



## **From 1960's to Today the Use of Nature, Body & Technology in Art: Changes in Artistic Spaces**

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### **ABSTRACT**

Many art movements and art forms which have emerged since 1960's up to the present have brought along significant changes by using nature, body and technology in a very different understanding and form. In this study, changes regarding artistic space are observed through examples from Robert Morris, Robert Whitman, Dennis Oppenheim, Robert Smithson, Michael Heizer, Walter De Maria, Sophie Ristelhueber, Andy Goldsworthy, Mark Dion, Orlan, Al Razutis, Alexander and Georges Dyens. Depending on also the diversity of material, artistic spaces, as production and exhibition areas, have changed the spatial perception by changing and increasing.

**Keywords:** Technology and art, nature and art, body and art, conceptual art, minimalist art, land art, holographic art, space, real space, virtual space.

### **INTRODUCTION**

1960s, in which art, artist and artistic object are questioned intensively from a philosophical perspective, is a beginning of a process which has its roots in the early 20th century. In this period, notion and concept have the primary importance in art; the importance given to form and emotion is objected. Thus it became possible to use nearly everything, including nature and body, as means of artistic expression and artistic space. All kind of techniques and materials such as readymade object, waste, steel, fluorescent lamp, fire brick, aluminum, polyester, industrial paint, photograph, film, video, projector, computer, light, laser, hologram etc. started to substitute for conventional techniques and materials. Abundance of instrumental and spatial diversity has also brought along evaluation of works with different categories. Land art, environmental art, process art, installation, body art, performance, interactive art, video art, light art, computer art, internet art and holographic art are only some of them.



Since 1960s, the use of nature, body and technology as means of artistic expression has played an important role in the emergence, continuance up to the present and development of changes in space perception and design. In this study, changes regarding artistic space design and perception -as an area of production and exhibition- is examined through examples from Robert Morris, Robert Whitman, Dennis Oppenheim, Robert Smithson, Michael Heizer, Walter de Maria, Sophie Ristelhueber, Andy Goldsworthy, Mark Dion, Orlan, Al Razutis, Alexander and Georges Dyens.

### **I. Real Spaces**

At the beginning of 1960s, artists began to evaluate regarding public and living spaces such as streets, bridges, parks, hospitals etc. and parts from nature such as deserts, lakes, sky even their bodies as places of artistic exhibition and production besides galleries.

*Inside the Gallery.* Parallel to the change of artistic material, various exhibition types (different from conventional exhibition mentality such as hanging on the wall and placing on pedestal) began to emerge; ground and ceiling gained importance besides the gallery walls. Through various arrangements defined as installation, exhibitions (by regarding the place as a whole, arrangement in tune with the place or spreading/piling/arraying in a part of the space) began. These are 'the spaces within a space.'

Robert Morris who frequently uses industrial technology materials such as rubber, steel, ply board, industrial felt, zinc, copper, aluminum, glass, thread etc. In his works states that "My works simply do not orient themselves with a place. The structure surrounding them plays a certain role in their living." (Cabanne, 1997). When the minimalist sculptures of Morris produced with this understanding in 1960s were exhibited, it was taken into consideration that his works are in conformity with the space (whitney.org, 2014). *Two Columns* in 1961, the untitled installation at Green Gallery in 1964 and *Four Mirrored Cubes* in 1965 serve as models to this. He exhibited some of his wool and felt works on which he started to work in 1968 by laying them on the gallery floor, spreading them as if they were randomly thrown on the floor or using floor and walls together (fig.1). (Kalina, 1969 ; guggenheim.org, 2010 ; artintelligence.net, 2008).



Fig. 1. Robert Morris, *Untitled*, 1960s, industrial felts, (artspace.com).



Fig. 2. Dennis Oppenheim, *Digestion*, pigmented fiberglass, gas, wax, rubber hose, cast resin, regulator, jeweler's torch tips, steel bolts, private collection, photo by David Sundberg (dennis-oppenheim.com).



