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The perpetuation of site-specific installation artworks in museums

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Citation for published version (APA):

Scholte, T. I. (2020). *Insite | Outside: The perpetuation of site-specific installation artworks in museums.*

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Chapter 2: Site-specific installation art in historical perspective

“Here, in fact, site-specificity arises precisely in uncertainties over the borders and limits of works and site.” Nick Kaye.⁴⁰

In this chapter, the argument develops from the art historical discourse on site-specific installation art. Artists as well as critics have explored various notions of site-specificity, usually in concordance with successive art historical periods: the first ‘wave’ of site-specific installations created during the late 1960s and early 1970s, and a second period, from the 1980s and early 1990s until today. The chapter elucidates several art historical perspectives on both periods and the shifts occurring in the relationship between artists and museum institutions, between the artwork and the site. Furthermore, it is important to realise that site-specific installation artworks are highly diverse in form, content, and meaning. For the current purpose of developing a model with an eye on the artworks’ perpetuation, a chronological approach is only partly effective. A further abstraction in categorisation is needed, focussing on the network of site-specific functions and their changes over time. To this end, this chapter presents a selection of relevant notions elucidating the extended lives of site-specific installations, which I derive from case examples and observations made by artists and art historians in this respect. The discussion is a prelude to Chapter 3, in which I take the vocabulary for site-specific installation artworks one step further by employing a triadic set of spatial functions, derived from Henri Lefebvre’s theory on space.

2.1 The rise of site-specific installation art: criticism towards the established art world

There is no particular art movement or art form called ‘site-specific installation art’. Nevertheless, site-specificity has dominated the art discourse since decades. In particular Miwon Kwon built a theoretical framework for site-specific installation art by analysing the development of site-specific installation art from the 1960s onwards in her seminal publications *One Place after Another*.⁴¹ Historically, the interest in ‘site-specificity’ came to the fore in the 1960s, together with major art movements: Conceptual Art, Minimal Art, Art in Public Space, Happenings and Performances. Kwon focuses on the

⁴⁰ Nick Kaye, *Site Specific Art: Performance, Place, and Documentation* (London: Routledge, 2000), 215.

⁴¹ See footnote 32 in Chapter 1.

influences of minimalism for identifying the first category of her typology, called 'phenomenological' site-specificity:

Emerging out of the lessons of minimalism, site-specific art was initially based in a phenomenological or experiential understanding of the site, defined primarily as an agglomeration of the actual 'physical' attributes of a particular location (the size, scale, texture, and dimension of walls, ceilings, rooms; existing lighting conditions, topographical features, traffic patterns, seasonal characteristics of climate, etc.), with architecture serving as a foil for the art work in many instances.⁴²

However, at the core of her critical theory is a second group of works, indicated as 'social-institutional', in which artists worked with "the actuality of a location (as site) *and* the social conditions of the institutional frame (as site)".⁴³ It was a vital element in the art practice of the 1960s and 70s to investigate institutional critique and reconfigure the site as

... a relay or network of interrelated spaces and economies (studio, gallery, museum, art market, art criticism), which together frame and sustain art's ideological system. Works by artists such as Michael Asher, Daniel Buren, Hans Haacke, and Mierle Laderman Ukeles are seen as challenging the hermeticism of this system, complicating the site of art as not only a physical arena but one constituted through social, economic, and political processes.⁴⁴

Kwon's incentive to develop a theoretical framework originated for a large part from institutional practices of a later date, the 1990s, when site-specific works from previous decades were collected and re-exhibited by commercial galleries and museums. Kwon points to the paradox that site-specific artworks resulting from critical strategies of the avantgarde, were being incorporated into the very same system the artists once opposed.⁴⁵ I will return to Kwon's viewpoint in this matter later on in this chapter.

In general, trends of the 1960s and 70s gave primacy to notions of place and time, as well as to 'process' and 'presence'. In *The Fall of the Studio. Artists at Work*, art historians Wouter Davidts and Kim Paice describe how artists abandoned the studio "as the unique and artisanal space of production."⁴⁶ Space and place were among the most favoured means to reach beyond the

⁴² Kwon, *One Place After Another*, 3.

⁴³ *Idem*, 44.

⁴⁴ *Idem*, 3.

⁴⁵ *Idem*, 2.

⁴⁶ Wouter Davidts and Kim Paice, *The Fall of the Studio. Artists at Work* (Amsterdam: Valiz Publishers, 2009). 76.

established art system. Art 'in situ' was created in all kind of public spaces, empty factories, office buildings and alternative exhibition places, often run by the artists themselves.

A link with Art in Public Space and Land Art is a recurring theme when explaining the rise of site-specific installations during the late 1960s. Well-known examples are, among others, Daniel Buren's painted stripes on buildings and street furniture, Christo and Jeanne-Claude's textile wrappings of buildings and bridges, and earthworks created by Robert Smithson or Walter de Maria. Like Miwon Kwon, Davidts and Paice refer to artistic statements that establish a connection between the physical location and a critical take on the economic power of the art market. Since they were physically 'rooted' in the site, these artworks were thought to resist commodification and distribution, an effective strategy to circumvent the market.⁴⁷ Like no other artistic approach, works created 'on site' (synonymous with the better-known term 'in situ') provoked a critical stance towards the underlying mechanisms of the art system. The authors illustrate this view in the following statement on Daniel Buren's coloured stripes applied to urban buildings:

Through their specific application on a given site or support, the stripes aim to elucidate the material conditions of the work of art and its various modes of production, presentation, and reception. This undertaking, according to Buren, continues to oblige him to work 'on site'.⁴⁸

This thought is followed by one of Buren's own statements about the inseparability of his works and the sites for which they are produced:

'[I]n situ' means, at least in my understanding of it, that there is a voluntary bond between the site of reception and the 'work' that is produced, presented and exhibited there.⁴⁹

By working directly with the conditions of the site, artists gave expression to their aversion of the ideology of the White Cube, a term coined by artist and theorist Brian O'Doherty, in 1976.⁵⁰ The White Cube was the prevailing paradigm of modernist art – "a place deprived of location" – representing the claim of a universal form of art "with a direct line to the timeless, a set of

⁴⁷ Meyer, "Functional site," 25; Kwon, "Notes on site-specificity," 40, 42-43; Rosenthal, *Installation Art*, 73; Bishop, *Installation Art*, 17-20, 32.

⁴⁸ Davidts and Paice, *Fall of the Studio*, 66.

⁴⁹ Daniel Buren recited in Davidts and Paice, *Fall of the Studio*, 66.

⁵⁰ Brian O'Doherty published a series of three articles in the journal *Artforum* in 1976. These articles have been republished in Brian O'Doherty, *Inside the White Cube, The Ideology of the Gallery Space (Expanded Edition)* (Berkeley, Los Angeles & London: University of California Press, 1986).

conditions, an attitude.”⁵¹ In contrast to the supposed ‘neutrality’ of the exhibition space, artists employed the possibilities of the space itself as constituent for the artwork’s meaning and emphasized their own presence and ‘gestures’ in space. This view corresponds to the category of phenomenological site-specificity, indicated by Miwon Kwon.

