

Emily Armstrong 2010

The Presence of Absence

PRE-OCCUPATION OF EMPTY SPACES

An exegesis submitted to Auckland University of Technology in partial fulfilment of the requirements for the degree of Master of Art and Design

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I hereby declare that this submission is my own work and that, to the best of my knowledge and belief, it contains no material previously published or written by another person (except where explicitly defined in the acknowledgements), nor material which to a substantial extent has been submitted for the award of any other degree or diploma of a university or other institution of higher learning.

A handwritten signature in black ink, appearing to read "E. Amohong", is written over a horizontal line. The signature is fluid and cursive, with a large loop at the end.

Acknowledgements

I'd like to express my gratitude to the following people for their role in the completion of this Masters project:

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Abstract

THE PRESENCE OF ABSENCE: PRE-OCCUPATION OF EMPTY SPACES.

This art research project explores the construct of private space by examining the nature of a dialectic relationship between inside and outside and the resulting implication of private and public. In addition, private space, which is viewed as a personalized retreat that serves to provide shelter, security and familiarity, is further investigated through the use of pre-used domestic and personal objects. The physical and psychological qualities of pre-used objects are utilized in installation to create spaces that evoke a sense of use. This engagement with the notion of occupation is used to question the relationship between the individual and pre-occupied spaces and to consider how the issue of access can affect an understanding of the notion of private.

"The room is very deeply our room, it is in us" (Bachelard, 1964, p. 226).

Introduction

The impetus for this project originated from a bar of soap. It was small, white, clean, unscented and un-used. In many ways this description is far removed from what developed into the proposal for a Master's project that investigates the implications of pre-used objects and lived-in spaces. However what has remained consistent is an interest in the capacity of everyday objects to evoke an expectation of use by the body. In the case of pre-used objects and spaces, this temporality is two-fold, suggesting both past and future use. This project aims to explore the way in which, in the absence of the body, evidence of use and expectation of use, can culminate to convey a present sense of a private space.

As part of a practice-based project this exegesis provides accompanying information that contributes to an understanding of the knowledge gained through practical research and reflection and forms a documentation of the research process and issues.

The section of *Approaching the Interior* (underpinning concepts) introduces the nature and implications of a physical interior, which form a foundation for the investigation of the notion of private space. The next section, *Finding a Way In* (methodology), discusses the methodologies and processes used and the ways in which these contribute to the development of the project. The practical component of the research is provided in the section *Stepping Inside* (experimentation and discovery) and is approached in seven parts that present how the research has progressed and shifted through experimentation. The last section, *Turning On the Light* (conclusion), offers reflection on the position of the project as it stands at the current point in its continuing development.

This thesis is comprised of 20% written exegesis and 80% practical outcome.

Approaching the Interior

PUTTING UP WALLS

The act of creating a physical interior space begins with the erection of a wall. As a result, two distinct spaces are established, however each space is dependent on the other for validation. The wall forms a bulkhead of spatial tension; when the wall dissolves so does the boundary of difference between the two spaces. This type of division of space through the employment of a wall establishes a dialectical relationship of interior and exterior space, which subsequently can create a dynamic of private and public.

A dialectic approach to notions of inside and outside proposes that rather than being static opposites, the relationship is much more complex and is dependent on a reflexive tension between the two. In *The Poetics of Space*, French philosopher Gaston Bachelard (1964) remarks of inside and outside that “they are always ready to be reversed, to exchange their hostility” yet they are not symmetrical - we think of inside as limited and outside as vast and physically endless (p. 215). The reversal Bachelard speaks of is perhaps more a type of encroachment. Professor of Philosophy Edward Casey (1997) writes in his book *The Fate of Place* that “the ‘in’... is in constant communication with the ‘out’” and that in terms of a building there is an overflow through open spaces such as doors and windows (p. 293). As a result, an interior is never complete or autonomous; it is always in the process of exchange with an exterior.

Essentially an interior operates as a shelter. The cave, the hut, the house are synonymous with the concept of shelter. From the first simple dwellings to the variable architectural interpretations of the twenty-first century the primary function of built interiors is to secure and shield the contained

occupants from the undesirable. In this sense, an interior ultimately pertains to the basic requirements of living, as a way of providing protection for the body.

However, the role of the interior may be more primal than physical. Author Peter Schwenger (2005) links a desire for interiority to a longing for the only complete interior experience, that of the womb. He then continues on to explain the significance of an interior in providing more than just shelter:

When our ancestors entered caves and took possession of them, it was doubtless not only for the practical reasons of shelter from the elements and from marauding beasts; it was also a way of creating a bounded space within an unbounded world without shape or ending and, consequently, always edged with incomprehension. The cave was comprehensible, it was familiar, it was ours. (p. 7)

As a physical shelter an interior can also function as a familiar location, a place of stability to return to from a largely unknown world.

It is through the experience of the edges of our bodies that we are able to navigate space and assign locations. Emmanuel Kant states that:

even our commonest knowledge of the position of places, would be of no aid to us if we could not, by reference to the sides of our bodies, assign to regions the things so ordered and the whole system of mutually relative positions” (as cited in Tuan, 1977, p.36).

This places the body at the centre of spatial understanding.

In modern Western society we tend to locate ourselves primarily in relation to buildings and the assigned function of their interiors. We are 'at home', 'at work', or 'on the way' between. Beyond its practical function, the act of building can be seen as an attempt to curb infinity; it is a return to the ordered and the limited from the vastness of outside. Geographer Yu Fi Tuan refers to essayist Wright Morris in a discussion of architectural space, to suggest the significance of the building: "There is too much sky out there...too much horizontal, too many lines without stops, so that the exclamation, the perpendicular has come.... It's a problem of being. Of knowing you are there" (as cited in Tuan, 1977, p. 108).

In a similar line of thought, Professor of Philosophy Wolfgang Zucker relays a story by German novelist Jean Paul in *Inside and Outside in Architecture: A Symposium*, about a poor man who inherits land but doesn't have enough money to build a house (Arnheim, 1966). Instead he is able to afford only one wall with a window. He places this wall in the middle of his land and sits behind it to enjoy the view 'outside'. Zucker refers to this story to propose the separation of inside and outside as being the "primeval act of architecture" (p. 7). The protagonist's single wall provides no shelter yet it does propose the idea of an inside. As this doesn't serve a practical purpose, what then is its value? Further in the essay it is observed that though not functional in the conventional sense, the houseless wall is "spiritually adequate" (p. 13). One could liken this desire to the childhood act of building forts or adopting hiding places,

creating a division between what space is 'ours' and what is not and thus deriving a sense of identity from a sense of place.

Through Jean Paul's story of the man with the houseless wall it becomes clear that the body is integral to the relationship between interior and exterior. On one side of the wall the man has a sense of interiority; on the other side he would no doubt feel excluded.

Sculptor Richard Serra creates installations that manipulate space and question the way it is interpreted, as the viewer moves between and around looming steel 'walls'. His piece *Band*, 2006, (see Figure 1) has no definitive inside or outside as the ends or sides of the seventy foot undulating steel wall never meet. However when the body is within one of the repeating folds, the viewer identifies with being 'inside' the work. The work informs an understanding of interior space as it relates to the perception of the body being surrounded and hidden by structure. It demonstrates the role of the body in defining a state of interiority.

In *The Poetics of Space* (1964), Gaston Bachelard's analysis of the 'corner' establishes a basis for a constructed interior as providing a space of retreat. He proposes a corner as being a refuge where "an imaginary room rises up around our bodies" (p. 137), resulting in the "negation of the Universe" (p. 136). Bachelard proposes that an interior state can create a relationship of inclusion and exclusion between the body and the surrounding world. He implies that an interior can function as a private place of refuge and seclusion - from outside and also from other bodies.



Figure 1 Serra, R. (2006). *Band*, weatherproof steel, 3.9 x 11.1 x 21.9 m, plate: 5.1 cm thick. The Museum of Modern Art, New York. Photo by Lorenz Kienzle.
Retrieved from <http://www.lorenzkienzle.com/en/serramoma.6.html>

OCCUPIED

As established through the examples provided by Jean Paul's story and by Bachelard, building a wall affects an understanding of the position of the body with regard to interior and exterior and can impact on social interaction. Walls place limitations on the body, organizing space by directing movement and controlling interaction. The meeting of body and wall is the result of a denial of access or escape that can imply an intentional exclusion or inclusion of the body. Consequently, as a result of these restrictions on the body, an interior can be regarded as undisclosed and therefore intimate or private, as opposed to an exposed and freely accessible public space.

