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[re]collection: Surfaces, Bodies, and the Dispersed Home

by

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ABSTRACT

This thesis seeks to identify notions of comfort and domestic habitation within the public spaces of Manhattan using a series of [re]collective practices. [My definition of] home is found along the surfaces of the city and within the body of its urban inhabitant. By reading the traces found between skin and surface, qualities of this dispersed home [and its user] within the urban landscape are identified. Using casting as a primary method -- a [re]collective practice -- home is identified and obtained [physically] along surfaces within the city. Sites identified between user and landscape will be tested for their specificity in an effort to prove that the dispersed home is reliant upon both subject and place. The posture of the body specific to occupation within/along a site, and the interaction of the specificity of the surfaces in contact define the space of the “release agent”. Through the design of memory devices and a proposal for street furniture, produced in response to traditional domestic furniture, pose and texture are retained outside of both site and body.

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re]collection: bodies, surfaces and the dispersed home

public [space]

habitation

occupation

public life

codes

watching

duration

occupation

public life

codes

sitting

leaning

grasping

storage

collection

accumulation

memory/cast

overflow

public [space]

sites

stoop
curb
sidewalk
facade
post/rail
mailbox
bench
public art

surfaces
decoration
vestigial space
degradation/transformation

microlandscapes

furniture

cabinet
drawer
bed

chair
table
drawer
drawer

dispersion

domesticity

home

container

home

street furniture

street lamp

boilard

bench

furniture

sitting

leaning

grasping

habituation

codes

ecoration

vestigial space
degradation/transformation

microlandscapes

furniture

cabinet
drawer
bed

chair
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One must forget in order to taste the full flavor of the present, of the moment, and of expectation, but memory itself needs forgetfulness: one must forget the recent past in order to find the ancient past again.

Marc Auge, Oblivion
INTRODUCTION

This thesis seeks to identify notions of comfort and domestic habitation within the public spaces of Manhattan using as its methodology [re]collective practices: printmaking, relief mapping, casting, and the personal narrative. Within this work, home is found along the surfaces of the city and within the body of its urban inhabitant. By reading the traces found between surfaces, qualities of this dispersed home [and its user] are identified.

Spatial memories inform our [re]collective practices, and as physical objects, these memories are not only remembered, they are collected. Using various methods of recording, the spatial attributes of these memories are gathered and studied. Remnants of past occupation within the city provide evidence of such domestic habitation within public space, offering forms for architectural study.

The following study is organized through a series of writings and analyses in which the terms used in the title “[re]collection: surfaces, bodies, and the dispersed home” are defined. The terms chosen situate the thesis within the discourses of femininity, domesticity, and personal narrative, positioning their role in such an architectural investigation. Following the identification of the terms and a series of studies using [re]collective practices, designs for memory devices and street furniture will be proposed in relation to both body and site.
part one: terms
[re]collection: bodies, surfaces and the dispersed home

memory/cast

accumulation
duration

occupation

public life
codes

sitting
leaning
grasping

watching

public space

habitat

sites

overflow

collection

storage

archive/catalogue

furniture

domesticity

dispersion

dispersion

home

container

street furniture

street lamp

bollard

bench

public art

surfaces

decoration

vestigial space

degradation/transformation

microlandscapes

chair
table
cabinet
drawer
bed

stoop
curb
sidewalk
facade
post/rail
mailbox
bench
a. [re]collection

As related to the concept of “place attachment”, the personal value of a site is gained over time through its re-use, the result of which is an emotional bond between body and place. The re-visiting of sites produces an accumulation of recalled experiences acquired linearly [in past/present scenarios] or cyclically [through ritual], producing site-specific spatial memories.

The early inspiration for this thesis is a desire to identify a spatial history -- a marking of the/my passage of time -- within the site of my childhood, New York City. While the initial stages of this research relied on my personal experience alone, it became evident that [re]collective practices could explore multiplied narratives, especially within a densely populated city like Manhattan, where an individual trajectory cannot be identified as a unique or isolated experience, but rather as part of a web of narrative¹.

Memory would serve to trigger a series of architectural methods of analysis; a series of [re]collective practices in search of a spatialization of that which is remembered. These practices attempt to shift the act of remembering away from flat “snapshots” [photographic or mental images], to find in their place new spatial and tactile constructs of memory.

1. see following exercises in part 2: sites, pages 30-35.

Marcel Proust, Remembrance of Things Past [6]
As physical objects, spatial memories are not only recalled, they are collectible. They act as remnants of past occupations. They provide evidence of spatial experiences, offering the architect forms to study and learn from.

Works by Rachel Whiteread, Eva Hesse, Gordon Matta-Clark, Anna Maria Maiolino, and Tara Donovan display the qualities of [re]collective practice. While working each in their own medium, these sculptors express form through the production of mass -- the most extreme example being that of Whiteread whose works are solid casts of negative architectural spaces. Each artist works through the multiple, not only as a method for testing ideas, but as a way of displaying accumulation, weight, and subtle differentiation in form. These artist create through their continuous production architectural experiences: environments -- rooms and galleries -- filled with their rigorous studies. It is from these artists that I derived many of my methods of [re]collective practice, focusing primarily on casting as a method of architectural investigation.

2. to cast light upon... to cast a shadow... to cast doubt...

