

## THE ART OF INSTALLATION IN THE FACE THE (MULTI)MEDIA CHALLENGE

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### Origin – history – characteristics

The diversity of the artists' attitudes and actions as well as the multiplicity of the tools they were using triggered a steady and internally diversified process of changing the character of newly created installations. As a result, the concept of the art of installation, just like many other categories of contemporary art, lacks a homogeneous and unequivocal character. Looking at the contemporary works referred to by artists and critics as installations, we can in fact state that none of their classical attributes mentioned so far is obligatory for them today. The presence or absence of those features only makes it possible for us to identify the types of installations. For example, the close relation to a particular place, until today regarded by numerous theoreticians and critics as a defining feature of the art of installation, is now in fact only a feature of one of its types, referred to as site specific, or *in situ* installation. As for the other types, only the impermanence, ephemerality or temporality manifesting themselves in various ways can be considered to be a remnant, or a consequence of the original relation to some concrete space. After their presentation at the exhibition, such installations are dismantled and, when shown again in another gallery, they often take on a different form. Thus they occur in different shapes and formats, which means that they remain the same artwork only owing to the identity of their concept, idea or meaning. Installations of this type thus have sort of the character of a work in progress. Their ephemerality ultimately becomes, to some extent, a defining feature of each type of installation, achieving, as stated above, its maximum concentration only in the form of the installation *in situ*. This type of installation is characterised by an unbreakable, and yet unique, relation between the person (artist), the place and the time. This process of transformation, which resulted in the loss of numerous, originally defining features of the concept of installation, both provided it with the aforementioned attribute of ephemerality, and also highlighted the importance of two other features, which were

not mentioned earlier. The first of these – let us call it relationality – characterises, to a various degree, any given installation. The second, which we will call intermediality, creates for installations a certain context of references realized each time in one of their possible forms.

The term "installation" came into being long after the appearance of the first thus called nowadays artworks, as is often the case with the categories necessary for the proper shaping of the discourse on contemporary art, the discourse capable of capturing, describing and interpreting the phenomena characteristic of 20th century culture. The term became widely used in the 1970s, whereas the first works – later termed, *a posteriori*, "installations" – appeared as early as the 1920s. Authored by, inter alia, Marcel Duchamp, Kurt Schwitters and Laszlo Moholy-Nagy, they were harbingers of the artistic processes to come.

The real development of the art of installation began in the 1960s. It was then that the appearance of works created in the spirit of installation began to shape the awareness of the birth of a new discipline of art, dismissing traditional strategies and techniques of fine arts, rejecting the idea of beauty, and challenging the conception of form understood as a vehicle for aesthetic values, perceived through an aesthetic experience. The awareness of the new art structure – installation, was beginning to take shape. It was part of the more general process, which unified the various concepts seeking to deformatise and dematerialise the work of art. Following in the footsteps of conceptual art, the art of installation was also becoming a domain of those forms of activity, which replaced an objectively existing work of art with semantic discourse. The art of installation, like its spiritually akin movements of performance, happening, Pop Art, minimalism, *arte povera*, and conceptual art (the source of them all), have thus helped create a neo-avant-garde current, another stage of development (after the historical avant-garde) of the radical tendencies in 20th century art.

Following the formation of the concept of installation, the term describing it eventually appeared. Nowadays, with the richness and variety of this art discipline, one cannot imagine the metalanguage of art without the category of installation.

The art objects, which are today referred to as installations, were described and classified for many years by means of other categories. Among these, the terms assemblage and

environment have become firmly established in the metalanguage of art. Their similarity, or in some cases even synonymy, with the category of installation is connected with the fact that their characteristic features also belong to the set of features defining the art of installation. Assemblages, whose origins can be traced to Duchamp's ready-mades and Schwitters's collages, are similar to installations in the complexity of their construction (though not necessarily realised in the same way), the heterogeneity of the materials, the use of ready-made objects (elements), and poor structural cohesion of their components (and their often temporary juxtaposition). Environments, in turn, are linked to installations mostly through their topological concreteness, their location in a specific space. The second constitutional feature of the environment – placing the recipient inside the work, treating her or him as part of it rather than leaving them out in neutral space, had less of an impact on the characterisation of installation during the first phase of its development. Only some installations were then actually incorporating the recipient into the structure of the work. It is only nowadays that – in consequence of the development of multimedia installations – the importance of this feature has increased considerably, leading also to changes within the concept itself. The change has been accompanied by a transformation of many other factors, elements and aspects of installation, and of the structure of their mutual interactions, which has consequently led to the necessary redefinition of the category of installation.

Let us have a closer look at the principal characteristics I would like to attribute to the art of installation. Ephemerality/temporariness (1) – one of its attributes – has been already discussed previously.

