

**A HOUSE PERFORMS**

A Dissertation

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By  
Lisa Flanagan  
B.A., University of Texas, 1990  
M.A., Louisiana State University, 2002  
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## ABSTRACT

This study analyses and performs a series of histories about a semi-abandoned Victorian house located in downtown Baton Rouge, Louisiana. I engage Gregory Ulmer's inter-discursive and inter-subjective process of historiography, the *mystory*, as a way of viewing and doing research. *Mystory* allows for research through diverse perspectives of professional, popular and personal discourses, which activates the pleasures and problems of knowledge production by urging invention and creative expression. Significance is discovered in less determined, more localized, ways of knowing that avoid fixing the house in terms of predetermined "historic" values.

Material culture and archives like the Sanborn Fire Insurance Maps discussed in Chapter Three are viewed as active or performance processes that affect and are affected by the shifting circumstances of history and culture. The partialities of all language forms function as miniatures of what they represent. Texts and performances are constructed through *bricolage* of the materials gathered. These metonymic expressions call attention to certain details, while eliding or ignoring others, and are essential to the knowledge and structures produced from them.

In constructing 310 Convention on the page and stage, I understand performance in Richard Schechner's terms as "restored behavior," an action or expression that draws on and refers to its past. I call on Martin Heidegger's notions of dwelling and building as fundamental states of human experience through which we learn about the world around us, make meaning from it, and understand our place(s) in it. Gaston Bachelard furthers the Heideggerian impulse with *topophilia*, or the desire to protect and preserve loved spaces if only in imagination. Jacques Derrida provides ways to structure arguments through *chora*, the spacing of text upon the page, and also contributes to the archive as a site that overflows with excess through its collection, composition, and coding. Through these and other discourses, I discover and produce ways to

view this “insignificant” house differently by acknowledging its many histories. I also recognize how performance on the page and stage, already embedded in loss through what cannot be restored, reflects the possibilities and limitations of its metonymic expression.

## CHAPTER ONE PERFORMING HOUSE WORK

The grand opulence of high ceilings, ornately carved crown mouldings, Georgian sash windows, and operable cypress shutters offer a rare kind satisfaction. And when the plaster of those high ceilings has a few cracks, the crown mouldings develop a crazed finish, the sash rattles wildly in the wind, and the shutters lose some of their louvers, we feel the inevitable effects of age and are enraptured by the gravity of human experience that all those telltale signs evoke. . . . One develops a rapport with and discrimination about old things: whereas the termite infestation may need to be dealt with at any expense, perhaps the peeling paint can be integrated into the motif

– Richard Sexton and Randolph Delehanty  
*New Orleans: Elegance and Decadence* (3)



Figure 1. *House at 310 Convention Street* April 7, 2003 (photo by the author)

I saw the house over fifteen years ago now, sitting in a state of splendid decay, a strange anomaly between a high rise and a parking lot in downtown Baton Rouge. The building seemed to be abandoned until the owner made cosmetic changes to the exterior a few years ago, leaving it otherwise untouched. The texture of the ashen wood and chipped paint façade, the lacy scalloped shell of cornice molding, the floral top curls of Corinthian columns, and the rhythmic undulation of the building as it shifts from regular right angles to trapezoidal juts of bay windows

create patterns of attraction that draw me to it. I am compelled by its beauty. I am also compelled by the stories the house tells of its heyday in the early twentieth century when it was one of many homes thriving amidst the bustle of a mixed use city center. My attraction is of a familial nature too. In my lifetime, I have lived in many older houses, but never ones with roots beyond my immediate family. Nevertheless, I frequently speculate as to the stories they carry within their walls and search for traces of the previous inhabitants in the nooks and crannies of each dwelling. Having no homestead for my family's genealogy, I often wonder why those connected with this particular place would seem both to shut it away and abandon it to the whims of time.

As I watch (over) the house, I am "hooked" by its story and survival, by the way the house makes me think, feel, and imagine, and by the archival documents, literary texts and popular materials, anecdotes and photographs I have drawn on to help me understand the house and my relationship to it. The house and the materials I have collected and composed over the years lure me into a space for dwelling on the significance of a place that in conventional terms is relatively insignificant. The house bears no connections to a famous person and, rundown as it is and impure in architectural style, it is not a house of historic importance. Save for legal documents, conveyance records and the like, nothing has been written about it. Further, I have never been in the house and, since its cosmetic update in 2003 when a chain link fence was installed around it, I find it difficult to get close to it. I tend to the house from afar. I dwell on it, in the sense of "sparing and preserving . . . its nature" and in the sense of my "stay" as a mortal "on this earth" (Heidegger 147). Prompted by the house, my choice to dwell is enacted in this document, which is as much about the process of dwelling as it is about the actual dwelling itself. Profound as that may sound, I also understand my dwelling as akin in process and

temperament to a big fish story (or a big fish out of water story) in so far as the subject comes into being by how the tale – a research tale in this case – is told.

### THE PROJECT

My project centers around a semi-abandoned Victorian house located at 310 Convention Street in downtown Baton Rouge, Louisiana. I have no direct connection to the place, but my feeling of attachment is strong just the same. To better understand my attraction, I approach the house from a number of different perspectives, effectively writing a history or a series of histories about the house, my research concerning it, and my performances of both here. A prevailing perspective, then, is that of my home discipline, performance studies, although many other perspectives enter the tale too. Additional perspectives include those of my secondary discipline, philosophy, the poetics and politics of material culture, and historical documentation concerning the house at 310 Convention. I also view the house through literary texts, particularly poems; popular culture materials such as children's stories and song lyrics; personal memories, anecdotes, and photographs; and live performances in which I staged the house or a manifestation of it.

Taken together, the diverse perspectives and discourses result in a mode of creative research that Gregory Ulmer terms a mystory, which I discuss more fully below. Briefly, a mystory is a method of historiography that asks the researcher to engage in the inter-discursive and inter-subjective processes by means of which texts, cultures, and histories are made. The method activates the pleasures and problems of textual and, thereby, knowledge production, urging an inventive process of exploration and expression. In this way, the method strives to restore creative-artistic practices to traditional histories or, as the case may be, to our perception and study of them, citing such practices not only in terms of discrete acts and events, but as technologies that affect how we think and behave.



The significance of the study lies in researching material culture, an “insignificant” house in this case, by means of the noted method. By insisting on a research process of exploration, the method helps me avoid fixing the house in terms of predetermined categories of “historic” meaning and value. Rather, a less determined process of research gives rise to surprising (as well as appropriate) discoveries regarding the histories of this particular house as engaged by this particular researcher. Knowledge is discovered more so than given; localized more so than determined by national or global narratives. However, as a result, the study offers a way that material culture might be viewed and studied as an active process – a performance process – that affects and is affected by the shifting circumstances of history and culture. In turn, the intersection of performance with material culture (and other perspectives too) contributes to our understanding of the possibilities and limitations of performance as a way of dwelling.

At the end of the chapter, I expand on some of the aforementioned points although, in light of the method, the precise significance of the study is discovered over its course. A few questions that anticipate significance and also guide my study include: how does a house perform? How might I perform it? How do archives, specifically maps, perform? How might they serve as models for doing research and/as performance? Indicative of the partiality of all language forms, how might the miniature (e.g., a doll house) help me understand how we perform place and space and thereby remember and forget? How do we dwell so as to build just and healthy futures for ourselves? What are the possibilities and limitations of performance in the processes of dwelling and rebuilding?

#### AN INTRODUCTION TO THE SUBJECT

I have composed the study so that it represents my process of discovering how to research the house and, in turn, perform the discoveries on the page. Since I hope to engage the reader in the process, I am reluctant to reveal too much about the house at this time. Instead, I

will share my initial research, what I knew about the house before I decided to study it in the un/determined way that I have. My introduction is based on my observation of the material house, conveyance, sales, and tax records that document ownership of the lot and house, and the Sanborn Fire Insurance Maps. The maps were developed and published by the Sanborn Map Company from 1867 through 1970 and used by insurance companies to assess the risk of insuring buildings in cities and towns across the US.

Absent from the 1903 Sanborn Map, the house suddenly appears on the 1908 map, which suggests it was built at some point during the intervening years. It was and is a two story structure, running two rooms wide and, it appears, three rooms deep. From the house's point of view, it sports bay windows on the right front and side, and porches on the left front and side. It was built upon wood trim on brick piers and, while damaged in places, it retains its original weatherboard siding – i.e., long narrow boards that are slightly thick at the top. Alterations to the house are indicated on later Sanborn Maps and are noticeable today as they don't quite adhere to the Victorian style. They are, as it were, misfits. Alterations include a glass enclosed porch covering the front and side porch areas, a one story room that runs along the left side of the house, a one story entranceway at the back left corner, and a two story, bay shaped, screened porch on the back right. In 2003, the house underwent exterior renovations, which included repairs to the siding, clean up of the spindle work trim on the decorative trusses beneath the gables and in the bay window overhangs (McAlester 264), new reflective windows, a yellow coat of paint, and a chain link fence erected around the whole of the house. The fence has yet to be removed. And the house bears up under its inscriptions: vacant and unsound, owned and unloved. I want to tear it down.

The perpetrators of the fence are the current owners of the house, R. Russell McMahon and his daughter, Claudia “Barbe” McMahon. I gain a degree of relief, however, when I recall

that the history of the house dates back beyond the control of the McMahons. Drawing on conveyance, sales, and tax records held in the Baton Rouge Courthouse, I track a path backwards from 2008 to 1854, one document leading to the next and then the next, as transmitted through computer records preceded by typescripts preceded by microfiches preceded by (photocopied) longhand script – discovering at the “end” of it all that the 310 property was first owned by one William Piku. Actually, the fellow’s name was Pike, but the old records are a puzzle, difficult to decipher due to the legalese and formal handwritten script. I discover my error while reading *River Capitol: An Illustrated History of Baton Rouge* by Mark Carleton. The informative book traces the developments and developers of Baton Rouge from its colonial beginnings through the late 1970’s. Mr. Pike was a wealthy banker, merchant, and entrepreneur, serving as president of the New Orleans and Baton Rouge Railroad (Carleton 72). From 1861 to 1900, he owned the one and only theater in Baton Rouge, which was variously called Pike’s Hall, Pike’s Opera House, or the Third Street Theater (Carleton 99). Although Mr. Pike did not build the house at 310 Convention, his position and wealth suggest the property was lucrative.

On May 15, 1902, the heirs of William Pike sold the lot to Dr. John Russell Fridge for \$1225 and, some time between 1903 and 1908, Dr. Fridge built the house that now stands there, placing a sign over the front door that read and still reads, “J. R. Fridge, M. D.” According to the conveyance records, the house was passed from Dr. Fridge to Mrs. Fridge, to their daughter and son-in-law, Pearl F. and Dr. Rhett G. McMahon, who passed it to their son, R. Russell McMahon, who now shares joint ownership with his daughter, Claudia “Barbe” McMahon. An old family with deep roots in the city, the McMahons own and manage a number of properties in downtown Baton Rouge. As I detail in Chapter Two, Barbe is a particularly “interesting” woman who has hooked more than one person into pointed debates regarding who has the authority to preserve old buildings and not. For a while, she hooked me too.

In 2002, the property at 310 Convention was assessed. It measured 64' on the south side of Convention by 160' deep, less 12' by 32' at the southeast corner of the lot. The land was valued at \$7,150 and improvements to the house at \$1000 for a grand total of \$8,150 on June 3 2002, when the McMahons incorporated the house as a limited liability company, calling it "Big House 310."

## METHOD

The mystery method was developed or, more accurately, articulated *as* a research process by the mass media scholar and cultural critic, Gregory Ulmer. As a research episteme and praxis – a way of viewing and doing research – the method is not new and current examples of it are multiple and diverse, ranging across disciplines in academic scholarship and popular culture expressions.<sup>1</sup> Compelled by these examples of what he calls creative research, Ulmer proceeded to identify and systematize the recurring elements he found in the examples into a method, terming the result "textshop pedagogy" or "mystoriography" or, simply, the mystery.

As I noted previously, a mystery is a mode of creative research that engages the researcher in the problems and pleasures of producing text and, thereby, knowledge too – or, as Foucault following Nietzsche might have it, the politics of laying claim to knowledge. In an attempt to recognize and activate rather than evade the politics of textuality, or inter-textuality to be precise, the mystery researcher aims to compose a document that is clearly a multi-sourced, multi-perspective and, for Ulmer, a multi-media production, such as a video or on-line event. As Michael Bowman and Ruth Laurion Bowman demonstrate in their translation of the mystery to live performance, a mystery on the page and stage are multi-media/mediated events too.

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<sup>1</sup> See, for example, Barthes, *A Lover's Discourse*; Michael Bowman, "Killing Dillinger;" Bowman and Bowman, "On the Bias;" Morris; Sebald; and Suchy.

My understanding and discussion of the mystory principles and practices is indebted to Bowman and Bowman's essay "Performing the 'Mystory': A Text Shop in Autoperformance" in which they define the key terms and concepts of the mystory and discuss their implementation of the method in the performance studies classroom. As a neologism, mystory alludes to its multiple texture. It is a term that intermingles history (or herstory), mystery, and one's own story. In the method, history is understood "as both a story of the past and a professional discourse that enables and constrains how the past is represented" (164). Mystery refers to the popular culture genre of detective fiction, which serves as an analogy for scholarly research: with spyglass in hand, the researcher tracks diverse, sometimes inconsequential clues in an effort to solve a problem or draw in/significant conclusions. The integration of one's own story is understood as the inevitable result of selecting and writing about a given subject. As with the reflexive tendencies in modern art (literary and otherwise) and the inter-subjective imperative in contemporary art, the mystory encourages the researcher to acknowledge how her story and discourses are enciphered in and through the given subject and the materials she brings to bear on it and, vice versa, how the subject and materials are enciphered through one's self (or storied self) and rhetoric. Ideally, the researcher finds creative, inventive ways to do this; to articulate the inter-subjective relationship without privileging her own subjectivity.

The components of history, mystery, and autobiography direct attention to the practical ingredients of a mystory research project. Typically, the researcher draws on and writes in terms of three general domains of discourse: professional, popular, and personal. Professional discourse articulates any branch of formal knowledge or expertise the researcher may hold or draw on in her research. For instance, in this study, I call upon performance studies, philosophy, and the poetics and politics of material culture. Popular discourse includes both pop cultural forms, such as those found in music, television, magazines, novels, fashion, and film, and more

traditional resources, such as community stories, oral histories, family lore, jokes, and gossip. Personal discourse refers to one's individual memories, thoughts, feelings, and experiences.

By including diverse perspectives and discourses, broader political aims are realized. Namely, the inclusion insists that the history or representation of the subject is constituted not only by professional discourses (as some scholarly texts might lead us to believe), but by diverse people talking about and enacting the subject in diverse often divergent ways. As Foucault on genealogy tells us, "if the [researcher] listens to history," she finds that it is a "profusion of entangled events . . . fabricated in a piecemeal fashion" in response to random conflicts by individuals and groups of disparate inclinations ("Nietzsche, Genealogy, History" 142, 152, 155). Like the genealogist, there is no doubt that the mystorian structures (makes some analytical sense and order of) the tangled web she finds, however, not to the extent that the differences within the web disappear. Indeed, aspects of the mystory process can prove to entangle the researcher, more so than not, in the profusion of people, events, stories, and discourses she discovers.

A key tool of entanglement and analysis entails writing in the mode, genre, or style of the specific discourses the researcher finds or chooses to use. Following Roland Barthes's lead that "every text contains a set of instructions for making another text" (*S/Z* 4), the researcher may adapt or even transform research materials in terms of other texts or text types and their language conventions. Needless to say, this tactic is no different from writing in the style of professional academic discourse, which of course we do all the time. Although the researcher is expected to integrate professional discourses into her work (informed as she is by them), other models of writing and thinking are available too. She can compose in the genre and style of the personal anecdote, family gossip, a pop up book, maps, poetry and song lyrics, the fairytale, or detective thriller, as I do in this study. Similarly, the researcher is encouraged to rewrite rather than

reproduce her personal responses to the subject – e.g., those associative memories, experiences, and stories that may arise. Although any auto-discourse rewrites the life it may seem to represent, the use of quite conspicuous models foreground the constructed aspects of the self and/in writing as compared to the concealment of one’s rhetoric in the adoption of a neutral or objective stance or, in some cases, that of the true hence credible self. The self then is not an assumed entity in this method; rather, it is a part of the mystery to be investigated. In this way, the mystery adopts what might be considered a more impersonal, inter-textual approach to self and self-expression in scholarship.

(Re)writing in terms of models encourages researchers to produce as well as report knowledge. In pedagogical terms, the researcher learns not only how to describe and analyze the inventions of others, but to invent something herself. And, throughout the process, the lesson is that analysis, imagination, and imitation are all integral parts of invention. Through an integration and juxtaposition of multiple forms of discourse and a more writerly approach in using these forms to generate new texts, the method allows for a heuritic as well as a hermeneutic approach to research. That is, the method is designed to generate sudden flashes of insight or illumination – “eureka experiences” or moments as Ulmer calls them (*Heuristics* 142) – more so than produce interpretations of source texts that one defends in light of some predetermined aim. To facilitate this approach, the researcher is encouraged to take a pedestrian or touristic view and attitude towards the research, moving around in and experiencing the subject as an inexpert, at ground level if you will rather than from an overhead view. The idea here, of course, is to retain an inclusive attitude toward the diverse materials and perspectives one discovers rather than accept or reject them in light of a predetermined aim. As I describe in Chapter Two, one of the many eureka moments I experienced in my research concerns the prickly figure of Barbe McMahan. While Barbe assumes the front stage role in her partnership

with her father, her interactions with the public are rare but startling. Ultimately, my attempts to gain access to the house are tied up in the mystery of “herstory,” sparking my curiosity, jealousy, and ire.

In their essay, Bowman and Bowman discuss how they translated Ulmer’s mystery to the performance classroom. Points they make that are particularly pertinent to my application of a performance perspective in this study include starting a process from an undetermined point of not knowing so as to discover and make knowledge through practical experimentation. This approach describes how a house I spied on for so many years kept popping up as a topic for research in diverse courses and projects in performance studies, anthropology, cultural geography, and architecture. A second pertinent feature is the importance of imitation to invention, which becomes integral in my use of *bricolage* to construct texts about the house from the research materials I have gathered. Bowman and Bowman expand further on the above concepts by calling on Barthes’s notion that “every text contains a set of ‘instructions’ for making another text” (*S/Z* 4). In each of the following chapters, I call on a material and linguistic trope (e.g., a house of wax) to inform how I view and compose the materials in the chapter, always working within the possibilities and limitations that the figure offers in constructing the text.

For this study, I understand performance in Richard Schechner’s terms as “restored behavior” (36). Culture and context specific, restored behavior is an action or expression that draws on and refers to its past. In some way, the action or expression infers it has been done before, although with slight to extreme differences. In these terms, we can say 310 Convention performs since the architect drew on the conventions of Victorian style (as applied in “kit houses” made available through rail commerce) in his design and building of the house, restoring and displaying them to the public eye. The public, in turn, appreciates and evaluates the house in



terms of its draw on and inventive play with the conventions. Over the years, the performance of additional styles (e.g., the glassed in porch) depreciates the “historic” value of the house for some audiences, such as architectural preservationists, since the value is based on notions of preserving “authentic” and “origin-al” styles. We might say the house performs an impure style and, hence, risks its survival. Rather than accept “historic” at face value, we might redirect our energies and ask what an assemblage of Victoriana memories and counter memories tell us about performing house-history-culture in Baton Rouge over the span of fifty or so years. Thereby, we make meaning of the values rather than accept them outright.

Another key “professional” perspective I bring to and drawn on in my research of the house is philosophy, specifically phenomenology and Jacques Derrida’s post-structural theories of language and language operations. These philosophies offer theoretical foundations for the various threads of discussion on the significance and implications of my research concerning 310. Additionally, each philosopher provides key metaphors and methodologies for doing research and translating it into text.

Martin Heidegger was a German philosopher who approached notions of being through many lenses, including existentialism and phenomenology. He introduced the paired notions of building and dwelling, which translate as preserving, sparing, or staying with things, be they structures we erect, relations we form, or the earth we inhabit. Dwelling and building are fundamental states of human experience through which we can learn about the world around us, make meaning from it, and understand our place(s) in it. In all phases of my research, I learn to build and dwell on the materials and associations that arise in the process of constructing my text, as well as the models and installations that accompany its production. Preserving also is important to my research in terms of Heidegger’s emphasis on the necessity of community or co-created values in the process of preservation.

Gaston Bachelard was a French contemporary of Heidegger who furthered Heidegger's phenomenological view on the poetics of experiential sense making by providing conceptual models for the human experience of space. Bachelard calls for an understanding of architecture and space generally through one's experiences and dreams of a certain place or space. Poetic forms and imagery are his chosen mode of expressing such experiences. In particular, Bachelard provides my research with the notion of *topophilia*, or the desire to protect and preserve spaces we love if only in our imaginations. Bachelard extends this loving affinity to the miniature as demonstrated by the miniaturist's careful attention to crafting descriptive details. Over the course of my research, I explored the miniature in a fairly explicit way by building a three-dimensional model of 310, which I discuss in the study.

Jacques Derrida's philosophy provides ways to structure the language of my arguments on the page and for understanding those structures as a play of meanings, or *differance*, which is implicit in signification. Derrida offers the chain of difference that occurs in naming where "metaphor shapes and undermines the proper name" (*Of Grammatology* 89), which correlates to my inability to access the house in literal terms and stabilize its meanings here. The play of meanings has generative potential in Derrida's notion of *chora*. *Chora* both recognizes and delights in the spacing of text upon the page, a spacing that is inherent to the structure of text and analogous to the process of deferral in language itself. Derrida also offers the concept of the archive as a site that overflows with excess despite and because of what the archivist includes and leaves out in her collection, composition, and coding of the archive. In Chapter Three, I apply this idea in my interpretation and performance of the Sanborn Maps, exploring the maps in terms of their structures of economy and excess.

The language and practices of material culture offer one way for me to get inside the structures of 310 Convention, if not inside the actual house. By studying the vernacular features

of the architecture, I can access not only the material aspects of the house's design, but also the broader historical and cultural implications or imprints embedded in the material choices. The archives I use in my research, particularly the Sanborn Maps, provide information on the material culture they document, the values implicit to producing the maps over time, and how the maps function as metonym. Such aspects influence how I think and write about 310 here. My research of the material culture of the house also requires me to recognize and claim my position in the genealogical histories or mystory I construct. Implications as to what I study and why emerge to the fore in Chapter Five when I discuss 310 Convention in light of the enormous loss of material, familial, and cultural home-places in the wake of the hurricanes that hit the Gulf coast in 2005.

In the following section, I anticipate my application of the mystory method and the diverse perspectives I discussed or inferred above by offering brief summaries of each chapter. Following Barthes's suggestion that every text contains a model for making a new text, I conceived each chapter in terms of a house trope that I discovered over the course of my research and that seemed appropriate to the material and issues in each chapter.

## CHAPTER SUMMARIES

In Chapter Two: Pop Up House, I launch my investigation of how I might research 310 and, like a pop up book, my discoveries are often surprising. The resources and tools I discover activate the house as a constantly shifting subject of research, a transformative site that allows the house to stand up and out for me. I draw on Martin Heidegger's notions of dwelling and building to preserve my experiences of the house through acts of the imagination, construction, and transformation. Nietzsche and Derrida provide the metaphor of the chain as a way to understand how individual moments or words are like links that are only as strong as their interconnections, which then results in the construction of language and history. Derrida also is

a key figure in my understanding of *chora*, a model for how language works on the page to merge being and becoming through transformation.

In Chapter Three: House of Wax, I draw on the metaphor of the archive as a hive that contains wax comb structures that support and give rise to the honeyed knowledge contained within. I use the figure to guide my collection and composition of the hard bound and digital archives of the Sanborn Fire Insurance Maps, concentrating on how the maps document 310 and its surrounding neighborhood over time. I learn that the maps perform in terms of a structure of economy, as indicated by their metonymic use of language, and an alternative or anti-structure of excess, as indicated by the gaps and contradictions that arise. The maps provide a structure for composing a three-dimensional model of the house that performs the metonymic function of the archive in and as miniature.

In Chapter Four: Doll House, I recall and emphasize the idea of the miniature, re-conceiving its perceived limitations as potential strengths for generative meaning making. The concepts and practices of miniaturization are used to view the three-dimensional model of the house as staged alongside three other pieces in a performance installation concerned with “places that evoke a sense of the past.” Installation functions as an act of preservation in Heidegger’s terms by encouraging others to stand within the space of the research and become a part of its co-creation. Derrida’s notion of play is important in addressing the “disruption of presence” (*Writing and Difference* 292), or what cannot be made present in the spaces of the page or stage, as miniature. To conclude, I connect my discussion of the miniature to Bachelard’s notion of *topophilia* or a love of space.

In Chapter Five: House of Cards, I introduce the metaphor of a house of cards, observing that balance and friction, patience and time are key factors in building a house of cards that is relatively stable. I follow Heidegger’s lead and wager, or risk, my research project to broader

issues of rebuilding homes and communities in the aftermath of the 2005 hurricanes that ravaged the Gulf coast. I begin by discussing a film about loss and hope composed shortly after the storms by two students from the New Orleans area. The students' project forced me to review 310 in light of priorities and issues of rebuilding and preservation. I proceed to discuss a fundraiser for displaced artists in which I and 310 Convention played a part, reflecting on the diverse experiences and expressions of the participants as they (also) contributed to an event of *communitas*. The creative potential of the metonym emerges to the fore in my discussion of how 310 operates in terms of the issues that concern me in this chapter and, in conclusion, I discover that an "art of losing" may help us rebuild our homes and communities in just and healthy ways.

In Chapter Six: A Full House, I highlight the theoretical and practical implications of the study for performance research and expression. The pop up house of possibilities allows for a multiplicity of positions and choices in doing and expressing research. The processes of transformation and *bricolage* demonstrate the embedded flexibility of structures and suggest how we might take advantage of the same. Transformation also is evident in *chora* or the imaginative building and spacing of language on the page and in performance. The house of wax provides a metaphor for the archive in action, as a structure always in movement in relation to the histories the archivist-researcher collects and composes, and in which she dwells. The resulting accumulation of materials may result in performances that sustain structures of appropriation, or performances that generate knowledge and that recognize that which enables them. The doll house delineates the way language, material artifacts such as 310, and performance are miniatures that magnify certain values and, potentially, encourage critical reflection on rather than blind acceptance of given values. One way the miniature realizes its potential is by highlighting the differences between the actual, imaginary, and fictive real spaces in expression and performance. Finally, a house of cards directs attention to the instability of texts, archives,

research, and performance due to the changing circumstances of time, place, and bodies. Things are remembered and forgotten. While creative and exciting, imagining possibilities for what is lost does not translate easily to material reality and action. What is lost cannot be made present and, therein, rests the art of losing.

### SIGNIFICANCE

By investigating the house at 310 Convention, I attempt to understand its material, cultural, and historical significance, as well as the importance it might hold for those with personal connections to and memories of a house. Admittedly, I would like to know why I am fascinated with 310 in particular. I like the features of its architectural details, those that remember its initial form and the alterations to that form over time. For the past twenty years or so, the house has sat vacant: a monument to its former days, a relic of a time when family homes were prominent in the downtown area, an oddity now amidst high rises and parking lots, a weathered keepsake (or tax write off) for the family who owns it. The added dimension of a familial history fuels my interest. The house, then, shows the processes of history, of telling stories and being told by stories in the continuously shifting space of people, their time and circumstances. By attending to these processes, I learn how the house performs and, in turn, how I might perform it here in ways that articulate, contribute to, and extend its many stories.

Studying the material culture of a people in time and place enables the comprehension and expression of the stories embedded in the artifacts and archives of, in this case, a house. Such study excites and entails a visceral experience of dwelling in the culture(s) and learning how it expresses itself. Additionally, the multiple texts of investigation, such as court records, maps, local histories, regional and national architectures, material constructions, photographs, paintings, and oral histories help unravel and further complicate the mystery and history of the house while they also contribute to the building of a place for it in the space of the document.

By concentrating on such a specific topic as one house in time, the many ways we might investigate and express material culture surface and, thereby, the processes of culture making are stressed.

The development of this project is important to performance as an example of the merits of an interdisciplinary approach to performance research. The perspectives I draw on emphasize the role of place and space in performance and the interplay of these concepts in the study and documentation of a subject. The making of a mystery in this case has philosophical implications for performance in emphasizing the process and partiality of the researcher in the chain of language and history. Generally, I address questions of how the house performs and I perform it; the performance of space and place, remembering and forgetting, dwelling and (re)building in diverse sites of expression; how different language forms provide models for performing one's experience and understanding of material culture; and how performance can indicate absence without forcing it to be present.

How this project comes together into something that moves beyond, but still recognizes the importance of my personal relationship to 310 is the subject of how knowledge is not only collected and interpreted, but discovered and composed. By intermingling hermeneutic and heuritic approaches, I demonstrate their compatibility and I hope the complexity of experience, understanding, and expression that can result. In doing so, I fulfill my desire to experience the house in a direct manner, interacting with the actual site, expressing my feelings as well as my thoughts, and allowing my imagination to dwell in (and sometimes fill) the gaps in the stories I collect and discover, interpret and compose. Although my specific aims vary, generally my goal is to find ways to view this insignificant house differently.

In his essay, “Worlds of Meaning: Cultural Geography and the Imagination,” Denis Cosgrove synthesizes how the imagination engenders diverse expressions through the process of transforming experience through other forms:

Imagination is what gives the world meaning. Imagination is neither purely of the senses, which align us to nature, nor purely of the intellect, which separates us from nature. The work of the imagination is neither purely *reproductive* (that is, determined by sense data from the external world on which it depends) nor purely *productive* (that is, an image-making negation of that external world). Rather, imagination plays a symbolizing role, seizing on sense data without reproducing them as mimetic images and “metamorphosing” them through its metaphorical capacity to generate new meaning. (388; emphases in original)

The transformation of 310 Convention into research and as performance allows me to engage the imaginative possibilities of the chorographical development of the text. My goal is to take the “present” being-ness of 310 Convention from the data and stories I collect and, from this collection, invoke a sense of the larger spaces the place evokes. By interweaving and juxtaposing the materials of the mystory, I strive to create a homestead of history and hope. From the individual and communal experiences and understandings of the house perhaps a space can be made for its future.



## CHAPTER TWO POP UP HOUSE

I have had dreams about houses for as long as I can remember. I have visited the same places multiple times throughout my life, each time exploring and learning a little more about the homes of my mind. One place I have visited since I was young is an old mansion on a cliff. At first, I felt awkward, scared, and out of place in the big sprawling house. I felt like I was in danger or invading someone else's space. Over time, I became more comfortable visiting the house and traversed its stairs, secret doorways, and passages looking for new things to explore. I remember spending time in the basement, among bricks and beams and low ceilings. There was a special staircase that led to the attic, one of my favorite places to visit because of the boxes and trunks of mementos to be explored there. Whoever lived in the house, she (I imagined an old woman who I always just managed to miss) didn't seem to mind me and often my family looking through the old photographs, vintage clothes and jewelry, toys and other knickknacks stored for our exploration. Sometimes my siblings and I would spend the night in a small room in the attic. I remember watching the ocean storms from the high windows, seeing the crash of the waves against the cliffs and yet knowing I was safe.

