

FANTASIES OF 'HOME-MAKING' IN THE WORKS OF YIN XIUZHEN,

MONA HATOUM AND NIKKI S. LEE

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ABSTRACT

This thesis conducts interrelated monographic studies on a selection of artworks made by three women artists, Yin Xiuzhen, Mona Hatoum and Nikki S. Lee in the 1990s and 2000s, which provide productive ways of imagining subjects' encounters with foreign places and other bodies in an increasingly interconnected, yet unevenly developed globalized world. By employing quotidian household materials, objects and banal labour, these artists, in their practices, investigate notions of home and belonging in a constant state of transregional, transnational movement and exchange. On the basis of their itineraries throughout multiple local dwelling environments, they construct their artworks as affective objects or spaces of mediation to engage themselves and viewers in various inter-bodily, intersubjective and intercultural communications and contradictions. By drawing on the works of feminist scholars, such as Luce Irigaray, Sara Ahmed, Iris Marion Young and Alison Weir, this thesis develops a theoretical framework underpinned by post-structural, post-colonial feminist theories and psychoanalytic discourses, exploring a number of contradictory terms related to 'home-making', including placement and displacement, construction and preservation, habitation and uprootedness, and domesticity and publicity.

TABLE OF CONTENTS

ABSTRACT	2
CONTENTS	3
LIST OF ILLUSTRATIONS.....	5
ACKNOWLEDGEMENT	12
AUTHOR’S DECLARATION.....	13
INTRODUCTION.....	14
CHAPTER I	45
YIN XIUZHEN’S FABRICATION OF ‘HOME’: A LEGACY OF DOMESTIC ‘PRESERVATION’	45
Portable Suitcases: The Immediate ‘Home’	51
Fabric Cavities: Fabricating ‘Strange Encounters’	74
Fluid Sites: Participation and Antagonism	98
CHAPTER II	118
MONA HATOUM’S CONSTRUCTION OF ‘HOME’: CONNECTION AND CONFLICT	118
The ‘Bedroom’: A Prison-like Domicile	126
The ‘Kitchen’: An Animated Fairy Tale of Domesticity	140
Artistic Residencies: One ‘Home’ After Another.....	159

CHAPTER III.....	187
NIKKI S. LEE'S <i>PROJECTS</i> : 'HOME' AS A STAGED PERFORMANCE OF 'BEING IN COMMUNITY'	187
'Drag': Gender Performance and Community 'Belonging'	193
'Passing': A Voluntary Racial or Ethnic Impersonation.....	218
'Simulacra': Virtual Citizenship and Collectivity	245
CONCLUSION	266
APPENDIX	281
BIBLIOGRAPHY	349

LIST OF ILLUSTRATIONS

1. Yin Xiuzhen. *Portable Cities* series, 2001-present; the exhibition view at Ausstellungsansicht Hong Kong Art Centre in 2010. Courtesy of Pace Beijing, Beijing. (Pace Beijing database).
2. Mona Hatoum. *Beirut, Lebanon*, 2000. Courtesy of Fondazione Querini Stampalia, Venice/ Mona Hatoum. (Bertola, 2009, p. 53).
3. Mona Hatoum. *Berlin, Germany*, 2008. Courtesy of Fondazione Querini Stampalia, Venice/ Mona Hatoum. (Bertola, 2009, p. 64).
4. Mona Hatoum. *Cairo, Egypt*, 1998. Courtesy of Fondazione Querini Stampalia, Venice/ Mona Hatoum. (Bertola, 2009, p. 45).
5. Mona Hatoum. *Sabbathday Lake Shaker Village, Maine, USA*, 2000. Courtesy of Fondazione Querini Stampalia, Venice/ Mona Hatoum. (Bertola, 2009, p. 38).
6. Nikki S. Lee. *The Yuppie Project (17)*, 1998. Courtesy of the artist and Sikkema Jenkins & Co, New York. (Sikkema Jenkins database).
7. Nikki S. Lee. *The Swinger Project (29)*, 1999. Courtesy of the artist and Sikkema Jenkins & Co, New York. (Sikkema Jenkins database).
8. Nikki S. Lee. *The Hispanic Project (11)*, 1998. Courtesy of the artist and Sikkema Jenkins & Co, New York. (Sikkema Jenkins database).
9. Nikki S. Lee. *The Exotic Dancers Project (18)*, 2000. Courtesy of the artist and Sikkema Jenkins & Co, New York. (Sikkema Jenkins database).
10. Mona Hatoum. *Chain*, 1999. Phonograph: Jo ð Damase. le Creux de l'enfer, Centre d'art Contemporain, Thiers, France. (Renton, 2006, p. 32)
11. Yin Xiuzhen. *Dress Box*, 1995. Beijing Contemporary Art Museum, Beijing. (Wu, Hou and Rosenthal, 2015, p. 60).
12. Yin Xiuzhen. *Dress Box* (detail), 1995. Beijing Contemporary Art Museum, Beijing. (Wu, Hou and Rosenthal, 2015, p. 61)
13. Yin Xiuzhen. *Suitcases I*, 2000. Earl Lu Gallery, Lasalle Gallery, Singapore. (Lv Jingjing & Zhang Xiyuan, 2012, p. 94)
14. Yin Xiuzhen. *Suitcases II*, 2000. Fukuoka Asian Art Museum, Fukuoka, Japan. (Lv & Zhang, 2012, p. 96)
15. Marcel Duchamp. *La Boîte-en-valise*, 1935-1941. The Museum of Modern Art, New York. (MOMA database)

16. Vivian Sundaram. *Box Three: Home* (from *The Sher-Gil Archive*), 1995. Courtesy of the artist. (Asian Art Archive database).
17. Yin Xiuzhen. *Portable City: Beijing*, 2001. National Art Museum of China, Beijing. (Lv & Zhang, 2012, p. 103)
18. Yin Xiuzhen. *Portable City: Shanghai*, 2002. Walker Art Centre, Minneapolis, U.S.A. (Pace Beijing database).
19. Yin Xiuzhen. *Portable City: Paris*, 2004. Sherman Contemporary Art Foundation, Sydney. (Lv & Zhang, 2012, p. 151).
20. Yin Xiuzhen. *Portable Cities*, 2001-present; the exhibition view at the Kunsthalle Düsseldorf, 2013. Kunsthalle Düsseldorf, Düsseldorf. (Kunsthalle Düsseldorf database).
21. Yin Xiuzhen. *Engine*, 2008. Courtesy of Pace Beijing, Beijing. (Pace Beijing database).
22. Yin Xiuzhen. *Thought*, 2009. Courtesy of Pace Beijing, Beijing. (Pace Beijing database).
23. Yin Xiuzhen. *Thought* (interior), 2009. Courtesy of Pace Beijing, Beijing. (Pace Beijing database).
24. Yin Xiuzhen. *Skin Cube*, 2009. The Pace Gallery, Beijing. (Pace Beijing database).
25. Donald Rodney. *In the House of My Father*, 1996-1997. The Estate of Donald G. Rodney, London. (Tate Collection database)
26. Yin Xiuzhen. *Skin Cube* (with the presence of the viewer), 2009. Courtesy of Pace Beijing, Beijing. (Pace Beijing database).
27. Yin Xiuzhen. *Introspective Cavity* (the artist's hand script), 2008. Courtesy of Pace Beijing, Beijing. (Provided by Yin Xiuzhen).
28. Yin Xiuzhen. *Introspective Cavity*, 2008. Courtesy of Pace Beijing, Beijing. (Pace Beijing database).
29. Yin Xiuzhen. *Introspective Cavity* (interior), 2008. Courtesy of Pace Beijing, Beijing. (Pace Beijing database).
30. Frederick Kiesler. *Endless House*, 1950. Austrian Frederick and Lillian Kiesler Private Foundation, Vienna. (Austrian Frederick and Lillian Kiesler Private Foundation database).
31. Naito Rei. *One Place on Earth* (interior), 1991. Courtesy of the artist. (Meyers, 2006, p. 13).

32. Yin Xiuzhen. *Restroom W or Restroom (Women)*, 2006. REDCAT, Los Angeles. (REDCAT database).
33. Carl Andre. *Fall*, 1968. Solomon R. Guggenheim Museum, New York. (Solomon R. Guggenheim Museum database).
34. Yin Xiuzhen. *Restroom W or Restroom (Women)* (with the presence of viewers), 2006. REDCAT, Los Angeles. (REDCAT database).
35. Yin Xiuzhen. *Restroom W or Restroom (Women)* (a close-up of the baby boy sculpture), 2006. REDCAT, Los Angeles. (Lv & Zhang, 2012, p. 191).
36. Yin Xiuzhen. *Beijing Opera*, 2001. Hamburger Bahnhof Contemporary Art Museum, Berlin. (Lv & Zhang, 2012, p. 110).
37. Yin Xiuzhen. *Beijing Opera* (the exhibition view), 2001. Hamburger Bahnhof Contemporary Art Museum, Berlin. (Lv & Zhang, 2012, p. 111).
38. Yin Xiuzhen. *Flying Machine*, 2008. Shanghai Art Museum, Shanghai. (Spalding, 2008, p. 67).
39. Yin Xiuzhen. *Flying Machine* (the 3-D image), 2008. Shanghai Art Museum, Shanghai. (Provided by Yin Xiuzhen).
40. Yin Xiuzhen. *Flying Machine* (interior), 2008. Shanghai Art Museum, Shanghai. (Pace Beijing database).
41. Mona Hatoum. *Measures of Distance*, 1988. Mona Hatoum. Courtesy of White Cube Gallery, London. (Tate Collection database).
42. Mona Hatoum. *Quarters*, 1996. Courtesy of White Cube gallery, London. (Archer, Brett, and de Zegher, 1997, p. 61).
43. Robert Gober. *Pitched Crib*, 1987. Courtesy of the artist and Paula Cooper Gallery, New York. (Foster, 2004, p. 316, Fig. 8.7).
44. Robert Gober. *X Playpen*, 1987. Courtesy the artist and Paula Cooper Gallery, New York. (MOMA database).
45. Mona Hatoum. *Incommunicado*, 1993. Tate Gallery, London. (Archer, Brett, and de Zegher, 1997, p. 22).
46. Mona Hatoum. *Untitled (Baalbeck Birdcage)*, 1999. Alexander and Bonin Gallery, New York. (Heon, 2001, p. 43).
47. Mona Hatoum. *Cage-à-deux*, 2002. Centro de Arte de Salamanca, Salamanca. (Renton, 2006, p. 15).
48. Mona Hatoum. *Kapan*, 2012. ARTER, Istanbul, Turkey. (ARTER database).
49. Mona Hatoum. *La Grande Broyeuse (Mouli-Julienne×17)*, 1999. le Creux de

- l'enfer ,Thiers, France; Courtesy of Alexander and Bonin, New York. (Heon, 2001, p. 34-35).
50. Mona Hatoum. *Slicer*, 1999. le Creux de l'enfer ,Thiers, France; Courtesy of Mona Hatoum and White Cube Gallery, London. (Heon, 2001, p. 39).
 51. Mona Hatoum. *Grater Divide*, 2002. Sculpture. Centro de Arte de Salamanca, Salamanca. (Garb, 2002, p. 62).
 52. Mona Hatoum. *Sous Tension*, 1999. le Creux de l'enfer ,Thiers, France; Courtesy of the Artist and Alexander and Bonin, New York. (Heon, 2001, p. 55).
 53. Mona Hatoum. *Homebound*, 2000. Tate Gallery, London; Courtesy of White Cube Gallery, London. (Tate Collection database).
 54. Mona Hatoum. *Mobile Home*, 2005. Courtesy of Alexander and Bonin, New York. (Renton, 2006, pp. 66-67).
 55. Mona Hatoum. *Keffieh*, 1993-1999. Collection of Peter Norton, Santa Monica.. (Panhans-Bühler, Uwe M. Schneede et al. eds., 2004, p. 37).
 56. Janine Antoni. *Loving Care*, 1992. Anthony d'Offay Gallery, London; Courtesy of Sandra Gering Gallery, New York. (Rinehart and Ippolito, 2014, p. 183).
 57. Doris Salcedo. *Unland: Audible in the Mouth*, 1998. Tate Foundation, London. (Tate Collection database).
 58. Mona Hatoum. *Recollection*, 1995. Beguinage St. Elizabeth, Kortrijk, Belgium. Collection of De Vleeshal, Middelburg, The Netherlands. (Archer, Brett, and de Zegher, 1997, p. 92).
 59. Mona Hatoum. *Recollection* (detail), 1995. Beguinage St. Elizabeth, Kortrijk, Belgium. Collection of De Vleeshal, Middelburg, The Netherlands. (Archer, Brett, and de Zegher, 1997, p. 101).
 60. Mona Hatoum. *Recollection* (detail), 1995. Beguinage St. Elizabeth, Kortrijk, Belgium. Collection of De Vleeshal, Middelburg, The Netherlands. (Archer, Brett, and de Zegher, 1997, p. 103).
 61. Mona Hatoum. *Present Tense*, 1996. Courtesy of Anadiel Gallery, Jerusalem. (Archer, Brett, and de Zegher, 1997, p. 27).
 62. Mona Hatoum. *Afghan (red and black)*, 2008. Courtesy of Mona Hatoum and White Cube Gallery, London. (White Cube Gallery database).
 63. Mona Hatoum. *Baluchi (Blue and Orange)*, 2008. Courtesy of the artist and Galerie Max Hetzler, Berlin. (Bertola, 2009, p. 147).
 64. Mona Hatoum. *Chain*, 1999. Phonograph: Jo ð Damase. le Creux de l'enfer, Centre d'art Contemporain, Thiers, France. (Heon, 2001, p. 45).

65. Mona Hatoum. *Mano a mano*, 2001. Courtesy of Laboratorio Arte Alameda, Mexico City. (Palma, Paloma Porraz Fraser ed., 2001, p. 46).
66. Mona Hatoum. *Mano a mano* (detail), 2001. Courtesy of Laboratorio Arte Alameda, Mexico City. (Palma, Paloma Porraz Fraser ed., 2001, p. 47).
67. Nikki S. Lee. *The Seniors Project (13)*, 1999. Courtesy of the artist and Sikkema Jenkins & Co, New York. (Sikkema Jenkins database).
68. Nikki S. Lee. *The Young Japanese (East Village) Project (1)*, 1997. Courtesy of the artist and Sikkema Jenkins & Co, New York. (Sikkema Jenkins database).
69. Nikki S. Lee. *The Hispanic Project (13)*, 1998. Courtesy of the artist and Sikkema Jenkins & Co, New York. (Sikkema Jenkins database).
70. Nikki S. Lee. *The Exotic Dancers Project (2)*, 2000. Courtesy of the artist and Sikkema Jenkins & Co, New York. (Sikkema Jenkins database).
71. Nikki S. Lee. *The Drag Queen Project (2)*, 1997. Courtesy of the artist and Sikkema Jenkins & Co, New York. (Sikkema Jenkins database).
72. Nikki S. Lee. *The Drag Queen Project (5)*, 1997. Courtesy of the artist and Sikkema Jenkins & Co, New York. (Sikkema Jenkins database).
73. Nikki S. Lee. *The Lesbian Project (11)*, 1997. Courtesy of the artist and Sikkema Jenkins & Co, New York. (Sikkema Jenkins database).
74. Nikki S. Lee. *The Lesbian Project (4)*, 1997. Courtesy of the artist and Sikkema Jenkins & Co, New York. (Sikkema Jenkins database).
75. Nikki S. Lee. *The Lesbian Project (14)*, 1997. Courtesy of the artist and Sikkema Jenkins & Co, New York. (Sikkema Jenkins database).
76. Nikki S. Lee. *The Lesbian Project (3)*, 1997. Courtesy of the artist and Sikkema Jenkins & Co, New York. (Sikkema Jenkins database).
77. Nikki S. Lee. *The Exotic Dancers Project (33)*, 2000. Courtesy of the artist and Sikkema Jenkins & Co, New York. (Sikkema Jenkins database).
78. Nikki S. Lee. *The Exotic Dancers Project (34)*, 2000. Courtesy of the artist and Sikkema Jenkins & Co, New York. (Sikkema Jenkins database).
79. Nikki S. Lee. *The Exotic Dancers Project (29)*, 2000. Courtesy of the artist and Sikkema Jenkins & Co, New York. (Sikkema Jenkins database).
80. Nikki S. Lee. *The Exotic Dancers Project (13)*, 2000. Courtesy of the artist and Sikkema Jenkins & Co, New York. (Sikkema Jenkins database).
81. Nikki S. Lee. *The Yuppie Project (4)*, 1998. Courtesy of the artist and Sikkema Jenkins & Co, New York. (Sikkema Jenkins database).

82. Nikki S. Lee. *The Yuppie Project (5)*, 1998. Courtesy of the artist and Sikkema Jenkins & Co, New York. (Sikkema Jenkins database).
83. Nikki S. Lee. *The Yuppie Project (23)*, 1998. Courtesy of the artist and Sikkema Jenkins & Co, New York. (Sikkema Jenkins database).
84. Nikki S. Lee. *The Swinger Project (4)*, 1999. Courtesy of the artist and Sikkema Jenkins & Co, New York. (Sikkema Jenkins database).
85. Nikki S. Lee. *The Swinger Project (53)*, 1999. Courtesy of the artist and Sikkema Jenkins & Co, New York. (Sikkema Jenkins database).
86. Nikki S. Lee. *The Hip Hop Project (1)*, 2001. Courtesy of the artist and Sikkema Jenkins & Co, New York. (Sikkema Jenkins database).
87. Nikki S. Lee. *The Hip Hop Project (19)*, 2001. Courtesy of the artist and Sikkema Jenkins & Co, New York. (Sikkema Jenkins database).
88. Nikki S. Lee. *The Hispanic Project (19)*, 1998. Courtesy of the artist and Sikkema Jenkins & Co, New York. (Sikkema Jenkins database).
89. Nikki S. Lee. *The Hispanic Project (1)*, 1998. Courtesy of the artist and Sikkema Jenkins & Co, New York. (Sikkema Jenkins database).
90. Nikki S. Lee. *The Hispanic Project (17)*, 1998. Courtesy of the artist and Sikkema Jenkins & Co, New York. (Sikkema Jenkins database).
91. Nikki S. Lee. *The Punk Project (7)*, 1997. Courtesy of the artist and Sikkema Jenkins & Co, New York. (Sikkema Jenkins database).
92. Nikki S. Lee. *The Punk Project (6)*, 1997. Courtesy of the artist and Sikkema Jenkins & Co, New York. (Sikkema Jenkins database).
93. Nikki S. Lee. *The Punk Project (1)*, 1997. Courtesy of the artist and Sikkema Jenkins & Co, New York. (Sikkema Jenkins database).
94. Nikki S. Lee. *The Young Japanese (East Village) Project (13)*, 1997. Courtesy of the artist and Sikkema Jenkins & Co, New York. (Sikkema Jenkins database).
95. Nikki S. Lee. *The Young Japanese (East Village) Project (11)*, 1997. Courtesy of the artist and Sikkema Jenkins & Co, New York. (Sikkema Jenkins database).
96. Nikki S. Lee. *The Schoolgirls Project (14)*, 2000. Courtesy of the artist and Sikkema Jenkins & Co, New York. (Sikkema Jenkins database).
97. Nikki S. Lee. *The Schoolgirls Project (3)*, 2000. Courtesy of the artist and Sikkema Jenkins & Co, New York. (Sikkema Jenkins database).
98. Nikki S. Lee. *The Schoolgirls Project (28)*, 2000. Courtesy of the artist and Sikkema Jenkins & Co, New York. (Sikkema Jenkins database).

99. Nikki S. Lee. *The Yuppie Project (7) (8) (9) (10)*, 1998. Courtesy of the artist and Sikkema Jenkins & Co, New York. (Sikkema Jenkins database).
100. Do-Ho Suh. *Seoul Home/L.A. Home/New York Home/Baltimore Home/London Home/Seattle Home*, 1999. The Museum of Contemporary Art, Los Angeles; Courtesy of the Artist and Lehmann Maupin Gallery, New York. (The Korean Cultural Centre database).
101. Do-Ho Suh. *Seoul Home/L.A. Home/New York Home/Baltimore Home/London Home/Seattle Home*, 1999. The Korean Cultural Centre, Los Angeles. (The Korean Cultural Centre database).
102. Do-Ho Suh. *Seoul Home/L.A. Home/New York Home/Baltimore Home/London Home/Seattle Home*, 1999. The Korean Cultural Centre, Los Angeles. (The Korean Cultural Centre database).
103. Do-Ho Suh. *348 West 22nd Street, apt. A, New York, NY10011*, Edition of 2, 2000. Courtesy of the artist and Lehmann Maupin Gallery, New York. (Kee, Grenville ed., 2003, p. 71).
104. Yoko Ono. *Wish Tree*, 1996; the installation view at the Japan Society, New York, 2007. Courtesy of the artist. (The Japan Society database).
105. Emiko Kasahara. *SHEER*, 2007. The Japan Society, New York. (Emiko Kasahara website).
106. On megumi Akiyoshi. *Flower Gallery*, 2007. The Japan Society, New York. (On megumi Akiyoshi website).
107. Emily Jacir. *Where We Come From*, 2001-2003, detail (Munir). Photo: Bill Orcutt. Courtesy of Emily Jacir. (Demos, 2013, Plate 8 and Plate 9).

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AUTHOR'S DECLARATION

I, Vivian Kuang Sheng, declare that this thesis is a presentation of original work and I am the sole author. This work has not previously been presented for an award at this, or any other, University. All sources are acknowledged as References. A shorter version of the section 'Fabric Cavities: Fabricating 'Strange Encounters' was published in the *Sculpture Journal*, 2014, Issue 23.3, pp. 393-402.

INTRODUCTION

This thesis conducts interrelated monographic studies on a selection of artworks made by three women artists, Yin Xiuzhen, Mona Hatoum and Nikki S. Lee in the 1990s and 2000s, which provide productive ways of imagining subjects' encounters with foreign places and other bodies in an increasingly interconnected, yet unevenly developed globalized world. By choosing three artists, who come from East Asia and the Middle East, but work as 'global artists' across a variety of social and cultural backgrounds, this thesis raises questions about both the voluntary and the involuntary mobility of human life in contemporary society, exploring a number of contradictory terms related to 'home-making', including placement and displacement, construction and preservation, habitation and uprootedness, and domesticity and publicity.

From 2001, the Chinese sculptor Yin Xiuzhen initiated an artistic project, titled *Portable Cities* (Fig. 1). From unfolded suitcases, Yin erected little fabric models of cities, such as Beijing, Berlin, Sydney, Tokyo, Vancouver, Amsterdam, San Francisco, Paris and Hong Kong, constructed from old clothes donated by local residents in each city. Yin's fabric cityscapes reflect her own impression and understanding of these either familiar or completely new and foreign places on the basis of her habitation of them. Carried inside portable suitcases, these fabric cities can be easily folded away after each exhibition and transported to the next destination. Through the repetitive,

banal domestic labour of threading, sewing, knitting and packing, each of her suitcases is constituted as a temporal ‘home’—a metonymic respite in a perpetual journey. Yin’s practice, in this way, investigates the unprecedentedly mobile condition of home and human life caused by growing transnational travel and exchange.

In her solo exhibition, *Interior Landscape*, held at the Fondazione Querini Stampalia, Venice in 2009, the Beirut-born, London and Berlin based, Palestinian artist Mona Hatoum exhibited a series of photographs taken in a multitude of geographical locations, such as Berlin, Beirut, Cairo, San Francisco, Turin, Thiers, and Mexico City, where she had held residencies in local art institutions and created artworks for exhibitions or events. A range of scruffy and disquieting scenes of everyday life were revealed to viewers to the exhibition. These included a mess of discarded dark brown hair left at the corner of the bath tub in an unknown bathroom in Beirut (Fig. 2); a collection of steel cheese and vegetable graters in different sizes and shapes placed, along with a group of rolled hair balls, a small rusty mincer and a piece of paper, on a white kitchen table located in an interior space in Berlin (Fig. 3); a mass of bamboo-made, animal cages randomly stacked together in a household courtyard in Cairo (Fig. 4); and an enamelled bucket with little signs of wear and tear left in the sun on the floor of the balcony at the community house in the Sabbathday Lake Shaker Village, Maine (Fig. 5). As an index of her artistic commitment to itinerancy, these photographic works of unnoticed and depressed quotidian scenes not only

demonstrate Hatoum's habitation and exploration of each place, but they also convey a keen sense of displacement and disorientation.

Unlike Yin and Hatoum, who travel widely but unevenly around the world, the New York-based, Korean artist Nikki S. Lee interrogated and revealed the inconsistency of identity and belonging through her series of performative, photographic *Projects* conducted mainly in America between 1997 and 2001. Marked by multiple cultural and ethnic scenes, American metropolises provided Lee with creative possibilities to blend into a wide range of local communities, including those of the white upper-middle-class (See Fig. 6 and Fig. 7) and other subcultural social minorities (See Fig. 8 and Fig. 9). Lee approximated herself to members of her varied adopted groups via clothing, make-up and props, and performed their stereotypical gestures and mannerisms in front of the camera. In her photographs from each project, Lee is variously featured in the disguise of other group members within deliberately chosen milieus where diverse communal and domestic activities take place. In her practice, the fantasy of masquerade and costume in female domesticity has been adapted to a social and public environment, to constitute a cosmopolitan image of contemporary life in which, as the art critic Cherise Smith has indicated, 'issues of national, ethnic, racial, gender, and class identities coalesce in complicated ways'.¹ Despite Lee's

¹ Cherise Smith, *Enacting Others: Politics of Identity in Eleanor Antin, Nikki S. Lee, Adrian Piper, and Anna Deavere Smith* (Durham, NC: Duke University Press, 2011), p.207.

bodily intimacy with the other group members shown in the photographs, her hardly concealed, distinctive Korean facial and physical features, as well as her mutating presence throughout different *Projects*, lay bare her status of ‘otherness’.

With their artworks, Yin, Hatoum and Lee reveal the ambivalent situation of a contemporary subject who is in and out of place in a constant state of movement.

Their itinerant practices, I want to suggest, articulate an artistic fantasy of ‘home-making’, which alternates between habitation and displacement, being settled and keeping mobile. This thesis was researched and written during a specific period of time, when economic migration and refugee settlement became important and intractable issues in Europe and in a broader international context. The investigation of questions about identity and home through contemporary artistic practices within a hardly uncontested globalized world is also intimately related to my own educational and academic background. While, on the one hand, as a UK-based research student, I, in some ways, share the privilege of these chosen artists under discussion, who are provided with institutional and financial support to reside and work in a variety of social and cultural environments; on the other, as a Chinese national, I usually encounter complicated visa application procedures when I need to travel to most countries in Europe and North America for research and conferences even for a very short period of time. This thesis, in this sense, resonates with my own exploration and reflection of both the advantage and restriction of being a transnational subject,

engaging frequently with international travel and cross-cultural interaction.

According to global historians and theorists Michael Geyer and Charles Bright, the process of globalization can be perceived as ‘a new ordering of relations of domination and subordination among all regions of the world’.² For Geyer and Bright, ‘the intensification and concentration of capitalist production went hand in hand with its global extension, binding the world together in tighter, if always uneven and unequal, global circuits of power, capital and culture’, and leading to competitive interactions, collaborations and collisions between communities, places and regions.³

The art historian Angela Dimitrakaki also considers the notion of globalization in terms of the vibrant development of contemporary capitalism, which disperses people’s lives by spreading capital asymmetrically around the world, giving rise to our increasingly fragmented and de-territorialized experience of space and place.⁴ As a result, a growing number of people take part in or are pushed into a productive, yet

² Michael Geyer and Charles Bright, ‘World History in a Global Age’, *The American Historical Review*, October 1995, vol. 100, no. 4, p. 1048. See also Bruce Mazlish and Akira Iriye, ‘Introduction’, in Bruce Mazlish and Akira Iriye (eds.) *The Global History Reader* (New York: Routledge, 2005), pp. 3-5; Anthony Giddens, *The Consequences of Modernity* (Oxford: Blackwell, 1990), pp. 63-78.

³ Geyer and Bright, ‘World History in a Global Age’, pp. 1049-1050. Geyer and Bright’s discussion especially focused on the asymmetrical communication and collaboration between the European-North Atlantic centres and the rest of the world.

⁴ Angela Dimitrakaki, *Gender, ArtWork and the Global Imperative: A Materialist Feminist Critique* (Manchester: Manchester University Press, 2013), p. 6. See also Angela Dimitrakaki, ‘Gendering the Multitude: Feminist Politics, Globalization and Art History’, in Marsha Meskimmon and Dorothy Rowe (eds.) *Women, the Arts and Globalization: Eccentric Experience* (Manchester: Manchester University Press, 2013), pp. 25-44.

unstable and challenging nomadic way of life.⁵

As has been noted by other writers, this nomadic trend is also clearly evident in the art world.⁶ As contemporary art is circulated as commodity capital in a global context, artists, through their creative practices, not only participate in, but examine the increasing transnational traffic of travel and migration. A significant number of artists from non-western origins travel to Euro-American metropolitan centres for study and career development, demonstrating a dynamic aesthetic intervention, and raising questions about the presentation of oneself and one's culture to other people in an inevitably hierarchical, intercultural circumstance. More importantly, the rise of international art biennials and triennials organized on a global scale since the early

⁵ In contemporary society, the mobility of life can be experienced in both the physical and the virtual realms. This project considers the real, corporeal travel and migration of human bodies, rather than the virtual, post-human 'immobile mobility'—a mobile situation of life in the wake of the development of contemporary communication technology. As for the difference between the physical and the virtual mobility, see Aharon Kellerman, *Daily Spatial Mobilities: Physical and Virtual* (Surrey & Burlington, VT: Ashgate, 2012). See also Arjun Appadurai's notion of five 'scapes', in 'Disjuncture and Difference in the Global Cultural Economy', *Theory, Culture & Society*, 1990, 7, pp. 295-310

⁶ See Nikos Papastergiadis, *Spatial Aesthetics: Art, Place and the Everyday* (Amsterdam: Institute of Network Cultures, 2010), pp. 8-10; 14-16; Marsha Meskimmon and Dorothy Rowe, 'Editorial Introduction—Ec/centric Affinities: Locations, Aesthetics, Experiences', in Marsha Meskimmon and Dorothy Rowe (eds.) *Women, the Arts and Globalization: Eccentric Experience*, pp. 1-5; Joaquín Barriandos Rodríguez, 'Global Art and the Politics of Mobility: (Trans)Cultural Shifts in the International Contemporary Art-System', in Mieke Bal and Miguel Á. Hernández-Navarro (eds.) *Art and Visibility in Migratory Culture: Conflict, Resistance, and Agency* (Amsterdam & New York: Rodopi, 2011), pp. 313-334. Jonathan Harris, 'Globalization and Contemporary Art: A Convergence of Peoples and Ideas', in Jonathan Harris (ed.) *Globalization and Contemporary Art* (Chichester: Wiley-Blackwell, 2011), pp. 1-16. Noël Carroll, 'Art and Globalization: Then and Now', *The Journal of Aesthetics and Art Criticism*, 2007, 65 (1), pp. 131-143.

1990s also creates opportunities for contemporary artists to explore diverse places and communities, and to make artworks in response to their immediate understandings of local cultural inheritance, visual traditions, or even power struggles in relation to a broader geopolitical environment.⁷ Contemporary art, in this way, brings to the fore the interrogation of notions of locality and home. The local is no longer merely confined to the place where the artist originally comes from, but it also refers to the place where she was once briefly based. Different from a simple artistic demonstration of one's individual background, or transnational experience of travel and communication, contemporary artists' practices of inhabiting a global world, I would argue, articulate an inspiring, yet, at times, also conflictual and problematic interaction of the specificity and the connectedness of multiple localities.⁸

⁷ For similar arguments about international art biennales, see John Potts, *The New Time and Space* (Basingstoke Hampshire & New York: Palgrave Macmillan, 2015), pp. 75-84. Nikos Papastergiadis and Martin Meredith, 'Art Biennales and Cities as Platforms for Global Dialogue', in Gerard Delanty, Liana Giorgi, Monica Sassatelli (eds.) *Festivals and the Cultural Public Sphere* (London: Routledge, 2011), pp. 45-62; Monica Sassatelli, 'The Biennialization of Art Worlds: The Culture of Cultural Events', in Laurie Hanquinet and Mike Savage (eds.) *Routledge International Handbook of the Sociology of Art and Culture* (London and New York: Routledge, 2016), pp. 279-286; Sabine B. Vogel, *Biennials—Art on a Global Scale* (Vienna: Springer, 2012). Irit Rogoff, 'Geo-cultures Circuits of Arts and Globalizations', in Jorinde Seijdel (ed.) *Open: The Art Biennial as a Global Phenomena* (Rotterdam: NAI Publishers, 2009), pp. 106-116. John Byrne, 'Contemporary Art and Globalisation: Biennials and the Emergence of the De-Centred Artist', *International Journal of the Humanities*, 2005, 3, 1, pp. 169-172.

⁸ As the art historian Terry Smith has argued, different from the modernist presumption of art as 'universal', 'timeless' and 'fundamentally unworldly', contemporary art is 'essentially, definitively and distinctively worldly', which 'comes from the whole world, from a growing accumulation of art-producing localities that no longer depend on the approval of a metropolitan centre and are, to an unprecedented degree, connected to each other in a multiplicity of ways, not least regionally and globally'. Terry Smith, 'Currents of World-Making in Contemporary Art', *World Art*, 2011, 1, no. 2, pp. 174-175. See also Terry Smith, *What is Contemporary Art?* (Chicago and London: University of Chicago Press, 2009), pp.

This thesis tends to develop existing discussions and debates about globalization and contemporary transnational art into specific case studies on Yin, Hatoum and Lee's practices, exploring their subtly interrelated, yet varied ways of 'homemaking' through their artworks. This thesis starts from Yin's domesticated, in some sense, banal and nostalgic fabrication and re-fabrication of local and global 'homes' in a seemingly unrestricted condition of international mobility. It then presents a more complicated and conflictual vision of 'home' by examining Hatoum's disquieting or even aggressive, altered household items, and finally ends with Lee's performative photographic projects of 'being in community' with a wide range of social and cultural groups, which infuse the notion of home with meanings in association with the experience of belonging and collectivity in society. Through the close analysis of a number of deliberately chosen images, objects and installations made and exhibited by these three artists in multiple geopolitical and socioeconomic contexts, this thesis investigates in what ways contemporary art might potentially instigate interactions between human bodies, communities, places and cultures, without negating possible conflicts and disparities, so as to provide productive, alternative perspectives to consider the intricate relationship between identity, home and belonging. However, on the basis of their advantaged transnational and transcultural engagement within the

151-152; Terry Smith, *Contemporary Art: World Currents* (London: Laurence King Publishing, 2011); Charlotte Bydler, *The Global ArtWorld Inc.: On the Globalization of Contemporary Art* (Uppsala: Acta Universitatis Upsaliensis, 2004).

contemporary art world, Yin, Hatoum and Lee's itinerant practices examined in the case studies also inadvertently run the risk of reinforcing their privileged exploration of a cosmopolitan mode of existence, which is, to some extent, extricated from various problems and contradictions related to international travel, migration and communication in the present context of globalization.

Furthermore, in addition to Lee's photographic projects, a significant number of works by Yin and Hatoum were also created in close connection with established local living communities. This resonates with the growing concern and debate about social collectivity and communal cohesion in the art world since the 1990s.⁹

However, compared with presenting a comprehensive view of the community life, the works of these three artists explore what Miwon Kwon has described as the 'impossibility of total consolidation, wholeness and unity' in the constitution of collective existence, revealing a fleeting sense of belonging and social attachment in multiple manners and artistic forms.¹⁰ As for Lee's *Projects*, her continuous

⁹ As Hal Foster has argued, 'discursivity and sociability are in the foreground of art today because they are scarce elsewhere'. Hal Foster, 'Chat Rooms', in Claire Bishop (ed.) *Participation: Documents of Contemporary Art* (London and Cambridge, MA: Whitechapel and MIT Press, 2006), p. 193. See also Jacques Rancière, 'Problems and Transformations in Critical Art', in Claire Bishop (ed.) *Participation: Documents of Contemporary Art*, p. 90.

¹⁰ Miwon Kwon, *One Place after Another: Site-Specific Art and Locational Identity* (Cambridge, MA: MIT Press, 2004), p.154. See also Miwon Kwon, 'Public Art and Urban Identities', in Cheryl Younger (ed.) *Public Art Strategies: Public Art and Public Space* (New York: New York University Press, 1998), p. 6; Grant Kester, 'Aesthetic Evangelists: Conversion and Empowerment in Contemporary Community Art', *Afterimage*, January 1995, 22, no. 6, p. 6; and Grant Kester, *Conversation Pieces: Community and Communication in Modern Art* (Berkeley, CA: University of

performance of 'passing' into a variety of American cultural and subcultural groups has challenged any assumption of human community as static and complete. For Hatoum, during the 1990s and early 2000s, she undertook a series of artistic residences in far-flung geographical areas, inhabiting small local communities on the verge of disappearance. By the use of fragile, mutable domestic materials, such as paper, soap, sugar, wool and pasta, found in situ, Hatoum reveals the dispersing condition of these communities through her simple, yet contemplative material language of art.

By contrast, in some of Yin's works, the specific communal living situation in China is recreated within an artistic context, and subsequently exhibited at various international venues for viewers to experience, albeit via heavily mediated means, an example of the traditional form of communal life in China. In this sense, Yin's works not only recall the community dwelling environment in a specific local area, but constitute and reconstitute a fluid, provisional social collective of embodied viewers, who are willing to get involved with her art pieces. Meanwhile, rather than simply engendering an immediate, participatory mode of social community free of conflict, Yin's works also induce discomfort and attempt to articulate instances of cross-cultural divergence. For example, at the turn of the century, Yin created a group of participatory works with the placement of low wooden stools, such as her *Beijing*

Opera pieces which I examine in more detail in chapter one. By inviting viewers to sit on these stools and interact with one another, Yin tends to restage a typical communal scene in the conventional Chinese courtyard dwelling of family members and neighbours sitting close to each other and engaging in relaxed conversations. However, it is not comfortable to sit on these humble wooden stools. The lack of acquaintance with the particular living situation in China also, at times, creates obstacles for the formation of an intimately interactive social collective. Most viewers simply wander around these stools as distant, independent bystanders. Some of them might also feel embarrassed when being coerced into interacting with strangers they have just met by coincidence at the exhibition site. Yin's work brings to mind the criticism of contemporary socially-engaged public and community art raised by art historians, such as Hal Foster, Claire Bishop and W. J. T. Mitchell that seeks to create a hospitable, non-hierarchical environment for the participating public.¹¹ In opposition to a pacified space of public engagement, these writers instead insist that participatory art needs to make visible the contradiction and violence which also play an important role in the constitution of social democracy.

¹¹ According to W.J.T. Mitchell, 'public art tends to repress violence, veiling it with the stasis of monumentalized and pacified spaces'. W. J. T. Mitchell, 'The Violence of Public Art' in Mitchell (ed.) *Art and the Public Sphere*. (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1992), p. 39. Similarly, Foster has also argued, 'sometimes politics are ascribed to such art on the basis of a shaky analogy between an open work and an inclusive society, as if a desultory form might evoke a democratic community, or a non-hierarchical installation predict an egalitarian world'. Foster, 'Chat Rooms', p. 193. See also Claire Bishop, 'Introduction: Viewers as Producers', *Participation: Documents of Contemporary Art*, pp. 10-17.

Yin, Hatoum and Lee, through their varied artistic practices, reveal the contingency and unsteadiness of one's sense of being and belonging in the contemporary world.

This thesis builds on such claims and develops a theoretical framework underpinned by post-structural, post-colonial feminist theories and psychoanalytic discourses.

Luce Irigaray's poetic elaboration of the concept of dwelling plays a fundamental role in how I forge my discussion of notions of home, identity and subjectivity as they take shape in Yin, Hatoum and Lee's works studied in this thesis. According to

Irigaray:

Time and space remain open while continuously constituting a dwelling place in which to stay. Its measure is found in a perceiving of oneself and of the other [...] to go toward the other, to welcome the other into oneself [...].¹²

For Irigaray, dwelling is not just the construction of an enclosed shelter, but a continuous, reciprocally constructive process between the self and the place where she dwells, and the self and the other subject with whom she cohabits.¹³ In contrast to stasis and rootedness, Irigaray's habitation of 'home' is marked by inter-bodily movement and intersubjective communication, which is instructive for my exploration of these artists' practices of 'dwelling' in their artworks.

Within the context of globalization, the notion of home has been unmoored from a

¹² Luce Irigaray, *The Way of Love*, (trans.) Heidi Bostic and Stephen Pluhacek (London & New York: Continuum, 2002), p. 149.

¹³ Ibid; see also Luce Irigaray, *Ethics of Sexual Difference* (Ithaca, N.Y.: Cornell University Press, 1992), pp.101-109.

fixed geographical location, and the individual and cultural identity typically associated with the idea of home or homeland can no longer simply be defined according to neat and exclusive territorial coordinates.¹⁴ As Nikos Papastergiadis has argued, in the face of pervasive international travel and exchange in the art world, ‘the concept of home needs to be fused with the fluid practice of belonging’.¹⁵ In her discussion of contemporary art in a transnational circumstance, Marsha Meskimmon has also argued that ‘imagining ourselves at home in the world, where our homes are not fixed objects but processes of material and conceptual engagement with other people and different places, is the first step toward becoming cosmopolitan’.¹⁶

Of course, by employing quotidian household materials, objects and banal labour, which are conventionally related to female domesticity and craft, Yin, Hatoum and Lee recall a longer tradition of women artists utilizing strategies of homemaking in their practices.¹⁷ In the late 1960s and early 1970s, under the influence of the

¹⁴ See literatures such as Jayne O. Ifekwunigwe, *Scattered Belongings: Cultural Paradoxes of Race, Nation, and Gender* (London: Routledge, 1999); Inderpal Grewal and Caren Kaplan (eds.), *Scattered Hegemonies: Postmodernity and Transnational Feminist Practices* (Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 1994).

¹⁵ Papastergiadis, *Spatial Aesthetics: Art, Place and the Everyday*, p. 26. See also Nikos Papastergiadis, *Cosmopolitanism and Culture* (Cambridge & Malden, MA: Polity, 2012).

¹⁶ Marsha Meskimmon, *Contemporary Art and The Cosmopolitan Imagination* (Oxon, UK & New York, US: Routledge, 2011), p. 8.

¹⁷ The use of domestic crafts and skills can be also related to Irigaray’s notion of ‘cultivation’ in ‘home-making’ (see chapter one in particular), which is discussed and further developed through chapters by drawing on recent works by feminist scholars such as Iris Marion Young and Alison Weir. Luce Irigaray, *Ethics of Sexual Difference* (trans.) Carolyn Burke and Gillian C. Gill (Ithaca, NY: Cornell University Press, 1992), pp. 101-107. Iris Marion Young, ‘House and Home: Feminist Variations on a Theme’, in *On Female Body Experience: "Throwing Like a Girl" and Other Essays*

second-wave feminist movement, artists, such as Miriam Schapiro, Judy Chicago, Mierle Laderman Ukeles, Kate Walker, Bobby Baker and others mainly in America and Britain, began to use skills of homemaking craft and household activities, including knitting, embroidery, cooking, cleaning, costuming and adorning, in their artworks, in order to challenge the institutional legitimacy of the standard art and craft divide, and to interrogate the domestic role historically and socially reserved for middle-class white women.¹⁸ Since the 1980s, artists from a wider social and geographical background, including Yin, Hatoum and Lee, have started to investigate the formation of individual identity and the sense of belonging, by virtue of their artworks derived from the experience of mundane domesticity and the unremarkable nature of community life in specific local contexts, while traditional feminist critiques of household drudgeries and gender confinement are to different extents sustained.

[Electronic Resources] (New York: Oxford University Press, 2005), pp. 124-125. Alison Weir, 'Home and Identity: In Memory of Iris Marion Young', in *Identities and Freedom: Feminist Theory Between Power and Connection* (Oxford & New York: Oxford University Press, 2013), pp. 46-61.

¹⁸ This refers to a range of individual and collaborative feminist art projects at the time, such as *Womanhouse* (1971-1972), co-organized by Judy Chicago and Miriam Schapiro, along with a group of female students at the California Institute of the Arts; Mierle Laderman Ukeles' performance projects *Hartford Wash: Washing Tracks, Maintenance Inside* and *Hartford Wash: Washing Tracks, Maintenance Outside* first conducted on July 24, 1973, at the Wadsworth Atheneum; and the *Feministo* (1975-1977) postal project initiated by Kate Walker and her friend Sally Gallop. A few selected literatures are as follows: Judy Chicago and Laura Meyer, 'Judy Chicago: Feminist Artist and Educator', in Phyllis Chester, Esther D. Rothblum and Ellen Cole (eds.) *Feminist Foremothers in Women's Studies, Psychology, and Mental Health* (New York: Routledge, 2009 [1995]), pp. 125-140. Kathy Battista, 'Alternative Spaces for Feminist Art', in *Renegotiating the Body: Feminist Art in 1970s London* (New York: I.B. Tauris, 2012), pp.91-138; Miwon Kwon, 'In Appreciation of Invisible Work: Mierle Laderman Ukeles and the Maintenance of the "White Cube"', *Documents*, Fall 1997, 10, pp. 15-18.

According to Meskimmon, ‘the most nuanced explorations of the domestic in contemporary art tend to be found in work that is decidedly not “local”, work that has no intention of staying at home’.¹⁹ Instead, artists tend to use the materials from the domestic and the local to engage and examine ‘the transnational flows and cross-cultural exchanges that characterise globalisation’.²⁰ Meskimmon’s argument articulates an intricate entanglement between local and global created by this productive turn toward the domestic in contemporary transnational art. Moreover, as the art historian Jennifer Johung has also indicated, situated domestic dwellings ‘have long been at the heart of efforts to reinvest’ in the reconstitution of ‘an intimate relationship between bodies and their changing spatial environment’.²¹

Contemporary artists’ frequent engagement with mundane domesticity and local communities demonstrate, to some extent, what Johung has called as ‘our ever-present impulse to find home’—the desperate urge to situate and resituate ourselves in place even in a constant state of travel and migration.²² In this sense, on the basis of their close interactions with the domestic and the local, the practices of inhabiting multiple ‘homes’ of artists, such as Yin, Hatoum and Lee, throughout a variety of dwelling environments draw alternative pathways out of the conventional narratives of nomadism, which fabricate an autonomous, utopian mode of subjectivity,

¹⁹ Meskimmon, *Contemporary Art and The Cosmopolitan Imagination*, p. 2.

²⁰ Ibid.

²¹ Jennifer Johung. *Replacing Home: From Primordial Hut to Digital Network in Contemporary Art* (Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 2012), p. xx.

²² Johung, *Replacing Home*, p. x.

released from all kinds of geographical and cultural attachments.²³

In *A Thousand Plateaus: Capitalism and Schizophrenia* first published in English in 1987, Gilles Deleuze and Félix Guattari described the nomad as a subject who lives in a perpetual state of transition, characterized by endless movements and passages between points of arrival. According to Deleuze and Guattari, for the nomad, ‘every point is a relay and exists only as a relay. A path is only between two points, but the in-between has taken on all the consistency and enjoys both an autonomy and a direction of its own’.²⁴ Deleuze and Guattari put forward an idealized form of nomadic existence grounded on a particular spatial experience of de-territorialisation, which, in their own words, ‘is localized and not delimited’.²⁵ This conception of nomadism has been challenged and criticized by feminist and postcolonial scholars since the early 1990s, owing to Deleuze and Guattari’s lack of discussion about the material realities that the homeless nomad might experience and encounter, and the specific racial, cultural and economic contexts from which the nomad originates.²⁶

²³ As the sociologist Beverley Skeggs has pointed out, the conventional nomadic paradigm is based on a ‘bourgeois masculine subjectivity’, which is described as ‘cosmopolitan’. See Beverley Skeggs, *Class, Self, Culture* (London: Routledge, 2004), p. 48.

²⁴ Gilles Deleuze and Félix Guattari, *A Thousand Plateaus: Capitalism and Schizophrenia*, translated by Brian Massumi (Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 2003), p. 380; 478.

²⁵ *Ibid.* p. 422.

²⁶ Christopher L. Miller has argued that Deleuze and Guattari in their work simply proposed ‘an intellectual nomadism and a nomadism for intellectuals’, and failed to examine critically the non-western source and the ethnographic context from which they developed the notion of nomadism. See Christopher L. Miller. ‘The Postidentitarian Predicament in the Footnotes of *A Thousand Plateaus*: Nomadology,

Rosi Braidotti further developed Deleuze and Guattari's notion of nomadism, by reworking it into feminist theory. According to Braidotti, nomadism is 'not fluidity without borders, but rather an acute awareness of the nonfixity of boundaries. It is the intense desire to go on trespassing, transgressing'.²⁷ For Braidotti, in contrast to the traditional phallogocentric vision of autonomous and unified individual existence, the figuration of nomadism constitutes a 'nonunitary and multi-layered' subjectivity, which dissolves a simple division of centre and periphery, belonging and exclusion.²⁸ Braidotti's feminist theorization of nomadism, which emphasizes the disruption of all forms of established boundaries, was also criticized by Irene Gedalof. From Gedalof's perspective, 'nomadic trajectories cannot simply sidestep location and take to the road'.²⁹ As she further elaborates, 'what should be important then, even within the terms of a Deleuzian project, is not "the going", but a different kind of relationship with the space one inhabits, that resists the striations of binary logic'.³⁰

Gedalof's criticism, to some extent, conflates Braidotti's conception of nomadism—a

Anthropology and Authority', *Diacritics*, 1993, 23.3, p. 10. For similar arguments, see also Caren Kaplan, *Questions of Travel: Postmodern Discourses of Displacement*, (Durham: Duke University Press, 1996), pp. 87-94.

²⁷ Rosi Braidotti, *Nomadic Subjects: Embodiment and Sexual Difference in Contemporary Feminist Theory*, 2nd edition. (New York: Columbia University Press, 2011), p. 66.

²⁸ *Ibid.*, p. 5; 7-10.

²⁹ Irene Gedalof. 'Identity in Transit: Nomads, Cyborgs and Women', *European Journal of Women's Studies*, (2000), 7, p. 343.

³⁰ *Ibid.* For similar arguments, see Kaplan, *Questions of Travel*, p. 163.

metaphoric experience of transgression which, in Sara Ahmed's words, 'resists settling into socially coded modes of thought and behaviour', with literal, physical acts of migration and travel.³¹ Nevertheless, this reconsideration of nomadism through the notion of locality can be helpful in the discussion of contemporary artists' periodic, multiple forms of 'habitation' in different places, through their creative engagements with household domesticity and embodied explorations of various local living environments.³² In this respect, Ahmed has pointed out how one's intimate interactions with a specific local place can engender an immediate feeling of 'being at home'. According to Ahmed:

The immersion of a self in a locality is hence not simply about inhabiting an already constituted space (from which one can simply depart and remain the same). Rather, the locality intrudes into the sense: it defines what one smells, hears, touches, feels, and remembers. The lived experience of being-at-home hence involves the enveloping of subjects in a space which is not simply outside them: being-at-home suggests that the subject and space leak into each

³¹ Sara Ahmed, 'Home and Away: Narratives of Migration and Estrangement', *International Journal of Cultural Studies*, 1999, (2) no. 3, p. 334. According to Ahmed, 'by separating her understanding of nomadism from those that are literally nomadic, Braidotti translates the literal into the metaphoric, such that the nomads come to perform a particular kind of theoretical work, to represent something other than themselves' (p.334). As for the critical discussion of the slippage between literal migration and metaphoric migration, see also Anita Haya Goldman, 'Comparative Identities: Exile in the Writings of Frantz Fanon and W.E.B. Du Bois', in Mae G. Henderson (ed.) *Borders, Boundaries and Frames: Essays in Cultural Criticism and Cultural Studies* (New York and London: Routledge, 1995), pp. 107-132.

³² For similar arguments see also Johung, *Replacing Home*, p. xiii-xiv.

other, inhabit each other.³³

In opposition to a fixed, purified place of belonging, Ahmed associates the formation of home with ‘the lived experience of locality’.³⁴

In response to the increasing travel and migration in the art world, James Meyer has drawn a distinction between two forms of nomadism, the lyrical and the critical, adopted in contemporary artistic practices.³⁵ Whereas lyrical nomadism refers to ‘a mobility thematised as a random and poetic interaction with the objects and spaces of everyday life’, critical nomadism ‘locates the mobile self within a periodised, discursive schema’ to reconceive historical incidents of travel and migration in the present.³⁶ The itinerant practice of contemporary artists examined in this thesis is more approximate to lyrical nomadism. According to Meyer, lyrical nomadism lacks its critical intention, since it presents ‘the body’s circulations as a series of phenomenological encounters occurring in real time, and tends to veil the material conditions in which this mobility occurs’.³⁷

³³ Ahmed, ‘Home and Away: Narratives of Migration and Estrangement’, p. 341.

³⁴ Ibid.

³⁵ James Meyer, ‘Nomads: Figures of Travel in Contemporary Art’, in Alex Coles (ed.) *Site-Specificity: The Ethnographic Turn, de-, dis-, ex- 4* (London: Black Dog Publishing, 2000), pp. 10-29.

³⁶ Ibid., pp. 11-12.

³⁷ Ibid., p. 11. As Braidotti has also warned, ‘being a nomadic is not a glamorous state of jet-setting—integral to and complicitous with advanced capitalism’—the unbounded circulation of commodity goods, images and data within a globalized trade network for instance. Braidotti, *Nomadic Subject*, p. 10.

While I agree with Meyer that contemporary artists' nomadic fantasy of inhabiting a global 'home' runs the risk of romanticizing the precarious and challenging condition of migration and uprootedness in reality, his discussion of two types of nomadism embodied in contemporary art still accords more importance to movement rather than locality, which pays no attention to artists' active interactions with the places of their short habitation. In this thesis, I want to examine how contemporary artists, through their nomadic practices, might also create moments of re-attachment to multiple localities that interrupt a constant motion, and engage in productive communications with other subjects, including local residents in each place and viewers from a broader international context.

I am not suggesting that the works of artists who briefly inhabit a place or community can provide a comprehensive insight into the local living situation and cultural tradition. However, it is through their incomplete, partial representations and recreations of the local life in their works that various interregional, intercultural and intersubjective exchanges with the place and local residents are instigated and staged.³⁸ Their artworks give rise to the formation of immediate, mutually constructive social and cultural attachments marked not only by communication and

³⁸ As Michelle Antoinette has argued, art as a 'connective medium' can constitute 'a site of cultural connectedness and a platform for generating cultural connectivities'. See Michelle Antoinette, 'Introduction Part 2—Asia Present Resonant: Themes of Connectivity and World-making in Contemporary Asian Art', in Michelle Antoinette and Caroline Turner (eds.) *Contemporary Asian Art and Exhibitions: Connectivities and World-making*, Asian Studies Series Monograph 6 (Canberra: Australian National University Press, 2014), p. 23.

affiliation, but by possible disparity and misunderstanding. In order to unravel this complicated interaction between the artist, the place she inhabits, and viewing subjects, who subsequently engage with her artwork made in the place, this thesis draws on Irigaray's discussion of a girl's embodied, gestural response to her mother's absence.

In her 1985 article 'Gesture in Psychoanalysis', Irigaray suggests that the girl, in the absence of her mother, feels distressed, and she either plays with a doll, 'lavishing maternal affection on a quasi-subject', or dances, repetitively spinning around to create a gestural territory of her own.³⁹ In this way, the girl engages in an active process of bodily practices (playing or dancing), through which she creates a symbolic object or space of mediation in relation to her mother, as well as the outside world. For Irigaray, this mediated object or space is formative for the girl's sense of self and her relations to other subjects.⁴⁰ This psychoanalytic account of the mother-daughter relationship, I want to argue, proposes a productive model for thinking about how an artwork can function as an object or space of mediation, which provides both the artist and her viewers with possibilities of encountering and interacting with other subjects.⁴¹

³⁹ Luce Irigaray, 'Gesture in Psychoanalysis', in *Sexes and Genealogies* (trans.) Gillian C. Gill (New York: Columbia University Press, 1993[1985]), pp. 97-98.

⁴⁰ *Ibid.*, p. 97.

⁴¹ As for similar arguments that the artwork might function as a means of mediation for intersubjective communication, see Hilary Robinson, *Reading Art, Reading Irigaray: The Politics of Art by Women* (London and New York: I. B. Tauris, 2006),

As for Yin, Hatoum and Lee's practices, they each explore the space of their chosen locality, to perform bodily gestures with found materials and to construct artworks that mediate their temporary engagement with the place and the life of local people. Different from a sustaining, situated experience of belonging and an unconstrained, completely uprooted, nomadic existence, these three artists, by virtue of their creative interactions with a variety of local living environments, create recurrent moments of grounding in place and in relation to other subjects. Their itinerant trajectories and periodic habitation demonstrate a critical revival of 'nomadism' within an artistic context, instantiating a distinctive form of subjectivity and 'home' which are both open to change, communication and transformation, formed and reformed through embodied engagement with multiple places and people. Indeed, alternating between fluidity and stasis, and the global and the local, this nomadic artistic fantasy of 'home-making' is based on a privileged mode of mobility, entitled to a number of contemporary artists by the booming global art market, which is, to some extent, extricated from the situation of increased border controls, and inevitable political exclusion and social xenophobia that most relatively disadvantaged moving bodies and economic immigrants have to confront.

Meanwhile, following a similar model to that proposed by Irigaray, it is through their

embodied, physical experiences of the material and spatial construction of the artwork that viewers are too involved in the artist's dynamic interaction with a particular place. The interrelated processes of the creation and reception of the artwork reveal a network of intersubjective relations between the artist, viewers and local residents whose lives in the place are investigated by the artist. The artwork functions as a mediating object, materializing an interactive ground for viewers to create or reconsider their relations to the place. Whereas local residents might be offered a new look at their daily living situation, international viewers, who momentarily engage with the place through the artwork, are also endowed with opportunities to learn about and explore a specific dwelling environment and cultural context different from where they usually reside.

For instance, during her residency at the le Creux de l'enfer Fine Art Centre, Thiers, France in 1999, Hatoum sewed a ring of leather gloves—a piece I investigate in more detail in chapter two, and hung it on an abandoned wooden wheel on the wall, which had been used to drive the machinery at the site to grind blades and knives (Fig. 10). In this way, Hatoum highlighted the industrial history of the exhibiting space, reminding local residents of the concealed past of this Fine Art Centre. Meanwhile, through her work installed in this former knife factory, international viewers were also offered a view of the living environment and manufacturing history in Thiers. Indeed, the local life and culture revealed via a particular artwork can only be

fragmented and incomplete, which might lead to varied readings and perceptions of the place. It is through viewers' subsequent, diverse forms of engagement with the artwork that multiple individual and cultural connections to the place are constituted, replaced and reconstituted. In this sense, the intermittently localized, nomadic fantasy of 'being at home' with other subjects in a multitude of places demonstrated in contemporary transnational art is not merely confined to artists' itinerant practices across geographical borders. It might be also considered in terms of the various embodied experiences of viewing, which continuously deconstruct and reconstruct the relationship between viewers and the place they encounter or rediscover by virtue of specific art pieces.