2. Relationality had already been part of the concept of assemblage, highlighting the relations between the particular elements of the work; it also contributed to the creation of the term "environment", this time emphasising both the relations between space and the structure of its arrangement and between the recipient of the artwork and space (including its constituents, aspects and dimensions). Installation art reveals in each of its incarnations – far more clearly than assemblage and environment – just this attribute, making it eventually its essential feature, whereas the diversity of forms under which this attribute appears becomes the main source of criteria for the classification of the types of installations. The higher degree of relationality in the structure of the artworks as a defining feature of installation art, as well as an increase in its importance and function,

result from dematerialisation of these works. The functions which e.g. in assemblage were fulfilled jointly by the material, form, and the relational structure, in the case of installation art are performed exclusively, or mostly, by the latter. That is what makes relationality an essential feature of the art of installation.

3. Intermediality, in turn, which in this case means being in unique contact with other disciplines of art, is a feature, which is common to the art of installation, and some other domains of 20th century art, such as film or video art. It also appears to be symptomatic of the whole artistic culture at the end of the 20th century. In a sense, intermediality of installations can be regarded as yet another variant of relationality characteristic of this art form. The relations considered here hold between various forms of creative behaviour activated by installation art. Installation in its diverse forms, as an artistic phenomenon, seems to have close and dynamic ties to any other kinds of art. Both different forms of visual creation, such as drawing, painting, sculpture or architecture, as well as other artistic disciplines, such as music, poetry or performance, are part of the system of intermedia references initiated by installation art. Especially important among them is what is broadly termed media art and, primarily, one of its variants, video art (to be discussed below).

4. Another feature of installation art may be called pro-interactivity. I understand by this the tendency of installations to make reception both an active and individualized process. This feature is sometimes referred to simply as interactivity (see e.g. Morse 1990). In such a case the reason given is that the recipient chooses his or her own way of experiencing the installation, one of the many possible ways of its reception (ibid. 159-161). I myself am not willing to subscribe to the assumption that each installation by itself has an interactive character. I would rather speak of interactivity only in connection with the artworks (including installations) in which the interference, or activity, of the recipient is not limited to the act of reception, but also extends onto the ontological plane, where the processually understood artwork itself rather than its mere reception, undergoes individualisation or even is the product of interactive creation in the context suggested or organised by the artist (cf. Kluszczyński 1996; 1997). Numerous installations do fulfill this condition. Still more numerous, however, are those which do not possess this quality. Instead, a lot of them incorporate the recipient, making him or her an element of their structure. Such works then acquire a certain degree of derivative interactivity, for the individualisation of reception in this case becomes a *sui generis* individualisation of the structure of the work.

Conversely, the installations which do not possess the quality of interactivity in the full (and proper) sense of the term, and do not make the recipient part of their structure, can acquire a sort of reference to interactivity thanks to the presentism characteristic of this kind of art. The presence of the installation and the recipient in the same time-space, without referring the latter to other worlds (imaginary or virtual), necessarily creates a certain relationship between the two, relationship, which modifies the artwork itself in a special way and constitutes a substitute for interactivity. And owing to the fact that all three forms of interactivity (or quasi-interactivity) manifested by installation art have blurred boundaries and are characterised by the smooth transition from one to another, the decision to ascribe pro-interactivity to installation art genre, seems to be more justified than ascribing to it in general the status of an interactive discipline. The latter decision would result in a situation in which interactivity can be applied to all types of installation, both those inherently interactive, and the ones which in fact only gravitate towards interactivity. Differences among these types will thus be another source of internal divisions and classifications.

5. A further attribute of installations, presentism, has already been mentioned in the above discussion of pro-interactivity. It refers, primarily, to the non-illusoriness of installation, which does not fulfill a presentative function or send the recipient outside the space where the installation has its location. Consequently, such an installation is not a staging (cf. Morse 1990); it only exists in physical, so called real space, which it shares with the recipients, that in turn means that they are necessarily within the installation's boundaries and enter into various temporal and spatial relations with it, often unintentionally. It is such relations that together create the aforementioned pro-interactive character of installation.

6. The last (but by no means the least important) feature of installation that needs to be mentioned in order to complete its definition will be called semanticity. As concluded previously, an installation is above all an operation on meanings; it is a structure arranging various semantic constructions into a system (an ad hoc ordering) of mutual relations. Semanticity thus plays the role of the basic substance (material) of the work, its context, and of its only frame of reference. The artistic doctrine of conceptual art thus becomes, as I have earlier pointed out, the basic source and the framework for the art of installation.

