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Conceptualism of Sculpture Films of the 1970s–1980s in the Experimental Field of “Expanded Cinema”

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Abstract. *The aim of the article is to analyse conceptual foundations of sculpture films in the 1970s–1980s in the context of experiments with “cinema expansion”. Results.* Sculpture films of the 1970s–1980s show signs of a tendency toward conceptualism inherent in postmodern art. In innovative experiments on the audiovisual art and sculpture synthesis, not only the updated artistic toolkit became basic, but the process of meaning creation with a mandatory appeal to the audience’s perception as well. All this was organically integrated into the general search of avant-garde directors, aimed at developing the technological and artistic possibilities of cinematography, which received a generalised name “expanded cinema” (G. Youngblood). W. Turnbull, A. Forbes, D. Ashton, R. Horn, V. Pye, G. Matta-Clark, L. Lijn, B. Flanagan, R. Smithson, G. Stevens, P. Dockley, D. Hall, D. Dye, E. McCall, L. Lye, J. Hilliard, T. Hill, and many others, can be considered the figures in this direction. *Scientific novelty.* For the first time, the conceptual foundations of sculpture films of the 1970s–1980s are systematically analysed in the context of avant-garde searches by masters in creating interdisciplinary arts, and in extended cinema as well. *Conclusions.* The analysis of projects significant for sculpture cinema in the 1970s–1980s reveals a few conceptual creative approaches: video documentation of the process of creating a sculpture, and presenting an audiovisual work as an independent art object; filming the transformation and destruction of sculpture works for the purpose of provocative statements on current topics; use of cinematographic equipment as a material for creating sculptures; expanded interpretation of the concept of “sculpture” as a form, the construction of which is not limited to solid materials or inanimate objects; fixation on film of kinetic sculptures, the contemplation of which is inseparable from the surrounding environment. A general conclusion is made that experiments with sculpture films contributed to the video art formation, and influenced the further development of media art.

Keywords: media art; video art; conceptualism; expanded cinema; interdisciplinary arts; sculpture films; kinetic sculptures; land art

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Introduction

In the 1960s, the Western cinematographic industry, having an appropriate technological arsenal in the creation of colour sound screen works, concentrated on the making commercially successful products. In spite of the fact that, for example, in the USA, the traditional studio production system was broken, and the director-author's figure came to the fore, New Hollywood creators focused on audience demand, and made appropriate entertainment content. Therefore, experiments with new forms and technologies became the main activity of the avant-garde independent cinema creators. The development of telecommunications and video technologies contributed to the formation of a new screen art concept, which was not limited by previous standards, particularly, by space dimensions.

Views on the cinema secession from the usual artistic and technological standards of many audiovisual avant-garde representatives were recorded by the American theorist of media art Gene Youngblood (1942–2021) in the concept of “expanded cinema”. In the cognominal monograph, which was published in 1970, he argued that the understanding of cinema should be expanded, as well as include new media and technologies (such as videotronics, informatics, cybernetics, holography, video spheres, etc.). According to G. Youngblood (1970), the creation of expanded cinema involved a change in perspective, and “the end of the era of cinema as we've known it, the beginning of an era of image-exchange between man and man” (p. 49).

Among artistic experiments aimed at transforming audiovisual arts, the phenomenon of “sculpture cinema” takes a special place. This conception arose on the wave of a general shift in the spatial art understanding, because the technological development of the 1950s–1960s stimulated a new attitude to the categories of time and space. It is not about the presence of sculpture objects on the screen as significant for the meaning-making of film text elements, but about how the cinema “changes the landscape” of the sculpture art (Wood & Christie, 2019), how the forms and means of artistic expression of the two types of art interpenetrate, which developed in parallel until the postmodern era. At the same time, despite the obviousness of the conceptual dominance of ideas over forms in the artistic pursuits of the sculpture cinema creators, this aspect of their work remains insufficiently highlighted. Regarding the fact that in many cases modern video art borrows the ideas of the postwar era postmodernists, the study of the conceptual ground of the sculpture cinema is an important issue, because the experimental artists' innovations in 1950s–1970s formed the cultural space for the modern polyform eclectic art.

