

# The (Un)Aesthetics of Radical Architectural Installations

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## Introduction

Since the postwar period, with the emergence of different approaches in art, the discipline of architecture has been a scene for many radical approaches and experimental urban-related problems. Originally derived from theatre design installations in the Renaissance period and infused with the spirit of the Dada movement and Russian Constructivism in the 1920s, architects in the late 1960s and the 1970s expanded their practice in an interdisciplinary context that included contemporary art. By the nature of their dynamics, installations can be regarded alongside paper architecture and architectural competitions as practices that transgress the conventional ways of thinking and doing architecture, creating a new field of experimentation, and pushing the frontiers of understanding and questioning the limitations and the possibilities of space, structure, form, and materiality. Architectural installations can be examined as an in-between and formless practice that transgresses the boundaries of disciplines and move beyond the “act” of construction realized as an outcome of architectural practice. As Christo points out, such artworks offer a “sense of fragility, vulnerability, and urgency, while also stimulating an awareness of the emptiness that [accompanies] its eventual dismantling.”<sup>1</sup> Installation art makes the invisible visible, or brings along a new reading, a new perspective that gives different meanings to the ordinary elements of everyday life. Some installations that serve as examples thereof include the burning down of a building (such as in Casagrande and Rintala’s temporary installation), demolishing an existing building as a form of activism (as in Gordon Matta-Clark’s interventions), and making visible the sensible and invisible (such as Rachel Whiteread’s urban sculptures). In this way, some installations coincide and intersect with architectural space or architectural activism through collective activity, including architectonic traits such as elements, materials, surfaces that go beyond the radical form and have the potential to radically transform architectural thought.

Therefore, this article focuses on the aspect of (un)aesthetics emerging in architectural installations. Though (un)aesthetics is a more common concept in philosophy and art, as violation of aesthetic canons or requirements, examining it in terms of architectural installations can lead to exploring *anarchitecture*, which goes beyond the utilitarian expectations of architecture. Architectural installations have their roots in the 1960s and 1970s, manifesting in the “Austrian Phenomenon”—defined by Peter Cook in 1970 as an “experimental field or environment,” in which architects explored the “boundaries of architecture” and extended them through acts of “happenings” or “performance pieces.” Radical architectural experiments in urban space emerged in this period in the post-war architectural scene mostly observable in Vienna, in the works of Günther Feuerstein, Zünd-Up, and Co-op Himmelblau. These works were also playful and experimental for the public, such as the *Gehschule* (or “walking school”) created in 1971 by Haus-Rucker-Co, who transformed part of the pavement and invited passers-by to partake in the “walking” experience in a playful way (Fig. 1).<sup>2</sup>

1 “Christo,” The Arts Story, accessed May 01, 2020, <https://www.theartstory.org/artist/christo/>.

2 Florian Kossak, “Exhibiting Architecture: The Installation as Laboratory for Emerging Architecture,” in *Curating Architecture and the City, Critiques: Critical Studies in Architectural Humanities*, eds. Sarah Chaplin



Fig. 1: Utopian architectural installation, *Oasis, no 7* (1972), Haus-Rucker-Co

## Installation Art

Peter Osborne defines installations as “the indebtedness of installation art to architecture and the appropriation of architectural precepts”<sup>3</sup> as the “architecturalization of art.”<sup>4</sup> Contemporary art installations refer to a wide range of interdisciplinary applications which, as architectural constructions, extend from the minimalist boxes of George Trakas’s *The Piece That Went Through the Window* and Tony Smith’s monolithic, brutal, and minimal sculptures, to Vito Acconci’s body performances and Stelarc’s trans-human cyborg hybrids that embed a poetic of the senses, and from Sol Le Witt’s parametric and kinetic volumes to Lygia Clark’s *Oculos* (1968).

The main purpose of installation art, which emerged by creating a breaking point in the history of art in the 1960s, is to demolish the existence of powerful art institutions, to question the limits of perception, to separate the concept of image and language from aesthetics, to question the process-product relationship, and to re-establish the relationship between the artist and the audience. Especially in the architecture of the post-1960 period, art and architecture became more intertwined than before, and installation art had become an event space that brought art and space together.

According to the Oxford Dictionary of Art (1988), an installation — “a term which came into vogue during the 1970s” — means an “assemblage or environment constructed in the gallery specifically for a particular exhibition.”<sup>5</sup> Similarly, the Glossary of Art, Architecture and Design Since 1945 (1977) defines installation in relation to minimal sculptures “produced for particular gallery or exhibition spaces” which are not “transferable, thus making installation a crucial factor”<sup>6</sup> and states that a “once-only affair and close-up photographs of single works would not reveal their crucial relationship to the environment.”<sup>7</sup> Before, installation art had been recognized as an “environment,” as Allan Kaprow used the word “Environment” to depict his room-scale artwork realized in 1958 at the Hansa Gallery.<sup>8</sup> In the mid-1970s, the terms “project art” or “temporary art” were used interchangeably.<sup>9</sup> In his short article “The Function of the Studio” (1971), Daniel Buren suggested the use of the word “installation” to change the meaning of the exhibition.<sup>10</sup>

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and Alexandra Stara (London and New York: Routledge, 2009), 125.

3 Kossak, “Exhibiting Architecture,” 119.

4 Peter Osborne, “Non-places and the Spaces of Art,” *The Journal of Architecture* 6 (2) (2001): 191.

5 *The Oxford Dictionary of Art*, eds. Ian Chilvers and Harold Osborne (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1988), 253.

6 John Albert Walker, *Glossary of Art, Architecture, and Design Since 1945* (London, Bingley, Hamden, Ct.: Linnet Books, 1977), 194.

7 *Ibid.*, 167.

8 Allan Kaprow, *Essays on the Blurring of Art and Life*, ed. Jeff Kelley (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1993), xiii.

