost. This makes it difficult to objectively analyze the presentations and their visual aspects. Perhaps this is why the publications related to Urania examine the workings of the Urania Science Theatre in parts rather than a whole.

To analyze the performances of Uránia, it is necessary to refer to the press of the time because newspapers and magazines regularly covered the news and novelties of Uránia on a daily basis. After the premiere performance, each newspaper published its own review of the current plays. These descriptions usually describe in detail the content of the performances, highlight the subject matter of the projected images and, in many cases, describe in detail what is shown in a moving image scene. It is actually in these reports that Uránia is found.

During my doctoral research, I created a collection of Uránia's performances and events:

The collection of Uránia - Uránia Science Theatre performances can be found at
https://uraniaresearch.com.

On this website the Uránia's performances and events can be found, organized chronologically and by subject. Click on the title of a performance to read the descriptions, reviews, and reports of the performance quoted from newspapers of the time. For some pieces, if I found a reproduction of the performance footage, I used it to illustrate the entries.
My aim in creating the collection was to see Urania and its program as a whole, but also to be able to read it one by one, and to imagine a performance based on a description.
As well as a collection of performances, the website allows you to search for Uránia playwrights and find out about Uránia's milestones via the timeline.

With this almost holistic overview of the collection, my aim was to show how the development of technology, historical events, the emergence of new ideologies, and politics could change the themes of a theatre show. Uránia, as its name suggests, started as a science theatre, and although it differed from its model, the Berlin Urania, founded in 1887; here "scientific" did not only mean lectures in the exact scientific and astronomical sense. From the very beginning, Uránia Budapest tried to think in a broader range of subjects and, in addition to the strong natural science influence at the beginning, to open to human themes, for instance, to include history, literature, ethnography, and arts in the program. Additionally, Uránia was quickly

recognized the popularity of presenting current events, and with the help of moving images, it very quickly organized locations and field trips where it could film newsworthy events and later present them on its stage. But the up-to-date approach was not only in terms of study tours, but also in terms of new issues such as women's issues or socialism. It has also tried to be topical in the presentation of foreign guests and to present different points of view.

This thesis also seeks to illustrate the changes and processes in the themes of Uránia's performance, how a scientific theatre is transformed to an institution dealing with current social issues and social science which eventually gets swallowed up by war propaganda.

In addition to the collection and thematic transformation of the Uránia collection, I am also presenting the images of the Uránia. How can we talk about images if there are no samples or if we find reproductions, they are not presented in the way that the scientific theatre of the time would have seen them?

In this thesis I present images that are presumably images from Urania - the authors of the paper have published books on the same subject or a paper of the same title which may have been shown in Urania.

With the help of the reproductions published in the press of the time - which are indeed pictures from Urania - I present the "color projected images" of Urania. These images, using digital colorization, can be found on the collection's website for each performance. I think it's important to point out that Uránia played its performances mostly with color projections and moving pictures, which is why I thought it was important not to see black and white reproductions when browsing the Uránia collection.

"Colour projected images" - In this thesis I introduce Károly Zamboni, photographer and retoucher at Uránia, who colored the Uránia slides. Reflecting on the hand-coloring techniques of the time, I present contemporary coloring using artificial intelligence, and contrast it with contemporary hand-colored slide painting.

Among the caricatures of Frigyes Karinthy in his "Így írtok ti" we find "Pekar, the Scientific". In the parody of style, Karinthy wrote the "real Uránia" performance, emphasizing all the exaggerated parts of it. Starting from this, and using artificial intelligence, I try to reconstruct the play "The Skin" on the text and images of the "Uránia" performance written by Karinthy, but not yet visualized.

The aim of my thesis is to interpret two approaches and comparisons. In the first part of the essay and in the collection, I will present the images of Uránia using ekphrasis. The ekprhasis, which means the description and representation of oral and written works of art, is done here in the case of the Uránia pictures with the help of the collection. My main goal in creating the Uránia collection was to give visitors to the collection and readers of this thesis a sense of the presence of the images presented by Uránia, in countless descriptions and reviews. Uránia's works are no longer just seen through pictures, but also through words and texts.
While ekphrasis brings images to life through verbal description and literary works, AI-generated images are created through algorithms and data. Their collision and analysis can broaden aesthetic understanding, the interpretation of images and the impact of technology on research processes.

The main theses of the thesis are:

1. Rethinking research on the Uránia Science Theatre: The thesis aims to bring new perspective to the functioning of the Uránia Science Theatre. The institution was unique in that it used early moving image techniques in its performances. The wide-ranging themes of the theatre's performances were examined from the perspective of previous publications and various disciplines.

2. Missing visual elements and the help of the early press: Details of the Uránia performances can be found in the press of the time, as newspapers reported in detail on the performances and the content of the projected images. The thesis uses this information to analyse the performances.

3. Collection of Uránia's performances: I have created a collection of Uránia lectures during the research, which I will make available on a website. The collection presents the lectures in chronological and thematic order, helping to build a broader picture of the institution's work.

4. Thematic changes and social context: The thesis aims to show how the themes of Uránia's performances have changed, how the institution has reacted to the development of technical achievements and to social and political changes.

5. Representing images - ekphrasis and artificial intelligence: The images of Urania are presented using ekphrasis, which allows the images to be described orally and in writing. The thesis examines how the images presented by Uránia appear in contemporary descriptions and reviews. At the same time, the thesis demonstrates the use of artificial intelligence-generated images in the reconstruction and colouring of the images of Urania. The thesis expands aesthetic understanding and interpretation through artificial intelligence-generated reconstruction of images of Urania, and examines the impact of technology on the research process.

Along these theses, my thesis offers a new approach to the research of the Uránia Science Theatre to the study of the themes and visual elements of the performances, and to the analysis of the impact of technology and social changes.