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SPACE, SITE, INTERVENTION

situating installation art

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Introduction: On Installation and Site Specificity

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On the horizon, then, at the furthest edge of the possible, it is a matter of producing the space of the human species—the collective (generic) work of the species—on the model of what used to be called "art"; indeed, it is still so called, but art no longer has any meaning at the level of an "object" isolated by and for the individual.

—Henri Lefebvre, "Openings and Conclusions"

Location and point of view are constantly shifting at the apex of time's flow. Language, memory, reflection, and fantasy may or may not accompany the experience. Shift to recall of the spatial experience: objects and static views flash in the mind's space. A series of stills replaces the filmic real-time experience. Shift the focus from the exterior environment to that of the self in a spatial situation, and a parallel, qualitative break in experience between the real-time "I" and the reconstituting "me" prevails. As there are two types of selves known to the self, the "I" and the "me," there are two fundamental types of perception: that of temporal space and that of static, immediately present objects. The "I," which is essentially imageless, corresponds with the perception of space unfolding in the continuous present. The "me," a retrospective constituent, parallels the mode of object perception. Objects are obviously experienced in memory as well as in the present. . . . the constitution of culture involves the burdening of the "me" with objects. It is the mode of the relatively clear past tense. Space in this scheme has been thought of mainly as the distance between two objects. The aim of this narrative is to make space less transparent, to attempt to grasp its perceived nature ahead of those habitual cultural transformations that "know" always in the static mode of the "me."

—Robert Morris, "The Present Tense of Space"

The line between art and life should be kept as fluid, and perhaps indistinct as possible.

—Allan Kaprow, "The Event"

Sites/Texts/Moments

Great Sphinx, c. 2570–2544 B.C.
Newgrange, c. 2500 B.C.
Stonehenge, c. 2600–1800 B.C.
Stillbury Hill, c. 2660 B.C.
Nazca Line Drawings, c. 100 B.C.–800 A.D.
Hadrian's Villa, Tivoli, 118–38 A.D.
Teotihuacán, c. 100–900 A.D.
Anasazi, *Sun Dagger of Fajada Butte*, Chaco Canyon, 1000–2000 A.D.

1190
Sultan Muhammad of Ghur, Minaret of Jam

1500
Intihuatana (Sun Hitching Post), Machu Picchu, 1500–1600

1540
Pier Francesco Corrado Orsini, *Gardens of Bomarzo (Sacro Bosco)*, 1540–84

1546
Grotto of the Animals, Villa Medici

1599
Ferrante Imperato, *Kunstkammer*

1613
Grotto of Orpheus, Hellbrunn, 1613–19

1632
The Uppsala *Kunstschrank*

1646
Rembrandt van Rijn, *Holy Family with Curtain*
Athanasius Kircher, *Room for Projected Images*

1650
Ole Worm's Museum, 1650s

1651
Athanasius Kircher, *Museum Kircherianum*

1668
Gian Lorenzo Bernini, Fireworks, Piazza Farnese

1671
François d'Orbay, *Water Theater*

1689
Martin Charbonnier, *The Hedge Theater at Herrenhausen*

To suggest what might be included in a history of an art form is to postulate an archive that denies closure and scatters labels, an eccentric assembly that seeks to collect and inquire simultaneously.[1] *Space, Site, Intervention: Situating Installation Art* intends to chart the terms of discussion and debate that have surrounded installation and site-specific practices and to provide new critical frameworks that encourage a rethinking of their history. This examination takes place specifically in relation to various contexts in which this work has been experienced—art history, target communities, and art institutions—and in relation to viewers and makers addressing the question of how the medium offers theoretical and conceptual challenges to institutional, historical, and conceptual assumptions in art discourse.

I have invited practicing artists, writers, art historians, and hybrids of all of those disciplines to address some of the issues at stake in installation and site-specific art. This volume seeks to examine critically and explore the situation of these works within divergent and varied spheres of meaning, including community space, corporate space, architectural hybrids, multimedia, cyberspace, environmental action, public and private ritual, political activism, governmental and private patronage systems, and the compelling and problematized intersections created by all of these sites.

In this zone of maximum hybridity, definitions fall flat. It is only at the intersection of practices located both self-consciously historically and within contemporary frameworks of debate that a definition can be tentatively constructed to address installation activity in Europe, Japan, and the Americas. Thus, we could begin by saying that installation is informed by a multitude of activities, including *architecture douce* (soft architecture),[2] set design, the Zen garden, happenings, bricolage, *son et lumière*, spectacles, world's fairs, vernacular architecture, multimedia projections, urban gardens, shrines, land art, earthworks, trade shows, eighteenth- and nineteenth-century panoramas, Arte Povera, follies, and the visionary environments of "folk" artists.[3] Collectively the work of installation and site specificity engages the aural, spatial, visual, and environmental planes of perception and interpretation. This work grows out of the collapse of medium specificity and the boundaries that had defined disciplines within the visual arts beginning in the 1960s.

