



JANOS KALMAR
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Preface

Art is a perpetual tool to interpret the world as we experience it. It helps us understand our own nature and our place in the world. It has innumerable visual tongues, one being that of sculpture which is most closely tied to and is in need of three-dimensional space, using all its qualities and being revealed in it. This visual artistic language is encountered in two different environments of human cultures: in nature and in man's own built urban setting. As these two domains cannot be separated from one another on account of their interpenetration in their practical and theoretical effects, too, both are usually treated as inhabited areas.

In this dissertation I am not addressing the stylistic questions of sculptural form or the topical issues raised by sculptural events. My concern is the role and significance of the art work including specifically the sculpture, the relationship between man living in built and natural spaces and sculpture, the everyday role it plays.

My aim is not to find conclusive answers to the raised questions. It is after all impossible. What I feel compelled to do is sorting, grouping them and arranging my unanswered questions relating to them, which have accompanied me since I started making sculptures in childhood. The range of topics awaiting elaboration is too wide, so I had to start with some selection. I picked the themes that are inevitable, partly because they are ignored and partly because I think they have a moral message.

I decided to write the dissertation also because I have encountered a hiatus in the synthesis of what has repeatedly been raised in discussions with fellow artists or people in close connection with art, particularly sculpture. Some themes will only be touched upon tangentially, but I do not want to omit them for the significance of their interrelations.

I must admit that this paper is also meant to be a confession, a pronouncement of my faith in art, with the overt aim to breach the silence and speak about related themes I found rare or missing in statements, publications, interviews with sculptors.

Screening the questions arising during my work and in conversation with colleagues I realized this paper would also be a document of my age, and thrashing them out would be the only way for me to make further progress. It may help the creation of new sculptures and hopefully will be a source of future discussions. Besides, I hope it will offer viewpoints worth considering by those who are resolved to devote their lives to art, particularly to sculpture.

I owe my gratitude to my friends and colleagues for their opinions and advice, and I dedicate this paper to them in part and to the collectors who are guided by the message and love of art. Not least I also dedicate this dissertation to art connoisseurs and lovers who are seriously concerned about the presence of art in their lives.

Man and Sculpture

On the interplay and motivation of creation and the shaping of space

Searching for the deepest motivations governing our lives, we have to try and understand our personal predilections and intentions rather than their physical manifestations in the first place. One of the instinctive and fundamental characteristics of human nature is the drive to record our experience, accumulated knowledge and beliefs in a lasting manner and share them with others. The need to perpetuate our view of experienced reality is inherent in the shaping of our environment and the creation of art objects, both carrying our personal imprints. When we arrange the space around our everyday life, it characterizes and interprets our personality and our value system through its individual traits. The art works we create or choose to surround us characterize us in the same way. Without a conscious decision, the works that we feel attracted to are such that are characteristic of our personalities.

The spaces created consciously or unconsciously, and the works created or placed in them fulfill their roles and affect our lives through their individual traits. “The point is that the manifestation of the ‘who’ comes to pass in the same manner as the notoriously unreliable manifestations of ancient oracles, which, according to Heraclitus, ‘neither reveal, nor hide in words, but give manifest signs’.”¹ Among visual arts, especially in painting and sculpture, space has a peculiar and personal function multiply interlaced with the work of art. Space becomes part of the art work, an instrument of the idiom of art, in addition to its everyday functions. Or, to put it in another way, it is transfigured in this capacity, representing a different value system and reality.

In painting, the role of space is more complex, divided into real and painted space. As the presence of the art work changes the role and connotations of real space, its relation to our everyday spaces also changes. From among the works addressed to this duality of space, let me mention Velázquez’s painting, *Las Meninas*. Analyses of this painting have raised questions of reality and appearance, resemblance and identity – the definition of the value order of our life that is, which was also discussed by Michel Foucault in his book *The Order of Things*.² Let me cite some relevant sentences from its Introduction that may have explanatory force as well: “a system of elements – a definition of the segments by which the resemblances and differences can be shown, the types of variation by which those segments can be affected, and, lastly, the threshold above which there is a difference and below which

¹ <http://www.mediafire.com/?zozoghjyzme> (Hannah Arendt, *The Human Condition*, The University of Chicago Press, 1998,) p.182.

² http://serendip.brynmawr.edu/sci_cult/evolit/s05/prefaceOrderFoucault.pdf (Michel Foucault, *The Order of Things*. Vintage Books, New York). p. xx.

there is a similitude – is indispensable for the establishment of even the simplest order. (...) The fundamental codes of a culture – those governing its language, its schemas of perception, its exchanges, its techniques, its values, the hierarchy of its practices – establish for every man, from the very first, the empirical orders with which he will be dealing and within which he will be at home.”³ Through the artistic shaping of space, creation allows for the fragile manifestation of the system of codes of human culture as defined by Foucault, as well as its value order redefined from age to age.

Going over from the space of painting to sculpture, it is immediately obvious that the interplay of sculpture and space is less indirect, its visual language is different, the physical nature of form and space have more features in common, and this is also one reason why a sculpture is so helplessly exposed in space. The tools mankind created over the millennia in accord with the laws of nature to shape its environment also determined the tools with which sculptures have been created. These technical endowments and their changes largely determined the way how artists could convey their credo, artistic ideas and convictions for thousands of years. Let me refer to Rudolf Wittkower’s book *Sculpture* in which he takes a detailed look at the issue from the beginnings of the Egyptian and Babylonian civilizations to the 1960s.⁴ Amidst the ever changing physical circumstances and the resultant possibilities, in this specific and incessantly transforming interaction and interdependence of space and creative intention have the sculptures that greatly determined our traditions been produced. This interrelation has always resulted in individual, personal, unique and irreplaceable artistic solutions that came to be embedded in our past by virtue of the causes and circumstances of their engenderment. Wittkower discusses various creative processes determined by the use of different instruments, e.g. the early block-like, compact works produced by chipping rather than carving with the bronze chisel, and the comparatively more advanced sculptures carved with the point and toothed chisels. He also mentions Michelangelo, whose tool use enabled him to access the inner spaces of the sculpture and hence to create more differentiated sculptural solutions. The different devices influenced not only the delimitation of the expression of artistic content in the sculpture, the space of its physical presence, its surroundings, but also the views of the creator and those living close to the sculpture. Whether these works of old are topical today having long shed their original functions, whether they go on influencing our lives, or simply exist as valuable investments is independent of their contents. Thus, irrespective of their age Etruscan sarcophagi, Egyptian wooden statuettes or Henry Moore’s reclining figures may reveal to us contemporary connotations that constitute part of our world view and that imply the potentialities of several common and new interpretations depending on our vantage point.

Space, which is inseparable from sculpture by the latter’s nature and character, becomes a contributory and coefficient part of a sculptural work, just as it is also a fundamental

³ Ibid. p. xx.

⁴ Rudolf Wittkower, *Sculpture*. Harper & Row 1977.

component of our lives. Not only the art works, but also we cannot exist without suitable and appropriate spaces, or else the creative process loses its impetus and often its function. In practical terms it means that unless the shaping of our immediate, personal and communal spaces provides us with a livable setting, we are reduced to make-shift solutions under adversary conditions. Situations like that lead to malfunctioning everyday spaces, mistakenly chosen sites for sculptures, false tracks. Or, to be more precise, they lead nowhere in the long run.

As mentioned above, one of the fundamental and instinctive motivations of human nature is to share our psychic values with others. An essential concomitant of this motivation is the creation of space. As much reference will be made to it later, let me make clear at this early point that space is perceived and interpreted through its continuously changing, altering forms. It is in this incessantly changing web of relations that the different space experience generated by a work of art and its creator is to be had. A more profound examination of this might easily lead us over to the domain of art psychology and sociology. Here I merely wish to call attention to the dual nature of spatial creation, its personal and communal aspects manifest both in the process of creation and in the ready work of art.

The process of creation itself is an interminable dialogue with one's self on the one hand, and the ambition to communicate a part of this content towards the person, persons or collective to whom we profess to belong. The specificities of the content must be found in the nature of the artistic content and its sensuously perceptible response-eliciting traits. In the course of this process the legitimacy of the personal content is substantiated in the work of art through the personal causes and value order of the creator. This is also the process in which the sculpture takes shape physically. The most public aspect of the sculpture that becomes perceptible for others through its visual qualities evolves in this process. This story often does not end within a single work but may accompany a whole oeuvre, however many periods it may be divided into.

From this it follows that both the work of art and the space that belongs to it are seemingly results of physical processes, but actually all this is the physical embodiment of several inner, personal, mental processes. I think a sculpture – “the - *form* set in space with its mode of existence and effects”⁵ acquires its significance in our life from the human contents and our relations articulated by it. This is how the work of art takes up a position that resolves a seemingly antagonistic situation: through visual experience it can manifest invisible spiritual contents of which we are the protagonists.

We endow the space shaped to our likeness with the characteristic traits of our personality so that we can exercise our faith in it and find a place for our personal mythology. A sculpture erected in a private space lends emphasis to our needs and psychic processes in our everyday physical spaces. A work of art creates a sacral space in our life arranged by our

⁵ Tibor Wehner, *Morph*. Catalogue, Aulich Trade Kft. 2008. p.8.

personal habits, a shrine to our personal faith and an asylum. It also holds true the other way round: a sculpture can only play a role and assume a place in an individual living space where it attains its meaning and function with its message and contents readable for others through the personal causes and liturgy of its creation.

We have created categories to classify art works, but the language of art never adapts to the rules. Compared to the consensual definition of a sculpture there are border cases and the boundaries we have created can easily be transgressed. *It issues from the inseparableness of sculpture and space that every new solution is unique and irreplaceable.* I am going to take a closer look at how sculpture shapes and influences the working of space in a later chapter. Let me cite here a unique and rare solution from another area of space creation which considerably overlaps with sculpture: architecture. An especially beautiful solution of shaping space like a sculpture is Peter Zumthor's Brother Klaus chapel in Wachendorf commissioned by a farming couple, the Scheidtweilers and dedicated to Saint Niklaus of Flüe. I perceive the interior created from tree trunks as an anthropomorphic space, as the body of a negative sculpture. This space, in which the tininess of the human presence suggests an anthropomorphic infinite, appears to prove the idea that the only place for man is in a world shaped on a human scale.

To be honest, I have a penchant for border cases, for they demonstrate that the creative intention is more compelling than the use of the safely comprehensible language of time-tested schemes and customary rules. Let me therefore mention another example of border cases to conclude this chapter. The memorial to 6 million Jews of Europe murdered in the Shoah was opened in Berlin on 10 May 2005. It was designed by New York architect Peter Eisenman, who had won the competition in 1999. The site is a former block of about two hectares in the heart of Berlin, which used to be part of the "death zone" next to the centre of the Nazi empire and the Berlin Wall. A public park was designed with 2711 geometrically arranged concrete steles. The ground-plan of each stele is 2.38 x 0.95 m, the height ranging from 0.2 to 4.7 m, all erected on a surface hollowed towards the middle and paved with granite cobble-stones. Peter Eisenman thought the place could be used as a playground for children and picnicking place for families. He did not foresee that the proportions of the steles and the undulation of the complex over two hectares had such a spatial impact which, compounded with the dedication, would make it impossible for anyone to find peace of mind and relaxation there. There are better suited places for picnic and recreation in the vicinity. That means that he has done an excellent job in view of the function of a memorial site.

