

Interpreting David Smith's Photography Through a Medium-centred Model of Communication

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American sculptor David Smith moved fluidly between media to elicit the kind of aesthetic reaction that he believed was unique to and inherent in modern art. As remediation of his sculpture, Smith's photography attains its own performative power by establishing a new aesthetic relationship with its spectators. This article applies Lars Elleström's medium-centred model of communication to the analysis of the intermedial quality of David Smith's photography. By emphasizing the significance of mediality and communication, it offers a new interpretation of the transmutation of modern sculpture as an alternative to modernist aesthetics. In this way, this case study of David Smith's photography functions as an initiative of expanding the research of intermediality beyond formalistic analysis, by integrating art history with communication and media studies.

Introduction

American sculptor David Smith was born in 1906 to his working-class parents and was raised in Indiana and Ohio. By his early twenties, Smith was studying drawing and painting at the Art Students League in New York, where he established a network with local painters, some of whom later became representative figures of Abstract Expressionism. One of Smith's painter friends, John D. Graham,^a showed Smith his collection of the welded-metal sculptures made by Pablo Picasso and Julio González. As Smith remembers it, this event inspired him to switch from painting to sculpture: 'Since I had worked in factories and made parts of automobiles and had

worked on telephone lines I saw a chance to make sculpture in a tradition I was already rooted in' (Cooke 2018: 100). Smith soon devoted himself to sculpture and had his first one-man exhibition in 1938. From then on, he sculpted with industrial materials until his death in a car accident in 1965. As a devoted and acknowledged sculptor, Smith openly identified himself with painters throughout his career. He traced his inheritance to modernist painters such as Cézanne, Kandinsky and Mondrian, arguing that 'the vision of painters has outstripped that of sculptors . . . the painter's concept has leaped away from its many centuries of mooring to the sculptured chiaroscuro' (Cooke 2018: 140). Representative works of his mature period, such as *Agricola* (1951–1959), *Tanktotem* (1952–1960) and *Cubi* (1961–1965), are regarded as cubist and constructivist series, because of their abstractness and flatness. Later in his life, Smith carried out experiments on documenting and remediating his sculpture, using photography as an effective medium.

This shows that David Smith didn't abide by the modernist rule of media specificity, but moved fluidly between media to elicit the kind of visual perception and aesthetic experience which he believed was unique to and inherent in modern art. In view of this, this article aims to examine the intermedial quality of David Smith's art by focusing on his photographs. To break through stereotypes created by modernist aesthetics and especially formalist criticism, the article adopts Lars Elleström's (2018) medium-centred model of communication to construct the analytical framework. Its basic ideas as well as its suitability and efficacy are explained in the next section. The main body of this article is arranged according to Elleström's conceptualizations of the three entities of communication and their interrelations, so as to analyse the construction of Smith's photographic images as the media product and the transfer of meaning through it. The article concludes with a discussion of the significance of Smith's intermedial creation in the context of contemporary media culture. By reflecting on the influence of Smith's experiments on subsequent art movements in the 1960s, the final section suggests a novel way of viewing the history of art as constituted by interrelated media events rather than as closed objects awaiting appreciation and interpretation. Focusing on David Smith, a key figure in modern sculpture and post-war art, this case study offers a glimpse of more general issues, including (1) how modernist principles of abstraction and art autonomy have reshaped painting and sculpture differently; (2) how the European avant-garde was accepted and adapted by different social groups in the United States, such as European immigrants, New York elites, and the general public.

Understanding the (Inter)Mediality of Modern Art from the Perspective of Communication

The powerful art critic Clement Greenberg published a fierce critique of Herbert Read's *The Art of Sculpture* (1956) in the *New York Times* in 1956, in which he praised David Smith as the best representative of abstract sculpture, as opposed to Read's hero Henry Moore. According to art historian David J. Getsy (2011),

Greenberg deliberately misread Read in an attempt to establish the absolute and sole legitimacy of the visual, or in his term ‘the opticality’, as an aesthetic and critical standard for modern sculpture. It is not the aim of this article to argue for Greenberg’s opticality or Read’s tactility. Rather, its purpose is to move beyond the dichotomies inherent in modernist aesthetics and its compatible art history. In fact, the opticality–tactility opposition and the painting–sculpture opposition are typical examples of the dichotomous mindset.

