INTRODUCTION

Site-determined, site-oriented, site-referenced, site-conscious, site-responsive, site-related. These are some new terms that have emerged in recent years among many artists and critics to account for the various permutations of site-specific art in the present. On the one hand, this phenomenon indicates a return of sorts: an attempt to rehabilitate the criticality associated with the anti-idealist, anticommercial site-specific practices of the late 1960s and early 1970s, which incorporated the physical conditions of a particular location as integral to the production, presentation, and reception of art. On the other hand, it signals a desire to *distinguish* current practices from those of the past—to mark a difference from artistic precedents of site specificity whose dominant positivist formulations (the most well-known being Richard Serra's) are deemed to have reached a point of aesthetic and political exhaustion.

This concern to reassess the relationship between the art work and its site is largely provoked by the ways in which the term ''site-specific'' has been uncritically adopted as another genre category by mainstream art institutions and discourses. The term is indeed conspicuous in a diverse range of catalogue essays, press releases, grant applications, magazine reviews, and artist statements today; it is applied rather indiscriminately to art works, museum exhibitions, public art projects, city arts festivals, architectural installations; and it is embraced as an automatic signifier of ''criticality'' or ''progressivity'' by artists, architects, dealers, curators, critics, arts administrators, and funding organizations.[1] For those who adhere to cooptation as the most viable explanation of the relationship between advanced art, the culture industry, and the political economy throughout the twentieth century, the unspecific (mis)uses of the term ''site-specific'' are yet another instance of how vanguardist, socially conscious, and politically committed art practices always become domesticated by their assimilation into the dominant culture. And this argument would insist that if the aesthetic and political efficacy of site-specific art has

become insignificant or innocuous in recent years, it is because it has been weakened and redirected by institutional and market forces.

But the current efforts to redefine the art-site relationship are also inspired by a recognition that if site-specific art seems no longer viable—because its critical edges have dulled, its pressures been absorbed—this is partly due to the conceptual limitations of existing models of site specificity itself. In response, many artists, critics, historians, and curators, whose practices are engaged in problematizing received notions of site specificity, have offered alternative formulations, such as context-specific, debate-specific, audience-specific, community-specific, project-based.[2] These terms, which tend to slide into one another at different times, collectively signal an attempt to forge more complex and fluid possibilities for the art-site relationship while simultaneously registering the extent to which the very concept of the site has become destabilized in the past three decades or more.

Yet despite these efforts to rethink site specificity, and despite the rise in interest in the artistic developments of the 1960s and 1970s in general, contemporary art discourse still lacks a substantive account of the historical and theoretical ''grounds'' of site specificity. Consequently, the framework within which we might discuss the artistic merit and/or political efficacy of the various formulations of site specificity, old and new, remains inconclusive.[3] Most importantly, what remain unrecognized, and thus unanalyzed, are the ways in which the very term ''site specificity'' has itself become a site of struggle, where competing positions concerning the nature of the site, as well as the ''proper'' relationship of art and artists to it, are being contested.

This book critically examines site specificity not exclusively as an artistic genre but as a problem-idea,[4] as a peculiar cipher of art and spatial politics. In addition to providing analysis and theorization of the various artistic (re)configurations of site specificity, and reevaluating the rhetoric of aesthetic vanguardism and political progressivism associated with them, the book situates the questions concerning the siting of art as a spatio-political problematic. Which is to say, site specificity is here conceived as what art historian Rosalyn Deutsche has called an ''urban-aesthetic'' or ''spatial-cultural'' discourse, which combines ''ideas about art,

architecture, and urban design, on the one hand, with theories of the city, social space, and public space, on the other.''[5] Informed by critical urban theory, postmodernist criticism in art and architecture, and debates concerning identity politics and the public sphere, the book seeks to reframe site specificity as the cultural mediation of broader social, economic, and political processes that organize urban life and urban space.

As a point of departure, the first chapter proposes a genealogy of site specificity since the late 1960s. Emerging out of the lessons of minimalism, site-specific art was initially based in a phenomenological or experiential understanding of the site, defined primarily as an agglomeration of the actual physical attributes of a particular location (the size, scale, texture, and dimension of walls, ceilings, rooms; existing lighting conditions, topographical features, traffic patterns, seasonal characteristics of climate, etc.), with architecture serving as a foil for the art work in many instances. Then, through the materialist investigations of institutional critique, the site was reconfigured as a relay or network of interrelated spaces and economies (studio, gallery, museum, art market, art criticism), which together frame and sustain art's ideological system. Works by artists such as Michael Asher, Daniel Buren, Hans Haacke, and Mierle Laderman Ukeles are seen as challenging the hermeticism of this system, complicating the site of art as not only a physical arena but one constituted through social, economic, and political processes.

