Opening the Cage at *Hungría 74*: Hungarian Artists in Argentina and Their Critical Take on the Dematerialization of Art Objects

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——— In 1974, the exhibition *Hungría 74* presented 24 artists from Hungary at the Centro de Arte y Communicación (CAYC) in Buenos Aires, Argentina. By the time, artists from both countries suffered political repressions of the dictatorships ruling their countries. *Hungría 74* thus was one of the few occasions to interchange ideas. However, the artists from Hungary and Argentina did not first and foremost agree on their political stance. Rather, they were both preoccupied with the dematerialization of art objects. Among Western artist dematerialization was perceived as a rebellious act against the commodification of art objects on the market; it was also embraced as a positive effect of media societies facilitating participation of marginalized groups. However, Argentinian and Hungarian artists transformed the idea to their own means. Experiencing political oppressions, they understood that the loss of material presence was not merely positive. By contrast, it was connected to disappearance, forced exiles or invisible political surveillance. The works of Dóra Maurer, Tamás Hencze, István Haraszty, György Jovánovics presented at *Hungría 74* reflect these different notions of dematerialization and offer a critical perspective on the broader political consequences of dematerializations in media societies developing worldwide since the 1970s.

Keywords: Centro de Arte y Communicación (CAYC), *Hungría 74*, Conceptual Art, cybernetics, systems art, dematerialisation, political oppression.

We are supposed to live in the era of mass media. But if I think of the little likeness of the Argentine public to understand Hungarian art, I get a little uncertain. <…> Are artists of the two continents really able to do something for each other? And is art able to do something for the future of mankind at all?[1]

With these critical questions, the Hungarian artist Lázló Beke turned to Jorge Glusberg, director of the CAYC in Buenos Aires in 1974. Beke's letter concerned the show *Hungría 74* to which 24 Hungarian artists had contributed conceptual positions. As one of the biggest art institutions in Argentine at the time, the CAYC was concerned with discussions connecting art and science while carefully opposing the military dictatorship under Juan Carlos Onganía and later Alejandro Augustín Lanusse. While the Argentinian artists faced the risk of censure, detainment and forced exile during the 1970s, the private cultural institution of the CAYC was generally tolerated by the regime. Furthermore, Glusberg's extensive international networking activities assured that the political activities at CAYC were monitored internationally[2]. To organize an international exchange, Glusberg developed a communication system, the so-called yellow sheets (*hojas amarillas*), which were distributed and connected the artists of the CAYC with artists, collectors, and art institutions around the world.

Organized through the exchange of *yellow sheets*, the exhibition *Hungría 74* at CAYC was one of the few occasions that opened a door for Hungarian artists to an international community. Meanwhile the official art scene in Hungary was harshly state-controlled under the government of the socialist leader János Kádár.[3] In particular experimental art practices

were banned under the regime[4]. Additionally, Hungarian artists were excluded from Western art contexts due to the Cold War[5]. Hungarian artists and their Argentinian hosts suffered political repressions in their countries. Lázló Beke's doubts about whether the Hungarian artists and the Argentinian public would "understand" each other did not so much arise from aesthetic concerns, but from the different political attitudes the artists carried towards Socialism[6]. While the Argentinian artists saw Socialism as an ideological aim in reference to the successful revolution in Cuba and the Socialist government established under Salvador Allende in Chile, the Hungarian artists neglected Socialist ideas as they saw them connected to the oppressive regime of the Soviet Union.

Although Jorge Glusberg's invitation of the Hungarian artists was motivated by a general intention to form a new conceptual art movement that could compete with the Western art scene, the political situation illuminates that he could not count on the artist's shared political concerns. Rather, as I want to argue in the following, Glusberg implicitly counted on their common aesthetic concerns. They shared a common interest in "dematerialisations", both in the sense of the positive effects of media technologies, and as moments of political restrictions and control, endangering individual freedom. In the positive sense, the "dematerialisation of the art object" was also proclaimed by Western art critics at the time. In his exhibition

p. 131; see also Lázló Beke, "The Present Time of the Conceptual Art, The Political Implications of Eastern European Art", in: *Radical Conceptual Art Revisited. A social and political perspective from the East and the South*, in: Vivid Radical Memory, [online], Barcelona, 2007. n.p.

4   Under State Socialism in Hungary experimental art practices usually fell under the category "banned" or "non-authorised" and were declared an offense to the public. The so-called Chapel Gallery for example was such an experimental exhibition space. Between 1971 and 1973 it hosted over 35 performance and exhibition events. After official complaints, the Gallery was closed by the authorities. Its founder György Galántai was withdrawn from the status of an official artist and driven to poverty; see György Galántai, "How Art Could Begin as Life. Supplement to the Boglár story", in: Júlia Klaniczay and Edit Sasvári (eds.), *Illegal Avant-garde, the Chapel Studio of György Galántai in Balatonboglár 1970–1973*, Artpool–Balassi, Budapest, [online] 2003, pp. 43–90, [cited 20-08-2020], https://www.artpool.hu/boglar/project/introduction.html#notes.

5   While Argentine artists were able to access the North American and European art scenes, the "communist" Hungarian artists were vastly excluded from international platforms during the Cold War. For example, exhibition events like Kynaston McShine's Information in 1970 hosted Argentine artists like Marta Minujin but no artists from Eastern Europe. See Kynaston L. McShine (ed.), *Information*, (MOMA, 2 July–20 Sept. 1970), New York: MOMA, 1970. Furthermore, Latin American artists were included in the number's exhibitions by the curator Lucy Lippard.

6   See Piotr Piotrowski, "The Global NETwork. An Approach to Comparative Art History", in: Thomas Dacosta Kaufmann, Catherine Dossin et al. (eds.), *Circulations in the Global History of Art*, Farnham: Ashgate Publishing, 2015, p. 161.

Software: Information Technologies and its new meaning for art (1970)[7] the curator Jack Burnham for example developed the idea of a "systems aesthetics" in which he considered artworks as reducible to "information", being adapted to the new needs and challenges of media societies. Similarly, the curator Lucy Lippard observed a "dematerialisation of the art object" in Conceptual art movements during the 1970s. Instead of a material execution of the artwork, artists should concentrate on the concept or idea of the work. In contrast to Burnham's somewhat more critical account towards media[8], Lippard embraced these "dematerialisations" as positive effects of media societies, facilitating processes of international exchange and democratization as well as institutional critique[9]. Both, Lucy Lippard and Jack Burnham, were in exchange with Jorge Glusberg. However, as they did not live under the historical circumstances of a dictatorship, "dematerialisation" did not carry the notions of political control as it did for the Argentinian and Hungarian artists. The latter experienced the advantages of their "dematerialised" artworks passing the borders by mail. However, they also remained sceptical towards "dematerialisations." Under the conditions of repressive regimes, the loss of material presence could also mean that persons disappeared, were forced to exiles, were shot or experienced other methods of invisible governmental control.

While Glusberg borrowed Burnham's idea of a "system's aesthetic," he transformed it into his own term, "arte de sistemas", which carried a double meaning as both an "art of the (political) system" and as systemic art. The so called "arte de sistemas" was scientifically engaged with the developments of the 20th century, but it was also in political opposition with the consequences of dictatorship. In the context of the CAYC, dematerialisations therefore were attached to a political meaning, articulating the needs to confront political repression and at the same time to participate on a globalized platform increasingly structured by media systems. It is this common tendency that Glusberg figured out between the work of the

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7   Jack Burnham (ed.), *Software Information technology: its new meaning for art*, New York: The Jewish Museum, 1970.

8   See Burnham in the introduction to his catalog to the exhibition *Software*: "It appears we cannot survive without technologies just as dangerous as the dilemmas they are designed to solve", Jack Burnham, *op. cit.*, p. 14.

9   Lucy Lippard, *Six Years. The dematerialisation of the art object from 1966 to 1972*, Berkley and Los Angeles: University of California Press, 1997 [1973], p. vii.

