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Władysław Hasior's Urban Performances

Abstract

This article discusses the performative art of Władysław Hasior, particularly his actions in the urban space. Initially expressed only in his artworks, since the 1970s Hasior's need for dialogue with the spectator took the form of very expressive artistic manifestations involving audience participation, direct involvement of spectators in the creation of the performative event, and abolition of the distance between the artist and society. Due to the ontological status of these events, their ephemeral and fleeting nature, they have been the least explored area of Hasior's work. The article analyzes his most important urban and open-air performances, such as the *Procesja sztandarów* (Banner Procession) in Łącko (1973), *Solspann* in Södertälje (1973–1976), and finally the ceremonial *Przeprowadzka* (Move) from the dormitory of Antoni Kenar school of fine arts to a new atelier in Zakopane (1984). These

actions are considered in the context of contemporary discussions on participatory art: Claire Bishop's antagonistic theory of participation and Grant H. Kester's concept of dialogical art. It is argued that Hasiór's performative projects combined two strategies of participatory art; he was able to co-create ephemeral works together with the audience, while at the same time directing the spectators' actions.

Keywords

Władysław Hasiór, urban performance, participatory art, ephemeral action, site-specific art

Abstrakt

Miejskie performanse Władysława Hasióra

Artykuł poświęcony jest performatywnej twórczości Władysława Hasióra, w szczególności jego działaniom aranżowanym w przestrzeni miejskiej. Potrzeba dialogowania z odbiorcą, początkowo wyrażana przez Hasióra jedynie w eksponatach, począwszy od lat siedemdziesiątych przybiera formę bardzo wyrazistych manifestacji artystycznych zakładających bezpośredni udział widzów w kreowaniu zdarzenia performatywnego, a także znoszenie dystansu między artystą a społeczeństwem. Ze względu na ontologiczny status tych zdarzeń, ich efemeryczny i ulotny charakter, stanowią one jak dotąd najmniej zbadany obszar twórczości artysty. W artykule analizie poddane zostały najważniejsze miejskie i plenerowe performanse Władysława Hasióra, takie jak *Pochód sztandarów* w Łącku (1973), realizacja *Solspann* w Södertälje (1973–1976) czy wreszcie uroczysta *Przeprowadzka* z internatu „Szkoly Kenara” do nowej pracowni w Zakopanem (1984). Działania te autorka rozpatruje w kontekście współczesnych rozważań nad sztuką partycypacyjną, zarówno w świetle antagonistycznej teorii partycypacji Claire Bishop, jak i koncepcji sztuki dialogicznej Granta H. Kestera, zauważając, że Hasiór w swoich projektach performatywnych łączył dwie strategie sztuki partycypacyjnej: potrafił współtworzyć efemeryczne dzieła razem z publicznością, a jednocześnie reżyserować działania odbiorców.

Słowa kluczowe

Władysław Hasiór, performans miejski, sztuka partycypacyjna, akcja efemeryczna, sztuka site-specific

Between Dialogue and Confrontation

In recent decades, the work of Władysław Hasiór, a Zakopane-based sculptor and visual artist, was the subject of theoretical reflection and academic analyses conducted almost exclusively by art historians. All scholarly publications so far have stemmed from the authors' interest in form, symbolism, and the socio-cultural context of the artist's works, while dedicating little room to the performative aspect of his output. Hasiór's numerous ephemeral and open-air actions, as well as his urban projects involving audience participation, remain the least explored area of his work. One reason is surely the temporary character of these events, which grants them performance status and distinguishes them from registered gallery items and monuments, despite the fact that it was often the latter that provided a starting point for arranging "new" recipient situations, based on unmediated dialogue or cooperation between the artist and audiences. Any attempts at "reconstructing" or describing Hasiór's performative actions must rely first and foremost on their material and immaterial "residue": surviving photographic materials, videos recordings, recorded or written comments of the artist himself, and accounts of the spectators-participants.

Hasiór's statements and artistic gestures testify to his perception of art as a vocation which leaves no room for compromise or pandering to audiences' tastes. "My art is an alternative proposition. The viewers do not have to like it. I see it as a form of social service and I derive satisfaction from the polemics and heated discussions that I am provoking," he claimed.¹ For Hasiór, staying true to one's own intuition and inventiveness was the chief prerequisite for artistic explorations, even those that involve audiences in the creative process. This declaration is especially important for the present study's attempt to position Hasiór's performative art within the context of contemporary reflections on participatory art and its basic models; indeed, it permits one to place his projects between Grant H. Kester's concept of dialogical art and antagonistic dimension of participation according to Claire Bishop. Many of Hasiór's performances can also be analyzed as examples of site-specific art, with reference to the communal context as proposed by Miwon Kwon.

In the 1970s, Hasiór's need to enter into dialogue with the viewers was vividly manifested through artforms involving audiences' direct participation in creating

¹ Władysław Hasiór, *Myśli o sztuce*, ed. Zdzisława Zegadłówna (Nowy Sącz: Sąddecka Oficyna Wydawnicza, 1986), 7.

the performative event as well as abolishing the distance between the artist and local community. Such practice, soon to become a crucial part of Hasiór's artistic activity, marks a clear turn toward collective action and confirms the artist's belief in its power and efficiency; in addition, it offers a way of catering to his individual need of holding large public performances, ascribing roles, and designing spatial relations between objects and viewers.

