

**ENCOUNTERING**

**A SITE-SPECIFIC WORK OF ART:**

**Concerning the Relationship between Image and Memory in  
the Conceptual Framework of Walter Benjamin**

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JULY, 2003

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## **ABSTRACT**

### **ENCOUNTERING SITE-SPECIFIC ART:**

#### **Concerning the Relationship between Image and Memory in the Conceptual Framework of Walter Benjamin**

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This thesis derives from the dual relationship of image and memory in Walter Benjamin's texts on literature and art criticism. This relationship is conveyed to site-specific art and analyzed in terms of space and time. As a consequence of this comparative study, the role of the reader/viewer is discussed and for the account of his/her encounter, a possible experience between perception and recollection is proposed. As a documentation of the proposed experience, a site-specific artwork is produced and presented.

**Keywords:** image, memory, aura, site-specificity.

## ÖZET

### MEKANA ÖZGÜ SANATLA KARŞILAŞMA:

#### Walter Benjamin 'in kavramsal yapılandırmasında imge ve bellek arasındaki ilişki

Başak Kaptan

Grafik Tasarım Bölümü

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Bu tez, Walter Benjamin'in sanat ve edebiyat eleştirilerinde değindiği imge ve belleğin ikili ilişki biçiminden yola çıkarak hazırlanmıştır. Bu ilişki biçimi, mekana özgü sanata aktarılarak, uzam ve zaman bağlamlarında çalışılmıştır. Bu karşılaştırmalı çalışmanın sonucu olarak, okuyucu/izleyicinin rolü tartışılmış ve sanat yapıtı karşısındaki algılama ve hatırlama üstüne olası bir deneyim önerilmiştir. Önerilen bu deneyimin bir belgesi olarak, mekana özgü bir sanat yapıtı üretilmiş ve sunulmuştur.

**Anahtar Kelimeler:** imge, bellek, aura, mekana özgülül.

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## 1. INTRODUCTION

The purpose of this thesis is to achieve a comparative study of Walter Benjamin's texts on image and memory and site-specific art by means of space and time. This comparison is mainly constituted on a possible experience, which enables the reader/author and/or the viewer/artist to encounter with the compatible space and time.

In the pursuit of a possible experience, this thesis serves to document my art works throughout my studies and to present a collaborating artwork, which sustains the relationship between memory and image. The work of art, "Living Room" will be enclosed with a specific site considering its temporal and spatial relations with the viewer. Therefore the work "Living Room" will document the projected experience.

Walter Benjamin proposes an aura experience. He defines "aura" as a unique phenomenon of distance however close it may be (Benjamin, 222). This definition is closely related to the space with its spatial references such as

distance. However later he conceives aura to be experienced as having subject's gaze returned from what he/she is looking at. As for an experience of aura, he proposes an object looking back in time. Thus, Walter Benjamin compensates for what was missing related to time in the first definition of aura, a unique phenomenon of distance.

Site-specific art is significant in terms of creating a possibility for such an experience in which the relationship between image and memory is constituted. Site-specificity by definition recalls a specific location for the work to be installed literally and figuratively on the place where it belongs. Considering the relationship between the work and the site, one can talk about a practice of the work within the space. Hence through this practice, it is possible to achieve an experience of the work, in which cannot the viewer cannot be excluded from its time and space. Besides, the viewer's time and space, which are prompted by memory, are welcomed into the space and time of the work. Corporate spaces and compatible time are enclosed with site. A site-specific work of art enables the viewer to participate in the work concerning one's architectural habitude and the established spatial relations to the objects and the practices of them.

Modern capitalist era transforms the perception of image by reducing its authentic relation of space and time. For this reason, Walter Benjamin claims that there is a decline of aura in the capitalist era. This reduction is caused by the reproducibility. When the images are ready and present, here and now, they lose their authenticity to create a specific encounter with the viewer. Therefore an experience, which separates the subject and the object at a distance, is always delayed by the reproduced images that never have stopped being multiplied and dispersed. Consequently, the reproduction, which has ways to reduce space and time, alters the comprehension of aura as a unique phenomenon of distance. Therefore the subject is not able to distance himself/herself from what he/she encounters. However, where resides the loss of the aura in spatial terms, there the aura is regained in temporal terms.

In contrast to Benjamin's spatial definition of an aura experience, the viewer encountering a site-specific artwork cannot distance himself/herself from the work since he/she is included in the site of the work. In fact the main objective of site-specific art is to abandon such a distinction, which centers the work as an object dominating the viewer from its authentic or original

position or vice versa the viewer/subject governing the work/object from a position of a dealer/collector for their marketing values. However, Benjamin's later definition of an experience of aura for an object looking back in time may help to reconsider the dual relationship of image and memory. This reveals such a prevention of a clear distinction between the object and the subject within the site.

Meanwhile, for literary criticisms of Walter Benjamin, it is possible to observe the works of Baudelaire and Proust in spatial and temporal terms. Benjamin opens up literary spaces of Baudelaire's poetry *Les Fleurs du Mal* and Proust's life work *A la Recherche du temps perdu* related to the image and the memory. In Baudelaire's poem "A une passante", the image composed is literally a figure of a passer-by. However the image is drawn as passing away together with the forming words. In the poem, the streets of Paris refer spatially to the image, whereas the crowd on the streets practicing the space, floating in time refers to the memory. In consequence of the space, the street, the crowd appears as passing, it is created in time, in durée. The floating and fleeting movement of the crowd is represented in the poem with crowded, massive like words pretending to move as passing. Such an attitude provokes the reader to experience the literal

space in comparison to his/her recalling of his individual and collective memory having sited the image of Parisian crowds or mass.

As for the work of Proust, which initiates an experience of gathering the images of his past, he tries in fact to hold his total image. His memory is an experience, which cannot be separable either from the collective past/experience or individual past/experience but rather is formed by the combination of both (Benjamin, 157).

Under the title of "Site-specific Art", the artists Michalengelo Pistoletto and Vito Acconci are selected and their specific works are analyzed in terms of image and memory relations. However their importance is considered mostly on the their attitude towards compatible spaces. Pistoletto's works present a practice of memory within the space and an experience of compatible existences of real and virtual spaces. However, Acconci's works are concerned more on the combinations of public and private spaces. They recall an experience, which is inseparable from the collective or subjective memory.

Video installation is studied in order to raise the issue of spacing the time. The temporal simultaneity of the viewer and the video is rather a disclosure of an

experience lived spatially. Gary Hill's attitude and his works serve to be a good example of this encountered disclosure. As in the example of "Inasmuch As It Is Always Already Taking Place" he presents his body monitored in parts, moving and fulfilling their true size. The viewer confronts with other's body having more or less the same temporality of his/hers.

My installation works, which bring about an urge to study on this subject, are documented and included in this thesis. All my furniture installations fulfil the spatial and temporal relations to the viewer's memory, to his/her perception of the practiced furniture. And my video installation "Window" which is associated with the bodily responses to the light while viewing another response that of the fly enables an experience, which is bound up with the site.

Since site-specificity is the only medium to lead the viewer to experience the work through a spatio-temporal state, a collaborating work of art will be constructed.

This artwork "Living Room" will serve as a documentation of a possible experience supported by the temporal space of furniture installations dealing with private and public spaces, individual and collective memory and by

the spatial time of video installation. The multiplied compatible spaces and corresponding time will allow combinations of past and present experiences summoned up by the specific site "living room".

## 2. THE REALTIONSHIP BETWEEN MEMORY AND IMAGE IN WALTER BENJAMIN'S TEXTS

Walter Benjamin claims for an experience in which things have lost their aura that it is possible to constitute a relation between image and memory; in the light of his reading of Proust and Baudelaire and his understanding of Bergson in his book called *Illuminations*. However he does not detach the experience as subjective or collective. He accepts memory as an experience in collective existence as well as the singular, individual existence (Benjamin, 157).

"... it is part of the inventory of the individual who is isolated in many ways. Where there is experience in the strict sense of the word, certain contents of the individual past combine with the material of the collective past" (Benjamin, 1968: 157).

Therefore as Benjamin puts forth the example of Proust's experience, memory by its nature is an experience, which is inseparable either from the collective past/experience or individual past/experience but is formed by the combination of both (Benjamin, 157).

It is important to read Benjamin's fragmented writings as if they were the fragmented recollections of an image in which he is trying to build up himself for his entire life. The image, which is combined with the collective and individual past, is the convergence of both experiences to initiate a total image, an image of the past. As in the example of Proust's eight-volume work, he is trying to hold an image of himself no matter how it arises, by chance or not.. It is not so easy to encounter such an accident when the material object of the collective past is found to bring forth the "involuntary memory". Its difficulty augments when there are images always already present by mechanical reproduction (photography) which are ready for the consumption of anytime remembrance. As Proust says:

"... somewhere beyond the reach of the intellect, and unmistakably present in some material object (or in the sensation which such an object arouses in us) though we have no idea which one it is. As for that object, it depends entirely on chance whether we come upon it before we die or whether we never encounter it" (Proust quoted in Benjamin, 1968: 159).

