Hungarian Academy of Fine Arts
Doctoral School

The myth of the frame
(Thesis of a thessay)

DLA theses

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My DLA dissertation speaks about the relationship of art and science in larger context, and about relationship of the media art and technoscience in a narrower sense.

It does not follow the rhetorics of a uniform scientific narrative, it rather outlines and frames the possible approaches together with their questions and doubts. The following text should be thus considered as an evolution of how the theme was approached by myself.

The dissertation comprising four chapters is preceded by the definition of its genre and is introduced by a set of methodological assumptions.

The introduction or more precisely the declaration of the fictitious and intermediary genre of *thessay* is justified by the a priori problematic trait of the DLA thesis in general since the different disciplines of art theory as independent fields have already "colonized" those aspects and methods which could serve at all for a theoretical approach of art. I had to start from a non-existent territory, which although once belonged to the art itself, it is no longer held by this. So the text had to take its start from the No-place's No-land, from a Utopia heading towards a foreshadowed direction and aspiring to find its own method on the way. The genre of thessay (a notion created by the combination of the words thesis and essay) assures the maintenance of a formalist and critical way of textual approach ensuring meanwhile its own autonomy from the already established modalities of discourse. It avoids becoming an art historical, esthetical or art critical narrative, and whenever it fails to do so, it hides beyond its own texture by using the language as a disguise.

The question posed by the main part of the dissertation consisting of four chapters is whether there are any connections possible between art and science, and if so, what would those be.

In the first chapter, entitled *Basic problems* I formulate three general questions which make the comparison art–science extremely difficult, if not impossible. The first is subtitled *The paradox of deconstruction* and it speaks about the contradictions of the role played in this comparison by a certain view of the philosophy of science, namely the social constructivism. The deconstruction of the myth of cultural uniformity of the two fields together with the limits of comparison due to the historically dependent interpretation of the two notions are expressed in the second part, which holds the title *Identification and identity.* The conclusion drawn in this part is that their apparent autonomy is illusory, the two fields are far more diversified both from methodological and philosophical points of view that would allow a general, non-contradictory comparison. The final part of this chapter carrying the title *Translation and transfer of models* draws the attention on those linguistical and logical problems which arise from the non-translatable character of the scientific models. The misunderstanding resulting from mistranslations is in close relation with the long-lasting "two cultures" debates provoked by C.P. Snow's 1959 lecture.

Epistemological frames is the title of the second chapter, which presents the epistemological references of the scientific methods forwarding the question whether these logical methods are applicable in the case of artistic statements. In order to answer it, in the first part the basic - though occasionally disputed - logical tools of epistemology, that is, induction, verification and demarcation are introduced. As the art seems to make use rather of a negative induction and the demarcation criteria seem to efficiently exclude art from the fields of science, the application of these methods within art is questionable. The emphasis that the dichotomy truth-beauty is given within art history and the history of science aims at solving these contradictions, though with a questionable efficiency. The chance of their real dissolution in epistemological sense lies in Popper's concept of 3 worlds, though the subject-beholder receiving the knowledge requires further cultural and social definition. This is essayed in the next part, which outlines the two distinct art historical genealogies of the viewer's development as a subject: the historicism and pragmatism. The latter genealogy offers a better perspective for comparison, but also makes it

clear that the power dimensions of the knowledge should be taken in consideration. This is one of the first major conclusions of my thessay regarding the participation of art within knowledge production, which is possible, but it should be approached as a question of power, which revolves around two notions: visibility and graphic (potential). These two aspects are discussed in the last part of this chapter, entitled *The twilight of graphicality*, presenting the lack of graphic representation as the major handicap of contemporary science. As the visual arts are in the possession of various methods of visualization, many tendencies of contemporary media art offer their assistance to science, but the practices are fairly different depending on the ways of interpretation of the subject-viewer as either a perceptual-biological or an ethical-social entity.

The third chapter attempts to define the viewer-subject through the inventory of the various meanings of the frame. Comprised of four parts, the chapter entitled *From the frame towards media* aims at delimitating a frame notion applicable in the case of media artworks highlighting the issue of participation. The argumentation departs from a historical coincidence of two events, the evolution of the modern function of the frame and the formation of the observer, and progresses towards the applicability of the concept of frame in the case of technical images and technology based artworks. The chapter treats in parallel the concrete and theoretical meanings of the frame, but through emphasizing this latter, it attempts to make palpable the process through which the notion has changed starting from the renaissance painting through the blind space which serves as frame for the photography, arriving at the special frame-notions of the real-time video image and interactive artworks. Through this process the technology itself has become the frame of the image not so much on the level of the device itself as on the level of the cultural relationship between the beholder and the socially omnipresent media.

The fourth chapter, *Research, knowledge and society* delimitates the two historically relevant attitudes which characterize the approach media art manifests towards knowledge economy. The chapter presenting case studies and specific examples firstly outlines those connections which can be found behind the interdependence of scientific research institutes and media art projects. The motivations which feed the struggle for producing, possessing and disseminating knowledge are different in the case of art and science, but they share a common demand for visibility and graphicality. However, this encounter generates several contradictions, which are discussed in the

part entitled *Visibility and Power*. Here an emphasis is placed on the dependant status in this symbiosis of the media artworks which treat scientific issues, especially in the field of data visualization.

The second part presents a critique of *high media art* from the perspective of the different traditions of totalitarian and participatory utopias. By introducing the notion of technoscience it points out the dilemma the media art faces, the choice between a passive-demonstrative or active-subversive attitude. *Estheticism vs. Activation* is the title of the third part which speaks about the same dilemma by bringing examples from both the early and contemporary media art practice and introduces the pair notion of public and community. The last chapter is devoted entirely to these two notions and presents through a concrete example the attitude which could serve as a model for the participation of media art in knowledge production.

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