The interconnectivity with the actual location encouraged visitors to explore the space of the installed artwork and its immediate surrounding; their own bodily movements being an intrinsic part of the experience. Instead of looking *at* the art object, art critics observe, viewers of site-specific installations are *surrounded* by its composition in space, redirecting the focus from the creator and the autonomous art object to the position of the visitor.⁵² The visitor, in turn, undergoes a heightened perception of the here-and-now and of the ‘hidden’ ideologies of the place when experiencing site-specific installations. As James Meyer states:

The body of site-specificity was a physicalised body, aware of its surroundings, a body of heightened critical acuity. Thus, the premise of site specificity to locate the work in a single place, and only there, bespoke the 1960s’ call for Presence, the demand for the experience of “being there.”⁵³

Summarizing the above, site-specific installation artworks of the 1960s and 70s were imbued with a critical stance towards the institutions, which art historians explain in two different ways: the artworks represented a breach with the established art system of trade and modernist ‘neutrality’ of the exhibition space; and secondly, they brought into focus the experience of art in ‘real life’, represented by the inseparable bond between the artwork and the physical site. That said, the terms of phenomenological and institutional site-specificity do not necessarily apply to *all* site-specific installation artworks created in the 1960s and 70s. Moreover Miwon Kwon acknowledges that, although her typology is presented in chronological order (as we shall also see below), these are “not stages in a linear trajectory of historical development.”⁵⁴ In fact, in cultural practices of today similar approaches of phenomenological site-specificity and institutional criticism still exist.

The institutional perspective

Despite the critical attitude, it was common practice for vanguard artists to collaborate with progressive curators and sometimes they created site-specific installations in commercial galleries and museum spaces. Land Art

⁵¹ O’Doherty, *Inside the White Cube*, 80.

⁵² See Bishop, *Installation Art*, 11; Kwon, “Notes on site-specificity,” 38; Nicolas De Oliveira, Michael Petry, and Nicola Oxley, *Installation Art* (London: Thames and Hudson, 1994), 13-14.

⁵³ Meyer, “Functional site,” 26.

⁵⁴ Kwon, “Notes on site-specificity”, 46.

projects, in addition, could find their ways into the distribution system of museums and commercial galleries in the form of documentary material relating to the project, such as sketches, photographs and films. These derivatives were, in the words of Lucy Lippard, “consumed” by gallery visitors, who were unable to experience the art itself at the location.⁵⁵ An overtly more critical stance was taken by Brian O’Doherty in his comment that the avant-garde of the 1960s and 70s “never attacked the idea of a gallery, except briefly to promote the move to the land which was then photographed and brought back to the gallery to be sold”.⁵⁶

That said, it is beyond dispute that the site of the gallery had turned into a place of questioning the art system, as curator Christian Rattemeyer also highlights in his reflection on site-specific art of the avant-garde. He observes that ‘in-situ’ working artists

[...] transformed the nature of art and its materials, questioning how and by whom art can be made, where a work of art can exist and even whether it needs to exist as a physical object at all.⁵⁷

One of the most famous, progressive gallerists at the time was Leo Castelli (1907-1999), who invited young artists to respond in their own ways to the conceptual and literal space of art. In 1968, he asked Robert Morris to curate an exhibition of conceptual and processual art for the Castelli Warehouse. Nine artists participated in the exhibition – called ‘9 at Castelli’ – most of whom became famous artists later on. Quite a number of site-specific artworks were presented at this show, but most of them were destroyed afterwards.⁵⁸

Other curators followed soon after and within the timeframe of one year - 1969 - several major exhibitions featured site-specific installations in prominent museums worldwide: ‘Op losse schroeven’ in Stedelijk Museum Amsterdam, ‘When Attitudes Become Form’ in Kunsthalle Bern and ‘Spaces’ in MoMA New York.⁵⁹ Most site-specific installations were made with

⁵⁵ Lucy Lippard, “Land art in the rearview window,” in *Surface Tension: Problematics of Site*, ed. Ken Ehrlich and Brandon Labelle (Downey USA: Errant Bodies Press, 2003), 59.

⁵⁶ O’Doherty, *Inside the White Cube*, 93.

⁵⁷ Christian Rattemeyer, Teresa Gleadowe, Charles Harrison, Harald Szeemann, and Wim Beeren eds., *Exhibiting the New Art. “Op Losse Schroeven” and “When Attitudes Become Form” 1969* (New York: Distributed Art Pub Inc., 2011), 14.

⁵⁸ In the exhibition ‘Nine at Castelli’ (1968) the following artists participated: Giovanni Anselmo, Joseph Beuys, William Bollinger, Rafael Ferrer, Eva Hesse, Stephen Kaltenbach, Bruce Nauman, Alan Saret, Richard Serra, Keith Sonnier, Gilberto Zorio.

⁵⁹ ‘Op ‘Losse Schroeven. Situaties en Cryptostructuren’, Stedelijk Museum Amsterdam, took place from 15 March to 27 April 27, 1969 and curated by Wim Beeren. ‘Live in Your Head. When Attitudes Become Form’, Kunsthalle Bern, took place from 22 March to 27 April, 1969 and was curated by Harald Szeeman. ‘Spaces’, MoMA, took place from 30 December, 1969 to 1 March, 1970 and was curated by Jennifer Licht. See for a detailed description of the first two exhibitions Rattemeyer et al,

ephemeral and temporary materials, signaling the influences of Conceptual Art and Process Art. Their site-specificity and ephemerality challenged common curatorial practices, as the art historian Julie Reiss notes in *From Margin to Center. The Spaces of Installation Art*:

Conceptual, Process, and installation works usually could not be seen by curators before they were installed, but were created by the artist, in situ, shortly before the exhibitions opened to the public.⁶⁰

The exhibition 'Spaces' was a typical example of this changed practice. Reiss explains that the usual processes of selection and valuation did not take place beforehand, meaning the curator could not be ensured of the quality of the works. Besides, immense pressure was put on the technical staff and the conservators, who had to accommodate gallery spaces to the requirements of spacious works of art, while the artists brought materials into the building that might pose a risk to the collection – such as mist or live spruce trees.⁶¹ These are usually severe enemies of the museum environment and staff members had to take the necessary measures in order to protect the collection, the building and the public.⁶²

In conclusion, site-specific installation artworks dating from the 1960s and 70s intentionally challenged the institutional policies and practices. Gallery spaces could 'simply' be transformed to a 'laboratory' for artistic experiment or become a temporary 'construction site'.⁶³ At the same time, new forms of cooperation and negotiation between artists and curators arose, establishing networks of collaboration which could last a lifetime.⁶⁴ In that respect, a

Exhibiting the New Art. For an elaborate discussion of 'Spaces' see Julie H. Reiss, *From Margin to Center: The Spaces of Installation Art* (Cambridge MA and London: The MIT Press, 1999), 87-106.

⁶⁰ Reiss, *The Spaces of Installation Art*, 81.

⁶¹ Idem, 87, 88, 93.

⁶² For example a room created by Larry Bell was completely darkened. Reiss, *The Spaces of Installation Art*, 93.

⁶³ Kim Paice uses the term 'construction site' in relation to Robert Morris's *Continuous Project* at the warehouse of Leo Castelli's gallery in New York, to which the artist transported huge amounts of raw materials and reworked them during live performances. The project lasted from 28 February to 22 March, 1969.

