MERGING ART AND INSTALLATION:
EXHIBITION INSTALLATION IN THE 20th CENTURY

GEORGIANA BUȚ[*]

ABSTRACT. This paper discusses exhibition installation as an aesthetic medium. Drawing on Germano Celant's writing on installation, we advance an interpretation of artists' engagement with installation resulting in room-size works in the first half of the 20th century, as part of the evolution of exhibition installation towards the convergence of art and design. The paper also address the problem of intermediality as discussed by Juliane Rebentisch, and its implications for installation and attempts to tests Rosalind Krauss's reconception of the medium against Rebentisch's criticism, while analyzing Krauss's disapproval of installation art, including the room-size works of the avant-garde.

Keywords: exhibition installation, installation art, aesthetic medium, intermediality.

Introduction

This paper is a response to the lack of aesthetic study of the exhibition installation and posits exhibition installation as an aesthetic medium. In spite of the recurring convergence and overlapping of exhibition installation with installation art (and its prototypes) in the 20th century, exhibition installation[1] has generally been positioned at best as meaning making and at worst as contextualization, while installation art has taken on the full role of an aesthetic medium. Is it possible that the two have sufficiently in common, historically but also formally, in order to theorize exhibition installation as art? In order to explore the idea of exhibition installation

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[*] PhD student, Department of Philosophy, Babeș-Bolyai University, Cluj, Romania. Email: georgianabut@gmail.com.
[1] Throughout the paper, I will use the formulation "exhibition installation" and "art installation" interchangeably, as opposed to "installation art" used for the genre gaining prominence around the 1970s.

as medium we will study artists' engagement with installation in room-size works, focusing on the first half of the 20th century. Although intermediality is generally associated with the artistic movements of the fifties and sixties, this aspect can already be found in artists' experiments with design and art at the beginning of the century. Rosalind Krauss, in the context of a theorization of the aesthetic medium after modernism, expresses her strong disapproval of installation art, including the room-size works of the avant-garde. We will address the problem of the medium as theorized by Krauss and that of intermediality discussed by Juliane Rebentisch. We will consider Rebentisch's criticism of Krauss's reconception of the medium and attempt to clarify the grounds on which her assessment is built, as well as to analyze Krauss's dismissal of installation. The section, "Exhibition installation and installation art in the 20th century" addresses the status of the room-size works created after 1920. Art historian Julie Reiss refers to these works as proto-installations, as part of the genealogy of installation art, which goes through painting, assemblage, sculpture, and design. A different analysis of the same works is that of curator Germano Celant, who regards them as key points in the development of exhibition installation. As we will show bellow, Celant redirects or attention towards the merging of art and design.

Our second direction of analysis is that of the redefinition of the aesthetic medium and its implications for installation, broached in the section entitled "Hybridization, and the reconception of the aesthetic medium". We will show that Rebentisch's criticism of what she describes as Krauss's attempt to protect art from the hybridization characteristic to postmodern art, best illustrated by installation art, by linking the concept of art and its autonomy with a specialized engagement with a particular medium, is contradicted by Krauss's redefinition of the medium. We will, however, discover a separation that is intended to guarantee art's autonomy, which Rebentisch rightly identifies in Krauss's argument, that of art from life. On this ground, Krauss links autonomy to the medium and the white cube. Krauss's new approach of the aesthetic medium as a logical construction and her acknowledgement of the dissolution of the traditional genre boundaries shows that her rejection of installation is not caused by intermediality – defined by Rebentisch as the fusion of the different arts that transcend their boundaries and tends to undermine the classification into individual arts – nor the classifications intermediality undermines. We will argue that what Krauss rejects is the art forms that dispense with the white cube, for Krauss, a warrantor of the medium and of autonomy.

Exhibition installation as medium

One of the strongest critics of the lack acknowledgement in the art historical accounts of installation art is Mary Anne Staniszewski. This lack she describes as an "amnesia"[2] on the part of writers that present and analyze artworks individually, failing to give the due attention to the role of contextualization and representation played by the exhibitions in which those works were shown. In *The Power of Display*, Staniszewski shows that, with the appearance of artworks that used the format of installation art, exhibition installation enters the creative dimension of the works.[3] In the hands of artists from the conceptual and institutional critique movement, the exhibition becomes a plurality of individual installations and the design of the exhibition installation, usually the responsibility of the museum, is integrated in the creative dimension of the works.[4] During the development and display of artworks using the format of art installation, artists simultaneously appropriate the exhibition installation as conceptual dimension of their work. According to Staniszewski, with this shift, and the merging of artistic and curatorial practices, exhibition installation, which previously had been an instrument of museological contextualization, became part of the creative and conceptual dimension of curators.

Staniszewski, a significant writer for history of exhibition installation as art, presents installation design as "historical category, a medium in its own right"[5], an argument for which she finds proof in the exhibitions organized between the 1929 and 1970 at the Museum of Modern art on New York. She attempts to correct the "failure to discuss artists' installations in terms of installation design"[6]. The artists' installations she refers to are those from the 1960s and 70s, the "inception of installation art". She also analyzes the innovative exhibition designs created by the avant-garde designers, architects and artists, such as Herbert Bayer, Frederick Kiesler, Lilly Reich, and El Lissitzky in the first half of the century. The installations they created were an "important aspect – in some cases the most important aspect – of their work"[7]. Staniszewski sees these installations as a prehistory of installation art.[8] She is one of the most prominent art historians discussing the relationship between installation art and exhibition installation, in a recent attempt from art historians and

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[2] Mary Anne Staniszewski, *The Power of Display: A History of Exhibition Installations at the Museum of Modern Art*, The MIT Press, Massachusetts, Cambridge, 1998, „Introduction", p. xviii.

[3] See Staniszewski, *op. cit.,* especially the chapter "Installation Design and Installation Art".

[4] *Ibidem*, p. 276.

[5] *Ibidem*, "Introduction", p. xxii.

[6] *Ibidem.* See the chapter "Installation Design and Installation Art".

[7] *Ibidem,* p. 3.

[8] *Ibidem,* p. 1.

curators to compensate for the absence of the exhibition installation in art history. Focusing on the design of exhibition galleries and on the types of experience offered by exhibition spaces throughout history, another art historian, Charlotte Klonk[9] provides a rich historical study of the evolution of gallery interiors, which, together with research by Staniszewski and Celant on the evolution of art installation and installation art are the grounding of this study.

As we will show below, the fluidization of boundaries in artistic, curatorial and design practices was already happening in the 1920s. In this gradual, ongoing transformation during the 20th century, exhibition installation played a key role and we could argue, to use Bruce W. Ferguson's phrasing, that the installation was "*the* medium" as well as "the *medium*"[10] through which it took place. In the anthology *Thinking About Exhibitions,* Ferguson, Greenberg and Nairne (eds.) „host" two apparently identical formulations which hide very different meaning. In the "Introduction" they write that "exhibitions have become *the* medium through which most art becomes known"[11], and in his essay "Exhibition Rethorics. Material speech and utter sense", published in the same volume, Ferguson refers to exhibitions as "the *medium* of contemporary art in the sense of being its main agency of communication"[12]. Paul O'Neill makes clear this difference of emphasis and meaning in his book *The Culture of Curating and the Curating of Cultures,* and understands it as the difference between the exhibition as "specific cultural form" when the stress is on the definitive article, compared to the exhibition as "an agency of communication" when the stress is on the noun (*medium*).[13] In other words, exhibition installation is instrument, as well as aesthetic medium.

Though their role in contextualization and representation has started to surface in art historical literature, arguments on what exhibition installation and exhibition are in aesthetic terms are underdeveloped. With few exceptions, they can be put under the umbrella of exhibition mediation, understood as placement in a certain scenario, the proximity to other works/objects, exhibition design (including the color of walls, typography, architecture) or the spectatorial mode it proposes. Moreover, the new discourse about the exhibition as medium is working with the

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[9] See Charlotte Klonk, *Spaces of Experience: Art Gallery Interiors from 1800 to 2000*, Yale University Press, New Haven & London, 2009.