The article of Walter Benjamin, entitled as "On Some Motifs in Baudelaire" is more like a disclosure of the relationship between image and memory after the former texts "The Image of Proust" and "The Work of Art in the Age of Mechanical Reproduction" where it is possible to

observe relative forms of the relation of image and memory. In the beginning of "On Some Motifs in Baudelaire", Benjamin adopts Bergson's conceptualization of "memory" as duration (*durée*) (180). He claims that the nature of the experience is in duration therefore only a poet can suffice this kind of experience. For that reason, he prompts Baudelaire to realize this experience after applying the performance of Proust to a "synthetic experience" of Bergson's theory "Matter and Memory". Regarding the literary work of Proust, the image is the appropriation of his experience (157-160). As for the work of Baudelaire, it is the grasping of the image of the world or image of the outside, which is the mass, the passing crowd of Parisians on the streets. What he means by masses is the amorphous crowd of passer-by, the people in the streets. However this crowd figure is hidden in Baudelaire's poetry. He does not simply talk about crowd or represent it in the former. Benjamin says that Baudelaire describes neither Parisians nor the city but he uses words, crowded words and draws an image of it. He adds by saying that Baudelaire is "more concerned with implanting the image in the memory than with adorning and elaborating it" (Benjamin, 1968: 165). The mass which as such never depicted or named is presented in "A une passante", one of the most famous components of *Les Fleurs du Mal*.

Samuel Weber claims that the "mass" appears with the divergent movement, which carries the passer-by is ambivalent, invisible and nameless (Weber, 84-85).

The appropriation of the passer-by may be taken as the perception of ghostly crowds by accepting a conception that they only come to be in passing away. And following this passing movement in amorphous crowd, the only way to experience it, is suggested to perceive it in duration, is to be a passer-by (Benjamin, 166-172).

"... the passante appears only to disappear, almost instantaneously. It is the invisible but legible space of this quasi-instant that the poem takes place" (Weber, 1996: 97).

The individual passer by happens to be only passing by and while doing this she comes to be the allegorical emblem of the mass. Samuel Weber claims that the ambivalent movement of the allegorical mass can therefore be designated by the term coming to pass (Weber, 94).

However in this latter text "On Some Motifs in Baudelaire", Benjamin posits the theory of "aura" in another context, which is different than his previous definition of aura "as the unique phenomenon of a distance, however close it may be" (Benjamin, 1968: 222).

Rather he indicates that the experience of aura is more likely to be the experience of a desire, which remains unfulfilled. Thus he compares this experience to those of involuntary memory (Weber, 100).

Benjamin claims that in order to have the receptions of the aura as an experience, one has to get his gaze returned from what he is looking at. This exchange of perception does not deal with space any more as in the former formation of aura as unique phenomenon of distance rather it is more concerned with the object that looks back in time. (Benjamin, 188) Consequently, this experience in duration is not just perception of the object but also the recollection of it, which may be considered, as memory (188).

The spatial definition of the aura by Benjamin is that, it is as if while resting on a summer afternoon, it is like we watch the mountains on the horizon or the branch, which cast shadow on us, and then we experience the aura of those mountains, of that branch (Benjamin, 223). Apparently this spatial configuration of the viewer/subject and the object within its unique distance departed to a temporal configuration since there is a decline of the aura (223).

Benjamin posits the decline of aura. He claims that the modern man reduced the spaces and made everything easily approachable (223). He exemplifies the situation with a comparison of the surgeon and the magician to the cameraman and the painter. He claims that the cameraman, like the surgeon who examines his patient so deeply and closely, touching every fragment, every organ, penetrates its scenery object so closely and cares every detail, of a fragmentary frame. However, the painter, like the magician keeping his distance to his assistant/patient and treats the one in total, carefully keeps his distance to nature and prevents any distraction of the composites for the sake of his total image (233-4). Under these circumstances, the contraction, the reduction of spaces leads to a decay of aura. However from this very contraction aura refines itself, as Benjamin changes its context to a desire unfulfilled, it turns into an experience in duration, into an involuntary memory. As a conclusion, Benjamin's aura theory, which is more related to space in his earlier definition, shifts to a time related definition. After the decay of the aura, it is possible to say that the aura is reproduced in a new formulation, which is more time related considering the duration of the

experience, of the expectation of the returning gaze (Benjamin, 157-234).

Like the example of the eye of the camera, it never winks but blinks, there are numerous reproductions of "here and now" in a proliferating series of images distributed everywhere, they cannot keep still even if they are instantaneous snapshots (Weber, 100). They are in a flux. They come to pass. In this flux, in this coming to pass the experience of the image seems to be trivial regarding the decline of the aura and impossible to grasp. However, Weber alters the notion of the aura to a possibility where the aura will be reproduced in and by the very media responsible for its decline. Weber critically summarizes this argument as:

"... the human equivalent of the apparatus (mass media): eyes that "look up" but do not look back, or even look at... And with this glance that does not look back and yet sees, a very different kind of aura emerges: that of a singularity that is no longer unique, no longer the other of the reproduction and repetition but their most intimate effect. What Benjamin calls the "decline of aura" emerges here not as its simple elimination but as its alteration, which, however, turns out to repeat what aura always has been: the singular leave-taking of the singular, whose singularity is no longer that of an original moment but of its posthumous aftershock" (Weber, 1996: 104).

In the final analysis, the aura discussion arouses the relationship of space and time as well as the relationship of the image and memory for an experience when an artwork is considered. We may convey these relations to photography, film, architecture, theatre, and visual art as well as literature.

Gilles Deleuze emphasizes Bergson's dualistic attitude in his book called *Bergsonism*. In *Matter and Memory* Bergson stresses on the polars as body and mind, perception and recollection, object and subject, present and past (Deleuze, 26). In respect to Benjamin and Bergson it is possible to lay out a dualism between image and memory, space and time as well, differentiating their characteristics as Bergson draws out that one is difference in quantity, in degree and the other is difference in quality, in kind (Deleuze, 33). As a conclusion, what should be kept during the reception of a work of art is the dualistic character of space and time, image and memory, preventing one's priority over another. As we come to the opposing polarities, the first is never completely erased and the second never totally completed.

The dual character of the relationship between image and memory unfolds the cooperation of different spaces and

time. For our concern is mainly on a possible experience, then this cooperation serves a transitive position of viewing between the accomplished time and space of the memory and the encountered time and space of the perception, which is the image.

Site-specific art enables such an experience among the converging spaces and time, between the image and the memory. The compatible spaces and corresponding time that of the viewer and the work which are included in the site proliferates and suspends this experience in between positioning of the dual relationship of image and the memory, of the encountered and of the accomplished, of the perceived and the recollected.

### 3. SITE-SPECIFIC ART

The term "site-specific", which can be defined by the dictionary meaning of site, intends a specificity in location. *The Oxford English Dictionary* defines the word "site" as follows:

**"Site:** (n) 1- The place or position occupied by some specified thing. Freq. implying original or fixed position.

2- The situation or position of a place, town, building, etc., esp. with reference to the surrounding district or locality.

3- The ground or area upon which a building, town, etc., has been built, or which is set apart for some purpose. Also, in mod. use, a plot or number of plots, of land intended or suitable for building purposes.

**Site:** (v) 1- *trans.* To locate, or to place.

2- *intr.* To be situated or placed, to lie. " (Oxford 1978, vol:IX, 118)

Since our concern is a site-specific artwork, then we should more concentrate on the relationship between the work and the site. Therefore we can talk about a practice of the work within the space. Hence through this practice, it may be possible to achieve an experience of the work, which cannot exclude us from its space and its time.

Returning to the discussion of the relationship between the site and the artwork, Nick Kaye defines site specificity as an exchange between the work of art and the places in which its meanings are defined. By this exchange he means that the work of art is affected and constituted by its local positioning and its place. The place and the position it belongs, bring all the predicates they have, such as political, geographical, institutional, aesthetic and historical. Kaye claims that a site-specific work of art cannot be thought separate from its circumstances of the site in which it functions (Kaye, 1).

In the history of art, among the artists, first the Minimalist Richard Serra with his work *Tilted Arc* (1981) brings site-specificity issue into question. In return for the removal of his sculpture, he responds to the authorities as: "To move the work is to destroy the work" (Serra quoted in Kaye, 2). Thus, Kaye underlies that Serra raises the idea of moving a site-specific artwork is re-placing it, therefore remaking it. It is not the same thing, which was used to be, when it is detached from its specific location. From a Minimalist perspective, the artists were critical about the White Cube and its determinations on regulations of the

artwork, therefore their site was mostly the gallery place. Their point was to criticize the role of the viewer in the gallery space; consequently they concerned more about the actions of the viewer while perceiving the work. Thus Minimalism forces an incursion of time and space onto the act of viewing that can create a possibility to experience the work (Kaye 2000, 3).