Another place I began to visit after my undergraduate years at Louisiana State University (LSU) was a house not far from campus that never existed, except in my dreams. It was a large, white columned estate set back from the road behind the Circle K. Inside, there were many apartments often connected by double doors. The rooms in the apartments were decorated in dark wood furnishings, rich brocades, heavy velvets, and crystal chandeliers overhead, a strange Rococo environment for poor college students. I always had a hard time figuring out which room was mine and which were my roommates'. I was happiest in the rooms on the ground floor in the back of house, which included a screened porch of wicker furniture, plants, lots of

sunlight, and a great view of a sprawling green yard that did not appear to exist when approaching the house from the front. I do not have much dream-memory of actually living in the house, but I have navigated my way through the rooms many times.

When I was young, my Mom had a recurring dream about a house and, from that time on, my family would take weekend drives in search of her “dream” house. The dreams started when we were living in Des Moines, Iowa, in a house we all loved, but were having to leave so that my Dad could pursue a master’s degree at Colorado University in Boulder. After the move, we would drive to neighboring cities and towns looking for the illusive house, asking my Mom to describe the size, color, and other distinctive details as we “cruised” the nicer neighborhoods. I suspect the activity was partially a diversion from the cramped student housing in which we lived and a means of free family entertainment for a college family of five. Nevertheless, we continued to look for the house on our subsequent moves to upstate New York and Massachusetts, as my Dad worked his way up in the corporate world and my Mom began to pursue her own education and career. These days, I sometimes imagine my parents taking a weekend drive from their home in Charleston, South Carolina, in the hopes of finding the illusive abode. It is not that their current home is not wonderful or that some of our other homes were not nice, but there is something exciting about the possibility of having the house of your dreams become a part of your reality. My Mom has never wanted to build the house; somehow, she feels it is just “out there” waiting for her and for us to find it.

Mom-

What were the details of the house you dreamed about that we used to drive around and look for in the various places we lived? I cannot quite remember the entire details about it, just that we would go on missions to try to find it. Was it Victorian? What color was it? I'm putting together some house-stories. . . .

Love, Lisa

Lisa,

It was more the setting rather than the building itself that was so vivid in my dreams. It was on a street that wound down a hill and it also sat up from the sidewalk with a stone retaining wall. The house foundation was stone also and the style was sort of Queen Anne Victorian (not a style I would have consciously sought after) and had a deep and wide front porch. I never dreamt the interior.

I had the dream repeatedly during the last year we lived in Des Moines (flat). So, when we moved to Colorado we began to think we would find it there where there were hills and made a point of looking for it. Dad thought he'd found it once in a town near Gloucester when he preceded us to Mass. and was looking around for a place for us to live (before he found Newburyport).

I still occasionally dream that I am back in our house in Des Moines. I know it belongs to someone else but it seems empty so I go on in. Once inside I am anxious I'll be found trespassing but I somehow feel its really still mine and I never want to leave. Sometimes when I go upstairs it is just as it was when you and Laura shared the space – still painted pink. And I always linger in the dining room. (Swartzel)

The dream house gives way to memories of the house of her dreams, a place that was passed on to us lovingly by the original owners heading into retirement after raising their own family there: A 1940's mid-western bungalow with shade trees and ample acreage tucked into mid-sized mid-city living. This is where I spent my formative years, my elementary school years with the paste and paper of home work in the upstairs room my sister and I shared and divided in turf and ego battles, she claiming the stairs and I the walk-in closet. It was a nice place to live despite the heartland cold and heat. The window seat view from my bedroom made me feel like I was peering through the eyes of the "little house" in Virginia Lee Burton's story by the same name: window eyes watching the change of the seasons around her year after year and, through it all, remaining intact, resolute, and hopeful. In the places and spaces of the literal and literary houses of my childhood, I feel most at home. Like *The Little House*, changes in and over time have not diminished the power such places hold.

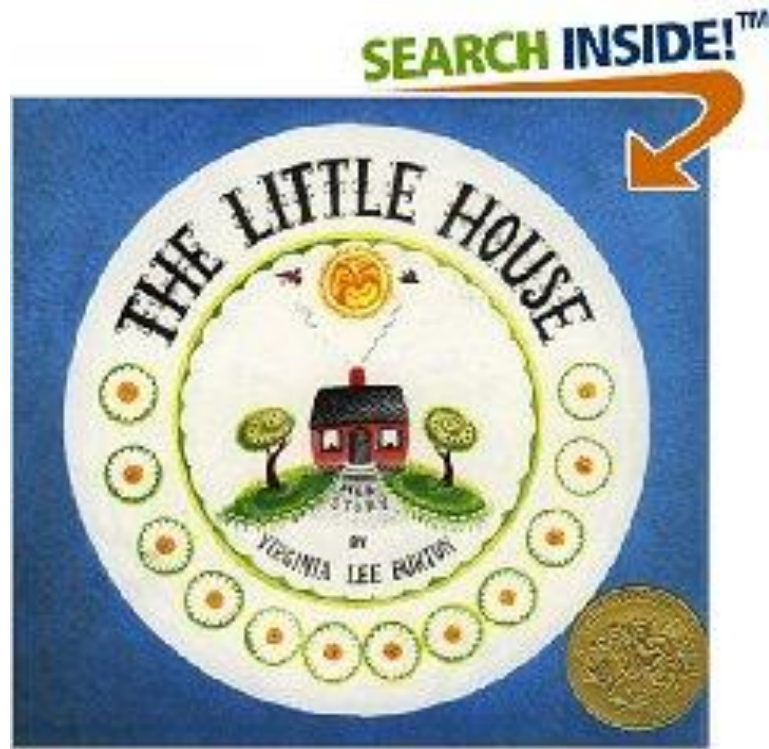


Figure 2. Burton, *The Little House* (cover illustration)

In this chapter, I discuss my introduction to 310 Convention and my initial experience of discovering ways to research the house, which I (now) understand and choose to articulate in terms of the metaphor of a popup book and house. The methods and models I discovered often “popped” to mind and also allowed the house to stand up and stand out as a subject for me. They include first person observation and photographic documentation, archival research of local documents and records, theoretical and practical investigations in classes on vernacular architecture and the poetics of place, genealogical processes, and heuritic play in live performance and writing. Martin Heidegger’s notions of building and dwelling as a way to experience and make sense of the world became an important model for me as did the notion of *chora*, which in this chapter I trace from Plato to Jacques Derrida to Gregory Ulmer. *Chora* is the space between thought and concept, the space and spacing of the word upon the page, and a

generative process of discovery. *Chora* is also *Kora*, the Greek goddess of springtime and, for William Carlos Williams, a metaphor for the creative force and power of the imagination. This chapter is about the process of finding forms that help me theorize and express my research of a particular house in ways that allow the house, my research, and the reader space for discovery on and through the page. The aim is to show that building and dwelling in the imagination as well as in other forms of research offer theoretical possibilities for transformation much like the popup books of childhood create images that jump out and then transform into other images, spurring the reader to engage a like process.

### LITTLE BIG HOUSE 310

And the house of memories becomes psychologically complex. . . .The house we were born in is an inhabited house. In it the values of intimacy are scattered, they are not easily stabilized, they are subjected to dialectics. (Bachelard 14)

Fast forward to the early 1990's, living in Baton Rouge, starting a family in the relative sleepy safety of little city living. I see the house at 310 Convention Street and am drawn to its abandoned grace. It stands in a state of splendid decay, a strange anomaly amid the mix of churches, parking lots, empty store fronts, and mini high rises in the downtown business district. It seemed to me the house was abandoned until the owner made cosmetic changes to the exterior in 2003, leaving it otherwise untouched: a painted lady with an air of quiet dignity that bespeaks its architectural craftsmanship and resilient pride. The structure, one of the last remaining residences in the downtown district, evokes grand narratives of a heyday long gone. In particular, I wonder about the stories that fill the spaces beyond the façade of this little house. Who owns it? Why don't they live there? Why do they leave the house vulnerable to the whims of time and environment? Why bother with exterior updates if the house is to remain empty? What drives such partial preservation?

A few years before the renovations, I tried to inquire about the house and the family who owned it. My inquiry was sparked when I was scanning property descriptions in the newspaper and by chance landed on a description that sounded very like 310 Convention. When I called the listed number, the female voice on the other end of the line told me the house was in such disrepair that it would never be suitable for residential use and only a corporate buyer would be interested in purchasing it. She said it was “unsafe,” making me wonder what kind of business would want to relocate there if it was so unsound. Maybe the implied point was that they could afford to tear it down and rebuild. I gulped and tried to get her to tell me the price, but she was unwilling to impart the information. I do not believe the number I called was that of a realtor’s. I do believe it was my first contact with “Barbe.” Claudia Barbe McMahon, the elusive owner who holds the keys to the house I inhabit.

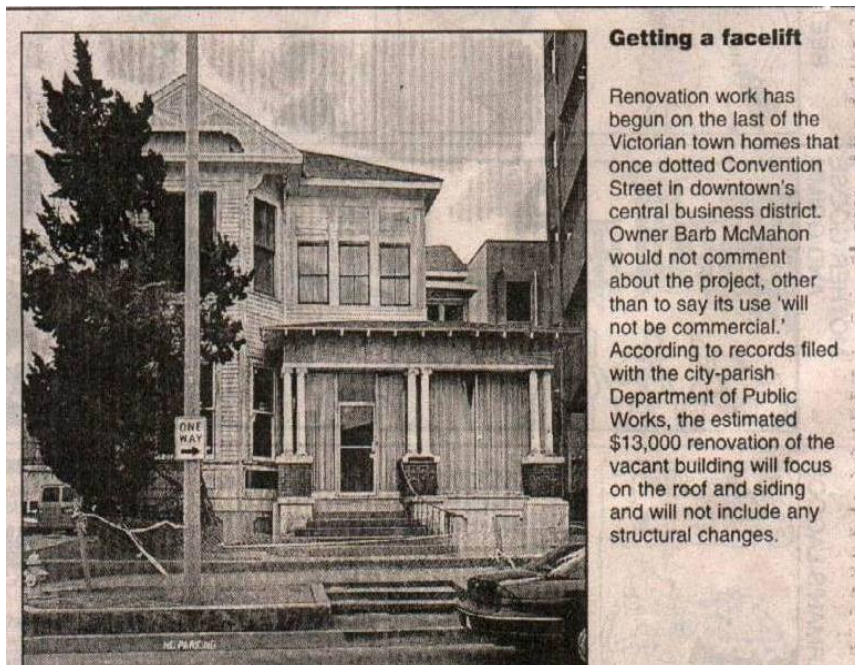
Three-ten Convention evokes a sort of literary nobility in its lovely architectural details that despite the grime or new paint persists. The house reminds me of the old homes of my upbringing, grand in their historicity and design. Although the homes were not mine in the sense of lineage, I have strong memories and associations regarding them. In Edward Casey’s terms, I inhabit them.

When I inhabit a place – whether by moving through it or staying in it – I *have* it in my actual purview. I also *hold* it by virtue of being in its ambience: first in my body as it holds on to the place by various sensory and kinesthetic means, then in my memory as I hold it in my mind, moreover, that includes such nonmentalistic things as language, body memory, and habitudes themselves. (Casey 412; emphases in original)

Habitation connects the concepts of place and self together through the sensory experiences one carries after interacting with a place. Although I have never entered the house at 310 Convention, my experiences in other similar places allow me to “have” this house due to my sense-memory “hold” on the other homes. Additionally, I am curious about those who also

“have” and likely “hold” this place, particularly Claudia Barbe McMahon. Three-ten Convention is her family’s homestead, left unoccupied and empty for so long, but not completely forgotten or ignored.

The McMahons seem to inhabit 310 Convention through ownership alone. No one has lived there for many years and I speculate it has been unoccupied since the death of Barbe’s mother, Yvonne (Barbe) McMahon, in 1991. I first noticed the house was empty in early 1993. Barbe, a brother, and her father list other addresses in town, and a sister lives out of state. I also know that the Downtown Development District has tried for years to get the family to sell the place for commercial purposes or residential use, something other than just sitting there. When the exterior renovations were being done, a foreman on the job told me that he felt the work was too little too late. He also said that no renovations were planned for the interior, which was in bad shape too.



A newspaper article about the work inspired more questions: why do the work if there are no plans to sell, rent or live in the dwelling? Why a purely cosmetic job? Was there pressure on the family concerning the “look” of the place? Is the owner’s name Barb or

Figure 3. “Getting a Facelift” (JohnWilliams)

Barbe? If Barbe, is the “e” voiced, as in Barbie?

According to a series of articles in *The [Baton Rouge] Advocate* in the fall of 1997, a parallel house story to my own involves Barbe and her father staging a successful fight to stop a Metro Council moratorium on the demolition of several properties they owned in the historic downtown neighborhood of Beauregard Town. The battle between the McMahons and community members became a war of wills and personalities. In an article dated October 28, 1997, the McMahons' lawyer, Art Smith, claimed that "[t]he houses are contaminated with lead paint and asbestos. They're in very, very poor shape. I don't see the historic value of these houses. I guess the argument can be made that every single structure should not be changed" (Angelette, "Property Owner" 14B). On the opposing side were several community members who hoped to persuade the McMahons to sell the houses instead. Once the moratorium was pronounced unconstitutional, several local preservationists, architects, and realtors came forward in the hopes of convincing the McMahons to sell, not destroy, the houses. A November 14, 1997, article documents one such attempt:

. . . Carolyn Bennett, executive director for the Foundation for a Historical Louisiana, said she hopes the McMahon family will consider offers from people interested in buying the homes before going forward with demolition plans.

"We've asked if we can continue to try and find someone to buy the properties," Bennett said. "We've tried all along to continue the dialogue."

Bennett said the McMahon's [sic] have repeatedly expressed concern about selling houses that contain asbestos and lead paint.

"They're an old Baton Rouge family. If they're sincere about transferring without liability, that can be done," she said.

(Angelette, "Moratorium Resolution Struck Down" 2B)

Apparently, the family was not "sincere," since they tore down all the houses. A final anecdote tells of Barbe, in a clown suit, holding balloons, and waving *adieu* to the neighbors as she rides the dump truck that holds the debris. Who IS this woman? The Beauregard scenario leaves me even more puzzled about why the house on Convention remains. I know the place has appeal for me, but I wonder what motivates the McMahons to keep it up unkempt.



My project was instigated by my fascination with an old “abandoned” house of architectural interest and nostalgic import to me. Bernd Jager, calling on Martin Heidegger’s terminologies, describes this attachment as a primary function of “building.” He writes, “[b]uilding is first a *being near* a place, a haunting of a site, an eagerness for a manifestation and an obedience to what presents itself there. Building already begins in this approach to a site. Its fundamental activity is that of *situating*” (223; emphases in original). I have situated myself in archival, anecdotal, theoretical, and physical positions that might allow me access to the stories the house holds in its structures and the structures of its memories. Like Jager and in contrast to the usual ideas about haunting, I am the one who haunts the house, not the reverse. I am the one who digs up its past and pokes about in its personal and public life story. I am the one who drives by and walks by. I am the one who takes photographs and attempts a peek through the windows for glimpses of what I cannot see. If I had a chance, I would go inside and listen to the echoes as I walk across the wooden floors, smell inside the fireplace for signs of use, run my hand along the staircase railing as I ascend to the second floor to look out from the window at the change of seasons year after year and, through it all, remain intact, resolute, and hopeful.

#### HOW TO MAKE A POPUP HOUSE/HOUSE POP UP

To inhabit and build the histories of 310 Convention, conventional wisdom might suggest the following tips. They were excerpted from *Researching the History of Your House, A Brief Guide* by John Sykes, which I received in a handout at a meeting for the Preservation Society of Baton Rouge.

##### *Getting Started*

In order to research the history of your house, you have to know its *legal* description. Check your deed for a description of your property; it should provide your lot number and a block number for its location

### *Who Lived Here First?*

Tracing a property's ownership is somewhat like researching a family tree and many of the same resources can provide important clues to unravel the history of your house. For every property in the parish, the assessor's office has a small card for every lot which denotes the ownership information. Be sure to note every reference on the card. These are important clues that refer to probate records and conveyance records concerning your property.

### *Using Court House Records*

When researching a property's title (really, the history of its ownership), you should start with what you know and work backwards.

*Conveyance Records*-----record the transfer of property from one individual to another. The seller (vendor) and the buyer (vendee) can be found in microfilm indexes which will provide the date of the transaction and a reference to the original document or its copy in a conveyance book.

*Probate Records*-----in the case of the death of an owner, property passes to heirs, and this transfer might not appear in the conveyance records. Individuals die *testate* (with a will) or *intestate* (without a will), and in either case, in order to dispose of their property, a "succession" record must be filed.

### *Sanborn Fire Insurance Maps*

The *Sanborn Fire Insurance Company* of Chicago regularly provided maps of local communities which detailed the construction details of houses and the location of the nearest fire prevention equipment. (These maps provided local insurance underwriters information in which to provide rates for homeowners.) Originally contained in large books, these map "sheets" contained several blocks and were updated about every five years. These are an excellent source for learning the evolution of a house over time.

### *Census Records*

The U. S. Constitution requires the enumeration of the citizens every ten years for the purposes of determining representation in Congress. For these censuses, each resident of town is identified with a *specific address*, listing every resident of the house, their age, occupation, and information about literacy and birth. (Sykes 1-3; emphases in original)

Such wisdom is quite helpful in discovering what the neighborhood was and is called, how the land and house were passed down over time, who built the house and when, who owns the house now, and how it and the surrounding neighborhood have changed over the years. I have gained much in the way of archival knowledge about my house through the official channels Sykes suggests. The problem, as I see it, is what to do with the information. Will the

certainties help me answer the elusive question of why the house “called” me in the first place? What is it trying to say? Maybe the better question is what am I trying to say? Or make the house say? Or make the documents say? And why do I desire to make the house say anything at all? Why not just let it be (present tense), be a presence in the shifting landscape of a (re)developing downtown?

One possible answer is a selfish desire for a little space in my life, a place to call my own as Virginia Woolf might have it. With my family of four, I have spent my adult years as a squirrely peg trying to fit into a number of small square abodes: a concrete and claustrophobic student barrack; a once rural ranch house remote from the centers of my life outside the home; a cramped and crumbling cottage close to everything, but impossible to keep clean and uncluttered. What I would do for even a small space full of windows that let in the light where I could draw a breath without distraction. Perhaps I inhabit 310 Convention to create this bit of respite, situating myself in the screen porch on the second floor to catch the breeze from the nearby Mississippi River, or in the bay window with a book, a fire blazing beneath the mantle, or on the front porch in the morning with a cup of coffee, watching the downtown work force arrive. Perhaps I inhabit and build 310 to knock myself free and into a more fitting space and place.

**To Create Your Dream House:**

**Step 1:** Begin with an 8 1/2" x 11" piece of construction paper or card stock.

**Step 2:** Fold the construction paper in half to form a card.

**Step 3:** Draw two lines of equal height towards the fold of the card. Angle the one at the top downwards; make sure the angled line is still the same height as the bottom one.

**Step 4:** Cut along both lines starting at the folded edge.

**Step 5:** Fold the cut section back . . .

**Step 6:** . . . and crease well along the edge with your thumb or finger.

**Step 7:** Put the cut strip back in its original position.

**Step 8:** Open the card up like a tent.

**Step 9:** Using your thumbs, push the cut strip through to the other side of the card.

**Step 10:** Close the card . . .

**Step 11:** . . . and press firmly.

**Step 12:** Open the card!

You've made a house pop-up!

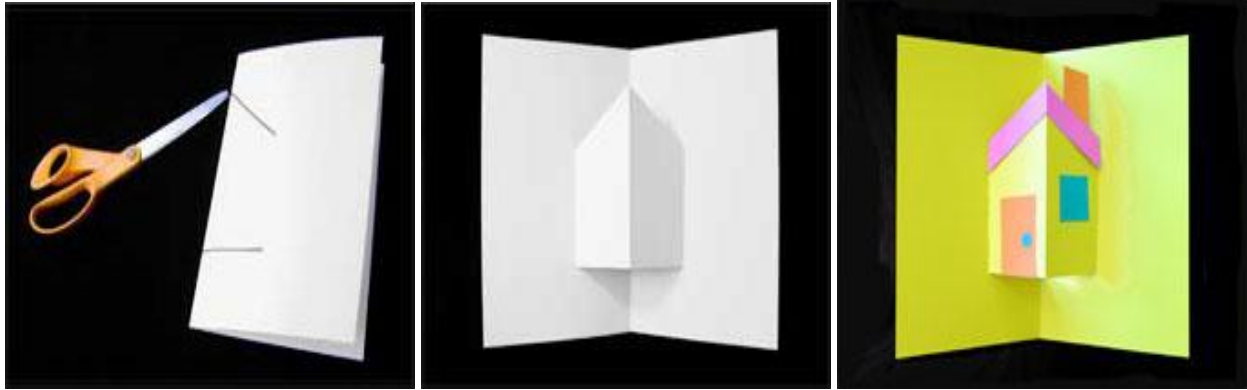


Figure 4. *A Pop Up House* (“Simple Pop-ups You Can Make”)

If only it were so easy to make my house pop up, to figure out what might be important about an empty dwelling. If only I could make and decorate a card and have it lovingly admired by the receiver(s) due largely to my efforts and because it was special to me. I do not think the task will be as simple as a paper version of a child’s dream house. For one, the focus of my research is an actual place, a physical house that sits in a specific location. How do I evoke its material presence on the written page and acknowledge all that I leave out? Do the archival texts and images accomplish evocation or lack? There is no doubt they participate in the performance of the house as they too are created by others who have “had” the house and, perhaps, “hold” on to it too. Subjective filters are not only the domain of the poetic and personal. The archives are riddled with agents and their acts of choice, value, and will that influence the subsequent forms and meanings.

I have projected a narrative on the house correlating to the mystery of its histories and current state, and the fantasy of unraveling that mystery. By exploring archival and anecdotal, theoretical and practical, personal and public means of investigation, I have made 310 Convention into a domain of research. I build, inhabit, and now dwell upon this place as a way

to ask broader questions about how human beings make space perform in everyday life and scholarly applications. In *Poetry, Language, Thought*, Martin Heidegger reflects on the idea of dwelling as a fundamentally human endeavor for interacting with and making sense of the world:

To dwell, to be set at peace, means to remain at peace within the free, the preserve, the free sphere that safeguards each thing in its nature. *The fundamental character of dwelling is this sparing and preserving.* It pervades dwelling in its whole range. That range reveals itself to us as soon as we reflect that human being consists in dwelling and, indeed, dwelling in the sense of the stay of mortals on the earth. (147; emphasis in original)

My goal is to dwell, to spare and preserve 310 Convention with the tools I discover and apply in my investigation. I don't want to alter the house or own it. As much as I would like to gain inside access to the house and its past, I am content to let it be "in peace" if it can operate as a way of understanding some of the larger questions of how we dwell.

The *Oxford English Dictionary* includes the following definitions for dwell:

**dwell**, v. **4.** To abide or continue for a time, in a place, state, or condition. **b.** to *let dwell*: to let (things) remain as they are, let alone, let be. *Obs. dwell on, upon* (in): to spend time upon or linger over (a thing) in action or thought; to remain with the attention fixed on; now, *esp.* to treat at length or with insistence, in speech or writing; also, to sustain (a note) in music. (The most frequent current use in speech.) **6.** To continue in existence, to last, persist; to remain after others are taken or removed. (*OED* v.; emphases in original)

I have let myself dwell in 310 Convention, investigating why the place has been left to dwell for so long. I dwell on my research as a means to provide for the house's continued dwelling on Convention Street and according to the conventions of the text. The *OED* even has a title for me: I am a dwelleress, or dwelster, "a female dweller" (*OED*, n.). The first term can denote the dreaming dweller, a subjective reveler at home in the magical space of the imagination that a place invokes. Dwelster refers to a detective, puzzler, or archeologist. She also is a *bricoleur* who patches together research clues in the space of a text so as to put in place a reason for dwelling on an abode. Inhabit, build, situate, dwell – these terms are theoretical and practical

tools that function as both subject and predicate of the statements and stories about 310 Convention.

(EN) TITLE (MENT)

In my research to date, I find there are many terms I can use to discuss my house and its stories. In my struggle to articulate just what it is about 310 Convention that interests me, issues of language, interpretation, and theorization arise. One issue concerns how history is conveyed through language and it is addressed by Friedrich Nietzsche in *The Genealogy of Morals*. He writes:

Thus the whole history of a thing, an organ, a custom, becomes a continuous *chain* of reinterpretations and arrangements which need not be causally connected among themselves, which may simply follow one another. The “evolution” of a thing, a custom, an organ is not its *progressus* towards a goal, let alone the most logical and shortest *progressus*, requiring the least energy and expenditure. Rather, it is a sequence of more or less profound, more or less independent processes of appropriation, including the resistances used in each instance, the attempted transformation for purposes of defense or reaction, as well as the results of successful counterattacks. While forms are fluid, their “meaning” is even more so. (210; emphases in original)

Nietzsche’s language for understanding history is that of combat and conquest, but also of unending ebb and flow. The tidal shifts that constitute the interpretive acts of documenting (a) history continually reformat the landscape of that history and reinvent the formations inscribed upon it – like the waves that (re)turn the morning sand castles into the afternoon sea floor and then the evening footpath by the shore. This story of history carries the grains of plot, scene, and character within the liquid forces of interpretation, extrapolation, and appropriation that make it always anew in the telling.

Once upon a time, a friend asked me how I came to discover the meaning of Barbe’s name. I answered that sometimes I stray from my determined research into less determined areas. (I stray from dwelster to dwelleress.) In this case, after weeks of reading various

theoretical tracts relevant to my study, I decided to mess around with what the surnames of the owners might reveal, particularly that of the main protagonist in the current narrative of the house, Claudia Barbe McMahon. What might these proper names reveal about the woman and her relationship to my house? I discovered that Claudia is the feminine form of the Roman name Claudius from the Latin *claudus*, meaning lame or crippled. Barbe is a French form of Barbara and means foreign woman. The saint named Barbara has some interesting parallels to our protagonist:

St Barbara has always been one of the most popular saints in the calendar, although there is some doubt whether she ever existed. According to legend, she was imprisoned in a tower and later murdered by her father, who was then struck down by a bolt of lightning; accordingly, she is the patron of architects, stonemasons, and fortifications, and of firework makers, artillerymen, and gunpowder magazines. (“The Barbara Surname”)

Let us just . . . dwell here a minute. I know from my genealogical research that Barbe is Claudia’s mother’s maiden name, of French origin, and given as a middle name to her daughter. It is the name Claudia prefers and I suppose, given the definitions noted above, I might prefer it too.

While acting as dwelleress in the less determined realm of user generated encyclopedic knowledge, I came across the notion that Saint Barbara’s tale is akin to that of Rapunzel. The analogy makes sense to some degree. According to a folklore classification system referenced at answers.com, “[t]he story of Rapunzel is an example of Aarne-Thompson type 310 *The Maiden in the Tower*. . . . It contains many fairy tale fragmentary themes: the Forbidden Fruit, the Womanly Wiles, a Hard Bargain . . . [and] the Unseen Watcher” (“Rapunzel”). Type 310? This is getting weird. It may be a coincidence, but the house I am investigating is at 310 Convention Street; the woman who owns it prefers to be called by a derivation of the name of the patron saint of architecture and, given her penchant for controversy, of fireworks and artillery men too;

she drives a hard bargain; and has an unseen watcher. There is the matter of the 2002 incorporation of the property as a limited liability company, giving it the ominous name of “Big House 310, LLC.” A plantation or a prison? What’s in a name?

According to Jacques Derrida, I am experiencing the chain of differences that constitute the process of naming, of signification itself:

Thus the name, especially the so-called proper name, is always caught in a chain or a system of differences. It becomes an appellation only to the extent that it may inscribe itself within a figuration. Whether it be linked by its origin to the representations of things in space or whether it remains caught in a system of phonic differences or social classifications apparently released from ordinary space, the proper-ness of the name does not escape spacing. Metaphor shapes and undermines the proper name. The literal [*propre*] meaning does not exist, its “appearance” is a necessary function – and must be analyzed as such – in the system of differences and metaphors. (*Of Grammatology* 89)

Barbe’s chosen moniker seems to have chosen her. It is inscribed in her activities and associations. In the space of her life and history, her name is caught up in a chain of representations that point to ancestry, the family homestead, local politics, fairytales and folklore, and one girl’s dissertation. She is a wily woman, protecting family property, explosive in her confrontations with others, fortifying her heritage from without, and denying access to the forbidden fruit of this or any other place in the family arsenal. As for my place in the chain, I am the un/seen watcher, gathering what I can from the shadows of documents, theory, and practice.

The phonic resonance of Barbe’s name works as a homonym for another layer of meaning, namely that of a barb that hooks onto or into one and is difficult to dislodge. Like a hook or an arrow, a barb articulates and activates “a recurved process” (*OED*, n. 1). I wonder what it is that gets recurved in this process. If we are talking about a fish hook or spear head, then definition twelve seems fitting: “[a] projection from the main body of something; esp. a natural appendage, extension, or outgrowth; a projection, prominence, protuberance” (*OED*, n.



12). In the *OED* definition of process, there is a definite sense of things moving in space and time toward some fruition:

**1. a.** The fact of going on or being carried on, as an action, or a series of actions or events; progress, course. **2.** Course, lapse (of time). **4. a.** A narration, narrative; relation, story, tale; a discourse or treatise; an argument or discussion. **6. d.** A linguistic operation or change. **8.** Onward movement in space; procession; progress, progression. (*OED*, n.)

Further, there appears to be intent and purpose in the movement. A recurved process then would seem to be one that rejects the implied linearity of forward progress in favor of movement that turns back on itself, like the ebb and flow of the tide. This movement gains strength from the curve or fold of matter and energy back onto itself. The difficulty lies in figuring out how the many recurved progressions operate together – within, upon, or against each other – in terms of my research, Barbe’s investment, and the house’s in/stability. Additionally, there is the matter of the linguistic operation that this text produces. Inevitably, the discourses I draw on and create to narrate my progress folds back onto the page, but will it have the strength to hook the reader, extending the house in a system of differences in the space of the page? There is no way not to change the house in the recurved process from lived experience into an archival document of a present that is already past. What is left on the page when all is said and done? A transformation created as I dwell on the nexus of this place in the space of text.

The progression of this document is my attempt to safeguard the nature of my relationship with the house, dwelling on possible variations of interpretation and arrangement that un/fold in the course of my fixation. As a dwelster in this process, I find my way is not forward moving but a series of recurves. Each link is unique, forming a fluid sequence in its relationship to others. Interconnections operate to form the course of my narrative and the advancement of a treatise. In terms of the municipal appellation for the house – i.e. Convention – I am “summoning an assembly” of information, ideas, and practices that I organize according

to “general agreement or consent” into an “assemblage” that is evocative of my experiences with the house and the associations it generates (*OED*, n.I.).

### MODEL HOUSE/ HOUSE MODEL

How do I construct my assemblage? How do I piece together the various materials I have gathered and created over the years into an inhabitable research space that allows me (and you, if you’d like) to linger and dwell in this house? What models might I use?

