

“Experience Near Death (END): The Context”

thesis paper to accompany MFA thesis project

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Introduction

This thesis paper looks to create a historical, conceptual, and theoretical dialogue with the inclusion of contemporaneous examples of five artists, as well as an analysis of installation art in both the theoretical and conceptual realm. In this way, the project aims to create a site of historicity in which to contextualize my own project while providing links to the shifting nature of installation art specifically.

END is an installation that explores a collection of personal stories with word associations and imagery from people who have been physically or emotionally near someone who dies. END begins with my own experience near death through the process of my husband's illness and eventual death. Like Allan Kaprow, I know how life-experiential situations do lend themselves to the idea of "Happenings". That experience, even a year later, continues and manifests itself in different ways. With this "Happening" now added to my memory, it touches every aspect of my existence, still. This project will act as a homage to the transformative experience that tends to deeply alter and affect change in the lives of the people who witness their loved ones going through this physical and mental process that ends in death, and also act pedagogically to inform those who have yet to have an experience of near death. It aims to provide a cathartic experience to a group who both lament and have already actualized this experience. It will contribute to praxis and research by offering an example of how installation art can powerfully address issues of mortality.

**FIVE ARTISTS:
Burden, Gonzalez-Torres, Irwin, Maurer, Turrell**

Chris Burden: performance, assemblage, relics

In the early 1970s, Chris Burden produced his first mature work, work that embraces a diverse spectrum of genres including performance, sculpture, assemblage, collage, installation, computer and video work. The period was characterized by the idea that the truly important, viable art of the future would not be precious objects. The precious, enduring, elitist art object, the wealthy patrons who supported it, and the museums that coveted it were all being questioned. Burden's production in 1979 of carefully made display cases that house the lasting remains of what we take to have been performance pieces repay close examination.

Perhaps Burden's most provocative performance is *Shoot*, which took place in F Space in Santa Ana, California, on November 19, 1971. Burden documented this work with this terse form of words: "At 7:45 p.m. I was shot in the left arm by a friend. The bullet was a copper jacket 22 long rifle. My friend was standing about fifteen feet from me."¹ Another performance, this one from the end of the 1970s, is *Atomic Alphabet*, which was first performed and took place November 17, 1979, at the San Francisco Art Institute in San Francisco, California.

Like a street tough, dressed all in black, with a black leather jacket and hat, I appeared spot lit in front of the audience. Raised my fist and stomping my foot to punctuate each word, I loudly and aggressively recited an alphabetical list of twenty-six words relating to atomic destruction: "A" for Atomic, "B" for Bomb, "C" for Combat," etc. The crazed chant ended with the terse cry "Yeh! Yeh! Yeh!" The performance lasted 30 seconds.²

The documentation of these performances, in words and photographs, is the principal way Burden has proof that the work ever happened. Ann Ayers refers to Chris Burden's "relics" as "objects of esthetic delectation".³ The "relics," gathered from the performances, beginning with the early-1970s, are an important contribution to the history of assemblage, but should be viewed within the larger context of Burden's performances in order to be understood and appreciated.

The assemblages consist of beautifully constructed, Plexiglas-sided display boxes, filled with a grouping of objects, atop a stand. Burden has commented that the boxes "were a big deal ... and took more time than making *The Big Wheel*" (a three-ton, cast-iron flywheel, eight feet in diameter, set in motion by a motorcycle).⁴

Although the slugs were not recovered from Burden's performance piece *Shoot*, he lays reference to it in his work *Two .38 Slugs and a One Pound Weight* as he continues his somewhat hidden dialogue about beauty and danger. The neat, symmetrical layout of the slugs and the weight may not communicate a sense of danger, defeat, or spent energy. You might never know that the slugs were found on a beach by children who gave them to Burden or that the one-pound weight was purchased at a five-and-dime store that was "going under."

An element of danger and edgy discomfort is evident in *Survival Kit*. Burden shows his "tough as nails" side by laying out the items he deems necessary for survival on the streets. He chooses basic objects, such as a toothbrush, and then introduces a bit of humor by supplying a spare set of bristles for the toothbrush. When we look at *Pick, Bottle, and Alcohol*, which Burden intimates is an abstracted version of *Survival Kit*, it gives us a sense of a "dangerous existence."⁵ The same is true of *TVs and Hats*, which

couples two television sets with Burden's hat. The hat is one that he frequently wore and that he thought projected a Mafioso image. By coupling the TVs and hat, he hoped to project an image of mindless danger. A danger that recalls his performance *Atomic Alphabet*.

Over the past thirty years, Burden has moved from assemblage to installations, kinetic and static sculptures, and scientific models. Although he may not be known for his assemblage pieces, the "relics" act as evidence and continue to inform the visual, intellectual, and emotional power of his work.

Felix Gonzalez-Torres: personal and global

The work of Felix Gonzalez-Torres (1957-2002) often dealt with personal and global concerns such as AIDS, U.S. foreign policy, gun control, racism, sexism, and homophobia. Throughout his career he created work that was relatively simple in construction and yet very rich in emotional content. Recognizing that his work could be interpreted in a number of different ways, he generally left works untitled, with a more specific reference in parenthesis). Gonzalez-Torres questioned our traditional idea of art by incorporating ordinary objects into his pieces and inviting the viewer in by intent and gesture. Candies, photolithography paper, photo puzzles, light strings, and billboards were a few of his preferred materials.