Hungarian artists presenting at *Hungría 74* and the artistic practices carried out at his own institute. In order to send the works of *Hungría 74* to the CAYC, they were dematerialised into ideas which could be sent back on the *yellow sheets*. Furthermore, the aesthetics of the proposed artworks themselves played with different notions of dematerialization.

In the works of *Hungría 74*, artists articulated ironic allusions to transparency and disappearance, like in the *cayc-piece* by György Jovánovics or critical reflections on bodily absence like in the piece of Dóra Maurer's *presence piece for CAYC*. Tamás Hencze's *fire painting action* critically reflected on memory and disappearance, and Édeske István Haraszty's *Mardárkalitka* (*Bird Cage*) envisioned invisible cybernetic regulations as a form of political self-control. Comparable Argentinian pieces developed at the CAYC, like the artificial ecosystem in Luis Fernando Benedit's *Biotrón*, it was based on transparency, regulation and enclosure. Interpreting this aesthetics with the media historical and political background of the time in mind, I will argue in the following that these positions cannot merely be interpreted as marginal positions which only critically comment on the political systems at the time of their creation. Instead, they can be read as critical approaches to the political implications of dematerializing systems in media societies developing worldwide.

In the first section of the article, I will therefore review the concepts of dematerialisation that were developing in the Western context and how they relate to Jorge Glusberg's idea of an "arte de sistemas" in Argentine. In the second section, I will discuss how the works of Dóra Maurer, Tamás Hencze, István Haraszty, and György Jovánovics presented at *Hungría 74* critically conceptualized "dematerialisations" both as effects of political oppression as well as effects of technological developments in media societies.

System's Art and the Global Visions of Dematerialisation

Throughout the 1970s, Western artists and critics developed a positive vision of "dematerialisation" of art objects, which was meant to free the artists from institutional restrictions, facilitate a new international art exchange and encourage processes of democratization. As the art historian

Edward Shanken has noted, these ideas of "dematerialisation" in Conceptual Art strongly connected to technological developments of the time[10]. Through the application of new media technologies, artworks did not have to exist as a material object anymore, but could be perceived as "information exchange", or, as the artist John Baldessari put it: "I was beginning to suspect that information could be interesting in its own right and need not be visual as in Cubist, ect. art"[11] According to Jack Brunham's "systems aesthetics" developed in 1968, the art object in the 20th century had become a "replaceable component in an interlocking system of production and needs fulfilment"[12] generated by industrialised societies. Such "art systems" were adapted to the complexity of society and characterised by efficiency in communication.

Taking on a similar systems view, the art critic Lucy Lippard declared in 1973 the "dematerialisation of the art object"[13] as the bases of Western "Conceptual Art":

> For artists looking to restructure perception and the process/product relationship of art, information and systems replaced traditional formal concerns of composition, color technique, and physical presence. Systems were laid over life the way a rectangular format is laid over the seen in paintings, for focus.[14]

In the "dematerialisation of the art object, Lippard saw a step towards the democratisation of the art world. Conceptual or dematerialised artworks subverted the conventions of art institutions and facilitated the

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10 A paradigmatic example for this connection is Jack Burnham's exhibition *Software. Information technology: its new meaning for art* realised in 1970 in the Jewish Museum in New York, or Kynaston McShine's exhibition *Information* taking place at MOMA the same year. Both explored the relationships between media technologies and Conceptual Art; see Edward A. Shanken, "Art in the Information Age, Technology and Conceptual Art", in: *Leonardo*, Vol. 35, No. 4, 2002, pp. 433 and 436.

11 John Baldessari, 1969, in: Lucy Lippard, *op. cit.*, p. xiii.

12 "The object denotes sculpture in its traditional physical form, whereas the system (an interacting assembly of varying complexity) is how sculpture gradually departs from its object state and assumes some measure of lifelike activity. <...>This impermanence is directly related to the industrial trend toward a *systemized* [sic] environment. <...> [T]he object is now a replaceable component in an interlocking system of production and needs fulfillment. <...> [It] becomes one of many means by which a systems-oriented culture functions at increasing levels of complexity tempered by efficiency". Jack Burnham, Beyond Modern Sculpture, *The Effects of Science and Technology on the Sculpture of this Century*, New York: George Baziller, 1968, pp. 10–11.

13 See Lucy Lippard, *op. cit.*

14 *Ibid.*, p. xv.

transmission of ideas across national borders, creating a new international interchange. In the curatorial practice of her numerous exhibitions, Lippard tried to give evidence for this new internationalism, including artists from Latin America. However, her intent to create a truly global ap-proach appears somewhat incomplete, as art historian Sophie Cras has noted[15]. While including various artists from Latin America, due to the political circumstances of the Cold War, Eastern European positions were marginalised.

Continually communicating with art critics from the US or Western Europe, Jorge Glusberg was inspired by the ideas of communication and dematerialisation as a means of political transformation. Setting up the programme for his new Centre for Arts and Communication in 1968, he had borrowed the term "arte de sistemas" (art systems) from his friend Jack Burnham. However, unlike the Western critics, Glusberg in Argentine confronted the political situation of military dictatorship. As the cultural historian Graciela Sarti has noted, due to the rising political repressions against the CAYC during the 1970s, his conception of "arte de sistemas" obtained a more and more political connotation in Glusberg's writings[16]. In the introduction of the catalogue to his seminal exhibition *Arte de Sistemas* held at CAYC in July 1971, Glusberg wrote:

> Art systems [arte de sistemas] refers to processes rather than to the finished products of 'good art'; through this show, we shall try to broaden and intensify the understanding of these systems, by leading the viewer through the main problems concerning experiences occurring during the last third of the XX century. <...> What we may see are not isolated statistic data, reflections of a social structure or the personality of the artist, but total facts whose objective significance is the result of that dialectic unity between the individual and society which becomes explicit through history and which includes the revolutionary potentials which announces the appearance [of] radical social changes.[17]

15 Sophie Cras, "Global Conceptualism? Cartographies of Conceptual Art in Pursuit of Decentering", in: Thomas Dacosta Kaufmann, Catherine Dossin et al. (eds.), *Circulations in the Global History of Art*, Farnham: Ashgate Publishing, 2015, p. 168.

16 Graciela Sarti, *op. cit.*, n.p.

17 "arte de sistemas", centro de arte y communicación en el museo de arte moderno en la ciudad de buenos aires, 1971, Collecció MACBA, Centre d'Estudis i Documentació, Barcelona, Llibre Artiste_M_0711, fol. 6.

In his statement, Glusberg describes "arte de sistemas" as a model for interdisciplinary artistic research uniting conceptual, environmental, and performative art practices. Establishing a common system of communication, these art practices should mediate between the different social, scientific and political spaces of society. In contrast to Burnham, who declared "art systems" as an expression of industrialised societies, Glusberg's "system's art" was a communication tool for political transformation under oppressive political "systems".

As Katarzyna Cytlak has noted, this politicisation of the CAYC corresponded with the extension of Glusberg's contacts to Eastern Europe. Under State Socialism, the artists and critics in Czechoslovakia, Poland, Hungary, and Romania seemed to face similar oppressions as the artists in Argentina. Unlike Lucy Lippard, Glusberg included artworks of Eastern European artists in his exhibitions held at CAYC. In July 1971, the exhibition *Arte de Sistemas* was one of the biggest events organised at CAYC. It showed the positions of about 100 international artists from 14 countries, including conceptual positions of the Czechoslovakian artists Eugen Brikius, Stano Filko, Olaf Hanel, Dušan Kimeš, and Jiří H. Kocman, Josef Kroutvor, Petr Štembera, and Jiři Valoch. In the following year, Glusberg extended his outreach to Eastern Europe[18]. *Arte de sistemas II* realised in September of 1972 included artists from Czechoslovakia, Hungary, Romania, and the Polish artist Jarosław Kozłowski[19]. Besides these group exhibitions, Glusberg developed a particular interest in the Hungarian experimental art scene,

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[18]   Countries participating in *Arte de Sitemas*: Argentina, Germany, Austria, Canada, Colombia, Czechoslovakia, Spain, France, Holland, Great Britain, Italy, Japan, Peru, Puerto Rico, and the U.S; see "arte de sistemas", centro de arte y communicación en el museo de arte moderno en la ciudad de buenos aires, 1971, Collecció MACBA, Centre d'Estudis i Documentació, Barcelona, Llibre Artiste_M_0711, fol. 4; On the participation of the Czechoslovakian artists see Katarzyna Cytlak, "Hacia el Arte Latinoamericano Globalizado. La Auto-Invención del CAYC – Centro de Arte y Communicación – desde la Perspectiva transmoderna y transregional", in: *Revista de Estudios Globales y Ar-te Contemporáneo*, Vol. 5, No. 1, 2017–2018, pp. 69–70.

