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DOI: 10.17234/9789531759113.7

Neo-avantgarde in the Prism of Poetry

Katalin Ladik and Mira Schendel

Abstract: *This paper is about applying dematerialized art theory for analyzing art that is not a part of the neo-avantgarde canon. The comparative analysis of the Hungarian neo-avantgarde poet and performer Katalin Ladik (1942 Novi Sad, Serbia) and the Brazilian postwar artist Mira Schendel (1919 Zürich, Switzerland – 1988 São Paulo, Brazil) shows how performativity and medium-extension occur in different artistic strategies. The analysis will prove that there are more similarities between the two artists, which can be interpreted within the neo-avantgarde. Both show common interest in defining their art as a development of poetry. The comparison of their works brings the attention to the re-reading of the neo-avantgarde canon and emphasizing the linguistic elements in the neo-avantgarde art itself.*

Keywords: *neo-avantgarde, Mira Schendel, Katalin Ladik, fragility, dematerialization, performance, Lucy R. Lippard, language*

Framing neo-avantgarde

Mira Schendel (1919–1988) and Katalin Ladik (1942) do not seem to have common space. Schendel is a Brazilian post-war artist who emigrated from Italy to Brazil and painted oil paintings on canvas from the 1950's until her last series from 1987. *Battens*¹ is painted on wood panel, and a triangle-like element is applied on it so it shows resemblance to the abstract expressionism, unlike her early works, which are rather modernist.

From her early paintings till her last work, since the 1960's Schendel had done experiments using the easily accessible and ephemeral material, the Japanese rice paper. Schendel used a specific monotype technique to write texts on the thin paper and had drawn simple forms or just lines on the paper. She also developed different installation techniques, which had also been presented several times posthumous following the original installation – breaking her original conception of the ephemerality. The experimental works

¹ Mira Schendel, *Battens*, 1987, Tempera and gesso on wood. 90 × 180 × 54 cm., Mira Schendel Estate.

of Schendel incorporated textual elements. But this is not the reason why her art is usually thought of as poetry.

Having lived in Hungary for decades, Katalin Ladik was first considered to be a neo-avantgarde poet and actress from the ex-Yugoslavian Serbia. After she became known as a poet, Ladik started to make performances in the 1970's and worked with the neo-avantgarde Bosch+Bosch group in mixed media works, mostly documented in photographs. Her performances always involve her poetry, and scholars usually highlight the interdisciplinarity when analyzing her art. However, the main focus in analysing her art is the relationship with music or theater and not the intermingling with literature.

It looks like Ladik and Schendel are not connected to each other indeed. Nevertheless, considering what Kitty Zijlmans says about art history as system theory and the relationship between opposite artistic positions in the inspiration of the analysis², Ladik and Schendel can be analysed side by side. The obvious connection is the notion of poetry, which has a strong presence both in Schendel's paperworks and Ladik's performances not only in the theoretical dimension but in the material sense as well. Although

Schendel and Ladik work in different mediums (Ladik in performance, Schendel in installation), the key motifs in their reception is time and space.

The paper's title, *Neo-avantgarde in the prism of poetry* refers to the neo-avantgarde movement's embeddedness in literature, and to the *Prism Poem*³, a visual poem by the Hungarian neo-avantgarde artist Tamás Szentjóby. This is an ink and letraset work on paper, which is considered to be a typical neo-avantgarde technique since the material is easily accessible and cheap. Further, the work implements a communicative situation because of the textual element. The visual poem *Prism Poem* shows the same elements which are relevant in the comparison of Ladik and Schendel: the complementarity of text and writing in visual works, the line, and the reductivity. Henry Flynt stated that concept art brings the art and linguistic theories into artistic dimension, and the material of the art can be anything, even concepts.⁴ This definition of neo-avantgarde (or conceptual) art, among the other different theories of the *new art* revealed in the period of 1960s and 1970s, makes it possible to discuss Schendel in relation to the neo-avantgarde canon, as the *opposite artistic position* of Ladik. According to Boris Groys, the art of the neo-

2 Zijlmans 1990.

3 Szentjóby 1967.

4 Flynt 1963.

avantgarde revolutionized not only the notion of art but the way art is installed (in exhibition) and discussed (in art history).⁵ Therefore, neo-avantgarde can be viewed as a frame of discussion, which can be relevant in the approach of a canonically non-neo-avantgarde⁶ artist, who was investigating experimental forms from the second part of the 1960s.