However built structures are only able to heighten this awareness of space and do not necessarily define what is public and what is private (Tuan, 1977). As Peter Marcuse (1997), Professor of Urban Planning points out, the notion of privacy can be culturally determined: "what appears intolerable crowding to some is normal sociability to others, and among some peoples merely turning their backs to others provides the sense of privacy for which others require a room of their own" (p. 101).

In terms of physical space, an interior is more suitable as a private space but is not definitively so. In fact the extent to which any private space is truly exclusive is debatable, for walls provide only the illusion of impermeability and much like the flow between exterior and interior, private space is vulnerable to usurpation. However, where as the relationship between interior and exterior can be seen as one of exchange, the interaction between private and public is more likely to be a process of subversion.

Private space becoming public space and vice versa can be an aggressive transition of intrusion and exclusion.

Henri Lefebvre (1991) recognizes in *The Production of Space*, that the boundary between what is public and what is not is often subtly perceived:

It is impossible to say how often one pauses uncomfortably for a moment on some threshold – the entrance of a church, office or 'public' building, or the point of access to a 'foreign' place, while passively, and usually 'unconsciously', accepting a prohibition of some kind. (p. 319)

This suggests the potential for a building to impose a sense of ownership by its nature as an unfamiliar interior. In her book *Intersecting Voices*, philosopher Iris Marion Young (1997) says that "to own a space is to have autonomy over admission to the space and its contents" (p. 162). Yet beyond legal documentation and written notification, how is this 'autonomy' established and subsequently interpreted by the individual who pauses on the threshold?

Perhaps an understanding of private space could be derived from a consideration of how ownership might be informed by the notion of occupation. Occupation can occur regardless of the legal parameters of ownership, through the habitual use of a space. In this way it may be possible for an interior to imply a user or dweller and in doing so, assert a form of ownership over the space that correlates with a sense of private space in the absence of the body.

Finding a Way In

INSTALLATION

In exploring the nature of private space, installation is an appropriate method by which it is possible to physically create a relationship between the body and structure. This places the viewer in a position where the implications of spatial constructs such as interior and exterior can be experienced directly.

In *Space, Site, Intervention: Situating Installation Art*, artist John Coleman (2000) quotes art critic Thomas McEvilley: "Space is the medium that enables the figure to exist, the figure in turn, is the agent that activates the space. Their collaboration, finally, is the necessary cause of the special situation in which narrative can occur" (p. 164). In installation, the interaction between space, structure and the body is imperative to the activation of the work and the generation of meaning.

In this project, the way in which a sense of private space can be suggested or questioned in installation is explored through the employment of built structures and pre-used objects that are indexical of components from common everyday spaces and our experiences of them. With regard to exploring notions of interior and exterior, consideration needs to be given to how the gallery space can be interpreted as an interior space and as a 'public' space, and how this will affect the viewer's experience of the work.

An installation can be entered into and engaged with, yet the experience is situated somewhere between representation and reality. Coleman (2000) discusses how installation can reference the world on both a physical and a psychological level:

[installation has the] potential to exist within both physical and psychic spaces: to extend the written, spoken, and/or implied narrative into the realm of a physically engaged experience. Space is tangible, much like color, texture, form. It can be shaped to mean, to contain, to conjure... (p. 163)

Installation has the ability to invoke personal narrative within the psychic space of the viewer. He or she is affected by memory and past experience via engagement with objects and spaces that conjure and suggest, prompting a resurfacing of their own subjective experiences.

Artist Mike Nelson (see Figure 2) exploits the capacity of objects in installation to evoke memory and narrative by converting and then furnishing abandoned buildings to create a fictitious 'used' space. The effect on the viewer is anticipated in relation to culturally understood associations; however ultimately, due to the subjective nature of the viewer's prior experience of objects, the narrative is open to interpretation.

In discussing the installations of Mike Nelson and Ilya Kabakov, art historian Dr Claire Bishop (2005) claims the work is not only physically engaging but "psychologically absorptive" in a way that corresponds with the state of dreaming (p. 14). As a direct experience, the immersion in the space can promote an almost dream-like alternate mental state in which the significance of the artwork shifts from the physical object to the effect on the viewer.



Figure 2 Nelson, M. (2007). A *Psychic Vacuum (detail)*, mixed media installation. Photo by Sam Horine. Retrieved from http://gothamist.com/2007/09/13/mike_nelson_art.php

HEURISTICS

In a creative practice-based research project, acknowledging and adhering to methods used in qualitative research systems such as experimentation and reflection, enables a more thorough engagement with and understanding of the area of enquiry. Heuristics is a methodology that employs a qualitative approach. Gerhard Kleining and Harald Witt (2000) say of the topic that unfolds through heuristic research: "It is only fully known after being successfully explored. The topic may be overlapped by another one or turn out as part of a different problem or just disappear" (p. 2). This occurs through experimentation which is suggestive and generative of an aim as it is undertaken to meet an initial enquiry and is not considered a by-product but rather becomes important content in itself (Scrivener, 2000).

The content of this project has developed through a tactile interaction with the materials, a process that has informed and repositioned the aims. The materials consist of objects to be considered in space and are initially chosen not to meet a predetermined outcome but as part of an intuitive collection of potentially thought provoking starting points.

Initial experimentation measures the physical possibilities or limitations of the materials. Akin to 'playing', this process of practical manipulation is

useful in promoting a consideration of tactility and form-in-space that can then be suggestive of conceptual and technical possibilities. It is through making and trialling that ideas are initiated and developed, which can then be refined and directed through reflective analysis.

In a statement that can be applied to the process of practical experimentation as well as reflection on experimentation, Kleining and Witt (2000) consider that "We 'ask' our material 'questions' in a similar way one may ask a person, receiving 'answers' and questioning again" (p. 3). The process of questioning begins with interpretation, followed by analysis with regard to fulfilling an aim and culminating in a decision to either continue or stall the line of enquiry based on the relevance of the 'answers'. By repeating this process of questioning the content and aims evolve and are refined.

Throughout the project a workbook (see Figures 3, 4) and an A2 whiteboard (see Figures 5, 6) are employed as diaristic and reflective tools. Where a workbook enables analysis through the juxtaposition of visual and written information, a whiteboard is used to visually map out the position of the project as it shifts. This then provides a reference point for making decisions during experimentation and reflection.

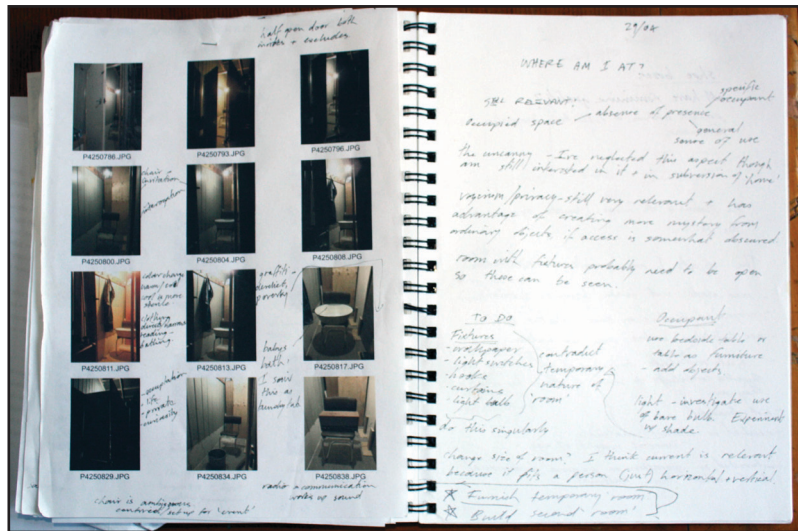


Figure 3 Armstrong, E. (2010). Example of a workbook page.

