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**Ephemeral Monuments**  
History and Conservation of  
Installation Art

*Introduction by*  
Germano Celant

The Getty Conservation Institute  
Los Angeles

Contents

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The title of this essay refers to the difficulty in defining and, therefore, in providing a history for an artistic practice which, by its very nature, will tend to the ephemeral.

An installation in fact lies somewhere between the exhibition and the making of art, thus leading not only to a formal, but also to a semantic overlay of the work, the process of its creation, and the act of displaying it.

The very term "installation," traditionally used as a synonym for setting up an exhibition, only entered the English language in the 1970s as a term to define a particular type of art work, and as a synonym for "environment."<sup>1</sup> If by the term installation one is generally referring to works comprising several elements and created in such a way as to be enjoyed through "immersion," it seems necessary to make the distinction between works created in galleries or museums, and those created outside of them. From the end of the 1960s, therefore, the whole art world underwent a severe ideological crisis, and while public art and Land Art represented a desire to move art out of traditional spaces in order to address a different public and with a different outlook, those artists whose aim was to undermine the limitations imposed by galleries and museums chose these radical art forms in order to force their use of space *in situ*, and to call into question the standards of the art market.

Although from the point of view of the medium, many works created outside a gallery setting can be validly considered installations, they have been excluded in this essay in order to focus on the relationship between the work and the gallery or museum space—in other words, the core concept in which the installation has its roots.

Indeed, reflecting on the various historical precedents—and more generally on the contamination between art, design, and architecture—the crucial point seems to be the author's exhibition experiences and the relationship between artistic production and exhibition conventions. As will be shown further on in this essay, once artists in the early twentieth century began to confront the problem of creating spaces which were specifically conceived for the exhibition of works, or decided to intervene so as to make the exhibition space an added value rather than simply a background, they anticipated the art of the post-World War II period by creating installations *ante litteram*—forerunners of later examples. In this context we have decided to concentrate on the dialectic between installations and experimental exhibitions, the latter

## Part I

### A Medium in Evolution A Critical History of Installations

Marina Pugliese

referring to a work in its own right, and not merely installing an environment as a museographic device.

Following an initial survey of experimental installations created by the avant-garde, this essay will go on to analyze the “environment” in a selection of works by European and American artists. When Lucio Fontana created *L'Ambiente spaziale a luce nera* in 1949, the title referred both to interstellar space and that of the specific space in which the work was created, that is, a room with walls and a ceiling. The “environments” created in the early 1960s by Allan Kaprow (1927–2006), Claes Oldenburg (born 1929), and Jim Dine (born 1935) could also be walked through and experienced by the spectator while remaining, in essence, attached to a defined space or room, albeit perceived as limits.

Around the same time, the exhibition event itself was beginning to be recognized as a work of art, and increasingly artists would participate in exhibitions by working in situ, choosing the place in which to intervene and making it part of the work.

Installations, therefore, developed from environments and artist-led exhibition events; the transition between environment and installation is almost certainly a shift in terminology, as has often been noted, but it also involved an ideological shift. Indeed, while with the environment the concept of the wall as a support for the work of art expanded to include the whole exhibition space as a determining factor, in the installation, in the wake of the exhibition experiments, artists seemed to take a further step, freeing themselves from the idea of a predetermined spatial delimitation for the work. As emphasized by Julie Reiss, all environments are in fact installations, but not all installations are environments.<sup>2</sup>

This essay also analyzes the conceptual transition that took place in the 1960s from the installation as the setting up of an exhibition, to the installation as a particular type of work of art.

The difficulty one encounters in defining the characteristics of an installation leads to an analysis of the inherent ambiguity of what we define in the second part of this essay as a “medium in evolution,” a medium ideal for representing directly and efficiently the essence of contemporaneity and its implications at a political, religious, and social level. In order to define the fundamental characteristics of installations, we decided to choose four works that can be considered paradigms of the type by Gregor Schneider, Thomas Hirschhorn, Ilya Kabakov,

and Olafur Eliasson, in order to reveal the specific peculiarities: space, material, time, and experience.

In conclusion, we further investigate the question of monumentality and the social worth of installations, taking into consideration both their economic impact and their enormous potential for involving the spectator. Installations today represent the most exacting and complex test for museums and patrons in terms of the difficulty of creation, the space required, and the problems of dismantling, storing, and conserving them. These efforts do, however, find their just returns in that the public—even nonspecialists—can physically enter into them because of their large dimensions and tend to be impressed by them and become involved.<sup>3</sup>

Thanks to these characteristics, installations represent an isolated instance in the sphere of contemporary art, which too often appears tiresome for the general public. So instead, we have not only astonishment and wonder, but also fragility, impermanence, and fragmentation. Installations, like their traditional counterpart the monument, share the capacity to communicate with the public, without the same value of memory and time.

#### **The Avant-Garde: Between the “Artist” Exhibition, Environments, and the Exhibition Space**

The investigations of the avant-garde into the relationship between sculpture and the space surrounding it, together with experiments on different ways of exhibiting art, and the influence of the exhibition environment on the work, all constitute direct precedents to installation art. From the moment that twentieth-century sculpture begins to expand into space—beginning with the declarations of the Futurist Manifesto of 1909 and the mixed-media assemblages of the Cubists to the weightless, pedestal-free works of the Constructivists—the exhibition space no longer acts as a mere backdrop to the presentation of a work of art, but in certain cases becomes an integral part of it.

It is therefore neither a question of tracing the history of sculpture nor of exhibitions during the twentieth century so much as it is important to focus on the most significant, often threshold examples between the two fields: when artists have created displays that have autonomous

aesthetic value or artworks inspired by and in reference to either the exhibition space or the act of exhibiting.

Germano Celant, who pioneered this theme in an exhibition and subsequently in a book for the 1976 Venice Biennale, emphasized in his introduction to the book that “*art creates an environmental space in the same measure as the environment creates the art.*”<sup>4</sup>

The crisis of the exhibition space modeled on the sixteenth-century picture gallery, still in vogue in the French *salons* and in the earliest Venice Biennales, meant that, at the beginning of the twentieth century, the need was felt to experiment with new models for exhibitions. With the Secessions—artist-led initiatives to be able to freely choose what to exhibit and to do so in less formal spaces—a new idea for the exhibition space began to develop, based on a respectful distance between the works, less aggressively invasive environments, and more diffuse lighting. This idea was exemplified in architecture by the exhibition hall designed by Joseph Maria Olbrich (1867–1908) for the Vienna Secession group in 1898.<sup>5</sup>

On the other hand, the search for a dynamic dialogue with the exhibition space led to the creation of experimental exhibition setups. The first crucible for this revolution was Germany in the 1920s. From 30 June to 25 August 1920, Raoul Hausmann, Georg Grosz, and John Heartfield organized the *Erste internationale Dada-Messe* (First International Dada Fair) in Berlin, an exhibition of paintings, collages, posters, and *assemblages*.<sup>6</sup> The installation was an integral part of the project: paintings and collages were surrounded by posters that bore Dadaist slogans against art, war, and the *bourgeoisie*. In addition to the posters hung on the walls were reproductions of works by so-called masters of the history of art, from Pablo Picasso (1881–1973) to the Renaissance painter Sandro Botticelli, suitably “corrected” with captions and slogans. A uniformed mannequin with a pig’s head hung from the ceiling, while in a second room, as “monumental Dada architecture,” was the *Great Plasto-Dio-Dada-Drama* (Fig. 1.1), a precarious multimedia *assemblage* by Johannes Baader (1875–1955).

There is no doubt that the show must have had an impact on Kurt Schwitters (1887–1948), although the Swiss artist had not been invited to participate.<sup>7</sup> Indeed, in that same year Schwitters, who had been a member of the Dada movement although remaining independent from it, began to work on the *Merz Column*, a sculpture which shows interesting analogies with the work of Baader, and seems to be an



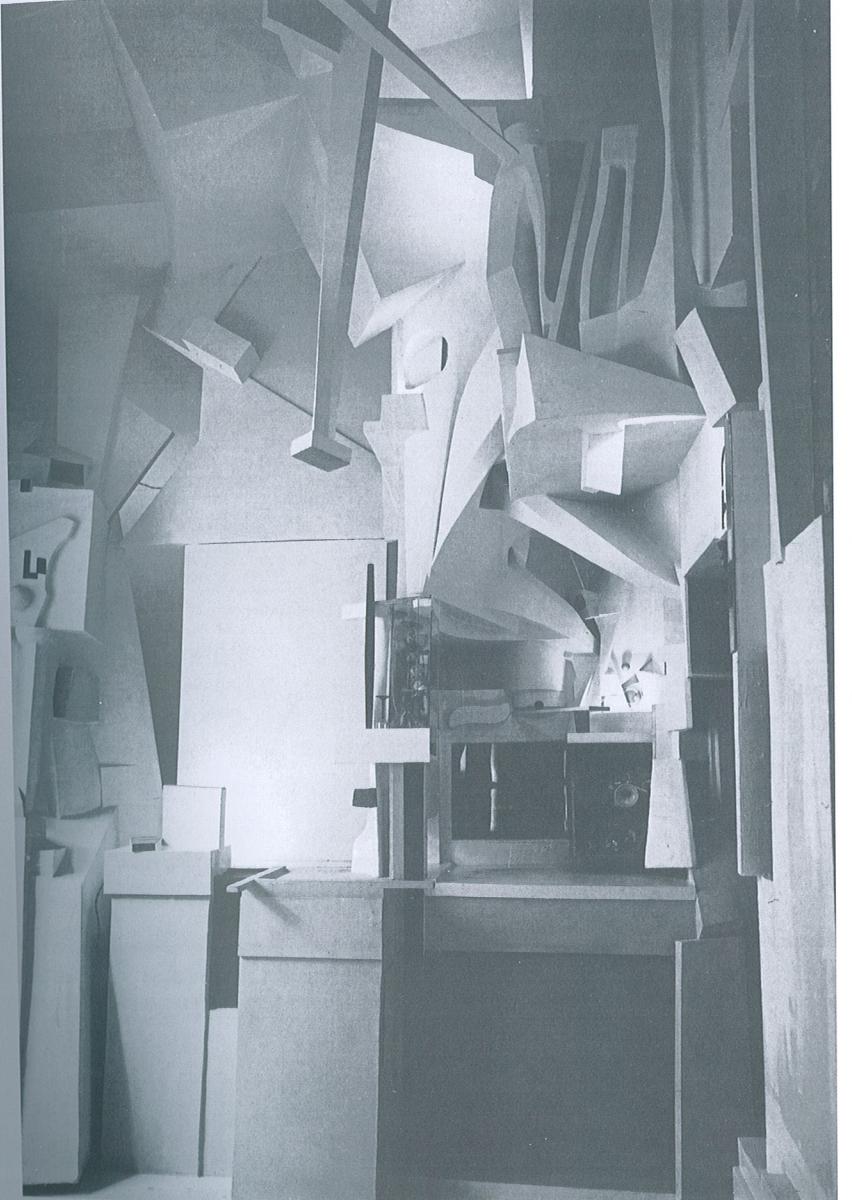
**Figure 1.1.** Johannes Baader, *Great Plasto-Dio-Dada-Drama*, 1920 (destroyed). Berlin, *Erste internationale Dada-Messe* (First International Dada Fair).

embryonic form of the later *Merzbau*. The latter, elaborated and re-elaborated between 1923 and 1937, was an accessible work set up in the artist's house in Hanover, characterized by a *horror vacui* reminiscent of the *Dada Messe* installation. In creating the *Merzbau*, Schwitters progressed layer by layer, amplifying and annexing certain areas within others. The artist would bring friends and colleagues to visit it, organizing long and detailed guided tours. It was a kind of private archive, and at the same time a gigantic *Wunderkammer* (cabinet of curiosities). The *Merzbau* (Fig. 1.2) was subdivided into caves, some of which were expressly dedicated to certain artists, including Piet Mondrian (1872–1944), Naum Gabo (1890–1977), and El Lissitzky (1890–1941). In 1936, in a letter addressed to Alfred Barr, director of the Museum of Modern Art in New York, Schwitters described the intention of the work, and the way in which he wished visitors to perceive it:

To avoid mistakes, I must expressly tell you that my working method is not a question of interior design, i.e., decorative style; that by no means do I construct an interior for people to live in, for that could be done far better by the new architects. I am building an abstract (cubist) sculpture which people can go into. From the directions and movements of the constructed surfaces, there emanate imaginary planes which act as directions and movements in space and which intersect each other in empty space. The suggestive impact of the sculpture is based on the fact that people themselves cross these imaginary planes as they go into the sculpture. It is the dynamic of the impact that is especially important to me. I am building a composition without boundaries, each individual part is at the same time a frame for the neighboring parts, and all parts are mutually interdependent.<sup>8</sup>

The fact that Schwitters considered the perception of the visitor as central, in addition to the immersion given by the scale of the work, has meant that *Merzbau* is unanimously considered to be an emblematic antecedent for the installation pieces of the 1960s.

Between the 1920s and 1930s, Hanover was a vital artistic center. Contributing to this atmosphere was the young director of the city museum, Alexander Dorner, a friend and admirer of Schwitters. Dorner invited two of the most significant artists of the time, El Lissitzky and László

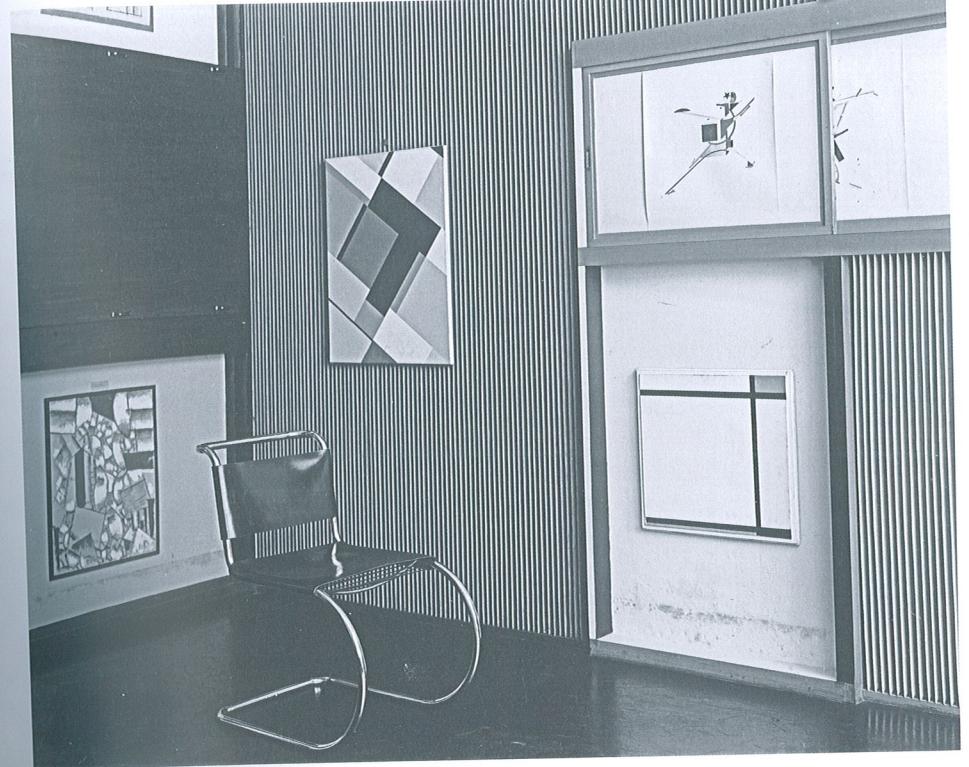


**Figure 1.2.** Kurt Schwitters,  
*Merzbau*, 1923–1937 (destroyed),  
Hanover. Photograph taken in 1930.

Moholy-Nagy (1894–1946), to design spaces in his museum for its most recent acquisitions. Dorner was convinced that contemporary works required new exhibition formats. As he wrote on the subject:

I tried to bring to the fore the changes which had taken place in artists' perception of reality. My efforts in this sense found temporary expression in two rooms. The first was the well-known "abstract cabinet" organized in collaboration with the Russian constructivist artist El Lissitzky, in which we tried to better understand the new realities implicit in abstract compositions, from Cézanne onwards. The second room would be built in cooperation with Moholy-Nagy, who later became director of the Art Institute of Chicago. In this room we proposed to give an idea of the new conception of reality and its repercussions on production techniques, such as abstract film, cinematography, etc. Both rooms were designed to have the visitor participate both physically and spiritually in the evolving process of modern reality.<sup>9</sup>

The *Kabinett der Abstrakten* (Cabinet of Abstraction, 1928) was based in part on a conception of the environment with which El Lissitzky had already experimented in his *Proun Space* [or *Proun Room*] for the *Grosse Berliner Kunstausstellung* (Great Berlin Art Exhibition) in 1923 and with the *Raum für konstruktive Kunst* (Room for Constructivist Art), proposed for the *Internationale Kunstausstellung* (International Art Exhibition) of Dresden in 1926. El Lissitzky's *Kabinett der Abstrakten* was installed in a room of about 20 square meters (roughly 65½ square feet) with sliding panels that allowed a visitor to cover one work and simultaneously "discover" another (Fig. 1.3). The walls were painted with vertical stripes of white, gray, and black, and the partition could change one's perception of the whole, depending on one's point of view. A series of works, including examples by Pablo Picasso, Fernand Léger, Naum Gabo, Piet Mondrian, and El Lissitsky himself, were exhibited in the room—without frames. A sculpture by Alexander Archipenko (1887–1964) had a mirror placed behind it, so as to be visible in its entirety. The environment that Moholy-Nagy proposed would have been even more innovative. He planned to include cinematic works, including experimental films. Lack of funds and the political climate in Germany around the late 1920s and the early 1930s thwarted the project.