⁶⁴ An example of a long-lasting relationship between artists and curators is Harald Szeemann's directorship of Kunsthalle Bern. In 1969, Szeeman curated 'When Attitudes Become Form' and in successive years opened numerous exhibitions with artist friends whose studios he frequently visited. Due to this personal network and the archive he created, a remake of the original exhibition was possible with the cooperation of many participating artists: 'When Attitudes Become Form: Bern 1969/Venice 2013', curated by Germano Celant, Fondazione Prada, Ca' Corner della Regina, 1 June – 3 November, 2013. See e.g. Marina Biryukova, "Reconsidering the exhibition *When Attitudes Become Form* curated by Harald Szeemann: form versus "anti-form" in contemporary art," *Journal of Aesthetics & Culture*, 9, issue 1 (2017). Online available at <https://www.tandfonline.com/doi/full/10.1080/20004214.2017.1362309> (visited on 7 September, 2019).

relevant comment has been made by Brandon Labelle and Ken Ehrlich in *Surface Tension. Problematics of Site*. The authors state that alongside the production of site-specific art, the institutional context and artistic practices became more and more intertwined:

In this sense, 'site' might function as an operational term through which to gauge practice – it is both the physical location of presentation and the intrinsic negotiations site-specificity entails.⁶⁵

Hereafter and in continuation of the discussion of the notions of social-institutional and phenomenological site-specificity, different perspectives on the extended lives of site-specific installation artworks will be elaborated. Two examples of artworks created by Richard Serra will illuminate the artist's view regarding the spatial design of the artworks, their social-institutional context and the position of the viewer. The first one is Serra's seminal installation in public space *Tilted Arc* (1981); the other example is Serra's performance-based installation *Splashing* (1968).

2.2 Unmoveable or movable? The case of Richard Serra's *Tilted Arc*

One of the most controversial examples of site-specific art is Richard Serra's *Tilted Arc* (1981), created in commission of the Federal Government for the Federal Plaza in New York (Fig. 2.1, 2.2) The work consists of a large 'wall' made of Corten-steel, measuring no less than 37 x 3.70 m², which divides a large section of the square into two parts. A few years after the work was completed, neighbours and people working in the surrounding offices complained that since the 'wall' was placed in the center of the square, the former social function of the plaza had been lost.⁶⁶ The General Services Administration proposed to relocate *Tilted Arc* from the plaza to a scenic environment in the countryside where it would be "appropriately sited" and better appreciated by the public.⁶⁷ Together with fellow-artists, curators and friends, Richard Serra started a law suit resulting in a famous public hearing in 1985. At this occasion Serra declared:

Tilted Arc was conceived from the start as a site-specific sculpture and was not meant to be 'site-adjusted' or 'relocated'. Site-specific works

⁶⁵ Ehrlich and Labelle, *Surface Tension*, 10-11.

⁶⁶ For example Joseph Liebman states: "I remember walking freely in the plaza, contemplating the examination of a witness, undisturbed by the presence of other people engaged in conversation or young lovers holding hands. I also remember my dreams of additional seating areas, more cultural events, temporary outdoor exhibits of painting and sculpture, and ethnic dance festivals." Clara Weyergraf-Serra and Martha Buskirk, *The Destruction of Tilted Arc: Documents* (Cambridge MA: The MIT Press, 1991), 113.

⁶⁷ Memo from the Public Buildings Service to the responsible administrator of the General Services Administration William J. Diamond. Weyergraf-Serra and Buskirk, *Destruction of Tilted Arc*, 31.

deal with the environmental components of given places. The scale, size, and location of site-specific works are determined by the topography of the site, whether it be urban or landscape or architectural enclosure. The works become part of the site and restructure both conceptually and perceptually the organization of the site.⁶⁸

In the public hearing of March 1985 the issues of site-specificity were addressed in an unprecedented way. On the one hand, Serra pointed out to his opponents the inseparability between the artwork and the site, in terms of their physical and optical dimensions. On the other hand, he objected to the fact that the government did not “respect the implications of the concept of site-specificity”, as it had been implied in the spatial design of the artwork that local pedestrians would need to adjust their route when traversing the square, therewith interfering with the square’s former social function and the natural flow of the people.⁶⁹

After a fierce debate between supporters and opponents, in 1989 it was decided that *Tilted Arc* would be removed and destroyed, in accordance with Serra’s refusal to relocate the work (Fig. 2.3).⁷⁰ His statement that site-specific art “cannot be moved without being destroyed” was effectuated by the Corten-steel plates being carted-off to a scrap metal yard, which the artist regarded an “accomplishment” of the process.⁷¹ Because of its destruction on 15 March 1989, *Tilted Arc* no longer exists as a physical work of art, but it is omnipresent in debates on site-specific art and the problem of relocating the artworks to a different site.

Art historian Douglas Crimp, who argued in support of *Tilted Arc* at the lawsuit, notes that the case of *Tilted Arc* reveals “the radical aesthetics of site-specific sculpture”, which is always politically charged.⁷² In his opinion the crisis shows that the general public nor the government comprehended the implications of this radical and historical moment in art practice:

The work was conceived for the site, built on the site, had become an integral part of the site, altered the very nature of the site. Remove it and the work would simply cease to exist.⁷³

Miwon Kwon takes a similar stance in *One Place After Another* – reminding us of an earlier statement, made by the installation artist Robert Barry, that site-

⁶⁸ Richard Serra in Weyergraf-Serra and Buskirk, *Destruction of Tilted Arc*, 11-12.

⁶⁹ Idem, 13.

⁷⁰ *Tilted Arc* was destroyed on 15 March 1989.

⁷¹ Idem, 4.

⁷² Douglas Crimp, “Serra’s Public Sculpture: Redefining Site Specificity,” in *Richard Serra / Sculpture*, exhibition catalogue, ed. Rosalind Krauss (New York: Museum of Modern Art, 27 February - 13 May, 1986), 55.

⁷³ Douglas Crimp, *On the Museum’s Ruins* (Cambridge MA: The MIT Press, 1993), 153.

specific art cannot be moved without being destroyed.⁷⁴ (Barry made this statement in 1969, referring to his fragile room-filling installations made of nylon and iron-wire.) Kwon points to the critical function of site-specific art of working against the physical and socio-political conditions of the site [and] simultaneously address the site as another *medium*, or another “language”. Put a little differently, working against the site coincides with working against the modernist illusion of artistic autonomy.⁷⁵

Relying on Barry’s dictum and the controversy over Serra’s *Tilted Arc*, Kwon develops a vital argument for the discourse on site-specific installation art, namely that this critical function is lost when the artwork is relocated. She extrapolates this view to an entire group of site-specific installation artworks from the 1960s and 70s, which had the function to “undercut the fallacy of the ‘autonomy’ of art and its institutions.”⁷⁶ Site-specificity of this period is indeed seen as a new language or medium to question the conditions and hidden structures of the site.

Kwon’s argument is key to the topic of the perpetuation of site-specific installation artworks. The author takes her stance in reaction to an emerging trend of the late 1980s, when museums in Paris, New York, Los Angeles and elsewhere started to re-exhibit, collect and refabricate site-specific installations from previous decades.⁷⁷ It is not by coincidence that fertile soil was found for opposing this practice, because, as Kwon indicates, it is precisely the mobilization of site-specific works that deprives them of their critical potential and sets a new norm in which the connection between artwork and site is rendered irrelevant. On the one hand, the author agrees that the re-execution of ‘unrepeatable’ works offers an opportunity to reconsider their historical significance. On the other hand, she points to what is lost:

But the very process of institutionalization and the attendant commercialization of site-specific art also overturn the principle of place-boundedness through which such works developed their critique of the ahistorical autonomy of the art object.⁷⁸

Seen from this perspective, there is a problem with the continued existence of site-specific installation artworks in a museum context, because of the disruption of the historical ties to the location. Although accountability is

⁷⁴ Kwon, *One Place After Another*, 12.

⁷⁵ *Idem*, 75.

⁷⁶ *Idem*, 40.