In more recent site-oriented, project-based art by artists such as Mark Dion, Andrea Fraser, Renée Green, Christian Philipp Müller, and Fred Wilson, among many others, the site of art is again redefined, often extending beyond familiar art contexts to more ''public'' realms. Dispersed across much broader cultural, social, and discursive fields, and organized intertextually through the nomadic movement of the artist—operating more like an itinerary than a map—the site can now be as various as a billboard, an artistic genre, a disenfranchised community, an institutional framework, a magazine page, a social cause, or a political debate. It can be literal, like a street corner, or virtual, like a theoretical concept. While chapter 1 proposes three paradigms of site specificity—phenomenological or experiential; social/institutional; and discursive—in a somewhat chronological manner, there are

no discrete separations or neat periodizing breaks between them. The paradigms are outlined as competing definitions that operate in overlapping ways in past and current site-oriented art.

Chapter 2 examines some key aspects of what the transformation of the site—from a sedentary to a nomadic model—might mean for the art object, artists, and art institutions today. Critical questions concerning the status of originality, authenticity, uniqueness, and authorship, those concepts so central to modernist ideologies of art, which in turn were problematized throughout the 1970s and 1980s, are raised anew in the first section of the chapter. The discussion here takes account of the ways in which the recent trend of reproducing, refabricating, and traveling site-specific art first produced in the late 1960s and early 1970s would seem to betray the earlier premise of site specificity. At the same time, the new conceptual, ethical, and practical problems provoked by this situation force a reorganization of the conventional terms of making, selling, collecting, exhibiting, and distributing site-specific art in both institutional and market contexts. As such, the current mobilization and commodification of site specificity is seen to represent its most salient critical moment even as it enacts a ''betrayal'' of its earlier aspirations.

The second section of the chapter poses similar questions concerning the status of originality, authenticity, uniqueness, and authorship in relation to the nomadic conditions under which artists pursue new site-oriented practices today. As more artists try to accommodate the increase in demand for singular on-site projects in various cities across the globalized art network (as evidenced, for instance, in the rise in number of city-based biennials and annuals around the world), the definition of site specificity is being reconfigured to imply not the permanence and immobility of a work but its impermanence and transience. The chapter focuses on the impact of this reconfiguration on the role of the artist (now a cultural-artistic service provider rather than a producer of aesthetic objects), the new commodity status of such art ''work,'' and the general shift from the ''aesthetics of administration'' to the administration of aesthetics in contemporary art. In addition, the chapter reflects on the ways in which such new site-oriented practices accommodate and/or trouble the construction and commodification of urban identities.

Chapter 3 charts the changes in the conceptualization of site specificity within the mainstream public art arena, examining the ways in which an art work's public relevance and its sociopolitical ambitions have been measured in terms of the art-site relationship over the past three decades. The incorporation of site specificity as a programmatic imperative by local, state, and national public art agencies in the mid-1970s encouraged the development of a design team approach in which artists were asked to collaborate with architects in producing or refurbishing public spaces, such as urban plazas, waterfront promenades, neighborhood parks, and office lobbies. The resulting paradigm of art-as-public-spaces, or ''place-making,'' accommodated several ongoing circumstances: the expanded scale of artistic (sculptural) practices of the period, such as those of Scott Burton and Michael Heizer, for instance; the need of public art administrators and city officials to integrate art into the urban environment in a more ''accessible'' manner; and the accelerated growth of real estate investment and urban redevelopment projects throughout the country. Meant to equalize the creative authority of artists and architects in the design of public spaces, this mode of site specificity presumed the humanizing influence of art over the inhumanity of urban architecture. The ideology of functional utility, foundational to the modernist ethos of architecture and urban design, came to overtake the essentialism of formalist beauty, traditionally associated with art; site-specific public art now needed to be ''useful.''[6]

Against this backdrop, Richard Serra proposed a countermodel of site specificity with his sculpture *Tilted Arc* (1981–1989). His ''medium-differential'' approach,[7] in which he uses the language of sculpture to interrogate rather than accommodate the given architecture, disrupted the spatial conditions of the art work's site at Federal Plaza in New York City and challenged the prevailing design-oriented definition of site specificity. The controversy surrounding the removal of *Tilted Arc*—precisely on the point of site specificity's artistic, political, and social validity—is revisited here to establish the terms that become central to public art discourse in subsequent years. John Ahearn's figurative sculptures for a Percent for Art commission in the South Bronx (1991), installed and deinstalled by the artist within one week because of local protest, serves as an important comparative study

for the consideration of another alternative model of site specificity. In this case, the site is not simply a geographical location or architectural setting but a network of social relations, a community, and the artist and his sponsors envision the art work as an integral extension of the community rather than an intrusive contribution from elsewhere. The volatile reactions that emerged in response to Ahearn's project, and Ahearn's own response to those reactions, exposed the incommensurate expectations, presumptions, and ideologies at play in much community-based public art today. With the shift from site to community, or the conversion of community into a site, questions concerning the role of the artist, the public function of art, and the definition of community are given new urgency.

Chapter 4 attends more generally to the artistic, architectural, social, and political implications of the shift from site specificity to community specificity in ''new genre public art.''[8] Claiming a major break from previous approaches to public art, proponents of new genre public art favor temporary rather than permanent projects that engage their audience, particularly groups considered marginalized, as active participants in the conceptualization and production of process-oriented, politically conscious community events or programs. Drawing on a detailed analysis of the highly acclaimed 1993 community-based public art exhibition ''Culture in Action'' as a case study, this chapter questions the presumptions of aesthetic radicalism, public accessibility, audience empowerment, social relevance, and democracy that support such practice. While many of the goals of new genre public art are salutary, this chapter counters the claims made by many of its advocates that its newness overcomes the contradictions of previous models of site specificity. The chapter unpacks the ways in which new genre public art can exacerbate uneven power relations, remarginalize (even colonize) already disenfranchised groups, depoliticize and remythify the artistic process, and finally further the separation of art and life (despite claims to the contrary).