By drawing on the work of performance theorists Elin Diamond and Peggy Phelan, Johung proposes a performance-based methodology in the discussion of the viewer's embodied engagement with the site and place where the artwork is exhibited.

According to Johung, performance theory, which considers 'moments of stillness among and within those actions', reveals 'when and how certain bodies and sites overlap in order for meaningful experiences to be both initialized and reinstated in time'.⁴² Following this paradigm of performance art, which demonstrates an

⁴² Johung, *Replacing Home*, p. xv-xvi. As Elin Diamond has argued, 'performance is always a doing and a thing done. On the one hand, performance describes certain embodied acts (and/or the watching self). On the one hand, it is the thing done, the completed event framed in time and space and remembered, misremembered, interpreted and passionately revised across a pre-existing discursive field'. Elin Diamond, *Performance and Cultural Politics* (London & New York: Routledge,

immediate, interdependent relation between the body and the site of its embodied practices, Johung argues that ‘sites and places are continuously determined through the ephemeral, variable experiences of viewing, rather than remaining tied to the formal spatial parameters defined by the sited object or structure’.⁴³ Through her discussion, Johung articulates a unique, momentary spatial situation of being in place on the basis of one’s contingent bodily interaction with the artwork.

In this sense, the notion of site-specificity, which historically refers to ‘an inextricable, indivisible relationship between the work and its site’, has been turned by Johung into a more contingent, flexible and changeable experience of viewing which continuously situates and resituates embodied viewers in a site of temporary grounding.⁴⁴ Within the contemporary art world, an artwork made in a specific site is quite likely to be dismantled and reinstalled in other places and involved in conversations with diverse viewer groups from different social and cultural backgrounds. Johung’s model of site-specific experience of viewing reveals the fluid, coincidental relationship

1996), p. 1. In her discussion, Johung also draws on Peggy Phelan’s discussion of the contingent nature of the spectatorship in performance practices. According to Phelan, performance ‘honours the idea that a limited number of people in a specific time/place frame can have an experience of value which leaves no visible trace afterward’. Peggy Phelan, *Unmarked: The Politics of Performance* (London & New York: Routledge, 1996), p. 146.

⁴³ Johung, *Replacing Home*, p. xvi

⁴⁴ Miwon Kwon, *One Place after Another*, p.12. This might also recall the artworks and projects created by contemporary artists, such as Mark Dion, Renée Green, and Fred Wilson since the 1990s, in which the site of the work has been constructed into a discursive field of public engagement and infused with intricate social, cultural and political meanings. Uprooted from a simple, invariable relation to a fixed site, these works also challenge the minimalist or post-minimalist definition of site-specificity. See Kwon, *One Place After Another*, p. 3; 7.

between viewers, the artwork, and its multiple exhibiting sites in contemporary transnational artistic practices which resonate with and reflect on our unprecedentedly unstable spatial experience of life.

However, Johung's discussion is based on an assumption of a universal viewing subject (or groups of people), who encounters the artwork, defines a site and momentarily grounds the self in place without any cultural, racial, gender and economic details. Moreover, the embodied interaction between the viewing subject and the artwork also remains neutral and detached, which is akin to the phenomenological mode of artistic encounter engendered by traditional site-specific pieces made by minimalist artists such as Robert Morris and Richard Serra in the late 1960s and 1970s.⁴⁵ In this respect, I want to explore in what ways viewers' active, and decidedly not neutral experiences of the artwork might define an affective site of bodily and cultural communication, providing an alternative means of imagining one's being and belonging in the world with other subjects.

In her recent article, 'Response and Responsibility: On the Cosmo-politics of Generosity in Contemporary Asian Art' (2014), Meskimmon argues that 'art offers a potential crossing between cultural, linguistic and social boundaries—and a place in

⁴⁵ As for the phenomenological encounter between the viewing subject and the transitional site-specific sculptural work, see Kwon, *One Place After Another*, p.11-12.

which we can imagine and respond to other people who are different from ourselves’, via ‘dual economies of response’.⁴⁶ For Meskimmon, the artwork can solicit two types of responses from its viewers—the sensory, bodily response to its material construction and the ethical response to the moral entreaty conveyed to viewers by virtue of their active embodied interactions with the art object.⁴⁷ The specific materiality, scale and placement of the artwork endow it with the affective capacity to evoke viewers’ physical, visceral and conceptual involvement, which might allow them to establish empathetic connections with other subjects, whose lives and existence are, to different extents, demonstrated or alluded to by the art piece, beyond cultural and geographical differences.⁴⁸ On the basis of their immediate, empathetic interactions with the artwork, viewers are provided with opportunities to imagine and engage with the various life experiences of other people, such as enjoyment, suffering, loss and struggle. In this way, as Meskimmon further indicates, ‘the micro-stories of individuals’ can be connected with ‘the macro-histories of global geopolitics’—a

⁴⁶ Marsha Meskimmon, ‘Response and Responsibility: On the Cosmo-politics of Generosity in Contemporary Asian Art’, in Michelle Antoinette and Caroline Turner (eds.) *Contemporary Asian Art and Exhibitions: Connectivities and World-making*, Asian Studies Series Monograph 6, p.147.

⁴⁷ Ibid, p.144-145. For similar arguments, see also Marsha Meskimmon, ‘Making Worlds, Making Subjects: Contemporary Art and the Affective Dimension of Global Ethics’, *World Art*, 2011, 1 (2), p. 193; Marsha Meskimmon, ‘The Precarious Ecologies of Cosmopolitanism’, *Open Arts Journal*, 2013,1 (1), pp. 21-22.

⁴⁸ The viewing subject’s multi-sensory response to the artwork is defined by Meskimmon as a form of ‘kinaesthetic empathy’ (Meskimmon, ‘Response and Responsibility’, p. 148), which is developed from the notion of ‘kinaesthesia’ proposed by the feminist theorist Barbara Stafford. According to Stafford, ‘we become aware of thinking only in those kinaesthetic moments when we actively bind the sights, savours, sounds, tastes and textures swirling around us to our inmost, feeling flesh’. Barbara Stafford, *Visual Analogy: Consciousness as the Art of Connecting* (Cambridge, MA: MIT Press, 1999), p. 58.

cosmopolitan mode of global citizenship, which calls for viewers' ethical and moral responsibility and obligation to other people in the world.⁴⁹

Indeed, the viewer's spontaneous physical response to the art object constitutes a crucial part in Yin, Hatoum and Lee's practices. Hatoum is famous for her strangely altered kitchen utensils and domestic furniture pieces, which engender a tangible sense of danger and elicit viewers' multi-sensory responses, through their peculiar scale and menacing materiality. Meanwhile, owing to her insistence on the high degree of formalization and minimal aesthetics, her artworks usually weave, as the art critic Alix Ohlin has suggested, 'a fine line between invoking specific conflicts and referring more abstractly to human violence and cruelty'.⁵⁰ By comparison, a significant number of Yin's works are constructed from worn clothes of anonymous individuals—the metaphorical 'second-skin', which fabricates an outreaching, yet, at times, repulsive and disturbing tactile interface between human bodies. By activating viewers' embodied interactions with her multiple fabricated works of 'second skin', Yin sets out to produce interpersonal, inter-bodily engagement beyond established geopolitical and sociocultural boundaries. Lee's photographic *Projects*, as residual proofs of her temporary 'belonging' to a range of American social and cultural groups,

⁴⁹ Meskimmon, 'Response and Responsibility: On the Cosmo-politics of Generosity in Contemporary Asian Art', p. 145-146. See also Meskimmon, *Contemporary Art and The Cosmopolitan Imagination*, p. 7; and Meskimmon, 'Making Worlds, Making Subjects: Contemporary Art and the Affective Dimension of Global Ethics', p. 193.

⁵⁰ Alix Ohlin, 'Home and Away: The Strange Surrealism of Mona Hatoum'. In *Mona Hatoum: Undercurrents* [Exhibition Catalogue] (Ferrara: Comune di Ferrara, Gallerie d'arte Moderna Contemporanea; XIII Biennale Donna Ferrara, 2008), p. 39.

reveal to viewers her dramatic facial and physical alteration through masquerades, clothing, diet and props, which easily generates bodily and sensory empathy, providing an effective means to imagine the possible infiltration into the life of people very different from us, even if in an ostensible and performative way.

By virtue of the specific construction and presentation of their art pieces, Yin, Hatoum and Lee engage viewers in an affective, empathetic situation, which might give rise to the formation of intersubjective connectedness, social collectivity and cross-cultural exchange.⁵¹ However, this embodied, sensory or even moral awareness of one's existence in connection with other subjects, engendered through viewers' immediate physical and psychical interactions with the artwork, can also be conditional and unstable. Viewers might feel uncomfortable with the materiality and format of the artwork, or refuse to take part in a participatory piece as they are unwilling to be coerced into doing what the artist anticipates. In these cases, their actual responses to both the material and moral aspects of the work might be also concomitant with unease, repulsion or even hostility. Moreover, as for artworks with strong references to the living situation of a particular geographical place or local community, viewers, who usually reside in other parts of the world, might have intercultural difficulties to completely understand the piece and respond it with

⁵¹ In most of their works, Yin, Hatoum and Lee demonstrate no explicit instructions for participation. The exceptions are Yin's participatory pieces examined in chapter one, which invite viewers to explore and use a shared public space with other subjects, who partake in the work, by coincidence, in the same time and place.

ethical concerns, despite their sensory and physical involvement.

In this sense, Meskimmon's notion of the cosmo-politics of generosity to other people's lives on the basis of the economies of response requires a very high degree of engagement with the artwork from viewing subjects, which might not always be fulfilled in reality. The possible physical discomfort, interpersonal conflict, as well as cultural disparity can persistently interrupt and destabilize the empathetic attachment of oneself in relation to other bodies evoked in contemporary art. Rather than an ethical appeal to viewers' moral obligation, my discussion in this thesis focuses on the inevitable contradiction and instability in multiple forms of social and cultural communication and connection ignited by these three chosen artists' practices. As the Italian political theorist Daniele Archibugi has argued, 'cosmopolitan democracy is therefore aimed at representing the condition of the inhabitants of the Earth in the present era, marked by problems and interactions that transcend one's own community'.⁵² In this thesis, I want to argue that the works of Yin, Hatoum and Lee constitute a democratic site of cosmopolitan encounters in which viewers can not only temporarily relate themselves to other subjects residing in different geographical areas, but experience the unavoidable conflict, resistance and divergence in the formation of this contingent connectedness between people, cultures, places and

⁵² Daniele Archibugi, *The Global Commonwealth of Citizens: Toward Cosmopolitan Democracy* (Princeton, NJ: Princeton University Press, 2008), p. 110.

regions.⁵³ Their diverse practices, through the notion of ‘home-making’, articulate an intersubjective, inter-corporeal mode of identity and belonging.

⁵³ This argument draws on Iris Marion Young’s discussion of political inclusion and social democracy, which is also further explored and discussed in chapter one. According to Young, ‘although the ideal of aiming to reach agreement normatively regulates meaningful dialogue, conflict and disagreement are the usual state of affairs even in a well-structured deliberative democratic setting’. Iris Marion Young, *Inclusion and Democracy* (Oxford: Oxford University Press), p. 44.

CHAPTER I

YIN XIUZHEN'S FABRICATION OF 'HOME': A LEGACY OF DOMESTIC 'PRESERVATION'

This chapter considers a series of artworks made by the Chinese artist Yin Xiuzhen since the mid-1990s. Although Yin was trained in traditional oil painting at the Capital Normal University in Beijing in the late 1980s, she turned her attention to installation and sculptural works in her later practice. The majority of Yin's works are constructed from mundane domestic items, including old clothes, shoes, furniture pieces and photographs, which recall the practice of other contemporary artists, such as Christian Boltanski. However, unlike Boltanski's art pieces of discarded personal items, which evoke a sense of loss due to the absence of the subject, Yin uses domestic remnants in a more productive format, transforming them into cars, airplanes, miniature cities or even huge rockets.¹ With her artworks, Yin investigates the drastic changes to people's lives in China as well as in other parts of the world in the past two decades, especially in consideration of rapid urbanization and the

¹ As for this specific aspect of Christian Boltanski's practice, see Tamar Garb, 'Interview: Tamar Garb in Conversation with Christian Boltanski', in Didier Semin, Tamar Garb and Donald Kuspit (eds.) *Christian Boltanski* (London and New York: Phaidon, 2004), p. 19. See also Ruth Golan, 'The Secret Bearers—From Silence to Testimony, from the Real to Phantasme', in *Loving Psychoanalysis: Looking at Culture with Freud and Lacan* (London & New York: KARNAC, 2006), p. 122; Kynaston McShine, *The Museum as Muse: Artists Reflect* (New York: The Museum of Modern Art & Harry N. Abrams, Inc, 1999), p. 14; Bernhard Jussen (ed.) *Signal: Christian Boltanski* (Göttingen: Wallstein Verlag, 2003).

pervasive development of global trade networks. Through her creative and manifold acts of placing, sewing, knitting and packing, Yin reveals living stories and human emotions concealed in humble obdurate objects which were used at home. Yin's artistic practice of employing repetitive banal labour, typically associated with female domesticity, demonstrates an overlooked, yet I will argue significant aspect of 'home-making', which the feminist philosopher and social theorist Iris Marion Young proposes as a form of 'preservation'.²

In her article, 'House and Home: Feminist Variations on a Theme' first published in 1997, Young suggests that preservation, which is normally related to women's daily routines of cleaning, arranging, repairing and storing things at home, plays a crucial role in both constituting individual identity and sustaining familial history.³ Young explores women's ambivalent relation to the notion of home, by following Irigaray's critique of Martin Heidegger's conception of 'dwelling as man's mode of being'.⁴ According to Irigaray, 'to inhabit is the fundamental trait of man's being' and she associates this with an unfulfilled desire in searching for substitutes for the lost

² Iris Marion Young, 'House and Home: Feminist Variations on a Theme', in *On Female Body Experience: "Throwing Like a Girl" and Other Essays* [Electronic Resources] (New York: Oxford University Press, 2005), p. 124. The article was first published in Young's book *Intersecting Voices: Dilemmas of Gender, Political Philosophy and Policy* (Princeton, NJ: Princeton University Press, 1997), pp. 134-164.

³ *Ibid.*, pp. 124-125.

⁴ Martin Heidegger, 'Building, Dwelling, Thinking', in Albert Hofstadter (trans.) *Poetry, Language Thought* (New York: HarperCollins, 1971), pp. 146-147.

mother.⁵ For Irigaray, rather than a continuous process of cultivating the self and his relations to the surrounding environment, Heidegger's elaboration of dwelling refers to a creative action of building an enclosed material container which extricates the self from the outside world, articulating the masculine longing for a sovereign existence.⁶ Although, in his work, Heidegger underlines that dwelling has two aspects: construction and cultivation; he devalues the significance of cultivation by arguing that dwelling 'in the sense of preserving and nurturing is not making anything'.⁷

On the basis of Irigaray's discussion, Young suggests that Heidegger's 'curious abandonment' of cultivation can provide a turning point to reconsider notions of home and domesticity.⁸ Indeed, women's domestic works were often described by feminist scholars as endless, anonymous and suffocating. For instance, in her classic book *The Second Sex* first published in English in 1952, the French feminist philosopher Simone de Beauvoir associates women's labour employed in quotidian household maintenance with 'immanence' (in opposition to transcendence), which is deprived of an active subjectivity.⁹ However, in recent years, a number of feminist

⁵ Luce Irigaray, *Ethics of Sexual Difference* (trans.) Carolyn Burke and Gillian C. Gill (Ithaca, NY: Cornell University Press, 1992), pp. 101-103. Heidegger's conception of dwelling also recalls Sigmund Freud's notion of 'the uncanny' which is discussed in chapter two.

⁶ *Ibid.*, pp. 103-107; 52.

⁷ Heidegger, 'Building, Dwelling, Thinking', p. 147.

⁸ Young, 'House and Home: Feminist Variations on a Theme', p. 125.

⁹ Simone de Beauvoir, *The Second Sex*, (trans.) H. M. Parshley (New York: Alfred A. Knopf, 1952), p. 451. According to Beauvoir, 'legions of women have only this

theorists have started to reconsider the meaning of women's housework from a different perspective. According to Ahmed, the myth of the 'unhappy housewife' established since the time after Second World War (in the Euro-American context in particular), to a large extent, overlooks women's duty and obligation in generating happiness through works of domesticity.¹⁰ Moreover, Young identifies women's traditional household activities as a mode of preservation, which is fundamental to the formation of home and the individual subject.¹¹

According to Young, preservation makes and remakes the home into a sustaining material anchor, where the subject can be 'understood as fluid, partial, shifting and in relations of reciprocal support with others'.¹² The work of preservation not only maintains things at home against their possible destruction, but also continuously endows those objects with new meaning, in so doing connecting the past with the present in preparation for the future. Young's elaboration renders preservation as a vital, sustaining process rather than a singular, finished act of keeping something intact in time. More importantly, for Young, those domestic activities of preservation

endless struggle without victory over the dirt. And for even the most privileged the victory is never final [...]. The housewife wears herself out marking time; she makes nothing, simply perpetuates the present'. Young also cited de Beauvoir's work in her article, see Young, 'House and Home: Feminist Variations on a Theme', p. 138.

¹⁰ Sara Ahmed, *The Promise of Happiness* (Durham and London: Duke University Press, 2010), p. 56.

¹¹ Young, 'House and Home: Feminist Variations on a Theme', p.124.

¹² *Ibid.*, p. 130. Young's discussion of preservation, to some extent, constitutes a theoretical interface to weave together Irigaray's poetic conception of 'dwelling' and her psychoanalytic account of the girl's gestural response to her mother's absence, which have been both discussed in the introduction.

are not undertaken exclusively by women.¹³ With the large-scale urban renewal construction and growing intercultural exchange that began to occur in China in the early 1990s, the mundane domestic acts of preservation, demonstrated in Yin's practice, spoke to broader anxieties about the home that were experienced by the contemporary subject, whether male or female, who attempted to recuperate local living traditions and cultures which were under threat and which would be otherwise lost.

This chapter relates Yin's artistic engagement with domesticity to Young's arguments about preservation, challenging the traditional feminist negative evaluation of women's housework. With most of her art pieces constructed from second-hand clothes that bear the mark of various personal life experiences, Yin's practice often evokes a sense of intimacy, although this is also, at times, concurrent with feelings of discomfort and invasion. Furthermore, a significant number of her works demonstrate a close association with the specific domestic and communal dwelling environment in China. Dated, old-fashioned household materials and objects have been preserved and creatively refabricated into artworks exhibited at diverse international venues to interrogate issues of modern urbanization and cross-cultural exchange. This chapter asks: how might Yin's artistic practice of reclaiming old domestic items provoke interactions and reveal contradictions between human bodies and their ever-changing

¹³ Ibid., p. 144.

spatial environments in contemporary society, and so provide a distinctive insight into the notion of home and one's sense of belonging?

This chapter begins with the series of Yin's works made in her own used suitcases, which examine both the dramatic social transformation of China's urban landscape, and the increasing interregional, international movement of subjects within the global context. A number of works of artists, such as Marcel Duchamp and Vivan Sundaram, are included to constitute fascinating parallels to Yin's suitcase pieces. On the basis of Young's theoretical conception of preservation, this section further develops Meskimmon's discussion, which also compared Yin's works with Sundaram's installation pieces held by small wooden boxes, and perceived portable suitcases used in contemporary transnational art as a dynamic ground of habitation and re-habitation in a fluid state of periodic travel and migration.¹⁴ With a particular focus on Yin's banal, repetitive and meticulous domestic gestures in her artistic constitution of 'home', this section considers in what way Yin's practice might provide a distinctive insight into the question of female domesticity and homemaking, and, to some extent, subvert the classic myth of cosmopolitan existence which lies heavily in the presumptively superior, unconstrained bourgeois masculine subjectivity. The second section of this chapter provides an original, detailed formal analysis of Yin's set of enormous, semi-abstract, body-like fabric cavities made in the late 2000s, which are

¹⁴ Meskimmon, *Contemporary Art and The Cosmopolitan Imagination*, pp. 11-25.

rarely discussed in existing publications about the artist. By drawing on Ahmed's post-colonial discourses on the notion of 'strange encounters', this section investigates how these oversized, semi-abstract evocations of human organisms instigate intimate corporeal encounters between viewers and the art object, exploring concepts of dwelling and human community from a unique perspective of inter-bodily movements and interactions. This chapter ends with a section on Yin's participatory pieces, which, in different ways, restage and introduce a conventional, indigenous form of Chinese communal dwelling within the international art world. This section grounds those well-established arguments about artistic participation and social practice of democracy raised by art historians and critics, including Nicolas Bourriaud, Claire Bishop and others over the past two decades in a broader sociocultural environment to study Yin's socially-engaged artistic practices conducted in a transnational, transcultural context. In this way, this section examines how Yin's participatory pieces invite groups of viewers to constitute and reconstitute a provisional community of public engagement, yet, at the same time, challenge the legitimacy of this contingent, artistic mode of social cohesion by evoking interpersonal, intercultural differences and contradictions.

Portable Suitcases: The Immediate 'Home'

Yin's first work made with a used suitcase is *Dress Box* (1995) (Fig. 11). This installation piece came from a performance conducted on the opening day of Yin's

first solo exhibition at the Beijing Contemporary Museum of Art. In a spacious gallery room, Yin started her work by unpacking a bundle of clothes that she had worn over the course of her life from early infancy to adulthood.¹⁵ Yin refolded each item into a rectangular block and placed them on the ground in rows (Fig. 12). After that, she carefully put these folded clothes into a large wooden trunk and sealed them permanently in place with mortar cement. A small bronze sheet, attached on the inside of the trunk lid, says that ‘these clothes are those I have ever worn in the past three decades, which carry my experiences, your memories and the trace of time’.¹⁶ The final piece was exhibited along with an old-style television set displaying Yin’s original performance in making the work.

By covering her old clothes, which carry memories and physical traces of the past life, with concrete dust—a ubiquitous substance in every corner of the city, Beijing in particular, Yin recreates an ‘intimate’ relationship between her body and the place where she lives.¹⁷ By virtue of her meticulous, labour-intensive works of preservation, Yin, with *Dress Box*, connects the past with the present, grounding herself in a familiar environment filled with used personal items from home, in an

¹⁵ Yin Xiuzhen, 2012, in *Interview Yin Xiuzhen* by Sabine Wang, primary interview resources provided by the Groninger Museum.

¹⁶ Yin, ‘The Artist’s Words’, in Lv Jingjing and Zhang Xiyuan (eds.) *Yin Xiuzhen* (Hong Kong: Blue Kingfisher, 2012), p. 18.

¹⁷ As for Yin’s use of mortar cement in her practice, see Wu Hung, ‘Totally Local, Totally Global: The Art of Yin Xiuzhen’, in Wu Hung, Hou Hanru, Stephanie Rosenthal (eds.) *Yin Xiuzhen* (London & New York: Phaidon, 2015), pp. 67-71; Wu Hung, *Transience: Chinese Experimental Art at the End of the Twentieth Century* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 2005), pp. 123-125.

attempt to create an ever-present sense of being in place. Indeed, ranging from the old-fashioned, hand-made cotton vest for a little girl to the mass-produced check shirt of a married woman, Yin's work not only articulates the biography of an individual subject, but reflects on the on-going social transformation in China by invoking shared memories of life among a generation of Chinese people.

Those early hand-made garments easily remind viewers of a typical family scene of female members getting together to make clothes before the 1990s, when material conditions were limited and everything had to be purchased with specific tickets, such as cloth tickets, grain tickets and meat tickets, under a state-planned economy.¹⁸

Wooden trunks were commonly used by Chinese women to hold their personal belongings after they married and left home. Moreover, owing to destructive, urban renewal construction since the early 1990s, courtyard houses (siheyuan) and intersected narrow alleys (hutong), which constituted the centuries-old architectural layout of Beijing, have been mostly demolished and replaced by modern apartment buildings. In this situation, the preservation of memories has become, in Yin's own words, 'an alternative way for survival'.¹⁹

¹⁸ As for literatures on China's state-planned economy, see John W. Garver, *China's Quest: The History of the Foreign Relations of the People's Republic of China* (New York: Oxford University Press, 2015), pp.8-10; 46-48; Alvin Y. So, 'Introduction: Rethinking the Chinese Developmental Miracle', in Alvin Y. So (ed.) *China's Developmental Miracle: Origins, Transformations, and Challenges* (Armonk, New York & London, England: M.E. Sharpe, Inc., 2003), pp. 3-28; Dorothy J. Solinger, *Chinese Business under Socialism: The Politics of Domestic Commerce, 1949-1980* (Berkeley, California: University of California Press, 1984), pp. 26-28.

¹⁹ Yin, cited in Sue-an van der Zijpp & Mark Wilson, 'Foreword', in Lv Jingjing and

To some extent, *Dress Box* can be perceived as a monumental object dedicated to a rapidly evolving China. According to Young, the work of preservation ‘involves preparing and staging commemorations and celebrations, where those who dwell together among the things tell and retell stories of their particular lives and give and receive gifts that add to the dwelling world’.²⁰ Yin’s *Dress Box* articulates stories of things among which she dwells to embodied viewers. Her humble quotidian domestic objects are infused with new meaning through the artistic experience of social engagement. In this sense, Yin’s personal activities of preservation that constitute an individual ‘home’ may be also understood as interactive, public acts aimed at constructing and reconstructing a communal space for immediate social communication and momentary collective connectedness.

Yin’s practice grew out of an artistic phenomenon, dubbed ‘Apartment Art’, which came to prominence in China during the first half of the 1990s.²¹ According to Gao Minglu, under the impact of the prosperous economic development, art became a legitimised part of the market, turning away from earlier manifestoes of political and

Zhang Xiyuan (eds.) *Yin Xiuzhen*, p. 7

²⁰ Young, ‘House and Home: Feminist Variations on a Theme’, p. 142.

²¹ The phrase of ‘Apartment Art’ was proposed by Gao Minglu in his article ‘From Elite to Small Man: The Many Faces of a Transitional Avant-Garde in Mainland China’, in Gao Minglu (ed.) *Inside Out: New Chinese Art* [Exhibition Catalogue] (Berkeley, Los Angeles & London: University of California Press, San Francisco Museum of Modern Art and Asia Society Galleries, New York, 1998), pp. 161-165.

cultural idealism.²² A group of Chinese avant-garde artists began to explore new artistic materials and formats, in contrast to state-sponsored mainstream art.

Meanwhile, confronted with the vast social transformation in China, artists, as most Chinese people in the 1990s, experienced a difficult process of reconfiguration, in terms of social rank, community existence and individual identity.²³ In this situation, artists, including Yin and her husband Song Dong, started to create art pieces with found objects at home and to conduct practices inside their domestic residences.

According to the American philosopher and cultural theorist bell hooks, '[the] homeplace is the site of resistance and liberation struggle' which provides the subject with a safe, visionary space, partially autonomous from the dominating social structure.²⁴ For Yin and other Chinese avant-garde artists involved in 'Apartment Art' movement, the domestic was fabricated into a liberating and productive space, in which they were free to critically reflect on recent social developments and to reveal contradictions between the enjoyment of material advancement that rapid urbanization produced and the concomitant loss of social traditions and cultural attachments that Yin addressed in her subsequent suitcase pieces.

²² Gao Minglu, in Christina Yu, 'Curating Chinese Art in the 21st Century: An Interview with Gao Minglu', *Yishu: Journal of Contemporary Chinese Art*, 2006, 5 (1), p. 22. For similar arguments, see Wu Hung, 'Introduction', in Wu Hung, Wang Huangsheng and Feng Boyi (eds.) *The First Guangzhou Triennial—Reinterpretation: A Decade of Chinese Experimental Art (1990-2000)* [Exhibition Catalogue] (Guangzhou: Guangdong Museum of Art, 2002).

²³ Gao, in Yu, 'Curating Chinese Art in the 21st Century: An Interview with Gao Minglu', p. 30.

²⁴ bell hooks, *Yearning: Race, Gender and Cultural Politics* (Boston: South End Press, 1990), p. 43.

According to the sociologist Zygmunt Bauman, ‘the most vital (and probably in the long run most consequential) characteristic of contemporary urban life [is], namely, the intimate interplay between globalizing pressures and the fashion in which the identities of urban sites are negotiated, formed and reformed’.²⁵ The progress of globalization, to different extents, influences contemporary urban life, giving rise to the reconstruction of infrastructure facilities, the expansion of urban space, as well as the unprecedented mobility of human life, which are particularly investigated in Yin’s practice from the late 1990s.²⁶

In 2000, Yin exhibited her series of works, titled *Suitcases* (Fig. 13; Fig. 14). From the inside of large open suitcases, she erected individual fabric buildings to constitute a room-sized, ephemeral city in a constant state of flux. Worn garments, such as a light-blue shirt, a long flowered dress and several pairs of skin-coloured pantyhose, have been stretched over foldable wooden or bamboo frameworks in different heights and shapes, to form fabric buildings with small windows and doors tailored by the artist’s hands. Illuminated from within, most of them look like strange, awkward and anonymous modern architectures, free of regional specificities. The alternate folding and unfolding of these suitcases throughout different exhibitions bring to mind the

²⁵ Zygmunt Bauman, *Liquid Times: Living in an Age of Uncertainty* (Cambridge: Polity Press, 2007), p. 79.

²⁶ From Bauman’s perspective, it is the pervasiveness of globalization that creates the shifty and uncertain situation of the ‘modern liquid’ city. *Ibid.*, p. 81.

process of modern urbanization in China and other parts of the world, which is characterized by periodic demolition and reconstruction, as well as migration and re-habitation.

Alongside the suitcases, Yin also displayed a video piece, depicting her experience of travelling with luggage throughout various international airports and finally going back home (see Fig. 13; Fig. 14). According to Yin, ‘the earliest inspiration for my suitcase works came from the baggage lines at the airport. I watched all these suitcases rotating by. I thought each one was like a tiny, shrunken home’.²⁷ Filled with foldable fabric buildings, each of these suitcases can be understood as a ‘portable home’, articulating the longing for belonging in an ever-changing living environment of contemporary metropolitan life. The work demonstrates not only Yin’s own itinerant lifestyle, but the increasingly prevalent, both promising and challenging uprooted experience of individual subjects owing to growing international travel, migration and exchange.

Yin’s practice subverts the generally-accepted ordinariness of ‘everyday life’, collapsing the socially and culturally defined distinction between use and aesthetic values.²⁸ In her works, mundane objects, old clothes and suitcases in particular, have

²⁷ Yin, ‘The Artist’s Words’, p. 102.

²⁸ See Ben Highmore, ‘Introduction: Questioning the Everyday Life’, in Ben Highmore (ed.) *The Everyday Life Reader* (London: Routledge, 2002), pp. 1-34.

been released from their conventional use value and rearranged into a new artistic format to examine the present urban living environment.²⁹ Yin, in this way, empowers the banal domesticity of ordinary household objects, which are traditionally considered as emblematic of ‘everyday life’, those items that are, as Ben Highmore has pointed out, ‘left out of historical accounts and swept aside by the onslaught of events instigated by elites’.³⁰

This conceptual correlation between home and suitcase has been further developed in Yin’s on-going project— *Portable Cities* begun in 2001. Instead of individual, anonymous buildings, her used suitcases, in this project, are filled with miniature models of cities, such as Beijing, Shanghai, Frankfurt, Paris, Berlin, Tokyo, San Francisco and Groningen, made of stitched together, washed old clothes collected from local residents in each of those specific places.³¹ Before my discussion of this particular series of sculptural pieces, I want to consider another two art projects in which portable suitcases or hand-held wooden boxes similarly constitute a crucial part in the construction and presentation of the artwork. As inspiring parallels to

²⁹ This, to some extent, resonates with Georg Simmel’s discussion cited by Highmore that the subject’s desire, rather than productive labour, is the source of an object’s value in modern social life. See Georg Simmel, ‘The Future of Our Culture’ (1909), in Mark Ritter and David Frisby (trans.) and David Frisby and Mike Featherstone (eds.) *Simmel on Culture* (London: Sage, 1997), p. 101.

³⁰ Highmore, ‘Introduction: Questioning the Everyday Life’, p. 1.

³¹ Some of the clothes came from people whom Yin had once come across or worked with; others were brought by these people from their friends, family members or even from people they were not so familiar with. Yin Xiuzhen, 2012, in *Interview Yin Xiuzhen by Sabine Wang*, a primary interview resource provided by the Groninger Museum.

Portable Cities series, these works help develop a more insightful perspective on Yin's artistic practice of 'home-making' in a global context through quotidian domestic works of preservation.

Yin's miniature cities packed in suitcases recall Marcel Duchamp's artworks, *La Boîte-en-valise* (Fig. 15), which were constructed between the years of 1935 and 1941. In response to his own displacement during the period leading up to World War II, Duchamp took photographs and made diminutive duplicates of his artworks, from his earlier oil paintings to his later pieces, such as *The Large Glass* (1915-1923) and *Fountain* (1917). He then put this collection of miniature replicas into nearly 300 leather valises, and categorized and labelled them as though a small-scale museum display.³² As with Yin's suitcase works, *La Boîte-en-valise* explored and demonstrated the concept of home as a nomadic, migratory site.

As T. J. Demos has argued, *La Boîte-en-valise* 'served multiple functions', as Duchamp imbricated his own geopolitical displacement with 'the developing paradigms of the museum and photography'.³³ On the one hand, *La Boîte-en-valise*

³² Rebecca J. DeRoo *The Museum Establishment and Contemporary Art: The Politics of Artistic Display in France After 1968* (New York: Cambridge University Press, 2006), p. 103.

³³ T. J. Demos, *The Exiles of Marcel Duchamp* (Cambridge, Massachusetts and London: MIT Press, 2007), p. 21; 25. For similar arguments, see also David Hopkins, *Marcel Duchamp and Max Ernst: The Bride Shared* (Oxford, Clarendon Press, 1998), pp. 167-170. Juan Antonio Ramírez, *Duchamp: Love and Death, Even*, translated by Alexander R. Tulloch (London: Reaktion Books, 1998), pp. 43-46.

provided Duchamp with ‘a portable home built upon the assembly of photographic reproduction’ of his artworks in a situation of homelessness; on the other, these works articulated Duchamp’s ‘longing for an independent existence’ that grew both out of the pressures of nationalism, which aimed to secure a unified subject and collective identity, and the increasing artistic institutionalization, especially in terms of the reproduction, distribution and commodification of the work of art.³⁴ With his portable ‘museum’, Duchamp intended to extricate himself from all national and institutional regimentations. Troubled by the loss of a secure living space and intimate personal relationships with friends and family members, Duchamp obsessively fabricated substitutes in the form of artificial analogies, in an attempt to reconstitute the self and his relations to a permanently-lost past. In this sense, Duchamp’s conception of ‘home’, revealed in *La Boîte-en-valise*, is based on a ‘dream-state conflation of past memories and images’, detached from the cruel reality of exile.³⁵ This contrasts to Young’s elaboration of home-making through preservation which underlines a sustaining process of embodied interaction with the specific living context within which the subject dwells.³⁶

By comparison, Vivan Sundaram’s *The Sher-Gil Archive* (1995-1996) offers a

³⁴ Demos, *The Exiles of Marcel Duchamp*, pp. 20-21.

³⁵ Gabson Bachelard, *The Poetics of Space: The Classic Look at How We Experience Intimate Places*, translated by Maria Jolas (Boston: Beacon Press, 1994), p. 5. The quotation is from Johung’s interpretation of Bachelard’s arguments in Johung, *Replacing Home*, p. xxii.

³⁶ Young, ‘House and Home: Feminist Variations on a Theme’, pp. 142-144.

different artistic model of constructing ‘home’ via preserving and re-appropriating old personal objects. The work is composed of five small wooden cases, which carry family photographs, along with a few letters and personal items, left by Sundaram’s maternal grandfather, Umrao Singh Sher-Gil, who was a Sanskrit scholar and one of the earliest photographers in India.³⁷ Between 1894 and 1947, Umrao Singh took a series of photographs of himself and his family—his wife, the Hungarian opera singer Marie Antoinette, his elder daughter, the eminent Indian painter Amrita, and his younger daughter Indira, Sundaram’s mother.³⁸ These photographs appear as residues of the family’s history—their life traces in both European metropolises and the Northern Indian subcontinent. Carried in teak boxes with red carpet linings, Sundaram’s *The Sher-Gil Archive* is displayed as a work of commemoration, which recollects the stories of periodic dwelling and migration of a remarkable family across geographical and cultural boundaries during the first half of the twentieth century.

For example, inside Sundaram’s *Box Three: Home* (Fig. 16), there are four attached small wooden cubes. Miniature photographs of the domestic spaces of the Sher-Gil family’s homes in Lahore, Budapest, Shimla and Paris are pasted on the surfaces of each. In this way, the four homes where the Sher-Gil family once lived are connected with each other and packed in a portable teak case. This not only articulates the

³⁷ Asian Art Archive, the website page on *The Sher-Gil Archive*, accessed on March 30, 2016,

<http://www.aaa.org.hk/Collection/CollectionOnline/SpecialCollectionItem/450>.

³⁸ Ibid.

transnational, transcultural experience of the family in a specific historical background, but proposes a productive way of thinking about home, as Meskimmon has suggested, ‘in and through multiple locations without reducing them to sameness’.³⁹

Furthermore, the majority of Umrao Singh’s photographs included in *The Sher-Gil Archive* are portraits taken in the interiors of these homes. As Meskimmon has pointed out, Amrita’s studio within the family’s residence in Shimla, shown in the photographs, was designed and furnished in the ‘international style’, whereas huge amounts of photographs of Umrao Singh practising yoga were taken in their apartment in Paris.⁴⁰ In this sense, I want to suggest that the domestic space, presented in *The Sher-Gil Archive*, can be perceived as a performative arena to stage and restage the family’s habitual ways of life in a fluid situation of travel and migration. According to the feminist philosopher Rosalyn Diprose:

Dwelling is both a noun (the place to which one returns) and a verb (the practice of dwelling); my dwelling is both my habitat and my habitual way of life. My habitual way of life, ethos or set of habits determines my character (my specificity or what is properly my own). These habits are not given: they are constituted through the repetition of bodily acts the character of which are

³⁹ Meskimmon, *Contemporary Art and The Cosmopolitan Imagination*, p. 25. Meskimmon also uses Sundaram’s *The Sher-Gil Archive* as a parallel to Yin’s *Portable Cities*.

⁴⁰ *Ibid.*, p. 22.

govern by the habitat I occupy.⁴¹

Diprose's argument identifies the distinction between 'home' as a material structure, and 'home-making' as a continuous practice of embodied activities in the household, demonstrating the importance of quotidian domestic life in the construction and reconstruction of home and one's sense of belonging. As for the Sher-Gil family, although they moved across a variety of social and cultural contexts, their habitual ways of life, such as Amrita's preference for western furnishing and design style, and Umrao Singh's commitment to Yoga, were preserved, sustained or even further developed. It is, in this way, that the family were able to make and remake a 'home' in multiple geographical locations.

In recent years, *The Sher-Gil Archive* has been exhibited in a multitude of places including Budapest, New Delhi, Bombay, Havana, Brisbane and Tokyo.⁴² Through his own experience of travel in the 'new' context of globalization, Sundaram infuses vibrant living meaning into his family 'archive'. By preserving and rearranging old photographs and objects left by his grandfather in his practice, Sundaram makes and remakes himself 'at home', relating his present to his family's history, and communicating with different viewer groups beyond geographical boundaries.

⁴¹ Rosalyn Diprose, *The Bodies of Women: Ethics, Embodiment and Sexual Difference* (London and New York: Routledge, 2005), p. 16. This paragraph is also cited by Meskimmon in her discussion of Yin's *Portable Cities* series. See *Contemporary Art and The Cosmopolitan Imagination*, p. 19.

⁴² See Asian Art Archive, the webpage on *The Sher-Gil Archive*, accessed March 30, 2016, <http://www.aaa.org.hk/Collection/CollectionOnline/SpecialCollectionItem/450>.

However, as a photographic ‘archive’, the work articulates a fragmentary, reduced artistic reconstitution, rather than a complete life story of the Sher-Gil family’s past. It is notable that the repetitive, painstaking yet necessary domestic work of home-making, such as furnishing, decorating, arranging and maintaining the various homes, is never explicitly presented in either Umrao Singh’s original photographs, or Sundaram’s installation works.

According to Young, ‘when things and works are maintained against destruction, but not in the context of life activity, they become museum pieces’.⁴³ In spite of the fact that both Duchamp and Sundaram’s practices include activities of preserving old personal items in order to sustain individual identity and the meaning of home, their artworks appear more like museum pieces, detached from the chores of quotidian life. In this respect, unlike Duchamp and Sundaram’s works, Yin’s *Portable Cities* series, as Meskimmon has suggested, relate ‘the most ordinary individual activities of living in a city’, such as sewing, wearing, knitting, repairing, packing, walking and carrying, to both the construction of the city, and the dynamic global communication and movement that the city enables.⁴⁴ In this way, Yin demonstrates an artistic form of ‘home-making’ through preservation, which is rooted in our trivial experiences of everyday life, and which gives rise to more grounded interactions between the subject and the place she inhabits.

⁴³ Young, ‘House and Home: Feminist Variations on a Theme’, p. 142.

⁴⁴ Meskimmon, *Contemporary Art and The Cosmopolitan Imagination*, p. 16.

Yin's *Portable Cities* series started in Beijing—her home city, where she was born and brought up (Fig. 17). A light green shirt was sewn up with a piece of blue cloth and stretched out across the bottom half of an open suitcase, to create a surface. On this fabric plane, Yin sewed a ring of small buildings along the edge of the suitcase, within which is an empty patch. There is a small hole on it, where Yin installed a magnifying glass underneath. Through it, viewers can see a map of the old Beijing. Inside the suitcase, Yin also set up a small light and a speaker. When exhibited, the artwork emanates a sound recording taken in Shichahai, the public district at the north of Beihai Park. Apart from the sound of people's voices, viewers can also hear the chants of Beijing opera. Covered with fabric pieces in different shades of green, the interior side of the suitcase lid might symbolize the green belt on the outskirts of the city.

In Yin's *Portable City: Beijing*, each fabric building appears as a small, colourful rectangular block devoid of recognizable features. The only identifiable landmark architecture is the China Central Television Tower—a sign of urban modernization and mobilization. Most viewers can only tell the city's identity through the map placed under the magnifying lens. As the sociologist Georg Simmel has argued, a trace of strangeness can enter even the most intimate relationship, engendering a

sense of estrangement that synthesizes nearness and remoteness.⁴⁵ Yin employed old clothes collected from people residing in Beijing to construct a strange city deprived of familiar characteristics. In this way, Yin's *Portable City: Beijing* articulates a strong sense of alienation, as the familiar home has become strange and anonymous. In addition, the empty patch at the centre can be easily related to the displacement caused by the large-scale urban renewal construction in the 1990s, when numerous families had to leave their courtyard-house residences and move into high-rise modern block buildings located in the suburbs of Beijing.

The year after, Yin made her second city, *Portable City: Shanghai* (Fig. 18). Unlike the suitcase of Beijing, most of the miniature buildings erected in this work are recognizable landmark architectures (even for foreign travellers), including the Oriental Pearl Tower, Jin Mao Building and Shanghai World Financial Centre. However, all these buildings featured in the work are located in Pudong, a newly-established metropolitan area. A blue shirt is stretched over the bottom half of an open suitcase. A circle of small light bulbs are attached on the inside of the back cover shining through a piece of red cloth. A pair of pantyhose is pulled from the right corner of the suitcase to the left side of the back cover, which forms two parallel curves, sweeping over the suitcase. In this way, the bottom half of the suitcase is divided into two triangular regions. Whereas the lower left part remains empty, the

⁴⁵ Simmel, 'The Stranger', in Kurt Wolff (ed.) and (trans.) *The Sociology of Georg Simmel* (New York: Free Press, 1950), p. 404.

right-hand corner of the suitcase is filled with those landmark skyscrapers in Pudong.

At the centre of the blue base is a circular opening, where Yin, again, inserted a magnifying lens for viewers to see a map of Shanghai under the surface.

The piece highlights the view of the Pudong Special Economic Zone, seen from the historic Bund opposite, where the remnant of the former concession locates. The pair of stretched pantyhose conceptually resembles the Huangpu River, which divides the new and the historic areas (Pudong and the Bund), as shown on the map beneath the magnifying glass. Pudong was a small village of farmland and countryside until the late 1980s. It was rapidly developed under the government's Open Door Policy. Over the past two decades, Pudong gradually replaced the Bund to become the city's new economic centre. Huge amounts of people moved into Pudong for the better working and living environment.⁴⁶ Emitting the noise recorded from the city's streets, the work brings to mind the massive social change that has taken place in Shanghai, which resulted in both the displacement and reconstruction of homes and communities. The physical disappearance of the Bund might allude to the decline of histories and cultures which usually happens to a progressively developing city.

These two suitcases of Beijing and Shanghai have travelled with Yin and been

⁴⁶ As for the development of Pudong into a Special Economic Zone, see J. Bruce Jacobs and Lijian Hong, 'Shanghai and the Lower Yangzi Valley', in David S.G. Goodman and Gerald Segal (eds.) *China Deconstructs: Politics, Trade and Regionalism* (London and New York: Routledge, 1994), pp. 235-251.

exhibited in a wide range of geographical locations. By telling and retelling the stories of her home city and home country to viewers from multiple backgrounds, Yin's works give rise to not only cross-cultural communication and connectedness, but, at times, disagreement and confusion. With her works, Yin reveals the new, as well as the old, the progress of social life, as well as the replacement of home and the loss of living traditions. Indeed, compared with the convenience, benefit and enjoyment achieved through modern urban development, Yin's art pieces attach more significance to its negative effects, demonstrating a relatively pessimistic configuration of this important process of social advancement.

In contrast, Yin's suitcases made for cities outside China are less critical, and more touristic in approach, which resonates with her status as a foreign traveller. For instance, Yin's *Portable City: Paris* (2004) (Fig. 19) is erected from a large open suitcase with red velvet linings. A flowered black lace blouse covers over the bottom half of the suitcase to form a fabric plinth. The inside of the suitcase lid is blanketed by two cotton shirts in red and dark brown respectively. A slightly twisted sleeve of a grey sweater is drawn from the left of the back lid to the front of the suitcase, which resembles the famous Champs Élysées. Along both of its sides are the toy-like, hand-stitched Eiffel Tower, Arch of Triumph, Notre Dame and Louvre Museum. A group of white and light yellow, fabric block buildings with blue-green roofs are located in the lower right hand corner of the suitcase. In front of the stitched Louvre,

there is also a void-like opening with a magnifying glass installed to display a map of Paris illuminated by a circle of small light bulbs underneath. On the back edge of the suitcase lid, the Grand Arche de la D efense is erected among a cluster of high-rise, modern office buildings. Accompanied by the noise recorded from the city's streets, the artwork appears as a three-dimensional postcard with well-known sites and buildings, circulated in the global tourist network. This is also shown evidently in other works of *Portable Cities*. Sightseeing landmarks such as the Brandenburg Gate, Berlin; the Spain Television Tower, Madrid; the Gold Gate Bridge, San Francisco; and the Sydney Opera House all vividly rise from Yin's suitcases.

Fabricated from the washed worn clothes of local people living in the place, each of these suitcases is a work of commemoration for Yin's experience of inhabiting a foreign city—her explorations of the local space and interactions with its residents. Similar to an ordinary tourist, who alleviates the anxiety of being in an unfamiliar place by taking photographs everywhere to colonize new spaces through the camera lens, Yin fabricates toy-like miniature cities and packs them into suitcases to display as a collection of individual belongings. In this way, Yin seeks to create intimacies with these places where she has travelled around and lived for a short period of time. Indeed, compared with her critical investigation of the dwelling environment in Beijing and Shanghai, Yin's physical and conceptual engagement with these foreign cities is relatively contingent and superficial. By simply replicating landmarks of each

city on a miniature scale, Yin's works might recall Jean Baudrillard's discussion of the modern living situation in his classic essay 'The Ecstasy of Communication' (1968): 'this is the time of miniaturization, telecommand and the micro-procession of time, bodies, pleasures. There is no longer any ideal principle for these things at a higher level, on a human scale'.⁴⁷ Yin's practice, to some extent, reveals the decline of human experience and local culture in contemporary cities, where everything, as Baudrillard argues, can be reduced to a consumable, superficial image transmitted through various media communication systems.

When exhibited, Yin's suitcases of Beijing, Shanghai as well as other foreign cities are typically displayed together, with an abstract map drawn by yellow woollen yarns and small buttons on and between the walls to reveal their geographical relations (Fig. 20). Through Yin's own border-crossing itineraries unevenly around the world, old clothes of local residents who live in a specific city are also involved in transnational flows and exchanges. According to Yin:

People in our contemporary setting have moved from residing in a static environment to becoming souls in a constantly shifting transience [...]; [the] suitcase becomes the life support container of modern living[...],[the] holder of

⁴⁷ Jean Baudrillard, 'The Ecstasy of Communication' (1968) in Joanne Morra and Marquard Smith (eds.) *Visual Culture: Critical Concepts in Media and Cultural Studies* (London and New York: Routledge, 2006), p. 230

the continuous construction of a human entity.⁴⁸

Oscillating between arrival and departure, Yin's *Portable Cities* works propose an alternative conception of home, which is marked by successive passages and movements. As Young suggests, mundane activities of home-making do not fix the subject in time and place, but instead they construct and reconstruct both the subject and home through reciprocal communications with multiple living spaces and human bodies.⁴⁹ With her works, Yin demonstrates a fluid situation of 'being at home' again and again in a multitude of geographical locations, however temporarily and contingently, by virtue of her repetitive, unremarkable domestic works of preservation.

Meanwhile, by blurring the distinction between soft and concrete, home and the outside world, as well as domestic maintenance and urban construction, Yin's *Portable Cities* series also provide a different perspective to think about Young's notion of preservation, which is proposed on the basis of a particular social and cultural situation that women, in many cultures, are excluded from the activities of building houses.⁵⁰ Through her practice, Yin not only fabricates models of cities where she has resided, but sustains her habitual way of life in a constant state of

⁴⁸ Yin, cited in Isabel Carlos (ed.) *On Reason and Emotion—Biennale of Sydney 2004* [Exhibition Catalogue] (Sydney: Art Gallery of NSW, Biennale of Sydney Ltd, 2004), p. 222.

⁴⁹ Young, 'House and Home: Feminist Variations on a Theme', pp. 143-144.

⁵⁰ *Ibid.*, p. 123.

travel via her banal obsessive gestures of mundane domesticity. In this sense, two modes of ‘home-making’, construction and preservation, are imaginatively and inextricably combined with each other, challenging the conventional exclusion of women in constructing home and the city, even if in a heavily metaphorical manner.

Directly placed on the floor, the miniature scale of Yin’s works elicits viewers to bend down or squat in order to scrutinize each city’s landscape. They are supposed to move from one suitcase to another and finally step back to see the map in the backdrop. In this way, Yin, with her works, constructs a contingent, communal space of moving human bodies and well-travelled suitcases involved in the global network of interconnected cities. According to the sociologist Eugene Thacker, ‘in the discourses surrounding networks, the tropes of connectivity, collectivity and participation obscure the material practices of network’.⁵¹ Yin’s *Portable Cities* pieces evoke a momentary sense of co-belonging among viewers, grounded no longer on a particular geographical location, but on their embodied, simultaneous engagement with the movements and connections between cities and regions at the global level demonstrated in the work.

However, Yin’s practice, I would suggest, is not fundamentally critical nor does it

⁵¹ Eugene Thacker, ‘Foreword: Protocol Is as Protocol Does’, in Alexander R. Galloway (ed.) *Protocol: How Control Exists after Decentralization* (Cambridge, MA & London, England: MIT Press, 2004), p. xviii.

entirely avoid potential charges of romanticism. Her *Portable Cities* series, which are politically and aesthetically committed to a form of utopian and unconstrained mobility of commodities, images, capital and human beings within the unprecedentedly globalized world, ignore the force of exclusion, as well as the existing geopolitical and socioeconomic disparity in the disguise of globalization. As Demos has argued, the poetic practice of nomadism in the contemporary art world normally ‘tends to dramatize first and foremost the artist’s own privileged, peripatetic existence’, and ‘fails to reflexively consider the institutional, historical, and geographical parameters in which the nomadic exists and ends up’.⁵² Despite Yin’s attempts of revealing and reflecting on the pervasive unsettledness and fluidity of human life in contemporary society, her works are still the results of her financially and politically empowered experience of travel and habitation as an established international artist. ‘Without radical political demands for equality’, her romanticized artistic space of transnational mobility and transregional connectedness constituted by varied suitcases of fabricated miniature cities is far from the conflictual and constrained reality that is experienced by mobile multitudes of migrants and refugees in relatively disadvantaged positions within the hierarchically organized and asymmetrically developed world.⁵³

⁵² T. J. Demos, *The Migrant Image: The Art and Politics of Documentary During Global Crisis* (Durham & London: Duke University Press, 2013), p. 11.

⁵³ *Ibid.*, p. 14.

Fabric Cavities: Fabricating 'Strange Encounters'

According to Bauman, 'cities are spaces where strangers stay and move in close proximity'.⁵⁴ Even individuals, who remain close to their home and local community, may still experience a sense of dislocation, due to their frequent, intimate encounters with 'outsiders' in the context of globalization. The second section of this chapter considers a series of gigantic fabric cavities created by Yin between 2008 and 2010. Constructed from hundreds of items of washed second-hand clothes, these works are modelled as soft, semi-abstract evocations of oversized human body parts. They represent a large red heart, an enormous blue brain, an enlarged cross-section of human epidermis and a giant, fleshy, womb-like interior space. By adopting the vernacular metaphor of clothing as a 'second skin', Yin fabricates metonymic body parts, instigating physical, bodily interactions between viewing subjects and her imposing sculptural pieces.⁵⁵ Unlike the suitcase works, these fabric cavities, I want to suggest, stage and explore the experience of what it is to encounter foreign places and unfamiliar bodies under globalization, through embodied, inter-corporeal movements and interactions that might conjure up the anxious, uncomfortable situation of 'living in the unsolicited yet obtrusive proximity' with strangers as Bauman has described.⁵⁶

⁵⁴ Bauman, *Liquid Times*, p. 85.

⁵⁵ Yin indicated this idea in the text on the gallery wall of the exhibition 'Yin Xiuzhen', Groninger Museum, Groningen, 2012, at which two of Yin's cavities, *Engine and Thought*, were exhibited.

⁵⁶ Bauman, *Liquid Times*, p. 86.

Both the body and its boundaries have long constituted an important site for female artists to explore the formation of the self and subjectivity. For instance, in the early 1960s, Louise Bourgeois made a series of *Lairs*, by pouring two different liquid materials next to each other. A rippling, soft latex mould would be covered with an outer shell made of poured plaster. According to Mignon Nixon, to view the works of *Lairs* is to track a material process in which the interior and the exterior of the object are ‘structurally involved but not fully coextensive’.⁵⁷ The splitting of the sculptural piece through the process of making ‘has as its corollary a splitting of the subject’.⁵⁸ From the mid-1970s, under the influence of Laura Mulvey’s article ‘Visual Pleasure and Narrative Cinema’ (1975), the female body began to be considered an erotic signifier for masculine visual pleasure.⁵⁹ In opposition to the objectified representation of the female body in typical Hollywood commercial films, and in mass media, women artists started exploring marginal spaces of the body, which are, as the feminist film theorist Teresa de Lauretis has suggested, ‘erased, or better, re-contained and sealed into the image by the cinematic rules of narrativization’.⁶⁰ In

⁵⁷ Mignon Nixon, *Fantastic Reality: Louise Bourgeois and a Story of Modern Art* (Cambridge: MIT Press/October Books, 2005), p. 180.

⁵⁸ *Ibid*, p. 184.

⁵⁹ See Laura Mulvey, ‘Visual Pleasure and Narrative Cinema’. *Screen*, Autumn 1975, vol.16, no.3, pp. 6-18.

⁶⁰ Teresa de Lauretis, *Technologies of Gender: Essays on Theory, Film and Fiction* (London: Macmillan, 1989), p. 26. The discussion surrounding the representation of the female body also resulted in negative evaluations in the 1970s and 1980s of the artworks in which the artists, straightforwardly, used and explored the female body. This has been discussed and reconsidered by feminist art historians since the 1990s. For instance, see Amelia Jones, *Body Art: Performing the Subject* (Minneapolis and London: University of Minnesota Press, 1998), especially pp. 22-29.

recent years, this artistic investigation of bodily margins has been no longer merely restricted to the feminist debate on the representation of the female body, but further developed in a broader social and political context to study inter-bodily, interpersonal relations.⁶¹

By transforming fleshy, visceral, human organisms into oversized fabric sculptural pieces, most of which remain open to viewers' visual or physical penetration into the interior, Yin's cavities not only expose a normally concealed and unfamiliar dimension of the body, but collapse the established boundaries between self and other, and internal and external. More importantly, covered with a skin-like touchable outer membrane, these works investigate one's bodily existence and relations to other subjects via the concept of 'touch'. Grounded in the present context of growing international travel and migration under globalization, this section draws on Ahmed's description of 'strange encounters' in her work on the postcolonial subject, in which the stranger is described as possessing a contingent, embodied and physical status produced through and constituted by tactile encounters with other bodies.⁶²

⁶¹ For example, bodily margins, such as hair, constitute a productive, yet ambiguous and conflictual site in Mona Hatoum's works, which are examined in chapter two.

⁶² Sara Ahmed, *Strange Encounters: Embodied Others in Post-coloniality* (London and New York: Routledge, 2000), p. 6; 15. The use of Ahmed's theoretical arguments about 'strange encounters' in my discussion of Yin's fabric cavities follows Jo Applin's 2011 study of Claes Oldenburg's 'Proposed Colossal Monuments'. See Jo Applin, "'Strange Encounters': Claes Oldenburg's 'Proposed Colossal Monuments' for New York and London", *Art History*, 2011, 34/4, pp. 838-57. This article examined a particular set of works by Oldenburg with reference to Ahmed's theoretical works on 'strange encounters'.