“cast” (v)
to throw or fling
to shed or discard; molt
to turn or direct: cast a glance at me
to assign a role to
to form (e.g. liquid metal) by molding

“cast” (n)
a throw
something, such as molted skin, that is shed or thrown off
a mold
outward appearance; look
the actors in a theatrical presentation
a slight trace of color; tinge
b. the dispersed home

As I recover it in recalling my child-wrought memories, it is no complete building; it is all broken up inside me; here a room, there a room, and here a piece of hallway that does not connect these two rooms but is preserved, as a fragment, by itself. In this way it is all dispersed within me – the rooms, the stairways that descended with such ceremonious deliberation, and other narrow, spiral stairs in the obscurity of which one moved as blood does the veins…

Rainer Maria Rilke, *The Notebooks of Malte Laurids Brigee* [30]

Challenging traditional conceptions of home, this project locates it beyond the centralized definition of ‘house”, dispersing it into the city’s streets, critiquing its archetypal role. Although, within the city, home and domesticity are placed within the interior, one must accept that within urban environments, “home” is made outside of the walls of the “house”. It is dispersed throughout the urban landscape, experienced in passing within movement along a surface. Traces or residues along the city provide evidence of “domestic” occupation. At times, something quite tangible is left behind: an empty bottle, cigarette butts; at other times, this evidence is nearly invisible and lies mainly within the memory of the occupant, within their [re]collection of those places.
The parts of the city referenced within this project are found throughout the East and West Villages, areas within Manhattan that display its early [pre-grid] foundation. The scales of streets and buildings, the preservation/degradation of surfaces, and the continuous density provide the unique backdrop for this project. These sites provide “historical” examples of the dispersed home. One could imagine the physical saturation, both of bodies and objects, from the interior, and their subsequent release to the street for the claiming of private space; a continued and repeated phenomenon occurring over the last two centuries.

3. “The streets and parks had particular significance for gay men as meeting places...but they were hardly the only people to use these venues for socializing and even for sexual encounters in the early twentieth century...most working-class men and women, gay and straight alike, lived in crowded tenements... Young people in search of sex and romance discovered that ‘privacy could be had in public’...” George Chauncey, “Privacy Could Only be had in Public: Gay Uses of the Streets” p.255.
Spaces found within the street vary, as does the behavior associated with them. While alleys allow for privacy through visual and physical secrecy, open spaces provide the opportunities for cruising and people-watching. The “eyes on the street” are familiar and easily ignored as comfort in within the city is established.

Not only do bodies overflow into spaces beyond the house or apartment, but objects, too. Hence, the sidewalk becomes the site of personal belongings: furniture, clothing, appliances; the site of storage of the city’s excess[ive collections: magazines, comic books, figurines, etc]. Such an accumulation of objects, as that found in E.M Forster’s “Howard’s End”, is described by Henry Turner as:

>“the forces that impel the disintegration of the “house”: the ubiquitous ebbs and flows, the flux of destruction and reconstruction, the forced vacancies and hemorrhages of superfluous personal belongings…Chairs, tables, pictures, books, that rumbled down to them through the generations, must rumble forward again like a slide of rubbish into the sea. But they were all their father’s books – they never read them, but they were their father’s and they must be kept.” [340]

Through their dispersion, these objects are shared by the city’s inhabitants; they travel and are re-claimed. Spread out along busy streets in the West Village, scavenged items are sold by informal street-vendors.⁴ Laid out on tables, and along the sidewalk, they produce a layer of decoration adorning the highly articulated surfaces already found in the city. They construct an image of what was contained inside and present it as a display in/to the public.

5. The artist, Ana Maria Maiolino imagined drawing and printmaking as a spatialization of the seemingly flat surface of paper: “no longer a surface for her figurative and abstract drawing, she begins to use as ‘space and body.’ As Maiolino explains: The matrix or plate used in the engraving process necessarily brings about our intimacy with the outside and the inside of the space of the impression. I was intrigued by the space at the reverse side of the paper: what is behind it, what is out of sight—the other space being that of the absent, the latent, the concealed. I began to print both the front and back sides of the paper. Then, through cutting, tearing and folding, I was able to discover what was printed on the reverse and to incorporate it in the work together with the void left by the removal of the paper cut or torn from it.

de Zegher, Catherine. “The Inside is the Outside: The Relational as the (Feminine) Space of the Radical”
c. surface habitation

It is along surfaces that the investigations of this thesis are located. While the East and West Villages mark the cultural boundary for this study, it is within the highly specific microlandscape that home is sought. Surface habitation describes the occupation of the vertical and horizontal surfaces marking the city’s sidewalks, streets, and facades. While these surfaces can be imagined as regular, if not impenetrable boundaries, we must look closer at their materiality and its transformation through constant use: the cracks in the sidewalk, peeling paint, rust, the smoothing out of stone steps, dried chewing gum stains; each expresses a pattern of surface habitation.

If remembrance is an “impression” [Auge 17] then we can imagine it as the manipulation of a medium, as the transference of physical information from object to surface. Thus, we can view the analogy of casting as a method that [re]collects information and practice it in various forms to gather proof of the dispersed home. Methods of [re]collection further express the physical attributes of the surface, both of body and the city. Casting and printmaking techniques register specific textures of each surface.

Traditional printmaking techniques display one surface\(^2\), while casting may display many, especially when employing such methods
of casting as those used by Rachel Whiteread: the casting of residual space. Following the writings of Whiteread’s critics, the term “release agent” appeared, standing in to define not only the lubricant used in the cast and mold-making processes to keep cast and mold distinct, but also to describe an invisible layer between cast and mold which retains within it the inscription of both surfaces. The term also implies “letting go” in relation to [spatial] memory.

The space of the “release agent” is described by Neil Wakefield in his essay “Separation Anxiety and the Art of Release” as:

* Negotiating the border from which are sprung the dialectics not only of sculptural presence but also in a grander metaphorical sense, the whole human edifice of spatial awareness, is an agent of release or separation. Sculpturally invisible...two-dimensional, sophisticated silicon releases can be measured in microns; topographically, the space that is described is either positive or negative since it is both. * [77]

The “release agent” is not privileged as the cast; rather the cast is dependent on its presence. Both formwork [temporary, disposable] and release agent [invisible] facilitate the production of the cast object, although their own material essence need not be preserved. However seemingly banal, the invisible layer that allows object, cast, and formwork to remain autonomous holds within its own form a recording of the entire casting process.
Thus, within this project, the “release agent” is a cast that records the space between two surfaces: one static [the urban landscape]; one in motion [the body’s surface]. In search of this liminal double-sided surface, various methods of recording were tested. Large format prints were made using plaster to produce a surface that could itself register movement of the body along it.

