

Claire Bishop

INSTALLATION ART



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A Critical History

Tate Publishing

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INTRODUCTION

INSTALLATION ART AND EXPERIENCE

What is installation art?

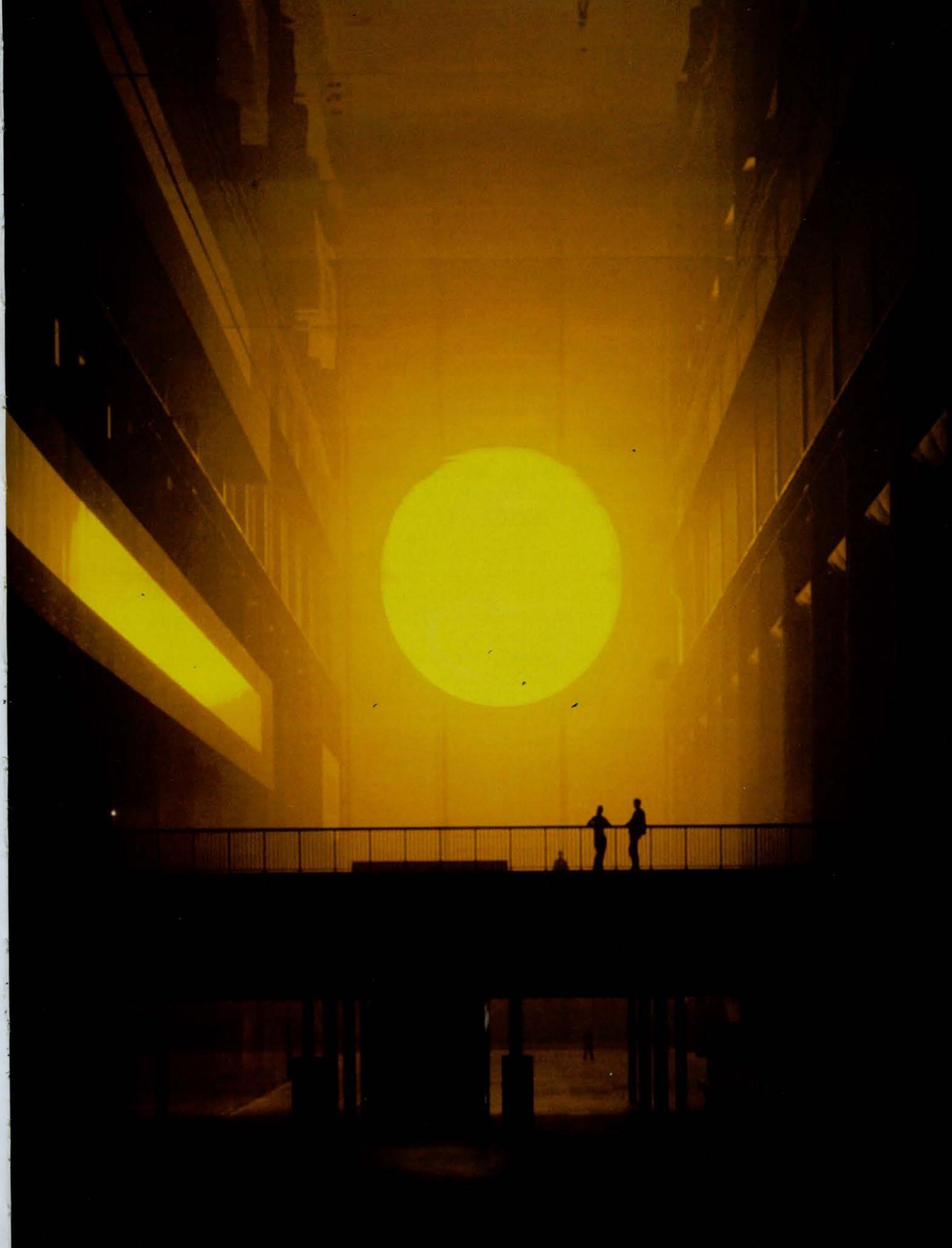
'Installation art' is a term that loosely refers to the type of art into which the viewer physically enters, and which is often described as 'theatrical', 'immersive' or 'experiential'. However, the sheer diversity in terms of appearance, content and scope of the work produced today under this name, and the freedom with which the term is used, almost preclude it from having any meaning. The word 'installation' has now expanded to describe any arrangement of objects in any given space, to the point where it can happily be applied even to a conventional display of paintings on a wall.

But there is a fine line between an installation of art and installation art. This ambiguity has been present since the terms first came into use in the 1960s. During this decade, the word 'installation' was employed by art magazines to describe the way in which an exhibition was arranged. The photographic documentation of this arrangement was termed an 'installation shot', and this gave rise to the use of the word for works that used the whole space as 'installation art'. Since then, the distinction between an installation of works of art and 'installation art' proper has become increasingly blurred.

What both terms have in common is a desire to heighten the viewer's awareness of how objects are positioned (installed) in a space, and of our bodily response to this. However, there are also important differences. An installation of art is secondary in importance to the individual works it contains, while in a work of installation art, the space, and the ensemble of elements within it, are regarded in their entirety as a singular entity. Installation art creates a situation into which the viewer physically enters, and insists that you regard this as a singular totality.

Installation art therefore differs from traditional media (sculpture, painting, photography, video) in that it addresses the viewer directly as a literal presence in the space. Rather than imagining the viewer as a pair of disembodied eyes that survey the work from a distance, installation art presupposes an *embodied* viewer whose senses of touch, smell and sound are as heightened as their sense of vision. This insistence on the literal presence of the viewer is arguably the key characteristic of installation art.

This idea is not new: at the start of her book *From Margin to Center: The Spaces of Installation Art* (1999), Julie Reiss highlights several recurrent characteristics that persist in attempts to define installation, one of which is that 'the spectator is in some way regarded as integral to the completion of the work'. This point remains undeveloped in her book. Yet if, as Reiss goes on to remark, spectator participation 'is so integral to Installation art that without having the experience of being in the piece, analysis of Installation art is difficult', then the following questions are immediately raised: who is the spectator of installation art? What kind of 'participation' does he or she have in the work? Why is installation at pains to emphasise first-hand 'experience', and what kinds of 'experience' does it offer? These are the kinds of questions that this book seeks to answer, and as such it is



as much a theory of installation art – of how and why it exists – as it is a history. Besides, installation art already possesses an increasingly canonical history: Western in its bias and spanning the twentieth century, this history invariably begins with El Lissitzky, Kurt Schwitters and Marcel Duchamp, goes on to discuss Environments and Happenings of the late 1950s, nods in deference to Minimalist sculpture of the 1960s, and finally argues for the rise of installation art proper in the 1970s and 1980s. The story conventionally ends with its apotheosis as the institutionally approved art form par excellence of the 1990s, best seen in the spectacular installations that fill large museums such as the Guggenheim in New York and the Turbine Hall of Tate Modern.

While this chronological approach accurately reflects different moments in installation art's development, it also forces similarities between disparate and unrelated works, and does little to clarify what we actually mean by 'installation art'. One reason for this is that installation art does not enjoy a straightforward historical development. Its influences have been diverse: architecture, cinema, performance art, sculpture, theatre, set design, curating, Land art and painting have all impacted upon it at different moments. Rather than there being one history, there seem to be several parallel ones, each enacting a particular repertoire of concerns. This multiple history is manifested today in the sheer diversity of work being produced under the name of installation art, in which any number of these influences can be simultaneously apparent. Some installations plunge you into a fictional world – like a film or theatre set – while others offer little visual stimuli, a bare minimum of perceptual cues to be sensed. Some installations are geared towards heightening your awareness of particular senses (touch or smell) while others seem to steal your sense of self-presence, refracting your image into an infinity of mirror reflections or plunging you into darkness. Others discourage you from contemplation and insist that you *act* – write something down, have a drink, or talk to other people. These different types of viewing experience indicate that a different approach to the history of installation art is necessary: one that focuses not on theme or materials, but on the viewer's *experience*. This book is therefore structured around a presentation of four – though there are potentially many more – ways of approaching the history of installation art.

The viewer

Like 'installation art', 'experience' is a contested term that has received many different interpretations at the hands of many different philosophers. Yet every theory of experience points to a more fundamental idea: the human being who constitutes the subject of that experience. The chapters in this book are organised around four modalities of experience that installation art structures for the viewer – each of which implies a different model of the *subject*, and each of which results in a distinctive type of work. These are not abstract ideas remote from the context in which the art was produced, but are rather, as will be argued, integral both to

Mike Nelson

The Cosmic Legend of the Uroboros Serpent
Turner Prize installation,
Tate Britain, London
Nov 2001–Jan 2002



the conceptualisation of installation art as a mode of artistic practice in the late 1960s, and to its critical reception. They should be considered as four torches with which to cast light on the history of installation art, each one bringing different types of work to the fore.

Chapter One is organised around a model of the subject as psychological, or more accurately, psychoanalytical. Sigmund Freud's writings were fundamental to Surrealism, and the 1938 International Surrealist Exhibition is paradigmatic for the type of installation art discussed in this chapter – work that plunges the viewer into a psychologically absorptive, dream-like environment. Chapter Two takes as its starting point the French philosopher Maurice Merleau-Ponty; the English translation of his book *The Phenomenology of Perception* (1962) was crucial to the theorisation of Minimalist sculpture by artists and critics in the 1960s, and to their understanding of the viewer's heightened bodily experience of this work. This second type of installation art is therefore organised around a phenomenological model of the viewing subject. Chapter Three turns back to Freud, specifically to his theory of the death drive put forward in 'Beyond the Pleasure Principle' (1920), and to revisitations of this text in the 1960s and 1970s by Jacques Lacan and Roland Barthes. The type of installation art discussed in this chapter therefore revolves around these different returns to late Freud and his idea of libidinal withdrawal and subjective disintegration. Finally, Chapter Four looks at a type of installation art that posits the activated viewer of installation art as a political subject, examining the different ways in which poststructuralist critiques of democracy – such as that of Ernesto Laclau and Chantal Mouffe – have affected installation art's conception of the viewer.

The argument, then, is that installation art presupposes a viewing subject who physically enters into the work to experience it, and that it is possible to categorise works of installation by the type of experience that they structure for the viewer. Of course, it is possible to say that all art presumes a subject – insofar as it is *made* by a subject (the artist) and is *received* by a subject (the viewer). In the case of traditional painting and sculpture, however, each element of this three-way communication (artist – work of art – viewer) is relatively discrete. By contrast, installation art from its inception in the 1960s sought to break radically with this paradigm: instead of making a self-contained object, artists began to work in specific locations, where the entire space was treated as a single situation into which the viewer enters. The work of art was then dismantled and often destroyed as soon as this period of exhibition was over, and this ephemeral, site-responsive agenda further insists on the viewer's first-hand experience.

The way in which installation art structures such a particular and direct relationship with the viewer is reflected in the process of writing about such work. It becomes apparent that it is difficult to discuss pieces that one has not experienced first-hand: in most cases, you had to be there. This problem has substantially affected the selection of examples included in this book, which are

a combination of those that I have experienced first-hand and those works that have become the focus of particularly strong or interesting observations from others about the experience of viewing them. The inevitably subjective streak in all these accounts once more asserts the fact that works of installation art are directed at and demand the presence of the viewer.¹ This point is further reinforced by the problem of how to illustrate installations photographically. Visualisation of a work as a three-dimensional space is difficult via a two-dimensional image, and the need to be physically *inside* an installation renders photographic documentation even less satisfactory than when it is used to reproduce painting and sculpture. It is worth bearing in mind that many artists turned to installation art precisely through the desire to expand visual experience beyond the two-dimensional, and to provide a more vivid alternative to it.

Activation and decentring

There is one more argument that this book presents: that the history of installation art's relationship to the viewer is underpinned by two ideas. The first of these is the idea of 'activating' the viewing subject, and the second is that of 'decentring'. Because viewers are addressed directly by every work of installation art – by sheer virtue of the fact that these pieces are large enough for us to enter them – our experience is markedly different from that of traditional painting and sculpture. Instead of *representing* texture, space, light and so on, installation art *presents* these elements directly for us to experience. This introduces an emphasis on sensory immediacy, on physical participation (the viewer must walk into and around the work), and on a heightened awareness of other visitors who become part of the piece. Many artists and critics have argued that this need to move around and through the work in order to experience it *activates* the viewer, in contrast to art that simply requires optical contemplation (which is considered to be passive and detached). This activation is, moreover, regarded as emancipatory, since it is analogous to the viewer's engagement in the world. A transitive relationship therefore comes to be implied between 'activated spectatorship' and active engagement in the social-political arena.

The idea of the 'decentred subject' runs concurrently with this. The late 1960s witnessed a growth of critical writing on perspective, much of which inflected early twentieth-century perspective theories with the idea of a panoptic or masculine 'gaze'. In *Perspective as Symbolic Form* (1924), the art historian Erwin Panofsky argued that Renaissance perspective placed the viewer at the centre of the hypothetical 'world' depicted in the painting; the line of perspective, with its vanishing point on the horizon of the picture, was connected to the eyes of the viewer who stood before it. A hierarchical relationship was understood to exist between the centred viewer and the 'world' of the painting spread before him. Panofsky therefore equated Renaissance perspective with the rational and self-reflexive Cartesian subject ('I think therefore I am').



Francesco di Giorgio

Martini

Architectural View

c.1490–1500

Gemäldegalerie,

Staatliche Museen zu

Berlin

Artists throughout the twentieth century have sought to disrupt this hierarchical model in various ways. One thinks of a Cubist still life, in which several viewpoints are represented simultaneously, or El Lissitzky's idea of 'Pangeometry' (discussed at the end of Chapter Two). In the 1960s and 1970s the relationship that conventional perspective is said to structure between the work of art and the viewer came increasingly to attract a critical rhetoric of 'possession', 'visual mastery' and 'centring'. That the rise of installation art is simultaneous with the emergence of theories of the subject as decentred is one of the basic assumptions on which this book turns. These theories, which proliferate in the 1970s and are broadly describable as poststructuralist, seek to provide an alternative to the idea of the viewer that is implicit in Renaissance perspective: that is, instead of a rational, centred, coherent humanist subject, poststructuralist theory argues that each person is intrinsically dislocated and divided, at odds with him or herself.² In short, it states that the correct way in which to view our condition as human subjects is as fragmented, multiple and *decentred* – by unconscious desires and anxieties, by an interdependent and differential relationship to the world, or by pre-existing social structures. This discourse of decentring has had particular influence on the writing of art critics sympathetic to feminist and postcolonial theory, who argue that fantasies of 'centring' perpetuated by dominant ideology are masculinist, racist and conservative; this is because there is no one 'right' way of looking at the world, nor any privileged place from which such judgements can be made.³ As a consequence, installation art's multiple perspectives are seen to subvert the Renaissance perspective model because they deny the viewer any one ideal place from which to survey the work.

With such theories in mind, the historical and geographical scope of this book should be addressed. Despite the vast number of installations produced in the last forty years, the majority of the examples featured here date from 1965 to 1975, the decade in which installation art comes of age. This is because it is at this time that the main theoretical impulses behind installation art come into focus: ideas of heightened immediacy, of the decentred subject (Barthes, Foucault, Lacan, Derrida), and of activated spectatorship as political in implication. This decade also witnessed the reconstruction of proto-installations by El Lissitzky, Piet Mondrian, Wassily Kandinsky and Kurt Schwitters, and some of these modernist precursors are discussed in order to stress the fact that many of the motivations behind installation art are not uniquely the preserve of postmodernism but are part of a historical trajectory spanning the twentieth century.

This is also why this study's field of investigation stays more or less within Western horizons, despite the fact that installation art is now a global phenomenon – witnessed in the contribution of non-Western artists to biennials worldwide. In order to keep this book focused on one aspect of installation, its viewing subject, there is no discussion of the work of those non-western artists whose desire to immerse or activate the viewer springs from different traditions.

THE DREAM SCENE

1

'Under the coal sacks, through the aroma of roast coffee, amongst the beds and the reeds, the record-player could make you hear the noise of panting express trains, proposing adventures on the platforms of main-line departures in the station of dream and imagination ...' Georges Hugnet¹

The Total Installation

In *The Man Who Flew into Space from his Apartment* 1985, the Russian artist Ilya Kabakov (b.1933) stages a narrative scene for the viewer to unravel. You enter a sparsely decorated hallway with coats and a hat hanging up on one wall; on another wall is a shelf, upon which a number of framed documents rest. These comprise three reports of an incident – a man flying into space from his apartment – that were ostensibly given to the police by the three men who shared the flat with the escapee. Looking around the hallway, you notice an incompetently boarded-up doorway; peeping through the cracks you see a small cluttered bedroom, strewn with posters, diagrams and debris, a home-made catapult with a seat, and a hole in the ceiling. In one corner of the bedroom is a maquette of the neighbourhood, featuring a thin silver wire soaring out of one of the rooftops. Kabakov refers to this type of work as a 'total installation' because it presents an immersive scene into which the viewer enters:

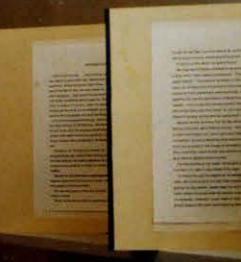
The main actor in the total installation, the main centre toward which everything is addressed, for which everything is intended, is the viewer ... the whole installation is oriented only toward his perception, and any point of the installation, any of its structures is oriented only toward the impression it should make on the viewer, only his reaction is anticipated.²

It is significant that Kabakov refers to the viewer as an 'actor', since his work is frequently described as 'theatrical', by which it is meant that it resembles a theatre or film set. Kabakov himself often compares his work to theatre: the installation artist, he says, is the 'director' of a well-structured dramatic play', and all the elements of the room have a 'plot' function: lighting, for example, like the use of sound and reading matter, plays a vital role in enticing the viewer from one part of the space to the next.

Since leaving Russia in the late 1980s, Kabakov has become one of the most successful installation artists working today and his writings are amongst the most fully formulated of the attempts made by artists to theorise installation art. However, the idea of the 'total installation' offers a very particular model of viewing experience – one that not only physically immerses the viewer in a three-dimensional space, but which is *psychologically* absorptive too. Kabakov often describes the effect of the 'total installation' as one of 'engulfment': we are not just surrounded by a physical scenario but are 'submerged' by the work; we 'dive' into it, and are 'engrossed' – as when reading a book, watching a film, or dreaming. This book hopes to show that cinema, theatre, reading and dreaming all offer quite distinct experiences, but what they do share with installation art is a quality

Ilya Kabakov

The Man Who Flew into Space from his Apartment 1985
Collection: Centre Georges Pompidou, Paris



of psychological absorption. The text will therefore focus on one specific mode that Kabakov cites – dreaming – and will argue that this provides the closest analogy to our experience of one particular type of installation art.

The Dream Scene

Sigmund Freud's *The Interpretation of Dreams* (1900) offers a psychoanalytic definition of what dreams are and how we should interpret them. For Freud, the experience of a dream has three main characteristics. The first is that it is primarily visual ('dreams think essentially in images'), although it may include auditory fragments, and presents itself with a sensory vividness more akin to conscious perception than to memory ('dreams construct a *situation*' that 'we appear not to *think* but to *experience*'). The second characteristic of the dream is that it has a composite structure: if taken as a whole, it will seem to be nonsensical, and can only be interpreted when broken down into its constitutive elements, rather like a rebus.³ Most importantly, Freud argues that the dream is not meant to be 'decoded', but analysed through free-association – in other words, allowing meaning to arise through individual affective and verbal connections. The ability of each dream element to be replaced by an associative word or syllable is the dream's third main characteristic.

These three features – the sensory immediacy of conscious perception, a composite structure, and the elucidation of meaning through free-association – precisely correspond to a model of viewing experience found in the 'total installation' as described by Kabakov. We imaginatively project ourselves into an immersive 'scene' that requires creative free-association in order to articulate its meaning; in order to do this, the installation's assemblaged elements are taken one by one and read 'symbolically' – as metonymic parts of a narrative. The appropriateness of the dream as an analogy for this type of installation art is borne out in Kabakov's description of how the 'total installation' operates on the viewer: 'the main motor of the total installation, what it lives by – [is] the cranking up of the wheel of associations, cultural or everyday analogies, personal memories'. In other words, the installation prompts conscious and unconscious associations in the beholder:

Familiar circumstances and the contrived illusion carry the one who is wandering inside the installation away into his personal corridor of memory and evoke from that memory an approaching wave of associations which until this point had slept peacefully in its depths. The installation has merely bumped, awakened, touched his 'depths', this 'deep memory', and the recollections rushed up out of these depths, seizing the consciousness of the installation viewer from within.

Moreover, this 'wave of associations' is not simply personal, but culturally specific. *The Man Who Flew into Space ...* was originally part of a large installation of seventeen rooms called *Ten Characters* 1988, conceived as a communal apartment complete with toilets and two kitchens, in which each room was

inhabited by a different personality. Representing the characters by the ephemera they had left behind in each space, Kabakov invited us to fantasise about the complex psychological interiority of the apartment's inhabitants: *The Man Who Never Threw Anything Away* (with an enormous collection of valueless objects), *The Talentless Artist* (a selection of banal Socialist Realist paintings), *The Composer*, *The Man Who Saved Nikolai Viktorovitch*, and so on. This installation, like much of Kabakov's subsequent work, alludes to the generic, institutional spaces of Soviet life under communism – schools, kitchens, communal apartments – but he hopes that they also represent a category of place that Westerners immediately recognise, and which he believes 'already exist in principle in the past experience of each person'. The viewer therefore encounters these works 'like his own personal, highly familiar past', while the installation as a whole, Kabakov writes, is capable of 'orienting a person inside of itself, appealing to his internal centre, to his cultural and historical memory'.

In *On The Total Installation*, Kabakov presents many arguments about installation art, several of which are worth reiterating since they epitomise the general tenor of opinion since the 1960s. He argues that installation is the latest, dominant trend in a succession of artistic forms (which have included the fresco, the icon and the painting) that all serve as 'models of the world'.

Indeed, installations should appear to the viewer, he says, as 'a kaleidoscope of innumerable "paintings"'. Here we encounter two ideas that frequently recur in texts on this type of installation art: firstly, that the immersive qualities of the 'dream scene' installation are in some way related to the character of absorptive painting, and secondly, that traditional perspective is overturned by installation art's provision of plural vistas.⁴ For Kabakov, what confirms the place of installation in this trajectory is its status as a non-commodifiable object. When the fresco first appeared, it was an 'immaterial' model of its world. As it waned, the fresco (like the icon and the painting) became increasingly 'material' and 'real', that is, it became a commercialised and commodified product. Kabakov claims that this is also characteristic of installation art:

It is just as absolutely immaterial, impractical in our practical time and its entire existence serves as a refutation of the principle of profitability ... the installation cannot be repeated without the author; how to put it together will simply be incomprehensible. It is virtually impossible to exhibit an installation permanently because of the lack of sufficient space in museums. [...] The installation encounters the firm hostility of collectors who don't have the place to house it and conditions do not exist for keeping it in reserve. It is impossible to repeat or reconstruct the installation in another place, as a rule it is 'tied', intended only for a specific dwelling. It is impossible to reproduce, recreate, a photo gives virtually no impression of it at all.

Despite the fact that Kabakov's own installations are successfully collected, toured, stored and photographed around the world, these are – as we shall see – well-rehearsed arguments about installation art: its scale and site-specificity



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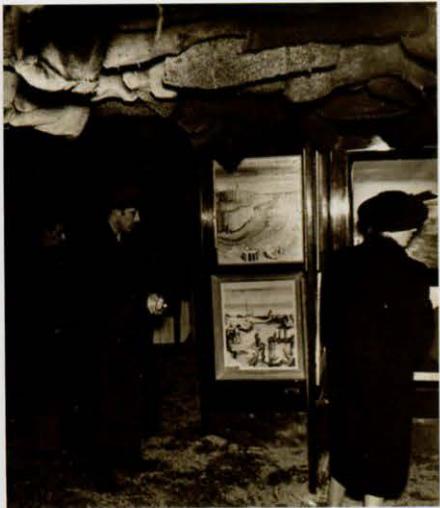
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International Surrealist
Exhibition
Galerie des Beaux-Arts,
Paris, Jan–Feb 1938

circumvent the market, while its immersiveness resists reproduction as a two-dimensional image, thereby placing new emphasis on the viewer's presence within the space.

The International Surrealist Exhibition

Many of Kabakov's installations – particularly those that mimic museums – encroach upon the role of the curator, almost to the point of usurping his or her position altogether. Today it is commonplace to observe that the hanging of an exhibition – the sequence of works on the wall, the lighting and layout of the rooms – determines our perception of the art on display, but this heightened awareness is a relatively recent development. For the early twentieth-century avant-garde, the exhibition hang was perceived as a way in which to supplement the radical polemics of their artistic practice and to announce their distance from current aesthetic conventions. The Surrealist exhibition displays in Paris in 1938, 1947 and 1959, and in New York in 1942, are some of the best examples of this tendency, which has been referred to as an 'ideological hang'.⁵ In recent years, the 1938 International Surrealist Exhibition has become an oft-cited precursor of installation art, celebrated less for the individual paintings and sculptures it brought together than for its innovative approach to exhibiting them. The exhibition is often referred to as 'Duchamp's coal sacks', but these comprised just one element of the installation. Contributions by Man Ray, Salvador Dalí, Georges Hugnet and Benjamin Peret played an equally important role. Under the direction of Marcel Duchamp as overall producer (*générateur-arbitre*), the installation's complex realisation was an unquestionably collaborative venture.

Held in the Galerie des Beaux-Arts, one of the smartest galleries in Paris, the 1938 exhibition sought to transform the grandiose decor of this prestigious venue, which was out of keeping with the Surrealist aesthetic. Georges Hugnet reports how the desire to conceal the gallery's interior swiftly became a priority: the red carpets and period furniture were removed, while bright daylight (entering via skylights) was obscured with 1,200 dirty coal sacks – filled with newspaper to give the appearance of volume – hanging from the ceiling. Dead leaves and bits of cork were strewn on the floor, and a Louis XV-style bed with rumpled linen was positioned in each of the four corners. Next to one of the beds was a pond, made by Salvador Dalí, complete with water lilies and surrounded by reeds, moss, rosebushes and ferns. The central room of the exhibition made a direct appeal to the viewer's senses: the poet Benjamin Peret installed a coffee-roasting machine, which 'gave the whole room a marvellous smell', while a disquieting recorded soundtrack of hysterical inmates at an insane asylum permeated the gallery, and, as Man Ray reports, 'cut short any desire on the part of visitors to laugh and joke'.⁶ A brazier in the middle of the space was surrounded by the only clear area in the show, while the works themselves were crammed onto revolving doors, pedestals and what walls were still available around the edge of this oneiric environment.



International Surrealist
Exhibition
Galerie des Beaux-Arts,
Paris, Jan–Feb 1938

For the opening night, the exhibition was held in darkness. Man Ray had devised a way in which to illuminate the exhibition with stage lights concealed behind a panel, which were to have provided a dramatic flood of light onto the paintings as the viewer approached the work.⁷ However, this was not ready in time for the opening – much to the chagrin of the artists, whose works were now plunged into darkness. Guests to the vernissage were therefore issued with Mazda flashlights to negotiate their path around the exhibition.⁸ Given the Surrealist interest in dreams and the unconscious, this nocturnal mode of encounter was an entirely fitting solution, since it evoked Freud's comparison of psychoanalysis to archaeology: viewers were cast into the role of excavator, uncovering the works one by one as if retrieving for analytic illumination the dark and murky contents of each artist's unconscious psyche.

Unlike the components of Kabakov's installations, the coal sacks, pond, beds and brazier of the 1938 installation were not culturally recognised symbols for anything in particular; their existence and juxtaposition served simply to spark new trains of thought in the visitor's mind. Indeed, using a railway metaphor, Georges Hugnet described the exhibition as 'a station for the imagination and the dream', a platform of departure for the visitor's unconscious free association.⁹ The suspended coal sacks, he wrote, were like a 'steamroller' that 'caused, in the ramparts of our senses, a breach so large that the besieged citadel was run over with the heroic charge of our dreams, desires, and needs'. Hugnet's language evokes a mode of experience redolent of psychically charged impact, both disturbing and pleasurable, which André Breton described as 'convulsive beauty': a fleeting experience of 'extraordinary happiness and anxiety, a mixture of panic, joy and terror' in the face of an apparently harmless object or incident – but which could nonetheless prove revelatory for the subject once analysed.¹⁰ This disturbing co-existence of desire and anxiety was considered by many of the Surrealist artists to hold revolutionary potential, since it threatened the thin veneer of bourgeois manners and social propriety. The 'dream scene' of the 1938 Surrealist Exhibition can be seen as a similar attempt to present the viewer with a psychologically charged encounter in order to rupture and destabilise conventional patterns of thought. The rumpled beds in each corner of the gallery confirmed this equation between the exhibition's *mise-en-scène* and the unpredictable and irrational imagery of dreams.

Environments and Happenings

Lewis Kachur has noted that it makes sense 'to see Surrealism's public exhibition spheres as actualisations of the spaces within the "painted dream", Dalí–Magritte wing of the group', in other words, as literal manifestations of the worlds depicted in their paintings.¹¹ Duchamp's *Mile of String* installation for the exhibition *First Papers of Surrealism* in New York, 1942, took a more abstract and gestural approach, criss-crossing the space with a mile-long string so as to impede clear

viewing of the paintings on display. His irreverent gesture prefigured a more sustained engagement with abstraction that was to come with the work of Allan Kaprow (b.1927), prompted by the death of Jackson Pollock in 1956.

Kaprow maintained that Pollock's contribution to art was significant for three reasons. Firstly, his all-over paintings – made on the floor and worked on from every angle – spurned traditional composition, ignoring the frame in favour of 'a continuum going in all directions simultaneously'. Secondly, Pollock's action-painting was performative: he worked 'in' the painting, and this process was a 'dance of dripping ... bordering on ritual itself'. Thirdly, the space of the artist, the viewer and the outer world became interchangeable: Pollock's method of painting was choreographic, and the viewers themselves must feel the physical impact of his markings, 'allowing them to entangle and assault us'.¹² In form, technique and reception, then, Pollock's work offered a challenge to the generation that followed.

Although wall-sized murals might have been the most obvious way to respond to this challenge, Kaprow rejected this solution since it was both two-dimensional and gallery bound. It is worth remembering that at this time – the late 1950s – Abstract Expressionist painting was commanding unprecedentedly high prices for living artists, and generating a boom in New York's commercial art galleries. It was precisely this type of market-oriented space that Kaprow wished to negate when he began making immersive environments using second-hand materials and found objects. For him, commercial galleries were 'stillborn' and sterile, spaces for looking but not touching – he disparaged the 'lovely lighting, fawn grey rugs, cocktails, polite conversation' that took place there and instead wished to make environments that were vividly 'organic', 'fertile', and even 'dirty'.¹³ Downtown loft spaces such as the Reuben Gallery, the Hansa Gallery and the Judson Gallery (in the basement of the progressive Judson Church) became the preferred choice of venue for artists like Claes Oldenburg, Jim Dine and Kaprow who chose to make immersive 'environments'. The move towards installation art and the rejection of conventional art galleries were therefore intimately connected.

An important part of Kaprow's agenda in turning to environmental installations was a desire for immediacy. Instead of *representing* objects through paint on canvas, artists should employ objects in the world *directly*:

[Pollock] left us at the point where we must become preoccupied with and even dazzled by the space and objects of our everyday life, either our bodies, clothes, rooms, or, if need be, the vastness of Forty-second Street. *Not satisfied with the suggestion through paint of our senses, we shall utilize the specific substances of sight, sound, movement, people, odours, touch.* Objects of every sort are materials for the new art: paint, chairs, food, electric and neon lights, smoke, water, old socks, a dog, movies, a thousand other things.¹⁴

That Kaprow understood the implications of Pollock's work in this way reflects the influence of John Cage, whose composition classes in New York he had



Allan Kaprow
An Apple Shrine
Judson Gallery, Judson
Memorial Church,
New York, Nov–Dec 1961
Photo: Robert McElroy

Allan Kaprow
Words
Smolin Gallery,
New York,
11–12 Sept 1962
Photo: Robert McElroy

attended during 1957–8. Cage's insistence on a Zen-inspired integration of art and everyday activity contributed to a new understanding of authorial intention and the role of the viewer. In events like *4'33"* of 1952, a silent work for performer and piano in which peripheral noise became the 'performance', the role of contingent phenomena (such as the coughs and shuffles of the audience) received a new significance. It was only a short step from Cage's passive incorporation of context and chance to Kaprow's Environments that aspired to make the viewer an active element of the composition.

Kaprow initially considered this inclusion of the viewer to be merely formal: 'we have different coloured clothing; can move, feel, speak, and observe others variously; and will constantly change the "meaning" of the work by so doing'.¹⁵ Later, he gave the viewer 'occupations like moving something, turning switches on – just a few things', which in turn suggested 'a more "scored" responsibility for that visitor' and the fully interactive role of audiences in the Happenings.¹⁶ *Words* 1962 was a 'rearrangeable environment with light and sounds', in which visitors could select words pre-painted on white sheets of paper and hang them around the room to form phrases. Kaprow claimed that he 'wasn't installing anything to be looked at ... but something to be played in, participated in by visitors who then became co-creators'.¹⁷ Both Environments and Happenings insisted on the viewer as an organic part of the overall work.

For Kaprow, this inclusion of the viewer placed a greater responsibility on him/her than had previously been the case. In his eyes, the activation of viewers had a moral imperative: the Environments and Happenings were not just another artistic style, but 'a human stand of great urgency, whose professional status as art is less a criterion than their certainty as an ultimate existential commitment'.¹⁸

As Jeff Kelley has argued, Kaprow's views were informed by the pragmatist philosopher John Dewey, whose *Art as Experience* (1934) he had read closely and annotated as a student.¹⁹ Dewey maintained that we can only develop as human beings if we actively inquire into and interact with our environment. Being thrust into new circumstances means having to reorganise our repertoire of responses accordingly, and this in turn enlarges our capacity for 'experience', defined by Dewey as 'heightened vitality ... the complete interpenetration of self and the world of objects and events'.²⁰ When Kaprow plunged visitors into a 'dirty' and 'rough' environment, filling them with 'tense excitement' and 'risk and fear', it was in order to provide visceral eruptions into everyday consciousness for the sake of its growth.²¹ Artwork that was politely framed, argued Kaprow, 'stood for experience rather than acting directly upon it'.²²

Thus Kaprow did not consider a conventional art gallery a suitable location for the transformative potential of aesthetic experience: there, the viewing of art was too inhibited by ingrained responses. Moreover, its pristine white spaces were synonymous with the eternal and the canonical – the precise opposite of Kaprow's insistence on flux, change and disorder. It is clear that the nervous

excitement he wished to solicit from the viewer was more psychological than existential: the objects from which the Environments were made were not random but chosen to 'represent a current class of things: memoirs, objects of everyday usage, industrial waste, and so forth'.²³ As a result, the Environments had 'a high degree of associational meaning' and were 'intended to stir the observer on an unconscious, alogical level'.²⁴ Bearing indexical traces of previous usage, the assemblaged materials were intended to prompt reverie in the viewer. In *An Apple Shrine* 1960, the visitor moved through maze-like narrow passages of board and wire, choked with tar paper, newspaper and rags, to a tranquil central clearing – described by one reviewer as having 'the stillness ... of a ghost town evacuated at the moment before an avalanche' – where apples were suspended from a tray and signs read 'Apples, apples, apples'.²⁵ The photographic documentation of this work shows how well viewers became collaged into it, tentatively exploring its passages as they would a decrepit and abandoned old house.

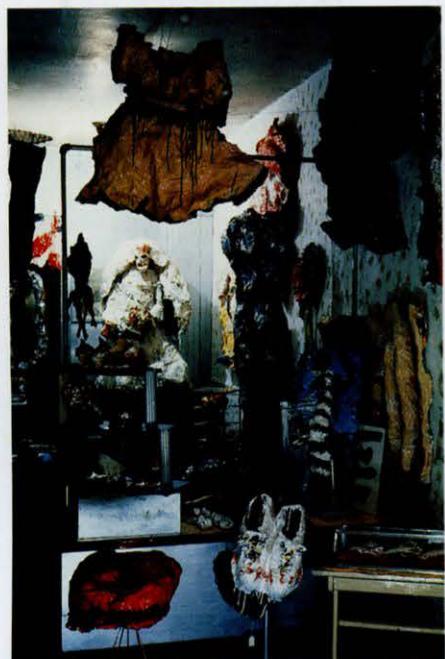
Kaprow's search for the shock impact of 'unheard-of happenings and events ... sensed in dreams and horrible accidents' therefore seems to offer many similarities to Surrealist art, with its aim to undercut the ego's defences and trigger unconscious desires and anxieties.²⁶ But the Surrealist encounter, as described by Breton, was essentially a missed encounter, whose immediacy temporarily steals our sense of self-presence.²⁷ By contrast, the shock of the dirty and new and unexpected in Kaprow's Environments sought to *confirm* the viewer's sense of self-presence: he tells us that 'all the time you're *there*, getting into the act'.²⁸ This 'authentic' revelation of the subject through the immediacy of first-hand experience was to become a recurrent theme in the rise of installation art in the 1960s.

Realism in the 1960s

Kaprow's desire to use actual objects in the world rather than represent them is, unsurprisingly, also found in the work of his contemporaries. At the end of 1961, Claes Oldenburg (b.1929) began renting a shop at 107 East 2nd Street, which he named The Ray Gun Mfg. Co. The back room functioned as a studio, while the front room, 'The Store', was used to display and sell his sculptures. Here, he presented small-scale works made of plaster-soaked muslin painted with trickled enamel paint. The walls, along with every other surface of the room, were also covered in paint – forming a 'wallpaper' of blobby green stripes patterned with leaves that united the space and the work.

Three years later, the Bianchini Gallery held *The American Supermarket*, an exhibition devised by the dealer Paul Bianchini and his business partner Ben Birillo as a way to display and sell the work of numerous Pop artists, including Andy Warhol, Robert Watts and Jasper Johns. Real cans of Campbell's soup were stacked next to Warhol's screenprint *Campbell's Soup Cans* 1962, and, like Oldenburg's *The Store*, drew attention to the similarities between shopping for

Claes Oldenburg
The Store
107 East 2nd Street,
New York, 1961
Photo: Robert McElroy





food and shopping for art. Cécile Whiting has shown how the installation played off two modes of viewer engagement: the connoisseurial detachment of aesthetic judgement and the hands-on ‘absorbed shopper’ involved in everyday chores. The latter mode, she notes, was at the time particularly associated with female consumers whose relationship to commodities was regarded as more susceptible to ‘unconscious or hidden ideas, associations and attitudes’.²⁹

These installations of the early 1960s structure an experience for the viewer that is in close dialogue with the ‘art’ of window-dressing, strategic shop layout, and the increasingly prevalent concept of a ‘retail experience’. Then, as now, department stores aimed to entice viewers into the shop by encouraging fantasy identification with the goods on display in the windows. While this structure was to a degree present in *The Store*, whose objects were visible through a large window from the street, it became an integral part of Oldenburg’s *Bedroom Ensemble* of 1963. This showroom-style bedroom is presented as a tableau, cordoned off and inaccessible to the viewer.³⁰

For Lucas Samaras (b. 1936), the fact that the *Bedroom Ensemble* could not be entered was its downfall. He found unsatisfactory the way in which Oldenburg – like Ed Kienholz and George Segal – failed to accommodate the viewer in his work. Instead he wished to create a wholly immersive environment in which the space existed for the viewer to activate as an engaged and absorbed participant. *Room 1964* comprised a reconstruction of the artist’s bedroom, installed in the Green Gallery, New York. Unlike the tableaux of Kienholz and Segal, in which figures were placed in particular scenarios, the objects in *Room* were not ‘glued down’ and relationships between the objects were ‘fluid’.³¹ Samaras believed strongly that installations should not illustrate a situation, but should be geared towards the visitor’s first-hand, real experience. Discussing his *Room* in the context of Oldenburg’s *Bedroom Ensemble* and of related tableaux by his former tutor Segal, he commented that ‘none of them was really concerned with a complete environment, where you could open the door, walk in, and be in a complete art work’.³²

Room therefore addressed itself directly to the viewer, whose experience was not that of detached onlooker but the focus of the work. Samaras saw the piece as an ‘aggressive’ riposte to the dealer Sidney Janis, who had exhibited Oldenburg’s *Bedroom Ensemble* under the label of ‘New Realism’ earlier that year; for Samaras, *Room* was authentically ‘real in that it has real things and you can walk in, poke around, sit down and make love’.³³ The room was cluttered with his personal ephemera – clothes, underwear, art works in progress, books, writing, paper bags – and a radio was left playing, suggesting that the room’s occupant might return at any minute. Unlike the tableaux of Kienholz and Segal, Samaras ‘turned the spectator into an accomplice, a Peeping Tom spying on him in his absence ... Though the spectator had been invited to spy, the menace of his own surreptitious forbidden curiosity replaced physical menace’.³⁴



George Segal
The Diner 1964–6
Collection: Walker Art Center, Minneapolis

The difference between the work of Samaras and that of Kienholz and Segal might therefore be understood not just as the difference between installations and tableaux, but also between dreaming and fantasy. The psychoanalysts Jean Laplanche and Jean-Bertrand Pontalis have explained that in the dream (or daydream) ‘the scenario is basically in the first person ... the subject lives out his reverie’: this would be analogous to installation art of the type presented by Samaras, in which the viewer is protagonist.³⁵ Fantasy, by contrast, is characterised by a scene in which we identify with a figure rather than acting this role ourselves: the work of Kienholz and Segal would typify this mode, since their sculpted figures are immersed and absorbed on our behalf, and prevent us from becoming the psychological centre of the work.

Paul Thek's processions

Installations like Samaras’s *Room* are conspicuously absent from the rest of US art production during the 1960s, largely due to the dominance of Minimalism on both East and West coasts. One notable exception is the work of Paul Thek (1933–88) who sought to combine the viewer’s movement in and through the installation with a symbolic iconography. Referring to his installations as ‘processions’, Thek alluded both to the ritualistic and social quality of the viewer’s movement through the work, and to the fact that each piece was constantly ‘in process’. His large-scale assemblaged scenes, made of found (and usually organic) materials, also incorporated sound, music and theatrical lighting, and were reworked for each venue where they were shown.