On the motives of a sculpture's presence

As the contradictoriness of this world is manifest in any element of a sight not being quite itself for it is constantly changing and transforming into something else, I tend to locate the causes and explanation in the process of interpretation and understanding offered by art, and the possession of the resulting knowledge gives meaning and a goal to my life. Art is therefore not merely a kind of outlook but it must be the comprehension of life. "Man can't shrink to a smaller size than he is, he can't get out of his skin: he creates what he is, and art is truth, a true confession of the artist."⁶

For me, a sculpture is human presence, a human figure. It means proportions in the formal order, measure in its changes, ethics in its happenings. It embodies a human sign that transforms its neutral surroundings into a sacral space. Béla Bacsó touches on the nature of the sculpture in his brief essay on the Morph group⁷: "When creating a sculpture, the artist does not re-present anything but *presents something as something*, which also implies the main danger in sculpture: a work exposes itself to attempts to find some equivalences in it with reality which it does not lay claim to by intent. In *Plastik*⁸ (1768-70) Herder warned that concerning a sculpture, it is not the sense of seeing or its experience of form and space that is important: *corporeal truth (leibhafte Wahrheit) is not attained via seeing, for a sculpture is apparent and tangible truth (dargestellte, tastbare Wahrheit)*. This *corporeal truth* is sought by any sculpture, and this truth is *always more than a sheer figure - whether human or otherwise* - shaped in any way."

Concerning the physical, corporeal presence of the sculpture and the identity of the space it creates, I should like to quote again from Béla Bacsó's study: „In his still remarkable book August Schmarsow⁹ stated that the space of an appearing sculpture is *not merely a space-concept (Raumvorstellung)* but also a *body-concept (Körpervorstellung)* and *their materialization brings about the body as well as the visualized space which he calls aesthetic space*. He makes it unambiguously clear that a sculpture is not part of *ordinary space*; what is more, being a creation, a sculpture excludes the customary relations of space, and while being created, it also creates the aesthetic space around itself. The work stands in the aesthetic space which it creates. Using Schmarsow's fine simile, this space covers the accomplished work like a *glass bell (Glasglocke)*."

⁶ Thomas Mann, *Richard Wagner szenvedése és nagysága* [The Sufferings and Greatness of Richard Wagner], Európa 1983, pp.81-82.

⁷ Béla Bacsó, "The Symptomatic Sculpture". In *Morph*, catalogue, Budapest Galéria 2008, pp.2-3.

⁸ "Raum, Winkel, Form, Rundung lerne ich als solche in leibhafter Wahrheit nicht durchs *Gesicht* erkennen: geschweige das Wesen dieser Kunt, *schöne* Form, *schöne* Bildung, die nicht Farbe, nicht Spiel der Proportion, der Symmetrie, des Lichtes und Schattens, sondern *dargestellte, tastbare Wahrheit* is." Herder - Plastik in: *Klassik und Klassizismus*. Eds. H. Pfotenhauser et al., Deutsche Klassiker Verlag 1995, p.21.

⁹ Cf. A. Schmarsow - *Plastik, Malerei und Reliefkunst in ihrem gegenseitigen Verhältnis*. Verlag von S. Hirzel, 1899, p.76 ("Der allgemeine Raum wird von der Behandlung der Skulptur ausgeschlossen.")

The first step an art work takes towards abstraction is disclaiming identity with reality, with the reservation that the process of abstraction should not mean the simplification of experienced reality. About these risks and traps as well as the analyses implied by the process of abstraction, Béla Bacsó writes the following: „Writings about sculpture as a branch of art also warn of its danger, the danger of *abstract* representation. The *aspiration after abstraction* would lift, or rescue as it were, the conception of artistic approach from *the flow of phenomena* and redeem it from the *torment of relativity*, guiding the work to a resting point, as Worringer noted in his book.¹⁰ I don't see any antagonism between the relative position and subjectivity of art and the process of abstraction, as the relative position refers to a changing viewpoint and not to the rightness or wrongness of the content, or, to put it in another way, the correctness of content can be judged from different viewpoints. The assertion of an identical content from a variety of viewpoints verifies the working of the sculpture and its space from all points of view. What Rudolf Wittkover defines as a decisive turn in modern 20th century sculpture in his eminent history of sculpture apropos a Gabo utterance is the recognition that space becomes '*a new and absolutely sculptural element*¹¹', which has modified the artistic notion of space in its essence. Space no longer simply frames, encloses the mass, but pierces the material, cracks a void in it and eventually exposes that which cannot be fixed in form to infinite space changing amidst relations.”¹²

Since then, lots of examples of the use of space and sculpture as a common language have come to life. Let me just mention Calder, Gabo, Miró, Hepworth or Henry Moore's pierced, subdivided reclining figures, the classic examples of the joint handling of space and form. Such consistent thought and creative work remind me of a sentence by Albert Einstein: „You ask me if I keep a notebook to record my great ideas. I've only ever had one.” This logically incomprehensible consistency has appealed to me in Bach's music, Giacometti, Miró, Moore, the Carnac monoliths, the Easter Island statues and several other places since my childhood. These works embody the motif of human content repeated like in a fugue.

I am aware that human nature is imperfect and hence I create imperfect sculptures, so I start again and again, because imperfection is no excuse. In my studio I keep copies of works that are important for me. It is instructive to see that the efforts to reformulate the same thing over the years always produce something different.

I experience the same when I first construct a sculpture on a small scale, without exploring all details, and after few variations I rebuild it in ever larger sizes. I find that the enlargement of the variant I have deemed best is not a larger variation but a new variant, a new spatial order. Apart from the above aspects, I have also realized that the proportions and vantage points of larger sculptures also change and the so-far invisible details having assumed visible

¹⁰ Cf. W. Worringer, *Abstraktion und Einfühlung*. Kiepenhauer Verlag, 1981, p.87.

¹¹ Cf. R. Wittkower, op.cit., p.274.

¹² Bacsó, op.cit., p.2.

dimensions also contribute to the composition, demanding a role in the space of the sculpture. I have also learnt that all human content, including a sculpture, has the space its existence requires and the size that its content demands, which have to be realized before it can be judged completed. "There are thousands of ways to express an idea, but if you do not find the ideal compression between a form and an idea, you have nothing."¹³ That is the most delicate issue because it depends on the sculpture's size, space, surroundings and site whether it is in the right place in accord with its nature and whether the connection between sculpture and its environment is established. "A sculpture is not part of *ordinary space*; what is more, being a creation a sculpture excludes the customary relations of space, and while being created, it also creates its own space around itself, which is aesthetic space."¹⁴

In moral terms, making a sculpture is not creation, since we receive at birth everything for our lives and for the building of our material environment. This situation is only sufficient for contemplation and learning. To understand the physical events of my life, I need to address myself primarily to their psychological causes and not to their consequences, and therefore a sculpture is – for me – the outcome of mental rather than physical processes. I am searching for the physical symbols of these mental states in my sculptures that may be able to convey them. The sculptures are always about man, irrespective of the approach or the degree of abstraction.

The physical presence of the sculpture is misleading because it is only the vehicle. It conjures up what is invisible. What it elicits, what life is about, remains hidden, just like Richard Serra's empty yet taut spaces or Giacometti's almost incorporeal sculptures that acquire their fragile existence from space. The sculpture is the outcome and imprint of my understanding of my life and it speaks about the world I live in. That is how this interpretation becomes interpretation of the human being as well. These are inseparable facets of my life. This incessant cycle keeps my days going. These days, in turn, make it possible that my sculptures be created.

Consequently, the sculpture that is born from my hands embodies the reality as I experience it in the space I experience, while its aesthetic quality lies in being an object that can be seen and touched in its own space referring to this reality. When I succeed, my "sculptures are not bodies put into space but flashes of blades touching, slightly wounding space."¹⁵ Since, I think, things are always more realistic than their explanations, my sculpture must reveal the essence. A seated man "is the representation not of a sitting figure but of sitting itself; the monument of a state of sitting."¹⁶ Its aesthetic is not the explanation, but it must be the aesthetic of life as I experience it, of my reality so that it might become part of my life. I am

¹³ <http://www.scribd.com/doc/32006243/Baudrillard-The-Conspiracy-of-Art>, p.35.

¹⁴ Bacsó, op.cit., p.2.

¹⁵ Wehner, op.cit. p.9.

¹⁶ Ibid.

convinced that through a sculpture the understanding of our identity, our situation, our role is the heuristic moment that lifts us above and beyond our everyday situation and role.

The presence of the sculpture is more, and more complex, than its mere sight. The sculpture is “a corporeal projection of a new quality.”¹⁷ The process of cognition, sensation and comprehension does not only take place in three dimensions, and it is not exclusively dependent on shifting place. It is therefore insufficient, and often unnecessary, for interpretation to try and represent the content by physically or virtually shifting the view of the three-dimensional mass of the sculpture. That would be mistaking the content for the vehicle that carries it. An art work loses its content and role when it is seen as a material tool or object; Barbara Hepworth’s sculpture by the UN headquarters in New York would only be a pierced stone if we took it for an object only. The reality concealed behind the sight is there without our believing it, it is infinite and diverse. The absence of its realization would be the dead-end street of art. By the same token, I must understand as a human being what I have faith in so that I could present it in my sculptures.

¹⁷ Ibid.

On the motives of space formation

In human cultures living closer to, in greater harmony with and dependence on Nature, but also in some more urbanized modes of living, several exemplary solutions have been realized with artistic implications in the creation of space required for man's existence over the millennia. I have in mind the temples, buildings and caves carved out of the mountain in Ellora and the similar Udaigiri caves in India, the puritanical, lucid interior spaces of the desert castles in Jordan, the round *tukul* huts standing on poles in Ethiopia. These spaces convey religious, aesthetic and philosophical contents both in communal and in private life. The basic inducements and motivations for creating or shaping space derive from the personal and collective reasons for shaping the environment. I think every single person is guided in his acts by cognition, by the drive to find the goals of his life and their meanings, to understand and realize them. This is a process in time, and in our past called history this drive has produced innumerable manifestations both in theory and in perceptible space.

Every time I plan to make a new sculpture, the question of creating space and existing in space, the interplay between our inner world and the space we experience arises. It is like starting everything from scrap. As if I had to start the sentence again and again, as if I didn't know anything of the world except the experience of the very thing I am going to articulate.

About this process, the process of cognition, the relations of art, space and time, Ernst Cassirer writes the following in his lecture entitled *Mythic, Aesthetic and Theoretical Space*: "The 'form' of space changes depending on its design being mythic, aesthetic or theoretical, and these changes affect the whole and its theoretical structure, and not only certain subordinated features." "Space does not possess a single wholeness, a structure that is done and complete for all times; it assumes this structure in the course of the general spiritual context in which it is being constructed. The spiritual function is the primary and decisive momentum, the space structure is secondary and dependent." "The process of their formation was motivated by cognition and faith, by the need to set limits to the unlimited, to define the undefined. That allows for the transition from coming into being to existing, from the hoard of phenomena to the realm of pure form. The function of the artistic approach and representation is also governed and thoroughly imbued by this fundamental force. It indeed closely complies with the basic principle of life: it produces unique formations into which creative imagination – from which these formations arise – breathes the whiff of life and presents us with the immediacy and freshness of life."¹⁸

The designation, demarcation, subdivision and possession of unknown space display the visual, spatial signs of the process of cognition crammed by art historians into the outworn conceptual systems of "sculpture" and "architecture". In the natural process of defining the

¹⁸ Ernst Cassirer, "Mítikus, esztétikai és teoretikus tér" [Mythic, aesthetic and theoretical space], in *Vulgo* 2000/1-2.

undefined, one of the self-evident oppositions in traditional societies is between the already inhabited territory and the unknown and indeterminate space surrounding it. In the private life, as Eliade writes, “a religious man’s abode was, for him, the micro-cosmic mirror image of the universe.”¹⁹ “The ritual construction of space is emphasized by a threefold symbolism: the four doors, the four windows, the four colours signify the four cardinal points.”²⁰ Man’s that-time attitude to the world is described by Eliade as follows: “In the earliest times, probably all man’s organs and psychological processes, as well as all his acts had religious connotations.” “The ideal man was striving to achieve was situated at a superhuman plane.”²¹ The “ritual construction” of “indeterminate space” can be traced back in time several millennia, and although it does not belong to the generally accepted Hellenistic world view, it offers a possibility of more profound interpretations, in my opinion. The formal idiom of the so-called primitive art with its more direct representation of fears and beliefs means a lot to me, such as the over 800-year-old Moai statues on Easter Island or the five-millennia old Cycladic figurines of goddesses.

