

Feral Objects and Acts of Domestic Piracy: Sculpture, Secular Magic and Strategies of Feminist Disruption

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Abstract

This practice-led doctoral project is a material investigation of the potential for sculptural artworks to perform disruptive, dissenting and resistant narratives of women and girls' intersubjective relationship with the material culture of feminine domesticity. I argue for the entanglement of objects, ideas, bodies and artwork as a material-led encounter and ask, what might a feminist new materialism look like when the focus is on domestic objects, and how can we draw meaning from these objects when they perform as sculpture?

I propose a category of material culture I call 'feral objects', the overlooked and undervalued materiality of consumer culture as identified by Attfield (2000), objects that perform in the threshold spaces of society and culture (Crewe and Gregson, 2003). I analyse feral objects in their role as sculpture to argue for a feminist new materialism that disrupts subject/object hierarchies (Boscagli, 2014). Developing Eckstein and Schwarz's (2014) identification of piracy as a boundary practice, I introduce the term 'domestic piracy' to identify material-led strategies of feminist disruption as activism materialised as sculptural artworks.

Drawing upon Bennett's (2010) vital materialism and Pil and Galia Kollektiv's (2010) proposition that sculpture and installations made from found objects are performative in and of themselves, I argue that the embodied encounter with sculpture and installation made from found domestic objects materialises the agency of objects to perform an inter-relationality that is agentic of corporeal feminism (Meskimmon, 2019).

I analyse **poltergeist phenomena as 'secular magic'**, the sleight-of-hand of conjuring (During, 2002), proposing that secular magic materialises feminine domestic disruption as the embodied encounter between (feminine) subject and (domestic) object. I argue that the trickery or sleight-of-hand required to construct sculptural artworks performs feminist strategies of domestic dissent enacted by women and girls through feminine material culture (Owen, 1989).

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Introduction: Disobedient Women, Disobedient Objects



Figure 1, Paula Chambers, *Feminist Clutter* (2018). Found objects, paper, plywood. Dimensions variable. Promotional image for Feminist Visual Activism symposium, ICA, London 10/07/2018. Photograph by the artist

The witchy women of my imagination, whose stories I conjure into being through the materialisation of sculpture, haunt their domestic spaces like vengeful housewives or middle-aged spinsters plotting the downfall of deceitful lovers. They are the stropy teenage girls frustrated with the restrictive impositions of society and culture choosing instead disruptive isolation in their bedrooms, the heroic young mothers who parent alone, abandoning themselves to the chaos and disorder of domesticity, the self-absorbed old ladies who hoard, who have too many cats, the ambitious lone artist whose occupation of home as studio threatens to overwhelm her domestic propriety. These women and girls are angry, and the domestic objects with which they commune have become angry also. These women and girls are disobedient, disruptive and dissenting, and it is through the

materiality of domesticity that they make manifest their feminine and feminist resistance.

This practice-led¹ doctoral project is a material investigation of the potential for sculptural artworks to perform disruptive, dissenting and resistant narratives of women and girls' intersubjective relationships with the material culture of feminine domesticity. In this thesis I argue for the entanglement of objects, ideas, bodies and artwork as the material-led² encounter of this project, and ask the question,

what might a feminist new materialism look like when the focus is on domestic objects, and how can we draw meaning from these objects when they perform as sculpture?

I propose a category of material culture I call 'feral objects', the overlooked and undervalued materiality of consumer culture as identified by Judy Attfield (2000), objects that perform in the threshold spaces of society and culture. My analysis of these objects in their role as sculpture asks the question,

how might an understanding of the feral nature of these specific objects inform feminist new materialism as a material-led way of being-in-the world that subverts and undermines subject/object hierarchies?

This thesis introduces my term 'domestic piracy' to identify strategies of feminist disruption as boundary practices, a term developed from Lars Eckstein and Anja Schwarz's (2014) identification of piracy as a boundary practice. I propose domestic piracy as a material-led strategy of sourcing and (mis)appropriating feral objects for their re-presentation as sculpture. An analysis of domestic piracy in this context asks the question,

how might strategies of feminist disruption be materialised as sculptural artworks?

¹ I am using the term practice-led as developed for postgraduate academic research projects to include the physical activities of making, ideas, influences, materials and techniques in relation to art practice (Gray and Malins, 2004) (see methodology for further details as to how this strategy has been adopted throughout my project).

² I am using the term material-led to specify the particular focus of my sculptural practice which is on the physical, social, cultural, historical and agentic properties of materials (informed by literature on new materialism and material culture, Ahmed, 2010; Appadurai, 1986; Bennett, 2010; Brown, 2001; Boscagli, 2014; Coole and Frost, 2010; Grosz, 2010; Harman, 2016; Miller, 2010).

I analyse secular magic as the materialisation of a specifically feminine domestic disruption, the embodied encounter between (feminine) subject and (domestic) object. I adopt Simon During's (2002) term secular magic to contextualise the trickery or sleight-of-hand required to both construct sculptural artworks that perform dissenting narratives of feminist domestic discontent, and the 'on-the-ground' disruptive domestic strategies of women and girls enacted through **feminine material culture. An analysis of** the secular magic of poltergeist phenomena in this context asks the question,

how and why women and girls materialise their discontent through the disruption of the material culture of feminine domesticity?

The embodied encounter with sculpture and installation works is a materialisation of the agency of objects that is both performative and full of agentic power. Pil and Galia Kollektiv (2010) propose that sculpture and installations made from found objects are performative in and of themselves, that they enact an object-to-object relationality without the activation of a viewer. Yet the embodied viewer/participant also enacts a subject to object relationality that is key to this project, for it is the material-led corporeal encounter between (feminine) subject and (domestic) object that prompts the question,

how might sculpture and installation made from found domestic objects perform an inter-relationality that is agentic of corporeal feminism?

My usage of the word feminine in this thesis is applied in relation to its definition as having the qualities or appearance that have – in an Anglo-Saxon and Western centric context – been historically associated with characteristics deemed appropriate or suitable to women. I acknowledge that femininity as a concept is socially and culturally constructed and has been disputed by feminists to be innate to those biologically sexed as female (Bordo, 2003; Butler, 1993, 1999; De Beauvoir, 1948; Gatens, 1996; Moi, 1999; Young, 2005). However, due to the persistence of the idea of femininity in Western culture and society, and its adoption by many subjects gendered female as a self-conscious strategy of self-representation, I propose that the word feminine can still be usefully applied to the analysis of the objects of material culture produced for and consumed by women,

and to subjects who self-consciously adopt femininity as a mode of being-in-the-world, albeit often at the level of clothing and self-representation.

I use the word feminism in relation to social and political movements and discourses that aim to define, establish and achieve gender equality. A feminist is one who actively engages with the world as an ideology and as a political movement. In relation to the context of this thesis, my usage of the word feminism demonstrates that the 1970s feminist adage 'the personal is political' (Hanisch, 1969) is relevant in the current context to identify the connection between personal experience and larger social and political structures.

My adoption of the term feminist new materialism in this thesis is a rethinking of recent writing on new materialism as an interdisciplinary field of academic enquiry. New materialism can be defined as the material turn towards the agency of matter that moves beyond the postmodern understanding of matter as mute or passive (Ahmed, 2010; Bennett, 2010; Brown, 2001; Boscagli, 2014; Coole and Frost, 2010; Dolphijn and van der Tuin, 2012; Grosz, 2010; Harman, 2016). Feminist scholars across a range of disciplines have analysed the complexities of material realities as the interconnectedness of things, as an ontology of presence. Art making, Barrett and Bolt (2012) argue, 'allows us to map the complex relations between nature and culture, between the body and language and knowledge' (Barrett and Bolt, 2012, p.21). The feminist new materialism that I argue for here, is the presencing of the material realities of the objects and materials of art (my sculptural practice) as agentic of feminist subjectivities that are also complex and pluralistic and are historically, socially and culturally interconnected.

The term material culture as I use it in this thesis is most closely aligned to anthropology and ethnography where the term is used to identify the artefacts or materials that are produced and employed by people in order to survive, to define social relations, and to represent identities and social and economic standing. In anthropology the analysis of material culture, the interpretation of objects, is understood in relation to social and historical contexts. Daniel Miller (2010) develops the term objectification to identify the ability of objects to condition human actors as the primary means by which people become social beings: 'We

cannot know who we are, or become what we are, except by looking in a material mirror...' (Miller, 2010, p.59). Material culture, therefore, is the relationship between people and their things; it is the process by which the very act of creating form creates consciousness.

I apply the word materiality throughout this thesis as it used in social sciences and humanities to define the material qualities of things, the physical properties of objects and their consequences – what Bennett (2010) terms the thingness of things. Materiality means the quality or state of being material, of being composed of matter. In contemporary art, the term materiality is used to emphasise the material qualities of mediums used by artists. Ingold (2007) identifies the slippage between the meaning of materials and materiality and argues that artists are more concerned with the inherent properties (or qualities) of materials than an abstract sense of their materiality.

In contemporary art, most specifically in contemporary sculpture, artists are now free to work with any and all materials as most appropriate to the materialisation of their concepts. The use of specific materials and objects for the purposes of art making are only limited by practicalities such as cost, size, availability and logistics. In certain circumstances, such as large-scale commissions, even these limitations can be overcome, for example Artangel's commissioning of Rachel Whitread's *House* (1994) where the interior space of an entire terraced house was cast in concrete. Sculpture made from found objects transforms through intervention the stuff of material culture and releases objects 'from the bond of being equipment... the object becomes something else' (Brown, 2001, p.15). Sculptural making moves material things beyond their state as commodities to obtain new value when transformed as art objects (Appadurai, 1986).

In this thesis I argue that the agency of artist (myself) and the agency of objects (the material culture of feminine domesticity transformed and materialised as my sculptural practice) share an inter-relational praxis; that the agency of either artist or object cannot be seen or experienced in isolation – one is continually informing the other in an ongoing process of material entanglement. Art making is productive

of the interconnectedness of things as analysed by feminist scholars within the field of new materialism.

The word phenomena is applied throughout this thesis primarily in relation to poltergeist phenomena. A phenomenon is defined as a perceptual fact or event, especially one whose cause or explanation is in question – the word phenomenon is usually used to describe an impressive, extraordinary or remarkable thing. Phenomenology is the study of phenomena, the philosophical study of experience and self-awareness, of things that exist and how we experience them (Merleau-Ponty, 1965). In poltergeist phenomena things are observed to have seemingly moved of their own accord and this is experienced as objects having supernatural agency.

The proposition of this practice-led project is that sculpture and installations made from found domestic objects perform as actants in narratives of feminist disruption. Developing Latour's (1996) actor-network theory whereby an actant can be both human and non-human, an active mediator in a complex network of relations between things and concepts, Bennett (2010) proposes that an actant 'is neither an object nor a subject but an "intervener" ... by virtue of its particular location in an assemblage and the fortuity of being in the right place at the right time, makes a difference, makes things happen, becomes the decisive force catalysing an event' (Bennett, 2010, p.9). The feral objects of this project are material mediators, they are actants with feminine agency that intervene in the relations of feminism to become activist, political and resistant.

This project is a material-led analysis of women's relationship to domesticity within the terms of what Dimitrakaki (2013) calls 'practices of refusal', the flight from domestic space and reproductive work, a refusal of the practices of good housekeeping. It is a feminist reappraisal of the domestic as a site of ambivalence materialised through an analysis of the affective, corporeal and inter-relational encounter between (feminine) subject and (domestic) object as dissenting in and of itself. Calder Williams (2011) suggests that the objects of material culture have a propensity towards hostility and malevolence. My sculptural artworks materialise the refusal of the practices of good housekeeping where domestic entropy

becomes threatening and potentially dangerous. It is my proposition that sculpture and installations made from found domestic objects perform an ambivalent domesticity that materialises Calder Williams' hostility of objects as a feminist strategy of disruption.

This practice-led project is a materialisation of my methodology of hunting for, sourcing, living with, and creating sculpture made from domestic objects, as a strategy of feral scavenging (Whiteley, 2011). Feminist clutter (see figures 1 - 5) materialises my methodology of situated knowledges as the material-led encounter whereby finding and living with objects suggests a narrative or train of thought that leads to reading, writing, sculptural making, analysis and evaluation. This in turn prompts more writing, more reading and the desire to find another thing; an ongoing process that both broadens and deepens my understanding of the ambivalence and ambiguity inherent in women's relationship with the material culture of feminine domesticity.

This thesis is broken down into five chapters, each of which is structured around an analysis of specific artworks in relation to the areas of enquiry pertinent to the title of the thesis. The artworks analysed are the sculptures and installations that I have made since the inception of this project in 2015: *Kitchen Shanks* (2017), *Cornered* (2016), *Runaway Objects* (2017), *Rupture* (2018), *Hidden* (2015), *Feminist Escape Route* (2017), and *Domestic Front* (2016 - present). Each of these works prompt specific lines of enquiry in relation to the focus of my project that I explore through critical theory, and through an interpretation of the works of other women artists that I consider to have similar visual and conceptual concerns to my own: Mona Hatoum's *Homebound* (2000), Tatiana Trouvé's *Untitled (Mattress Works)* (2009), Lucy Puls' *Ad Hoc Locum* (2014-6), Sarah Lucas' *Spinster* (2000), Melanie Bonajo's *Furniture Bondage* (2011), Carolee Schneemann's *Interior Scroll* (1975-1995), Becky Beasley's *Surface Coverings (The Feral Works)* (2004-6), Pussy Riot's *Balaclavas* (2012-present) and Cecilia Vicuña's *A Journal of Objects for the Chilean Resistance* (1973-4). The analysis of these artworks is, I propose, a contribution towards feminist new materialism as art theory and art practice. The content of the chapters of this thesis are outlined in more detail towards the end of this introduction.

Methodology: Feminist Clutter as Situated Knowledge



Figures 2 and 3, Paula Chambers, *Feminist Clutter* (2019). Found objects, paper, plywood. Dimensions variable. As exhibited at *(im)Material Disarray*, SNAPArts, Wakefield, 31/07/19 – 15/09/19. Photograph by the artist

Since 2018 I have been constructing a series of installation works that I call *Feminist Clutter* (see figures 1 - 5). These object-led³ interventions are curated assemblages of the domestic stuff I have accumulated over the duration of this practice-led project, from 2015 to the present day (2019). Sourced from second-hand shops, flea markets, car boot sales and sometimes from skips and roadside collection, the objects – often stained, broken or rusted beyond usefulness – loiter untidily in the gallery space. Each assemblage is guarded or defended by the women and girls with guns figurines that I originally made to ‘man’ the sculptural

³ I use the term object-led to specify the particular role that objects play in my sculptural work. Objects are material things that are stable in form and have a physical and tangible presence.

barricade *Domestic Front* (2016-present). The methods through which these assemblages of feminist clutter come into being are those of material-led knowledge-making processes. Each object as actant actively contributes to the production of the assemblage, materialising the relations and forces that take place within the processes of making each new version of *Feminist Clutter*.

This practice-led project is intertextual in the sense that my integration of poltergeist phenomena into my analysis of the agency of objects is a methodology that allows for the allusion, plagiarism, and parody associated with intertextuality to become integral to my proposition for a feminist new materialism. As a material-led methodology, intertextuality allows for a relationship between objects, texts and artworks to generate new knowledge and to become meaning making within the context of my present proposition. Intertextuality as a knowing strategy of appropriation, usually with canonical texts and discourses (McCallum and Stephens, 2016), materialises in this project through the engagement with and disruption of the material culture of feminine domesticity, its presentation as sculptural artwork, and its analysis through texts across feminist critical theory, new materialist literature, art criticism, anthropology, sociology, design history, phenomenology, literature and popular culture.

A methodology, as Gray and Malins (2004) state, is not the product of methods undertaken, but rather the processes through which the limitations of knowledge are exposed. These processes at the frontiers of knowledge are those which suggest new formulations of knowledge (Gray and Malins, 2004, p.12). I see my methodology as processes at the boundaries, margins or thresholds of knowledge, in the margins or liminal spaces of knowing and not-knowing, much like the ambiguous understanding of poltergeist phenomena as supernatural or sleight-of-hand. My research resembles a spiral: one thing leads to another and back again, yet always moving forward. My research is practice-led, and specifically material-led: I find a thing, I live with it and it lives with me; the things suggest a narrative or train of thought; I read, I write, I look at the artwork of others; an idea for sculpture occurs; I make; I read some more; I analyse and evaluate what I have produced; I write some more, I read some more; I find another thing, and so on. An inter-relational material-led embodied encounter between (feminine) subject and (domestic) object as methodology. The material qualities of the domestic objects

through which my sculptures materialise are quite specific. When sourcing these from charity shops, car boot sales, flea markets and sometimes from eBay (an online auction and shopping website) if I am looking for something particular, I am waiting for certain stuff to draw my attention, for what Bennett (2011) calls 'The call of things' in her analysis of hoarding. These things tend to have the overlooked and undervalued qualities of what Attfield (1997) terms 'feral design', mass-produced objects deemed to have low cultural value. These objects that call to me are the material culture of feminine domesticity that Sparke (1995) identifies as 'expressed by such reputedly vulgar items as coal-effect fires, chintzy fabrics, and potted plants' (Sparke, 1995, p.xxvi). Yet it is these very objects that shape the feminine subjective encounter I propose, and it is these domestic objects that have a shared and inter-relational agency with the feminine subject that materialise as the sculptural artworks I produce.

The context and process of sourcing the objects and materials of my sculptural practice are of methodological importance in relation to the proposition of this practice-led project, strategies that I conceive of as domestic piracy, a boundary practice that takes place in the marginal spaces of consumer culture. These strategies of sourcing Whiteley (2011) terms 'feral scavenging', describing them as 'an ethnography of lost and found objects' and as 'processes of salvaging and re-assembling lost lives' (Whiteley, 2011, p.12). To re-present these objects and materials as art, Whiteley proposes, is 'to rehabilitate and re-value the lost, the discarded and the unwanted – both metaphorically and materially' (Ibid, p.27). Boscagli (2014) develops Douglas' (1966) proposition that trash is a threat to order and destabilises borders – 'taking out the trash' re-establishes the boundaries between inside and out. The 'reclaimer' disrupts the processes of separation, processes that Crewe and Gregson (2003) see as constituting a structural shift in value when the cast-out or cast-off object is reclaimed. In my sculptural practice, the re-presentation of domestic objects and materials as sculpture is a form of object rehabilitation or even redemption. The intentional strategy of finding and making in which Formica-topped coffee tables, used Tupperware containers, broken and discarded kitchen utensils, or even the (mis)appropriation of images uploaded to online media sites and subsequently forgotten disrupts cycles of consumption through their reclamation. The

rearticulation of these objects in their performative role as sculpture disrupts the understanding of the domestic context within which these materials and objects have been denigrated as worthless and trivial.

My feminist re-appraisal of new materialism and the agency of objects adopts a methodology of material-led knowledge making identified by Haraway (1991) as situated knowledges. Situated knowledges, Haraway proposes, require conversation between objects as actors and the embodied subject, where the object of knowledge is an 'active, meaning-generating axis of the apparatus of bodily production' (Haraway, 1991, p.200). This active and generative conversation between humans and non-humans Haraway terms the material-semiotic actor. Applying Haraway's situated knowledges to art making processes, Bolt (2007) presents the material-semiotic actor as that which actively contributes to the production of artwork, as the relations and forces that take place within the process of making. In this encounter, between bodies and all the other actors implicated in the process of making, 'the human is no longer outside of the assemblage directing the proceedings. The human being becomes just one material-semiotic actor engaged in complex conversation with other players' (Bolt, 2007, p.2). *Feminist Clutter* (figures 1-5) as a material manifestation of a practice-led methodology enacts Haraway's situated knowledges as a meaning-generating mode of production, and also Bolt's proposition that the encounter between subject and object implicates both in the processes of making.

My methodology of material-led research adopts domestic piracy as a strategy of sourcing that integrates the feminine subjective encounter with materiality. My encounter with found domestic objects and their materialisation as sculpture, performs Bolt's (2007) proposition 'that creative practice can be conceived of as a performance in which linkages are constantly being made and remade. Whilst each actor has the same praxiological [of deeds and actions, purposeful behaviour] status, each has its own character and contribution to make as part of the work of art' (Bolt, 2007, p.3). These processes of coming-into-being, where each actor contributes to the materialisation of a specific work of art, manifests in each version of *Feminist Clutter* to perform as inter-relational domestic ambivalence.

In my transition from girlhood to womanhood, Poltergeist phenomena, alongside autobiographical experiences, play a key role in both the sculptural objects I produce, and in my research strategies and outcomes. My sculptural objects and poltergeist activity have both specific material qualities of embodiment that are inter-relational and also a disruptive sense of agency that materialises the ambiguity of the performativity of femininity as constructed in relation to domestic objects and spaces.

Contribution to Knowledge: Feminist New Materialism

The sculpture and installation works that lead this project are a materialisation of feminist new materialism as an emerging way of thinking about subject/object relations that feed back into being-in-the-world as embodied encounter.

Developing new materialist ideas around the agency of objects⁴ (Ahmed, 2010; Bennett, 2010; Brown, 2001; Boscagli, 2014; Coole and Frost, 2010; Dolphijn and van der Tuin, 2012; Grosz, 2010; Harman, 2016), mine is a feminist proposition, where new materialist ideas can be transformative of the ways in which we understand the material culture of feminine domesticity as a vibrant and agentic entanglement of bodies and objects that troubles established narratives of the alignment of women to the domestic sphere. I offer a feminist new materialism that is grounded in the phenomenological encounter between (feminine) subject and (domestic) object made manifest through the sculpture and installation works of my (home as) studio practice. This practice-led project brings together themes, and theories across a range of disciplines to present new ideas that offer the possibility of a feminist new materialism materialised as sculpture. Developing theories proposed in feminist critical theory, new materialist literature, art criticism, anthropology, sociology, design history, phenomenology, literature and popular culture, I pose new questions that arise from this collaboration of ideas and ask how sculpture and installation can articulate and enact strategies of feminist disruption.

⁴ New materialism represents a range of cross-disciplinary theories that foreground the nature of matter and the place of embodied humans in a material world (Ahmed, 2010; Bennett, 2010; Brown, 2001; Boscagli, 2014; Coole and Frost, 2010; Dolphijn and van der Tuin, 2012; Grosz, 2010; Harman, 2016).

The feminist new materialism that I propose here is knowledge making through praxis. Art making is an intrinsically material practice and it is the materiality of matter that lies at the core of all creative practice, specifically that of sculptural art practice that engages with found objects. New materialist theories have been applied across a range of academic subject areas, including nature, humanity, culture and social organisation (Ahmed, 2010; Bennett, 2010; Brown, 2001; Boscagli, 2014; Coole and Frost, 2010; Dolphijn and van der Tuin, 2012; Grosz, 2010; Harman, 2016), and much of this writing has been directly informed by feminist theory in subject areas such as science, geography, ecology, phenomenology and queer theory. New materialism opposes the modernist understanding of human as creator, the Anthropocene understood as the human placed at the centre of things, a concept which reinforces the muteness or passivity of matter. New materialism proposes instead that matter is a shared and exchanged state of being, and as a consequence all things are co-responsible and indebted to each other. Yet little has been written about the specific materiality of matter in its form as objects. In their writing, Ahmed (2010) and Bennett (2010) both directly engage with and analyse stuff or things – Ahmed analyses the table for writing upon, and Bennett the assemblage found in a storm drain – yet both writers remain removed from these objects, they observe and analyse objectively albeit with subjective affect. Art making as praxis has the potential to step into this gap left by academic theory: the artist as agent transforms the stuff of material culture, applying knowledge brought about through direct experience and the concern that artists have with the inherent properties (or qualities) of materials (Ingold, 2007). Praxis is material knowing.

Art making as the production of knowledge is both experiential and performative. Knowledge occurs as a material process through intra-action, where agency is understood as not an inherent property of subjects, but as a dynamism of forces (Barad, 2007, p.141), the vibrancy of matter as analysed by Bennett (2010). The feminist new materialism that I propose readdresses the alignment of the muteness or passivity of matter to a gendered reading of materiality. Art making processes materialise as a redistribution of power between subject and object, a collaborative process whereby agency is shared. In this context new materialism is the negotiation between bodies and matter that produce knowledge through art

making. Art making operates in the gap between the signifying processes of language and reality (Barrett, 2013, p.64). Feminist new materialism manifested as sculptural practice, specifically in this context as sculpture made from found domestic objects, is feminist praxis as the intra-action with the material culture of feminine domesticity.

This material-led project manifests as sculptural artworks and installations which I propose bring to light untold stories of the intersubjective and embodied relationship that women and girls have with the material culture of feminine domesticity as disruptive and resistant in and of itself. This project is both inter-textual and transdisciplinary, arguing (through material engagement, the praxis of art making) with and for the proposition that objects have agency and as such perform as actants that both form and inform the intersubjective domestic encounter. I am proposing that women's relationship to the domestic is one of ambivalence, for if femininity and domesticity have been defined in reference to and by each other, and women's bodies and the conceptual spaces of home are also modelled after each other, then how might the (mis)appropriation of the material culture of feminine domesticity re-presented as sculpture and installation upset and undermine constructs of femininity through an analysis of domestic objects and materiality as agentic in and of itself? Feminist new materialism – presented here as the study of found domestic objects as they perform as sculpture and installation – allows for an analysis of the agency of objects to be investigated as relational and ambivalent.

My sculptural artworks and installations that form and inform the premise of this practice-led project are material manifestations of the hidden stories of women and girls and their disruptive relationship to the material culture of feminine domesticity. And like the overlooked and undervalued stuff that makes up this specifically feminine domestic materiality, these stories of domestic disruption as they manifest in material form are uncanny, the **familiar made strange**. Bennett (2010) **proposes that her** exploration of vital materiality is one in which she will 'turn the figures of "life" and "matter" around and around, worrying them until they start to seem strange' (p.vii). This is not a new idea, she suggests, as this manner of thinking about materiality has 'already found expression in childhood

experiences of a world populated by animate things rather than passive objects' (Ibid, p.vii). This uncanniness of materiality Bennett terms 'thing-power': thing-power she suggests 'gestures toward the strange ability of ordinary, man-made items to exceed their status as objects and to manifest traces of independence or aliveness, constituting the outside of our own experience' (Ibid, p.xvi). This animistic way of thinking about objects where materiality is not inert stuff awaiting activation, but rather an active and equal participant in moments of encounter is applied here to a critical analysis of poltergeist phenomena, an uncanny domestic haunting where I propose the trickery and misdirection of secular magic manifests as the feminine supernatural.

I set out to question how and with what intent domestic spaces and the material culture of feminine domesticity that inhabit these spaces have been assimilated into the structuring and construction of an embodied femininity that is often at odds with the actual lived experience and aspirations of women and girls. In mid to late nineteenth century Britain, femininity and domesticity were defined in reference to and by each other, as were women's bodies and the concept of home (Sparke, 1995; Giles, 2004). The interpretation of domestic material relationality as trivial and silly, as unworthy of serious attention undermines femininity as an embodied experience and undervalues it as a construct. This aesthetic moralising has produced narratives of femininity that reiterate the age-old adage that 'women's place in the domestic sphere meant that their resistance remained a private, rather than a public, activity' (Sparke, 1995, p.159). Yet if the stories of women's lives are to be told, their relationship to the spaces and stuff of home need to be re-evaluated as resonant of subjective and embodied creative encounters with the material culture of feminine domesticity.

Mine is a feminist project, a re-interpretation of the resonance of the materiality of femininity as it manifests through found domestic objects that perform as sculpture or sculptural practice (the 'feral objects' of this project) to offer the possibility for a dissenting feminist reappraisal of domesticity. The ambivalence and ambiguity of feminist art practice grounded in the materiality of domesticity proves an ideal medium for subversive politicised activities due not least to its ability to expose 'patriarchal domesticity as contradictory, fragile and frayed at the

edges' (Kokoli, 2017, p.156). Domestic piracy, I propose, is a revolutionary feminist strategy of resistance, one in which the trickery or sleight-of-hand of secular magic can be applied to processes of the making, sourcing and disruption of both artwork and of femininity itself.

Overview of Theoretical Context



Figure 4, Paula Chambers, *Feminist Clutter* (2019). Found objects, paper, plywood. Dimensions variable. As exhibited at *(im)Material Disarray*, SNAPArts, Wakefield, 31/07/19-15/09/19. Photograph by the artist

The Agency of Objects and the Performativity of Sculpture

Central to the proposition of this practice-led project is the notion that objects have agency and as such are able to perform an object to object relationality that undermines subject-object hierarchies and places emphasis instead on the stuff of material culture through which we negotiate subjectivities and social relations. Pil and Galia Kollektiv (2010) propose that sculpture and installations made from found objects can be seen to be intrinsically performative in and of themselves. The object as actant shapes and influences interactions in staged performances manifest as sculpture, 'where objects are seen to stage their own theatrical experiences, performing themselves without requiring the activation of a viewer's body' (Pil and Galia Kollektiv, 2010, np). If this is so, then I am asking what kind of

performances and interactions do found objects stage when they materialise as sculpture and installations made from the material culture of feminine domesticity? New materialist literature (Ahmed, 2010; Bennett, 2010; Brown, 2001; Coole and Frost, 2010; Grosz, 2010; Harman, 2016) has made much of the potential agency of objects as a way of conceiving materiality as transgressive of binary oppositions. Yet it would seem to me that the specific material qualities and biographies of objects as they perform subject-object relationality has (partially at least) the possibility of a gendered, and in this context, feminist reappraisal of materiality and of the agentic potential of the material culture of feminine domesticity as it performs as sculpture. Not only is it disruptive of subject-object hierarchies, but also of femininity as it has been conceived of as passive and open to possession, in a similar manner to the philosophical understanding of materiality as inert stuff awaiting activation.

Feminism and its Ambivalent Relationship with Domesticity

The ideology of domesticity as culturally aligned to femininity has undergone transformation since the mid to late nineteenth century Victorian Britain. And yet the cultural construct of domesticity in late nineteenth century Britain, whereby 'it was possible to link domesticity, femininity, tradition, the past and constraint, and to understand this conceptual cluster as set against outdoors, abroad, masculinity, modernity, the future and freedom' (Giles, 2004, p.15), still holds sway in the popular imagination and in popular culture. **In the early twenty-first century, women continue to be primarily responsible, at least at an organisational level, for domestic tasks (Rezeanu, 2015, p.17), including home decoration and its associated consumer practices.** As Sparke (1995, 2010) identifies, the gendering of the domestic sphere continues to inform the production and consumption of the material culture of domesticity. The historical cultural inscription of domesticity as aligned to femininity was performed 'through sets of social relations that were historically specific and they inscribed and organised sexual difference and its relation to the modern world' (Giles, 2004, p.15). In the early twenty-first century women's relationship to home has had to be renegotiated in light of changing demands on women's time – the difficulty of maintaining a work-life balance requires domesticity to be conceptualised differently.

Many second-wave feminist writers and theorists (Friedan, 1963; Oakley, 1974; Rowbotham, 1973, among others), condemned home as a site of physical and psychical restriction and confinement. Yet for many women, particularly those from working class or minority backgrounds, domesticity, the practice of homemaking and its relation to the structuring of identity offers a space, however small, within which these women develop a sense of self-worth autonomous from prejudiced or exploitative social structures. Young proposes that 'Home enacts a specific mode of subjectivity' (2004, p.61). Identity is materialised in the home through belongings arranged in space as an extension of bodily habits and as a support for routines; the things of home carry sedimented personal meaning as retainers of personal narrative (Ibid, p.62). Home can also be a site of resistance, a place within which women are beyond the reach of dominating and exploiting social structures. 'Homeplace', hooks (1990) proposes, enables the development of a self-conscious constructed identity as a political project of criticism and transformation of unjust institutions and practices (hooks, 1990, p.48). Thus, home, and the material culture of feminine domesticity that inhabits home is both ambivalent and ambiguous. For some women domesticity is confining and claustrophobic, yet for others it is the process through which they are able to find autonomy and dignity. How then might sculpture made from found domestic objects articulate this ambivalence and ambiguity of being-at-home, not-being-at-home, the homely and the unhomely simultaneously? If the agency of objects can be analysed in ways that take into account their feminine materiality, I am asking how might sculpture made from these materials and objects that perform feminist strategies of domestic disruption be thought about and analysed within the contexts outlined above.

Despite second-wave feminism's call to leave home, women did not and have not left home: on the contrary, in the Global North many women have adapted to their work-life commitments and integrated domestic femininity as 'it is lived as a tactic against the alienation due to depersonalisation and commercialisation from the public sphere, a way to relax, to express freely their individuality and to connect to their close ones' (Rezeanu, 2015, p.24). What might domestic feminism look like? I propose that, in line with Hunt's (2009) analysis of the British reality TV show,

How Clean is Your House (2003-2009), it could be that the 'dismissal of domestic responsibility should be admired; the refusal to invest time and energy in laborious tasks respected as a method to fulfilling other, more lofty, aspirations' (Hunt, 2009, p.131). This dismissal of domestic responsibilities, which might also include homelessness and transient domesticities, I propose, is a domestic feminism that refuses to apologise for the house being a mess, **the self-regulating process through which, 'women are legitimising the traditional gender coded duty to clean and order the domestic space'** (Rezeanu, 2015, p.18) and instead embrace the mess, the accumulation of junk, the feminist clutter as a material practice of domestic refusal.

Liminal Materiality as Trash, Junk or Garbage

Bennett (2011), in the presentation *Powers of The Hoard*, discusses the lively intensities of things when they accumulate as hoarding, what she terms 'the call of things'. This propensity of stuff to exhibit a vibrancy specific to the entanglement of bodies and objects is intercorporeal, each bares the imprint of the other, the junk or stuff of hoarding are less possessions than pieces of self. Hoarders, Bennett proposes, are more susceptible to vibrancy of matter, and the process of hoarding one of joint agency of person, thing and place. My investigation into the specific material and agentic qualities of the found domestic objects that make up my sculptures led me to a consideration of their properties as junk, and of how this ambiguous material status might affect their propensity to perform certain kinds of social relations. If junk, as Boscagli (2014) proposes is dangerous and threatening due to its liminal status as neither desirable commodity object nor landfill at the end of its useful life, and if, as Crewe and Gregson (2003) propose, the act of casting out is one with moral and gendered implications, what then of objects that have gone feral, have been cast out inappropriately, or have come to signify or stand in for those who have been cast out of 'proper' society. Sculpture made from found domestic objects, objects sourced from the marginal spaces of consumerism, from charity shops, car boot sales and flea markets, perform the threshold states and spaces of society and culture, as intercorporeal domestic disruption.

Femininity and the Embodied Encounter

Femininity as I present it here is the adoption of a subjectivity that embraces and integrates the myths and material trappings of femaleness, the adoption of a female identity that is 'situated within a history of representation in which femininity is imagined through the restrictive binaries of sexual difference' (Grant and Waxman, 2011, p.4). I am exploring femininity from a phenomenological perspective, adopting Young's (2002) proposition of the lived body as a unity of facticity and situation – facticity being the material facts of the body and its relation to a given environment, situation being the capacity to act in certain ways and express oneself accordingly. As such, I propose femininity as a subjective and embodied experience of agency in the construction of a self-identity. The outward appearance of femininity has undergone radical changes in Britain since the late nineteenth century, and the restrictions imposed upon girls and women who adopt a feminine mode of being in the world have become less visually apparent. Yet as authors writing on girlhood have pointed out (Harris, 2004; Grant and Waxman, 2011; McRobbie, 1991, 2000, 2009), the adoption of femininity as embodied subjectivity still remains regulated and monitored through a system of structural constraints: 'new times both regulate and constrain young women in unprecedented ways, which unleashes unforeseen techniques of critique and resistance by them' (Harris, 2004, p.183). In this context, a study of girlhood as a bodily state of **identity in progress offers a conceptual space** through which alternative forms of embodied resistance can be analysed.

The relational and liminal status of the found domestic objects that perform as sculpture in my work have the disruptive material agency of girlhood as an embodied state that is neither one thing nor another, 'not-yet, no-longer, not-quite, not a woman nor anything else' (Elfving, 2011, p.107), a performance of feminine defiance in which girls stage a protest in their bedrooms with their bedroom things. McRobbie and Garber (1991) point out that the tight-knit friendship groups formed by pre-teen girls and the activities they engage with in their bedrooms offer different possibilities of resistance: 'a function of the social exclusiveness of such groupings is to gain private, inaccessible space. This in turn allows pre-pubetal [sic] girls to remain seemingly inscrutable to the outside world of parents, teachers, youth workers and boys as well' (McRobbie and Garber, 1991, p.112). If

femininity is both performative and constructed in relation to the material culture and spaces of domesticity, as Sidalkulas (1996) proposes, then what might be understood about girlhood as a transitional threshold embodied state where it is domestic objects, the things of home, that perform a feminine protest that disrupts these constructs and as such undermines the hierarchy of subject-object relations. I propose that this inter-relational agency, where feminine discontent is a process of transference from subject to object and back again, has the potential to be materialised as sculpture where it can perhaps be understood as girlhood femininity itself that has gone feral.