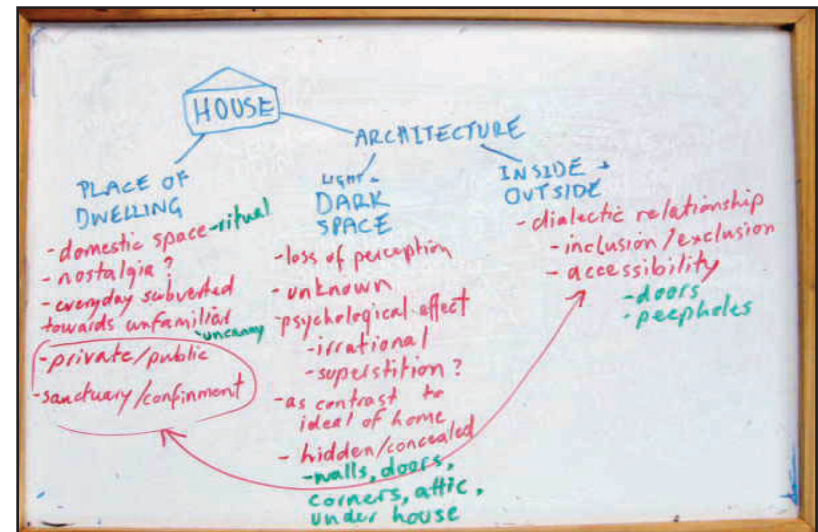


Figure 5 Armstrong, E. (2010). Example of whiteboard notes.

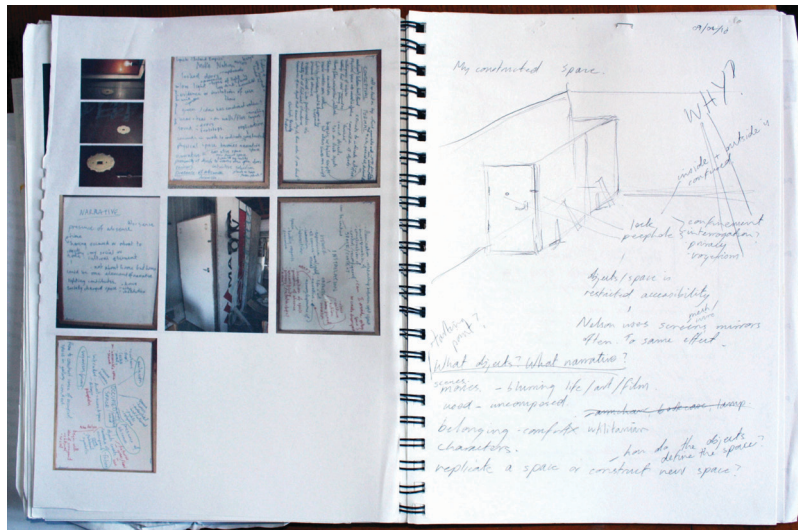


Figure 4 Armstrong, E. (2010). Example of a workbook page.

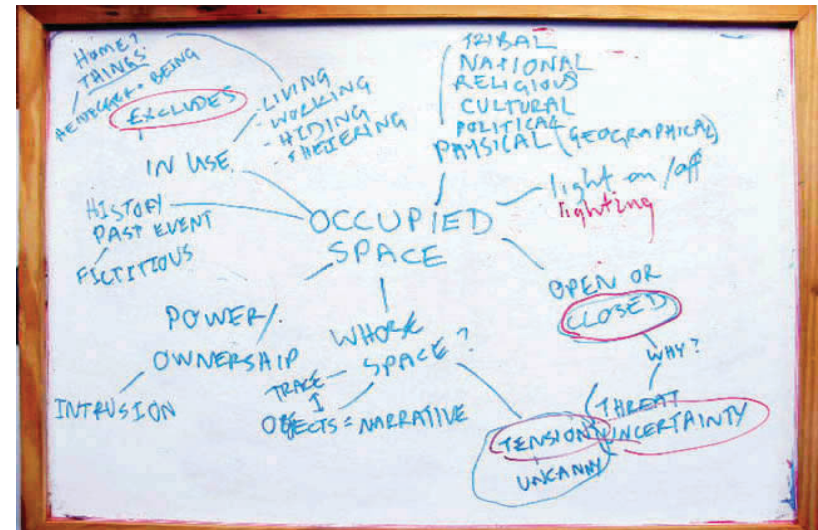


Figure 6 Armstrong, E. (2010). Example of whiteboard notes.

BRICOLAGE

Philosopher Claude Levi-Strauss (1966) brought the term bricolage into common use through his book *The Savage Mind*. Speaking of the means available to the bricoleur he states:

the elements are collected or retained on the principle that 'they may always come in handy' ... They each represent a set of actual and possible relations; they are 'operators' but they can be used for any operations of the same type. (p. 18)

More recently, lecturer in Modern and Contemporary Art Dr Jo Applin (2007) summarizes bricolage as "a temporary do-it-yourself form of collecting, re-ordering and recycling.....in order to generate if not something new then at least something else" (p. 72). In the context of art, bricolage can be used to refer to work in which materials are appropriated, re-used and recycled in an improvised manner to produce new and collective meaning.

In this practical research project bricolage relates to the appropriation of pre-used objects from everyday life and their associations, for use in installation. Materials that have the potential to inform the project are collected, stored, used and re-used as 'operators' in practical work. When objects are combined, the content they bring with them is regenerated and culminates in a way that can produce new or alternate meaning.

In most cases materials are not sought out but present themselves as I go about my everyday activities. Therefore many of the materials collected for experimentation are those that are on hand from my home, from other people's homes or from opportunity shops. In cases where specific material requirements arise as a result of experimentation and reflection, pre-used versions are sought out so that a history of use can also be appropriated. For instance a series of doors used were salvaged from the local transfer station (see Figure 7).



Figure 7 Armstrong, E. (2010). Collected materials.

When ready-made objects are used in installation the context challenges their functionality. However, this doesn't diminish the reference to use by the body. Derived from everyday objects this association is likely to be common to any viewer in a Western context. In examining the use of objects in art and design Christine Atha (2004) states that "context enables a new meaning to emerge from the object" (para. 11). It is important that the objects I collect are pre-used and have a history. New meaning can occur when the history that is evident in the condition of the objects used in installation evokes a narrative of use in the psychic space of the viewer.

THE ROLE OF PHOTOGRAPHY

Photography and film were initially considered as mediums for producing final work however as discussed above, installation is more appropriate for exploring issues such as occupation that have direct spatial implications. Also, as a distance learning student, the regular analysis of digital photographs posted online for the purpose of discussing work in progress, has instilled an awareness of how the use of photographic images can function as a component in the heuristic process. Therefore photography has been used to assist the development of the project in two ways: as a tool for documenting work in progress and for gathering data through recording

images that can inform an understanding of spaces and objects.

Drawing on the strategy of bricolage, practical works are often temporary and require photographic documentation before they are disassembled. Using the photographic frame, I am able to isolate aspects of the work and assess visual and conceptual strengths or weaknesses by considering what is dominant within the selected area of the frame.

Where the documentation of experimentation enables refinement through reflection, the documentation of spaces and places that exist in the everyday is a technique for gathering data that can contribute to a conceptual understanding of the research context.

Photography as a research tool is initiated in much the same way as objects are initially collected, in a process that is often intuitive and can arise from circumstance rather than being planned prior to execution. As Gaston Bachelard's (1964) phenomenological approach to philosophy posits "One must be receptive, receptive to the image at the moment it appears" (p. xv). This sentiment can be applied to a readiness to capture visual ideas from one's surroundings. Through reflection and analysis the results of the intuitive act then become suggestive of content.

Stepping Inside

In line with a heuristic approach to practical research a number of different issues have been explored over the course of the year. At times several enquiries were undertaken concurrently or issues were put aside only to become relevant again further on in the development of the project. While the structure of this section is loosely linear, it is designed primarily to present the significant areas of investigation and show how experimentation and supporting theoretical research has produced new aims and investigations that have culminated in the end of year installation.

UNCANNY SPACE

I began the year with an interest in the theory of The Uncanny as defined by Sigmund Freud when he refers to the German term 'heimlich' - that which is homely, comfortable and familiar but also concealed and therefore potentially private, secretive and unfamiliar, thus becoming its opposite 'unheimlich' (Freud, 1919). In response to this I explored the way in which the ideal notion of home as comfortable and familiar can be threatened by the existence of hidden, unfamiliar spaces in and around the house. Photography and video were employed to investigate the possibility of presenting a sinister perspective of the familiar home (see Figures 8, 9, 10). Analysis of the outcomes developed an association between hidden space and dark space.



Figure 8 Armstrong, E. (2010). Documentation of hidden space, digital photograph.



Figure 9 Armstrong, E. (2010). Documentation of hidden space, digital photograph.



Figure 10 Armstrong, E. (2010). Documentation of hidden space, digital photograph.



Figure 11 Armstrong, E. (2010). Documentation of dark space, digital photograph.