Thek is best known for his irreverent response to Minimalism in his first installation *The Tomb* 1966–7, later renamed *Death of a Hippie*. The work comprised an 8½ foot high pink-lit ziggurat (a form much used by Robert Smithson) into which the viewer could enter. Inside this three-tiered pyramid was a beeswax model of Thek’s body as a corpse, surrounded by pink goblets, a funerary bowl, private letters and photographs. Viewers filed into the construction like mourners and could sit on floor cushions around the ‘body’. In the rest of the gallery were wax body parts, ‘laid out on the floor in their cases and roped off with red cord’, placed to look ‘like finds from a tomb or an archaeological site’.³⁶ The work encouraged the viewers to activate and interpret the scene by adopting the roles of mourner and archaeologist.³⁷

Later installations recycled the hippie figure, as well as other sculptures (such as *Fishman* 1968) in more elaborate scenes. These installations, made from 1968 onwards, look incredibly contemporary in their casual distribution of materials around the gallery space. In this year Thek relocated his practice to Europe, touring from venue to venue with The Artist’s Co-op, a collective with whom he collaborated to produce each exhibition. This nomadic and communal approach to making art was reflected in Thek’s conception of how the work as a whole was to be experienced: the viewer’s passage through the installation



Lucas Samaras
Room or Room no. 1,
installation at Green
Gallery, New York, 1964



Paul Thek
*Pyramid/A Work in
Progress*
Moderna Museet,
Stockholm, 1971

was compared to communion, and wherever possible, Thek organised his exhibitions to coincide with religious festivals. He felt strongly that the public understood more clearly 'the "liturgical" nature of the art' during a holiday period ('Christmas is my favourite').³⁸ The ritualistic structure of his installations reflected his Catholicism and his desire to 'humanise' the gallery environment by 'turning down the lights, giving people some chairs to sit on, and not having the art restricted in any way'.³⁹ Visitors to his installations of the 1970s followed paths through the works that were softly lit, often by candles, and that contained a variety of opportunities to rest in contemplation.

As might be imagined, Thek was influenced by contact with the work of Joseph Beuys (1921–86), which he encountered for the first time in 1968. Beuys was yet to develop the environmental approach to displaying his work seen in the *Beuys Block* in Darmstadt in 1970, but Thek was clearly inspired by his passion for a democratic 'social sculpture', which had clear parallels with his own inclusive and collective approach to the production and reception of art. Moreover, just as Beuys used fat and felt as allusions to his personal mythology, Thek developed his own symbolic iconography in which trees, boats, fish, stags, pyramids and a stuffed hare were recurrent elements. Although such symbolism remained obscure to the uninitiated viewer, the recycled materials were highly evocative and open enough to permit personal interpretation. Jung's 'collective unconscious', which Thek related to his own experience of Christianity, was an important influence in this regard, as was the group's experience of psychedelic drugs.

Significantly, it was not just the individual objects that Thek considered to be symbolic, but also their layout: a corridor was a 'place of concentrated energy, a womb passage, the Way of the Cross'; a fountain was 'the sacristy'; trees were 'growing life, visible age'; sand was 'water that you can walk on'.⁴⁰ *Pyramid/A Work in Progress* 1971, at the Moderna Museet Stockholm, was the first piece in which the viewer's path through the installation was choreographed step by step:

One had to come through a twisting, almost-pink newspaper tunnel, and walk up some steps onto a wharf which is in a truncated pyramid. On the inside are blue newspaper walls held up by trees from which I had not stripped the branches or leaves so it feels like a forest. So you are in a forest in a pyramid at the end of a tunnel and it is painted blue like the sea and lit by candles. And then the wharf is set as a dining room. There's some bread on the table and some wine and newspaper clippings and books and prayers. In a corner is a little light and a chair and a flute. There is also a piano and a bathtub with oars. And then you leave the pyramid and there's a large room to wander through with all sorts of things and it's all lit by candles and filled with waves of sand. And at the very end, just before you exit, is the Hippie as a Viking chieftain in a kind of boat.⁴¹

Robert Pincus-Witten remarked of Thek's meticulously visualised *Tomb* in 1967 that 'the central experience of the spectator is that of intrusion', but these later installations – more allusive and enigmatic in their imagery – sought to create

a gentle atmosphere of comfort and beauty.⁴² The loose and collective nature of the work was carried through from manufacture to reception, so that the experience of peacefulness he sought to elicit – ‘so beautiful that you’re shattered when you leave’ – was also emphatically communal.⁴³

Institutional critique

Richard Flood has argued that Thek’s installations were defined by the fact that he was an American whose country was fighting a war in Vietnam: his comforting, ‘meditative environments’, Flood writes, opposed ‘the awfulness that was unfolding in South East Asia’.⁴⁴ In Europe and the US, mounting hostility towards the conflict in Vietnam, together with the left-wing student protests of 1968 and the rise of feminism, were proving to be decisive events for many artists. The younger generation came to acknowledge that politically disengaged art could be seen as complicit with the status quo, and argued that any art object that gratified the market implicitly supported a conservative ideology in which capitalism dovetailed with patriarchy, an imperialist foreign policy, racism and a host of other social ills.

The link between museum institutions and social inequality was made explicit in the works of Hans Haacke (b.1936), whose *Manet-PROJEKT 74* 1974 exposed the links between museum patrons, trustees, politics and business. Many artists began to question their role within the museum system, and consciously avoided the production of discrete, portable objects on which the market depended. Assuming responsibility for the dissemination and reception of their art, increasing numbers of artists turned to the issues of medium and distribution as a way in which to make a ‘political’ statement without subjecting the work to explicit propaganda on the level of content. Context became a crucial consideration in addressing art’s relationship to the market and museum infrastructure, and installation art was but one of many forms that emerged as a result.⁴⁵ Married to the physical architecture of a given space for a specific duration, works of installation art were dependent on the context in which they were shown and were therefore difficult – if not impossible – to sell. Moreover, context-dependency redirected meaning away from the individual author and onto the work’s reception: the specific circumstances in which it was experienced by a particular audience. The active nature of the viewer’s role within such work, and the importance of their first-hand experience, came to be regarded as an empowering alternative to the pacifying effects of mass-media.⁴⁶

The international exhibition Documenta 5, held in Kassel in 1972, reflected this changed political mood, and saw an unprecedented number of contributions taking the form of installation art.⁴⁷ Several of these directly addressed the institutions in which art was shown, and became known as ‘institutional critique’. Vastly differing formal strategies were grouped under this label. From 1965 onwards, for example, the French artist Daniel Buren (b.1938) began

Marcel Broodthaers
Musée d'Art Moderne,
Département des Aigles,
Section des Figures
(Der Adler vom
Oligozän bis Heute)
Städtische Kunsthalle,
Düsseldorf, May–July
1972

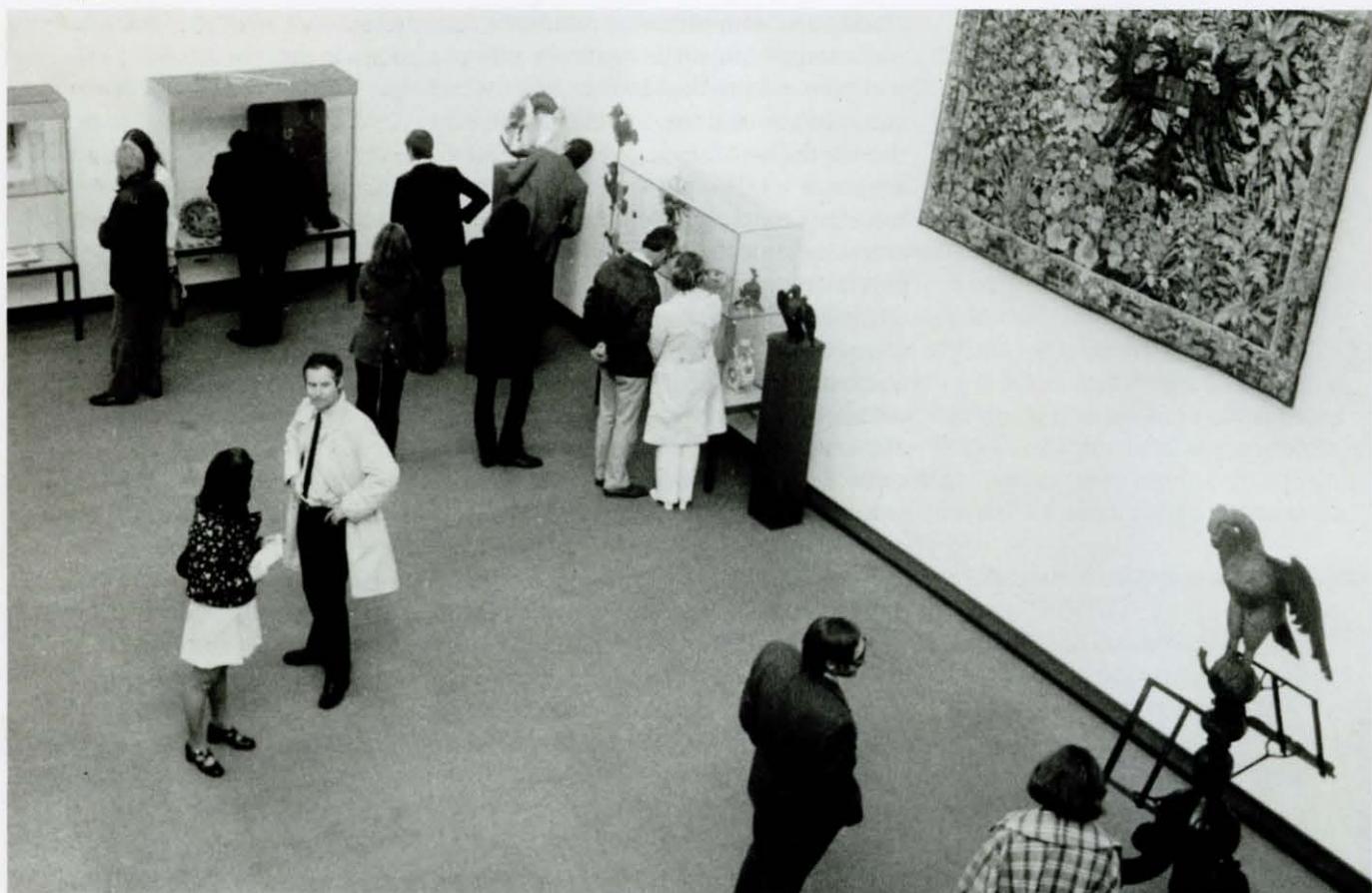


placing alternate white and coloured stripes on billboard hoardings and gallery walls, responding to the entire site around a gallery in order to undermine its authority as a privileged venue for art. The Belgian artist Marcel Broodthaers (1924–76), by contrast, assumed directorship of his own (fictional) museum, the *Musée d'Art Moderne, Département des Aigles*, 1968–72. Broodthaers's *Musée* adopted a 'total installation' approach in order to parody the apparatus by which museums confer value upon objects. It has subsequently become the subject of extensive critical discussion, but its status as an installation is often overlooked, as is its relationship to Broodthaers's Surrealist literary heritage. Like the 1938 Surrealist exhibition, the *Musée* operated as a platform of departure for the imagination, but not in order to unleash an encounter with unconscious desires in the name of revolutionary Marxism; instead it sought to induce a different type of catalysing narrative, one more specifically critical of structures of authority, and of our psychic investments in them.

Broodthaers's *Musée* had numerous sections, each of which alluded to the various roles of a museum, from the historical and exhibiting function of the *Section XVIIIe Siècle*, *Section XIXe Siècle*, and *Section XXe Siècle*, to the administrative, financial and press concerns of the *Section Publicité*, *Section Documentaire*, and *Section Financière*. The largest section, the *Musée d'Art Moderne, Département des Aigles, Section des Figures (Der Adler vom Oligozän bis Heute)* 1972, involved the actual loan of over 300 objects – each bearing the image of an eagle – from forty-three collections including the British Museum, the Imperial War Museum and the Musée des Arts Décoratifs in Paris. Shown at the Düsseldorf Kunsthalle, these objects were hung on the walls and displayed in vitrines, but this conventional presentation was complicated

by a trilingual plaque placed beside each object stating that 'this is not a work of art'. Explicitly referencing René Magritte's disruption of language and image ('this is not a pipe'), Broodthaers's plaques sought not only to disturb the viewer's assumption that all objects in a museum were automatically works of art, but also to remind us that it was not the individual object *alone* but the relationships between the objects (including their context) that constituted this work of art. The fact that Broodthaers's *Musée* impersonated a museum within a museum strengthened the work's subversive power. He maintained that this potency lay not so much in the idea of a fraudulent museum, but in the creation of an entire fictitious structure around it that drew attention to the way in which any institutional authority is staged. The official inaugurations, the correspondence with stamped letterheads, the mailing list of art world notables, the donations, the visitors who flocked from abroad, the concerts held in the *Section XIXe Siècle*, the contracted art shippers: all these peripheral supports and the simulacra of bureaucracy were as significant as the *Musée*'s individual exhibitions.

Although conventionally framed as Conceptual art – with all its connotations of anti-visual austerity – Broodthaers's *Musée*, like his entire oeuvre, is in fact



Marcel Broodthaers

Musée d'Art Moderne,
Département des Aigles,
Section des Figures
(*Der Adler vom
Oligozän bis Heute*)
Städtische Kunsthalle,
Düsseldorf, May–July
1972

Marcel Broodthaers
Musée d'Art Moderne,
Département des Aigles,
Section des Figures
(Der Adler vom
Oligozän bis Heute)
Städtische Kunsthalle,
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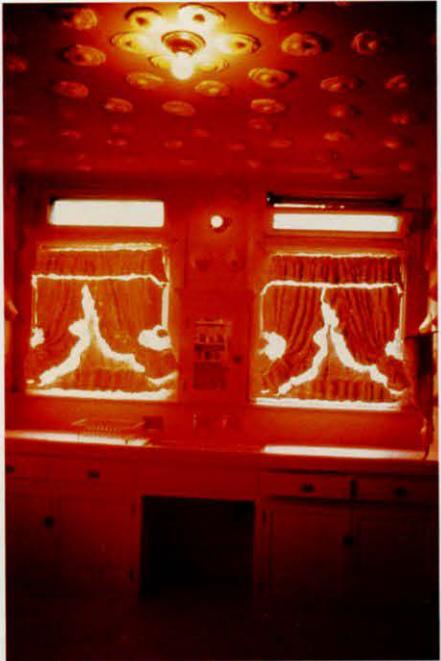


dense with rebuses, puns and riddles. And the ‘puzzle’ of the work is exacerbated by the artist’s deliberately contradictory statements about it. As Michael Compton observed, ‘it is in the experience of trying to sort it out and of knowing, finally, that one has not, that one perceives a kind of hidden message’.⁴⁸ This is because the work cannot be reduced to a simple deconstruction of museum ideology – its supposedly impartial and valorising status, the objectivity of its taxonomy, its status as public repository of wealth and the symbolic invocation of the eagle to uphold this – since it also harnessed the disruptive force of the viewer’s unconscious desires and anxieties. Every visitor to a museum, noted Broodthaers, is steered by ‘narcissistic projection ... onto the object he contemplates’, and so it was on the level of unconscious free-association that the placards beside each object would disrupt (*perturbe*) conventional patterns of viewing.⁴⁹ As Broodthaers acknowledged, it is only through deception that the truth may appear: ‘I believe that a fictional museum like mine allows us to grasp reality as well as that which reality hides.’⁵⁰

Broodthaers’ *Musée d’Art Moderne* sets a precedent for contemporary installation artists like Mark Dion (b.1961), who seek not to vilify the museum but to ‘make it a more interesting and effective institution’.⁵¹ Dion’s *The Department of Marine Animal Identification of the City of New York* 1992, like Fred Wilson’s *Mining the Museum* 1992, and Susan Hiller’s *From the Freud Museum* 1995, investigates and overturns museum taxonomies, and by implication the ideologies that underpin them. Although all three artists are motivated by different political tendencies, it is significant that they choose to articulate these through a parody of museum-display conventions. Vitrines are filled, labels are written, charts are drawn, taxonomies unravelled; the ‘objectivity’ of institutional display, these artists imply, is always already interpretation. As Dion notes, the museum tells a narrative ‘through a very particular type of representation: for it is both the thing itself and a representation of it’.⁵² It is important that so many of these artworks harness the viewer’s own capacity to free-associate in their installations, revealing subversive, marginal perspectives doing combat with grand narratives.

Feminism and multi-perspectivalism

One of the key ideas underlying institutional critique is that there is more than one way to represent the world. Installation art, by using an entire space that must be circumnavigated to be seen, came to provide a direct analogy for the desirability of multiple perspectives on a single situation. One artist who has articulately theorised this shift in relation to installation art is Mary Kelly (b.1941). For her, the viewer of an installation is ‘sort of out of control’ because ‘the view is always partial’ – ‘there’s no position from which you can actually see everything at once’.⁵³ Like many artists in this period, Kelly came to regard installation art’s multi-perspectivalism as emancipatory – in contrast to single-



Susan Frazier,
Vicki Hodgetts and
Robin Weltzsch
Nurturant Kitchen
from **Judy Chicago and
Miriam Schapiro**
Womanhouse
553 Mariposa Avenue
Los Angeles, Jan–Feb
1972

point perspective, which centres the viewer in a position of mastery before the painting, and by extension, the world.

Kelly's *Post-Partum Document* 1973–9 is a complex installation assembled over six years, in which 135 framed images colonise the walls of a gallery space: her identically framed pictures, texts, objects and documents line the gallery walls in the coolly objective manner typical of the museum displays that Brodthaers's *Musée* parodied. And like Brodthaers, Kelly's formal restraint was used to counterpoint a more turbulent and troubling content: collecting her son's used nappies, dirty vests and scribbled drawings, Kelly overlaid each fetishised 'relic' with personal commentary and Lacanian diagrams. Like the rest of Kelly's oeuvre, *Post-Partum Document* occupies an ambiguous position within the history of installation art: its neatly framed components do not respond to the exhibition site, and are more *psychologically absorptive* (in the manner of traditional painting) than physically immersive. And yet Kelly maintains that it is precisely the temporal, cumulative unfolding of the work in an installation situation that enables it to impact upon the viewer, 'rather than viewing the work from the fixed vantage of traditional perspective'.⁵⁴

Kelly's writing repeatedly highlights a connection between single-point perspective and (patriarchal) ideology, and implies that installation art is one way to challenge and subvert this association. Rather than representing women iconically, as an image to be 'mastered', Kelly uses images of clothing or texts to show a 'dispersed body of desire', a modality of representation that also affects the viewers, since we are unable to 'master' this body in one glance. It would be an understatement to say that Kelly's installations are visually remote from the 'dream scene' works discussed in this chapter, but her observations are crucial to the history of installation art. This is because she represents a position that became increasingly important in installation art's self-legitimation – that the inclusion of the viewer in a multi-perspectival space offers a significant challenge to traditional perspective, with its rhetoric of visual mastery and centring. Instead of a hierarchical relationship to the object (which was viewed as synonymous with bourgeois possession and masculinity), the viewer of installation art finds that 'there's no position from which you can actually see everything at once'.

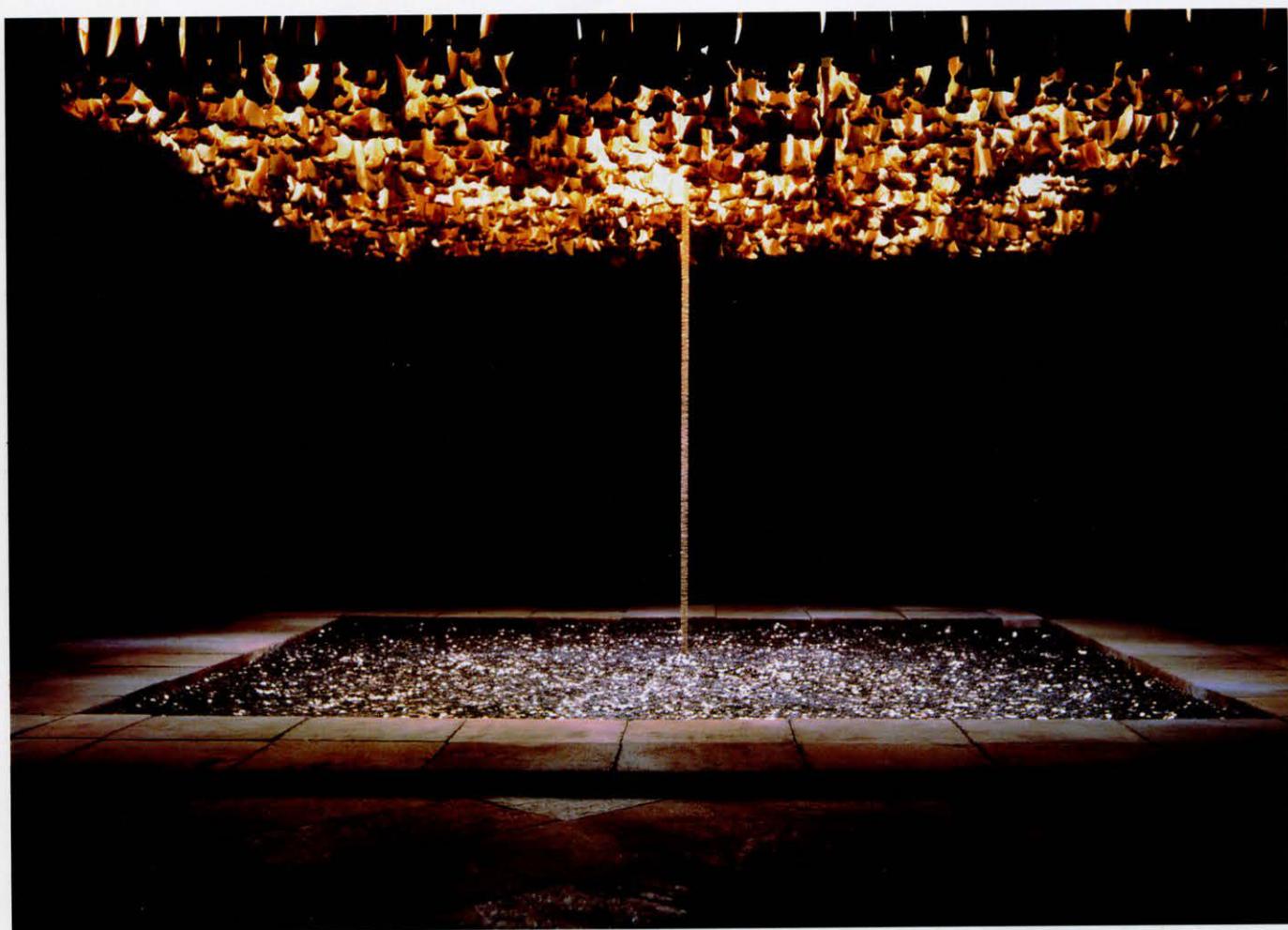
With feminist art of the early-to-mid-1970s in general, it could be argued that formal concerns were less significant than the politicised content. This is well demonstrated if we compare Mary Kelly's psychoanalytic reworking of Conceptual art to the visceral 'central core' imagery developed in West Coast performance and installation art. *Womanhouse* 1972, by Judy Chicago (b.1939) and Miriam Schapiro (b.1923), comprised a series of installations in a condemned Hollywood mansion. Together with the twenty-one students on their Feminist Art Program at Cal Arts, Schapiro and Chicago transformed the building's interior into a series of site-specific installations. Today the iconography of *Womanhouse* appears dated and heavy-handed: Chicago's *Menstruation Bathroom* contained an

overflowing bin of ‘used’ sanitary towels and tampons, while the fleshy pink *Nurturant Kitchen* by Susan Frazier, Vicki Hodgetts and Robin Weltsch was adorned with ambiguous shapes that resembled both food (fried eggs) and breasts. Although the anger and frustration permeating *Womanhouse* is specific to the 1970s, its symbolic equation of domestic space and femininity continues to reverberate through contemporary art, from the work of Louise Bourgeois and Mona Hatoum to that of Tracey Emin.

Spectacular immersion

During the 1980s, major international exhibitions such as the Venice Biennale, Documenta, Skulptur. Projekte Münster and the São Paulo Biennial, together with venues like the Dia Center (New York) and Capp Street Projects (San Francisco), came to rely increasingly on installation art as a way to create memorable, high-impact gestures within large exhibition spaces, be these signature architectural statements or derelict ex-industrial buildings. A surge of new venues dedicated to post-1960s art further consolidated the status of installation art through enlightened acquisitions policies and the creative commissioning of new work.⁵⁵ Today, installation art is a staple of biennials and triennials worldwide, capable of creating grand visual impact by addressing the whole space and generating striking photographic opportunities. For curators, installation art still carries a hint of mild subversion (the work will probably be unsaleable) and risk (since the outcome is unpredictable), though as Julie Reiss has argued, today’s installation art is far from a marginal practice but close to the centre of museum activity.⁵⁶

Much installation art of the 1980s is notable for its gigantic scale, and often involves an expansion of sculptural concerns to dominate a space, rather than a specific concern for the viewer’s immersion in a given environment. These works do not adversely affect the space in which they are shown, nor in many cases do they respond to it: one thinks of the productions of Arte Povera artists, Joseph Beuys, or Claes Oldenburg during this decade. Cildo Meireles (b.1948) and Ann Hamilton (b.1956) both produced work in the late 1980s that could be regarded as typical of the ambitious and visually seductive installation art prevalent in that decade, but they distinguish themselves by retaining a specific interest in the viewer’s sensory experience. Like the other artists mentioned above, their work is characterised by the use of unusual materials, often in vast quantities, yet Meireles and Hamilton seek to transform the character of a room entirely, generating meaning through the symbolic associations of the materials used and thereby immersing the viewer in a vivid psychological encounter. Cildo Meireles was unable to realise many of his installations during the 1970s due to the oppressive military regime that had gripped Brazil since the mid-1960s; many of his works remained in notebook form until the 1980s – a delay that is reflected in the dating of each piece. His installations manifest many of the phenomenological concerns of Brazilian art of this period, staging a heightened



Cildo Meireles
*Missão/Missões
(How to Build
Cathedrals)* 1987



perceptual experience for the viewer that may be optical (the monochromatic overload of *Red Shift* 1967–84), haptic (the balls of various weights in *Eureka/Blindhotland* 1970–5), gustatory (sweet and salty ice cubes in *Entrevendo* 1970–94) or olfactory (the smell of natural gas in *Volatile* 1980–94). The materials that Meireles uses, often in large quantities, are symbolically freighted:

I am interested in materials which are ambiguous, which can simultaneously be symbol and raw substance, achieving a status as paradigmatic objects. Materials which can carry this ambiguity range from matches to Coca-Cola bottles, from coins and banknotes to a broom, as in *La Bruja* (The Witch, 1979–81). They are in the everyday world, close to their origin, yet impregnated with meaning.⁵⁷

Missão/Missões (How to Build Cathedrals) 1987, is perhaps typical of Meireles's use of repetitive and metaphorically laden materials: 600,000 coins arranged on the floor are joined to 2,000 bones hanging from the ceiling by a white column of 800 communion wafers. The objects metonymically allude to religion, commerce and human loss, and together stage a critical commentary on the practices of the church in an oblique and poetic fashion.⁵⁸

An important aspect of Meireles's installations is the fact that they can be reconstructed; unlike many of his contemporaries, Meireles does not tie his work to a specific site, seeking instead to work against the aura of the unique work of art. This is in sharp contrast to Ann Hamilton, who does not restage her installations. This is not just because each one requires an immense amount of collective labour in order to be realised, but also because they are integrally related to the specific history of the site in their structure and choice of materials. For the installation *indigo blue* 1991, for example, she placed 14,000 pounds of recycled work clothing in a former garage in Charleston. Like Meireles, Hamilton harnesses perceptions other than the visual to immerse the viewer, often demoting the optical in order to foreground more intuitive senses like smell, sound and touch: in *between taxonomy and communion* 1991, the floor was laid with sheep fleeces covered by panes of glass that cracked under the weight of the viewer's body. In *tropos* 1993, the Dia Center in New York was carpeted with the tails of slaughtered horses, forming an excessive turf of slippery, tangled, pungent hair.

Hamilton's use of sensory perception differs from that of Meireles in that she aims to reawaken our sensory relationship to the organic physical world through memory and unconscious association. Sensory perception is always placed in the service of emotional triggers to prompt what Hamilton calls a 'state of suspended reverie'.⁵⁹ The inability of language to describe and contain somatic experience is one of her enduring interests, and the erasure of language has become a recurrent motif in her work.⁶⁰ As such, her materials do not operate symbolically (as metonymic references to nature, science, the animal kingdom, and so on), but seek to prompt in the viewer an individual chain of associational



responses. As part of *privations and excesses* 1989, a performer continually dipped his hands into a felt hat filled with honey. While Beuys used both felt and honey as objects of deep personal resonance (he saw the honeycomb as a symbol of warmth and survival and regarded felt as a substance with life-saving properties), Hamilton's emphasis is on the very stickiness of sweet honey adhering to the skin, and the associations of its pungent scent. By presenting these materials in specific quantities, Hamilton seeks to produce an immersive and unconfined state of mind in the viewer, one in which the heightened self-awareness of phenomenological perception is overtaken by personal associations.

Studio/installation/house

All of the work mentioned above involves an emphasis on 'real' materials rather than their depiction or illustration. The associational value of found materials – which had been used in the 1960s and 1970s to connote 'everyday life' (Kaprow), 'low culture' (Oldenburg), or 'nature' (Thek) – were by the 1980s harnessed for their sensuous immediacy, but as a way in which to subvert our ingrained responses to the dominant repertoire of cultural meanings. This strategy remains the prevailing mode of articulating ideas in contemporary installation art, but its origins go back to the 1920s and 1930s – not just to Surrealist exhibition installation, but to the *Merzbau*, an environmental work developed by Kurt Schwitters (1887–1948) in his home in Hannover. Extending from the studio to embrace adjacent rooms, the found materials in the *Merzbau* included newspapers, driftwood, old furniture, broken wheels, tyres, dead flowers, mirrors and wire netting. As Hans Richter recalled, Schwitters also included metonymic tokens of his friends:

there was the Mondrian grotto, the Arp, Gabo, Doesburg, Lissitzky, Malevich, Mies van der Rohe and Richter grottoes. A grotto contained very intimate details of each friendship between them. For example, he had cut a lock of my hair for my grotto. A big pencil from the drawing table of Mies van der Rohe was in the area reserved for him. In others, you would find a shoelace, a cigarette butt, a nail clipping, the end of a tie (Doesburg's), a broken pen.⁶¹

These objects were combined into assemblages, *ex voto* shrines and walk-in 'grottoes', while the whole sprawling work was permeated by the stench of boiling glue, found rubbish and pet guinea pigs.⁶²

The *Merzbau* is now regularly cited as a precursor of installation art, and has an extensive surrounding literature that does not need to be revisited here. It will suffice simply to mention two accounts of viewing the work, which focus on the somewhat testing ordeal of Schwitters's guided tours around it and reveal the symbolic status of the materials he assemblaged. Nina Kandinsky recalled that 'he always had an anecdote, a story or a personal experience to hand, to illustrate the tiniest incidental [object] that he was preserving in the niches of the column'.⁶³ Vordemberge-Gildewart recalled that a 'guided visit around this giant work,



commented on and illuminated by Schwitters himself, lasted more than four hours. It wasn't an easy experience.⁶⁴ Schwitters used the word 'Merz' to denote a technique of assemblage – 'the combination of all conceivable materials for artistic purposes, and technically the principle of equal evaluation of the individual materials' – but despite this technical equality, it is clear that in practice the artist was drawn to objects of a specific, highly personal provenance.⁶⁵

This reading of the *Merzbau* as a palimpsest of metonymic objects will have many resonances for people familiar with recent installation art. The use of old clothing, draped across walls or strewn over the floor, in the work of French artist Christian Boltanski (b.1944) is an obvious example (such as *Réserve 1990–*), as is the use of old shoes in installations by innumerable artists. However, it is Schwitters's conversion of his studio to an installation that has become a more poignant point of reference for recent work. In 1971, Daniel Buren argued that artists should abandon their studios and operate site-specifically, so that the production of a work of art was not divorced from its place of reception.⁶⁶ Buren's agenda was explicitly political: he objected to art's commodity status within the market system. But his alternative – the belief that there is only one correct way to see art (that is, in the place where it was made) – nevertheless still subscribes to a doctrine of authenticity that the market reinforces (for example, in its valuation of the artist's signature). Although many artists today work with installation, and often site-specifically, Buren's anticipated liberation of art from the market has failed to come about. Works of installation are certainly harder to sell than paintings or sculptures, but they are nevertheless bought, sold and collected by both institutions and private individuals worldwide. One contemporary artist whose work reflects the complexity of this situation today is the German artist Gregor Schneider (b. 1969). As with Schwitters, his home is the site of an ongoing work of art, but the rooms are replicable elsewhere, in galleries, museums and private collections.

Das Totes Haus Uri Schneider's home in Rheydt, which originally belonged to his family but that has been subject to an ongoing internal revision by the artist since 1984. Purged of natural light and colour – almost every surface is bleached a dusty sterile white and reeks of stale disuse – the rooms of the house are obsessively lined and re-lined. One room has up to eight windows placed in front of each other; some are artificially lit to give the impression of opening on to the exterior; the final room has a window that opens onto a solid white wall ('That makes most people scared,' says Schneider, 'and they want to get out').⁶⁷ *The Kaffeezimmer* rotates imperceptibly on an axis, so that people are unnerved to find that the door through which they exit the room does not lead back to the place where they entered. Schneider receives visitors, but the guest room is *total isoliertes* – spartan, soundproofed and windowless.

When invited to exhibit elsewhere, Schneider rebuilds the rooms of his house in the museum or gallery; he refers to these as its dead limbs and this has led to the



Gregor Schneider
Das Totes Haus Ur
(views of the stairway
and *The Totally Isolated
Guestroom*)
12 Unterheydener
Strasse, Rheydt, 1984-

naming of the work as *The Dead House Ur*. These replica rooms are reconstructed from memory and are not always identical to the 'originals' in Rheydt – which are themselves subject to ongoing revision. For the German pavilion at the 2001 Venice Biennale, Schneider reconstructed the entire *Dead House* as a labyrinthine structure spanning four floors. Visitors had to sign a declaration of personal liability before entering, an act that charged the viewing experience with the chilling possibility that one could indeed become trapped inside its claustrophobic interior.

In Rheydt, Schneider has made one small room that is completely insulated:

If you had gone into the room the door would have swung shut. There was no way of opening it either from inside or from outside. I was interested in notions of immediacy. In that room you would no longer have been sensually perceptible. You would have been gone.

Schneider's understanding of the word 'immediacy' here does not strike us as something that can be compared to Kaprow's search for life-affirming experience. Nor is it a phenomenological, heightened perception of space. Like the Surrealist model of the 'encounter' that overshadows this chapter, it is a highly charged psychological experience inflected by unconscious affect. The *Dead House Ur* is an uneasy, uncanny space, not just because it demands our willing submission to its interiority, but because this is itself doubled – both within the house (its interred rooms, rubbish-logged crawl spaces, trapdoors and blind windows) and elsewhere (in its exhibited 'limbs').

An imaginative virus

In contrast to Schneider, the British artist Mike Nelson (b.1967) has neither a studio nor collectors. Within the context of this chapter his work represents a return to some of the values that were originally associated with installation art when it came of age in the 1960s: its engagement with a specific site, its use of 'poor' or found materials, and its critical stance towards both museum institutions and the commercialisation of 'experience' in general. It is also one of the most influential examples of this type of installation being produced today. Nelson cites Kienholz and Thek as formative influences, but his work is more regularly compared to that of Kabakov because it presents for the viewer a series of corridors and rooms to explore, each of which appears to belong to a recently departed individual or group of individuals. Like Kabakov, Nelson adopts a narrative approach to installation, creating scenarios that are 'scripted' in advance from a complicated web of references to film, literature, history and current affairs; his scope is therefore more ambitious, both intellectually and narratively, than Kabakov's world of imaginary characters perpetually locked within Soviet Russia of the 1960s and 1970s. *The Deliverance and the Patience* made for the Venice Biennale in 2001 takes its title from the names of two eighteenth-century galleon

ships built by a community of shipwrecked castaways on Bermuda to take them to Virginia. The installation's sixteen rooms refer to utopian communities, colonisation and the origins of capitalism; this theme is reinforced by allusions to William Burroughs's novel *Cities of the Red Night* (1981), Hakim Bey's *T.A.Z. : the temporary autonomous zone, ontological anarchy, poetic terrorism* (1991), and *The Many Headed Hydra* (2000), a history of eighteenth-century trading by Marcus Rediker and Peter Linebaugh, all of which Nelson relates to Venice's past (as the nexus of East-West trade routes) and its tourist industry present.

Nelson's first major work of this kind, *The Coral Reef* 2000, at Matt's Gallery in London, is a complex installation that is worth describing in some detail. Passing through a shabby gallery entrance, the viewer first encountered an Islamic mini-cab office, then went on to access a network of corridors, doors and rooms. These included a biker's garage, a spartan chamber bearing a notice of evangelical meetings, a virulent blue room containing heroin paraphernalia, a security surveillance office with pornographic magazines, a bar strewn with equipment for a bank raid, and a small room containing a sleeping bag and some extinguished candles. The spaces were not labelled, and therefore required a degree of detective work in order to fathom who and what was being referenced. The individual rooms had an extraordinary psychological potency, but so did the experience of linking them all together. Each room seemed to allude to a different subculture or social group, and more specifically to the particular belief system for which it stood. This repertoire of belief systems seems to allude to the alternatives that form a substrata (a coral reef) beneath the 'ocean surface' of global capitalism in the West.

Moreover, Nelson's underlying theme – 'the impossibility of believing in anything but wanting to believe in something ... wanting another system of government or humanity' – was repeated in the structure of the work as a whole.⁶⁸ As one moved through the rooms, piecing together their clues – a painting of white horses, a mobile phone, or a newspaper cutting – the sense of 'searching' for what each room symbolises (and for what connects the rooms) replicated the ideological 'search' that each room represented. At the furthest 'end' of the installation, the first room (the mini-cab office) was doubled: many visitors assumed themselves to be back at the beginning, and thus experienced the most unnerving confusion when they next encountered a series of rooms that bore no relation to the ones they recalled walking through only minutes previously.⁶⁹ The doubled room also acted as a destabilising *déjà-vu*, casting into doubt what one had seen in the rest of the installation.

The Coral Reef therefore integrated our physical presence within its thematic narrative, carefully structuring a viewing experience that reinforced and enriched the concerns of the work. The swastika-shaped layout drew the viewer in and around the space, maximising confusion; as Nelson observed, 'disorientation was so much part of *The Coral Reef* – you were supposed to be lost in a lost world of lost people'.⁷⁰ In other installations – such as *The Cosmic Legend of the Uroboros Serpent*



Mike Nelson
The Coral Reef
Matt's Gallery, London,
Jan–March 2000

2001, or *Nothing is True, Everything is Permitted* 2001 – the experience of fictional space constructed by Nelson has been so compelling that viewers questioned whether or not they had even entered a work of art.⁷¹ The complex layering of references, many of which are impossible to fathom without assistance, can give the impression ‘that somebody knows the purpose of the space, what’s happening behind the scenes and you don’t’; as the artist observes, this powerlessness offsets the psychological absorption with feelings of exclusion and otherness, ‘whether that be cultural otherness, intellectual otherness or political otherness’.⁷²

These uncertain beginnings, middles and endings are integral to the psychological impact of Nelson’s installations, and one that he hopes stays with the viewer long after they have left the work; as the critic Jonathan Jones noted, entering *The Coral Reef* was akin to signing a contract in which one agreed ‘to have an implant in your head ... an acceptance of an imaginative virus that you would not be able to purge from your memory’.⁷³ Nelson maintains that one of the reasons for the complicated distribution of rooms in his work, and its meticulous replication of reality, is precisely to expose the viewer to a different mode of receptivity, one in which you could ‘fall into a more relaxed state, where things can affect you on a subliminal level’ – infecting your mind to the point where elements of the work might return, like a dream, ‘at times and places that are quite unpredictable’.⁷⁴

Nelson’s work is thus paradigmatic of the ‘dream scene’ type of installation art that has been put forward in this chapter. Such work is characterised both by psychological absorption and by physical immersion – the viewer does not identify with a character depicted in a scene but is placed in the position of protagonist. As a consequence, this form of installation art is often regarded as being related in some way to the absorptive character of painting, reading and cinema. These analogies are all valid, since there is a strong narrative element to many of the installations discussed here. Yet because the installation seeks to trigger fantasies, individual memories or cultural associations in the viewer’s mind, the symbolically charged ‘dream scene’ provides the richest and most poignant model of comparison for our experience of these works. The use of found materials, whose worn patina bears the indexical trace of previous ownership, is prevalent in this type and acts as a further trigger for reflection and free association. The highly subjective criticism that circles around these often uneasy spaces, and the artists’ insistence on our first-hand experience of them, reinforces this emphasis on a psychologicistic mode of interpretation. Perhaps most importantly, the key idea that emerges in writing on this work is that traditional single-point perspective is overturned by installation art’s provision of plural and fragmented vistas: as a result, our hierarchical and centred relation to the work of art (and to ourselves) is undermined and destabilised.