9 Julie Reiss, *From Margin to Center, The Spaces of Installation Art* (Cambridge, Massachusetts, London: MIT Press, 1999), xi.

10 Daniel Buren and Thomas Repensek, “The Function of the Studio,” *October* 10 (1979): 56.

Covering a wide range of art, such as Fluxus, happenings, land art (i.e. earth art or earth works, minimalism, video, body or performance art, conceptual art, and process art), the core of installation art lies in its “site specificity, institutional critique, temporality, and ephemerality.”<sup>11</sup> Installation art can be “theatrical,”<sup>12</sup> as well as “abstract or pictorial, controlled or spontaneous,”<sup>13</sup> or “immersive” and “experiential.”<sup>14</sup> Reiss describes it as context-oriented, because even if the artwork is installed repeatedly in different locations, it produces different meanings and contents due to spatial differences. In her view, installation art supposes an embedded and a “reciprocal” relationship between “the viewer and the work, the work and the space, and the space and the viewer;” the viewer is “integral to the completion of the work,” and they are “required to complete the piece” mentally or physically. Therefore, the meaning in installation art stems “from the interaction between” the work and the viewer.<sup>15</sup>

As Rosalind Krauss puts it, sculpture developed another dialogue with the audience by losing its base. Krauss refers to Robert Morris’s “Green Gallery Installation” (1964), which she describes as “quasi-architectural integers” that blur the difference between sculptural and architectural space. In this way, the sculpture shows the alienation of the object and becomes a “pure negative.” Both the spatial elements installed in the gallery and the mirrored boxes installed outdoors amidst the landscape of grass and trees – although constantly visible in the landscape – disrupt continuity in nature. In this way, sculpture shifted from “the addition of the *not-landscape* to the *not-architecture*.”<sup>16</sup>

Looking more carefully to this last concept, Krauss analyses the works of artists like Robert Irwin, Sol LeWitt, Bruce Nauman, Richard Serra or Christo, who investigated “the possibilities of architecture” and “not-architecture” through interventions in the “real space of architecture,” “through partial reconstruction” or “drawing,” and became “a process of mapping the axiomatic features of the architectural experience — the abstract conditions of openness and closure — onto the reality of a given space.”<sup>17</sup> In this way, the expanded field in Krauss’s opening “provides both for an expanded but finite set of related positions for a given artist to occupy and explore, and for an organization of work that is not dictated by the conditions of a particular medium...”<sup>18</sup>

### (Un)aesthetics in Architecture

In the field of art, architecture, and philosophy, the history of (un)aesthetics is not as common as the history of aesthetics and beauty. Although this concept has started to emerge mainly in contemporary art practices and literature, in architecture it has been generally considered within the framework of functionalist approaches, in which the reason behind our admiration of buildings lies within the concept of “means,” as functionalism “asserts that we appreciate the aptness of form to function.”<sup>19</sup> This theoretical shift comes after a long architectural history built on concepts like “symmetry” and “harmony” introduced by Vitruvius and reworked by Alberti; and after a previous shift from “ornament” or “mass” as discussed by Ruskin, to the

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

12 Michael Fried, *Art and Objecthood: Essays and Reviews* (Chicago: The University of Chicago Press, 1998), 157.

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

14 Claire Bishop, *Installation Art* (London: Tate Publishing, 2005), 6.

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

16 Rosalind Krauss, “Sculpture in the Expanded Field,” *October* 8 (1979): 36.

17 *Ibid.*, 41.

18 *Ibid.*, 42-43.

19 Roger Scruton, “Architectural Aesthetics,” *British Journal of Aesthetics* 13 (4) (1973): 328. doi: 10.1093/bjaesthetics/13.4.327.

view expressed by Heinrich Wölfflin and Paul Frankl, that “the object of appreciation is space, or the play of interlocking spaces.”<sup>20</sup>

However, these considerations are rather pertinent to architecture regarded as an autonomous field and artefact, and less consistent with the current views of both architecture and the arts, as territories of engagement with urgent matters of the public sphere. Perhaps like no time before, the past six decades have built the case for contemporary art and architecture as public phenomena, which are to be judged by other criteria. Due to architecture’s relation with public and social issues, its judgment has been predominantly invaded by factors such as “cost, practicality, or environmental impact.”<sup>21</sup> Unlike the field of art, the concept of (un) aesthetics in architecture is more difficult to diagnose, but less relative and technical, in functional and utilitarian terms. For example, modernist habitation has been evaluated as “ugly” or “unpleasant” in the sense that it did not meet the basic needs of human beings. Many iconic modernist buildings such as high-rise blocks, urban housing, or postmodern buildings have been criticized from this perspective, and uninhabitable urban neighborhoods have been interpreted by their users as “ugly.”

According to François Laruelle, non-aesthetics is not directly present in philosophy, but it has a resemblance to the philosophical concept of *non-philosophy*, “of which it seems to present a sort of analogical extension in the form of a particular application to the artistic domain.” Therefore, non-aesthetics emerges as “a new way of thinking philosophy in resort to peripheral categories that traditionally belong to the artistic domain.”<sup>22</sup> Non-aesthetics or (un)aesthetics can be related to the debates on ugliness in art and architectural history. One of the early texts on ugliness is German philosopher Karl Rosenkranz’s “Ästhetik des Hässlichen” [Aesthetics of Ugliness, 1853], in which he “described how ugliness is not merely the inverse of beauty or a negative entity but rather a condition in itself.”<sup>23</sup> “Rosenkranz argued that the ugly cannot proceed very far along a path toward abstraction, toward an autonomous essence, in the manner of beauty.”<sup>24</sup>

Timothy Hyde mentions that ugliness emerges as a term in contemporary aesthetics in terms of the “instrumentality of aesthetic judgment.” The importance of ugliness as a “category of judgment” is that it prevents an object from being judged from a “purely aesthetic” point of view.<sup>25</sup> Gretchen Henderson considers ugliness as something “deformed, grotesque, monstrous, degenerate, asymmetric, crooked, bestial, freakish, unruly, disproportionate...”<sup>26</sup> writing that “Ugly is based in the physical world yet remains conceptual - ambiguous, adaptable, anamorphic, relational,”<sup>27</sup> and transgresses “the border between ‘us’ and ‘them.’”<sup>28</sup>

Similarly, the brutalist language of the 1970s has been interpreted as a dull, discreet, or failed architecture and thought to be not aesthetic. Apart from the values that architecture represents semantically and symbolically, the elements that make it (un)aesthetic are embedded in the mind of the audience, a specific user group, or the observer looking at it, because of the fact that those elements may be surprising and sometimes shocking, and hence damage and upset performative expectations.