Among the world of theories on neo-avantgarde, the dematerialized art conception by Lucy R. Lippard seems the most vivid to us. Lippard in an essay, which has been co-written with John Chandler and published in 1968, states the following: „[highly conceptual works] set critic and viewer thinking about what they see rather than simply weighing the

formal or emotional impact. Intellectual and aesthetic pleasure can merge in this experience when the work is both visually strong and theoretically complex.”⁷ Furthermore, they emphasize some specific type of art in which the paths lead to neo-avantgarde: black paintings, white paintings, light beams, transparent film, silent concerts, invisible sculpture.⁸ This listing is wide enough to effortlessly insert Schendel’s transparency-obsessed installations in it. Especially when we consider what Lippard stated about the conception of dematerialized art later in her book *Six Years*: „[c]onceptual art, for me, means work in which the idea is paramount and the material form is secondary, lightweight, ephemeral, cheap, unpretentious and/or „dematerialized”;⁹ „[c]onceptual art offered a bridge between the verbal and the visual”¹⁰. In the end of their article, Chandler and Lippard refer to Ortega y Gasset who write that, „[new art] wants to create from nought”.¹¹ The notions of emptiness and void are emphasized when Lippard says dematerialization is „a deemphasis on material aspects” and *new art* brings „ephemeral materials as time itself, and space”.¹² The Hungarian literary historian Miklós Szabolcsi

5 Groy 2011 <https://www.e-flux.com/journal/29/68059/introduction-global-conceptualism-revisited/>.

Further, it is worth mentioning the story of the Croatian Neo-Avantgarde artist, Josip Vaništa (1924) from 1964, where he presented not the paintings, but the descriptions (texts on paper) of his paintings with the following explanation: He stops painting, because he realized, it is enough to write. Neo-Avantgarde artist follow this tradition: who has a background in painting, starts to work with new mediums in this period. Szombathy Bálint: *Akcióművészet a volt Jugoszláviában és utódállamaiban 1969 és 1999 között*. In: Szombathy 2009, p. 48–49.

6 Traditionally Mira Schendel is not described as a conceptual (or Neo-Avantgarde) artist, and usually connected to the Postwar Abstraction label. See the recent exhibition, *Making Space: Women Artists and Postwar Abstraction*. curators: Stars Figurra, Hillary Reder. MoMA, New York, 19.09.2017.–13.08. 2017.

7 Chandler, Lippard et al. 1968, p. 34.

8 Ibid., p. 35.

9 Lippard 1973, p. VII.

10 Ibid., p. X.

11 Chandler, Lippard 1968, p. 35.

12 Lippard 1973, p. 5.

defines *signal type neo-avantgarde*: „this kind of art breaks down the language as the material of literature – likewise other arts’ materials –, it separates its elements, isolates them and builds a new model”¹³. Following Szabolcsi, Schendel uses letters and words as „the new objects of visual arts”¹⁴. Comparing their artistic strategies, both Ladik and Schendel eliminate the distinction between poetry and visual arts as long as Schendel incorporates poems in her drawings and Ladik preserves poetry in performances.¹⁵

The experimental art of Mira Schendel

The most often used notion in Schendel’s reception is fragility.¹⁶ The other significant formal attributes are textual elements and transparency or translucency, which stand close to the just mentioned fragility. Textual elements can be linked to the fragility as well if we consider their fragmentedness. Texts in Schendel’s works are separated words, citations or letters only. Tension can be registered between the medium of the works and connotations of themselves. The

fragility of the materials (Japanese rice paper, acrylic plate, nylon thread) disappears when the work is finished, furthermore, the works become forceful, quite opposite of fragile: „fragility and energy indicate space as an active thing”¹⁷.

Schendel’s power is developed by the works’ relations to the surrounding space: the shadows (*Little Train*, 1965; *Little Stubs*, 1973)¹⁸, or the closeness of each part of the series (*Graphic Object* 1967; *Variants*, 1977)¹⁹. Her experimental works (*Monotypes*, *Graphic Objects*, *Little Nothings*, *Still Waves of Probability*)²⁰ mostly encompass an operation with the space. The way Schendel made the installations makes the viewer see the works in relation to the spacial circumstances. Thin lines and handwritten words on the Japanese rice paper, and the thin papers arranged in the exhibition space are connected to the light shining space. The material of the works enable the viewer to see the light itself, and the visible light draws the attention to the space.

