

Hungarian University of Fine Arts
Doctoral School

The Non-autonomous Artwork
Site-specific installation, environment and total installation

DLA abstract

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Subject of the thesis

I conducted my research at the MKE Doctoral School in the field of non-autonomous artworks, i.e. environment, site-specific installation and total installation. The research explored the subject in the context of the expansion of sculpture and the transformative processes of spatio-temporal perception.

The contextualisation of the above-mentioned factors was important to me because, in the course of my creative, research and teaching practice, I have recognised that the spatial and temporal expansion of the concept of sculpture throughout history can be paralleled with the expansion of the individual's perception of spacetime. In proportion as man has observed and recorded his knowledge of his surrounding and wider environment, he has constantly repositioned himself, shaping his role and opportunities both individually and socially. Throughout human history, changes in the perception of space has also entailed a constant reform of the representation of space that has been used to describe and symbolically represent it. This realisation has given me new perspectives for my current interpretation of my creative position and has led me to examine the question of how the ability of perceiving spacetime determines the individual's relation to phenomena and their position in the hierarchical systems that interweaves everyday life.

While writing this thesis, I drew on my empirical and theoretical research that the social and individual levels of decoding the experience of spacetime (and their interactions) determine the individuals' potential for autonomy and self-fulfilment - and thus their relationship to the power and/or institutional structures of the day. To measure and relate the directions, distances and positions that determine one's life, and to question the basis of reality of our fixed spatial concepts, it is an essential key to relating to the phenomena of the world around us and to the construction of one's own identity. It is necessary to separate the hierarchic patterns from above (vertical) and one's own (horizontal) experience, and to deal with the difference in the right way.

However, it is a well-known fact, that the radius of opportunity for individual self-fulfilment cannot be considered solely in terms of individual freedom, since the individual's scope for action is also determined by the cultural horizon of the community. This common field brings us to the areas of the arts that I have studied, which seek to promote the democratisation of society and which, unlike the vertical orientation of hierarchical power structures, move in a kind of extended, horizontal spacetime and are present in all artistic disciplines. The focus of my research, however, is specifically on the expansion of sculpture and the interrelationships between transformative processes of spatio-temporal perception.

In a mental space in which the experience of freedom is replaced by a sense of isolation, confusion and anxiety over powerlessness, I have an inevitable interest in the individual's, and in particular the artist's influence in society. I believe that in the world of the spectacle (Debord¹), space and time commodified and overcrowded with events, need to be recoded.

¹ Guy Debord: *The Society of the Spectacle* (1967)

We need to re-inhabit our depersonalised, urbanised spaces. This requires a decolonialised way of thinking, to which the artist who attempts to shift the habitual flow of spacetime and the positions taken as fundamental on the basis of this flow, contributes greatly to the conditions of emergence and transformation. Through their works, this type of artist tries to induce a new acting attitude of the audience (participators), which can reposition their assumptions by exercising it.

I USE THE CONCEPT OF THE **NON-AUTONOMOUS ARTWORK** AS A COUNTERPOINT TO THE MODERNIST, MEDIUM-SPECIFIC, AUTONOMOUS ARTWORK CHARACTERISED BY THE AESTHETICS OF L'ART POUR L'ART. THE NON-AUTONOMOUS ARTWORK BREAKS WITH BOTH THE TOPOS OF THE CLOSED AND FINISHED WORK AND THE ARTISTIC AUTOCRACY OF POWER REPRESENTATION AND/OR MERE PLEASURE OF BEAUTY. WITH THE RISING OF OPEN, PERFORMATIVE GENRES, THE NON-AUTONOMOUS ARTWORK IN THE FIELD OF SPATIAL ART HAS CHANGED THE SYSTEM OF RELATIONS BETWEEN (ART) OBJECT - (EXHIBITION) SPACE - INDIVIDUAL (BOTH THE CREATOR AND THE RECIPIENT).

The subject of this thesis is therefore to present the interrelationships I have explored on the above-mentioned topic.

Structure and brief presentation of the thesis

In the first major unit, I outline the ontological process of spatial thinking in the context of sculpture, including the ways of spatial representation, with particular reference to the expansion of the concept of sculpture as articulated by Rosalind E. Krauss² and its move away from a representational function. I examine the phenomenon in the context of the efforts to expand individual freedom and the social changes that have made this possible, because these have fundamentally determined the level of decoding of spatial perception. Thus, in this chapter, I also pay particular attention to the cultural and social influences that are important in the context of this thesis, as well as to the development of the autonomous artwork and its layers of meaning. The works of art I have taken as examples illustrate this process.