In terms of art and architecture, Mark Cousins mentions the ugly as “an object which is experienced both as being there and as something that should not be there.” Ugly is something

20 Ibid., 333.

21 Timothy Hyde, *Ugliness and Judgment on Architecture in the Public Eye* (Princeton and Oxford: Princeton University Press, 2019), 3.

22 François Laruelle, *Dictionary of Non-Philosophy*, trans. Taylor Adkins (Minneapolis: Univocal, 2013), 87.

23 Gretchen, E. Henderson, *Ugliness: A Cultural History* (London: Reaktion Books, 2015), 12.

24 Hyde, *Ugliness and Judgment*, 8.

25 Ibid., 3.

26 Henderson, “*Ugliness: A Cultural History*,” 10.

27 Ibid., 17.

28 Ibid., 128.



“which is in the wrong place,” a definition which is detached from aesthetics...<sup>29</sup> Ugliness, he continues, “...arises as and when the interior of the existence of an object exceeds, for a subject, its representational exterior.”<sup>30</sup>

Based on these ideas on ugliness, waste materials used in installations—such as residues, found object, or recycling process—allow the artist to transfer the object or architectural element and turn it into a mysterious, uncanny, and unfamiliar encounter for the viewer. Although material (as isolated matter) is not the visible and unique component of the artwork, but genetically forms the latter’s meaning, it can be (un)aesthetic, depending on its inherent meaning such as in conceptual artist John Baldessari’s *Cremation Project, Corpus Wafers* (1969). This work—in which Baldessari burned the accumulation of thirteen years of his paintings (1953-1966) in a mortuary, baked them, and made cookies with their ashes and flour—can be cited as an example of the non-existence of materiality in art. By destroying his past works, placing them in boxes and jars in a gallery, and declaring the death of pictures in a local newspaper, Baldessari represented the death of an era in his art and pointed to a rebirth from the ashes, and a return from painting to conceptual art in art.<sup>31</sup> For Baldessari, the works of art did not need to exist materially.<sup>32</sup> This action also represented “the end of art.”

### Architectural Installations as Atypical Forms

The most important difference that separates an architectural product or a building from an object is not in referencing itself in an autonomous way, but in coexisting with its (in)visible environment shaped by its users. Installation art, with its characteristic of creating an awareness of its surroundings and coexisting with them, thus is in close contact with architecture.

The difference between art installations and architectural installations is that the latter “embodies the practice of experimentation.”<sup>33</sup> Architectural installations open up space for “criticism and reflection” as well as the freedom for architects to “experiment” through their “ephemerality.” In this aspect, Mark Robbins argues that “an installation is a distillation of the experiences of architecture.”<sup>34</sup> Architectural installations can be extended from Mary Miss’s landscapes to Vito Acconci’s *Collision House* (1981) and to Arne Quinze’s red entropic structures in urban space. Jane Rendell writes that architecture and art are independent, that through “performing practices, art can focus attention on the critical possibilities of a site or place, encapsulated in a particular moment in time or set of activities.”<sup>35</sup>

Installations aim to experiment with “both the material and social dimensions of architecture,” create “conversations both with academics and the general public about the built environment” and educate “future architects.”<sup>36</sup> Although not having such a focused goal, installations create important experiences for architects to discover intellectual and physical construction possibilities. The works in the gallery, in the open area, or in the public area are important in creating interactions with the user or perceiver and in observing the architect’s own practices. Although architectural installations resemble artistic installations in terms of scale, spatial features, whether they are functional or temporarily functional in reality, and so on, they share “site-specific” features, “spatiality, engagement of the viewer and temporality,” as Kossak

29 Mark Cousins, “The Ugly” (Part 1), *AA Files* (28) (1994): 63. <https://www.jstor.org/stable/29543923>.

30 Mark Cousins, “The Ugly” (Part 2), *AA Files* (29) (1995): 3. <https://www.jstor.org/stable/29543944>.

31 Jennifer Mundy, “The Death of Painting. Lost Art, Theme ‘Destroyed,’” *Tate* (2013): 3. <http://galleryoflostart.com/>, accessed May 15, 2020.

32 Mundy, “The Death of Painting,” 2.

33 Kossak, “Exhibiting Architecture,” 119.

34 Sarah Bonnemaison and Ronit Eisenbach, *Installations by Architects, Experiments in Building and Design* (New York: Princeton Architectural Press, 2009), 14.

35 Jane Rendell, *Art and Architecture: A Place Between* (New York: I.B. Tauris & Co Ltd., 2006), 29.

36 Bonnemaison and Eisenbach, *Installations*, 183.

argues.<sup>37</sup> The “engagement of the viewer” is an intrinsic trait of installation art that can be actively perceived and tested with the participation of the audience at both a physical and mental level. Temporality is related to the replacement and establishment of the installation in a context other than the production space, whether built in a studio, a gallery, or on a site.