13 Own translation. Szabolcsi 1981, p. 54.

14 Ibid., p. 23.

15 The fusion of different art territories appears in the reception of Ladik and her poetry and performance activity usually discussed paralel. See: Balind 2011; Samu 2011.

16 See for example this group exhibition: *Frágil*. Museo de Arte Contemporáneo Esteban Vicente, Segovia, Spain 2008.

17 Barson 2013, p. 24.

18 Schendel c.1965; Schendel 1973.

19 Schendel 1967–; Schendel 1997.

20 Schendel 1964–69; Schendel 1965–66; Schendel 1969.



Fig 1. Schendel, Mira. *Graphic Objects*, 1965.
Installation view in the Mira Schendel exhibition
in the Pinacoteca do Estado de São Paulo, 2014.

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*The Return of Achilles*²¹ is a 'written painting' which contains a quotation from the *Iliad*: „Froude and myself at the time, we borrowed from M. Bunsen a Homer and Froude chose the words in which ACHILLES returning to the battle says you shall know the difference now that I am back again.” The caption is made in stencil technique, the word ACHILLES is white, and the rest stays in dark tones. This work is the last oil on canvas painting before the experimental works. In the experimental works, the proportion of the light and dark surfaces becomes reversed: the whiteness of the almost empty sheets is rampant, while drawings and the texts occupy only a tiny area. According to Taisa Palhares, the Achilles-painting has all the important qualities from forthcoming experimental works.²² Ana Mannario registers the presence of the words in

21 Schendel 1964.

22 Palhares 2013, p. 10.

Schendel's experimental works.²³ She describes the elements of the experiment in the works from the 1960s in connection to the textual fragments appearing on the paperworks and installations: „These artworks allow an indeterminate and open reading, enabled by the rupture with linearity and the surface organization of words and letters.”²⁴

Monotypes (1964–1969) was the first experiment. Palhares describes the series as the investigation of the „invisible visibility”.²⁵ Schendel uses printmaking technique to make oil drawing on Japanese rice paper. According to Palhares, monotype is the most personal technique among printmaking „in which the mark of the gesture and the individuality of the hand become most evident, giving each print a unique character.”²⁶ Despite this I would rather consider the monotype specifically in Schendel's *Monotypes* series as a technique which eliminates the artist's hand, artistic signature or personality. That is the crucial difference between Schendel's earlier work and the ones after the 1960s. Earlier works were paintings, the first pieces of the *Monotypes* series were traditional drawings. When defining the subjectivity

23 Mannarino 2014, p. 106–114.

24 Ibid., p. 107.

25 Palhares, 2015.

26 Ibid.

of the printing technique of Schendel, it has to be compared to the above mentioned works. When discussing the technique we can recall Didi-Huberman and Barthes. The latter says „the text is a trace of a gesture”²⁷, while the former understands the image as a trace.²⁸ According to Didi-Huberman, the trace is becoming by touching.²⁹ At this point we can associate to Ladik, since she is working with the body. But before returning to the performance art of Ladik and the connection to Didi-Huberman’s description on trace as ready-made³⁰, this paper continues with Schendel’s other experimental works.

In Graphic Objects the dispossessive or expropriated use of text as an *objet trouvé* is an avantgarde gesture. *The Little Nothings* is an exception among the paperwork, because it is the furthest peak in Schendel’s investigation. On this occasion Schendel did not write or draw on the paper, but knotted the sheets into a net-like ephemeral sculpture which has no definite form. This is a good example for the endless meaning-process of these works. *Notebooks* (1971) bring to the foreground the difficulty of display. This is a notebook indeed, with very similar drawings as the early pieces of *Monotypes*. Similarly to

The Little Nothings, it is an object, which incorporates emptiness. Souza Dias describes Schendel’s *Notebooks* as ‘chains of thoughts’ and identifies these books as a continuation of Schendel’s investigation of transparency.³¹ He argues that in these works Schendel’s form of expression is between the traditional art object and the conceptual: they embody the unfolding of an idea in which the object, in its subtle physical aspect is present. Two other works, the *Untitled / Yes* (1960s) and the *Untitled / How Beautiful* (1966) emphasize textual elements („yes” and „how beautiful”).³² These projects have similar atmosphere and common strategy with the Croatian Neo-Avantgarde artist Mladen Stilinović. In the paperwork *Akcija*, Stilinović uses handwritten label with red colour as well as Schendel’s above mentioned paperworks.³³