[19]   As Cytlak has further mentioned, besides the contact to Lázló Beke, Glusberg also had friendships with the Polish art historians Janusz Bogucki and Jan Świdzinski. In return, Glusberg's exhibition *Hacia un perfil de Arte Latinoamericano* was exhibited in Warsaw at Wspólzenska Gallery in 1973. In 1977, Glusberg participated at a conference "Art as activity in the context of reality" at Remont Gallery in Warsaw; see Katarzyna Cytlak, *op. cit.*, p. 69 and Graciela Sarti, *op. cit.*, n.p. According to Piotr Piotrowski, Glusberg's connection to Kozłowski inspired him to plan an exhibition of Polish artists, but it remains unclear if this exhibition took place. Piotrowski states that the exhibition had been planned, while Clara Kemp-Welch speaks of the event as if executed see Piotr Piotrowski, *op. cit.*, p. 157, and Kemp-Welch Klara and Christina Freire, "Artists Networks in Latin America and Eastern Europe", in: *ARTMargins*, No. 2, 2012, p. 10.

which operated mostly undercover. In 1973, he organised the "Festival de la Vanguardia Húngara" ("Festival of Hungarian Art"). *Hungría 74* was the second exhibition at CAYC dedicated solely to Eastern European artists.

The interchange with Eastern European artists and critics at CAYC offered a possibility for Glusberg to create an alliance against the hegemony of Western definitions of Conceptual Art. However, the artists of the different countries did not necessarily share the same political goals. Instead, their positions converged with Glusberg's idea of "arte de sistemas" as a critical revision of the utopic "dematerialisations" of the West. Compared to their Western colleagues' subversive intentions, Eastern European artists experienced a partly forced "dematerialisation". As physical travel was mainly prohibited between Latin America and Eastern Europe, the artists communicated with the CAYC by mail. The letters offered a possibility to establish communication bypassing the discourses of the Western art scenes. Furthermore, presenting "dematerialised" art concepts was also a way to bypass censorship[20]. However, although the artists experienced the advantages of their "dematerialised" artworks passing the borders by mail, they also remained sceptical towards a "dematerialisation of the artwork". Under the conditions of repressive regimes, the loss of material presence also carried the connotation of political constraints, like disappearance, exiles, shootings, spying, and other methods of invisible governmental control.

Revising the artistic positions of Dóra Maurer, Tamás Hencze, István Haraszty, and György Jovánovics conserved in the archival material of the CAYC, I will discuss in the following, how these artists envisioned "dematerialisation" both as a means of political oppression and as an effect of developing media societies. They therefore fit Glusberg's conception of an "arte de sistemas" conducting social critique through the alliance of art and science. Considering this background of systems aesthetics, the conceptual

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20 Even though cultural life in Hungary was determined, experimental artists in Hungary found their way to make international exchange possible. Besides the publications of the CAYC, they communicated via unofficial magazines, so-called *samizdat* (self-publishing) literature, or letters that often bypassed the censors as they were not considered relevant enough. As Piotr Piotrowski found, the magazine *N.E.T.* founded by Jarosław Kozłowski formed conceptual art in Poland. Piotr Piotrowski, *op. cit.*, pp. 149–151, and Klara Kemp-Welch, *Networking the Bloc. Experimental Art in Eastern Europe 1965–1981,* Cambridge: Massachusetts Institute of Technology, 2018, pp. 173–174. Also, books like Klaus Grohs *Aktuelle Kunst aus Osteuropa* were platforms where artists, who worked often separated from each other, could get to know each other's activities; see Klaus Groh (ed.), *Aktuelle Kunst in Osteuropa*, Köln: Verlag m.Dumont Schauberg, 1972.

positions of *Hungría 74* should therefore not be considered as "marginal"[21] art histories of political resistance, but as a critical contributions commenting on the possible political implications of mediatisations.

The Artistic Positions of *Hungría 74* and their Critical Take on Dematerialisations

When the director of the CAYC, Jorge Glusberg, visited Budapest in the early 1970s, he left a bunch of empty papers to his friend and artist Lázló Beke. They were 27.1 × 21.6 cm in size and had the form of a square with the corners cut off in the upper right and the lower left. A diagonal line from the top left simulated the form of a three-dimensional block on the paper. On its front side, the sheets were structured by a grid and left space for a draft. These *yellow sheets* (*hojas amarillas*) – so-called because of their yellowish paper – served as the primary communication tool of the Argentinian Centre for Arts and Communication. Through these yellow sheets, Glusberg sustained a broad range of international connections, including in Eastern Europe. He distributed the sheets to institutions, artists, and collectors worldwide. They served as a medium to announce exhibitions, screenings, and lectures, publish theoretical texts, and for documentation and as an exhibition catalogue. With their particular form and paper colour, the yellow sheets established a corporate identity making the publications of the CAYC recognisable. They also built a platform that tended to diminish hierarchies between artistic positions from different countries and various art movements, all obtaining the same space on the sheets to be presented[22]. Thus, with the sheets, Glusberg built a media-system around the

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21   In the introduction to the catalogue of her seminal exhibition *Subversive Practices. Art under Conditions of Politi-cal Repression in the 60s-80s, South America and Europe*, art historian Klara Kemp-Welch has argued that the recent interest in "marginal" art histories satisfies the neoliberal hunger for the "always new" implemented in western avantgardes and their tendency to exoticism: "We are complicit of feeding the eternal desire for the 'new' in neoliberal societies.", see Klara Kemp-Welch and Christina Freire, *op. cit.*, p. 5. Well aware of the double-bind situation I find myself in as a western scientist, I conduct the current research by partially admitting and at the same time revising this neoliberal tendency critically. Following Ana Longoni, I propose to examine the works of *Hungría 74* in the context of a "shared climate of the epoch, that bypasses a unidirectional circulation of information" and allow "works and ideas to develop in different parts of the globe that do not subordinate to the canon of the metropolitan 'centers'", see Ana Longoni, "Otros inicios del conceptualismo (argentino y latinoamericano)", in: *artenuevo*, [online], 2007, n.p., [cited 23-08-2020], http://arte-nuevo.blogspot.com/2007/05/otros-inicios-del-conceptualismo.html.

22   Usually, for the exhibition catalogues, the contributions of the artists were sorted alphabetically.

artistic movements of what he called "arte de sistemas", including conceptual, kinetic, technological, ecological, and performative positions. His integrative approach also shows that all these forms separated by the Western art discourse grew in a shared climate of technological growth and social change, shaping societies worldwide in different ways.

The yellow sheets form the source material documenting the exhibition *Hungría 74*[23]. To participate in *Hungría 74*, the artists received yellow sheets from the CAYC to sketch and display ideas, concepts, or photographs of their work and biographical data. After filling the sheets, the artists sent their drafts back to CAYC, where they were xeroxed for distribution. Among the participants of *Hungría 74* were Lázló Beke himself, as well as 23 other artists: Attalai Gábor, Baranyay András, Imre Bak, Tibor Cis-ky, Miklós Erdèly, Gayok (?), Gulyás Gyula, Istiván Hasarzty, Tamás Hencze, György Jovánovics, János Major, Adam Kái, Keszthelyi Gyula (?), Konkoly Gyula, Lázló Lakner, Péter Legéndy, Dóra Maurer, Géza Perneczky, Sándos Pinczekelyi, Tamás Szentjóby, Endre Tót, Péter Türk and János Urban[24]. As a consequence of the production mode of the yellow sheets, many of the contributions to the exhibitions are formulated as letters directed to Jorge Glusberg. The contributions contain photographs of actions or objects that could not be transferred to Argentina, but also propositions that were developed especially for the CAYC and should be executed in the Argentinian context.