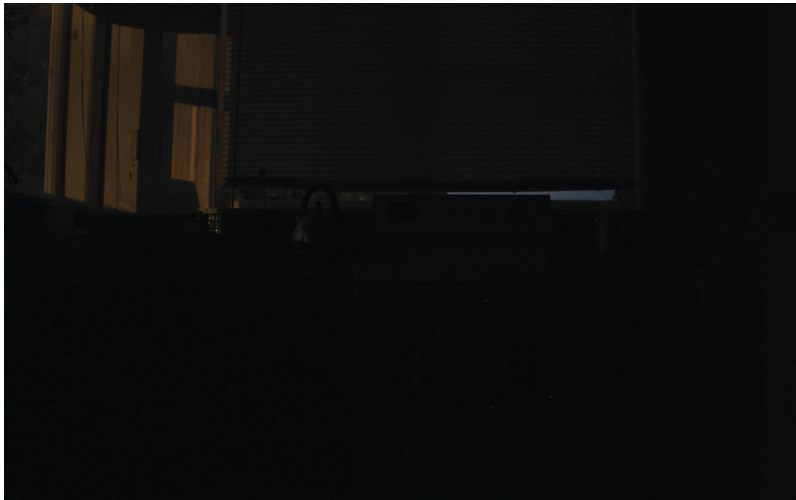


Figure 12 Armstrong, E. (2010). Documentation of dark space, digital photograph.

DARK SPACE

Hidden spaces of the home, when seen as concealed, secretive and threatening are likely to also be dark spaces. Professor of Architecture Anthony Vidler (1992) addresses the fear associated with darkness and its ability to conceal when he writes that space is “assumed to hide, in its darkest recesses and forgotten margins, all the objects of fear and phobia that have returned ... to haunt the imaginations of those who have tried to stake out spaces to protect their health and happiness” (p. 167). He continues on to suggest that “In every case, ‘light space’ is invaded by the figure of ‘dark space’” (p. 168). This is similar to the way in which the sanctuary of the house interior suggests an ever-present threat of invasion and is also relevant to the dialectic relationship of interior and exterior. In each instance it is the contrast between the two that imposes their very validity.

Reflections:

In considering the nature of hidden and dark spaces of the house I became aware of a duality not only in the relationship between light and dark but also within the way that dark space operates. Although a dark space can be interpreted as unknown and therefore threatening, in its capacity to obscure the body, darkness can also provide a refuge in which to hide (see Figures 11, 12, 13). This investigation has raised an awareness of the potential for an interior to operate ambiguously, in a way that can both suggest and contradict a particular understanding of a space, for example, as either a refuge or a place of confinement.



Figure 13 Armstrong, E. (2010). *Home*, video still.

INTERIOR SPACE

In exploring spaces within the context of the home I became interested in how a built interior might serve as a private retreat from the outside world. I started this aspect of the investigation with the basic principle of dividing space to create an interior (see Figure 14) and then I questioned how this interior might function as a place of habitation. Throughout this body of experimentation the door was used and subsequently became a significant element of the project. The original lean-to structure developed into a stand-alone construction from which a number of different sizes were tested (see Figures 15-19).



Figure 14 Armstrong, E. (2010). Constructed interior test, pre-used materials, 250 x 64 x 200 cm. approx.



Figure 15 Armstrong, E. (2010). Constructed interior test, pre-used materials, 200 x 64 x 140 cm. approx.



Figure 16 Armstrong, E. (2010). Constructed interior test, pre-used materials, 200 x 64 x 150 cm. approx.



Figure 17 Armstrong, E. (2010). Constructed interior test, pre-used materials, 250 x 64 x 200 cm. approx.



Figure 18 Armstrong, E. (2010). Constructed interior test, pre-used materials, 200 x 64 x 62 cm. approx.

Reflections:

The basic nature of the initial construction implies that it is build out of necessity and for a particular purpose. The structure serves to segregate selected space from the surroundings which can suggest a desire to conceal or contain.

Incorporating a door implicates the body and at this point in experimentation the issue of the body in space was raised, particularly with regard to a position of inclusion or exclusion. The consideration of a body within this particular sized space denotes an intimate space and is reminiscent of a bathroom or changing room, which was seen as being inconsistent with a practical living space. It was noted that variations in size changed the association of the type of space from a bathroom to a hallway, a closet, a bedroom, raising the issue of how interpretation of spaces is influenced by the experience of living spaces in Western culture. After experimentation I returned to the initial shape, concluding that an 'intimate' space when combined with evidence of inhabitation could create an element of ambiguity that would question rather than simply represent a lived-in space.



Figure 19 Armstrong, E. (2010). Constructed interior test, pre-used materials, 250 x 64 x 200 cm. approx.



Figure 20 Armstrong, E. (2010). Documentation of occupied space, digital photograph.

INHABITED SPACE

I was interested in the way that pre-used objects could contribute to the interpretation of the interior as an individualized private retreat. This was approached in three ways: by documenting actual living spaces to inform an understanding of inhabited space, by testing how juxtaposition of objects might allude to a narrative, and by arranging objects in constructed interior spaces to investigate how this can evoke a sense of inhabitation.

Figures 20-23 show documentation of objects within a space and suggest how combinations can imply different levels of human activity. Despite the variety of ways in which people live, the content of these images may indicate current use of a space through a shared cultural understanding of living spaces.



Figure 21 Armstrong, E. (2010). Documentation of occupied space, digital photograph.



Figure 22 Armstrong, E. (2010). Documentation of occupied space, digital photograph.



Figure 23 Armstrong, E. (2010). Documentation of occupied space, digital photograph.



Figure 26 Armstrong, E. (2010). Object juxtaposition test, pre-used objects.



Figure 27 Armstrong, E. (2010). Object juxtaposition test, pre-used objects.



Figure 28 Armstrong, E. (2010). Inhabited space test, pre-used objects.



Figure 29 Armstrong, E. (2010). Inhabited space test, pre-used objects.

I then tested objects inside the interior space I had previously constructed, considering how a combination of objects might suggest the narrative of a particular occupant or how the function of the objects might suggest a particular use of the space (see Figures 28-33).



Figure 30 Armstrong, E. (2010). Inhabited space test, pre-used objects.



Figure 31 Armstrong, E. (2010). Inhabited space test, pre-used objects.



Figure 32 Armstrong, E. (2010). Inhabited space test, pre-used objects.



Figure 33 Armstrong, E. (2010). Inhabited space test, pre-used objects.

Reflections:

There is a tendency to apply to 'things' a subjective significance that can evolve from personal or cultural experience. Christine Atha (2004) reveals the way in which this can be exploited in artworks that use objects:

Our interaction with these pieces becomes a means of understanding both the objects and the stories they can tell. If we accept the enactment of culture through objects then we invest meaning in them, place significance upon them and retrieve memories from them. (para. 12)

Overall I gained a clearer understanding of the way in which pre-used objects can operate as a vehicle for memory based on cultural and personal associations, although my initial approach was problematic. I combined different types of objects in an intuitive manner, looking for narrative content to evolve from the interactions. As I had not established any criteria over the selection of objects and therefore over any interpretations that might arise, the combinations didn't consistently convey the idea of a particular type of person or space. However, I recognised the implications of the pre-use and function of objects with regard to a sense of use. I considered how objects could be used to convey an essence of used space instead of attempting to dictate a specific story. By testing combinations that used varying numbers of objects I proposed that perhaps independent objects were ultimately not necessary to the notion of inhabited space and that wall and light fixtures may alone be sufficient to imply occupation of an interior in the absence of the body (see Figures 34, 35).