Schendel’s artistic interest is distinctly connected to the conceptual or notional art due to her orientation to the language and her approach to defining art and items of art. Scholars usually interpret her art from philosophical background (Flusser) because of her interest in it, and her previous academic

27 Mannarino 2014, p. 109.

28 Didi-Huberman 2008, p. 36.

29 Ibid., p. 33.

30 The trace always borrows the forms of a second object. See: Didi-Huberman 2008, p. 32.

31 Dias 2009, p. 275, cited in: Barson 2014, p. 29.

32 Schende 1960s; Schendel 1966.

33 Stilinović 1977.

studies.³⁴ Nonetheless Schendel has work, which can be doubtlessly discussed within the neo-avantgarde frame in a broader sense. The *Still Waves of Probability* (1969) is conceptually situated on language and has direct links to political and social interactions as well, which is a crucial narrative for understanding the conceptual artistic strategies developed in different continents under similarly repressive regimes.

Still Waves of Probability is an installation set up in a room with thousands of nylon threads hanging from the ceiling. Since the nylon is translucent, the work itself is hardly recognizable. It was first presented for the 10th Bienal de São Paulo. Similarly to the painting of Achilles, there is a quotation on the wall. It is from the Old Testament, Books of Kings, another basic antique tradition next to the *Iliad*. The interpretations of this installation can be extended to Brazilian military dictatorship since that bienal in 1969 was under international boycott to protest against the dictatorship and censorship.³⁵ That work can be

interpreted as an artistic response to the circumstances of this political situation.³⁶ In *Still waves of Probability*, Schendel presents the void, and since she presents the void in a bienal, which was under boycott by several artists, she performed the boycott or resistance, and the protestation itself in a proactive and yet artistic way. This component of the work links Schendel again to the very conceptual art which stands up at a power structure in each location of the world, even in an institutional hierarchy or a broader, governmental level. With *Still waves of Probability*, Schendel joins the neo-avantgarde artworks, which reports the impossibility of the dialogue in repressive systems, still making an experiment for the communication.



Fig 2. Mira Schendel: *Still Waves of Probability*, 1969. Nylon thread with text on acrylic. Dimensions variable. © Mira Schendel Estate.

34 Guy Brett, Flusser and Umberto Eco's open work conception is not very far from the intermediality of conceptual art.

35 Isobel Whitelegg understands this work as art under conditions of repressions and links it to the Brazil dictatorship in her essay. See: Isobel Whitelegg, „The Other World Is This: Mira Schendel's Participation in the 10th Bienal de São

Paulo, 1969,” in *Mira Schendel* by Barson-Palhares (London: Tate Publishing, 2013).

36 The period of the Brazil dictatorship (1964–1985) is almost the same as the large-scale international Neo-Avantgarde exhibition's timeframes.

Katalin Ladik and the vulnerable presence

Still Waves of Probability show similarities to *3.44*, a composition by John Cage. Both of them present the same „nothing”. Cage gave a time frame, while Schendel gave a spatial frame to define „a room of nothing”. Surely neither of them contains only the void, because of the *probable* voices. Coincidence is an often mentioned notion about Cage, and in the interval of *3.44* Cage actually presents the *probable* voices: coughing, knocking. Cage shows the connection of the spatial and temporal in the artwork, that has to be complemented by the audience. Cage creates content from the spatial arrangement of the words: „[s]ilence is born with the help of the words” he says.³⁷ „What I call poetry, others often call content. I call it form.”³⁸ The void Cage composed between the words in the *Lecture on Nothing* creates content indeed.³⁹ This artistic strategy and the unstable meaning of works appears in Schendel’s experimental art as well.⁴⁰ The parallel with Cage is a priori in the possibilities of objectivizing of the void. Further, Cage is a general

reference in the neo-avantgarde and appears in the reception of Katalin Ladik⁴¹, although not in a particularized way, only to set the neo-avantgarde context.