In the book edited by Anni Philippon²² analyses and photos can be found of over 5000-year-old menhirs and pre-Hellenic praying statues, some palm-size, some over a meter tall found in France and kept in the Fenaille museum. Their central and common characteristic is that they were created for the worship of a peculiar and superior being.

Jean-Pierre Mohen discusses the manners and meanings of the marking of natural space in his book on monoliths and megaliths. He expounds the Carnac temple complex, the world’s largest sacral space designated upon complicated geodetic and astronomical calculations. It comprises 134 carved granite columns each 22 m in height and 3.5 m in diameter. “It is not so difficult to analyze the erected pieces: they are either independent or set in a straight line or a circle. The Carnac complex consists of a variety of arrangements.”²³ The simplest way of designating space with megaliths is to mark out a rectangular area with small stones, just as we did with pebbles on the vacant lot or drew the lines with a twig for our games. Mohen’s book also touches on the healing and fertility-ensuring power ascribed to the stones. An example might be La Tremblais, a phallic menhir in Saint-Samson-sur-Rance. Researchers suggest that these obelisks were erected in Neolithic Europe and Egypt some 6000 years ago. The planes of the Egyptian obelisks meet in edges, the European ones were rounded and the original shape of the boulder was also taken into account, presumably for ideological reasons, too. The space layout and demarcation make it presumable that these enormous menhirs played both sacral and astronomical roles, as they also had a role in delimiting an area. Sometimes the connection with the realms beyond “is expressed with a world column that supports the sky, connecting heaven and earth, with its base being fixed

¹⁹ Mircea Eliade, *A szent és a profán* [The Sacred and the Profane], Európa Könyvkiadó 1987, p.21.

²⁰ Eliade, op.cit., pp.38-41.

²¹ Eliade, op.cit., p.177.

²² Anni Philippon (ed.), *Statues – Menhirs*. Éditions du Rouergue 2002.

²³ Jean-Pierre Mohen, *Les Mégalithes. Pierres de mémoire*, Gallimard 1998.

in the world below (infernal regions).”²⁴ An example is the Dol de Breton, the largest erected stone in France, which does not only signify the border of Normandy but also marks the spot where Saint Michael fought with the devil, as the Gospel says. In the 11th century a church was built next to it in what is a fine example of man creating his own sacral space in every age. In his book *The Sacred and the Profane*, Mircea Eliade discusses the nature of creating sacred spaces and their symbolic systems. On the common features of the church, mound and vertical signs he notes: “The work of the gods, the universe, is repeated and imitated by men on their own scale. The axis mundi, seen in the sky in the form of the Milky Way, appears in the ceremonial house in the form of a sacred pole.” “The same identification is between the cosmic pillar and the sacred pole, the ceremonial house and the universe.”²⁵ There are obelisks in London, Paris, New York and the Vatican, but the most astonishing example of the axis mundi is in Heliopolis in Egypt where the obelisk erected in around 2400 BC as the centre of the sun worship was set on the foundation stones of a temple dating from around 5100 BC. The greatest pyramids of Egypt – Giza, Saqqara and Abusir – are all along tangents starting from this obelisk.

The designation of the environment and the shaping of diverse spaces in our everyday life can be demonstrated spectacularly in the home culture of people in different cultures. Besides climatic conditions, the different space use is caused by varying space needs in different parts of the world, so they divide the area available to them differently. Let me mention Gaudí’s Casa Milà, Casa Batlló, Güell palace and park and the unfinished “ceremonial house”, the Sagrada Familia church in Barcelona, which he began to build in 1884, at the age of 34. Or we can mention Le Corbusier’s characteristically different chapel in Ronchamp, a small out-of-the-way place in east France, which has grown into a place of pilgrimage.

The view of life of the ever fewer cultures in closest proximity to nature is more cosmically comprehensive, and leads to artistic solutions from a viewpoint that embraces life more extensively and intensively. The cohering force of faith has always played a great role. At this point I should like to emphasize the adherence to the human order of values as an aspect of faith, which explains why faith has been able to create artistic works. It is “based on the simple fact that the existence of space and time is not identical with ‘the existence of things’ but differs from it specifically.”²⁶

Cultures changing with the passing of the time, succeeding one another or living side by side, are only connected by their consequences. That was so in our past turned into tradition, and that is how we should address ourselves to any inquiry into the past. Art history is therefore no history in its chronological order, for in art it is not time that is the governing principle. The works of long past ages must not be seen from that angle; first they must be viewed in their own right, before their network of relations are studied.

²⁴ Eliade, op.cit. p.31.

²⁵ Eliade, op.cit., p.30.

²⁶ Cassirer, op.cit.

On the relationship between sculpture and space

Our communal spaces, just like personal spaces, are consequences of our human presence and characterize our community (just as our personality). The forming and building of space necessary for our life is an incessant personal process reflecting our everyday life. The sculpture adapts itself to this private or communal space through its visual traits, its physical qualities that communicate its character. The consonance of these circumstances is the fundamental condition for the presence of the sculpture. The everyday functions of the aesthetic space of a sculpture are determined by its personal causes and purposes as well as its collective implications, or, to quote Cassirer, the formation of the structure of this space is carried out through the general net of intellectual relations which determined its emergence.

It generally holds true of the relationship between man and space that it is the basis for any human activity, and personal spaces are endowed with individual roles. The creation of a sculpture also depends on this process, only the space it results in is of another quality in being aesthetic and becoming part of the sculpture's body – it is appropriately called by August Schmarsow body-concept. Thus, although there is qualitative difference between spaces with ordinary and with artistic functions, they are interdependent in our everyday life. It can be concluded then that we speak of man-made space whenever its emergence has a human cause, or, in other words, when it is the outcome of human activity and it cannot be separated from the nature of this activity. The label aesthetic for the space of a sculpture is to signify its different nature and function beyond everyday practice from that of everyday space. The cause and source of this space is the sculpture and its human content always implies some moral content whereby the sculpture becomes artistically meaningful.

Since the interdependence of man and space means not only the mutual determination, but also the mutual characterization of one another, this applies to the sculpture and its space as well. Some colleagues of mine also tend to call this the *aura* of the sculpture. When in a public or private space a sculpture enters into interaction with its environment, it characterizes, qualifies this space. That is how a sculpture "speaks to us" through its visual tools and perceptible spatial language. It exists in the same space, its contents are about the same space in which we live and in which it constitutes a comprehensible artistic sign for others as well. This unique sign conjures up the artistic content that interprets man in his relationship to the world in which he lives.

Walter Benjamin wrote about the presence of the sculpture, its similarity to the aura, the unique and permanently changing appearance of its singularity in *The Work of Art in the Age of Mechanical Reproduction*. In Benjamin's definition, the aura is "the unique phenomenon

of a distance, however close it may be.”²⁷ This is Schmarsow’s glass-bell distance in which the sculpture is present, in which it is set in space, giving it a new meaning. “It is a significant fact that the connection of the presence of a work of art with its aura can never be torn completely,” Benjamin continues. In practice it is inseparable. The uniqueness and unity of an art work appears within and with this space. The sculpture speaks about the space, age and tradition in which it was born and from which it is *inseparable*. In this environment does it appear together with its created space, its aura.

No sculpture is intelligible physically by itself. As it only exists with its environment, a sculpture brings about a distinct new, unique, unrepeatable situation in each case. The placement of a sculpture changes according to its views and the given circumstances, for a setting may accept the sculpture into which it can accommodate itself or it may reject the sculpture because the two are about two very different things, or one of them has nothing to offer. The overriding principle is that incongruence or congruence always primarily depends on the nature of the sculpture, since the *genesis of a sculpture always depends on an adequate space and hence it can only fulfill its role in a similar environment*. To exemplify palpably the spatial views of a sculpture and the hidden intentions that may be implied by a just acquired sculpture taken home, let me cite Rodin’s friend Camille Mauclair (from Wittkower’s book²⁸) who wrote about Rodin’s working method. “The study of movement has led him to five unlooked-for values to the general outline and to produce works which may be viewed on all sides and which continually show a fresh and balanced aspect that explains the other aspects.” Mauclair quotes Rodin as saying: “To work by the profiles, in depth not by the surfaces, always thinking of the few geometrical forms from which all nature proceeds, and to make these eternal forms perceptible in the individual case of the object studied, that is my criterion.” This is the unity of Walter Benjamin’s aura concept handled at a distance.

A basic characteristic of both the sculpture and its surrounding space is individuality, as it is the basic condition for the conveyance of artistic content in the relationship of the two. In an optimal case a well-positioned sculpture in a given space determines a space around it with unique and individual features through which it is associated with its environment. Whenever it can, it designates the required space by its physical presence and function. It makes this space livable for us as it endows this environment with its individual features. What we have here is the natural process of defining the indeterminate as described by Mircea Eliade who speaks about a self-evident opposition between the lived, used, designated territory and the unknown, indeterminate space surrounding it in both the built and the natural settings.

This correlation of the interdependence of man and space holds true the other way round as well. Since owing to their nature and function man-shaped private and collective spaces

²⁷ <http://www.marxists.org/reference/subject/philosophy/works/ge/benjamin.htm>

²⁸ Wittkower, op.cit., pp. 234 and 240.

have their individual traits, they designate and qualify the spots in space that are rich in personal and communal implications where a sculpture might be incorporated provided that its contents and formal solutions have resonances to the given site. This is the state of mutual dependence on the basis of which sculptures were created with changing tools and under diverse circumstances in different spatial settings over the past millennia, as described so sensitively in his book by Rudolf Wittkower. And this dependency determines by its spatial features whether an artist creates a monument, or small-scale sculpture, or maybe a medal.

On private spaces, on public places

Various ways of living, individual and collective mythologies have created different spaces for our private and communal lives. Naturally, they cannot be separated by sharp lines but are multiply interlaced along our everyday activities. Every personal space has some collective features and roles however much it may be restricted to the private sphere, and conversely, every space with a collective function must have individual features without which it would lose its role. The demarcation, formation and building out of the space we need for living and the role and history of a sculpture created or put into space and only surviving in a space of specific individual profile are interconnected via the two main instruments of space creation: sculpture and architecture. On the basis of their main roles and functions, I have divided spaces into private and public varieties. Their separation is only conceptual, because they always appear in combination.

The smallest space of our life is our private space endowed with our most personal traits. Its smallest component is our body, its smallest unit concerning our movement is our home in which we live our everyday life, exercise our habits and personal rituals. Since we get far more information to be processed than in earlier ages, we can hardly adapt to our environment via our shared beliefs. Added to this is the enormous magnitude of migration, which resulted in representatives of all races and creeds of the world, e.g. among the 11 million inhabitants of Paris, and they all shape their lives differently. The building out of one's living space is a sacral role as "man must create his own world and assume the responsibility of maintaining and renewing it. Habitations are not lightly changed, for it is not easy to abandon one's world. The house is not an object, 'a machine to live in'; it is the universe that man constructs for himself."²⁹

We live in different spaces that we have constructed for ourselves or they were made by others for us. There are other spaces built for everyone. It is up to us to decide if we share our private space with others, and there are acts in a public space that we may not physically perform, or if we do, the result will not be what we expect because the space has been built for other purposes of the community. The concept of public space is indefinite as is the concept of the apple, because its profile is always determined by the taste of the given individuals, the institutions, plans, site features, etc. At any rate, a public space is generally aimed to serve occasionally repeated activities of a group of people of varying size. Both in various buildings and open communal space, and in smaller private spaces different genres of sculpture may play varying roles which can influence the possibilities of shaping the given space and conversely, the space also influences the sculptural solutions for the specific site. Whether the final work of art is a statue, a monumental sculpture or a relief is determined by the size, layout and role of the given space. It must be realized that spaces shaped for a

²⁹ Eliade, op.cit., pp. 51 and 59.

collective are structurally more complex and to my mind, they always play a dual role. The foundation and goal is always man with his individuality. Public spaces are actually spaces with the basic features of personal spaces endowed with communal roles. Though public spaces are primarily for some collective purpose, the possible attraction in them is also another person – that is why I say they are based on personal space. The layout of private spaces with the potential of both intimacy and opening towards other spatial connections is combined here with collective functions. These personal features make a public space intimate, or otherwise the space is just a functionally poor, untrimmed lot. A well-designed public space implies the point of orientation by which the person passing or stopping there can adapt to the roles of the public space. The significant role of such spaces may be interpreted through a common spatial experience the protagonist of which is, for instance, a sculpture. It may upgrade the value of the given space, endowing it with artistic contents and a higher-quality experience of space.