[10] Ferguson, Bruce W.; Greenberg, Reesa; Nairne Sandy (eds.), *Thinking about Exhibitions,* London, Routledge, 1996, p.1; p. 127.

[11] Ferguson, Bruce W.; Greenberg, Reesa; Nairne Sandy (eds.), *op. cit.,* "Introduction", p.1.

[12] Bruce Ferguson, "Exhibition Rethorics. Material speech and utter sense", in Ferguson, Bruce W.; Greenberg, Reesa; Nairne Sandy (eds.), *op. cit.*, p. 127.

[13] Paul O'Neill, *The Culture of Curating and the Curating of Cultures*, The MIT Press, Cambridge Massachussets, 2012, p. 90.

assumption that the exhibition is a medium as mere extension of installation art. An eloquent example of this assumption is the discussion between Matthias Michalka and Juliane Rebentisch, published in the catalog accompanying an exhibition dedicated to art practices of the 1990s and to the way in which these practices worked with, explored and expanded the exhibition.[14] Michalka's question for Rebentisch, if artistic work with the medium of the exhibition can be understood as an extended form of installation in which artists incorporate aspects of selection and display in their work[15], suggests Michalka's understanding of the exhibition medium as an extended installation. In this view, self-reflective exhibitions are works of installation art expanded to include the curatorial attributes of selecting, display and communication in the creator's work. While Michalka is right to see the integration of a curatorial dimension in the work of artists active in the 1990s, he limits the sense of the exhibition as medium to an extension of installation art. There are two points in this logic that can be contested, drawing on Rebentisch's position on the matter.

Rebentish posits that "installation art is essentially exhibition" and that installations reflecting directly on the act of exhibiting (many of them associated with institutional critique) are not extended installations but simply installations.[16] Her argument is based on the idea that installation does not need to expand in order to reflect upon the exhibiting spaces or conventions, because this reflection is already implicit in the modality of formal opening of installation towards its location.[17] On one hand, installation art can approach a variety of problems, of which the exhibitionary conditions is only one option. On the other hand, installation art is not the only form through which the exhibition space can be thematized. Installation art is exhibition, maintains Rebentisch, not because all art installations address curatorial themes but because the open form of installation brings attention to the fact that context influences art.[18]

In other words, and this is the first point of contestation, there is no need to think of installations as expanding towards the exhibition, because the formal openness to the context of exhibiting is already implicit in installation art. The second point is that self-reflexivity is a possible, but not necessary aspect of installation

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[14] Juliane Rebentisch, and Matthias Michalka, "To install", in Armaly Fareed, *To Expose, to Show, to Demonstrate, to Inform, to Offer: Artistic Practices Around 1990*..., catalogue accompanying the exhibition with the same name, Museum moderner Kunst Stiftung Ludwig, Vienna, 2015, pp. 223-4.

[15] Matthias Michalka, "To install", in Armaly Fareed, *op. cit.,* p. 223.

[16] J. Rebentisch, *Ibidem*, p. 223.

[17] *Ibidem*, pp. 223-4.

[18] *Ibidem*.

as exhibition.[19] The discussion about exhibitions as mediums can be encountered more frequently when the respective exhibitions address the topic of exhibiting, in other words, when they are self-reflective, and less so when exhibitions address different topics. It is, of course, a starting point for such a discussion.[20] On one hand, Rebentisch could be alerting us to the danger of a false premise – that self-reflectivity is a necessary aspect of exhibitions-as-mediums – and of granting the status of medium based on theme. On the other, Rebentsich's conception of self-reflectivity is developed also with regard to Rosalind Krauss's reconception of the aesthetic medium and to the invention of mediums by artists such as Ed Ruscha, James Coleman or Bruce Nauman. As we will attempt to show in the third section of this paper, Rebentisch regards what Krauss calls invention of mediums as reflection of the specificity of the mediums engaged.

Rebentisch is aware that all art has been sensitive to the context of its presentation. From the Renaissance paintings in cathedrals, to Claude Monet's *Water Lilies* arranged in the Orangerie in 1927, art has been site-specific[21] before the term site-specificity was invented. But installation art, Rebentisch argues, differs due to the fact that it precisely reflects on this aspect, playing with the logic of the *parergon*, the "frame", the accessory, the dynamic limit of the work, which is more and more porous, to the point of complete convergence.[22] This is particularly resonant for the exhibition installation, the "frame" of all exhibited works, which starts reflecting on its role as accessory and transgresses it.

Exhibition installation and installation art in the 20th century

Germano Celant[23] regards the same type of installation works of the 20th century described by Julie Reiss[24], not as a genealogy of installation art, searching for proto-installations, but as a study of the development of exhibition installation.

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[19] *Ibidem.*

[20] Another possible line in the discussion regarding the exhibition as medium, one which I do not take up in this study, could be developed on the basis of roles (artist/ curator/ artist-curator/ curator-artist).

[21] I owe this kind reminder to my academic adviser, prof. dr. Dan Eugen Rațiu.

[22] J. Rebentisch, *Ibidem*.

[23] See Germano Celant, "A Visual Machine. Art Installation and its modern archetypes", in Ferguson, Bruce W.; Greenberg, Reesa; Nairne Sandy (eds.): *Thinking About Exhibitions*, Routledge, London, 1996.

[24] See Julie H. Reiss, *From Margin to Center: the Spaces of Installation Art*, MIT Press, Cambridge; London, 1999.

In his view, installation lies somewhere between architecture and art.[25] Along with providing the role of mediation for „an organization of spaces and an arrangement of visual materials", it is also, Celant says, "a crucial component of any exhibition", "in and of itself a form of modern work".[26]

Celant shows how installation got there by gradually abandoning its decorative, illustrative, and ornamental role. From being „an ornamental and illustrative process", „a material support and a background for an object to be seen and sold,"[27] it became an exhibitionary technique that put emphasis on the relationships between the works, and which slowly changed the accumulative style of arranging works from ceiling to floor, with a linear articulation comprising fewer objects and more space "breathing" between them. This affected the distancing of art objects and an altogether enhanced attention to the installation; relationships, deliberately sought, are associative and auxiliary to the art objects, creating sequences and rhythms through an "expository phraseology" in an organized and differentiated totality. [28]

Celant describes how this new method "ignored" the upper and lower part of the walls, using only the middle band, which the Futurists change again, not to establish the old salon's ideal unity, but to reach an artistic totality in which the motifs do not differentiate themselves. The 20th century Italian Futurists had in mind a synesthetic merging of all the elements into an environment, the walls transforming from support for paintings, into pictorial surface as well, and soon after, Russian Suprematism and Futurism explore the convergence of installation and art into organic whole, an art object and a pure environment.[29] Celant proposes a different approach after the middle of the 20th century, when Constructivist, Bauhaus and Surrealist approaches will distance themselves from the wall, for a type of agglomerated arrangement that loved to suspend and rotate of works, engaging all senses in a rather theatrical scenery, and showing a spherical perception of the exhibition space.[30]

Balla's Futurist paintings from 1918 and 1923 bring the walls and the paintings together in a synesthesia, transforming the walls from background framing painting, into painting, and merge all the elements of the exhibition, from the painting, the walls, and the furniture in a total environment. Celant best exemplifies the change in the role of the wall with Balla's Futurist paintings which lose individual importance,

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[25] G. Celant, *op. cit.*, pp. 261-6.

[26] *Ibidem*, p. 261.

[27] *Ibidem*, pp. 260-2.

[28] *Ibidem*. The organization was done according to periods, themes, characteristic sequences in an artists' body of work.

[29] *Ibidem*, p. 264.