⁷⁷ Exhibitions featuring site-specific art from the 1960s and 70s in this period are, for example: ‘L’art conceptuel, une perspective’ (1989) in Musée d’art moderne Paris; ‘New Sculpture, 1965-75: Between Geometry and Gesture’ (1990) and *Immaterial Objects* (1991), both in the Whitney Museum, New York; and ‘Out of Actions. Between Performance and the Object’ (1998) in MACBA Los Angeles.

⁷⁸ Kwon, *One Place After Another*, 38.

mainly attributed to the art market and the institutions who aspire to extend the lives of site-specific installations, most of the times the artists themselves cooperated with galleries and museums for a remake and/or acquisition.⁷⁹ Interestingly, one prominent example in this respect is Richard Serra's performance artwork *Splashing*, created for the Leo Castelli Warehouse Gallery in 1968. After the initial iteration, Serra re-executed *Splashing* numerous times at different locations.

2.3 The extended life of Richard Serra's *Splashing*

Richard Serra created his first performance, *Splashing* (1968), by throwing molten lead in one of the corners of the Leo Castelli Warehouse in New York (Fig. 2.4, 2.5). The lead hardened at the juncture between the wall and the floor, demarcating the dimensions of the space. Douglas Crimp describes the initial iteration of *Splashing* as follows:

There it was, attached to the structure of that old warehouse on the Upper West Side, condemned to be abandoned there or scraped off and be destroyed.⁸⁰

The result of Serra's performance was a site-specific installation that was on show during the exhibition '9 at Castelli', curated for the warehouse by the artist Robert Morris.⁸¹ Most of the artworks were process related and site-specific, and most of them have not been remade. *Splashing*, on the other hand, became a famous example of site-specific art, precisely because Serra reperformed the work many times, resulting in site-specific installations at different locations (Fig. 2.6). In this case, Richard Serra considered the site-specificity of *Splashing* no impediment to remake 'splash pieces' at other locations. Performances were executed at various venues, by the artist himself, and in later years with the help of assistants (Fig. 2.7).⁸² For each exhibition, the performance was adjusted to the conditions of the new location, resulting in a redefinition of the spatial parameters of the site-

⁷⁹ An exception to this 'rule' is a collection of artworks created during the 1960s and 70s (including site-specific installations) that was acquired by the Italian collector Giuseppe Panza di Biumo. The artists did not always authorize reinstallation and sometimes no longer acknowledged the reinstalled piece as their art. To ensure research, preservation and presentation of the Panza Collection, which is now with the Guggenheim Museum, New York, a grand-scale project was carried out by the Guggenheim Museum between 2010 and 2019: The Panza Collection Initiative. <https://www.guggenheim.org/conservation/the-panza-collection-initiative> (visited on 7 September, 2019).

⁸⁰ Crimp, *Museum's Ruins*, 151.

⁸¹ '9 at Castelli', organized by Robert Morris for the Leo Castelli Warehouse Gallery, was open from 4 to 28 December, 1968, between 1 – 5 PM.

⁸² For example, Richard Serra's *Gutter Corner Splash: Night Shift* (1969/1995) has been created for SFMOMA with the help of his assistants, who splashed the lead in the corner under his supervision.

specific work. In hindsight, Serra emphasizes the repeatability of his Splash Pieces, making no distinction between temporary or permanent iterations:

I did one at the Castelli Warehouse, just a very straight line. And then subsequently, I think about four months later, I did one in the Whitney Museum. And over the last twenty or twenty-five years I have been doing them every three or four years as the occasion allows, or as a museum calls for one or as an exhibition comes up. The museum in Tilburg (De Pont, 1992, TS) asked me to build a permanent one. The one in SFMOMA (1995, TS) is the second permanent one, and I think probably within this next six months I am going to build one in Hamburg (Kunsthalle Hamburg, 1996, TS).⁸³

Serra's statements can be read as a notion that site is a highly variable location, as something that occurs with the occasion and is not per definition tied to a particular physical site. In his reflection on the splash pieces, the artist takes a different stance than with *Tilted Arc*, in which case he considered the permanency of the physical site a prerequisite for the future existence of the artwork. Can we therefore assume that Serra regarded a museum gallery, for which a splash piece was created, fundamentally different from a site-specific location in public space? That he considered the former more aligned with the White Cube ideology of a 'neutral' exhibition space instead of the social space he wished to give shape to with *Tilted Arc*? Although this fundamental question reaches beyond the scope of the current study, it is worth looking at the following statement by Richard Serra, made during an interview with Craig Owens in 2016:

I think I am a transitional figure. If anything, I would call myself a post-structuralist, not a postmodernist. I'm involved with the evolution of form, the connection where space and matter meet. One of the things that form constantly has to do is reach a point where it pushes back against content. ... Form is something that metamorphoses into other forms. It has its own internal logic that can be dispelled and migrate into other forms.⁸⁴

Coming back to Miwon Kwon's typology of phenomenological and social-institutional site-specificity, I am inclined to believe that in this case the emphasis is put on the first category, whereas Kwon, on the other hand, stresses the latter when discussing the refabrication of Serra's *Splashing*.⁸⁵ In reference to this artwork, among others, she states:

⁸³ The interview with Richard Serra was recorded and published by the San Francisco Museum of Modern Art in 1995, <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=LjvVEN2v8rY> (visited on 8 October, 2019).

⁸⁴ Interview with Richard Serra by Craig Owens in *The Guardian*, 1-10-2016.

⁸⁵ Kwon, *One Place After Another*, 33-45.

With the cooperation of the artists in many cases, art audiences are now offered the 'real' aesthetic experiences of site-specific copies... As Susan Hapgood has observed, 'the once-popular term 'site-specific,' has come to mean 'movable under the right circumstances,' shattering the dictum that 'to remove the work is to destroy the work'.⁸⁶

It can be concluded, according to Miwon Kwon's views, that the memory of the historical piece would have prevailed over the mechanisms of musealization, while Serra's engagement with new sites and publics signals the negation of the critical stance avant-garde artists once took regarding the institutional policies. Memories of site-specific installations are usually based on photographic documentation, and sometimes on narratives and discourses, as in the case of *Tilted Arc*. This point leads us back to the role of photographs in the extended lives of site-specific installation artworks, which Martha Buskirk already observed in the case of Allan Kaprow's *Yard* (see Chapter 1). Buskirk indicates the importance of photography for reiterations of ephemeral works of art as follows:

Thus the photograph is part of a process that is both fixed and fluid, allowing comparison of the far-flung examples of a work that cannot be understood as singular, even as the work has, after each disturbance, largely settled back into its identity with photographs [from the past].⁸⁷

Buskirk takes a 'pragmatic' stance when it comes to reiterations of site-specific installation artworks. Re-contextualisation, she states, is often a "technique that artists ... choose to employ as a key element of the artistic process".⁸⁸ Buskirk observes that artists often collaborate with institutions "in the process of organizing, staging, and documenting their site-dependent or event-based projects".⁸⁹ In other words, an ongoing dialogue between artists and institutions takes place in the process of musealization, and contemporary art museums have the ability "to absorb, even foster, what once appeared to be critical discourse".⁹⁰ Apart from that, in recent times museums preserve the art of the past as much as they actively help to produce the art of the present.⁹¹ Buskirk's viewpoints will recur in the discussion of the case studies, but for now it is sufficient to note that one and the same artist (in this case Richard Serra) may hold different views and that different trajectories can be traced, depending on the artist and the identity of

⁸⁶ Idem, 33 and 38.

⁸⁷ Buskirk, *Creative Enterprise*, 137.

⁸⁸ Idem, 10.

