

Hungarian University of Fine Arts
Doctoral School

Art-memorial-art

DLA thesis

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2023

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1. Background to the research

In the period after graduating from the Hungarian University of Fine Arts, my starting point for my work was the urban, built space as a set of forms. Due to the many commutes between Budapest and my hometown Szeged, my attention was focused on non-places. Later on, moving to Budapest, I was influenced by the experience of the metropolitan environment as a local resident. I was constantly preoccupied with the underpasses and overpasses, stations and crowds of functional places, non-places, and their changes. The wave of public space renamings, which intensified again in the early 2010s, focused my attention on the relationship between power and public spaces. I was interested in how power represents itself in the fabric of the city.

The PHOTO/MODEL 2. exhibition in the first year of my doctoral studies provided a good opportunity to start the planned research programme. Through the theme chosen for the exhibition, I had the opportunity to investigate the relationship between a group of sculptures and their environment, and the impact of changes in social systems on the works. The exhibition was organized by the Library, Archives and Art Collection of the Hungarian University of Fine Arts and the Doctoral School, and included, among other things, an exhibition of artistic reactions to selected images from the University's library photo archive. My project for the exhibition was on the history of the Horvay Kossuth statue group.

2. Subject and content of the thesis

As an artist, I follow the efforts of the authorities to transform public space with increased attention. My thesis examines the politics of memory and spatial planning in public spaces in two Budapest locations, the aspirations of power to visibility in the space and the artistic reactions to the transformations.

In addition to my previous studies and my own previous work, I would like to present some basic theories of space theory that are relevant to the interpretation of my work, and through which the relationship between space and power can be understood. It is not the purpose of this paper to discuss the theories of space in detail.

My aim is to investigate the politics of symbolic appropriation of public space and collective memory, observing the cross-regional changes in Liberty Square and Kossuth Square. The research provides a sketchy overview of the impact of the changes in memory policies over the last hundred years on the spaces under study, focusing on the post-2010

transformations through the observation of the instruments of symbolic appropriation of space, such as public space and street name changes, commemorative exhibitions, and space transformation.

The two public spaces under study were chosen because of their prominent status as active spaces for cultural policy games. An analysis of their changes reveals the ideological practices of the changing powers. Kossuth Square, which is currently the country's most important national memorial site, has undergone a major reorganisation in recent years, erasing forty years of historical imprint from the square's commemorative fabric. Liberty Square is also an important space for power occupation practices. Here, in contrast to Kossuth Square, we witness an exercise in monumental displacement, where statues are juxtaposed rather than relocated in response to changing power aspirations.

In this thesis, I examine bottom-up initiatives against narratives dictated from above. I seek to answer the question of how these transformations have altered the spaces of memory in the city I am discussing and how they have provoked reactions from artists. Furthermore, I examine how symbolic space occupation structures the visual space.

The title of the dissertation, *Art-memorial-art*, has multiple readings, as a playful and provocative combination of words, it includes both the concepts of memory and memorial. My aim is to illustrate the relationship between the two concepts through a description of the research on space and memory. It is not the aim of this thesis to develop the theoretical frameworks of these concepts and to create new definitions.

Following the theoretical part, I will present the German practice of memory research and collective memory through examples of visual art. Then I will discuss the topic of competing memories in Hungary, and finally I will point out the challenges of Hungarian memory culture through the example of Liberty Square, which I interpret as a space of competing memories.

I will introduce the *Living Monument social movement* and the circumstances and reasons for its creation by discussing the concept of monuments and counter-monuments. My aim is to highlight the intertwined relationship between the *Living Memorial* and the German Occupation Memorial.

This is followed by a presentation of the *Imre Steindl Programme* as one of the most comprehensive spatial planning programmes of the last decade. After winning the 2010

elections, the government started to develop its long-term spatial planning plans for memory policy. The most prominent sites of these efforts are Kossuth Square and its surroundings, and Buda Castle, where the concrete moulding of palaces bombed in the Second World War is now taking place. This essay is not intended to describe the *National Hauszmann Programme*.