## Media installations

The artistic media played a prominent role in the shaping of the installation. Of these, the most important was video art. However, besides video installations, the media art of the late 1960s and early 1970s also developed an extremely interesting trend of film installations, which can be regarded as an offshoot of the development of video installations. But it can also be regarded as an autonomous process of transformation of the film, which attempted to overcome the limitations imposed by the linearity of the medium and to assume the character of spatial art, bound with real surroundings. In such films, the projection ceased to be only an external, "invisible" and aesthetically neutral foundation of the artwork (located in the context of the *dispositif*), winning in return the status of a significant element of artistic film structure (as well as entering the framework of film textuality). Film projections, just like other types of film installations, were part of an extensive and internally diverse trend, which Gene Youngblood (1970) called expanded cinema. Film installations (often accompanied by film performance) of such artists as for instance Tony and Beverly Conrad, David Dye, Dan Graham, Malcolm Le Grice, John Hilliard, Takahiko Iimura, Polish artists Jozef Robakowski and Andrzej Rozycki, Paul Sharits, or Peter Weibel, constituted jointly the "artists' films", associated with galleries and museums, as opposed to "art films", feature films shown in cinemas (see Gidal 1972, Nicolson 1972). Andy Warhol's 1963 – 1965 films, such as *Sleep*, *Empire* or *Couch* preceded their appearance). It is also worth noting that the category of film installation itself began to be used relatively early in the literature (e.g. Le Grice 1972), which made it possible to separate works of the aforementioned artists from among the rest of artistic film production, and which was evidence of the high degree of awareness of that phenomenon among avant-garde filmmakers and theorists.

As I have already mentioned, the art of video installations has a privileged position within the domain of (audio)visual media installations. Compared to photographic installations it is richer by a temporal (and aural) factor; it is in turn superior to film installation by its ability to build (audio)visual feedback connections (closed circuits), and to create tension between simultaneously existing aspects of reality and their (audio)visual representations. The term "video installation" consolidated its position within the language of art criticism in the same decade as the general category of installation. In that initial period of video art,

phenomena having the character of installations were also described by some other terms. Those terms, however, were also based on the same quality, which we had regarded as the essential one for defining installation in general, i.e. relationality. A telling example is the term "closed-circuit video environment", which was used by, inter alia, Lizzie Borden (Borden, 1975), while characterising the main tendencies in video art in 1965-1975. Not only does this term reveal relationality as an important feature of video installation, but it also points to the relations between this type of video art and environment – the art of space. Closed-circuit video environment at the same time remains closely bound with the receptive behaviour of the viewers, in that it combines the perception of the video with the parallel perception of physical surrounds, and interferes with the traditional methods of orientation (physical and psychological dislocation). It also introduces an element of simultaneity to the perception of the video itself. The other two trends distinguished by Borden include the abstract video, which she also calls self-referential video, and the figurative video, which may additionally have a narrative character.

Obviously, the category used by Lizzie Borden was closely bound with the situation in video art characteristic of that decade, since the basic type of video installation was then the one in which the camera, the monitor and their surroundings constituted one system of interrelations (cf. Duguet 1985). Some other writers, however, were concurrently using the term "video installation" to name and characterise all types of spatial video arrangements, both those utilising the feedback system, and the ones favouring other systems of relations between elements or aspects of the work. Among those writers was Wulf Herzogenrath, who, characterising the situation of video art in West Germany and distinguishing four main areas of art making use of video technology, described one of them as the domain of video installation and video objects (Herzogenrath 1976: 222).

As I have mentioned, Herzogenrath's approach was not unique at that time. Video installations were discussed very often. The authors of the publications devoted to this kind of video art (and using the aforementioned category) include David Hall (1976), Stuart Marshall (1976), Peter Frank (1976), Susan C. Larson (1978), and Ingrid Wiegand (1978). This fact can be treated as a proof that, although it was relatively new, the concept of video installation, just like the very phenomenon itself, became firmly established in the world of art at that time. Indicating the growing artistic awareness of video installation was also the fact that its numerous examples were included (and supplied with both

theoretical and historical commentary) in one of the first monographs of video art, the eponymous anthology published by Ira Schneider and Beryl Korot in 1976.

It is worth stressing the fact that Lizzie Borden wrote in her article mentioned above about the history of video installations in the years 1965-1975. It was also true of video art then that the development of the phenomenon preceded the appearance of its name and concept. The beginning of video installation coincides with the beginning of video art in general, for the first video installations, authored by Nam June Paik and Wolf Vostell, were created as early as 1963. They were followed by numerous works of other artists, which turned the discipline of video installation not only into the area of rapidly developing experiments laying the foundations of video art, but also into the most dynamic area of installation art in general. Nam June Paik's artistic activity alone provides examples of an immense variety of video installations and is itself a source of many of their types.

The characterisation of the concept of artistic installation which I carried out at the beginning of this article, made it possible to define its essential qualities: relationality, intermediality, temporariness, pro-interactivity, presentism, and semanticity. All these attributes of installation in general can also be found in video installation. Yet, they do not exhaust the set of features characteristic of it, because the concept of video installation comprises some other features, peculiar to it owing to the characteristics of its medium, i.e. the video.

