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HOW IT WORKS, WHAT IT DOES. NOTES ON SELECTED DRAWINGS BY WINCENCY DUNIKOWSKI- DUNIKO IN THE CONTEXT OF THE MACHINE ART TRADITION

As I was going through the artistic output of Wincenty Dunikowski-Duniko, an active participant in the art world of the 1970s, I came across several sketches of machines and drawings depicting physical processes. Some ideas are more complicated than others in these sketches: some are simple notes penned on pieces of paper that cannot be treated as finished works of art; others are advanced device designs that are difficult to execute. Therefore, these projects have never materialized. However, I believe that today the effect of both the former and the latter is strengthened by not having developed beyond the hypothetical.

Regarding the structure of the devices, the works sometimes manifest false assumptions that explore the dominant discord between the intention that might lie behind the engineer's concept and the outcome that would make everyday activities easier for the eventual users. Sometimes the drawings are aimed at producing cognitive dissonance in the viewer. Hence, my conviction that these constructs make observations about the changes that the art world and the ordinary world underwent at the beginning of the second half of the 20th century. However, I do look at these drawings

in other contexts too. I see them, for instance, as humorous reactions to the propaganda of success in the People's Republic of Poland, which maintained that the country ranked among the world's fastest-growing economies. The projects also display similarities not only to many themes from the rich tradition of machine art in the 20th century,¹ but also to the neo-avant-garde large-scale intents which in the 60s and 70s annexed space outside art institutions on either side of the Iron Curtain.

Duniko's experimenting with the mechanisms that set a work of art in motion dates back to the beginnings of his career. In the late 1960s he planned *Ruchome monochromy* [Moving monochromes], plain canvases stretched between two slowly turning rolls; drawings from this period still survive today.² The idea of tensioning a stretchy fabric on which spheres roll as they follow the material's tension dates from 1972 (*Gymnastic Batut*). Here, a score with machine-coded instructions on building an object was printed on a roll of perforated computer printer paper.³ *Platforms* (before 1978) are drawings that illustrate actions to be performed using unusual plumb bobs made of iron instead of brass. These are attracted by

magnets attached to the title ramps, thus giving the illusion of disturbed gravity. This instruction also exists in printed form on computer paper.⁴ The passion for engineering stayed with the artist for years. In the 90s he was still sketching an installation composed of three spherical objects whose interiors are lit in white, red, and black, respectively, and which are entered by viewers on hydraulic lifts; the name of the project, finished as a sketch in 1997, is *Absolute Light, Absolute Love, Absolute Nothing*.⁵