One of these works was Dóra Maurer's *presence piece for CAYC* [Fig. 1]. In her proposal to the *Hungría 74* exhibition, Dóra Maurer questioned the (im)possibility of being present at the exhibition space. Therefore, she sent photographs of her body, hair and blood samples in glass tubes, and a complete list of planned activities she would perform in her home country during the exhibition. Written in big letters, her description on the yellow sheet starts with the statement: "I WANT TO BE HERE&NOW (in

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23 Miklós Peternák and Annamária Szöke, *op. cit.*, p. 131.

24 The information is retrieved from the archival material. Names that could not be confirmed by other sources are in-dicated with a question mark. Drawing on conversations with Jorge Glusberg and archival material, the art historian Mercedes Kutasy has argued, that the exhibitions might not have been presented at the CAYC. Her findings have been presented at Wüttembergischer Kunstverein Stuttgart in 2009 and are conserved in an audio file of the conference: https://www.wkv-stuttgart.de/en/program/2009/exhibitions/subversive/readertextsaudio/, [online], [cited 01-01-2019]. Even if the exhibition was not presented at the CAYC at the time, the exchange and conceptions discussed here nonetheless serve to jolt a debate on how dematerialisations were negotiated at the time.
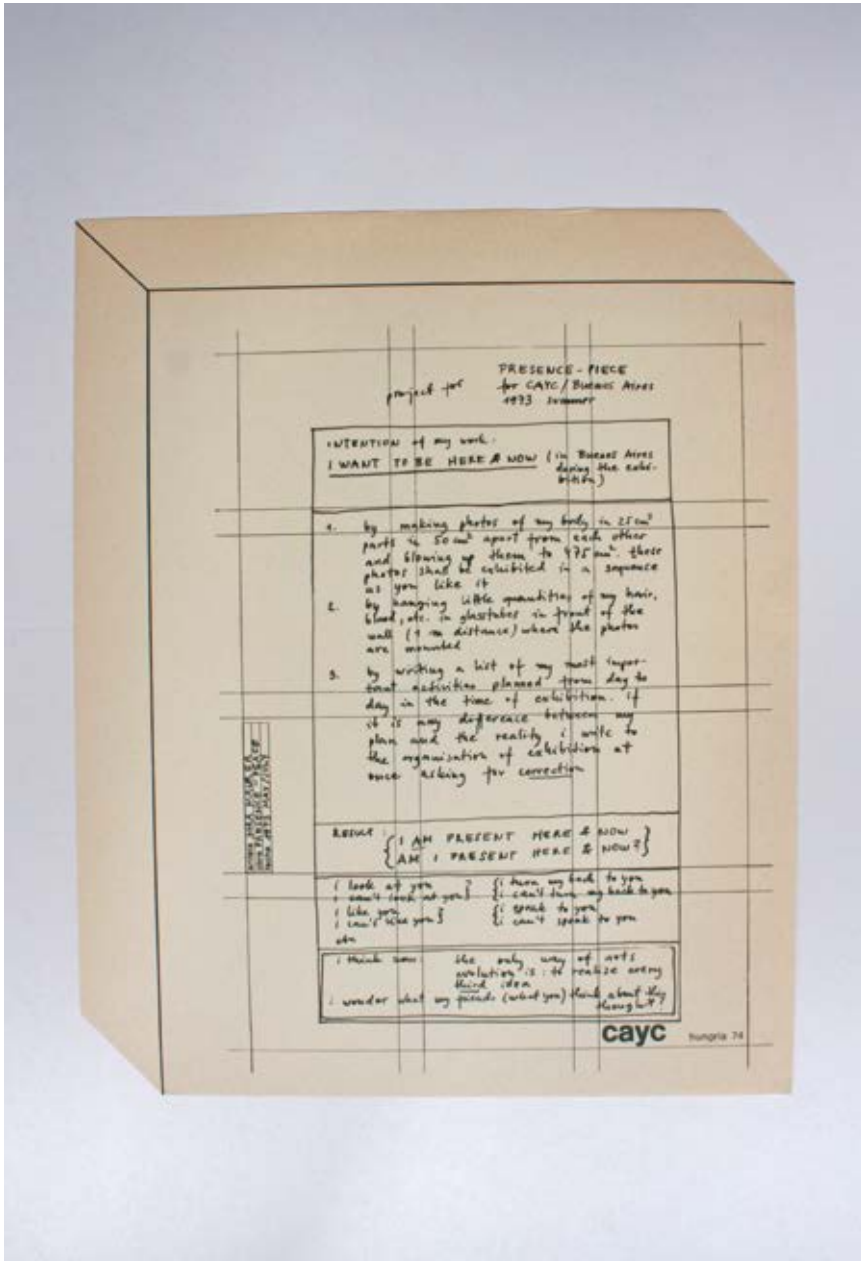
1.
Dóra Maurer, *Presence Piece*, 1973, *Hungría 74* en el CAYC, Centro de Arte y Comunicación, Buenos Aires, 1974, Collecció MACBA, Centre d'Estudis i Documentació, Barcelona, Opuscle Arxiu_M_0176_c1, fol. 35

Buenos Aires during the exhibition)". After explaining how her body parts should be distributed, she resumes her proposal with the sentences:

RESULT: I AM PRESENT HERE&NOW.

AM I PRESENT HERE&NOW?

i look at you.	i turn my back on you.
i can't look at you.	i can't turn my back to you.
i like you.	i speak to you.
i can't like you.	i can't speak to you. Ect.[25]

Dissolving her initial statement poetically, Maurer explored how her artistic communication would have been transformed even if she had been present in the Argentinian context or if the ambivalence in creating an understanding had been persistent. Her sentences parenthesise her absence, turning her bodily presence into a communicative gap. Her proposal leaves open whether her distributed presence creates additional communicative value.

While Dóra Maurer was mainly concerned with physical exclusion from the exhibition space, the artist György Jovánovics turned the question of a dematerialised art object into an ironic utopia. In a letter to Glusberg, Jovánovics proposed an art piece that was impossible to realise: the *cayc-piece* [Fig. 2]. He wrote:

Dear Jorge Glusberg,

One of the items you intend to display from my work is something which presses various objects to the ceiling. The other one pierces the floor.

It goes without saying that the third one should be something which floats freely between the floor and the ceiling, by itself, i.e. without being suspended or supported by anything or without any magnetic tricks.

Yours sincerely,

Jovánovics György.[26]

25 *"Hungría 74* en el CAYC", Centro de Arte y Comunicación, Buenos Aires, 1974, Collecció MACBA, Centre d'Estudis i Documentació, Barcelona, Opuscle Arxiu_M_0176_c1, fol. 35.