⁸⁹ Idem, 17.

⁹⁰ Idem, 7.

⁹¹ Idem, 3.

the work. Some artworks are more strictly spatiotemporally defined, while others are more suitable for reiteration.

Site-specificity as an artistic strategy

The point I want to add to the above is that various strategies may come into play where the perpetuation of site-specific installation artworks is concerned. The artist's intent is without doubt a primary incentive, but personal networks, collaboration with museums, the know-how of assistants and professional staff, technical means such as photographs, and theoretical discourses can all play a part in extending the lives of site-specific installations.

The conservation scholar Tina Fiske scrutinizes Andy Goldsworthy's *White Walls* (2007) from a processual point of view. The installation consists of wet porcelain clay, rolled in slabs which are applied to the four walls of a gallery space. The idea is that the clay dries and delaminates to the floor, a process that is utterly unpredictable and intrusive, because through the bonding of the clay and the substrate, layers of wall paint are taken off, "revealing the physical substance of the walls and the traces of previous interventions by other artists". In the end, the artwork is a "material embodiment" of a "destructive" process that involves many participants, including the work of artists previous on show in the gallery.⁹² Fiske takes this example as her starting point for a reflection on the "iterability" of site-specific installation artworks that have the potential of being repeated.⁹³ Most of the times, she argues, a site-specific installation loses the "physical bond to its originating event or context of inscription" after the exhibition period.⁹⁴ A period of "absence" starts when the artwork is disassembled, some parts may be put in storage and temporary materials will be thrown away. Key to Fiske's argument is that after such intermission and dormant state of the artwork, a radical understanding is required in order to reinstall the work. The author compares this process to a strategy of "translation".⁹⁵ Professionals need to fully understand the artwork's origin and need the know-how to reactivate the artwork's site-specificity in new contexts, accepting its "iterability" as "a particular mode of repetition that mobilizes notions of breach, absence and difference."⁹⁶

⁹² Tina Fiske, "White walls: installations, iteration and difference," in *Conservation: Principles, Dilemmas and Uncomfortable Truths*, ed. Alison Richmond and Alison Bracker (Amsterdam: Elsevier/Butterworth-Heinemann, 2009), 229.

⁹³ Tina Fiske offers an in-depth reflection on the conservation and presentation of site-specific installations in a museum context, which she understands as an exemplification of Derrida's notion of "iterability": a particular mode of repetition that "rather than 'aspiring to the fulfilment of the original,' searches or reaches beyond the original itself". Fiske, "White Walls," 234-35.

⁹⁴ Idem, 233.

⁹⁵ Idem, 236.

⁹⁶ Idem, 232.

Fiske's notion of iterability is also at the heart of my current study given the pivotal question of the artwork's perpetuation. From her discussion of *White Walls* I gained the insight that site-specificity is often a strategy to set a process in motion that can be repeated at different locations; another convincing argument is that sometimes radical solutions need to be taken in order to translate the artwork from one context to another.

An explicit call to conceive site-specificity as a 'modus operandi' has been made by artist and philosopher Kevin Melchionne. Rejecting Crimp's belief in "the singularity of place" in site-specific art (as demonstrated with the case of *Tilted Arc*), Melchionne states that site-specificity "denotes an increasingly complex set of practices."⁹⁷ The relocation and/or reiteration of a site-specific installation does not necessarily mean the work has lost its intended meaning:

[...] the possibility of relocating site-specific works depends on an alternative conception of the relation between the ontology of space and the meaning of the work. Typically, in discussions of site-specificity, it is assumed that the meaning of the work relies on qualities that define a particular place as unique. [But] singularity is not their only quality. Those aspects of the place which constitute its singularity may not be the most relevant for a work of art made for the place.⁹⁸

Instead of adhering too much to the artwork's physical rootedness, Melchionne suggests an approach of *differentiating* between different modes of site-specificity. Scholars and curators, he states, should determine what the artist aims to achieve with a strategy of working site-specific. To this end he offers a list of possibilities: engagement with the formal structures of the site, interaction with the art system (institutional criticism) and/or with the viewer (in experiencing the installed work), incentives provided by a contest or a commission for a site-specific work (in galleries or public space), engagement with the historical and/or socio-political meaning of a place, and so forth.⁹⁹ Following Melchionne's multi-layered perspective on site-specificity, I argue that a research into the perpetuation of site-specific installations can be guided by the analysis of the site-specific strategies applied by the artists and the ways in which these are activated or disregarded in future iterations.

Firstly, however, I will continue my search for notions that can help identifying the strategies and site-specific functions applied by the artist. Whereas so far the primary focus has been on the relationship between the artist and the museum institution, it is now time to include the visitor, in a

⁹⁷ Kevin Melchionne, "Rethinking site-specificity. Some critical and philosophical problems," *Art Criticism* 12, no 2 (1998), 47.

⁹⁸ *Idem*, 45, 47.

⁹⁹ *Idem*, 38-39.

triangular relationship between the work, the surrounding space and the spectator. As said before, various art historical movements have influenced the rise of site-specific installation art and frequently references are made to Minimal Art– in particular when addressing the perception of the work and the position of the visitor in the exhibition space.¹⁰⁰ This is a further elaboration on the type Miwon Kwon identified as phenomenological site-specific installation art (introduced earlier in this chapter).

2.4 Site-specificity and the viewer's position in the gallery space

During the 1960s, Minimal Art dominated the art world with abstract images that are defined by their spatial dimensions, colour, surface, and the surrounding space. The visitor's own position in the exhibition space contributes to the perception of the work – accentuating the awareness of the visitor's presence in the here-and-now. With Minimalism, the spatial arrangement became part of the meaning of the artwork, redirecting the attention from the artwork (and its creator) to the visitor, as Douglas Crimp observes:

During the 1960s, minimal sculpture launched an attack on the prestige of both artist and artwork, granting that prestige instead to the situated spectator, whose self-conscious perception of the minimal object in relation to the site of its installation produced the work's meaning.¹⁰¹

Crimp continues by stating that the viewer becomes “the subject of the work” in minimal paintings and sculptures. These artworks are only completed when the viewer is present and, moreover, they incite a sense of introspection and self-awareness through the reciprocal relationship between the artwork, the viewer and “the place inhabited by both”.¹⁰²

There are differences in opinion apropos of the comparison between Minimal Art and site-specific installations. Art historian Mark Rosenthal observes that Minimal Art is indeed influenced by the spatial coordinates, light conditions and the visitors' trajectories through space. Installations of Minimal Art are “in tandem with and even embrace literal space, if only in a generic sense – wall, floor, ceiling, corner.” The author continues by stating that the artworks on display are seldom site-specific in a strict sense because they are, in fact,

¹⁰⁰ See for the influence of Minimal Art on site-specific installations: Crimp, *Museum's Ruins*, 16-17; De Oliveira et al, *Installation Art*, 23; Kaye, *Site-specific Art*, 25; Kwon, *One Place After Another*, 12-13; Meyer, “Functional site,” 25-26; Rosenthal, *Installation Art*, 64; Bishop, *Installation Art*, 77.

¹⁰¹ Crimp, *Museum's Ruins*, 16-17.