His first solo exhibition in 1989 he rented a billboard in Sheridan Square in Greenwich Village. On a plain black surface about half way up, two lines in white type read: "People with AIDS Coalition 1985 Police Harassment 1969 Oscar Wilde 1895

Supreme/Court 1986 Harvey Milk 1977 March on Washington 1987 Stonewall Rebellion 1969.” One had to look to reshuffle the listed dates to see a linear history of gay oppression and militancy. To add to the complexity, the billboard itself had a rich history of serving advertisements to the gay community in the neighborhood.

In 1991 at the Andrea Rosen Gallery (New York), “*Every Week There is Something Different*” ran from May 2 – June 1. The first week the gallery had cream-colored walls and was lined with framed photographs of carved inscriptions from the Teddy Roosevelt monument. Listing attributes that identify Teddy as a soldier, humanitarian, and explorer contributed to the idea that our culture expects all men to emulate these traits of masculinity. The second week Gonzalez-Torres introduced a powder-blue wooden platform surrounded on all sides by a row of lights; during the third week, the platform was transformed into a stage for a male go-go dancer who performed for a short period each day. The final week Gonzalez-Torres brought in “Bloodworks,” graphs depicting diagonal red lines that denoted the decreasing of an AIDS patient’s T-cell count. Gonzalez-Torres stated,

My attempt was not only to play with form, but also to create a very specific meaning by the end of the exhibition. It wasn’t just to show wares - from the warehouse to the showroom - it was about using the gallery as a testing ground, and in many ways subverting the meaning of the work itself, as well as the situation, the rules, or place in which this work happens to be.⁶

In 1995, Gonzalez-Torres was asked, “What’s your agenda? Who is your public?” and he replied, “When people ask me, ‘Who is your public?’ I say honestly, without skipping a beat, ‘Ross.’”⁷ Ross Laycock was Gonzalez-Torres’s lover and confidante. Ross contracted HIV/AIDS and was sick for many years before he passed away in 1991.

In his 1990-91 piece “*Untitled*” (*billboard shot of bed*), Gonzalez-Torres used a black-and-white photograph pasted on several billboards to convey several messages. The billboards were posted in twenty-four locations around New York City to get the public’s attention. At first people weren’t sure what this image was about and waited for some text eventually to show up to explain the advertisement. When no words arrived, people started to ask questions. This is the kind of cunning that Gonzalez-Torres was the master of. These billboards were commemorative. First of Ross who had died, for he was showing their empty bed, a bed that had clearly having been slept in by two people with the image of rumpled sheets and two depressions in the pillows. Gonzalez-Torres took a risk that this project might be misinterpreted to be only about AIDS. For him, this piece was about irrevocable loss although he understood that there would always be those who found either subject cause for discomfort. “[My work] is all my personal history, all that stuff...gender and sexual preference...I can’t separate my art from my life.”⁸

One of Gonzalez-Torres’ quintessential pieces is *Untitled (perfect lovers) 1987-90*. He placed two working clocks together, side by side and touching; they were perfectly synchronized and identical in form. They signified two lovers and were dated for the years his lover was sick. “[T]ime is something that scares me...or used to. The piece I made with two clocks was the scariest thing I have ever done. I wanted to face it. I wanted those two clocks right in front of me, ticking.”⁹

After Ross’s death, Gonzalez-Torres was still grappling with the subject of immortality, death, and our understanding of eternity. With his series of *Stacks* and *Spills* he explored these ideas further and allowed the public to become an active participant in the work. The *Stacks* consisted of a seemingly endless pile of photolithographs neatly

stacked on the floor, each one with the same image adorning it. In *Untitled (7 stack) 1991*, the image was a close up of the sea. The *Untitled (Death by Gun) 1990* consisted of a 9” stack of photolithographs and measured 44-15/16” x 32-15/16”. Listed on the sheets were the names of 460 individuals killed by gunshot during the week of May 1–7, 1989, listed by name, age, city, and state, with a brief description of the circumstances of their deaths, and, in most cases, a photographic image of the deceased. These images and words, taken from *Time Magazine*, where they first appeared, reflected Gonzalez-Torres’ interest in gun control.

The *Spills* began in 1990. They featured large quantities of colorful wrapped candies, heaped in corners or spread out as "carpets" on the floor. These works have a formal sculptural quality as well as a potential for metamorphosis. *Untitled (a Corner of Baci) 1990* consisted of forty-two pounds of silver-and-blue, foil-wrapped candies. *Baci* is Italian for “kisses,” and Gonzalez-Torres was inviting the viewer to take a “kiss” from him, an invitation that directly confronted the audience with the issues of homophobia, fear of HIV carriers, and fear of intimacy. *Untitled (Placebo) 1993*, made of gold-wrapped candies, referred to the AIDS epidemic. The amount of candy spread out represented the combined weights of Gonzalez-Torres and Ross. Gonzalez-Torres said that