**Figure 1.3.** El Lissitzky, *Kabinett der Abstrakten* (Cabinet of Abstraction), 1928 (destroyed). Hanover, Sprengel Museum (photograph ca. 1930s).

Another milestone in the relationship between installation works and the exhibition environment came with the Surrealist exhibitions, in particular the *Exposition internationale du surréalisme* (International Surrealist Exhibition) that opened at the Galerie des Beaux-Arts, Paris, on 17 January 1938, and the *First Papers of Surrealism*.

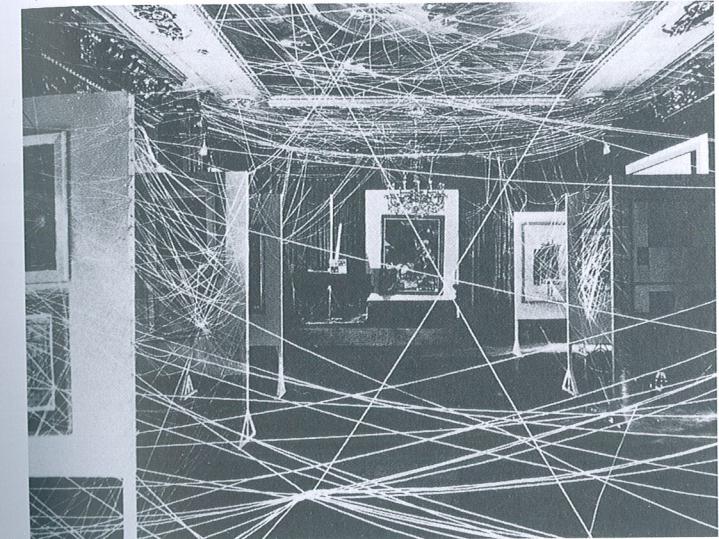
The concept for the main room of the international exhibition was the brainchild of Marcel Duchamp (1887–1968), who collaborated with Man Ray (1897–1976) for some of the details. The exhibition space would be presented as a kind of immense cave (Fig. 1.4). The ceiling was covered with jute coal sacks filled with newspapers, the floor covered with a layer of leaves, water, water lilies, and roses. The lighting was very dim and low to the ground, the original idea being that it should be lit from a brazier, but this was later replaced with an electric lamp because of safety concerns. The light source at ground level and



**Figure 1.4.** *Exposition Internationale du Surrealisme* (International Surrealist Exhibition), main exhibition hall, 1938.  
Galerie des Beaux-Arts, Paris.

the sacks on the ceiling created a strange inversion between high and low, while the pictures exhibited on the walls, and the moving panels (featuring works by Giorgio de Chirico, Salvador Dalí, Max Ernst, René Magritte, Joan Miró, and Yves Tanguy, among others), could be admired by the public only with the aid of hand-held flashlights. In effect, Man Ray's lighting concept, which received considerable press coverage, turned the opening night into a *kermesse*, with shafts of light playing on the visitors to the exhibition.

In order to convince the artists that their work would be presented in proper light, Man Ray guaranteed that after the opening event the works would be shown in better lighting.<sup>10</sup> Several huge beds were placed around the room's periphery, a reference to brothels, while a phonograph machine amplified sounds of laughter that had been recorded earlier in a lunatic asylum. The environment was also enriched with olfactory sensations: a coffee-roaster was installed in one corner to provide fragrance. On opening night, an actress, naked



**Figure 1.5.** Marcel Duchamp,  
*Mile of String*, 1942.  
New York, Reid Mansion,  
*First Papers of Surrealism*.

and chained, appeared to be having a hysterical crisis. The exhibition therefore went well beyond being a simple presentation of works of art, and was instead an event in which the public was involved and stimulated in many senses.<sup>11</sup>

From 14 October to 7 November 1942, the *First Papers of Surrealism* exhibition was installed in the Victorian rooms of Reid Mansion in New York. The installation was meant as a fund-raising project on behalf of French prisoners of war. The exhibition had a limited budget, and again it was Marcel Duchamp who conceived a plan to put together an event that proved to be a highly successful media event. Featured on moving panels were works by a number of French Surrealists who had immigrated to New York, along with others who were part of the circle of the wealthy art patron Peggy Guggenheim. Taking into account the height and the decoration of the ceilings, and the impossibility of making it any lower, Duchamp decided to transform the space, crossing it and connecting it all with an infinite maze of string. This is how the renowned *Mile of String* (Fig. 1.5) was conceived, aiming to link together the exhibition space, while limiting access to it. In this way, the traditional manner of experiencing art was undermined by an installation that went beyond the aesthetic potential of the individual

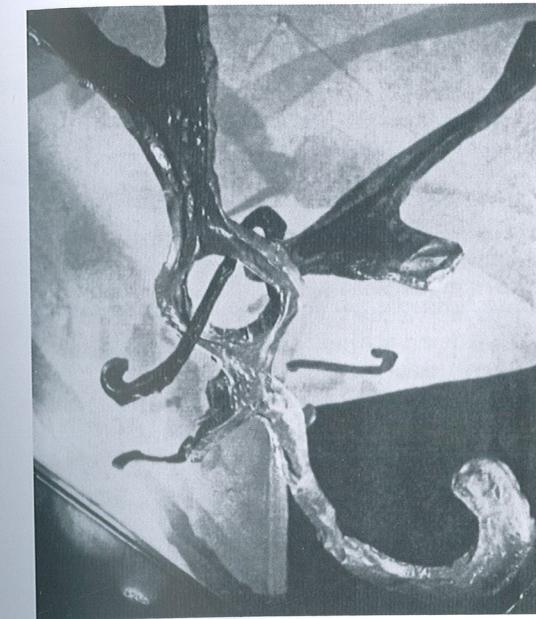
paintings and precluded any prescribed route within the space. This time, Duchamp perceived the installation itself as an autonomous work, giving it a title and, aware of the temporary nature of the event, hired a photographer to document it in detail. The transition from the concept of installation to that of a work of art did not escape the notice of art dealer Sidney Janis, who wrote about the *Mile of String* in the magazine *View*: “Despite the prevailing idea that Duchamp has abandoned art, the high spiritual plane on which all his activity is conducted converts his dada installation at a surrealist exhibit into a work of art.”<sup>12</sup>

Moreover, in contrast to the Dada exhibition and to the *International Surrealist Exhibition*, the installation *First Papers of Surrealism* was no longer characterized by the same *horror vacui*, filled with objects, forms, and suggestions of various kinds, but instead became an essential device, entirely conceptual in its matrix, anticipating Lucio Fontana’s environments of the 1950s, especially his *Esaltazione di una forma* (Exaltation of a Form), realized in 1960 for the exhibition *Dalla natura all’arte* (From Nature to Art) at Palazzo Grassi in Venice.

#### Ambienti and Environments

Lucio Fontana’s installation *Ambiente spaziale a luce nera* (Spatial Environment with Black Light) of 1949 marked a milestone in the history of installations, offering a new mode of expression that he precociously called *ambiente* (environment). Permeated by a culture rooted in Futurist poetics and in response to rationalist architecture, Fontana was applying the spatial theories that had previously been proclaimed in various aesthetic *manifesti*.<sup>13</sup>

On the evening of Saturday, 5 February 1949, Milan’s Galleria del Naviglio on the Via Manzoni was dark. The entrance to the gallery was covered by black draperies and the vaulted white ceiling of the exhibition space was lit only by an ultraviolet (“black light”) lamp (Fig. 1.6). In the center of the vaulted hall, hanging from a thin chain, was a strange *papier-mâché* object painted in shades of sky-blue, gray, red, and fluorescent colors, while other isolated elements seem to float around it, attached to the ceiling by threads. The exhibition lasted only six days, and the invitation to the opening bore the title of the work, *Ambiente*



**Figure 1.6.** Lucio Fontana,  
*Ambiente spaziale a luce nera*  
(Spatial Environment with Black Light), 1949 (destroyed).  
Milan, Galleria del Naviglio.

*spaziale a luce nera* (Spatial Environment with Black Light) and a succinct and somewhat cryptic description of the work: “Illumination with black light of art / light.”<sup>14</sup> For the opening event, Fontana hired a ballerina, wearing a tutu, to dance in the space. The sensation was one of complete disorientation in both space and time. Contemporary reviews emphasized the complete novelty of Fontana’s invention.<sup>15</sup> In fact, the review by Raffaele Carrieri in *Tempo* was enthusiastically entitled *Fontana ha toccato la luna* (Fontana has touched the moon) and went on to describe the experience:

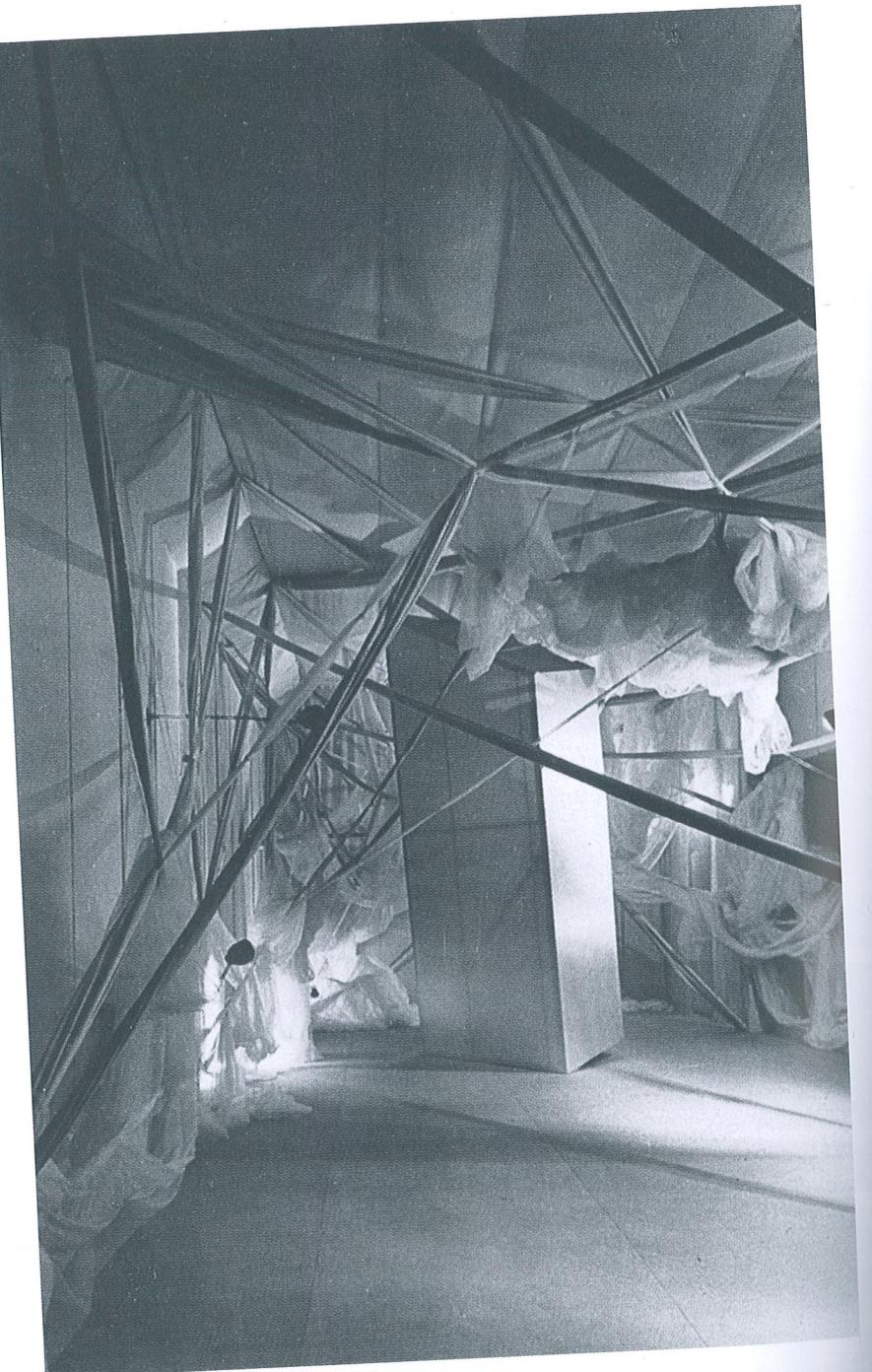
One enters a kind of cabalistic cave enveloped in black drapes. Is this the first or the last night of our planet? A large, tentacled, half-formed shape hangs in a spectral sky filled with dancing grubs. Is it a calcified dinosaur? The spine of a mammoth? I don’t want to create images. The environment which Fontana has created in Via Manzoni in Milan has brought us nearer and more effectively to the moon than any telescope. What Apollinaire would have given to have been present.<sup>16</sup>

The article was illustrated with a photograph of the ballerina, and another of members of the public pointing up at the *papier-mâché* object with amusement, as one might respond to a rainbow or a shooting star. What were the origins of such an innovative and extraordinarily precocious work? Analyzing the title—*Ambiente spaziale* (Spatial Environment), we find at its roots Umberto Boccioni (1882–1916), who in his *Manifesto tecnico della scultura futurista* (Technical Manifesto of Futurist Sculpture, 1912) declared the impossibility of “renewal unless through an environmental sculpture,” that is, a sculpture that is open to a connection with the space surrounding it.<sup>17</sup> Indeed, the revolutionary value of Boccioni’s sculptures was distilled in their capacity to represent the interpenetration of the subject with its environment. This concept is evident in the title *Forme uniche della continuità nello spazio* (Unique Forms of Continuity in Space, 1913). On several occasions, Fontana referred to his debt to Boccioni and spoke of his intention to further Boccioni’s investigations by borrowing another concept dear to Futurism, the importance of placing the spectator at the center of the work, so that the work and the spectator inhabit a single space—the environment. An analysis of the art-historical texts on this work, however, indicates that iconographic analysis has been neglected and it has not been examined in relation to the texts published by Fontana himself. Indeed, the work should not just be read and understood in the context of the other works he produced during this period. Between 1948 and 1949, Fontana was also developing the iconography of the vortex—a kind of point of origin in space, a motif that was to return frequently in his drawings and ceramics of these two years—but also in relation to his writings.

In the manifesto “Spaziali” of 18 March 1948, Fontana wrote: “To this end, with the resources of technology, we shall make artificial forms appear in the sky, rainbows of delight, luminous writing. We have looked at ourselves from on high, photographing the earth from rockets in flight.”<sup>18</sup> Fontana’s statement might well have been inspired by breakthroughs in space flight. In the United States, from 1943 onward, experiments were being carried out in telephotography with cameras attached to V-2 rockets in order to photograph the Earth from high altitudes. These images, which in themselves were nothing special, were widely published in the illustrated popular magazines of the day.<sup>19</sup> On 5 November 1946, newsreels were screening images from footage shot

at the White Sands testing grounds in New Mexico with a movie camera attached to the fin of a German V-2 rocket. The film, the first ever to show the curvature of the Earth, also shows the spiral trajectory of the rocket.<sup>20</sup> Taking into consideration the importance of this piece of news and the showing of the newsreel in cinemas at intermission of feature films, it is quite possible that Fontana may have seen these images around 1946 and 1947 in Argentina, or sometime later in Italy. So, if we were to compare the fluorescent *papier-mâché* object hanging from the ceiling of the *Environment* in the Galleria del Naviglio with vapor trails emitted by the rocket as shown in the newsreel, it seems that the long, spiraling form that the journalists associated with baroque forms or images of marine flora or fauna could instead be interpreted as a prototype for the “rainbow of delight,” which might be an allusion to the luminous vapor trail that appeared in the wake of the rocket during its flight. Fontana was aware of the revolutionary nature of the work exhibited in Naviglio, so much so that as early as 1950 he tried, unsuccessfully, to exhibit his *Ambiente spaziale* at the 25th Venice Biennale, and continued throughout the 1960s to probe ever deeper into “environments.”<sup>21</sup>

In 1960, a precocious interest for environmental works was evident during the exhibition *Dalla natura all’arte* (From Nature to Art) at Palazzo Grassi in Venice, curated by Paolo Marinotti (son of the owner of the Palazzo Grassi exhibition center) in collaboration with Willem Sandberg (director of the Stedelijk Museum, Amsterdam).<sup>22</sup> For this exhibition, Fontana created *Esaltazione di una forma* (Exaltation of a Form), a space constructed of strips of fabric stretched over an invisible armature and crisscrossed with strips of red canvas, from which hung shapeless masses of red voile (Fig. 1.7). The room was lit by two standard lamps that emitted orange and red light, and an unstable, fabric-covered parallelepiped was placed in the center.<sup>23</sup> As in *Ambiente spaziale a luce nera* of 1949, this work also contained a strong chromatic element, although here the colors were confined to tones of red and orange without the use of either fluorescent colors nor ultraviolet light. In the Venetian space, moreover, if we are to judge from the reviews and evidence referring to “frothy waves, impalpable nylons” (*spumose onde, nylon impalpabili*) or clumps of light fabrics (*grumi di tessuto leggeri*), it would seem that beyond the chromatic effects, the tactile nature of the materials was also apparent—a further innovation with regard to the earlier environmental piece.<sup>24</sup>



**Figure 1.7.** Lucio Fontana, *Esaltazione di una forma* (Exaltation of a Form), 1960 (destroyed). Venice, Palazzo Grassi.