Fig. 1. Richard Serra, *Tilted Arc*, 1981

### 3.1. The relationship between place and space:

Michel de Certeau in his book *In the Practice of Everyday Life* posits the relationship between 'place' and 'space' by comparing it to the distinction between the 'langue', order of a language, and the 'parole', the practice of speech. De Certeau designates 'place' as an ordering system, which realizes itself in spatial practices (Kaye, 4). This is parallel to Saussure's statement indicating that the 'langue' is always realized in practices. Talking about the practices de Certeau claims that the street, which has its rules of a system of an urban plan, shelters diverse practices such as walking. Walker's or passer-by's action is a practice which bring its space to an order of place. This space transforms the place. De Certeau gives another example: "In the same way, an act of reading is the space produced by the practice of a particular place: a written text, i.e.: a place constituted by a system of signs" (de Certeau quoted in Kaye, 2000: 4).

De Certeau comes closer to Benjamin's critical analysis on Baudelaire's lyric poetry on the point that modern city for de Certeau and mass in the figure of the crowd for Benjamin both have a transitory condition. De Certeau says:

"The moving about that the city multiplies and concentrates makes the city itself an immense social experience of lacking a place (...) The identity furnished by this place is all the more symbolic (named) because, in spite of the inequality of its citizens' positions and profits, there is only a population of passers-by, a network of residences temporarily appropriated by pedestrian traffic, a shuffling among pretences of the proper, a universe of rented spaces haunted by a nowhere or by dreamed of places (de Certeau quoted in Kaye, 2000: 6).

De Certeau's practiced space of passer-by realises itself in the act of passing/walking. Passer-by looks for the proper place to rest in the city, which is placeless. He claims that this movement is transitory (Kaye, 6). It is possible to argue that this movement, the transitory phase, reminds Benjamin's reading of Baudelaire's "La Passante" where he claims that the "passente" appears when she disappears. The space of her is just the same as de Certeau's passer-by. From another point, this argument suggests that Benjamin's texts have the possibility to be read considering spatial and temporal relations.

Returning to the argument of site specificity, Kaye's approach to site-specific art is in a way that it should be read through the terms of performance. However his attitude concerning the performance is bounded by site,

which gives priority to space. Yet we are not able to think without space, image or representation. Experience is the only possibility to come over such an incident. As Bergson says in order to be in pure duration, we should be able to discriminate differences in kind. For that he suggests intuition as a method, his persistence on keeping dualism should be for this reason.

### **3.2 Timing the space: Performing gallery space**

Treating the gallery as site, minimalists have gone through some surveys questioning established rules of White Cube, its regulations on the viewer's perception and obligations on the clear distinction of artwork and the viewer. Therefore they resisted this distinction of the viewer's space and the artwork's space and they took into question the role of the viewer. They criticized the convention of viewing from outside the work, yet inside the gallery. The habit of practicing the gallery space and the artwork space was challenged by respecting the memory of the viewer subject's spatial, temporal relations to the architecture, to the visual sight to be experienced (Kaye, 22-5).

Site-specificity reveals the incursion of the surrounding space into the viewer's experience of the

artwork (Kaye, 25). Thus the space of the artwork is not closed to itself any more. Rather it intervenes to the space of the viewer. The privileged position of the viewer is rejected by situating both the work and the viewer in the site. The viewer's practice is not distinctly standing any more opposed to the work. It is rather experiencing the artwork through an exchange of spaces, through a double movement of taking places of spaces (Kaye, 25-6).

### **3.2.1. An approach to site-specificity: Michelangelo**

#### **Pistoletto**

Pistoletto's installations have a great importance for they do not only deal with the real spaces of gallery but also with the memory and anticipation as well as present confrontation of "writing over", of a fiction of spaces.

Pistoletto, in his previous works, uses life size images of figures, positioned as either male or female spectators facing away from the viewer, printed on mirrors. He replaces these mirrors on the walls of the gallery permitting a convergence of virtual and real spaces, which are incompatible. The real viewers' and the virtual viewers' intercourse is caused by the mutual

occupation of and displacement from each others' spaces  
(Kaye, 32).



Fig. 2. Michelangelo Pistoletto,  
*The Human Figure in Motion*,  
1961

One of the most fundamental characteristics of Michelangelo Pistoletto's works is his presentation of time on the basis of an encounter with the viewer. Especially in his mirror pictures, he deals with the captured present moment.

"The reflecting surface is blind and intensive in only one respect: when the silhouette of an object or person is fixed. But this allows verification of the dialectics; it is the negative on the positive, the darkness on the light of the reflection. It testifies to halted time as opposed to moving time. It is the stasis that witnesses motion, the past that embraces the present (Celant, 1988: 22).

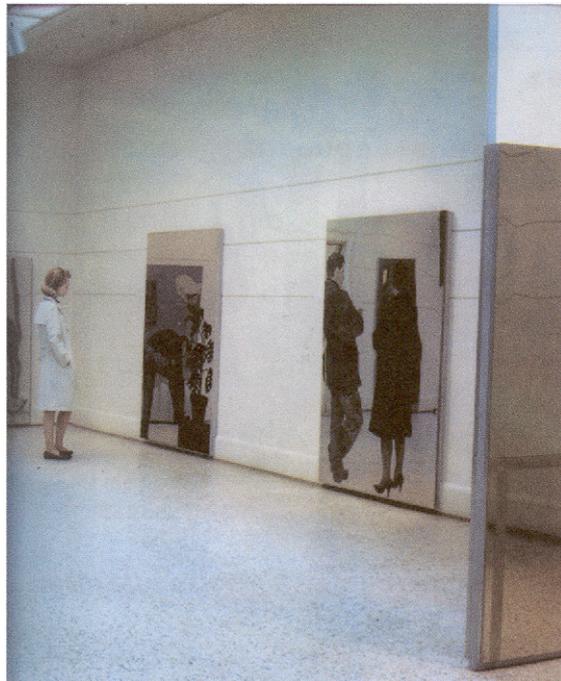


Fig. 3. Michelangelo Pistoletto,

*A reflected World,*

1966

**3.2.2. A site-specific work by Pistoletto: *Le Stanza*  
(*The Rooms*) (1975-1976)**

Pistoletto presented blank mirrors for the first time for his twelve following installations occupying the same space at the Christian Stein Gallery in Turin from October 1975 to September 1976. Uninterrupted surface of the mirror corresponds to an overlapping of virtual and real spaces. Apart from the mirror's reflected image of the virtual space of the gallery, there may be another kind of virtuality appeared by its fictitious character of being written over and over during the very process of producing, remembering, experiencing and rewriting with the help of imagination. Through the passage of the rooms, which are opening into another, and through the doorways, which are exposed of various reflections from both sides, there arouses a suspended duration repeated in twelve different approaches and applications. Nick Kaye claims that, this passage of time introduces anticipation and memory into the experience of both the 'real rooms' and the work of 'writing over' them (Kaye, 32). Pistoletto prompts the viewers to map their space over another; the final statement of Kaye for this work *The Rooms* would be that:

"In this work, each writing over, in space, time or imagination, is characterized by the attempt to recover the real rooms" (Kaye, 2000: 32).