[30] *Ibidem*, p. 266.

as they become elements of an „installation of artistic totality where differentiation of artistic motives is no longer permitted"[31]. He sees here a liberation of the painting from the frame into the exhibition space, creating an „environment which reflects the art and vice-versa", imbued with a sense of floating of the equal visual elements in a visual continuity[32]. In the exhibitions held between 1915 and 1919, the Russian Futurists arrange their works either very low, or very high on the wall, or in the corner (Malevich, 1915).[33]

In 1921, before El Lissitzky and Kiesler's room-size works, Ivan Pruni scatters his works all over the interior of Sturm Gallery in Berlin. What is taking place is a transition from individual artwork to environment, which Celant links to visual-sound experiments by poets like Klebnikov and to those in the Italian and Russian Futurist circles.[34] Very soon after, at the Grand Exposition of 1923, in Berlin, El Lissitzky and Kandinsky exhibit environmental situations. There is an "artistically intelligible organic unity" in the exhibitions designed by Lissitszky, provided by establishing "a link among all his visual and plastic elements", leading to the *Proun Room* of 1923, which takes "the convergence of the visual machines of art and installation to its logical conclusion".[35]

Both influenced by Einstein's theory of relativity, El Lissitzky and Malevich use white for experimenting with the exhibition space. In her *History of Gallery Interiors*, Charlotte Klonk[36] indicates color as one of the important aspects for mediation and experience. If for Malevich white represents the infinite space, for Lissitzky it is a symbol of dynamic space. The latter's *Abstract Cabinet* [Kabinett der Abstrakten] at Provinzialmuseum Hanover, 1928, will accentuate the dynamic movement through the design of the room, created to host constructivist and abstract painting fixed on "spacial walls".[37] It is an environment acting like a "dynamic *frame*"[38] for paintings, in which the viewers are guided through by the chromatic variations of the walls, a space intended to inspire collective experience.[39]

Looking again at Lissitzky's *Proun Room*, a rendering in tridimensional space of a painting in a room, and at his *Abstract Cabinet*, at once installation for paintings and artwork, the merging of exhibition installation and art in the work of a single

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[31] *Ibidem*, p. 264.

[32] *Ibidem*.

[33] *Ibidem*.

[34] *Ibidem.*

[35] *Ibidem*, p. 265.

[36] C. Klonk, *op. cit*., pp. 119-21.

[37] *Ibidem*, 116-7.

[38] *Ibidem*, p. 265.

[39] *Ibidem*, p. 116.

artist become visible as soon as the 1920s. What results is commonly called proto-installation and put on a pathway to installation proper.

But Celant shows us a different lens through which to look at the same events and tendencies in the art of the 20th century. He describes the *Proun Room* as the "ultimate art installation object", "the first example of *pure environmental art* or *art installation*", stressing that there is no trace of interior design and that the paintings enter the installation and create a unified piece.[40] A couple of decades later, in 1954, Frederick Kiesler exhibits at Sidney Janis Gallery in New York pictorial elements related thematically, installed on the wall, the ceiling and the floor of the exhibition room. Twelve years before, he had famously designed Peggy Guggenheim's *Art of This Century Gallery*, with its *Surrealist Gallery* in which works were installed not on its concave walls, but throughout the rooms. The adjustable support systems were to be moved at different angles and heights, the whole design making it seem as if the works were floating. If the work done by Kiesler for *Art of this Century* was an exhibition installation created to show the works of other artists, the *Horse Gallaxy* from 1954 was his own artistic project, a pictorial group showing a horse from different angles and surrounding the viewer from all directions.[41] We find this type of arrangement also as the work of a curator, Arnold Bode.

In 1964, during the third edition of Documenta, Bode, who played a key role in the creation of the famous exhibition, installs the three paintings of Ernst Wilhelm Nay on the ceiling of a long corridor-like room. The arrangement of Nay's works as "ceiling paintings" in an oblique angle and rhythmic manner offered the room a quasi-religious aura.[42] The "wall paintings" mounted so in spite of the artists' intention, according to Charlotte Klonk[43], is just one on Bode's unconventional installations. As part of the same section, named tellingly *Sculpture and Panting in Space*, the German curator hangs Sam Francis' works, *Three Paintings for the Staircase at Kunsthalle Basel* (1956-57) on an elevated hexagonal wall construction. Closest to environments is considered the installation of Emilio Vedova's paintings at different angles, in a room painted in black.[44]

El Lissitzky's and Kiesler's room-sized works, both artists as well as designers, are similar formally and thematically to the rooms arranged by curator Arnold Bode. There is not only a convergence of arts, but also of practices. In the design created

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[40] G. Celant, *op. cit*., p. 265.

[41] J. Reiss, *op cit.*, p. xx.

[42] https://www.documenta.de/en/retrospective/documenta_iii.

[43] C. Klonk, *op. cit.,* p. 180.

[44] https://www.documenta.de/en/retrospective/documenta_iii.

by Kiesler for the gallery *Art of this Century*, Celant sees a theatrical component: the supporting walls could be moved, the furniture was multifunctional, and the walls covered with canvas were mirroring the furniture design with their curved surfaces.[45] It is another instance of the various viewpoints in a room, after Lissitzky, and a step further in the merging of art and installation in a room-size work.[46] At the same time, his design for Peggy Guggenheim's gallery points for Celant the tendency of moving the artworks away from the wall and installing them on supports to be seen from all sides, in a space characterized by a "spherical perception".[47] He sees this development as enabled first by the "suspended and rotating forms of Constructivism" and by the functional design of Bauhaus: Gropius' and Schmit's designs from 1934, and also Bayer's designs for expositions in the 1920s and 1930s will "exclude a priori" the limitations of the wall and suggest a supremacy of visual concept over object.[48]

Against the freed wall the Surrealists will have a strong reaction. Their exhibitions (1938-1947) were filled with objects meant to awaken all possible senses, not giving a moment's rest or allowing for passivity, like a "voyage through the viscera of the unconscious rather than a walk through the void"[49]. Duchamp's installation of 1200 coal sacks at the *International Exposition du Surrealisme* at Beaux-Arts Gallery, Paris, in 1938, was the strongest moment of the "Surrealist embrace", to use Celant's words, which intensified as the visitor progressed in the space. Duchamp played the role of both artist and curator in this show, contextualizing the objects within the unifying environment of the exhibition. The show comprised oneiric installations that evoked the imagery and the emotional tone of the works and reflects on the exhibition space, addressing the role of context on the content, and the way in which context becomes content, thematizing the exhibition environment. Moreover, the installations conceived by Duchamp show a close bond between the content of the works, the theme of the exhibition, and its form. Four years later, Duchamp creates *One Mile of String*, the installation of the 1942 exhibition *First Papers of Surrealism*, which anticipates the environments built by Allan Kaprow, Claes Oldenburg and his contemporaries.[50]

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[45] G. Celant, *op. cit*., pp. 266-8.

[46] *Ibidem.*

[47] *Ibidem*, p. 266.

[48] *Ibidem*.

[49] *Ibidem*, p. 267.

[50] J. Reiss, *op. cit.*, p. 6.

Kaprow' environments were named so by the artist and were room-scale or room-size works that took over the entire room.[51] As shown in an article published in 1958[52], he identifies the roots of environments in action painting. His theory regarding environments is that artists arrive at tridimensional spaces or environments progressively, from action painting and through assemblages. Kaprow writes about the way in which Pollock was inside his painting, about the sensation that his paintings are endless, stepping out into the room. In Kaprow's view, Pollock's practice is a sort of ritual whose material happens to be painting. In her history of Installation Art, Reiss[53] notices how Kaprow positions his art next to Pollock's, theoretically but also visually, by juxtaposing a photograph of Pollock in his studio to one of his own environments. In fact, Kaprow came up with the idea of assemblages by watching Pollock paint on glass and placing different objects on it.[54]

Alongside the particular inspiration taken from Pollock's action painting, in Robert Motherwell's 1951 book *The Dada Painters and Poets*, Kaprow specifies that Dada, Italian Futurism and Russian constructivism have had a significant influence upon his work, as well as finding prototypes of environments in art history. Of these, we already discussed 1928 *Abstract Cabinet*, a room created with the purpose of showing expressionistic works, which becomes an artwork per se. In 1923, the Russian constructivist had already transferred his pictorial idea into the tridimensional space creating the *Proun Room*. But, as Julie Reiss observes in her study[55], Motherwell's book also contains an essay by Schwitters in which the German artist writes about his interest in creating a complete work of art, an idea he experiments with in *Merzbau*, a room-size work that was, perhaps, even more inspiring for the later installation artists than the *Abstract Cabinet*.