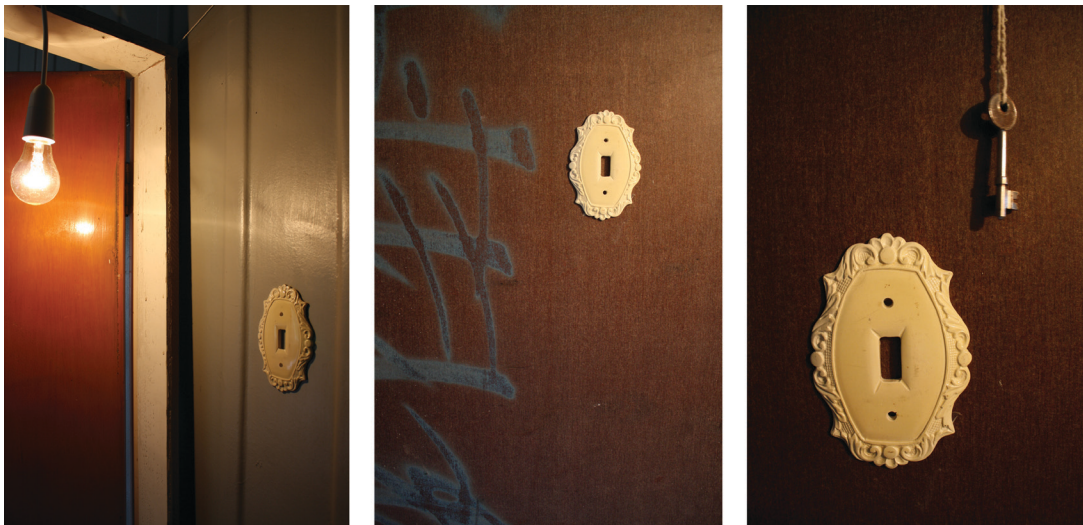


Figure 34 Armstrong, E. (2010). *Untitled*, digital photograph triptych.



Figure 35 Armstrong, E. (2010). *Untitled*, mixed media installation, variable dimensions.



Figure 36 Armstrong, E. (2010). Documentation of occupied space, digital photograph.

LIGHT SPACE

From early on in the project the single hanging light has been used as a fixture in experimentation (see Figures 33, 38, 39). The tungsten household light is used to explore ways in which a light may be able to imply occupation of a space in the absence of the body. Photography was employed to investigate how the quality of household tungsten light can imply a sense of current human presence (see Figures 36, 37, 41).



Figure 37 Armstrong, E. (2010). Documentation of occupied space, digital photograph.



Figure 38 Armstrong, E. (2010). *Untitled*, mixed media installation, variable dimensions.



Figure 39 Armstrong, E. (2010). Inhabited space test, pre-used objects.



Figure 40 Armstrong, E. (2010). Inhabited space test, pre-used objects.

Reflections:

A bare hanging light-bulb is significantly different from one with a lightshade. The former carries with it a sense of austerity, perhaps even dilapidation. As a bare bulb it can suggest an element of danger and therefore the sinister. Both these qualities can question the nature of the house space as a comfortable and familiar retreat and in this way reference the uncanny.

A lighted space, by implicating human presence and activity, can emphasise the exclusion of the viewer from a private space. For example, a lighted interior observed from a position of exclusion and darkness immediately registers as an occupied space, perhaps even a homely space. The viewer draws on the ideal notion of a shelter as a place of comfort and safety (see Figure 41). This type of light can be used as a visual and sensory means by which to imply a sense of occupied space and to arouse a corresponding sense of intrusion in the viewer (see Figures 40, 42).



Figure 41 Armstrong, E. (2010). Documentation of occupied space, digital photograph.



Figure 42 Armstrong, E. (2010). *Untitled*, mixed media installation, variable dimensions.



Figure 46 Armstrong, E. (2010). Inhabited space test (view through crack) pre-used objects.

ACCESSIBLE SPACE

In considering the implication of an interior as a private space in an installation practice, the issue of the position of the viewer is raised. By addressing the physical accessibility of the interior my aim was to test how the viewer might approach and interpret the space. Installing a security peephole in the front side of the door (see Figures 15-18) could invite the viewer to observe the interior and create a relationship of power between the gaze of the stranger and a potential occupant (see Figure 43). Paradoxically, the peephole is not necessary, as one can see through the cracks and holes in the structure (see Figures 44, 45, 46).



Figure 43 Armstrong, E. (2010). Inhabited space test (peephole view of interior), pre-used objects.

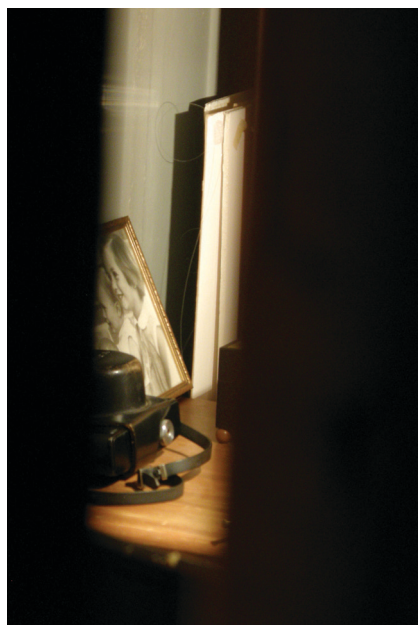


Figure 44 Armstrong, E. (2010). Inhabited space test (view through crack), pre-used objects.

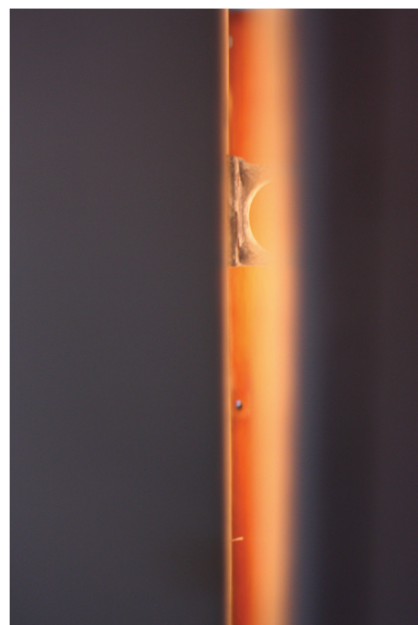


Figure 45 Armstrong, E. (2010). *Untitled (detail view through crack)*, mixed media installation.



Figure 49 Armstrong, E. (2010). Wooden doors and pre-used fixtures test.

The door used in the front of the initial structure (see Figure 14) was seen as being an entrance to the interior. The most immediate way to limit this perceived point of access was to remove the door handle, thereby forcing a change in the dynamic between the viewer and the structure (see Figure 47). I extended this idea by exchanging all of the existing plywood panels with pre-used doors. As objects in themselves the doors suggest access, yet presented as they are, handle-less and immobilized, they quickly deny entry (see Figures 49, 50). Where the handles have been removed, holes remain that can be utilized as peepholes by the viewer should they choose to access the inside in this way (see Figure 48).



Figure 47 Armstrong, E. (2010). Constructed interior test, pre-used wooden doors, 200 x 61 x 130 cm. approx.



Figure 48 Armstrong, E. (2010). Constructed interior test (detail), pre-used wooden doors, 200 x 61 x 130 cm. approx.



Figure 50 Armstrong, E. (2010). *Untitled*, mixed media installation, 200 x 130 x 160 cm. approx.