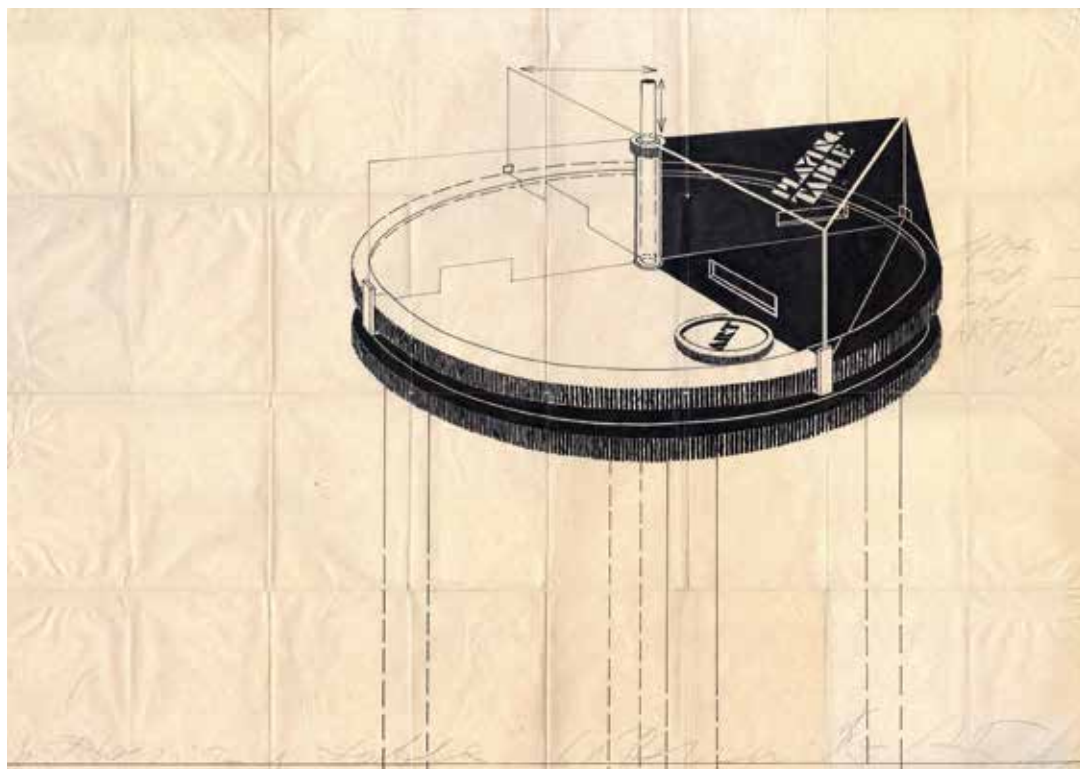
In the following paragraphs I focus on interpreting the three works which to me are most interesting as they are complex in terms of the structure of the machines, and the implied motion inspires symbolic readings. These works are also finished; they are complete as precise sketches. I will discuss *Art Playing Table* (1975) first, then *Przedłużenie życia ludzkości* [An extension of the life of mankind] (1974–1976), followed by *Rzeźba słoneczna* [Sun sculpture] (1972–1976). I intend to pay particular attention to the drawing *Art Playing Table*,⁶ which was made by Duniko in pen and ink on soft, yellowy paper. The other two are miniature sketches on transparent graph paper and follow the conventions of sharp technical drafting and the ‘aesthetics of administration’,⁷ both of which were characteristic of conceptual artists and were intended to facilitate attempts to understand the principles of operating specific machines. This is in contrast to the works of American Conceptualists, who in the mid-1960s strived to remove any traces of traditional artistry from their works. Mel Bochner, for example, exhibited photocopies of a notebook accompanied by a Xerox machine manual (*Working Drawings and Other Visible Things on Paper Not Necessarily Meant to Be Viewed as Art*, 1966). In contrast, Duniko’s projects are utopian, high-flown, and implicitly artistic right from the start: their purpose is to deal with art, to heal mankind, or to tame an element.

Studying structure usually reveals a natural need to understand how something operates. This theme is examined by Alfred H. Barr Jr.’s writing at the time of the *Machine Art* exhibition in New York’s Museum of Modern Art in 1934. The show summarized the modern

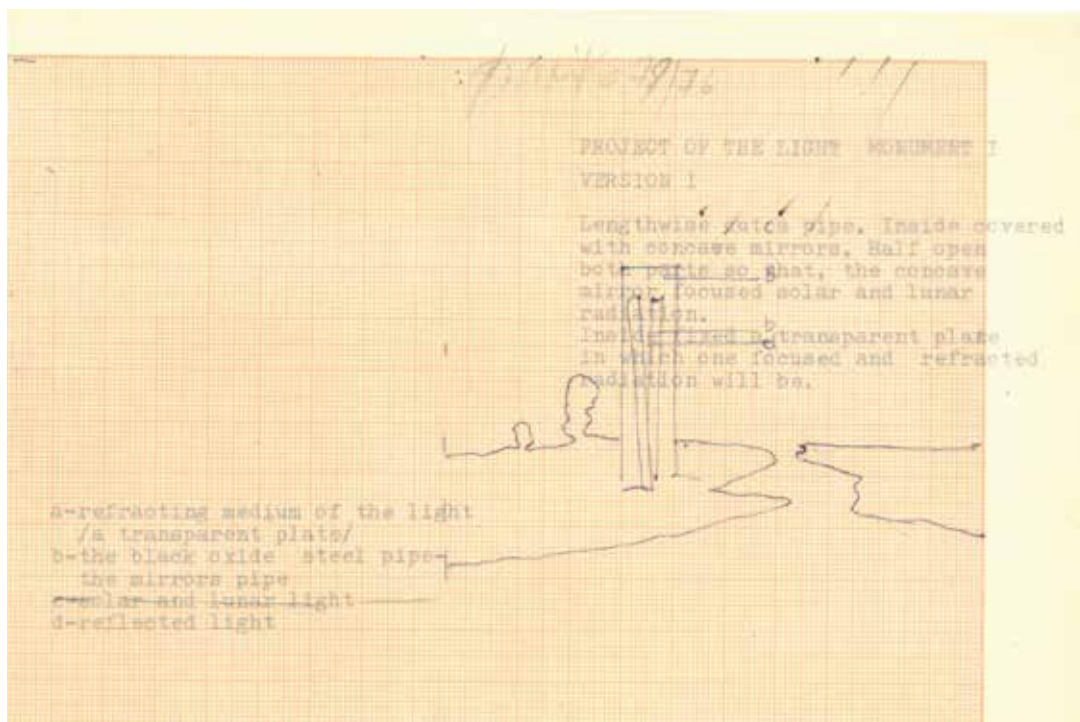
artists’ preoccupation with machine-made items and machines themselves. Emphasis on the function of the items was noted. According to Barr, answers to questions about *how it works* and *what it does* are, apart from the sensory experience, crucial for perceiving beauty in the aesthetic of machines.⁸ Perhaps surprisingly, the author upholds a classical definition of beauty: not only does beauty please the senses, but it is useful as well. My intention here is to expand upon such questions: are they relevant to post-conceptual art projects created about forty years after the major MoMA show?