I made *Untitled (Placebo)* because I needed to make it. There was no other consideration involved except that I wanted to make artwork that could disappear, that never existed, and it was a metaphor for when Ross was dying. So it was a metaphor that I would abandon this work before this work abandoned me. I'm going to destroy it before it destroys me. That was my little amount of power when it came to this work. I didn't want it to last, because then it couldn't hurt me. From the very beginning it was not even there - I made something that doesn't exist. I control the pain. That's really what it is. That's one of the parts of this work. Of course, it has to do with all the bullshit of seduction and the art of authenticity. I know that stuff, but on the other side, it has a personal level that is

very real. It's not about being a con artist. It's also about excess, about the excess of pleasure. It's like a child who wants a landscape of candies. First and foremost it's about Ross. Then I wanted to please myself and then everybody.¹⁰

Gonzalez-Torres's light-string piece's made consisted of two white electrical cords, each approximately 140 inches long. Attached to those cords were white porcelain light sockets about ten inches apart with forty-watt bulbs in them. He made this piece around the time of Ross's death. *Untitled (Couple) 1990* consisted of two strings, perfect lovers intertwined, glowing together, with the implication that one can burn out before the other. The bulbs can be replaced even though the idea of that is agonizing. This piece is another example of Gonzalez-Torres' work transforming a banal material into something hopeful, beautiful, and uplifting. *Untitled (North) 1993* and *Untitled (last night)* consisted of 15- or 25-watt bulbs, on one or more extension cords hung from the ceiling and puddled in a pile on the floor. They were to be viewed turned on or off. The light bulbs are replaced as they burn out, echoing the theme of loss and renewal again. Gonzalez-Torres decided to only make twenty-four light pieces to represent and memorialize the twenty-four most important events or concepts in his life with these light string pieces.

Gonzalez-Torres also produced *word portraits* that were conceptual art biographies consisting of a string of dates and proper nouns that identified significant events in the life of the subject. He would ask the subjects about their lives and then record them on their walls in a linear fashion. He designed these word portraits to be added to as a running record of the subject's life. He did a few self-portraits and most famously he created his own biography/bibliography in 1993.

Robert Irwin: from painting to installation

Robert Irwin's work spans the period from the 1960's through the present. His most recent projects include an installation of palm trees for the Los Angeles County Museum of Art (LACMA) garden. Is it kismet that he returns to LACMA? In 1966 Maurice Tuchman organized a small exhibition of Irwin's paintings and increased the idea of art and technology that eventually evolved into a catalogue essay about Irwin, written by Philip Leider (*Artforum's* founding editor). It was from this show that Irwin questioned idea of "installation" substituting it for the word "painting." Describing the paintings in the LACMA show might seem a bit silly because an accurate assessment would be that they were plain white, almost seven-foot-square oils on canvas. The four edges of each stretched canvas, rather than meeting the wall at 90' angles, the way most canvases do, curved subtly back towards the wall, blurring the line between border and wall. Leider described it as "a haze of color energy"—that, after viewing for a few minutes, gathered in the center. It was this observation that that led him to coin the term that has come to characterize a whole movement, "an experience of space and light."

Leider points out that Irwin was after something further: "In Irwin's painting the point of modern art shifts from an exploration of the elements essential to the medium, to the elements essential in conveying the experience of art." Leider continues,

Irwin clearly was interested in more than an intellectual dialogue with the tenets of art history. He wanted his work to have a direct effect on the people who saw it, one that, far from being temporary, might potentially alter or extend the limits of their thought and perception. To achieve this, he would have to make work that

was even less evident in terms of its material presence, and at the same time so arresting that people would stop and give it their attention.¹¹

Beauty? It's a word the contemporary art world has until recently assiduously avoided. Yet Irwin is emphatic when he talks about beauty being "absolute and primary" to the experience he is creating, as opposed to much contemporary art, which he describes as concerned with "an acceptable, abstract rationale to which one can apply meaning." That's why, Irwin says, when people look at Abstract Expressionist paintings, they try to "Rorschach them, psychoanalyze them or infuse them with content, because they're still unable to deal with the issues of experience and beauty." Much art, as he sees it, is the result of the artist's lack of faith in the viewer's capacity to have the art experience without a lot of direction. "What I'm trying to do is make the thing as beautiful as I can, working with my own ability to know and understand what it is I'm doing. As soon as you have ambitions other than just knowing, you alter how decisions are made. The key is to focus on your own understanding."¹²

Due to Irwin's multi-faceted ideas and activities it is difficult for some art historians to place him, often opting to call him a conceptualist, even though he is widely grouped with in the light and space movement, there are still early lyric installations that border on philosophical meanderings that seem to broaden our idea of perception art. For example, in Irwin's, "Set of Questions," presented at an international symposium on "Art Education at the Higher Level," held in Montreal, Canada, 1980, he eludes to how this meandering can lend itself to the creation of a whole piece built upon question after question about art.¹³

Irwin's interdisciplinary approaches towards his art practice and his life is inspiring to me as an artist.

In 1975 Irwin installed a mid-career survey of his work at the Museum of Contemporary Art in Chicago that included "two installation pieces, Scrim V, looked like a giant elongated wedge of shimmering white light that dominated the gallery in which it was centered. Irwin made the triangular enclosure, which measured 15 by 10 by 78 feet, by stretching scrim from floor to ceiling and then lighting it from within."