Tracking the complex exchanges among numerous participants in the planning and presentation of ''Culture in Action,'' the chapter also offers a schematic typology of four ''communities'' that commonly emerge out of community-based collaborations: community of mythic unity; ''sited'' communities; temporary in-

vented communities; and ongoing invented communities. Collectively, the categories reveal that despite the effort of many artists, curators, critics, and historians to unify recent trends in public art as a coherent movement, there are numerous inconsistencies and contradictions in the field. For instance, while one community type might require extensive artist and/or institutional involvement, another type remains self-sufficient in overseeing the development of its own project. Further, each category defines a different role for the artist, posing, in turn, alternative renditions of the collaborative relationship. These variations indicate the extent to which the very concept of ''community'' remains highly ambiguous and problematic in public art today.

This last point is emphasized in the review of the key critiques of community-based art in chapter 5, especially as they pertain to ethical issues of uneven power relations in the triangulated exchange between an artist, a curator-art institution, and a community group. From Hal Foster's critique of its ethnographic working methods, to Grant Kester's claims of its reformist-minded ''aesthetic evangelism,'' to Critical Art Ensemble's complete rejection of it, to Martha Fleming's critique of the critics of community-based art, this chapter reveals the extent to which the identity or definition of a community remains open, like the site, as a scene of political struggle. Relying on the work of feminist social theorist Iris Marion Young on the one hand and French philosopher Jean-Luc Nancy on the other, the chapter argues against the common notion of the community as a coherent and unified social formation—equally valorized by neoconservatives and the liberal left—which often serves exclusionary and authoritarian purposes in the very name of the opposite. Instead, the chapter proposes the idea of community as a necessarily unstable and ''inoperative'' specter in order to think beyond formulaic prescriptions of community, to open onto an altogether different model of collectivity and belonging. Like the concept of the ''public sphere,'' the community may be seen as a phantom,[9] an elusive discursive formation that, as Nancy puts it, is not a ''common being'' but a nonessential ''being-in-common.'' Based on this insight, the chapter concludes with a provocation to imagine ''collective artistic praxis,'' as opposed to ''community-based art.''

In the final chapter, the dissipation of the site in site specificity as described in the previous chapters—the prioritizing of its discursivity, its displacement by the community—is examined in relation to the ''dynamics of deterritorialization'' as elaborated in architectural and urban spatial discourse. While the accelerated speed, access, and exchange of information, images, commodities, and even bodies is being celebrated in one circle, the concomitant breakdown of traditional temporal-spatial experiences and the accompanying homogenization of places and erasure of cultural differences is being decried in another. The intensifying conditions of spatial indifferentiation and departicularization—that is, the increasing instances of locational *un*specificity—are seen to exacerbate the sense of alienation and fragmentation in contemporary life. Consequently, the nature of the tie between subject/object and location, as well as the interplay between place and space, has received much critical attention in the past two decades' theorization of oppositional cultural practice. For example, Fredric Jameson's ''cognitive mapping,''[10] Lucy Lippard's ''lure of the local,''[11] Kenneth Frampton's ''critical regionalism,''[12] Michel de Certeau's ''walking in the city,''[13] and Henri Lefebvre's ''production of space,''[14] as ideologically divergent as they may be, are all attempts to theorize the transforming nexus between the subject/object and location.

To this list we should add site specificity as an analogous artistic endeavor. For if the search for place-bound identity in an undifferentiated sea of abstract, homogenized, and fragmented space of late capitalism is one characteristic of the postmodern condition, then the expanded efforts to rethink the specificity of the art-site relationship can be viewed as both a compensatory symptom *and* critical resistance to such conditions. Indeed, the resilience of the concept of site specificity as indicated by its many permutations, with its vague yet persistent maintenance of the idea of singular, unrepeatable instances of site-bound knowledge and experience, manifests this doubleness. Countering both the nostalgic desire for a retrieval of rooted, place-bound identities on the one hand, and the antinostalgic embrace of a nomadic fluidity of subjectivity, identity, and spatiality on the other, this book concludes with a theorization of the ''wrong place,'' a speculative and heuristic concept for imagining a new model of belonging-in-transience. As evi-

denced throughout the book, this task of imagining altogether new coordinations of art and site is an open-ended predicament. Thus, in its final pages, the book can only conjure the critical capacity of intimacies based on absence, distance, and ruptures of time and space.

Robert Smithson, *Partially Buried Woodshed*, at Kent State University campus, 1970. (© Estate of Robert Smithson/ VAGA, New York; courtesy James Cohan Gallery, New York.)

