Viewer-, Author-, and Ownership in the Work of Andrea Zittel

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Viewer-, Author-, and Ownership in the Work of Andrea Zittel

by

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I dedicate this thesis to my grandpa, Dr. Leonard Charles Waite (1941–2015), who passed away during its drafting. During his life, he was the source of endless and unwavering support, and his intelligence, dedication, and compassion remains with me.
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Thanks as always to my family members, who are endlessly encouraging.
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INTRODUCTION

Andrea Zittel invites others to collapse the distinctions between artist, viewer, and collaborator by interacting with her usable works. Throughout her twenty-five-year-long artistic career, Zittel has found daily activity to be a rich subject matter for her work. Her sculptures and installations paradoxically simplify the tasks of maintenance of home and body that structure human existence, while complexly bringing issues of physical and psychological need to the fore.

Zittel’s simplified structures and basic materials bear no resemblance to the lushly appointed apartments gracing the glossy pages of house ware catalogues: For Zittel, such choice becomes a burden. This burden can be circumvented through the establishment of self-imposed limitations, and, as such, limitations can be surprisingly liberating. These contrasts question the excesses of contemporary life, and Zittel’s solution is that fewer things require less maintenance and more time for creativity and exploration.

I was privileged to be involved with Zittel’s work while I was a curatorial assistant at the Indianapolis Museum of Art. I joined the museum as an intern in 2008, during my junior year of college, when the curatorial staff was in the final stages of developing a new type of sculpture park called 100 Acres. This park was a large endeavor
involving the commission of contemporary artists to create experimental and varyingly temporary or mutable works. Zittel envisioned *Indy Island*, a habitable space anchored in the center of the park’s lake. When I joined the staff fulltime in 2010, I facilitated a residency program on *Indy Island*, and, with Zittel, selected the artists who would come to call the work home for the next four summers. This hands-on experience has greatly informed my thesis.

Since my introduction to her work, Zittel’s ideas have grown increasingly normalized via popular media outlets. *Tiny House Hunters*, a TV show on the Home and Garden Television network, debuted in December 2014, and follows suburbanites as they move from sprawling homes to the smallest of spaces, a choice that echoes Zittel’s *Living- and Homestead Units*. On April 3rd, 2015, *Harpers Bazaar* posted an article by Mathilda Kahl, an art director of the global advertising agency Saatchi & Saatchi. Titled “Why I Wear the Exact Same Thing to Work Every Day,” Kahl explains the simplicity that wearing the same clothing daily allows her—a sentiment that shares much in common with Zittel’s *Six Month Uniform* series begun in 1991. The article has over 110,000 “shares” on readers’ social media accounts, and I became aware of it, too, through a posting on my Facebook feed. I do not believe these changes in public opinion to be directly related to her artwork—she is never mentioned in these contexts—but her ideas have been incorporated into a growing cultural movement, which bolsters with them an increased widespread relevancy. Recent converts to this lifestyle seek freedom

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1 Matilda Kahl “Why I Wear the Exact Same Thing to Work Every Day,” *Harpers Bazaar*, April 3, 2015. Accessed on May 29, 2015. http://www.harpersbazaar.com/culture/features/a10441/why-i-wear-the-same-thing-to-work-everyday/. Although a large and longstanding part of her practice, Zittel’s ongoing series of uniforms are not discussed at length in this thesis. As a garment worn exclusively by Zittel as she goes about her life, they do not blur the distinctions between object/viewer and owner/author as strongly as the others works discussed at length here.
from financial obligations, maintenance, and daily decision-making—themes Zittel discusses as the underlying motivations for her practice in writings and interviews.

While the examples of a TV show and article (and many more instances that could be cited) occur in the wake of decades of Zittel’s work, earlier initiatives, of course, also predate her practice. Comparisons can be drawn between her work and ideas proposed in the 1970s. Books such as Frances Moore Lappé’s *Diet for a Small Planet* (1971) and E.F. Schumacher’s *Small is Beautiful: Economics as if People Mattered* (1973) voiced an opposition to large-scale business and wasteful expenditure of resources. The authors propose downsized and thoughtful consumption as a solution to many problems created by an increasingly global and industrialized economy. The reoccurring introduction of simplicity as a solution to problems (in these cases, often sparked by crises of non-renewable energy and collapsed economy), in some ways, demonstrates its validity. Unlike these shows, articles, and books, the purpose of this thesis is not to extoll the virtues of simplified living, but to instead explore issues of viewer-, owner-, and authorship—fundamental aspects of the art world that Zittel complicates.

Zittel was born in 1965 in Escondido, California. In 1988 she graduated from San Diego State University, where she studied painting and sculpture. She then attended Rhode Island School of Design, where she earned an MFA in sculpture before moving to New York City in 1990. Living in a Brooklyn storefront influenced her practice, as she

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2 Susan Freudenheim, “I Want to Create a World and Live in It Completely,” *ARTnews* (September 2005), 122.

3 Ibid.

sought to live in a way she found comfortable despite her limited means and barebones apartment. Zittel bought a Brooklyn row house in 1994, now called A–Z East, and it was her exclusive home and studio until she moved to Los Angeles in 1998. In 2000, Zittel purchased land in Joshua Tree, California, which she dubbed A–Z West. This property is where she lives and works, and she has grown it to encompass thirty-five contiguous acres.

Zittel’s work has received relatively sustained attention from curators and critics. In the mid-90s her work was featured in group exhibitions at noteworthy venues, such as The Museum of Modern Art (1994) and the Art Institute of Chicago (1995), and written about in their accompanying catalogues. Her work was also shown in Europe during this time, and one such catalogue titled Living Units (1996) published by the Museum für Gegenwartskunst, Basel, features interviews with Zittel and her collectors that have been helpful for my project.

The largest resource of her work to date is the retrospective catalogue Andrea Zittel: Critical Space (2005), an exhibition jointly organized by the Contemporary Arts Museum Houston and the New Museum, traveled to Buffalo, Los Angeles, and Vancouver. Zittel has been forthcoming with her experiences and thoughts in her writings and interviews throughout her career. In 2002 she published Diary #01, which gave


Alex Coles, “Andrea Zittel interviewed by Alex Coles.” Art Monthly 343 (February 2011), 3.


Julin, 17.

Cristina Ruiz, “Dream-building in the American West,” The Gentlewoman no. 11 (Spring/Summer, 2015), 188.
insight into the intersections of her personal and professional activities. *Lay of My Land* is an extended interview with curator Richard Julin published in 2011, and was the catalogue for an exhibition of the same name at Magasin 3 in Stockholm. Additionally, conversations with curators at the Indianapolis Museum of Art and the National Gallery of Art, Australia, have greatly contributed to the information included in the final chapter of this thesis.

The domestic nature of Zittel’s works complicates the notion of audience. As many of her works are made for private use, few are able to engage them the way Zittel intended—through ongoing and daily interaction. In my first chapter, I argue that Zittel’s audience is bifurcated into two groups: users and observers. Presumably, users are able to come to new conclusions about their desires and needs though the lens of Zittel’s sparse environments. Observers must try to develop an understanding of the work through less ideal means, by viewing the used objects when they are on public display, or through Zittel’s descriptive writings, paintings, sculpture, and video. Zittel frequently mentions the idea of “utopia” in her statements, as both a tie to Modernist goals of the 20th century and as a current motivation in her work. Nicolas Bourriaud also discusses utopia in his 2002 book *Relational Aesthetics*, a concept he updates for this century. In this book, Bourriaud also discusses artists of the 1990s who rethought aspects of audience, duration, and materiality in their practices. Zittel is mentioned in passing in *Relational Aesthetics*, but many of her artistic strategies are reflected in the statements Bourriaud makes of other artists.

Zittel has stated, “Because I could not truly design for anyone else, I had to come to terms with the idea that once a product departed from my own possession, it would
need to be claimed by its new owner...What we forget is that there are at least two authors of every object—one is the designer, the other is the owner (or user).”

The second chapter charts the variety of ways Zittel cedes artistic authorship of her work, most often by inviting others to take on that role after she has designed the initial structure. Other times, she works with the future owner throughout the design and fabrication phases of a project to customize the work according to his or her desired aesthetic and function. These owners and users of her work are encouraged to change her pieces by adding personal possessions and making alterations. Together, their initiatives are meant to attest to the use that has taken place on or with the structure, and also to reflect the user’s personality and values—ends that are both practical and ideological. I believe the relationship Zittel cultivates between her work and its users to be a characteristic that separates her work from that of her peers.

Zittel’s later interest in customization was foregrounded by a variety of explorations of authorship earlier in her career. From the start, Zittel limited her involvement in the creation of objects through the use of found objects, store-bought materials, and engagement of naturally-occurring processes as a means for creation, such as the breeding of chickens. Additionally, Zittel began to adopt the language of advertising to describe her work; rather than issuing an artist’s statement for a project, she began instead to make promotional materials in the third person. I use the theories of Roland Barthes and Michel Foucault as historical context in this chapter, while statements made by the artist and collectors lend insight to the rationale behind and process of customization.

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The last chapter considers two case studies of the most transparent uses of Zittel’s work to date, which are installations of work in public contexts. These two examples put into practice the theory discussed in the previous two chapters. The transparency of their habitation provided more complex source material than the privately owned works from which to draw. Thanks to the curators currently involved with these projects, I am able to share previously unpublished information about how these residencies have functioned and what the future holds for these now uninhabited works.
CHAPTER 1: ZITTEL’S AUDIENCE

Andrea Zittel’s audience is divided between those who interact with her works and those who observe. Her sculptures are everyday environments designed to prompt use and interaction. In Zittel’s practice, a sculpture of an apartment is not meant to symbolize an apartment, but to be a place for living. She strips away unnecessary objects and ornamentation, so that a typical Zittel apartment, or A–Z Living Unit as they are titled, merely comprises a bed, a surface for working and dining, bookshelves and storage compartments, and a barebones kitchen with hotplate and washbasin. By their domestic nature, however, these works inherently limit the scope of those who can interact directly with the work, as they are intended for private use. The sculptures are sometimes displayed publically—in these contexts they can be viewed, but not touched.

