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**CONSTRUCTIONS OF HOME:
The Interrelationship Between Gendered Exhibition Sites and Contemporary
Canadian Installation Art**

by

Donna Wawzonek, Hons. B.A.

A thesis submitted to the Faculty of
Graduate Studies and Research in partial fulfillment
of the requirements for the degree of
Master of Arts
in Canadian Art History

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Natalie Luckyj, Thesis Supervisor

Bryan Gillingham, Acting Director:
SSAC

Carleton University

Ottawa, Ontario

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ABSTRACT

This thesis is an examination of the interrelationship between contemporary Canadian installation art and exhibition space. The central concern of this thesis is the exploration of the gendered meanings of three types of exhibition space: the modernist white cube gallery, the house-as-temporary installation site and the house-gallery, and the gendered meanings of the installations. A selection of works by artist collectives and individual artists are analyzed with respect to site, location, the use of domestic subject-matter and the affective role of architectural space in the interrogation and creation of gendered meanings. Specific collaborative projects such as *Womanhouse*, *The House Project* and *Les Occupantes* and works by Kim Adams, Rita McKeough, Renée Van Halm, Anne Ramsden and Patrick Mahon are used to support this thesis.

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INTRODUCTION

Activity in space is restricted by that space; space ‘decides’ what activity may occur, but even this ‘decision’ has limits placed upon it. Space lays down the law because it implies a certain order – and hence also a certain disorder.... Interpretation comes later, almost an afterthought. Space commands bodies, prescribing or proscribing gestures, routes and distances to be covered.¹

Exhibition sites have a symbiotic relationship with the art installed within them.

The installation space affects the reading of the work and the installations have the power to interrogate the affective role of the site. This thesis will examine selected site-specific installations within gendered exhibition spaces in order to demonstrate the interrelationship between the art and the affective role of the installation site. The feminine subject-matter of domesticity² offers unique interrogations of the gendered installation sites whether they be the masculine ‘white cube’ gallery space, the feminine house/apartment site co-opted for temporary installations or the house-gallery hybrid.³

The central focus of this thesis will be the examination of site-specific installations that make overt use of domestic subject-matter within both the ‘male’ white cube and the two types of ‘female’ house sites. Chapter One will explore the white cube gallery space using installations by Kim Adams and Rita McKeough to determine how these works interrogate and subvert the site, noting its masculine characteristics and affects on the art.

¹ Henri Lefebvre, The Production of Space Trans. Donald Nicholson-Smith (Oxford: Blackwell Press, 1991), 143.

² By ‘domesticity’ I am referring to subject-matter, action or condition referring to the domestic sphere.

³ The “white cube” is a term developed by Brian O’Doherty in Inside the White Cube: The Ideology of the Gallery Space (San Francisco: The Lapis Press, 1976).

In Chapter Two, three temporary projects – *Womanhouse*, *The House Project* and *Les Occupantes* – will be used to discuss the interrelationship between the house as home and the temporary installation within a domestic space. In Chapter Three, site-specific installations in two hybrid galleries – the Gairloch Gallery in Oakville and the Burnaby Art Gallery in Burnaby, British Columbia – will be discussed. Two exhibitions at the Gairloch will be examined to reveal the interrelationships between site and installation. Renée Van Halm’s *Anonymous Volumes* (1993) and Anne Ramsden’s *Residence* (1994) will be examined to determine how the hybrid nature of the site is exposed and interrogated by these works. It will be shown that the inherent privacy of the hybrid gallery’s original domestic status shifts in its new public, institutionalized position and thus, it becomes a very different site from those discussed in Chapter Two. At the Burnaby Art Gallery Patrick Mahon’s installation, titled *Re-entering the House of Flowers* will be used to discuss the affective role and conscious male interpretations developed by the artist.

As gendered spaces, these three sites are reflexive of the gendered division between public and private spheres. Domestic subject-matter, as an aspect of the private sphere, is subverted in the ‘white cube’ where public issues are more commonly emphasized. Traditionally the domestic sphere has been at odds with masculine modernism and the hybrid house-gallery offers a unique site for the institutionalized interrogation of both the house and gallery spheres. This thesis will argue that the gendered meanings of the house and gallery spaces are antithetical to one another; that the house/apartment as home, house-gallery or temporary installation site presents a hybrid of

these two sites; and, that all three types of installation site are used by the artists as an explicit exploration of the gendered meanings of these spaces.

LITERATURE REVIEW

The source material for this thesis draws on several disciplines, so an introduction to these sources is offered to trace how I have developed my understanding of the installation sites and the works of the artists examined here. This selection is organized first by central issues concerning the gallery space and domestic sites, and secondly by a review of the specific catalogues and essays for each selected project.

THE MEANING OF SPACE

(Social) space is not a thing among other things, nor a product among other products: rather, it subsumes things produced, and encompasses their interrelationships in their co-existence and simultaneity – their (relative) order and/or (relative) disorder. It is the outcome of a sequence and set of operations, and thus cannot be reduced to the rank of a simple object.⁴

Henri Lefebvre argues that space not only defines the activity within it, but also affects the meaning of any object within it. If space is said to influence activity within it, then one can assume that specific spaces influence activity in specific ways. This thesis will argue that the particular affective roles of such spaces gives gendered meanings to the space. It will be argued that the gendered meaning of each exhibition site discussed in the following three chapters has a specific affect on the art installations. How each artist

⁴ Lefebvre, 73.

makes use of and challenges the affective role of the space in each site will be a fundamental component of this thesis.

A gendered space has specific meanings or forms of influence which exert a substantive control over the production of meaning. As Lefebvre states, social space is a product that subsumes all products within it. Central to the concept of gendered spaces are the separate spheres of the public and private, and the affective role of space in the formation of a gendered engagement within these separate spheres:

It is clear that the public-private distinction is gendered. This binary opposition is employed to legitimate oppression and dependence on the basis of gender; it has also been used to regulate sexuality. The private *as an ideal type* has traditionally been associated and conflated with: the domestic, the embodied, the natural, the family, property, the 'shadowy interior of the household', personal life, intimacy, passion, sexuality, 'the good life', care, a haven, unwaged labour, reproduction and immanence. The public *as an ideal type* has traditionally been the domain of the disembodied, the abstract, the cultural, rationality, critical public discourse, citizenship, civil society, justice, the market place, waged labour, production, the polis, the state, action, militarism, heroism and transcendence.⁵

These aspects of gendered social spaces will be applied to my examination of site-specific installations in order to determine how these installations engage in the formation of the meaning of these spaces.⁶ Nancy Duncan's definition of the characteristics of public and private ideals is particularly useful in building the argument that a traditional white cube gallery space (Chapter One) embodies the public sphere and male ideal, whereas the house-as-temporary installation site (Chapter Two) embodies the private sphere and

⁵ Nancy Duncan, "Renegotiating Gender and Sexuality in Public and Private Spaces", *Body Space* ed. Nancy Duncan (London and New York: Routledge, 1996), 128.

female ideal; the house-gallery (Chapter Three) is a hybrid of the latter two. The public/private, male/female binary oppositions will provide the focus for my examination of the artists' works and for the interpretation of the meaning of the gendered spaces in which the selected installations are presented. In her essay "Renegotiating Gender and Sexuality in Public and Private Spaces", Duncan argues that the binary distinction between public and private spheres is highly problematic and that contemporary political practices of groups marginalized by this system, such as abused women and sexual minorities, work to undermine these binaries.⁷ I will extend this argument to include installation artists, and establish that they are able to interrogate the traditional meanings of these sites through their installations. In keeping with Duncan's insight, the final site – the hybrid house-gallery – may be seen as an architectural manifestation of a contemporary blurring of these traditional boundaries between public and private spheres.

THE GALLERY

I will begin with an examination of the literature which informs my understanding of the affective role of the gallery. Eilean Hooper-Greenhill offers a helpful history and examination of museums, collection practices and institutional constructs of memory in her book Museums and the Shaping of Knowledge.⁸ Her examination is a useful one in

⁶ In this thesis I take Duncan's reference to 'immanence,' not to mean 'God' but rather as the antithesis of transcendence and therefore, a secular type of 'indwelling.'

⁷ Duncan, 127.

⁸ Eilean Hooper-Greenhill, Museums and the Shaping of Knowledge (London and New York: Routledge, 1992).

mapping the development of collecting practices and I will use it to make connections between public and private values in collecting.

Although the house and gallery sites are now viewed as binary and reflexive of the division of the public and private spheres, Martha Ward's article demonstrates that historically they have not always been mutually exclusive. Martha Ward's essay "Impressionist Installations and Private Exhibitions" traces the development of nineteenth-century exhibition practices through to the installations of the Impressionists.⁹

Throughout Ward's essay, both in the words of the contemporary critics and the observations of the author, inferences are made to suggest the 'feminine' nature of the Impressionist's installations and exhibition designs, as exemplified by this critic's commentary:

A sunny green landscape, a bright winter scene, an interior twinkling with polishes and fashions require different frames, which only their respective authors know how to devise, just as a woman knows better than anyone else the nuances of materials and powders and boudoir hangings that will bring out her colour, the expression of her face, her manners.¹⁰

Even though this may be read today in a positive light, this link between the installation practices of the Impressionists and a feminine sensibility of interior design, especially the boudoir, resulted in the Neo-impressionists at the end of the nineteenth century making an assertive effort to move away from this strategy:

The [1886 Neo-Impressionist] exhibition lacked the amenities of some of the earlier Impressionist ventures: no hangings, draperies, plants or Algerian settees....[an] insistent focus on the works themselves, along with

⁹ Martha Ward, "Impressionist Installations and Private Exhibitions" in The Art Bulletin vol.73 no.4 (Dec.1991), 599-622.

¹⁰ Ward, 611.

an allegiance to group presentation, subsequently emerged as the guiding principles of the Neo-Impressionist installations.¹¹

Their emphasis on the art object placed within an austere exhibition space situated these exhibitions within the domain of the masculine and, therefore, the public sphere. This gendered understanding of the gallery and domestic sites in early modernism is iterated in Michael Clapper's essay "The Chromo and the Art Museum: Popular and Elite Art Institutions in Late Nineteenth-Century America" which was useful in my characterization of the gallery site, specifically its status as a modernist construct.¹²

The focus on the individual art object and the erasure of personal decoration that Ward chronicles eventually would lead to gallery spaces such as the Betty Parsons Gallery in New York. Parsons who opened her gallery in 1946, after acquiring Peggy Guggenheim's stable of artists (including Mark Rothko and Jackson Pollock), claimed to be one of the first to develop the austere white cube space demanded by modern abstraction:

[she] emptied it, stripped it of all architectural embellishment and painted it bone white. She installed strong lights and bought no chairs or rugs to pander to the comfort of visitors. "A gallery isn't a place to rest. It's a place to look at art. You don't come to my gallery to be comfortable."¹³

With everything stripped away to emphasize the art object, the separation of the gallery space from the decorative, feminine domestic sphere of the Impressionist's exhibitions was complete.

¹¹ Ward, 619.

¹² Michael Clapper, "The Chromo and the Art Museum: Popular and Elite Art Institutions in Late Nineteenth-Century America", in Not at Home: The Suppression of Domesticity in Modern Art and Architecture ed. Christopher Reed (London: Thames and Hudson, 1996), 33-47.

¹³ Lee Hall, Betty Parsons: Artist, Dealer, Collector (New York: Harry N. Abrams, Inc., 1991), 77.

In classical modernist galleries, as in churches, one does not speak in a normal voice; one does not laugh, eat, drink, lie down, or sleep; one does not get ill, go mad, sing, dance, or make love.¹⁴

These prohibitions, set out by Thomas McEvilley in his introduction to Brian O'Doherty's Inside the White Cube, and supported by gallery owners such as Parsons, defined the gallery space as public but, more importantly for this thesis, as anti-domestic. All the excluded daily activities noted by McEvilley belong to the realm of the private and the domestic, thereby reinforcing the idea of the white cube gallery space as a counterpoint to the domestic and, therefore, anti-feminine. Reesa Greenberg continues this gendered interpretation of both the gallery and domestic sites in her essay "The Exhibited Redistributed: A Case for Reassessing Space."¹⁵ Her work is a call to examine the exhibition site as an integral aspect to understanding the art itself. This thesis is a direct response to this appeal.

The white cube gallery embodies Nancy Duncan's characteristics of the ideal public space for it encompasses the ideals of the abstract, the cultural, and the rational. It is a space for critical public discourse, heroism and transcendence.¹⁶ Thus, if the polarity between public and private is gendered, then the white cube gallery may be defined as a masculine public space.

In her book Civilizing Rituals: Inside Public Art Museums, Carol Duncan presents the art gallery/museum as a stage which "prompts visitors to enact a performance of some

¹⁴ Thomas McEvilley, "Introduction" in Inside the White Cube Brian O'Doherty (San Francisco: The Lapis Press, 1976,) 10.

¹⁵ Reesa Greenberg, "The Exhibited Redistributed: A Case for Reassessing Space" in Thinking About Exhibitions eds. Reesa Greenberg, Bruce W. Ferguson and Sandy Nairne (London and New York: Routledge, 1996), 349-367.

kind....”¹⁷ She examines art museums/galleries as both architecture and spaces which contain art but, more significantly, have the power to influence the viewer’s reception of art. This relates directly to Lefebvre’s notion of the space ‘deciding’ the action within it. Duncan argues that the museum “offer[s] up values and beliefs – about social, sexual and political identity....”¹⁸ Her work provides a useful model for the examination of these projected values and beliefs in conjunction with those of the work installed within the gallery.

Karl E. Meyer’s The Art Museum: Power, Money, Ethics is also helpful in framing the emergence of the white cube gallery and the predominance of the International Style in museum architecture, a style that has many affinities with the masculine attributes of the white cube.¹⁹ The book contains an examination of statistical evidence of the cost of constructing museums and art galleries and the implications of architectural styles in the gallery building type. The International Style is discussed in terms of the movement away from historical references for this building type, yet Meyer acknowledges that this new style was just as constraining as any historical predecessor. He also discusses the problem of installing art in International Style buildings, citing the imposing character of the structure.²⁰ Meyer supports the practice of recycling existing structures that are more intimate and sympathetic in scale so as to create a hybrid of the intimate domestic setting

¹⁶ Duncan, 128.

¹⁷ Carol Duncan, Civilizing Rituals: Inside Public Art Museums (London and New York: Routledge, 1995), 1.

¹⁸ Carol Duncan, 2.

¹⁹ Karl E. Meyer, The Art Museum: Power, Money, Ethics (New York: William Morrow and Co. Inc., 1979).

²⁰ Meyer, 128-131.

with white cube gallery amenities. The house-gallery, spaces which are discussed in Chapter Three achieve similar ends.

Brian O'Doherty's Inside the White Cube (1976) remains a significant text on the analysis of gallery space. O'Doherty characterizes the white cube as an embodiment of the authoritative voice that is so widely criticized today by theorists and artists alike. He argues for a return to the connection between art and real life, characterizing the white cube as a sterile and overbearing environment for art.²¹ O'Doherty also is helpful for mapping the history of interventions between the 'real world' and the gallery space, including the work of Marcel Duchamp, Andy Warhol and Claes Oldenburg, who will be used in Chapter One to provide a short history of installation art.

One central characteristic of the white cube space defined by O'Doherty is that of a closed system:

The ideal gallery subtracts from the artwork all cues that interfere with the fact that it is "art." The work is isolated from everything that would detract from its own evaluation of itself. This gives the space a presence possessed by other spaces where conventions are preserved through the repetition of a closed system of values.²²

O'Doherty goes on to liken this closed system to that of a church or a courtroom or a laboratory. Such a closed system denies the visitor the possibility of bringing in the outside: the conventions and actions of real life do not enter into such a space. For better or worse, the art is left to stand on its own. The house, however, serves to reinforce the gender roles of the inhabitants by embodying the identities of those who shaped it and

²¹ O'Doherty, 15.

²² O'Doherty, 14.

exist within it, the white cube gallery purports to erase all notions of personal influences so as to present a space in which art can project its own meanings without interference. It is this denial of the real world that separates the white cube gallery from the realm of the private, the real the realm of immanence:

The white cube was a transitional device that attempted to bleach out the past and at the same time control the future by appealing to supposedly transcendental modes of presence and power. But the problem with transcendental principles is that by definition they speak of another world, not this one.²³

As this thesis will demonstrate, artworks that incorporate domestic, feminine subject-matter into the male space of the white cube present an affront to this transcendence.

Kenneth E. Silver, in his essay “Master Bedroom, Master Narratives: Home, Homosexuality, and Post-War Art,” clearly defines modern as a masculine construct which suppresses domestic subject-matter.²⁴ This definition is central to my examination of the affective role of the white cube space as a modern, masculine construct.

An essay by Mark Wigley examines “the interrelationship between how the question of gender is housed and the role of gender in housing.”²⁵ His specific examination of the white wall surface as a gendered construct which subverts ornament, corporeality, and therefore, femininity is central to my examination of the white cube space as well as to the work of specific artists which use the white surface in their work.