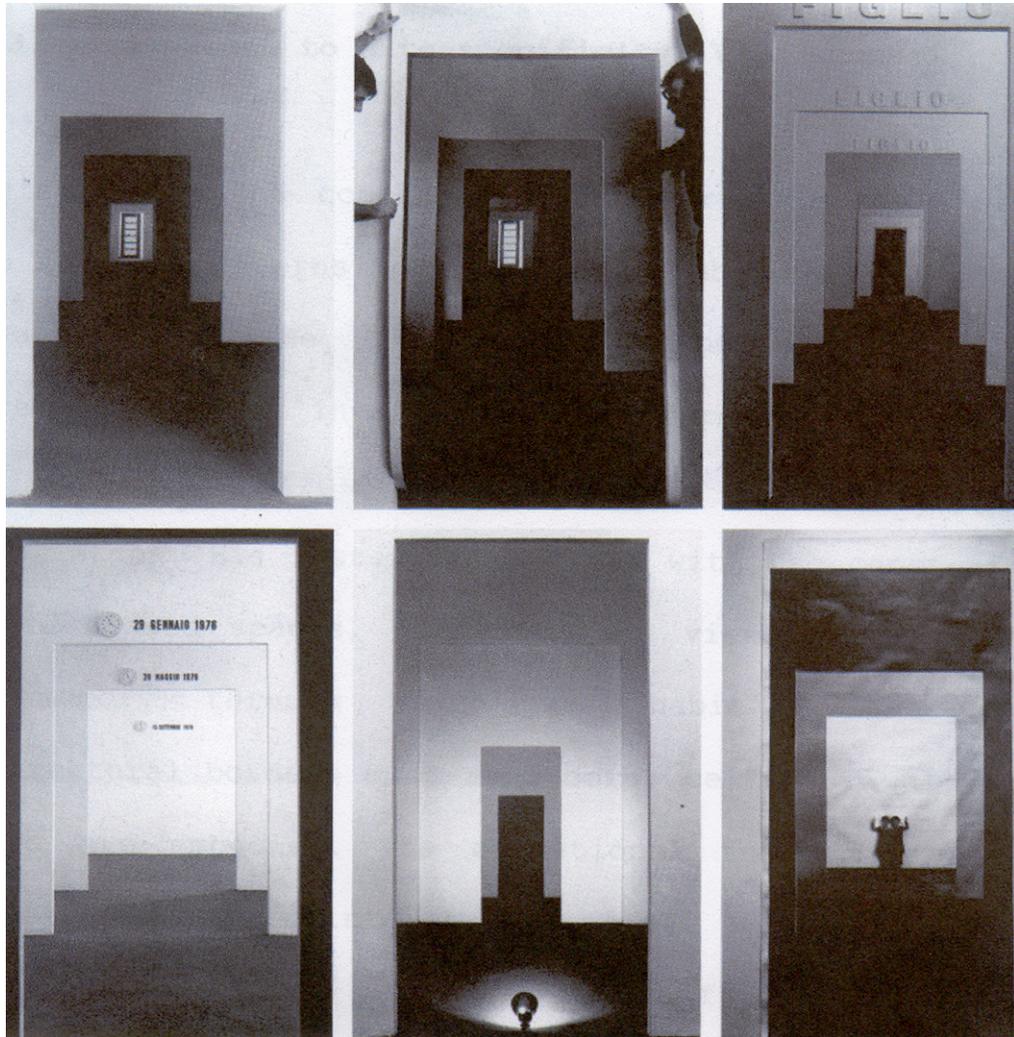


Fig. 4. Michelangelo Pistoletto, *Le Stanza (The Rooms)* (1975-1976)

Regarding Pistoletto's work, a total image of the work is never fulfilled. The convergence of the virtual and real spaces and repeatedly folding process of the spaces by memory do not stop producing the spaces over spaces. Thus it is possible to achieve a negative experience of the relationship between image and memory.

### **3.2.3. An approach to site-specificity: Vito Acconci**

Vito Acconci who can be considered as an Arte Povera artist, concerns more about the public space and the private space. He has a wide range of modes of expression. He is involved with performance, body works and related efforts in film, photography and installation. His installations deal with the constraints of the closed spaces, centering the viewer's perception and memory through which the habit of receiving architectural borders such as floors, ceilings, walls and stairs are embodied. The operational functions of the space are converted into itself, a full space that loses its use but folds up onto itself. The fundamental aim of the artist is to question the concept of space. However his difference from Pistoletto lies in his attitude to invite public spaces into the private and private spaces into the public. Thus his works have

two positive directions outside and inside folding onto each other (Acconci, 1993).

The combination of private space and public space reminds us the memory, which is constituted by the combination of collective experiences and individual experiences. Site embodies both collective past and individual past, both public place and private space, both image and memory. The medium site-specificity reveals itself on his concerns about the distinction and combination of public places and private spaces.

Site specificity of Acconci's works can be traced in his words: "Were we trying to find an alternative space or just trying to keep all the alternatives in the family?" (Acconci quoted in Reiss, 2001: 131).

Julie H. Reiss believes that Vito Acconci implies that if an alternative space is created very successfully then it will not be able to define itself in opposition to more established spaces (Reiss, 131). Thus an alternative space created successfully means that a space is so altered that it is disentangled by its predicates included in the site and it becomes a place, a somewhere else.

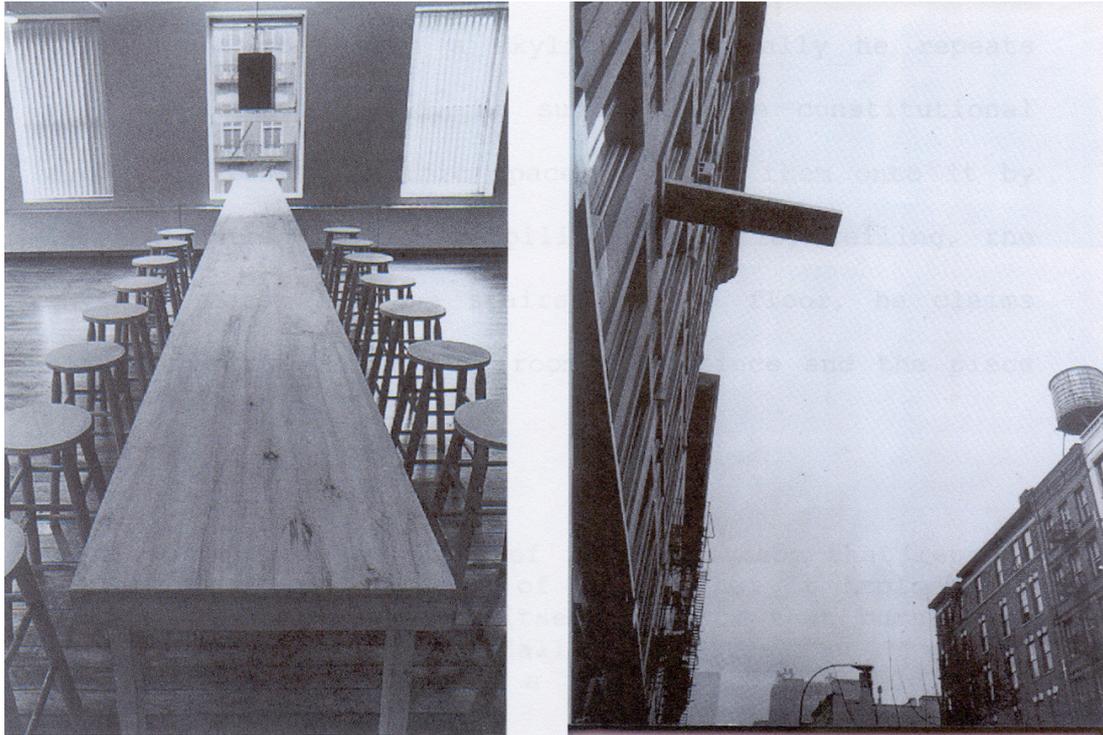


Fig. 5. and Fig. 6. Vito Acconci, *Where are we now (Who are we anyway?)*, 1976

#### **3.2.4. A site-specific work by Acconci: *The city inside us* (1993)**

Invited to the MAK exhibition Hall in 1993, Vito Acoonci is given the central exhibition hall, which he describes later as a room with a skylight. Basically he repeats what he is confronted. He subtracts the constitutional element of this specific space and adds them onto it by tilting and scaling. Recompiling the walls, ceiling, the skylight comes in, the stairs and the floor, he claims that he is converting the room to a piece and the piece to a room (Acconci, 1993).

"A room that comes out of itself, a room that repeats itself; a room so full of itself that it implodes; a room that turns in on itself; a room that bursts out of itself... A room that falls in on itself; a room that rises out of itself; a room turned inside out..." (Acconci, 1993:23).

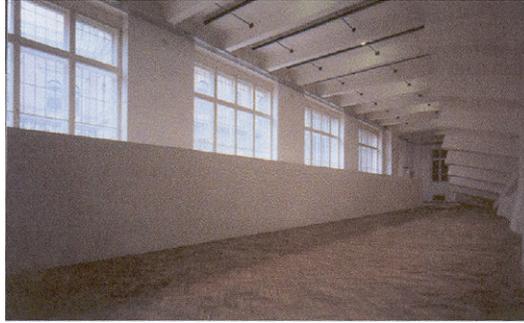


Fig. 7. Vito Acconci, *Exhibition Structure for Models (Reverse Side)*, 1990



Fig. 8 Vito Acconci, *"The City Inside Us"*, 1992

He is given the exhibition hall of a museum, so he concerns about a museum that should be a public place. However, he claims that the museum is a simulated public place. Its multi-directional and omni-functional space is reduced to auto-directional and uni-functional space. He means that a museum visitor has only one thing to do that is to visit (to go, to look and continue to go again). Though he suggests a room that slips, loses its ground, promising a space, which is freed and opened to diverse functions and alternative purposes (Acconci, 1993).

“Now that people are here, they might as well have the run of the place. Turn the place upside-down. They’ll find their way around; they’ll find places to be and things to do” (Acconci, 1993: 24).

To this already established public space, Vito Acconci brings personal spaces with the idea of furniture. He installs cold steel and neon beds that are intertwined in relation to the site.

The furniture plays quite an important role in Acconci’s works just like the idea of home.