Print plates [hybrids between etching and collograph plates] were produced through the application of a thin layer of drywall compound along cardboard, which received the body’s impression. Once dried, the plates [48 x 84 inches] exposed a series of faint surface articulations, textures, and the loss and accumulation of material.
fig 25. large format surface print studies
These plates were subsequently inked, wiped, and printed intaglio on a flatbed press onto long sheets of watercolor and rice papers -- substrates durable enough to absorb ink and withstand such surface deformation. The prints registered the textures and tonal variation of the surface as found in traditional prints. More importantly, they produced examples of double-sided surfaces made between a textural landscape and the print press, as the high relief of the plates embossed the paper used.

Alongside these prints, casts were produced using lightweight, air-dry clay in the collection of “grasps”. The spaces recorded and collected were made between hand and city surface [posts, rails, facades, etc.]

In addition to these tactile surface studies, photographs of urban surfaces were manipulated as an exploration of microlandscapes. Various methods of photographic analysis and transformation were produced [figs 26-29]: [a] tonal variation from the photos were transferred onto textured watercolor paper, using acetone; [b] photos of cracks in the sidewalk, architectural decoration, and debris were vectorized and [c] transformed into relief models which translated tonal variation in a black-and-white photo into a topography; [d] from these relief maps, casts were made. Each alteration expressed a transformation of the photograph from flat image to articulated surface.
d. bodies
Throughout this thesis, the body has been a central theme, acting to re-introduce personal experience, narration, and corporeality into the discourse surrounding public space. In a city as densely populated as New York, bodies create masses, and often the individual is unseen. Still, there is no universal body within the city, and issues of ownership [of property] create distinctions regarding whose body gains access to which space [often determined by race, creed, sexual orientation, gender, and economic class]. Thus, for this project, the body used in the study of [re]collective practice is often my own -- that body-as-subject made most available to me.

The use of my own body suggests that this work is a personal essay limited in its legibility/relevance to others. While this is not the intention of this study, the personal narrative is not rejected for these reasons, as it serves to provide the richness of individual experience throughout the work, preventing the study from remaining generic.6 My narrative is not considered alone, as the concept of multiple narratives within the city, a site of shared and overlapping experiences, is both more appropriate and interesting. However, it is maintained that the location of the personal within public space is of great importance to the notion of [re]collection in the city.

6. I will contend that throughout much of the discourse of urban occupation the body is neutralized -- often made into a generic body -- or transformed into a statistical unit within a demographic study.
My body was used to produce a series of prints and casts made deliberately in the absence of a site. Contact-transfers were made marking the location of my body situated within a pose specific to the occupation of a place within the city. The prints were tiled to reconstruct the entire body in relation to site, producing a “plan” and a series of “elevations”.

Additionally, the site of the sweatshirt pocket was examined. Hands held within the sweatshirt pocket were printed and cast in place. The pocket provides comfort for the body in public space, through physical and visual protection. The casts and prints display forms of domestic comfort achieved by the body through its posture outside of the home.
part two: sites
[re]collection: bodies, surfaces and the dispersed home

public space

accumulation

duration

occupation

public life

codes

sitting

leaning

grasping

habitation

watching

storage

overflow

container

furniture

domesticity

home

dispersion

street furniture

street lamp

bollard

bench

stool

curb

sidewalk

facade

post/rail

mailbox

bench

public art

surfaces

decoration

vestigial space

degradation/transformation

microlandscapes
As previously stated, the notion of the site in this thesis is non-traditional. This project does not focus on identifying, studying, or modifying any site in particular. Rather, it seeks to identify qualities of sites found within the city, their generic and specific attributes, materiality, and use.

Alongside the initial casting and printing exercises, a series of site studies were done to locate patterns of use through the collection of multiple narratives. A series of “followings”, inspired by the work of Vito Acconci, took place on-site in Manhattan. The subjects of the work were selected among individuals with whom I have shared spaces in New York. The “followings” provided a recording [both photographic and audio] of the “everyday” use pattern of the city. Additionally, the narratives offered examples of [re]collection through the re-visiting of sites of importance to each of the subjects.

While the works did not provide a strategy for mapping or site selection, they confirmed notions of surface habitation and provided physical examples from which I could study. Most photos during the fieldwork display the texture of the city’s surfaces. Most sites documented qualified as sitting spaces -- some intentional, others creatively invented. The sites visited during the fieldwork study were categorized and examined. The following pages [30-35] are examples of such documentation and analysis.
figs. 36-37. following Raluca

Passer-by: You got the time, homeboy? You got the time?

Des: It’s 5:10. What’s also interesting is the mode of talk that means you’re home, or proves to other people that wherever you are is your home. If other people think you’re home, then you might as well be.

Nico: How do you feel about parks in the city? Do you ever use them? Like playgrounds?

Des: They’re a little too “on the map”... but that kind of goes in line with my whole thing... “It’s a spy-game”
So, there’s a real sense that somehow you’ve escaped time, and that you’ve escaped many of the things that are uncomfortable. But I realize it’s very specific to my cultural background that I feel comfortable here. It’s very much specific to my own history. I think I also feel some kind of adult empowerment. I remember coming here as a seven or eight year old and then coming here as a thirteen year old and being able to pay for my own coffee and drink coffee and sort of emulating the things that I had seen my mother and her friends and her boyfriend doing...