The first of these should be termed pro-virtuality. Video installations use the contrast between the physical, material world (reality) and the virtual world for artistic purposes. They put the recipient at the boundary between these two ontological dimensions, which in consequence means that the discourse on the methods of articulating reality through the media inevitably becomes part of the reception process. Thus the basic function of video installations in the context of culture becomes, as Margaret Morse demonstrates, an analysis of all kinds of materialisation of the conceptual element which are accessible to contemporary, deeply medialised, society (Morse 1990: 155).

In the currently developing (multi)media paradigm<sup>1</sup>, the relation between the material and the virtual aspects of the artwork is now coming to the fore. Video installations represent particular types of relations between the material and the virtual sphere. These relations jointly create a paradigm of co-presence, realised through conflict tensions or a



harmonious dialogue; they also show the different forms of implementation of those two dimensions. The diversity of forms of materiality is accompanied by similar diversification of the forms of virtuality.

A further form typical of video installation is narrativity. Before I proceed to discuss it, I should first like to call up one more differentiation, this time within video installation itself. One should differentiate there between two types:

1. Installations where audiovisuality is only a function of feedback. The camera transmits the picture (and/or sound) onto the monitor and the installation, remaining in close circuit, investigates the relations between the picture/representation and its environment, deconstructs the status of that environment, deals with the process of transmission and communication, highlights the relationship between the spatial and the temporal aspect of the work, and, as Morse observes, reflects on the process of medialising identity and power (1990: 159).

2. Installations which use pre-prepared (audio)visual material, recorded on magnetic tape. In this case, the installation, developing over time, complements its spatial character with the intensified status and properties of a process, at the same time creating a specific world – a correlate of mental states. The created world has a problematic ontological status and as a result brings about tension between *mimesis* and simulation.

Let us go back to the narrativity of video installation. It would seem that narrativity, as a structural feature of the record on tape, is connected only with video installation of the second type. However, the analysis of various existing works allows us to state that although narrativity is a structural quality of only those installations, which make use of pre-prepared tapes, we can also speak of a kind of narrativity in connection with other types of works. Narrativity in video installation extends far beyond its traditional domains. In fact, it often goes beyond the structural design of a given work. We do not have to tell a story even when we want it to appear in the field designated by the work of art, which we are creating. We can make references to stories, which every recipient carries within himself or herself. In such cases the work merely releases these stories, or generates their institution in the process of artistic communication. This strategy is at the same time an example of defusing conflict tension between the material dimension of the work and its virtual aspect, represented here by the story. In such a situation narration is understood as

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<sup>1</sup> The term *(multi)media* embraces here both, media and multimedia phenomena.

a kind of physical component of the work; it is indirectly introduced into the structure of the work in the same way and on the same basis as the work's material elements.

The concept of a game is becoming one of the basic structural categories of the latest developments in (multi)media installations. It is a game between materiality and virtuality, conception and technology, space and time, narration and its framework, history and the present, the artwork and its recipient.

The recipient gains a special and important position within the framework of such a creative strategy as described above. As a carrier of stories, activated and incorporated into the structure of the artwork, he or she concurrently becomes the hero(ine) of the narration, a character from the stories told by the artwork with her or his participation. He or she also becomes an object of his or her self-observation. They cannot escape their intervention, voluntary or not - becoming in consequence an element of the work, and the subject and object of observation.

There is another aspect of the process within which the viewers participate in the structure of the observed work. When the recipient becomes part of the image, at that very moment part of the image becomes the recipient, and his or her body becomes the screen. This strategy is a fragment of the process of analysing the image, which results in freeing the image from its surface. The discovery of the materiality of the image (the material dimension of virtuality) at the same time makes it clear that one consequence of that fact is the self-sufficiency or autonomy of the image, which is its own basis, its own screen. The two aspects of the process of individuating the structure of reception and the structure of the experienced work complement the attributes of installation discussed above, i.e. (pro)interactivity and presentism.

Together with the film installations mentioned above and photographic installations – which have not been discussed here (represented e.g. by the works of Jan Dibbets or John Hilliard, and present also in the *oeuvre* of such Polish artists as Izabella Gustowska, Adam Klimczak, Konrad Kuzyszyn, Natalia Lach-Lachowicz, and Jozef Robakowski) – video installations have formed an extensive trend of visual and audiovisual installations using technical images. Their development has been accompanied by the development of sound installations, which are just as interesting and internally diverse. Together, they have brought into being an extensive and multiform phenomenon of media installations, one

that has had an enormous influence on the condition of both the art of installation and contemporary art in general.

I have emphasised many times the great importance of media installations – above all, video installations – in the history of the art of installation. The characterisation of video installation carried out above has provided abundant evidence for this claim.