1

GENEALOGY OF SITE SPECIFICITY

Site specificity used to imply something grounded, bound to the laws of physics. Often playing with gravity, site-specific works used to be obstinate about ''presence,'' even if they were materially ephemeral, and adamant about immobility, even in the face of disappearance or destruction. Whether inside the white cube or out in the Nevada desert, whether architectural or landscape-oriented, site-specific art initially took the site as an actual location, a tangible reality, its identity composed of a unique combination of physical elements: length, depth, height, texture, and shape of walls and rooms; scale and proportion of plazas, buildings, or parks; existing conditions of lighting, ventilation, traffic patterns; distinctive topographical features, and so forth. If modernist sculpture absorbed its pedestal/base to sever its connection to or express its indifference to the site, rendering itself more autonomous and self-referential, thus transportable, placeless, and nomadic, then site-specific works, as they first emerged in the wake of minimalism in the late 1960s and early 1970s, forced a dramatic reversal of this modernist paradigm.[1] Antithetical to the claim, ''If you have to change a sculpture for a site there is something wrong with the sculpture,''[2] site-specific art, whether interruptive or assimilative,[3] gave itself up to its environmental context, being formally determined or directed by it.

In turn, the uncontaminated and pure idealist space of dominant modernisms was radically displaced by the materiality of the natural landscape or the impure and ordinary space of the everyday. And the space of art was no longer perceived as a blank slate, a tabula rasa, but a real place. The art object or event in this context was to be singularly and multiply experienced in the here and now through the bodily presence of each viewing subject, in a sensory immediacy of spatial extension and temporal duration (what Michael Fried derisively characterized as theatricality),[4] rather than instantaneously perceived in a visual epiphany by a disembodied eye. Site-specific work in its earliest formation, then, focused on

establishing an inextricable, indivisible relationship between the work and its site, and demanded the physical presence of the viewer for the work's completion. The (neo-avant-gardist) aesthetic aspiration to exceed the limitations of traditional media, like painting and sculpture, as well as their institutional setting; the epistemological challenge to relocate meaning from within the art object to the contingencies of its context; the radical restructuring of the subject from an old Cartesian model to a phenomenological one of lived bodily experience; and the selfconscious desire to resist the forces of the capitalist market economy, which circulates art works as transportable and exchangeable commodity goods—all these imperatives came together in art's new attachment to the actuality of the site.

       In this frame of mind, Robert Barry declared in a 1969 interview that each of his wire installations was ''made to suit the place in which it was installed. They cannot be moved without being destroyed.''[5] Similarly, Richard Serra wrote fifteen years later in a letter to the director of the Art-in-Architecture Program of the General Services Administration in Washington, D.C., that his 120-foot, Cor-Ten steel sculpture *Tilted Arc* was ''commissioned and designed for one particular site: Federal Plaza. It is a site-specific work and as such not to be relocated. To remove the work is to destroy the work.''[6] He further elaborated his position in 1989:

> As I pointed out, *Tilted Arc* was conceived from the start as a site-specific sculpture and was not meant to be ''site-adjusted'' or . . . ''relocated.'' Site-specific works deal with the environmental components of given places. The scale, size, and location of site-specific works are determined by the topography of the site, whether it be urban or landscape or architectural enclosure. The works become part of the site and restructure both conceptually and perceptually the organization of the site.[7]

Barry and Serra echo one another here. But whereas Barry's comment announces what was in the late 1960s a new radicality in vanguardist sculptural practice, marking an early stage in the aesthetic experiments that were to follow through the

1970s (land/earth art, process art, installation art, conceptual art, performance/body art, and various forms of institutional critique), Serra's statement, spoken twenty years later within the context of public art, is an indignant defense, signaling a crisis point for site specificity—at least for a version that would prioritize the *physical* inseparability between a work and its site of installation.[8]

Informed by the contextual thinking of minimalism, various forms of institutional critique and conceptual art developed a different model of site specificity that implicitly challenged the ''innocence'' of space and the accompanying presumption of a universal viewing subject (albeit one in possession of a corporeal body) as espoused in the phenomenological model. Artists such as Michael Asher, Marcel Broodthaers, Daniel Buren, Hans Haacke, and Robert Smithson, as well as many women artists including Mierle Laderman Ukeles, have variously conceived the site not only in physical and spatial terms but as a *cultural* framework defined by the institutions of art. If minimalism returned to the viewing subject a physical body, institutional critique insisted on the social matrix of the class, race, gender, and sexuality of the viewing subject.[9] Moreover, while minimalism challenged the idealist hermeticism of the autonomous art object by deflecting its meaning to the space of its presentation, institutional critique further complicated this displacement by highlighting the idealist hermeticism of the space of presentation itself. The modern gallery/museum space, for instance, with its stark white walls, artificial lighting (no windows), controlled climate, and pristine architectonics, was perceived not solely in terms of basic dimensions and proportion but as an institutional disguise, a normative exhibition convention serving an ideological function. The seemingly benign architectural features of a gallery/museum, in other words, were deemed to be coded mechanisms that *actively* disassociate the space of art from the outer world, furthering the institution's idealist imperative of rendering itself and its values ''objective,'' ''disinterested,'' and ''true.''