HEIGHTENED PERCEPTION

2

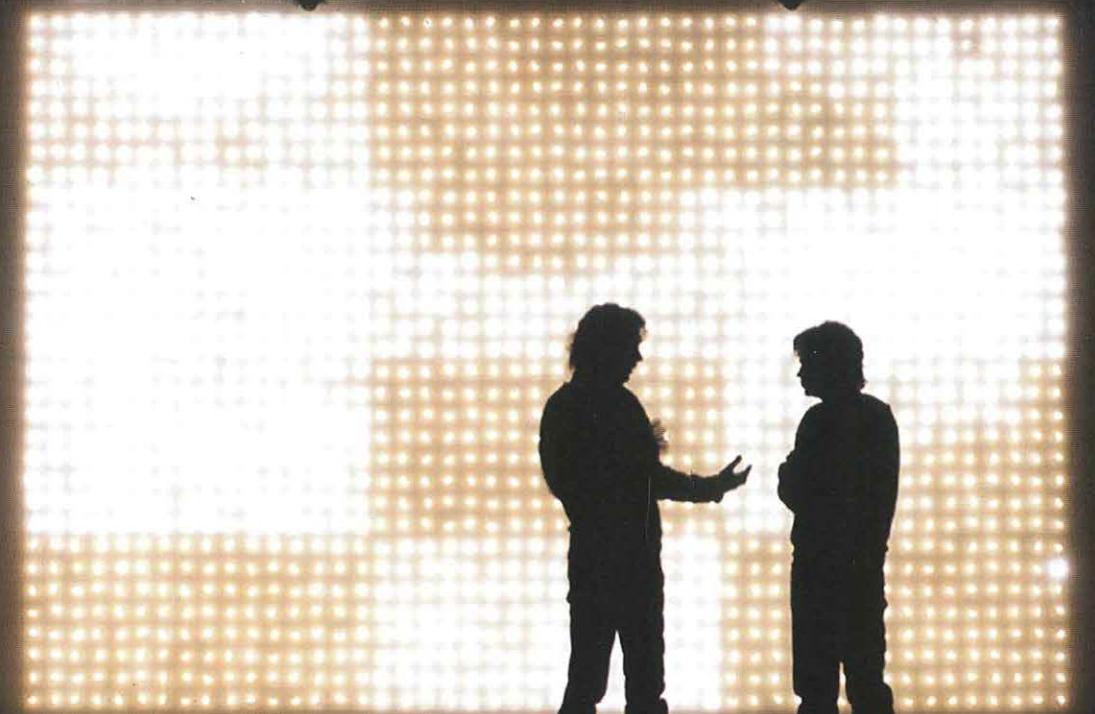
'Space is not there for the eye only: it is not a picture; one wants to live in it ... We reject space as a painted coffin for our living bodies.' El Lissitzky'

Carsten Höller's *Lichtwand* (Light Wall) 2000 comprises an intensely bright barrage of flashing lights whose harsh impact on the retina is almost intolerable for more than a few minutes. Several thousand lightbulbs flash incessantly at 7.8 hz – a frequency that is synchronous to that of brain activity and thereby capable of inducing visual hallucinations in the viewer. Entering this environment is unbearable for some people. The bulbs generate an oppressive heat, while the relentless lighting assaults not only the eye but also the ear, generating a sound pulse to equal the visual overstimulus that bears down upon us. It is a work designed to dislocate and disorient, but which also requires the presence of the viewer in order to generate its effect: Höller (b.1961) describes *Lichtwand* and related pieces as 'machines or devices intended to synchronise with the visitors in order to produce something together with them. They are not objects that can be given a "meaning" of their own.' The work is therefore incomplete without our direct participation.

Höller began to produce this type of work in the mid-1990s, harnessing the viewer's physical and mental engagement via machines and installations that provoke alterations of consciousness and cast the stability of our everyday perception into doubt. *Pealove Room* 1993 is a small space in which to make love under the influence of phenylethylamine (PEA) without touching the ground: it comprises two sex harnesses, a mattress, a phial and syringe containing PEA, the chemical produced by the body when in love. *Flying Machine* 1996 invites the viewer to be strapped into a harness and fly in circles above a room, able to control the speed but not the direction of his or her journey. Like Höller's *Slides*, adult-sized versions of the children's playground ride relocated inside a gallery, the *Flying Machine* induces a sense of bodily euphoria – what the artist calls 'a mixture of bliss and senselessness' that releases us from the gravitational certainty of daily life.

Höller has described himself as an 'orthopaedist who makes artificial limbs for parts of your body that you don't even know you've lost'. This comment highlights the feelings of bodily revelation and dislocation that can occur when interacting with his work. Perception is understood to be something mutable and slippery: not the function of a detached gaze upon the world from a centred consciousness, but integral to the entire body and nervous system, a function that can be wrong-footed at a moment's notice. Höller's art permits glimpses of the world from radically different perspectives – under the influence of drugs or a disorienting environment – and in this way aims to induce doubt about the very structure of what we take to be reality. Although at times the viewer may feel like a laboratory rat in this work, Höller aims less to prescribe a particular outcome or gather data (as in a scientific experiment) than to provide a playful arena for unique perceptual discoveries.

Carsten Höller
Lichtwand 2000
Collection: Museum für
Moderne Kunst,
Frankfurt

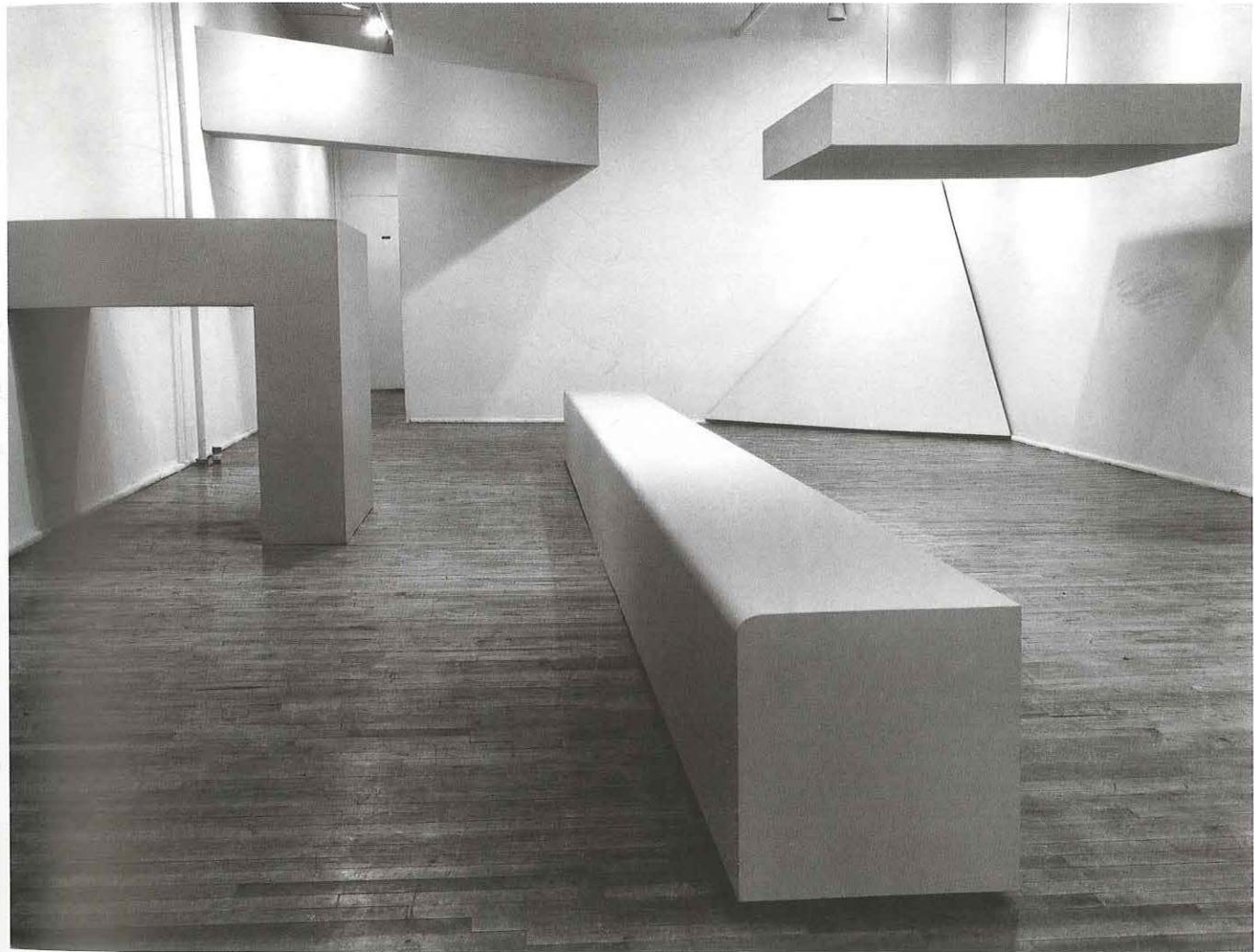


Merleau-Ponty and Minimalism

The 1960s was the decade when this type of work first began to emerge. It is indebted to Minimalist sculpture, and to its theoretical reception by artists and critics in New York at this time, for whom the writings of French philosopher Maurice Merleau-Ponty (1908–61) were of decisive influence. In *The Phenomenology of Perception* (1945), Merleau-Ponty addressed what he saw as a fundamental division in Western philosophy's understanding of the human subject. He argued that subject and object are not separate entities but are reciprocally intertwined and interdependent. One of the key claims of Merleau-Ponty's phenomenology is that 'the thing is inseparable from a person perceiving it, and can never be actually in itself because it stands at the other end of our gaze or at the terminus of a sensory exploration which invests it with humanity'.³ The perceiving subject and the perceived object are therefore considered as 'two systems ... applied upon one another, as the two halves of an orange'.⁴ The second key claim of Merleau-Ponty is that perception is not simply a question of vision, but involves the whole body. The inter-relationship between myself and the world is a matter of embodied perception, because what I perceive is necessarily dependent on my being at any one moment physically present in a matrix of circumstances that determine how and what it is that I perceive: 'I do not see [space] according to its exterior envelope; I live it from the inside; I am immersed in it. After all, the world is all around me, not in front of me'.⁵

Although Merleau-Ponty wrote about art on several occasions, his focus was on painting as evidence of how the body is inscribed in its surroundings. His essays 'Cézanne's Doubt' (1945) and 'Eye and Mind' (1960) both turn to painting as a manifestation of the way in which we relate to the world in general. By contrast, if the artists discussed in this chapter use Merleau-Ponty's ideas, it is to illuminate our experience of a particular type of art: installation. For these artists, painting mediates the world, and does not allow the viewer to experience perception *first hand*. This chapter therefore deals with works that drastically change the way in which Merleau-Ponty himself exemplified his ideas with regard to artistic production. It is telling that this shift occurs in the early 1960s, when painting appeared to reach exhaustion. *The Phenomenology of Perception* was translated into English in 1962, and *The Primacy of Perception* in 1964; both were seized upon by artists and critics as a way in which to theorise the new aesthetic experience offered to the viewer by Minimalist sculpture. To begin this second genealogy of installation art, then, it is necessary to turn to Minimalism and its status as a crux between the tradition of sculpture and installation art.

Robert Morris's plywood polyhedrons, Donald Judd's Plexiglass boxes and Carl Andre's bricks are among the works that immediately come to mind when we think of Minimalist sculpture. The inert uneventfulness of these pieces, in which composition and internal relationships are stripped down to the simplest geometrical structure, often leads people to proclaim that Minimalism is



Robert Morris
Installation view of
exhibition at Green
Gallery, New York,
Dec 1964–Jan 1965



Robert Morris
Untitled (L-Beams) 1965
Collection: Whitney
Museum of American
Art, New York

inhuman, anti-expressive and therefore boring art. From photographs, one could be forgiven for agreeing, but in the flesh our encounter with the work is quite different. As we walk around a Minimalist sculpture, two phenomena are prompted. Firstly, the work heightens our awareness of the relationship between itself and the space in which it is shown – the proportions of the gallery, its height, width, colour and light; secondly, the work throws our attention back onto our process of perceiving it – the size and weight of our body as it circumnavigates the sculpture. These effects arise as a direct result of the work's *literalism* – that is, its literal (non-symbolic and non-expressive) use of materials – and its preference for reduced and simple forms, both of which prevent psychological absorption and redirect our attention to external considerations.

In his essay 'Notes on Sculpture 2' (1966), Robert Morris argues that one more factor determines the quality of our relationship to Minimalist objects: their size. Large works dwarf us, creating a public mode of interaction, while small works encourage privacy and intimacy. It is significant that most Minimalist sculptures, such as Tony Smith's 6ft cube *Die* 1964, fall between these two extremes and are human in scale. The critic Michael Fried, in his well-known indictment of Minimalist sculpture 'Art and Objecthood' (1967), argued that it was precisely this scale that gave such works 'a kind of *stage presence*', not unlike 'the silent presence of another person'. As such, Minimalist objects are inescapably 'in a situation – one that, virtually by definition, includes the beholder'.⁶

Theatricality

Minimalism's call to the beholder threatened two of the paradigms that Fried, like many critics at that time, held dear: firstly, the autonomy of the art object (in other words, its self-sufficiency and independence from context) and secondly, the purity of each artistic medium. Fried argued that because Minimalist art shared its space and time with that of viewers (rather than transporting them to another 'world'), it was more akin to *theatre* than to sculpture. His argument hinges on the idea of temporality: rather than existing in a transcendent time and place (signalled by a plinth or frame), Minimalist sculpture responds to its environment. The experience of viewing it is therefore marked by 'duration' (like theatre), because it directly solicits the viewer's presence, unlike the transcendent 'instantaneousness' that Fried felt to be proper to the condition of beholding visual art. He used the term 'theatricality' to denote such unwanted cross-pollination between artistic disciplines.⁷

Minimalism was immensely controversial at the time of its appearance, and debate around it continued to rage throughout the 1960s. Merleau-Ponty was often invoked by Minimalism's supporters to explain the work's effect: Judd's sculptures, wrote Rosalind Krauss in 1966, were 'obviously meant as objects of perception, objects that are to be grasped in the experience of looking at them'.⁸ Later, in *Passages in Modern Sculpture* (1977) she argued that Robert Morris's

Untitled (L-Beams) 1965 demonstrated how perceptual experience precedes cognition: these three identical forms could each appear quite different, depending on the position of the work and of the viewer. Her argument is explicitly indebted to Merleau-Ponty: each L-beam takes on a different character according to the angle from which it is seen and a host of contingent factors such as the level of sunlight, the depth of shadows, and the varying intensities of colour even within the most neutral shade of grey. As Krauss explains:

no matter how clearly we might *understand* that the three Ls are identical (in structure and dimension), it is impossible to see them as the same ... the ‘fact’ of the objects’ similarity belongs to a logic that exists *prior* to experience; because the moment of experience, or *in* experience, the Ls defeat the logic and are ‘different’.⁹

By alluding to Merleau-Ponty, Krauss demonstrated that she understood Minimalism to have radical implications for the way in which art had hitherto been understood. By relocating the origin of an artwork’s meaning away from the interior (the colour and composition as a metaphor for the artist’s psyche – as in Abstract Expressionist painting), Minimalism proposed that art was no longer modelled ‘on the privacy of psychological space’; instead, Krauss argued, it was structured ‘on the public, conventional nature of what might be called cultural space’. By stressing the interdependence of work of art and viewer, Krauss showed that Minimalist work pointed towards a new model of the subject as ‘decentred’.

As argued in the previous chapter, installation art’s claim to destabilise the viewer is a recurrent theme from the 1970s onwards, and the idea also underpins Krauss’s appreciation of Minimalism’s importance. Intriguingly, it was not a Minimalist sculpture but Michael Heizer’s epic earthwork *Double Negative* 1969 that she considered best exemplified this decentring tendency. Visitors to *Double Negative* – 240,000 tons of earth displaced from either side of a desert mesa in Nevada – could only ever have a partial view of this work because it existed in two halves, separated by a ravine. Krauss saw *Double Negative*’s elimination of a single viewing position as ‘a metaphor for the self as it is known through its appearance to the other’. Her argument reflects the way in which Merleau-Ponty’s ideas about the interdependency of subject and object came increasingly to acquire an ethical and political tenor in the years following 1968: the multi-perspectivalism implicit in installation art comes to be equated with an emancipatory liberal politics and an opposition to the ‘psychological rigidity of seeing things from one fixed point of view’.¹⁰

The Minimalist environment

Significantly, the artists associated with Minimalism did not consider their work to be installation art – or, as it would have been called at the time, an ‘environment’. They acknowledged that the placement of the work in a gallery was important, but protested against the use of this term: ‘That the space of the

room becomes of such importance does not mean that an environmental situation is being established,' wrote Morris. He immediately followed this statement, however, with the apparently contradictory view that 'the total space is hopefully altered in certain desired ways by the presence of the object'.¹¹ Morris was not alone in expressing such reservations. Judd felt that the word 'environment' should denote one unified work, and concluded his review of Morris's 1965 Green Gallery show in characteristically prosaic fashion: the fact that the exhibition comprised several sculptures did not mean that it was an environment, because 'there are seven separate pieces. If Morris made an environment it would certainly be one thing.'¹² It would seem that for these artists, the word 'environment' evoked the assemblage-based works of Oldenburg and Kaprow, and the tableaux of Kienholz and Segal – art characterised by a symbolic and psychologistic *mise-en-scène*. Such pieces adopted precisely those aspects of the Abstract Expressionist legacy that Minimalism sought to eliminate: the narrative, the emotive, the organic. Indeed, anything remotely connected to the psychodramatic tendencies of the Happenings stood for the precise opposite of the Minimalists' literal 'what you see is what you see' aesthetic.¹³

Even so, critics were on the whole adamant that Minimalist exhibition installations forged a heightened awareness of space that was undeniably environmental. Reviewing Frank Stella's 1964 Castelli show alongside Judd's Green Gallery exhibition of the same year, Lucy Lippard noted how both bodies of work had affected their surroundings to such an extent that they had to be called environments:

There is a growing tendency, even in straight painting exhibitions, to surround the spectator, whose increased physical participation, or immediate sensorial reactions to the work of art, often operate at the expense of the more profound emotional involvements demanded by the New York school painting in the 50s ... Don Judd was probably not planning an environment, yet his exhibition casts a definite collective spell which to some extent overshadows the individual pieces.¹⁴

As Lippard rightly notes, contemporary painting was also beginning to establish relationships with its place of exhibition: the bold, unmodulated colours of Frank Stella's hexagonal canvases at Castelli inevitably led the viewer to register the negative spaces between the paintings. The previously neutral background wall was activated, and the gallery walls gave the impression of a coherent, quasi-muralistic, whole. The syntax of these works became as important as the individual paintings, whose domain now seeped out to embrace the whole room.

To reflect this, 'installation shots' documenting an exhibition began to be reproduced in magazines, implying that the sum of the works *in situ* was more important than any single image of one object in the show. Such photographs recorded the negative space between individual works and the interplay amongst them, together with a host of contingent factors like the proportions of the room

and the quality of light. The aesthetics of an exhibition's 'installation' and 'hang' were increasingly commented upon by critics, directly testifying to the way in which the new work shifted the viewer's attention away from the objects (be these paintings or sculptures) and onto their overall relationship to each other and to the space. In this respect, Robert Morris's 1964 exhibition at the Green Gallery, New York, is paradigmatic: the simple, block-like sculptures articulate and activate the room, creating an impression of a unified whole. As a result the word 'installation', with its neutral overtones of the exhibition hang, increasingly gained currency as the 1960s progressed.

Yet, however panoramic, installation shots could not convey the viewer's experience of heightened bodily awareness when moving around the works. Morris was among the first to emphasise the importance of the viewer in understanding what was radically new about Minimalism:

The better new work takes relationships out of the work and makes them *a function of space, light, and the viewer's field of vision*. *The object is but one of the terms in the newer aesthetic*. It is in some way more reflexive, because one's awareness of oneself existing in the same space as the work is stronger than in previous work, with its many internal relationships. One is more aware than before that *he himself is establishing relationships as he apprehends the object from various positions* and under varying conditions of light and spatial context.¹⁵

The viewer was now considered to be as essential to the work as the room in which it was installed, and the next generation of artists, on the West coast of the US, took up this challenge directly.

Light and Space

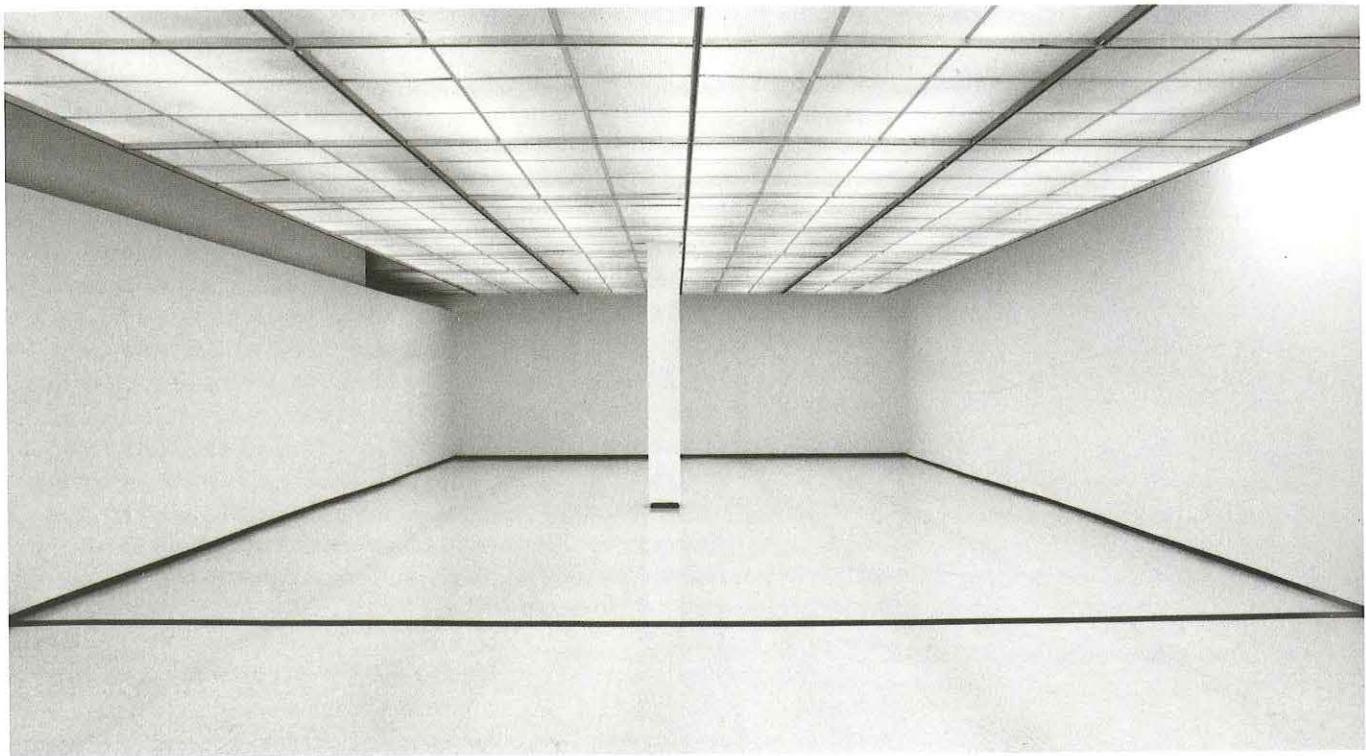
The West coast response to Minimalism focused less on the critical debates around objecthood than on the ephemeral character of the viewer's sensory experience. In many cases, this experience was staged within finely tuned spaces voided of all material objects – as seen in the work of Robert Irwin, James Turrell, Doug Wheeler, Bruce Nauman, Maria Nordman, Larry Bell and Michael Asher. The phrase 'light and space' was coined to characterise the predilection of these artists for empty interiors in which the viewer's perception of contingent sensory phenomena (sunlight, sound, temperature) became the content of the work. In photographic documentation, many of these works look disarmingly similar. From Bruce Nauman's *Acoustic Wall* 1971, to the MOMA installations by Michael Asher (*Untitled* 1969) and Robert Irwin (*Fractured Light – Partial Scrim – Ceiling – Eye – Level Wire* 1970–1), there is a tendency for each installation to resemble little more than a bleak, white, eventless space. To a degree this photographic similarity is unproblematic, since such installations intended to resist mediation and instead be experienced directly. Nevertheless, closer investigation of these works, and of the divergent criticism they attract, allows us to identify important differences between them.

The installations of Robert Irwin (b.1928) are paradigmatic of this dematerialised response to phenomenological perception. They are governed by the idea of response to a site: what he calls site-*determined*, as opposed to site-dominant (work made in the studio without considering its destination), site-adjusted (work commissioned for a particular situation but relocatable) or site-specific (work that responds directly to a specific venue and which cannot be relocated).¹⁶ Irwin's faith in the primacy of perceptual experience is evidenced whenever he discusses his installations made with 'scrim' of muslin that filter and reflect the light. He recalled standing in his 1970 project at New York MoMA, *Fractured Light – Partial Scrim – Ceiling – Eye – Level Wire*, when a fifteen-year-old boy entered the work, said 'wow' and 'spun around, sort of walked around in a revolving circle, turning as he went, just sort of really reaching and responding to it'.¹⁷ Such a spontaneous response was, for Irwin, evidence of the primacy of embodied perception over intellection. As such, he considered his work to be democratically available to everyone. Describing *Black Line Volume* 1975, a single line of black tape installed on the gallery floor of the Museum of Contemporary Art, Chicago, Irwin noted that four people who worked at the gallery asked whether he had built the structural pillar in the centre of this space. He regarded this as a great triumph since it indicated to what extent 'they were seeing this room for the first time'.¹⁸

For Irwin, such experiences demonstrated that interpretative criticism – like photographic documentation – was of limited value in relation to his work. Indeed, all mediation or explanation was doomed to failure: 'The idea of midwifing experience is absurd for this reason: the relationship between art and viewer is all first hand *now* experience, and there is no way that it can be carried to you through any kind of secondary system.'¹⁹ To an extent this is true, at least as borne out in the writing on Irwin's practice, in which critics find little to observe beyond the fact that the work makes you 'perceive yourself perceiving'.

Irwin regards installation art as a way to 'free' the viewer's perceptual experience and allow the act of seeing itself to be felt. As might be anticipated, his writings make extensive reference to Merleau-Ponty, whose texts he studied throughout the 1970s. He considered the viewer's heightened consciousness and inclusion in the work to represent an ethical position ('by your individual participation in these situations, you may ... structure for yourself a "new state of real", but it is you that does it, not me, and the individual responsibility to reason your own world view is the root implication').²⁰ However, this 'responsibility' was far from the targeted political 'consciousness raising' of his contemporaries. Indeed, Irwin's ultimate aim seems to have been simply to open the visitor's eyes to the aesthetic potential of the everyday world as it already existed: 'if you asked me the sum total – what is your ambition? ... Basically it's just to make you a little more aware than you were the day before of how beautiful the world is ... The whole game is about attending and reasoning.'²¹ For Irwin, perceptual

Part II



Robert Irwin
Black Line Volume
Museum of
Contemporary Art,
Chicago, 1975

experience is unquestionable and absolute. The authenticity of our perception is what matters, and it is never considered that this experience might be socially and culturally predetermined. As such, his aestheticising approach could not be further removed from the rigorous interrogation of perception that was being undertaken at this time by several of his contemporaries, including Michael Asher (b.1943).

Asher's approach to installation art since the late 1960s has been allied to a critique of the political and economic role of exhibition venues. He is probably best known for his installation at the Art Institute of Chicago in 1979, in which he removed a late eighteenth-century statue of George Washington by Jean-Antoine Houdon from the exterior of the building and replaced it in one of the museum's galleries of eighteenth-century art. Resituating the monument amongst other art of its period had the effect of immediately diminishing the political and historical rhetoric with which it was imbued when adorning the exterior of the Institute; Asher's gesture implied that art history could act as a neutralising cover for politics and ideology. The relocation of the statue demonstrated how objects are dependent on their context for meaning. Like Morris's three L-beams, Houdon's George Washington was perceived as different depending on where one stood in relation to it – but there was an important difference: in Asher's intervention the shift showed not merely the contingency of our perception, but also how objects acquire different meanings according to their context and the different discourses inhabiting them. Yet Asher's installations from the ten years preceding this work are – in the photo-documentation at least – almost indistinguishable from Irwin's: both artists present empty, white, uninhabited, apparently neutral architectural spaces.

In critical writing on Asher's earliest installations, perceptual phenomenology is down-played in favour of a more political enquiry into the work of art's ideological preconditions. But in his first appearance in a major exhibition, the Whitney Museum's *Anti-Illusion: Procedures/Materials* 1969, Asher produced work no more explicitly critical of the museum institution than most other dematerialised art of this time. His contribution to this exhibition – a 'sculpture' taking the form of a column of pressurised air – used one of the museum's existing passageways, eight feet in width, through which a planar body of air was siphoned. With low noise levels, minimum airstream velocity and a marginal location away from the main galleries, the work was imperceptible to the eye. Asher later rationalised the piece in terms of integrating peripheral phenomena into the institutional mainstream: 'In this work I was dealing with air as an elementary material of unlimited presence and availability, as opposed to visually determined elements. I intervened therefore to structure this material, given in the exhibition container itself, and to reintegrate it into the exhibition area.'²² This uneasy use of phenomenological means for conceptual ends hints at some of the problems to be encountered by 1970s artists dealing with the legacy of Minimalism.

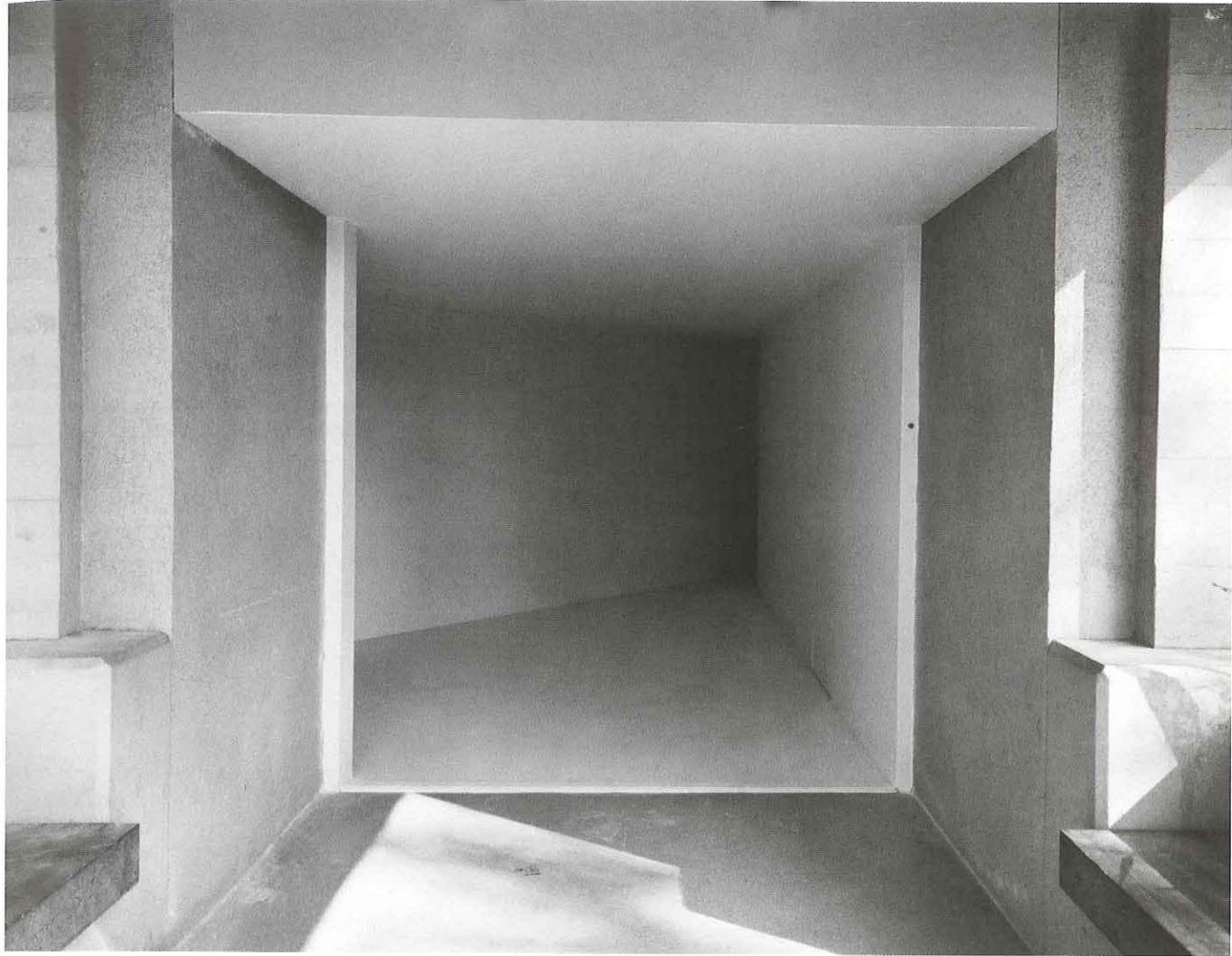
A similar confrontation between sensory immediacy and institutional critique is seen in Asher's 1970 installation at Pomona College, California. The photo-documentation of this work is once more deceptively similar to Irwin's installations in consisting of little but a series of empty, white, well-proportioned architectonic spaces. Asher removed the front door to make the entrance area a perfect cube, open day and night. He then split the gallery into two triangular spaces, linked by a short corridor, and lowered the ceiling to provide a uniform height throughout. The installation therefore comprised a series of clean and immaculately sealed spaces, while the drywall panels and sandbags of their construction could be seen from the gallery offices, entered by the public from a courtyard behind the gallery during working hours. Like Minimalist sculpture, Asher's installation focused attention on the viewer, and on how we receive and perceive any given space. Unlike Minimalism, it also showed how the white gallery space was not a timeless constant but subject to contingent flux: the installation was accessible day and night, so that 'exterior light, sound, and air became a permanent part of the exhibition'.²³ In Asher's description of the work, he becomes more critical as he proceeds: because the work was open to a multiplicity of viewing conditions, it was seen to undermine both the 'false neutrality of the [art] object' and its dependency on 'the false neutrality of the [architectural] container'.²⁴

Later, Asher was at pains to distance these installations from 'phenomenologically determined works which attempted to fabricate a highly controlled area of visual perception', yet this was precisely how Asher's work was received when first exhibited.²⁵ Like the work of Irwin, Nordman, Bell and others, Asher's installations offered situations for the viewer to meditate on the contingent and contextual nature of their sensory perception in relation to their surroundings. His association of the phenomenological with the purely *visual* (rather than the embodied) is revealing: Merleau-Ponty's complex account of perception is reduced to opticality, and the politics of his phenomenology are ignored. Instead, Asher regards perception as a de-intellectualised sensory indulgence – in opposition to Merleau-Ponty, for whom it is precisely 'the moment when things, truths, values are constituted for us', summoning us 'to the tasks of knowledge and action'.²⁶

Vivências

The reception of Merleau-Ponty in the US is markedly different from its application in Brazil, where phenomenology was introduced into the artistic context in the late 1940s by the art critic Mário Pedrosa. Pedrosa – along with the poet and theorist Ferreira Gullar – was a decisive influence on Concretism (the first wave of Brazilian abstract art) in the 1950s. The second wave of abstract art, Neo-Concretism, reacted to this Constructivist-inspired work by manipulating its abstract geometrical forms into environmental situations that surround and

Concretism



Michael Asher
Untitled installation
view from exterior,
Gladys K. Montgomery Art
Center at Pomona College,
California, Feb–March 1970



Hélio Oiticica
Tropicália
Museu de Arte Moderna,
Rio de Janeiro, 1967

directly engage the viewer. Lygia Clark (1920–88) produced multi-panel objects to be manipulated by the spectator; by the mid-1960s these took the form of softer, more malleable toys to prompt heightened sensory perception as a direct stimulus for psychological exploration. The work of Hélio Oiticica (1937–80) was more social and political in inclination, engaging with the architecture of the *favelas* (slums) and the communities that lived there. Oiticica's writings about viewer perception, interactivity, and lived experience (*vivências*) are therefore a crucial reference point not only for this chapter but for the history of installation art as a whole.

By the mid-1960s, Oiticica had developed a series of objects that were to form the building blocks of his later environments, the most important of which were the *Penetrables*. Initially produced in maquette form, the *Penetrables* used panels of colour to create temporary-looking architectural structures. The viewer was required to 'penetrate' the work physically, and it is telling that Oiticica's description of this anticipates the multi-perspectival theme reiterated by Western installation artists in the following decade: 'the structure of the work is only perceived after the complete moving disclosure of all its parts, hidden one from the other, it is impossible to see them all simultaneously'.²⁷ *Tropicália* 1967 was the first of these environments to be realised, and took the form of a closed labyrinth. It comprised a wooden structure curtained with cheap patterned materials, set amongst a 'tropical' scenario with plants, parrots and sand. Entering the structure, viewers walked over a sequence of different materials (loose sand, pebbles, carpet) and could play with different toys and tactile objects before arriving at the innermost space, which was dark and contained a television. For Oiticica, the underlying meaning of the work was not the 'tropicalist' imagery but the viewer's 'process of penetrating it'.²⁸ He compared the sensory experience of entering *Tropicália* to walking over the Rio hills and to the architecture of the slums, whose improvisational dwellings strongly appealed to him as formal influences, as did makeshift structures on construction sites and popular decorations in religious and carnival feasts.

Underpinning all of Oiticica's tactile and sensory environments was the desire to exceed the 'passive' experience of viewing two-dimensional works of art. Spectator participation, Oiticica wrote in 1967, was 'from the beginning opposed to pure transcendental contemplation'.²⁹ Unlike Europe and the US, where single-point perspective came to be regarded as analogous to an ideology of mastery (be this colonialist, patriarchal, or economic), the Brazilian emphasis on activated spectatorship was a question of existential urgency. A military dictatorship seized control of the country in 1964, and from 1968 onwards the government suspended constitutional rights, practised kidnapping and torture, and effected a brutal censorship of free expression. It is impossible to regard the drive towards interactivity and sensuous bodily perception in Brazilian art during the 1960s as other than a political and ethical exigency in the face of state repression.

The sensory fullness of *vivência* (total life-experience) in Oiticica's installations therefore came to focus on an idea of individual emancipation from oppressive governmental and authoritative forces.³⁰ Oiticica developed the term 'Supra-sensorial' to account for the emancipatory potential of this work which, it was hoped, could 'release the individual from his oppressive conditioning' since it was irreducible to consumer product or confinable by state forces:

This entire experience into which art flows, the issue of liberty itself, of the expansion of the individual's consciousness ... immediately provokes reactions from conformists of all kinds, since it (the experience) represents the liberation from those prejudices of social conditioning to which the individual is subject. The stance, then, is revolutionary.³¹

Oiticica argued that he could not have come to this new understanding of the relationship between work of art and audience without the development of the *Parangolés* (1964 onwards), capes and tents to be worn and (ideally) danced in, which he developed in collaboration with the Mangueira samba school. His experience of the samba, and of the Dionysian fusion of individual and environment that it provoked, was for him revelatory in rethinking the viewer's position within a 'cycle of participation', both a 'watcher' and 'wearer': 'My entire evolution, leading up to the formulation of the *Parangolé*, aims at this magical incorporation of the elements of the work as such, in the whole life-experience of the spectator, whom I now call "participator".'³² Like the *Penetrables*, the *Parangolés* were regarded as open-ended objects that did not enforce a particular reading or response, and as situations that permitted the participant to realise their own creative potential through a direct engagement with the world. That this engagement was effected through the intensity of sensory perception – to the point of hallucination – was of the highest importance.

Political censorship in Brazil increased after 1968 and resulted in an artistic diaspora: Lygia Clark relocated to Paris, while Oiticica moved to New York in 1970. Cildo Meireles likewise moved to New York at this time in order to avoid the cultural marginalisation that was taking place in Brazil. His work, as we have seen in Chapter One, is strongly marked by phenomenological interests, but its sensory impact always aspires to a more symbolic level (as in the use of the colour red in *Red Shift* or the smell of natural gas in *Volatile*). Merleau-Ponty's principle of embodied perception continues to be a prominent feature of contemporary Brazilian installation art: Ernesto Neto's engorged membranes of translucent fabric, held taut by bundles of aromatic spices, invite the viewer to relax inside their curved and sensuous forms, while Ana Maria Tavares employs urban architectural materials such as steel, glass and mirrors to create complex walkways. In *Labirinto* 2002, Tavares cut through several floors of a former textile factory in São Paulo to create a Piranesian series of spiral staircases and paths that offered the viewer different means of navigating the space, and radical new perspectives onto it.