Art Playing Table is a depiction of a machine shaped like a short cylinder. On the top, a black arm rotates, annotated with the phrase “PLAYING TABLE,” and with a slit that is located slightly above the bottom edge. Before the arm, there is a coin annotated with the word “ART,” which is unable to go through the opening because it is too low. The composition involves the viewer in consideration of the mechanics of the work, in which the principle of operation is emphasized alongside its obvious defect. The machine also looks like a simple revolving structure, although the author envisaged the hypothetical motion otherwise. With subtler strokes, he repeated the now-transparent arm in two subsequent stages: positioned halfway and at three fourths into the swing of the pendulum. In these suggested elements, the slit is taller, and its bottom edge coincides with the plane of the table, allowing the coin to fit easily within the limits of the opening. However, in the depicted stages of the arm’s movement, no inside of that part of the device has been designed: only the front side of the pendulum is visualized. There is no inside in that future at all: the coin will remain motionless on the surface of the table.

The drawing displays the difference – contained in dissimilarity – between the structure and its motion, as well as between motion that can be logically deduced and motion that is confirmed empirically. Structure ceases to be the principle of operation: it does not determine movement, nor is the process determined by it. The structure of the machine is subject not to Newtonian mechanics but to



Wincenty Dunikowski-Duniko, *Art Plying Table*, 1975



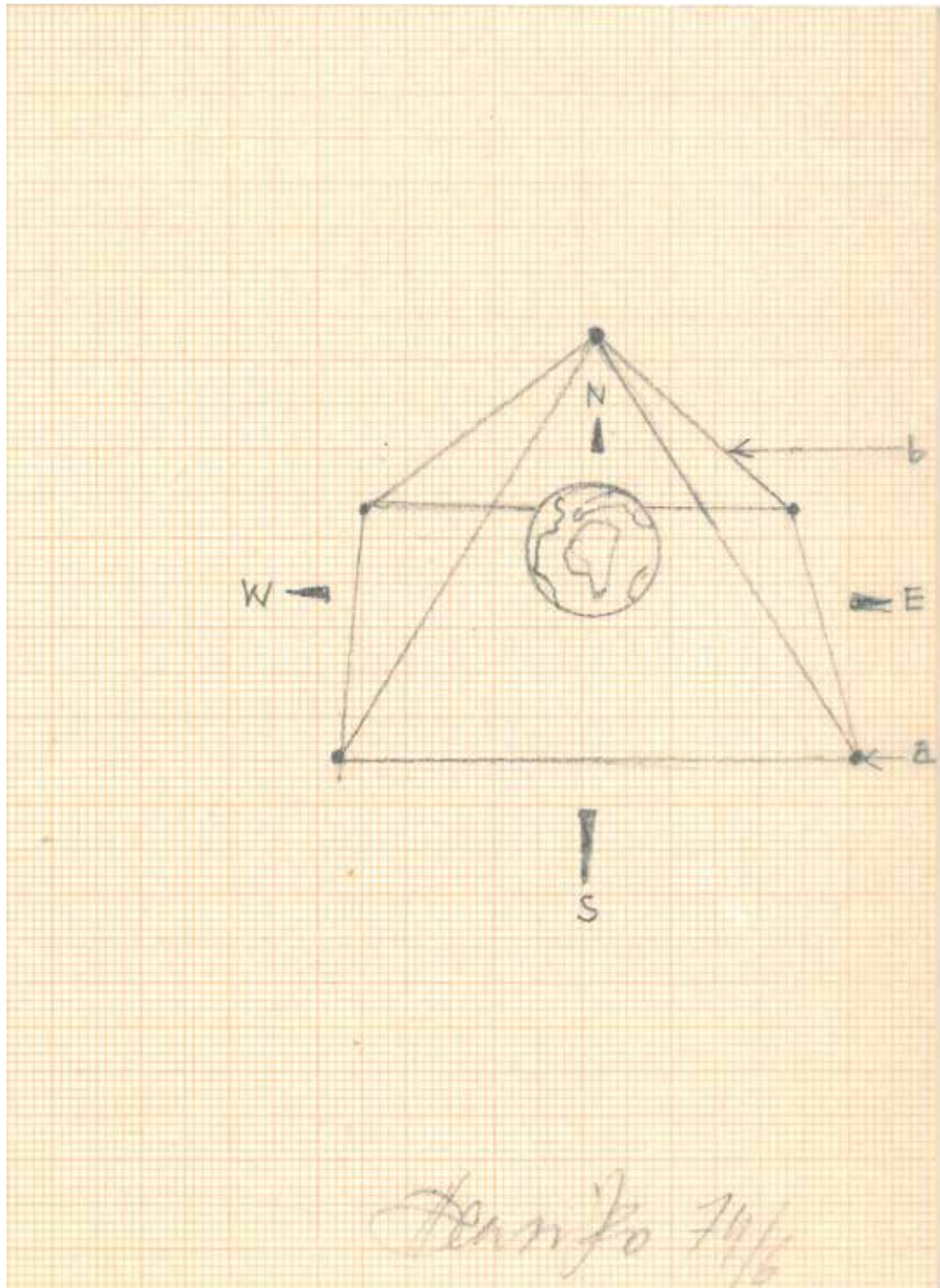
Wincenty Dunikowski-Duniko, *Rzeźba słoneczna (Sun Sculpture)*, 1972-1976

relativistic mechanics, which allow the pushed coin to remain motionless. The perception of beauty, Alfred H. Barr Jr. might have written, can still be linked with the function of the machine, but there is no way one could comprehend how the machine operates. Rather, one could conclude by asking *how is this even supposed to work?* However, I do not want to see this drawing as an exploration of the power of the absurd. The suggested motion and function within the device can certainly be interpreted symbolically, and the art of the 20th century is not short of analogous cases.

