doctoral dissertation:

PlayDead.info

DEATH/IMMORTALITY AS CONCEPTS SEEMINGLY
CONTRADICTORY IN CONTEMPORARY CULTURE

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Description of artistic projects

"Flying House of Good Death" (described in the third chapter) is a social project, an activity in public space, to which I invite various people who want to talk about dying. The idea is based on a question about the definition of good death, understood in the personal dimension of an each individual participating in project. I am asking to think about the death we would like for ourselves, our loved ones and the formulation of a personal definition. "The Flying House of Good Death" for the first time was implemented as part of the Festival of Contemporary Art in Public Space Arteria in September 2017 that took place in Częstochowa. Later I had moved it to Olsztyn and organized author meetings during my solo exhibition at the BWA Gallery in 2018. In the meantime, I received a lot of feedback from visitors to the House, who needed more time to write down their thoughts. The third chapter contains a detailed description of the project implemented in Częstochowa and the analysis of the participants' statements that is considered in the context of the contemporary perception of death and mourning.

„PlayDead.info" is a cyber conceptual participatory project. It sounds recondite, but it does quite well reflect the work characteristics. „PlayDead.info" is an Internet project that can be found at www.playdead.info. It consists four independent parts, which are fun tools: „Draw with Dead", „Director's Cut", „In Effigie" and „My Funeral Party". All of them, in a more or less literal way, illustrate a phenomenon that I call non-mortality. It appears somewhere on the border of fear of dying in the physical world,

and life beyond the passing time in a new virtual ecosystem. I chose the Internet space as the most natural one for this subject. The recipient and at the same time the person actively co-creating it is the average user, that is used to a specific way of using the literary texts, not necessarily aware of how to receive art. It is he who plays, draws, fools, becomes the creator. The Internet and modern media are perfect space for artistic reflection and attempts to diagnose problems related to the issue of death and mourning in the context of cyber-life. The purpose of my work is to create tools for (co-)creating a work (paintings, film narratives) with the user. It is him who, with the help of programs, will have the opportunity to create his own work of art. I assume that only the creative process can help us fully understand the problem of making death taboo in our contemporary world. I am convinced that this can happen when the recipient is involved in co-creation, even if at the first moment it will be treated as fun. The effects and analysis of the participants' activities will be presented at the exhibition accompanying the PhD thesis defense. In the meantime, I invite you to play: www.playdead.info

Content of the interpretive work

The following text is a collection of thoughts and feelings appearing around dying in times of dynamically developing technology, and therefore bolder, fuller and more likely plans of human immortality. To better understand and indicate the contemporary meaning of phenomena that arise in the new, Internet ecosystem, I try to find their counterparts and sources in other cultures and times.

In the first chapter, I try to analyze the transformations taking place in the field of the modern experience of death. This is based on changes in population growth, life expectancy and causes of mortality. Their result is the fact that each of us experiences illness (own or loved ones) and feelings associated with it, and these in the last decades have become socially undesirable and replaced with the cult of the body and youth. I locate the causes of these phenomena in the changes concerning the place of dying (home / hospital), the people surrounding the patient (family / medical staff), the place of the cemetery in the topography of the city (center / outskirts), rejection of feelings and disappearing funeral rituals, taking over corpses by funeral services (destruction of rituals related to the body washing by the family, watching corpses). All this leads to the so-called taking death from a dying person. Death became a medical act, a lost fight between medicine and nature, the opposite of life. At the end, I wonder what is hidden today by the term of death taboo, a few decades after its definition.

In the next chapter, I try to answer the question of how to talk about death, bring it back to life? What to do to make it tame, present, so that feelings associated with it do not involve fear, loneliness and shame? I analyze two artistic works from the borderline of art and design. Artists in various

ways present mortality in everyday life, doing it in a gentle and conscious manner, and all this leads to taking control over their own death.

The third fragment contains the analysis of my project „Flying House of Good Death", which is based on the conclusions drawn from work on the first two sections.

In the fourth chapter, I look at the birth of the Internet „self" and the creation of a biography (which is a kind of monument for the user of social media), often an alternative to the physical world. I cite statistics, noting the amount of time and scale of involvement in the evolution of virtual identity. Then I go on to the description of other beings that we can meet on our way, traverse the more or less obvious paths of both interwoven worlds. I am describing the first robot who has been granted citizenship, a mascot robot who works with seniors during polisensory therapy, body prostheses and applications, thanks to which we increase our physical and mental abilities, becoming the most superficial entities. Through everyday entanglement in technology, we cease to be beyond her achievements and become co-participants in new life, waiting for the arrival of an immortal personality somewhere between technology and biology.

