

## RECONFIGURATIONS OF THE EXHIBITION SPACE. CASE STUDY: CRISTI RUSU EXHIBITION AT THE “PLAN B” GALLERY

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**ABSTRACT.** *Reconfigurations of the Exhibition Space – Case Study: Cristi Rusu Exhibition at the “Plan B” Gallery.* In this paper I focus on a case study concerning the Cristi Rusu exhibition, *The Only Thing I Am Sure about in This Life Lies above My Head*, from the Plan B Gallery in Berlin (March 6 – April 11 2020). By integrating some interventions specific to land art in the gallery space (and, therefore, transforming it), Cristi Rusu manages to transgress the conventional limits imposed by the idea of a white cube gallery neutral space. The art gallery’s space functions as a medium for developing artistic discourse as the project tries to detach from the tradition and ideologies already incorporated in a certain place and time, in search for the sublime.

**Keywords:** *Plan B Gallery, Cristi Rusu, sublime, the archive, “profane space”, non-site*

### Introduction

Cristi Rusu’s most recent exhibition – *The Only Thing I Am Sure about in This Life Lies above My Head* – presented at the Plan B Gallery (Berlin) can be seen as representative for the way in which contemporary artists use the exhibition space of the gallery as a work’s medium, transforming it into an adaptable space that is no longer perceived as neutral or intangible. With this project, Cristi Rusu reveals to the public the reconfiguration of the gallery’s space: the artist transforms an imaginary space of “anti-memory” into a physical one (that of the gallery), that can be appealing from an aesthetic point of view, given the artist’s interventions. Cristi Rusu is creating a new setting in an apparently “neutral” space, just like a *story within a story*, and, from this perspective, I shall analyze in the following paragraphs

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the issue of archiving site-specific works by placing them in the aesthetic and institutional context of the art galleries. In order to illustrate the gallery's role in the process of archiving site-specific projects (that are characterized by their ephemerality), I shall consider the concept of "the archive"<sup>1</sup> as defined by Boris Groys. From Groys' philosophical perspective, whether we are referring to the field of art or that of theory, the archive is constituted today as a mechanism that informs us and draws our attention towards that which is seen as new in the real world. For Groys, the idea of "new"<sup>2</sup> is a philosophical issue in itself, because it is not separated from an entire tradition (or cultural memory) that participates in the development of an artistic act that is intended as innovative.

Concerning Cristi Rusu's exhibition at Plan B, an interesting, yet problematic, feature emerges from an aesthetic point of view: the project was initially designed as a site-specific intervention in the village of Cojocna, but it is actually set up in the Plan B gallery space – here, the archived images from the Cojocna setting prove to be work-instruments in themselves, as the space imagined by artist is brought to reality and given a form. Initially designed as human (artificial) intervention in the natural landscape, the entire project is introduced into the context of the gallery exhibition, thus gaining a new form that is self-contained and allows the public to experience an authentic impression of the Cojocna setting. The site-specific intervention in the gallery space and the assigning of the landscape with a new contextual meaning in relation to the Plan B exhibition are connected by the background concept and by several recurrent themes in Cristi Rusu's work: anti-memory, anti-monument(ality), the issue of isolation, reinstating the sublime, the way in which "history and fictional stories can both define a certain time and place".<sup>3</sup>

At this point, a question emerges: how are all these themes (constantly present in Cristi Rusu's works) *translated* and included in the project *The Only Thing I Am Sure about in This Life Lies above My Head*, in the setting of the gallery's exhibition space? In other words, how does the artist use the gallery environment in order to approach these topics that are of interest to him, eventually transgressing the imposed limits by means of site-specific interventions?

Cristi Rusu's latest project is an open (and ever-transforming) one and it represents the artist's fictional intervention within the landscape. As the curatorial

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<sup>1</sup> Boris Groys, *Despre nou. Eseu de economie culturală*, transl. Aurel Codoban, Idea Design & Print, Cluj-Napoca, 2003, p. 29.

<sup>2</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 30.

