

University of Pécs Doctoral School of Music and Visual Arts

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Personal effigies

*About the intuitive spatial and visual experience in light of my
sculptures*

The theses of DLA dissertation

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Within the work programme of the doctoral training I decided to focus on the analysis of space and optical phenomena. In relation to this topic sculptures and installed plastics have been produced for many years. I am researching the relationships of these phenomena; I am investigating the possibilities of reinterpretation. I am engaged in the space, the mirror generated reflection of the real space and the different illusional possibilities of the aforementioned. The dissertation explores this dilemma in the context of my results related to sculpture, up to date.

1. Introduction

In the introduction phase of the DLA dissertation I briefly present the process which springs from the initiatives to the currently arising creative issues. In the subchapter titled, *About the sculptures* – by augmenting the photo documentation with short art descriptions – I illustrate a few of my works which I will cite later on in my dissertation.

The key concerns linked to the sculptures – projecting the topics of the dissertation – are related to the following concepts:

- reality and semblance
- momentariness and permanence
- physical and metaphysical space
- the space of the sculpture and the correlation of the mappings created by it
- material relations, the factors defining the materials of the sculpture
- conceptual and supra-conceptual language
- the mirror
- internal and external space
- the image and sensation of the infinite space; space and time
- personal visual and spatial experience.

2. From rational to irrational thinking?

The tool of fine art (sculpture) that is: the language of vision, is perfectly appropriate for the creator or the person 'living through' the artwork – beyond the methods of the rational and analytical, traversing those – to arrive to a realm which is unreachable via the instruments of 'intellectualisation'. The sculptural working mechanism, vision and with this the consumption of art pieces could be the means to live through and get acquainted with the phenomena outside the practical world, those which are incomprehensible through sensory perception, the metaphysical realities. The contemplative attitude may enable the beholder to gain experience in the phenomena of the world and art in an undisturbed way, through which one would not solely become an observer, but also a participant. Therefore one does not interpret, analyse the visual information of the scenery, one does not draw posterior conclusions based on that, rather one gleans experience in the present. This type of 'thought pattern' can be determined as intuitive approach.

In this chapter – through the subchapters called sensation, empathy, inner and outer cognition – I draft such a line of thought through which the differences between interpretation and the intuitive approach become apparent, moreover, the need for further research between these possible connections emerges.

3. Intuition

Taking the proper designation of inspiration, intuition, direct cognition and contemplation - they are the collective definition and tools of expression of the process in which the rational and irrational, thought and existence come into balance, in which an artwork can be born and how it happens to be understood.

The concept of intuition, the cogitation of intuition in these days is rather incoherent and often misread. With regard to the varied descriptions of the notion and definitions of intuition, an apparent controversy can be detected. Thus, in this section I pivot around the idea of intuition by studying and comparing the views of Benedetto Croce, Valéria Dienes, József Somogyi, A. K. Coomaraswamy, Attila József, Zsigmond Szabó.

Apropos of labelling intuition – in agreement with the opinion of Dienes – the problem of ‘conceptualisation’ is considered the greatest issue when formulating the precise definition. Those phenomena which Dienes puts as ‘inarticulate’, ‘unmantled’, Attila József frequently names as intuition. It is obvious that with regard to his relation to time the ‘passing imageries, evanescent impression shreds’ are identical with the explanation of intuition as stated by Attila József. Attila József - as opposed to this - names inspiration as Dienes, Croce or Coomaraswamy does intuition. Somogyi disjoints, analyses the diverse ‘types’ of intuition. For him the majority of this can be understood at the most metaphorically, highlighting the *direct approach*, which along the line of correct interpretation can on its own become the tool of cognition.

As Suzuki claims ‘the zen-approach means that we penetrate into the object itself and evaluate it from the inside’, in the writings of Attila József the expression ‘read internally’ also appears which is identical with the direct approach; absorbing in the object, with the help of the object in which the ‘subject and object, observer and observed unite in the act of vision’.¹

4. Further about the intuitive examination of space

Space is one of the basic ideas of philosophy and thinking. For the sculptor it is rather a material. For cogitation it is indefinable once and for all. For the sculptor it is modifiable, changeable. In agreement with Henri Focillon: ‘Space is the site of the artwork, however, this does not exclusively mean that it occupies space within: it handles it to its requirements, it defines it, moreover, it creates it fittingly to what it necessitates.’²

As difficult it is to term, ‘conceptualise’, intuition or even impossible for that matter, it can be ascertained about space that it ‘naturally resists being clad in concepts’. In chapter *The Concept of Space* I explore more thoroughly the ideas that emerged after formulating the notion of *intuitive examination of space*. Here I

¹ Szabó Zsigmond: *A tér és a művészet*. In: *Tér a szobrászatban, a szobrászat tere*. Műcsarnok, Budapest, 2005. 25. o.

