

Installation: Genre, Medium, or What?

Svetlana Makeeva

Abstract

Since its emergence at the international scene in the 1970s, installation has been one of the artforms central to the contemporary art system. Yet at the theoretical level the issue of its categorial framework remains unresolved, which in turn reflects the situation within contemporary art's categoriality in general. Concepts and terms such as "genre", "medium", "intermediality", "post-medium" and "postconceptual" condition have all been applied to installation art. This article attempts to analyze whether these labels are appropriate to the installation art phenomenon, especially with regard to the recent developments within genre, literary and media studies. Hence, the article provides the historical and modern definitions of the terms, while special attention is paid to their usage within art history and installation art discourse. The resulting conclusions are intended to situate installation art within a viable categorial framework and to shed light on several areas of contemporary art categoriality at large.

[1] In his renowned treatise on contemporary art, *Anywhere or Not at All: Philosophy of Contemporary Art*, Peter Osborne has noted that "the problem of categorization [...] is a very real – that is to say, ongoing, unresolved – critical problem. It is in many ways the problem of contemporary art criticism."¹ This situation is also the case for installation art, an artform central to the contemporary art system. The installation art discourse is distinguished by a certain disparity in terms: "genre", "medium", "intermediality", "post-medium" and the "postconceptual" condition have all been used to situate installation art. Although it is a challenging endeavor to conceive installation art in categorial terms, and the terms in question are too vast to be exhaustingly analyzed, I would like to attempt to handle the issue of categoriality of installation art, which may help to shed light on some aspects of contemporary art categoriality in general.

[2] The article is built in the following way: firstly, I attempt to define these concepts, taking the latest developments within the relevant disciplines – in particular, literary and media studies – into account; secondly, I give a brief overview of the ways these concepts have been used within art theory and art history; thirdly, I consider whether, and how, they are applicable to installation art. This article employs the relevant writing on installation art, with a focus on those texts that problematize the installation's categoriality, as well as more general art-theoretical and art-historical works and texts from related disciplines.

[3] It seems that dealing with the issue of installation's categoriality, one inevitably confronts another question: if installation is part of the contemporary art system,

¹ Peter Osborne, *Anywhere or Not at All: Philosophy of Contemporary Art*, London 2013, 102.

then one should first assess whether there are genres and media discernible within the contemporary art, at all.

[4] For instance, it was Peter Osborne who has attempted to reject the terms "genre" and "medium" altogether as applicable to contemporary art. Instead, Osborne suggests that contemporary art is ontologically *postconceptual* and operates within its own categorial framework, built on "critical *isms* and series", such as Minimalism.² Considering the six criteria of the postconceptual art, or the six "insights" inherited by it from the conceptual art, as laid out by Osborne, one may conclude that installation art matches all of them:³

1. *Art's necessary conceptuality. (Art is constituted by concepts, their relations and their instantiation in practices of discrimination: art/non-art.)*

2. *Art's ineliminable – but radically insufficient – aesthetic dimension. (All art requires some form of materialization; that is to say, aesthetic – felt, spatio-temporal – presentation.)*

3. *The critical necessity of an anti-aestheticist use of aesthetic materials. (This is a critical consequence of art's necessary conceptuality.)*

4. *An expansion to infinity of the possible material forms of art.*

5. *A radically distributive – that is, irreducibly relational – unity of the individual artwork across the totality of its multiple material instantiations, at any particular time.*

6. *A historical malleability of the borders of this unity.*⁴

[5] On the other hand, Osborne's strive to view all contemporary art phenomena in relation to (post)conceptualism only leads to inevitable distortions: accordingly, installations become mere "instantiations of art ideas",⁵ thus being reduced to a secondary supplement to the initial idea. This interpretation excludes a vast field of installations that are phenomenologically oriented and e. g. concerned with the issues of multisensorial bodily perception.⁶ Hence, one may call installation a postconceptual artform within Osborne's paradigm, but this characteristic does not cover some of the features central to installation art. Accordingly, I do not see much advantage in total abandonment of genre and medium and substituting them with the postconceptual label that does not seem to adequately reflect some of the diverse contemporary art phenomena.