Hasiór's performative projects ascribe a special role to the venue—always a specific public space, with its local, cultural, and historical context. It is precisely that space (understood both topographically and symbolically) that outlines the sphere of dialogue and confrontation between the artist and local community. What matters within this context is not only observing and listening skills, but also “empathetic insight,” which, according to Grant H. Kester, is a prerequisite for the felicitousness of all collective artistic pursuits.² Such projects, often juxtaposing various attitudes, worldviews, or cultural traditions, tend to expose tensions and conflicts as well as mutual interest, fascination, and potential web of influences. According to Kester, dialogue and exchange are crucial concepts in participatory art, allowing us to “think outside our own lived experience and establish a more compassionate relationship with others.”³

Hasiór's local performances, amongst which I also count some of his sculptures due to their performative dimension, correspond with Kester's understanding of dialogical art, stressing its processual character, cooperation, and “empathetic identification.” The latter concept is used by Kester as a point of reference for his definition of interaction, viewed not as a form of communication focused on representing one's own self but rather as an ability to identify with others.⁴ The processual character of Hasiór's performative projects stems mainly from their long-term impacts, including the stage of creation (involving the presence, and often also participation, of local community members), its official public presentation (based sometimes on interaction, as seen by Kester, and sometimes on confrontation, closer to Bishop's framework) and finally the way the work would subsequently function in the public space (including the artist's designs for performing the site, its history, and memory, as well as entering into relationships with new generations of viewers and changing landscapes).

² Grant H. Kester, *Conversation Pieces: Community and Communication in Modern Art* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 2004), 114–120.

³ Kester, *Conversation Pieces*, 150. See also Grant H. Kester, *The One and the Many: Contemporary Collaborative Art in a Global Context* (Durham, NC: Duke University Press, 2011).

⁴ See Grant H. Kester, “Conversation Pieces: The Role of Dialogue in Socially-Engaged Art,” in *Theory in Contemporary Art since 1985*, eds. Zoya Kocur and Simon Leung (Malden, MA: Blackwell, 2005), 76–100.

The validity of interpreting Hasior's performative works in the "dialogical" context is evident if one takes into consideration the circumstances surrounding the creation of many of his projects—suffice it to mention his *Organ* (1966) in Kluszkowce near Czorsztyn, *Calvary* (1969) in Montevideo or *Solspann* (*Scandinavian Chariot*, 1972–1976) in Södertälje, Sweden. All these projects were based on the "expanded" understanding of sculpture,⁵ viewing it as an undertaking reflecting the local community's moods and emotions, firmly grounded in the local experience. The intention of incorporating these intersubjective elements fuelled Hasior's activities aimed at involving the local public. As a result, local communities took part in the creative process, whether indirectly (like in *Organ*, where the artist collected testimonies among the local community members) or directly (like in *Calvary* or *Solspann*).

The "dialogical" character of Hasior's urban performances does not translate into the absolute equality between the artist and participants, as postulated by Kester in his definition of participatory art. Indeed, Hasior's designs stem from his urgent need to understand the "Other," his sociological studies, deep desire to strengthen social bonds, and even empathetic identification with the viewer, but their final result does not always lead to the consensus advocated by Kester. On the contrary: the impact of Hasior's public artistic interventions is often attributable to their capacity for triggering tensions and interference within the recipient community's established set of values. Due to this antagonistic potential, Hasior's performative art may merit analysis within the framework proposed by Claire Bishop.

According to Bishop, participatory art is a kind of strategy "in which people constitute the central artistic medium and material, in the manner of theater and performance."⁶ In most cases, these are ephemeral actions aimed at raising temporary communities and evoking responses, emotions, and collective disturbances, which often lead to real social and cultural transformations. Bishop remains wary when it comes to the ethical turn implied by socially engaged art.

⁵ Here, I am not referring directly to Rosalind E. Krauss's concept of "sculpture in the expanded field," but rather alluding to this category in order to draw attention to the constant "expansion of the field in sculpture" in contemporary art. This process is well summarized by Wojciech Szymański: "Sculpture is then . . . a situation created in the field of art rather than a three-dimensional artefact; it is a place rather than a form; it is designing the conditions of a potential encounter rather than a defined shape of an object in space; a psychical or somatic event rather than an empirical fact; an affect rather than a sensory perception," Wojciech Szymański, "Rzeźba, czyli to, co wydarza się, kiedy się cofasz, aby obejrzeć obraz," *Szum*, no. 15 (2016): 50–52, <https://magazynszum.pl/rzezba-czyli-to-co-wydarza-sie-kiedy-sie-cofaszaby-obejrzec-obraz/>.

⁶ Claire Bishop, *Artificial Hells: Participatory Art and the Politics of Spectatorship* (London: Verso, 2012), 2.

Clearly influenced by Jacques Rancière,⁷ she replaces ethical categories with aesthetic ones. In contrast to Kester, whose valuation of dialogue and consensus is unequivocally positive, Bishop focuses on confrontation and potential tensions emerging from the close encounter between the artist and participants. In her view, socially engaged art sustains substantial loss through depreciating authorship and prioritizing ethical discourse—as a result, it “enters a realm of useful, ameliorative, and ultimately modest gestures, rather than the creation of singular acts that leave behind them a troubling wake.”⁸

Władysław Hasior’s performative art—his interferences into urban landscape, sculpture installations, and ephemeral actions—undoubtedly stems from his need to foster dialogue and relationships with collective audiences; nevertheless, this does not preclude disturbances and antagonisms stirred by placing his works within political and ethical contexts. The history of the *Organ* monument near Czorsztyn as well as that of *Birds* situated in Szczecin and Koszalin provide brilliant examples of polarization within local communities, triggered by a work of art placed in public space.