According to Ahmed, bodies are both formed and deformed via ‘economies of touch’.⁶³ Through physical encounters with other bodies in close proximity, the individual body of the immigrant, the stranger or the native subject and the collective body of a community can be each brought into a precarious state of being.⁶⁴ Compared with Bauman, Ahmed points out more explicitly that intimate physical interactions between ‘strangers’ can challenge the integrity of the subject and the conventional conception of human community as a coherent and unified social construction. This section examines in what way Yin’s body-like fabric cavities evoke ‘strange encounters’ with viewing subjects, bringing to the fore issues of corporeality and tactility raised by Ahmed. Different from some other works examined in this chapter, which demonstrate evident cultural implications for Yin’s Chinese background, this particular series of oversized sculptural pieces set out to explore the formation of the individual subject and the wider community in which people find themselves from a relatively universal and abstract perspective.

Over the past ten years, Yin has obsessively collected old clothes and sorted them by colour to create sculptures.⁶⁵ As Stella North has argued, clothing, as ‘the layer of the world closest to the body, and the layer of the lived body closest to the world’, is

⁶³ Ahmed, *Strange Encounters*, p. 49.

⁶⁴ Ibid.

⁶⁵ Patricia Karetzky, ‘Yin Xiuzhen’, in *Femininity in Asian Women Artists’ Work from China, Korea and USA: If the Shoe Fits*, kindle edition (London: KT Press, 2012), the third page of the ‘Yin Xiuzhen’ part.

‘both corporeally and inter-corporeally significant’, and plays a crucial role in forming and presenting embodied experience.⁶⁶ On the basis of Didier Anzieu’s psychoanalytical conception of ‘the skin ego’, which ‘takes the body’s physical skin as the primary organ underlying the formation of the ego’, North proposes the idea of ‘the clothing ego’.⁶⁷ From her perspective, clothing, which ‘simultaneously extends the skinned body into the space of the world and marks the limit of its interaction’, performs ‘a similar ego-function’ to skin, constituting a mediated interface through which the subject can configure the formation of the self and her relations to other bodies.⁶⁸

In the case of her fabric cavities, the majority of the clothes used by Yin are second-hand, mass-produced undervests and shirts. Most of them are deliberately turned inside out in order to conceal their external appearance and to expose instead their interiors, that which sat closest to the skin of their former owners. By manipulating these used clothes without precise markers of the wearers’ class, region, race and gender, Yin does not aim to fabricate material substitutes for the body of a

⁶⁶ Stella North, ‘The Surfacing of the Self: The Clothing Ego’, in Sheila L. Cavanagh, Angela Failler, Rachel Alpha Johnston Hurst (eds.) *Skin, Culture and Psychoanalysis* (New York: Palgrave Macmillan, 2013), pp. 64-65.

⁶⁷ The first quotation is from Jay Prosser’s interpretation of Didier Anzieu’s discussion in *The Skin Ego*, trans. Chris Turner (New Haven, CT: Yale University Press, 1989), p. 62. Jay Prosser, *Second Skins: The Body Narratives of Transsexuality* (New York: Columbia University Press, 1998), p. 65. North, ‘The Surfacing of the Self: The Clothing Ego’, p. 64.

⁶⁸ North, ‘The Surfacing of the Self: The Clothing Ego’, p. 72; p.79.

particular social or cultural individual or community.⁶⁹ Rather, her enormous sculptural objects are each constructed as an anonymous, estranged body of ‘second skin’, provoking viewers’ tactile interactions with the artwork and exploring the physical relations between self and other, and individual and community, through the skin-like, ambiguous interface of clothing. Moreover, despite the fact that the clothes employed in Yin’s works are normally washed before use, the surface of her fabric cavities still engenders a sense of discomfort and estrangement, especially when viewers navigate these huge sculptural objects at close proximity. Since people often feel reluctant to come close to the worn clothes of strangers, those discarded undervests in particular. Fabricated into metonymic body parts with the uncomfortable ‘second skins’ of unknown, nameless bodies, Yin’s cavities engage viewers in strange, yet open corporeal encounters with the sculptural object, which might inspire them to imagine the bodily experience of being a stranger to other bodies.

Engine (2008) (Fig. 21) takes the form of an oversized human heart. Through a physically demanding process, Yin covered an armature of welded steel wires with hundreds of articles of old red clothing, roughly layered and stitched together. Most of the chosen clothes are made from a thick cotton textile, which prevent light from

⁶⁹ In this respect, Yin’s fabric cavities are quite different from her *Portable Cities* works, each of which is fabricated from old clothes given by local residents living in the specific city.

penetrating the inside of the artwork. As the uneven layers of fabric depict the fluctuating surface of the human heart, those scratchy seams between different items of clothing constitute a complicated network of threads suggestive of blood vessels. The imposing presence of the work provokes a sense of unease. The collars and sleeves of the clothes have been rolled into small tubes in various sizes and depths, which jut out into the viewer's space at different angles. This enormous, fleshy, bulbous object tapers to a single narrow opening, embedded with a stainless steel rim—the 'heart valve' at the end. Those protruding tubes appear as unblinking, watchful or even potentially devouring bodily orifices, which lure the viewing subject to come close to the work, yet still keep her at a certain distance by presenting an underlying threat to her body.⁷⁰ Higher up, with the aid of a stretched turtleneck sweater, the 'arch of aorta' is fabricated into a concave black cavity. Placed above the viewer's head, it induces her to look up, engendering a sense of danger with its intangible depth and darkness.

As Ahmed has argued, 'bodies are touched by some bodies differently from other

⁷⁰ As for the abstract materiality of the void, Jo Applin, in her discussion of Lee Bontecou's series of wall-mounted reliefs made during the late 1950s and the early 1960s, has argued that 'it is the void at the point of activation, as staring socket or vacant, hollow, activated orifice and black absence, which lures the viewer and mobilizes the encounter between the object and the spectator'. See Jo Applin, "'This Threatening and Possibly Functioning Object': Lee Bontecou and the Sculptural Void'. *Art History*, June 2006, 29/3, p. 490. Similar arguments which relate abstract sculptural holes or voids to potentially threatening bodily orifices have been also made by Nixon in her discussion of Louise Bourgeois' abstract sculptural pieces. See Nixon, *Fantastic Reality*, p. 180

bodies'; and different ways of 'touching' allow for different configurations between inclusion and exclusion.⁷¹ Thus, 'the social body is precisely the effect of being with some others over other others'.⁷² Yin's *Engine* elicits the viewing subject's physical interaction with the sculptural work in close proximity, yet refuses the actual traversing of the established bodily boundaries. With its oppressive scale and numerous threatening, protruding orifices, this oversized fabric heart provokes an uncomfortable or even aggressive inter-bodily 'touch' between the viewer and the sculptural object, through a tactile 'fleshy metonymy'.⁷³ Indeed, in this case, touch does not necessarily refer to an actual, tactile contact with Yin's fabricated body part, since the refusal of intimate touch between bodies that have come into close proximity, as Ahmed has indicated, can also form and reform the body in relationship to other bodies.⁷⁴ With *Engine*, Yin creates an immediate exhibiting environment in which the viewer finds herself physically and psychically estranged from the artwork—a fabricated body of 'second skin'. In this way, Yin produces a 'strange body' structured not on the basis of where the viewing subject is here and now, but of a contingent and possibly disquieting corporeal encounter with another body.

As North has explained, in 'negotiating between the functions of concealment and display', clothing is 'at once the ground and the boundary of embodied experience',

⁷¹ Ahmed, *Strange Encounters*, p. 48.

⁷² *Ibid.*, p. 49.

⁷³ *Ibid.*

⁷⁴ *Ibid.*

carrying not only memories of the wearers' personal life, but physical traces of their social interactions.⁷⁵ With a fabric membrane constituted of hundreds of individual items of clothing, Yin also perceives *Engine* as a cultural and artistic embodiment of human community. According to Yin, in a text that accompanied the 2012 exhibition of this work, the phrase 'big heart' has a positive significance in many languages. In Chinese, it refers to collective ideals and ambitions for a better future, while in English and Dutch, it stands for people who devote time, attention and energy to others.⁷⁶ In both cases, 'big heart' suggests a favourable relation between individual subjects. However, Yin's *Engine*, as we have seen, is a deformed, enlarged human heart with numerous holes and stitched seams. The fabricated human collective of a 'second skin' that covers *Engine* is mutable and fragile. It can be readily turned into a precarious entity through an intimate encounter with bodies outside it. With its peculiar formal language, *Engine*, to some extent, can be associated with the fluid and unstable situation of human community caused by increasing international travel and exchange which has been discussed by both Bauman and Ahmed.

Yin continued her exploration of inter-bodily relations and community existence in *Thought* (Fig. 22), an artwork made in 2009, and first exhibited in 2010 for her solo exhibition, *Second Skin*, held at the Pace Gallery, Beijing. *Thought* is a semi-abstract

⁷⁵ North, 'The Surfacing of the Self: The Clothing Ego', p. 78. For similar arguments, see also Elizabeth Wilson, *Adorned in Dreams: Fashion and Modernity* (Los Angeles: University of California Press, 1985), p. 2.

⁷⁶ Yin's words were cited in the text on the gallery wall of the exhibition 'Yin Xiuzhen', Groninger Museum, Groningen, 2012.

rendering of an enormous blue brain. In making this piece, Yin welded flat steel rods to form a variety of irregular polygons, and connected them together with steel bolts to construct a tortoise-shell-shaped skeleton. Within each polygonal frame, Yin set up a series of coiled steel wires, organizing multiple anomalous, twisted convolutions (see Fig. 23). In so doing, Yin depicted the alternate curves and convexes of the human brain. Finally, this complicated steel structure was covered with a patchwork skin, largely comprising worn undervests and shirts in various shades of blue. The collars of the clothes were either left open to form small hollows or rolled several layers into stout ‘doughnuts’. While some sleeves dangle outside the brain, others, as with *Engine*, have been rolled into small tubes, jutting into the viewing space at different angles.

Thought provokes the viewer’s anxiety in two ways—first through the physical expansion of the human organ and secondly through its composition. When viewing subjects come close and wander around the sculptural object, the dangling sleeves, as extensions of the brain, gently stroke their shoulders or even tickle their faces. These intimate ‘touches’ generate a sense of discomfort, as though the body of another has come too close. Most of the clothes used in the work, as with *Engine*, are turned inside out with rough seams and brand labels exposed. The bulging outer shape makes the piece look, at close proximity, like a pile of clothes waste. However, in contrast with *Engine*, the fabric membrane of *Thought* is made up of relatively thin,

translucent shirts and undervests, and light can penetrate its interior space. A certain number of protruding orifices, which seem from a distance to be threatening and dangerous as intangible black voids, are revealed as peepholes. Through them, the viewing subject catches sight of the interior of the fabric brain bathed in blue light, and, at times, of another viewer, standing inside the object (see Fig. 23).

Near the ‘hippocampus’ of Yin’s fabric brain there is a narrow entrance through which one viewer, or at most two, can crawl into the artwork and stand for a few minutes. Intruding into the fabric brain, the viewer becomes part of a larger organism, and an awkward fabric brain is transformed into a momentary shelter, implying the social experience of dwelling with another body. The conventional boundaries between self and other, and inside and outside immediately collapse through this intimate bodily interaction with Yin’s work. Standing inside the huge fabric cavity, the viewer has to negotiate the cramped space of the circular entrance to look up and contemplate its elaborate interior structure. The strangely-welded steel girders call to mind the unavoidable intrusion of outside violence into the domestic interior due to continual industrial advancement and urban modernization, which are usually interrogated in Yin’s practice.

Furthermore, on occasion, two small viewers are able to squeeze into the fabric brain together. In the confined space, two viewers can barely move. Even if they are good

friends or family members, they may still feel restless and embarrassed with such uncomfortable proximity. This intimate physical ‘touch’ threatens to dissolve the secure boundary of the individual subject. Different from Ahmed’s argument that the way of touching between familiar and strange bodies can be different, the French philosopher Jean-Luc Nancy considers that any ways of ‘touching’, even those gentle and friendly, can all potentially induce a sense of discomfort and resistance.⁷⁷ This is shown appropriately in this particular situation of the extremely close, inter-bodily engagement within *Thought*. In this sense, despite welcoming viewers’ physical penetration, the work provokes various intimate inter-bodily interactions with and within the sculptural object that are marked by uncomfortable invasions and insistent bodily negotiations.

Similar to *Engine, Thought*, which is constructed as an assembly of old clothes collected from diverse individual subjects, can be also interpreted as a fabricated, corporeal embodiment of human community. As an intruder in this metonymic, bodily collective, the viewing subject is positioned as an outsider who has come too close. When viewers access the interior of the work one by one, this fabricated human collective of ‘second-skin’ in *Thought* is continuously deconstructed and reconstituted. By instigating intimate tactile encounters between the fabric brain and its viewers,

⁷⁷ As Nancy has argued, ‘the break is nothing more than a touch, but the touch is not less deep than a wound’. See Jean-Luc Nancy, *The Inoperative Community*, edited by Peter Connor and translated by Peter Connor, Lisa Garbus, Michael Holland and Simona Sawhney (Minneapolis & London: Minnesota University Press, 1991), p.98.

Yin casts doubt on the existence of both the individual body and the body of a social community as a homogeneous, centred entity. The corporeal formation of the subject and the human community are presented in Yin's artwork as processes, which are, as Diprose describes, 'produced, maintained and transformed through the socially mediated inter-body transfer of movements and gestures'.⁷⁸ In the case of *Thought*, the viewing subject is rendered not simply as a strange, undesirable body expelled from the physical dimension of a particular human community. Instead, she is an active, precarious subject, who interacts intimately with the body of the community, playing an important role in constructing and reconstructing the community's physical and social borders.

On the exhibition *Second Skin*, Yin also displayed another sculptural work, *Skin Cube* (2010) (Fig. 24) through which she conflated the cultural border of the body, clothing, with its biological boundary, skin. The piece is a huge fabric block, constructed from stainless steel wires and hundreds of nude-coloured undergarments. It resembles a detailed cross-section of human epidermis, complete with fabric hair follicles. On its vertical sides, there are four symmetrically-placed viewing portals. With roughly stitched seams and curve lines left on the surfaces, the work displays a magnified view, which looks like the sags and crests of human skin under the lens of the

⁷⁸ Rosalyn Diprose, 'Giving Corporeality against the Law', *Australian Feminist Studies*, 1996, 11, 24, p. 258. See also Gail Weiss, *Body Images: Embodiment as Intercorporeality* (New York and London: Routledge, 1999), p. 162.

microscope.

Unlike *Thought*, *Skin Cube* is not open to the viewer's real bodily intrusion into its interior. Rather, it presents a metonymic corporeal border—a border of both inter-bodily incorporation and expulsion. As Ahmed has suggested, the skin, as a border that feels, 'allows us to consider how the boundary-formation, the marking out of the lines of a body, involves an affectivity which already cross the line'.⁷⁹ Covered with hundreds items of skin-like clothing, Yin's oversized fabric cube is similarly rendered as an affective, reciprocal entity, engaging in immediate, intimate physical interactions with embodied viewing subjects. According to Paul Schilder, the bodily contours of both an individual and a community are always shrinking and expanding in the bodily encounter with other bodies.⁸⁰ Since familiar bodies may be connected together to form a collective as like bodies, which, in turn, spreads out the contours of the social and public as well as individual body, while strange bodies move apart as unlike bodies, evoking no expansion of the body. On the basis of her critical reading of Schilder, Ahmed argues that 'likeness and unlikeness as "characteristics" of bodies' do not precede, but rather are produced through 'the tactile encounters of

⁷⁹ Ahmed, *Strange Encounters*, p.45. As for similar arguments, see also Sue Cataldi, *Emotion, Depth and the Flesh: A Study of Sensitive Space* (New York: State University of New York Press, 1993), p. 145-146; Ahmed, 'The Skin of the Community: Affect and Boundary Formation', in Tina Chanter and Ewa Plonowska Ziarek (eds.) *Revolt, Affect, Collectivity: The Unstable Boundaries of Kristeva's Polis* (Albany, NY: State University of New York Press, 2005), p. 101; Sara Ahmed and Jackie Stacey (eds.) *Thinking Through the Skin*.

⁸⁰ Paul Schilder, *The Image and Appearance of the Human Body* (New York: International Universities Press, 1970), p. 210.

incorporation or expulsion'.⁸¹ Thus, 'as bodies move towards and away from each other, in relationships of proximity and distance, both bodily space (the shape of the skin) and social space (the skin of the community) expand and contract'.⁸² In other words, even the tactile contact between unlike bodies, which eventually expel each other, might also create a moment of mutual incorporation that temporarily expand their bodily contours.

In the case of *Skin Cube*, the viewing subject is rendered as an 'unlike' stranger, who is involved in an immediate, contingent corporeal encounter with the artwork at close proximity, yet finally expelled from its bodily space. There are two small lamp bulbs shining from the inside of the object, which induce the viewer to approach the fabric cube and watch its interior through any of the four viewing portals (see Fig. 26). In this way, the viewer is enmeshed in a momentary, metonymic, skin-to-skin engagement with another 'skinned body' fabricated by Yin. This temporary expansion of the outer surface of the individual and communal body evoked by the work can easily shrink and expand again, as viewers come close and get away in succession. Moreover, according to Nancy, touching opens up a space of 'being-in-common', 'posed at the border of the sharing and the splitting of singular beings'.⁸³ In this

⁸¹ Ahmed, *Strange Encounters*, p. 50.

⁸² Ibid.

⁸³ The quotation is Louis Kaplan's interpretation of Nancy's words, see Louis Kaplan, 'Photography and The Exposure of Community: Reciting Nan Goldin's Ballad', in *American Exposures: Photography and Community in the Twentieth Century* (Minnesota: University of Minnesota Press, 2005), p. 82.

sense, the fabricated human skin presented in Yin's work might be also understood as an incorporative yet menacing bodily fringe of physical communications and intersections. The intimate, embodied engagement between the viewing subject and Yin's fabricated skinned body not only creates possibilities for the constitution of a provisional, coalesced community of skin, but potentially disintegrates both of them, presenting a tangible threat to the unity and completeness of one's bodily existence.

Furthermore, *Skin Cube* also, at times, instigates its viewers' own interactions with one another through their simultaneous involvement with the art object. As the viewing subject bends down or squats to look into the interior of the fabric cube, she might catch sight of another viewer, who is observing the inside of the work at the same time via the viewing portal placed on the opposite side. By bringing about accidental, visual contact between embodied viewers, Yin's work creates a mediated path for immediate connectedness of self-conscious viewers temporarily related to one another through the specific material construction of the sculptural object.

Viewers might also feel uncomfortable or embarrassed especially when they realize they are watching and watched by unfamiliar strangers. Indeed, this momentary collective identification can only occur in a relatively idealized condition which requires viewers' coincidental bodily engagements with the artwork at the right time and position.

In an earlier site-specific work, *Introspective Cavity* (2008), Yin constructed a soft, comfortable interior for groups of viewers to interact with one another, different from the cramped space within *Thought* and the enclosed construction of *Engine* and *Skin Cube*. *Introspective Cavity* (Fig. 27) was commissioned by the Ullens Foundation, Beijing, for an exhibition, *Our Future*, presented to coincide with the Beijing Olympic Games. The piece is a four-meter high, womb-like, fabric cave, with a ground surface of 135 square metres. As she went on to develop in her later fabric cavities, Yin stretched a patchwork membrane of translucent, flesh-coloured undervests and shirts over a metal skeleton of welded steel rods (See Fig. 28). In this work, most of the collars and sleeves of the clothes have been transformed into peepholes, opening into the interior of the cavity. Its imposing, bulbous sculptural shape triggers viewers' physical interactions with the artwork in a similar way to *Engine* and *Thought*. A tunnel-like entrance leads to the soft, spacious place of repose within the cavity. Viewers are asked to take off their shoes and step on to the spongy ground covered with used clothes, to recline on cushions scattered around and to listen to restorative sounds of gurgling water (See Fig. 29). At the end of the fabric cavity, Yin erected a quadrangular structure fitted with mirrors, in which viewers can see themselves in relation to each other. According to Yin, 'when people are rushing around like robots, they often forget about themselves. Therefore, I wanted to create a space that allows people to learn about themselves, a space, where they can pause and

rest.’⁸⁴

Yin’s *Introspective Cavity* recalls, yet also deviates from, the classic model of the mother’s womb as a secure, nurturing comfort, which has been explored and demonstrated in a variety of artistic practices conducted in different historical and cultural contexts. For example, from 1950 to 1969, the surrealist architect Frederick Kiesler created a group of sketches and models, entitled *Endless House* (Fig. 30).⁸⁵ These works present a range of enclosed, elliptical, womb-like architectural shells, most of which are detached from the earth.⁸⁶ In consideration of his exilic experience of deracination, Kiesler’s fabrication of *Endless House*, as Demos has suggested, demonstrated a desire to regress to ‘a primordial intrauterine home’.⁸⁷ With his unique architectural design, Kiesler sought to evoke ‘a psycho-aesthetic homeliness’ in response to ‘a geopolitical homelessness’.⁸⁸

By comparison, since the mid-1980s, the Japanese artist Naito Rei has created a series of large-scale, womb-like installation works fabricated from different types of textiles.

⁸⁴ Yin, cited in David Spalding, ‘Introspective Cavity’, in *Yin Xiuzhen* [Exhibition Catalogue] (Beijing & Berlin: Alexander Ochs Galleries, 2008), p. 60.

⁸⁵ Kiesler considered his *Endless House* the ‘last refuge of man for man’. Frederick Kiesler, *Inside the Endless House: Art, People and Architecture: A Journal* (New York: Simon and Schuster, 1966), p. 567.

⁸⁶ *Ibid.*, p. 49. See also Jane Pavitt, ‘The Future is Possibly Past: The Anxious Space of Gaetano Pesce’, in Robin Schuldenfrei (ed.) *Atomic Dwelling: Anxiety, Domesticity, and Postwar Architecture* (London and New York: Routledge, 2012), p. 34.

⁸⁷ Demos, *The Exiles of Marcel Duchamp*, p. 216.

⁸⁸ *Ibid.* See also Shirley Haines-Cooke, *Frederick Kiesler: Lost in History: Art of This Century and The Modern Art Gallery* (Newcastle: Cambridge Scholars Publishing, 2009), pp. 30-66.

As for her *One Place on the Earth* (1991) (Fig. 31), Rei constructed a tent-like structure, into which viewers entered one at a time through a narrow slit. Taking off her shoes and stepping on the felt carpet, the visitor finds herself in a 'fairyland' filled with tiny, imaginative objects crafted by the artist from multiple domestic and natural materials, such as paper, clothing, shells, plant leaves and seeds. She is supposed to spend time interacting with these small items placed on the ground. Fabricated into a quiet, cosy and inspiringly creative interior space only for one person, Rei's work celebrates, as Gunhild Borggreen has argued, 'the protective and goddess-like spiritual powers of motherhood', evoking a sense of home by returning to the origin of life.⁸⁹

Unlike Kiesler and Rei's works, Yin's *Introspective Cavity* is not constructed as an isolated, protective and motherly space, which tends to extricate viewers from their present living situation in the outside world. Wandering around within the piece, viewers can see the concrete construction of the exhibiting hall through those peepholes made of rolled collars and sleeves of the clothes. The solid, metallic interior girders also reveal a production process through modern industrial techniques of welding and laser cutting. More importantly, in *Introspective Cavity*, viewers are invited to explore, use and share the interior space of the artwork, encountering one

⁸⁹ Gunhild Borggreen, 'Gender in Contemporary Japanese Art', in Joshua S. Mostow, Norman Bryson, Maribeth Graybill (eds.) *Gender and Power in the Japanese Visual Field* (Honolulu: University of Hawaii Press, 2003), pp. 188-189.

another within an environment of 'second skin'. Yin's work, in this sense, presents an alternative perspective on the notion of 'being at home', reconsidering the motif of the mother's womb.

According to Didier Anzieu, the skin ego is developed 'in the earliest stages of infancy, when the new-born baby is entirely dependent on and completely exposed to the touch and feel of the maternal body'.⁹⁰ The shared mother-child skin surrounds the baby as 'an external envelop made of messages', through which the baby can learn how to mediate its relation to the outside world and, finally, distinguish the self from the other.⁹¹ Through the processes of welding, sewing and stitching, Yin fabricates a womb-like maternal environment of 'second skin', in which viewers might temporarily return to an early stage of human life, rediscovering themselves and reconsidering their social and physical relations to the external world via active bodily interactions with one another and with the fabric interior of the work. As Ahmed has argued, 'we can think of the lived experience of being at home in terms of inhabiting a second skin, which does not simply contain the homely subject but which allows the subject to be touched and touch the world'.⁹² On the basis of viewers' contingent, simultaneous, physical engagement with the sculptural object, the

⁹⁰ Marc Lafrance, 'Exposing the Body: Didier Anzieu and the Psychoanalysis of Skin', in Kathryn Banks and Joseph Harris (eds.) *Exposure: Revealing Bodies, Unveiling Representations* (London and Berne: Peter Lang, 2004), p. 32.

⁹¹ Didier Anzieu, *The Skin Ego*, trans. Chris Turner (New Haven, CT: Yale University Press, 1989), p. 62.

⁹² Ahmed, 'Home and Away: Narratives of Migration and Estrangement', *International Journal of Cultural Studies*, 1999, (2) no. 3, p. 341.

womb-like interior space fabricated by Yin in *Introspective Cavity* can be understood as a nurturing ground for collective participation, where various embodied experiences of inter-bodily, interpersonal interactions are instigated, practiced and staged, giving rise to the formation of immediate human communities.

As Young has discussed in her book *Inclusion and Democracy* published in 2000, everyday interactions are fundamental to the constitution of ‘a communicative mode of democracy’.⁹³ Grounded on her reading of the French philosopher Emmanuel Levinas, Young argues that an effective communication between subjects starts from a daily greeting, which ‘announces Here I am and I see you’, ‘without promise of answer or acceptance’.⁹⁴ To some extent, the soft, fabric interior of Yin’s *Introspective Cavity* is constructed as a public space for daily greeting, which seems to be ideal for practising Young’s notion of communicative democracy. Within the artwork, a number of viewers may talk to people sitting around or even approach others sitting in different places to strike up conversations, which might easily engender a democratic, communicative atmosphere for the formation of a provisional social collective of participating individual subjects.⁹⁵

However, Yin’s *Introspective Cavity*, which possibly aims at materializing an

⁹³ Young, *Inclusion and Democracy* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2000), p. 61.

⁹⁴ Ibid., p. 58. See Emmanuel Levinas, *Otherwise than Being, or Beyond Essence*, (trans.) Alphonso Lingis (The Hague: Nijhoff, 1981), p. 117.

⁹⁵ For similar arguments, see Sarah Suzuki, ‘A Home in the World: Yin Xiuzhen’, in Lv Jingjing and Zhang Xiyuan (eds.) *Yin Xiuzhen*, p. 263.

immediate, fluid communal space of 'being at home' with other bodies, cannot always result in a favourable outcome of social participation and communication. As the art historian Rosalyn Deutsche has argued, 'conflict, division, and instability, then, do not ruin the democratic public sphere; they are conditions of its existence'.⁹⁶

Viewers might feel uncomfortable accessing the interior of Yin's cavity primarily constituted of second-hand clothes, or simply be reluctant to be coerced into doing what the artist expects. Some may be uneasy relaxing in a public space or feel embarrassed when talking to people they have met for the first time. From my observations on the first day of the exhibition (on 19 July 2008), in most cases, viewers scattered into small groups around the interior space of the work. Family members and friends, who came along together, normally stayed in close proximity and kept a certain distance from other viewers. Indeed, as a participatory piece made and exhibited in an unprecedentedly cosmopolitan context at the time of the Beijing Olympic Games, viewers from diverse social and language backgrounds might have met difficulties in communicating with one another.

According to Ahmed, cultural difference and social antagonism function in marking out the boundary of the body and its complex spatial relations to other bodies, including those considered as familiar and strange.⁹⁷ A significant number of

⁹⁶ Rosalyn Deutsche, *Evictions: Art and Spatial Politics* (Cambridge, MA: MIT Press, 1998), p. 289.

⁹⁷ Ahmed, *Strange Encounters*, p. 40.

embodied viewers in Yin's *Introspective Cavity* refuse to engage in physical intimacy with unfamiliar others and this reveals the unavoidable contradiction, repulsion and estrangement between human bodies in the formation of a communal 'home'—a place of social belonging and democratic engagement. Furthermore, the viewing subjects, who constitute a momentary social collective inside the cavity, can see those 'outsiders'—people standing in the gallery hall— through the peepholes spreading over the body of the work; they also become 'outsiders' themselves after coming out from Yin's cavity. *Introspective Cavity*, in this way, indicates the interchangeable and ambiguous nature of the binary constructions between insider and outsider, belonging and estrangement. In the form of both an enlarged mother's womb and a temporary dwelling cavity, the piece relates the construction of a communal 'home' to the strange encounter with other bodies. In *Introspective Cavity*, 'home' has become, as Ahmed has described, 'a complex and contingent space of inhabitation', characterized by inter-bodily exchange, negotiation and replacement.⁹⁸

With their peculiar sculptural forms and scale, Yin's semi-abstract fabric cavities create situations for strange corporeal encounters, instantiating Ahmed's theoretical ideas on international travel and migration through specific embodied experience in an artistic context. Any viewing subject, who engages with Yin's enlarged, metonymic body parts, can occupy the bodily status of a stranger, by virtue of an

⁹⁸ Ahmed, 'Home and Away: Narratives of Migration and Estrangement', p. 340.

intimate, yet potentially threatening and uncomfortable physical encounter with the sculptural object. As Ahmed argues, ‘differences are not marked on the stranger’s body, but come to materialise in the relationship of touch between bodies’.⁹⁹ Yin’s works challenge the cultural stereotypes of strange bodies, which are conventionally associated with migrants, tourists as well as people of cultural, racial, ethnic and gender minorities, who are estranged from the social and national majority. Her practice, in this sense, collapses the assumption of human collectivity and one’s sense of belonging as a culturally and geographically static condition.

However, as with her suitcases works, Yin’s artistic practice of producing ‘strange encounters’ through these body-like fabric cavities is still based on a form of assumed mobility, which enables human bodies to come into close proximity with one another, giving rise to various tactile interactions between self and other, native and foreigner as well as individual and community. Her commitment to presenting and exploring the possible world, in which subjects can encounter one another freely, if strangely, pay no particular attention to the lived reality of increased military and political interventions at national and regional borders, which deprive groups of human bodies, marked as ‘strangers’, of the possibility of any such intimate bodily encounter.¹⁰⁰

⁹⁹ Ahmed, *Strange Encounters*, p. 15.

¹⁰⁰ See Wang Gungwu, ‘Migration and Its Enemies’, in Bruce Mazlish and Ralph Buultjens (eds.) *Conceptualizing Global History* (Boulder, CO: Westview Press, 1993), pp. 131-150; and Demos, *The Migrant Image*, pp. xiii-xiv.

Fluid Sites: Participation and Antagonism

Following *Introspective Cavity*, the last section of this chapter considers a set of Yin's participatory pieces, which solicit viewers' active, concurrent, embodied engagement with the artwork. In these works, the particular communal living situation in China is investigated and restaged in a global context, which plays an important part in Yin's artistic constitution and exploration of community existence, forging intricate intercultural, interpersonal communication and connectedness while revealing irreconcilable conflict and disagreement.

From the early 1990s, with the increasing artistic interest in social participation and collaboration, a surge of participatory artistic practices started to take place in a multitude of geographical locations, which sought to overturn the traditional relationship between the art object, the artist and the viewer.¹⁰¹ In opposition to a one-to-one relationship of interaction between the art object and the viewer, participatory art tends to construct an artistic space of embodied viewers in order to practice and to explore concepts of community, and political participation and action. For instance, over the past two decades, the Argentine-born Thai artist Rirkrit Tiravanija famously created a series of participatory pieces, by transforming the gallery space into a public dining hall, where he cooked vegetarian green curry or Phai Thai and served for visitors to the exhibition. Through his works, Tiravanija

¹⁰¹ Claire Bishop, *Artificial Hells: Participatory Art and the Politics of Spectatorship* (London & New York: Verso, 2012), pp. 1-3.

intended to create a convivial atmosphere of individual subjects coming together to have a free dinner party. In his book *Relational Aesthetics*, first published in English in 2002, the French curator and art critic Nicolas Bourriaud categorized the works made by Tiravanija as ‘relational art’.¹⁰² According to Bourriaud, ‘relational art’ elicits interactive encounters among viewers, who participate in the artwork, and so constitute an immediate temporary social collective.¹⁰³ From his perspective, this particular type of artistic practice presents a mode of ‘microtopias’ in which individuals adopt a ‘do-it-yourself’ approach in order to create positive human relations with other bodies in the here and now.¹⁰⁴

However, as has been well discussed in the literature, Bourriaud’s idea of ‘relational art’ was roundly criticized by Claire Bishop, in her article ‘Antagonism and Relational Aesthetics’ published in 2004. According to Bishop, Bourriaud’s paradigm of ‘relational art’ runs the risk of foreclosing the meaning of the artwork as ‘relational’ or ‘temporary emancipation’ and erasing differences.¹⁰⁵ Bishop argues that conflicts and antagonisms are basic conditions in constituting democracy as a work in process, which continuously reveal the partiality, precariousness and contingency of the

¹⁰² Nicolas Bourriaud, *Relational Aesthetics*, (trans.) Simon Pleasance and Fronza Woods (Paris: les presses du réel, 2002[1998]), p. 18.

¹⁰³ Ibid., p. 17. See also Claire Bishop, ‘Antagonism and Relational Aesthetics’, *October*, Fall 2004, 110, p. 54.

¹⁰⁴ Bourriaud, *Relational Aesthetics*, p. 13.

¹⁰⁵ Bishop, ‘Antagonism and Relational Aesthetics’, p. 55. See also Bishop, ‘Introduction: Viewers as Producers’, *Participation: Documents of Contemporary Art*, pp. 10-17.

society, and provide possibilities to question the power and the dominant social order.¹⁰⁶ Bourriaud's claims for the politics of relational aesthetics, from Bishop's point of view, are 'not intrinsically democratic', since they ignore the inevitable conflict, exclusion, disagreement and unresolvedness in and through multiple interactions between individual subjects.¹⁰⁷ An artwork can create a much more complex condition of participation than a simple, emancipated space for a momentary togetherness of individual subjects as suggested by Bourriaud.¹⁰⁸

By drawing on Bishop's arguments about artistic participation and social practice of democracy, this section examines how Yin's series of participatory works construct fluid sites for temporary social connectedness and belonging, while revealing those instances of contradiction and rejection that are also part and parcel of attempts at

¹⁰⁶ Bishop, 'Antagonism and Relational Aesthetics', p. 67. Bishop's argument is based on her reading of political theorists, Ernesto Laclau and Chantal Mouffe. According to Laclau and Mouffe, 'we are confronted with a different situation: the presence of the 'Other' prevents me from being totally myself. The relation arises not from full totalities, but from the impossibility of their constitution'. As one's sense of self is always put into question via the encounter with the 'other', the constitution of intersubjective relations, as well as various human communities, is also inevitably concomitant with disagreement, conflict and instability. See Ernesto Laclau and Chantal Mouffe, *Hegemony and Socialist Strategy* (London: Verso, 1985), p. 125.

¹⁰⁷ Bishop, 'Antagonism and Relational Aesthetics', p. 67.

¹⁰⁸ In the case of Tiravanija's work, the spicy green curry or Phai Thai has excluded or even offended a certain number of people who might not like or cannot eat Thai food. Some viewers, even those regular gallery-goers, might still feel uncomfortable eating dinner with strangers in the gallery room. Some might participate in Tiravanija's feast but refuse to talk to other viewers. For similar arguments about various forms of participation and antagonism in contemporary participatory art, see Nicola Grobler, 'Participatory Art and the Everyday: A South African Perspective', in Kathryn Brown (ed.) *Interactive Contemporary Art: Participation in Practice* (London & New York: I. B. Tauris, 2014), pp. 57-60; Dave Beech, 'Don't Look Now! Art After the Viewer and beyond Participation', in Jeni Walwin (ed.) *Searching for Art's New Publics* (Bristol & Chicago: Intellect, Ltd., 2010), pp. 15-30.

collective cohesion; and how Yin, through her works, practices and explores frictions and negotiations between local and global, promoting mutual understanding beyond established geographical boundaries, yet refusing to fabricate an illusion of harmonious reconciliation.

In 2006, Yin exhibited her installation piece, titled *Restroom W* or *Restroom (Women)* (Fig. 32). The work was made for a collaborative exhibition with her husband Song Dong held at REDCAT, Los Angeles. The two artists built a two and a half metres high white box inside the gallery hall and divided it with a temporary wall to constitute two restrooms for women and men respectively. When exhibited, viewers (both male and female) can enter into Yin's half through a temporary door, labelled with written words 'Restroom W' and the typical ladies' toilet sign. Within the room, a triple-tiered crystal chandelier hangs from the ceiling, with its bottom end suspended at about the height of the viewer's head. On the far side of the space is a humble concrete structure constructed by Yin before the exhibition. Piles of bricks were layered on the floor and along the bottom half of the wall and fixed together with mortar cement wiped on the surfaces. Its formal shape, as well as the use of literal, everyday materials, calls to mind Carl Andre's minimalist sculpture, *Fall* (1968) (Fig. 33), which is made of twenty-one L-shaped, hot rolled steel plates lying on the floor and leaning against the wall. However, with twelve narrow rectangular troughs evenly scattered on the side above the floor, Yin's sculptural work is far from abstract.

It actually resembles a shabby, squatting-trough-style public lavatory, which is still used in a few old-fashioned, courtyard-house neighborhoods in Beijing.

The courtyard house (Siheyuan) is a typical Chinese dwelling in which the main structure of the building is constructed around a central courtyard. Each courtyard set was traditionally for one family, albeit a large one that may consist of two or three generations and their servants. However, since the communist takeover of power in 1949, these compounds of houses were mostly converted into multifamily apartments with a shared inner yard, owing to the drastic increase of urban population.¹⁰⁹ People living in the Siheyuan share the kitchen, rooms for food storage as well as bathroom and toilet facilities.¹¹⁰ In this sense, Siheyuan can be considered an ambiguous domestic space in-between the private and the public. While, on the one hand, such a living environment might set out to produce a relatively stable communal neighbourhood in contrast to the alienated modern apartment living style; on the other, it also too easily creates a troubling invasion to individual and family privacy. As already noted, in the 1990s, huge amounts of courtyard houses in Beijing were demolished. Only a small number of them were preserved by the city's historical and cultural heritage industries. Some local residents, the elders in particular, still live there and maintain the traditional communal dwelling style.

¹⁰⁹ Haron Graham Niederhaus and John L. Graham, *Together Again: A Creative Guide to Successful Multigenerational Living* (Plymouth: The Rowman & Littlefield Publishing Group, 2007), p. 112.

¹¹⁰ *Ibid*, 113. See also Ronald G. Knapp, *China's Old Dwellings* (Honolulu, HI: University of Hawaii Press, 2000).

At REDCAT, through her painstaking domestic gestures of layering, wiping and scraping, Yin constructed a model of the communal toilet traditionally used in the hutong, courtyard dwelling in China and exhibited it in front of the public eye.

According to Yin, ‘this kind of restroom is in one sense a meeting space. People using these toilets at once relieve themselves, read the newspaper, and chat of everything from international affairs to local gossip’.¹¹¹ With her installation work, Yin tends to engage viewers in an authentic, indigenous form of communal living environment, recollecting a traditional collective bond. However, in contrast to Yin’s relatively idealized interpretation, which perceives this type of public lavatory as an important community space and completely ignores its inconvenient and insanitary condition, a variety of unsolved conflicts and contradictions in the formation of an immediate social collective are revealed to viewers by virtue of their own dynamic embodied interactions with the specific artistic site created by *Restroom W*.

As a dysfunctional model of a primitive and austere Chinese communal lavatory installed in an American commercial art gallery, the work is alienated from the stylish modern exhibiting hall, articulating a status of displacement. Even with a short description in the exhibition leaflet, it is still not easy for most American viewers to

¹¹¹ Yin, in ‘Presence and Absence: Yin Xiuzhen in Conversation with Eungie Joo’, in Lv Jingjing and Zhang Xiyuan (eds.) *Yin Xiuzhen*, p. 191.

relate Yin's minimalist-like, sculptural piece to a toilet.¹¹² Wandering around the space, viewers sense the uncomfortable dazzling light and the threatening heat from the 110 lit bulbs of the hanging chandelier (see Fig. 34). A luxury item, which is often found in the hotel lobby or other public venues, replaces the dim lamp commonly used at the toilet, evoking feelings of dislocation and inappropriate transgression. With no partitions separating each trough, users are granted no privacy. By displaying a specific communal site, where the most private act is performed in public, Yin's work intensifies the contradiction between private and public, individual and communal. Although viewers are not supposed to really use Yin's toilet in public, they can still feel a strong sense of discomfort and anxiety, owing to the aggressive invasion of individual privacy demonstrated by the artwork.

Meanwhile, the presence of other viewers might make this uneasy, embarrassing situation of social engagement even more prominent. Within this enclosed 'public lavatory', viewers rarely talk to each other. Some of them may even feel perplexed and awkward, when encountering one another on the site.¹¹³ As groups of viewers come in and go out in sequence, a contingent, artistic mode of social collective of

¹¹² Yin's *Restroom W* is a site-specific work, made especially for American viewers. By now it has been only exhibited twice in America in 2006 and 2013. If exhibited in China, the work might remind some viewers of their previous or current experience of living in a courtyard-house neighbourhood. However, it is still, undoubtedly, embarrassing, uncomfortable and astonishing to encounter a 'communal toilet', which is usually out of public sight, in the gallery room.

¹¹³ These arguments about viewers' responses to *Restroom W* are based on my informal conversation with Yin on the afternoon of August 23, 2013.

participating individual subjects, who coincidentally and temporarily engage with Yin's *Restroom W*, is formed and reformed. However, instead of a friendly communicative experience, this momentary, fluid social connectedness with other bodies evoked in Yin's work is characterized by shared confusion and incomprehension about a particular culture and living situation, which induce physical and psychical disquiet.

In addition, behind the large column located at the corner of the room lies a life-size, wax sculpture of a new-born baby boy covered in blood, whose right hand clutches a pair of scissors, as if the umbilical cord was just cut from his body (Fig. 35). His crouching, helpless posture might recall the Freudian infantile anxiety that occurs when the child is first separated from the body of the mother and is exposed to the outside world.¹¹⁴ This wax sculpture was actually created in response to a horrific event—an attempted murder of a boy baby in a countryside communal toilet in China just before Yin's exhibition at Los Angeles.¹¹⁵ In contrast to the common situation usually reported and circulated through American news that male children are much more highly valued in the countryside of China and some parents abandon their girl babies, this 'abandoned' boy baby, as Yin indicated, aimed at challenging a

¹¹⁴ See Sigmund Freud, 'The Ego and the Id' (1923), in James Strachey (ed.) *The Standard Edition of the Complete Psychological Works of Sigmund Freud*, vol. 19 (London: Hogarth Press/Institute of Psychoanalysis, 1961), p. 58.

¹¹⁵ Suzanne Muchnic, 'Seeing the Restroom as a Work of Art', *Los Angeles Times*, December 10, 2006, accessed March 31, 2016, <http://articles.latimes.com/2006/dec/10/entertainment/ca-restroom10>.

stereotypical assumption of China constructed by American mass media.¹¹⁶ Yin's work reveals to viewers an ambiguous space in-between private and public, individual and communal, local and foreign as well as truth and fiction. Rather than simply essentializing an indigenous communal living environment in China, *Restroom W*, I want to argue, constructs what Bishop calls as 'the terrain of antagonism', where the boundaries of different binaries listed above remain unstable and open to challenge and potential change.¹¹⁷

Unlike her disturbing, controversial *Restroom W*, the series of participatory works, *Beijing Opera*, which Yin started in 2000, provide a different insight into the communal living situation in the courtyard housing area in Beijing. The work is mainly composed of three major parts, huge sheets of inkjet wallpaper, wooden stools and sound recordings. Those giant sheets of wallpaper are derived from a group of photographs taken by Yin in the Houhai lake area, located in the northwest of Beijing, where old hutongs, courtyard buildings and historic palaces are concentrated. Her photographs present quotidian collective activities of ordinary people, the elders in particular, around the area. For each exhibition, the choice of wallpaper and the particular placement of the work can be variable according to the size of the exhibiting site. By using and reusing her old photographs and wooden stools, Yin continuously incorporates new events and relationships with human bodies and places

¹¹⁶ Yin, cited in Muchnic, 'Seeing the Restroom as a Work of Art'.

¹¹⁷ Bishop, 'Antagonism and Relational Aesthetics', p. 72.

into the narrative of her *Beijing Opera*.

My discussion focuses on Yin's *Beijing Opera* work (Fig. 36), made and exhibited in 2001 for an exhibition, *Living in Time*, held at Hamburger Bahnhof Contemporary Art Museum, Berlin. Inside the spacious gallery room, huge sheets of wallpaper are pasted all over the walls. The back right corner is covered with the sheet of wallpaper, representing the life scene of different groups of male elders sitting on stools around low round tables, and playing Chinese chess in a public courtyard. A few people stand behind and watch the game with bamboo fans in hand. Beside it, most of the central space of the wall on the right hand side is taken up by another sheet of wallpaper, attending to a group of elderly people, who are performing Beijing opera in a public space along the Houhai Lake. While an elder man is standing and singing, four men sitting around him are either playing traditional musical instruments or simply beating the rhythm with a folded silk fan. There are several passers-by sitting or standing at the back to enjoy the performance. Whereas the enlarged image on the front wall presents people casually sitting on stools or squatting on the curbs while chatting with each other and enjoying the beautiful scenery of the Houhai lake, the one on the left hand side features a traditional leisure activity among the elders in Beijing, *liu niao*—which means individuals sit together in a public courtyard or along small streets to observe and talk about their birds in cages every morning.

Each of Yin's enlarged photographs provides a view of people engaging with each other in a specific shared activity, articulating a sense of community and belonging. The majority of people shown in the wallpaper are the elders, who spend most of their life time in the old hutong area in Beijing. They persist in their habitual ways of life and enjoy their collective leisure time. Their slow, relaxed daily routines of singing, sitting, chatting and playing preserve local cultural traditions, sustaining the meaning of home and local community. In this sense, these images communicate a strong feeling of nostalgia, recollecting a disappearing past—an idealized, indigenous mode of community existence, which has been gradually lost in a rapidly-evolving China.

Thirty-two small wooden stools are scattered in small groups around the room. Viewers are invited to sit on them and look at Yin's huge images pasted on the walls. These humble wooden stools can be perceived as metaphoric symbols of the stable and grounded collective life, as they are the most common objects on which people sit and perch as they chat with neighbours or family members on a daily basis. The placement of these stools brings to mind a specific collective experience during the time of the Cultural Revolution. People living in neighbouring areas would bring their own stools and sit together in the open cinema to watch propaganda films.

Accompanied by the chant of Beijing opera, coming out from a loudspeaker located at the far right hand corner of the room, Yin's work seeks to create a visually and aurally affective space, in which viewers can participate in an immediate, contingent

community life, by sitting together, watching and contemplating various collective activities in the conventional Chinese dwelling environment presented in her wallpaper.

However, viewers, even those who are willing to get involved with her work, do not always feel obliged to do what Yin expects. It is, undoubtedly, uncomfortable to look at such huge images pasted on the wall from an underneath position, when sitting on low wooden stools. According to a photograph taken in Berlin (see Fig. 37), only three people sit together on stools beside the wall on the right hand side; to the left another couple of viewers instead stand to stare at Yin's wallpaper. Compared with those seated well on stools, these standing viewers seem to be more engaged in observing the collective activities shown in Yin's wallpaper, although they refuse to constitute a temporary human community of people sitting together.

Indeed, for most western viewers, it is not easy to participate and restage moments of conventional communal life in China simply according to the limited, unfamiliar narrative unfolding in Yin's wallpaper. As Young has argued in her discussion of democratic communication, storytelling is an important vehicle in terms of speaking across differences and promoting the understanding of people's specific experience in a different social situation.¹¹⁸ Although storytelling is unable to assume a complete,

¹¹⁸ Young, *Inclusion and Democracy*, pp. 73-75.

mutual understanding, it encourages communication, resulting in ‘reasonable disagreement’.¹¹⁹ To some extent, Yin’s artwork can be understood as an artistic vehicle, which tells real life stories in China to viewers in the west without the expectation to achieve a complete agreement. With strong references to a specific cultural and geographical background, Yin’s artwork reveals problems in terms of introducing the local into a global context. The lack of understanding of the communal living situation in China hinders viewers’ real involvement with the artwork. Unlike the intimate interactions of people depicted in Yin’s oversized images, viewers, who momentarily take part in her work in Berlin, are rendered as estranged outsiders. This disparity between Yin’s invitation for viewers’ participation and their actual engagement of her work can provide a distinctively critical insight into contemporary participatory practices. An artwork, which tends to create a hospitable, communal environment for interactive public engagement, might give rise to a totally divergent experience of participation marked by confusion and exclusion, when exhibited in different social and geographical backgrounds, due to the deficiency of intercultural understanding.

The piece can be read differently by Chinese viewers, who have a better knowledge of the collective living situation in China. However, they may also feel embarrassed or reluctant to squat on low wooden stools in such close proximity to people they are

¹¹⁹ Ibid., p.73

not familiar with, for some of the stools are placed extremely close to each other. In consideration of the tiny size of these stools, it is quite difficult for viewers, when sitting on them, to retain a polite and comfortable distance to other bodies. Similar to the participatory situation in *Introspective Cavity* which has been discussed in the previous section, viewers, if they come along with family members or friends, would prefer to sit together as a small group and keep a comfortable, polite distance from other viewing subjects. Detached from a familiar neighbourhood, these wooden stools placed in the *Beijing Opera* work might recall, but never actually evoke a similarly casual and relaxed experience of communal life in old Beijing as shown in the wallpaper. Yin's practice, in this sense, reveals the anxiety and helplessness of a contemporary subject in maintaining and preserving local cultural tradition and collective life.

According to Nancy, 'being already engaged in the community, that is to say, undergoing, in whatever manner, the experience of community as communication'.¹²⁰

Therefore, the constitution of human community always challenges the definite finitude between self and other, private and public. By inviting viewers to sit on those shabby wooden stools in close proximity to other unfamiliar bodies, Yin's work reveals the unavoidable disruption and invasion of one's secure sense of self in the formation of various communal relations. In this sense, different from Bishop's

¹²⁰ Nancy, *The Inoperative Community*, p.41.

account of social antagonism in contemporary participatory practices, which especially investigates the artwork's capacity to provoke conceptual unease and emotional disturbance that destabilize the constitution of a favourable communal relationship, Yin's participatory piece creates a conflictual and unstable situation of collective engagement in both psychical and bodily terms.¹²¹ Rather than simply restaging an idealized, harmonious scene of community life, Yin, with her *Beijing Opera* work, not only sustains the tension of cultural differences, but induces anxiety and discomfort on the basis of viewers' immediate inter-bodily interactions with one another, articulating the inevitable collision and disagreement in interpersonal and intercultural communications.

In the late 2000s, Yin created a set of participatory works, transformed from scrapped transport vehicles. In the form of both a public transport and an architectural shelter, each of these works is open to viewers' bodily intrusion and exploration of the interior space, engendering embodied pathways and meeting points of human bodies within the art object. For the Seventh Shanghai Biennale held in 2008, Yin made an awkward *Flying Machine*, incorporating three different methods of transportation into one oversized piece (Fig. 38). After splitting the bottom of an obsolete aeroplane from its front part, Yin placed a set of steel planks on rows of small wheels to construct a

¹²¹ Bishop develops her arguments about participatory art and antagonism mainly via her discussion of two chosen artists, Thomas Hirschhorn and Santiago Sierra, whose works, in her words, demonstrate a 'tougher, more disruptive approach to "relations" than that proposed by Bourriaud' (p. 77). See Bishop, 'Antagonism and Relational Aesthetics', pp. 69-77.

cross-shaped structure, which looks like two plate trailers intersected with each other. Through it, Yin not only connected the two separated parts of the plane, but created a perpendicular pathway. On the one end of this pathway is a tractor; on the other is a Volkswagen Santana—one of the most common taxi cars in China in the 1990s (see Fig. 39). From the ground of steel planks, Yin erected a group of arches of rolled steel wires and covered them with a patchwork of white garments. In this way, Yin constructed a cave-like fabric section, tapering to the body of each vehicle. The overhead was left open as a circular hatchway, opening to the ceiling of the exhibiting hall.

The three types of transport—the tractor, the sedan and the aircraft represent the countryside, the city and the world respectively. Yin's *Flying Machine*, to some extent, creates both material and conceptual passages, which connect the three locations into an inextricable network. The piece is often exhibited along with a video work, which reveals the situation of internal migration between rural and urban areas in China over the last two decades. In the 1980s, the process of rural industrialization and the introduction of new labour systems significantly increased agricultural productivity, generating huge profits, yet, at the same time, exacerbating the surplus of labour force in China's countryside.¹²² From the early 1990s, due to the development of the global trade network, foreign investments began pouring into major capital cities, such as

¹²² Delia Davin, *Internal Migration in Contemporary China* (Hampshire: Macmillan Press, 1997), p. 57; p. 68.

Beijing, Shanghai, and Guangzhou, as well as the eastern coastal regions, resulting in the establishment of new industrial sectors. In this situation, huge amount of surplus rural labour, especially during slack seasons, started to crowd into nearby developing areas for temporary employment. Fabricated from worn clothes of people from both the city and the countryside, Yin's *Flying Machine* can be understood as a public monument dedicated to this historical urban migration in China. Furthermore, the whole piece is based on a dismembered aeroplane, which was used for various transregional, transnational movements and communications. In this way, mass internal migration in China is figured in Yin's artwork as part of the circulation of capital, commodities and people within the booming global market.

When the piece is on display, viewers, who wish to enter into this *Flying Machine*, often queue in front of the sideway door to wait for their turns to climb into the work. Covered with a thick, non-transparent cotton patchwork, most of the space within the work, away from the circular hatchway, is dim and dusky (Fig. 40). The interior is much smaller than you might imagine. It is quite crowded even for a limited number of viewers. Stepping on the shaking ground of steel plates, viewers are compelled to insistently negotiate the space and with other human bodies. They, at times, have to squeeze through other embodied viewers and sidle along the empty seats of the aeroplane. For taller viewers, they need to slightly bend over, when they go through those lower sections leading to the body of each vehicle.

On the basis of her reading of the British social scientist and geographer Doreen Massey, Meskimmon proposes that place can be perceived as an event, ‘where place is not a fixed and stable marker of identity or power, but is a site of perpetual negotiation’.¹²³ Through her labour-intensive preservation and re-appropriation of old transport vehicles and clothes, Yin materializes her work into an artistic event, characterized by multiple trajectories and persistent negotiations of embodied viewers, who engage with her work in a specific time and place. As groups of viewers are in and out in turns, Yin’s *Flying Machine* becomes a socially engaged space, where a temporary mode of collective cohesion is constantly constituted, replaced and reconstituted via intersected, accidental encounters of moving human bodies, in and through their on-going passages and intermittent pause throughout the artwork. Exhibited in multiple geographical places, the piece is no longer confined to the specific living situation in China. It can be also broadly related to the prevalent experience of travel and migration at the global level, implying the longing for belonging within the increasingly fluid and unsettled contemporary world. With *Flying Machine*, Yin fabricates a mediating space between past and present, local and global, rural and urban, self and other as well as individual and communal, in which

¹²³ Meskimmon, *Contemporary Art and The Cosmopolitan Imagination*, p. 61. According to Doreen Massey, ‘place...changes us not through some visceral belonging, but through the practicing of place, the negotiation of intersecting trajectories; place as an arena where negotiation is forced upon us’. Doreen Massey, *For Space* (Los Angeles, London, New Delhi, Singapore: Sage Publications, 2005), p. 152.

these opposite terms are, as Bishop has described, presented as neither reconciled nor totally separate spheres.¹²⁴

Through her participatory art pieces, Yin creates and recreates a fluid site of public engagement, in which embodied viewers not only constitute a provisional social collective as active participants, but encounter intercultural, inter-bodily differences and conflicts. Indeed, as Bishop has argued, ‘artistic models of democracy have only a tenuous relationship to actual forms of democracy’.¹²⁵ The politicised, artistic participation instigated in Yin’s works might provide an alternative perspective to reconsider the notion of democracy and the formation of human community on the basis of our immediate experiences of the art object and accidental interactions with other embodied viewers. However, this cannot be simply understood as an effective, ameliorative approach to establishing positive, democratic social relations. As shown in Yin’s works, this artistic form of participation can be unstable and disquieting. It even fails, when visitors to the exhibition refuse to be implicated in the artwork. Participatory art, which tends to constitute a contingent, artistic mode of socially interactive human collective, is normally confronted with the unavoidable disagreement, exclusion and uncertainty engendered through viewers’ multiple interactions with the artwork.

¹²⁴ Bishop, ‘Antagonism and Relational Aesthetics’, p. 72.

¹²⁵ Bishop, *Artificial Hells*, p. 5.

Fabricated through banal domestic gestures of preservation and, in most cases, closely associated with the specific individual and communal living situation in China, the varied forms of 'home' demonstrated in Yin's works still call to mind an intimate, nostalgic and desirable domain, although it has been disrupted and destabilized by the pervasive progress of urban modernization and globalization, and grounded in the unprecedentedly mobile and unstable contemporary world. By comparison, Hatoum's practice, as we shall see in the next chapter, which evokes palpable feelings of unease and threat, proposes a more subversive and challenging take on the notion of home and one's sense of belonging and community.

CHAPTER II

MONA HATOUM'S CONSTRUCTION OF 'HOME': CONNECTION AND CONFLICT

In Mona Hatoum's artworks, 'home' is never simply a familiar, hospitable and comfortable place where one feels settled and at ease. Instead, the most quotidian household objects, such as beds, chairs and kitchen utensils have been unexpectedly distorted by the use of incongruous materials, absurdly exaggerated in scale or even ingeniously animated by an audible, forbidding electrical current, engendering a tangible sense of threat and disturbance at the heart of the 'home'. Entrapped in this elusive, artistic sphere constituted of familiar yet deliberately estranged domestic items, viewers of Hatoum's works are compelled to reconsider their relations to the outside world—to the things and people around them, and to reassess their previous assumptions and attitudes to the notion of home.