²³ O’Doherty, 11.

²⁴ Kenneth E. Silver, “Master Bedrooms, Master Narratives: Home, Homosexuality, and Post-War Art” in Not at Home: The Suppression of Domesticity in Modern Art and Architecture ed. Christopher Reed (London: Thames and Hudson, 1996), 206-221.

²⁵ Mark Wigley, “Untitled: The Housing of Gender” in Sexuality and Space ed. Beatriz Colomina (Princeton: Princeton Architectural Papers, 1992), 329.

Although the white wall was meant to provide a neutral background for artistic expression and reception, this thesis will argue that it has specific meanings that are challenged and deconstructed by the artists who install within these walls. This thesis will follow O'Doherty's position on the 'white cube' and combine his critique with the work of Henri Lefebvre and Nancy Duncan to develop a framework for understanding space as a physical, conceptual and emotional context for the installations within it.

THE HOUSE AS HOME

"...the ideal happiness has taken material form in the house" Simone de Beauvoir writes in The Second Sex, and thus the house "stands for permanence and separation from the world." Woman, the domestic keeper of that ideal happiness, has herself taken on the house's traditional attributes of enclosure and isolation. No other building type embodies such symbiotic association between occupant and object.²⁶

Studies in behavioural psychology, specifically those examining the relationship between the domestic sphere and its inhabitants, have been useful in my examination of artistic interventions with this site. Most significant is the text The Meaning of Things: Domestic Symbols and the Self which examines how people valued domestic objects and the variance in these values according to age, gender and class distinctions.²⁷ One examination, written by Susan Saegert and Gary Winkel, offers an expanded analysis of

²⁶ Susana Torre ed., Women in Architecture: A Historic and Contemporary Perspective (New York: Whitney Library of Design, 1977), 16.

²⁷ Mihaly Csikszentmihalyi and Eugene Rochberg-Halton, The Meaning of Things: Domestic Symbols and the Self (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1981).

the interrelationship of the home and the construction of identity.²⁸ Other texts, including works by Janet Carsten and James Duncan, have informed my examination of the domestic sphere by presenting a more cross-cultural approach.²⁹

Several texts have been useful in tracing the history of the development of the domestic site and the political implications of this subsequent private sphere. As Witold Rybczynski points out in his book, Home: The History of an Idea, our contemporary notion of domesticity began in seventeenth-century Netherlands with the separation of the family business from the domestic space.³⁰ Today, this distinction between public and private spheres, associated with commerce and domesticity, is central to our definitions and interactions with these sites. Other texts on this subject include Building Sex: Men Women, Architecture, and the Construction of Sexuality,³¹ Lucy Lippard's essay "Centers and Fragments: Women's Spaces,"³² New Space for Women,³³ Building the Dream: A Social History of Housing in America,³⁴ Through the Kitchen Window: The Politics of Home and Family,³⁵ and Architecture in the Family Way: Doctors, Houses, and Women

²⁸ Susan Saegert and Gary Winkel, "The Home: A Critical Problem for Changing Sex Roles" in New Space for Women eds. Gerda R. Wekerle, Rebecca Peterson and David Morley (Boulder: Westview Press, 1980), 41-64.

²⁹ Janet Carsten and Stephen Hugh-Jones eds. About the House: Lévi Strauss and Beyond (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1995)

James Duncan ed. Housing and Identity: Cross-cultural Perspectives (London: Croom Helm Ltd., 1981)

³⁰ Witold Rybczynski, Home: The History of an Idea (New York: Viking Press, 1986), 26-27.

³¹ Aaron Betsky, Building Sex: Men, Women, Architecture, and the Construction of Sexuality (New York: William Marrow and Company Inc., 1995).

³² Lucy Lippard, "Centers and Fragments: Women's Spaces" in Women in Architecture: A Historic and Contemporary Perspective ed. Susana Torre (New York: Whitney Library of Design, 1977).

³³ Gerda R. Wekerle, Rebecca Peterson and David Morley eds., New Space for Women (Boulder: Westview Press, 1980).

³⁴ Gwendolyn Wright, Building the Dream: A Social History of Housing in America (New York: Pantheon Books, 1981).

³⁵ Meg Luxton and Harriet Rosenberg Through the Kitchen Window: The Politics of Home and Family (Toronto: Garamond Press, 1986).

1870-1900³⁶ all of which examine the political implications of the separate public and private spheres and women's interaction with architecture.

The literature reveals that the house only became a separate sphere when the workplace was removed from the home and the male world of commerce was separated from the world of women and children. With the progress of capitalism in the nineteenth-century, the cult of domesticity was firmly entrenched by the separation of domestic and commercial spheres. The home was now venerated as a safe haven for men, where they could retreat from the stressful and the world of commerce often regarded as immoral. As Wekerle, Peterson and Morley note in their introduction to New Space for Women:

women's participation in the public sphere – whether in work outside the home or in public life – came to be viewed as unnatural and destructive of the social order. Conversely, the home environment and women's domestic roles were seen as a private affair of concern only to each individual family and of no concern to the public interest.³⁷

The home was seen as the bastion of morality and comfort. It was the role of the woman to maintain these standards by entertaining guests, decorating the home with art and crafts, regulating familial pursuits and providing proper instruction and discipline for children.

The artists I will be examining are responding to the implications that stem from this state of affairs. Again, to extend Duncan's ideas, they are attempting to break the bounds between the public/private, male/female polarities. It is this idea of the private that the 1960s feminists rallied against with their slogan, "The personal is political."

³⁶ Annmarie Adams Architecture in the Family Way: Doctors, Houses, and Women 1870-1900 (Montreal & Kingston: McGill-Queen's University Press, 1996).

³⁷ Gerda R. Wekerle, Rebecca Peterson, and David Morley, "Introduction," 9.

However, the confinement of women to the sphere of the domestic meant that if they were to engage with public issues they must do so in the private sphere. As Christopher Reed and Sharon Haar point out in their essay “Coming Home: A Postscript on Postmodernism,” this situation provides a double connotation for the phrase “the personal is political.”³⁸ One can either bring the personal life of the everyday into the public sphere, or one can bring the political implications of the public sphere into the personal space of the home. These dual connotations are manifest in installations of domestic subject-matter in the white cube art gallery, as discussed in Chapter One, and in the idea of bringing the public into the domestic sphere, as is the case of temporary installation sites discussed in Chapter Two. The house-gallery site, discussed in Chapter Three, may be seen as an example of a break from this binary opposition, and therefore the site-specific works installed within it are reflexive of this hybridity.

EXHIBITION CATALOGUES

Exhibition catalogues and review articles are the primary sources for my thesis. Often the catalogues are not expository, nor do they necessarily provide a contextual framework for the art. Instead they are presented as parallel works to accompany the exhibitions or as autonomous book-works. The temporary nature of the work coupled with the lack of a contextual framework makes the examination of these installations doubly problematic. First, the works presented in this thesis were known to me only through

³⁸ Sharon Haar and Christopher Reed, “Coming Home: A Postscript on Postmodernism” in Not at Home: The Suppression of Domesticity in Modern Art and Architecture ed. Christopher Reed (London: Thames

reproductions and, second in some instances, the conceptual framework had to be drawn from secondary sources. However, I will argue that despite the difficulties the examination of these works is imperative for a contemporary understanding of these temporary projects.

I will review catalogues which were particularly helpful for an understanding of installations by Rita McKeough and Kim Adams. The text Kim Adams (1991), produced cooperatively by the Winnipeg Art Gallery and Shedhalle of Zurich, is an examination of the artist's career up to that point.³⁹ This thesis will focus on Home Decoys (1987) and more specifically on the works *Surfer Shack* and *The Moon* from this series. Both works are large-scale constructions which couple the elements of vehicles and prefabricated storage sheds. Andy Patton's essay entitled "Trousers on Head" is helpful in the examination of Adams' work from several perspectives, including its position in the Canadian context and the various combinations of the ideas of transience and permanence and privacy.

The second essay in this text by Shirley Madill examines the artist's work in light of its exploration of technology and the social degradation associated with technology's progression. "Kim Adams: Points of Perception" is not as appropriate as Patton's to my analysis of Adams's work, but it does present a provocative position on the relationship among the avant-garde, suburbia and technology, representing links between the modernist avant-garde aesthetic and contemporary domestic living.

and Hudson, 1996), 255.

³⁹ Andy Patton and Shirley Madill, Kim Adams (Winnipeg: Winnipeg Art Gallery, 1991).

In contrast, the catalogue to accompany the installation *Defunct*, by Rita McKeough, provides only a brief introduction by the curator.⁴⁰ For the most part, this work will be discussed from the images alone. A more recent publication examining the extent of McKeough's installation practice, proved to be more helpful. Rita McKeough: an excavation is an anthology of essays on the work of McKeough which was published in conjunction with a retrospective exhibition at the Glenbow Museum in Calgary.⁴¹

Annette Hurtig's essay in this book is a survey of the artist's work to date, including the installation and performance which was staged specifically for this exhibition.⁴² Hurtig examines McKeough's career in terms of her vocalizations of political issues in artistic forums. This essay was helpful in defining McKeough's work as centrally political and giving voice to those silenced by isolation, specifically those in poverty or in the domestic sphere. Sandra Vida's essay "Passages: Rita McKeough's Art and Life in Alberta" is more general than the others in this anthology and is helpful in describing the *Defunct* installation.⁴³

Chapter Two examines the house as installation site and the phenomenon of artists creating temporary site-specific installations inside domestic spaces. Two Canadian 'house projects' will be examined in detail and in the context of an American project, *Womanhouse*, that will be cited as an example of historical precedent for these projects.

⁴⁰ Charlie Fox, Defunct: an installation by Rita McKeough (Calgary: Alberta College of Art Gallery, 1982).

⁴¹ Annette Hurtig, Rita McKeough: an excavation (Calgary: Glenbow Museum, 1993).

⁴² Annette Hurtig, "Enunciating Pain and Imagining Intimacy: Toward an Ethical Politics of Agency" in Rita McKeough: an excavation ed. Annette Hurtig (Calgary: Glenbow Museum, 1993), 12-23.

⁴³ Sandra Vida, "Passages: Rita McKeough's Life and Art in Alberta" in Rita McKeough: an excavation ed. Annette Hurtig (Calgary: Glenbow Museum, 1993).

Womanhouse is most extensively examined in Arlene Raven's essay on the project in The Power of Feminist Art: The American Movement of the 1970s, History and Impact.⁴⁴ This essay is a thorough description and examination of the project and its installations and also discusses its impact on the feminist art practices that followed it, and is therefore helpful in both the description of *Womanhouse* and the critical examination of *The House Project* and *Les Occupantes*.

The second project is *The House Project*, located in Toronto. It has a catalogue with accompanying essays written by Sylvie Fortin and Claire Christie.⁴⁵ This project is particularly relevant for several reasons, one of them being that the artists as well as the two writers, Sylvie Fortin and Claire Christie, spent a significant amount of time living in the installation space and several of the works draw on traces of the previous inhabitants of the space, such as the layers of wallpaper. Christie examines the house from room to room in its anthropomorphic allusions: the dining room meaning power and consumption; the attic, fantasy and banishment; the bedrooms, intimacy and dream. The author sees each work as a rejection of the patriarchal system embedded in the house and as an examination of the oppression that takes place within this system. Christie's introduction to the installations is just that, an introduction which is helpful to those who were not physically present for the installation.

Each room was installed by a different artist and Fortin's text deals with the project room by room, presented in the form of a descriptive narrative as the author walks through

⁴⁴ Arlene Raven, "Womanhouse" in The Power of Feminist Art: The American Movement of the 1970s, History and Impact eds., Norma Broude and Mary R. Garrard. (New York: Abrams, 1994), 48-65.

the space. This narrative approach is quite appropriate for the show because of the personal nature of the site. As well, Fortin's explicit acknowledgment of the physical body moving through the space and its experience of the house has strong links to Christie's anthropomorphic approach. This conceptual link of the body to the house is present in several of the installations and relates to the gendered nature of the site as well as the corporeal understanding of the house, associated with this gendered influence.

The third house project to be examined is *Les Occupantes*, a collaboration by the artists' collective, *Venus Fly Trap*.⁴⁶ The catalogue essay, written by Susan Douglas, is based on a series of e-mail messages. Douglas finds this method appropriate because e-mail and 'house projects' such as *Les Occupantes* serve to break boundaries between private and public, to shift our notions of time and space, and to differentiate between cultural production and lived experience.⁴⁷ A significant difference between the catalogues for *The House Project* and *Les Occupantes* is the form of the discussion of the work. Fortin literally takes the reader for a walk through the space, while Douglas addresses the work as a concept rather than as a reference to the specific installations, referring more concretely to the practice of art production than to the actual work. She repeatedly returns to the polarity of the public/private to develop a conceptual framework for this project. As well, she briefly examines the nature of the collective and how it works within this project. Although Douglas presents several important questions regarding the nature of these house

⁴⁵ Sylvie Fortin and Claire Christie, *The House Project* (Toronto: The House Project, 1994).

⁴⁶ Susan Douglas, *Les Occupantes* (Montreal: Venus Fly Trap, 1996).

⁴⁷ Douglas, 5.

projects, the casual and fragmented nature of the e-mail format leaves many of these presented but not analyzed.

In Chapter Three, on the house-gallery, I will focus on two sites: the Gairloch Gallery of Oakville, Ontario and the Burnaby Art Gallery of Burnaby, British Columbia. At the Gairloch Gallery two recent shows – Renée Van Halm's *Anonymous Volumes* and Anne Ramsden's *Residence* – have centered specifically on the issue of domesticity. The Renée Van Halm catalogue (1994), by Carolyn Bell Farrell, discusses Van Halm's work in terms of the traditional split between high and low arts, which in this exhibition are the decorative arts and minimalist approaches to painting.⁴⁸ Farrell positions the work as both a critique of these categorizations and an engagement with the modernist white cube space and her analysis influences my own examination of Van Halm's work.

Helga Pakasaar in her essay for Anne Ramsden's installation *Residence* (1994) at the Gairloch focuses on the artist's approach to space.⁴⁹ This installation was created in direct response to the space of the gallery itself and the artist consciously makes reference to the potential meanings/readings of the gallery architecture. Pakasaar considered the two most commonly understood meanings of the term 'residence' as that of dwelling place and as legal ownership of property and class privilege associated with home ownership at the time of the construction of this house. In addition, Pakasaar takes note of Ramsden's engagement with issues of class, race and gender and the architectural form of this specific house as a gallery.

⁴⁸ Carolyn Bell Farrell, *Renée Van Halm: Anonymous Volumes* (Oakville: Gairloch Gallery, 1994), 1.

⁴⁹ Helga Pakasaar, *Anne Ramsden: Residence* (Oakville: Gairloch Gallery, 1994).

The 1996 installation by Patrick Mahon at the Burnaby Art Gallery entitled Re-entering the House of Flowers is the most relevant of his projects to my thesis.⁵⁰ The catalogue essay, written by Susan Schuppli, introduces the masculine experience of domesticity that questions the relationship between men and a historically female sphere. Schuppli argues that Mahon's work "def[ies] a programmatic read[ing]" and should be read as a more critical examination of these issues.⁵¹ Her essay is helpful in addressing the nature of a masculine engagement with domesticity.

CONCLUSION

These three types of spaces – the white cube, the house-as-temporary installation site and the house-as-gallery – have all been popular sites for installations dealing with issues of domesticity as of late. Because of the temporary nature of these installations I feel that it is important to examine them now to build a conceptual framework which is at least fairly contemporary to the installations themselves. The discourse on gendered spaces is a current and trendy one; artists and writers are working concurrently to question and dismantle the notion of the public/private, male/female spheres. An examination of the interrelationship between installation sites and the art within them will provide a groundwork for defining the affective role of the site on art.

⁵⁰ Susan Schuppli, Patrick Mahon: Re-entering the House of Flowers (Burnaby: Burnaby Art Gallery, 1996).

⁵¹ Schuppli, 2.

CHAPTER 1

THE WHITE CUBE GALLERY

The migration from the domestic-like interior as a setting for displaying art to a factory-like space can be seen in gendered terms for, since the late nineteenth century, the home has been designated feminine space and the workplace masculine.¹

Like the traditional temples and palaces they so often emulate, art museums are complex entities in which both art and architecture are parts of a larger whole.... That is, I see the totality of the museum as a stage setting that prompts visitors to enact a performance of some kind, whether or not actual visitors would describe it as such (and whether or not they are prepared to do so).²

This chapter, in part, takes up Carol Duncan's premise that art and architecture must be examined together in order to understand the complete dynamic of the art gallery. It will examine how the white cube affects the art displayed within it and how artists interrogate the affective role of the white cube space through installation art which uses domestic subject matter. It will establish that the essential characteristics of the white cube gallery are masculine, public and authoritative; that it is a closed system supporting the notion of transcendence and privileges the gaze over other means of engaging with the art, thus subverting notions of femininity and domesticity.³ These characteristics make the white cube gallery space the gendered antithesis of the domestic site and provoke artistic interventions which seek to disrupt the specific affective role of the white cube gallery. A

¹ Reesa Greenberg, "The Exhibited Redistributed: A Case for Reassessing Space" in Thinking About Exhibitions eds. Reesa Greenberg, Bruce W. Ferguson and Sandy Nairne (London and New York: Routledge, 1996), 350.