Ernesto Neto
*Walking in Venus Blue
Cave*
Tanya Bonakdar Gallery,
New York, 2001

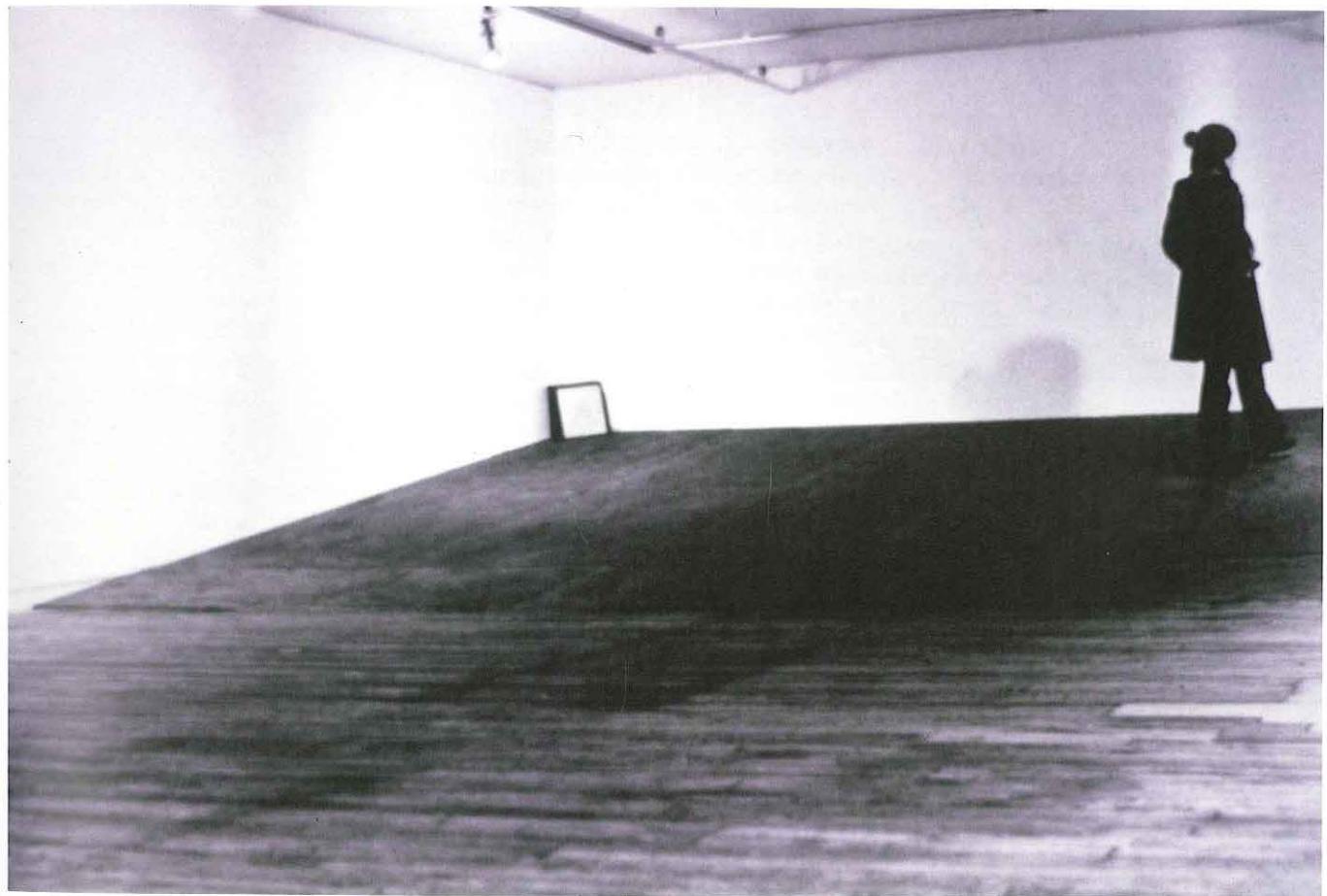
Live installation

The approach to embodied perception by Brazilian artists is noticeably more sensuous than in the West, where it was used more strategically, and often to highly conceptual ends. By the 1970s in New York, Minimalist sculpture was the subject of extensive critique by the subsequent generation of artists, particularly those associated with performance art. The work of Vito Acconci (b.1940) is typical of the convergence of installation, performance and Conceptual art: from making performances staged outside the gallery (and shown as documentation), he moved to performing inside the gallery space, and then abandoning performance altogether in favour of showing residual props in installations where viewers are expected to perform for themselves. In this last move, the activated role of the viewer was seen as explicitly political in motivation: encouraging the viewer to interact with the installation was hoped to raise consciousness directly, and to produce an active relationship to society at large. As Acconci later said, 'I never wanted to be political; I wanted the work to *be politics*'.³³

Acconci acknowledged that his early work 'came out of a context of feminism, and depended on that context', but it was equally an engagement with Minimalism, which was by 1970 the art norm. He recognised that Minimalism had initiated an important shift in the viewer's perception of gallery space: 'For the first time, I was forced to recognise an entire space, and the people in it ... Until Minimalism, I had been taught, or I taught myself, to look only within a frame; with Minimalism the frame broke, or at least stretched'.³⁴

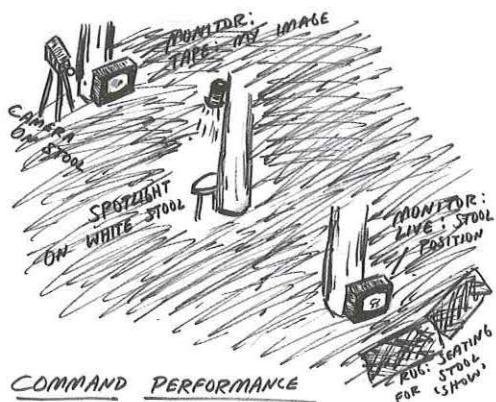
In his now legendary *Seedbed* 1972, Acconci presented an installation of clearly Minimalist lineage that was used as a masking device to conceal his body and to shift the focus onto the viewer. He performed *Seedbed* three times a week, for a duration of three weeks, in January 1972. The gallery was empty but for a ramp of raised floorboards at one end of the room, culminating on either side with a loudspeaker. Beneath the ramp Acconci lay masturbating, his amplified gravelly Brooklyn accent dominating the room and responding verbally and physically to the visitor's presence above. The self-consciousness that Fried found to be uncomfortably 'theatrical' in Minimalist sculpture became, in *Seedbed*, acutely intimate: every audible physical movement on the visitor's part triggered a flood of ambiguous verbal fantasy from the artist.³⁵ The visitor was implicated in the installation-performance, and this complicity was soldered by Acconci's suggestion that without the viewer, he would be unable to 'perform' successfully. It hardly needs saying that this eroticisation of phenomenological perception wrought a significant twist in the received understanding of these ideas. The viewer's experience of *Seedbed* could not be more different from the emotionally detached, self-reflexive stroll taken around the work of Morris or Judd.

Seedbed therefore seemed to be a critique of Minimalism, and of its viewing subject: although Minimalist sculpture foregrounded the viewer's perception



Vito Acconci
Seedbed
Sonnabend Gallery,
New York, Jan 1972

Vito Acconci
Sketch for *Command Performance*
at 112 Greene Street,
New York, Jan 1974



as embodied, this body was not gendered or sexual. *Seedbed* brought the visceral corporeality and sensationalism of the more explicit performance art by women (such as Shigeko Kubota's *Vagina Painting* 1965, or Carolee Schneemann's *Meat Joy* 1966–7) into a literalist and anti-expressive Minimalist installation. When Acconci compared himself to 'a worm under the floor' he hinted at the repressive clinicality of both Minimalism (with its emphasis on de-eroticised 'pure' perception) and the 'white cube' gallery space, in which baser actions, emotions and excretions had no place.³⁶

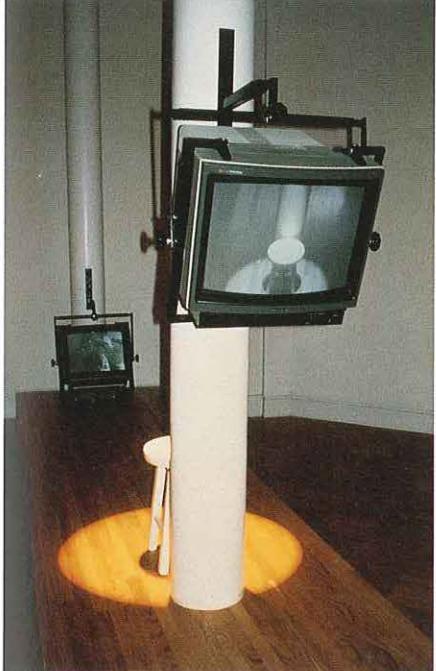
By the mid-to-late 1970s, Acconci turned to making installations in which the audience was invited to 'act' and assume for themselves the role of performer. In his notes for *Command Performance* 1974, this summoning of the audience was explicit: 'to leave viewers room to move, on their own, the agent has to get out of the space (since, as long as he/she is there as "artist", other people can be there only as "viewers")'.³⁷ Made for 112 Greene Street, New York, *Command Performance* comprised a chair placed at the base of one of the columns bisecting the gallery. A closed-circuit television camera was trained upon the spotlit chair, filming whoever sat in it; in front of the chair was a monitor playing a tape of Acconci inciting the visitor to step into the limelight and 'perform' for him/herself. The camera linked the participants' image to a monitor positioned behind them at the entrance to the installation – and which they would have seen upon entering. Viewers became both passive observers and active participants in the piece, watching Acconci on video while bringing the work to completion by sitting in the chair and 'performing' for other visitors who enter the installation. For Acconci, this perceptual activation was expressly political in motivation:

much of the early work focused on instrumentality because at that time there was an illusion that the instrumentality of a person was important and it could lead to a revolution ... The viewer is sort of – you're in this position where you're pushed. You have been aimed at. Now that you're aimed at, though, you can potentially do something.³⁸

Acconci's installations of the late 1970s, such as (*Where We Are Now ...*) 1976, *The People Machine* 1979, and *VD Lives/TV Must Die* 1978, all set up situations in which literal 'missiles' were suspended in rubber slingshots, aimed at visitors and the gallery architecture: if the viewer unhooked the swing of *The People Machine*, 'one swing after another will swing out window, catapult will be released, ball will be shot, flag will wave and fall into heap'.³⁹ Perhaps unsurprisingly, this potentially violent interaction was never actually realised. Acconci came to acknowledge that both the artist and the gallery situation would inevitably restrict what kind of gestures (if any) would be taken by the viewer.

PheNaumanology⁴⁰

Acconci wanted to take a step back from performing 'so there could be room for other selves ... Remember, this was just after the late 60s, the time – the starting



Vito Acconci

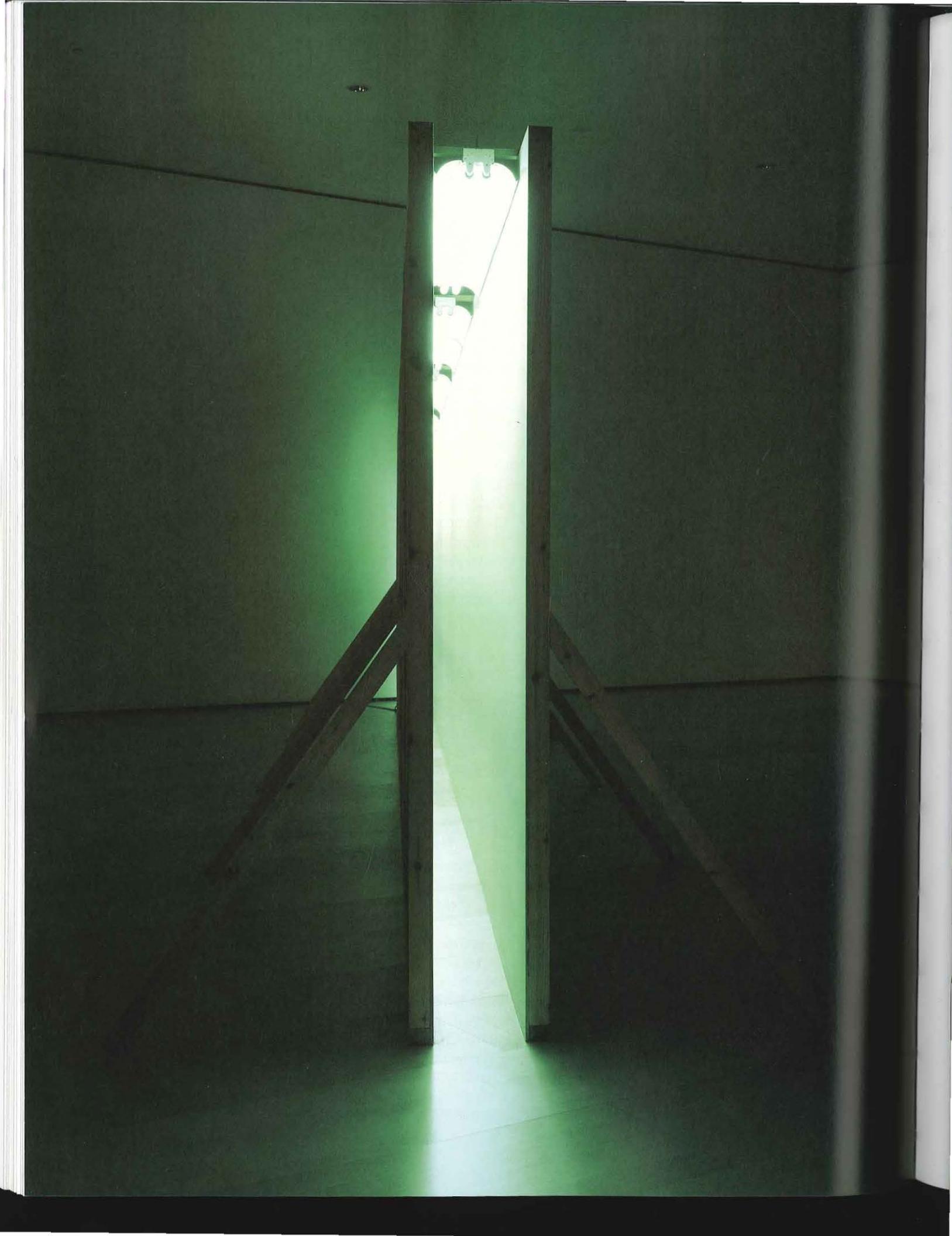
Command Performance
112 Greene St, New York,
1974
Collection: San Francisco
Museum of Modern Art.
Accessions Committee
Fund: gift of Mrs. Robert
MacDonnell, Byron R.
Meyer, Modern Art Council,
Norman C. Stone and
National Endowment
of the Arts

time of gender other than male, race other than white, culture other than Western.⁴¹ As the 1970s progressed, phenomenology came under attack for assuming the subject to be gender-neutral and therefore implicitly male. Feminists and left-wing theorists argued that the perceiving body was never an abstract entity but a nexus of social and cultural determinations. This type of thinking sought to 'decentre' further what was already (in Merleau-Ponty) a project of destabilising subjectivity. These arguments will be revisited at the end of this chapter. What follows next is a focus on the work of Bruce Nauman (b.1941) whose installations of the 1970s did not directly engage with such identity politics but instead proposed a type of 'difference' more akin to Merleau-Ponty: one in which perception itself is shown to be internally fractured and split. Nauman's influential output suggests that the body, rather than being a unified repository of sensory perceptions, is in fact in conflict with itself.

In Nauman's soundproofed *Acoustic Wall* 1970, one becomes aware of the fact that we perceive space with our ears as much as with our eyes: as one moves past the wall, auditory pressure increases and subtly affects one's balance. *Green Light Corridor* of 1970–1, by contrast, uses scale and colour to generate physical unease: the corridor is so narrow that it can only be entered sideways, while the oppressive green fluorescent light lingers on the retina and saturates one's after-vision with magenta upon leaving the space. Even with full knowledge of how these pieces work, they still prompt a certain level of anxiety: anticipation is wrong-footed by actual experience, and we feel perpetually at odds with the situation. The introduction of closed-circuit video technology allowed Nauman to develop these ideas, and to suggest that these moments of bodily confusion could disrupt the plenitude of self-reflexive perception proposed by Minimalist art.

In the late 1960s and early 1970s, instant video feedback was widely used by artists, since it allowed them to watch the monitor (as if it were a mirror) while simultaneously performing for the camera. In an essay published in 1976, Rosalind Krauss argued that such work was narcissistic: because video could record and transmit at the same time, it 'centred' the artist's body between the parentheses of camera and monitor.⁴² She went on to discuss works that exploit technical glitches and disruptions in feedback in order to criticise the medium of video. At the end of her essay she turned to video installation as a further example of the way in which artists might resist the easy seductions of video. She mentioned Nauman but trained the full weight of her argument on the work of Peter Campus. In his installations *mem* 1975 and *dor* 1975, Campus projects video feedback of the viewer onto the gallery wall from an oblique angle; rather than presenting a mirror-like image that we can master, he allows us to see only a fleeting, anamorphic glimpse of ourselves when exiting the room.

Nauman's works of the early 1970s set up a similar tension between the viewer's anticipated and actual experience:



They won't quite fit. That's what the piece is, that stuff that's not coming together ... My intention would be to set up [the situation], so that it is hard to resolve, so that you're always on the edge of one kind of way of relating to the space or another, and you're never quite allowed to do either.⁴³

In *Live-Taped Video Corridor* 1970, two video monitors are installed at the far end of a long thin corridor; the top monitor is linked to a camera positioned high on the wall at the corridor's entrance; the lower monitor plays a pre-recorded tape of an empty corridor. As you walk into the work and advance towards the monitor, the image of your head and body (filmed from behind) becomes visible on the upper screen. The closer you get to the monitor, the smaller your image appears on screen, while the more you try to centre your image on screen, the further away from the monitor you are required to stand. At no point are you allowed to feel 'centred' and in control.⁴⁴ Nauman compared the viewer's experience of these works to the moment of 'stepping off a cliff or down into a hole':⁴⁵

The feeling that I had about a lot of that work was of going up the stairs in the dark and either having an extra stair that you didn't expect or not having one that you thought was going to be there. That kind of misstep surprises you every time it happens. Even when you knew how those pieces were working, as the camera was always out in front of you ... they seemed to work every time. You couldn't avoid the sensation, which was very curious to me.⁴⁶

Although clearly related to Minimalist sculpture in their literal use of materials, and in foregrounding the viewer's perception in time and space, Nauman's *Corridor* Installations also differ from these works. Rather than providing a plenitudinous experience of perception, Nauman fails to reassure us that we are a synthesised unity (and seems to relish our discomfort). The glitches and misrecognitions that take place in these corridors suggest that there might be a blind spot in perception that becomes apparent only when our looking is returned to us by a camera or a mirror.⁴⁷ We can therefore observe some subtle differences between Minimalist sculpture and the Postminimalist installations of Nauman. Krauss argued that Minimalism *decentres* the viewer, because we are no longer afforded a single position of mastery from which to survey the art object. However, we are only decentred in relation to the work, not in relation to our own perceptual apparatus, whose plenitude still guarantees that we are coherent and grounded subjects. By contrast, Nauman's installations demonstrate how easily perception can be prised apart and might be far more fragile and contingent than we allow. Merleau-Ponty describes this failure of perception in *The Visible and the Invisible*: it is impossible to be both subject and object, as the point of coincidence 'collapses at the moment of realisation'.⁴⁸ He describes this as a blind spot or *punctum caecum*, evidenced when we try and feel our left hand touching our right hand at the same time as feeling our right hand touching our left. Each limb has

Bruce Nauman
Green Light Corridor
1970–1
Collection: Solomon R.
Guggenheim Museum,
New York, Panza
Collection, Gift, 1992

its own tactile experience, and cannot be synthesised. Nauman's installations likewise point to the impossibility of our own organs of perception being immanent: I fail to coincide with myself.

Dan Graham

Merleau-Ponty discusses the blind spot in chapter four of *The Visible and the Invisible*, where he also introduces the idea of the 'chiasm', a crossing over between ourselves and the world. It is well-known that Merleau-Ponty's idea of the blind spot derives from his reading of an essay by the French psychoanalyst Jacques Lacan, 'The Mirror Stage as Formative of the Function of the I' (1949). In this paper, Lacan argues that it is only when seeing itself in the mirror (or having its actions reflected by a parent) that the child realises that it is autonomous and independent entity in the world – rather than narcissistically co-extensive with it. Of course, for Lacan this independence is mere illusion: our sense of self (the ego) is just an imaginary construct, a defence against our internal sense of fragmentation. What is important in Lacan's essay is that the ego is structured as an effect of an external or reciprocal gaze: the world looking back at us. Lacan's theory came to be of great importance to a generation of film theorists and feminists in the early 1970s who focused on the question of perception as socially predetermined, indebted to the world that pre-exists our presence in it. In the installations of Dan Graham (b.1942) made in the 1970s, mirrors and video feedback are used to stage perceptual experiments for the viewer that demonstrate how our awareness of the world is dependent on interaction with others. Graham's work is therefore a crucial consideration for this type of installation art, since the status of the viewer preoccupies his thinking throughout this decade.⁴⁹

Graham's installations and writing of the 1970s can be understood as attempts to address what he saw to be two problems in Minimalist and Postminimalist art of the 1960s. The first problem was that its emphasis on perceptual immediacy and the viewer's presence 'was detached from historical time': 'A premise of 1960s "Modernist" art was to present the present as immediacy – as pure phenomenological consciousness without the contamination of historical or other *a priori* meaning. The world could be experienced as pure presence, self-sufficient and without memory.'⁵⁰ For Graham this was suspect because it paralleled consumerist amnesia: the way in which the 'just-past' commodity is repressed in favour of the new. In contrast to perception as a series of disconnected presents, Graham wished to show 'the impossibility of locating a pure present tense'; the perceptual process, he argued, should instead be understood as a continuum spanning past, present and future.⁵¹ His second criticism of 1960s art was its stress on the viewer as an isolated perceiver. He particularly objected to the solitary and 'meditative' nature of Light and Space installation art developed on the West Coast: 'when people in California were



Dan Graham
Public Space/Two Audiences 1976
Collection:
Van AbbeMuseum,
Eindhoven

doing meditative spaces around the perceptive field of the single spectator ... I was more interested in what happened when spectators saw themselves looking at themselves or looking at other people.⁵² Graham's installations of the 1970s therefore insist on the socialised and public premise of phenomenological perception. This interest, as already suggested, was partly informed by his reading of Lacan: the installations 'are always involved with the psychological aspect of your seeing your own gaze and other people gazing at you'.⁵³ Any experience of his work therefore aims to be 'a socialised experience of encountering yourself among others'.⁵⁴

For Graham, the experience of being among other people forms a strong counter to the 'loss of self' that we experience in traditional works of art, specifically painting, which encourage us to escape from reality by identifying with the scene or objects represented: 'In this traditional, contemplative mode the observing subject not only loses awareness of his "self", but also consciousness of being part of a present, palpable, and specific social group, located in a specific time and social reality and occurring only within the architectural frame where the work is presented.'⁵⁵ The spartan, empty spaces of his own installations deliberately eschew the direct imagery of advertising and representational painting in favour of presenting the 'neutral' frames through which we usually experience these objects (the white walls of a gallery, or the windows of a shop). In the absence of an object, picture or product to look at, our perception is necessarily reflected back onto ourselves. Again, this approach continues the phenomenological concerns of Minimalism, but there is an important difference: although Graham's materials look 'neutral', for him they are socially and historically referential. Mirror and glass partitions, he writes, are often 'employed to control a person or a group's social reality':

Glass partitions in the customs area of many international airports are acoustically sealed, insulating legal residents of the country from those passengers arrived but not 'cleared'. Another example is the use of hermetically sealed glass in the maternity ward of some hospitals, designed to separate the observing father from his newly born child.⁵⁶

Graham's writings on his installations therefore move beyond abstract theoretical issues of perceptual phenomenology and Lacanian models of vision in order to ground these theories in specific social and political situations: the shopping mall, the gallery, the office, the street, the suburban residence or urban park.⁵⁷

Even so, Graham's installations appear somewhat stark and literal, harnessing the viewer's body in a manner more conceptual than sensuous. *Public Space/Two Audiences*, made for the Venice Biennale in 1976, comprises a 'white cube' gallery with a door at either end, bisected by a pane of sound-insulated glass. The far wall of the space is mirrored, while the other end is left white. Two systems of reflections are thus established – in the ghostly, semi-reflective glass divide, and in the mirrored wall – both of which offer the viewing subject a reflection of



Dan Graham
Present Continuous
Past(s) 1974
Collection: Centre
Georges Pompidou,
Paris

him/herself in relation to the other viewers. Graham used his allocated space in the Italian pavilion in order to display ‘the spectators, their gazes at themselves, their gazes at other spectators gazing at them’.⁵⁸ One’s experience of the work is rather drab, if not pointless, without the presence of other viewers to ‘activate’ this network of returned glances and make one ‘socially and psychologically more self-conscious’ of oneself perceiving in relation to a group.⁵⁹ Other works achieved a similar effect in a less austere fashion, using video to explore the temporal aspects of perception that were absent in Minimalist sculpture. *Present Continuous Past(s)* and *Opposing Mirrors and Monitors on Time Delay*, both 1974, take the form of plain white gallery spaces in which mirrors, monitors and delayed video feedback encourage viewers to move around and collaborate with each other in order to activate a network of reciprocal and temporally deferred glances.

In Graham’s *Cinema* proposal, 1981, the complex account of heightened bodily awareness that forms such a major theoretical component of his 1970s installations is applied onto a functional architectural structure: a cinema. In this model, the walls are constructed from two-way mirror and glass in order to make film-goers conscious of their bodily position and group identity. As might be imagined, the work is an explicit response to 1970s film theory. Paraphrasing Christian Metz’s influential article ‘The Imaginary Signifier’ (1975), Graham argues that cinema-goers passively identify with the film apparatus (the point of view of the camera) and become ‘semi-somnolent and semi-aware’, disembodied viewers in ‘a state of omniscient voyeuristic pleasure’.⁶⁰ Cinema audiences lose consciousness of their body, because they identify with the film as if it were a mirror: ‘At the cinema, it is always the other who is on the screen; as for me, I am there to look at him. I take no part in the perceived; on the contrary, I am all perceiving’.⁶¹

It is against this disembodied perception and passive identification with the film apparatus that Graham’s *Cinema* proposal is targeted. When the house lights are on, the audience sees itself reflected in the mirrored walls, while also being visible to passers-by outside; when the lights are down, the mirror becomes glass, allowing two-way visibility between inside and outside. This, says Graham, enables spectators both inside and outside the building to perceive more accurately their positions in the world. Once again, implicit in his account of this work is an idea of *decentring* the viewer, and the implication that this reveals the ‘true’ status of our condition as human subjects.

Graham’s works of the 1980s are atypical, in that there is a sharp decline in ‘phenomenological installations’ during this decade. An interest in the perceiving body has nevertheless returned in contemporary art via video installation. Although this merits extensive discussion in its own right, it must briefly be noted how embodied perception has become a crucial consideration for artists like Susan Hiller, Jane and Louise Wilson, Doug Aitken and Eija-Liisa Ahtila, who work with multi-channel video projections. Although these video installations

feature highly seductive images that appeal strongly to imaginary identification, our psychological absorption in the work is often undercut by a heightened physical awareness of our body and its relation to other people in the room.⁶²

The return of phenomenology

As mentioned above, the main reason for the demise of interest in phenomenology after the 1970s was the rise of feminist and poststructuralist theory that showed how the supposedly neutral body of phenomenological perception was in fact subject to sexual, racial and economic differences.⁶³ The writings of Michel Foucault, Jacques Derrida and others placed the subject in crisis, dismantling Merleau-Ponty's assertion of the primacy of perception to reveal it as one more manifestation of the humanist subject. Yet in the 1990s, the 'phenomenological' type of installation art returned as an explicit point of reference for contemporary practitioners who now seek to incorporate identity politics and 'difference' into the perceptual agenda; these artists address time, memory and individual history in ways that are arguably truer to Merleau-Ponty's thinking than the reductive interpretation offered by Minimalism. As Merleau-Ponty observed, the self is not simply an embodied presence in the present tense, but a psychological entity that exists 'through confusion, narcissism ... a self, therefore, that is caught up in things, that has a front and a back, a past and a future'.⁶⁴

The installations of Danish artist Olafur Eliasson (b.1967) are clearly indebted to the work of 'Light and Space' precursors of the late 1960s, as well as to Graham's perceptual experiments of the 1970s. Indeed, several of Eliasson's works appear to be remakes of key pieces from this decade: *Room for One Colour* and *360 degree room for all colours*, both 2002, for example, allude to Nauman's *Yellow Room (Triangular)* 1973 and *Green Light Corridor* 1970–1. This return to 1970s strategies arises partly from Eliasson's belief that the project of dematerialisation begun during this decade is still urgent and necessary (since the 1980s saw only a return to objects inundating the art market) and partly from his conviction that chronological distance permits a more nuanced rereading of this work, particularly with regard to its understanding of the viewer. Rather than presupposing a 'neutral' and therefore universal subject, Eliasson considers his work to be a 'self-portrait of the spectator'.⁶⁵ His emphasis on the non-prescriptive individuality of our responses is seen in his titles, which often address the viewer directly: *Your intuitive surroundings versus your surrounded intuition* 2000; *Your natural denudation inverted* 1999; *Your windless arrangement* 1997. The 'you' implies the priority (and uniqueness) of your individual experience – in contrast to Eliasson's precursors, for whom a particular type of embodied viewer (and experiential response) was pre-empted.

Eliasson is best known for harnessing 'natural' materials (water, air, earth, ice, light) into spectacular but low-tech installations that deliberately reveal their staging: in *Beauty* 1993, a perforated hose sprinkles down tiny drops, creating a liquid curtain, while a lamp beams light onto the water to produce a rainbow.

In *Your intuitive surroundings versus your surrounded intuition* 2000, the effect of a changing sky as clouds pass over the sun is recreated through electronic dimmers on an irregular schedule – but the lights are not concealed, and the mechanism is laid bare for us to see. Eliasson makes a point about our perception of nature today (as something we more frequently experience through mediation than first-hand), but the fact that such a point about mediation is made through installation art (a medium that insists on immediacy) is paradoxical. This is reflected in visitors' response to his work: during *The Weather Project* 2003, a vast installation that suffused the turbine hall of Tate Modern in hazy and acrid yellow light, it was curious to see visitors stretched out on the floor bathing beneath Eliasson's artificial sun.

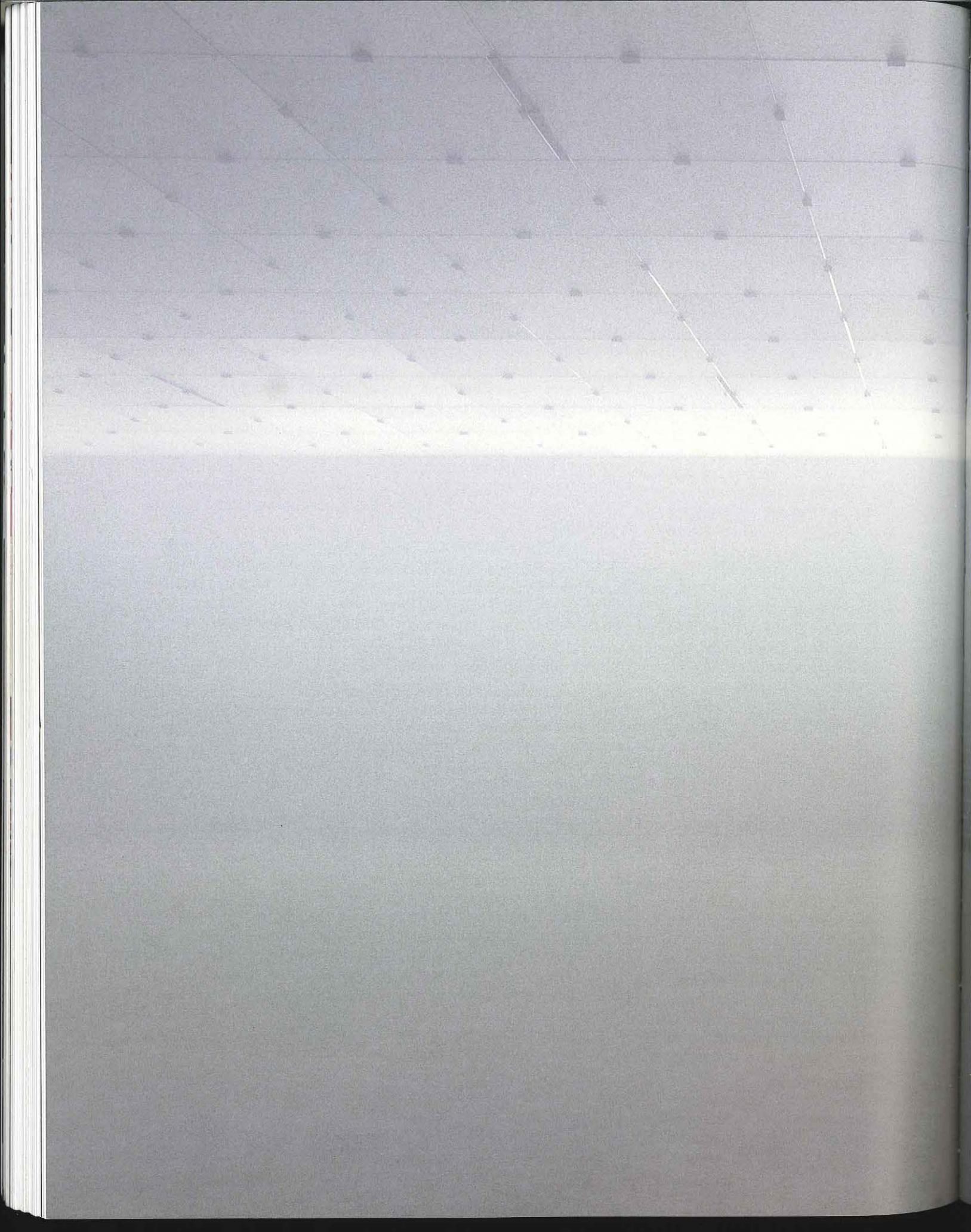
Eliasson maintains, however, that the allusions to 'nature' in his work are not designed to form any environmentalist critique; rather, nature comes to stand for what is 'natural', in the broadest ideological sense of something that is taken for granted. Despite the sensuous and spectacular appearance of Eliasson's work, he is keen to assert that it is also a form of institutional critique. Significantly, this critique is no longer directed at the literal physicality of the white cube or the authority it symbolises (Asher, Graham), but at its 'natural' presentation of objects:

I think that the museum, historical or not, much too often is exactly like *The Truman Show*. The spectator is tricked and neglected with regards to the museum's failure to carry out or enforce its responsibility by means of the way it discloses its ideology of presentation. Or to put it more straight: most institutions forget to let the spectators see themselves seeing.⁶⁶

Providing an experience of heightened consciousness, not only of the work but also of our position in relation to the institution, is regarded by Eliasson as a moral and social responsibility (just as it was for his Light and Space predecessors). Unlike business, which offers experiences for profit, art institutions should, he argues, 'unveil the politics of experiential conditions ... [so] they do not submit to commodifying our senses using the same manipulative techniques as elsewhere'. In Eliasson's ambitious series of installations for Kunsthaus Bregenz in 2001, *The Mediated Motion*, he presented a different sensorial 'landscape' or environment on each of the museum's four storeys: a floor of mushrooms, a watery plane covered with duckweed traversed by a wooden deck, a platform of sloping packed earth, a rope bridge hanging across a foggy room. The uneven floor of earth, for example, affected the visitor's balance (rather in the style of Nauman's *Acoustic Wall*), and this physical destabilisation sought – by extension – to raise doubts about the museum's authority 'naturally' encoded in this space.

It could be argued that in such installations, Eliasson does little more than spectacularly alter the gallery space: the critique operates on so refined and metaphorical a level that its relationship to our experience of the installation is hard to fathom. This dehiscence was particularly evident in *The Weather Project*, where institutional analysis was confined to the catalogue: a series of interviews

Overleaf:
Olafur Eliasson
The Mediated Motion
Kunsthaus Bregenz,
March–June 2001





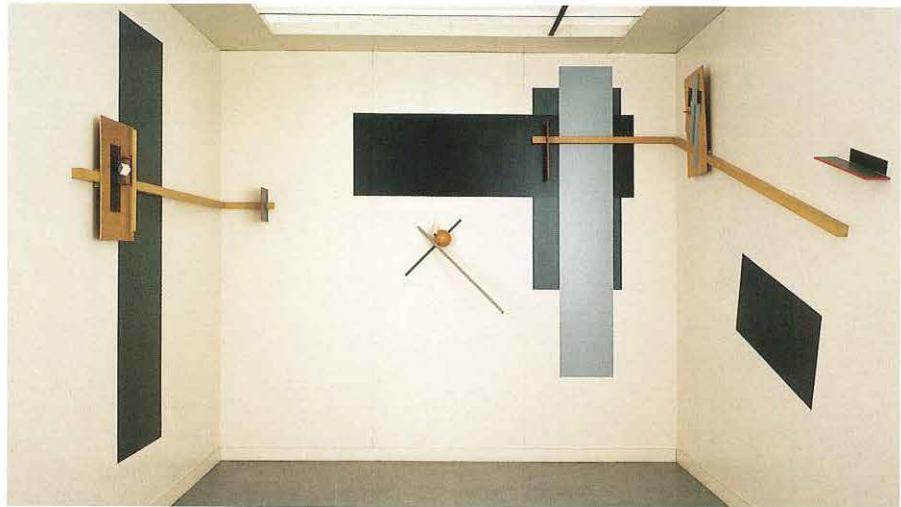
*Anti-Humanist
Structuralist*

with Tate staff sought to render the museum's *modus operandi* more transparent. It is important, however, that Eliasson's call for change is not directed at external considerations (such as the museum's infrastructure), but at 'the way we see and locate ourselves in relation to that external *materia*'. This point underlies an important difference between his work and that of his 1970s forbears: rather than seeking to overturn the system by addressing its structure, Eliasson wishes to change our perception of that system, beginning from the individual, since 'changing a basic viewpoint necessarily must mean that everything else changes perspective accordingly'. Like many of his contemporaries (such as Carsten Höller), Eliasson has 'a renewed belief in the potential of the subjective position'. This marks a major shift away from the anti-humanist and 'structuralist' thinking of previous institutional critique, such as that of Buren and Asher. By returning to the subjective moment of perception, Eliasson aims less to activate viewers than to produce in them a critical attitude.

Emerging here, then, is a reiteration of the concerns already unfurling in the previous chapter: an increasing interest in directly implicating and activating the viewer as a direct counterpoint to the pacifying effects of mass-media entertainment, and in disorientation and decentring. Both of these point to an overriding insistence on the viewer's first-hand experience, since neither operation (activation nor decentring) can conceivably take place through a mediated experience of the work in photographs, magazines, videos or slides. In this way, installation art implies that it reveals the 'true' nature of what it means to be a human in the world – as opposed to the 'false' and illusory subject position produced by our experience of painting, film or television. But this idea is not simply the preserve of post-1960s art. Although Minimalist exhibition installation is crucial to the development of installation art as a whole, an important precursor for its literalist, non-symbolic use of materials is found in the writing and exhibition spaces of El Lissitzky (1890–1941).

At the 1923 Berlin Art Exhibition, El Lissitzky was allocated a small gallery space to himself, but did not use it for a conventional exhibition of his drawings on paper. Instead, since all six surfaces of the room – ceiling, floor and four walls – could potentially be part of the exhibition, he integrated these architectural elements into a unified display. Attaching coloured relief forms to the walls, Lissitzky drew visitors into the space and encouraged their dynamic movement around it through a predetermined sequence of visual events.⁶⁷ The emphasis on movement was deliberate: pondering the nature of exhibition installation, Lissitzky noted that 'space has to be organised in such a way as to impel everyone automatically to perambulate in it'.⁶⁸ He understood the need to keep people flowing around the rooms to be the practical imperative behind any given exhibition. In his essay 'Proun Space', written to accompany the 1923 room, Lissitzky argues – in terms that anticipate Merleau-Ponty's account of embodied vision – for a new conception of three-dimensional space. Lissitzky posits space

El Lissitzky
Proun Room 1923
(reconstructed 1965)
Collection:
Van Abbemuseum,
Eindhoven



as ‘that which is not looked at through a keyhole’ but which instead surrounds the viewer. Rejecting the Renaissance ‘cone of perspective’, which fixes the viewer in a single vantage position, Lissitzky argues that ‘space does not exist for the eye only: it is not a picture; *one wants to live in it*.⁶⁹ For Lissitzky, the wall as neutral support should itself be mobilised as a vital component in the composition: ‘We reject space as a painted coffin for our living bodies.’⁷⁰

Lissitzky’s equation of decorative walls and death prefigures innumerable avant-garde gestures against the sterility of white galleries. However, it is important to recognise that – unlike later artists – he is not targeting the ideology of institutional space; instead he is seeking a practical, utilitarian revision of conventional perspective, so that space becomes not a pictorial abstraction but a real arena in which every subject must act. The implication is that ‘keyhole’ space for the eye alone – the perspectivalism of traditional painting – is synonymous with complacent bourgeois spectatorship, in which ‘real life’ is observed from a safe, detached and disengaged distance. The axonometrical space that Lissitzky developed in his Proun drawings was intended to supplant the structural limitations of perspective, which bound the spectator to a single point of view, at a specified distance, before a painting.⁷¹ Most importantly, he considered these drawings not to be ‘yet another decorative patch’ for the walls of a home or gallery, but as ‘diagrams for action, operational charts for a strategy to adopt in order to transform society and to go beyond the picture plane’.⁷² Exactly like subsequent installation artists who equate activated spectatorship with social and political engagement, the Proun Space was not simply an architectural installation adorned with reliefs, nor an exercise in fusing interior design with sculpture, but a blueprint for activating and engaging the viewer in everyday life and politics.

MIMETIC ENGULFMENT

3

'He is similar, not similar to something, but just *similar*.' Roger Caillois¹

Darkness

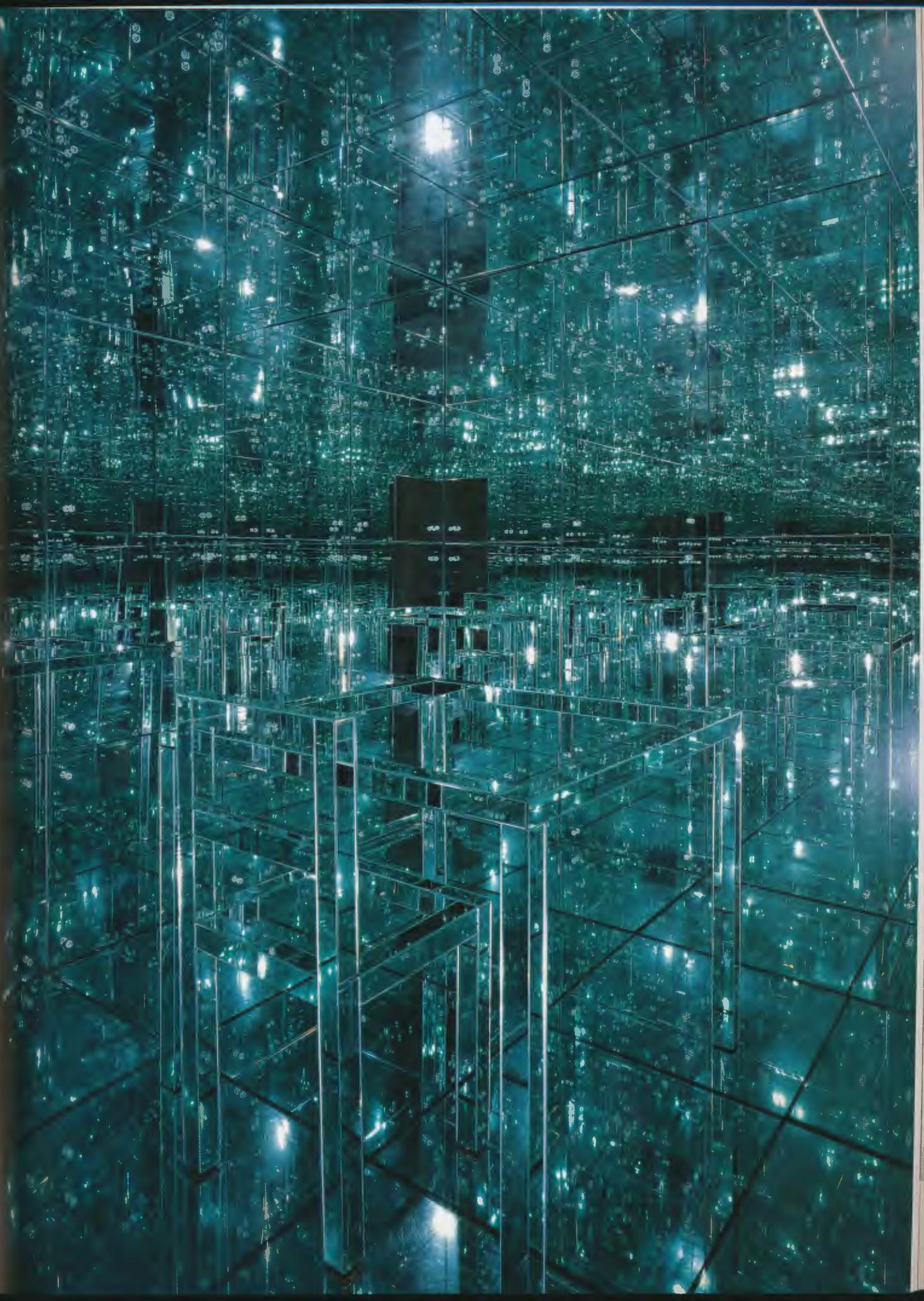
Few of us have not lain in bed at night and felt ourselves slipping out of consciousness, our bodies enveloped in darkness as if by a soft black cloud. Yet in an age of pervasive electrical illumination we rarely experience darkness as a completely engulfing entity. Even at night, streetlamps and car headlights slip through chinks in the curtains to offer limited visibility. Stepping into a pitch-black installation may be one of the few times we experience total, consuming darkness. In most museum displays of contemporary art, an encounter with such spaces has become increasingly familiar. We leave behind a bright white gallery and step into a dark passageway that twists and turns on itself to block out the light. As we fumble for the reassuring presence of a wall to orient us, the blackness seems to press against our eyes. Even when the light of a video projection becomes visible as the main focus of the work, we still strain to locate our body in relation to the dark environment.

