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Chapter 3: A conceptual model for the analysis of site-specific installations

“The past leaves its traces; time has its own script. Yet this space is always, now and formerly, a *present space*.” Henry Lefebvre.¹³¹

In the previous chapter, I argued for a broader notion of site-specificity than the connectivity between the artwork and the physical location of display. The institutional and socio-cultural contexts of production and reception were also identified as important parameters for a site-specific installation. Thus we can speak of a ‘network’ of site-specific functions.

The current chapter aims to develop a conceptual model for the analysis of site-specific installation artworks, in order to understand how this network is formed and transforms over time. The model basically consists of two parts, one focussing on a categorization of various modes of site-specificity; the other one being a proposal for a methodology to compare successive iterations of the artwork and to analyse which ‘factors of influence’ cause changes at a particular biographical stage.

The theoretical backbone for the first part is the theory on space offered by social geographer Henri Lefebvre (1901-1991), who published his famous theory on space, *The Production of Space*, in 1974. Lefebvre takes the stance that spaces are no ‘empty voids’, that exist independently from the actions taking place. In real life situations people inhabit spaces and employ activities in relation to the space. In any production practice, he argues, there is a reciprocity between the physical space, the activities of people, and the symbolic or representational function of the space (like a museum has a different symbolic function than a factory or a living room). Lefebvre envisions the production of space as the activation of a triadic network of spatial functions, which he specifies in his Triad of Spatiality as the physical, social and symbolic. After an in-depth examination of Lefebvre’s theory, I propose to incorporate his views into the conceptual model for the analysis of site-specific installations by making a similar triadic distinction: the physical relationship between the artwork and its surrounding (in concept and realization), the social spaces in which the artwork is produced and experienced, and the symbolic (representational) context in which the artwork is presented.

However, to understand the influences of time and the actions applied to the artworks in museum practices, an additional approach is necessary. Hence, in the second part of the chapter I propose to include this temporal aspect by examining the factors of influence on the artworks’ transformation

¹³¹ Henri Lefebvre, *The Production of Space*, trans. Donald Nicholson-Smith (Oxford: Blackwell Publishing, 1991), 31.

over time. Insights are derived from the current conservation discourse in which installation artworks are compared to a performance or 'live event'. This analogy offers notions which are beneficial to understand the time-based ontology of contemporary artworks and to examine the causes of change in successive iterations. For the model I am developing, the notion of 'script' is adopted as an instrument to compare different manifestations and understand underlying motives. Furthermore, I translate the approach suggested by the discourse to 'follow the actors' to this study with the proposition to examine site-specific installation artworks 'in action'.

Both parts of my conceptual model will be applied in the examination of case examples, one directed towards a description of the network of spatial functions at distinct biographical stages (derived from Lefebvre); the other one offering the analytical tools of 'script' and 'actor' in order to examine the causes of change (derived from the conservation discourse). I will argue that those two parts, fitting like two segments of a walnut, belong together and are necessary to be able to understand the perpetuation of site-specific installations in a museum context. The model not only offers insight into the paradoxes and dilemma's, but also helps to reconsider the challenges and possibilities when re-exhibiting site-specific installations in different contexts and times.

The conceptual model part 1: Triadic model for analysing site-specificity

3.1 Introducing Henri Lefebvre's Theory on Space

Henri Lefebvre¹³² (1901-1991) is a French philosopher, sociologist and political activist, who has theorized on a diversity of subjects and is best known for his engagement with social praxis and everyday life. Born and raised in Hagetmau (a rural village near the French Pyrenees), Lefebvre moved to Paris in 1919, where he studied philosophy.¹³³ He became famous for his critical publications about societal problems, grouped together under the title *The Critique of Every Day Life*.¹³⁴ From 1928 to 1957, Lefebvre joined the French Marxist Party. He is still considered as one of the most prominent Marxist intellectuals of France, although he distanced himself from the Party in later years.¹³⁵ In his extensive oeuvre, Lefebvre synthesizes different disciplines and approaches of prominent thinkers of the 20th Century,

¹³² For an extensive reading of Lefebvre's theory I refer to Edward Soja, *Thirdspace. Journeys to Los Angeles and Other Real and Imaginary Spaces* (Cambridge MA: Blackwell, 1996) and Stuart Elden, *Understanding Henri Lefebvre. Theory and the Possible* (London, New York: Continuum, 2004).

¹³³ See for the influence on Lefebvre's spatial theory of his youth spent in a rural area: Elden, *Understanding Henri Lefebvre*, 9.

¹³⁴ Between 1947 and 1981, Henri Lefebvre published a series of articles under the title "Critique de la vie quotidienne." Republished in English translation as: Henri Lefebvre, *Critique of Everyday Life*, trans. John Moore and Gregory Elliott (New York/London: Verso Books, 2008).

¹³⁵ Elden, *Understanding Henri Lefebvre*, 6-7.

looking for subjects that were disregarded in the discourse at the time.¹³⁶ As his biographer Stuart Eldin states, Lefebvre was primarily interested in “the everyday, the urban, difference, social space.”¹³⁷

Space became Lefebvre’s favourite subject during the 1960s and 70s, a period in which he experienced and criticized the influence of modern city planning; in particular in Paris where he was involved in the 1968-protests. As he writes in the introduction to *The Production of Space*:

We are forever hearing about the space of this and/or the space of that: about literary space, ideological spaces, the space of the dream, psychoanalytic topologies, and so on and so forth, but this thinking is never put in connection with the “actually lived space”.¹³⁸

Lefebvre’s goal was to bridge this gap between theory and praxis, between the spatial and social fields of interaction. His publication was highly influential for the discourse on urban planning and social geography at the end of the 20th Century; and it is still acknowledged for the way it raises awareness of “the interwoven complexity of the social, the historical, and the spatial”.¹³⁹ In developing his theory, Lefebvre drew on various disciplines, including philosophy, sociology and human geography, and interlarded theoretical statements with numerous case studies. As his follower Edward Soja states: notwithstanding a “meandering and idiosyncratic style of writing,” Lefebvre’s ideas are still appealing to scholars, urban developers, architects and art designers.¹⁴⁰

Being a social geographer himself, Edward Soja explains Lefebvre’s theory as a critique on the traditional perspectives on space which are based on a dual mode of thinking: one mode addressing “the concrete materiality of spatial forms, on things that can be empirically mapped”; the other one concerning “re-presentations of human spatiality in mental or cognitive forms”.¹⁴¹ Instead of adhering to such a binary opposition, Lefebvre envisioned a model that “draws upon the material and mental spaces of the

¹³⁶ For the influence of Marx’s notion of ‘dialectic materialism’ and Hegel’s dialectical idealism, please see Elden, *Understanding Henri Lefebvre*, 15-64 and the first part of Chapter 2, “Engaging with Philosophy,” 65-69.

¹³⁷ Idem, 1, 65.

¹³⁸ Henri Lefebvre first published *La production de l’espace* in 1974. This quote comes from the English translation: Lefebvre, *Production of Space*, 3-4.

¹³⁹ Soja, *Thirdspace*, 3.

¹⁴⁰ Idem, 8. Lefebvre’s work is still part of universities’ curricula in social geography and architecture. For example, a theme issue of the international *journal Urban Planning* (June 2018) was dedicated to his spatial theory. In 2008, his notion of ‘spatial practice’ was the central topic of the Dutch Artistic Research Event (DARE#3), organized by the Utrecht Graduate School of Visual Art and Design. See <http://www.mahku.nl/mahku/philosophy.html> (visited on 10 October, 2019).

¹⁴¹ Soja, *Thirdspace*, 10.

traditional dualism but extends well beyond them in scope, substance, and meaning”.¹⁴²

The production of space in everyday practice

A source of inspiration for Lefebvre’s theory was Foucault’s hermeneutic notion of ‘other spaces’, or, Heterotopias as he called them.¹⁴³ Heterotopias are encountered in the cultural domain, such as a cinema or a museum, a church or a Turkish bath. According to Foucault, the spaces of Heterotopia can only be fully understood if we recognize the connectivity of the actual space (the lived world) with the virtual space of the dream and the imagination (Utopia). The function of Heterotopias is that they overcome this dichotomy and establish a relationship between actually lived spaces and imaginary worlds, surpassing even the distance of different moments in time. According to Foucault, typical examples of Heterotopias “proper to western culture of the nineteenth century” are museums and libraries, because those spaces have the capacity to enclose “in one place all times, all epochs, all forms, all tastes.”¹⁴⁴

Although Lefebvre borrows Foucault’s concept of Heterotopia when developing his theory, he complains that Foucault never really explains what space is.¹⁴⁵ Quintessential to his own stance is that, whereas a comparable connectivity between real and imaginary spaces is envisioned, the focus is on the *use* of space or the *production of space* in everyday practice. To understand the production of space, Lefebvre proposes to employ a model for the analysis that envisions space as a network of productive forces – physical, mental and social. It is up to the social geographer – or other social scientists – to unravel this network in concrete practices.¹⁴⁶

Let me illustrate the above argument by citing one of Lefebvre’s own examples: a common door and its spatial functions in everyday practice. Doors can be described in a formal language – the geometrical dimensions of height, width and depth – or in optical terms, but either way the description would be insufficient to understand the network of spatial and social functions. Doors connect spaces and allow passage when human beings step over the threshold, implying that doors only become meaningful entities in relation to human action. Moreover, every door has once been made and traces of this production process may still be present when the door is ‘in use’. Finally, the door’s threshold may serve a symbolic meaning, like “crossing a threshold as analogous to passing through a lock”, as Lefebvre states:

¹⁴² Idem, 9, 11.