As their purpose is to be used as an alternative form of domesticity, the Living Units prompt several questions. Who is meant to use the units? Does one have to use a work to understand the artist’s intent? What does it mean to observe a Zittel after its use by another? This chapter discusses Zittel’s intentions for her audience in relation to her interactive, and often habitable, works.
The first iteration of Zittel’s *Living Units* was her *A–Z Management and Maintenance Unit, Model 003* (1992), designed by Zittel to perfectly fit inside a small and sparsely appointed apartment in the Brooklyn neighborhood of Williamsburg [fig. 1]. A steel framework was assembled within the walls of a 40-square-foot room. Wood panels could be affixed to the metal in various combinations, and the end result included storage shelves and cabinets, a food prep area, a dining table with benches, and a lofted bed. Zittel found that semi-permanent structures such as this first unit were not suitable for the transitory aspects of contemporary apartment living, as something designed to perfectly fit the dimensions of a specific room could not realistically be transferred to another location. Her solution to this problem was the *A–Z Living Units* (1993 and 1994), which collapse the essentials for apartment living—kitchen, bed, and seating—into an oversized wheeled steamer trunk for easy relocation [figs. 2–3]. Their portability and adaptability made the *Living Units* suitable for use—or at least ownership as sculptures—by others, and in the following two years she made multiples for sale. This initial invitation for others to participate in the customization and use of her structures through ownership or her work marks the beginning of Zittel’s divided audience.

Further understanding of how her sculpture can be categorized within art historical discourse helps to clarify the boundaries between artwork and viewer. Zittel says her work is characterized by “literalness”—things exist and function as they appear, but prompt deeper exploration and critical engagement. Her use of “literal” is likely a

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nod to Michael Fried’s “Art and Objecthood,” in which he used the term “literalist” to discuss the work of artists associated with Minimalism, such as Robert Morris and Donald Judd. Fried positions the sculpture of these artists as antithetical to art, as their status as “objects” prompts theatricality, and “theater is now the negation of art.” Fried explains:

Literalist sensibility is theatrical because, to begin with, it is concerned with the actual circumstances in which the beholder encounters literalist work. Morris makes this explicit. Whereas in previous art ‘what is to be had from the work is located strictly within [it],’ the experience of the literalist art is of an object in a situation—one that, virtually by definition, includes the beholder.

Concern with the relationship between sculpture and the body was new territory explored by Minimalist artists, Fried argues. Robert Morris’s participatory sculpture drives this home, as seen in his Box for Standing (1961), Wheels (1963), and the immersive Passageway (1961), all of where made so the artist and others could physically engage the work [figs. 4–6]. Zittel’s wry adoption of Fried’s terminology underscores the usability (as an object) of her work—an element she encourages and incorporates into her sculpture.

Those who own her work, are friends of the artist, or participate in residencies at public institutions (see chapter 3) have the opportunity to directly engage with Zittel’s structures. Others can observe a unit that has been previously owned or used when it is later installed in an exhibition space, but the public is not permitted to enter or touch. These distinctions are not inherent in other more explanatory works, which she instead uses to communicate her experiences within her alternative structures for living to

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14Ibid., 838–839.
everyone else.

The artist uses gouache compositions of images and text, photographs, and video in an effort to share her observations with a wider audience. These works exist beside Zittel’s sculpture, not predating them, as would sketches or plans. They are typically comprised of text explaining portrayals of Zitel’s daily life: her actions, thoughts, and environment. This is exemplified by works such as the 2013 painting *To Create Structure and Order, or to Live in a Fluid State of Flux?*, which simultaneously states Zittel’s thought process and depicts her home organizational system of wall-mounted clipboards [fig. 7].

Zittel has stated, “I consciously make my work for personal experience.” But15 how widely available this experience is differs. When Zittel is the only person privy to these experiences, she considers herself a “sort of a sample citizen for society at large,” and believes her findings can be applied to a larger group of subjects.16 Regardless, she invites others to participate when they purchase her work, through loans of pieces to her friends, and public installations of her works inhabited by another artist.

Statements such as this, though, make the distribution of her work seem superfluous: “It’s really important that my work results in some real lived experience. I’m trying to figure out if it’s enough to have it myself or if I need to share it with others.” This leads to deciding if an object requires an audience for it to have a status as an artwork, and Zittel has asked herself “the question of what exactly it is that makes something ‘art.’ Is art about having a ‘real’ experience and learning from it—or does art

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15 Andrea Zittel, *Diary #01*, 128.

emerge in the act of packaging and communicating that experience?"\textsuperscript{17} Rather than reaching a clear solution, Zittel seems to have continued her multi-faceted approach; firstly, by providing opportunities for others to participate, and, secondly, the diaristic portrayal of her private activities made public by way of her published writings, drawings and paintings, and video.

Zittel has employed a variety of documentary means to share her life—exhibitions have included a first-person video (\textit{Small Liberties}, 2010) and looping PowerPoint presentation (\textit{Sufficient Self}, 2004); she co-published a journal titled \textit{Diary #01} (2002), and she has maintained a blog on www.zittel.org since March 2010. \textit{Sufficient Self} was included in the 2004 Whitney Biennial, four years after Zittel had moved her practice from Brooklyn to Joshua Tree, California. It is a 17-minute looping PowerPoint that focuses on the life she had then fairly recently established in Joshua Tree. Through slides of text interspersed with photographs, Zittel shares her recent projects, daily activities, the desert landscape, changes to her property, and exploratory forays into the surrounding area. \textit{Sufficient Self} also includes glimpses into the lives of her neighbors and the social groups to which Zittel belongs, such as the Interlopers Hiking Club. The text is matter-of-fact, with brief informative descriptions to contextualize the photographs, or dated journal entries that lend a feeling of an intimate look into the artist’s life.

Zittel felt conflicted about the opening up of her personal life. She stated:

There was a particular moment in the evolution of my practice when I finally came around to using a diaristic mode of presenting first-person experience as a conduit through which everything else could happen. Though sometimes I think things are more interesting to me than they are

\textsuperscript{17} Jacqueline Khiu, “Life’s Work,” \textit{Surface 59} (Summer 2006), 106.
to anyone else. I think my struggle with representation is more of an issue for me than it is for anyone else.\textsuperscript{18}

Zittel stated, “I would like to think that I’d do what I do whether I have an audience or not. Because it goes back to having an authentic experience.”\textsuperscript{19} Zittel’s understanding of experience seems to trump the importance of audience. Zittel broadcasted her private experience to a public audience, and a twofold problem arose: Was she committed to living within the rigid framework she had established because people were now watching? And, conversely, as an artist using her life as the foundation of her practice, did she need people to observe her activities? She turned to the writings of artist Allan Kaprow for a solution to these interrelated dilemmas. She stated:

I wanted to create works as a lived experience for both myself and for others, in part because I thought that would make it more real. What happened though, was that once my life became really public, it actually started to feel less real. It was hard to separate what I was doing for real and what I was doing for show. Was I putting my uniform on every day because it was more comfortable or because somebody might come by and I’d be out of character? That was kind of a turning point.\textsuperscript{20}

She continues to say that Kaprow’s practice enhanced her understanding of this seeming contradiction:

I’ve spent a lot of time thinking about this idea of ‘performance’ and ‘performing’ and what belongs in public and what doesn’t. I really love what Allan Kaprow wrote about performing art: in his mind the word ‘performing’ was used in the sense that you would perform a gesture. In his interpretation the word connotes a kind of ‘mindfulness.’\textsuperscript{21}

\textsuperscript{18} Julin, 63.
\textsuperscript{19} Cook, unpaged.
\textsuperscript{20} Julin, 21.
\textsuperscript{21} Ibid.
Through Kaprow’s statements, Zittel arrived at a reconciliation of issues of private and public activities, between authentic experience and performance, and that viewers are not essential to many of the activities she considers part of her practice.

Zittel’s sparse *Living Units* appear so adamantly anti-consumerist, that it initially seems a direct attack on excessive consumption. Despite this, Zittel does not seek to catalyze a counter-cultural group or movement, and, while she remains in touch with the owners of her work, they are free to use the pieces as they wish. Trevor Smith, co-curator of Zittel’s first large-scale museum exhibition titled *Critical Space*, observed of her work in the catalogue, “Zittel is…ambivalent about collectivity, proposing instead a socially responsive self-awareness where each person examines ‘his [or her] own talents and opinions, and then based on these begins to invent new models or roles to fulfill his or her needs.”22 Few interact with Zittel’s work, and there is not an attempt to establish a formalized community on the part of those who interact or the artist herself. While she may joke in artist’s statements about having “mass-produced” two *Living Units* during one year,23 she has, in fact, turned down requests to actually do so,24 presumably preferring to maintain a closer relationship with the artworks’ owners in order to stay abreast of their alterations.

Due to her aims to improve and streamline everyday life through largely unembellished, well-considered physical and conceptual structures—from her *Living


24 Cash, 126-7.
Units, to self-imposed uniforms, to a food product suitable for every meal—Zittel’s work has often been contextualized within the rubrics of 20th century European movements such Bauhaus, De Stijl, and Constructivism. Unlike these past artistic movements, Zittel’s purpose is not to disseminate a large number of standard units, or even a widespread ideology, but instead to make the Living Units available to a small number of people whose individual needs are taken into consideration through predetermined customizations or the user’s post-fabrication additions. In contrast to previous movements, Zittel keeps her audience deliberately small.

To Zittel, the obligation to create objects that improve the lives of a large number of other people lies in the field of design; as an artist, she’s free to experiment—Zittel’s works prompt questions rather than provide the steadfast solutions expected of good design. Zittel’s overlaps with design have elicited criticism, however, and as artist Joe Scanlan quipped in his essay “Please, Eat the Daisies,” “Zittel’s A–Z Living Units are so materially cumbersome and ergonomically cruel as to be laughable as anything other than art.” Zittel doesn’t aim to be a designer, and Scanlan’s observations oversimplify her practice, as the distinctions between art and design are more complex than a question of an object’s usability. Scanlan has a point, however, as there is no record of someone other than Zittel living in her work fulltime.