"At the very best," Irwin says, talking about the experience he wants his work to engender, "a few people will walk in and it will change their lives."¹⁴

It is this statement that influences the way I think about installation art; it may seem a bit egocentric for him to make this statement, but it is truly the way one hopes your work effects the viewer.

In a recent interview at LACMA with Michael Goven, where Robert Irwin sat down and discussed his work and the newest garden installation he eluded to his continued efforts to discover new materials, light spaces, and the dynamics of space, and perception. In the plan that has been created as solution for the garden, Irwin will use palm trees as an attraction. Creating interest by using the palm as an iconographic symbol of the oasis and cultural objects that defines LACMA.¹⁵

Ingo Maurer: seduced by light

Ingo Maurer's work as a lighting designer has been influenced by Pop art from his first design entitled *Bulb* (1966). Clearly, from this original work that was conceived by him after spending the night under a 15-watt hanging light bulb in a shoddy hotel in Venice where he thought "What a combination! This is the shape of poetry and industry-a fantastic marriage between the two."¹⁶

"Maurer treats light as the ultimate found object. In the spirit of Italian designer Achille Castiglioni, his lamps often assemble a magpie collection of ad-hoc materials gathered through the designer's travels, both far-flung and very close to home."¹⁷

It is clear that Maurer is not just a lighting designer but an installation artist, as well. In his *Tableaux Chinois* (1989), which consists of goldfish, water, mirrors, and aluminum we see an installation not just a light fixture. This simple concept that takes a mirror and

hovers it over a shallow fish tank that includes goldfish and floating clear plastic discs that emanate reflective light onto the surrounding walls. His hologram chandelier, a tribute to Thomas Alva Edison, the inventor of the light bulb, called *Wo bist du Edison, ...? (Where are you Edison..?)* (1997) which is but the shadow of Edison's invention like an apparition of Obi-Wan Kenobi (actually conjured from more than 2,600 separate images).¹⁸

Claude Maurer discusses where his father's inspiration comes from by eluding to the idea that Ingo's passing ideas; chance and being receptive to it may play a factor in how his father creates. He says, "For Ingo, inspiration is not to be found in a quiet room sitting at a desk, or while using drawing tools or computers, or running in a park. His receptive state of mind is instead triggered by sensuous, physical well-being, including good food, the occasional glass or two of wine, and a free flow of subjects to talk or think about- in short, a pleasurable, relaxed environment. (Perhaps that is why, wherever he goes in the world, the restaurant napkin is his favorite sketching medium; the resulting drawings have become one of his trademarks.)".¹⁹

Art installations have become more important in Maurer's life and work as he professed to a reporter for Metropolis Magazine in March 2007. "I am interested in turning an ordinary project into a kind of dream, an illusion".²⁰ The established art world may not consider Maurer as an installation artist in his own right but his installations have been attracting thousands at the annual furniture fairs in Cologne and Milan yearly. I see his work as a great example of disciplines crossing, where design, art, industry all have a place in this one man's work.

Maybe the best statement thus far about Maurer is that his work "...does not attempt to conquer an ecstatic public; he wants to seduce it, to gain access to its sensorial and emotive core by rediscovering light's symbolic and evocative quality."²¹

I believe the magic of Maurer is his ability to seduce us with light, luring us in and then giving us a surprise to wonder at. It may be a light fixture to part of the viewing world and an installation to the rest of us who witness the beauty, illumination, and humor in his work. Whatever his intentions or inspirations his work beckons us closer to discover what it is that he is trying to convey.

James Turrell: a transformative experience

"Turrell's art took ordinary objects--a light bulb, a skylight, a frameless window--and turned them into ecstatic experiences."²²

James Turrell, one of the original Light and Space artists, considers himself an architect of light and has always been concerned that his work be harmonious with the source. His statements on light and space have led him to produce works with both natural and artificial light although he does not make the distinction between the two, "because light can only be natural."²³ His installations and particularly the skyspaces and skyboxes in which he controls the light to produce varying effects are a kin to the artists' small studies done in preparation before the masterpiece. For Turrell, this most consuming masterpiece is his lifework, the creation of the Rodent Crater project.²⁴

The Roden Crater is his largest skyspace located in the desert outside of Flagstaff, Arizona. Roden Crater is an extinct volcanic cinder cone in which Turrell has created a

series of complex underground chambers and tunnels that capture the light at different times in the day and seasons, to capture certain celestial moments.

Turrell's concept in skyspaces is to bring the sky down closer to the viewer. Being inside one of the skyspaces, like the one in the sculpture garden of the DeYoung Museum in San Francisco, one feels as if light and mysticism are one and the same. The presence of silence as one watches the sky reflects Turrell's desire to make us "realize that the sky is not something out there, away from us", but "rather, we are dwellers at the bottom of the ocean of air."²⁵ His creations may come from the influence he received from being raised as a Quaker by his grandmother who subjected him to the ritual practice of sitting and greeting the light and his love of flight.

Witnessing Turrell's exhibition in 1980 at the Whitney Museum of American Art where he exhibited large-scale color "perceptions"²⁶ is where I first became aware that he worked the "material of light into space"²⁷ His projected light works and Shallow-Space Constructions served as an example to me, of what transformative light as art could be.

The word "photography" means writing with light and Turrell's ability to manipulate space, time, and light has the ability to formulate a reality. Turrell explains in a recent interview his thoughts.