² Carol Duncan, Civilizing Rituals: Inside Public Art Museums (London and New York: Routledge, 1995), 1.

brief history of installation art in gallery spaces will establish the context in which contemporary projects exist. Installations by Kim Adams and Rita McKeough – Canadian projects in white cube gallery spaces – will facilitate my examination of the symbiotic relationship between art and the space in which it is installed.

Specifically, installations with domestic imagery will be used to demonstrate how the interjection of this feminine subject-matter of immanent everyday reality into a masculine modernist space that is transcendent and traditionally closed to domestic subject-matter can challenge the assumptions of public, authoritative masculinity in the white cube gallery. At the same time it will be shown that these interventions reveal and disrupt the site's masculine characteristics. This modernist notion of transcendence comes from contemporary assumptions about the nature of abstract art. As Lee Hall points out in her book on Betty Parsons, those involved in the abstraction movement in the United States, including Parsons, believed that abstract art had mystical powers, and that viewing and understanding it could lead to a form of spiritual transcendence:

Betty believed a miracle was in the making. Artists of the twentieth century, through the mystical powers of art, were in the process of recoding human sensibilities, of opening the human mind and spirit to a paradisiacal new world, shaped and empowered by a creative elite.⁴

This transcendent quality of abstract art is linked to its non-objective qualities that is, the lack of reference to the outside world. Such a conscious emphasis on the intellect, associated with the privileging of the gaze over corporeal engagements with art, and

³ Thomas McEvilley, "Introduction," in *Inside the White Cube*, Brian O'Doherty (San Francisco: The Lapis Press, 1976), 12.

⁴ Hall, 79.

spirituality, associated with transcendence, stand in opposition to the immanence of domesticity. Thus, it will be argued that the inclusion of the domestic world, with its connotations of, femininity, immanence and habitual qualities in the installations by Adams and McKeough is subversive to the site and counters the masculine public space of the white cube. The world of the everyday is seen as mundane and unaesthetic in comparison with the high art ideals of the modernist avant-garde. The artists discussed in this chapter are not only aware of this ideology, but actively seek to engage critically with it by focusing on domestic subject-matter. They wish to engage the viewers in an interrogation of the ideology of the white cube space and its affective power on the art within it.

The white cube gallery was a response to the desire to present abstract modernist art in a new kind of public space which, as pointed out by Greenberg “can be seen in gendered terms...”⁵ and was consequently a further separation of women from the art world. This white cube space is reflective of the aesthetic of modernism, the individual, and the anti-historic and monumental. Because modern abstract art was about transcendence, about a level of art that went beyond the world of the everyday and beyond representation, “ultimately, in the eyes of the avant-garde, being undomestic [sic] came to serve as a guarantee of being art.”⁶ These characteristics situate the white cube as masculine, a closed and public system:

⁵ Greenberg, 350.

⁶ Christopher Reed, Not at Home: The Suppression of Domesticity in Modern Art and Architecture (London: Thames and Hudson, 1996), 7.

By its absence, then, the role of the domestic in American [modernist] art was clear: it marked the limits of masculinity, the place of the spectator (the consumer rather than the producer) at the edges of the existential arena, the terra incognita of women.⁷

The effect which this positioning has on art reinforces a public/male-gendered reading of the space and the art within it. Brian O'Doherty's characterization of the physical features of the white cube gallery make this clear:

The outside world must not come in, so windows are usually sealed off. Walls are painted white. The ceiling becomes the source of light. The wooden floor is polished so that you click along clinically, or carpeted so that you pad soundlessly, resting the feet while the eyes have the wall. The art is free, as the saying used to go, "to take on its own life."⁸

The gallery as a closed system invites a particular response from the viewer. As O'Doherty notes, it is much like that of a visitor to a religious sanctuary where personal aspects of one's life must be suppressed in order to allow an individual to achieve a transcendent experience. "The white cube's ultimate meaning is this life-erasing transcendental ambition disguised and converted to specific social purposes."⁹ Yet this closed system of transcendence must not be mistaken as a neutral site:

The spotless gallery wall, though a fragile evolutionary product of a highly specialized nature, is impure. It subsumes commerce and aesthetics, artist and audience, ethics and expediency. It is an image of the society that supports it....The wall *is* our assumptions. It is imperative for every artist to know this content and what it does to his/her work.¹⁰

⁷ Kenneth E. Silver, "Master Bedrooms, Master Narratives: Home, Homosexuality, and Post-War Art" in Not at Home: The Suppression of Domesticity in Modern Art and Architecture ed., Christopher Reed (London: Thames and Hudson, 1996), 213.

⁸ Brian O'Doherty, Inside the White Cube (San Francisco: The Lapis Press, 1976), 15.

⁹ McEvelley, 12.

¹⁰ O'Doherty, 79-80.

The white cube not only houses modernist art but also reflects the societal priorities and values associated with modernism. As Reesa Greenberg notes, the aesthetic value of transcendence and the values of capitalism are emulated in this space over the everyday and the immanence of domesticity.¹¹ The link of the International Style to corporate image is a link to capitalism, which was strictly separated from the domestic sphere in the Victorian era.

When something is placed in this space it has the potential to become art through that placement alone. As O'Doherty points out: "[i]n this context a standing ashtray becomes almost a sacred object, just as the firehose in a modern museum looks not like a firehose but an esthetic conundrum."¹² It obscures for the viewer those conditions that make them (ashtrays and firehoses) of this world:

The flow of energy between concepts of space articulated through the artwork and the space we occupy is one of the basic and least understood forces in modernism. Modernist space redefines the observer's status, tinkers with his self-image.¹³

As Mark Wigley states in his essay "Untitled: The Housing of Gender," the white wall is a means to detach oneself from the body. The habitual physical reality of the viewer, and therefore his/her corporeal engagement with space, is subverted by the emphasis on the gaze. The denial of the body allows the viewer to engage in aesthetic transcendence:

¹¹ Greenberg, 350.

¹² O'Doherty, 15.

¹³ O'Doherty, 38.

The white surface was a critical device with which a detachment from the body, understood as a feminine surface, a discontinuous surface vulnerable to penetration, could be effected.... The architecture of vision was already in place in Alberti's text in which the status of the white wall depends upon 'the keenest of the senses' with which the rational mind (which is to say, the masculine eye) is said to 'immediately' [sic] comprehend the immaterial order within a material object.... Its white surface actively assists the eye by erasing its own materiality, its texture, its sensuality....¹⁴

It is this rational mind that is privileged through the emphasis on the gaze in the white cube. The emphasis on the gaze is a subversion of the body and, consequently, the corporeal engagement with the world, which is associated with sensuality and women.

Installation art holds a unique position due to its direct engagement and critical interaction with the gallery space. As well, it moves away from the white wall and, like all sculpture, engages the viewer through his/her body as well as their eyes by becoming part of his/her physical space; it breaks the privileging of the gaze by moving into the viewer's physical space.

There are some direct precursors of the installations to be examined in this thesis. The mapping of their history will build a context for the work of Adams and McKeough. Installation art, an invention of the avant-garde, is a creation of modernism. Those moving away from Abstract Expressionism were the first to acknowledge significance in the physicality of the gallery space, and the first to attempt to disrupt its control. Surrealist, Dada, Pop, Conceptual and Postmodern/Feminist artists have all taken up the practice of

¹⁴ Mark Wigley, "Untitled: The Housing of Gender" in Sexuality and Space Beatriz Colomina ed., (Princeton: Princeton Architectural Papers, 1992), 359-60.

installation art to engage in the developing question of the relationship between life and art and the influence of the gallery.

A BRIEF HISTORY OF INSTALLATION ART

The installations of Rita McKeough and Kim Adams are direct descendants of the historical avant-garde, as they work within the traditional art venues in order to expose and subvert their power. A brief history of these developments puts the work of these artists in a historical context.

Each art licensed premises where it confronted and sometimes tested the social structure - concert hall, theatre, gallery. Classic avant-garde hostility expresses itself through physical discomfort (radical theatre), excessive noise (music), or by removing perceptual constants (the gallery space).¹⁵

A prime example of such a disruption can be found in Marcel Duchamp's installation *1,200 Bags of Coal* [fig.1] at the 1938 Surrealist exhibition in Paris. Although this was not a white cube gallery, the attempt at subverting the status quo installation space is as powerful as its 1990s counterparts. Here, Duchamp made the ceiling the centerpiece of his installation rather than the paintings on the walls. The installation involved the hanging of burlap sacks (supposedly filled with coal) from the ceiling of the gallery. This installation not only created a physically hostile environment, with the potential for the sacks to fall, but also obscured the usual source of light from the ceiling for the other works in the exhibition. Duchamp replaced the light source with a barrel on the floor, originally intended to contain a fire but, in the end, fitted with a light bulb. Thus

¹⁵ O'Doherty, 74-75.

the role of the ceiling and the floor was reversed and one's perception of all the work in the exhibition altered.¹⁶ In *Sixteen Miles of String* (1942) [fig.2], he made the viewer aware of the entire space of the gallery by using string to constrict the movement of the visitor through the space and hamper his/her visual and physical access to the art. Again, this is a classic example of avant-garde hostility towards an audience that ultimately increases the viewer's awareness of the traditionally benign gallery space. Much like Adams and McKeough, Duchamp effectively engaged in challenging the assumed neutrality of the traditional modernist gallery space.

The Betty Parsons' Gallery opened in New York in 1946 and embodied the essential characteristics of the white cube space. Once Parsons had established her white cube gallery, it became one of the favourite venues among the Abstract Expressionists.¹⁷ As Parsons states of Pollock's 1948 exhibition: "He exploded easel painting, the wall painting. His paintings *were* the walls – whole worlds, expanding worlds."¹⁸ The empty void of the white cube proved to be the singular option for adequately accommodating such work without appearing to compete with the works themselves.

The strongest reaction to the absence of representational subject-matter in Abstract Expressionism was through Pop Art's reintroduction of subjects from everyday life into art. The most appropriate example for this thesis, Andy Warhol's *Cow Wallpaper* (1966) [fig.3], first installed in 1970 with paintings overtop, mimicked a domestic space. Yet, unlike the later installations of Adams and McKeough, Warhol's work was not a comment

¹⁶ O'Doherty, 69.

on the subversion of the white cube space by the domestic. Rather it was an acknowledgment of the aesthetics of contemporary consumer society. Yet, Warhol's work was a subversion of the transcendent nature of high art because of his serial approach to production, disregarding the singular art object and his direct engagement with the site. Spearheaded largely by male artists, Pop Art gained a validity in the art world which would have been impossible for women artists.

Claes Oldenburg was a Pop artist who produced giant-scale soft sculptures of everyday objects and, like Warhol, recreated domestic space inside the white cube gallery. In 1963, at the Sidney Janis Gallery, the idea of an installation was extended further by his interrogation of the meaning of gallery space. *Bedroom Ensemble* [fig.4] presents the gallery space as a showroom-cum-business office. Everything in this bedroom is plastic and cold:

The sculpture and furniture cannot be *used*; they are pure presence, neuter and impersonal....Underlying their neutrality, however, is a strong concept: impersonal planning and design, which makes the object *full of icons*, thus charged with suppression of fleshiness and sensuality leads to privileging of intellect and conceptualization....¹⁹

Oldenburg acknowledged the masculine aspect of modernism by applying a modernist aesthetic as well as a modern conceptualization to the domestic subject and championed the valuing of the domestic. The installation is an icon of the quintessential bedroomsuch as one might find in a department store window, architectural magazine or

¹⁷ Artists commonly showing with Parsons included Mark Rothko, Jackson Pollock and Hedda Stern. Hall, 90.

¹⁸ Hall, 90.

¹⁹ Germano Celant, Claes Oldenburg: An Anthology (New York: Guggenheim Museum Publications, 1995), 29.

hotel. The bedroom is not related to domestic comfort; but rather to the public conception of consumer desire, which reflects the modernist influence of the white cube space. The original site of the installation, the Sidney Janis Gallery in New York, further positions the work as an object for consumer desire. Now repositioned in the National Gallery of Canada, desire and consumption are limited to the gaze, rather than potential ownership. This emphasis on the gaze combined with the erasure of sensual pleasure, evident in the cold plastic aesthetic of this installation, is reflexive of the affective power of the masculine modernist white cube. Wigley, as we have seen, argues that the white wall is a replacement for the body and thereby denies its sensual pleasure. Within the National Gallery of Canada, a public rather than commercial gallery, Oldenburg's work doubly interrogates the meaning of the white cube space, by merging the domestic with the consumerism of the art world. These ideas are central to the work of Kim Adams and Rita McKeough. Adams work in particular, has affinities with Oldenburg. Both work with singular objects which incorporate a modernist aesthetic and thus respond to the affective power of the white cube space. They are predominantly approached for their transcendental value, whereas the work of McKeough subverts this value on transcendence through its physical destruction and aspects which engage the viewer corporeally.

American artist Vito Acconci contributed to the interrogation of the boundaries between public and private, immanent and transcendent in his installations and performance art. In *Room Piece* (1970) Acconci brought the entire contents of his apartment into the gallery space. The artist continued to bridge the gap between the gallery space and his apartment by coming in every day to use personal items, such as his

toothbrush. Unlike Oldenburg and Warhol, who present iconographic interpretations of the domestic, Acconci brought his own domestic reality into the gallery by means of the contents and his daily engagements with these objects. Thus, he challenged the transcendental public nature of the white cube gallery and also subverted the privacy of his daily domestic actions. Yet, as Christine Poggi points out in her essay “Vito Acconci’s Bad Dream of Domesticity”:

Acconci’s own works, however, do not fully escape the myths he so clearly exposes as fragile constructs. As his rejection of the private self and the domestic sphere implies, his work remains linked to the modernist ethos of the singular, heroic, transgressive male, whose independence drives him from home.²⁰

Thus, his work reflects both the assumptions of the white cube gallery as well as the male response to the domestic site. Although Acconci was engaged in a critique of the public and private spheres, he was doing so in a way that emphasized his separation from the domestic sphere and linked him directly, as performance artist, to the public realm of the gallery site. He aligned himself with the very modernist gallery system that Adams and McKeough were seeking to interrogate and break down.

With artists such as Vito Acconci making evident the construction of the public and private spheres in the 1970s, this construct was then potentially open to deconstruction by the artists who followed him. The works selected for this thesis are contemporary installation works which have largely developed from artists such as Warhol, Oldenburg and Acconci. As with most postmodern artists, Adams and McKeough have a conscious

knowledge of the legacy of modernism as well as an openly critical approach to the white cube gallery spaces where they exhibit their installations. This, however, does not remove them from its influence.

SOME RECENT INSTALLATIONS: KIM ADAMS AND RITA MCKEOUGH

The works of Rita McKeough and Kim Adams have been chosen for this thesis because of their conscious engagement with domestic subject-matter and with the aesthetics and meanings of the white cube space. As well, they show direct ties with the examples from the history of installation art that have been developed here, drawing on avant-garde strategies of subversion while maintaining strong influences from the white cube space, such as the interest in singular art objects.

Kim Adams' works are not direct, site-specific installation works; nor are they always shown in a white cube space. However, they do position themselves in the public realm, and thus can be read as provocative engagements with the modernist aesthetic of the white cube gallery space and with the public/private values associated with domestic architecture. They also are an attempt to break the traditional public/private, male/female, High/Low Art binarisms. The works to be examined here, *Surfer Shack* [fig.5] and *The Moon* [fig.6], from his Decoy Homes series (1987), are domestic constructions which reflect strong influences of the white cube gallery installation site. As Andy Patton states in his essay "Trousers on Head":

²⁰ Christine Poggi, "Vito Acconci's Bad Dream of Domesticity" in Not at Home: The Suppression of Domesticity in Modern Art and Architecture eds., Sharon Haar and Christopher Reed (London: Thames and

An artwork becomes useful, but the “use” turns inside out: a parody of itself. And neither side of the equation is given priority: the works seem to depend on each side having equal force and validity. They are not aimed at overcoming art as an institution; they only intensify its contradictions....²¹

Adams’ use of the traditional polarity between private domestic space and public gallery site shifts our understanding of both. His installations acknowledge the power structure of the white cube space by subtly shifting the modernist push for the new to a critique of the disposable attitude towards objects by creating non-utilitarian decoys which pretend to be useful. He is thus problematizing the notions of aesthetics and utility alike.

In Decoy Homes, Adams uses pre-fab garden sheds and trailer chassis to create domestic constructions, thus giving permanence and aesthetic value to objects that are usually considered to be disposable. This ceaseless interest in forward movement and fetish of the new is an integral part of the modernist and capitalist ideologies. By using these materials, Adams is engaging the viewer in a critique of these ideologies. This critique is strongly linked to the exposure of the gallery as a site of capitalism and consumerism.