[6] Hence, I would like to investigate whether the overarching terms "medium" and "genre" – plus the derivatives "intermediality" and "post-medium" – are suited for describing installation art. It should be noted that the very relation between genre and medium may be quite complex, too. As media theorist Claus Clüver points out,

² Osborne, *Anywhere or Not at All*, 86.

³ Cf. Anne Ring Petersen, *Installation Art: Between Image and Stage*, Copenhagen 2015, 84.

⁴ Osborne, *Anywhere or Not at All*, 48.

⁵ Peter Osborne, "Installation, Performance, or What?", in: *Oxford Art Journal* 24 (2001), no. 2, 147-154: 150.

⁶ For further critique of this statement by Osborne, see Petersen, *Installation Art*, 82.

such artforms as installations or earthworks are not easily comprehended as either media or genres.⁷ At large, a genre accounts for a sub-category within a medium; still, it is insufficient to present medium as a higher-order umbrella instance that incorporates some genres, as there are higher-order genres and lower-order sub-genres as well.

[7] The English word "medium" appears as early as in the 1902 English translation of Aristotle's *Poetics*.⁸ Seen from different perspectives, a medium may account for as wide range of phenomena as "vehicles, machines, tools, bodies, senses, languages and complex technological settings".⁹ Some possible definitions include: "a material social practice";¹⁰ "the objective, material factors specific to a particular form: pigment-bearing surfaces; matter extended through space; light projected through a moving strip of celluloid";¹¹ "that which mediates for and between humans a (meaningful) sign (or a combination of signs) with the aid of suitable transmitters across temporal and/ or spatial distances".¹² Some scholars directly equal the word "medium" with "art" or "art form".¹³ Generally, the concept of medium within media studies can be understood in art terms and in communication terms. In this article, I mainly concentrate on the art aspect of medium, as this is relevant for the tasks and material I am considering.

[8] Within modernist art, an influential medium concept was elaborated by Clement Greenberg, who supported the idea of clear boundaries between the arts. As it is against the background of the Greenbergian concept that the latest medium theories have developed, it is worth briefly reminding of Greenberg's main theses. The purity of the arts was, according to him, to be secured by their narrowing of their "area of competence" and revealing the essence of their medium (which equals to the medium-specificity principle), which, above all, accounted for the aesthetic autonomy of modernist art. In case of painting, for instance, the medium-specific limitations constituted "the flat surface, the shape of the support, the

⁷ Claus Clüver, "Intermediality and Interart Studies", in: *Changing Borders. Contemporary Positions in Intermediality*, eds. Jens Arvidson, Mikael Askander, Jørgen Bruhn and Heidrun Führer, Lund 2007, 19-37: 31.

⁸ "Epic poetry and Tragedy, Comedy also and Dithyrambic Poetry, and the music of the flute and of the lyre [...] are all in their general conception modes of imitation. They differ, however, from one another in three respects — *the medium*, the objects, the manner or mode of imitation, being in each case distinct" [italics added]; Aristotle, *The Poetics*, ed. Samuel Henry Butcher, London 1902, 7.

⁹ Mika Elo and Miika Luoto, "Introduction: In Media Res", in: *Senses of Embodiment: Art, Technics, Media*, eds. Mika Elo and Miika Luoto, Bern 2014 (= *Art / Knowledge / Theory*, vol. 3), 7-19: 8.

¹⁰ Raymond Williams, *Marxism and Literature*, New York 1977, 158-164.

¹¹ Rosalind Krauss, "Video: The Aesthetics of Narcissism", in: *October* 1 (1976), 50-64: 52.

¹² Clüver, "Intermediality and Interart Studies", 30-31.

¹³ Jørgen Bruhn, "On the Borders of Poetry and Art", in: *The Borders of Europe. Hegemony, Aesthetics and Border Poetics*, eds. Sissel Laegreid, Torgeir Skorgen and Helge Vidar Holm, Aarhus 2012, 217-230: 217.

properties of pigment".¹⁴ This stance, generally congruent with G. E. Lessing's fundamental work *Laocoon: An Essay on the Limits of Painting and Poetry* (1766), was embraced by the critic's disciples, most notably Michael Fried and Rosalind Krauss.