As Kossak notes, architects always needed spaces to meditate and think of their ideas “beyond the studio and before the built building.”<sup>38</sup> In the Renaissance period, the dramaturgical plays, masques, festivals and later theatre *scena* provided spatial experiments and “possibilities for architectural installations” on a larger scale. Early installations were observed as ideal city spaces with a perspective, such as in the stage design of the Teatro Olimpico, designed by Palladio and completed by Scamozzi in Vicenza in 1585.<sup>39</sup> Architectural installations as atypical architecture began with the avant-garde art of the 1920s and continued after World War II. However, architecture’s break from the ground started with modern architecture. Architecture’s detachment from the ground triggered it to gain more autonomy and become more prominent.

In “times of social and political revolutions,” architects preferred public spaces for their architectural interventions. Public space provided a “social and spatial context” and a direct encounter with a wider audience in both revolutionary France (1789-1795) and Russia (1917-1924).<sup>40</sup> As constructive experiments, these installations started with the Russian Constructivists and included El Lissitzky’s *Proun Room* (1923) and Vladimir Tatlin’s *Monument of the Third International*—a small-scale model which references communism, and which is regarded as one of the most important examples of Constructivism. Tatlin, Stenberg, Rodchenko, Ioganson, and Medunetsky used the term “laboratory work” for their work in the studio, gallery exhibitions, and theatre, and their experiments aimed at experiencing and testing out new architectural expressions, constructions or spatial figurations that could contribute to the solution of some utilitarian task. Three-dimensional constructions displayed the “complex assemblage of elementary architectural elements,” from timber-frame to cantilevers to machines for exploring new expressions for a changing society.<sup>41</sup>

Other installations included the painted abstract environments of de Stijl artists, and Kurt Schwitters’s *Merzbau*, which emerged over time in physical space and interrogated the idea of architecture.<sup>42</sup> In the *Proun Room*, El Lissitzky designed a space “active for the viewer” that demanded their movement through the exhibition. El Lissitzky’s *Raum für konstruktive Kunst [Room for Constructivist Art]*—designed for *Internationale Ausstellung* in Dresden in 1926—allowed the viewers “to control their experience of viewing the art on the walls” through shifting panels.<sup>43</sup> On the other hand, Schwitters’ Hannover-based *Merzbau* (1923-1943) was a growing structure within Schwitters’ apartment based on the Dada and Constructivist movements, which was initially conceived as a three-dimensional collage of linear forms of wood and plaster and later turned out into an architectural space, involving its exterior. Schwitters’ apartment soon became an unfinished “walk-through environment” for a period of 20 years and was eventually bombed during the war.<sup>44</sup>

37 Kossak, “Exhibiting Architecture,” 118.

38 *Ibid.*, 120.

39 The layout is a “semi-circular arrangement for the audience and the perspectival *scena* of the stage had already been developed theoretically by architects like Peruzzi or Serlio.” *Ibid.*, 120, 121.

40 *Ibid.*, 124.

41 “The Magnanimous Cuckold” (1921) realised for third OBMOKU exhibition in Moscow and “*Izvestiya pavilion*” by Niva, Gladkov and Kester at the 1923 *All Union Agricultural Exhibition* in Moscow. “This form of traditional theatre space, where the audience or the viewer is separated from Palladio and Scamozzi’s ‘scena’ or Popova’s constructions, contradicts the ‘immersion of the viewer’ in the installation, in that it does not allow for the viewer to be physically immersed in the installation itself. ... Immersivity is experienced vicariously, whereby it is the actor who performs the spatial penetration of the installation.” *Ibid.*, 122, 123.

42 Reiss, *From Margin to Center*, xxiii.

43 *Ibid.*, xxiv.

44 Bonnemaïson and Eisenbach, *Installations*, 16, 17.

In the 1950s, the Situationists discovered the notion of “play” in installations as an essential trait that provided alternative and experimental ways of mapping urban and architectural spaces and relations within shifting socio-political contexts. After the 1960s, artists and architects engaged in “perception, performance and experience,” decreasing architecture’s impetus as a shelter for “physical survival” and shifting instead “to social activity.”<sup>45</sup> Installation art has been shaped by the happenings movement and other approaches that have emerged since the 1960s. In today’s digital age, with novel approaches such as augmented reality, VR technologies, and particle animation evident in the works of artists like Refik Anadol, installations demand a different interaction between subject and object.

The limiting nature of architecture, due to its constructional reality, does not find a place in architectural installations and art installations. Architectural installation is a process, a methodology for thinking, which also allows for the observation of space, the built environment, and its interaction with the audience. In this way, as Bonnemaïson and Eisenbach noted, it is “not the end product,” but rather aims to examine and broaden the “conversation about the built environment, or [expand] ways that architecture can participate...”, and thus to promote intellectual discourse both inside and outside the discipline.<sup>46</sup>

In architectural installations, (un)aesthetics emerges not only in art itself, but also as a result of the artist’s activism and radical stand against mainstream practices that can be considered milestones of contemporary architectural installations. One of the most important features that brings architectural installations closer to art installations is actually a content convergence of “formlessness” rather than physical resemblance and scale relationship. Formlessness in architecture is a liberation that emerges beyond boundaries and liberates thought—which is the essence of architecture—and in artistic installations affects the audience.

In architectural installations, we are accustomed to seeing in every aspect, which includes the urgency of experiencing; one of the reasons for this is that what appears in our minds as an architectural structure has a functional, utilitarian value. In this sense, architectural buildings and installations are costly, technical, and long to construct. By contrast, a temporary building may be an urge to miss the vital and existential potential that “life”—that is, architecture as a living space—offers us. The desire to see and experience the space disappoints our permanent expectations of the space. The destruction of buildings at the end of their existence is also related to this: a permanent place that must always stand still takes something from us when it turns into a ruin, and as a human-made object that is defeated by the victory of nature and time, the space has now become fragmented.

### Radical Architectural Installations

Radical architectural installations demolish the boundaries of conventional architectural practice, i.e. the form of building or constructing a space. Conversely, they emerge as imageless or formless, sometimes perceived as useless; however, they convey a strong message or an idea by intervening in or destroying—instead of constructing—an idea or physical space. They exist between art and architecture.