We made this eye that sees for us, like the camera, and this is very much a part of how we organized our culture. Of course it became this holder of truth. I mean in a court of law you take a photograph, and you can use it as evidence. But, if you think about it, there are many factors: first of all, where you point the camera, and whether you choose a lens that's a telephoto, which flattens the space, and sees through the distance, or a wide angle that sees a much wider area than we see. Then there is the setting of the aperture. All may be in focus, or just a part with the rest out of focus. Do you choose to put in a film that represents light from the sun as white, tungsten light as white, or fluorescent light as white; or do you use color, or infrared? Then, of course, you get this photo that you can change in

development, and crop. Then you can present this photo as "proof of reality," when every step of the way you've created the reality.²⁸

Turrell has altered or informed people's perceptions of art and light, creating transformative experiences within his exhibitions. Turrell describes it like this, "I would like to have the physicality of my light at least remind you of this other way of seeing. That's as best I can do. It's terrible hubris to say this is a religious art. But it is something that does remind us of that way we are when we are thinking of things beyond us."²⁹

Installation Art / Definitions

The notion of installation art could be “traced back to the second half of the 19th century and in particular to Richard Wagner’s concept of the Gesamtkunstwerk as a synthesis of sensory impressions overwhelming the spectator.”³⁰ Gesamtkunstwerk means ‘total artwork’ and Wagner was convinced that a combination or fusion of the arts, such as that the ancient Greeks had forged in their practice of theater, was the future. The work of Fluxus and those works that have been called “intermedia” in 1968 (University of Iowa) are indications that all things come together to inform the work and the audience, just like the DANM program at UCSC as an interdisciplinary program.

The following description of Wagner’s methods, by the longtime director of the Bayreuth Festival, himself a great-grandson of Richard Wagner, points to ways in which Wagner changed the environment in a theater to immerse the audience.

“The Festpielhaus (Festival House) Theater opened in 1876 in Bayreuth, Germany, where Wagner applied his theatrical innovations including: darkening the house, surround-sound reverberance, and the revitalization of the Greek amphitheatrical seating to focus audience attention on stage. This approach to opera foreshadowed the experience of virtual reality, immersing the audience in the imaginary world of the stage.”³¹

Wagner’s attempt to create a different environment for the audience was a combination of spatial arrangements, acoustics, and lighting. If this is installation art then wouldn’t that make some of the most famous interior and exterior architects

installation artists as well? Consider James Whistler's *Harmony in Blue and Gold: The Peacock Room* (now installed in The Freer Gallery of Art, Washington, D.C.; once the dining room of a wealthy ship owner in London)³²; a bedroom in Sagredo Pal from the Palazzo Sagredo in Venice (now installed in the Metropolitan Museum of Art, New York)³³; Antonio Gaudi's Casa Milà³⁴; Mies Van Der Rohe's Farnsworth House³⁵, Frank Lloyd Wright's Fallingwater³⁶, Charles and Ray Eames's Case Study House #8³⁷, Frank O. Geary's Walt Disney Concert Hall³⁸. The architects not only considered the interior and exterior spaces, but the experience as a whole for their audience. While these architectural examples may seem incongruous with one another, they aim to combine the tenets of installation art because the creators considered the interior and exterior spaces and strove to make a complete emersion experience for their audience.

What is the difference between Felix Gonzalez-Torres's "Word" portraits that were conceptual art biographies consisting of a string of dates and proper nouns and slogans written in the same way in the study-library of the Cooper-Hewitt Design Museum³⁹, once the study library of Andrew Carnegie? Torres's dates and nouns identified significant events in the life of the subject, while the study library held significance for its owner. Both instances intended to influence their audiences, publicly and privately.

Creating an environment that can alter a person's perception, inspire, offer solace, make a statement, inform; we realize that our environment can have great effect on us.

Why haven't I mentioned traditional installation artists like Ann Hamilton, Mathew Barney, Bill Viola and many more? Most people already associate these artists

with installation art, due to Art historians and Art critics who have already dubbed these artists as Installation artists because it is the Art critics and Art historians that determine what Installation art is.

Claire Bishop, an Art historian and critic, writes that “ ‘Installation art’ is a term that loosely refers to the type of art into which the viewer physically enters, and which is often described as ‘theatrical’, ‘immersive’, or ‘experiential’. However, the sheer diversity in terms of appearance, content and scope of the work produced today under this name, and the freedom with which the term is used, almost preclude it from having any meaning. The word ‘installation’ has now expanded to describe any arrangement of objects in any given space, to the point where it can happily be applied even to a conventional display of paintings on the wall”.⁴⁰

It is true that installation art’s definition is widely expanding and enveloping involving a wide range techniques and artists.