[9] At the present stage, probably two main stances on medium may be found: to give up on it completely, as it is inadequate to the contemporary art situation; and to reformulate it, in a way similar to the recent rethinking of genre, that I will touch upon later. What unites the two positions is the rejection of the Greenbergian paradigm and a polemic against it. The first stance, that I already have mentioned, is taken by Peter Osborne and implies that medium "as an ontological category"¹⁵ was completely ideologically destroyed in the 1960s by the wide-ranging practices that consistently challenged the artistic programme of high modernism. Following this view, the post-1960s art cannot be comprehended through the notion of medium at all. In contrast, the second idea, articulated by W. J. T. Mitchell and Jørgen Bruhn, is to view all media as inherently mixed. W. J. T. Mitchell criticizes the Greenbergian practice of viewing modernist painting as a purely optical medium deprived of any relations with other media. In contrast, modernist painting appears related to literature, meaning that it strongly depends on theoretical or critical texts that substituted myths, history, and the Bible on which the earlier historical or religious painting built. Moreover, painting in general appears, in Mitchell's interpretation, related to the sense of touch, as in a painting the viewer only sees the traces of artistic brushwork or handwork.¹⁶

[10] Within installation art discourse, authors such as Mark Rosenthal¹⁷ and Erika Suderburg¹⁸ have called installation a medium, though, without giving the concept a proper grounding or redefinition, which impairs their research.

[11] Still, are there any media in contemporary art? I tend to view medium as a material practice, following the laconic definition by W. J. T. Mitchell. A metaphor from the domain of media studies may also help here: a medium resembles a "communication pipe"¹⁹ which – if one transfers this schema to art – an artist chooses to materialize and transmit meaning. Yet this pipe is not neutral: firstly, it should suit the idea to be transmitted and involve the desired modes of viewer interaction with the work; secondly, it may be loaded with a historical burden – e. g., today one can hardly deal with painting overlooking that this medium has been an ideological battleground throughout the 20th century and especially since the 1960s. I would say that in the contemporary situation painting, sculpture, or

¹⁴ Clement Greenberg, "Modernist Painting", in: *Art in Theory 1900–2000: An Anthology of Changing Ideas*, eds. Charles Harrison and Paul Wood, Oxford 1999, 754-760: 755.

¹⁵ Osborne, *Anywhere or Not at All*, 99.

¹⁶ W.J.T. Mitchell, "There Are No Visual Media", in: *Journal of Visual Culture* 4 (2005), no. 2, 257-266: 258-259.

¹⁷ Mark Rosenthal, *Understanding Installation Art: from Duchamp to Holzer*, Munich et al. 2003.

¹⁸ Erika Suderburg, *Space, Site, Intervention: Situating Installation Art*, Minneapolis 2000.

¹⁹ Marie-Laure Ryan, "Introduction", in: *Narrative Across Media: The Languages of Storytelling*, ed. Marie-Laure Ryan, Lincoln 2004, 1-40: 16-17.

installation still may be called media, which equals to the more conservative notion of an individual "art". Naturally, reservation should be made that medium is understood not as the outdated Greenbergian concept, but in the light of the contemporary idea of all media as to some extent mixed. Installations are suitable for communication of ideas that concern the issues of contemplation and activity, bodily presence and mediation, site-specificity, ephemerality and preservation, to name just a few. At the same time, I think one can also find the most general material thing that unites all installations and enables them to deal with the themes mentioned: this is probably the use of space that unfolds between, or is formed by, the installation's elements and that engulfs the viewer. This has been captured by Boris Groys:

*The material support of the installation medium is the space itself. That does not mean, however, that the installation is somehow 'immaterial'. On the contrary, the installation is material par excellence, since it is spatial – and being in the space is the most general definition of being material.*²⁰

Yet does that contradict the fact that installation has become widely discussed as an "intermedial" phenomenon? Can a medium be intermedial?

[12] The notion of *intermediality* has actually become established in writing on installation art.²¹ One of the early and important incarnations of this concept is the "Intermedia" text by Fluxus artist Dick Higgins (1965), later followed by a chart showing the phenomena that Higgins considered to be intermedial.²² The chart includes a number of artforms and art movements – some of which intersect – that experimented with methods of more than one medium or developed a range of heterogenous practices in the 1960s: Concrete Poetry, Conceptual Art, Happenings, Performance Art, the Fluxus itself, and so on.