As argued by contemporary philosopher Thierry de Duve (1998), what is central to the Greenbergian formalism is his definition of the medium in modernism. Early in ‘Towards a newer Laocoön’, Clement Greenberg (1940) clearly stated that for non-representational and abstract art, there are only subject matters left to be discovered in the process or conventions of a particular medium, since the external empirical world is abandoned. This means that the aesthetic judgement of the modernist artist must have been suggested, inspired and stimulated by the medium itself. In other words, the medium is the only subject matter, i.e., the centre of the artist’s aesthetic constraints. Therefore, the history of modern painting as defined by Greenberg (1940: 299) is ‘a progressive surrender to the resistance of its medium; which resistance consists chiefly in the flat picture plane’s denial of efforts to “hole through” it for realistic perspectival space’. Due to its two-dimensionality and flatness, abstract painting fits perfectly with these doctrines of modernism and formalism, whereas sculpture has to deal with stronger resistance caused by its substantiality and anthropomorphism. This context helps us to understand David Smith’s identification with modernist painters. But if we simply consider David Smith as a follower of the Greenbergian formalism, we couldn’t explain his tenacious struggles for a new sculptural abstraction, nor could we understand the motivations and effects of his intermedial creation, especially the role of photography in his art. Previous researchers Rosalind Krauss and Sarah Hamill have laid a solid foundation for the study of Smith’s photographs. Krauss (1981) analyses Smith’s creation in the context of diversified modern sculpture. She emphasizes that Smith found a unique formal language of discontinuity through photography, and hence distinguished his abstract sculpture from the surrealist totemism and the constructivist aesthetics. Hamill’s (2015) monograph explains in detail how Smith used his photographs to manipulate the pictorial encounter between his sculptures and audiences. Both of them discuss David Smith’s photographs in the context of the discourses of modern sculpture, sculptural aesthetics, and post-war art. To offer a new tenable interpretation, this study applies Lars Elleström’s (2018) medium-centred model of communication to the analysis of the intermedial quality of David Smith’s photography.

To remedy the lack of old models of communication, Lars Elleström develops a new model to conceptualize core features of communication ‘in terms of mediality and with the aid of semiotics, thereby offering theoretical tools that are vital for pinpointing basic media similarities and differences and developing the material and mental aspects of mediality to a sufficient degree of complexity’ (Elleström 2018: 270). Elleström’s model proposes a broad notion of medium as ‘the intermediate

stage of communication', thus incorporating not only 'media based on external technological devices but also media based on corporeality; not only media used for practical purposes, but also artistic media' (Elleström 2018: 270–271). Therefore, this model is fit for analysing David Smith's intermedial creation, which employs both the artist's bodily techniques and photographic equipment. Compared with the modernist conception of media specificity and Claude Shannon's focus on the transmission of quantifiable data, it has greater explanatory power because of its efficacy in describing and explaining the transfer of verbal and non-verbal meanings across media. Specifically, Elleström's model clarifies three entities of the communication process: the cognitive import (meaning to be transferred), the producer's mind and the perceiver's mind (sites to hold meaning), and the media product (the intermediate stage that enables the transfer of meaning). It also categorizes essential interrelations among these entities: an act of production, an act of perception, cognitive import inside the minds, and a transfer of cognitive import through the media product.^b This model is built up based on a more fundamental categorization of four media modalities: the material, the spatiotemporal, the sensorial and the semiotic, and the three types of media characteristics: basic media, qualified media and technical media (Elleström 2013). Elleström puts forward this methodical, bottom-up conception to avoid 'blunt and misleading dichotomies such as "text" vs. "image" or "verbal" vs. "visual"' (Elleström 2018: 292).