Tara: It kinda looks normal around here, still.
Nicole: What do you mean?
Tara: Yeah. It’s uh...the same as in the memory...the memory. Like when you walk on 23rd street or whatever, Sixth Avenue...there’s no parking lot there anymore. Where the Best Buy is...
Nicole: Uh huh.
Tara: And that’s...confining and...I mean, I’m used to it now. But, when it was first put up, I just...it was built and I...we’d walk around there. I’d feel so lost. Without the parking...the empty space...It’s like feeling closed in.
the stoop
varied;
size, shape, materiality specific to site.
typical: stone, 2-8 steps.
intended: threshold; entry/exit
actual: steps act as seats

the curb
generic, located at periphery of sidewalk.
intended: distinction b/tn street/sidewalk.
actual: curbs act as seats for idle occupation in areas with low vehicular traffic.

the [crack in the] sidewalk
varied; found between concrete/stone/tile units; found along surface as markings of weathering/use.
intended: none
actual: to be determined

the subway shelter
specific; Astor Pl. subway shelter
intended: none at back of shelter; opposite side provides the threshold for entry/exit of station
actual: base of shelter occupied as seat for idle occupation [reinforced by location of MUD coffee truck]

the post [or rail]
varied; types include light posts, posts for signage, hand rails.
intended: none “intended”; infrastructural amenities held/grasped [used to leverage body]
actual: sat upon, leaned on, held [for comfort?]

what is [re]collected?
contact with surface
visual recording of passing activity

contact with surface
audio recording of traffic/movement

collected debris
recording of movement [within surface]

contact with surface
visual recording of passing activity

contact with surface
recording of weight/pressure
<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Area</th>
<th>Specificity</th>
<th>Intended Use</th>
<th>Actual Use</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>the fountain</td>
<td>specific; Washington Square Park</td>
<td>intended: visual amenity, audio amenity, centralized focal point, thermal comfort</td>
<td>actual: point of collection; stage + seating</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>the [absent] public sculpture</td>
<td>specific; Astor Place “cube”</td>
<td>intended: visual amenity; centralized focal point; interactive public art [can be “spun”]</td>
<td>actual: point of collection; sitting/waiting</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>the alley</td>
<td>specific; btwn Great Jones and Bond Sts.</td>
<td>intended: space for storage of garbage; access for small trucks, trailers, etc.</td>
<td>actual: sitting space for residents and workers of surrounding buildings.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>the facade</td>
<td>generic; of residential + commercial bldgs</td>
<td>intended: no “intended” occupation; functions not as “space” but as physical barrier between exterior/interior.</td>
<td>actual: places for sitting/leaning</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>the debris</td>
<td>varied</td>
<td>intended: none</td>
<td>actual: none; to be determined</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

- **audio recording of surrounding performances**
- **contact with surface**
- **imagined contact with “cube”**
- **contact with surface**
- **imagined surrounding activity**
- **contact with surface**
- **visual recording of passing activity**
- **contact with objects**
- **cataloguing of objects**
a. the stoop

Intended as an elevated entry, the stoop, like many other steps, offers comfortable seating. Within the city, seating disassociated from program [not a chair in a house or a seat at a bar] provides the space for unplanned activity. Facing the sidewalk, the seating is presented to the stage of the street, and people-watching becomes an informal programming of a building’s entryway.

“No Loitering” signs are often presented nearby in an attempt to deter such collection of bodies and such spontaneous activity. Apartment dwellers can complain to stoop-sitters, requesting that they leave if certain codes of behavior regarding the sharing of space are not met:

“You wouldn’t find a stranger sidling up and easing herself down for a sit on somebody else’s porch in the country. But in the city, a silent compact between city residents and passersby says you may sit most anywhere as long as you abide by stoopsitting etiquette: move aside deferentially when a resident wishes to pass, don’t make too much noise or leave your garbage, and don’t invite all your friends at once. A No Loitering sign suggests that others have spoiled the spot for you. Don’t sit there. Since there are literally hundreds of stoops just in the East Village, you can claim your own. There, you are unmoored from a rent check and unaccountable to taxes. You can sit beyond your means.”

Leonora Todaro, “A Stoop of My Own”
b. the facade

Often rendered flat, the facades of many New York buildings display subtle and sometimes expressive decorative surfaces. Many of these facades suggest pre-war construction, others, designed later, mimic this style. These ornate surfaces offer various possibilities for habitation: sitting, leaning, climbing; however none of these are intentionally embedded into the building fronts. Unlike the stoop’s steps which offer a culturally practiced seat/bench, the articulated facades of many of Manhattan’s pre-war buildings are surfaces along which a city dweller can explore new modes of habitation. The programmatic association with such surfaces is less clear and the subsequent use pattern suggests fleeting habitation.

The articulated facade receives the body during short lapses of time in-between programmatic activities. Its carved surface invites the body to attempt sitting or leaning but does not create enough comfort to support long-term occupation.

The articulated facade provides an opportunity for the inhabitant to become part of the surface-reading of the city. Collapsing the distinction between the “organism and its surroundings” [Caillous 16], the urban dweller enacts a form of mimicry while occupying the facade’s surface.⁸

7. Arguing against Loos’ “Ornament and Crime,” I suggest that the ornamental facades in the city provide the opportunity for habitation.

8. In his study of the practice mimicry as a form of survival among insects, Caillous presents the concept of an “attraction to space” that produces a willing “depersonalization” of the organism in exchange for identification with its surroundings.
c. the sidewalk

The ordinary practitioners of the city live ‘down below,’ below the thresholds at which visibility begins. They walk -- an elementary form of this experience of the city; they are walkers. Wandersmanner, whose bodies follow the thicks and thins of an urban ‘text’ they write without being able to read it. These practitioners make use of spaces that cannot be seen...