Relationality, which should be regarded as the basic determinant of the art of installation, is a fundamental feature of video installation. Video artists and critics promptly and unanimously identified this feature as a defining attribute of video installation. In Poland, Andrzej Paruzel, for instance, wrote in 1978 in his exhibition catalogue "each video installation constitutes a certain system with definite structure. To understand it, one has to discover the relations obtaining between the elements of that system." (1978)

Dematerialisation and deformalisation – the processes upholding the dominant character of relationality within the structure of installation, are the basic structural properties of video installation. In the case of other types of installations, they often occur in a much substantial or weaker form.

Intermediality, a further element of installation art, is a definitional feature not only of video installation, but also of video art in general.

The presentism of video installation is a logical consequence of its relationality, which also absorbs the recipient, making her or him an element of the installation. At the time of the dominance of analytical tendencies in art, this property acquired the status of one of the most important features of video installation, since it laid the foundations of the processes of discovery and self-discovery. The issue was vividly present in Paruzel's text already mentioned above: "In the process of getting to know its structure, the person entering a video installation has a chance to concurrently discover the functioning of his or her own cognitive structures, thanks to the possibility of manipulation both within the interactions processed by the system, and of the system itself" (ibid.) Before Paruzel, other Polish video artists – most of all Wojciech Bruszewski and Jozef Robakowski – expressed their artistic views in a similar vein.

Pro-interactivity is much more intense in video installations than in non-media forms. It is a logical consequence of the other properties of video installation. Paruzel ends his comment quoted above as follows: "Currently my activity focuses on such recipient-centered situations, in which the creative act is realised through a conscious

participation, co-creation, understanding" (ibid.). In this way pro-interactivity turns out to be the natural extension of relationality and presentism.

The semanticity of video installations, owing to the structural and substance-related complexity of this art form, is potentially much greater than in other types of installation. On the other hand, the intensified virtuality of the video medium ultimately strengthens the dominance of semanticity over the materiality of installation.

Finally, one cannot but conclude that video installation is superior to all the other types of installation not only owing to its exceptional cohesion (or organicity, as one is tempted to say) in combining all its aforementioned features, but also because of the abundance and diversity of the relations it creates, as well as the scope and scale of its influence. Initiated and developing at the same time as the art of installation, video art, equipped with a number of characteristic features, doubtless played a crucial role in the process in which installation was beginning to secure a place for itself within the cultural system, and in which it was building its identity. One would probably be justified to assume that the art of installation has found its perfect manifestation in video art, were it not for the fact that the development of technology and multimedia arts has complicated the whole system by introducing new elements and thus calling for a fresh consideration of the characterisation, place and status of installation, this time within an interactive and virtual cyberculture.

### **Installation – object – sculpture**

Let us go back for a moment to Herzogenrath's (1976: 221-222) distinction between a video installation and a video object. It seems that in his view the latter is semantically equivalent to a video sculpture; both of those terms direct us to those video phenomena where the material dimension of the work – its physical form – plays a role which is at least as significant as that played by its media-related, electronic, or virtual aspect. The video sculpture therefore appears to be the product of the materialisation of video art, the product that also achieves formal permanence as a result of this materialisation. It is a common – and not unfounded – opinion that this type of video art (and the term itself) owes its existence (and especially its frequent occurrence and its acceptance within the art establishment) not only to its adherence to artistic tradition, but also to the slowly

advancing "museumification" of video art, i.e. the process of incorporating this discipline into museum collections (Lehmann 1994). After all, from a museum-based perspective, video sculpture seemed for a very long time (or, indeed, still seems) to be an artefact much better adapted to the conventions and practices of a museum, than the ephemeral, dematerialised and in a sense aformal installation, or, for different reason, videotape.

The dichotomous character of video sculpture – manifested in the tension between its electronic (virtual) and material aspects – is thus arrived at in a different way than in the case of video installation using feedback. There, such character is determined primarily by the relation between physical reality and its (audio)visual representation, a relation that at the same time introduces relationships – crucial for a work of this type – between its temporal and spatial orders. Of course, this type of relation can also be found in video sculpture, turning it into a work of increased structural complexity, and equally sharp dichotomy.

The structural dichotomy mentioned above, manifested in a manner characteristic either of video installation or video sculpture, is also very often extended to the semantic plane. Video installations and sculptures are concerned with the ontological complexity of the world of our experiences; they tackle the issue of similarities and differences between its various spheres and of their interrelations. Nowadays, because of the increasing virtualisation of the all dimensions of reality (Welsh 1991), those issues become more and more important. I have already discussed this problem in connection with video installations. I shall return to it in the subsequent sections, this time investigating them in relation to multimedia art.

It is easier to distinguish both, a video sculpture and a video object (the contrast between these two forms most probably results from some artists' disinclination to associate their work with an art form so traditional in character as sculpture) from installation at the level of theoretical considerations, than on the phenomenal plane, where particular works often combine the features of both. The characteristic attributes of a sculpture (an object), i.e. the emphasis on the materiality of its form and its disconnection from concrete space (or place of presentation) are not always enough to draw a clear-cut and indisputable distinction. Also the works belonging to the particular types of video installation, such as e.g. video walls, can take on features turning them into video sculptures. Given a certain superiority (at the level of definition) of video installation over video sculpture and video

object, one can accept these two forms as (a) special category (categories) of installation (cf. Hattinger 1996).