Most of the works of art related to architecture, sculpture, and industrial design in the 1960s were affected by technology, individual alienation, and utopianism. With the advent of inflatable technologies and plastic molding, the works of the Austrian collective Haus-Rucker-Co and Walter Pichler conceived of a common vision shared by experimental and avant-garde architecture.

45 Kossak, “Exhibiting Architecture,” 124.

46 Bonnemaïson and Eisenbach, *Installations*, 183.

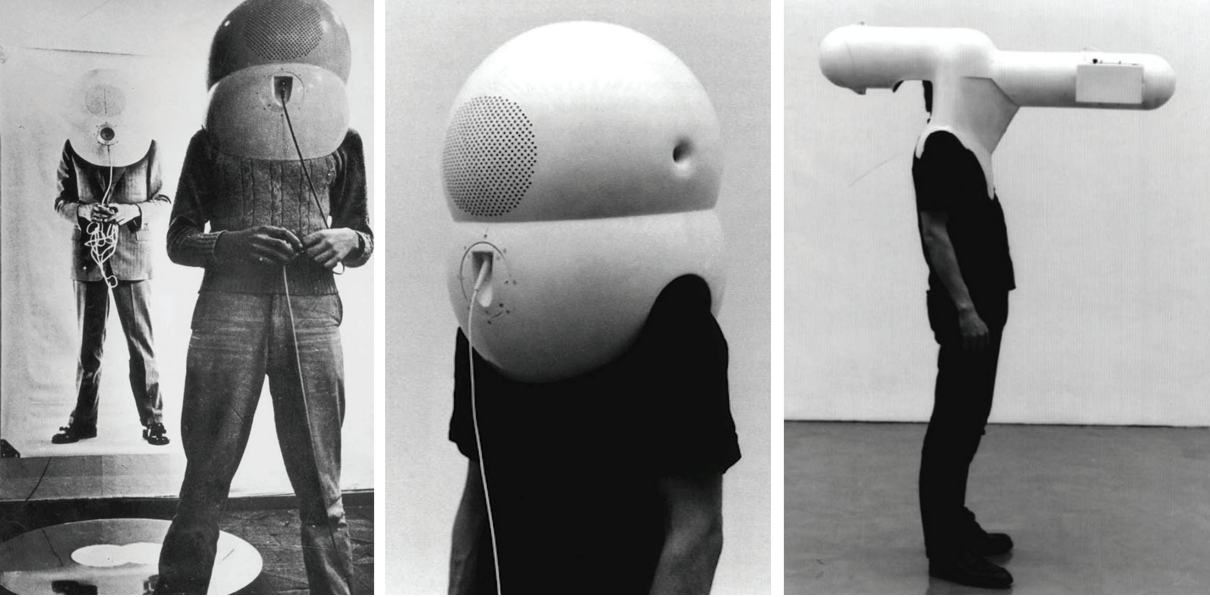


Fig. 2: Futuristic inflatables installation, between art, architecture and industrial design, *TV-Helmet (Portable living room)* and *Prototypes* (1967), Walter Pichler (from left to right)

In the late 1960s, with the emergence of pneumatic structures as a new form of technology, they soon began to share a common background with “grassroots protests,” because, according to architectural historian Marc Dessauce, “they animate and transport us on the promise of an imminent passage into a perfected future.”<sup>47</sup> The inflatables made it possible for the quick installation of advertising structures and were also a rebellion against “the rectilinearity of buttoned-down mainstream Modernism” with their fluid forms. *Oasis* (1972) by Haus-Rucker-Co, which emerged as an “architectural protuberance on a classical facade,” represents a kind of emergency exit.<sup>48</sup>

For example, the Zünd-up (1969-1972) artistic collective was looking for a new relationship between technology and humans, combining happenings, mail-art, and architecture with political statements, hence “engaging social, political and new aesthetic viewpoints and ideas like participation in a provoking way.”<sup>49</sup> Inspired by motorbikes, photomontages, and mechanics, Zünd-up mixed together cityscapes and human bodies in parts of engines and pipes.<sup>50</sup>

“Wearable” inflatables of the architect and artist Walter Pichler, such as *TV-Helmet (Portable Living Room)* (1967) and *Prototypes* (1967), are both pieces of sculpture and industrial design, as well as wearable prostheses. These designs emerged as “three-dimensional expressions of individual perception in the age of communication technology.” To free architecture from construction, Pichler’s alien and futuristic personal headwear “extended the body by means of a television set,”<sup>51</sup> as in his work *Tragbares Wohnzimmer [Wearable Living Room]* (1967) (Fig. 2).<sup>52</sup> Kaplan and Ted Krueger’s “use of the machine” was seen as:

“both a critique of functionalism and a call for hands-on invention that transcends corporate goals and limits. For Kaplan and Krueger, paradox and contradiction confound existing institutions of power, but at the same time are political opportunities for the rest of us.”<sup>53</sup>

47 Ibid., 19.

48 Ibid., 18-19.

49 “Zünd-up (a),” accessed April 17, 2020, <https://www.zuend-up.com/english/english.html>.

50 “Zünd-up (b),” FRAC, accessed April 17, 2020, [http://www.frac-centre.fr/\\_en/art-and-architecture-collection/rub/rubauthors-316.html?authID=269](http://www.frac-centre.fr/_en/art-and-architecture-collection/rub/rubauthors-316.html?authID=269).

51 Bonnemaïson and Eisenbach, *Installations*, 17.

52 “Walter Pichler - Austrian Avant-Garde Architectural Artist,” Voices of East Anglia, accessed May 13, 2020, <http://www.voicesofeastanglia.com/2014/09/walter-pichler-austrian-avant-garde-architectural-artist.html>.

53 “Mosquitoes,” Lebbeus Woods, accessed June 03, 2020, <https://lebbeuswoods.wordpress.com/2010/05/10/mosquitoes/>.