Secular Magic and Technologies of Enchantment

The relationship between new materialism, animism and secular magic (the conjuring of stage magicians) is I propose, materialised as the domestic disruption of poltergeist phenomena as a form of conjuring, a strategy of misdirection also evident in the materialising techniques of spiritualist mediums. Both are performed by girls and women as supposed supernatural activities where feminine agency is transferred from subject to object in acts of deception and misdirection, both also employ the material culture of feminine domesticity as the stuff through which these 'supernatural' acts are made manifest. In poltergeist phenomena domestic objects appear to move of their own accord, sofas and chairs tip over, wardrobes and chest of drawers jump forward suddenly, pots and pans leap from kitchen tables. In a spiritualist séance vases of flowers float and hover, tables tilt and levitate, and yards of ectoplasmic cloth materialise from the orifices of the mediums themselves. Gell (1994) states that when we do not know how things happen or are made, they are seen to have been magically produced. These technologies of enchantment could be applied also to the deception and misdirection required for the acts of conjuring involved with the production of poltergeist phenomena or of the materialisations of a spiritualist séance, and as such, their 'reading' as supernatural activities. Calder Williams (2011) proposes a radical theory of hostile objects in which things are 'out to get us' in malevolent acts of self-sabotage. The domestic objects of poltergeist phenomena are just such malevolent objects; they are the things that have come to life in extreme situations of Taussig's (2015) animism, the things that go bump in the night. My sculptures

and installation works that lead this project enact the secular magic of poltergeist phenomena and the materialisations of a spiritualist séance, they stage a disruptive domestic haunting where it is not the how, but rather the why (Owen, 1989) women and girls choose to manifest their embodied discontent through the material culture of feminine domesticity that is important. This inevitably poses the question, is it the malevolent objects themselves or the trickery, deceit and motivation of the women and girls involved that is so terrifying and threatening?

Domestic Piracy as a Boundary Practice

This material-led project sets out to research through both practice and discursively through theory, the potential for found domestic objects to perform as sculpture that manifests strategies of feminist disruption. The concept of domestic piracy has been adopted as a methodology through which I propose the politics of domestic dissent can be analysed. In this context piracy is seen as a boundary practice (Eckstein and Schwarz, 2014) that operates in the liminal spaces of society and culture both in relation to the marginal status of the material culture of feminine domesticity, specifically in its form as junk or trash, and to practices of engaging with this materiality as a form of feminist agency. The figure of the feminist artist as domestic pirate who undertakes acts of material theft and appropriation is one of subversive feminine agency in which domestic piracy offers the potential of the re-presentation of femininity as **one of feminist resistance. I propose domestic piracy** as a strategy of resistance materialised as sculpture and installations that perform a feminist new materialism with the radical potential to rethink subject/object relations whereby the shared agency between (feminine) subject and (domestic) object is one that offers the possibility of thinking, making and doing things differently.

Structure: The Chapters



Figure 5, Paula Chambers, *Feminist Clutter* (2019). Found objects, paper, plywood. Dimensions variable. As exhibited at *(im)Material Disarray*, SNAPArts, Wakefield, 31/07/19-15/09/19. Photograph by the artist

Each chapter of this thesis examines one of the main themes of the project in relation to the potential of sculpture made from found domestic objects to perform feminist strategies of dissent. I investigate the agency of objects and their uncanny potential as disruptive domestic materiality, notions of the feral as they manifest in found objects, strategies of sourcing these materials, threshold states and spaces and the social abjection that has come to be aligned with a 'feral underclass' (Tyler, 2013). I investigate femininity and girlhood as an embodied subjectivity relational to the material culture of domesticity, secular magic (During, 2002) as the misdirection of conjuring and how this has manifested historically through the materialising mediums of the spiritualist movement (Owen, 1989) with a focus of the materiality of these materialisations, and domestic piracy as a politicised feminist strategy of disruption as made manifest through the material culture of **feminine domesticity**. I propose **poltergeist phenomena** as a material manifestation of domestic disruption whereby materiality becomes active, vibrant and potentially hostile. Poltergeist phenomena is intrinsically domestic and performative, it is through the material culture of feminine domesticity that girls and young women perform their embodied dissent.

In chapter one, *Uncanny Domesticities: Objects, Agency and The Stories Things Tell*, an analysis of my sculptural artworks *Kitchen Shanks* (2017) and *Cornered* (2016) in relation to a re-reading of *Hatoum's Homebound* (2000) explores the potential for domestic objects to have agency. I analyse the domestic objects of these artworks as uncanny, and their materiality as active, vibrant and potentially hostile (Gell, 1998; Bennett, 2010; Taussig, 2015; Calder Williams, 2011). Developing Kokoli's (2016) proposition that the uncanny is the space where feminist art practice operates, I propose domestic dissent as an animistic, feminist new materialism whereby the material culture of domesticity performs as actants in narratives of domesticity. Gell's (1998) proposition that artefacts are materiality as the 'congealed residue of performance and agency in object-form' (p.68), and as such are capable of 'initiating casual sequences of a particular type, this is, events caused by acts of mind or will or intention' (Ibid, p.16), is one in which agency becomes not just about persons, but about persons and things and what they do in relation to each other. Taussig (2015) suggests that objects become animated by storytelling, and that the animistic qualities of objects is one in which things have attitude, where things come to life in extreme situations. Calder Williams' (2011) proposition that the objects of material culture have a propensity towards hostility and malevolence is materialised in *Kitchen Shanks*, *Cornered* and *Homebound* as sculptural artworks where the objects themselves "come alive": they are things that make things happen, the actants of Bennett's (2010) vital materiality. My animistic reading of the agency of objects questions the understanding of materiality as passive and inert, proposing instead that the domestic objects of the sculptures analysed in this chapter are active and vibrant in and of themselves. The things that happen are uncanny stories of resentment, hostility, threat and danger played out through the material culture of feminine domesticity.

Developing the proposition that domestic objects as they perform as sculpture resonate a material agency that is vibrant and hostile, in chapter two, *Going Feral: Sculpture on the Threshold of Domesticity*, I use my own sculptural installation, *Runaway Objects* (2017) as a tool for analysis in relation to Tatiana Trouvé's *Untitled (Mattress Works)* (2009) Lucy Puls' *Ad Hunc Locum* (2014-6) and Sarah Lucas' *Spinster* (2000). I propose that the feral objects of these artworks perform as liminal materiality, and present 'going feral' as a concept that embraces

practices of finding, disrupting and repurposing homeless domestic objects. Developing Boscagli's (2014) analysis of garbage as the unruly and potentially dangerous stuff that disrupts the cycle of commodity culture due to its liminal status as neither desirable consumer object, nor waste at the end of its useful life, I examine the found object as junk as it performs as sculpture, and the implications that garbage is 'a full affront to ordered materiality, is stuff at its most uncertain, vulnerable and wild' (Boscagli, 2014, p.227). Crewe and Gregson's (2003) analysis of disposal strategies, as 'casting out appropriately', is one in which the liminal spaces of consumer culture becomes an in-between space and time that offers the possibility of object rehabilitation or redemption. Current cultural concerns of the impact of marginality and the liminal as spatial, physical and psychological states are investigated through Tyler's (2013) analysis of a 'feral underclass'. Meskimmon's (2011) conceptualisation of threshold spaces as transitional states both physically and metaphorically, is applied to the artworks analysed as those that fracture an understanding of 'being at home' through their disruption of domestic materiality. As sculpture that perform narratives of going feral, *Runaway Objects, Untitled (Mattress Works)* and *Ad Hunc Locum* integrate the feral materiality of the liminal spaces of commodity culture as a strategy of sourcing – Whiteley's (2011) 'feral scavenging'. The found domestic object performing as sculpture is disruptive and dangerous – it asks what happens when we cast out inappropriately and what of uncanny situations of not-being-at-home.

In chapter three, *Dangerous Objects, Dangerous Subjects: Transgressive Materialities, Girlhood, Agency and Embodiment* I develop the concept of feral domesticities to propose the agency of domestic objects as materiality resonant of feminine embodiment, and girlhood agency as transgressive and disruptive of the formation of a feminine subjectivity. Through an analysis of my own artwork *Rupture* (2018). alongside Melanie Bonajo's *Furniture Bondage* (2011) series of performative sculptural images, I propose that the agency of girls, young women and domestic materiality can be seen to be relational and embodied and ask how this has been understood in certain situations as paranormal activity. **This chapter proposes that** poltergeist phenomena can be analysed as a manifestation of the embodied discontent of girls and young women as a materialisation of their subjective relationality to domestic spaces and objects. Following De Beauvoir

(1948) and Young's (2005) phenomenological analysis of feminine embodiment, I investigate the ways through which girls learn to inhabit their bodies in a restricted and constrictive manner. Domestic space as the stage on which the intimate feelings of women and girls 'could be acted out with the greatest authenticity' (Sidlauskas, 1996, p.65), is one where the symbolic relationship between the interior spaces of domesticity and psychic interiority has inflected the formation of femininity itself. The alignment of psychic and physical interiority with the interior spaces of domesticity as supernatural possession is, Clover (1992) writes, one in which the female body is presented as a portal to occult powers as a narrative of feminine interiority. As sculptural artworks *Rupture* and *Furniture Bondage* perform as a manifestation of the embodied relationality of women and girls with the material culture of feminine domesticity. I propose that these artworks make visible the invisible psychic spaces of femininity and as such pose questions about the ambiguous and ambivalent conceptual states and spaces of girlhood adolescence as sites of possession and appropriation, gaps in narratives of femininity that have become open to reinterpretation as the supernatural, uncanny domestic disruption of poltergeist phenomena.

Chapter four, *Secular Magic: Feminine Agency as Supernatural Domestic Disruption* develops the proposition that the disruption agency of girls and young women, perceived as supernatural, makes visible the invisible psychic spaces of femininity. I investigate the secular magic of séance, the mediumship of spiritualism and poltergeist phenomena through an analysis of my own artworks *Hidden* (2015) and *Feminist Escape Route* (2017), alongside Carolee Schneemann's *Interior Scroll* (1975-1995) and Becky Beasley's *Surface Coverings (The Feral Works)* (2004-6). I propose that these sculptural artworks perform as the material evidence of feminine discontent that is also manifest in séance and poltergeist phenomena as the agency of secular magic. Adopting During's (2002) term secular magic to describe the technologies of enchantment utilised by stage magicians and others in the business of 'deceiving' their audience through perceived magical acts, I develop Gell's (1994) proposition that it is the unknowability of the technologies of making that induce the sensation that it is in fact an act of magic that enables objects to come into being through the hands (and minds) of the maker. I propose secular magic and enchantment as strategies of materialising sculpture as an uncanny act

of conjuring, a sleight-of-hand that we recognise as a trick but are enchanted by nevertheless. The secular magic of materialisation is contextualised through Owen's (1989) analysis of spiritualist mediumship as a potential escape from nineteenth century proscriptive and restrictive femininity, and that the materialising mediums of the spiritualist movement can be seen to be in possession of femininity gone awry. As sculpture that performs Gell's enchantment of technology, the secular magic of materialising mediums, and the disruptive domestic agency of poltergeist phenomena, I propose that *Hidden, Feminist Escape Route, Interior Scroll* and *Surface Coverings (The Feral Works)* manifest Owen's femininity gone awry through materiality as embodied conjuring. My proposition that sculptural artworks made from domestic objects, the material culture of feminine domesticity, hide narratives of deceit and resistance allows for an investigation of feminine disruption as a politicisation of the agency of objects as dissenting materiality.

Bringing the feminist politics of activism to the fore, in chapter five, *Piracy and Hijacking: Strategies of Feminist Disruption and the Materiality of Dissent*, I offer as a tool for analysis my own sculptural installation *Domestic Front* (2016 - present), alongside the hastily made balaclavas of Russian performance group Pussy Riot, and the series of small sculptures by Cecilia Vicuña *A Journal of Objects for the Chilean Resistance* (1973-4). Developing Eckstein and Schwarz's (2014) concept of piracy as a boundary practice, I propose domestic piracy as a material-led strategy for feminist disruption and resistance. Domestic piracy as the appropriation of materiality – the hijacking of the material culture of feminine domesticity for the purpose of political feminist protest – is presented as a concept through which sculpture made from domestic objects can be analysed as a subversive strategy for the re-presentation of femininity as embodied domestic protest. I propose that the infinite reproduction of images offered by online media, both legally and illegally (Internet piracy), can be aligned to Gell's (1994) technologies of enchantment as potentially supernatural. Gessen's (2014) account of Pussy Riot's notorious rise to fame gives context to the adoption of the brightly coloured homemade balaclavas worn by the members of the group as a feminine **strategy of anonymity**. **The found objects** that make up Cecilia Vicuña's *A Journal of Objects for the Chilean Resistance* are analysed as materiality that is politically resistant in and of itself. *Domestic*

Front as a materialisation of domestic piracy as a boundary practice re-presents femininity as a disruptive material embodiment of subversive feminist agency, a material manifestation of the cultural hijacking of femininity itself, a political concern with cultural currency in an intersectional age of online piracy and material appropriation.

What follows then, is not a series of answers to the questions posed by a material-led analysis of the performativity of sculpture made from found domestic objects – the material culture of feminine domesticity – but is rather a feminist discursive investigation in the process of unfolding. Through a practice-led analysis of the agency of objects this project asks questions that trouble the edges of some tricky and slippery fields of knowledge that have no easy answers. The agency of objects as hostile and malevolent; trash, junk and the liminal status of the found object (the feral object); the problematic of domesticity and of feminine embodiment, femininity and domesticity as relational, inter-relational and open to disruption; the ambiguity of the supernatural, poltergeist phenomena as conjuring or sleight-of-hand, piracy as a boundary practice, and the materiality of feminist activism (which I define as domestic piracy), are investigated through an analysis of sculptural and installation artworks as the material embodiment of strategies of feminist resistance and disruption. As such, I propose a feminist new materialism that unsettles subject/object hierarchies through an analysis of the embodied encounter between (feminine) subject and (domestic) object as they perform as sculpture and installation made from the material culture of feminine domesticity. The sculptural artworks that lead this project, including the feminist clutter that inhabits my home as studio, manifest Dimitrakaki's (2013) practices of refusal, as well as the ambiguity and ambivalence of women's relationship to domesticity, through their vibrant, disruptive and often hostile materiality. Analysing sculptural artworks across generations and geographies, I propose that feminist new materialism has the potential to be world-making within the terms of Elizabeth Grosz's (2010) proposition that freedom is located in acts, and that the indeterminacy of materiality, including bodies and other forms of matter, is 'useful for life in ways that cannot be specified in advance' (Grosz, 2010, p.150). Freedom, Grosz states, 'is not a transcendent quality inherent in subjects but is immanent in the relations that the living have with the material world, including other forms of

life' (2010, p.148). If the *work* of art, as Meskimmon (2019) proposes, makes visual the dynamic intersubjective encounter between matter and meaning, and the embodied encounter one where agency is ascribed to both subject and object, then an analysis of the work that art does as a mode of experimental and material thought is imperative for the reimagining, redoing and remaking of feminist new materialism as manifest in the sculpture and installation works that form and inform this practice-led project.

Chapter One – Uncanny Domesticities: Objects, Agency and The Stories Things Tell



Figures 6 and 7, Paula Chambers, *Kitchen Shanks* (2017) Kitchen utensils, tights, hair bands, security grill, 90cm x 120cm, and *Cornered* (2015) Hockey sticks, kitchen knives, electrical tape. Dimensions variable (details). Photographs by the artist

Introduction: Material Encounters

Kitchen knives, pickle forks, corkscrews and scissors; tights, hair bands, hockey sticks, belts and tape; a security grill and the resonance of warfare. These are the things that make up the artworks *Kitchen Shanks* (2017) and *Cornered* (2015) (see figures 6 and 7), the materiality of a reimagined domestic scenario where women and girls take up the stuff of domesticity, the accessories and accoutrements of feminine subjectivities, and creatively alter and adapt these material objects in order to defend or attack from within the home as feminist strategies of resistance. As artworks, *Kitchen Shanks* and *Cornered* manifest as objects awaiting activation; they appear ready for use, threatening in their faintly veiled disguise as aestheticised objects. They are uncanny, the familiar made strange – one would not

expect to be stabbed with a pickle fork wrapped in purple tights, or fatally wounded by a girl's hockey stick with gold sparkly belt carry strap.

Both *Kitchen Shanks* and *Cornered* are artworks that can be seen to exemplify Kokoli's (2016) proposition that art informed by feminism is, in and of itself, intrinsically uncanny, in particular artwork that engages with the domestic and as such sets out to reveal the inadequacies of domesticity as a patriarchal construct founded on an oppressive ideal of the **division of labour**. *Kitchen Shanks* and *Cornered* materialise women's domestic narratives through the re-use of objects that have the resonance of femininity. The manner in which these artworks are displayed brings to light narratives of 'the suppressed discontents, silences, inequalities and even violence on which domesticity is founded' (Kokoli, 2016, p.2). The uncanniness of *Kitchen Shanks* and *Cornered* lies in their **subversive disruption of the materiality of domesticity as art making process**, whereby narratives of the domestic sphere become strange and threatening. These narratives of unexpected dread are also overwhelmingly present in Mona Hatoum's *Homebound* (2000), an installation in which domestic objects enact an ambiguous scenario of threat and potential violence. *Kitchen Shanks*, *Cornered* and *Homebound* are sculptural works that re-present uncanny domesticities through their materiality, 'Infecting the familiar with the unfamiliar and the seemingly innocuous with the shock of unexpected dread' (Kokoli, 2016, p.179). The uncanniness of these artworks manifests the agentic power of materiality in their ability 'to exceed their status as objects and to manifest traces of independence or aliveness' (Bennett, 2010, p.xvi). The domestic objects of these artworks are materiality made very strange indeed.

In this chapter I use my artworks *Kitchen Shanks* and *Cornered* as an analytical tool, in relation to a re-reading of Hatoum's *Homebound*, with which to explore the potential of objects with agency to tell feminist stories of disruption and resistance. The materiality of the domestic objects of these artworks, if considered active, vibrant and potentially hostile, troubles narratives of the alignment of women to the domestic sphere and re-presents the problematic of home materialised as unhomely domestic objects activated as sculpture. Domestic dissent is investigated through the material culture of domesticity from the

perspective of an animistic, feminist reading of new materialism where it is domestic objects that perform as actants in the retelling of the **stories of domesticity**. **These three sculptural artworks** are analysed through an understanding of animism as 'things coming to life' (the uncertainty as to whether things are alive or not), and through new materialist thinking on the vibrancy inherent in materiality and its ability to affect us as much as we effect it. **In the encounter between domestic object and feminine subject as art making process, material boundaries are broken down and the relationship between subject and object becomes ambiguous and ambivalent.**

Kitchen Shanks (2017) is a wall-based sculpture constructed from domestic detritus resonant of a resistant and disruptive femininity. **Kitchen utensils are bound and wrapped in coloured women's tights and hair bands, presented as objects of potential violence mounted on a steel security grill.** *Cornered* (2015) is a series of twenty-one old wooden hockey sticks that have been transformed through the addition of kitchen knives bound tightly to their handles by coloured electrical tape to form a kind of bayonet. The addition of women's belts as carrying handles completes these objects, now all stacked against the wall as if ready for use as domestic defence, or domestic attack. Encountering Mona Hatoum's *Homebound* (2000), I was struck by the implied threat and violence of this sculptural installation, by the uncanniness with which it appeared to reference the history of women's relationship to the domestic yet it disrupted and unsettled all associations of the homeliness of home. In this installation a range of domestic objects, resonant with an unfounded nostalgic aesthetic, are electrified via a connecting cable and hiss and **buzz** threateningly behind a steel wire fence. The domestic objects appear anthropomorphic, as if the women of this unhomely space have transformed themselves into a menacing and ominous domestic scenario and are now waiting to exact uncanny revenge on unsuspecting inhabitants. It seemed to me **that *Homebound* embodied narratives** of supernatural domestic disruption very much like those of poltergeist activity.⁵ These three sculptural artworks share a vibrant materiality that is domestic and potentially violent, that upsets and unsettles in its re-presentation as the familiar made strange.

⁵ Poltergeist phenomena is discussed in more depth in chapters three and four of this thesis.

Story Telling and the Agency of Objects

The narrative of the objects that make up *Kitchen Shanks, Cornered* and *Homebound* is that of a specifically domestic sense of agency where it is the objects themselves that “come alive”: they are things that make things happen, the actants of Bennett’s (2010) **vital materiality**. **The materiality of** the individual objects that make up these particular artworks are ‘far from inarticulate and inert stuff waiting to be informed by artistic intention or inspiration, matter is no less an active participant in the making of a sculpture than the throwing of a pot, as it embodies forms and structures relations’ (Jones, 2009, np). **As the material culture of domesticity, the objects of *Kitchen Shanks, Cornered* and *Homebound* are actants that participate both in the making of these sculptural artworks and give form to the uncanny **narratives they embody**. **The material agency** of *Kitchen Shanks, Cornered* and *Homebound* is performative of the social relations of feminine domesticity, and of the power relations that have denigrated domesticity as modernity’s uncanny other.**

Taussig (2015) suggests that objects become animated by storytelling, and that it is through stories that we are able ‘to see the soul in apparently lifeless objects’ (p.25). Taussig’s take on the animistic qualities of objects is one in which things have attitude, where things come to life in extreme situations. Taussig articulates the process through which objects are animated as a continuous, if staggered, series of transformations (Ibid, p.30). **A process that resonates with the making of sculptural artworks, in particular to the ‘animation’ of domestic objects that perform as sculpture, such as those in *Kitchen Shanks, **Cornered and Homebound***. **I suggest here** that the effects and affects of materiality enable a reading of the material culture of feminine domesticity as it performs in my sculptural works *Kitchen Shanks, and *Cornered*, to be stuff capable of producing a specifically feminist experience***. Brown (2001) presents thingness as a moment of encounter between subject and object where the transformative power of materiality is revealed, Brown states,

We begin to confront the thingness of objects when they stop working for us: when the drill breaks, when the car stalls, when the window gets filthy, when their flow within the circuits of production and distribution, consumption and exhibition, has been arrested, however momentarily. The

story of objects asserting themselves as things, then, is the story of a changed relation to the human subject and thus the story of how the thing really names less an object than a particular subject-object relation. (Brown, 2001, p.4)

Calder Williams (2011) takes this moment of arrest further to propose that objects have an uncanny tendency towards self-sabotage (Calder Williams, 2011). This hostility of objects that brings to light their material agency as disruptive, yet also as potentially transformative, materialises in *Kitchen Shanks*, *Cornered* and *Homebound* as domestic ambivalence that in relation to the proposition of this thesis is intrinsically uncanny.

Performativity and the Material Culture of Feminine Domesticity

The history of women's relationship to the domestic, as a space both literal and conceptual, and to the material culture of domesticity, the stuff of house and home, has been fraught with misunderstanding and the sentimental undertones of nostalgia. That home is a space that has been gendered through association and by implication has been written about by many cultural theorists, sociologists and art and design historians (Attfield, 2000; Kirkham, 1989; Sparke, 1995; Giles, 2004; Gillis and Hollows, 2008; Molesworth, 2000; Kokoli, 2016), but little has been written about the material culture of domesticity from a specifically feminist perspective, particularly in relation to the use (and misuse) of domestic objects by women artists within the practice of sculpture (Applin, 2019, 2018, 2017, 2016; Bal, 2010, 2001; Butler, 2007, 2010; De Zegher, 2015, 2006, 1999, 1997; Fer, 2018, 2014, 2013, 2005; Lippard, 1976, 1995; Molesworth, 2014, 2005, 2000; Sorkin, 2007, 2016). Yet it would seem to me that there is a lot to be said for the domestic objects of material culture being implicit in the formation of a feminine subjectivity, of being the stuff through which women and girls learn and adopt certain modes of behaviour and forms of female identification.⁶ That many of the objects of *Kitchen Shanks*, *Cornered* and *Homebound* are what Attfield (2000) has termed feral design is important here; these objects often being the overlooked and undervalued stuff of design history and material cultural analysis. Attfield makes a case for the importance of domestic objects that do not fit within design

⁶ The relationality between female subject and feminine object is analysed in more depth in chapter three of this thesis.

history, objects that are 'part of the disordered everyday clutter of the mundane, ...the disarray of wild things that don't quite fit anywhere – the undisciplined' (Attfield, 2000, p.5). What can be said about a rack for drying plates, or a set of fold-out kitchen steps, or a footstool, or coffee table, a cake stand, chopping board, coloured tights, hair bands or hockey sticks – what stories do these objects tell?

New materialist literature (Ahmed, 2006; Bennett, 2010; Cole and Frost, 2010; Dolphijn and van der Tuin, 2012; Harman, 2018) seems to have a bias towards the philosophical and, more recently, the ecological impact of reassessing materiality as 'vibrant matter' (Bennett, 2010). This reassessment of the role of materiality in shaping our understanding of the environment and the place of humans within it is extremely valuable in the process of rethinking relationality as not just something that happens between people, but also between people and objects, between objects and objects, and between humans and non-humans. From a feminist perspective, and more specifically from a feminist new materialist perspective where the stuff of domesticity takes on a vibrancy particular to its feminine associations, the materiality of objects such as the women's tights and kitchen utensils of *Kitchen Shanks* can become more than markers for a conceptualised understanding of 'the domestic'. The objects that make up *Kitchen Shanks*, *Cornered and Homebound* are not simply nostalgic or kitsch for 'Kitsch is only popular in its 'cute' form – acceptable as long as it is not threatening, not too ugly or offensive, as long as it has had its sting removed' (Attfield, 2000, p.219). As sculpture, the objects of *Kitchen Shanks*, *Cornered and Homebound* are 'meant to be wild; it only works as a statement if it has not been tamed' (Ibid, p.219, italics in original). Pil and Galia Kollektiv (2010) apply the concept of the object as actant to contemporary sculpture made from found objects, 'things actually exist in the world and are not merely projections of our diverse perspective. Moreover, they shape us at least as much as we influence them' (np). Hence, the objects that make *Kitchen Shanks*, *Cornered and Homebound* are materiality more closely aligned with an animistic understanding of the agency of objects where relationality is as much about material vibrancy as it is about human interaction. The domestic materiality of *Kitchen Shanks*, *Cornered and Homebound* comes together as artwork 'where objects are seen to stage their own theatrical experiences, performing themselves without requiring the activation of a viewer's body' (Pil and Galia Kollektiv, 2010,

np). As they perform as sculpture, the domestic objects of *Kitchen Shanks, Cornered* and *Homebound* stage disruptive, hostile and uncanny narratives of dissenting feminist agency through and with the materiality of domesticity.

Kitchen Shanks: Hostile Domestic Objects



Figures 8 and 9, Paula Chambers, *Kitchen Shanks* (2017). Kitchen utensils, tights, hair bands, security grill, 90cm x 120cm. Photograph by the artist

The word shank is prison slang for a homemade knife, defined by the Urban Dictionary as 'made out of scrap metal found anywhere and sharpened like a knife, the bottom tightly wrapped with cloth as a handle' (2003). The objects of these weapons made illicitly by prisoners are everyday objects often stolen from the prison canteen, workshop or library, or adapted from those already in their possession. Until recently, most prisons in both the UK and the US kept a collection of these confiscated weapons on display in the office area as an educational tool for prison wardens (Darrell Dean Antiques, 2016).⁷ In my work *Kitchen Shanks I* imagine women and girls physically or psychologically confined to the domestic realm arming themselves against perceived threats of attack or abuse. Like prisoners who utilise objects ready-to-hand, these kitchen shanks are created from the ephemera of femininity and are presented here as fetish-like objects – self-contained, magical and inter-relational, these are objects that bear testimony to

⁷ The National Law Enforcement Museum in Washington DC owns a large collection of prison shanks donated by Louisiana State University's Law Enforcement Training program (Law Enforcement Museum, 2010).

women's strategies of domestic resistance. Fruit knives, cheese knives, pickle forks, cork screws, barbeque skewers, broken scissors, potato peelers and other small items of kitchen hardware have been carefully wrapped and bound with pieces of used women's tights, mostly brightly coloured, the type marketed to girls and young women as fashion accessories. The bound handles are held securely in place by hair bands, in colours similar to those of the tights and often with sparkles; the addition of longer bands – for holding hair out of your face – makes a handy wrist strap to ensure your attacker cannot appropriate your weapon in a fight. Mounted on a sheet of security grill that floats in front of the wall surface, the display of *Kitchen Shanks* mimics that of the collections of confiscated shanks found in prison offices and wardens' recreation rooms. The girlishness of *Kitchen Shanks* has a specifically feminine sense of agency, a sort of feminised thing-power where the materiality of the domestic objects that make up the artwork exceeds their original usage and as such becomes something else, something other.

Thing-power perhaps has the rhetorical advantage of calling to mind a childhood sense of the world as filled with all sorts of animate beings, some human, some not, some organic, some not. It draws attention to the efficacy of objects in excess of human meanings, designs, or purposes they express or serve. (Bennett, 2011, p.20, italics in original)

The use of kitchen utensils as objects that operate as the actants of domestic disruption are analysed here as objects that cause things to happen: Gell's (1998) material social agents. Like Bennett, Gell sees objects as materiality capable of 'initiating casual sequences of a particular type, this is, events caused by acts of mind or will or intention' (Gell, 1998, p.16). For Gell agency is not just about persons, but about persons and things and what they do in relation to each other. Gell also extends the notion of the index as a sign that points to something else to include the made artefact as 'a congealed residue of performance and agency in object-form' (Gell, 1998, p.68). The assemblage of material objects that make up *Kitchen Shanks* have within them layers of social relations that evidence their former usage as domestic and/or feminine objects; the utensils were either my own and bear physical and biographical traces of my use of them as artist, mother and house keeper, or were sourced from junk shops and bric-a-brac markets and as such bear traces of another woman's personal domestic experiences. The tights were also either my own or donated by female friends, many of which had been

worn to the point of disuse. Ladders, holes at the toe end and waistbands stretched beyond their function are not only an index of their wearing, but also a physical embodiment of the wearer herself. The majority of the hair bands I will admit to buying new, although these too must have been made somewhere, by someone, even if that someone just operated the machinery that produced these objects: commodity production of course being the social relations of capitalist economy, the commodity object becoming a condensation of social forces (Steyerl, 2006, np). Calder Williams (2011), positioning the hostility of objects in relation to the processes of their manufacture, suggests that the world of commodified objects, if understood as a world of social relations, are those of hatred, coercion, competition, boredom and exploitation (Calder Williams, 2011, np). As art objects the shanks become the congealed residue of performance and agency in object-form that Gell (1998) sees as the indexical qualities of the made artefact. The performance and agency being not just my own as artist/maker, but also the performance and agency of all previous users including the social relations of hostility suggested by Calder Williams (2011). As objects that cause things to happen, I, as maker, am projecting an as-yet-to-happen scenario where the individual shanks could be used as weapons of defence or attack in a specifically premeditated manner implied by the care with which the objects were made, each being colour coordinated and attached to the security grill with aesthetic consideration.

Gell's (1998) theory on objects with agency is an anthropological project, and as such he makes reference to a folk understanding of the relationship between maker and material artefact where neither is indistinguishable from the other. This is of importance here in relation to the fetish-like quality of the bound objects that make up *Kitchen Shanks*, and to the concept of animism which can be seen as an extension of the idea that objects can be actants in their own narrative dramas. In the context of my proposition here, animism is the uncertainty as to whether or not a thing is alive, the uncanny quality of things. In *Kitchen Shanks* the bound utensils seem reminiscent of swaddled babies, or perhaps, given their diminutive size, baby dolls. That little girls are trained in domesticity and maternal care from birth (the choice of 'girls' toys' in any toy shop bares testament to this gendering of play) in this context takes on a disturbing quality, for what kind of little girl would

so carefully swaddle a kitchen knife? Perhaps a little girl who still believed that all things were alive in some way: 'Think back to the days before you laid aside your dolls, but after you gave up the belief that they were as alive as the family dog. There was certainly a period of uncertainty. Were the dolls alive or dead? Kind or vicious?' (Steward Heon, 2001, np).

Animism: The Uncanny Agency of Things

The objects of *Kitchen Shanks*, *Cornered* and *Homebound* in their role as sculpture tell stories of use and misuse and, by implication, of women's troubled and uncanny relationship to domesticity where extreme situations might be that of entrapment, violence, threat or survival. Freud's concept of the 'uncanny' (1919) is perhaps another story where things come to life in extreme situations. Although Freud disputed Jentsch's (1906) proposition that the uncanny is the intellectual uncertainty as to whether an object is alive or not (Jentsch, 1906, pp.8-13), I find the definition useful as it allows for an analysis of animism to be applied to domestic objects as uncanny materiality. In defining the uncanny as the return of the repressed, Freud uses the example of young children who in their games do not distinguish clearly between living and lifeless objects, seeing this as an instance where, if re-experienced in adulthood, sensations of the uncanny return (Freud, 1919, p.12). Taussig (2015) proposes that it is the liveliness of things themselves that animates them and enables us 'to see the soul in apparently lifeless objects' (Taussig, 2015, p.25). A conceptualisation of animism as the narrative agency of objects, an encounter with the liveliness of things, allows for a reading of the uncanny as the intellectual uncertainty as to whether an object is alive or not. The domestic objects of *Kitchen Shanks*, *Cornered* and *Homebound* as they perform as sculpture become animistic actants in the dramas of domesticity, the uncanny domestic dramas of women and girls where the material culture of feminine domesticity enacts extreme situations – in the context of this project, those in which women and girls might feel the need to protect or defend themselves within the home.

The uncanny animism of *Kitchen Shanks* references an uneasy relationship to the anthropological fetish object. Dant (1996) defines the psychoanalytic understanding of fetish objects as objects that stands in for a woman's lack of penis

and as such becomes the focus/fixation of sexual desire and gratification. The Marxist understanding of fetishism is the process through which objects, real things, come to have economic value in relation to other objects or things in and of themselves; and the anthropological understanding of the fetish as an inanimate object that is worshipped for its supposed magical powers or because it is believed to be inhabited by a spirit (Dant, 1996, np). The mystical properties of fetish objects imbue them with supernatural influence, and with special powers and abilities that have **supremacy over mortals.**

It is the mutability of fetish objects, Taussig (2012) proposes, their propensity to transcend their status as matter, that reveals their agentic potential to become animate. In the materialism of the encounter, shared materiality produces not objects but events. My repurposing of domestic objects as the sculptural work *Kitchen Shanks* was a **transformative process, one I undertook** as a transitional mode of thinking through making that linked new materialist ideas on the agentic qualities of materiality, and the animistic qualities of the anthropological **fetish object.** **The objects that** make up *Kitchen Shanks* have been transformed through processes of wrapping, binding and careful colour-coordination of hair bands to secure the tights and make a comfortable handle for these improvised weapons. The performativity of my **process of transformation, where one thing** becomes another, animates the objects in their form as shanks to become intermediaries where 'Things are never just inert objects, passive items, or lifeless shucks, but consist of tensions, forces, hidden powers, all being constantly exchanged' (Steyerl, 2012, p.55). ***Kitchen Shanks* embodies my agency as artist/maker through the transformation of these domestic objects into artwork to materialise these forces, tensions and hidden powers.** There is perhaps no need for the objects to actually be used; their mere presence becomes a marker or warning of their potential, very much like the displays of confiscated weapons held by prison warders.



Figure 10, Confiscated prison shank collection for sale. Available at: www.thegolfclub.info/related/prison-shank-for-sale (accessed 29th December 2018)

The security grill of *Kitchen Shanks* literally holds tensions, forces and hidden powers in the form of the domestic shanks displayed in colour coordinated format; the transformed and performative materiality of these objects tell stories of imprisonment and resistance both psychic and physical. The shanks of *Kitchen Shanks* mimic those of prison shank displays: they are somewhat fraudulent yet no less powerful as objects for being so. Their fetish-like quality holds the transformative potential of feminine thing-power that is more than the **sum of its parts**. **The act of making** *Kitchen Shanks* was one that required the transference of agency from subject to object, an act within which the manipulation of things, their perceived transformation, includes the human body in relation to such things (Taussig, 2012, np).

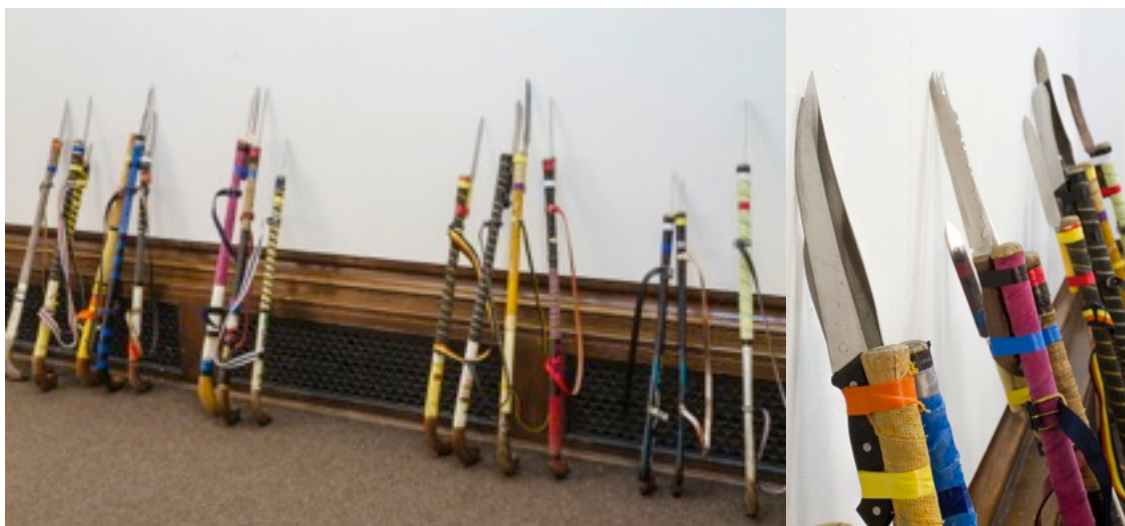
The materiality of the domestic objects that make up *Kitchen Shanks* is disruptive in and of itself; as artwork *Kitchen Shanks* is the congealed residue of a performative action that had the intent of bringing to light stories of women's domestic resistance that may otherwise have been beyond perception. As sculpture, *Kitchen Shanks* performs as the bodies of both subject and object, collapsing the boundaries between the two through the use of material **object as**

actant. *Kitchen Shanks* is an artwork that critiques domesticity as aligned to a restrictive and constricted feminine subjectivity through the agentic materiality of the objects that make up the work, and the processes through which these were transformed. The objects of *Kitchen Shanks* are markers of a specifically feminist form of resistance, of political agency; they are markers of women's ongoing psychic imprisonment within the domestic realm and of the fight to overturn this. And although many of the kitchen utensils used in this artwork are sharp enough to actually be useful in a fight, it is their materiality as domestic implements with traces of use and misuse that makes them objects with agency. Developing vital materialist thinking that proposed tool use as the material engagement that engendered interiority in humans, Bennett (2010) identifies the material trace embodied in implements as tool as archive. She proposes that the materiality of tools act as a marker of past need, an "archive" of its function, calling attention to its projected and recollected use (Bennett, 2010, p.31). This alignment of interiority to material encounter – specifically to the use of functional implements as agentic not just in terms of practical need, but to a psychic inner life – has interesting and important implications when applied to an analysis of the kitchen utensils that comprise *Kitchen Shanks*. If, as new materialist thinking proposes, material agency has the capacity to make new things happen, to engender new kinds of relations between humans and non-humans, has the power to make a difference, then *Kitchen Shanks* is an artwork that re-presents domesticity as a psychic and material space within which disruption and resistance can be materialised as feminist dissent.