I have disregarded, as secondary to the interest of our discussion, the issues connected with the artistic applications of robots. Any discussion of those issues would simply go beyond the scope of our considerations. The reason why I mention the existence of this domain of art here lies only with the fact that it is relevant for the discussion of the works of Nam June Paik, the artist who has played an extremely important role in the development of the art of installation.

### **Multimedia installations – the art directed towards the future**

The development of interactive and multimedia art in the last two decades has changed fundamentally the position of art. It has also considerably affected the state of the installation. Contemporary multimedia installations significantly alter or expand the established properties of this kind of art.

Relationality becomes here primarily a system of references between the context of the interaction (i.e. the product of the artist's creative effort) and the recipient, i.e. the (co) author of the work (interactor), which is a product of the recipient's interaction. (Kluszczyński 1997). The individualisation of the structure of the work here goes to extremes and the basic creative (and research) concerns also include the tools used in the interaction (i.e. the interfaces). In another dimension, relationality assumes the form of a telematic connections network, and the basic research concern is e.g. the Internet installation.

Intermediality, in turn, is identical with multimediality, which makes one reflect on the relationship between both systems of *correspondences des arts*, and on the potential consequences of the new way of "internalising" the relations between art genres on the digital platform.

Temporariness (ephemerality) assumes completely new connotations in the context of advanced interactive practices, and especially in the case of individual and collective creations on the Internet, where it gets entangled in the questions of potential existence and the issues of multiple worlds, or extended reality.

Pro-interactivity achieves its most complete and advanced form in hypermedia art. The hypertextual structure of multimedia installations is subjected to the creative experience of reception, i.e. navigation, and one result of such practices may be complete individualisation of the structure of the work, which in this case is actually identical with communicative experience.

An installation making use of virtual reality gives a new meaning to presentism, and at the same time puts the recipient in a position in which he or she is forced to define anew the relations between the actual and the virtual reality, and determine the character of the place of experience, and of the status and function of corporeality in the processes of reception.

Semanticity also acquires completely new dimensions in the world of art, where the meanings multiplying in the process of interaction transform objective meaning into an endless process of signification.

As a consequence of the introduction of hypermedia technologies, the number and diversity of video installations created today has increased significantly. Jeremy Welsh (1991), for example, characterising only the British art scene, enumerates the following types of installations made under the video umbrella: (1) installations within a closed circuit (feedback and surveillance cameras); (2) video objects and sculptures; (3) narrative installations; (4) multimedia installations and environments; (5) public art projects; and (6) interactive projects using new media technologies.

Interactive multimedia art confronts the researcher of the art of installation with a number of new problems, which are additionally much more complex than anything in this field so far. Their solution is – as always – dependent on the adopted axioms, and on preliminary definitional choices. For example, the adoption of the axiom that relationality is a fundamental attribute of installation makes it possible to accept the Internet as a new domain of installation art. The process of dematerialisation of the work is completed, and the art of installation becomes identical with the art of communicating, thus becoming one of the latter's basic categories.

To close this part of our considerations, let us recall a handful of examples of interactive multimedia installations realised in recent years. It is true that the lack of a time perspective makes it impossible for us to make any significant generalisations, e.g.

formulate a proposed typology of the works in that field, or systematise the most important tendencies. For the time being, however, we can gather and systematise our observations relating to the construction of these works, the character of the sensations they cause, the artistic means they use, and the issues they take up. We can also point out those tendencies that have yielded particularly interesting and valuable results. This preliminary reflection on selected works should prove useful in making the analysis of the character of such art (which I have carried out above using some general categories) both deeper and more precise. The reflection should be also useful given the increasing need for constructing some general rules and criteria for assessing the value of the interactive art works. Relevant examples have been chosen if they seemed representative of the contemporary explorations in the field of the art of (multimedia) installation. I have also taken into account their originality, innovativeness of technological solutions, the importance of the problems tackled, and the ability to combine the above with the technological dimension of the works.

Although they direct us towards very interesting and thought-provoking works, we can also use the first two examples to formulate some critical observations (for constructive purposes, though). The works have been chosen so that – as I have said above – we could arrive at some observations concerning the rules of assessing the value of interactive installation works. Like all suggestions of axiological character, also the present one is not free from inevitable arbitrariness. And so it merely provides examples of the criteria for evaluation that could be used for hypermedia art works.