25The A–Z Food Group (1994) is a mixture of twelve dehydrated ingredients. Zittel stated that she “wanted it to be completely healthy and flexible enough that it could be cooked into a variety of interesting formats. In this search for a healthy, easy to prepare, and flexible enough that it could be cooked into a variety of interesting formats… Based on this concept of an all-in-one meal the A–Z Food Group consists of a medley of dehydrated grains, vegetables, fruits, and legumes and has the appearance of a garden potpourri.” Andrea Zittel, Diary #01, 18.

In his 1997 book *Relational Aesthetics*, curator and writer Nicolas Bourriaud discusses what he identified as a nascent artistic agenda to address smaller audiences. He considers this tendency to be both indebted to and in opposition of Modernism; these endeavors are idealistic, but applied on a hands-on basis rather than a grand scale. He states, “The role of artworks is no longer to form imaginary and utopian realties, but to actually be ways of living and models of action within the existing real, whatever the scale chosen by the artist.”

Zittel’s structures that make the most of affordable urban living spaces fit this observation by Bourriaud.

Bourriaud calls these initiatives, which aim to incite change or experience to a limited audience over the course of a predetermined timespan “micro-utopias.” Dissemination of ideas and wide production are not aims of the artists discussed in Bourriaud’s text. “These days, utopia is being lived on a subjective, everyday basis, in the real time of concrete and intentionally fragmentary experiments,” Bourriaud continues, “It seems more pressing to invent possible relations with our neighbors in the present than to bet on happier tomorrows.” Bourriaud argues throughout *Relational Aesthetics*, that micro-utopias share the hopefulness of Modernist aims, but also contain key oppositions, such as the scope of its participants and the impermanent nature of interactions that form a group united by its shared experiences. Lynn Zelevansky commented on this aspect of Zittel’s work in 1994:

Zittel is interested in redefining the artist’s role. Rather than acting as a moral authority apart from society, she feels that artists should serve the community, in the manner that designers and architects now can. She looks back to those moments in the 20th century when the vanguard

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adopted this worthwhile goal. She neither endorses nor indicts those phrases of Modernism; instead, she explores issues that they raised… Zittel notes that she differs from the early Modernists in that they were concerned with organizing society at large, while her work functions on a more personal level.\textsuperscript{29, 30}

The Modernist issues Zittel confronts include utopia, but also ones such as freedom and luxury, and their oppositions, such as confinement and poverty.

Zittel discusses utopic aspects of her work, but as a “sample citizen” her utopia is limited to one. She mentioned this aspect of her work specifically when discussing her \textit{A–Z Deserted Islands} (1997) [fig. 8]. Naturalistically shaped like rocks or ice with irregular jagged edges and topped by a padded white seat, when installed the \textit{Deserted Islands} are anchored in the middle of lakes, and are an invitation to swimmers to rest in isolation. “The islands that I construct are meant as utopias for one person—a bitter-sweet idea,” Zittel explained.\textsuperscript{31} Zittel’s audience is selective; rather than a discourse forged or experience shared between strangers, as Bourriaud discusses in \textit{Relational Aesthetics}, Zittel instead offers solitude to someone for as long as he or she chooses to remain on an island. His or her experience may parallel that of other’s, but it is not a shared micro-utopia as discussed by Bourriaud. Furthermore, the \textit{Deserted Islands} is more a metaphor for utopia than a practical solution—the idea of seclusion is more enticing than actually swimming out to be secluded.

Zittel’s interest in Modernism goes beyond ideologies to also encompass aesthetic priorities. She has stated that her working method is “not a new strategy and was the

\textsuperscript{29} Zelevansky, 29.

\textsuperscript{30} Zelevansky, 30.

\textsuperscript{31} Coles, 3.
position of groups like the Bauhaus, the Russian Constructivists and De Stijl.” She concludes, “My departure from these movements occurs when I work with the dilemmas and the contradictions that their work unearthed.”32 She positions her work in dialogue with modern design, and as such, her Living Units share a sensibility with the wood and metal shelving of Charles and Ray Eames, for example. She said she purposely adopted this aesthetic because she “discovered that through the language of modern design, this kind of lifestyle could be translated into a sparse but elegant habitat that could make limitations feel like luxuries.”33

The small scale of Zittel’s operation keeps her work from closely resembling Modernist movements—she produces for herself, a small group of collectors, and a few friends—but her taking up of issues raised by these groups in the 20th century does lend her work the utopic quality discussed by Bourriaud. Zittel is sensitive to this, and genuinely enjoys the enthusiasm garnered by leaders of these now-defunct movements. She has stated, “One of the reasons that I’m so fascinated by modernism is that it was the last era of great faith…people still really believed. Faith seems to be a natural human trait, and although I don’t want to embarrass myself or be overly naïve, I still try to indulge in the act of belief now and then.”34 She explained her position further:

Intellectually of course, we understand the failures or ‘death’ of modernism. However, in the desires and expectations of our day-to-day lives we continue to have an almost superstitious faith in the


33 Zittel, Diary #01, 62.

34 Zittel, Diary #01, 119.
inevitability of ‘linear evolution,’ in the possibility to constantly reconfigure our lives and in an unshakeable belief in progress. I don’t really see beliefs as ‘problems.’

Perhaps what most distinguishes Zittel from previous movements is that she acts alone in her belief system. She is not part of a school or group, and this, in a way, is what shields her ideas from criticism; Zittel categorizes her ideas as “personal,” rather than an ideology.

Zittel emphasizes customization and personal (over collective) experience. She acknowledges that everyone has unique wants, goals, and desires when presenting others with the opportunity to alter or use her work as they wish, as individuals, and not as part of a group. The importance of their individuality is underscored by the emphasis Zittel places on the possessions they add and the physical alterations they make to her work—that these changes can add up to portray the values of the person who made them.

In an interview conducted in 2002—five years after the publication of Relational Aesthetics—Bourriaud discussed the formation of micro-utopias as a localized activity. If unable to alter society on a large scale, as was aspired to by Modernist movements, artists should start by effecting social changes in their immediate surroundings. “I think that [large scale improvement] is totally impossible and what artists are trying to do now is to create micro-utopias,” Bourriaud stated, “Neighborhood utopias, like talking to your neighbor, just

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35 Vischer, 16.
what’s happening when you shake hands with somebody.”

Zittel’s practice, too, became more localized during these years.

In 1999 Zittel moved from her Williamsburg townhouse (which she had named A–Z, then later renamed as A–Z East) to a large plot of land in Joshua Tree, now A–Z West. Social activities and groups—such as the Thursday Evening Personal Presentations at the A–Z at A–Z East and the Interlopers Hiking Club at A–Z West have been part of Zittel’s life at both of these locations—and although these activities certainly informed her practice, they are not artworks. Rather, it was the seemingly limitless expanse of available land, in contrast to cramped and expensive urban interiors, that transformed her works into standalone shelters from the all-encompassing home furnishings that she had previously made.

Zittel moved, in part, because she sought a space where her work could have an entire lifespan: conceptualization, creation, customization, use, and natural wear while available for viewing. She stated:

In a world that tends to package art as an import/export commodity, I often find myself wondering if there are still ways to experience an artwork in a single place and moment in time. What if, rather than trying to campaign for more and more funding and lure out larger audience and travel our exhibitions, we develop works that cost less, that are dependent on no one for their creation, and provide an experience for an intimate audience?

Despite the relative isolation of her home in Joshua Tree, Zittel believes that participation remains integral to certain project’s success. This is most clearly evidenced in her A–Z


38 Julin, 15.
Wagon Stations (2003). These works were made to house friends and visitors on her expansive property. In their original state, pre-customization, these metal structures are just large enough to hold a bed and wall-mounted shelf. Four legs support the unit’s base, and one curved wall opens up like a hatchback car, complete with a curved vertical window to let in light when closed. The units were first installed at the Milwaukee Art Museum for a year before their return to Joshua Tree [fig. 8].\(^3\) Once the Wagon Stations were sited on her property, Zittel invited her friends and frequent visitors to customize them [fig. 9].\(^4\) They remained in use until their inclusion in the 2011 exhibition Lay of My Land at Magasin 3 in Stockholm, where they were displayed open with all of the users’ customizations and additions [fig. 10]. This installation marked the end of the pieces’ use.

The remoteness of her location in Joshua Tree has perhaps prompted a new approach to exhibitions. While technically open to those who schedule a visit, A–Z West’s remote location implies exclusivity; it is difficult to visit, and from documentation on Zittel’s blog and her diaristic videos, the audience appears more local than the international audiences of urban art centers. The seven-piece artwork Lay of My Land, the title work for the Magasin 3 exhibition, was conceived with a wider viewership in mind. Zittel and her assistants sculpted seven parcels of her Joshua Tree property in plaster, Styrofoam, and sand and displayed them on steel armatures placed on the ground, like dioramas in a natural history exhibit [fig. 11]. These monochromatic horizontal panels are populated


\(^4\) Julin, 103.
with the buildings that form Zittel’s compound and include natural features, like boulders, rocks, and hills. As such, visitors to the exhibition can develop an understanding of where the Wagon Stations on view had been installed for the previous seven years in the arid expanse of Joshua Tree. Rather than the photograph and text format of her previous video works sharing her experiences at Joshua Tree with a wider audience, in this instance Zittel let the land speak for itself, an act that implies how important she believes context to be. Thus, an audience in Stockholm was invited to embark on a sort of virtual visit to the hub of Zittel’s practice.

The remoteness of Joshua Tree prompts associations between Zittel’s endeavors and those associated with Land Art, such as Walter de Maria and Michael Heizer. More specifically, the Magasin 3 works nod to Robert Smithson’s “non-sites,” for which the artist used samples of earth, stone, and minerals; industrial materials such as mirror and aluminum; and altered maps or close up photographs to give a viewer the sense of a removed location. In his 1968 essay “A Provisional Theory of Non-Sites,” Smithson stated of his work A Non-Site, Pine Barrens, New Jersey [fig. 12]:

> Between the actual site in the Pine Barrens and the Non-Site itself exists a space of metaphoric significance. It could be that “travel” in this space is a vast metaphor. Everything between the two sites could become physical metaphorical material devoid of natural meanings and realistic assumptions. Let us say that one goes on a fictitious trip if one decides to go to the site of the Non-Site. The “trip” becomes invented, devised, artificial; therefore, one might call it a non-trip to a site from a Non-Site.41

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Zittel clearly shares this line of thinking, although *Lay of My Land* is a more veristic portrayal of a landscape than Smithson’s abstracted maps and arranged natural materials. She strives to form a connection, although one that is imagined, between her land in Joshua Tree and faraway viewers.

