Art in Print
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# *A Matrix You Can Move In: Prints and Installation Art*

Charles Schultz

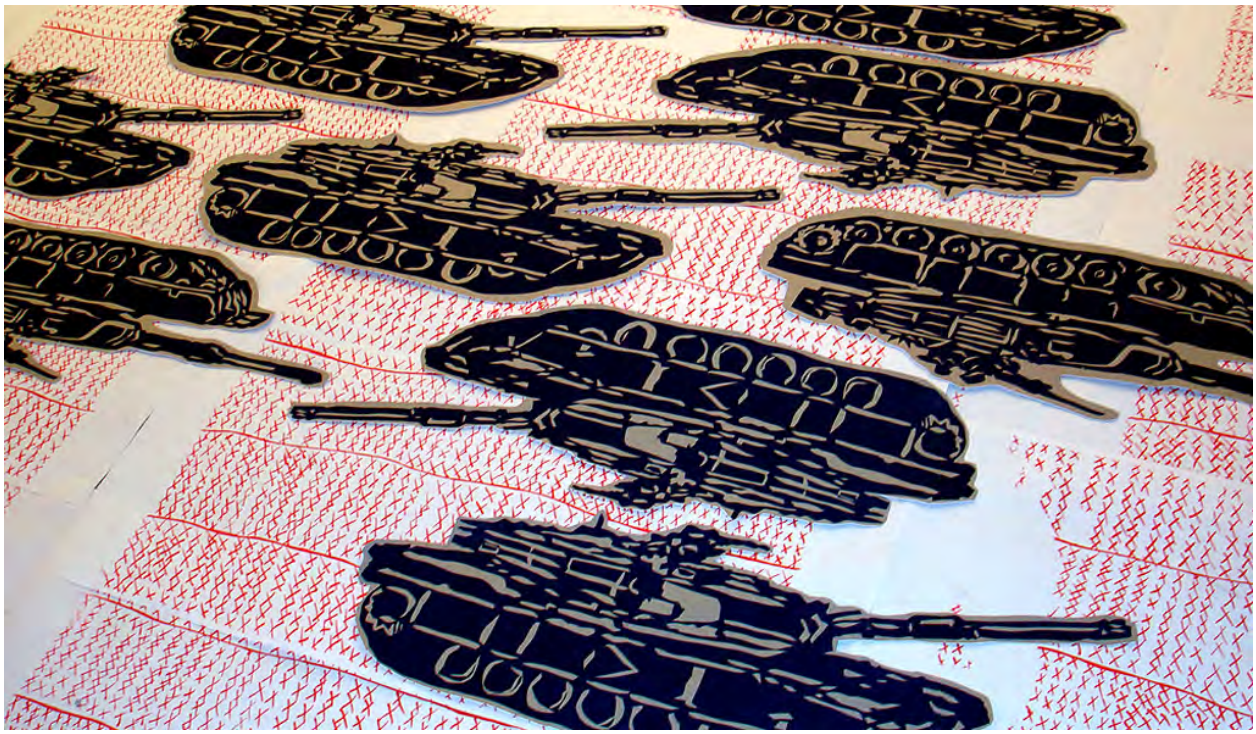

Fig. 1. *John Hitchcock, detail of* ***They're Moving Their Feet—But Nobody's Dancing*** *(2007), large scale, variable size, 24-hour screenprint action at the School of Art and Design, Coyne Gallery, Syracuse University, New York, ©hybridpress.net.*

Printstallation" is not a pretty word. Coined as a neologism for "print-based installation art," the term arose among printmakers and has been embraced in academic circles, though as evidenced by Sarah Kirk Hanley's essay, "The Lexicon of Tomorrow: Print-based Installation" on the Art21 blog, it is beginning to circulate in non-academic art journalism as well.[1] However clunky the term, the phenomenon it seeks to describe is becoming a vital—if difficult to define precisely—aspect of contemporary art, replete with dedicated blogs, a growing number of active artists and collectives, and a smattering of literature dissecting a multitude of emerging formats and styles. Joining a very recent art phenomenon (installation art was described as having a "recent pedigree" and "relative youth" as late as 1994) to techniques of mechanical reproduction that date back to the late 14th century in Europe (and as far back as the 7th century in China,)[2] the form is both innovative and grounded in art historical precedents.