¹⁴³ Foucault explains the notion of Heterotopia in his famous essay “Of Other Spaces: Utopias and Heterotopias (1967),” trans. Jay Miskowiec, *Architecture /Mouvement/ Continuité* 5 (October 1984): 46–49.

¹⁴⁴ Idem, 234.

¹⁴⁵ Lefebvre, *Production of Space*, 3.

¹⁴⁶ Idem, 175.

Its surrounding makes a door into an object. In conjunction with their frames, doors attain the status of works, works of a kind not far removed from pictures and mirrors. Transitional, symbolic and functional, the object 'door' serves to bring a space, the space of a 'room', say, or that of the street, to an end; and it heralds the reception to be expected in the neighbouring room, or in the house or interior that awaits.¹⁴⁷

The tripartite dialectic suggested by Lefebvre for the analysis of space is thus geared to actual circumstances: to the practices in social life, to the sensory perception of space and to the symbolic meanings attributed by a society to specific spaces. If a space has a symbolic or ideological meaning, this is not because an ideology is projected onto a neutral space, but because ideologies are shaped by the space in which it is “practiced”:

Ideologies dictate the locations of particular activities, determining that such and such a place should be sacred, for example, while some other should not, or that a temple, a palace or a church must be here, and not there. But ideologies do not produce space: rather, they are in space, and of it.¹⁴⁸

Transposed to the current study on site-specific installation art in a museum context, the symbolic significance of a museum would thus not be projected *onto* the architecture of the building, but it would be *shaped by it*, in a reciprocal interaction between the architecture, the institutional policies, the visitors' 'use' of the space, and the wider socio-cultural context in which the museum is located. This relational 'spatial network' is subjected to continuous change and in that sense any given space can be considered the product of a transformation process within the context of the social and material world. Hence, 'the production of spaces' should be studied in relation to their respective times and contexts.¹⁴⁹

Lefebvre's theory lays the foundation for my conceptual model for site-specific installation artworks and enables me to envision the staging or 'production' of a site-specific installation as an activation of three modalities of space, attributed by Lefebvre to the physical, social and mental (see Diagram 1).

¹⁴⁷ Idem, 210, 209.

¹⁴⁸ Idem, 210.

¹⁴⁹ Idem, 175.

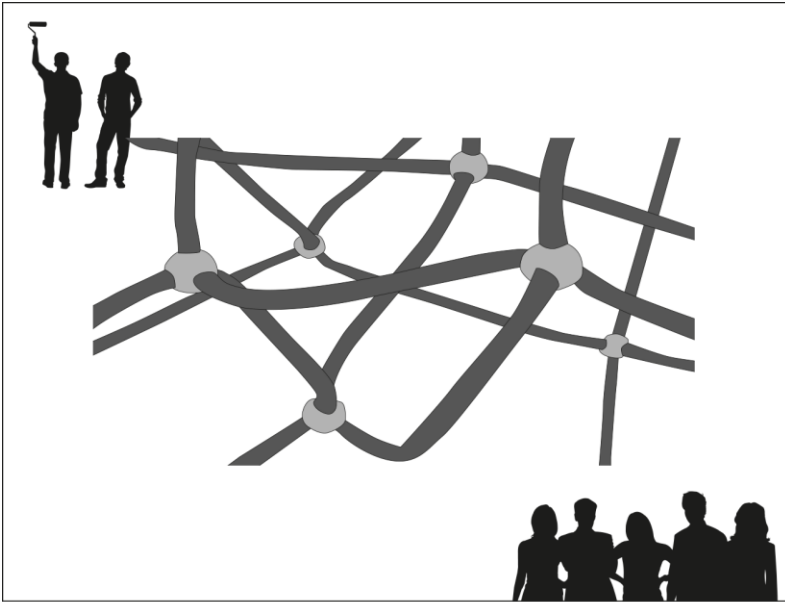


DIAGRAM 1 The installation artwork as network.
 The artist and co-fabricators are represented at the top left,
 audiences at the bottom right.

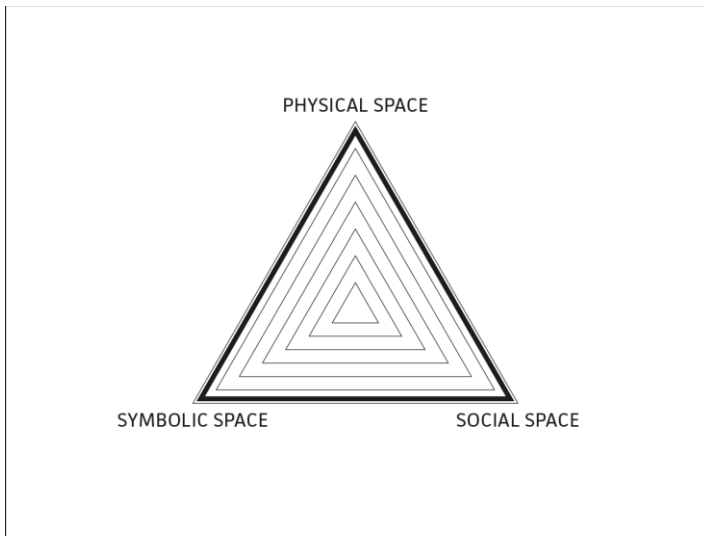


DIAGRAM 2 Three modalities of space: physical, social and symbolic.

3.2 Lefebvre's Triad of Spatiality applied to site-specific installations

Lefebvre elaborated his thoughts on the network of spatial functions in a Triad of Spatiality, composed of the following three modes: physical or 'conceived' space, social or 'perceived' space, and symbolic or 'lived' space (see Diagram 2).¹⁵⁰ The first mode (conceived space) is considered the dominant and most familiar spatial function in urban planning, architecture and other forms of design, engineering and social geography: in practice, we encounter this function in the *spatial design* or in abstract representations of space, as Lefebvre states – in architectural drawings, schemata of urban planning, maps and other codes or signs. In the arts, for instance, spatial designs are expressed in sketches, technical drawings, floor plans, calculations, visualizations or other representations of space on the basis of which works of (applied) art can be realized.

Transposed to site-specific installation art, the function of spatial design can be present in all of the above forms and is referential for the artist's intentions regarding the spatial arrangement of the installed work in a specific context. In the design process of, for example, Land Art projects, the configuration is conceptualized by means of sketches, technical drawings and models, engineering calculations and so forth, which serve as indicators for the realization of the actual work.

The application of representations of space to reality establishes, as Lefebvre notes, a dialectical relationship between the formal codes and signs, and the subjects who interpret and apply them to practice.¹⁵¹ During this process some degree of subjectivity and contingency is unavoidable:

Representations of space are certainly abstract but they also play a part in social and political practice: established relations between objects and people in represented space are subordinate to a logic which will sooner or later break them up because of their lack of consistency.¹⁵²

According to Lefebvre, representations of space are "relative and in the process of change".¹⁵³ This implies that representations of a spatial design cannot be separated from the other modes of space: the social (or 'perceived') and the symbolic (or 'lived') space.

This is an important note in regard of the conceptual model for site-specific installations as it underscores the fact that the intended spatial design cannot be juxtaposed to the execution of the artwork in all circumstances. As

¹⁵⁰ See for a concise explanation of the Triad of Spatiality: Lefebvre, *Production of Space*, 34-35.

¹⁵¹ *Idem*, 17-18.

¹⁵² *Idem*, 41.

¹⁵³ *Idem*, 41.

Lefebvre elucidates, actual manifestations will always diverge from the plan to a certain extent. Sometimes it is impossible to execute the spatial arrangement (entirely) in concord with the coded representations, due to influences of the social and symbolic modes of space. In the course of time, tensions between the three spatial modes might easily occur, sometimes with far-reaching effects on the transformation of site-specific installation artworks.

An additional remark is that not all site-specific working artists adhere to a practice of creating coded representations previous to the work's realization. In the art historical discussion of site-specific installation art in Chapter 2, I mentioned Robert Morris and Richard Serra as two artists who preferred to improvise during their performances and their realizations of site-specific installations. They discovered their working space 'spontaneously' through bodily movements and actions, and they defined the spatial configuration of their installations 'on the spot'. Serra, for example, realized his Splash Pieces from memory and embodied his know-how of the materials' behaviour into his actions of splashing the lead. Hence, with each new performance, a site-specific relationship was established between the materials and their physical form, the spatial qualities of the room, and the artist's own body. Geared to the specifics of the site, different manifestations 'crystalized' out of one and the same artwork, as Serra states: "Even if you try to do it [in the same way], you invariably make something else."¹⁵⁴ (See Chapter 2 and Fig. 2.4 and 2.5)

The second mode distinguished by Lefebvre, is the 'perceived space' or *social space*. This function is interrelated with the practices employed in a given space, either by individuals or by a social group. In this context the indicator 'perceived' refers to the conscious and unconscious ways in which spaces are being 'used' or 'inhabited' and thereby influence the production process. This function directly relates to everyday spaces where human labour, individual perception and collective practices are taking place. For example, the spaces of factories, offices, schools, public transport, or museums are perceived in very different ways, because people feel and behave differently in the respective places and employ different practices in them. Lefebvre emphasizes the sensorial perception of space and the use of the body in spatial practices:

Spatial practices presuppose the use of the body, ... the use of the hands, members and sensory organs, and the gestures of work [and] activity unrelated to work. This is the realm of the perceived (the practical basis of the perception of the outside world, to put it in psychology's terms).¹⁵⁵

¹⁵⁴ See, for example, an Interview with Richard Serra explaining the realization of his Splash Pieces, SFMOMA, published 23 March 2011, <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=LjvVEN2v8rY> (visited on 11 October 2019).

¹⁵⁵ Lefebvre, *Production of Space*, 40.