Hatoum's artistic practice is often discussed in association with her biography, including her early years of forced exile in Beirut and London, as well as her voluntary, nomadic experience of artistic residencies across a variety of geographical areas over the past twenty years. Hatoum was born in 1952 in Beirut of Palestinian parents, who had lived in Lebanon as exiles since 1948. Due to the difficulty of

obtaining Lebanese identity cards at the time, the family became naturalized British citizens instead and were never able to integrate into the Lebanese context.¹

According to Hatoum, ‘I grew up in Beirut in a family that had suffered a tremendous loss and existed with a sense of dislocation’.² In 1975, Hatoum travelled to England for a brief visit, yet had to stay in London due to the outbreak of the Lebanese Civil War. She went to study first at the Byam Shaw School of Art and the Slade School of Art, and then became an artist residing in London and later also in Berlin, but travelling frequently for artistic residencies. In his article, ‘The Art of Displacement: Mona Hatoum’s Logic of Irreconcilables’ first published in 2000, the Palestinian scholar Edward Said argued that Hatoum’s ‘disaffected, dislocated, oddly deformed’ domestic pieces are objects, in which the experience of exile is figured and plotted.³ For Said, ‘in the age of migrants, curfews, identity cards, refugees, exiles, massacres, camps and fleeing civilians, however, they (Hatoum’s artworks) are the uncooptable mundane instruments of a defiant memory facing itself and its pursuing or oppressing others implacably’.⁴

Indeed, at the beginning of her career in the early 1980s, Hatoum made a group of

¹ Mona Hatoum, cited in ‘Mona Hatoum Interviewed by Janine Antoni, Spring 1998’, in Laura Steward Heon (ed.) *Mona Hatoum: Domestic Disturbance* [Exhibition Catalogue] (North Admas, Massachusetts: MASS MOCA & Santa Fe, New Mexico: Site Santa Fe, 2001), p. 20.

² Ibid.

³ Edward Said, ‘The Art of Displacement: Mona Hatoum’s Logic of Irreconcilables’ (2000), in Saloni Mathur (ed.) *The Migrant's Time: Rethinking Art History and Diaspora* (Williamstown, MA: Sterling and Francine Clark Art Institute, 2011), p. 14.

⁴ Ibid.

politicized, issue-based, performance and video works, which reflected on her alienated position and daily reality of living in a foreign cultural context.⁵ For instance, in one of her most famous video pieces, *Measures of Distance* (1988) (Fig. 41), Hatoum showed footage of her mother in the shower, accompanied by the taped conversations between mother and daughter in Arabic, and her voice in English reading her mother's letters sent to her during the time of the Lebanese Civil War. Arabic texts appear on the screen scrolling across and obscuring the image of her mother's naked body.⁶ By virtue of multiple recorded and transmitted materials, the piece tends to fabricate an immediate mode of intimacy between family members beyond the gulf of geographical separation in the situation of war and exile.

However, since the late 1980s, this type of biographical narrative, which is infused with direct political messages, has rarely appeared in Hatoum's practice. Instead, she began to move towards to 'less narrative and consequently more elusive' works of installation and sculpture.⁷ Different from Said, feminist art historians, such as Tamar Garb and Whitney Chadwick, have studied Hatoum's recent practices in a broader art historical context of surrealism and minimalism, and examined issues of place,

⁵ Hatoum, 'Interview with Claudia Spinelli', in Michael Archer, Guy Brett, and Catherine de Zegher (eds.) *Mona Hatoum* (Phaidon: London, 1997), p. 134.

⁶ By revealing the female body which is normally concealed in the Arab world, the piece also challenges the stereotypical representation of 'the Arab woman as passive, as mother, as a non-sexual being'. See Guy Brett, 'Itinerary', in Michael Archer, Guy Brett, and Catherine de Zegher (eds.) *Mona Hatoum*, p. 56.

⁷ Alix Ohlin, 'Home and Away: The Strange Surrealism of Mona Hatoum', in *Mona Hatoum: Undercurrents* [Exhibition Catalogue] (Ferrara: Comune di Ferrara, Gallerie d'arte Moderna e Contemporanea; XIII Biennale Donna Ferrara, 2008), p. 37.

identity and belonging articulated in her works from a more comprehensive, but less personal perspective.⁸ On the basis of this feminist, object-based approach of visual analysis, this chapter investigates not only the materiality, scale, placement and presentation of Hatoum's works, but the immediate physical and psychical engagement of embodied viewers instigated by the peculiar construction of her art objects, which, I want to argue, engenders multiple and often contradictory political and cultural meanings in terms of the formation of 'home' and the complex interrelationship between power and resistance in society.

Since the mid-1990s, a significant number of Hatoum's works have been the results of her varied artistic residencies. Without any pre-planned ideas, her practice is largely inspired by her short-term habitation of each chosen place. For instance, the possibilities of using certain materials and crafts in the area, and the specific location and history of the exhibiting site can all contribute to her creation of the artworks. Following the surrealist legacy of 'ready-mades' or 'assisted ready-mades', these local materials, objects and spaces, which, I want to suggest, evoke a sense of identity and community in the place, are often used in unexpectedly incongruous ways to reveal complex, ambiguous feelings of dislocation and affection, estrangement and

⁸ See Whitney Chadwick, 'Situated and Unsettled: An Introduction to the Work of Mona Hatoum', in *Mona Hatoum: Undercurrents* [Exhibition Catalogue]; and Tamar Garb, 'Homesick', in *Mona Hatoum* [Exhibition Catalogue] (Salamanca: Centro de Arte de Salamanca and Santiago de Compostela: Centro Galego de Arte Contemporánea, 2002).

belonging.⁹ Meanwhile, the formal construction of Hatoum's works also recalls the aesthetic tradition of minimalism. However, unlike the precision, rigidity and neutrality of minimalist sculptures, most of her domestic ready-mades can be perceived as both abstract, geometric structures, such as grids and cubes, and altered, yet still recognizable mundane objects.¹⁰ In this way, Hatoum seeks to infuse her works with multiple, expressive meanings in association with domesticity and home.¹¹

⁹ Different from surrealist readymade pieces, which also raised questions about the manufacturing uniformity and commodity fetishism under the developing capitalist economy during the first half of the twentieth century, Hatoum's works are mainly concerned with her artistic exploration of home and domesticity. As for the discussion of the intricate relation between surrealist readymades and commodity fetishism see Johanna Malt, *Obscure Objects of Desire Surrealism, Fetishism and Politics* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2004), pp. 101-114; 128; Janine A. Mileaf, *Please Touch: Dada and Surrealist Objects After the Readymade* (Dartmouth: Dartmouth College Press, 2010), pp.22-24; David Banash, *Collage Culture: Readymades, Meaning, and the Age of Consumption* (Amsterdam and New York: Rodopi, 2013), pp. 137-141.

¹⁰ As for the modernist formal aesthetics embodied in the abstract geometric structure, Rosalind Krauss has argued, 'the absolute stasis of the grid, its lack of hierarchy, of centre, of inflection, emphasizes not only its anti-referential character, but—more importantly—its hostility to narrative. This structure, impervious both to time and to incident, will not permit the projection of language into the domain of the visual and the result is silence'. Rosalind Krauss, 'The Originality of the Avant-Garde', in *The Originality of the Avant-Garde and Other Modernist Myths* (Cambridge, MA: MIT Press, 1985), p. 158.

¹¹ To some extent, Hatoum's re-appropriation of minimalist aesthetics call to mind the works of the Cuban-born, American artist Félix González-Torres, who interrogated a range of social issues, including gay rights, the AIDS epidemic, and political crisis through his abstract, minimal language of art. According to Martha Buskirk, González-Torres' artworks, which are constituted by multiple, identical, geometric units, not only resemble the formal construction and elegance of minimalist objects, but also explore 'how the powerful rhetoric of minimal and conceptual art might also be made to reflect the concerns of a gay-Hispanic man', and to incorporate 'references to both social issues and personal history'. Martha Buskirk. *The Contingent Object of Contemporary Art* (Cambridge, MA: MIT Press, 2005), p. 154. See also José Esteban Muñoz, 'Performing Disidentity: Disidentification as a Practice of Freedom', in *Disidentifications: Queers of Colour and the Performance of Politics* (Minneapolis and London: University of Minnesota Press, 1999), p. 165. Jan Avgikos, 'This is My Body', *Artforum*, February 1991, 26, no. 9, pp. 79-83.

Furthermore, owing to her insistence on the minimalist aesthetics of formal regularity and seriality, certain sculptural forms and mundane objects are fabricated in a cumulative and compulsive manner from different local materials and on diverse scales. For Hatoum, each place of her residencies can be perceived as a provisional base from which her various artistic ideas are practised, reconsidered and further developed. When talking about the situation of modern and contemporary transnational artistic practice, T. J. Demos has suggested that ‘it is important to avoid reading dislocation, in any of its guises, exclusively in the negative, as solely melancholic or chaotic, as if its identity were metaphysically rooted’.¹² As Alix Ohlin has also argued, Hatoum’s nomadic artistic itineraries across geographical boundaries, as well as her ‘bifurcated personal history in both the Middle East and the West’ provide her with not only a multiplicity of creative materials and cultural resources, but also a unique global perspective from which to consider issues of identity and belonging.¹³ Her de-familiarized household objects articulate not a simple sense of loss and displacement, but productive possibilities of encountering difference, affinity, instability and exclusion through which viewers might reconsider their bodily and

¹² T. J. Demos, *The Migrant Image: The Art and Politics of Documentary during Global Crisis*, p. 3. Demos’ argument is raised on the basis of his reading of a wide range of modern and contemporary literatures on migration and exile. For instance, see Edward Said, ‘Intellectual Exile: Expatriates and Marginals’ (1993), in Moustafa Bayoumi and Andrew Rubin (ed.) *The Edward Said Reader* (London: Granta, 2000), pp. 368–381. Gayatri Spivak, ‘Asked to Talk About Myself’, *Third Text*, Summer 1992, no. 19, pp. 9-18; Hannah Arendt, ‘We Refugees’, *Menorah Journal*, 1943, no. 1, pp. 69-77.

¹³ Ohlin, ‘Home and Away: The Strange Surrealism of Mona Hatoum’, p. 38.

psychical existence in relation to the concept of home, as well as the wider social and cultural human community.

By rereading the feminist debates on both the problem and the importance of a safe and protective home in the formation of individual identity, the philosopher Alison Weir argues:

Rather than oscillating between the desire for a safe, secure, conflict-free home and the recognition that homes are in fact sites of violence and abuse, predicated on oppression and exclusion, we can recognize and affirm an ideal of home as a space of mutuality and conflict, of love and its risks and struggles, of caring and conflictual connections to others.¹⁴

In this chapter, I examine how Hatoum, via her peculiar language of art that operates ‘between formal rigor, conceptual subtlety and political awareness’, might set out to construct and reconstruct an alternative model of ‘home’ akin to that described by Weir, in which the viewing subject can be both destabilized and reformed through her conflicts and connections with the outside world, and remain open to difference,

¹⁴ Alison Weir, ‘Home and Identity: In Memory of Iris Marion Young’, in *Identities and Freedom: Feminist Theory Between Power and Connection* (Oxford & New York: Oxford University Press, 2013), p. 50. Weir’s arguments are based on her critical reconsideration of the works of feminist scholars, including Iris Marion Young, Bidy Martin and Chandra Mohanty. See Young, ‘House and Home: Feminist Variations on a Theme’ (1997), which has been also used as a significant theoretical material in forging my discussion in chapter one on Yin Xiuzhen’s works; and Bidy Martin and Chandra Talpade Mohanty, ‘Feminist Politics: What’s Home Got to Do with It?’, in Teresa de Lauretis (ed.) *Feminist Studies/Critical Studies* (Bloomington: Indiana University Press, 1986), pp. 191-212.

challenge and transformation.¹⁵

The first two sections of this chapter consider a selection of Hatoum's strangely altered sculptural pieces, particularly her confining, cage-like bed works and enlarged, menacing kitchen utensils. In contrast with most existing discussions by a significant number of art critics and curators, which examine Hatoum's distorted household items with reference to Sigmund Freud's psychoanalytic term—'uncanniness', this chapter draws on Melanie Klein's accounts of infantile phantasy and aggression, and interrogates in what way viewers, through their embodied interactions with Hatoum's artworks, are engaged in an artistic space of familiarity, disquiet, danger and violence in not only psychological, but physical terms.¹⁶ The discussion of Hatoum's works in these two sections raises questions about issues of architectural confinement and institutional regimentation in connection with the notion of home, and reveals the ever-present discord and conflict in the household and in a broader social context of disparities and power struggles. The last section of this chapter focuses on Hatoum's works, constructed from fragile, degradable materials found in the places of her

¹⁵ Chiara Bertola, 'Mona Hatoum: Unstable, Living, Organic and Moving Form', in *Mona Hatoum: Interior Landscape* [Exhibition Catalogue] (Milan: Edizioni Charta Srl, 2009), p.21.

¹⁶ For instance, see Laura Steward Heon, 'Grist for the Mill', in *Mona Hatoum: Domestic Disturbance*; Chiara Bertola, 'Mona Hatoum: Unstable, Living, Organic and Moving Form'; Alix Ohlin, 'Home and Away: The Strange Surrealism of Mona Hatoum'; Kristy Bell, *Mona Hatoum: Unhomely* [Exhibition Catalogue] (Berlin: Galerie Max Hetzler and Holzwarth Publications, 2008). Patricia Falguières, 'Disbelonging', in *Mona Hatoum: Shift* [Exhibition Catalogue] (Berlin: Galerie Max Hetzler and Holzwarth Publications, 2012).

artistic residencies, which were mostly undertaken in remote, relatively disadvantaged local communities in the 1990s and early 2000s. This section relates the mutable and ephemeral materiality of these works, which have been also investigated by art critics, such as Andrew Renton and Chiara Bertola, to the increasingly fluid and precarious condition of individual and collective existence under globalization.¹⁷ By drawing on the Kleinian concept of ‘the depressive position’, this section examines how the unstable, vulnerable material construction of these works might evoke feelings of loss and depression in association with the possible disintegration of human bodies, ‘home’ and communities, while, in the meantime, demonstrating an idealized, artistic mode of freedom and mobility.¹⁸

The ‘Bedroom’: A Prison-like Domicile

As Hatoum has argued, ‘having always had an ambiguous relationship with notions of home, family and the nurturing that is expected out of this situation, I often like to introduce a physical or psychological disturbance to contradict those expectations’.¹⁹ In her practice, the domestic often takes on an unexpected aspect. With the materials, scale and other details subtly or exaggeratedly altered, mundane household items, such as furniture pieces and cooking implements, which provide the body with

¹⁷ Andrew Renton, *Mona Hatoum* (London: Jay Jopling/White Cube, 2006), p. 29. Bertola, ‘Mona Hatoum: Unstable, Living, Organic and Moving Form’, p. 21.

¹⁸ Klein ‘A Contribution to the Psychogenesis of Manic-Depressive States’ (1935), p. 124.

¹⁹ Hatoum, in ‘Mona Hatoum Interviewed by Jo Glencross, London, Summer, 1999’ in Laura Steward Heon (ed.) *Mona Hatoum: Domestic Disturbance*, p. 68.

support and convenience in its daily activities, have been deprived of their original appearance and function, and transformed into odd, menacing and unstable ready-made pieces. By imbuing ordinary, seemingly benign objects with elements of threat and disquiet, Hatoum's works recall the familiar psychoanalytic term 'uncanny' (or *unheimlich*), which was proposed by Sigmund Freud in his famous essay 'Das Unheimlich' published in 1919.²⁰

For Freud, 'an uncanny experience occurs either when infantile complexes which have been repressed are once more revived by some impression, or when primitive beliefs which have been surmounted seem once more to be confirmed'.²¹ This psychoanalytic concept was widely adopted in surrealist and Dadaist avant-garde practices during the first half of the twentieth century as, in Anthony Vidler's words, 'an instrument of defamiliarization', through which artists challenged viewers' habitual perceptions of things in everyday life, engendering a sense of disturbance

²⁰ Sigmund Freud, 'The Uncanny' (1919), in James Strachey (trans.) & (ed.) *The Standard Edition of the Complete Psychological Works of Sigmund Freud: An Infantile Neurosis and Other Works (1917-1919)*, vol. 17 (London: Hogarth Press/The Institute of Psycho-Analysis, 1955). Freud started his discussion with an etymological exploration of the German word 'heimlich', which refers to something familiar, cosy and homely, as the opposite of the 'unheimlich' (p. 220). For Freud, 'the unheimlich place is the entrance to the former heim of all human beings (the maternal womb in particular), to the place where each one of us lived once upon a time and in the beginning'. (p. 245).

²¹ *Ibid.*, p. 249. See also Anthony Vidler, *The Architectural Uncanny: Essays in the Modern Unhomely* (Cambridge, MA: MIT Press, 1992), p. X; 7. See also Nicholas Royle, *The Uncanny: An Introduction* (Manchester: Manchester University Press, 2003); pp.1-38; Mladen Dolar, "'I Shall Be With You On Your Wedding-Night': Lacan and the Uncanny', *October*, Fall 1991, 58, pp. 5-23. Anneleen Masschelein, *The Unconcept: The Freudian Uncanny in Late-Twentieth-Century Theory* (Albany: State University of New York Press, 2011), pp. 1-16.

and unease.²² Hatoum's distorted domestic objects similarly produce a certain kind of uncomfortable strangeness within familiarity, an 'uncanny' aspect of her work that has been discussed by scholars and art critics, such as Laura Steward Heon (2001), Kristy Bell (2008), Alix Ohlin (2008), Chiara Bertola (2009) and Patricia Falguières (2012) in their monographic studies and catalogue articles on the artist.²³ While keeping some of these arguments about uncanniness in play, I want to also extend my discussion to a critical consideration of the physical as well as the psychological threat and disquiet that Hatoum's work often engenders, by examining her artistic construction of 'home' in relation to notions of aggression and destruction.

Undoubtedly, the physical existence of the body always plays a crucial role in Hatoum's artistic practice. In her earlier performance pieces, Hatoum constructed her own body as an artistic vehicle to represent and investigate issues of institutional control, cultural alienation, as well as the vulnerability and mortality of the human body. In her later installation and sculptural works, the body, in most cases, has been

²² Vidler, *The Architectural Uncanny*, p. 8. According to Vidler, in the face of the catastrophic loss between the two world wars, the notion of the uncanny was perceived as 'a metaphor for a fundamentally unliveable modern condition', implicating the permanent loss of the natal 'home'—'the cradle and apparently secure house of western civilization' (p. 7). See also Royle, *The Uncanny*, p. 97. Hal Foster, *Compulsive Beauty* (Cambridge, MA: MIT Press, 1993), pp. xvii; 8-10; 13-17.

²³ See Laura Steward Heon, 'Grist for the Mill', in *Mona Hatoum: Domestic Disturbance*; Chiara Bertola, 'Mona Hatoum: Unstable, Living, Organic and Moving Form'; Alix Ohlin, 'Home and Away: The Strange Surrealism of Mona Hatoum'; Kristy Bell, *Mona Hatoum: Unhomely* [Exhibition Catalogue] (Berlin: Galerie Max Hetzler and Holzwarth Publications, 2008). Patricia Falguières, 'Disbelonging', in *Mona Hatoum: Shift* [Exhibition Catalogue] (Berlin: Galerie Max Hetzler and Holzwarth Publications, 2012).

concealed, yet tactically alluded to by the object it uses.²⁴ Viewers' bodies have replaced that of Hatoum's to experience or envision the corporeal constraint and destructive threat evoked by the material construction of her works. The intricate, uncanny situation of simultaneous familiarity and strangeness, perceived normalcy and impalpable instability fabricated through Hatoum's practice can be experienced not only as a psychological, but also as a physical condition, within which viewers' bodies are 'at once implicated and challenged'.²⁵ In my following discussion of her varied sculptural and installation pieces, I will turn to the work of the psychoanalyst Melanie Klein, specifically her work on infantile aggression and phantasy, a term she uses to describe 'both the activity and its products', as Juliet Mitchell has put it.²⁶

According to Klein, an inherent, destructive force is present in the infant child from birth, which arouses persecutory anxieties and gives rise to sadistic phantasies of the impending annihilation of itself and its surrounding objects (such as the mother's

²⁴ Volker Adolphs, 'The Body and the World', (trans.) by Ishbell Flett, in Uwe M. Schneede, Christoph Heinrich, Dieter Ronte, Volker Adolphs, David Neuman and Richard Julin (eds.) *Mona Hatoum* (Hamburger Kunsthalle; Kunstmuseum Bonn; Magasin 3 Stockholm Konsthall: Hatje Cantz Verlag, 2004), p. 43.

²⁵ Salwa Mikdadi, 'The State of Being in Mona Hatoum's Artwork', in *Mona Hatoum* [Exhibition Catalogue] (Amman: The Khalid Shoman Foundation, Darat al Funn, 2008), p. 59.

²⁶ Juliet Mitchell, 'Introduction', in Juliet Mitchell (ed.) *The Selected Melanie Klein*, (Middlesex, England & New York: Penguin Book Ltd, 1986), p. 23. As Mignon Nixon has also argued, Klein's notion of phantasy distinguish from Freud's concept of psychic reality, as 'it secures for the bodily drives the significance of what, in Freud's account, is exclusively the work of mind'. Mignon Nixon, *Fantastic Reality: Louise Bourgeois and a Story of Modern Art* (Cambridge, MA: MIT Press/October Books, 2005), p. 200.

body).²⁷ For Klein, the Oedipus conflict is subsumed in this aggressive impulse of destruction arising at a period ‘when sadism predominates’.²⁸ For this reason, as others have noted, Kleinian psychoanalysis constitutes a significant part in feminist theories, given that its emphasis is on pre-Oedipal infantile desire, prior to the process of sexual difference and individuation.²⁹ In her analyses of both adults and children, Klein considers that ‘all aspects of mental life are bound up with object relations’—one’s immediate bodily experience of the relationship with the external environment.³⁰ In this sense, compared with a dreadful state of uncanny regression, the anxious and disturbing situation created by Hatoum’s works, most of which present a tangible, hazardous threat to viewers’ bodies, is rather understood as an ever-available position in which, as Mitchell has written, ‘one is sometimes lodged’.³¹

²⁷ Melanie Klein, ‘The Psycho-Analytic Play Technique: Its History and Significance’ (1955), in Juliet Mitchell (ed.) *The Selected Melanie Klein*, p. 42; 48-50

²⁸ Melanie Klein, ‘The Importance of Symbol Formation in the Development of the Ego’ (1930), in Juliet Mitchell (ed.) *The Selected Melanie Klein*, p. 96.

²⁹ Nixon, *Fantastic Reality*, p. 248; pp. 259-260. See also Janice Doane and Devon Hodges, *From Klein to Kristeva: Psychoanalytic Feminism and the Search for the ‘Good Enough’ Mother* (Ann Arbor: University of Michigan Press, 1992), pp. 12-13. Mary Jacobus, ‘“Tea Daddy”: Poor Mrs. Klein and the Pencil Shavings’, *Women: A Cultural Review*, Summer 1999, 2, special issue, ‘Positioning Klein’, p. 160-179; J.-B. Pontalis, ‘The Question Child’, (trans) Catherine and Phillip Cullen, in John Philips and Lyndsey Stonebridge (eds.) *Reading Melanie Klein* (London: Routledge, 1998), p. 89. Judith Butler, ‘Moral Sadism and Doubting One’s Own Love: Kleinian Reflections on Melancholia’, in John Philips and Lyndsey Stonebridge (eds.) *Reading Melanie Klein*, p. 181. Jacqueline Rose, ‘War in the Nursery’, in Jacqueline Rose (ed.) *Why War?—Psychoanalysis, Politics and the Return to Melanie Klein* (Oxford: Blackwell, 1993), p. 215. Melitta Schmideberg, ‘Intellectual Inhibition and Eating Disorders’, appendix to Rose, *Why War?* p. 262.

³⁰ Klein, ‘The Psycho-Analytic Play Technique: Its History and Significance’ (1955), p. 52.

³¹ Mitchell, ‘Introduction’, p. 28.

As Klein has suggested, ‘object relations start almost at birth and arise with the first feeding experience’.³² The child acts out its sadistic aggression toward the outside world first through its incipient acts of sucking and biting the mother’s breast, through its phantasized attacks aimed at destroying the mother’s body and robbing her of its contents, such as faeces, the father’s penis and children.³³ Meanwhile, these aggressive phantasies against the mother or the mother’s breast also result in ‘the fear of retaliation by similar attacks’.³⁴ Thus, the feeding breast can be perceived as the archetypal object through which the child relates its embodied interactions with the surrounding environment to its inner impulses and anxieties. In her psychoanalytic practices, Klein develops the ‘play technique’ in which small plain toys and quotidian household objects, such as knives, cups, paper and tables, are used as crucial objects similarly bridging the gap between the external and the internal world, in order to study a wide range of phantasies and experiences of violence, fear and sadism on the basis of her patients’ varied, active and often aggressive interactions with these unremarkable mundane items.³⁵ This model of play and object relations can be instructive in studying viewers’ multiple, spontaneous physical and psychical responses to Hatoum’s phantastically distorted sculptural works. In drawing on Klein’s arguments, I want to suggest that Hatoum’s de-familiarized household items

³² Klein, ‘The Psycho-Analytic Play Technique: Its History and Significance’ (1955), p. 52.

³³ Ibid., p. 48.

³⁴ Ibid.

³⁵ Mitchell, ‘Introduction’, p. 23; Klein, ‘The Psycho-Analytic Play Technique: Its History and Significance’ (1955), p. 37.

are constructed as similar mediated objects, through which instinctual phantasies of sadistic aggression and persecutory anxiety as described by Klein are reactivated and staged, on the basis of viewers' contingent, momentary bodily engagement with the artwork.

The discussion of Hatoum's works start from a series of sculptural objects which take the form of both the cage and the bed. With these works, Hatoum creates an ambiguous space of a domicile and a prison at the same time, exploring an abiding question of home in relation to architectural confinement and social regimentation. In 1996, based on a photograph of a dilapidated cell that she took in a Philadelphia prison, Hatoum created an installation work, titled *Quarters* (Fig. 42). An array of identical bunk beds normally used in prison cells were stripped of mattresses and bed linens, and stacked into piles of symmetrically aligned, depersonalized structures of rectilinear frames that tend to confine and trap the body. According to Klein, by playing with the small toy, the child is enabled to bring out its destructive aggressiveness, projecting its phantasized attacks on the imaginary figure (a parent or a little sister or brother) that the toy stands for.³⁶ Meanwhile, its violent, sadistic gestures of play also engender persecutory fear, as 'the attacked person represented

³⁶ Klein, 'The Psycho-Analytic Play Technique: Its History and Significance' (1955), pp. 41- 42. According to Klein, 'aggressiveness is expressed in various ways in the child's play, either directly or indirectly. Often a toy is broken or, when the child is more aggressive, attacks are made with knife or scissors on the table or on pieces of wood; water or paint is splashed about and the room generally becomes a battlefield'. (p. 41).

by the toy has become retaliatory and dangerous'.³⁷ With the recognizable form of prison beds, *Quarters* easily inspires the viewing subject to project imaginary bodies onto these hard metallic structures. This sadistic phantasy of confining and penalizing fictitious anonymous figures, whose bodily presence is metaphorically implied by the material construction of the piece, is also concurrent with the viewer's own anxiety and dread of being punished by this menacing work in a similar way. In this sense, *Quarters* presents a palpable threat of potential destruction, in stark contradiction to the conventional expectation of the bedroom as restful and relaxed.

Furthermore, meandering through and scrutinizing these towering, elegant geometric skeletons, viewers are exposed to one another's gaze. Even when someone wanders around the work merely by herself, she may still, at times, feel as though a furtive gaze of another person is hidden somewhere within this set of intricately overlapping, coaxial, rectangular structures. This surreptitious gaze evoked by the specific sculptural form of the work generates an elusive source of danger and disquiet, giving rise to viewers' phantasies of being secretly harmed or even destroyed by a latent act which threatens to become reality. This resonates with Freud's account of 'the evil eye' in his discussion of 'the uncanny'. As Freud has argued, 'what is feared is thus a secret intention of harming someone, and certain signs are taken to mean that such an intention is capable of becoming an act'.³⁸ Comprised of uniform bed bunks stacked

³⁷ Ibid., p. 42.

³⁸ Freud, 'The Uncanny' (1919), p. 240. This is different from the surrealist

together, this sculptural piece, as the art critic Ursula Panhans- Bühler has suggested, can be associated with a typical form of architectural and institutional structure in modern urban living environment, under which individual bodies are confined in standard, identical residential units and exposed to constant governmental surveillance.³⁹

In *Quarters*, the viewing subject appears as both an active penetrator, who investigates this inhuman, potentially torturing domicile and a passive victim in danger of being imprisoned and punished by the artwork under impalpable and disturbing external control and coercion. In Hatoum's practice, viewers are never simply and explicitly rendered as the marginalized, oppressed or disempowered. Instead, they are placed in an uncertain or even questionable aesthetic situation, where they, in Hatoum's words, engage in 'a kind of self-examination and an examination of the power structure'.⁴⁰

Hatoum's practice, which explores the motif of the bed, brings to mind the works of the American sculptor Robert Gober. In the 1980s, Gober created a group of hand-crafted, subtly altered beds, cribs and playpens (See Fig. 43; Fig. 44), through

conception of 'the evil eye' demonstrated in a significant number of works, which summons intensive anxiety of castration. See Foster, *Compulsive Beauty*, p. 9.

³⁹ Ursula Panhans-Bühler, 'Being Involved', (trans.) by Ishbell Flett, in Uwe M. Schneede, Christoph Heinrich, Dieter Ronte, Volker Adolphs, David Neuman and Richard Julin (eds.) *Mona Hatoum* [Exhibition Catalogue], p.54.

⁴⁰ Hatoum, in 'Mona Hatoum Interviewed by Janine Antoni, Spring 1998', p. 24.

which he also attempted to transform the domestic into an unsettling and disquieting sphere.⁴¹ Before *Quarters*, Hatoum also constructed a few works modelled on an individual bed. For instance, *Incommunicado* (1993) (Fig. 45) is another sinister apparatus of imprisonment and torture, transformed from a wheeled infant cot.⁴² Similarly stripped of the mattress and bed linens, the piece, constructed from hard, polished carbon-steel tubes, calls forth not tender, loving care, but coldness and menace. A solid underpinning base of slats or bed springs is replaced by thin, sharp cheese-slicer wires stretched tautly across the bottom frame of the cot. The work is capable of cutting any baby's body mercilessly into slices, inducing intensive fear about this potential persecution and fatal regimentation.

With its peculiar sculptural form, *Incommunicado*, I want to suggest, evokes the typical Kleinian oral-sadistic infantile phantasy of biting and devouring the mother's body and being bitten and devoured by her in turn that emerges in a pre-linguistic stage at the very beginning of the infancy.⁴³ With her artwork, Hatoum tends to

⁴¹ According to Foster, 'pitched, slanted, tilted or otherwise distorted', Guber's deranged furniture pieces are 'cages marked with aggression', which articulate the repressed childhood insecurity under the socialized, uniform straitjacket of family life—the idealized heterosexual domestic normalcy in suburban America. Hal Foster, 'A Missing Part', in *Prosthetic Gods* (Cambridge, MA: MIT Press, 2004), p. 315. See also Deborah Wye & Starr Figura, *Artists & Prints: Masterworks from the Museum of Modern Art* (New York: The Museum of Modern Art, 2004), p. 242.

⁴² In the following years, Hatoum constructed two counterparts, *Silence* (1994) and *Marrow* (1996) to *Incommunicado*, from the more fragile materials of glass and rubber. Being liable to break, these two supposedly secure, protective baby's cots have been typically turned into uncanny objects which allude to the vulnerability and changeability of our own bodies, epitomizing the ever-present danger of death.

⁴³ Klein, 'The Psycho-Analytic Play Technique: Its History and Significance', p. 49.

create an artistic vehicle for viewers (not only the infant) to communicate their innate dread and aggressiveness originating from this ‘incommunicado’ infantile period. Moreover, on the basis of their momentary embodied interactions with the artwork, viewers are also enabled to develop their object relations to this phantastically deformed bed piece, engaging in a conflictual, but productive exchange between the self and the external world. Ranging from a distorted bed, such as *Incommunicado*, to *Quarters* which resembles the dehumanizing architectonic design of contemporary urban housing, Hatoum’s altered bed works reveal the confining, disquieting and oppressive aspect of home and the urban residential situation.

This idea of constructing an ambivalent space in-between a domicile and a prison was further developed by Hatoum in a series of works, modelled on small animal cages. In 1999, Hatoum created *Untitled (Baalbeck birdcage)* (Fig. 46) by enlarging an old-fashioned birdcage to ten times the original size. The final dimension of the work was decided according to the size of the prison cell in Alcatraz, a famous American penitentiary.⁴⁴ Constructed from wooden lathes and galvanized steel bars, the look of the piece might call to mind a four-poster bed. However, different from a soft, comfortable and upholstered bed, the base of the work is composed of two pulled-out drawers made of cold solid steel boards. The bigger one might be understood as a space of habitation, whereas the smaller one appears to function as a kind of feeding

⁴⁴ Hatoum, cited in ‘Mona Hatoum Interviewed by Jo Glencross, London, Summer, 1999’, p. 68.

bowl. The bed curtains, which provide the sleeper with privacy, are replaced by vertical steel rods erected from the base of the bed to the canopy. A number of shorter ones have been also installed between the wooden frames of the slightly vaulted canopy top. The artwork creates no possibility for escape, engendering a sustaining sense of physical imprisonment.

Similarly, in 2002, for her solo exhibition held at the Art Centre of Salamanca—a former men’s prison, Hatoum displayed another work constructed with the structural reference to an animal cage—*Cage-à-deux* (Fig. 47), literally a cage for two.

Enlarged to seven times the original scale of the cage, the piece has become a prison cell of dark mild steel. Within its metal bars, there are two feeding bowls, which can be filled and refilled through two tiny openings, by removing the semi-circular lids made of painted MDF boards. Two single light bulbs, at times, hang above this oversized cage, highlighting the uneasy, suffering situation of physical imprisonment created by the artwork. As *Untitled (Baalbeck birdcage)*, the work also appears as a restless, torturing residence, implying two absent bodies, who are inescapably entrapped in this cold, dehumanizing living environment with no personal privacy.

Exaggerated in scale, these two animal cages have been turned into penitentiary structures used, in Garb’s words, to ‘incarcerate two adults rather than the small pets

for which its prototype was designed'.⁴⁵ More importantly, by transforming small pet cages, which are commonly placed under the scrutinizing eyes of people for amusement, into prison-like human-sized residences, Hatoum, with her artworks, reveals a stressful, confining, dwelling situation under ubiquitous external surveillance, articulating an unequal power relation between viewing and being viewed.⁴⁶ The enclosed interior is exposed to viewing subjects from all sides. When wandering around the work, viewers are placed in a ferocious, sadistic position, phantasizing the relentless experience of imprisonment that bodies, if jailed in the space, might experience. Meanwhile, the imposing scale of these two enlarged cages also induces a strong fear of being potentially confined by the sculptural object. The ruthless, menacing design of the interior space also aggravates the persecutory dread of this underlying physical punishment. Both cages are purposely left empty. A series of questions—‘Am I the jailed or the jailer? The oppressed or the oppressor? Or both?’ remain inconclusive and open for viewers to bring their own answers and interpretations.⁴⁷ Though the violent intrusion of residential privacy and their harsh, sinister material construction, these two pieces present a disturbing or even

⁴⁵ Tamar Garb, ‘Homesick’, p. 19.

⁴⁶ In this sense, Hatoum’s enlarged cages, if considered as prison cells, collapse the modern system of prison described by Michel Foucault in his classic book *Discipline and Punish: The Birth of the Prison* (1977). According to Foucault, the modern system of punishment is especially characterized by ‘the disappearance of the spectacle’ in public and ‘the elimination of pain’ in the penalty. In this sense, Hatoum’s artworks, to some extent, articulate an uncanny revival of an outdated system of punishment which has been superseded in modern society. See Michel Foucault, *Discipline and Punish: The Birth of the Prison*, Alan Sheridan (trans.) (New York: Random House, Inc. 1977), p. 11.

⁴⁷ Hatoum, in ‘Mona Hatoum Interviewed by Janine Antoni, New York, Spring 1998’, p. 24.

destructive threat to their possible inhabitants, conjuring up viewers' inherent aggressiveness and persecutory anxiety towards the outside world, as that described and analysed by Klein.

From the mid-2000s, Hatoum's cage-like bed pieces have been reduced to a variety of simple, abstract metallic skeleton of grids, which are all fabricated approximate to the average human height.⁴⁸ To some extent, this series of works can help gain a more insightful view of Hatoum's artistic interrogation of issues of architectural confinement and institutional surveillance in association with the concept of home.

For instance, in her first solo exhibition in Turkey, at ARTER, Istanbul, Hatoum created *Kapan* (2012) (Fig. 48). The work consists of five cuboid-shaped structures of grids constructed from reinforcing steel bars. In spite of being slightly different in sizes, they are all scaled to the average human height, ranging from 150 centimetres to 170 centimetres. Within each steel structure, there is one or two body-like sculptural objects made of bloody-red, hand-blown glass, which can be easily associated with the sensuousness and vulnerability of the human body.

Composed of both hard, indifferent, minimalist structures of grids and imprecise, seemingly floating, semi-abstract sculptural evocations of human body parts,

Hatoum's artwork juxtaposes solidity with fragility, form with body, and confinement

⁴⁸ This series of works include a skeletal *Cube* (2006), a slant *Globe* (2007) and *Kapan* (2012).

with freedom. As Garb has argued, Hatoum's practice often reveals the contradiction between depersonalized 'institutional circuits and containing structures' and the individual body's 'somatic excesses, its unruly physicality'.⁴⁹ In this sense, in her works, Hatoum investigates and demonstrates the physical and psychological confinement of 'home' within a broader social context, revealing the regimentation and surveillance of individual life under the strict governmental system of control and coercion. The locus of bedroom is not simply constructed as a private domestic domain, but as an open, productive space in which the subject can reconsider and explore the relation between the self and the surrounding environment, between individual freedom and privacy and the outside social power structure.⁵⁰

The 'Kitchen': An Animated Fairy Tale of Domesticity

The domestic kitchen is another critical site of Hatoum's artistic intervention.

According to Hatoum:

I see kitchen utensils as exotic objects, and I often don't know what their proper use is. I respond to them as beautiful objects. Being raised in a culture

⁴⁹ Garb, 'Homesick', p. 24.

⁵⁰ In this sense, Hatoum's artistic re-fabrication of the bedroom is different from the works of artists who engaged with feminist movement in the 1970s and 1980s especially in America and Britain, which aimed at protesting the historical and social confinement of women's creativity to the household. See literatures such as Phyllis Chester, Esther D. Rothblum and Ellen Cole (eds.) *Feminist Foremothers in Women's Studies, Psychology, and Mental Health* (New York: Routledge, 2009); Kathy Battista, *Renegotiating the Body: Feminist Art in 1970s London* (London: I.B. Tauris, 2012); Jayne Wark, *Radical Gestures: Feminism and Performance Art in North America, 1970-2000* (Montreal: McGill Queens University Press, 2006).

where women have to be taught the art of cooking as part of the process of being primed for marriage, I had an antagonistic attitude toward all of that.⁵¹

Between 1999 and 2002, Hatoum constructed a series of oversized sculptural pieces that took the form of multiple kitchen utensils. In Klein's account, the embodied activity of play can help the subject (the pre-linguistic child in particular) express anxieties and sadistic phantasies in real life.⁵² Through her ingenious play with the scale of quotidian cooking tools, Hatoum creates gigantic, menacing sculptural works, by virtue of which the instinctual aggressiveness and persecutory fear of herself and her viewers are dramatically evoked and acted out. The nurturing kitchen, in this way, has been turned into a playground of absurdity, distortion and impending danger akin to that described in fairy tales such as *Alice in Wonderland* and *Gulliver's Travels*, revealing a strange reality of 'home' in which the familiar has become detrimental, and the stable has grown destabilized. Moreover, compared with *Untitled (Baalbeck birdcage)* and *Cage-à-deux*, which are also exaggerated in scale, these enlarged, incisive kitchen utensils elicit a more vividly threatening and violent encounter between the viewer's body and the artwork.

The contemporary artistic experiment with the question of scale examined in this thesis, via Yin's oversized body-like fabric cavities and Hatoum's enlarged household

⁵¹ Hatoum, in 'Mona Hatoum Interviewed by Jo Glencross, London, Summer, 1999', p. 65.

⁵² Klein, 'The Psycho-Analytic Play Technique: Its History and Significance', p. 37.

items, is inseparable from the physical engagement of the viewing subject. This, to some extent, resonates with the classic paradigm of minimalist works by artists such as Robert Morris and Richard Serra in the 1960s and 1970s, which sought to define an immediate spatial situation to relate the viewer with the sculptural piece, through the work's grand presence.⁵³ However, different from these minimalist predecessors, artists of a younger generation, such as Yin and Hatoum, not only engage viewers in a phenomenological encounter with the material and spatial construction of their gigantic sculptural works, but they dramatize this encounter by bringing conflict and perturbation into the field of phenomenality. In his infamous article, 'Art and Objecthood' first published in 1967, Michael Fried argued that the minimalist aesthetic emphasis on the viewer's contingent, bodily interaction with the sculptural work and its environmental circumstance is 'theatrical'.⁵⁴ In contemporary artistic practices, the 'theatricality' of minimalist sculptures criticized by Fried has been exploited by artists in more explicit and dynamic ways.⁵⁵ In the case of her oversized

⁵³ For instance, Robert Morris, in his 1967 article 'Objecthood and Reductionism', has indicated, 'in the perception of relative size the human body enters into the total continuum of sizes and establishes itself as a constant on that scale. [...] The awareness of scale is a function of the comparison made between that constant, one's own body size, and the object. Space between the subject and the object is implied in such a comparison'. Robert Morris, 'Objecthood and Reductionism', in Charles Harrison and Paul J. Wood (ed.) *Art in Theory 1900—1990: An Anthology of Changing Ideas* (Oxford: Blackwell, 1992), p. 831. See similar arguments in James Meyer, 'No More Scale: The Experience of Size in Contemporary Sculpture', *Artforum*, Summer 2004, 42 (10), p. 223.

⁵⁴ Michael Fried, 'Art and Objecthood', in *Art and Objecthood: Essays and Reviews* (Chicago: Chicago University Press, 1998), pp.153-155. The article was first published in *Artforum*, June 1967.

⁵⁵ For similar arguments, see also Patricia Falguières' discussion of Hatoum's works in 'Disbelonging', in *Mona Hatoum: Shift*, p. 71.

kitchen utensils, Hatoum instigates furious, ‘theatrical’, mutual engagement between viewers and her sculptural pieces, by evoking a latent mode of animism and eroticism through their specific sculptural forms, scale and postures. The viewing subject takes the responsibility to reveal the disquieting domestic violence and discord, on the basis of her immediate, spontaneous, embodied experience of Hatoum’s deformed household items.

In 1999 and 2000, Hatoum created two gigantic sculptural pieces entitled *La Grande Broyeuse* (Fig. 49), by scaling up a Mouli-Julienne—a hand-cranked vegetable shredder to seventeen and twenty-one times its original size.⁵⁶ In consideration of ‘its augmented size measured against that of the viewer’, the work induces discomfort and unease in both physical and psychical terms.⁵⁷ Looming over the viewer’s head, this imposing object appears, in Hatoum’s words, as a giant, monstrous animal with ‘three spindly legs and an outsized tail’, which seems ready to skitter over, grab or even devour the viewing subject.⁵⁸ Hatoum’s interpretation of this vividly threatening and potentially destructive sculptural piece recalls a typical situation of

⁵⁶ Mouli-Julienne is a typical French food processor, first produced and widely used during the time after the Second World War. The prototype for the work was, in fact, an object from Hatoum’s childhood—a small Mouli-Julienne that Hatoum found many years later at the back of a cupboard, while helping her mother clean up the kitchen at home in Beirut. Hatoum, in ‘Mona Hatoum Interviewed by Jo Glencross, London, Summer, 1999’, p. 66.

⁵⁷ Imogen Racz, *Art and the Home: Comfort, Alienation and the Everyday* (New York & London: I.B. Tauris, 2015), p. 98.

⁵⁸ Hatoum, interpreted by Laura Steward Heon, in ‘Grist for the Mill’, p.12. Similar arguments see also Hatoum, in ‘Mona Hatoum Interviewed by Jo Glencross, London, Summer, 1999’, pp. 66-67.

uncanniness described by Freud, which is caused by the child's inability to distinguish clearly between living and inanimate things—an anxious uncertainty that has been mostly surmounted in the adulthood through learning and practice.⁵⁹

However, rather than simply conjuring up a familiar feeling of dread and confusion that viewers experienced in childhood, *La Grande Broyeuse*, via its oversized, sinister material construction and poised posture, also engenders an immediate, tangible threat of impending annihilation in the viewing space. As the art critic Laura Steward Heon has argued, apart from the 'biomorphic qualities' of the work, this enlarged, forbidding, labour-saving food processor also evokes 'a latent animism'.⁶⁰ The huge cavity of the piece, which looks like a devouring mouth, is big enough to accommodate a crouching body. The towering crank is ready to hold down the body to be shredded. Three huge metal discs with multiple sharp cutting and grinding perforations are placed on the ground, which reveal to viewers the underlying menace of physical pain. The piece is rendered as an activated, devastating instrument, which seems well-prepared for the action of grinding anybody coming close with the same efficiency as shredding a carrot. Wandering around the work, the danger of being scrunched by this poised contraption is palpable. To some extent, *La Grande Broyeuse* also embroils the viewing subject within a typical Kleinian phantastic scenario of devouring and being devoured by another imaginary body by virtue of the

⁵⁹ Freud, 'The Uncanny' (1919), p. 233.

⁶⁰ Heon, 'Grist for the Mill', p. 12.

menacing and latently animated sculptural work.

Moreover, the threat of mortal danger engendered by *La Grande Broyeuse* can be also related to the psychoanalytic theory of castration anxiety which both Freud and Klein have explored and discussed.⁶¹ This enormous, threatening sculptural object might be perceived as an abstract material embodiment of the female body.⁶² Equipped with a giant shredding cavity and three interchangeable steel discs interspersed with numerous cutting and grating holes, the artwork brings to mind the mythical ‘vagina dentata’, which summons intensive fear and anxiety of castration.⁶³ Indeed, its dramatically exaggerated scale makes this threat of potential castration even more explicit and tangible.

⁶¹ As for the notion of castration anxiety, see Freud, ‘Inhibition, Symptoms and Anxiety’ (1926), in James Strachey (ed.) *The Standard Edition of the Complete Psychological Works of Sigmund Freud*, vol. 22 (London: Hogarth Press/The Institute of Psychoanalysis, 1953), pp. 77-175; Nicholas Royle, *The Uncanny*, pp. 41-42. Melanie Klein, ‘Early Stages of the Oedipus Conflict’ (1928), in Juliet Mitchell (ed.) *The Selected Melanie Klein*, pp. 70-77.

⁶² In her recent study of the ready-mades by artists such as Marcel Duchamp and Man Ray, Janine Mileaf has discussed the importance of eroticism and corporeality embodied in this specific surrealist practice. The surrealist humour of puns of both human bodies and banal manufactured items is also adopted in a significant number of Hatoum’s distorted sculptural works. See Janine A. Mileaf, *Please Touch: Dada and Surrealist Objects After the Readymade*, p. 3.

⁶³ A variety of arguments about the myth of ‘vagina dentata’ have been made by feminist scholars and theorists. For example, Sheena J. Vachhani argues that ‘the toothed vagina is the classic symbol of men’s fear of castration, expressing the unconscious belief that a woman may eat or castrate her partner during intercourse’ (p. 168). See Sheena J. Vachhani, ‘Vagina Dentata and the Demonological Body: Explorations of the Feminine Demon in Organization’, in Alison Pullen and Carl Rhodes (eds.) *Bits of Organization* (Copenhagen: Copenhagen Business School Press, 2009), pp. 163– 183. See also Barbara Creed, *The Monstrous Feminine: Film, Feminism, Psychoanalysis* (London & New York: Routledge, 1993), p. 87.

For Klein, the castration complex is experienced, albeit differently, by children of both sexes. It is, she writes, ‘released in the consequence of the frustration’ that the child experiences at weaning and reinforced later through ‘the anal frustrations undergone during training in cleanliness’.⁶⁴ In both cases, the mother acts as the phantasized castrator, who dismembers and castrates the child by taking away the internalized feeding breast or faeces from the inside of the child’s body.⁶⁵ Thus, for Klein, the mutilation anxiety can reach back to an earlier infantile phantasy triggered by the inborn destructive impulse— the fear of being penetrated, robbed and devoured by the mother as the result of its similar, either real or phantasized attacks on the mother’s body and its contents.⁶⁶ Infused with the latent erotic significance, this enlarged vegetable shredder, which is capable of dismembering the viewer’s body or even scooping it inside out, induces anxieties of genital mutilation and bodily destruction, significantly subverting the image of a nurturing domestic kitchen.

Apart from *La Grande Broyeuse*, Hatoum also created another two oppressive oversized cooking implements, *Slicer* (1999) and *Grater Divide* (2002), in which the underlying violence and danger ‘at home’ are also unveiled to viewers through their active interactions with the art object. *Slicer* (1999) (Fig. 50) is an enlarged replica of an egg slicer. The oval egg rest is big enough for accommodating a human head. The

⁶⁴ Klein, ‘Early Stages of the Oedipus Conflict’ (1928), p. 70.

⁶⁵ *Ibid.*, p. 73.

⁶⁶ Nixon, *Fantastic Reality*, pp. 234-235.

carver is rendered in a poised position ready for action. The artwork, as *La Grande Broyeuse*, also provokes a palpable sense of threat and sadistic destruction. The whole piece is present in the viewing space as an activated, forbidding guillotine.

In 2002, Hatoum made *Grater Divide* (Fig. 51), a scaled-up version of an old-fashioned vegetable grater. Cutting across the exhibition space, the piece looks like a sinister room divider or screen, punctured with multiple incisive grating holes. Under light, these menacing holes appear as though disturbing eyes whose inspecting gazes follow the every move of viewers' bodies in the space, evoking both physical and psychical unease. It is the kinetic encounter between viewers and the sculptural object that animates and reanimates the work. As in *La Grande Broyeuse*, these cutting and slicing perforations might be also perceived as dreadful genital orifices or castrating eyes, which call forth anxieties of possible castration and bodily annihilation. In addition, with a specific focus on 'the publicly invasive and surreptitiously controlling gaze', the piece, similar to *Quarters* discussed in the previous section, also interrogates the persistently conflictual relation between personal privacy and external control and surveillance.⁶⁷

With their threatening and abusive appearance, Hatoum's enlarged kitchen utensils articulate a form of 'anxiety-inducing strangeness' in the household.⁶⁸ This might

⁶⁷ Panhans-Bühler, 'Being Involved', p. 30.

⁶⁸ Falguières, 'Disbelonging', p. 68.

trace back to the ‘emblematic feminist critique’ of mundane domesticity in the 1970s.⁶⁹ For instance, in her famous filmed performance, *Semiotics of the Kitchen* (1975), Martha Rosler directed and performed a parody of the typical American cooking show, which played a significant role in building up the image of the capable, industrious and productive housewife in America at the time. After presenting and identifying a selection of kitchen utensils in front of the camera, Rosler enacted a performance of domestic violence and discord through her deviant, absurd use of these manual devices. For instance, she struck a metal saucepan with a cleaver and stabbed a frying pan with a fork. Through her practice, Rosler sought to challenge and subvert the traditional assumption of the domestic kitchen as a place of maternal nourishment and familial reassurance.

In contrast with Rosler’s practice, in which the artist herself takes the central position in her undomesticated drama, Hatoum endows her sculptural objects with their own lives, and instigates viewers’ dynamic embodied interactions with them. Viewers are welcome to bring their own interpretations of the artwork. Their various backgrounds and life experiences might also result in different readings of the same piece of work.⁷⁰ In this sense, Hatoum’s terrifying kitchen devices, which have been

⁶⁹ Ibid.

⁷⁰ This resonates with Hatoum’s own arguments about the artwork’s capacity to generate associations with multiple places and diverse viewer groups. According to Hatoum, ‘a work of art has two aspects: the natural, physical aspect, which I think of as the conscious aspect that the artist can manipulate and shape; and then there is the very complex cultural and unconscious aspect of the artwork. This is rich and full of

dramatically enlarged in order to dwarf and intimidate viewing subjects, are not necessarily understood in terms of either her personal or the feminist critique of domestic drudgeries.

Instead, by constructing humble household implements on a monumental scale, Hatoum's works collapse the conventional association of the miniature with the private, domesticated domain of the interior and the gigantic with the communal world of the exterior.⁷¹ Exhibited in a gallery space of social engagement, her oversized kitchen utensils also become infused with the kind of political meaning typically attributed to public sculpture.⁷² Apart from the fearsome and destructive aspects of these works which have been discussed through this section, Hatoum's enlarged, oppressive domestic tools, as Garb has argued, are actually 'double edged objects', which might also serve as commemorating 'the traditional connotations of warmth and nurturance associated with the implements of food preparation and the

meanings and associations, and it is as impossible to explain fully or comprehend as an individual or the social subconscious. Years after making this work, I still discover interesting associations, sometimes pointed out to me by viewers'. Hatoum, cited in 'Michael Archer in Conversation with Mona Hatoum', in Michael Archer, Guy Brett and Catherine de Zegher (eds.) *Mona Hatoum*, p. 25.

⁷¹ According to Susan Stewart, 'whereas the miniature represents closure, interiority, the domestic and the overly cultural, the gigantic represents infinity, exteriority, the public and the overly natural'. Susan Stewart, *On Longing: Narratives of the Miniature, the Gigantic, the Souvenir, the Collection* (Durham, N.C., Duke University Press, 1993), p. 70.

⁷² As for the function of public sculpture in the demonstration of social power, see Benjamin Buchloh, 'Michael Asher and the Conclusion of Modern Sculpture' (1983), in Jon Wood, David Hulks and Alex Potts (eds.) *The Modern Sculpture Reader* (Leeds: Henry Moore Institute, 2007).

maternal space of the kitchen'.⁷³ Meanwhile, their seriousness as monuments to female domesticity is too disrupted by a keen sense of humour, provoked by their absurdly oversized presence, especially when these works are exhibited together as a group. As Hatoum has suggested, 'when you recognize it or make a connection with the kitchen implement, there is a moment of relief, maybe even laughter'.⁷⁴

In her discussion of Hatoum's gigantic kitchen utensils, Rachel Wells considers that the artist's own interpretation of these works as sinister as well as humorous is problematic. By drawing on Henri Bergson's discussion of the relation between exaggeration and the comic, Wells argues that 'no matter how dangerous the object, if its exaggeration has excited laughter, then it is unlikely to have also provoked fear'.⁷⁵ In this respect, I do not think the feeling of amusement and absurdity engendered by Hatoum's enlarged sculptural pieces contradicts with the accompanying sense of menace and disquiet they too invoke.

Owing to their vividly threatening appearance, her enormous cooking implements

⁷³ Garb, 'Homesick', p. 22.

⁷⁴ Hatoum, cited in 'Mona Hatoum Interviewed by Jo Glencross, London, Summer, 1999', p. 67.

⁷⁵ Rachel Wells, *Scale in Contemporary Sculpture: Enlargement, Miniaturization and the Life-size* (Surrey, UK & Burlington, US: Ashgate Publishing Company, 2013), p. 48. According to Henri Bergson, 'to speak of small things as though they were large is, in a general way, to exaggerate. Exaggeration is always comic when prolonged and especially when systematic; then, indeed, it appears as one method of transposition. It excites so much laughter that some writers have been led to define the comic as exaggeration'. Henri Bergson, *Laughter: An Essay on the Meaning of the Comic*, (eds.) Per Bregne and Guy Bennett; (trans.) Cloudesley Brereton and Fred Rothwell (Copenhagen and Los Angeles: Green Integer Books, 1999), pp. 118-119.

might instigate viewers' physical, multi-sensory engagement and call forth anxious, aggressive phantasies of impending annihilation, before they recognize the familiar domestic prototypes from which these works originate. For Klein, after distinguishing clearly between the phantasized and the real mother, children gradually learn to cope with their cannibalistic phantasies against the maternal figure (as well as her inner contents) through 'reasoned rejection' or even 'at times adopt an attitude of humorous criticism towards them'.⁷⁶ According to Klein, 'I hear even very little children making jokes to the effect, for instance, that some time ago they really wanted to eat up their mummy or cut her into bits'.⁷⁷ This reconsideration of their relations to the mother, from Klein's perspective, can be considered 'a notable step forward in adaption to reality', despite the fact that a strong source of anxiety and aggression towards the external world still remains.⁷⁸ Similarly, as viewers start to make reasonable connections of Hatoum's phantastically deformed works with familiar household objects, these magnified, forbidding sculptural pieces, which evoke destructive situations of discomfort and violence, might be also imbued with a sense of intimacy, amusement and relief. This, to some extent, lessens the disquieting tension between the viewing subject and the artwork, although the threat of mortal danger is still tangible.⁷⁹

⁷⁶ Melanie Klein 'The Psychological Principles of Infant Analysis' (1926), in Juliet Mitchell (ed.) *The Selected Melanie Klein*, p. 67.

⁷⁷ *Ibid.*, p. 68.

⁷⁸ *Ibid.*, p. 67.

⁷⁹ In some rare cases, this sense of amusement is inhibited as a few viewers are not familiar with the prototypes from which Hatoum's works are derived. For instance, as

Furthermore, as intimate, harmless domestic tools have been transformed into oversized, industrialized sculptural works, which might grind, grate and cut the viewer's body, Hatoum, in her practice, also articulates the unresolved power struggles between dehumanizing industrial development and fragile human life. The solid, durable and metallic construction of her oversized sculptural pieces makes the vulnerability and mutability of the human body even more prominent. The domestic kitchen, through Hatoum's sculptural works, is rendered as an intricate, unstable domain of not only nourishment, but also hidden violence and conflict in connection with the outside world, which might be related to a wide range of experiences of oppression and resistance. In this way, rather than fabricating an idealized, stable and desirable locus of domesticity and belonging, Hatoum seeks to endow the notion of home with multiple definitions and diverse emotions.

In addition to her play with the scale of quotidian domestic implements, Hatoum also animates the kitchen and the household, engendering a horrifying sense of tension via her creative use of electricity. Between 1999 and 2000, Hatoum created a series of installation works of electrified domestic items. *Sous Tension* (Fig. 52) was made and exhibited at the le Creux de l'enfer, Thiers, France in 1999.⁸⁰ In the gallery room, a

a traditional French food processor, the Mouli-Julienne might be not quite recognisable for some international viewers.