Fig. 3. Mark Dion, *Alexander Wilson - Studio*, 1999, wooden structure, various tools, books, bird illustrations, taxidermic birds, etc. 243.8 x 365.8 x 274.3 cm (approx), installation shot at the Carnegie Museum of Art, Pittsburgh, USA, (goodwatergallery.com).



Fig. 4. Robert Morris, *Bodyspacemotionthing*, installation at Tate Gallery in 1971, London, England.  
([www.bbc.co.uk](http://www.bbc.co.uk)).

Robert Smithson states that technology and industrial products began to appeal to the artist who wants to work like a laboratory technician and that technology and industry turned into an ideal in New York world of art in early 1960s (Yilmaz, 2004). Although Smithson objects to the understanding of gallery, he exhibited his works such as *Map of Broken Glass (Atlantis)*, *A Nonsite*, *Dead Tree* and *Earthworks* spreading, arraying or piling on the gallery floor (Pekşen, 2005 ; [robertsmithson.com](http://robertsmithson.com)).

Dennis Oppenheim made use of gallery walls, floor and ceiling (by hanging his works) for his installations that he made between 1970-2009 using industrial technology materials such as *Theme for a Major Hit*, *Recall*, *Digestion*(fig.2), *Above the Wall of Execution* and *Splash of Buildings* ([dennis-oppenheim.com](http://dennis-oppenheim.com)).

Mark Dion, who uses archeological and scientific methods in collecting arranging and exhibiting wastes and various objects in nature, piled his works such as *Ichthyosaurus*, *Concrete Jungle/The Birds* on the floor; in his works such as *Alexander Wilson-Studio* (fig.3), *Landfill*, *The Curiosity Shop* and *Systema Metropolis Fieldwork* 2he worked on between the years 1999-2005, he created showcases and separate spaces having room appearances(Hunter, 2009 ; [artvehicle.com](http://artvehicle.com), 2007; [art21.org](http://art21.org), 2005).

Walter De Maria exhibited his works he created in 1970-80s *Equal Area Series*, *Broken Kilometer* and *13, 14, 15 Meter Rows* by scattering them all over the gallery floor or arraying them orderly. Maria drew attention to the relationship between space and structures with his works the giant pottery *Five Continents* which is filled up with marble and quartz pieces coming from five different continents and his twenty-five-ton sphere named *Large Red Sphere-Turkentar* which was exhibited in 1990 (Wong, 2008 ; Glancey, 2011).



Even though Goldsworthy is an artist who uses natural materials without changing them in open spaces and leave them to nature, he planned his dome-like stone structure *Roof* which he exhibited in 2005 in such a way that they pass beyond the glass wall(Sooke, 2007 ; goldsworthy.cc.gla.ac.uk).

In galleries, not only the exhibition methods changed. Artists began to make interacting with the work actively available for the viewers. In his installation named *Bodyspacemotionthing* (1971)(fig.4)which is considered to be one of the archetypes of Morris's participatory art type caused viewer to be in a physical activity such as climbing, crawling, sliding and standing in balance(Higgins, 2009). In De Maria's work *The Earth Room*(1977), viewers walked on the soil poured on the gallery floor (www.marin.edu).



Fig. 5. Robert Smithson, *Spiral Jetty*, 1970, Great Salt Lake, USA, photo by Hikmet Loe (artistsof Utah.org).



Fig. 6. Michael Heizer, *Double Negative*, 1968-70, Nevada, USA.(artwelove.com).



Fig. 7. Orlan, *Carnal Art-Operation Theatre*, 1990s.(uk.phaidon.com).



Fig. 8. Sophie Ristelhueber, *Eleven Blownups Series*, 2006,(Vandermeulen and Veys, 2013).

**Outside the Gallery.** Artists who want to produce works which are not possible to exhibit in galleries frequently used nature and body as a means of artistic expression and manipulated nature and body in various ways. These are generally stated as different categories such as land art, environmental art, earth art, nature art, body art, performance etc.