Simultaneously, Archigram and Lebbeus Woods' opposing architecture, which used technology and machinery, are some of the installations that have emerged as unrealized radical urban interventions. However, the absence of these experimental futuristic visions and dreams did not diminish their value within the context of art, architecture, and installation.

One of the features that brings the object of installation art to architecture is the relationship between function and scale. With the differentiation of scale, the art object—apart from monuments—acquires penetrating spatial features, such as an architectural space that creates inhabitation. But it's not just the scale that creates the latter. As alienating objects of architecture, monolithic installations draw the boundaries between non-object and building.

"The surface of the monolithic is characteristically independent of such constraints: it is designed with distinct and often uncompromising formal features that tend to set it apart from the 'body' of the building."<sup>54</sup>

According to Machado and El-Khoury, monolithic installations also "have uncanny beauty." Container-shaped monolithic installations are mysterious, shocking, and their unexpected expression represents a mystery under their alienated outer shell. In other words, unlike the integral and "repressive authority" of the "formed," this architecture insistently punishes the liberating "virtues of [the] formless." The installations are paradoxical because of their radical internal and external realities, because they consciously carry their monolithic characters into the aesthetic field. The gestalt of the building cannot be grasped without navigating around the building. Its identity as an object depends on the perception of movements that change over time. Monolithic facilities, such as sculpture formations and accessories attached to the urban fabric—which adorn the city, add emphasis to it, and form its identity—are the independent installations that have become the icons of their place.<sup>55</sup>

Some of the radical architectural installations that can be cited as large-scale works include the splitting series by artist and architect Gordon Matta-Clark, whose works *Splitting: Four Corners* (1974), *Conical Intersect* (1975), and *Office Baroque* (1977), split existing concrete buildings in half and divided existing real estates into symmetrical flat and planar sections. These solid geometric cuts mapped "geometrical considerations onto broader architectural concerns such as movement and space."<sup>56</sup> Building dissections by Matta-Clark "against architecture" stemmed from his architectural education, in which he developed his ideas against "object-based art" through attacking "the formal preoccupations of high modernism" and the "valorization of form."<sup>57</sup> These acts transgressed the idea of architectural existence – in modern terms, namely, that a building must exist and resist time. However, his works show the idea of decay in architectural practice. By transforming the buildings into a ruinous state, he showed how spaces were designed to be unusable, and on a higher level, how architecture, city planning, and the architectural discourse "about making space without building it" failed.<sup>58</sup> This idea was also shared by members in "Anarchitecture," a collaborative exhibition held in London in 1974. In this exhibition, Matta-Clark exhibited works on his ideas about "the sculptural use of space" (Fig. 3).<sup>59</sup> For Matta-Clark,

54 Machado and El-Khoury mention that, the "external economy" of monolithic installations "is achieved at the cost of formal and material excesses and calibrated for intended effects." Machado and El-Khoury, *Monolithic Architecture*, 13-20.

55 *Ibid.*, 20.

56 Stephen Walker, "Gordon Matta-Clark's Building Dissections," in *Architectures: Modernism and After*, ed. Andrew Ballantyne (Malden, Oxford, Carlton: Blackwell Publishing, 2004), 126. <https://doi.org/10.1002/9780470774229.ch5>.

57 Stephen Walker, "Gordon Matta-Clark: Matter, Materiality, Entropy, Alchemy," in *Material Matters: Architecture and Material Practice*, ed. Katie Lloyd Thomas, trans. Adrian Jackson (Abingdon, Oxon: Routledge, 2007), 44.

58 Gordon Matta-Clark au Jeu de Paume. Paris, August 17, 2018, <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=uHORQuidVUM>, accessed May 3, 2020.

59 James Attlee, "Towards Anarchitecture: Gordon Matta-Clark and Le Corbusier," *Tate Papers*, 7 (2007). <https://www.tate.org.uk/research/publications/tate-papers/07/towards-anarchitecture-gordon-matta-clark-and-le-corbusier>, accessed May 17, 2020.





Fig. 3: *Splitting: Four Corners* (1974), Gordon Matta-Clark

Fig. 4: *Land(e)scape*, Marco Casagrande, Sami Rintala, Savonlinna, Finlandiya, 1999 (Rintala Eggertsson Architects (n.d.))

Fig. 5: *Untitled (House)*, Rachel Whiteread, London, 1993, demolished in 1994

anarchitecture was the “search for qualities beyond the rule,” which “attempts to solve no problem but to rejoice in an informed well-intended celebration of conditions that best describe and locate a place” through “inventive irrationality.”<sup>60</sup> Anarchitecture displayed the “weakness” of architecture, its contradictions and connection “between architectural technique or knowledge.”<sup>61</sup>

Many of Matta-Clark’s splits implied the presence of a spectator, whether they could visit their works or not. This presence also signaled a “découpage and montage,” in Lefebvre’s terms, “in the architectural or real estate spaces he worked with.”<sup>62</sup> This action became a protest against the snapshot as a consumable image from a single point of view, because the experience of Splitting would change depending on the movement of the viewer. The horizontal and vertical movements in plan and section are interrupted by the cuts, moving architecture “toward attaining a ‘whole-object’ quality that can be understood once and for all.”<sup>63</sup>

Another attempt to destroy the idea of the building is Marco Casagrande and Sami Rintala’s *Land(e)scape* (1999) installation in Savonlinna in the countryside of Finland. The temporary installation was realized as a protest in order to raise awareness of the loss of “the traditional Finnish landscape and farming practices” and signified “a protest against the endless growth of the low-density suburbs.”<sup>64</sup> In the work, three reinforced abandoned barns were raised on ten-meter columns, thus acting against the farms of new industrial and agricultural techniques which left the multifunctional Finnish traditional buildings unnecessary and useless. Following the setting on fire of the barns, the temporary operation made the barns “march to death” and created a sublime feeling, as architectural critic Slessor notes (Fig. 4).<sup>65</sup>