In some ways installation art—with its emphasis on direct, enveloping experience—developed in purposeful opposition to mechanical reproduction. In contrast to the innate multiplicity of prints, installation art defiantly reiterates the traditional concept of a work that exists in just one location; it is often site-specific and ephemeral, bound as much by place as by time. The print, on the other hand, enjoys the protection of the multiple: one copy may get crumpled or burnt, but its brethren can still travel the world. Installations are designed to emphasize a singular experience: be–here–now. Prints offer the gift of the archive: a window into some other place, some other time.

At the same time, however, the development of installation art was driven by the concerns with social context and ephemerality that motivated a variety of 20th century print forms, from the artist's book to street posters. The early 20th century utopian ideal, articulated by groups like the Russian Constructivists, of fully integrating art and life necessarily embraced the world of mass-produced images. By the 1950s advances in technology and the discourse around avant-garde art practices had merged in the phenomenon of "the spectacle" identified by Guy Debord.

Debord's spectacle was a consequence of mechanically (re)produced images (photography, film, etc.) coming to dominate social trends and influence artistic practices. In the 1957 Situationist manifesto, Debord sought to disrupt the overwhelming authority of this burgeoning mass media: "we must try to construct situations, that is to say, collective ambiances, ensembles of impressions determining the quality of a moment… The construction of a situation begins on the ruins of the modern spectacle."[3] As scholar Tom McDonough notes, these situations relied on "the practice of arranging the environment that conditions us"—they did not require anything to be physically built.[4] Nonetheless, they contained an essential germ of installation art: the desire to redirect human attention through interventions in the environment.

A year earlier, the exhibition "This is Tomorrow" at London's Whitechapel Gallery explored these same issues through a merger of integrative design and a large-scale use of printed matter. Conceived by the writer and architect Theo Crosby, "This is Tomorrow" was a collaboration between artists, architects, designers, and theorists, organized into twelve creative teams. It included Richard Hamilton's famous collage, *Just What Is It That Makes Today's Homes So Different, So Appealing* (commonly described as the first piece of Pop Art.) It also featured an environment, created collaboratively by Hamilton, John McHale, and John Voelcker, that was physically constructed of pop-cultural images recycled from magazines and films. McHale, a self-declared Constructivist, described this work as "a complex of sense experience that is so organized, or disorganized, as to provoke an acute awareness of our sensory function in an environmental situation."[5] Hamilton and his colleagues recognized the conditioning influence of printed and projected imagery and they went a step beyond the Situationists by using those spectacular images to create a physical space. Though the Bauhaus had promoted interdisciplinary collaborations decades earlier, "This is Tomorrow" was one of the first exhibitions structured to challenge conventional modes of both art creation and art reception.

Concurrent with Debord and Hamilton's investigations of image reception and space, Dieter Roth was conducting similar experiments but at the hand-held scale of the book. For Roth, the book was not a narrative progression, but "a thing layered in groups, a community of like-minded things pasted or sewed together…"[6] In early works, he disrupted the book's flow by cutting out segments in the shape of squares and circles. He alternated paper pages with pieces of colored transparent plastic and often bound the work in ring binders so the viewer/reader would be able to take the book apart and rearrange the pages. "Artist books," says Marshall Weber (founder of Booklyn, an artist book production house and gallery), "are about controlling the totality of your experience in an environment created by a book. They're meant to engage more than your eyes. Your whole body gets involved." Roth's *Copley Book* (1965) (Fig. 2) was not bound at the spine, but stapled in the center so that anyone wishing to engage it would have to remove the staple and separate the book into loose-leaf pages. Like Hamilton's environment in "This is Tomorrow", the *Copley Book* required viewers/readers to make their own decisions about how to engage the images and the physical experience. Instead of passively absorbing information,