As early as 1970 Buren proclaimed, ''Whether the place in which the work is shown imprints and marks this work, whatever it may be, or whether the work itself is directly—consciously or not—produced for the Museum, any work presented in that framework, if it does not explicitly examine the influence of the framework upon

itself, falls into the illusion of self-sufficiency—or idealism."[10] More than just the museum, the site comes to encompass a relay of several interrelated but different spaces and economies, including the studio, gallery, museum, art criticism, art history, the art market, that together constitute a system of practices that is not separate from but open to social, economic, and political pressures. To be "specific" to such a site, in turn, is to decode and/or recode the institutional conventions so as to expose their hidden operations—to reveal the ways in which institutions mold art's meaning to modulate its cultural and economic value; to undercut the fallacy of art's and its institutions' autonomy by making apparent their relationship to the broader socioeconomic and political processes of the day. Again, in Buren's somewhat militant words from 1970:

> Art, whatever else it may be, is exclusively political. What is called for is the *analysis of formal and cultural limits* (and not one *or* the other) within which art exists and struggles. These limits are many and of different intensities. Although the prevailing ideology and the associated artists try in every way to *camouflage* them, and although it is too early—the conditions are not met—to blow them up, the time has come to *unveil* them.[11]

In nascent forms of institutional critique, in fact, the physical condition of the exhibition space remained the primary point of departure for this unveiling. For example, in works such as Hans Haacke's *Condensation Cube* (1963–1965), Mel Bochner's *Measurement* series (1969), Lawrence Weiner's wall cutouts (1968), and Buren's *Within and Beyond the Frame* (1973), the task of exposing those aspects which the institution would obscure was enacted literally in relation to the architecture of the exhibition space—highlighting the humidity level of a gallery by allowing moisture to "invade" the pristine minimalist art object (a mimetic configuration of the gallery space itself); insisting on the material fact of the gallery walls as "framing" devices by notating the walls' dimensions directly on them; removing portions of a wall to reveal the base reality behind the "neutral" white cube; and ex-
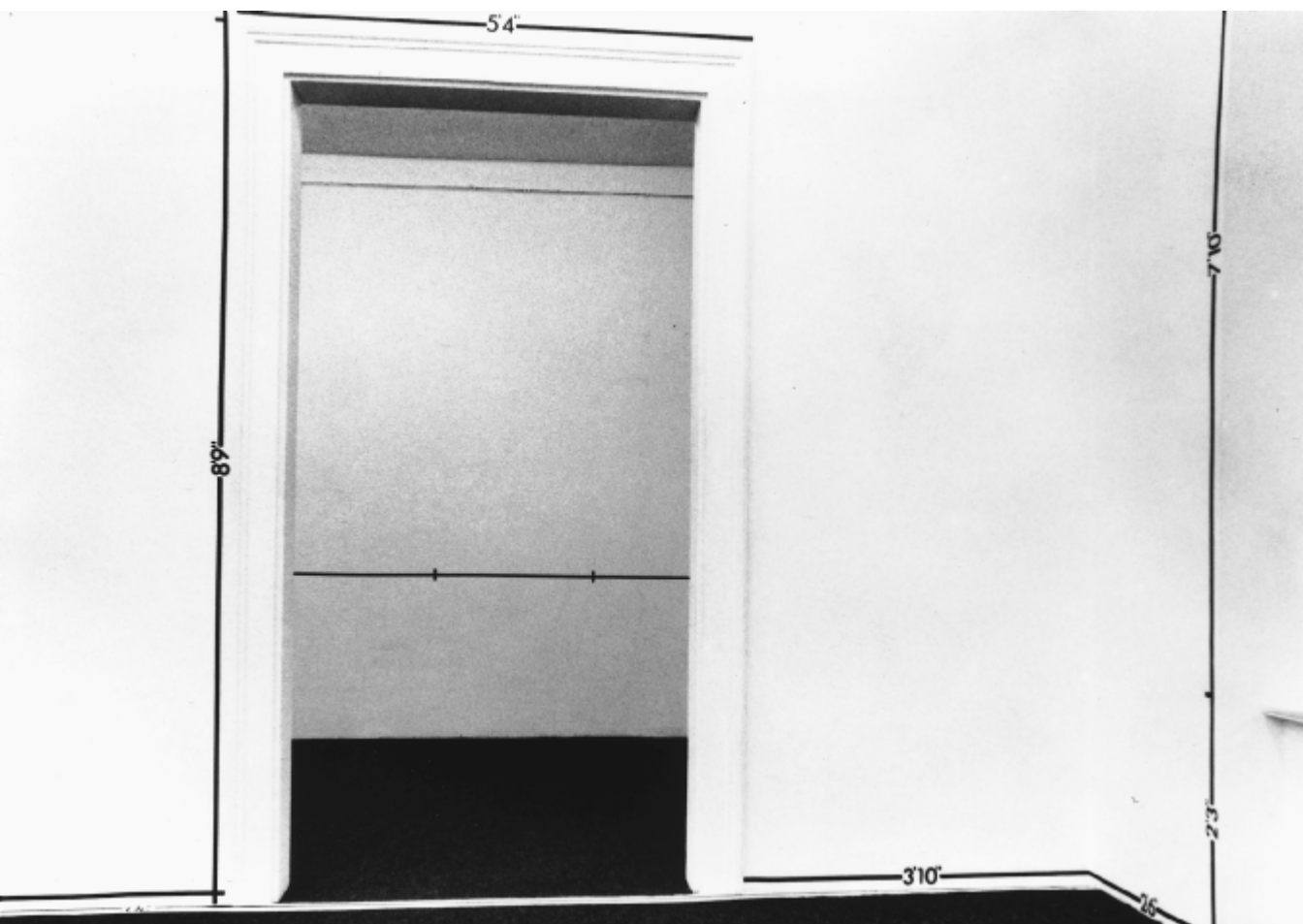
Mel Bochner, *Measurement: Room*, tape and Letraset on wall, installation at Galerie Heiner Friedrich, Munich, 1969. (Photo by the artist; Collection The Museum of Modern Art, New York.)

