

Bridget Elliott, ed., *Breaking and Entering : The Contemporary House Cut, Spliced, and Haunted*, Montreal & Kingston : McGill-Queen's University Press, 2015, 228 pp., 41 colour illustrations, \$ 50, ISBN 978-0-7735-4545-8

Olivier Vallerand

Volume 41, numéro 1, 2016

URI : <https://id.erudit.org/iderudit/1037563ar>

DOI : <https://doi.org/10.7202/1037563ar>

[Aller au sommaire du numéro](#)

Éditeur(s)

UAAC-AAUC (University Art Association of Canada | Association d'art des universités du Canada)

ISSN

0315-9906 (imprimé)

1918-4778 (numérique)

[Découvrir la revue](#)

Citer ce compte rendu

Vallerand, O. (2016). Compte rendu de [Bridget Elliott, ed., *Breaking and Entering : The Contemporary House Cut, Spliced, and Haunted*, Montreal & Kingston : McGill-Queen's University Press, 2015, 228 pp., 41 colour illustrations, \$ 50, ISBN 978-0-7735-4545-8]. *RACAR : Revue d'art canadienne / Canadian Art Review*, 41(1), 105–108. <https://doi.org/10.7202/1037563ar>

liberté, de l'hétérogénéité, du fétiche, de la thérapeutique, de la temporalité, de la performativité et de la connaissance. ¶

Maude Trottier est doctorante au département d'histoire de l'art et d'études cinématographiques de l'Université de Montréal. —maude.trottier@umontreal.ca

1. Emmanuel Alloa (dir.), *Penser l'image*, Paris, 2010.
2. Pour un autre aperçu de la place centrale qu'occupe Warburg dans le champ croisé de l'anthropologie et l'image, voir le numéro de *L'homme* dédié à l'image et l'anthropologie, vol. 165, 2003, <https://lhomme.revues.org/198>.
3. Thierry Dufrène et Anne-Christine Taylor (dir.), *Cannibalisme disciplinaire. Quand l'histoire de l'art et l'anthropologie se rencontrent*, actes du colloque «Histoire de l'art et anthropologie», tenu du 21 au 23 juin 2007 au musée du quai Branly, Paris, 2009. Les actes sont disponibles en ligne: <http://actesbranly.revues.org/60>
4. Keith Moxey, «Les études visuelles et le tournant iconique», *Intermédialités: histoire et théorie des arts, des lettres et des technologies*, n° 11, printemps 2008, p. 149–168.
5. Tandis que l'anthropologie de l'image se situe au croisement de l'histoire de l'art et de l'anthropologie, l'anthropologie visuelle concerne plus spécifiquement l'usage des matériaux visuels par les anthropologues. Et tandis que l'anthropologie philosophique réfléchit à la spécificité définitionnelle de l'homme, la *Bildanthropologie* se préoccupe de libérer l'histoire de l'art du carcan conceptuel de l'œuvre d'art. Pour des contextualisations détaillées, je réfère aux articles suivant: David MacDougall, «L'anthropologie visuelle et les chemins du savoir», *Journal des anthropologues*, n° 98–99, 2004, <http://jda.revues.org/1751>; Stiegler Bernd, «"Iconic Turn" et réflexion sociétale», *Trivium*, n° 1, 2008, <http://trivium.revues.org/308>.
6. L'éditeur précise qu'il s'agit d'une première traduction française d'un texte issu des archives Flusser à Berlin et d'une réflexion sur le «techno-imaginaire» menée vers la fin des années 1980, sans stipuler de date précise.

Bridget Elliott, ed.
Breaking and Entering: The Contemporary House Cut, Spliced, and Haunted
Montreal & Kingston: McGill-Queen's University Press, 2015
228 pp. 41 colour illustrations
\$50 ISBN 978-0-7735-4545-8

Olivier Vallerand

THE HOUSE, AS THE CENTRE of everyday life, is a constant source of thinking and experimentation for artists

and architects. However, as Bridget Elliott points out in her introduction to *Breaking and Entering: The Contemporary House Cut, Spliced, and Haunted*, “the treatment of home by recent generations of artists is just starting to receive serious scholarly attention” (6). Following a group exhibition and an associated symposium of the same title presented at the University of Western Ontario's Artlab Gallery in 2011, this edited volume brings together essays that discuss how contemporary artists “take apart the fabric of domestic structures to expose their fragility as well as their powerful hold upon our imagination” (6). It adds to what Elliott understands as a recent surge of interest in house and home by looking at the treatment of home by recent generations of artists, a topic that is only beginning to be discussed.