Art historian and critic Jan Avgikos remarked on the imaginative aspects of Zittel’s work in a 1999 exhibition catalogue by stating, “My clothes. My bed. My floating island home. My body. We viewers occupy the designated personal zones in Zittel’s art as voyeurs, or worse yet, as tourists.” The viewer becomes a virtual tourist to Joshua Tree, or a virtual inhabitant in Zittel’s sculpture when works are on display and no longer functional. This is not necessarily negative, as Avgikos implies, but it is a speculative exercise, attempting to gain an understanding of a Zittel work without actually having the opportunity to engage one directly.

Throughout Zittel’s career, the artist has employed a multifaceted and evolving approach to her audience. Her sculptures ask a lot of their owners and users, and their limited production means few are able to fully participate. Zittel tries to accommodate for this by creating opportunities for distanced spectatorship with her videos, gouaches, and installations created for museums and galleries. Her audience is differentiated by the role each member plays, and her deliberately small scope is opened up through documentary measures. Zittel must, therefore, see her audience as divided between those who use her work and others who are only able to observe. This second audience is necessary specifically for their

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42 Jan Avgikos, “These Things I Know About Her,” *Personal Programs* (Ostfildern-Ruit: Hatje Cantz, 2000), 16.
viewership—not their participation. Her primary audience consisting of the users of Zittel’s objects and their various roles in customization, authorship, and public display will be further discussed in the next chapter.
As discussed in the previous chapter, Zittel’s personal and domestic necessity was the impetus for much of her early work. She stated of her usable works, “I made furniture and lived with it. And when I needed a change, I’d sell the whole set and make a new one.” Later, she became more interested in the alterations made by others to her work after it left her hands.

Rather than simply selling her furniture and creating a new set, she began to form ongoing relationships with her buyers. She tracked their changes to her work for the purpose of her own interest, and published some of her findings in her *A–Z Personal Profiles Newsletter* made for distribution to her friends and collectors. This chapter explores the conceptual basis of Zittel’s approach to customization and how she sees these actions as impacting the authorship of her works. Even though others conduct alterations, Zittel folds these activities into what she considers the final artwork. Thus, users of her work greatly impact the appearance of the final works, when artworks are brought later into public collections accompanied by the additional objects. The following text discusses Zittel’s process, both in regard to the overall evolution of her

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43 Cook, unpaged.
working method over the course of her work and how individual works come to fruition, undergo customization, and are later preserved.

If assessed according to the schema set forth by Rosalind Krauss in her essay “Sculpture in the Expanded Field,” Zittel’s work could be categorized as an “axiomatic structure” — a classification that exists between “architecture” and “not architecture” on Krauss’ diagrammatic representation [fig. 13]. Krauss includes the work of Robert Irwin, Sol LeWitt, Bruce Nauman, Richard Serra, and Christo in this category, as some of their works are “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.”

Zittel’s works are not abstract, as Krauss’ examples are, but are architectural without actually being architecture. Her Living Units and other similar works of the 1990s especially are not standalone structures, but function in tandem with existing architectural spaces. They often can be used as furniture, but also provide the functionality that is usually integrated into domestic architecture, such as the means to cook or bathe when water is available. This lack of boundaries permits others to use and potentially change her works. Zittel became increasingly invested in the process and meaning of customization early in her career. Although she is a “sample citizen” who can come to conclusions about the simplicity versus livability of her work, hypothetically a larger pool of participants allows for a broader understanding of the various approaches a person can take when living with a Zittel.

Customization takes place in two ways. Firstly, some works are manufactured according to demand and are commissioned from the artist according to the desires of the

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work’s future owner. For example, if someone wanted to own an A–Z Cellular Compartment Unit, they would work directly with Zittel on the production of a new work suited to their intended function and aesthetics (such as colors and materials). This scenario is documented in a catalogue accompanying the 2003 exhibition Andrea Zittel at Sammlung Goetz in Munich. This exhibition consisted of an A–Z Cellular Compartment Unit designed in consultation with the collector Ingvild Goetz and her staff. A–Z Cellular Compartment Units are comprised of rectangular modules fabricated from stainless steel, plywood, and glass that can be stacked or aligned in various configurations. As such, a large room could be transformed into several small spaces, each dedicated to a single purpose—for sleep, eating, or work.\textsuperscript{45} Emails published in the catalogue detail the process that led to the finished product, as Zittel worked with the staff at Sammlung Goetz to determine the scale, capacity, function, and color of the six units that make up the piece.\textsuperscript{46}

For the most part, however, customization occurs in stages, and begins with standard customizable units made in series that Zittel has positioned as the center of her practice. These include the A–Z Living Unit (started 1993), A–Z Escape Vehicle (1996), A–Z Cellular Compartment Unit (2001), A–Z Homestead Unit (2001), and the A–Z Wagon Stations (2003). This more mutable type of customization occurs post-manufacture, when users outfit or more significantly change the appearance of a work, and they are free to edit and expand on these alterations throughout the duration of their ownership. Users and owners are encouraged by Zittel to continually alter her works,

\textsuperscript{45} Ingvild Goetz, Rainald Schumacher, Mimi Zeiger, and Andrea Zittel, \textit{Andrea Zittel} (Munich: Sammlung Goetz, 2003), 119.

\textsuperscript{46} Ibid.
which she purposefully makes as minimally designed as possible as a way to invite others to participate.\textsuperscript{47}

The art system’s modus operandi must be undermined in two ways in order for others to alter her works post-fabrication. As curator Paola Morsiani stated, “The artist…retooled the relationship of artist/collector and collector/artwork by asking new owners to integrate the artwork unto their lives as an actual piece of usable furniture, modifying it to fit their domestic and individual needs.”\textsuperscript{48} Firstly, Zittel had to convince collectors that, unlike a typical art object, her works were not intended to remain in pristine condition. This goes against the notions of preservation, artistic authority, and monetary value that are considered integral to the treatment and reception of art. Secondly, the artist needed to find collectors who were willing to partake in an ongoing relationship surrounding the use and change of her work. Not only was their ownership intended to be active, but communicative as well, and to such an extent that they contributed information for inclusion in Zittel’s \textit{A–Z Personal Profiles Newsletter}, which the artist published and distributed in thirteen issues between September 1996 and August 1997.\textsuperscript{49} She shared her life as well, and utilized the newsletter to update her readers on her recent activities at A–Z East.\textsuperscript{50}

Issues of authorship and artistic authority are also evident in Zittel’s works that predate her customizable sculpture. She started her \textit{Repair Works} series shortly after her arrival in New York in 1991. Zittel found broken objects on the street and restored their

\textsuperscript{47} Morsiani, 24.

\textsuperscript{48} \textit{Ibid}.

\textsuperscript{49} \textit{Ibid}., 17.

\textsuperscript{50} \textit{Ibid}.
functionality through simplistic means, without regard for the object’s original appearance. For example, Repair Work [Table] (1991) is a small battered side table Zittel found with only two remaining spindled legs [fig. 14]. She replaced the other two with unadorned, unpainted lumber she cut to size and glued to the existing table—the simplest solution, and one that purposely does not privilege artistic style, but instead relies on readily available and inexpensive materials. Aspects of authorship and collaboration found in this work anticipate Zittel’s later sculpture, but she thinks that these were likely then-latent interests. In a 2001 interview with the artist, curator Stefano Basilico pointed out these themes found in the Repair Works related to her future longstanding explorations, and Zittel responded that she was not sure if she had been thinking specifically about authorship at this time.51

She soon began to deliberately consider authorship, however, as is evidenced by a statement for her project breeding bantam chickens (also begun in 1991), in which she made the claim that “Chickens hatch from eggs so there is complete authorship of the ‘creation.’”52 She did not elaborate, but it seems that Zittel believed an egg’s impermeable shell to be symbolic of a product unmediated by outside influences—a hen’s “complete authorship.” For the A–Z Bantam Breeding Project, she sought to undermine generations of selective breeding that had caused recessive traits to become more prominent than dominant traits. She bred different types of bantams together to return to create an “average” chicken.53 While significantly different from the Repair


52 Paola Morsiani and Trevor Smith, Andrea Zittel: Critical Space, 149.

53 Ibid.
Works in medium, duration, and overall intent, these two bodies of work share the fact that Zittel limits her involvement. As with her later customizable units, for these early series Zittel set a process in motion, and allowed the project to unfold outside of her activities, but within parameters she established.

Zittel further obfuscated authorship by founding the company A–Z Administrative Services, also in 1991. She did this initially so manufacturers would take seriously her requests for information and materials necessary for her A–Z Bantam Breeding Project. Companies were responsive to Zittel’s “illusion of being an entity much larger than [herself],” and it empowered her at a time when she was newly out of graduate school and her work had not yet garnered widespread attention. Necessity aside, she began to fold this corporate identity into her overall practice and used the company name in brochures promoting series of her work. She found the company useful in this instance because the language of advertising allowed her to make statements that she felt an artist could not ethically make. She stated, “Ads allow me to say what I believe or hope that products will do, since everybody understands the language of advertising as one of fantasy, I don’t feel that I am leading people on or lying to them.” Her resulting advertising materials blur the boundaries of authorship by using the implied authority of a company to state personal beliefs.

54 Ibid., 18.
55 Basilico, unpaged.
56 Basilico, upaged.
57 Morsiani, 19.
With these three early projects and initiatives in mind, Zittel’s later invitation to others to alter her work, and, therefore, share authorship of these objects, is a clear progression of Zittel’s ideas. She stated:

I realized that ultimately I was only able to design to serve my own needs. Because I could not truly design for anyone else, I had to come to terms with the idea that once a product departed from my own possession, it would need to be claimed by its new owner… What we forget is that there are at least two authors of every object—one is the designer, the other is the owner (or user).^58

Thus, customization became more than an artistic interest, and instead grew to be an essential tool to ensure the efficacy of her projects.

