

Summary

This dissertation is dedicated to a research into the perpetuation of site-specific installation artworks in a museum context. Site-specificity relates to artworks that are produced for specific locations and are often intended for temporary exhibitions. From the 1960s onwards, artistic practices show an increasing trend of creating site-specific installation artworks at a variety of locations, including museums. From the 1990s onward, museums frequently commission artists to produce installations for specific gallery spaces. Notwithstanding their site-specific and often temporary nature, these artworks are widely collected by museums, distributed and reinstalled again at different places, in different times. Hence, pivotal questions of this dissertation are: What does it mean when the lifespan of site-specific installation artworks is extended? How are their content and form affected by musealization processes and the – often inevitable – relocation?

In answer to these questions, my research offers a conceptual model for the analysis of site-specific installation artworks over time, enabling a systematic comparison of successive iterations and the factors that influence their presentation as a *site-specific* installation. The building blocks of this conceptual model are derived from various academic disciplines – art history, conservation and socio-geography – that will be shaping the model step by step.

The starting point of the argument is that site-specific installation artworks can best be understood as dynamic relational networks, a notion I derive from the art historical discourse on site-specific installation art as well as from the conservation discourse on contemporary art. From socio-geography, in particular Henry Lefebvre's *The Production of Space* (1991 [1974]), I borrow the idea that site-specificity is *produced* as a network of spatial functions. In view of the perpetuation of a site-specific installation artwork, I argue that these functions can be reinvigorated when the artwork is reinstalled in a specific context and moment in time.

With this study I aim to contribute to both the academic field at the intersection of conservation, museology and art history, as well as the decision-making processes regarding the presentation of site-specific installation artworks in a museum context. Hence, apart from a profound study of the literature, my research consists of comprehensive case studies, based

on interviews with a range of stakeholders, archival research, personal observation and ethnographic fieldwork during a number of museum projects in which I participated.

Chapter 1 *The problem of the perpetuation of site-specific installation art*, describes the problem of the perpetuation of site-specific installation artworks in a museum context. Since the artworks are created for a specific place and time, an inherent paradox occurs when a museum acquires the work, meaning that the lifespan of the work is extended. Immanent alterations and contextual changes may have considerable effect on the artwork's content and form *after* the acquisition. Therefore, the research question of this dissertation is twofold. The first question addresses the connectivity between the artwork and the 'site' of its presentation: How can we describe this connection and what set of parameters can support a comparison between one iteration of the artwork and another? The second question concerns the strategies artists and custodians apply in respect of the activation of the network of site-specific functions and it foregrounds the factors of influence regarding the presentation of site-specific installations. In particular relating to the second question, ample attention is paid to museum practices and the underlying motives of the decision-makers.

Furthermore, the chapter provides a first outline of the group of works called 'site-specific installation art', which can roughly be divided in two art-historical periods: the avant-garde period of the 1960s and 1970s, when site-specificity was 'discovered' as a means to circumvent the mechanisms of the art market by creating site-specific works that could not (easily) be traded; and a second period from the 1990s onwards, when art practices changed under the influence of globalization – at the same time, museums started to collect and commission site-specific art.

Chapter 2 *Site-specific installation art from an historical perspective*, is an in-depth examination of the art historical literature on site-specific art. According to a genealogy proposed by Miwon Kwon in *One Place After Another. Site-Specific Art and Locational identity* (2002), three types of site-specificity can be observed. The first two types are elaborated by Kwon in relation to the avant-garde period of the 19760s and 1970s: on the one hand, site-specificity establishes a direct, physical relationship between the artwork and the site, experienced by the audience in the here-and-now of the exhibited artwork (phenomenological site-specificity); on the other hand site-specificity is conceived as an artistic strategy, i.e. by creating unmovable (and untradeable) artworks and therewith offering a critique on the established art circuit (socio-institutional site-specificity). The third type emerges in the 1980s and 1990s, when artists start working around the globe in projects that incorporate social, historical and other specifics of a place, often executed in collaboration

with local communities. The artworks resulting from those projects are distributed through the gallery and museum system, therewith creating a gap between the site of production and the site of reception. The artwork still refers to the original location, but has been moved physically (discursive site-specificity).

Other authors too have contributed to my understanding of the art historical developments of site-specific installations and provided steppingstones for my conceptual model. An interesting observation in this respect is offered by Kevin Melchionne, who is of the opinion that site-specificity is an artistic strategy, although the approach not necessarily criticizes the institutions nor ties the artwork to a physical location per se. Another observation is made by Nick Kaye, who points to the ‘performativity’ of site-specific installations in the sense that these artworks *activate* the connection between the work and the conditions of the (museum) site, not only during the initial manifestation of the work, but with each new iteration. Site-specific installations repeatedly pose challenges to museum institutions when they are being preserved and presented in various contexts.