[13] Intermediality can be defined through two aspects. Firstly, intermedial is that which lies between the traditional arts, or media, and combines their features (spatial, temporal, material and others). Secondly, intermedial is that which challenges the border between art and non-art, as formulated by Allan Kaprow in his renowned dictum: "The line between art and life should be kept as fluid, and perhaps as indistinct as possible".²³ Building upon Umberto Eco's important text *Opera aperta* (1962), Anne Ring Petersen conceives the intermedial trend as the "opening" of the work in visual arts – towards other artforms and towards its surroundings,²⁴ which is rooted in the experiments of the historical avant-garde.

²⁰ Boris Groys, "Politics of Installation", in: *e-flux journal* #02 (January 2009), <https://www.e-flux.com/journal/02/68504/politics-of-installation/> (accessed May 12, 2019).

²¹ Cf. Rosalind Krauss, *A Voyage on the North Sea: Art in the Age of the Post-Medium Condition*, London 1999; Juliane Rebentisch, *Aesthetics of Installation Art*, Berlin 2012; Petersen, *Installation Art*.

²² Dick Higgins and Hannah Higgins, "Intermedia", in: *Leonardo* 34 (2001), no. 1, 49-54: 50; <https://muse.jhu.edu/article/19618> (accessed July 12, 2020).

²³ Allan Kaprow, "Assemblages, Environments and Happenings", in: *Art in Theory 1900–2000: An Anthology of Changing Ideas*, eds. Charles Harrison and Paul Wood, Oxford 1999, 703-709: 706.

²⁴ Petersen, *Installation Art*, 389.

[14] The tendency towards intermediality in art became especially distinct, and received the first critical reflections, in the 1960s, to which Higgins's work also belongs. Another early and pivotal text is Michael Fried's essay "Art and Objecthood" (1967), although Fried does not directly use the terms "intermedial" or "installation". Initially, Fried aimed at criticizing Minimalism and the dissolution of rigid medium conventions. Famously, the essay stated: "The concepts of quality and value – and to the extent that these are central to art, the concept of art itself – are meaningful, or wholly meaningful, only within the individual arts. What lies *between* the arts is theatre."²⁵ This stance indicates that Fried still upholds Lessing's rigid-limited, two-domain paradigm of the spatial and the temporal arts. On the contrary, the newer works of the 1960s, whether they belong to Minimalism, performance, environments or other, were incommensurable with this system, as clearly having both spatial and temporal dimensions. An installation, or an environment – and these are the two labels for largely the same phenomenon – is a spatial construct and, at the same time, is inescapably experienced over time, as it does not have a single vantage point and cannot be momentarily grasped in all its spatial wholeness.

[15] It should be noted that most writing on intermediality concentrates on comparing the newer media that emerged in the 1960s – performance, environment, and other – to the high modernism specific media: painting, sculpture, and other. This is evident in the way Juliane Rebentisch handles the issue of intermediality: for Rebentisch, the starting point is always the modernist project of aesthetic autonomy, with which intermediality presumably does not break, but continues it in a critical way. Intermediality plays a "constitutive" role for each medium and becomes evident when the arts pursue their "immanent principle in a pure way" – here Rebentisch refers to Theodor Adorno. For instance, Frank Stella's *Shaped Canvases* are paintings that bring their sculptural quality to the fore.²⁶ Thus, as I see it, intermediality has had a decisive part in relating the new media to the 'old' ones, yet it cannot exhaustingly account for what installation art is at the present stage, especially with regard to the latest developments within media studies.

[16] If it has generally been agreed by contemporary media scholars that all media are mixed,²⁷ then what role intermediality today may play, as it suggests that intermedial phenomena exist between the rigid borders of the established pure media? I would argue that intermediality should be seen as an important yet historical term, describing the tension between the old and the newer media in the 1960s–1970s. And it was precisely the appearance of the newer media and installation art that has led to the reconsideration of the concept of medium:

From the standpoint of art history in the wake of postmodernism, it seems clear that the last half-century has decisively undermined any notion of purely visual art. Installations, mixed media, performance art, conceptual art, site-specific art,

²⁵ Michael Fried, "Art and Objecthood", in: id., *Art and Objecthood: Essays and Reviews*, Chicago and London 1998, 148-172: 164.