Zittel stated in a 1997 interview, “I think my work actually questions the desire for artistic authority. Even though people often claim to desire individuality and free choice, they still seem to choose the tangible value of an art object authored by an expert over a possession in which they have a creative hand.”^59 This is perhaps because collectors are in some sense aware that their participation results in the negation of something else: Zittel as artist. Zittel cedes some of her artistic authority by encouraging others to alter her work after completion. While working with castoff furniture and decorative objects and the recessive chicken genes diminished Zittel’s need for a specific aesthetic style by choosing the least complicated method of repair or the uncontrollable aspects of reproduction, her interactive sculpture required others to become complicit in the destruction of her artistic authority. She has found this aspect of her practice to be a struggle, as collectors of her work often privilege the original object for reasons of artistic integrity or resale value, and consequently refrain from making alterations.

^58 Zittel, *Diary #01*, 119.

^59 Grögel, 98.
The functional aspects of Zittel’s work have led to comparisons to other artists working in the 90s and 2000s who also create usable pieces, such as Jorge Pardo and Joep Van Lieshout.⁶⁰ Pardo’s 4166 Sea View Lane (1998) is “a sculpture that is also a house” that was on view for the public as part of the Los Angeles Museum of Contemporary Art’s exhibition program from October 11 through November 15, 1998 [fig. 15].⁶¹,⁶² Thereafter, Pardo used the home as his own private residence. The Dutch artist Joep Van Lieshout also creates usable structures. His Clip-On (1997) is a room that attached to the exterior of the Centraal Museum, Utrecht, and designed for the director to have a private space [fig. 16]. Like Zittel’s Living Units, Clip-On is dependent on pre-existing architecture, as it is bolted directly to the building. Clearly, these and other artists pushed the boundaries between art and design, a commonality shared by Zittel. Unlike her, however, they did not simultaneously investigate the overlaps between creator and user and the impact of these accumulated actions on authorship. This factor distinguishes Zittel’s work.

Zittel has prompted some successful alterations by others, and these works are characterized by their stylistic variety, as is most evident when previously used units of the same series are reunited for display. Morsiani, who was co-curator of Zittel’s first large-scale exhibition, points out in the 2005 catalogue, “While on the one hand each piece simply becomes ‘a photograph’ of the owner, on the other hand their coexistence within Zittel’s production in all their diversity represents a short-circuiting of the artist’s


semiotic process, that is, a lost of stylistic unity, but most of all a loss of stability and plain coherence.\textsuperscript{63} This was clear as well a decade earlier, as well, when curator Madeleine Grynsztejn wrote about Zittel’s work in the exhibition catalogue for \textit{About Place: Recent Art of the Americas}. Grynsztejn stated, “In this installation of used living modules….Zittel relinquishes absolute authoritative design and welcomes the unexpected vagaries and felicities of co-authorship.”\textsuperscript{64}

When stylistic unity is lost, it is replaced by traces of activity that, over time, form a narrative for the artwork. Zittel considers this integral. She stated:

> When these structures are on the verge of falling apart I extract them and aid their transition to an institution that will look after them and archive their history. If an object has as long and circuitous a trajectory as some of the \textit{A–Z [Escape] Vehicles}, then, when you see one of them in a museum, you get a sense of something that has really passed through time and has a story to tell. But I only figured that out recently. Many of my earlier works felt too hermetically sealed because they weren’t allowed to play out a full lived life.\textsuperscript{65}

As her practice progressed, Zittel realized the value of lived experience and the narrative surrounding the object or environment and began to incorporate these traces of interaction into the artwork.

Unused works were particularly problematic in institutional contexts where acquisitions are maintained in perpetual mint-condition, never allowing for the vital markings of life to be embedded. Zittel, as earlier in her career, has continued to insert herself into the process of artwork purchases by beginning to rethink the creation and sale of her works in two different markets: the public realm and the institution. Freshly

\textsuperscript{63} Morsiani, 25–6.

\textsuperscript{64} Madeleine Grynsztejn, \textit{About Place: Recent Art of the Americas} (Chicago: Art Institute of Chicago, 1995), 19.

\textsuperscript{65} Coles, 4.
fabricated works are available for purchase in exhibitions at Sadie Coles HQ (London), Andrea Rosen Gallery (New York), Sprüth Magers (Berlin), Regen Projects (Los Angeles), and Galleria Massimo De Carlo (Milan), but customized and used works are placed in the hands of public institutions, which archive and catalogue their contents.

Michel Foucault works against the concept of authors as producers of—to borrow Zittel’s term—“hermetic” works. In “What is an Author,” he discusses how authorship had become more fluid at the time of his writing, 1969, than was the common perception. Foucault stated, “The initiation of discursive practices appears similar to the founding of any scientific endeavor,” and Zittel’s work could similarly be seen as a hypothesis. She has pointed out that, for her, really good art “brings up complicated questions rather than proposing smug answers.” She tries to address the problems that surface through her projects in the next work she makes, so that her practice revolves around trying to amend previous failures. In regard to failure, the piece she mentioned most often in her writings and interviews is the A–Z Management and Maintenance Unit, Model 003 (1992)—her first design for an apartment that led to the Living Units. Zittel states that the design was too final; predating her mobile designs, this precursor was physically and conceptually in stasis, as she thought no further improvements were necessary. She decided that progress was more intriguing than perfection, and, as goals vary from person to person, this could also have had a bearing on Zittel’s decision to invite others to


68 Basilico, unpaged.

69 Andrea Zittel, Diary #01, 62.
alternate her works. As such, the possibilities would be endless, and no one would likely be completely satisfied with the alterations of another.

As previously discussed, artistic authorship is inherently linked to value in the art market. This, of course, benefits Zittel financially when selling her work, even as it problematizes the engaged ownership she seeks. She is willing to forgo or lessen financial gain for the prospect of participation, however, and she has offered up the sale of licenses for “registered copies” or encouraged the replication of her work. She found that:

Lots of institutions did copies, but more takers wanted real pieces. There were six or seven versions of the pit bed, some exact copies, others did radical take-offs. I was interested in production issues. A furniture company offered to mass-produce objects if I designed them, but then I’d lose its experimental nature. Students would say: “I’d love to live in a piece, but I can’t afford it,” so I’d say: “copy it.” People with a lot of money bought official pieces and a student could do a copy. The idea of value was important. 70

Zittel’s ideas circulate as objects to be appropriated. However, there are limits to the way this working method can function in relation to one object, created directly by a single artist, and customized over the course of a few years. So, realistically, Zittel proposes co- or dual authorship rather than the non-authorship that characterizes her A–Z Bantam Breeding Project. But what do people do when given unlimited options to engage and alter Zittel’s works? And how does that affect their later public display?

“For me,” Zittel stated, “with the Living Units and Escape Vehicles, by far the most interesting thing about them is what people do with them once they get them and what that reveals about them and what they value...what someone does when they can do

A–Z Escape Vehicles differed from the A–Z Living Units in two significant ways. Unlike the gradual process of customization that characterizes the Living Units, the Escape Vehicles (1996) were immediately outfitted by their future owners and installed in a solo exhibition at Andrea Rosen Gallery later that year. They also did not address the demands of everyday life; instead, as their name suggests, they provided a fantastical environments tailored to the owner’s fantasies, from an isolation tank, to a place with special fans for smoking cigars, to plush blue velvet interior complete with wet bar. Zittel’s own Escape Vehicle is a papier-mâché recreation of the Bavarian King Ludwig’s grotto [fig. 17]. It joined the Museum of Modern Art’s (New York) collection the following year, and in this time it was not able to gain the altered or worn patina of other works. The Escape Vehicles’ clear distinctions between authors make them a less complex example of co-authorship. With Zittel’s design choices coating the outside in an aluminum exterior decorated with pinstripes and the user’s choices relegated to the interior, the roles of Zittel and those who customize are literally delineated, not discursive, as the Living Units are.

As such, the Living Units are a more suitable study for Zittel’s approach to co-authorship. A 1996 exhibition catalogue published by the Museum für Gegenwartskunst, Basel, which, through a series of interviews, provides valuable insight into how owners navigate their roles within Zittel’s artistic framework. Foremost, no one at that time had chosen to use their Living Unit as it was intended, as an integral component of a primary

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71 Arty Nelson, “Be Your Own Guinea Pig,” LA Weekly 29, no. 21, April 13-19, 57.

residence. The units were used as a traveling office for an art dealer,\textsuperscript{73} bar,\textsuperscript{74} and potential guest bedroom.

Each collector navigated Zittel’s invitation of engaged ownership and dual authorship differently. Some were deliberately light of touch, as they wanted to privilege Zittel’s role in the work. The collectors Patti and Frank Kolodny stated of their 1994 unit, “The modifications were rather minor and very personal in order to improve the functional aspects of the Living Unit—a light switch, drawers, improved accessibility from both sides of the desk area, headboard. We would not want to significantly tamper with the overall sculptural aesthetics of the artist.”\textsuperscript{75} Conversely, Leonora and Jimmy Belilty more willingly embraced this new role [fig. 18]. Their Living Unit was constructed in Venezuela according to Zittel’s specifications.\textsuperscript{76} They stated, “We dressed the Living Unit with objects that are part of our daily environment and with objects that are clues to our way of facing our relation with art. Therefore, the original sample unit was austere and ours is a little more joyous. Maybe we ‘tropicalized’ it.”\textsuperscript{77} They continue to describe the objects they added to their Living Unit: work by Latin American contemporary artists, dishware, and pre-Columbian artifacts and books.\textsuperscript{78} The A to Z 1994

\textsuperscript{73} Vischer, 28.
\textsuperscript{74} Ibid., 33.
\textsuperscript{75} Ibid., 41.
\textsuperscript{76} Ibid., 44.
\textsuperscript{77} Ibid.
\textsuperscript{78} Ibid.
Living Unit Customized for Leonora and Jimmy Belilty was sold at auction three years later, complete with the Belilty’s added possessions.\(^{79}\)

In his 1967 essay “The Death of the Author” Roland Barthes matter-of-factly stated, “The birth of the reader must be at the cost of the death of the Author.”\(^{80}\) While Zittel willingly offers up her authority as artist/author, this empty metaphorical space needs to be claimed by others—the customizer/reader—and she has found them hesitant to do so on a large scale. Therefore, owners must be cognizant that customization comes at a cost. She has found the most successful instances of collaboration to be the A–Z Wagon Stations embellished by her friends, who view her work as less precious, perhaps because—as these works are loans to their users and remain in Zittel’s possession until later sale—they have less at stake.\(^{81}\)

Works are free to pass from owner to owner, each with the opportunity to override the previous owner’s alterations. Interestingly, Zittel has observed that when past works are re-sold, new owners refrain from further customization; however, this tendency could be indicative of a number of considerations, including fear of decreasing the value of the artwork, rather than illustrative of a satisfaction with past interventions.\(^{82}\) In any case, withheld participation limits the scope of authors of any one object. This is one example of how authorship is shared amongst the artist and owners, but it is not


\(^{81}\) Grögel, 103.