The kind of experience that such installations generate for the viewer is diametrically opposed to Minimalist sculpture and Postminimalist installation art. Rather than heightening awareness of our perceiving body and its physical boundaries, these dark installations suggest our dissolution; they seem to dislodge or annihilate our sense of self – albeit only temporarily – by plunging into darkness, saturated colour, or refracting our image into an infinity of mirror reflections. Postminimalist installations are invariably spaces of light, where the body's physical limits are established and affirmed by their relationship to the sensible co-ordinates of a given space. By contrast, in the works discussed below, the possibility of locating ourselves in relation to the space is diminished, because this space is obscured, confused, or in some way intangible.

There is no 'placement' in engulfing blackness: I have no sense of where 'I am because there is no perceptible space between external objects and myself. This is not to say that in darkness I experience a 'void': on the contrary, encounters, when they occur, are sudden and all too present; consider how objects become more jutting, awkward, unwieldy in a dark room. Yet until we do bump into someone or something, we can go forwards and backwards in the blackness without proof of having moved. At its extreme, this lack of orientation can even raise the question of whether it is accurate to speak of 'self-awareness' in these circumstances. Entering such rooms can make one aware of one's body, but as a loss: one does not sense one's boundaries, which are dispersed in the darkness, and one begins to coincide with the space.

The ideas above are indebted to the French psychiatrist Eugène Minkowski, who vividly describes in his book *Lived Time* (1933) how daylight is characterised by 'distance, extension and fullness', while the dark night has something more 'personal' about it since it *invades* the body rather than keeping its distance:

Lucas Samaras
Room no.2 or Mirror
Room 1966
Collection: Albright-Knox Art Gallery, Buffalo, New York



'I no longer have the black night, complete obscurity, before me; instead, it covers me completely, it penetrates my whole being, it touches me in a much more intimate way than the clarity of visual space.'² Minkowski gives a case study of schizophrenia and suggests that the patient's sense of being 'penetrated' by and dissolved in space may well be the overriding characteristic of human experience of darkness in general:

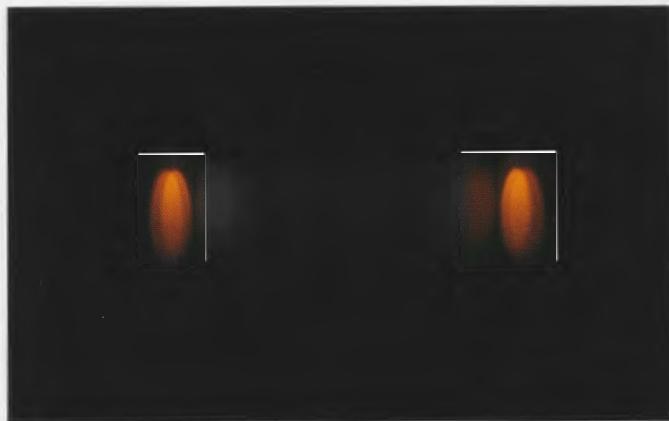
[dark space] does not spread out before me but touches me directly, envelops me, embraces me, even penetrates me completely, passes through me, so that one could almost say that while the ego is permeable by darkness it is not permeable by light. The ego does not affirm itself in relation to darkness but becomes confused with it, becomes one with it.³

Minkowski's ideas were taken up by the French theorist Roger Caillois (1913–78) whose 1935 essay 'Mimicry and Legendary Psychasthenia' analyses the phenomenon of insect camouflage or mimicry.⁴ Observing that mimetic insects stand as great a chance of being eaten by predators as non-mimetic insects, Caillois concludes that what in fact occurs in the phenomenon of camouflage is 'a disturbance in the ... relations between personality and space'.⁵ Insect mimicry is thus tantalisingly described by Caillois as a 'temptation by space', an assimilation to the surrounding environment that results from a *desire* for fusion between animate and inanimate. As with the human experience of dark space, argues Caillois, the mimetic insect is *decentred*: it no longer feels itself to be the origin of spatial co-ordinates, and its awareness of being an entity distinct from its external surroundings begins to disintegrate. The mimetic insect does not know where to place itself and is thus depersonalised: 'He is similar, not similar to something, but just *similar*'.⁶ Caillois's argument is explicitly influenced by Freud's theory of the death drive, in which he posited an instinct of libidinal retreat, in other words, a desire to return to our primary biological condition as inanimate objects. Freud's theory is complicated and controversial – not least because the 'unbinding' work of the death drive can be experienced as both pleasurable and unpleasurable – but the idea of instinctual renunciation is key to the experience of mimetic engulfment structured for the viewer by the works in this chapter. The dualism of life and death drives, like that of conscious and unconscious psychic activity, was considered by Freud to destabilise the rational Enlightenment subject.

Lost in the light

In many of the installations made by the American artist James Turrell (b.1943) since the late 1960s, viewers walk through a disorienting pitch-black corridor that extinguishes all residual daylight before finally emerging into a larger, darker space infused with deep colour. This colour becomes stronger (and even changes hue) as the cones and rods of our eyes adjust to the drop in light, a process that may take up to forty minutes. For a long time, therefore, we cannot identify the boundaries of the room we are in, nor see our own bodies, nor even differentiate

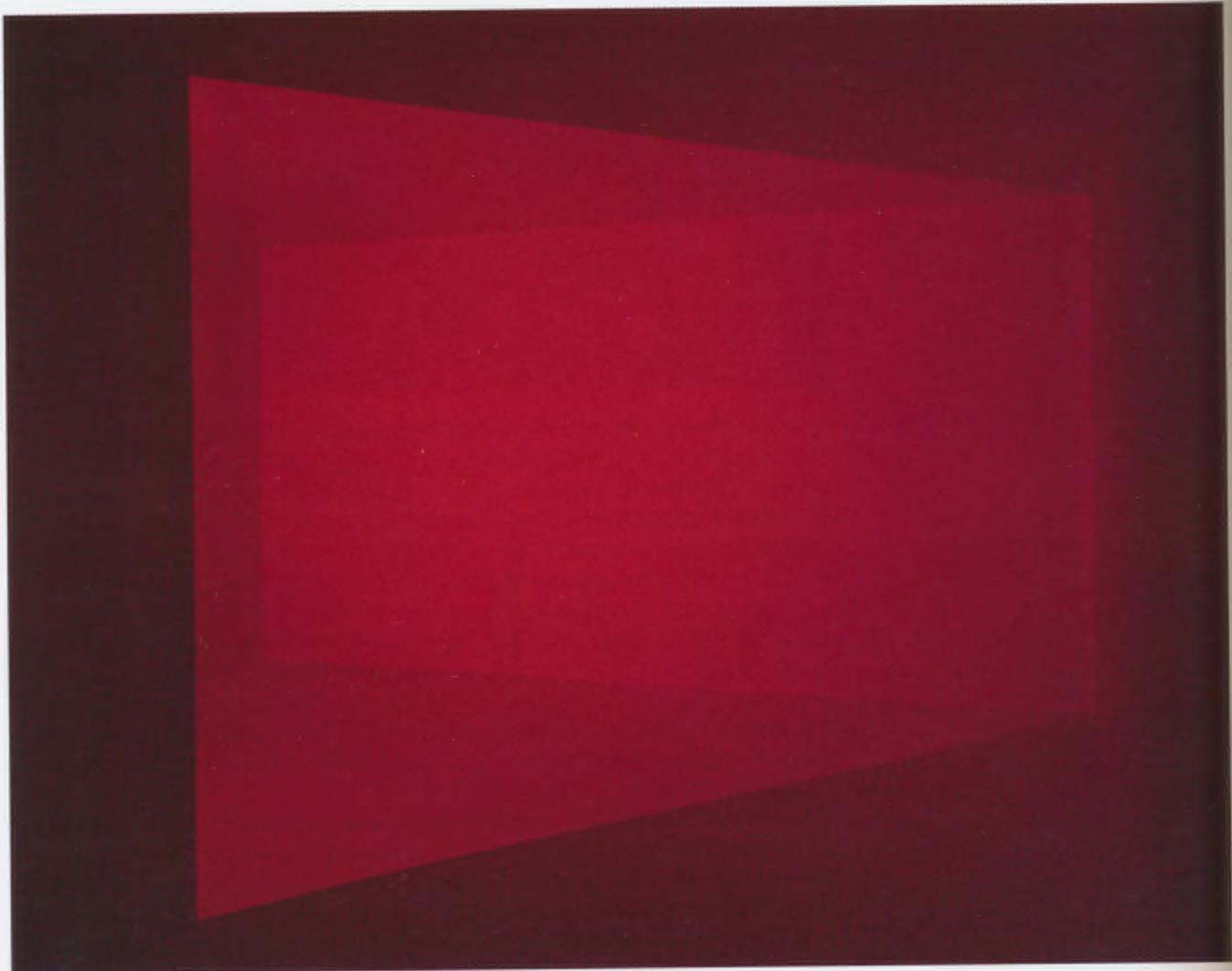
James Turrell
Trace Elements 1990
Installation at Hayward
Gallery, London, 1993



external colours and shapes from those that seem to derive from inside our eyes. In some of Turrell's darkest pieces – such as *Wedgework III* 1969 – we become aware of a glowing deep-blue wedge of light beyond what appears to be a white dais, but the terrain between our body and this space of light is unfathomably dark. In his series of 'Space-Division Pieces' such as *Earth Shadow* 1991, a dark room is lit only by two dim spotlights; the room appears to be empty but for a glowing rectangular shape on the far wall. When we advance towards this rectangle, its colour seems opaque and yet too evanescent to be solid. If we try and touch this coloured block of light, our tentatively outstretched hands pass through the anticipated surface to an unbounded volume of coloured fog – a revelation that is both unnerving and exhilarating. Standing before such fields of colour, our bodies are immersed in a rich, thick atmosphere of coloured light almost tangible in its density.

James Turrell is usually considered to be paradigmatic of the 'Light and Space' art discussed in Chapter Two. Like his Postminimalist contemporaries on the West Coast (Robert Irwin, Maria Nordman, Bruce Nauman), he was influenced by the way in which Minimalism's reductive and literal forms forced the viewer into heightened awareness of perception as embodied and interdependent with its surroundings. The argument that Turrell's installations are objects of perceptual enquiry – like the Minimalist sculptures of Morris or Andre – has therefore tended to dominate readings of his work, backed up by Turrell's own assertions that 'perception is the object and objective' of his art.⁷ Far less attention is paid to the way in which his installations in fact undermine the self-reflexivity of phenomenological perception. Rather than grounding the viewer's perception in the here and now, Turrell's installations are spaces of withdrawal that suspend time and orphan us from the world. Although the installations contain light, and materialise this as a tactile presence, they also eliminate all that we could call an 'object' situated as distinct from ourselves. Turrell describes the works as situations where 'imaginative seeing and outside seeing meet, where it becomes difficult to differentiate between seeing from the inside and seeing from the outside'.⁸ This borderline status is quite distinct from the heightened self-reflexivity induced by Minimalist sculpture: Turrell's works do not make us 'see ourselves seeing' because, as Georges Didi-Huberman has observed, 'how, indeed, could I observe myself losing the sense of spatial limits?'

This mimetic elision of subject and environment is well demonstrated in accounts of Turrell's 1976 exhibition at the Stedelijk Museum, Amsterdam, in which he adapted a series of four galleries to form a single installation, *Arhirit*. The work made use of research that he had undertaken with Robert Irwin during their joint participation in Los Angeles County Museum of Art's 'Art and Technology' programme in 1969. They had experimented with the perceptual effect of the Ganzfeld (a homogenous phenomenal space) and its aural equivalent, the anechoic chamber. *Arhirit* comprised a sequence of four Ganzfelds: the white



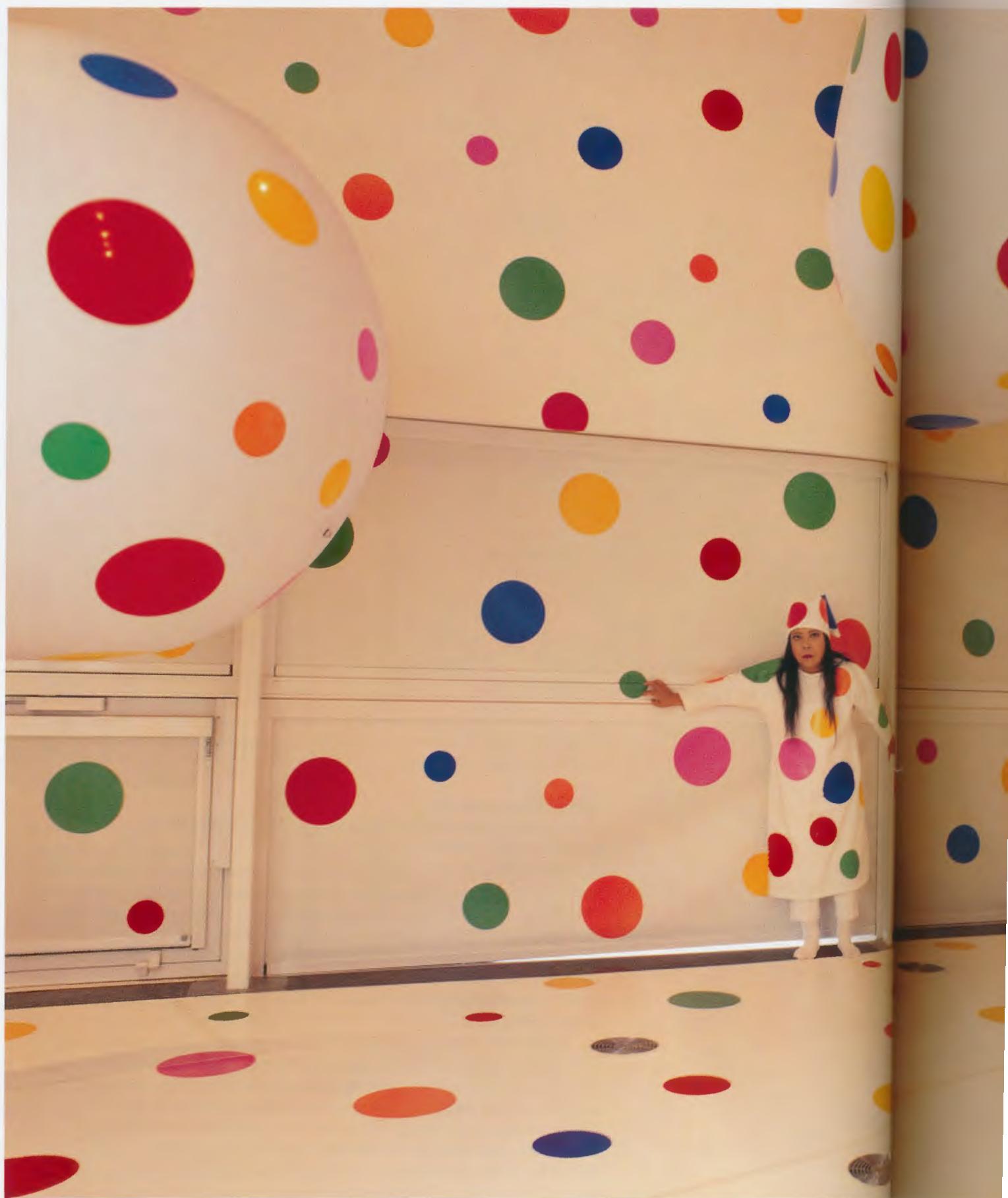
James Turrell
Wedgework IV 1974,
installation at
Hayward Gallery,
London, April–June,
1993

rooms were experienced by the viewer as a series of different coloured spaces, since the light entering each (through an aperture high on the wall) reflected particular objects outside the building (a green lawn or red brickwork). This gentle tinting of the white spaces was exaggerated in intensity by the sequencing of the rooms, so that the after-colour of one gallery space lingered on the retina to make its complement in the following room even stronger. Turrell could not fully have anticipated the physical response elicited by this installation: without form for the eye to latch onto, visitors fell over, disoriented, and were unable to keep their balance; many had to crawl through the exhibition on their hands and knees in order to prevent themselves from being 'lost in the light'.¹⁰

When *Arhirit* was reinstalled in single-room format as *City of Arhirit* at the Whitney Museum of American Art in 1980, several US visitors brought lawsuits against Turrell after having fallen through what they perceived to be a solid wall, but which in fact was just the edge of the Ganzfeld. In subsequent installations, Turrell divided viewers off from the Ganzfeld by a slim wall to create what he calls a 'sensing space' for the viewer to stand in. Even with the presence of this partition, the colour and darkness of his installations still seem to adhere to the body: as one critic noted, 'it is as though one's eyes were glued to this hazelike emanation, as though they were being sucked into it with deliberate determination'.¹¹ The extreme effects of these colour fields frustrate our ability to reflect on our own perception: subject and object are elided in a space that cannot be plumbed by vision.

Mirror displacements

Although Turrell's work is notable for its calmness and stillness, it also plays on a desire for abandonment, and this has led many critics to frame their response to his installations – with their unbounded, embracing opacity – in terms of spirituality, or a sense of the absolute. This is because it structures a subsuming *over-identification* with the void-like coloured space that engulfs and penetrates us. This provides a quite different challenge to the centred subject from that discussed in Chapter Two. In the installations of Dan Graham, we are made aware of the interdependency of our perception with that of other viewers: reflective glass and mirrors are used to disrupt the idea that subjectivity is stable and centred. For Turrell, the space in which such self-reflexive perception may take place is foreclosed, and we become one with the surrounding environment. The same mimetic engulfment may nonetheless occur with mirrors when set against each other to form a *mise-en-abyme* of reflections. From the early 1960s and throughout the 1970s there is a conspicuous rise in the number of artists incorporating mirrors in their work. Not all of these take the form of installation – one thinks of Michelangelo Pistoletto's ongoing series of *Mirror Paintings* 1962–, Robert Morris's *Untitled* mirror cubes 1965, Robert Smithson's *Minor Vortexes* of the mid-1960s, Michael Craig-Martin's *Face* 1972 and Lucio Fontana's *Cubo di*





Yayoi Kusama
*Dots Obsession: New
Century 2000*
Maison de la Culture du
Japon, Paris,
Feb 2001



Yayoi Kusama
Kusama's Peep Show or
Endless Love Show
Castellane Gallery,
New York, March 1966

specchi 1975. For the most part, this use of mirrors arises as a logical extension of the interest in phenomenological perception during this period: reflective surfaces were an obvious material with which to make viewers literally 'reflect' on the process of perception. But it is no coincidence that Jacques Lacan's paper on 'The Mirror Stage' was translated into English at this time (1968), and that his most significant discussion of visual art took place in his 1964 seminar 'The Four Fundamental Concepts of Psychoanalysis'.

Lacan's argument in 'The Mirror Stage' is underpinned by the idea that the literal act of reflection is formative of the ego. Unlike Merleau-Ponty's idea that consciousness is *confirmed* by reflection – 'seeing itself seeing itself' – Lacan instead stressed the fact that my first recognition of myself in the mirror is in fact a willed misrecognition, or *méconnaissance*. I am seduced by identification with the external impression of myself as a coherent, autonomous totality – when in fact I am fragmentary and incomplete. Lacan turns to the example of a person standing between two mirrors to show how the regress of reflections does not represent any progress in interiority and does not confirm the certainty of our self-identity; instead, the reflections destabilise the ego's fragile veneer. His thesis is easily affirmed if we situate ourselves between two or more mirrors. My sense of self is not corroborated by an infinity of reflections; on the contrary, it is unpleasant – even disturbing – to see the reflection of a reflection of myself, and stare into eyes that are certainly not anybody else's, but which do not feel commensurate with 'me'.¹²

This effect is well demonstrated in two installations exhibited within months of each other in 1966, both of which have (appropriately) doubled titles: *Kusama Peep Show*, also known as *Endless Love Show*, by Yayoi Kusama and *Room 2*, subsequently retitled *Mirror Room*, by Lucas Samaras. Unlike the work of Robert Morris and Dan Graham, the mirrors in the work of Kusama and Samaras do not corroborate the present space-time of the viewer, but offer a mimetic experience of fragmentation. In these installations, our reflection is dispersed around the space to the point where we become, as Caillois writes, 'just similar'.

Self-obliteration

In the work of Japanese artist Yayoi Kusama (b.1929), self-obliteration is a persistent motif – from her performances of the late 1960s, in which she used polka dots (painted or cut out of paper) to make herself and her performers blend in with an environment that had also been covered in similar dots, to more recent video work such as *Flower Obsession Sunflower* 2000, in which the artist wears a yellow hat and T-shirt and sits in a field of sunflowers; when the camera pulls back, she appears to be assimilated into her surroundings. In her return to installation art in the 1990s, such as *Dots Obsession* 1998 and *Mirror Room (Pumpkin)* 1991, Kusama has designed and worn special outfits that integrate her into the colour and pattern of the room.

Of course, the experience of mimicry in these pieces exists primarily for the artist: it is hard for the visitor in everyday clothing to feel remotely 'similar' to an installation of enormous coloured balloons covered in dots. However, in Kusama's mirrored installations of the mid-1960s, such as *Kusama's Peep Show* – a mirrored hexagonal room with coloured lights flashing in time to a pop soundtrack that includes songs by The Beatles – the viewer does become 'one object among many' in a visual field. Kusama was photographed inside this room, as she has been inside most of her installations, but viewers today remain on its exterior (itself confusingly installed in a mirrored room), looking in through one of two peep holes to the interior. Stretching out as far as the eye can see are reflections of your eyes (angled from left, right and centre), interspersed with flashing lights and blaring music. Although the title and viewing holes allude to erotic peep shows, there is no gratification of voyeurism in this work: the only performers are your own eyes darting in their sockets, multiplied to infinity.

Given the work's alternative title, *Endless Love Show*, it would seem that viewers were intended to experience this installation in the company of someone who would look through the second peep hole; two sets of eyes would be cast around the room and be fused as one.¹³ The title of this work – as with her other pieces and exhibitions, such as *Love Forever*, *Love Room*, *Endless Love Show* – is typical of a 1960s psychedelic sensibility in appealing to the fantasy of a shared social body whose intersubjective immanence would obliterate individual difference: 'all you need is love' to fight individualistic capitalism.¹⁴ The 'endless love' ethos, although premised on self-obliterative impulses, is ultimately in the service of erotic fusion: 'Become one with eternity. Obliterate your personality. Become part of your environment. Forget yourself. Self-destruction is the only way out ... I become part of the eternal and we obliterate ourselves in Love.'¹⁵

The obliteration of self-image has also been an enduring motif in the work of Lucas Samaras since the late 1960s.¹⁶ In his *Autopolaroids* 1970–1, he double- and triple-exposed his naked image in order to present his profile, his hands and body fading in and out of the holes in his furniture, embracing himself in his kitchen, or obliterated in shadows and pools of light. This doubled and mimetic relationship to both his image and environment takes three-dimensional form in his *Mirror Room*, first shown at the Pace Gallery, New York, in 1966. Unlike the hexagonal *Kusama's Peep Show*, Samaras's work comprises a cube into which the viewer enters. The room is large enough to contain not just the standing visitor but a table and chair, also covered in mirrors. If Kusama's work has an expansive coherence in its illusion of infinity (the octagonal walls reflect enough to keep the viewer's multiplied face identifiable in the darkness), Samaras's panelled room, made of hundreds of smaller mirrored plates, dissolves the viewer's perception of both body and space into a kaleidoscope of fragmented shards.

Kim Levin has described the experience of walking into this work as yielding 'the disorienting precarious feeling of seeing yourself endlessly receding, a feeling

of vertigo, a dropping in the pit of your stomach as from a dream of falling'.¹⁷ The director of Albright-Knox Art Gallery in Buffalo, which acquired the work in 1966, described it in more euphoric terms: 'When you're inside it, you feel you're floating on a cloud. Infinity stretches out in all directions. You see yourself reflected thousands of times'.¹⁸ But if Kusama's use of mirror reflections was in the service of 'endless love', Samaras's work derives from more violent and morbid impulses. In a statement to Albright-Knox Art Gallery, Samaras writes that 'the idea for a completely mirror covered cube room occurred to me around 1963 when I incorporated the idea in a short story, *Killman*'. Levin has also recorded how Samaras, growing up in Greece, recollects the 'scary' custom of covering the mirrors of a house while a corpse was in it.¹⁹ More important for the artist, however, was the way in which a mirror, during adolescence, 'was used to inspect portions of one's body identity, and it was also used as an aid in the physical mimicry of adults and the opposite sex. Sometimes one's image in the mirror became an audience but most of the time it was a source of perplexion'.²⁰ For the viewer too, *Mirror Room* structures an experience of the body fragmented into separate pieces.

Samaras continued to pursue the theme of mirrored space, now with sadistic intent. *Corridor 1* 1967 comprises a mirrored corridor that turns back on itself twice as the ceiling slopes lower, until the viewer must crouch down to exit the work; *Room 3*, made in Kassel in 1968, returned to the cube format but was armed inside and out with protruding mirrored spikes. Entering via a low door, visitors invariably bumped their heads on a spike above the entrance as they tried to stand up. Arnold Glimcher, director of the Pace Gallery, vividly described the disorienting character of this work: 'You didn't know where the points really were in the slick wet dark light, you were totally inhibited, your perceptual faculties were completely confused. It was terrifying'.²¹

It is noticeable in discussions of the work of both Kusama and Samaras that viewers' accounts of this work fall into one of two categories: oceanic bliss or claustrophobic horror. This is not something that the artist can predict, and there is no 'right' or 'wrong' way to experience such a work. Because the pieces use mirror reflections to dislocate our sense of self-presence and play with our orientation, they solicit an individual response that reflects the dual role of the ego as understood by Lacanian psychoanalysis: as a comforting defence against fragmentation, or as an all too fragile mirage.

Through the looking glass

Since first being exhibited in 1987 at Matt's Gallery in east London, the installation *20:50* by British artist Richard Wilson (b.1953) has acquired a media reputation verging on cult status. The installation comprises a room half filled with 200 gallons of used sump oil, and entered by viewers – one or two at a time – via a narrow wedge-like walkway that runs from one corner diagonally into the



Richard Wilson
20:50
Saatchi Gallery,
Boundary Road, London,
1987

centre of the space. Visitors are requested to leave coats and bags behind before entering, and this unburdening of chattels inadvertently charges the experience with a quasi-ritualistic character; as one critic has noted, entering the installation is like 'a journey half-way across the River Styx'.²² This deposit of baggage also serves an aesthetic purpose, since it heightens awareness of the way in which the wedged steel walkway closes in on the boundaries of our body (the sides are waist high but appear to fall away as the ramped floor rises). As you walk along the gangplank, you seem to rise gently above this turbid lake of oil whose reflective surface provides a perfect mirror of the room.

At first glance 20:50 appears to be an object of phenomenological enquiry in the tradition of Nauman's corridors discussed in the previous chapter. It can also be read symbolically (in the style of the 'dream scene' installations of Chapter One), since the title refers to the viscosity of standard engine oil: as an elegiac embrace of industrial waste, 20:50 has been seen to encapsulate the tension between technological production and nature.²³ However, the disorienting reflections that form such an integral part of 20:50 align it with the mimetic concerns of Freud and Caillois. As with Turrell's tangible abysses of light, the oil of 20:50 is both threatening and seductive: it has been compared to a 'terrifying void' that 'draws you down into its still and fathomless depths'; it is 'forbidding' and 'sinister', even 'menacing', yet challenges you to 'brave its velvety surface'.²⁴ The ambiguous character of the oil mimics the room in which it is installed and in doing so appears to evacuate us from the space. Indeed, standing at the narrow tip of the walkway – wide enough for one person only – we seem weightless, hovering above the oil, which in turn seems to disappear, present only through its prickly smell and the occasional speck of dirt on its surface. The stilled reflection of the walls and ceiling adds a morbid touch (one critic compared the experience of this work to the sailor's fate of 'walking the plank'). The dense inertia of the oil is marked by a lucid, hyperreal stasis; one moment it is overproximate, a mass of stagnant liquid matter that threatens to spill over to where you stand, the next it is all but invisible, disappearing beneath its reflection.

When installed at the former Saatchi gallery in north London, the glass ceiling gave viewers the impression of being suspended over a void: at a certain point the reflections ceased to be the spectral double of the room and actually assumed the uncanny solidity of a darkened world. This oscillation between presence and absence, threatening and seductive, draws the viewer into a dizzying, disembodied state – not unlike the 'syncretistic' vision described by Anton Ehrenzweig as crucial to the 'oceanic' experience of artistic creation. In *The Hidden Order of Art* (1967), Ehrenzweig describes how, in syncretistic vision, the libido is not drawn to meaningful configurations (gestalts) but surveys everything with an 'open-eyed empty stare', in which the artist is unable to extricate him or herself from the work as a separate entity ('as we reach the deepest oceanic levels of dedifferentiation the boundaries between the inside and outside world melt away

and we feel engulfed and trapped inside the work of art').²⁵ The dark and simulacral mirror of the oil exerts a similarly irresistible pull on the viewer's unconscious, and this is especially acute when the work is seen at night: the dark windows form the final veil between the night sky below and an oceanic chasm beneath.

Video Atopia

In his article 'A Cinematic Atopia' (1971), the American artist Robert Smithson (1938–73) describes the engulfing lethargy of sitting in a cinema and watching films. The consuming darkness removes us from the world, suspending us in an alternative reality in which our bodies are subordinated to eyesight:

Going to the cinema results in an immobilisation of the body. Not much gets in the way of one's perception. All one can do is look and listen. One forgets where one is sitting. The luminous screen spreads a murky light throughout the darkness ... The outside world fades as the eyes probe the screen.²⁶

Smithson revels in the sheer number of films in existence; for him they swarm together in a celluloid mass to cancel each other out in a pool of tangled light and action. In the face of this 'vast reservoir of pure perception', the viewer is 'impassive' and 'mute', 'a captive of sloth' whose perception descends into 'sluggishness'. Indeed, the ultimate filmgoer, Smithson notes:

would not be able to distinguish between good or bad films, all would be swallowed up into an endless blur. He would not be watching films, but rather experiencing blurs of many shades. Between blurs he might even fall asleep, but that wouldn't matter. Sound tracks would hum through the torpor. Words would drop through this languor like so many lead weights. This dozing consciousness would bring about a tepid abstraction. It would increase the gravity of perception ... All films would be brought into equilibrium – a vast mid field of images forever motionless. But ultimate movie-viewing should not be encouraged.

Initially Smithson's text seems to be derogatory, as if he – like so many of his contemporaries – is deriding the passivity of mass-media spectacle. But the evident pleasure that he takes in his writing makes it impossible to align him with denigrators of mass-media consumption in this period. Instead, Smithson's vocabulary is permeated by a fascination with entropy, the idea of the physical and spatial energy drain that he took from the second law of thermodynamics, and which underpinned his artistic practice and theoretical interests. The inevitable dissolution of entropy was for Smithson a manifestation of the Freudian death-drive; the latter's dual aspect of unpleasurable disintegration and pleasurable retreat into nothingness is clearly visible in Smithson's droll and vivid language.²⁷

Smithson wrote this essay just before film theory was to undergo a radical upheaval through the influence of Marxist and psychoanalytic thinking in French and English leftist intellectual circles during the 1970s. Focused around the magazines *Communications*, *Cahiers du Cinéma* and *Screen*, this new and

heavily theorised discipline culminated in two key articles, written in 1975: 'The Imaginary Signifier' by Christian Metz and 'Visual Pleasure and Narrative Cinema' by Laura Mulvey. Both writers were concerned with the 'apparatus' of cinema itself – the way in which viewers identify with the camera's eye – and the ideological pacification that this engenders. Both essays are more concerned with our psychological relationship to the content of a film than to our experience of viewing it in a cinema. However, Metz's tutor Roland Barthes discusses precisely this latter situation in 'Leaving the Movie Theatre', an essay that can only be regarded as a riposte to his former student.²⁸ Since he accounts for our experience of cinema in spatial (rather than simply psychological) terms, Barthes's essay permits a consideration of video installation as a practice distinct from cinema. His starting point is an evocative description of how we leave cinemas: in a slight daze, with a soft, limp and sleepy body. He thus compares the experience of watching a film to being hypnotised, and the ritual of entering the dimmed space of a cinema as 'pre-hypnotic'. Unlike Metz and his generation, who are suspicious of the ideological hold film has over us, Barthes is willing to be fascinated and seduced. This is because he does not consider cinema to be solely the film itself, but the whole 'cinema-situation': the dark hall, the 'inoccupation of bodies' within it, viewers cocooned in their seats. Unlike television, whose domestic space holds no erotic charge, cinema's urban darkness is anonymous, exciting, available.

This is not to say that Barthes is unwary of 'cinematographic hypnosis' and its hold over us: indeed, it 'glues' us to the screen, fascinating and seducing us, just like our reflection in the mirror (Barthes deliberately alludes to Lacan's article). Following contemporary film theorists of that decade, he suggests that film's ideological hold can be broken by arming ourselves with a counter-ideology, whether this be internal (such as a critical vigilance to what we are watching) or external, via the film itself (as in Brechtian alienation, or the chopped-up narratives of Godard). But for Barthes these are not the only ways with which to break the spell of cinema; the strategy that interests him most, he says enigmatically, is to 'complicate a "relation" by a "situation"'. In other words, he advocates that we be 'fascinated twice over' by cinema:

by the image and *by its surroundings* – as if I had two bodies at the same time: a narcissistic body which gazes, lost, into the engulfing mirror, and a perverse body, ready to fetishise not just the image but precisely what exceeds it: *the texture of the sound, the hall, the darkness, the obscure mass of the other bodies, the rays of light, entering the theatre, leaving the hall*.²⁹

This enthralment with the 'surroundings' of cinema is the impulse behind so much contemporary video installation: its dual fascination with both the image on screen and the conditions of its presentation. Carpeting, seating, sound insulation, size and colour of the space, type of projection (back, front or freestanding) are all ways with which to seduce and simultaneously produce



Isaac Julien
Baltimore
Installation at FACT,
Liverpool,
Feb–April 2003

a critically perceptive viewer. Works like Isaac Julien's three-channel installation *Baltimore 2003* make manifest the psychological and physical split that Barthes describes: we are enticed by the smooth play of images across the screens, but also by the intense blue walls that surround them. In Douglas Gordon's free-standing projections, such as *Between Darkness and Light* 1997, viewers circumnavigate a large screen on either side of which two different films are simultaneously projected. The video installations of Eija-Liisa Ahtila (such as *Today* 1999) and Stan Douglas (*Win, Place or Show* 1998, for example) both use multiple screens to present alternative versions of a narrative. Tellingly, many of these works do not immerse the viewer in darkness: dark space (with its mystical and mystifying atmosphere) would run counter to the focused rationality and concentration needed to investigate and elucidate these narratives. The viewer's split and desirous relationship to both the image and the physical 'cinema-situation' is integral to all of these artists' works.

Addressing what exceeds the cinematic image, then, provides an important alternative to the model of 'activation' discussed in the previous chapter, together with a different modality of destabilising the viewer. The split focus of moving image and surrounding situation together serves to distance art from spectacle – yet this distance is ambiguous, since contemporary artists are (like Barthes) as smitten with the cinematic object as they are critical of it. This is a significant difference between contemporary video art and its 1970s forebears, for whom the medium of video was often deliberately contrived to frustrate the viewer and thwart visual pleasure as a direct opposition to the mainstream use of the moving image – as exemplified in Joan Jonas's *Vertical Roll* 1972, Vito Acconci's *Red Tapes* 1976, or Martha Rosler's *Semiotics of the Kitchen* 1975 and *Domination and the Everyday* 1978.

Technological fragmentation

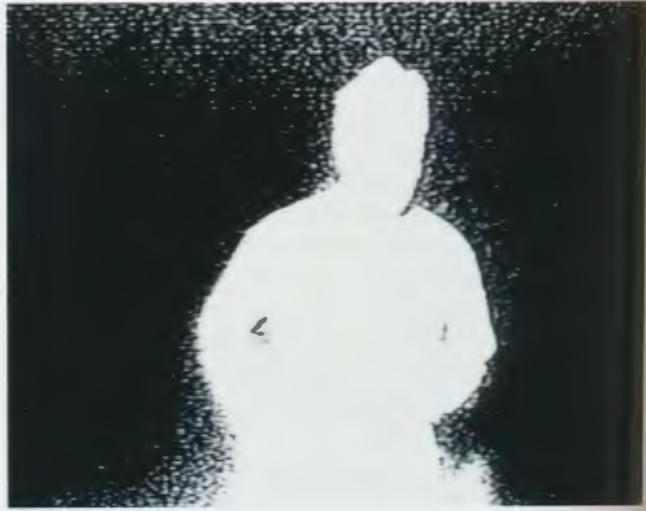
One of video installation's pioneers, the American artist Bill Viola (b.1951), has recently come under attack by the art historian Anne Wagner. She has suggested that unlike Acconci, Jonas and Rosler, who refuse 'any guarantees of pleasure, whether bodily or artistic, or offers of entertainment, whether passive or voyeuristic', Viola has no mistrust of his medium.³⁰ Wagner argues that for the 1970s generation, such scepticism was a necessary rejection of 'the public pleasures of television, which, like the offers of advertising, centre on illusions of presence, intimacy, and belonging'. One way of refusing the pacifying comforts of mass-media, she suggests, is for artists to create a discrepancy between 'what the viewer sees and feels, and what she can be sure she knows'. For Wagner (and for many of her colleagues writing in the journal *October*), it is our relationship to video's content that must be tackled, not its presentation in an installation. For them, the redoubled, eroticised fascination that Barthes proposed 'the bliss of discretion' in the cinema-situation – is not a critical alternative.



Bill Viola
Five Angels for the Millennium 2001
Collection: Tate, London

Even so, Wagner is right to suggest that Viola's recent work emblematises a certain complacency with regard to video as a medium. His imagery has become increasingly religious, often deriving from or suggesting paintings, and the work is ever more slick and populist, employing the latest plasma screens and special effects. In *Five Angels for the Millennium* 2001, a vast dark room filled with ambient music accompanies five large-scale projections; an absorptive darkness and immersive imagery combine to engulf and soothe the viewer. Each screen is saturated in richly coloured watery imagery (it is hard to ascertain if they are filmed from above or beneath the surface), and on each one in turn we are shown the figure of a man falling through or leaping out of the fluid depths. The screens are individually titled – *Departing*, *Birth*, *Fire*, *Ascending* and *Creation* – and these metaphysical names suitably reflect the portentous mood of the imagery. The work clearly aspires to an immersive experience for the viewer, where we are fused with the darkness and identify with the figure passing through sublimely elemental colour.

The popular reception of Viola's recent work as 'spiritual' is reminiscent of writing on Turrell, and for similar reasons: Viola's work has always consorted with the metaphysical, but for a brief period he produced a more aggressively bleak type of art. In his video installations of the early 1990s, a tougher, more existential approach to the video medium (and the darkness in which it is projected) is adopted. In these works, Viola does not encourage a fusion with the absolute (as is implicit in *Five Angels*) but explores a more annihilating brand of subjective fragmentation. The four-screen installation *The Stopping Mind* 1991 offers a dark, protean rush of images (operations, barking dogs, owls flying, desert roads at night, figures tossing in their sleep) in a way that only just keeps disintegration below the surface. The camerawork is not slick and polished, but harnesses the glitches and errors inherent in video technology to exaggerate its affective impact. The staging of these screens reinforces this fragmentation further: entering into a black chamber, you encounter the four hanging screens, each showing frozen imagery. Moving towards the centre you hear a man whispering a description, at high speed, of his body's progressive loss of sensation in an unknown black space. A loud grating noise suddenly sets the images on the screens into motion and we are harried by jolting camerawork. The shock of this movement catches us off-guard. Just as suddenly, the screens become still and silent, and the whispered voice resumes its description of sinking down into blackness. *The Stopping Mind* has been seen as a metaphor for consciousness – the coloured 'external' world of the video screens contrasting with the 'internal' and 'unconscious' whispered voice of the artist. But the two realms remain disconnected, and suspend the viewer in an uneasy hiatus. We may be 'centred' in the installation (it is only by standing at its very middle that one can fully hear Viola's voice) but our relationship to the sound and the images on screen is perpetually on the verge of collapse.