Surfer Shack is a two-storey construction comprised of two pre-fabricated garden sheds. The first level has a storage area for surf boards and its only amenity is a fold-out lawn chair. The construction speaks to the surfer life-style: mobile, minimalist, transient and single-minded.

Hudson, 1996), 238.

²¹ Andy Patton, “Trousers on Head” in Kim Adams ed. Andy Patton, (Winnipeg: Winnipeg Art Gallery, 1991), 31.

The main component in *The Moon* is a large barrel-shaped light source which is a replica of a KFC revolving bucket – the icon of fast food and car-orientated culture. Coupled with the domestic components of the work, namely the sheds and lawn chairs, this construction acts as a critique of consumerism and disposable culture, associated with suburbia in reliance on cars and instant architecture.

In comparison to Oldenburg's icon *Bedroom Ensemble*, a parody of consumer desire, Adams' parody appears utilitarian in aesthetic. Andy Patton argues:

It cannot be used as housing, as art it is necessarily seen as being outside concrete usefulness....But what *Decoy Homes* does allow is a glimpse of the positioning of artworks and at its own position in the complicity of things, by emphasizing both concrete usefulness, and at the same time, its own existence as a decoy....²²

This is indicative of how difficult it is to deal with issues of domesticity in a male-gendered site such as the white cube gallery. Kim Adams successfully interrogates the separation between life and art by simultaneously referring to useful and artistic objects. The combination of these otherwise binary categories may be read as a critique of the gendered distinction between the High and Low Art. The decorative arts have traditionally been considered Low Art because they are commonly applied to utilitarian objects, and are most often practised by women. Patton's statement on Adams' role in blurring these boundaries is indicative of the affective power of the white cube, how it immediately validates what it contains as art, separating it from the utilitarian objects of the world.

Adams' work lends support to Mihaly Csikszentmihalyi and Eugene Rochberg-Halton's observations about the meanings and values middle-aged men place on domestic

objects.²³ They observed that men discuss the domestic site in ideal and abstract terms, concentrating on its economic value, as Oldenburg did with his *Bedroom Ensemble*. These values are very different from those of women and, as Csikszentmihalyi and Rochberg-Halton go on to state:

These differences reflect, at the level of symbolic household objects, the distinction sociologists have made between *instrumental* male roles and *expressive* female roles. What they further indicate is that these distinctions not only involve behaviour society expects from sex roles but also permeate the most intimate symbolic environment people create to give meaning to their lives.²⁴

If these distinctions are observable at the private, personal level, then certainly they are influential in the artistic engagement with domestic subject-matter. A further element of contradiction and complicity is Adams' combination of mobility with the notion of stability associated with domesticity and privacy in Decoy Homes. Placed on a trailer chassis, each of these constructs has the potential to become mobile, thus contradicting the traditional connotation of home with stability and settlement. Yet, because they lack living amenities such as plumbing, hydro, and insulation, they are not houses but decoys of housing and are therefore art, as their aesthetics override their usefulness.

Adams' work emulates the characteristics of the recreational-vehicle (RV) culture it parodies; but, ultimately it remains a decoy of both mobility and privacy because it cannot move and the privacy is superficial. As Patton points out, these elements are references to the "two fundamentals of contemporary suburban life: the car and the

²² Patton, 18.

house.”²⁵ Yet these decoys are indicative of the ‘expressive’, not ‘instrumental’ value of objects, and therefore may be considered a feminine construct displayed in a masculine site. The combination of the mobile and the domestic devalues both the settledness of the house and the escape value of the car.

Adams, by incorporating the prefabricated, disposable and utilitarian aesthetics of the sheds into his work, he acknowledges the stereotype of modernist domestic architecture as being utilitarian and impersonal, a criticism often directed towards the white cube gallery. The amenities for living are missing from these constructs; they lack the clutter of everyday life. As a result, they also lack the immanence that is linked to domesticity and erased in the white cube.²⁶ Yet this aesthetic, used in conjunction with the utilitarian aspect of housing and thus the practical domestic sphere, becomes an idea for aesthetic exploration, well suited to the white cube gallery space.

Nonetheless, Kim Adams’ conflation of house with vehicle, and art with utility is successful in problematizing both sides of these traditional polarities. By doing so he has also questioned the gendered readings which underlie these assumptions associated with ‘instrumental’ and ‘expressive’ values. Adams addresses our understanding of these oppositions and then opens our imaginations to alternative possibilities, which serve to destabilize our very understanding of these traditional polarities.

²³ Mihaly Csikszentmihalyi and Eugene Rochberg-Halton, The Meaning of Things: Domestic Symbols and the Self (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1981).

²⁴ Csikszentmihalyi, 106.

²⁵ Patton, 17.

²⁶ Patton notes on page 18 of “Trousers on Head” that the original conception of these constructions included plumbing and lighting but through the creative process they were eliminated.

Like Adams, Rita McKeough uses domestic constructions to address architectural issues in the gallery space. An examination of her *Defunct* (1981) [fig.7] installation, at the Alberta College of Art Gallery reveals an artist whose installation recognizes:

...those who struggle to supersede isolation and objectification and attain symbolic and social subject status. By sounding voices, by speaking out and serving notice, Rita McKeough... celebrates actions in defiance of ideologically produced boundaries.²⁷

Her work presents an intervention in the white cube space, as well as an investigation of the meaning of home and its association with both the public and private values of memory and architecture. *Defunct* incorporates elements of performance. Performance art is particularly powerful and subversive in the white cube, as seen in the work of Acconci: first, because of the white cube's links to the theatre, which establishes the role of the viewer as spectator and the art as spectacle; and second, because acts of performance go against the sanctity of the gallery.

Defunct, a time-based and site-specific installation, examined the public value of domestic architecture. Inside the gallery, a raised, undulating platform was constructed and covered with live sod. One-third scale models of four houses were then assembled on the site, creating a miniature, idyllic neighbourhood. Shortly after the completion of the construction, the destruction of the site began. First windows were boarded up and then the sod began to decay. Soon, one by one, the little houses were demolished. Sandra Vida explains the context from which this work emerged:

²⁷ Annette Hurtig, "Enunciating Pain and Imagining Intimacy: Toward An Ethical Politics of Agency" in *Rita McKeough: An Excavation* ed. Annette Hurtig (Calgary: Glenbow Museum, 1993), 21.

Calgary developers were then still riding on a temporarily inflated economy, razing thousands of dwellings, destroying entire neighbourhoods and replacing them with steel towers or parking lots.²⁸

McKeough's engagements with domestic architecture and notions of domesticity have always been designed to make the private realm a public concern and to make evident the political influences on the personal.

The four houses that stood at the opening of the installation would occasionally think aloud. The talk emanating from the inside of each house communicated various emotional traits from panic to zen-like calm, through crying, cursing or conversing. An overriding soundtrack filled the entire gallery with its rhythms of pile drivers, power saws and hammers, accompanied by an orchestrated mix of percussive sound generated by musical instruments and sundry objects, including a mechanical bear beating a toy drum.²⁹

The voices being emitted from the houses lent the installation an anthropomorphic reading and embodiments of possible memories and experiences associated with a personal interaction with the houses. They also personalized the house, which took on an identity through the voices. These voices and the other sounds subverted the otherwise silent purity of the white cube and broke the ocular emphasis of the gallery experience. This multi-sensory experience is related to the immanent response to subvert the traditional transcendent approach to art.

McKeough combined both personal and public interactions with the notion of architecture and memory. The anthropomorphic reading of the houses, with their own voices, may be extended to refer to the destruction of these houses as the destruction of the

²⁸ Sandra Vida, "Passages: Rita McKeough's Art and Life in Alberta" in Rita McKeough: An Excavation ed. Annette Hurtig (Calgary: Glenbow Museum, 1993), 69.

²⁹ Charlie Fox, introduction Defunct: an installation by Rita McKeough (Calgary: Alberta College of Art Gallery, 1981), 2.

body. With the walls of the house serving as a metaphor for our vulnerable skin Hurtig points out:

Anthropomorphized houses, domestic rooms with skin-like walls bruised like battered bodies, homes like abandoned bodies inhabited only by ghostly voices, domestic sites inside public galleries, inside museums – all sorts of metaphorical bodies and metonyms for the self, the subject.³⁰

In this installation McKeough investigated the public value of domestic architecture as an embodiment of both public and familial memories and histories. McKeough recreated architecture as art to make the viewer aware of its presence and importance not only as architecture but as public memory and of the interrelationship of these public and private values. This is a criticism of capitalism and consumerism, of which the white cube is a part. McKeough's installation was set in a gallery, separate from the world of the everyday, and, because of its scale, separated from the viewer, largely privileging a visual response. The authoritative role of the white cube also increased the validity of McKeough's project. The destruction of McKeough's work was an integral part of the installation and powerfully refers to the destruction of architectural history as well as the power of the white cube space.

The act of destruction was a reminder of the demolition of houses in Calgary to make room for more up-to-date housing, and with it, the destruction of public histories and private memories associated with those buildings. It may also be seen as a cathartic act of control on the part of the artist over personal memories associated with her own childhood home. Similarly, it was a subversive act within the gallery space, destroying the singular

³⁰ Hurtig, 19.

art object, as did modernist avant-garde artists like Duchamp, devaluing the male heroic conception of art that goes along with the white cube.

Defunct acknowledged the privileged gaze of the viewer by positioning him/her as voyeurs, looking over the constructed neighbourhood, as opposed to a more feminine positioning where the viewer is placed within the confines of the constructed domestic space or established as part of the spectacle. The scale of this work puts the viewer in a distanced, powerful and larger position to the work, allowing the viewer to project his/her fantasies onto the construction. This aspect of the work reflects the affective role of the gallery. Yet here the fantasies were pre-empted by the voices that already inhabit the space. Rita McKeough successfully brought together public and personal values of domestic architecture and its embodiment of memory into the white cube space, acknowledging the power of the site, not by subverting its position of authority or status of transcendence, but by destroying that which the gaze is set upon; and by embedding that object with political rhetoric, so often absent in the gallery space. That political statement was a personal one associated with the domestic site. In *Defunct* issues of domesticity were placed within the gallery as a unique art object and then subverted through the destruction of the art object itself.

Both Adams and McKeough have used the authority of the white cube space to question and undermine its power. Adams adopted the aesthetic of modernist, prefabricated objects to acknowledge the authoritative power of the site, thus lending authority to domestic subject-matter. McKeough went further than Adams, moving

beyond the privileged gaze by incorporating olfactory and aural aspects to her work, thereby engaging the viewer corporeally.

From its inception, artists have used installation art to acknowledge the authority of the gallery space. It began with the historical avant-garde acknowledgment of its presence, debunking its assumed neutrality and developed into a critique of the societal assumptions and values we now understand it to embody. In a contemporary intellectual and aesthetic context, artists today are using this subversive power to undermine the binary understanding of public and private space, modernism and its suppression of domesticity; and the gendered assumptions these binarisms reflect. Whether through the entrance of the suppressed domestic into the white cube space or through acts of subversion such as performance or destruction, artists are actively using the gallery site to engage the viewer in the domestic subject-matter and its gendered associations. The white cube, as a unique installation site, provokes artistic engagements with domestic imagery to focus on the public values of domestic architecture. This is reflective of the public nature of the site.

These issues are examined in other environments but the affective role of the site evokes alternative responses. The other installation sites are domestic in nature, and are therefore in opposition to the white cube space. The subversive nature of the work discussed in this chapter against the white cube space itself is absent in the following chapters as the act of installing in these sites may be read as subversive itself. The house-as-home, co-opted for temporary installations, may be seen as the gendered antithesis of the white cube gallery, and is examined as such in the following chapter.

CHAPTER 2

THE HOUSE-AS-TEMPORARY INSTALLATION SITE

House, body and mind are in continuous interaction, the physical structure, furnishings, social conventions and mental images of the house at once enabling, molding, informing and constraining the activities and ideas which unfold in its bounds.¹

This chapter is an investigation into the affective role of the house/apartment as a site for installation art. It will be argued that to display art within the house/apartment is reflective of the dynamic relationship between the home and the artist. Artists examined here develop issues surrounding family life, motherhood and childhood in the house site, and focus on more individual issues, such as romantic love or the influence of politics on personal histories in an apartment space. These different artistic reactions speak to the particular affective roles of the particular house/apartment sites investigated in this chapter. Although the inherent privacy of the domestic status of each site shifts because art is installed and viewed in these spaces, they do not become public, institutionalized sites such as the house-galleries discussed in Chapter Three.

The three installations discussed in this chapter, *Womanhouse*, *The House Project* and *Les Occupantes*, all took place in temporarily appropriated domestic sites, whose history has been, largely, traditional domestic habitation. Because these sites are actual houses or apartments, traces of their habitation remain and the artists are able to

¹ Janet Carsten and Stephen Hugh-Jones, "Introduction" in *About the House: Lévi-Strauss and Beyond* eds. Janet Carsten and Stephen Hugh-Jones (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1995), 2.

problematize these traces as well as to draw upon common assumptions associated with the specific uses of each room and site.²

If space 'decides' activity, as Lefebvre argues, then the home would be the most influential space as it is where everyday existence takes place. Lefebvre establishes that the affective role of a space is immediate with interpretation following one's unconscious reaction to the space.³ The house is where identity is developed, where we maintain our bodies and nurture our souls. Families and individuals alike depend upon the home for shelter and support. A central part of domestic life is consumption: the consumption of food and other products for bodily maintenance and the consumption associated with home rental and ownership. Each artist's engagements with these issues speaks directly to her personal response to the affective role of the site. The dynamic relationship between house and identity can be clearly seen in the standard layout of a house, which serves to reinforce an oppressive social order. Here the division of public and private as gendered constructions establish an isolated, separate sphere for women. For the purposes of this thesis a generic ground-plan would include a living unit with separate, designated spaces for cooking and dining, leisure, sleeping, washing and storage. This standard is often

² This selection implies that only women artists have interrogated the domestic site, which is untrue. In 1981 a project entitled *Apartment Number* included the work of Daniel Buren, among others, and in 1986 a project in Montreal entitled *Maison de Chambres* also included male artists. I have chosen these three particular projects because of their conscious interrogation of the domestic space as a gendered site. Jane Perdue and Doug Sigurdson *Apartment Number* [Colin Lochhead, Lawrence Weiner, Ted Weir, Daniel Buren, Toby MacLennan, David MacWilliams] (Toronto: A Space, 1981). Frederick McSherry, *Maison de Chambres/Rooming House Show* [Barry Allikas, Joyce Blair, Judith Crawley, Michele Delisle, Freda Guttman, Lani Maestro, Frederick McSherry, David Moore, Tanya Morand, Su Schnee, Henri Sylvestre, Martha Townsend, Richard-Max Tremblay, Cameron Watt] (Montreal: 1069 rue MacKay, 17 August - 21 September, 1986).

³ Lefebvre, 2.

depicted in the idyllic drawings of children; a house with door, two windows, triangular roof and smoke rising from the chimney.

The house as an ideal, however, is not only a gendered space; but also reinforces the notion of the private domestic sphere as gendered and female. As stated in the introduction, the house form was developed initially as a separate sphere from business and eventually became an entity separate from all concerns of the public. This private realm was initially constructed to house women and children hidden away from the public world of men. The house served to keep women pure and free of the perceived corruption of capitalism and politics.⁴

The layout of the standard house reinforces this domestic confinement. The space of the kitchen, typically found at the back of the house, does not acknowledge its actual role as the centre of domestic activity. Commonly the space where most women spent a majority of their time, it remains hidden from view. This concealment undermines the centrality of activity within it and isolates women's activities. The garage as a gendered space of maintenance is the male equivalent. Typically a kitchen looks out on the backyard – a private space, and is equipped with the tools for the maintenance of the physical body whereas the garage usually opens out onto the public space of the street through the direct connection of the driveway. It is commonly reserved for the tools of home maintenance, but also can be symbolic of the escape from the house. These oppositional and gendered spaces found throughout the layout of a standard house reinforce the gendered divisions

⁴ Rybczynski, 26-27.

that are particularly evident in an analysis of the male/female interaction with the domestic sphere:

Women were more likely to think of the home as an expression or component of their own identity...men responded to the meaning of the home more as simply a physical place and associated the meaning of the home more with their own childhood than did women.⁵

Yet, as Annemarie Adams argues in her text Architecture in the Family Way: Doctors, Houses, and Women 1870-1900, the house was a site for political action more often than many historians would have us believe:

Alternative sources to those traditionally used reveal...[that] the house played a major role in Victorian feminism as a place where women proved their readiness for changing ideals and exhibited their competence as mothers, managers, and healers; the house offered opportunity, rather than being an institution that defined women or limited their power.⁶

Thus, the installations discussed in this chapter emerge from and engage with feelings of frustration and isolation within the home. They also acknowledge and celebrate the house as the traditional site of women's political action. The home as a site for political action is an issue most evident in the domestic site interventions of *The House Project* (1994) and *Les Occupantes* (1996). Earlier interventions, such as *Womanhouse* had focused more, but not exclusively on the feelings of powerlessness experienced by women in the domestic

⁵ Susan Saeger and Gary Winkel, "The Home: A Critical Problem for Changing Sex Roles" in New Space for Women eds., Gerda R. Wekerle, Rebecca Peterson and David Morley (Boulder: Westview Press, 1980), 46-7.

