

# Art as an Open Concept: The Mechanics and Poetics of Interplay in the Work of Adam Kalinowski

By Denise Carvalho

Art as an open concept sets new possibilities for thinking an object/image as a mere participant of an array of possibilities. As things are reduced to language, the magnitude of possibilities in viewing becomes more abstracted into the overall of what is viewed, since the object/image becomes fragmented through the associative objects/images that surround it or constitute it, disseminating the concept into an array of possibilities and a broader scope of viewing these possibilities. In this realm of possibilities that surround the image/object as language, there is not much difference between the artist, the viewer, and the participant. The question here is whether the preoccupation should be only on how we view things, since viewing has long been in the center of empirical discourses. The time has come to push the limits of art participation in such a way that viewing becomes a part of the interactive immersion between interplay and thought, leaving thought as an open-ended structure that serves as a model, but not limiting the potential of experimentation. How does viewing as interplay differ from viewing as totality? My argument is that viewing as an articulate process of interplay brings the concept of interference into the center of one's perception, that way not only the object/image becomes open to its own discursivity, but the distinctions between player/artist/viewer/participant lose their meaning. It is through the model of a possibility that we can begin reflecting on its potentials as play. The model is not a matrix, but a synthesis of innumerable potentialities of reproduction, dissemination, representation, presentation, interactivity, discursivity, and fragmentation of correlative potentials. Thus the work's playfulness is also grounded on practical formulations of scale, materials, functionality, weight, light, interactivity, etc., but not limited to them. All begins and ends with an open-concept, referencing the idea of redefining the game in Wittgenstein.

In Adam Kalinowski's "The Sky-Reaching Hammock," a project for kinetic outdoor sculpture from 2000, steel, aircraft cable, and wind turbines with reduction gears are assembled to create a free kinetic function in a suspended object. In this piece, propellers are pointed to various directions in relation to the wind. "The gears help to lift or lower down the object which hangs freely among free poles, so form rotates very slowly around the axis and also moves up and down, left and right within the limited area among the poles." As a kind of soliloquy, the form is designed for only one spectator who can get inside and experience slow changes of its position against the horizon while the form is suspended among the poles. Motion and direction are unpredictable since they depend on the wind; it can vary between the experience of levitation and that of turbulence. In its connection to nature, "The Sky Reaching Hammock" creates a dynamic mediation with the forces of nature and those of physics and mechanics, enabling function to enter the dialogue with the unpredictability of nature.



The Sky Reaching HAMMOCK, 2000, model, Osaka , Japan.

Winner of the Bronze Prize at the 10<sup>th</sup> International Design Competition in OSAKA, in 2001, this work is part of the collection of The Japan Design Foundation, in Osaka. What is relevant about Kalinowski's prototype is that the lack of a predictable outcome makes the experience a part of a playful aspect of reflection: the experience as an open-concept. Kalinowski's piece can be paralleled to Carsten Höller's *Test Site* (2006), shown as part of the "Unilever Series" (2006-2007) at the Turbine Hall of the Tate Modern. Based on the phrase by the French writer Roger Caillois, a "voluptuous panic upon an otherwise lucid mind," Höller's installation exemplifies the experience of overcoming fear in the act of game.<sup>1</sup> The slides are sculptures and architecture in their own right, but they are also de-objectified through the immediate connection with the viewer as participant. What makes the viewer a participant is the experience. Whether overwhelming, sublime, frightening, or exciting, in the end, the experience is all about play. This work represents the next phase of relational aesthetics as an art of sociability, turning the gallery/museum into an amusement park. The point of Wittgenstein's open-concept is not only to be lost in the play of the game, but to redefine it.<sup>2</sup> In Kalinowski's work, the idea of play is not lost in the sociability of the game, but it is always centered on the idea of a continuous open-thought through corporeal or projected corporeal experimentations.

Kalinowski's model, "Floating Bridge" (2010) is a project attempting to embrace the complexities of aerodynamics as it suspends the weight of memory of oppressive histories. Constructed with bamboo sticks filled with 300 balloons with gas, the idea is as beautiful as it is sublime. The project was created for the

## Bielsko-Biała in the South of Poland, although it was never realized.

FLOATING BRIDGE 2010; model.