26 *"Hungría 74* en el CAYC", Centro de Arte y Comunicación, Buenos Aires, 1974, Collecció MACBA, Centre d'Estudis i Documentació, Barcelona, Opuscle Arxiu_M_0176_c1, fol. 22.
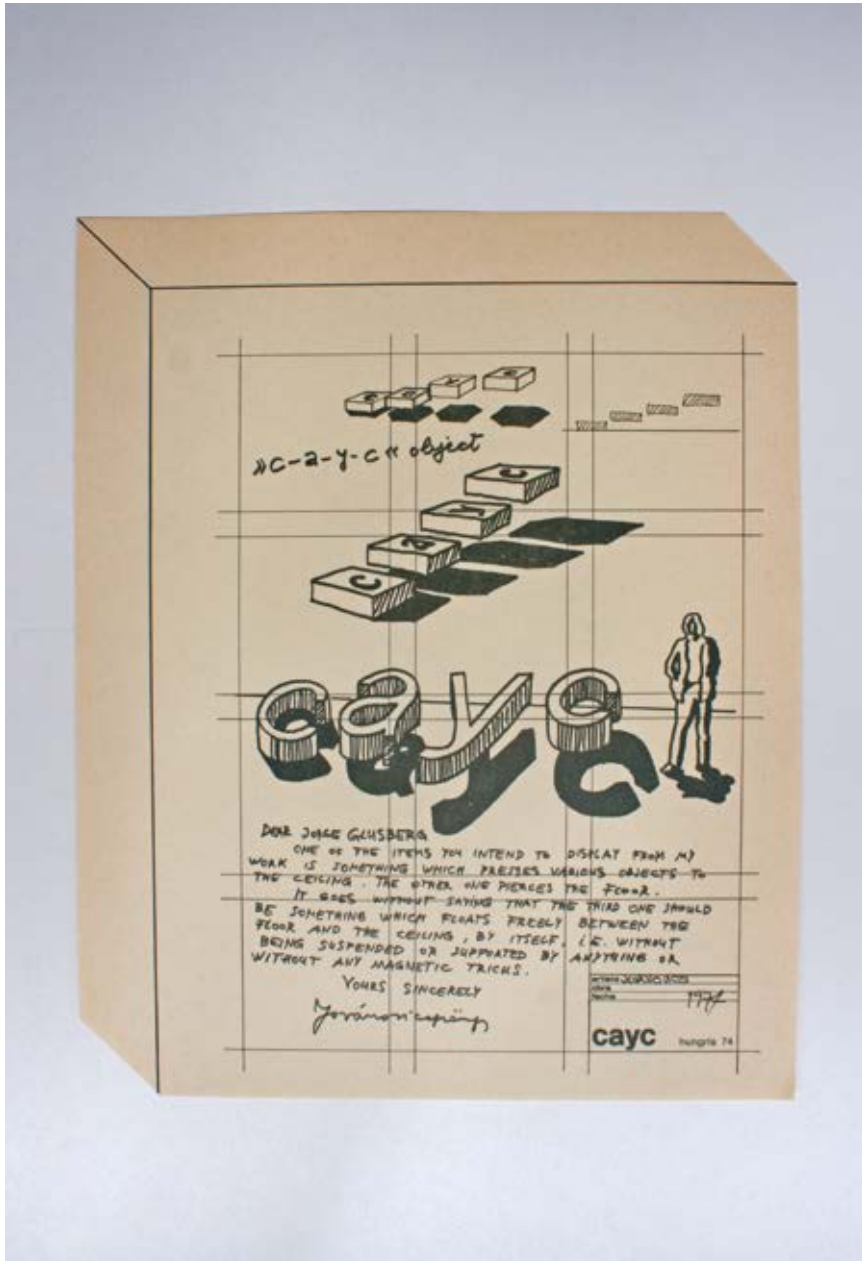
2.
György Jovánovics, *cayc-piece*, 1973, *Hungría 74* en el CAYC, Centro de Arte y Comunicación, Buenos Aires, 1974, Collecció MACBA, Centre d'Estudis i Documentació, Barcelona, Opuscle Arxiu_M_0176_c1, fol 22

The drawings accompanying the letter show a sketch of four squares containing the letters "c-a-y-c", positioned as a staircase in different formations. In the middle of the page, the free-floating letters are placed next to a human figure. Somewhat contradicting the description, the accompanying drawing shows that the sculpture's formation is not "pierced at the ceiling", but at the hip height of the figure. However, the description indicates that the proposal would not have been realisable as it did not follow physics laws. Thus, according to Jovánovics' proposal, the *cayc-piece* could never become a material object, nor was it an entirely utopian idea. It stayed in an in-between position that subtly subverted the hierarchical order of "up" and "down". Due to its utopic character, the piece can be read as a critical comment on the Western belief that the "dematerialisation" of Conceptual Art would have a democratising effect, as art would be easily accessible and distributable all over the world. It ironically demonstrates that creating material artworks under the given political circumstances and across national borders was not an act of democratic knightliness but factually impossible. Furthermore, by using the letters of the "c-a-y-c", the piece staged the institution in the same in-between state as the artwork itself, as a mediator, neither attached to any extreme of the hierarchical order of the international art scene.

Perpetuating the ironical undertone of Jovánovics, the artist Tamás Hencze developed a rather iconoclast – or: "dematerialising" – contribution to *Hungría 74*. In a letter to Glusberg, he explained his *fire painting action* [Fig. 3]:

Dear Mr. Glusberg,

I have received your invitation to the exhibition "HUNGARY 1974" and thank you very much indeed.

If it is possible would you kind [sic] to realise my "FIRE PAINTING ACTION" Please, would you

echibit [sic] one/ or more/ unpainted canvas/ 1,0 × 1,0 meter/ and light it possibly on the vernissage.

I should like [sic] if a photograph would be taken of the burning canvas and this
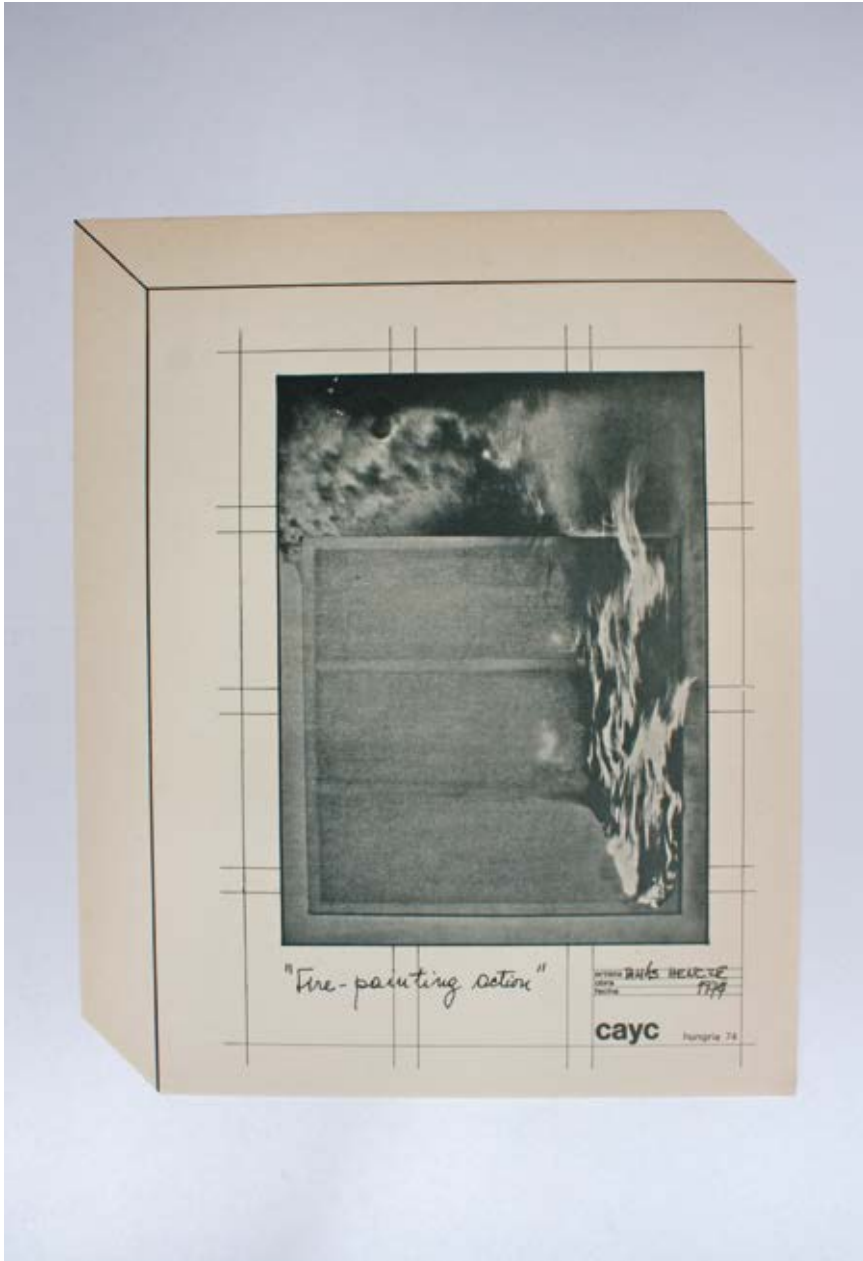
3.
Tamás Hencze, *fire painting action*, 1973, *Hungría 74* en el CAYC, Centro de Arte y Comunicación, Buenos Aires, 1974, Collecció MACBA, Centre d'Estudis i Documentació, Barcelona, Opuscle Arxiu_M_0176_c1, fol. 20

photograph would be desplayed [sic] over the burnt canvas left on the wall during the rest period of the exhibition.