Another feature of perceived space is that a group of individuals may take part in the same practice, which ensures “continuity and some degree of cohesion”, because the members of the group are familiar with the social patterns of that particular space and know what to do:

In terms of social space, and of each member of a given society's relationship to that space, this cohesion implies a guaranteed level of *competence* and a specific level of *performance* [original emphasis].¹⁵⁶

For example, the surgeons and assisting staff members in an operating room know exactly how to act and perceive the room in concord with the actions usually performed. Likewise, the conservation studio or technical department of a museum may have its own ‘social space’ and each space will be perceived in concord with the actions usually employed in that space. Lefebvre notes that the ‘employees’ or ‘users’ of a space preferably have a shared know-how of the expected behavior and competences, although this cannot always be structured in words or prescribed instructions. Lefebvre:

Social space thus remains the space of society, of social life. Man does not live by words alone; all 'subjects' are situated in a space in which they must either recognize themselves or lose themselves, a space which they may both enjoy and modify.¹⁵⁷

In this respect it is important to note that Lefebvre developed his theory from a post-Marxist point of view. The patterns of perception and behavior he distinguishes in the ‘perceived space’ are understood as collective production practices (of material objects) or other activities of social groups in urban society. Transposed to contemporary art, it may seem inappropriate to speak of a ‘shared practice’ or ‘cohesion’, because each artwork needs a particular approach and standard procedures seldom apply. Yet, I would argue that the notion of the ‘perceived’ or ‘social space’ *does* apply to the museum practice, because it is an indication of the various functions and disciplines, of skills and routines, which are performed in the various departments of the organization; backstage as well as frontstage. For instance, conservation ethics is an intrinsic part of daily practices and a set of shared codes are applicable to the diverse practices of staff members in storage rooms, technical departments, administration, galleries, visitor spaces and so forth.

An illustration of the above is the earlier discussed site-specific project and video-installation *they shoot horses* by Phil Collins (see Chapter 2 and Fig. 2.10). Various moments of spatial practices can be identified in the biography of this work. For example, during the original film shooting in the dance hall

¹⁵⁶ Idem, 33.

¹⁵⁷ Idem, 34.

of Ramallah, there was a shared spatial practice among the volunteers; as a collective, they created a social space of dancing and stopped their movements during the calls for prayer. Later on, when the artwork entered the museum collection, the original footage was adjusted to the spatial and temporal conditions of Tate Modern. The know-how and daily routines of staff members in the museum's technical department guaranteed the necessary adjustments of the raw footage to museum standards, in order to accommodate the installation to a gallery space and the opening hours of the museum. Last but not least, when visitors came to experience the installation, a spatial trajectory for *they shoot horses* was designed by the exhibition makers, who created a 'social space' for the perception of the artwork. Underneath those spatial practices there was – at least to some degree – a consensus about what usually happens in the respective spaces of production, post-production and reception of the artwork.

As we have seen above, Lefebvre assumes that individuals and social groups have the potential to modify social space. Hence, individual perception is not disregarded all together, despite Lefebvre's emphasis on social space. Likewise, when I use the terms 'spatial practice' or 'social space' in the context of the conceptual model, I mean to say that throughout successive biographical stages of the artwork, certain spaces may provoke certain activities while, conversely, certain actions can only take place in particular spaces; in this case referring to the modification of the footage in the technical studio, the dancing in the dance hall, or people visiting the installed artwork in the museum's gallery space.

The third mode introduced by Lefebvre is the 'lived space' or *representational space* (not to be confused with 'representation of space'). Every space, he states, carries a symbolic or cultural meaning for its 'inhabitants' and 'users', and represents a specific set of socio-cultural values. Lefebvre:

Representational space is alive: it speaks. It has an affective kernel or centre: Ego, bed, bedroom, dwelling, house; or: square, church, graveyard. It embraces the loci of passion, of action and of lived situations, and thus immediately implies time. Consequently it may be qualified in various ways: it may be directional, situational or relational, because it is essentially qualitative, fluid and dynamic.¹⁵⁸

The lived space is variable, because ideologies and value system change over time. As mentioned in my introduction to Lefebvre's theory, ideologies and value system may leave their imprint on any kind of spatial configuration, but they are also shaped by them: the symbolic meaning of a burrier ritual, for example, is shaped by a pattern of gravestones, pathways and trees in a graveyard; likewise, the symbolic value of a museum visit is shaped by the architectural structure of the exhibition rooms, education spaces, museum

¹⁵⁸ Idem, 42.

entrance, cafeteria, and so forth, as much as by the collection of artworks on display. All such spaces carry their own symbolic meaning of pleasure, reflection, education, socializing, et cetera. Lived spaces are thus a combination of actual and symbolic (representational) space, both abstract and concrete and, as Lefebvre states, “need obey no rules of consistency or cohesiveness”.¹⁵⁹

In his discussion, Lefebvre refers to “the clandestine or underground side of social life, as also to art”.¹⁶⁰ Although the juxtaposition of the “underground side of social life” and “art” may give rise to different interpretations, in this context Lefebvre means to say that within these domains the imagination is still ‘free to play’ with the spatial codes, making symbolic use of them and at the same time changing them.¹⁶¹

Lefebvre’s specification of representational space can be attributed to museum spaces as a set of values, represented by the museum building as well as by the institutional philosophy and organizational principles. Bearing in mind Miwon Kwon’s typology for site-specific installations, I argue that the notion of representational space is reminiscent of the function Miwon Kwon attributes to site-specific artworks, which is their potential to scrutinize the institutions of the artworld. Recent years have shown remarkable shifts in the representational spaces of museums, when numerous renovations were executed and spectacular museum buildings and annexes were designed. The intense building activity was juxtaposed by a new take on exhibition narratives and demonstrated a renewed ambition of museums to play an active societal role. The architectural structure gives expression to new ideals by giving more room to social spaces, such as public entrances, café’s, education rooms, and museum shops. The curatorial interest of inviting artists to create site-specific installation artworks for museum spaces, can be understood in the same light: a current emphasis on representational space.

During the late 1960s and early 1970s, there was a similar focus on representational space, when artists of the avantgarde effectuated a change in the administration of contemporary art museums. As described in Chapter 2, the representational function of the White Cube gallery was rejected at first, since it represented the commodification and ‘depersonalization’ of art. Gradually, however, the same artists created site-specific installations for museum galleries and agreed to the acquisition and re-exhibition of their work. This shift in practice can be explained as a transition of the museum’s representational space (partly incited by the artists themselves), changing the practice and codes of the gallery space. From a ‘neutral space’ galleries transformed into a ‘lived environment’, where the artists became the ‘new inhabitants’ of spaces that had formerly been the domain of museum directors, curators and managerial staff.

¹⁵⁹ Idem, 39.

¹⁶⁰ Idem, 33.

¹⁶¹ Idem, 39.

The influence of time and the Triad of Spatiality

To summarize the above, the three modes of space could be reformulated for the description of site-specific installation artworks as follows: the designed space of the artwork in connection to the spatial surrounding (coded and concrete), the social spaces of production (processes and action), and the representational space of the exhibition context (symbolic and 'lived') (see Diagram 3). Based on these 'building blocks', the model takes shape with a first set of parameters which enable the conceptualization of site-specificity and the description of the artwork's spatial functions across biographical stages.

At the heart of Lefebvre's model is the idea that space and time are inseparable. He argues that the production of space is anchored in a specific moment and, at the same time, interlaced with historical traces which are left behind – or, to put it in his words, traces “inscribed” into the space:

The past leaves its traces; time has its own script. Yet this space is always, now and formerly, a *present* space, given as an immediate whole, complete with its associations and connections in their actuality.¹⁶²

Elaborating on Lefebvre's statement, the idea took root that a work's site-specificity is *produced* in the actualization of the network of spatial functions (physical, social and mental). In accord with the “associations and connections” of the actual site, certain spatial functions may be reinvigorated, while others may be disregarded or may have been lost altogether over time.

Furthermore, Lefebvre's collocation of past and present, supports the notion that whereas each iteration of a site-specific installation is rooted in the actuality, the work's display can bear material or immaterial traces of previous manifestations. In other words, space and time are inseparable in this model. I therefore argue that careful attention is needed for the interrelated stages of the artwork taking into account that each iteration is a unique manifestation.

The above insights about space and time, derived from Henri Lefebvre, are beneficial to the understanding of the ontology and transformative nature of site-specific installation artworks. However, they do not explain how the series of actions applied to the artwork throughout its biography influence the shifts of functions within the spatial network. In the actual practices of conservation and curation, the artwork's site-specificity in a museum context is redefined over and over again. Hence, in order to truly understand the challenges and possibilities these artworks pose to the institutions, an additional element of the model is needed – offering an analytical toolbox for

¹⁶² Idem, 36.

identifying the 'actors' involved in the strategies and practices of the museum profession, and for tracing the 'scripts' steering their decisions.

As a first step, an analogy is drawn between the staging of a (site-specific) installation artwork and the execution of a musical performance or theatre play. Such a comparison between two different art forms is not uncommon in the field of the humanities in general and contemporary art conservation in particular. I will start my argumentation with a general introduction on the analogy and then zoom in on the notion of 'performativity' in conservation studies.