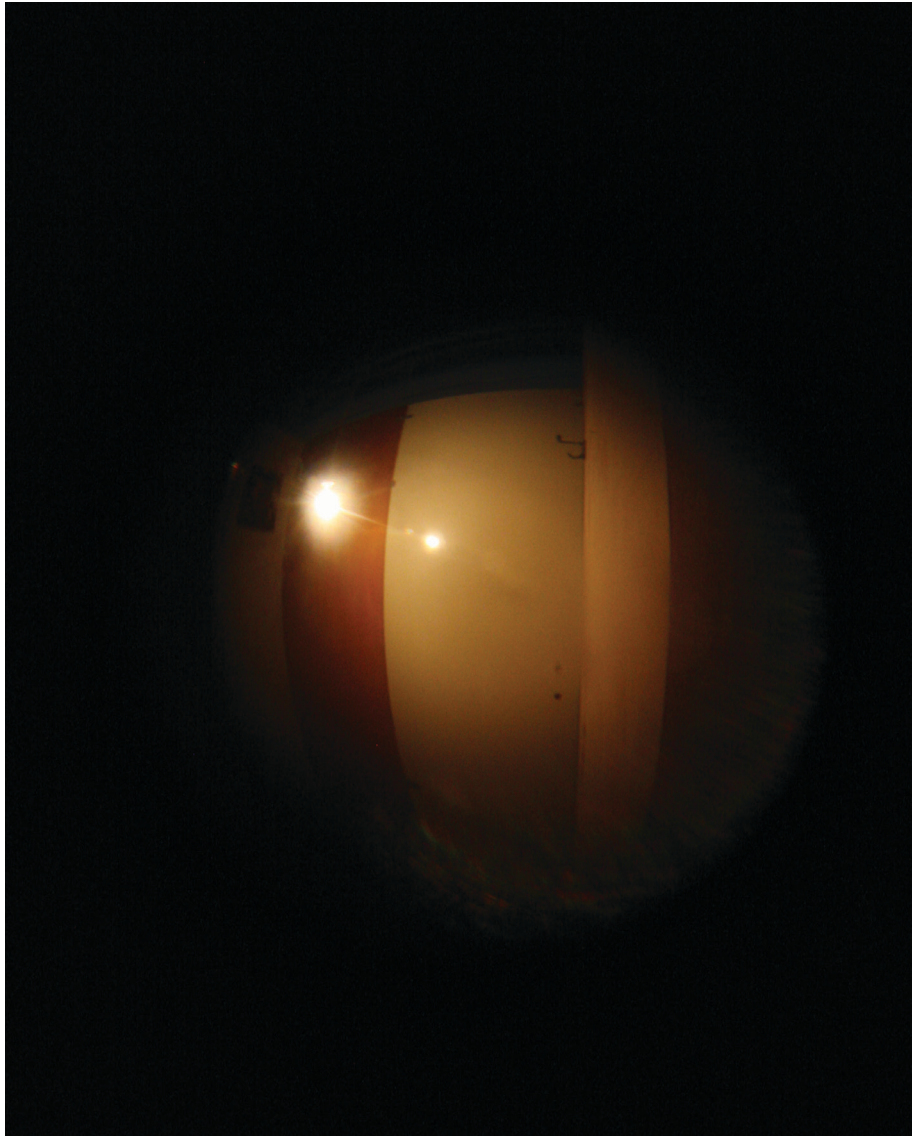


Figure 52 Armstrong, E. (2010). *Untitled (interior view detail)*, mixed media installation, 200 x 130 x 160 cm. approx.

Reflections:

By limiting access to the interior, I explored the possibility of creating a sense of uncertainty and curiosity in the viewer, thus drawing attention to their own position as a stranger to the space. I proposed that by doing this I might be able to activate the way in which the individual approaches and interprets an unfamiliar and potentially private space. This raises the question of permission and to some extent draws on the notion of voyeurism (see Figure 51). By installing a manufactured security peephole in the front of the structure I was openly inviting the viewer to visually access the interior and implying that a level of permission had been granted. In contrast, the pre-existing holes and cracks, most of which call for a repositioning of the body to enable viewing of the interior, do not indicate permission and have stronger connotations with viewing as a form of intruding on what might be private (see Figure 52).

The employment of visual access points draws on a natural curiosity of the viewer. A desire to view is paired with a mild apprehension of what might be discovered (see Figure 53). What and how much I choose to then present to the viewer's gaze significantly alters the perception of the space and whether it is occupied or empty, private or public. This interest in how far I can limit access also poses the problem of defining the point at which the work might begin to lose meaning or fail to intrigue the viewer.



Figure 51 Armstrong, E. (2010). *Untitled*, video still.



Figure 53 Armstrong, E. (2010). *Untitled*, mixed media installation, 130 x 200 x 160 cm. approx.



Figure 56 Armstrong, E. (2010). Photoshop composite of work in gallery space, view towards back of 'Exhibition Space 1'.



Figure 55 Armstrong, E. (2010). View of gallery towards 'Exhibition Space 3'.

GALLERY SPACE

In considering the work in a gallery context, I aimed to examine the spatial implications of the structure within an existing exhibition space. As a site for installation the gallery interior becomes a component of the work. The gallery chosen for the final exhibition has three partitioned spaces that can be used (see Figures 54, 55).

As it was not possible to physically test the installation in the space prior to the final exhibition, Photoshop composites (see Figure 56) were used to suggest ways in which the relationship between the built structure and the surrounding space of the gallery can contribute to notions of interior and exterior, which are relevant to corresponding notions of private and public space.

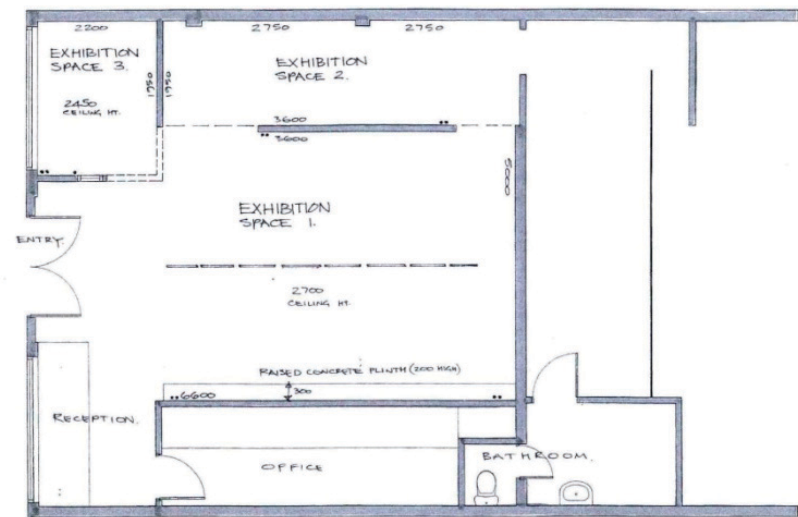


Figure 54 Armstrong, E. (2010). Plan of gallery space showing three exhibition spaces.

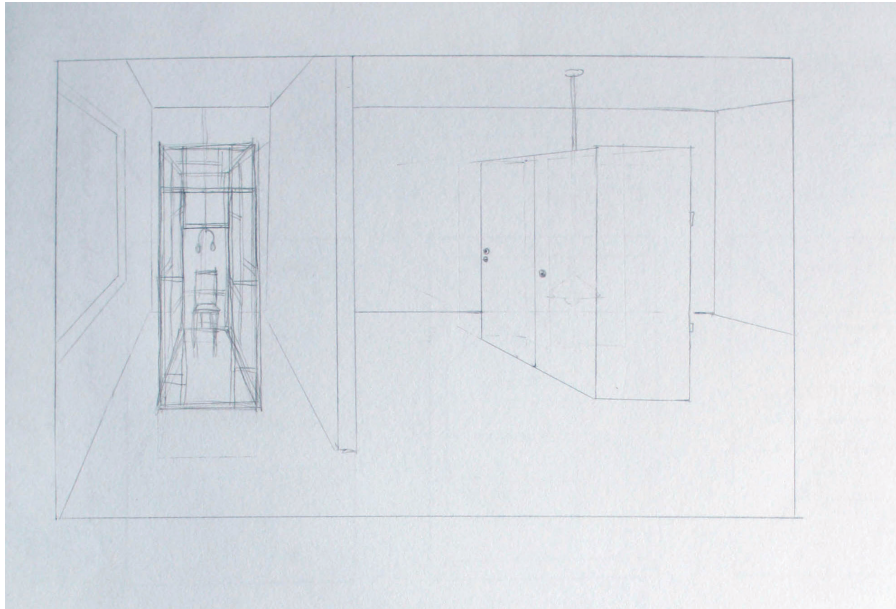


Figure 57 Armstrong, E. (2010). Workbook sketch of gallery space and proposed installation.

Reflections:

When I transported the practical work from the studio to a test gallery space it was immediately apparent that the size, chosen for its intimate nature was too small and the connotations of an actual bathroom or closet space within the gallery were too strong. Subsequently the size of the interior was extended so as to appear more ambiguous (compare Figures 47 and 50).

Considering the final exhibition space as site raised awareness of the potential for the structure to be regarded as independent of the surrounding space. The gallery space could be more successfully activated as a component of the installation by transforming and incorporating the walls of the existing gallery interior and also by addressing the way in which multiple structures can operate within this space.

A plan was developed for a second piece to be included in the exhibition which relates to the first piece in a reciprocal way in terms of access, visibility and notions of inside and outside within the gallery (see Figures 57, 58, 59). The intention is that this will contribute to the activation of space surrounding and between the two structures (see Figures 59, 60).

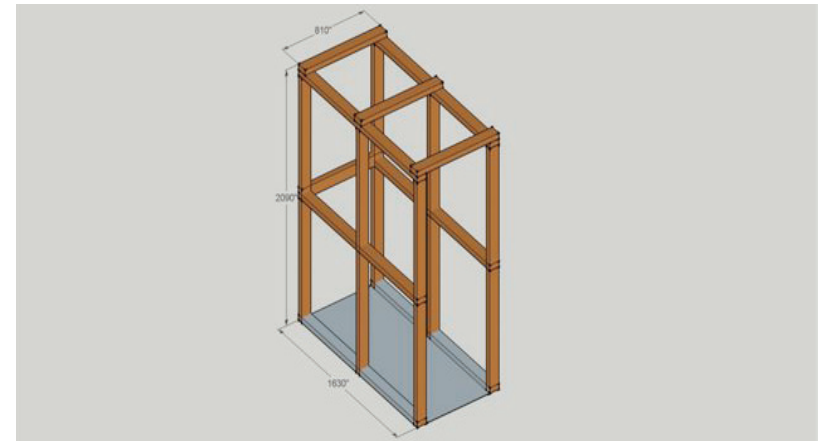


Figure 58 Armstrong, E. (2010). CAD Design digital image for second structure.