Recent Research and Publication Analysis. The study of the “sculpture cinema” phenomenon is currently one of the interesting, and at the same time promising topics in the scientific and academic sphere. First of all, the publication of the collection of specialised scientific works edited by J. Wood and I. Christie (2019) “Sculpture and Film” should be mentioned. The book contains an analysis of definite phenomena related to sculpture films, particularly: reevaluation of surreal objects on the screen (S. Lecky), sculpture in experimental cinema (K. Lund), artistic significance of the sound and music in the sculpture cinema (N. Alter), description of films and sculptures by New Zealand artist Len Lye (D. Curtis), American sculptor-minimalist Robert Morris (L. le Fevre), etc. (Wood & Christie, 2019). The section “Sculpture cinema”

is a part of a study by David Curtis “A History of Artists’ Film and Video in Britain” (2007), carried out within the framework of the the British Film Institute activity. D. Curtis analyses some experiments on the combination of film technologies and sculpture techniques by artists of the United Kingdom of Great Britain and Northern Ireland (Curtis, 2007).

In Ukraine, the phenomenon of “sculpture cinema” is less known, and has not received separate systematic studies. For the most part, the facts of using sculpture compositions are analysed as a component of video art. For example, V. Golovei and O. Rud (2019), investigating social and cultural prerequisites for the grounding video art in the context of the development of media technologies, turn to the work of one of the founders of video art, N. D. Paik. They describe compositions from television monitors, which the “grandfather of video art” began to create since 1962, and conclude that “sculptures and installations from television screens have become a kind of a calling card of the artist” (p. 50). I. Pecheranskyi (2023, p. 66), analysing the origins of video art with taking into account the socio-cultural and technological aspects of its transformation into a popular audiovisual art direction, analysed some demonstrative experiments of artists in the screen presentation of sculptures. Particularly, the researcher cites an example of the interaction between the viewer and the video installation by N. J. Pike “TV-Budda” (1974), where the video camera displays the Buddha sculpture on the monitor, and the recipient has an opportunity to take an active part in its meditative contemplation, and to be a participant in the action. It is worth mentioning that the vast majority of foreign and domestic scientists point to the existence of a unique common artistic and paradigmatic space in which video art, television, experimental (author’s) cinema, including sculpture films, developed.

Aim of the article

The aim of the article is to analyse the conceptual foundations of sculpture films of the 1970s–1980s as a reflection the expanded cinema idea.

Main research material

On the one hand, grounding the idea of “expanded cinema” required artists to increase their capabilities (avant-garde directors), and on the other hand, to try to overcome the static, i.e. timeless nature of image creation (representatives of spatial arts). The main goal of such projects was to change the interpretation of the static art of sculpture with the help of screen visualisation of the process of viewing three-dimensional and stationary works. This led to the emergence of the so-called “sculpture cinema”, which subsequently caused a variety of media art forms (Jacobs et al., 2017). Characteristic features of a new type of artistic creativity were various experiments on combining artistic and technical means of sculpture and cinema art, mostly aimed at interactive relations with the viewer. The researcher of this phenomenon Nora Alter (2012) defines sculpture films as such ones where “the camera animates the objects and expands their physical spaces beyond the visible” (p. 34).

Although sculpture cinema as a separate artistic phenomenon was known in the 1960s, its appearance became a logical continuation of the avant-garde artists' searches in the first half of the 20th century. The prototype of sculpture films is considered to be the Dadaist short films of the French-American director and photographer Man Ray, particularly, his "Le Retour à la Raison" (1923), "Emak Bakia" (1926), "Les Mystères du château de Dé" (1929) (Lund, 2019, p. 33). The camera actively worked with three-dimensional geometric shapes, and their demonstration was mixed with animated textures, radiographs, with the addition of rotations, highlights, shimmers, and reflections. According to Cornelia Lund, the experimental silent short film "Ritual in Transfigured Time" (1946) by the American director Maya Deren (Lund, 2019, p. 37) has the sculpture film characteristics as well. In this film, the author studied the statuary of human figures and sculptures through the prism of metamorphosis and anthropomorphism. The film is marked by non-linearity, usage of slow motion and stop shots, convergence of the temporal art of choreography and the spatial nature of sculpture: the dancers' bodies sometimes freeze like marble, instead, the garden statues acquire dynamics, begin to come to life, which ultimately leads to the understanding of the identity of the human body as a model for the sculptor, and a creation inspired by the artist, capable of becoming a lively organism.