In spite of the contrast between minimalist works (clean, minimalist, part of a controlled situation) and environments (built in line with an aesthetics of improvisation, of spontaneity and of debris), in terms of both the aspect and componence, these very different works overlap when it comes to the relationship public-work-space and to temporality. Moreover, as Reiss shows by following the history of their exhibitions, the artists of the two approaches also meet collaboratively in common exhibition

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[51] *Ibidem,* p. xi.

[52] See Allan Kaprow, "The Legacy of Jackson Pollock" in Alan Kaprow (author), Jeff Kelly (ed.), *Essays on the Blurring of Art and Life*, University of California Press, London, 1993, pp. 4-6.

[53] J. Reiss, *op. cit.,* p. 8.

[54] Hans Namuth captures Pollock painting on glass in his video *Jackson Pollock 51*. I owe this informative detail to art critic Joseph Melyi.

[55] See J. Reiss, *op. cit.,* p. 7.

spaces such as Judson Gallery.[56] But what they all share and Reiss considers to be most significant is the shift from exhibiting individual, autonomous works of art, to the inclusion of the space or the site conceptual parameter of the work.[57]

Hybridization, and the reconception of the aesthetic medium

The 1960's and 1970's bring to the spotlight a transformation of the concept of art that, as seen, was already acting within the art world before the middle of the century. Intermediality is the new status quo, one that Rebentisch[58] believes art criticism is not ready to accept. It is the home of installation art, one of the most conceptually challenging art genres winning ground in that time. With its hybridization and transgressing of boundaries, Rebentisch argues in her *Aesthetics of Installation Art*, it threatens an idea about art in which aesthetic autonomy is dependent on specific mediums.[59]

Clement Greenberg and Michael Fried, both modernist critics, have written extensively about the necessity of medium specificity for aesthetic autonomy. Rosalind Krauss, a postmodernist, has instead a more ambivalent position. Her books and essays offer two main and seemingly contradictory positions towards the transgression of traditional art categories. She acknowledges the new characteristics of the art production since the 1970s and proposes a different understanding of the medium, which is no longer defined on the grounds of a material, but as a certain set of rules or operations with cultural terms. This is the "post-medium condition" theorized by Krauss in her early essay "Sculpture in the Expanded Field" (1979/1998) and discussed also in later publications such as *A Voyage on the North Sea: Art in the Age of the Post-Medium Condition* (2000) and *Under Blue Cup* (2011).

Her 2011 book is considered a return to the medium. But already in 1997, she talks about the invention of new mediums. Her "knights of the medium" presented in *Under Blue Cup* are rescuing arts' autonomy from the kitsch of intermedial condition best exemplified by installation art, with the same strategy proposed in 1979, meaning the invention of new mediums. In the following part of this paper, we will discuss Krauss's idea of artists inventing mediums and her overall position towards the aesthetic medium. We will also consider Rebentisch's criticism of Krauss and attempt to clarify the grounds on which her assessment is built.

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[56] *Ibidem*, pp. 63-64.

[57] *Ibidem*, p. 64.

[58] J. Rebentisch, *Aesthetics of Installation Art*, Sternberg Press, Berlin, 2012, see the chapter „Intermediality".

[59] *Ibidem,* p. 80.

As Dan Eugen Rațiu points out[60], by acknowledging the transgression of the traditional categories or genre boundaries by contemporary artists associated with the movements of 1960-70s, such as installation, minimalism, conceptualism, performance etc., Krauss relativizes the status of aesthetic categories previously considered as universal (such as painting and sculpture). In his analysis of Krauss's position, Rațiu shows that she is only partly against Greenberg: she acknowledges, like Greenberg, that there is an internal logic and rules of painting and sculpture, but considers them as relative and limited historically. Rațiu analyzes the texts in which Krauss discusses this issue, such as the essay "Sculpture in the Expanded Field" (1979): against Greenberg's thesis – that each modern art purified itself progressively according to the logic and requirements of its specific medium – Krauss describes the characteristics of the postmodern artistic production in America, where everyday objects, debris, natural materials etc. are integrated into the works of contemporary artists, and shows that Greenberg, instead of changing his critical discourse in order to account for the new phenomena in the artistic practice, only manages to manipulate traditional categories like "painting" and "sculpture", until almost anything can fit in.

Krauss's "conceptual expansion"[61], as Rațiu calls her endeavor, entails that in postmodernism, artistic practice does not need to be defined in relation to a given, universal or privileged medium (such as "sculpture"), "but rather in relation to certain logical operations on a set of cultural terms, for which any medium – photography, books, lines on walls, mirrors, or sculpture itself – might be used".[62] As Rațiu summarizes, Krauss thinks of individual artistic practice and of the problem of medium in the terms of a structural strategy and not on the grounds of the material or in the linear and essentialist terms of modernism.[63]

Krauss's idea of the medium distanced from materiality appears not only in "Sculpture in the Expanded Field", but also in later publications, such as *A Voyage on the North Sea: Art in the Age of the Post-Medium Condition* (2000) and in *Under Blue Cup* (2011). In this later book, the aesthetic value and autonomy seems to have been lost during the "post-medium condition" and needs to be saved by the "knights of the medium", a term borrowed from Russian formalist Viktor Schlovsky (*Knight's Move*)[64]. Against the practices of the "post-medium condition" (installation, conceptual

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[60] See Dan Eugen Rațiu, *Disputa modernism – postmodernism. O introducere în teoriile contemporane asupra artei,* Eikon, Cluj-Napoca, 2012, pp. 246-51.

[61] *Ibidem*, p. 250.

[62] *Ibidem*.

[63] Ratiu, *op. cit.*, pp. 251-52. Rosalind Krauss, "Sculpture in the Expanded Field", in Hal Foster (ed.), *The Anti-Aesthetic. Essays on Postmodern Culture*, The New York Press, New York, 1998, pp.35, 45-46.

[64] R. Krauss, *Under Blue Cup*, The MIT Press, Cambridge, Massachusetts, 2011, p. 102.

art, relational aesthetics), which are demanding the end of the white cube and of the medium, her knights are looking for new "technical supports" in order to extend the life of the medium. She proposes that the medium is defined now as paradigm based on the terms memory and forgetting, a binary that can describe the artistic practices expanding sculpture into installation and conceptual art.[65] Krauss notes that this distancing from materiality to abstract relations is similar to Stanley Cavell's move, who described the medium as "automantism", made of rules and logic and argues for a necessity of rules in a time when artists have broken with tradition and "anything goes".[66]

Krauss insists on a principle of self-differing of the aesthetic medium, and, already in an early essay published in the magazine October in 1997[67], but also later, in *Under Blue Cup*, on invention of mediums. Rebentisch sees the self-difference principle as Krauss's solution to the problem of redefining Greenbergian "proper area of competence", or "medium specificity" since they are no longer to be found in the material qualities of the respective means of representation.[68] Juliane Rebentisch equates Krauss's solution – the principle of self-differing "never simply collapsed into the physicality of their support"[69] – with Niklas Luhmann's distinction between medium and form.[70]

An interesting argument made by Luhmann in his *Art as a Social System*[71], which Rebentisch discusses, is that the medium can never be seen in itself, but only in the form, and that forms cannot express the essence of the medium, not even when the medium appears as form in the artwork. A useful example she gives that of Jackson Pollock's painting, where paint and the canvas (the medium) appear as forms. Rebentisch goes on to argue that in the case of all art, the material from which the work is made of shows up in the work, but Pollock's painting reflects precisely on this transition between medium and the contingency of form creation. These, continues Rebentisch, are not making visible the essence of the medium but address its potentiality; in Luhmann's words, "leaving room for multiple combinations"[72]. She argues that not only is the idea that modern painting expresses the flatness of its own medium problematic due

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[65] *Ibidem*, pp. 17-19.