Morris's *Steam* and *Untitled Earthworks*, Oppenheim's *Accumulation Cut*, *Whirlpool/Eye of the Storm* and *Time Line*, Smithson's *Glue Pour*, *Asphalt Rundown*, *Mirror Displacement* and *Spiral Jetty*(fig.5), De Maria's *Mile Long Drawing*, *The Lighting Field*, Goldsworthy's *Ice Ball*, *Rain Shadow* and *Wall* serve as models for the works which nature is chosen as the space of production and exhibition (Hafner, 2010 ; Higgins, 2009 ; dennis-oppenheim.com ; robertsmithson.com ; goldsworthy.cc.gla.ac.uk).

Heizer's(who started to work in 1967 in Nevada Desert) *Double Negative* (fig.6)in which he had a 'space' created by moving 244.000 tons of earth with the help of bulldozer and *Complex City*, which has been worked on by him since 1971 are far remote from living areas. Both of the works are among the biggest statues which have been built so far one can stroll in (Kimmelman, 2005 ; Pekşen, 2005).

Oppenheim, during his performance named *Parallel Stress* in 1970, stretched his body between two collapsing concrete blocks and maintained his position for two minutes. In the same year, he had another performance in which he used his body: *Reading Position for Second Degree Burn*. In this performance, he put a book on his naked body and stayed in the sun for five hours. So that he achieved to leave the shadow of the book as an unburnt area on his body(dennis-oppenheim.com ; Manchester, 2007).

Orlan, who transformed surgery into an artistic performance and had aesthetic interventions on her body in order to question the role of the body in public and



experience different identities, used both her body and surgery room and preferred local anesthesia to communicate with viewer. In this 'operation theater' of the artist, "not those who are on the stage but also viewers play a role as interactive participants and unlike an ordinary play, they witness a real pain." Orland recorded these operation moments which she calls "Carnal Art," "Operation Theater" or "Body Sculpturing" (fig.7) Later, she broadcasted the video on internet(Akman, 2004).

Sophie Ristelhueber, who focuses on the effects of destruction of wars and conflicts on earth and architecture, photographed the bombarded settlements, war wastes in deserts, weapons left in trenches in a personal arrangement. *Spread form Bayreuth* (1991), *Fait No. 31* and *Eleven BlownupsSeries*(fig.8) serve as examples. And *Operation Series* consists of the photographs of unknown patients in Paris hospitals. These works of Ristelhueber manifest the interventions which were made or had to be made to nature or body. The artist exhibits some of her works she created with this understanding by enlarging and sticking them on the wall (Barliant, 2009 ; Lane, 2009 ; bintphotobooks, 2012).

Some of Oppenheims works (he created between the years 1980-2011) which feature light such as *Radiant Fountains*, *Paintbrush Gateway*, *Electric Kiss*, *Splash Buildings* and *Architectural Cactus* are sculpture-architecture hybrid public space statues. The artist describes his work in 2011 *Still Dancing* as the unity of sculpture, architecture and theatre (Denson, 2011 ; Scott, 2010; Peterson, 2010;dennis-oppenheim.com).



Fig. 9.Robert Whitman, *Shower*, 1964, 16mm film, DVD transfer, projector, shower curtains, water, water pump, 203,2 x 76,2 x 76,2 cm, photo by Howard Agriesti (diaart.org).

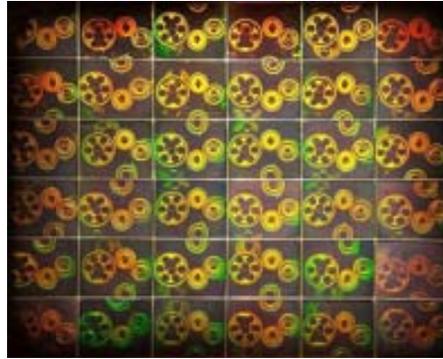


Fig. 10. Al Razutis, *Newtonian Galactic Assembly Line*, 1974-76, silver halide holographic film, 20,32 x 25,4 cm 36 Denisjuk holograms, 121,92 x 121,92 cm. (alchemists.com).



