
Olivier Vallerand

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liberté, de l’hétérogénéité, du fétiche, de la thérapeutique, de la temporalité, de la performativité et de la connaissance.

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5. Tandis que l’anthropologie de l’image se situe au croisement de l’histoire de l’art et de l’anthropologie, l’anthropologie visuelle concerne plus spécifiquement l’usage des matériaux visuels par les anthropologues. Et tandis que l’anthropologie philosophique réfléchit à la spécificité définitionnelle de l’homme, la Bilddan


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THE HOUSE, AS THE CENTRE OF EVERY-DAY LIFE, IS A CONSTANT SOURCE OF THINKING AND EXPERIMENTATION FOR ARTISTS. HOWEVER, AS BRIDGET ELLIOTT POINTS OUT IN HER INTRODUCTION TO BREAKING AND ENTERING: THE CONTEMPORARY HOUSE CUT, SPICED, AND HAUNTED, “THE TREATMENT OF HOME BY RECENT GENERATIONS OF ARTISTS IS JUST STARTING TO RECEIVE SERIOUS SCHOLARLY ATTENTION” (5). FOLLOWING A GROUP EXHIBITION AND AN ASSOCIATED SYMPOSIUM OF THE SAME TITLE PRESENTED AT THE UNIVERSITY OF WESTERN ONTARIO’S ARTLAB GALLERY IN 2011, THIS EDITED VOLUME BRINGS TOGETHER ESSAYS THAT DISCUSS HOW CONTEMPORARY ARTISTS “TAKE APART THE FABRIC OF DOMESTIC STRUCTURES TO EXpose THEIR FRAGILITY AS WELL AS THEIR POWERFUL HOLD UPON OUR IMAGINATION” (6). IT ADDS TO WHAT ELLIOTT UNDERSTANDS AS A RECENT SURGE OF INTEREST IN HOUSE AND HOME BY LOOKING AT THE TREATMENT OF HOME BY RECENT GENERATIONS OF ARTISTS, A TOPIC THAT IS ONLY BEGINNING TO BE DISCUSSED.


LAUZON’S ESSAY, THE FIRST IN THE BOOK, DISCUSSES TRACES OF MELANCHOLIC ATTACHMENT TO THE HOME BY ARTISTS ATTEMPTING TO MOURN AND SEEK JUSTICE FOR TRAUMATIC EXPERIENCES. THE AUTHOR HIGHLIGHTS THE UNCANNY IN THE DOMESTICALLY INSPIRED ENVIRONMENTS

depicted by artists Lida Abdul, Emily Jacir, Wafaa Bilal, and Mona Hatoum to underline how the home’s “capacity to safeguard both its inhabitants and their memories is tenuous at best” (20), and how it acts instead as an insistent reminder of the traumatizing consequences of war and geopolitical displacement. The following essay, Charles Rice’s, shifts gears completely: while rigorously structured, his analysis of Francis Ford Coppola’s The Conversation (1974), which documents a spatial transformation that moves interiority from the domestic sphere to the urban, is ultimately limited in its focus on the 1970s context of the film and lacks an engagement with current processes that transform relations to the cityscape. The third essay, by Anthony Purdy, discusses one of the Breaking and Entering artists, Iris Häussler, and links back to Lauzon’s analysis of the uncanny home. Picking up on Rice’s discussion of the increasing dissolution of the concept of the domestic as a space hidden from public view, Purdy analyzes Häussler’s 2008 staged “archaeological” installation in the Grange, the nineteenth-century mansion that is the historical core of the Art Gallery of Ontario. He carefully explores the enmeshed layers of domestic and institutional, real and fictional, the “almost authentic” (46). But whereas other analyses of the work have focused on the social histories hidden within architectural spaces, Purdy addresses the construction of the work, the ways Häussler hid the temporary dwelling—and present our an unrealized Mies van der Rohe house. Suspended and inverted, and in the notion of house and home. The book’s third section takes a closer look at the physical conditions of the contemporary house. Kirsty Robertson sets the tone by discussing how tents—the stereotype temporary dwelling—are omnipresent in contemporary culture: in the wake of natural disasters and man-made crises, after conflict, and on borders of territories. She argues that the temporariness associated with tents is quickly changing under the “indifference” of twenty-first century capitalism into a structuring principle for social life and space, and that their materials are themselves part of that capitalist system—petroleum-based, patent-protected products. Sandra Al-
upside down house/model promises for her another model for the future. It is a metaphor for a revolution that would impact both the shifting orientation of the house and a larger world order. Malin Zimm’s essay discusses another interpretation of existing architecture: it examines the ways in which some famous architects have “sampled,” “remixed,” and “fictionalized” architecture of which they were fans. Whereas fan fiction usually bridges the gap between community and individuality, and is thus an act of creating and building, she sees fan architecture as a process of destruction and decay, using as examples chains of architects from Monsú Desiderio to Sir John Soane and from Adolf Loos to Rem Koolhaas. Zimm uses contemporary concepts as a way to understand historic processes, but, apart from Koolhaas, she does not really discuss contemporary projects. While she argues that “fan fiction allows anyone to challenge male domination, both in the production of the canon and its narratives” (169), her attempt to show that similar challenges are brought to architecture are somewhat diminished by her discussion solely of male architects, all clearly part of the canon, except for two women, Ines Weizman and Madelon Vriesendorp (whose work is discussed in relation to her ex-husband Rem Koolhaas’s writings). Zimm seems instead to suggest that, in architecture, fan fiction is more often about admiration and beloved mentorship. The book ends with Elliott’s essay on three of the artists from the Breaking and Entering exhibition: Wyn Geleynse, David Hoffos, and Heather Benning. The three have taken up the dollhouse typology and use spatial displacement to critically question conventions. In opposition to the “digital dollhouses” that are increasingly present in our culture, Elliott insists on the materiality of the works discussed. These three artists resist the desire to create “beautiful” homes; they play with the dollhouse—by opening it up, by adding videos, by scaling it back up, by destroying it—reflecting the collection’s title. In addition to ending the book with a direct discussion of the exhibition, Elliott, by focusing on dollhouses—toys that also mirror models used by professional designers—bridges the gaps between artists and architects, between representations and lived spaces, and between the fictionalized and real domestic environments that are present in almost all of the essays.