In another part of the text I am searching for ways to manage our presence in the virtual world after the death of the biological body. Starting with the Augmented Reality technology, which enables the existence or resurrection of a person in the form of spectrum in the physical world. This is due to passing a control of the account in social media to trusted people (or companies) so that they can administer them on our behalf. Their activities range from creation of afterlife by pre-planning the published posts, to attempts to build artificial intelligence based on data collected over the years of the entity's operation on the Internet.

The result of the conclusions from Chapter 5 is the creation of the project „Draw with the dead" (described in the sixth part). It illustrates the Internet filling of beings who are not entangled in the physical world. The application is based on charts filled which number of births and deaths in the real world and an analogous situation in a virtual one. The charts have the shape of brushes that are well-known from graphic programs.

The seventh chapter is an attempt to describe a phenomenon that I call non-mortality. It occurs in the virtual world and is by no means identical with the immortality known from the biological world. Non-mortality occurs where there is no continuity of generations (virtual beings do not have their ancestors). Also there is no time taken linearly, therefore travel in time, modification of the future and the past are possible. We will also not find physical signs of the time passage that we could not control. Space also becomes illusory.

The stretched present and praise of temporality is the result of the invalidation of the space-time continuum. Eternity is not an existence beyond time. It's an accumulation of beings that observe a given user, because

they guarantee its non-mortality. Dying on the Internet is not the result of old age, but a neglect of interaction, disappearance of care. Just as the dream of immortality was a personal matter of an individual, immorality is a common and even obligatory phenomenon. In the last words of the chapter, I am thinking of cryogenization and diamonds of memory as methods preventing the body from decomposing and ways to remove the line between the living and the dead.

In the eighth chapter, I describe the commercialization and the shocking by corpses in the media while they are being pushed out of private space. Cinematic death is painless, unreal and reversible, and that's how we learn about death. This leads to a phenomenon of desensitization against the real human tragedy. The viewer ceases to deny evil, violence, aggression, and consequently does not notice the difference between looking at real death (reports, exhibitions) and false one (action films).

In the last part of the chapter I try to answer the question of how to talk about death resulting from violence or accident that will force the recipient to reflect. I am referring to Teresa's Magolles art, and despite the fact that she speaks of violence, she never exasperates with cruelty. The artist focuses on the remnants of the crime and their contexts, which gives the recipient a space for the imagination, through which empathy, understanding and knowledge can appear.

The ninth chapter is a description of the „Director's Cut" project. The user compiles and reconstructs the content (the base creates death scenes from over 500 films) creating his own film and giving it a title.

The tenth chapter is a story about images that have the causative power of actually influencing the fate of people. I follow the history of punishments made on people with the help of their paintings to reflect on contemporary forms of destroying images. However, these actions are not identical with killing them, but rather with turning them into new ones. I compare the transformation of image entities in the virtual world with functioning in the Indian Wari community. In both cases, we are dealing with a different from the anthropocentric vision of the world. Another similarity is the perception of death, which is not treated as a denial of life, but a moment of transmutation, changing of own image.

The „In Effigie" project, described in chapter eleven, refers to the medieval execution of death sentences in images. The project illustrates this problem in a literal way: the user after uploading the photo can „play" to execute the image, selecting various weapons from the arsenal.

In the last chapter, I consider the idea of thinking about one's death understood as a medicine for its tabooation, so that when it comes, it can be treated sensibly and without fear. I point out that this idea is nothing new, it appears in different cultures, religions, times. Also on the Internet space, it finds its manifestation in the form of activities gathered around the concept of Positive Death. I analyze images posted by doule death, funeral undertakers, artists, tanatologists, confectioners, etc. on Instagram, centered

around the #deathpositive hashtag, to pay attention to the phenomenon that can be the beginning of restoring death to life. A revolution whose characteristic feature is gentle communication with various recipients.

In the thirteenth chapter I describe the last part of the project, „My Funeral Party", where the user will be able to prepare his own funeral, invite guests (choose characters from the base or add their own) and decide on the intensity of mourning (type of crying, sobbing). The name of the project indicates that the user creates it for himself. The essence of the project is to turn to your own death and mourning.

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