

Doctoral Programme of the Hungarian
Academy of Fine Arts

FORM AND PHENOMENON, BOUNDARY AREAS

The role of repetitive structure in the works titled *1965/1-∞* by Roman Opałka,
Today by On Kawara, and *Should I live to be a hundred – Day by day I think about the future*
by Emese Benczúr

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Theses

My doctoral dissertation attempts to find an explanation for the role of repetitive temporal and spatial structures in the works titled *1965/1-∞* by Roman Opałka, *Today* by On Kawara, and *Should I live to be a hundred – Day by day I think about the future* by Emese Benczúr, interlinked with a study of artist's books and bookworks as a boundary area phenomenon between genres. The study method is a historical approach.

I was led to the issues scrutinized in my dissertation by my masterwork titled *Report of existence*, produced in the framework of my working towards a DLA degree. My masterwork is a report compiled from data of specific types and kinds, collected for a year on a daily basis. The objects produced during implementation can also be considered as artists' books. On the other hand, my masterwork shows similarities with the works titled *1965/1-∞* by Roman Opałka, *Today* by On Kawara, and *Should I live to be a hundred – Day by day I think about the future* by Emese Benczúr. A common feature of these works is that they formulated individual existence – the creators thinking about their own existence – within a spatial and temporal framework unifying visuality and verballity.

- 1.) From the early 19th century on, the phenomenon of artists' books and bookworks is related to the property of books (and in a broader sense, printed media) that they are perfectly suitable for imparting artistic content in boundary areas between genres, constituting a medium of a peculiar spatial and temporal structure and material flexibility. Their development and history is closely intertwined with artistic trends aiming at and / or resulting in opening genres up to

each other and with printed media – in a broader sense, information – becoming a mass product, which made it possible for authors to widely use books as media and converted books into the conceptual symbol of knowledge at the same time. Another interconnection is that the status of books underwent a change by the late 19th century: they were no longer carriers of unquestionable and unvarying content, but of disputable and ever changing mundane content, published in multitude (and printed in large numbers of copies), which could not provide a comprehensive and complete explanation for worldly phenomena.

- 2.) I consider those works as artists' books which use books (and their alternative forms) as works of art, with a creative-artistic intention, and by applying the capability of books to carry content; as well as those works which apply the book format (and its alternative forms) as a conceptual symbol, retaining its capability to carry content. I consider those works as bookworks which use book objects as works of art, with a creative-artistic intention, as conceptual symbols, somehow eliminating their capability to carry information.
- 3.) In a historical sense, I also consider those publications as artists' books which turned books into works of art as media carrying an original object of art, such as *livre d'artiste* type publications. The issuance of *livre d'artiste* type publications in Europe has been a continuous publisher's practice since the late 19th century, spanning over the two world wars, which is also connected to the transformation of printed media into mass products.
- 4.) In addition to creators, institutions supporting the production and distribution of works and collectors also play a dominant role in the occurrence and development of the artist's book / bookwork phenomenon.
- 5.) The works of Roman Opałka, On Kawara and Emese Benczúr are existence representation projects, formulating a personal relationship between the individual and the surrounding world, characteristic of the given creator.
- 6.) A common feature of these works is attachment to the time process. The sequentiality of textual and / or numerical content to partition the time process determines the objective appearance of the works, thereby they can be formally linked to the repetitive spatial and temporal structure of books. Symbolically, the authors can be deemed to have created the book of their life.

- 7.) The fact that the formal structure of these life work series actually has a function of time process representation, is made clear by the artists' statements in case of Opałka and Benczúr, and by the use of dates in case of Kawara. Opałka's life work series depicts a closed time process of a rhythm defined by the creator, by which the creator detached himself from the outside world. Kawara's life work series represents the author's existence connected to the outside world, in the correlation of time, space and social existence, in an open system. The ribbon roll series by Emese Benczúr is an open work in terms of content, by which its creator asks the question in connection with her own future again and again through daily activities.
- 8.) The individual's (creator's) connection to the outside world is decisive in terms of the relationship with information and cognizance. This is the way how these works are related to the group of artists' books and bookworks, using books as a conceptual symbol of the knowledge accumulated by humankind, inquiring about the relationship between the individual and cognizance. My masterwork titled Report of existence also examines this relationship; in respect of formal realization, it can be considered as an artists' book project.