In Jennifer González’s “Installation Art” in *Encyclopedia of Aesthetics*⁴¹, she explains the history of Installation art. She states that “the term *installation art* has been used increasingly since the 1960s to denote temporary, site-specific artworks designed to surround or interact with the spectator and/or extant architecture in a given exhibition space.”⁴² Here she discusses the conceptual precepts such as the Surrealist exhibitions held during and after the 1930’s in London and the Galerie Beaux-Arts in Paris in 1938, moving on to the performativity of “environmental” or “happenings” of Fluxus artists of the 1950s and early 1960s. González states that there is a difference between environment and installation art, being that “ In environment art, it is implied, the audience literally enters into the work of art, becoming a functional part of the art itself or at least

physically encompassed by it. Installation art is usually taken to mean the partial transformation of a given exhibition space, often in conjunction with an explicit exploration of the artwork's production, exhibition, and reception."⁴³

The diversity of work being produced that is considered installation art today encompasses a cast of influences from architecture, film, theatre, painting, lighting design and performance art to name only a few. A fusion between performance art in relationship to installation art is evident in the works of Marina Abramovic's 'The House with the Ocean View (November 15 through December 21, 2002)⁴⁴, Chris Burden's *Transfixed* (23 April 1974)⁴⁵, or Joseph Beuys', *I Like America and America Likes Me* (1974)⁴⁶. These three artists have all staged installations and included performance within their work. From Burden's hands being nailed to a Volkswagen Beetle as he was splayed across the front of the car to Beuys acting as the shaman to mediate between the audience and his props to Abramovic exhibiting her body for 12 days in a gallery pseudo home while not eating or speaking we see that "the audience is understood to be a conduit in a system of meaning"⁴⁷ and the goal to envelope and immerse them has been achieved. "No longer confined to the closed circuit of contemplation elicited by abstraction (art object/viewer) but that also includes the material traces of social institutions and collective practices that exist beyond the walls of the gallery."⁴⁸

END and Five Artists

END is a representation of my experience of the process of my husband's death, the time in the hospital, his death, and the aftermath of that experience. END also reaches out to others who have had the experience to help console and to educate those who have not had the experience. Through moving and still images, words projected, and words spoken I hope to share this experience with others and affect their perspectives. Being able to share my extreme sadness and make a commentary about an institution such as the health care industry is an indirect influence from Felix Gonzalez-Torres because of his example of what it means to live your art. He too lost his partner and friend and had the need to translate into art works. The idea to give the audience room to determine what your meaning may be and how it applies to them was also gleaned from his art works.

The idea that one's own experience near death should manifest itself into an art installation seems absurd. If Chris Burden's was able to manifest "Shoot" in which he documented, catalogued, and preserved the experience through saving relics and presenting them in exhibition, then so too could END serve as a vehicle for my experience. I documented my husband's illness by keeping a journal through the experience, saving correspondence and relics like dressing gowns, unused needles, and expeller bags and photographing them later. Dressing as a nurse, using the artist as actor, in END to assist the participants to "check-in" at the waiting area and lead them into the installation. In my experience, most of the nurses I came in contact with in the hospital or in a doctor's office all wore scrubs that were personalized by the denoted material

pattern used, such as teddy bears or jellybeans, and they all had fake nails, therefore this attire is representational of nurses that make up the profession, in my opinion.

While waiting the audience will be exposed to certain assemblages such as Heparin flush needles encrusted in a cast resin table, a book of memories of hospital experiences, photographs of hospital relics such as needles and expeller bags. All the items will help to create a surreal representation of the waiting room experience. I wanted to create a whole experience for my audience, just as Robert Irwin had realized in the beginning of his work, by giving people an alternative experience in END through effecting their senses. One way I achieve this is the presence of a large metal sculpture that will be inside END and serve as a pseudo standing steel gurney that the audience members will lean up against to encounter a few degrees of coldness and a sense of loss of control as they lean back at a 20 degree angle, unable to really maneuver effectively while sharing the viewing experience with others. The smell that will permeate the olfactory in the space will be isopropyl alcohol and pine cleaner, the same as used in hospitals. Once the audience is in place they will be facing a large curved screen, no more than 8 feet away, that will evoke a sense of emersion through the experience of light and film. Ingo Maurer seduces his audience with light and James Turrell produces transformative palettes that give the audience the opportunity to be engaged visually. My way of using Ingo's seduction of light is to entice visitors approaching the END by emanating video and lights from behind the curtain that will make them want to come and investigate. I will draw them into the exhibition by making it interesting and engaging and then give them something to think about via the content. Through my use of light and light manipulation, in the interior of END, where the video projection will be staged over the

heads of the viewers so that it gives the sense of piercing light through the darkness to create a dramatic effect that having viewed Turrell's work must have influenced me. Creating the reality I want my viewers to perceive through my installation via the still and moving images I have chosen for inclusion in END will help people see beyond themselves. Considering these "thoughts beyond", that Turrell spoke of earlier, helped me with the idea that one can alter or inform someone's perceptions as a catalytic way of change to create a transformative experience.

I subscribe to what Irwin says, "At the very best," Irwin says, talking about the experience he wants his work to engender, "a few people will walk in and it will change their lives." ⁴⁹

END and Installation Art

Gesamtkunstwerk, or ‘total artwork’, the synthesis of sensory impressions overwhelming the spectator is what END is attempting to accomplish.

Just as the Wagner applied his “theatrical innovations” to his opera, I will be applying my technical innovations to my art installation. END is creating an environment for the audience to consider by utilizing technical innovations such as video projection run through a multi display software solution developed by Dataton, called *Watchout*⁵⁰, sculpture that the audience interacts with such as the steel gurney and encrusted table, and controlling the viewing experience by acting as a guide. As END is a complete interior installation, I will be working with spatial, auditory, olfactory, and visual - including lighting and video.