⁸⁰ *Sous Tension* was developed from a smaller piece, *Home*, exhibited earlier in the same year in San Antonio.

dark brown double-deck table is placed in front of the back wall, within which a sealed interior window is installed. A wide range of metal kitchen devices, such as cheese graters, steamers, cooking pans, grinders, coffee strainers, funnels, colanders, ladles, can openers and whisks are either located on the table or scattered around it on the ground. Unlike the electric kitchen appliances prevalent nowadays, the majority of the devices featured in this work are those invented and widely used after ‘the great industrial age of the nineteenth century, when the all-purpose kitchen knife, the mortar and pestle and the simple pot that was drained by tilting were ousted by a plethora of individually functional labour-saving items created in factories’.⁸¹ These household tools easily call to mind conventional quotidian domestic labour in the kitchen—‘the repetitive movements and reassuring sounds of chopping, grating, sifting and stirring’.⁸² However, in the case of *Sous Tension*, these obdurate, banal kitchen utensils have been creatively connected with each other and dramatically animated by a lethal electric cable which forms irregular winding traces on the floor.

The artwork looks seductively beautiful, especially when light beams fall through the gaps and holes of the objects, projecting ever-changing shadows on the ground, on the surface of the table and on the window mounted on the back wall. Meanwhile, fading on and off in a certain rhythm, the use of light also produces a disquieting situation. The piece emanates excruciating noises—the humming, crackling and

⁸¹ Panhans-Bühler, ‘Being Involved’, p. 24.

⁸² Garb, ‘Homesick’, p. 20.

grating sound, amplified by a hidden sonic system, of the electric spark and voltage when passing through each object.⁸³ Enclosed by an impromptu fence of stretched steel wires, which separates viewers from this life-threatening electric trap, the whole work is rendered as, in Patricia Falguières' words, a 'mysterious, unpredictable and destructive creature', haunting the guarded exhibiting site and enacting a terrifying drama of domestic peril and dissonance.⁸⁴ With her work, Hatoum constitutes a visually, acoustically, physically or even psychically affected space, where the domestic has been animated and featured uninhabitable and dangerous in front of the viewer's eyes. According to Freud, an uncanny effect is often and easily produced when 'our statements about animism and mechanisms in the mind that have been surmounted' appear before us in reality.⁸⁵ By effacing the distinction between imagination and reality, the animated and the lifeless, *Sous Tension* reminds viewers of an uncanny, nightmarish phantasy in which banal household items come to life secretly during the night and haunt the place in the dark. Or it might be also perceived as a prison of sadistic abuse and punishment, in which phantasized bodies are suffering from endless tortures under the scrutiny of the external gaze.

In 2000, Hatoum made an even bigger version of this electrified domestic entrapment, *Homebound* (Fig. 53), with a number of added pieces of furniture and domestic items.

⁸³ Heon, 'Grist for the Mill', p. 13.

⁸⁴ Falguières, 'Disbelonging', p. 71.

⁸⁵ Freud, 'The Uncanny' (1919), p.245.

Homebound incorporates Hatoum's two major artistic themes, the kitchen and the bedroom, into one piece of work. Located at the centre is a pale yellow Formica kitchen table with two folded leaves, which can be stretched out to extend the length of the item. A number of chairs are placed around it, as they would be normally arranged in the dining room. Scattered on the table and on the ground are a range of kitchen utensils, including funnels, Mouli-Juliennes, cheese graters, coffee strainers, a mincer, a sauce pan and a few colanders. Around the table are two stacked steel boxes with mesh apertures, a wire-mesh metal trash bin, a steel bucket, two standard lamps without shades, a well-designed armchair, a bench, a wheeled trolley on which locates a table lamp with a shade, as well as a small animal cage—the prototype for Hatoum's work *Cage-à-deux* (2002). In the far left hand corner, there is a metal single bed, a skeletal baby cot, a washbowl, a clothes stand, two children's chairs and a locomotive displaced from a toy train set. The furnishing of the space recalls the typical post-war aesthetics of interior design that formal simplicity, elegance and functionality were especially underlined.⁸⁶ Nearly all the items are stripped down to the metal frame. No fabric, cushion or mattress appears in the work to soften the solid surfaces and harsh edges of these metallic skeletal pieces.

The majority of the objects are linked to each other by a long copper cord, which traces intricate curvilinear lines across the floor. Through it, a flow of pulsating

⁸⁶ Panhans-Bühler, 'Being Involved', p. 21.

electric energy is transmitted to each household item, brightening and dimming the bulbs hidden within them alternately in a pace similar to that of one's breath. As with *Sous Tension*, the disconcerting sound of the electric current when coursing through each domestic item is amplified by a hidden loudspeaker. By the use of electricity, the piece is animated as a menacing, living organism, capable of electrocuting any bodies if they step into the space. It is also carefully screened off by a set of horizontal lines of steel wires—a rigid grid structure, which both protects viewers standing outside and imprisons imaginary anonymous inhabitants of this electrified space. Although viewers are not actually positioned in the centre of this hazardous domestic domain, the visual and acoustic aspects of the work still present a palpable threat to their bodies. The cruel, suffering experience of excruciation imposed on bodies, if confined in the space, can be easily phantasized. As indicated in the work's title— 'homebound', the piece engenders a conflicting situation between the longing for home and the reality of constraint or even persecution derived from this supposedly familiar and comforting domain.⁸⁷

Different from *Sous Tension*, *Homebound* can be only seen from the front. However, the looped connecting cord within the steel fence competes for viewers' attentions, soliciting them to track its intricate, meandering routes and explore the three-dimensional construction of the work via their eyes.⁸⁸ By exposing a domestic

⁸⁷ Racz, *Art and the Home*, p. 97.

⁸⁸ For similar arguments, see Tamar Garb, 'Hairlines', in Carol Armstrong

space to viewers' scrutinizing gazes, Hatoum, again, collapses the established boundaries between interior and exterior, and private and public, reinforcing a stressed situation of personal life under external invasion and surveillance. Without any explicit reference to a specific culture or social context, these two electrified domestic traps *Sous Tension* and *Homebound*, as most of Hatoum's artworks, remain open to viewers' own interpretations.

Hatoum's practice proposes a distinctive way of thinking about the formation of the self and home on the basis of one's immediate relations to the surrounding objects.

As we have already discussed, for Klein, the child's relation to the mother's body plays a significant role in the development of its subjectivity.⁸⁹ Indeed, in Klein's account, the mother's body first appears not as a subject, but as a partial object to her infant. On the one hand, the child finds itself dependent on the mother, her feeding breast in particular, to satisfy its vital needs; on the other, it acts out its destructive aggressiveness through physical as well as phantasized interactions with the mother's body, articulating the sense of helplessness, dread and loss it experiences as it learns to gradually separate from the maternal figure and develop into an independent subject.⁹⁰ Marked by both communication and conflict, this incipient relationship with the mother is instructive for the child to establish connections with other external

and Catherine de Zegher (eds.) *Women Artists at the Millennium* (Cambridge, MA: MIT Press, 2006), p. 258. *Sous Tension* can be viewed from the front, left and right.

⁸⁹ Klein, 'The Psycho-Analytic Play Technique: Its History and Significance', p. 52.

⁹⁰ Mitchell, 'Introduction', p. 16.

objects and human bodies, which constitutes a crucial part in its individual and social development. Hatoum's deformed, menacing sculptural objects, I want to suggest, engender a conflictual, yet inspiring relationship between the viewing subject and the domestic or home akin to that of the child and mother in the pre-Oedipal period.

Taking the form of familiar household items, Hatoum's sculptural pieces still, at some point, recall intimate memories of domesticity, implying familial attachment and affection. However, the material and formal structure of her works arouses bodily discomfort and emotional disturbance, on which anxious phantasies of danger and violence related to the notion of home are projected. Entrapped in Hatoum's artistic space, viewers are provided with opportunities to encounter and consider the possible disturbance and conflict concealed in the domestic sphere and prevalent in multiple social power struggles. In her practice, 'home' is never simply constructed as a secure, stable and comforting place at the expense of excluding 'specific histories of oppression and resistance'.⁹¹ Instead, 'home' becomes a productive, reciprocal site, where, as Weir has suggested, 'we are able to recognize and confront power relations', constructing and reconstructing our relationships with other people and our specific social living environment 'through these confrontations and through the feelings of risk and danger they entail'.⁹² Indeed, evoking overwhelming, inconsiderably different anxiety and discomfort, Hatoum's sinister, threatening domestic pieces also

⁹¹ Weir, 'Home and Identity: In Memory of Iris Marion Young', p.48.

⁹² *Ibid.*, p. 52.

run the risk of essentializing various forms of conflicts and struggles associated with our individual and social existence 'at home' into similar scenarios of disquieting and violent artistic engagement.

Artistic Residencies: One 'Home' After Another

Hatoum has been always fascinated by the idea of artistic residency and considers her short habitation of each place a crucial source for her creativity and productivity.⁹³

The use of multiple local materials, crafts and spaces also, to a large extent, enriches her artistic presentation and exploration of home and domesticity. When choosing the place of her residency, she often feels drawn to remote communities and historical sites, relatively alienated from the social mainstream of contemporary metropolitan life. In response to the specific cultural and living situation of the places where she selected to stay, Hatoum, since the mid-1990s, has also constructed a number of, in Panhans-Bühler's words, 'tender, ephemerally fleeting, yet meditative objects' from mutable, fragile materials, including hair, soap, paper, pasta and gloves.⁹⁴

In these works, the instinctual sadistic aggressiveness and persecutory anxieties that

⁹³ According to Hatoum, 'I am very much affected by where I am in the sense that I don't see the studio as the centre of my creative output. I feel that I am at my best in terms of inspiration and creativity when I am on the move. My work is often the result of happy accidents and a series of coincidences which occur when I am visiting, for the first time, a space I have been offered for an exhibition'. Hatoum, cited in Cecilia Fajardo-Hill, *Mona Hatoum* [Exhibition Catalogue] (Caracas, Venezuela: Sala Mendoza, 2001), p. 5.

⁹⁴ Panhans-Bühler, 'Being Involved', p. 33.

are called forth by her tough constraining furniture pieces and creatively animated, menacing kitchen utensils discussed in the previous two sections, have been replaced by a keen sense of loss and depression due to the disintegrating status of 'home' and human communities alluded to by the vulnerable material construction of the art object. According to Klein, the depressive position emerges at around the age of six months, when the infant starts to perceive the mother or caregiver as a whole object rather than a multitude of dispersed bodily parts.⁹⁵ Since then, in addition to the threat of various persecutions, the infant has also been tormented by the fear that its sadistic phantasies might destroy the mother, giving rise to the painful 'loss of the loved object'.⁹⁶ The anxious urge to preserve and make reparation to the loved mother arouses feelings of depression and guilt, as the infant 'doubts its capacity to achieve this restoration'.⁹⁷ Through her precise handling of materials, Hatoum's fragile, degradable sculptural pieces considered in this section evoke a similarly desperate and frustrating position, owing to the irretrievable loss of the loved 'home'—the stable locus of collective affinity and belonging.

Moreover, through her artistic residencies undertaken in a multitude of places

⁹⁵According to Nixon, 'in her 1935 paper "A Contribution to the Psychogenesis of Manic-Depressive States", Klein formulates a central tenet of her psychoanalytic theory that psychic life is structured by the interplay of manic (or paranoid-schizoid) and depression positions'. Nixon, *Fantastic Reality*, p. 104. See also Melanie Klein 'A Contribution to the Psychogenesis of Manic-Depressive States' (1935), in Juliet Mitchell (ed.) *The Selected Melanie Klein*, pp. 118-120.

⁹⁶ Klein 'A Contribution to the Psychogenesis of Manic-Depressive States' (1935), p. 118.

⁹⁷ *Ibid.*, p. 124.

undertaken unevenly around the world, Hatoum not only engages in, but also interrogates the unprecedented mobility and fluidity of contemporary life. For instance, in her work *Mobile Home* (Fig. 54) from 2005, between two steel barriers are used suitcases, a foldable wooden table with chairs, children's toys, and kitchen utensils, which are strung together by nearly imperceptible, thin parallel steel wires that are pulled back and forth slowly. A number of washed tea towels and a fluffy toy rabbit hang on the wires, moving in the same pace. By constructing a domestic sphere of basic household items in a constant state of movement, Hatoum appears to articulate the growing unsteadiness and inconsistency of home in contemporary society.

However, in most of her works, the instability and fluidity of home and community existence are not simply presented as a dynamic phenomenon of physical movements as shown in *Mobile Home*, but practised as an autonomous, creative aesthetic form which is always receptive to change and transformation. By the use of vulnerable, degradable materials, Hatoum, in her works, tends to demonstrate a mode of formal freedom, which refuses to stay the same twice. Furthermore, she regularly revisits certain sculptural forms and structures to resemble and refer to her previous works or projects, yet, each time, reconfigures them into a new artistic format by virtue of her persistent experiments with a wide range of local materials and crafts. As the art critic Andrew Renton has argued, Hatoum reworks existing artistic materials as 'part of an

economy of given signs', reshaping and reclaiming them to accrue a new artistic configuration standing independently of its origin, despite its acknowledgement of the source.⁹⁸ Her practice, in this way, demonstrates not monotonous stasis or repetition, but an insistent transformation of differences.⁹⁹ Through her continually evolving, material and formal language of art, Hatoum challenges the fixed definition and classification of things, places and identities.

With a specific focus on a selection of Hatoum's residencies undertaken in the 1990s and early 2000s, including the Beguinage Saint-Elizabeth in Kirtrijk, Belgium (1995), the Anadiel Gallery, in East Jerusalem, Palestine (1996), le Creux de l'enfer in Thiers, France (1999), and Sala Mendoza in Caracas, Venezuela (2001), this section examines how Hatoum, through her artworks, raises questions about both the formation and disintegration of home and community life in a variety of local living environments; and how Hatoum's practice explores and represents cultural specificities of these places of her residencies, yet, at the same time, demonstrates an idealized, artistic form of mobility and freedom beyond established geographical and cultural boundaries.

⁹⁸ Andrew Renton, *Mona Hatoum* (London: Jay Jopling/White Cube, 2006), p. 29.

⁹⁹ As Bertola also argued, Hatoum's artwork demonstrate 'an idea of metamorphosis in which the concept of form was not a fixed given, immutably connected with an image but a dynamic element that indicated the instability of the image itself and its need to always look for new boundaries for its own appearance that could not be reduced to an isolated images'. Bertola, 'Mona Hatoum: Unstable, Living, Organic and Moving Form', p. 21.

In 1995, Hatoum was commissioned by the Belgian Kannal Art Foundation to make an installation work at the Beguinage Saint-Elizabeth in Kortrijk, Belgium, a nunnery community of the Roman Catholic Church, dating from the early thirteenth century.¹⁰⁰ Located in the centre of Kortrijk, the Beguinage area appears as, in Guy Brett's words, 'a town within a town', which is 'cobbled, gardened, quiet and still', very different from the rest of the modern city. At the time when Hatoum created her work, only the last beguine and two aged companions lived there. To recollect and reconceive the life of a nearly vanished community, Hatoum spent several weeks constructing *Recollection*— a work that was primarily comprised of her own hair that she collected from bathtub drains, combs and brushes and stored in shoe-boxes over a six-year period.

During her time as a student at the Slade School of Art, Hatoum had begun to use her bodily detritus, such as nail clippings, hair, and pieces of skin to create artworks.¹⁰¹ In her later practices, she also used her own hair in a number of works. For instance, between 1993 and 1999, Hatoum created a series of artworks, entitled *Keffieh* (Fig. 55). Long strands of hair were woven into a rectangular piece of white cotton cloth, in accordance with the pattern traditionally used in the design of the Arabic male scarf. Embroidered with female hair, the piece, as Garb has suggested, makes 'visible the

¹⁰⁰ The work was made for the exhibition *Inside the Visible* curated by Catherine de Zegher.

¹⁰¹ Hatoum, 'Interview with Claudia Spinelli', pp. 141-142.

presence of women whose labour and bodies are conventionally hidden from sight' in the Arab world.¹⁰²

A number of other contemporary women artists, including Janine Antoni and Doris Salcedo, also used hair as an artistic material in their works. In her performance work, *Loving Care* (1992-1996) (Fig. 56), Antoni soaked her hair in a bucket of hair dye and mopped the gallery floor. The consequence of her painstaking, repetitive labour constituted an abstract painting on the floor of controlled, energetic, thick brush strokes, which, as Catherine de Zegher has argued, ironized 'the machismo of (Jackson Pollock's) action painting', with the presence of an attractive, clothed young woman in charge of all artistic decisions and in full control of her body.¹⁰³

Between 1995 and 1998, Salcedo created a collective of artworks, titled *Unland* (Fig. 57) in response to the traumatic experience of the Colombian Civil War. In these works, Salcedo used black and dark brown hair of Colombian women, acquired from a local hair dresser, in combination with raw white silk fibres to fabricate a veil of 'cobweb' on the surfaces of two old wooden tables asymmetrically joined together.

¹⁰² Garb, 'Hairlines', p. 256.

¹⁰³ Catherine de Zegher, 'Hatoum's *Recollection: About Losing and Being Lost*', in Michael Archer, Guy Brett and Catherine de Zegher (eds.) *Mona Hatoum*, p. 102; Andrea Miller-Keller, *Janine Antoni/ Matrix 129* (January 7-April 28, 1996) [Exhibition Catalogue] (Hartford, Connecticut: Wadsworth Atheneum, 1996), pp. 4-5. Antoni's work was initially exhibited as an abstract painting on the floor in the absence of the artist in 1992 for a group exhibition, *The Auto—Erotic Object*, at the Hunter College in New York City. See also Richard Rinehart and Jon Ippolito, *Re-collection: Art, New Media, and Social Memory* (Cambridge, Ma: MIT Press, 2014), pp. 182-184.

These artworks call to mind the numerous abandoned houses and domestic places covered by dust after the war in the disappearance of family members.¹⁰⁴

The use of hair, particularly in women artists' practices, resonates with the feminist debate on the politics of the body and its representation since the 1970s. In her 1978 essay 'The Bodily Politic: Female Sexuality and Women Artists since 1970', Lisa Tickner argued that women artists, in the 1970s, started to challenge the pervasive presence, idealisation and fetishisation of the female body in art and visual culture through 'an attack on the patterns of dominance and submission within it, a rejection or parody of the standards by which women are judged sexually desirable, a repossession of our own use of the "colonized" and alienated female body'.¹⁰⁵ In this sense, hair is, indeed, a preferred material, as it is able to 'act as a metonym that stands in for the female body, while avoiding representing that body directly'.¹⁰⁶

However, in Hatoum's practice, hair appears not merely as a residual bodily

¹⁰⁴ As for the use of hair in Salcedo's *Unland* works, see Mieke Bal, *Of What One Cannot Speak: Doris Salcedo's Political Art* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 2010), pp. 134-135. Mieke Bal, 'Sticky Images: The Foreshortening of Time in an Art of Duration', in Carolyn Bailey Gill (ed.) *Time and the Image* (Manchester: Manchester University Press, 2001), pp. 96-97. Andreas Huyssen, 'Doris Salcedo's Memory Sculpture: *Unland—The Orphan's Tunic*', in *Present Pasts: Urban Palimpsests and The Politics of Memory* (Stanford, California: Stanford University Press, 2003), p. 113. See also Carlos Basualdo, Nancy Princenthal and Andreas Huyssen (eds.) *Doris Salcedo* (London: Phaidon, 2000).

¹⁰⁵ Lisa Tickner, 'The Body Politic: Female Sexuality and Women Artists since 1970' (1978), in Rozsika Parker and Griselda Pollock (eds.) *Framing Feminism: Art and The Women's Movement 1970-1985* (London: Pandora Press, 1987), p. 275.

¹⁰⁶ Leila McKellar, 'Hairpieces: Hair, Identity and Memory in the Work of Mona Hatoum', in Geraldine Biddle-Perry & Sarah Cheang (eds.) *Hair: Styling, Culture and Fashion* (Oxford: Berg, 2008), p. 169.

substance registered with sexuality and identity, but as an inspiring biological margin of provocation and exchange. This recalls the discussion of the body and its boundaries in chapter one on Yin's body-like fabric cavities of 'second-skin'. In the case of her room-sized installation, *Recollection*, Hatoum, via the subtle yet extensive presence of her own hair, instigates disturbing, yet productive inter-bodily encounters between viewers and the artwork, raising questions about notions of belonging and social collectivity from the perspective of corporeality and embodied experience.

Recollection was installed in a temporary exhibition space—the main meeting hall of the Beguinage Saint-Elizabeth, located on the second floor of an eighteenth-century building. It is a spacious and luminous room with timber floor and ceiling, high wooden windows and walls of faded green pigment (see Fig. 58). A large amount of tiny balls of dark brown hair, rolled carefully by the artist, have been scattered in the corner of the windowsills and on the polished floor boards with dark knots. As viewers step into the space and walk through the room, those weightless hair balls drift along with their movements, gently skimming their shoes and trousers. Almost imperceptible, long strands of delicately knotted single hair are suspended evenly at six-inch intervals from the ceiling, which define a vertical field intersected with the rectangular floor boards and ceiling beams and, ideally, constitute a grid structure. However, these strands of weightless, fragile hair contain their own tensile energy and refuse to be in place, in conformity to the strict formal accuracy and clarity of the grid

structure. Far from being an abstract, detached representation of the formal order, these barely visible hairlines reveal their presence by brushing the viewer's face, stroking her clothes, tickling her hands or even catching in her mouth.

In the far corner of the room, a hand-made wooden loom is attached on the edge of a pale green wooden table (Fig. 59). Skeins of woven hair have been pulled on the loom and held taut with the help of tapes, which constitute a delicate grid pattern, with 'its horizontal-vertical intersection of two separate system of tread; the weft and the warp' as de Zegher has suggested.¹⁰⁷ In contrast to the orderly pattern within the loom, a fuzzy mass of hair tendrils are left out, which appear as unruly messy margins out of order or system. They attract viewers' attention, dissolving the regular and precise tracing of the grid by diffusing the focus of viewing. Hatoum's work, in this sense, reveals the difficulty of bringing obdurate, vulnerable hair into a form of order, the grid structure in particular. In addition, a network of discarded, dirty wavy pubic hair sprouts from the surface of a small bar of white soap placed on one of the windowsills at the corner (Fig. 60).

Hatoum's use of hair is closely associated with the architectural and historical past of this community space. According to Hatoum:

The room was so beautiful, with light flooding in from a row of windows on

¹⁰⁷ de Zegher, 'Hatoum's *Recollection: About Losing and Being Lost*', p. 99.

both sides and the walls painted institutional green. Here I didn't want my intervention to be anything but subtle. The hair balls could be like the dust that settles in unused spaces and contains the sheddings from all the women who have lived in that space through the centuries. It is about the feeling of a community of life where every little thing matters.¹⁰⁸

Indeed, hair is widely perceived as a symbol of remembrance in western society, asserting the role of personal relics. In the Victorian period, it was popular to preserve the hair of a lost loved one and enclose it in jewellery to wear as a memento.¹⁰⁹ By filling the room with dispersed, displaced hair, Hatoum recollects the collective existence of the beguines, who once lived in the place in large numbers, and left ubiquitous physical traces through their daily activities of writing, lacemaking and meditation.

According to Klein, the depressive position is derived from the recognition of the fact that the loved object is in a state of dissolution.¹¹⁰ In the absence of community members, Hatoum's nearly undetectable, yet pervasive bodily intervention in the space, in fact, underlines the unavoidably disintegrating condition of this nunnery

¹⁰⁸ Hatoum, cited in de Zegher, 'Hatoum's *Recollection: About Losing and Being Lost*', pp. 99-100,

¹⁰⁹ As for the use of hair as personal relics in jewellery see Deborah Lutz, *Relics of Death in Victorian Literature and Culture* (Cambridge : Cambridge University Press, 2015), pp. 128-154; Galia Ofek, *Representations of Hair in Victorian Literature and Culture* (Surrey: Ashgate, 2009), pp. 47-52.

¹¹⁰ Klein 'A Contribution to the Psychogenesis of Manic-Depressive States' (1935), p. 124.

community—the once beloved home for groups of beguines through the centuries, which engenders palpable feelings of loss and depression. Through her artwork, this isolated communal living environment, historically and culturally concealed from the public attention and male gaze, is exposed to the eyes of scrutinizing viewers, whose bodies are momentarily enmeshed with the discarded, physical remnants of another subject, which are used to allude to a historical human collective on the verge of disappearance. As Falguières has argued, *Recollection* constructs an ‘empty, negative monument to the industrious lay mysticism of the pious women of times gone by’, which commemorates their past presence and devotion by virtue of ‘a very tactile sense’ of the absence produced through viewers’ active embodied interactions with the artwork.¹¹¹ Hatoum and viewers of her work have substituted the absent beguines, occupying this community space.

Moreover, oscillating between order and disorder, form and body, cleanliness and dirt as well as suppression and revolt, Hatoum’s installation of displaced hair brings to mind a theoretical term ‘abject’, proposed by the feminist philosopher Julia Kristeva. In her book, *Powers of Horror: An Essay on Abjection*, published in 1982, Kristeva develops her arguments about the notion ‘abject’ or ‘abjection’ on the basis of her reading of the British cultural anthropologist Mary Douglas, who articulates a symbolic system to distinguish between clean and unclean, and equates dirtiness with

¹¹¹ Falguières, ‘Disbelonging’, p. 65.

the matter out of its proper place within an established systematic ordering and classification.¹¹² According to Kristeva, the abject, which is considered disgusting and defiling, arises not from something simply ‘lack of cleanliness and health’, but from ‘what disturbs identity, system, order, what does not respect borders, positions, rules’.¹¹³ In other words, the abject is perceived as a kind of retching defilement since it ‘escapes that social rationality, that logical order on which a social aggregate is based’.¹¹⁴ For Kristeva, bodily fluids and waste products, such as tears, perspiration, faeces, urine, vomit as well as skin, nail and hair clippings, which disrupt biological boundaries and possess the capacity to contaminate the ‘clean and proper’ body, can be perceived as the typical examples of abject.¹¹⁵

Derived yet displaced from Hatoum’s own body, the hair used in *Recollection* is undoubtedly an abject material, which is out of its natural place. With its particular

¹¹² According to Kristeva, ‘the British anthropologist Mary Douglas begins by constructing the “symbolic system” of religious prohibitions as a reflection of social divisions or even contradictions. As if the social being, coextensive with a “symbolic system”, were always present to itself through its religious structures which transfer its contradictions to the level of rituals. And yet, at a second stage of her thinking, Mary Douglas seems to find in the human body the prototype of that translucent being constituted by society as symbolic system’. Julia Kristeva, *Powers of Horror: An Essay on Abjection*, trans. Leon S. Roudiez (New York: Columbia University Press, 1982), p. 66. See also Mary Douglas, *Purity and Danger: An Analysis of the Concepts of Pollution and Taboo* (London and New York: Routledge, 1992[1966]), pp. 2-3; 35; and J. Brooks Bouson’s interpretation of Kristeva’s arguments about ‘abjection’ in *Embodied Shame: Uncovering Female Shame in Contemporary Women’s Writings* (Albany, New York: The State University of New York Press, 2009), p. 4.

¹¹³ Kristeva, *Powers of Horror*, p. 4.

¹¹⁴ *Ibid.*, p. 65.

¹¹⁵ *Ibid.*, p. 3; 102. As Kristeva has argued, ‘the body must bear no trace of its debt to nature: it must be clean and proper in order to be fully symbolic’. (p. 102)

material construction and placement, the artwork investigates the abject quality of hair in response to the historical background of the exhibiting site. This intricate theoretical idea, which disrupts and questions established social orders and cultural traditions, is adopted in Hatoum's practice to examine inter-bodily relations and community existence in association with the notion of home.

In *Recollection*, viewers can hardly walk through the room with ease and confidence. Weightless and floating, those hair balls and suspending hair strands provoke unsolicited, disquieting tactile encounters between viewers and the artwork, which arouse a sense of repulsion and disgust, as they are reluctant to touch Hatoum's abject bodily detritus. *Recollection*, I want to suggest, demonstrates a mode of collectivity, on the basis not of a shared origin or cultural ideal, but of immediate, momentary, yet uncomfortable inter-bodily, inter-corporeal engagement. On the one hand, *Recollection* provides the viewing subject with the opportunity to temporarily dwell in a specific communal space in connection with other bodies (Hatoum's bodily remnants and other viewers who simultaneously engage with *Recollection*). On the other, the work induces physical and psychical experience of disturbance and unease, which continuously challenges and disrupts this contingent social collective of the self in relation to others, engendered through tactile interactions between viewers and the material body of the art object.¹¹⁶

¹¹⁶ Here, I believe viewers might also have to negotiate with one another when wandering around the space filled with ubiquitous hair 'interventions'. However, my

Furthermore, in *Recollection*, Hatoum not only constitutes a provisional, unstable social collective of bodies temporarily engaging with one another, but explores the historical existence of the Beguinage community through the symbolic language of her artwork. In the case of the small Weave-It hair loom, strands of hair, with the aid of tapes, are strung on the loom, both conforming to (the hair grid at the centre) and escaping from (the chaotic mass left outside) the grid system. Discarded hair, which is usually considered unclean or even disgusting, has been partially included in the system of tidiness and order. In this way, Hatoum subverts the simple, universal association of bodily detritus with dirt and disorder. By comparison, an extremely ambivalent situation in-between cleanliness and defilement in *Recollection* is created through an inappropriate view of the pubic hair displaced from an unfamiliar body. The particular part of the work may induce feelings of disgust, shame and loathing. The network of pubic hair is pressed into the surface of a bar of smooth soap, which is used for cleansing the body. On some occasions, the result of a clean body might also lead to abject hair carelessly left on soap. The use of pubic hair in the work not only interrupts the clear division of cleanliness and dirt, but subverts social conventions and cultural taboos related to visibility and invisibility.

discussion focuses on how viewers momentarily relate to one another through their provisional, simultaneous interactions with this artistic space of abject hair. Indeed, this contingent collective relation can easily collapse if they, even only some of them, feel uncomfortable contacting Hatoum's work and retreat from the room.

This symbolic ambiguity in-between order and disorder, culture and nature, form and mess presented in *Recollection* can be also broadly related to the construction of the social power structure. As de Zegher, who also cites Douglas in her essay on Hatoum, has argued, *Recollection* can be perceived as ‘a diagram of social structures’, which ‘questions behavioural patterns of dirt-affirmation and dirt-avoidance as analogous to social ordering *vis à vis* degrees of symmetry or hierarchy and the cultural obstructions between the inhabitant and the alien, the significant and the inconsequential’.¹¹⁷ With *Recollection*, Hatoum, again, obfuscates the tidy and static definition of ‘otherness’.

Grounded in the specific context of the Roman Catholic Beguinage, the symbolic aspect of the work can be considered in relation to the marginalized and, at times, equivocal social and cultural status of the community in history, which evades a clear classification of identity.¹¹⁸ According to Carol Neel, the beguines were neither ordinary women nor nuns, since they ‘lived outside the (masculine) authority of both the church and the secular institutions of marriage and the family’.¹¹⁹ Despite

¹¹⁷ de Zegher, ‘Hatoum’s *Recollection*: About Losing and Being Lost’, p. 93.

¹¹⁸ As Catharina Lis and Hugo Soly have suggested, ‘from the second quarter of the thirteenth century, Beguines increasingly lived in communes in the Low Countries, acquired property as a community and established formal institutions known as Beguinage, nearly all located at the edge of the city or just outside the wall [...] Not all Beguines opted for these inlands of seclusion, but whatever they chose, retreating from the world was more the outcome of a mental construct than a physical reality’. Catharina Lis and Hugo Soly, *Worthy Efforts: Attitudes to Work and Workers in Pre-Industrial Europe* (Leiden, The Netherlands: Koninklijke Brill NV, 2012), p.129.

¹¹⁹ Carol Neel, ‘The Origins of the Beguines’, *Signs*, 1989, 14, 2, p. 323. The quotation is from McKellar, ‘Hairpieces: Hair, Identity and Memory in the Work of

residing in a remote community dwelling isolated from the secular world, they supported themselves through manual labour, in close association with local manufacturing industries.¹²⁰ The historical living situation of the beguines, in this sense, reverberates with Kristeva's description of the abject, which is 'in-between, the ambiguous, the composite'.¹²¹ With her work of abject hair, Hatoum reveals a form of community existence in-between being included in and excluded from the social mainstream. The notion of home, in this sense, has been widened out to the experience of belonging in society. In *Recollection*, the concept of abjection is represented and explored in both formal and corporeal, both visual and cultural terms. A supposedly protective and homely place of community life has been transformed into a controversial communal space to engage in conflict and communication with other bodies, and to reconsider the broader social ordering of inclusion and exclusion, mainstream and margin.

In her subsequent residencies undertaken during the late 1990s and early 2000s Hatoum created the majority of her works using materials obtained from the local area. In the works discussed in the following part of the section, the collective existence of local communities is demonstrated mainly via the material and formal construction of the work, rather than the unpleasant, transient mutual engagement

Mona Hatoum', p. 173.

¹²⁰ Lis and Soly, *Worthy Efforts*, p. 130.

¹²¹ Kristeva, *Powers of Horror*, p. 4.

between individual bodies evoked in *Recollection*. In the April of 1996, Hatoum was shortly based at the Anadiel Gallery located in East Jerusalem. Returning to her cultural origin where she had never been, Hatoum made a few artworks by the use of materials, objects and crafts found in the area. Inspired by a map of Palestine that she came across by coincidence on her first day in Jerusalem, Hatoum created a floor-based installation piece, *Present Tense* (1996).

The work consists of cubic blocks of white soap, arranged into a loose grid structure (see Fig. 61). Obtained from a small factory in Nablus, a city located in the north of Jerusalem, this particular type of soap, which is made from pure olive oil, is considered by Hatoum as a symbol of resistance, since it is produced through a traditional manual process carried on by Palestinian artisans despite the drastic change in the place.¹²² Emitting a strong smell, the piece, when exhibited, evoked a strong sense of identity and belonging in the local area.¹²³ On the surface of the soap blocks, Hatoum pricked little holes with a nail and filled them with shiny red glass beads, drawing the contour of small territories, which had been given back to the Palestinian government at the time under the Oslo Peace Agreement of 1993.

However, these territories drawn on the soap squares appear as fragmented and

¹²² Hatoum, in 'Michael Archer in Conversation with Mona Hatoum', pp. 26-27.

¹²³ Ibid., 27. According to Hatoum, 'the Palestinians who came to the gallery recognized the smell and the material immediately'. See also Rainald Schumacher, 'Mona Hatoum: Double Sound—Organic Arabesques and Narrative Grids', in Ingvild Goetz, Rainald Schumacher, Larissa Michelberger (eds.) *Mona Hatoum* [Exhibition Catalogue] (Goetz Collection, Munich: Hatje Cantz, 2011), p. 49.

separated amoeba-like tiny islands, demonstrating no integrity and coherence, but isolation and confinement.

In consideration of the soluble nature of soap, Hatoum's work, to some extent, demonstrates the longing for dissolving those controversial disconnected borders that restrict the physical mobility of local residents, or even for resolving the conflict in the area.¹²⁴ However, the degradable materiality of the piece also reveals to viewers an anxious state of disintegration. Both soap and beads are intimately related to the human body, playing an important part in its daily activities of cleansing and adorning in the domestic sphere. The possible, material deterioration of this soap map can also allude to the vulnerability and instability of both human bodies and the home where they inhabit. As Garb has suggested, in Hatoum's work, neither land, home nor nation can provide the subject with 'a stable foundation' or a consistently 'secure point of origin'.¹²⁵ This work, in this sense, conveys the helplessness and frustration in the face of the divided state of the country, evoking the position of depression, which is, as Klein has suggested, coupled with 'despair, remorse and anxiety', owing to the inability to make reparation to the loved object, the beloved homeland in particular.¹²⁶

With *Present Tense*, Hatoum articulates 'the irrational, incoherent and contingent

¹²⁴ As Hatoum indicated, one Palestinian visitor asked after seeing the work, 'did you draw the map on soap because when it dissolves we won't have any of these stupid borders'. Hatoum, 'Michael Archer in Conversation with Mona Hatoum', p. 27.

¹²⁵ Garb, 'Homesick', p. 20.

¹²⁶ Klein 'A Contribution to the Psychogenesis of Manic-Depressive States' (1935), p. 124.

dimensions' of nations and states, 'whose ancestry and boundaries are not emanations of an organic past but largely the products of repeated bureaucratic interventions', as described by Rob Nixon.¹²⁷

Hatoum's work of mapping, constructed in a specific political and cultural context, might be associated with Alighiero Boetti's embroidered world maps, most of which were produced in Afghanistan and Pakistan. Over the twenty years since 1971, Boetti visited thousands of Afghan women embroiderers first in Kabul and later in the Afghan refugee camps located in the Pakistani border city, Peshawar, and commissioned them to embroider coloured political maps of the world.¹²⁸ The territorial contours of different countries were meticulously embroidered and filled with patterns of the respective national flags.¹²⁹ Behind the accurate delineation of lands and countries in the design of these maps were Boetti and Afghan women embroiderers' transnational, transcultural collaboration and production, which, in fact, disrupted geographical boundaries.

¹²⁷ Rob Nixon, 'Refugees and Homecomings: Bessie Heads and the End of Exile', in George Robertson (ed.) *Travellers' Tales: Narratives of Home and Displacement* (London and New York: Routledge, 1994), p. 123.

¹²⁸ Luca Cerizza, *Alighiero e Boetti: Mappa* (London: Afterall Books, 2008), pp. 32-35. Nicola Müllerschön, 'Versatile Collaborations: Narratives of Alighiero Boetti's Afghan Embroideries', in Hans Belting, Jacob Birken, Andrea Buddensieg, Peter Weibel (eds.) *Global Studies: Mapping Contemporary Art and Culture* (Ostfilder Germany: Hatje Cantz Verlag, 2011), p. 45.

¹²⁹ Müllerschön, 'Versatile Collaborations: Narratives of Alighiero Boetti's Afghan Embroideries', p. 46-47.

In contrast, Hatoum's map work destabilizes established national and regional borders primarily by virtue of the mutable, fragile materiality of the art object itself. After *Present Tense*, Hatoum also made a number of world map pieces without explicit geopolitical details other than the natural territorial shape of the continents.¹³⁰ For instance, in the late 2000s, Hatoum created a group of map pieces, such as *Afghan (red and black)* (2008) and *Baluchi (blue and orange)* (2008) (Fig. 62; Fig. 63), by re-appropriating old oriental carpets. In these works, the woollen surface of the carpet is partly sheared to form eroded patterns which roughly resemble the territorial shape of the continents that are normally presented in the world map. Seen from above, the work looks as though 'the artist has injected worms, viruses, into these forms to eat away at their structure and turn them into something else'.¹³¹ Although the title of each work is suggestive of people living in particular countries (Afghanistan, Iran and Pakistan), these sheared map pieces demonstrate no special relation to any geopolitical region. The plotting of the continents remains obscure and subject to further change. In Hatoum's artwork, even the natural attributes of geographical territories also become unreliable and unidentifiable.¹³²

By the use of degradable, mutable materials, Hatoum's artistic configurations of either regional or world maps are constructed as open forms which are receptive to

¹³⁰ Fajardo-Hill, *Mona Hatoum*, p. 17

¹³¹ Bertola, 'Mona Hatoum: Unstable, Living, Organic and Moving Form', p. 27.

¹³² As Bell has argued, Hatoum's changeable world maps might be associated with 'the looming threat of climate change and rising water levels'. Bell, *Mona Hatoum: Unhomely*, p. 63.

continual material deterioration, revealing the difficulty in presenting and defining national and regional territories. With her map pieces which refuse to stay in stasis, Hatoum demonstrates the increasingly unsettled living situation of contemporary life, collapsing the conventional assumption of home or homeland as geographically rooted. Her artistic exploration of the conflictual political situation in Jerusalem has been further developed into an aesthetic motif that calls for vigilance and attention toward all forms of instability and fluidity of place, home and nation.

According to Chadwick, ‘Hatoum’s work is inseparable from contemporary art’s expanded discourse of material, including those long devalued through their association with feminine spheres of production—such as embroidery, thread, sequins and hair’.¹³³ By the use of mundane household materials and skills in the place of her temporary habitation, Hatoum, in her work, not only overturns the established hierarchy between art and craft, but creates and recreates an artistic domain, which evokes one’s sense of home and collective belonging.¹³⁴ However, with a strong interest in undertaking her artistic residencies in disadvantaged, diminishing and precarious indigenous communities, Hatoum’s works, which make desperate efforts to trace and reconceive the local life, culture and collective existence, also

¹³³ Chadwick, ‘Situated and Unsettled: An Introduction to the Work of Mona Hatoum’, p. 31.

¹³⁴ As for women artists’ struggle in the twentieth century for legitimating domestic crafts and materials in the art world, see for example Elissa Auther, *String, Felt, Thread: The Hierarchy of Art and Craft in American Art* (Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 2010); and Rozsicka Parker and Griselda Pollock, *Old Mistresses: Women, Art and Ideology* (New York: Pantheon Books, 1981).

communicate strong feelings of pathos and loss, revealing the inevitably decaying fate of these communities.

At the turn of the century, Hatoum made two installation works by sewing together work leather gloves, found in situ, into an unbroken circular structure. The first piece was created at the le Creux de l'enfer, a contemporary art centre in Thiers, France, which was a knife factory. Thiers is a commune located at the heart of France, which has been famous for its manufacturing production of knives, blades and cutleries for centuries. In response to the endlessly spinning wheels, rushing water and grinding noise in the place, Hatoum constructed a pair of gigantic, provocative kitchen utensils with menacing blades, *La Grande Broyeuse (Mouli-Julienne x 17)* (1999) and *Slicer* (1999), which have been discussed in the previous section.¹³⁵ In contrast to these works, which evoke a highly-charged encounter between viewers and the sculptural object, *Chain* (1999) (Fig. 64) reflects on the industrial history of a replaced workers' community in a less aggressive, yet more thoughtful way.

Chain was displayed in a specific exhibiting site, where 'certain vestiges of its former use' still remained in the space. Through Hatoum's practice, an abandoned pulley

¹³⁵ During her time of living in Thiers, Hatoum read Georges Sand's novel *La Ville Noire* written based on the lives of workers in Thiers. According to Hatoum, 'the dominant image I got was this sense of the whole place being about wheels, turning and grinding, and turning and grinding metal into thin cutting edges—until it all ground to a halt'. Hatoum, cited in 'Mona Hatoum Interviewed by Jo Glencross, London, Summer, 1999', p. 66.

wheel on the wall, which had been used to turn the belt and drive the machinery in the factory, was transformed into the temporary hub of a long still loop of cream-coloured leather work gloves, ‘sewn finger to finger and cuff to cuff’ with nearly invisible light flesh-coloured yarns.¹³⁶ According to Heon, ‘the gloves are ghost hands, markers of absence’, alluding to a specific human collective which has faded into history.¹³⁷ As Klein has argued, ‘the desire for perfection is rooted in the depressive anxiety of disintegration’.¹³⁸ Hatoum’s unbroken, endless circle of absent human labour actually reveals the fate of departed workers, who once worked together with their hands in this historic industrial site for knife production. The piece arouses feelings of sorrow and depression in association with the loss of a collective ‘home’ for groups of manual workers. As Panhans-Bühler has argued, Hatoum’s tender, ephemeral and contemplative pieces do not necessarily stand in contradiction to her aggressive and menacing works, such as *La Grande Broyeuse* and *Slicer*, which were also made and exhibited in the place.¹³⁹ Instead, these two types of artworks mutually enhance each other, revealing the inevitable unsteadiness and disruption in the formation of home and human community.

This artistic experiment with the circular structure fabricated from leather gloves was further developed, when Hatoum resided at the Sala Mendoza, Caracas, Venezuela in

¹³⁶ Heon, ‘Grist for the Mill’, p. 16.

¹³⁷ Ibid.

¹³⁸ Klein ‘A Contribution to the Psychogenesis of Manic-Depressive States’ (1935), p. 125.

¹³⁹ Panhans-Bühler, ‘Being Involved’, p. 33.

2001. By the use of similar materials collected from the local area, Hatoum's *Chain* of invisible, cooperative manual labour has been turned into a floor-based piece—*Mano a mano (Hand in Hand)* (2001) (Fig. 65) on a much smaller scale and infused with new living meanings and cultural associations. The work is a ring of leather gloves roughly sewn together with compelling red nylon yarns. A number of threads are left out at the seam crossing points (see Fig. 66). As indicated in the work's title, the piece sets out to produce a strong sense of community, implying physical and cultural togetherness.

The work might be understood in terms of the specific living context where the exhibition space locates. The gallery is situated in an area surrounded by shanty towns, a barrio community isolated from the rest of the city. In response to the local living condition, as Hatoum suggested, *Mano a mano (Hand in Hand)* can be associated with 'the need for co-operation' within a tightly connected, impoverished community in which its group members work hard together and live on painstaking, primordial forms of manual production.¹⁴⁰ The red threads that attach the gloves together into a circular shape can be perceived as 'the common veins through which blood circulates', alluding to the inseparable and interdependent state of community existence.¹⁴¹

¹⁴⁰ Hatoum, cited in Fajardo-Hill, *Mona Hatoum*, p. 27.

¹⁴¹ Fajardo-Hill, *Mona Hatoum*, pp.27-28. See also Francisco Reyes Palma, "“Drink Me” “Eat Me”", in Paloma Porraz Fraser (ed.) *Mona Hatoum* [Exhibition Catalogue] (Mexico City, Mexico: Laboratorio Arte Alameda/ Ciudad de, 2001).

Meanwhile, fabricated from fragile leather gloves and threads, the work is also liable to damage. As Klein has argued, the depressive position is ‘filled with sorrow and anxiety for the object’, which the subject would ‘strive to unite again into a whole’.¹⁴² Despite Hatoum’s painstaking manual labour of threading and sewing individual gloves together into a whole object, the vulnerable material construction of the piece still gives rise to anxiety and frustration about the underlying danger of material deterioration, which might be related to the threat of possible disintegration and dispersion that most small, less advantaged communities have to confront and struggle to overcome.

In the contemporary art world, as Nikos Papastergiadis has suggested:

Artists are increasingly working with small communities, and exploring the complex histories of visual traditions that are formed in these places. However, while they are often very protective and committed to these places they are also deeply aware of their links to global debates and part of transnational dialogues on the meaning of their practice and its relevance to others.¹⁴³

This dynamic mutual engagement between the local and the global articulated by

¹⁴² Klein, ‘A Contribution to the Psychogenesis of Manic-Depressive States’ (1935), p. 127.

¹⁴³ Papastergiadis associates this dynamic interaction between the local and the global with ‘the dual ambition of contemporary artists who maintain the right to an active presence in a local context and participate in transnational dialogues’. See Papastergiadis, *Spatial Aesthetics: Art, Place and the Everyday*, p. 8.

Papastergiadis is clearly evident in Hatoum's practice through her multiple artistic residencies unevenly spreading over the world. As the results of her exploration of a range of local materials, spaces and crafts, Hatoum's works, to different extents, reveal histories, cultural traditions and collective living conditions of the places she has briefly inhabited, engaging herself and her viewers in inspiring, but mostly disquieting and conflictual interactions with varied local communities. However, at the same time, a significant number of her art pieces are made by drawing on, as Fajardo-Hill has suggested, 'a repertoire of ideas, concepts and concerns that she has articulated in previous works'.¹⁴⁴ Whenever Hatoum reconsiders and refabricates her existing works or ideas in a new context, she also reconstitutes their relations to the previous location from which they are derived and developed. With her interrelated works, such as *Chain* and *Mano a mano*, created in different places of residencies, Hatoum, to some extent, reveals an aesthetic form of being and belonging, which is, to borrow Said's words, 'neither completely at one with the new setting nor fully disencumbered of the old beset with half involvements and half detachments'.¹⁴⁵ Her border-crossing, itinerant practice, in this sense, also demonstrates a recurrent, autonomous process of construction and reconstruction that transcends geographical boundaries, and subverts the myth of local specificity and exclusivity.

¹⁴⁴ Fajardo-Hill, *Mona Hatoum*, p. 6.

¹⁴⁵ Edward Said, *Representations of the Intellectual: The 1993 Reith Lectures* (London: Vintage, 1996), p. 49.

Furthermore, although Hatoum's practice often examines the domestic and collective dwelling environment of remote, alienated human communities, it aims not at celebrating a situated and unchanging primitive mode of 'home' of communal belonging.¹⁴⁶ Instead, via her disturbingly fragile, yet multiply transformative sculptural works, Hatoum reveals the diminishing, unstable and precarious situation of these chosen local communities, articulating a pervasive condition of collective existence in contemporary society, which always yields to change, challenge or even disintegration. However, her artistic investigation of the marginal local is actually in the service of demonstrating a typical phenomenon under globalization—the loss of local identity and tradition, which is, as the anthropologist Ulf Hannerz has argued, often shown most distinctively at the geopolitical periphery, due to the global homogenization of culture via the centre-to-periphery spread of capitalism.¹⁴⁷ Compared with presenting the insightful view of specific local conflicts and struggles, Hatoum's artworks tend to abstract similar peripheral communities, via their ephemeral, changeable and, at times, partially repetitive sculptural forms, in order to bring in fuel for her interrogation of the dominant globalizing development and its

¹⁴⁶ This refers to the critiques of the modernist envision of primitive cultures as situated and bounded entities by scholars, such as Elizabeth Harney and Hal Foster. See Elizabeth Harney, *In Senghor's Shadow: Art, Politics, and the Avant-Garde in Senegal, 1960–1995* (Durham, NC: Duke University Press, 2004), p. 95. Hal Foster 'The Artist as Ethnographer', in *The Return of the Real: The Avant-Garde at the End of the Century* (Cambridge, MA: MIT Press, 1996), pp. 196-197.

¹⁴⁷ According to Hannerz, the persistent transcultural exchange in the context of globalization results in not an egalitarian global village, but multiple asymmetric interactions between geopolitical centres and peripheries. Ulf Hannerz, 'Peripheral Cultures', in Anthony D. King (ed.) *Culture, Globalization and the World System: Contemporary Conditions for the Representation of Identity* (Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 1991), pp. 107-109.

problems and concerns. Her artistic interventions in various localities of her short habitation, in this sense, reinforce rather than alleviate the uneven power relation between regional and global, and periphery and centre.

By uncovering the ever-present communal instability, domestic dissonance and human mobility which all disrupt a consistent sense of belonging and collectivity, Hatoum demonstrates a complicated, rotating process of making art and making 'homes' marked by both regeneration and disintegration of individual and communal identities. Her works that engage explicitly with the idea of the home as a trap, or site of violence or precariousness are indicative of her broader concern with making sense of how subjects learn to navigate their trajectories through the world psychically as well as physically, in aggressive and destructive as well as reparative and productive ways. The question related to the artist's exploration and representation of local communities and cultures will be further explored in the following chapter on Nikki Lee's photographic *Projects*, in which 'home' has become a public site of performing one's communal existence within multiple social and cultural milieus.

CHAPTER III

NIKKI S. LEE'S *PROJECTS*: 'HOME' AS A STAGED PERFORMANCE OF 'BEING IN COMMUNITY'

In a series of seemingly ordinary photographs: an elderly lady clutches the arm of a well-dressed older gentleman, standing in front of a large black-and-white image of Alfred Hitchcock (Fig. 67); a young Japanese girl with green hair smiles to the camera along with a group of friends to document a cheerful moment in a happy-go-lucky birthday party (Fig. 68); a Latino woman is depicted holding a child in her arms in an ordinary household in the Hispanic area of Harlem, New York (Fig. 69); and finally a strip dancer, who wears a leopard-print bikini, snuggles up to a male customer and poses for the camera (Fig. 70). These four unremarkable, mundane snapshots can be connected by the repeated presence of the chameleon-like figure, the New York-based Korean conceptual photographer Nikki S. Lee.¹

Born in a small Korean town, Kye-Chang, and raised in a middle-class family who run a wedding hall in Seoul, Lee's real name is Lee Seung Hee. She adopted the name

¹ Despite the fact that Lee has been residing in Seoul, Korea since 2007, all her existing works, including *Projects* (1997-2001), examined in this chapter, *Parts* (2002-2005), *A.K.A. Nikki S. Lee* (2006) and *Layers* (2007) were created during the time when she was based in America and she is still represented by the American gallery, Sikkema Jenkins & Co, New York. Therefore, in this chapter, I still define Nikki S. Lee as an American-based Korean artist.

‘Nikki’ when she moved to New York City as an international student in 1994. Lee first studied at the Fashion Institute of Technology, New York, specialising in commercial photography, and then went to New York University for a M.A. in photography.² Initiated as her graduation project at New York University, Lee, from 1997 to 2001, produced fourteen *Projects*—her series of ‘visual sociological experiments’, as Louis Kaplan has put it, set mainly in New York and other major American cities.³ In her *Projects*, Lee appears as a slippery agent, who infiltrates a range of cultural and subcultural groups, including drag queens, exotic dancers, yuppies, Latinos, black hip-hoppers, lesbians, senior citizens, neo-swing dancers, Japanese youth, seniors, skateboarders, Ohio trailer-park dwellers, Asian tourists and Korean schoolgirls.

Lee’s approach to her artworks might call to mind the ethnographic strategy of ‘going native’.⁴ At the beginning of each project, Lee identifies a particular community that she wishes to immerse herself into and studies their stereotypical semiotic codes and

² All Lee’s biographical information comes from Lee’s own words cited by Carol Kino, in ‘Now in Moving Pictures: The Multitudes of Nikki S. Lee’, *The New York Times* (October 1, 2006), accessed March 29, 2016, http://www.nytimes.com/2006/10/01/arts/design/01kino.html?_r=2&; and Gilbert Vicario, ‘Conversation with Nikki Lee’, in Lesley A. Martin (ed.) *Nikki S. Lee: Projects* (Ostfildern-Ruit, Germany: Hatje Cantz, 2001), pp. 97-108.

³ Louis Kaplan, ‘Performing Community: Nikki S. Lee’s Photographic Rites of Passing’, in *American Exposures: Photography and Community in the Twentieth Century* (Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 2005), p.173.

⁴ As for the ethnographic concept ‘going native’, see, for instance, Jim Thomas, *Doing Critical Ethnography* (Newbury Park, CA: Sage Publications, 1993), p.48.

lifestyles.⁵ Lee dramatically alters her appearance through a blend of clothing, make-up, diet, hair extensions and use of hair dye, as well as tanning salons. After transforming herself, in her own words, into someone who looks like ‘eighty percent of any person from whichever group’, Lee accesses to the community with a point-and-shoot camera and announces her artistic intention to become a member for a short period of time.⁶ To perform her temporary membership, she spends time with other group members, adopting their gestures, behaviours and mannerisms and joining in their everyday activities. In some cases, Lee also needs to learn new skills, such as skateboarding and dancing, from other group members or personal trainers. In order to record her experience of hanging out with the group, Lee asks a friend or a passer-by to take snapshot photographs of herself embraced by other group members in a series of chosen contexts.

Lee’s *Projects* are endowed with multiple functions, as she uses photography—an art medium, which is normally related to the promise and criticism of truth and authenticity, to document her sociological explorations of identities and human communities that are nonetheless artificial and staged. The indexical nature of photography enables Lee to exhibit her time-stamped snapshots as ‘fake’

⁵ See Lee, in Vicario, ‘Conversation with Nikki Lee’, p. 107; and William Hamilton, ‘Shopping with—Nikki S. Lee: Dressing the Part is Her Art’, *The New York Times* (December 2, 2001), accessed March 27, 2016, <http://www.nytimes.com/2001/12/02/style/shopping-with-nikki-s-lee-dressing-the-part-is-her-art.html?pagewanted=all>.

⁶ Lee, in Vicario, ‘Conversation with Nikki Lee’, p. 107. See also Russell Ferguson, ‘Let’s Be Nikki’. In Lesley A. Martin (ed.) *Nikki S. Lee: Projects*, pp. 7-19.

documentaries of the various simulated personas she performs. Following the vernacular ritual of snapshot photography—posing and smiling to mark memorable moments of holidays, parties, family reunions and other public events, Lee's works fabricate scenarios of 'social belonging' in the guise of other group members she hangs out with for a period of weeks or months. Made during the first few years after her move to New York City, Lee's *Projects*, to some extent, reveal her own experience as a young Korean woman of identifying and negotiating new cultures, places and communities in an unfamiliar foreign environment. Her artistic practice brings to the fore discussions of a range of theoretical ideas relating to the social sciences and culture studies, such as identity performativity, multiculturalism and consumerism, as well as to new critical approaches to thinking globalism, which have become prevalent since the late 1990s.

Different from Yin and Hatoum's varied artistic itineraries in a transnational context, Lee completed the majority of her photographic *Projects* in America.⁷ However, Lee's practice, I want to argue, articulates a similarly nomadic fantasy of 'home-making' by moving between the dwelling environments of multiple social and cultural groups and engaging with their community life. Lee's works present identity as relational, formed and reformed by virtue of identification with others. After

⁷ Different from other thirteen projects, which were taken in America, Lee's *The Schoolgirls Project* was made in Seoul when she came back to home for holiday in 2000.

reviewing feminist theories on the constitution of collective identities in the past three decades, Alison Weir argues that the concept of ‘identification with’ opens up a ‘liberatory dimension of identity politics’, through which identity is considered no longer a static category that enforces ‘sameness across group members’, but an active practice, based on ‘recognition of the other, and an openness to transformation of the self’.⁸ In this sense, identity can be reconstructed and re-enacted through continual acts of self-making, rebuilding relationships with others and reconsidering power relations in society. This chapter examines how Lee’s *Projects* practice identity politics, in Weir’s terms, as a continuous process of ‘identification with’, in an attempt to extricate the formation of individual and communal identities from the constraints of fixed categories of gender, sexuality, ethnicity, race, age, class and nationality; and how Lee’s performative photographic practice of ‘being in community’ with other bodies can be both productive and problematic, raising questions about notions of home and collective belonging in the increasingly cosmopolitan context of contemporary metropolitan life.