Transparency (or translucency) that is previously discussed in the context of Mira Schendel can be correlated to the performance *The Screaming Hole* by Ladik.⁴² Ladik is behind a huge sheet of paper, and the audience only hear her voice (and the cooking noise). After a while, the audience start to cut holes on the paper to see what is happening inside the barricade. Ladik creates here a voyeuristic situation. In this performance the problem of visibility and non-visibility is the main organizer. It is often mentioned that Ladik first became a poet and later started to extend the traditional poem in each dimension. Besides the poems and the performances in 1969, she created a group of paperworks, which have a smaller position between the two above mentioned mediums. That third medium she worked in, the paperworks show a close relationship with visual poems. They are similar to but not the same with visual poetry because the textual elements are sometimes missing, there is only the title and one unreadable line that resembles handwriting.⁴³ That

37 Cage 1994, p. 65.

38 Ibid.

39 Cage 1994 (chapter *Lecture on Nothing*).

40 Moreover, similarly to Cage’s coincidence, the accidentally traces can be also observable:

fingerprints are accidentally leaving traces during the printmaking (*Monotypes, Graphic Objects*).

The most prominent is how the texts relate to each other.

41 Kürti 2017.

42 Ladik 1979b.

43 Ladik 1969b; Ladik 1969/2015; Ladik 1969a.

handwritten but unreadable irregular line should be the metaphor of poetry. Also, Ladik has several visual poems. The *Traces of Green Palm* from 1972 can be highlighted here.⁴⁴ This is a typed text on a (bed-)sheet-sized paper which has a pattern with plenty of lines. These originally printed lines sometimes confuse the writings and drawings by the artist, and sometimes they complement them. The pattern as a *ready made*, the sheet-like size, and the usage of the line and drawings constitute another connection between Ladik and Schendel (for example the *Graphic Objects*). Therefore, the joint exhibition of Ladik and Schendel should show interesting connections.

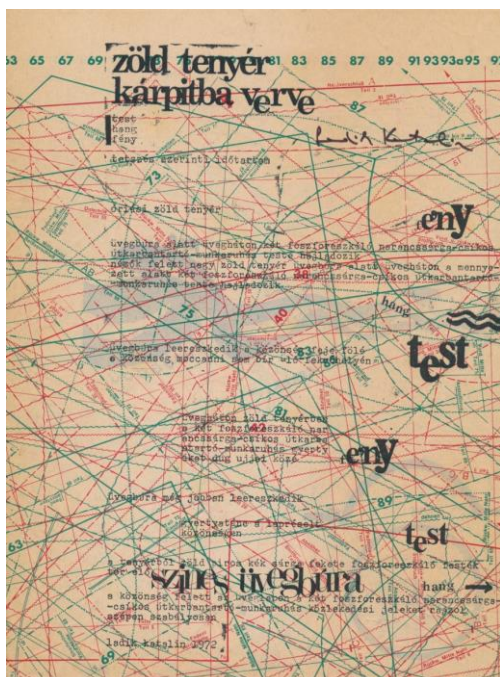


Fig 3. Ladik, Katalin. *Traces of Green Palm*, 1972. Ink, letraset, typewriting, offset on paper. 32 × 50 cm. © Katalin Ladik, acb Gallery.

44 Ladik 1972.

It can be seen that the title of these paperwork and visual poems have a privileged role in the meaning or sense of the whole artwork. These titles are usually sentence-like and resemble a line from Ladik's poems, which stand close to the surrealist literature tradition. They are closer to the poetry of Lautréamont than to the poetry of the 1960s and 1970s or the contemporary literature after that.⁴⁵ This quality of the titles are preserved in the performances as well; therefore, it should be treated as a motif in the oeuvre of Ladik. According to the previous statement, it is not further legitimate to say, that Ladik superseded poetry with the extension of the poem. However Ladik is still working as a performer (see for example her presence in the latest Documenta in 2017, or the *Transit Zoon*, 2015).⁴⁶ There is a discourse around her that treats her art as a finished oeuvre.⁴⁷ This approach can be understood if we consider how repetitive the work of Ladik is, constantly re-staging her performances from the 1970s. Nevertheless, it is worth

45 Just to mention the well-known quote by Lautréamont: „As beautiful as the chance encounter of a sewing machine and an umbrella on an operating table.”

46 Ladik 2015.

About the participation of Katalin Ladik at the 14th Documenta in 2017, see:

<http://www.documenta14.de/en/artists/13488/katalin-ladik> (2017.11.30.).

47 Šuvaković 2010; Balind 2011; Samu 2014; Kürti 2017.

rereading it from a different frame of reference.