One theoretical model I discovered is that of *chora*. The idea came (back) to me when one of my colleagues expressed that she wanted to change her name from Corey to Cora. Her desire evoked the dwelleress in me. Cora. Where have I heard that word before? I scanned my bookshelf of poetry and found William Carlos Williams’ *Kora in Hell*. The text consists of a series of reflections Williams wrote each night for a year after spending his days as physician. The reflections are written as prose poems and include interpretive notes in italics. Williams considered the text as the foundational model for his later works. *Kora* is a variation of the goddess of springtime in Greek mythology. She was captured and taken to hell, where she was consigned to live during the winters, until emerging to the surface of the earth as spring. In *Kora*, Williams found a kindred spirit and the text marks his efforts to escape from his hell(s) through his creative composition.

I also returned to Plato and found that, in *Timaeus*, *chora* is Plato’s term for the place in which the eternal Forms of Being (models) are imprinted upon the transitory sensory objects of Becoming (copies). This place is difficult for Plato to define because it straddles the two realms of knowledge, Reason and Opinion, that he feels correspond to Being and Becoming. He writes,

. . . ever-existing Place, which admits not of destruction, and provides room for all things that have birth, itself being a kind of bastard reasoning by the aid of non-sensation, barely an object of belief; for when we regard this we dimly dream and affirm that it is somehow necessary that all that exists should exist *in* some spot and occupying some

*place*, and that that which is neither on earth or in the Heaven is nothing. So because of all these and other kindred notions, we are unable also on waking up to distinguish clearly the unsleeping and truly subsisting substance, owing to our dreamy condition, or to state the truth – how that it belongs to a copy – seeing that it has not for its own even that substance for which it came into being, but fleets as a phantom of something else – to come into existence *in* some other thing. (123-125; emphases in original)

*Chora* has a status that seems untenable within and yet is necessary to Plato's system of philosophy. It is a space that cannot be aptly expressed in language because there is "nothing" to describe there. Yet Plato must make a place for this space in his thinking. The fact that he lacks adequate language to describe *chora* does not diminish the importance of the concept. In essence, *chora* becomes a metaphor for the space that exists between our thoughts and experiences and the language(s) we use to express them. *Chora* is the wakeful dream state in which we struggle to express the images that emerge from sensation, ideation, and imagination.

Derrida expands on Plato's notion of *chora* through essays, interviews, and letters in *Chora L Works*, a collaborative text commissioned in 1985 that provides a theoretical foundation for a garden design in the Parc de la Villette in Paris. Bernard Tschumi was the lead architect on the project and invited Derrida and architect Peter Eisenman to collaborate with him. Tschumi wanted the park to contain a series of follies, understood not as errors but rather delights reflective of the "madness" of architectural design at the time. The *OED* explains:

**Folly**, **n.** **4.** Madness, insanity, mania. **5. a.** A popular name for any costly structure considered to have shown folly in the builder. R. Wendover says that when (in 1228) a castle which Hubert de Burgh had begun to build, near the Welsh border, had to be razed to the ground on account of a treaty concluded with the Welsh, much amusement was excited by the recollection that Hubert had given to the building on its foundation the name of Hubert's Folly (*Stultitiam Huberti*). It was remarked that he had shown himself a true prophet. Probably the word used by Hubert was *F. folie*; the original meaning seems to have been not *stultitia*, but "delight", "favourite abode". Many houses in France still bear the name *La Folie*, and there is some evidence that "the Folly" was as late as the nineteenth century used in some parts of England for a public pleasure-garden or the like. **b. pl.** A revue notable for the glamour of its female performers; used esp. as a title, as *Ziegfeld Follies*; also, the female members of such a revue. (*OED*, n<sup>1</sup>; emphases in original)

In *Chora L Works*, Derrida suggests that the collaborators play with and within the restrictions of certain terms in order to design their garden. He bases their play on the multiple interpretations of Plato's *Timaeus*, particularly the many meanings that arise in scholars' attempts to define *chora*, for example, in terms of "place,' 'location,' 'site,' 'region,' 'country'" or as a metaphor for "mother,' 'nurse,' 'receptacle,' 'imprint bearer'" (16). In their play with forms of *chora* and folly, the collaborators settle on the images of a sieve, lyre, and grid for their design.

In reflecting on *Chora L Works*, Derrida expresses a key aspect in his composition of texts:

I have this feeling that when I write, when I build some texts, the law for me, the rule, has to do with the spacing of things. What interests me is not really the content but some distribution in space. The way that I write is shaped. It has to do with rhythm of music on the one hand, but also with building, with architecture, with spacing. When I am interested in what I write I am certain it has not to do with the content, with the meaning or with the philosophical meaning, but with the way these objects are articulated in the way that the composition of my text corresponds to models that are not well received in the architectural association of philosophy. And so they are physical objects. And when I am attached to them it is as such. (109)

In Derrida's articulation of the importance of space and spacing in building his texts, he simultaneously implies *chora*, which "is the spacing which is the condition for everything to take place, for everything to be inscribed. The metaphor of impression or printing is very strong and recognizable in this text. It is the place where everything is received as an imprint" (10).

Notably, the practical manifestation of *Chora L Works* was never installed in Parc de la Villette; rather, it was installed, imprinted in Derrida's document. It emerges through the physicalization of visual and written languages in the space of the page. Thereby, *Chora L Works* performs place (imprint) in space due to the possibilities of spacing. On the one hand, Derrida's enactment of *chora* is akin to Plato's concept since it "has not for its own even that substance for which it came into being, but fleets as a phantom of something else – to come into existence *in*

some other thing” (Plato 125; emphases in original). On the other hand, for Derrida, since *chora* is spacing, it has no origin substance for which it came into being. (There is no origin substance in Derrida’s philosophy of language.) It is and always refers, defers to some other thing and therein lies the delight, the folly, of *chora*.

In *Heuretics: The Logic of Invention*, Gregory Ulmer draws on Derrida’s interpolations of *chora* in Plato’s *Timaeus* and attempts to create a new rhetoric that addresses the particularities of producing, reading, and translating hypermedia. In contrast to the singular proof of argumentative writing, Ulmer proposes a generative process of discovery where one draws on and produces “a database . . . the full paradigm of possibilities through which a multitude of paths may be traced” (38). By acknowledging the multiple meanings of key concepts, the researcher becomes a collector and arranger of data that is “unified by a pattern of repetition, rather than by a concept . . . more like discovery than proof” (56). The idea and realization of a collection, which can be re/arranged by both the producer and reader of a text, activates the positions of those who engage it. Ulmer names his experimental method chorography. The term evokes the body spaces, or positionalities, of those who engage and produce a text:

While *chorography* as a term is close to *choreography*, it duplicates a term that already exists in the discipline of geography, thus establishing a valuable resonance for a rhetoric of invention concerned with the history of “place” in relation to memory. Within geography “chorological analysis” produces a sense of place “that is similar to the sense of time that comes from the subject of history,” trying to capture a more subjective dimension of spatiality in specific rather than in generic terms. (39)

The memory and position of the researcher (whether writer or reader) influences how the text is re/generated. One’s spatial and temporal location in relation to the texts and contexts of analysis creates a place for new imaginative constructions to emerge. Whereas Plato separates being and becoming, and Derrida fuses them through the emergence of language in the space of the page

(so that being is always becoming), Ulmer recognizes the body memory and position of the reader and writer as part of Derridian (e)mergence.

#### TRANSFORMATION: A LITTLE STORY ABOUT HOUSE DREAMS/DREAM HOUSES

Three-ten Convention is my springtime. It is an un/folding chain of possibilities that compels me to situate myself within it. My narrative takes shape as a description of a house formed from an assemblage of experiences and materials I imprint here. In William Carlos Williams' follow up to *Kora in Hell*, a prose-poetry piece titled *Spring and All*, he finds the key to reaching that season beyond winter's hell:

Imagination is not to avoid reality, nor is it description nor an evocation of objects or situations. . . . It affirms reality most powerfully and therefore, since reality needs no personal support but exists free from human action, as proven by science in the indestructibility of matter and of force, it creates a new object, a play, a dance which is not a mirror up to nature but –  
As birds' wings beat the solid air without which none could fly so words freed by the imagination affirm reality by their flight. (149-150)

Spring emerges in the space and spacing (the *chora*) of the imagination. The objects created from imagination's inventions provide a means to generate new possibilities for the subjects of research.

Like Williams, Derrida, and Ulmer, the space of *chora* is not real for performance folks either. Rather, in their vernacular, it is the space of the fictive real where physical bodies and language in space make manifest the possibilities that (rational) "real" life would deem impossible. As with my performance in this chapter, performance practitioners build and dwell in this space, experimenting with ways to express the connections and the differences between the fictive real and "real" so that the possibilities they discover and enact are apparent to an audience. As I also have tried to express in this chapter, one way performance practitioners articulate the differences is through the transformation of language forms and conventions or,

more precisely perhaps, they acknowledge and highlight this operation as one we exercise daily, but tend to ignore or elide.

In this chapter, my fictive real, *chora* folly is that of the popup book, two models of which the Popup Lady describes on her website:

**METAMORPHOSIS** (or **TRANSFORMATION**) – Convention uses these terms interchangeably for two different mechanisms.

1. Two circular illustrations sharing one center axis have pie-shaped cuts which will allow them to intersect when moved (usually by a string or tab) so that the top illustration will rotate over the bottom illustration allowing the bottom illustration to show through. The top illustration “metamorphoses” or “transforms” into the bottom illustration. (Also called DISSOLVING WHEEL)
2. Two illustrations are slit like Venetian blinds vertically or horizontally. When pulled by a tab or ribbon, one illustration will slide over the other, “metamorphosing” or “transforming” into the other. (Rubin; emphases in original)

In the *OED*, metamorphosis and transformation share the same definition in their initial entries. Both are actions “changing in form, shape, or substance” (*OED*, n.1 a.). Metamorphosis, however, implies the “supernatural means” (*OED*, n.1.a.) of an outside force that changes “the form or character of (something)” (“metamorphisize” *OED*, v.1.) and thereby erases the former elements entirely in the manifestation of the new. Transformation, on the other hand, is a double-directed action that retains and acknowledges the traces of the old in the new. The art of transformation is evident in the traditions of theatre and performance as is the case with the “mechanical disclosing scene in a pantomime; *spec.* the scene in which the principal performers were transformed in view of the audience into the players of the ensuing harlequinade” (*OED* n.1.c.). Transformation is then an action that humans create rather than an action exercised on them by an outside force of fate or the gods.

In her descriptions of popup books, the Popup Lady veers more toward transformation than metamorphosis. Both the dissolving wheel and venetian blind mechanisms require active

audiences to make the transformations occur through the pulling of tabs, and both retain traces of the old images in the new. The process of transformation in popup books recycles past and present and, thereby, questions conventional terms and perspectives regarding time and space, particularly those that equate forward moving time to progress, and presence as a dictate of “being” and “becoming.” The possibilities of *chora* in and as spacing suggest otherwise and serve as a means of modeling 310 Convention on the page.



Figure 5. *Venetian Blind Popup* (illustration by Burton; photo by the author)

While significant issues regarding how material culture, such as a Victorian house, performs history are entailed here, we also might remind ourselves that *chora* entails folly. That is, folly is part of performing history in this case. Derrida likewise called on folly in modeling a space upon the page. The British organization, The Folly Fellowship, builds a like relationship between history and folly when they submit that their goal is to protect lonely and unloved buildings of little purpose from being rationalised or destroyed” (“The Folly Fellowship: Aims”). Rationalization allows for fixed notions of historical value that can lead to the destruction of “lonely and unloved” places; while *chora* and folly unfix singular values, suggesting how to compose the histories of such places in different ways. This chapter does not erase rationalization, but adds to the processes allowing multiple values to arise through eureka moments, word play, and arbitrary associations that write a history of the house so as to preserve



and spare it. In the upcoming chapters, I continue to inhabit, dwell in, and build 310 Convention through the transformative processes of *chora*.

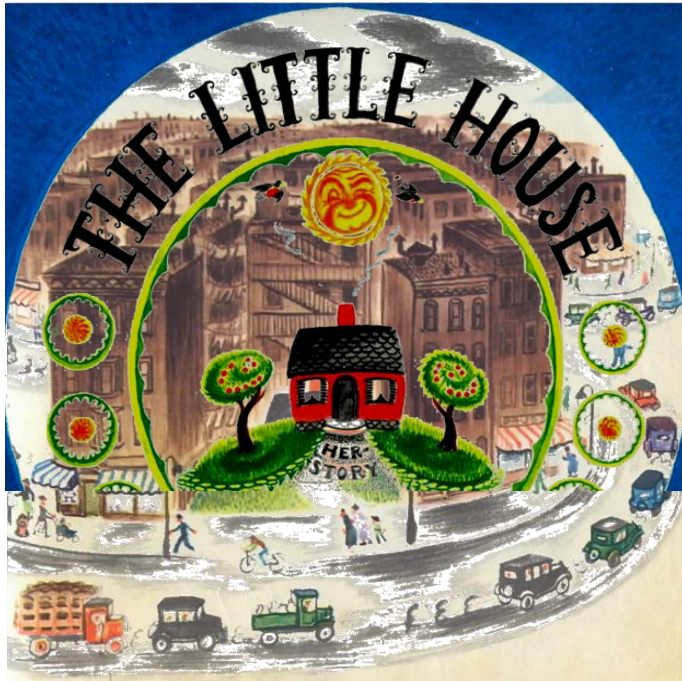


Figure 6. *Dissolving Wheel* (illustrations by Burton)

supposing i dreamed this)  
only imagine, when day has thrilled  
you are a house around which  
i am a wind-

your walls will not reckon how  
strangely my life is curved  
since the best he can do  
is to peer through windows, unobserved

-listen, for (out of all  
things)dream is noone's fool;  
if this wind who i am prowls  
carefully around this house of you

love being such, or such,  
the normal corners of your heart  
will never guess how much  
my wonderful jealousy is dark

if light should flower:  
or laughing sparkle from  
the shut house (around and around  
which a poor wind will roam  
(Cummings 97)

### CHAPTER THREE HOUSE OF WAX

“I am a Bee, (no Drone) tho’ without sting  
Here you may see, what Honey-Combs I bring . . .  
What others did Contrive, I carry to my Hive.”

-Pastorius quoted in Erben

“‘Honey Combs’ and ‘Paper Hives’” (163-164)

Three-ten Convention is more than a specific locale. It is a lot of land, a city address, a building, an uninhabited dwelling, someone’s house, maps, conveyance records, photographs, and news clippings, to name but a few of its transformations. The Victorian town house that sits semi-abandoned next to a parking lot and a high rise also comprises the various stories, texts, and images I use to construct it on the page. This empty site is full of imaginative possibility, and I find I model the house in multiple forms, morphing the structure of this document in an effort to document the structure of my research.

This process of assembly and transformation compelled me to search for additional ways to experience and understand 310 Convention. In the spring of 2003, I took an anthropology-architecture class called Vernacular Architecture and Material Culture in hopes of adding to my repertoire of research tools. Professor Jay Edwards introduced me to many of the archival practices used to investigate a building’s history. The collecting practices I learned offered me new ways to inhabit the house and tell its tale.

One of my favorite practices is the Sanborn Fire Insurance Maps, hereafter referred to as the Sanborn Maps or, simply, the maps. From 1867 through 1970, the Sanborn Map Company developed and published the maps, which were used by insurance companies to assess the risk of insuring buildings. The maps provide large scale plans of cities and towns across the US, tracking their growth and development over intervening years. The Baton Rouge Public Library holds the hard bound versions of the maps for Baton Rouge in three separate volumes that cover

the period from 1923 through August 1951, although additional updates extend through 1963. The online LSU archives hold additional maps, all black and white digital reproductions of the originals. The online version offers ten progressive “books” for Baton Rouge dating from May 1885 through April 1951. My house can be found on Sheet 7 in Volume 1 of the 1923 through August 1951 hard bound version. Online, it resides on Sheet 5 in the 1908, 1911, and 1916 books until it moves to Sheet 7 in the 1923 book and to Sheet 7 Volume I in the 1923-1947 and 1923-1951 books.<sup>1</sup>

In this chapter, I inhabit and dwell in the places and spaces of the maps in order to explore the stories they tell about my house. Further, their performance serves as a model for my research process and performance in this chapter; for how I perceive, conceive, and document the histories of the house as map(ped). To learn to perform like the maps and, thereby, better understand their performance – the substance and structures of language they collect and use to (trans)form the house – I made an actual three-dimensional model of the house, which I also discuss in this chapter.

My experience and understanding of the maps is that of an archive in action – a hive – in which the process of collecting and composing the sustenance of honeyed knowledge occurs simultaneously. The idea of the hive as an archival endeavor can be traced back to the manuscripts of Daniel Pastorius (1651-1719), founder of Germantown in Pennsylvania and a key figure in colonial politics and society. I first discovered Pastorius online in a brochure about an exhibit at the Annenberg Rare Book & Manuscript Library at the University of Pennsylvania.

The exhibit was called, “The Revolt of the Bees, Wherein the Future of the Paper-Hive is

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<sup>1</sup> In my text and “Works Cited,” I use the date 1923-1963 to reference the hard bound maps, so as to account for the updates added to them (e.g., by means of overlays) after the maps were published. I cite the hard bound maps under the title of the editor, Sanborn Map Company. For each digital map I analyze in my text, I use the discrete date of the map, whereas in my “Works Cited” I do not. Instead, I reference all the digital maps under the archive title, “Digital Sanborn Maps 1867-1970.” My choice reflects that the digital archive holds all the maps produced by the company between 1867 and 1970, although the various maps for Baton Rouge extend from 1885 to 1951 only.

Declared.” Drawing on books and manuscripts from the Annenberg collection, the exhibit explored “a new culture of memory and archiving in the true spirit of the beehive” (University of Pennsylvania Holdings 2). Pastorius’ ideas were activated in the main theme of the archive as a hive, and they were detailed in lesson two of the eleven lessons displayed in the exhibit. His manuscript, titled *The Bee-Hive*, contains a distilled collection of quotations culled from his voracious readings, and his insights and observations on contemporary issues. According to the curators of the exhibit, “[a]gainst the frequent analogy of the museum as mausoleum and columbarium for the storage and preservation of cultural artifact, Pastorius’ *The Bee-Hive* implies a dynamic and perpetually changing model for archival practice” (University of Pennsylvania Holdings 4). He wrote the book as a source of contemporary wisdom for his progeny to reflect on and use, and also as a model they might follow in composing encyclopedic texts of their own knowledge.

Cultural historian Patrick Erben recognizes Pastorius’ work as indicative of a broader method, in which “the process of collecting and composing simultaneously engages the experiential and concrete world outside the text, the intellectual world of his reading and writing and, finally, the physical compilation and representation of his knowledge on the pages of his manuscript books” (Erben 163). In terms of the hive, Pastorius’ process transforms the nectar of his learning into the fuel of his thoughts (the honey stored within the hive) and the structure of his arguments on the page (the wax honeycomb). This process of collection, distillation, and transformation parallels that of *chora* in the research and production of a text. *Chora* reflects the cycle of the seasons in the springtime production of honeyed knowledge in the collective dwelling of the hive or text.

Those who study and raise honey bees look at a colony not as a collection of individual creatures, but as “an individual, a ‘compound animal,’ a body with thousands of detachable cells

or organs – the bees. Each bee is capable of a limited sphere of activity whilst at some distance from the hive, but is still linked with the rest of the body in interests and is always working for the community” (Wadey 13). Each bee of the body acts for the greater good of the collective in all its endeavors, which are designed so as to maximize the future of the hive as a whole. The main food source of bees is the honey they produce by gathering nectar from flowers, of which only a small portion is digested immediately. The bulk of the nectar is “regurgitated into a cell of one of the combs” for future consumption (Harris 45). The honey combs are made of wax, or bee fat, which is a secondary byproduct of their nectar gathering and honey conversion. The process of converting nectar into wax requires a huge amount of energy and raw material as “for every one ounce of wax produced, at least a pound of honey is consumed by the bees” (Harris 54). The constant collection required to sustain the hive and the effort involved in transforming the nectar articulate the processes necessary to compose the hive’s continued sustenance and structure.

Another intriguing aspect of the archive as hive trope concerns the worker bees. Their job entails seeking out food sources, communicating the locations to other workers, sharing their take with others in the hive, producing the wax, and constructing the combs that house the colony. The worker bee approaches her duties as both dwelleress and dwelster in her labors:

When she first leaves the hive to collect nectar, water, or pollen, she embarks on a voyage of discovery. She may have to find a predetermined source of nectar of which she has been given a sample by another bee. . . . She may, on the other hand, be a free-lance, seeking pastures for herself, and prepared to work on any kind of flower she finds to be yielding nectar in abundance. (Wadey 31)

In either case, the worker collects her nectar as resource for projects that benefit the future of the hive. Her efforts also benefit and benefit from the food sources, a symbiotic relationship developed between the bee and the plants from which she gathers the nectar. The plants need the bees for cross pollination, which in turn sustains future supplies for the hive.

Building on the hive as metaphor, I use the Sanborn Maps as nectar to produce a paper hive that holds the honeyed knowledge I gain from this archive. The process parallels Erben's articulation of the components in Pastorius' model. My experience with the materiality of the maps in both the digital and hard bound versions coupled with the conceptual discourse I collect and make are transformed in their representation on the page and as a three-dimensional model. Both form (wax) structures that contain and contribute to the uniquely flavored honey thoughts distilled from the nectar of the maps.

### NECTAR COLLECTING

In Professor Edwards' class on Vernacular Architecture and Material Culture, we are assigned to do historical research on a building or dwelling of our choice. I convince a colleague in Performance Studies who is also taking the class to make the focus of our projects local, downtown buildings. Interested in a house in the downtown district of Beauregard Town, my friend agrees. In class, Professor Edwards tells us about the Sanborn Maps, stressing that they are important tools for researching local buildings. He also informs us that the maps are located in the Baton Rouge Room in the River Center Branch Library of the East Baton Rouge Parish Library System. Professor Edwards's detailed directives suggest we would be remiss if we didn't take a look at the maps and so we head downtown to investigate.

Upon entering the square, concrete and glass library, my friend and I are greeted by the circulation librarians at work behind the counter. We inquire about access to the Baton Rouge Room. One of the librarians tells us that the man who oversees the collection is at lunch, but that she would be willing to chaperone us until he returns. We take the tiny, creaky elevator to the fourth floor and approach a locked glass door that leads to a small room on our left. The librarian is very friendly and inquires about our research as she opens the door. We tell her about 310 Convention and the house in Beauregard Town. The librarian does not know about

my house, but tells my friend she has been to parties at “her” house in the 1970s when it belonged to a good friend. Go figure. She shows us drawers full of maps and charts and other documents, and points out the Sanborn Maps on top of one of the drawers. She also takes us into a back room – deep inside this particular archive – where there are file boxes and folders full of photos and small mementos. My friend’s uncanny luck continues when she chances upon a photo of her house in Beauregard Town while I poke about hoping for something on my house to pop up too.

Soon, the man in charge of the collection returns. Although the librarian explains our projects to him (then bids *adieu*), he seems very edgy about our being there. We sidle out of the back room as he sidles in to inspect (we imagine) what we might have displaced there. We begin to look through the drawers in the front room and find documents ranging from Spanish and French language property maps to the diagrams for the Esso (now Exxon) plant located just north of downtown along the river. Once, a drawer gets stuck and we think we hear a tear. We carefully re-open the drawer to inspect for damage and, as carefully, close it again, deciding we had better leave the drawers alone. We turn our attention to the large bound volumes of the Sanborn Maps stacked on top of the drawer we have just closed.

My friend and I take a volume each and try to figure out how they work. The volumes are large (2’ x 2’ x 3”) hard bound books with fabric covers and leather detailing. Lifting the book requires exertion and opening its pages results in a cracking from the old spine that binds the thick pages. The pages are yellowed with age and thick like cardstock. The weight supports the many layers of yellow tissue or white paper overlays that indicate the additions and erasures to the buildings over time. The inner lining of the cover is a repeating pattern of green wavy lines on a white background. The ocean of lines is dotted with islands, each stamped with a circular seal that consists of a compass rose around which turns the maker of the maps, the

“Sanborn Map Company.” Addendums to the index found on one of the first pages are pasted on this lining, one atop the other, over time. The layers of the archive accumulate – addendums on addendums, graphics on graphics, papers on papers, books on books, rooms in rooms, floors on floors – and testify to the ongoing building of memory, the performance of remembering.

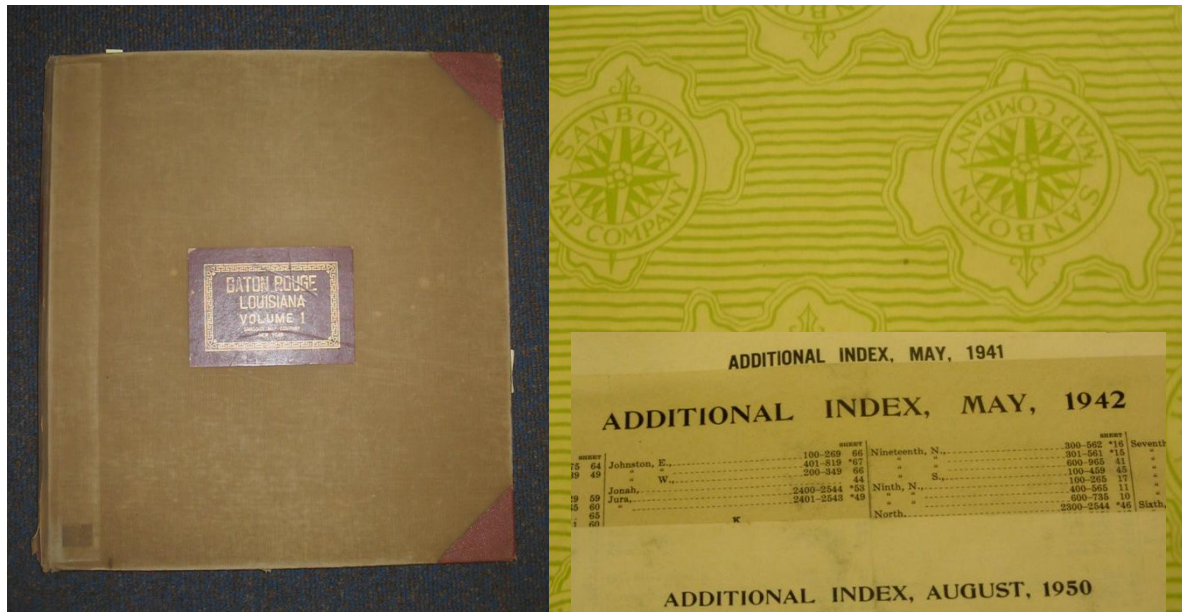


Figure 7. *Cover and Front Matter*  
(Sanborn Map Company, *Insurance Maps of Baton Rouge Louisiana*, Volume 1 1923-1963)

The maps are contained within three volumes of approximately one hundred sheets each. Each volume includes a “Graphic Map of Volumes” that shows a map of Baton Rouge divided into three blocks of color. Each block refers to one of the three volumes. The map also illustrates the radial development of the city in ripples outward from the river’s edge and downtown center to the suburbs in the north, east, and south. With a yellow block, the graphic map indicates that Volume 1 contains the maps for the oldest neighborhoods in the city, which includes that of 310 Convention.

In Volume I, I find another map or “Key Sheet” that (again) uses colored blocks to indicate each neighborhood, and numbers to direct the viewer to the sheet on which the



neighborhood is detailed. Situated in a blue block of color, it appears 310 Convention can be found on Sheet 7. (This is getting exciting; I wonder what will pop up next?)



Figure 8. *Graphic Map of Volumes and Key Sheet*  
(Sanborn Map Company, *Insurance Maps of Baton Rouge Louisiana*, Volume 1 1923-1963)

I turn to Sheet 7. From an overhead view, I scan the page quickly in search of 310. My eyes circle, narrow in, then land to dwell on my house. I am like a bee who has found the sweet nectar at the yellow center of a colorful flower. I drink the map in.

The house is tinted yellow, which according to the color “Key” designates it as a wooden structure or frame building. The buildings that surround the house are pink, which means they are built of brick, or grey, which indicates that a fire resistant material of some kind was used in building it. The numbers “1” and “2” indicate the number of stories. Three-ten is a two story building except for the porches on the west and south sides. At the back of the lot is a one story auto garage, designated by the letter “A.” The garage is built of wood also, but the grey line around the yellow tells me it is metal clad. There are tissue and white paper overlays pasted on the base page that show changes to the house although faint traces of the old details are visible

beneath. For instance, across the back of the house is a swath of white paper that shows a “new” bay window porch extension in the southeast corner beneath which are lines that indicate that a smaller squared off porch once stood there (too).

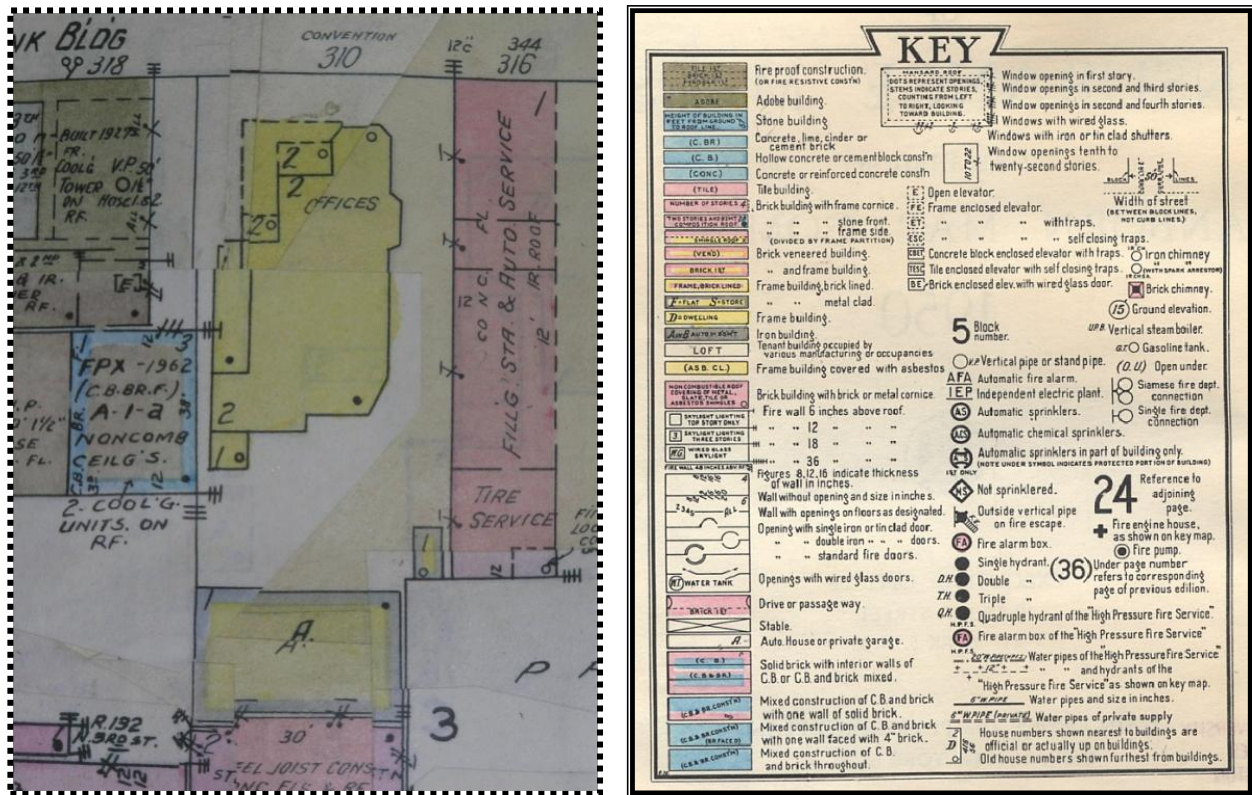


Figure 9. Sheet 7 Detail of 310 Convention Street and Color Key (Sanborn Map Company, *Insurance Maps of Baton Rouge Louisiana*, Volume 1 1923-1963)

I also discover that each volume contains a “Skeleton Key” for each sheet that shows the bare bones or outlines of the buildings. Sometimes, the outlines are papered over to indicate changes that correspond to those on the colored sheets, but not always. In the skeleton for Sheet 7, I can see ghostly traces of four small structures beneath the white paper on which the garage is drawn. One looks large enough to be a stable; the others for poultry perhaps, a tool shed, maybe an outhouse? (I am reminded of my friend’s house, built in 1928 and located in the Garden District of Baton Rouge. The separate garage holds “facilities” – i.e., a shower, sink, and toilet – which, we can only speculate, were to be used by the black employee(s) hired at one time to tend

to the house and garden.) The outline of the house does not yet reflect the addition of porches on the front, west, and back sides of the house or the bay window extension on the southeast corner.