/If the photograph could be enlarged up to same dimensions of the canvas, they could be desplayed [sic] side by side./

The text for this "FIRE PAINTING ACTION" is as follows:

WHY ARE THE LIFE, AFFECTION, J.O.Y., PAIN, HATE AND DEATH BURNING? *[handwritten in the original]*

Sincerly [sic] yours

Thomas Hencze.[27]

For Tamás Hencze, known for his stylised paintings with precisely executed colour gradients, this action's proposal seems to be an iconoclast approach towards painting[28]. It reminds one of Western colleagues' positions, such as John Baldessari's cremation piece executed in June 1969 in New York or the auto-destructive paintings by the German artist Gustav Metzger from the 1960s, in which he destroyed the canvas by draining acid upon its surface. For his *cremation piece*, shown at Jack Burnham's *Software* exhibition in 1970 in New York, Baldessari developed the following concept:

> One of several proposals to rid my life of accumulated paintings. With this project, I will have all of my accumulated paintings cremated by a mortuary. The container of ashes will be interred inside a wall of the Jewish Museum. For the le[…] of the show, there will be a commemorative plaque on the wall behind which the ashes are located. It is a reductive recycling piece. I consider all these paintings a body o[…] in the real sense of the word. Will I save my life by losin[…]? Will a Phoenix arise from the ashes? Will the paintings having become dust become art materials again? I don't know, but I feel better.[29]

27 *"Hungría 74* en el CAYC", Centro de Arte y Comunicación, Buenos Aires, 1974, Collecció MACBA, Centre d'Estudis i Documentació, Barcelona, Opuscle Arxiu_M_0176_c1, fol. 20.

28 Annemarie Andre, "Tamás Hencze, der ungarische Neo-Avantgardist", in: *Kunstmagazin Parnass*, [online], 2019, n.p., [cited 23-08-2020], https://www.parnass.at/news/tamas-hencze-der-ungarische-neoavantgardist.

29 John Baldessari, "Cremation Piece", in: Jack Burnham (ed.), *Software Information technology: its new meaning for art*, New York: The Jewish Museum, 1970, p. 31; print of catalogue record not complete.

Although the burnings of Baldessari and Hencze appear similar at first glance, their conceptual ideas reveal quite different notions. By burning his "old" paintings, Baldessari stressed the relief of "getting rid" of them. According to his description, the burning also carried a notion of purification and reincarnation. The paintings should be commemorated with a plaque on the museum wall and thereby transformed into a new art practice. Tamás Hencze instead proposed to burn an unpainted canvas that he connected to "life, affection, joy, pain, hate and death". The canvas' burning envisioned the political discrepancy and the risk the artist found himself in. Through its destruction, the canvas evolved into a representation of its own burning, displayed, and replaced by the technology of photography. The burnt canvas was replaced by a life-sized photograph as a sign of mourning and loss, creating a memory of the process of disappearance. After the closing of the Chapel Gallery, where Hencze had exhibited, this "fire painting action" handled the governmental thread towards experimental art practices and abstract art. Due to his political and social situation, Hencze did not celebrate the "dematerialisation" of painting as a moment of renewal through institutional critique like his Western colleague John Baldessari, nor did he stage the burning as a show. Instead, he emphasised the importance of memory and documentation in the historical process, as he felt that art only existed as a memory of its disappearance. His idea seems to predict the future historical status of the artwork, considering that the entire exhibition today only exists as documentation[30].

A more explicit, humorous critique of the political system of "Kádárism" in Hungary was formulated by Édeske István Haraszty, known for the satiric and surreal machinic sculptures he produced apart from the 1950s[31]. His *Mardárkalitka* (*Bird Cage*), which he contributed to the CAYC exhibition, was first exhibited at Chapel Gallery in 1971, but also fit well into the Argentinian context [Fig. 4]. The cage contained a perch for a parrot on the left side. At the bottom of the right side, a door and a ladder led to the parrot's food source inside the cage. On the cage's floor was a cybernetic regulation module connected with a sensor that detected the bird's position in the cage. When the parrot was sitting on the left side of the cage, the

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30 I thank my colleague Margaret Hogie for her comment on this issue.
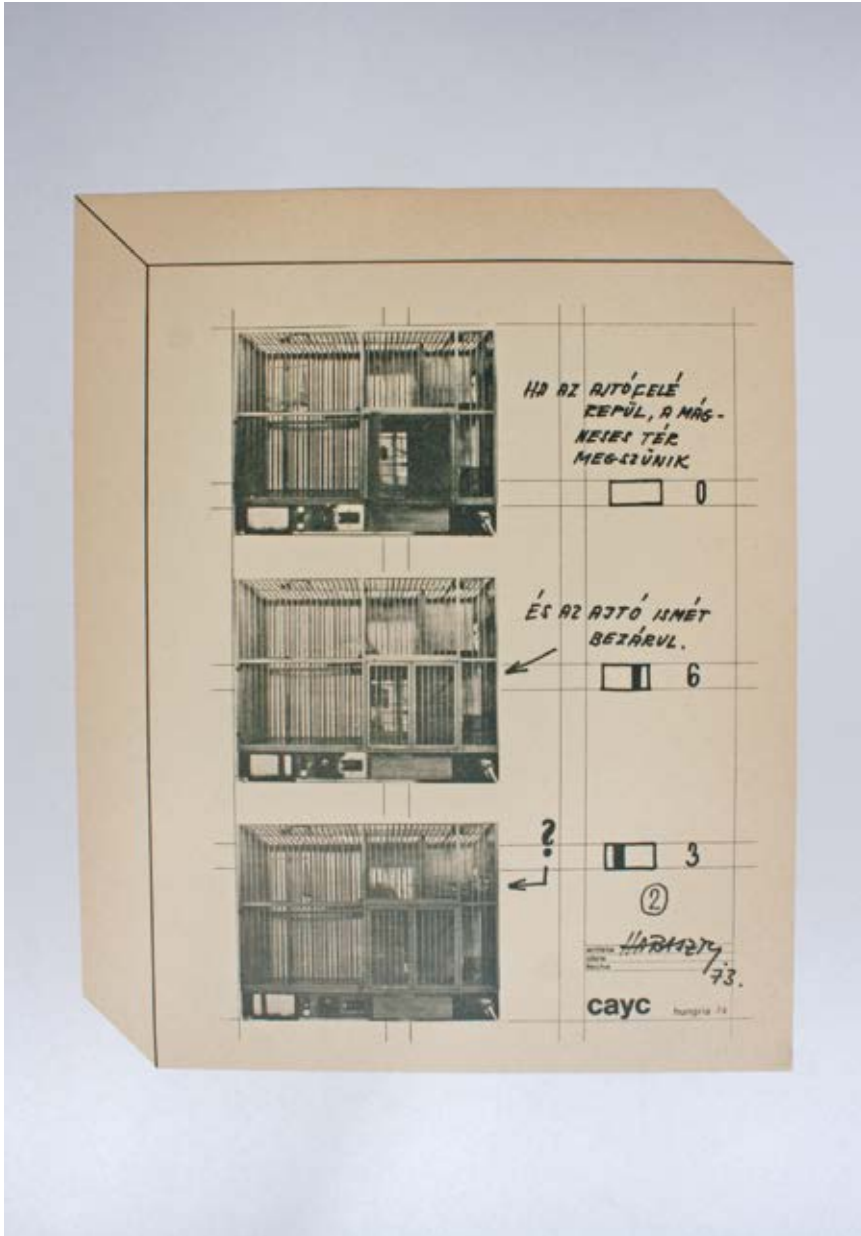31 Announcement of Retrospektive István Haraszty, [online], Mücsarnok Kunsthalle Budapest, 1989, n.p., [cited 19-08-2020], http://kepes.society.bme.hu/Tagok/Haraszty/HarasztyC.jpg.