Based on my examination of the art historical discourse and with an eye on the conceptual model, I propose to make a triadic distinction of site-specific functions of the artwork that can be activated when the installation is exhibited. First, the artwork’s spatial design and its connection to the physical surrounding; secondly, the way in which a site-specific work activates the visitor’s experience in the here-and-now and therewith stimulates awareness of the socio-cultural context; and thirdly, the discursive dimension of site-specificity, bridging the gap between the site of production and the site(s) of reception; the latter may reach beyond the installed artwork and take a variety of forms in the ‘mediation’ of the artwork on display (including documentation about its site-specific functions).

In Chapter 3 *A conceptual model for the analysis of site-specific installations*, I develop the conceptual model further by elaborating the triadic network of spatial functions on the basis of Henri Lefebvre’s social-geographical theory. In his famous publication *The Production of Space* (1974), Lefebvre deviates from the then prevailing understanding of space in terms of the Euclidian laws of geometry. From a social-geographical perspective, Lefebvre introduces a performative dimension: the *production of space*. He 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, Lefebvre argues, there is a reciprocity between the physical space, the activities of people, and the symbolic or representational function of the space (like the symbolic function of a museum is different from that of a factory or a living room). Hence,

Lefebvre envisions the production of space as the activation of a network of spatial functions, specified 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 practices and spaces in which the artwork is produced and presented; and the symbolic (representational) context of the presentation.

What is still missing from the conceptual model at this stage, is the factor time and the influence of museum practices on the perpetuation of site-specific installation artworks. Therefore, I include in the second part of Chapter 3 this temporal aspect by examining the factors of influence on the artworks' transformation over time. Insights are derived from a current movement in the conservation discourse in which installation artworks are compared to a 'performance' or 'live event'. The rationale for understanding site-specific installations in terms of their performative quality is that these artworks only gain meaning once they have been installed – or 'staged' – at a particular place and moment in time.

This view also brings into focus the fact that staging a site-specific installation is the result of a decision-making process, which can be analysed with a similar set of terms as applied in the performance arts, such as 'script' and 'actor'. I incorporate this view into my conceptual model by developing a 'toolbox' – based on the notions of 'script' and 'actor' – which supports the analysis of the decision-making and the factors of influence for a particular iteration. Lefebvre's theory of the triadic network of spatial functions and the performance analogy are complementary to one another, like two segments of a walnut. Together they constitute my proposition of a conceptual model for the perpetuation of site-specific installation artworks in museum context.

Throughout this dissertation, I combine theories, conceptual ideas and case studies based on elaborate examination of the artworks and related documentation. In Chapters 1, 2 and 3, several historical examples are presented in order to develop the argument and the conceptual model. In the case study chapters 4, 5 and 6, the model is tested against case examples from a more recent date (originating from the first decade of this century). Due to their relatively young existence, they pose challenges and dilemmas which museums, as yet, have not always solved. The examples were selected on the basis of specific questions raised in view of the perpetuation of the artwork in a museum context. Each of the main case studies is accompanied with at least one comparative case, which has a longer history of musealization.

Chapter 4 *Ernesto Neto's Célula Nave: extending the lifespan of a temporary, site-specific installation in a museum context*, examines the problem of a site-specific installation artwork that was intentionally of a temporary nature and yet has been acquired by a museum. *Célula Nave. It happens in the body where truth dances* (2004) is a room-filling installation in the collection of Museum Boijmans Van Beuningen. A spatial structure, resembling a 'tent' or 'nave', is made of a delicate, stretchable polyamide fabric. The artist intended that visitors enter the nave and move around in the interior spaces of the work, touching the sides and the floor of the membrane with their hands and feet. After two terms of display, the condition of the installation deteriorated to such an extent that the artwork was considered a 'total loss'. *Célula Nave* was commissioned for the main gallery space (the first floor of the Bodon Gallery) in accordance to the museum's policy to offer its audiences experiential, interactive artworks created in commission.

This case study first of all examines how the spatial design and physical space of the artwork relate to the representational context of the Bodon Room. Therewith the case study sheds light on the dilemma caused by a contradiction between the intended site-specific functions – including the visitors' physical interaction with the nave's membrane – and the decision to extend the lifespan of the artwork. The notion of 'script' helps to analyse the factors of influence like, in this case, the haptic qualities of the polyamide fabric and the implicit script to touch the membrane ('inscribed' by the artist into the spatial design), which eventually caused the damages and current state of total loss. Furthermore, the places of production – in terms of Lefebvre's Triad of Spatiality: the social spaces of production – play an important role in this case study since they are significant parameters for the meaning of the work. With an eye on the current state of the artwork, the conceptual model is employed for an exploration of possible scenarios for future iterations, taking into account the relation between the production process and production place, and the intended site-specific experience of the visitor. These options are: restoration of the original, remake under supervision of the artist, and remake by another fabricator.