Another important aspect of the common space is associated with time, with past, present and future, in which the sculpture as a sign plays the central role. Accordingly, there are public spaces in which we exercise the gesture of commemoration; other spaces are about the present: the spaces shaped by contemporary sculptures must satisfy the physical and mental requirements of the present age, conveying the general contemporary feeling of life.

Other spaces that have great importance for me are those representing the future: the playgrounds. To promote the visual education of the future generations, to help children learn and experience playfully about artistic contents we should provide contemporary sculpture not only in public parks and institutions but also in schools and kindergartens. The possibilities, roles and significance of this idea were illustrated for me in practice by the long and joyful hide-and-seek played by children in a three-part Henry Moore sculpture in Münster, Germany.

This example proves that an art work always addresses the whole of one's self provided that certain conditions and circumstances are given. The existence of a work of art has objective and subjective conditions, just as its creation had. The objective conditions mainly influence the chosen genre of a sculpture. One condition is the potentiality of the strongly determining, surrounding space, while the subjective condition is the human content that is to be conveyed through the chosen vehicle. An insight into the endowments of the environment illumines the decision of the artist as to what sculptural genre to work into: whether to make a palm-size medal, small sculpture, relief or large sculpture. Let me touch here on the problem of categories that can provide some help but in certain cases simplify both decisions and comprehension, for the platitudinous conceptual schemes may direct our decisions in the wrong way. Dictionaries define exactly what a medal, relief, small sculpture, etc. is. These definitions classify the works of plasticity on the basis of their one- or several-dimensional expansion and size. They may have a negative effect if they result in a sculpture as the formal appearance of a lexical definition or conception, instead of the evaluation of

the nature of a situation and task. These categories were possibly suitable to define their subjects at the moment of birth, but today they might be misleading and have to be used with caution. They can never show the way amidst the constantly changing forms of art. This raises again the notion of border cases so frequently used today, which also calls for the reconsideration of genre definitions. I am attracted to these solutions in sculpture, as I try to give first priority to the task itself and not try to find the solutions that would fit into the given conceptual frames.

As far as I know, little attention has been devoted to the influence of circumstances in sculpture. One reason is the public ignorance about the role of contemporary sculpture and the misuse of the sculptures themselves; secondly, these circumstances have great significance for only the sculptor. It is a fact, however, that there is inseparable interdependence between various private and public spaces and the genres of sculpture, which mutually determine each other.

The different sculptural genres – medal, relief, small sculpture, monumental sculpture – provide different accesses for the viewers with their diverse uses of space, and these accesses are coupled with different social customs in the different spaces. A small-scale work, a medal, is easy to get intimate with, as it can be held in hand, taken anywhere with oneself, thus its intimateness is unique. I think that is the first and foremost quality why so many people insist on it. The spaces of large sculptures must be shared – physically at least – with others, and that also has an impact on the viewer. Everyone must have some things that he does not share with anyone else.

The border of our smallest space is our skin. The smaller an object, the closer it can come to our body, and if it can be worn continuously, the relationship is the more intimate. Such a small art object can convey intimate contents that a public sculpture of several meters will never be able to. If you compare the realization of a theme in a plaque and in a sculpture in the round, the different uses of space will be obvious. One has much more to do when viewing a sculpture in the round, since the experience of space is built up of more components, be the venue a home or a public space. When the place of a sculpture has been decided upon, one is reluctant to change it in a home, and even in a public space. To find the location for a sculpture in a private space one has to consider the habits of the residents, all the functions of the home before the spot is found where the sculpture can offer what is expected of it. The intention is to find a permanent place for the sculpture, and whenever one wishes to see it, one has to go up to it and circumambulate it, as is demanded by the nature of a sculpture.

Different is the case with a medal or small sculpture that fits the palm. If you insist on it, you can take it with you where you stay long: a home or an office. The role of space is also different: when you want to view it, you needn't move but turn the object round. Besides, the medal has its own inner three-dimensional space which differs by the nature of its

illusory space created by its forms from the space you are and move in physically. The space of such small art works is similar functionally to the space in which we read a book and which tears us from the space and reality in which we are present and move physically.

Adherence to such small-scale works of art displays a peculiar facet of human nature. In general we insist on the visual appearance of our emotions and impressions. The more we believe in something, the more stubbornly we stick to its image: that is why we like to possess the object that symbolizes it. The physical manifestation verifies the reality of our thoughts and feeling and confirms us in our belief. We take it for certainty, for we are credulous. A small relief, bas relief or a medal may be the carrier of the intimate image of our personal world, which may be similar to – but never identical with – that of others. Like an amulet. Anyway, every belief has personal characteristics, and if you have faith in it or fear of it – the two are almost identical concerning attachment – then a small object like a medal can become the symbol or proof of such a realm of beliefs. I noted above that sometimes you must share the space and experience of a sculpture with others, but this never happens with a medal. It is one of human nature's mysteries why one wants to have certain things for oneself alone, and sometimes essentially important things. The possessed object, maybe a tiny work of art, thus symbolizes the view of the world we profess to have. A relief or intaglio is similar to an angular medal or plaque but by virtue of its size the latter can only be read frontally – its plastic virtues are enjoyable at an angle of about 70 degrees, a smaller angle would distort and conceal the details according to the law of perspective – so it is most often placed on the wall. But disconnected with us, on the wall of a room, it loses the specific features of the medal as a genre. The space requirement of its formal order addresses a whole room in its entirety.

A small sculpture interferes with our moving space by its size alone. It can be nearly one meter in size, and if we don't find the right place for it, it is in the way. We may put it on a shelf, but then it remains invisible. It is we who move around the sculpture and only rarely turn it round. Exceptions are the kinetic sculptures which provide infinite variations and interpretations with their permanently new views and the involvement of time as a compositional element – take, for example, Schöffer's works from the beginnings, or the playful, differently kinetic and manually interactive art works by Tinguely or Haraszty. Of course, a traditional sculpture also has many views, so with the changes of objective and subjective circumstances, it always offers a new profile from among which we can choose the one we want to see when the decision of placement is ours. Unless it is locked off in a corner where only one person can view it at a time, the experience of it is shared regularly with others, so small sculpture also has a communal quality. When size keeps increasing, even larger family residences may prove too small and the plastic values of the sculpture may demand spaces that only a public area can provide. I find it most regrettable that in a

space “accessible freely by anyone”³⁰ – i.e. in a public space – “it is never, or seldom even raised as an idea to set up a sculpture free from political contents”³¹ in our country. It is also regrettable that “new legislation does not differentiate between art works, sculptures in public places and public compositions serving political-ideological-propagandistic purposes.”³² The public sculpture exhibition in Erzsébet tér realized in 2004 upon the initiative of the Hungarian Sculptors’ Society, in the organization of which I also participated, was a rare event. For a few years the heart of Budapest became a sculpture park, setting a first-rate example on the joint shaping of sculpture and environment. Had it been granted some support, it could have remained a paragon. Let me also mention that in 2005, 2006 and 2007 the Sculptors’ Society staged conferences in the Palace of Art/Kunsthalle on the interaction of sculpture and public place beyond the consequences of the Erzsébet tér showing. There is ample and informative material published by the Palace of Art on the topic in the mentioned years.

I thought these aspects and differences were important to mention because an *autonomous artistic content* – despite the above-discussed public space problems – *has a place in every space* and has a specific form of appearance, size, space and derivative role every single time and these will always be different from all other solutions.

³⁰ Brigitta Iványi, “Megjegyzések a szobrászat lehetőségeiről” [Comments on the possibilities of sculpture], in József Készman – Edina Nagy (eds.), *A hagyomány ösvényein túl* [Beyond the path of tradition], Műcsarnok 2007, p.77.

³¹ Mária Lugossy, “Körkérdés / 1956 – Autonóm szobrászat a politikai térben” [All-round inquiry / 1956 – Autonomous sculpture in the political space], in *A hagyomány ösvényein túl* op.cit. p. 7.

³² Tibor Wehner, “Emlékművek kora” [The age of memorials], in *A hagyomány ösvényein túl* op.cit. p.38.

On the nature and spaces of the sculpture

The common concept of sculpture is often defective regarding its meaning, role and function. In secondary school education, for example, Hellenic sculpture is the vantage point from which sculpture is evaluated and taught as an artistic mode of expression. This means a wrong assessment of classical Greek sculpture and its significance, and hence its role is damaged. On the webpage [sulinet.hu](http://www.sulinet.hu) the following can be read: "In the continuous cultural historical chain of the East and the Mediterranean, before Greek antiquity sculpture could only rarely free itself from the system of symbolic signs that resulted in a simplification of the represented figures and elicited in the mind of the viewer the concepts of the depicted via cognitive associations generated by the simple stereometric forms. At the beginning of the archaic age the Greeks entered the course along which they came closer step by step to the artistic representation of realistic forms. Bringing details of the cubistically sculpted bodies gradually closer to the real forms was *an incessant struggle with millennia-old traditions.*"³³ The incessant struggle with the millennia-old tradition presumed by the author deems the millennia-old past of the world's sculpture worthless, and gives a sad overview of visual education today. By contrast, this is what Henry Moore said in an interview: "The world has been producing sculpture for at least some thirty thousand years... and the few sculptors of a hundred years or so of Greece no longer blot our eyes to the sculptural achievements of the rest of mankind."³⁴ I perfectly agree, citing by way of an example the lion-headed human figure estimated to be some 32,000 years old or several other statues found during excavations in Hohlenstein Stadel in Germany, or the Venus of Brassempouy carved of a mammoth tusk approximately 25,000 years ago and found near Brassempouy, France.

The recognition of the significance and role of the sculpture as a work of art in our contemporary world and traditions is indispensable. It plays a great role in getting to know and understand ourselves, making our experiences re-livable through its set of three-dimensional tools perceived through sight and touch. What is invisible is conveyed through the complex system of perception always as an irreproducible, unique and single experience. The experience of the physical sight of a sculpture at a certain moment will never be repeated. Though the sculpture remains in place, our position and all other circumstances – light, colour, shape, appearance – keep changing all the time.

Those who have little to do with sculptures, who lack knowledge of a sculpture's structure and characteristics and consequently of its working will be hard put to find the right place for a sculpture and will thus fail in their endeavor. Without a thorough examination of the conditions a sculpture may either be ascribed an ill-suited role, or placed at a wrong spot

³³ <http://www.sulinet.hu/eletmod/hogyantovabb/tovabbtanulas/elokeszito/muveszettortenet/2het/gorog.html>

³⁴ Philip James, *Henry Moore on sculpture*, The Viking Press, New York 1971. p.59.

where it won't be able to visualize its full content. Conversely, there are excellent settings in which certain features of a work of art will be reinforced or emphasized. The main consideration is that the sculpture's own formal order, inner space, the space its mass creates should be perceptible in its totality in the given surroundings.

Since we are speaking of space used and lived by man, it is by nature a designated space. Apart from this designation, space is never empty because its lack of a content that is intelligible for us or its invisibility does not mean that it does not exist. A space might have different roles and charges depending on the role we humans or nature ascribe to it. I know of two basic roles. One separates people, the other connects people. A work of art belongs by nature to the latter category.

A space acquires a new quality through the physical presence of an art work, and its content derives from the artistic content conjured up by the sculpture. In accord with the quality difference between designated and indeterminate spaces, the space required by this role marks itself off from its previous environment, or might even lose touch with its neutral setting, and owing to the presence of the sculpture it is no longer part of Schmarsow's general space. This newly designated space is where the sculpture appears in its glass-bell to offer its body-concept, the incorporated human content, to the senses.