*Esaltazione di una forma* seems to harken back to Duchamp's *Mile of String*. The reverberations from Duchamp's work might also explain the title of Fontana's work (which is the only one of the *Spatial Environment* series to have a distinct title). While Duchamp's maze of intertwined threads created a kind of *mise-en-evidence* of the paintings of his Surrealist colleagues, Fontana's environment, crossed as it is by canvas strips and veils, would have emphasized the central form, the mysterious parallelepiped in the center of the room.

It is important to emphasize the fact that, in *Esaltazione di una forma*, the polygon is lopsided and its base does not sit absolutely flat on the floor. The theme of instability and imbalance would become one of the stylistic codes of the "corridor" series that Fontana would produce from 1964 onwards. Of special note is the red corridor (a soft, undulating red carpet) that Fontana created with architect Nanda Vigo (born 1940) for the *Utopie* section of the XIII Milan Triennale. Another example of this theme of instability is the *Environment* he produced for the exhibition *Lo spazio dell'immagine* (The Space of the Image, 1967) in Foligno. Here, Fontana created an unstable floor, and on the wall he painted a series of fluorescent green signs pointing in opposite directions, so as to disorientate the spectator.

To return to the analysis of the Venice show at Palazzo Grassi in 1960, in addition to Fontana's environment, it also included Pinot Gallizio's *Caverna dell'Antimateria* (Cavern of Antimatter), a navigable cave of almost 150 meters (about 164 yards) of cloth painted with industrial pigments and innovative techniques covering the floor, walls, and ceiling of the space (Fig. 1.8). The work had precedents in Fontana's *Ambiente spaziale a luce nera* for its immersive qualities and the expanded dimensions of Jackson Pollock's drip paintings (which had been exhibited at the GNAM [National Gallery of Modern Art], Rome, in March 1958). *Caverna dell'Antimateria* was conceived at the end of the 1950s, coming from debates on anti-architecture theorized in the *Internazionale situazionista* (Situationist International) by Guy Debord, Constant [Nieuwenhuys], Asger Jorn, and Giuseppe Pinot-Gallizio.<sup>25</sup> The *Caverna*, which originally would have included both perfumes and music, was created in 1960 for the Drouin Gallery in Paris. It was later installed at the Stedelijk Museum, and was finally acquired by Marinotti for the Palazzo Grassi, where it was only partially installed.<sup>26</sup>

Critics, caught unaware by such innovative works, compared them to theater designs, thereby diminishing their innovative power. In the



**Figure 1.8.** Pinot Gallizio, *Caverna dell'Antimateria* (Cavern of Antimatter), 1958–1959. Paris, Galerie Iris Clert.

review by the art critic Paul Davay, “it was evident for example that the Fontana and the Gallizio were made for the lyrical settings of Baroque opera, given their outward appearance.”<sup>27</sup>

While the *Caverna dell'Antimateria* proved to be an isolated experience in Gallizio's artistic career, Fontana continued to create environments in international exhibition contexts during the last four years of his life: at the Venice Biennales of 1966 and 1968; at the exhibition *Lucio Fontana: The Spatial Concept of Art* presented in Minneapolis and Austin in 1966 and in Buenos Aires in 1967; at the exhibition *Lucio Fontana: Concetti spaziali* (Lucio Fontana: Spatial Concepts) at the Stedelijk Museum, both in Amsterdam and in Eindhoven; and finally, at *Documenta IV*, Kassel, Germany, in 1968.<sup>28</sup>

Though Fontana's legacy has not been duly recognized in studies devoted to the subject, it was, on the other hand, soon absorbed and interpreted by subsequent generations, both in Italy and abroad. The works of Yves Klein (1928–1962), for instance, can be understood, in this sense, as an extreme form of the poetics of space of the Italian artist, now filtered through the two artists' shared interest in the avant-garde Japanese group Gutai.<sup>29</sup> Both artists were also linked by strong and mutual esteem.<sup>30</sup> Fontana showed a marked and precocious curiosity for the monochrome works of the Frenchman. In fact, Fontana was the first to acquire one of the works that Klein exhibited in 1957 in the Galleria Apollinaire in Milan.<sup>31</sup> “Another who has understood the problem of space is Klein, with the blue dimension,” Fontana would say later in an interview.<sup>32</sup>

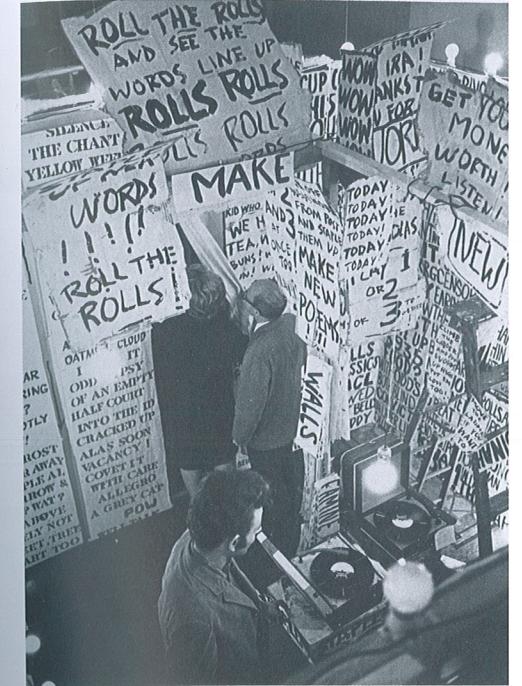
Klein's *Le vide ou La spécialisation de la sensibilité à l'état matière première en sensibilité picturale stabilisée* (Emptiness, or the Specialization of Sensitivity to the Raw Material State into Stabilized Pictorial Sensibility), presented in 1958 in the Galerie Iris Clert in Paris, consisted of a completely empty space, entirely painted in white. The furniture in the gallery was minimal, and access to the gallery was channeled through a service door.

During the forty-eight hours preceding the opening of the exhibition, Klein whitewashed almost the entire gallery, eradicating all signs of preceding exhibitions. Through the white, Klein in some way dematerialized the space; by canceling out color, he put forth a kind of painting which begs to be perceived not only in visual, but also in conceptual terms.<sup>33</sup>



**Figure 1.9.** Gruppo T, *Grande oggetto pneumatico—Ambiente a volume variabile* (Large Pneumatic Object—Environment with Variable Volume), 1960. Milan, Galleria Pater.

In Italy, the tradition of Fontana's environments was inherited by the subsequent generations, especially by the artists of Gruppo T. Between 1960 and 1968, this group of artists collectively elaborated a whole series of spaces designed to have a close relationship with the visitor. As Gruppo T, Giovanni Anceschi, Davide Boriani, Gabriele De Vecchi, Gianni Colombo, and Grazia Varisco demonstrated their interest in the interactive possibilities of the environment. *Grande oggetto pneumatico—Ambiente a volume variabile* (Large Pneumatic Object—Environment with Variable Volume), created by the group in 1960 in the Galleria Pater in Milan, was their first environment (Fig. 1.9). The space in the gallery was taken up by six polyethylene tubes, inside which the air was alternately blown in and aspirated; as a result, the volume of the tubes varied according to the volume of air present, acting invasively within the exhibition space, disturbing the experience of the public, and—when the tubes were full of air—forcing visitors to exit the room. After 1968, following the completion of their experiments with collective exhibitions, which they called *Miriorama*,



**Figure 1.10.** Allan Kaprow, *Words*, 1964. New York, Smolin Gallery.

each artist then continued on his path of creating environments (Grazia Varisco never realized environments).

Ten years after Fontana's *Ambiente spaziale a luce nera*, the American artist Allan Kaprow began to create a whole series of environmental works which he called "Environments." Assembled for the most part from rejected materials, Kaprow's environments invited the active participation of gallery visitors. Other artists working in the same direction as Kaprow—including Jim Dine, Robert Whitman, and Claes Oldenburg—were also experimenting with collective performances and creating environments characterized by the use of ephemeral and recycled materials. In 1960, the Judson Gallery in New York hosted a series of environments, including Kaprow's *An Apple Shrine*, along with *The House* and *The Street*—signed by Oldenburg in collaboration with Dine. Kaprow's best-known environment, *Words* (New York, Smolin Gallery, 1964), was a three-dimensional space covered in inscriptions, accompanied by sounds and words reproduced by a record player. The artist had proposed an entrance fee of 20 cents, which allowed visitors to participate actively in the project by writing words and messages on sheets of paper, which were then appended to the structure (Fig. 1.10).

Allan Kaprow, a theorist of this art scene, maintains in his landmark book, *Assemblage, Environments and Happenings*, that environments were the result of the amplification of the painting medium that had begun with the Cubists' use of collage and assemblage, and was further amplified by Jackson Pollock's "action painting." Kaprow stressed that these new artistic forms were environmental because their aim was to force the work art out of its traditional relationship with architecture, believing that for art "the room has always been a frame or format too." The motivation behind the choice of nonartistic materials lay in the desire to bring real life into art. Similarly, he emphasized how these works, because they were a living testimony to the times, must also be subject to change—an art form that therefore must not be mummified in order to last.<sup>34</sup>

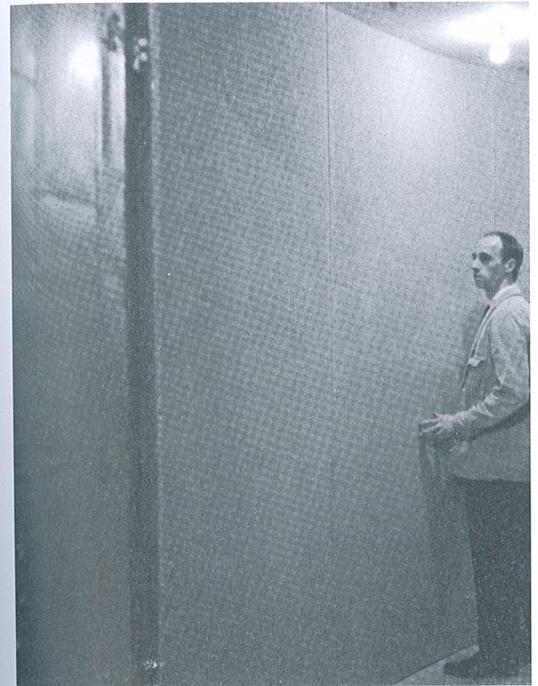
Kaprow relates environments and happenings as being both the result of and linked to the principle of extension, tracing a map of the new art. In addition to his own work, he included that of Jim Dine, Claes Oldenburg, and Robert Whitman, as well as images of environments by Yayoi Kusama and the works of George Segal (defined as "environmental sculptures" in order to emphasize their three-dimensional nature), the performances of the Gutai Group, and of some of the proponents of Fluxus and New Realism.

During the same period that Kaprow was working on his environments, Robert Morris installed *Passageway* (1961) in the studio of Yoko Ono. The work consisted of a plywood corridor that becomes progressively narrower until it physically compresses and psychologically oppresses the visitor (Fig. 1.11). As Julie Reiss commented:

The fine line that Kaprow had walked between manipulating the audience and allowing the audience to participate was more frankly authoritarian in Morris' work.<sup>35</sup>

These different approaches, the fruit of complex interactions among art, performance, theatre, and dance in the 1960s, demonstrate how the relationship between the exhibition space and the public can go to extremes.

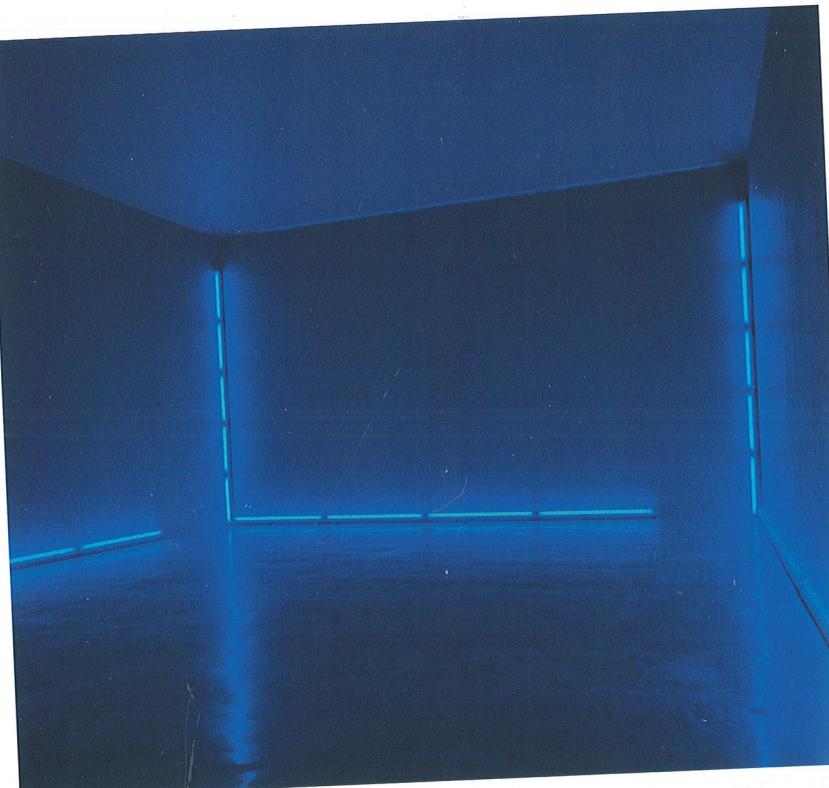
In "The Shape of the Art Environment: How Anti Form is 'Anti Form'?" published in the September 1968 issue of *Artforum*, Kaprow further distinguished between "environments" and Morris's works, making the point that environments fill a space with compositions that are



**Figure 1.11.** Robert Morris,  
*Passageway*, 1961.  
New York, studio of Yoko Ono.

created in situ, not designed elsewhere and then transported to the exhibition space.<sup>36</sup>

The Minimalists, as underlined by Morris's essay in *Artforum* in 1966, and earlier in Donald Judd's "Specific Objects" essay of 1965, were more interested in the dimensions and shape of their structures than their interaction with the space. At the beginning of the 1960s, publication of the writings of the philosopher Maurice Merleau-Ponty on the perceptual interdependence of subject and object brought about a critical reading of Minimalism in terms of the environment.<sup>37</sup> Yet the relationship between Minimalist works and the surrounding space varied greatly from one artist to another. If, for instance, Donald Judd's works occupy space in sculptural terms, the neon works created by Dan Flavin (1933–1996) actually alter the perception of the space they occupy, thus to a greater extent justifying a phenomenological reading. After Flavin's early works, which he still conceived traditionally in terms of exhibition,<sup>38</sup> the artist's visual vocabulary evolved, progressively appropriating more and more of the exhibition space: from the "corners" to the "barriers," from the "corridors" to the site-specific installations, his interventions developed increasingly close relationships with



**Figure 1.12.** Dan Flavin,  
*Ultraviolet Fluorescent Light Room*, 1968.  
New York, The Solomon R. Guggenheim  
Foundation—The Panza Collection

(Panza Gift), on permanent loan to FAI,  
Fondo per l'Ambiente Italiano,  
Villa Menafoglio Litta Panza di Biumo, Varese.

the space that contained them. Fundamental to this development was the influence of the Constructivist Vladimir Tatlin (1885–1953), which Flavin absorbed and translated into his “Corners” series. These angled compositions paid homage to the “Corner-reliefs” that Flavin’s Russian predecessor placed in the corner of the room, a space traditionally reserved for sacred images, the icons of the Russian Orthodox Church. Through the use of colored fluorescent lights, Flavin was able to act on the space creating environments with emotional connotations and limitations, or having different optical and atmospheric effects. In *Ultraviolet Fluorescent Light Room* (1968), Flavin placed a series of ultraviolet tubes in an L-shape at the juncture of the walls, thus making it impossible to relate the walls to each other, effectively preventing the reading of a possible perspective grid (Fig. 1.12). The sensation of confusion that is instinctively created in the visitor is then increased by the action of



**Figure 1.13.** James Turrell, *Skyspace I*, 1976.  
New York, The Solomon R. Guggenheim  
Foundation—The Panza Collection

(Panza Gift), on permanent loan to FAI,  
Fondo per l'Ambiente Italiano, Villa  
Menafoglio Litta Panza di Biumo, Varese.