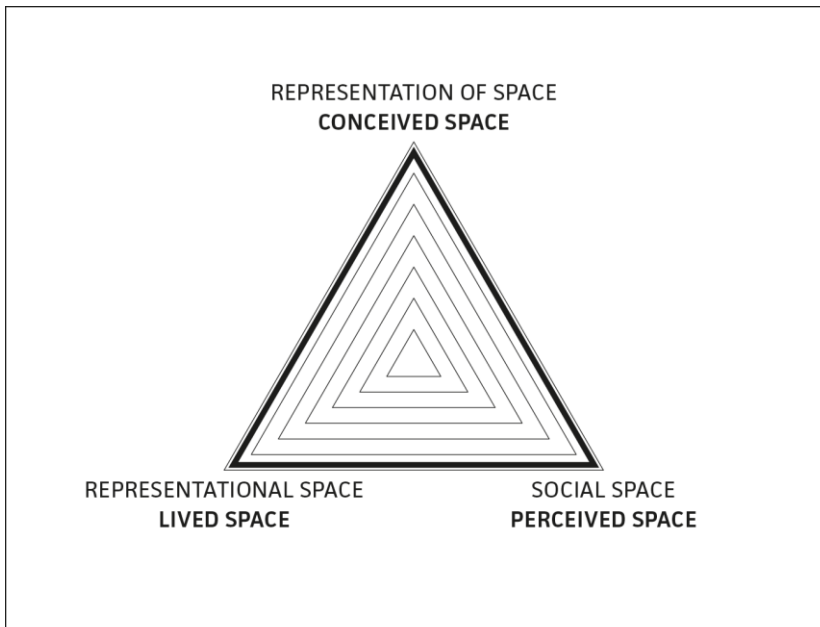


DIAGRAM 3 Henri Lefebvre's *Triad of Spatiality*: conceived space, perceived space, lived space.

3.3 Analysing cultural phenomena ‘as performance’

The idea that cultural phenomena can be analysed as if they are a performance originates from the so-called Performative Turn in the mid-20th century.. In 1955, the British philosopher of language J.L. Austin (1911-1960) coined the term ‘performativity’ (1955) for speech acts.¹⁶³ Austin took a stance against the prevailed, positivist claim in linguistics that utterances declare something as either true or false. He contended that certain utterances are not referential or descriptive but an act in themselves, like with a wedding ceremony. When a person says “I take this woman as my lawful wedded wife”, there is no reference made to a past or future action; it is an act in the here-and-now, changing reality at the very moment of speaking.¹⁶⁴ Austin attributed the notion of speech act only to language in real life situations, but his ideas have been widely adopted in the social sciences and from the 1990s onward, his views became influential in the study of human culture in the humanities.

Based on Austin’s notion of performativity, performance scholar Richard Schechner (2013) states that any cultural manifestation can be studied in analogy with the performance arts. In classic theatre, the stage ‘frames’ the action and draws a dividing line between the performance and the audience, between the ‘make-believe world’ of the performance and everyday reality.¹⁶⁵ However, with the 1960s credo to fuse art with life, such traditional boundaries faded away and the ‘performative’ has permeated contemporary cultural practice ever since. Schechner suggests that even works that are not performances in the classical sense, can be analysed ‘as if’ they were a performance, provided that the manifestation is framed by the coordinates of space and time.¹⁶⁶ Schechner deems visual arts and architecture suitable phenomena for this approach since he does not consider them as “things” or “objects” in themselves, “but as players in ongoing relationships, that is ‘as’ performances.”¹⁶⁷ In the analysis, the focus is on a mutual comparison of manifestations that belong to the same category of work, which means he studies them “in process, and as they change over time”.¹⁶⁸

¹⁶³ John Langshaw Austin (1911-1960) launched his theory on speech act and the ‘performative’ in the William James lecture series, published as J.L. Austin. *How to Do Things with Words* (second edition). Harvard University Press, 1975. An explanation of his theory is in Stanford Encyclopaedia of Philosophy, <https://plato.stanford.edu/entries/austin-il/> (visited on 25 July, 2019).

¹⁶⁴ See for Austin’s influence on performance studies: Richard Schechner, *Performance Studies. An Introduction (Third Edition)* (London and New York: Routledge, 2013), 123.

¹⁶⁵ Idem, 42-43.

¹⁶⁶ Idem, 38.

¹⁶⁷ Idem, 2.

¹⁶⁸ Idem, 48.

Schechner's viewpoints are relevant to the current research, because they emphasize the possibility of comparing and analysing site-specific installation artworks as a succession of iterations. By examining their 'performance' in concrete circumstances, it may become feasible to discern patterns in their biographies and the causes of continuation and change, which relate to the questions posed in the first chapter of this dissertation. First and foremost, however, for a systematic comparison a consistent set of analytical tools is needed. To this end, it is beneficial that the conservation discipline has developed a thorough theoretical framework over the past years, based on the analogy between contemporary art and performance arts. In the following paragraphs, I will focus my attention on the achievements in this field and I will use some of its key notions for my own research.

The conceptual model part 2: Analysing successive iterations of site-specific installation artworks

3.4 Looking through the lens of conservation: performativity of site-specific installation artworks

In reaction to the many challenges posed by new artforms such as media art and installation art, conservators and curators developed an entirely new set of theories and practices over the past two decades. Pivotal insights are the notion that theory develops alongside practice, and that communication with the artists, as well as a (self-)reflective attitude, are essential strategies for museum practices. 'Managing change' is an epithet that binds many contemporary artworks, as they are often intentionally made of temporary or ephemeral materials, and pose rigorous questions in respect to their reinstallation.¹⁶⁹ In the early 2000s, the focus shifted from safeguarding the

¹⁶⁹ See for the discourse on managing change the following readings (among others): Hanna Hölling, "The technique of conservation: on realms of theory and culture practice," *Journal of the Institute of Conservation* 40, no 2 (2017): 87-96. Vivian van Saaze, *Installation Art and the Museum. Presentation and Conservation of Changing Artworks* (Amsterdam: Amsterdam University Press, 2013), 22-23; Salvador Muñoz Vinas, "The artwork that became a symbol of itself: reflections on the conservation of modern art," in *Theory and Practice in the Conservation of Modern and Contemporary Art. Reflections on the Roots and Perspectives*, eds. Urusla Schaedler-Saub and Angela Weyer (London: Archetype Publishers, 2010), 12-17; Simon Cane, 'Why do we conserve? Developing understanding of conservation as a cultural construct,' in *Conservation Principles, Dilemmas and Uncomfortable Truths*, eds. Alison Richmond and Alison Bracker (Oxford: Elsevier/Butterworth-Heinemann, 2009), 164; Pip Laurensen, "Authenticity, Change and Loss in the Conservation of Time based Media," *Tate Papers* (Autumn 2006), 6; Laurensen, Pip. "The Management of Display Equipment in Time-Based Media Installations," in *Modern Art, New Museums*, eds. Roy Ashok and Perry Smith (Bilbao: The International Institute for Conservation of Historic and Artistic Works, 2004), 49-52; Glenn Wharton, "The Challenges of Conserving Contemporary Art," in *Collecting the New: Museums and Contemporary Art*, ed. Bruce Altshuler (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 2005), 174-176; Van de Vall et al, "Biographical approach," 1.

artwork's physical constituents to the question what a transient artwork should *do* – or how the artwork is supposed to *behave* – given the volatile nature of its material composition.

This notion was first developed by the Variable Media Initiative, with their statement that artworks can be defined independently from the material composition or media of which they are composed.¹⁷⁰ The Variable Media Initiative put the primary focus on the installation or 'performance' of the artwork, in which it reveals its actual 'behavior'. A qualification for an appropriate reinstallation is whether or not the conservator is able to identify the *intended* behavior of the artwork, which is often indicated as the 'ideal state'. Crucial information about what the artwork should *do* can be obtained by consulting the artist or others who are knowledgeable about the composition and meaning of the work.¹⁷¹

Time-based media art conservator and scholar Pip Laurenson elaborates this view in her seminal article *Authenticity, Change and Loss in the Conservation of Time-Based Media Installations*.¹⁷² Focusing on time-based (media) artworks, Laurenson suggests comparing an installation with the performance of a piece of music or theatre. Time-based (media) artworks, she argues, can be positioned "on the ontological continuum somewhere between performance and sculpture," and can therefore be considered as "installed events" rather than as art objects that derive their meaning from material authenticity.¹⁷³ Arguably, the object-centered paradigm usually applied to the conservation of 'traditional' art, has its pitfalls in view of performative artworks that rely on installation strategies and a thorough understanding of the intended behavior of the work.

Scrutinizing the ontology of these kind of works, Laurenson compares their creation and realization with the two-staged process of a music performance; the first stage being the work of the composer, who records the musical composition in a score; the second stage beginning when musicians perform the notation of the score and start to play.¹⁷⁴ Transposed to time-

¹⁷⁰ The Variable Media Approach was initiated and developed by the Daniel Langlois Foundation and Guggenheim Museum in 2003. The approach consists of a classification based on eight medium-independent behaviours of the artwork, which are summarized as: contained, installed, performed, interactive, reproduced, duplicated, encoded, and networked. The corresponding conservation strategy includes storage, reinstallation, migration, emulation and reinterpretation. See Jon Ippolito, "Accommodating the Unpredictable: The Variable Media Questionnaire," in *Permanence Through Change: The Variable Media Approach*, ed. Alain Depocas (New York and Montreal: Solomon Guggenheim Museum and Daniel Langlois Foundation, 2003), 47-53.

¹⁷¹ *Idem*, 50-51.

¹⁷² At the time of this publication, Pip Laurenson was Head of Conservation of Tate's Time-based Media Art Collection.

¹⁷³ Laurenson, "Authenticity," 4. Due to the rapid obsolescence of media art technology, physical components of media art installations change rapidly and artists themselves may conceive their work to exist in multiple forms.