The chapter starts with an in-depth investigation of Lee’s approach to her *Projects*, which combines the social documentary, staged performance and vernacular snapshot together. Rather than simply restating the artistic correlations between the works of Lee and another two women photographers, Cindy Sherman and Nan Goldin, which

⁸ Alison Weir, ‘Global Feminism and Transformative Identity Politics’, in *Identities and Freedom: Feminist Theory between Power and Connection*, p. 65.

have been discussed by art critics, such as Russell Ferguson and William Hamilton, this chapter interrogates in what ways Lee's practice has been distinct from that of women photographers in previous generations, and has made a unique and critical contribution to the photographic construction and representation of both individual and collective identities.⁹ The first section of this chapter considers three of Lee's *Projects* in association with the formation of gender identity—a set of works which are often briefly mentioned for bringing in Judith Butler's notion of performativity. On the basis of Kaplan's discussion of Lee's works, this section advances further in reconsidering Butler's conception of drag in gender performance, and examines how this mode of drag performativity is practiced in Lee's performance of 'gender trouble', as well as her impersonation within a wider range of social and cultural communities.¹⁰ The second section focuses on Lee's photographic *Projects* in which she blends into a selection of American racial and ethnic groups. This section explores the theoretical term 'passing' which usually remains at the centre in the discussion of identity transformation and ethnic impersonation. In contrast with the works of scholars, including Kaplan and Cherise Smith, my discussion, in this section, tends to draw a more explicit distinction between passing as a social phenomenon, traditionally related to light-skinned black people's attempted assimilation to white

⁹ Russell Ferguson, 'Let's Be Nikki'. In Lesley A. Martin (ed.) *Nikki S. Lee: Projects*, pp. 7-19. William Hamilton, 'Shopping with—Nikki S. Lee: Dressing the Part is Her Art', *The New York Times* (December 2, 2001), accessed March 27, 2016, <http://www.nytimes.com/2001/12/02/style/shopping-with-nikki-s-lee-dressing-the-part-is-her-art.html?pagewanted=all>.

¹⁰ Kaplan, 'Performing Community: Nikki S. Lee's Photographic Rites of Passing', pp. 193.

society, and drag as an exaggerated, persona-play performance, and investigates how Lee's practice, conducted in a theatrical, artistic context, turns the controversial process of passing into a playful, voluntary performance similar to drag, unhinging the notion of passing from its conventional discourses on race and ethnicity.¹¹ This chapter ends with a section on Lee's works concerned with the formation of subcultural identity and collectivity. In response to the growing commodification of contemporary culture, Lee, through her photographic works, examines and represents a number of communities, whose collective existence has been primarily dependent on the purchase, display and manipulation of shared fashion and commodity codes in a global context, demonstrating a virtual form of citizenship and transnational, transcultural existence via mass consumption. This chapter attaches unprecedented significance to contemporary theories and debates in the fields of music and popular culture studies related to neo-swing, hip-hop, punk and Japanese street fashion.

'Drag': Gender Performance and Community 'Belonging'

Lee's *Projects* present an ambiguous artistic format at the edge of fiction and reality, performance and documentary. On the one hand, Lee's amateur snapshots, complete with visible flaws of composition and crude lighting, aim to create an air of authenticity, in conformity with the dominant objective of verisimilitude in

¹¹ Kaplan, 'Performing Community: Nikki S. Lee's Photographic Rites of Passing', pp. 184-194. Cherise Smith, *Enacting Others: Politics of Identity in Eleanor Antin, Nikki S. Lee, Adrian Piper, and Anna Deavere Smith*, pp.216-224.

photography; on the other, Lee also questions the truth value of her snapshot photographs, by using them to document a performed, simulated life, challenging the rawness and unscripted immediacy revealed in them. In this way, Lee's practice develops a critical insight into what Catherine Zuromski has called as 'the culture and complexity of snapshot photography itself'.¹² Grounded in a particular historical moment at the turn of the twentieth century, when the use of smartphones as well as other advanced electronic facilities did not yet prevail in everyday life, the term 'snapshot', as it is addressed in Lee's *Projects*, refers to a conventional mode of amateur photographic practice used for facilitating and documenting family life and social relations. As Zuromski argues, the taking of snapshots and the collecting of family albums are popular, common activities in America, straddling the domestic realm and the public sphere, and constructing 'cultural shorthand for American values, family stability and national pride'.¹³

In an exhibition, *Role Models: Feminine Identity in Contemporary American Photography*, that opened in 2008 at the National Museum of Women in Arts, Washington, D.C., a number of Lee's *Projects* photographs were exhibited along with artworks created in the past three decades by other contemporary women photographers based in America. With a specific focus on the genre of portrait

¹² Catherine Zuromski, *Snapshot Photography: The Lives of Images* (Cambridge, MA: MIT Press, 2013), p. 242.

¹³ *Ibid.*, p. 9.

photography, the exhibition started with, as the curator Shelley Rice argued, ‘an opposition, the two modalities of creative photography that defined the medium in the 1970s’—photographic works by Nan Goldin and Cindy Sherman.¹⁴ Undoubtedly, Goldin and Sherman are two artists who frequently come to mind in any discussion of Lee’s practice. This parallel with Goldin’s quasi-documentary colour photographs of individuals and groups living on the margins of society, and Sherman’s staged portraits of female roles constructed through masquerade and performance in *Role Models* offers an art historical context for studying Lee’s photographic *Projects*.

Goldin’s photographs of subcultural subjects articulate, as Liz Kotz has suggested, ‘a welcome return’ of values of sincerity, immediacy and transparency in conventional documentary photography.¹⁵ Since the early 1970s, Goldin has started to train her camera on people she knows and loves, depicting the lives of a circle of friends, such as queers, drag queens and drug addicts, who live outside or against conventional ‘family life’. Embellished with the emotional spontaneity and candid frankness of snapshot photography, Goldin’s works seek to blur the boundary between art and life, defining, constructing and exposing a range of countercultural identities evolved into

¹⁴ Shelley Rice, ‘Crosscurrents: Models, Migration and Modernism’, in Susan Fisher Sterling, Kathryn Wat, Lucy Soutter (eds.) *Role Models: Feminine Identity in Contemporary American Photography* (National Museum of Women in the Arts Washington, D.C. and London: Scala Publishers Limited, 2008), p. 23.

¹⁵ Liz Kotz, ‘The Aesthetics of Intimacy’, in Deborah Bright (ed.) *The Passionate Camera: Photography and Bodies of Desire* (London: Routledge, 1998), p. 210.

‘the Family of Nan’.¹⁶

Indeed, the low-tech vernacular snapshot often engenders an egalitarian impulse, which can function as ‘a useful tool for members of subaltern or marginalized groups to construct alternative visual cultures to those perpetuated by mainstream society’.¹⁷

Different from documentary photographers of the post-war generation, such as Diane Arbus, who appeared as detached ‘super-tourists’ in other people’s worlds, Goldin, through vernacular snapshots, intends to destabilize the unequal power relation between the photographer and the photographed, and demonstrate her status as an ‘insider’ belonging to those groups represented in her varied photographic projects.¹⁸

As Goldin has claimed, ‘I am not crashing; this is my party. This is my family, my friends’.¹⁹

According to Kotz, Goldin’s works can be loosely grouped with subcultural

¹⁶ The phrase ‘the Family of Nan’ was first used by Max Kozloff as the title for his review of Goldin’s *The Ballad of Sexual Dependency*, published in *Art in America*, November 1987, 75, 11, pp. 38-43. Kaplan has suggested, with a simple turn of a letter, ‘the Family of Nan’ can be understood as a subversion of the universal humanism and nuclear familial ideal demonstrated by the exhibition *The Family of Man*. In opposition to the normative conventions surrounding middle-class white heterosexual families, Goldin, in her works, tends to reinvest ‘the value of those subcultural differences repressed by *The Family of Man* exhibition’. Kaplan, ‘Photography and The Exposure of Community: Reciting Nan Goldin’s Ballad’, in *American Exposures*, p. 92.

¹⁷ Zuromski, *Snapshot Photography*, p.33

¹⁸ The term ‘super-tourists’ is drawn from Susan Sontag, *On Photography* (New York: Anchor Books, 1990), p. 177.

¹⁹ Nan Goldin, ‘Introduction’, *The Ballad of Sexual Dependency* (New York: Aperture, 1986), p. 6.

photographic projects made mainly in the 1980s and 1990s by artists, such as Larry Clark, Wolfgang Tillmans, Mark Morrisroe and Richard Billingham, which together articulated an artistic phenomenon, dubbed ‘insider’ documentary practice.²⁰ By presenting their photographs ‘under the guise of an intimate relationship between artist and subject’, this group of photographers aimed to disrupt the ‘problematic enmeshment with histories of social surveillance and coercion’ in the traditional documentary works of relatively marginalized and disempowered individuals or groups.²¹

However, this aesthetic embrace of ‘intimacy’ and ‘inside-ness’, through unskilled domestic photography and family snapshots, usually reaffirms rather than subverts the status of subcultural ‘others’ as victimized, objectified subjects of representation. Goldin’s photographic works are inevitably objectifying and voyeuristic, especially when they are exhibited in public to disclose the private life of people who are supposedly out of the social and cultural mainstream, in an attempt to evoke benevolent understanding and humanistic sympathy.²² Furthermore, despite Goldin’s persistent artistic pursuit for transparency and honesty, her photographs are never as authentic and natural as they appear to be. As Zuromski has argued, Goldin, in her

²⁰ Kotz, ‘The Aesthetics of Intimacy’, pp. 205-208.

²¹ Ibid., pp. 207-208.

²² A number of scholars, including Kotz and Zuromski, have argued that Goldin’s photographic projects also make a claim on the ideal of ‘universal humanism’, by presenting ‘prevalent’ social conditions of poverty, marginalization and violence and evoking empathy in audiences. See Kotz, ‘The Aesthetics of Intimacy’, p. 209 and Zuromski, *Snapshot Photography*, p. 286.

own interpretation of her works, ignores the performative nature of her photographed subjects in front of the camera. For instance, in her best-known series, *The Ballad of Sexual Dependency* (1986), the community featured by Goldin was constituted by individuals heavily influenced by ‘cultural tropes of bohemianism and life on the fringes’.²³ In order to collapse white, middle-class, heterosexual familial conventions, Goldin’s subjects engaged in an endless, conscious live performance of countercultural norms and visual styles. As Mike Crang has argued, ‘images are not something that appear over or against reality, but parts of practices through which people work to establish realities’.²⁴ Goldin’s photographs of subcultural communities would not have come into being without her group members’ complicity.

In contrast with Goldin’s naturalistic approach to photography, Sherman, along with other postmodern pioneers who were not trained in photography, often grounds her artistic practice in the simulated world of postmodernism—a world considered to be over-saturated with images and commercial signs.²⁵ Sherman’s performative photographic works can be subsumed within the particular genre of portrait photography—that is ‘staged photography’.²⁶ For instance, in her ground-breaking

²³ Zuromski, *Snapshot Photography*, p. 261.

²⁴ Mike Crang, ‘Picturing Practices: Research through the Tourist Gaze’, *Progress in Human Geography*, 1997, 21 (3), p.362.

²⁵ Rice, ‘Crosscurrents: Models, Migration and Modernism’, p. 24.

²⁶ As Lucy Soutter argues in the exhibition catalogue of *Role Models*, although staged photography includes ‘many richly varied practices’, it basically refers to

black-and-white *Untitled Film Stills* made between 1977 and 1980, Sherman created numerous simulated tableaux cut out from the established gender hierarchy, in which she conducted role-playing games by virtue of clothing, makeup and props to perform various stereotypical female roles in apparently ‘classic’ films that, in fact, had no indexical referent in reality.²⁷

By striving to construct an image of herself within a range of flattened scenarios, Sherman challenged the gender power relation in terms of looking and being looked at, production and reception.²⁸ In Sherman’s works, ‘womanliness’, to borrow Joan Rivière’s term, was constructed and reconstructed through a series of conscious acts of masquerade and performance, both consolidating and subverting the passive image of women under the patriarchal social order.²⁹ Different from Goldin’s insistence on

photographic practices ‘connected to notions of tableau and masquerade’. Lucy Soutter, ‘Enigmatic Spectacle: Key Strategies in Contemporary Staged Photography’, in *Role Models: Feminine Identity in Contemporary American Photography*, p.12.

²⁷ In his essay ‘Diderot, Brecht, Eisenstein’ (1973), Roland Barthes has argued, the tableau can be considered as a self-conscious field, which enables artists to subvert the social construction in an intellectual way. As he argued, ‘the tableau (pictorial, theatrical, literary) is a pure cut-out segment with clearly defined edges, irreversible and incorruptible; everything that surrounds it is banished into nothingness, remains unnamed, while everything that it admits within its field is promoted into essence, into light, into view’. Roland Barthes, ‘Diderot, Brecht, Eisenstein’, in Richard Howard (trans.) *Responsibility of Forms: Critical Essays on Music, Art, and Representation* (New York: Hill and Wang, 1985), pp. 90-91.

²⁸ Many film theorists, such as John Berger, Mary Ann Doane and Laura Mulvey have pointed out that women’s relation to the camera is different from that of men’s, since the ‘ideal’ spectator is always male and the female subject is normally depicted as a passive image in an attempt to flatter him. See John Berger, *Ways of Seeing*, (Harmondsworth: Penguin, 1972), p. 64; Mary Ann Doane, ‘Film and the Masquerade: Theorising the Female Spectator’, *Screen*, September/October 1982, vol. 23, no. 3-4, p.76; Laura Mulvey, ‘Visual Pleasure and Narrative Cinema’, *Screen*, Autumn 1975, vol.16 no.3, pp. 12-13.

²⁹ See Joan Rivière, ‘Womanliness as Masquerade’, in Victor Burgin, James

real life experiences and immediate visceral affections, Sherman, in her *Untitled Film Stills*, played with surfaces and commodity signs to constitute simulated personas, revealing the iconographic nature of representation in mass media and demonstrating the end of originality in postmodern culture.³⁰

In a number of photographic works included in *Role Models* by younger artists, such as Lee and Sharon Lockhart, these two artistic modalities, staged and documentary photography, have been skilfully combined with each other. In this way, the distinction between the documentation of quotidian life experiences, and of the actions and emotions staged specifically for the camera is further blurred. These photographic works from the 1990s might call to mind the notion of ‘documentary style’ proposed by Walker Evans, to describe how artists create a kind of anti-documentary style by using the documentary form to record not reality but choreographed performance.³¹

Due to the similar mode of self-transformation and identity impersonation in front of

Donald, Cora Kaplan. (eds.) *Formations of Fantasy* (London: Methuen, 1986), p. 38.

³⁰ With regard to Sherman’s exploration and criticism of postmodern culture, see Douglas Crimp, ‘The Photographic Activity of Postmodernism’, *October*, winter 1980, vol. 15, pp 91-101.

³¹ According to Evans, ‘because a documentary photograph could be a police photograph of an accident, literally; but documentary style is what we’re interested in [...]. This style does seem honest. It isn’t always so, but it seems so’. See Walker Evans, ‘Visiting Artist: A Transcript of His Discussion with the Students of the University of Michigan’ (October 29, 1971), in Beaumont Newhall (ed.) *Photography: Essays and Images* (New York: The Museum of Modern Art, 1980), p. 320.

the camera, Lee's works are frequently associated with Sherman's *Untitled Film Stills*.³² However, instead of Sherman's artistic influence, Lee attributes her ability to work in performance and masquerade to her previous experience in fashion photography. For nearly ten years, Lee was trained in fashion and commercial photography. She once worked as an intern assistant for the fashion photographer David LaChapelle. The working experience in the fashion world results in her proficiency in fabricating varied cultural and subcultural personas through identifying and manipulating fashion codes.³³

Moreover, as Charlotte Cotton has indicated, the rise of 'insider' photographic projects, such as Goldin's *The Ballad of Sexual Dependency* (1986), Larry Clark's *Tulsa* (1971) and *Teenage Lust* (1983), created 'a spur for the injection of a gritty realism into fashion photography' in the 1990s.³⁴ 'The faked-glamour of high-production fashion shoots that had been prevalent in the mid-1980s' were starting to be replaced by photographs taken in unglamorous, suburban interiors, in order to 'represent fashion as it was customized and used by young people'.³⁵ This

³² As Lee has suggested, 'I'd seen Cindy Sherman's work at school, but I didn't really pay attention at that time. I was just interested in commercial and fashion photography. I liked the film stills, but I was more into the people getting published in *Vogue*. Lee, in Vicario, 'Conversation with Nikki Lee', p. 98.

³³ As Lee has also argued, 'I think I have good instincts when it comes to different lifestyles. I just go to the shops that those people go to and check them out. I don't go on the Internet or anything. And I have a good fashion sense'. *Ibid.*, p. 107.

³⁴ Charlotte Cotton, *The Photograph as Contemporary Art* (London and New York: Thames & Hudson, 2004), p. 144.

³⁵ *Ibid.*

conflation of fashion photography with mundane realism is also shown evidently in Lee's practice. In her series of *Projects*, Lee constitutes her fashion tableaux in the ordinary household, on the street or at other public venues in place of normal photographic studios. Unlike Sherman's feminist-engaged, studio-based self-portraiture, Lee's photographic works expose and examine the semiotic construction of ideals and stereotypes related to issues of gender, race, ethnicity and class within a broader social and cultural context.

Indeed, Lee's practice also shares Goldin's quasi-documentary method in staging and representing community life. However, unlike Goldin's deeply emotional bonds with her group members, Lee's engagement with the communities that she has blended into, and taken photographs of, is relatively shallow and contingent. As Lee has confessed, 'I don't live with the people, I just hang out. I have to have borders'.³⁶

Lee's practice, in this sense, overthrows the aesthetic form of 'insider' social documentary that has boomed since the 1980s, by virtue of undertaking an ethnographic mode of performance of 'going native' to temporarily impersonate an 'insider'. Compared with Goldin, Lee employs snapshots in a more critical way, as she both utilizes and overturns the banality of this vernacular form of photography, in terms of revealing and recording one's individual life and communal existence.

³⁶ Lee, cited in Jessica Kerwin, 'Faking It: From Trompe l' Oeil Fashion to Faux Documentaries: The New Reality Is Completely Twisted', *W Magazine*, September 2001, p. 418.

Furthermore, different from Sherman and Goldin's practices, Lee does not take the photographs herself. In her *Projects*, she is not a photographer in a traditional way, but rather a performer. Her artistic practice has commenced long before the camera is actually held in position to capture those immediate moments of community life. In this sense, Lee's artworks might be associated with the kinds of photographic practice explored by a number of conceptual artists during the 1960s and 1970s, who used photography to record and disseminate performance and other ephemeral works of art. For Lee, the dramatic acts of self-transformation and the performance of community existence, selectively depicted by her 'non-art', 'de-skilled' and 'un-authored' photographic works, are key to her *Projects*.³⁷

My discussion of Lee's practice will start from her series of *Projects*, which trouble the conventional identity categories of gender and sexuality. Lee's first project is *The Drag Queen Project* created in 1997. Although this project only includes four photographs, it explores the formation of gender identity, playing a fundamental and instructive role in shaping Lee's practice. Wearing a black sequined dress, long black gloves and stiletto heels, Lee has herself photographed hanging out in a Manhattan drag club. Her ensemble is complete with heavy makeup and a platinum blonde wig. In one image (Fig. 71), Lee sits beside a drag queen who also wears a

³⁷ The three words. 'non-art', 'de-skilled' and 'un-authored' are drawn from Cotton, *The Photograph as Contemporary Art*, p. 21.

black evening dress and a platinum blonde wig. Lee embraces his arm and rests her head on his shoulder. The photograph challenges the conventional assumption of femininity, encouraging viewers to identify and negotiate a complex of gender signifiers, such as 'male' and 'female'. In another photograph (Fig. 72), Lee stands in the middle of three drag queens, all dressed in evening wear with high heels and a wig. Although they stand together as a 'community', the height difference between the petite Lee and other three towering drag queens reveals Lee's status as an outsider—a woman who mimes a man miming a woman.

According to Butler, drag instantiates an 'imitative structure by which hegemonic gender is itself produced and disputes heterosexuality's claim on naturalness and originality'.³⁸ It is through the repetitive, parodic citations of heterosexual gender norms in drag performance that 'a radical contingency' between sex and gender is revealed.³⁹ The normative heterosexual 'ideals' of being a masculine man and being a feminine woman are a set of acts of imitation of itself. By miming a subcultural, 'female' gender role adopted and falsified by male performers, Lee disrupts and obscures her naturalized 'womanliness'. Her practice reveals how gender, as a form

³⁸ Judith Butler, *Bodies That Matter: On the Discursive Limits of 'Sex'* (New York: Routledge, 1993), p. 125. Similarly, in her article 'Performative Acts and Gender Constitution', Butler also argues that 'the transvestite's gender is as fully real as anyone whose performance complies with social expectations'. Judith Butler, 'Performative Acts and Gender Constitution: An Essay in Phenomenology and Feminist Theory', in Carole McCann and Seung-kyung Kim (eds.) *Feminist Theory Reader: Local and Global Perspectives* (London: Routledge, 2003), p. 398.

³⁹ Butler, *Gender Trouble: Feminism and the Subversion of Identity* (New York: Routledge, 1990), p. 33.

of performance, can be both produced and destabilized through repetitive acts of imitation without an original. As Kaplan has suggested, this particular mode of drag performativity might be understood as a functioning template for Lee's later practices—her performance as a member of a wider range of social and cultural groups.⁴⁰ While, to a large extent, I agree with Kaplan's assumption, this adoption of drag mechanism in Lee's series of cultural and subcultural projects is in need of further unpacking.

In response to the misreading of gender performativity as free theatricality, in *Bodies That Matter* (1993) Butler distinguishes between gender as a product of the 'forcible citation of a norm' and drag as a voluntary performance through the parodic citation of a norm.⁴¹ Whereas gender is formed through a set of repeated acts of imitation 'within a highly rigid regulatory frame', drag is not a compulsory and faithful imitative performance of the naturalized 'realness' of heterosexuality. As Butler argues, 'in the drag ball productions of realness, we witness and produce the phantasmatic constitution of a subject, a subject who repeats and mimes the legitimating norms by which it itself has been degraded, a subject founded in the project of mastery that compels and disrupts its own repetitions'.⁴² As for Lee's practice, she tends to constitute various individual identities and group memberships

⁴⁰ Kaplan, 'Performing Community: Nikki S. Lee's Photographic Rites of Passing', p. 193.

⁴¹ Butler, *Bodies That Matter*, p. 232.

⁴² *Ibid.*, p. 131.

by imitating, adopting and reinforcing a selection of stereotypical semiotic codes (such as clothing, makeup, mannerisms and demeanour), those which have partially deviated from the daily reality of her chosen groups, and reduced their social and cultural constructions. Conducted as a voluntary process of self-determination, self-fashioning and self-transformation, Lee's performative practice demonstrates a similar mechanism to drag, which reiterates, yet, at the same time, degrades the legitimating norms and traditions of her adopted communities.

Indeed, in addition to the exaggerated satire and playfulness in the conventional drag performance, Lee's adoption of a drag mechanism in her practice also seeks to articulate a humanist egalitarian utopia, which aims at constituting social and cultural attachments beyond established identity boundaries and hierarchies. Thus, the mechanism of drag performativity is applied by Lee to not only her gender impersonations, but also her *Projects* concerned with other identity categories, such as race, ethnicity and class. In a later section, I discuss how Lee's performance of 'passing' into a range of racial, ethnic and cultural groups can be also understood as a voluntary, performative act which is akin to drag.

However, there is no doubt that Lee's mimicked, dramatic projection of identities runs the risk of abstracting the collective existence of her adopted groups into a series of reified, illusory images. As Peggy Phelan has suggested in her discussion of drag, a

man imitates and performs an image of a woman ‘externally and hyperbolically because he wants to see himself in possession of “her” and to dramatize himself as “all”’.⁴³ Lee’s performance as a member of a specific social or cultural community through her hyperbolic masquerade and imitation also, in a similar way, objectifies the assumed identity she impersonates, in order to fabricate ‘fake’ moments of ‘social belonging’. As shown in *The Drag Queen Project*, Lee intends to integrate into this particular subcultural group by simply wearing its typical clothing and makeup, and visiting drag nightclubs. In Lee’s photographic works, drag culture has been reduced to a performative ‘feminine’ image constituted of superficial, essentialized visual signifiers.

Lee continued her performative exploration of gender identity in *The Lesbian Project* which was also made in 1997. In this series, Lee appears as a female butch-lesbian. Sitting alone in a gay bar in Manhattan, Lee stares at the camera, while holding a cigarette and a bottle of Amstel Light beer in her hands (Fig. 73). She leaves her blue checked flannel shirt unbuttoned and shows a grey vest underneath. Clad in dark brown corduroy slacks, Lee positions her legs apart to assume a ‘masculine’ posture. Her hair is black and cut short with a swooping curl dangling along her forehead. Lee wears glasses with narrow metal rims. In contrast to Lee’s stiff pose and frontal gaze, two women lovers behind her are captured in the midst of a passionate kiss.

⁴³ Peggy Phelan, *Unmarked: The Politics of Performance*, p. 17

This project also includes a series of photographs, which depict Lee's daily life with her 'temporary girlfriend'—a young white woman with short blond hair, who was fully aware of Lee's project and assisted her in performing for the camera a 'fake' family life.⁴⁴ The domestic setting creates a relatively secure environment detached from social prejudice. Lee appears more relaxed and confident, different from those rigid gestures shown in the photograph discussed above. In one image (Fig. 74), Lee and her partner snuggle together on the sofa while watching the television. Empty bottles, used paper cups, take-away packs and bags are scattered around. Captured here is a casual and cosy moment of the young lesbian couple at home. Furthermore, one of Lee's photographs features an intimate moment (Fig. 75), when two lovers are in the midst of a kiss as they tightly hold each other and rest their heads on a white pillow. Since the camera directly focuses on their heads and the room is brightly lit, this scene is clearly coded as a performance rather than a natural affective gesture. By presenting quotidian household scenes of the lesbian couple, Lee's photographs both imitates and queers the didactic social model of domestic normalcy, specifically established and sustained by white, middle-class heterosexual families in America. Meanwhile, through the form of family photography in the domestic realm, Lee also, to some extent, gains a measure of cultural legitimacy for the life of lesbian subjects.

⁴⁴ According to Lee, 'the pictures of intimacy with my fake girlfriend—she knew what I was doing, so she really participated in the work [...]. We were both performing'. Cited in Carly Berwick, 'Extreme Make Over', *ARTnews*, March 2006, 105, no. 3, p.112.

In her artworks, as an admittedly heterosexual woman, Lee mimes stereotypical male gender norms to enact a butch-lesbian persona, crossing the conventional boundaries of gender and sex.⁴⁵ Like drag queens, butch women also take the central position in Butler's discussion of gender performativity. According to Butler, the butch's performance of masculinity reveals and dramatizes the radical contingency between heterosexual gender ideals and the imitative performance of them.⁴⁶ It is these explicit visual signifiers of gender transgression projected onto the butch subject that demonstrate alternative realities to the apparent naturalness of heterosexuality. In the case of Lee's practice, she impersonates a butch subject by replicating and adopting identifiable fashion codes, styles and behaviours, which conventionally characterize a 'masculine' male subject. Her gender transformation from a straight woman to a butch lesbian is conducted as an imitative performance similar to drag, which both reinforces and destabilizes established heterosexual norms and traditions. In this way, Lee collapses the social and cultural division between heterosexuality and homosexuality, masculinity and femininity.

⁴⁵ In her article 'Imitation and Gender Insubordination', Butler argues that 'there is no "proper" gender, a gender proper to one sex rather than another, which is in some sense that sex's cultural property'. Judith Butler, 'Imitation and Gender Insubordination', in Henry Abelove, Michele Aina Barale, and David M. Halperin (eds.) *The Lesbian and Gay Studies Reader* (New York: Routledge, 1993a), p. 312.

⁴⁶ Butler, interpreted by Lisa Walker. Lisa Walker, *Looking Like What You Are: Sexual Style, Race, and Lesbian Identity* (New York: New York University Press, 2001), p. 205.

Furthermore, as Sally Munt has argued, 'butch, in common use, is a term as unstable as the gender configurations of masculinity and femininity'.⁴⁷ The line of demarcation between the butch and the femme role is also not so explicit in Lee's photographs. Her temporary 'femme' girlfriend has even shorter haircut and wears gender-neutral trousers, shirts and sweaters in plain and dark colours (see Fig. 76). She too appears coded as a butch. Lee never indicates explicitly whether her girlfriend is also a straight woman impersonating a femme or whether she is a butch lesbian temporarily adopting the femme role in Lee's project. By fabricating a 'fake' family life with a relatively 'masculine' femme figure, Lee also puts into question her own performance as a butch lesbian through the parodic citation of masculine norms and styles.

Moreover, according to Lisa Walker, in contrast to the drag queen, who performs degraded, simulated gender identities on stage, butch and femme roles are 'sexual styles that also parody the notion of true gender identity'.⁴⁸ This argument is slightly different from Butler's configuration of the butch subject in her discussion of gender performativity. From Walker's perspective, the butch lesbian is not simply an image composed of transgender signifiers, but a sexed body disrupting the naturalized norms of heterosexuality. As Jay Prosser has also suggested, Butler's performative

⁴⁷ Sally Munt, *Heroic Desire: Lesbian Identity and Cultural Space* (London and Washington: Cassell Press, 1998), p. 56.

⁴⁸ Walker, *Looking Like What You Are*, p. 205.

economy of gender identity ‘relies heavily on a notion of the body as that which can be seen, the body as visual surface’.⁴⁹ On the basis of his rereading of Freud’s notion of the ‘body-ego’, Prosser argues that the formation of gender identity demands ‘some recognition of the category of corporeal interiority (internal bodily sensations) and of its distinctiveness from that which we can be seen (external surface)’.⁵⁰

In this sense, Lee’s performance as a butch lesbian is never comprehensive and successful. In other words, she can adopt the external appearance and demeanour, but never the ‘corporeal interiority’ of the butch subject. Following the mechanism of drag performativity, Lee’s imitative, queer performance of transgender identities, in fact, essentializes the particular subject she enacts, ignoring the importance of the corporeality of the sexed body in the formation of gender identity. The photographic moments of ‘being at home’ or ‘being in community’ compiled through her superficial, incomplete impersonations draw attention to the limitation and bias of defining one’s individual and social existence merely based on apparent visual labels.

Unlike her transgender performance in *The Drag Queen Project* and *The Lesbian Project*, Lee, in *The Exotic Dancers Project* made in 2000, played excessively with her ‘original womanliness’ in a particular nightclub setting. During the time of

⁴⁹ Jay Prosser, ‘Judith Butler: Queer Feminism, Transgender, and the Transubstantiation of Sex’, in Susan Stryker & Stephen Whittle (eds.) *The Transgender Studies Reader* (New York: Routledge, 2006), p. 271.

⁵⁰ Ibid.

making her works, Lee temporarily transformed herself into a strip dancer working at the Gold Club Gentlemen's Cabaret in Hartford, Connecticut. In one photograph (Fig. 77), clad in a hot pink bikini and black high-heeled sandals, Lee performs a pole dance with other co-workers and strips off her bra in front of paying male customers. A black lace ring fastened on her right thigh is used for keeping tips. Although the photograph is awkwardly cropped and terribly blurred, it still captures a typical scene of striptease culture—the consumption of the female body for the erotic pleasure of male audiences. In another image (Fig. 78) taken before the bustle of the show, Lee and one of her colleagues, who both wear low-cut, tight blue dresses, squat in front of a shiny golden pole to rehearse an opening pose for the performance. Different from the over-exposed, seductive pole dance displayed in the first photograph, these two figures appear relatively restrained and uncomfortable. Another image (Fig. 79) features Lee standing in close proximity to the same girl outside the Gold Club in the evening after work. Lee wears a loose hoody top and jeans in contrast to her glamorous and revealing outfit on stage, while her colleague has been also covered up with layers of outdoor clothes. It becomes difficult to identify them as strip dancers except for the big pink cosmetic box in Lee's hands, which carries the make-up she needs for her professional 'disguise'.

Through three photographs taken in different situations, Lee gradually peels away the seductive, erotic image of female strippers from her photographed subjects,

articulating the significance of masquerade and performance in the formation of this particular night-club, subcultural female persona. Following her reading of Joan Rivière, Mary Ann Doane argues, in her influential article 'Film and the Masquerade' (1982), that 'the masquerade in flaunting femininity holds it at a distance. Womanliness is a mask which can be worn or removed.'⁵¹ From Doane's perspective, despite the fact that the masquerade consolidates the objectified female image constructed for patriarchal visual pleasure, it also resists the designation of the conventional gender role by creating a mediated distance between the real self and the socially expected image of women.⁵² As shown in Lee's photographs, the erotic, flirting image of the strip dancer is a cultivated mask which can be worn for attracting male customers' attentions and making money, and removed after the performance. In this way, Lee seeks to unsettle and disrupt the socially defined gender division between the active male and the passive female roles. This is shown even more evidently in another photograph (Fig. 80), in which Lee and a fellow dancer browse clothes in a local costume shop. A variety of six-inch heels and leather dresses are visible in the background. Lee wears a simple round-necked blouse and her colleague is in a white strapless shirt and dark overalls. In this photograph, the dancers are not portrayed as objectified, erotic figures consumed by male audiences, but active customers for a specific subcultural style, involved in an endless circle of consumption and self-fashioning.

⁵¹ Doane, 'Film and the Masquerade: Theorising the Female Spectator', p. 81.

⁵² *Ibid.*, p. 82

However, Lee's photographs, which present striptease culture as a visual style and profitable performance, lack critical consideration of the controversial, sexist aspect of the strip club. Her elaborately programmed performance in this particular subcultural context, similar to drag, constitutes illusory images of strip dancers, which, in fact, essentialize and obscure the reality of their social and cultural existence. Through her practice, the strip dancer is portrayed as a detached, performative 'mask', which can be donned and doffed at will. Indeed, it is easy for Lee to simply remove her 'mask' and go back to her life, since she never suffers the marginalized social status of strip dancers in her real personal life. In most photographs, Lee stares at the camera indifferently. Her face registers no emotion. Her temporary membership of the group is demonstrated largely on the basis of the conventionality of snapshot photography itself.

Guided by dominant social norms and cultural ideals, the tropes of domestic bliss, interpersonal intimacy and social harmony have become iconic images of mundane snapshots.⁵³ People incline to perform intimacy and show gestures of mutual affection in front of the camera. It is this aesthetic convention of snapshot photography that enables Lee to stage the falsely signified 'intimacy'—'a quality of

⁵³ As Zuromski has argued, as a multimillion dollar industry and a popular product of consumer culture, snapshot photography, in America in particular, is 'a means of linking private symbols of domestic harmony to explicitly public ideals of social conformity and American nationalism'. Zuromski, *Snapshot Photography*, p. 10.

extended engagement normally based on deep knowledge, rapport and trust', as Miwon Kwon has put it.⁵⁴ Although Lee is not the person who takes the photographs, she has complete creative control over their production, and decides where, when and how all her works are made.

Lee's practice, in this sense, reflects a common problem of contemporary community-based art projects, in which the artist works as a quasi-ethnographer to represent the life of a particular living community. In his essay 'The Artist as Ethnographer', published in 1996, Hal Foster criticized the apparent authority of the artist as the ethnographic participant-observer in contemporary community-based art, which tends to be unquestioned and unacknowledged.⁵⁵ For Foster, due to the uneven power relation between the ethnographer and the observed 'others', 'almost naturally the project strays from collaboration to self-fashioning, from a decentring of the artist as cultural authority to a remaking of the other in neo-primitivist guise'.⁵⁶ As for *The Exotic Dancers Project*, rather than disclosing the real life of a community of strip dancers, Lee's photographs, which record her daily engagement with the group, are

⁵⁴ Miwon Kwon, 'Experience vs. Interpretation: Traces of Ethnography in the Works of Lan Tuazon and Nikki S. Lee' in Alex Coles (ed.) *Site-Specificity: The Ethnographic Turn, de-, dis-, ex-* 4 (London: Black Dog Publishing, 2000), p. 86.

⁵⁵ Hal Foster, 'The Artist as Ethnographer', in *The Return of the Real* (Cambridge, MA: MIT Press, 1996), p. 196.

⁵⁶ *Ibid*, 196-197. Following the French sociologist Pierre Bourdieu, Foster argues that 'ethnographic mapping is predisposed to a Cartesian opposition that leads the observer to abstract the culture of study. Such mapping may thus confirm rather than contest the authority of mapper over site in a way that reduces the desired exchange of dialogical fieldwork'. See also Kwon, *One Place after Another: Site Specific Art and Locational Identity*, p. 139.

juxtaposed with each other as residual proofs for her successful transformation into an acceptable, temporary member. In her works, other group members around her are rendered as props for the formation of her fabricated moments of 'belonging' to the community.⁵⁷

On the basis of her reading of the Argentine feminist philosopher Maria Lugones, Weir argues that, to identify with another we must have the capacity to 'travel to her world', so as to enable our recognition of her experience and 'her resistant agency', and shift our relation from indifference to interrelated interdependence.⁵⁸ 'To travel to her world' refers to a friendly gesture, which conveys the willingness to learn about the other and transform the self, as well as the relation between each other.⁵⁹ As for Lee's practice, she travels to a variety of living communities and gets involved with people's daily life in order to transform herself into a provisional member of them. When Lee's *Projects* are exhibited, it is not difficult for viewers to pick out Lee, who is both a part of and apart from each featured group. Lee's photographs create an artistic mediation for viewers to imagine the experience of building up new collective relations with other people that they 'might rather not see and not know', even if in a

⁵⁷ For similar arguments see Kwon, 'Experience vs. Interpretation: Traces of Ethnography in the Works of Lan Tuazon and Nikki S. Lee', p. 86.

⁵⁸ Weir, 'Global Feminism and Transformative Identity Politics', p. 78. See also Maria Lugones, 'Playfulness, "World"-travelling and Loving Perception', *Hypatia*, 1987, 2 (2), pp. 3-19.

⁵⁹ Weir, 'Global Feminism and Transformative Identity Politics', p. 79.

superficial and performative way.⁶⁰

Indeed, Weir's notion of 'travel to her world' is not aimed at fully assimilating into the community of 'others'. Instead, it proposes a new form of conception of individual and communal identities, which can be both constructed and reconstructed through self-transformation and mutual communication with others. Lee's practice, to some extent, articulates a democratic ideal of constituting community bonds freed from established social, cultural and political boundaries which divide self and other, similar to what Weir has proposed. However, Lee never travels to the world of other people in the manner outlined by Weir. The real experience and possible difficulty of integrating into an unfamiliar milieu is concealed by her performed, collective 'attachment' staged and programmed for the camera.

In his discussion of contemporary community-based art practices, Grant Kester has investigated how artists tend to 'overemphasize the primacy of individual transformation as a measure of their project's (artistic) success'.⁶¹ In the case of Lee's practice, her artistic primacy of self-transformation results in her neglect and indifference, to borrow Kwon's words, of 'the broader socioeconomic, political and cultural forces' that render her adopted communities hegemonic or marginal,

⁶⁰ Ibid.

⁶¹ Kester, interpreted by Kwon, *One Place after Another*, p.142. See also Grant Kester, 'Aesthetic Evangelists: Conversion and Empowerment in Contemporary Community Art', *Afterimage*, January 1995, 22, no. 6, pp. 5-11.

privileged or disempowered in society.⁶² Her seemingly well-intended, egalitarian gestures of building up collective relations with relatively disadvantaged, transgender or subcultural groups, in fact, articulate an unconflicted personhood as a privileged artist, who is adaptable to diverse 'home' environments. This stands in stark contrast to Weir's model of 'identification with' in the formation and reformation of communal collectivity, which requires the recognition of other people's social power relations and resistant agency. Through her practice, Lee makes up a performative illusion, but not a deep reality of 'being at home' with the communities she has ever worked with.

'Passing': A Voluntary Racial or Ethnic Impersonation

Passing was conventionally associated with a social phenomenon through which light-skinned black subjects strived to gain entry to white society by assimilating white norms, behaviours, looks and lifestyles within the historical context of segregation in America in particular.⁶³ In contemporary society, it can be also used to describe the situation of immigrants or members of marginalized social groups who similarly make desperate attempts to participate in mainstream culture. In both cases, the term 'passing' refers to a form of self-transformation, through imitation and the adoption

⁶² Kwon, *One Place after Another*, p.143; Foster, 'The Artist as Ethnographer', p. 197.

⁶³ Undoubtedly, Nella Larsen's novella *Passing* (1929) played a significant role in constituting 'passing' as a scholarly term to examine issues of race and ethnicity.

of dominant social and cultural norms.⁶⁴ As Catherine Rottenberg has argued, passing can be considered ‘a point of entry into the question of race as performative reiteration’.⁶⁵ With a specific focus on some of Lee’s *Projects*, which play with semiotic codes socially and culturally imposed on categories of race and ethnicity, this section considers how Lee conducts her performative practice of ‘passing’ into a range of racial and ethnic communities as another form of making oneself ‘at home’ in contemporary America.

As Cherise Smith has argued, ‘to pass successfully, one must suppress one’s own difference from and perform the behaviours of members of the dominant culture in order to appear like them’.⁶⁶ In a significant number of American passing fictions in the twentieth century, the racial and ethnic passer is portrayed as a subject of pity and conflict, who accesses ‘privileges previously denied’ at the expense of betraying her original identity.⁶⁷ Thus, passing, in a traditional sense, cannot be simply defined as a

⁶⁴ Butler’s conception of gender performativity has been adopted by a number of scholars to consider race as performative reiteration. For instance, in ‘Race as a Kind of Speech Act’, Louis Miron and Jonathan Ina argue that ‘race does not refer to a pre-given subject. Rather, it works performatively to constitute the subject itself and only acquires a naturalized effect through repeated or reiterative naming of or reference to that subject’. Louis Miron and Jonathan Ina, ‘Race as a Kind of Speech Act’, *Cultural Studies: A Research Annual*, 2000, 5, pp. 86-87.

⁶⁵ Catherine Rottenberg, ‘Passing: Race, Identification, and Desire’, *Criticism*, 2003, 45, p. 436.

⁶⁶ Cherise Smith, *Enacting Others: Politics of Identity in Eleanor Antin, Nikki S. Lee, Adrian Piper, and Anna Deavere Smith* (Durham, NC: Duke University Press, 2011), p. 13.

⁶⁷ Michael B. Gillespie, ‘Smiling Faces: Chameleon Street, Racial Passing/Performativity, and Film Blackness’, in Julie Cary Nerad (ed.) *Passing Interest: Racial Passing in U.S. Fiction, Memoirs, Television, and Film, 1990-2010*, (Albany: State University of New York Press, 2014), p. 258.

theatrical, imitative performance in a similar way to drag, which obscures identity boundaries with its playfulness and exaggeration, as passing ‘seeks to erase, rather than expose, its own dissimulation’.⁶⁸ In this respect, Lee’s practice, I want to suggest, significantly unhinges the notion of passing from its conventional narratives on race and ethnicity.

In Lee’s works, ‘passing’ is enacted as a hyperbolic performative act, through which she attempts to assimilate into both mainstream cultural groups (yuppies and white neo-swing dancers) and subaltern minority collectives (Hispanic Americans and black hip-hoppers). Despite her dramatic masquerade, Lee’s ‘immutable’ Korean face still, in most cases, creates a visual interstice owing to her simultaneous sameness to and difference from the assumed identities she impersonates.⁶⁹ Unlike a traditional racial or ethnic passer, who strives to eliminate her apparent difference, Lee candidly exposes or even at times highlights her original Korean features in a number of photographic *Projects* examined in this section. In this way, Lee’s practice commits to ‘a shift from racial passing to racial performativity’, demonstrating the constructed, contingent and discursive nature of identity and community existence.⁷⁰ Her

⁶⁸ Valerie Rohy, ‘Displacing Desire: Passing, Nostalgia, and Giovanni’s Room’, in Elaine K. Ginsberg (ed.) *Passing and the Fictions of Identity* (Durham, NC: Duke University Press, 1996), p. 226.

⁶⁹ As the fashion critic Guy Trebay has suggested, ‘certain immutable elements of Lee’s own reality affected her masquerade, foremost among them physiognomy and race’. Guy Trebay, ‘Shadow Play’, *New York Times Magazine*, September 2004, 19, p. 82.

⁷⁰ Gillespie, ‘Smiling Faces: Chameleon Street, Racial Passing/Performativity, and Film Blackness’, p. 255.

performative photographic works deconstruct not only the racial bifurcation of white and black, but any identity boundaries ‘predetermined by a relatively fixed social and ethnic hierarchy’.⁷¹ Whereas Butler utilizes drag as a queer, transgender example to reveal the illusion of gender identity and to instantiate the imitative working structure of gender formation, Lee portrays herself as an unusual, yet productive racial or ethnic ‘passer’ to challenge identity categories that naturalize the field of race and ethnicity, via her imitation of stereotypes and ideals thrust on her adopted groups. In this sense, Lee’s practice transforms the traumatic experience of passing into a playful and voluntary performance, which both reinforces and disrupts the established racial and ethnic stratification in American society.

Meanwhile, in consideration of her personal background as a Korean-born foreign artist based in America, Lee’s performative practice of ‘passing’ into multiple ethnic and racial groups can be also associated with issues of migration and nationality. Her photographic works might be understood as an artistic, symbolic instantiation of ‘Americanization’, which explores the so-called ‘American way of life’ and its cultural heterogeneity. As Lauren Berlant has argued, since the rise of Reagan Republicanism over the 1980s, the most hopeful images of American national life circulated in the public sphere have been those of ‘the most vulnerable minor or virtual citizens—fetuses, children, real and imaginary immigrants’, which aim at making up a

⁷¹ Smith, *Enacting Others*, p. 233

post-historical, post-racial, future-oriented democratization freed from its complex and intractable social, racial and cultural situations.⁷²

To some extent, Lee's artistic performance of 'passing', which destabilizes fixed identity categories and hierarchies of race and ethnicity, resonates with this democratic fantasy of making America a promising, hospitable and egalitarian 'home' as described by Berlant. In her photographic works, Lee appears as an incipient 'citizen', who tends to inhabit America through learning and accessing its hybrid, multifaceted national culture. On the one hand, Lee demonstrates her 'innocent' detachment from various racial and ethnic conflicts and struggles, by claiming that 'I am not Korean-American, which means I don't have issues about race'.⁷³ On the other, her works also inevitably subordinate to the complexity of American racial and social history. This section examines how Lee, through her performative acts of 'passing', creates an interface in-between inclusion and exclusion, giving rise to dynamic interactions between people that go beyond established social boundaries and stratifications concerned with race and ethnicity; and it also explores in what way Lee's series of photographic works provide a critical insight into the ideological constitution of American democracy and citizenship.

⁷² Lauren Berlant, *The Queen of America Goes to Washington City: Essays on Sex and Citizenship* (Durham, NC: Duke University Press, 1997), p. 5.

⁷³ Lee, 2006, cited in Kino, 'Now in Moving Pictures: The Multitudes of Nikki S Lee', *The New York Times* (October 1, 2006), accessed March 29, 2016. http://www.nytimes.com/2006/10/01/arts/design/01kino.html?_r=2&.

‘At the level of racial representation’, as Richard Dyer has argued, ‘whites are not of a certain race, they are just the human race’.⁷⁴ Whiteness normally appears as an invisible category, which is rarely named in the discussion of racial and ethnic structures in society. Whereas the artist Coco Fusco has made clear that this invisibility of whiteness actually ‘redoubles its hegemony by naturalizing it’, bell hooks also argues that ‘in white supremacist society, white people can “safely” imagine that they are invisible to black people since the power they have historically asserted, and even now collectively assert over black people accorded them the right to control the black gaze’.⁷⁵ When making *The Yuppie Project* (1998), Lee accessed the ‘preppie, moneyed’ domain of young Wall Street professionals, subverting this power relation of looking between whites and people of colour, by inserting herself into the line-up and disrupting its apparently homogeneous appearance.⁷⁶

According to Maurice Berger, the word ‘yuppie’, as an acronym for Young Urban Professional, articulates the situation that white people are usually freed from ‘seeing their complicity in the social, cultural, and historical economy of racism’.⁷⁷ The concept of yuppie is innately related to whiteness in American society, since the

⁷⁴ Richard Dyer, *White: Essays on Race and Culture* (London: Routledge, 1997), p. 3.

⁷⁵ bell hooks, ‘Representing Whiteness in the Black Imagination’, in Larry Grossberg, Cary Nelson, and Paula Treichler (eds.) *Cultural Studies* (New York: Routledge, 1991), p. 339; Coco Fusco, ‘Fantasies of Oppositionality: Reflections on Recent Conferences in Boston and New York’, *Screen*, Autumn 1998, 29, no. 4, p. 91.

⁷⁶ Maurice Berger, ‘Picturing Whiteness: Nikki S. Lee’s *Yuppie Project*’, *Art Journal*, Winter 2001, 60, no. 4, p. 55.

⁷⁷ *Ibid.*

yuppies of colour are called buppies, Juppies and Chuppies (black, Japanese and Chinese young urban professionals). Adopting the dress styles, habits and behaviours of white yuppies, Lee joined in a group of Wall Street investment bankers, financial analysts and stockbrokers for about two months and performed as a member of them. A series of snapshots were taken during the time to document her provisional 'attachment' to the group. These mundane photographs not only make white people visible, but represent them with a critical 'ethnographic' gaze, demonstrating an expression of racism. By working on a number of stereotypes of yuppies—they shop in expensive department stores of big brands; they eat at luxury restaurants in Manhattan; they use upscale gyms, and drink in their member's clubs while wearing 'uniforms' of formal business suits, Lee's photographs, as Kaplan has argued, 'expose and denaturalize this invisible racial category of power and privilege'.⁷⁸

One image (Fig. 81) shows the artist standing in front of an upscale department store. Lee wears a heavy, fur-trimmed black overcoat and carries an expensive leather handbag. One of her gloved hands catches the leash of a white fluffy lapdog. The other hand carries a turquoise blue Tiffany shopping bag. In the lower right-hand corner of the image, a young white woman in dark brown coat is kneeling to pet Lee's dog. Similar to Lee, she also has a shoulder-length hair cut with expensive-looking light brown highlights. She holds a black 'Barneys New York' shopping bag, as though she

⁷⁸ Kaplan, 'Performing Community: Nikki S. Lee's Photographic Rites of Passing', p. 182.

also just finished shopping. A pair of sunglasses rests on her head. She smiles confidently to the camera, in contrast to Lee's relatively rigid appearance. It is not clear that whether they are friends shopping together; or whether they have just met by coincidence. Nevertheless, they are assumed to belong to the same social group and class. The title of the photograph indicates that they are young urban professionals with a high-income, luxury lifestyle in New York City.

In another photograph (Fig. 82), Lee sits in a cosy, candlelit restaurant with a gentleman who wears a smartly tailored blue shirt paired with a brown striped tie. Lee is in a bright red blouse adorned with a pearl necklace. She nestles into the chest of her male partner and leans her head toward his shoulder. Their body gestures suggest intimacy to their relationship. A table covered with a piece of white cloth is foregrounded. On the table are their unfinished desserts. A glass vase with one single pink rose is placed in front of them, creating a sense of romance. The light blue Tiffany shopping bag has been opened with a small packed box left on the table. It seems that they move their chairs nearer to each other and have this snapshot taken to record this romantic moment. However, their postures are stiff and their faces register no emotions. As Smith has suggested, the two characters 'carry themselves as though they are completing tasks on a list: romantic dinner, check, exchange gift of expensive jewellery, check, record occasion, check'.⁷⁹

⁷⁹ Smith, *Enacting Others*, p. 208.

By imitating and exposing the luxury lifestyle of yuppies, Lee, in her works, features an upper-middle-class social group, who perform their privileged roles in society by purchasing expensive commodity goods and services that symbolize and reinforce their supremacy. According to the cultural theorist Valerie Babb, ‘only by coming to a full awareness of the ways in which an artificially crafted identity was constructed to maintain hierarchy and divisiveness can any meaningful and useful dialogue on race begin’.⁸⁰ Through her photographic projections of the yuppie group, Lee not only reveals the artificiality of this mainstream culture dominated by white people, but offers a paradigm for understanding the formation of this advantaged social collective as a performance. While Lee intends to ‘pass’ into the group through her choreographed imitation, white yuppies themselves engage also in an endless, repetitive, money-consuming process of self-fashioning, through which they iterate and reiterate the naturalized social prestige of whiteness. Indeed, simply on the basis of her acquisition and display of specific commodity and cultural signifiers that stereotypically characterize the group, Lee’s impersonation and representation of the yuppie subject, similar to drag, are not a ‘faithful reproduction of a content that inheres in the original’.⁸¹ Her snapshots, to a large extent, reduce the complexity and

⁸⁰ Valerie Babb, *Whiteness Visible: The Meaning of Whiteness in American Literature and Culture* (New York: New York University Press, 1998), pp. 5-6.

⁸¹ Linda M. G. Zerilli, ‘Feminists Know Not What They Do: Judith Butler’s Gender Trouble and the Limits of Epistemology’, in Terrell Carver and Samuel A. Chambers (ed.) *Judith Butler's Precarious Politics: Critical Encounters* (Oxon & New York: Routledge, 2008), p. 35.

multiplicity of the yuppie life to a selection of moments of consumption and enjoyment.

In contrast with her dramatic alteration of skin colour and masquerade in some other projects, Lee did not seek to conceal or obscure her natural Korean features when ‘passing’ into the yuppie community. The yuppie persona enacted by Lee can be understood rather as a fictitious figure of a successful young Korean urban professional, who lives an upscale life in New York City, yet still feels isolated in this financially-advantaged social domain. Interestingly, a small number of images taken for *The Yuppie Project* also show Lee hanging out with yuppies of East Asian origins (Japanese, Korean and Chinese yuppies in particular), although they were not eventually included in Lee’s published catalogue.⁸² In one image (Fig. 83), which has been also discussed by Berger in his article, Lee is sitting in a restaurant and having dinner with a male East Asian yuppie. Lee appears relaxed and confident, very different from the awkward expression and posture she adopts in her photographs taken with white yuppies. According to Berger, Lee’s stiffness and discomfort when she is surrounded by white yuppies imply a sense of alienation that people of colour usually feel in the group, in spite of their professional success.⁸³ By impersonating a seemingly alienated Korean yuppie, Lee reveals a situation of ‘internal exclusion’ that

⁸² This information was provided by Mr. Scott Briscoe, the Gallery Associate at Lee’s gallery, Sikkema Jenkins & Co, New York, when I visited their archives on 5 February 2014. A few poor-quality, printed files of Lee’s unpublished photographs taken with yuppie subjects of East Asian origins were also provided (see Fig. 99).

⁸³ Berger, ‘Picturing Whiteness: Nikki S. Lee’s *Yuppie Project*’, p. 56.

immigrants and members of minority cultural groups often experience when they attempt to pass into the social mainstream.⁸⁴

As Homi Bhabha has argued, mimicry is an ambivalent process, which simultaneously stabilizes and disrupts identity boundaries between the colonizer and the colonized.⁸⁵

On the one hand, non-white natives imitate and repeat norms associated with whiteness, in order to approximate themselves to white colonizers and challenge white hegemony.

On the other, this process of mimicry also reinforces the effect of colonial discourse, which divides the colonizer and the colonized.⁸⁶ In the case of *The Yuppie Project*,

Lee's performance of 'passing' into the group via her mimicry of their stylish, sumptuous lifestyle destabilizes the assumed naturalness of whiteness in this community of privilege. However, her imitative performance also, at the same time, restates and reinforces visual markers of social traditions and ideals historically and culturally related to white superiority, which hinders her successful, complete 'passing' from a Korean to a member of the yuppie group, mainly constituted of iconic, white upper-middle-class American citizens.

In this sense, I disagree with those over-positive assessments of Lee's works made by critics, such as Jennifer Dalton, who argue that Lee's practice presents identity merely

⁸⁴ The term 'internal exclusion' is drawn from Iris Marion Young's discussion of democratic communication. Young, *Inclusion and Democracy*, p. 54.

⁸⁵ Homi Bhabha, *The Location of Culture* (New York: Routledge, 1994), p. 86.

⁸⁶ *Ibid.*, p. 88; 91.

as a conscious choice of clothing, hairstyles, facial features and skin colours.⁸⁷

Drawing on the work of the cultural theorist Rey Chow, Kaplan, in his critical analysis of Lee's *Projects*, has argued that 'the consciousness of race and ethnicity for Asian and other non-white groups is inevitably a matter of a history of discrimination and of social interpellation rather than of choice'.⁸⁸ Lee's performance of 'passing' is never totally separated from those problems and debates surrounding racial politics and struggles in contemporary American society.

Moreover, her incomplete, unsuccessful integration into the yuppie community, demonstrated through her photographic works, also, to some extent, collapses the legitimacy of the American Dream, which seeks to fabricate an image of America as an idealized national 'home' with class mobility and social equality created through individual efforts.⁸⁹ Indeed, the 'internal exclusion' experienced by yuppies of colour in this white-dominated social group cannot be simply reduced to Lee's relatively awkward gestures and unconfident expression staged in her snapshot photographs. The complicated, asymmetrical cultural engagement between white subjects and members

⁸⁷ Jennifer Dalton, 'Look At Me: Self-Portrait Photography after Cindy Sherman', *PAJ: A Journal of Performance and Art*, September 2000, 66, no. 3, p. 49.

⁸⁸ Kaplan, 'Performing Community: Nikki S. Lee's Photographic Rites of Passing', p.182. See also Rey Chow, *Writing Diaspora: Tactics of Intervention in Contemporary Cultural Studies* (Bloomington: Indiana University Press, 1993).

⁸⁹ According to Stuart Ewen, mass consumption stands at the heart of constituting and understanding American democratic promise—'the notion that each individual has fair access to status and recognition and therefore can escape the anonymity and conditions of the common lot', by creating individual wealth and purchasing commodity goods and signifiers that symbolize personal distinction. Stuart Ewen, *All Consuming Images: The Politics of Style in Contemporary Culture* (New York: Basic Books, Inc., 1988), p. 59.

of other ethnic groups within the yuppie milieu is concealed by Lee's superficial, mimicking performance in front of the camera.

Lee's artistic practice, as Smith has argued, 'demonstrates her impressive ability to identify cultural groups that present complexly intersected identifications'.⁹⁰ Some of Lee's photographic projects engender multiple meanings owing to the intricate racial and ethnic background in the formation and development of the group culture itself. This is shown evidently in the following two projects discussed in this section, *The Swinger Project* (1999) and *The Hip Hop Project* (2001). In one image from *The Swinger Project* (Fig. 84), Lee dances with a female friend in a nightclub in Manhattan. Lee wears a sleeveless light blue bubble dress, whereas her friend is in an old-fashioned dark flapper costume. Both women have a 1940s-pin-up hairstyle. Lee's companion wears her hair in side parted victory rolls, while Lee keeps her faux bangs and shoulder-length curls. In spite of the fact that the photograph is terribly framed, it is not difficult to tell that Lee and her friend are participating in a dancing party. They are surrounded by a number of dancers, whose presence can be discerned through those cut-off arms and shoulders in the photograph. The backdrop of the image is a stage. A woman who wears a furry tippet is standing and singing in front of a music band. This photograph, which is stamped with the time '1-28-99', appears somewhat anachronistic, as all figures are dressed in a vintage style that was popular during the

⁹⁰ Smith, *Enacting Others*, p. 207.

time of the Second World War.