Toward Collective Action

Even during the inaugural celebrations accompanying the first public display of Hasior’s early monuments and open-air sculptures, it was clear that the artist was fascinated by the idea of ceremonial assembly, ascribing specific roles to both the artist and audiences. The unveiling of *Prometheus Executed by a Firing Squad* (a monument to Polish insurgents executed by the Nazis) in Kuźnice in 1964 attracted nearly 6,000 spectators and transformed into a major event. Another ceremonial inauguration, engaging large numbers of local spectators, was the unveiling of the “musical” iron *Organ* situated on the Snozka Pass near Czorsztyn, where Hasior’s artistic performance had to be inscribed into a superordinate structure of the performance of the communist regime—the monument is dedicated to “those fallen in the struggle for consolidating the communist rule in the Podhale region.”⁹ In the late 1960s, Hasior was increasingly drawn to

⁷ See e.g. Jacques Rancière, *The Politics of Aesthetics: The Distribution of the Sensible*, trans. Gabriel Rockhill (London: Continuum, 2004); *Dissensus: On Politics and Aesthetics*, trans. Steven Corcoran (London: Continuum, 2010).

⁸ Bishop, *Artificial Hells*, 23.

⁹ See Jacek Żukowski, “Pomnik,” *Gazeta Krakowska*, no. 232 (1966): 3, <http://mbc.malopolska.pl/dlibra/publication?id=123121>; [anonymous], “Pomnik poległym o utrwalenie władzy ludowej na Podhalu,” *Echo Krakowa*, no. 238 (1966): 1, <http://mbc.malopolska.pl/publication/109016>.

theater practices, his sculptures morphing into ephemeral, spectacular displays, accentuating action and momentary aesthetic impressions.¹⁰

The shift in focus from the art object toward the process and direct relationship with audiences is a typical feature of Polish art in the 1960s and 1970s—suffice it to mention such phenomena as happening, ephemeral art, environmental, and conceptual art. In his description of the period, Jerzy Ludwiński names several characteristics of the new approach to visual arts: devaluing the original and the artist's involvement in manually producing the artwork; moving away from spatial structures and toward temporality (action in time); negating traditional artistic arrangements; the new role of audiences (participation and co-creation instead of observation); and, finally, dismissing the materiality of artworks and preference for conceptual forms.¹¹ Even though many of these elements can be traced also in Hasior's artistic output, his sculptural performances and ephemeral actions are closer to the traditional model of theatricality, based on staging and constructing semantically charged scenes, than to happening art, deliberately blurring the boundaries between art and everyday reality and prioritizing incidental, spontaneous, and improvised actions. For this reason, Hasior's performances differ significantly from the output of artists representing the happening or conceptual movement, which was evidenced by emerging tensions in the artistic community, for instance between Hasior and Tadeusz Kantor, artists linked with Foksal Gallery in Warsaw or Mona Lisa Gallery in Wrocław.¹²

The distinct character of Hasior's performative actions is further evidenced by his increasing interest in participatory practices, redefining his rapport with audiences. One of the first—and especially vivid—artistic manifestations in this vein was the *Banner Procession* in Łącko in May 1973. The town authorities commissioned Hasior, who came from nearby Nowy Sącz, to supply artworks to celebrate the yearly Apple Blossom Festival, organized in Łącko from 1947. Even though the backdrop for this action was the countryside with its local flavor, the artistic strategy applied by Hasior can be viewed as crucial for his subsequent urban participatory performances.

¹⁰ For more on these practices and the concept of theatricality in Hasior's works see Magdalena Figzał-Janikowska, "Władysław Hasior: Od rzeźby do performansu," *Didaskalia*, no. 165 (2021): 53–80, <http://dx.doi.org/10.34762/t100-bh02>; "Teatr żywiołów Władysława Hasiora," *Teatr Lalek*, no. 2/3 (2021): 11–15, <https://www.teatrlalek-pismo.pl/2021/06/teatr-zywioow-wadysawa-hasiora.html>.

¹¹ See Jerzy Ludwiński, "Sztuka w epoce postartystycznej," in *Epoka błękitu*, ed. Jerzy Hanusek (Kraków: Stowarzyszenie Artystyczne Otwarta Pracownia, 2009).

¹² See e.g. Wiesław Borowski, *Zakrywam to, co niewidoczne: Wywiad-rzeka, rozmawiają Adam Mazur i Ewa Toniał* (Warszawa: Stowarzyszenie 40 000 Malarzy, 2014); Władysław Hasior, "Hasior mówi..." interview by Stanisław Zawisliński, *Sztuka* 22, no. 7–12 (1998): 8–28.

The artist rejected the traditional, gallery-based way of displaying his works, inviting the local inhabitants to participate in a colorful parade with banners, inspired by Corpus Christi processions. Venturing out into the open, and thus dismissing institutional regimes, is a characteristic feature of many of Hasior's performative projects; it is not to say, however, that they are dominated by social and ethical rather than aesthetic discourse. Contrary to many works oriented toward audience participation, Hasior's collective projects do not blur the division of authorship. Their aim can be defined as consistent construction of communal aesthetic experience, opening the possibility for the subsequent emergence of different values.

The colorful banner procession started in the main square in Łącko and marched to the amphitheater on Jeżowa Mountain, filled with 35,000 spectators.¹³ The parade setup was carefully planned by the artist. It was led by a highlanders' musical band, setting the pace; behind it marched Hasior himself and local firemen in ceremonial uniforms, followed by local people in regional folk garments. The banner procession in Łącko was likened to a happening, yet the artist was not willing to embrace this label. In fact, Hasior did all he could to limit the workings of chance and control the unfolding of the event. As a result, *Banner Procession* cannot be viewed as a participatory act levelling the status of the artist and the participants. Media reports comment on the tension between authorial concept and its collective implementation, which seems to transgress Kester's notion of consensus.