⁶ Annmarie Adams, Architecture in the Family Way: Doctors, Houses and Women 1870-1900 (Montreal & Kingston: McGill-Queen's University Press, 1996), 164-165.

sphere.⁷ The empowerment women gained through the feminist movement, which included projects such as *Womanhouse*, has allowed the current generation of artists to develop a wider range of investigations of and celebrations into women's roles.

The artists discussed in this chapter all investigate the meanings of the standard house form. They examine both the compartmentalized layout of a generic house and the roles that are determined by the internal spaces. The separation of individual rooms into specific uses establishes a fragmentation and/or compartmentalization of identity. The affective role of this compartmentalization makes the influence of the domestic site oppressive. It is the influential power of such spaces that the artists in this chapter attempt to expose, question and problematize:

Most women's lives are compartmented, fragmented, and necessarily far more flexible than those of men. They are conditioned by and reflected in the many rooms of the ordinary house. A woman may be a cook in the kitchen, a hostess in the living room, a mother in the children's room, a lover in the bedroom. Men's lives are more concentrated on their workplace, and they move freely through the home like guests. Women occupy different rooms at different times of the day, and the house becomes a temporal and spatial metaphor for role playing.⁸

It is not just women, as Lucy Lippard suggests here, but everyone living within these spaces who will, to some degree, experience the fragmentation and compartmentalization derived from the identities mapped onto different rooms within the domestic site.

All three projects presented in this chapter were developed as collective efforts an approach that is reflective of the ways women have historically sought to break from the

⁷ *Womanhouse*, organized by Judy Chicago and Miriam Schapiro, took place in a condemned mansion in San Francisco in 1972. An example of the celebratory approach to feminist art practice can be seen in Sherry Brody and Miriam Schapiro's *Dollhouse* [fig.10].

isolation of the domestic site, by gathering together and building strength and support in numbers. Yet, in all three cases, the artists have engaged in specific rooms individually, speaking to the fragmented nature of the site and the compartments of identity associated with each room. These projects therefore speak to the individual voice and how it can be retained in the collective as well as the domestic sphere.

Womanhouse, *The House Project* and *Les Occupantes* engage with the stereotypical meanings of the spaces in the home. This generic approach to each space allows for an immediate connection with the viewer and speaks to the affective role of the individual rooms. Furthermore, these works seek to disrupt these fixed meanings of isolation and compartmentalization in order to question traditional assumptions and thus draw attention to the inherent stereotypes associated with them.

WOMANHOUSE

This strategy of using an existing house as a site for installation was first used in feminist art practice in 1972, when Judy Chicago, Miriam Schapiro and their students from the California Institute of the Arts opened a site-specific show entitled *Womanhouse* in an abandoned mansion. Their approach here was the predecessor to *The House Project* and *Les Occupantes*. The format used at *Womanhouse* allowed the artists to engage directly with the domestic spaces and offered visitors an opportunity to enter a private female sphere:

⁸ Lucy Lippard, "Centers and Fragments: Women's Spaces" in Women in Architecture: A Historic and Contemporary Perspective ed. Susana Torre (New York: Whitney Library of Design, 1977), 194-95.

Womanhouse literally brought to life the ideas and viewpoints first articulated in Betty Friedan's 1963 *The Feminine Mystique* and soon to be developed in *Ms.* magazine, which was founded in 1972.... The kind of bold looking at issues created an apprehensive tension in the audience for *Womanhouse*, provoking argument as well as revealing terrible pain.⁹

Several artists used tableaux to make explicit and direct statements about the dilemma of the housewife. For example, Kathy Huberland's mannequin/bride featured a long train trailing down the stairway, becoming grayer as it descended. Sandy Orgel presented a female mannequin trapped between the shelves of a closet alongside the linen [fig.8] and Robin Schiff, in *Nightmare Bathroom* [fig.9], produced a silhouette of a sand-woman sunken in the bath, unaware of an approaching snake. In each case the artists made a clear connection between the home, the body and the entrapment of women in the home. Betty Friedan referred to this condition as 'the problem without a name': to describe the isolation, frustration and depression suffered by so many women at this time and which they had no way to express.¹⁰ The installations at *Womanhouse* addressed the feelings of isolation and frustration projected onto the domestic sphere as well as reflecting the artist's contemporary connection between women's identity and the house.

The Dollhouse by Sherry Brody and Miriam Schapiro [fig.10] at *Womanhouse* presented a dollhouse with all the comforts of domesticity but looming at the windows were images of men, bears and darkness, encroaching on this safe haven. The use of

⁹ Arlene Raven, "Womanhouse" in The Power of Feminist Art: The American Movement of the 1970s, History and Impact Norma Broude and Mary D. Garrard eds., (New York: Harry N. Abrams, Inc., Publishers, 1994), 51. Because of the isolation of the domestic sphere, issues of domestic violence and the frustration of this isolation were hidden. With the performances in *Womanhouse* a voice was given to the silent struggles which provoked feelings of relief often associated with the consciousness-raising self-examination of the 1970s feminist movement. (See Raven, 61)

¹⁰ Betty Friedan, The Feminine Mystique (New York: W.W. Norton & Company, Inc., 1963).

textiles in this piece was indicative of the 1970s practice of celebrating women's traditional art practices. The construction was reflective of both the entrapment women felt in domesticity and the perceived safety it offered in the face of the masculine public sphere. The traditional role of the dollhouse as a catalyst for fantasy is evident, but there are fairytales, dreams and nightmares in Brody and Schapiro's construction.

In the *Womanhouse* kitchen [fig.11], Susan Frazier, Vicki Hodgetts and Robin Weltsch covered the ceiling of the flesh-pink room with plastic fried eggs, which as they descend down the wall, slowly transformed into breasts. The artists were attempting to communicate the relationship among food, giving and receiving, and women's role as nurturer in the kitchen.¹¹

In the dining room of *Womanhouse*, [fig.12] Beth Bachenheimer, Sherry Brody, Karen LeCoq, Robin Mitchell, Miriam Schapiro and Faith Wilding constructed an enticing yet inedible feast. Everything from the painted mural on the wall to the fabric plates and sculpted food presented the viewer with an inedible visual feast – perfectly and eternally preserved. The artists who engaged with the kitchen site developed the theme of nurturing life, and the female body. The dining room interrogated issues of consumption as well as women's traditional skills in culinary and textile arts. Thus the installation acknowledged that the functionality of these arts commonly undermined their aesthetic value as art.

As the first artistic acknowledgment of the influence of the house/home on the female identity, *Womanhouse* significantly influenced other contemporary projects that sought to link art with contemporary life:

a 'learning by doing' educational method at *Womanhouse* put into practice the psychological self-discoveries offered by the consciousness-raising format of the women's movement.¹²

Performances were also a critical component of *Womanhouse*. In *Cunt and Cock*, Faith Wilding and Janis Lester acted out the cultural assumptions of the connection between biological differences and sex roles. In Faith Wilding's performance *Waiting* the woman whispered:

Waiting for my breasts to develop/Waiting to get married/Waiting to hold my baby/Waiting for the first grey hair/Waiting for my body to break down, to get ugly/Waiting for my breasts to shrivel up/Waiting for a visit from my children, for letters/Waiting to get sick/Waiting for sleep...¹³

This performance vividly expressed the frustration and powerlessness felt by women confined to the domestic space, the frustration of a woman whose identity was controlled by her isolation and confinement. Furthermore, it did so in a format reflective of the consciousness-raising approach to self-discovery of the 1970s. These early engagements with the domestic sphere were primarily used to raise awareness of the realities of the housewife. They mark the first attempts to reveal the silent oppression of the housewife. *Womanhouse* was thus influential both as an aesthetic and as a social strategy for feminist activism:

The result of these changes has been to intensify family-related issues in the public mind. A generation or two in the past, issues like wife battery, child abuse, abortion, divorce and custody were perceived of as personal or family problems. Now they are considered to be social problems requiring

¹¹ Raven, 52.

¹² Raven, 50.

¹³ For a complete transcription refer to: Judy Chicago, *Through the Flower: My Struggle as a Woman Artist* (Garden City: Anchor Press / Doubleday, 1982), 213-17.

legal, political and economic attention by both governmental and private organizations.¹⁴

Womanhouse adopted many of the historical avant-garde strategies to break with the traditional understanding of art as a singular, static art object. The site-specificity of subject-matter of this project and its status as installation art break into the viewer's physical space, thus disrupting the privileged gaze and approaching the viewer corporeally. This approach subverts the transcendent understanding of the art object and moves into the realm of the immanent and everyday both in its domestic subject-matter and its installation and performance approach.

THE HOUSE PROJECT

The House Project, a recent domestic intervention with affinities to *Womanhouse*, was developed at 12 Washington Street in Toronto in 1994. It too was a collective effort in which each artist was responsible for the installation of a specific room. This chapter will deal specifically with installations by Shanna Miller in the living room, Lois Andison in the dining room, Penelope Stewart in the kitchen and Suzy Schlanger in a children's bedroom. These installations examine and problematize the traditional connotations of each room and speak to the compartmentalized nature of the site. Whereas *Womanhouse* provided an introduction to the feminist ideas of the 1970s, *The House Project* was more complex and dealt with mid-1990s issues in a critical examination of the different meanings of 'house' and the relationship of women and children have to this construct.

¹⁴ Meg Luxton and Harriet Rosenberg, Through the Kitchen Window: The Politics of Home and Family

The artists and writers in *The House Project* took up residency for a month before the opening of the show at 12 Washington Avenue. Their common goal was to:

locate/disrupt the female experience within the social and cultural construct of the private sphere.... Each artist chose a room in which to resurrect latent memories or layer her personal imprint while each writer observed and logged the unfolding installations from her unique vantage point.¹⁵

Whereas *Womanhouse* identified and acknowledged the female experience, the artists at *The House Project* attempt to take this investigation one step further by disrupting the common understanding of feminine domesticity and acknowledging the political influences on the domestic site. As Luxton and Rosenberg point out, the awareness of the politics of the private sphere has influenced the approaches artists take to the subject-matter.¹⁶

Shanna Miller's engagement with the meaning of the living room [fig.13], a space of formality, the daughter of the drawing room, is indicative of this contemporary approach to the domestic site. As Sylvie Fortin states in her essay for this project, "[l]iving rooms are to families what museums are to nations and so Shanna Miller has turned the living room into a gallery."¹⁷ Miller drew on the notion of living room as a space of public display and private memory. The living room is traditionally located at the front of the house, where the passerby can see in through a large picture window and the inhabitants can see out to the street framed by the window. This room is commonly a construction of

(Toronto: Garamond Press, 1986), 13.

¹⁵ Claire Christie and Sylvie Fortin, Preface. *The House Project* by Christie and Fortin (Toronto: The House Project, 1994), 5.

¹⁶ Luxton, 13.

¹⁷ Sylvie Fortin, "Claimants: Christine, Claire, Lois, Madeleine, Penelope, Shanna, Siobhan, Suzy and I" in *The House Project* Sylvie Fortin and Claire Christie (Toronto: The House Project, 1994), 29.

normalcy directed to the public. It projects a myth of family history and identity through the display of family photographs and memorabilia. Just as family photograph albums emphasize the positive and cherished moments in a family's life, so too is the space of the living room – displaying the best objects and furniture in the home – a reflection of the public face of the family.

Miller presented a replica of these personal, small-scale, carefully constructed histories found in typical living rooms, but in a larger format and to a wider public audience than would normally have access to them. The artist created a portrait of a nurse, images of a group of people at a banquet, a wedding and a group of swimmers and hung them on the walls as if they were in a typical family living room. Unlike the small family photographs intended for personal contemplation these were portrait-sized silk-screens and oil paintings produced for public display, and consumption.

The space was altered to accommodate the display of these images. Devoid of furniture or other domestic objects, the room had now become the austere space associated with the white cube gallery space, where visual rather than physical interaction was primary. By using subject-matter from personal history and presenting it as a public display, Miller had temporarily transformed domestic context into a public viewing space. The public and the private confront each other at every turn.

The artists in *The House Project* broaden our understanding of the house site by developing more complex investigations of the relations between the political and the private than those of *Womanhouse*. In the case of Miller the concern is how the private is construed for public consumption so as to reinforce the parallel associations of the

affective roles of the gallery and the living room. Whereas the living room at *The House Project* was the familial display case to the outside world, the artists in the dining room of *Womanhouse* took the natural, necessary consumption of food and made it artificial, antiseptic and aesthetic.

Shanna Miller's living room in *The House Project* transformed a personal history for the public white cube gallery consumption. The *Womanhouse* dining room, on the other hand, transformed physical consumption into visual consumption: private necessity to public pleasure. Whereas the artists at *Womanhouse* drew on personal experiences provoked by the self-reflexive, consciousness-raising 1970s feminism and feminist art practice, Shanna Miller drew on the public understanding of the affective role of the living room. Both projects, in varying degrees, brought public values into the private sphere, in order to subvert and challenge the traditional understanding of the domestic site.

Lois Andison continued the investigation of consumption in the home in her installation in the dining room of *The House Project*. The artist constructed a large table with two motorized drums set into it [fig. 14]. The rotating drums each contain tiny plaster cows. Food was not used for aesthetic effect, as in *Womanhouse*, but rather became part of an investigation of the relationship between food and power: "Encompassing notions of servility – the inability of these animals to withstand their dictated fate – the work echoes a similar structure evident in the traditional family."¹⁸ The similarities between the domesticated cows and the domesticated female were acknowledged by the artist. Her

¹⁸ Claire Christie, "A New Address" in *The House Project* Sylvie Fortin and Claire Christie (Toronto: The House Project, 1994), 12.

interrogation of the dining room differed from *Womanhouse*, which focused primarily on the role of women within the domestic sphere. Andison instead dealt with broader issues of the politics of consumption, the shifting meanings of the private sphere and the affective power of the domestic space. The artists of *Womanhouse* presented the house solely as a site of isolated domesticity. For Miller it was also the battleground for political issues that affect our private and public daily lives, especially those associated with the politics of consumption. This shifting focus speaks not only to the changing meaning of the domestic site but also to its changing affective role.

In *The House Project* Penelope Stewart disrupted the notion of kitchen as nurturing space, and woman as nurturer. In her installation all evidence of consumption, preparation, creation and nurturing have been erased and covered by white organza [fig.15]. As Fortin points out, this strategy acknowledges the invisibility of domestic labour.¹⁹ However, the white organza could also be read as the ‘white skin’ that Mark Wigley examines in his essay, “Untitled: The Housing of Gender”.²⁰

White linen took over the role of the porous surface it protected. It literally became the body.... The white surface was a critical device with which a detachment from the body, understood as a feminine surface, a discontinuous surface vulnerable to penetration, could be effected.²¹

[W]ithout such vigilant control of the surface, the disorder of the body can infect ethical, aesthetic, political, and juridical regimes. Order, in general depends upon an ordering of the body, which is to say, a detachment from it.... This disciplining of the body is an extension of the traditional

¹⁹ Fortin, 26.

²⁰ Mark Wigley, “Untitled: The Housing of Gender” in *Sexuality and Space* Beatriz Colomina, ed. (Princeton: Princeton Architectural Press, 1992).

²¹ Wigley, 359.

disciplining of the cultural artifact 'woman', authorized by the claim that she is too much a part of the fluid bodily world to control herself.²²

Wigley establishes that the white walls were introduced and venerated in the home, most notably by Alberti, as a symbol of purity and protection: firstly, protection against disease through their cleanliness and secondly, protection against the ornamentation associated with pleasure, sensuality and femininity. It was the creation of this privacy that allowed the production of sexuality within the confines of the home and allowed for its erasure in the public sphere. Stewart, like Alberti, who used the white surface to obscure sensuality, has erased the pleasurable sensuality associated with cooking and eating in order to foreground domestic labour through the shrine-like protection of the vessels and objects.

Both in *Womanhouse* and in *The House Project*, there is an overall treatment to the surfaces of the kitchen, either through pink paint or silk organza, indicative of the desire to coat or protect all the surfaces. This speaks to the common understanding of the kitchen as a site in greatest need of cleanliness to ward off dirt and illness. Thus the purity and cleanliness of the space are preserved and the erasure of any sensuality associated with eating is complete.

In the standard two-storey house, the first floor is usually public, whereas the second floor retains a status as private sanctuary. The installations in *The House Project* emphasized and interrogated these traditional divisions, which serve to reinforce the isolation of the domestic site and ultimately the oppression of women within. Suzy

²² Wigley, 345.

Schlanger's installation in the child's bedroom introduced the idea of the danger of privacy, silence and secrecy [fig.16].