Daniel Buren, photo-souvenir: ***Within and Beyond the Frame***, John Weber Gallery, New York, 1973. (© Daniel Buren.)

ceeding the physical boundaries of the gallery by having the art work literally go out the window, ostensibly to ''frame'' the institutional frame. Attempts such as these to expose the cultural confinement within which artists function—''the apparatus the artist is threaded through''—and the impact of its forces upon the meaning and value of art became, as Smithson had predicted in 1972, ''the great issue'' for artists in the 1970s.[12] As this investigation extended into the 1980s, it relied less and less on the physical parameters of the gallery/museum or other exhibition venues to articulate its critique.

In the paradigmatic practice of Hans Haacke, for instance, the site shifted

Michael Asher, untitled installation at Claire Copley Gallery, Inc., Los Angeles, 1974. (Photo by Gary Krueger; courtesy the artist.)

from the physical condition of the gallery (as in *Condensation Cube*) to the system of socioeconomic relations within which art and its institutional programming find their possibilities of being. His fact-based exposés through the 1970s, which spotlighted art's inextricable ties to the ideologically suspect if not morally corrupt power elite, recast the site of art as an institutional frame in social, economic, and political terms, and enforced these terms as the very content of the art work.[13] Exemplary of a different approach to the institutional frame are Michael Asher's surgically precise displacement projects, which advanced a concept of site that included historical and conceptual dimensions. In his contribution to the ''73rd American Exhibition'' at the Art Institute of Chicago in 1979, for instance, Asher revealed the sites of exhibition or display to be culturally specific situations that generate particular expectations and narratives regarding art and art history. Institutional framing of art, in other words, not only distinguishes qualitative value; it also (re)produces specific forms of knowledge that are historically located and culturally determined—not at all universal or timeless standards.[14]

Yet another approach to a critique of the institutional frame is indicated in Mierle Laderman Ukeles's 1973 series of ''maintenance art'' performances at the Wadsworth Atheneum in Hartford, Connecticut.[15] In two of the performances, Ukeles, literally on her hands and knees, washed the entry plaza and steps of the museum for four hours, then scrubbed the floors inside the exhibition galleries for another four hours. In doing so, she forced the menial domestic tasks usually associated with women—cleaning, washing, dusting, and tidying—to the level of aesthetic contemplation, and revealed the extent to which the museum's pristine self-presentation, its perfectly immaculate white spaces as emblematic of its ''neutrality,'' is structurally dependent on the hidden and devalued labor of daily maintenance and upkeep. By foregrounding this dependence, Ukeles posed the museum as a hierarchical system of labor relations and complicated the social and gendered division between the notions of the public and the private.[16]

In these ways, the site of art begins to diverge from the literal space of art, and the physical condition of a specific location recedes as the primary element in the conception of a site. Whether articulated in political and economic terms, as in

Mierle Laderman Ukeles, *Hartford Wash: Washing Tracks, Maintenance Outside*, Wadsworth Atheneum, Hartford, 1973. (Photos courtesy Ronald Feldman Fine Arts, New York.)

Mierle Laderman Ukeles, **Hartford Wash: Washing Tracks, Maintenance Inside**, Wadsworth Atheneum, Hartford, 1973. (Photos courtesy Ronald Feldman Fine Arts, New York.)

Haacke's case, in epistemological terms, as in Asher's displacements, or in systemic terms of uneven (gendered) labor relations, as in Ukeles's performances, it is rather the *techniques* and *effects* of the art institution as they circumscribe and delimit the definition, production, presentation, and dissemination of art that become the sites of critical intervention. Concurrent with this move toward the dematerialization of the site is the simultaneous deaestheticization (that is, withdrawal of visual pleasure) and dematerialization of the art work. Going against the grain of institutional habits and desires, and continuing to resist the commodification of art in/for the marketplace, site-specific art adopts strategies that are either aggressively antivisual—informational, textual, expositional, didactic—or immaterial altogether—gestures, events, or performances bracketed by temporal boundaries. The ''work'' no longer seeks to be a noun/object but a verb/process, provoking the viewers' *critical* (not just physical) acuity regarding the ideological conditions of their viewing. In this context, the guarantee of a specific relationship between an art work and its site is not based on a physical permanence of that relationship (as demanded by Serra, for example) but rather on the recognition of its unfixed *impermanence,* to be experienced as an unrepeatable and fleeting situation.