¹⁰² Idem, 154.

quite moveable.¹⁰³ On the other hand, in reaction to the “regularity and [the] structures and grids” of Minimalism, site-specific working artists such as Richard Serra went a step further, because they truly *intervened* with the physical conditions of the space, engaging visitors in such a way that it might feel “uncomfortable”.¹⁰⁴

Site-specific interventions have their “own internal logic and formal integrity” which, as Rosenthal states, could be reinvigorated when the artwork is relocated to a different location provided that a new connection with the site is established: “Again, the viewer has a real time and space experience of that location in particular.”¹⁰⁵ Rosenthal shows that with such radical gestures and interventions – worded by Serra as “attacking and restructuring” a given space – the integrity of the artwork would not necessarily be lost when the work is relocated and distributed to different places.¹⁰⁶ These observations bring into focus the conception of the spatial design of the artwork as a site-specific *function* that can be repeated or re-performed at different locations. In that sense, the perpetuation of Serra’s *Splashing* could be explained as a succession of reiterations and reactivations of the *function* of the spatial design, characterizing Serra’s approach for this particular work of art.

The performativity of site-specificity

Like the authors mentioned above, performance scholar Nick Kaye draws a comparison with Minimal Art in his book *Site Specific Art: Performance, Place, and Documentation*. Looking at site-specific installations as radical interventions “into the gallery, the city, and other ‘found’ sites”, he suggests to focus on what those artworks *do*:

[...] Although operating through a variety of disciplines and means, each [of these works] take their effect in performance.¹⁰⁷

Site-specificity is brought to life in interaction with the surrounding context and, as Kaye states, provokes uncertainties about the distinctions “under which a work’s integrity and place are fixed”.¹⁰⁸

What makes Kaye’s argument relevant to the current research is that he points to the performativity of site-specific installations in the sense that these artworks activate the connection between the work and conditions of the (museum) site. When he states that site-specific works “trouble the oppositions between the site and the work”, I interpret this as a deliberate

¹⁰³ Rosenthal, *Installation Art*, 64.

¹⁰⁴ Idem, 64.

¹⁰⁵ Idem, 66-67.

¹⁰⁶ Richard Serra’s citation comes from Rosenthal, *Installation Art*, 64.

¹⁰⁷ Kaye, *Site-specific Art*, 25.

¹⁰⁸ Idem, 215. See also Kirsi Peltomaki, “Affect and spectatorial agency: viewing institutional critique in the 1970s”, *Art Journal* 66, no 4 (2007): 36 ff.

effect of site-specific installations: to address the gallery space as an 'activated site' where the usual procedures and practices of the museum regime are being challenged.¹⁰⁹ In a sense, his argument does not seem to diverge from the notion of institutional criticism made by Miwon Kwon and others, but Kaye underscores the iterability of this function, as a continuous potential for questioning the gallery space and the museum's organizational structure: by "conceiving the museum as a conceptual framework rather than a built form," the work is not only defined by the site but, conversely, site-specific installations define the site just as well.¹¹⁰

In the above paragraphs two concepts were elaborated upon regarding the artists' strategies of creating site-specific installations: from Minimal Art I derived the notion that site-specificity heightens the visitor's perception in the here-and-now. Nick Kaye called attention to the 'performativity' of site-specific installations that establish a reciprocal relationship between the work and the site, challenging the usual procedures of the museum institution. Later on, in Chapter 3, I will return to his statements when discussing the notion of performativity from the perspective of conservation theory and practice, as well as the processes of 'staging' site-specific installation artworks in a museum context. As an illustration of his views, I will briefly introduce an example of a site-specific installation that interfered with the usual practices of museum professionals at several occasions, not least because the installation included a performance in which museum staff members were actively involved.

2.5 Robert Morris's *Amsterdam Project*

Robert Morris' *Amsterdam Project. Specification for a Piece with Combustible Materials* was first realized as a site-specific installation in 1969, at the Stedelijk Museum Amsterdam (Fig. 2.8). The installation was repeated at the same location in 2011.

Robert Morris used to work in the tradition of Minimal Art and Conceptual Art with a variety of art forms, including performance and installation art.¹¹¹ In his writings, the artist familiarizes us with the idea that site-specific installations evoke a "present tense of space" due to the fact that they are "temporary and situational, made for a time and place and later dismantled".¹¹² The first installation that made Robert Morris famous was

¹⁰⁹ Idem, 11.

¹¹⁰ Idem, 191. Kaye refers to a statement made by Daniel Buren.

¹¹¹ Initially a painter and sculptor, Morris cooperated with the Judson Dance Theater in the early 1960s, for which he choreographed a number of works.

¹¹² In a series of essays Robert Morris explains his views on site-specificity: "Notes on Sculpture", published in *Artforum* (February and October 1966) and "The Present Tense of Space", *Art in America* (January-February 1978), reprinted in *Continuous Project Altered Daily: The Writings of Robert Morris* (Cambridge MA: The MIT Press, 1994). This quote comes from the "The Present Tense of Space" in *Continuous Project*, 202.

Continuous Project Altered Daily (1969), executed at the Castelli Warehouse in New York. Over a period of several months, Morris took up residence in the warehouse and brought 'raw' materials to the site, such as clay, water, cotton sheets, asbestos, felt and wood. He used the place as a 'construction site,' continuously changing the spatial arrangement of the materials into new configurations, while people could watch him at work.¹¹³ Of this project nothing has remained, except for photographic documentation and written reports.

In the same year, Morris participated in the earlier mentioned exhibition 'Op losse schroeven' in the Stedelijk Museum, one of the first overviews of Conceptual Art and Process Art featuring a considerable number of site-specific installations.¹¹⁴ Morris's project consisted of a collection of inflammable materials, such as turf, branches, grass and coal, that were arranged in a specific order on the gallery floor. Toward the end of the show, the artist handed over a set of instructions to the museum for the completion of the *Amsterdam Project* (see Appendix B). He requested that museum professionals carry out a performance by setting the combustibles on fire in front of the museum building. And so it happened in April 1969. The materials were brought to the front of the museum and were set on fire by the staff members, marking the end of this initial iteration of *The Amsterdam Project*. In accordance with the ideas of Conceptual Art, Morris allowed the Stedelijk Museum to restage the installation based on his instructions and to carry out the performance in a similar way.¹¹⁵

More than four decades later, in 2011, the Stedelijk Museum took up the challenge and re-executed *The Amsterdam Project* once more at the original location (Fig. 2.9). At that time, the museum was right in the middle of a major reconstruction, including renovation of the old building and the addition of a new wing. Before the Stedelijk would entirely be closed for a long time, it featured the series 'Recollections,' restaging a number of artworks from 'Op losse schroeven'.¹¹⁶ Morris's *Amsterdam Project* was included and a similar set of materials was collected by the museum staff.¹¹⁷ The instructions were used to install the heaps of raw materials in the same

¹¹³ Davidts and Paice, *Fall of the Studio*, 55.

¹¹⁴ See footnote 18 of this chapter.

¹¹⁵ Conservator and scholar Sanneke Stigter explains that conceptual artworks in which the idea predominates the artwork's materialized form open up the vista that custodians can re-execute the artwork, although in practice questions of how "to cope with the dilemmas when having a responsibility towards the work's conservation and presentation" may still stand in the way of doing so without the presence of the artist. Sanneke Stigter, "Between Concept and Material. Working with Conceptual Art: A Conservator's Testimony" (PhD diss., University of Amsterdam, 2016), 36.

¹¹⁶ 'Recollections – Op losse schroeven' was curated by Margriet Schavemaker and Ann Goldstein, Stedelijk Museum Amsterdam, Summer 2011.