Close to the aesthetics of sculpture cinema is the film "Visual Variations on Noguchi" (1945) by the American Marie Menken. It was filmed using a hand-held camera. In one of the episodes, she slowly revolved around an abstract sculpture in order to create an impromptu dance in the film space. Thanks to this, the screen image was freed from the aspect typicality inherent to the human eye (Rees et al., 2011, p. 61).

At the beginning of the 1950s, experiments on the combining artistic means of screen arts and sculpture were revived. For example, the film "83B" (1951), created by sculptor William Turnbull and director Allan Forbes, showed shadows cast by W. Turnbull's sculptures on the walls and ceiling of his studio, caused by a moving light source. Due to the movements of the camera, fast montage, and sound design (noises, rhythmic beats), the sculpture "came to life", and acquired signs of kinetics. It is noteworthy that, according to the authors' plan, the video sequence together with the sound were made to be played both in forward and reverse order. The film of the British artist Dudley Ashton "Figures in a Landscape" (1953) contained specific, almost choreographic camera trajectories, which explored a sculptural group in the open landscape, simulating the spatial experience of its admiration by the viewer (Reynolds, 2021).

Some sculptors used the camera in order to record the stages of their own creative work. As a result, such American and British sculpture films as "Einghorn" (1970) by Rebecca Horn, videos of sculpture and ecological interventions "Open House" (1972) and "Split" (1974) by Gordon Matta-Clark, "From Scrap to Sculpture" (1971) by William Pye, "Creations" (1970) by Barry Flanagan, "What is the Sound of Clapping Hands" (1973) by Liliane Leane Lijn, etc. (Curtis, 2007, p. 128). For example, the colour film "Spiral Jetty" (1970) by the American artist Robert Smithson (Robert Smithson) documented the construction of the sculptor's eponymous land art project, as a huge embankment dam, built on the shore of a lake near Roselle Point in the state of Utah. The video series was united by an off-screen narration of the legend of a great lake maelstrom leading to underground channels, to the Pacific Ocean. According to the author's idea, the spiral shape of the sculpture appears as a metaphor for the transition to the underworld. The

director-sculptor gives the viewer an opportunity to see dump trucks, graders, bulldozers that change the landscape. A huge part of the film is shot from the air: helicopters turn and circle around the finished spiral, trying to catch the imprint of the Sun in the centre of the sculpture, and the small figure of R. Smithson himself, who “doomed” runs along the pier, as if he is being captured as well, and pulled towards the underground vortex (Alter, 2012, p. 34).

Filming of the sculptors’ creative experiments gradually accustomed the viewers to the idea of optional static material forms of fine art. Films of Graham Stevens “Atmospheres” (1971) and “Desert Cloud” (1975) captured the interaction of air, water, earth and thin polyethylene tubes, squares and cylinders that floated, bounced and flew. The camera documented the public’s reaction to experiments in the “dematerialisation” (i.e. destruction) of geometric shapes. The process of changing sculpture materials was explored in Peter Dockley’s film “Cast” (1971): the author filmed the heating and melting of wax figures depicting a family dining as a grotesque metaphor of human vulnerability (Curtis, 2007, p. 130).