The key also notes that the property was once numbered 330.

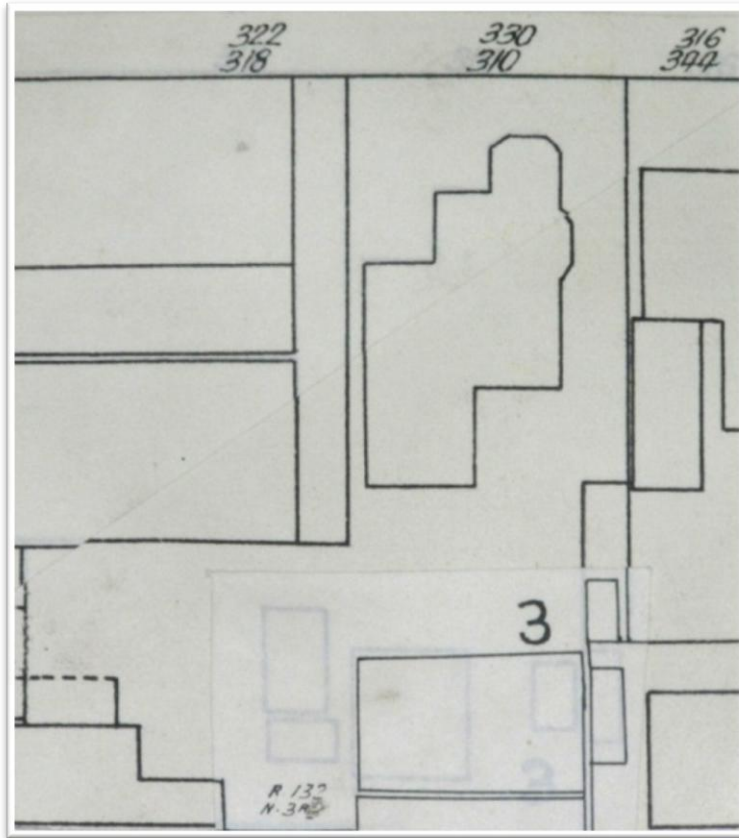


Figure 10. *Skeleton Key Detail of 310 Convention Street* (Sanborn Map Company, *Insurance Maps of Baton Rouge Louisiana*, Volume 1 1923-1963)

During my first visit, I realize there are two versions of Volume 1, each apparently updated through a different date. One version (shown in Figure 9 above and Figure 11 below) is updated through at least 1962 as indicated by the date on the grey building to the west of 310. In 1962, it appears the building was (re)constructed in fire resistant material with a reinforced floor, frame, and roof, likely to support the two new cooling units on the roof. The other version (in Figure 11) is updated through 1961 at most since the same building is of brick and without the noted improvements. Next door at 310, there is a second auto garage and a two story porch on the southeast corner, both of which are absent from the more recent version.

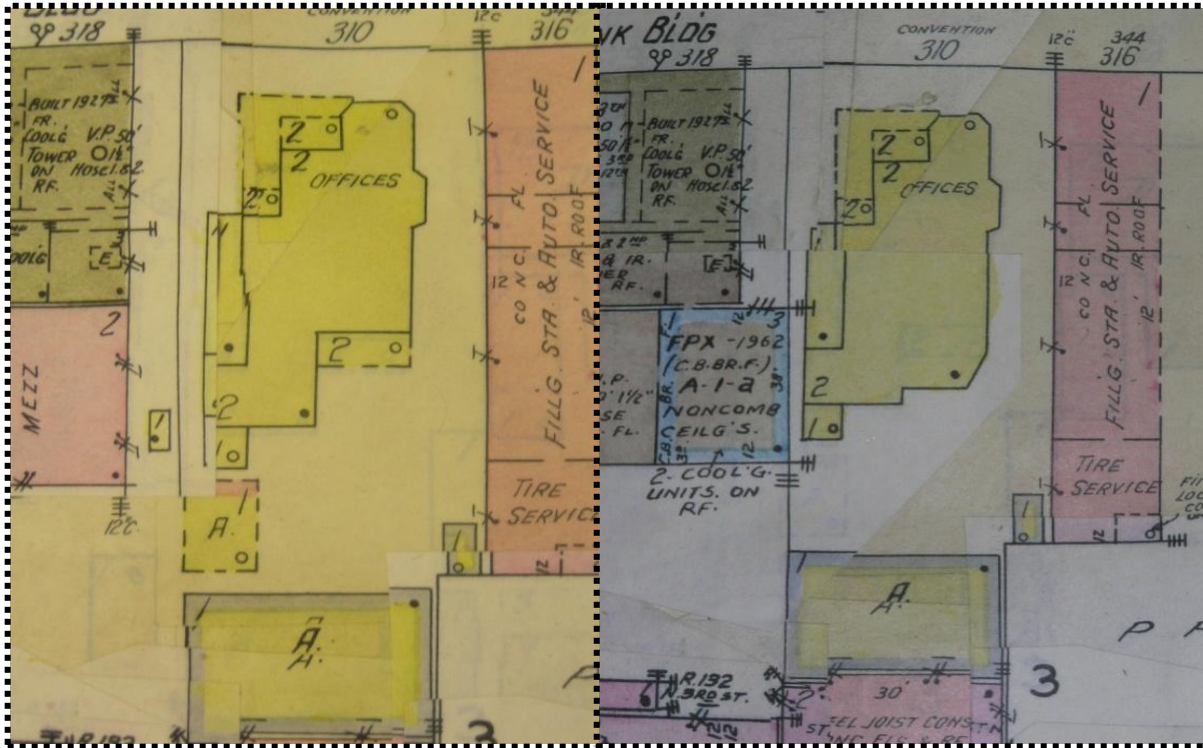


Figure 11. *Sheet 7 Details of 310 Convention Street, Pre and Post 1962* (Sanborn Map Company, *Insurance Maps of Baton Rouge Louisiana, Volume 1 1923-1963*)

The nectar I gather from my initial journey through the Sanborn Maps transforms into honeyed knowledge about 310. The nectar also provides me with a model for structuring language in forms that both evoke my experience and are accessible, reliable. The (wax comb) structure of the maps is integral to the making of the (honeyed) knowledge they recall and hold – which is not to say there are not empty combs and excess honey. (When I saw that in 1962, or thereabouts, cooling units were installed atop the building next door, I wondered if similar perhaps smaller units were installed in my house. The question led to an empty answer, but gave rise to a memory excess the maps cannot contain; namely, the ironic coincidence that cooling units for comfort should become popular in the 1950’s, anticipating it seems the social “heat” of the sixties. Since this was the era when color televisions became popular, it would appear folks could watch the social sparks from the cooling comfort of their homes. Perhaps these factors

contribute to the reason why the downtown area dwindled as a residential neighborhood during this time, no activity outside the hive or pollination through social interaction.)

My interactions with the maps recur to recall Erben's comments on Pastorius's process of integrating concrete experiences and intellectual insights so as to produce an evocative text that both contains and generates the knowledge produced. Such expressions are indicative of performance studies scholarship that seeks to posit the experience of the researcher in interaction with the archive as integral to the ensuing text's structure and expressive potential.<sup>2</sup> The experience of opening the Sanborn Maps and entering into the layers upon layers of memory highlight for me a research process that activates an archive already in action. It is an experience and understanding of material culture embedded in the languages of the body-text.

#### PAPER COMBS AND HONEY

The Sanborn Fire Insurance Maps offer a certain objectivity in the uniformity of their language codes, as well as an historically and socially grounded context for interpreting what a particular culture values in the transmission of historical detail. Developed in 1867 and used through 1970, the maps were a product of economic exigency as insurance companies called on them to check the extent of their liability for buildings damaged or destroyed by fire. They were especially valuable early on when a single fire could wipe an entire city off the map. The crucial color "Key" (see Figure 9), coded according to features that make a structure more or less fire resistant, fulfills this functional role in that the noted icons refer to building materials and, hence, a building's susceptibility to or ability to withstand fires. However, the craft involved in the making the maps shows an attention to detail that moves beyond functionality. The maps or

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<sup>2</sup> This notion is fundamental to the concept and practices of mystory. For a self-identified mystory, see Bowman and Bowman, "On the Bias." For additional performance historiographies that activate the same idea, see Jackson, Mavor, and Suchy.

rather the mapmaker tells stories about the cities and buildings he draws and, then, tints with watercolor or covers with odd cuts of paper, adhered ever so carefully to the page.

One look at Sheet 7 (or any other sheet for that matter) demonstrates the amount of hand-crafted detail required to make the maps and, for some, insure insurer liability or lack thereof. In addition to indicating the building materials of each structure, the mapmaker tells the type and location of chimneys, the number of floors, doors, elevators, windows, and porches, and the building's function. The mapmaker contexts each building within its neighborhood, including such features as the streets and their names, sidewalk widths and property boundaries, house and block numbers, fire stations and hydrants, railroads and other public transport, government buildings, commercial buildings, large factories and what they produce.

By means of each sheet, the neighborhood "Key Sheet," and the "Graphic Map of Volumes" (see Figure 8), the mapmaker extends his purview to document the development of the city over time. The lower numbers on the noted sheets and maps refer to the older neighborhoods, which are located near the river in the downtown district. As the city grows, the numbers and their referents increase, extending outwards from the city center in both predictable and scattershot patterns. No surprise, the mighty Mississippi curbs extensive residential growth to the west, as if crossing the river were crossing into unfamiliar territory. Instead, the western bank facilitates industrial growth, the main port of Greater Baton Rouge emerging there and serving such industries as lumber and oil, the latter voracious in its claim to land along the river in the mid to later part of the twentieth century. As industry expands, additional railway lines are laid and, in the 1920s, the main public depot is built on River Road, just across from the (old) state capitol and a mere block from where Convention Street intersects with River Road. From the depot then (suitcase in hand, a newly arrived state legislator, river worker, or industry man), it is but a short walk to Convention Street, up the hill to busy Third, and a few doors down to

find 310 Convention and the services of the physician and home owner, one J. R. Fridge, M. D. Through at least 1916, there were many homes like Dr. Fridge's in the downtown area, within the first five blocks of the Mississippi. By 1923, most have been replaced by banks, churches, hotels, and other commercial establishments, which suggests an economically vital city center servicing both a transient population and city residents who (now) live in the neighborhoods to the near east, such as Spanish Town, Beauregard Town, and the Garden District. Since, in 1923, Dr. Fridge provides a useful and likely lucrative service, there is good reason why he retained his residence and office, enduring or perhaps taking pleasure in the burgeoning hubbub of downtown life.

In the bound Sanborn Maps, the mapmaker tells his story of development and change by means of yellow tissue paper and white paper overlays – small, often odd cuts of paper glued directly over the preexisting image of a building and thereby indicating changes to it. Used for minor alterations, the tissue paper overlays allow one to see traces of a building's prior form beneath. Eliminated buildings or those with extensive alterations are enshrined under a shroud of white paper. As pertinent to each case, the mapmaker indicates the alteration or replacement building by drawing it on the overlay, noting details, and tinting it in accordance with the color “Key.”

As I noted on my first visit to the maps, minor and major alterations have been made to 310 Convention over the years. In subsequent visits (to the little room behind the locked door up the elevator on the fourth floor of the library downtown – always a journey it seems into the combs of this archive), a few additional changes to the house and surrounding area are notable. At some point between 1923 and 1951, the “D” that designated the house as a residential “D”-welling is overlaid with tissue and transformed to an “O” with “-ffices” printed next to it. In other words, the official function of house shifted from family home to doctor's office, although

the alterations to the house over the same period of time (e.g., additional porches) suggest it fulfilled both functions. Perhaps the designation reflects changes in zoning codes in the downtown area or property laws that require any public access to and use of a building supersede any private use.

I also became intrigued by the seeming discrepancies between the detailed Sheet 7 and its “Skeleton Key” or, rather, what was concealed beneath the built-up overlays on the detailed sheet and quite visible on the “Skeleton Key.” It was as if the mapmaker had grown weary of making changes to both and, at some point, set the skeleton aside, a barebones remnant of what had been. In Figure 12, the differences are apparent. In the skeleton, there are four small buildings in the two lots directly east of 310 and, in the lot to the southeast, is an oddly shaped building that looks like a skyscraper lying on its side with an arrow pointing west through its middle. I figure the arrow is a courtyard around which three connected buildings cluster. On the detailed Sheet 7, this structure is but a trace beneath the white cut-out that indicates the lot is used for “PARK’G.”

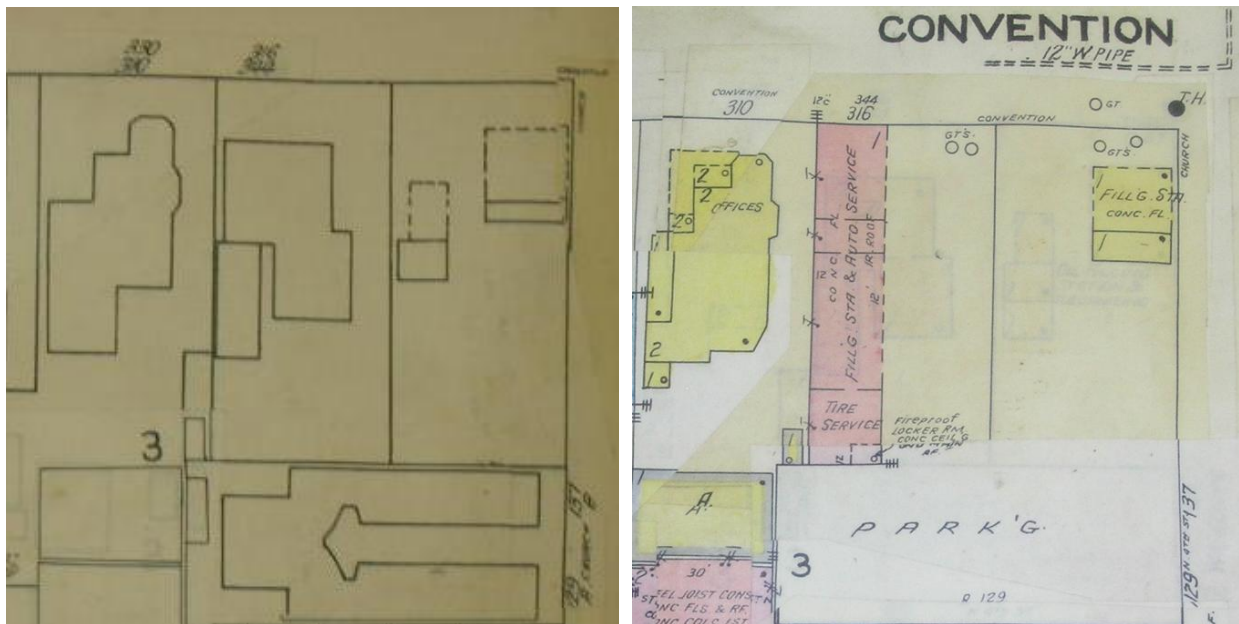


Figure 12. *Skeleton Key and Sheet 7 Details*  
(Sanborn Map Company, *Insurance Maps of Baton Rouge Louisiana, Volume 1 1923-1963*)



Likewise, the small buildings to the east of 310 become little phantoms beneath the tissue paper overlays that show the buildings that have replaced them. On the corner is a wooden gas station, which may have been the actual fueling kiosk for its partner to the west, the long brick auto repair shop and filling station. On the other hand, the two may have been competitors, the smaller station surviving because of its prime location on the corner of an intersection.

I am impressed, actually awed, by the hard bound Sanborn Maps due to the labor and care involved in handcrafting their details. To my digitized eye and hand (which so easily can copy, crop, enlarge or minimize the maps dis/placing them here for you to see), the handcrafting amuses me too. In terms of current reproductive technologies, the maps perform their economic function “inefficiently,” which is not to say they were inefficient as applied in their time. Two results that I will but mention here are the maps show us – they display – how the act of representation/remembering is always one that forgets too, and the temperament of their display is often whimsical. The tissue or white paper overlays demonstrate both results in that replaced or forgotten buildings often leave traces beneath the updated representations and the updates are clearly paper cut-outs that admit to their odd shape or slight misfit with the outlines of what they (do not) replace. In many ways, the overlays remind me of my house with its various alterations that jut out at odd angles and don’t quite fit with the lines of the original structure.

#### DIGITAL COMBS AND HONEY

As I mentioned earlier, the Sanborn Maps for Baton Rouge are archived online by the LSU library system. The black and white digital reproductions of the hard bound maps are contained in ten books that date from May 1885 through April 1951. Three-ten Convention Street is found on Sheet 5 in the 1908, 1911, and 1916 books and, as with the hard bound version in the public library, on Sheet 7 of Volume 1 in the 1923-1951 book. Due to the digital media or language structure (the wax comb) in terms of which the maps are transmitted, the (honeyed)

knowledge collected there and that I make here is a bit different than that I collected and made in my interaction with the material maps. A main difference concerns how the digital maps show the changes made to the buildings and city over time. Since the digital archive holds earlier books, another key difference is that I am able to gather additional information regarding 310, its surrounding neighborhood, and Baton Rouge generally.

Until 1923, the Sanborn Maps were updated every three to seven years – i.e., 1885, 1891, 1898, 1903, 1908, 1911, and 1916. Each book contains an index that provides population figures and, by comparing them, we can get a sense of the city’s growth over time. Between May 1885 and June 1903, the population increased from 10,000 to 14,000 people. Between June 1903 and April 1908, it jumped to 18,000 residents and held at that figure through August 1911. The August 1916 map reports rapid growth again, the population up by 5000 people. By 1923, a whopping 12,000 additional people had settled in the city, raising the population to 35,000. In a 1923-1947 volume that concentrates on the burgeoning suburbs, the population figure is placed at 55,000 while the 1923-1951 book reports a figure double that size, 120,000 in 1951. The soaring increase between 1947 and 1951 reflects urban-suburban growth across the US generally as WW II veterans return home and settle down to raise their families.

On the 1903 digital map, my house does not exist although the lot is demarcated by the number 113. On the April 1908 map, it magically appears in the shape of the structure shown on the “Skeleton Key” in 1923-1951 hard bound map – i.e., without the added front, side, and back bay window porches (see Figure 10). The house also has a stable out back that bears the number 310½. (I wonder if the stable was considered a possible residence or a potential site on which to build another house?) By August 1911, the stable turns into the four buildings I saw lurking beneath the white overlay on the “Skeleton Key” noted above (see Figure 10). Both the 1923-1947 and 1923-1951 digital maps show that a wood and metal clad garage has replaced the

four buildings, although the “Skeleton Key” for the 1923-1947 digital map retains them. This observation suggests: (a) the auto garage was built sometime between 1923 and 1947; (b) the mapmaker of the 1923-1947 “skeleton” chose not to indicate the change while the mapmaker of the 1923-1951 “skeleton” did; and (c) since neither chose to indicate changes to the house, we might surmise ; (d) the house changes may have been made after 1947; or (e) the “skeletons” are questionable sources for fixing dates; which (f) confirms making and reading maps are active practices of language negotiation; which (g) is fun precisely because it is confusing.

Tracking backwards through the books of digital maps, I find an interesting story about the filling stations that lie to the east of 310 (on lots 316 and 320) as depicted in Figure 11 above. The 1923-1951 digital book includes pages that show what stood on the lots prior to the placement of the overlays in the hard bound version. Like the “Skeleton Key” in the hard bound version (see Figure 11), the digital map indicates that in 1923 a house or “D”-welling stood next door to 310. The front half of the house was two stories high, the back half one, and there was a one story building behind it (see Figure 13). The corner lot contains the two buildings shown on the “Skeleton Key,” one or both demarcated as an “Oil Filling Station.” On the 1916 digital map, the “D”-welling remains, but the oil station is gone or, rather, it is anticipated by a one story stable or livery situated in the southeast corner of the lot. (On the Sanborn Maps, stables and liveries are designated by an “X” marked through the structure). The 1911 digital map shows the same “D”-welling, but with a larger livery next door (see Figure 13). The livery was under transfer at the time, and the 1908 digital map shows it as being sold. Both the “D”-welling and large livery remain intact through to the first digital map of 1885 although the livery business appears to change hands a number of times (see Figure 14).

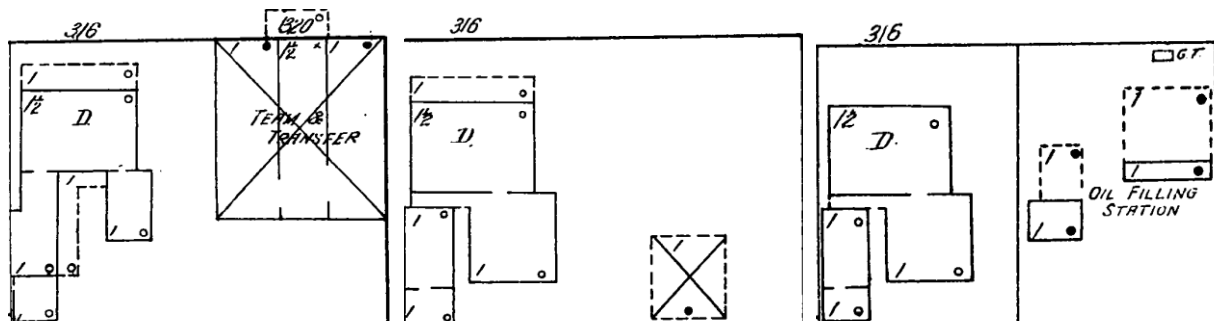


Figure 13. Assemblage of drawings that show the changes to lots 316 and 320 from the 1911, 1916, and 1923 digital maps ("Digital Sanborn Maps 1867-1970")

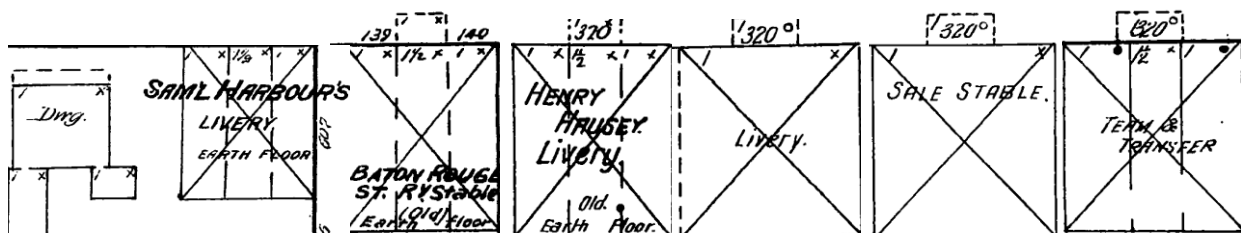


Figure 14. Assemblage of drawings that show the changes in the name of the livery business from the 1885, 1891, 1898, 1903, 1908, and 1911 digital maps ("Digital Sanborn Maps 1867-1970")

On the Sanborn Maps, the above-noted story recurs throughout the downtown area over the years. Liveries give way to service stations, which frequently give way to parking lots as is the case currently with the two lots next door to 310. Generally, the story sustains and confirms the importance of individual transport and mobility in US society and culture. It also tells the familiar story of residential and commercial blight in urban centers as services, such as gas stations and auto repair shops, follow the "flight" of residents to outlying neighborhoods and suburbs from the 1950s on. Once commercially diverse, city centers such as that of Baton Rouge now service daily commuters with park-n-pay lots and places to eat lunch. Should downtown redevelopment efforts prove successful, such services as auto repair shops (beauty salons and barber shops, clothing, book, and hardware stores, a florist, cinema, and toy shop) may find a lucrative niche in the area again.

The digital maps tell a number of additional stories about the buildings in the immediate neighborhood of 310. On the 1885 digital map, there is a private “D”-welling located just south of the large livery noted above, “Sam’l Harbour’s Livery” to be exact. By 1916, the home has been replaced by the Wickliffe Apartments, which boast three stories, a central courtyard, and a passageway that runs from the courtyard to the west side of the building (see Figure 15). Of course, the apartments are none other than the “oddly shaped . . . skyscraper” I found hidden beneath the “PARK’G” lot on the 1923-1951 hard bound map (see Figure 12). The 1923-1951 digital map reveals that the Wickliffe did not disappear beneath the white overlay of “PARK’G” until sometime between 1951 and 1960, which once again correlates to the post WW II decline of urban centers as many residents take to suburban life.

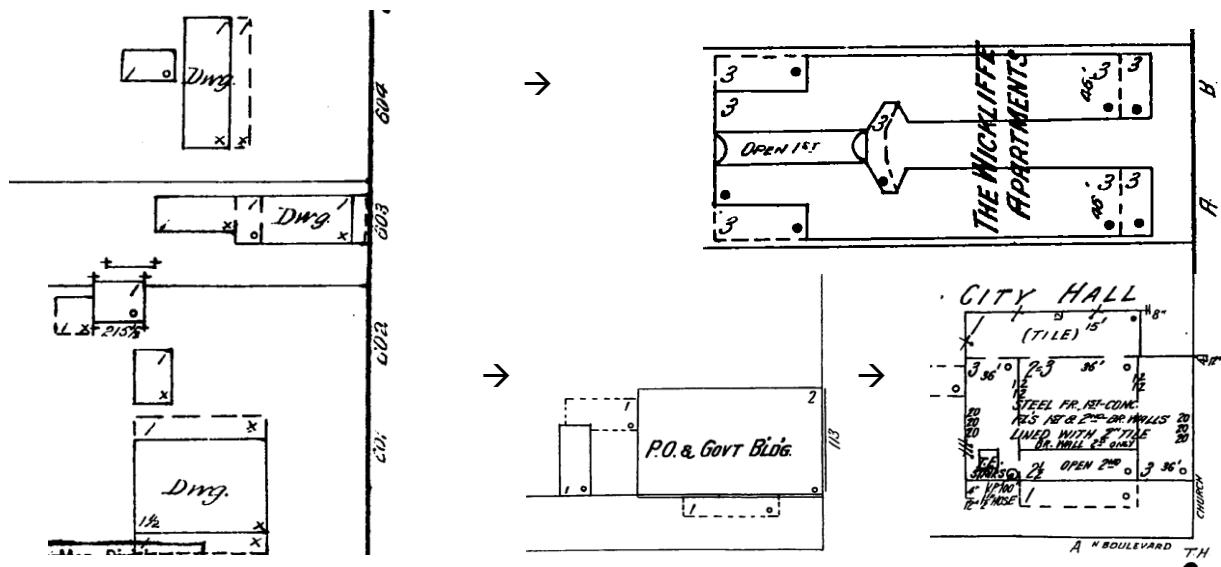


Figure 15. Assemblage of drawings that show the changes to the lots southeast of 310 Convention from the 1885, 1898, 1916, and 1923-1947 digital maps (“Digital Sanborn Maps 1867-1970”)

The lots to the south of “PARK’G” tell a little different story (see Figure 15). In 1885, there appear to be two private homes, which by 1898 are replaced by a two story post office and government building. Between 1923 and 1947, a large, decoratively tiled City Hall is built, the Wickliffe Apartments situated just next door. Unlike the Wickliffe, the building that housed City

Hall remains today, its architecture of municipal austerity and ornamentation serving the needs of a private social club.

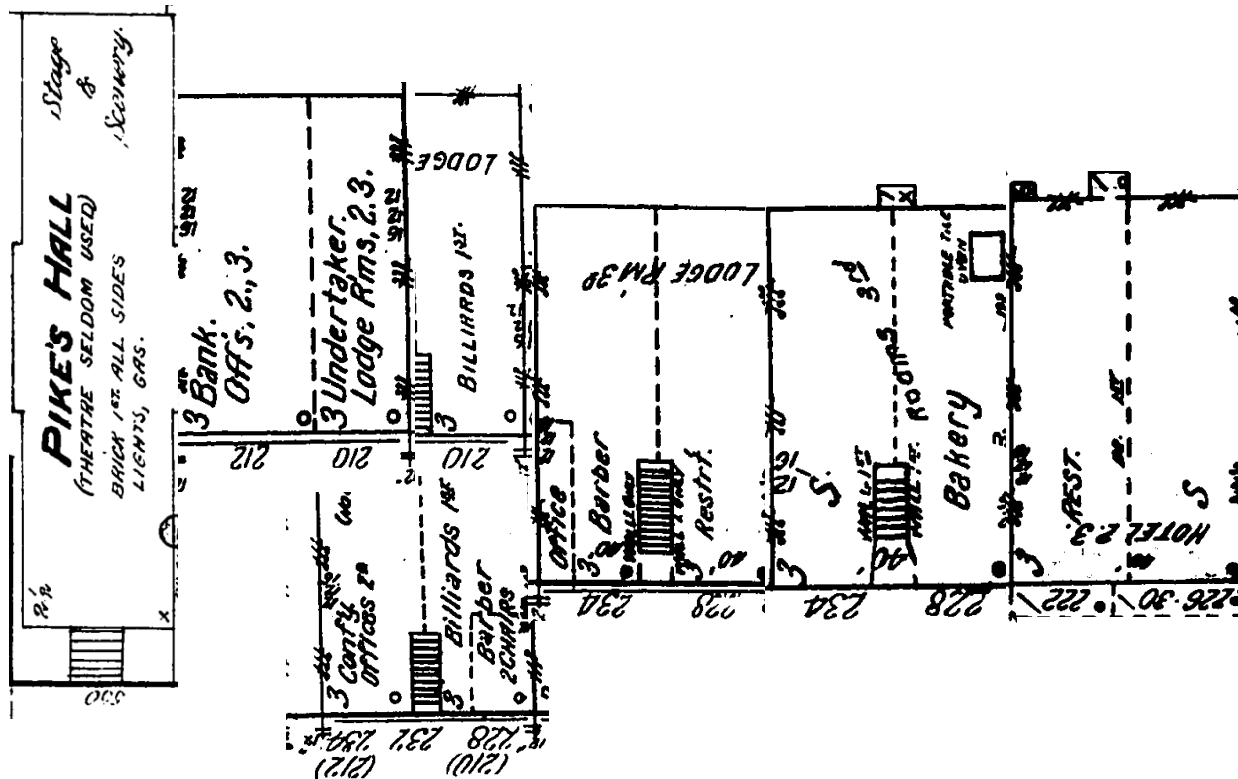


Figure 16. Pike's Hall Transformations from the 1885, 1903, 1908, 1911, 1916, 1923, and 1923-1951 digital maps ("Digital Sanborn Maps 1867-1970")

Another interesting story concerns Pike's Hall, a theater owned by the wealthy entrepreneur and president of the New Orleans and Baton Rouge Railroad, William Pike, who also owned the lot for 310 Convention before J. R. Fridge obtained it. The theater was located about a block from 310, up on Third Street and between Convention and Florida Streets. On the 1885 map, there is a note appended to the drawing of the building that states, "theater seldom used." The observation seems to anticipate the 1903 replacement of the theatre by a funeral home and, also, a bank office with lodging on the upper floors. By 1908, lighter spirits prevail as the undertaker's has become a billiard hall, which by 1911 includes a small barber shop tucked into one of its corners. Apparently, the barber shop did well. By 1916, it along with a restaurant and small bank office have replaced the pool room – although, within a few short years (by

1923), a bakery has taken over the whole of the first floor. At some point between 1923 and 1951, the bakery becomes a restaurant with a hotel on the second and third floors. This final note prompts me to re-curve and view the maps again whereby I discover that upper rooms were available to let for a good part of the building's history. I find pleasure in this observation since, hypothetically, a person such as myself might have lived there for twenty or thirty years and led a rich, sensuous life; an odiferous life, propped up in bed with a good book as the pungent smells of flowers and formaldehyde, beer, soap, and hair tonic, fried catfish and freshly baked bread fill my room on the second floor. The maps tell me stories of buildings, buildings made and used by people ever adapting to the shifting circumstances of time and place and bodies in motion.