In 1973, Lucy Lippard would postulate the *dematerialization* of the object of art: "for lack of a better term I have continued to refer to a process of dematerialization, or a de-emphasis on material aspects (uniqueness, permanence, decorative attractiveness)."[4] Installation art as genre, term, medium, and practice acts as the assimilator of a rich succession of influences. In installation the object has been rearranged or gathered, synthesized, expanded, and dematerialized. Daniel Buren has declared that *site-specific* as a term "has become hackneyed and meaningless through use and abuse."[5] Hal Foster, speaking of Richard Serra, says "for sculpture to harden into a thing-category would be for sculpture to become monumental again—for its structure to be fetishized, its viewer frozen, its site forgotten, again. In this light to deconstruct sculpture is to serve its 'internal necessity'; to extend sculpture in relation to process, embodiment, and site is to remain within it."[6] This volume hopes to counteract and complicate these paradigms and assertions by examining the definitions and legacies of site specificity and installation while articulating a broad range of theoretical, material, and conceptual practices.

1730
Maharaja Sawai Jai Singh II, *(Observatory) Brihat Samrat Yantra*

1734
Father Louis Bertrand Castel, *Clevessin oculaire (Ocular Organ)*

1743
Joseph Saint-Pierre, *Ruin Theater at the Hermitage*, 1743–46

1750
Giovanni Battista Piranesi, *Views of Rome*

1780
François Barbier, house of Racine de Monville

1784
Étienne-Louis Boullée, *Monument to Isaac Newton* (unbuilt)

1785
Claude-Nicolas Ledoux, house of the Groundskeeper

1787
Robert Barker, *Edinburgh and Holyrood Castle*, panorama

1870
Frédéric Kastner, *Pyrophone (Color Organ)*

1876
Fidelis Schabet, *Grotto of Venus*

1879
Joseph Ferdinand Cheval, *Palais idéal*, 1879–1912

1880
Auguste Rodin, *The Gates of Hell*, 1880–1917

1884
Auguste Rodin, *The Burghers of Calais*, 1884–86
Sarah Pardee Winchester, mansion, 1884–1922

1886
Medardo Rosso, *The Kiss on the Tomb*

1887
Gustave Eiffel, *Eiffel Tower*, 1887–89

1890
Karl Junker, house, 1890–1912

Toward Definition

> A more rigorously analytical reading of the history of modernist sculpture would have to acknowledge that most of its seemingly eternal paradigms, which had been valid to some extent in late nineteenth-century sculpture (i.e., the representation of individual, anthropomorphic, wholistic bodies in space, made of inert, but lasting, if not eternal matter and imbued with illusionary moments of spurious life), had been definitely abolished by 1913. Tatlin's corner-counter relief and his subsequent "Monument for the Third International" and Duchamp's readymades, both springing off the height of synthetic Cubism, constitute the extremes of an axis on which sculpture has been resting ever since (knowingly or not): the dialectics of sculpture between its function as a model for the aesthetic production of reality (e.g., its transition into architecture and design) or serving as a model investigating and contemplating the reality of aesthetic production (the readymade, the allegory). Or, more precisely: architecture on the one hand and epistemological model on the other are the two poles toward which relevant sculpture since then has tended to develop, both implying the eventual dissolution of its own discourse as sculpture.
>
> **—Benjamin Buchloh,**
> **"Michael Asher and the Conclusion of Modernist Sculpture"[7]**

We find ourselves presently at the tail end of an intriguing and sometimes baffling series of moments, movements, and gestures that cross-reference installation art. Seemingly inexhaustible numbers of

1898
Paris Exposition

1900
Antoní Gaudí, *Parc Güell,* 1900–1914

1903
The Electric Tower, Luna Park, Coney Island

1912
Pablo Picasso, *Still Life with Chair Caning*

1913
Armory Show
Vladimir Tatlin, *Corner Counter-Relief*

1914
Bruno Taut, *The Glass House,* Werkbund exhibition

1916
Cabaret Voltaire

1917
Alexander Rodchenko, *Metal Mobile*

1918
Gerrit Rietveld, *Red/Yellow/Blue Chair*

1919
Bauhaus, Weimar and Dessau, 1919–33

1920
Kurt Schwitters, *Merzbau,* 1920–43
Vladimir Tatlin, *Monument to the Third International*
Naum Gabo, *Kinetic Sculpture: Standing Wave*
Man Ray, *The Enigma of Isidore Ducasse*