But if the critique of the cultural confinement of art (and artists) via its institutions was once the ''great issue,'' a dominant drive of site-oriented practices today is the pursuit of a more intense engagement with the outside world and everyday life—a critique of culture that is inclusive of nonart spaces, nonart institutions, and nonart issues (blurring the division between art and nonart, in fact). Concerned to integrate art more directly into the realm of the social,[17] either in order to redress (in an activist sense) urgent social problems such as the ecological crisis, homelessness, AIDS, homophobia, racism, and sexism, or more generally in order to relativize art as one among many forms of cultural work, current manifestations of site specificity tend to treat aesthetic and art historical concerns as secondary issues. Deeming the focus on the social nature of *art*'s production and reception to be too exclusive, even elitist, this expanded engagement with culture favors public sites outside the traditional confines of art both in physical and intellectual terms.[18]

Furthering previous (at times literal) attempts to take art out of the mu-

Group Material, *DaZiBaos*, poster project at Union Square, New York, 1982. (Photo courtesy the artists.)

seum/gallery space-system (recall Daniel Buren's striped canvases marching out the window, or Robert Smithson's adventures in the wastelands of New Jersey or isolated locales in Utah), contemporary site-oriented works occupy hotels, city streets, housing projects, prisons, schools, hospitals, churches, zoos, supermarkets, and they infiltrate media spaces such as radio, newspapers, television, and the Internet. In addition to this spatial expansion, site-oriented art is also informed by a broader range of disciplines (anthropology, sociology, literary criticism, psychology, natural and cultural histories, architecture and urbanism, computer science, political theory, philosophy) and is more sharply attuned to popular discourses (fashion, music, advertising, film, and television). Beyond these dual expansions of art into culture, which obviously diversify the site, the distinguishing characteristic of today's site-oriented art is the way in which the art work's relationship to the actuality of a location (as site) and the social conditions of the institutional frame (as site) are both subordinate to a *discursively* determined site that is delineated as a field of knowledge, intellectual exchange, or cultural debate. Furthermore, unlike in the previous models, this site is not defined as a *pre*condition. Rather, it is generated by the work (often as ''content''), and then verified by its convergence with an existing discursive formation.

◄ Mark Dion, **On Tropical Nature**, in the field near the Orinoco River basin, 1991. (Photo by Bob Braine; courtesy American Fine Arts, Co., New York.)

► Mark Dion, **On Tropical Nature**, installation at Sala Mendoza, Caracas, 1991. (Photo by Miwon Kwon.)

Mark Dion, *New York State Bureau of Tropical Conservation*, with materials from Orinoco River basin reconfigured for installation at American Fine Arts, Co., New York, 1992. (Photo by A. Cumberbirch; courtesy American Fine Arts, Co., New York.)

For example, in Mark Dion's 1991 project *On Tropical Nature,* several different definitions of the site operated concurrently. First, the initial site of Dion's intervention was an uninhabited spot in the rain forest near the base of the Orinoco River outside Caracas, Venezuela, where the artist camped for three weeks collecting specimens of various plants and insects as well as feathers, mushrooms, nests, and stones. These specimens, picked up at the end of each week in crates, were delivered to the second site of the project, Sala Mendoza, one of two hosting art institutions in Caracas. In the gallery space of the Sala, the specimens, which were uncrated and displayed like works of art in themselves, were contextualized within what constituted a third site—the curatorial framework of the thematic group exhibition.[19] The fourth site, however, although the least material, was the site to which Dion intended a lasting relationship. *On Tropical Nature* sought to become a part of the discourse concerning cultural representations of nature and the global environmental crisis.[20]

Sometimes at the cost of a semantic slippage between content and site, other artists who are similarly engaged in site-oriented projects, operating with multiple definitions of the site, in the end find their ''locational'' anchor in the discursive realm. For instance, while Tom Burr and John Lindell have each produced diverse projects in a variety of media for many different institutions, their consistent engagement with issues concerning the construction and dynamics of (homo)sexuality and desire has established such issues as the ''site'' of their work. And in many projects by artists such as Lothar Baumgarten, Renée Green, Jimmie Durham, and Fred Wilson, the legacies of colonialism, slavery, racism, and the ethnographic tradition as they impact on identity politics have emerged as an important ''site'' of artistic investigation. In some instances, artists including Green, Silvia Kolbowski, Group Material, Andrea Fraser, and Christian Philipp Müller have reflected on aspects of site-specific practice itself as a ''site,'' interrogating its currency in relation to aesthetic imperatives, institutional demands, socioeconomic ramifications, or political efficacy.[21] In this way different cultural debates, a theoretical concept, a social issue, a political problem, an institutional framework (not necessarily an art institu-

tion), a neighborhood or seasonal event, a historical condition, even particular for-
mations of desire are deemed to function as sites.[22]

      This is not to say that the parameters of a particular place or institution no
longer matter, because site-oriented art today still cannot be thought or executed
without the contingencies of locational and institutional circumstances. But the *pri-
mary* site addressed by current manifestations of site specificity is not necessarily
bound to, or determined by, these contingencies in the long run. Consequently, al-
though the site of action or intervention (physical) and the site of effects/reception
(discursive) are conceived to be continuous, they are nonetheless pulled apart.
Whereas, for example, the site of intervention and the site of effect for Serra's *Tilted
Arc* were thought of as coincident (Federal Plaza in downtown New York City),
Dion's site of intervention (the rain forest in Venezuela or Sala Mendoza) and his
projected site of effect (discourse on nature) are distinct. The former clearly serves
the latter as material source and inspiration, yet does not sustain an indexical rela-
tionship to it.