Construction out of bamboo sticks filled with balloons with gas



“Floating Bridge” is a reconstruction of the real bridge, destroyed by escaping German troops in 1945. The bridge stood on the river Biała between the two cities of Bielsko and Biała. By reproducing the real bridge through a floating bridge with the same dimensions of the original (25 by 16 by 6 m), the artist’s intended to reconnect the two banks of the river with an “autonomous, lighter-than-air flying object,” mocking the entire project of German power in the past history, but redefining the idea and function of the crossing. The floating bridge can be perceived as the imaginary exception, the “part of no part,” referencing Žižek, in contrast to the symbolic eternal of the fascist ideology. The crossing, on the other hand, is the performative act of displacement of the body as it redefines spaces that are regulated and controlled.<sup>3</sup>

Kalinowski’s most recent works continue with the idea of play as an open-thought. His “Rock in Void” (2011), shown at the Brazilian Museum of Sculpture (MuBE), in São Paulo, is a four-model outdoor sculpture dedicated to the Polish artist Andrzej Bereziański, who defined the artwork as a multifaceted object of experimentation. As A. Kostolowski put it several decades ago, Bereziański’s “impossible art” resulted from random experimentations with materials and degraded objects, “unsuitable for the purpose to which they are put,” rediscovering an ever redefining role of materials and a unique direction toward the concept and practice of drawing.<sup>4</sup> Kalinowski’s “Rock in Void” consists of a suspended form, made out of Styrofoam and a smoke machine producing a light grey smoke that is absorbed by the foam and emanated out of it, like an inhaling/exhaling object. The large sculpture (320 x 620 x 250 cm) and a four-model piece that can be executed through a variety of scales, thus

problematizing the relationship between matrix and reproduction by embracing inevitable deviations and “accidents” that result from “natural” but unexpected sources, such as the unspecified scale in relation to space, or light to volume, or weight to structure.



"IN VOID", O MUSEU BRASILIERA da ESCULTURA, SAO PAULO, Brazil, 2011.

In its conceptual approach, the work reverses the functional/material relationship between model and reproduction by embracing other arbitrary relations as part of the metaphysics of the work. Form is perceived by the artist as a symptom, not as a root or aim; form becomes the hypothetical language that enables a material object to experiment with other elements in time and space. The artwork is here perceived not merely as visual form, but also as an object of experimentation and investigative thought; a process that is both open-ended and inductive, and not limited to a conclusive hypothesis. There is no ideology that stands behind the work. For Kalinowski, the impact of a created reality is always greater than that of reproducing a fragment of a common reality. In sum, art is play, and as play it should resonate play. This is why Kalinowski uses materials that are fragile and transitory; the use of Styrofoam, for example, references its practical use as insulation or packaging associated with garbage or waste. The smoke, which emanates from the suspended form, also gives the impression of the dematerialization of form.

Kalinowski is not alone in the examination of form and nature. Many contemporary artists have questioned this relationship by rethinking or defining art; others by pushing the boundaries of nature. In Hans Haacke's early work, "Condensation Cube" (1963), for example, the traces of biological and ecological changes created by the passing of time attempt to redefine art. Benjamin Buchloh explained "Condensation Piece" by stressing that the viewer "is "no