1921
Tristan Tzara and Sonia Delaunay, *Le coeur à gaz*
Simon Rodia, *Watts Towers,* 1921–54

1922
Oskar Schlemmer, *Triadic Ballet*
Ludwig Hirschfield-Mack, *Reflected Light Composition*

1923
El Lissitzky, *Proun*
László Moholy-Nagy, *Light-Space Modulator,* 1923–30

objects, environments, landscapes, cityscapes, mindscapes, and interventions could be filed under the terms *site specific* and *installation,* terms that have an equally complex history. *Site specific* derives from the delineation and examination of the site of the gallery in relation to space unconfined by the gallery and in relation to the spectator. As discursive terminology, *site specific* is solely and precisely rooted within Western Euro-American modernism, born, as it were, lodged between modernist notions of liberal progressiveness and radical tropes both formal and conceptual. It is the recognition on the part of minimalist and earthworks artists of the 1960s and 1970s that "site" in and of itself is part of the experience of the work of art. Robert Smithson's use of the terms *site* and *nonsite* to label his works that removed samples from exterior sites and placed them into the "neutral" space of the gallery demanded an expansion of what could be thought of as art. Content could be space, space could be content, as sculpture was extrapolated into and upon its site. It was an examination of the very foundations of modernism (gallery as "site"), and later, as earthworks claimed land as site, it was an examination of the foundations of landscape and the natural.[8] With earthworks artists and with Smithson in particular the sheer expanse of "the natural" became an extension of minimalism's delineation of what Robert Morris called "primary structure," which in turn suggested that artwork must be reactive to its site, informed by the contents and materials of its actual location, whether they be industrially, "naturally," or conceptually produced.

Installation is the noun form of the verb *to install,* the functional movement of placing the work of art in the "neutral" void of gallery or museum. Unlike earthworks, it initially focused on institutional art spaces and public spaces that could be altered through "installation" as an action. "To install" is a process that must take place each time an exhibition is mounted; "installation" is the art form that takes note of the perimeters of that space and reconfigures it. The ideological impossibility of the neutrality of any site contributes to the expansion and application of installation, where sculptural forms occupy and reconfigure not just institutional space but the space of objecthood as well. As Douglas Crimp has noted of installation's minimalist precursor:

> Minimal objects redirected consciousness back on itself and the real-world conditions that ground consciousness. The coordinates of perception were established as existing not only between spectator and the work but among spectator, artwork, and the place inhabited by both. This was accomplished either by eliminating the object's internal relationships altogether or by making those relationships a function of simple structural repetition, of "one thing after another." Whatever relationship was now to be perceived was contingent on the viewer's temporal movement in the sphere shared with the object. Thus the work belonged to its site; if its site were to change, so would the interrelationship of object, context, and viewer. Such a reorientation of the perceptual experience of art made the viewer, in effect, the subject of the work, whereas under the reign of modernist idealism this privileged position devolved ultimately on the artist, the sole generator of the artwork's formal relationships.[9]

1924
Francis Picabia, set for ballet *Relâche*
Gerrit Rietveld, *Schröder House*

1925
Marcel Duchamp, *Rotary Demi-Sphere*
Sonia Delaunay-Terk, matching room, coat, and car

1926
Piet Mondrian, *Salon de Madame B. à Dresden*
Alexander Calder, *Circus*
Sophie Taeuber-Arp, *Café Aubette*
Vladimir Mayakovsi, *Door Poem*

1927
Marcel Duchamp, *11, rue Larrey,* door
Theo van Doesburg, *Café Aubette*

1929
Naum Gabo, *Light Festival,* proposal
Vladimir Tatlin, *Letatlin*

1930
Giorgio De Chirico, *Bagni misteriosi,* fountain
Joseph Cornell begins boxes
Aw Boon Haw, *Tiger Balm Gardens*
Le Corbusier, roof garden for Charles Beistegui, 1930–31

1932
Alexander Calder, *The Motorized Mobile That Duchamp Liked*
Alberto Giacometti, *The Palace at 4 A.M.*

1933
Black Mountain College founded

1934
Bruno Munari, *Useless Machine*
Albert Speer, *Cathedral of Light*

1935
Constantin Brancusi, *Tirgu-Jui,* 1935–38

1938
Marcel Duchamp, *1200 Bags of Coal*
International Exhibit of Surrealism
Salvador Dalí, *Rainy Taxi*

1939
Norman Bel Geddes, *General Motors Futurama*

The site of installation becomes a primary part of the content of the work itself, but it also posits a critique of the practice of art-making within the institution by examining the ideological and institutional frameworks that support and exhibit the work of art. "To install" becomes not a gesture of hanging the work of art or positioning a sculpture, but an art practice in and of itself. Crimp goes on to discuss artists such as Daniel Buren, Hans Haacke, and Michael Asher—artists who expanded the original tenets of site specificity with materialist critiques.