Within the period now known as second-wave feminism, home was recast as a site of crisis and violence, within which contemporary culture uncovered concepts of the domestic to reveal gendered connotations and bias. Home and homeliness had been modelled after the primordial nostalgia for the maternal body, a state guaranteed by the presence of woman in and of the house, as such nostalgia became implicated with gender. In such conditions home becomes an internal exile, a pervasive and insidious structure identified by Irigaray (1993) as the paradox of women's existence as both symbolic homelessness and the gendered expectation of care that ties women to the idea of home (Irigaray, 1993, p.65). This culturally over-determined association between women and the domestic sphere

in which much has been hidden but has perhaps, through artwork informed by feminism, been brought to light, marks the gendered distinction between private (things that should be hidden) and public (things that should be shown). 'Since the private sphere, inextricably mapped onto domesticity; is thus systemically repressed, if not disavowed, the figure of woman becomes marginalised and edited out alongside it' (Kokoli, 2016, p.36); it is these narratives of nostalgic domesticity that I intended *Kitchen Shanks* to disrupt, for as women we know that this is not the whole story, it is not even our story, but rather one that has been imposed upon us against our will. I propose that it is the agentic qualities of the domestic materiality of *Kitchen Shanks* that can tell a different story of women and girls and of the stuff through which they shape resistance. For it is through the objects of home, the material culture of feminine domesticity that art informed by feminism can bring to light the secret stories of women's oppression. *Kitchen Shanks* is one such artwork: the agency of kitchen utensils, transformed through performative material engagement, unearth the social relations of home, whilst also proposing the potentiality of uncanny domesticities in the present.

Cornered: A Dangerous Game



Figures 11 and 12, Paula Chambers, *Cornered* (2015). Hockey sticks, kitchen knives, electrical tape. Dimensions variable. Photograph by the artist

Hockey is a dangerous game, for each player wields a solid wooden stick which upon impact with soft human flesh and bone can cause considerable damage, I strongly suspect you could kill someone with a hockey stick if you set your mind to

it. I did not realise until I set out to make my sculptural artwork *Cornered* (2015) that hockey sticks are no longer made of wood but are now constructed from a composite material of fiberglass, aramid and carbon fibre; but when I was a girl players still used the traditional hand-crafted wooden stick that is reminiscent of school-girl bullies and local teams of aggressive Amazonian women. *Cornered* as an artwork has significant personal resonance as my mother played in a local team for many years and I was always taken along to Saturday matches – in fact my mother tells the story that she continued to play hockey until she was eight months pregnant with me, and that she was back on the field by the time I was three months old. She would leave me at the edge of the pitch in my pram and when everyone broke for the obligatory orange slices at half time, she would breastfeed me on the side lines.

My mother's hockey sticks were very visible in my childhood household – they leant against walls and occupied corners of rooms; they were as much domestic objects as the cushions on the sofa. Yet *Cornered* is an artwork that is anti-domestic, revealing narratives of the politics of power, 'Tracherous domesticity that revolts against itself remains a feminist – art – issue... by repeatedly staging confrontations, in methods, materials and 'subject matter', between homely connotations of home and its uncanny accommodation of emotional and physical distress, vulnerability and violence' (Kokoli, 2016, p.180). *Cornered* therefore, is a feminist artwork that is uncanny in its ability to give material form to the often unhomeliness of home. Hockey is a team game; in this case, one played predominantly by women, and as such is an instance of social relations. There are rules (which can be broken, albeit with the consequence of penalties if witnessed by the referee), players have positions, there is an objective, and there are tools or implements without which the game cannot be played. My transformation of hockey sticks into artwork exposes the social relations implicit in an understanding of the **agency of objects**. Gell (1998) defines agency as the word that serves to discriminate between happenings, caused by physical laws and actions, caused by prior intentions where "objects' merge with 'people' by virtue of the existence of social relations between persons and things, and persons and persons *via* things' (Gell, 1998, p.12, italics in original). Thus, the hockey sticks I transformed as the artwork *Cornered* are objects with agency as they have the

potential to cause actions with prior intentions. They are the actants or interveners of Bennett's (2010) vital materiality, the decisive force catalysing an event – they make a difference. As the potentially transformative objects of social relations, it was my intention that *Cornered* be an artwork that staged confrontations in relation to women's psychic alignment with the domestic sphere.

What I had also forgotten about the old-style wooden hockey sticks until I started collecting them to make *Cornered*, was the customised nature of the handle end of the sticks. The covering with which they were sold must have worn through quite quickly and failed to provide the adequate grip required to wield the stick as a lethal weapon. Thus, the handles were wrapped and bound in strips cut (or torn) from old towels, wound like a spiral around the top foot or so of the stick and held in place at either end with electrical tape. Some of the sticks I received in the post or from relatives were surprisingly colourful, with towelling in greens, blues and yellow, one even in pink. It would appear that the women had individualised their sticks to suit their personality or to match the colours of their club, or perhaps they just used whatever bit of old towelling they had to hand. The material traces of past need and use embodied in these customised objects are an example of Bennett's (2010) **tool as archive**. **These old wooden** hockey sticks were not only used as the tools with which to play a team sport, but also potentially caused actual bodily harm to other players, whether intentional or not. In *Cornered*, this implication of the suppressed violence of women is made apparent through my addition of knives, tape and belts to form the rifle-like form they **take as sculpture**. **As a sculpture**, *Cornered* is the congealed residue of the performance of both maker (myself) and original user/player; the altered and adapted hockey sticks embody the agency of maker and user in object-form, they reveal narratives with political consequences.

The twenty-one old wooden hockey sticks that make up *Cornered* have been adapted and altered, kitchen knives have been bound to the handle end of the sticks by colour coordinated electrical tape and carrying straps created through the addition of decorative women's belts. These transformed objects – now more closely resembling a rifle with bayonet attachment – have become, in effect, the malevolent objects of Calder Williams' (2011) *Hostile Object Theory*. The carrying

strap belts suggest an army on the move, a domestic army of women and girls, for some of the hockey sticks are three-quarter length, designed for children. The familiarity of hockey sticks has become unfamiliar; they have become uncanny in a manner that Kokoli (2016) sees as an art making strategy as subversive **countercultural strategy**. **When conceiving** *Cornered*, I imagined a scenario where women and girls might feel the need to construct makeshift weapons from the materials they had at hand, but asked myself, under what circumstances might these women and girls be forced to defend themselves or mount an attack in their own homes – might this not be an instance of the subversive countercultural strategy that Kokoli (2016) identifies as uncanny?

Displayed in the gallery space, the transformed hockey sticks of *Cornered* stand on their curved ends, the kitchen knife bayonets against the wall, the group of makeshift femininised weapons mimicking the manner in which soldiers stack their rifles when not in use. In a similar manner to both *Kitchen Shanks* and *Homebound*, the objects that comprise *Cornered* have a feeling of imminent usage, they appear as if in a state of suspended animation, partway between rest and potential action. They appear to have agency in their own right, they are things with attitude, the things that come to life in extreme situations identified by Taussig (2015) as a key component of animistic thinking where objects are animated by storytelling (p.25). The re-appropriated domestic objects of *Cornered* have been brought to life through processes of material transformation to tell stories of extreme situations of domestic entrapment, violence, threat or oppression.

The title *Cornered* is an obvious reference to being backed into a corner, a phrase that means to be forced into a difficult or unpleasant situation that cannot easily be resolved or escaped from. In hockey, a corner is a penalty given against the defending team, awarded for a deliberate defensive infringement. **Both of these meanings are pertinent to my conceptual intention for *Cornered***. The imagined scenario of women and girls 'backed into a corner' within a domestic environment, either literally or figuratively, might require an imaginative plan of escape and the construction of makeshift weaponry perhaps. Kokoli (2016) takes Freud's usage of the word *unheimlich* and translates it verbatim into unhomey. In relation to

artwork informed by feminism that engages with the domestic through materiality, space or concept, the notion of the unhomeliness of home takes on a multiplicity of contexts in which the lived 'at home' experience of women and girls is not necessarily that of comfort and safety.

'Home' becomes an issue when it is faced with external or internal forces that disrupt its established meanings as a site of security and belongingness. The interfaces of home and homeland, home and woman, not simply as concepts but in terms of the lived experience of exiles, the homeless, refugees, escapees from intimate partner violence are constantly being interrogated and contested in both theory and a range of practices, including visual art. (Kokoli, 2016, p.101)

And although *Cornered* is a material manifestation of weaponry required for an imaginary escape from a situation of domestic threat or uncertainty, there is also the implication that women and girls might conceive of other femininised material acts through which to resolve an unpleasant or difficult situation. The notion of a deliberate defensive infringement here also has implications of a domestic situation that might require imaginative solutions materialised through the processes of the production of artworks. Although the domestic situation that might require the sort of defensive manoeuvre that is first suggested by *Cornered* is that of domestic violence on the part of a man towards female family members, there are perhaps wider narratives here of hostility both factual and fictional. The kitchen knives of *Cornered* manifest a hostility that Calder Williams (2100) describes as,

Particular hostility: Distinct instances of objects whose relation to those using them, or in proximity, appears distinctly malevolent, counter-productive, and weird... There is something particular about *this thing* that acts in a manner that cannot be understood in terms of its intended function yet which appears to have it in for us. (Calder Williams, 2011, np)

That the objects of *Cornered* became the material evidence of particular hostility is of importance here in relation to their domestic materiality, and to the proposition that objects come to life in extreme situations, sometimes with lethal potential. That these overlooked and undervalued domestic objects that make up *Cornered* have agency is undeniable – in either cases of actual attack, or as potentially defensive weapons, the knife, bat, club or stick is in itself the materiality through

which violence is enacted. And although it is the will or intention of the subject – in this case, the woman or girl – who instigates the act, it is the object that performs as actant.

Homebound: The Familiar Made Strange



Figure 13, Mona Hatoum, *Homebound* (2000) at Documenta 11, Fridericianum.

Photo: Haupt and Binder (2002). Available at:

<https://universes.art/en/specials/mona-hatoum/documenta-2002/4-homebound>

(accessed 29th December 2018)

Trapped or restrained behind a barrier of taut horizontal steel cables, domestic objects stripped to their skeletal metal structures are connected via a snaking network of live electrical cables. The installation *Homebound* (see figure 13), in its various formations, presents an ambiguous narrative of domesticity gone awry. Lamps and bare bulbs flare and dim intermittently, the amplified buzz and hiss of the electric current that connects chair legs with cot frame, table structure with metal baskets, boxes and kitchen utensils literally brings these objects alive. They are dangerous and the viewer is physically excluded in a manner similar to that of caged lions in a zoo; Do Not Enter: Danger of Death say the signs on electricity pylons, and one would hope on the perimeter fences of predatory animals housed

in zoos. In a catalogue essay for the exhibition *Grist for the Mill* (2001), curator Laura Steward Heon says of *Sous Tension*, another of Mona Hatoum's electrified domestic objects sculptures, 'In this case, although not actually alive, Hatoum's work is "live" enough to be lethal' (Steward Heon, 2001, np). *Homebound* gives material form to the translation of *unheimliche* as unhomey, the installation embodies the inherent unhomeliness of any home as the domestic space where women experience the 'near-universal feminine dread of a confining domestic life' (Steward Heon, 2001, np). Yet the apparent nostalgic quality of the materiality of *Homebound* is misleading, for although,

These objects share their quotidian origin in the recent past; they are for the most part not from a contemporary home... but from one of not so long ago, which is nevertheless impossible to date precisely. Their materials unite them too... Such materials should make us feel right at home, but in Hatoum's hands they chill us and put us on guard. (Steward Heon, 2001, np)

Homebound comprises (amongst other objects) several chairs, tables and bedframes, all of which reference the human body through its absence, yet the installation does not imply that it is humans who are a threat to the viewer, but the actual objects themselves. The potential aggression of the objects of this artwork echoes that of Calder Williams (2011) where he suggests that objects have within them the potential to become malevolent and to turn on their users in an act of sabotage. The hostility of objects, he proposes, is built into their manufacture, and the world of commodified objects is, he suggests, 'a literal record of hate, drudgery, longing and withheld explosions, stacked millions of hours high' (Calder Williams, 2011). Of course the same can be said for housework and of the confining nature of domesticity – the social relations of the domestic sphere are most often presented as those of comfort, nurture and safety, yet *Homebound* appears as a domestic scenario of malevolence where objects are 'structurally hostile, and... locally hostile: uncertain, unstable, loathing or loathsome, dangerous and weirdly incommensurable with the purpose for which they were designed' (Calder Williams, 2011). In *Homebound* the mundane has become monstrous, in a manner that is reminiscent of a horror film or haunted house, where objects and spaces have become possessed by an external force, an unseen and unknown agent. Applin (2006) asks, 'And what does it mean for that haunting to be of such an unresolved, conflictual and violent nature?' (p.255). That *Homebound* mimics a

domestic space and therefore one that is implicated as feminine, suggests that femininity itself may be a dangerous territory, although the exact nature of the threat remains unclear.

Ohlin (2002) describes this uncanny threat posed by the objects of *Homebound* in their performative role as sculptural installation:

areas of the home we associate with female nurturing and comfort – the kitchen, the bedroom, the nursery – are charged with menace and distortion. The result is a sense of domesticity set against itself, of cognitive dissonance between the traditional function of the objects displayed and their materials and execution. (Ohlin, 2002)

The agency of domestic objects and of the girls through whom these objects become hostile, threatening and violent – as depicted in horror films such as *Carrie*, (De Palma, 1976) or in **poltergeist phenomena as fact or fiction** – materialise in *Homebound*, as the potential to rethink narratives of domestic haunting as situations where the phantom of femininity returns to wreak havoc within the hallowed spaces of home. As sculpture, *Homebound* performs an uncanny narrative where it is the objects themselves that become the actants that ‘make things happen, becomes the decisive force catalysing an event’ (Bennett, 2010, p.9) – although what that event might be is uncertain: ‘Presumably the scene contains clues to some mysterious past events, if we only knew how to decipher them’ (Ohlin, 2002, np). Ohlin analyses *Homebound* as an artwork that presents household objects whereby their relationship to the human body is implied rather than shown. She makes reference to the use of barriers to contain the work as if it were a cage or prison cell, and suggests that ‘The resulting installations, deserted by people yet haunted by their presence, create a malevolent atmosphere that suggests the aftermath of violent events’ (Ohlin, 2002, np). The domestic objects could perhaps be the preserved artefacts of a fictional culture, remnants through which its character may be judged.

If the animistic qualities of objects is that in which things have attitude, where objects become animated by storytelling and where things come to life in extreme situations, and the uncanny is situations where things that should have remained hidden have been brought to light, then *Homebound*, *Kitchen Shanks* and *Cornered*

evoke the intellectual uncertainty of the uncanny precisely because it is the domestic objects that have become animated. These animated domestic objects tell uncanny stories of extreme domestic situations that bring to light the material relationality of women and domesticity as a haunted narrative of entrapment both psychic and physical. Of *Homebound*, Steward Heon asks 'Such a terrifying kitchen if encountered in a dream would portend... what? An all-powerful and angry mother?... The fear of a life of domestic drudgery? The bitterness of a nurturer to the object of her nurturance?' (2001: np). My re-reading of *Homebound* and its material relation to *Kitchen Shanks* and *Cornered* is one in which domestic objects perform uncanny narratives of hostility and malevolence, where it is the agentic nature of the objects themselves that activates the unhomeliness of these artworks and as such materialise feminist new materialism as sculpture.

Conclusion: Towards a Language of Things

Kitchen Shanks, *Cornered* and *Homebound* are artworks that embody narratives of the domestic uncanny, both through and of the material culture of feminine domesticity. These objects perform as artworks that manifest an underlying threat and sense of danger. They tell stories of women and their relationship to the domestic where home is not necessarily a safe space, stories where objects are the material social agents that cause things to happen, things that might uncover a lurking hostility where the agency of domestic objects is anything but benign. As artwork, the narratives of domestic dissent that *Kitchen Shanks*, *Cornered* and *Homebound* tell are those of the politics of power where material objects as social agents come together as assemblages of the detritus of domesticity performing now as sculpture and sculptural installation. These artworks are the index of maker, user and social relationality, yet also the congealed residue of performativity and action where agency is potentially hostile, and the social relations played out are those which society and culture has found troubling and sought to repress. The intransigency of domestic materiality performing as artwork reveals the uncanniness of the agency of the domestic objects that make up *Kitchen Shanks*, *Cornered* and *Homebound* and tells a story of women's relationship to the domestic that, 'reveals home truths by uncovering the discontent that has been veiled for so long under the sheath of 'natural' femininity'

(Kokoli, 2016, p.112). My intention when making *Kitchen Shanks* and *Cornered* was to re-present a dissenting story of material culture where domestic objects are potentially hostile, malevolent and monstrous, a story where little girls bind and swaddle kitchen knives in a macabre parody of feminine nurture, where hockey sticks become the animate objects of suppressed female violence, where chairs, tables and kitchen utensils are live enough to be lethal. The domestic objects of *Kitchen Shanks*, *Cornered* and *Homebound* are the material evidence of these dissenting feminist stories of domestic disruption.

In response to Benjamin's (1916) text 'On Language as Such and on the Language of Man', Steyerl (2006) poses a series of questions: 'What if things could speak? What would they tell us? Or are they speaking already and we just don't hear them? And who is going to translate them?' (Steyerl, 2006, np). Steyerl reappraises Benjamin's text to propose that a language of things would enable us to think about relationality differently. Evidenced through the material culture of feminine domesticity in *Kitchen Shanks*, *Cornered* and *Homebound*, Steyerl's language of things can be applied to the analysis of a feminist engagement with the haunted legacy of the domestic as a political undertaking in which domestic objects take the lead role. Steyerl (2006) suggests that to engage with the language of things is not about representation but rather about actualising what things have to say in the present: 'It is a matter of presencing and thus transforming the social, historical and also material relations which determine things' (Steyerl, 2006, np). As an analysis of sculptural artwork, this transformation of relationality as presencing material objects allows them to speak their own language rather than implicating them in the restrictive discourses of humanity. It offers the possibility for a different language of things to emerge where materiality is as much an active participant in the forming of social relations as humans: 'It can move beyond representation and become creative in the sense of a transformation of the relations which define it' (Steyerl, 2006, np). That these social relations might sometimes manifest as hostility is just as valid as those of comfort and nurture. Artwork informed by feminism performs the uncanny narratives of domesticity through the materiality of domestic objects; it translates the language of things and reveals a feminist potentiality that does not disregard domesticity as safe and

benign, but rather through material objects offers disruption as a transformative process in the present.

Kitchen Shanks, Cornered and Homebound tell stories in which the agency of objects enacts dramas of threat, hostility, horror and the animism implicit in acts of material conjuring. The language of domestic objects brings to light the relationality of femininity and domesticity as an articulation of the often overlooked and undervalued narratives of the material culture of home. Feminine thing-power manifests as material social agents where domestic objects cause things to happen, where 'the feminist artistic challenge to domesticity does not manifest as a departure from the home but through a repeated performance (in a variety of media) of patriarchal domesticity as contradictory, fragile and frayed at the edges' (Kokoli, 2017, p.156). The artworks analysed in this chapter are those that I propose perform the hostile agency of domestic materials and objects as uncanny, animistic and intrinsically disruptive.

Chapter Two – Going Feral: Sculpture on the Threshold of Domesticity



Figure 14, Paula Chambers, *Runaway Objects* (2017). Stools, coffee tables, cushions, Tupperware, belts. Dimensions variable. Photograph by the artist

Introduction: Feral Objects

Living as I do, with my sculptures in and around my domestic space, I build an intimate relationship with them; they ‘come alive’, they take on personality, and I form imaginary narratives within which these objects perform. The footstools and coffee tables of *Runaway Objects* (2017) (see figures 14 - 21) inhabited my living room for quite some time; they huddled together (out of necessity) in a corner under a window. I imagined one day that they were planning to escape, to pack up and run away from home. What would they take with them? Where would they go? How would they survive alone in the liminal spaces of urbanity? Driving and walking around the back streets of any town, city or countryside area, one encounters a great many abandoned or discarded items of furniture. These domestic objects seem to me to take on personality, they slump or stand proud, defeated or defiant in their out-of-placeness, they appear to have gone feral.

In this chapter I offer the proposition that found domestic objects performing as sculpture embody notions of going feral. The concept of 'going feral' is addressed in relation to the notion of feral as that which was once domesticated but has now returned to the wild, that which operates on the margins or thresholds of society and culture (my own definition). Going feral is a process of liminality, a boundary practice, one that disrupts our understanding of the stability of domestication as a one-way process. My conception of the term feral does not have to operate solely outdoors; a feral animal may live on the boundaries of domestic space, choosing to be indoors or out yet still retaining the undomesticated state that defines it as feral – so too with furniture and domestic objects that have been abandoned, cast out or discarded. The material culture of feminine domesticity, most often encountered indoors, in the private spaces of home, becomes transgressive when encountered on the street, in alleyways or by roadsides, out in the public realm. Domestic objects encountered in these threshold spaces are always on the verge of becoming valueless, they are objects at the borders of commodified matter (Boscagli, 2014). This devaluation of materiality encountered in the public realm can be seen as being in direct opposition to the binary of public/private, in which the public is given precedence and value over and above that of the private. There are feral households too, where purpose and tradition are undermined by alternative usage, such as hoarding, squatting or home as studio. Situations where the lively intensities of materiality, 'the call of things' (Bennett, 2010) overrides appropriate disposal strategies of casting out. If objects can be considered as actants, as the material social agents that cause things to happen, what things might happen when these material actants transgress the spatial boundaries of domesticity to occupy instead the liminal states and spaces of the public realm, and how might this be articulated as a feminist understanding of the performativity of sculpture made from found domestic objects?



Figures 15 and 16, Paula Chambers, *Runaway Objects* (2017), gallery view and as *Unusual Suspects*. Stools, coffee tables, cushions, Tupperware, belts. Dimensions variable. Photograph by the artist

Runaway Objects (2017) is a series of small sculptures made from 'subservient' domestic objects, the overlooked and undervalued 'stuff' of modernist design history (Attfield, 2000), stuff considered boring, ordinary and feminine. These are objects whose function would seem to be somewhat trivial, things that become noticeable mostly through their absence. Tupperware containers in pastel shades and rolled cushions are strapped to stools and coffee tables by decorative belts – these sculptures perform narratives of abscondence, like children who run away from home, pets who stray too far, or like women fleeing domestic violence, social pressure, or drudgery and boredom perhaps. These runaway sculptural objects have seemingly been caught on night-vision camera roaming the liminal spaces of urbanity like feral objects haunting the problematic legacy of women's relationship to the domestic. If going feral is a process of reverting to a semi-wild undomesticated state, a rejection of cultural and social confinements, *Runaway Objects* questions how contemporary concerns around the marginal and affective status of the found object might be thought of in relation to sculptural objects and practices that reclaim the detritus of the domestic and re-present back to us sculpture that questions our understanding of feminism, home, class, abjection and protest against domestication.

In this chapter I use my own series of sculptures, *Runaway Objects*, as a tool for analysis in relation to Tatiana Trouvé's undomesticated sculptures *Untitled (Mattress Works)* (2009), Lucy Puls' *Ad Hunc Locum* (2014), and Sarah Lucas' *Spinster* (2000) in which the abandoned mattress performs as liminal abject materiality, an object cast out, abandoned and reclaimed as resonant of a feral domesticity. This chapter positions going feral as a concept that embraces

practices of finding, disrupting and repurposing homeless domestic objects in relation to current cultural concerns of the impact of marginality, and the liminal as spatial, physical and psychological states, through the evidence of domestic materiality performing as sculpture.

Feral Scavenging and The Liminal Spaces of Consumer Culture

My analysis of the feral object and processes of going feral are a development of Attfield's (2000) concept of 'feral design' that I explored in chapter one. Attfield uses the term to define a sub-genre of objects produced in response to the needs and desires of a classed and gendered consumer, the mass production of domestic objects that have been relegated by design history to the arena of low taste and kitsch. It is very often this genre of objects that find their way onto the street, or into a skip, deemed to have low value by those who discard them. It is these undervalued and discarded objects that make up my sculptural work *Runaway Objects*. These abandoned and discarded feral objects are a rich material source for artists such as myself who make sculpture from found domestic objects. Whiteley (2011) identifies the process of sourcing the discarded objects of consumer culture for re-use as art through the use of the term 'feral scavenging' to describe the skip-raiding, dumpster-diving and tip-dwelling strategies of artists who work with a 'bric-a-brac sensibility' (Whiteley, 2011, p.56). I too engage with practices of feral scavenging to source the material objects that form the basis of my art practice: many of the stools that make up *Runaway Objects* were rescued from skips or roadside collection. Crewe and Gregson (2003) analyse another range of spaces within which these cast-out objects come to be reclaimed – charity shops, car boot sales and sites of retro retailing – the sorts of spaces from which I acquired most of the belts, cushion covers and Tupperware for *Runaway Objects*. These liminal spaces of consumer culture, Crewe and Gregson propose, are an in-between space and time that offer the possibility of object rehabilitation or redemption. As the sculptural work *Runaway Objects*, these feral objects scavenged or salvaged from the liminal spaces of consumer culture, whether from skip, roadside, car boot sale or charity shop, have an agency above and beyond their origins at point of manufacture. These objects have multiple spatialities and temporalities all of which they perform when encountered as sculpture.

In his proposition for a theory of things, Miller (2010) argues that things make people as much as people make things. Focusing on artefacts, the 'stuff' of material culture, Miller proposes what he calls the 'humility of things', the capacity of objects to fade out of focus, yet still determine our behaviour and identity. The objects of material culture are familiar and taken for granted, they are important not because they are evident and physically constrain or enable actions, but because we do not see them. The less we are aware of them, the more powerfully they determine our expectations, by setting the scene and ensuring appropriate behaviour (Miller, 2010, p.51). Miller proposes that objects exist in relation to each other and people in relation to objects, and that objects are the agents in processes of socialisation. The capacity of objects to fade out of focus is reversed through processes of casting out, for in certain situations these previously unnoticed objects come suddenly to the fore. In his discussion on the casting out of objects in the process of moving house and in his study of the role of material culture in death, Miller (2010) proposes that processes of casting out are a critical realignment of persons with their possessions. People use their divestment from things to maintain control over the process of separation, to bring memory up to date, based largely on deciding which past relationships still matter, and to what extent. This process of separation from certain specific objects Miller (2010) terms an 'economy of relationships', noting that 'the materiality of each of the genres of material objects is often employed to determine the temporality of divestment' (Miller, 2010, p.150). The casting out of specific objects at specific times is a way in which people work on how they represent themselves to the world, and how they realign this process of self-representation in relation to wider social contexts.

The agentic qualities of the found objects of *Runaway Objects* as feral are analysed in this chapter through Boscagli's (2014) analysis of the conceptual position that garbage occupies as the unruly and potentially dangerous stuff that disrupts the cycle of commodity culture due to its liminal status as neither desirable consumer object, nor as waste at the end of its useful life. Boscagli (2014, pp. 227-268) identifies the resonance of trash as liminal objects that upset the narratives of consumer culture through cycles of use, reuse and abandonment, as such becoming abject and marginal but with the potential for a radical rereading as feral

materiality. This identification of feral materiality is applied to my analysis of *Runaway Objects*, linking notions of the feral to subjects as well as objects. Douglas' (1966) identification of dirt as matter out of place is one whereby transgressive spatial materiality functions as the necessary stuff of social structure. The abjection or casting out of dirt defines boundaries both physical (bodily and spatially) and social **(moral and religious)**. **For Douglas (1966)**, the disruptive nature of dirt as a threat to order also has the potential for power, as it is in the liminal or threshold spaces that boundaries inevitably produce that the transgressive agency of **subjects may manifest** **(Douglas, 1966, p.114)**. Tyler (2013) develops Douglas' (1966) concept of abjection to explore the marginal social status of subjects who trouble defined roles and expectations through their unwillingness or inability to conform to social and cultural norms. Tyler's analysis of a 'feral underclass', specifically the Gypsy and Traveller community, is used in this chapter as a theoretical strategy to cross reference the agency of feral objects and feral subjects as materialised in ***Runaway Objects***. **It is in these** conceptual spaces that *Runaway Objects* intervenes, the undomesticated liminal states and spaces that disrupt clear-cut notions of commodity culture and the consumer object. They are constructed from the things of material culture that loiter at the edges of domesticated propriety, like feral teenagers hanging out at the boundaries of parks and playgrounds – this is sculpture on the **threshold of domesticity**.

The Oxford English Dictionary (OED, 2018) defines 'feral' as 'in a wild state, especially after escape from captivity or domestication', including in parentheses '(especially of an animal)' (OED, 2018). It goes on to add, 'behaving in a wildly undisciplined and antisocial way' with, in parentheses, '(of a young person)' (OED, 2018). This alignment of wildness, escape, and undomesticated antisocial behaviour with young people has been picked up on by social commentators as a way of positioning those whose behaviour and lifestyle is perceived as threatening and potentially dangerous. The labelling of a disenfranchised youth as a feral underclass pathologises the representation and spaces of poverty so that, 'council estates were abject border zones within the state which were not only *liminal* with regard to wider societal norms and values but were actively *antisocial* spaces' (Tyler, 2013, p.160, italics in original). And although this notion of a feral underclass has been applied to people, it might equally be applied to the liminal

materiality of the (perceived) antisocial spaces of council estates and other border zones.

Runaway Objects: Matter Out of Place



Figures 17 and 18, Paula Chambers, *Runaway Objects* (2017). Stools, coffee tables, cushions, Tupperware, belts. Dimensions variable. Photograph by the artist

In an ongoing project titled *Runaway Objects*, I have produced a series of sculptural objects that have been documented as if through the technologies of surveillance. Several small domestic items like occasional tables and stools carry rolled cushions and Tupperware containers strapped down with ladies' belts. Three of these small sculptures were photographed as a group outside, an image that was later utilised in a 'Lost' poster when the sculptures purportedly ran away from home (see figure 17). The small sculptural objects were then photographed outdoors at night in a semi urban/rural environment where they appeared to have gone feral. These images document the sculptures as if through night vision cameras reminiscent of wildlife photography, hunting, stalking and modern warfare technologies (see figures 14 and 18 - 21). In the gallery space the sculptures huddle together in a corner as if frightened, corralled or seeking comfort from those of their own kind (see figure 15). I also documented five of the sculptures against a backdrop that mimics that of a police line-up in a manner that directly references the publicity image of the film *The Usual Suspects* (Singer, 1995), I titled this shot of *Runaway Objects, Unusual Suspects* (see figure 16).

Runaway Objects consists of four specific forms of domestic materiality, stools and coffee table (or occasional tables as they are sometimes known), rolled cushions, Tupperware containers, and belts. These objects were all sourced from skips, roadside collection, charity and bric-a-brac shops or eBay. Crewe and Gregson (2003) propose that sites such as charity shops and car boot sales disrupt the cycles of consumer culture in a manner that radically impacts upon an understanding of the biography of objects as a process that has a distinct beginning and end. They propose that consumption is as much about the work of 'casting-out' as it is about production and purchase. Sites of second-hand exchange, and the disposal practices that feed into and allow for this type of exchange to take place, are those in which dualistic accounts of exchange are reworked and destabilised 'through goods that have been 'cast off', 'cast out', 'given away', 'donated' or, indeed, that have either out-grown or that have outlived their original consumers' (Crewe and Gregson, 2003, p.2). It is these categories of goods that are analysed here as the stuff of the sculptural artwork *Runaway Objects* that reclaim and reanimate 'cast out' domestic objects, their feral materiality.

If, as Crewe and Gregson (2003) (and others before them, including Marx, 1887; Appadurai, 1986; Miller, 1987; Baudrillard, 1998) argue, consumption is an act that is constitutive of social relations, and that modern consumption practices privilege production over consumption (Crewe and Gregson, 2003, p.4), then second-hand exchange and practices of disposal have the potential to radically undermine and disrupt the privilege of production through the negotiation required in the interaction with second-hand goods, either at point of purchase or in the decisions involved with disposal. Things can transgress the boundaries of their state as commodity object – the status of commodity is just one stage in the life of some things, and these things obtain new value when transformed as art objects, what Appadurai (1986) calls 'commoditisation by diversion' (Appadurai, 1986, p.28). Commoditisation by diversion, Appadurai argues, is the way in which the everyday object or commodity is framed and aestheticised, and as a consequence, as art their value is accelerated or enhanced through the process of placing objects or things in unlikely contexts. The new object becomes out-of-date

object, becomes junk, becomes collectible object, becomes art, and in this context becomes *Runaway Objects*.

For goods to enter the cycle of second-hand exchange they first have to be cast out, a process that is bound to the gendered practices of 'good-housekeeping' where it is predominately women who make the subjective evaluations about commodity devaluation, 'the determining moments at which value is seen to have ceased to exist, and the point at which a commodity can be cast out' (Crewe and Gregson, 2003, p.117). Miller's (2010) proposition that processes of casting out are a critical realignment of persons with their possessions and that people divest from things to maintain control over the process of separation, also points to a specific moment when an object's value is reappraised. The process of casting out is one that Crewe and Gregson (2003) see as associated with particular subject and class positions – there is, they propose, a moral imperative of disposal, that casting out be engaged with 'appropriately' (Ibid, p.124). The relationship between the discourse of femininity in relation to material culture is fraught with ambivalence, for on the one hand products are designed and marketed directly at the female consumer, yet on the other, this very same consumer is culturally denigrated for doing so.⁸ The specific objects of *Runaway Objects* were cast out by someone at a particular time and for a particular reason, most probably by women. Yet my transformation and rehabilitation of these objects as sculpture exposes the gendered social relations at play within these practices of disposal.

Second-hand exchange and associated disposal strategies are intrinsically spatialised practices – dustbins, skips and tips (renamed as the recycling centre) are sites that punctuate everyday life. The car boot sale is often perceived as consumer culture's unruly other, appearing and disappearing on the urban fringe, in car parks, sports fields, farmland and the derelict spaces of industrial decline, the car boot sale is a threat to the codes of English suburban respectability and sensibility. Seen also as a space that is at best dubious, at worst downright illegal, the car boot sale is 'unregulated and uncontrollable... and characterised by a

⁸ Imogen Tyler (2013) identifies a situation of perceived inappropriate engagement with femininity in relation to the depiction of Gypsy and Traveller women whose liminal social status positions them as marginal subjects. The appropriate performance of femininity has never been easily accessible to non-white or working-class women and Gypsy and Traveller women have been presented in the media as women who 'are unable to 'do' femininity correctly' (Tyler, 2013, p.144).

plethora of Arthur Daleys and Del Boys⁹ unloading mountains of dodgy gear onto the unsuspecting masses' (Crewe and Gregson, 2003, p.31). The car boot sale entered the British vernacular in the 1990s as a consumer site literally out of control. The anxiety-making quality of the car boot sale was due partly to it being a manifestation of matter out of place, for what right do table lamps and chipped crockery have to be hanging out in car parks or playing fields, but may also be due to the visual links with domestic consumption and other unruly forms of second-hand exchange such as the jumble sale, where stalls are set up like domestic spaces, with fold-out tables, table cloths, and objects arranged as if for a dinner party, or ordered like archive material, children's toys on the ground, jewellery in boxes or baskets, mechanical objects set to one side – a set-up that mimics sculptural installation made from found objects perhaps.