Sculpture films gave rise to a special approach in the interaction of cinematography and sculpture, an interpretation that seems to reconstruct the process of understanding the art work by the recipient. A representative of such an approach was the British artist David Hall. His sculpture of the 1960s reflected angles and perspectives, a specific perception of space through constructions and interventions. It was created for interaction, that is, it focused on direct relations with the viewer. This approach was embodied by David Hall in the experimental film “Vertical” (1970). It was a powerful experiment in framing the perception, a deliberate focus of the viewer’s attention on certain natural or artificial phenomena, snatched from the usual environment, and limited by clear frames. At the same time, such works symbolised the transition from the concept of “sculptors’ films” as a separate case of expanded cinema to the full-fledged video art grounding (Rees et al., 2011, p. 87).

In the early 1970s, against the background of the general fascination with creative searches in art, young British sculptors began to spread their experience of working with sculptures modeled in space for the screen and video projection usage. It is significant that most of them, including David Dye, Eaterly, David Hall and others, avoided direct contact with professional cinematographers. Thus, they embodied the “expansion” of the planar reality of film art through the understanding of the world as a multidimensional moving space (Curtis, 2007, p. 213).

Some artists of the 1970s reinterpreted the standard apparatus of the main cinema: its cameras, projectors, and lenses. For example, the film “Film onto Film” (1970) by David Dye projected the image of a moving slide diafilm onto the film tape. That is, before the main image, one could see additional projections that were thrown by the slide film tape in the form of a ringed loop. Similarly, David Dye’s creative work “Projection / Introjection” (1971) directed the image of the projector back at itself through mirrors. Understanding the film tape as a three-dimensional material that can form a kinetic sculpture prompted David Dye to create the project “Unsigning for 8 Projectors” (1972). The artist’s declared “anti-ego-journey” showed a close-up of the master’s hand, which painted the letters of his name. This action was shown asynchronously by eight projectors loaded with continuous, ringed film tape. The repeated image was collected on one screen, which was not static as well. It rotated slowly, and this led to

additional image fragmentation, and the appearance of animated effects on the walls of the room (*Projects*, n.d.).

Anglo-American artist Anthony McCall gained fame thanks to his innovative creative works in illusory film projections, particularly, solid-light installations that emphasised the sculptural qualities of light rays. E. McCall's early works "Landscape for White Squares" (1972), "Landscape of Fire" (1973) filmed his serial action performances. The work "Line Describing a Cone" (1973) became indicative for that period. It set the tone for the subsequent stylistic creativity of E. McCall's work. Based on simple but moving (animated) linear pictures, the master offered the viewer serial repetitions of light projections. In darkened and specially filled with gaseous fog (haze) rooms, projections create an illusion of three-dimensional shapes, ellipses, waves and planes. All of them do not look static, as they gradually oscillate, change size and shape.

By reducing the audiovisual artistic work to the basic components of time and light, and completely removing the screen as a given surface for projecting, the master attempted to deconstruct the cinema in total. His works also changed the audience's attitude towards the film, as they became complicit: streams of light cross their bodies, distorting familiar contours and forms. In "Long Film for Four Projectors" (1974), E. McCall used the film tape in order to explore ideas of space and time by creating light walls. Four projectors were installed along the walls of the room. Their beams created intersecting and intercrossing planes of interrupted light, forming a changing three-dimensional sculpture through which the audience had to pass. After a twenty-year break, the artist returned to sculptural experiments with "solid light". This time he used not 16 mm film, but computer animation and digital projections. For example, the installation "Doubling Back" (2003) used slow cinematographic fading for combining and separating two opposite forms in one voluminous object. New works also explored the extended cyclical installation structure which the master first developed in films of the 1970s. Among the new projects, the following are noticeable: "You and I, Horizontal" (2006), "Leaving, with Two-Minute Silence" (2009), "Face to Face" (2013) (*About*, n.d.).

New Zealand master Len Lye (1901–1980) is known both for his avant-garde film works and kinetic sculptures. He became famous not only because of his work in "direct" (using no camera) film production, the essence of which is the play-by-play processing of epy film tape in order to create a screen image. His moving sculptures and installations of the 1970s were often accompanied by a video sequence, which increased a dynamic impact effect on the audience (Horrocks, 2015).