#### A MODEL OF THE ARCHIVE

In *Archive Fever: A Freudian Impression*, Derrida writes,

The archive, as printing, writing, prosthesis, or hypomnesic technique in general is not only the place for stocking and for conserving an archivable content *of the past* which would exist in any case, as such, without the archive, one still believes it was or will have been. No, the technical structure of the *archiving* archive also determines the structure of the *archivable* content even in its very coming into existence and its relationship to the future. The archivization produces as much as it records the event. (16-17; emphases in original)

As archives, the Sanborn Maps are neither neutral nor static representations of the city and buildings they record in their hard bound and digital forms. In literal as well as figurative ways, the maps perform an accumulation of memories that operate within, upon, and against each other: barber, billiard room, bakery. Thereby, they show the archive in action, simultaneously collecting and generating the knowledge it produces; the stories it tells about a house, neighborhood, and city. Like a hive, the generation of knowledge (honey) is determined by and dependent on the structure (the wax comb) in which it is stored and through which it is made manifest, restored or performed in material ways for others. In Derrida's terms, the "technical structure" of the Sanborn Maps "determines the structure of the *archivable* content." So it

follows, the differences between hand drawn and digital technologies affect content, experience, and meaning making too. As Derrida argues, “what is no longer archived in the same way is no longer lived in the same way. Archivable meaning is also and in advance codetermined by the structure that archives” (*Archive Fever* 18).

Understanding that the digital maps are black and white reproductions of the hand drawn maps, both versions attempt to imitate with precision and accuracy the basic lines and shapes of the buildings and the city that contains them. In other words, the technologies of material architecture and city planning (e.g., the composition of buildings on lots, in relation to each other in blocks and to the grid of streets that enables mobility between them) “codetermine” the structure of the maps. The city and buildings are a living archive too. With the aim of efficiency and functionality, the imitative maps reduce the scale of the referents and their life over “real” time, condensing the latter into summaries of three or more years. In this way, the maps are structured in terms of a metonymic language of efficient communication that retains direct associations between signifier and signified (e.g., “D”-welling; “PARK’G” lot; “A”uto garage). The maps speak an economical language directed, initially, to meet the economic function of insurer liability. However, due to the differences between the signifier and signified (a technological glitch, some might say), gaps emerge in the flow of efficient and precise information. While an insurer might overlook most of these gaps, others such as I find the gaps to be sites where additional experiences and meanings emerge. For one, the very use of metonymic language marks its partiality and incompleteness as epitomized by the “Skeleton Keys.” One wonders what has been left out or forgotten in the name of bare bone efficiency. The question gives rise to associative memories, experiences, and meanings that, in a sense, restore flesh to the bare bone structure: the blacksmith “Sam Harbour” shoes horses on the “earth floor” of his “livery”; a lodger leaves his “R’ms” to grab a quick shave at the “Barber” before



taking dinner at the “Restrt” next door; a doctor levels four buildings out back to erect a metal clad “A” garage. Importantly, this excess of experience and meaning is born by rather than opposed to the structure that attempts to contain it. It is an alternative or, as Victor Turner would have it, an anti-structure of excess that, in this case, insists that structures of economy are codependent with structures of bodies – i.e., people, who build and inhabit buildings as well as those who record their stories in the maps they make.

As I implied earlier, the particular structure of the hard bound, hand crafted maps insists on the interplay of economy and excess in fairly overt ways. The tissue and white paper overlays call attention to the act of remembering as one that also forgets. Further, the hand drawn, tinted, titled, cut-and-paste technology of making the maps is evident and, to our digitized sensibility, it appears an odd way to realize efficiency. We are made aware of the map maker and the seeming excess of physical labor involved in creating the maps. The maps defamiliarize the structures of economy and excess and to the point where I, at least, experience the maps as art; as an artful project *about* economy and excess that, in our time and place, offers a prime example of post-structural historiography, philosophy, textuality, and performance. That is to say, the form and function of the maps are unfamiliar enough to us today that their operations stand out as “strange,” confirming that structures are neither neutral nor static, but alter in light of changing circumstances and our perceptions regarding them.

The technological structure of the digital maps operates a little differently. For one, the maps lack color and, hence, no longer enable a quick read of the buildings in terms of insurer liability. Their reproduction in black and white drains them of this function. Second, instead of overlays, the digital maps show changes in a building by the complete replacement of an old drawing by a new one, the latter erasing all traces of the prior building and its function. Rather than an accumulation of layers that indicate a past, the digital maps operate more as a montage,

each map existing in its own space and time without reference to a past. In this way, the maps *are* easy to read and, as such, we might say they substitute the economy of presence for the economy of (insurer) risk. Excess comes into play as the researcher flips between the individual maps so as to gain an understanding of the building's story. So too, there are more maps in more books and hence more and older stories to collect than is the case with the hard bound archive. Lastly, the maps' digital composition and explicit reproductive aesthetic invite me to copy, crop, cut-n-paste with ease and little guilt as compared to my furtive experience taking photographs (ever so carefully) of the hand crafted maps. The result is reproductive excess with a difference, as I hope is demonstrated by my assemblages in Figures 13-16. In Brecht's and Benjamin's terms, then, the digital maps democratize access to and re-use of the maps and, more broadly, art and culture making. The risk of such democratization, of course, is that in free access to the imagery, the re-use is elided and the past erased in favor of the currency of new and present ownership.

So, while the hand crafted maps structure economy and excess so as to make me highly aware of the politics of representation (of remembering and forgetting), the digital maps encourage me to give it a try anyway. Together, they ask me to acknowledge what I have been doing all along; namely, by interacting with the archives I have been collecting and composing an archive of my own – i.e., codetermined by the language structures of the hand crafted and digital maps. This chapter is an expression of that interaction and it is prefigured by my making another archive in three-dimensional form: a miniature model of 310 that shows my understanding of how the maps (and I) perform the house.

The last available outline of 310 in the 1923-1951 digital “book” provides a ground plan for the model, which I copy and enlarge so as to fill an 11” x17” piece of white foam board. The result is a 50’ to 1” scale ground plan of the actual house. Coupled with photographs of 310, the

ground plan determines the length and angle of the walls and their relationship to each other. As noted on the maps, most of the walls run two stories high. I cut the walls from white foam board and, based on map details and photographs, also cut out windows and doors. Then I glue the walls together. It takes some effort. Like the maps, my performance to this point attempts to imitate, in reduced scale, the current house as accurately and precisely as possible.

To include changes made to the house over time, I integrate the lines of the squared off porch into the design of the back bay window porch that replaced it sometime between 1951 and 1963. I also construct and attach two- rather than three-dimensional porches to the front and side of the house so as to highlight rather than elide the changes to the house and my act of restoring them. Like the overlays on the hard bound map, the odd two-dimensional porches call attention to their artificial misfit with the rest of the model. For like reasons, I craft a flat rather than three-dimensional roof on which I draw a web of triangles that quite accurately mis/represents the multifarious angles and pitches of the roofline. The roof is removable although there is nothing to see inside except empty space . . . unless you happen to see the globs of glue along the seam lines, evidence of the backstage labor involved in building the house.

With the white foam board structure (of metonymic economy and some excess) in place, I copy, enlarge, and cut out bits of information from the various digital books, such as notations of structural and architectural details. I also copy and cut out my correspondence with others regarding 310. While my requests for concrete information bore little fruit, the replies show interest in and support for my research, as if the writers have experienced an important dwelling in their lives too. I paper the outside of my miniature house with the black and white paper cut outs, aiming to perform like the archives in a number of ways, such as: the layered accumulation of tissue and white paper memories in the hard bound maps; the invocation of metonymic economy and associative excess; and the explicit use of (black and white) reproduced copies that

acknowledge their draw on and also misfit with a prior referent. I also strive to make a model that celebrates my hand (in the) crafting of cultural history and, thereby, support our mutual right and responsibility to do the same with confidence and also respect to those whose prior performances enable our own.



Figure 17. *A Model Hive* April 2008 (photo by author)

Like all archives, my model is a beehive consisting of wax comb structures that house and give rise to honeyed knowledge that inevitably exceeds and changes those structures. Like all archives, my model also is a metonymic miniature of the cultural history it collects and composes; a miniature house that helps me express how the maps and I perform. According to Lévi-Strauss,

Miniatures . . . are “manmade” and, what is more, made by hand. They are therefore not just projections or passive homologues of the object: they constitute a real experiment with it. Now the model being an artifact, it is possible to understand how it is made and this understanding of the method of construction adds a supplementary dimension. . . . [The supplement suggests] there are several solutions to the same problem. The choice of one solution involves a modification of the result to which another solution would have led, and the observer is in effect presented with the general picture of these

permutations at the same time as the particular solution offered. He is thereby transformed into an active participant without even being aware of it. (24)

In the upcoming chapter, “Doll House,” I examine the miniature more fully, but call on it here to ruminate briefly on if and how the “method of construction” (i.e., constructing miniatures of a house and city in model and map) “adds a supplementary dimension” that transforms the “observer . . . into an active participant.” As I tried to express in my writing of this chapter, my interaction with the maps entwined the pleasures of discovering facts about 310, its neighborhood and city, with discovering gaps or, as Derrida would have it, “spacing” in the facts that I could either engage as an activate participant or ignore. That is, while the metonymic miniaturization of material reality boasts an economy of expression that implies things left out, I am not sure the noted implications are always pursued by the observer. The transformation of observer to active participant does not just happen or, if it does, we are not always “aware of it” and, hence, aware of the significance and ramifications of our participation. As Vera Zolberg offers, “reflexivity makes life hard” (ix), and it makes life hard precisely because it excites participation that is not active, in conventional terms anyway – i.e., in terms that privilege the spontaneity of the I/eye in his or her present tense. Of course, in these terms, transformation from observer to active participant happens all the time.

The question, then, is how to stimulate participation in a miniature map, model, performance, and/as archive that embraces reflexivity; that embraces a transformation that makes life difficult or shows life to be difficult more so than easy. I will not presume to answer the question here as much as pursue a few permutations.

When placed in conversation with the archive as an event of collecting and composing simultaneously, the question places as much stress on collecting as on composing so that the latter is constantly questioned by the collection. When I first visited the Sanborn Maps, my aim

was to find my house, 310 Convention, in the archive of maps. As I recall, “I turn to Sheet 7” and “from an overhead view . . . scan the page quickly in search of 310. My eyes circle, narrow in, then land to dwell on my house.” At the time and in my narrative, I was transformed (no doubt about it) by my active participation with a single house on a single map. I collected and composed the house as easily and efficiently as, say, an insurer who in search of the same house on the same map finds, collects, and composes it as a high risk liability because it is tinted yellow. She closes the book. The house disappears. The performance is over precisely because the collection and composition of the house abides by the economics of (her) presence. As I discovered, however, once I engaged multiple maps, an accumulation of maps, maps within and upon and against other maps, my composing process slowed down considerably and often came to a grinding halt due to the substantive excess of the archive, which includes its resistant gaps and contradictions.

In his concepts of place and space, Michel de Certeau offers another permutation of the noted question. Like my initial grasp of 310 or the composition and use of the digital maps as separate entities, “place” for de Certeau occurs when “the elements taken into consideration are beside one another, each situated in its own ‘proper’ and distinct location, a location it defines” and that “implies an indication of stability” (117). “Space,” on the other hand, “occurs as the effect produced by the operations that orient it, situate it, temporalize it, and make it function in a polyvalent unity of conflictual programs or contractual proximities.” Space is “the act of a present (or of a time), and modified by the transformations caused by successive contexts” (117). In the Sanborn Maps, space arises in the accrual of tissue and white paper overlays whose attempt to economize – to place value and meaning on top – is countered by the excess beneath. Similarly, in the digital maps, the collection and composition of the single maps in relation to each other (e.g., billiard room, barber, bakery, restaurant) indicate a polyvalent space of shifting

claims to place. Notably, while I found the transformations of Pike's Hall pleasurable (in odiferous terms) I suspect the pool hall owner, barber, and baker did not. For them, the transformation of place into space made life difficult. And I am able to participate in this understanding only by means of a healthy collection, and a reflexive composition process that makes life difficult for me too since my sensuous experience of the archive is countered by my collection.

In this chapter, I engaged the archives of the Sanborn maps as nectar for collecting and composing another hive of research concerning 310 Convention and its environs. In the process, I discovered my role as a worker bee requires me to value collecting as a way to double check what I compose from the honeyed knowledge, be it sustenance in thought or the structure of my arguments. I found I must spend time dwelling on what I gathered, take interpretive care as well as risks in how I distilled the collection, and transform my choices into forms that "give back" to the maps and the individuals and communities they represent. As Derrida urges, the product of archival reproduction should "illuminate, read, interpret, establish its object, namely a given inheritance, by inscribing itself into it, that is to say by opening it and by enriching it enough to have a rightful place in it" (*Archive Fever* 67). Bees enact this notion of inheritance and enrichment in their commitment to their colony's well being and in their symbiotic relationship with plants. I hope my archival efforts operate similarly, sustaining and activating the communities connected with my research and the house that drew to me to them.

## CHAPTER FOUR DOLL HOUSE

I was never really into dolls much, although I did have a Fisher-Price Little People house when I was young. I liked that I could carry around the house with me, aided by the convenient handle that also worked as a hinge to keep the house closed. I also liked that all the little people and their accessories fit neatly inside the house for such adventures. I appreciated the lithographs that decorated the walls and floors and landscaping of the self-contained dwelling, and the little plastic pieces (the chairs, tables, beds, and car) suited my imagination just fine. Since I also had a Little People barn with animals, a Little People school and bus, and a Little People plane, the domestic site of Little People life was a sub-scene in a larger adventure. When I imagined and played out stories of family life, I don't recall (re)furnishing the house as much as using an assortment of Little People pieces to create new and different spaces in which the stories could unfold. Similar story spaces and places were created with my Lincoln Logs, Tinker Toys, and Lego pieces, base materials that could be taken apart and reassembled (often in hybrid combinations) easily. Even though I may not have been a girl who played with dolls in the traditional sense, I was a girl who enjoyed creating stories that allowed me to get inside the miniature worlds of my toy box and imagination.

I appreciate the desire of the dollhouse as a place for collecting miniatures and as a swell curio cabinet in which to store the collection. According to Flora Gill Jacobs in *A History of Doll Houses*, miniature containers and their contents were leisure class symbols of status dating from early Egyptian funerary pieces made to accompany the dead in the afterlife to fifteenth and sixteenth century curios or cabinet houses. From the adult desire to collect, design, and decorate a perfect world evolved the cheaper, sturdier versions for child's play. For me, some of the more interesting dollhouses are those where the makers have attended to the meticulous details of



architecture and décor so as to highlight a certain lifestyle and imaginary. Queen Mary's Dollhouse of 1924 includes "a vast number of objects created expressly for it," such as "drawerfuls of prints and original watercolors by famous artists" and "two hundred books written by celebrated authors in their own handwriting" (Jacobs 260). The Castle of actress Colleen Moore represents a fantasy dwelling or, rather, it is a dwelling on fantasy. In architecture and décor, each room pays tribute to a fable or fairytale, its story line and characters.

The degree of detail in miniature constructions is all the more impressive, even staggering, when viewers consider the amount of thought, time, and labor such constructs require. As Lévi-Strauss observes, due to its scale, the miniature highlights the effort of the creative act, prompting the viewer to recognize what the creator chose to retain, alter, and delete in the process of miniaturization. In turn, the miniature recalls the larger referent, encouraging the viewer to recognize and review places and items she may overlook in everyday life. In *The Poetics of Space*, Gaston Bachelard considers the miniaturist's efforts in terms of her disposition toward the world and the reasons she concentrates on the details.

All small things must evolve slowly, and certainly a long period of leisure, in a quiet room, was needed to miniaturize the world. Also, one must love space to describe it as minutely as though there were world molecules, to enclose an entire spectacle in a molecule of drawing, in this feat there is an important dialectics of the intuition – which always sees big – and work, which is hostile to flights of fancy. Intuitionists, in fact, take in everything at one glance, while details reveal themselves and patiently take their places, one after the other, with the discursive impishness of the clever miniaturist. It is as though the miniaturist challenged the intuitionist philosopher's lazy contemplation, as though he said to him: "You would not have seen that! Take the time needed to see all these little things that cannot be seen all together." In looking at a miniature, unflagging attention is required to integrate all the detail. (159)

As a way of viewing and making culture, the miniaturist turns aside from the much-vaunted overview, which "always sees big" and aims for significance – i.e., what's the broader point of seeing small? For the miniaturist, the broad patterns of cultural history and their significance are

realized in the details, which require desire (love) on the part of the researcher in order to take the time to see and study them.

Jacobs is of this disposition when she writes that in addition to being a collector's item, a container for collections, a work of art, and a child's plaything, a dollhouse functions as a site of cultural history:

[An] historian, with words, attempts to tell us a great deal about customs and tastes. A painter, with brush, lets us know even more, recording perhaps, and simply, the corner of a kitchen with the cook roasting a goose. But the dolls' house reveals, at a glance, what has taken the writer many chapters and the artist much canvas to say. . . . Time stands still and a period is preserved as it never can be in a full-sized house. All sorts of things, however ephemeral, are left as they were in a dolls' house that would never remain in a human's. (4-5)

While I am not sure time stands still in a doll house, as Jacobs suggests, it does slow down since, like descriptive accounts in narrative and painting, the details of an item are focused on closely. In *On Longing*, Susan Stewart confirms that “the details of a miniature magnify the importance of what we experience and express . . . : [t]he procedure by which description multiplies in detail is analogous to and mimetic of the process whereby space becomes significance, whereby everything is made to ‘count’” (47). For Stewart, this magnification reveals “a secret life . . . a set of actions and hence a narrativity and history outside the given field of perception” (54). The “given field” in this case is the perceptual norm that action occurs in everyday scenic time and place. In US culture especially, another “given field” is summary time and place where action (narrative and history) are sped up so as enable the efficient production and consumption of an action, item, story, or image and, hence, facilitate the broad overview and aim of progress. So, while the miniature, and the dollhouse especially, may “present . . . a constant daydream” of domestication and class consumption (Stewart 54), it simultaneously critiques *how* domestication and class consumption are enacted (differently) in the “given fields” of experience and

expression. That is to say, the miniature is not the sole performer of these ideological practices, although it may indeed magnify them, urge us to slow down and take account of them.

Embedded in the descriptive poetics of the miniature, then, is the political potential to make meaning of “the ongoing business of quotidian life” (Turner 75); the scenic and summary fields of experience and expression. In *From Ritual to Theatre*, Victor Turner calls on Wilhelm Dilthey to observe that making “*value . . . inheres in the affective enjoyment of the present*” and “the power and faculty of using the will . . . refers to the *future*” while “*meaning . . . arises in memory, in cognition of the past, and is concerned with negotiation about the ‘fit’ between past and present*” (75; emphases in original). In the conservative impulse to spare and preserve the stuff of everyday life by slowing down time so as to focus on it –  *dwell on it* in Heidegger’s terms – the miniature demonstrates its ability to make meaning of assumed values and our will to power. In a sense, this is the job assigned the miniature, which is not to say it always succeeds in fulfilling it.

My draw on Turner in the above paragraph implies that there is a connection between the poetics and politics of the miniature and performance. Like the miniature, performance has been or is defined as an act of imitation, reiteration, a stylized act of repetition, or restored behavior. Performance recalls a prior referent. Also like the miniature, many performances result in if not aim to represent a microcosm of quotidian life so as to magnify certain material aspects, values, and motives; to make them count and urge the audience to take account of them. One type of performance pertinent to my house and to my dollhouse concerns in this chapter is the performance practice of installation.

In her introduction to *Space, Site, Intervention*, Susan Suderburg traces the concepts and practices of installations to the seventeenth and eighteenth century collecting practices of the *Wunderkammern*, or cabinets of curiosities and wonders:

*Wunderkammern* were composed of collections of items chosen not because of their historical value as antiquities or their monetary worth but because the collectors found the objects pleasing and demonstrative of the “wonders of the world,” whether natural, spiritual, or man-made. . . . This lack of homogeneity is precisely what makes the *Wunderkammer* such an intriguing precursor to installation art. It suggests as well a connectivity to acts of intimate material collection and repositioning such as curio or souvenir cabinets, personal altars, roadside and hiking memorials, and autobiographical mantelpiece groupings, all of which take the institutional scale of the *Wunderkammer* and dissolve and redistribute this passion for knowledge through the consumption and arrangement of objects on a more intimate scale across the everyday. (7-8; emphases in original)

The “intimate scale” of installations and miniatures refers not only to size, but to the collector’s active selection of and engagement with the objects she has chosen or made and the stories they tell (or spark in the viewer) by means of their composition. Like miniatures, installations draw on the phenomena of actual life to create fictive worlds that become real – fictive real – in their material manifestation. In this way, the installation like the miniature “multiplies significance”; it inspires multiple acts of meaning-making “by virtue of the tension it creates between inside and outside, container and contained, surface and depth” (Stewart 41).

In this chapter, I continue to inhabit 310 Convention through the perspectives of the dollhouse as miniature and as installation, inspired by my “fictive real” performances of the same. As I described in Chapter Three, I made a three-dimensional model of 310, a wax house, in order to better understand the archive activated in the Sanborn Maps. In this chapter, I reconceive my model as a dollhouse, a miniature dwelling, in light of my placement of it within another miniature dwelling, an installation about abandoned places that I and others performed for the public. Our collective installation served as the 2003 program for *Across Disciplines: Performance Research and Response*, an annual event sponsored by the Performance Studies area in the Department of Communication Studies at LSU. *Across Disciplines* features the performance research of graduate students to which faculty from diverse departments and

disciplines respond. Below, I discuss *Across Disciplines* as a model for performance research and describe our specific program, paying particular attention to my little dwelling within the installation as a whole. I analyze my dollhouse site and, progressively the entire performance, by calling on Heidegger's notion of preservation and Derrida's "archive fever." I then move to the significance of the miniature as installation and performance in terms of issues of absence and presence, recalling concerns I discussed in my introduction to the chapter. Lastly, I extend Bachelard's interest in the motivation behind miniatures to his concept of toponophilia or "felicitous spaces" – i.e., those spaces we love and, as necessary, defend against adversarial forces.

#### A PLACE TO PLAY

*Across Disciplines: Performance Research and Response* is an annual event initiated by the Performance Studies faculty in the fall of 2000. The aim of the program is to feature the performance research of graduate students in and through live performance and, thereby, insist that performance is both a subject and method of study. Typically, the program is organized around a central theme or theoretical issue of research and, typically, it runs for two nights in the department's performance facility, the HopKins Black Box. Each night, three to four invited respondents – faculty and other professionals from various departments and often other institutions – provide feedback and discuss the pieces with the audience. Rather than impose a "performance" perspective, the diverse respondents are encouraged to address the research from their base of interest, which then expresses another aim of the program; namely, to understand and activate the study of performance as explicitly cross-disciplinary.

The performances for the first event were conceived in various classes, but finalized in a Problems in Performance and Criticism seminar taught by Dr. Ruth Laurion Bowman in the spring of 2000. The four graduate students who presented their work experimented with various

research methods, including performance ethnography, historiography, and performative writing.

According to Ruth Bowman, the idea for the program emerged in the cross-feed between her course and the first Performative Writing seminar, also taught in spring 2000 by Dr. Michael Bowman. Having sat in on the course, Ruth found,

. . . by experimenting with diverse writing models or relays, the course helped us discover different ways of crafting subjectivity; models that resulted in something that seemed to us more like “performance” on the page than did the results of other models we’d been taught to use – i.e., for writing research. We found we could acknowledge our subjective position (as we’d been charged to do) through the play of different voices and perspectives; doubling, tripling, quadrupling “the self” by ciphering it through social-cultural forms of writing and other expressive media. So, in these terms anyway, it seems the performative writing seminar → Across Disciplines program was and is an attempt to position ourselves not only in terms of the politics of writing/research in the academy, but identity politics as they have and continue to play out in performance studies and other disciplines. (R. Bowman)

As a student taking the writing seminar, my experience was similar to that expressed by Ruth. In addition, I found that the experience helped me move between the theories and practices of the page and stage more easily, understanding myself as a performer of research in both text and (corporeal) body.

For the spring 2003 *Across Disciplines*, I petitioned for and was selected to produce the program. The research emphasis and theme of the program derived from a Poetics of Place seminar taught in the fall of 2002 by Dr. Miles Richardson in the Department of Geography and Anthropology. I asked three of my seminar classmates if, along with me, they would like to reconceive the research they had done for the course in terms of a performance installation, which we would stage for the public the following semester. All agreed to do the project although none were performance studies/communication studies students. As the producer and director of the event, I was responsible for designing and implementing the rehearsal process, purchasing the necessary materials for the installation(s), staffing and publicizing the show, and arranging for the respondents. The show ran two nights, April 9 and April 10, 2003 in the HopKins Black

Box. On the first night, three respondents offered feedback. They were Dr. Bainard Cowan from the Department of English, Dr. Jay D. Edwards from the Department of Geography and Anthropology, and Dr. Joshua Gunn from the Department of Communication Studies. Three different respondents provided insights on the second night. They were Marsha R. Cuddeback, AIA certified architect and Instructor in the School of Architecture, Dr. Marchita B. Mauck, Associate Dean of the College of Art & Design, and Dr. Miles E. Richardson from the Department of Geography and Anthropology.

As noted above, the program was based on Dr. Richardson's seminar, *Poetics of Place*, which in the fall of 2002 emphasized places that evoke a sense of the past. In addition to reading and discussing materials by cultural geographers and anthropologists, course activities included field trips to historic and other sites in Baton Rouge, poetic responses to the readings, and listening to and understanding the song lyrics of such as artists as Lucinda Williams in poetic terms. For my research project in the course, I focused on "Big House 310: Building, Dwelling, and Inhabiting Desires" – tracing the multiple stories I discovered in researching (what at the time I understood was) an "abandoned" Victorian town house.

For *Across Disciplines*, I retained my concentration on abandoned places and selected three classmates whose research was similar to my own in this way. In "Rituals of Truth at the Picture Show," Barbara Faulkner, a doctoral student in Education Curriculum and Instruction, documented the shifting screen of graffiti images applied to the exterior walls of the defunct University Cinema that (once) stood near campus. Jacqueline Mills, a master student in Cultural Geography, created a phantom image of a break tree in "Shadows and Whispers Beneath the Break Tree." Once used for shade by slaves and tenant farmers, the large oak tree stands as a relic of the plantation past on a contemporary Mississippi cotton farm. In his piece, "Le Petit Versailles: A Garden Overgrown with Memory," John Welch, a doctoral student in Cultural

Geography, explored the traces of the past that remain in an overgrown garden on a southern Louisiana plantation. Along with my house, all four places were no longer occupied according to their former uses and we found we were preoccupied with how the spaces had adapted to and survived their various states of abandonment.

To activate further the cross-feed between disciplines and help my classmates make the shift from page to stage, I paired each participant with a graduate student in performance studies. Understood as guides, Melanie Kitchens, Gary Reeves, and Gretchen Stein Rhodes worked with the non-performance majors to conceptualize their research in terms of performance and performance installations and to find practical ways to realize the connections they had made. In return, the performance studies students were guided by their partners and their expertise as regards the places they had researched. All in all, we were “tour guides” of various sorts, enacting *theoria* as Michael Bowman articulates it in his call for “better tourism.”

[*Theoria*] of course is the etymological root of our words *theory* and *theater*. The practice of *theoria* involved travel to foreign places, to oracles, to sites where strange or marvelous objects, people, or activities were rumored to be. The *theoros* would venture to such places in order to see what could be seen, to get the lay of the land, to investigate the rumors, and so forth, and he would return home and appear before the public to give an account of his travels. Tourism, theory, and theater come together in the ancient practice of *theoria*, considered as a mode of creative research that relies on performance as its method. (“Looking for Stonewall’s Arm” 105; emphases in original)

By means of their field work and archival research, and by traveling into the “foreign” territory of performance, my three classmates had ventured forth “to get the lay of the land.” So too, the performance studies students had entered the unknown fields of their partner’s discipline and specific site of research. Together, we installed our accumulated knowledge in the HopKins Black Box so as to “appear before the public to give an account of [our] . . . travels.” Thereby, we asked the audience to travel in *theoria* too.



## PLAYING SPACES

Through the shared theoretical lens of abandoned places that perform a sense of the past, we created a new space – a microcosm of our individual and collective research – in the HopKins Black Box, which is itself a microcosm of experimental performance in the academy.

On the nights of the performance, the audience entered the space through the main door on the south side of the room. Immediately to their left was a large scaffold that contained my mini-installation for 310 Convention.<sup>1</sup> The audience entered the scaffold through the opening that faced them and exited on the opposite side. A series of wooden disks representing a cobblestone path led them around to the north face of the scaffold where they could sit and view a slideshow of the house projected on a white sheet. In the center of the space, north of the scaffold or straight ahead as the audience entered the room, was John's mini-installation. It consisted of four (4' X 8') flats arranged in a pentagon with one open face on the western side. The flats were topped with heavy burlap, branches, and greenery. With flashlights in hand, the audience entered and exited through the single opening in order to discover what lay within. In the northwest corner of the room was Jacqueline's mini-installation, a giant black paper tree lit from below and surrounded by cotton balls. The audience had to maneuver around the tree and through the cotton balls to see the images that were projected on the north and west walls. Barbara's mini-installation extended almost the full length along the eastern wall. Her arrangement of platforms, flats, and pieces of building materials from the defunct cinema positioned the audience in direct relationship to the wall, which was covered with white paper. Armed with markers and crayons, the audience was encouraged to create their own graffiti on the white papered wall.

