

LICKESTRA: A PEDESTAL FOR A SENSORY ARTWORK

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Abstract: With the aim of understanding the transformation of the pedestal in contemporary art and design through *Lickestra* as a way of lifting up the experience as the artwork, this study examines the experimental *Lickestra* project, which is an exemplary, playful artwork, inviting participants and utilizing the simulation of different senses to create the artwork. Throughout the history of art and design, the representational and expressional transformation of artworks has triggered transformations in the form, meaning and function of the pedestal. With the artwork being more reflective of its creator's artistic expression and the viewer becoming a participant through more physical and imaginative engagement, the pedestal has become an integrated part of the artwork, even with a stronger emphasis on the sensory experience, which has been becoming the artwork itself. This study shows that the viewer is not only the participant but also the performer, the co-creator, and an inseparable constituent of the artwork, participating actively through all senses. Therefore, the function and meaning of the pedestal have changed. It has become both seen and unseen and both material and immaterial, serving for multiple functions and consisting of multiple layers of meaning. Furthering this study may initiate new discussions in the field of art and design in terms of integrating sensory experiences and the potential contribution of the utilization of different senses in interactive consumer products.

Keywords: Pedestal, pedestal-artwork relationship, sensory experience, interactive consumer product

1. INTRODUCTION

The pedestal had been considered as a separate entity for centuries and its existence had been trapped by the sculpture, the logic of which had been inseparable from the logic of monumentality (Krauss, 1979). In time, the artwork has started to be more related with its creator's freedom of thought and the commemorative monumentality of sculpture has faded away through artists' intention to make more self-referential sculptures, more of an expression of their artistic stance. Thus, the pedestal has changed in form, meaning, and function of emphasizing the mysteriousness and monumentality of a sculpture and carrying it as its base (Kraus, 1979; Alp, 2013; Crowther, 2019; İlden & Mutlu, 2020). Considering the transitions and transformations of the sculpture has gone through, the ever-increasing emphasis on experience and participation in artworks has given prominence to emotions and senses, through which we make sense of and give meaning to our own existence and the world. Therefore, the sensory experience has started to become the artwork itself, which is accompanied by the question of whether the pedestal will be entirely vanished or the technology has been becoming the pedestal itself lifting up the immaterial artwork.

In this study, the experimental *Lickestra* project, which involves the overstimulation of underutilized senses in the pursuit of sensory experiences to be used in interactive consumer products ("Lickestra", n.d.; Flatherty, 2014), has been selected as an exemplary artwork to be examined in terms of the coherence and harmony of unique, sensory experiences and the way of uplifting these experiences to become the art/design work in contemporary art and design.

2. THE HISTORICAL OVERVIEW OF THE PEDESTAL

Before modernity, the pedestal was the mediator between the site and representational sign of the sculpture, which had been merely monumental, figurative, and vertical (Krauss, 1979). The logic of monument with a representational mission had been embedded in the sculpture, as seen in the Renaissance sculptures (Figure 1); thus, the main function of the pedestal was to

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increase the stupendous look of the sculpture and support it visually and physically. Therefore, pedestals had many ornamental and figurative details and were giant in size in order to enhance the sculpture's meaning. Another function of the pedestal was to secure the site of the sculpture, support it to stand, and lie down as its base in order to connect it to the ground.



Figure 1. Michelangelo, *Pietà*, 1498-1499

With the beginning of modernism in the late 19th century, the relationship between the sculpture and the pedestal, i.e. the existence of the pedestal as the implication of the sculpture's bond to a specific site, has started to be questioned. Rodin's works, *The Gates of Hell* (Figure 2) and *Monument of Balzac* (Figure 3), were the first examples of this transition that the sculpture went through, declaring the nomadic meaning and function of the artwork (Krauss, 1979). The sculpture liberated itself from the strict rules of creating the ideal beauty of the previous period and the pedestal became a part of the sculpture by leaving its function as a base behind and instead dissolving into it. Therefore, its transition signaled the changes in its function and meaning, becoming much closer to those of the sculpture.



Figure 2. Rodin, *The Gates of Hell*, 1880-1885



Figure 3. Rodin, *Monument of Balzac*, 1891

In the early 1990s, Brancusi's revolutionary use of pedestals influenced and inspired his contemporaries in terms of bestowing great importance to the pedestal as a part of the art and that is absorbed by the artwork (Constantin Brancusi, 2016). For instance, the *Endless Column* (Figure 4), consisting of repetitive forms that appear as if it drills the ground to reach the sky without limit and ascend to infinity, is a pure pedestal itself (Krauss, 1979). The liberation of the pedestal by being absorbed into the sculpture has brought about the independence of its existence from its connection to the ground. Thus, the pedestal-sculpture relationship shattered; instead, they both united and, at the same time, freed from each other due to this notion of belonging.