Fig. 9. Vito Acconci, *Multi Bed, The City Inside*

*Us*, 1992



Fig. 10. and 11. Vito Acconci, *Multi Bed*, *The City Inside Us*, 1992

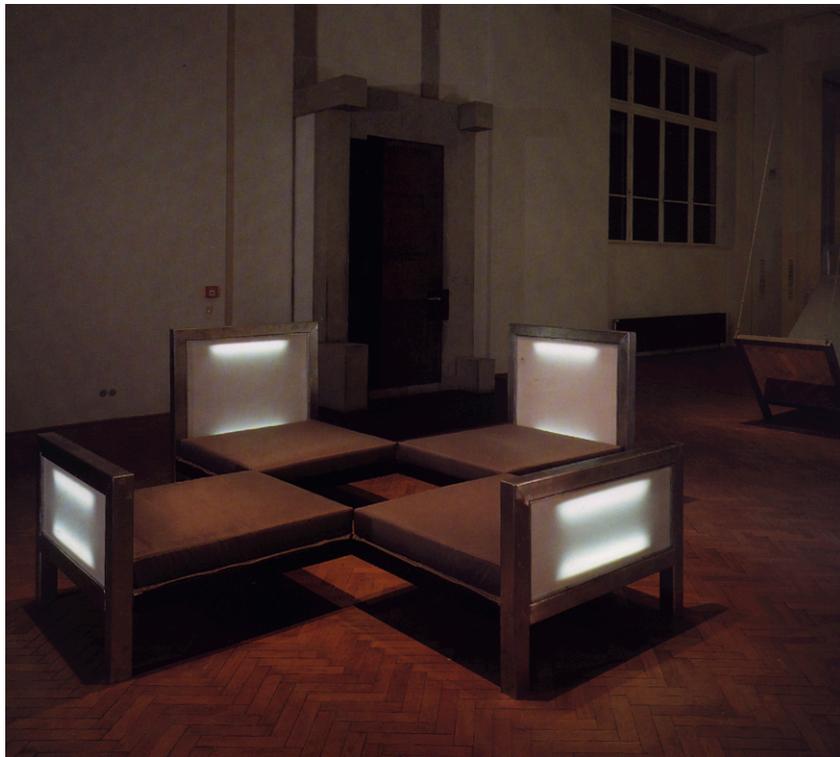


Fig. 12. Vito Acconci, *Multi Bed Nr.2*, *The City Inside Us*, 1992

### **3.3 The Installations: *NIGHT FLY* (2000), *THE TOUCH* (2001), *CARE* (2002), *SILENT PLAY* (2003)**

These three installations have a common point with the Acconci's attitude towards furniture. The furniture's individual and collective memory reflected upon the site. And the image of the site is transitive between private and public spaces. As the furnished objects alter the inner-space, the site as well is altered towards the viewer's experience, his/her memory.

#### **3.3.1 *THE NIGHT FLY***

The regular first aid case is hung on the wall slightly above the eye level so as not to be reached at by a child. The box is lighted with neon lights through its shelves. However these lights are hidden behind digitally processed images of hospital rooms. The sizes of these images are adjusted to those sizes of the shelves covering the openings. When the viewer gets closer to examine the photographic images pasted on the shelves before the lights, he/she encounters with dead moths peeled onto the hospital images. The moths are caught and stuck there behind the glass covers. The buzzing sound of the flickering neon gives a movement

to the moths as if they are opening and closing their wings.

The viewer is caught to the light like moths. The memory of having bodily approached to this specific object leads us to look through it however it is hung differently beyond the reach of the hand. The bodily posture of leaning towards it is meant and then escaping from the unpleasing witnessing of waiting to be cured or dead is implied concerning its spatial application.



Fig. 13. *NIGHT FLY*, Ankara, 2000

### 3.3.2 *THE TOUCH* (2001)

*The touch* was installed at Borusan Art Gallery in 2001 in Istanbul. It is mainly a hospital bed construction with altered dimensions. A big slightly moving spoon and a sound installation of a clock tick tacking were accompanying to the bed. The head of the bed is set against the wall with its feet confronting the viewer. The bed is covered with a plastic shield stretched to prepare a smooth, undisturbed surface. However the bed has a vertical cut of 30cm in the middle; the black color of the matrix is visible. The width of the bed was exaggerated in order to emphasize that it is hardly a one-person bed. The seat of the bed implies not a soft cast to rest on but a stable, stuffed and solid posture. At the head of the bed, on the wall a big spoon is hanged, bended and folded along with the line of the cut, extending towards the viewer. The only movement apart from the represented mechanical movement of the clock is the spoon's movement, which is visually synchronized by the rhythmic sound of clock ticktack. The spoon tends to move back and forth along the line of the cut on the bed. It reminds a digging position, going in and out.

The uneasy dimensions of the bed enable the viewer to perform it. The viewer is caught in the site of this strange bed, being dragged onto it. The viewer is expected to experience the bitter feeling of loneliness and sickness by the penetrated space of a private bed prison. The sense of oscillation is suspended in the air.



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Fig. 14. *THE TOUCH*, Istanbul, 2001

### **3.3.3. CARE**

Care was installed in METU in 2002. Again it is a metal bed that belongs to the institutional dorms. However, this bed is specified to children as the dimensions of it suggest. The metal construction of the bed has a pool case, which is 10 cm deep for ice blocks. The ice blocks are covered by a piece of felt given the form of a human figure in the pose of a lying body contracted on which it is meant to cover and protect the ice with its heat. It is quite a contradictory image of hot and cold, protection and damage. After two days, the ice melts completely turning the bed out of a rusty tank full of water, it is possible to recognize that the felt is still almost dry and keeps its uneasy form. However there occurs an exchange of bodies regarding the image of body in our memory. The felt becomes more solid compared to the fluidity of water, which reminds the inner floating softness of the body. The water within the tank becomes the body living and changing when the rusts are observed and something should be protected and preserved. The felt becomes a cover for the body like a coat or a blanket, a skinny left over of the body.



Fig.15. *CARE*, Ankara, 2002

#### **3.3.4. SILENT PLAY**

*Silent Play*, the chair installation, is constituted from a childhood memory. The site of memory, the experience of the space of the playground is attempted to be carried into a new site and to be represented.

Half of a wooden adult chair, a child's chair of the same design, which is reduced in size serve a stage for the play ground. The materials of the play are a handkerchief and a rope. Traditional way of preparing a bed for a doll to make her sleep by swinging is inherited from collective memory. However looking for a place to play and creating it is subjective in a sense.

The play is in between the real space and the virtual space. It is constrained in between the private and public space. Through the established space of the furniture, there is the secret playground. However this playground inescapably repeats the habitual treatments to the space as for the child is learning to be an adult.



Fig. 16. *SILENT PLAY*, Muenster, 2002

#### 4. SPACING THE TIME: VIDEO INSTALLATION

For three decades video art has been developed gradually by the support of various artists coming from different disciplines. Related to their field of work, each has the special purpose to use the video as a medium. The need to deal with video brings about diverse approaches to the medium. One may not say that these video works based on the broadcast television as a unique and primal source. However it will be misleading to deny the critical relationship of video art and the television as if they were separate and independent from each other. Hence this relation has a very little connection to the criticism of the context of television (Ross, 1995, 90). David Antin defines broadcast television as "a horrifying relative" (Antin quoted in Ross, 1995: 90).

Marshall McLuhan defines a mystical video image coming from his previous definition of television in his book *Understanding Media* that is published in 1967. He claims that while watching TV, the spectator is the screen. Roy Arnes discloses this definition in comparative instances. He says that on the one hand you sit in front of a big screen to watch in a dark public space, on the other hand you sit in your own sitting room to watch the

TV set and that is where you become a screen (Armes, 46). The difference in the position of the spectator can be exemplified also in video as a consequence of the same relation with the screen and the distance (the remoteness and the closeness) it enables. For the video, which has not got the power of film as a hypnotizing medium, it is possible to say that the process of production is rather challenging. It is impossible to intervene between the recorder (video camera) and the player (monitor), thus video image remains loyal to the real world (Armes, 57). Yet, it is not proper to say that video is realistic or real. Video reflects what it receives and it is actual. This uncontrollable property can be called the remoteness of the medium. As for the opportunity to replay what is recorded, the closeness of the medium leads to control the time.

Video art criticizes broadcast TV's dominating character on the viewer, which constitute one directional flow from TV to the viewer. For this reason the medium video invites the viewer's interactivity to change the direction of the flow falling back to the source. Video art questions the position of the viewer in order to resituate one to confront the simultaneous space and time of video. Thus the viewer compares the encountered space and time to his/her spatial and temporal

situation. This simultaneous corporation of different spaces and time leads to an experience transitive between memory and image.

The approaches to video by artists are various in kind. However when the video was first widespread around the world, the applications mostly appeared as in four attitudes. First is the "cine-aesthetic abstraction". This method of using video synthesizer in order to create new synchronized electronic waves quite influenced music video industry (Marshall, 37). Second is "narcissist video". The examples of this self-projecting video are mostly constituted by the attending body of the artist as acting, seeing and being seen (Marshall, 38). Third is the attempt to focus on the monitor (Marshall, 39). This is quite alike to the attitude of Nam June Paik while he was interfering in the images of the monitor with a magnet. His concern was an interrupted screen on a trial to decompose the synchronized electronic signals. And the forth one is about the tradition of displayed TV shows. This is more like using the already recorded material to bring about its re-edited and remade quality.

The nature of installation is to belong to a specific time and a specific site however video is independent

from any specific site. Thus the video as a medium speaks to the absence of the three-dimensional materiality of the installation (Armatage, 1995). Vito Acconci states that the video installation is a combination of opposites. He argues that installation places the work itself to a specific site for a specific time whereas video is placeless when its materiality is considered along the temporal flux. The temporal flux is related to the fleeting images that never stop flowing through the broadcast television screens. He says:

" Video is placeless: at least, its place cannot be determined- there's no way of knowing the particular look of all these millions of homes that receive the TV broadcast. Video installations, then, places placelessness: video installation is an attempt to stop time" (Acconci quoted in Armatage, 1995: 81).