Wiktor Osiatyński's extensive commentary published in *Kultura* explains that the participants whom Hasior involved in the parade were initially hesitant about the event—some of them viewed the banners as disrespectful toward traditional, religious values; others admitted to not comprehending their message. The initial disorientation of the local community is evidenced by some of the comments quoted by Osiatyński. For instance, the fire chief said: "Sir, we can't make head nor tail of it. . . . We were told to gather the men and carry these things, and that is all."¹⁴ Quite a few locals expressed their distrust and dislike of the artist's intentions. Nevertheless, as one of the journalists reports, "the higher up the hill they climbed, the more familiar people became"¹⁵ with the aesthetics and symbolism of Hasior's banners. Eventually, all of the items were placed on an improvised stage on the hilltop, forming a sort of peculiar

¹³ This is the number cited by the press; see e.g. "Niezapomniany dzień w Łącku," *Gazeta Krakowska*, no. 114 (1973): 2, <http://mbc.malopolska.pl/dlibra/publication?id=124250&tab=3>.

¹⁴ Wiktor Osiatyński, "Jak Hasior uświęcił sztukę," *Kultura*, no. 22 (1972): 4.

¹⁵ Osiatyński, "Jak Hasior uświęcił sztukę," 4.

exhibition and providing a backdrop for the performances by local music bands and traditional dances from the region. At that stage, the artist was officially introduced as a born and bred Sącz area dweller, which immediately changed the locals' attitude: "After all, he's ours, the sculptor; a sculpture is art, isn't it; if he made it, and it is art, then maybe we're just not ready for this kind of art."¹⁶ The above comment reveals, on the one hand, the recognition of the artist as a member of the community, which is crucial for participatory art; on the other hand, it is clear that there are differences when it comes to the roles ascribed to various subjects in the artistic process—something that Kester is openly critical about. According to Kester, in many collective projects the artist is "viewed as creatively, intellectually, financially, and institutionally empowered," while the local community "is defined a priori as in need of empowerment,"¹⁷ which translates into hierarchical relationships. Hasior arrived in Łącko with a ready concept of how the collective action is to be construed, and he carefully delineated its framework. It seems that it was precisely the arbitrariness of his artistic gesture, ascribing predefined roles to all participants, which inspired the initial distrust and discontent among the people in Łącko. In subsequent presentations of *Ardent Banners*, accompanying important town celebrations, Hasior made efforts to incorporate the locals' aesthetic expectations and make a direct use of their creativity.¹⁸

The event on Jezowa Mountain in Łącko revealed the main goal of Hasior's performance: the attempt to find a common ground for contemporary avant-garde art and spontaneous, joyous folk expression. The spectacular banner procession was meant to express the idea of encounter between different cultures, traditions, approaches to life and, especially, art. Initial tensions and conflicts that emerged in the process can be viewed as an immanent characteristic of artistic phenomena based on direct cooperation between the artist and specific

¹⁶ Osiatyński, 5.

¹⁷ Kester, *Conversation Pieces*, 137.

¹⁸ A good example is the presentations of *Ardent Banners* in Nowy Sącz in 1988 and 1992. On the first occasion, the artist only designed the overall form of the objects, while the banners themselves were created by local boy and girl scout troops. The second occasion was linked with the celebrations of the 700th anniversary of the founding of Nowy Sącz; Hasior became personally involved as a member of the Honorary Council of the Civil Celebrations Committee. His design of fifty banners that were lit in the town square on the main day of the festivities was the pinnacle of a larger cycle of artistic activities linked with Hasior's symbolic return to his native town (including e.g. an exhibition, a performance, and a meeting with audiences in Villa Marya). In the Nowy Sącz banners, Hasior consciously switches to a new aesthetics. Abandoning the multi-layered, eclectic, and mocking form, he replaces it with simple, easily deciphered symbols alluding to the communal spirit (presentation in 1988) or town history (monumental spectacle in 1992). For more information on these events, see Władysław Hasior, "Pomniki żarliwe," ed. Dorota Macieja, *Stolica*, no. 51 (1988); Jerzy Leśniak, "Samorząd Nowego Sącza w latach 1989–2009," *Rocznik Sądecki* 37 (2009): 135–136.

social groups. As Bishop points out, it is through exposing differences and piercing appearances of civil harmony that the artist offers “a more concrete and polemical grounds for rethinking our relationship to the world and to one other.”¹⁹ Hasior’s ephemeral action can be viewed as the artist’s first definitive attempt at intervention within a specific cultural landscape, which is shifted for the duration of the performance—the well-known, tamed space suddenly reveals new, often subversive meanings.²⁰

It should be noted that the artist himself perceived the parade in Łącko as an inclusive, unifying event rather than a political one. “There is ample evidence that he who obtrusively pushes toward social action through art is neither a priest of his community, nor is he an artist,”²¹ he stated in an interview before the event. As Bishop points out, participatory activities in Eastern Europe during the communist rule were often apolitical in character due to the artists’ dislike of ideological collectivism imposed by the regime and their search for alternative forms of community.²² Hasior’s performative projects in the 1970s should thus be situated among artistic actions exploring the existential space and committed to the “authentic . . . mode of collective experience.”²³ They were not meant as a protest or veiled propaganda—Hasior’s artistic strategies fall close to celebratory and escapist artforms discussed by Bishop, characteristic of many artists in the Eastern Bloc. “Art is one of the main elements integrating any community,” Hasior said.²⁴ Based on the accounts of the event participants and press reports, it can be inferred that in spite of the locals’ initial reserve, the project was successful. Zofia Raducka wrote in *Tygodnik Demokratyczny* weekly:

It made a huge impression. Hasior’s “procession” perfectly matched the atmosphere of folk festivities. One could hardly imagine a better setting for regional

¹⁹ Claire Bishop, “Antagonism and Relational Aesthetics,” *October*, no. 110 (2004): 79, <https://www.jstor.org/stable/3397557>.