Michel de Certeau, The Practice of Everyday Life [93]

The sidewalk, the site of walking and drifting, has been considered in great length within architectural thought. The city is the site for new forms of nomadic occupation⁹, producing characters such as the flâneur, the bohème, the wanderer. Each of these occupants is privileged with the luxury of using the city as a site of discovery: of passive observation and colonial conquest. The dérive, or drift, introduced by the Situationists, implies both a lightness [in its lack of attachment to place], as well as a “violent emotive possession over the streets,” both of which are associated with personal detachment in relation to site [similar to Caillois’ “depersonalization”, a sacrifice for partial identification with one’s surroundings].

“We drifted for three to four months; that’s the extreme limit, the critical point. It’s a miracle it didn’t kill us.”

Chtcheglov, from Sadler, The Situationist City [81]

9. For instance, in her notes for Urban Sleeper, Lisa Hsieh introduces the nomad as a product of the urban home: “domestic functions are not suitably contained in its single volume, and thus its inhabitants are forced to become city-nomads. They wander endlessly from one place to the next, obscuring the meaning and function of a home.”
In an attempt to move away from the Situationist mode of mapping various urban nomads, the sidewalk throughout this thesis is considered as a nearly static surface for occupation, not merely a surface for movement along. The particularities of the sidewalk, its cracks, the patterning of gum stains along it, are of importance. The sidewalk is segmented by texture and pattern of use.\textsuperscript{10} It is analyzed within a frame of stasis. It is the marking of use found within each frame that is studied, rather than a mapping of the process of mark-making.

\textit{10. The sidewalk carries a logic of segmentation within it, as its use reflects a pattern of zones of occupation for various programmatic functions. See figure 55.}
part three: furniture
**a. in the home**

Furniture – the agents of comfort and signs of well-being, interior equipment, upholders of status, symbolic configurations of the tight fabric of affections in the scheme of things, instruments of domestic comportment – can also dislocate and render inhospitable the space par excellence of intimacy, the room.

*Georges Teyssot, “The Disease of the Domicile” [92]*

The introduction of furniture into this project re-introduces the notion of home through the example of the objects, spaces, and activities that the body encounters within the domestic realm. Furniture not only acts to make the body comfortable, it also suggests specific poses for the body and associates these poses with particular domestic activities. Outside of the home, domestic comforts can be reproduced through the reconstruction of such poses devoid of such activity.

In order to gain a clearer understanding of the various poses of domestic comfort, furniture was studied. Modern architects such as Le Corbusier, Eileen Gray, and Charles and Ray Eames were responsible for the production of innovative interpretations of furniture. Their works express the inherent complexity of furniture design,
focusing both on the specificity of the body and of the processes of mass-production. During this time, chairs began to radically take on new forms. For instance, the curvature of the body in repose is reflected by the Eames’ through a method of mass-production: bending plywood to hold various sensuous curves without carving.

Interestingly, many of the designers of these new types of furniture were architects who envisioned these objects not in isolation, but rather integrated into a newly envisioned domestic interior. For example Eileen Gray’s E.1027, one of the few of her architectural works acts as a container for her many furniture designs. The design of E.1027 reflects a feminist desire for the transformation of the domestic interior, achieved namely through the act of substitution, not of architectural forms, but of the objects located inside the home:

In place of the sentimental objects of the bourgeois interior, Gray merged furnishings and architecture to afford the occupant a protected realm of affective identification. Her design eschews the singular, closed, and imposing patriarchal order of the traditional interior. Rather, it embodies a renewed and revitalized sense of ritual, liberating the occupants from attachments to things or to familial bonds. The mirror replaces the family
The new methods of furniture design reflected both the feminization and masculinization of these objects; as their forms became more sensuous [female], they represented machinic acculturation [male]. The issue of gender in relation to furniture is not limited to a formal reading of the body within an object, it appears as part of a discussion of the domestic interior and the performance of gender within this space. The upholstered divans and fainting couches of the 19th century express, formally, the positioning of the female upon them, themselves becoming female: stuffed into soft, sensuous forms, dressed in fine fabrics, pleated and trimmed. While the fainting couch is easily gendered as a female object, other items of furniture can be identified as male: the Lay-Z-Boy recliner, the desk, the valet, both through their use and form. Despite whose body [male or female] is contained by furniture, the incorporation of the body’s form into furniture design marks a socio-political re-definition of the body at this time. Now sensual, the body shifts away from its repressed Victorian form. Rather than

11. Cailliois’ notion of mimicry re-appears in this context, as the female body and the upholstered divan collapse the clear demarcation between the organism/occupant and its surroundings.
focusing on the eroticism implied by the sensuous body, this shift provides the opportunity to re-introduce notions of comfort into design. Taylorism, the inception of ergonomics, considered this body, too, focusing not on the pleasures of comfort as much as the limitations of comfort; testing the body’s durability and efficiency as part of the labor of production.

The definition of comfort has made an interesting shift over time. Initially meaning “strengthen,” it now more commonly describes pleasure. As explored in his essay “Boredom and the Bedroom,” Georges Teyssot gleans through etymological references the transformation of the notion of comfort:

Disease derives from dis, “the contrary of,” and ease, from the French aise, or in the plural, les aises, referring in general to comfort. Prior to its application to maladies or pathological states of health, dis-ease referred to something that was literally uncomfortable. The word comfort in English derives from the French confort, originally referring to moral or psychological comfort. Thus welfare and “feeling well” had an initial moral meaning. It was only during the eighteenth century that comfort acquired its modern meaning, indicating material and technological circumstances that enabled physical “well-being.” [46]
Throughout *Mechanization Takes Command*, Siegfried Giedion displays this shift within the history of furniture design, as early furniture acted to support the body while more contemporary notions of furniture provide additional benefits of physical and visual pleasures.

Giedion links the shift in methods of furniture design following the invention of such technologies as the pivot and the hinge. These innovations provide mobility within furniture, allowing for ease of transport, storage, and multiplied use, each attribute acting to minimize the space required per object. New York City apartments saved space using the Murphy bed, which acted also to conceal the bed from view when not in use: “Anxiety about the status of the bed derived not only from its connection to sleep, but also its relation to dreaming and sex...Murphy’s hinge strained to maintain a separation, but also a continuous arc of movement between positions of storage and display.” 