¹⁷⁴ Pip Laurenson borrows the partition into two stages from Nelson Goodman, a philosopher of art who distinguishes autographic art from allographic artforms. In general, the notion of autographic

based (media) installations, the concept of the work could be defined by a score or script, while its performance is in the actual realization of the work.¹⁷⁵ Like in music, a gap between the score and the execution defines the ontology of time-based artworks, which implies that, in principle, different iterations can be considered genuine performances. As Laurenson explains:

Performances can occur in different times and different places with different performers and still be authentic instances of that performance. In the performance of a musical work it is recognised that there is a gap between a work as represented as a score and its performance. This allows us to speak of good and bad performances while still being able to say that a work is the same work even if badly performed.¹⁷⁶

It is part of the profession of a conservator to be knowledgeable about the determinative properties of the artwork and to perform its reinstallation accordingly. However, unlike the paradigm of Western music on which the analogy is based, there is no conventional notational system for this purpose. Laurenson suggests that an equivalent can be found in the ‘instructions’ guiding the installation process, taking into account that these instructions may be very different for individual works in form and content, and are variable in the degree of prescription. Since “two-staged” artworks depend on interpretation, it is important to know what degree of interpretation is

arts applies to paintings or sculptures; artworks that can be identified as genuine on the basis of the artist’s signature, the evidence that the work is made by its creator and not a forgery. The performance arts, on the other hand, are based on a notational system – like a music score – created during the first stage of the work and serving as a reference for its performance during the second stage. See for an elaborate discussion of Laurenson’s proposition and Nelson Goodman’s philosophy: Renée van de Vall, “The devil and the details: on the relevance of conservation practice for the theory of contemporary art and vice versa,” *British Journal of Aesthetics* 55: 3 (2015): 288-290.

¹⁷⁵ In the conservation literature, the preferred term for a written definition of the artwork is ‘score’. See Laurenson, “Authenticity,” 5 ff.; Joanna Phillips, “New practices of collecting and conserving live performance art at the Guggenheim Museum,” *VDR Beitrage* 1 (2018): 124-132; Glenn Wharton, “Reconfiguring Contemporary Art in the Museum,” in *Authenticity in Transition: Changing Practices in Art Making and Conservation*, eds. Erma Hermens and Frances Robertson (London: Archetype Publications, 2016), 28). Sometimes, ‘score’ and ‘script’ are used interchangeable. For example: Julia Noordegraaf, “Documenting the analogue past in Marijke van Warmerdam’s film installations,” *Revista de História da Arte* 4 (2015): 119; Van de Vall, “The devil and the details,” 290; Pip Laurenson and Vivian van Saaze, “Collecting Performance-Based Art: New Challenges and Shifting Perspectives,” in *Performativity in the Gallery. Staging Interactive Encounters*, eds. Outi Remes, Laura MacCulloch, and Marika Leino (Oxford etc: Peter Lang, 2014), 31; Ariane Noel de Tilly, “Scripting Artworks: Studying the Socialization of Edited Video and Film Installations,” (PhD diss., University of Amsterdam, 2011), 55.

¹⁷⁶ Laurenson, “Authenticity,” 5.

allowed by using the indicator of “thickly” or “thinly” defined works of art.¹⁷⁷ If the specifications are thinly described by the artist, Laurenson observes, “the work’s determinative properties are comparatively few in number and most of the qualities of a performance are aspects of the performer’s interpretation”. Thickly specified works, on the other hand, are “works where the artist has specified the qualities of the work and its presentation as precisely as possible”.¹⁷⁸ Those specifications have a more prescriptive character for the execution, allowing for a lesser degree of interpretation. Looking at the daily practice in museums, conservators and curators often determine in consultation with the artist what are ‘fixed’ elements for the work’s meaning and to what extent variation and interpretation are permitted or even desired.

The above viewpoints, first stipulated by Laurenson and followed by others in the conservation field, are incentives to regard site-specific installations as a two-staged process as well. Although it might be confusing regarding another use of the term ‘stage’, employed in this study in reference to the artwork’s biographical stages, this distinction seems appropriate. The first stage could be attributed to the spatial design and the artist’s specification of the spatial arrangement in relation to the surrounding site. Floor plans, sketches, photographs, films of the installed work, records of the sensorial requirements, as well as guidelines for reinstallation and material-technical information, could qualify as a ‘set of instructions’ defined during the first stage. Or, in Lefebvrian terminology: the conceptual mode of the artwork’s site-specificity. The second stage begins when the artwork ‘performs’ in the gallery space and is perceived by the audience.

More than with installation art at large, with site-specific installations (changes in) the physical surrounding and the representational space of the museum determine the form and content of the artwork’s meaning and social space of the visitor’s experience. These functions – identified by Lefebvre as social space and representational space – are susceptible to the contingency of the site, which may or may not be fully incorporated into the artwork’s spatial design from the beginning. The time gap between iterations – when the artwork is dormant and museum buildings may be renovated, policies may develop, and audiences may change – is highly influential for differences between the ‘conceptual’ stage and the ‘performance’ stage. Most of the contingencies and changes cannot be foreseen at the moment the artist conceptualizes the work or the moment the museum acquires it. In this respect, a ‘set of instructions’ may be steering future performances, but in order to reactivate the work in different circumstances an interpretative voice regarding the entire network of spatial functions may be necessary.

¹⁷⁷ *idem*. The author borrows the distinction between thinly and thickly specified works from the philosopher Stephen Davies, who developed this theory in relation to Western music.

¹⁷⁸ *Idem*.

As for the conceptual model, the above discussion illuminates the relatedness between the functions of site-specificity (derived from Lefebvre's Triad of Spatiality) and the factor 'time', which is highly influential on the shifts in the artwork's spatial network. Drawing on the conservation discourse, I argue that this relationship can be studied as a succession of iterations (see Diagram 4).

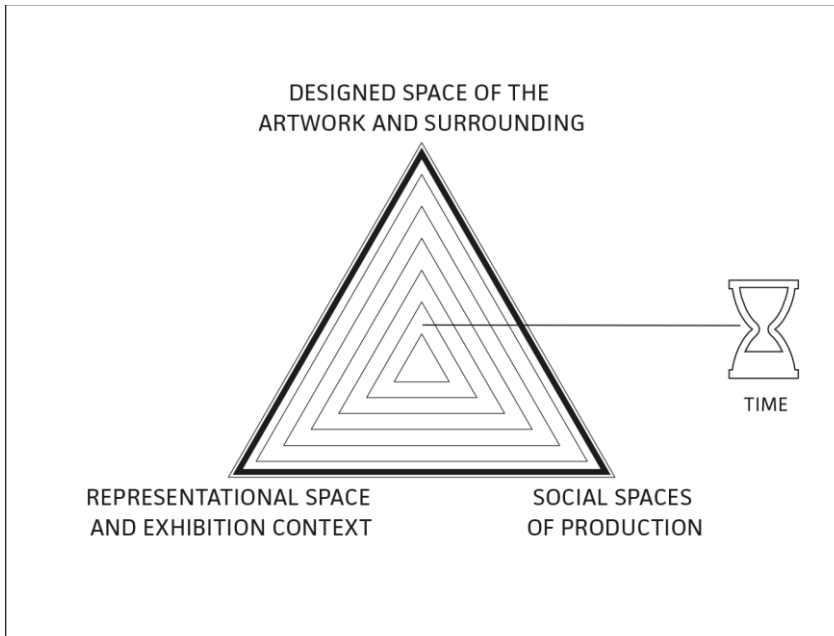


DIAGRAM 4 Lefebvre's *Triad of Spatiality* transposed to site-specific installation artworks. Time has influence on variations in the spatial network.

There are a few additional comments I would like to make. The first concerns the term 'performance', as applied to the conservation discourse in relation to the interpretative authority of the custodians. Assuming that site-specific installations come into being through 'interaction' with the gallery space and other contextual elements (such as the connection with the building, the collection, and the socio-cultural context at large), it is evident that custodians have at least some interpretative authority. Social and representational functions of the museum largely belong to the domain of curators and other museum professionals. Although this is not the place to peruse the question to what degree the interpretation of a site-specific installation artwork can and should be interpreted, I would like to emphasize that somewhere during the perpetuation processes a 'reflective space' is needed, in which custodians consider how the artwork should be staged from the

perspective of an adaptation of its spatial functions to the actual situation and the contingencies of the museum site.

The second comment is a refinement in terminology, as suggested by curator and conservation scholar Tiziana Caianiello, that helps paving the way to the next step of the model. Caianiello makes a distinction between “performance” and “staging”, the latter term referring to “the process of planning [...], testing, and determining strategies” – that is: to decision-making and the processes and practices of the artwork’s perpetuation. “Performance”, on the other hand, is the term assigned to the *outcome* of this process “that occurs only when an installation has already been staged and is taking effect on (at least) one viewer”.¹⁷⁹ Caianiello argues for leaving aside the terms *re-staging* and *re-performance*, because with each instantiation a new staging and a new performance takes place. Throughout this dissertation I will employ the terms staging and performance in the same manner.¹⁸⁰

The third comment concerns the different ways in which requirements for a reinstallation can be captured in a notational system, including the visualizations of an installation with photographs and videos. Images are strong markers for the performance of a work, as Martha Buskirk observes (see the introductory case of Allan Kaprow’s *Yard* in Chapter 1). She acknowledges the benefits of visualisation, but is also cautious about it, since iconic photographs of the first iteration frequently serve as a reference for the “identity” of a site-specific installation and may easily turn into a guidance for future iterations. Visual material or otherwise recorded evidence may give an impression of how visitors interact with the work, but, as Buskirk contends, documentation not only registers but also isolates a historical moment that can never be retrieved.¹⁸¹ It may pose the risk that a site-specific installation is ‘fixed’ in its (initial) historical state, while ‘live elements’ such as contextual relationships with the representational gallery space and the wider socio-cultural context, including the interaction with the audience, are disregarded. This way the installation might lose its structural capacity to connect with the new site, while only a relic of the spatial arrangement is maintained.