The Swinger Project is grounded in a neo-swing nightclub culture, which emerged in major American cities in the 1990s. According to the music historian Eric Martin Usner, neo-swing is a cultural re-enactment of swing music and dance which prevailed in the 1930s and 1940s in America.⁹¹ The majority of its group members are middle-class white youth, who are not only interested in classic swing culture, but who also attempt to resurrect ‘the social etiquette, morality, and ideals of a past generation’ in the present, through their participation in an old-style social dancing performance.⁹² The formation of this youth culture is based on a nostalgic idealization of a specific historical period, in its practitioners’ words, ‘when men were men and women were women’ and social interactions between couples were ‘healthful and respectful’, refrained from drinking alcohol and ‘smoky hip-hop clubs’.⁹³

In another photograph (Fig. 85), Lee is standing in the middle of four white men on the porch of an old white wooden house. Behind them, an oversized American flag hangs from the interior ceiling. Lee wears a vintage red dress and pins up her hair with a red snood. A red flower is positioned behind her left ear, paired with the colour of her clothing and lipstick. Three men wear Panama straw hats and short-sleeve

⁹¹ Eric Martin Usner, ‘Dancing in the Past, Living in the Present: Nostalgia and Race in Southern California Neo-Swing Dance Culture’, *Dancing Research Journal*, Winter 2001/2002, 33, 2, p. 92.

⁹² *Ibid*, p. 89.

⁹³ *Ibid*, pp. 90-91.

tropical-print shirts. The fourth is in a white vest and plaid shorts. The title reveals that the photograph also belongs to *The Swinger Project*, although it was not taken in the ballroom setting. Lee's undisguised East Asian features articulate her 'outsideness'. However, different from her alienated appearance shown in most of her photographs in *The Yuppie Project*, Lee smiles confidently and leans close to the two male companions flanking her. As swing dancing is usually considered a typical heterosexual social activity between lovers and couples, Lee might be perceived as a partner of one of the men standing around her, who brings her to this outmoded, ecstatically patriotic scene in front of American 'Old Glory'. Both the clothing style and postures of all figures in the photograph indicate trenchant heterosexual gender roles.

As Berlant has argued, apart from the idealized democratic future of social and racial equality, 'portraits and stories of citizen-victims' have also been used to define American citizenship since the Reagan-era.⁹⁴ 'A citizen is defined as a person traumatized by some aspect of life in the United States', demonstrating 'a mass experience of economic insecurity, racial discord, class conflict and sexual unease'.⁹⁵ This dominant political discourse of citizenship crisis, in spite of diluting negative stereotypes concerning cultural, sexual and ethnic minority groups, also, to some extent, deprives 'formerly iconic citizens', white, upper-middle-class, heterosexual Americans in particular, of their national privilege, which fosters a strong desire in

⁹⁴ Berlant, *The Queen of America Goes to Washington City*, p.1.

⁹⁵ Ibid.

them to return to a previous order of life—the so-called conventional ‘American way of life’.⁹⁶ The rise of neo-swing culture among white middle-class youth can be associated with this specific social and political environment in America since the 1980s. Their revitalization of swing culture can be understood as the attempted restoration of the lost national iconicity, historically attached to the hegemony of heterosexual whiteness.

According to Usner, although swing was ‘an interracial appropriation of an African-American music and dance by members of white immigrant groups’, which cut across racial and class lines; the swing era through its representations in contemporary America is normally falsified as ‘predominantly white’.⁹⁷ The African-American origin of swing culture was disguised by ‘a homogeneous, utopian image of America’ established in the 1930s and 1940s, which aimed at forging ‘a unified national consciousness during the wartime’.⁹⁸ As Fredrick Jameson has argued, the ‘deep realities of the period’ have no direct connection to ‘our cultural stereotypes thus labelled and defined in terms of generational decades’.⁹⁹ By giving an example, Jameson suggested that popular understandings of the 1950s ‘shift from realities of the

⁹⁶ Ibid. p. 2.

⁹⁷ Usner, ‘Dancing in the Past, Living in the Present: Nostalgia and Race in Southern California Neo-Swing Dance Culture’, pp. 96-97; for similar arguments, see also Lewis Erenberg, *Swingin’ the Dream: Big Band Jazz and the Rebirth of American Culture* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1998), p. 39.

⁹⁸ Usner, ‘Dancing in the Past, Living in the Present’, p. 97.

⁹⁹ Fredrick Jameson, *Postmodernism, or, the Cultural Logic of Late Capitalism* (Durham, NC: Duck University Press, 1991), p. 281. Usner also cited Jameson’s argument in his article. Usner, ‘Dancing in the Past, Living in the Present’, pp.97-98.

1950s to the representations of that rather different thing, the “fifties”, a shift which obligates us to underscore the cultural sources of all the attributes with which we have endowed the period, many of which seem very precisely to derive from its own television programs; in other words, its own representations of itself’.¹⁰⁰ Due to the lack of an appropriate representation of blackness in mass culture, the swing era has been divorced from its deep realities and transformed into a privileged ideal of white norms and values.

In this sense, *The Swinger Project* depicts a group of young people who perform and reconstruct their white identities according to a mistaken racist trope—a cultural stereotype of white hegemony produced by patriotic ideals and mass media industries.¹⁰¹ By imitating fashion styles and social norms of the swing era selectively adopted by this community of white youth, Lee fabricates her temporary ‘belonging’ to the group, revealing the artificial naturalness of white prestige that neo-swing practitioners are desperate to restore. However, Lee’s seemingly subversive, politically meaningful performance of ‘passing’ as a member of the white mainstream through *The Swinger Project* also reiterates the problematic, racist misrepresentation of swing culture in contemporary America.

¹⁰⁰ Jameson, *Postmodernism, or, the Cultural Logic of Late Capitalism*, p. 281.

¹⁰¹ Personally, I believe Lee knows the racist aspect of neo-swing culture, since she mentioned several times in the interviews that she is familiar with swing music and culture. For instance, see Vicario, ‘Conversation with Nikki S. Lee’, p. 105.

In 2001, Lee continued her exploration of race and ethnicity through a performance of ‘passing’ for black in *The Hip Hop Project*. As the last series of her sociological experiments, *The Hip Hop Project* was a commissioned project for the exhibition, *One Planet under a Groove: Hip Hop and Contemporary Art* held at the Bronx Museum of the Arts in 2001, which explored the hybridity of hip-hop culture and its influence in a global environment.¹⁰² As the music historian Oliver Wang has argued, on the one hand, hip-hop is ‘a multitude of different cultural traditions and influences’; on the other, it is also inseparably concerned with a popular imagination of blackness in the specific socio-political context of America.¹⁰³ In response to the main theme of the exhibition, Lee’s photographic works reveal the complicated racial and social background of hip-hop culture by investigating the Asian-African interaction within the milieu.

In a widely discussed image (Fig. 86), five young African Americans sit on the back of a car. Lee has transformed herself into a ‘black’ girl by tanning her skin darker. She sits between the legs of the hip-hop artist Prodigy, resting her arms on the tops of his thighs.

¹⁰² Cathy Covell Waegner, ‘Performing Postmodernist Passing: Nikki S. Lee, Tuff, and Ghost Dog in Yellowface/Blackface’, in Heike Raphael-Hernandez and Shannon Steen (eds.) *AfroAsian Encounters: Culture, History, Politics* (New York & London: New York University Press, 2006).

¹⁰³ Oliver Wang, ‘These Are the Breaks: Hip-Hop and AfroAsian Cultural (Dis)Connections’, in *AfroAsian Encounters: Culture, History, Politics*, p. 148. See also Imani Perry, ‘Originalism and Identity in the Music’, in *Prophets of the Hood: Politics and Poetics in Hip Hop* (Durham & London: Duke University Press, 2004), pp. 9-38; Oliver Wang, ‘Rapping and Repping Asian: Race, Authenticity and the Asian American MC’, in Mimi Thi Nguyen and Thuy Linh Nguyen Tu (ed.) *Alien Encounters: Popular Culture in Asian America* (Durham, NC & London: Duke University Press, 2007), p. 37.

Lee is in low-cut black dress, adorned with a bling-bling gold metal chain belt. Her head is covered with a silky kerchief. Lee raises her sunglasses to make a seductive gesture, a variation of the pose made by the woman behind her, who is seated on the lap of another male companion in the group. Prodigy slightly raises his eyebrows, staring scornfully at the camera with the typical hip-hop ‘yo’ gesture. Beside him, a black male subject is partly cropped out of the left frame of the photograph. Embraced by other group members, Lee’s artificially-tanned skin through sun beds and cosmetic products can be easily discerned. The colour of her arms and chest is lighter than her exaggeratedly dark-toned face. Moreover, Lee also overstates her East Asian features by the use of eye makeup.¹⁰⁴ This is shown more explicitly in another photograph (Fig. 87), when Lee stands with two black female dancers in a hip-hop studio. The photograph is cropped at about their waists. Whereas one stands on Lee’s left hand side, intimately holding Lee’s shoulder, the other is slightly behind them. Three women smile to the camera. In comparison with Lee’s petite body shape, her two companions are taller and more muscular. This time, Lee’s hair has been turned into cornrow braids. A pair of sunglasses rests on her head. Her eyebrows have been shaved into thin, finely arched shapes. Eyeliner has been applied ‘past the outside corners of her eyes in an “orientalist” flourish’, highlighting Lee’s almond-shaped eyes with epicanthic folds—one of the most typical facial characteristics of people from East Asian origins.¹⁰⁵

¹⁰⁴ Smith, *Enacting Others*, p. 220.

¹⁰⁵ Ibid.

Lee's parodic performance of 'passing' for black in *The Hip Hop Project* might recall the histories and dynamics of Asian and African communication through this particular cultural context in contemporary America. According to Wang, hip-hop, as a youth subculture, creates a social space where African and Asian Americans encounter one another in both constructive and cautionary ways.¹⁰⁶ Asian American martial art has an important influence on hip-hop aesthetics. Cultural elements such as wrestling in breakdance and graffiti and tattoos in Oriental scripts have been representative visual signs of contemporary hip-hop. Meanwhile, over the past three decades, Asian American youth have become one of the major consumer groups for hip-hop culture.¹⁰⁷ They buy hip-hop music and other relevant products, and adopt the clothes, hairstyles and language of black hip-hop super stars. In recent years, this inter-racial, intercultural interaction and exchange within the hip-hop milieu have been criticized by some contemporary scholars. For instance, the American social activist and hip-hop scholar Kenyon Farrow compared Asian American youth's participation in hip-hop activities to the white minstrel tradition. As white minstrels, who sang black popular music and mimed black style to ensure their white supremacy, Farrow asked that 'can Asian Americans use hip-hop (the music, clothing, language and gestures, sans charcoal make-up), and everything it signifies to also assert their dominance over

¹⁰⁶ Wang, 'These Are the Breaks: Hip-Hop and AfroAsian Cultural (Dis)Connections', p. 148.

¹⁰⁷ Wang, 'Rapping and Repping Asian: Race, Authenticity and the Asian American MC', p. 61.

Black bodies, rather than their allegiance to Black liberation?’¹⁰⁸

I do not really agree with Farrow’s equation of Asian American youth’s embrace and consumption of hip-hop as an increasingly multi-cultural product with the white minstrels’ exaggerated, playful, racist impersonation of black subjects on stage. This form of subcultural collectivity on the basis of mass consumption is particularly discussed in the following section. Nevertheless, Farrow’s arguments can provide an instructively critical insight into Lee’s practice of ‘passing’ into this black popular culture via her dramatic masquerade and parodic performance. With her ‘blacking up’ East Asian face, Lee appears in her series of photographs as a ‘drag persona’, whose hyperbolic, theatrical performance of hip-hop fashion styles, gestures and demeanour renders the normalized blackness in the context as an illusion, obscuring its social, cultural and racial specificity. Similar to those white minstrels, Lee, in her practice, also demonstrates her artistic supremacy over the community she mimes and represents, which enables her to ‘pass for black’ at will, however provisionally and incompletely. Indeed, in Lee’s photographic works, black hip-hoppers are not simply featured as inferior, barbaric subjects for public amusement as that shown in white minstrelsy. Instead, they are one of the selected social groups that Lee makes efforts to blend into for the sake of her performative *Projects* of inhabiting the culturally and

¹⁰⁸ Kenyon Farrow, *We Real Cool?—On Hip-Hop, Asian-Americans, Black Folks, and Appropriation*, accessed March 29, 2016, <http://kenyonfarrow.com/2005/06/02/we-real-coolon-hip-hop-asian-americans-black-folks-and-appropriation/>. This website resource is also cited in Wang, ‘These Are the Breaks: Hip-Hop and AfroAsian Cultural (Dis)Connections’, p. 155.

socially heterogeneous American metropolises.

By constituting a visual coalition of oneself in relation to others which transcends fixed racial categories, Lee fabricates moments of ‘collective belonging’, on the basis of her seemingly close involvement with the hip-hop community depicted in her photographs. Her practice, in this sense, subverts the traditional conception of passing, which is usually conducted from black to white, from marginal to mainstream.

However, Lee’s participation in a black popular culture fundamentally differs from a real life engagement with black communities and their political struggles. As bell hooks has suggested, the socially-constructed image of blackness demonstrates no critical vigilance in terms of challenging the existing racial power relation.¹⁰⁹ Despite its dominant conversations around counterhegemonic politics and racial issues, hip-hop, as a commodified youth culture, reiterates rather than disrupts the popular imagination of wild and unruly blackness.¹¹⁰ In this sense, Lee’s practice of ‘passing’ for black in order to make herself ‘at home’ runs the risk of reinforcing and consolidating the racist reification of black subjects in American visual culture and social history.

¹⁰⁹ bell hooks, ‘In Our Glory: Photography and Black Life’, in *Art on My Mind: Visual Politics* (New York: The New Press, 1995), p.59.

¹¹⁰ As for the popular imagination of blackness demonstrated through hip-hop culture, see Reiland Rabaka, *Hip Hop's Amnesia: From Blues and the Black Women's Club Movement to Rap and the Hip Hop Movement* (Lanham, Boulder, New York, Toronto and Plymouth: Lexington Books, 2012), p. 112. Murray Forman, ‘Obama/ Time: The President in the Hip Hop Nation’, in Travis L. Gosa and Erik Nielson (ed.) *The Hip Hop & Obama Reader* (Oxford & New York: Oxford University Press, 2015), p. 156.

Distinct from *The Swinger Project* and *The Hip Hop Project*, which are each grounded in a specific popular culture, *The Hispanic Project* (1998) explores people's daily life within the Hispanic neighbourhood of East Harlem in New York City. By copying the fashion codes, hairstyles and behaviours of young Latino women, Lee immersed herself into this particular milieu of immigrants and later generations of the Puerto Rican origin for two months in the summer of 1998. *The Hispanic Project* offers a different perspective to think about the notion of American citizenship with regard to issues of migration and cultural assimilation. Of course, as already noted, Lee also comes from an ethnic minority background. After living in New York City for nearly fourteen years, Lee failed to get her US visa extended in 2007 due to the loss of her sponsorship and had to go back to Korea.¹¹¹ To some extent, Lee's performance of 'passing' into the Hispanic community shown in her series of photographs can be perceived as a symbolic process of 'Americanisation', in which, after Berlant, we might argue she appears as a 'fetal-style' foreign citizen, exploring the life of 'adult' Latinos, who have settled down as 'Americans' in New York City.¹¹²

¹¹¹ This information was provided by Mr. Scott Briscoe, the Gallery Associate at Lee's gallery, Sikkema Jenkins & Co., New York, when I visited their archives on 5 February, 2014.

¹¹² According to Berlant, the notion of 'fetal-style' citizen demonstrates a mode of national supericonicity, constituting an image of a future American citizen, who is 'not yet bruised by history: not yet caught up in the processes of secularization and sexualisation; not yet caught in the confusing and exciting identity exchanges made possible by mass consumption and ethnic, racial and sexual mixing; not yet tainted by money or war'. Berlant, *The Queen of America Goes to Washington City*, p. 6.

One image (Fig. 88) depicts Lee and four Hispanic women seated on plastic pallets in a courtyard and basking in the sunshine. Lee wears a sleeveless white lace shirt, long white trousers, and black sandals. Her hair is coloured dark brown and completed with a bronze, artificial ponytail hair extension. The four women sitting around her wear casual dress. They also hide their natural dark hair by colouring it different shades of bronze. A young Latino girl, who wears a rainbow striped swimming suit and jean pants, bathes in a light purple, inflatable plastic swimming pool, while another girl in a black camisole and jean shorts stands at the back. All the people in this photograph seem to be enjoying their time together as a community.

Another image (Fig. 89) features Lee participating in a street celebration after the Puerto Rican Day Parade in New York City. Amid the waving Puerto Rican flags, Lee is depicted posing for the camera with a number of Latino girls, who are celebrating their Puerto Rican cultural heritage. This image can be perceived as an effective articulation of what Berlant has called as ‘the ongoing power of American democratic ideals’.¹¹³ Immigrants are provided with freedom to demonstrate their own cultural traditions and contribute differences and variations to American national culture. However, unlike her enthusiastic companions, Lee’s relatively dispassionate face and stiff posture, to some extent, disrupt this harmonious moment of successful assimilation. In another photograph (Fig. 90), Lee is captured hanging clothes on the

¹¹³ Ibid., p. 195.

washing line in a remote, shabby outdoor area within the Harlem neighbourhood, while holding a little girl in her arms. Two Latino teenagers stand behind her. The scruffy residential environment presented in the photograph is difficult to be related to a well-developed, modern metropolis, New York City. In contrast to the hopeful, patriotic scene depicted on the Puerto Rican Parade Day, this photograph of quotidian domestic life reveals a less positive, yet more realistic view of the living situation in the Hispanic community.

Through her snapshot photographs taken in different situations, Lee uncovers the inevitable distinction between the utopian imagery of democratic citizenship and the endless struggle against racial and economic inequality in reality. As Berlant has argued, different from ‘citizen adults’, who ‘have learned to “forget” or to render as impractical, naive, or childish their utopian political identifications in order to be politically happy and economically functional’, the ‘stubborn naiveté’ endows ‘infantile citizens’ with ‘enormous power to unsettle, expose, and reframe the machinery of national life’.¹¹⁴ Featured in her works as a foreign resident who accesses and studies the life of various American racial and ethnic groups, Lee, different from those settled Latino-Americans, retains her critical vigilance when investigating the national myth of democracy. Her amateur snapshots of the Hispanic group, both their patriotic public demonstration and their rough community existence,

¹¹⁴ Ibid., p. 29.

constitute the infantile citizenship narrative, which candidly discloses the social and racial stratification concealed by the democratic ideology that dominates the American public sphere.

Meanwhile, by replicating and representing the exaggerated makeup, awkward hairstyles, unrestrained dress codes as well as the austere living situation of Latino subjects, Lee's works also, to a certain extent, reinforce discriminative stereotypes thrust on minority ethnic groups, who are considered incapable of 'negotiating the semiotic, economic and political conditions of his or her existence in civil society'.¹¹⁵

Although Lee, in her practice, intends to portray herself as an incipient, 'fetal-style', foreign citizen, who has not yet been bruised by American racial and social prejudice, and its democratic myth, her works still subordinate to the established social and cultural hierarchy between the white majority and people of colour, especially when the primitive, austere living condition of the Hispanic community is displayed alongside the white yuppies' luxury, cultured life through her *Projects*.

As Eileen O'Brien has argued, people in the 'racial middle' are always provided with 'more flexibility to use racial discourse even more explicitly than do either whites or blacks'.¹¹⁶ I too argue that Lee, in her series of photographic *Projects* discussed in

¹¹⁵ Ibid., p. 37.

¹¹⁶ Eileen O'Brien, *The Racial Middle: Latinos and Asian Americans Living Beyond the Racial Divide* (New York: New York University Press, 2008), p. 61

this section, is also positioned in this 'racial middle', which endows her with critical freedom to perform, study and explore the two racial binaries of white and black, as well as other ethnic minorities, such as the Hispanic community. While developing an anti-racist perspective to question white supremacy and racial discrimination, Lee's work also, at the same time, espouses and consolidates the dominant racial discourse in American social history. By immersing herself into multiple racial and ethnic groups with the same zeal and desire in order to temporarily become an 'American', Lee's performance of 'passing' challenges, to borrow Kobena Mercer's words, 'the monologic exclusivity on which dominant versions of national identity and collective belonging are based'.¹¹⁷ In her photographs, nearly all the members of her adopted groups (except that Lee appears indifferent and awkward in some of her works) look happy and satisfied with their individual and collective living situations. With her varied *Projects*, Lee tends to constitute a vision of 'multiculturalism', in which different racial, ethnic and cultural groups coexist in contemporary America.

However, the socially-constructed, reified, stereotypical images of these chosen communities are the most significant references for Lee's continuous performance of self-transformation. Her seemingly non-essentialist standpoint with regard to the fluidity and changeability of identity is based on her essentialized modeling of

¹¹⁷ Kobena Mercer, 'Diaspora, Culture and the Dialogic Imagination: the Aesthetics of Black Independent Film in Britain', in *Welcome to the Jungle: New Positions in Black Cultural Studies* (New York: Routledge, 1994), p. 62.

gestures, behaviors and appearance that characterize a specific racial or ethnic group. In this way, her photographic works, which appear to counter social, cultural and racial discrimination, actually restate the constraints of fixed identity categories that commit to the particularities of ethnicity, race and nationality.¹¹⁸ In this sense, Lee's practice submits to, rather than manages to collapse, what T. J. Demos has described as 'the institutionalization of multiculturalism and the instrumentalization of cultural identity as a marketable form of racial and sexual difference'.¹¹⁹ All her adopted groups are reduced to a complex of visual signifiers which are employed to fabricate Nikki S. Lee, a chameleon-like persona, who traverses racial, ethnic and social boundaries and makes herself 'at home' repetitively and virtually in America. Similar to her various gender-crossing impersonations discussed in the previous section, Lee's performative acts of 'passing' into both the white mainstream and other minority groups without personal prejudice, in fact, aim at empowering herself 'politically, professionally, and morally'.¹²⁰

'Simulacra': Virtual Citizenship and Collectivity

¹¹⁸ The notion of 'multiculturalism' has been roundly criticized by a number of political theorists. As Tariq Modood and Pnina Werbner have argued, 'in a post-Communist, post-national era, multiculturalism has been theorized as a paternalistic, top-down solution to the "problem" of minorities, a dangerous reification of "culture", or a new way forward to a politics of "recognition" and "authenticity"'. Tariq Modood and Pnina Werbner, 'Preface', in Tariq Modood and Pnina Werbner (eds.) *The Politics of Multiculturalism in the New Europe: Racism, Identity and Community* (London: Zed Books, 1997), p. vii.

¹¹⁹ Demos, *The Migrant Image*, p. 10.

¹²⁰ Kester, 'Aesthetic Evangelists: Conversion and Empowerment in Contemporary Community Art', p. 6.

According to Kwon, in Lee's practice, 'the rush towards experience might indicate an instinctive distrust of the ways in which information, knowledge, indeed "experience" itself come to us pre-packaged, commodified and "interpreted" today'.¹²¹ Lee's inability to engage and examine her adopted groups as a responsible and self-reflexive participant 'ethnographer' might be also considered a response to the loss of originality and authenticity in contemporary society, which is marked by endless mass consumption and image reproduction. In this respect, Lee's performative practice in front of the camera recalls historical debates and artistic practices relating to theories of postmodernism and simulacra that prevailed in the 1980s and 1990s. However, different from the works by artists from the previous generation, such as Sherman's performative masquerades, Lee's practice attaches more significance to the increasingly globalized world of economic and cultural exchange, and examines how the pervasive consumption of commodity and cultural signs at the global level might create unprecedented elasticity in the construction of multiple social and cultural identities. The last section of this chapter considers a set of Lee's photographic *Projects* in which the consumption, display and manipulation of subcultural styles and mundane commodities replace the conventionally-defined identity categories of race, ethnicity, gender, nationality and class, playing the primary role in the formation of social collectivity and belonging under global capitalism.

¹²¹ Kwon, 'Experience vs. Interpretation: Traces of Ethnography in the Works of Lan Tuazon and Nikki S. Lee', p. 87.

In his book *The Consumer Society: Myths and Structures* (1998), Jean Baudrillard associates the pervasiveness of signs and images in postmodern culture with mass consumption. Lee has said she read Baudrillard's work in Korean translation, when she first started her *Projects* as a student.¹²² According to Baudrillard, consumption is 'an unlimited social activity', through which people exchange and produce codes and values, communicating messages to each other about themselves.¹²³ From Baudrillard's point of view, the consumption of signs plays an important role in forging individual and group identities in contemporary society:

You never consume the object in itself (in its use-value); you are always manipulating objects (in the broadest sense) as signs which distinguish you either by affiliating you to your own group taken as an ideal reference or by marking you off from your group by reference to a group of higher status.¹²⁴

In this way, Baudrillard replaces the Marxian traditional focus on production and labour distribution with the consumption and circulation of signs, interpreting its political rationalism and optimism in terms of class division and social democracy in semiotic terms. On the one hand, Baudrillard considers consumption a mode of being in society, which provides each subject with the equal opportunity to establish individual identity, private happiness and social prestige. This resonates with the

¹²² See Kino, 'Now in Moving Pictures: The Multitudes of Nikki S. Lee', *The New York Times* (October 1, 2006), accessed March 29, 2016, http://www.nytimes.com/2006/10/01/arts/design/01kino.html?_r=2&_

¹²³ Jean Baudrillard, *The Consumer Society: Myths and Structures* (London, Thousand Oaks; New Delhi, CA: Sage Publication, 1998), p. 74; 78.

¹²⁴ *Ibid*, 61.

democratic model of the American Dream, which has been briefly mentioned in the previous section. On the other, Baudrillard also insists that ‘consumer societies are constituted by hierarchies of sign values in which one’s social standing and power are determined by where one stands within the semiological system of consumption and sign values’.¹²⁵ Lee’s practice, in part, parallels Baudrillard’s paradigm of the identity formation on the basis of the consumption and manipulation of visual signs. However, through her photographic works, Lee also subverts Baudrillard’s theoretical arguments to some extent, presenting alternative examples. This is shown evidently in *The Punk Project*.

In one photograph (Fig. 91), Lee is captured sitting on a park bench with a male friend. Her hair is coloured pink-purple and her face is powdered sickly pale, in stark contrast to her black and purple eye makeup. On close inspection, her nose and lip rings are revealed. Clad in a studded black leather jacket, a bondage necklace, a translucent black blouse, stripped tights and a pair of leather ankle boots, Lee dresses in accordance with a particular kind of punk style. Her friend performs his membership to punk culture by wearing a black oversized jacket, plaid, zipper-covered pants, large leather boots, and a knitted skull cap. In another image (Fig. 92), Lee retains the same outfit, sitting on the cement steps of an anonymous building with another male friend.

¹²⁵ Maden Sarup, *Identity, Culture and The Postmodern World* (Edinburgh: Edinburgh University Press, 1996), p. 108. The quotation is Sarup’s interpretation of Baudrillard’s idea.

He sports a Mohawk and wears camouflage pants and black sweat-shirt. A leather jacket with metal studs is placed across his legs.

In these two photographs, Lee and her companions, dressed in a typical punk uniform, articulate a common language, despite a few variations, bonding them together as a 'community'. In contrast with Lee's *Projects* discussed in the previous two sections, in which issues of gender, race and ethnicity still constitute a crucial part in the construction and representation of individual identities and group memberships, punk is an ideal context for Lee to impersonate a subcultural culture simply through the adoption and manipulation of commodity signs and fashion codes. The peculiar performativity of punk culture was critically analysed by the British cultural theorist Dick Hebdige in his classic piece *Subculture: The Meaning of Style*, first published in 1979. According to Hebdige, as a rebellious youth subculture characterized by anti-establishment views, punks did not 'so much magically resolve experienced contradictions as represent the experience of contradiction itself in the form of visual puns'.¹²⁶ To some extent, the punk subculture itself has challenged Baudrillard's model of modern consumption which constructs individual identity and social prestige. Since it reveals an effective example that commodity codes are purchased and manipulated not in order to secure access to the dominant upper and middle classes, but, rather, in order to demonstrate a countercultural existence, in opposition to more

¹²⁶ Dick Hebdige, *Subculture: The Meaning of Style* (London: Methuen, 1979), p.121.

familiar forms of social aspiration aimed at attaining economic privilege.

Moreover, over time, as Hebdige suggests, ‘the exact origins of individual punks were disguised or symbolically disfigured by the make-up, masks and aliases’, which made the original punk movement and its ethos—the white working-class subversion of the social establishment remain inaccessible to contemporary hangers-on. Within consumer society, due to the prevalent circulation and reproduction of punk images, punk culture is no longer particularly concerned with white working-class youth.

Instead, people from a variety of social and cultural backgrounds can consume punk music and fashion, share its visual language, and become a member of the punk group.

As a Korean artist involved in a subculture, which was historically dominated by the white working-class, Lee, through her artistic doubling of punk clothing and visual styles, exacerbates the disjunction between punk originals and contemporary hangers-on, its substance and surface. Her temporary, performative membership of the punk community resonates with Baudrillard’s arguments about the postmodern simulation: ‘it is no longer a question of imitation, nor duplication, nor even parody.

It is a question of substituting the signs of the real for the real’¹²⁷. Punk culture is presented in Lee’s artworks as a symbolic statement of fashion and style. The original resistance to societal norms and conventions has become a simulated form of incorporation through its members’ persistent consumption and display of punk

¹²⁷ Jean Baudrillard, *Simulacra and Simulation*, (trans.) Sheila Faria Glaser (Michigan: University of Michigan Press, 1994), p. 2.

signifiers.

As shown in another photograph (Fig. 93), six people, who come from diverse social and ethnic origins, stand together with similar outfits and appearance in order to show their sense of belonging to a subculture. The photograph reveals the hybridity and multiplicity of the contemporary punk milieu, demonstrating a symbolic mode of group membership, which traverses social, racial, cultural or even national boundaries.

With her photograph, Lee proposes that the consumption of signs not only invests individuals with semiotic markers, which indicate their economic and social status, but creates opportunities to destabilize identity boundaries, subverting what

Baudrillard calls as ‘hierarchies of sign values’.¹²⁸ As the cultural theorist Sunaina

Maira has suggested, ‘subcultures provide a micro-cultural realm for subcultural citizenship, a space where youth learn codes of belonging based on style, body

language, cultural interest’.¹²⁹ It is the objectification of punk culture through its

historical evolution that provides Lee with artistic possibilities to demonstrate an inclusive democratic ideal of sociocultural heterogeneity—a semiotic form of

subcultural citizenship and belonging. Indeed, this virtual image of integration freed

from social stratifications and cultural differences is, in fact, constituted by refusing

¹²⁸ Sarup, *Identity, Culture and The Postmodern World*, p. 108. The quotation is Sarup’s interpretation of Baudrillard’s idea. See also Stuart Ewen, *All Consuming Images*, p.76.

¹²⁹ Sunaina Maira, ‘Desis in and out of the House: South Asian Youth Culture in the United States Before and After 9/11’, in Paul DiMaggio, Mar á Patricia Fernández-Kelly (eds.) *Art in the Lives of Immigrant Communities in the United States* (New Brunswick and London: Rutgers University Press, 2010), pp. 100-101.

punk culture—its political and cultural originality.

By comparison, *The Young Japanese (East Village) Project* (1997), which focuses on the vibrant subcultural scene of young Japanese immigrants and art school students in the East Village, explores the notion of subcultural citizenship and collectivity in the situation of migration and diaspora. In her photographs, Lee looks comfortable and relaxed when ‘passing’ into this funky youth subculture in New York City. Indeed, Lee might behave in a way that she is quite involved in the group, in order to engender a sense of confusion, as she plays with the fact that most western people struggle to distinguish between a Korean and a Japanese subject. As Ana Honigman has argued, Lee’s practice addresses a western racist assumption of the ‘physical and historical uniformity’ across all East Asian subjects.¹³⁰

Meanwhile, *The Young Japanese (East Village) Project* also, in some respect, recalls an intricate background of conflict and exchange between Japan and Korea that have occurred since the early twentieth century. Japan’s occupation of Korea began at the end of the Russo-Japanese War (1904-1905). Over the next forty or so years, Japan enforced an official suppression of Korean history, language, and culture to the extent that Japanese cultural forms and aesthetics are still prevalent in contemporary Korean

¹³⁰ Ana Honigman, ‘Nikki S. Lee’, *Flash Art*, January/ February 2002, 35, no. 222, p. 94.

society.¹³¹ Moreover, after the Second World War, Japanese cartoons and comics started having a far-reaching influence on the development of contemporary visual culture in East Asian countries, such as China and Korea. Therefore, in consideration of these historical and contemporary cultural crossings between Japan and Korea, Lee's performance as a Japanese youth can be perceived as a mixture of both subversion and embrace of Japanese aesthetic and cultural power. Indeed, her project is grounded in a foreign context—the East Village in New York City, 'where both the Koreans and the Japanese become exiles abroad in the artistic centre of the imperial West'.¹³²

The East Village, as Christopher Mele has argued, is usually considered 'an offbeat and unconventional neighbourhood' in New York City.¹³³ Its local landscape, diverse ethnic and subcultural scenes and rebellious lifestyles are represented and widely circulated through various aesthetic forms, including the graphic design, film, writing and music, constituting an 'idealized', 'concocted' and commodified image of the

¹³¹ Anne Wilkes Tucker, 'Past/Present: Coexisting Realities', in Anne Wilkes Tucker, Karen Sinsheimer, and Pon-ch'ang Ku (eds.) *Chaotic Harmony: Contemporary Korean Photography* [Exhibition Catalogue] (The Museum of Fine Arts, Houston; Santa Barbara Museum of Art, Santa Barbara: Yale University Press, 2009), p.10. For similar arguments, see Jae-Ryung Roe, 'International Abstraction in a National Context: Abstract Painting in Korea, 1910-1865', in Kymberly N. Pinder (ed.) *Race-ing Art History: Critical Readings in Race and Art History* (New York: Routledge, 2002), p. 353.

¹³² Kaplan, 'Performing Community: Nikki S. Lee's Photographic Rites of Passing', p. 177.

¹³³ Christopher Mele, *Selling the Lower East Side: Culture, Real Estate, and Resistance in New York City* (Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 2000), p. 290.

East Village in a global context.¹³⁴ Owing to the widespread representation of the vibrant artistic scenes of the East Village in Japanese youth-oriented magazines, a significant number of middle and upper-class Japanese youth with artistic aspirations, during the 1990s, started to reside in the East Village.¹³⁵ Most of them are art school students who want to settle in New York City and become artists, musicians, designers and filmmakers.¹³⁶ Lee's photographic project features this group of Japanese youth in their late teens, whose consumption and adoption of Japanese fashion and cultural commodities make contribution to what Mele has described as 'the symbolic economy' of visual culture in the East Village.¹³⁷

One image (Fig. 94) shows Lee hanging out with her Japanese friends. Lee has bleached blond curly hair, adorned with a bright orange hair clasp. She wears loose plaid trousers and an orange blouse with extremely long sleeves, which brings to mind the traditional Japanese geisha dress. The girl standing on Lee's left hand side constructs herself as though a sexy cartoon figure popularized through Japanese video games. She wears a glistening black bra, a dark green mini-skirt and stockings. Her two towering braids are dyed bright yellow. On close inspection, it is revealed that her

¹³⁴ Ibid.

¹³⁵ Ibid., p. 291. As Mele has indicated, 'an idealized subversive East Village is presented extensively in youth-oriented magazines, such as *Clique: New York Style and Street*' in Japan.

¹³⁶ Ines M. Miyares, Jennifer A. Paine and Midori Nishi, 'The Japanese in America', in Jesse O. McKee (ed.), *Ethnicity in Contemporary America: A Geographical Appraisal* (Oxford: Rowman & Littlefield Publishers, Inc., 2000), p. 277.

¹³⁷ Mele, *Selling the Lower East Side*, p. 291.

mini-skirt is altered from a cut-off waistband. The girl in the foreground of the image is dressed in a futuristic mode with light green hair, carrying a small camera and a cute backpack, from which a pair of metal antennas can be seen growing. She wears a bright orange shirt and a self-tailored, apron-like dress. Two safety pins are around her waist. Her costume is complete with a heavy dark link chain carried by her shoulder.

As shown in this photograph, the Japanese community depicted by Lee is a fashionable group of young people. Their outlandish and hand-crafted costumes draw to mind the youth street fashion movement at the Harajuku, Tokyo, which also emerged in the 1990s.¹³⁸ Different from the traditional costume play, the Japanese youth involved in the Harajuku street culture make, wear and display their own outfits, most of which are the results of a creative combination of fashion elements drawn from a diverse multitude of cartoon characters.¹³⁹ According to the Japanese artist Takashi Murakami, the obsessive use of devices from cartoons and comics in contemporary Japan articulates a culture and national politics of ‘infantilization’.¹⁴⁰

¹³⁸ Shoichi Aoki, ‘FRUITS: Tokyo Street Style’, *Teachers Exhibition Notes*, Powerhouse Museum, Sydney, 2002, accessed on 03 April, 2016, http://www.powerhousemuseum.com/pdf/education/teachersnotes/fruits_teachers_notes.pdf.

¹³⁹ Ibid.

¹⁴⁰ Murakami, cited in Alexandra Munroe, ‘Introducing Little Boy’, in Takashi Murakami (ed.) *Little Boy: The Arts of Japan’s Exploding Subculture* (New York: Japan Society and Yale University Press, 2005), p. 246. See also Murakami, ‘Superflat Trilogy: Greetings, You Are Alive’, in *Little Boy: The Arts of Japan’s Exploding Subculture*, pp. 150-163.

From his point of view, the horror of national disaster and nuclear threat after Japan's Second World War defeat is emphatically eclipsed by a flattened, two-dimensional cute world of manga and anime, which demonstrates 'a wilful negation of both adulthood and nationhood'.¹⁴¹ Murakami's argument runs the risk of reducing the multifaceted Japanese society and its history since the mid-twentieth century to a popular aesthetic trend of 'cuteness' in mass culture. Nevertheless, the Harajuku youth street culture, which reveals an escapist, symbolic mode of youth collectivity through the consumption and re-fabrication of super-flat cartoon and fashion signifiers, to a large extent, resonates with Murakami's notion of 'infantile' politics in contemporary Japan.

When the Harajuku street fashion is adapted to the soil of America, it is used by these young Japanese expatriates as a naive, performative mechanism to construct and reconstruct individual identity and social collectivity in the situation of diaspora. In another photograph (Fig. 95), Lee sits in the middle of two Japanese boys. In contrast with Lee's light green hair, her two companions have their hair coloured light brown. Behind them is a wall of snapshots which display the daily life of this Japanese youth community. They try different fashion styles, hair colours and makeup. By continuously absorbing fashion fragments from their favourite manga-anime figures, these young Japanese in the East Village engage in a simulated life, creating a series

¹⁴¹ Murakami, cited in Munroe, 'Introducing Little Boy', p. 246; and Munroe, 'Introducing Little Boy', p.251.

of 'fake' selves without originals.

According to Maira, 'subcultures can also promote the notion of individual freedom to "choose" an identity based on style, through purchasing certain kinds of fashion, music or other commodities'.¹⁴² Lee's artistic practice of 'passing' into the young Japanese community in the East Village is, in fact, on the basis not of the intricate, interactive relation between two Asian cultures, but of the consumable and easily purchased form of subcultural performativity grounded on clothes, make-up, hairstyles and so on. As one of the earliest series made in 1997, *The Young Japanese (East Village) Project* plays its important role in the formation of Lee's performative approach to her photographic *Projects*. Lee's 'fake' documentaries of her multiple social and cultural identities particularly in America parallel these young Japanese subjects' obsessive, endless self-fashioning and self-transformation on a daily basis which they also record by photographic means.

Unlike *The Hispanic Project*, which displays deliberately selected scenes of community life in order to reveal the distinction between the illusion of democracy and the real life struggle against social inequality, Lee's photographs of these young Japanese expatriates fabricate a contrived ethnic group identity, which has been pre-packaged into a cultural product of superficial fashion codes and extricated from

¹⁴² Sunaina Maira, 'Desis in and out of the House: South Asian Youth Culture in the United States Before and After 9/11', p.101.

the conflictual social and political situation that is normally experienced by an immigrant, minority group living in America. To some extent, *The Young Japanese (East Village) Project* articulates an alternative mode of diaspora identity, which is, as the sociologist Robin Cohen has suggested, detached from its conventional narratives of ‘uprootedness, disconnection, loss and estrangement’, ‘from its moorings in the catastrophic and territorializing tradition’.¹⁴³

This recalls Stuart Hall’s discussion in his well-known article ‘Cultural Identity and Diaspora’ published in 1990. According to Hall:

The diaspora experience as I intend it here is defined not by essence or purity, but by the recognition of a necessary heterogeneity and diversity; by a conception of identity which lives with and through, not despite, difference; by hybridity. Diaspora identities are those which are constantly producing and reproducing themselves anew, through transformation and difference.¹⁴⁴

However, Hall’s conception of diaspora identities, which is based on a hybrid combination of ‘fragments of a mythologized past’ with ‘a fractured, multi-cultural, multisourced present’, is still different from the ‘super-flat’ individual and group

¹⁴³ Robin Cohen, ‘Diaspora, the Nation-State, and Globalization’, in Wang Gungwu (ed.) *Global History and Migrations* (Boulder, CO: West View Press, 1997), p. 141; p. 139.

¹⁴⁴ Stuart Hall, ‘Cultural Identity and Diaspora’, in Jonathan Rutherford (ed.) *Identity: Community, Culture, Difference* (London: Lawrence & Wishart, 1990), p. 235.

existence of the Japanese youth group featured in Lee's photographs.¹⁴⁵

In this respect, Berlant, in her discussion of 'infantile citizenship', presents an inspiring example—a fictitious, 'fetal-style' citizen invented by the *Time* magazine in 1993. The image shows a nameless, computer-generated, yet heterosexual and 'white-enough' female immigrant by melding faces of multiple races and ethnicities.¹⁴⁶ For Berlant, this virtual image of the American citizen tends to suppress 'the complex racial and class relations of exploitation and violence' in America, by fantasizing a seemingly democratic, racially heterogeneous but still 'white-enough' American future through intermarriage (with white people) and crossbreeding.¹⁴⁷ This example can offer a productive way of thinking about *The Young Japanese (East Village) Project*. By purchasing, re-appropriating and displaying superficial fashion and cartoon codes in a transnational context, these American-based Japanese youth create virtual scenes of social collectivity that actually reduce their cultural heritage and objectify their daily lives. Their performative 'super-flat' lifestyle shown in Lee's photographs, I want to suggest, demonstrates an even more overturning and problematic image of 'infantile' citizenship, which makes up a 'global' future of democratization—a simulated form of identity and belonging, via the naive negation of all racial, ethnic, cultural and

¹⁴⁵ The quotations about Hall's notion of 'diaspora' are drawn from Cohen's discussion of Hall's work in Cohen, 'Diaspora, the Nation-State, and Globalization', p. 141.

¹⁴⁶ Berlant, *The Queen of America Goes to Washington City*, pp. 206-207.

¹⁴⁷ *Ibid.*, p. 207.

national histories.

In order to sustain her artistic performance of ‘passing’ from an outsider to a temporary member of her chosen group, Lee did not examine her real subcultural identity by getting involved with a Korean community in America. Rather, after years of residing in New York City, Lee went back to Korea for about three months at the end of 2000 and blended into a group of teenage schoolgirls, who were born and brought up in an increasingly westernized, heterogeneous Korea. According to Lee, the schoolgirls depicted in her works are a generation raised in Western-style apartments, ‘watching Hollywood movies, listening to foreign pop songs and eating McDonald’s hamburgers’.¹⁴⁸

Coming to the conclusion of her voluntary performance of self-transformation, *The Schoolgirls Project* (2000) provided Lee, as an American-based expatriate, with a fascinating opportunity to ‘immigrate’ back to her home country and to be ‘reborn’ as a growing teenage ‘citizen’.¹⁴⁹ Her photographs in this series reveal a visual fusion of Korean aesthetic and living traditions and western cultural influences, fabricating a symbolic mode of identity, at both the individual and the collective level, constituted

¹⁴⁸ Lee, cited in Catherine Gibson, ‘Nikki S. Lee’, in Lewis Biggs (ed.) *International 2002: Liverpool Biennial* (Liverpool: Liverpool Biennial of Contemporary Art, 2002), p. 74.

¹⁴⁹ As already noted in the previous chapter, *The Hip Hop Project* made in 2001 was a commissioned project. *The Schoolgirls Project* is normally considered the end of Lee’s voluntary performance of self-transformation.

of transnational cultural codes and commodity signs. In this way, Lee's artistic exploration of subcultural citizenship on the basis of mass consumption has been adapted to a broader socio-political context to study the formation of individual and national identity in the face of growing transnational, transcultural communication and engagement under globalization.

The Schoolgirls Project features a visually identical community of teenage girls, who wear the state official school uniform of dark suit jackets, knee-high skirts and black stockings. In the guise of cultural homogeneity, Lee, who had been in her early thirties at the time, temporarily 'returned' to a younger age and performed as a student at a local female public high school in Seoul. This project, in this sense, also plays with a racist childlike stigma that most people from East Asia look much younger than their actual age in western people's eyes.¹⁵⁰

One image (Fig. 96) shows Lee and her two companions sitting in a local fast food restaurant having dinner together on Christmas Eve in 2000. Although it is not an American-based chain, its layout, decoration, business mode and packaging all resemble McDonald's. The three subjects are all dressed in their school uniforms, in contrast to the red and white Christmas outfits worn by members of staff standing at

¹⁵⁰ As Jim Cullen has argued, the racist stereotype of the child-like East Asian subject can trace back to the late nineteenth century when huge amount of Asian immigrants started to reside in America as wage-earning labour force. See Jim Cullen, *The Art of Democracy: A Concise History of Popular Culture in the United States* (second edition) (New York: Monthly Review Press, 2002), p. 105.

the back. The decorative lights, as well as the floral hoop hung on the orange wall behind Lee and her friends, create an atmosphere of Christmas. By comparison, in another image (Fig. 97) taken one-month earlier, Lee and another three schoolgirls are in a small Korean restaurant, eating traditional Korean food, Ddokboki, literally spicy fired rice cake. On close inspection, it is revealed that they are holding forks, instead of the stainless steel chopsticks conventionally used for having Ddokboki. One photograph (Fig. 98), taken at the end of the year, shows Lee standing alone in a spacious auditorium of the school, in which a Korean national flag hangs above a Crucifix in the backdrop. As Kaplan has suggested, ‘the dominant religion of the west along with its brand of Christian communion has made its mark’ at this local high school.¹⁵¹

As shown in these mundane snapshots, a variety of foreign influences have deeply infiltrated into the nation’s cultural landscape, giving rise to young people’s westernized living habits, interests and religious beliefs. Lee’s long-term experience of residing abroad endows her with a critical distance to readapt to her cultural origin and to reconsider the formation of Korean identity under the booming development of the world economy. As Berlant has argued, the increasing social, cultural and economic communication in a global context have gradually destroyed the notion of a

¹⁵¹ Kaplan, ‘Performing Community: Nikki S. Lee’s Photographic Rites of Passing’, p. 187. In fact, in contemporary Korea, Christianity is, after Buddhism, the largest religion in the country. About one third of its forty-five million population is Catholics and Protestants. See Mary E. Connor, *The Koreas: A Global Studies Handbook* (Denver, CO: ABC-CLIO, 2002), pp. 168-187.

model citizen, who is purely affiliated to a nation, in which she currently resides, and is immutably loyal to the nation's dominant culture.¹⁵² In this sense, the concept of nationhood and experience of belonging have become ambiguous and unstable. Lee's photographs, which feature her performance of 'passing' back into her home country—an unprecedentedly westernized, heterogeneous Korea, constitute an artistic vehicle for viewers to imagine and reflect on 'their linkage to one another through the nation', as well as their inextricable connectedness to the transnational.¹⁵³ Lee's practice, in this way, challenges what Michael Hardt and Antonio Negri has described as 'the slavery of belonging to a nation, an identity and a people' and the 'sovereignty and the limits it places on subjectivity'.¹⁵⁴

However, Lee's fabrication and representation of Korean identity under the expansive spread of the global economy, as shown in *The Schoolgirls Project*, seem to be simply based on her superficial display and juxtaposition of easily purchased, cultural signifiers, such as the Korean national flag with the Crucifix, and the Ddokboki with western cutlery. In this sense, Lee's practice subordinates to, rather than challenges, the homogenising process of global capitalism which tends to render all places and cultures alike and essentialize regional differences.¹⁵⁵ Lee's photographs of these

¹⁵² Berlant, *The Queen of America Goes to Washington City*, p. 13.

¹⁵³ *Ibid.*, p. 14.

¹⁵⁴ Michael Hardt and Antonio Negri, *Empire* (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 2000), pp. 360-361.

¹⁵⁵ As for the discussion on the homogenising tendencies of global capitalism, see William I. Robinson, *A Theory of Global Capitalism: Production, Class, and State in*

growing Korean ‘citizens’, I would argue, present a simulated, idealized image of global ‘citizenship’ constituted through unconstrained mass consumption, which reifies people’s transnational experience of life into a ‘flattened’ visual collage of diverse commodity and cultural signs. This conceals social debates and struggles over the dilemma of preserving local traditions and integrating foreign influences in the context of globalization, ignoring the unavoidable asymmetrical cultural communication between geopolitical centres and peripheries.¹⁵⁶

As another two artists Yin and Hatoum examined in this thesis, Lee also explores one’s individual and social existence in the contemporary world of growing interregional, intercultural movement and exchange, through the politics of ‘home’ or ‘homecoming’. By immersing herself into a wide range of community contexts, Lee tends to articulate an artistic utopia of making and remaking oneself ‘at home’ beyond geopolitical and sociocultural restrictions. However, as the philosopher Jeremy Waldron has pointed out, the engagement with ‘the norms and practices of one’s community or culture’ cannot be presented ‘as though they were costumes or [visible] attributes rather than intelligent and intelligible structures of reasoning’.¹⁵⁷ Lee’s

a Transnational World (Baltimore, MD: Johns Hopkins University Press, 2004), p. 32; Diane Perrons, *Globalization and Social Change: People and Places in a Divided World* (London and New York: Routledge, 2004), p. 26-27.

¹⁵⁶ As for the erosion of local tradition caused by the spread of western metropolitan popular and commodity culture, such as American fast food, soft drinks and sitcoms, see Hannerz, ‘Scenarios for Peripheral Cultures’, pp. 108-110.

¹⁵⁷ Jeremy Waldron, ‘What is Cosmopolitan?’, *The Journal of Political Philosophy*, 2000, vol. 8, no. 2, p. 242.

artistic attempts of 'homemaking' through her performative, superficial, virtual images of 'being in community' with other bodies are, in fact, too flawed and ultimately failed, which ironize the idea that identity and social belonging can be simply defined by one's apparent visible cues of racial, ethnic, gender, economic and cultural backgrounds.

CONCLUSION

In Yin, Hatoum and Lee's practices, 'home' refers no longer simply to a situated, desirable domestic dwelling, but to an immediate experience of belonging through our active embodied interactions with different places and other subjects. By virtue of their border-crossing itineraries throughout multiple local living environments, these artists reveal the instability and fluidity of notions of identity, home and community, as they are challenged and reformed under the pervasive social and cultural influence of globalization. Yin's artistic fantasy of 'home-making' in a global context is inextricably interwoven with her nostalgic recollection of an idealized, indigenous form of communal existence in China. Her observation of life under radical social transformation in a specific local is embedded within her experience and investigation of international travel and exchange, communicating with viewers near and far across geographical boundaries.¹ Yin's works fabricate moments of not only physical and cultural connectedness, but also collision and exclusion.

In contrast, Hatoum's strangely distorted household items collapse the conventional ideal of home as smooth and supportive. By evoking a tangible feeling of bodily

¹ As Yin has suggested, 'when you enter another culture, apart from enriching our experience and getting to know the foreign culture better, you can also reappraise your own culture from a certain distance. At the same time, the concept of "home" becomes broader'. Yin, cited in Amy Huei-Hua Cheng, 'The Art of Yin Xiuzhen', in Bruce Grenville (ed.) *Home and Away* [Exhibition Catalogue] (Vancouver: The Vancouver Art Gallery, 2003), p. 43.

discomfort and psychological unease, Hatoum, via her artworks, embroils viewers in a series of mutable, threatening scenarios in which a seemingly familiar domesticity has been embellished with elusive discord and unsettledness. In her works, ‘home’ can be also dangerous and disquieting, implying either specific or more general conflict and violence in diverse domestic and social power struggles. In Lee’s performative photographic practice, ‘home’ is demonstrated as a fraud. The culturally and socially heterogeneous American metropolises have been converted into a playground of costume and role playing parties with various local communities. On the one hand, Lee’s works enable viewing subjects to envisage the situation of making themselves ‘at home’ with different social and cultural groups. On the other, they also disrupt and challenge established collective bonds, revealing the contingency and changeability of individual and collective identities.

This thesis has explored the affective capacity of contemporary art to transcend geopolitical and socioeconomic borders, and to foster communication and conflict in an unprecedentedly globalized world, through the notion of ‘home-making’.² While the focus of the thesis has been on individual monographic studies of my three chosen

² This claim is based on my reading and discussion of a collection of literatures by scholars, such as Marsha Meskimmon, Nikos Papastergiadis, Michelle Antoinette, Terry Smith, Jennifer Johung and others throughout the chapters. See particularly Antoinette, ‘Introduction Part 2—Asia Present Resonant: Themes of Connectivity and World-making in Contemporary Asian Art’; Meskimmon, *Contemporary Art and The Cosmopolitan Imagination*; ‘Making Worlds, Making Subjects: Contemporary Art and the Affective Dimension of Global Ethics’; ‘The Precarious Ecologies of Cosmopolitanism’; Nikos Papastergiadis, *Spatial Aesthetics: Art, Place and the Everyday*; and *Cosmopolitanism and Culture*.

artists, this conclusion reconsiders the three terms ‘domesticity’, ‘social collectivity’ and ‘mobility’, with references to a number of works by other contemporary artists working in a similar transnational, transcultural context. In this way, I want to further sharpen my discussion of Yin, Hatoum and Lee’s works and provide a more comprehensive insight into the recurrent practice of making art and making ‘homes’ prevalent in the contemporary art world.

As discussed, the question of domesticity is central to Yin, Hatoum and Lee’s practices. However, despite the focus of this thesis on the works of these three woman artists and their multiple forms of creative engagement with household materials, spaces, objects and crafts, mundane domesticity is not necessarily gendered feminine, and addressed or practiced exclusively by women artists. Here, I am not negating what Meskimmon has described as the ‘historical and conceptual links between women, the “feminine” and the domestic’ and the far-reaching influence of feminist artistic practices related to womanhood and motherhood since the late 1960s.³ Instead, I want to explore the ways in which the motif of ‘home’ in contemporary art is no longer only confined to women artists’ struggles against domestic containment and gender discrimination, but has been adopted by others keen to recreate and re-appropriate those terms in order to interrogate questions of identity, subjectivity, and belonging in a wider political and cultural context.

³ Meskimmon, *Contemporary Art and The Cosmopolitan Imagination*, p. 1.

For instance, in recent years, domestic works and crafts have also played a significant role in a number of works made by artists exploring not feminism but alternative models of domesticity and queer home-making. Since the 1990s, artists Oliver Herring and Charles LeDray have investigated issues of masculinity and queer identity through their works constructed from mundane textiles or other household materials with the help of the domestic craft of needlework.⁴ Moreover, in response to the increasing frequency of international travel and migration, the British-Nigerian artist Yinka Shonibare and the New York-based Korean artist Do-Ho Suh have also looked into concepts of cultural identity and diaspora via their ingenious re-appropriation of mundane domesticity. I will examine a set of installation works made by Suh, which articulate his understanding and exploration of home throughout his periodic displacement and re-habitation in a transnational circumstance.

Between 1999 and 2000, Suh constructed his work *The Perfect Home*—a pair of life-size architectural phantasms of his family home in Seoul and his apartment in New York from translucent silk and nylon cloth. The two pieces are named respectively as *Seoul Home/L.A. Home/ New York Home/ Baltimore Home/London Home/Seattle Home* (1999) and *348 West 22nd St., Apt. A, New York, NY10011 at Rodin Gallery, Seoul/ Tokyo Opera City Art Gallery/ Serpentine Gallery*

⁴ Elissa Auther, *String, Felt, Thread: The Hierarchy of Art and Craft in American Art* (Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 2010), p. 166.

London/Biennale of Sydney/ Seattle Art Museum/Smith College Museum of Art, Northhampton/North Carolina Museum of Art (2000). With the ever-expanding titles of his works, Suh reveals the sites of their temporary situation and exhibition.

Fabricated from a fragile, semi-transparent, light green silk membrane, *Seoul Home* is a soft, hand-crafted replica of his childhood home, which itself is also a reconstruction of a dismantled nineteenth-century building located on the ground of a royal palace that was built in the Yi dynasty.⁵ Aided with his newly learned skills in traditional Korean dressmaking, Suh managed to sew solid seam lines and structured volumes with easily collapsed, vulnerable fabric.⁶ This malleable, flimsy and portable 'home' usually hangs from the ceiling at the exhibition site. In this way, the draped fabric is stretched into lines and shapes to constitute a three-dimensional domestic dwelling of rooms, doors, corridors, walls, windows and roofs (Fig. 100). Owing to Suh's interest in the concept of 'transportable site-specificity', the actual placement of the piece can be subtly altered in order to make the best use of each exhibiting space.⁷ For instance, when exhibited at the Korean Cultural Centre in Los Angeles in 1999, *Seoul Home* was suspended over a spiral staircase (Fig. 101).⁸

⁵ See Hee-Young Kim, 'The Fabric of Nomadism: Stitching the Global and the Local', in Celina Jeffery and Gregory Minissale (eds.) *Global and Local Art Histories* (Newcastle: Cambridge Scholars Publishing, 2007), pp. 176-177.

⁶ *Seoul Home* is the result of Suh and his hired helpers' intensive manual work.

⁷ Lisa G. Corrin, 'The Perfect Home: A Conversation with Do-Ho Suh', in Lisa G. Corrin (ed.) *Do-Ho Suh* [Exhibition Catalogue] (London: Serpentine Gallery; Seattle: Seattle Art Museum, 2002), p. 27. See also Jane Rendell, *Site-Writing: The Architecture of Art Criticism* (London & New York: I.B. Tauris, 2010), p. 214.

⁸ Johung, *Replacing Home*, p. 168.

Viewers climbed the stairs, moved through the interior space of this fabric reproduction of Suh's family home and observed its complicated architectural layout. After reaching the corridor platform on the first floor, they walked out of the structure through its half-opened front door and then eventually had a look at its construction from the outside (Fig. 102).