This process takes place in the common space in which we live. Human communication in most diverse media, in different languages and their changes do not only form and reinterpret spaces but also keep alive and characterize a given community, the people, and through them the human content, the quality of life that can find expression in that given space. This man-created quality of space is a double-edge weapon: as we have created it, it is about and for us, but just like all human contents, it can be turned to our detriment.

To return to the structure and characteristics of the sculpture: its formal order laid out in accord with its artistic content also determines its own body and the inner space within its body, in addition to its relationship with space. The formal order of the sculpture also determines whether its inner space that is within its mass can be seen or not. The visibility of its inner formal realm can theoretically be envisioned as a section of a physical mass, though this mechanical term cannot explain the system and interrelations of the inner formal world and their appearances. Whatever formal solution one encounters, it is never the outcome of some external effect alien to the nature of the sculpture, but it is the consequence of the laws of creation, of the process of interpretation, and the changes of form are the visually perceptible results of its immanent laws. When the positive and negative forms cohere into a contiguous, closed formal order on all sides whatever the material, I call the body of the sculpture a traditionally unified mass in which inner space remains invisible, imaginary. When in the formal order of a sculpture a positive form alternates with a space element, the mass of the sculpture opens up. The order of compact forms is modified by the inserted new element as it introduces a new point of reference within the system of the sculpture. The

inner space of the sculpture is exposed by the new formal order generated by this new space element to which it connects and reacts but which it also delimits. A more intricate formal order arises caused by the nature of the new spatial element. This most spectacular quality of space – transparency – becomes perceptible between two tactile forms as an extant thing and a mediator, and by nature it provides a new, so-far unseen point of view for the spectator. I quoted earlier Wittkower, but there are numberless examples: Gabo, Hepworth, Moore, Calder, who applied the plastic quality of silence, the device of the pause well known and used in music.

A sculpture therefore does not only comprise visible physical forms, a formal order that might constitute a mass depending on the extent of the physical forms – and here I do not mean Schmarsow's aesthetic space and the glass bell created by the sculpture. Space is often a constitutive, compositional element of the sculpture, always a positive feature, even though it is commonly regarded as negative by virtue of its role to visually interrupt the formal order of the sculpture. That is why space is said to be negative mass as opposed to the visible and tactile positive form.

In analyses of sculptures, “broken forms”, “pierced forms” are inaccurately spoken of, whereas the inner order is not broken or interrupted, the formal order remains continuous with space playing an identical plastic role to the positive form. Another frequent term is “negative space” which can only be interpreted as such in comparison with the visibility of the substance of the sculpture; in actual fact space as a constitutive element is just as positive and form-creating a tool as is the visible and tactile form. This brings to mind Archipenko's *Walking Woman* of 1912. Let me cite first Boccioni from Wittkower's book: “no one can any longer believe that an object ends where another begins.” Gabo refers to his crystallized world in his *Realist Manifesto* published in 1920 as follows: “We consider space as a new and absolutely sculptural element, a material substance...”³⁵

Henry Moore had the following to say on the interplay of space and form placed into space to perform a certain role: “to give form and space an equal partnership, to make them inseparable, neither being more important than the other.”³⁶ This sentence does not only apply to the formal solution of a creative process. To my mind, it reflects a comprehensive view encompassing the totality of life.

Space filled with air is usually thought to be empty, though it is not, but its substance is different. We must realize that the two are present in symbiosis in our world. Eliade divided the space designated and used by man into sacred and profane space depending on the quality we devolve upon it and what we place in it. That is why filling out space is not only a phrase but an art philosophical concept. The concept of a sign in space means designating a place, occupying space. Filling a space is a process in the course of which a new element is

³⁵ Wittkower, op.cit., p. 274.

³⁶ Philip James, *Henry Moore on Sculpture*

inserted in space by the reshuffling of the old elements, with the outcome of introducing a new meaning to the given site. This is an integrative process which presupposes the suitability and adequate quality of the new element, in our case a work of art, for the chosen place.

The mutual integration of the art work and the environment gives rise to a new relation that revalues both through their reciprocal effects and generates new viewpoints and criteria of interpretation. The art work fulfills its role, occupying the place reserved for it, while the place thereby becomes a designated space endowed with a definite role, sacralized in a certain sense. Just as an architectural space endows a portion of space carved out of the infinite and hereafter having a physical boundary with an individual profile and meaning, the sculpture as a sign placed into space enriches the space with new connotations in relation to the existing contexts. With its contents and symbolic system it occupies that part of space where it creates a new order with its immediate surroundings, and the art work is also filled with life and assumes new interpretations in the adequate setting.

Space thus fills several roles, all at the same time. It appears as a possible *plastic, compositional tool* of the sculpture, as *a space formed by the sculpture* and as *the environment of the sculpture*. All three roles are equally important and indispensable for the presence of the art work. This is exactly the process described by Eliade in which a sculpture vested with the personal, visual, spatial features of cognition turns a so-far neutral place into a meaningful space in the course of designating, demarcating a so-far unknown, "indeterminate" territory. This process takes place via the sculpture's personal artistic content, expressing its presence in a personalized space. Here, just like everywhere, space plays a mediating role.

Worringer was quoted earlier as claiming that the physical body of the sculpture and the space created by the sculpture comprise jointly the body-concept. In other words, a physically perceptible presence created by a work of art conveying an autonomous artistic message as its function distinctly differing from all roles satisfying everyday practical purposes is called aesthetic space by Cassirer. I also often compare this outer part organically tied to the sculpture and to its inner space to man's aura, the expansion and magnitude of which is solely determined by the sculpture's content and its resultant formal order. This capacity of the sculpture accommodates it to its environment and mediates the human, personal content to express which it was brought into existence.

This designation of the environment and its consequently changed quality is perceived as the effect of the sculpture. The process of interpreting space takes place through the sensuous presence of the human message of the sculpture created and placed in space, via its space-creation. This is the spatial experience generated by a sculpture – but only when there is reciprocity: when a space receives a sculpture that fits its character, and conversely, when the sculpture has found the right space to be placed in. The sculpture becomes a space filled

with the effects of the contentual features of its environment bounded by the surroundings built physically for it.

We move in functionally most diverse spaces every day. Among them there are private or public places with sculptures to which various interim spaces lead. These interim spaces are passageways between different spatial layouts with more emphatic roles; some can have smaller accent and again some may have their autonomous functions. In private spaces such are the corridors and ante-rooms, in public spaces they include pavements, foregrounds, esplanades, landings. The presence and importance of space is always decisive, appearing in the roles we ascribe to it rightly or wrongly in which we live our lives day to day.

On the intimacy of public spaces, on the openness of private spaces

In the chapter on public and private space I discussed their structure and pondered about public spaces as carriers of some characteristics of private spaces. They have a dual role, since the basis of the community for a person is always another person, so the layout of a public space is the alloy of the personal features of a private space with the open spatial linkages so as to provide room for various forms of human speech and intercourse.

These personal traits make a public place intimate to us. What does this intimacy conceal? What quality is the content that makes us wish to experience it and to share it with others as far as circumstances permit? I think that whenever we have any – fundamentally human – content in some space, then we cannot interpret it without considering its personal implications, or can only do so at a theoretical level. That would mean pondering the logic and formal solutions of the content without having any personal experience of it. That would lack the personal element that is capable of addressing anyone. Any message loaded with human connotations to be communicated between two human beings, two individuals, can only be carried by personal features, and whatever form we wish to share it with others in, it can only be interpreted through such personal contents. The process of interpreting a sculpture means that the personal message triggers off a complex process which comprises a lot of synchronous visual, tactile, aural, emotional, intuitive, logical and other intelligible and unintelligible mediating components. It follows from this that communicating any human experience, particularly an artistic experience, can only provide unintelligible information when channeled through some of its details, because of the quality and complexity of the experience. It can also be stated that since all human acts, particularly an artistic message contain communicative elements, any act can be potentially taken for speech. Whatever the carrier, speech between man and man can only take place through the personal traits of these acts qualified as speech but not necessarily perceivable in space. By the same token, in visual art this personal experience is the “channel” for reading that art work and taking delight in it. This is therefore the criterion that governs the effort to find the right place for a much-liked sculpture in the home so that it can be enjoyed and it can “speak to us” any time of the day, always differently as light conditions change.

The foundations of both public and private spaces must be spaces well suited to mediating such man-to-man contents and hence liable to communication; this turns a public space into a personal experience, this opens up our private space and any other space towards others where people show up, for in every situation the basis of any community is the potential of communication and its quality, and the target is always the other person. Since by nature every human story is two-sided and hence potentially two-edged, we only become capable of undergoing this experience without fail, if we face up to our personal characteristics. That being so, the question that remains to be answered is whether the building or space created for a definite purpose, the sculpture placed in it and the content it is to convey all

adequately carry the personal traits of the designer and artist and represent their intentions, for they constitute the points of reference which make us comprehend the situation and let us have a positive experience entering the given space.

A public space, however large a group or groups of people it was created for, can only be interpreted individually. The sculpture situated in this space may also only fulfill its role through the personal implications of its content and meaning, and it can only live up to the personal requirements it is expected to meet in this way. A sculpture designed for a given spot in such a public space must be by nature an autonomous creation, because that is the only guarantee that it can adapt to an autonomous space planned for specific purposes, and vest it with artistic contents. That is how it is possible to “outline the authentic or seemingly authentic profile of the age through sculpture”.³⁷

Public spaces are not only in the open, but also in offices, railway stations, museums, institutes, schools, hospitals, etc. Be their themes the past, the present or the future generations, they cannot do without the personal features of their messages, for otherwise they remain bleak, unpleasant, hollow, incomprehensible empty spaces. Lots of examples of the latter are known from the past and the present; that is why it is so urgent to rectify and reinterpret the practice of public sculpture. This applies to both autonomous sculpture and public sculpture in commemoration of the Hungarian past which must also be just as autonomous; the two have to be handled jointly; and not least, the future roles of public spaces have to be defined. The reconsideration of these tasks will have a favourable impact on the now poor and spiritless visual education so that the present and future generations may have better grounds to need and evaluate all these achievements.

The basis for the intimacy of a public space is constituted by the personal lineaments of the properties of the private space. They actually characterize man himself and the smallest space that he reserves for himself. This space is usually meant to be closed, but its connection with art, the possession of a painting or sculpture enriches it with a content that changes its quality, its working and its role, and this, in turn, may influence the functioning of its environment.

Sculptures appearing in private spaces, or, if great quantities are at issue, the private collections are diverse, just as the people who develop them, but they are perfect examples of the potential openness of private spaces. In legal terms they are not public spaces, but their openness may theoretically endow them with certain public roles. Though hardly visible, they play an important role in the network of dependences of the cultural life of our ordinary existence. For lack of public acknowledgement, some owners are not encouraged enough to improve their collections, although their presence and activity represent a stratum of the private sphere who respond as openly and sensitively as they can to the changes in contemporary visual culture. The destiny of these collections is influenced by the

³⁷ Wehner, „Emlékművek...” op.cit. p. 38.

general views on contemporary art, while conversely, they play an important role by popularizing and influencing the general impact and evaluation of contemporary art. This state of dependency might lead to their isolation and loss of activity if contemporary art, including contemporary sculpture, is officially relegated to the background and its autonomous presence is banished from public spaces.

I think such private collections are indispensable today. They belong to the process that can incorporate a part of the art life in the collectivity of private space which – to however little an extent – has an impact on the influence of contemporary art on the general tastes of the public. This would lead me over to another topic – the relation of mass art and elite art in our everyday life – which is important enough to be mentioned here and for the studying of which I recommend the reading of Miklós Almási's book *Anti-aesthetics*.³⁸ To conclude, I am convinced that private collections play a serious role in establishing the traditions of contemporary Hungarian art and in preserving its legacy.