<sup>3</sup> Excerpt from the curatorial text of the exhibition (*The Only Thing I Am Sure about in This Life Lies above My Head*), Plan B Gallery, Berlin, March 6 – April 11, 2020, text signed by Diana Marincu: <https://www.plan-b.ro/wp-content/uploads/2020/02/Cristian-Rusu-The-Only-Thing-I-Am-Sure-about-in-This-Life-Lies-above-My-Head-press-release-3.pdf> (link accessed on June 13, 2020)

text mentions, this intervention creates a hidden chamber destined for meditation seen as a “third space”, a phantomatic space that the artist imagines and creates from zero using the gallery’s environment. Cristi Rusu develops this third space of meditation and detachment starting from a grave in Cojocna village that carries with it an entire cultural memory based on the dramatic history surrounding it. The story concerning this grave in Cojocna is related to the moment when, in 1940, Northern Transylvania is assigned to Hungary by the Second Vienna Diktat. More specifically, the new borders that were established that year separated the village cemetery from the rest of the village. Thus, the grave selected by C. Rusu as a landmark is isolated on a hill, outside the cemetery, because the family of the deceased wanted to bury him on Romanian grounds. It is not without meaning that Cristi Rusu chooses this starting point for his project as the space itself seems to incorporate a vast ideological background that the artist deconstructs implying a third space, imagined under the grave and adjusted to the context of the gallery.

A long- term recurrent theme in Cristi Rusu’s work is also present in this project: that of anti-monuments. It captures from a critical perspective the way in which the mechanisms of history and “fictional stories” participate in the construction of a physical space perceived by the collective memory through ideological filters. Just like in other exhibitions of his, Cristi Rusu follows this anti-monument principle employing the concept of the *stranded monument*.<sup>4</sup> In this case, the grave in Cojocna is itself a stranded monument, marginal, isolated from the natural course of history. At the same time, in Cristi Rusu’s approach, as we can see from other exhibitions as well, the monument is implicitly connected to the idea of monumentality and this feature is often reflected in his large-scale installations. For example, the concept behind the 2016 exhibition, *Monuments to the Ruins of Tomorrow*<sup>5</sup>, suggests the fusion between the monument and monumentality in the artist’s approach. The relationship between the two functions as the work’s inner structure, representing a “recodification of space as a relic of the past”.<sup>6</sup>

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<sup>4</sup> See, for example, the *Stranded Monuments*<sup>2</sup> exhibition by Cristi Rusu and Michael Takeo Magruder at the Plan B Gallery (Cluj-Napoca, The Paintbrush Factory), November 10 – December 10, 2007, curatorial text signed by Diana Marincu and Horea Avram: <https://www.plan-b.ro/wp-content/uploads/2017/11/Press-Release-Cristian-Rusu-Michael-Takeo-Magruder.pdf> (link accessed on June 13, 2020).

<sup>5</sup> *Monuments to the Ruins of Tomorrow* exhibition by Teodor Graur and Cristi Rusu, curator Diana Marincu, Plan B Gallery (Cluj-Napoca, The Paintbrush Factory), June 10 – July 31 2016: [https://www.plan-b.ro/wp-content/uploads/2017/03/press\\_release\\_cluj\\_m.pdf](https://www.plan-b.ro/wp-content/uploads/2017/03/press_release_cluj_m.pdf) (link accessed on June 13 2020).

<sup>6</sup> Excerpt from the curatorial text of the exhibition (*Monuments to the Ruins of Tomorrow*) signed by Diana Marincu: [https://www.plan-b.ro/wp-content/uploads/2017/03/press\\_release\\_cluj\\_m.pdf](https://www.plan-b.ro/wp-content/uploads/2017/03/press_release_cluj_m.pdf) (link accessed on June 13 2020).

### In search of the sublime

In the current project, *The Only Thing I Am Sure about in This Life Lies above My Head*, the grave is also constituted as a relic of the past, however this recodification can be deciphered in the actual space of the gallery. The *monumentality of the monument* is presented in the context of the exhibition by recreating the imagined meditation room from under the Cojocna grave (since a conventional land art intervention did not take place within the landscape). In this sense, that which is normally hidden from sight is revealed to the public by the exhibition from Plan B (Berlin). Cristi Rusu's knowledge in terms of scenography allows him to make full use of the gallery's space, integrating it as a part of the project and thus transforming it into a work medium. The elements of geometry and architecture are combined with interventions specific to land art and they are all *staged* by using (and reconfiguring) the exhibition space. As a clear suggestion of the Cojocna grave, the artist builds a new room, inside the gallery, with the help of an installation, a room in which the public is invited to contemplate from within a "moment of solitude".