The expansion of sculpture and the search for the possibility of individual fulfilment can be examined in a common field that has moved away from vertical mechanisms of power and their representation and has gradually developed a radically different artistic filtering and transcription system. This field emerged spectacularly at the turn of the 19th and 20th centuries, thanks to paradigm shifts in the field of fine art. During this process, sculpture went through a change of scale, where sculpture moved away from the tradition of *mimetic representation, or embodiment*.

At the end of the 19th century, Rodin's oeuvre shook up the representational function of sculpture, and at the same time created a space for sculpture in the everyday sphere (Burghers of Calais, 1895). With this radical gesture, he extended the space of sculpture and opened a gate to the autonomous sculpture. Constantin Brancusi began to develop his sculpture on this field: his works initially manifested autonomous, non-figurative forms that

² Rosalind E. Krauss: *Sculpture in Expanded Field* (1979)

existed in themselves, breaking with the tradition of narrative art. However, over time, these forms became inextricably linked, first to their own postament, then to their surrounding space and time, thus left the autonomous sculptural system: the sculpture from pointing to itself had begun to point to its actual environment.

In the second major unit of the thesis, I analyse Brancusi's work (with particular reference to his studio on Impasse Ronsin, which I consider one of the first environments) and transfer the question of autonomous sculpture to the fields of environment, site-specific installation and total installation, which are situated in the expansive field of sculpture. For Brancusi, following and developing Rodin's legacy, eliminated the delimitation of the sculpture, questioned its spatio-temporal distancing and the earlier artistic principles of compression and filtering. He examined the interactions of his sculptures, carefully arranged in his studio, with the movement of human figures and the changing game of light and shadow and made photographs and films of them (at the beginning with the help of Man Ray) that went far beyond documentation. On the basis of his photographs and film footage of Brancusi's studio and the studies that have analysed them (including a study by Krisztina Passuth³ and a collection of papers compiled from the exhibition I saw in New York in 2018⁴), I have come to the conclusion that it is here, not in the late 1960s, that the *environment*, which I define as follows, is born:

ENVIRONMENT IS AN UMBRELLA TERM: IT USUALLY REFERS TO ANY KIND OF LARGE-SCALE INSTALLATION IN SPACE, COMPRISING SEVERAL ELEMENTS CLOSELY RELATED IN FORM AND CONTENT. EVERY WORK HAS A SPATIAL ORGANIZING POWER, EVERY WORK IS IN IRREDUCIBLE DIALOGUE WITH ITS CURRENT DISPLAY ENVIRONMENT. HOWEVER, ENVIRONMENT BEHAVES DIFFERENTLY FROM A PAINTING ON A WALL OR A SCULPTURE IN A POSTER: IT FORMS A LARGE-SCALE SPATIAL NETWORK BETWEEN ITS OWN ELEMENTS AND THE SURROUNDING SPACE AND EVEN THE AUDIENCE.

Duchamp, in close association (and friendship) with Brancusi, and Schwitters also had arrived at this field: they desacralized art, inextricably linking the space of life (actual and local) and art (ideal). A new method of space-making was born, in which unfiltered (real) space is mixed with the space of autonomous plasticity - dissolving it, merging it (e.g. Duchamp: One Mile String, Schwitters: Merzbau). Another genre has emerged, which has a lot in common with environment: *site-specific installation*.

THE **SITE-SPECIFIC INSTALLATION** IS NOT ONLY CLOSELY CONNECTED TO ITS GIVEN *SPACE* BUT IS IN INSEPARABLE COMMUNICATION WITH THE *PLACE* REPRESENTING THE VITALITY OF THE "HERE AND NOW", AND ALSO CARRIES THE ACTUALITY OF ITS ENVIRONMENT - THE TEMPORALITY THAT CAN BE EXPERIENCED AND HIGHLIGHTED IN THE GIVEN *SITE*. THUS, AN INTERACTION AND RELATIONSHIP IS ESTABLISHED BETWEEN THE ARTWORK AND THE *SITUATION*. HOWEVER, THIS RELATIONSHIP IS USUALLY TEMPORARY, ONLY TRUE THERE AND THEN, AND THEREFORE UNREPEATABLE, IT CANNOT BE REPRODUCED IN ANOTHER PLACE IN THE SAME WAY, WITHOUT DISTORTION OF MEANING.