³⁸ Miklós Almási, *Anti-esztétika* [Anti-aesthetic], Helikon Kiadó 2003.

Sculpture in the private life

On the nature of the sculpture and the painting

The majority of people do not have spatial vision, which is attributable to deficiencies in education in the first place. As a consequence of this lack of perceiving space, they usually do not interpret but just use the space they live in. That is why their experiences merely derive from their ideas which they only realize within the space they shape and live in.

In the section on private and public spaces I recalled the merry hide-and-seek some children were playing for a long time in a three-part Henry Moore sculpture in Münster, Germany. I need not stress how fruitful every effort vested in culture and the education of the next generations is, and what tragedy the absence of this effort causes. I am sure this example is evident and I hope to come across more and more such examples in practice. The lack of spatial vision partly explains why fewer people go in for sculpture than for painting, which is – understandably – more conspicuous in the private sphere.

The spatiality of a classical panel painting (disregarding here the material and thickness of the frame) is attributable to traditional perspective representation or to colours that provide the illusion of space (aerial perspective): this is the picture's inner, illusory space which is normally installed on the wall to delight us. Concerning its use of tools, the inner space of a panel painting is thus quite different from that of a sculpture discussed. In painting the duality of space resides in the painted illusory space and the objective presence of the carrier of the image. A painting thus clearly embodies the contradictions between appearance and reality through the corporeal presence of the panel and the inner space created as an illusion on its surface.

The properties and requirements of the body of the picture share with us the real space in which it is installed – in private space it is mainly the wall of our apartment where we try to find the right location for it adjusted to our habits and daily rituals so that in certain times of day we can take pleasure in it. Since compared to sculpture it has ignorable plastic values and most often it fulfills its role hanged up, requiring a frontal vantage point, the central role is played by the painted frontal surface.

I think it is important to understand the differences stemming from the nature of the illusory image and the three-dimensional presence of the art work not only in the creative process but also in the roles played by the panel painting and the sculpture in the private life – these differences are not oppositions; if we conceived of the differences as opposites, we would deprive ourselves of the possibility to recognize their separate and sometimes common roles.

The use of the painting mounted on the stretchers as an object without a frame is a widespread interpretation and example. Where this aspect of the picture is stressed, the motifs may often continue on the sides of the frame or the canvas. What this approach does is to combine the languages of appearance and reality and make use of the plastic values of the carrier of the painting. Let me mention Bolívar's relief-like, pierced paintings almost on box-like carriers: the motifs of the painting are applied to a curved space, a surface with plastic values. It can be taken for a border-case in that he combines the space-creation of painterly elements with some elements of the relief belonging to sculpture. Another border-case is István Haász's reliefs: apart from the immanent role of the painted values, they also play a dual game with the colour modifications caused by the plastic forms, reinforcing each other. This is also an example of the consciously applied joint use of the languages of painting and sculpture, but they are also meant to be installed on the wall. Among many examples I can also mention the interpretation based on eastern philosophies in which the drawn paper or painted canvas appears emphatically as an object. This can also be illustrated with Péter Kovács's large suspended works. What also intrigues me is hanging the two-dimensional drawing in space, handling it as an object. Treating the picture or paper/canvas deliberately as an object, accepting or questioning the reality or illusion of the representation was a topical issue already in the 1960s – I associate this question with Lucio Fontana. To go back to earlier times and an example I cited earlier: Velázquez also consciously deals with the contents and meanings of the real and illusory presence of the work of art in *Las Meninas*. Interpreting both the painted and objective presence of the picture, he illustrates the mentioned duality not merely through the duality of the physical object and the painted picture, but replays it through mirroring within the picture; that is, he repeats, accentuates it with the tools of painting, thus questioning again the contents and language of his picture. At the same time he asks questions about the objective and pictorial reality of the panel picture, and about the similarities, identities and dissimilarities characterizing our life, about the determination of the value orders interpreting our life. Michel Foucault also addresses these themes in depth in his book *Words and Things*. I think these questions of interpretation must have unceasing validity. It is not the devaluation of values that we encounter as time passes, but the rightness of views, viewpoints and their inevitable changes.

The sculpture's objective presence and manifestation as creation come about in the same space in a studio, for its set of expressive tools is a system of symbols kneaded from the material of the body, and this system develops its artistic idiom using the specificities of the given space. Removed from the studio, its presence forces us to share with it our personal space, our home. Apart from being spiritual nutriment, its objective presence – the source of corporeal-sensuous experience – constitutes a physical part of our living space, and therefore it adjusts to our everyday routine, our life, via a multitude of personal implications, requiring a lot of considerations. Its physical presence, spatial palpability turns it into a different family member than a painting. When I was a child, I remember we had a Serov

painting in the room, in which I often wanted to go for a walk. This childhood example was just appropriate for me to illustrate the difference between the two kinds of representation already as a child. These differences engender different attachments to sculpture than to painting. A sculpture enters into a relationship with us in the process of the synthesis between the real three-dimensional presence of its spatiality and our personal living space. What is more, its sight changes continuously as we move or as we move the sculpture. The inner space of the sculpture – which in a picture is usually created by a representation suggesting three dimensions on a flat surface – is determined by its mass or spatial order, or, in other words, it can be found within the formal order of its physical matter that can be walked round.

Thus, a sculpture has tactile space. In this space the sculpture is not only visible but its plastic values are accessible to another of our senses: it is tangible. Speaking of sight and touch, Herder illustrates the experience of space in his work entitled *Plastik*³⁹ with an example. He mentions a blind man who is given back his eyesight in an operation. “After his eye operation, he was unable to recognize the things by sight that he had known by touch earlier. He was unable to see space and failed to differentiate even the markedly separate objects. He saw in front or around him an infinite large painted surface. He had to be taught to differentiate things by sight that he had known by touch earlier, and to turn formations into bodies and bodies into formations... and finally, he became capable of seeing the formations in space, as signs in their own alphabet, just as earlier they had comprised the tactile knowledge about the bodies.” To conclude, he says: “sight only makes forms visible, and it is touch alone that can realize mass: therefore, anything that has form can only be known through the tactile sense, while seeing only manifests to us the visible surface – not the whole surface of the bodies, to boot, but the part of the surface that is reached by light.”

Just as the study of these two of our senses does not explain the intricate system of their working – how our tactile and visual sensations work together – the comparison of sculpture and painting does not clarify the spatial working of the two art branches. In such a comparison the physical mass and body of the sculpture would be analogous with the presence of the picture carrier – the stretchers and canvas – while concerning the vehicles of creation, the sight of the painted surface would parallel the order of formal values materializing in real space. However, neither would explain the working of the art object in space.

To return to the possible appearance of a sculpture in private life: a sculpture put in a certain place has its peculiar and unique requirements inherent in its properties, but there is no ready-made scheme for its placement. Since a sculpture speaks in the language of space, through the experience of space, in each case the specificities of the sculpture, its possible roles, as well as the characteristics and possibilities of space in which it is to feature have to

³⁹ J. G. Herder, *Sculpture*, The University of Chicago, 2002. p.36.

be considered. A sculpture removed from the studio can't fulfill its function and thus can't be fully enjoyed until its right place has been found. I all too often encounter situations in which a sculpture in an office, flat or public space is simply "in the way", because it is not treated as a work of art but as an everyday ornament or an asset.

To solve the problem of finding the right place of a sculpture in private space is a time-consuming but also highly rewarding task. An apartment has numberless functions and must usually cater to the needs of several persons – a community on a small scale. Personal tastes, needs, habits and individual daily rituals have their own physically demonstrable space, which may influence the possible sites for a sculpture. A sculpture may not be treated as an ornament, a knick-knack, or just a valuable property. Though the former two categories contain some aesthetic features, the latter deprives it of all values it was created to have. A sculpture and its space are inseparable by nature, they are collaborators and coefficients, so the spatial properties of a sculpture cannot assert themselves and give us delight unless the right place is found in the private setting. Why would we want to have a sculpture, if not for our pleasure? It is then the proportions, layout, interior endowments of a home as well as the harmonization between the sculpture with its own space and the living environment that have to be weighed and discussed at length to achieve the required result. The subjective assessment of the sculpture's values and of the specificities of the environment influences the above criteria and the outcome, but their discussion is beyond the purview of this paper.

The specific features of a given space naturally delimit the possibilities. That is the job of the architect: the intimate, livable quality of the home, the use of communal spaces largely depends on the arrangement, size and – importantly – the proportions of the given space. In my view, the phrase "on human scale" is not used by accident when these values are deliberated. The adjustment of the system of proportions of such spaces to the human body greatly facilitates our movement and existence in such a space. The height of the ceiling in a prefab concrete block and the size of the rooms influence our general state of well-being differently from a traditional middle-class home built at the onset of the 20th century. There is an ostensible antagonism between the human, psychic needs and the financial possibilities that influence our daily life and life in general. They also influence – sometimes perfectly disable – the installation of a work of art. Just like all pieces of art, a sculpture is also about man. By the same token, the building we live and work in must adapt to the human proportions, for the physical properties and proportions of space must make it possible for every human being to manifest themselves. The space must also be about man.

Sculptures in the home, in the gallery

This is naturally the topic that would need most discussion and that is the most difficult to discuss because the presence of an art work in private life, our attachment to a sculpture as a work of art depends on a wide variety of subjective aspects apart from the objective preconditions, consequently this is the subject-matter about which the least can be written without any bias. Nevertheless, it is necessary to try and define the criteria – apart from personal feelings, taste and world view – that determine the significance of a sculpture and provide the ground for installing it in our flat, office, collection or gallery.

In the chapter on sculpture and panel picture I explicated a few important aspects of a sculpture's presence in private life. Spinning on that line of thought, now I would like to enlarge upon the generally accepted and exercised role of the art work in everyday life, the possibilities of its appearance and the relevant properties of the nature of an art work.

The business perspectives of the private sphere give rise to diverse spaces with collective features, and these spaces occasionally undertake the everyday roles of public spaces which can house a sculpture. From offices and banks to publicly accessible collections there are many examples. One form is the art gallery. Why I mention it as private space is not for financial reasons but because its running and the set of art works in it are determined by personal tastes. This likens them to private collections, but since they are mainly established for business, this aspect might easily lead the evaluation of art works into less resistant channels. Their activity is important in our everyday life and they have several positive impacts. They are present in our cultural life with continuously changing collections, presenting our world as mediated by art to the passers-by in the street, to those interested in art and to collectors. As obviously they try to have ever wider publicity, they reinforce the permanent presence of exhibitions and contemporary art in public awareness. In their mediating role they closely depend on both the artists and the art lovers, as well as on the generally prevalent tastes. It is not negligible that precisely this dependence enables them to exert some influence and change the public taste in the long run.

Much has been said, also critically, of the contradictions about works of art in art trade, and I have to confirm herewith, too, that the subject-matter of art trade is restricted to the object, the generator of the artistic content, for the content itself is not material and as such, it can never be the object of trading. It is like the magic lamp that you have to rub to start it working, but you can never buy the djinni in it. Just one more thought: a sold work of art often assumes the impersonal traits of a commodity, hence one of the dangers of the art market is that the art work may get alienated from the reality it represents, just as a commodity often only represents the simulation of value, the sentimental form of the commodity as Baudelaire put it. This situation is meant to be avoided by the exhibiting spaces run by diverse institutions. Their aim is usually to present a cross-section of

contemporary art, yet often relying on criteria of popularity they tend to adapt to predominant trends in the art trade.

Returning to the spatial appearance and deeper recognition of the sculpture, let me cite Wittkower⁴⁰ again speaking about Hildebrand's *The Problem of Form in Fine Arts* published in 1893: "Hildebrand starts by differentiating between two modes of vision; vision from afar and vision from a near standpoint. The far-vision is the language of art, because one has a simultaneous impression of a whole. Near-vision offers only parts of the objects, which by eye movement we have to perceive in a successive process."