As the curatorial text mentions, this installation was adapted to the size and context of the gallery with the purpose of creating a most realistic experience for the public. Cristi Rusu seeks to explore more and more experiences of mediation, of detachment and of the sublime in his art. In addition, with a reflection on solitude and death, the project brings new challenges to the idea of the exhibition space as a neutral space, especially given its transformation based on a land art project that was initially envisioned outside the gallery perimeter.

The search for the sublime and its actualization, a major theme in Cristi Rusu's artistic evolution, is transferred to his own visual language in direct connection with the construction and transformation of space (in relation to the development of a singular artistic object). The exhibition, seen as a whole, becomes a work of art in itself in which all the composing elements correlate aesthetically and conceptually.

Therefore, not just in the current project, but in previous ones as well, the environment (or, more specifically, the site) appears to Cristi Rusu as a synthesis between "geometry and nature", between the artificial landscape created by architectural interventions and the natural one, unaffected by man. For the artist, architecture generally implies a conflict within space, given the simple fact that it can alter nature's framework; however, the main intention here is not necessarily ecological. We are rather dealing with the creation of a new spatiality based on the interaction between geometrical shapes, architecture and nature, to which subjectivity is added in order to seek "the contemporary condition of the sublime"<sup>7</sup> and its possibilities

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<sup>7</sup> See the curatorial text for the *Space Itself* exhibition by Cristi Rusu, curator Mihnea Mircan, Plan B Gallery (Berlin), June 19 – July 25, 2009:

in today’s art. We can therefore observe the artistic process evolving towards a research effort that the artist undertakes in configuring the final result. The action of transforming an artistic investigation into a proper research endeavor leads Cristi Rusu to conclude that the landscape, as a part of nature, is inseparable from the ideologically contaminated cultural memory that it carries within itself (this approach was also visible in his first solo exhibition in Berlin with the Plan B Gallery, *Space Itself*, 2009). Consequently, all ideological contaminations of the landscape would be, in this case, a corruption of the sublime by means of culture, socio-political features and art specific to the modernism and postmodernism of the past century.

From this point of view, it is not coincidence that, in his attempt to construct a new space (physical or imaginary), Cristi Rusu approaches the idea of the sublime that can be actualized by art *here* and *now*, just as the American painter Barnett Newman suggested in his famous essay *The Sublime is Now*. The fundamental question behind Newman’s text concerns modern man’s refusal to live in an abstract world of ideas: given this refusal, is it still possible for the artist to create sublime art? In the first part of his essay, Newman considers that one of the first manifestations of man was an aesthetic one and, therefore, the first function of language would be an artistic-aesthetic one, and not one of communication. In relation to this idea, Newman mentions that “man’s first cry was a song. Man’s first address to a neighbor was a cry of power and solemn weakness, not a request for a drink of water. Even the animal makes a futile attempt at poetry”.<sup>8</sup> He criticizes modernism for its failure in creating a sublime image that would separate from the entire tradition of Western European painting. Modern art’s impulse to eliminate beauty in favor of the pure forms and Formalism, although it seems to deny traditional artistic values, it only manages to transfer old values without any new vision.

For Newman, the only reminiscences of the sublime can be seen in modern art because of its “energy to escape the pattern”.<sup>9</sup> From a rather radical perspective, he only sees the American art of those times as being capable of actualizing the sublime because it develops in a context freed from the “weight of European culture”,<sup>10</sup> a context that authentically allows the complete denial of beauty in art: “The image we produce is the self-evident one of revelation, real and concrete, that can be understood by anyone who will look at it without the nostalgic glasses of

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[https://www.plan-b.ro/wp-content/uploads/2017/05/pressrelease\\_rusu.pdf](https://www.plan-b.ro/wp-content/uploads/2017/05/pressrelease_rusu.pdf) (link accessed on June 13, 2020).

<sup>8</sup> Barnett Newman, “The Sublime Is Now”, *Tiger’s Eye*, New York, No.1, October 1947, p. 59.