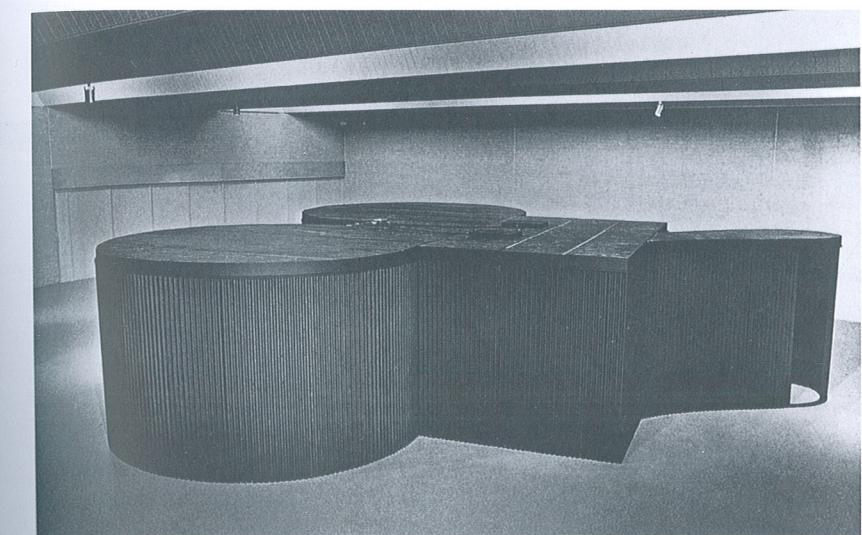
the ultraviolet light, which by interacting on the dust in the atmosphere creates a misty, boundless environment, evading clear perception. Similarly, the effects of light on the environment were at the center of the investigations of the so-called Light and Space circle, a group of artists that included James Turrell (born 1943), Maria Nordman (born 1943), Robert Irwin (born 1928), and Douglas Wheeler (born 1939), who were active in California during the late 1960s and early '70s. In works by these artists—nearly empty interior spaces, sometimes only minimally altered by environmental conditions (light, air, or temperature)—it is the visitor's perception, rather than the space itself, that is altered.

James Turrell, for instance, employs different kinds of light source: if, on the one hand, artificial light can be controlled, sunlight and moonlight cannot be manipulated directly. So for Turrell, the walls of the rooms in a certain sense become an instrument of action on natural light as it is filtered through small holes and openings that allow it to be modulated (Fig. 1.13). Operations of this type took off in 1968, when the artist's studio in the Mendota Hotel in Ocean Park was partially shielded from outside light, and Turrell embarked on a long period of analyzing possible effects, depending on the sources of the light and the time of day.<sup>39</sup> In the Mendota Hotel, his intervention consisted in opening and closing windows and walls, and he later continued his investigation into what he termed the translation of "receptive space," that is, a space bound by an external environment and the visitor's reception to it.\*

#### From Exhibition Design to Installation

With the neo-avant-garde, over and above the development of "environments," the critical analysis and subversion of conventional museum and exhibition installations contributed to defining a new form of expression—the installation.

In 1961 Claes Oldenburg, wishing to contrast the aesthetic of the museum with that of the everyday commercial shop window, had installed *The Store* in his studio overlooking Second Street in New York. This installation was a whole series of objects made out of *papier-mâché*, covered in plaster and then varnished. The objects were displayed and exhibited for sale as if they were merchandise in a store. Between 1965 and



**Figure 1.14.** Claes Oldenburg, *Mouse Museum*, 1965–1977. Vienna, Museum moderner Kunst, Stiftung Ludwig.

1977 the artist progressively elaborated the idea of the *Mouse Museum*, an enclosed space painted black, with a long illuminated shop window inside it containing a huge collection of small objects, either created or found by the artist. The project was the result of Oldenburg's attitude toward everyday objects as mirrors of contemporary society, a kind of spontaneous museum of popular art. When invited in 1966 to exhibit his collection at the Institute of Contemporary Art, Boston, for the exhibition *As Found*, the artist began to catalogue these objects. As a result, the idea of installing them as a kind of museum began to ripen. In 1972, when he was invited to participate in the international exhibition *Documenta V*, Oldenburg formulated the definitive plan for the project. Clearly, with an ironical bent on the meaning of the museum as an institution, the artist displayed his collection in a space that was defined by the outline of the head of a mouse, a fact that was only perceptible when the visitor looked down on the pavilion from above (Fig. 1.14).<sup>40</sup>

Marcel Broodthaers (1924–1976) was just as critical in 1968, when he created a conceptual museum, the *Musée d'Art Moderne, Département des Aigles* (Museum of Modern Art, Eagle Department), of which he proclaimed himself, at the same time, director, curator,



**Figure 1.15.** Marcel Broodthaers, *Musée d'Art Moderne, Département des Aigles* (Museum of Modern Art, Eagle Department), 1972. Düsseldorf, Städtische Kunsthalle.

and communications manager. Over the years, his museum would be presented under a variety of aspects, either making reference to collections (ranging from the art of antiquity, to that of the nineteenth century, to modern art), or to the various roles of the real museum. His exhibition events were generally accompanied by inscriptions and labels on glass or walls indicating *Musée d'Art Moderne, Département des Aigles*, exhibiting original works, reproductions of masterpieces, postcards, and giving public lectures. Obviously, this parodies the institution, as well as the concept of the originality and the revered status of art. The eagle symbolizes the power that is incarnate in the institution, although Broodthaers remained resolutely contradictory and vague on this subject. In 1972, at the Städtische Kunsthalle of Düsseldorf, the artist installed the *Section des Figures* (Figures Section) of his museum, exhibiting more than three hundred works representing eagles, along with the captions "This is not a work of art"—a reference to René Magritte's famous caption under a smoking pipe—"Ceci n'est pas une pipe" (This is not a pipe)—and the paradoxical nature of the situation<sup>41</sup> (Fig. 1.15). Broodthaers officially closed his museum when he installed two sections of it in the 1972 edition of *Documenta*,



**Figure 1.16.** Michael Asher, *Intervention* at the Claire Copley Gallery, 1974. Los Angeles, Claire Copley Gallery.

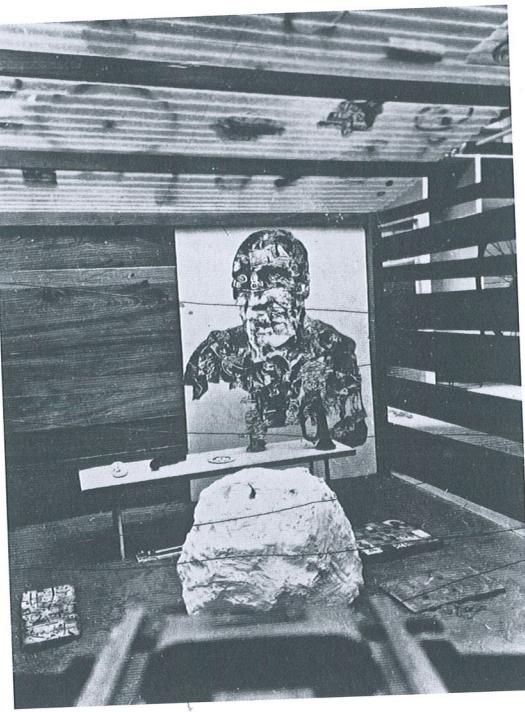
curated by Harald Szeemann (1933–2005), significantly the same exhibition in which Oldenburg's *Mouse Museum* was exhibited.

Michael Asher (born 1943), on the other hand, by such minimal operations as removing existing elements or adding fans or amplifiers, subtly alters the physical appearance of the exhibition space, laying bare the ideological mechanisms in both a physical and a symbolic sense. In 1974, at the Claire Copley Gallery in Los Angeles, Asher arranged for the wall separating the exhibition space from the office to be knocked down, creating an embarrassing continuity between the "intellectual" part in which the art is created and the "material" part where it is sold (Fig. 1.16).

Such critical approaches to exhibition conventions and gallery spaces led therefore to the creation of installations *ante litteram*. At the same time, by means of collective exhibitions of an experimental nature, the exhibition became an autonomous means of expression. As a result, independent spaces, galleries, and museums—in the span of a few years—were transformed into open laboratories.

In this context, the event that confirmed the birth of Pop Art can be considered a milestone.

From 9 August to 9 September 1956, in London's Whitechapel Gallery, a number of artists, architects, and designers—including Richard



**Figure 1.17.** Group 6, Pavilion in the exhibition *This Is Tomorrow*, 1956. London, Whitechapel Gallery.

Hamilton, Eduardo Paolozzi, John McHale, and Alison and Peter Smithson—organized themselves into groups to mount the exhibition *This Is Tomorrow*. Their interests were directed toward the interdisciplinary approach, technology, and mass-culture, in addition to the comic strip, cinema, and publicity. In his introduction to the catalogue, Lawrence Alloway noted that the artists openly declared their interest in space:

Both architects and artists have been concerned with the manipulation of the space and volume. Each space is a complex visual organization, each has its own message, each space relates to the other spaces in sequence.<sup>42</sup>

In addition there were references to the earlier environmental experiments of the Constructivists and of Kurt Schwitters. In the exhibition *This Is Tomorrow*, for instance, Group 6 created a pavilion occupied and partly covered by an accumulation of objects, stones, and pieces of plaster resembling archaeological fragments, a work by Eduardo Paolozzi (1924–2005) (Fig. 1.17). Group 10 created a curvilinear passageway, from the walls of which emerged geometric volumes:



**Figure 1.18.** Daniel Spoerri, Room 3, *Dylaby* exhibition, 1962. Amsterdam, Stedelijk Museum.

The aim of our collaboration has been to explore ground that is common to architecture and sculpture. We believe that the development of such collaboration may lead to a more integrated human environment. In the context of this particular exhibition we have confined ourselves to articulating a directional space through which the spectator passes.<sup>43</sup>

At the end of the exhibition, in the space allotted to Group 2, a jukebox, a poster of Robby the Robot from the 1956 film *Forbidden Planet*, and a gigantic bottle of Guinness stout introduced popular culture into the enclosure of art. Over and above sanctioning the birth of Pop Art, *This Is Tomorrow* opened the road to a collective and global conception of the exhibition space.

The idea was taken up again, this time within a museum, for the 1962 exhibition *Dylaby*.<sup>44</sup> In the early 1960s, thanks to its farsighted director, Willem Sandberg, the Stedelijk Museum in Amsterdam had become a laboratory for the avant-garde. Sandberg loved to associate and collaborate with artists, including Jean Tinguely (1925–1991) and Daniel Spoerri (born 1930). In 1961 he challenged them to put

together an exhibition for the Stedelijk Museum that would examine kinetic art. Thanks to the resounding success of the resulting group exhibition *Bewogen Beweging* (Moving Movement) in 1962, the two artists also created *Dylaby*, an exhibition that was revolutionary for its time and one that has remained a unique example of its type. *Dylaby* was conceived as a dynamic labyrinth that required the spectators' active participation as they passed through different environments. In addition to Tinguely and Spoerri, other artists involved in the project included Niki de Saint-Phalle (1930–2002), Martial Raysse (born 1936), Per Olof Ultvedt (born 1927), and Robert Rauschenberg (1925–2008). The exhibition route involved several rooms, including a dark, narrow labyrinth created by Spoerri. In order to move about, visitors had to use all of their senses: touching warm, cold, moist surfaces and protrusions; experiencing a variety of different smells; a beach with a tank filled with water (Raysse's idea, which gave the museum's curators some concerns); a room filled with metal cages, inside which some of Rauschenberg's assemblages emitted sounds or moved; and finally, a room full of balloons kept in motion by a fan (Tinguely's idea). In the third of seven rooms designed for the exhibition, Spoerri transferred his principle of inverted planes (which also formed the basis of his famous *Trap Pictures*, in which the horizon becomes vertical) on a larger scale: a whole museum room, with paintings, doors, and sculptures, appeared to be rotated 90 degrees, so that visitors found themselves walking (or so it seemed) on the exhibition walls (Fig. 1.18). In fact, however, it was the floor, onto which the paintings had been secured. These paintings were works of little intrinsic value bought at a flea market, while the paintings hung on the walls were part of the museum collection. The sculptures, which were mold-cast reproductions of neoclassical works, were supported by a buttress hidden behind a false wall. From this arose an unreal state of affairs, in which visitors—seeing the works from an abnormal perspective—would react with curiosity. More than being a work of art in itself, this room led one to "direct one's eyes into unaccustomed areas."<sup>45</sup>

The crucial importance of the public's involvement and the environmental nature of the works were emphasized by the catalogue:

Artists gathered from several countries  
With the intention of letting the public

Participate in their work  
To let you see, feel, collaborate with them....  
Six artists in seven rooms  
Created environments full of variety  
Gay and weird, loud and silent  
Where you may laugh, get excited  
Or thoughtful  
You are not outside the objects  
But constantly within them  
As part of the whole.<sup>46</sup>

By giving the artists such free rein, the museum was, in fact, opening its doors to ephemeral and not commercial art, giving the artist total freedom and aiding in the installation of the works. As exhibitions moved away from the display of objects the rooms were essentially assembled using cheap materials, to be destroyed at the end of the show. As in the "environments," in these exhibitions, the public's participation became a fundamental aspect of the work.

Another important experiment in the research into space was represented by the exhibition *Lo spazio dell'immagine* (The Space of the Image), held at Foligno (near Perugia) in 1967. The exhibition, the idea of artist Gino Marotta (born 1935), invited several artists to create "a three-dimensional environment rather than exhibiting single sculptures or paintings."<sup>47</sup> Thus, in the historic space of the Palazzo Trinci, a series of environments were installed representing the complexity of spatial research in Italy. Fontana, who had been invited as the master emeritus to re-create his 1949 *Ambiente spaziale a luce nera* (Spatial Environment with Black Light), instead created a black environment, with fluorescent spotlights and an unstable floor.<sup>48</sup> The catalogue (with texts by such international critics as Udo Kultermann and Christopher Finch) also includes an essay by Maurizio Calvesi, who laid claim to the primacy of Italy in the field of environmental art, in contrast to the predominantly American culture in force at the time. In his text Germano Celant made the distinction between two different types of spatial relationships: the organized forms by Castellani, Bonalumi, and Program Art, with the environments of Gruppo T, Gruppo MID, and Gruppo N; and forms disconnected from their original functionality of Objective art such as Pino Pascali's *32 Mq di mare circa* (Approximately 32 sq. m. of Sea), Luciano



**Figures 1.19–1.20.** Giosetta Fioroni,  
*La spia ottica* (The Optical Spy), 1968.  
Rome, Galleria La Tartaruga.

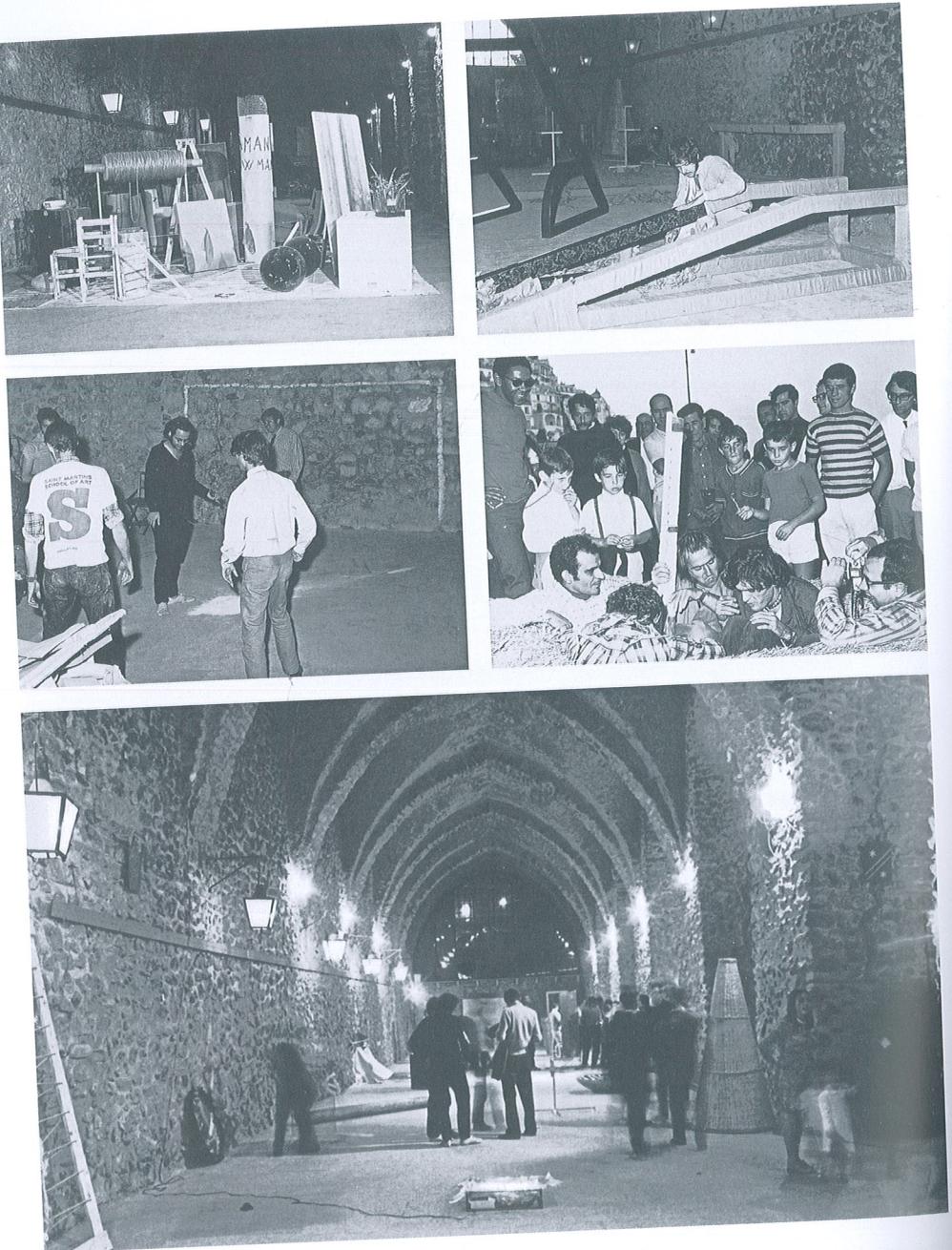
Fabro's *In Cubo* (In a Cube), Mario Ceroli's *La Gabbia* (Cage), and Gino Marotta's *Naturale-Artificiale* (Natural-Artificial).<sup>49</sup> In the wake of such experimental projects as *Twelve Evenings of Manipulation* (1967), a series of twelve events on twelve evenings at the Judulson Gallery, New York (in which Allan Kaprow had also participated), another environmental art project was organized in Rome in 1968. This was the *Teatro delle Mostre* (Theatre of Exhibitions) presented at the Galleria La Tartaruga (founded and run by Plinio De Martiis). Each afternoon, from 6 to 31 May 1968, the gallery was given over to the initiative of a different artist.<sup>50</sup> Some of the most important artists of the contemporary Italian art scene participated, including several proponents of the so-called *Arte povera* movement.<sup>51</sup> Many of these works were installations, "poor" in terms of the materials used, transient or temporary, and elaborate in relation to the space they occupied. Of particular interest, in environmental terms, was the intervention of Franco Angeli (1935–1988), who lowered the gallery ceiling by inserting slabs of polystyrene, thus altering the perception of the space. In the exhibition catalogue, Maurizio Calvesi noted: "Angeli realized that the theme was—essentially—space, infinitely modifiable, and has attempted to make a radical alteration with minimal means: low ceiling, all white, intense lighting; a white trap, a space which,



through its nudity, spotlights you and lays you bare, handing you over to the recording camera placed in the corner."<sup>52</sup>