Special attention needs to be paid to Elleström's explanation of some details of his model. First, the production and perception 'involve complex and entangled corporeal and cognitive processes' (Elleström 2018: 283). This means that the primary bodily act could be linked to the subsequent extensive act of production, whereas the act of perception is quickly followed by and entangled with interpretation. Second, the media product is 'a material entity that has the capacity of triggering mental responses' (Elleström 2018: 285). It could be analysed in terms of the four media modalities which are equally important for the communication process. Third, the cognitive import is formed based on an individual's preconceptions such as knowledge, experiences, beliefs and values, which are shaped by his/her living environment and traditions. According to Elleström (2018: 290), the hardwired cognitive capacities and mental activities are beyond the reach of known research methods, but the attained predispositions could be scrutinized within the area of hermeneutics. Before starting the analysis, it is necessary to state that this article focuses on the act of production and the media product, because its aim is to explain how David Smith's aesthetic ideas are transferred across different media. Future research could be expanded to include audiences' perception.

Cognitive Import in the Sculptor's Mind

In Lars Elleström's model, cognitive import is the mental configurations inside the producer's and the perceiver's minds. In the case of David Smith, the cognitive import in his mind is his aesthetic ideas of sculpture creation and appreciation.

Although it is impossible to restore Smith's mental activities, his own writings are reliable indirect resources for uncovering what he infused in his sculptures and photographs.

Since the early stage of Smith's career, he had been eager to establish the equal freedom in self-expression for sculptors as painters. He even went further, to proclaim sculpture's superiority over painting, precisely based on the physics of the creating process:

Sculpture is more immediate than painting for visionary action. The feeling for natural constants such as gravity, space and hard objects are the physicals of the sculptural process. Consequently they flow more freely into the act of vision than the illusion of constants used in painting. (Cooke 2018: 148)

The quotation reveals that, for Smith, vision is not pure or independent of other senses. Moreover, 'the act of vision' indicates that vision is not simply an innate ability but an action. This means that the time dimension is vital for understanding Smith's notions of image, reality and plasticity. An image has a life in the sense that it could be perceived by a stimulated mind in a flash; furthermore, while being perceived at that moment, it is simultaneously connected with its other lives kept in one's memory, and even with the constellation of images in art history and cultural life.

Smith proposes the concept of 'eidetic image' to define his idea of visual perception. He argues that 'the eidetic image, the after-image, is more important than the object' (Cooke 2018: 245–253). This shows that the eidetic image relates to visual memory, a physiological and cultural phenomenon that interconnects reality, the artist and art: 'Reality includes the visual memory of all art, and the working reality of his particular art family. [...] His interest in reality is not its prosaic representation but the poetic transposition of it' (Cooke 2018: 245). This argument for an artist's poetic reality suggests the contrast between eidetic image and naturalistic image. In Smith's opinion, a naturalistic image is as accurate as an imprint, but has no place in art because it is static, sterile and meaningless. An eidetic image no longer submits to naturalism, but depends exclusively on human sensorium and emotions. Smith believes that '[i]t is beyond human power not to have some emotional response to the object. Nature isn't enough, it is one single sterile image' (Cooke 2018: 162). Thus, eidetic images are those which project certain feelings and conceptions of the artist and require perceptual responses from the viewer. On the other hand, for eidetic images, symbolic or literal explanations are unnecessary. In Smith's view, they are irrelevant to the art-making process. Neither can they explain the human sensory experience implicated in that process. Smith does not deny or ignore the process of meaning making in image viewing, but simply distrusts verbalized interpretation: 'visual metaphoric exchange is perceived daily in many ways. When it is verbalized its poetic value is lost. The mind's eye and not the mirror eye contributes to the perceptual realization of art making more than the reporting view or the idea way' (Cooke 2018: 245). Moreover, Smith believes that in the

context of modern art, any artwork is perceivable to all because contemporary life has moulded the contemporary senses and sentiments: 'No man has seen what another has not, or lacks the components and power to assemble' (Cooke 2018: 146). Basically, Smith thinks that it is impossible to produce an unperceivable work in both logical and historical senses.