Depictions of motion have been understood allegorically since the beginnings of the avant-garde. The clumsy painting *Coffee Mill* by Marcel Duchamp (*Moulin à café*, 1911, held in the Tate Gallery collection), which highlights the related action rather than the object itself, is associated with the unreliable design of the French army's machine guns.⁹ In his 1919 study *Alarm Clock*, also in the Tate Gallery, Francis Picabia did not suggest the principles of operation of the clock. It is the lack of principles being emphasized in these works that constitutes the overriding rule; this is not meant to show that the mechanism is dysfunctional, and it testifies not to the absurd and anarchic but to the condition of society right after the Great War.¹⁰ Duchamp's *Large Glass* is actually a set of devices giving the illusion of motion – of an exchange of energy. A water wheel and rolls turning inside a chocolate mill, drawn with the precision of technical drafting, make for the engineered elegance of the design. *The Bride Stripped Bare by Her Bachelors, Even* (1915–1923) depicts an incredibly complex process, in which speculation and irrationality are accentuated. The ambiguity of the suggested system makes the work rank among the most complicated of the 20th Century. It is important to understand that the complexity here is both equally intended on the part of the artist and produced by creative readings of the piece.¹¹ *Slot Machine* by the German sculptress and installation artist Isa Genzken (*Spielautomat*, 1999, held in the collection of New York's MoMA) is an example of a late 20th-century work made from a gambling device. The housing of

a slot machine has been obscured by prints of photographs: some of the author herself, others showing idols like Leonardo DiCaprio, Andy Warhol, and Lawrence Weiner. The mechanism cannot be seen, the motion is suspended, and the photographs construct a mental map. It is a quasi-self-portrait of the artist that deals with the visual genealogy of inspiration and with the process of absorbing attitudes. In the light of the examples given above, I am likely to agree with Andreas Broeckmann, who in his monographic study of the history of machines in art noted that using the iconography of engineering allows the depiction of phenomena unrelated to mechanics.¹² A diagram of a table is a device that is useful for playing a game with art. So, what was at stake in Poland in 1975, and who was involved from among Kraków's avant-garde-wise artists and theorists in the generation born after the Second World War?