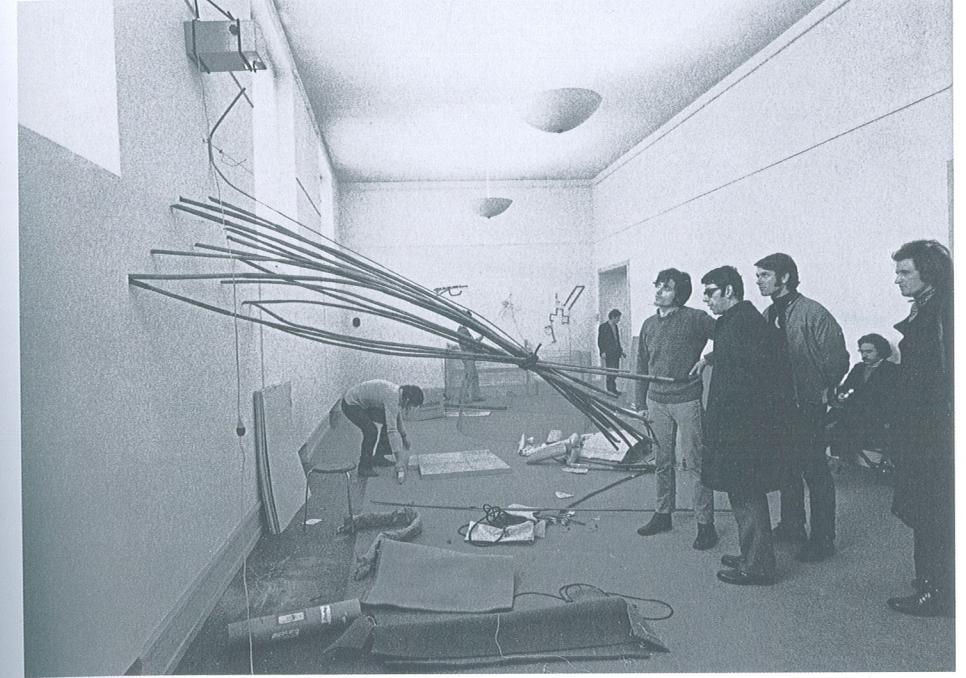
Alighiero Boetti (1940–1994) divided the room in two with a stretcher covered in blue paper, which was lit from behind: the public was invited to pierce the paper with nails, thereby creating constellations of light. *La spia ottica* (The Optical Spy) by Giosetta Fioroni (born 1932) blocked off the entrance to the gallery with a door in which there was a peephole through which one could observe a reconstructed bedroom in which the actress Giuliana Calandra engaged in everyday activities. As emphasized in the catalogue, in Fioroni's work "the spectators, queuing up one at a time, partake of the false intimacy of the scene": the active participation of the public in the act of spying thus becoming the epicenter of the operation (Figs. 1.19–1.20).

That same year, 1968, between 4 and 6 October, the third edition of the *Rassegna di Amalfi* (Report of Amalfi), curated by Germano Celant, was held in the ancient arsenals at Amalfi. *Arte povera più azioni povere* (Poor Art plus Poor Actions) ranged from exhibition, to performance, to debate on the role of art and of the critic (Fig. 1.21). The choice of structuring the event around these three initiatives reflects the curator's desire to find a new working model. The exhibition, installed in the spaces of the ancient Republic's arsenals, besides anticipating the



**Figure 1.21.** (above) Exhibition installation, *Arte povera più azioni povere* (Poor Art plus Poor Actions), 1968. Amalfi, Arsenali della Repubblica (Ancient Arsenals of the Amalfi Republic).

**Figure 1.22.** (opposite) Exhibition installation, *When Attitudes Become Form*, 1969. Bern, Kunsthalle.



use of functional and nonartistic spaces for exhibitions, was also set up without any particular agenda, resulting in a spontaneous participation on the part of the artists. Michelangelo Pistoletto (born 1933), who arrived after the others, found himself having to install his work in the far end of the space, which was occupied by Roman remains, and adapted himself to this context by creating a work expressly suited to it: "I made another small monument with bricks, rags, and a broken shoe, to add to the other Roman ones." Boetti, in contrast, installed *Shaman-showman*, a complex installation built up from his earlier works created between 1966 and 1968, putting into place a surprising climax to his production in the realm of *Arte povera*.<sup>53</sup>

The focus—as the title indicates—was therefore shifted from the object to the process, and even the show itself took on a secondary role, becoming the subject of exchange and interaction among the artists, even including an impromptu football game amidst the works. Here is what Piero Gilardi underscored about the Amalfi experiment:

The experience of Amalfi, in addition to being a convivial holiday for the artists and an example of an event which would be followed

by the dynamic museums of Northern Europe, was also the first official knot to be tied in a political agreement reflected in all major Italian events in 1969. There have been other “open” shows in 1968, and there will be many more in the near future, in the US as well; the “actions,” the “geographic projects,” and the “dematerialized” expressions will become ever more frequently exhibited in museums, in private galleries, and in book illustrations, in the context of a cultural control but on a grand scale, which the International establishment will apply to the new avant-garde. On the other hand, what sets the Amalfi show apart, is that physical proximity, and those brief moments of individual identification and emotional understanding that we experienced during those days.<sup>54</sup>

As Gilardi predicted, this kind of exhibition, in which artists are completely free to choose the arrangement and disposition of their works, would soon be destined to enter the museum institution. From 22 March to 27 April 1969 in the Kunsthalle in Bern, Switzerland, Harald Szeemann curated the historic exhibition *When Attitudes Become Form* (Fig. 1.22). The title referred to the “process” characteristic of the new mode of artistic expression, while the subtitle *Works, Concepts, Processes, Situations, Information* alluded to various ways of taking part in the project. This enabled Szeemann to combine, in a single event, Conceptual artists, Land artists, Minimalists, and artists of *Arte povera*. Freedom was therefore maximized in all aspects, from the mode of participation to the location of the intervention. Both the exterior and the interior of the museum, as well as the catalogue, and even the entire city, all became the theater in which the works were exhibited. While Daniel Buren (born 1938) decided to hang posters throughout the city of Bern, Michael Heizer (born 1944) created *Berne Depression* on the museum terrace, and Richard Serra—for his *Splash Piece*—threw 210 kilos of molten lead onto the wall of one of the rooms. As Szeemann underscored, “the Kunsthalle became an open work-site.”<sup>55</sup> Although almost all of the works were, in fact, installations, not one was described in the catalogue as such. Instead they were listed according to materials and dimensions. The exhibition was a media success, and after Bern the exhibition was installed at the ICA (Institute of Contemporary Arts), London, from 28 September to 27 October. In addition to the invited artists (almost all of them top international artists of the day), various representatives of *Arte povera* were also present,



**Figure 1.23.** Robert Morris, *Untitled*, Spaces, 1969.  
New York, Museum of Modern Art.

including Alighiero Boetti, Pier Paolo Calzolari (born 1943), Jannis Kounellis (born 1936), Mario Merz (1925–2003), Emilio Prini (born 1943), and Gilberto Zorio (born 1944).<sup>56</sup>

In 1968, therefore—coinciding with the debate surrounding the redefinition of the museum and the novel ways in which artists were involved directly in and with space—a conscious awareness of the birth of a new form of artistic expression gradually emerged.

From 30 December 1969 to 1 March 1970, the exhibition *Spaces* was held at the Museum of Modern Art (MoMA) in New York. Participating artists included Michael Asher, Larry Bell, Dan Flavin, Robert Morris, and Franz Erhard Walther (born 1939); as well as PULSA, an American art, research, technology, and design group. In her instructions to the artists, exhibition curator Jennifer Licht specified that “the concept is to use a cohesive spatial situation in a unique work.”<sup>57</sup>

As explained in the exhibition catalogue, the galleries had been divided up, and each artist was assigned an independent and anonymous space. In his room, for example, Robert Morris placed four large metal

polygonal containers, which he then filled with dirt, leaving corridors between them for the public to walk through (Fig. 1.23). Each structure was set at a different angle, and miniature trees were arranged in the earth so as to create the optical illusion of a natural environment within an interior space, giving an appearance of distance and depth that did not actually exist.

The exhibition was first going to be called *Environments*, but the fact that U.S. astronauts landed on the moon that same year suggested both the new title and the catalogue cover's star-studded sky.<sup>58</sup> Having made clear that "the human presence and perception of the spatial context have become materials of art,"<sup>59</sup> Licht traced the genealogy of the exhibition's precedents from the Futurists to Kurt Schwitters, completely leaving out Lucio Fontana's contribution. The most interesting passage is perhaps the one relative to the environments and to their interpretation:

The mixed-media activities of the late 1950s—the Environments and Happenings of Kaprow, Dine, Oldenburg, and others, and the tableaux of Kienholz and Segal—were the direct inheritors of Schwitters's Dada application of collage-assemblage techniques. The para-theatrical nature of these artists' activities was an appropriation of the physical and kinesthetic experience of the stage. Theater had, in fact, earlier attracted artists interested in extending the possibilities of space but in general they retained the critical separation between performer and spectator. Environments and Happenings largely overcame the distinction by involving the spectator, but they concentrated on activity within a situation rather than on characterizing the spatial volume. The artistic qualification of space itself is the primary fact of the more comprehensive spatial experience that followed. It was an outgrowth of an amalgamation of larger artistic traditions with the particular cultural concerns of the present moment. In this "Space Age," space is no longer an abstraction.<sup>60</sup>

Fascination with outer space—which had also inspired Lucio Fontana's *Ambiente spaziale a luce nera*—was, according to Licht, one of the motivating forces behind this type of work—that is, installations. Licht was the first to make the semantic shift between installation as an action and installation as a work of art: "An exhibition in which

the installation becomes the actual realization of the work of art and rooms must be planned and built according to the artists' needs, challenges the usual role of the museum and makes unaccustomed demands of its staff and resources."<sup>61</sup>

### A Medium in Evolution

We have traced a history of the possible reciprocal influence between the exhibition space and the work of art, with the aim of then embarking on a discussion about the installation as a medium. From the examples cited, we have seen how the immersive quality of the environment, the use of ephemeral materials assembled directly in the exhibition space, and therefore the multisensory aspects of the work, as well as the active involvement of the public, are fundamental elements in the connection between the work and the space. In the 1970s the terms environment, project art, and temporary art were used as synonyms, as noted by art historian Julie Reiss in her book on installation art and exemplified far ahead of its time in the exhibition *Spaces*. Later on, however, there was a change in terminology, from "installation" as the act of setting up an exhibition to "installation" as a work of art. Reiss noted how the term "installation" was included in the 1978 *Art Index* only as a cross-reference to the term "environment," while in the 1988 *Oxford Dictionary of Art* "installation" was defined as "a term which came into vogue during the 1970s to refer to an assemblage or environment constructed in the gallery specifically for a particular exhibition."<sup>62</sup>

The term "installation," therefore, while indicating both a practice and the work itself, highlights how the specific medium of sculpture is transcended, becoming a structured and complex entity. The hybridization of sculpture, exhibition, theater, and architecture—which ended the individual purity and separation of media in the 1960s—brought about the birth of a new medium, one able to modify itself over time and to avoid rigid definition.

According to Rosalind Krauss, with Minimalism and Land Art during the 1960s, there is a loss of identity that leads sculpture to become "that which is not architecture, and that which is not landscape." Having thus overcome specificity, sculpture entered the broader field of Postmodernism in which the organization of works no longer depended on a single medium, but employed several media.<sup>63</sup> As art historian

Mark Rosenthal noted, however, Krauss's suggestion that sculpture had simply broadened its field of action seemed to be marginalizing installations.<sup>64</sup>

Indeed, Krauss repeatedly referred in her text to the fact that the medium was not the sole support for the work of art, but rather a language with its own syntax and rules shared over time. In 2004 she wrote:

The installation transforms the gallery and the museum space into the matrix of the assembled object, so that—as it is the stage on which the object appears, it becomes essential for the very existence of the latter.<sup>65</sup>

This dualistic interpretation of the relationship between space-matrix and object-mold does not do justice to the complexity of the installation, which involves much more of a dialectical than a constricting relationship with space. In that the installation is the product of series of influences, it has, in fact, become a medium with a shared language. It structures itself in its relation to space but also to its material, to time, and to the way it is experienced—all categories that we will analyze below. Installation art is a complex medium, because it is open-ended and continually changing.

Between the 1980s and 1990s, installation artists began to address new themes, with questions such as gender and identity. In fact, the order underlying the structure of art history itself became the object of research by various artists, who, not surprisingly, found in the installation the perfect medium of expression. In referring to works dealing with questions of race—such as those by Fred Wilson (born 1954), Pepón Osorio (born 1955), Amalia Mesa-Bains (born 1943), James Luna (born 1950), and Renée Green (born 1959)—historian Jennifer González emphasized that:

By turning to installation art, the artists directly reference traditions of display by restaging or reframing their spatial and cultural forms. Their works examine how not only the visual arts and museum exhibitions, but also religious architecture, mass media, commercial commodities, government agencies, and material culture, in the past and the present, have determined the social landscapes of racial subjects.<sup>66</sup>



**Figure 1.24.** Fred Wilson, *Metalwork 1793–1880*, from the exhibition "Mining the Museum: An Installation by Fred Wilson," 1992–1993. Baltimore, The Contemporary Museum and Maryland Historical Society.

Fred Wilson, for example, in recontextualizing and reorganizing pre-existing elements and employing museum and exhibition conventions, analyzed the mechanisms of inclusion, exclusion, and attributions of worth in American museums. Indeed, Wilson made it clear how even culture was a matter of social and racial hegemony. In 1992, the artist had at his disposal the collections of one museum, the Maryland Historical Society in Baltimore. His experience with these objects gave rise to the exhibition *Mining the Museum* (1992–1993), in which Wilson presented a series of interventions on the arrangement of the objects within the museum, which made clear how the curatorial act is by definition selective and therefore constitutes a critical and questionable action. For one of the works that Wilson created, *Metalwork 1793–1880*, he simply inserted iron chains that had been used as slave shackles into a display case devoted to silverwork in the decorative arts section of the museum (Fig. 1.24). By juxtaposing otherwise unrelated objects, Wilson built stories in a nondidactic fashion, which in this case was particularly effective. In this sense, the installation is the ideal medium because it allows the artist to reconstruct and to imitate certain sets of conditions, in order to create shifts of meaning and reveal mechanisms that might otherwise be ignored.<sup>67</sup>

Making an anthropological analysis, Jean-Hubert Martin saw an analogy between altars and installations:

From a formal and methodological point of view, an altar and an installation of contemporary art are comparable. In both instances the objects are arranged in the space in such a way as to confer meaning. The differences consist in the level of consciousness of the purpose of the arrangement, the artist's freedom, and of the person experiencing it.<sup>68</sup>

The kind of space in which the artist operates is also permeated by signs of power and cultural hegemony. After the installations of Asher and Broodthaers, which aimed at unmasking the power of artistic institutions, both architecture (a masculine art *par excellence* in the Modernist tradition) and the room (one of the archetypes of living space) became the objects of critical attention. For the 48th Venice Biennale of 1999, Monica Bonvicini (born 1965) created a white room in wood and plasterboard, copying onto one of the walls a quotation by the architect Auguste Perret (1874–1954) presenting architecture as a symbol of masculine power: “a window is a man, it stands upright.” Beside it she put a caricature of a nude man with an erection. Bonvicini titled the work, *I believe in the skin of things as in that of women*, a well-known quote from the architect Le Corbusier,<sup>69</sup> referring to the surfaces of façades and of walls. Then she eloquently vandalized the walls of the room, piercing them and tearing them apart. In contrast to environments, installations move away from a relationship binding them to the architecture, and away from the dimensions and the structural rigidity of the room. Installations also break from the conventions that separate interior from exterior. This evolution derives from the shift in the elements that define the installation: space, materials, time, and the experience of the beholder. As will be shown below through paradigmatic works, if the relationship with space and materials becomes nomadic, and the relationship with time and experience becomes fragmentary, then as an “open” medium, the installation’s connection to reality is very fluid.