Therefore, Smith's eidetic image is neither the draft settled for realization, nor the completed work to be viewed. It lives and constantly changes. By proposing this concept, Smith contests the possessive and contemplative gaze that is fundamental to classical sculptural aesthetics. For him, the appreciation of a modern sculpture lies in dynamic relationships – the form of relationship that summons the creator–viewer relationship. However, the relational and dynamic nature of visual perception inevitably problematizes the artist's conviction, which concerns Smith: 'Maybe I am afraid that sculpture is a confining thing. Maybe I resent the time it takes. I don't want my medium to hold me [back] from having a soaring vision' (Cooke 2018: 166). Here, the fundamental dilemma is the inherent contradiction of plastic art between physical medium and human sensorium, between the concreteness of the art-making process and the dynamism of the eidetic image. In this sense, the issue of plasticity is more difficult for sculptors who have to maintain their conviction and stimulus, whereas painters can realize a conceptual aim faster and easier.

Nevertheless, it is this greater difficulty that Smith considers as the essence of his art: 'the battle for solution is the most important. . . . The conflict for realization is what makes art, not its certainty, nor its technique or material' (Cooke 2018: 308). In fact, it is during the process of looking for solutions to this great conflict that Smith affirms his visual language and aesthetics of modern sculpture. First, Smith abandons material worship in sculpture and exploits the expressiveness of industrial metals. In his view, metals are ideal for realizing his aesthetic idea:

In metal, I do not think the volume is necessary. It can be suggested with line. Volume is necessary, in marble, for instance, . . . Cubism is my heritage and volume no longer seems important. [Cubism] was the breaking down of volume. . . . Metal is more fluent and free. . . . In marble you can take it off, too, but you can't put it back. (Cooke 2018: 248)

Second, he uses drawing to facilitate the holding of conviction, for drawing makes fast realization of forms. Most importantly, he adopts photography to document and reflect on his working process: 'I'm using [photographs] to refer to the way I work. . . . If I try to tell how I make art, it seems difficult. There is no order in it' (Cooke 2018: 335–336).

In summary, (modern) sensibility is the foundation for what Smith perceived as the 'freedom of self-expression': 'Identity within man, the artist, the drive and the conviction, make the work of art. The work of art is not premediated. [. . .] And in the final analysis all the components are dissolved in the true reality, the work itself' (Cooke 2018: 205–206). As the quotation shows, Smith believes that an artist's identity, namely his drive and conviction, is the only origin of art. Modern art no longer submits to the law of imitation, and hence secures its autonomy based on

visual perception. The work of art that dissociates from any external subject becomes a representation of the mechanics of vision per se. In this sense, it ‘needs only be seen’ – literal interpretation or explanation is unnecessary and fallacious. Sensibility imparts absolute freedom to art. It also becomes a curse because an artwork could never again be comprehended or judged by its completeness, that is, how well it manages to present a resemblance of certain appearances or ideas. What Smith defines as ‘the conflict for realization’ is the continuous process of making art, which involves the visual–perceptual dynamism between the artist and the viewer. Hence, the artist is not identified by his techniques or talents, but is confined to the battle with his medium to establish and reaffirm the dynamic relationship with the viewer. The eidetic image that emerges in this ongoing dynamism is never fully realized but constantly changes and renews itself, undergoing the circle of mediatization and remediation.

Transfer of Meaning through Media Products

As analysed above, the cognitive import inside David Smith’s mind, namely the meaning of his art, is his notion of how a modern sculpture should be seen rather than what a piece of sculpture represents or expresses. His art creation could be seen as communication of this meaning, which transfers his aesthetic ideas through different kinds of media products: his sculptures and photographs.

From the mid-1940s up to his death in 1965, David Smith took thousands of photographs of his sculptures. Yet it remains a less discussed and perplexing category of his portfolio, largely because of Smith’s own ambivalent attitude towards the photographs. On one hand, he would carefully stage his sculptures, meticulously arrange vantage points, and even crop film frames purposefully every time he produced photographs for catalogues and art journals. On the other hand, he considered photographs as still images, which ‘[have] no place in art’ (Cooke 2018: 146). He also distrusted the dissemination function of photography, claiming that ‘[n]obody can make a copy with integrity. . . . the original gesture of the artist – the original object – is the true art’ (Cooke 2018: 336). This self-contradiction means that we need to interpret Smith’s photography in relation to his conception of visual perception. What kind of perceptual response would Smith expect viewers of his photographs to have? What visual and aesthetic effects do these photographs actually produce?

