Replacing Home: From the Primordial Hut to Network Art

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On a rooftop in Manhattan, the partial reflection of one body is caught in a curving surface of mirrored glass, just as another body passes along the other side, both held together for a moment at the end of the afternoon sun, against the urban sprawl of New York below.

A woman wearing bright yellow clogs leads a group to and from forgotten, hidden slivers of city property, her soles trailing light footprints of chalk, marking out new temporary lines of access.

A shipping container, transformed into a fully functional living unit, docks into a vertical framework along a city’s shore just as another docks out, about to board a cargo ship for another destination.

Across Rwanda, Japan, Turkey, and India, makeshift homes are constructed within hours using paper tubes.

A long metal cage rolls down a city street, as its owner collects cans and bottles before climbing inside for the night.

A woman takes off her dress and transforms it into a dining table. Another puts on a reflective bodysuit, zipping it completely over her head.

Hours after logging onto a website and designing a dome of light, a young boy in Mexico City looks up to see a bright canopy of searchlights above the Zócalo square, blocks from his home, where just days before a riot had broken out in front of the Court of Justice.

Narratives of drift and dislocation
What do all these moments have in common? Each attests to the desire to be in place and to belong at home; each is attuned to the ways in which we currently experience spatial situation as dispersed throughout a world responding to mass tourism, catastrophic diasporas, digital accessibility and virtual realities. Occurring in time and across specific sites, and drawn from across contemporary art and architecture, these events—actualized and imagined by Dan Graham, Gordon Matta-Clark and Julia Mandle, Lot-ek, Krzysztof Wodiczko, Hussein Chalayan, Lucy Orta, and

Refuge Wear: Habitent, 1992-3, Lucy Orta
Courtesy of Galerie Peter Kilchmann, Zurich
Rafael Lozano-Hemmer—together offer a challenge to present-day narratives of drift and dislocation, and a response to our ever-present impulse to find home. *Replacing Home* examines the temporal methods and systems of being in place that coalesce once these practices are put in dialogue.

Neither fully celebrating our release from territorial borders, nor longing nostalgically for a return to tightly localized communities, architectural practices have offered models for situated dwelling that attempt to reconnect us to each other and to our ever-expanding spatial environment over time; but what can architecture learn from visual art about current experiences of belonging? How does art intervene into architectural understandings of home? This project proposes that the recent entwinement of art and architecture over issues of dwelling enacts an ongoing process of replacing home, beginning with a return to the primordial hut’s ideal mode of sustained dwelling, including a re-imagination of property ownership, modular constructions, and garments-shelters, and encompassing the possibility of belonging within digital networks.

**Fields of discourse**

*Replacing Home* joins a long conversation about the changing definition and experience of place that repeatedly surfaces during times of spatial expansion, from the writings of Vitruvius to network theory. Arguing that both contemporary art and architecture conceptualize spatial boundaries through performance-based frameworks of embodied presence, movement and experience, my project proposes that while place may no longer be a sustainable category, being in place is nonetheless possible, as home is always in the process of being re-situated. By emphasizing reusable modes rather than fixed constructions of place, art and architecture together suggest various durational systems of replacing home, in which specific sites can be revisited, material structures can be renewed, and dwellers can come into back into contact, over and over again.

In charting the under-studied intersections between contemporary art and architecture, my research will introduce a new framework for conceptualizing spatial situation that is based on similarities in the phenomenologically-based language of performance theory present in each discipline’s conceptualization of place and belonging.

Drawing on my interdisciplinary background in contemporary art history, architecture, and performance studies, I engage with recent art history publications that address our contemporary nomadic spatial experiences, for example in Miwon Kwon’s genealogical study of site-specific art practice (*One Place After Another: Site-Specific Art and Locational Identity*, MIT, 2002), in Nick Kaye’s incorporation of performance into site-based visual arts practice (*Site-Specific Art: Performance, Place and Documentation*, Routledge, 2000), in Alex Potts’s study of the changing relations between sculpture and viewer (*The Sculptural Imagination:...*)
My research is also inspired by studies that find continuities within the differences between pre-modern, modern, and contemporary spatial models for sustained situation. In particular, art historian David Summers’ *Real Spaces: World Art History and the Rise of Western Modernism* (Phaidon, 2003) provides a rich historical and theoretical foundation. While Summers does not explicitly deal with architectural structures, he does address the architectonic complexes within which objects are situated and viewed, proposing an enduring intersection between art and architectural practices in the formation and experience of real space. *Replacing Home* aims to examine specific exchanges between these two disciplines, beginning where Summers ends, in the post-1970s contemporary period, while also acknowledging the return of pre-modern models of situated dwelling.

**An embodied process of homecoming**

While Summers emphasizes the role of spatiality in world understanding and building, my research considers the time-based features that are prevalent in contemporary art and architecture, and in turn, argues for a temporal dimension of real space. The phenomenological philosophy of Martin Heidegger provides a guide, in particular his concept of dwelling in relation to temporality. Re-imagined as an embodied process of homecoming, dwelling opens up a role for performance, defined most broadly as the study of embodied experiences in specific spaces and times by such scholars as Peggy Phelan (*Unmarked: The Politics of Performance*, Routledge, 1996), Shannon Jackson (*Professing Performance: Theatre in the Academy from Philology to Performativity*, Cambridge University Press, 2004), and Jon McKenzie (*Perform or Else*, Routledge, 2001). Indeed a performance methodology, with its phenomenal attention to both temporal and object-based frameworks of knowledge and experience, can attend simultaneously to dwelling as a structure and as a process extended over time. *Replacing Home* thus acknowledges that as we build, we must always continually be in search of what it means to dwell, in our own time, in our own places, and in our own bodies.