The film works of the British conceptualist John Hilliard (born in 1951) demonstrated the systematic exploration of space inherent in his artistic pictures, particularly, reflexive games with the camera that fixed its own image through the consecutive change of the diaphragm. For the film "From and To" (1971), J. Gilliard gave conceptual instructions to his two cameramen: one of them had to stand in the middle of a circle and slowly rotate the camera, while the other one had to point the camera at the centre of the circle (Curtis, 2007, p. 218).

British sculptor and architect Tony Hill (born in 1946) also combines various art practices in his experimental films. The director's short film "100 Heads" (1971) offered the viewer to look at a person as a living statue. Instead of marble pedestals, the screen demonstrates a quick change of the heads of people of different sex, age and

appearance, which is fixed on a white background. According to the author's statement, "Water Work" (1987) is a sculpture film that explores visual, sound, kinesthetic effects caused by immersion in water. T. Hill plays with verticals and horizontals, "weightlessness" of the body in the underwater world, statuary of human figures separated by the elements of air and water. He reinterprets the surface of water, which turns into a kind of boundary between worlds. It is both a window and a mirror, acquires signs of visible and invisible (*Home*, n.d.). So, although T. Hill's films are far from direct filming of sculptures, the conceptual approach emphasised by the author and, most importantly, the direct implementation of sculptural thinking in the visual images present on the screen, make him one of the most significant representatives of sculpture cinema.

Conclusions

Sculpture films of the 1960s–1980s show signs of a tendency toward conceptualism inherent in postmodern art. In innovative experiments on the synthesis of audiovisual art and sculpture, not only the renovated artistic tools, but the process of meaning-making with a definite appeal to the audience's perception became basic.

In experiments with filming creativity acts, attempts to rethink the camera or living bodies as sculptures, a change of emphasis from the formal demonstration of artistic images to the retelling of the principles and motives that drove the author was observed. The master became a guide, opening the world of ideas to the viewers, clearing the mind of illusions and patterns. The analysis of projects significant for sculpture cinema in the 1960s–1980s revealed the authors' several leading conceptual positions, the main of which are the following:

- Video documentation of the process of creating a sculpture, which turns into an independent art object at once. The direction of such films is least aimed at offering the viewers to trace the chronology of the sculpture construction. The act of creation serves as a script for the film, which loses its status as a documentary one, acquires the meaning of an alternative view of sculpture, supplemented by the entire arsenal of artistic expression means of screen arts, from non-linear narrative and montage to acoustic effects. Thus, the creative process and its fixation on the film tape becomes no less significant than a sculptural art object.

- Filming the processes of transformation and destruction of sculptural creative works. Fixation of performative presentating works of art, accompanied by their further deconstruction, is observed mostly in the case of active authors' provocative statements, development of social and political, environmental, gender and other topical issues. The secondary audiovisual art work is used to inform about the realised individual performance to a wide range of viewers who could not be present during the transformations of the authors' sculptures. In this way, the message grounded both in the destroyed sculpture and in the captured sculpture film becomes a tool of propaganda and agitation, as well as a slogan expressed by the conceptualist.

- Using cinematographic equipment (camera equipment, film tape, screens, projectors, etc.) as a material for creating sculpture groups, searching and demonstrating the aesthetic appeal of the filming process, recoding three-dimensional sculpture ob-

jects into a planar image and vice versa, intension to make such voluminous installations, which would be read as a full-fledged artistic image only from one angle with the help of a camera. In most cases, the authors aim to destroy the stereotypes of the viewers' perception, to play with their imagination, to shake up the stable worldview, to impress them, to immerse them in a special artistic space.

– Expanded interpretation of the concept “sculpture” as a form, the construction of which is not limited to solid materials or non-spiritual objects. Light streams, projection walls, pillars, fog, gas, shadows, flickering – all these also appear as factors of form grounding, just as the human body belonging to the performer or the viewer. That is why masters strive for all the artistic and instrumental achievements of cinematography to be used for realising the idea of “ephemeral” sculptures.