Bill Viola
Tiny Deaths 1993

The three-screen installation *Tiny Deaths* 1993, addresses our experience of darkness more directly. We are plunged into total blackness before emerging into a penumbral space: on the three walls ahead are projections, dimly lit and barely visible in the darkness. A low-level murmuring of indecipherable voices can be heard. The screens do not emit enough light to enable us to see where we are in the room, nor to identify the presence of other visitors. On each wall we gradually become aware of the dim shadow of a human form, flickering in slow motion. Gradually a light source appears on one of the figures, increasing in intensity until it is consumed in a flash of white light. During this burst of brightness, the whole room is momentarily illuminated; then abruptly, everything is plunged back into darkness until the cycle begins again. Viola's work does not give one's retina time to adjust to the drop in light, and one is repeatedly made to undergo the experience of being plunged into darkness. This disorientation is integral to the installation, since it oscillates our attention between identification with the figures on screen, the silhouettes of other visitors visible against them, and the darkness into which we are submerged. Each burst of light momentarily illuminates the room, but plunges us deeper and more irreparably into the blinding darkness that follows. Viewers are mimetically engulfed by the work on two levels: in the consuming darkness, and as shadows merging with the silhouettes on screen.

Aural engulfment

Sound can be as immersive as darkness, and the work of Canadian artist Janet Cardiff (b.1957) demonstrates this well. Cardiff uses the Binaural recording method – in which microphones are placed inside the ears of a dummy head – to create an uncannily intimate relationship with the viewer. Taking the form of installations and walks in which the viewer listens to a pre-recorded soundtrack on headphones, Cardiff's work has primarily been discussed in terms of its affective impact on the viewer – its unnerving, eerie vividness, its eroticism and menace – rather than on the level of theme or structure. This is because the work is mesmerisingly vivid, to the point where critical distance is almost entirely foreclosed in the overwhelming immediacy of entering the aural situations she creates. These experiences are particularly strong when they take the form of individual audio-walks, such as *The Missing Voice – Case Study B* (London, 1999).

Many critics have observed that Cardiff's audio-walks are cinematic, transforming the world into a film set with the viewer as its central protagonist, but Cardiff has also produced a series of installations that deal explicitly with the experience of watching film. Perhaps more than any other contemporary artist, Cardiff is infatuated with what Barthes calls the 'cinema-situation': her installations *Playhouse* and *The Paradise Institute* both place the viewer inside miniature cinemas, and are preoccupied less with the action on screen (which is deliberately enigmatic and fragmented) than with the experience of being in

a dark public space. The sound of other viewers whispering, taking off their coats, answering mobile phones and eating popcorn are integral to the work's immersive effect. Ironically, these sounds are the ones that we conventionally shut out in order to lose ourselves in a film; the darkness of cinema theatres is designed to promote absorption and separation from the physical proximity of other people. Yet this apparatus is precisely what Cardiff draws our attention to, paradoxically by reinforcing our isolation through the use of headphones.

Playhouse 1997, is designed for one viewer at a time, and begins from the moment we don a set of headphones, pull apart the red velvet curtains and enter the box of a miniature theatre. This 'pre-hypnotic' situation, which Barthes discussed as crucial to the experience of cinema, is exaggerated further in *The Paradise Institute* 2001, a larger installation designed to seat seventeen people simultaneously. The events that follow taking a seat in this work are so completely disorienting that it becomes impossible to distinguish real-time peripheral noise from Cardiff's pre-recorded ambient soundtrack. In both *Playhouse* and *The Paradise Institute* the noise of the 'cinema situation' is only one of three levels of the soundscape: there is also the film soundtrack (re-recorded in a large cinema to give a false impression of space) and a narrative that unfolds in the form of Cardiff's voice, implicating the viewer within a noirish mystery that competes with the entertainment on screen. If 1970s film theory imagined our identification with cinema via an internalised 'camera' in the back of our heads, then Cardiff pulls our attention in three directions simultaneously in order to expose this mechanism. Our absorption in the performance on screen before us is constantly thwarted by the fragmented and unbelievable plot, the stock characters and hammy acting, but also by the artist's own femme-fatale persona, whispering breathily in our ears and sweeping us into a competing subplot.

By inverting our conventional experience of cinema and its imaginary hold over us, Cardiff exposes us to the 'cinema-situation' – the peripheral space that goes beyond the image on screen. However, in doing this she could be said to force another identification, this time with sound – and to replace one dominant sense with another. Cardiff's use of sound is undeniably hypnotic – few are able to break the spell and remove their headphones once the piece has begun, and the sheer seductiveness of this *trompe l'oreille* immediately makes us yield to her directorial will. Unlike the immersive 'dream scene' installations of Chapter One, Cardiff leaves no space for our own fantasy projection: we are at the sway of her instructions for as long as we wear the headphones.³¹ Although she speaks of a desire to heighten the viewer's awareness and to sharpen our senses, we are consumed by her sound to the point of invisibility, reduced to a disembodied ear. (Reading transcriptions of the installations afterwards, one is struck by whole parts of the script that did not stay in one's mind.) This complete yielding of control to another voice has prompted reviewers to describe the work as both menacing and erotic. Indeed, in the most vivid moments of her work it is

Janet Cardiff
The Paradise Institute
Installation at the
Canadian Pavilion,
Venice Biennale, 2001



as if we become indivisible from Cardiff's own body, as she herself has observed.³² Although she inverts the cinema apparatus by refusing identification with the image, it is ultimately the seductive escapism of mainstream cinema that she aspires to replicate: 'I think that my work allows you to let go, to forget who you are ... What I, and I think many other people, love about movie theatres is that you can forget about "the real world" and just let the film carry you along with it.'³³

The works of art discussed in this chapter problematise the idea of subjectivity as stable and centred, by fragmenting or consuming the viewer's sense of presence within a space. Cardiff's audio-installations enact a similar eclipse of the viewer through a form of aural hypnosis. Her embrace of the seductive and escapist can be (and has been) criticised for its shameless manipulation of the viewer and for its uncritical compliance with spectacle: although the work seems to offer active participation, our experience inside it is one of powerless obedience. But Barthes's article reminds us that literal activity is not necessarily a prerequisite for criticality: he notes how we may free ourselves from the ideological hold that film has over us by becoming 'hypnotised by a distance' – not simply a critical/intellectual distancing, but an 'amorous', fascinated distance that embraces the whole cinema situation: the theatre, the darkness, the room, the presence of other people. Cardiff's installations foreground this situation, even while they risk replacing one seductive apparatus with another: Barthes's 'bliss of discretion' – as both separation and discernment – is jeopardised by Cardiff's over-proximate collapse of our body and world into hers.

The installations in this chapter, then, do not seek to *increase* perceptual awareness of the body but rather to *reduce* it, by assimilating the viewer in various ways to the surrounding space: in these works, the viewer and installation can be argued to collapse or (to use Ehrenzweig's term) 'dedifferentiate'. This type of mimetic experience may be an effect of dark space (where you cannot situate your body in relation to the room, its objects, or to other visitors), of mirrors that reflect and refract one's image, of submerging us in an unbounded field of colour, or of consuming us in sound. Unlike the call to activation that motivates the other types of installation art discussed in this book, the viewer in these works is often intended to be passive. This dedifferentiating passivity is in keeping with the libidinal retreat that marks Caillois's understanding of mimicry. His observations about 'psychasthenia' are apt for such installations, particularly those of Cardiff: the ego is 'penetrated' by sound (rather than space), and is dissolved, as a discrete entity, into its environment. This raises the question of how it is possible to reconcile installation art's drive to 'decentring' with its persistent emphasis (explored in the previous chapters) on activated spectatorship. This conflict – which will be explored further in the conclusion – suggests that such modalities might well be incompatible with each other, and might problematise the apparently smooth rhetoric that accompanies installation art's historical and theoretical development.

ACTIVATED SPECTATORSHIP

4

'The entire experience into which art flows, the issue of liberty itself, of the expansion of the individual's consciousness, of the return to myth, the rediscovery of rhythm, dance, the body, the senses, which finally are what we have as weapons of direct, perceptual, participatory knowledge ... is revolutionary in the total sense of behaviour.'

Hélio Oiticica¹

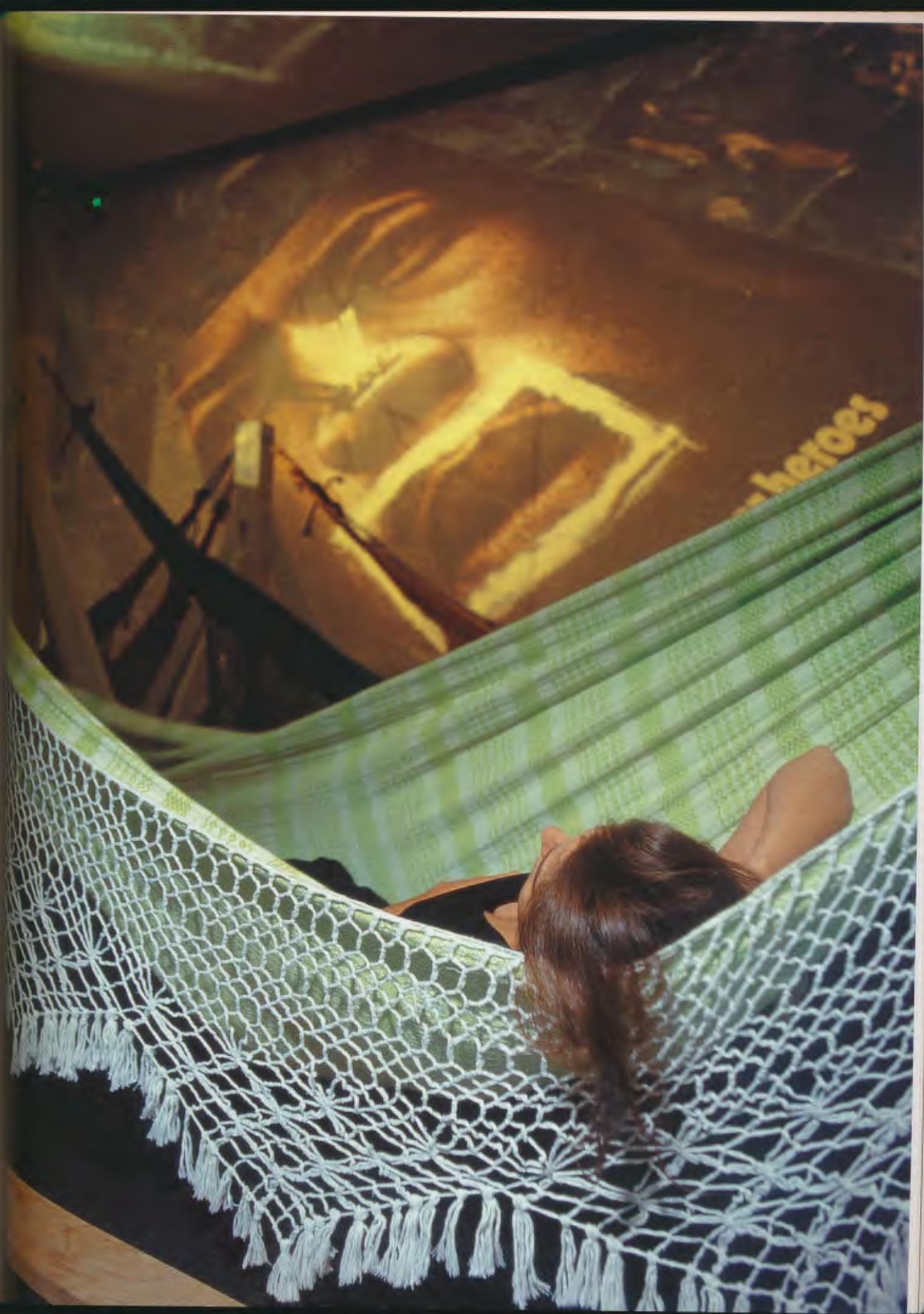
If the last chapter focused on an analysis of one way in which installation art aims to decentre the viewer, then this chapter examines the idea of activated spectatorship as a politicised aesthetic practice. It is conspicuous that the drive towards activating the viewer (so that we are surrounded and given a role within the work, as opposed to 'just looking at' painting or sculpture) becomes over time increasingly equated with a desire for political action. Recent critics and artists writing about installation art have suggested that the viewer's active presence within the work is more political and ethical in implication than when viewing more traditional types of art. A transitive relationship is implied between activated spectatorship and active engagement in the wider social and political arena.

But what exactly do we mean by 'political' in this context? In the broadest sense, 'politics' refers to the organisation of state and government, and to the operations of power, authority and exclusion that take place within this domain. Of course, this has often been addressed by art on the level of illustration: there is a long history of propaganda and political criticism in painting – David, Manet,² or Russian Revolutionary posters, for example. Equally, art can be instrumentalised³ as a political weapon or scapegoat, as seen in the repression and promotion of abstraction in post-World War II USSR and USA respectively. This chapter does not address the political in art in this sense (as a symbol or illustration), nor does it examine the political uses of art; instead it turns to some 'political' models that have been explored through installation art's literal inclusion of the viewer. A recurrent theme underpinning the work discussed in this chapter is a desire to address viewers in the plural and to set up specific relationships between them – not as a function of perception (as we saw in Chapter Two), but in order to generate communication between visitors who are present in the space. This type of work conceives of its viewing subject not as an individual who experiences art in transcendent or existential isolation, but as part of a collective or community.⁴

Social Sculpture

Any discussion of society and politics in relation to installation art ought to begin with the German artist Joseph Beuys (1921–86), whose work is in many ways a crux between politicised art practices of the early and late 1960s. Beuys's activities fall into two distinct areas: an artistic output comprising sculpture, drawing, installation and performance, and direct political activism (he formed the German Students' Party in 1967, and was instrumental in founding the Free

Hélio Oiticica
Block Experiments in Cosmococa...1973
Reconstruction at the Whitechapel Art Gallery, May–June 2002



International University in 1974 and the Green Party). The key idea underpinning all of Beuys's activities was the notion of 'social sculpture', in which thought, speech and discussion are regarded as core artistic materials:

My objects are to be seen as stimulants for the transformation of the idea of sculpture ... or of art in general. They should provoke thoughts about what sculpture can be and how the concept of sculpting can be extended to the invisible materials used by everyone.
THINKING FORMS – how we mould our thoughts or
SPOKEN FORMS – how we shape our thoughts into words or
SOCIAL SCULPTURE – how we mould and shape the world in which we live:
SCULPTURE AS AN EVOLUTIONARY PROCESS; EVERYONE IS AN ARTIST.³

Beuys regarded the world as spiritually alienated from its relationship with nature, and deemed creativity the key to emancipation and individual self-determination. Only art, he maintained, could provide a space of 'playful activity' free of the means-ends relationships of capitalism.⁴ He therefore proposed that political activity should itself be reconceived as artistic practice: 'Real future political intentions must be artistic.' In 1970 he formed the Organisation for Direct Democracy through Referendum, and used exhibitions as a means to campaign for this to a wider audience. Public debates and dialogues became an increasingly important aspect of Beuys's practice during the following decade, and in them he laid out his ideas for an 'expanded concept of art', the importance of 'social sculpture', and sought feedback on these ideas. Significantly, these dialogues were not conceived as performance art, although they took place within galleries and often lasted many hours, and today would almost certainly be described as such.

When compared to the writings of many other artists during this period, the transcriptions of Beuys's debates are notable for their frustratingly circular character: he seems to advocate an interminable big dialogue that never seeks to form conclusions, only to set ideas in motion. At Documenta 5, 1972, he chose to put forward his campaign for 'direct democracy' (as opposed to electoral representation) in the form of a debate-based installation, *The Bureau for Direct Democracy*, an office in which the artist worked for the duration of the exhibition. It was a direct copy of his headquarters in Düsseldorf (into which the public could come off the street and find information about his campaign), relocated to Kassel in order to reach a wider audience. This live installation directly solicited the participation of members of the public and was a significant development in Beuys's practice, which until this point had taken an environmental form only in the *Beuys Block* 1970, an elaborate seven-room display of his work at the Hessisches Landesmuseum in Darmstadt. Staging his office within an art exhibition (rather than on the streets of Kassel) was important for Beuys, since he believed that for politics to advance, it must be subsumed within art.

As a consequence, the appearance of the *Bureau* is less important than what

Joseph Beuys
Bureau for Direct
Democracy
Documenta 5, Kassel
June–Oct 1972



took place there. Dirk Schwarze's report of one day's proceedings in the installation is a remarkable testimony to the artist's indefatigable energy for embroiling the public in debate. The office opened at 10am and shut at 8pm daily, and on the day that Schwarze documents, Beuys received 811 visitors in the intervening ten hours, of which thirty-five directly engaged with the artist. Their questions are highly varied, and range from investigating his ideas for democracy through referendum, to interrogating him on the relationship between his art and activism, and harrassing him for his naive idealism and celebrity. As with many other transcriptions of Beuys's debates during the 1970s, the discussion is notable for the artist's willingness to field all questions, even if hostile or pointedly personal. If the day described in Schwarze's report is typical of the work as a whole, then Beuys probably converted very few people to the campaign, but his use of speech and debate as artistic materials nevertheless allow us to read the *Bureau* as a seminal forerunner of much socially engaged contemporary art.

Beuys's *Bureau* installation for Documenta 5, and *7000 Oaks* for Documenta 7 in 1982, are the works that seem most contemporary in their integration of direct activism and artistic techniques. The concern here, however, is to consider the subjective model underlying these pieces, not Beuys's efficacy in instrumentalising political change. For the most part, Beuys is out of sync with his contemporaries (in both Europe and the US) in believing in the transformative power of creativity: for him, art is a route to individual self-realisation, and is indivisible from an understanding of spirituality as a force that integrates us with our environment. If we disregard the spiritual dimension of Beuys's world view, then his entire theoretical edifice crumbles, for his belief that politics can be subsumed within the aesthetic is supported by a faith in the transcendent potency of creativity. The controversy that ensued from Beuys's decision to exhibit at the Guggenheim Museum after Hans Haacke's show had been censored there in 1971 demonstrates how different priorities were emerging.⁶ For Beuys's contemporaries like Haacke, Buren and Asher, art is not a free space that exists outside ideology, but an intrinsically contested and therefore political site, since how and what we validate as art is determined by institutional authority. Beuys, by contrast, viewed political activism as an extension of his artistic practice. From his perspective, boycotting a museum would have no impact on the status quo, whereas establishing a political party (as art) certainly would.

Because of Beuys's understanding of the relationship between art and politics, he has come under heavy critical fire from left-wing art historians such as Benjamin Buchloh, who claim that his attempts to fuse the two lead to a neutralisation of the latter by the former. In other words, Beuys's claim that 'everyone is an artist' aestheticises politics, rather than politicises aesthetics. Buchloh quotes Walter Benjamin by way of corroboration: the Third Reich aestheticised politics (in the form of rallies and light displays) in order to conceal the true horror of its ideological message.⁷ The comparison is extreme, and is

symptomatic of the US backlash against Beuys's cult status in Europe by 1980. With distance it is possible to observe Beuys's work as more radical than Buchloh's doctrinaire criticism could at that time permit. Buchloh argues that Beuys did not change the status of the art object within the discourse itself (unlike Duchamp, Beuys does not make us question what and how an art object might be); yet it is possible to assert that, at moments, Beuys's practice engages in this question radically, since it posits *dialogue* and direct communication as artistic materials. 'Social sculpture' may therefore be understood as a precursor of contemporary installation art that presupposes a politicised viewing subject, and this permits a more nuanced reading of Beuys than the straight rejection of him by early postmodernist theorists. Opening his work to public examination, criticism, hostility and dialogue, Beuys provides a model of artistic engagement that has influenced a whole generation of contemporary practitioners, one of whom – Thomas Hirschhorn – will be discussed later in this chapter.

Babylonests and creleisure

As Thierry de Duve has pointed out, 'power to the imagination' is Beuys's core cry, familiar to us from nineteenth-century Romanticism: he upholds the cult of the centred individual, realising him- or herself through the creative act.⁸ It is therefore productive to compare his 'social sculpture' with the Brazilian idea of *vivências* (total life-experience), which, in the work of Hélio Oiticica, was similarly construed as a counter to the alienating relations of capitalism. For Oiticica, heightened sensory perception was also founded on an idea of creative self-realisation, but this was not to be aestheticised; instead, the sensory immediacy of *vivências* aimed to produce a subjectivity radically opposed to that formed by the dominant culture.

Chapter Two discussed the importance of phenomenology for a generation of Brazilian artists working in the 1960s. In the 1970s, this interest became more socially engaged: Lygia Clark's small-scale sculptural objects, to be handled by the (occasionally blindfolded) viewer, came to take the form of a psychological group therapy in which the senses were regarded as key to the process of healing. In the work of Hélio Oiticica, installations became an occasion for collective interactions and relaxation. For him, activation of the viewer was a political and ethical imperative in the face of an oppressive dictatorship: a call to collective sensory perception and fusion with one's environment as a mode of resistance, and ultimately of emancipation. Grounded in an experience of the body, *vivências* opposed Brazilian state repression on the one hand and the pervasive consumerism and alienation of US culture on the other.⁹

Across Europe and the US at this time, the direct gestures and personal instrumentality implicit in performance and installation art were viewed as tools to challenge and change the dominant culture, its reactionary stereotypes and ingrained attitudes. This motivation continues to underpin most performance art

today, as the body's presence is considered to be authentic, immediate and ephemeral, the last refuge against ideological capture. These ideas certainly underpin Oiticica's thinking; it is significant, however, that for him the body is not isolated but part of a community. Around 1965, he began to conceive of a 'sense of total art', which emerged from his experience of the popular samba culture of the *favela*. This was to be of decisive importance for the social development of his work.¹⁰ Oiticica's family was middle-class, and thus his embrace of *favela* culture and its grinding poverty was in itself a social statement, especially when he invited *favela* samba dancers to participate in an exhibition of his *Parangolé* works at Rio's Museu de Arte Moderna in 1965.¹¹ The *Parangolés* (a slang term meaning an 'animated situation and sudden confusion and/or agitation between people') were strangely weighted capes made from unusual fabrics that encouraged wearers to move and dance, and forged a circular relationship between watcher and wearer. Oiticica observed that for the person wearing a *Parangolé*, 'there is, as it were, a violation of his "being" as an "individual" in the world', which leads to a shift in his role to that of 'participator' ... motor centre, nucleus'.¹² These performances were staged within large collective events such as the *Parangolé Colectivo* (Rio 1967, a collaboration with Lygia Pape, samba dancers, and the audience) and the multi-disciplinary action *Apocalípopótese* (August 1968). As the curator Carlos Basualdo has noted, they 'could not fail to be perceived as extremely provocative'¹³ due to the explicitly political confrontation they staged between street celebrations and institutional propriety, disrupting class hierarchies and conventions.¹⁴

The vibrant interaction of the *Parangolés* was translated into an installation format in *Eden* 1969, the focal point of a larger project called the 'Whitechapel Experience' or the 'Whitechapel Experiment'.¹⁵ The whole ground floor of the Whitechapel Art Gallery in London was subsumed into a total environment that included sand on the floor, tropical plants and two parrots in an *ad hoc* enclosure that the curator Guy Brett described as an 'abstracted evocation of a Rio de Janeiro back yard'.¹⁶ *Eden* itself was bounded by a wooden fence, and contained different areas for participants to explore barefoot: the floor was carpeted in parts, but also featured large *Bolides* of sand and hay, and a zone of dry leaves. The work contained the familiar Oiticica groups of works (referred to by the artist as 'orders') – *Bolides* (manipulable boxes), *Penetrables* and *Parangolés*, as well as a dark tent. But the most important new feature was the *Nests*, an elaboration of his early 1960s *Nuclei* (geometrical forms hanging freely in space). The *Nests* comprised small cabins, around two by one metres in size and divided by veils, inside which viewers were invited to relax, alone or with others. Oiticica referred to these spaces as 'nuclei of leisure', places for sensory pleasure, conviviality and reverie; in the context of London's cold, repetitive streets, he regarded them as a return 'to nature, to the childhood warmth of allowing oneself to become absorbed ... in the uterus of the constructed open space'.¹⁷

Hélio Oiticica
Eden
Whitechapel Art Gallery,
London, 1969



In a preparatory drawing for *Eden*, Oiticica subtitled the installation 'an exercise for the creleisure and circulations'. The neologism 'creleisure' (a combination of creation, leisure, pleasure, belief, and perhaps Creole) was the subject of an essay that he had written that year, and he viewed *Eden* as his first major work of art on this theme. In 1968 he had been exposed to the writing of the German political theorist Herbert Marcuse (1898–1979), whose *Eros and Civilisation* 1955 and *One-Dimensional Man* 1964 argued that sexuality and leisure under capitalism are forms of 'repressive desublimation'; in other words, what appears to be liberatory pleasure is in fact a form of repression, keeping people content, passive, and thereby unwilling to rise up against the system. For Oiticica, creleisure denoted a way to reappropriate leisure in capitalist society: instead of the organised non-work of weekends and holidays, he proposed a more ritualistic, collective outburst that jeopardises the conditioning of the existing order – not unlike Mikhail Bakhtin's definition of carnival. In this light, *Eden*'s spaces were not to be equated with hippie passivity and 'dropping out'. They aimed to be creative spaces for demystifying and internally transforming an alienated world, 'not the place for divertive thoughts, but for the replacement of myth in our lives'.¹⁸ The installation was therefore seen as something open-ended, to be used by each subject as a catalyst for individual development and creative production. 'It is not the object which is important but the way it is lived by the spectator,' he wrote, asking the reader at the end of his essay for the Whitechapel catalogue to reflect on their communal environment: 'Have you the idea for yours?'¹⁹ *Creleisure* became integral to his conception of integrating the viewer in his installations of the 1970s, 'essential to the conclusion of the participation-proposition'.²⁰

The nests in *Eden* were reworked for New York MoMA in 1970, and variants on them – the *Babylonests* – were permanently installed in Oiticica's small apartment in New York during that decade. These took the form of small 'cabins' stacked two or three high, completely filling the space of his apartment and frequented by friends and visitors. Each nest contained a mattress and was fronted by a gauzy veil that 'simultaneously evoked a feeling of motherly cosiness and of seeing the outside world through a mist'.²¹ It was Oiticica's social and working environment in his 'nest' he kept a typewriter, telephone, television, tape recorder and radio.

His apartment was also the location of his first *Cosmococa* installation, a collaboration with Neville d'Almeida that further probed the idea of creleisure. The *Cosmococas*, like the *Quasi-Cinemas*, were environmental installations accompanied by films, slides and rock music that proposed a heightened sensory pleasure explicitly derived from the use of cocaine. In *Block Experiments in Cosmococa, Program in Process, CC5 Hendrix-War* 1973, viewers were invited to lounge on hammocks while tracks from Hendrix's album *War Heroes* blasted out and the walls were washed with rapidly changing slide projections showing the album's cover 'graffitied' with lines of cocaine. In these works, recreation is



Hélio Oiticica
Eden
Whitechapel Art Gallery,
London, 1969

posed as anarchically counter-cultural, since both the 'outlaw' heroes and the iconography of cocaine are seen to stand outside the law, and therefore the logic of consumer spectacle.²² This space for non-alienated leisure, with the senses heightened by cocaine, was intended to produce a liberatory experience of the world, 'as opposed to that leisure of today which is the programmed desublimation', rigidly circumscribed by the clock, checking in and checking out either side of work.²³

Group Material

Thus Oiticica opposed the mediated spectacle of consumer culture in New York, proposing an authentic experience of self-realisation that would undercut and resist repressive desublimation. However, the use of cocaine removed this agenda from the social and collective impetus that had originally driven the *Paranglés* and *Penetrables*, and prompted a more individualist mode of narcotic escapism. Even so, Oiticica's work and writings anticipate the rethinking of notions of public and private that was about to take place in the late 1970s – in which the public was not viewed as discontinuous with the private, but intrinsically constitutive of it. This meant that the literal (physical) activation of the viewer advocated by Oiticica, Acconci, Graham and others was not necessarily seen as any more 'political' in implication than an examination of two-dimensional imagery, popular film or any cultural artefact demanding a more traditional mode of engagement. For this next generation of artists, all culture was viewed as capable of *producing* subjectivity since it forms the repertoire of images with which we identify and emulate. Influenced by the feminist engagement with the psychoanalytic theory of Jacques Lacan and the Marxist writings of Louis Althusser, these artists viewed culture as an 'ideological state apparatus' that art could meticulously examine and demystify in order to raise consciousness and realise change. Through such analyses, it was hoped that art could address concrete issues such as feminism, education, Latin American right-wing militarism, homelessness and AIDS. Perhaps inevitably, the oppositional attitude towards the market system and museum that had so strongly marked the preceding decade was no longer an overriding concern for these artists. The New York-based collective Group Material was typical of the proponents of this new position in claiming that the alternative should no longer stand outside the mainstream but integrate and subvert it: 'Participating in the system doesn't mean that we must identify with it, stop criticising it, or stop improving the little piece of turf on which we operate.'²⁴

Group Material, whose membership has oscillated between fifteen and three in number since its inception in 1979, is best known for blurring installation and exhibition making.²⁵ It began by running a community gallery on the lower East Side of Manhattan, and its first show, *The Inaugural Exhibition* 1980 included works of art by Group Material members alongside that of artists from a variety of

Group Material

Americana 1985
Exhibition installation
at the Whitney Museum
of American Art



backgrounds (local, professional and untrained). For the exhibition *The People's Choice* 1981, neighbours were invited to donate 'things that might not usually find their way into an art gallery'. This activity was backed up by collaborative events focused on social interaction and collaboration, such as the *Alienation Film Festival* 1980 and *Food and Culture* 1981. The group considered the collaborative process of this exhibition-making to be as important as the outcome, and the entire spectrum of activity directed towards the production of art and exhibitions became the subject of its work as much as the final display. Ideologically, Group Material sought to position itself between the commercial galleries of Manhattan and the ghetto of low-funded 'alternative' spaces without status: 'We knew that in order for our project to be taken seriously by a large public, we had to resemble a "real" gallery. Without these four walls of justification, our work would probably not be considered as art.'²⁶

By 1982, gallery activities became less important, and the group found a new venue, less an exhibition space than a hub of operations for organising off-site events.²⁷ Group Material was also being invited to participate in institutional shows, such as the Whitney Biennial and Documenta. *The Castle* – its contribution to Documenta 8, 1987 – directly alluded to Franz Kafka's short story of oppressive bureaucracy and took the form of a curated exhibition in which objects by forty other artists (including Barbara Kruger and Felix Gonzalez-Torres) were hung alongside mass-produced objects and work by lesser-known artists. For the Whitney Biennial, the installation *Americana* 1985, similarly took the form of an alternative exhibition within an exhibition, an 'officially approved *salon des refusés*'. This installation also juxtaposed work by artists and non-artists as well as mass-media imagery and commercial products – from detergent packages named *Bold*, *Future* and *Gain* to Norman Rockwell saucers, biscuits, folk music and an illustration of Kafka's *Amerika* by Tim Rollins and fifty children from the South Bronx – in order to dissect and criticise the myth of the American Dream. This curatorial approach reflected a belief that all cultural objects are equally important manifestations of ideology; Group Material's militant policy of inclusion attempted to avoid reiterating the oppressive structures and hierarchies they perceived to be already dominant in culture:

Mirroring the various forms of representation that structure our understanding of culture, our exhibitions bring together so-called fine art with products from supermarkets, mass-cultural artifacts with historical objects, factual documentation with homemade projects. We are not interested in making definitive evaluations or declarative statements, but in creating situations that offer our chosen subject as a complex and open-ended issue. We encourage greater audience participation through interpretation.

As such, Group Material considered its curatorial method to be 'painfully democratic'.²⁸

Group Material's practice implies that any critique of art is interchangeable.



Felix Gonzalez-Torres
Untitled 1989–90
Installation at Serpentine
Gallery, London, 2000

with a critique of dominant culture. In other words, the aesthetic is always already ideological, since authorities such as museums and cultural institutions have the power to determine which objects we view as art, and how. As Felix Gonzalez-Torres, a member of Group Material between 1987 and 1991, argued: ‘Aesthetics are not about politics; they are politics themselves. And this is how the “political” can be best utilised since it appears so “natural”. The most successful of all political moves are ones that don’t appear to be “political”.’²⁹ Group Material therefore showed work that was under-represented or excluded from the official art world due to its sexual, political, ethnic, colloquial or unmarketable character. As the AIDS crisis mounted during the 1980s, the group’s agenda acquired fresh urgency, fuelled by the NEA censorship of ‘homosexual’ and ‘blasphemous’ art by Robert Mapplethorpe and Andres Serrano in 1989.

Debate and dialogue became an important aspect of Group Material’s practice, and its 1988 Dia installation *Democracy* was backed up with a series of round-table and town-meeting discussions, later compiled into a book. The installation itself took on the appearance of a vibrant educational display, themed around the subject of electoral politics, education, cultural participation and AIDS; the diversity of material accumulated served to form a cultural indictment of government policy and its handling of the AIDS crisis. Like *Americana*, *Democracy* presupposed a critically vigilant viewer, one who is able to decipher cultural signs as symptoms of a larger (dominant) ideology. The work was designed to instigate a critical mindset, which the viewer would ideally carry forward into the world and actively use. Not unlike Brodthaer’s exhibition of eagle iconography in the Düsseldorf installation of the *Musée d’Art Moderne*, Group Material forged in the viewer an identification with its demystificatory agenda, now allied to a set of political convictions specifically opposed to the conservative policies of a Republican US government.

Community of loss

Arguably the most significant art to emerge from Group Material was that of Cuban artist Felix Gonzalez-Torres (1957–96), who abandoned the dogma of collaboration to produce an influential body of sculpture, photography and installation in his own right. His work is quite distinct from that of Group Material in both its formal and political approach: if the latter’s exhibitions sought a clear dissemination of information and did not contrive to represent a particular ‘aesthetic’, then the formal language of Minimalist and Conceptualist art remained key concerns for Gonzalez-Torres, who invested their anonymous aesthetic with a subtle political and emotional charge. In *Untitled (Placebo)* 1991, one thousand pounds of identical silver-cellophane wrapped sweets are laid out in the shape of a long rectangle on the gallery floor. The audience is invited to help themselves to a sweet, and the piece gradually disappears over the course of the exhibition. Like Gonzalez-Torres’s ‘paper stacks’ of posters that viewers may



Felix Gonzalez-Torres

*Untitled (Placebo –
Landscape – for Roni)*

1993

Installation at Museum of
Contemporary Art, Los
Angeles, April–June

1994

take away with them, *Untitled (Placebo)* exists as an instruction and can be endlessly remade, but its key idea is viewer participation, since it is the gallery visitor who creates the work's precarious physical identity. Gonzalez-Torres considered our interaction with his installations to be a metaphor for the relationship between

public and private, between personal and social, between the fear of loss and the joy of loving, of growing, of changing, of always becoming more, of losing oneself slowly and then being replenished all over again from scratch. I need the viewer, I need the public interaction. Without a public these works are nothing, nothing. I need the public to complete the work. I ask the public to help me, to take responsibility, to become part of my work, to join in.³⁰

Gonzalez-Torres began making the 'candy spills' in 1991, when facing the death from AIDS of his partner Ross Laycock. The spills therefore acquire an almost unbearable poignancy since their weight often alludes to that of Ross's body, or to both their body weights combined, as in *Untitled (Loverboys)* 1991. Comprising 350 pounds of white and blue cellophane-wrapped sweets, this work forms a double portrait of the two men, but also alludes to their impending separation through death. Gonzalez-Torres's work therefore signals a crisis in the type of political subjectivity proposed thus far in this chapter, which has revolved around an assertion of political will and identity. The idea of subjective activation that recurs in the work of Beuys, Oiticica and Group Material is based on a humanist model of the subject as having an essence – which is realised through an authentic experience of creativity or political representation. In this model, there is an emphasis on community as a form of communion, a goal of togetherness via a shared idea or aim. By contrast, Gonzalez-Torres proposes an idea of community centred around loss, always on the verge of disappearance. The viewing subject in his work is always implicitly incomplete, existing as an effect of being-in-common with others rather than as a self-sufficient and autonomous entity.³¹

Doubled clocks (*Untitled (Perfect Lovers)* 1991) and mirrors (*Untitled (March 5th)* 1991) allude to this reciprocal dependency, as does *Untitled (Arena)* 1993 – two pairs of headphones plugged into a single Walkman playing a recorded waltz tune, which viewers may wear to dance with a partner beneath a garland of light bulbs. Yet it is the candy spills that form the clearest expression of Gonzalez-Torres's conception of the subject as 'incomplete', since they establish a relationship between us precisely at the moment of disappearance: the sweets allude to a vanishing body, and are in turn dispersed into the bodies of the viewers, a transition that is infused with both mortality and eroticism:

I'm giving you this sugary thing; you put it in your mouth and you suck on someone else's body. And in this way, my work becomes part of so many other people's bodies ... For just a few seconds, I have put something sweet in someone's mouth and that is very sexy.³²

Relational aesthetics

The French curator and art critic Nicolas Bourriaud (b.1965) regards Gonzalez-Torres's work as exemplary of what he terms 'relational aesthetics', artistic practices of the 1990s that take as their theoretical horizon 'the realm of human interactions and its social context, rather than the assertion of an independent and *private* symbolic space'.³³ In other words, the works of art that Bourriaud categorises as 'relational' seek to set up encounters between people in which meaning is elaborated *collectively* rather than in the privatised space of individual consumption. The audience of this work is therefore envisaged as plural: rather than a one-to-one relationship between work of art and viewer, relational art sets up situations in which viewers are addressed as a collective, social mass; moreover, in many of these works we are given the structure to create a community, however temporary or utopian this might be.

It is important to emphasise that Bourriaud does not regard relational aesthetics as simply a theory of interactive art, but as a means of locating contemporary practice within the culture at large: relational art is seen as a direct response to the shift from a goods- to a service-based economy in the 1980s and 1990s. It is also seen as a response to the virtual relationships of the internet and globalisation, which on the one hand have prompted a desire for more physical and face-to-face interaction between people, while on the other inspiring artists to adopt a DIY approach and to model their own 'possible universes'.³⁴ This emphasis on immediacy is of course familiar to us from the 1960s, when artists placed a great premium on the authenticity of our first-hand encounter with a space or their own presence. But Bourriaud distances contemporary work from that of previous generations, because today's artists have a different attitude towards social change: instead of a 'utopian' agenda, he argues that artists today seek to set up functioning 'microtopias' in the here and now; instead of trying to change their environment, they are simply 'learning to inhabit the world in a better way'.³⁵

Bourriaud lists many artists in his book, most of whom were featured in his seminal exhibition *Traffic* at CAPC Bordeaux in 1993. One artist is mentioned with metronomic regularity, and his work can therefore be taken as paradigmatic of Bourriaud's theory: Rirkrit Tiravanija (b.1961).³⁶ His is typical of much of the relational art that Bourriaud discusses, being somewhat low-impact in appearance and including photography, video, wall texts, books, objects to be used and leftovers from the aftermath of an opening event. It is basically installation art in format, but this is a term that Tiravanija and many of his contemporaries would resist: rather than forming a coherent and distinctive transformation of space (in the manner of Kabakov's 'total installation'), relational artworks insist upon *use* rather than contemplation. This approach can be seen in Maurizio Cattelan's hiring out of his gallery space at the 1993 Venice Biennale to a cosmetics company, or in Christine Hill's setting up of the *Volksboutique*, a second-hand clothes shop at Documenta X, 1997.³⁷



Rirkrit Tiravanija
Untitled (Still)
303 Gallery, New York,
1992



Rirkrit Tiravanija
Untitled (tomorrow is another day) exterior view at the Kölnischer Kunstverein, Köln, 1996

Tiravanija is one of the most influential contemporary artists working in this way. He was born in Buenos Aires to Thai parents, raised in Thailand, Ethiopia and Canada, and is currently based in New York. This nomadic global upbringing is reflected in his hybrid installation-performances in which he cooks vegetable curry or *pad thai* for people attending the museum or gallery in which he has been invited to work. The phrase 'lots of people' appears in the list of materials for each piece, indicating that the viewers' participation is crucial. In his first major installation, *Untitled (Still)* 1992, at 303 Gallery, New York, Tiravanija moved everything he found in the gallery office and storeroom into the main exhibition space, including the director, who was obliged to work in public. In the storeroom he set up what was described by one critic as a 'makeshift refugee kitchen' with paper plates, plastic knives and forks, gas burners, kitchen utensils, two folding tables and some folding stools.³⁸ In the gallery he cooked curries for visitors, and the detritus, utensils and food packets became the exhibit whenever the artist wasn't there. A more elaborate version of this live installation was undertaken in *Untitled (tomorrow is another day)* 1997, at the Kölnischer Kunstverein. Here, Tiravanija built a wooden reconstruction of his New York apartment that was open to the public twenty-four hours a day. People could use the kitchen to make food, wash themselves in his bathroom, sleep in the bedroom, or hang out and chat in the living-room. The catalogue accompanying the Kunstverein project quotes a selection of newspaper articles and reviews, all of which reiterate the curator's assertion that 'this unique combination of art and life offered an impressive experience of togetherness to everybody'.³⁹ Several critics, as well as Tiravanija himself, have observed that this involvement of the audience and the fostering of relationships between them is the main focus of his work: the food is a means to allow other issues to develop.⁴⁰

Tiravanija therefore seeks to set up literal relationships between the visitors to his work, and this active participation is privileged over the detached contemplation more conventionally associated with gallery experience. His work insists that the viewer is physically present in a particular situation at a particular time – in this case, eating the food that he cooks, alongside other visitors in a communal situation. As we have seen elsewhere in this book, this mode of considering the work of art as a trigger for participation has a history – Kaprow's Happenings, Accconci's performances, Oiticica's nests and Beuys's declaration that 'everyone is an artist'. A rhetoric of democracy and emancipation accompanied each of these precursors, and this continues to be the case with Bourriaud.⁴¹ He regards the open-ended, participatory work of art as more ethical and political in implication than the autonomous, finite object. The interactive premise of relational art is seen as inherently superior to optical contemplation (which is deemed passive and disengaged) because the work of art is a 'social form' capable of producing human relationships. As a consequence, the work is understood to be political in implication and emancipatory in effect.