Acconci claims that the TV set in our homes is almost unnoticed as furniture. Though when it is presented in the installation, it happens to dominate the installation work, it appears, as its materiality is more visible then ever. For the material properties of video, Maureen Turim claims that the video is a medium, which spatializes time and temporalizes space. Returning to the argument of Acconci in which he equates the video monitor with the TV at home, he states that the field or the ground of the installation disappears in favor of the point, the TV set, where this furniture brings back

the domestic private space of home. This argument and approach is consistent when we think of Acconci's installations occupying same trial of converging private and public spaces (Armatage, 1995).

In 1974, Acconci presents a video installation called *Command Performance* in a room on 112 Green Street at New York. Acconci replaces a video monitor on the floor in front of a stool lighted from above. The video monitor plays a tape, which is recorded by the artist as he is sitting on the same stool. The viewer sits on the stool to watch the video of Acconci sitting. Meanwhile, the viewer sitting on the stool is recorded by a camera and projected to a monitor, which is set behind. A carpet is replaced in front of the other monitor to serve as a sitting place for a group of viewer. The viewer is included in the work by the position of viewing. The viewer becomes the object of voyeurism such as Acconci was the object of the same attention.

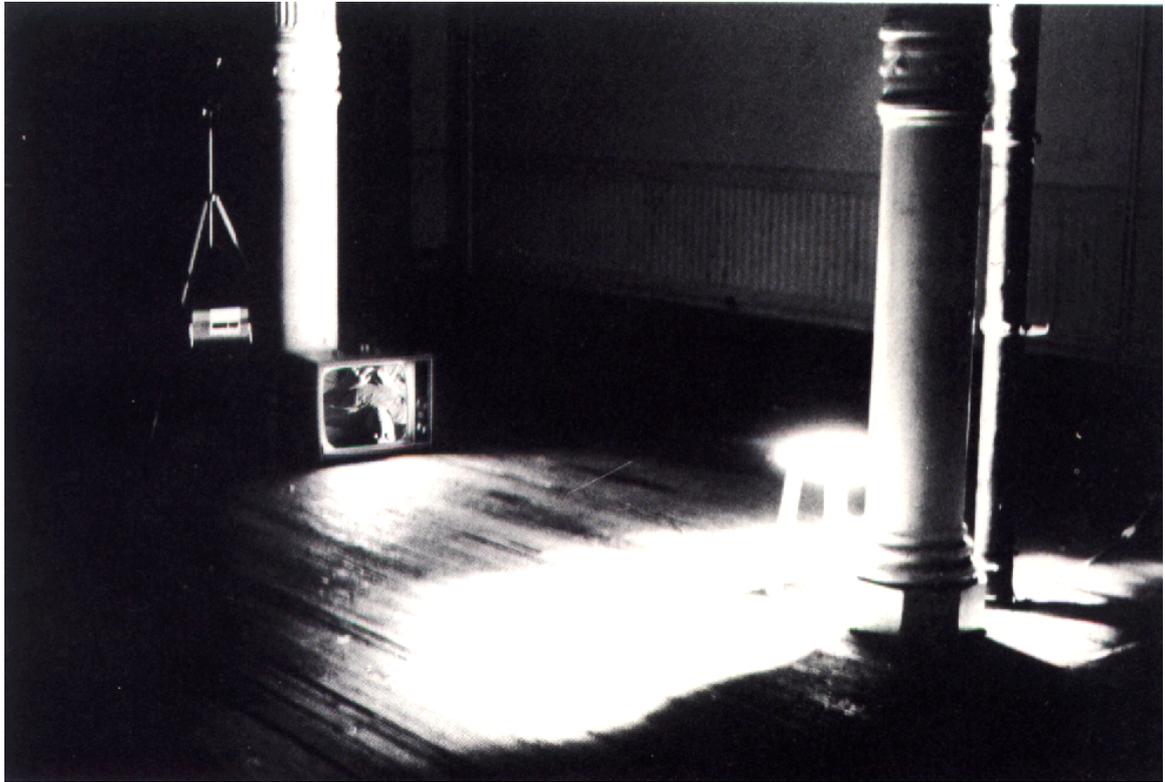


Fig. 17. Vito Acconci, *Command Performance*, 1974

#### **4.1. An approach to video installation: Gary Hill**

Gary Hill's first video installation *Hole in the Wall*, 1974 is directly related to the site, which encircles his work creating a video memory of that specific site. While he is working at the Woodstock Artists' Association, he sets a camera in front of a wall. He frames the exact section of the rectangular scale of the viewfinder onto the wall. No more, no less than what is viewed is designated for breaking through the wall. Then a camera is set and it records the real-time of the process of cutting through the layers of the wall until the outside appears finally. Then a monitor that is the same scale of the hole is replaced into the wall. The monitor shows repeatedly what is happened on that site (Hill, 246).

For his later works, he is more concentrated on his body dealing with the space and time of it corresponding to the viewer's spatial and temporal relations within the site. He also brings the sites of his memory, the representations of the sites of his past to his works such as waves of the sea and branches of the forest. In 1996, Louis-Jose Lestocart asks him in an interview whether the same kind of environment, a forest with branches and sea, is taking place in his videos that

capture his movements and if this is a representation of his own inner space. Gary Hill answers that he has certainly used numerous images of the forest and the sea literally and metaphorically. As for he has lived in or near these two environment for most of his life, it affects how he sees and thinks about things in very particular ways.