Figure 59 Armstrong, E. (2010). Test of second constructed space, 230 x 130 x 120 cm. approx.



Figure 60 Armstrong, E. (2010). *Untitled*, mixed media installation, 200 x 130 x 160 cm. approx.

Final Exhibition

The final exhibition was held at the Laundromat Art Project Space, 92 Second Ave in Tauranga. Because the space was not available until four days prior to the exhibition, much of the experimentation of the placement of the installation components and how they relate to the gallery space was undertaken as the exhibition was being installed.

Before installing in the gallery I made the decision to utilize all three potential exhibition spaces as indicated in the floor plan (see Figure 54). My intention was to activate these spaces in a way that would create a sense of both interior and exterior space in relation to the position of the body within the overall interior of the gallery. The number, shape and dimensions of the structures to be built were decided according to how each one would operate both within the individual exhibition spaces and in relation to the other structures.



Figure 62 Armstrong, E. (2010). Installation process using paper templates.

The use of paper templates provided a preliminary idea of the spatial relationships before the structures were erected. The three components of the installation are all rectangular in shape reflecting the obvious form of the interior as shelter in Western culture.

The largest structure was placed in 'Exhibition Space 1' and positioned in front of the entrance (see Figure 61) where the intention was that the viewer would be confronted with the physicality of the structure and its ambiguous nature. The viewer would then have to walk around it and into the space between the three structures (see Figure 62). Using the templates the positioning was determined according to the way in which the shapes could be angled to activate 'corners' and dark space where the viewer might gain a sense of being semi-enclosed while also being 'on the outside', prompting an awareness of the implications of the relationship between interior and exterior space and private and public space. By providing opportunity for the obscuration of the body the intention is that the viewer might experience a sense of privacy themselves in certain parts of the installation, despite not having access to the interior of the built enclosures (see Figures 63-68).



Figure 61 Armstrong, E. (2010). Installation process using paper templates.



Figure 63 Armstrong, E. (2010). View of final exhibition from front of gallery space.



Figure 64 Armstrong, E. (2010). Structure 1 & 2, pre-used wooden doors.



Figure 65 Armstrong, E. (2010). View to the right of structure 1, pre-used wooden doors.



Figure 66 Armstrong, E. (2010). Structure 2, pre-used wooden doors, 198 x 76 x 233 cm.



Figure 67 Armstrong, E. (2010). Structure 2, pre-used wooden doors, 198 x 76 x 233 cm.



Figure 68 Armstrong, E. (2010). View from rear of gallery towards Structure 3.



Figure 69 Armstrong, E. (2010). Structure 1, 2 & 3, pre-used wooden doors.

Like the positioning of the structures, the lighting could not be fully tested before the installation of the work in the gallery space. Hanging bulbs were installed and adjusted to a height that would allow the rays of light to be seen reflected on the ceiling. The visible light alludes to the interior as a potentially occupied space and emphasises the exclusion of the viewer (see Figures 69, 70, 71).

The uniform style of the pre-used doors was intended to question the purpose of the interiors. Are these living spaces, or working spaces? Selected for their utilitarian and non-decorative nature these doors create a sense of sparseness, perhaps of dilapidation, thus contradicting the idea of comfort that is associated with the warm tone of tungsten light.



Figure 70 Armstrong, E. (2010). View of structure 3 through gallery street window, pre-used wooden doors.



Figure 71 Armstrong, E. (2010). Structure 3, pre-used wooden doors.



Figure 72 Armstrong, E. (2010). Individual object test, ashtray.



Figure 73 Armstrong, E. (2010). Individual object test, rubber glove.



Figure 74 Armstrong, E. (2010). Individual object test, carpet.

As pre-used objects themselves the doors and their physical condition present a history of use that is drawn upon to suggest traces of the body and subsequently the apparent absence of the body. In addition, I elaborated on this history by fabricating wear and tear and adding fixtures such as wallpaper to add to the sense of prior use. I was interested in the way we interpret 'used' spaces as occupied or unoccupied and how this could be fabricated or manipulated.

Through the project research the interiors were refined to contain only fixtures so as to concentrate on the idea of an interior as a used space, rather than on the possible narratives of singular objects. This was further considered in the preparation of the final installation during which items were again tested to see how they affected the sense of occupation, and from this the degree of information that each structure would contain was determined (see Figures 72, 73, 74). Whereas structure three is completely empty but for the hanging bulb, structure one and two contain wallpaper, fixtures and carpet in varying degrees to question the point at which (if ever) an interior becomes empty of a sense of presence.



Figure 75 Armstrong, E. (2010). Photo showing viewer participation with installation.



Figure 76 Armstrong, E. (2010). Photo showing viewer participation with installation.

In some cases viewers were inclined to interact only with the 'exterior' space around the structures within the gallery, and did not wish to or perhaps were not aware of the potential to see inside the structures. From this viewpoint it was hoped that the viewer would gain a sense of the ambiguity of the relationship between interiority and exteriority as they consider their own position in the space, and also explore the subtleties of the worn and marked doors and the allusion to possible histories of use.

The denial of physical access to the interiors removed the premise of permission, and in choosing to view the interior through the 'peepholes' the viewer simulates the establishing of, and breaking down of, perceived notions of interiority and privacy (see Figures 75, 76). The gallery layout, in particular Exhibition space 3 (see Figure 76), added a further dimension to the installation by allowing the viewer to be viewed from the street outside as they in turn viewed the interior of the structure. This places the body in a position between interiority and exteriority and to a certain extent between public and private space as while they can be seen from outside the gallery, from within the main area of the gallery the viewer is hidden from sight.

The view through the holes left from removed door handles and cracks in the structures provided only limited and fragmented information of the contents, forcing the viewer to seek out other vantage points in attempt to satisfy their curiosity (see Figures 77-83). The installation of several peephole security viewers disrupted the expected spatial perception of the interior and gave a greater sense of enclosure and interiority to the structure (see Figure 77).

Some of the holes were intentionally blocked up with paper or newspaper to further confuse the notion of privacy. During the process of the exhibition some of this newspaper was pulled out by a viewer and the decision was made to leave this on the ground as evidence of presence and also to raise the issue of permission.