² Henri Focillon: *A formák élete. A nyugati művészet*. Gondolat, Budapest, 1982. 30. o.

recall the theories and thoughts linked to space of Martin Heidegger, János Székely, István Schneller, Ákos Moravánszky and Katalin M. György. In subchapter titled sculpture-space – from the starting position of the intuitive examination of space – I bring an example for the possibilities of the relationship between spaces and individuals through studying my sculpture called *It Is More Spacious Inside*.

5. Space-time-intuition

By the act of a phenomenon becoming rooted in sculpture, it is objectified and may be constantly re-experienced. The sculpture, reflection and the illusion called forth by the aforesaid in the present develop into the place of '(oc)current(ce)'. These occurrences cannot be specified simply as a process attributed to time or space. It becomes visible in the unity of the sculpture and the time factor of space and space factor of time may unravel.

In connection with objectifying the phenomena in sculpture, by seeking for the potential of verbal explanation related to the constant workings of the temporality present in the object, I have found analogies in poetry and the instruments of poetry, all of which are tied to the dilemma of phenomena, subjectivity, mirror and reflection – in a concrete or figurative sense. I see the possibility that this verbal language – through the intuitive, introspective and subjective approach – stimulates the deeper understanding and deciphering of the given issue inherent in fine art. For interpretation the poetic, symbolic language might be the 'bridge' that connects conceptual terms with the different (fine) artistic languages.

In subchapter *perpetuated present* I draw a parallel between the relation of (oc)current(ce) to time, created in my sculptural work, and the notion 'applied' in poetry regarding time.

'In lyric poetry time is not sequential. The tense of lyric poetry is the present, which, however, does not express the actual present, as it namely expresses the borderline between past and present which is hardly seizable and is in continual flux towards the future (cf. eg.: the tense of drama), but the stagnant form of time which is akin to the time of sententiae,

proverbs and bodies of laws (gnomic present)'.³

A literary trope becomes an actor of the present via reception. The new reflections of my sculptures - the sculptural image - appearing in real space and time also belong to the present. Present made persistent the 'stagnant form of time' that is: gnomic present. The corresponding linguistic equivalent of this special type of temporality is the gnomic aorist tense (aspect).⁴

'Inspiration does not exterminate time; rather it tames it and creates rational infinity. [...] we see that it solely embraces one fragment of time, nevertheless it extends this fragment infinitely – figuratively speaking – it snaps a piece off of the endless line of time and fashions it to an uninterrupted curve that returns to itself.'⁵

Through the working mechanism of my works titled *Image of Space I-II.*, the *Already Seen* and *The Same River Twice* I declare that the phenomenon is anchored in the sculptures in stagnant time as gnomic present.

The question arises, is the space altered by a phenomenon of such tense an *Illusion*? Does it in fact turn into illusion in the space of the sculpture, the space in time? From my standpoint this process taking place in space and time which comes about in the space of sculpture and therefore the space modified by sculpture is *real*.

³ Jan Mukařovský: *A lírai költészet; A költői mű mint értékek összessége.*

<http://www.kalligram.eu/Kalligram/Archivum/2004/XIII.-evf.-2004.-aprilis/CSEH-POETIKAK/A-lirai-koeltesz-A-koeltoi-mu-mint-ertekek-oesszessege>, (utolsó letöltés: 2014. december 15.)

⁴ 'The Greek term aorist means 'undetermined', thus it does not aim to express temporality but the beginning and settlement of action by emphasising the fact of the action's occurrence.' Balla Péter: *Újszövetségi görög nyelvi jelenségek II.* (Igék), <http://www.peterballa.eoldal.hu/cikkek/tanulmanyi-segedanyagok---study-material/gorog-nyelvi-jelensegek-ii.-igek-.html>, (utolsó letöltés: 2014. december 20.)

The gnomic aorist is the tense used to express universally acclaimed truths. It is a timeless 'tense'.

⁵ József Attila: *Ihlet és gondolat.* In: Miklós Tamás: *József Attila metafizikája.* Magvető kiadó, Budapest, 1988. 211.o.

6. Mirror in space, space in mirror

In the first half of the chapter my thoughts revolve around the notion of mirror and formation of reflection, a crucial element utilised in my sculptural work. In subchapter *Metaphor-reflection* I shed light on the connection between literary trope and reflection. Based on this, I state:

As literary tropes acquire new, diverse meanings through symbolic reading in poetry; likewise the reflection of reality can gain new connotations. Consequently the mirror in sculpture remains no longer an ordinary mirror, but the mirror of the sculpture. It becomes a tool in order to fulfil its destination designated by the artwork. The reflection might appear 'in a figurative sense'. It develops into a sculptural image.