²⁰ In Grzegorz Dubowski’s film documenting the event, *Wernisaż wśród jabłoni* (An Opening Day among Apple Trees) (1973), its subversive character is revealed through the juxtaposition of carefree folk celebration with the cruelty of some of the banner motifs, as well as with the *Burning Birds* performance, which can be read as a direct allusion to the violent history of the Nowy Sącz area (Hasior presented the performance near the amphitheater stage, the day after the official celebration). For more on the realisation of the performance, see Andrzej Urbaniec, “Z domowego archiwum,” *Almanach Łącki*, no. 8 (2008): 81–83.

²¹ Osiatyński, “Jak Hasior uświęcił sztukę,” 4.

²² Bishop, *Artificial Hells*, 160–161.

²³ Bishop, 161.

²⁴ Osiatyński, “Jak Hasior uświęcił sztukę,” 4.

performances and nowhere would the “banners” look as great as against the backdrop of Nowy Sącz area landscapes.²⁵

It seems, then, that Łącko provided not only a new space for displaying the banners, but also enabled their incorporation into a wider landscape of plebeian culture, so close to Hasiór's heart.

***Solspann* as an Integrative Urban Project**

The *Banner Procession* in Łącko can be treated as an introduction to Hasiór's later intervention into public spaces—his site-specific urban installations and ephemeral actions involving audience participation. Often both these attitudes can be found within one project, due to the artist's performative approach to sculpture. The analysis of Hasiór's selected sculpture installations in urban spaces in terms of their form and function reveals a tension between the artist's intentions (to create art that is dialogical and responds to the particular place and its character) and the final effect. For this reason, it is worth asking the question about the boundary between intervention and integration—the two different models of contemporary site-specific art according to Miwon Kwon.²⁶

Although Hasiór's commitment to integration with both urban spaces and natural landscapes is evident even in his early sculpture projects, it seems that assimilation—understood as affirmative interaction with the local community—was not achieved until *The Scandinavian Chariot* (known as *Solspann* in Sweden), a sculpture project realized in 1972–1976 in the Swedish coastal town Södertälje. The project was preceded by an exhibition of works by Hasiór and Jerzy Bereś in Södertälje Konsthall.²⁷ During the running of the exhibition the gallery director Eje Högestätt commissioned Hasiór to create a sculpture for the town.²⁸

Solspann is a monumental assembly of six Pegasi made of concrete, created using Hasiór's preferred technique at the time, namely, “pulling from the ground.” It involved carving a form in the ground and filling it with concrete, followed

²⁵ Zofia Raducka, “Łąckie trzęsienie ziemi,” *Tygodnik Demokratyczny*, no. 22 (1973): 11.

²⁶ See Miwon Kwon, *One Place after Another: Site-Specific Art and Locational Identity* (Cambridge, MA: MIT Press, 2002).

²⁷ See Ingvar Claesson, ed., *Władysław Hasiór, Jerzy Bereś: Södertälje Konsthall 6 okt.–5 nov. 1972* (Södertälje: Södertälje Konsthall, 1972), exhibition catalogue.

²⁸ More on this issue in Władysław Hasiór, “Płomienne ptaki,” interview by Hanna Kirchner, *Literatura*, no. 34 (1974): 13.



Solspann, Södertälje, 1973

Władysław Hasiór's Photographic Diary
The Tatra Museum in Zakopane

by the “disinterment” of the finished sculpture. The theme and final design of *Solspann* emerged only through exploring the local character, the designated site (a hill near the harbor channel), and local cultural traditions. Hasiór’s design can be viewed as a site-specific project, considering both the terrain and interactive potential—local inhabitants’ vision and expectations. It is worth stressing the wide definition of “place,” implying the transition from its material aspect toward the community emerging from a shared experience. Kwon describes such strategy as a turn toward “community-specific” and “audience-specific” art.²⁹

The sculpture was intended as a future landmark and the artist’s gift to the people of Södertälje.³⁰ The project evoked much public interest and many volunteers

²⁹ Kwon, *One Place after Another*, 109–112.

³⁰ Hasiór refused remuneration. The town was to cover only the cost of materials, the artist’s expenses and the cost of technical implementation. See Gunn-Britt Robertsson, “På språng mot solen,” *Kulturdelen.nu*,



Solspann, Södertälje, 1973

Władysław Hasiór's Photographic Diary
The Tatra Museum in Zakopane

wanted to assist in its creation. A number of local inhabitants helped Hasiór at work, while others closely monitored the process of “pulling” and putting up sculpted horses—for the people of Södertälje, *Solspann* was an identity project. According to an article by Gunn-Britt Robertsson, written many years later, the local newspaper *Länstidningen* described the creation process as a “fascinating adventure directed by one of the world’s finest sculptors.”³¹ Catalogues and press commented on the fact that the “chariot” was cast in the ground on which it was then to stand,³² which further enhanced the local people’s emotional attachment

November 2, 2010, <https://kulturdelen.nu/2010/hasior-hastarna/>; “För och emot,” *Kulturdelen.nu*, November 2, 2010, <https://kulturdelen.nu/2010/hasior-kritiken/>.

³¹ Robertsson, “På språng mot solen.”

³² See the catalogue Eje Högestätt and Per Drougge, eds., *Ny Konst Nya Utställningar i Södertälje Konsthall* (Södertälje: Södertälje Konsthall, 1973), 46–47, as well as press articles: [anonymous], “Monumentalt Södertälje,” *Storstaden* 1974 [precise date unknown]; [anonymous], “Södertälje påtält,” *Expressen*, July 1, 1976. Materials

to the piece. The topic proposed by Hasiør alluded to Greek mythology and Swedish folk culture (the similarity to the Dala horse was fully intentional). Other important sources of inspiration were cave paintings and Viking burial sites. The horses were adorned with a host of supplementary elements—for this, the artist used ready objects found in the area. Hasiør “inventoried factory clearance items; he was looking for old machine parts, especially wheels and steering wheels, propellers, and switches.”³³ These symbolic objects were to function as *objets trouvés*, accentuating the special relationship between the piece and local landscape.