longer exclusively, or even primarily linked to the work through perceptual interaction, but rather observes the traces and texture of physiological and physical processes generated within the work, which operates in relative independence from the viewing subject".<sup>5</sup> Mel Chin expanded on the notion of passive viewing to that of responsible action, also redefining nature. His "Revival Field: Projection and Procedure" (1990-1993) was a 60 square foot phytoremediation test plot at the Pig's Eye Landfill in St. Paul, Minnesota. In collaboration with scientists, the artist designed a circular field with the same plants from the area plus hyperaccumulators to extract cadmium, zinc and lead from the contaminated soil, changing nature with nature. In both examples, however, art seems to reference alchemical processes of nature as knowledge that have been misunderstood or overlooked. Adam Kalinowski's "Jungle House" (2011) adds a third element to the role of nature in art: that of the social space. According to Henri Lefebvre, the social space involves "levels, layers and sedimentations of perception, representation, and spatial practice which presuppose one another. Perception of the entrance to a monument, or even to a building or a simple cabin, constitutes a chain of actions that is not less complex than a linguistic act, utterance, proposition or series of sentences."<sup>6</sup> "Jungle House" is an assemblage of two components of social space derived from nature, plywood and grass. The piece has an enveloping shape alluding to a shelter, enabling viewers to enter it, so they can contemplate the growing vegetation from inside out. "Jungle House," will be realized at MuBE – Museu Brasileiro da Escultura, in São Paulo, reiterates the dialogue between interior and exterior spaces akin to organic architecture, which informed the relationship between art and architecture marked by the Brazilian early contemporary artist, Hélio Oiticica, and his "Tropicália," "Penetrables," "Nests," and "Bólides."



"JUNGLE HOUSE", model 2011.

The relationship between Oiticica's artwork and Rio de Janeiro's slums, for example, was a developing step toward a more interactive dialogue between

performative art and organic architecture, central to the concept of social sculpture in early Brazilian contemporary art—a dialogue that was revived by numerous art collectives in the late 1990s and 2000s through emancipated spectators engaged into the anthropoetics of art: a mixture between a revival of cultural anthropophagism and the politics and poetics of community art. In Kalinowski's "Jungle House," the participation of viewers is both interactive and critical, emphasizing the importance of shifting sensorial perceptions from viewing to touching and smelling, as well as rethinking social awareness in relation to a sustainable environment. In relation to today's sustainable energy, there is a lot to be learned from the relationship between architecture, society, and nature. As the artist states: "This sculpture, especially in the classic Urban Jungle, which is the city of São Paulo, is an important symbol of a necessary bond, which must be of particular importance in the mind of the architect or artist in the country today, which is one of the last refuges of the complex natural environment in its original form on Earth. We must remember the seemingly obvious bond that connects us with nature. It's nonsense to build cities as the place of residence for hundreds of thousands or millions, as artificial, grounded space. The city of the future is adapted to the natural space within which we make the right solutions in terms of aesthetics, energy, and function."



The Grave, Slovakia, 2010

In the 2010 TED Salon in London, one of the architects of the Eden Project, in Cornwall, UK, Michael Pawlyn, describes how ideas of biology can lead to radical increases in resource sufficiency. In thinking nature as a source for sustainable design, he speaks about three habits of nature that could transform architecture and society: radical resource efficiency, shifting from linear wasteful polluting way of using resources to a closed loop model, and changing from a fossil fuel economy to a solar economy. "The way we tend to use

resources is by extracting them, turning them into short life products and then disposing them. Nature works very differently; in ecosystems the waste becomes the nutrient of something else in that system.”<sup>7</sup> His examples include “superefficient roof structures based on giant amazon water lilies, whole buildings inspired by abalone shells, superlight weight bridges inspired by plant cells.”<sup>8</sup> Terreform One is a nonprofit ecological design collective headed by Mitchell Joachim, which promotes green initiatives in cities. One of their projects is “One-Day Tower,” a model of a 53-story building constructed from all the trash produced by New York City in 24 hours. In “Urbanengineering Brooklyn 2110, City of the Future,” Joachim provides a sustainable design for the New York City borough of Brooklyn, in which food, water, air, energy, waste, mobility, and shelter are radically restructured to support life in every form. Replacing dilapidated structures with vertical agriculture and housing merged with infrastructure, former streets become snaking arteries of livable spaces embedded with; renewable energy sources, soft cushion based vehicles for mobility, and productive green rooms. “The plan uses the former street grid as the foundation for new networks. By reengineering the obsolete streets, we can install radically robust and ecologically active pathways. These operations are not just about a comprehensive model of tomorrow’s city, but an initial platform for discourse. We think the future will necessitate marvelous dwellings coupled with a massive cyclical resource net. The future will happen, how we get there is dependent upon our planned preparation and egalitarian feedback.”<sup>9</sup>