<sup>9</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 60.

<sup>10</sup> *Ibid.*

history".<sup>11</sup> As a representative of Abstract Expressionism, Barnett Newman relies on creating images that can be apprehended in themselves, images in which beauty and the sublime do not become impediments, but natural occurrences in an art that separates itself from the burden of cultural memory, whose content includes myths, legends, nostalgia and *the devices of Western European painting*. At the same time, some theorists believe that, starting with the 20<sup>th</sup> century, art transforms into a neutral space in which contrary aesthetic categories, such as beauty or ugliness, only cancel each other.<sup>12</sup>

From a certain perspective, we can observe that Newman's action of separating from the values of Western European art (and from its cultural memory) has a lot in common with modern art's nihilism in relation to the entire set of values that precedes it. Furthermore, if we consider Boris Groys' approach on the matter, we must admit that despite some tendencies of modern and postmodern artists to deconstruct the myth to the point of excluding it, the myth itself does not disappear completely, but it is transformed into personal myths<sup>13</sup> that will be re-valued and assimilated into the constituents of a culture's archive. What Groys perceives as a symptomatic manifestation in modern and postmodern art (that can be related to Newman as well) is that artistic practice enters a circle of innovation that implies re-valuing the profane and de-valuing tradition.<sup>14</sup>

The concept behind the exhibition *The Only Thing I Am Sure about in This Life Lies above My Head* suggests that Cristi Rusu's creative energies are oriented towards finding the sublime. Whether we are talking about the possibilities of activating the sublime by means of his own works, or we are considering an external search by means of exploring the landscape, the ultimate purpose is to amplify the quality of the relationship that one can have with the sublime. In this sense, the artist's goal becomes his *trademark* and it originates with his projects dating back all the way to 2009. From then until now we can see how his research takes this on-going direction that is far from being concluded. The connection between Barnett Newman's interest in the sublime and Cristi Rusu's current artistic investigation lies in a question that is relevant to both artists, despite the different cultural eras: How can the sublime still exist in a world and in an art that have abandoned narratives?

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<sup>11</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>12</sup> See, for example, Marcella Tarozzi Goldsmith, *The Future of Art: An Aesthetics of the New and the Sublime*, State University of New York Press, New York, 1999, p. 169.

<sup>13</sup> Boris Groys, *Despre nou – Eseu de economie culturală*, transl. Aurel Codoban, Idea Design & Print, Cluj-Napoca, p. 83.

<sup>14</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 86.

Before the aesthetic revolutions that art undertakes throughout the 20<sup>th</sup> century, the sublime was most often associated with the landscape genre in painting, capturing the *smallness* of man or the overwhelming feeling that one has in contact with the greatness of nature. In relation to the new cultural paradigms emerging near the WW2 period and immediately after (including Abstract Expressionism), the art historian Robert Rosenblum proposes (at the beginning of the 60's) the concept of *the abstract sublime*,<sup>15</sup> describing the new Colour Filed approach on the sublime, where we are no longer dealing with a figurative representation of the landscape.

For Rosenblum, the notion of abstract sublime designates the feeling of vastness and solitude that can be triggered not just by nature's unpredictability, but also by an art such as that of abstract expressionism. It would seem that this confrontation with vastness is the link between the non-figurative paintings of different artists such as Newman, Rothko, Still or Pollock. Even from a Kantian perspective, these approaches can all be correlated to the idea of the sublime, given the fact that in Kantian philosophy the sublime is often correlated to the shapeless object as well. Consequently, the stylistic explorations of abstract expressionism are not entirely separated from the evolution of this aesthetic category in the philosophical tradition. According to Umberto Eco (himself influenced by the Kantian perspective), “the sublime was the recognition of the independence of human reason from nature, thanks to the discovery of the existence of a faculty of the spirit capable of going beyond all sensible measure”.<sup>16</sup>