Creating a Theatrical Space

Most of Smith’s photographs were shot outdoor in Bolton Landing.^c These giant metal objects would be standing in contrast to the natural environment. Smith researcher Sarah Hamill (2015) analyses the effects of this juxtaposition strategy: first, staged photography of these iron monsters in the natural landscape dramatizes their otherness and dislocation; second, the particularly low vantage point highlights

the sculptures' command over their setting. The visual-perceptual effect is most distinct when Smith's photographs are compared with those of Henry Moore. In photographs, Moore's sculptures in the English countryside could easily be mistaken for prehistoric remains, not only because of their organic materials and biomorphic figuration, but also because Moore's staging strategy is aimed at monumentality and harmony. Contrarily, Smith's photography has little nostalgic implications, but only the uneasy relationship between his sculptures and their surroundings.

A sculpture could be viewed as a completely different object when Smith deliberately changes the shooting angle. In this way, Smith's photography intensifies the plastic quality of his sculpture. More importantly, this approach flattens the sculptural space into fragmented, discrete planar surfaces. Through the remediation of photography, Smith re-presents his sculptures as contingent things which change according to the setting and point of view. Therefore, while dramatizing the radical otherness of his sculptures, these photographic images also seduce viewers by convincing them that the sculptures you see are signalling another, separate space. It is hoped that these viewers, who are deprived of a stable and consistent seeing order, would get involved in that illusionistic space. In other words, Smith creates a theatrical space with photography's discursive framework. This is consistent with his notion of a visionary act, for he is commanding but also liberating his viewers by urging them to respond to his implied questions: Do you see my sculpture? Do you really see it by getting involved in the perceptual dynamism?

Photography is expedient for those who could not see the work on site. Smith despised this solution but customized it as an applicable way to approach his viewers, knowing that sculpture was retreating from the public sphere in the post-war era. The atmosphere of alienation in Smith's photographs indicates the impossibility of the public monument as a stable model of communal wholeness.^d As the autonomy of art and its foundation of common sensibility were both endangered by the ideological wars and the sweeping consumerism, many modernists, including Smith, stood back and sought to communicate to potential audiences on a one-to-one basis. Their solutions, such as circulation and display through photography, stimulate the intermedial performativity of perception by reaching out to individual spectators who are confined in a world of simulacrum.

Performativity of the In-betweenness

In *The Art of Sculpture*, Herbert Read states his aesthetics of sculpture based on the physicality of the medium and sensations involved in the viewing experience:

An art owes its particularity to the emphasis or preference given to any one organ of sensation. If sculpture has any such particularity, it is tone distinguished from painting as the plastic art that gives preference to tactile sensations as against visual sensations, and it is precisely when this preference is clearly stated that sculpture attains its highest and its unique aesthetic value. (Read 1956: 70)

Photography reduces this physicality and tactile sensation to the minimum level, since material facets of a sculpture, that is, its mass, weight, bulk and volume all become obscured in a photo. However, this minimum level is enough to activate the haptic sensibility of the viewer, due to the indexical nature of photographs. Originally, photography is believed to provide evidence of physical existence because of the technical quality of photographic imaging. That is to say, sculpture photography is situated in the gap between image and substance, between pictorial encounter and sculptural encounter. It is this in-betweenness that makes it a perfect medium for Smith's experiment with the perception of objects and space.

Photographic images remediate sculpture works and hence open a theatrical space, wherein viewers are expected to participate by playing their role of visionary actor. Judging from Lars Elleström's model, Smith's sculpture photographs could be regarded as a kind of media product, which according to Elleström is 'an assemblage of representamens that, due to their qualities . . . represent certain objects (that are available to the perceiver), thus creating interpretants (cognitive import) in the perceiver's mind' (Elleström 2018:19).

The ideal eidetic image in Smith's understanding of visual perception only emerges in the ever-ongoing dynamism between the physical medium and human sensorium, between the artwork and its viewer. Those sculpture photographs as media products are not exactly 'still images' as Smith himself criticized. They create new interpretants while representing original sculptures on a two-dimensional plane. In other words, photographic images attain a performative power that derives from the agency of original sculptures but transforms itself as it travels across media (He 2020). Thus, David Smith's photography should be regarded as an intermediate stage of the paradoxical perceptual realization that constantly changes and renews itself.