If the disposal strategies of casting out and the consumption practices of second-hand culture are classed and gendered as Crewe and Gregson (2003) propose, and as such require an appropriate and respectable engagement with the commodity objects whose value is seen to have ceased to exist, what might be considered to be casting out inappropriately, or a disrespectful engagement with unwanted objects, might be fly-tipping, a term defined on the Keep Britain Tidy website (Keep Britain Tidy, 2018) as the 'illegal deposit of any waste onto land that does not have a license to accept it'. The website states that 'Tipping a mattress, electrical items or a bin bag full of rubbish in the street causes a local nuisance and makes an area look ugly and run down' (Keep Britain Tidy, 2018). The tone of this statement reflects that of the anxiety-making narratives of **the car boot sale where matter out of place** becomes a threat to the codes of English suburban respectability and sensibility. The cast out domestic object is threatening and disrespectful, it loiters in the liminal spaces of the urban fringe like foxes or feral cats and dogs; it is the excommunicated object hovering on the edges of value and commodification, materiality perpetually on the threshold of domesticity. Yet as Crewe and Gregson (2003) point out, 'everybody's junk is somebody else's treasure' (p.124). The cast out domestic object has the possibility of revalorisation, of rehabilitation, **even of redemption. This structural shift** in value recontextualises the **cast out domestic**

⁹ Arthur Daley and Del Boy are characters from British TV sitcoms *Minder* (1979-1994) and *Only Fools and Horses* (1981-2003) respectively. Both characters were unscrupulous small-time traders engaged in activities that bordered on the illegal.

object, and as sculpture found objects can be revalorised. In *Runaway Objects* the stools, coffee tables, cushions and belts become more than just the detritus of domesticity, they perform both as objects with the possibility of rehabilitation and as disrespectful feral objects that disrupt sensibilities around the liminal status of the found object.

Runaway Objects in all its forms – as gallery sculpture, as night vision images, and as *Unusual Suspects* – is intended to be faintly humorous or ironic at least. The idea that domestic objects might choose to run away from home (for whatever reason) is patently ludicrous. Yet humour as a strategy in art practice, specifically in relation to social class, has been employed by many artists as a way to break down barriers of taste and to question authority. Whiteley (2011) states that laughter, 'is a performative act of subordination and subversion' (p.79), and that taken to extremes laughter can become dangerously insurgent with the potential to threaten social order (Ibid, p.81). The humour of *Runaway Objects* is an intentional strategy to make apparent the transformational potential of the encounter with found objects as artwork or garbage. The ironic re-imagining of domestic materiality as objects that have run away from home asks the viewer to reconsider the agency of these objects, and as a consequence our relational responsibility to them. Isaak (1996) proposes that laughter can be used as a revolutionary strategy, that it is a metaphor for transformation, a way of thinking about cultural change (Isaak, 1996, p.5). Sculpture and installations made from found objects have a history in the anarchic spirit associated with the early assemblage works of Dada and mid-century British sculptors, a knowingly anarchistic strategy developed by more contemporary artists such as Sarah Lucas and Tim Noble and Sue Webster. The transgressive qualities of the found materials utilised in the sculptures of artists such as Lucas play wittily with the perceived excessive behaviours of a gendered and classed subjectivity, the use of 'trash' as art aligns to the definition of trash as 'a person or people regarded as being of very low social standing', yet also 'intoxicated with alcohol or drugs' (OED, 2018), another scenario where excessive laughter can be dangerous or threatening.

Abject Objects, Abject Subjects



Figures 19, 20 and 21, Paula Chambers, *Runaway Objects* (2017). (Night Vision Images). Stools, coffee tables, cushions, Tupperware, belts. Dimensions variable. Photograph by the artist

The decision to document the individual sculptures that make up *Runaway Objects* as if through the use of night vision photography was taken initially as a way of making more apparent the feral nature of these objects (see figures 14 and 18 - 21). I did in fact photograph the sculptures at night using the camera function on my phone, but added the night vision filter on Photoshop, with visual reference to night vision images of animals taken by wildlife enthusiasts. It was only later upon analysing my images that I made the connection to surveillance techniques and technologies, the distancing strategies that Tyler (2013) describes in her contextualisation of the forced eviction of Gypsies and Travellers at Dale Farm.

This use of long-distance visual shots is a conventional framing device in news coverage of Gypsy and Traveller issues. This bird's-eye perspective forms part of a longer tradition of representing 'social others', notably the urban working classes, through distancing point-of-view shots that reinforce a sense of 'us' and 'them'. (Tyler, 2013, p.136)

Tyler (2013) also makes the link between anthropological or wildlife documentary style of photography where shots are taken from hidden locations, a perspective from which viewers are invited to 'peek' at the wonders or horrors depicted, a dehumanising strategy that equates people with wild animals. In *Runaway Objects* my intention was perhaps the opposite: I was *intending* to equate domestic objects with feral animals and intentionally employed the distancing strategy of wildlife documentary photography, yet the outcome is perhaps the same – boundaries between subject and object are broken down and uncertainty sets in. The liminal states and spaces of feral animals, and of those who occupy the marginal spaces of

urbanity, those cast out or abandoned by 'respectable' society, pose a threat to order and as such become transgressive.

Tyler's (2013) analysis of social abjection applied to the liminal status of the found domestic objects of *Runaway Objects* as they perform as sculpture disrupts an embodied understanding of being-at-home. Tyler's (2013) identification of the moral ambiguity of an economically and materially disenfranchised 'feral underclass' are those whose position in society is seen as marginal and as such become threatening to social order. This perceived disruption of social order is presented as a threat to morality as a form of social censure, an immorality applied through transference to the material culture of these groups also. Tyler (2013, p.123-152) contextualises the eviction at Dale farm in 2011 through a media-led analysis of Gypsies and Travellers as historical and cultural national abjects. Tyler reminds us that it is often through the materiality of their living conditions that these people have been perceived to be disgusting and so worthy of abjection.

Tabloid newspapers invariably depict Traveller sites as abject and liminal territorial spaces, polluting the landscape of rural Britain... To reinforce this revolting classification, the florid descriptive writing which accompanies these distancing visual depictions of Gypsy and Traveller sites in newspapers functions to incite readers' disgust for the filthy and squalid conditions in which, it is claimed, Gypsies and Travellers live. (Tyler, 2013, p.136)

The 'distancing visual depictions' referred to here are the images taken through the use of long-distance photographic technologies as a strategy to reinforce an us-and-them mentality, a strategy I employed in the use of (mocked-up) night vision imagery to document the sculpture *Runaway Objects*. It is often comments made in relation to 'the mess they leave behind' that invokes the feelings of disgust attributed to the Gypsy and Traveller community, the material evidence of lives lived on the margins of 'respectable' society.

Untitled (Mattress Works) and Ad Hunc Locum: Threshold Materiality



Figures 22 and 23, Tatiana Trouvé, *Untitled (Mattress Works)* (2009) At *Lustwarande*, Tilburg, The Netherlands, 2011, and as *The Guardian*, Schinkel Pavilion, Berlin (2009). Available at: <https://gagosian.com/exhibitions/2010/tatiana-trouve> (accessed 9th February 2019)



Figures 24, 25 and 26, Lucy Puls, *Ad Hunc Locum* (2004) Available at: <https://www.lucypuls.com/ad-hunc-locum-page> (accessed 9th February 2019)

Tatiana Trouvé creates sculpture and installation works that stage ambiguous scenarios within which viewers find themselves unwittingly complicit yet mysteriously shut out. I analyse Trouvé's use of a mattress as an ambiguous domestic object that invokes comfort and security, yet also sex, death, nightmares and intimate partner violence. Transformed by the artist through processes of casting and the specifics of installation, these objects begin to suggest more

uncomfortable readings, those of transience and homelessness, of the cast out domestic object that occupies the liminal states and spaces identified in my analysis of *Runaway Objects*. Lucy Puls has also created sculptural works that highlight the ambiguous narratives of the abandoned mattress. In 2004 she created a series of sculptural objects titled *Ad Hunc Locum* (see figures 24 – 26) in which images of discarded mattresses printed onto cloth and encased in clear resin hang slumped from the gallery wall accompanied by found domestic objects, most of which are artificial fruit and plants. All these objects were sourced through strategies of feral scavenging, from skips or roadside collection.

The mattress is a ubiquitous domestic object with clear associative and phenomenological meaning: an object designed for rest and sleep, for comfort and for pleasure (we have sex on mattresses too). Yet it can also be the site of horror, trauma and fear (rape, sexual abuse, murder). A stained mattress is often the material evidence of shame and humiliation where bodily excretions are made visible (drooling, sweating, bed-wetting, incontinence, night-time ejaculation, sexual fluids, period leakage, etc.). Ironically, it is these stained evidential objects that are often discarded so publicly; left out in street or garden, fly-tipped by the roadside or over convenient fences. Witnesses to the pleasure, pain, shame and humiliation of those whose lives that have shaped these abandoned objects, in a sense these objects have become a materialisation of those who had previously occupied them. Sorkin (2000), on the relationship between staining and shame comments that,

Satins mark the wearer: To be stained is to be dirty, messy, poor, and/or careless. It infers a variety of judgments: One does not care for his or her clothing. One does not care about his or her presentation. One is unprofessional. One is obviously a slob. Many people feel embarrassment and/or scorn for the wearer of the stain. They hardly ever feel empathetic, preferring not to identify with the sloppy individual. (Sorkin, 2000, p.77)

This **alignment of staining with poverty** and carelessness, where the stain becomes evidence of an uncontrollable body, a body that has surpassed the boundaries or thresholds of the skin, suggests not only a disorderly subject, but also materiality as transgressive and capable of the transmission of abject subjectivities. The stained and cast out mattress is humiliation and social abjection objectified; the

transgressive materiality evident in Sarah Lucas' *Spinster* (2000) (see figure 27). In addition to its derivation from the term for skilled at spinning, spinster has become a derogatory term for an older unmarried, childless woman who has passed what was historically considered marriageable age. That older women's bodies are also perceived to be more prone to leakage (or conversely, to 'drying up'), more abject, more shameful, more transgressive in relation to social, cultural and moral norms can be seen here to be performed and materialised through *Spinster*. Russo (1997) analyses the old hag as a subject whose body has been aligned to the abject: 'Blood, tears, vomit, excrement – all the detritus of the body that is separated out and placed with terror and revulsion... on the side of the feminine' (p.2). The spinster presents as a subject on the threshold of acceptability.



Figure 27, Sarah Lucas, *Spinster* (2000) Available at: <https://www.pinterest.com/pin/206321226648831859> (accessed 9th February 2019)

Like me, Lucy Puls is an artist whose practice embraces strategies of feral scavenging. When asked about these strategies of sourcing materials, Puls replies,

I can't help but wonder about some of the things I've acquired... What is so special about this particular time that prompts the removal of stuff that has hung around peoples closets, garages, and basements that it just has to go away now? (Sherwin, Puls, 2007)

This curiosity about the decision to cast out domestic goods at a specific time brings us back to Crewe and Gregson's (2003) analysis of the gendered and classed processes of 'good housekeeping' and casting out appropriately, and Miller's (2010) processes of separation as an economy of relationships. That Puls' images of mattresses that make up *Ad Hunc Locum* are of domestic materiality abandoned on the street and as such can be seen to be cast out inappropriately changes the nature of our understanding of these specific objects – they have become much more like Boscagli's liminal matter, 'a full affront to ordered materiality... stuff at its most uncertain, vulnerable and wild' (Boscagli, 2014, p.227). These abandoned mattresses occupy the threshold spaces of the pavement or back alley, the liminal space between the private realm of home, and the public space of the street.

In an analysis of Doris Salcedo's series of sculptural works *La Casa Viuda* (1992-94), Meskimmon (2011) conceptualises threshold spaces as transitional states both physically and metaphorically, states that can be applied to artworks that fracture an understanding of 'being at home' through their disruption of domestic materiality (p.32). Meskimmon proposes that Salcedo's sculptures that are made from domestic objects embody the notion of the threshold through their transformation of materiality, the processes that enable a change of state (art making) reconfigure sensory perception and as such do not depict memory or affect, but perform them (Ibid, p.37). This notion of the performativity of domestic materiality as sculpture engenders a phenomenological understanding of domestic objects and of their transformative potential when presented as sculpture and installation: 'We recognise the found objects and recall domestic interiors, we circumnavigate the installation through our habitual knowledge of the scale and mass of the doorways and the furnishings' (Meskimmon, 2011, p.37). *Runaway Objects* exhibited in the gallery were grouped closely together in a corner of the space. This form of presentation was conceived of in direct response to an image I had seen many years previously where Salcedo had exhibited a collection of her *La Casa Viuda* furniture works in a similar manner. The objects of both *Runaway Objects* and *La Casa Viuda* appear to huddle together like frightened animals or people, and as such exclude the viewer. As viewers, we remember situations where we too were frightened and felt the need to find comfort amongst others of our

kind. *Runaway Objects, Untitled (Mattress Works)* and *Ad Hunc Locum* are sculptural artworks that perform Meskimmon's (2011) transitional threshold spaces through the transformation of liminal materiality. These artworks are embodied and performative and as such materially locate us. As sculpture, these objects perform as a negotiation with cast out domestic materiality that confronts the viewer with the disquieting phenomena of materiality as dangerous, inappropriate and wild in and of itself.

In its manifestation as *The Guardian* in Schinkel Pavilion, Berlin, Trouvé's *Untitled (Mattress Works)* (see figure 22), the mattress, folded and strapped tightly to gallery pillar, appears initially to be an original object, a ready-made. Upon closer inspection it is revealed that the mattress is in fact a cast made in concrete. In a manner reminiscent of Gell's (1998, p.68) proposition that it is the congealed residue of performativity and action that enables objects to be seen to have agency, Trouvé, discussing the transformative processes of her engagement with specific objects and materials says,

Same thing with a mattress: if I place it as is in a room, it evokes sleep, softness, etc., but if I wrap it and then remake it in cement, it becomes sculpture. Now it may call to mind Pompeii, speaking of a fossilized story – a kind of petrified, congealed narrative. (Pietropaolo, 2010, np)

The cast mattress and use of concrete as a transformative sculptural medium is object biography fossilised. Lucy Puls' images of abandoned mattresses trapped in resin also exhibit the fossilised qualities of Trouvé's cast works, yet in Puls' work, the mattresses appear more alive, more bodily, more poetic, and somehow more abject, their obvious discardment becoming the material evidence of the social and economic abjection Puls is drawing our attention to. In Lucas' sculpture the viewer's discomfort is offset by the use of humour, the anarchic strategy of drawing the viewer's attention to the strangeness of materiality that we have become inured to, the 'comedy of waste' identified by Whiteley (2011). Neither Trouvé nor Puls' sculptural artworks are 'funny' in the way that Lucas' are, but all perform as actants in narratives of liminal materiality and of the transgressive threshold spaces these objects occupy.

In an untitled outdoor installation for the annual exhibition *Lustwarande*, in Tilburg, in the Netherlands in 2011, Trouvé's mattress sculpture is encountered strapped tightly to the trunk of a tree accompanied by strategically-placed black plastic objects and wrappings (see figure 23). The unexpected encounter with this domestic object in so open and public a setting brings to mind associations of abandonment, of objects gone feral, but also of outdoor living, camping out and **nomadic lifestyles**.¹⁰ **Trouvé's Untitled (Mattress Works)** in this particular setting, a woodland park, brings to mind occasions of fly-tipping, the inappropriate or disrespectful engagement with unwanted objects that produce anxiety narratives of matter out of place. Yet the careful and deliberate strapping of the (cast) mattress to a tree trunk cannot have come about through processes of tipping 'on-the-fly' as the term implies, but rather through the ambiguous relational agency of artist and object in what I imagine to be a considerable physical struggle. The mattresses documented by Puls for *Ad Hunc Locum* also evidence the physical struggle of object-subject relations as anyone who has ever tried to manoeuvre a double mattress will know. They are heavy and unwieldy, they fold and bend unexpectedly yet are surprisingly resilient to manipulation, a little like trying to manoeuvre a dead body, I imagine, a slapstick comedy moment that might be seen as 'being unknowingly 'othered' through an unconscious link to social class' (Whiteley, 2011, p.81). Manoeuvring a mattress is performative and potentially dangerous – its efforts to escape control might well apply also to women artists such as Sarah Lucas whose work induces laughter as an act of subordination that threatens to **undermine the social order**.

Trouvé's mattress sculptures, Puls' *Ad Hunc Locum* and my own *Runaway Objects* reference all of these social and historical implications around the cultural status of domestic objects cast out, abandoned and discarded, including the intentional societal disruption caused by those who set out to operate outside restrictions of **law or politics**. **Undomesticated and resonant** of threshold times and spaces, Trouvé's mattress sculptures perform as feral objects in both the gallery and

¹⁰ There is a rich European history of enforced removal of those occupying outdoor spaces, from the land enclosure acts in the Middle Ages that began the restriction of movement and access to common ground, to the implementation of the criminal justice act in 2003 that prohibited outdoor gatherings of more than twenty people, basically making illegal outdoor raves and the movement of New Ages Travellers (www.gypsy-traveller.org, 2017).

woodland installations. Lucy Puls too reimagines narratives of materiality in *Ad Hunc Locum*: as installation, the domestic objects in her work appear haunted by the ghosts of domesticity, they wander the liminal spaces of pavement and back alley like feral cats searching for the owner who abandoned them. The fictionalised night vision photographs of *Runaway Objects* also perform this narrative of leaving home, of feral materiality roaming the liminal spaces of urbanity, the threshold space and time where the material culture of feminine domesticity acquires the agency of social abjection.

The liminal status of junk, neither one thing nor another, yet still affective and embodied, is trash as a threat to order, 'the outlaw underside of consumer culture' (Boscagli, 2014, p.227). Junk as the discarded materiality of domestic life is stuff as objects at the borders of commodified matter. The found domestic objects that (in)form my sculpture *Runaway Objects*, Trouvé's *Untitled (Mattress Works)* and Puls' *Ad Hunc Locum*, embody the instability of materiality as it performs as stuff, trash, junk, bric-a-brac: they are material objects in the role of liminal go-between. If, as Meskimmon (2011) proposes, the materiality of sculpture made from found objects has the potential to locate us as subjects, and in the process to disrupt an embodied understanding of being at home, then the feral materiality of *Runaway Objects*, Trouvé's *Untitled (Mattress Works)* and Puls' *Ad Hunc Locum*, the stuff of 'not-being-at-home', spatially, physically and conceptually liminal, disrupts and disturbs notions of home as a site of comfort and security

The stools, coffee tables, Tupperware, cushions and belts that make up *Runaway Objects* are all objects from the material culture of feminine domesticity, a gendered world of commodities which has been deemed inferior to those of high culture. In their performance as feral materiality, *Runaway Objects* articulates a critique of domesticity as an escape route from internal exile – these objects are the material culture of the feminine domestic playing at running away as a feminist strategy of disruption and resistance. This is feral materiality as bad housekeeping, as casting out inappropriately, or not casting out at all – materiality here performs as improper femininity.

Conclusion: Object Redemption

Considering the various definitions of the word feral, including its use as a derogatory prefix for those on the margins of society, the decision to document the small sculptures of *Runaway Objects* as if they had been spotted and photographed by night-time wildlife enthusiasts – or perhaps wildlife hunters, or anyone else who has a reason to be out at night with a night vision camera – was made in order to position the sculptures as if feral animals, pets who have left home or been left behind. Yet as the title of this chapter suggests, going feral is a process that implies intention and agency, one that requires some preplanning. These sculptures then have not been abandoned or discarded but have intentionally left home. They are domestic objects, the material culture of feminine domesticity, and they have packed up and gone, choosing to free themselves from the internal exile of the domestic sphere to inhabit instead the liminal spaces on the margins of society. That they have been tracked, spotted, stalked, captured on film exposes the threat those gone feral now pose to the boundary maintenance that upholds the structure of society and ensures the continuing psychic restrictions placed on women through their alignment to the domestic (amongst other things). By deliberately choosing to exist outside acceptable societal norms, those deemed social objects, Tyler's (2013) 'feral underclass', are positioned as transgressive, a threat to law and order, and the structure of society. This feral underclass have been legislated against and vilified by the public, the symbolic focus of this vilification being the 'stuff' of these people, the material evidence of their existence. The most common complaint made about people with nomadic lifestyles is the 'mess' they leave behind, the domestic detritus of everyday life.

The found object, cast out, abandoned or discarded, is also spatially and culturally unstable, and as such disruptive and potentially dangerous, a **threat to be contained**. **These are feral** objects, materiality that has been dropped from the networks that give it economic and **affective significance**. **And it is through** their reclamation and rehabilitation as sculpture that these feral objects perform as materiality with the agency to subvert and disrupt the hierarchy of subject-object relations. The stools, coffee tables, cushions and belts of *Runaway Objects*, the mattresses of Trouvé's *Untitled (Mattress Works)*, Puls' *Ad Hunc Locum* and Lucas' *Spinster*, are evidence of subjects and objects discarded and abandoned, they have

left home; and like the undisciplined and antisocial youth in the dictionary definition of feral, they inhabit the transitory and liminal spaces between public and private, they have become undomesticated and undisciplined, they have escaped the confines of social and domestic propriety. Mattresses also make excellent forensic witnesses due to their absorbent qualities and their ability to retain evidential stains.¹¹

If, as Boscagli (2014) proposes, the found object as junk, as ‘stuff’ that does not belong to a fixed category but is a state into which all objects and materiality **can enter, then the feral** object is a very particular kind of lively matter, the overflow of commodities that fascinates myself and Lucy Puls: ‘Stuff, as unruly-object hoard, might in this sense seem an ideal candidate for rebellion, leading more proper objects into a more intimate, subtle, and dangerous relation to the subject – and all material into new kinds of subject-object encounters’ (Boscagli, 2014, p.14). And perhaps it is the materialism of this encounter, the reclaiming of feral materiality as a shared experience that produces not objects but events. Both I and Puls engage with feral scavenging as a process of sourcing art materials for our sculptures and installations, from skips or roadside collection, from charity shops, car boot sales and bric-a-brac markets, the liminal spaces of commodity culture that threaten respectable society (Crewe and Gregson, 2003). We hunt for elusive domestic objects that have gone feral and offer them redemption through the performative **potential of sculpture. Feminist artists** can reclaim their coffee tables, cushions and Tupperware containers in a strategy of disruption and resistance that re-presents the material culture of femininity as sculpture on the threshold of domesticity. The feral materiality of *Runaway Objects, Untitled (Mattress Works)*, and *Ad Hunc Locum* – unstable, dangerous and wild, the commodity object denigrated, devalued and abandoned – reappears in the unlikely context of the gallery space and fractures our understanding of what being-at-home might mean for women in the twenty-first century.

¹¹ In 2014-15 American art student Emma Sulkowicz undertook an endurance performance, *Carry That Weight*, where she carried a mattress around campus as a protest of her rape by a fellow student and to the University’s response of finding her rapist not responsible. Sulkowicz took the mattress with her to classes and also to her graduation ceremony. The performance attracted considerable criticism from those who doubted Sulkowicz’s accusations, but also praise from the art critics who compared the work to Ana Mendieta’s *Untitled (Rape Scene)* (1973) (Euse, 2017, np).

Chapter Three – Dangerous Objects, Dangerous Subjects: Transgressive Materialities, Girlhood, Agency and Embodiment



Figure 28, Paula Chambers, *Rupture* (2017). Trays, paper, plywood, glass marbles. Dimensions variable. Photograph by the artist

Introduction: Girls, Girls and More Girls

Rupture: to break or burst suddenly, to breach or disturb, to fracture, to disrupt, to split, sever, part or divide. Perhaps a little too close to rapture: a feeling of intense pleasure or joy, ecstasy, bliss, euphoria, elation (OED, 2019, my italics). Both words, rupture and rapture, are bodily in association; both imply a transgression from the expected, the everyday, a moment where everything changes. Girls too suddenly break, or break forth, they disrupt and disturb, often in moments a little too close to rapture.

My wall-based sculpture *Rupture* (2017) (see figure 28), consists of six shelf-like trays¹² that each hold a paper and plywood cut-out item of furniture disrupted

¹² The shelves upon which the flattened miniaturised furniture and oversized marbles precariously balance are ambiguous objects in their own right. Although they function in *Rupture* as shelves or wall-based plinths for the glass and plywood sculptural objects, they would in fact seem to be a set of trays, designed perhaps to slot into a stacking system. I purchased this set of six trays in a charity shop in Reykjavik, Iceland. When I asked the shop assistant where in Reykjavik I could find more second hand shops, to my surprise the assistant told me that there were only three such shops in the whole city as the people of Iceland do not really have a culture that throws away goods, or is in need of the kind of charities that are so prolific in the running of such shops in Britain. I was

through the intervention of glass marbles. Above each shelf, mounted away from the wall to create theatrical shadows, paper and plywood cut-outs of girls appear to float, fly or levitate as if they are somehow responsible for the apparent movement of the domestic objects below. This series of small sculptures is a material exploration of the liminal status of girlhood as an embodied experience of transitional femininity often perceived as unruly and dangerous, a boundary state, not quite one thing or another, an open psychic structure that offers potential as a site of resistance. The term girlhood as I use it here is not a state that is defined by age, but a term that can be more usefully thought about as 'not only a particular female identity or stage of life', but also 'a site of encounter through which to reconsider notions of female subjectivity, sexuality and agency' (Grant and Waxman, 2011, p.13). The specific agency of girlhood as it is materialised in *Rupture* is that of transgressive transference, an inter-relational agency between feminine subject and domestic object. In *Rupture* the ghost of femininity haunts, and is haunted by, domestic spaces and objects, a disruptive haunting also made manifest in poltergeist phenomena.¹³

Analysed here alongside my work *Rupture* as a sculptural re-presentation of disruptive girlhood embodiment, I also explore analogies present in one of the photographic images that make up Melanie Bonajo's series of performative sculptural interventions, *Furniture Bondage* (2009) (see figure 37). In the image analysed, a young woman appears bound to domestic objects in a manner that

informed that Icelandic people prefer to give unwanted objects to friends or family, to reuse, recycle or repurpose objects that might be seen as old fashioned or no longer necessary, and that anyway, there is not the kind of consumer pressure in Icelandic culture to buy domestic goods as a kind of hobby or pastime, therefore households tend not to accumulate unnecessary items. The processes of 'casting-out' objects seen in Britain as trash or junk are intrinsically linked to notions of value and functionality, and the spatialities of their disposal mapped out accordingly. Yet it would seem that in Iceland consumption cycles are more specific to their culture than I had anticipated. 'The spaces of disposal themselves map onto and parallel individual constructions of commodity value and judgment about appropriate disposal behaviors' (Crewe and Gregson, 2003, p.118).

¹³ In the context of this thesis as a proposition for a feminist new materialism, my analysis of poltergeist activities is one where I examine the phenomena as a materialisation of rebelliousness against gender normativity as a manifestation of collaborative agency of subject and object. I do not disregard the interpretation of poltergeist phenomena as supernatural but my intention here is to investigate why this transference of agency from feminine subject to domestic object takes place. As such, I use examples from both sides as appropriate to my analysis of poltergeist agent as subject and poltergeist phenomena as a materialisation of inter-relational domestic agency. The word poltergeist literally translates from the German as 'noisy ghost' and is by nature intrinsically domestic, in all situations where poltergeist activity has been recorded there are said to be items of furniture, pots and pans and other domestic objects thrown or levitated as if by unseen hands.

suggests an inter-relational agency in which feminine embodiment is transgressive of the expectations and representations of girlhood, and as the body in collusion with materiality as an example of subject/object inter-relationality. In this chapter I investigate the potential for a feminist exploration of the agency of domestic objects as materiality resonant of feminine embodiment, and of the feminine agency of girlhood as potentially transgressive and disruptive of the expectations of feminine subjectivities. I examine how the agency of girls and young women, and domestic materiality can be seen to be relational and embodied, specifically when aligned to the disruption of a restrictive and constricted femininity, traditionally constructed in relation to the gendered spaces of home. I also investigate how this inter-relational and embodied agency has been understood in certain situations as paranormal activity, such as the disruptive haunting of poltergeist phenomena.

My theoretical exploration of girlhood has been primarily informed by De Beauvoir (1948) and Young's (2005) writing on feminine embodiment and the ways through which girls learn to inhabit their bodies in a restricted and constrictive manner. Elfving's (2011) identification of the spaces of girlhood adolescence as 'not-yet, no-longer, not-quite, not a woman nor anything else' (p.107), also proved invaluable. Extending these analyses, I propose that the materiality of constructed femininity, specifically the domestic objects encountered during girlhood adolescence, when re-presented as the sculptural work *Rupture*, perform this unnamed feminine embodiment. Young (2005) proposes the concept of the lived body as a means of theorising sexual subjectivity grounded in phenomenology. For feminist theory, the lived body offers a way of conceptualising subjective experience without the danger of biological reductionism. Lived body as concept allows for the material facts of the body sexed female to incorporate all the differentials of material existence including the performativity of femininity that responds, positively or negatively, to the relative freedoms and restrictions of her culture and society. Young (2005) argues that the female subject is embodied as feminine through language, clothing, age, occupation, status, expectation, habits of comportment, interaction, and experience (Young, 2005, p.17). Yet the physical and psychical experiences of girlhood, including their (non)representation in culture troubles the potentiality of feminine embodiment. Elfving (2011) writes of this unnamed

space of girlhood, 'as a ghost she haunts the borders of representation and threatens all attempts to take possession of the world and one's place in it through a centered perspective' (pp.110-111). Thus, if girlhood is a boundary state, the girl has not yet the experience to enable the formation of subjectivity as lived body.

Rupture and the Material Culture of Girlhood Bedrooms

Rupture was conceived and created as an intentional materialisation of my understanding of girlhood subject formation in relation to material culture. In his **concept of objectification**, Miller (2005) proposes that it is through objects that subjects see their own identity reflected and understood (p.8). Miller proposes the concept of 'the humility of things' as the properties of objects that we do not 'see'. The less we are aware of them, the more powerfully they can determine our expectations by setting the scene and ensuring normative behaviour (Ibid, p.5). This ability of objects to condition human actors becomes the primary means by which people are socialised as social beings: 'We are brought up with the expectations characteristic of our particular social group largely through what we learn in our engagement with the relationships found between everyday things' (Ibid, p.6). In the context of the focus of this chapter, Miller's (2005) concepts of objectification and the humility of objects are applied to an analysis of *Rupture* as a material embodiment of the formation of a feminine subjectivity through the objectification of the material culture of **feminine domesticity**.

An analysis of girlhood embodiment as materialised in *Rupture* and *Furniture Bondage* poses the question as to why girls and young women might transfer their subjective agency onto domestic objects. McRobbie (2008) proposes that the problematic relationship some young women have with their bodies in a cultural climate that denies them an understanding of feminism and as such offers no strategies to allow for a fully embodied experience of femininity, proposing that various forms of self-harm are the manifestation of a post-feminist discontent (McRobbie, 2009, p.94). I take this proposition further, suggesting that other forms of disruptive bodily expression, such as poltergeist phenomena, might also be a manifestation of **feminine discontent**. **Both *Rupture*** and *Furniture Bondage* perform as sculptural narratives of disruptive feminine embodiment, one in which

girls stage a protest in their bedrooms with their bedroom things. McRobbie and Garber (1976) explore what they term a 'culture of the bedroom', proposing that girls' bedrooms are spaces of active subject formation. The private and inaccessible space of the bedroom offers tight friendship groups of girls a **social exclusiveness**. **They propose** that these inscrutable spaces offer girls different **possibilities for resistance**. **Kearney (2007)** develops McRobbie and Garber's original proposition to include a wider demographic of girls, and to include the impact of new media technologies on the formation of feminine subjectivities and their dissemination **via the Internet**: **'adolescent girls** construct multiple 'zones' in their rooms through specific configurations and uses of furniture, technology, clothes, and books' **(Kearney, 2007, p.131)**. **Girlhood agency** as constructed and performed through bedroom culture may have changed its form in the forty-three years since McRobbie and Garber first proposed a culture of the bedroom, yet the basic nature of the materiality through which girlhood subjectivity finds its form has not.

Both *Rupture* and *Furniture Bondage* perform as transgressive materiality that questions the impositions of femininity as aligned to passivity, confinement and bodily restriction and is understood as the material transference of agency from girl/young woman to domestic object due to the ambivalent and sometimes problematic relationship girls and young women have with the construction of feminine subjectivities. These two artworks are situated conceptually within the haunted, borderline spaces of girlhood femininity as the material evidence of a specifically domestic form of embodied possession that resonate with poltergeist phenomena as **disruptive haunting**. **Through this analysis** of my work *Rupture*, I propose that agency here becomes a shared and inter-relational experience between feminine subject and domestic object where both are potentially dangerous and transgressive, a boundary space where girlhood and domestic materiality are re-presented as feminine embodiment.

Rupture: To Break Forth Suddenly, to Breach or Disturb, to Fracture or Disrupt



Figures 29, 30, 31, 32, 33 and 34, Paula Chambers, *Rupture* (2017). Trays, paper, plywood, glass marbles. Dimensions variable. Photographs by the artist

Contextualising the title of my work *Rupture* (see figures 29 - 34), Milne (2004) writes that to experience rupture is to experience the fantastic, the sense of hovering on a threshold, where the subject is unable to choose between competing sets of contexts. Rupture is a sense of release at a moment of change in everyday reality, a moment where the self is suspended, a release from oppressive self-consciousness. Rupture can occur involuntarily (in dreaming) or can be consciously sought (religious experience, aesthetic or sexual encounter) yet all

climax in the end of desire, often characterised by the release of a flood of emotion (rapture?). When one emerges from this break in reality, one must fabricate some account of where the self has been, the returning ego must write itself back into being, writing itself retroactively, manufacturing a kind of memory which sutures over the edges in the break in consciousness (Milne, 2004, pp.142-3). This retroactive rewriting of the moment of rupture emerges in some situations as supernatural narrative, poltergeist phenomena being an example of rupture as suspended self, rewritten as supernatural narrative. It is this narrative ambiguity that my work *Rupture* materialises.

If rupture is a process of fracture, a process of bursting forth suddenly, and rapture is a feeling of intense pleasure or euphoria, then how might this manifest through an embodied inter-relational agency with the material culture of feminine domesticity? The psychoanalytic concept of transference can be defined loosely as the formation of an attachment between a subject undergoing analysis (the analysand) and the analyst. This mutual investment of psychic energy is a collaborative operation, a process of actualising the unconscious of the analysand. Transference inevitably engenders countertransference (the analyst's counter-attachment to the analysand) (Laplanche, 1999). Although the concept of transference has usually been applied to relations between subjects, it is my proposition here that it can be equally well applied to subject-object relations in a manner that extends Winnicott's (1953) concept of the transitional object as symbolic of an infant's transition towards subjecthood to include the ongoing formation of subjectivity throughout childhood and adolescence. If subjects can form an attachment to objects, and if it is understood that objects have agency, then it can be theorised that subject-object relations are collaborative and involve a level of countertransference. If transference is also the actualisation of the unconscious of the subject, then the objects through which this transference takes place, to a certain extent, become the materialisation of the subject's unknown inner life. The mutual investment of psychic energy required for transference to take place is applied here to the examination of the inter-relational subject-object agency that manifests as the disruptive domestic haunting of poltergeist phenomena, and as materialised in my work *Rupture*.

The literature on poltergeist phenomena in parapsychology suggests that the phenomena materialises in the main around pubescent girls and young women with cause for personal turmoil and rebellion, and that the specifics of these girls' domestic situations would appear to also be of importance – and that 'poltergeist disturbances in some way are associated with emotional conflict in the focal person. The frequency of adolescent cases may indicate further that the agent is not in a situation to express the conflict openly (Irwin and Watt, 2007, p.150). The nature of this emotional conflict is qualified by Irwin and Watt (2007) as situations 'when there were changes or other problems in the home or family which may have affected the agent' (p.150). And although parapsychology does not identify further potential sites for emotional disturbance in the agent, De Beauvoir's identification of the embodied experience of the transition from girlhood to womanhood as one in which 'the young girl feels that her body is getting away from her, it is no longer the straightforward expression of her individuality' (p.333), offers the possibility that puberty for girls can also become a site of **emotional disturbance**.

Yet the flying, floating or levitating cut-outs of girls in my work *Rupture* (see figures 29-34) and those engaged with the domestic disruption of poltergeist activity are transgressive – their actions seem to exceed the limits of possibility. Foucault (1977) describes transgression as an excess, 'a world exposed by the experience of its limits' (p.32). He explains that transgression is an action which involves the limit, transgression incessantly crosses and re-crosses a line, the fissures and fractures of rupture: 'Transgression contains nothing negative, but affirms limited being' (Ibid: p.35). The embodied disturbance experienced by the adolescent girl is the awakening understanding of the limits imposed upon her by society and culture; that some girls transfer their psychic energy onto material objects can be seen as an example of transgression as **embodied excess**.

This embodied disturbance experienced by some girls does not usually prompt them in to moving furniture and domestic objects as a consequence, yet many do in fact resort to other methods by which to express emotional turmoil and bodily discontent. This turmoil is expressed by girls through various forms of self-harm that McRobbie (2009) terms post-feminist disorders. She identifies that, 'There is

an increase in the range of demarcated pathologies associated almost exclusively with young women, and in the numbers of those who suffer from a spectrum of conditions seemingly connected to body image and low self-esteem' (p.96). The body, if recognised as a cultural construct as well as biological entity, is a construction that reproduces gender relations. McRobbie's post-feminist disorders reproduce the gender relations of the pathologised feminine body as normative discontent (2009, p.94), anorexia being just one of many forms of embodied discontent that has been normalised as a sign of femininity. In historical phenomenology, the feminine subject is unable to transcend the materiality of the body, and therefore in order to participate in culture must embrace emptiness. Sliwiska (2016) analyses the anorexic female body in relation to Heywood's (1996) 'anorexic logic' and Hegel's (1977) 'impotent shadows'. The anorexic body, Sliwiska proposes, reproduces tropes of vulnerability, incompleteness and inferiority; anorexic logic embraces the body as an ungendered space yet to be constructed as either masculine or feminine: 'Anorexia is an experience of embodiment, an agency of negation, and an escape from gender through the reification of anorexic ideals' (Sliwiska, 2016, p. 123). McRobbie (2009) acknowledges that,

if it is the case that the anorexic girl is frequently embroiled in her own family dynamics, and is also tending to be a girl who is seeking approval, in terms of school work and other activities, then we might propose that... her disorder is still at least a mark of her femininity... that these disorders come to be a way of freshly demarcating the boundaries of sexual difference. (McRobbie, 2009, p.95)

McRobbie's proposition that disorders such as self-starvation, bulimia, self-harm and binge drinking have been normalised as healthy signs of unhealthy femininity, and that this normalisation has taken place due to an intentional strategy by patriarchal power structures, disavow the political gains and discourses of feminism.