Donald Kuspit talks about the un-aesthetics brought about by Duchamp’s previous installations. The post-aesthetic character of the art implies an uncanny effect, and is defined by Frank Stella as the end of art. According to this view, art has “no important human use”, because it “no longer further[s] personal autonomy and critical freedom, strengthening the ego against the social superego as well as the instincts, both of which stifle individuality with conformity.”<sup>66</sup>

Another installation, *House* (1993, demolished 1994), by artist Rachel Whiteread was a brutal, monolithic concrete cast of the intimacy of a temporary Victorian house. In this work, the idea of the house emerged as a reverse transfer of the negative interior to the shell of the space—i.e. the flow of the interior and privacy of the house with a concrete image. As a monument to the idea of the “house,” the work challenged the concepts of community, place, and security, problematizing “the politics of geography and location that necessarily lead to protracted discussions about identity and nationhood.” The house was a “fossil [...] filled up with liquid concrete” and was externalized by all traces transferred to the interior cavity and volumetric surfaces. The house itself served as a mold for this process, which was later demolished. Therefore, a new architecture emerged metaphorically from the ashes of the existing architectonic object (Fig. 5).<sup>67</sup>

60 Stephen Walker, *Gordon Matta-Clark: Art, Architecture and the Attack on Modernism* (London, New York: Tauris, 2009), 19.

61 *Ibid.*, 152.

62 Stephen Walker, “Gordon Matta-Clark: Drawing on Architecture,” *Grey Room*, 18 (2005): 125. [10.1162/1526381043320787](https://doi.org/10.1162/1526381043320787).

63 Walker, *Gordon Matta-Clark’s Building*, 131.

64 Catherine Slessor, “Burning Passion,” *Architecture Review* (Dec 1999). <https://www.casagrandelaboratory.com/portfolio/landscape/>, accessed May 11, 2020.

65 *Ibid.*

66 Donald Kuspit, *The End of Art* (Cambridge University Press, New York, 2004), 14.

67 Shelley Hornstein, *Losing Site: Architecture, Memory and Place* (Farnham, Surrey, UK: Ashgate, 2011), 88-89.

Whiteread's *House* installation takes the emphasis of a building to be demolished as a relief of the space by the negative, in a sense externalizing its lost spirit. In this context, the work itself appears as a silent and immanent reaction to the consumption cycle and production paths of spaces. Could this dying spirit of architecture be a metaphysical reading in cycles of overproduction and consumption? Similar to *House* was Whiteread's 1990 installation *Ghost*, in which the ghost of the spaces was frozen with a reverse-casting technique. According to Hornstein, Whiteread's *House* can also be seen in terms of Freud's *heimlich* and *unheimlich* aspects. Freud mentioned the *unheimlich* [uncanny] in his article, "Uncanny" (1919). *Unheimlich* is the opposite of *heimlich* [homely] and *heimisch* [native], *heimelich*, and *heimelig*, and means "belonging to the house, not strange, familiar, tame, intimate, friendly." *Unheimlich*, on the other hand, is related to something "frightening," and is "what arouses dread and horror," and is not familiar.<sup>68</sup>

### (Un)Aesthetics of Radical Installations

According to Benjamin, "with the ready-made, what occurs is that the interruption of the signifying system in which the object was initially located distrusts the space in which it comes to be placed." When a ready-made object is repositioned, it transcends more than simple functionality into a work of art.<sup>69</sup> There are differences between object-oriented, functionalist theories of beauty and subject-oriented perspectives. Object-oriented beauty theories are classical and concern external vision of the object, such as its proportion and composition. These approaches "reduce the experience of beauty to a concept."<sup>70</sup> On the other hand, functionalist theories of beauty approach aesthetics with the belief that "visual pleasure is found in the object"; these theories are also object-oriented and value the usability of the object. Subject-oriented perspectives, meanwhile, evaluate a subjective dialogue of "experiencing, cultivating and valuing the beautiful."<sup>71</sup>

Probing into these contemporary sensibilities, Paul Crowther first retraces Burke's idea of the sublime, as the sensation of vast, high objects, because their shock reminds us of our aliveness. In order for an installation to be sublime, it must test "our perceptual or imaginative resources, [and] at the same time make the scope of rational comprehension more vivid."<sup>72</sup> Burke described the sublime as "productive of the strongest emotion"<sup>73</sup> and distinguished the beautiful from the sublime. According to Burke, the sublime is a "powerful feeling mixed with "astonishment" as "a state of the soul."<sup>74</sup> Towards the end of the last century, Lyotard writes that through art, the "dumb," "immobilized" and "dead" soul returns "to the agitated zone between life and death, and this agitation is its health and its life." Beauty gives a positive pleasure, but "pain and impending death" create a stronger satisfaction. Building on Burke's ideas, Lyotard considers that the feeling of sublime arises from such terror, and such terror mixed with pleasure.<sup>75</sup> Küpflen considers sublimity as "the

68 Sigmund Freud, *The Standard Edition of the Complete Psychological Woks of Sigmund Freud*, vol. XVII, ed. and trans. James Strachey (London, The Hogarth Press, 1925), 220, 222.

69 Andrew Benjamin, "Matter and Meaning: On Installations," *AD, Art and Design Installation Art* 30 (1993): 32-33.

70 Herman Parret, "On the Beautiful and the Ugly," *Trans/Form/Ação*, 34, 2 (2011): 24.

71 For subject-oriented approach, Kant's idea of "Rührung" (emotion being touched) refers to: "Beauty frees us from the dungeon of desire while desire and beauty are of different orders." Parret, "On the Beautiful," 25, 26.

72 Paul Crowther, "The Postmodern Sublime/ Installation and Assemblage Art," *AD, The Contemporary Sublime: Sensibilities of Transcendence and Shock* 40 (1995): 10-17.