Henry Urbach, “Morpheus Mepris” [134]

Identifying the roles of furniture in relation to an activity, the initial designs for this project include “memory devices”: objects worn to reconstruct poses specific to furniture and its associated program. The stoop provides the initial site for the study of such devices. For each project, the recording of poses specific to the furniture’s use were obtained and subsequently analyzed in relation to the stoop.

12. Gideion’s survey is limited to the study of Western culture.
fig 62. sections at 14 Gay Street stoop
chair [GAY STREET, NOS. 14-16]

Only 260 feet long, Gay Street was originally an alley entrance to stables. In 1827 a row of houses, including nos. 14 and 16, were built on the west side of the street, and in the 1840s the eastside stables were replaced with houses. Although Abbott was probably drawn to the architectural detail and ironwork railings of nos. 14 and 16 Gay Street, she would certainly have known the street’s reputation as an artist’s haunt, and she may have thought of McKenney’s stories, which were written in the basement apartment of 14.

The precedent of the chair identifies the specificity of such furniture to a single inhabitant engaged in an activity. Although one may sit to rest, the chair assists in working, eating, and watching (TV). As discussed in part two: sites, urban sitting surfaces find themselves almost accidently, as the step, facade decoration, or sculpture base bears the dimensions appropriate for various seated poses.

The buckling edge of this particular stoop tells a story of its use over time. The “seat” sections [fig 62] model these forces. Based on two surfaces [body and stoop], and considering time [the approach of the body into seated position], several sections were designed along the length of the stoop near the buckling corner. The space between body and stoop became the space of the seat, as conceived through both drawing and prototype.
fig 67. movement of hands along scanner bed

fig 68. “table” cast

fig. 69 “table” section/axonometric
Following the chair exercise, casting reappeared as a means for recording the body in a particular pose. The table was the next memory device designed. As *an article of furniture having a flat horizontal surface supported by legs*, the table is dependent on the chair for its occupation. Without a seat, the table merely holds objects, acting as a display. When partnered with a seat, tables are assigned to specific functions often associated with eat, drink, recreation and work.

Using the dictionary definition as a starting point, the legs of the occupant became the supports of the table in the design of the memory device.

Rather than allowing the cast to remain an evocative object, it was cut into sections, drawn, and combined with the pocket cast to produce a new table. Prototyped using a CNC router, the table is a device of curiosity, as it is not recognizable as furniture. However, when worn, the device successfully produces a comfortable pose in the absence of the sites which produced it, as neither stoop nor pocket need be present for the device to be activated.

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14. The bed implies intimate programmatic activity -- sleeping, dreaming, sex -- and yet its form has remained simple throughout its design. Mattress, futon, mat and bedding related to the size of one or two bodies suggest a fixed geometry. Headboards, canopies and frames act as decorative components, making more visually pleasing the simplicity of the bed itself. African and Asian head rests suggest another possible architecture of the bed, limiting the comfort or support of the body to specific points along it. The bed casts are a response to this re-interpretation of bed.

15. As an assemblage, the components of the bed cast are worn to create a type of prosthesis. The medical use of the term prosthesis refers to those devices supplementing loss [most commonly the loss of a limb], as well as devices of physical enhancement [contact lenses, breast implants]. The bed casts, as well as the other memory devices designed for this thesis supplement the loss of site. They do not provide an enhancement of the body, and are in fact not necessary for the reconstruction of the poses considered. They are mere aides for prior site occupation.
bed

Using the same method for recording as with the table, a rest position was captured in plaster to produce a bed with relation to sitting at the stoop. The pose, elbow resting on the stoop’s step with face resting in hand, replaces a traditional sleep position with a “rest” pose. As a site of anxiety and vulnerability, the traditional bed does not function as an object of display, and is at times intentionally hidden [as in the Murphy bed]. As not to replace the bed, or suggest public sleeping, the cast engages notions of intimacy in its design.\(^4\)

The cast for the bed was produced in three parts [elbow-rest, arm-holder, hand-pillow], which when engaged together complete the rest position. As a kit of parts,\(^5\) the pieces are activated through their use and have a dependence on one another.
cabinet

While a prototype for the cabinet was not completed in this project, the study of the cabinet as both an object of furniture and a metaphor for the concealment and/or display of material and personal items suggested a rich opportunity for the speculation of an urban equivalent. In her essay, “Domesticity at War,” Beatriz Colomina describes the cabinet’s three meanings:

a “cupboard or case with drawers, shelves, etc., for storing or displaying articles”; a “piece of furniture containing a radio or television set”; and, in the terms of politics, a “group of ministers controlling government policy.”

The cabinet is a space. In the first definition, this space is associated with the traditional domestic interior, the house; in the second, it houses the media; in the third, it has been displaced into the media itself. [15]

As a site of the display of objects or projection of media, the street is an urban cabinet, functioning as the stage for observation and people-watching. Through the on-site studies in the East and West Villages, Astor Place contained the attributes of a theater for watching. The now empty island where the “cube” was once sited acts as the stage for street performance. The articulated surface on the back of the Astor Place subway shelter functions as a row of seats directed at the stage. The images to the right [figs 84-88] document a peripheral view from these seats, cinematically displaying the approach of passers-by.
As a site of concealment, the cabinet contains within it collections and secrets. While cabinets present the possession of objects through their volume, the closet provides storage through the concealment of both the objects and itself:

Armoires, chests, and the like are volumetric objects with unambiguous spatial presence...Freestanding, upright, and decorated, they evoke the clothed human body. By contrast, the closet displays itself more surreptitiously. It relies on the spatial effects of the hollow wall to present itself as not quite there...The threshold between closet and room mediates their relation, simultaneously connecting and dissociating the two spaces.