Smith's Legacy and Implications of Photography

Smith's photography denies possessive and contemplative viewing by manipulating beholders' perceptions of object and space. Consequently, viewers of those sculpture photographs would find themselves confronted with a theatrical space that summons their engagement. This is already verging on what Michael Fried describes as the theatricality of literalist art (Fried 1998). In Fried's account, theatricality in minimalist sculpture was a staged relationship between art object and beholder. As a follower of the Greenbergian formalism, Fried regarded theatricality as a symptom of the decadence of art. According to Alex Potts (2004), Fried's critique was aimed at rescuing the idea of aesthetic autonomy, which was increasingly threatened by the blurring of the boundary between art and life. What Potts discovered in the controversy of post-war sculpture were transmutations of aesthetic autonomy and artists' subjectivity in the 1950s and 1960s. The split and retreat of avant-gardists as well as the almost simultaneous rise of Pop Art and Minimalism were all intertwined with the sweeping trends of consumerism and Cold War ideologies.

Under these historical circumstances, artists' immersion into everyday life was in fact part of an encompassing process: the formation of the economy and culture of mass communication, which in turn transformed the nature of media and mediation. Nowadays, mass communication has become a transparent environment, and our age is a time when the process of mediation is more frankly appreciated. According to Jay Bolter and Richard Grusin (2000: 75), the pervasiveness and transparency of mass communication challenges Walter Benjamin's definition of aura, because remediation does not destroy the aura of an artwork but refashions it in another media form.

Of course, Smith couldn't foresee this aesthetic consequence of the ubiquitous (re)mediation, since his experiments with photography were at the initial stage of this transformation. But not long after him, refashioning of the aura was fully manifested in installation and performance art. However, sculptors before Smith would never dream of what he strived to achieve by representing those art objects in staged photography. Hence we can infer that the history of art, which too often is stipulated by aesthetics, is in fact a continuous and sometimes iterative process of mediation and remediation. In other words, the atlas of all artworks of all times, if there's a capable mind to visualize that, would be an evolving network of (re)mediation, of which the structure and form as well as discourses about them will be refashioned every time a new object connects to that network and thus becomes a medium.

This means the history of art is constituted by media events, rather than static objects, no matter that we call them artworks or cultural artefacts. Therefore, this media logic suggests a novel mindset and approach to the rewriting of art history. Its foundation is a redefinition of media not as entities or functions, but as practices and processes because 'a medium is that which remediates. It is that which appropriates the techniques, forms, and social significance of other media and attempts to rival or refashion them in the name of the real' (Bolter and Grusin 2000: 65). The conception of a media event indicates that media are not conditions for events, be it communication of message or art creation and appreciation. They are in themselves events: 'assemblages or constellations of certain technologies, fields of knowledge, and social institutions' (Horn 2007: 8). This notion also helps to explain the deep variance between Clement Greenberg and David Smith. The sculptor who adequately utilizes the performativity of the in-betweenness would not identify with an essentialist view of media specificity.

Furthermore, the constantly evolving network of (re)mediation also requires a critical reflection of the established art historiography. This is especially evident in today's media-saturated culture. Our media experiences involve multi-layers of mutual (re)mediation. Such complexity means that it is impossible or meaningless to designate a single, stable position for observation and generalization because every media event is undergoing the process of 'becoming a medium'. As a matter of fact, this has been the immanent contradiction of art history since the very beginning of this discipline. A historical narrative has to be based on a solid foundation, whereas art historians seek to give shape to the ungraspable, or rather, they 'create' their research object by writing about it. This is what Margaret Iversen and Stephen Melville (2010) mean by arguing that art history and sculpture intersect at plasticity: the Hegelian art history echoes the sculptural plasticity, i.e., the repetition and

dialectic transformation of a centre made absolute. This absolute yet absent centre is what Laurence Alloway (1984) emphasizes in his critiques: the complex and ambiguous present.