Thanks to this continuous redefinition, the installation is the medium that best represents the contemporary world and, as was lucidly noted by the conceptual artist Ilya Kabakov (born 1933), today takes on the role that was once held by fresco and canvas painting.<sup>70</sup>

**Space: Gregor Schneider, *Totes Haus Ur*, 2001**  
**Venice, 49th Venice Biennale, German Pavilion**

For the 2001 Venice Biennale, artist Gregor Schneider (born 1969) transformed the interior of the German Pavilion into the environment of his home, a council house in Rheydt, Westphalia.

The model for his installation was the so-called *Haus Ur* in which, from 1985 to 1997, Schneider had built rooms within rooms. The interior spaces—with lowered ceilings and blind windows—had no openings, turning them into caves, shelters, and manholes. Schneider, who at times allowed visitors access to his house, re-created the spaces. For exhibitions he would demolish certain sections that he would then rebuild temporarily in an exhibition site. In his work, based on the concept of the replica, nothing new is invented; instead, what already exists is modified and reproduced. For his installation at the German Pavilion at the Biennale (for which he later received the Golden Lion prize), Schneider rebuilt a large portion of the house. The Venetian version was named *Totes Haus Ur* (Dead House Ur), to distinguish the original from the replica (Fig. 1.25). Schneider’s installation shares multiple analogies with Kurt Schwitters’s *Merzbau*: the same obsessiveness, the compulsive urge to reconstruct, the character of the work as a private memorial, and its inherent isolation from the world, but also, at times, accessible to the public. In Schneider’s piece, the visitor is put to the test. Such environments—rooms within rooms—are unsettling and claustrophobic, promoting anxiety and disorientation. They are rooms that have been lived in, but it is not clear whether the memory that permeates them is private or collective. Besides the alienating effect of finding oneself in a kind of labyrinth is added the discomfort of entering a space that has no clear identity.

With an installation, the space becomes the material, becomes its center, the means through which physical entrance to the work is granted. Moreover, space—both exhibition space and museum space—was also the instrument by which installations exerted pressure on the art world in the 1970s.

Sleeping in a gallery, breaking down its walls, or shuffling a museum’s collections: the installation indeed builds a dialectical—sometimes forced—relationship to space, from which novel results can emerge.



**Figure 1.25.** Gregor Schneider,  
*Totes Haus Ur* (Dead House Ur), 2001.  
Venice, 49th Venice Biennale, German Pavilion.

In installations, space is expanded, fractured, and can even extend beyond the measurable limits of the room and—more generally—can break down the distinction between interior and exterior.

Installation art has adapted to becoming a nomadic space. As the sections of Schneider's house were rebuilt in different exhibition locations and were no longer tied to a specific site, so installations today are often modified and transferred. Moreover, as installations reconstruct different environments and rooms, they also analyze the symbolic value of space as a social construct, both private and public. Indeed, according to Jennifer A. González, installations have broken “the traditional semiotic and somatic boundaries assumed to exist among the audience, the work of art, the site of exhibition, and the world beyond.”<sup>71</sup>

**Material: Thomas Hirschhorn, *The Bridge*, 2000  
London, Whitechapel Gallery**

The materials typically found in the works of Thomas Hirschhorn (born 1957) are cardboard, culinary aluminum foil, and adhesive tape. Thanks to these disposable materials, the German artist meticulously and studiously builds temporary environments within which he inserts books, newspaper clippings, photocopies, and objects. Hirschhorn's installations are deliberately not precious: they are fragile and ephemeral, yet at the same time monumental, and architectural in their dimensions. In 2000, for the group exhibition *Protest and Survive*—on the relationship between politics and art—the artist linked the spaces of the Whitechapel Gallery Café in London with the adjacent anarchist bookstore, Freedom Press. He did so by creating a cardboard tunnel covered in adhesive tape, so as to allow visitors to go from one place to the other without stepping outside (Fig. 1.26). The written word, in the form of a book, a text, or a newspaper clipping, plays an important role in Hirschhorn's works, which are usually dedicated to political themes, literary figures, or great thinkers. With *The Bridge*, the link between the world of art and that of political thought is not only metaphorical but also becomes material, albeit temporary and ephemeral, perhaps to demonstrate how the relationship between the two spheres has become precarious, despite their widespread engagement during the 1970s.

The choice of materials and the manner of their assembly has had strong symbolic value. Installations, referring directly to a particular site, and

Time: Ilya Kabakov, *The Toilet*, 1992

Kassel, Documenta IX

Ilya Kabakov's *The Toilet* was a reconstruction of one of those small huts housing public toilets, such as those installed near bus stations in the 1960s and 1970s in the Soviet Union. The structure, divided in two and with two different access points—one for men and the other for women—appeared as a two-room apartment from the inside: a drawing room in the men's toilet and a bedroom in the women's. In both spaces, in addition to the expected furnishings, a row of latrines such as those found in public toilets stood along one of the walls (Fig. 1.27). For Kabakov, the installation built with wallpaper, furnishings, and objects, was a means of reconstructing institutional spaces such as school or public toilets, in order to evoke the totalitarian and decadent climate of the former Soviet Union. Where the Russian artist sees Western society as tied to objects, he sees Soviet society as one of shortage of personal belongings, which attributes much more importance to the element of space.

When viewing Kabakov's installation at Kassel, the public had to queue outside the hut, just as they would have done outside the public toilets at bus stations. Inside, the brutality of the juxtaposition of furniture and latrines alluded to the absence of personal freedom and the forced promiscuity typical of a totalitarian regime.

Personal and collective memory mingle in the work of Kabakov and the installation becomes the materialization of the past, both private and public, which superimposes on the visitor's present and past experiences.<sup>74</sup>

Critics agree that installations introduce a new element in art with regard to time. Jennifer A. González speaks of the temporal stratification used in installations.<sup>75</sup> By means of hetero-chronological references, an installation can produce a resonance from many different pasts in a single present. According to Pascale Ancel, "by destroying temporal cohesion, the installation destroys usual syntaxes, frees objects, finding them a different logic."<sup>76</sup> In fact, because they are related to time-based media—cinema, theater, and performance—installations borrow from them a series of expedients. This medium, which Claire Bishop compared to a dream-dimension, functions like cinema at different levels, crystallizing a set of elements that appears incoherent. The debt to theater consists in the need of an onstage protagonist.

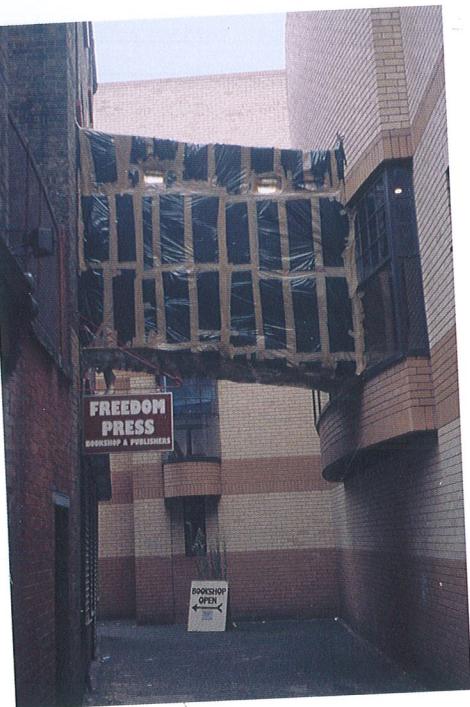
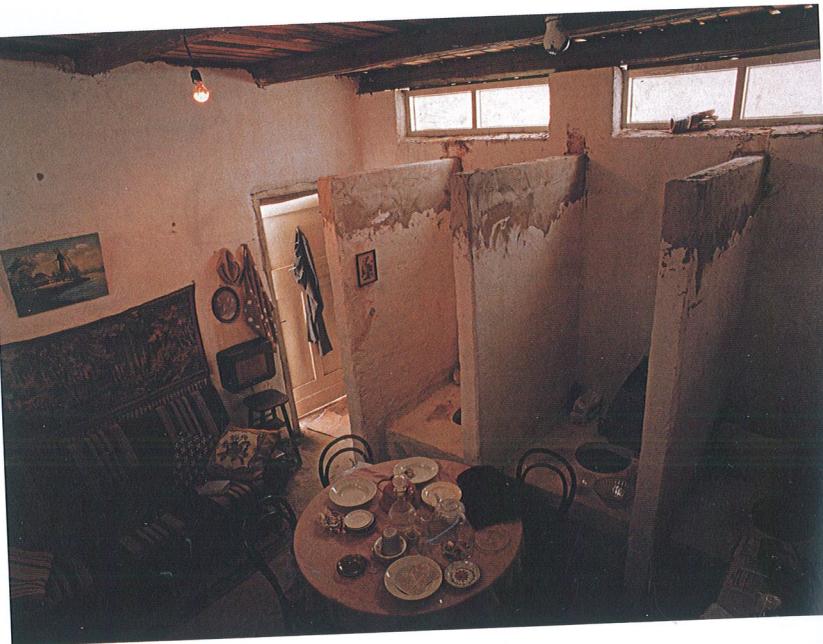


Figure 1.26. Thomas Hirschorn, *The Bridge*, from the exhibition "Protest and Survive," 2000. London, Whitechapel Gallery.

constructed with more or less ephemeral media, put the art world in crisis, at least initially. As Germano Celant described it:

One can state, indeed, that the combined practice of art and environment demonstrates the will to tear the material shaped by the artist, from the jungle of distribution and uncontrolled exchange, in order to assign it a single "field"—private or public—but one projected at the same time as artistic and ideological intervention.<sup>72</sup>

If it is true that the strongly experimental value of the early "environments" led artists to lose faith in their actual value as works of art, some, as Allan Kaprow did, deliberately decided to use "throw-away" materials, attributing a political value to this choice. But installations are also linked to the material by the particular way in which they are used. As the sociologist Pascale Ancel notes, "It is no longer a question of working from an existing model, but from a concept of the model."<sup>73</sup>



**Figure 1.27.** Illya Kabakov, *The Toilet*, 1992.  
Kassel, Documenta IX.

In installations, this need is fulfilled by members of the public, who become both actors and spectators of themselves. If, as Kabakov pointed out, art has occupied itself until now with two and three dimensions, then “installations, over time, will allow us to penetrate and know a fourth dimension.”<sup>77</sup>

#### Experience: Olafur Eliasson, *The Weather Project*, 2003 London, Tate Modern

The Tate Modern was designed by the Swiss architectural firm of Herzog and De Meuron, who added a new building to an abandoned power plant and converted the vacant industrial space to an entrance hall with a descending ramp. Today, the Turbine Hall is a stage-like space that can be enjoyed from several viewpoints; the floors of the galleries look out onto the Hall and a footbridge crosses it. It is 155.44 meters (509.9 feet) long, 22.3 meters (73.1 feet) wide, and 26.7 meters (87.5 feet) high. Since 2001 the Turbine Hall has been used for the “Unilever



**Figure 1.28.** Olafur Eliasson,  
*The weather project*, 2003.  
Monofrequency lights, projection foil,  
haze machines, mirror foil, aluminum,  
scaffolding, 26.7 x 22.3 x 155.44 m

(Installation view at Turbine Hall, Tate Modern London) (The Unilever Series), 2003.  
Courtesy of the artist; neugerriemschneider,  
Berlin; and Tanya Bonakdar Gallery, New York  
© 2003 Olafur Eliasson.

Series,” presenting large-scale installations sponsored by the homonymous Dutch-British multinational company.

Olafur Eliasson’s work explores the reproduction of perceptual effects or atmospheric phenomena in museums or galleries, and is interested in the public’s interaction with the environment. In 2003 Eliasson created a project inside the hall that included a simulated “Sun” and fog. By means of a huge mirror that covered the ceiling and hundreds of single-wave-length lamps arranged in a semicircle, the space was inundated by a dazzling light. The monofrequency lamps allow a person to see only two colors, yellow and black, radically changing the perception of the space. At the same time, smoke machines generated a fine mist, to create fog (Fig. 1.28). Before he created *The Weather Project*, Eliasson interviewed members of the museum staff on the topic of weather, and from these he extrapolated phrases to use for the exhibition’s promotional materials. These materials were deliberately designed without images, to avoid giving the public any preconceived ideas about the exhibition, which would have affected their reaction to the work. Once people came into the hall and saw the installation, it radically altered their perception of the space, and engaged visitors in a completely novel way. As happens during an eclipse of the sun, people filmed and photographed the work, lying on the ground to contemplate its effects and bathing in the rays of the indoor “sun.”

The popular success of *The Weather Project* was soon confirmed on the Internet. Visitors uploaded footage of the project on YouTube, a popular online network for sharing amateur videos. Their video clips showed Eliasson’s sun, footage of the public viewing the installation, and the indoor environment of the hall transformed by the lamps and the huge mirror above them.

In installations, the role of the observer is crucial because, as Pascale Ancel noted, “the observer is part of the system which he is observing; through his observation he produces the conditions of his observation and transforms the object observed.”<sup>78</sup> From Allan Kaprow’s *Environments* (in which the spectator was invited to collaborate in the creation of the work), to Robert Morris’s corridor, or Gregor Schneider’s *Totes Haus Ur* (in which the observer is put to the test and frustrated), to Olafur Eliasson’s welcoming “environments,” the installation introduces many different kinds of experiences, all of which confirm the visitors’ central role and underscore the fluidity of the medium.

## Ephemeral Monuments

Let us imagine a history of modernist sculpture that is entirely negative. A history in which the movement is not that of the imagination which triumphantly leaps forward, a history that does not see in the growth of technical innovation a new metamorphosis of the medium of plastic ideas and feeling, which in no way relates to the constant expansion during this period of the “sculptural” domain. Let us create a project for a different history, which we could call the history of failure. This would be the history of the relationship between modern sculpture, the monument, and the monumental.<sup>79</sup>

According to art historian Rosalind Krauss, sculpture in the twentieth century does not succeed in relating to the traditional concept of the monumental. In her well-known essay “Sculpture in the Expanded Field,” Krauss ascribes the radical change in modernist sculpture to its separation from the monument. Until the end of the nineteenth century, the monument had been bound by traditional figurative subjects, a typically vertical form, and the common use of the pedestal. Once this logic of the monument had been overcome, sculpture in fact became a pure, abstract self-referential sign, entering into what Krauss defines as a “negative condition, a kind of sitelessness or homelessness, an absolute loss of place.”<sup>80</sup> In effect, twentieth-century sculpture had finally freed itself from its narrative, celebratory, and popular role, which it had maintained until the end of the previous century. That shift, however, only came at the cost of a diminished capacity to communicate clearly with the public, to the extent that some public works of art are often challenged and at times removed.<sup>81</sup>

Installations, on the other hand, by their presence in a museum or gallery, are endowed with a sanctifying cloak. The museum setting also endows them with viability, which bestows on them an accessible approach to monumentality. Today installations are the only medium with the capacity of involving and communicating with the public. Indeed, as art critic and curator Massimiliano Gioni notes:

More recently, the practice of installation art has created immersive environments that pulverize any sense of unity. Still, in its interconnected openness, multiplicity of references, and chaotic

embrace of commodities and objects of desire, installation art creates experiences imbued with the same grandiosity associated with monumental sculpture. It is no accident that the triumph of installation art has run parallel to an economy of the public spectacle and short attention spans. Installation art reflects the bombardment of data that shapes the mature phase of the Information Age. It describes the ecstasy of communication, the sublime realization of being just a knot in an ever-expanding network of instant connections across the globe.<sup>82</sup>

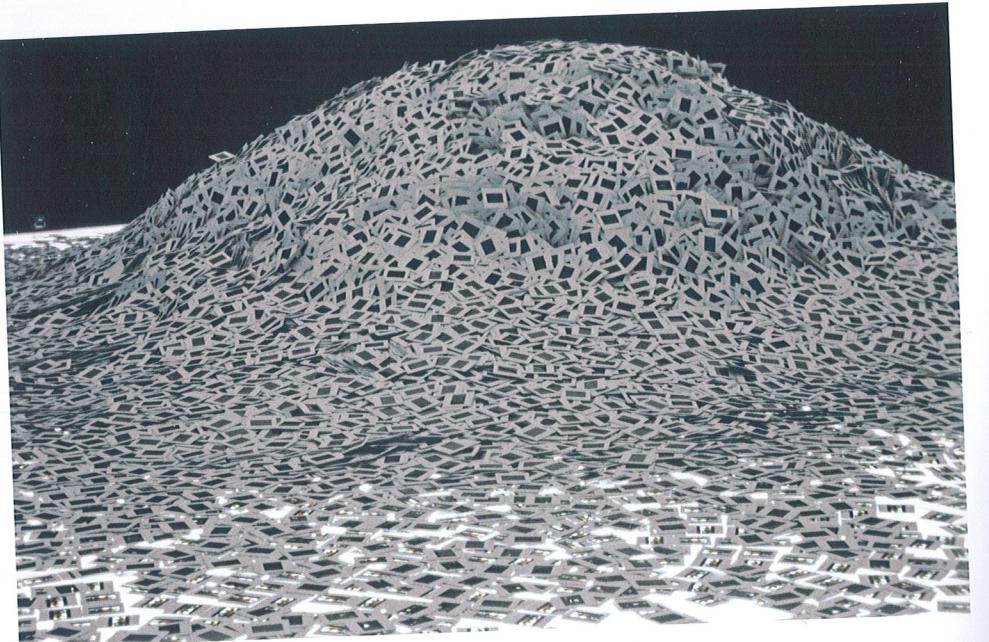
Indeed, in contrast to monuments, installations do not commemorate specific moments of shared memory. Instead, they celebrate the rites and manners of a featureless community. *Réserve*, the series of works that Christian Boltanski (born 1944) created in the late 1980s and 1990s, alludes to death and absence, or simply refers to the past, through photographs, objects, and used garments. The 1990 *Réserve* was a dimly lit room; the walls were covered with hanging clothes. The overall effect suggested deposits of goods confiscated from concentration camp prisoners during World War II. The hanging garments in installation underscored the absence of people, an impression made more vivid by the odor they exuded. Those anonymous people, the implied subjects of the installation, became a collective *memento mori* (Fig. 1.29). Without any indication of unambiguous interpretation, the work becomes a common memorial, evoking almost a collective lost memory.