Toshio Iwai's installation entitled *Piano as an Image Media* (1995) captures one's attention owing to its spectacular manner of operation and its strongly emphasised audiovisual character. Using a simple computer interface (a trackball), the recipient can compose uncomplicated tunes, which are realised in real time, both as regards sound (a real piano is part of the installation), and vision (spatial projections). The recipient is dazed by the excellent mutual interpenetration of real and virtual space, which jointly form a contemporary version of a performance based on synaesthesia, a tendency realised in many ways during the last century. When the initial euphoria subsides, however, we realise that the only aspect of the installation we can still develop are manual dexterity in using the interface and our skills of audiovisual instrumentation. Although enrapturing



with its form and ingenuity of implementation, Iwai's installation is in fact devoid of significant depth that would engross the viewer; likewise, it lacks complexity, and a prospect of transformative continuation that could motivate further exploration. Its asset, on the other hand, is its openness to the actions of the interactor, its readiness to effectuate any project undertaken in the context provided by the dispositif. *Piano as an Image Media* is a classic example of an interactive work-instrument, using which the recipient composes and at the same time performs his or her work.

Something similar occurs in Chris Dodge's *The Winds That Wash the Seas* (1995) – although its form is less spectacular and does not provide the recipient with such extensive possibilities of interaction, as was the case with Iwai's installation. Blowing onto the surface of the monitor or stirring the water filling a nearby bathtub, the recipient may telematically disturb the image (both on the monitor, and on a screen placed on one of the walls). Yet, the electronically generated magic of the installation exhausts itself in that gesture, not offering any further course of action. Like the Toshio Iwai installation, *The Winds That Wash the Seas* recalls the idea of art as contemplative performance, which magic however is now triggered by the viewer-interactor.

Both of those installations involuntarily bring an awareness of the consequences of giving art an interactive character. They make the viewer realise that the extension of the area of aesthetic perception to cover actual reception-related reactions in actual space, should also lead to the extension of the sphere of symbolic behaviours. When mental activity is the only form of communing with the work, the coherence of the aesthetic perception and of reception is guaranteed a priori. However, when the mental activity is complemented with various forms of actual, physical participation in the artwork (interaction), the coherence of the multilevel, interactive reception of the work can be achieved only by saturating such corporeal-spatial behaviour with the same qualities that characterise mental and emotional activity. Reflection cannot be realised in this situation only in a purely intellectual form. It should also be "embodied" in gestures and movements. Actual interactive behaviour then becomes a kind of extension of mental, intellectual and affective activity. It is only in such situations that the reception of the artwork – of the result of the interactor's co-creative activity – can achieve full internal coherence. A valuable piece of interactive art should therefore provide the conditions for this kind of reception.

A hypermedia work also becomes more valuable when interactive behaviour is motivated by the desire to pursue the unknown, or when it shapes an experience just developing. Only a reasonable prospect of entering a hitherto undiscovered dimension of experiencing the work – the one that will shed new light on the old experiences connected with it – can persuade us successfully to prolong the process of communing with this dimension.

An example of such a work is Agnes Hegedus' installation entitled *Between the Words* (1995), which, incidentally, is similar in character to Iwai's work. It involves two recipients at a time, which means that the interaction is enriched with an actual (direct) interpersonal factor. Using joystick-like interfaces, they operate a pair of virtual hands located and visible in the space between them (the space is enclosed within a cubical construction). Moving the virtual hands, which become an extension of the real hands, each of the recipients communicates with his/her partner by means of a powerful language of gestures. In this way, manual behaviour is combined with mental activity at the level of the created meanings and emotions. The fact that the partners' behaviour cannot be foreseen, creates numerous interactional possibilities (motivating the prolongation of contact with the work).

An important source of the value of Hegedus' work is the combination of real and virtual space. The interactors' activities are forms of joining these two spaces; they are thus a form of embodied reflection on quasi-direct communication that transcends the boundaries between ontologically and qualitatively different worlds. In this context, *Between the Worlds* appears to constitute yet another way of activating the relation between actual and virtual reality, a relation that is so characteristic of (multi)media art.

The works of Mirosław Rogala, such as *Lovers Leap* (1995), *Electronic Garden/NatuRealization* (1996), or *Divided We Speak* (1997) provide examples of other attributes of multimedia installation. Since I discuss them elsewhere (Kluszczyński 2001), I will only point out here some of their characteristics, which are nowadays becoming the most important attributes of hypermedia art:

- Multimediality, multiplying the relations between the recipient-interactor and the work he or she is experiencing;

- Interactivity, which turns the recipients into the interactors and makes them responsible for the character of the experience of the artwork, and for the development of the work itself;
  - Growing dematerialisation of the artefact (artwork), which eventually transforms itself into a dynamic and empty space of the interaction;
  - The tendency to treat the interactor's body as an interface;
  - Searching for the possibility of combining the individual experiences of the interactors and thus making them dependent on one another;
  - Combining the private space of experiencing the work with the public space of its context.
- In Rogala's works, the art of installation becomes a space within which the recipient discovers and defines (and sometimes redefines) his or her identity in a dialogue with the other interactor.