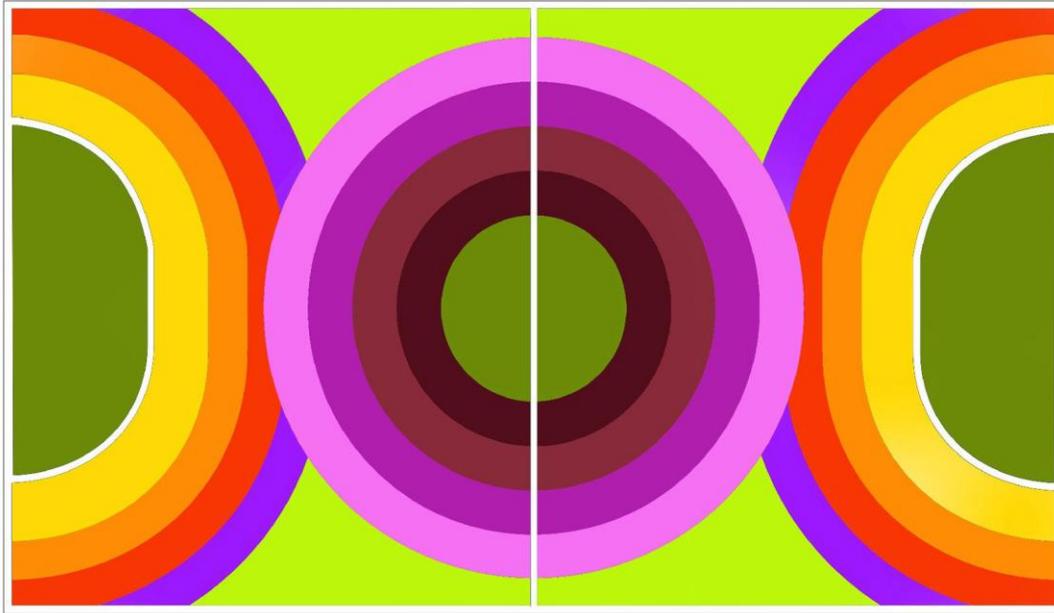
Less idealistic, Kalinowski’s “Jungle House” also invites us to reconsider the dialogue between sustainable design and nature. His notion of living sculpture is always in between culture and nature. Learning from nature’s broaden resourcefulness, simplicity, and flexibility, the work of art becomes “a symbolic instrument” to redefine society at play, rethinking the world not as an established and finite product, but as something which is constantly in the making. His earlier works were powered by mini electric motors with controlling cyclic modes. Later, he worked with wind turbines and wind as a driving force, creating what he calls a “one-day sculpture.” In his more recent work, the concept of a living sculpture derives from living interventions with plants, water, wind, and human. Not different from Oiticica, his works depend on the participation of spectators and volunteers in watering plants or trimming them, which for Kalinowski produces a public ritual nurtured by empathy and responsibility.

Kalinowski’s “Rainbow Park” is a public installation realized in London in 2012 during London Olympics, is a developed version of work made by author in 2009 in Warsaw “Park of Colored Sand”, with 150 tons of different colored sand gradations and sculptural elements for sitting or playing that reference elements of rocks, creating a multi-sensorial experience and a relief from the stress of daily life in the big city. Using pebbles and large stones, sand banks, and luminous colors, participants encounter nature through what the artist calls a “sensory shock,” an almost “unnatural” state produced by excessive use of technology that desensitizes us from our corporeality.



Rainbow Park, 2012, Southbank Centre, London, UK.

The priority given to the sensory of sight has been linked to the ideologies of human superiority since the ancient Greeks, but in Kalinowski's work, the physicality of touching, hearing, smelling, seeing are all equal partners in the awareness of the journey. Touch, for example, can redefine the sense of space through the nuances of form, material, temperature, experienced in an immediate connection with things. Touch is a bridge to the awareness of the nature outside the body, a nature much more connected than detached to the human body; it is a conduit of energies, vibrations, frequencies, warmth, reminding us that there is no split between mind and body, between our body and all nature. But, as Kalinowski puts it, with touch and sight "we are exposed to a textural experience, a huge collection of planes and spaces, both realistic and completely invented, such as the surface of Mars and the traces of the destruction in Pompeii, the bottom of the ocean and the imprints of a maze of railway lines, a battlefield in shambles. The experience would have the value of an archeological site being explored in a state of repose. It is the world in a nutshell, the multiplicity of experience in one." This is the idea in his project, "The Barefoot Park," where an intergalactic pattern of geological surfaces, including those of Mars, the Moon, and the Earth, create the ground for our barefoot walk, as we realize that our journey is not just that of the walk on thousands or millions of years of rock formation, but also that of the dream of other worlds and our infinitesimal percentage in their stories.