[66] *Ibidem*, p. 19.

[67] Rosalind Krauss, "…And Then Turn Away?" An Essay on James Coleman, *October*, vol. 81 (summer, 1997).

[68] J. Rebentisch, *Aesthetics…*, p. 81.

[69] R. Krauss, *A Voyage on The North Sea. Art in the Age of the Post-medium Condition,* Thames & Hudson, London, 2000, p. 53.

[70] J. Rebentisch, *Aesthetics…*, pp. 81-7.

[71] It is Niklas Luhmann's chapter "Medium and Form", in N. Luhmann, *Art as A Social System*, Stanford University Press, Stanford, California, 2000, apud. J. Rebentisch, *Aesthetics…*

[72] *Ibidem*, p. 82.

to its medium positivism, but even more so because it tends to collapse the distinction between medium and form, as Luhmann warns, with absurd restrictions for the possibilities of painting[73].

Moreover, for Rebentisch, Greenberg's tendency to identify medium with form leads to a conceptual failure to appreciate the implicit theoretical provocation of such paintings as Ad Reinhardt's black monochromes, whose subject is precisely an approximate convergence of medium and form. One reason for putting forward Luhmann's distinction between medium and form is because Rebentisch believes it "might also serve to more precisely formulate Krauss's valid objection to Greenberg's positivism."[74] Rebentisch regards Krauss's response to Greenberg as "the restitution of the guiding art theoretical difference between medium and form."[75]

A second reason is that Rebentsich adheres to Luhmann's definition of the medium as the unified "medium of art", one that transgresses the boundaries of individual arts, and in which the dynamic between medium and form plays an important part.[76]

For Luhmann, there are two sides in all forms, that which is fixed in the work and the unmarked space of possibility for other forms, and that any making of a form starts with a first step, the decision that separates the unmarked space of aesthetic form, from the possibility of other forms and it is the gesture that generates the difference between form and medium.[77] To illustrate Luhmann's idea, Rebentisch chooses as examples the first brushstroke on a canvas and the first mark of an installation.[78] According to Luhman, Rebentisch summarizes, "the aesthetic form is distinguished from other forms by the fact that we reflect on it against the backdrop of an unmarked space that makes it possible while at the same time undermining it."[79] Luhmann's unmarked space refers to "the other side" of the form: "the unmarked space is the indispensable other side, a reference to the possibilities that, for their part, point to an infinity that cannot be contained in one place."[80] The question that arises is if this "unmarked open space of the possibilities of other forms" is not precisely the "loose coupling of elements" leaving "room for multiple combinations" which Luhmann names "medium".[81]

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[73] *Ibidem*.
[74] J. Rebentisch, *op. cit.*, pp. 81-3.
[75] *Ibidem*, p. 84.
[76] N. Luhmann, *op. cit.*, p. 118, apud. J. Rebentisch, *Aesthetics…*, p. 87.
[77] *Ibidem.*
[78] J. Rebentisch, *op. cit.*, pp. 86-7.
[79] *Ibidem*, p. 87.
[80] N. Luhmann, *op. cit.*, p. 117, apud. J. Rebentisch, *Aesthetics…*, p. 86.
[81] *Ibidem*, p. 104, apud. J. Rebentisch, *Aesthetics…*, p. 81.

The discussion revolves around the concept of the medium. Rebentisch redefines the medium by drawing on Luhmann, offering, at the same time, a positive answer to our question: "the term "medium" here, and this is the decisive reconception, no longer denotes the endless possibilities of the means of representation in question. Medium is now the potentially infinite and open horizon of possible formations of interrelation given with each individual work of art itself."[82] Rebentisch's analysis of Luhmann's dynamic between medium and form leads her to a concept of the aesthetic "that transcends the various particular qualities of artistic means of representation" and also to "a different concept of aesthetic autonomy".[83] This reconception of aesthetic autonomy, she writes, "in a theory of experience is not tied to an identification of somehow specifically aesthetic areas of competence" but, and this is the focus of her argument, "art is autonomous rather, in and by virtue of the specific structure of the experience that corresponds to it."[84]

Going back to Krauss, Rațiu is right to stress the change in Krauss's position and to see it as a "return of the same", in nietzschean terms, but it is not a surprising return since Krauss had not in the first place left as far as it seemed. Although both Fried and Krauss criticize Greenberg's medium positivism, they remain faithful to his idea that aesthetic autonomy can exist only if art defines its area of competence. Whereas Fried argues that an area of competence/autonomy can exist only within the boundaries of the individual arts, boundaries which can expand or renew, but not be disrupted by intermediality, according to Rebentisch, Krauss acknowledges the dissolution of boundaries between arts, but still remains faithful to Greenberg's theory by rearticulating the idea that autonomy can exist only when there is a medium specificity.[85] But how does Krauss conceive *medium specificity*? Is it, as it is for Greenberg, "tied to a physical substance"[86]? Or does she think of the medium, as Rațiu sees it, "in the terms of a structural strategy and not on the grounds of the material or in the linear and essentialist terms of modernism."[87]

In *Under Blue Cup*, Krauss redefines the medium by "substituting 'technical support' for the traditional idea of a physical medium"[88]. It is the material support – "oil on canvas, tempera on wooden panel, pigment on wet plaster – the materials of the

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[82] Rebentisch, *Aesthetics…*, p. 90.
[83] *Ibidem*, p. 92.
[84] *Ibidem.*
[85] *Ibidem*, p. 84.
[86] R. Krauss, *Under Blue Cup*, p. 7.
[87] D. E. Rațiu, *op. cit.*, pp. 251-52.
[88] R. Krauss, *op. cit.*, p. 16.

guilds" which Krauss is distancing the medium from in order to reconceiving it as "a logic, rather than a form of matter".[89] Krauss redefines the medium as a paradigm:

> Since the paradigm is a logical support, it can substitute itself for a physical substance in founding the rules of the medium. Constituting a unified field, the medium's paradigm might be considered the foundation of all the possible variations open to a physical substance – pigment supported in turn by canvas, wooden panel, leaded glass, or plastered wall. Later in this argument I will explore the paradigm of /medium/ itself, as a binary of memory versus forgetting.[90]

In her use of the paradigm, Krauss draws on structural linguistics, a discipline that "discovers meaning as the sum of two opposing terms, which it calls binaries and Roland Barthes renames 'paradigm.'"[91] Krauss establishes the paradigm of the "/medium/" as "memory versus forgetting."[92] Memory is here "the power of the medium to hold the efforts of the forebears of a specific genre in reserve for the present", while forgetting is "the antagonist of memory." This forgetting is encouraged by three things that, during the end of the 1970, "the time of the postmodernist crisis", lead to the disposal of the "specific medium."[93] The three things Krauss refers to are post minimalism, conceptual art, and Duchamp's readymade.[94]

The mediums Krauss finds in contemporary art practice are those invented by artist who "discover the conventions of a new technical support."[95] Krauss discusses the idea of the possibility of artists inventing mediums in the catalog essay "...And Then Turn Away? An Essay on James Coleman", published in 1997, and in her latest book, *Under Blue Cup*, published in 2011. In the later publication, she explores the work of eight artists who she believes successfully invent mediums: Ed Ruscha, William Kentridge, James Coleman (Coleman's work is exemplified in this line already in the 1997 essay), Christian Marclay, Bruce Nauman, Sophie Calle, Marcel Broodthaers and Harun Faroki.