Creating an environment, an installation that alters a person’s perception, inspires, offers solace, informs, and makes a statement about what it is like to have the experience near death was a profound opportunity. Just as Joan Didion talks about in her book *A year of Magical Thinking* in which she describes witnessing her husband’s heart failure and subsequent death over dinner one evening, this experience can change your whole life overnight. Didion lost her husband, friend, and professional collaborator all in a matter of moments. After his death, she discusses how life seems surreal over the subsequent year. The unreal aspect of the experience is very real to the person standing next to the one who is dying. In this way, the experience itself is environmental, because your part as the person left standing becomes functional and physically encompassing.

There are four films that will be shown in a quasi-linear timeline.

Exiting, a film about a premonition of death in which I speak to the un-believability of the “happening”. Waiting, a film about hospital corridors, which will be enhanced by the actual waiting room interior and pseudo gurney structure. The Entering or rebirth is denoted in two films that will convey how everything in life seems brighter and more intense and how everything you thought that mattered before, seems obviously petty now, the things we do to mourn and grieve our losses like reading inspirational books like the *Tibetan book of the Dead*, visiting the Rocky Mountain Shambhala Center to seek peace, buying a motorcycle to confront fear, joining others in building the Temple of Forgiveness in Black Rock City where others bring their sorrow to share, and making vows to oneself to not waste time. Just as Joseph Beuys acted as shaman for his audience, I will act as guide, confidant dressed in scrubs and playing the part of the nurse. I will have two other artists as actors helping visitors navigate the video interviews that I am asking audience viewers to participate in. My personal experience near death taught me that relationships are the most important thing and that I should always try to honor and cultivate these when possible. END has allowed me to interview people who have shared their personal stories with me and cultivate relationships by allowing people to make their peace. END does not really fit one or the other of Jennifer Gonzalez’s descriptions, so it may deserve a new art description. END can be referred to as environmental installation art in which the audience enters into the work of art, becoming a functional part of the art itself by physically encompassing it and partially transforming it further in the exhibition space, in conjunction with the explicit exploration of the artwork’s production, exhibition, and reception.

¹ Burden, Chris, *Chris Burden*, (pg. 53) (Los Angeles: Chris Burden, 1971).

For all of Burden's work, see esp.

Burden Chris, "Chris Burden : a Twenty-year Survey" / organized by the Newport Harbor Art Museum, Newport Beach, California ; curators, Anne Ayres, associate curator, Paul Schimmel, chief curator ; essayists, Donald Kuspit ... [et al.], Newport Harbor Art Museum, 1988, ISBN 0-917493-11-7

² Revolutions Per Minute (The Art Record), 1982, Producer: Jeff Gordon - Greene Street Recording Studio / Ronald Feldman Fine Arts.

Also text provided in Chris Burden, *Chris Burden*, (pag.163) (San Francisco Art Institute: Chris Burden, 1979)

³ Burden, Chris, *Chris Burden 47*, Ayers.

⁴ Burden, Chris, *Chris Burden 89*, Ayers.

⁵ Burden, Chris, *Chris Burden 89*, Ayers.

⁶ Nickas, Robert . "Felix Gonzalez-Torres: All the Time in the World." Flash Art Vol XXIV #161, November/December, 1991

⁷ Schjeldahl, Peter. "Tender Sentience", The Village Voice, March 21, 1995

⁸ Weintraub, Linda. Art on the Edge and Over, (pg.110) Art Insights Publishers, 1996

⁹ Weintraub, Linda. Art on the Edge and Over, (pg.111) Art Insights Publishers, 1996

¹⁰ Storr, Robert. "Setting Traps for the Mind and Heart" Art in America, January 1996 Page 70-77

¹¹ Phillip Leider, Robert Irwin / Kenneth Price, Los Angeles, Los Angeles County Museum of Art, 1966, unpaginated.

¹² Diehl, Carol. "Robert Irwin's Doors of Perception". Art in America. December 1999.

(Page 5)

All quotes from Robert Irwin, unless otherwise noted, are from interviews with the Carol Diehl conducted between July 1998 and July 1999.

¹³ Johnson, Ellen H., American Artists on Art from 1940 to 1980; Westview Press, 1982. (pages 141-145, 210)

¹⁴ Carol Diehl "Robert Irwin's Doors of Perception". Art in America. December 1999. (Page 3)

¹⁵ <http://www.lacma.org/art/podcasts/Irwin.mov>

¹⁶ Hastreiter, Kim, Iovine, Julie V., Mauer, Claude, Mauer, Ingo, "Provoking Magic: Lighting of Ingo Mauer" Smithsonian, Cooper-Hewitt Design Museum, 2007. (page 17)

¹⁷ Hastreiter, Kim, Iovine, Julie V., Mauer, Claude, Mauer, Ingo, "Provoking Magic: Lighting of Ingo Mauer" Smithsonian, Cooper-Hewitt Design Museum, 2007. (page 48)

¹⁸ Hastreiter, Kim, Iovine, Julie V., Mauer, Claude, Mauer, Ingo, "Provoking Magic: Lighting of Ingo Mauer" Smithsonian, Cooper-Hewitt Design Museum, 2007. (page 56)