– Fixation of kinetic sculptures on a film tape, the observing of which is inseparable from the perception of the surrounding natural or urban environment. These are cases when it is impossible to present the art object in another place, and when the functioning of the moving sculpture depends on its immediate environment (ebbs and flows, wind rose, soil, relief or background historical monuments, iconic buildings in the urban landscape).

Therefore, developing as a separate direction of “expanded cinema”, “sculpture cinema” sought to overcome the static nature of creating spatial images. On the other hand, the authors of interdisciplinary “cinematic” projects aimed to go beyond the flatness of the screen, to add three-dimensionality to the standard models of audiovisual creative works. However, later their experiments led to the full-fledged formation and development of video art, became an organic component of sculpture interventions and installations, which took a strong position in modern art.

The scientific novelty of the article grounds in the fact that for the first time the conceptual foundations of sculpture films of the 1970s–1980s are systematically analysed in the context of the artists' avant-garde searches in creating interspecies arts, particularly, expanded cinema.

Prospects for further research. Turning to the topic of sculpture cinema as a representative component of the avant-garde film of the 1970s–1980s is promising not only from the point of view of researching the idea of “expanded cinema”, which, due to technological progress, continues to be embodied nowadays. Further study of similar processes seems important both at the level of the media art theory, interspecies interaction of arts, history of audiovisual culture, and at the level of direct analysis of those outstanding artists' creativity work in the 20th century, whose sculpture films have not been studied until now.

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Conflict of interests

The author declares that there is no conflict of interests.

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Концептуалізм скульптурних фільмів 1970–1980-х років в експериментальному полі «розширеного кіно»

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Анотація. *Мета статті* – проаналізувати концептуальні основи скульптурних фільмів 1970–1980-х рр. у контексті експериментів з «розширенням кіно». *Результати дослідження.* Скульптурні фільми 1970–1980-х рр. мають ознаки тяжіння до концептуалізму, що притаманне постмодерному мистецтву. В новаторських дослідях з синтезу аудіовізуальних мистецтв і скульптури базовим став не лише оновлений мистецький інструментарій, а процес смислотворення з обов'язковою апеляцією до глядацького сприйняття. Все це органічно інтегрувалося в загальні пошуки режисерів-авангардистів, спрямовані на розвиток технологічних і художніх можливостей кінематографа, що отримали узагальнену назву «розширене кіно» (Дж. Янгблад). Діячами цього напрямку можна вважати В. Тернбулла, А. Форбса, Д. Ештона, Р. Горн, В. Пая, Г. Матта-Кларка, Л. Лійн, Б. Фланагана, Р. Смітсона, Г. Стівенса, П. Доклі, Д. Холла, Д. Дая, Е. Маккола, Л. Лая, Дж. Гілліарда, Т. Хілл та багатьох інших. *Наукова новизна.* Вперше системно проаналізовані концептуальні основи скульптурних фільмів 1970–1980-х рр. у контексті авангардних пошуків митців зі створення міжвидових мистецтв, зокрема розширеного кіно. *Висновки.* Аналіз значущих для скульптурного кіно проєктів 1970-1980-х рр. виявив кілька концептуальних творчих підходів: відеодокументація процесу створення скульптури та презентація аудіовізуального твору як самостійного артоб'єкта; фільмування трансформації та знищення скульптурних витворів з метою провокативного висловлювання на актуальну тематику; використання кінематографічного обладнання як матеріалу для створення скульптур; розширене тлумачення поняття «скульптура» як форми, конструювання якої не обмежується твердими матеріалами чи неживими предметами; фіксація на плівці кінетичних скульптур, споглядання за якими невіддільне від навколишнього середовища. Зроблено висновок, що експерименти зі скульптурними фільмами сприяли становленню відеоарту та вплинули на подальший розвиток медіамистецтва.

Ключові слова: медіамистецтво; відеоарт; концептуалізм; розширене кіно; міжвидові мистецтва; скульптурні фільми; кінетичні скульптури; ленд-арт