In the following year, Suh constructed *348 West 22nd St., Apt, A, New York, NY 10011*, which duplicates the interior of his apartment in New York City (Fig. 103). Different from *Seoul Home*, which is closely linked to his family background and cultural origin, this replica of a typical New York studio, as Joan Kee has suggested, 'is nondescript enough to be absorbed within the experiences of many urban dwellers'.⁹ Made of translucent blue-grey nylon cloth, the work, unlike the suspending *Seoul Home*, is custom-sewn and grounded on the floor of each exhibition site. Viewers can walk through this simple, compact interior space, which reminds them of a provisional, yet convenient and functional residence in modern metropolises. Since 2000, *Seoul Home* and *348 West 22nd St., Apt, A, New York, NY 10011* are normally joined together into *The Perfect Home* via a rose-coloured diaphanous silk corridor.

Suh's work incorporates two forms of home—an idealized, domestic dwelling in association with the place of origin and a temporary site of repose in a constant state

⁹ Joan Kee, 'Evanescence Terrain: The Unknowable Home in the Works of Do-Ho Suh', in Bruce Grenville (ed.) *Home and Away*, p. 16.

of movement. As with Yin's *Portable Cities* series, the rotating processes of demolition and reconstruction of *The Perfect Home* allude to the mobility and instability of contemporary life.¹⁰ More importantly, Suh's work creates and recreates a site of momentary grounding, in which viewers not only contingently engage with the personal 'homes' of another subject, but encounter other bodies, who are accidentally enveloped in this fluid and portable dwelling structure in the same time and space. In this sense, *The Perfect Home* seeks to evoke an on-going feeling of 'being at home' across geographical boundaries through viewers' dynamic interactions and negotiations with each exhibiting site and other embodied subjects. However, similar to Yin's *Portable Cities*, Suh's work lacks a critical insight into the inevitable hierarchies and differences among multiple moving bodies in the context of globalization. Mainly on the basis of his artistic itineraries with essential financial and institutional supports, Suh's practice demonstrates an idealized, mobile form of 'homeliness', at the expense of negating the possible conflict and difficulty that most people, especially those less privileged migrants and travellers, usually experience, when inhabiting unfamiliar foreign places in real life.

Similar to Yin, Hatoum and Lee, Suh also investigates intricate issues relating to identity, home and transnational existence, by virtue of his creative employment of

¹⁰ See also Miwon Kwon, 'The Other Otherness: The Art of Do-Hu Suh', in Lisa G. Corrin (ed.) *Do-Ho Suh*, p. 17; and Janet Kraynak, 'Traveling in Do-Ho Suh's World', in *La Biennale di Venezia/ Korean Pavilion* (Seoul: Korean Culture Arts Foundation, 2001), pp. 43-45.

unremarkable domestic materials and skills. As Meskimmon has argued, ‘world-making in art that acknowledges our embeddedness, our embodied “worldliness”, articulates difference through, rather than beyond, the everyday’.¹¹

The discussion of Suh’s work in this conclusion aims to further challenge the traditional relegation of mundane domesticity to the trivial, uncreative ‘women’s work’, and to reconsider and reaffirm its meaning and importance in exploring and demonstrating our experiences of being and belonging in the world under globalization.¹² As the political theorist Louise Amoore has pointed out, ‘it is the realm of the everyday that our understandings, experiences and meanings of globalization are made’.¹³

In recent years, instead of engaging with the question of ‘domesticity’, a number of other contemporary artists have also organized their works into an experimental and flexible platform of public engagement, in an attempt to engender an immediate sense of collectivity and belonging, detached from the familiar domestic setting of home. These works can be broadly grouped with Yin’s socially-engaged art pieces, which have been examined in chapter one, under the label of ‘participatory art’. However, unlike Yin’s works, which reveal explicit references to an old-fashioned, indigenous

¹¹ Meskimmon, ‘The Precarious Ecologies of Cosmopolitanism’, p. 21.

¹² This also, to some extent, recalls Young’s conception of domestic preservation which have been discussed in chapter one. See Young, ‘House and Home: Feminist Variations on a Theme’, p. 144.

¹³ Louise Amoore, *Globalization Contested: An International Political Economy of Work* (Manchester: Manchester University Press, 2002), p. 61.

form of communal, domestic existence in China, the participatory works considered here demonstrate no specific relation to any pre-existing human communities. In 2007, an exhibition, *Making a Home: Japanese Contemporary Artists in New York*, opened at the Japan Society, New York, which included the works of thirty-three New York-based Japanese artists from diverse generations. Rather than simply articulating their own transnational experiences of inhabiting this foreign metropolis, the theme of public participation and collaboration dominated.¹⁴

For instance, Yoko Ono displayed her work *Wish Tree*, which had been exhibited in a multitude of geographical locations since 1996 (Fig. 104). With her artwork, Ono intended to engage viewers from different social, cultural and linguistic backgrounds in a temporary community of hope, by asking them to write a wish on a slip of paper and attach it to the tree.¹⁵ By comparison, the Japanese artist Emiko Kasahara invited viewers into a contingent, collective space of loss, through her work *SHEER* (2007) (Fig. 105). In a commodious exhibiting hall, Kasahara erected a whispering architectural structure consisting of hundreds of plastic-covered wooden blocks piled together. Within it, numerous small plastic nipples covered with skin-toned pantyhose

¹⁴ Reiko Tomii, 'Border-crossings: A Preface to the Exhibition', in *Making a Home: Japanese Contemporary Artists in New York* [Exhibition Catalogue] (Japanese Society Gallery, New York: Yale University Press, 2007), p. 17.

¹⁵ Hans Ulrich Obrist, *Yoko Ono/Hans Ulrich Obrist: The Conversation Series: 17* [Exhibition Catalogue] (Köln: Walther König, 2010), p. 22; see also Thomas Kellein, *Yoko Ono: Between the Sky and My Head* [Exhibition Catalogue] (Köln: Walther König, 2008), p. 6; 9-10; Gianfranco Maraniello, Sergio Risaliti, Antonio Somaini (eds.) *Gift: Generous Offerings, Threatening Hospitality* [Exhibition Catalogue] (Milan: Edizioni Charta, 2001), p. 59.

sprout from the vertical surfaces of the four block walls, through which viewers can hear personal tales of loss contributed by anonymous volunteers from multiple geographical and cultural backgrounds in their own mother tongues. Although many of them are incomprehensible due to language barriers, the mournful voices emitted from the work still, to different extents, conjure up viewers' own memories of sorrow and frustration. The meaning of this affective communal realm of loss and sadness is actually revealed to each viewer through her momentary, spontaneous emotional and conceptual involvement.¹⁶ Furthermore, On Megumi Akiyoshi displayed her *Flower Gallery* (1999) (Fig. 106)—a brightly coloured communal space of artistic meditation. Akiyoshi drew large pink and orange flowers all over the walls and the ceiling of a gallery space with a reflective, mirror-like, white marble ground. In contrast to the extremely colourful backdrop of the room, a number of blank canvases mounted with gilt frames hang on the walls at about the height of the viewer's eyes. Enmeshed in this florid wonderland filled with artificial happiness and vibrant energy, viewers are welcome to complete these blank paintings through imagination.¹⁷

Ono, Kasahara and Akiyoshi's works seek to create a utopian, egalitarian environment, in which each viewer or creator is endowed with the equal opportunity

¹⁶ Tomii, 'Border-crossings: A Preface to the Exhibition', p. 18; Eric C. Shiner, 'Emiko Kasahara: The Body Delivered', in *Making a Home: Japanese Contemporary Artists in New York*, p. 103.

¹⁷ Eric C. Shiner, 'Making a Home for Japanese Contemporary Artists in New York', in *Making a Home: Japanese Contemporary Artists in New York*, p. 25. Alexandra Chang, *Envisioning Diaspora: Asian American Visual Arts Collectives* (Beijing & Shanghai: Timezone 8, 2008), p. 79; 84; 167.

to articulate her personal wish, sorrow and creativity regardless of regional, cultural and linguistic differences.¹⁸ In these works, ‘home’ has been uncritically turned into moments of social collectiveness constituted by non-interactive participating individuals, demonstrating no particular relation to any geographical locations or cultural contexts. Different from these works, Yin, Hatoum and Lee’s practices aim at involving viewers in intricate communications and collisions with different people and places. The constitution of an immediate, open and democratic artistic mode of social collective of oneself in connection with other subjects, iterated and reiterated in this thesis, is based on multiple forms of interactive engagement between subjects and places, and between individual subjects evoked by Yin, Hatoum and Lee’s mediating art pieces, which bring to the fore rather than conceal or negate interpersonal, intercultural conflicts and differences.

According to global historians Bruce Mazlish and Akira Iriye, ‘although globalization is often characterized as the movement of capital, goods and people across national boundaries, the movement of people usually lags behind that of capital or goods’.¹⁹

¹⁸ Indeed, compared with Ono and Akiyoshi’s works, Kasahara’s *SHEER* instigate more complicated interactions between the viewing subject and the artwork (or even other subjects whose personal experiences are articulated by virtue of the artwork), which are marked by physical and psychical unease, caused by those jutting-out nipples, and insurmountable language obstacles. However, the piece was created on the basis of the artist’s random selection and coalescence of irrelevant individual stories, which aimed at creating an idealized, egalitarian environment for narrating and hearing personal tales of sorrows beyond individual, social and cultural differences.

¹⁹ Bruce Mazlish and Akira Iriye, ‘Migrations’, in *The Global History Reader* (New York and London: Routledge, 2005), p. 91.

However, in response to their own itinerant experiences within the art world, Yin, Hatoum and Lee's practices attach more significance to the 'mobility' rather than 'immobility' of contemporary life. Yin investigates the increasing fluidity and unsettledness of human bodies in both literal (her *Portable Cities* series) and metonymic (her oversized body-like fabric cavities) ways, through which viewers of her works are involved in complex global networks of inter-bodily movement and exchange. A significant number of Hatoum's works have been created over the course of her periodic artistic residencies, which, to different extents, reveal and reflect on her experience of inhabiting multiple local places. Moreover, as discussed in the chapter, inspired by the disintegrating and precarious condition of some small communities she was shortly based with, Hatoum, in recent two decades, has also made a series of works, which reveal a symbolic mode of 'mobility' with their degradable, ever-changing sculptural forms that refuse to stay static. Lee's performative photographic *Projects* are inseparable from her own experience of inhabiting the seemingly hospitable, egalitarian, cosmopolitan America. Her fluid practices throughout the dwelling environments of her varied adopted groups can be also grounded in a broader contemporary context of pervasive international, interregional travel and communication, which bring about the unprecedented frequency of encountering unfamiliar bodies and communities.

In contrast, the works created by the American-based Palestinian artist Emily Jacir,

which especially interrogate the inequality between the economic freedom of transnational exchange and the increased restriction of people's movement in the context of globalization, can offer a different perspective to consider the notion of 'mobility'. Between 2001 and 2003, Jacir created a multi-medium art project entitled *Where We Come From*. Jacir initiated her work by calling for entreaties from Palestinians residing in or outside Israel and the Occupied Territories. With her American passport, Jacir, at the time, could travel to where they were denied or restricted to access, and helped them do what they wished, yet were unable to do in the place. For instance, one of the pleas was from a Palestinian man living in Bethlehem, who asked Jacir to visit his mother's grave on her birthday, put flowers and pray, as he was prohibited an entry to Jerusalem where the grave is located. His request, along with his basic information and Jacir's notes about the experience of her special task, was inscribed on a rectangular white panel. When carrying out her mission, Jacir took a photograph of her shadow over the white tombstone. The white panel was finally displayed together with Jacir's photograph (Fig. 107). Her ghostly presence shown in the image actually reveals the painful, forced absence of her client. As Demos has argued, 'implying a parallel between political disfranchisement and representational erasure, *Where We Come From* confronts the oppressive apparatus of spatial control in which these Palestinian subjects are enmeshed'.²⁰

²⁰ T. J. Demos, *The Migrant Image*, p.104; for similar arguments, see also Krista Geneviève Lynes, 'Discontinuous States: Palestinian and Israeli Border Imaginaries', in *Prismatic Media, Transnational Circuits: Feminism in a Globalized Present* (New York: Palgrave Macmillan, 2012), p. 136.

During her residency at the Al-Ma'mal Foundation for Contemporary Art, Jerusalem in 2002, Jacir's series of works were printed out in a local magazine *What's Up* and distributed for free to local viewers, whose daily mobility was limited by various border checkpoints in the area.²¹ In this sense, with *Where We Come From*, Jacir articulates a poignant disparity not only between the empowered, moving artist and the disadvantaged, restricted Palestinian residents or exiles, but between viewers who can and cannot visit the gallery and engage with her works. This is, undoubtedly, not considered in Yin, Hatoum and Lee's works. The diverse forms of intersubjective, inter-bodily, interregional and intercultural communication and contradiction evoked through their artistic practices of 'home-making' are instead based on the assumed, unrestricted mobility of some privileged artists and viewers, who are able to travel across geographical boundaries and to make or encounter the artwork.

Rather than simply demonstrating an artistic fantasy of inhabiting multiple 'homes' in a global context, this thesis, on the basis of the monographic studies of three chosen artists, reveals the intricate conditions and limits of this idealized artistic mode of being and belonging in the world, remaining open to further critical reconsideration and theoretical reflection. Moreover, globalization itself, as Mazilish and Iriye have

²¹ Demos, *The Migrant Image*, p. 104; See also Faye S. Oweis, *Encyclopaedia of Arab American Artists* (Westport, Connecticut & London: Greenwood Press, 2008), pp. 167-168.

pointed out, is ‘a changing, many-faceted, historically evolving process’.²²

Contemporary art, grounded in this evolving, growing, controversial and uneven process of integration and exchange, at its best seeks to continuously raise new questions and perspectives about notions of home, social cohesion and cultural identity.

²² Bruce Mazilish and Akira Iriye, ‘Introduction’, in *The Global History Reader*, p. 2.

APPENDIX
ILLUSTRATIONS



Fig. 1: Yin Xiuzhen. *Portable Cities* series, 2001-present; the exhibition view at Ausstellungsansicht Hong Kong Art Centre in 2010. Installation. Suitcases, used clothes, light, map, sound, small buttons, woollen yarns. Courtesy of Pace Beijing, Beijing.



Fig. 2: Mona Hatoum. *Beirut, Lebanon*, 2000. Photograph on paper. Courtesy of Fondazione Querini Stampalia, Venice/ Mona Hatoum.



Fig. 3: Mona Hatoum. *Berlin, Germany*, 2008. Photograph on paper. Courtesy of Fondazione Querini Stampalia, Venice/ Mona Hatoum.



Fig. 4: Mona Hatoum. *Cairo, Egypt*, 1998. Photograph on paper. Courtesy of Fondazione Querini Stampalia, Venice/ Mona Hatoum.



Fig. 5: Mona Hatoum. *Sabbathday Lake Shaker Village, Maine, USA*, 2000. Photograph on paper. Courtesy of Fondazione Querini Stampalia, Venice/ Mona Hatoum.



Fig. 6: Nikki S. Lee. *The Yuppie Project (17)*, 1998. Digital C-Print. Courtesy of the artist and Sikkema Jenkins & Co, New York.



Fig. 7: Nikki S. Lee. *The Swinger Project* (29), 1999. Digital C-Print. Courtesy of the artist and Sikkema Jenkins & Co, New York.



Fig. 8: Nikki S. Lee. *The Hispanic Project (11)*, 1998. Digital C-Print. Courtesy of the artist and Sikkema Jenkins & Co, New York.



Fig. 9: Nikki S. Lee. *The Exotic Dancers Project (18)*, 2000. Digital C-Print. Courtesy of the artist and Sikkema Jenkins & Co, New York.



Fig. 10: Mona Hatoum. *Chain*, 1999. Installation. Leather gloves and nylon threads, 450×25×100 cm (diameter). Photograph: Joël Damase. le Creux de l'enfer, Centre d'art Contemporain, Thiers, France.

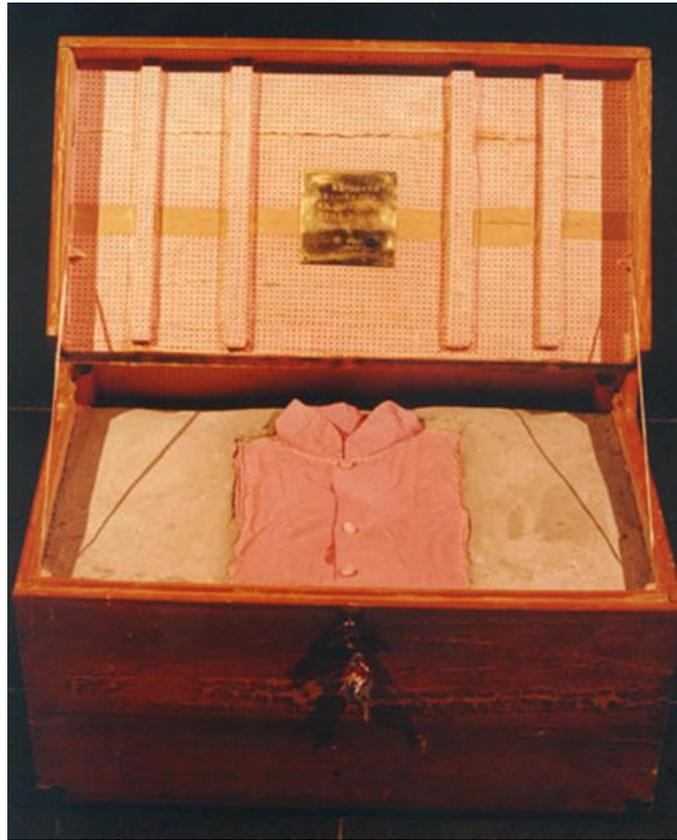


Fig. 11: Yin Xiuzhen. *Dress Box*, 1995. Installation. Old clothes, cement, wooden trunk, copper plate, television, 67×46×38 cm. Beijing Contemporary Art Museum, Beijing.



Fig. 12: Yin Xiuzhen. *Dress Box* (detail), 1995. Installation and performance. Old clothes, cement, wooden trunk, copper plate, television. Beijing Contemporary Art Museum, Beijing.



Fig.13: Yin Xiuzhen. *Suitcases I*, 2000. Installation. Old clothes, suitcases, wood, bamboo, light, video. Earl Lu Gallery, Lasalle Gallery, Singapore.



Fig. 14: Yin Xiuzhen. *Suitcases II*, 2000. Installation. Old clothes, suitcases, wood, bamboo, light, video. Fukuoka Asian Art Museum, Fukuoka, Japan.



Fig. 15: Marcel Duchamp. *La Boîte-en-valise*, 1935-1941. Installation. Leather valises containing miniature replicas, photographs, and color reproductions of works. The Museum of Modern Art, New York.



Fig. 16: Vivan Sundaram. *Box Three: Home* (from *The Sher-Gil Archive*), 1995. Installation. Teak board box, miniature photographs, wooden cubes, 50 × 34 × 45cm. Courtesy of the artist.



Fig. 17: Yin Xiuzhen. *Portable City: Beijing*, 2001. Installation. Suitcases, used clothes, light, map, sound, 148 × 88 × 30 cm. National Art Museum of China, Beijing.

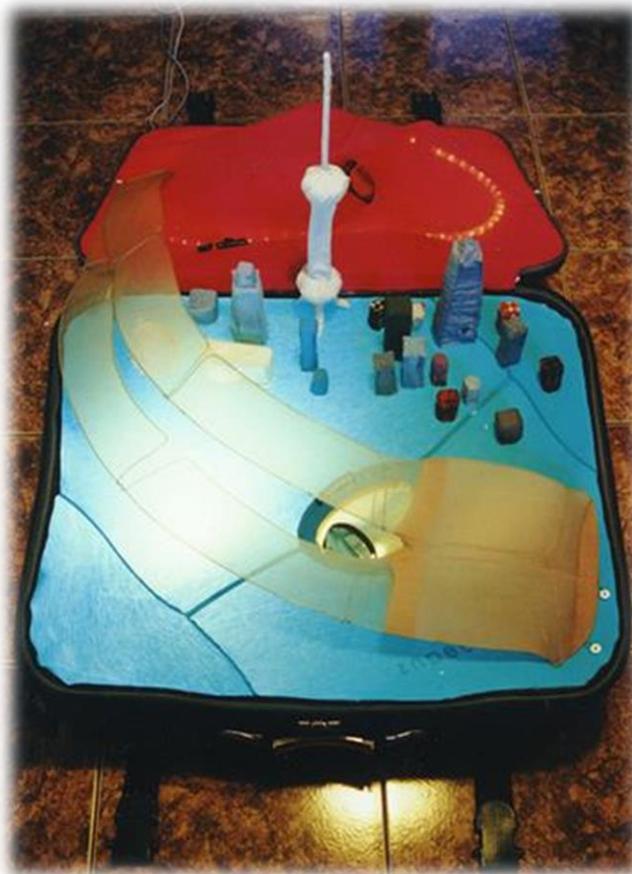


Fig. 18: Yin Xiuzhen. *Portable City: Shanghai*, 2002. Installation. Suitcases, used clothes, light, map, sound, 148 × 88 × 30 cm. Walker Art Centre, Minneapolis.



Fig.19: Yin Xiuzhen. *Portable City: Paris*, 2004. Installation. Suitcase, used clothes, light, map, sound, 148×88×30 cm. Sherman Contemporary Art Foundation, Sydney.



Fig. 20: Yin Xiuzhen. *Portable Cities*, 2001-present; the exhibition view at the Kunsthalle Düsseldorf, 2013. Suitcases, used clothes, light, map, sound, yarns and buttons. Kunsthalle Düsseldorf, Düsseldorf.



Fig. 21: Yin Xiuzhen. *Engine*, 2008. Installation. Old clothes, stainless steel, steel, 200(h) × 230(w) × 410(d) cm. Courtesy of Pace Beijing, Beijing.



Fig 22: Yin Xiuzhen. *Thought*, 2009. Installation. Old clothes and steel, 340(h) × 510 (w) × 370 (d) cm. Courtesy of Pace Beijing, Beijing.



Fig 23: Yin Xiuzhen. *Thought* (interior), 2009. Installation. Old clothes and steel, 340(h) × 510(w) × 370(d) cm. Courtesy of Pace Beijing, Beijing.

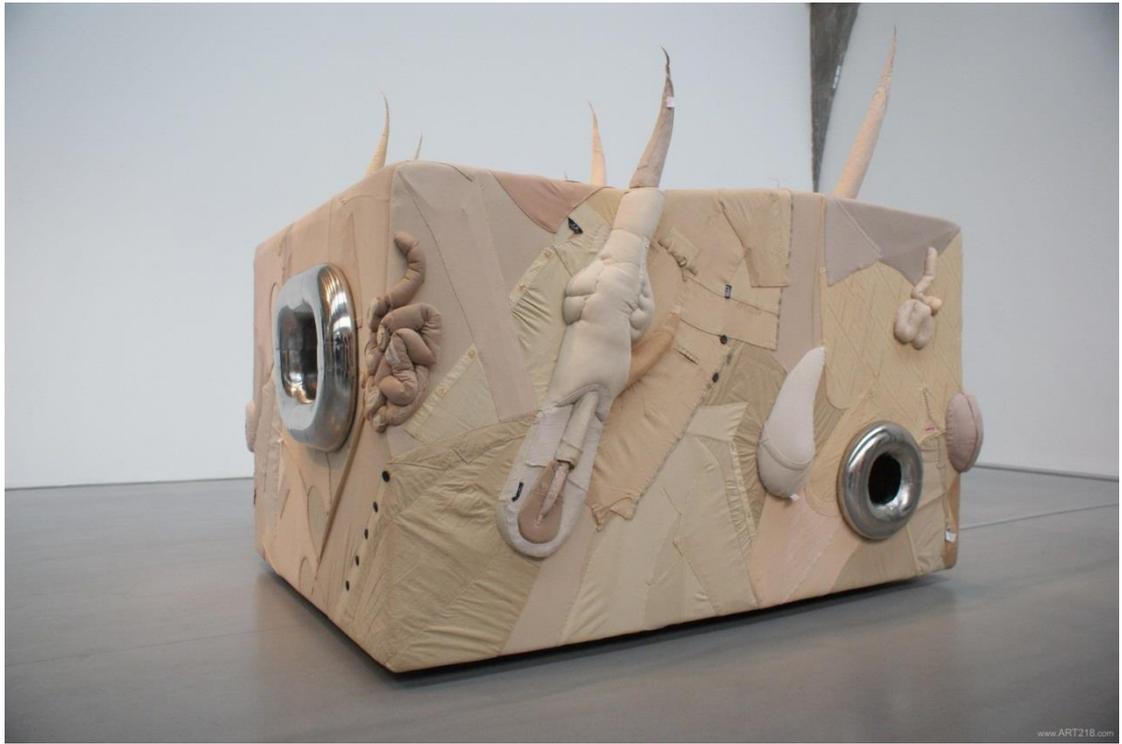


Fig. 24: Yin Xiuzhen. *Skin Cube*, 2009. Installation. Old clothes, lights, stainless steel, 174×207×158 cm. Courtesy of Pace Beijing, Beijing.



Fig. 25: Donald Rodney. *In the House of My Father*, 1996-1997. Photograph on paper mounted onto aluminium, 1220×1530 mm. The Estate of Donald G. Rodney, London.

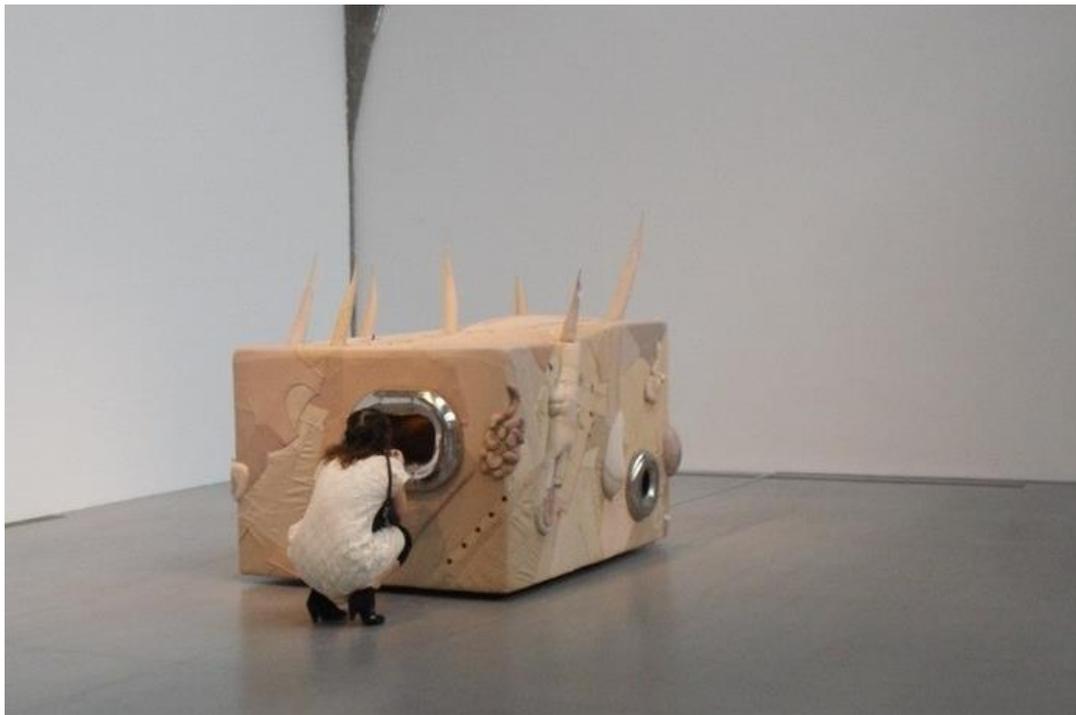


Fig. 26: Yin Xiuzhen. *Skin Cube* (with the presence of the viewer), 2009. Installation. Old clothes, lights, stainless steel, 174×207×158 cm. Courtesy of Pace Beijing, Beijing.



Fig. 27: Yin Xiuzhen. *Introspective Cavity* (the artist's hand script), 2008. Used clothes, stainless steel, mirror, sound, sponge, 425(h)×1500(w)×900 (d) cm. Courtesy of Pace Beijing, Beijing.



Fig. 28: Yin Xiuzhen. *Introspective Cavity*, 2008. Installation. Used clothes, stainless steel, mirror, sound, sponge, 425(h)×1500(w)×900 (d) cm. Courtesy of Pace Beijing, Beijing.



Fig. 29: Yin Xiuzhen. *Introspective Cavity* (interior), 2008. Installation. Used clothes, stainless steel, mirror, sound, sponge, 425(h)×1500(w)×900 (d) cm. Courtesy of Pace Beijing, Beijing.

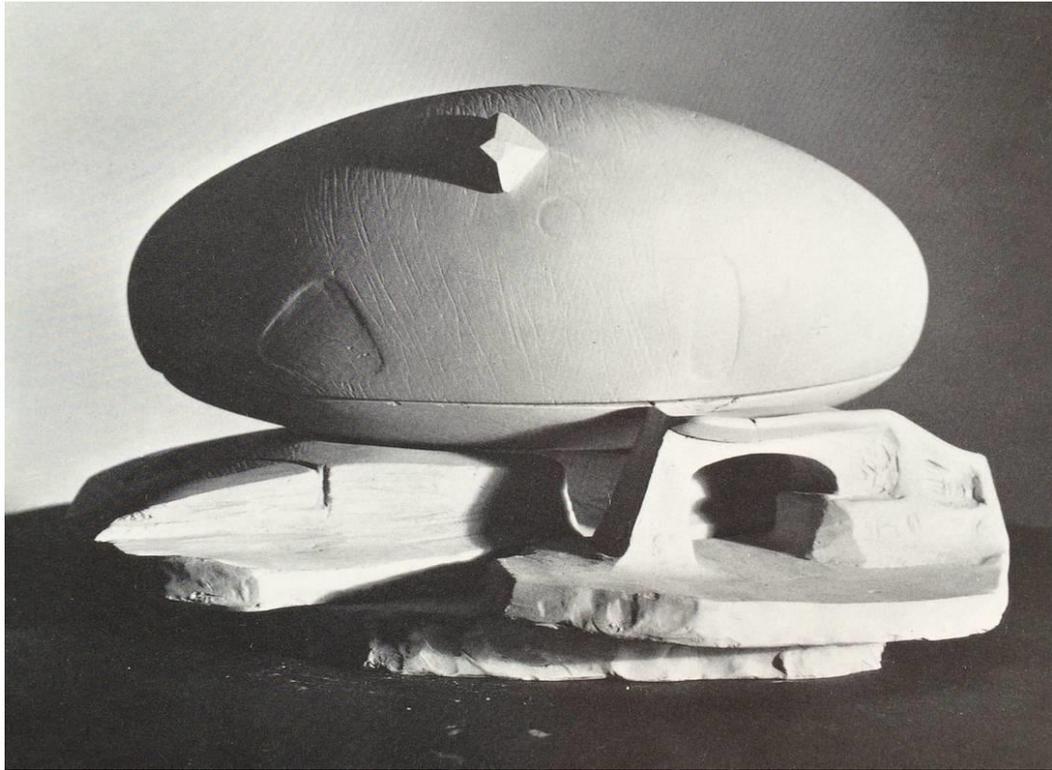


Fig. 30: Frederick Kiesler. *Endless House*, 1950. Architectural model. Austrian Frederick and Lillian Kiesler Private Foundation, Vienna.



Fig. 31: Naito Rei. *One Place on Earth* (interior), 1991. Installation. Rattan, bamboo, string, wire, woods, seeds, leaves, fruits, petals, shells, stones, sand, wax, felt, cotton cloth, fur, leather, glass, and other materials, 15 × 5.5 × 2.6 (h) m. Courtesy of the artist.



Fig. 32: Yin Xiuzhen. *Restroom W or Restroom (Women)*, 2006. Installation. Chandelier, concrete, plastic figure, bricks. REDCAT, Los Angeles.



Fig. 33: Carl Andre. *Fall*, 1968. Installation. Hot-rolled steel, 21 units, 1.8×14.9×1.8 m. Solomon R. Guggenheim Museum, New York.



Fig. 34: Yin Xiuzhen. *Restroom W or Restroom (Women)* (with the presence of viewers), 2006. Installation. Chandelier, concrete, plastic figure, bricks. REDCAT, Los Angeles.



Fig. 35: Yin Xiuzhen. *Restroom W or Restroom (Women)* (a close-up of the baby boy sculpture), 2006. Installation. Chandelier, concrete, plastic figure, bricks. REDCAT, Los Angeles.



Fig. 36: Yin Xiuzhen. *Beijing Opera*, 2001. Installation. Inkjet wallpaper, stools, sound. Hamburger Bahnhof Contemporary Art Museum, Berlin.



Fig. 37: Yin Xiuzhen. *Beijing Opera* (the exhibition view), 2001. Installation. Inkjet wallpaper, stools, sound. Hamburger Bahnhof Contemporary Art Museum, Berlin.



Fig. 38: Yin Xiuzhen. *Flying Machine*, 2008. Installation. Used clothes, stainless steel, steel planks, old aeroplane, tractor, Santana car, 1592×1220×353 cm. Shanghai Art Museum, Shanghai.



Fig. 39: Yin Xiuzhen. *Flying Machine* (the 3-D image), 2008. Installation. Used clothes, stainless steel, steel planks, old aeroplane, tractor, Santana car, 1592×1220×353 cm. Shanghai Art Museum, Shanghai.



Fig. 40: Yin Xiuzhen. *Flying Machine* (interior), 2008. Installation. Used clothes, stainless steel, steel planks, old aeroplane, tractor, Santana car, 1592×1220×353 cm. Shanghai Art Museum, Shanghai.



Fig. 41: Mona Hatoum. *Measures of Distance*, 1988. Video projection, sound, 15 minutes, 30 seconds. Courtesy of Mona Hatoum and White Cube Gallery, London.



Fig. 42: Mona Hatoum. *Quarters*, 1996. Installation. Mild steel, 275.5×516×516 cm, Each unit: 275.5×80.8×183 cm. Courtesy of White Cube Gallery, London.



Fig. 43: Robert Gober. *Pitched Crib*, 1987. Sculpture. Wood with enamel paint, 38.25×77×52 inches. Photo by D. James Dee. Courtesy of the artist and Paula Cooper Gallery, New York.



Fig. 44: Robert Gober. *X Playpen*, 1987. Sculpture. Wood and enamel paint, 68.6×94 ×94 cm. Photo by D. James Dee. Courtesy of the artist and Paula Cooper Gallery, New York.



Fig. 45: Mona Hatoum. *Incommunicado*, 1993. Sculpture. Mild steel and wire, 127× 49.5×95.5 cm. Tate Gallery, London.



Fig. 46: Mona Hatoum. *Untitled (Baalbeck Birdcage)*, 1999. Sculpture. Wood and galvanized steel, 309.88×297.18×195.58 cm. Alexander and Bonin Gallery, New York.



Fig. 47: Mona Hatoum. *Cage-à-deux*, 2002. Sculpture. Mild steel and painted MDF boards, 201.5×315×199.5 cm. Centro de Arte de Salamanca, Salamanca.



Fig. 48: Mona Hatoum. *Kapan*, 2012. Installation. Mild steel and glass, 156×300×330 cm. Photo: Hadiye Cang k e. ARTER, Istanbul, Turkey.



Fig. 49: Mona Hatoum. *La Grande Broyeuse (Mouli-Julienne x 17)*, 1999. Sculpture. Mild steel, 343 × 575 × 263 cm; disks 5 × 170 cm (diameter). le Creux de l'enfer, Thiers, France; Courtesy of Alexander and Bonin, New York.



Fig.50: Mona Hatoum. *Slicer*, 1999. Sculpture. Varnished steel and thermoformed plastic, 104 × 117.5 × 93.5 cm. le Creux de l'enfer, Thiers, France; Courtesy of Mona Hatoum and White Cube Gallery, London.



Fig. 51: Mona Hatoum. *Grater Divide*, 2002. Sculpture. Black finished steel, 204×3.5 cm, width variable. Centro de Arte de Salamanca, Salamanca.



Fig. 52: Mona Hatoum. *Sous Tension*, 1999. Installation. Table, kitchen utensils, light bulbs, electric wire, computerized dimmer unit, amplifier, mixer speakers, dimensions variable. le Creux de l'enfer, Thiers, France; Courtesy of the Artist and Alexander and Bonin, New York.



Fig. 53: Mona Hatoum. *Homebound*, 2000. Installation. Kitchen utensils, furniture, electric wire, computerised dimmer device, light bulbs, amplifier and two speakers, dimensions variable. Tate Gallery, London; Courtesy of White Cube Gallery, London.



Fig. 54: Mona Hatoum. *Mobile Home*, 2005. Installation. Furniture, household objects, suitcases, galvanized steel barriers, three electric motors and pulley system, 119 × 220 × 645 cm. Courtesy of Alexander and Bonin, New York.

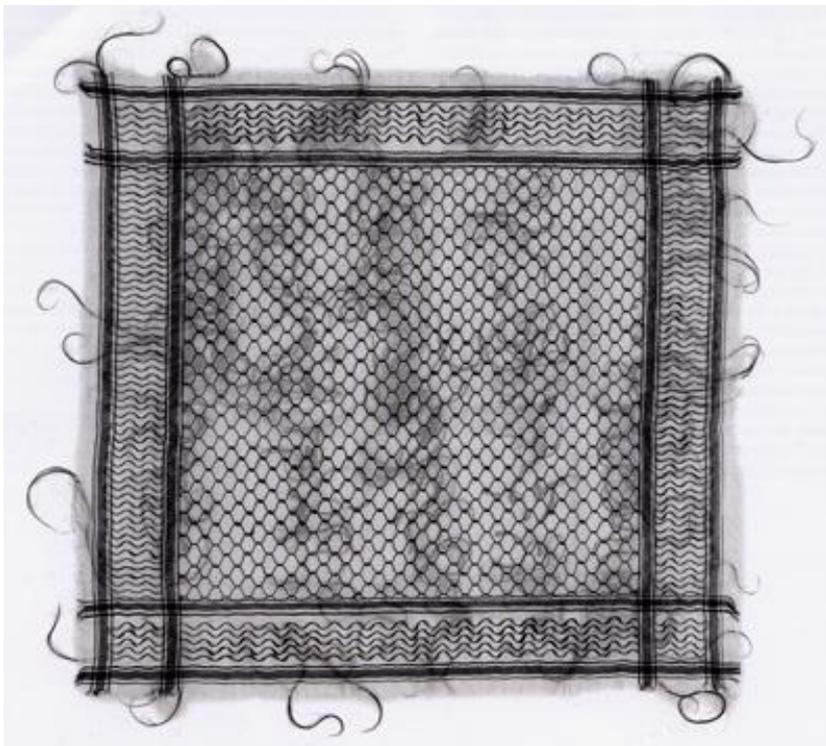


Fig. 55: Mona Hatoum. *Keffieh*, 1993-1999. Human hair on cotton fabric, 120 × 120 cm. Collection of Peter Norton, Santa Monica.



Fig. 56: Janine Antoni. *Loving Care*, 1992. Performance. Hair dye. Anthony d'Offay Gallery, London; Courtesy of Sandra Gering Gallery, New York.



Fig. 57: Doris Salcedo. *Unland: Audible in the Mouth*, 1998. Installation. Wood, silk thread and hair, 800×750×3150mm. Tate Foundation, London.



Fig. 58: Mona Hatoum. *Recollection*, 1995. Installation. Hair balls, strands of hair hung from the ceiling, wooden loom with woven hair, table and soap. Beguinage St. Elizabeth, Kortrijk, Belgium. Collection of De Vleeshal, Middelburg, The Netherlands.

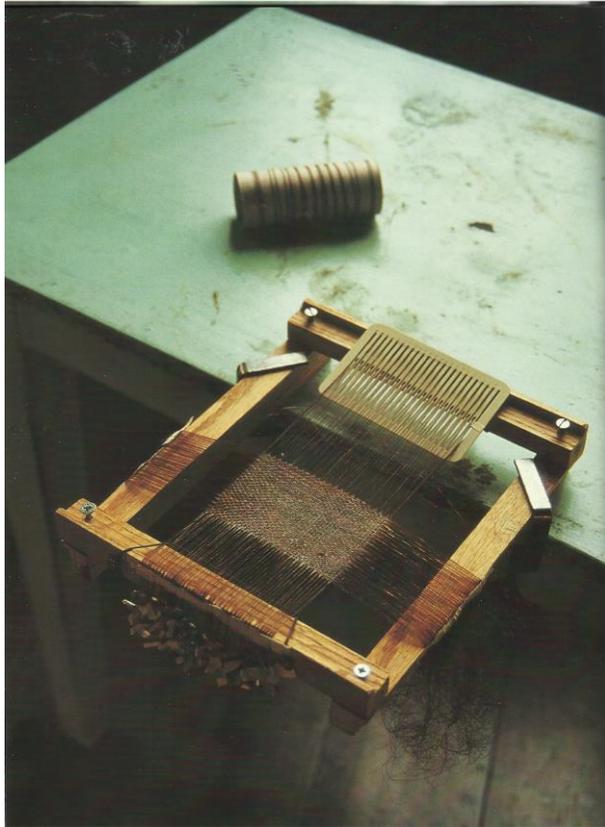


Fig. 59: Mona Hatoum. *Recollection* (detail), 1995. Installation. Hair balls, strands of hair hung from the ceiling, wooden loom with woven hair, table, soap. Beguinage St. Elizabeth, Kortrijk, Belgium. Collection of De Vleeshal, Middelburg, The Netherlands.



Fig. 60: Mona Hatoum. *Recollection* (detail), 1995. Installation. Hair balls, strands of hair hung from the ceiling, wooden loom with woven hair, table, soap. Beguinage St. Elizabeth, Kortrijk, Belgium. Collection of De Vleeshal, Middelburg, The Netherlands.



Fig. 61: Mona Hatoum. *Present Tense*, 1996. Installation. Soap and glass beads, 4.5 × 299 × 241 cm. Courtesy of Anadiel Gallery, Jerusalem.



Fig. 62: Mona Hatoum. *Afghan (red and black)*, 2008. Wool, 250 × 320 cm. Courtesy of Mona Hatoum and White Cube Gallery, London.



Fig. 63: Mona Hatoum. *Baluchi (Blue and Orange)*, 2008. Wool, 135×240 cm.
Courtesy of the artist and Galerie Max Hetzler, Berlin.

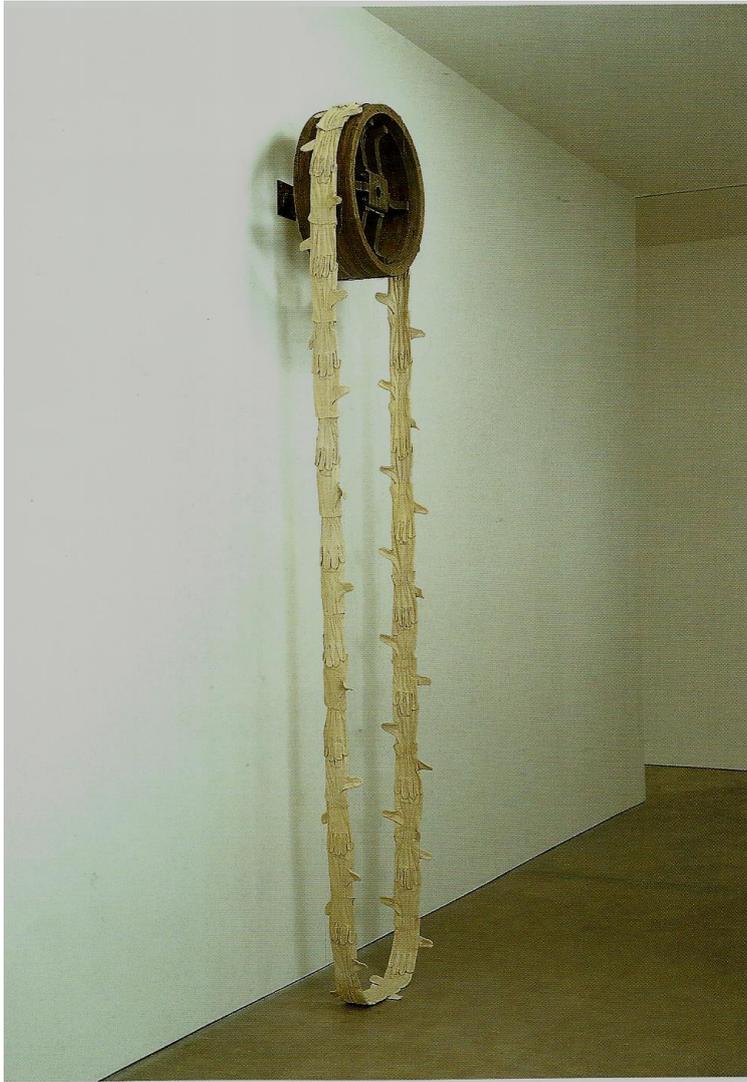


Fig. 64: Mona Hatoum. *Chain*, 1999. Installation. Leather gloves and nylon threads, 450×25×100 cm. Photograph: Joël Damase. le Creux de l'enfer, Centre d'art Contemporain, Thiers, France.

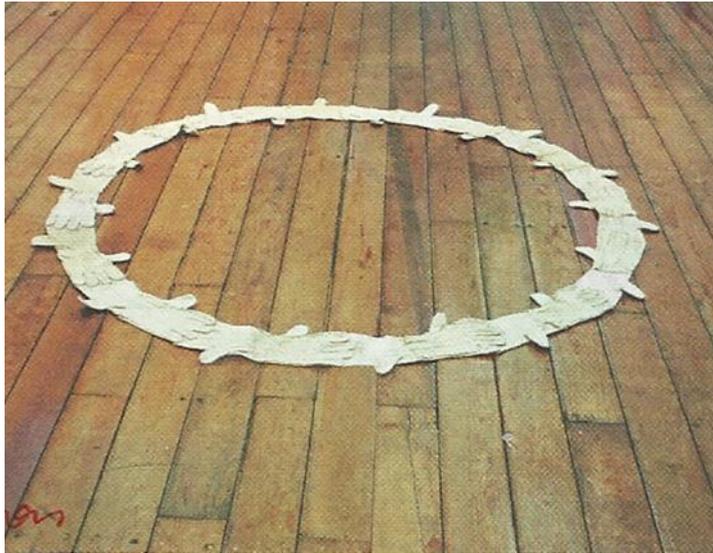


Fig. 65: Mona Hatoum. *Mano a mano*, 2001. Installation. Leather gloves and nylon threads, 1.5 × 190 cm diameter. Courtesy of Laboratorio Arte Alameda, Mexico City.



Fig. 66: Mona Hatoum. *Mano a mano* (detail), 2001. Installation. Leather gloves and nylon threads, 1.5 × 190 cm diameter. Courtesy of Laboratorio Arte Alameda, Mexico City.



Fig. 67: Nikki S. Lee. *The Seniors Project (13)*, 1999. Digital C-Print. Courtesy of the artist and Sikkema Jenkins & Co, New York.



Fig. 68: Nikki S. Lee. *The Young Japanese (East Village) Project (1)*, 1997. Digital C-Print. Courtesy of the artist and Sikkema Jenkins & Co, New York.



Fig. 69: Nikki S. Lee. *The Hispanic Project (13)*, 1998. Digital C-Print. Courtesy of the artist and Sikkema Jenkins & Co, New York.



Fig. 70: Nikki S. Lee. *The Exotic Dancers Project (2)*, 2000. Digital C-Print.
Courtesy of the artist and Sikkema Jenkins & Co, New York.



Fig. 71: Nikki S. Lee. *The Drag Queen Project (2)*, 1997. Digital C-Print. Courtesy of the artist and Sikkema Jenkins & Co, New York.



Fig. 72: Nikki S. Lee. *The Drag Queen Project (5)*, 1997. Digital C-Print. Courtesy of the artist and Sikkema Jenkins & Co, New York.



Fig. 73: Nikki S. Lee. *The Lesbian Project (11)*, 1997. Digital C-Print. Courtesy of the artist and Sikkema Jenkins & Co, New York.



Fig. 74: Nikki S. Lee. *The Lesbian Project (4)*, 1997. Digital C-Print. Courtesy of the artist and Sikkema Jenkins & Co, New York.



Fig. 75: Nikki S. Lee. *The Lesbian Project (14)*, 1997. Digital C-Print. Courtesy of the artist and Sikkema Jenkins & Co, New York.



Fig. 76: Nikki S. Lee. *The Lesbian Project (3)*, 1997. Digital C-Print. Courtesy of the artist and Sikkema Jenkins & Co, New York.



Fig. 77: Nikki S. Lee. *The Exotic Dancers Project (33)*, 2000. Digital C-Print. Courtesy of the artist and Sikkema Jenkins & Co, New York.



Fig. 78: Nikki S. Lee. *The Exotic Dancers Project (34)*, 2000. Digital C-Print. Courtesy of the artist and Sikkema Jenkins & Co, New York.



Fig. 79: Nikki S. Lee. *The Exotic Dancers Project (29)*, 2000. Digital C-Print. Courtesy of the artist and Sikkema Jenkins & Co, New York.



Fig. 80: Nikki S. Lee. *The Exotic Dancers Project (13)*, 2000. Digital C-Print. Courtesy of the artist and Sikkema Jenkins & Co, New York.



Fig. 81: Nikki S. Lee. *The Yuppie Project (4)*, 1998. Digital C-Print. Courtesy of the artist and Sikkema Jenkins & Co, New York.



Fig. 82: Nikki S. Lee. *The Yuppie Project (5)*, 1998. Digital C-Print. Courtesy of the artist and Sikkema Jenkins & Co, New York.



Fig. 83: Nikki S. Lee. *The Yuppie Project* (23), 1998. Digital C-Print. Courtesy of the artist and Sikkema Jenkins & Co, New York.



Fig. 84: Nikki S. Lee. *The Swinger Project* (4), 1999. Digital C-Print. Courtesy of the artist and Sikkema Jenkins & Co, New York.



Fig. 85: Nikki S. Lee. *The Swinger Project (53)*, 1999. Digital C-Print. Courtesy of the artist and Sikkema Jenkins & Co, New York.



Fig. 86: Nikki S. Lee. *The Hip Hop Project (1)*, 2001. Digital C-Print. Courtesy of the artist and Sikkema Jenkins & Co, New York.



Fig. 87: Nikki S. Lee. *The Hip Hop Project (19)*, 2001. Digital C-Print. Courtesy of the artist and Sikkema Jenkins & Co, New York.



Fig. 88: Nikki S. Lee. *The Hispanic Project (19)*, 1998. Digital C-Print. Courtesy of the artist and Sikkema Jenkins & Co, New York.



Fig. 89: Nikki S. Lee. *The Hispanic Project (1)*, 1998. Digital C-Print. Courtesy of the artist and Sikkema Jenkins & Co, New York.



Fig. 90: Nikki S. Lee. *The Hispanic Project (17)*, 1998. Digital C-Print. Courtesy of the artist and Sikkema Jenkins & Co, New York.



Fig. 91: Nikki S. Lee. *The Punk Project (7)*, 1997. Digital C-Print. Courtesy of the artist and Sikkema Jenkins & Co, New York.



Fig. 92: Nikki S. Lee. *The Punk Project (6)*, 1997. Digital C-Print. Courtesy of the artist and Sikkema Jenkins & Co, New York.



Fig. 93: Nikki S. Lee. *The Punk Project (1)*, 1997. Digital C-Print. Courtesy of the artist and Sikkema Jenkins & Co, New York.



Fig. 94: Nikki S. Lee. *The Young Japanese (East Village) Project (13)*, 1997. Digital C-Print. Courtesy of the artist and Sikkema Jenkins & Co, New York.



Fig. 95: Nikki S. Lee. *The Young Japanese (East Village) Project (11)*, 1997. Digital C-Print. Courtesy of the artist and Sikkema Jenkins & Co, New York.



Fig. 96: Nikki S. Lee. *The Schoolgirls Project (14)*, 2000. Digital C-Print. Courtesy of the artist and Sikkema Jenkins & Co, New York.



Fig. 97: Nikki S. Lee. *The Schoolgirls Project (3)*, 2000. Digital C-Print. Courtesy of the artist and Sikkema Jenkins & Co, New York.



Fig. 98: Nikki S. Lee. *The Schoolgirls Project (28)*, 2000. Digital C-Print. Courtesy of the artist and Sikkema Jenkins & Co, New York.



Fig. 99: Nikki S. Lee. *The Yuppie Project* (7) (8) (9) (10), 1998. Digital C-Print. Courtesy of the artist and Sikkema Jenkins & Co, New York.



Fig. 100: Do-Ho Suh. *Seoul Home/L.A. Home/New York Home/Baltimore Home/London Home/Seattle Home*, 1999. Installation. Silk, 149×240×240 inches. The Museum of Contemporary Art, Los Angeles; Courtesy of the Artist and Lehmann Maupin Gallery, New York.



Fig. 101: Do-Ho Suh. *Seoul Home/L.A. Home/New York Home/Baltimore Home/London Home/Seattle Home*, 1999. Installation. Silk, aluminium frame, 379×610×610 cm. The Korean Cultural Centre, Los Angeles.

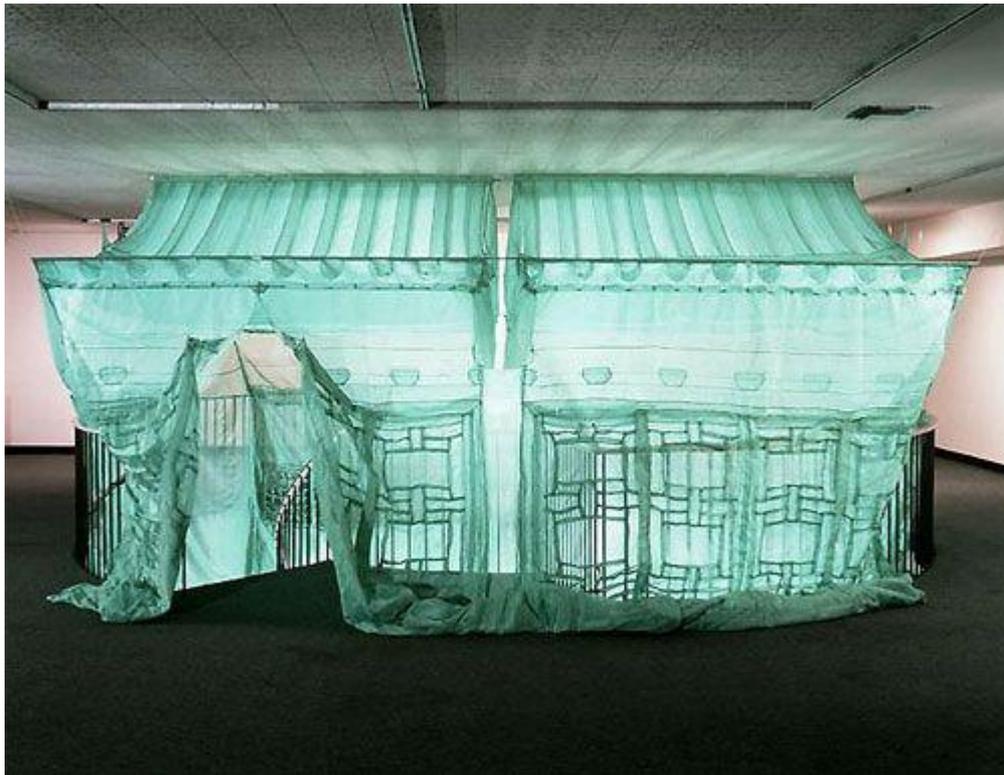


Fig. 102: Do-Ho Suh. *Seoul Home/L.A. Home/New York Home/Baltimore Home/London Home/Seattle Home*, 1999. Installation. Silk, aluminium frame. 379×610×610 cm. The Korean Cultural Centre, Los Angeles.



Fig. 103: Do-Ho Suh. *348 West 22nd Street, apt. A, New York, NY10011*, Edition of 2, 2000. Installation. Translucent nylon, 245×430×690 cm. Courtesy of the artist and Lehmann Maupin Gallery, New York.



Fig. 104: Yoko Ono. *Wish Tree*, 1996; the installation view at the Japan Society, New York, 2007. Living tree, wishes written by viewers in pen on paper tags with string, printed instructions. Courtesy of the artist.

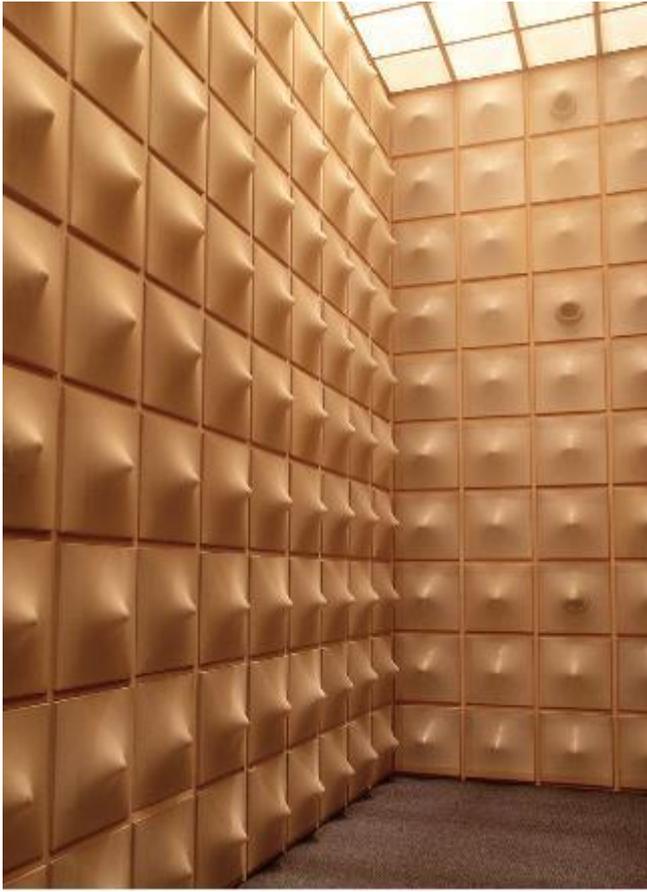


Fig. 105: Emiko Kasahara. *SHEER*, 2007. Installation. Nylon stocking, acrylic, wood, sound system, 7×12×4 feet. The Japan Society, New York.



Fig. 106: On megumi Akiyoshi. *Flower Gallery*, 2007. Mixed media, 2.7×4.9×3m. The Japan Society, New York.



Fig. 107: Emily Jacir. *Where We Come From*, 2001-2003, detail (Munir). Mixed media installation. American passport, 30 texts, 32 c-prints and 1 video. Text (Munir). 24×29 cm; photo (Munir): 38×50.8 cm. Photo: Bill Orcutt. Courtesy of Emily Jacir.

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