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<sup>1</sup> Mini-installation refers to each performer's piece. Installation refers to the collective project.

To start, audience members tended to investigate the space by beginning with Barbara's or my piece and moving in a counterclockwise or clockwise direction respectively, ending with John's piece in the center of the room. As the space filled with audience members, travel variations occurred. The audience explored the installation for about forty-five minutes and, after a short break, the respondents offered their feedback. Discussion among the audience, performers, and respondents followed.

Below, I discuss each piece more fully, concentrating on my mini-installation and the event as a whole. As the research projects progressed from the page to the stage and now to the page again, the theme of abandonment was supplemented by the interaction of bodies (our own and those of the audience) with the installation(s) that represented places of abandonment. In other words, in and through performance, the represented places were not abandoned. This understanding of *différance* (between the actual and fictive real) guides me as I process my research on the page, resulting in a re-conceptualization of each piece and the installation as a whole in terms of the miniature.

Barbara Faulkner investigated the shifting picture show of graffiti that had taken over the exterior of a defunct movie theater. I visited the theater when I toured LSU during my senior year of high school. I and some newfound friends saw the movie *Brazil* there, which in light of this project seems somewhat uncanny. *Brazil's* emphasis on the imagination as a way to resist and contest ideological practices we find errant or oppressive speaks to a similar activation and function of the imagination in our installation(s). We used our imaginations to create fictive real spaces of sensory and cognitive engagement for places that had been relegated to the periphery of the contemporary landscape – i.e., abandoned. In subject and method, Barbara's piece placed explicit stress on this/the activation and political functioning of the imagination.

Shut down in the early 1990s, the theatre was inherited by a female artist who allowed graffiti artists to mark or “tag” the space as their own. Abandoned as a site for the showing of commercial films (i.e., the reproduction of mass culture), the empty building became a site for the ever-shifting display of alternative art by a fringe culture. In her miniature representation of the site, Barbara prompted audience members to use their imaginations to “tag” the wall of the Black Box. The *differance* between expressive cultures was indicated I think by the tense differences “between inside and outside” (Stewart 41); between the relative safety and ease of marking a white papered wall inside a performance space and the danger, the illegality, of tagging the outside of a building at night – which of course is another kind of performance, a microcosmic representation of a culture(s) and its values.

Just prior to the *Across Disciplines* program, the cinema was torn down. To mark the loss, Barbara collected graffiti rubble from the site and integrated it into her piece along with her collection of photographic images and filmed interviews with some of the artists. In this way, her miniature became a memorial to the building as a site for an alternative art practice and the culture of artists who do it. The activity of tagging → marking the walls in the Black Box multiplies in significance too since it might be understood as an act of remembrance; the restoration, preservation, and positive evaluation of an alternative art form; the perverse imitation of the same; and Barbara willing the continuance of resistant art into the future through the audience’s rehearsal of it. Through the miniaturization and magnification of the activity, Barbara’s piece helps me focus on and take account of it here. The miniature does its job. I can only speculate as to whether, in the heat of marking the walls/performing graffiti, the audience experienced their own “cognition of the past” (Turner 75), aware of the differences between the miniature and its referents.

John Welsh explored the once formal gardens of Petit Versailles Plantation in Saint James Parish, Louisiana. In the mid 1800's, the plantation was owned by Valcour Aime, one of the wealthiest sugar planters in the country who made his fortune by developing a successful sugar refining process. The lavish compound he built for himself and his family included acres of formal gardens tended by gardeners from the "original" Versailles, located just south of Paris. There also were greenhouses where the gardeners nurtured nonnative plants and crops. Aime's desire to control and contain the nature that surrounded him and contributed to his wealth came to an end when he lost his only son, his wife, and a daughter within a few years. Aime went into exile and stopped caring for the land, and it reverted back to its former state. His palatial home burned to the ground years later. All that remains of the former compound are some stone features of the gardens and a few exotic plants that managed to survive amid the local flora.

In the exterior and interior of his miniature, John imitated the tightly tangled space of dripping moss, wet leaves, tree branches, and hanging vines he found when he visited Petit Versailles, once a miniature in itself. With the aid of flashlights, the audience found their way into the dark interior space where bits of text and image hung amidst the overgrowth. The materials documented the "culture" and "cultivation" of Petit Versailles in its heyday, articulating what the estate (as miniature) had attempted to replicate and contain within its tidy boundaries and also keep at bay. Simultaneously, John's miniaturization and magnification of the now wild gardens highlighted the space of resistance that had emerged over the years, the untamed local growth asserting its right to shape the memory of Petit Versailles.

Jacqueline Mills created the space of a break tree that still stands on a former Mississippi plantation now converted to corporate farming. Break trees were large oaks or other shade trees beneath which slaves and, later, sharecroppers would gather for breaks without the presence of owners, overseers, or bosses to impede free discussion. These sites became places for open

dialogue on social, cultural, and political topics that were prohibited or censored in the presence of an authority figure. The trees are often retained by corporate farmers because it is too costly to remove them. Further, descendants of the families who continue to own or manage the land keep the trees as reminders of the culture(s) they represented and engendered.

Jacqueline's tree was a large black paper cut-out, a silhouette that seemed to emerge from the black earth of the floor and cast itself in shadows against the flickering images of industrial farming projected on the walls. The floor of the space was covered with cotton balls, implying the consistent impact of agriculture on the people, the land, and the landscape over the course of recent history. The simplicity of Jacqueline's piece focused attention on the main element, the tree, magnifying the perspective of those it represented and in contrast to the summary of agribusiness flickering on the wall. On the one hand, the lack of detail in the representation of the tree – an abstraction finally – veered the account toward a nostalgic representation of labor and race relations, “the folk” garnering strength from their mighty tree. On the other hand, the artificiality of the paper tree and the cotton balls on the floor countered such a bent. The paper tree seemed to imply the ephemerality of free discussion and the illusion or fragility of power, while both elements acknowledged the partiality of (all) representation.

I constructed my mini-installation, a miniature house of Big House 310, within and around a black metal scaffold that typically houses the sound and lighting equipment in the HopKins Black Box. The scaffold was located in southwest corner of the space, immediately to the left of the main entrance door. The scaffold is large, consisting of two (5' X 7' X 6') frames, one set on top of the other. The long sides of the scaffold contain crossbars for support, while the wide sides have ladders (to enable access to the upper level) and openings to get beneath. One of the openings, hereafter referred to as the “front door,” faced the audience as they

approached the scaffold. In front of it was a welcome mat that encouraged the audience to enter the little house.

Upon crossing the threshold, the audience entered a cozy space with a low ceiling decorated in twinkle lights. The “walls” of the house were constructed of colorful panels that hung down from the ceiling along the long sides of the scaffold. The panels were decorated with reproductions of the 1903, 1908, and 1911 Sanborn maps, with keys and title pages. On the maps were glow-in-the-dark stars that indicated the location of 310 Convention. Like a prized memento from a trip, the doll house size model of the “big house” was displayed on a pedestal directly across from the front door. Illuminated from within, the dollhouse emitted a soft warm glow that enabled the reading of the texts papered on the exterior of it and also those affixed to the panels of the walls.

As the audience wandered through the cozy house, a soundtrack of songs played. I chose the songs based on the use of “house” or “home” in the title, and then arranged them to create contrasts in sound or content. The lyrics often highlighted themes implicit to my research. The house is a site of memory and nostalgia in “Our House” by Madness and, in another version, Crosby, Stills and Nash. In “Burning Down the House” by Talking Heads and “Sonny Came Home” by Shawn Colvin, a house and home are willfully destroyed. “Come on-a My House” by Rosemary Clooney and “Tones of Home” by Blind Mellon describe a house and home as places of refuge and escape. A house is personified in “This Old House” by Rosemary Clooney and people are housified in “Brick House” by The Commodores.

Outside the “back door” of the scaffold house was a cobblestone path constructed of four round pieces of wood painted in earth tones and imprinted with an excerpt from Gary Snyder’s poem, “Rip Rap.”

Lay down these words  
 Before your mind like rocks.  
     placed solid, by hands  
 In choice of place, set  
 Before the body of the mind  
     in space and time:  
 Solidity of bark, leaf, or wall  
     riprap of things:  
 Cobble of milky way.  
     straying planets,  
 These poems, people,  
     lost ponies with  
 Dragging saddles –  
     and rocky sure-foot trails.  
 The worlds like an endless  
     four-dimensional  
 Game of Go.  
     ants and pebbles  
 In the thin loam, each rock a word  
     a creek-washed stone  
 Granite: ingrained  
     with torment of fire and weight  
 Crystal and sediment linked hot  
     all change, in thoughts,  
 As well as things. (Snyder 30)

At the time of the installation, Snyder's poem expressed how I was thinking about my house and its poetics. My research seemed a rip rap, rag tag collection of bits and pieces that I could not quite "place solid." The dead end paths in trying to contact Barbe and gain inner access to the house had just about exhausted me until I reflected on the "endless . . . games" I might engage by making my research "Go" through the play of text, image, and performance. My desire for solid information about a solid house fixed in a solid place deferred to the potential power of the spaces I might discover and create in light of the historic and affective fluidity of the house and the materials I had collected to date. As Snyder offers, "all change, in thoughts, as well as things."

The wooden cobblestones of "Rip Rap" led the audience around to the north side of the scaffold house where I had placed some chairs and a projector that looked back at the house. A

white sheet covered the exterior wall and against it I projected a slide show of materials about 310. The slides included conveyance records for the land and property, deed transfers and property assessments, LLC incorporation documents, news articles about the house and family, and photographs of the house at various stages of seeming abandonment and renovation. I sequenced the documents in chronological order in an effort to communicate the accumulative history of the archive and I juxtaposed the photographs so as to offer contrasts in perspective, such as near and far shots.

My miniaturization of 310 reminded me of my childhood construction of little worlds from the materials collected in my toy box: Little People pieces, Lincoln Logs, Sanborn Maps, conveyance records, photographs, Tinker Toys, lyrics, letters, and Legos. Like the Little People house that beckoned me to open it in order to access the collection of materials, my little house in the Black Box invited the audience to enter a cozy, warmly lit place of collected research and, while there, to “take the time . . . to see all [the] little things that cannot be seen all together” (Bachelard 159). Also like my Little People House, the collection of materials and people in the house constantly overflowed its container, spilling through the gaps in the walls and out the back door into the “rip rap” of a less stable space of multiple stories and story makers, where “this old house” could become “our house” could become a “brick house” could become “burning down the house” as the audience dwelled on and built 310 Convention, less as a scene in itself and more as a sub-scene in a larger adventure.

My mini-installation also functioned along the lines of *mise en abyme*: a dollhouse miniature, set within the miniature of the scaffold house, set within the art house of the HopKins Black Box, set within the academic house of Coates Hall, set within the institutional house of LSU, set within the community house of Baton Rouge while the actual house, the little Big House of 310, stood and still stands blocks away on a dark street downtown. What is the



relationship between the actual and the fictive real? Through the imagination, does the fictive world of miniatures confirm abandonment or refigure it within a shifting structure of relations, one container framing the next within, upon, and against which the next strives to shift values and gain meanings? While we might say the house of Baton Rouge telescopes and enfolds the others including 310 within its frame, we also might say that the others including 310 telescope and enfold Baton Rouge within their frames. The play of frames suggests that while the miniature(s) “multiplies significance by virtue of the tension it creates between inside and outside, container and contained, surface and depth” (Stewart 41), the “and” space between apparent opposites is crucial to the performance of the miniature since it inserts multiple frames, questioning what is inside and outside, container and contained, surface and depth.

#### A SPACE IN PLAY

On the nights we presented our installation, the four miniatures of abandoned places were full of life. By telling of our journeys into the fields and archives of the four locales and encouraging the audience to take a journey themselves, the installation created a lively preserve for the places and our research concerning them. Heidegger notes that the act of preserving consists of something more than the subjective impressions that one might deem of value.

Preserving the work does not reduce people to their private experiences, but brings them into affiliation with the truth happening in the work. Thus it grounds being for and with one another as the historical standing-out of human existence in reference to unconcealedness. Most of all, knowledge in the manner of preserving is far removed from that merely aestheticizing connoisseurship of the work’s formal aspects, its qualities and charms. Knowing as having seen is a being resolved; it is standing within the conflict that the work has fitted into the rift. The proper way to preserve the work is cocreated and prescribed . . . by the work. (66)

In the case of *Across Disciplines*, then, preserving involved placing our research in communal interaction and asking it (and ourselves) to “stand within the conflict” that the interaction

created. It also involved inviting the public to “stand within the conflict” too and co-create meanings from the exchange.

In the discussion period that followed the audience’s tour of the installation, the guest respondents and other members of the audience had the opportunity to express their experiences. Above, I enfolded some of their responses into my reflections on each piece. As regards the installation as whole, some experienced it in historical terms, finding that the miniature house, garden, and break tree recalled the landscape of plantation life: lavish gardens protecting the domestic Big House from the agriculture and labor that lay beyond and also sustained it. In response, some found that the theatre of graffiti marked the encroachment of post-industrial urban life and decay on the agrarian landscape and lifestyle. In this frame, the house became a blighted structure, the break tree a remnant threatened by corporate will, and the garden an overgrown lot or, as some preferred, a resistant counter that showed the supremacy of nature over our attempts to control it. Others found that their explicit co-creation of Barbara’s piece served as a relay for their interaction with the other pieces or, for some, it highlighted how we all leave marks upon the social landscape through buildings, gardens, storied trees, and other expressive means. While some found this marking valuable in itself – linking it to resistant acts of creativity – others broadened the frame to recognize the diverse meanings made and agendas gained by the different markings we make.

As for abandonment, many audience members distinguished between the actual sites and the fictive real miniatures, insisting that the latter (i.e., performance) cannot resolve the real life issues of abandoned people and places. While others concurred, they also expressed that the installation imagined an alternative space of “abandonment” where people interacted with the concepts, practices, and ramifications *of* abandonment. As Heidegger might observe, by inter-relating and standing within the conflict of a vacant house, forgotten garden, lone tree, and

ruined theatre, we built alternatives. “The nature of building is letting dwell,” Heidegger writes. And, “building accomplishes its nature in the raising of locations by the joining of their spaces. *Only if we are capable of dwelling, only then can we build*” (157; emphasis in original).

As researcher-performers, we also built an alternative space by miniaturizing and magnifying aspects of our field and archival research. Thereby, we simultaneously represented and analyzed the four places, our research collections, and our manner of composition. As with Derrida’s theory of the archive, “by incorporating knowledge deployed in reference to it” (i.e., in reference to the archived place, collection, and miniature container), “the archive augments itself, engrosses itself, it gains in *auctoritas*.” However “in the same stroke it loses the absolute and meta-textual authority it might claim to have. One will never be able to objectivize it with no remainder . . . and that is why the archive is never closed. It opens out of the future” (*Archive Fever* 68). The ability of certain miniatures to engross detail and time and *thereby* extend meanings more so than fix values also operates to question that affective experience Stewart aligns with miniatures; namely, “a particular form of interiority, an interiority which the subject experiences as its sanctuary (fantasy) and prison (the boundaries or limits of otherness, the inaccessibility of what cannot be lived experience)” (65). While there is no doubt our miniatures were partial and incomplete, unable to make what is absent present (i.e., a “lived experience”), they also never presumed to claim such “absolute . . . authority” in relation to that which they signified. Very like the admitted plasticity of my Little People house, our miniatures acknowledged their tactics and thereby turned the miniature inside out, gaining meanings by admitting to their inability to represent fully. The same tactics question the seeming insistence on Stewart’s part that our longing for miniature places (e.g., research and/in performance) equates to a longing to close the distance between the self and other and thereby make the other present, “live” the other, as if this is the only way we can escape the prisons of our little lives.

Derrida views things a little differently of course. In response to Lévi-Strauss's recognition that there are no central structures or binaries (such as presence and absence) to stabilize his work and yet he must use them anyway since such structures are all that are "at hand," Derrida notices and advances the alternative of play.

Play is the disruption of presence. The presence of an element is always a signifying and substitutive reference inscribed in a system of differences and the movement of a chain. Play is always play of absence and presence, but if it is to be thought radically, play must be conceived of before the alternative of presence and absence. Being must be conceived of as presence or absence on the basis of the possibility of play and not the other way around. (*Writing and Difference* 292)

For Derrida, just as language plays with the seeming presence and always absence of the referent, so too being might be conceived; that is, as play, at play. In these terms, one and one's "lived experience" are not defined by being present or making others present, and the absence of the same is certainly not understood as a prison. Rather, being and lived experience are defined by playing in the shifting space of time (place and bodies). In a sense, being becomes an archive – a container of memories, experiences, thoughts, feelings, language, knowledge – and rather than fix the value of one's archive as present or absent or what have you, Derrida encourages us to play with its inevitable instability and thereby gain multiple meanings for ourselves.

In fairly explicit terms, our installation played with presence and absence since it assembled people in what we call the present to experience and co-create meanings about abandoned places. In Derrida's more "radical" terms, the play of miniatures influenced the temporal reality that was created, magnifying research details and thereby encouraging the audience to slow down and reflect on the meanings rather than accept the given values of the terms at play, such as abandonment and preservation, imitative and resistant art, nature and civilization, detail and abstraction, container and contained, remembering and forgetting, and presence as an arbiter of lived experience and absence as not. In this way, we highlighted "the

specific zone” of the “imprint” or “trace” where “*lived experience . . . is neither in the world nor in ‘another world’ . . . nor more in time than in space.*” As a result,

differences appear among the elements or rather [they] produce them, make them emerge as such and constitute the *texts*, the chains, and the systems of traces. These chains and systems cannot be outlined except in the fabric of this trace or imprint. The unheard difference between the appearing and the appearance (between the ‘world’ and ‘lived experience’) is the condition of all other differences, of all other traces, and *it is already a trace. . . . The trace is the différance* which opens appearance and signification. (*Of Grammatology* 65; emphases in original)

That we were struck by our chosen places and engaged them with passion and intimacy is demonstrated by our research efforts and subsequent performance. However, the many little archives that emerged (e.g., research documents, performance installation, our beings at play) were not and would never presume to be the actual places. They are traces. And they are no less intimate for being so since they respect that their subject of desire – a house, garden, tree, theatre, public – “does not let itself be summed up in the simplicity of the present” (Derrida, *Of Grammatology* 66). This is the play of the miniature inside out.

### PLAYING HOUSE

Three-ten Convention is important to me because it too is a trace of something beyond my full comprehension. The house extends the play of its many meanings to me, which then makes my play, my many meanings, possible. However, because it indicates the *différance* between (its) appearance and significations in fairly explicit ways, it is threatened by the value of presence and the progressive will of the future as enacted, for example, in recent renovation plans for downtown Baton Rouge. By means of this research, I hope to protect and create a space for the house, perhaps as a miniature archive of the city, the container-contained frames of meaning (value and will) reversed. Or, perhaps, I create a space simply because I love the house. As Bachelard might observe, my engagement with 310 is one of topophilia:

Indeed, the images I want to examine are the quite simple images of *felicitous space*. In this orientation, these investigations would deserve to be called topophilia. They seek to determine the human value of the sorts of space that may be grasped, that may be defended against adverse forces, the space we love. . . . Attached to its protective value, which can be a positive one, are also imagined values, which soon become dominant. Space that has been seized upon by the imagination cannot remain indifferent space subject to the measures and estimates of the surveyor. It has been lived in, not in its positivity, but with all the partiality of the imagination. Particularly, it nearly always exercises an attraction. (xxxv-xxxvi; emphasis in original)

As I have discussed in this chapter, one way I exercise my attraction is by imitating the house, understanding that imitation linked with analysis is inventive, aimed at respecting rather than collapsing differences in time, space, and bodies. The dollhouse within the miniature house that I installed in the Black Box (another felicitous space I might admit) is one such imitation. My miniature installation included a soundtrack of house tunes, popular songs that I hoped the audience would find familiar and appealing and thereby the songs would encourage associative play on their part. One song I particularly liked was a “House Where Nobody Lives” by Tom Waits:

There's a house on my block that's abandoned and cold  
The folks moved out of it a long time ago  
And they took all their things and they never came back  
It looks like it's haunted with the windows all cracked  
Everyone calls it the house  
The house where nobody lives

Once it held laughter, once it held dreams  
Did they throw it away, did they know what it means?  
Did someone's heart break  
Or did someone do somebody wrong?

Well, the paint is all cracked, it was peeled off of the wood  
The papers were stacked on the porch where I stood  
And the weeds had grown up just as high as the door  
There were birds in the chimney and an old chest of drawers  
Looks like no one will ever come back  
To the house where nobody lives

Oh, and once it held laughter, once it held dreams  
Did they throw it away, did they know what it means?  
Did someone's heart break  
Or did someone do somebody wrong?

So if you find someone, someone to have, someone to hold  
Don't trade it for silver, oh don't trade it for gold  
Cause I have all of life's treasures and they're fine and they're good  
They remind me that houses are just made of wood  
What makes a house grand, oh it ain't the roof or the doors  
If there's love in a house, it's a palace for sure  
But without love it ain't nothin' but a house  
A house where nobody lives  
But without love it ain't nothin' but a house  
A house where nobody lives (Waits)

I add this song to the research collected and at play in this document. For me, it is a trace of the house and the house a trace of it. I like that the lyrics reflect certain aspects of 310 and my relationship to it, such as its seeming abandonment or vacancy, its once cracked paint and peeled wood, and the laughter, dreams, and heart break I often experience standing outside the house or as I sit here writing about it. The song is different from the house though and, while I might elide the differences so as to draw closer to the house through song, I would rather stand within the conflict of the rift and (shifting between song and house, house and song) choose to defend the house against the notion that the only houses that can be loved are those where somebody lives. I dwell in this difference, not in positivity, but with all the partiality of my imagination and longing.

## CHAPTER FIVE HOUSE OF CARDS

Marco Polo describes a bridge, stone by stone.

“But which is the stone that supports the bridge?” Kublai Khan asks.

“The bridge is not supported by one stone or another,” Marco answers, “but by the line of the arch that they form.”

Kublai Khan remains silent, reflecting. Then he adds: “Why do you speak to me of stones? It is only the arch that matters to me.”

Polo answers: “Without stones there is no arch.”

-Italo Calvino, *Invisible Cities* (82)

To build a house of cards requires the forces of balance and friction, time and patience, as well as a deck of cards that is not too old or too new. Figuratively, a house of cards is a structure such as an argument that rests on shaky premises; or it may fall due to forces beyond the control of the designer. I hope my attempt to build 310 Convention does not confront the latter although the process has required elements of the former. The house itself seems like a house of cards in its continued survival amidst downtown renewal efforts. There has been friction between the owners and the community over the status of the house countered by a balance between the community’s commitment to preservation and the owners’ desire to keep the house intact and in the family. The house has withstood the test of time (retaining the line of its arch) and stands patiently, waiting to see if its story can support a new layer of stones.

So that my house on the page does not fall prey to a shaky foundation, I must consider the contexts beyond my mild obsession that enable the forces of research necessary to maintaining its shape. To do so, I have to continue risking that others find some value in the project and my performance(s) of it as it develops. This balancing act requires that I allow my paper project to come in contact with other projects and audiences that challenge and expand its



scope and focus. Its stability also is aided by theoretical and practical insights I fold or find folded in its layers. According to Heidegger, I have to risk what I have created already to insure the research continues:

In the Middle Ages the word for balance, *die Wage*, still means about as much as hazard or risk. This is the situation in which matters may turn out one way or the other. That is why the apparatus which moves by tipping one way or the other is called *die Wage*. It plays and balances out. The word *Wage*, in the sense of risk and as the name of the apparatus, comes from *wägen, wegen*, to make a way, that is, to go, to be in motion. . . . To weigh or throw in the balance, as in the sense of wager, means to bring into the movement of the game, to throw into the scales, to release into risk. (101)

I risk my project appearing too colloquial, subjective, and narrow unless I can develop a praxis that allows 310 Convention and my research of it to play, or some play, in how the cards are arranged, how the story unfolds. Some elements can be decided upon in this game, others are left to chance. The storms that hit the Gulf coast in 2005 threw much out of balance and forced me to put new ideas into play concerning what my research meant in the balance.

Three-ten Convention is an actual, imaginary, and fictive real site of loss and renewal, remembering and forgetting, history and historicities – issues that became more pronounced to me after Hurricanes Katrina and Rita hit south Louisiana and the surrounding states in the fall of 2005.<sup>1</sup> Hurricane Katrina came ashore on August 29, 2005, cutting a devastating swath through southeast Louisiana and Mississippi, and southwest Alabama. Rita followed three weeks later on

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<sup>1</sup> Katrina death tolls vary from source to source, some exceeding 2000 with the inclusion of those who died as a result of suicide, violence (e.g., during the “looting” of New Orleans), and the interruption of life-sustaining medical treatments. The Louisiana Department of Health and Hospitals provides conservative figures, reporting that 1,464 people lost their lives to Katrina and 120 died as a result of Rita. Of the deaths attributed to Katrina, 53% of the deceased were African-American, 39% Caucasian, 2% Hispanic, 1% Asian/Pacific, 1% Native American, and 5% unknown. 48% of victims were 51 years or older while 26% were 75 years or older (Louisiana Department of Health and Hospitals). The hurricanes destroyed or damaged 302,000 housing units across the Gulf Coast. Seven out of ten of the destroyed or damaged units, 216,000 in all, were affordable to low-income households, and 92,000 were affordable to very low-income households. Of the 200,000 housing units impacted in Louisiana, 40% were rental units; of these, over half were affordable to households making less than 80% of the area median income. By one estimate, Hurricane Katrina destroyed up to three-quarters of the affordable rental units for extremely low-income households in the New Orleans area. In New Orleans, rents have risen as much as 40 to 200 % since the storms. Programs to facilitate the rebuilding of rental units have been largely unsuccessful (Kromm and Sturgis 23).

September 24, 2005, hitting southwest Louisiana and the southeast portion of Texas. The storms severely affected the key industries of oil, fishing, and tourism in south Louisiana and the social and cultural infrastructures of the Gulf coast were decimated, leading to an enormous loss of life, home, and community. Who am I to dream of a better dwelling when I have a roof over my head? Who is Barbe to keep 310 empty and entombed when so many people might make use of it? Does this place matter? Why does it matter? What might it tell me about loss, and acts of remembering and rebuilding? Even those who did not lose their physical dwelling lost some sense of home in the destruction of their larger city or town and region. Some places that were damaged by the storms, such as the many public housing projects in New Orleans, now face demolition in the city's effort to redevelop as it rebuilds. Will such projects be rebuilt so as to create a story of public housing that remembers and makes room for the individuals and families who once built a community there while it also acknowledges the problems of the past so as to enable more secure and empowering futures?<sup>2</sup>

I found that the 2005 storms encouraged me, required me, to view my project in the terms and issues that arose as a result. In terms of such severe physical loss that only memories remain to assure individuals and communities that they have a past; that they are not *tabulae rasae* wiped clean by the forces of history as acts of forgetting. Issues of memory as creative acts of retrieval and reimagining that make survival and carrying on possible. Issues that call for “my house” to converse with other projects that insist we remember and then do something about it.

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<sup>2</sup> Before Hurricane Katrina, 5,100 families lived in public housing in New Orleans. In June 2006, the US Department of Housing and Urban Development and the HUD controlled Housing Authority of New Orleans declared their intention to demolish . . . public housing complexes and replace them with privately developed mixed-income housing. If carried out, the plan would eliminate 4,500 public housing units in New Orleans replacing them with 800 units of traditional public housing. The plan is proposed at a time when thousands of residents are still displaced and thousands of others are on a waiting list for low-income housing in the city (Kromm and Sturgis 23). While the noted demolitions have begun, they are now embroiled in scandal as the former secretary of HUD, Alphonso Jackson, quit under allegations of corruption that include how and to whom HUD contracts were awarded.

In this chapter, I inter-relate my project with other projects of creative memory that were developed in the aftermath of the storms. The first project was created by two students who evacuated to Baton Rouge from New Orleans and, while in Baton Rouge, took classes at LSU. The students enrolled in a practical film course I was teaching and, by means of their final project in the course, they expressed both their loss of and hope for their home places in and around New Orleans. The second project I discuss is a series of performance installations that were housed within a benefit for visual artists displaced by the storms. The event was held at the Shaw Center for the Arts in Baton Rouge three months after the hurricanes and it featured works by the displaced artists and also those in support of them. The noted installations served to guide the audience's movement within and between the galleries and, as I discuss below, they also came to signify for me key aspects regarding the event and its relationship to the larger task of remembering and rebuilding communities. One of the installations included my three-dimensional model of 310 Convention (addressed in the prior chapters), which I redesigned for the benefit. In the fourth section of the chapter, I re-conceive the model as a metonym of the actual house, and both as metonyms of homes lost and recalled through the forces of history and memory. As a creative figure of expression, the metonym is a house of cards, striking a precarious balance between recalling its referent, but partially. It restores through loss. To interact with this present absence, I enjoin the forces of *decollage* and *bricolage* – tearing away and rebuilding from the remnants. In the last section, I extend the aforementioned discussion to the other projects I have addressed in the chapter and reflect on the potentially generative power of the metonym to insist on absence despite the overwhelming force (and currency) of presence to solve and thereby dismiss it.

In the balance, I learn from the other artists that in times of great loss there emerges not only a desire to rebuild for the future, but to preserve the intangible intricacies of what was. The

artists' seeming inclinations are like those of the inhabitants of Ersilia in Italo Calvino's *Invisible Cities*. In their creative communities, the transient inhabitants construct webs of relationships that they hope outlast their lives and dwellings.

In Ersilia, to establish the relationships that sustain the city's life, the inhabitants stretch strings from the corners of the houses, white or black or gray or black-and-white according to whether they mark a relationship of blood, of trade, authority, agency. When the strings become so numerous that you can no longer pass among them, the inhabitants leave: the houses are dismantled; only the strings and their supports remain.

Thus, when traveling in the territory of Ersilia, you come upon the ruins of the abandoned cities, without walls which do not last, without the bones of the dead which the wind rolls away: spider-webs of intricate relationships seeking a form. (76)

A community is a house of cards built of intricate relationships (in friction and balance) over time and with patience. Literal places mark the effort, and when lost – when the cards tumble – the intricate relationships may appear to tumble too. However, amidst the rubble of physical loss and through the force of memory, the relational webs are recovered, if bruised and battered and (as ever) requiring constant attention to their transformative shifts. It is in these terms that the stability of place – of placing cards in relation to each other – must be performed.