Fig. 11. Alexander, *Horrors of War*, 1988, 101,6 m<sup>2</sup> installation, hologram, holosculpture (Zone, 1990, ray3dzone.com).



Fig. 12. Georges Dyens, *Vertigo Terrae*, 1994, installation, holosculpture, hologram, land art, holophotogram, aluminum, light, plaster, stone, music, scraps, sand, wood, polyester resine, broach, laser, fog, earth and plexi glass (georgesdyens.com).

## II. Virtual Spaces

The use of hi-tech products enabled wider range of artistic materials and different types of art such as computer art, holographic art, internet art etc. to emerge. Thanks to the technology, which make possible to create spaces that actually do not exist, emergence of different arts began to become possible by recording, projecting, reproducing, copying and transmitting sound and image. Thanks to many different recording and



demonstration techniques and materials such as projection, video, computer, internet, hologram etc., art incorporated into virtual spaces as well. So that, notions such as virtuality, simulation, simultaneity and virtual reality began to be used frequently in art.

Robert Whitman, who is known for uniting images, sounds, artists, films and slides, became the first artist including a video in a performance in his work *The American Moon* (1960) (post.thing.net, 2008 ; diaart.org, 2011). In the work *Shower* (fig.9) Whitman, who frequently uses projection in his works, produced in 1964, a real-size virtual image of a showering woman created by projection takes part. And in *Passport* he produced in 2010-11, he delivered two performances simultaneously. In this work, sound, live performance and video projections are arranged with the help of wireless connection through internet and video streaming. Viewer watched the visual and poetic narrative of the artist in two separate places (Le, 2012). Whitman describes his work in which probability of being in two different places at the same time is emphasized as a nonverbal theatre which space, rhythm, scale and plastic elements are emphasized in and states that it is not written in the holy book that everyone can see the same thing at the same time (whitmanpassport.net).

In the 35-minute video work of Morris *The Birthday Boy* which is produced in 2004 to celebrate the 500<sup>th</sup> birthday of David, two art historians -a man and a woman- are satirized. At the end of the video, the female critic is astonished by the view in which David turns into an old naked man. The other video with the male critic turns into a black woman sculpture (Komisar, 2005; sfu.ca/gallery, 2008).

This feature of holography which can make use of both the *virtual space* at the back side of the holographic film and the *real space* in front of it has begun to be used by artists since the late 1960s. Real and virtual scope of hologram was used intricately in Al Razutis' work called *Newtonian Galactic Assembly Line* (fig.10) done between 1974 and 1976 comprising 36 holograms.

In Alexander's arrangement in 1988 called *Horrors of War* (fig.11), a 'holosculpture' was used blend with a sound. This is a holographic virtual space image of human skull in real dimensions and comes as close as about 8-10 m in front of the plate (Işık, 2013, 2014).

Since 1980s, Georges Dyens has combined land art and holography. Also he has added special music of his works such as *Reliqua Terrae*, *Vertigo Terrae* (1990s) (fig.12) and *The Galactic Horizons* (2004) (georgesdyens.com). He says: "I also integrate music into my works. Holography and music share an interesting similarity: both are made of waves."



Dyensusually creates *holosculptures* and use them with fiber optics and electronic system. (Dyens, 1989).

## CONCLUSION

Since the 1960s, using nature and technology has altered the sense of artistic setting in parallel with spatial variance. Artistic settings have become a space/environment/medium where artistic productions can be made and performed and they also have gained importance in art as much as real spaces. On the other hand, virtuality and reality have begun to be intertwined with the possibility of perceiving a virtual space as a real one. Classical art studios known as artistic production points have also changed. An artist, as the person who *devises projects* or *activist* no longer needs to be in such kind of an 'artist studio' to produce works or have them produced because there are many options of materials and settings among which artists can make decision. Settings which are devised, perceived and experienced as the stage of performance and artistic production have undergone successive changes in a period of fifty years and seem to go on experiencing these changes in the future.

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