Possession(s): Why Furniture?

There may be many reasons why girls move furniture in their homes, and many more as to why and how this comes to be attributed to poltergeist phenomena, but

there can be no doubt that girls' feminine discontent plays a major part in its instigation. Analysing poltergeist phenomena materialised in my artwork *Rupture* as performative, the domestic objects that also perform as sculptural, and the relationship between poltergeist agent and these domestic objects as one of shared agency, I propose that it is the furniture itself that plays the starring role in poltergeist phenomena, and that the girl who performs as agent is intrinsically bound to the domestic objects that have helped shape her sense of self, and as such, she has no choice but to act out her discontent through the objects that also inhabited her domestic space. 'If the physical structures that gave shape to private life – the cherished possessions, favoured corners, connecting passageways – could be obliterated, or at least fundamentally altered, what then of the identity that those structures had helped to define?' (Sidlauskas, 1996, pp.79-80). This phenomenological shift of perception that Sidlauskas identifies as relational to domestic objects and spaces can be seen to be an embodied response to the shift in identity as experienced by **pubescent girls. If the onset of puberty** and the troubling associations this has/had for young women in relation to their understanding of femininity as something that transformed them into an object rather than a subject, and that the domestic objects encountered and lived with on an intimate level in the home have also become unrecognisable, the boundaries between self and other, between subject and object become obscured, become **ambiguous and unstable**.

In the late nineteenth and early twentieth century, particularly in the UK and US, much was made of the symbolic relationship between home and body, both being seen as containers for feeling, emotion and the formation of identity. This alignment of the interior spaces of domesticity with psychic interiority became one that was attributed to the (assumed) interiority of the female body and as such the formation of femininity itself. The objects that inhabit domestic spaces thus become the symbols or props with which this femininity is played out, domestic space becomes 'a stage on which one's most intimate feelings could be acted out with the greatest authenticity' (Sidlauskas, 1996, p.65). In late-capitalist consumerist societies, these spaces of femininity, as they structure and form feminine subjectivity in girlhood, are often the private spaces of bedrooms, as analysed earlier in this chapter. Elfving (2011) also makes the link between

femininity, subjectivity, interiority and domestic spaces in her analysis of Eija-Liisa Ahtila's moving image works, 'The woman and her space, or her interior states and her room, blur together. The room appears to have become the externalised internal space of her subjectivity, yet more of a battleground than a fortress' (p.116). The identification of interiority as a battleground supports my proposition that the construction of femininity as relational to domestic objects and spaces is contradictory, problematic, yet also has the potential to be disruptive, both of femininity itself, and of the domestic objects and spaces within **which it is constructed.**

Haunted Spaces of Femininity

In *Rupture* I wanted to capture something of that transgressive moment, the embodied time and space of adolescence when a growing awareness of potential impositions of femininity, both physiological and psychological, impact upon developing subjectivities as relational to the spaces and objects of domestic femininity **that shape them.** **The ambivalence** with which girls experience their changing bodies is that of an acute awareness of their bodies as sexualised objects in culture, a lack of autonomous agency where girls' sexuality continues to be under surveillance and regulated. Ringrose (2011) identifies the sexual regulation still in place in the twenty-first century, and how teen girls manage the tensions and contradictions of self-representation via online social media. Girls struggle to negotiate the intensified, normalised forms of visual bodily objectification – their embodied experience of themselves as sexualised 'appeared to be in constant tension with fairly resilient, disciplinary norms of sexually appropriate conduct and heterosexualised feminine passivity' (Ringrose, 2011, p.112). De Beauvoir, writing in the late 1940s in France, described the bodily experiences of pubescent girls in a manner and tone that still feels relevant today:

If, well before puberty and sometimes even from early infancy, she seems to be already sexually determined, this is not because mysterious instincts directly doom her to passivity, coquetry, maternity: it is because the influence of others upon the child is a factor almost from the start, and thus she is indoctrinated with her vocation from her earliest years. (De Beauvoir, 1948, pp.295-6)

The girls in *Rupture* reflect a cross-generational shared sense of female embodiment: the original images, sourced from Google, come from a range of times, from the early twentieth century to the present, and a range of cultural and social backgrounds, but they are all girls on the cusp of womanhood. They have not yet conformed to the unspoken feminine rules of appropriate and domesticated bodily comportment. They jump, fly or levitate with joy, suspended in a moment of rapture. Yet this uncanny ability to transcend the confines of domestication is intrinsically disruptive, the girls have broken free suddenly in a moment of rupture.

The domestic objects and items of furniture in *Rupture* are all objects that were chosen for their specificity to the furniture that poltergeists are documented to have moved or interfered with. In *Rupture*, the chair, drawers, wardrobe, dresser and heater are precariously tipped forwards or backwards through the intervention of large glass marbles (or perhaps through the intervention of the levitating girls – it is uncertain, ambiguous, from whom or what the agency emanates). Marbles are objects of childhood, they transcend time, for children have been playing with glass marbles since at least the late nineteenth century when they first entered mass production (National Toy Hall of Fame, 2019). The use of marbles to disrupt the furniture cut-outs of *Rupture* reference marbles thrown (or materialised) in poltergeist phenomena by girls at the point of transition from girlhood to womanhood, and can be seen in the context of this project as a resistance to growing up, a strike against femininity; materialised through the objects of childhood, they act as an intermediary between feminine subject and domestic object.



Figure 35, Susan Hiller, *Homage to Yves Klein: Levitation (Child)* (2011) Available at: <https://www.mutualart.com/Artwork/Homage-to-Yves-Klein--Levitation--Child-/DA34275F75D60E5B> (accessed 27th October 2019)

The six paper and plywood cut-outs of girls who fly, float, jump or levitate above the shelves in *Rupture* have a visual similarity to Susan Hiller's *Levitations* (2007) series of photographs (see figure 35), which also appear to depict gravity-defying moments of bodily suspension. Like my levitating girl images, Hiller's have also been taken out of context, with the images of *Levitations* being sourced from the Internet. Hiller acknowledges the faked nature of her found levitation images yet positions them within 'a long-established tendency in modernist art to make use of certain mystical or spiritual traditions derided as superstitious by scientific rationalism' (2008, np). Without the backgrounds that placed them on trampolines, with skipping ropes and engaged in other girlish activities, the girls in *Rupture* now hang in mid-air, their bodily postures implying paranormal agency perhaps. As with poltergeist phenomena, the faked nature of this agency is potentially disruptive of our expectations, for the intention of the girls is ambiguous – they appear to be performing acts of telekinesis, moving the furniture below in an unseen manner.

Hiller's *Psi Girls* (1999), a five-screen installation work in which short clips from horror films depict girls in the act of moving objects by telekinesis (see figure 36), also presents the viewer with scenes of disruptive material agency where girls appear to have breached or ruptured the subject/object dichotomy. Milne (2004) writes of *Psi Girls*, 'Hiller's images recall the child's fluid sense of self, capable of investing any object with life and agency, apprehending no distance between desire, thought and action' (p.149). Milne uses Gell's (1974) definition of the occult as 'The place where things are when they are not happening' (Gell, 1974, p.145), as a way of conceptualising the place of missing explanation, the place where the unavailable part of any narrative must be, whatever manner of explanation is envisaged. The girls in *Rupture* and *Psi Girls*, and their paranormal materialisation of agentic objects can be seen here as less a literal supernatural intervention, than rupture as portal, '*the place where I am when I am not happening* – redefined as a shared state of being, marvellous and ordinary at the same time' (Milne, 2004, p.149, italics in original). Poltergeist phenomena also, as the transference of agency from feminine subject to domestic object, can be seen as embodied protest against femininity, in which girls enact or perform disruptive material acts often in an unconscious or semi-conscious state, as Milne's (2004) '*place where I am when I am not happening*'.



Figure 36, Susan Hiller, *Psi Girls* (1999) Available at:

<https://www.tate.org.uk/art/artworks/hiller-psi-girls-t12447> (accessed 1st November 2019)

Furniture Bondage: A Condensation of Material Energy



Figure 37, Melanie Bonajo, *Furniture Bondage* (2009) Available at: <https://curiator.com/art/melanie-bonajo/0> (accessed 19th May 2018)

When I was a child, I was very restless and never wanted to sleep. To have a little rest my parents would tie me to the bed, but I was able to escape running around with a mattress and half the bed tied to me... As an adult my life goal is all about preserving my stuff, bringing it from A to B and back again and dropping some of the things in C in between. If I look at the objects maintaining my life as a condensation of material energy, I often wonder how long I could live free and happy from the gain I get out of that pure energy... I don't actually own so much stuff, but often I dream of burning everything I have. (Melanie Bonajo, 2009)

The short introduction by the artist to the series of works *Furniture Bondage* (2009) makes several points that are salient to my proposition here. That girlhood embodiment is, at least partially, relational to domestic objects, and that the materiality of these objects has an agency that is not confined and contained within the stuff itself, but rather is an agency shared by both subject and object, as

such becoming intrinsic to the construction of feminine subjectivity. A subjectivity that Young (2005) also sees as one that is constructed in relation to a concept of home, one in which, 'the subject... fills its existential lack by seeing itself in objects' (p.131). Although she also asks the question, 'is it possible to retain an idea of home as supporting the individual subjectivity of the person, where the subject is understood as fluid, partial, shifting, and in relations of reciprocal support with others?' (Young, 2004, p.130). Bonajo's performative sculptural works, and her autobiographical introduction to them, act here as markers for this shifting sense of self, of subjectivity reflected back through a relational engagement with the domestic objects and spaces of home.

Furniture Bondage as a series consists of thirteen sculptural performances that are presented in an artist's book as both colour and black and white images. Eleven of the images appear to be studio shots, with neutral backdrops and careful staging, the other two however, are much less formal and appear to be shot in a domestic setting, a bedroom perhaps – it is one of these images (see figure 37) that I am choosing to focus on here, an image that appears to be a material re-enactment of Bonajo's childhood experiences of domestic disruption. In this image, a naked young woman is seen tied to a folding metal bedframe by a length of yellow cord. Although the image does seem to have been staged, the young woman is not as inert as in the other images from the series, in fact she appears more as an accomplice in a self-absorbed domestic scenario that leads the viewer to question the circumstances that have led to this peculiar eventuality. It might even be thought that paranormal or psychotic activity had occurred just prior to the images being captured, for, 'Possession and madness, like femininity and sexual difference, depend on visible bodily signs and behavior' (Elfving, 2011, p.115). Bonajo has reconstructed 'a stage on which one's most intimate feelings could be acted out with the greatest authenticity' (Sidlauskas, 1996, p.65), an interior domestic space that perhaps reflects her psychic interiority and the objects that inhabit this domestic space, the props with which femininity is played out. If the space depicted is in fact a private bedroom, the self-absorbed young woman enacts a blurring of interior states and domestic objects and spaces whereby, 'The room appears to have become the externalised internal space of her subjectivity' (Elfving, 2011, p.116). This act of self-absorbed interiority excludes the viewer in

this very subjective domestic encounter: 'Involved yet detached, she inhabits the border, where the fictional realm and the time-space of the viewers meet. She is a mediator, neither here nor there, present nor absent' (Elfving, 2011, p.110). The gap in Bonajo's personal narrative – which may after all be fictional – is materialised in *Furniture Bondage* as Milne's (2004) place of missing explanation.

Developing McRobbie and Garber's (1976) theory of bedroom culture as a site of the construction of feminine subjectivities, Kearney (2007) positions the girlhood bedroom as a privileged social and recreational site within which 'female youth might negotiate their relationship to the public sphere within the safe confines of their rooms through culturally productive practices, like artwork or media-making' (Kearney, 2007, p.131). Yet Kearney admits that contemporary

female youth also face unique psychological hardships during adolescence that often contribute to their lack of self-confidence and difficulty asserting themselves. As a result, adolescent girls may demonstrate excessive self-consciousness, and many turn to their bedrooms as a haven where they are safe from surveillance and ridicule. (Kearney, 2007, p.128)

Bonajo's image of domestic disruption appears to take place within a bedroom setting yet is obviously staged and re-presented as artwork. The self-absorbed young woman re-enacts Bonajo's own childhood bedroom escapades, materially disruptive experiences that informed her adult relationship with objects as a condensation of material energy that maintains her life. The ambivalent status of the girlhood bedroom as space both of cultural production and a haven from surveillance and ridicule materialises in *Furniture Bondage* as an intermediary space, between girlhood agency and womanhood, and as the transference of agency between feminine subject and domestic object in a manner that was also my intention when making *Rupture*.



Figures 38, 39 and 40, Melanie Bonajo, *Furniture Bondage* (2009) Available at: <https://curiator.com/art/melanie-bonajo/0> (accessed 19th May 2018) and Johannes Vermeer, *Woman in Blue Reading a Letter* (1662-5) and *Young Woman with a Water Pitcher* (1662-5) Available at: <http://www.essentialvermeer.com/> (accessed 28th Sept 2019)

The image from Bonajo's *Furniture Bondage* series analysed here is set in a bedroom environment that has a subtle and specific colour palette, faded gold and cream curtains form a backdrop that is bisected by the aluminium coloured frame of a folding bed that is tied to a young woman by bright yellow nylon cord. The manner of this binding does not appear to be overly constrictive, in fact it seems more hastily applied, and if the woman were to stand upright, or move from her bent position, the frame could be easily dislodged. It actually looks as if the woman has tied herself to the bedframe, or as if the bedframe has somehow impinged itself upon her and, being bereft of arms or appendages, has only partially succeeded in the job of binding itself to its temporary host. The entire image is constructed in a manner that references formal painting techniques: the brown hair of the young woman merges with a small wooden table in the corner of the room as she bends to reach towards her lower leg. The woman's body, the bed frame and curtains form the diagonal lines that draw the eye inward, a technique employed in Vermeer's paintings of young women in domestic interiors (see figures 39 and 40). Like Vermeer's paintings, the woman in Bonajo's image is not contained within the frame of the image, she is cut off below the knee as if there is the possibility that she might at any minute step out of the frame and make her escape – but escape what? The limitations of a socially and culturally proscribed femininity? Yet as Bonajo's states 'I was able to escape running around with a mattress and half the bed tied to me' (Bonajo, 2009).

The intimate domestic interior spaces of Bonajo's image and Vermeer's paintings are crowded with objects; the spaces appear densely populated by the women themselves and the stuff that surrounds them. In Bonajo's image there are books on the lower shelf of the table and a laptop computer on the top, objects for reading, writing and research, objects of her time, and from these objects certain things can be assumed about the young woman in the image. Likewise, in Vermeer's paintings the women share their domestic space with objects that reflect their feminine subject positions as maid and mother-to-be. These are the objects of Miller's (2005) concept of objectification, the things through which subjectivities are created and identities reflected and understood. Ahmed (2006) explores the phenomenology of orientation through an analysis of 'how bodies take shape through tending towards objects that are reachable, that are available within the bodily horizon' (p.2). In the cluttered domestic spaces of Bonajo and Vermeer's images all of the objects visible within the frame of the image could easily be reached by the women depicted, these objects animate the space and are animated by it. These are the objects of Miller's (2005) 'humility of things', objects that we do not 'see', objects that set the scene and unconsciously determine behaviour. Ahmed (2006) also writes of the importance of objects that tend to disappear into the background as relational to subjectivities or an embodied sense of self. What makes furniture 'furniture' Ahmed (2006) argues, 'is this tendency to disappear from view' (p.168). Yet this humility of objects has agentic potential, for 'as soon as we notice the background, then things come to life' (Ahmed, 2006, p.168). The ordinary domestic objects in Bonajo and Vermeer's images and in my own work *Rupture* are socially, culturally and historically specific, they set the scene and orient specific bodies in specific spaces, orientations that are formed through the intimacy of bodies, spaces and objects Ahmed (2006).

Bonajo's images of the sculptural interventions that make up *Furniture Bondage* may be autobiographical, yet they also present as a transgressive embodied performance of the inter-relationality of feminine subject and domestic object that is also present in *Rupture*. The staged yet self-absorbed act which the young woman and bedframe in Bonajo's image performs, and the girls engaged in acts of domestic disruption in *Rupture*, enact Miller's objectification and humility of

things, yet also materialise the disorientation inherent in Ahmed's (2006) things becoming strange. The unsettling bodily sensation of disorientation, 'the strangeness that seems to reside somewhere between the body and its objects is also what brings these objects to life' (Ahmed, 2006, p.163) is one whereby the transference of agency from subject to object disturbs and unsettles the historical understanding of feminine subjectivity formed and structured in relation to the material culture of domesticity as passive and inert, and offers instead the vibrant agentic potential of material transgression.

Conclusion: The Place of Missing Explanation

If, as De Beauvoir famously proposed, 'one is not born, but rather becomes, a woman' (1948, p.295), and that this process is relational to the domestic spaces and objects of home, then what the two artworks *Rupture* and *Furniture Bondage* share is the inter-relational agency of girl and domestic items of furniture, the uncanny disruption of domesticity through material intervention, and the performativity of feminine embodiment as intrinsic to the formation of subjectivity and femininity. The girls depicted in *Rupture* and *Furniture Bondage* are engaged in transgressive material acts of disruption. They exceed the limits of possibility both bodily and materially; they experience the break in reality that is rupture, a moment of change where the self is suspended and the transgressive transference of psychic energy onto material objects is manifest as embodied excess. If domestic space is the stage on which one's most intimate feelings can be acted out (Sidlauskas, 1996, p.65), and domestic objects are the props through which psychic interiority is played out, and if femininity can be seen to be structured through an intimate relationality with the material culture of feminine domesticity, then these acts and processes have transgressive feminist agency due to 'the personal sense of identity supported in the site and things of homeplace thus enable political agency' (Young, 2005, p.150).

The retroactive rewriting of the moment of rupture reads as supernatural narrative within a feminised and subjective redefinition of the occult as '*the place where I am when I'm not happening*' (Milne, 2004, p.149, italics in original) – the place of missing explanation is applied here to the domestic disruption of

poltergeist phenomena as embodied material excess. Young's (2005) theorisation of the lived body as subjective experience where the material facts of the body sexed female incorporate all the differentials of material existence is one that includes the performativity of femininity as embodiment. Feminine embodiment is experienced as a response, positive or negative, to the relative freedoms of her specific culture and society. That these limits can be transgressed, as re-presented here through an analysis of my sculptural artwork *Rupture* and *Furniture Bondage*, offers the potential for girlhood as a boundary state to be considered as dangerous in and of itself. If, as Kearney (2007) proposes of the girlhood bedroom, 'contemporary female youth are not retreating to private spaces; they are reconfiguring such sites to create new publics that can better serve their needs, interests, and goals' (p.138). And if objectification is the process through which objects and subjects engage, interact, and incorporate materiality, then I propose that embodied femininity as materialised in *Rupture* and *Furniture Bondage* has the transgressive potential to perform dangerous supernatural narratives of the domestic disruption of poltergeist phenomena.

Chapter Four – Secular Magic: Feminine Agency as Supernatural Domestic Disruption



Figures 41 and 42, the length of cloth regurgitated by materialising medium Helen Duncan *Spellbound: Magic, Ritual and Witchcraft*, Ashmolean, Oxford (2018). Photograph by the artist. And Paula Chambers, *Feminist Escape Route* (2017). Net curtain, reed basket. Dimensions variable. Photograph by the artist

Introduction: Materialisations

A visit to the exhibition *Spellbound: Magic, Ritual and Witchcraft* at the Ashmolean in Oxford (31 Aug 2018 – 6 Jan 2019) confirmed for me many of the conceptual and material links I had been making between femininity, domesticity and the supernatural. I was enchanted by the witch's ladder made from knotted rope and feathers, the wooden doors inscribed with indecipherable marks and symbols, and, most excitingly, the length of stained white fabric that spiritualist medium Helen Duncan had secreted in her stomach then regurgitated as ectoplasm in a performance of paranormal materialisation. A whole host of other objects on display were those that had been secreted in walls, chimneybreasts and around doorways and windows – children's clothes, shoes, a dead cat. This material culture of 'supernatural' magical protection appeared as evidence of home as body, vulnerable at its thresholds and openings where unwanted forces may enter. But what happens when your home is haunted not by unseen and unknown supernatural entities, but by the disruptive domestic antics and activities of women and girls whose subjectivities have been formed and informed by the material culture of feminine domesticity? And in the context of the proposition of

this thesis, how might these disruptive domestic antics be made manifest as sculpture?

This chapter investigates the transference of agency from girls and young women onto domestic objects when perceived as potentially supernatural. I analyse the material evidence of the secular magic of séance, the mediumship of spiritualism and poltergeist activity in relation to my own artworks *Feminist Escape Route* (2017) and *Hidden* (2015), alongside Carolee Schneemann's *Interior Scroll* (1975-1995) and Becky Beasley's *Surface Coverings (The Feral Works)* (2004-6). I analyse how these sculptural artworks can be seen to embody the performativity of domestic objects as the material evidence of a feminist/feminine discontent also evident in séance, spiritualism and other feminised supernatural activities, as the material agency of secular magic. As introduced in the previous chapter, Gell's (1974) definition of the occult as 'where events are when they are not happening' (p.21), and Milne's (2004) redefinition of Gell's occult dimension of consciousness as '*the place where I am when I am not happening*, a shared state of being, marvelous and ordinary at the same time' (Milne, 2004, p.149, italics in original), as the place of missing explanation or where the unavailable part of a narrative might be, is useful here as a way of analysing the hidden or concealed experience of embodied femininity materialised as supernatural. If embodied femininity is a shared state of being between women and girls and the material culture of feminine domesticity that structured and informed their subjectivities as feminine as I propose, then the performance of embodied femininity as supernatural is where missing explanations may lie.

Contextualising my artworks *Feminist Escape Route* and *Hidden* (see figures 42, 43 and 47 respectively) in relation to the super-naturalisation of the feminine body, I explore how and why femininity has been aligned with psychic interiority, and how and why girls and young women have 'played along' with this positioning of their embodied experiences, as a consequence displacing their subjective agency onto domestic objects as a strategy of dissent. The supernatural, including its representation in the occult possession film, manifests through the material evidence of the technologies of enchantment. Objects appear and disappear; in poltergeist phenomena, séance and the materialisations of spiritualism, women

and girls employ strategies of secular magic, a conjuring or sleight-of-hand that disrupts our understanding of the solidity or reality of materiality. *Feminist Escape Route* and *Hidden* are artworks that materialise interiority as aligned to the construction of femininity, they are objects of feminine agency; enchanted objects conjured into being through the sleight-of-hand of making processes. Yet they are also material evidence of femininity gone awry, of the transference of feminine subjective agency onto domestic object as a subversive strategy of misdirection. They are disruptive and dissenting, both of femininity as a cultural construct, and of the material culture of feminine domesticity through which this has been structured.

Feminist Escape Route and Hidden: Sculptural Making as Secular Magic

Feminist Escape Route (2017) was created as a response to my research into secular magic, the conjuring or trickery of séance and poltergeist activity – sleight-of-hand presented as supernatural phenomena. *Feminist Escape Route* consists of twenty meters of rope made from net curtains that emerges vertically from a small woven basket, the rope appearing to escape the gallery space through a high window. Referencing both the Indian Rope Trick,¹⁴ an infamous hoax, and the copious quantities of gauze or fine muslin secreted by the materialising mediums of the late spiritualist movement, *Feminist Escape Route* can be read as a material manifestation of secular magic as performed by the women and girls who presented themselves as spiritualist mediums and as the agents of poltergeist phenomena. Schneemann's (in)famous performance work *Interior Scroll* (1975) is also a performative embodiment of female/feminine interiority as a materialisation of Clover's (1992) theorisation of the occult possession film as one that seeks to make visible the invisible. The moment of reveal in *Interior Scroll* resonates with the conjuring of stage magicians, albeit in a much more transgressive manner, and makes conceptual references to *Feminist Escape Route*.

¹⁴ The Indian Rope Trick briefly explained goes as such; a conjurer throws one end of a coil of rope into the air to about fifteen or twenty feet, where it remains, stiff like a pole. A small boy climbs the rope and balances at its extremity. At a word from the conjurer the boy vanishes, only to reappear magically from under a blanket or from the watching crowd. A signal from the conjurer causes the rope to collapse to the ground. The trick is said to originate in India from around the late 1800s but no reliable eyewitness accounts exist. No magician since has been able to recreate the trick and it is now commonly considered to have never actually been performed as described (The Secret of the Indian Rope Trick, 2013).

Hidden is also an artwork that directly references spiritualist and paranormal activity: a length of curtain, printed with a pattern of vines and leaves, partially hides a young woman whose bare legs and feet are visible below the curtain hem. An intermittent soundtrack of a woman running away imbues the work with a sense of hide-and-seek, but here also references the manner in which girls and young women were covered in séance situations to hide their (secular) magical activities. Beasley's series of photographic images that make up *Surface Coverings* also hide potentially magical or enchanted objects; items of domestic furniture are hidden beneath old carpet and presented as grainy black and white images that resonate with the materiality of spiritualist photography. Warner (2006) gives historical, social and religious context to the development of the technologies of film and photography as the medium through which the supernatural met a mass audience. Beasley's artworks appear as photographic evidence of a hidden feminine agency presented as paranormal activity, furniture and domestic objects becoming actants in supernatural narratives of domestic disruption.

As analysed in chapter three of this thesis and applied here to my analysis of *Feminist Escape Route and Hidden*, girlhood, as visual signifier and as embodied experience, is temporally and spatially uncertain, and as such offers the potential to be read – and lived – as disruptive and dissenting of the impositions and confinements of femininity. It is through the domestic objects and spaces that inform the construction of femininity that this dissention can be articulated by girls who experience femininity as restrictive to their subjectivity (Sidlauskas, 1996). The power relations at play and need for subjective affirmation evident in the formation of poltergeist phenomena directly mirror those present in the spiritualist séance, a space which 'permitted the medium to play out her refusal of fixed gender meanings and behaviour. Intrinsic to this refusal was an infringement of the power politics implied by gender relations' (Owen, 1989, p.12). The female mediums of the late nineteenth century were considered a threat to the social order less on account of their supposed contact with the dead than because of their social mobility and financial independence, which challenged patriarchal stereotypes of femininity (Owen, 1989, pp.1-40). Although the understanding of femininity in late Victorian England (against which the spiritualist mediums rebelled) was more specific and more openly acknowledged than that of the

present day there is still considerable social and cultural pressure on modes of behaviour and forms of bodily presentation for girls in Britain at this time.

I adopt During's (2002) term secular magic to describe art making strategies as technologies of enchantment, strategies also utilised by stage magicians and others in the business of 'deceiving' their audience through perceived magical acts.

During defines secular magic as,

not the magic of witches or Siberian shamans – not, in other words, what one writer on the subject of the occult calls “real and potent magic” – but rather the technically produced magic of conjuring shows and special effects. This magic, which stakes no serious claim to contact with the supernatural, I will call “secular magic”. (During, 2002, p.1)

During (2002) proposes that with magic, and the understanding of the magic show or conjuring act as illusion presented as illusion, secular magic can be positioned as tricks and fictions that stand as border posts at the threshold of a supernatural domain that can never be mapped (During, 2002, p.2). For although secular magic stakes no serious claim to contact with the supernatural, there have been moments when the two become culturally indistinguishable, for example in the case of spiritualist séance and mediumship, and also, I propose, in the manifestation of poltergeist phenomena.

As materialised in *Feminist Escape Route*, feminine embodiment and processes of embodied transference from subject to domestic objects and spaces can be seen as both physical and psychological processes; poltergeist phenomena can also be understood as psychical or paranormal processes, where the supernatural manifests as disruptive domestic disturbance. Federici's (2004) analysis of the European witch hunts of the sixteenth and early seventeenth century reminds us that women have been historically, socially and culturally aligned to the supernatural through their association with folk lore, superstition, fortune telling, the evil eye, black magic and witchcraft (p.167 and 174). The supernatural – here including poltergeist phenomena, séance, and the mediumship of spiritualism – offers scope for an analysis of a specific kind of feminine agency. Intrinsically domestic, bound to issues of class and performative in both a literal and metaphorical sense, *Feminist Escape Route* and *Hidden* are analysed as the material

evidence of psychical transference of feminine agency to domestic objects as an intentional strategy of disruption, as the secular magic of a feminine materialisation of protest and rebellion similar to the deceptive strategies of sleight-of-hand undertaken by the women mediums of Victorian **Spiritualism** (Owen, 1989).

The Secular Magic of Spiritualism: Fraud or Phenomena

‘Real’ or ‘faked’ is perhaps not the point here – the trickery of secular magic **as materialised in *Feminist Escape Route and Hidden*** allows for an analysis of the agency of objects in their form as sculpture, to be read as secular magic articulated by girls and young women (consciously or unconsciously) as a strategy of embodied domestic dissent. Munt (2013) writes that ‘paranormal phenomena are very real in the sense that people really and truly experience them’ (p.3). **In late nineteenth** century Britain, the young women who presented themselves as spiritualist mediums performing materialisation phenomena (Florence Cook, Annie Fairlamb Mellon and Rosina Mary Showers, to name just a few) were engaged in the same sleight-of-hand perceived by others as supernatural intervention. Most of these women, when investigated by members of the Society for Psychical Research (SPR)¹⁵ were exposed as frauds; thus, the question that seems most pertinent here is why, rather than how: ‘Evidently, it is not what happens, but how, when, where, and to whom it happens which will motivate a diagnosis in terms of the occult’ (Gell, 1974, p.21). Spiritualist materialisation phenomena – whether this be the floating of domestic objects in darkened rooms, the ringing of bells, the apparition of disembodied heads and hands, or the production of ‘ectoplasm’ from bodily orifices – was, despite exposure as fraudulence, presented and understood within the social and religious context of the time as **supernatural intervention**.

Gell (1994) proposes that it is the unknowability of the technologies of making that induce the sensation that it is in fact an act of magic that enables objects to come

¹⁵ The Society of Psychical Research was founded in 1882 and continues to this day. Its aim is to conduct scholarly research into events and activities commonly described as psychic or paranormal. In the late nineteenth century, many members of the SPR investigated spiritualist mediums for fraudulence, most notably, Richard Hodgson, Frank Podmore, Edward Cox and Harry Price (Society for Psychical Research, 2018).

into being through the hands (and minds) of the maker. Gell (1994) writes that the art object is that which is beautifully made or made beautiful through technical means: 'The power of art objects stems from the technical processes they objectively embody: the technology of enchantment is founded on the **enchantment of technology**' (p.44). The art object, Gell (1994) explains, displays a level of artistry that can only be explained in magical terms, as a thing that has been produced **by magical means**. **Gell aligns the** agency of the artist in their ability to create illusion to that of occult power, the ability of the artist to make what is not out of what is, and to make what is out of what is not (Ibid, p.53). As such, art and magic become intrinsically intertwined, the art object arising as much from the mind of its creator, as from the technical processes involved in its making. **The making of *Feminist Escape Route* involved a process that transformed a single material, net curtains, into an art object that is presented as a narrative illusion of magical coming-into-being.**

Peeren (2013) positions mediumship as a process of making the unexpected visible through feats of materialisation. Mediums, Peeren (2013) writes, 'retain a potential subversive force if they can exploit their liminal position between the credible and the incredible' (p.206). Spiritualism involved the disruption of sense boundaries, and the materialising medium subverted 'societal norms by manifesting (ostensibly without meaning to) the prohibited and disavowed, conjuring that which is not supposed to appear' (Peeren, 2013, p.207). Gell's magical coming-into-being of the art object and Peeren's identification of conjuring the prohibited and disavowed as subversive material agency in *Feminist Escape Route* and *Hidden* materialise as sculpture that presents feminine agency as supernatural domestic disruption. These two artworks embody the disruptive and deceitful agency of girls and young women denied and/or misunderstood by the viewer. We do not know how these things have happened, we cannot conceive of the trickery involved, or will not allow the girl enough agency to have undertaken such deceitful misdirection, and therefore what we witness must be a form of magic or (supernatural) enchantment.

Feminist Escape Route: Technologies of Enchantment

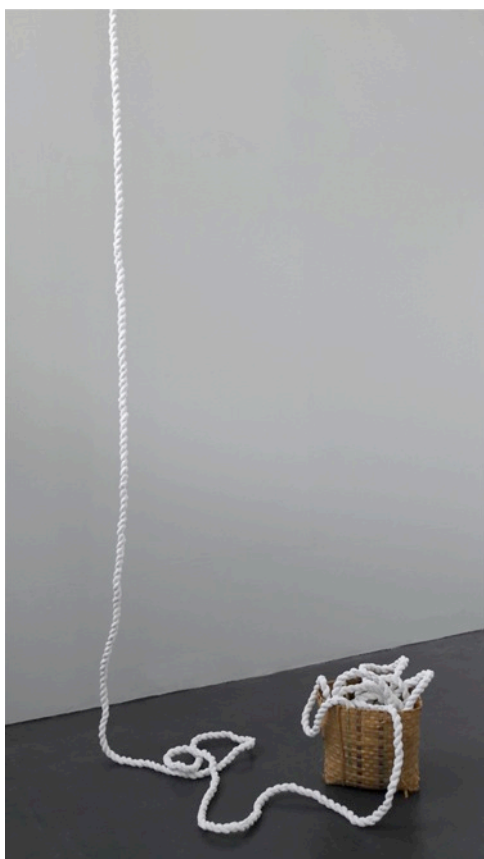


Figure 43, Paula Chambers, *Feminist Escape Route* (2017). Net curtain, reed basket. Dimensions variable. Photograph by the artist

Feminist Escape Route (2017) (see figure 42) is a sculptural artwork consisting of twenty meters of white rope made from net curtains. The rope emerges from a woven reed shopping basket to coil across the gallery floor; ascending vertically, it appears to escape the space at an unseen height. This work is an artistic sleight-of-hand, an enchanted object, a material embodiment of girlhood supernatural agency presented as a trick of materialisation; rope, I discovered, is deceptively straightforward to make.

Rummaging through knick-knacks and bric-a-brac in a local charity shop I came across a roll of net curtain fabric. The fabric was synthetic, yellowing and very thin, of the cheaply made and mass-produced kind, the overlooked and undervalued material culture of feminine domesticity, Attfield's (2000) feral design. This roll of net curtain made me think of a passage in Warner's (2006) *Phantasmagoria*, where she describes an encounter in the archives of the Society of Psychical Research

with a 'sample of ectoplasm' produced by the materialising medium Helen Duncan in 1939.

[This] sample of ectoplasm' turned out to be 4 yards of the cheapest kind of dressmakers' lining silk, unhemmed, yellowing, and crumpled with traces of old blood still present. The cloth had been secreted in Helen Duncan's stomach it was alleged, and was produced or regurgitated in a materialising séance as evidence of communication with the spirit world. (Warner, 2006, p.299)

This was the very cloth I also encountered during my visit to *Spellbound: Magic, Ritual and Witchcraft* at the Ashmolean in Oxford. The history of spiritualist séance is one of class and gender as much as it is of religion, death and the otherworldly. The women who became spiritualist mediums (and they were nearly always women) were predominately from the working or lower middle classes, and to become a medium offered a respectability often accompanied by a certain level of fame and authority that would have been otherwise impossible (Owen, 1989, p.5). Owen (1989) outlines the context in which these women seized the opportunities offered by spiritualism to transgress the constraints imposed on their lives by the narrow positioning of appropriate modes of femininity at that time. The materialising mediums of late Victorian spiritualism were (intentionally or not) subversive – their embodiment of the supernatural undermined power structures and authority. Owen proposes that spiritualist mediumship offered a potential escape from nineteenth century proscriptive femininity, one that hints at an unconscious resistance on the part of the women involved.

séance behavior itself signified a transgression and transposition of normative femininity. For, whilst speaking directly to the feminine ideal, mediumship succeeded in effectively undermining it. What was implied by the structure of the séance was the permission to infringe culturally imposed limits. (Owen, 1989, p.11)

One of the consequences of this transgression was the presentation of spiritualism as the spectacle of femininity gone awry. Owen (1989) proposes that women's involvement with the spiritualist movement can be seen as a precursor to modern feminism.