The broad themes presented in Breaking and Entering reflect the very diverse and sprawling nature of recent thought on the home. The domestic is omnipresent in popular publications such as Witold Rybczynski’s Home: A Short History of an Idea (1986), in countless home and decoration magazines, in the works and writings of numerous architects, in exhibitions in art galleries, architecture centres, and anthropology museums, and in scholarly research discussing domesticity very broadly or in very precise ways. One book in particular, Jennifer Johung’s Replacing Home: From Primordial Hut to Digital Network in Contemporary Art (2012) is an attempt, like Elliott’s collection, to examine how contemporary art accounts for changing understandings of the home, and more particularly the emergence of portable and temporary architecture. The success of other recent exhibitions that have used the home to present critiques of broader societal themes, such as Michael Elmgreen & Ingar Dragset’s domestic environments for the Venice Biennale (2009) and the Victoria & Albert Museum (2013), also highlights the rich aesthetic potential of the deconstruction of domestic structures. Such a diversity of accounts renders sustained narratives harder to grasp, but this might be exactly the point: the domestic is impossible to pin down, its diverse components enmeshed and constantly being transformed by their recombinant relations.

Many of the essays look back to the past, and more particularly to the modernist era, to discuss the present situation. Tellingly, in the introduction Elliott points the reader to Housing and Dwelling: Perspectives on Modern Architecture, edited by Barbara Miller Lane (2006), in order to situate the collection. As such, Breaking and Entering—in its book form, the exhibition being less concerned with the past—is not very far from Yesterday’s Tomorrows, a 2010 exhibition curated by Lesley Johnstone at the Musée d’art contemporain de Montréal: both even include works by Iñigo Manglano-Ovalle that play with Mies van der Rohe’s houses. To Johnstone who asks why so many contemporary artists have returned in recent years to the forms, ideas, and aspirations of modernist architecture and design, Elliott replies by asserting that current artists have no choice but to engage with issues that have long histories; by tackling modernist utopian ideals—or what remains of them—they create diverse dialogues with the past that highlight sometimes divergent readings of the present.

I opened this review by pointing out how the house is a constant source of ideas not only for architects, but also for artists. What Breaking and Entering does is to highlight the complex meanings that support our understandings of the house. It also clearly shows how artists use the home as a site of critical thinking in a much more explicit way than architects can. It is not that critical architecture cannot exist, it is that “cutting, splicing, and haunting” can be done only with difficulty in a more permanent setting. Artists’ engagements with architecture should thus not be only unidirectional, but should instead, like most of the examples discussed in this collection, become sustained dialogues between the two disciplines, so that artists’ critical readings may be used to complete architects’ attempts at transforming domestic environments.

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3. Many architects, including major figures such as Le Corbusier, Philip Johnson, and Peter Eisenman, launched and shaped their careers through their obsessions with the domestic. See for example the writings on how their domestic designs relate to architectural design in general: Le Corbusier, Une Maison – Un Palais: “À la recherche d’une unité architecturale” (Paris, 1928); Peter Eisenman, House X (New York, 1982); Philip Johnson, “House at New Canaan, Connecticut,” Architectural Review, September 1950.

4. Looking only at the Museum of Modern Art’s engagement with the theme is sufficient to demonstrate the importance of the house in art and architectural discourse, for example: the exhibition houses by Marcel Breuer (1949) and Gregory Ain (1950); the exhibitions “The Un-Private House” (1999) and “Home Delivery” (2008), in combination with further prefabricated exhibition houses by Kieran Timberlake Architects, Lawrence Sass, Jeremy Edmiston and Douglas Gauthier, Leo Kaufmann Architects, and Richard Horden. Terence Riley, The Un-Private House (New York, 1999); Barry Bergdoll et al., Home Delivery: Fabricating the Modern Dwelling (New York, 2008).