The specific characteristics of this room, including the position on the upper floor and the layers of wallpaper, evoked a personal response in the artist.²³ Pairs of children's shoes were placed row by row across the floor. From the ceiling a forest of coloured skipping ropes dangled. The wallpaper was torn away to reveal layer upon layer of childhood icons: Snoopy, Smurfs, rainbows and football players – the cultural and commercial signs of childhood consumption.

Throughout the room a woman's voice was heard narrating painful events from her youth. Through these vocalizations of pain Schlanger confronts the powerless position of children trapped and isolated in the private realm of the house beyond the reach of public protection. The layers of wallpaper and the sea of tiny shoes were a testament to the long history of children falling victim to the silence of the private sphere.²⁴ This is not everyone's history, but the specific characteristics of this site, such as the children's wallpaper, facilitated this examination and allowed the audience to identify with the ideas developed by the artist. This installation was so dense, filled with skipping ropes and shoes and the voice, that the viewer was forced to engage corporeally with the site.

The artists at *The House Project* astutely introduced many contemporary political issues into the domestic site, thus disrupting the assumptions concerning the house as a separate sphere. Where *Womanhouse* introduced the isolation of the domestic sphere, *The*

²³ Christie, 13.

²⁴ Fortin, 27.

House Project investigated where the public and private spheres meet in the contemporary house site. This is indicative of the shifting affective role of the domestic site, which is related to both the changing perception of the domestic space and the specific attributes of the different installation sites.

LES OCCUPANTES

Les Occupantes was installed in a 1920s row house at 4581 rue Garnier in Montreal (1996). Situated in a residential neighbourhood with full support for the artistic initiative, this apartment space evokes a different history than Toronto's *The House Project*.²⁵ In Toronto the layout of the Washington Street house, with its master bedroom, children's rooms, bathrooms and separate spaces for the preparation and consumption of food, maintained the idea of a larger family home. The ground-floor Montreal potentially apartment offered more flexible space, suitable for a variety of occupants – a couple, a small, young family, roommates, or a single tenant.

In contrast to *The House Project*, where individual installations were presented in specific domestic spaces, *Les Occupantes* was created by an established collective *Venus Fly Trap* made up of four Montreal woman artists: Gail Bourgeois, Barbara McGill Balfour, Lorraine Oades and Lorraine Simms. Though both of these projects were developed through the work of collectives, *Les Occupantes* establishes a more unified approach to the site whereas *The House Project* reflects to a greater extent the particular

²⁵ Gail Bourgeois, "Venus Fly Trap: Cross-Pollination in the Collective Process" UAAC Annual Conference McGill University, Montreal. 10 November, 1996.

affective roles of specific rooms in the house. This thesis will specifically examine the work of three artists – Oades, Simms and Bourgeois.

Not surprisingly, because of the collective approach these installations maintain a more unified interrogation of meaning in domestic space. Here the home served as a space for remembering and acting out the notion of the habitual roles associated with women's lives in the domestic sphere. Women's traditional role as family historians, keepers of scrapbooks, diaries, photograph albums and family heirlooms, all related to the notion of nostalgia, are domestic activities. For *Venus Fly Trap* the apartment became a 'live-in scrap-book' with each room holding the memory of past inhabitants through the objects it contains and the traces left by those who have lived there. This is essentially a private history, and traditionally one that has not held significant cultural value outside the home. It is this connection between the domestic space and memory, specifically the construction of memory and knowledge through bringing a microcosm of the exterior world into the domestic sphere, that the artists in *Les Occupantes* continued to investigate.²⁶ Shanna Miller had also challenged this traditional boundary in her living room installation at *The House Project* by presenting a private history in a public format. *Venus Fly Trap's* statement in their press release for this show is revealing:

²⁶ The history of the connection between the house as architecture and memory began with the practice of the 'art of memory,' as presented by Hooper-Greenhill in her book Museums and the Shaping of Knowledge. The 'art of memory' was commonly used to remember long speeches or lessons, and was developed in the classical period and continued to be used in medieval monasteries. It involved placing different arguments or sections of a speech inside different rooms of a mental architecture, sometimes a house, so that one need only take a psychic walk through that space to retrieve that material. This idea would later manifest itself in physical form in the memory theatres and curiosity cabinets of the Renaissance. The contemporary domestic form of these traditions may be found in the collecting of mementos and souvenirs from places we have visited or people we want to remember.

With the notions of the home as a confine and refuge, as actual and remembered, apart and a part of the outside world, *Les Occupantes* considers the possibilities of reading domestic space as a semi-permeable membrane in which art objects, familiar associations, and site-specific meanings combine.²⁷

A temporal, site-specific intervention into domestic space like *Womanhouse* and *The House Project*, the Montreal project also attempted to provide the viewer with the opportunity to engage with the art installation as he/she would in a real life domestic situation.

When artists... use the home as an exhibition site, they do so not to make a visible connection with the possible future ownership of what is on display but to indicate that the home as a setting for art or as art relates to lived experience.²⁸

That is to say, the work is installed in a domestic setting to evoke and draw upon the lived experience of both the artists and the viewer. The domestic site provides an intimate, comfortable setting where the viewer's engagement with the installations can be more relaxed than in the public venue of the austere white cube gallery.

One of the front rooms was occupied by Lorraine Oades, who sought to investigate the memories of romantic love and the nostalgia associated with past or lost love. In this work Oades created a fictive history of a distant love. This fictive history was set one hundred years before her installation and she recorded it in a journal format, thus reflecting the habitual and process-orientated nature of the activities of the domestic sphere.²⁹ Oades' journal entries were set during a cholera epidemic and an economic

²⁷ Venus Fly Trap, press release for *Les Occupantes*, 1996.

²⁸ Greenberg, 351.

²⁹ Lorraine Oades, interview with Donna Wawzonek. 19 April, 1997.

depression, thus revealing the cyclical nature of history. This cyclical understanding of history is a feminine one, associated with the habitual, cyclical nature of female life and is positioned in opposition to the masculine construct of a linear history. Such a non-linear approach to history is common to women's autobiographies, including private diaries, published memoirs and scrapbook constructions in which complex connections take precedence over the chronological mapping of events. Oades has taken care to allow more than one reading of the history. For example, if the viewer understood this room as a study, then Oades' work could be related to issues of women's histories and literature. If however, the room is understood as a child's room then the work could be associated with the lost-love themes of fairytales. Thus Oades' work plays on two potential readings of the affective history of this room.

Lorraine Simms' installation took place in the two adjoining front rooms, the original living room/drawing room spaces. In one room overlooking the street, the wall was hung with dried roses and watercolour depictions of roses [fig. 17]. The artist saw these as symbolic of something undisclosed and very personal to her.³⁰ Simms was meticulous in the reproduction of the light effects on these painted roses, thus acknowledging the unique quality of light and the site-specificity of her installation. Unlike controlled lighting in the white cube gallery, this work responds to natural light and in doing so foregrounds the specificity of the domestic site.

The roses make reference to the traditional link between women and nature, specifically the link between women and the 'kept' and cultivated nature of the garden and

women's cultivation of the garden through still-life painting. Flowers and romantic love, particularly absent or lost love, and the past-time of still-life watercolour painting were commonly associated with upper-class women and the hobbies of the drawing room. This examination of romantic love as an evocation of the past history of the site, which may well have been, at one time, an apartment for a single woman or a young couple, is very different from the installations of *Womanhouse* and *The House Project* which focused more on the role of family and motherhood within the domestic sphere rather than the individual's private life.

The roses also act as reminders of past events. They may have been received on the occasion of a death, for the drawing room was often the site of the public presentation of the deceased. This connotative role of objects is closely linked to Shanna Miller's installation in *The House Project*, where the large-scale painted images served as mementos of personal relationships. Similarly, Simms refers to both the private contemplation of these roses, in their preservation, and the public consumption of them, through their painted reproduction. This acted as a subversion of the traditional boundary between personal values, associated with objects as mementos, and painting, associated with representation, thus reflecting and disrupting the binary of public and private values. Whereas painted objects are associated with the High Art values of the gallery, mementos have a personal and therefore domestic value. In both Miller's and Simms' works, the memories were personal and the representations were appreciated by the viewer for their aesthetic and connotative value. In both cases there was a merging of the public and

³⁰ Lorraine Simms, interview with Donna Wawzonek. 16 April, 1997.

private values/memories associated with personal objects. Whereas Miller's works were formatted for the public, Simms' maintained a personal scale which relates to the practice of preserving memories through mementos rather than a public presentation of a private history. The living room, at the front of the house, is the most public space within the house and therefore both these installations reflect the affective role of the history of the site.

The room adjoining this, which has a closet on the far side, set back from the street was painted entirely in red by Simms. When asked about this, Simms spoke of the vibrating affect this colour has on the viewer's retinas and, in opposition to the white wall of the conventional gallery, it makes the viewer aware of his/her own physical presence in the room.³¹ This corporeal engagement with the viewer is reinforced by the overwhelming odor of the roses in the front room as well as in the closet.

On the mantel was displayed a photograph of the artist's arm. This photo is enclosed in a set of hinged frames, commonly used for family photographs, which move like an accordion, expanding and contracting, toward and away from the room of dried roses. Simms believes this is a symbol of hope. It moves towards the closet containing the live flowers and away from the front room and the street the public sphere: a reference to domestic entrapment. Consequently, the arm is both trapped in this frame and capable of movement, as it fluctuates between stretching and retreating, speaking to the intermediate position of this room.³²

³¹ Lorraine Simms, interview with Donna Wawzonek. 16 April, 1997.

³² Lorraine Simms, interview with Donna Wawzonek. 16 April, 1997.

The closet is both the container of outwardly constructed identity, as it holds a person's wardrobe, how they present themselves publicly, and the space most hidden from the public; and it is a particularly poignant site of installation for Simms. The closet in the room adjoining the front room was where the roses were actually dried. Here the public identity was constructed through the drying of the flowers and then displayed to the public as they were moved to the drawing room, the site of the display of the public face of the family.

Her interest in process is reflective of the habitual nature of domestic labour. It is also linked to the casual past-time activities of the Victorian drawing room to which Simms was referring. Furthermore, it makes the relationship among the dried flowers, reaching arm and drying flowers cyclical, completing the circle of life. As in Lorraine Oades' works, this cyclical interpretation of history is an approach traditionally linked to the feminine because of its opposition to the linear, and therefore the male, construct of history. Therefore it is linked to the feminine and domestic, a response to the affective role of the site.

Of all the installations in this apartment, it was Gail Bourgeois' work in the kitchen that made the most direct connection with the history of the apartment [fig. 18]. Taking up the issues of nostalgia and memory, Bourgeois linked the history of the space to her own personal history. Bourgeois comments:

That particular kitchen, with its unusually high number and variety of cupboards and drawers, helped me to convey, through a visual rendering of the passage of time, a feeling of accumulation. The kitchen, as a domestic space, is historically woman-based and can represent the site of nourishment and nurturing (memories placed in bottles and put on the

shelf), and of desire and loss (the beautiful red dress). The domestic is made up of small stories, fictions, that are told and retold, stretched over time they are mediated by the utilitarian backdoor to the outside. Opening a cupboard door or a drawer begins a process. The temporal and social aspects of place construct a reading of the self in a relationship of the psyche to its dwelling places, the body, home, and city.³³

Where the living room is a construct to present to the public, the kitchen is usually placed at the back of the house, hidden from public view, where women have commonly taken on the role of domestic labourer, whether for themselves, others or for their family. It is this role that was most emphasized in the installations in the kitchens of *Womanhouse* and *The House Project*. Where at *Womanhouse* the public was invited in to view the exposed politics of the domestic site, at *Les Occupantes Bourgeois* investigated the influence of public politics on private lives. Because so many women have spent so much of their time in the house in this specific space, it necessarily takes on several roles. It is where the newspaper is read over morning coffee and where close friends visit and discuss the events of the day, either personal or more worldly. Also, because this installation occurred in a different type of space, an apartment space, than that of *Womanhouse* and *The House Project*, there was a greater focus on the individual's engagement in the domestic sphere and less interest on that individual's role as mother or other familial relationships.

Bourgeois responded to Annemarie Adams' understanding of the domestic site as “a place where women proved their readiness for changing ideals... rather than being an

³³ Gail Bourgeois, artist's statement. May, 1996.

institution that defined women or limited their power”.³⁴ On the windows and inside the cupboards were pasted various newspaper clippings from *Le Devoir*, *The Providence Journal*, *The New York Times* and others. The cupboards are filled with personal mementos representing childhood (toys), heritage (photographs), and the traditional links of women to nature (various dried flowers and the floral motif of the wallpaper) and public history (a television and newspapers) [fig.19]. These notions of public and private histories were conflated through the juxtaposition of these objects as well as their being contained in the jars labeled “Big Science” and “Thelma and Louise,” thus bringing contemporary/public culture to a private history, yet also entrapping these public influences and therefore controlling them.³⁵ The use of newspapers and the television also reminds us of the media presentations of public affairs that are brought into the private space of the home and made part of our own private histories. The repetitive use of jars in this installation speaks of the history of women preserving food for family consumption, as seen in the dining room at *Womanhouse*, as well as their role of preserving family histories, thus referring to the third way in which women sustain life, through its preservation in memory. Both these practices of archival and nurturing preservation are related to the understanding of the home as a site for personal consumption which does not contribute to public economics, other than a subservient support system for the man of the house. This is subverted by Bourgeois’ use of public histories through the newspapers and television. Bourgeois constructed microcosms which reflect the affective role of the site

³⁴ Adams, 165.

through their emphasis on women's approaches to history, and celebrated women's roles in the domestic sphere, rather than dwelling on their isolation, as in *Womanhouse*. This reflects the evolving meaning of the domestic site.

Unlike the house-gallery installations which will be examined in Chapter Three, *The House Project* and *Les Occupantes* are direct interventions with the site, and consistently address the notion of the domestic site as a separate, female sphere which is specific to the particular domestic site with which they are engaging. These interventions are the direct legacy of *Womanhouse* and their lineage is evident in their consistent investigation of the shifting relationship among women, the home and public and private constructions of female identity. As feminist art practice and feminism have evolved from their early consciousness-raising days they have become more varied and subtle. The contemporary installations are more complex efforts of examination of the relationship between environment and identity than they are obvious exposés of the oppressive nature of this relationship and take on the specific meanings of different domestic sites. As well, the phrase 'the personal is political' shifts from meaning that the politics of the personal need to be exposed to how public politics interact with our private lives.

Although the sites discussed in Chapter Three were also originally domestic spaces, their reconstruction as galleries subverts the type of direct engagements with the site as was seen in the works by Susan Schlanger, Lorraine Simms and Gail Bourgeois, and instead develops works which act more as hybrids between those in this chapter and

³⁵ "Big Science" is a reference to Laurie Anderson's experimental music album and "Thelma and Louise" refers to a Hollywood film dramatizing the life of two women on the run from the law.

the works of Adams and McKeough in the white cube spaces. The temporary installation sites discussed in this chapter maintain the status of the domestic sphere, whereas the sites to be discussed in Chapter Three are validated through their institutionalized gallery status and thus are of a different nature to the Chapter Two projects.

CHAPTER 3

THE HOUSE-GALLERY

Art museums eventually institutionalized art as anti-domestic. Architecturally, homes could not rival the grandeur of museums. The expenditure of money and energy on museum buildings was an overwhelming demonstration of their cultural authority. The separation of everyday experience and material exigencies from the aesthetic experience offered in museums disallowed integration of art and pragmatic concerns.¹

This chapter will examine the interrelationship of the house-gallery site and the installations within it. The two galleries examined here are the Gairloch Gallery in Oakville, Ontario and the Burnaby Art Gallery in Burnaby, British Columbia. These galleries and the installations within by Renée Van Halm, Anne Ramsden, and Patrick Mahon respectively, have been chosen because of the site's self-acknowledgment as a transformed domestic space and the artists conscious interest in the hybrid nature of the house-gallery. These artists' consciously acknowledge and problematize both the domestic and gallery aspects of this hybrid space.

The house-gallery adopts some characteristics of the white cube space, such as the empty space, white walls and removal of creature comforts like seating. At the same time it retains some of the domestic resonances such as original woodwork, familiar floor-plan, windows and doors, which all offer visual interest and natural light as well as intimacy of scale. This hybrid space provides an opportunity for interventions, through site specific installations, in these sites that differ from the installations in white cube galleries

discussed in Chapter One and the houses discussed in Chapter Two. These domestic resonances evoke a sense of familiarity with the site, linked, as it is to the artists' and viewers' personal domestic experiences. It is this affective aspect of the installation site – its hybridity of public/private, institutionalized/domestic, male/female – which influences site-specific creation and personal responses. This hybrid setting allows for an investigation into the domestic site, validated by its institutionalized status as an established gallery setting.