Contemporary trends in multimedia arts bring to life more and more artworks entering the domain of artificial life. A particularly interesting series of installations dealing with such issues was realised jointly by Christa Sommerer and Laurent Mignonneau. Their multimedia installation entitled *Interactive Plant Growing* (1992) makes use of D'Arcy Thompson's observation that from the mathematical point of view, organic forms are functions of time and can be treated as events in time-space (Thompson 1942). The recipient, moving his hand close to real plants, which are part of the installation, initiates the processes resulting in the creation of virtual plants. Sommerer and Mignonneau's installation thus seems to be an expression of the desire to discover – through artistic activity – the principle of life, which is invariably determined by morphogenesis and transformations.

It is worth mentioning at this point a very characteristic property of the art of interactive multimedia installations (we have already come across it in the case of Agnes Hegedus' work), which assumes a special meaning when they get involved in the issues of virtual corporeality. This property is called tactilism. The interactivity of art works results in their reception often acquiring the form of tactile contact. We touch both the material elements of the interface, and the remote virtual forms (teletouch). Touch always has the character of communication; many works place strong emphasis on this aspect of it. Whereas in *Interactive Plant Growing*, apart from communication, we are faced with the process of

form creation, Kirk Wolford and Stahl Stenslie's work called *CyberSM III* (1994) presents exclusively pure tactile communication. Real bodies interconnected by means of a computer network can communicate through touch, using the tactile sensitivity of the costumes made for this purpose. When a participant touches his or her own body, the partner of communication experiences a tactile sensation. The installation incorporates into its structure not only touch, but also images and sounds; however, dialogue (communication) is made possible predominantly through touch/teletouch (Wolford, Stenslie 1994).

Coming back to the works of Sommerer and Mignonneau, I should like to consider another interactive installation they have authored, *A-Volve* (1993-1994). Here the recipients can design (again through touch) artificial creatures swimming in a pool, and then (still by means of touch) interactively affect their subsequent fate. A new element here is the quasi-independence of the virtual creatures, which also interact with one another, thus having a degree of control over their "lives". Thanks to that, the recipient is able to telematically contact the virtual bodies of artificial creatures, and to experience, in an artistic context, virtual corporeality. Other works of Sommerer and Mignonneau, similar in character, include e.g. *Anthroscope* (1993) or *Phototropy* (1994). Similar works of other artists include the interactive environment installation of Simon Penny (with Jamieson Schulte's co-operation) entitled *Sympathetic Sentience* (1995-1996). All of them make available to us the experience of contact with creatures, which react to our behaviour, or the impression of being in contact with independently existing tangible worlds.

Daniela Alina Plewe's installation entitled *Muser's Service* (1994) introduces into our discussion the concept of yet another borderland – this time an intra-artistic one. It combines areas of visual arts and literature. An installation, together with its user, produces texts (materialised on the screen, printed out and spoken by a computer speech synthesiser) whose internal logic and related discourse demonstrate interesting poetic possibilities deriving from an indifferent procedure of generating texts. The system, whose poetic potential is extended in the course of its creative use by successive users (interactors), again actualises – this time less critically but somewhat perversely – the question about the humanistic character of art in the times of proclaimed anti-humanism, or posthumanism.

Intra-artistic or intra-cultural issues can also be found in Jean-Louis Boissier's works. In his *Globus Oculi* (1992), an interactive installation, as well as in his other works using the CD-ROM as a medium (*Flora petrinsularis* (1993-1994) and *Mutatis mutandis* (1995)), he combines traditional literary-philosophical motifs with contemporary interactive and hypertextual techniques. He thus juxtaposes a classical past with a cybercultural future, at the same time providing one of the possible answers to the question about the future (place, function, and meaning) of cultural tradition in a virtual world.

Despite the fact that the works of all of these artists (Boissier, Hegedus, Iwai, Penny, Plewe, Rogala, Sommerer and Mignonneau, and Welford and Stenslie) represent but a small (though, it seems to me, representative and extremely valuable) fragment of the global artistic production in the field of interactive multimedia installations, they all present very competently the breadth, diversity, depth and importance of the problems, which hypermedia art incorporates and concurrently activates in our consciousness. The observations resulting from the analysis of these works carried out above, demonstrate the variety of the means used in contemporary artistic practice to combine within it the once remote domains of human activity. They also show numerous attitudes, strategies, technological and structural-artistic solutions, all of which are characteristic of today's interactive production in the area of multimedia installation. Finally, they are a proof that in the world of artistic hypermedia, the art of installation – owing to the symmetry of its basic attributes in relation to the character of interactive multimedia – plays a role of crucial importance. And, given the fact that it is the art of the hypermedia that will probably be the most dynamic art discipline of the next century, installation is bound to become the most characteristic art form of the nearest future.

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