²⁶ Rebentisch, *Aesthetics of Installation Art*, 121.

²⁷ Bruhn, "On the Borders of Poetry and Art", 227.

*minimalism, and the often-remarked return to pictorial representation has rendered the notion of pure opticality a mirage that is retreating in the rear-view mirror.*²⁸

[17] Another concept that remains intertwined with the Greenbergian paradigm is the well-known term coined by Rosalind Krauss – namely, that of the "post-medium" condition. Krauss's text entitled *A Voyage on the North Sea: Art in the Age of the Post-Medium Condition* declared the demise of the modernist medium and the transition to the new, "post-medium" condition, in which process installation art had also played a significant role, being part of "critical postmodernism" that Krauss equals to institutional critique and site specificity.²⁹ Yet the system in which she operates largely remains Greenbergian, with the understanding of a medium as something that still needs specificity, retrospectively rethought by Krauss: "The specificity of mediums, even modernist ones, must be understood as differential, self-differing, and thus as a layering of conventions never simply collapsed into the physicality of their support."³⁰ Her using of expressions such as "the intermedia loss of specificity"³¹ indicates that she upholds the paradigm of distinct media and impure "intermedia" that lie between them, which I have commented on earlier. I believe, the very notion of medium has proved viable enough to embrace the newer artforms if it is thoroughly reconceptualized. In addition, Krauss's concept of "post-medium" does not tell much positively about the nature of installation art that she undertakes to criticize – does not tell much about what it is, apart from what it is not. As Peter Osborne remarks, post-medium, as well as its "critical siblings", post-formalism and postmodernism, "suffers from the indeterminacy of its constitutive negation, rendering it an empty, periodizing term awaiting further determination".³²

[18] Now the second overarching category is to be analyzed: "genre" is widely applied in writing on installation art, both critically and by inertia. This is a term mostly used and theorized about in literature studies, yet there can hardly be found a common criterion for definition, be it language, meter, structure, length, theme, social appeal, or mode of communication.³³ Historically, genres were regarded as fixed categories or natural phenomena, in the spirit of biological taxonomy, the law of genre being determined in the "order of things" – cf. J. Derrida's critical essay "The Law of Genre", where genre is compared to gender.³⁴ This essentialist understanding of genres had dominated since the Renaissance, dwelling upon Aristotle's *Poetics* rediscovered at that time. On the contrary, the modern definition, for instance the one suggested by Claus Clüver, implies that a genre is a definite class or kind, or category of "similar signs accessible or 'readable' according to

²⁸ Mitchell, "There Are No Visual Media", 260.

²⁹ Krauss, *A Voyage on the North Sea*, 7.

³⁰ Krauss, *A Voyage on the North Sea*, 53.

³¹ Krauss, *A Voyage on the North Sea*, 15.

³² Osborne, *Anywhere or Not at All*, 236.

³³ Claus Clüver, "On Genres", in: *Genre and Ritual: The Cultural Heritage of Medieval Rituals*, ed. Eyolf Østrem, Copenhagen 2005, 27-46: 36.

³⁴ Jacques Derrida, "The Law of Genre", trans. Avital Ronell, in: *Critical Inquiry* 7 (1980), no. 1, 55-81.

certain codes and conventions".³⁵ The word "convention" hints that genres are currently viewed as sociocultural constructs acknowledged by the respective interpretive communities. Accentuated is the role of the reader, with the work's reception being of the same, or even greater, importance than its production. Such a position was influenced by H. R. Jauß's reception theory and especially his notion of "horizon of expectation". The conventional aspect of genre implies that the reader decides on how to decode the sign momentarily, relying on the generic "traffic signs", and this is where the hermeneutical and interpretative role of genre stems from.³⁶

[19] In visual arts, genres par excellence emerged in the 17th century and were hierarchized within the French Academy. As long as the mimetic convention was established within the art, the genres in painting and sculpture were differentiated on the thematical basis: historical, portrait, genre painting, landscape, still life. Nonetheless, borderline generic cases have never been uncommon, and the same paintings could be appreciated as both portrait and landscape, or religious and genre scene.