Alfredo Jaar's 1996 installation *The Eyes of Gute Emerita* began with his journey to Rwanda two years after the genocide of the Tutsi in 1994. During that trip, he met a woman who had witnessed the killing of her husband and children during the massacre of an entire village in Africa. Jaar took a picture of her eyes, that he later decided to duplicate in a million transparencies and placed them in a heap in his installation. The work thus became a memorial that is both individual and collective, because it honored all who perished during the massacre through the unforgettable look in one person's eyes (Fig. 1.30). In 2007 Mark Wallinger (born 1959) created the installation *State Britain* inside the Tate Britain. His goal was to re-create the encampment that pacifist Brian Haw had erected in London's Parliament Square in 2001, to protest economic sanctions against Iraq. Haw had erected a tent in front of Parliament, exhibiting postcards, photographs, and



**Figure 1.29.** Christian Boltanski, *Réserve*, 1990. Paris, Musée d'Art Moderne de la Ville de Paris.

messages of various kinds around it. Police confiscated the materials that made up Haw's encampment in 2006, when Parliament passed a law prohibiting encampments within a one-mile radius of the Houses of Parliament. Wallinger had calculated that the Tate Britain was exactly that distance away and therefore marked the boundary on the museum floor so that his faithful reconstruction of Haw's encampment would be outside the restricted zone. Every element of Wallinger's installation was a memorial to Haw (Fig. 1.31). Wallinger's work was also clearly a reference to freedom of expression and introduced to the museum venue a new type of spontaneous monument that had recently become familiar to the public: accumulations of flowers, handwritten notes, tickets, and other souvenir objects placed by citizens as impromptu memorials—whether at the Pont de l'Alma, Paris, where Princess Diana died in 1997, or Genoa's Piazza Alimonda,

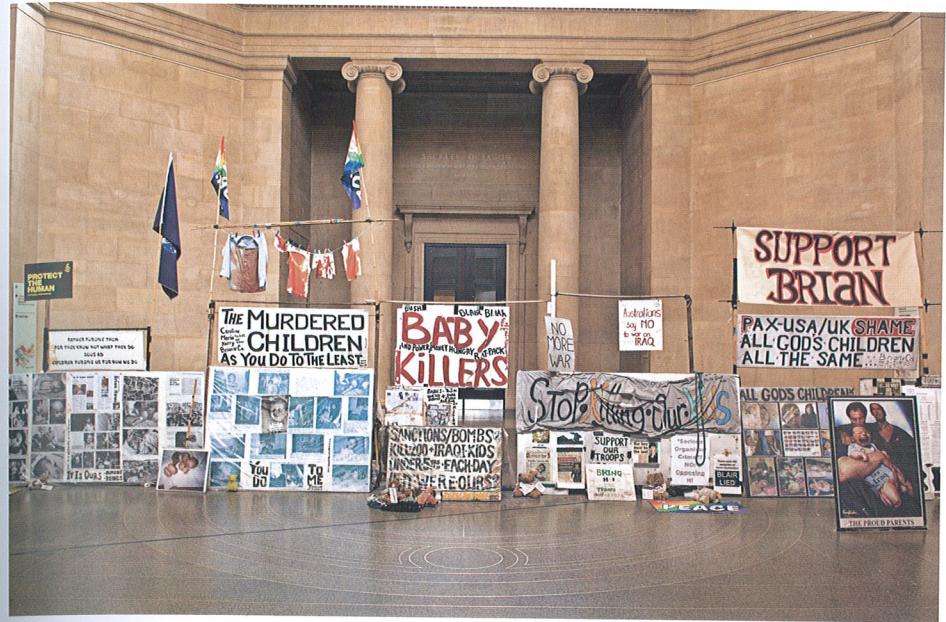


**Figure 1.30.** Alfredo Jaar,  
*The Eyes of Gutele Emerita*, 1996.  
Zurich, Daros Collection.

where the young political protestor Carlo Giuliani was killed by police in 2001 during the G8 summit.

By virtue of this renewed capacity for communication, which is rare in contemporary art, installations have paradoxically become the new emblem of power in the art world. This has happened chiefly because of their large scale and structural complexity, qualities that have long characterized traditional public monuments. In fact, installations have become so effective that they have begun to attract high-profile sponsorships, such as the notable "Unilever Series" at the Tate Modern. But then monumentality, especially architectural monumentality, has always been a symbol of power.

Hans Haacke (born 1936), charged with representing Germany at the 1993 Venice Biennale, revisited the history of exposition pavilions, which, since the early twentieth century, typically symbolized the power of the nation they represented. When Adolph Hitler visited the German pavilion at the Venice Biennale in 1934, a new marble floor had just been installed. When Haacke re-created the 1934 German pavilion for his *Germania* installation in Venice, he had the floor torn up and left the desolate rubble for visitors to walk on (Fig. 1.32). In reinterpreting a

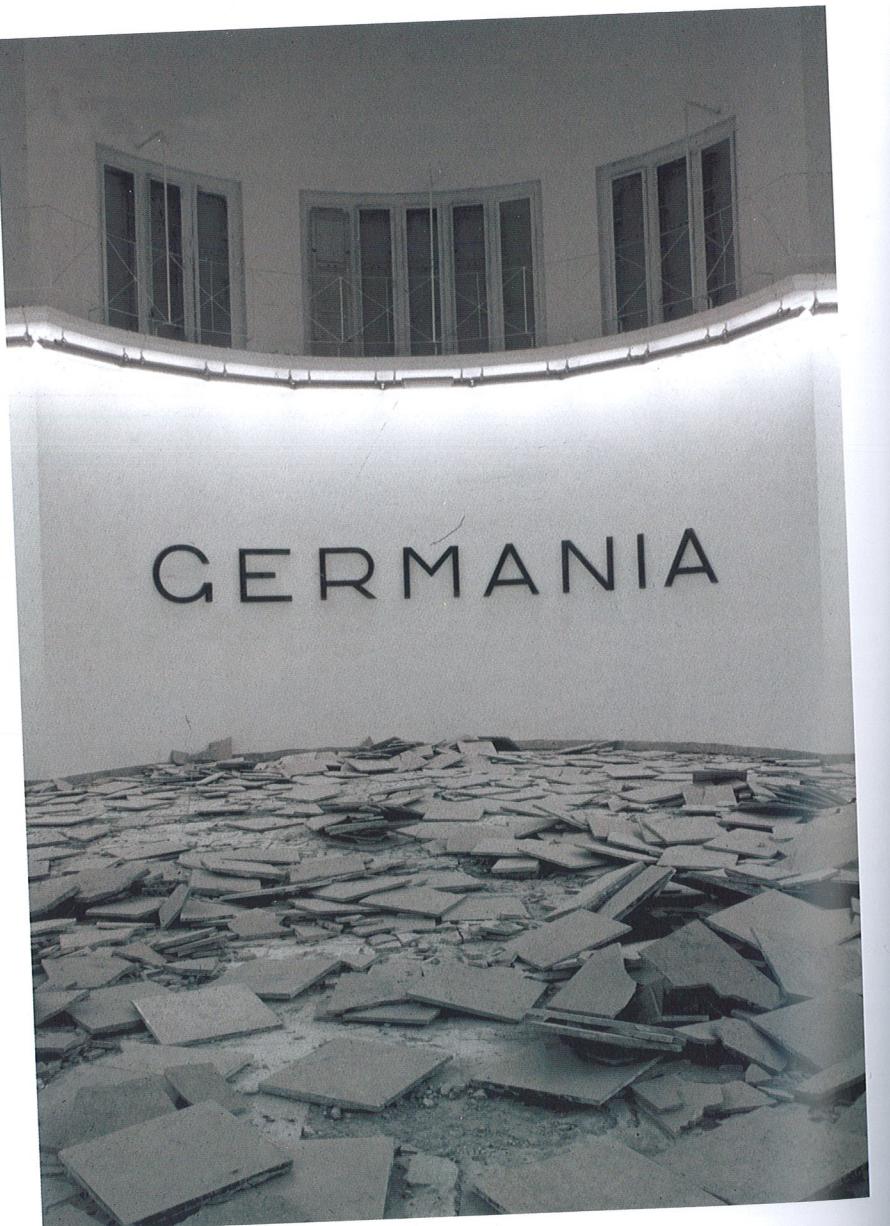


**Figure 1.31.** Mark Wallinger,  
*State Britain*, 2007.  
London, Tate Britain.

historic structure in this way, Haacke's installation not only represented a critical and transient monument to the history of Nazi Germany, but also commented on the relationship between art and power.

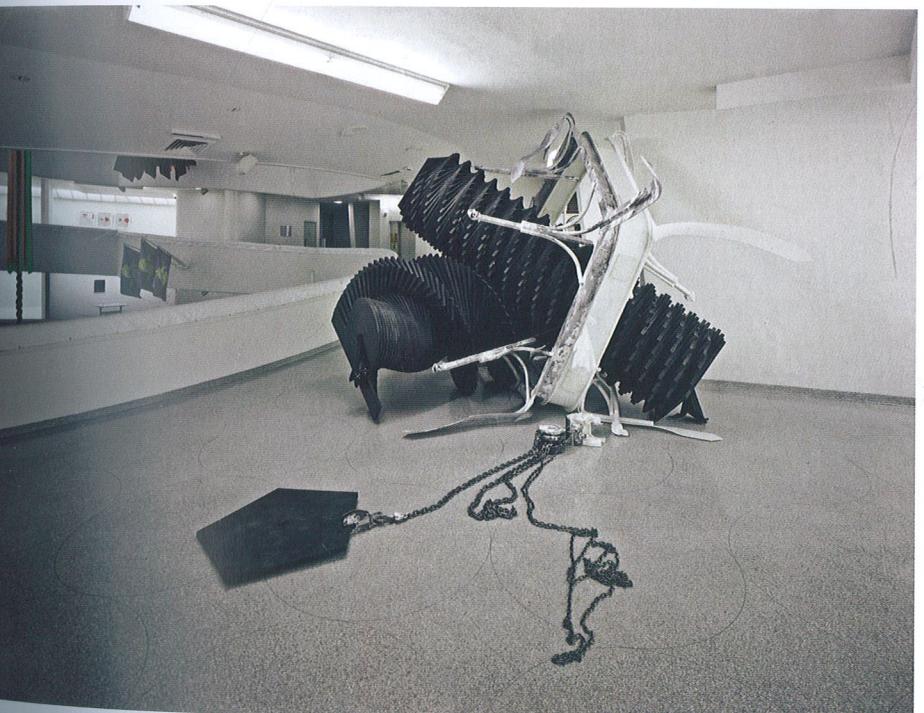
Monumentality and the relationship between art and power also represent the symbolism behind *Matthew Barney: The Cremaster Cycle 1994–2002* (2002–2003), an installation in which the artist presented his whole cycle of five feature-length films and a series of related sculptures, photographs, and drawings, as well as the sets he made as backgrounds for his work.

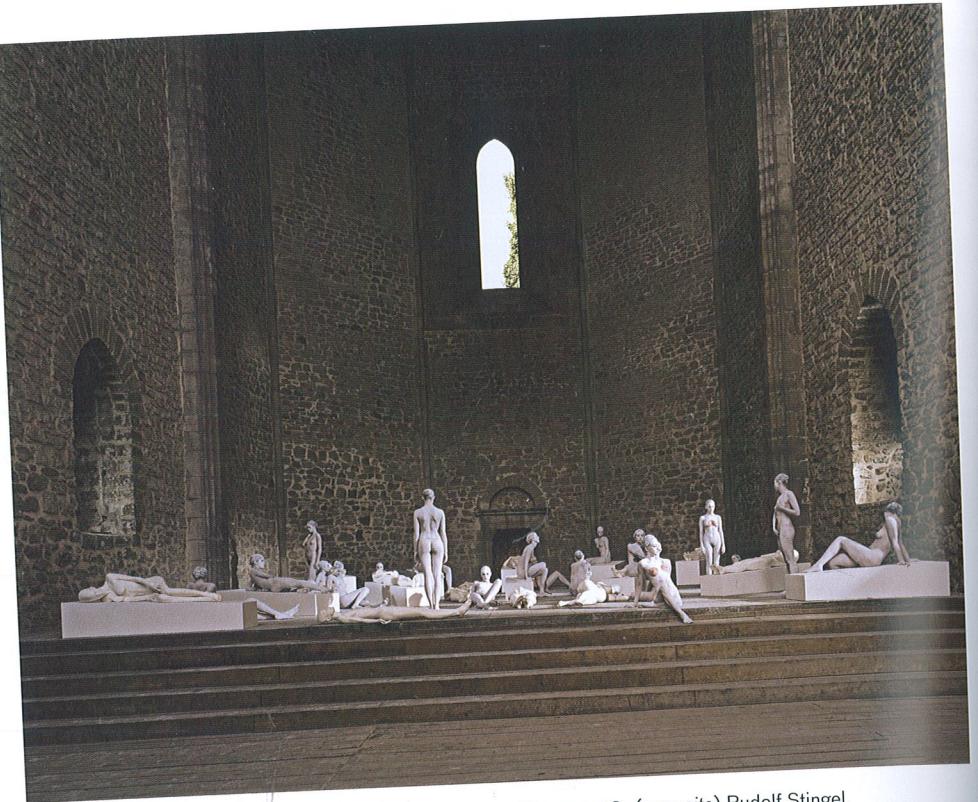
The exhibition, which was first installed at the Musée d'Art Moderne de la Ville de Paris and the Museum Ludwig in Cologne, had its apotheosis and final venue in 2002 at the Solomon R. Guggenheim Museum in New York. Barney's huge multimedia installation transformed the exhibition spaces of the Guggenheim, which is widely considered the definitive memorial to twentieth-century art. Projection screens for the films, his sculptures, and the drawings he produced for the sets created a huge *Gesamtkunstwerk*, a comprehensive work of art that was a tribute to the degree of power and status that Barney had achieved (Figs. 1.33–34).



**Figure 1.32.** Hans Haacke, *Germania*, 1993. Venice, 45th Venice Biennale, German Pavilion.

**Figures 1.33-1.34.** Views of the exhibition Matthew Barney: *The Cremaster Cycle*, 2002–2003. New York, The Solomon R. Guggenheim Museum.





**Figure 1.35.** (above) Vanessa Beecroft, VB62, 2008. Palermo, Chiesa di Santa Maria dello Spasimo.

**Figure 1.36.** (opposite) Rudolf Stingel, Untitled, 2006. Venice, Palazzo Grassi.

If the monument has historically been the emblem of power, the installation represents the precarious nature of present-day society, devoid of both ideology and economic certainty.