Chapter 5 *Jason Rhoades's SLOTO: reactivating site-specificity and the social space of perpetuation and care*, examines a room-filling installation by Jason Rhoades in the collection of Van Abbemuseum. *SLOTO. The Secret Life of the Onion* (2003) was created for the opening exhibition of the new museum (2003), as a site-specific installation for the museum's 'project space' in the basement. The chapter focuses on the perpetuation of a site-specific installation that results from a co-production between the artist and the museum. Jason Rhoades involved museum staff members in the preparations, e.g. by collecting

numerous objects of which the installation is composed (most of which refer to cultivation processes in agriculture) and he engaged them in ‘uncommon’ activities for a museum context – such as slicing onion rings and cooking them in the museum canteen before adding them to the installation. The case study analyses the site-specific network by looking into the functions of spatial design (the physical site-specificity of the installation in the museum’s basement) and the social production spaces in the concept and realization of the artwork. Furthermore, the function of representational (symbolic) space is analysed in relation to the spatial design, as Rhoades incorporated the entire collection of artworks of Van Abbemuseum in the installation, in the form of ‘thumbnails’.

When *SLOTO* was reinstalled in 2011, the museum faced two immense challenges: in 2006, the artist had suddenly passed away and the original location was no longer available as a gallery space. With this second iteration, the curators decided to relocate *SLOTO* to a White Cube gallery space and they accommodated its site-specific functions this new location. The conceptual model enables the analysis of the resulting shifts in the spatial network, in particular regarding the spatial design and representational (symbolic) space of the gallery. With the relocation to the White Cube, the curators decided to replace one element of the original installation with another artwork in their collection: Donald Judd’s Minimalist artwork *Untitled* (1974-1976). This comes down in my analysis to a reactivation of the symbolic space. The case study clarifies this (radical) solution by looking into the role of the actors involved (e.g. the role of the custodians in the production of the work) and by analyzing the decision in terms of a curatorial ‘scenario’ (an extension of the notion of ‘script’ in this context) for reactivating the work’s site-specificity in a new context.

Chapter 6 *Drifting Producers: the perpetuation of an installation artwork emerging from a site-specific project*, is dedicated to the installation artwork *Drifting Producers* (2003) by the South-Korean artists’ group Flying City (in the collection Van Abbemuseum). This installation is intertwined with a socio-geographical art project carried out by Flying City over a period of several years (2001-2009). Apart from being artists, the collective took on the role of urban researchers in Seoul and integrated this research into their installation *Drifting Producers*. The case study examines the transition from a socio-geographical project into an installation artwork and analyses its perpetuation in a museum context with the following questions in mind: To what extent and how does the project which has been conducted at a different geographical location, still resonate in the materialized installation artwork? What happened to the site-specific functions of the installation after the work entered the museum collection?

As part of this study, I look into to the social network of actors that were formed in the early stages of the project (including the local community of Seoul, the artists and the future custodians) and I analyse the changes within this network after the project has ended and *Drifting Producers* ‘lives on’ as a musealized work of art. By using the conceptual model, I make insightful that the representational space of the museum predominates the lived ‘social spaces’ of the network of actors involved with the project. I conclude that the perpetuation of the installation *Drifting Producers* has inevitably led to a stage in which the artwork has turned into an aesthetic, ‘site-generic’, art object.

Chapter 7 *Conclusion*, presents the main outcomes of the research and reflects on the applicability of the proposed model to museum practices. The analyses of the case studies show that the functions of the site-specific network are continuously redefined, often with the help of the artist, but certainly not always. Sometimes custodians need to reinvigorate the functions of the spatial network in a way that could not be foreseen at the moment of creation. Hence, one of the main conclusions is that a strategy for staging site-specific installations is inevitably based on an interpretation of the work’s site-specificity, which is informed by the artist’s instructions, but just as well by curatorial concepts and current museum policies. The wish to expand the life of a spatiotemporally defined artwork is an inherent paradox which cannot easily be solved. Reinvigoration of the site-specific network may easily lead to radical changes in the artwork’s manifestation. Yet, if such a reinvigoration does not take place, there is a risk that the artwork loses its site-specific meaning all together.

Finally, I once more return to the performance analogy in relation to museum practices. Whereas the notions of ‘script’ and ‘actors’ are beneficial for studying the decision-making processes and underlying motives of the artists and custodians, the analogy could be extended with the notions of ‘scenography’ and ‘dramaturgy’, which are familiar concepts in the study of theatrical performances. Looking into curatorial strategies for site-specific installations, I suggest that ‘scenography’ could be applied to the analysis of the spatial design of the artwork at successive iterations. Furthermore, the notion of ‘dramaturgy’ can be applied to the views and practices of custodians when reactivating the artwork’s site-specific functions. The dramaturg studies previous biographical stages of the artwork and develops a curatorial strategy for exhibiting the site-specific installation in the here-and-now. I propose that in museum practices a team of professionals, both from inside and outside the organization, takes on the role of the dramaturg. In combination with the notion that site-specific installations are performative works of art, the idea took root that interpretation is an indispensable factor in keeping those artworks ‘alive’. By envisioning the role of a dramaturg,

activation of the network of spatial functions might in the future become an accepted strategy for a meaningful perpetuating of site-specific installations in a museum context.