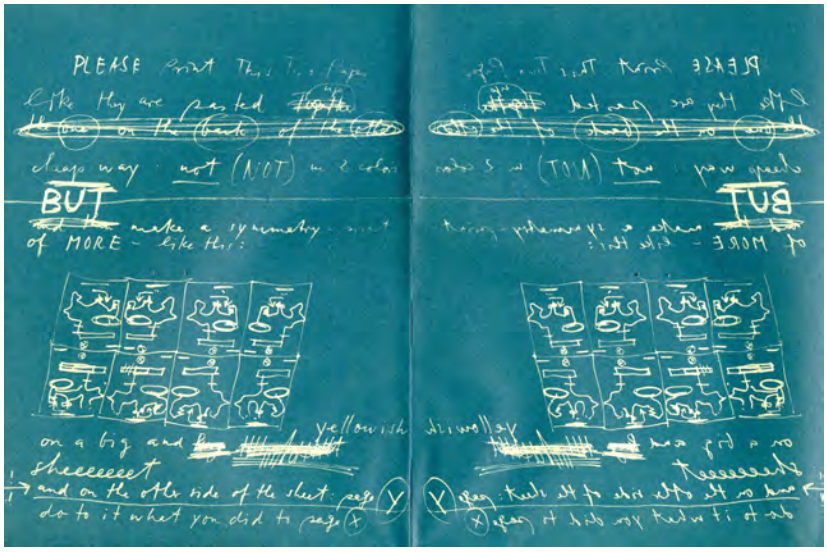


Fig. 2. *Dieter Roth, page from the* ***Copley Book*** *(1965), 112 loose pages of various sizes. Published by the William and Noma Copley Foundation, Chicago. © Dieter Roth Estate, courtesy Hauser & Wirth.*

Fig. 3. *Nancy Spero,* ***Maypole Take No Prisoners II*** *(2008), steel, silk, wood, nylon monofilament, hand print on aluminum, installation view at Anthony Reynolds Gallery, London, 2008, ©The Estate of Nancy Spero, courtesy Galerie Lelong, New York.*

the audience was invited to contribute creatively to the artwork's conceptual resolution.

All these precursors of installation art attempt to negotiate—in some way—between printed images on the one hand, and physical experiences on the other, and to break down the distinction between 'art experiences' and regular life. Happenings—or as Jim Dine called them, "painter's theatres"—sought immediacy of experience through multi-media performance works that were immune to the distortions of value inherent in saleable objects. But even here, printmaking played a part: their connection to the market made them part of real life, but with overtones of cheapness and ephemerality. Dine's first lithography series, *Car Crash* (1959-62) was based on drawings he had made as props for his 1960 Happening, *The Car Crash.* Oldenburg's first editioned print, *Legs* (1961) was a bijou version of the objects he made for *The Street,* a Happening that was effectively an installation in which performances could take place.

These conceptual affinities between installation art and printed matter were in circulation for decades, but it was in Nancy Spero's epic multipanel pieces of the late seventies and early eighties that hands-on printmaking and installation structures achieved a kind of formal merger. In works such as *Torture of Women* (1976) and *First Language* (1981) Spero used letterpress plates to handprint images on paper that scrolled around the gallery walls in the manner of a Greco-Roman frieze. Like a book writ large, Spero's work required an active engagement from viewers—it was not enough to stand still and observe, the viewer had to move through the story. (Fig. 3)

In addition to printing directly on paper, Spero adhered cut-out texts and figures to the paper, evoking the heterogenous collage aesthetic of earlier avant-garde movements. In the late eighties Spero began to print her images directly onto walls, making works that were both site-specific and ephemeral. *Rebirth of Venus* (1989) was printed directly onto the curving walls of a skylit cupola at the Schirn Kunsthalle during Prospect 89 and, like much of her later work, was later painted over.

To some extent, of course, all art is site-specific: as critic Michael Archer has observed, "what a work looks like and what it means is dependent on the configuration of the space it's in. In other words, the same objects displayed in the same way in another location would constitute a different work."[7] Certain artists—most notably Daniel Buren—have made this reality a fundamental subject of their work. But site-specificity necessarily entails exclusivity; prints, with their inherent multiplicity and portability, are non-exclusive and difficult to make site-specific. Buren, however, devised a strategy for print-based DIY installations that both responded to the site and could go anywhere. Each member of the edition *Framed/Exploded/Defaced*, (1979) was a unique color variant of Buren's signature stripes, divided into 25 small frames, and accompanied by a precise set of instructions for installation: for any given wall the 25 parts had to be placed in a grid stretched evenly over the full extent of the wall; any parts that met an impediment (window, door, radiator) had to be removed for the duration of the installation. If the prints were not displayed as instructed the piece was neither complete nor authentic.

For many artists in the 21st century, print is simply one option on the menu of strategies and materials, and those who define themselves as printmakers often see installations as one option on the menu of structures. The critical arena of overlap is the social: printed matter is a way to engage with the world and to distribute power. The print, as Buren discovered, has the potential to adapt to a variety of surroundings. It wouldn't have taken a great leap of imagination to turn Roth's *Copley Book* into an installation, and more recent artists have run with that idea. "The exhibition in a book" called *Resourced* was released in 2010 by the multinational artist cooperative Just Seeds, a socially conscious group of printmakers and designers who work in a panoply of styles. *Resourced* con-

tains 26 artist prints, executed using a range of techniques on a variety of papers. The book is bound with steel bolts and can be unbound and mounted on walls, as the collective did last summer in a concert hall in Montreal.