Starting the work on *Solspann*, little could Hasiør suspect that the piece would develop into a long-term project of exceptional social and integrative value. Even though the costs covered by the local authorities far exceeded the initial estimates, which prompted controversies in some circles, most locals viewed Hasiør’s concept as a manifestation of a communal idea, linked to the identity of the place and its inhabitants. This is how the project was described in the press, curator’s papers, and town council documents.³⁴

As stated in the document listing the reasons behind the renovation permit issued in 2018 by the Leisure and Culture Office in Södertälje, “*Solspann* is a unique piece of site-specific art, designed precisely for this venue.”³⁵ The same document mentioned a host of local initiatives organized near “Hasiør’s horses,” proving their “unique character and status of a sculptural and spatial landmark,” and making it “an important mark of the international community of Södertälje.”³⁶

The first horse was pulled from the ground in November 1972, and the occasion was celebrated by a symbolic exhibition and burning of the sculpture. The headline in *Länstidningen* described that first happening as a “burnt sacrifice to the gods of art.”³⁷ Another, larger performance took place in June 1973, when the artist significantly expanded his piece (to include four horses, a Viking chariot drawn in white concrete on the hill slope and a red sun dome). The

available in Södertälje Konsthall Arkiv, item Władysław Hasiør 18.3-30.4 INKL S/v. See also https://www.sodertaljekonsthall.se/public_works/solspann/.

³³ Robertsson, “På språng mot solen!”

³⁴ See the catalogue Bengt Skoog, *Władysław Hasiør: Solspann* (Södertälje: Tryckning Ljungberg, 1980), as well as press articles reporting on Hasiør’s retrospective exhibition in Södertälje Konsthall in 1989: Christer Duke, “Hasiør Tände Tälje,” *LT*, March 20, 1989, 12–13; A. M. Gedda, “Förstummande iderikedom,” *SN: Nyheter*, March 25, 1989, 4; materials available in Södertälje Konsthall Arkiv, item Władysław Hasiør 18.3-30.4 INKL S/v.

³⁵ Stadsarkivet Södertälje Kommun, *Renovering av Władysław Hasiørs skulpturgrupp Solspann förstudie*, KF N 2018/46, April 3, 2018, 1.

³⁶ *Renovering av Hasiørs Solspann*, 4.

³⁷ Robertsson, “På språng mot solen!”

unveiling of the whole set of sculptures was arranged like a ritual orchestrated by Hasior—the artist walked among the audience with a torch until the chariot was completely animated through fire. The whole event was transformed into a shared celebration, a local festival centred around free exploration of individual parts of the work of art.

“For Hasior, artistic activity is all about different stages of ritual, acts of drama,”³⁸ reads the Swedish catalogue accompanying the exhibition *Ny offentlig konst i Södertälje 1973–1974* (New public art in Södertälje 1973–1974). For the Swedes, the unveiling of *Solspann* was decidedly ritualistic, a symbolic act of unearthing the ancient spirit of their land.³⁹ This integrative and identity-related aspect of this multi-stage project was best visible during the official inauguration of the finished sculpture in July 1976. On this occasion, a parade with torches was organized, with the participation of the artist and local inhabitants. Stations were set up on the hill, next to the burning elements of the artwork—each accompanied by music and poetry reading. Hasior insisted that the inauguration of the finished “chariot” be communal and ceremonial in character. An important part of the designed performance were the elements: fire, water, and earth, whose symbolism was meant to stir the audiences’ imagination. The ceremony designed by Hasior became a yearly tradition, regularly repeated by the Swedes and linked with Midsommar celebrations.⁴⁰ A special bond emerged between the artist and the people of Södertälje, which is evidenced by his returning to the town on several occasions and his taking part in parades and Midsummer Night celebrations next to the “Pegasi.”⁴¹

Owing to its performative qualities, *Solspann* enables constant recreation of the relationship with the viewer and the changing social-cultural landscape. It is an example of long-term dialogic practice, grounded in enhanced collective interaction.⁴² The assimilating potential of the piece was revealed when the mass influx of Iraqi immigrants transformed the formerly homogenous community of Södertälje. On the tenth anniversary of *Solspann*'s final completion, the parade with torches and communal events near the “chariot” turned into multi-cultural

³⁸ Högestätt and Drougge, *Ny Konst Nya Utställningar*, 47.

³⁹ Högestätt and Drougge, 47.

⁴⁰ See Skoog, *Władysław Hasior: Solspann*; a brochure on the tenth anniversary of *Solspann*, [anonymous], *Sommaren i Södertälje* (Södertälje: [n.p.], 1986). Materials available in Södertälje Konsthall Arkiv, item Władysław Hasior 18.3-30.4 INKL 5/V.

⁴¹ One of the most spectacular parades with torches led by Hasior was organized in 1989, to celebrate the inauguration of Hasior's solo exhibition in Södertälje Konsthall. See press and photography reports of the event: Duke, “Hasior Tände Tälje”; <https://www.sodertaljekonsthall.se/exhibitions/wladyslaw-hasior-2>.