For Krauss, artists don't extend or reinterpret the respective medium, but "invent" new mediums.[96] She sets the term "invention" between quotation marks, acknowledging that artists don't really invent mediums, that carving, painting and

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[89] *Ibidem*, pp. 16-7.
[90] *Ibidem*, p. 17.
[91] *Ibidem*.
[92] *Ibidem*, p. 128.
[93] *Ibidem*, p. 20.
[94] *Ibidem*.
[95] *Ibidem*, p. 19.
[96] R. Krauss, "...And Then Turn Away?", pp. 5-6.

drawing already existed at the time where the first group of people call themselves artists.[97] The artists' move, according to her, is that they individualizes their practice within specific mediums, develop skills and histories against which innovation can be measured. By the end of the 20th century, Krauss thinks, art is already in the post-medium condition either by fault of Duchamp or photography, which populates our lives with media, meaning technologically rendered images leaving medium aesthetics obsolete. The invention of other mediums, and the return to painting in its state prior to the monochrome are the two reactions to this situation seen by Krauss. [98]

Rebentisch questions Krauss's idea of the invention of mediums and believes that what Krauss is in fact describing with examples such as James Coleman's slide series is an "invention" of genres.[99] In her use of the term "genre", Rebentisch refers to "the genres of art in general, that is, to the distinction between the various arts, and not to the poetic or artistic generic distinctions within the individual arts,"[100] whereas with the term "medium" she refers "generally to the representational means of the various arts."[101] In attempting to clarify Rebentisch's definition of the genre, we will shortly go back to the discussion regarding the Luhmann's distinction between medium and form. In this context, Rebentisch points out that painting (as opposed to canvas and paint), for example is precisely not a medium but a way of creating form.[102] Therefore, the medium is for Rebentisch the support, "the canvas and paint" and the "representational means" of the arts, whereas "painting" is one of the various arts, a genre. Rebentisch believes that:

> What Krauss is obviously taking aim at by speaking of inventing a medium" is the invention not so much of new *media* but of new artistic *genres*. In the most advanced art practice of today, the invention of new genres has indeed replaced the production of works within preconceived genre boundaries. But I think it is characteristic of these new works of art, which simultaneously constitute new genres, that their means of representation are explicit about and even exhibit the fact that they precisely do not constitute a distinct domain separate from other arts or from the extra aesthetic.[103]

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[97] *Ibidem.*
[98] *Ibidem*, p. 6.
[99] Rebentisch, *op. cit*., pp. 85; 94-5.
[100] *Ibidem*, p. 75.
[101] *Ibidem*, p. 76.
[102] *Ibidem*, p. 82.
[103] *Ibidem*, p. 85.

At one point in the text of *Under Blue Cup*, Krauss does indeed refer to the invention of genres. She reflects on the way in which "the various artistic supports, each represented by its individual muse, serve as the scaffolding for a "who you are' in the collective memory of the practitioners of that particular genre – painting, sculpture, photography, film."[104] Her intent is that her book speak not only to the "who you are" of each muse, but also "to 'the who you are' of what I will show are the new genres that contemporary artists – during what I am calling the 'post-medium' condition – feel an imperative to "invent".[105] Krauss's use of the idea of the invention of genre in the context of the invention of mediums is not explained. However, as we will show below, Krauss's definition of technical support neutralizes the genres.

According to Rebentisch, when Krauss posits the idea that, faced with a situation in which the traditional mediums have been exhausted, artists invent new mediums, she shifts the discussion "to the level of individual works of art". Moreover, Rebentisch argues, "according to Krauss, the possibility of aesthetic autonomy today is tied to the question of whether individual artists can succeed in 'inventing' a specific aesthetic medium in relation to their individual artistic production."[106] Developing her argument in *Under Blue Cup*, Krauss selects eight artists that she believes successfully invent mediums, but their invention is not judged (only) in relation to their individual artistic production, but, as is the case for Ed Ruscha (one of the eight artists), also in relation to the tradition of "the medium he is both abandoning and reinventing". What Ruscha uses as technical support for his *Stains* is "iodine, chocolate syrup, chutney" and "cloth-bund book covers like taffeta, or the photography of the book's contents", instead of the traditional oil on canvas.[107] Krauss writes:

> Ruscha's stains travel back down the history of recent painting to the 1960s and the advent of stain painting, also called color field: chroma poured onto raw canvas to leave a lurid stain. In doing so, they function as the "memory" of the medium he is both abandoning and reinventing.[108]

Going back to Rebentisch's criticism of Krauss's idea of the invention of mediums, she observes that when Coleman uses the tape, and Jeff Wall the light boxes,

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[104] R. Krauss, *Under Blue Cup*, p. 2.

[105] *Ibidem*, p. 3.

[106] J. Rebentisch, *op. cit.*, p. 85.

[107] R. Krauss, *op. cit.*, pp. 76-78.

[108] *Ibidem*, p. 78.

neither "strictly speaking invented their media".[109] Krauss's idea can be interpreted as a "discovery as aesthetic mediums" of something existent in the domain of life-culture. As Rebentsich writes, "Coleman merely discovered the slide series, and Wall the light box, *as* an aesthetic medium."[110] These, Rebentisch points out, are already known in the advertising industry. According to her, their use by Coleman and Wall is a reflective engagement with mediums familiar outside the aesthetic realm, and does not establish them as mediums, but as genres.[111]

But for Krauss, Coleman's appropriation of the slide tape, taken from the advertising industry and its use *as* medium, is not merely a discovery, in the nonaesthetic sphere, of a material support. Rather, the medium consists of his use of such a technical support, "as set of rules".[112] One of Coleman's rules is the "double face-out", a technique taken from photo novels, comic books and advertising, which works "as reminder of the screen's physical surface as the underlying principle from which the rule derives".[113] Similarly, *Twenty-six Gasoline Stations* Ruscha creates a recursive structure: "Ruscha's interest in the idea of medium as a type of support also takes shape as a set of rules.[114] Krauss writes: "with his gasoline stations, Ruscha's medium has less to do with the physicality of the support than with a system of rules.[115] Indeed, for Krauss, the artists who are inventing new mediums are those who "discover the conventions of a new technical support."[116] Both Ruscha and Coleman take their supports from the culture industry.

Colemn's slide tapes, Rebentisch notes, are in between film and photography. This "in between" of the slide tapes is a merging of two accepted mediums, film and photography, which implies a transgression of medium boundaries that Krauss does not reject. Rebentisch sees this coalescence as intermediality and argues that "as Krauss's essay also indicates, aesthetic autonomy seems to be constituted, in and through the specificity of the experience that Coleman's works provoke precisely by virtue of their intermediality." [117] Intermediality, as defined by Rebentisch, is a term established in the 1960s to describe artistic practices that could not be classified by using the traditional categories of art.[118] According to Rebentisch, in intermediality

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[109] Rebentisch, *op. cit.*, p. 94.

[110] *Ibidem.*

[111] *Ibidem*, p. 95.

[112] R. Krauss, *op. cit.*, p. 78.

[113] *Ibidem*, p. 83.

[114] *Ibidem*, p. 78.

[115] *Ibidem.*

[116] *Ibidem*, p. 19.

[117] Rebentisch, *op. cit.*, p. 95.

[118] *Ibidem*, pp. 75-6.

there is a fusion, a merging of the different arts, and this is a tendency that undermines both the conventional classification of art in different arts, and an idea about art dependent on the tradition of individual arts. Rebentisch also points out that, for its critics, intermediality entails a hybridization of art, and, more essentially, the decline of taste and an end of artistic autonomy caused by the transgression of boundaries between genres. Rebentisch identifies the idea that unites diverse positions such as Greenberg's, then those of Fried and Krauss, and also Adorno. This idea, which she believes is not only conceptually flawed, but also art historically untrue, is: the specialized engagement with a specific medium informed by the tradition of the respective art is indispensable to the production of autonomous art. This is the logic which the three critics try to protect, Rebentisch argues, and which the art practices appearing in the 1960s and 1970s threaten with their new truth, intermediality.