¹¹⁷ Some of the artworks could not be refabricated and were presented in the form of documentation. A multimedia tour (including QR codes and GPS technology) explained the original location and meaning of the works.

room and with the exact same spatial arrangement as in 1969. In addition, like before, the show ended with a performance executed by the custodians, who set fire to the combustibles in front of the museum building. And, in order to convey the historical significance of the exhibition, visitors with a smartphone could take a virtual guided tour and experience 'Op Losse Schroeven' in the gallery spaces where the artworks had originally been displayed in 1969. In those cases where the original artworks could not be recreated, visual documentation and spoken word gave an impression of what the installation had been like at the time.

According to the museum's press release, 'Recollections' restaged "one of the most innovative surveys" of the 1960s and Morris's project emphasized the role of the museum as a memory institution:

'Combustible' can be read as a criticism of the art world that places too much weight on technical virtuosity and the primacy of the object. Morris's critique is equally pertinent today and highlights a paradox of the current exhibition: in attempting to offer insights on a historical exhibition intended to subvert both the traditional art object and the traditional role of the museum, it must rely on objects from its own collection.¹¹⁸

The reinstallation of the *Amsterdam Project* puts dilemmas to the fore of re-executing a site-specific installation in the absence of the artist, even if it is intended this way in the concept of the work. With the original iteration, the artist made a powerful statement by bringing in combustible materials and letting them be burned by museum professionals, literally 'troubling' the oppositions between the work and the site. Morris turned the museum regime upside down and yet he intended that his work was being collected and re-executed. In the self-reflective statement cited above, the museum acknowledges that the reiteration of the installation and the performance in 2011 were not 'subversive' acts in themselves, but ways to keep the memory of the original project alive. One could argue that this reactivation was in agreement with the artist's intention regarding the artwork's site-specificity and his intent to interfere with museum practices. The exhibition space was still the same and the entire process was repeated, carefully following the artist's instructions in regard of the work's spatial arrangement and orchestration of the performance in front of the museum building.

That said, the impact of the restaged *Amsterdam Project* was completely different from its original iteration, not least because the socio-cultural context had radically changed in 40 years. Although the display setting was still anchored in the original location, the experience needed an explanation. To this end, much effort was put into communicating the historical context of

¹¹⁸ See Press release <http://www.stedelijk.nl/en/press-releases/stedelijk-museum-presents-recollections--op-losse-schroeven> (Visited on 2 August, 2019).

‘Op losse schroeven’ to the public by means of a virtual tour, elucidating the initial site-specificity of the works. After this final iteration the building was renovated and with the disappearance of the original site a reconstruction like this could never be realized again.

2.6 The site of production and the site of perception

In the above review of the literature and discussion of case studies, the focus has been on artworks dating from the historical period of the 1960s and 70s. In the following paragraphs I will shift the attention toward the 1990s, when a renewed interest in site-specificity emerged, both in the artists’ production practices and the museums’ collecting policies and exhibition programmes.

Influenced by the possibilities of traveling, globalization and technological developments, artists of the 1990s started to work all around the globe, with well-known examples as Thomas Hirschhorn, Francis Alÿs, Mark Dion and Renée Green. According to James Meyer, a large group of artists started to explore “a mobile notion of site and a nomadic subjectivity.”¹¹⁹ Meyer describes this new form of site-specificity in terms of the “functional site”, moving it away from physically rootedness and institutional critique to a broader cultural sphere of investigation and communication.¹²⁰

The functional work explores an ‘expanded’ site: the ‘art world’, in this activity has become a site within a network of sites, an institution among institutions. To be sure, previous institutional critique demonstrated the financial and ideological ties of the gallery to greater economic and political structures. ... Today, much practice explores an expanded site, enlarging its scope of inquiry into contingent spheres of interest, contingent locations [and this practice] may engage several sites, institutions, and collaborations at once.¹²¹

The expanded notion of site-specificity primarily applies to geographical site-specific projects. Quite often, site-specific working artists engaged with the history or geography of a particular place, and they often involved local communities in the production of their art. As Miwon Kwon too observes, in theory any place, community or social issue could prompt a site-specific work. The communication with ‘an audience,’ as was common in the 1990s, had largely replaced the fascination for site-specificity of previous periods.¹²²

Many geographical site-specific projects have resulted in a film, a series of photographs, or an archive, and these art objects might easily find their way into a commercial gallery or museum. To some extent, the circulation of

¹¹⁹ Meyer, “Functional site,” 32.

¹²⁰ Idem, 23-25.

¹²¹ Meyer, “Functional site,” 27.

¹²² Kwon, *One Place After Another*, 109.

derivatives of Land Art projects of the 1960s and 70s are comparable, taking into account that earthworks can still exist in the actual, physical environment, whereas these newer art productions were conceived as the main result of the project and circulated as 'independent' artworks. The gap between the production site and the site of perception is denoted by Meyer as a "discursive" relationship and a juxtaposition of different "realities of site."¹²³ Miwon Kwon therefore adds to her typology a third category, namely that of discursive site-specific works:

This is not to say that the parameters of a particular place or institution no longer matter, because site-oriented art today still cannot be thought or executed without the contingencies of locational and institutional circumstances. But the primary site addressed by current manifestations of site-specificity is not necessarily bound to, or determined by, these contingencies in the long run. Consequently, although the site of action or intervention (physical) and the site of effects/reception (discursive) are conceived to be continuous, they are nonetheless pulled apart.¹²⁴

Also according to James Meyer, the expanded notion of site does not necessarily imply that the spatiotemporal characteristics of the artwork are disregarded; they are just raised to another level, allowing for a potential coexistence of multiple site-specificities, both real and virtual. Moving away from "the premise of site-specificity to locate the work in a single place, *and only there*" (original emphasis), those strategies are primarily related to social and artistic *practices*.¹²⁵ Hence, if we conceive site-specificity this way, we could further explore its function as "an operation occurring between sites, a mapping of institutional and discursive filiations and the bodies that move between them (the artist's above all)."¹²⁶

It follows that in conservation and presentation strategies applied during successive biographical stages of the artwork, all kind of mediation processes come into play. When fluid notions of a 'discursive' and 'mobile' site enter the art production as well as the discourse, the role of a 'mediator' who presents these artworks to the public comes to the fore. Roles are shifting and the person who takes on the function of mediator could either be the artist, the gallerist or the museum curator, or a combination. In this respect, some critics emphasize that site-specificity (and contemporary art in a broad sense) has primarily become a strategy of mediation; of connecting places and sites, of art producers and art receivers. Martha Buskirk, for example, argues in *The Contingent Object* that contemporary art opens up "temporal gaps ... at the level of production" and requires an act of mediation

¹²³ Meyer, "Functional site," 25-27; Kwon, *One Place After Another*, 26-30.

¹²⁴ Kwon, "Notes on site-specificity", 45.

¹²⁵ Meyer, "Functional site," 26.

¹²⁶ Idem, 25.

and interpretation:

This rift may appear in the very places where spatial and temporal experiences are the most important, as objects that depend on an unmarked uniformity are marked with the signs of age, as performances are known through partial documents or accounts, and as works initially installed or arranged with the artist's direct participation are increasingly interpreted by others.¹²⁷

Following the idea that site-specificity is not 'fixed', but gradually unfolds as a network of relationships between the artwork and multiple sites, it sometimes happens that museums play an active role in the mediation of the work as 'site-specific installation', bridging the gap between the site of production and the site of perception. This 'mobility' of site-specificity is illustrated with the following case example of Phil Collins's geographical site-specific project and video installation *they shoot horses* (2004).