Rob Swainston, co-founder of the collaborative studio Prints of Darkness, builds modular installations that are designed to accommodate any site: as Swainston explains, "the individual panels are designed in such a way that they can be installed in larger or smaller formats. There are a number of linkage points built into the drawings that allow for easy addition or subtraction."[8] The work is not designed for any particular location, but can respond to the specificities of any site. Swainston calls this "non-site/site-specificity" (no relation to Robert Smithson's concept of the "non-site".)

Swainston, like Spero and Buren, employs prints as pre-fabricated elements that can be deployed in different ways in response to the physical properties of specific sites. How and where the templates are created is not particularly relevant to the content of the installations they produce. A handful of contemporary artists, however, have applied the ethos of site-specificity to the production of printed matter, emphasizing the social role and cultural baggage of particular locations and processes.

The German artist Thomas Kilpper is best known for carving enormous matrices into the floors of abandoned buildings and then printing them. What distinguishes Kilpper's work, apart from its sheer scale, is the explicit elucidation of social and political histories in his sprawling imagery. His first major project, *The Ring* (2000), was executed on the tenth floor of Orbit House in Southwark, London, where Kilpper carved a 400 square meter woodcut into the mahogany parquet floor. The visual narrative begins with the octagonal Surrey Chapel, which occupied the site of Orbit House in the 18th century; it continues with images of boxing, for which the location was later temporarily famous, and concludes with newspaper images from the Falklands war, a reference to the Ministry of Defence's secret printing office, situated in Orbit House. Kilpper hung the enormous print produced from the floor on the building's exterior, while smaller excerpts were hung inside and the reception for the work took place on the floor that Kilpper carved.

Fig. 4. *Thomas Kilpper,* ***State of Control*** *(2009), carved linoleum floor of the former Stasi headquarters, Berlin.*

Fig. 5. *Thomas Kilpper,* ***State of Control*** *(2009), linocuts on paper, exterior façade of former Stasi headquarters, Berlin.*

Kilpper's *State of Control* (2009) (Fig. 4) was even more impressive and disturbing: its matrix was the linoleum floor of the former East German Ministry of State Security (Stasi) headquarters in Berlin. At 1,600 square meters, *State of Control* is the largest linocut ever made—a third of an acre of image-driven history, detailing state projects of surveillance and repression from Nazi Germany to the present day. Again, Kilpper covered the façade of the building with the prints and hung them individually from the ceiling in the reception hall.

Kilpper's work extends, in intriguing and dramatic ways, both the physical impact of the print and its social and procedural accessibility. The 'how' and 'where' of print production are often frustratingly invisible to viewers—in Kilpper's work these things are not only evident but are the basis of the

Fig. 6. *Regina Silveira,* ***Irruption*** *(2005), laser-cut adhesive vinyl, Museum of Fine Arts, Houston, ©Regina Silveira.*

work's content. American artist John Hitchcock also focuses on the activity of making prints as a locus of content, working in a participatory manner that echoes early Happenings. In 2007, Hitchcock collaborated with students from the Art School of Syracuse University to create *They're Moving Their Feet—But Nobody's Dancing*, a "screen print action" in which everyone made images.[9] Other interactive installations, such as *Ritual Device* (2006), incorporated games to be played—ring toss, dart throwing—with prizes to be won. During the most recent Venice Biennale, Hitchcock joined forces with The Dirty Print Makers of America to produce *Epicentro/Epicenter: Retracing the Plains* (2011), an installation in which prints were given away.

Projects such as Kilpper's and Hitchcock's take prints out of the frame and operate in the socially interactive and environmentally scaled way we associate with "installations," but are they "Installation Art"? What distinguishes an exhibition of eccentrically installed prints from a work of installation art? Jonathan Borofsky's sprawling multimedia installations of the 1970s and 80s (nearly all of which incorporated prints of some sort,) suggested that that an idiosyncratic display of materials is precisely what defines a work of installation art. Clair Bishop, who authored an authoritative text on installation art,[10] proposed two key stipulations, that the audience "physically enter" the art work and that—however many parts it contains—the artwork entered constitutes a "single unity." Borofsky's concatenations certainly created an environment that engulfed the viewer, but he was less adamant about the work's unity: buyers could take home the whole installation, but they were just as welcome to purchase a print on its own.