\(^{82}\) *Ibid.*, 100.
equal. And, while Zittel can offer participation to others, she is clearly the dominant author: she is the initiator of the project, the largest participant in the lifestyle she proposes, and the authority when it comes to installing her work in public contexts.

This overarching authorship is evident in exhibitions, in which Zittel sets the stage to convey her works as usable objects. Morisiani explains,

Museum viewers very rarely are able to step into a Zittel unit, but must be content to witness her practice and observe the owner’s habits, needs, and wishes. Zittel, however, does not leave this constituency unaddressed. To include a sense of the museum audience’s specific position in relation to her work, Zittel uses the gallery literally as a presentation room: painting walls, carpeting the floor, and adding illustrative drawings. So the viewers’ first encounter, already both contemplative and voyeuristic, is further transformed into a somewhat participator experience induced by Zittel’s creation of an emphatic tableau that hovers between commercial showroom and museum installation.\(^{83}\)

Zittel explains her approach to exhibition making

I also think its important that people understand the roles of different sorts of art spaces. The underlying role of a gallery is basically that it’s a place where work is commoditized and distributed. It is this exchange that facilitates all the other projects that I do. And museums are spaces where information is disseminated and people are in a sense ‘educated.’ But it is important that the work also exists in a situation where people can see it in its original or more native context.\(^{84}\)

As Zittel’s statement illustrates, an essay with multiple authors still has an editor, which is currently a role she fills. This is one of the largest questions in relation to the posterity of Zittel’s work, and is unremarked upon by the artist, writers, and curators. It is giving too much credit to objects to presume that every item a person owns contributes in some way to a larger understanding of the owner’s personality, identity, and values. Should the refuse of daily life, such as crumpled receipts and outdated magazines, be absorbed by

\(^{83}\) Morsiani, 27.

\(^{84}\) Julin, 17.
the artwork? Who decides which items should stay and which should be thrown away? This process is maybe made easier because no one appears to live in a Zittel fulltime, except for the artist herself, and others can be selective about the objects they add to their pieces. The stipulations of wall color, didactic material, and accompanying illustrations mentioned by Morisiani are not imbedded in the works—Zittel adds these components to installations as they occur. Anyone other than Zittel would likely employ a lighter curatorial touch, and how and if Zittel’s work should be installed by others as she would herself is a topic the artist should clarify.

Not only is the appearance of the Living Units adapted, but the artist’s intention is as well. As the units are not utilized as structures for simplified living, but instead are installed in homes with ample room to accommodate them, they exist alongside (rather than become the nucleus of) everyday life. These and other works by Zittel, such as the residencies described the following chapter, become retreats from the demands of domesticity, and, unlike the Escape Vehicles, nearly monastic in their sparseness. Thus, they slip from the practical into the metaphoric for most owners, although, in albeit fewer cases, they are put to use.

Two such documented examples are public installations of Zittel’s work that were resided in at various points in their history, and these are the most ready example of fulltime habitants. One in Indianapolis, Indiana, and the other in Canberra, Australia, these works provide the opportunity for unmediated portrayal of the experience of living in a Zittel. In place of curated exhibitions or edited publications, the residents have all shared their alterations to a Zittel while they occurred—nearly unmediated—through in-
person interactions and blogs. The following chapter digs deeper into how these residencies have functioned.
CHAPTER 3: CASE STUDIES: PUBLIC HABITATION OF ZITTEL’S WORK

Zittel has worked with two museums to design, install, and facilitate residencies on the grounds of their institutions in initiatives that fold together alterations by the user and public display. The first residency program, *Indy Island* (2010) is installed at the Indianapolis Museum of Art, and the second, *A–Z Homestead Unit (Commission for the National Gallery of Australia: Customised by Charlie Sofo)* (2012), was on display in Canberra, Australia, on the grounds of the National Gallery of Australia. This chapter is made possible through the participation of curators at the Indianapolis Museum of Art and the National Gallery of Australia, who are singularly privy to many details of planning and implementation of the residencies.

As Zittel has stated, the public inhabitation of these works by others bridges the gap between personal experience and public viewership that is present in many of her works.\(^{85}\) Additionally, as objects and events hosted by non-profit organizations, this

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model is an answer to the problems of value and resale that hindered the customization of privately owned works.

While the ability to directly engage Zittel’s work for a substantial period of time is still limited to few, the public can interact with the residents or glimpse their interactions with the work through blogs they maintain, per each museum’s criteria for its residents. The residents have used the structure of the residency to different ends, as is seen in the blogs, which themselves utilize different media—text, images, video, and sound—in posts of varying detail and frequency. The origin of this criterion is not clear, but it is similar to Zittel’s own early *Personal Profiles* newsletter in that it shares private activities with an audience. As such, it is likely that Zittel thought the blogs integral to the ability for the public to view the work.

Perhaps due to these artworks’ locations outside of art centers, these specific works have are rarely mentioned outside of local press. Being sited in places other than large metropolises likely makes these works feasible, however, because they would be impossible to implement where space is at a premium. The generous grounds of these institutions benefit Zittel’s works. Other museum resources, such as staff time, are dedicated to the residency as well. Curators are the residency facilitators, and remain in contact with Zittel about the residency and structures in addition to coordinating the museum operations needed to implement the project.

An artwork that is occupied by a person fulltime is outside the purview of a museum’s typical role. In fact, in an environment where staff conserves and repairs artworks, it could be argued that the museum becomes complicit in the object’s partial
destruction through this use. Museums must agree with Zittel that habitation of the artwork is important enough to justify the time and effort involved in working outside the rigid framework that dictates how museums function. The result is a strategic use of museum resources and structures to several different ends.

Through these endeavors, the object becomes more storied. The piece is no longer a theoretical proposition for how Zittel’s ideas may possibly work, but grow to include how someone actually employed them. Thus, a history is created for the work as it is on view. Additionally, the residencies have been conducted to date by artists with less professional exposure than Zittel, who is internationally exhibited, collected, and written about. It must be acknowledged that living publicly in a Zittel work has the possibility of bolstering a younger artist’s career, a boost which is reciprocated by the resident through his or her participation in what Zittel sees as the completion of her work. As with Zittel’s past projects, the resident or user is credited in the artwork’s title. This relationship also allows for artists whose work in media not often the focus of museums’ collections, such as extended performance pieces and social interventions.

With this in mind, Zittel’s works for public habitation are not so much a shelter in the traditional sense, but an opportunity for experimentation. The resident is not a surrogate for Zittel, and their projects differ greatly from her own practice, as is evidenced by case studies of these two works.

*Indy Island*

Zittel conceptualized *Indy Island* as a residence that would be inhabited by others within the public realm, and from 2010–14 Zittel and the Indianapolis Museum of Art (IMA) hosted four summer residencies on the structure [fig. 19]. In keeping with the all-
encompassing nature of Zittel’s “A–Z” practice, the chosen resident was tasked to live for six weeks on the island in a purposeful way of his or her choosing. This experiment was accompanied by few stipulations aside from a blog residents were required to maintain to communicate their experiences and that they should have some interaction with the museum’s public, as audience engagement and education is a priority of the museum.

The structure of the residencies and Indy Island itself took form over the course of three years through conversations with staff at the IMA. The work was planned to be part of a new sculpture park the museum was opening titled 100 Acres. There, Indy Island and the other commissioned works exist within their own set of conservation guidelines that are more lenient than those for works in the museum’s permanent collection, as each of the works was commissioned with the intention of temporality. Depending on the artwork and the artist’s intention, the natural and cultural environment impacts the works, leaving traces of the passage of time and people. Such a framework allowed for the work to be altered by the residents, as an acquired work would need to be maintained as close as possible to its original state.

Discussions between Zittel and IMA staff prior to the final design and fabrication of the island centered on the artwork’s possible uses. While Zittel was certain the island should have an interior space, how to best utilize an artwork positioned in the middle of a body of water on the grounds of a public institution (with its own complex set of legal obligations and insurance policies) was initially unclear. A classroom, office, and hotel were concepts considered before the yearly residency program was deemed the best way to engage the structure.86

86 Laura Mackall of Andrea Rosen Gallery, email to Lisa D. Freiman, curator at the Indianapolis Museum of Art, July 13, 2007.
This early decision informed the final design, which is scaled to snugly accommodate one or two individuals who access the space via a small rowboat. *Indy Island*’s curvilinear white exterior, made from an application of fiberglass over a sculpted foam form, is domed on one side to create an interior, the roof of which slopes down on the opposing side into an outdoor seating area. Its form is unique, unlike the previously discussed works produced in series. It was designed with the site in mind, but made in Los Angeles, so Zittel could supervise the fabrication process. The rounded living space is twenty feet in diameter and ten feet tall at the highest point. Aside from the doorway outfitted with a solid wood door, the only other interruption in the smooth surface is a porthole near the dome’s peak. Storage alcoves on either side of the entrance make use of every available inch, and a countertop with shelving and a small sink lines one interior edge. Everything is fabricated to the scale of the limited space, and, excepting the brown slatted floor and door, everything is white, and the space is unfurnished. A beach on the shore of the lake contains signage to introduce visitors to the island and residency, and the residents often incorporated this area into their project with further installations of interactive components or text.