Speaking of the infamous removal of Richard Serra's *Tilted Arc* from its public site, Crimp problematizes both the reception of the piece and also the recuperation of site specificity within art discourse to serve seemingly opposite claims of conceptual radicality and timeless aestheticism:

> The larger public's incomprehension in the face of Serra's assertion of site specificity is the incomprehension of the radical prerogatives of a historic moment in art practice. "To remove the work is to destroy the work" was made self-evident to anyone who had seen "*Splashing*'s" literalization of the assertion, and it is that which provided the background of *"Tilted Arc"* for its defenders. But they could not be expected to explain, within the short time of their testimonies, a complex history that had been deliberately suppressed. The public's ignorance is, of course, an enforced ignorance, for not only is cultural production maintained as the privilege of a small minority, but it is not in the interests of the institution's art and the forces they serve to produce knowledge of radical practices even for their specialized audience. And this is particularly the case for those practices whose goal is a materialist critique of the presuppositions of those very institutions. Such

1940
Jean Dubuffet, *l'art brut* (raw art)

1941
Peggy Guggenheim Gallery, *Art of This Century*

1942
Marcel Duchamp, *First Papers of Surrealism*, exhibition

1946
Lucio Fontana, *Manifiesto blanco (White Manifesto)*
Marcel Duchamp, *Étant donnés*, 1946–66

1947
Isamu Noguchi, *Sculpture to Be Seen from Mars*

1948
Clarence Schmidt, *House on Ohayo Mountain*, 1948–71

1949
Lucio Fontana, *Black Light Environment*

1950
James Hampton, *Throne of the Third Heaven of the Nations Millennium General Assembly*, 1950–64

1952
John Cage, *Theater Piece no. 1*
Wiener Gruppe
John Cage, Robert Rauschenberg, David Tudor, and Merce Cunningham, *Untitled Event*

1954
Wolf Vostell, *Décollage no. 1*
Zero-kai (Group Zero), founded
Gutai Bijutsu Kyōkai (Gutai Art Association) founded

1955
Herbert Bayer, *Earth Mound*
Kazuo Shiraga, *Doru ni idomu (Challenging Mud)*
Experimental Outdoor Modern Art Exhibition to Challenge the Burning Midsummer Sun
Tadeusz Kantor, *Cricot 2*, Galeria Krzysztofory
Giuseppe Pinot Gallizio, *Experimental Laboratory of the International Movement for an Imagist Bauhaus (MIBI)*
Tressa Prisbrey, *Bottle Village*

> practices attempt to reveal the material conditions of the work of art, its mode of production and reception, the institutional supports of its circulation, the power relations represented by these institutions—in short, everything that is disguised by traditional aesthetic discourse. Nevertheless, these practices have subsequently been recuperated by that very discourse as reflecting just one more episode in a continuous development of modern art. Many of "*Tilted Arc*'s" defenders, some representing official art policies, argued for a notion of site specificity that reduced it to a purely aesthetic category.[10]

The trajectory from Smithson to Crimp traces the development of an art practice designated within a particular sphere of theoretical and conceptual boundaries that claim its radicality. The conclusion of sculpture is declared, with installation and site-specific art awkwardly occupying part of its terrain.

Updating Richard Wagner's original operatic definition, Walter Gropius theorized architecture as the *Gesamtkunstwerk,* or total work of art. Architecture was to assimilate all forms of the visual and performing arts into a single totalizing project that would define the twentieth century. The Bauhaus would attempt to resolve the split between art and craft as well as performer and audience, the alienation of the subject from art, and the artist's alienation from technology and commerce. In the totalized project of art, object-making, music-making, and building would form a singular modernist unity. Installation aspires to this continuum.