As the individual work integrates more and more mediums, and as specific artistic abilities are no longer necessary, we face a concept of art illustrated by what Rebentisch calls "the Duchampian provocation", one that is "*not at all* tied to specific mediums".[119] This situation in which apparently anything can be called art is a problem that art criticism still struggles with, proved, for Rebentisch, by the way in which critics such as Krauss link the concept of art with that of an engagement with an aesthetic medium.[120] Krauss discusses Duchamp, amongst other occasions, in the context of the three things that led to the disposal of the aesthetic medium. Conceptual artists saw Duchamp's installation of the objects in the museum as ready-mades, as "the naked definition of the objects' aesthetic status and made Duchamp its god."[121] She writes: "as art became 'idea', the medium vanished."[122] With the contribution of the three things – post minimalism, Duchamp and Conceptual art - art stepped into what Krauss calls "the post-medium condition", and to these three things artists react in the 1970s, and begin inventing new mediums.[123] However, for Krauss, neither the post-medium condition, nor, as we have seen, the invention of mediums is tied to the traditional idea of the specific medium.

Krauss's medium does not echo Greenberg's unique proper area of competence of each individual medium. Moreover, when Krauss links the concept of art to an engagement of the aesthetic medium, her reconceptualization of the medium as logical support (and not a material one) changes the terms of the discussion. Unlike Greenberg, Krauss does not reject the transgression of medium or genre boundaries.

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[119] Rebentisch, *op. cit.,* pp. 75-76.
[120] *Ibidem*, p. 76.
[121] R. Krauss, *Under Blue Cup*, p. 20.
[122] *Ibidem.*
[123] *Ibidem.*

She acknowledges the exhaustion that artists felt in the 1970s with the traditional mediums and the existence of a "profusion of forms" in the contemporary art practice, but believes that "the medium's unified field can nonetheless be charted."[124]

The heart of the problem is understanding the different concepts of the aesthetic medium engaged in the discussion. Neither Krauss not Rebentisch agree with the Greenbergian idea of the medium as defined by the unique and proper area of competence. Although Rebentisch makes the point that Krauss steps away from Greenberg's modernist position by acknowledging the dissolution of boundaries between arts and by questioning the idea that art has an essence that can be found in the material qualities of the means of representation, she sees the self-differing principle of the medium theorized by Krauss as residue of modernist thinking. Rebentisch talks about "Rosalind E. Krauss's more recent attempt to rehabilitate the modernist idea of medium specificity against the rise of intermedial installation art, which she regards as tainted by spectacle."[125] The more recent attempt she refers to is Krauss's book, *A Voyage to the North Sea*, in which she strongly criticizes installation art, conceptual art and the art of relational aesthetics for leading to the dissolution of the white cube and of the medium.

In Rebentisch's view, this criticism is intended as a defense of art from the "culture of spectacle" and the "aestheticization of the life-world."[126] In other words, Krauss is attempting to defend art from life. It is this idea, Rațiu explains, that can be seen as a continuity of Greenbergian essentialism ("a modernism purified of any extra-aesthetic reference"[127]) in Krauss's theory.[128]

Rebentisch's argument is that the concept of artistic autonomy is not dependent on the particular qualities of specific means of representation (Greenberg), nor on the reflecting on them (Krauss), but that autonomy can be guaranteed through aesthetic experience and not at the level of production. Although an important problem, it is not within the purpose of this study to expand on the analysis of aesthetic experience. However, it is the key of Juliane Rebentisch's argument and it must be mentioned, so we can understand the logic of her claim. Her point is that medium reflectivity is a possible but not necessary quality of art. Here she refers to Krauss's theorization of the invention of mediums, which Rebentisch regards as a reflection, from the part of the artists, on the specificity of the chosen mediums, from aesthetic or non-aesthetic spheres. Although Krauss, like Fried, criticizes Greenberg's idea that all art

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[124] *Ibidem*, p. 18.

[125] J. Rebentisch, *Aesthetics...*, p. 81.

[126] *Ibidem.*

[127] Rațiu, *op. cit.,* p. 150.

[128] I owe this clarification to my academic adviser, prof. dr. Dan Eugen Rațiu.

has an essence which can be found in the material qualities of the means of representation, Rebentisch claims that all three - Greenberg, Fried and Krauss - conceive aesthetic autonomy as a proper area of competence, determined by the medium of each individual art and that what Krauss is doing is an attempt at the rehabilitation of the modernist (Greenbergian idea) of medium specificity.[129] If we can agree with Rebentsich's reflection that Krauss accepts Greenberg's idea "that aesthetic autonomy cannot exist unless art defines its own area of competence", her interpretation of Krauss's position in respect to how that area of competence can be achieved is debatable. Art's area of competence is not, for Krauss, dependent on the individual mediums. If we understand Krauss's definition of the medium as technical support, we realize that it allows for transgression of boundaries between the individual arts. Moreover, the expanded field in which the medium can be found in Krauss's theorization, includes elements typically used in the mass culture. Krauss's restriction is not to the individual arts, and not even an exclusion of mass culture elements. She writes:

> As opposed to these traditional foundations, "technical supports are generally borrowed from available mass-cultural forms, like animated films, automobiles, investigative journalism, or movies – hence "technical" replaces the "artisanal" materials of the guilds; in the same way "support" neutralizes the individual names of the *muses*.[130]

The rehabilitation of medium specificity that Rebentisch criticized Krauss for requires yet another clarification. Not only does Krauss distance the medium from the modernist medium embedded in material coordinates, but redefine its specificity as differential. In exploring one of her knight's mediums, Bruce Nauman's "video promenades", she turns to Sam Weber's theorization of the medium of video. The defining condition of television, Weber argues in the essay "Television: Set and Screen", is difference. Krauss writes: "Weber's conclusion is that television had to be characterized through the term "differential specificity," which "though it sounds like a paradox, is necessary in order to respect the complexity of this form."[131] Krauss sees in Naumann's *Mapping the Studio* an instance in which we take contact with Jameson's and Cavell's understanding of video specificity as "total flow", as well as Weber's, as "differential specificity." It is Weber's theorization that captures, for Krauss, the essence of video.[132] This proposal of "differential specificity" together with the

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[129] J. Rebentisch, *Aesthetics...*, p. 81.

[130] R. Krauss, *Under Blue Cup*, p. 16.

[131] *Ibidem*, p. 122. See Samuel Weber, "Television: Set and Screen," in Weber, *Mass Mediauras: Form, Technics, Media*, Stanford University Press, Stanford, 1996.

[132] *Ibidem*, pp. 119-122.

proposition of the "idea of rules as vehicle of specificity"[133] breaks the continuity with Greenberg's positivist definition of specificity, one that coincides with material substance.

Believing that Krauss shares Greenberg's concept of medium specificity – which we have attempted to show she does not - Rebentisch poses a question to both. She formulates this question by turning again to Luhmann: "Luhmann asks weather unity in multiplicity - that is, weather a specific logic of art in general, a logic that would *transcend* the various arts or works of art – might not be found in the structural logic of the interrelation of the medium and form." Following his trail of though, Rebetisch writes: "it would indeed be possible that this structural logic seems to realize something analogous with the terrains of various media – for example, a specific, autonomous function of art."[134] Interestingly, Rebentisch comes to endorse the idea of a specific, structural logic of art. She refers to a logic of art in general, perhaps as a solution to what she seems to regard as the specific medium's enclosure. This solution transcends the various mediums, just as Krauss's definition of the medium as logic, convention or paradigm transcends the traditional mediums. Believing that a specific medium closes the intermedial possibilities of art, Rebentisch turns to the specificity of art in general as the source of autonomy. This is to be found in the structural logic of the interrelation of medium and form. She quotes Luhmann's idea:

> "Although perceptual media and artistic genres differ greatly with regard to their concrete materialization, they share a common ground in the manner in which they construct novel medium/form relations […]. The unity of art resides in that it creates for the sake of observation and observes for the sake of being observed, and the medium of art consists in the freedom to create medium/form relations." [135]

Rebentisch's analysis of Luhmann's idea focuses on his description of art as "social media", because "works of art, in other words, are media of communicative exchange between subjects."[136] The idea of medium, nevertheless, plays an important role in Luhmann's reflection, as "the medium of art and the "medium/form relations". Rebentsich adheres to Luhmann's definition of the medium as the unified medium of art: the medium of art can be understood as "the sum total of possible ways of crossing form boundaries (distinctions) from within toward the outside and of discovering fitting indications on the other side that stimulate further crossings by

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[133] *Ibidem*, p. 7.