      James Meyer has distinguished this trend in recent site-oriented practice in
terms of a ''functional site'': ''[The functional site] is a process, an operation occur-
ring between sites, a mapping of institutional and discursive filiations and the bod-
ies that move between them (the artist's above all). It is an informational site, a
locus of overlap of text, photographs and video recordings, physical places and
things. . . . It is a temporary thing; a movement; a chain of meanings devoid of a
particular focus.''[23] Which is to say, the site is now structured (inter)textually rather
than spatially, and its model is not a map but an itinerary, a fragmentary sequence of
events and actions *through* spaces, that is, a nomadic narrative whose path is articu-
lated by the passage of the artist. Corresponding to the model of movement in
electronic spaces of the Internet and cyberspace, which are likewise structured as
transitive experiences, one thing after another, and not in synchronic simultaneity,[24]
this transformation of the site textualizes spaces and spatializes discourses.

      A provisional conclusion might be that in advanced art practices of the past
thirty years the operative definition of the site has been transformed from a physical
location—grounded, fixed, actual—to a discursive vector—ungrounded, fluid, vir-

tual. Of course, even if a particular formulation of site specificity dominates at one moment and recedes at another, the shifts are not always punctual or definitive. Thus, the three paradigms of site specificity I have schematized here—phenomenological, social/institutional, and discursive—although presented somewhat chronologically, are not stages in a neat linear trajectory of historical development. Rather, they are competing definitions, overlapping with one another and operating simultaneously in various cultural practices today (or even within a single artist's single project). Nonetheless, this move away from a literal interpretation of the site, and the multiple expansions of the site in locational and conceptual terms, seem more accelerated today than in the past. The phenomenon is embraced by many artists, curators, and critics as offering more effective avenues to resist revised institutional and market forces that now commodify ''critical'' art practices. In addition, current forms of site-oriented art, which readily take up social issues (often inspired by them), and which routinely engage the collaborative participation of audience groups for the conceptualization and production of the work, are seen as a means to strengthen art's capacity to penetrate the sociopolitical organization of contemporary life with greater impact and meaning. In this sense the chance to conceive the site as something more than a place—as repressed ethnic history, a political cause, a disenfranchised social group—is an important conceptual leap in redefining the public role of art and artists.[25]

But the enthusiastic support for these salutary goals needs to be checked by a serious critical examination of the problems and contradictions that attend all forms of site-specific and site-oriented art today, which are visible now as the art work is becoming more and more unhinged from the actuality of the site once again—''unhinged'' both in a literal sense of a physical separation of the art work from the location of its initial installation, and in a metaphorical sense as performed in the discursive mobilization of the site in emergent forms of site-oriented art. This unhinging, however, does not indicate a reversion to the modernist autonomy of the siteless, nomadic art object, although such an ideology is still predominant. Rather, the current unhinging of site specificity indicates new pressures upon its practice today—pressures engendered by both aesthetic imperatives and external histori-

cal determinants, which are not exactly comparable to those of thirty years ago. For example, what is the status of traditional aesthetic values such as originality, authenticity, and uniqueness in site-specific art, which always begins with the particular, local, unrepeatable preconditions of a site, however it is defined? Is the prevailing relegation of authorship to the conditions of the site, including collaborators and/or reader-viewers, a continuing Barthesian performance of the ''death of the author'' or a recasting of the centrality of the artist as a ''silent'' manager/director? Furthermore, what is the commodity status of anticommodities, that is, immaterial, process-oriented, ephemeral, performative events? While site-specific art once defied commodification by insisting on immobility, it now seems to espouse fluid mobility and nomadism for the same purpose. Curiously, however, the nomadic principle also defines capital and power in our times.[26] Is the unhinging of site specificity, then, a form of resistance to the ideological establishment of art, or a capitulation to the logic of capitalist expansion?

Guided by these questions, the next chapter examines two different conditions within which site-specific and site-oriented art have been ''circulating'' in recent years. First, since the late 1980s, there have been increasing numbers of *traveling* site-specific art works, despite the once-adamant claim that to move the work is to destroy the work. Concurrently, refabrications of site-specific works, particularly from the minimalist and postminimalist eras, are becoming more common in the art world. The increasing trend of relocating or reproducing once unique site-bound works has raised new questions concerning the authenticity and originality of such works as well as their commodity status. Secondly, now that site-specific practices have become familiar (even commonplace) in the mainstream art world, artists are traveling more than ever to fulfill institutional/cultural critique projects in situ. The extent of this mobilization of the *artist* radically redefines the commodity status of the art work, the nature of artistic authorship, and the art-site relationship.