

Moholy-Nagy University of Art and Design  
Doctoral School, Architecture

DOCTORAL DISSERTATION – THESES

## **INITIATIVE WAYS**

*Contemporary monasteries in light of the Rule of Saint Benedict*

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## TOPIC

The role of Benedictine and Cistercian orders in forming the architectural image of medieval Europe had declined by the beginning of the Modern Age – we are not reckoning with their typical role in building our environment any more. However, in Pannonhalma, in the centre of the Hungarian Benedictine order one can witness an exemplary architectural activity in the past fifteen years. Besides the unique quality of the works, the complexity and preparedness of the planning and building progress and also the cooperation of the participants are impressive. This is tightly connected to the traditions of the community and the principles of the founder.

## THESES

### *1. Monastic anthropology*

Monastic buildings are mappings of some kind of a monastic anthropology. Besides offering physical comfort, the spaces of the monastery serve the psychical development of those inhabiting them. The creators of spaces offer proper initiative spaces to support the initiation of community members. This possibility is also open for the guests of the monastery.

### *2. The rigour and freedom of model makers*

Taking all round the rule of Saint Benedict, the ideal plan of Sankt Gallen or other historical examples, we can notice that monastery builders were following their models in a free and creative way. Monks do not search for God according to Benedict's rule, but they recline upon the rule interpreted by the chosen abbot of the community, who is always taking space, time and the actual members of the community into consideration. Shaping and constructing a monastery is always adjusted to the given space, time and community. Accordingly, monastic self-consciousness of a community is necessarily mapped in the buildings they live in.

### *3. Resilience and discretio*

Resilience or the ability of renewal of monastic communities is sustained by Benedictine temperance and *discretio*, the ability of making distinction. Continuous resilience is related to self-reflection and initiative. The resilience of a monastery as a building complex presumes a reflective and creative relation to the environment and to the heritage of the past.

### *4. Important life events, important places*

The communal and private spaces of the monastery are remarkably functional, one can hardly find spaces without a function. The ways connecting spaces of different functions support initiation by making changes physically experimental.

### *5. Visual silence, concentration*

In our time of global crisis in faith, monasticism may be a watcher and transmitter of silence, inner life and meditation. With its visual silence, concentratedness and simplicity, the assigned architectural space may support or, if it is surfeit, may even discourage the process. Emptiness may enable reception.

## MASTERPIECE

My masterpiece was carried out in a complex planning and designing context in the Archabbey of Pannonhalma, in the course of renewing three gardens of different characters and functions. In my thesis I am focusing on two parts of the working process, namely the labyrinth of the Arboretum and the new open-air theatre of Hospodárkert, thus illustrating the coherence of my research and creative work.

The labyrinth, a symbol of initiative ways, is a meditative space of centuries of traditions. In the course of planning *the labyrinth* in Pannonhalma, I refined my ideas by creating ephemeral labyrinths, and, in this way, I also had the opportunity to collate my experience with that of others. The labyrinth built in the arboretum observes the strict rules of centuries of labyrinth drawing, but it is in living dialogue with its natural environment, so becoming unique and belonging to the given space alone.

In Hospodárkert, in the orchard of the abbey, the open-air theatre was likewise planned by harmonizing the architectural work and the receptive environment. *The open-air theatre* is primarily a location for the art festival organized year by year according to the community's mission of familiarizing contemporary culture. It is also a place for literature and drama classes, and it may occasionally be used for student masses. Its spacious and expandable space may serve as a worthy place for school convocations and school leaving ceremonies. It has become a privileged space of initiation for the young men attending Pannonhalma.

According to the founder, the monastery should be built so that it includes everything the members of the community need, "so that there may be no need for the monks to go about outside" (RB 66, 7). In Foucault's sense, the monastery is a heterotopic place: it is connected to every other space, and it also has a space of its own. My masterpiece, the labyrinth and the open air theatre in the gardens of the Archabbey of Pannonhalma are also heterotopic spaces within the large complex of the archabbey. By stepping out of our everyday world, in these spaces we can gain distance and find new viewpoints.



LABYRINTH and OPEN-AIR THEATRE  
in the Gardens of the Archabbey of Pannonhalmi