Kiki Smith's various adventures in print presentation similarly run afoul of Bishop's precise definition of installation art: in *Peabody* (*Animal Drawings)* (1996) Smith covered an expanse of gallery floor with layered prints on top of one another. Though the individual prints comprised a single whole, viewers could no more "enter" into the space of the work than one can "enter" a carpet. Smith's 2010 exhibition at the Brooklyn Museum, Kiki Smith: *Sojourn* was billed as a "site-specific installation," but each component was a fully realized, independent work of art.

And what are we to make of Regina Silveira's print-based works? Over the last four decades Silveira has experimented with silkscreen, lithography, offset, photocopying, and blueprint, but she is best known for her installa-

Fig. 7 *John Hitchcock,* ***Epicentro Retracing the Plains*** *(2011), Venice, Italy, ©hybridpress.net.*

Fig. 6. *Orit Hofshi,* ***If the Tread is an Echo*** *(2009), woodcut, ink drawing, and stone tusche rubbing on carved pine wood panels and handmade paper, 136 x 287 x 36 inches.*

tions of black laser-cut vinyl adhesive. For *Irruption* (2005 and 2006) (Fig. 6) Silveira applied thousands of black vinyl footprints to a gallery space at the Museum of Fine Arts in Houston. The following year she adhered the same black footprints to the exterior of the Taipei Arts Museum during the 6th Taipei Biennial. In Bishop's terms, the work in Houston would be an installation while the one in Taipei would not, though the artist considers them both manifestations of the same piece.

Other well-known print-installations, such as Xu Bing's *Book from the Sky* (1987-1991), Nicola Lopez' three-dimensional printed jungles, or Gunilla Klingberg's window dressings, are equally problematic. As always, the problem lies not with the art, but with our post-facto attempts to parse work in exact ways. Bishop's definition is useful for distinguishing many installation works from general exhibitions, but is less helpful when dealing with printed components that often are capable of leading double lives, the same component behaving one way in one place and another way in another place.

The increasing presence of "street art" (or at least street artists) in museums and galleries [see Street Art article, this issue] is another manifestation of print's fluidity. When the Situationists pasted posters and slogans over advertisements, they called the practice *detournment* (which translates roughly as "hijacking") and championed the activity as a form of protest through which art becomes active rebellion. In the spring of 1968 Daniel Buren followed suit with *Affichages Sauvages*, pasting some 200 of his striped posters on billboards and advertisements across Paris. Such street art strategies continued in Paris in the 1980s with artist groups such as Frères Ripoulin, and more recently in cities throughout the world, as stencils and pre-printed images have become the media of choice for artists choosing to work on the surfaces of city walls.

In recent years wheat-pasting artists such as Swoon and JR have been invited off the street and into the museum, where they have received accolades for their print-based installations. In an event for the 2009 Abu Dhabi Art Fair, JR completely covered the walls, ceiling, and floor of a long corridor with photographic portraits of local people. More recently Swoon installed *The Ice Queen* (2011) at LA MOCA's "Art in the Streets" exhibition. Roughly fifteen feet tall, *The*

*Ice Queen* was a gigantic tent-shaped jack-o-lantern whose intricate paper cuts appeared as projections on the enveloping fabric. This move from the street to the museum has been lamented by some commentators as the institutionalization of an art form born to be radical and subversive, but it is worth considering that Swoon spent nearly a month creating *The Ice Queen*—a type of extensive execution that could never have occurred on the street.

Swoon's work—on or off the street—is characterized by an old-fashioned sense of singularity. Though she is working with repeatable elements in the form of printing blocks, each iteration proclaims its uniqueness. This tension between repeatable devices and the absolute specificity of a place, a moment in time, and an array of human labor, runs thread-like through all these diverse endeavors.