Fig 4. Attila, Csernik et Ladik, Katalin. *Body poetry*, 1973. Gelatine silver print. 23 × 13.7 cm. © Vágó László Collection

Both Ladik and Schendel can be approached by the notion of emancipation, as long as we see their intermediality as parenthesizing the hierarchy of genres (or medium). The performances of Ladik have their root in the poem, and the poem had been extended in different directions before it became a performance. The notion of extension can be used in relation with

Schendel as Palhares emphasizes: „language receives a new extension in the *Graphic Objects*, starting in 1967, in which the field of writing expands to three-dimensional space.”⁴⁸

Furthermore, Palhares continues: „letters and words were converted into events on the plane.”⁴⁹ The extension of poem in the case of Ladik results in the disappearance of the traditional poem. This is the opposite process of what Schendel does, because Schendel transfers the poem to the space and shows its components. Albeit their opposite strategies, we cannot state that in Ladik’s case we see the purification of poetry and in Schendel’s case we see the manifestation of poetry. Nevertheless we can say that writing as a form becomes central in Schendel, while it is missing or eliminated in Ladik. We can ask the question, does the purification of the poetry have to result in the elimination of itself? Both of them realize the manifestation of poetry and poem, however their manifestations have opposite directions. If we declare that the letter is the most significant in poetry (Schendel), then the letter will be manifested. If we declare that the acoustic and the visual elements are the most significant in poetry (Ladik), then sound and the body will be manifested. For this reason we can say that in the performances Ladik purifies the

⁴⁸ Palhares 2014, p. 15.

⁴⁹ Ibid.

poem from the letter, and Schendel purificates poetry from everything but the letter.

Although the poem is eliminated from Ladik's performance, the performance still directs the attention back to the poem with their meanings which is concentrated highly in their titles, as we have seen previously. It seems that the poem becomes a space for Ladik where she can perform new experiments.⁵⁰ The process from the written poems to the performance, or the so-called body involved phonical presentation, is a process in which the first crucial transformation was made on the first medium, the (written) poem. The displacement of the poem creates a common situation with the works and methods of Schendel. „The words are materialized by forms, luminosity and texture,” says Mannarino about the materialization of words in Schendel's art.⁵¹ The materialization brings the (viewer's) body to the forefront, which is a possible direction to connect Schendel to Ladik again.

Further connections between Ladik and Schendel are the transparent and translucent materials, such as nylon and plastic. There are several performances where Ladik uses transparent materials and these nylon sheets or plastic bags

always play an important role. For example, in *Poemim* she uses a glass plate in order to deform her face, or in *Performance* organized in Pécs in 1980, she wears a transparent raincoat on her underdress,⁵² and in *Mandora*, white threads were bound to her.⁵³

In many performances Ladik uses the nylon as a mask. Because of the transparency of the nylon, the viewer can hardly make a distinction among the skin and the mask. Thus here we can also observe the disappearance of the nylon, even if it is partial. This disappearance is similar to the falling and even rain-like nylon threads of the *Still Waves of Probability* by Schendel. The nylon however emphasizes the light effect in both Ladik and Schendel (more intensive lights can be observed on the surface of the nylon mask). On the other hand, Schendel uses a morphological pluralism that seems to be missing from Ladik. In the case of Schendel the light sometimes seems to be water, which leads us to the territory of immateriality. This immateriality, which moreover recalls the lippardian dematerialization, is not a part of the artistic strategy of Ladik.

It is important to analyze who finishes the transformations that the artworks accomplish: the viewer or the artist.

50 Kürti 2017, p. 41.

51 Mannarino 2014, p. 104.

52 Ladik 1978b.

53 Ladik 1980/1983.

During the interpretation the audience can become an equal participator as we saw in the Cageian concept, or the artist as a performer can interpret almost everything on stage. The performer can sometimes go ahead in the interpretation and can finish it as a part of the artwork. János Samu, a Hungarian specialist in literature, writes about the viewer and the place for interpretation in relation to the performances of Ladik: „Ladik is not working instead of the viewer, albeit she declares the territory for interpretations consciously and the problematic places to be discussed.”⁵⁴ The gesture that Ladik „declares the territory for interpretation consciously” means that Ladik as a performer goes ahead in the interpretations. On the contrary Schendel does not calculate with a passive viewer or interpreter. Even she works with traditional materials and mediums, but she relies on the viewer’s interactions in the space of the artworks. Compared to Schendel, the behavior or attitude of Ladik as an artist is less performative.