The material content and constitution of installation suggests ever more complex and varied sources and legacies, including everything from Neolithic standing stones to eighteenth-century human garden statuary up to contemporary video projects. Installation traverses upon and draws from disparate legacies, from Fidelis Schabet's *Grotto of Venus* built for "Mad" King Ludwig II in 1876 (which sported an interior, underground lake complete with swans) to Simon Rodia's *Watts Towers* (hand built from urban detritus in South Central Los Angeles between 1921 and 1954 and including a 102-foot-high central spire encrusted with glass bottles and crockery). The desires that motivate installation—to fabricate interior and exterior environments, to alter surfaces until they envelop the viewer, to construct "all-over" compositions utilizing natural and man-made objects, and to reallocate and disorder space—can be situated in relation to myriad historical art movements and smaller, sometimes private domestic actions. The artists of the dada, happenings, Fluxus,

situationist, and Arte Povera movements have all produced work indicative of these concerns, as have so-called visionary, environmental, or folk artists.

Located in the intersection of the collection, the monument, the garden, and the domestic interior, works of installation and site-specific practices can be posited in several locations that predate modernist genres and labels. I would suggest that both the *Wunderkammern,* or *cabinets de curiosité* (cabinets of curiosities or wonders), and the *Kunstkammern* (room-sized collections of art and intriguing objects) from the seventeenth and eighteenth centuries have more than a passing resemblance to the contemporary practice of installation. They were the personal and idiosyncratic collections of private individuals that predate the establishment of public museums in Europe and are often characterized as having laid the foundation for the establishment of the modern museum.[11]

Wunderkammern were composed of collections of items chosen not because of their historical value as antiquities or their monetary worth but because the collectors found the objects pleasing and demonstrative of the "wonders of the world," whether natural, spiritual, or man-made. The objects in a *Wunderkammer* were arranged according to circumference, height, weight, color, luminosity, transparency, or like geometries. A *Wunderkammer* might juxtapose a group of ostrich eggs with marble acorn garden ornaments, or a wooden bow with the thigh bones of an antelope. Barbara Maria Stafford, in one of several extensive explorations of the *Wunderkammer*'s placement in the historical discourse of the eighteenth century, recounts the reaction of neoclassical critics to the *Wunderkammer*'s "past crimes": "Lord Shaftesbury, the Abbé Batteux, Winckelmann, and Lessing excoriated conspicuously artificial and extravagant manufacture. They termed 'deformed' and 'unnatural' any egalitarian or truly interdisciplinary hybrids. These dissonant decorative mixtures graced the heteroclite *cabinet de curiosité.* According to unsympathetic critics the equivocal ornamental grotesque embodied everything that was excessive, contaminated, and 'monstrous' about the uncontrolled imagination."[12] This lack of homogeneity is precisely what makes the *Wunderkammer* such an intriguing precursor to installation art. It suggests as well a connectivity to acts of intimate material collection and repositioning such as curio or souvenir cabinets, personal altars, roadside and hiking memorials, and autobiographical mantelpiece groupings, all of which take the institutional scale of the *Wunderkammer* and dissolve and redistribute this passion for knowledge through the

1956
Juan O'Gorman, house, 1956–61
Saburō Murakami, *Sakuhin: Hako (Work: Box)*
Shōzō Shimamoto, *A Work to Be Walked On*
John Cage, New School for Social Research, class in experimental composition
Emery Blagdon, *Healing Machines*, 1956–84

1957
First Gutai Theater Art
The Situationist International
Sister Gertrude Morgan, *Everlasting Gospel Revelation Mission*
Peter Kubelka, *Schwechater*, 1957–58
Lina Bo Bardi, *Museu de Arte de São Paulo*, 1957–68
Sibyl Moholy-Nagy, *Native Genius in Anonymous Architecture*
Gaston Bachelard, *Poétique de l'espace*

1958
Jannis Kounellis, *Metamorphosis*, 1958–84

1959
Allan Kaprow, *18 Happenings in 6 Parts*
Red Grooms, *The Burning Building*
Pinot Gallizio, *La caverna dell'antimateria (Cave of Antimatter)*
Robert Rauschenberg, *Monogram*
Otto Piene, *Archaic Light Ballet*
Neo-concrete, manifesto
Gustav Metzger, *Auto-Destructive Art*, manifesto

1960
Lygia Clark, *Bichos (Animals)*, 1960–66
Jean Tinguely, *Homage to New York*
Robert Whitman, *The American Moon*
Groupe de Recherche d'Art Visuel
Pierre Restany, *Nouveau réalisme*, manifesto
Jean-Jacques Lebel, *The Anti-Procès*
Howard Finster, *Paradise Garden*, 1960s–1970s
Arman, *Le plein*