Zittel stated, “I am fascinated at how the things that set us free are also the same things that oppress us; you could say that the concept of the deserted island is both our greatest fantasy and our greatest fear.”87 The opportunity for isolation and independent living that a deserted island embodies is also linked to Zittel’s childhood experience in suburbia, where she was struck by the distinctively thematized houses and yards of her

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neighbors, a topic explored in previously discussed projects prompting customization and self-sufficiency. Contrasting displays on adjacent lawns (themselves as expansive as a body of water) illustrated the distinctly contemporary American need for individualism and autonomy.\(^8^8\) Zittel became sensitive to these tendencies when traveling in Europe in the early 90s, and her observations resulted in the creation of a series of \textit{A–Z Deserted Islands} (1997) [fig. 20].\(^8^9\) Installed first as a part of the decennial Skulptur Projekte Münster (Germany) and later in Central Park’s lake, the small white fiberglass islands resemble floating chunks of ice that are nearly ascetic in their sparseness and isolation. A single padded seat in the middle of each island beckons those daring enough to make the swim from shore to sculpture, and rewards them with a place of comfortable solitude.

The small modules of \textit{A–Z Deserted Islands} evolved into the 60-foot-long habitable island \textit{Prototype for A–Z Pocket Property} (2000) that served as Zittel’s home for one month while anchored off the coast of Denmark [fig. 21]. \textit{A–Z Pocket Property} cheekily merged the three things a suburbanite most values—land, home, and transportation—commenting upon individualist and isolationist desires.\(^9^0\) Zittel stated of the project, “As the world around us becomes increasingly complex, it is not surprising that the most human reaction is to try to shrink it back down to manageable proportion—to go live on a deserted island, so to speak.”\(^9^1\) While similar to \textit{Indy Island} in theory, the \textit{A–Z Pocket Property} differs greatly in appearance. The structure, which includes decks and an interior living area, was coated in a rough layer of gray concrete to imitate a

\(^{88}\) \textit{Ibid.}

\(^{89}\) Zittel, “Andrea Zittel: 500 Words.”

\(^{90}\) Zittel, \textit{Diary #01}, 20.

\(^{91}\) \textit{Ibid.}
natural rock formation, and plants growing on the exterior heighten the affect. The starkness of *Indy Island* is jarring in contrast to the previous work’s natural aesthetic, but could be seen as a tabula rasa on which future residents can project their own desires—in a sense, a symbolic invitation for the resident to participate in shaping the structure.

The residents, of course, had their own specific motivations, and as artists participating for a brief period of time, these desires were clearly quite different from those demonstrated by the everyday life of a typical American that Zittel usually explores. Every submission was related in some way to each artist’s preexisting practice. For the inaugural residency, students from the local Herron School of Design were asked to submit proposals, to test the water, so to speak, in regard to this experimental framework. After the first residency, the call was opened internationally, and in the last two years nearly 200 applications were received. Groups and independent artists, architects, and designers were encouraged to apply. In exchange for a personal and materials stipend, the selected resident was obligated to maintain a blog, interact with visitors in some way, and utilize the island.

*Indy Island* residents are integral to Zittel’s exercise of dual authorship, and all of the artists used *Indy Island* and the duration of the residency for means that deviate from Zittel’s artistic priorities. For the inaugural residency, Indianapolis-based artists Michael Runge and Jessica Dunn implemented *Give and Take* (2010), and they took it upon themselves to act as informal ambassadors to the new sculpture park. They established visiting hours to the island and stations where visitors could strike up a conversation with them through the use handcrafted floating receptacles, à la message in a bottle. They opened up their lives to the visitors to such an extent that if a guest brought an object to
the island, it could be traded for another of their choosing owned by either of the artists. All of these messages and trades were documented on their blog.

Katherine Ball, then a student at Portland State University’s graduate program in social practice art, conducted the residency *No Swimming* in 2011. Alarmed by a previous water quality report listing high levels of E. coli in the lake (which, along with liability concerns contributed to a strict “no swimming” policy enforced by museum security), Ball sought to improve the water’s condition through natural ecological interventions. She staged weekly events to educate the public about environmental issues and used the blog as a platform to share her research and daily experiences.

*INDIGENOUS* was the 2012 residency of A. Bitterman, a pseudonym for the Kansas City-based artist Pete Cowdin. Bitterman used the island as a platform to critique the prominent view of nature as separate from modern life. Despite its seclusion in the middle of a lake, *Indy Island* attracted an intrusive amount of public attention. The artist folded this aspect of the residency into *INDIGENOUS*, and for the entire six weeks when he was in the public eye Bitterman maintained a persona that evoked a wild animal—unable to speak or understand, elusive, and dependent on the public for food. Signage around the park instructed visitors how to interact with Bitterman, and his location was tracked in real time and available online, as if an animal tagged for research purposes.

For the fourth residency, Los Angeles-based artist Rimas Simaitis conducted *Island Fever* (2013). This project was an extension of the artist’s previous studies of radio waves and long distance communication, and specifically how they historically impacted people who live on islands. Simaitis installed different methods of communication. An now-old-fashioned pay phone was installed on the lake shore. This
signal from the phone was transmitted to one, then another floating capsules made from
Igloo brand coolers—their usage a play on the igloo-like shape of the island’s structure.
The coolers reverberated and made the sound’s transmission into visible waves. The
visitor’s message then traveled to Indy Island where it was further transmitted into deep
space through a device Simaitis fabricated. Thus, the island’s remoteness was put into a
larger perspective, and to stand at a payphone on a beach in Indiana meant to contemplate
the unknowable vastness of the universe.

_Indy Island_ is a paradoxical work, one that counters the promise of escape and
freedom with the realities of living without modern conveniences. Rather than the brief
respite provided by former works such as _A–Z Deserted Islands_, the residents, or
“islanders,” go to great pains to address problems easily solved in average residences—
how and what to cook, where to use the bathroom and wash. The residents retained their
ability to choose, however, and each determined his or her level of interactivity with the
outside sphere. Readily available at the museum’s main building are conveniences such
as electricity, restrooms, refrigeration, and—perhaps the biggest draw during an
oppressively humid Indiana summer—air conditioning. Residents have chosen to
embrace or reject these resources on their own terms, within a complex matrix weighing
wants and needs against the conceptual bases of their projects.

The materials of each _Indy Island_ residency—which are mostly utilitarian and
range from custom or mass-produced furnishings, shelving, hardware store items like
hooks and buckets, and the components necessary to implement a floating garden—are
stored for the possibility of use by successive residents. Only the most commonplace of
these items were repurposed, as each resident sought to make his or her own unique mark
on the space—an impulse that perhaps reflects Zittel’s own suburban experiences of individualism. Despite annual renovations, *Indy Island* continued to develop a layered patina of scuffs and tracked-in sand, its shell occasionally punctured by small holes telling of items installed, then de-installed the following year. Zittel’s statements about these alterations reveal that *Indy Island* undergoes a continuous process of artistic creation. Zittel said in a 2010 interview, before the first residency, with IMA conservator Richard McCoy, “I would say that the island in its current condition (completed but uninhabited) is still only one element of the larger equation that will ultimately end up as the ‘work.’”92 And she further explains, “It should be a living, breathing, evolving work in order to retain the essence of my practice.”93 In this way, purposeful and unintentional markings become layered throughout the years and, together, substantially change the structure’s initial hermetic appearance.

*Indy Island* has remained dormant since the conclusion of the 2013 residency. Currently the IMA staff is reassessing the structure’s possible uses and exploring the option of conducting multiple short-term residencies or public events each summer.94 Staff remains in conversation with Zittel to implement future plans.95 As was intended from the start of the project, the museum has no plan to acquire the work.96

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92 Andrea Zittel, quoted in McCoy, “The Island in 100 Acres: An Interview with Andrea Zittel.”


94 Phone conversation with Scott Stulen, curator of audience experiences and performance at the Indianapolis Museum of Art, March 10, 2015.


96 Phone conversation with Tricia Paik, curator of contemporary art at the Indianapolis Museum of Art, March 9, 2015.
**A–Z Homestead Unit (Commission for the National Gallery of Australia: Customised by Charlie Sofo)**

In March 2013, Melbourne-based artist Charlie Sofo resided for ten days in an A–Z Homestead Unit on the grounds of the National Gallery of Australia (NGA) in Canberra, Australia, where it was installed in the museum’s grassy sculpture garden [fig. 22]. The model of the Homestead Unit has been a part of Zittel’s body of work and made in multiples since 2001. The unit at the NGA was previously designed and suitable for installation in a variety of locations, unlike Indy Island’s singular form. Similar to her Living Units conceived nearly a decade prior, Zittel’s Homestead Units are supported by a welded steel armature built to alternately frame solid wood panels or large windows. The units are capped off with a simple slanted corrugated metal roof.

In 2003 Zittel made A–Z Homestead Office Customized for Lisa Ivorian Gray [fig. 23]. This earlier work shares a common outer structure of steel, glass, and wood panels with the NGA’s Homestead Unit, but an additional small structure is attached to the main unit to house Gray’s dog. Gray was involved with the personalization of this unit, and, as she was presumably not in need of an alternative structure for housing, she sought from the beginning to utilize the work as a home office. It was created for use indoors, and was installed in her SoHo loft. Zittel devised an organizational structure for Gray’s work, with customized shelving and display systems and a wraparound desk.

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97 According to Lucina Ward, curator of international painting and sculpture at the National Gallery of Australia, Sofo occupied the structure for ten days in two segments, March 7–10 and 19–24. Email to the author March 17, 2015.


99 Sheets, 103.

100 Ibid.
Gray’s reverence for the artwork is an additional motivator for her to keep the space tidy—she stated, “It has made me more organized because it’s an absolutely beautiful work of art, and I feel astoundingly guilty when it gets messy.”