Rirkrit Tiravanija
Untitled (tomorrow is another day)
Installation view at the Kölnischer Kunstverein, Köln, 1996

But what kind of politics is at stake here? With Tiravanija's work, and the critical claims made for it, it is important to examine what is meant by the 'political'. Because the work is inclusive and egalitarian in gesture, 'political' here implies an idea of democracy. However, recent political theorists have shown that inclusiveness does not automatically equate with democracy: instead, the public sphere remains democratic only insofar as its naturalised exclusions are taken into account and made open to contestation. In their influential book *Hegemony and Socialist Strategy* (1985), Ernesto Laclau and Chantal Mouffe argue that a fully functioning democracy is not one in which friction and antagonisms between people have disappeared; rather, democracy occurs when the frontiers between different positions continue to be drawn up and brought into debate. This is because Laclau and Mouffe, following Lacan, understand the subject to have a failed structural identity, and therefore to be dependent on *identification* in order to proceed.⁴² Because subjectivity is this process of identification, we are necessarily incomplete entities – and antagonism is the type of relationship that emerges between such incomplete subjects.⁴³ When Tiravanija provides an 'experience of togetherness for everybody', it could be argued that relations of conflict are erased rather than sustained, because the work speaks only to a community whose members have something in common: an interest in art, or free food.⁴⁴ Indeed, for the majority of visitors to a Tiravanija installation, the overwhelming impression is one of arriving too late – having been excluded from the opening night's party.

Underlying Bourriaud's argument about relational aesthetics is the presumption that dialogue is in and of itself democratic. This idea is found frequently in writing on Tiravanija's work. Udo Kittelmann, for example, has stated: 'Groups of people prepared meals and talked, took a bath or occupied the bed. Our fear that the art-living-space might be vandalised did not come true ... The art-space lost its institutional function and finally turned into a free social space.'⁴⁵ Tiravanija's installations reflect Bourriaud's understanding of the conditions produced by relational artworks as fundamentally harmonious, because they are addressed to a community of viewing subjects with *something in common*. This is in contrast to the works of Gonzalez-Torres, where the emphasis is less on communion than on what Jean-Luc Nancy calls a 'community at loose ends', forever slipping out of grasp. Relational aesthetics understands the political only in the loosest sense of advocating dialogue over monologue (the one-way communication that the Situationists equated with spectacle); in all other respects it remains an assertion of political will (in the creation of a mini-utopia). Ultimately, Tiravanija's works tend not to destabilise our self-identificatory mechanisms but to affirm them, and collapse into everyday leisure – the repressive desublimation opposed so passionately by Oiticica. The microtopia arguably gives up on the idea of transformation in public culture and reduces its scope to the pleasures of the people in a private group who identify with each other as gallery goers.

Relational antagonism

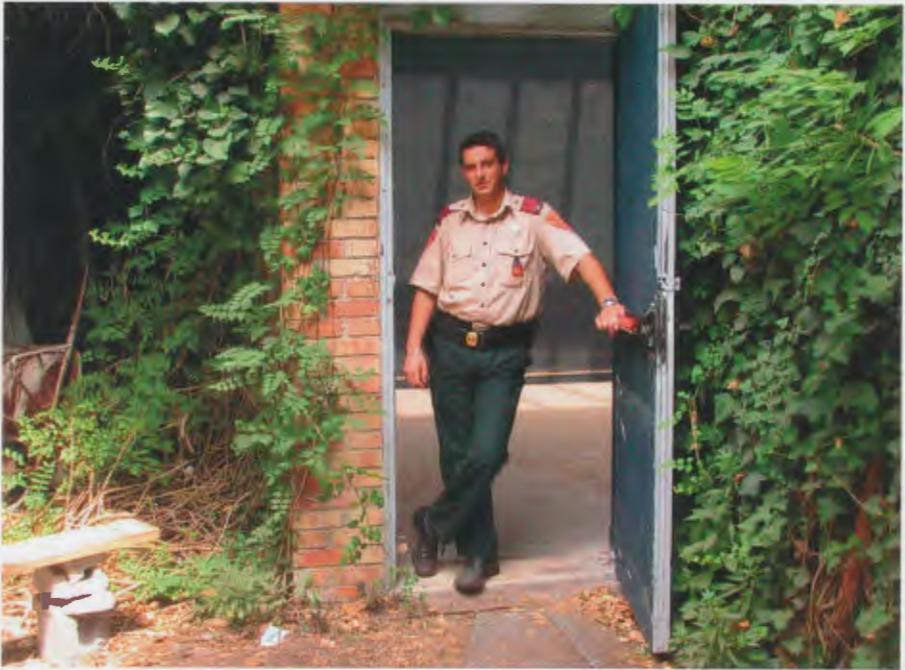
By contrast, the 'antagonism' theory of democracy put forward by Laclau and Mouffe is underpinned by an idea of subjectivity as irremediably decentred and incomplete. It can be used to illuminate the work of an artist conspicuously ignored by Bourriaud: Santiago Sierra (b.1966), a Spanish artist who lives and works in Mexico. The work of Sierra, like that of Tiravanija, involves the literal setting-up of relationships between people: himself, the participants in his work, and viewers. But Sierra's 'actions' since the late 1990s have been organised around a manipulation of relationships that are more complex (and more controversial) than those produced by the artists associated with relational aesthetics. Sierra has attracted tabloid attention and belligerent criticism for some of his more extreme actions, such as *160cm line tattooed on four people* 2000 and *A person paid for 360 continuous working hours* 2000. These actions and live installations are – like much performance art of the 1970s – ephemeral and documented in the form of casual black and white photographs, a short text, or video. Sierra's work nevertheless significantly develops the 1970s performance art tradition in his use of other people as performers, and in his emphasis on their remuneration: everything and everyone has a price. His work can therefore be seen as a sobering meditation on the social and political conditions that permit such disparities in people's 'prices' to emerge.

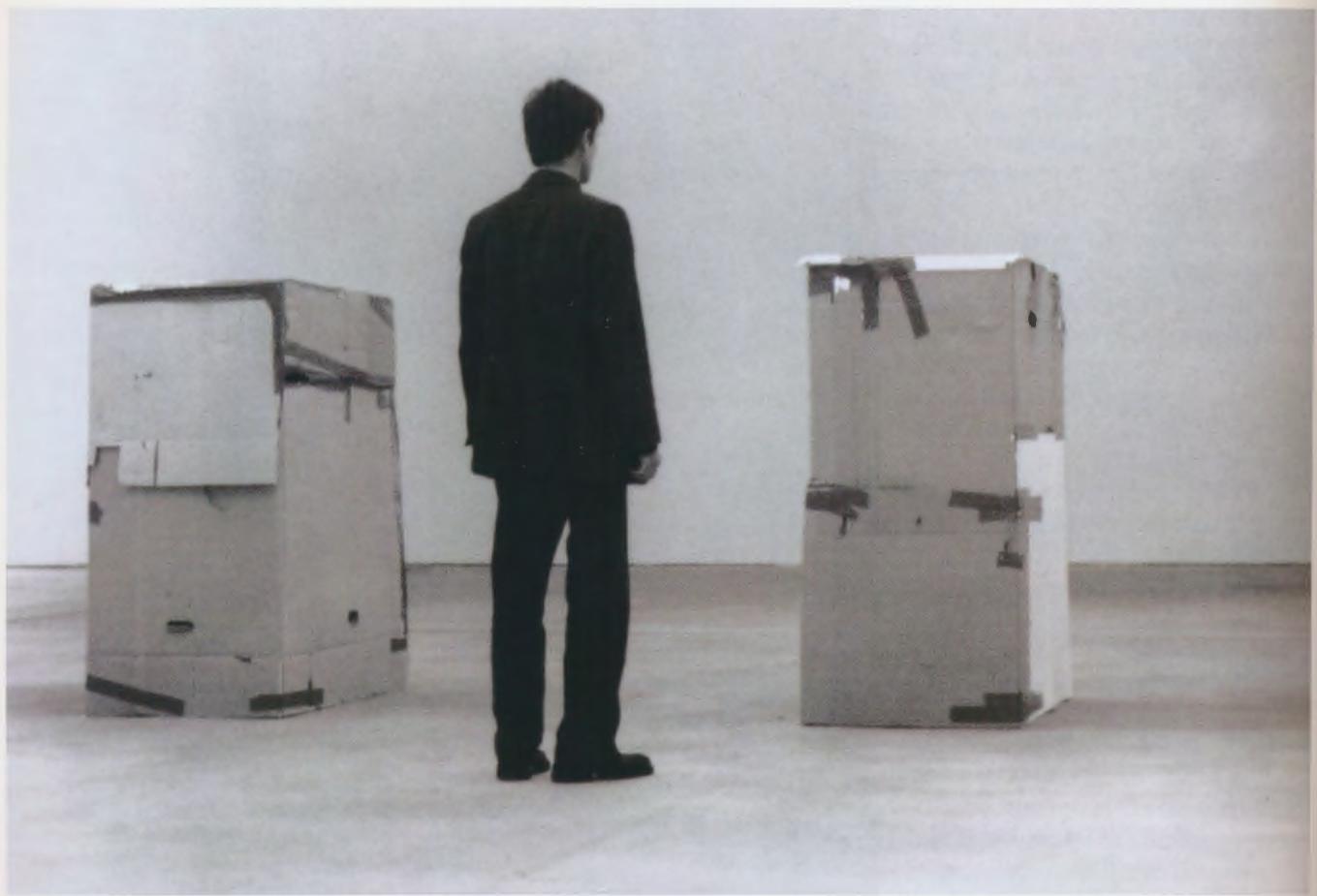
Unlike the emphasis on dialogue for its own sake (as a representation of communication) in the work of Tiravanija, Sierra's installations often imply that silence can be as forceful as speech. In his exhibition at Kunst-Werke in Berlin 2000, viewers were confronted with a series of makeshift cardboard boxes, each of which concealed a Chechyan refugee seeking asylum in Germany. The boxes were a low-budget, Arte Povera take on Tony Smith's celebrated 6 × 6 foot sculpture *Die* 1962, which Michael Fried famously described as exerting the same effect on the viewer as 'the silent presence of another person'. In Sierra's piece, this silent presence was literal: since it is illegal in Germany for immigrants to be paid for work, the refugees' participation could not be announced by the gallery. Their lack of status was highlighted by their literal invisibility beneath the cardboard boxes.⁴⁶ In such works, Sierra seems to argue that the embodied perception posited by Minimalism is politicised precisely through the *quality* of its relationship to other people – or more precisely, its lack of relationship. Presence and perception, then, are shown to be pre-regulated by legal and economic exclusions.

Sierra's work for the Spanish pavilion at the 2003 Venice Biennale, *Wall Enclosing a Space*, involved sealing off the pavilion's interior with concrete blocks from floor to ceiling. On entering the pavilion, viewers were confronted by a hastily constructed yet impregnable wall that rendered the galleries inaccessible. Visitors carrying a Spanish passport, however, were invited to enter via the back of the building, where two immigration officers inspected their documents.

Santiago Sierra

Wall Enclosing a Space
entrance (left) and rear
view (below right)
Spanish Pavilion,
Venice Biennale,
June–Nov 2003





Santiago Sierra
*Workers who cannot
be paid, renumerated
to remain inside
cardboard boxes*
Kunst-Werke, Berlin,
Sept 2000

All non-Spanish nationals were denied entry to the gallery, whose interior contained nothing but grey paint peeling from the walls, left over from the previous year's exhibition. Once again, the type of Minimalism espoused by Sierra charges phenomenological perception with the political: his works seek to expose how identity (here, national identity) is, like public space, riven with social and legal exclusions.⁴⁷

It could be argued that Sierra's installations and actions are nihilistic, simple reiterations of an oppressive status quo. Yet he embeds his work into 'institutions' other than contemporary art (immigration, the minimum wage, traffic congestion, illegal street commerce, homelessness) in order to highlight the divisions enforced by these contexts. Crucially, though, he does not present these territories as reconciled (unlike Tiravanija's seamless fusion of the museum with the café or bar), but as spheres fraught with tension, unstable yet open to change. Our response to witnessing Sierra's live installations and actions – whether the participants face the wall, sit under boxes, or are tattooed with a line of ink – is quite different in character from the 'togetherness' of relational aesthetics. The work does not offer an experience of human empathy that smoothes over the awkward situation before us, but a pointed racial/economic *non*-identification: 'this is not me'. The persistence of this friction, its awkwardness and discomfort, alerts us to the relational antagonism of Sierra's work.

Making art politically

The Swiss artist Thomas Hirschhorn (b.1957) has repeatedly rejected the term 'installation' as a description for his practice, instead preferring the commercial and pragmatic resonance of the word 'display'.⁴⁸ What he seems to dislike most about the term 'installation art' is its reduction of the work to a medium or set of conventions within which it can be qualitatively measured; instead he regards his practice as sculptural in the broadest sense, and he explicitly references Beuys's concept of Social Sculpture. It would certainly be wrong to categorise Hirschhorn as an installation artist, since his work takes many forms: impermanent outdoor 'monuments' dedicated to philosophers, makeshift 'altars' celebrating writers and artists, and 'kiosks' displaying objects and information. Yet when shown inside the gallery, his work is unequivocally installational in format, immersing the viewer in an overload of found images, videos and photocopies, bound together in cheap, perishable materials such as cardboard, gaffer tape and tinfoil.

Hirschhorn is well-known for his assertion that he does not make political art, but makes art politically. Significantly, this political commitment does not take the form of activating the viewer in a space:

I do not want to invite or oblige viewers to become interactive with what I do; I do not want to activate the public. I want to give of myself, to engage myself to such a degree that viewers confronted with the work can take part and become involved, but not as actors.⁴⁹ Hirschhorn therefore represents an important shift in installation art's

conception of the viewer, one that is matched by his assertion of art's autonomy. Since the 1920s (and even earlier), artists and theorists have denigrated the idea of art as a privileged and independent sphere, and instead sought to fuse it with 'life'. Today, when art has become all too subsumed into life – as leisure, entertainment and business – artists such as Hirschhorn are reasserting the autonomy of artistic activity as a separate discipline. As a consequence, Hirschhorn does not regard his work to be 'open-ended' or requiring completion by the viewer, since the politics of his practice derive instead from *how* the work is made:

To make art politically means to choose materials that do not intimidate, a format that doesn't dominate, a device that does not seduce. To make art politically is not to submit to an ideology or to denounce the system, in opposition to so-called 'political art'. It is to work with the fullest energy against the principle of 'quality'.⁵⁰

Thus a rhetoric of democracy also adheres to Hirschhorn's work, but it is now manifested in concerns other than for the viewer's literal activation: rather, it appears in decisions regarding format, materials and location, such as his 'altars' that emulate the *ad hoc* memorials of flowers and toys at the site of an accident, and which are located in peripheral sites around a city.⁵¹ In these works – as in the installations *Pole-Self* and *Laundrette*, both 2001 – found images, texts, adverts and photocopies are juxtaposed to contextualise consumer banality with political and military atrocities.

Many of Hirschhorn's concerns came together in the *Bataille Monument* 2002 at Documenta 11. Located in Nordstadt, a suburb of Kassel several miles away from the main Documenta venues, Hirschhorn's *Monument* comprised three installations in large makeshift shacks erected on a lawn between two housing estates, a temporary bar run by one of the local families, and a sculpture of a tree. The shacks were constructed from Hirschhorn's signature materials of cheap timber, foil, plastic sheeting and brown tape; the first housed a library of books and videos grouped around five Bataillean themes: word, image, art, sex and sport. Several worn sofas, a TV and video were also provided, and the whole installation was designed to facilitate familiarisation with the philosopher, of whom Hirschhorn describes himself a 'fan'. The other shacks housed a TV studio, and an installation presenting information about Bataille's life and work. To reach the *Bataille Monument*, visitors had to participate in a further component of the work: securing a lift from a Turkish cab company that was contracted to ferry Documenta visitors to and from the site. Viewers were then stranded at the *Monument* until a return cab became available, during which time they would inevitably make use of the bar.

In locating the *Monument* in the middle of a community whose ethnic and economic status did not immediately mark it as a target audience for Documenta, Hirschhorn contrived a curious rapprochement between the influx of art tourists and the area's residents. Rather than the local populace becoming subject to what



Thomas Hirschhorn
Bataille Monument
Documenta 11, Kassel,
June – Sept 2002



Thomas Hirschhorn
Bataille Monument
Documenta 11, Kassel,
June–Sept 2002

Thomas Hirschhorn
Bataille Monument
Documenta 11, Kassel,
June–Sept 2002



he calls the ‘zoo effect’, Hirschhorn’s project made the art public feel like hapless intruders. Even more disruptively, in light of the international art world’s intellectual pretensions, *Monument* took the local inhabitants seriously as potential Bataille readers. This gesture induced a range of responses amongst visitors, including accusations that Hirschhorn’s gesture was inappropriate and patronising. This unease revealed the fragile conditioning of the art world’s self-constructed identity and intellectual ambitions. The complicated play of identificatory and dis-identificatory mechanisms at work in the content, construction and location of the *Bataille Monument* were radically and disruptively thought-provoking. Rather than offering, as the Documenta handbook claims, a reflection on ‘communal commitment’, the *Bataille Monument* served to destabilise (but also potentially liberate) any sense of what community identity might be, or of what it means to be a ‘fan’ of art and philosophy.

A work like the *Bataille Monument* is of course dependent on context for impact, but it could theoretically be restaged elsewhere, in comparable circumstances. Ultimately, it is not important that it is an installation, because the viewer is no longer required to fulfil a literally participatory role, but instead to be a thoughtful and reflective visitor. The independent stance in Hirschhorn’s work – collaboratively produced, but a product of a single artist’s vision – assures the autonomy of the work, but also of the viewer, who is no longer coerced into fulfilling the artist’s interactive requirements: ‘This is something essential to art: reception is never its goal. What counts for me is that my work provides material to reflect upon. Reflection is an activity.⁵²

There has been a long tradition of activated spectatorship in works of art across many media, from experimental German theatre of the 1920s (Bertold Brecht) to new-wave film (Jean-Luc Godard), from Minimalist sculpture’s foregrounding of the viewer’s presence to socially engaged performance art (Mierle Laderman Ukeles or Christine Hill, for example). The examination of works in this chapter shows that it is no longer enough to say that activating the viewer *tout court* is democratic, for every artwork – even the most ‘open-ended’ – determines in advance the type of participation that the viewer may have within it.⁵³ Hirschhorn would argue that such pretences to emancipation are no longer necessary: all art – whether immersive or not – can be a critical force that appropriates and reassigns value, decentralising our thoughts from the predominant and pre-existing consensus. Not tied any more to the direct activation of viewers, or to our literal participation in the work, installation art now witnesses its own implosion – and finds itself many miles from the avant-garde call to collapse art and life with which it began.

CONCLUSION

'Perhaps all our models, not only of history but of the aesthetic, are secretly models of the subject' Hal Foster'

Insisting on the viewer's first-hand presence in the work, installation art has come to justify its claims to political and philosophical significance on the basis of two arguments: *activated spectatorship* and the idea of the *dispersed* or *decentred subject*. This argument supports a consensus widely held among academics, curators, critics and practitioners of contemporary art that the decentring of normative (i.e. modern) subjectivity is today a *fait accompli*. In this conclusion these claims are re-examined, alongside the question of whether the achievements of critical postmodernism can be considered so unproblematically accomplished. The discourses identifiable as shaping the formation of the latter – phenomenology, poststructuralism, feminism, post-colonialism – raise a number of problems and contradictions that persistently intrude on this history of installation art as presented thus far.

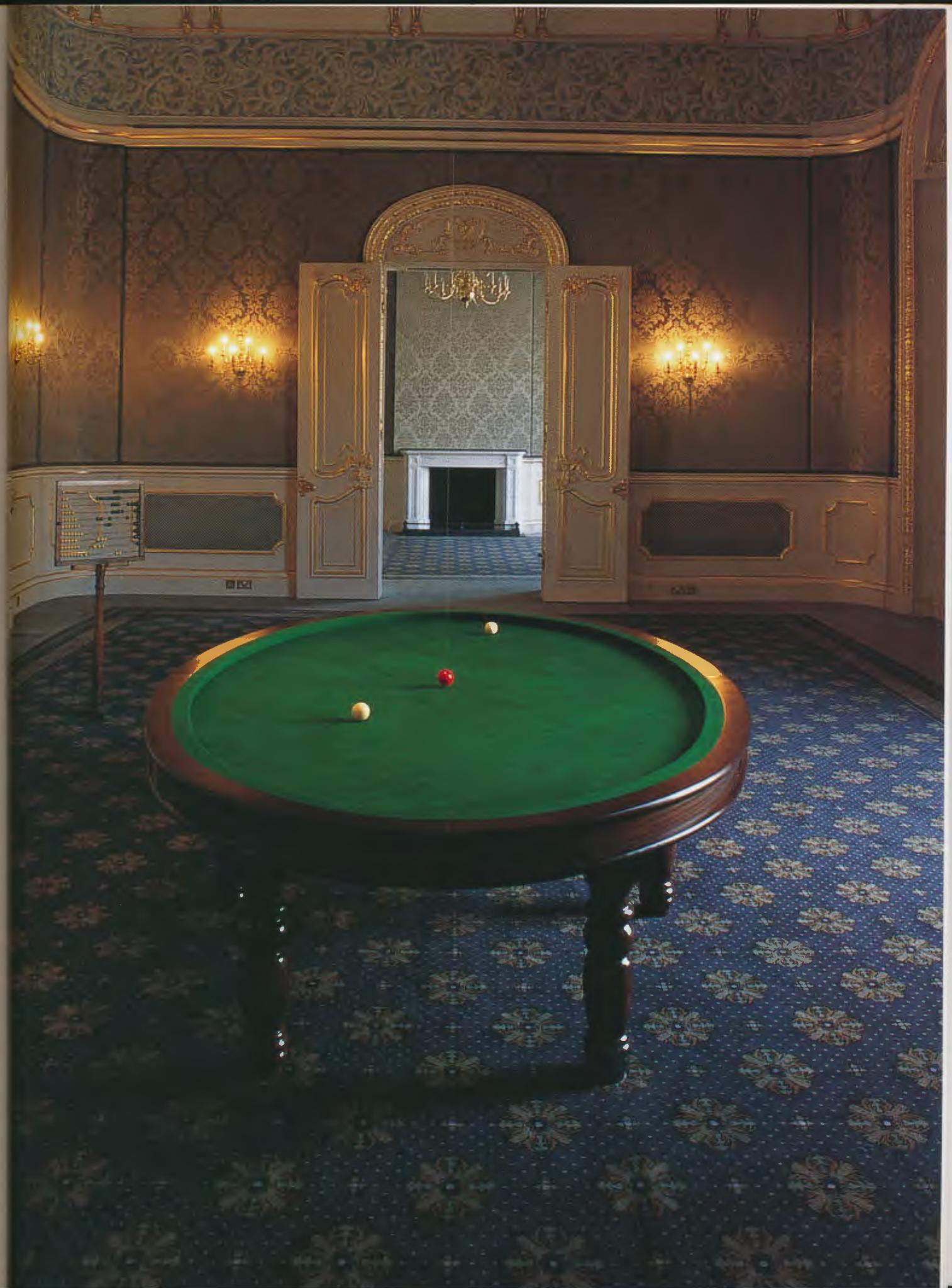
Self-reflexive and fragmented

Each of the preceding chapters has been organised around a theory that dissolves what it considers to be an outdated modern conception of the subject as coherent, transparent and self-reflexive.¹ These 'new' models are argued to fragment the subject by unconscious representations (Freud), by the mutual imbrication of subject and object (Merleau-Ponty), or by non-coincidence and alienation from itself (Lacan, Barthes, Laclau and Mouffe). Yet in much writing about installation art, the theories on which these models are based are conflated with both the subject matter of the work and our experience of it.

The installation *Empty Club* 1996, by the Mexican artist Gabriel Orozco, comprised a series of interventions in a disused gentlemen's club in London. One of these featured an oval, pocketless billiard table, above which was a red ball, hanging from the ceiling by a fine wire like a pendulum. In the catalogue, the critic Jean Fisher notes that in navigating the installation, visitors came to understand that an imperial world view was being undermined by a 'cryptic or hermetic order for which the game rules have not been provided':

In a deterritorialised world that no longer possesses a centre (a *telos* – an organising principle such as God, the Imperium, or even the gentlemen's club), there can be only a multiplicity of inflections or contingent points of view ... in *Oval Billiard Table*, the swinging pendulum-ball challenges the authority of the gravitational centre – a position which we cannot occupy. Moreover, unlike a regular billiard table, Orozco's pocketless ellipse provides no privileged position from which to survey the field, but an indefinite number of equally tangential points of view. And perhaps significantly, it *in itself* does not present a game of elimination (no balls or players are knocked out of play) although the relations of its parts may change; in other words, displacement is an event inherent in the work's internal relations as well as those with the spectators or players.²

Gabriel Orozco
Empty Club
50 St. James's, London,
1996
Commissioned and
produced by Artangel,
London



She goes on to argue that because visitors are ‘unable to map themselves within an entirely familiar field’ they ‘lose a sense of certainty – and become “decentred”’. In other words, Fisher makes a direct analogy between the viewer’s *experience* of the work and a politically correct viewing *subject* – as if Orozco’s installation, by inducing a sense of disorientation, could produce a viewer who identifies with a decentred postcolonial subject position. Yet how is this ‘fragmented’ viewer to recognise his or her own displacement unless from a position of rational centredness? Throughout Fisher’s text, and many like it, we find the viewer of installation art posited both as a decentred subject *yet also* as a detached onlooker, the ground of perceptual experience.

This same problem gnaws at the account of installation art in the present book: the decentring triggered by installation art is to be experienced and rationally understood from a position of centred subjectivity. Everything about installation art’s structure and *modus operandi* repeatedly valorises the viewer’s first-hand presence – an insistence that ultimately reinstates the subject (as a unified entity), no matter how fragmented or dispersed our encounter with the art turns out to be. Perhaps more precisely, installation art *instates* the subject as a crucial component of the work – unlike body art, painting, film and so on, which (arguably) do not insist upon our physical presence in a space.⁴ What installation art offers, then, is an experience of centring *and* decentring: work that insists on our centred presence in order then to subject us to an experience of decentring. In other words, installation art does not just articulate an intellectual notion of dispersed subjectivity (reflected in a world without a centre or organising principle); it also constructs a set in which the viewing subject may experience this fragmentation first-hand.

Viewer and model

Thus the ‘decentring’ of the viewer staged by contemporary art is not as simple and automatic as it first appears. As we have observed, installation art’s emphasis on first-hand experience arises in the 1960s as a response to mediated consumer culture and from opposition to the work of art as commodity. But in doing so it admits a flood of conflicting appeals to the viewer’s authentic experience of ‘heightened consciousness’ (of body, self, place, time, social group) as – paradoxically – *both* an assertion of *and* a decentring of subjectivity. This is because installation art plays on an ambiguity between two types of *subject*: the *literal* viewer who steps into the work, and an abstract, philosophical *model* of the subject that is postulated by the way in which the work structures this encounter. To an extent this observation was pre-empted by Dan Graham in 1978, who noted that 1960s art was a ‘new form of Kantian idealism’ in which ‘the isolated spectator’s “subjective” consciousness-in-itself replaces the art object to be perceived-for-itself; his/her perception is the product of the art. Thus, instead of eliminating the physically present art object, environmental art’s meditative

approach creates a secondary, veiled object: the viewer's consciousness as a subject.⁵ Graham's comment points to the ambiguity at the heart of installation art: does the viewer's consciousness become the subject/object, or the subject matter? Installation art and its literature elides the two subjects of its address – the literal viewing subject (who enters the work as a 'veiled object') and an abstract model of the subject (of which the viewer is ideally made aware through being in the work).

This tension – between the dispersed and fragmented *model subject* of post-structuralist theory and a self-reflexive *viewing subject* capable of recognising its own fragmentation – is demonstrated in the apparent contradiction between installation art's claims to both *decentre* and *activate* the viewer. After all, decentring implies the lack of a unified subject, while activated spectatorship calls for a fully present, autonomous subject of conscious will (that is, a 'modern' subject). As argued in Chapter Four, the conception of democracy as antagonism put forward by Laclau and Mouffe goes some way towards resolving this apparent conflict; even so, the majority of examples discussed in this book are underpinned by a more traditional model of political activation and therefore of 'modern' subjectivity. As such, they operate on two levels, addressing the literal viewer as a rational individual, while simultaneously positing an ideal or philosophical model of the subject as decentred. Both types of viewer are implied, but it is impossible to reduce one to the other: I (Claire Bishop) am not interchangeable with the subject of phenomenological consciousness posited by a Bruce Nauman installation. But paradoxically, I (Claire Bishop) am subjected by Nauman's work to an experiment that fragments my perception of myself as a self-contained and coherent ego.

Aesthetic judgement

Some would argue that this split sense of the 'subject' – as both centred *and* decentred – indicates a failure of installation art, not least because this is an age marked so strongly by proclamations that the philosophical subject is not simply decentred, but completely dead.⁶ This argument might run as follows: installation art feeds off the poststructuralist project to disperse the singular and unified subject and to propose an alternative model of subjectivity as fragmented and multiple; yet in doing this, installation art's repeated emphasis on the need for a *literal* viewer makes of us a point of synthesis that undermines such deconstructions of interiority, self-presence and mastery. However, the situation is more nuanced and complex than this argument permits: installation art posits us as *both* centred and decentred, and this conflict is *itself decentring* since it structures an irresolvable antagonism between the two. Installation art calls for a self-present viewing subject precisely in order to subject him/her to the process of fragmentation. When successful, this involves an overlap between the philosophical model of subjectivity presupposed by the work and the production



Carsten Höller
Flying Machine 1996
Installation at the
Contemporary Arts
Center, Cincinnati,
Sept 2000

of this model in the literal viewer who experiences it first-hand. By this means, installation art aims not only to problematise the subject as decentred, but also to produce it.

This interplay is what differentiates the viewer's presence in installation art from that implied by Michael Fried's famous (and quasi-religious) assertion that 'presentness is grace'.⁷ The differences are clear: for Fried, 'presence' refers to the work of art, rather than the viewer, who is virtually *eclipsed* by the work of art (ideally, abstract painting and sculpture); Fried's model of the subject is centred and transcendent, adequate to the centred and self-sufficient painting before us. Installation art, by contrast, insists upon the viewer's physical presence *precisely in order to subject it to an experience of decentring*, a transition adequate to the context-dependent work in which we stand. But herein lies a crucial difference between installation art's use of philosophy and what the latter actually articulates. Merleau-Ponty's phenomenology is an account of our *everyday* relationship to the world and is not intended to engender specific mechanisms of subjective fragmentation; likewise, for Freud and Lacan we are 'decentred' at all times, not just when experiencing a work of art. By seeking to contrive a moment of decentring, installation art implicitly structures the viewer *a priori* as centred. Even so, it is the achievement of installation art that on some occasions (and these may only be very rare), the ideal model of the subject overlaps with our literal experience, and we genuinely do feel confused, disoriented and destabilised by our encounter with the work.

The degree of proximity between model subject and literal viewer may therefore provide a criterion of aesthetic judgement for installation art: the closer the ideal model to the literal viewer's experience, the more compelling the installation. By way of conclusion, it is worth considering the broader significance of the motivations underpinning the history of installation art as it has been presented here. It has been argued in these pages that installation art is closely allied to the concerns of poststructuralist theory, and shares its call for emancipation. It is possible to say that installation art's insistence on the viewer's experience aims to thrust into question our sense of stability in and mastery over the world, and to reveal the 'true' nature of our subjectivity as fragmented and decentred. By attempting to expose us to the 'reality' of our condition as decentred subjects without closure, installation art implies that we may become adequate to this model, and thereby more equipped to negotiate our actions in the world and with other people. That this is to be achieved by our literal immersion in a discrete space contiguous with the 'real world' has been the tacit manifesto – and achievement – of installation art.

NOTES

Introduction

1 Readers will note an inconsistency of tense in this book. If pieces are still extant they are discussed in the present tense; if they have been destroyed they are discussed in the past tense. This problem of tense also reveals much about the status of installation art: it does not easily lend itself to discussion as an object detachable from the conditions under which it is seen.

2 Poststructuralism is part of but not reducible to postmodernism. It refers to a disparate group of thinkers who came to prominence after 1968, particularly in France, and which includes Jacques Derrida, Michel Foucault, Julia Kristeva, Jean Baudrillard, Gilles Deleuze, Jean-François Lyotard, as well as transitional figures like Roland Barthes and Jacques Lacan. Their ideas do not belong to any specific school of thought, but can be characterised by a desire to resist grounding discourse in metaphysics, an insistence on plurality and an instability of meaning, and an abandonment of the Enlightenment concept of the subject put forward by Descartes.

3 For example, Jean Fisher, writing on Gabriel Orozco's installation *Empty Club* 1996, notes that visitors are 'unable to map themselves within an entirely familiar field, lose a sense of certainty – and become "decentred":' 'Orozco's decentring operation produces a compelling analogy with current cultural debates on centre-periphery relations. In a deterritorialised world that no longer possesses a centre (a telos – an organising principle such as God, the Imperium, or even the gentleman's club), there can be only a multiplicity of inflections on contingent points of view ... [Orozco's work] provides no privileged position from which to survey the field, but an indefinite number of equally tangential points of view.' Fisher, 'The Play of the World', *Empty Club*, London, 1998, pp.19–20.

Chapter 1

1 Georges Hugnet, 'L'exposition internationale du surréalisme en 1938', *Preuves*, no. 91, 1958, p.47.

2 Ilya Kabakov, *On The Total Installation*, Bonn, 1995, p.275. All subsequent Kabakov quotes are from this book unless otherwise stated.

3 This is what Freud calls the 'dream-work', a four-fold activity of condensation, displacement, considerations of representability and secondary revision. The dream-work ensures that all latent dream-thoughts are censored (or disguised) in manifest images. The meaning of the dream therefore lies not in its latent content but in the *relation between* the manifest and latent dream-thoughts, that is, in the operations of the dream-work. Sigmund Freud, *The Interpretation of Dreams* (1900), Pelican Freud Library, vol. 4, Harmondsworth, 1974, chapter 6, 'The Dream Work'. All subsequent Freud quotes are from this book unless otherwise stated.

4 Michael Fried famously argued that some paintings are 'absorptive' while others are 'theatrical', depending on whether the depicted figures ignore or establish eye contact with the beholder (Fried, *Absorption and Theatricality: Painting and the Beholder in the Age of Diderot*, Berkeley and London, 1980). If I refer to painting in general as 'absorptive', it is in the sense that the viewer projects onto and is therefore identified with the subject of the art. This contrast between loss of self and heightened awareness of self will be explored further in Chapters Two and Three.

5 Lewis Kachur, *Displaying the Marvelous: Marcel Duchamp, Salvador Dalí and the Surrealist Exhibition*, Cambridge, Mass, 2001.

6 Marcel Duchamp, in Pierre Cabanne, *Dialogues with Marcel Duchamp*, London, 1971, p.82; Man Ray, *Self Portrait*, London, 1963, p.287. Marcel Jean, by contrast, reports that the soundtrack comprised a loud speaker blaring out 'the German army's parade march'. Marcel Jean, *The History of Surrealist Painting*, London, 1960, p.281.

7 'Duchamp had thought of installing electric "magic eyes", so that lights would have gone on automatically as soon as the spectator had broken an invisible ray when passing in front of the paintings. The scheme proved too difficult to carry out and had to be abandoned.' Jean, ibid., pp.281–2.

8 In the following days, the public soon pocketed the entire stock of torches and there was no alternative in the end but to install permanent lighting. See Jean, ibid., p.282.

9 Hugnet, op.cit., p.47.

10 André Breton, *L'Amour Fou*, Paris, 1937, p.60.

11 Kachur, op.cit., pp.216–7.

12 Allan Kaprow, 'The Legacy of Jackson Pollock', in Jeff Kelley (ed.), *Essays on the Blurring of Art and Life*, Berkeley, 1993, pp.1–9.

13 Kaprow, interview with Barbara Berman, in *Allan Kaprow*, Pasadena Art Museum, 1967, p.3; Kaprow, 'Happenings in the New York Scene', in Kelley (ed.), op.cit., p.8.

14 Kaprow, 'The Legacy of Jackson Pollock', op.cit., pp.6–9 (my emphasis).

15 Kaprow, 'Notes on the Creation of a Total Art' (1958), in Kelley, op.cit., p.11.

16 Kaprow, quoted in Michael Kirby, *Happenings: An Illustrated Anthology*, London, 1966, p.46. Although Happenings were durational and 'scored' (in the loosest sense) for performance, Kaprow acknowledged that there was very little difference between the two, describing Environments and Happenings as 'the passive and active sides of a single coin': 'Environments are generally quiet situations, existing for one or for several persons to walk or crawl into, lie down, or sit in. One looks, sometimes listens, eats, drinks, or rearranges the elements as though moving household objects around. Other Environments ask that the visitor-participant recreate and continue the work's inherent processes. For human beings at least, all of these characteristics suggest a somewhat thoughtful and meditative demeanour.' Kaprow, *Assemblage, Environments and Happenings*, New York, 1966, p.184.

17 Kaprow, cited in *The Hansa Gallery Revisited*, New York, 1997, n.p.

18 Kaprow, 'Happenings in the New York Scene', op.cit., p.21.

19 Kelley, op.cit., pp.xi–xxvi.

20 John Dewey, *Art as Experience*, London, 1934, p.19.

21 Kaprow, 'Happenings in the New York Scene', op.cit., p.22.

22 Kaprow, *Assemblage, Environments and Happenings*, op.cit., p.156.

23 Ibid., p.16.

24 Ibid. p.16; Kirby, op.cit., p.20.

25 Review by V.P., *Art News*, January 1961, p.12.

26 Kaprow, 'The Legacy of Jackson Pollock', op.cit., p.9. See for example, his description in 'Happenings in the New York Scene', op.cit., p.15: 'blankets keep falling over everything from the ceiling. A hundred iron barrels and gallon wine jugs hanging on ropes swing back and forth crashing like church bells, spewing glass all over ... a wall of trees tied with coloured rags advances on the crowd ... there are muslim telephone booths for all with a record player or microphone ... you breathe in noxious fumes, at the smell of hospitals and lemon juice. A nude girl runs after the racing pool of a searchlight, throwing spinach greens into it. Slides and movies, projected over walls and people, depict hamburgers.'

27 The trope of 'haunting' by which Breton opens his novel *Nadja* (1928) expresses this sense of self-dislocation: 'I retrace my steps over "what I must have ceased to be in order to be who I am".' Breton, *Nadja*, Paris, 1982, p.1.

28 Kaprow, 'Happenings in the New York Scene', op.cit., p.16.

29 Cécile Whiting, *A Taste for Pop*, Cambridge, 1997, pp.34–5, 48.

30 *The Bedroom Ensemble* was first shown as an installation at Sidney Janis's New York gallery. It marks a severe change in style from *The Store*, and reflects the rising hard-edged aesthetic of Minimalism and the influence of advertising hoardings, whose depictions of furniture in deep perspective are the most obvious source for the distorted angles of the *Bedroom Ensemble*.

Appropriately for a work that references consumer culture, the piece exists in five versions.