The far-vision is unavoidable and of fundamental importance. It means the first and essential moment, the first encounter when actually everything is decided. That is the moment when we are overcome by the impression of the totality of the sculpture, by the presence of its aura that envelops the complete work of art like a glass bell, its aesthetic space, to quote Schmarsow. If we ignore it and fail to emphasize it when looking for the right place for a sculpture in a flat or gallery, then we are guided by something else than the nature of the sculpture. This danger must not be overlooked. It is "...the desire of contemporary masses to bring things 'closer' spatially and humanly, which is just as ardent as their bent toward overcoming the uniqueness of every reality by accepting its reproduction," Walter Benjamin writes.⁴¹ This is exactly identical with Hildebrand's first comprehensive far-vision and with what Rodin said about forming the main view of his sculpture, for that is what the fate of a sculpture depends on. The other delicate issue touched on in this sentence is that the desire to bring a sculpture closer ignores – because overlooks – the aura of the art work. It treats the art work as an object, and since human nature is such that we want to possess, possession means physical proximity, but most unfortunately, only the object can be possessed in this way. Through Hildebrand's near vision only details of the object we have already comprehended in its entirety can be taken delight in, while it is only the physical matter we can enjoy if we insist on an art piece with the above desire after material possession.

Let me note at this point that the cause for this materialized world is also inside us. We experience time, the moments of our life differently and usually ascribe no significance to the objects around us except for some use value. We have lost the ability to comprehend the uniqueness – hence the significance – of objects, so they are no more than objects. This common conception has its influence on art as well. I think the greatest danger of its influence in art is that "it is no longer the subject that represents the world for itself (I will be your mirror!), but the object crushes the subject."⁴²

⁴⁰ Wittkower, op.cit., p.247.

⁴¹ <http://www.marxists.org/reference/subject/philosophy/works/ge/benjamin.htm>

⁴² Baudrillard, op.cit., p.26.

The singularity of the sculpture, its objective uniqueness also alludes to the oft-discussed problem of multiplication, which has considerable impact on public tastes and jeopardizes the values represented by art. "Mechanical reproduction of art changes the reaction of the masses toward art."⁴³ This is a real problem for us. The topical issues of mass art using cutting edge technical tools and of contemporary art are also affected. Miklós Almási discusses this aspect in detail in his *Anti-aesthetics*. Let me cite a relevant sentence from Walter Benjamin: "The greater the decrease in the social significance of an art form, the sharper the distinction between criticism and enjoyment by the public."⁴⁴

To return to the uniqueness of a sculpture: "Even the most perfect reproduction of a work of art is lacking in one element: its presence in time and space, its unique existence at the place where it happens to be. This unique existence of the work of art determined the history to which it was subject throughout the time of its existence."⁴⁵

"During long periods of history, the mode of human sense perception changes with humanity's entire mode of existence."⁴⁶ It is precisely the role of the presence of contemporary art that it exists here and now, inseparably from the present, from the "perception" of our own lives, in various spots of our private and public spaces. "...The existence of the work of art with reference to its aura is never entirely separated from its ritual function."⁴⁷

This ability and quality of a sculpture that appears in a given time and place in a certain setting, through which the artistic content it conveys takes effect either in a public or a private space, and gives us delight in the space we have assigned to it, will be unique on every occasion. I call each of these moments the moment of cognition.

⁴³Benjamin, op.cit.

⁴⁴ Ibid.

⁴⁵ Ibid.

⁴⁶ Ibid.

⁴⁷ Ibid.

Sculptures in everyday life

Anything that is or comes to be in our physically perceptible world is a manifestation of space. We spend our daily life in the most diversely shaped spaces which may be indefinable one by one. Space as such, as a notion, is unintelligible, for the interpretation of space is always about its role assigned to it by one or more people, hence it always carries the personal imprint of the will and character of one or more people. This space being inseparable from man, the definition of its changing role must be an interpretation of man. That is how man and space are inseparable in every moment of life in this world.

It follows from this that space surrounding man may function as individual space tailored to the given person with unique characteristics. Any human content in any space can only be interpreted at a theoretic level without its personal implications, relying only on the objective features. Individual spaces are the settings of our everyday activity but the physical events that take place in them have mental causes and goals. We can feel at home in such a space endowed with personal characteristics and connotations.

One of the decisive features of our personal everyday spaces is their sacrality owing to the customary, oft-repeated activities connected to religious contents. Because of the regularly performed work or rituals and habits in these spaces, these homes are “not machines to live in” but the cosmos itself that man builds for himself.⁴⁸ Building is not meant in the physical sense only but signifies a complex process: the designation, furnishing, sanctification of individual space that carries our personal traits from the very first movement. Everyone knows that entering an unknown flat, the sight gives us a perfect description of its dweller. The longer time one spends in that flat, the more personal features are lent to every corner and nook.

Such a space endowed with roles and customs may also house a sculpture. A space like that may have personal implications and reasons why a sculpture should be put in it. Only when a work of art has been placed somewhere in space can it offer the reading it was vested with in another personal space and time during its creation. There isn't necessarily any connection between the two venues or sets of circumstances. There are famous sculptures that were made on dining tables or stools, but it may also occur that in the genesis of a sculpture so many special references to the original setting get incorporated in it that it also needs to be installed amidst similar conditions. Whatever the relations between the two venues and events, there is no other way for a sculpture to be tied to another person's emotional, religious realm than through personal, subjective experience. It conveys connotations that are inherent in its physical presence, its aura.

⁴⁸ Eliade, op.cit., pp.

That is how a sculpture becomes part of our life in the home. Through its constant presence it gets integrated in our life, it becomes a “family member” as I heard some collectors say. That was thought-provoking and I’ve had to realize that to become a family member in a meaningful sense also implies that the sculpture becomes part of a personal life, of a personal sacred space, or, in other words, it gets incorporated with its given appearance and aura in a space having several other functions and assumes a role in it. To my mind it means that it merges with the environment of those living there, with their lives, their relationships, with the quality and kind of these relationships. Since the physical presence of a sculpture can never be torn from its relationship with its aura, and since Hildebrand’s far-vision that gives an immediate and complete impression of the sculpture changes constantly in a flat in every minute, also because of the changes of light, the relationship with a sculpture offers the possibility of new interpretations all the time. I quoted Walter Benjamin as saying about the ephemeral appearance of the sculpture that it has a “presence in time and space, its unique existence at the place where it happens to be. This unique existence of the work of art determined the history to which it was subject throughout the time of its existence.”⁴⁹

This historical character of the art work cannot be accentuated in a museum. Museums are public but impersonal spaces in which a sculpture – in a lucky case – can have enough room to delight us and not interfere with the space of other sculptures as if in a storeroom. However much I like to visit museums so that I can be face to face with my favourite sculptures, I have never been able to get rid of the feeling of temporariness: as if the sculpture was only a catalogue item. I miss the personal, unique, transient environment. In addition to its unique appearance, it has a unique role in a visitor’s daily life enriching, upgrading his/her everyday existence. A sculpture as a work of art can upgrade its everyday surroundings with its presence, only the museum is not everybody’s everyday environment. When a sculpture becomes part of a private life through a visit or purchase, it assumes a sacred role in the person’s life, it becomes part of a family, community or collection and will have a personal story at its new place. That is why it is so important to have an art work in our everyday life, and the only way a sculpture can be present in our private life is in this personal way.

The role of the presence of contemporary art is its being inseparable from the present, from our own lives – appearing here and now in private spaces or in some fortunate cases in public spaces.

A sculpture can elevate its immediate surroundings with its presence when two new and interrelated properties of it are brought to bear. The sculpture must become the vehicle of a sign for someone or some people in a personal space. This role means that it symbolizes the people’s relationship with their environment, their lives, and its artistic content must be connected to their ideas about their lives. This presupposes an intimate relationship so that

⁴⁹ Benjamin, op.cit.

the sculpture's contents can be linked up with a person's realm of beliefs through its physical presence. In this intimate relationship the sculpture must become a personal and meaningful object for someone. This is attachment to the physical presence of the sculpture, to an object whose continuous presence gets integrated in our everyday customs. This reveals another property of the art object through which it becomes a meaningful instrument of the possessive desire of human nature. Adherence to the unique physical presence of a possessed sculpture has another important consequence which lends the sculpture an even more personal role in private life. Being part of the daily personal rituals, it may become a cultic object depending on the attention to its contents, that is, it may be drawn into the most intimate circle of a private life and get incorporated in the person's everyday outlook. Thus, it may form an inseparable unit with the life of those living around it through the material and contentual associations of this personal attachment.

The content value of being attached to a sculpture means that with its day by day presence it reminds us of some important content which is also why it is present in our private life. The existence of the art work conjuring up the content of its constant material presence plays a role in private life that reaches beyond this private sphere.

Every person has his/her own faith and moral values fed by this faith. This plays a decisive role in all the happenings of life. We shape our personal mythologies in our everyday life, and their value system, symbols, examples have a decisive influence on our personality. These personal mythologies, symbols carrying parts of our personality are visible to others, for our personal world view is manifest in everything from clothing to our personal environment, including the sculpture we choose. This subjectivity, this uniqueness is manifest in every movement. When it is not so; when a borrowed, multiplied system of symbols, span-long Davids, plastic waterfalls, and invincible plastic heroes fill the empty places where our examples and moral gauges should be, then we can't speak of a personal world view or of art.

"...The situations into which the product of mechanical reproduction can be brought may not touch the actual work of art," Walter Benjamin says.⁵⁰ I know this is not a new question and mechanical reproduction has some useful aspects as well in our world, but it does not belong to the theme of sculpture. "Uniqueness and duration (...) are closely intertwined,"⁵¹ meaning that the content of an art work can be constantly present through its uniqueness. That also applies to the mediation of its content: "The authenticity of a thing is the essence of all that is transmissible from its beginning."⁵² The fact of the impersonality of mechanical multiplication only verifies that the communication of a meaning of any human content between two persons is only interpretable in personal space and through personal properties.

⁵⁰ Ibid.

⁵¹ Ibid.

⁵² Ibid.

On traditions, obsolescence, timeliness

“The uniqueness of a work of art is inseparable from its being imbedded in the fabric of tradition.”⁵³ Its unique appearance acquired during its genesis and role tied to a given place, time and occasion always happens in the present, now, and it allows for its transformation into tradition in the future.

We usually conceive of tradition as something of the past that has to be preserved. But traditions have more than just past; they also have a present born in and salvaged from the past. What’s more, they also have a future which depends on the present, on here and now, in which they are being shaped and revalued. That’s the role of contemporary art. And contemporary art belongs to those who attend to it and care for it, who grasp its moral weight, a task that calls for a lot of conscious deliberation and responsibility.

The traditions get incorporated in contemporary art. Such is human nature that the generously static nature of tradition enables us to discard and reformulate our value order. The meaning of a contemporary work of art becomes interpretable in terms of the difference between the old and the new. Since the nature of the artistic content is complex and lacks messages for practical use, this interpretation cannot be verbal: artistic content cannot be explained in words without fail. “That’s how it is with artistic communication, with the aesthetic effect to which information theoretical examination may provide addenda but you can’t build solely on it.”⁵⁴

For a spectator viewing a sculpture in a gallery the interpretive schemes based on the set of receptive customs also influence the process of interpreting the work. His/her judgment of the sculpture depends on these schemes according to his/her knowledge and cultural erudition. In this complex process “the art lover is requested not only to freely follow the associations suggested by the artificial complex of stimuli, but also to judge the artifact of his experience as user at the very moment of enjoying it (and later again, pondering over his delight, trying to verify it again). In other words, a new dialectic emerges between the work and my experience of it which is an implicit demand to qualify the work on the basis of my experience and to check my experience on the basis of the work.”⁵⁵ This is the process in which a work of art meets taste shaped by traditions, customs and fashions and gets integrated in personal taste. It is the role of contemporary art to “constantly challenge the fixed and ready language and the panels of order sanctified by tradition at the level of formal structures. Art breaks away from these panels of order so as to speak about today’s man through its specific organizations.”⁵⁶ The ability of contemporary art to reformulate issues implies the topicality of the raised issues. “A classical work... tries to sanction the structures

⁵³ Benjamin, op.cit.