The house-gallery has had a long tradition associated with private collectors and curiosity cabinets. The Renaissance invention of the curiosity cabinet provided an understanding of the world through objects and their associations.² An example of this is Gustavus Adolphus's cabinet which contained specimens of the animal, vegetable and mineral kingdoms from across the known world as well as other mementos and artifacts.³ This connotative value of collected objects continues in the domestic realm today, as evidenced in Csikszentmihalyi's interviews about the feelings evoked by domestic belongings. One boy stated that looking at his animal toys provoked an associative response:

“They make me feel like I'm part of the world.” By interacting with them, some of his psychic energy is channeled beyond personal goals toward

¹ Michael Clapper, “The Chromo and the Art Museum: Popular Elite Art Institutions in Late Nineteenth-Century America” in Not at Home: The Suppression of Domesticity in Modern Art and Architecture ed. Christopher Reed (London: Thames and Hudson, 1996), 46.

² The curiosity cabinet was a cabinet or room constructed to hold curious objects or memorabilia and was an early predecessor of the first public galleries, such as the Louvre and the Medici Palace, both originally domestic structures. Thus from the beginning, the display of art was linked to the development of the gallery from the private domestic collection and display. This will become evident from the spaces discussed in this chapter.

³ Eileen Hooper-Greenhill Museums and the Shaping of Knowledge (London and New York: Routledge, 1995), 86-88.

larger purposes and thereby to the realization of the interconnectedness of the individual with the totality....⁴

The early conflation of the domestic and exhibition spaces is best examined through the example of the Durand-Ruel gallery. In 1877 Paul Durand-Ruel rented an apartment to exhibit recent photographs by Nadar.⁵ This would be the beginning of the connection between art dealership and the domestic site. As Ward points out:

By the end of the 1870s, such “private” settings...had come to be praised by favourable reviewers for providing a haven where artists could disclose their most “natural” or spontaneous aspects, the personal sides of their individuality, their incomplete works.⁶

There is a resonance of these qualities and values of intimacy, privacy and femininity within the house-gallery spaces discussed in this chapter. Both of the houses in Oakville and Burnaby were constructed as Arts and Crafts colonial style homes by wealthy individuals, located on substantial lots. Their later transformation into gallery spaces reinforces the association of art with the wealthy and empowered upper-classes. These class references makes consumerism and consumption part of the affective role of the site.

In each case the interior space has been altered in some measure to incorporate qualities of the white cube space while retaining strong residues of their domestic architecture. It is the very hybrid nature of these house-gallery spaces that attracted and inspired the interventions of the artists discussed in this chapter. Their attempts to both expose and blur the boundaries between public and private space, fine and decorative arts,

⁴ Mihaly Csikszentmihalyi and Eugene Rochberg-Halton, The Meaning of Things: Domestic Symbols and the Self (Cambridge: University of Cambridge Press, 1981), 193.

and male and female binarisms will foreground the unique affective roles of the house-gallery. The hybridity of these sites provokes examinations of the embedded gendered binarisms. These interventions differ from those of the white cube because the house form inherently evokes notions of domesticity. Thus any examination of the domestic in this setting appears less subversive than it would be in the white cube space discussed in Chapter One. Because the house is also an institutionalized gallery space, the installations within it can never be as subversive of the white cube modernist ideology as art which separates itself entirely from the white cube, such as environmental art or the temporary installations in actual homes (see Chapter Two). The institutionalized status of the house-gallery validates the investigation of domesticity. The hybrid nature of the house-gallery also opens the opportunity for artists to engage notions of both domesticity and white cube ideology at once in order to investigate the complexities of a dual gendered space in a public, institutionalized forum.

The contemporary conflation of the gallery and the house is also reflective of recent interest in architectural heritage, the backlash against the white cube's suppression of domesticity, and the public desire for more intimate gallery spaces. As Meyer points out in The Art Museum: Power, Money, Ethics:

The imaginative recycling of older buildings is desirable not just on financial grounds. Such structures often provide an appropriate setting for art: their scale tends to be intimate, their design unintimidating, their patina of age sympathetic to noncontemporary art. Interestingly, as the author discovered, most museum goers, when asked to name their favourite gallery, single out a small museum in a residential setting....These are

⁵ Ward, 602.

⁶ Ward, 607.

places that inspire affection rather than awe, a quality that the museum-as-monument too often fails to achieve.⁷

These qualities allow for personal artistic interventions for contemporary installation artists which relate to the original use of each room. Although similar in the approach to the artists discussed in Chapter Two, with the combination of both male and female gendered attributes present in the site, there is an investigation of both these aspects of the gendered space. Artists working in the house-gallery discussed in this thesis do so by either by taking up the historical understandings/uses of the room, exploring the owners' use of the space or interjecting their personal understanding/experience with that particular space.

THE GAIRLOCH GALLERY

The Gairloch house in Oakville, now transformed into the Gairloch Gallery, is a case in point. Here the features of the original private home are found in the exterior appearance and interior architectural details. From the exterior, the structure is residential in appearance and is surrounded by houses which remain residential. The traditional division of public and private spaces within a house remain, with the second floor rooms, once private bedrooms, now serving as private offices, and the public gallery spaces located on the lower level. Similarly, the entrance hall with the reception area for greeting visitors and controlling access reflects the public nature of the original hallway and drawing rooms.

⁷ Karl E. Meyer, The Art Museum: Power, Money, Ethics (New York: William Morrow and Co. Inc., 1987),

Renée Van Halm, in her exhibition *Anonymous Volumes* (1994) which specifically responded to the Gairloch site, is one artist who has overtly challenged the viewer to consider both the domestic space and modernist minimalist aspects of this site. Van Halm's installation echoes the hybrid nature of the architectural form in the gallery's combination of house and white cube. The artist interrogates both aspects of this hybridity through her use of architectural referents and painting styles. Curator Carolyn Bell Farrell points out the specific nature of Van Halm's work:

Implicit in Van Halm's use of Gairloch is a critique of galleries designed to house modernist art. These pristine cubes, with their high ceilings and immaculate white walls, were built to accommodate the heroic proportions of modernist works while purporting an austere environment, devoid of intrusive outside references.... While responding to the intimate viewing conditions of Gairloch Van Halm speaks to the re-positioning of painting within the context of everyday life – both its social relevance and its function as a private commodity – refuting the perception of it as something separate, exalted and self-referential.⁸

Van Halm's specific reference to the domestic sphere is made through her use of the still-life painting in several of the works included in *Anonymous Volumes*. This genre has come to be associated with the accomplishments of upper-class women.⁹ Until recently it was considered to be, not only a female genre, but also the lowest rank of painting with history painting at the other end of the scale. As the furthest removed from public subject-matter and closest to the representation of the everyday, the common and the domestic still-life painting with its attention to detail remains within the private realm,

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⁸ Carolyn Bell Farrell, *Renée Van Halm: Anonymous Volumes* (Oakville: Gairloch Gallery, 1994), 2.

⁹ By still-life painting, I am not referring to the *vanitas* tradition, but rather to the painting of domestic scenes, particularly flowers, either in watercolour or oil, which came to be a Victorian women's practice, labelled as decorative rather than associated with High Art practices.

embodying domestic notions of art. Van Halm has both acknowledged this history and offered a more complex reading of it by presenting the painting in more traditionally masculine frameworks such as the constructed architectural frame, or the coupling of these with modernist works. She also makes use of their architectural, theatrical set connotations – they are frames which are seen through, painted or ornamented upon and are hence giving context to the paintings within, acting as masculine constructions.

This combination of traditional conceptions of masculine and feminine art practices is most evident in *Anonymous Volumes* in the works *Study Notes* (1993) and *Mirroring* (1993). *Study Notes* [fig.20], whose title refers to the possible history of this room as a study, installed in the small room at the back of the house called the ‘stone room.’ It was comprised of two circular panels set onto a background of oak veneer.¹⁰ The panel on the left was a blue and pink minimalist rendering of a weave pattern. This image recalled both women’s traditions of textile art and the masculine minimalist abstractions in twentieth-century painting. The coupling of these two genres was reflective of the white cube gallery and domestic site at the Gairloch, making it a hybrid work.

The panel on the right was a black and white painting of the windowed corner of the 1924 Schröder House by the De Stijl architect Gerrit Rietveld. Rietveld and his architecture are associated with the De Stijl movement in Holland which developed a built form from abstract painting like that of Piet Mondrian. This minimalist style of painting was originally meant to be displayed in a white cube gallery space and the architecture of such galleries may be said to embody the suppression of the domestic, an accusation often

leveled against modernist architecture. Van Halm's image of De Stijl architecture, a minimalist, masculine style, was painted from the interior perspective. Thus the content was masculine but the interior viewpoint was from a feminine position. In *Study Notes*, the floral paintings were rendered in black and white and the abstracted images in colour. The still-life paintings are, thus, distanced from their illusionistic form and moved closer towards the traditional high art status and are subsequently read for more formal qualities.

The framing structure around the panels acted as reference to the masculine relationship with architecture as built form. Both are masculinized by the medium and feminized by the domestic site. Yet the left-hand circular panel, with its allusion to a textile pattern, was also rendered in an abstract, minimalist manner. Thus the juxtaposition of these two panels in this constructed frame presented a constant flux between the masculine/High Art/public and the feminine/Low Art/private polarities. The entire conception of this work, with its pure geometric forms and simple formal relationships, was also reminiscent of the minimalist traditions like those of Mondrian, the likes of which the white cube was meant to house.

The installation of *Mirroring* [fig.21] in the original dining room at Gairloch spoke to Van Halm's desire to interrogate the traditional masculine, modernist art practice and the feminine domestic site. *Mirroring* is a wall-size construction of wood panels. At eye-level, three square windows were cut into the wood which enclose two black and white paintings of flowers flanking a stylized painted image of wood grain. Her use of wood veneer coupled with black and white minimalist paintings actively spoke to the hybrid

¹⁰ Helga Pakasaar refers to this as the 'stone room' in the Anne Ramsden catalogue (see pg. 4.)

nature of the Gairloch Gallery; by “paraphras[ing] the interior decor; the beveled edges of the squares mimic the paneled facade of the room while the painted roses within reiterate the stylized motif of the molding.”¹¹ Once again, she made reference to women’s artistic traditions in the use of flower painting and linked this directly to the architecture of the house, thus reflecting the affective role of the site both in its history and in the architectural specificity of the site.

Just like the painting of the interior of Schröder House, these flower images spoke of an interiority and domestication associated with women in the home and the tradition of still-life painting which is reinforced by the imitation wood veneer frames. The overall conception of *Mirroring* was architectural, with the painted stripes along the top and side edges easily interpreted as references to post and lintel construction. The use of wood paneling consolidates this architectural reading of the work. By mirroring the wood paneling of the room, and reinforcing this motif in the framing of the domestic subject-matter inside the male frame – i.e. a constructed, containing form – Van Halm interrogates the idea of the confinement of women inside the domestic sphere. Thus the female subject-matter is doubly confined by the partially male gendered space of the gallery and the confines of the constructed frame. With the coupling of the actual wood panels in the work with the stylized painting of wood grain, the artist is asking the viewer to contemplate details of the domestic site for their aesthetic value, referring to the status of consumption associated with home ownership. Issues of consumption are represented doubly in the house-gallery – firstly through the issues of consumption associated with the original

¹¹ Farrell, Renée Van Halm, 3.

domestic site – secondly through the practice of visual consumption in an art gallery. In this way Van Halm is responding to the affective role of the house-gallery. As well, by using traditional domestic/feminine art practices within the institutionalized gallery site she validates these traditions, calling for the public consumption of a normally private commodity.

In her piece entitled *Quotation (1924-25)* (1993) [fig.22], which was installed in the sun room at the back of the house overlooking the gardens, Van Halm makes another direct reference to the male-centred architectural form of Rietveld's Schröder House by reconstructing the corner window she had painted in *Study Notes*. Here, this construction becomes a second frame for the original windows of the sun-room that overlooks the cultivated gardens of the Gairloch Gallery. Van Halm has consciously inserted a reference to masculine, modernist architecture within this Arts and Crafts house as a means to frame and problematize the hybrid nature of this house-gallery. Thus, two architectural styles popularized one after another are used together to provide a critique of their gendered meanings. One is a representative of the modernist, minimalist style and the other of nostalgic turn-of-the-century domesticity. In Chapter One the work of Rita McKeough also engaged the domestic as a subversive act against the authority of the white cube. However, in Van Halm's work the insertion of modernist subject-matter into the domestic site serves to validate the domestic site as a gallery.

As Farrell points out in her catalogue essay for *Anonymous Volumes*, the frontality of *Quotation (1924-25)* made it essentially much like a theatre set, with the viewer taking

the position of the actor on stage.¹² This frontality also reinforces the state of interiority and objectification, as the viewer is confined to outward looking and is not positioned to peer in and the hence feminine position of the viewer as he/she look out to the windows and then to the landscape.

Overall, Van Halm's overt combination of references to both the domestic space of the Gairloch house and the High Art modernist architecture of Reitveld problematized both aspects of this site: "[u]ltimately, these domestic surroundings become absorbed into representation."¹³ Now the decorative domestic has been positioned as High Art, suitable for the white cube. Van Halm achieves this by emphasizing the formal qualities of the paintings and thereby makes an association with abstraction, rather than the feminine tradition of illusionistic still-life painting. More importantly, the type of High Art aesthetic once destined for the white cube gallery was recontextualized in relationship to feminine, domestic art traditions and therefore became appropriate in a hybrid domestic gallery. This work is successful in acknowledging both the domestic and the white cube influences of this particular space. Van Halm successfully used the unique conflation of these two spaces at the Gairloch Gallery to problematize and explore solutions to the traditional polarity of masculine and feminine spaces and art practices.

Van Halm's constructions performed as critical examinations of both the traditional status of women's art practices – textile work and still-life painting – and the separation of High Art traditions from the domestic sphere. These binaries are reflective of

¹² Farrell, Renée Van Halm, 2.

¹³ Farrell, Renée Van Halm, 4.

the polarities of the gendered attributes in the house-gallery site. The relationships between these gendered polarities are complex and relate to the site both as a gallery and as a house.

Anne Ramsden's exhibition, *Residence* (1994), at the Gairloch Gallery provides a poignant comparison to Van Halm's work. Whereas Renée Van Halm interrogated the hybrid status of Gairloch Gallery, Anne Ramsden investigated the domestic history of this same site by using installations related specifically to the gallery site.

Both Van Halm's *Mirroring* and Ramsden's *Dominion/domain* (*Gairloch, c. 1965/1993*) [fig.23], were installed in the original dining room of the Gairloch house. In Ramsden's installation enlarged photographic images of flowers from the Gairloch's gardens were presented on a scale comparable to Van Halm's *Mirroring*. Ramsden then alternated these flower images with enlarged photographs of the interior of the Gairloch house from the 1960s when it was still in private hands. Whereas Van Halm used the floral motif to refer to the traditional female genre of still-life, Ramsden transformed the specific garden reference into quasi-wallpaper and thus referenced women's connection to the decorative arts and interior decorating through floral imagery as well as medium.

Both artists were referring to women's decorative, Low Art traditions. But in each case the large scale images appear more appropriate for a white cube gallery space, as opposed to the smaller, domestic spaces of Gairloch. This play with scale shifts the domestic status of these constructions into a High Art tradition and reinforces the site as both gallery and house. As demonstrated in Chapter Two, Shanna Miller employed similar methods in her installation in the living room of *The House Project* on Washington Street,

Toronto [fig.13]. Whereas Miller was drawing on a personal history, Ramsden examines the history of Gairloch and its former inhabitants, thus referring to the institutionalized history of the site rather than bringing in a personal one.

The images of the interior of the house as home focus on the home as a site of consumption and its objects as status symbols and reflections of identity. “‘Home’ brought together the meanings of the house and of household, of dwelling and of refuge, of ownership and of affection.”¹⁴ Much like Oldenburg’s *Bedroom Ensemble*, this work exposed issues of consumption which enter the domestic sphere.

In Helga Pakasaar’s catalogue for *Residence*, she points out that the only figure represented in Ramsden’s images is the black maid who worked at the Gairloch house, standing in the kitchen, reproduced as a negative.¹⁵ The maid effectively becomes another commodity in this image, owned as much as the furniture in the other photographs. As in many of the projects discussed in this thesis, including Lois Andison’s dining room installation at *The House Project* [fig.14], Van Halm and Ramsden have examined the dining room as a site of consumption. Whereas Van Halm referred to visual, High Art consumption, Ramsden dealt with the more general consumption of objects and the symbols of financial status such as furniture and hired help. In *Residence* Ramsden has interpreted images taken directly from Gairloch’s history where Van Halm referred to the more general history of art and architecture.

¹⁴ Witold Rybczynski, *Home: A Short History of an Idea* (New York: Viking Press, 1986), 62.

¹⁵ Pakasaar, 7.

Ramsden continued her investigation of the idea of visual consumption and the domestication of nature in the decorative arts in her piece *Curtain (investor confidence)* (1994) [fig.24], exhibited in the same room in which Van Halm installed her *Quotation (1924-25)* [fig.22] piece. Both of these installations focused on framing a view of nature. In Ramsden's work nature was tamed and brought indoors in the stylized floral pattern on the oversized chintz curtain, while Van Halm framed the view of the garden in her piece so that visual consumption occurred by both emphasizing and controlling the original window. Once again the house was recognized as a site of consumption. The garden outside the window was now obscured by the floral curtain, simultaneously revealing and concealing by obscuring and mimicking.