Figure 44, Spiritualist medium Kathleen Goligher materialises ectoplasm from her vagina. Available at: <https://www.pinterest.com/pin/291185932133953260> (accessed 7th July 2018)

Considering the 'reality' of spirit manifestation, Owen (1989) points out that to view spiritualism as real/not real sets up a binary that has historically been unhelpful when investigating the role women played within the movement. Yet the subversive possibilities of either conscious and/or unconscious fraud by the women mediums is of interest here in relation to my proposition that the transference of agency from girls and young women onto domestic objects can be viewed as supernatural. My intention was that *Feminist Escape Route* materialises the uncertainty as to the 'reality' of spirit phenomena: it must have been made by the hand of the artist, yet it appears before us as enchanted in the manner of Gell's (1994) magical objects – was the rope manufactured, or materialised by some other unknown means? The material ambiguity of *Feminist Escape Route* and the manner in which it was produced, has visual and conceptual reference to spiritualist materialisation where 'The physical attributes of ectoplasm depend on a long tradition of making visible the invisible, of rendering material the immaterial' (Warner, 2006, p.290), very much like the alignment of femininity and interiority in the occult possession film. *Feminist Escape Route* appears to be

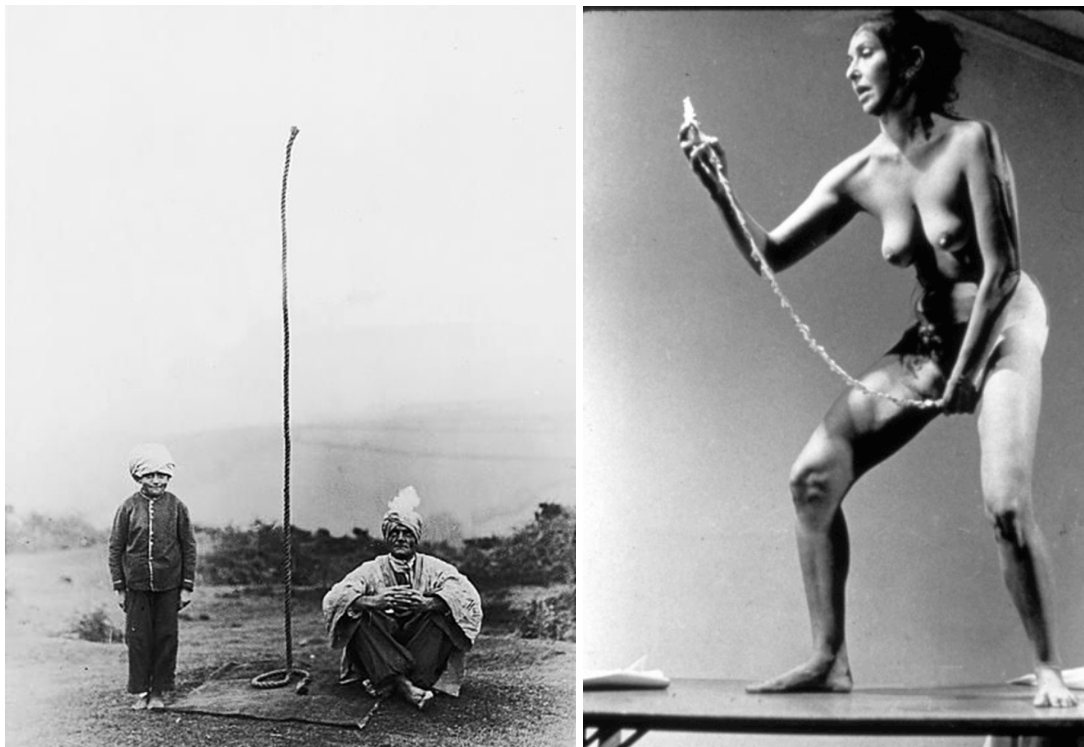
performing the transgressive and disruptive femininity of the materialising mediums of spiritualism, yet also the performative supernatural female body of the occult possession film.

As I looked at my roll of cheap second-hand net curtain, I thought about comedy sketches of people escaping from high windows in prison or from danger (a fire, an attacker etc.) by knotting together bed sheets or curtains to make a sort of rope ladder. I thought too about Rapunzel¹⁶ with her long hair, trapped through enchantment in a tower, awaiting rescue by a handsome prince. Warner (1995) introduces fairy tales as stories of magic and enchantment, offering the proposition that these tales are 'a form of camouflage, making it possible to utter harsh truths, to say what you dare' (p.xvii), and that these tales contain 'powers to illuminate experiences embedded in social and material conditions' (p.xviii). *Feminist Escape Route* then is a material narrative not just of fairy tale princesses trapped by enchantment – the unseen agency of others – but also offers a possible means of escape by trickery and sleight-of-hand through the agency of the materiality of femininity.

Returning to my initial reaction that the fabric of *Feminist Escape Route* reminded me of the materialisation of spiritualist mediums, I realised that the theme running through all my references was that of escape, albeit escape by a certain degree of trickery and misdirection. My interest in secular magic as applied to the potential for sculpture and installation made from found objects to perform in an almost theatrical manner, to be staged, led me to conceive of producing a rope that appeared to ascend from a humble bag or basket in a manner similar to that of the apparently gravity defying act of the Indian Rope Trick (see figure 45). It is now widely acknowledged that the Indian Rope Trick was never performed as originally described and was in fact a hoax – interestingly though, this has not diminished its status as an impressive feat of conjuring ability. As with the

¹⁶ In the most commonly known version of the Rapunzel tale by the Brothers Grimm, itself based on earlier European versions and with similarities in folk tales from the East, the girl Rapunzel is given over to the care of an evil witch on her twelfth birthday – at her transition from girlhood to womanhood – because of a promise made by her father when he is caught stealing the herbs his wife (Rapunzel's mother) craves during her pregnancy. Held captive in a high tower with no points of entrance or exit other than the window through which the witch climbs daily by using Rapunzel's long hair as a rope, Rapunzel does not in fact escape through her rescue by the Prince, but is cast out after inadvertently giving away the secret of the Prince's nightly visits by (in some versions) asking for a larger dress, a slip of the tongue that implies her own pregnancy (Warner, 1995).

performativity of sculpture made from found objects, it is understood that it is the hand of the artist (or conjurer) who has transformed the mundane and the everyday into the wondrous or inspiring form of contemporary art (or feat of magic), yet we are still awed by this seemingly miraculous transformation, as with materialising mediums too, who 'could be numbered among the extraordinary performance artists of the period' (Warner, 2006, p.295).



Figures 45 and 46, The Indian Rope Trick. Available at:

<https://www.thecannachronicles.com/up/> (accessed 7th July 2018) and Carolee Schneemann, *Interior Scroll* (1975) Available at: <http://mousse magazine.it/meat-joy-carolee-schneemann/> (accessed 7th July 2018)

Watching *Rebel Women: The Great Art Fight Back* on BBC Four (2018) I recognised the visual references that *Feminist Escape Route* has with Carolee Schneemann's 1975 performance work *Interior Scroll* (see figure 46), a work of which I was long aware. Schneemann's performance has become an iconic image of the transgressive bodily excesses of feminist art. The key moment in the performance is of Schneemann unfurling the folded scroll that she had secreted inside her vagina. The white paper scroll has been folded concertina like, and as she pulls this out of her vagina, slowing reading the printed text, it appears as a snake-like form emerging upward from between her naked legs. In both *Feminist Escape Route* and

Interior Scroll a quantity of material is revealed in a manner resonant of the material manifestations of women mediums – who used their vaginas as orifices within which to secrete, then ‘magically’ produce the samples of ectoplasm required for their performances (see figure 44). The very real vagina of Schneemann’s performance, and of the materialising mediums, and the allusions to this presented by the basket from which the net curtain rope ascends in *Feminist Escape Route*, can both be analysed here in relation to Clover’s (1992) reading of the interiority of female/feminine bodily experience as a supernatural revelation through which the invisible is made visible, the vagina being the port of entry for the supernatural (p.76). Likewise, Sliwiska (2016) identifies the patriarchal alignment of the vagina with femininity where both are figured as abyss, hole or lack, a perceived emptiness onto which narratives of shame and horror have been projected (p.25). In artworks by women that actively incorporate the vagina as a feminist and/or political strategy of demystification, femininity and its association with fragmentation is erased (Ibid, p.126).

In *Interior Scroll*, Schneemann reads aloud from the scroll as it emerges from her vagina, giving voice to her subjective experience of belittlement at the hands of a patriarchal art establishment. A fragment of the text recalls the derision of a male structuralist filmmaker who berated Schneemann for her use of ‘the personal clutter, the persistence of feelings, the hand-touch sensibility’ (Schneemann, 2002, p.159). Jones (1998) argues that in *Interior Scroll* Schneemann projects herself as a fully embodied subject, ‘a deeply constituted (and never fully coherent) subjectivity in the phenomenological sense’ (p.3). This process of self-enactment is intersubjective, an integration of the occluded interior of the female body, with its mobile and eminently readable exterior. Intersubjectivity as performance art, Jones (1998) argues, is the process of enactment of the artist themselves as both author and object; a process whereby the subject is embodied as contingent on her/his others and is performed or enacted in relation to these others (p.40). Jones (1998) also proposes the concept of interobjectivity as an interrelatedness with the world, the simultaneous existence as subject and object that produces the fully embodied social and political subject (p.18). Mahon (2017) writes that Schneeman’s performative works were intentionally anti-modernist in their presentation of the female body as domestic body. The domestic here though,

Mahon argues, is not that of the traditional loving (or repressed) housewife or mother, but is rather,

a much more expansive sense of the domestic, which includes revelation and exposure of the private, intimate body and its desires and functions as a means of engagement with the public sphere. The traditional domestication of woman is subverted and the home mobilised for radically different cultural and gender politics. Played out by and through bodies in environments that have all the trappings of the familiar home. (Mahon, 2017, p.53)

This expansive sense of the domestic that is subversive in its revelation of the private, intimate female body Mahon (2017), in her analysis of Schneemann's earlier works *Meat Joy* (1964) and *Fuses* (1964-67), calls 'domestic mess', 'the personal clutter, the persistence of feelings, the hand-touch sensibility' (Schneemann, 2002, p.159). In *Interior Scroll* Schneemann performs femininity as both intersubjective and interobjective, an enactment of herself as embodied subject interdependent with the mess of her domestic environment.

Feminist Escape Route was conceived initially as a performative sculptural object that embodies the misdirection of secular magic as a feminist strategy of subversion. Having made the rope, installed the sculpture, documented and evaluated the outcome; I can see now that this artwork addresses much more than I had originally intended. It has a ghostly quality that is also melancholic, perhaps a reflection of the considerable pain and distress many materialising mediums experienced as a result of their physical and mental exertions as they regurgitated cloth, cotton wool and animal intestines through mouth, nose, ears and vagina in an attempt to mystify increasingly incredulous audiences (Warner, 2006, p.288). There is also the more obvious reference to some women's need to escape domestic violence and abuse, or in less extreme situations, to escape the drudgery and boredom of home life or the monotony of caring for small children. But there is also the need to escape the confines of proscribed femininity.¹⁷ *Feminist Escape Route* also enacts Mahon's (2017) analysis of Schneemann's performative work as domestic mess, an intersubjective and interobjective revelation of the domestic body materialised through the performativity of artist as conjuror, net curtain and

¹⁷ As analysed in chapter three of this thesis.

small woven basket. And although there is no female body directly in evidence in this work, she has perhaps disappeared in a manner not dissimilar to Sliwinska's (2016) anorexic aesthetics where the desire to escape the polarities of the feminine and the masculine, of negation and elimination, produces 'the ghost body' (Sliwinska, 2016, p.122). In *Feminist Escape Route* both the title and the manner in which the net curtain rope is installed in the gallery space implies that the feminist subject makes her escape by climbing either up or down the rope in a transgressive **act of misdirection.**

Hidden: Disorder and Deceit



Figure 47, Paula Chambers, *Hidden* (2015). Curtain, paper, sound file. Dimensions variable. Photograph by the artist

In my installation work *Hidden* (2015) (see figure 47), there is an allusion towards the unspoken narratives of poltergeist phenomena and materialising séance. I was considering the sleight-of-hand required to move furniture and other domestic objects, the misdirection, careful timing, planning and preparation, and perhaps too an ability to respond to the needs and desires of others. I imagined girls hiding behind doors, listening for retreating footsteps, I imagined the careful setting up of lengths of cotton tied to chair legs, of objects removed in secret, then replaced 'uncannily' where least expected, whispered conversations, visits to the local library to research poltergeist phenomena and the tricks of secular magic. Is this

what girls who instigate poltergeist phenomena do? We do not know, they will not say, but it is known that spiritualist mediums had an underground network that passed information in a similar mode to the information gathered on sitters by clairvoyants for the purpose of cold reading (before the invention of the magical technology of the Internet that is) (Brown, 2006, p.341). *Hidden* makes reference to this unseen and unspoken knowledge, the secret and illicit tactics of the misdirection of agency, the secular magic of girls and young women as they absent the self in performative strategies of dissenting femininity.

Hidden consists of a large vintage curtain sourced from the world's best flea market in the Place du Jeu de Balle in Brussels; the slightly soiled beige synthetic fabric is printed with large leaves in various unpleasant shades of green and brown.¹⁸ The curtain hangs against the gallery wall, ending about eighteen inches from the ground. From beneath the curtain appears a photographic image of a pair of female legs; black and white and printed onto paper, these legs seem both insubstantial and reassuringly sturdy. The original owner of the legs was in fact Francesca Woodman; sourced from Google images, I was unaware of this fact until downloading the image to print; it seemed apt (and slightly uncanny) to use Woodman's legs for this work. Woodman has become best known for the series of photographic images of herself taken in derelict houses. Images in which the young and often naked body of the artist appears and disappears, her body dissolving at the edges, the boundary between female body and domestic space becoming unclear (see figures 48 and 49). The house in Woodman's images becomes 'an uncanny structure, at once dead and gone, yet strangely animated and alive: a house as the space of disorder rather than domestic order, of detritus rather than cleanliness and neatness' (Armstrong, 2006, p.350).

Accompanying the curtains and legs installed as *Hidden* is a sound file of a woman running away and slamming a door, the sound fading in and out as the viewer approaches the work. The sound file is ghostly and has the quality of the supernatural, specifically as presented within the genre of horror film, perhaps one of breaking and entering as referenced in the occult possession film (Clover, 1992, p.82). The choices of material and context are very deliberate here, Woodman's

¹⁸ The overlooked and undervalued feral objects of the material culture of feminine domesticity are analysed in chapter two of this thesis.

legs make links to 1970s feminist art practice, and to her own use of houses and female bodies as a strategy for exploring the haunted poetics of femininity gone awry.



Figures 48 and 49, Francesca Woodman, (1976) *Space 2* and *House No. 3*.

<https://www.theparisreview.org/blog/2017/01/19/ideas-and-a-new-hat/> and <https://designobserver.com/feature/exposure-house-3-by-francesca-woodman/39152> (accessed 13th October 2019)

The title *Hidden* is ambiguous: the woman whose legs can be seen could be playing a game, the kind of supernatural 'hide and seek' poltergeist agents may or may not engage in. Or perhaps the woman in *Hidden* is hiding from something more threatening, an abusive partner maybe, or a malevolent supernatural presence. *Hidden* references the hidden nature of women's embodied disruptive domestic experiences. Peeren (2013) writes of the need to strategise mediumship's association with the hidden: 'not all that can be seen is considered intelligible and not everything invisible is dispossessed' (p.205). The materialising medium, Peeren proposes, is empowered by invisibility, a process through which 'the indistinct is rich with potential rather than signalling the absence of meaning' (Ibid, p.209). Like Woodman's disappearing female body in both her own photographic images and in *Hidden*, 'her determination to 'haunt this room' indicates a taking control, a re-possession, through the disruptive force of haunting, of the very space that sought to render her invisible-as-inconsequential' (Ibid, p.210). The domesticated body of the medium threatens to exceed both the

normal and the paranormal, the materialising medium's strategies of making the invisible visible (whether intentional or not, supernatural or not) evidence a specific kind of feminine agency that is both subversive and empowering.

The paranormal as that which exceeds the ordinary, is analysed by Munt (2013) as the phenomenal experience of the reality of everyday life, whereby the paranormal is always spatialised, temporalised and politicised. Haunting is nearly always domestic in nature, ghosts appear in houses, yet even the dead it would seem are not immune to the class divides of British society.

All aristocratic houses are replete with a particular and quirky apparition (the posh kind of ghost)... Inhabitants of bungalows usually have to make do with the odd door slamming, lights flickering, and inexplicable noises, due to the nebulous goings-on of a beastly, mischievous and lesser being, the poltergeist. Even the spirit world deals in social capital. (Munt, 2013, pp.19-20)

The materiality of my childhood home also evidenced social class: curtains were sewn by my mother, appliances were out of date and constantly repaired by my father rather than replaced, we even lived in a bungalow! Thus, the curtains behind which Woodman hides in *Hidden* are the materiality of poltergeist phenomena as working class paranormal activity yet are also the material evidence of feminine agency as domestic disruption. Goldman (2014) analyses the relationship between haunting and hysteria, a disease that was historically associated with wandering. The fears of the time associated with gender and class mobility were transferred to the body of the hysteric who wanders beyond the confines of class and gender boundaries (Goldman, 2014, p.212). This wandering above one's station, the wandering of women beyond their allotted place in the domestic sphere was transgressive, it exceeded limits both bodily and socially (Ibid, p.216). The message directed at the lower classes and at women was, 'stay in your place' (Ibid, p.213), yet in poltergeist phenomena, we witness girls, young women, and also furniture, that resolutely refused to stay in its place.

Surface Coverings: The Invisible Made Visible



Figures 50, 51, and 52, Becky Beasley, *Surface Coverings (The Feral Works)* (2004-6) Available at: <https://azurebumble.wordpress.com/2010/11/27/becky-beasley-surface-coverings-the-feral-works/> (accessed 7th July 2018)

Becky Beasley's photographic series of items of furniture covered by stiff cloth titled *Surface Coverings (The Feral Works)* (2004-6) (see figures 50 – 52) also presents hidden narratives of the domestic, the images having the uncanny quality of being both dead and gone, yet also strangely animated and alive. And although Beasley's images contain no actual female body, the items of furniture that are partially hidden by stiff dark cloth stand in for the body of a woman in a manner that reminds the viewer of the cultural alignment of femininity to that of the domestic sphere (Sidlauskas, 1996).¹⁹ The items of furniture are ambiguous, some hide their form better than others – a metal frame chair back appears in one image, the legs of a kitchen stool in another, one is obviously a table – but several seem deliberately obtuse, a visual trick conceived to distract the viewer, like the spirit cabinets or curtained enclosures that hide materialising mediums as they manifest spiritualist phenomena, or perhaps like the uncanny masquerade of femininity itself. The cloth too has an ambiguous quality, and although a later image references towel in its title, *Stool/Towel* (2006), the dark and damaged cloth appears too weighty and inflexible to be any kind of towel one would want to dry oneself with. Beasley herself describes this body of work as 'the form of an ongoing and experimental archive of encounters in the guise of photographs of objects', going on to add 'it is that from time to time something may erupt through the

¹⁹ As analysed in chapter three of this thesis.

surface of the day and reveal, in its mute manner, the real which is both more and less real than previously anticipated' (Beasley, 2006). The grainy black and white quality of the images of *Surface Coverings* has a direct visual reference to Victorian spirit photography, a technology perceived at the time as one where 'the light waves of the ether – and the interpreter became one and the same' (Warner, 2006, p.221). Psychic photographers believed that the preservation of light traces as materiality offered by this new technology guaranteed a truth, and that 'the camera could verify that something had really happened' (Ibid, p.222). As a consequence, photography became the primary tool of both the domestic séance and the psychic investigator. In the domestic séance the technology of the camera and the woman who acted as medium often became indistinguishable, the immaterial made material, the invisible made visible. The relationship between women, femininity, spiritualism, and mediumship as manifest through the enchanted technology of photography is one that resonates with the visual qualities of Beasley's *Surface Coverings*, yet also echoes the focus on female/feminine interiority of occult possession films in which the supernatural becomes a psychic space in which the invisible is made visible.

The visual links to Woodman's much earlier house photos produced in the late 1970s, Woodman's partial appearance in *Hidden* made in 2015, and Beasley's *Surface Coverings* made in 2004-6 offers the potential to examine the haunted quality of these works, in relation to Gordon's (1997) conceptualisation of *Ghostly Matters* as allowing for the understanding of the linear notion of time to be questioned. Ghosts produce material effects, Gordon (1997) tells us, they are part of social life, and haunting enables alternative stories to be written about the relationship between power, knowledge and experience. The ghost merges the visible and the invisible, the past and the present (Gordon, 1997, pp.23-4). Armstrong (2006) reminds us that Woodman's ghostly images are full of the resonance of 1970s feminist concerns around women's cultural alignment to the domestic spaces of house and home. Woodman's body appears and disappears in her photographs and reappears in my work *Hidden*. In Woodman's work, boundaries of bodies and spaces are blurred in a manner that suggests a spectral presence; in *Hidden* and *Surface Coverings* the ghostly is more materially present, yet the domestic materiality of all three works made across time is haunted

women's ambivalent relationship with domesticity, Solomon-Godeau (2006) analyses haunting in relation to the production of feminist artwork as 'the conjuring of historical absences and silences' (Solomon-Godeau, 2006, p.373), and that this haunting can be seen as a strategy with which to unearth that which has been hidden or unsaid, a presence in the present of the unredeemed past.

Looking back to the (secular) magical activities of the materialising mediums of spiritualism, and to the context within which these activities took place, where the transgressions of the séance room questioned the confining nature of nineteenth century proscriptive femininity, I am arguing that this supposed supernatural performance is disruptive and dissenting of both femininity and domestic confinement. 'Within the séance, and in the name of spirit possession, women openly and flagrantly transgressed gender norms. Female mediums, with the approval of those present, often assumed... a trance persona which was at total odds with the Victorian idea of respectable womanhood' (Owen, 1989, p.10). Beasley's *Surface Coverings* and my work *Hidden* are artworks haunted by the transgressive activities of spiritualist mediums, and by the uncanny 'disappearing woman' images of Woodman, images that disrupt narratives of time, place and identity. The images of Beasley and Woodman are of enchanted objects and spaces where the magical technology of photography performs the sleight-of-hand of secular magic. *Hidden* also performs as secular magic yet is an artwork that makes more apparent than either Beasley or Woodman the strategies of misdirection undertaken by materialising mediums and the agents of poltergeist phenomena.

Conclusion: Domesticity Gone Awry

The house, as it stands in for the female body, is the historical space within which 'idealised femininity has been ideologically shaped by the domestic sphere and its connotations, while the 'home' is cast as the personal project and reflection of the woman who keeps and runs it (even though she would historically be highly unlikely to own it)' (Kokoli, 2016, p.94). Clover (1992) makes the point that in occult possession films the 'unclean' supernatural entity is banished through a symbolic exorcism, making the comparison that in some films 'the possessed entity is not a person but a house – which can be exorcised in much the same way as a

possessed woman is exorcised, “This house is now clean!” announces the medium Tangina after the exorcism in *Poltergeist*’ (Clover, 1992, p.66, italics in original). But as feminists, do we actually want the house to be cleansed of domestic disruption? In *Feminist Escape Route* and *Hidden*, haunted narratives of the perceived supernatural agency of girls and young women manifest as the materiality of sculpture to perform as the disruption of domestic objects and spaces as a strategy through which escape is made possible. The confinements of proscriptive femininity ‘cannot be treated in the home but only by breaking out of it and taking it down, at the very least as an ideological construct. If the stake is freedom, then there will be no more playing house’ (Kokoli, 2016, p.93).

In *Feminist Escape Route*, *Interior Scroll*, *Hidden* and *Surface Coverings*, the conjuring or sleight-of-hand of secular magic as a subversive strategy of misdirection is materialised as artwork that perform technologies of enchantment. They are artworks that expose the trick or illusion yet are no less marvellous for doing so. All four artworks engage with strategies of making the invisible visible, articulating the feminine interiority of the occult possession film and the abstention of self-thought required for the materialisations of spiritualist mediums. In each artwork the transference of agency from feminine subject to domestic object is performed as the embodied material form of intersubjective and inter-objective social relations. The materialising mediums of late Victorian spiritualism were engaged in ‘inventing new subjects, yet the medium as social subject was empowered by invisibility’ (Peeren, 2013, p.209). *These women* and girls who subversively enacted their discontent through the materiality of domesticity wandered transgressively above their defined social and economic roles. It is my proposition that poltergeist phenomena and the materialisations of spiritualist mediumship are an embodied response by women to their confining social roles and to unequal power relations. Poltergeist phenomena analysed as the feminine agency of domestic disruption materialises the inter-relational and embodied performance of subject and object, ‘the personal clutter, the persistence of feelings, the hand-touch sensibility’ (Schneemann, 2002, p.159) of Schneeman’s domestic mess. *Feminist Escape Route*, *Interior Scroll*, *Hidden* and *Surface Coverings* materialise a specifically feminine haunting whereby, ‘The ghost or the apparition is one form by which something lost, or barely visible, or seemingly not there to

our supposedly well trained eyes, makes itself known or apparent to us' (Gordon, 1997, p.8). These artworks are the material evidence of femininity gone awry, of domesticity gone awry, of things refusing to stay in their place, of transgressive and subversive subject formation acted out as supernatural domestic disturbance. Poltergeist phenomena and the artworks analysed in this chapter materialise Milne's (2004) 'The place where I am when I'm not happening', as the gaps in an ambiguous supernatural narrative, the place of missing explanation.

Chapter Five – Domestic Piracy: Strategies of Feminist Disruption and the Materiality of Dissent



Figure 53, Paula Chambers, *Domestic Front*, (2018). Found furniture, paper, plywood. Dimensions variable. Exhibited at *Home (dis)Comforts*, Dye House Gallery, Bradford, 16/04/18-04/05/18, (front view). Photograph by the artist



Figure 54, Paula Chambers, *Domestic Front*, (2018). Found furniture, paper, plywood. Dimensions variable. Exhibited at *Home (dis)Comforts*, Dye House Gallery, Bradford, 16/04/18-04/05/18, (rear view). Photograph by the artist

Introduction: Why Piracy?

Domestic Front (2016-present) (see figures 53 - 57) is an on-going sculptural installation that performs as a barricade, both visually and literally. This large-scale sculpture – a construction of furniture that I either found or sourced from sites of second-hand exchange – is assembled in the gallery space to reference the kinds of barricades built by resistance groups, such as those constructed by students in the Paris riots in 1968. The majority of the found furniture used to construct the barricade *Domestic Front* was sourced from the street and from the council depot after the devastating floods in Hebden Bridge on December 26th 2015. As the water subsided many householders affected by the floodwater neatly stacked their damaged furniture on the pavement outside their houses, awaiting collection by the local council. During the night, under cover of darkness (the streetlights were also affected by the floods), I drove through Hebden Bridge and ‘collected’ items and objects suitable for my project – technically I stole them.

I argue here for ‘domestic piracy’ as a material-led feminist strategy of non-compliance centred around and within the private realm of home. I see this as a metaphorical strategy, but also as a methodology that women may adopt of domestic material non-compliance: why only spread butter with a knife when it can also be used as a screwdriver, a bread knife can become a lethal weapon, as can an iron, a fire poker, the electric cable from a vacuum cleaner or hair straighteners. Bed sheets become banners for political slogans, and the domesticated home computer is the perfect tool for online protest. Piracy is a criminal act, a practice of robbery, or the illegal copying or use of someone’s product. The scavenged furniture that comprises most of *Domestic Front* was acquired through acts that are technically theft and as such illegal. The images used for the women and girls’ guns figures were also sourced, reproduced and represented without acknowledgement made to their provenance; copyright laws have been flouted; the figures have been produced through acts of Internet piracy. I propose domestic piracy as a development of going feral (as analysed in chapter two of this thesis). Going feral is a boundary practice; it is neither public nor private but an in between process that embraces liminality. Piracy involves acts of transgression in a similar way to that of going feral, as both imply an escape from domination, control and domestication. If law is an instrument of civilisation, a

hierarchy, a regulating power and a homogenising structure, then piracy is lawlessness and unpredictability. Domestic piracy is both domestic and piratical because it takes place in, through and with the stuff of home, and as such is politicised and feminist. Domestic piracy in this context is an intentional strategy of non-compliance and irresponsibility made manifest through the material culture of feminine domesticity.

Domestication can become domestic piracy when unruly and dissenting objects transgress the threshold of the private realm of home to become public and as a consequence politicised. Meskimmon (2011) conceptualises thresholds as transitional spaces where sculptural objects materialise a physical change of state, and proposes these as imaginative spaces of response-ability and responsibility (Meskimmon, 2011, pp.35-36). Yet I propose that domestic piracy takes place in spaces and through materiality in a manner that often borders on illegality and as such can be seen as strategies of irresponsibility. Domestic piracy as my sculptural art practice embraces the lawlessness of going feral through processes of finding, making and presentation where feral objects both embody and perform Meskimmon's (2011) physical change of state as an escape from the domination of domestication.

Struthers Montford and Taylor (2016) also argue for ferality as a physical change of state, for if heterosexist patriarchy is a process of domestication that involves the taming and breaking of those targeted, and if women have been oppressed through their relegation to the domestic sphere and through the exploitation of their domestic labour they can be seen to have become domesticated. Going feral is an escape from former relationships of domination and control, a process of separation embodied as a physical change of state. Feminist separatism involves withdrawing from certain male-dominated and misogynistic relationships, situations and institutions; feminists make their time, homes and bodies less available to certain people than they did before.

This kind of separation from relations of domination, even while remaining within the dominant society in order to survive, is not unlike the situation of ferals who escaped captivity and direct control of humans, even while they remain in human-built environments and depend on these to survive. (Struthers Montford and Taylor, 2016)

I propose domestic piracy as feminist politics materialised as a private strategy of non-compliance from within the home.

Domestic piracy as a strategy of non-compliance and irresponsibility manifests in *Domestic Front* as the appropriation and transformation of the material culture of feminine domesticity to perform as disruptive of the modernist understanding of women's social, cultural and historical relationship to the domestic sphere. It is my proposition that domestic piracy as sculptural practice materialises the agency of objects and takes a feminist turn to manifest as materiality that has become potentially villainous. Piracy is a practice of 'operating in that grey zone that exists between the gaps left open by various rules, laws and technologies' (Graziano, 2018, np), a practice that is increasingly being adopted by a range of organisations and social groups in order to circumnavigate bureaucratic restrictions. *Domestic Front* and the sculptural and material objects analysed in this chapter are works that were produced through strategies of material engagement that operate in the gaps left open by law. The objects, images and actions of these artworks were all sourced and/or performed through acts that are technically illegal. The domestic materiality of these works embody non-compliance and irresponsibility as a specifically femininised articulation of anarchistic freedom, the freedom to manipulate and manifest materiality outside and beyond the restraints and constraints of domestication, outside and beyond the restraints and constraints of the law.

I propose domestic piracy as a boundary practice, a material-led feminist strategy of disruption and dissent. Eckstein and Schwarz (2014) analyse piracy as a boundary practice, stating that it is more useful to think about pirates in terms of what they do rather than what they are, and that piracy as a strategy enables access to media and forms of material engagement otherwise denied to many who are othered by modernity. Although Eckstein and Schwarz are discussing the postcolonial other, I would add gender to their piracy agenda also:

buccaneering also institutionalised some of the first distinctive counter-cultures of modernity, crucially destabilising the modern identitarian politics of nation, class, capital, religion or race by creating limited social

spaces which, if only temporarily, established an alternative ethic and an alternate mode of being. (Eckstein and Schwartz, 2014, p.10)

My engagement with the materiality of found domestic objects in *Domestic Front* and other works is a piratical practice, the sourcing and repurposing of goods that have been cast out or given away, objects that have outlived their original consumers, is both a reclamation of the materiality of home, and a radical intervention into the cycle of production and commodity biographies (Crewe and Gregson, 2014), it is also a practice that often borders on illegality. This chapter analyses how and why domestic piracy can be a strategy for feminist politics and for the production of art informed by feminism, specifically sculpture made from found domestic objects. I contextualise piracy as a practice that offers access to commodity culture for those othered by society and analyse the concept of piracy as a boundary practice as a feminist strategy of irresponsibility, one where resistance and disruption is made manifest through the material culture of feminine domesticity. My sculptural installation *Domestic Front* is analysed as a material manifestation of resistance with political intent as a practice of domestic piracy that makes use of boundaries both as physical obstructions and as conceptual spaces within which resistant actions take place.

The encounter with *Domestic Front* in the gallery is disruptive; the sculpture is constructed in such a way as to partially inhibit the viewer's interaction with the work in the space. In its different configurations, the sculpture divides the space, situated too close to walls or doors, and as such requires the viewer to negotiate the work and the space in a manner that prompts an embodied response to the objects of *Domestic Front*. The manner of this method of installation blatantly flouts accessibility regulations which state that a 1.5 metre corridor should be allowed at all times for ease of access for wheelchair users and others with mobility issues. The partially restrictive interaction required through negotiation with *Domestic Front* in a gallery situation is performative and performed by the viewer, and by me as artist during the construction processes required to build the work. The performativity of found objects in their role as sculpture and installation materialise relational sociality, 'It is exactly its potential for staging a social situation that makes contemporary artists interested in sculptural installations. At the same time, as a prop, the object does more than delineate an architecturally

determined space, a stage' (Pil and Galia Kollektiv, 2010, np). In the gallery space *Domestic Front* performs as a barricade that is both protective and defensive yet is also spatially disruptive in its transgression of accessibility laws. As an act of domestic piracy, *Domestic Front* is a sculptural work that materialises feminist social relations of dissent as irresponsibility.

The domestic objects of *Domestic Front* do not stand alone: the sculptural barricade is 'manned' or infested with ninety-five paper and plywood cut-outs of images of women and girls with guns. These little doll-like figures swarm over the sculpture as if protecting or defending the domestic realm. The images of the women and girls with guns were all sourced from various online media sites, copied and printed out without acknowledgement to IP and copyright laws, then pasted to their plywood stands. Grounded in an analysis of my own sculpture *Domestic Front*, I will be applying the agency of piracy, both as metaphorical concept and as an anarchistic practice of irresponsibility, to how revolting objects and other material strategies of resistance can be analysed in relation to piratical practices. I analyse the specific materiality of this artwork through the application of concepts developed out of the study of Internet piracy and the creative commons. Contemporary piracy, made manifest through illegal online file sharing, is contextualised here as a politically subversive practice of open access creativity that resonates with other forms of resistant material engagement, such as squatting, guerrilla gardening and street piracy. As such, contemporary piracy can be seen to be an activity that occupies the undomesticated boundary spaces of the economic underclass (Liang, 2010) and is applied here as a concept with which to analyse the theft of objects, the appropriation of online imagery and the piratical strategies of sourcing the abandoned and cast out domestic objects that make up the sculpture *Domestic Front*.

Domestic piracy as a strategy of non-compliance is also evident in the materiality of the neon-coloured balaclavas worn by the Russian feminist performance group Pussy Riot (2012-to present) and is analysed in this chapter as a strategy of material engagement as feminist political practice. Cecilia Vicuña's *A Journal of Objects for the Chilean Resistance* (1973-4) is analysed here as a political project that engages with the agentic material qualities of the liminal status of found

objects. Vicuña's intention that the small sculptures that make up this body of work stand as talismans against oppression is contextualised as a materially magical practice that utilises the symbology of **waste aesthetics**. **The revolutionary** intentions and illegal actions of both Pussy Riot's balaclavas and Vicuña's small subversive sculptures are read as the material evidence of these piratical boundary practices as both undermining the intentions of repressive and domineering political regimes in many ways similar to that of Internet piracy.

Domestic Front: The Barricade



Figure 55, Paula Chambers, *Domestic Front* (2018) Found furniture, paper, plywood. Dimensions variable. Exhibited at *Home Strike*, l'étrangère, London, 08/03/18-09/04/18, (front view). Photograph by the artist



Figure 56, Paula Chambers, *Domestic Front* (2018) Found furniture, paper, plywood. Dimensions variable. Exhibited at *Home Strike, l'étrangère*, London, 08/03/18-9/04/18, (rear view). Photograph by the artist

Domestic Front (see figures 53 - 57) is a sculptural installation that materialises domestic piracy as a disruptive strategy of feminist non-compliance and irresponsibility. Infested by the figures of women and girls with guns, *Domestic Front* references the kind of barricades built by resistance fighters as an obstruction prohibiting access to an area of refuge or safety. Resistance fighters are usually a community of underground renegades, not part of an official or established group in relation to power structures; they have a piratical ethos and operate outside of societal norms, the transitional space of the boundary practices identified by Eckstein and Schwarz (2014). Resistance fighters' relations with material culture are equally transitional – they may have to be resourceful when constructing defensive barriers or barricades. Furniture found on the street or in abandoned buildings can be extremely useful for building barricades. Tables, sofas, bed frames and chairs, when stacked up and interlocking, can form a surprisingly sturdy temporary wall to hide behind or to lay ambush, and an impediment to the advance of enemies and attackers.²⁰ Barricade building is itself a domestic practice

²⁰ The student riots in Paris in 1968 made successful use of furniture barricades to block access to the authorities and French police during the occupation of the universities (Duigan, 2017). As did the resistance fighters in the Paris insurgency of 1832, made famous in film and theatre adaptations of *Les Misérables*, (Victor Hugo, 1862) where barricades made of wood and furniture were set up in the Les Halles area of Paris in order to stop the military advance (Haven, 2012).

that makes use of the everyday objects of material culture: 'The re-use of easily accessible objects, like the shipping barrels composing nineteenth-century barricades (from *barrique*, French for barrel), implicate these objects in unfinished dialectics of social struggle' (Flood and Grindon, 2015, p.14, italics in original). The implication of the domestic objects in activist strategies of resistance imbues them with an agency specific to their materiality. Tables, sofas, bed frames and chairs enact strategies of resistance in their own right.