Taking note of these additional comments, it is now time for a closer examination of the instruments developed in the conservation discipline for studying the staging and performance of installation artworks, and to see how these can be integrated into the model for the analysis of successive iterations.

¹⁷⁹ Tiziana Caianiello, *Media Art Installations. Preservation and Presentation. Materializing the Ephemeral* (Berlin: Dietrich Reimer Verlag, 2013), 209.

¹⁸⁰ For the initial occurrence, Caianiello uses the term “first staging.”

¹⁸¹ Buskirk demonstrates this view with the example of Kaprow’s *Yard*. Audiences that were never there can experience the artwork from photographs, showing a diversity of reinterpretations of the original manifestation over time. The downside is that “the photograph falsely locks into place a conception of the work as a single, now inaccessible moment” and that iconic photographs of the initial *Happening* are referential for the ideal moment of display. Buskirk, *Creative Enterprise*, 129-144.

3.5 Site-specific installations as networks ‘in action’

The idea that contemporary artworks can be understood as heterogeneously composed networks was first introduced by conservation scholar Vivian van Saaze. In *Installation Art and the Museum. Presentation and Conservation of Changing Artworks*, Van Saaze makes the proposition to study contemporary art conservation by “following the actors” of the network during practices applied to the conservation and presentation of the artwork.¹⁸² Against the background of science-and-technology studies – in particular the Actor-Network-Theory (ANT) developed by Bruno Latour and others in the 1980s – Van Saaze puts into focus the social environment of museum practices and the “productive activity” of conservation and presentation.¹⁸³ Contemporary art conservation is “done” in practice, as her credo reads. By scrutinizing the network of human and non-human actors, insight is gained into the meaning production of the artwork and the processes of decision-making.¹⁸⁴ Van Saaze:

It helps to analyze ‘art in action,’ and draws attention to changes, transformations, and places of friction. Such an approach allows a consideration of the constituting role of the museum and a recognition of the distinction among actors which is usually overlooked.¹⁸⁵

One of the cornerstones of the actor-network approach is that both human beings and non-humans can have agency. According to Latour’s own observation: “An actant can literally be anything provided it is granted to be the source of an action”.¹⁸⁶ Although ANT does not say that things have the capacity to act in the same way as human beings, it suggests that things and

¹⁸² Van Saaze, *Installation Art*, 147 ff.

¹⁸³ ANT was first developed at the Centre de Sociologie de l’Innovation (CSI) of the École nationale supérieure des mines de Paris in the early 1980s by Bruno Latour, John Law and Michel Callon. See for an introduction to ANT, Bruno Latour, “On actor-network theory. A few clarifications plus more than a few complications”, *Soziale Welt*, 47 (1996): 1-16. Van Saaze explains the relevance of Latour’s theory for the study of museum practices in Van Saaze, *Installation Art*, 146-148.

¹⁸⁴ Van Saaze, *Installation Art*, 27.

¹⁸⁵ Idem, 28.

¹⁸⁶ Latour, *Sociale Welt*, 7. According to ANT, both human and non-human ‘actants’ have agency, because they act within dynamic networks. In the study of knowledge production processes or cultural practices, the emphasis is on a ‘symmetrical approach’ in which human and non-human actants are assigned as an equally productive force. The idea is illustrated with the well-known example of the gunshot. Is it the person who shoots the gun, or the gun that releases the bullet responsible for the shooting? The point made by Latour here is that the origin of the action is localized both with the gun and the shooter. See for actants and the example: Bruno Latour, *Resembling the Social. An Introduction to Actor-Network Theory* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2005), 63-70, 76.

human beings are equally important ‘participants’ of a productive network – of science, art, or the social world. By examining these networks as “a continuously altering association of humans and nonhumans,” the causes of action and processes of production can be analysed.¹⁸⁷ A point raised by Latour as well as by Van Saaze, is that such an actor-network analysis is not something one does from an objective distance. Latour:

The key point is that every entity, including the self, society, nature, every relation, every action, can be understood as “choices” or “selection” of finer and finer embranchments going from abstract structure – actants – to concrete ones – actors.¹⁸⁸

Being aware that the researcher him- or herself becomes an actor when studying the artwork ‘in action’, I see benefits in this approach for the analysis of the processes of staging and actual manifestation of site-specific installation artworks.¹⁸⁹ It helps to understand the complex relationships between people and things, ideas and intentions, spatial conditions and visitors’ behaviour, instructions, agreements, decision-making processes, and so forth, at specific places and moments in time.

In addition to Lefebvre’s Triad of Spatiality, the actor-network approach paves the way to developing an analytical toolbox for a systematic analysis of successive iterations. The assumption is that site-specific installations move from one stage to another as the result of a series of decisions and activities. The second premise is that in the reactivation of the artwork’s site-specificity, both human and non-human actors can fulfil an active role. The added value of the method I derived from Van Saaze is that describing the artwork ‘in action’ helps to identify what factors are of influence on the shifts in spatial functions. Furthermore, by mapping the network of actors with the time-space coordinates of the iteration, discrepancies and contradictions can be traced that might easily be overlooked otherwise. Key to this approach is that the script is regarded a useful instrument in the analysis of reactivation processes, as suggested before, in the discussion of contemporary art conservation. In the following paragraphs the notion of the script will be elaborated further, starting with the viewpoint taken by Bruno Latour and Madeleine Akrich.

3.6 Using script as an analytical tool

Looking through the lens of ANT, Akrich and Latour elaborate the notion of ‘script’ for technological objects. In developing a vocabulary for describing the

¹⁸⁷ Van Saaze, *Installation Art*, 148.

¹⁸⁸ Latour, *Sociale Welt*, 8.

¹⁸⁹ For the current study this applies, for example, to the research activities carried out within museums or in collaboration with interviewees and other researchers.

association of human and non-human actants, their concept embraces the idea that technologies contain a “program of action” and that “things-in-use” can prescribe a specific form of action.¹⁹⁰ For example, the heavy weight attached to a hotel key has the ‘prescription’ that the guest will return the key to the front desk before leaving the hotel. Or, as philosopher of technique Peter-Paul Verbeek observes:

A plastic coffee cup, for instance, has the script “throw me away after use”; the cameras along many roads in the Netherlands have the script “don’t drive faster than 50 km/h.” Artefacts are not passive and inert entities. They actively co-shape what actors do.¹⁹¹

Madeleine Akrich employs the script as an analytical tool for explaining why the designer’s intentions regarding the use and form of an object may turn out differently when the object is put into use. Designers, she states, anticipate how future users will employ the object according to a “script” or “scenario”, which may include user’s guidelines as well as the functionality and competences “inscribed” into the object by the designer.¹⁹² The projected user, however, may be quite different from the real user who acts in another context and time. To understand this diversity, Akrich points to the effectuation of the script in terms of a performance, defined by the coordinates of space and time:

Thus, like a film script, technical objects define a frame of action together with the actors and the space in which they are supposed to act.¹⁹³

As Akrich elucidates, there is uncertainty about the user’s behaviour and sometimes “devices go wrong”, not in the least due to differences in cultural contexts.¹⁹⁴ Hence, the script can be best applied to a comparison between the intended design and the actual performance of the object in more or less comparable contexts. Or, to put it in her own words,

[the script leads us] back and forth continually between the designer’s projected user and the real user (...) and provides a “key” that can be used to interpret all subsequent events (...) Nevertheless, although users add their own interpretations, so long as the circumstances in

¹⁹⁰ Madeleine Akrich and Bruno Latour, “A Summary of a Convenient Vocabulary for the Semiotics of Human-Nonhuman Assembles,” in *Shaping Technology / Building Society*, eds. Wiebe E. Bijker and John Law (Cambridge, MA: The MIT Press, 1992), 259-260.

¹⁹¹ Peter-Paul Verbeek, *What Things Do. Philosophical Reflections on Technology, Agency, and Design* (Pennsylvania: The Penn State University Press, 2005), 125.

¹⁹² Madeleine Akrich, “The De-scripting of Technological Objects,” in *Shaping Technology / Building Society*, eds. Wiebe E. Bijker and John Law (Cambridge, MA: The MIT Press, 1992), 208.

¹⁹³ Akrich, “De-scripting,” 208.

¹⁹⁴ Idem, 211.

which the device is used do not diverge too radically from those predicted by the designer, it is likely that the script will become a major element for interpreting interaction between the object and its users.¹⁹⁵

According to ANT, such an analysis is 'done' in writing, because language provides applicable means to describe the actual form and 'use' of the object, and to reveal the designer's intentions or possible deviations from the script. Hence, as Akrich proposes, the process of *de-scripting* may start from observations in the here-and-now and then, by moving backwards and putting into words the interaction between the object, human beings and past contexts, we return to "the world in-scribed in the object."¹⁹⁶

Although the notion of the script, defined by Latour and Akrich for technological objects, cannot be directly applied to contemporary artworks (given fundamental differences in the nature and function of both object categories), it seems to offer a productive approach for the analysis of different iterations of site-specific installation artworks in a museum context. Nevertheless, it remains an important question whether we can speak of a 'similar context' when the artwork is relocated. I will return to this point in my case studies.

The method of de-scripting

Within the conservation field, the method of de-scripting has gained currency, as put forward in, for example, a study of art historian Ariane Noel de Tilly.¹⁹⁷ Noel de Tilly applies the approach to installation artworks that appear in multiple forms while still being considered the same work of art. She refers to Akrich's method of de-scripting as

[going] back and forth between the artist's concept and the persons interpreting the work (curators, conservators, technicians, registrars, visitors, etc.). De-scribing here would mean identifying and analyzing the interactions taking place between the artistic creation (or art object), its creator, and other mediators interacting with it. In the end, the purpose of description is to put on paper the text of what the various actors in the settings are doing to one another.¹⁹⁸

Noel de Tilly suggests to make a clear distinction between on the one hand the script (or score) defined as a set of inscriptions and on the other hand the method of describing as proposed by ANT: whereas the first notion is a

¹⁹⁵ Idem, 208-209, 216.