From this perspective, the monumentality of “anti-monument” installations like those adapted to the aesthetic environment of the gallery by Cristi Rusu, the re-utilization of the landscape far from its geographical borders (and outside its historical context) as well as its re-valuing in an universal sense brings the artist closer, in this case, to the actualizations and artistic research that involve the sublime in contemporary art. The feelings of vastness and solitude reflected in the sublime are inter-connected by Cristi Rusu to the uncomfortable thought of death. We find this association between the sublime and death examined in the artist's previous works as well. For example, the already mentioned exhibition, *Space Itself*, features a film entitled “Calle dela morte” consisting of a footage that captures a street sign from Venice. The video manifests as a deconstruction of the moment,

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<sup>15</sup> Robert Rosenblum, *The Abstract Sublime*, <https://www.artnews.com/art-news/retrospective/beyond-the-infinite-robert-rosenblum-on-sublime-contemporary-art-in-1961-3811/>, link accessed on June 13, 2020.

<sup>16</sup> Umberto Eco, *On Beauty. A History of a Western Idea*, transl. Alastair McEwen, Seeker & Warburg, London, 2004, p. 267.

when the protagonist's hand starts to shake from the effort as he films the street sign and the image captured on camera becomes more and more unclear until it fades away and "dies".

Unlike the *Space Itself* exhibition, Cristi Rusu's latest project reflects on the issue of death in a less metaphorical way, giving it a clearer expression by means of using the entire exhibition space as a work medium. The artist uses the architecture and geometry of the gallery space in order to project the room imagined under the Cojocna grave, creating a space within a space, a place that seeks for the public a close simulation of the limitless after-death uncertainty and solitude. These feelings are associated by Cristi Rusu to what the public may perceive as the sublime. For the artist, the gallery space has often proven to be a medium and this is why many of his works are site-specific, created *on the spot* in the gallery. Research and documentation precede the site-specific projects, a fact noticeable because the works keep a trace of his sketches and, quite often, these sketches participate in transposing and defining *phantasmal spaces*, just like in the case of the exhibition *The Only Thing I Am Sure about in This Life Lies above My Head*. Even though the first stages of his artistic process involve these sketches, when Cristi Rusu moves on to the actual construction of the works in the gallery space, he proves to be open to the idea of modifying and adapting them to the space of the gallery. This helps him create a simulation that is much closer to the emotions one might experience in contact with the places that were the starting point of his art: natural or urban landscapes, certain monuments etc.

### **The archive and the natural space as "profane space"**

As I have already mentioned, the artist documents these featured places with the purpose of creating site-specific projects within the gallery. However, an aspect that one should not ignore is the fact that this documentation, that includes photos taken at the initial site or sketches, ends up as a foundation for a personal archive. Cristi Rusu uses this visual archive as a working instrument, a structure participating in his "artistic laboratory".<sup>17</sup> The personal archive plays an essential role in the project because it allows the artist to create an "imagined land art"<sup>18</sup> project. Given

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<sup>17</sup> See the curatorial text of the exhibition (*The Only Thing I Am Sure about in This Life Lies above My Head*), Plan B Gallery, Berlin, March 6 – April 11, 2020, text signed by Diana Marincu: <https://www.plan-b.ro/wp-content/uploads/2020/02/Cristian-Rusu-The-Only-Thing-I-Am-Sure-about-in-This-Life-Lies-above-My-Head-press-release-3.pdf> (link accessed on June 13 2020).

<sup>18</sup> *Ibid.*



the fact that the actual grave from Cojocna is evidently not present in the exhibition, the transformations we are witnessing are shaped only by their development as a site-specific project in the gallery, unlike in the case of a real land art project. Cristi Rusu’s photos and drawings are not just ways of tracking the traces left by his art in the landscape. In addition, the resulting archive is not just a simple way of capturing the ephemeral act specific to land art and inserting it into a gallery in order to validate its existence and to include it into a broader archive of cultural memory (like the one Boris Groys refers to, for example). Finally, art history itself testifies for the need of an artistic movement such as land art (that initially developed by trying to surpass the limits imposed in the context of galleries and museum) to re-enter the institutional circle, because of its transitory nature.

Cristi Rusu’s latest project is first designed in the context of the gallery in order to materialize the space imagined by the artist, while the Cojocna site remains, at least for now, a starting point in the construction of the final work. We can analyze the concept of the archive in the case of this exhibition in a double sense: firstly, as a form of recording the profane space represented by the Cojocna grave, the surrounding landscapes and the traces they determine within the project; secondly, we can consider that the resulting project is automatically included in a cultural archive (in Groys’ terms) that involves the gallery’s participation as a constituent part of the art world.