PITCH OF COLORED SAND 2010, project for beach soccer pitch.

Kalinowski's "Pitch of Colored-Sand" installations are also a part of two other upcoming projects, where he plans to create a soccer field of colored-sand for lovers of the game, in Ipanema beach in Rio de Janeiro, Brazil. In this installation, the idea is to redefine the game beyond the competitive pressure of the professional sports in their training and championships, focusing on the game as the interplay of human relations and performativity. The body's creative interaction with the city challenges a normative function of the city's topography, resituating the performative act in the center of everyday life.

This is an idea that is very much in tune with the work of many Brazilian contemporary artists. The notion of the moving and dancing body in Oiticica's *Parangolés*, for example, challenges an automatism of city walkers in an increasingly competitive, stressful, and overpopulated public experience. For its residents, the slum is an inevitable source of psychogeographical knowledge, sometimes produced by choice, sometimes by necessity and survival. As residents build and rebuild into the landscape, they also redefine the landscape. The hills contain numerous forking paths, with zigzagging stairways that begin hundreds of feet below. These paths or dirt stairways are like labyrinths, often turned into streams by excessive rain, causing mud avalanches and shacks to slide down. Like in Jorge Luis Borges's *The Garden of Forking Paths* (1944), the slum's paths signal unpredictable futures, chance-encounters, and the probability of meeting death, since individual or group executions are not unusual and used as ritualized spectacle. The swinging path of the labyrinthine landscape hides the traces of the walker, evoking the performative body of the *Parangolé*. As in Oiticica, dance is a step-by-step process, without a mapped out itinerary, and contrary to all traditional urban patterns and architectures. Borrowing from this idea of the organic experience of the body in space, Kalinowski also attempts to challenge the systems of regulation and control of the city, using beauty and nature as a place of departure.

THE CLOUDY THOUGHTS / POCHMURNE MYŚLI, O MUSEU BRASILIERA da ESCULTURA, SAO PAULO, Brazil, 17th January-31st MARCH 2013 - SAO PAULO.  
500x500x480 cm, OSB board, ecoroof system, soil, plants



THE CLOUDY THOUGHTS / O Pensamento Nas Nuvens, 2013  
O MUSEU BRASILIERA da ESCULTURA, SAO PAULO, Brazil

The use of sand as an element of replenishment and respite in Kalinowski's work also informs the early work of Artur Barrio and his situations in the beaches of Rio. Equally important is Kalinowski's project in Poznan, which parallels another event: the UEFA Euro, to be held in the newly renovated City Stadium in June, three months before the opening of the Mediations Biennial. This is a great opportunity to bring together the sociability of the game to the experimental possibilities of the arts. Thus the mechanics and poetics of play go beyond a relational aesthetics of sociability, aiming at a dialogical interplay of experimentation and reflection. This idea begins with the prototype of a possibility, and art is nothing other than that.

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<sup>1</sup> Roger Caillois, *Man, Play and Games*

<sup>2</sup> Wittgenstein, *On Certainty*.

<sup>3</sup> Slavoj Zizek, *The Ticklish Subject*, p. 188,

<sup>4</sup> A. Kostolowski,

<sup>5</sup> Benjamin Buchloh, "Hans Haacke: Memory and Instrumental Reason," *Art in America*, no. 2 (February 1988), pp. 9 -108, 157-159.

<sup>6</sup> Henri Lefebvre, *The Production of Space*, p. 226.

<sup>7</sup> Michael Pawlyng, 2010 TED Salon in London.

<sup>8</sup> Ibid.

<sup>9</sup> Mitchell Joachim, Terreform One's website