Another site used by both Van Halm and Ramsden is the 'stone room', originally a study or child's playroom. Van Halm used this site for *Study Notes* (1993), and Ramsden used it for *Scene(Carolina Herrera)* (1994) [fig.25]. Unlike Van Halm's modernist, High Art references, Ramsden took her source imagery from popular culture, specifically an advertisement for a Carolina Herrera fragrance [fig.26]. In the original image, a woman stands wrapped in a sheet, as if she were just emerging from bed to look out on an idyllic garden framed by billowing curtains. Ramsden chose to reproduce the room, in a dollhouse-scale construction, omitting the female figure. The constructed room extends over two storeys of the dollhouse, in effect larger than what would be possible for an actual house. Consequently, Ramsden's impossible construction positioned itself as a fantasy space, where references to the idyllic world presented in the Herrera advertisement are conflated with the fantasies that children in play project onto dollhouses. Whereas Van

Halm used the study reading of this space, Ramsden draws on its potential history as a children's playroom. Affinities can be established with McKeough's *Defunct* (see Chapter One) [fig.7]. However, there are differences. Whereas McKeough's work was already 'occupied' by specific voices, Ramsden's construction was empty, silent and thus open to any type of personal projection.

The dollhouse format of this work also shares affinities with Sherry Brody and Miriam Schapiro's *The Dollhouse* [fig.10] at *Womanhouse* (see Chapter Two). Their *Dollhouse* was a combination of fairytale and nightmare, equipped with shutters to entrap or shelter those inside. The inside of Ramsden's *Scene* remain empty, and therefore open to limitless interpretations and projections of the viewer. It is also exposed, open to fantasy, public scrutiny and consumption, just as the domestic site is once it has been transformed into a public gallery space.

Like installations within the white cube space, Ramsden's dollhouse and the advertisement were "unconstricted by the clutter of everyday domesticity."¹⁶ The viewer was forced to observe from the male, public position outside the confines of the domestic space. In contrast, Renée Van Halm positioned the viewer inside the Schröder house. Both Van Halm and Ramsden have used this room as a site of leisurely domestic activity, Van Halm with her *Study Notes* referring to women's 'craft' and art traditions that would take place within the home, and Ramsden using the dollhouse to refer to the fantasies associated with childhood play. As Emily Putman pointed out in her Victorian text:

¹⁶ Helga Pakasaar, *Anne Ramsden: Residence* (Oakville: Gairloch Gallery, 1994), 3.

The lady's life, and even her character, are always sensibly modified by the house she lives in, and the house represents the social or economic requirements of the man of her class. The man shapes the house and the house shapes the lady.¹⁷

Ramsden continues her explorations of public influences and issues of consumption of the private in the living room with her *Drawing Room (with my mother's mirror)* (1994) [fig.27]. Once again, as in *Scene, The Dollhouse* [fig.10] and *Defunct* by Rita McKeough [fig.7], the viewer was placed in the position of the voyeur. Because of the fragmented nature of the images and the placement of the mirror above eye level, only the room is reflected, not the viewer, thus erasing their presence, allowing for a voyeuristic position. The drawing room was the Victorian site of public display, the predecessor of the contemporary formal living room which houses the public face of the family, referred to by Shanna Miller [fig.13], where status was displayed and guests were entertained. Ramsden's title alludes to ownership and memory. The characterization of the mirror as belonging to the artist's mother classifies the view of the room as informed by the mirror of the mother and also takes the position of a personal memento. Traditionally, the drawing room was the site of material domestic control, where the mother of the family dictated how the family was presented to the public and who was allowed entrance into the drawing room. Ramsden has emphasized the traditional maternal control of the activities within the Victorian drawing room. Ramsden and Van Halm have both used framing devices to control the viewer's access to a particular aspect (garden, drawing room etc.) in

¹⁷ Bonnie Lloyd, "Women, Home and Status" in Housing and Identity: Cross-cultural Perspectives James Duncan ed. (London: Helm Ltd., 1981), 191.

the Gairloch house-gallery and in doing so emphasize the role of consumption in the domestic space of the home and in the institutionalized art world of the gallery.

Each piece in *Residence* – the doll house, the curtain, the drawings/mirror, and the photographs – disrupts the architectonic authority of the house/gallery.... The exhibition is a sequence of tableaux that draw attention to how objects are given social value in a way that implicates the spectator as consumer.¹⁸

The installations of Renée Van Halm and Anne Ramsden at the Gairloch Gallery are telling in their similarities and differences in approach. Both artists have incorporated the original domestic details and architectural forms as well as the traditional uses of the different rooms. Van Halm has taken the Gairloch as a site to investigate the layers of meaning unique to this type of hybrid gallery space. Most importantly Van Halm exposes the relationship to the distinct values traditionally associated with High Art and masculine art practice and Low Art and women's art practices. Also examined are the distinct affective roles of domestic and gallery architecture, thus interrogating several art historical associations with the gendered division of the public and private spheres. Ramsden also takes issue with these values, no longer associated with gendered practices, but rather with the gallery and domestic spaces as sites of consumption, ownership and cultivation.

BURNABY ART GALLERY

The Burnaby Art Gallery, also an Arts and Crafts design, was built in 1910 by Vancouver architect Robert Twizell.

¹⁸ Pakasaar, 14.

Like Renée Van Halm's *Anonymous Volumes* (1994) [figs.20-22], Patrick Mahon's installation at the Burnaby Art Gallery, entitled *Re-entering the House of Flowers* (1996), combined domestic allusions and a modernist aesthetic to acknowledge the hybridity of the house-gallery in order to problematize both aspects. Mahon reproduced a Victorian-style wallpaper that could have been present in the house when it was used as a home, as a means to explore masculine relationships with the domestic space. Similar to Acconci, Mahon acknowledged the masculine predilection for escaping the domestic sphere. Susan Saegert and Gary Winkle discuss gendered responses to the domestic sphere in their essay "The Home: A Critical Problem for Changing Sex Roles:"

Men responded to the meaning of the home more as simply a physical place and associated the meaning of the home more with their own childhood than did women.... Men were more likely to relate the meaning of the home to its being a place where things belong to me, feels like it's mine, architectural design, a room, a street, where I can spend my childhood, where one's parents live, where you learn attitudes, some place for a long time, leisure, a bed, and an extra place.¹⁹

Mahon reflects this male response in his repeated use of imagery associated with male childhood and the floral imagery traditionally associated with femininity. As Susan Schuppli states in the catalogue accompanying this work:

Playing off the architectural traces of its former incarnation as "home" sets up a disjuncture between a reading of the space as "feminized" in its instrumentalization of decorative floral tropes, and a counter-reading of the space as male in its present manifestation as an art gallery with "modernist antecedents."²⁰

¹⁹ Susan Saegert and Gary Winkle, "The Home: A Critical Problem for Changing Sex Roles" in *New Space for Women* Gerda R, Wekerle, Rebecca Peterson and David Morley eds. (Boulder: Westview Press, 1980), 47.

²⁰ Susan Schuppli, *Patrick Mahon: Re-entering the House of Flowers* (Burnaby: Burnaby Art Gallery, 1996), 2.

Mahon took up the type of domesticated flower motif found in Ramsden's *Curtain* [fig.24] and Van Halm's *Mirroring* [fig.21] and made use of the original Arts and Crafts wallpaper to establish the space as feminized and consequently recognized the duality of its current position as an art gallery.

Emily Post and other decorators parlayed Sigmund Freud and Havelock Ellis into a formula of "sex psychology", for decorating and architecture. "The kind of room a man likes' had dark colours, substantial furniture, and bold, rugged materials. A study or a corner of the living room might conform to this description. "The lady's touch" was more pervasive, exemplified in chintzes and floral patterns, delicate furniture, and lacy curtains...²¹

In the work of Patrick Mahon there was a more conscious attempt than in the installations of Ramsden and Van Halm to recreate a feminine, domestic space by including hooked rugs that use the same colour scheme and floral motif as the wallpaper [fig.28]. The artist introduced the same domestic details that the adaptation of the house to a gallery setting had erased, details which would detract from the viewer's task of intense looking. Thus Mahon seeks to reinforce the 'lady's touch' in his construction of the domestic and creates a domestic setting which subverts the gallery's predilection for privileging the gaze.

Mahon, like Van Halm and Ramsden, made effective use of the polarity between traditionally masculine and feminine conceptions of the domestic space. As stated earlier, he used the floral motifs to reference the domesticated nature that is typically associated with women's relationships to the home. All three artists present the floral motif in forms

²¹ Gwendolyn Wright, Building the Dream: A Social History of Housing in America (New York: Pantheon Books, 1981), 208-9.

in which they would normally exist – paintings, wallpaper, curtains, rugs – and used media associated with the decorative arts and women’s art practices. Moreover, these works built on notions of the decorative arts as associated with the feminine. For example, in one of the rooms the floral wallpaper was over-inked with images of fly fishermen, astronauts and men climbing ropes [fig.29]. As Schuppli points out, the floral motifs were linked to the association of women with nature, by presenting the flowers in their original decorative forms, and the figures make the traditional link of men to culture by depicting figures all engaged in masculine activities.²² All these figures were dwarfed by the floral jungle that engulfs them, reflecting feelings of entrapment within the feminine controlled domestic sphere.

As in Suzy Schlanger’s intervention in the bedroom at *The House Project* [fig.16] in Toronto, Mahon also used wallpaper to refer to the childhood memories of the home and the early associations of house and identity. This figural aspect of the wallpaper, the fishermen and astronauts, are most commonly associated with wallpaper intended for children’s rooms. Mahon’s figures could then be said to be part of a childhood perception or memory of the home, where the feminine dominates over the masculine, the mother dominating the domestic sphere and the flowers engulfing the figures. It is this dwarfing of the characters by the floral motif that relates to the relationship between men and the domestic space outlined by Csikszentmihalyi and Rochberg-Halton:

More than any other subgroup of this sample, the dependence of children on the emotional atmosphere of the home comes through clearly. What is significant is that boys express negative feelings almost twice as often as

²² Schuppli, 2.

any other group. Perhaps it is this early disenchantment that turns into a lack of effect by the time boys grow into men, possibly young males expect too much from the emotional atmosphere of the family – being more dependent on affective sustenance and therefore more clearly hurt.... Perhaps this reflects the inclination to push boys out of the home to also make sure that girls are dependent upon it.²³

There were a series of panels along the wallpaper, raised sections that do not interrupt the over-all impression of the pattern, that acted as subtle shifts which emphasized certain images in the paper. The panels acted as frames, set at eye-level, as paintings in a gallery would be, and their placement over the wallpaper referred to the use of this site as both a house and a gallery much like Warhol's *Cow Wallpaper* [fig.3].

With all the figures holding onto lines of some sort, such as ropes and fishing lines, there was a reference to the umbilical cord, suggesting either a breaking off or a pulling back in.²⁴ Thus *Re-entering the House of Flowers* took on a double meaning: the feminized domestic space and the space of the womb. Re-entering this space is the goal of the man and the boy, as represented on the wallpaper. This allusion was reinforced by the other wallpaper installation at Burnaby which Mahon titles *Collage* [fig.30]. Here, fetal images are reproduced and framed over the wallpaper, separated from the overwhelming forces of the flowers and protected inside a glass enclosure. This wallpaper consisted of bands of a floral pattern alternated with lines of figures climbing ropes. As Schuppli points out, these figures represented the innermost reality, and the original position of all men 'inside the house of flowers'.²⁵

²³ Csikszentmihalyi, 130.

²⁴ Schuppli, 6.

²⁵ Schuppli, 6.

The third component to Mahon's installation was the video installation. There were two projections in a separate room, one of which depicts a man pulling himself up a rope and the other, a boy climbing a ladder; again, these used the iconography of the umbilical cord. The umbilical cord in Mahon's installations may be symbolically linked to both the womb and the domestic sphere but it can further be understood as an attempt by the artist to draw the line between modernism and the decorative arts.

Upon reviewing the material presented in this chapter, it is evident that the house-gallery is a unique and important site for examinations of the white cube and modernism, the domestic space and traditions of craft and decorative arts by artists. The installations in this type of space are unlike those seen in either the pure white cube or the temporarily appropriated domestic site. The site evokes an examination of the ideas of hybridity. The artists here must initially acknowledge or subvert the presence of the white cube with the insertion of the domestic and then examine the site as a hybrid with the domestic. Issues of consumption and framing consistently appear in these works, emphasizing the entrance of the male public, capitalist space into the female private space where consumption had connotations closer to the maintenance of the body. This allows for artistic explorations that offer alternatives to gendered understandings of art, architecture, and notions of the public and private spheres. These responses are directly influenced by the affective role of these hybrid galleries.

These installations are more immediate engagements with the domestic subject-matter of art history and the gendered divisions of High and Low Art associated with the division of public and private spheres, modernity and domesticity and the gallery and

domestic sites. Their interrogation within the site is not as physically direct as the works discussed in Chapter Two; the artists do not engage directly with the site, as such artists as Schlanger, Simms and Bourgeois do. The hybridity of the site provokes installations that not only problematize the affective role of the gallery and domestic sites, but also reflect these roles.

CONCLUSION

The history still to be made will take into consideration the place (the architecture) in which a work comes to rest (develops) as an integral part of the work in question and all the consequences such a link implies.

It is not a question of ornamenting (disfiguring or embellishing) the place (the architecture) in which the work is installed, but of indicating as precisely as possible the way the work belongs in the place and vice versa, as soon as the latter is shown.¹

Constructions of Home has sought to acknowledge and examine the interrelationships between installation sites and the art within them². The installation artists selected here acknowledge this affective role by either reflecting or subverting its influence, often doing both to varying degrees. Rita McKeough and Kim Adams acknowledge the masculine, public, transcendent nature of the white cube by creating works that conform, in scale and aesthetic, to the expectations of this site. They also subvert this influence by injecting domestic subject-matter, i.e. feminine, private and immanent content into the space. McKeough also incorporates performance and corporeal aspects into her installation to subvert the sanctity of the white cube gallery space.

Projects such as *Womanhouse*, *The House Project* and *Les Occupantes* take advantage of the affective role of the temporarily appropriated domestic site to develop artistic practices that are alternative to the traditional white cube installations. These works directly engage with the site and incorporate more private, feminine and immanent aspects

¹ Daniel Buren, "Function in Architecture" in *Thinking About Exhibitions* eds. Reesa Greenberg, Bruce W. Ferguson and Sandy Nairne (London and New York: Routledge, 1996), 314.

² This examination has been developed largely from exhibition catalogues. The catalogues are as powerful frameworks as are the installation sites and often the discussion of the works are necessarily made exclusively through exhibition catalogues.

in their work. They challenge this reading of the site by injecting more public concerns into the space, thus acknowledging the shifting affective role of the domestic site.

The hybrid space of the house-gallery offers a unique site of investigation. Artists can explore the issues of domesticity in ways parallel to those artists who work in temporary house projects but here their investigations are validated by the institutional status of the site. As well, Renée Van Halm, Anne Ramsden and Patrick Mahon acknowledge this institutionalized status by incorporating modernist, High Art attributes to their work, thus reflecting the hybrid nature of the site and problematizing the binary relationship between the public and private spheres and the gendered associations with them.³

The discussion of site-specificity and the examination of gendered spaces are timely and trendy ones, yet my own investigation offers unique subject-matter as well as a unique approach.⁴ This is the first text to deal with Canadian installations. Although this investigation is limited, it does offer a more holistic approach to the works than individual exhibition catalogue essays.

The discussion of the interrelationship between art and site is a notable one, as there have been several essays calling for such an examination but few which take up the

³ An underlying assumption to my thesis is that gender sensibility is not attached to sex, thus, in part accounting for the similar approaches to the domestic space in male and female artists.

⁴ One issue related to my thesis is that of site-specificity and how these projects come to be produced. Often, artists are invited to engage with the specific site, as in the case of Anne Ramsden and Renée Van Halm. Whereas in other cases it is the initiative of the artists to come together to create a project such as *Les Occupantes* and *The House Project*. Approaches to the production of art are relevant and deserve greater consideration in investigations to follow my own.

call.⁵ My acknowledgment of the shifting affective role of an exhibition site, on which I focus, has not been carefully considered before.

The implications of my investigation are twofold. First, it creates a groundwork for further examination of installation sites and subject-matter as gendered. Second, it establishes the validity of the investigation of the interrelationship between art and site. There are many possible readings of the affective role of installation sites; the gendered meaning presented in this thesis is just one of many. As the popular practice of recycling older buildings (not just houses) to accommodate both temporary and institutional needs continues, the framework provided by this thesis will open the way for broader considerations of the affective role of installation sites.

⁵ Some of these include Reesa Greenberg's "The Exhibited Redistributed: A Case for Reassessing Space" in Thinking About Exhibitions eds. Reesa Greenberg, Bruce W. Ferguson and Sandy Nairne (London and New York: Routledge, 1996), 349-367. and Daniel Buren's "Function in Architecture" in the same anthology, 313-319.

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fig. 29

fig. 30

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