[20] Among the texts on installation art that highlight its generic status, three main stances can be found: to use the concept of genre quite unconsciously; to abandon any attempt to define installation as a genre at all; and, finally, to elaborate a flexible generic understanding of installation art as a hybrid artform.

[21] The first tendency is exemplified by *From Margin to Center: the Spaces of Installation Art* (1999) by Julie H. Reiss, who definitely tends to regard installation as a genre, establishing certain features typical of it. These are: lack of formal restrictions, "a reciprocal relationship of some kind" between the viewer, the work and the space, and "treat[ing] an entire indoor space [...] as a single situation".³⁷ Evidently, Reiss approaches the genre from an essentialist perspective, claiming that "the essence of Installation art is spectator participation".³⁸ Moreover, she tries to set up a body of artworks constitutive of the genre, concentrating on the New York activities (first of all, on Allan Kaprow's oeuvre) and barely mentioning the relevant European processes.

[22] Philosopher Juliane Rebentisch in her *Aesthetics of Installation Art* (2012) evades any attempt to define installation as a genre, claiming that the umbrella term "installation" includes "not so much works but models of the possibility of works; not so much examples of a new genre but ever new genres".³⁹ If I understand this thesis correctly, it approaches the state of anarchic atomization that destroys meaning, as shown by Peter Osborne: "Retrospectively constructed *critical isms*" (or, we may say, labels such as "installation") are needed in order to structure the infinity of individual artworks and avoid "the schema of *absolute*

³⁵ Clüver, "On Genres", 28.

³⁶ Clüver, "On Genres", 28.

³⁷ Julie H. Reiss, *From Margin to Center: The Spaces of Installation Art*, Cambridge, Mass. 1999, xii-xiii.

³⁸ Reiss, *From Margin to Center*, xiii.

³⁹ Rebentisch, *Aesthetics of Installation Art*, 14-15.

individuation".⁴⁰ At large, Rebentisch uses the term "genre" as a substitute for an individual art – painting, sculpture and so forth, – not as a denominator for subdivisions within the individual arts;⁴¹ the loose way in which this term is handled reveals the author's bird's-eye view, philosophical perspective.

[23] Consequently, Anne Ring Petersen in *Installation Art Between Image and Stage* (2015) criticizes Juliane Rebentisch for avoiding any genre definition at all.⁴² This avoidance results in uncertainty, what material is due to analysis throughout Rebentisch's work, as well as in the overlooking of the already existing museum and discursive practice to label a distinct body of artworks as installations. Petersen advocates for an understanding of installation as a "genre", supporting this stance with Ludwig Wittgenstein's concept of family resemblance:

*If we transfer this idea to installation art, what binds a broad spectrum of artworks together under the specific generic term installation is the presence of empiric analogies: installation A resembles installation B, which, on its part, resembles installation C, which resembles installation D, etc. [...] The family resemblance principle does not rule out differences; A, for instance, might appear very different from D. [...] Family resemblance requires that at least some of the objects in a group appear as exemplary or paradigmatic of the concept root. With this criterion, Wittgenstein made sure that the lineage could not evolve infinitely.*⁴³

Acknowledging that the installational genre is hard to delineate, Anne Ring Petersen suggests the following generic traits: installations "activate space and context", possess a temporal – i. e., situational, processual – quality, and have a "phenomenological focus on the viewer's bodily and subjective experience, and on the temporal aspects of reception".⁴⁴

[24] Hence, the following generic features of installation art at large may be traced: absence of formal limitations; spatio-temporal dimension; theatricality, i. e., the "stagedness" of installation art and the crucial role of the viewer; phenomenological and contextual implications.

[25] Having briefly considered the existing views on genre, we may ask if installation can be called a genre of contemporary art – in particular, if one agrees that it can be called one of its media, as I have suggested. I would say that installation fulfills the two criteria central to the understanding of genre. Firstly, there is a convention that enables the viewer to identify an artwork as belonging to the domain of installation art and presupposes the modes of interaction with it. As we live in a context in which installation art has existed for some 50 years, intuitive rules have been formed that guide the viewer facing an installation and control his or her horizon of expectations. This convention is also reflected in the diverse, even the most mundane associations that come to mind when thinking of installation – some spatial combination of objects that may be built up of whatever materials

⁴⁰ Osborne, *Anywhere or Not at All*, 84-85.