In a way that might be paradoxical, for Boris Groys “the new”, as a sign of innovation in culture, can be identified, particularly in the archive. By the fact that it is included in the archive, *the new* gets its validation within cultural paradigms. In order to demonstrate this phenomenon, Groys deconstructs modernism’s “myths” that imply a denial of traditional values and a constant search for originality. Following Nietzsche, Groys sees *the new* as a re-evaluation of values<sup>19</sup>. In this sense, everything that might have been previously labeled as profane (that was not hidden from view but suddenly also revealed itself) enters a circle of reevaluation and is assimilated in an archive, thus taking part in a certain tradition. For Groys, the most suggestive example here is the field of visual arts and, not surprisingly, an important argument for him revolves around Marcel Duchamp’s *Fountain*.<sup>20</sup>

The model of the archive proposed by Groys is different from what is traditionally referred to as an archive. As Wolfgang Ernst observes, Groys presents an archive based on the relationship between reality and fiction, understanding the concept of the archive as “a machine for the production of memories, one that

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<sup>19</sup> Boris Groys, *Despre nou – Eșeu de economie culturală*, transl. Aurel Codoban, Idea Design & Print, Cluj-Napoca, p. 29.

<sup>20</sup> *Ibid.*, pp. 82-83.

fabricates history out of the material of unassimilated reality”.<sup>21</sup> Consequently, we can admit that everything related to cultural memory, even if it positions itself as *anti-memory*, is assimilated in an archive. In addition, Groys talks about a process of universalization and formalization of cultural archives, given the contemporary era determined by globalism.<sup>22</sup> The art world seems to function similarly, ignoring national borders and customs in order to develop as a general common cultural fund of values.<sup>23</sup> If we consider the gallery as a microstructure of the art world, it becomes an integrated part of the grand archive called “the art world”; however, at the same time it functions as a smaller archive in itself because it consolidates its own set of values.

In other words, following Groys’s theory, a contemporary art gallery can function according to the principles of the archive because it is capable of drawing out attention to that which is constituted in the real world as *new*. All the innovative artistic tendencies, that initially started as “profane” and defined themselves as opposing the hierarchy of traditional values, were included and revalued in what can be called “the art world archive”. As Groys notes,<sup>24</sup> everything functioning according to the logic of cultural economy is eventually constituted as an archive, and the art gallery can certainly fit into that type of logic. What remains outside the cultural archive is referred to as profane space by Groys and he describes it<sup>25</sup> as being insignificant, extra-cultural, irrelevant, transitory etc. However, the author also observes<sup>26</sup> that the profane space is capable of providing new potential cultural values and, even more, this profane space has been often integrated and revalued in the cultural archive by ready-made objects, land art, performance, Arte Povera etc. Therefore, Groys takes into consideration the possibility of the total disappearance of the profane space because of its assimilation in the grand cultural archive of mankind (because of the way in which visual arts deal with this profane space).

Wolfgang Ernst observes<sup>27</sup> that Groys’ cultural archives are powered by a *motor* – that of narratives and these narratives are practically composed of the interpretations that we give to new artworks. The world without narratives that

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<sup>21</sup> Wolfgang Ernst, *Stirrings in the Archives: Order from Disorder*, transl. Adam Siegel, Rowman & Littlefield, London, New York, 2015, p.11.

<sup>22</sup> See Boris Groys, *Despre nou –Eseu de economie culturală*, transl. Aurel Codoban, Idea Design & Print, Cluj-Napoca, p. 63.

<sup>23</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>24</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 86.

<sup>25</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 63.

<sup>26</sup> *Ibid.*.

<sup>27</sup> Wolfgang Ernst, *Stirrings in the Archives: Order from Disorder*, transl. Adam Siegel Rowman & Littlefield, London, New York, 2015, pp. 11-12.

Newman spoke about at the half of the 20<sup>th</sup> century was not, in fact, a world outside of narratives. Mainly the need to escape memory and the Western European tradition, that Newman was talking about, sets the foundation for a new narrative in which the sublime can be actualized by the diverse set of experiences and interpretations that we engage in relation to the same artwork at different times.