In the year the sketches were created, Poland's most influential conceptual art dogmatist worked on defining the stages of the evolution of art, with the ultimate *stage zero* being the phase in which concepts borne in human consciousness cannot be revealed using any means we already have – they can only be suggested.¹³ Jerzy Ludwiński's manifesto entitled *Sztuka niezidentyfikowana* [Unidentified Art] was published in 1975 in the catalogue of Kraków's cyclical event *Spotkania Krakowskie* [Kraków Meetings], held in the Pavilion of the Bureau of Art Exhibitions (BWA). Duniko's (b. 1947) most creative period of artistic drive was in Kraków in the 1970s, where he lived until emigrating to West Germany for good in 1981. He was concerned with ways of capturing ephemeral processes, documented in the photographic series *Moment Art* (from 1976 onwards), and he extended the field of art to include cybernetic aesthetics through works in the form of computer prints issued by The Artistic Program Centre Duniko Kraków Pl. Kossaka 1–14. The few artists in Kraków who were interested in contemporary avant-garde were at the time fascinated with Dada and the anti-art tradition.¹⁴ The Polish Writers' Union (ZLP) had an art gallery called U Literatów [At the Writers'], run by Krystyna Damar and Wojciech



Wincenty Dunikowski-Duniko, *Przedłużenie życia ludzkości* (An Extension of the Life of Mankind), 1974–1976

Sztaba, where visitors could see exhibitions by young artists and attend lectures on Dadaism.¹⁵ Sztaba was introducing the output of Stanisław Ignacy Witkiewicz to his generation, interpreted by him in terms of playing with art, while Maria Hussakowska-Szysko studied the reception of Marcel Duchamp's oeuvre in American artists' circles.¹⁶ All this provided a sound theoretical foundation for the anarchism then present in the intellectual air.

The processes at work between the essential components of *Art Playing Table* are very unclear and may consequently seem like innocent play or even mockery of the ontological determinants of art. The impossibility of rationalizing the work's mechanics reinforces the significance of intention and aim. Blurring that which is in-between makes the first of the questions that Barr asked, *how does it work?*, less important and accentuates the second question, *what does it do?* Unlike the uncertain aspects of beauty, this is above all pragmatic in terms of the outcome, and it demands that the figure of the viewer (or the user for that matter) is considered when rendering an interpretation. It is to the viewers and users that artists began to dedicate much more attention in the second half of the decade. At this point, Duniko was inscribing rolls of computer paper with handwritten interrogative platitudes such as *how to help you* and *what suits you*.

In the groundbreaking year 1968, MoMA held the exhibition *The Machine as Seen at the End of the Mechanical Age*, programmed as another summary of the transformations that had occurred in art and in the aesthetic of machines. The curator K. G. Pontus Hultén was convinced that the time of mechanical structures mimicking the work of muscles was over, and that the time had come for devices imitating the processes that take place in the human brain – designed in imitation of the nervous system.¹⁷ The only photograph on show, although a symbolic one, was the documentation of Jean Tinguely's infernal machinery, *Homage to New York*, which self-annihilated when it was being displayed in MoMA's gardens in 1960. The suicide of a machine symbolically bid farewell to the classical artistic engineering of the 20th century, which had given

way to a fascination for global communication systems. As a result, the device's motion stopped, and knowledge of the principles of its operation vanished. Laying emphasis on a process that takes place inside an assembly while passing over details of the related structural idea heralded the art of the 21st century, drawing inspiration from biological sciences and experiments within the realm of animate beings.