A
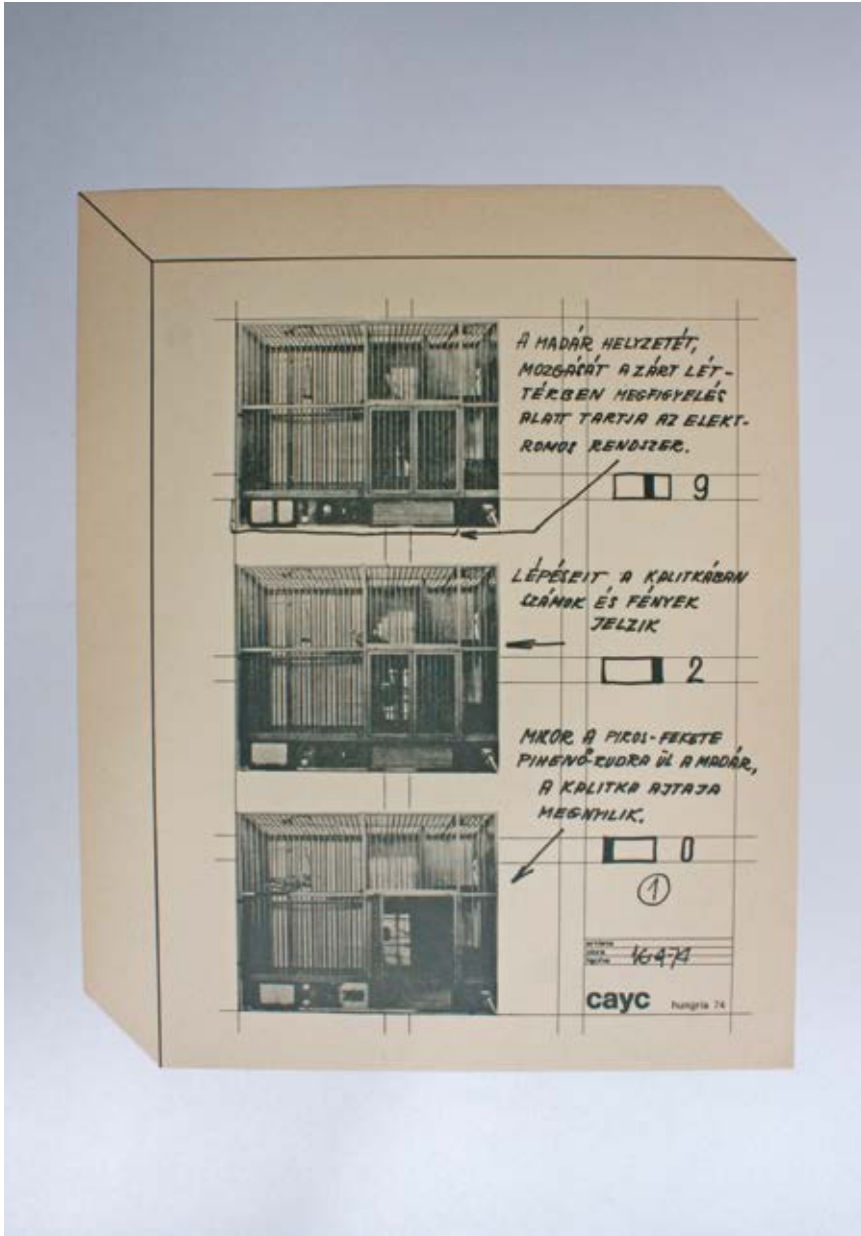
Lena Sophie Trüper ——— *Opening the Cage at* Hungría 74*: Hungarian Artists in Argentina and Their Critical Take on the Dematerialization of Art Objects*

B

4 A, B.
Édeske István Haraszty, *Mardárkalitka* (*Bird Cage*), 1971, Hungría 74 en el CAYC, Centro de Arte y Comunicación, Buenos Aires, 1974, Collecció MACBA, Centre d'Estudis i Documentació, Barcelona, Opuscle Arxiu_M_0176_c1, fol. 17 and 18

cage's door stood open. But as the bird tried to fly to the right side to get some food or fly outside the cage, the electronic device immediately closed the door and kept the bird trapped. A display below the door indicated the position of the bird by changing numbers.

The documentation Haraszty sent to CAYC shows six photographs of the cage in different states complemented with a short handwritten description:

> The bird's position in the enclosed cage is monitored by the electrical system.
>
> Its steps in the cage are indicated by numbers and lights.
>
> When the bird sits on the red-black resting pole, the door of the cage opens.
>
> When it flies towards the door, the magnetic field disappears.
>
> And the door once again closes.
>
> ?[32]

It was Haraszty's cage that Lázló Beke mentioned in his initial letter to Glusberg, expressing some hope, that although he considered the Hungarian positions quite challenging to understand for the Argentinian public, the "communication [was] not totally impossible". Beke compared the work of Haraszty to the *Biotrón*, an artificial ecosystem developed by the Argentinian artist Luis Fernando Benedit[33].

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32 "*Hungría 74* en el CAYC", Centro de Arte y Comunicación, Buenos Aires, 1974, Collecció MACBA, Centre d'Estudis i Documentació, Barcelona, Opuscle Arxiu_M_0176_c1, fol. 17 and 18. Translations from Isotta Poggi, "The Door that Closes: Art, Freedom, and Oppression in 1970s Hungary, The metaphor of István Haraszty's Like a Bird", in: *the iris, Behind the Scenes at the Getty, Hungarian courtesy of Arpad Kovacs*, Getty Museum, [online], 2020, [cited 10-08-2020], https://blogs.getty.edu/iris/the-door-that-closes-art-freedom-and-oppression-in-1970s-hungary/.

33 In his letter to Glusberg concerning the exhibition *Hungría 74*, Lazló Béké noted: "I cannot give here much help to them [the Argentinian public] to understand the Hungarian art. They will be left on their own devices facing the exhibited works. At most I can give them an idea to grasp. Let them start from the fact that an Argentine artist, Luis Fernando Benedit at the 1970 Venetian Biennale exhibited an experimental beehive from which the bees could have flown away, but they couldn't, because the smell of the artificial nutritive material enticed them back. <...> a year later, a Hungarian artist, Hasarszty István made a cage in which every motion of a parrot was controlled by a counter-device. At certain movements of the bird, the door of the cage was opened, but it was closed immediately when the bird tried to fly out. I think similar analogies between Argentine and Hungarian works could be drawn, not only in the field of experimental biokinetic art but in the other trends as well. So perhaps communication is not impossible after all.", see "*Hungría 74* en el CAYC", Centro de Arte y Comunicación, Buenos Aires, 1974, Collecció MACBA, Centre d'Estudis i Documentació, Barcelona, Opuscle Arxiu_M_0176_c1, fol. 2.

The *Biotrón* consisted of an aviary (350 × 140 cm) made of an aluminium rack subdivided into 40 cubes of transparent acrylic glass. Fifty light bulbs illuminated it on top of the aviary. Next to it, a honeycomb contained a beehive with 4,000 live bees, cased between two acrylic glass panes. The display stood vertically, in such a way that the visitors were able to observe the bees' activity. Through a small entrance, the bees could leave the comb and access their food source. The inside of the aviary was vastly empty, except for an "artificial meadow" (*pradera artificial*) with five transparent acrylic glass flowers. Connected to an electrical pulsar, the flowers dispensed a sugar liquid as artificial nectar that should nourish the bees[34]. Furthermore, the pulsar connected sensors measuring the temperature, lighting conditions, and time of day. According to the circumstances, the central control module regulated the nectar's segregation, the electric illumination of the aviary, and the honeycomb's temperature, which could be modified by a heater consisting of eight lightbulbs.