3. Hypotheses

1. I assume that power is making a symbolic occupation of space - extending its power into space - transmitting its values through it. Through these transformations, intentions to change collective memory become decodable.
2. I assume that the self-representational aspirations of power, by defining and changing the symbolic system of spaces, play an indicative role in the related artistic manifestations, actions, community activities and creative processes.
3. I suppose that in the struggle for representational spaces, positions of power have an impact on the cultural and, within that, the visual arts scene.

4. Research sources and processing methods

Looking at the hypotheses, in each case, there is evidence based on theory and, through artistic examples, practical results. In addition to the domestic literature, I have tried to draw on international literature to verify and research the hypotheses. The topics examined in the thesis are predominantly Hungarian-language literature sources and newspaper articles, due to their predominantly domestic relevance.

I will briefly describe the processes and reasons for the revival of memory research and its international and domestic implications. A good proportion of the relevant international literature is available in Hungarian translations due to the popularity of the research topic. The research has confirmed the continued relevance of the field of research at both national and international level. In addition to reviewing the literature, I will also review the results of previous empirical research and draw on my own observations and experiments in my research.

My research demonstrates that the power of self-representation influences artistic manifestations, actions, communities, and creative processes by defining and changing the symbolic system of spaces.

My thesis takes a personal artistic approach. In my research, I have used as examples spaces that are prominent places of power, but also important for me as an artist to explore. The changes I experience in them have an impact on my creative work. At the beginning of

this thesis, I described my relationship to space and the theoretical approaches that have influenced me. I have explored some important theoretical concepts, such as Edward W. Soja's concept of trialectic space, and illustrated the influence of spatiality on me as an artist through my own work.

I have shown that changes in power affect the architectural and artistic image of public spaces. Power positions in the struggle for representational spaces have an impact on the cultural and, within that, the visual arts scene. However, the capacity for assertion is unequal. Over the past decade, grassroots initiatives that started in the post-change period have gradually been squeezed out and withered away.

4. Further research opportunities, research limitations

The research topic covered in this thesis is very diverse, and there is a risk that the focus of the content may become fragmented. I believe it is important to acknowledge the potential for error in research as well as in the creative process. My research has been limited by the fact that there is now so much literature about memory research available on the world wide web - in English and in many other foreign languages - that it is practically impossible for me to fully explore it. There is also an international interest in memory research, with different research objectives in different countries. The empirical part of my research focuses on the Hungarian context, including the recent history of the Kossuth and Liberty Square, and the artistic reactions to the sculpture exhibitions and their transformation. My findings are therefore valid in a domestic context.

The aim of my thesis is to review my own creative processes from the immediate post-university period to the present, through the chosen research topic. The coordination of artistic research and creative processes, and their substantiation by scientific methods, is not a simple task. The question of what standards a research-based visual arts dissertation should meet has been a constant concern of mine.

Studying doctoral theses and publications in various disciplines, I have developed a formal framework. The possible fragmentation of the thesis is related to the uncertainty of the artist's creative process, the trial-and-error method, the struggle with creative crisis and burnout, and attempts to move on. Power games and a sense of growing divisions strongly influence my creative and self-representational stance. The thesis can be seen as an analysis of the creative process and the processes that influence it, which will help me to move on. At the same time, the writing of the thesis has provided an opportunity for a comprehensive creative analysis.

The conclusion of the questions I asked myself, beyond the examination of space, is the recognition of the possibility of a more active use of space and the need to incorporate this into my creative processes. The research has made me aware of the importance of using sculptural approaches in my subsequent work.

I think of artwork itself as a continuous process of research, experimentation, and learning. I seek my identity in a changing power and cultural framework. I try to experiment freely with forms of artistic expression based on a complex and diverse conceptual framework for memory research. An important experience for me is how the data I collect relates to my creative processes.