

## A Report on Site-Specificity.

How could work transferred to another site, change its purpose/impact?

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In relation to site-specificity, an artwork with “a ‘proper’ relationship with its location, claiming an ‘original’ and fixed position” (Kaye, 2000) often has a set purpose and impact in and on, its surroundings. If an artwork of such concrete placement, both physically and ideologically, is displaced, the purpose will either cease to exist to its full ‘original’ state or transform with its environment. Two site-specific works will be discussed, one working against its site change, and the other working with it.



Meredith Monk: Juice (1969), Public Domain.

Firstly, to discuss site-specificity is the work of Meredith Monk titled *Juice* (1969). The performance artwork took place over three different sites, with each, Monk worked closely with the space and its changes. The first instalment was at the Solomon R. Guggenheim Museum in New York on November 7<sup>th</sup>, the second instalment was at the Barnard College's Minor Latham Playhouse between November 29<sup>th</sup> and December 1<sup>st</sup> and the last was at Monk's loft in lower Manhattan on December 7<sup>th</sup>. With each instalment the site and work became increasingly smaller and more personal. Starting of as a huge performance with vast space, 75

singer-dancers and a group of 4 performers, then changing its scale with the sites scale to something smaller, only having four performers from the first piece, as their own sperate figures. In the smallest, most personal site that is Monk's own loft, the previous pieces echo in the space through showcasing objects and costumes used in the other pieces, whilst the performers were only seen through video footage played in the site. With each changing site the impact changes with it: "the viewer's perception of the piece shifted from the monumental to the intimate during the progression of the piece from site to site" (ref book.) Monk, through her work adapts with her surroundings, creating each piece to reflect it instead of working against it, looking more specifically at Monk's last instalment, she doesn't take her smallest site to create something it is not, instead she works with the sites intimacy and creates a space that reflects it in the work and therefore impacts the viewer in the same fashion, as stated by Siri Enberg (1998) : " Monk chooses her sites carefully, often likening her role in the creation of her to that of an archaeologist in order, as she has said "to excavate a space and let it speak".".



Richard Serra: Tilted Arc (1981). Public Domain.

The second work is the Tilted Arc (1981) by Richard Serra, a 36.5 meter long, 3.6-meter-tall steel sculpture, sharing the height of the lowest point of the Great Wall of China, which in the same way blocks people's passage. Placed in the centre of the plaza in front of the Jacob K. Javits Federal Building in downtown New York City, the sculpture was commissioned by United States General Services Administration's Arts-In-Architecture Program. The sculpture was then destroyed by the same people. Influenced by the Land or Earth movement as a

reaction to ever growing fetishist commodification and restrictive traditions of art. The giant steel slab that was supposed to react to its environment and start rusting, was tilting towards the Jacob K. Javits Federal Building. The site, although not chosen by Serra, was a perfect opportunity for him to react to the space and silently comment on its politics through the sculpture which “highlights the power discrepancies between the business professionals who work in this plaza and the everyday population” (Julie Ault et al, 1999). To add further context, President Ronald Reagan upon entering the office in the same year the statue was built, attempted to “persuade congress to completely eradicate the National Endowment of the Arts by the year 1984” (William H. Honan, 1988). With the attempt to erase the arts, the tilt of the *Tilted Arc* not only comments on the imbalance of power between the people of the building and the public, but Serra also shoves his art into the face of the people who have tried to eliminate it. On March 15<sup>th</sup> 1989 the sculpture was destroyed, voted by a jury for its complete removal due to “Complaints over the sculpture ranged from claims that it was aesthetically unattractive; it increased the amount of graffiti, garbage and rats; it provided cover for muggers; and it caused an unbearable interference on the daily lives of the public” (Sherrill Jordan, 1987). Due to Serra’s vast amount of context within the site, as well as his reaction to the site which created the work, if the sculpture’s site were to be changed it would demolish the work, as quoted by Serra himself in 1994: “to move the work is to destroy the work.”. Due to everything the work is and stands for, its purpose and impact would be completely diminished within a different space, the materials which it was built with used the same materials as the buildings built around it. These factors would not match a different site. As well as this, the sculptures tilt would not be tilting towards what it was critiquing, as well as all the other context of the work, therefore, this piece of work cannot exist in a different space.

Monk and Serra, both react to the sites they are working with, creating a site-specific work that absorbs its surroundings to create work that reflects it. Monk, much more fluid with her work, switching sites multiple times and adapting each time, creates multiple different purposes that impact the work and the audience in significantly diverse ways. Serra, although also reacting to the space, creates a work that can only exist to its fullest extent to serve its purpose, unlike Monk's fluid and ever-moving work, Serra’s work has established a fixed position to its environment. Monk’s advantage of strictly reacting to the sites allows for the work to exist in many different spaces without losing its narrated impact, whereas with Serra's work that is so intensely fuelled not only by the sites structure and materials but also its highly specific socio-political context, the impact can only be maintained in the site it was built.

In conclusion, if work, hypothetically, would be transferred to another site, its change of purpose/impact would have to depend on the work itself and how deeply rooted it is in the site and everything that comes with the space. If the work responds to the site's architectural structure, it has a higher ability to change its purpose/impact in a way where the work is still able to stand and function as an art piece. The issues arise when the site-specific work is deeply rooted in the site it was created, in connection to its social, political, environmental etc. status. When such work is transferred, the purpose/impact becomes non-existent.

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