[134] J. Rebentisch, *Aesthetics…*, p. 85.

[135] N. Luhmann, *op. cit.,* p. 117, apud. J. Rebentisch, *Aesthetics…*, p. 86.

[136] J. Rebentisch, *Ibidem*.

virtue of their own boundaries."[137] Rebentisch's turn to the medium of art and the rejection of the specificity of mediums – be it Greenberg's definition of specificity, or Krauss's self-differing specificity – frees art from the demarcation of the muses, in other words, of the individual arts, and of tying artistic autonomy to them. As we have shown earlier, Krauss's medium as a technical support for the work of art, does not retain the separation between the traditional arts, but "neutralizes the individual names of the muses"[138].

As indicated previously, there is one separation that Rebentisch opposes that can be found in Krauss's reconception of the medium. It is not that between the individual arts, or, turning to Thierry de Duve's terminology, "between the 'generic' and the 'specific' (or the general and the particular)"[139], but the one between art and life. This is sugessted by her rejection of installation art and favoring the white cube. Krauss sees the white cube as a warrantor of arts autonomy and of the medium: "the rules generated by the medium allows us to kick off against the cube's resistant surface."[140] Installation, on the other hand, is "ignored", "leaped over", by her knights of the medium.[141] She declares installation "fake", "fraud", and "kitsch" and describes her book as "a call to remember, against the siren song of installation to "forget."[142]

Krauss maps installation art as a combination of not-memory and not-forgetting, and kitsch, as "the combination of memory and its opposite (not-memory).[143] In her view, the term installation art characterizes the current post-medium practice that Krauss's "small band of guerrillas" fight, a condition that is "engaged in the constant rehearsal of Duchamp's inaugural gesture".[144] Duchamp's well known gesture that Kauss refers to is the introduction of an object, the *readymade*, in the exhibition space of an art institution – in Duchamp's case a museum, but for the artists that practice installation art it can be also a gallery or an art fair – in order to ask "the general question - "What makes this *art*? - rather than the specific one of the medium".[145] When Krauss' knights move on the chessboard, they jump over installation art, and "place whole sections of modernist art in a fork".[146]

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[137] N. Luhmann, *op. cit.,* p. 118, apud. J. Rebentisch, *Aesthetics…*, p. 87.

[138] R. Krauss, *Under Blue Cup*, p. 16.

[139] J. Rebentisch, *Aesthetics…*, p. 36.

[140] R. Krauss, *op. cit.*, p. 86.

[141] *Ibidem*, pp. 113; 126.

[142] *Ibidem*, p. 69.

[143] *Ibidem,* p. 128.

[144] *Ibidem,* p. 32.

[145] *Ibidem*. Here, Krauss is drawing from Thierry de Duve's analysis of the generic and the specific (or of the interrelation between art in general and particular arts). See Thierry de Duve, *Kant after Duchamp*, MIT Press, Cambridge, 1996, p. 152.

[146] *Ibidem*, p. 126.

Krauss disapproves of such works as those already discussed as points the convergence of art and installation: "the early twentieth-century transformations of museum galleries into installations of sculptural incursions, like Duchamp's *Étant donnés*, Lissitzky's *Demonstration Room*, or Schwitter's *Mertzbau",* and of artists that "transform the museum galleries in installations"[147]. Duchamp's *Étant donnés* is a diorama in which a naked woman (the bride from his earlier work *The Bride Stripped Bare by Her Bachelors, Even*) is lying on her back, her legs spread, on a stack of hay. The nude bride holding a gas lamp against a landscape background, shielded from the public view with by a wooden door, can be seen only through a pair of peep-holes. For sure, Krauss writes, Duchamp is not a knight of the medium, because when he constructs the installation *Étant donnés* at the Philadelphia Museum of Modern Art, he contradicts one of Kant's conditions for aesthetic judgement – that it must be spoken with a universal voice. In Krauss's view, in the case of Duchamp's work this is not possible, because the viewer is forced to become a "solitary spectator who can share his visual object with no one else.[148] In this way, Duchamp disperses the medium and invalidates it for any aesthetic judgment.[149] Nevertheless, according to Rațiu, Krauss does not challenge installation's status as a medium. As we have seen, in the Klein diagram Krauss places installation on the opposite side of the medium: "medium" is the combination of "memory" and "forgetting"; "installation" is the combination of "not-memory" and "not-forgetting". As Rațiu points out, the position of installation in Krauss's diagram mirrors the medium. It is, paradoxically a medium, a convention that negates the medium. In spite of her disapproval of it for the reasons discussed, Krauss does not call into question installation's status as medium.[150]

Conclusion

The analysis of installations mounted in exhibition spaces by artists such as Kiesler, El Lissitzky, or Duchamp reminds us that, even in modernism, the categories of art, design, and exhibition installation were not strictly delineated. Works such as *The Surrealist Gallery* at *Art of This Century*, *The Abstract Cabinet* or *One Mile of String* explored aspects of design and art simultaneously. These innovations led to a synthesis of the merging of art and design in room-size, environmental works. Julie Reiss rightly describes this transformation as an evolution towards installation

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147 *Ibidem*.
148 *Ibidem*.
149 *Ibidem*.
150 D. E. Rațiu, personal comunication, 20 July, 2018.

art, and considers them proto-installations, whereas Germano Celant regards it as a development of exhibition installation. The two accounts are not mutually exclusive, but Celant's analysis nuances the discussion by focusing on the convergence of art and design, which implies an intermedial character of the works.

Our examination of two key positions toward the aesthetic medium in contemporary art and its implications for installation, Rosalind Krauss's and Juliane Rebentisch's, shows that Krauss's reconception of the medium as a paradigm (of memory versus forgetting) and her distancing of the medium from the material brings a substantial difference from Greenberg's modernist definition of the medium and its specificity. We also stress that this structural logic of Krauss's medium dispenses with genre boundaries. Rebentisch's interpretation of Krauss's endeavor as an attempt to rehabilitate the modernist idea of medium specificity is, in our view, neglecting Krauss's profound reconception of medium specificity, one that is no longer modernist, but postmodernist.

Rebentisch argues that Krauss follows Greenberg in linking the concept of art and its autonomy with a specialized engagement with a particular medium, as a strategy to protect art from the hybridization characteristic to postmodern art, best exemplified by installation art. Our assessment shows that Krauss's redefinition of the medium does not reject the transgression of medium or genre boundaries. Nevertheless, and this is an idea that Rebentisch opposes that can be found in Krauss, she does link arts' autonomy with the medium and the white cube, on the grounds that this provides a separation from the life world by virtue of their different aesthetic experiences.

With regard to Krauss's disapproval of installation, our analysis shows that it is not reserved to postmodern installation works, but extends to early examples of installation, the modern ones such as Duchamp's or Kiesler's. Therefore, but also because such installations, as we have seen, are instances of the convergence of art and installation in complete artworks, Krauss's criticism of installation art refers also to the works discussed in the first part of this paper. In our view, intermediality – the fusion of the different arts that, according to Rebentisch, undermines the classification into individual arts – is not the reason for Krauss's rejection, as Rebentisch believes, but the tendency of installation art to dispense with the white cube is, remembering that the white cube is, for Krauss, a warrantor of the medium and of autonomy. However, Krauss does not contest installation's status as a medium. Furthermore, as we show in the first two sections of this paper, it is as a medium that artists approach exhibition installation when creating the room-size works of the first half of the 20th century.

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