The already mentioned Andreas Broeckmann, inspired by Giorgio Agamben's deliberations in the essay *What is an Apparatus?*, proposed that, in art, a mechanism whose symbolic aspect is dominant and whose principle of operation is allegorical rather than mechanical allows the examination of the machine in social terms.¹⁸ Gerald Raunig developed this even further, turning the machine into a concept after which society is organized. He used technical terms such as 'structure' and 'motion' to describe the ways in which individuals function in organized populations. Elements of social systems operate within communicating vessels, as if governed by certain mechanisms. Community, therefore, is both natural, as it consists of living organisms, and artificial, in that it is subject to an organizational idea. In Raunig's metaphorical approach, the machine does not necessarily have to take a specific shape. It can be hypothetical and abstract, or simply hidden.¹⁹ These propositions come in handy when examining attempts of neo-avant-garde and postmodern artists whose intentions revolve around extending the field of art and its machinery to include nature and society.

In 2018, the Bunkier Sztuki Gallery of Contemporary Art in Kraków acquired for its collection two drawings by Duniko which reveal different, broader intentions in terms of creating mechanisms and processes. The preliminary nature of his concepts dating from the 70s is confirmed by the chaos in their nomenclature, which in fact has never been unraveled and which indicates that the designs entered hibernation in the stage of developing concepts. Renouncing the original handwritten caption of the drawing, which reads *Laser Monument Long Life*, today the artist prefers to refer to this work as what would translate into English literally as "an extension of

the life of mankind” (*Przedłużenie życia ludzkości*). The originally titled *Light Monument I* is referred to by him as the Polish word-for-word equivalent of “Sun sculpture” (*Rzeźba słoneczna*). These former English titles may suggest that the author struggled with the genre of monument, or that he tried to deconstruct the meanings implied by a monument. However, in my opinion, these sketches, which were submitted by the artist when applying for a Berlin DAAD scholarship to work on them further in 1976, are unique because of other themes that recur in them. I would characterize them as a parody of planning utopias, which were already quite a rich tradition at the time and were devised for taking control of the elements for aesthetic purposes.

Laser Monument – Long Life depicts a globe inscribed within a pyramid with equilateral triangles for sides, the vertices of which are bold and, along with its edges, are marked (a and b); the cardinal directions are also indicated (N, E, S, W). As an integral part of the work, there is also a description typed on a white sheet of paper that states the intent to place the globe within the force field of a pyramid formed by laser beams that would connect five satellites circling the planet. *Light Monument I*, created in 1972, is an installation composed of a longitudinally cut pipe with a mirror inside which would focus the sun’s rays or the light of the moon and reflect them onto a transparent plate inserted between the pipe halves.

The drawings look like examples of orthodox conceptual art. Indeed, Joseph Kosuth considered the work to be a proposal, not a finished object.²⁰ However, the planned function and the irony interwoven within that intent contradict the dogmatic pursuits found in *Art after Philosophy*. Such a recipe for unsatisfactory life on Earth stems from the then-popularized esotericism that proclaimed, among other things, the healing effects of pyramids. In 1949, the Czechoslovakian inventor Karel Drbal reportedly even patented a pyramid-shaped razor blade-sharpening machine. In the certificate that regulated ownership of the work, the artist also transferred the right to construct the pyramid at such a time at which it was incorporated into

a public collection. In doing so, he proved that a transaction could concern not only a futuristic concept itself, but also the mockery of it being possible to realize such a concept. The case of the “Sun sculpture” is different. Up until the 1990s, at successive Duniko retrospectives, the subject of the work’s eventual materialization recurred.²¹ The artist was not sufficiently determined to implement his concept, and I have to admit that this is not a pity at all. To me, *Light Monument* is more convincing as a sketch. In the real world, it could have been an instance of modern megalomania, upholding mankind’s rule over nature.

Do projects of complicated systems and actions directed at the globe and the landscape have pragmatic significance? Are they anything other than fun and mockery? Can they be – like machines – acknowledged as carriers of symbolic meanings and allegoric interpretations of reality? Certainly, they can. They are executions that never developed beyond a sketch or small-scale undertakings. I suggest that they are ideas for another game played with art. By not having materialized in full, they have never extended beyond the field of art.

Ambitious designs involving the globe, space, or the elements are not uncommon among neo-avant-garde artists. Analogies of Duniko’s laser pyramid are known in the history of Polish conceptual art: in 1970 Jerzy Rosołowicz made *Creatorium of the Millennium Stalagmatic Column*; Druga Grupa [The Second Group] proposed cutting the Giewont mountain in half (*Giewont*), and Zdzisław Sosnowski requested that the Earth be moved one meter closer to the Sun (*Proszę przesunąć kulę ziemską o jeden metr w kierunku słońca*). Impossibility of execution and absurdity are typical here. All these works originated at a time when Poland was experiencing a strong propaganda of success campaign: a Polish cosmonaut had made it to the crew of a Soviet spacecraft (1976) – a peculiar escape to nature but not from civilization. Losing oneself in futuristic phantasmagorias was a syndrome of the Polish melancholia of the 1970s.