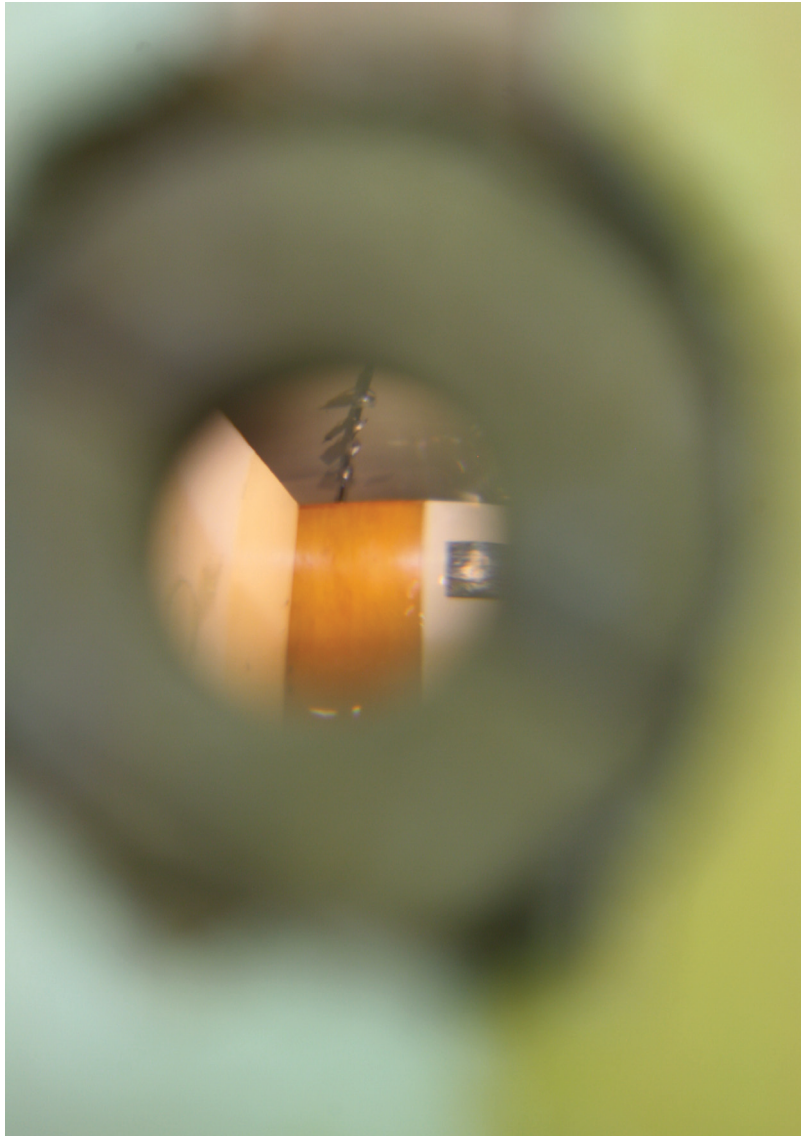


Figure 77 Armstrong, E. (2010). View of Structure 1 interior through peephole with security viewer.

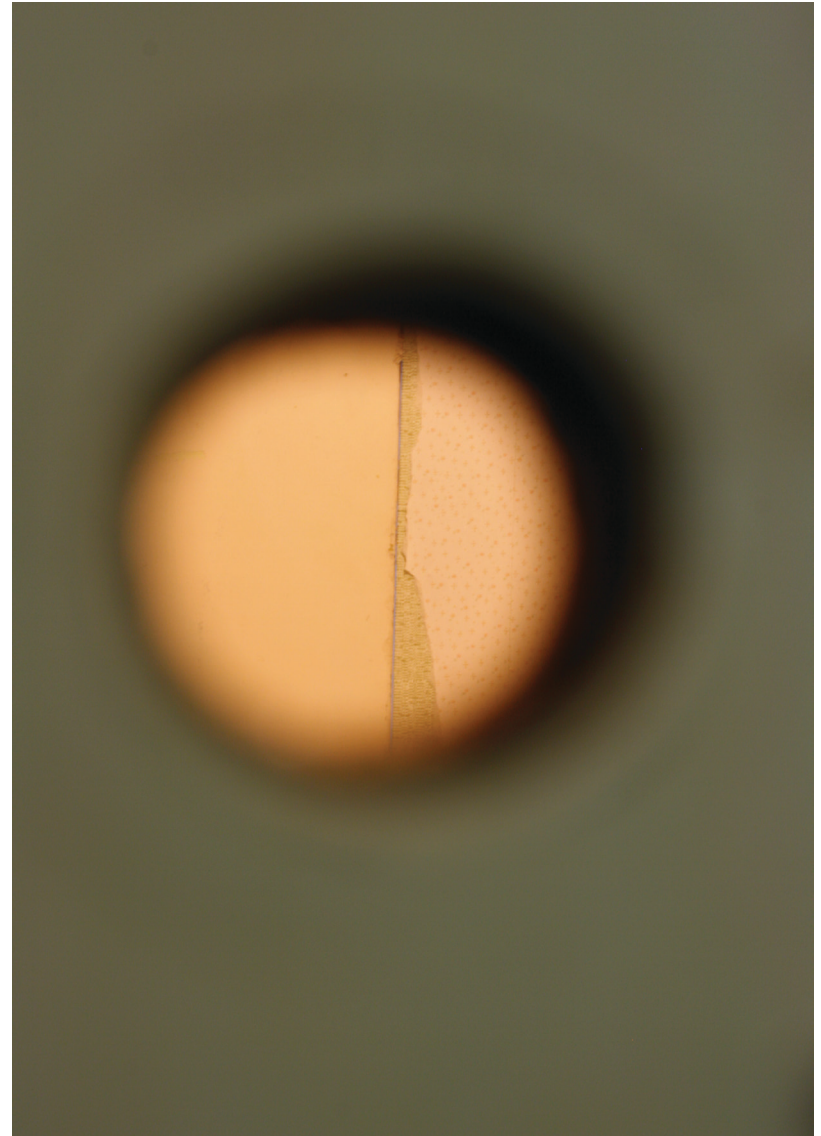


Figure 78 Armstrong, E. (2010). View through peephole left from removal of door handle.



Figure 79 Armstrong, E. (2010). Removal of door handles leaves holes for viewing.



Figure 80 Armstrong, E. (2010). Hole blocked with newspaper.

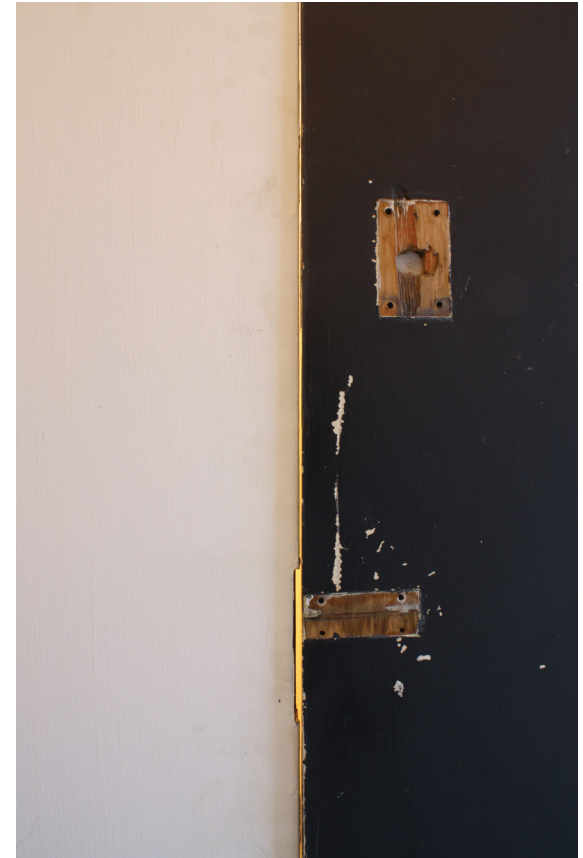


Figure 81 Armstrong, E. (2010). Blocked hole.



Figure 82 Armstrong, E. (2010). View through crack (wallpaper).



Figure 83 Armstrong, E. (2010). View through crack (wallpaper).

Turning On the Light

In *The Poetics of Space*, Gaston Bachelard (1964) proposes that “A living creature fills an empty refuge, images inhabit, and all corners are haunted, if not inhabited” (p. 140). An innate understanding of the potential for an interior to house a body arouses suspicion of all interiors in the mind of the approaching individual: Is it occupied? Do I have permission? One way in which this may be determined is through evidence of use.

Objects within a space can operate as the residue of experience and use in the absence of the body and indicate that the space has been pre-occupied. However, it is perhaps the presence of an illuminated electric light that is key to proposing the return of the occupant and subsequently evoking in the stranger a sense of intrusion. The illuminated tungsten light can evoke a sense of present occupation that questions the individual’s right to access the space.

In its capacity to include and exclude an interior can provide an intimate space of seclusion. However, there is a duality of meaning that can occur with regard to the nature of the interior, as it can function both as a sanctuary and a place of confinement. In the manner of a heuristic investigation, a number of contrasts have arisen and been embraced in the exploration of the project, having stemmed from the dialectic relationship

of interior and exterior. The research undertaken has suggested that the boundary that defines interdependent yet opposing states such as interior and exterior, light and dark, is a shifting one. As each state refers to its present iteration it also invites consideration of its opposite. For example, light space invites dark space, sanctuary invites invasion. Yet, as the boundary shifts towards one extreme or the other there is also the potential for overlap, creating a grey space of uncertainty. The relationship between private and public space is similarly complex and the transition from public to private and vice versa, is across a liminal boundary that has many levels.

An increasing awareness of the potential for the blurring of boundaries between contradictions, gradually led to the exploration of this ambiguity within the physical works themselves. Creating an opportunity for this sense of uncertainty to be experienced in installation can lead to the questioning of the nature of the space. By investigating the ambiguity between notions of interior and exterior, light and dark, familiar and unfamiliar, accessibility and inaccessibility, presence and absence, and private and public, the subjectivity of the limits within which these relationships can operate is revealed.

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