The Israeli artist Orit Hofshi creates monumental woodblock prints using large pine boards from construction supply stores for her matrices. *If the Tread is the Echo* (2009) (Fig. 8), created for Philagrafika, was Hofshi's first three-dimensional work. Her intention was "to create an experience viewers can physically be part of and [in which they can be] collaborators in the conceptual outcome."[11] Hofshi built a small shed of pine-board matrices, which she attached to a large wall installation of prints and their matrices. *Convergence* (2011), which will be installed in Swarthmore College's List Gallery this fall, draws deeply upon the materiality of the printmaking process, incorporating prints and pine-board matrices as well as containers of dark ink, representing the passage of the image from plate to paper. As Hofshi explains:

> *[the] synthesis of these elements goes beyond process and matter. Paper is also typically a product of wood. The imagery of cascading stones [printed on the paper] is a visible testimony of the physical carving of the wood. Darkly inked wood panels surrender just glimpses of the imagery, and the dark liquid basins reflect the imagery in turn.*[12]

This is an installation about printmaking itself. It reformulates the historic perception of the image as an index of experience while drawing attention to its mutation over time and across mediums. Work that is inherently self-reflexive, as *Convergence* is, necessarily incorporates the aspect of memory as it considers itself in order to become a different version of itself. The image of the cascading rocks remains the same, though each medium gives it a unique character. *If the Tread is the Echo* touched on this concept by exhibiting the prints and matrices together. *Convergence* goes further by demonstrating a threefold transformation that culminates in a reflection that is both literal and symbolic. The viewer may experience the installation as a narrative, though it's presented all at once. *Convergence* may refer then not only to the intersection of stages oriented around processes and material, but also to the metaphysical relationship between memory and nowness. It suggests that memory is always a function of the present moment, and that through memory the past is always present.

*Convergence* also works as a metaphor for the "printstallation" as a form, at once exceptionally contemporary and thoroughly rooted in both historic processes and the ambition of the 20th century avant-garde to merge art and life. If the print-based installation is an art form of the moment, perhaps it is because this moment is permeated by the growing power of images and the machines and networks that create and disseminate them. It should be no surprise that artists feel the need to investigate the reception and production of images in the physical world, to call our attention to the occupation of space by images, and to look at both how we got here and where we can go.

*Charles Schultz is a New York-based art critic.*

**Notes:**

*1. The first documented use of the term (that I could find) was for an exhibition in 2007 titled "Painting and Prinstallation" at the Green Door Gallery in Kansas City, MO. The exhibition was organized in conjunction with the Southern Graphics Council (SGC) International Conference. The SGC is organizing "a large-scale collaborative printstallation" titled "Uncharted Territories: A Printscape" as part of a larger exhibition that will accompany its 2012 printmaking international conference. Since 2007 the term has come into greater use in academic circles, most notably at the Savannah College of Art and Design (printstallation.blogspot.com), the University of Montana-Missoula (printana.blogspot.com), the Stephen F. Austin State University (sfaprintmkaing.blogspot,com). Syracuse University printmaking program organized an exhibition entitled "Monumental Printstallation" in 2010, and Fanny Retsek, master printer at the San Jose Institute of Contemporary Art teaches a course in "Printstallation" at the Santa Cruz summer workshops. Non-academic blogs and networking websites such as Printeresting, Inkteraction, and Hot Iron Press have also embraced the neologism and begun documenting artworks that fit into its categorical boundaries.*

*2. Michael Asher,* Installation Art*, Eds. Nicolas de Oliveira, Nicola Oxley, Michael Petry, (London: Thames and Hudson Ltd., 1994), 8-9.*

*3. Guy Debord, "Toward a Situationist International," in Situationist International Anthology, Ed. and Trans., Ken Knabb, (Berkeley: Bureau of Public Secrets, 1981) 24-25.*

*4. McDonough, Tom, Ed.* Guy Debord and the Situationist International: Texts and Documents*, (Cambridge: MIT Press, 2002), 91.*

*5. ohn McHale,* This is Tomorrow*, Ed. Theo Crosby, (London: Print Partners, 1956). Published in conjunction with the exhibition "This is Tomorrow" at the Whitechapel Gallery.*

*6. Dieter Roth,* Roth Time: A Dieter Roth Retrospective*, Eds. Bernadette Walter, Christine Jenny, Theodora Vischer, (New York: Museum of Modern Art and Switzerland: Lars Muller Publishers, 2003), 48. Published in conjunction with the exhibition "Roth Time: A Dieter Roth Retrospective" at the Museum of Modern Art, New York.*

*7. Asher,* Installation Art*, 35.*

*8. From an email exchange with the artist.*

*9. Alexia Tala,* Installations & Experimental Printmaking*, (London: A & C Black, 2009), 55.*

*10. Claire Bishop,* Installation Art: A Critical History*. (New York: Routledge, 2005).*

*11. From an email exchange with the artist.*

*12. Ibid.*