Chapter 9

Art and Space:
New Boundaries of Intervention

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ABSTRACT

The duo “art and space” looks very easy to understand: art interacts with spaces, uses spaces, or simply fills spaces. However, starting from this simple consideration, what this chapter would like to propose is a reflection about a kind of art that creates spaces and places instead, expanding the discussion about the interdisciplinary approach of artists to creation. Considering the works of some artists that have made the intervention on spaces one of their prerogatives, the research focuses on the new connections that arise between the artist and the public through these creations. The imagery of Yayoi Kusama, Tomas Saraceno, Anish Kapoor, Cristina Iglesias, Carsten Nicolai, Rudolf Stingel, among others, allows a different perception, most of time asking to the spectator itself an active part in the work of art. The chapter offers a specific case study dedicated to the work of the Dutch artist Krijn de Koning.

INTRODUCTION

Somehow there are no more boundaries between different disciplines; art, design, architecture, installation, sound and light are all gathered together to conceive a new experience, far beyond the simple contemplation. The examples that will be discussed in the chapter aim to consider how contemporary art has opened up new possibilities, where the communication with the public is not straightforward anymore, but passes through different channels and uses different means and materials. A type of art that is interior and exterior at the same time, reaching beyond the simple intervention on spaces, and generating new ones ready to be experienced in a different way.

This research, then, wants to be a selected recollection of artistic expressions where the relationship between art and space has reached a new level of awareness. The direct participation and interaction of the spectator in the work of art becomes essential to the development of the project and produces unexpected results, which are constantly changing.

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The 20th and 21st century have demonstrated a certain tendency to blur the borders between different artistic disciplines. The result seems to be a harmony of what is usually called art or design or architecture or performance. Within this contemporary path, it is particularly interesting to analyse how art and space has taken a significant turn towards a new way of conceiving creation. In the 1970s lots of artists began to look for new connections with the surrounding space, giving birth to a series of interventions that moved outside the commonly designated places for art, like galleries and museums, and invaded public spaces and unlimited landscapes. “The space of art was no longer conceived as a blank slate, a tabula rasa, but a real place” (Kwon, 2002, p. 11). Minimal art and Land art marked the growth of the site-specific art concept, thanks to the research of artists like Richard Serra, Richard Long, Robert Smithson, Walter de Maria, and Daniel Buren. As early as 1970 Buren proclaimed (1973): “Whether the place in which the work is shown imprints and marks this work, whatever it may be, or whether the work itself is directly- consciously or not- produced for the Museum, any work presented on that framework, if it does not explicitly examine the influence of the framework upon itself, falls into the illusion of self-sufficiency-or idealism” (p. 67).

At the same time, the public dimension of these creations has consequently acquired a new meaning within the realm of perception: the interaction and the intervention of the spectator has become essential in the process, allowing a different experience of the work of art and, of course, the space. Because the artistic experience is thought to belong to a specific place, it will no more be perceived as an external object, which only occupies a portion of the space, but it arises with the space and, sometimes, it creates a new space.

It becomes clear that there is a certain affinity for architecture or design, disciplines whose main prerogative is to build new spaces for a specific purpose. The research shows that some artists are moving in a similar direction, though using a different prospective: the space they are conceiving has not a material or tangible objective, it becomes pure creativity and aesthetic experience. Although the rooms of Yayoi Kusama are created to be real, confined rooms, they are nothing but a stream of the troubled subconscious of the artist, who she wants to make the visitor be part of. The space becomes the canvas, but the spectator is not only an observer from the outside, he leaves all the barriers behind and is invited to personally participate and grow the experience of the creation.

L’inversione delle attese sposta la finalità del lavoro dalla contemplazione estetica alla riorganizzazione del rapporto fruitore-opera. [...] Esso è usato per negare l’abituale ruolo e significato narrativo o programmatico-strumentale del testo, fondato sul modello consequenziale della scrittura, per mettere lo spettatore dentro un sistema di relazioni. (Grazioli, 2001, p. 174)

English Translation of the quotation:

“The reversal of expectations moves the purpose of the work from the aesthetic contemplation to the reorganisation of the relationship between the viewer and the work of art. [...] It is used to deny the common role and narrative meaning or programmatic-instrumental of the text, based on the consequential model of the writing, for placing the spectator inside a system of relationships.”
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