73 Edmund Burke, *A Philosophical Inquiry into the Origin of our Ideas of the Sublime and Beautiful* (London, Haymarket: Thomas M'Lean, 1823), 45.

74 *Ibid.*, 73.

75 Jean-Francois Lyotard, "The Sublime and the Avant Garde," *Paragraph* 6 (1985): 11.

power of our mind,” rather than something attributed to the object itself. Its feeling “is the feeling of the recognition of the supremacy of our reason over our sensible nature and accordingly it is a feeling of respect.”<sup>76</sup>

Then, Crowther turns to Kant’s idea of the sublime, which he considers more closely related to contemporary culture, depending on our “rational comprehension capacities” and “our ability to create and discover meaning,” revitalized by “perceptual and imaginative excess.”<sup>77</sup> For Kant, the sublime is “absolutely great.” It is based on the relationship between transcendental and rational boundaries. “... what can be grasped with our own rational abilities is completely perfect [...] it is the disposition of the mind resulting from a certain representation occupying the reflective judgment, but not the object, which is to be called sublime. [...] [it] demonstrates a faculty of the mind that surpasses every measure of the senses.”<sup>78</sup> While evaluating nature and our aesthetic judgment, Kant divided the sublime mathematically and dynamically in terms of cognition and desire. The mathematically sublime allows us to “recognize our physical powerlessness” depending on the “measurability” in our “mind [of our] superiority over nature” and vice versa, while their power allows us to judge “ourselves as independent of it and [holding] a superiority over nature on which is grounded a self-preservation of quite another kind than that which can be threatened and endangered by nature outside us.” In the dynamically sublime, “an object of fear”—such as lightning, thunder, volcanoes, or hurricanes—with devastating effects “make[s] our capacity to resist into an insignificant trifle in comparison with [its] power.” However, that object becomes more attractive and fearful when we feel safe.<sup>79</sup>

On the other hand, Parret goes back to Kant to inquire whether we can aesthetically experience ugliness and if formlessness lead[s] to ugliness, or if there is “a formless beauty.” Ugliness, not being the “opposite” or “contradictory” of the beautiful—but rather its “*antipodal*”—“is formless and lacks internal structure, balance and symmetry”. It is “is not complete, it deviates from the norm...”<sup>80</sup> For Kant, “the ugly is not considered as opposed to the beautiful but as a continuation of the sublime: the extremely-sublime is ugly.” Ugly is “not an aesthetic value or category but a post-aesthetic one.” Parret concludes that “contemporary arts can no longer be judged and valued according to the quality of the aesthetic categories, beginning with the beautiful, but according to the intensity of the impact on the interests of our faculties.”<sup>81</sup>

Onorato argues that “the aesthetic power of installation art does not reside in the singular, defiant objects but in an ability to become, rather than merely represent, the continuum of real experience by responding to specific situations”.<sup>82</sup> Crowther meanwhile notes that the reason why installations appeared prominently after the 1960s is related to the deconstructive tendencies of the age, and the growing interest in “theoretical issues amongst artists and critics.”<sup>83</sup>

76 Mojca Küplen, “The Sublime, Ugliness and Contemporary Art: A Kantian Perspective,” *Working Papers in Philosophy* 1 (2016): 10-11.

77 Crowther, “The Postmodern Sublime,” 11.

78 Immanuel Kant, *The Critique of Judgment*, ed. Paul Guyer, trans. Paul Guyer and Eric Matthews (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2000), 131-134.

79 *Ibid.*, 144-145.

80 For Valéry, “Beauty is a kind of death”, and “aesthetics is no longer a science of the beautiful but it became a science of sensations, a science of a convulsive subjectivity whose sensitivity functions chaotically and is context-dependent”. “The idea of classic aesthetics of the beautiful” has been transformed in contemporary art. Parret, “On the Beautiful,” 22-23; 29.

81 *Ibid.*, 33.

82 Ronald J. Onorato, “Blurring the Boundaries: Installation Art 1969-1996,” in *Museum of Contemporary Art, Exhibition Catalogue*, ed. Hugh Marlais Davies, Ronald J. Onorato, and Anne Farrell (San Diego: Museum of Contemporary Art, 1997), 13.

83 Crowther, “The Postmodern Sublime,” 12.



In contemporary aesthetics, Umberto Eco mentions that “a work of art” is a unique work “while at the same time constituting an open product on account of its susceptibility to countless different interpretations which do not impinge on its unadulterable specificity.”<sup>84</sup> In this context, “every reception of a work of art is both an interpretation and a performance of it, because in every perception the work takes on a fresh perspective for itself.”<sup>85</sup>

The radical installations that have the potential to break aesthetic perceptions and judgments in between art and architecture liberate architectural thinking from templates. After all, architecture is controlled by the human hand, and therefore, we think that we can control this cultural product. It may stem from what we instinctively attribute our desire to be in life and to feel at home in the artificial or human-made architecture. By confronting (un)aesthetic architectural installations, the latter surprise us.

### Final Words

According to Krauss, “the logic of the space of postmodernist practice is no longer organized around the definition of a given medium on the grounds of material, or, for that matter, the perception of material.”<sup>86</sup> Installation art—which is at the center of today’s performance-oriented art and architecture studies—has abandoned the old physical boundaries of the object as a result of its expansion within a contemporary art context and especially within a spatial context.

The installations are a transformative process for both artists and architects, and offer new possibilities for problematizing new architectural problems, social conflicts, and interactions. These uncanny and radical works, which have the potential to break aesthetic perceptions and judgments in between art and architecture, trigger change, and liberate architectural thinking at the borders of the two disciplines and their relations. Radical architectural installations also appear as playful and temporary experiences that cannot be expressed in this context but possess the aim of touching and affecting the viewer to greater extent.

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85 *Ibid.*, 4.

86 Krauss, “Sculpture,” 42, 43.



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