

Paksi Endre Lehel

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A proposal for the methodology of interpreting light environments

The project is based on the fact that the types of artworks that can be classified as ‘light environments’ has been a marginalized art form from the point of mainstream art history writing compared to the traditional art genres. This marginalization is traceable in the western canon, and is exceedingly true for the Hungarian situation. I consider light environments as a separate genre of art, differing fundamentally from the conventional art genres, and lacking a proper methodology of interpretation. This is the main factor that hinders light environments to become part of the art historical canon.

To come closer to solving this problem, first we should have a definition on what can be considered a light environment. Through the historical analysis of the appearances of the specific term and related terms in different European languages it became clear that a consensus is missing. The definition ought to be the synthesis of a debated subject matter resulting in a spectrum. Problems of the spectrum still include classification issues, as there is no exact definition for the term ‘environment’ and its relation to ‘installation’, nor is there any settled meaning defining the ‘Art of Light’ among European languages. Speaking from a Central Eastern European point of view, using not a latin, nor a german language, the national differences in term usage become evident – and also disturbing.

Having identified the minimum traits of light environments I select three paradigmatical works that have been exhibited in Hungary to demonstrate the problems of hermeneutic interpretation. A light environment can possess traits that can be found in live art, thus a programme gives the dimension of time to the artwork. Processuality can be said to be an obligatory quality of light environments since the artwork is experienced by the spectator through the walk of the physical body of the spectator inside of it, thus producing a series of ‘originals’ by every processing step and view – of which ‘originals’ none can be conserved. As light environments’ ‘material’ –light – is not a material in the everyday sense, there is always a basic distinction between the physical assembling of the work and the

transformation of the space which encompasses it. These result in problematic, if not impossible documentation, collection or re-installation of the artworks.

For the Berlin Forum I would happily lay out a part of the interpretation process, namely the means and role of western influences on the artists creating the first laser, and the first cybernetic programmed light environments in the People's Republic of Hungary. Although with nearly twenty year's delay to the first light environments – exhibited as such – these artworks could be realised beyond the Iron Curtain in the meltdown of centrally controlled state aesthetics in the eighties, when modernist tendencies were no more unanimously claimed 'anti-humanist' tendencies heading to the self-obliteration of art.