Sofo does not describe the unit NGA’s unit further in his blog, but from the photographs he published online, it seems to have held a bed and work surface. The NGA unit was subject to small additional alterations before his residence. A photograph of an Australian plateaued desert landscape was printed on vinyl and affixed to the bottom half of the structure’s windows, perhaps to provide privacy. The landscape also linked the structure to the country where it was located—although the barren landscape depicted differs greatly from the NGA’s grassy, wooded garden—and underscored the ideas of frontier living the Homestead Units embody. Zittel stated, through the voice of her A–Z promotional materials, of the NGA’s Homestead Unit:

The original pioneering spirit of the “frontier” considered autonomy and self-sufficiency as prerequisites of personal freedom. At A–Z West, we are investigating how such perceptions of freedom have been re-adapted for contemporary living. We believe that personal liberation is now achieved through individual attempts to “slip between the cracks.” Instead of building big ranches and permanent homesteads, today’s independence seekers prefer small portable structures, which evade the regulatory control of bureaucratic restrictions such as building and safety codes.

Originally inspired by Zittel’s own move to the western United States, the Homestead Unit also applies to the pioneering mythos that came to be modern day Australia. With this and the transportability of the unit through dis- and re-assembly, Zittel and the NGA discussed the possibility of creating an additional future unit that could travel for

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101 Ibid.

habitation by different artists in diverse landscapes—bush, desert, and city—however, solid plans for this venture are not yet underway and are subject to the availability of future resources.¹⁰³

The residency stemmed from the NGA’s desire to acquire a Zittel. NGA curator Lucina Ward explains, “Initially the A–Z Homestead Unit was planned as a ‘straight’ acquisition but, after discussion with Andrea, this was changed as it was too ‘object-like’ and we wanted to incorporate a lived experience. The single residency was pragmatic: we didn’t want to have the work in the garden for longer than a month [in order to preserve its condition] but we couldn’t resolve the practicalities of a residency within the institutional building.” Thus, the residency “completes” the work, as Zittel stated about the residents of Indy Island, but with a far more conclusive impact. Authorship becomes less blurred in the NGA piece due to one resident. It is clear what Zittel provided and how Sofo altered it over the course of his residency. It is worth noting that the NGA explored installing the unit inside, where it would no longer technically be a shelter, which further emphasizes the point that, despite that they are primitive structures installed outdoors, these residencies are not about explorations of isolation and independence that defined its initial form.

Perhaps because the museum had not planned to launch a large or ongoing residency program, a widespread call for applicants was not conducted. Sofo was chosen from a small group of artists selected for the project by the museum staff, who thought his previous body of performative work as an artist would make him well-suited for the residency, which inevitably involved interaction with the public. With this attribute in

¹⁰³ Ibid.
mind, however, the NGA set few guidelines for Sofo’s time and artistic endeavors, although they were more structured than the *Indy Island* agreements with residents. Sofo was expected to invite artists for meals and visits to the structure, maintain a blog detailing his experiences in relation to the structure and Canberra as a whole, set up a workshop with local schoolchildren, and be available to the public at the structure for two hours a day. Additionally, he was asked to credit Zittel and her work when applicable, and the museum agreed to reciprocally promote his initiatives as resident. In addition to a blog, Sofo produced *Homestead news*, a pamphlet consisting mainly of photographs documenting his interactions with the public, which is available in the NGA’s galleries when the work is on display. Thus, his narrative in addition to his objects became a part of the final work.  

As with Zittel’s other customized works not subject to public interaction, all of Sofo’s additions and alterations became assimilated into the final acquired piece. In the galleries, the *Living Unit* is displayed closed with Sofo’s objects carefully arranged within [fig. 24]. These objects were catalogued during the piece’s acquisition and are considered integral to the work. Over the duration of display, museum staff would rearrange Sofo’s belongings to “imply some activity.” While the objects are part of the collection, they are not static; the *Living Unit* is self-contained in this respect, but without the stagnation of a relic. Although this ongoing activity is perplexing, and seems a superfluous activity conducted for the benefit of the audience, who would presumably return to the museum on multiple occasions in order to observe in change in the

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104 Email to the author from Lucina Ward, March 17, 2015.

arrangement of objects. This meticulous staging marks the transition from experimental structure to acquired artwork—it is now literally and figuratively sealed, and the public is not permitted to enter.

**Conclusions**

The public nature of these works allows for the objects to have an accumulated history. Whereas works such as the *Living Units* can be considered a snapshot of their owners—their tastes, what they value—the residencies are ongoing stories. No aspect of their habitation is privileged over other details, which is especially true of the blog format in which their posts are listed chronologically. Additionally, although previous customized works by Zittel have been purchased by new collectors, the public is not privy to how the new owners alter the work. With its five former residents, *Indy Island* provides the unique opportunity for insight into its continual process of change.

The question should be posed: How do these residencies that greatly differ from Zittel’s practice in their aims and aesthetics become folded into her work? The answer lies in two ongoing explanatory works by the artist titled *These things I know for sure* and *Radiating Arenas of Enhancement*.

Zittel adds to and edits the list *These things I know for sure* annually. The statement had fourteen entries upon publication in 2005 that are simplifications of the principles Zittel puts forth through her practice. The last paragraph reads, “People are most happy when they are moving towards something not quite yet attained.”\(^{106}\) This is one of Zittel’s predominant rationales for constantly re-evaluating and changing her daily

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\(^{106}\) *Critical Space*, 14.
life, as stagnation creates restlessness. Therefore, it is unnecessary for Zittel to continue testing all of her structures in each new location, and makes more sense for the opportunity to be extended to others to encompass a new set of artistic, personal, and professional goals.

In this same psychological vein, *Radiating Arenas of Enhancement* makes the case for a hierarchy of needs, similar to yet different from Maslow’s pyramid [fig. 25]. The nucleus of her illustration states “well being,” and the three surrounding layers move outward from this core, listing “physical state” in the next bracket to “clothes” in the third and “car, house, yard” in the last. Rather than a building up of conditions, it is a branching out, with the subject’s emotional state at the center and surrounding environment. The residencies work in a way oppositional to this framework: Zittel provides the exterior structure, and the residents are left to establish an inner framework.

The variation of these inner states weaves into these residencies sited at museums, but spectators can only see the solutions through the resident’s belongings or what he or she chooses to share with the public. In this way, the stipulated fixation on the residents’ belongings begins to make sense. When accumulated cookware, textiles, and tools become part of the display, the viewer becomes witness to how the resident subsisted in the structure. The museum both assists and archives the residencies, as participants choose the extent to which they use museum facilities while the museums meticulously acquire and archive. Because their physical needs are met, the core of their residency can be filled with projects related to their larger practice, audience interaction, and musings on the uniqueness of their situation.
CONCLUSION

This thesis has addressed three essential aspects of Zittel’s artwork: viewer-, author-, and ownership. Zittel renders these terms slippery and open-ended with through her multifaceted approaches that, together, undermine traditional understandings of these concepts. For the sake of posterity, though, further questions about her work should be addressed and clarified.

In the first chapter, Paola Morisiani described Zittel’s exhibitions as having the appearance of a “commercial showroom,” with collections of objects of different media, paint colors, and texts. A museum curator would likely not take such a heavy-handed approach to installing an artist’s work. How should decisions about the display of her works be made when Zittel can no longer, in a sense, curate her exhibitions herself? Is an installation by Zittel more a temporary artwork than an exhibition?

Relatedly, in the second chapter I argue that although Zittel cedes authorship of her works, she remains firm in an editorial role by deciding when objects like her Wagon Stations are ready to retire from use in order to join public collections. How exactly is an artwork by Zittel finished? And who decides the objects that should be included as part of these finished works? Perhaps this role will be passed along to the user of each work.

Zittel has said, “Lots of institutions did copies, but more takers wanted real pieces. There were six or seven versions of the pit bed, some exact copies, others did radical take-offs.”107 I used this statement as part of a quote to demonstrate Zittel’s flexible authorship. However, more time should be devoted to documenting this working

107 Kaplan, 9.
method. How are copies created? What is Zittel’s level of involvement? It is also unclear if the copies still exist, or if they were exhibition copies, so to speak, and were destroyed after display.

The open-endedness of her working method lends to the hypothesis that these questions will linger, and, as such, Zittel’s pool of co-authors will continue to grow.
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ILLUSTRATIONS

All works by Andrea Zittel unless otherwise noted.

Figure 1. *A–Z Management and Maintenance Unit, Model 003*, 1992.

Figure 2. *A–Z Living Unit*, 1994.
Figure 3. A–Z Living Unit, 1994.

Figure 4. Robert Morris, *Box for Standing*, 1961.

Figure 5. Robert Morris interacting with his sculpture *Wheels* (1863).
Figure 6. Robert Morris, *Passageway*, 1961.

Figure 7. *To Create Structure and Order, or to Live in a Fluid State of Flux?*, 2013.
Figure 8. *A–Z Wagon Stations*, 2003. New units installed at the Milwaukee Art Museum.


Figure 11. *Lay of My Land*, 2011. Wood, steel, metal mesh, wire, plaster, Styrofoam, sand. Commissioned by Magasin III.
Figure 12. Robert Smithson, *A Nonsite, Pine Barrens, New Jersey*, 1968.

Figure 13. Rosalind Krauss, illustration from “Sculpture in the Expanded Field,” 1979.
Figure 14. *Repair Work [Table]*, 1991.


Figure 18. *A to Z 1994 Living Unit Customized for Leonora and Jimmy Belilty*, 1994.

Figure 19. *Indy Island*, 2010.
Figure 20. *A–Z Deserted Islands*, 1999.

![Prototype for A–Z Pocket Property, 2000.](image)

Figure 21. *Prototype for A–Z Pocket Property*, 2000.
Figure 22. Homestead Unit (Commission for the National Gallery of Australia: Customised by Charlie Sofo), 2012.

Figure 23. A–Z Homestead Office Customized for Lisa Ivorian Gray, 2003.
Figure 24. *Homestead Unit (Commission for the National Gallery of Australia: Customised by Charlie Sofo)* installed in the museum’s galleries.

Figure 25. *Prototype for Billboard at A–Z West: Radiating Areas of Enhancement #3, 2006.*

When maintaining my world becomes an overwhelming endeavor, I try to practice Radiating Areas of Enhancement. This system prioritizes the elements of life according to proximal proximity. I spend the most time keeping the things closest to myself, walking outwards as resources permit.