⁵⁴ Umberto Eco, *Nyitott mű* [The Open Work]. Európa Könyvkiadó 2006. p.212.

⁵⁵ Ibid. p. 221.

⁵⁶ Ibid. p. 316.

adopted by public sensitivity, and only opposes the laws of redundancy to confirm them, in however an original manner. Contemporary art, by contrast, appears to set as its primary goal a break with the probability laws of everyday language usage, using and deforming them all at the same time, thereby creating a crisis.”⁵⁷ This crisis is actually reevaluation, the presentation of a new viewpoint, and does not affect the artistic content if there is any. The interpretation of an art work from a novel point of view sheds new light on the content which may generate perplexity but does not preclude the possibility of interpretation, for “a work has infinitely many aspects, and these are not simply parts or fragments of it but each incorporates the entire work and shows it from a definite perspective.”⁵⁸ When it comes to a sculpture, this does not only apply to its content but also to the constantly changing views of its physical presence in a given space.

Topicality is influenced by many things, a lot being concealed in fashion generated by commerce. It is often easy to mix up topicality and fashion in their manifestations. The nature of the content of an art work is not a function of time. The topicality of the artistic content appearing in the spatial and temporal uniqueness as defined by Walter Benjamin always has a role then and there. “An ancient statue of Venus, for example, stood in a different traditional context with the Greeks, who made it an object of veneration, than with the clerics of the Middle Ages, who viewed it as an ominous idol. Both of them, however, were equally confronted with its uniqueness, that is, its aura. Originally the contextual integration of art in tradition found its expression in the cult. We know that the earliest art works originated in the service of a ritual – first the magical, then the religious kind. It is significant that the existence of the work of art with reference to its aura is never entirely separated from its ritual function. In other words, the unique value of the ‘authentic’ work of art has its basis in ritual, the location of its original use value. This ritualistic basis, however remote, is still recognizable as secularized ritual even in the most profane forms of the cult of beauty”⁵⁹

The artistic content manifest in space through the aura of a sculpture is carried by the subjectivity of its original purpose, that is how it can be comprehended and that is what it preserves in its changing roles. The questions posed by a sculpture and deemed old, outdated or topical are, in my view, to be judged from the viewpoint of the preserved aura, the individual forms of the appearance of artistic content integrated in traditions as defined by Benjamin. For me, these sculptures are either imbued with traditions or appear like contemporary works of art reformulating certain contents. When I gaze at sculptures in a museum or exhibition, they convey human values and beliefs to me appearing always in different forms: the justification for their presence is not the negation but the reconsideration and reformulation of earlier contents.

⁵⁷ Eco, op.cit., p. 212.

⁵⁸ Luigi Pareyson, *Estetica*, Sansoni, Firenze 1974. p. 194. – Eco, op.cit., p. 104.

⁵⁹ Benjamin, op.cit.

Conclusion: a few viewpoints about art

I remember I always touched the statues in the museums as a child when I could be sure the caretaker wasn't looking. It was marvelous to complement the sight with the sensation of touch. Earlier I cited J.G. Herder who wrote in his book *Plastik* of 1778: "it is only form that becomes perceptible to sight, and only touch realizes the mass."⁶⁰ Punishing this instinctive desire millions of parents rap at their children's hands with the exclamation "don't touch it", depriving them of one of the basic sensational and learning tools of human nature.

Since a work of art conveys an invisible human content, it can only be evoked by the sculpture's aura. Perception, the process of cognition does not only take place in three dimensions, and it is not exclusively conditional upon changing place. This should be taught in early childhood. It is therefore insufficient for interpretation to consider the classic concept of the plastic animation of an idea manifest in physical space through the sculpture's three-dimensional mass.

It is strange to be a sculptor and at the same time to realize that what is indeed important is invisible. Most people today only believe things that have physically experienced evidence. That is the basis on which they can accept something. That is why they first ask how much the sculpture is worth. There is a sentence in Tarkovsky's *Stalker*: "nowadays the majority of people live without faith. This of their organs has become necrotic."

It is faith alone that allows us to hearken to physically incomprehensible, invisible messages. Our intellectual capacities might be sufficient to partially grasp them but not to understand them. In the process of perception forms, colours, sounds carry information for us. The material itself, that of a sculpture, carries little evidence as it is dead matter, yet we may conceive of it as a sign of our extended existence which it may conjure up. What we comprehend through our senses belongs to the three-dimensional world. The sculpture is the door to invisible reality which it has conjured up. It does not embody it but evokes it. A work of art, a sculpture can never be a materialized idea, for the two have two different natures. A sculpture "produces a figure at a point at which its place in space created via the work of art is only acquired temporarily. The creation of a sculpture opens the space into which the viewer is involved as part of it and in which it designates the varying distance or the unfixable point from where the work appears always different."⁶¹ Sometimes the spectacularity of a sculpture is so strong that it is enough to put it in the focus of attention. Such viewing is of course futile because it scrutinizes the qualities of the sculpture's physical presence, which confuses and misleads the viewer. Art is not only the presentation of objects. When I achieve the goal with my sculptures, then "these bodies – approached from the direction of similarity – try to get rid of their corporeality in two ways: through their

⁶⁰ Herder, op.cit.

⁶¹ Bacsó, op.cit., pp. 2-3.

unrealistic elongation and through their openness, by giving up the solidity, the fullness of the body”⁶² so that they can be integral parts of the space into which they are built, and by precluding any shade of similarity their pure form should bring to life, conjure up their own real existence.

It must be noted that so far I have been dealing with the traditional tools of sculptural space creation, and deliberately, too, for I believe in the always unique experience of sensuously perceptible, modelled artistic form. I am aware that in contemporary art there are innumerable languages, each having its reason and justification, and the space of our life has several new interpretations, be they the spaces of installations or projected virtual spaces. I know I have not touched on objects, assemblages, objets trouvés, kinetic works, land art, installation, etc. separately. I think the aim of my paper was different. But I have to point out that all these new interpretations are continuations of processes in various directions that started in the second half of the 19th century when by questioning reality, the artistic analysis in search of the inner and personal truths of the visible world began. “...I still see abstraction both as a complete renewal of things and as an aberration. It is potentially dangerous for art to the extent that the aim of abstraction (and modernity as a whole) is to move towards an analytical exploration of the object; in other words, shedding the mask of figuration in order to find behind appearances an analytical truth for the object and for the world ... to provide a more elementary truth of the world is grandiose if you like, but also extremely dangerous. .. for me, the major turn began with Duchamp: the event of the readymade indicates the suspension of subjectivity where the artistic act is just the transposition of an object into an art object. Art is then only an almost magic operation: the object is transferred in its banality into an aesthetics that turns the entire world into a readymade.”⁶³ Keeping to this line of thought, I think that searching for the analytic truth of the world art can't lose and can't do without its subjectivity, otherwise it becomes something like science. I find that the truth content of artistic analysis is compatible with the subjective nature of the content and they can merge into a unity in artistic creation materialized in the artistic form. Jean Baudrillard says the following about this: “I have a firm belief in this irreversible functioning of form”. I ...”establish a relationship with objects, a glance on a fragment of the world, allowing the other to come out from his or her context... This secret operation seems crucial to me. There are thousands of ways to express an idea, but if you do not find the ideal compression between a form and an idea, you have nothing.”⁶⁴ In another interview he says: “Art is a form. A form is something that does not exactly have a history but a destiny. Art had a destiny. Today, art has fallen among the values, and unfortunately at a time when values have suffered. Values: aesthetic value, commercial value...”⁶⁵ I miss in today's interpretations the art object – the outcome of the

⁶² Sándor Radnóti, “Az ülő ember”, in *Élet és Irodalom*, vol. LIII, No. 17, April 24, 2009.

⁶³ Baudrillard, op.cit., p.25.

⁶⁴ Ibid. p.35.

⁶⁵ Ibid. p.30.

process of artistic creation – as an image of our world in a form, its role as the carrier of artistic contents. It has disappeared from the mainstream of contemporary art, and in many places some reference or matrix of the represented content is only present. “Art aimed to disrupt the logic of the spectacle (...) The art work (...) that creates connections between people (...) regards the process of exchange between people as an independent aesthetic object.”⁶⁶ In this interpretation the work of art is no longer an art object, nor a meditative object as the outcome of a process, but an assembled system of informative signs, usable sometimes as instruction for use or a recyclable, remixable set of information. I find that with the disappearance of the art work, the spectacle – the goal – , the process of consumption – the means –, the materialness of our everyday existence becomes the aim of analysis, of contemporary criticism. “The use of an object necessarily also implies its interpretation,”⁶⁷ and through this awareness “the accumulated objects will determine the personality of the ego and fulfill its desires,”⁶⁸ thus art works become mere consumer goods, so I agree with Baudrillard’s analysis that regarding its tendency, “all modern art is abstract in the sense that it is more pervaded by ideas than by imagined forms and substances. All modern art is conceptual in the sense that it fetishizes the concept, the stereotypes of a cerebral model of art in the work– in exactly the same way as what is fetishized in commodity is not its real value but the abstract stereotype of value.”⁶⁹ “... but forms, ... these forms are indestructible. (...) Today ... the pitfalls of all-powerful value and of the transcription into value are so strong that you can see the province of this type of form diminishing. Unfortunately, forms have no history; they probably have a destiny, but not exactly a history, so it is very difficult to conclude any future from the past. And the hope, which is still a virtue associated with this continuity of time, also seems slight...”⁷⁰

In our age our ability to comprehend what is happening around us through our senses has deteriorated. Our notions and concepts of things have become separated and thinking is preoccupied with abstractions. The atrophy of the ability of image creation has put its stamp on the views and tendencies of contemporary art. The pleasure and comprehension of creation are no longer consummated by the traditionally concurrent processes of taking delight in the work through our senses and meditating. Instead, we try to figure out the history of the artist’s conceptual system summarized in conceptions, explanations; when there is a visible object, it illustrates the intentions of the artist along conceptual and logical dimensions. The creation of images has been replaced by the formation of concepts, and hence the art object has become redundant for many people. To look at the situation from another angle, so-called elite art has grown jealous of the popularity of the mass culture of our information society and debased itself into information, enjoying its regained prestige

⁶⁶ Nicolas Bourriaud, *Utómunkálatok* [Finishing touches], Műcsarnok könyvek 2007, p.19.

⁶⁷ Ibid., p. 12.

⁶⁸ Ibid and Ann Goldsten, “Jeff Koons”, in *A forest of signs: Art in the Crisis of Representation*, catalogue, Los Angeles / Cambridge, CA, 1989.

⁶⁹ Baudrillard, op.cit., p.62.

⁷⁰ Ibid., p.28.

behind the curtain of culture sometimes in the disguise of collective art. Many people have forgotten that perception cannot be replaced by any description or explanation. A conceptual model can never substitute for the essence of a work of art to be grasped through its image. The intellect and intuition got on well earlier. Now in our informal world the more calculable and controllable half has gained strength, and sent the other half of its inscrutable self packing. Just to be sure. The ambition to arrange things in order is wonderful, but at the same time it makes us forget that seeing is not identical with the physical process of sensual stimuli. When our brains work, images and concepts act hand in hand, and the mind works as a complete whole. In his book of 1974 Rudolf Arnheim already warned: "every perception is also thinking, every judgment is also intuition, every observation is also invention."⁷¹

From the perspective of timelessness, I think, the values of a sculpture begin where motion and happening ends, where boredom begins, as Pilinszky writing about ingenious talent mentions Chekhov's *Three Sisters*, in which the most important things happen then and there when and where nothing happens. Artistic creation roots in the soul, hence by nature it cannot be rationalized. What art speaks about cannot be verbalized: it can only be referred to, or circumscribed. That is why silence, space and the form in it have the weightiest sacral meaning for me. The rest are extras in this mystery play.

⁷¹ Rudolf Arnheim, *Art and Visual Perception*, University of California Press, Berkeley & Los Angeles 1974.

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