My sculptural barricade, *Domestic Front*, references historical practices of barricade building of course, but also something more. The specific use of feminised furniture, ironing boards, coffee tables, kitchen stools, play pens and cot frames, all low-end consumer objects of an era analogous with the period of my own adolescence (the late 1970s), the overlooked objects of gendered modernist design history (Sparke, 1995), implies a specifically domestic resistance, the kind women might undertake if they were threatened in their own homes. The use of out of date domestic objects adds a misplaced nostalgic resonance to the sculptural barricade, for these objects were never the desirable commodities of the middle class, but rather items purchased for utility or frivolity, traits attributed to the feminisation of home.²¹ On a very real level, a woman or girl under attack from an abusive partner or family member may well lodge a chair or table under a door handle to prevent access to her place of hiding by the potential attacker. In science fiction and post-apocalyptic media genres, a barricade of furniture and domestic objects often plays a role in the fortress building of those perceived to be under threat of attack or exposure (in *Shaun of the Dead*, 2004, dir. Edgar Wright, and *Night of the Living Dead*, 1990, dir. Tom Savini, for example). The theatricality and/or narrative intentions of the kind of barricade building depicted in these genres requires the furniture and other domestic objects to play an active role in the plot, they become agentic actants in these kinds of domestic dramas, whether real or fantastical. *Domestic Front* then, is a sculptural installation that enacts narratives of threat, of attack and defence, and asks, under what circumstances might women and girls feel the need to build such a barricade in their own home?

²¹ See chapter one of this thesis for more detailed analysis of feminine material culture.

Domestic Front can also be analysed as a material performance of **domesticity in extremis, made manifest** through materiality often encountered in the marginal spaces of urbanity, the very spaces positioned as dystopian by political parties then and since; ‘a consensus emerged that council estates were abject border zones within the state which were not only *liminal* with regard to wider societal norms and values but were actively *antisocial spaces*’ (Tyler, 2013, **p.160, italics in original**). **Spaces Tyler (2013)** identifies as ‘those border zones within the state, in which the overwhelming imperative is not transgression, but survival’ (Ibid, p.4), the practice of survival as economic necessity is one of piracy, and the materiality of this boundary practice is domestic.

Boundaries, Thresholds and Liminality



Figure 57, Paula Chambers, *Domestic Front*, (2016). Found furniture, paper, plywood. Dimensions variable. Exhibited at *In Dialogue: Made of All Work*, Bowery, Leeds, 06/08/16-21/10/16. Photograph by the artist

The positioning of my barricade of found furniture within the gallery space to intentionally disrupt the viewing experience of the visitor is intended to prompt questions as to why and in what circumstances one might feel the need to construct such an obstruction. The furniture and other domestic objects, manifest

here as sculpture/barricade, take on an active role in the viewer's gallery encounter, they become the key players in a potential and imagined domestic drama. Meskimmon (2011) analyses the role of domestic objects as installation as an experience that requires full bodily engagement from the viewer, one that triggers both body memory and semantic memory, 'We recognise the found objects and recall domestic interiors, we circumnavigate the installation through our habitual knowledge of the scale and mass of the doorways and the furnishings' (Meskimmon, 2011, p.37). Meskimmon suggests that these types of installation are not static, that the requirement to navigate an installation in and through space, the encounter with the everyday object in a state of transformation, engenders attention to absolute detail and as such 'materially locates us' (Ibid, p.40). *Domestic Front* in its role as sculpture enacts these narratives of encounter as both relational – the viewer's inability to move freely around the space is directed by the work itself – and as anti-relational 'where objects are seen to stage their own theatrical experiences, performing themselves without requiring the activation of a viewer's body' (Pil and Galia Kollektiv, 2010). This imbuing of objects with agency specific to their materiality enables objects to act as independent agents and to take on roles otherwise performed by human bodies. The boundary status of the objects that form *Domestic Front* bring to light the specific agency of marginal materiality, as discussed earlier, including the social abjection of these relational and biographical objects, in particular their domestic and feminised materiality. These objects perform narratives of disruption that are transgressive of their material resonance as feminine objects.

Boundaries materialise in *Domestic Front* both physically and metaphorically. The liminal status of the found furniture that makes up the barricade, and the unsettling proliferation of the little figures of women and girls with guns who 'man' the barricade – possibly defending, possibly attacking – appear as objects that destabilise culturally recognised forms of gendered warfare, a visual undermining of modernist identity politics in line with Eckstein and Schwarz's (2014) identification of piracy as a boundary practice. Whilst both boundaries and thresholds are liminal, they differ in their manifestation – boundaries are demarcated lines or zones (conceptual, metaphorical, physical or legal) that can be transgressed, thresholds are transitional states or spaces that offer an in-

betweenness that implies an active change from one state or space to another. As analysed in chapter two of this thesis, threshold spaces as written about by Douglas (1966) are spaces of potential danger where things are neither one thing nor another. Meskimmon's (2011) threshold spaces are transitional states both physically and metaphorically. Boscagli (2014) proposes waste as the liminal stuff of material culture, where objects occupy the transitional space between desirability (the commodity fetish) and object death (landfill), a current concern at a time when it is now recognised that landfill has wider ecological implications. In a similar manner to Meskimmon's (2011) threshold spaces, the found object performing as sculpture embodies uncertainty, 'proximate, visceral encounters at the limits of sensibility' (Meskimmon, 2011, p.36) and as a consequence the potential threat Douglas (1966) identifies as 'Danger lies in transitional states; simply because transition is neither one state nor the next, it is undefinable' (Douglas, 1966, p.116). *Domestic Front* materialises these threshold spaces identified by Douglas and Meskimmon, as a sculptural installation that is at once a physical obstruction and a psychological threat, as such becoming a space of potential danger, yet it is also an object that through its disruption of domestic materiality confronts the viewer with a sense of 'not being at home'.

If piracy can be seen as a transitional state, one that operates on the inarticulate boundaries of consumer culture and as such undermines the modernist imagination whilst acquiring the power attributed to threshold states and spaces; it is my proposition that the notion of piracy as a boundary practice that inhabits the threshold spaces of law and bureaucracy can be applied to artworks and sculpture made from found domestic objects that perform the dissenting materiality of political feminism – what I term domestic piracy. There are distinct parallels here between the liminality of trash/garbage as liminal materiality and piracy as a boundary practice, as both threaten the stability of cultural practices economically and metaphorically. The liminal status of the found object threatens and disrupts – 'all margins are dangerous. If they are pulled this way or that the shape of fundamental experience is altered. Any structure of ideas is vulnerable at its margins' (Douglas, 1966, p.145). The found domestic object shares many of the piratical qualities of the boundary object, the stuff of consumer culture made unruly through its lingering presence and refusal to go away, the vulnerable

material presence of a discarded and unwanted relationality. The sofa on the street, for example, upsets our understanding of the relational context of the private domestic sphere and as such becomes resonant of the social abjection associated with a 'feral underclass' (Tyler, 2013). Occupying the threshold space between public and private, the sofa on the street is both corporeal and affective, its materiality requires sensory negotiation and as such it materialises rather than represents thresholds, it does not depict memory, trauma and the body, but performs them (Meskimmon, 2011, p.37). These cast out or abandoned objects operate on the margins of sociality, the border zones of subject and object where materiality becomes the stuff of moral disgust. The found domestic object exudes the disturbing potential to return to its previous habits and habitus yet with memories and experiences that will persist and affect its mode of being in the world, it may never be fully re-domesticated. As sculpture, the found domestic object performs the uncanny remembering of its previous existence as a consumer object, it stages the social situations identified by Pil and Galia Kollektiv (2010), through its boundary status as garbage, its materialisation of abject social relations, and of its present transformative state of being as sculpture.

The found domestic objects that make up the barricade of *Domestic Front* present ambiguous commodity biographies: many are worn and broken through (mis)use, some required cleaning prior to their repurposing as sculpture. All had been 'rescued' from a state of abjection, a state that mirrors perhaps the moral disgust previous owners experienced upon the realisation that these objects no longer served the relational domestic function of their original intention. Like subjects who exist on the margins of social respectability, these disorderly domestic objects – matter out of place, or matter out of control – materialise an abject subjectivity that Tyler (2013) describes as 'to be one who repeatedly finds herself the object of the other's violent objectifying disgust' (p.4), and as such 'If disgust is a reaction to the imagined over-proximity or intrusiveness of the disgusting thing, it creates (or attempts to create) boundaries and generates distance' (Ibid, p.22). Thus, the found domestic objects of *Domestic Front* can be seen to be a material rehabilitation of the boundary spaces of **social abjection**.

The Magic of Infinite Reproduction



Figures 58 and 59, Paula Chambers, *Domestic Front*, (2016) (detail – The women and girls with guns). Found furniture, paper, plywood. Dimensions variable. Exhibited at Transcendental Housework, Stockport Art Gallery, 16/01/16-27/02/16. Photograph by the artist

The barricade component of *Domestic Front* does not stand alone: ninety-five doll-sized paper and plywood cut-out figures of women and girls carrying guns occupy this sculptural installation (see figures 58 and 59). These little figures, ranging in height from 8cm to 35cm, are freestanding objects able to be placed differently each time the barricade is constructed. The images of the women and girls were all sourced from online media pages, Google images, Facebook and other specialist sites, and were reproduced without acknowledgement of IP or copyright laws. The images cover a spectrum of genres and situations from historical figures such as Annie Oakley and Bonnie Parker, characters from film and fiction, like Princess Leila and Ripley from *Alien*, contemporary freedom fighters from Columbia,

Kurdistan and Nigeria, US gun club members and ordinary women sporting their guns as part of the 'open carry' movement.²²

The relationship between magic and the mimesis of reproduction as argued by Taussig (1993) is one in which humans adapt themselves to their environments through bodily acts of assimilation. These processes of mimicry blur the distinction between self and other and as such break down subject/object hierarchies.

Mimetic excess, Taussig writes, is 'the power to both double yet double endlessly' (1993, p.255), this infinite reproduction of things he surmises can be seen to be magical due to 'the power of the copy to influence what it is a copy of' (Ibid, p.250). Infinite reproduction is magical, Taussig argues, because, 'The wonder of mimesis lies in the copy drawing on the character and power of the original, to the point whereby the representation may even assume that character and that power' (1993: p.xiii).

The multiplicity of the doll-like figures of women and girls with guns resonates with the agency of magic on many levels. On an autobiographical level, as a girl I was convinced my toys came alive at night and led secret lives, undertaking all the adventures and experiences I projected onto them during the daytime when they existed in their inanimate state – this is a childhood fantasy shared by many, I now realise, exploited to great effect in many children's films, not least Disney/Pixar's *Toy Story* franchise (1995 to 2019).²³ My cut-outs of women and girls with guns also reference the Cottingley Fairies, an extraordinary true story of two girls who fooled many into believing there really were fairies at the bottom of the garden by photographing paper cut-outs of fairies from children's books.²⁴ In light of

²² The use of images that could be perceived to be pornographic in any way was studiously avoided due to the over-sexualisation of the gun as a phallic substitute. This was at times a tricky endeavour, as when you type 'women with guns' in a Google search nearly all the images that appear are of scantily clad young women – mostly white, holding weapons in sexually suggestive poses. The intention of *Domestic Front* was to open questions about the forms that women's domestic resistance might take, not to re-present the female body as sexualised object or the woman with gun as an idealised male fantasy.

²³ The animistic understanding of the agency of objects is analysed in more depth in chapter one of this thesis.

²⁴ In 1917 in Cottingley near Bradford in England, Elsie Wright aged sixteen and Frances Griffiths aged nine took two initial photographs of Frances allegedly posing with fairies, the girls took a final three images of the fairies in 1920. After investigation by photographic technicians who stated that the images could not be fakes, those who believed the 'proof' of the photographs took them to be evidence of psychic phenomena. Edward Gardner, leading member of the Bradford Theosophical

Taussig's (1993) proposition that the copy of a copy has magical qualities in and of itself, and that it is this very quality that offers the potential for politicised disruption, I propose that the potential of infinite reproduction offered by online digital media is both a political act and a magical act, even if in many cases is in fact technically illegal.

Maybe the doll-like figures who 'man' the barricade *Domestic Front* inhabit the spaces of mimetic excess, they are reproductions of reproductions, a feminisation of the materialisation of the zeros and ones that make up the binary code that manifests on our computer screens as digital images. Taussig (1993) would seem to be saying that they are no less real than the original women and girls who were photographed, whether that be Bonnie Parker in 1933 (now long dead) or the women who posted open carry images on Facebook in 2016. The images of women and girls with guns, presented as the potentially magical objects of reproduction, have piratical intent, the objects themselves imbued with something of the original women who defy feminine stereotypes through the defiant act of carrying a gun (and in some circumstances actually using one with deadly outcomes). The processes of reproduction, and of their presentation as doll-like figures, also has the uncanny qualities of sympathetic magic.

Internet Piracy and the Creative Commons

The decision to 'steal' the images of women and girls with guns from online media sources was an intentional disruptive strategy of Internet piracy. As a utopian ideal, the World Wide Web was originally intended by creator Tim Berners-Lee in 1989 to be a universal platform for the free sharing of information, the creative commons. Yet copyright laws and the application of intellectual property (IP) rights to images and information has led to online material becoming a commodity to be consumed by the masses in a similar manner to that of any other material goods or services. As a consequence, free file sharing and the copying of online material has become subject to laws and regulations that often prohibit the

Society believed that the girls had been able to 'materialise them (the fairies) at a density sufficient for their images to be recorded on a photographic plate' (Smith, 1997).

creative and innovative potential of much of the material seemingly available.²⁵ In theory, but perhaps not in practice, digital technologies offer the possibility of costless reproduction, a royalty-free technology that could be easily adopted by anyone.

Internet piracy undermines and subverts commodity culture by operating as a free exchange of culture and information. People sharing files online do not see this as theft, but rather as part of a free and participatory aspect of new media culture, as an equality of material distribution. Mylonas (2012) defines online piracy as follows: 'The term piracy is a metaphor describing informal uses of media, technology, and products of intellect that cannot be controlled by the industry, the market, copyright security code, or law' (Mylonas, 2012, p.710). He sees Internet piracy and free online file sharing as part of everyday life and communication practices. These types of (technically illegal) everyday communication first became apparent in the 1980s and 90s with the practice of home taping music and video recording films. Much of the Internet piracy practiced now is of a similar vein, with the torrenting of films, music and digital games, and the use and reproduction of images for creative purposes being the primary forms this kind of IP theft takes.

That the main form of Internet piracy takes place within the home is of relevance here, free file sharing is most often intended for personal use and consumption, and as such can be seen as a domestic practice. Liang (2010) states that the vast majority of media piracy takes place in the 'illegal city', the domestic spaces of migrants, illegal immigrants, the disposed and the economic underclass. This domesticated space is neither tame nor comfortable, nor does it fit the modernist narrative of home. Problematizing these boundary spaces within which the practice of piracy operates, Liang (2010) suggests that,

Rather than looking at the neat spaces created by the opposition between the 'legal' and the 'illegal', it might be more fruitful to consider the spaces in which piracy plays itself out, the transforming urban landscapes and the specific histories of the nooks and crannies that render this space an illegal one (Liang, 2010, p.60)

²⁵ In the UK copyright law is held under the 1988 Copyright, Designs and Patents Act and can be applied to the copying, appropriation or theft of online and digital material in the same way as it is to material objects (UKCS, 2017).

The decision to 'steal' online images of women and girls with guns as the materiality with which to 'man' the barricade *Domestic Front* is one of intentional piracy, a subversive act that disrupts narratives of domesticity and commodity culture, joining the renegade band of online Internet pirates who operate in domesticated cyberspace. Online piracy and its relation to the creative commons is a boundary practice, a practice I propose is also evident in the women and girls with guns of *Domestic Front* and in feminist art making materialised as strategies of domestic disruption, the domestic piracy of this project.

Pussy Riot: The Materiality of Dissent



Figure 60, Pussy Riot's balaclavas. Available at:

<https://www.theguardian.com/books/2014/jan/24/pussy-riot-behind-balaclava>
(accessed 28th December 2018)

The politically resistant potential of the materiality of both the women and girls with guns figures, and of the found furniture and domestic objects that perform as the sculptural barricade *Domestic Front*, has parallels in other feminist artworks that can be seen as manifestations of piracy as a boundary practice, an intentional anti-commercial and anti-establishment creative strategy. Pussy Riot²⁶ are a group

²⁶ The following section on the dissenting materiality of Pussy Riot's balaclavas appears in full as a chapter in *Feminist Art Activisms and Artivisms* (Chambers, Paula (2020) *Materialising Dissent: Pussy Riot's Balaclavas, Material Culture and Feminist Agency*. In *Feminist Art Activisms and Artivisms*. Deepwell, Katy (ed.) Amsterdam, Valiz).

of young Russian women who first came together in 2010 as a political performance group that operated as a feminist punk band. Their intention was to highlight, through direct action performances, the social injustices and corruption of the Russian governmental system. The group is collaborative and open to all who share the Pussy Riot ethos and as such consists of an ever-changing line-up who all remain anonymous behind their homemade balaclavas (see figure 60). On 21st February 2012 Pussy Riot were famously arrested for staging a direct action in the Cathedral of Christ the Saviour in Moscow.²⁷ The wearing of brightly coloured balaclavas was an activist strategy and a symbolic act of political resistance.

In her account of the rise and subsequent arrest and trial of Pussy Riot, Gessen (2014) explains the decision of the group to adopt the balaclava as a strategy both of anonymity to avoid arrest and to allow for an ever-changing line-up of members where individual identification was discouraged, but also as a kind of visual symbol for the group's intention and purpose. Gessen says,

First they came up with wearing balaclavas, which would make them anonymous – but not like the Russian special forces, who kept their identities hidden behind black knit face masks with slits for the eyes and mouth, but like the opposite of that: their balaclavas would be neon-coloured. (Gessen, 2014, p.69)

The use of brightly coloured outfits for the purpose of feminist protest is a material strategy adopted by other women's activisms as well, with the wearing of pink Pussy Hats at the Women's March on Washington in January 2017 being one example of what has become known as 'tactical frivolity' (Kingsmith, 2016). Tactical frivolity involves the wearing of pink and sparkly costumes at protests and demonstrations, where bodily participation in acts of political subversion is both

²⁷ In February 2012 Maria Alyokhina (Masha), Nadezhda Tolokonnikova (Nadya) and Yekaterina Samutsevich (Katya), three of the five women performing in the Cathedral of Christ the Saviour in Moscow that day, were arrested whilst giving a noisy and disruptive (albeit very brief) rendition of their punk prayer 'Mother of God, Chase Putin Away'. Subsequently the three members of the group were tried and convicted in a very public trial. They were charged with hooliganism and blasphemy. However, the media attention this injustice brought to Pussy Riot's case meant that the group attained worldwide attention and became icons of feminism for a generation of young women across the globe. The most striking visual aspect of the women who performed as Pussy Riot – and there could be as many as twelve at some performances – was the wearing of brightly coloured balaclavas (Gessen, 2014).

transformative and liberating. This exaggerated mimesis of femininity, Ruiz argues, evokes the fragility often associated with femininity and as such places responsibility of the protestor's safety in the hands of the authorities (2013, p.273). Ruiz states that masking as a strategy is one that has cohesive qualities; as a material strategy of political protest it 'has utilised both the threatening and the frivolous' (2013, p.273). The mask, Ruiz explains, is not a disguise but a strategy to draw attention, it downplays the role of the individual and foregrounds collective political endeavours, the wearing of masks as a form of political protest signifies **collective identity**. **In this context**, Pussy Riot's balaclavas as objects both threatening and frivolous can be seen to be examples of **tactical frivolity**. **As masks**, Pussy Riot's balaclavas are intrinsically activist objects, they are embodied material objects with political agency that draw attention to and **signify collective identity**. **Pussy Riot's reinvention** of brightly coloured woolly hats as balaclavas, objects more usually associated with undercover crime and violence, disrupts the symbolism of these objects and repurposes them **for feminist use**. **Pussy Riot's performative** actions border on illegality, they are piratical in their irresponsibility; the brightly coloured balaclavas themselves are objects with feminist material agency, they are activist objects that materialise radical strategies of feminist dissent, the material strategy I identify as domestic piracy.

Cecilia Vicuña's Symbolic Objects and the Materiality of Resistance

Cecilia Vicuña's project *A Journal of Objects for the Chilean Resistance*²⁸ (1973-4) is analysed here as liminal materiality performing strategies of domestic piracy as sculpture. Over the period of one year Chilean artist Vicuña made and then exhibited four hundred tiny sculptural objects, objects small enough to travel with her. These small sculptural objects operate as the material evidence of domestic piracy due to Vicuña's strategy of working with stuff she found on the streets or in the landscape. **In a similar manner to my appropriation of found objects for *Domestic Front***, Vicuña engaged in a strategy of sourcing that is technically theft or

²⁸ When Chilean artist Cecilia Vicuña found herself stranded as an exile in London after the assassination of President Salvador Allende by General Pinochet in 1973, she made the decision to more fully develop a project she had been working on from time to time since 1966, that of making small ephemeral sculptures *The Precarious*, a series of very small sculptures and installations made from found objects or rubbish, made in the landscape on the streets or in the studio. When these were made during her period of exile in London they took on a sort of symbolic magical form for Vicuña – like talismans, these objects could be carried in pockets or purses (Lippard, 1997).

looting. Vicuña's intention was that the transformed objects that make up *A Journal of Objects for the Chilean Resistance* stand as talismans of political resistance, they are materiality with the outlaw qualities of garbage with the affect of piratical intent, an undermining of societal norms – or in Vicuña's case, the undermining of right-wing dictatorship, similar to that undertaken by the members of Pussy Riot in their opposition to the Putin regime in Russia forty years later. Vicuña insisted that these objects were in some way magical, a concept that echoes Internet piracy as the infinite reproduction of things where in a transformative sleight-of-hand one becomes many.

Identifying the specific material qualities of objects in their role as activist protest, Flood and Grindon (2015), in their introduction to the catalogue that accompanied the exhibition *Disobedient Objects* at the V&A, contextualise art making strategies as intrinsic to political disobedience. They give the example of *Arpilleras*, the brightly coloured patchwork pictures made by women as a protest against the Pinochet government in Chile, 'Smuggled illegally out of Chile, they use traditional folk arts to simply and honestly make public the regime's torture camps and mass 'disappearances', and tell stories of women's everyday lives and resistance' (Flood and Grindon, 2015, p.11). Vicuña too worked simply and honestly with everyday materials to make public the social injustices of the Pinochet government.

One of the objects exhibited as part of *A Journal of Objects for the Chilean Resistance* stands as a kind of mission statement for the project as a whole (see figure 61). The object consists of a small piece of red cloth, cut roughly from an object or garment. The cloth is stitched to a sheet a paper in large childlike stitches. Typed onto the cloth, Vicuña wrote,

A diary of objects for the Chilean resistance

In June 1973 the c.i.a. the pentagon, the Chilean right wing and part of the army were openly conspiring to overthrow the popular unity government. I decided to make an object everyday in support of the Chilean revolutionary process.

After the coup d'état and Allende's assassination the objects intend to support the popular resistance against the dictatorship.

The objects try to kill three birds with one stone, politically, stand for socialism. Magically, help the liberation struggle. Aesthetically, be as beautiful as they can to recomfort the soul and give strength.

The objects have to be very small in order to travel with me. They are also very precarious, I put them together with what I find, little nails, wool, glue. Looking at them you must always remember I belong to another culture. I have not chosen to stay in England. (Lippard, 1997)

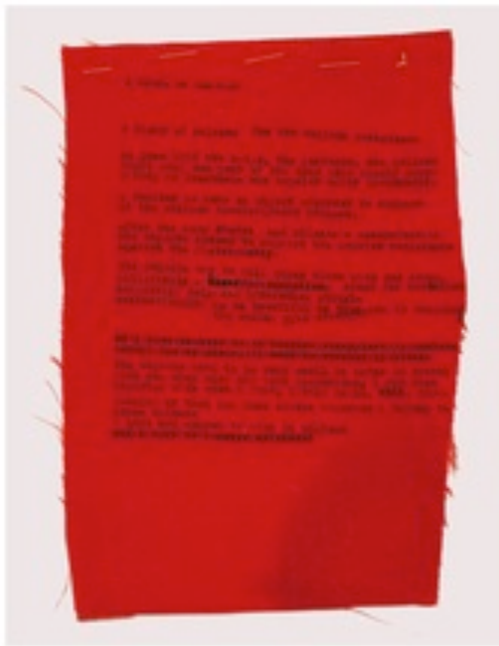


Figure 61, Cecilia Vicuña, *A Journal of Objects for the Chilean Resistance* (1973-4)

Available at:

<http://www.ceciliavicuna.com/objects/vktlmc2ekb3izsjd1n8ir0s0zo116r>

(accessed 28th December 2018)

The use of red cloth is, I imagine, a reference to communism, it may even be a piece of communist flag cut to the small size Vicuña says is necessary in order for the objects to travel with her. There is evidence that this is not a new piece of fabric: the bottom right-hand corner being stained with use or disregard. The small piece of cloth contains many crossed out words and sentences, overtyped as was the practice before digital technologies introduced the word processor. However, this can also be seen as an intentional strategy by Vicuña, part of her manifesto to produce an object a day, hastily, and from whatever materials she had at hand. To have retyped her poem/mission statement without errors would have undermined

her intention. This small piece of brightly coloured cloth may also be a reference by Vicuña to the *Arpilleras* her fellow country women were making as material strategies of resistance, for Vicuña's work too articulates stories of oppression and dissent.



Figure 62, Cecilia Vicuña, *A Journal of Objects for the Chilean Resistance* (1973-4)
Available at: <http://www.ceciliavicuna.com/objects> (accessed 28th December 2018)

Another object in this series is a small sculpture titled *Paño e' Sangre*, which translates roughly as blood cloth or blood rag (see figure 62). The word *Paño* is also used in Spanish in a derogatory manner, along the lines of 'a bit of old cloth', to imply something unwanted, unclean or unhygienic, an object sullied by the stigma of staining identified by Sorkin (2000) and analysed in chapter two of this thesis. The sculpture *Paño e' Sangre* consists of a piece of very fine red cloth that appears to be perhaps muslin, stitched to the side branch of a small woody twig or piece of shrubby plant. The twig is wrapped and bound in hessian string at the point the side branch emerges, in documentary images this sculptural objects is mounted to striking effect, on a piece of what looks like an old wooden door painted white. It is unclear as to whether the sculpture was displayed in this format at the exhibition of *A Journal of Objects for the Chilean Resistance*. As in the previous sculpture analysed, the use of red cloth in *Paño e' Sangre* may reference the communist flag, yet also has the material resonance of menstrual rags. The small scrap of cloth

hangs defiantly from the piece of twig like a flag or signal of its own presence. Like many of Vicuña's earlier landscape installations this sculpture, *Paño e' Sangre*, has the feel of something encountered accidentally, something overlooked yet surprising. Lippard (1997) writes, 'Vicuña has sometimes called her works *basturitas* (little garbages, or rubbish). She uses the word to mean "that which is abandoned. There is something sacred about something totally poor and totally denied"' (Lippard, 1997, p.13). Like Boscagli's (2014) identification of garbage as 'stuff at its most uncertain, vulnerable, and wild' (p.227), Vicuña's use of liminal materiality, stuff on the borders of consumer culture, is both dangerous and potentially disruptive. Yet the defiant flag-like quality of this object and its redness also plays very directly to both communist and feminist political agendas, the red rag signals socialist propagandas yet also the historical practice of putting menstrual rags out to dry. *Paño e' Sangre* is a tiny resistant object, the very materiality of which presents the personal reality of Vicuña's situation as a political exile in London, and of her **embodied womanhood**.

There is a melancholy aesthetic to Vicuña's small sculptures; if they are, as Vicuña' intended, talismans to be carried with her and to remind her of home, then their (intentional) poor quality, the use of abandoned materials and objects, tells us much about Vicuña's relationship to, and understanding of, her exile from Chile. The marginal qualities of garbage as the compromised stuff of consumer culture, is one that can perhaps be aligned to the compromised status of exiled subjects, specifically in this situation, female subjects, the abjected feral underclass identified by Tyler (2013) and analysed in chapter two of this thesis. If, as Boscagli (2014) proposes, the liminality of stuff that exists as garbage is due to its status as that which has dropped out of the networks that give it economic and affective significance, Vicuña's small sculptural objects signify a relationship between body and object that present a dissenting stance where 'the hybridity and liminality of junk allows one to rethink relationally, in a way which situates the object and myself in a multiplicity of relations – perceptual, bodily, affective, economic, individual, collective – with other materialities, people, **discourses, events'** (Boscagli, 2014, p.229). As feminist politics, this multiple relationality of things, the co-implication of subject and object, is materialised in *A Journal of Objects for the Chilean Resistance* as a strategy of active material-led resistance. Vicuña's intention

that the sculptures be small enough to travel with her lends the objects an embodied material agency, as an extension of the artist herself the sculptures become politicised objects. *Vicuña's A Journal of Objects for the Chilean Resistance* materialises domestic piracy both through strategies of sourcing and through *Vicuña's intention for these small sculptures to be politically resistant objects.*

Conclusion: Making Feminist Things Happen

Returning to my own sculptural installation, *Domestic Front*, although this artwork was not produced as a direct retaliatory gesture against a repressive right-wing political regime like that of either *Vicuña's A Journal of Objects for the Chilean Resistance*, or Pussy Riot's balaclavas and direct action performances, it was however conceived and produced as an object of feminist resistance. As domestic piracy, the intentional usage of feminised domestic objects and items of found furniture to construct the barricade materialises as a **strategy of non-compliance and irresponsibility** and is a boundary practice in line with Eckstein and Schwarz's (2014) identification of piracy as a boundary practice. The materiality of the sculptural installation is dissenting, in the liminality of the stuff of its construction, **the illegal strategies of sourcing the objects and images**, and in the mimetic qualities of the women with guns figures who present us with images of a disruptive femininity yet also resonate the uncanniness of the infinite reproduction of sympathetic magic and online piracy. The physical and conceptual process of working with 'stolen' things – be that the found furniture and domestic objects that make up the barricade of *Domestic Front*, or the images of women and girls with guns who so valiantly defend it – materialise **domestic piracy as 'the triumph of disruption'** (Hake, 1988, p.88). *Domestic Front*, *Vicuña's A Journal of Objects for the Chilean Resistance*, and Pussy Riot's balaclavas are all forms of materiality that in their own way perform feminist political strategies that disrupt the processes of domestication through the re-appropriation of the cast out or abandoned liminal stuff of feminine material culture.

Domestic Front, *Vicuña's A Journal of Objects for the Chilean Resistance*, and Pussy Riot's balaclavas are all disobedient objects, their use of appropriated or stolen materials disrupt meaning and context. These sorts of objects are activist 'in the

sense that they are active, bound up with the agency of social change' (Flood and Grindon, 2015, p.15). In these objects, political agency is made manifest through materiality to make feminist things happen and offers the potential to rethink the material culture of feminine domesticity as it performs as sculpture, as the materialisation of feminist agency. Flood and Grindon's (2015) identification of disobedient objects as the materiality through which protest manifests – where everyday objects are appropriated and turned to a new purpose – is one in which we are asked to 'look instead at the range of object-based tactics and strategies that movements adopt to succeed. Its edges remain open to questions. What other forms of agency do these objects involve? Can we identify material points where disobedience begins, or turns into something else?' (Flood and Grindon, 2015, p.11). I propose that domestic piracy has the revolutionary potential to materialise feminist dissent, a strategy whereby 'works of art have the power to articulate against the grain, materialise ideas as yet unthought and, through these means, enable us to conceive the world differently' (Meskimmon, 2011, p.92). The embodied material encounter brings us closer to realising alternate forms of being and to be able to navigate alternate routes and pathways through political matter-scapes as activist feminists in the twenty-first century; to be feminist pirates in a material world.

An Interlude

Folding Chair for the Feminist Resistance (The Narration)

Folding chairs, like women, are mindful of the space they take up. Packed away, flat and hidden, unseen and forgotten until next needed, then, ah ha, that useful folding chair makes a reappearance. In the garden, in the park, for camping, picnics and outdoor parties and festivals. For protests, demonstrations and sit-ins, for squatters and street life, for recreational fishing and other antiquated sporting events, the folding chair has upheld its worth.

Light, portable, functional and convenient, tidy, discreet and user-friendly the folding chair surpasses the more cumbersome traditional deckchair whose renowned complication of construction and heavy wooden frame and canvas seating, has a whiff of awkward masculinity, the stiff-upper-lip of the Edwardian middle-class. Sitting too is ungainly in a deckchair, the hammock-like canvas invites sprawling indignity, the folding chair however, requires the sitter to maintain posture, slender armrests, a sprung seat and upright back provides a contained and proscriptive seated experience.

Like feminism, the folding chair has proved durable and enduring. Fashions and attitudes change, the invention of the ubiquitous moulded plastic chair, most often seen in white, would seem to have usurped the classic folding chair. But wait; a revival, antique shops and vintage stores stock originals in 1960's floral prints. Tesco, Asda, Argos and other low-end shopping emporiums, have also rediscovered the folding chair, in deckchair stripes and plain bold colours, the utilitarian folding chair has made a comeback.

Yet in certain circumstances the folding chair is also unstable; lean too far in one direction or another and it is liable to tip over and dislodge the sitter in what is often a comedy moment. So folding chairs have humour too. Witness the hilarity of Uncle Albert, one moment sitting comfortably, bottle of cheap lager in hand, the next, upon leaning too far to receive a half cooked hot dog, or plate of wilting salad, deposited upon the ground in an unseemly and undignified manner. Nylon shirt and slacks awry, mismatching sports socks and sandals formally unnoticed but now pointing

skyward much to the amusement of previously bored family members. The potential instability of the folding chair is disruptive and unsuspecting, it takes you unawares.

The twenty-first century folding chair now has small metal catches at each side as a safety measure against sudden closure. The chairs from the 1960s and 70s had no such safety measures, they were not so community minded and were known to snap shut suddenly, the spring mechanism ensuring considerable pain and often resulting in trapped fingers and bar-shaped bruises on backs of thighs and backs of heads. One could get stuck in a folded folding chair. Yet the aggressive tendency of the folding chair has not dulled its appeal, in fact the opposite, it almost seems a shame that safety catches have been introduced as the uncertainty of sitting, the added element of potential danger, made the experience of using a folding chair one that could not be taken for granted.

So, like women, the folding chair is not what it might at first appear to be. The slightly prim utility and convenience hides humour and potential danger. There is an autonomy to the adaptability of the folding chair, one that cannot be forced to be what it is not. Time has not relegated the folding chair to quaint nostalgia, nor has it been immortalized as modernist icon. Surpassing class, the folding chair is equally at home sipping Prosecco, at Proms in the Park as it is at a council house back garden barbecue. And like feminism, the folding chair will continue to serve a purpose whilst we still need it; supportive and ultimately portable the folding chair comes with us as we head up the feminist resistance.

Folding Chair for the Feminist Resistance

An analysis of one final artwork, my short film *Folding Chair for the Feminist Resistance* (2017) allows for the sometimes-divergent threads of this thesis to come together to offer the possibility of doing, thinking and making things differently, with the potential for a new materialist feminist becoming. The film – originally made in a PowerPoint slideshow format – depicts a black folding chair with the word FEMINIST stencilled on the back in white, inhabiting a range of seating arrangements, from the formal to the feral. The chair itself was rescued from a roadside collection point. I sprayed the frame black to match the fabric seat and added the stencilled text. The chair was photographed from many angles in a makeshift set-up in my living room and Photoshopped into images of various seating situations I sourced from Google images. The film has an ironic overlaid narration that aligns the ubiquity of the folding chair to the resilience of women as embodied subjects. The folding chair acts as a stand-in for the female (feminist) body yet is also a material embodiment of femininity; to be a feminist in every situation one finds oneself in requires commitment and stamina despite, or perhaps because of, the femininity performed on a daily basis.

Sara Ahmed (2010), in 'Orientations Matter', applies a feminist new materialist critique to a phenomenological and materialist analyses of 'The Table'. She makes the point that 'The Table' of philosophy is a gendered object that makes spectral the domestic labour required to maintain a table for writing. Ahmed writes of the bodily proximity required in order for a table to be fully understood as an object with social, material and affective history. The tables on which feminists write are often those that are used also for eating and preparing food, a worktable for sewing or crafting, for children's play.

Tables for feminist writers might not bracket or put aside the intimacy of familial attachments. Such intimacies are at the front; they are "on the table" rather than behind it. We might even say that feminist tables are shaped by attachments, which effect the surfaces of tables and how tables surface in feminist writing. (Ahmed, 2010, p.253)

In my home, tables also have multiple uses: I write at them, I eat at them, I use them as a surface for making art. My living room table has a fake lace plastic

tablecloth, the tables in both my kitchen and living room are piled with clutter which I work around. As with Ahmed's feminist table, the folding chair of *Folding Chair for the Feminist Resistance* is one in which 'The materialisation of subjects is hence inseparable from objects, which circulate as things to do things with' (Ahmed, 2010, p.249). The feminist folding chair in my film and accompanying overlaid narration materialises Ahmed's understanding that in order for an object to be fully understood one must acknowledge its social, material and affective history.

Conclusion: The Vibrant Life of Objects; a Feminist Proposition



Figure 63, The 'Aladdin' thermos flask and 'Dandycore' mat. (2019). Photograph by the artist

Today (02/07/2019), I received in the post a yellow, red and black woven plastic 'Dandy Cord' mat about 20x60cm in size, and a blue and cream 'Aladdin' thermos flask. These two objects bear the scars of use and misuse: the mat has an ingrained greasy stain and the flask is scratched and discoloured, and the cream top and bottom may once have been white. These are objects that have ambiguous domestic biographies – I do not know who or how many have used them, where or why they were used, yet they resonate an embodied femininity that is at once past, present and future. These two objects will join the hordes of other such misused domestic items that make up the feminist clutter of my home as studio, awaiting activation through their potential performative role as sculpture. As with the vibrant life of objects, this practice-led project has no concise conclusion, but is rather one of many stages in a much more complicated and dynamic cycle of use, reuse and misuse, the entanglement of objects, ideas, bodies and artwork that lead the material-led encounter of this project. In the introduction of this thesis I asked the question, what might a feminist new materialism look like when the focus is on domestic objects, and how can meaning be drawn from these objects when they perform as sculpture? A question I investigated through a methodology of sourcing, making, reading, writing, exhibition and evaluation.