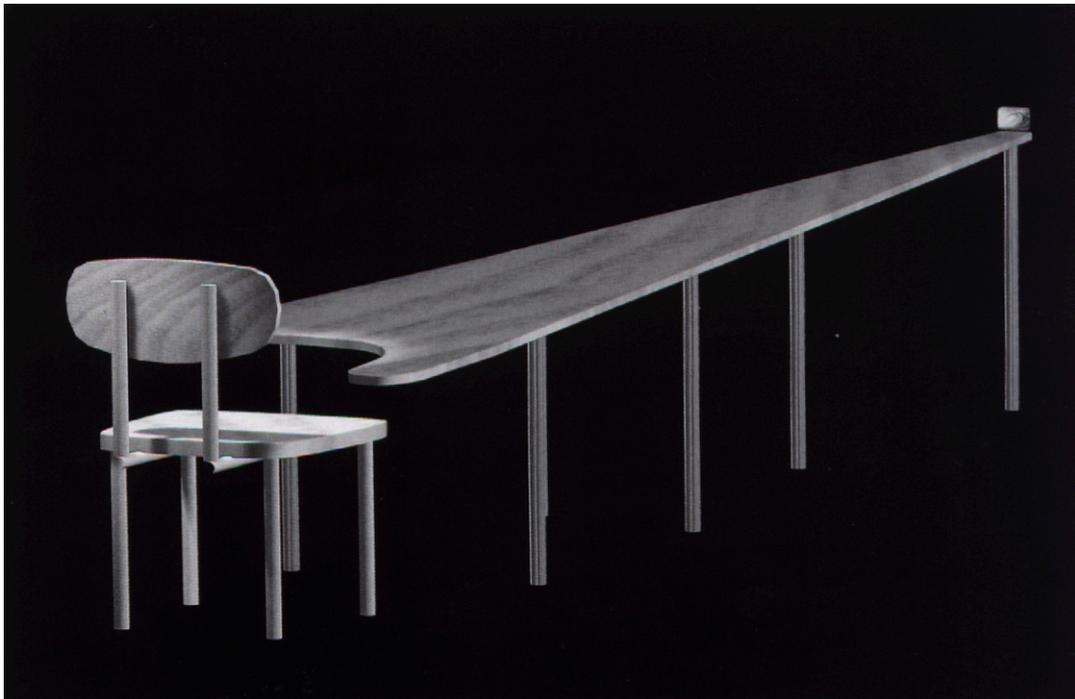


Fig. 18. Gary Hill, *Learning Curve* (still point), 1993

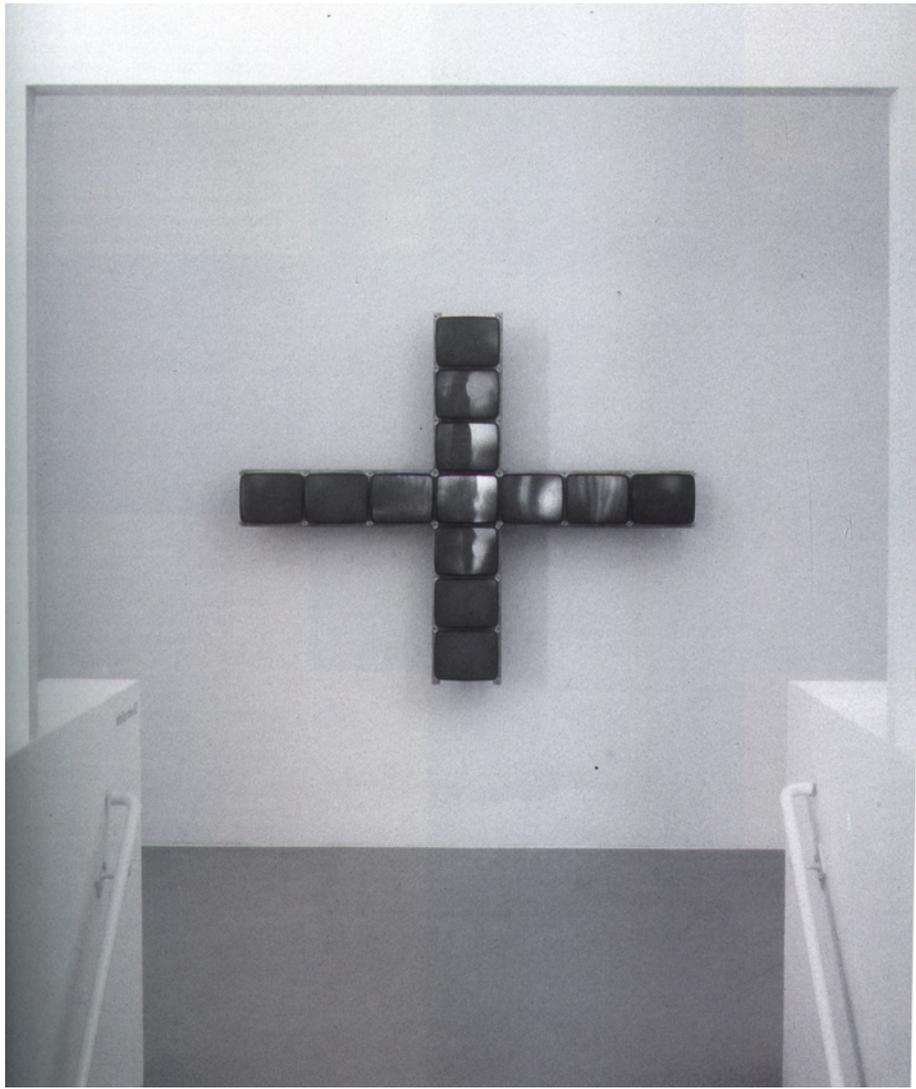


Fig. 19. Gary Hill, *Crux*, 1983-1987

Robery C. Morgan claims that the first noticeable themes in the work of Gary Hill is his concern for the self-referentiality of the medium. And he adds that there is also the obsession with time, the focus on specific intervals of time (Morgan, 4).

The crucial point in his works is the attention he pays to the viewer that how he/she experiences the image. And he believes that the experience of the image is possible not just toward an analysis of the image but through the language that of the way images speak (Morgan, 4).

As a conclusion, it may be possible to say that the experience of the viewer is ambiguous. The viewer encounters an unfolding space and time of Hill's video installations. Thus the viewer is confronted with the ambiguity between the image and the memory.

"The spectator no longer knows what came first: his text, the images on the tape, his own mental images, or the text read by Hill. This is important because the creator is attempting to pursue the spectator as relentlessly as possible. In this tape, Hill has woven together absence and presence, essence and fact, time and space, meaning and sign, perception and imagination, speech and writing into a whole that is impossible to disentangle" (Morgan quotes Willem van Weelden, 2000: 11).

**4.1.1. A Video Installation by Gary Hill: *Inasmuch As It Is Always Already Taking Place* (1990)**

Gary Hill installs sixteen monitors varying in size from an eyepiece of a camera to the dimension of an adult rib cage, slightly below the eye-level on a shelf recessed into the wall. The monitors display looped recordings of the movements of different body parts of the artist. The bodily gestures and movement are continuous. Yet the parts of the body are not gathered together according to their proper places considering the skeleton as the base (London, 22). The life-size parts of the body are decomposed concerning their fragmentary structure in order to form another unity to be scanned through the surfaces of the screens.

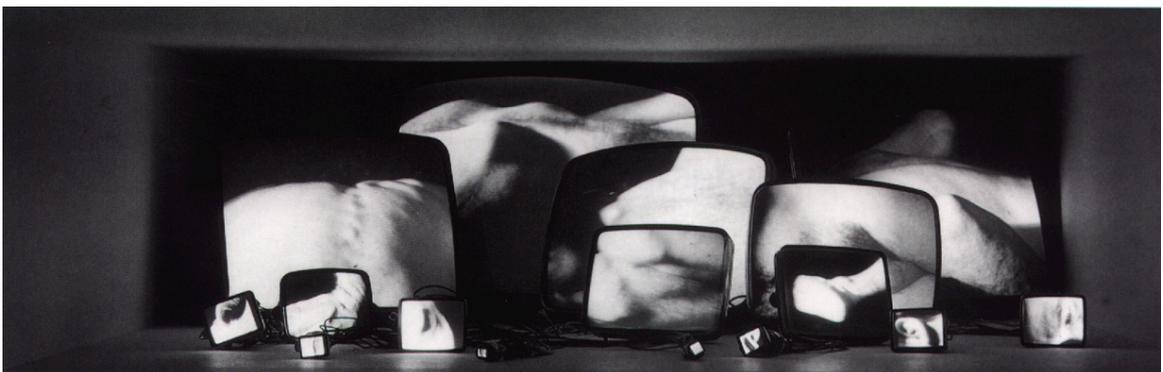


Fig. 20. Gary Hill, *Inasmuch As It Is Always Already Taking Place*, 1990

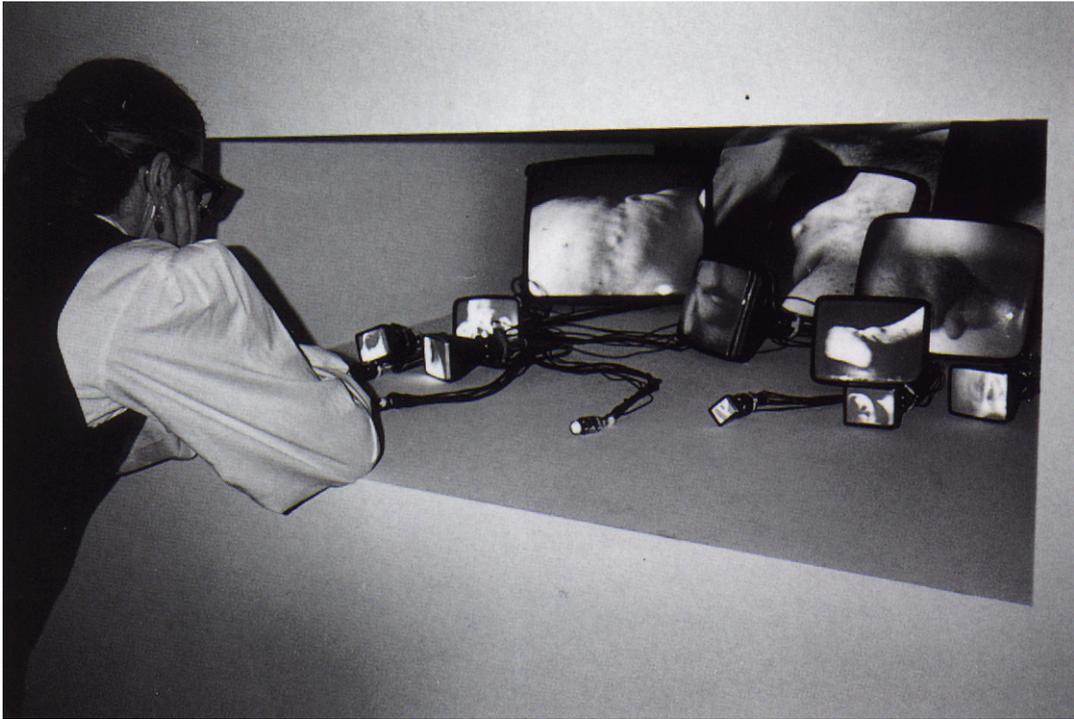


Fig. 21. Gary Hill, *Inasmuch As It Is Always Already*  
*Taking Place*, 1990

Gary Hill appears as a performer artist and an anonymous human body as well. While presenting his work, Gary Hill replaces several monitors showing body parts, fragments each having their own time and space into the gallery space for the viewer to read and contemplate the image of time and space on the artist's body. These tracks of duration of fragments have their movement and sound caused by the very gesture of body such as breathing, floating, palpitating, and murmuring that are compiled to a "slowly and patiently draining meaning to the end or the origin of language and being". (Penwarden, 5)

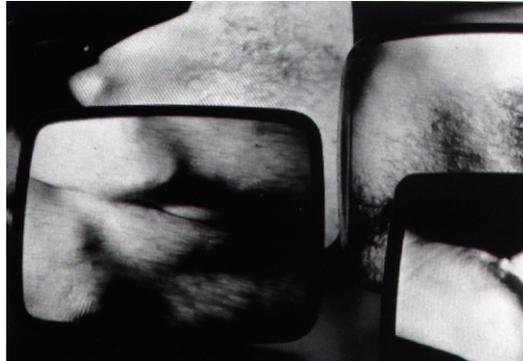


Fig. 22. Gary Hill, *Inasmuch As It Is Always  
Already Taking Place*, 1990

Bodily sounds are synchronized with the sound of water flowing. And these exemplary visceral sounds of a living body attracts the attention of the viewer to take a closer look at the parts which are presented in the chamber of the wall. The viewer's body even leans on the monitors to get the sounds and utterances in order to have a meaning out of this body image. Thus the viewer bodily attends to the examined space and time of the body.