⁴¹ Rebentisch, *Aesthetics of Installation Art*, 75.

⁴² Petersen, *Installation Art*, 34-35.

⁴³ Petersen, *Installation Art*, 36.

⁴⁴ Petersen, *Installation Art*, 41.

- and is especially associated with contemporary art. In addition, a genre presupposes a set of interpretative rules that help to handle the work. In case of installation, one of these rules would be, for instance, to physically enter the artwork's space and experience it in its phenomenological fullness, not to look on it from the outside as if it were a picture.

[26] Secondly, a genre suggests a body of works, or texts, that constitute it. Within literary studies, it is anthologies that in some cases have played a genre-constituting role: once compiled together, texts may show common generic traits and establish a genre's corpus. For instance, the medieval Fleury Playbook comprises texts that had probably been used for liturgical purposes, yet being collected within a single playbook they are detached from their ritual context and are read as sharing the same generic characteristics, namely, that of the drama.⁴⁵ Similarly, the earliest groundbreaking texts related to installation art, such as B. O'Doherty's *Inside the White Cube* (1976)⁴⁶ and G. Celant's *Ambiente/arte* (1977)⁴⁷, established the body of work that subsequently came to be viewed as 'predecessors' to the newly emerged artform, as well as the first installations par excellence. This canonical row features, among others, Monet's *Nymphéas* installed in the Musée de l'Orangerie in Paris, Futurism, Cubist still-lives and collages, Constructivism and El Lissitzky's *Proun Room*, De Stijl and Mondrian's *Salone de Madame B...*, Dadaism and Kurt Schwitters' *Merzbau*, the Bauhaus programme, Duchamp's Surrealist exhibitions, environments by Allan Kaprow etc., and most writing on installation art has more or less revolved around this selection.⁴⁸ Thus, the art-historical importance of texts by O'Doherty and Celant is much the same as the role of literary anthologies in the creation of a genre. In addition, it is the generic body of work that follows Wittgenstein's family resemblance pattern that Anne Ring Petersen has applied to installation art.

[27] As I have attempted to show, installation art can be called both a medium and a genre of contemporary art. As such, installation art par excellence emerged in the 1970s, preceded by the closely related installational environments of the late 1950s and 1960s. I believe that the very notions of genre and medium are not dissolved or finished within contemporary art, as Peter Osborne or Rosalind Krauss have claimed. Dissolved are the historical understandings of genres and media: for instance, the formalist modernist definition of medium, as articulated by Greenberg, Fried and Krauss, is irrelevant to contemporary art. However, the recent trend - to view all media as inherently mixed and all genres as conventional and socioculturally constructed - creates a viable categorial framework that is able to incorporate a phenomenon as versatile and amorphous as installation art.

⁴⁵ Clüver, "On Genres", 31-33.

⁴⁶ Brian O'Doherty, *Inside the White Cube: The Ideology of the Gallery Space*, expanded ed. Berkeley, Los Angeles and London 1999.

⁴⁷ Germano Celant, *Ambiente/arte dal Futurismo alla Body Art*, Venice 1977.

⁴⁸ Cf. Nicolas de Oliveira et al., *Installation Art*, London 1994; Sotirios Bahtsetzis, *Geschichte der Installation: situative Erfahrungsgestaltung in der Kunst der Moderne*, Berlin 2006 (<https://d-nb.info/980868491/34>); Barbara Ferriani and Marina Pugliese, *Ephemeral Monuments: History and Conservation of Installation Art*, Los Angeles 2013; Reiss, *From Margin to Center*; Petersen, *Installation Art*.

Reviewers

Katerina Kochetkova, Lomonossov State University of Moscow
Viktor Misiano, independent scholar and curator

Local Editor

Armen Kazaryan, State Institute of Art Studies, Moscow

License

The text of this article is provided under the terms of the Creative Commons License
CC-BY-NC-ND 4.0