In 2008 Vanessa Beecroft (born 1969) created *VB62* in the church of Santa Maria dello Spasimo, Palermo. In the apse of the church she placed a series of plaster sculptures of nude female bodies on bases similar to the typical sarcophagi of funerary sculpture, arranging them in a radiating pattern. Among the sculptures she positioned a number of nude female models with their bodies painted white, to mimic the sculptures (Fig. 1.35).

Suddenly the models, at first indistinguishable from the sculptures, would seem to come alive as they slowly began to move. Beecroft's concept recalls a scene in an ancient narrative poem by Ovid. In Book X of his *Metamorphoses*, the poet described how Pygmalion, King of



Cyprus, created a statue that was so beautiful that it came to life. By her references to classical culture and to the virtuosity of eighteenth-century funerary sculpture, Beecroft created a work that is both performance and monumental in nature, but at the same time temporary and materially fragile.

As paradigms of contemporary existence, then, installations are the ideal medium for representing not only its complexity and its social and political questions but also its identity, its aesthetics, and its trends. In contrast to classical monuments—conceived so as to last through time and to make collective memory eternal, installations like the environments of Rudolf Stingel (born 1956), with their incised marks and Post-it® notes attached to Celotex® fiberboard walls (Fig. 1.36), are the ephemeral monuments of a society that is too complex and distracted to be able to share a common memory for any significant length of time.

#### Notes

\* The paragraphs about Dan Flavin and James Turrell are written by Teresa Bovi.

1 Julie H. Reiss, *From Margin to Center: The Spaces of Installation Art* (1999; Cambridge, Mass., 2001), p. xi.

2 Ibid.

3 Sean Cubitt, "Fountains and Grottos: Installations and the Neo-baroque," in Erika Suderberg, ed., *Space, Site, Intervention: Situating Installation Art* (Minneapolis, 2000), pp. 84–99.

4 Germano Celant, "*L'arte crea uno spazio ambientale nella stessa misura in cui l'ambiente crea l'arte*" [author's italics], introduction, in *Ambiente / Arte: Dal Futurismo alla Body Art* [Environment / Art: From Futurism to Body Art] (Venice, 1977). See also Germano Celant, "A Visual Machine: Art Installation and Its Modern Archetypes," in Reesa Greenberg, Bruce W. Ferguson, Sandy Nairne, eds., *Thinking About Exhibitions* (London, 1996), pp. 371–385. Originally published in *Documenta 7*, vol. 2, exh. cat. (Kassel, 1982).

5 Brigitte Felderer, et al., *Secession: The Vienna Secession, from Temple of Art to Exhibition Hall* (Ostfildern-Ruit, Germany, 1997).

6 Helen Adkins, "Première Messe-Dada Internationale Berlin 1920" [First International Dada Fair, Berlin 1920], in Denis Trierweiler, Bernd Klüser, Katharina Hegewisch, et al., *L'Art de l'exposition: Une documentation sur trente expositions exemplaires du XX<sup>e</sup> siècle* [The Art of the Exhibition: Documentation of Thirty Exemplary Exhibitions of the 20th Century] (Frankfurt, 1991; Paris, 1998), pp. 133–143.

7 According to Hannah Höch, Schwitters visited the exhibition. See Hannah Höch, "Vortrag Düsseldorf, 1966" [Düsseldorf Lecture 1966], in Gwendolen Webster, *Kurt Merz Schwitters: A Biographical Study* (Cardiff, Wales, 1997), p. 79.

8 Cited in John Elderfield, *Kurt Schwitters*, exh. cat. (New York, 1985), p. 156.

9 Alexander Dorner, *Il Superamento dell'arte* [Overcoming Art] (1946; Milan, 1964), pp. 8–9.

10 Lewis Kachur, *Displaying the Marvelous: Marcel Duchamp, Salvador Dalí, and Surrealist Exhibition Installations* (Cambridge, Mass., 2001), p. 73.

11 Uwe M. Schneede, "Exposition Internationale du Surrealisme" [International Exhibition of Surrealism], in *L'Art de l'exposition* (note 6), pp. 173–187; Brian O'Doherty, *Inside the White Cube: The Ideology of the Gallery Space* (1976; London, 1999), pp. 67–71.

12 Kachur, *Displaying the Marvelous* (note 10), p. 189.

13 Fontana's *Spazialismo* is formulated in the vast journalistic production inaugurated in 1946 with the *Manifiesto Blanco* [White Manifesto] published in Buenos Aires and signed by his Argentine pupils Bernardo and Pablo Arias, Horacio Cazeneuve, Marcos Fridman, Pablo Arias, Rodolfo Burgos, Enrique Benito, César Bernal, Luis Coll, Alfredo Hansen, and Jorge Rocamonte. Although Fontana's name does not appear among the signatories, the master's direction is implicit. In May 1947 the *Primo manifesto dello Spazialismo* [First Spatialist Manifesto] was published by Fontana, with Benjamin Joppolo, George Kaisserlian, and Milena Milani. In March 1948 the *Secondo manifesto dello Spazialismo* [Second Spatialist Manifesto] was published by Fontana, Gianni Dova, Benjamin Joppolo, Giorgio Kaisserlian, and Antonio Tullier. These manifesti are published in Enrico Crispolti, ed., *Fontana: catalogo generale* [Fontana: General Catalogue], vol. 1 (Milan, 1986), pp. 33–36.

14 The description of the work found in the literature related to *Ambiente spaziale a luce nera* [Spatial Environment with Black Light] therefore derives—not philologically—from the fusion of the title with the description "illuminazione a luce nera di arte / luce" [illumination with a black light of art / light], which was written on the invitation.

15 Polignoto (pen name of Leonardo Borgese), "Illuminazione a luce nera," *Europeo* 8 (20 February 1949): p. 11; "Gli Spaziali," *Avanti* (8 February 1949); "Lucio Fontana—Ambiente Spaziale," *AZ arte d'oggi* 1, no. 2 (November 1949); *Bellezza* 9 (September 1949): pp. 64–65; *Corriere d'informazione* (12–13 February 1949); "Il Nuovo Corriere," *Firenze* 31 (5 February 1949); U. N., "Fontana," *Il Tempo di Milano* (10 February 1949); "L'Ambiente spaziale di Lucio Fontana," *Sanremo* (May–June 1949); Lisa Ponti, "Primo graffito dell'età atomica," *Domus* 2 (1949): p. xiii.

16 Raffaele Carrieri, "Fontana ha toccato la luna," *Tempo* 8 (19–26 February 1949): p. 28.

17 Umberto Boccioni, "Manifesto tecnico della scultura futurista" [Technical Manifesto of Futurist Sculpture] (Milan), in Maria Drudi Gambillo and Teresa Fiori, eds., *Archivi del Futurismo* [Futurist Archives] (Rome, 1956–1962), p. 72.

**18** Earlier the iconography of the Spatial Concepts—but not the “environments”—was linked episodically to images of stars and planets, while research indicated that the rocket, referred to on several occasions in Fontana’s texts, was not in the least an incidental reference. The most specific contribution is a piece by Giorgio Zanchetti that makes the connection between the work of the artist and a technical manual published by Hoepli that was popular at the time. Giorgio Zanchetti, “Un futuro c’è stato... Anacronismo e suggestioni iconografiche di Lucio Fontana” [There was a Future... Anachronism and Iconographic Suggestions of Lucio Fontana], in *Uomo Nero, Intorno a Fontana* [The Black Man: Around Fontana] 1, no. 1 (June 2003): pp. 89–100.

**19** “US talks at Moscow, Earth is photographed from 100 miles in the air,” table of contents, *Life* magazine, 13 March 1947. Stephen L. Freeland, “Chutes Save Rocket Secrets,” *Popular Science* 151, no. 3 (Sept. 1947): pp. 124–128.

**20** See image at: [www.britishpathe.com/record.php?id=51485](http://www.britishpathe.com/record.php?id=51485)

**21** Unfortunately the proposal would not arrive in time, and Fontana’s participation would be restricted to the inclusion of a few pieces of ceramic sculptures. See letter number 146, dated 19 November 1949, addressed to Rodolfo Pallucchini, Segretario Generale Biennale di Venezia, in Paolo Campiglio, ed., *Lucio Fontana: Lettere 1919–1968* (Milan, 1999), p. 150. In letter number 147, dated 14 September 1951, also addressed to Pallucchini, Fontana again proposes *l’Ambiente spaziale* for the following Biennale. *Ibid.*, p. 151.

**22** Represented in the exhibition were Jean Dubuffet, Lucio Fontana, Henry Heerup, Enzo Mari, Etienne Martin, Bruno Munari, Giuseppe Pinot Gallizio, Germaine Richier, and Sofu Teshigahara. The opening and closing dates of the exhibition are not specified in the catalogue, but from the press reviews one can deduce that the exhibition was installed from July to the end of October 1960. In Italy, the first group exhibitions specifically organized on the theme of the relationship between a work of art and its environment were indeed *Lo spazio dell’immagine* (Foligno, 1967) and *Vitalità del negativo* (Rome, 1970).

**23** The work is described in Jole De Sanna, *Lucio Fontana: Materia, Spazio, Concetto* [Lucio Fontana: Material, Space, Concept] (Milan, 1993), p. 134. It is also described in detail in the review by Paul Davay, “De La Nature à l’Art: une démonstration éclatante de l’unité du monde” [On the Nature of Art: A Brilliant Demonstration of World Unity], *Les Beaux-arts* (Brussels, 11 April 1960); and in an undated account by Gianni Colombo (Thesis Locatelli-Bosé, supervised by Jole De Sanna, Accademia di Belle Arti di Brera, academic year 1989–1990), p. 144: “For the third room Lucio Fontana had created a special project for the occasion. The room was covered with red cloth—walls, ceiling, and the floor—and in the center was erected a kind of parallelepiped, but with very precise trapezoidal facets, and placed on the floor at a slight angle. The space around this nucleus was occupied by strips of red cloth that crossed the space from wall to wall, and from floor to ceiling. At the intersection of these trajectories, gauze-like material—also red—was gathered, clot like. The whole was lit with a strong red light that lightened the red of the material, so that the effect of the whole was dazzling.”

**24** Although in fact in several photographs Fontana is seen fingering the fabric suspended in the gallery in Milan, none of the reviews or the critical analyses give any importance to the tactile element of the work.

**25** Maria Teresa Roberto, *Pinot Gallizio: Catalogo Generale delle opere 1953–1964* [Pinot Gallizio: General Catalogue of Works, 1953–1964] (Milan, 2001).

**26** Stefano Collicelli Cagol, *Venezia e la vitalità del contemporaneo: Paolo Marinotti a Palazzo Grassi, 1959–1967* [Venice and the Vitality of the Contemporary: Paolo Marinotti at Palazzo Grassi, 1959–1967] (Padua, 2008), p. 95.

**27** “Il fut évident, par exemple, qu’un Fontana et un Gallizio sont faits pour des lyriques mises en scène baroques, toute en effets extérieurs.” A. Toniolo, “Come un gruppo di astrattisti interpreta la lezione della Natura” [How a Group of Abstract Artists Interprets the Lesson of Nature], in *Libertà* (15 July 1960). See also M. Valsecchi, “Dalla natura all’arte” [From Nature to Art], *Tempo* (30 July 1960).

**28** Venues for the *Spatial Concepts* exhibition were the Walker Art Center, Minneapolis; the University of Texas Art Museum, Austin; and the Instituto Torcuato di Tella, Buenos Aires. Dates for the exhibition at the Stedelijk Museum, Amsterdam: 23 March to 7 May 1967; Stedelijk Museum, Eindhoven: 12 May to 18 June 1967.

**29** Both Klein and Fontana related to the concept of “absolute space,” as conceived by the Japanese group, and expressed by them in painting, theater, and works in open spaces. See De Sanna, *Lucio Fontana* (note 23), pp. 107–110.

**30** Their reciprocal interest is documented in correspondence between the two. See Bruno Corà, “Yves Klein: perché no?” [Yves Klein: Why Not?], in Bruno Corà and Gilbert Perlein, *Yves Klein: La vita, la vita stessa che è l’arte assoluta* [simultaneously published in English as: *Yves Klein: Long Live the Immortal!*], exh. cat. (Nice and Prato, 2000), p. 14.

**31** Cf. De Sanna, *Lucio Fontana* (note 23), pp. 106–112. Subsequently, Fontana added more works by Klein to his collection. Cf. “Yves Klein e Lucio Fontana,” in Corà and Perlein, *Yves Klein*, pp. vii–viii.

**32** See Tommaso Trini, “Interview with Lucio Fontana,” *Domus*, no. 466 (September 1968), not paginated.

**33** “With this attempt, I want to create, establish, and present to the public—with the limits of an ordinary space for exhibiting paintings—a sensory pictorial state. This invisible pictorial state in the gallery space must be... an intangible and invisible irradiation, and, if successful, this dematerialization of the picture must act on the bodies or sensory faculties of visitors to the exhibition with greater effectiveness than mere pictorial canvases.... In this day and age, there should be no intermediaries. One should literally find oneself impregnated by this pictorial atmosphere, established and dedicated to the space under consideration.” Yves Klein, “Conférence de la Sorbonne,” in Corà and Perlein, *Yves Klein* (note 30), pp. 220–221.

**34** Allan Kaprow, *Assemblage, Environments & Happenings* (New York, 1966), p. 154.

**35** Julie H. Reiss, *From Margin to Center* (note 1), p. 64.



**66** Jennifer A. González, *Subject to Display: Reframing Race in Contemporary Installation Art* (Cambridge, Mass., 2008), p. 14.

**67** Ibid., pp. 7–9.

**68** "Formal und metodologisch betrachtet, sind die Altäre und zeitgenössischen Kunstinstitutionen miteinander vergleichbar. Bei beiden gleichermaßen werden die Gegenstände im Raum so angeordnet, dass sie einen Sinn ergeben. Die Unterschiede bestehen auf der Ebene der Zweckbestimmtheit, der Freiheit des Künstlers und der Gruppe der Rezipienten," in Jean-Hubert Martin, ed., *Altäre. Kunst zum Niederknien* [Altars: Art to Die For], exh. cat. (Ostfildern-Ruit, 2001), p. 12.

**69** On the wall of the actual work, the source was cited as: Le Corbusier, *Précisions sur un état présent de l'architecture et de l'urbanisme*

busier, *Précisions sur un état présent de l'architecture et de l'urbanisme* (1930). This is documented in Beatriz Colomina, "The Split Wall: Domestic Voyerism," in Beatriz Colomina, Jennifer Bloomer, et al., *Sexuality and Space* (New York, 1992), p. 113.

**70** Ilya Kabakov, *Über die "totale" Installation / On the "Total" Installation* (Ostfildern-Ruit, 1995), p. 245.

**71** González, *Subject to Display* (note 66), p. 8.

**72** Celant, Introduction, *Ambiente / Arte* (note 4), p. 5.

**73** "Il ne s'agit plus de travailler à partir d'un modèle existent, mais à partir d'une conception du modèle." See Pascale Ancel, *Une représentation sociale du temps: Étude pour une sociologie de l'art* [A Social Representation of Time: Study for a Sociology of Art] (Paris, 1996), p. 83.

**74** Amei Wallach, ed., *Ilya Kabakov: The Man Who Never Threw Anything Away* (New York, 1996).

**75** González, *Subject to Display* (note 66), p. 19.

**76** "En brisant les cohérences temporelles, l'installation détruit les syntaxes habituelles, libère les choses, leur découvre une autre logique." See Ancel, *Une représentation sociale du temps* (note 73), p. 65.

**77** Wallach, *Ilya Kabakov* (note 74), p. 240.

**78** "L'observateur fait partie du système qu'il observe; en observant il produit les conditions de son observation et transforme l'objet observé," Ancel, *Une représentation sociale du temps* (note 73), p. 95.

**79** "Imaginons une histoire de la sculpture moderniste entièrement négative. Une histoire dont le mouvement ne soit pas celui de l'imagination bondissant triomphalement vers l'avant, une histoire qui ne voie pas dans la montée de l'innovation technique un nouvel avatar du véhicule des idées plastiques et du sentiment, qui ne relate pas l'expansion constante, durant cette période, du domaine du 'sculptural.' Formons le projet d'une histoire différente, qu'on pourrait appeler une histoire de l'échec. Ce serait l'histoire du rapport de la sculpture moderne au monument et au monumental." See Rosalind Krauss, "Echelle / monumentalité: Modernisme / postmodernisme. La ruse de Brancusi" [Scale / Monumentality: Modernism / Postmodernism, The Cunning of Brancusi], in Margit Rowell, ed., *Qu'est-ce que la sculpture moderne?* [What is Modern Sculpture?], exh. cat. (Paris, Musée national d'art moderne—Centre Georges Pompidou, 1986), p. 246.

**80** Rosalind Krauss, "Sculpture in the Expanded Field," *October* 8 (Spring 1979): p. 34; inclusive pp. 30–44.

**81** Carlo Birrozzi and Marina Pugliese, eds., *L'arte pubblica nello spazio urbano: Committenti, artisti, fruitori* [Public Art in Urban Space: Clients, Artists, Viewers] (Milan, 2007).

**82** Massimiliano Gioni, "Ask the Dust," in Richard Flood, ed., *Unmonumental: The Object in the 21st Century*, exh. cat. (New York, 2007), p. 65.