¹⁹⁶ Akrich 1992: 208-209.

¹⁹⁷ Ariane Noel de Tilly, "Scripting Artworks: Studying the Socialization of Editioned Video and Film Installations," (PhD diss., University of Amsterdam, 2011), 58-59.

¹⁹⁸ Idem, 59.

steering factor in the decision-making processes on which basis the performance of the work is executed, the latter method of “de-scripting” can be considered a tool for observation and analysis of the similarities and deviations between various iterations.¹⁹⁹

The “art of de-scripting” is also a methodological instrument for a scholar in the field of art and architecture, Albena Yaneva. Similar to Noel de Tilly, the author borrows viewpoints from Latour and Akrich regarding a method for analyzing the trajectories of contemporary installation artworks or architectural buildings.²⁰⁰ In *Mapping Controversies in Architecture*, Yaneva examines the underlying ‘scripts’ of a building at moments when controversies arise, for example when a historic building gets a modern extension or is renovated. By comparing successive architectural stages of the building, not only the controversy could be explained from the standpoints and desires of the various parties involved, but also “the turmoil it triggers” demonstrated the building’s “particular abilities to act”.²⁰¹ The causes of “turmoil” can be understood by describing all actors, which in architecture are associated with the spatial design of the building and the materials applied to the structure at various historical stages, as well as other influential forces and events: “the discordant voices of its makers; of qualities and substances; of passers-by’s noises; and of accidents.”²⁰²

This proposed method of de-scripting all the actors involved in a “turmoil”, opens up an interesting vista for the analytical toolbox, because Yaneva takes into account the entire set of relationships activated at the moment of controversy. In the case of site-specific installation artworks this can be interpreted as a ‘turmoil’ arising when the connectivity between the artwork and the site is being redefined. Or, to reuse the words of Nick Kaye, when uncertainties arise about the ‘fixation’ of a site-specific installation artwork in a given biographical stage (see Chapter 2). Consequently, the method of describing the set of actors, and therewith tracing the scripts for reinvigoration the artwork’s site-specificity, would include the exhibition space as influential factor, in addition to the artwork itself; as well as the set of actors who ‘follow’ a script for reinvigorating the artwork’s site-specificity, such as the artist, technicians, conservators, exhibition curators, the public, and so forth.

Looking at exhibition design and curatorship, others before me have argued that the script is a useful tool for analysing exhibitions as a network of relationships. For example, cultural studies scholar Julia Noordegraaf introduces in her methodological study of museum exhibitions the notion of

¹⁹⁹ Idem, 58-59

²⁰⁰ See for an elaborated case study by Yaneva concerning the process of exhibiting a complex installation artwork in a museum context and the actors involved: Albena Yaneva, “When a bus met a museum: following artists, curators and workers in art installation,” *Museum and Society* 1, 3 (2003): 116–131.

²⁰¹ Albena Yaneva, *Mapping Controversies in Architecture* (London: Ashgate, 2012), 26.

²⁰² Idem, 20.

the script in order “to analyse the complex relations between such diverse components as people's ideas and intentions, material objects, buildings and visitor behaviour”.²⁰³ In a similar way as suggested by Akrich, Noordegraaf moves back and forth between the intentions of the exhibition makers, the objects themselves and the ‘imagined’ users of the exhibition, the visitors. Noordegraaf:

In the case of museums, the 'object' is the presentation itself, which (...) comprises the location, the architecture and layout of the building, the organisation and design of the displays and the means of visitor guidance. An analysis of the script of museum presentation can bring to the fore the set of instructions that defines the relationship between the museum and its audience.²⁰⁴

In the analysis of site-specific installation artworks, the script could thus be a tool for moving back and forth between the intentions of the artist and the motives of the curator and other custodians to safeguard the artwork and reinvigorate its site-specific functions, including the conditions of the space, the routes the visitors take, safety measures, et cetera. If we focused only on the installation artwork itself, we might run the risk of overlooking how influential some of those seemingly insignificant actors are. However – just as this model proposes –, all actors should be taken into account when analysing the scripts of successive staging processes and the actual performance of the work (see Diagram 5).

Inevitably, this ‘holistic’ approach entails a degree of subjectivity, if only in the selection of actors and influential factors that are considered relevant for the analysis and the interpretation of what is considered ‘a script’. Earlier in this chapter, I suggested to derive from the conservation discourse the notion of considering the script a definition of the artwork in the ontological sense and as a set of instructions for the artwork’s manifestation. Thereafter, I argued that the script could also be seen as a notion applying to the analysis of a wider spectrum of actors and factors of influence. I believe that both viewpoints are beneficial to the kind of works under discussion, taking into account that site-specific installation artworks put the assumption that the artwork can be defined through a set of instructions under pressure. Too many uncertainties arise in the redefinition of the relationship between the work and site. In terms of Lefebvre’s Triad of Spatiality, it could be argued that the turmoil especially occurs in the functions of social and representational space, as these are particularly time-dependent. To some extent, the perpetuation of the spatial design could be based on a script defined by the artist, provided that the surrounding space has not change.

²⁰³ Julia Noordegraaf, *Strategies of Display. Museum Presentation in Nineteenth- and Twentieth-Century Visual Culture* (Rotterdam: NAI Publishers, 2004), 14.

²⁰⁴ Idem, 15.

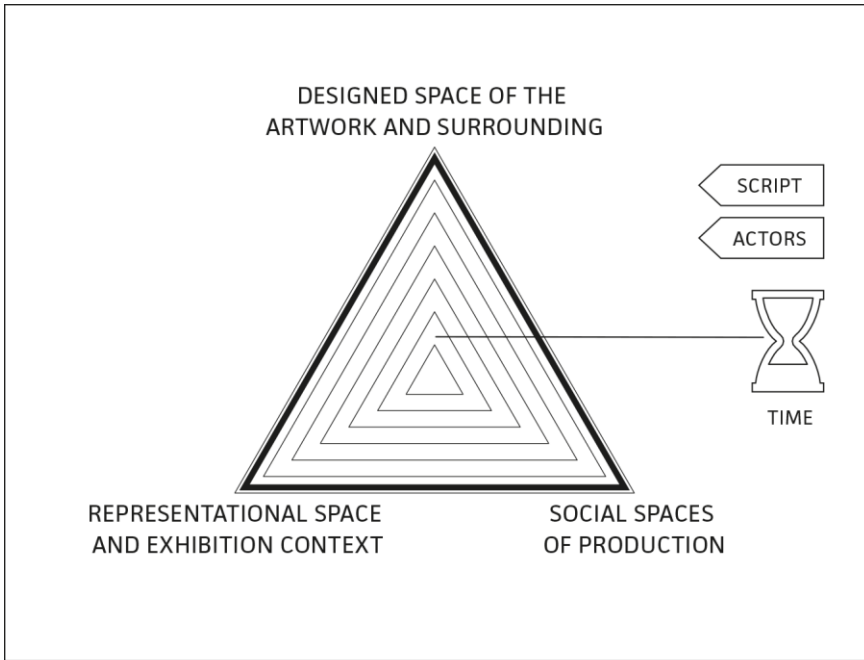


DIAGRAM 5 Triadic model for the analysis of site-specific installation artworks with additional toolbox of script and actors.

For the other spatial functions, the staging depends on many different factors and contingencies, which cannot be foreseen at the moment of creation and which reveal themselves only during the processes and practices of keeping these artworks alive in diverse circumstances.

Let me illustrate the above outline of the conceptual model with a taste of what will follow in the case study chapters. I will briefly examine two case examples of Richard Serra with the triadic set of spatial functions at hand and the analytical toolbox of script and actor. *Tilted Arc* (1981), already discussed in the previous chapter, will be revisited from the current perspective. The other example is *Waxing Arcs* (1980), created by Serra as a site-specific installation artwork for Museum Boijmans Van Beuningen.

3.7 A short analysis of two site-specific installations by Richard Serra

Tilted Arc revisited

The introduction to *Tilted Arc* (1981, Fig. 2.1 and 2.2) in the previous chapter, showed that Richard Serra conceived the artwork as physically and conceptually rooted in the Federal Plaza. The curved Corten-steel plates cutting the square in half were destined to be there forever.

The spatial design (the conceived mode of the Triad of Spatiality) defined the dimensions and exact curves of the arc, the Corten-steel material and its finish, and the trajectory taken by commuters in order to traverse the square. Directly connected to its material form, was the social experience and 'use' of the work (the perceived or social space in terms of the model). As Serra argued, it was the "explicit intention of site-specific works to alter their contexts".²⁰⁵ The artist anticipated how citizens would cross the square and navigate along the 'wall'. This function can be seen as the intended outcome of a script elaborated in the functional design – the spatial arrangement and materialization of the arc.

Furthermore, the Federal Plaza is a location with a special representational function (the lived space in terms of the model), because it hosts the offices of the Federal Government, which also commissioned the project, and is usually a crowded space.