#### THE ART OF BALANCING LOSS

In the direct aftermath of Hurricane Katrina, many college students transferred to LSU from schools in the New Orleans area, including the University of New Orleans, Delgado Community College, and Xavier University. In each of my classes, there were between one and three transfer students trying to piece together a course of study that met their interests and degree requirements. Despite the enormous odds, a number of students were able to finish the semester and earn the course credits they needed. Along with many students enrolled at LSU prior to the storms, the transfer students found they had to balance attending school with earning a living, caring for themselves and other displaced family and friends, and returning to their

storm ravaged communities to retrieve, rebuild, or reflect on what was/not left of their homes. The precarious balancing act repeated itself a few weeks later in the wake of Rita.<sup>3</sup>

Rather than impose an illusion of stability by upholding standard classroom conventions, my students and I found it more helpful to admit to the instability and alter the conventions. Attendance became a way to check in with each other, assignment deadlines were “suggested” or “encouraged,” and many lessons were tailored to address crisis management at both the personal and communal levels. In my “Introduction to Film” course, there were three transfer students, two of whom not only completed the semester, but produced work that was complex and complete in form as well as topical and poignant in content. Jason and Gina were in the film program at the University of New Orleans. I do not believe they knew each other well. However, upon transferring to LSU and into my course, their common affiliation united them. Since, prior to the storms, the class had established the small groups in which they would work on their projects, Jason, Gina, and the third transfer student formed their own group. When the third student had to leave, Jason and Gina became a dynamic duo in their own right.

Originally designed by Dr. Patricia Suchy, the final assignment in the course requires the students to create an experimental movie that “movies” the way a poem “poems.” To introduce the assignment, I showed the students a film by Maya Deren, which served as the compositional model for the project, and then I explained the assignment to them:

For the final project, your group will adapt a selected poem into a short (5 minute) film. The poems on which you may base your film are “One Art” by Elizabeth Bishop, “Six Significant Landscapes” by Wallace Stevens, “Musée des Beaux Arts” by W. H. Auden, “Medusa” by Louise Bogan, “Why I am not a painter” by Frank O’Hara, “You Begin” by Margaret Atwood, and “On Aesthetics” by Kenneth Koch.

Your adaptation should not be a literal translation of word to image. Instead, you are to pay special attention to what and how your poem communicates, which is different

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<sup>3</sup> Vice Provost Frank Cartledge announced that of the 2,700 displaced students who enrolled at LSU after Katrina, 804 resigned before the end of the semester. Of the 1,896 remaining students, 650 qualified to continue at LSU. Of the “regular” LSU student body, 910 (about 3%) resigned (Gonzales).

from what it means. Then, you are to translate your understanding into what and how your film communicates. Think of the poem as a coded set of instructions. You should film the film like the poem poems.

Your models for the project are Maya Deren's films *Meshes in the Afternoon* and *Ritual in Transfigured Time*. The structure of Deren's films is meant to inspire you: the structure is more like a poem than a narrative although certainly the films make use of narrative. As you watch the films, consider the rhythm of their movement; note their symbols and metaphors; and the ways in which they connect images, but also leave the connections open enough for the viewer to participate in interpreting the films. Above all, pay attention to *how* the films communicate. This is a more appropriate and compelling way to look at the films than to ask *what* they mean.

Like Deren's films, your poem communicates through image, through figures of sound and sense, through the movement of rhythmic language, and through poetic form. Similarly, your film needs to communicate through image, through visual and acoustic means, and through the elements of film language, such as the *mise en scene*, the montage sequence, the transitions between images, and distance, angle, and focus.

In order to decide how your film will communicate, first work with your poem to discover and analyze how it works. Who is the "speaker"? What sorts of figurative language are used – e.g., metaphor, metonymy, synecdoche, allusion, irony? Are there rhymes, assonance, or dissonance? Is there a pronounced rhythm, a regular metrical or stanza form? How do time and space flow in the poem? What sorts of sensory images does the poem use to communicate its world to the reader?

Then make the leap and ask how your film might be composed similarly. How do you create a visual rhyme, for instance? Does your poem move in a montage, or continuity, or both? How might you adapt the poem's form? For this project, you are expected to call upon all of the techniques and methods for composing shots and working with movement, editing, and post-synchronizing sound. You may use pre-recorded sound or record speaking voices and other sounds. Think of this project as a chance to synthesize all of the parts of film language we have studied this semester. (Flanagan)

I asked the students to come to the next class with their top three poem choices so that we could begin to work on the assignment.

At the following class meeting, Jason and Gina were the first to request a particular poem, "One Art" by Elizabeth Bishop. The poem is a villanelle, which consists of five tercets followed by a quatrain. The first line of the first stanza, or a near approximation, is repeated in the last line of the second and fourth stanzas and, likewise, the last line of the first stanza is repeated in the last line of the third and fifth stanzas. The two alternating lines or their variations become the second rhyming pair of the quatrain. The resulting rhyme scheme is A<sup>1</sup>bA<sup>2</sup>, abA<sup>1</sup>,

abA<sup>2</sup>, abA<sup>1</sup>, abA<sup>2</sup>, and abA<sup>1</sup>A<sup>2</sup>. The content of the poem juxtaposes themes of disaster, loss, and mastery.

The art of losing isn't hard to master;  
so many things seem filled with the intent  
to be lost that their loss is no disaster.  
Lose something every day. Accept the fluster  
of lost door keys, the hour badly spent.  
The art of losing isn't hard to master.

Then practice losing farther, losing faster:  
places, and names, and where it was you meant  
to travel. None of these things will bring disaster.

I lost my mother's watch. And look! my last, or  
next-to-last, of three loved houses went.  
The art of losing isn't hard to master.

I lost two cities, lovely ones. And, vaster,  
some realms I owned, two rivers, a continent.  
I miss them, but it wasn't a disaster.

– Even losing you (the joking voice, a gesture  
I love) I shan't have lied. It's evident  
the art of losing's not too hard to master  
though it may look like (Write it!) like disaster. (Bishop 39)

In addition to selecting their poem, Jason and Gina also had a good idea as to how they wanted to adapt it to film. They asked me if it would be alright if they shot footage of their homes and communities around New Orleans. Both had returned with their families to assess damage and begin the process of demolition and rebuilding. Gina's family lived in old Metairie and lost their home to the 17<sup>th</sup> Street Canal breach and Jason's family home was in Chalmette, which was flooded by the storm surge off Lake Bourne as well as the breach of the Industrial Canal. I told them I was comfortable with their plan as long as they felt emotionally safe. They were eager to begin.

Their final project is titled, *New Orleans "Our Home": 10 Weeks after Katrina*. The film is comprised of a series of images from the New Orleans area, including Jason's and Gina's

neighborhoods. Many of the shots travel from right to left, tracking the destruction as we move through the neighborhoods. The static debris and devastation is filmed in almost constant motion, whether zooming in and out from piles of rubble and cracked earth or panning 360 degrees around what is left of a suburban street. There are some digital effects between shots, like a “push” to the right as the camera passes yet another flooded vehicle or an “iris out” from a tree to a bunch of discarded washing machines lined up on a curb.<sup>4</sup>

Most of the images sweep and pulse with the music the filmmakers selected, which is an instrumental piece of strings, low bass, and percussion framed and underscored by the ticking of a clock. A synthesized chant pulses beneath the instrumentation too. So, as the music ebbs and flows in volume and intensity, there is the constancy of an underlying beat and tempo very like that of a heartbeat. At the penultimate scene, a staccato crescendo of chants accents the rapid series of zoom-ins on still images of previously seen devastation. The final image is of a gull soaring over the still waters of Lake Pontchartrain as the scene fades to black and the clock ticks on.

The film also includes seven brief voiceovers that Jason and Gina drew from taped interviews they conducted with family and friends. The lines are divided between at least three speakers, one of whom is female. The first two lines are “This will wipe out all our personal belongings and assets” and “My two grandsons lost their house too, like my daughter.” The lines are spoken as the camera tracks along routes filled with large debris, such as appliances, furniture, and building materials. The third line, “Our wedding photographs can’t be replaced,” coincides with a still collage of small ruined items, including some toys, clothing, and jewelry. The fourth phrase, “I haven’t seen my family in two and a half months,” is delivered as the

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<sup>4</sup> A push is when an image is pushed out of the frame (from side to side or from the top down) by the next image, which then replaces it. Iris out is when a small iris appears in the center of an image and expands outward, revealing the next image in the sequence.



camera tracks past a blown out house and neighboring debris. “Lost all their belongings and house” is spoken as the camera pans 360 degrees around Jason’s neighborhood in Chalmette. The camera tracks across the top of the 17<sup>th</sup> Street Canal breach looking back towards Gina’s area of Metairie as the sixth line is delivered, “I never thought that we’d be flooded like this.” The final line is heard after a black out as the camera tracks past a house with a hand painted sign stating, “I will rebuild.” There is a blackout and the speaker tells us, “The sad thing is you’re exhausted and yet you know you’ve not even really begun the path getting everything completed and back to living your life as a normal individual again” (LeRoy and Guillory). Certainly related, the spoken text seems to alternate between expressions of material loss and the emotional toll of the storm. The final line operates like the quatrain of the villanelle in that it combines elements of the five prior expressions into one statement concerning the fragile if determined process of mastering loss.

In their commitment to the project and their creation of the piece, Jason and Gina enact Heidegger’s notion of dwelling by “staying with things” and “sparing and preserving” what is left of their homes, communities, and culture (145). In titling their film *New Orleans “Our Home,”* they engage Derrida’s chain of difference as one place defers to the other without replacing it. So too, the title and film imagery defer to each other, creating a web of intricate relations between community (as) home (as) devastation (as) hope (as) memory, created and vital. As with Bishop’s poem, they strike a precarious balance due to the friction between undeniable loss and the creative act of remembering, the “art of losing.” In this way, they insist on the absence of all they and their families have lost and on the continuance of relations that will enable them to pick up the pieces (the tumble down of cards) and, with time and patience, transform them into a place of renewal and hope.

## RELATIONAL WEBS

On December 2, 2005, *Baton Rouge Artists Give 100%*, a fundraiser for artists displaced by the storms, was staged at the Shaw Center for the Arts in downtown Baton Rouge. One of the co-sponsors was the Brunner Gallery, which resides on the second floor of one wing of the Shaw Center. The owner and his wife, Rick and Susan Brunner, had sustained storm damage to their home and Rick's workshop in Covington, Louisiana, which is located on the north shore of Lake Pontchartrain. On the night of the benefit, the Brunner Gallery displayed art works by Brunner and other displaced artists that could be purchased separately from those displayed in a gallery on the ground floor and donated (also for purchase) by Baton Rouge area artists. The event organizer, Paul Neff, had contacted me to ask if I knew of performers who would be willing to contribute performance installations to the benefit. I contacted three doctoral students in the Department of Communication Studies at LSU who, like me, concentrate in Performance Studies. They agreed to participate, developing new or adapting pre-existing pieces for the event.

Gretchen Stein Rhodes installed her piece in the Brunner Gallery on the threshold of a door leading to an adjacent theater. She sat at a small table covered with white lace, dressed in a white Victorian lace blouse and long full white skirt. The stark white setting and attire were contrasted by Gretchen's red lips and shoes. As Gretchen sat at the table, she sharpened one pencil after another down to their nubs, collecting the shavings in a wooden bowl placed on the table. Arranged at her feet among lace were a palm frond, a Bible, a white ceramic bird, and some paintbrushes. Behind her, a loop of images and text were projected. The projected materials and the installation as a whole drew on Gretchen's doctoral research concerning the affective aesthetics of the displays in the Isabella Stuart Gardner Museum located in Boston, Massachusetts. Contrary to the now standardized categories for displaying art works in

museums, Gardner arranged her collection according to associations she made. Further, she stipulated that upon her death the collection and its displays remain unchanged. Gretchen's piece was installed amidst works by artists directly affected by Katrina. The displayed pieces were the last remnants of or first works following the storm and, as such, they represented the artists' personal experiences and material needs. The selling of the works would benefit the artists directly.

The event context – a benefit designed to respond to losses incurred as a result of the storm – influenced how Gretchen's piece functioned at the time and my subsequent interpretation of it here. As I see it, the piece struck a tensive balance between determined and undetermined forces. On the one hand, various components evoked a force of will to create and maintain an austere and untouched reality. The content of Gretchen's projections, her white costume and staid demeanor positioned within a carefully composed tableau and gallery of works reflected Gardner's directives and also the broader curatorial aim to context "fine art" as objects beyond change. On the other hand, the leakage of red excess from Gretchen's (silent) mouth and (unmoving) feet, the inevitable "shaving away" of time, the constantly changing projections, and the "storm" context implied the ever-shifting circumstances that counter will, marking the installation and the other pieces in the gallery as transient. While Gretchen's piece expressed our longing for stability (the longing of the artist, collector, viewer, and community), it also risked that longing by showing that stability is always "in motion"; always in "the movement of [a sometimes cruel] game" of chance and change (Heidegger 101).

Downstairs, in the cramped entranceway to the gallery of donated works, Melanie Kitchens installed a beggars (borrowed) opera that drew on the aesthetic conventions of the Bauhaus School, Theater of Images, and chance composition. Titled *An Opera in Five Eggs*, the piece was based on the results of specific tasks assigned Melanie by another performance artist,

thereby inciting chance associations that Melanie might not have made had she determined all the choices herself. The tasks and resulting materials included dream work, pirating bits from others' conversations, borrowing or stealing three objects to use in the performance (i.e., an umbrella, a yoga mat, and a bouquet), and selecting five images to inform the composition of the piece. The five images were a cracked egg, a large turtle, a postcard of an egg and a brain, a picture of a deejay spinning records, and a photo of Robert Wilson, who is known for his spectacular surreal operas of meticulously crafted imagery. Melanie selected the egg and specifically its yolk as the unifying motif of the piece, performing her actions on a large, bright yellow map of swirls made from many smaller maps. Each act or egg of her performance began with a tableau based on her chosen images and included a character commonly associated with one of the objects or images, such as a turtle, yoga instructor, and Mary Poppins with her umbrella. Like Wilson's operas, the montage of tableaus, the seemingly arbitrary imagery, and the crafting of painterly and sculptural space encouraged the audience to interpret the piece by making associative connections of their own.

In the context of the benefit, Melanie's swirly map mat reminded me of the satellite imagery of the storm, its looped progressions threatening the edges of my television screen. Melanie's eye focus, still tableaus, and interactions with the different objects were contained within the mat and the mat within the cramped entryway to the gallery. Again, given the context, I could not help but be reminded of how the contingencies of the storm, any storm, dis/places bodies to contained spaces – attics, roofs, buses, helicopters, institutional centers – with the remnants of one's life in hand, a chance collection of what one can pick up and carry at the time. The spatial dynamics also evoked an ironic discomfort that I attribute to the poetics and politics of viewing. Melanie composed the space so as to juxtapose her containment and lack of eye contact with the audience's freedom to move and view her undetected. The noted "freedoms"

were qualified in that the close proximity of the performer to the audience prompted a self-awareness regarding one's choice to stand close to the performer and watch her or ignore her efforts altogether, neither of which is a comfortable option necessarily. Out of respect or desire, we feel compelled to watch and yet the close up view feels impolite. In this way, Melanie encouraged the audience to reflect on what it means to watch contained bodies in space. Without stretching the point too far, Melanie's piece recalled (with a difference) the efforts of the mass media who trained our eyes on the victims of the storm – appealing to our desire for information, eliciting our empathy for the victims, and inciting anger toward the media spectacle and our collusion with it.

In addition to balancing the forces of dis/placement and un/detected viewing, Melanie also balanced the reflective somewhat melancholy tone of the piece with whimsy. The latter emerged through the performer's pleasure in her technical ability to craft the intricate web of relations and her creative play with the different objects and images. In a sense, her play became a practical tactic for carrying on within and despite the constraints of the material world in which she found herself.

Inside the gallery of donated works, Danielle Sears Vignes donned a tyvek suit and displayed slides from her Chalmette home and community, both pre and post Katrina. She began the piece sitting on a stool listing some colloquial expressions from her hometown. Next, she told of her family's first return to their home to inspect the damage from the storm and to see what they could salvage. Her script included additional family stories and also references to local lore and landmarks. However, Danielle quickly chose to go off-script, engaging in conversations with the audience. Her choice, she said, was due to the emotional toll of remembering Chalmette as it once was and now clearly was not. The performance became an

informal conversation between Danielle and the gallery audience who asked questions, offered condolences, and shared their own experiences of donning a tyvek suit to “go home.”

While the performance did not go as scripted, the piece that emerged highlighted how everyday conversation and, therein, the telling of anecdotes is a verbal art form that people know well and are comfortable and creative in applying. Because knowledge and use of the form is shared, people engage with relative ease in coproducing this/their mutual performance. In the benefit event, Danielle put aside her planned piece wagering that the audience shared not only the skills of conversation and storytelling, but also invested knowledge regarding the content. In this way, Danielle activated a social form that she and her community sought in order to express their experiences and confirm their relational ties (cf., Calvino 76). In terms of secular ritual, we might understand that the resulting performance served as a redressive act (e.g., inciting *communitas* and proposing a model for community interaction) that responded to the ongoing social drama(s) in the aftermath of the storms (Turner 70-71; 47-48).

Beneath the staircase that led to and from the Brunner Gallery, I installed my piece, which consisted of an updated model of the house, a slide show of images and text, Jason and Gina’s film, and a few other items that further helped to context the piece in terms of the current event. In 2003, 310 Convention had undergone external renovations, one of which was a cosmetic facelift in the way of a yellow paint job. For safety purposes, a chain link fence had been erected around the house and, at the time of the benefit and thereafter (as I write now), it had not been removed. To reflect and refract the changes, I covered the exterior of my miniature model in yellow tissue paper and illuminated it from the inside. In the slide show, I included images that showed the various stages of the renovation, and with Jason and Gina’s consent, I alternated looped viewings of their film and my slides, projecting the assemblage of imagery on the exterior wall beneath the stairs. Lastly, I cordoned off the piece with some fencing and

yellow caution tape. A guest book welcoming audience signatures and comments provided an ironic counter to the cautionary references.

As I see it, in the context of the benefit, my installation served as a fairly explicit reminder of where we were in December 2005 and why we were assembled. The juxtaposition of film imagery that showed the destruction of homes and neighborhoods with that of the renovated model (representing a likewise renovated house) might be read as an ironic contrast or friction between the two sites – i.e., the travesty of expending resources on an abandoned shell of a Baton Rouge home while resources are lacking for rebuilding homes in the southeast and southwest parishes. In the broader context of rebuilding issues, the physical model with its largely cosmetic updates implies the unimaginative folly of a surface address of issues as compared to an in-depth analysis of the (geographic and social) forces at work on the fragile house(s) of cards. While intended to safeguard individuals, the fencing and yellow tape inscribe the home place as unsound. Such inscriptions provide an errant excuse for the slow flow of federal monies and insurance payments for rebuilding, and open the door for entrepreneurs and their visions of commercial redevelopment. To insure that community and family structures – the webs of intricate relationships – are sustained in the rebuilding process, time and patience are needed. We must enter the house (the tumble down of cards) and take a close look at how it was built and might be rebuilt, similarly or differently, card-by-card stone-by-stone, cognizant of balancing the diverse desires and needs of people and the land on which they build their lives.

#### REFLECTIONS AND ECHOES: A METONYM OF IMAGES

Leaving the benefit from the Third Street entrance, walking half a block north to Convention Street and then half a block east, I arrive at 310 Convention. When I first noticed the house many years ago, she showed her age: wrinkles of paint chip and chemical peel, which some may have referred to as blight. These days, she wears a new yellow coat with accessorized

trim that leaves her taut and smooth, her wrinkles well hidden. My three-dimensional model is yellow too: tissue paper yellow like the Sanborn maps with the tint of texts that paper the foam core beneath. My act of *bricolage* – tissue and texts apparent but re-functioned to serve as paint – induces an impulse to *decollage*, to peel away the layers to reveal what lies beneath just as I would like to peel away the layers that hide the wrinkles of my house. In these ways, the model is a metonym of the house. It bears direct associations to the referent it restores, but always, always partially. Like my research, it restores through loss, through an art of losing I would hope. It is a wager that I risk.



Figure 18. *Relations: Shaw Center for the Arts & 310 Convention, 2008* (photo by *Live Search Maps*).

If windows are the eyes to a home then 310 Convention has gone from cataracts to mirrored lenses. When I first started to document the house, all of its original windows were intact, complete with weather streaked glass and rusty screens. Actual and imagined glimpses of the interior were always through multi-textured filters. The new reflective windows might offer a crisp clear view of the interior – if I could get close enough to them, press my face against



them, in an effort to reduce the reflective glare. As it is, I stand on the other side of the chain link fence (a remnant of renovation, a cautionary keep out) watching the windows mirror the environment outside the house: ductwork, light poles, clouds, trees, me.



Figure 19. *Windows and Trim*, April 8, 2003 and January 3, 2006 (photos by the author).

However, when viewed in the right light at the right angle, some of the new windows allow for glimpses of the interior rooms. The photos I make of these views are often a *bricolage* that layers the image of interior details with the image of exterior elements reflected off the glass of the window. The result is a partial representation of both that “forgets” some of the light rays while it “remembers” others, merging the remaining memories into a visual conversation of reflected light. The conversation is not clear. Rather, I want to say it is a visual echo of voices from disparate sources speaking simultaneously, their sound waves bouncing off each other to reverberate between. To decipher the conversation, I find I must perform *decollage*.

One of my favorite photos was taken through an open porch window on the west side of 310. Through it I can see the dark wood frame of an interior window on the west side of the house in friendly conversation with the dark wood frame of a window on the east side of the house, a parking lot of sunlit steel beyond. A window latch catches my eye. It’s high in the

frame, the window large. If unlatched and opened, the window would let in a lot of air, a chill breeze in winter, a no breeze in summer, the cicada at dusk. Between the force of upright frames, more dark wood uprights with crafted curves; I count four in refracted counterpoint: a banister. A partial banister in support of the partial railing I hold to climb the absent stairs to the second floor. In harmonic friction with the bass note of vertical frames, the diagonal of the dark wood railing is repeated in white, over and over and over again, in the railings one holds to climb the absent stairs to the floors of the building behind me, outside the house. Unhappy with the conversation, a busted beam grumbles in the foreground.

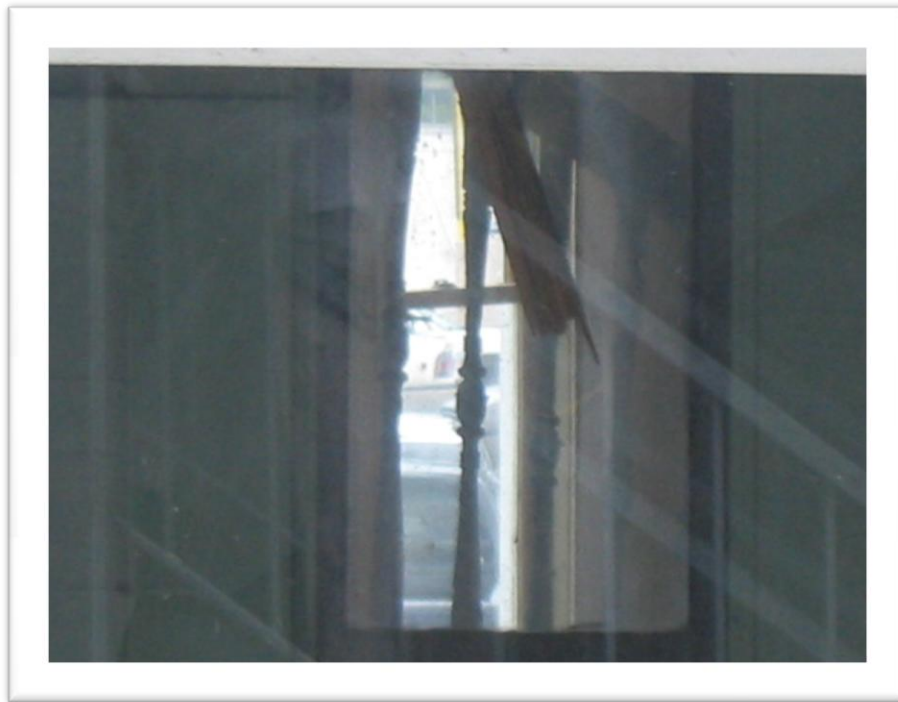


Figure 20. *Visual Reverb*, May 7, 2006 (photo by the author).

Through reflected tree branches and the windows of a high rise, I make out echoes of an archway and a molded mantelpiece, loving details attending to a past I don't know. They whisper amidst the forest of branches that have entered and (re)claimed the house, as if in a fairytale or myth or those books about the machine in the garden only reversed.

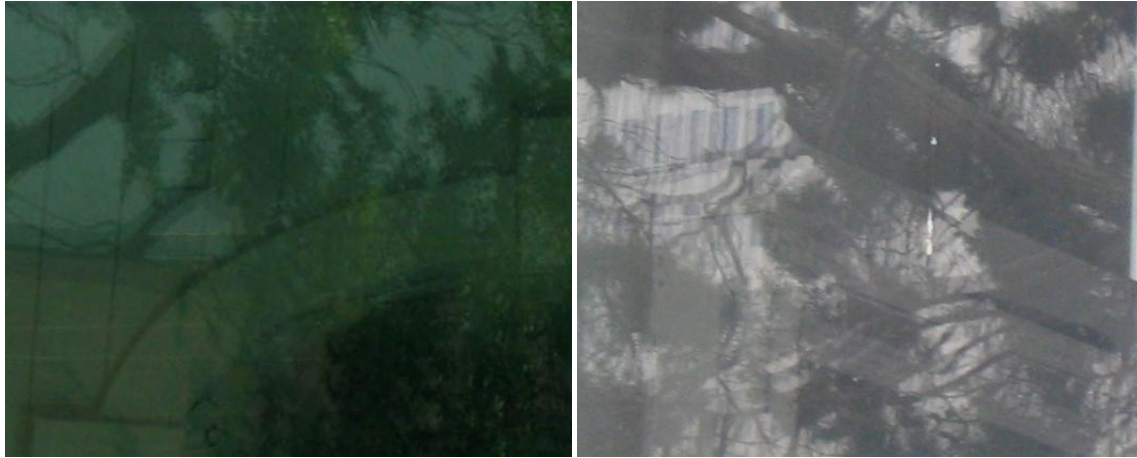


Figure 21. *Layered Light*, July 16, 2007 (photos by the author).

While the photos shown above perform new or at least unique compositions, it is evident that their various elements derive from and refer to structures that are not wholly present. The result is a sensory *bricolage* of reflections and echoes, a performance that is no less real than those in which the elements are new and hence fully present. That is to say, presence is only possible in things that are new, as if the new is ever possible. We rebuild constantly.

From my various view points into the house, I can see no furnishings save for those I glimpse on the front porch. Prior to the renovation, an opaque drapery covered the glass windows that enclosed the porch. When construction began, the drapery was removed, revealing remnants of a place that seemed to meet both personal and professional functions. My view from the west side shows a pair of lazy, low slung rattan chairs with cushions for the back and behind to sit a spell on a hot summer night an iced drink in hand listening to the low buzz of city life up on Third Street, the blast of a barge, the coo of a dove, the “help” in their homes elsewhere. There also is a magazine stand (or perhaps it’s for plants?) and a metal and glass medicine cabinet, its doors slightly ajar. Clay pots and gardening tools clutter the furnishings as if someone has left the spring potting undone. Through the glass door on the north side, I can make out an oval window on what was once the front face of the house before the porch was

added. At night, from another angle through the same door and directly above the exterior (now interior) wooden door, I can see a sign that indicates the home's first owner and his profession.

"J. R. Fridge," the sign says, followed by an "M" and I imagine a "D" too.



Figure 22. *Front Porch Views*, January 3, 2006, April 8, 2003, and July 13, 2007 (photos by the author).

A practical understanding and use of the metonym aims toward efficiency: whole for the part, part for whole, life as vita, history as chronology, story as list: porch, chair, drink, stand, cabinet, pots, Fridge, M. D. While the efficient metonym bears a direct association to its referent, it is not concerned with “quoting” it and certainly not concerned with discussing what it leaves out (e.g., the “help” in their homes elsewhere), since such quotation and discussion would slow things down. The efficient metonym builds language to create the illusion that what we read or see or hear is all we need to read or see or hear. It is a house without wrinkles, a figure of language without spacing, the performance of communication without negotiation

Of course, the latent power of the metonym lies in its creative inclinations, when it uses its partial form to call attention to its partiality; when it quotes or discusses what is short-changed, left out, lost, or absent in the metonymic process. It is a house without wrinkles. The

creative metonym is like *bricolage* (which is not to say it is *bricolage*) since, in its reuse of old things, *bricolage* refers to but does not replace them. It too quotes or discusses them, usually with comic or whimsical pride since part of its job is to poke fun at the notion of “new” by making adept reuse of the old, the disposed of, the left-over, the remnant. We might say *bricolage* bears a comic attitude toward loss while that of the metonym is tragic or, at the very least, pensive.

*Bricolage* then is about building or, rather, rebuilding whether it be language, research, text and tissue paper, light and sound waves, a house, a city, a region. In fact, in France, Bricolage is the name of a chain of stores that carry building supplies, sort of like our Lowe’s and which, also like our Lowe’s, handymen and women (*bricoleurs*) frequent often. My point is simple: with attention paid to the past a sturdy house can be rebuilt. This, I believe, is implicit in the art of losing.

In *And Our Faces, My Heart, Brief as Photos*, John Berger reflects,

The visible brings the world to us. But at the same time it reminds us ceaselessly that it is a world in which we risk to be lost. The visible with its space also takes the world away from us. . . .

To this human ambiguity of the visible one then has to add the visual experience of absence, whereby we no longer see what we saw. We face a *disappearance*. And a struggle ensues to prevent what has happened, what has become invisible, falling into the negation of the unseen, defying our existence. Thus, the visible produces faith in the reality of the invisible and provokes the development of an inner eye which retains and assembles and arranges, as if in an interior, as if what has been seen may be forever partly protected against the ambush of space, which is absence.

. . . Appearances belong to the boundless space of the visible. With his inner eye man experiences the space of his own imagination and reflection. Normally it is within the protection of this inner space that he places, retains, cultivates, lets run wild or constructs Meaning. (50, 51; emphasis in original)

My process in this section has helped me realize how and why I have developed “an inner eye” over the course of my research. When I look at 310, I “face a *disappearance*,” less so in the literal than in the figurative sense although the one might lead to the other. (The collapse of

space in the figuration of what we mean by “downtown redevelopment” may well lead to the demolition of this fenced-off remnant.) By attending to what is absent, partial, or incomplete in the house I view, the maps I peruse, the model(s) I make, the photos I take, the words I write, I learn to restore loss without insisting it be present. *Bricolage* teaches me to rebuild with attention paid to the loss. Together, the metonym and bricolage reveal an inner space that allows me to protect and dwell in what I have remembered and rebuilt. The expression of partialities “produces a sense of place” (Ulmer 39), in “the spacing of things” (Derrida, *Chora L Works* 109), through the imagination. It is “a play, a dance which is not a mirror up to nature but – As birds’ wings beat the solid air without which none could fly so words freed by the imagination affirm reality by their flight” (Williams, *Spring and All* 149-150).



Figure 23. *In/visible Negotiation*, July 16, 2007 (photo by the author).