## Conclusions

In the case of Cristi Rusu we can also talk about a search for the *profane space*, given some recurrent themes in his works: anti-memory, anti-monumentality, anti-history or even the way in which he investigates the sublime. However, an analysis on the role of profane space in the exhibition *The Only Thing I Am Sure about in This Life Lies above My Head* has its difficulties. It is true that the artist uses a language specific to land art (among other things), but, in reality, he creates a site-specific work within the gallery and does not effectively work with the actual landscape from the original site, a landscape that could determine a profane space. On the other hand, the Cojocna grave carries with it an entire narrative developed in correspondence with historical events, a narrative that Cristi Rusu revalues from a cultural-artistic perspective. This revaluing is possible due to the elaboration of a project imagined starting with the Cojocna site and built directly in the exhibition space, thus automatically entering the cultural archive of the gallery in this case. In addition, the themes themselves enter the circle of the archive because in their background a diverse tradition of similar artistic approaches was already consolidated throughout history.

Cristi Rusu's latest project can also be interpreted in relation to the concept of non-site developed by Robert Smithson at the time of his first similar artistic explorations from 1968. These non-sites were created by Smithson at that time as a form of connecting the natural or urban landscapes to the actual space of the gallery by transporting and placing natural raw materials (rocks, earth etc.) in the institutional context of the gallery or the museum. Consequently, a *non-place* was configured, a non-site as Smithson would call it, that challenges the *white cube* limits by introducing the marginal in the central exhibition point of the gallery.

As Peter Osbourne notes, for Smithson, the non-sites are actually other sites designating a certain place that is usually outside the limits of the exhibition space; the sites imagined by Smithson as non-places are generated based on “specific combinations of representations of the 'site/ sight' itself: samples of earth, descriptions, maps and photographs – unified and contained by an imaginary frame, which is literalized in the non-sites themselves by the actual framework of the samples: steel

containers".<sup>28</sup> Mapping is therefore an essential part of these non-sites, as they essentially build "mental islands"<sup>29</sup> based on the dialectic relationship between presence and absence.

The paradox is that these mental islands, non-places, become perceivable in the exhibition space due to the artist's use of physical materials presented to the public as a synthesis of the information contained by the initial landscape. Therefore, the non-site does not lose its connection to the original source; it ends up as a new place containing some of the information and "a negation of an actual place done through physical meaning".<sup>30</sup> This relationship between the site and the non-site, representative for Smithson's approach, is also present in Cristi Rusu's latest exhibition, as the artist creates a *bridge* between the Cojocna site and the exhibition space of Plan B Gallery. Cristi Rusu also creates a 3d mapping of the Cojocna site that can be described as a "synthesis between representation and abstraction".<sup>31</sup>

Cristi Rusu's project discussed here is relevant in illustrating the ways in which the art gallery's space proves to be adaptable and, even more, essential in the creation of the artwork, as it becomes a constituent part of it and, at the same time, a constituent part of a non-site. In addition, the project enables a double archiving process: the artist's personal archive (that documents a profane space from outside the gallery and that he uses as a work instrument) and an archive of the definitive result (given the site-specific status of the project created in the gallery). These types of interventions in the gallery space illustrate the fact that the gallery is not just an institutional part of the art world (where the market would leave its mark on the rules of the system). It can be as well a *medium* for exploring the sublime or themes and artistic approaches such as anti-memory, anti-history, anti-monumentality without losing, due to the "anti" prefix, the meaning of the major ideas that participated in our cultural evolution.

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<sup>28</sup> Peter Osborne, *Anywhere or Not at All: Philosophy of Contemporary Art*, Verso, London, 2013, p. 112.

<sup>29</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 113.

<sup>30</sup> Paul Taner, Robert Smithson, *Interview with Robert Smithson (1970)*, in Robert Smithson, *The Collected Writings*, ed. Jack Flam, University of California Press, Berkeley, Los Angeles, London, 1996, p. 238.

<sup>31</sup> Susan Kandel, *The Non-Site of Theory, Theory and Practice in "Frieze"*, May 7 1995, <https://frieze.com/article/non-site-theory> (link accessed on June 13 2020).

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