Even if Duniko had won a scholarship in the mid-70s and in collaboration with engineers

from NASA, for example, succeeded in executing his projects, today the works would have been mentioned alongside others as violating nature in the name of art. There have been many cases of such arrogance. In 1961, in the Danish city of Herning, Piero Manzoni erected an inverted steel pedestal inscribed with the words *Socle du Monde* [Base of the World]. Commemorating the act of placing the planet on a pedestal, successive editions of Socle du Monde Biennale are held there. The 7th edition, in 2017, with the motto *to challenge the Earth, the Moon, the Sun & the Stars*, was dedicated to artists who turn our unstable world upside down.²² Władysław Hasiór's pipe organ (*Organy*, 1966), located on the Snozka mountain pass and designed so that the wind would hum in it, never worked as per his design. During the Wrocław '70 symposium, floodlights emitted *Nine Rays of Light in the Sky* according to Henryk Stażewski's design; the event, although remembered, is spectacularly simple from today's perspective.

The sketches, notes, and drawings by Wincenty Dunikowski-Duniko resulted from affection for certain ideas, from concepts being born and eventually abandoned. They are analogous to changes that were taking place in the aesthetic of machines over the course of the 20th century, and to artists' intentions that reach beyond the traditional field of art. In these concepts, I find irony in the dysfunctionality of each of the planned executions. Moreover, I see them as projects that are subversive and that work against the well-known manifestations of art of the time, which aimed to subjugate the real world for the sake of artistry.