Barbara London, the curator of the exhibition *Video Spaces: Eight Installations* in which Hill participated with his work *Inasmuch As It Is Always Already Taking Place* claims that although none of the segments are

"still", the installation has the quality of a still life (London, 22). This still life image of the body increases its spatial quality gained by the time of body folding on itself.

The body as surface is brought into the same equation with the surface of the monitors in Hill's work. The spatiality and temporality arouses on the conjunction of the fragments. This reminds pure memory, which is inscribed in body or in unconscious as Proust names involuntary memory. Confronting such an image, we, as the viewers may be suspended placeless as body. However the viewers sustain the relation of space and time constituted in their own body yet fragmented and exiled, with the practice of reading the given abstract body image in different duration.

#### 4.2 *WINDOW* (2003)

*Window* is installed as a single channel projection on the wall, which has an opening to the roof. Actual opening is used as a virtual window. The light, which was coming from the floor, serves a space for the viewer to interact with the video by his/her hands' shadows projected on the video image.



Fig. 23. *WINDOW*, Moscow, 2003



Fig. 24. *WINDOW*, Moscow, 2003

On the video there appears a fly buzzing in a jar. However it is invisible and distant sometimes, it is mostly appeared as passing away, while walking on the glass of the jar. The video is recorded with a wide opened aperture that makes a sort of whiteness erasing the contours of the jar and what was seen beyond it. The pure light is left to isolate the fly from its surrounding just to bring about its performance with the light on the screened frame.

The viewers who are positioned between the light source and the projected video attempts to capture the fly with their hands. The attempt to grasp the fly is parallel to the viewer's trial in which he/she positions himself/herself both in the architectural place of the gallery in collective usage and memory, and in the

unpractised subjective spaces initiating an involuntary  
memory.

## **5. *LIVING ROOM***

In the light of the dual relation of image and memory, a work is going to be installed to create an experience in reference to space and time.

### **5.1 Description of the work:**

Following Pistoletto's and Acconci's approach to site-specificity, a room will be occupied. Painting all the walls including the doorway and the floor will alter the room. This alteration will continue with a slope on one corner of the floor corresponding to the far end side of the room. This incline on the corner will give an emphasis on the folding scope of the floor, which will be covered with a white paint. An old, white, three-wheeled cycle will be replaced on the far end of the slope. The wheels of the cycle will be taken off implying that it is lack of wheels and in order to go it needs the slope.

Between the two curtains and two windows, a TV set will stand. There will appear a fly buzzing in the screen,

sometimes it is off the screen sometimes returning to the frame, it will remind the trapped flies on the window, seeing outside but cannot get out. A regular TV set will be used instead of flat monitors or projection surfaces because an invitation of domestic and private space is intended. This intended space is inscribed in our memory. Acconci requires the need of using TV as furniture in order to create a homely atmosphere. The buzzing sound implies the float of nonsense of the TV broadcast. And also, it designates a forgotten TV dominating the space and our life as if we are trapped on the screen of TV, just like the fly seeing the exterior through the window but cannot get out. The *Window* video will be screened. By this time it needs to be on the TV monitor, because I intend to use the sound of the fly hitting the jar as if hitting sound is belonging to the glass of the TV. Thus the TV monitor literally appears like a window cage for the fly.

Shadows of big leaves of domestic plants will be casted on the curtains. They are painted in gray, life size as if the afternoon sun casting the shadow. The taper may curl up some leaf shadows, which are mounted on the cloth of the curtain, for its surface of the cloth will not be smooth.

On the other corner, *Silent Play*, chair installation, is replaced and from the same material a table installation is presented, with some sugar powder scattered on the surface of it. These two furnitures will recommend spatial relation with the childhood memory between the spaces of furniture, between the spaces of a place, a room.

What is related with time beyond the spatial experience of the viewer's presence in the room would be the perpetual sound of buzzing and desperately moving fly which would be the video: actual images. Another sign of time would be the documentation of the viewers' touching on the scattered sugar powder. The viewers would like to experience the table by touching the powder, which inescapably calls for touching this catchy, fetishistic material. The traces of hands would be kept as an indication of duration of the room visited. The sugar gift makes both the viewer and the fly be trapped.

Divergent materials are brought together like sugar, sound, and cloth, recalling a bodily memory of past experiences.

Furnitures like chairs, table, cycle and also the curtains including shadows are the most common

components of childhood memories. The used familiar furniture reminds the lived spaces. Used furniture is a spatial relation to time. They bring back the spatial relations to the objects. These lived spaces can be either public spaces like school or private like home, whereas the shadow presents a temporal relation to the space. The fleeting and passing uniqueness reveals itself as an abstract record.

Constructing such a work would be a concentration on the relationship between space and time as well as the subjective and collective past, which bears memory traces.

This artwork will serve as a documentation for a possible experience as it accomplishes to bring about compatible spaces and time. As a conclusion, site-specific art can suffice to produce such an experience in which the viewer is positioned between memory and image.



Fig. 25. *Living Room*, establishing view, 2003



Fig. 26. *Living Room*, establishing view, 2003



Fig. 27. *Living Room*, powder sugar, 2003



Fig. 28. *Living Room*, cubic sugar, 2003



Fig. 29. *Living Room*, chair installation, 2002



Fig. 30. *Living Room*, chair installation, 2002



Fig. 31. *Living Room, shadows of the leaves, 2003*



Fig. 32. *Living Room, shadows of the leaves, 2003*



Fig. 33. *Living Room*, three wheeled cycle, 2003

## 6. CONCLUSION

Through this work, it is possible to achieve a conclusion concerning the encounter of the viewer with the site-specific work of art. However, the work, *Living Room* is not a conclusion of this study about the relationship between image and memory but, it is an instance of the proposed experience emerging from this relationship. The work conveys an example of the experience of the possible relation between image and memory with a spatio-temporal reference. Thus the work serves as a site in which we can rediscuss the issues about the relation of image and memory related to space and time.

Representation allows the viewer to perceive a total image. Contemporary art has been concentrated on an open image, which is not possible to totalize as representation. Like in the example of Baudelaire's poem, in which he prefers to present crowded words, massive in quality and quantity, rather than simply depicting the crowds, he presents his poem to the experience of the reader/viewer by recalling his/her memory. Compared to this example, contemporary art attempts to figure out

this relationship with image and memory, stressing on the viewer, his/her perception of space and time. Site-specificity is the very medium, which leaves the viewer free to invite his/her memory since site refers to collective and individual practices of space and time.

In this thesis, video space and video time, included by a video installation, are embodied by a site-specific approach. Video, which is considered by its material values as an object in relation to the viewer's perception and recollection, already becomes site-specific. Video installation, bearing its own space and time simultaneously conveys the viewer's space and time. The compatible spaces and time creates the fold of different spaces and time and through this fold, it is possible to achieve a continuous transition between image and memory.

Returning to the argument of Benjamin's proposal of an aura experience, such experience resembles the viewer's experience within a site-specific work of art. He claims that after the age of mechanical reproduction, the aura experience is lost because of the reproduced images, which have reduced the distance between the image and the viewer (Benjamin, 233). The reduced distance is altered and the space with all its temporalities is regained by

site-specific art for the viewer. Thus, it is possible to say that site-specific art is a return to aura. However, the viewer is not replaced in front of the image as Benjamin suggests. Rather, he/she is replaced in the image revealing an experience between his/her perception and recollection, between his image within the space of the work and his/her memory compiled with the time; duration of the work. Benjamin's earlier configuration of the viewer in reference to his earlier definition of aura is like a subject confronting a representation from a distance (Benjamin, 223). Considering the traditional way of perceiving an artwork, a painting for instance, some distance is proposed for the viewer. As a consequence, in the age of mechanical reproduction, the role of the viewer is changed. Weber proposes a reproduction of the aura when the decay of the aura is observed (Weber, 104). In Benjamin's words, the reproduction of the aura is formulated as an experience of the subject in which his/her gaze is returned from what he/she is looking at. This proposed experience includes the viewer's involvement and interaction. The duration is introduced here as a consequence of the distance either decreasing or increasing. The viewer is looking at and yet being looked. Thus, duration of the perception leads to memory in which the viewer recalls his/her past experiences in comparison to what he/she encounters.

In the final analysis, through a site specific art, it is possible to achieve an experience related to image and memory, which is constituted on the corporate spaces and compatible time corresponding to the viewer's perception and recollection.

Being in the picture is what site-specificity suggests as encountering its space and time. This is the experience in which the viewer will recollect. The dual cooperation of the image and the memory will let the viewer oscillate from the image and to his/her memory and from his/her memory to the image again. This continuous oscillation is the reproduced aura experience, which is a return to aura.

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