¹⁹ Hastreiter, Kim, Iovine, Julie V., Mauer, Claude, Mauer, Ingo, "Provoking Magic: Lighting of Ingo Mauer" Smithsonian, Cooper-Hewitt Design Museum, 2007. (page 69)

²⁰ Hastreiter, Kim, Iovine, Julie V., Mauer, Claude, Mauer, Ingo, "Provoking Magic: Lighting of Ingo Mauer" Smithsonian, Cooper-Hewitt Design Museum, 2007. (page 61)

²¹ Ingo Mauer: Light Reaching for the Moon by Vitra Design Museum, 2004 (page 82)

²² Greeting the Light An Interview with James Turrell, <http://www.conversations.org/story.php?sid=32>

²³ Farrow, Clare. "James Turrell, Painting with Light and Space", Art & Design, Vol. 8 No 5/6 March-April 1993

²⁴ Hogrefe, Jeffery. "In Pursuit of God's Light: James Turrell's Roden Crater Project is the culmination of the artist's lifelong quest for spiritual light." Metropolis Magazine, August/September, 2000, http://www.metropolismag.com/html/content_0800/tur.htm

²⁵ Farrow, Clare. “James Turrell, Painting with Light and Space”, Art & Design, Vol. 8 No 5/6 March-April 1993 (pg. 47)

²⁶ Farrow, Clare. “James Turrell, Painting with Light and Space”, Art & Design, Vol. 8 No 5/6 March-April 1993 (pg. 43)

²⁷ Farrow, Clare. “James Turrell, Painting with Light and Space”, Art & Design, Vol. 8 No 5/6 March-April 1993 (pg.43)

²⁸ Greeting the Light An Interview with James Turrell,
<http://www.conversations.org/story.php?sid=32>

²⁹ Greeting the Light An Interview with James Turrell,
<http://www.conversations.org/story.php?sid=32>

³⁰ <http://www.groveart.com/shared/views/print.html?section=art.041385>

³¹ Wolfgang Wagner, excerpt from film “Wagner in Bayreuth”, Polygram video, 1992, ASIN: 630254159X

³² James Abbott McNeill Whistler, Harmony in Blue and Gold: The Peacock Room. 1876-77. Oil and gold leather and wood. Freer Gallery of Art, Washington, DC, USA

³³ Bedroom from the Sagredo Palace, Venice, Period Room, 18th century (ca. 1718) Stuccowork probably by Abbondio Stazio of Massagno (1675–1745), Probably by; and Carpofofo Mazzetti (ca. 1684–1748), Probably by; Probably after a model by Gasparo Diziani of Belluno (1689–1767), Made in Venice, Italy
Wood, stucco, marble, glass; H. 25 ft. 2 in. (767.1 cm), W. 18 ft. 2 in. (553.7 cm), D. 13 ft. 2 in. (401.3 cm), Rogers Fund, 1906 (06.1335.1a–d) <http://www.metmuseum.org>

³⁴ Antonio Gaudi, Casa Mila, at Barcelona, Spain, 1905 to 1910.

³⁵ Ludwig Meis Van Der Rohe, Farnsworth House, at Plano, Illinois, 1946 to 1950.

³⁶ Frank Lloyd Wright, Fallingwater, at Ohiopyle, (Bear Run), Pennsylvania, 1934, 1938, 1948.

³⁷ Charles and Ray Eames, The Eames House, Case Study House #8, 1949.
www.eamesfoundation.org

³⁸ Frank O. Geary, Walt Disney Concert Hall, at Los Angeles, CA, 1989 to 2004.

³⁹ Dolkart, Andrew S., Cooper-Hewitt, National Design Museum, The Andrew and Louise Carnegie Mansion, Scala Publishers, Ltd. in association the Cooper-Hewitt National Design Museum, Smithsonian Institution, 2002, ISBN 1 85759 268 9

⁴⁰ Claire Bishop, Installation Art: A critical History, Tate Publishing, 2005, N6494I56B57, (pg. 6).

⁴¹ Jennifer González, “Installation Art” in *Encyclopedia of Aesthetics*, edited by Michael Kelly, (Oxford University Press, 1998).

⁴² Endnote 12 (page 503)

⁴³ Endnote 12 (pg 503)

⁴⁴ Hunger Artist, The 12 Days of Marina Abramovic by C.Carr, Village Voice, December 3rd, 2002 12:00 AM, <http://www.villagevoice.com/news/0249,carr,40282,1.html>

⁴⁵ Chris Burden, Transfixed (Venice CA) April 23, 1974

This action took place in a Speedway Avenue garage. The artist lay on his back over the rear section of a Volkswagen Bug and stretched his arms up over the roof. An assistant drove nails through the palms of Burden's hands, into the car's roof.

The garage door was opened and the car was pushed partway out of the garage. After running the engine at full speed for two minutes, the car was turned off and pushed back into the garage, and the door closed.

⁴⁶ Endnote 12 (pg 505)

⁴⁷ Endnote 12 (pg 505)

⁴⁸ Endnote 12 (pg 505)

⁴⁹ Carol Diehl "Robert Irwin's Doors of Perception". Art in America. December 1999. (Page 3)

⁵⁰ <http://www.dataton.com/watchout>

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