Subchapter *The mirror* summarises the materials of my sculptures, the material-immaterial contrast born with the reflection and the mirror as sculptural 'substance'. In relation to the conceptual resemblance gleaned from the essay called *Between Mirror and Reflection* by Zsuzsa Beney, I underline the visual and formal parallels in subchapter water-mirror. In subchapter *mirror-space* – taking the dream metaphor of Zsuzsa Beney as a point of reference – I review the infinite space-time effect generated by multiple mirror systems and the perspective visual and spatial experience.

The spatial reality and the 'illusory' space created in the sculpture, the different external and internal relations considering space enable the viewer an intellectual contemplation distinct from the observations of everyday reality, systems of relations and states of being. The phrases 'mirrored chamber' and 'magic mirror room' carry analogous denotations to my sculptures above.

The expressions 'absolute present' and 'simultaneity' are used by Beney with utmost emphasis. This obviously can be led back to the 'time definition', time profile which is articulated in the former chapters as inspiration, gnomic present and perpetuated present.

In the perspective space where the effect of multiple mirror systems occurs, space and time are in unity. In the continuous multi-reflection phenomenon the 'present unlimited by past and future' can be experienced as spatial scenery.

7. Personal effigies, mimetic alloys

In the first half of the chapter I give a short explanation why I sought for new sculptural modes of expression when creating my works involving complex technical solutions. I was searching for an answer how to bridge the gap between the realisable in the exhibition space and personal ‘utilization’, through which the sculpture is not the occurrence of the given place, but the sculpture is permanent home to the occurrence. In a more traditional sense this is the object-sculpture where the carefully selected material, technique, size, mass, proportion define mainly the functioning of the sculpture.

In the first half of the subchapter *Personal visual experience* I stress the role of the concave mirror as a sculptural, optical solution which becomes an appropriate instrument in my sculptures for creating simple yet special spatial experiences. In these pieces interactivity is a result of examining the sculpture in ‘reality’, produced by the right position of the individual and mirror. The reflection of the beholder is what places the nexus of the viewer and object on a new foundation. The generated image is that of the beholder’s that watches its observer. To unfold the reason why and how the connection might be stronger between viewer and object and viewer and reflection I evoke the thoughts of Maurice Merleau-Ponty and Zsuzsa Beney:

‘The mystery lies in the fact that my body is an observer and observable at the same time. One who observes everything can examine oneself as well and can recognise the ‘other side’ of one’s ability of sight in those which one sees in this manner. One sees the self-observing self, senses the self-sensing self; one is visible and palpable for oneself.’⁶

‘And as we do not know in the case of two eyes gazing at each other which one the mirror and which one the reflected is, we know just as little about the world and ourselves which one the observer and observed is, and can we only examine ourselves by being reflected in the world, further, the world in the mirror which it creates in us? [...].’⁷

⁶ Maurice Merleau-Ponty: *A szem és a szellem*. <http://www.doksi.hu/get.php?lid=2918>, 4. o. (utolsó letöltés: 2014. december 20.)

⁷ Beney Zsuzsa: *Tükör és tükörkép között*. <http://vigilia.hu/regihonlap/2002/6/beney.html>, 4. o. (utolsó letöltés: 2015. május 4.)

The exceptional, re-founded relationship between viewer and object is realised by converting the sculpture into a *tool*. By stipulating the sculpture as a place of (self)cognition, the opportunity of living the *intuitive space and visual experience* might be given. With the aid of the vision of the ‘image exfoliated from the material’, the beholder is allowed to place himself/herself into the space of the sculpture and to ‘analyse it internally’. The *experiences* that take place in the sculptural space – in which space, time and the individual cannot be separated – happen in first person singular, in *me*. The direct connection with the object might be the direct place of observation. Space in which subject and object, observer and observed unite in the act of sight.

In certain pieces belonging to the series *Personal effigies*, in addition, in the works titled *Mimetic Alloy* and *Insert I* strived to create the tightest bond possible related to the work and beholder in order to facilitate the formation of the *direct approach*.

Through contemplation the sculpture can become a type of meditative tool for the viewer. The consciously produced object might stir up those subconscious or supra-conscious feelings which become perceivable as concentrated experiences pointing to one direction.

8. Conclusion

In the last part of the dissertation I summarise with bullet points those ideas which I deem the most significant in relation to my sculptures:

- I wish to enable the viewer *to get as close to the object as the subject itself and the typicality of the object allow*;
- The foremost function of these sculptures is the intuitive cognition, (self)recognition and the provision of the possibilities of cognition in general which stimulates a chain of personal experiences beyond the 'mere' subjective experience, sensed in a higher realm. I aspire to create a dialogue in which the viewer can contact his/her effigy and through that himself/herself in the personal experience of space; a dialogue in which the artwork is not the one to speak to the viewer, in which I, as creator, am not the one to 'speak'.
- Sculpture is the silence of space. From the noise of common space it constructs a quiet sculptural space in which the visual 'message' comes through valid and emphasised.
- The creation of the (oc)current(ce), the 'infinity bounded in the moment', is what is important.

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