⁴² Cf. Kester, *The One and the Many*.

festivities aimed at integrating the diverse local community.⁴³ Poetry reading at “Hasior’s horses” was held in twenty different languages, which became a kernel of a new tradition that subsequently developed into Täljefestivalen—commonly known as the “immigrants festival.”⁴⁴ From that moment, *Solspann* became an important symbol of the “multicultural community of Södertälje.”⁴⁵

According to Kwon, “only those cultural practices that have this relational sensibility can turn local encounters into long-term commitments and . . . into indelible, unretractable social marks.”⁴⁶ Considering the importance of *Solspann* for the people of Södertälje, it can be claimed that its function is precisely that of a social-cultural sign, far exceeding the basic definition of sculptural work. Apart from its material and aesthetic dimension, it becomes an integrative project that is processual and culture-specific in character, allowing the emergence of shared aesthetic and social experiences, which are then redefined and recontextualized over the years.

From a Gallery to a “District Day Center”

Hasior’s interest in processions and parades as well as assemblies for the purpose of communal action or dialogue reached a whole new level with the opening of his Gallery-Studio in Jagiellońska Street in Zakopane. Through much effort and with considerable support on the part of the artistic community, in the early 1980s the artist took over the former building of “Warszawianka” sanatorium.

A few months before the official opening, which took place on 1 February 1985, Hasior organized a symbolic ceremony of moving into the new space. His leaving Villa Borek, the dormitory of Antoni Kenar Secondary School of Fine Arts, in October 1984, was transformed into a sentimental performance of first moving out and then publicly transferring his works to the new building. A parade was organized for the occasion, with the participation of forty students from the Kenar school, journalists, and town citizens. In total, twenty-seven pieces were moved. In her report for *Gazeta Krakowska*, Urszula Orman links that number

⁴³ See *Sommaren i Södertälj*, 2.

⁴⁴ The idea behind the festival and its links to Hasior’s sculpture were explained in the press by Per Drougge, new director of Södertälje Konsthall. See Per Drougge, “Model för Tälje – festival sånger till Solen,” LT, April 22, 1988. Material available in Södertälje Konsthall Arkiv, item Władystaw Hasior 18.3-30.4 INKL 5/v.

⁴⁵ Skoog, *Władystaw Hasior: Solspann*.

⁴⁶ Kwon, *One Place after Another*, 166.



Move, Zakopane, 1984

Władysław Hasiór's Photographic Diary
The Tatra Museum in Zakopane

with twenty-seven years of Hasiór's residence in cramped dormitory rooms.⁴⁷ The spectacular parade was fully orchestrated by Hasiór, who not only planned its route and composition, but also involved local participants.

The symbolic, collective performance was diligently documented in press reports and numerous photo essays. The extensive report published in *Panorama* described the event as follows:

A mystery of sorts begins. Accompanied by young people, the master brings paintings and banners outside from his old studio. The procession sets out. From an old shed to a new interior of light spruce paneling. Photographers,

⁴⁷ See Urszula Orman, "Płoną z radości diabły Hasióra," *Gazeta Krakowska*, no. 252 (1984): 3–4. <http://mbc.malopolska.pl/dlibra/publication?id=128096&tab=3>.

television reporters, people from neighboring houses, and the Kenar school students accompanied the artist on this singular pilgrimage.⁴⁸

It was not by chance that Hasiór ensured the presence and support of those who were later to benefit from his gallery. From that first moving day until his death, he viewed his gallery-studio as communal property, an open space, a space of dialogue. He described it as a “district day center,”⁴⁹ which best summarizes the local and participatory character of the space and activities it hosted.

Hasiór’s gallery was meant not only to provide space for exhibiting his works, but also enable integration through art. Its purpose was to engage professional and amateur artists working in different fields, and its artistic-educational program was to encourage audiences’ active participation. The lack of a traditional stage fostered a close relationship between artists and viewers, promoted engagement rather than distanced observation. Asked about his role in the gallery, Hasiór explained: “I’m available. I sleep upstairs, and I work here. When a group of visitors announces itself, I’m happy to offer my time and my library.”⁵⁰ The artist viewed his constant presence in the gallery as a commitment to sharing not only his own knowledge and experience but also the space and its potential. His methods of approaching audiences were grounded in dialogue, encouragement of active participation, and rejection of elitism.

Opening the gallery enabled Hasiór to pursue his social interests in a new, educational and activist form. Over time, his open-air and urban performative actions fully gave way to activity labelled by Bishop as “pedagogic projects.”⁵¹ Lectures accompanied by slide shows, the Fringes Theater Meetings festival, Films on Art Festival, Theater of Creation Festival—these are but a few of many artistic and educational events held in the gallery upon Hasiór’s initiative or with his support. Their cyclical character enabled the emergence of a network of small groups of collaborators working with the artist, including youngsters, patients from the Academic Physiotherapy Centre, and amateur folk artists.

The idea of the gallery was realized through elements which now attract the attention of art theorists interested in the educational turn in art, such as Irit

⁴⁸ Stefania Ciesielska, “Idzie Hasiór,” *Panorama*, no. 47 (1984): 16–17.

⁴⁹ See e.g. Władysław Hasiór, “Nie jestem szamanem,” interview by Eugeniusz Iwanicki, *Odgłosy*, no. 19 (1987): 4; “Jestem powiatowym plastykiem,” interview by Piotr Sarzyński, *Polityka*, no. 21 (1997): 58–60.

⁵⁰ Władysław Hasiór, “Seans z Hasiórem,” interview by Adam Klaczyński, *Związkowiec*, no. 20 (1985): 17.

⁵¹ See Bishop, *Artificial Hells*, 241–274.