Figure 4. Brancusi, *Endless Column*, 1938

By the 1960s, the definition of artwork started to be questioned due to the emergence of postmodernism and regarded as a more conceptual level of artistic expression. The sculpture became more of an abstraction that was no longer possible to exhibit on a pedestal or a pedestal-like base, i.e. an “ontological absence, the combination of exclusions, [and] the sum of neither/nor” (Krauss, 1979, p.36). Due to this transition, the commercialization of artworks and the existence of art galleries and museums started to be questioned as well. The utilization of any material, medium, and thought started to become acceptable in art (İlden & Mutlu, 2020) and artworks started to appear and/or dissolve in public spaces and natural environments that transform into exhibition/performance spaces, declaring the space-occupation of the object and its relation to the surrounding context (Krauss, 1979; Crowther, 2019). Therefore, the thought was prioritized over the artwork through a process drawing attention to the interaction with nature and different materials (Alp, 2013). Moreover, the physical and imaginative participation of the viewer became prominent. Regarding the sculpture-pedestal relationship, Manzoni's *Magic Base-Living Sculpture* (Figure 5), empty pedestals transforming people that stand on top of them into artworks, and *Base of the World* (Figure 6), an upside down iron pedestal bearing the whole world with all living and non-living things on it and turning it into an artwork, were among the first examples of a non-sculptural thing becoming a sculptural entity in the viewer's imagination (Yılmaz, 2006; Fondazione Piero Manzoni, 2021).



Figure 5. Manzoni, *Magic Base-Living Sculpture*, 1961

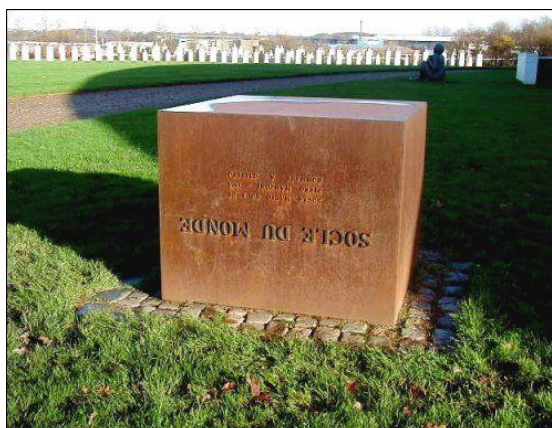


Figure 6. Manzoni, *Base of the World*, 1961

Ordinary products and ready-mades, such as Duchamp's *Fountain* (Figure 7) and Warhol's *Brillo Boxes* (Figure 8), started to appear as artworks in the postmodern era as well. All these attempts and artistic expressions started to tear down the notion and logic of sculpture completely. Therefore, as a result of this transformation and the elimination of the border between art and daily life in the expanded field of postmodernism, the pedestal has disappeared within the sculpture once again and dissolved into immateriality, on a more conceptual level (Krauss, 1979; İlden & Mutlu, 2020).



Figure 7. Duchamp, *Fountain*, 1917



Figure 8. Warhol, *Brillo Boxes*, 1964

With the technological developments in the late 20th century, installations and land art emerged as a new form of artwork, bringing about the temporality, sitelessness, and impermanency of the artwork, which was beginning to go through representational and expressional transformation, such as reproducibility, transportability, and using different materials and mediums (Krauss, 1979). Audiovisual mediums have become an integral part of installations. Video and especially photography have become a medium for capturing the impermanent or very large-scale land art or performance art, i.e. the experience. Due to the technological and scientific advancements in the 21st century, the ever-increasing emphasis that has been put on experience and participation in artworks has been even stronger on the participant's emotions and senses, which have started to become the artwork itself. Therefore, the sensory experience of the participant has been put on a pedestal, on a conceptual level.

3. THE EXPERIMENTAL LICKESTRA PROJECT

Lickestra (Figure 9) is “a musical licking performance at the intersection of food design and smart objects” (EmilieBaltz, 2016). It is an exemplary artwork of our senses and experiences becoming the artwork. It was developed by Emilie Baltz, who is a technologist, food, experience, and industrial designer, scriptwriter, and contemporary dancer, in collaboration with a smart object designer, Carla Diana, and a composer, Arone Dyer of Buke&Gase, in the Visible Futures Lab in New York in 2014 as artist in residence in order to explore act of licking for the discovery of new worlds through different sensory experiences. In this section, the sensory experience that *Lickestra* provides is explained and the pedestal-artwork relationship in the project is examined.