The individual and artistic question of autonomy is thus most clearly concentrated in the DADA which I will analyse through the works of the three artists mentioned above, which are

³ Edith Balas and Krisztina Passuth: Brancusi and Brancusi (Noran, Budapest, 2005)

⁴ Paul B. Franklin: Brancusi & Duchamp – The Art of Dialogue (Kasmin, New York, 2018)

linked to space-making, and sometimes through their relationship to each other. In DADA, the liberation of the individual by artistic tools, the decolonization of the individual from power, was more strongly focused than any previous attempt. Indeed, the revolutionary nature of DADA lies in its claim to the recognition of life and the right to individual freedom. To achieve this it has dismantled and reconstituted the previous system of relations between the (art) object and the human being (both creator and recipient) and the (exhibition) space. With this creative approach and practice, the DADA liberated the possibilities of individual experience and action from its previously given and accepted system. The art historical discourse on the question of the spatio-temporal expansion of the art object is dominated by narratives from the perspective of painting, but in my view the 'objectness' world of DADA prepares the way for a paradigm shift in sculpture, for the abolition of the autocracy of the closed, autonomous work.

I examine as its result the phenomenon of the so called non-autonomous artwork, in the context of reality, life, art, and the relationship between the individual and constructions of power. I present the methods of these art forms that reflect on power in the field of spacemaking and their liberating power on individual perception. I highlight the artists who have made significant contributions to this process and their most important relevant works. I explore the interplay between the institutional system of art and the non-autonomous work, including the significant role played by Virginia Dwan and Harald Szeemann, an American and a European curator of the 1970s.

The spatio-temporal revolution that started at DADA and was gradually revived during the Second World War culminated again in the late 1960s, and was closely linked to these two curators, who organised their projects around the rethinking of the institutional system and exhibition practice, which had become outdated by then. The emergence of American environmental art, minimalism, land art and the '*gallery as site*' phenomenon was greatly influenced by the heiress to the 3M conglomerate, Virginia Dwan, and the Dwan Gallery she founded in 1959. I briefly analyse Dwan's influence in the chapter of my thesis entitled 'Performative practices in the extended space - the gallery as site', highlighting the artists she patronised and specific exhibitions that radically rewrote the previously established exhibition practice of closed artworks in the white-cube. The works in these new wave exhibitions are mostly no longer works of art in the traditional sense of the word, but *situations, performative practices* that were able to emerge and function thanks to the changed exhibition practice. Of course, this required an appropriate institutional structure, cultural policy and/or patronage, and for this reason it flourished mainly in areas where these artistic ambitions were recognised and supported, such as in certain institutions in the USA or in Western Europe. At this point, I also mention Harald Szeemann's performative and expansive projects in Western Europe, similar to Dwan's practice, such as the exhibitions at the Kunsthalle in Bern, highlighting the project *When Attitudes Become Form*.

In this expanded, liberated field, the focus had already shifted completely from the artwork as an object to the individual, or more precisely to the human body and the whole bodily perception.

IT IS FOR THIS SHIFT THAT THE RUSSIAN ARTIST COUPLE ILYA AND EMILIA KABAKOV COINED THE TERM **TOTAL INSTALLATION**: WORKS WHOSE MAIN COMPOSITIONAL PRINCIPLE AND FOCUS IS THE VIEWER AND THEIR FULL BODILY PERCEPTION. TOTAL INSTALLATION IS AN OPEN WORK, A COMPLEX ATMOSPHERE WHERE THE BOUNDARY BETWEEN THE ARTIST AND THE VIEWER, BETWEEN THE FIELD OF ART AND THE FIELD OF EVERYDAY LIFE, IS ERASED.

In conclusion, my dissertation draws the conclusion of my research: I juxtapose the expansion of the experience and representation of space in the wake of important social crises that have emerged from the drift of history, and the identity-forming power of this process. I identify the interactions of the individual and power that can be understood in the context of spatial experience, with particular reference to the changes promoted by DADA. I articulate the potential of space-making, which, having succeeded in moving away from the representation of power, can promote and facilitate individual autonomy and the unfolding of the acting individual in an expanded, democratized field. Finally, I place my creative practice in this field.