As already mentioned, Ladik’s face is often hidden by masks made of different materials. In the *Poemask* Ladik covers her face with a painterly material, which replaces her skin(nes).⁵⁵ This interaction with the mask is repeated with the body as well when

Ladik hides and shows her (often naked) self.⁵⁶ These works can be approached by the definition on erotic: according to Bataille, the origin of the erotic lies in the activity of hiding nudity. In the performance *Blackshave poem* the nudity brings the void into the interpretation as the disappearance of the body.⁵⁷ With the motif of undressing, Ladik evokes the earlier performances that presented her naked. However, the situation is repeated in a reversed way because under her white underwear Ladik wears black tights and black sweater which cover (and hide) the entire body.

The *Pseudosculpture* performance on the Croatian island of Hvar in 1982 depicts the motif of the sea, which is also a poetical topos.⁵⁸ The woman who steps out of the sea evokes ancient prefigurations, similarly to Schendel’s Achilles painting. The watery clothes of Ladik correlate with the antique Greek sculptures technique. The clothes of the figures seem watery because of the plenty of wrinkles on it. Not only do the clothes cover the body, but they even emphasize it more due to their wetness. The function of the clothes in this

54 Samu 2014, p. 87.

55 Ladik 1978a.

56 For example: *Tour de Merde*, 1979, private apartment, Budapest; *The Screaming hole*, 1979.04.20. Tribina Mladih, Novi Sad, photo by Ifjú Gábor, 1979.02.23, FMK, Budapest; *Pseudo Presence*, photo-performance, Novi Sad, 1974.

57 Ladik 1979a.

58 Ladik 1982.

performance is similar to the transparent raincoat in another performance mentioned above.

Conclusion

At last it is worth mentioning the similarity in their pluralistic use of language. In Schendel we can observe the use of German, English, Italian, Croatian, Portuguese at the same time, that results in the „mixture of language”.⁵⁹ Ladik in her early performances (during the 1970s) spoke in Hungarian and Serbian alternately before the Croatian audience, what resulted the obscurity of the performance.⁶⁰ Furthermore in both Ladik's and Schendel's oeuvre, displacement⁶¹ and border identity⁶² are the central notions because of the complexity of international and intercontextual situations.

Both in the interpretations of Ladik's and Schendel's, the question of sense or meaning is a recurring element. According to Mannarino, „most of her works, though filled with letters and words, never achieve any articulate sense. (...) We are faced then with the void of meaning.”⁶³ In relation to Ladik,

the obscurity of meaning comes from her poetry, preserved in the performances as well. Fragility and multi-sensual characters seem to be relevant in both arts. For a more comprehensive understanding, it is worth analyzing Ladik and Schendel with the two opposite language theories of the 20th century, by Derrida and Saussure. Their debate was about the language and what has the primacy: *orality*, said Saussure, *literacy*, said Derrida. The formal analysis of Katalin Ladik and Mira Schendel can be completed with a Latin-Eastern theoretical approach in the future. Although they have never been exhibited together, the latest overarching international large-scale exhibition on neo-avantgarde art, *Transmissions: Art in Eastern Europe and Latin America, 1960–1980*⁶⁴ can be read as a sign of this process. Next to Mira Schendel, the two previously mentioned Croatian artists, Mladen Stilinović and Josip Vaništa, were exhibited, beside the Hungarian artists Dóra Maurer and Endre Tót.

Illustrations

1. Schendel, Mira. *Graphic Objects*, 1965. Installation view in the Mira Schendel exhibition in the Pinacoteca do Estado de São Paulo, 2014. © Simon Bettina

59 Palhares 2014.

60 In order to interpret this border identity, Vera Balind analyzes Gloria Anzaldúa's theory. Balind 2011, pp. 27–29.

61 Palhares 2014, p. 10.

62 Samu 2014, p. 83.

63 Mannarino 2014, p. 113.

64 2015.09.05.–2016.01.03. Museum of Modern Art, New York. chief curator: Stuart Comer

2. Mira Schendel: *Still Waves of Probability*, 1969. Nylon thread with text on acrylic. Dimensions variable. © Mira Schendel Estate.
3. Ladik, Katalin. *Traces of Green Palm*, 1972. Ink, letraset, typewriting, ofset on paper. 32 × 50 cm. © Katalin Ladik, acb Gallery.
4. Attila, Csernik et Ladik, Katalin. *Body poetry*, 1973. Gelatine silver print. 23 × 13.7 cm. © Vágó László Collection

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