Translated by Błażej Bauer

Notes

- ¹ Andreas Broeckmann, *Machine Art in the Twentieth Century* (Cambridge-London: MIT, 2016), 47–86.
- ² Wincenty Dunikowski-Duniko, "Od Duniko do nieskończoności." Interviewed by Krzysztof Siatka. *Artluk*, no. 2 (2007): 26–34.
- ³ Work executed for a retrospective exhibition held at the BWA Contemporary Art Gallery in Katowice in June 1995.
- ⁴ A concept drawing was shown in the exhibition *Graphic Art (methods, attitudes, tendencies)* held at the Palace of Art (Pałac Sztuki) of Kraków Society of Friends of Fine Arts (Towarzystwo Przyjaciół Sztuk Pięknych w Krakowie) in 1978, during the 7th International Print Biennale.
- ⁵ The project was executed for the exhibition *Construction in Process VI*, held in 1998 in Melbourne. Also, the author noted the title of the work differently in different instances: the spelling *Absolute* alternated with *Absolut* and *Absoluth*.
- ⁶ The drawing, which originated other concepts as well as an object known by the same title, was first shown in the artist's solo exhibition held in the Mały Rynek Gallery in Kraków in 1980, where Dunikowski installed, e.g., TV sets with film projections, and it was in this version that the project came to be featured in all major exhibitions of the artist held in the 1990s as well as at the turn of 21st century in Kraków, Heidelberg, Orońsko, and Bielsko-Biała. See: Wanda Dunikowska and Krzysztof Głuchowski, eds., *Wincenty Dunikowski-Duniko, Retrospektywa „Moją najlepszą...”* (Kraków: BWA, 1995); Hans Gercke, ed., *Wincenty Dunikowski-Duniko – Retrospektive* (Heidelberg: Heidelberger Kunstverein, 2001).
- ⁷ Benjamin Buchloh, "Conceptual Art 1962–1969: From the Aesthetic of Administration to the Critique of Institutions," *October* 55 (1990): 105–143.
- ⁸ Alfred Hamilton Barr Jr., "Foreword," in *Machine Art* (New York: MoMA, 1934), 9–12. Alfred Barr Jr. and Philip Johnson's concept of the exhibition consisted in displaying everyday objects and tools on pedestals, in a way analogous to that of exhibiting works of art. Items were chosen for the show as part of a peculiar beauty contest whose jury included, among others, philosopher John Dewey. Dewey's aesthetic concepts had been an inspiration to Philip Johnson, and the originator of the definition of *art as experience* can also be seen as an important author in Poland of the 1970s, since it was at that time that the Polish translation of his book was published (1975). See: John Dewey, *The Later Works, 1925–1953*, ed. Jo Ann Boydston, vol. 10: 1934 *Art as Experience* (Carbondale: Southern Illinois University Press, 2008); *Sztuka jako doświadczenie*, trans. Andrzej Potocki (Wrocław: Ossolineum, 1975).
- ⁹ Kieran Lyons, "Military Avoidance: Marcel Duchamp and the 'Jura-Paris Road,'" *Tate Papers*, no. 5, <https://www.tate.org.uk/research/publications/tate-papers/05/military-avoidance-marcel-duchamp-and-the-jura-paris-road>, accessed 12.05.2020. See also Anne d'Harnoncourt and Kynaston McShine, *Marcel Duchamp* (Philadelphia: Philadelphia Museum of Art, 1973), 256; Broeckmann, 70.
- ¹⁰ William A. Camfield, "The Machinist Style of Francis Picabia," *The Art Bulletin* 48, no. 3/4 (1966): 309.
- ¹¹ Maria Hussakowska-Szysko attempted to define the aim of the *Large Glass*, identifying it as dealing with the mechanics of consciousness. See: Maria Hussakowska-Szysko, *Spadkobiercy Duchampa* (Kraków: Wydawnictwo Literackie, 1984), 58.
- ¹² Broeckmann, 68.
- ¹³ See the latest edition: Jerzy Ludwiński, "Sztuka niezidentyfikowana 1975," in *Epoka błękitu* (Kraków: Otwarta Pracownia, 2003), 203–206.
- ¹⁴ See: Krzysztof Siatka, "O sposobach spoglądania, odsłaniania i zasłaniania. Kilka przykładów z Krakowa lat 70. XX wieku, które czasami wpisywały się w neoawangardowe idiomy," in *Księga zmian*, ed. Anna Bargiel, et al. (Kraków: Bunkier Sztuki, 2018), 272–330.
- ¹⁵ See: Anna Gebhard-Gądek, "Historia i działalność grupy ASPUJ" (MA Thesis, Jagiellonian University, 2005).
- ¹⁶ See: Wojciech Sztaba, *Gra ze sztuką. O twórczości Stanisława Ignacego Witkiewicza* (Kraków: Wydawnictwo Literackie, 1984); Hussakowska-Szysko, *Spadkobiercy Duchampa*. The books by Sztaba and Hussakowska-Szysko, although published in the 1980s, were emanations of theses that the authors had developed in their doctoral dissertations under professor Mieczysław Porębski at the Institute of Art History of Jagiellonian University in the mid-1970s.
- ¹⁷ See: Karl Gunnar Vought Pontus Hultén, "Foreword and Acknowledgements," in *The machine as seen at the end of the mechanical age* (New York: MoMA, 1968), 3–4.
- ¹⁸ See: Giorgio Agamben, *What is an Apparatus? and Other Essays*, trans. David Kishik and Stefan Pedatella (Stanford: Stanford University Press, 2009); Broeckmann, 71.
- ¹⁹ Gerald Raunig, *A Thousand Machines. A Concise Philosophy of the Machine as Social Movement* (Los Angeles: Semiotext(e), 2007), 91–119.
- ²⁰ Joseph Kosuth, *The Sixth Investigation 1969 Proposition 14* (Köln: Gerd De Vries/Paul Maenz, 1971).
- ²¹ Ryszard Stanisławski, "Wincenty Dunikowski-Duniko i jego przestrzeń nasycona," in *Wincenty Dunikowski-Duniko, Retrospektywa „Moją najlepszą...”*, 27–50.
- ²² Louisa Elderton, "The Base of the World. A Report from the 7th instalment of Denmark's Socle du Monde Biennale: 'to challenge the Earth, the Moon, the Sun & the Stars,'" *Frieze* published electronically 4.05.2017 <https://frieze.com/article/base-world>, accessed 12.05.2020. Fascinated with Manzoni's work, in 2018 at Scotland's Dundee Contemporary Arts gallery, the Spanish inciter Santiago Sierra made public the documentation of the *Black Flag* project, as part of which his assistants put black flags (symbols of anarchism) at the North and South Poles. The artist so annexed the outermost points of the Earth, thus invalidating the world's empires' claims to these places and to the deposits of natural resources located deep below.

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