Henry Urbach, Closets, Clothes, Disclosure [64]

The recessed entryway, tucked within a building’s surface acts as a closet, allowing for the containment of the body in the street. Alleys and other hiding places function similarly, providing the danger of concealment within the street. These spaces become sites of sexual encounter and vulnerability. The alley and closet become sites of hidden sexual practice, as the cabinet contains within collections [at times related to the practices of the closet/alley]:

“familial icons, objets d’art or private papers, themselves fetishized and invested with rarified forms of eroticism. The mania of collecting and its increasingly refined, recherché developments – bric-a-bracomania, tabulaumania bibliophilia, vestignomia – seems to have merged with the newly minted sexual aberration of erotomania…”

Emily Apter “Cabinet Secrets” [8]
<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>furniture</th>
<th>program</th>
<th>scale[s]/site[s]</th>
<th>assemblage/activation</th>
<th>materiality</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>chair</td>
<td>rest, watch</td>
<td>theater</td>
<td>components of seat [combined with table]</td>
<td>wood</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>body/stoop</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>under leg+backrest+table</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
| table*          | “work”            | remembering, smoking,                 | [see chair]                                             | wood, fabric,
|                 |                   | working                                 |                                                          | cast materials|
| bed             | rest, sex         | intimacy                                | components of bed                                       |              |
|                 |                   |                                        | micro/clothing/body/step/stoop                          |              |
| drawer/cabinet  | storage of ______ | micro/clothing/body/step/stoop/       | composition of drawers/containers [built into clothing]  | wood, metal,
|                 |                   | facade/building/alley/street           |                                                          | cast component|
| armoire/closet  | deviance, intimacy|                                        | composition of drawers/containers [built into alley]     |              |
|                 |                   |                                        |                                                          | wood, building materials|

The cabinet is a space. In the first definition, this space is associated with the traditional domestic interior, the house; in the second, it houses the media; in the third, it has been displaced into the media itself. [15] Beatriz Colomina “Domesticity at War” Assemblage 16 15-41

The two closets resonate against one another within a linguistic and material network of representations that organize the relation between storage and display, secrecy and disclosure. The sexual closet refers, through an operation of metaphor, to the familiar architectural referent. The built-in closet, in turn, petrifies and disseminates, as architectural convention, the kind of subjectivity described by the homosexual closet. The built-in closet concretizes the closet of identity, while the closet of identity literalizes its architectural counterpart. [64] Honey Urbach “Closets, Clothes, Disclosure” Assemblage 30 62-73.
b. street furniture

While the early casts inspired by postures of comfort enacted within the home were imagined as memory devices to be engaged away from these sites, the following is an attempt to return the objects to public space in an exploration of their role as street furniture. A term used to describe public amenities such as benches and lampposts, “street furniture” in this context will include the transformation of domestic furniture as it moves into the realm of the public, challenging the accepted codes of comfort in these spaces and placing the personal within the space of the collective.

Urban designs often consider the occupant of public space as part of a collective identity rather than as a corporeal individual. Approaching a question of design ethics, urban designers, such as Màrius Quintana Creus in his introduction to the book Elementos Urbanos [a collection of examples of street furniture by Barcelonan designers] declares that:

*Urban spaces cannot and must not have to make do with objects of dubious usefulness or of a utility transferred from other cultures or needs...Order and urban clarity are qualities of the city which have to find expression in a siting of elements born of a reading of public space. Each element has to find its own place, without changing it, as so often happens. Yet at the same time, it must be possible to place each design in any scenario.*
of the city. There is no reason why there should be specific designs for different parts of the same city…Unlike indoor furniture, users do not buy urban furniture and, therefore, maximum citizen comprehension of the element has to be worked at. Reduction of the number of designs of a single element (which does not mean having one version only) aids such comprehension, since the user will then know how to use it correctly. [8]

While designs for street furniture attempt to maximize use by many, this project disrupts the economics of furniture design and introduces into the fabric of the city a series of interventions for a singular body, my body. These interventions may seem selfish through their denial of communal use, however, in this project’s attempt to find home within public spaces, these designs
are not meant to replace existing public amenities, but as supplementary architectures. Each design produces a unique experience for an individual body through the addition of a minimal form onto/into various articulated surfaces not traditionally occupied as sites of habitation.

Postures of domestic occupation determined the casts produced in this study. Multiple casts per posture recorded the relationship between body and surface, as well as that between the body and itself. Selected forms were reproduced in temporal and permanent materials (wax and concrete) and sited within the city’s surfaces. The following is an examination of the siting of these objects and an analysis of their programmatic function as street furniture.
figs 94-96. mold-making for pillow cast

fig 97. original pillow cast after mold-making process

fig 98. detail of shoulder cast
fig 99. shoudler cast

fig 100. cast of space between feet when standing, “foot rest”

fig 101. cast of space between thighs and stomach when reading seated

fig 102. detail of cast taken from “kneel” position

fig 103. detail of thigh/stomach cast
**ledge/armrest**

In the image to the right, ground floor windows adorned with a deep ledge and window planters...This scene marks the space of the interface between the domestic interior and the street -- neighbors exchanging stories: one inside the other outside.

Located between two ground floor windows, the ledge is extended to receive an armrest. The armrest invites the surface habitation of the facade in a lean position. Set within the surface, the armrest replaces five bricks of the facade.
figs 105-106 ledge/armrest cast

fig 107. ledge/armrest
shoulder-rest
Like the ledge/armrest, the shoulder-rest also acts to hold the body in a rest position along the facade. The concrete cast cradles the shoulder and provides a surface for the face to lean upon. Attached to the wall with a customized steel anchor plate, the shoulder-rest lightly adheres itself to the surface.