The present is the fundamental difficulty of art historiography. For each specific media event to be written into a coherent narrative, historians must deal with the absent and the present, the performance and the mediation at the same time. Nevertheless, the difficulty also points to a new opportunity for art historians today to imagine a historical narrative that pays attention to contemporaneity. For contemporary artworks, Alloway alleges that one would encounter an artwork in photography's discursive space, which may enable a further investigation of that artistic object in the mass media network, where it could be interpreted in varied and unpredictable ways. Here lies the historiographical significance of David Smith's sculpture photography. These intermedial images indicate an approach for art history of performativity as alternative to the Hegelian art history of plasticity. By addressing the present, this art history of performativity converges with Michel Foucault's archaeology, which is an attempt

to show that to speak is to do something – something other than to express what one thinks; . . . to show that to add a statement to a pre-existing series of statements is to perform a complicated and costly gesture, which involves conditions [. . .], and rules [. . .]. (Foucault 1982: 209).

Foucault's view of history reveals the historical significance of art making and art objects. Conversely, artists could be consciously writing art history by creating novel artworks as a new comment of existing statements, which is most evident in Dadaism and Conceptual Art. Recently, Georges Didi-Huberman's (2009, 2018) critical reflections of art historiography and methodology have received extensive attention. He questions the 'science of iconology' and suggests incorporating Freud's concept of the 'dreamwork' to study the 'underside' of visual representation by treating images/forms not as legible signs but as a mobile process that often involves substitution and contradiction. By problematizing art historians' conceptions of time, memory, and symbols, Didi-Huberman emphasizes the equal importance of the rational and irrational forces of the psyche. This echoes Elleström's appeal for attentions to 'material and mental aspects of mediality to a sufficient degree of complexity' (Elleström 2018, 284). In view of this, this case study of David Smith's photography could be seen as an initiative of expanding the research of intermediality beyond formalistic analysis, by integrating art history with communication and media studies.

Conclusion

David Smith's aesthetic ideas and creative practice reflect his aspiration to establish a new kind of sculptural abstraction that is independent of the European modernist principles. Moreover, his intermedial explorations illustrate the divergence between his understanding of modernism and the discourse of Clement Greenberg's formalist

criticism. Therefore, David Smith's career gives a glimpse of the acceptance and adaptation of European avant-garde by different social groups in the United States. It also reveals major transformations of the global art world in the post-war era.

As a sculptor, Smith strived to transcend the limitations of his medium. He moved fluidly between media to pursue the eidetic image. His photography attained its own performative power by establishing a dynamic aesthetic relationship with its viewers. Lars Elleström's medium-centred model of communication provides a new approach to the interpretation of Smith's intermedial exploration. The analysis of Smith's photography reveals that the eidetic image only emerges in the ever-ongoing dynamism between the physical medium and human sensorium. In other words, the eidetic image is not a perfect completion of visual perception. Rather, it constantly changes and renews itself, undergoing the circle of mediatization and remediation. This suggests that all artworks in a broader sense could be studied as interconnected media events, which calls for a new art history of performativity as an alternative to the Hegelian art history of plasticity.

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Notes

- a. John D. Graham (1886–1961) was born Ivan Gratianovich Dombrowski in Kiev. He migrated to the United States in 1920 and became a key figure in the New York art world in the mid-twentieth century. He was known as an impresario among New York avant-garde artists, connecting New York art circles to European modernism, particularly surrealism.
- b. For a detailed description of each entity and interrelation, see Elleström (2018: 279–289).
- c. In the late 1920s David Smith travelled to Bolton Landing, New York in the Adirondack mountains. Inspired by that initial visit, he purchased 86 acres of land on what used to be a fox farm. Smith built a home and art studios and moved there permanently in 1940. The studio spaces consisted of a metal shop and drawing studio in addition to the expansive outdoors where he would often work, placing his sculptures in the surrounding fields. These arrangements and his ongoing relationship to this landscape profoundly influenced Smith's art-making practices. The Bolton Landing studio and sculpture workshop became the birthplace of many of Smith's best-known works. See <https://www.davidsmithestate.org/bolton-landing> (accessed 24 January 2023).
- d. For a detailed analysis of the antimonumentality of Smith's art, see 'Images of non belonging' in Hamill (2015: 88–118).

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