Developing and extending the writing and theories of others in the area of new materialism (Ahmed, 2006; Bennett, 2010; Boscagli, 2014; Coole and Frost, 2010; Miller, 2010), I am arguing for a feminist new materialism made manifest through sculptural art practice that offers new ways of thinking about subject/object relations that feed back into being-in-the-world as embodied experience. As a feminist proposition, new materialist thinking offers the potential to be transformative of the ways in which the material culture of domesticity is understood as vibrant and agentic of a specifically feminine embodied encounter. My reading of new materialism is one that is grounded in the physical, the embodied encounter with the material culture of the everyday, the domestic objects that perform as the sculpture and installation works of my (home as) studio practice. 'Living bodies act not simply or mainly through deliberation or conscious decision but through indetermination, through the capacity they bring to the material world and objects to make them useful for life in ways that cannot be specified in advance' (Grosz, 2010, pp.149-50). The understanding of new materialist thinking that materiality has agency, and as such breaks down the hierarchy of subject/object relations, is one through which the inter-relational and intersubjective encounter between (feminist) artist and domestic object as the *work* of art materialises Dimitrakaki's practices of refusal. Materialisation implies a coming-into-being that is both material and agentic, an active process of making and of making things happen. The indeterminacy of the materiality of both subjects and objects as embodied encounter offers a political challenge to beliefs about human agency and its material practices. The antipathy towards oppositional ways of thinking embedded within new materialist ideas and ways of being involves active processes of materialisation of which embodied humans are an integral part.

Conceiving matter as possessing its own modes of self-transformation, self-organisation, and directedness, and thus no longer as simply passive or inert, disturbs the conventional sense that agents are exclusively humans who possess the cognitive abilities, intentionality, and freedom to make autonomous decisions and the corollary presumption that humans have the right or ability to master nature. (Coole and Frost, 2010, p.10)

Coole and Frost (2010) propose the need for a more phenomenological approach to theories of embodiment, whereby the manner in which bodies discover,

organise, and respond to patterns are corporeally significant, that living matter structures natural and social worlds before, during and after they are encountered by rational actors (p.19). This corporeality is vital for the development of any contemporary political theory, especially so for a feminist politics that sets out to challenge normative assumptions and established structures of power. I have proposed that it is through the *work* of art that just such a feminist political challenge can be materialised.

This practice-led project brings together subject matter, themes, and theories across a range of disciplines (feminist critical theory, new materialist literature, art criticism, anthropology, sociology, design history, phenomenology, literature and popular culture) to present new ideas that offer the possibility of a feminist new materialism as a way of being-in-the-world materialised as sculpture. Developing theories proposed in these writings, I posed new questions that arise from this collaboration of ideas and ask how sculpture and installation can articulate these. I asked how a study of found objects, the material culture of feminine domesticity as it performs as sculpture and installation, might allow for an analysis of the agency of objects, within the context of new materialist thinking, to be investigated as feminist, as activist, as political, as resistant, and as disruptive. The sculpture and installation work that I have produced throughout the duration of this PhD project are intended to perform all of these things, and possibly more. It is through my personal encounters with the found domestic objects that (in)form the basis of my sculptural practice that I investigated the propositions laid out in this thesis. The title of this thesis – *Feral Objects and Acts of Domestic Piracy: Sculpture, Secular Magic, and Strategies of Feminist Disruption* – poses a series of questions investigated in each chapter through an analysis of specific artworks of my own and of those made by other women. The findings from each of the chapters of this project are detailed below in the section sub-titled *Transgressive Objects, Transgressive Subjects*. It is my intention that the entanglement of objects, ideas, bodies and artwork presented here is such that the political imperative of feminist new materialism is enabled through a new understanding of the inter-relatedness of femininity and domestic objects.

Past, Present, Future: Strategies of Feminist Disruption

Dimitrakaki (2013) urges the ongoing critique of feminist art practice; there is an urgent need to look at art history in terms of relations in and of the present as much as with the past she proposes. My practice-led project engages in just such a critique, analysing artworks across generations and geographies, and re-appraising these works within the context of feminist new materialism as embodied materialisations of feminine agency. This project is one that materialises feminine subjects otherwise, one where femininity in the process of becoming-subject is embodied through the intersubjective encounter, where matter and meaning are entangled. As a feminist project made manifest through sculpture and installation created from found domestic objects, the material culture of feminine domesticity, I offer the possibility that feminist new materialist thinking and sculptural making can be at once vibrant, dynamic, hostile, disruptive, resistant, and activist. In my sculptural works analysed in this thesis, the material culture of feminine domesticity as it performs as sculpture tells stories of women's ambivalent relationship to home: these are works of art that materialise through the performative acts of sleight-of-hand, this is art making as a boundary practice – what I term domestic piracy.

An investigation of materiality as vibrant and agentic underpins all areas of analysis in this thesis; in particular the material culture of feminine domesticity as it performs as sculpture. I have demonstrated that specific forms of materiality can be seen to resonate femininity, and that these materials and objects can also be seen as feral (wild, undomesticated and dangerous). Further, that the materialisation of these agentic objects as sculpture and installation articulates in a very real and physical manner a femininity that is dissenting in its very corporeality. As such, the feminist new materialism that I have proposed here is one in which the embodied encounter between (feminine) subject and (domestic) object is disruptive of domesticity itself.

Agency as attributed to both (feminine) subjects and (domestic) objects is a key proposition of this thesis. And whilst new materialist thinking has been useful in defining the intersubjective relationship between subjects and objects, and in how a shared sense of agency forms and informs the material encounter of both, I have

taken this proposition further and argued that an animist way of thinking can materialise as sculpture that is performative of the agency of women and girls where domesticity has gone awry. I have demonstrated that the hostility of objects and the unruly agency of garbage as liminal materiality performing as sculpture is an embodiment of the disruptive agency of women and girls as a feminist strategy of resistance and dissent.

I have demonstrated through a phenomenological analysis that embodied femininity is acquired through material encounters, specifically in relation to intersubjective encounters during girlhood. Highlighting poltergeist phenomena as an agentic form of transference from (feminine) subject to (domestic) object, I have shown that these phenomena can be read as a performative materialisation of an embodied, corporeal feminine discontent. Further, through an analysis of sculpture and installation made from the material culture of feminine domesticity, I have argued that it is through the *work* of art that the embodied discontent of girls and women can be materialised.

I have introduced the concept of secular magic as a way of analysing agency as a specifically feminine and embodied encounter with the material culture of domesticity, demonstrating that poltergeist phenomena in both its understandings as either supernatural or as an act of conjuring, is an intrinsically domestic disruption where the sleight-of-hand of girls and young women is performative of the misdirection also required to produce artwork. I have shown that the materialisation of the work of art can be understood as an act of sleight-of-hand where the artist performs as conjurer, and that such acts are those in which feminine agency performs as misdirection. Further, I have demonstrated that it is through the material culture of feminine domesticity that the supernatural is made manifest.

Importantly, this is a political project, and as such I have argued that new materialist thinking, grounded in the physical (the matter or materiality of both subjects and objects), can be analysed as vibrant or agentic of feminist activism. I have demonstrated that the making of sculpture and installation from found domestic objects is a feminist strategy of disruption and dissent, and that it is

through the *work* of art that activism as domestic piracy is materialised. In this practice-led project, feminist new materialism is the literal materialisation of the embodied feminine encounter with materials and objects with the intention of making **feminist things happen**.

The analysis of poltergeist phenomena is a methodology through which I have presented domestic disruption as the materialisation of embodied feminine discontent. I analyse poltergeist phenomena, interpreted as either supernatural occurrence or secular magic as sleight-of hand, as the method through which specific acts of feminine agency are materialised through domestic **objects and spaces**. **I have demonstrated** that an analysis of poltergeist phenomena integrates theories of objects with agency, feminine embodiment, domestic disruption, and conjuring as the materialisation of sculpture and installation.

Transgressive Objects, Transgressive Subjects

My analysis of six still images from the short film *Folding Chair for the Feminist Resistance* guides the following discussion on the findings of this practice-led project. In relation to the arguments of each of the chapters of this thesis I begin with an introduction to the subject matter through a short analysis of an image from the film that visually summarises uncanny domesticities, feral objects, transgressive materialities, domestic disruption, domestic piracy and doing things otherwise.



Figure 64, Paula Chambers, 'still' from *Folding Chair for the Feminist Resistance* (2017). Uncanny domesticities, the folding chair in Freud's consulting room, Vienna. Photograph by the artist

In the above 'still' from the film *Folding Chair for the Feminist Resistance*, the folding chair is seen in Freud's consulting room in Vienna as it is currently set up for a museum-type visitor encounter. The folding chair appears as an unwelcome intruder, it has transgressed the boundaries of the proscribed visitor experience and sits behind the museum ropes opposite an upholstered chair that perhaps Freud himself once occupied. Is the feminist implied by the chair undergoing psychoanalysis, or is she perhaps confronting Freud with the ambiguities and ambivalences of his psychoanalytic theories?

In chapter one of this thesis I investigated how objects might be seen to have agency, and how the specific qualities of materials and objects lead them to behave or act in specific ways. Through an analysis of my artworks *Kitchen Shanks* (2017) and *Cornered* (2017) alongside Mona Hatoum's *Homebound* (2000), I demonstrated that the uncanny hostility of objects (Calder Williams, 2011) is embodied in the domestic objects of these sculptural works as the materialisation of feminine discontent. Following Pil and Galia Kollektiv's (2010) proposition that sculpture and installation made from found objects is performative in and of itself, and that the vibrancy of objects can be seen as animistic, I demonstrated that found domestic objects tell stories of hostility and malevolence, a proposition that

has uncanny implications for an understanding of women's relationship to domesticity.



Figure 65, Paula Chambers, 'still' from *Folding Chair for the Feminist Resistance* (2017). Feral objects, the folding chair hanging out with discarded chairs in the street. Photograph by the artist

In the above 'still' from the film *Folding Chair for the Feminist Resistance*, the folding chair is seen loitering on the street in the company of other chairs that appear to have been improperly discarded. The folding chair faces its discarded colleagues as if engaging them in conversation, the chairs take on a personality specific to their materiality, they appear animated and autonomous, dangerous and wild, as if they have escaped from the confines of domestication.

Developing my proposition that the material culture of feminine domesticity can be seen to have (hostile, malevolent) agency, in chapter two I investigated the term feral objects as the agency enacted by objects and materials that occupy the boundary spaces of culture and society. Developing Boscagli's (2014) proposition that garbage is the outlaw underside of consumer culture and as such is both wild and dangerous, I analysed my sculptural installation *Runaway Objects* (2017) alongside Lucy Puls' *Ad Hoc Locum* (2004), Tatiana Trouvé's *Untitled (Mattress*

Works) (2009) and Sarah Lucas' *Spinster* (2000), as the materialisation of liminality, thresholds and abjection. I argued that sculpture made from feral objects perform as a materialisation of abject social relations, demonstrating that the materiality of these sculptural works perform the threshold spaces of uncertainty and danger as the embodiment of subjects who may also perform their subjectivities as a boundary practice.



Figure 66, Paula Chambers, 'still' from *Folding Chair for the Feminist Resistance* (2017). Transgressive materialities under surveillance, the folding chair in a Stasi interrogation room. Photograph by the artist

In the above 'still' from the film *Folding Chair for the Feminist Resistance*, the folding chair is seen occupying the position of a subject under interrogation. The material qualities of the room in which the chair finds itself would seem to imply degradation, yet the chair holds its own. Like femininity itself, the folding chair in this image appears as a subject (or object) under surveillance.

Developing my proposition of liminal materiality as feral objects, in chapter three I investigated how embodied femininity effects and affects women and girls'

relationship with material culture. Through an analysis of my artwork *Rupture* (2017) alongside Melanie Bonajo's *Furniture Bondage* (2009) and Susan Hiller's *Psi Girls* (1999) as materialisations of the embodied discontent of girlhood, and through De Beauvoir's (1948) and Young's (2004) phenomenological writing on female embodiment, I demonstrated that it is through the intersubjective relationship between girls and their bedroom things that feminine embodiment is acquired. I proposed that girlhood adolescence is a psychical space of liminality and demonstrated that the embodied discontent of girls and young women perceived as supernatural materialises in poltergeist phenomena as a performative feminine material embodiment of domestic disruption.



Figure 67, Paula Chambers, 'still' from *Folding Chair for the Feminist Resistance* (2017). Domestic disruption and the material culture of feminine domesticity, the folding chair in a 1970s living room. Photograph by the artist

In the above 'still' from the film *Folding Chair for the Feminist Resistance*, the folding chair is seen in an out of date living room. The chair seems materially out of place, as if an unexpected visitor has arrived or a family member whose experience is one of 'not-being-at-home'. The material qualities of this particular living room have the aesthetic of a scene from an occult possession film perhaps. The feminist of whom the folding chair is an embodiment is maybe a spiritualist medium come to exorcise the house, or even the one **supernaturally possessed.**

Developing my proposition that feminine subjectivity is (in)formed through the intersubjective relationship with domestic objects, materials and spaces encountered in girlhood, in chapter four I investigated the relationship between femininity and the supernatural materialised as sleight-of-hand, an act of deception or misdirection as evidenced in poltergeist phenomena and the materialisations of spiritualist mediums. I applied During's (2002) term secular magic, the conjuring or trickery of stage magician, to the proposition that sculpture and installation made from the material culture of feminine domesticity performs as secular magic through its making and its performativity. An analysis of my artworks *Hidden* (2015) and *Feminist Escape Route* (2017), alongside Carolee Schneemann's *Interior Scroll* (1975) and Becky Beasley's *Surface Coverings (The Feral Works)* (2004-6), demonstrated that the acts of deception required for spiritualist and poltergeist materialisations undertaken by women and girls materialise as an embodied femininity that is both disruptive and resistant, that secular magic materialised as artwork performs technologies of enchantment and is agentic of the artist as conjuror.



Figure 68, Paula Chambers, 'still' from *Folding Chair for the Feminist Resistance* (2017). Domestic piracy, the folding chair in a prison visiting area. Photograph by the artist

In the above 'still' from the film *Folding Chair for the Feminist Resistance*, the folding chair is seen in a booth of a high security prison visiting area. There appears to be a narrative of conspiracy, of law breaking and subversion. The concept of crime is perhaps subjective, for we cannot be sure that the bars we see in the image are not in fact reflections, so maybe it is our feminist who has broken the law here after all.

Developing my proposition that secular magic is a form of conjuring or sleight-of-hand is transgressive of both femininity and domesticity, in chapter five I analysed artworks as politically vibrant as evidenced through the form and materiality of their manifestations. Through an analysis of my sculptural installation *Domestic Front* (2017-present), Pussy Riot's balaclavas (2012), and Cecilia Vicuña's *A Journal of Objects for the Chilean Revolution* (1973-4), I propose domestic piracy as a development of Eckstein and Schwarz's (2014) concept of piracy as a boundary

practice as the materialisation of activist strategies of feminist dissent. I analysed these feminist activist objects and strategies of material engagement, demonstrating that it is through materiality that feminist activism is made manifest as domestic piracy.

And So.... Feminist New Materialism as Thinking, Making and Doing Otherwise



Figure 69, Paula Chambers, 'still' from *Folding Chair for the Feminist Resistance* (2017). Doing things otherwise, the possibility for change, the folding chair in an outdated works canteen. Photograph by the artist

In the above 'still' from the film *Folding Chair for the Feminist Resistance*, the folding chair is seen occupying a place at the table of an outdated works canteen. The other chairs in the room have a masculine material aesthetic, a sort of sleazy brown vinyl that resonates misogyny and male arrogance. They lean backwards as if comfortable in their outdated assumptions about the nature of femininity. The folding chair sits upright as if bringing to attention the need for a feminist reappraisal of working conditions, unafraid to voice her opinions. Unlike the heavy

brown vinyl chairs, the folding chair is light and portable, it can be taken with her to other situations where there is a need for feminist intervention.

If materialist feminism is an understanding of the material conditions through which feminism comes into being, and that the material conditions of social relations play a role in the social production of gender, then new materialism takes this further by proposing that it is the vibrant nature of materials and objects themselves that break down subject/object hierarchies through the embodied encounter with materiality. My analysis of objects specifically gendered feminine (by design, consumption or usage) as they perform as sculpture, develops both materialist feminist theories of the relationality of the construction of femininity and of new materialism's embodied encounter as dynamic and intersubjective. As such, I offer this analysis of the agency of found domestic objects (the feral objects of this project) as feminist new materialism, demonstrating that feminine relationality is embodied, intersubjective, and ultimately transformative of an understanding of femininity itself, and of women's ongoing and ambivalent relationship to domesticity.

This practice-led project materialises through sculpture and installation Grosz's (2010) proposition for a feminist strategy of embodied freedom where the indetermination of matter liberates life from the constraints of the present. My material-led methodology of finding, making, thinking and writing is a dynamic, transformative and embodied encounter with the material culture of feminine domesticity as 'the ability to make (or refuse to make) activities (including language and systems of representation and value) one's own, that is, to integrate the activities one undertakes into one's history, one's becoming' (Grosz, 2010, p.152). Mine is a practice that entangles the agency of both subject and object (myself and the things I make into sculpture) as a process of becoming otherwise that is unpredictable and cannot be entirely anticipated in advance, transformative activities that have the 'capacity or potentiality to act both in accordance with one's past as well as "out of character," in a manner that surprises' (Grosz, 2010, p.152). As a feminist act of autonomy and freedom, the making of sculpture and installation from found domestic objects is just such a transformative action where memory and history materialise as the inter-relationality of (feminine) subject and

(domestic) object in a manner that surprises and offers the possibilities of exceeding the past whilst still acknowledging its presence in the present.

Art making as embodied material encounter presented here as a feminist strategy of disruption has the potential to be world making, whereby, 'The world is not a thing out there, but one in which 'we' are formed and of which we are formative; the strength of feminist corporeal-materialism is its ability to imagine, think and make differently from within' (Meskimmon, 2019, p.366). It is this ability to imagine, think and make differently from within, the agency to think and make otherwise, that my sculpture and installation works materialises as process and as artwork. My sculptural works embody feminist new materialism as the freedom to rethink subject/object relations as 'the openness, contingency, unevenness, and complexity of materialisation as an ongoing process within which social actors [*subjects and objects*] and theorists are irremediably immersed' (Frost and Coole, 2010, p.28). Homeplace, as bell hooks so famously reminds us, can be a site of resistance, the construction of the spaces of home requires effort and is a conscious choice and takes place in spite of the reality outside. Resistance can be against all kinds of things that are like war: opposition to being invaded, occupied, assaulted and destroyed by the system (hooks, 1990, p.80). A feminist resistance embodied as sculpture and installation made from the material culture of feminine domesticity is, I propose, vital. As a shared agency between (feminine) subject and (domestic) object, the intrinsically domestic disruption I present in this practice-led project as feminist new materialism is imperative, urgent, and dynamic, it is about doing, thinking and making things differently.

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Artworks

Mine

Kitchen Shanks (2017)

Cornered (2015)

Runaway Objects (2017)

Rupture (2017)

Hidden (2015)

Feminist Escape Route (2017)

Domestic Front (2017-present)

Folding Chair for the Feminist Resistance (2017)

Others'

Mona Hatoum, *Homebound* (2000)

Lucy Puls, *Ad Hoc Locum* (2004)

Tatiana Trouvé, *Untitled (Mattress Works)* (2009)

Sarah Lucas, *Spinster* (2000)

Melanie Bonajo, *Furniture Bondage* (2009)

Susan Hiller, *Psi Girls* (1999)

Becky Beasley, *Surface Coverings (The Feral Works)* (2004-6)

Francesca Woodman, *Space 2* and *House No. 3*. (1976)

Carolee Schneemann, *Interior Scroll* (1975)

Pussy Riot's balaclavas (2012)

Cecilia Vicuña, *A Journal of Objects for the Chilean Revolution* (1973-4)

Appendix

Three Exhibitions of Work Produced Since 2015

Home (dis)Comforts, Dye House Gallery, Bradford, 16th April – 4th May 2018.

Solo exhibition

Home Strike, l'étrangère, London, 8th March – 21st April 2018. Group exhibition

Transcendental Housework, Stockport Art Gallery, 16th January – 27th February 2016. Solo exhibition

A photograph of a gallery space. On the left, there are two potted plants on stands. In the center, a large window with multiple panes is visible. The floor is polished and reflects the light from the window. The text is overlaid on the left side of the image.

Home (dis)Comforts

an exhibition by
Paula Chambers

Dye House Gallery
Carlton St. Bradford BD7 1AY
16th April - 4th May

Private View
Thursday 19th April
4.30 - 7.30pm

Gallery opening times
Monday - Friday
10.00am - 4.30pm

further information
email: t.carlton@bradfordcollege.ac.uk
tel: 01274 438965

Bradford College Group

Home (dis)Comforts
An Exhibition by Paula Chambers
16th April – 4th May 2018

Dye House Gallery, Carlton St.
Bradford, BD7 1AY

Press Release

Home (dis)Comforts

An Exhibition by Paula Chambers

16th April – 4th May 2018

Dye House Gallery, Carlton St. Bradford, BD7 1AY

Private View – Thursday 19th April 2018, 4.30-7.00pm

Gallery opening times – Monday to Friday, 10.00am-4.30pm



Paula Chambers, *Domestic Front* (2016) found furniture, paper, plywood

In *Home (dis)Comforts* found domestic objects perform uncanny narratives of feminist discontent. These overlooked and undervalued objects have been transformed as sculpture, activated through careful manipulation of the materiality of femininity to disrupt purpose and intention. Items of furniture alongside other feminized domestic objects perform a kind of unhomeliness that can be seen to trouble Freud's reading of the uncanny as the return of the repressed, a contemporary feminism haunted by the unresolved past. Together these sculptural objects form an installation that addresses current concerns around the precarious concept of home, and of the persistent yet problematic alignment of femininity to domesticity. *Home (dis)Comforts* poses an alternate understanding of home as a place where women can create a site of resistance as well as comfort.

Biography

Paula Chambers has exhibited widely nationally and internationally with a back catalogue of solo shows, including most recently *Transcendental Housework* at Stockport Art Gallery and *Domestic Pirate* at Show Space, London. Paula studied under Griselda Pollock at the University of Leeds for the MA Feminist History, Theory, Criticism and Practice in the Visual Arts; this course had a profound and lasting impact on the focus and direction of Paula's art practice and academic research. Paula is currently Subject Leader on BA (Hons) Fine Art, at Leeds Arts University. She is also studying for a practice-led PhD at Middlesex University.

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Home (dis)Comforts, gallery view

In *Home (dis)Comforts* found domestic objects perform uncanny narratives of feminist discontent. These overlooked and undervalued objects have been transformed as sculpture, activated through careful manipulation of the materiality of femininity to disrupt purpose and intention. Items of furniture alongside other feminized domestic objects perform a kind of unhomeliness that can be seen to trouble Freud's reading of the uncanny as the return of the repressed, a contemporary feminism haunted by the unresolved past. Together these sculptural objects form an installation that addresses current concerns around the precarious concept of home, and of the persistent yet problematic alignment of femininity to domesticity. *Home (dis)Comforts* poses an alternate understanding of home as a place where women can create a site of resistance as well as comfort.





Domestic Front, paper, plywood, found furniture (2016-present)
Top view – front of installation, bottom view – back of installation



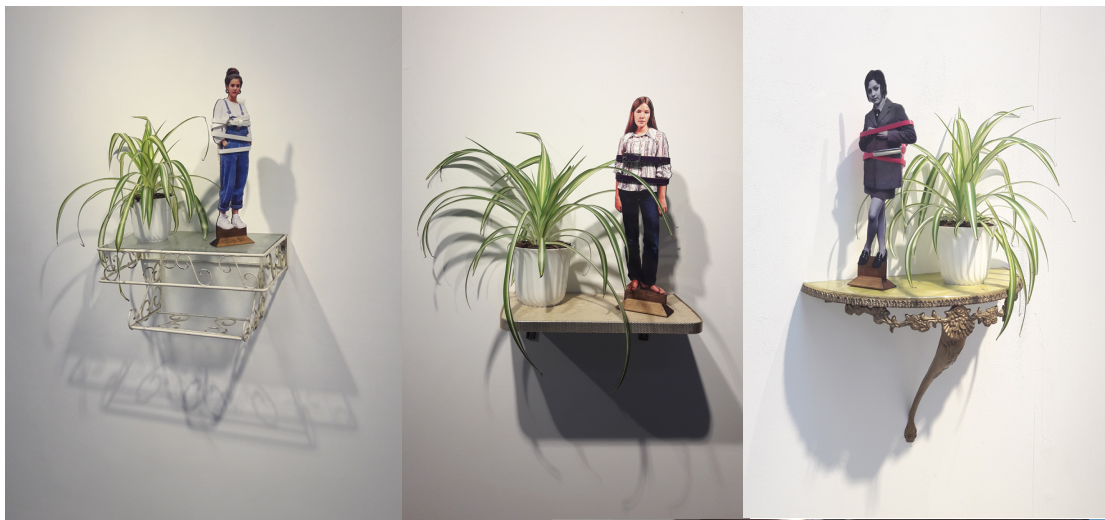
Top - *Runaway Objects*, stools, coffee tables, cushions, belts, Tupperware (2017)
Bottom – *Lost Bloom*, paper, plywood, ink (2016)



Rupture, paper, plywood, glass marbles, found shelves (2018)



Witchcraft for the 21st Century, paper, plywood, plastic shot glasses, salt
(2018)



Volatile Adventurers, paper, plywood, belts, Tupperware, found furniture (2018)



Near sculpture - *Blossom*, waiting room chair, nylon bed sheet, embroidery thread, lace (2015)
Far sculpture - *Clairvoyant*, waiting room chair, cushions, belts, plastic sheet, American Tan tights (2018)

Home Strike

a group exhibition by
CANAN, Paula Chambers,
Malgorzata Markiewicz,
and Su Richardson

l'étrangère,
44a Charlotte Road,
London, EC2A 3PD

8th March – 21st April 2018





Home Strike, guest curated by Alexandra Kokoli and Basia Sliwiska, brings together the work of four women artists — CANAN, Paula Chambers, Malgorzata Markiewicz, Su Richardson — in an exhibition exploring contemporary resistance to the persistent feminisation of domesticity and household maintenance. The exhibition interrogates those biopolitical and cultural norms that see women, and their bodies, systematically domesticated, exploited and imprisoned by ideologies founded on patriarchy.

Oscillating between horrific and humorous images, *Home Strike* revisits the domestic biopolitics of 1970s feminism. Through its inflection, the exhibition considers the impact 1970s feminism has had on intersectional discussions of class, gender, and race.

<http://letrangere.net/exhibitions-past/canan-paula-chambers-malgorzata-markiewicz-su-richardson/>

Selected Press

- <https://fadmagazine.com/2018/04/01/top-7-art-exhibitions-see-london-week-010418/>
- <https://news.artnet.com/exhibitions/shows-womens-day-1238396>
- <https://wsimag.com/art/36828-home-strike>
- <https://www.standard.co.uk/go/london/arts/international-womens-day-2018-four-women-artists-are-resisting-domesticity-with-a-home-strike-a3785191.html>
- <http://contemporarylynx.co.uk/calendarevent/london-malgorzata-markiewicz>
- <https://londonist.com/london/art-and-photography/the-best-exhibitions-to-see-to-mark-international-womens-day>





Gallery view, Paula Chambers, *Domestic Front* (2016-8) and *Bridie* (2013)

- <https://artmattermagazine.com/home-strike-letrangere-gallery-london/>
- <https://www.islingtongazette.co.uk/entertainment/home-strike-at-letrangere-in-shoreditch-weaponising-domesticity-1-5430151>
- <http://cubmagazine.co.uk/2018/03/home-strike-a-feminist-art-exhibition-subverting-the-role-of-woman/>
- <https://www.studiointernational.com/index.php/home-strike-alexandra-kokoli-basia-sliwinska-malgorzata-markiewicz-su-richardson-video-interview>



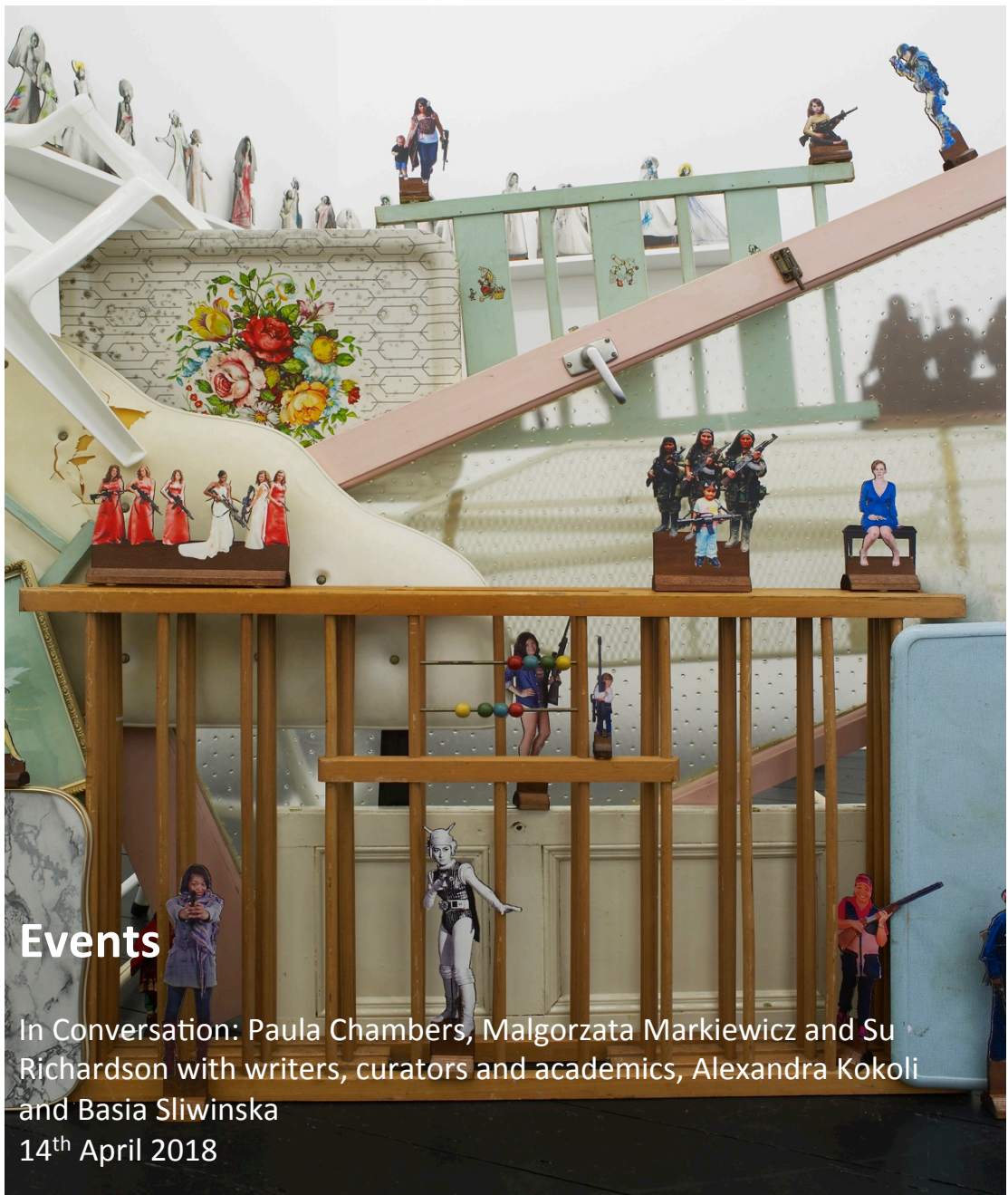




Paula Chambers, *Mother Knows Best* (2013) archive inject print on stolen paper



Paula Chambers, *Kitchen Shanks* (2018) kitchen utensils, tights, hair bands, security grill.
With Su Richardson's *Burnt Breakfast* and other crochet works



Events

In Conversation: Paula Chambers, Malgorzata Markiewicz and Su Richardson with writers, curators and academics, Alexandra Kokoli and Basia Sliwinska
14th April 2018

<https://letrangere.net/talks-and-events/paula-chambers-malgorzata-markiewicz-and-su-richardon-in-conversation-with-alexandra-kokoli-and-basia-sliwinska-14-april-2018/>



Transcendental Housework
By Paula Chambers

16th Jan – 27th Feb, 2016
Stockport Art Gallery





Transcendental Housework
by Paula Chambers

Transcendental Housework

by Paula Chambers

Stockport Art Gallery
From Saturday 16th January
Until Saturday 27th February 2016

Private View
Saturday 16th January 2016, 2.00-4.00pm

An exhibition of sculptural objects
that interrogate women's relationship
to the domestic

Stockport Art Gallery
Wellington Road S.
Stockport
SK3 8AB

Opening Hours
Saturday 10:00 am - 5:00 pm
Sunday 11:00 am - 5:00 pm
Monday Closed
Tuesday 1:00 - 5:00 pm
Wednesday 1:00 - 5:00 pm
Thursday 1:00 - 5:00 pm
Friday 1:00 - 5:00 pm



Press Release

Transcendental Housework By Paula Chambers

An exhibition of sculptural objects that interrogate women's relationship to the domestic

16th January – 27th February 2016

Stockport Art Gallery, Wellington Road South. SK3 8AB

Private View – Saturday 16th January 2016, 2.00 – 4.00pm

My mother was not a feminist, yet growing up in 1970s suburban north London I was witness to, and complicit in, her active refusal to conform to the expectations of a good housewife. Cleaning, tidying, dusting, washing up, were all low on the list of my mother's priorities, instead she played tennis, she grew vegetables, she went out dancing; my sister and I were left to our own devices. As a feminist artist, I have adopted my mother's domestic dissent, integrating it as philosophy into the processes and outcomes of my art making practice. I do not have a studio but make art in my kitchen; I rarely clean or tidy up, I utilize my domestic space and the objects that inhabit it, as a temporalized site of domestic resistance.



The domestic objects and household ornaments of our childhoods take on an emotional value that shape our notions of self; that construct significant personal identities. In the body of work '*Transcendental Housework*', I subvert these domestic objects that haunt our retrogressive imagination. This is dysfunctional furniture and ambivalent ornamentation. Sculptural objects, both floor based and wall based seem to lurk or loiter in the gallery space, they have a whiff of discontented anthropomorphism.

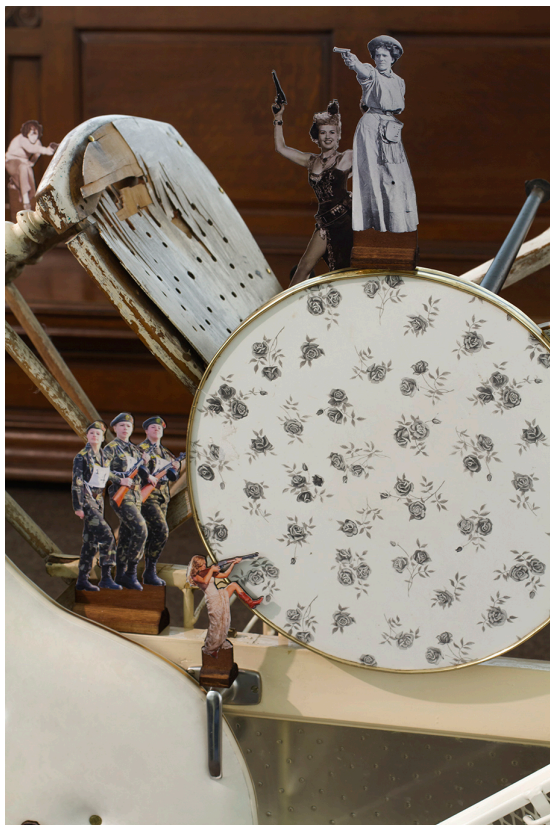
Paula Chambers, *Domestic Front* (2016)
Paper, plywood and found furniture

Biography

Paula Chambers has exhibited widely both nationally and internationally; with a back catalogue of solo shows, including most recently "Domestic Pirate" at Show Space, 14 Warren St, London, and "With Intent: Fanciful Objects" at Batley Art Gallery. Paula studied under Griselda Pollock at the University of Leeds for the MA Feminist History, Theory, Criticism and Practice in the Visual Arts. Paula is currently Principal Lecturer on BA (Hons) Fine Art – Sculpture Strand Leader, at Leeds College of Art, and lectures also on MA Creative Practice. She is undertaking a practice-led PhD at Middlesex University.

Contact

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Domestic Front, paper, plywood, found furniture (2016-present)



Daddy's Little Princess (left) and *Daddy's Girl* (right), sewing patterns and headboard legs (2014)



Cornered, hockey sticks, kitchen knives, electrical tape (2016)



Satisfaction Not Included, Happiness Not Included and Playing Field Not Included, sewing patterns and footstool legs (2014)



A Haunting, coffee tables, digital print, glass (2015)



Lucid Dreaming, vinyl on found mirrors (2015)



Bridie, paper, plywood and felt tip pen (2014)



The Enfield Poltergeist, easy wipe vinyl in found frames (2015)



Mother Knows Best, archive inkjet print on stolen paper (2015)



Lost Bloom, paper, plywood, ink
(2016)