## FRICITION AND BALANCE, TIME AND PATIENCE

The subjunctive realm of the imagination and its performances cannot revitalize the actual structure of 310 or rebuild actual homes lost to the storms. However, as was the case with *Baton Rouge Artists Give 100%*, the manifestation of the imagination in concrete performances of artistic expression can generate actual funds that contribute to the rebuilding effort. Just as important, the subjective realm can serve as a site for imagining and rehearsing what might be entailed in rebuilding. It serves as equipment for living, as Kenneth Burke might say.

As performance, the benefit served as a site for the individual expression of stories, thoughts, feelings, and opinions regarding the storms and, also, one's reasons for participating in the event, whether as artist or audience. The two are enfolded in this case: by attending the event one chooses to remember the storms in one way or another. The benefit also united those in attendance in a common cause, resulting in *communitas*. Thirdly, in these ways, the benefit helped us imagine and rehearse an "art of losing" that I believe is generative and hopeful.

Through Nietzsche, Michel Foucault calls for an "effective history" or genealogy that attends to events in time by tracking recurrences and disparities in the archival record, which he views as a "field of entangled and confused parchments . . . that have been scratched over and recopied many times" (139). In other words, the memories and counter memories in the archive indicate distinct and partial perspectives on a given event. Thereby, they show culture in action, culture being made through the confluence of what is remembered and forgotten or lost. Understanding that distinct and divergent perspectives are an undeniable force of history and culture making, Foucault urges the historian to attend to those in the archive and, also, acknowledge her own "slanted" perspective – her own "appraisal" of the events she studies – taking care to ground her partial view in the circumstances of her "particular time and place"

(156, 157). As I mentioned in the first chapter, the concept and practices of the mystory call for a similar acknowledgement on the part of the author. Such perspective knowledge is articulated most explicitly through the personal discourse one crafts, often in terms of artistic or creative models (forms and conventions) of writing and other media. A less explicit though no less irrefutable indicator of perspective is expressed through the network of materials and discourses the author selects and arranges so as to tell her story, which due to its content and form is a story of others too.

In these terms, the benefit might be understood as an historical event of culture making in which distinct and divergent stories and views regarding the storms and resulting issues were expressed through multiple media. In her installation, Gretchen ciphered her research interests regarding the affects of a seemingly stable collection of art work through the benefit event and its concerns. The story that emerged expressed a longing for stability (e.g., on the part of Gardner, curators and collectors generally and, I speculate, those in attendance at the event), while it also showed that stability is liable to the forces of history and those who make it – including, it would appear, Gretchen. Melanie crafted a story and perspective that focused on dis/placement and un/detected viewing, issues that are pertinent to her studies and the inscription of storm victims as transmitted through the mass media. Balancing melancholy with whimsy, Melanie also articulated a broad tactic for survival in her inventive play with the bits and pieces (the objects and images) left to her by chance. Responsive to the contingencies of the event, Danielle amended her story and view by including those of the audience. By means of the familiar forms of conversation and anecdote, the co-creators confirmed relational ties while also sharing distinct experiences of the storm and its aftermath

My installation, which included Jason's and Gina's movie, offered a perspective on individual and community homes in peril, at risk in the physical, discursive, and institutional



storms of history. As a metonym of the actual house and remnant houses generally, my model of 310 argued against cosmetic rebuilding, urging instead an in-depth analysis of the in/visible forces at work in any re/building. In *New Orleans, "Our Home,"* Jason and Gina focused on their homes first and then broadened their perspective to include the "home" of the community to which access has been denied or inhibited. The reasons for the restriction lie in the immediate fallout of a natural disaster as opposed to one family's obstinacy as has been my experience with 310. However, in light of the institutional inscription of the homes as unsound and, hence, vulnerable to the forces of progress (demolition and commercial cooption), the restrictions are similar. The installation recognized what is undeniably lost and anticipated what can be lost should we erase the past in our drive forward. This erasure includes physical homes and the relational web of families and communities they, in part, represent. Attending to this web is risky business since it requires balancing the forces of in/stability in an effort to avoid the totalizing effect of (devolutionary) stagnation on the one hand and (evolutionary) progress on the other – i.e., the evolutionist view that the present is an unquestionable improvement on the past.

While distinct in the stories they told and the views they proffered, the individual pieces and those who created and viewed them were united in the space and time of the benefit, which had as its specific aim the raising of funds for artists displaced by the storms. As I noted earlier, by participating in the event, the artists and audience chose to remember the storms and attend to at least one of its many repercussions. Thereby, they were united by broader experiences and issues than that of helping the displaced artists, which is not to under-estimate the importance of doing so. As representatives of a regional community devastated by the worst natural disaster in US history, those in attendance understood in experiential if not cognitive terms what Foucault means when he says that bodies are "totally imprinted by [the forces of] history" (148). In their various ways, all the participants shared the imprint of the physical storm as well as those of the

institutional and discursive storms that raged in the aftermath. And I believe it is fair to say that the participants understood the mark as one of undeniable loss, which they chose to remember by attending the event. In this way, they also demonstrated that bodies are not only imprinted by history, but imprint it through the actions they perform in space and time. In this case, the assembled community performed a benefit that featured and celebrated the arts, through which they expressed their resilience and hope. In Victor Turner's terms, they experienced *communitas*, or that "moment when compatible people . . . obtain a flash of lucid mutual understanding" that their problems can be resolved "if only the group . . . [can] sustain its intersubjective illumination" (48; emphasis added). By remembering their mutual loss through distinct creative expressions, the community rehearsed ways to rebuild. They performed an art of losing. However, as Turner implies, sustaining the inter-subjective understanding that diverse people and perspectives constitute the public space (of rebuilding in this case) is difficult. The rehearsal runs in fits and starts, the quotidian intra-subject runs willy-nilly toward her future, and the ever fragile house of cards trembles.

The benefit performance of loss and hope touches on and articulates our deep human need for building . . . so that we may dwell . . . "in place" (Heidegger 144). Entailed here are the sustenance and nurture of the intricate webs of individual and social relations. Involved too is the recognition that all our recollections and views of these webs are partial and incomplete. We restore through loss. As Maurice Halbwachs writes in *On Collective Memory*:

We preserve memories of each epoch in our lives, and these are continually reproduced; through them, as by a continual relationship, a sense of identity is perpetuated. But precisely because these memories are . . . successively engaged in very different systems of notions, at different periods of our lives, they have lost the form and appearance they once had. They are not intact vertebrae of fossil animals which would in themselves permit reconstruction of the entities of which they were once a part. (47)

The house of cards is rebuilt through the individual and collective recognition of loss and it is the loss (our metonymic grasp of the past) that helps us understand the similarities and differences in our perspectives. Like the *bricoleur*, it is in light of (and not despite) our partialities that we must place our perspectives in conversation and thereby, with time and patience, rebuild a sturdy house in which to dwell.

## **CHAPTER SIX A FULL HOUSE**

In this study, I have filled (out) 310 Convention with figures that create chains of signification in an attempt to express how the house, its archives, and I perform its history. On the one hand, I have created a “full house” of cards, each chapter a unique playing card that contributes to the meanings and values of the other cards. For instance, Chapter Two might be a Queen Victorian, the era and style of the house initiating the hand I play there. As it turns out, the meanings of the old Victorian house are not as uniform or easily accessed as I assumed they would be. Beneath the stolid exterior are divergent stories and perspectives that constantly shift and redefine the act of remembering an old dwelling. Chapter Three is a Queen Bee. Embedded in the structure of the hive, she supplies it with the worker bees or archivists who sustain and activate the hive through their constant collection, distillation, and transformation of materials. Chapter Four is an Ace of Hardware representing the tools and labor of those who build places in spaces so as to better understand the conceptual as well as practical aspects of building and dwelling. Chapter Five is an Ace of Hearts, the ultimate gesture of a community in crisis coming together to help each other rebuild their lives by creating an art of remembering. The final card is the Queen of Hearts represented by this chapter in which I discuss how the document magnifies the pre-eminence of topophilia in how we build, dwell, and preserve the material places and relational traces in the spaces we call home.

On the other hand, I have not created a “full house” at all since the very assumption contradicts the signifying potential of each chapter and the document as a whole, claiming a “win” in the card game of sense-making rather than acknowledging how the cards and their interplay are always partial and incomplete. The document overflows its boundaries due as much to the cards I lost in the shuffle as to those I held and played. The “full house” I have

created then is a house constituted by metonymic forms and expressions in conversation with the many sources that compel them, and which also operate in terms of metonymic partiality. The hand I play regarding 310 Convention is a “call” – not so as to conclude play, but rather to attend to and remember loss so as to compel future play in the building and dwelling of text, place, performance, and community.

Three-ten Convention is transformed throughout the document in terms of the informing tropes of each chapter: pop up house, wax house or hive, miniature doll house, house of cards, and full house. In each case, the trope provided a model for how I performed writing about the materials and issues I discovered while researching 310 Convention. Below, I summarize key points in the prior chapters, addressing how each trope functioned to frame what I discovered.

In Chapter Two, I recounted and composed my initial research process so that it would reflect the many possibilities that “popped up” and surprised me in the early stages. Martin Heidegger’s notions of dwelling and building provided the impetus to “stay with” 310 Convention even when it was not easy to collect or interpret the meanings that arose. I transformed the inter-discursive and inter-subjective entanglement of theoretical, practical, archival, anecdotal, personal, and public ways of knowing into *chora*, as both Derrida’s spacing on the page and Ulmer’s generative process of discovery and invention. As I modeled 310 Convention, I took delight in folly, in unfixing singular notions of historic value that might deem the house insignificant.

In Chapter Three, I addressed the question of how archives, particularly maps, perform, and how they might serve as models for research and/as performance. Daniel Pastorius’ notion of the archive as hive provided a dynamic model that acknowledges the collective activity involved in the construction and maintenance of an archive and the structures of knowledge therein. As archives, the Sanborn Maps perform an accumulation of stories about 310

Convention and the surrounding city. The maps are subject to the different conventions used to compose the hard bound and digital maps, which affected my relationship to and use of the information contained in each. The transformative potential of the Sanborn Maps archives occurs when we recognize the structures and anti-structures embedded in their forms, the building details the maps cannot represent, and those dwellings on the maps that no longer exist.

I integrated the material culture of the maps into my research by transforming their substance and structure into a three-dimensional model of 310 Convention, performing the house like the archives. The model functioned as a metonym for how the maps in particular and the archives in general perform in and as miniature. I also performed the efficiency and economy of the maps in my (re)use of terms and images in how I wrote the chapter. My archival collection was “modified by the transformations caused by successive contexts” (de Certeau 117), producing excesses and contradictions that required me to operate reflexively, taking time and care in my collection and composition of the details.

In Chapter Four, I focused on the metonymy of form, particularly how miniatures perform the partialities of remembering and forgetting place and space. The figure of the doll house is a metonym of the magnification of detail that occurs in the act of miniaturization whether through language, artifact, or performance method. Miniaturization urges us to slow down in our observation, description, and critical reflection of the miniaturized object.

My enactment of 310 Convention as a mini-installation was a “fictive construction,” in which my prior experiences researching the house were enfolded. The house became a miniature echoing themes of abandonment, lost eras and landscapes, and the desire to preserve, spare, and (re)build the places we love. In the *Across Disciplines* installation, my miniature 310 was placed in conversation with other projects concerned with “places that evoke a sense of the past.”

Activated by the researchers and audience, the four projects created chains of signification in the fictive real space of performance. This document is another iteration of the miniaturization of the house and its research. An imprint of a space of *différance* is created between the fictive real house composed here and in the installation and the actual house that I have not experienced except from without.

The miniature as metonym also recognizes what it cannot make manifest, the absence it cannot make present by means of its miniaturized forms. Absent from our mini-installations were the lived experiences of those represented by the places we researched. This lack did not foreclose however the imaginative potential of topophilia, which enabled us to preserve the spaces of our research through forms of expressive miniaturization. Following Derrida, we encouraged our audience to play in the instability of being by reflecting on what was included and magnified in our research, and by partaking in the co-creation of meanings that arose through performance. However, such notions of imaginative play were disrupted by the storms of 2005. Hurricanes Katrina and Rita compelled me to recognize that we cannot rebuild devastated homes, communities, and regions through metonymic expressions alone.

In Chapter Five, the tropes I articulated to help me construct and express 310 Convention were destabilized, like a fragile house of cards, by the impact of the storms. Building, dwelling, and preserving took on added significance in my research, prompting me to wager my project in the balance of larger community concerns. In the chapter, I juxtaposed topophilia for an insignificant dwelling against the mastery of loss presented in my students' film, *New Orleans: "Our Home."* While Jason's and Gina's project could not restore their homes and communities, their willingness to remember the loss helped to restore the relational webs of those places. The fictive real spaces of art and performance allowed us to transform our sense of loss into acts of

remembering that moved beyond thoughts and into action, first and foremost in the labor of creative production.

Remembering activated *communitas* during the fundraiser for displaced artists. The event brought together people affected by the storms in various ways. The bodily engagement of performers, artists, and participants created a transformative space in which the participants refashioned the imprint of loss into a creative act, an art of remembering the communal body necessary to rebuilding spaces in which to dwell. One event will not rebuild a region, city, or home, but if we do not wager to preserve such moments of *communitas* we risk creating uninhabitable places, in which there is no space to dwell.

#### SHOWING MY HAND

In this section, I am called on to reveal the significance of my hand. Queen Victorian delights in the folly that arises when we compose histories in ways that allow the indeterminate and often arbitrary associations (as well as the pleasures of more determined processes) to occur. The Queen Bee has earned her right to dwell in the hive by building herself into its form. She is a metonym of the substantive and structural transformations that result from the activities performed by the worker bees she has produced. The Aces of Hardware and Hearts are linked through their use of multiple temporalities that demonstrate how signs of the past are always present in the restored behaviors, labor, material, and tools of performance. Performance is embedded with losses that can be recognized through the metonymic bits it fashions in creative acts of remembrance. The mystory becomes the tool for addressing how the Queen of Hearts transforms the previous cards into the hand I play in the construction of this document. The text engages multiple discourses from the fields – the spaces and places – of philosophy, performance, and material culture, professional, popular, and personal domains, national and local histories in an effort to compose a performance about a particular place. The discursive



interplay helps me articulate how we might build and dwell in texts that transform material culture and performance practices into spaces of metonymic possibility that attend to the acts of remembering and forgetting. We must wager the mix of old and new so as to (re)build and preserve the relational webs of the felicitous spaces we love, or we risk losing more than just our homes.

The word folly can mean an error, but in architectural terms it also can mean delight, or a favorite abode. A folly might be appreciated by the builder only or, perhaps, a visitor from the Folly Fellowship whose “goal is to protect lonely and unloved buildings of little purpose from being rationalized or destroyed” (“The Folly Fellowship: Aims”). I consider 310 Convention a folly in that if one were to evaluate it solely in terms of fixed notions of historical value (e.g., the renown of its architect or owner, its age, rarity, or architectural purity), it might be easy to tear down. In my efforts to protect the house, I have relied on the folly to be found in methods such as *chora*, a generative process of discovery that allows for a multiplicity of perspectives in doing research and creative options in how that research is expressed in the spacing on the page.

Building on Derrida’s play with the word *chora* as a model for his spacing on the page, Ulmer notes that “the choral word (event functioning as abstraction) sets a series going, a movement or passage through language, a spreading memory, drawing to itself an associated range of meanings. The choral word produces the paradigm, the combinatorial of possibilities, from which the inventor selects” (227). My investigation of 310 Convention is full of such indeterminate pleasures. The house “called” to me when, in the Poetics of Place seminar, Dr. Richardson encouraged us to research a place of the past that held personal interest for us. Three-ten Convention popped to mind and, since that light bulb eureka moment, I have allowed chains of significance to unfold without (and certainly with) determined force in my approach to research. Ulmer identifies the process as “punctual” and differentiates between it and more

evident so-called linear connections we might make. He writes, “[t]he pun is one of the most basic linguistic units for creating redundancies, the condition that gives rise in experience to a feeling of eureka. . . . Thus the formal point at which the Heuristic code may be grafted onto the Hermeneutic code is located in the mystery’s reliance on the pun as part of its *invention*” (228; emphasis in original). A most surprising puncept was the chain of definitions and derivations of the name “Barbe” I discovered on my “day off” from reading theory. The discovery resulted in a refreshed understanding of my relationship to Barbe, the house, and the emerging document in ways I would not have considered otherwise. In a sense, I learned to think other-wise.

The folly of punceptual knowledge and invention has influenced how I apply Martin Heidegger’s concepts of building and dwelling, sparing and preserving, as fundamental states of being. Not all dwelling-beings require folly. One can spare and preserve without the feeling of delight, perhaps solely out of duty or necessity. In the case of 310 Convention and, perhaps, similar houses and projects, folly is imperative because of the insignificant status and perspectives attributed to the house through hermeneutic approaches. The choral play of heuristics releases the signifying potential of the subject, encouraging others to interact with and build significance too; to dwell in the potential of the subject. Through folly, the dwelling-being of 310 Convention is transformed into a fictive real site where the subjunctive “what if?” interacts with the indicative “what is” to imagine possibilities for how human beings make and perform space in life and on the page.

Whatever the pleasure, the folly of less determined processes requires the researcher to attend to her rights and responsibilities regarding the subject(s). This point is illustrated by the trope that guided my interaction with the Sanborn Maps in Chapter Three. Chancing upon Pastorius’ model of the archive as hive, I learned through subsequent research that honey bees gather nectar so as to create the structure and sustenance, the wax comb and honey, of the hive.

Further, their actions are directed toward the greater good of the colony and, through pollination, they give back to the plants from which they gather the nectar. The archiving bees taught me to consider not only how my interaction with the maps might benefit me and my academic community, but how it might acknowledge those people and communities embedded in the maps, those who made them and those who lived and worked in the structures represented there.

In Chapter Three, my process of collecting and composing, dwelling in and building from the Sanborn Maps implied how I might give back to the archives that sustained me. The digital and hard bound maps required me to engage them in different ways, acknowledging what was included and left out of each archive, and what I chose to focus on and ignore. Generally, the metonymic partiality of the maps resulted in gaps where I discovered elements that exceeded the economy of the structure. While efficient, the shorthand labels for buildings gave way to the promise and drawbacks of change – “D”-welling becoming FILL’G STA becoming PARK’G LOT – as people fled to “better” neighborhoods leaving the downtown district desolate of places we might love and call home. The excesses of historicity, of bodies imprinted by and imprinting history, were evident also in the labor and craft required to compose and update the hard bound maps. Similarly, the digital maps invited me to follow a chain of discrete moments in time and space in order to grasp a partial sense of the historicity embedded there. My joyous play with the digital graphics was interrupted by my realization that the places I reproduced and shifted about so easily were once inhabited by people for whom the shifts – from theatre to undertaker’s to barber’s to baker’s – were not so easy. In other words, I learned that my representations in word and image were bound by the same conventions of metonymic economy and excess displayed in the archives I drew on to make them.

In building this document, I have had to consider the implications of how my collection and composition performs. What I build on the page is not the house, its miniature model, or my performance installations. Rather, it reflects the multiple chronotopes (figures of bodies in space and time) I have discovered and bring to bear upon what I have collected and transformed. The written result of this accrual is not indicative of sterile reproduction although it does reflect, even imitate at times, the iterations layered within its form. I do not write, as Peggy Phelan suggests I should, “towards disappearance” (165). Instead, I perform the act of *bricolage* aiming to represent and present the multiple temporalities that accumulate in bodies, their memories, the things they make and do in order to express themselves to others. I understand and appreciate Phelan’s position against a politics of visibility, in which “institutions whose only function is to preserve and honor objects – traditional museums, archives, banks, and to some degree, universities – are intimately involved in the reproduction of the sterilizing binaries of self/other, possession/dispossession, men/women which are increasingly inadequate formulas for representation” (165). However, I do not believe the response to the inadequacies lies in favoring a present-ist bias as Phelan does in her claim that “performance’s only life is in the present,” and that the only way to document such events is through “the act of writing toward disappearance, rather than . . . writing toward preservation” (146, 148).

In staking out her position for the ontology of performance as one of disappearance, Phelan writes:

Performance implicates the real through the presence of living bodies. In performance art spectatorship there is an element of consumption: there are no leftovers, the gazing spectator must try to take everything in. Without a copy, live performance plunges into visibility – in a maniacally charged present – and disappears into memory, into the realm of invisibility and the unconscious where it eludes regulation and control. Performance resists the balanced circulations of finance. It saves nothing; it only spends. (148)

Phelan's claim that the defining feature of performance is an all consuming presence that "saves nothing" seems to me to miss the mark especially as regards the living bodies that are so central to her claim. Bodies are not *tabulae rasae* that enter a performance unmarked by their prior experiences. Performers and spectators alike enter into a performance carrying their assorted baggage, always packed a little differently, with them. Their histories and herstories, sensory and cognitive, visual and verbal and print informed memories affect how each interacts with the event and what they take away with them. In *Across Disciplines*, for example, my experience of Barbara Faulkner's project concerning the defunct movie theatre was influenced as much by my memories of attending the theatre in the past as by the remnants she displayed and the activity she designed for the audience to do. My memory bits affected my experience and how I think about it now. Images of the movie *Brazil*, a new found friend eating popcorn at my side, regulate and are regulated by my recall of Barbara's piece, each bit activating and sustaining the other and, like Barbara's piece, paying tribute to the power of the imagination to preserve the past in generative, exciting ways. Barbara's performance saves. Different perceptual baggage influenced how I experienced Gretchen's piece performed for the benefit at the Shaw Center. For me, her research concerning the Isabella Stewart Gardner Museum was ciphered through the reasons we had gathered. A desire for stability, not unlike that of a curator faced with a collection of remnants she loves, showed itself liable to the forces of history, whether institutional, discursive, or physical. Gretchen's performance saves this desire and liability, helping me at the time and as I write now to make some sense of the manically charged present, which would just as soon such sense-making disappear; that I dump my political baggage and go unconscious. The noted examples demonstrate my view of how we and the things we make and do function metonymically. Through the partialities we restore, performance is already embedded in loss.

To write of performance requires that we recognize the past that is always already a part of the performance event. The bodies that participate in a performance are marked by the diverse and divergent pasts they carry with/in them. Restored in the act of performance, these remnants operate as metonyms, recurved in the *bricolage* of multiple temporalities that constitute the event. The accumulations and restorations add to the web of relations that emerge in a given performance as the participants make associations from what they bring, gather, and piece together individually and collectively. The recognition and use of metonymy and *bricolage* in performance and performance writing demonstrates what can be gained from the accumulation of partialities. As Derrida reminds us, binaries like absence and presence are superseded by play, by how we choose to play, and while playing in recognition of multiple temporalities exposes us to leftovers, copies, regulations, and controls, it also increases the potential of the web of relations we construct.

The significance of the issues I addressed above became apparent to me through my use of the mystery, which allows me to engage the house and my research on multiple levels. The multiplicity helps me unfix the attributions of historic or commercial value that might deem the house insignificant. As processed and written, the research re-imagines in-significance showing how multiple subjectivities and perspectives are at work in the term as applied to the house and, as such, it cannot be erased easily even if it is physically destroyed.

One in-significant issue that emerged from the mystery process concerns what it means to write and perform from multiple and shifting perspectives where the power of will is not denied as much as tempered by a curiosity regarding the other forces at play. As with Richard Schechner's notion that performance is restored behavior, the mystery understands it is embedded with memories and histories that it restores deliberately and not so deliberately through enactment, thereby activating a confluence of networks and forces that extend beyond

itself. For instance, my miniature model of 310 Convention restores with deliberate care the yellow color used to designate it as a wooden structure in the Sanborn Maps, which by sheer coincidence also restores the current color of the actual house repainted to meet cosmetic standards of urban renewal (Barbe perusing paint samples at Lowe's); and while the shape of the model restores, again with deliberate care, the architectural details I drew from my photos, field research, and the Sanborn Maps, it also restores what I failed to learn, the model papered with the dead end letters that spurned my efforts (Barbe perusing paint samples at Lowe's); and while the house as modeled gained in-significance by means of the two installations – a *mise en abyme* miniature and a metonym of loss – a few blocks away sat the actual house “abandoned and isolated” I write always cognizant of its resistant force to anything I or anyone else might create or say about it.

Remember the chain link fence I mentioned in Chapter Five, the cautionary “keep out” that surrounded 310 after its renovations? Well, the fence is gone, replaced (sometime between Chapters Five and Six) by a gleaming black, wrought iron fence of impressive height: Spanish inspired New Orleans meets Impure Victoriana in downtown Baton Rouge, Dr. Fridge on the porch and Barbe perusing paint samples at Lowe's, big bold black stripes against a bright yellow bulk. It looks like a bee.

The mystery process also propels the in-significance of local knowledge, history, memory, and culture. By insisting that the researcher engage diverse domains of discourse, the mystery levels the playing field to start, encouraging the researcher to discover rather than assume the relationship between the discourses at play. In this way, a researcher learns to view the world in terms of perspectives often subjugated in the academy due to the discourses it deems significant as conditioned by nationalist and corporate agendas and patronage. However, learning to view locally is not only about subverting or resisting subjugation by the powerful, the

once termed “dominant discourses” or “master narratives.” It also is about recalling and learning from events held by and for locals where subjugation, as discussed here, is the last thing on people’s minds. For instance, in south Louisiana, crawfish boils are events typically staged in someone’s backyard for a small group of family and friends. If someone were to ask the group, the significance of the crawfish boil to national or global cuisines, the group might smile politely and, then, turn back to decapitate some more crawfish – finding the question *slightly* irrelevant (and just a little bit stupid) in the current context. However, if the same person asked the group the ingredients of the boil, attention would be paid since recipes are prized and often discussed at boils. Similarly, while I made significance of the benefit for displaced artists – i.e., what does the event tell us about performance and culture if we could care less about the aftermath of Hurricanes Katrina and Rita – for me and I believe those who participated in the event, it was important precisely because it was held by and directly addressed the needs of the local public. Put another way, the event could not have been staged elsewhere. It was insignificant itself. From this view, and reinserting power structures, the entity of 310 might ask the arbiters of historic value to explain the significance of its criteria: why should I care about the purity of style or the renown of an architect or owner? Why should the provincial concerns of your itty-bitty group matter to me? Of course, they do matter. My point, then, is not that power structures should be ignored, or that we should favor isolationist attitudes, or that discourses don’t cohabitate, or that someone at the crawfish boil couldn’t explain the significance of the boil to national cuisine. Rather, my point is that in its most radical applications the mystery shows the researcher turning the multi-facet of power so as to learn what it might mean to view and practice power from another angle, otherwise insignificant.

My application of the mystery also influenced my relationship to philosophy. The method encouraged me to experiment with how I might ground philosophical inquiry in



performance and historicity, in the materiality of bodies in place and time imprinted by and imprinting their histories. Derrida's call for *chora*, or spacing on the page, became manifest in the playful folly of derivatives related to Barbe and her ownership of the house, in the *bricolage* photographs of 310, and in the visual models of pop up houses, which delight us not because they close the gap between signified and signifier, but because they open it, displaying inventive difference. Heidegger's twin concepts of building and dwelling became increasingly important to me as I applied the mystery method, placing divergent discourses in conversation with each other and, in this case, finding they converse quite amiably. Building and dwelling ask to be enacted in sensual, material ways so as to discover the experiential knowledge of what it means to build a house and what it means to dwell, to situate the body in relation to a place it loves. As transcendent states of mind, building-dwelling-loving bear up under the scrutiny of significance, while as material practices – fingers gooey with paste, a glazier etching “J. R. Fridge, M.” over a door as Fridge himself waits to see the “D.” appear, my love for the place expressed through my fingers as I type this sentence – they bear less significance until one dwells in them, discovers them through actual or imagined practice.

The mystery has taught me the in-significance of a study that functions figuratively, as metaphor and metonym. In light of the latent power of metonymic forms, the study articulates itself as loss, as a creative art of losing. Like performance, it seeks to recall and restore remnants of the past through enactment and expression and, like many performance forms, it also seeks to recognize what it cannot represent and to acknowledge its partiality and incompleteness. My performance of loss helps me understand and express what loss means to me in light of communities that suffer enormous loss across the world and here at home, and in light of the losses of daily life: a dear pet, a forgotten lover, a misdeed, a button, a memory, a home. It is

my hope that by performing loss in creative ways I have told a story that in some way benefits the in-significance of the other subject of my story.

In closing, I return to the house that compelled me to build and dwell in it by means of research and this document. Even if I can attend to 310 only by means of this text, perhaps it will eke out a space for the house in which it can survive. Underlying my desire is an ethics of responsible stewardship toward the places in which we dwell, our homes, communities, and the environment that sustains us. As Heidegger reminds us, the material and cultural spaces we inhabit are worthy of preservation for no other reason than dwelling is a fundamental human need:

On all sides we hear talk about the housing shortage, and with good reason. Nor is there just talk; there is action too. We try to fill the need by providing houses, by promoting the building of houses, planning the whole architectural enterprise. However hard and bitter, however hampering and threatening the lack of houses remains, the *real plight of dwelling* does not lie merely in a lack of houses. The real plight of dwelling is indeed older than the world wars with their destruction, older also than the increase of the earth's population and the condition of the industrial workers. The real dwelling plight lies in this, that mortals ever search anew for the nature of dwelling, that they *must ever learn to dwell*. What if man's homelessness consisted in this, that man still does not even think of the *real* plight of dwelling as *the* plight? Yet as soon as man *gives thought* to his homelessness, it is a misery no longer. Rightly considered and kept well in mind, it is the sole summons that *calls* mortals into their dwelling.

But how else can mortals answer this summons than by trying on *their* part, on their own, to bring dwelling to the fullness of its nature? This they accomplish when they build out of dwelling, and think for the sake of dwelling. (158-159)

Heidegger's ideas seem more imperative in light of the events of the past three years in south Louisiana, the consequences of which are apparent in the number of homes that lie empty and unrepaired; the parallel number of homeless who cannot find affordable housing; the continued loss of the wetlands that if attended to would provide protection for those who remain. I hope my investigation of the in-significance of 310 Convention extends beyond my own case of topophilia into a fictive real space that inspires others not only to preserve places like this, but to extend the idea of building toward and in terms of our collective dwelling on the earth.

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## VITA

Lisa Flanagan was born November 19, 1967, in New Brunswick, New Jersey. While her young parents, Judith and Robert, searched out their own education and purpose in life, she and her siblings, Laura and Chris, were afforded the opportunity to grow up in many interesting dwellings and spaces over the years. In June of 1986, she graduated from Newburyport High School in Newburyport, Massachusetts, and subsequently entered Louisiana State University. She continued the family nomadic tradition and received a Bachelor of Arts degree in philosophy from The University of Texas at Austin in December of 1990. She followed graduation with some life lessons in New Orleans that included the discovery of her husband, James, and the birth of her first child, Devon. In January of 1996, after completing her education as a coffee slinger and bookshelver at her friends' bookstore she entered the master's program in communication studies at Louisiana State University, with a focus in performance studies. To date, she has participated in numerous productions as performer and director in the HopKins Black Box Theater, which she currently manage; taught almost every class the department has to offer at the 1000 and 2000 levels; and even communicated across curriculums during her tenure at LSU. It has been a long ride, earning her Master of Arts in August 2002 (after having another son, Liam, in the middle of thesis work) and then continuing on towards a soon to be conferred doctorate. Future goals include performing, directing, teaching, writing, spending time with her family, and a house near the ocean.