Rogoff—namely, through collaborative practices, creativity, and discussion.⁵² As Bishop points out, “today education is figured as art’s potential ally in an age of ever-decreasing public space, rampant privatization and instrumentalized bureaucracy”⁵³; it creates conditions for exploring people’s creative potential and consolidating communal identity. This is precisely the approach adopted by Hasior—for instance in his slide shows from the *Photographic Diary*, which he held from the mid-1960s. Hasior’s photographic oeuvre was comprised of over 20,000 slide films, arranged by topic, which he regularly presented during meetings known as *Cinema*. According to the participants, Hasior usually let the audience choose the topic.⁵⁴ Most of these sessions were dedicated to art—its different directions, cross-associations, repeated motifs, and the relationship between artistic activity and other spheres of life. Among important issues raised was also ecology, and Hasior’s lectures involving ecological themes were closely related to the performance cycle *Environmental Alarm*, created by Hasior in the 1980s and 1990s.⁵⁵

In the new gallery, meetings with audiences were held on the first floor, in a large space directly linked to the artist’s living space. They followed a fixed agenda: welcoming the guests, a gallery tour, a lecture accompanied by a slide show, a few breaks allowing the participants a chance of exploring the artist’s extensive library, and finally a time for questions and discussion.⁵⁶ The participants responded especially to the atmosphere (dimmed light, candles, the aroma of freshly made tea) and the “performative” way of presenting content (a carefully orchestrated dramaturgy built through intonation, gestures, change of rhythm, and direct appeals to the audience).⁵⁷ Hasior’s *Cinema* was a project co-created by the audiences. As Katarzyna Wincenciak points out, it was the participants who gave the presentation its final shape:

⁵² See Irit Rogoff, “Turning,” in *Curating and the Educational Turn*, eds. Paul O’Neill and Mick Wilson (London: Open Editions, 2010), 32–46.

⁵³ Bishop, *Artificial Hells*, 242.

⁵⁴ The content, atmosphere, and topics discussed during the meetings are described in detail by Ryszard Dąbrowiecki, who also draws attention to selected discussions and comments they raised. See Ryszard Dąbrowiecki, *Upadły anioł: Rzecz o Władysławie Hasiorze* (Katowice: Wydawnictwo „Śląsk”, 2004).

⁵⁵ More on Hasior’s environmental performances and his related educational activity in Magdalena Figzał-Janikowska, “Performanse ekologiczne Władysława Hasiora,” *Performer*, no. 22 (2021), <https://grotowski.net/performer/performer-22/performanse-ekologiczne-wladyslawa-hasiora>. The article discusses Hasior’s sustained commitment to environmental issues, impacting on his artistic and educational activity.

⁵⁶ Hasior’s *Cinema* sessions were often discussed in the press. See e.g. Urszula Orman, “Hasiora trening wyobraźni,” *Gazeta Krakowska*, no. 162 (1985); Antoni Kiemystowicz, “Twórca pomników chwili,” *Gazeta Krakowska*, no. 14 (1989).

⁵⁷ The information about the proceedings is based on my interviews with *Cinema* sessions participants, e.g. Ryszard Dąbrowiecki, Urszula Dubowska, Adam Bojara, Krystian Szczepny, as well as recollections cited in the book: Hanna Kirchner, *Hasior: Opowieść na dwa głosy* (Warszawa: Rosner & Wspólnicy, 2005).

Hasior imposed the overall narrative structure of each session, but during the entire meeting he remained open to dialogue, enabling the audience to actively participate in the creative act. The final shape of *Cinema* emerged through tensions, cooperation, and interaction. It only became a finished work owing to the communal presence. In consequence, community building was paramount.⁵⁸

Hasior's performative lectures were predominantly intended as educational events; nevertheless, due to their form they can also be interpreted based on their aesthetic value. Analysing pedagogic activity of selected artists, Bishop explains that "programming events, seminars and discussions . . . can all be regarded as artistic outcomes in exactly the same way as the production of discrete objects, performances and projects."⁵⁹ This is a valid observation with reference both to *Cinema* and Hasior's other socially engaged workshop and festival activities, which always displayed aesthetic value. Hasior accentuated intrinsic links between artistic and social dimensions of the gallery's functioning, declaring that its main purpose was not to become "a coffin or a mausoleum for museum exhibits" but rather "a living space, a cultural offering for locals and tourists alike."⁶⁰

Hasior's Gallery's engagement in local initiatives and commitment to inviting audiences into gallery spaces, its openness to the viewer and their creativity, as well as efforts to enable discussion suggest that it can in fact be perceived as one of the artist's main participatory projects.

The above analysis of Hasior's performative activity confirms his commitment to both stirring the audiences' emotions and engaging them directly in various artistic activities. At first, he pursued these goals through major sculpture projects, urban performances, and ephemeral actions, and subsequently moved on to collaborative gallery projects. Hasior's statements confirm that—especially toward the end of his life—he indeed perceived dialogue and collaboration with viewers as his main responsibility and calling. Framing Hasior's selected artistic practices within the context of participatory art enables a new

⁵⁸ Katarzyna Wincenciak, "Kino Hasiora a zwrot performatywny," in *W pracowni—Hasior, Brzozowski, Rżęsa: Materiały konferencyjne*, ed. Julita Dembowska (Zakopane: Muzeum Tatrzańskie im. Dra Tytusa Chałubińskiego, 2018), 22.

⁵⁹ Bishop, *Artificial Hells*, 245.

⁶⁰ Orman, "Hasiora trening wyobraźni," 4.

interpretation of his oeuvre, based on shifting the focal point from the work toward the relationship with the recipient, which makes it all the more defined. The abovementioned examples of Hasior's socially integrating projects reveal his ambiguous approach to audiences—while treating them as equal partners in dialogue, he also saw them as requiring guidance and directions. It seems that Hasior successfully combined both these strategies, selecting the right approach in every collaboration, based on the character of the project, type of community, participants' requirements, and desired outcome. The unifying aspect of Hasior's artistic and pedagogic practices described in this article is to be found in his consistent commitment to deepening and renewing the relationship with the audiences through constantly resetting it in new, surprising communicative and spatial contexts.

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