31 Samaras, in Kim Levin, *Lucas Samaras*, New York, 1975, p.57.

- 32** Samaras, in Alan Solomon, 'An Interview with Lucas Samaras', *Artforum*, October 1966, p.44.
- 33** Samaras, cited in Levin, op.cit., p.57.
- 34** Ibid., p.57.
- 35** Jean Laplanche and Jean-Bertrand Pontalis, 'Fantasy and the Origins of Sexuality', in Victor Burgin, James Donald, Cora Kaplan (eds), *Formations of Fantasy*, London, 1986, p.22.
- 36** Thek, in Richard Flood, 'Paul Thek: Real Misunderstanding', *Artforum*, October 1981, p.49.
- 37** The inclusion of a sculpted figure in this work did not preclude a 'space' for the viewer because, unlike the work of Kienholz and Segal, the figure in question was supposedly 'dead' – an object rather than another subject.
- 38** Thek, letter to Felix Valk at Lijnbaancentrum, Rotterdam, 1978, reprinted in *Paul Thek: The Wonderful World That Almost Was*, Barcelona, 1995, p.230.
- 39** Thek, in Flood, op.cit., p.53.
- 40** Paul Thek, in interview with Harald Szeemann, 1973, reproduced in *Paul Thek: The Wonderful World*, op.cit., p.208.
- 41** Thek, in Flood, op.cit., p.52.
- 42** Robert Pincus-Witten, 'Thek's Tomb... absolute fetishism...', *Artforum*, November 1967, p.25.
- 43** Thek, in Flood, op.cit., p.52.
- 44** Flood, in *Paul Thek: The Wonderful World*, op.cit., p.217. His work can also be seen as a response to the commercial imperatives of the art world, which would not be gratified by his insistence on recycled materials (the components of the *Pyramid/A Work in Progress* were reworked for *Ark, Pyramid* at Documenta 5, 1972, and again for *Ark, Pyramid, Easter* at Duisberg in 1973). Thek's collaborator Anne Wilson notes that 'Paul had a strong sense of overturning the money-changers in the temple and for Paul this temple was art'. Wilson, 'Voices from the Era', in *ibid.*, p.204.
- 45** See also the development of Land art (earthworks inseparable from their remote location); Conceptualism (an art of ideas, documented in typescripts, Xeroxes and reportage-style photographs); performance art (ephemeral and time-based); multiples (mass-produced and widely disseminable); and Video art (often explicitly opposed to commercial television and mainstream cinema in both presentation and content).
- 46** Guy Debord provided the most forceful discussion of this idea in *Society of the Spectacle* (1968): spectacle is equated with 'false consciousness': 'the empire of modern passivity ... immune from human activity ... the opposite of dialogue'. Debord, *Society of the Spectacle*, New York, 1994, pp.15–17.
- 47** Vito Acconci (*Fitting Rooms*), Art and Language (*Survey 1968–72*), Michael Asher (*Environment*), Joseph Beuys (*Bureau for Direct Democracy*), Marcel Broodthaers (*Musée d'Art Moderne*), Daniel Buren (*Exposition d'une exposition, une pièce en sept tableaux*), Christo (a travel agency selling tickets to see his Colorado *Great Curtain*), Bruce Nauman (*Elliptical Space*), Claes Oldenburg (*Mouse Museum*), Richard Serra (*Circuit*), Paul Thek (*Ark, Pyramid*).
- 48** Michael Compton, in *Marcel Broodthaers*, Tate Gallery, London, 1980, p.21.
- 49** Broodthaers, in *Marcel Broodthaers*, Paris, 1991, p.221.
- 50** Ibid.
- 51** Mark Dion, in Lisa Corrin, Miwon Kwon and Norman Bryson, *Mark Dion*, London, 1997, p.16.
- 52** Dion, 'Field Work and the Natural History Museum: Interview by Alex Coles', *de, dis-, ex-*, vol. 3, 1999, p.44.
- 53** Kelly, in Margaret Iversen, Douglas Crimp and Homi Bhabha, *Mary Kelly*, London, 1997, p.29.
- 54** Kelly, *Imaging Desire*, Cambridge, Mass., 1996, p.169.
- 55** See for example the Fondation Cartier in Paris (1984), the Saatchi Gallery in London (1985), Kunst-Werke in Berlin (1990), the Museum für Moderne Kunst in Frankfurt (1991), the De Pont foundation in Tilburg (1992), the Fondazione Prada in Milan (1993), and Hamburger Bahnhof in Berlin (1996). The late 1990s witnessed yet more new galleries, often housed in elaborate architectural statements that rival the art shown inside: the Bilbao Guggenheim (1997), Kunsthaus Bregenz (1997), Kiasma, Helsinki (1998), Mass MOCA (1999), and Tate Modern (2000).
- 56** The final line of Reiss's book *From Margin to Centre: The Spaces of Installation Art* argues that 'tangible evidence of Installation art's evolutionary arc toward the conventional, the final move to the centre' is to be found in the merger between the Museum of Modern Art, New York, and the alternative venue PS1 in 1999. Op cit., p.157.
- 57** Meireles, cited in Paulo Herkenhoff, Gerardo Mosquera, Dan Cameron, *Cildo Meireles*, London, 1999, p.17.
- 58** Paulo Herkenhoff has argued that the vaulted bones of Meireles's metaphorical cathedral are cannibalistic, quantifying 'the human cost of evangelisation and its connections with the exploitation of wealth in the colonies', and making visible 'what has been obscured by history: the conquering and devouring of humankind, as well as the physical connection between the body and God which occurs in the holy space of the church'. *Ibid.*, p.59.
- 59** Hamilton, Public Art Fund talk, Cooper Union, New York, 28 September 1999.
- 60** For example, words are singed or rubbed out of books by a performer, or broken down phonetically in soundtracks.
- 61** Hans Richter, cited in François Bazzoli, *Kurt Schwitters: l'art m'amuse beaucoup*, Paris, 1991, pp.71–2. He continues: 'There were also strange objects, and even more than strange – as for example a piece of a dental bridge to which some teeth were still attached, or a little bottle of urine bearing the name of the "donor". All these were placed in individual holes kept for this purpose. Some of us had several grottoes – for this we were dependent on Schwitters' frame of mind – and the column grew'.
- 62** One riveting account of the *Merzbau* comes from Alexander Dorner, the progressive director of the Hannover Landesmuseum and a keen supporter of Schwitters's work. Recorded in Dorner's biography, it describes a visit to the *Merzbau*, a work 'made of garbage packed in plaster', and is striking for its intense evocation of odour and dirt: 'Dorner felt that free expression of the socially uncontrolled self had here bridged the gap between sanity and madness. The Merz tree was a kind of fecal smearing – a sick and sickening relapse into the social responsibility of the infant who plays with trash and filth.' Samuel Cauman, *The Living Museum: Experiences of an Art Historian and Museum Director, Alexander Dorner*, New York, 1958, p.36.
- 63** Nina Kandinsky, quoted in Bazzoli, op.cit., p.12.
- 64** F. Vordemberge-Gildewart, in *MERZ: Ecrits choisis et présentés par Mac Dachy*, Paris, 1990, p.350.
- 65** Kurt Schwitters, 'Merzmalerei', in *Der Sturm*, July 1919, cited in John Elderfield, *Kurt Schwitters*, London, 1985, p.50.
- 66** Daniel Buren, 'The Function of the Studio' (1971), *October*, no. 10, Fall 1979, pp.51–8.
- 67** Gregor Schneider, in interview with Ulrich Loock in *Gregor Schneider: Das Totes Haus Ur, 1985–1997*, Städtisches Museum Abteilung Mönchengladbach, Portikus Frankfurt am Main, Galerie Foksal Warszaw, 1997. All quotes by Schneider that follow are taken from this catalogue.
- 68** Nelson, interviewed by David Burrows, *Everything Magazine*, issue 3.2, March 2000, p.3.
- 69** One reviewer explicitly linked this effect of helplessness to that described by Freud when he found himself lost in a maze of unfamiliar streets but involuntarily returning again and again to the same place – the red-light district. Rachel Withers, 'Mike Nelson, Matt's Gallery', *Artforum*, April 2000, p.151. The much-cited passage to which she refers is from Freud on 'The Uncanny' (1919), Standard Edition XVII, p.237.
- 70** Mike Nelson, conversation with the author, 16 July 2001 and 14 April 2000.
- 71** *The Cosmic Legend of the Uroboros Serpent* was entered through an unmarked security door at Tate Britain, while *Nothing is True, Everything is Permitted*, at London's ICA, saw some visitors mistakenly wandering off into another building that was unconnected to the exhibition.
- 72** Mike Nelson, in 'Mike Nelson interviewed by Will Bradley' (leaflet), London, 2003, n.p.
- 73** Jonathan Jones, 'Species of Spaces', *Frieze*, June–July–August 2000, p.76.
- 74** Mike Nelson, op.cit., n.p.

NOTES

Chapter 2

1 El Lissitzky, 'Proun Space, the Great Berlin Art Exhibition of 1923', reproduced in *El Lissitzky 1890–1941: Architect, Painter, Photographer, Typographer*, Eindhoven, 1990, p. 35.

2 Carsten Höller, in *Carsten Höller: Register*, Milan, 2001 n.p. All subsequent quotes by Höller are from this catalogue.

3 Maurice Merleau-Ponty, *The Phenomenology of Perception*, London, 1998, p. 320.

4 Merleau-Ponty, *The Visible and the Invisible*, Evanston, 1997, p. 133. The unfinished manuscript of *The Visible and the Invisible* was published posthumously in 1964 (English translation 1968).

5 Merleau-Ponty, 'Eye and Mind' (1961), in Merleau-Ponty, *The Primacy of Perception*, Evanston, 1964, p. 178.

6 Michael Fried, 'Art and Objecthood', *Artforum*, Summer 1967, p. 16, p. 15.

7 Although analogies to theatre often arise in relation to the 'dream scene' type of installation art discussed in the previous chapter, it is important to note that, for Fried, theatricality does not refer to the scenographic aspect of installation, but rather to the way in which we self-consciously 'perform' around it. In this respect, it is worth recalling that Robert Morris performed with the choreographer Simone Forti and his earliest untitled Minimalist sculpture, a column, featured in a stage performance in 1961.

8 Rosalind Krauss, 'Allusion and Illusion in Donald Judd', *Artforum*, May 1966, p. 25.

9 Krauss, 'Double Negative: A New Syntax for Sculpture', *Passages in Modern Sculpture*, London, 1977, p. 267.

All subsequent Krauss quotes are from this chapter.

10 This connection was also made by Merleau-Ponty. In 'The Child's Relations with Others' (1960), he cites an experiment that took place in the United States, in which psychologically 'rigid' subjects showed a tendency to give 'black-and-white answers' and to show 'very strong racial and social prejudices'. There was therefore a direct connection between 'psychological rigidity, as a mode of relation to self and others' and perception in its own right: those subjects able to perceive ambiguously ('the same drawing of a cube seen now from one standpoint, now from another') were also those most likely to adopt a liberal and tolerant outlook on politics and society. The questions given to subjects in the experiment touch precisely on the social issues that would come to a head at the end of that decade: 'Girls should learn only about household matters', 'We should deport all refugees and give their jobs to veterans', 'There is only one way to do something properly'. Merleau-Ponty, 'The Child's Relations with Others', in Merleau-Ponty, *The Primacy of Perception*, op.cit., pp. 101–5.

11 Robert Morris, 'Notes on Sculpture, Part 2', in Morris, *Continuous Project Altered Daily*, Cambridge, Mass., 1995, p. 16.

12 Donald Judd, Reviews, *Arts Magazine*, February 1965, p. 54. Dan Flavin was also adamant that his exhibitions should not be referred to as environments, since the word connoted 'living conditions and perhaps an invitation to comfortable residence'. Flavin, 'Some other comments ...

more pages from a spleenish journal', *Artforum*, December 1967, p. 23.

13 Frank Stella, in Bruce Glaser, 'Conversation with Frank Stella and Donald Judd', *Art News*, September 1966, pp. 55–61.

14 Lucy Lippard, 'Four Environments by New Realists', *Artforum*, March 1964, p. 19.

15 Robert Morris, 'Notes on Sculpture, Part 2', p. 15 (my emphasis).

16 See Melinda Wortz, 'Surrendering to Presence: Robert Irwin's Esthetic Integration', *Artforum*, November 1981, p. 63.

17 Irwin, in Weschler, *Seeing is Forgetting the Name of the Thing One Sees: A Life of Contemporary Artist Robert Irwin*, Berkeley, 1982, p. 153.

18 Irwin, in Weschler, op.cit., p. 174.

19 Irwin, in *Transparency, Reflection, Light, Space: Four Artists*, Berkeley, CA, 1971, p. 88.

20 Irwin, in *Robert Irwin*, Chicago, 1975, p. 11.

21 Irwin, in *Robert Irwin*, Los Angeles, 1993, p. 173.

22 Michael Asher, *Writings 1973–1983 on works 1969–1979*, Halifax, NS, 1984, p. 8. It should be noted that all the texts for this book were co-authored with the left-wing art historian and theorist Benjamin HD Buchloh.

23 'Light intensity, colour, and shadows varied, depending on the sun's position in the sky. Reflected light had a yellow tint due to the off-white colour of the interior. Nighttime light entered from streetlights which cast a low, tinted blue light into the installation ... Sound was generated from such sources as street traffic, people walking past the gallery, and people within the installation ... With the removal of the main-entry doors, the installation was also directly ventilated from outdoors, and therefore subject to varying climatic conditions'. Asher, op.cit., p. 38.

24 'The triangular shapes were defined in opposition to the usual architectural context surrounding a work of art ... The arbitrary way in which the exterior elements entered the triangular spaces was as important to the work as the material construction of the installation, if only as a contradiction to the installation's formal control over these elements.' Asher, op.cit., pp. 38–42.

25 Ibid., p. 30. Asher's installation at MoMA for the group-exhibition *Spaces*, 1970, for example, was insulated with acoustical board on all six sides, including the floor, and viewers were required to remove their shoes before entering the space. The room absorbed sound to varying degrees depending on where one stood. As one reviewer observed: 'minimal light and sound stimuli place the subject in a condition of suspension. If he navigates the white obscurity slowly, he may well feel dizziness and perceptual disorientation. The thick carpeting and sound-proofed walls and ceiling make it impossible for the sensitive subject to respond, as he would normally, while moving through.' Dore Ashton, 'New York Commentary', in *Studio International*, March 1970, p. 118.

26 Merleau-Ponty, 'The Primacy of Perception and Its Philosophical Consequences' (1956), in Merleau-Ponty, *The Primacy of Perception*, op.cit., p. 25.

27 Hélio Oiticica, 'About the Hunting Dogs Project', 1961, reprinted in Guy Brett, Catherine David, et al., *Hélio*

Oiticica, Rotterdam, 1992, p. 57.

28 Oiticica, quoted in Guy Brett, 'Hélio Oiticica: Reverie and Revolt', *Art in America*, January 1989, p. 177. In a similar work, *Penetrável Projeto Filtro para Carlos Vergara* 1972, viewers enter a labyrinthine structure of wood and coloured plastic sheeting, pass through soft curtains in various fabrics, and are finally given a glass of freshly squeezed orange juice while listening to the radio or watching television.

29 Oiticica, 'General Scheme of the New Objectivity', 1967, reprinted in Brett et al., op.cit., 1992, p. 116.

30 'It is against everything that is oppressive, socially and individually – all the fixed and decadent forms of government, or reigning social structures', Oiticica, 'Position and Program', 1966, reprinted in ibid., p. 103. This essay is significant for its conspicuous shift in Oiticica's understanding of participatory art as political in implication.

31 Oiticica, 'Appearance of the Supra-sensorial', 1967, reprinted in ibid., p. 130.

32 Oiticica, 'Notes on the Parangolé', reprinted in ibid., p. 93.

33 Acconci, in Jeff Rian, 'Vito Acconci', *Flash Art International*, Jan/Feb 1994, p. 84. This is subtly different from Oiticica, for whom a sensuous heightening of perception was viewed as a form of resistance to the law.

34 Acconci, in Richard Prince, 'Vito Acconci', *Bomb Magazine*, Summer 1991, p. 53.

35 'the person to my left ... I'm doing this with you now ... I'm touching your hair ... I'm running my hand down your back ... I'm touching your ass.' Acconci, 'Seedbed' statement, from Barbara Gladstone Gallery archive.

36 Acconci, in Prince, op.cit., p. 55.

37 Acconci, notes for *Command Performance*, reprinted in Vito Acconci, Chicago, 1980, p. 20.

38 Vito Acconci, interviewed by Maria Lind and Sina Najafi, 'Vito Acconci Interviewed', *Index*, 1996, p. 70; Acconci, interview with Robin White, *View*, pp. 10, 16.

39 Acconci, notes to *The People Machine*, quoted by Steven Melville in 'How Should Acconci Count for Us?', *October*, no. 18, Fall 1981, p. 85.

40 Taken from the title of Marcia Tucker,

'The NAUMANology', *Artforum*, December 1970, pp. 38–44.

41 Acconci, in Prince, op.cit., p. 54.

42 Rosalind Krauss, 'Video: The Aesthetics of Narcissism', *October*, no. 1, 1976, pp. 51–64.

43 Bruce Nauman, in Michele De Angelis, 'Interview with Bruce Nauman', in *Bruce Nauman*, London, 1988, p. 128.

44 'I used a wide-angle lens and it was above and behind you as you walked into the corridors, so you were removed from yourself, sort of doubly removed. Your image of yourself was from above and behind, and as you walked, because the wide-angle lens changes the rate that you're going away from the camera, so as you took a step, you took a double step with your own image.' Ibid., p. 128.

45 Nauman, in Willoughby Sharp, 'Interview with Bruce Nauman', in *Bruce Nauman*, op.cit., p. 97.

46 Nauman, in De Angelis, op.cit., p. 128.

47 *Corridor with Mirror and White Lights* 1971 achieved a similarly disjunctive result: one critic recalled walking

inside and coming across the mirror reflection at the end, which cut off his head: the 'shock of seeing myself headless', he recalled, was the most disarming aspect of the piece. Sharp, op.cit., p.89.

48 Merleau-Ponty, *The Visible and the Invisible*, pp.148–9.

49 'I thought the perceptual process – and the optics – of the artist and the spectator should be what the art was about.' Dan Graham, in Birgit Pelzer, Mark Francis and Beatriz Colomina, *Dan Graham*, London, p.15.

50 Dan Graham, *Two-Way Mirror Power*, Cambridge, Mass, 1999, pp.62, 143–4.

51 Ibid., p.144.

52 Graham, in *Forum International*, September 1991, p.74.

53 Graham, *Two-Way Mirror Power*, op.cit., p.145. Graham has said that he came to Lacan's article 'The Mirror Stage' after he had begun using mirrors and reflective surfaces in his work, but he took the essay as confirmation of his thinking. See Graham, in Hans Dieter Huber (ed.), *Dan Graham: Interviews City?*, 1997, p.17; Birgit Pelzer, 'Vision in Process', *October*, no. 11, Winter 1979, pp.105–19.

54 Brian Hatton, in *Two-Way Mirror Power*, op.cit., p.145.

55 Graham, ibid., p.158. Not just traditional easel painting, but film too is implied as a site of 'ego loss'. This is discussed in more detail below.

56 Ibid., pp.155–6. In this context, not even the most basic architectural materials used by Minimalist sculptors – steel, bricks, lighting strips – could be truly 'literal' and devoid of reference.

57 In this respect, Graham felt affinities with the work of Jean-Luc Godard, particularly the approach taken in *Two or Three Things I Know About Her* (1967). Graham saw this film after making *Homes for America* (1966–7), and immediately understood Godard to be making a similar analogy between suburban housing schemes, formalist aesthetics and capitalism.

58 Graham, op.cit., p.77.

59 Graham, *Rock My Religion: Writings and Art Projects 1965–1990*, Cambridge, Mass, 1993, p.190.

60 Graham, 'Cinema, 1981', in *Dan Graham*, Barcelona, 1998, p.138. Metz's article on the identificatory mechanisms of cinema was first published in English in *Screen*, Summer 1975, pp.14–76.

61 Christian Metz, 'The Imaginary Signifier', cited by Graham in ibid., p.136.

62 In Jane and Louise Wilson's *Stasi City* 1997, and *Gamma* 1999, it is impossible to watch all four screens at once: appropriately for work that deals with institutional control and surveillance, you feel uneasy in the space, as if it is watching you. Similarly, Susan Hiller's four-screen video installation *An Entertainment* 1990, offers a physically disorienting montage of Punch and Judy exhibitions in which the images travel around the room from one wall to the next, assaulting the viewer from all four sides. There is no ideal place from which to view the whole. Like Graham's *Cinema* proposal, these installations ground the viewer's experience in a complex social situation: as you move around to 'capture' all four projections, you obstruct the sightlines of other viewers, who in turn obstruct your own view. Each viewer becomes implicated in the work, as – by extension – we are in society and culture at large.

63 See for example Judith Butler: 'Merleau-Ponty's conception of the "subject" is additionally problematic in virtue of its abstract and anonymous status, as if the subject described were a universal subject or structured existing subjects universally. Devoid of a gender, this subject is presumed to characterise all genders. On the one hand, this presumption devalues gender as a relevant category in the description of lived bodily experience. On the other hand, inasmuch as the subject described resembles a culturally constructed male subject, it consecrates masculine identity as the model for the human subject, thereby devaluing, not gender, but women.' Judith Butler, 'Sexual Ideology and Phenomenological Description: A Feminist Critique of Merleau-Ponty's *The Phenomenology of Perception*', in Jeffner Allen and Iris Marion Young, *The Thinking Muse*, Bloomington and Indianapolis, 1989, p.98.

64 Merleau-Ponty, 'Eye and Mind', op.cit., p.163.

65 Ólafur Eliasson, in Karen Jones, 'The ontology of immateriality', in *Seamless*, Amsterdam, 1998, <http://www.xs4all.nl/~deappel/textkaren.html>

66 Ólafur Eliasson, in Angela Rosenberg, 'Ólafur Eliasson – Beyond Nordic Romanticism', *Flash Art*, May–June 2003, p.110. All subsequent Eliasson quotes are from this article unless otherwise stated.

67 It is important to note that Lissitzky still regarded each relief as a separate work of art, and listed each work individually in the Proun Inventory.

68 El Lissitzky, 'Proun Space, the Great Berlin Art Exhibition of 1923', reproduced in *El Lissitzky 1890–1941: Architect, Painter, Photographer, Typographer*, p.35.

69 Ibid., p.35 (my emphasis).

70 Ibid., p.36.

71 Yve-Alain Bois expresses this contrast vividly: 'perspective is Medusa, it petrifies the spectator... [while] axonometry is Pegasus, the flying horse which was born from the blood of Gorgon'. Bois, 'Axonometry, or Lissitzky's mathematical paradigm', in *El Lissitzky 1890–1941: Architect, Painter, Photographer, Typographer*, p.31.

72 Ibid., pp.32–3.

Chapter 3

1 Roger Caillois, 'Mimicry and Legendary Psychasthenia', in Annette Michelson (ed.), *October: The First Decade, 1976–1986*, Cambridge, Mass, 1998, p.72.

2 Eugène Minkowski, *Lived Time*, Evanston, 1970, pp.428, 405.

3 Ibid., p.429.

4 Caillois, op.cit. Minkowski is also referenced by Merleau-Ponty, but the latter does not mention the ego-annihilating implications of Minkowski's text. Merleau-Ponty accepts that our spatiality in darkness can erode all sense of individuality, but ultimately finds the 'mystical', unificatory character of the night to be 'reassuring and earthly', another 'expression of the total life of the subject, the energy with which he tends towards a future through his body and his world'. Merleau-Ponty, *The Phenomenology of Perception*, op.cit., pp.283–4.

5 Caillois, op.cit., p.70.

6 Ibid., p.72.

7 James Turrell, interview with Ziva Freiman, in *Positionen zur Kunst/Positions in Art*, Vienna, 1994, p.10; see also Turrell's comments in *James Turrell*, Madrid, 1993, p.65; and in *Air Mass*, London, 1993, p.26: 'First, I am dealing with no object. Perception is the object. Secondly, I am dealing with no image, because I want to avoid associative, symbolic thought. Thirdly, I am dealing with no focus or particular place to look. With no object, no image and no focus, what are you looking at? You are looking at you looking.'

8 Turrell, quoted in *James Turrell: The Other Horizon*, Vienna, 1999, p.127.

9 Georges Didi-Huberman, 'The Fable of the Place', in *James Turrell: The Other Horizon*, pp.46, 54.

10 Craig Adcock, *James Turrell: The Art of Light and Space*, Berkeley, 1990, p.140.

11 Oliver Wick, 'In Constant Flux – The Search for the In-Between', in *James Turrell: Long Green*, Zurich, 1990, p.12.

12 Mikkel Borch-Jacobsen, alluding to a passage in Lacan's *Seminar X*, speaks vividly of 'my own image in the mirror, gazing at me with strange anxiety-producing unheimlich eyes, which do not belong to me: some sort of brilliant marbles, fully ready to leap from their sockets'. Borch-Jacobsen, *Lacan: The Absolute Master*, Stanford, CA, 1991, p.232.

13 For one critic, visiting *Kusama's Peep Show* with his wife, this intention was jubilantly affirmed: he felt their 'images became constantly confused by being ceaselessly reflected on the seemingly endless lit up ceiling and walls – and so one felt to be an integral part of some exploding endearment expanse'. Joseph Nechvatal, 'Yayoi Kusama: Installations, Maison de la culture du Japon, Paris', <http://www.nyartsmagazine.com/bbs2/messages/634.html>

14 Kusama targeted Wall Street for at least three performances in 1968. A press release read: 'OBLITERATE WALL STREET MEN WITH POLKA DOTS. OBLITERATE WALL STREET MEN WITH POLKA DOTS ON THEIR NAKED BODIES.' Kusama, press release for *Naked Protest at Wall Street*, 1968, reproduced in Laura Hoptman, Akira Tatehata, Udo Kultermann, *Yayoi Kusama*, London, 2000, p.107.

15 Yayoi Kusama, poster for the first 'Self-Obliteration'

NOTES

performance, 1968, and interview with Jud Yakult (1968), both reprinted in *ibid.*, p.112. More recent installations, such as *Fireflies on the Water* 2000, immerse us in the work directly. We enter a darkened room (5 x 5 x 3 metres) onto a small jetty over a black pool of water; the walls are lined with mirrors while small coloured lights ('fireflies') hang from the ceiling, reflecting across the watery surface into reduplicated infinity. Our own reflection is jettisoned into an oceanic vortex that extends, apparently endlessly, in all directions. We lose all sense of space and orientation and merge with the environment – an experience that has been described by one art critic on the internet as akin to scuba diving or entering a planetarium: 'jubilatory and claustrophobic', 'energising ... and deeply disturbing'.

16 An early installation by Samaras was discussed in Chapter Two.

17 Levin, *op.cit.*, p.71. Her comment recalls Bruce Nauman's observation that the visitor to his *Video Corridors* reliably experienced the feeling of 'stepping off a cliff or down into a hole'. Nauman, in Sharp, *op.cit.*, p.97.

18 Gordon M. Smith, cited in Jean Reeves, 'New Dazzler at Albright Knox: Room with Mirrors to Infinity', *Buffalo Evening News*, 18 November 1966.

19 Lucas Samaras, letter to Mr Murdock, p.1. For his family, Samaras continues: 'the mirror had connotations of devilry and vanity'.

20 *Ibid.*, p.2.

21 Arnold Glimcher, cited in Levin, *op.cit.*, p.71. Samaras said of the work: 'With this room you actually did damage yourself ninety per cent of the time. It was pretty lethal.'

22 Margaret Iversen, *Art Beyond the Pleasure Principle* (forthcoming publication).

23 Michael Newman, 'From the Fire to the Light: On Richard Wilson's installations', *Richard Wilson*, London/Oxford/Bristol, 1989, n.p.

24 Monica Petzal, review of 20:50, *Time Out*, 18–25 February 1987, no.861, p.33; Andrew Graham-Dixon, 'An oil well that ends well', *The Independent*, 18 February 1987.

25 Anton Ehrenzweig, *The Hidden Order of Art*, London, 1967, p.134. Ehrenzweig's ideas were influential on a number of artists in the United States during the 1960s, most notably Robert Morris (who used Ehrenzweig's ideas to theorise 'anti-form' sculpture) and Robert Smithson. This sense of engulfment is found in the original press release for 20:50, in which Richard Wilson included a passage from Lewis Carroll's *Alice Through the Looking Glass* (1872): 'Oh, Kitty! How nice it would be if we could only get through into Looking Glass House! Let's pretend there's a way of getting through into it somehow, Kitty. Let's pretend the glass has got soft gauze, so that we can get through.' Alice's mirror finds its horizontal equivalent in the silvery, filmy appearance of the oil in 20:50, and Alice's desire to pass through it parallels the oft-cited urge of viewers to fall through the oil's pristine, yielding surface into the space below.

26 Robert Smithson, 'A Cinematic Atopia', in Jack Flam (ed.), *The Collected Writings of Robert Smithson*, Berkeley, 1996, pp.138–42. All following Smithson quotations are from this article.

27 For a fuller discussion of the connections between

entropy and the death-drive, see Margaret Iversen, *Art Beyond the Pleasure Principle* (forthcoming publication).

28 Roland Barthes, 'Leaving the Movie Theatre', in Barthes, *The Rustle of Language*, Oxford, 1986, pp.345–9. All following Barthes quotations are from this article.

29 My emphasis.

30 Anne Wagner, 'Performance, Video and the Rhetoric of Presence', *October*, no. 91, Winter 2000, p.80: 'what is missing from Viola's spectacular meditations on life and death and transience is any built-in mistrust of his medium. Nor does irony bracket his message. Instead his work insists – sometimes to the point of coercion and against the grain of his predecessors' sheer reluctance and scepticism – that we believe in the magnitude and meaningfulness of what camera and artist give us to see.' All subsequent Wagner quotes are from this article.

31 Cardiff's collaborator George Bures Miller has compared the immediacy of her soundtracks to 'a thinking voice, a voice inside your head', precisely because it 'seems to exist outside any kind of mediation'. Miller, quoted in Meeka Walsh and Robert Enright, 'Pleasure Principals: The art of Janet Cardiff and George Bures Miller', *Border Crossings*, no.78, 2001, p.33.

32 'It's as if I am part of your body.' Cardiff, quoted in *ibid.* *The Paradise Institute* 'creates an eerie personal space that the viewer enters, as if to abandon the sanctuary of self for someone else's mind and body.' Wayne Baerwaldt, *Janet Cardiff*, New York, 2002, p.151.

33 Cardiff, quoted in Carolyn Christov-Bakargiev, 'Janet Cardiff', *tema celeste*, no.87, 2001, p.53.

Chapter 4

1 Hélio Oiticica, 'Appearance of the Supra-Sensorial' (November/December 1967), reprinted in Brett et al, *op.cit.*, pp.17–20.

2 As Walter Benjamin notes, 'The theological archetype of this contemplation is the awareness of being alone with one's God.' Benjamin, 'The Work of Art in the Age of Mechanical Reproduction', *Illuminations*, London, 1992, p.243, note 18. Another important reference point for this shift can be found in Peter Bürger's *Theory of the Avant-garde* (1974), in which a typology of artistic production is traced from the medieval period to the twentieth century. Bürger argues that 'sacral art' of the middle ages, such as the cathedral, was produced collectively and received collectively; this was superseded by 'courtly art' of the Renaissance, which was produced by an individual artist but received collectively; this in turn was replaced by 'bourgeois art' – the model of artistic practice ushered in with the Enlightenment and still dominant today – which is both produced and received individually. For Bürger this individualism is symptomatic of industrialisation and the alienating effects of capitalism; it also indicates how impotent art has become, for it is no longer integrated into the public arena but exists in the domain of private consumption. The desire of the historical avant-garde (Dada, Constructivism, Surrealism) to blur 'art and life' – which for Bürger is more accurately art and political praxis – is a key reference point for much of the work discussed in this chapter.

3 Beuys, 'Introduction' (1979), in Carin Kuoni (ed.), *Energy Plan for the Western Man: Joseph Beuys in America*, New York, 1990, p.19.

4 Beuys, 'We are the Revolution. A free and Democratic Socialism' (2 April 1972, Palazzo Taverna, Rome), reprinted in Lucrezia De Domizio Durini, *The Felt Hat – Joseph Beuys – A Life Told*, Milan, 1997, p.140.

5 Beuys, quoted in Götz Adriani et al, *Joseph Beuys Life and Works*, New York, 1979, pp.246–9.

6 Haacke's exhibition had been cancelled due to the inclusion of Shapolsky et al: *Manhattan Real Estate* (1971), work that detailed the ownership of slum housing in Manhattan and found one family to have the monopoly on properties. The Guggenheim felt that the piece was 'muckraking' and had political intentions – even though Haacke had simply presented publicly available information with no evaluative comments.

7 Buchloh is referring to the final pages of Walter Benjamin's essay 'The Work of Art in the Age of Mechanical Reproduction' (1936).

8 Thierry de Duve, 'Joseph Beuys, or the last of the proletarians', in *October* no.45, Summer 1988, p.55.

9 The latter became a real concern for Oiticica after moving to New York in 1970, supporting himself by working night-shifts as a telephone operator and doing other menial jobs.

10 Oiticica, 'General Scheme of the New Objectivity', 1967, reprinted in Brett et al, *op.cit.*, p.118.

11 The geometric planes of the *Parangolés* were often emblazoned with agitational and poetic slogans such as 'I embody revolt' (P15 cape 11, 1967), or 'of adversity live' (P16 cape 12, 1964), 'sex, violence, that's what pleases me' (cape 7), 'out of your skin/grows the

humidity/the taste of earth/the heat' (cape 10).
12 Oiticica, 'Notes on the Parangolé', in Brett et al, op.cit., p.93.

13 Carlos Basualdo, 'Waiting for the Internal Sun: Notes on Hélio Oiticica's Quasi-cinemas', in Ann Bremner (ed.), *Hélio Oiticica: Quasi-Cinemas*, Hatje Cantz, Ostfildern-Ruit, 2002, p.42.

14 During the opening days of the São Paulo Biennial in 1994, some samba dancers wearing Oiticica's *Parangolé* capes danced through the rooms of the museum in a reprise of the mid-1960s, but were ejected from the museum (ironically, from a room of Malevich paintings) by the Dutch curator Wim Beeren.

15 The Whitechapel Experience also included the penetrable *Tropicália* (discussed in Chapter Two), a selection of *Parangolés*, and a large billiard table (which Oiticica compared to Van Gogh's *Night Café*), on which groups of East End boys often played during the show.

16 Email to author, 26 July 2003.

17 Oiticica, quoted by Brett in 'Hélio Oiticica's "Whitechapel Experiment"', *The Whitechapel Art Gallery Centenary Review*, London, 2001, p.78.

18 Oiticica, 'Eden' (1969), in Brett et al, op.cit., p.13.

19 Oiticica, quoted by Brett in 'Hélio Oiticica's "Whitechapel Experiment"', op.cit., p.78; Oiticica, 'Eden', op.cit., p.13.

20 Oiticica, in Brett et al, op.cit., p.138.

21 The poet Silvano Santiago, quoted in Catherine David, 'The Great Labyrinth', in ibid., p.255.

22 The price for this, as Basualdo notes, was the impossibility of exhibiting these works in public, and their complete exclusion from the art circuit; it was only in 1992, twelve years after Oiticica's death, that it became possible to present a *Cosmocócas* installation in public. See Basualdo, op.cit., p.52.

23 Oiticica, cited in Catherine David, 'Hélio Oiticica: Brazilian Experiment', in *From the Experimental Exercise of Freedom*, Los Angeles, 1999, p.199.

24 Judge Bruce Wright, New York State Supreme Court, quoted by Group Material as the epigraph to their article 'On Democracy', in Brian Wallis (ed.), *Democracy: A Project by Group Material*, Seattle, 1990, p.1.

25 Group Material began with fifteen members, which soon dropped to three (Julie Ault, Mundy McLaughlin, Tim Rollins); Doug Ashford joined in 1982 and the four collaborated until 1986. McLaughlin left in 1986, Rollins a year later. In 1988 Ault and Ashford were joined by Felix Gonzales-Torres. The majority of problems around membership centred on whether what they were doing was viewed as art, curating or activism.

26 Group Material, 'Caution! Alternative Space!' (1981), quoted in Nina Felshin (ed.), *But is it Art? The Spirit of Art as Activism*, Seattle, 1995, p.88.

27 These included an exhibition of posters on subway trains in New York, and a display of illegally pasted posters in Union Square (*DA ZI BAOS*, 1982).

28 Group Material, in Wallis, op.cit., p.2. In such exhibitions, of course, it is possible to say that artists bite the hand that feeds them: the political potency of such gestures is, some argue, neutralised by conforming to the institution's own wish to be seen

as conscientious, self-critical and politically correct.

29 Gonzalez-Torres, in Nancy Spector, *Felix Gonzalez-Torres*, New York, 1995, p.13. This point is also made by Douglas Crimp in the AIDS special issue of *October*, no.43, 1987, 'AIDS: cultural analysis/cultural activism'. Crimp argues that cultural production is itself political, an active participation in democratic struggle. It is not a case of either art or activism, because cultural production is not a marginalised luxury but a powerful political tool. In this Crimp – like many of his generation – follows Althusser's proposition that culture is an 'institutional state apparatus'; art, therefore, does not reflect society but is capable of producing subjectivity.

30 Felix Gonzalez-Torres, interviewed by Tim Rollins, in *Felix Gonzalez-Torres*, Los Angeles, 1993, p.23.

31 The French philosopher Jean-Luc Nancy has argued that in political writing, community should be understood as 'communion', a nostalgic desire for an immanent relation between subjects, rather like a relationship to a divinity. He proposes a vision of community as 'inoperative' (*désœuvre*) or un-worked; one that opens us up to the threshold of others' existence, and which is calibrated on the death of those we call its members. Crucially, Nancy's theory provides a reading of politics that is not based on activism or the assertion of individual will, but on the incessant fading and impossibility of 'communion'. Jean-Luc Nancy, *The Inoperative Community*, Minneapolis, 1991.

32 Gonzalez-Torres, cited in Nancy Spector, *Felix Gonzalez-Torres*, New York, 1995, p.15. Given the heightened anxiety around bodily fluids as the AIDS crisis reached its peak in the late 1980s, the use of sweets (and by implication saliva) in the work acquired a subtly transgressive edge.

33 Bourriaud, *Relational Aesthetics*, Presses du Réel, 2002, p.14.

34 Ibid., p.13. One could argue that this idea underpins most of the work discussed in this book – perhaps not as a riposte to cyberspace, but certainly to a perception of mass-media spectacle as numbing and pacifying.

35 Ibid.

36 Other artists mentioned frequently by Bourriaud include Liam Gillick, Philippe Parreno, Pierre Huyghe, Carsten Höller, Christine Hill, Vanessa Beecroft and Jorge Pardo.

37 Further examples might include Surasi Kusolwong filling the gallery with mattresses on which candidates for a massage were asked to lie down (Kwangju Biennial, 2000), or Jorge Pardo's *Pier* (Skulptur-Projekte Münster, 1997), a 50m long jetty of Californian redwood with a small pavilion at the end. The work was a functional pier, providing mooring for boats, while a cigarette machine attached to the wall of the pavilion encouraged people to stop and look at the view.

38 Jerry Saltz, 'A Short History of Rirkrit Tiravanija', *Art in America*, February 1996, p.106.

39 Udo Kittelmann, 'Preface', in *Rirkrit Tiravanija: Untitled (tomorrow is another day)*, Cologne, 1996, n.p.

40 Historical precursors for this type of art include Michael Asher's untitled installation at the Clare Copley Gallery, Los Angeles, in 1974, in which he removed the

partition between exhibition space and gallery office, or Gordon Matta-Clark's restaurant *Food*, opened with his artist colleagues in the early 1970s; *Food* was a collective project that enabled artists to earn a small living and fund their art practice without succumbing to the ideologically compromising demands of the art market. Other artists who presented food as a social and artistic event in the 1960s and early 70s include Allan Ruppersberg, Daniel Spoerri, and the Fluxus group.

41 Beuys is mentioned infrequently in *Relational Aesthetics*, and on one occasion is specifically invoked in order to sever any connection between 'social sculpture' and relational aesthetics. See Bourriaud, *Relational Aesthetics*, p.70.

42 Laclau and Mouffe, *Hegemony and Social Strategy: Towards a Radical Democratic Politics*, London, 1985. The subject is partially self-determined. However, as this self-determination is not the expression of what the subject *already* is but the result of its lack of being instead, self-determination can only proceed through processes of *identification*. Laclau, *New Reflections on the Revolution of Our Time* (1990), quoted in Mouffe (ed.), *Deconstruction and Pragmatism*, London, 1996, p.55.

43 Laclau contrasts this to the types of relationship that emerge between complete entities, such as contradiction [A-not A] or 'real difference' [A-B]. For example, we all hold a number of mutually contradictory belief systems (there are materialists who read horoscopes, and psychoanalysts who send Christmas cards) without this resulting in antagonism. Nor is 'real difference' [A-B] equal to antagonism: since it concerns full identities, it results in collision – like a car crash. Antagonism, by contrast, occurs when the presence of the 'Other' prevents me from being totally myself, because this presence makes my identity precarious and vulnerable; the threat that the Other represents thrusts my own sense of self into question.

44 See my article 'Antagonism and Relational Aesthetics', *October*, no.110, Fall 2004.

45 Udo Kittelmann, 'Preface', in *Rirkrit Tiravanija: Untitled (tomorrow is another day)*, 1996, n.p.

46 Workers who cannot be paid, remunerated to remain inside cardboard boxes, Kunst-Werke, Berlin, September 2000. Six workers remained inside the boxes for four hours a day for six weeks.

47 As Laclau and Mouffe conclude, politics should not found itself on postulating an "essence of the social" but, on the contrary, on affirmation of the contingency and ambiguity of every "essence" and on the constitutive character of social division and antagonism. Laclau and Mouffe, op.cit., p.193.

48 Thomas Hirschhorn, in Alison Gingeras, 'Striving to be stupid', *Thomas Hirschhorn London Catalogue*, London, 1998, p.5.

49 Hirschhorn, in interview with Okwui Enwezor, in *Thomas Hirschhorn: Jumbo Spoons and Big Cake*, Chicago, 2000, p.27.

50 Ibid., p.29. Hirschhorn is here referring to the idea of quality espoused by Clement Greenberg, Michael Fried and other modernist critics as a criterion of aesthetic judgement.

51 The location of these works has on occasion meant that their contents have been stolen, most notably in Glasgow, 2000, before the exhibition had even opened.

52 Hirschhorn, in op.cit., p.27.

53 It is worth recalling Walter Benjamin's comments in 'The Author as Producer' (1934), where he praises newspapers because they solicit opinions from their reader (via the letters page) and thereby elevate him/her to the status of a collaborator: 'The reader is at all times ready to become a writer,' he says, 'that is, a describer, but also a prescriber ... he gains access to authorship.' Walter Benjamin, 'The Author as Producer', in Benjamin, *Reflections*, 1978, p.225. Even so, the newspaper retains an editor, and the letters page is but one among many other authored pages beneath the remit of this editor.

Conclusion

- 1 Hal Foster, 'Trauma Studies and the Interdisciplinary', *de, dis-ex*, vol. 2, 1998, p.165.
- 2 This in turn presupposes that the 'modern subject' from Descartes onwards can be generalised in such a way – an assertion that should be made with caution.
- 3 Fisher, op.cit., pp.19–20.
- 4 To requote: 'all the time you're there, getting into the act' (Kaprow, 'Happenings in the New York Scene', op.cit., p.16); 'the spectator can be drawn into the space and involved with the experience of real time ... It's only in the context of reading in the installation that the writing has its full effect' (Kelly, *Imaging Desire*, op.cit., p.188); 'The main actor in the total installation, the main centre toward which everything is addressed, for which everything is intended, is the viewer ... the whole installation is oriented only toward his perception, and any point of the installation, any of its structures is oriented only toward the impression it should make on the viewer, *only* his reaction is anticipated' (Kabakov, *On the Total Installation*, op.cit., p.275); 'the relationship between art and viewer is all first hand *now* experience, and there is no way that it can be carried to you through any kind of secondary system' (Irwin, in *Transparency, Reflection*, op.cit., p.88); 'Hopefully, they were completely compromised as soon as they walked into the gallery, onto the ramp – they were implicated' (Accocci, interview by Liza Bear, *Avalanche*, no.6, Fall 1972, p.73): 'I was more interested in what happened when spectators saw themselves looking at themselves or looking at other people' (Graham, in *Forum International*, September 1991, p.74); 'the reality of "being here" in the "lived moment" is *more* than its representation' (Oiticica, 1973, quoted in Basualdo, *Quasi-Cinemas*, op.cit., p.39).
- 5 Graham, 'Public Space/Two Audiences', *Two-Way Mirror Power*, op.cit., p.157.
- 6 'Structuralism, deconstruction, historicism – so many of our contemporary discourses have announced the ... atomisation and demise of the subject, that one cannot help but be struck by the very thoroughness of its effacement.' Joan Copjec, 'Introduction', in Copjec (ed.), *Supposing the Subject*, London, 1994, p.xi. Copjec is thinking of Lacan's positioning of the subject as split (eccentric to the Freudian ego), of Roland Barthes's 'death of the author', of Foucault's subject as an effect of discourse, and of Derrida's re-inscription of the subject as one of *difference, desinuance* and alterity.
- 7 Michael Fried, 'Art and Objecthood', *Artforum*, Summer 1967, p.22.

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