2.7 Phil Collins's *they shoot horses*

Phil Collins's installation *they shoot horses*, in the collection of Tate, consists of a two-channel video installation with sound (Fig. 2.10), which is projected in a darkened space. When Collins started the preceding geographical site-specific project in 2004, he lived and worked in Israel. Nine young volunteers from Ramallah were asked to perform a dance marathon of two days and record the dancing themselves.¹²⁸ They were provided with a non-professional camera and filmed each other mainly in close-up. Collins involved this local group of volunteers in creating the 'raw material' for the installation in the same way as he used footages of Reality TV for other art productions.

The meaning of *they shoot horses* is interlaced with the geography and socio-political situation in Ramallah, signifying not only the work's content, but also the spatiotemporal conditions during the recording: the length of the performance and the location of the marathon were similar to dance events usually held in Ramallah and the screening of the artwork thus seems to represent the local situation. Claire Bishop describes this as follows:

It goes without saying that *they shoot horses* is a perverse representation of the 'site' that the artist was invited to respond to: The occupied territories are never shown explicitly but are ever-

¹²⁷ Martha Buskirk, *The Contingent Object of Contemporary Art* (Cambridge MA: The MIT Press, 2003), 14.

¹²⁸ The title refers to the novel *They Shoot Horses, Don't They* (1935) by Horace McCoy in which dance marathons during the Great Depression of the 1930s are the central theme. See for more information <http://www.tate.org.uk/art/artworks/collins-they-shoot-horses-t12030> (accessed 7 August 2019).

present as a frame. ... By using pop music as familiar to Palestinian as to Western teens, Collins also provides a commentary on globalization that is considerably more nuanced than most activist-oriented political art.¹²⁹

What the public may not have realized, is that the artwork had to be accommodated to the museum conditions in order to be experienced at all. A second layer of site-specificity was added to *they shoot horses* when the artwork was acquired and entered a stage of post-production at Tate: the raw footage was brought into the museum's technical department and, with the help of the artist, a team of technicians, conservators and curators, accommodated to a suitable work of art.

A case study carried out by Pip Laurenson during the 'Inside Installations' project, demonstrated that Collins's preference for using a non-professional camera posed a challenge to the artwork's musealization since the original footage was of insufficient quality for a museum screening and, moreover, the technicians expected a rapid degradation of the material.¹³⁰ Hence, the conservator and technicians of Tate decided to transfer the footage to a more sustainable carrier and figure out an appropriate display. During this process, profound questions were posed in relation to the editing of the footage: What approach should be followed with regard to gaps in the footage resulting from technical failures during the dance marathon? How to treat the intervals when the calls for prayer from a nearby mosque interfered with the music? Should those calls be included or left out? And last but not least: one hour of footage had been lost when the material was confiscated at one of the Israeli checkpoints. How should this gap in the material be treated?

After discussions with the artist, it was decided to use a film editing package and to cut the footage to a duration matching the opening hours of Tate Modern, meaning 6 hours and 40 minutes of dancing. The timeslot was applied to both channels that were presented in the gallery in order to complete the installation. In other words, the real time recording of *they shoot horses* was *reconstructed* to fit a site-specific installation, adjusted to the time-space coordinates of the gallery and the presentation standards of the museum environment. Mediation, in this example, took place during the post-production of the artwork with the support of advanced technology and was highly influenced by custodianship.

they shoot horses can be considered an illustration of what James Meyer and Miwon Kwon indicate as a discursive or mobile site, emerging in the movements and relationships between one site and the other. During the

¹²⁹ Claire Bishop, "The Social Turn: Collaboration and its Discontents." *Artforum International* 44 (February 2006): 182.

¹³⁰ The case study was carried out by Pip Laurenson at Tate during the European Inside Installations project (2004-2007) and has been published in Tatja Scholte and Paulien 't Hoen, eds., *Project Preservation and Presentation of Installation Art* (Amsterdam: Instituut Collectie Nederland/Stichting Behoud Moderne Kunst, 2007), 9.

production and post-production of *they shoot horses*, several stages of 'site-specificity' can be identified: firstly, the original socio-geographical location where the volunteers performed and filmed their dancing in Ramallah; secondly, the travelling and the problems of smuggling the footage out of the country (and one part of it being confiscated); and thirdly, the postproduction in the technical department of Tate and the presentation of the artwork in the gallery. One question is not addressed in this context, i.e. what would happen if *they shoot horses* would be sent on loan. Would new adjustments regarding the duration of the screening have to be made in order to accommodate the work to another gallery space with different opening hours?

2.8 Conclusion of the chapter

Summarizing the discussion above, there is a number of notions supporting the analysis of the perpetuation of site-specific installations. The typology developed by Miwon Kwon set the terms for understanding site-specificity as a multi-layered phenomenon, which she takes apart in a genealogy of phenomenological, social-institutional and discursive types of site-specificity. The dividing line between the 1960s/70s and the 1980s/90s distinguishes the first two types from the third one, although Kwon acknowledges that these are overlapping categories in artistic practices. Based on James Meyer's discursive or mobile site I elaborated on the functional mode of site-specificity, situating the gallery or a museum as a 'site' between other sites, e.g. the site of the art project, the site of production, various sites of reception, the site of musealization, and so forth. The function of presenting a site-specific installation could this be to bridge the gap between one and the other function of the 'site'. In respect of the museum presentations, Nick Kaye pointed to the 'performativity' of site-specific installations as an artistic strategy to activate the connection between the artwork and conditions of the site, posing challenges to the institutions when preserving and presenting the work of art.

In Chapter 1, I made the assumption that site-specific installation artworks are relational networks. In this chapter, following Kevin Melchionne and Nick Kaye, I added the notion that site-specificity can best be understood as an artistic strategy. In that respect, I consider it a useful approach to regroup the types proposed by Miwon Kwon and other art historians, into a set of site-specific functions that can be applied to site-specific installations in a generic sense. Based on my examination of the art historical discourse, I therefore propose to make a differentiation of site-specific functions of the artwork that can be activated when the installation is exhibited and may serve my analysis of successive iterations. First, the artwork's spatial design and its connection to the physical surrounding; secondly, the way in which a site-specific work activates the visitor's experience in the here-and-now and raises awareness of the socio-cultural context; and thirdly, the discursive dimension of site-specificity, bridging the gap between the site of production and the site(s) of reception; the latter may reach beyond the installed artwork

and take a variety of forms and mediation practices of the artworks on display (including documentation).

Various case examples presented in this chapter show how diverse strategies are being employed in reinvigorating site-specificity in different contexts and times; by artists, conservators, curators and art historians alike. Whereas the term site-specific suggests that these works are singular manifestations – spatiotemporally defined like Serra's *Tilted Arc* –, various authors took the position that these works can be reiterated, as the practices of museums and commercial galleries from the 1990s onward demonstrate. Mark Rosenthal, for example, takes the stance that reactivation of the work's site-specificity can give the viewer a 'real time and space' experience, despite the fact that the work is executed at different locations in different times (like, for example, Richard Serra's *Splashing*). And looking through the lens of the custodian, Tina Fiske proposes a strategy of 'translation', ensuring that reinstallations of site-specific installation artworks are repetitions of a process of interaction between the work and the site, which may lead to radical solutions in the exhibition strategies.

Now that an overview has been provided of the history of site-specific installation art and an inventory has been made of the various typologies and notions of site-specificity, it is time to elaborate the conceptual model I am proposing for the analysis of site-specific installations artworks over time. In Chapter 3, I will turn to Henri Lefebvre's *The Production of Space*, in order to provide a descriptive set of site-specific functions, and I will take a close look at contemporary art conservation, in order to develop an analytical toolbox for tracing the factors of influence on successive iterations of site-specific installation artworks.