In 1970, the *Biotrón* was sent to the Venice Biennale to represent Argentina and also initiating Benedit's international career. Although the bees had the freedom to leave the exhibition space to search for natural food resources in the near surroundings, according to a description of Glusberg, most of them decided to stay in their artificial environment, mingling among the visitors[35]. The exhibition was the start of Benedit's international career and in the following years, he exhibited his artificial ecosystems in Germany, Amsterdam, and the MOMA in New York. With its automatic regulation, the living environment of the *Biotrón* matched the Western discourse of self-adaptive ecosystems that became popular in art & technology movements of the 1960s and permeated the discourse of Conceptual Art[36].

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34 Jorge Glusberg, Luis Benedit, "Las memorias del olvido, ensayo crítico", in: *Luis Fernando Benedit en el Museo de Bellas Artes*, Buenos Aires: Museo de Bellas Artes de Buenos Aires, 1996, p. 21.

35 *Ibid.*

36 This electronic impulse of cybernetics and communication theory reducing the artwork to "information" twitches the theoretical writings on Conceptual Art up to the 21st century. In the introduction to the exhibition catalog *Global Conceptualism: Points of Origin* from 1999 says: "For conceptual artists, the use of language could be a way of reconstituting the work of art into an active – interactive – circuit. Unfortunately, despite such democratizing aspirations, the particular language employed by Conceptualists was often obscure, elitist, or otherwise not compelling to the intended audience, causing a short circuit.", see Luis Camnitzer, Jane Faver and Rachel Weiss, "Foreword", in: *Global Conceptualism, Points of Origin 1950s–1980s*, New York: Queens Museum of Art, 1999, p. ix.

With its transparent walls, the *Biotrón* not only envisioned the destruction of borders between the "system" of the artwork and the museum space. It also worked as a metaphor for the Argentinian artist's situation in the European context. The bees were seemingly free to decide on whether to stay or to leave, but in fact, were controlled by a transparent system that incited their needs and controlled their behaviour. This interpretation especially converged in the presentation of the honeycomb: The wooden frame of the display with its rounded edges recalled the look of contemporary T.V. screens. Due to its position at eye level, it took the place of a classical painting in the museum's context. The bees – or, rather, the "exotic" artists – were observed through this frame of intermingling representation technologies.

Comparing Haraszty's and Benedit's positions shows that the two artists dealt with the thematic of biokinetic control, using the animals as metaphors for their own situation. While the enticing smell held back the bees in Benedit's transparent ecosystem, the bird experienced the determination of its freedom by its cage bars. It was only able to reach its food when the door of the cage was closed. While Argentinian artists experienced relative freedom, controlled by their own country's political system and observed by Western critics through their "transparent cage", it was clear that the demand for independence by the Hungarian artists would end in further restrictions. Simultaneously, Haraszty's cage also metaphorized the safe environment of private space, in which art could unfold, hiding from governmental harassment. However, Benedit's and Haraszty's cage was an undeniable structure for the beings who lived in them. Instead of an opaque box, their transparent or "dematerialised" realities controlled and constituted their artistic practice.

Conclusion: Dematerialisations as a Form of Political Oppression in Media Societies

As the example of *Hungría 74* shows, the artistic positions in Argentina and Hungary actuated in a shared climate of media technologies and political oppression that evolved as the flip coin of both globalisation

and East-West division by the Iron Curtain. Although the West perceived their artistic positions, they were categorised as an exoticism hidden behind a demand for democratisation and globalisation driven by the "demateri-alising" forces of postcolonialism and high-tech capitalism. Corresponding to Glusberg's concept of a political "arte de sistemas", the artists did not subordinate to the canon of the centres. Still, they developed local prac-tices commenting on Western art critics' dialectic ideologies promoting their claim for "dematerialisation" and their vision of a "global" art world through their own complex histories. Developing a low-tech version of a "new" international art world through mediums like the "yellow sheets", they countered the position of the influential Western media theorist Mar-shall McLuhan, who saw "the cultural aspect of globalisation as primari-ly a shift from print-dominated communication technologies to electronic media"[37]. Nonetheless, in the contemporary art historical discourse of the West, the CAYC is barely mentioned[38]. Hungarian artistic positions did not receive as much attention as those of their Western colleagues. Their invis-ibility is rather a statement about their cultural significance as of the still prevailing geopolitical hegemony of the Western art world with its mar-ginalisation strategies under the umbrella term of Conceptual Art and its technological "dematerialisations".

37 Stephen Bann, "Introduction", in: *Global Conceptualism, Points of Origin 1950s–1980s*, New York: Queens Mu-seum of Art, 1999, p. 6.

38 For example, CAYC is not mentioned in the catalogue of *Global Conceptualisms* from 1999. In the exhibition catalogue of Transmissions: *Art in Eastern Europe and Latin America 1960–1980* (MoMA, 2015–2016), Daniel R. Quiles dedicates the CAYC's "remarkable reach" towards Eastern Europe a passage of two lines. See Quiles Daniel R., "Mediate Media, Daniel R. Quiles Buenos Aires Conceptualism", in: *Transmissions: Art in Eastern Europe and Latin America, 1960–1980*, [online], New York: MoMA, 2015–2016, n.p., [cited 08-01-2021], https://www.moma.org/calendar/exhibitions/1532.

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Santrauka

Paroda *Hungría 74*: vengrų menininkai Argentinoje ir meno dematerializacijos kritika

Lena Sophie Trüper

Reikšminiai žodžiai: Centro de Arte y Communicación (CAYC), *Hungría 74*, konceptualus menas, kibernetika, sisteminis menas, dematerializacija, politinė priespauda.

1974 m. Buenos Airių Meno ir komunikacijų centre (CAYC) eksponuotoje parodoje *Hungría 74* buvo pristatyti 24 Vengrijos menininkai. Jánoso Kádáro socialistiniam režimui suvaržius eksperimentinio meno praktikas, Vengrijos menininkams ši paroda tapo viena iš nedaugelio galimybių pristatyti savo kūrybą tarptautiniu mastu. Straipsnyje aptariama Dóros Maurer, Tamáso Henczes, Istváno Haraszty ir Györgyjo Jovánovicso kūrinių archyvinė dokumentacija CAYC „sisteminio meno" (isp. *arte de sistemas*) kontekste. Teigiama, kad Vengrijos ir Argentinos menininkus konceptualistus vienijo kritinis požiūris į XX a. 8 deš. Vakarų meno kritikų priimtą „meno dematerializavimo" sampratą: jei Vakaruose „dematerializacija" buvo suvokiama kaip demokratinis projektas, skirtas meno rinkos taisyklėms apeiti ir tarptautiniams mainams skatinti, tai autoritariniuose Vengrijos ir Argentinos režimuose materialumo nebuvimas suponavo neregimą valdžios kontrolę ir politinę izoliaciją. Straipsnyje atskleidžiama, kad Vengrijos menininkai „dematerializaciją" suvokė tiek kaip politinės priespaudos išdavą, tiek kaip masinės komunikacijos priemonių amžiuje vykusios technologinės raidos efektą.

Per *Hungría 74* atvejo studijas atskleidžiamos marginalizuojančios Vakarų konceptualiojo meno strategijos ir kvestionuojamos „dematerializacijos" termino taikymo ribos. Straipsnio tikslas – sustiprinti Argentinos ir Vengrijos konceptualiojo meno svarbą istoriniam (post)moderniojo meno diskursui. Šių šalių menines praktikas derėtų suvokti ne kaip „marginalias"

politinio pasipriešinimo istorijas, o kaip kritinius komentarus apie globalio-se medijų visuomenėse vykstančią dematerializaciją.