The turmoil arising when the government proposed to relocate *Tilted Arc* to a scenic environment outside the city, can be analysed as a conflict between various scripts and actors. The artist and his protagonists claimed that the contract between Serra and the government was breached and that a proposition for relocation was an "assault on freedom of artistic expression".²⁰⁶ According to the opponents, Serra had not taken into account the social function of the plaza and citizens reclaimed the right to use the square like before, as a social space meant for local inhabitants and employees. In this respect the role of the Federal Government is interesting, because the government had installed a jury (representing the public), which had initially applauded the proposal, but turned against it during the lawsuit.²⁰⁷ This radical turn was unforeseen at the moment the artist developed his design. At that stage the focus was on the spatial design and Serra's artistic views on site-specificity. During the actual 'performance' of *Tilted Arc*, however, the citizens and government put the representational function and social space of the plaza to the fore. The artwork itself was 'sacrificed' to this process.

In conclusion, three stages of *Tilted Arc* can be recognized: the first stage of its conception as a site-specific installation, the agreement with the government and its realization; the second stage of the performance of the artwork in public space; the third stage in which the lawsuit, and eventual destruction, marked the end of the project. Perhaps, especially in the case of *Tilted Arc*, an additional fourth stage could be recognized in the ongoing interest in this case example, as the discussions never came to an end although all that remained were descriptions and a few photographs..

²⁰⁵ Serra in Weyergraf-Serra, C. & Buskirk, M. 1991: 12.

²⁰⁶ Weyergraf-Serra and Buskirk, *Destruction of Tilted Arc*, 69.

²⁰⁷ Idem, 68-69.

The extended life of Waxing Arcs

Richard Serra's site-specific installation *Waxing Arcs* (1980, Fig. 3.1) in museum Boijmans Van Beuningen followed a completely different trajectory.²⁰⁸ The artwork still exists, but the surroundings have changed several times and the current version is a remake of the original. *Waxing Arcs* consists of two huge, curved plates made of Corten-steel. At the moment Serra created the artwork in commission of the then museum director Wim Beeren, it was a site-specific installation for the museum's entrance hall. In the course of time, however, the architectural surrounding and the function of the exhibition space changed over and over again: at a certain moment the arcs marked the museum's cloakrooms, later on they gave access to the ticket office and later still the museum's café was placed opposite the arcs. Today, *Waxing Arcs* is exhibited in a separate space at the museum's ground floor of the Bodon Gallery, the so-called Serra Room.

A crucial moment in the biography of *Waxing Arcs* is 1999, when Serra agreed to its re-fabrication in order to accommodate the artwork to the reconstruction of the museum building. The entrance of the building was relocated and equipped with a façade of concrete, steel and glass – affecting the dimensions of the space surrounding *Waxing Arcs*. Two new Corten-steel plates were manufactured, with a slightly different curve and measuring one meter higher; the plates were half a centimeter thicker than the originals. In addition, the suspended ceiling of the exhibition space was removed in order to create a more industrial look.

In terms of the Triad of Spatiality, the successive biographical stages show a strong mutual relationship between the spatial design of *Waxing Arcs* and the representational functions of its surrounding space. One can even observe a dominance of the representational space at the expense of the spatial design as originally intended by the artist. Furthermore, together with the series of new functions, the social use of the space surrounding *Waxing Arcs* varied, and the public's perception was influenced by those changes, not least because their trajectories along the arcs altered with each modification.

When examining the actors involved and the underlying scripts of the decision-making processes, we see a conglomerate of directors and architects who developed their own 'script' for the building. Serra himself agreed to the adjustments, but in 2003, when the Serra Room was created, he stipulated that no other artworks could be exhibited next to *Waxing Arcs*. The only exception to this script were light works made by the minimalist artist Dan Flavin, who's artworks Serra was familiar with and which were often site-specific as well. As it turned out, Museum Boijmans Van Beuningen could not comply with this request. The Serra Room has large dimensions and

²⁰⁸ The information for this case example was kindly provided by Saskia van Kampen, curator of contemporary art in Museum Boijmans Van Beuningen, who initiated and executed the project 'Serra on the Move' in 2014.

frequently the space is needed for other exhibition purposes, meaning other artworks are shown in close vicinity to the arcs.²⁰⁹

In 2013, the museum's curator of contemporary art, Saskia Van Kampen, acknowledged that incongruences had taken place vis-à-vis the intended site-specificity and the current performance of *Waxing Arcs*. Many shifts in the spatial network had occurred over time, as she states: "Sometimes, the arcs only serve as some sort of 'obstacle' in the room". Van Kampen initiated a project to rehabilitate the work and provide insight into the rich biography of the artwork, the actors who had been involved, and the 'scripts' of their decision-making.²¹⁰

Focusing on the site-specificity of *Waxing Arcs*, Van Kampen carried out an in-depth research and gave commission to the multimedia company IJsfontein to draw a script for a guided tour – or 'performance' – in the Serra Room, called *In Constant Motion: Richard Serra's 'Waxing Arcs'* (Fig. 3.2). During the five-minute performance the room was darkened and film fragments, photographs and other documentary material illuminated the respective biographical stages. A voice-over explained the many twists and turns the artwork and the building had undergone. After each performance the lights were turned off and the audience could experience the installation in daylight, just as intended by the artist in 2003.²¹¹ The guided tour was on show in the museum for one year.²¹²

What fascinates me about this performance is that the curator made the history of *Waxing Arcs* accessible in two different ways: the virtual tour gave access to the complex network of spatial functions and its shifts over a long period of time, while at the end of the show the artist's script was followed – illuminating the 'ideal' biographical stage in which the relationship between the arcs' spatial design and the gallery space was established in a room that was only separated from public space by means of the glass façade. I would like to conclude that this staging of *Waxing Arcs* shows a variation in possibilities to keep site-specific installation artworks alive, especially by employing virtual means of communication. Some of the options may have a

²⁰⁹ Sometimes, *Waxing Arcs* has even served as a 'background' for other artworks. When I visited a solo exhibition of the Dutch artist Peter Zegveld in 2013, for example, I was surprised to see one of Zegveld's lightworks projected on the orange-brownish surface of one of the *Waxing Arcs*.

²¹⁰ The project was part of the SBMK's Platform for Conservation Issues, in 2013-2014. A group of museum professionals examined site-specific installation artworks made by Richard Serra in four museum collections in the Netherlands. In 2014, Saskia van Kampen realized a multimedia tour and an exhibition solely dedicated to *Waxing Arcs*. Besides, the SBMK project resulted in the symposium 'Serra on the Move', held on 14 November 2014,

<https://www.sbm.nl/nl/activiteiten/serraonthemove> (accessed 31 July, 2019). The project was also presented at the international symposium 'Revisited: Site-Specificity in Recent Outdoor Sculpture', Stiftung Situation Kunst, Bochum, 26-27 February, 2016.

²¹¹ See for a full description of the project <https://www.boijmans.nl/en/exhibitions/richard-serra-waxing-arcs> (accessed 31 July, 2019).

²¹² 'In Constant Motion: Richard Serra's *Waxing Arcs*' was on show from 11 October 2014 until December 2015.

documentary character, shedding light on the spatial network and biographical stages of the artwork, while others may reinvigorate one spatial function of the network and establish a renewed, spatiotemporally defined, connectivity with the exhibition site.

3.8 Conclusion of the chapter

This chapter was dedicated to developing a conceptual model for the analysis of site-specific installation artworks (see Diagrams 1-5). The model combines two approaches, one derived from Henri Lefebvre's Triad of Spatiality, the other based on current notions and approaches in contemporary art conservation. The connection between the two elements of the model was established in the first place by the argument that site-specific installation artworks move from one biographical stage to another as a result of a series of activities. Secondly by the idea that, because of their performative ontology, these artworks can be analysed 'as if' they are a performance.

The benefit of the performance analogy is that it paves the way to a method for comparing different iterations in a systematic way. Using the triadic model of spatial design, social space and representational space, for each manifestation of the work the site-specific network can be described. When the artwork moves from one stage to another, it will be subjected to shifts in the spatial network, due to a renewed connection of the artwork to the physical surrounding, institutional conventions, professional practices, variations in the wider socio-cultural context, changed audiences, and so forth. Identifying these changes with the help of the three spatial functions sheds light on the extent and nature of the artwork's adaptability to new circumstances.

From the conservation discourse I adopted the idea to study the artwork 'in action', translated into the model as an analytical search for factors that are of influence on the perpetuation of site-specific installations. Borrowing the notions of 'script' and 'actor' from conservation scholars and the Actor-Network Theory, a 'toolbox' for the model was proposed, enabling the analysis of actions and decision-making processes leading to the reinvigoration of spatial functions, or disregarding them, in a given context and time.

The combination of the descriptive part of the model – making use of the triad of spatial functions – and the analytical part – making use of the toolbox of script and actor – should be sufficient to understand how and why site-specific installation artworks transform over time and how their perpetuation is shaped within a museum context.

In the following three case studies of this dissertation, the conceptual model will be applied to a range of site-specific installation artworks in museum collections, varying in content, form and spatial functions. Each of these case studies will emphasize a particular set of spatial functions and discuss the problem of their perpetuation.

In Chapter 4, the focus is on the functions of spatial design and social space in the site-specific installation artworks of Ernesto Neto. The example of Neto's *Célula Nave. It happens in the body of time, where truth dances*, highlights the problem of the transition of a site-specific, temporary and interactive installation into an artwork of a permanent collection.

In Chapter 5, the focus is on the functions of social space and representational space in Jason Rhoades's *SLOTO. The Secret Life of the Onion*, highlighting the problem of a commissioned site-specific installation artwork that can no longer be installed at its original location. One of the main questions in this chapter is which curatorial strategies were applied after the artist suddenly passed away.

In Chapter 6, the focus is on the functions of spatial design and representational space of the installation *Drifting Producers*, created by the artists' group Flying City, as part of a socio-geographical project. The main question is if and how the museum, being the host of the only existing materialized product of this project, can reinvigorate the various dimensions of its site-specificity in a museum context.