Figure 9. Baltz and Diana, *Lickestra*, 2014 (EmilieBaltz, 2022)

3.1. The sensory experience of *Lickestra*

The experimental *Lickestra* project involves the overstimulation of underutilized senses in the pursuit of sensory experiences to be used in interactive consumer products (“*Lickestra*”, n.d.; Flatherty, 2014). Our daily ritual of eating is embedded within *Lickestra* by our natural act of licking. There are four interactive cones on four pedestals in different heights (Figure 10), each creates different sounds, and Baltz states in an interview that one of the main reasons to choose ice cream as the material for their work is that it naturally gives a person the only option to lick, whereas the pedestal is also designed in a way that it forces the performers to only use their tongues to make music in a playful manner (Yuan, 2014). They originally used vanilla ice cream to maintain the visual coherence of the pedestal and cones; however, they also partnered with Big Gay Ice Cream shop in order to develop a new flavor, cayenne pepper ice cream, which triggers more licking due to its spicy flavor (Flatherty, 2014). The sounds, which were also crafted specifically for this work, are four different compositions resembling icicles and slippery surfaces, by Arone Dyer of Buke&Gase, which is musical duo designing and making music with unusual instruments. The performance took place at Special on C, which is an art space that is a bodega for community and expression (Flatherty, 2014) and in her interview with Flatherty, Diana states that they observed participants willing to become performances and the playfulness of this experience made them act as “naughty, sculptural, rhythmic, and ballet-like” when licking in public.



Figure 10. The *Lickestra* experience (Mold, 2013)

3.2. The pedestal-artwork relationship in *Lickestra*

The participant, i.e. the eater/licker, of *Lickestra* is the performer licking the ice cream in an interactive cone and his or her sensory perception oscillates between different senses. In this work, the unique sensory experience basically appears as the artwork and the body as the pedestal within a pedestal. While participants create the art themselves, the audiovisual experience for the non-lickers, i.e. only viewers and listeners, is another artwork presented simply on a pedestal lifting up the experience-creators (Figure 11). In parallel with the postmodern and contemporary understanding of the art, anyone can become an artist and any “sense” and “experience” can become an artwork – impermanent, temporal, siteless, and merely taken out of the daily rituals.



Figure 11. The pedestal-artwork relationship in *Lickestra* (Mold, 2013)

Lickestra is not merely an installation, a gallery-artwork, a sculpture, or a visual or musical performance. All materials come together to create and serve for something immaterial, created by and based on multiple layers of sensory experiences. Therefore, each sense, material, and experience is fragmented, but at the same time, united and complemented by each other. Rethinking about the relationship of the pedestal and the artwork, the pedestal of *Lickestra* stands there as the base, as the stage, and as the frame, uniting all those fragmented constituents of the artwork and presents it to us not only on a visual level but also on different

sensorial levels, i.e. visual, audial, tactile, and emotional. In that sense, the re-considered function and meaning of the pedestal has its roots in its historical function and meaning. However, it has now the ability and power to touch upon our different senses to enable us having a different sense and meaning of our experiences and the world without sacrificing its freedom as it comes into scene again. The pedestal absorbs the performer and the performer absorbs the pedestal. Thus, they both use their natural qualities to uplift the unique experience, without the logic of monumentality, but instead with the coherence and harmony of individual sensorial worlds of unique individuals.

4. CONCLUSION

The logic, form, and function of the pedestal has evolved in time due to the transformation of the sculpture/artwork, absorbing and freeing the pedestal, influenced by the social and cultural transformations and the advancements in technology and science. The artwork has started to be more related with its creator's artistic expression and the viewer's physical and/or imaginative participation. In parallel with this, the function of the pedestal has drifted away from emphasizing the sculpture's monumentality and mysteriousness, which have been no longer the main function an artwork, and shifted towards becoming an integrated part of the artwork, creating a coherent whole and harmony. This representational and expressional transformation, which has started to be seen in the temporality, sitelessness, and impermanency of the artwork, has led to a stronger emphasis on the sensory experience, through which an individual makes sense of and gives meaning to his/her own existence and the world. This historical journey signals the utilization of material/immaterial entities and sensory experiences not only in the arts, but also in interactive consumer products. Therefore, it is worth exploring and discussing the ways of lifting up the experience as the artwork and where the pedestal stands in contemporary art and design.

Examining *Lickestra* as an exemplary, playful artwork, inviting participants and utilizing the stimulation of their different senses to create the artwork, has shown the new form and role of the pedestal in contemporary art and design. Today, the viewer is not only the participant but also is the performer, the co-creator, and an inseparable constituent of the artwork, participating actively through all senses. As the sensory experience becomes the artwork itself, the physicality and materiality of the pedestal, even when there is one, can be questioned in terms of its function and meaning. In the case of *Lickestra*, it is uncertain whether it is the physical, material pedestal lifting up the material artwork, i.e. the cone and the performer, or whether it is the technology that becomes the pedestal itself lifting up the immaterial, i.e. the sensory experience. Therefore, the pedestal is both seen and unseen, is both material and immaterial, serves for multiple functions, and consists of multiple layers of meaning.

Considering the possible domains in the field of art and design to integrate sensory experiences and the potential contributions of the utilization of different senses, it is hoped that this study will initiate new discussions and inspire researchers, artists, and designers to explore this field of research further.

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