The shoulder-rest creates a feeling of containment and security. Marking the space between shoulder, head and a wall’s surface, the cast provides an ease of occupation, cushioning the body as it leans against the facade.

figs 108-112. casting shoulder-rest in wax and concrete
fig 116. shoulder-rest

figs 113-115. shoulder-rest cast

fig 116. shoulder-rest
The casting process allowed for the shoulder cast to be produced as an object, or, with one side of the mold removed, as a tile or block. As a block, the cast moves beyond its original alien/parasitic position along the surface, becoming part of the production of the wall itself; the block is a unit of construction. It can embed itself within the logic of surface architecture as a load bearing unit acting to complete the wall rather than adorn it.

Stacked in sequence, the units produce a new form of decoration within the facade’s surface, embedded with possible programmatic function of “resting” along the wall.
fig 120-121. shoulder-rest cast

fig 122. shoulder-rest
figs 123-125. pillow in use
pillow
Located upon a different surface than the previous examples, the pillow is designed in relation to a seated position. Attached to a highly decorative surface, the pillow presents itself as an ambiguous form hovering near, but not making full contact with, the existing architecture. In its careful placement along the surface, the cast allows for occupation through the placement of the arm around its form. It holds the arm in a leaning position, similar to that of someone leaning in a chaise. The pillow supports the arm and also provides a surface for the face to rest upon.

Like the bed-cast-as-memory-device, the pillow presents the challenges of the vulnerable body in a bed within public space. The difficulty of occupying the pillow allows its occupation to remain brief.
fig 132. site
decorated facade, 9th Street

fig 133. desk/bollard
Adding the notion of assemblage, as produced in the earlier bed cast, the desk uses two components dependent on one another for completion. The base of the desk, its legs of support, are modelled from a cast of the legs in a seated reading position -- cast from foot to knee, which when sited near the facade are set within the concrete of the sidewalk. This display of embeddness provides a structural anchorage of the object to the ground, while allowing the body the opportunity to occupy the sidewalk. The upper portion of the “leg” receives a tablet to allow it to function as a desk. The tablet is a cast plate held by the facade’s decoration and is inspired by the lap-pillow displayed in figures 101 & 103 [page 61].

Although the desk requires the most specific use, its specificity transforms through the multiplication of the cast object, allowing it to be used in a more conventional way as street furniture. When repeated, the leg component of the desk can function as a bollard, providing it is placed in at the edge of the sidewalk or along the street rather than as a neighbor to an articulated facade.

Additionally in its repeated state, a desk becomes of large table or counter. When placed near a bench, the repeated desk can function as the site for collective habitation.
part four: conclusions
I actually often fantasize about the relation of my body to a space...when I look at those corners, I think about the physical experience of being in that place rather than the practicalities of day-to-day...

I love thinking about interiority that way... I have usually examined it as a social/cultural phenomenon. I am fascinated by how people see the interiors of their homes as the one place where they are free to be whoever they “really are” and also how the way they decorate their interior can somehow reveal their soul or character. I mean what makes all of this so interesting to me is that this is so symptomatic of our particular moment in history. In the past people led much more communal public lives, and there was never this sort of attachment to personal spaces. I guess all of this turning inward also has a lot to do with how “individualized” and isolated we are becoming socially.

Andrea Zittel, during interview with Allan McCollum

As this project searches for home in public space, it cannot do so innocently. Although the focus of the research presented throughout this thesis lies within the production of [re]collective practices, exercises in tactility, the major theme presented is the position of the individual body within the city. As recognized throughout the feminist movement in the United States, the personal is political, and the interruption of the codified collectivity of public space allows for an architectural reading of subversive habitation of the cracks and crevices of surfaces found within the city.

In her interview with Allan McCollum, artist/architect Andrea Zittel describes her relationship to spaces within the city as curiosities to be fulfilled through non-traditional occupation. She follows this statement with an observation of a general obsession of the great-
er society with individualization. She describes this process as part of a retreat from public space indoors; a personalization of the domestic interior through decoration. Combining both the desire for new spatial experience within the city with a need to individualize space as an expression of personal character, this project introduces customized expressions of a body located in the corners, cracks, and crevices of the city and its surface decoration.

The challenges presented through this attempt to transform the urban landscape for the purposes of finding home within the city, are the limitations of the processes used to create the corporeal interventions. The [re]collective practices discovered and practiced throughout the project suggest a means of extracting a relationship between the surfaces of the body and the city. Still, the methods of [re]collection employed in this work produced a strategy for one body, limiting the proposal to that of a personal narrative. Further research of [re]collective practices could provide a do-it-yourself method of creating both memory devices and street furniture, allowing for a cumulative alteration of the surface landscape of the city and a new understanding for domestic occupation within public space.

While remaining analytical in its approach, the project seeks to maintain a discourse surrounding the role of the individual body within architecture, challenging stigmas associated with the themes presented: [re]collection, bodies, surfaces, and the dispersed home.


[re]collective precedents

figure 2. Bronx Floors: Floor Above, Ceiling Below, 1972-73. Object to be Destroyed page 75.

surface habitation

page 15: figure 5. Crosstown page 63.
page 17: figure 10. Pier 52, Stud page 267. Note: courtesy of Leonard Fink Collection, National Museum and Archive of Lesbian Gay History. The appearance of someone in these photographs should not be taken as an indication of his sexual orientation.
figure 11. Sidewalk page 102.

definitions


page 47: figure 60: Illustration from Murphy In-A-Dor Bed Co brochure. “Morpheus Mepris” page 133.
figure 61. Mechanization Takes Command page 436.


page 54: figure 80. Bedroom furniture, 1850. p.64 Henry Urbach, Closets, Clothes and Disclosure
figure 82. Ole Worm’s cabinet of curiosities, Museum Wormianum, 1655.

conclusion


All images by author unless otherwise noted.