The eleven essays, all well-researched and original discussions of domesticity, are organized into four thematic sections that Elliott sees as opening up new avenues of enquiry. The first, “Excavations,” explores how (real and fictional) memory relates to spatialized domesticity, with a focus on the shifting boundaries between private and public. The second, “From House to Housing,” discusses the work of artists who build on changing understandings of modernist domestic environments and urban communities. The third, “Such Stuff as Dreams Are Made Of...,” is the most diverse as it looks at the use of unorthodox building materials and techniques as



ways to think about housing crises. The final part, “A Matter of Perspective,” investigates various model

houses, both physical and virtual. The authors, who come from disciplines as diverse as craft history, art history, architectural and urban history, curatorial and museum studies, French studies, visual culture, and architecture, explore the work of contemporary artists questioning domestic structures from different viewpoints. Some themes, such as the dissolution of the limits between private and public and the dialogue between past and present, appear in more than one essay, but overall, the collection reads less as a unified approach to the domestic and more as a snapshot of sometimes unconnected thoughts on the house as understood by contemporary artists—a diversity that can be linked to the diversity of the topic at hand.

Although the collection is not limited to the Canadian context, one of its major contributions is the important number of Canadian artists discussed. Only two of the book's essays—Anthony Purdy's and Bridget Elliott's—directly address the four artists from the 2011 exhibition (Heather Benning, Wyn Geelyne, Iris Häussler, and David Hoffos). The nine other are all more or less marked by the long-lasting effects of the 2007–08 American housing crisis and recession, as Elliott and a few of the authors note. Many essays carefully link emergent and established artists, highlighting new narratives and changing understandings of the domestic. While the articles in the third part of the volume, as well as Claudette Lauzon's, Shelley Hornstein's, and Elliott's essays in other sections, address the “Contemporary House” of the subtitle more directly, the others deal more abstractly with contemporary readings of twentieth-century modernism, and even with older examples.

Lauzon's essay, the first in the book, discusses traces of melancholic attachment to the home by artists attempting to mourn and seek justice for traumatic experiences. The author highlights the uncanny in the domestically inspired environments

depicted by artists Lida Abdul, Emily Jacir, Wafaa Bilal, and Mona Hatoum to underline how the home's "capacity to safeguard both its inhabitants and their memories is tenuous at best" (20), and how it acts instead as an insistent reminder of the traumatizing consequences of war and geopolitical displacement. The following essay, Charles Rice's, shifts gears completely: while rigorously structured, his analysis of Francis Ford Coppola's *The Conversation* (1974), which documents a spatial transformation that moves interiority from the domestic sphere to the urban, is ultimately limited in its focus on the 1970s context of the film and lacks an engagement with current processes that transform relations to the cityscape. The third essay, by Anthony Purdy, discusses one of the *Breaking and Entering* artists, Iris Häussler, and links back to Lauzon's analysis of the uncanny home. Picking up on Rice's discussion of the increasing dissolution of the concept of the domestic as a space hidden from public view, Purdy analyzes Häussler's 2008 staged "archaeological" installation in the Grange, the nineteenth-century mansion that is the historical core of the Art Gallery of Ontario. He carefully explores the enmeshed layers of domestic and institutional, real and fictional, the "almost authentic" (46). But where— as other analyses of the work have focused on the social histories hidden within architectural spaces,¹ Purdy addresses the construction of the work, the ways Häussler hid the different layers, creating a detective narrative that shows how "everything brought back to us from the past is condemned to fracture and immediately fall apart, because... we thrust them back into life... to face the lethal assaults of time" (60, quoted from Laurent Olivier, *The Dark Abyss of Time*). The three essays in the first section thus discuss the past, but the engagement with it varies much from one to the other: while the artists discussed

by Lauzon and Purdy seek to destabilize memories and histories, Rice references the past just as a historian examines an artefact.

The second part of the book, the shortest and most focused, begins with Christine Sprengler's discussion of film artist Mark Lewis's readings of modernist housing projects. Sprengler analyzes how Lewis subverts mediated images of modernist housing as a crime-ridden dystopia, at the same time offering an original way to intervene in present-day debates about regeneration schemes and demolitions. Sprengler also discusses Lewis's critical engagement with the contemporary obsession with ruins as an opening toward a more complete understanding of a recent past that fetishizes the "promise of something new" (77). Shelley Hornstein's essay follows with a discussion of artists—Cyprien Gaillard, David Maisel, Chris Mottalini, Isabelle Hayeur, and Gregor Schneider— whose work on the 1960s and 1970s demolition of modernist housing she sees as an active dismantling of the home, a breaking and entering. Unlike Lewis's films, which focus on the progressive-ness at the heart of the modern, these artists seek to render visible the cacophony of networks, buildings, and places that makes modernity in order to destabilize and understand anew the notion of house and home.

The book's third section takes a closer look at the physical conditions of the contemporary house. Kirsty Robertson sets the tone by discussing how tents—the stereotypical temporary dwelling—are omnipresent in contemporary culture: in the wake of natural disasters and man-made crises, after conflict, and on borders of territories. She argues that the temporariness associated with tents is quickly changing under the "indifference" of twenty-first century capitalism into a structuring principle for social life and space, and that their materials are themselves part of that capitalist system—petroleum-based, patent-protected products. Sandra Al-

foldy's essay follows with an exploration of how ornament, craft, and hoarding survive despite dismissive attitudes from art theorists and architects. She argues that they serve as comforting retreats from the "frightening forces of the outside world," but that popular culture is quickly starting to expose "this crafty secret" (118). She also underlines that, while artists may be inspired by them, art institutions lag behind in their acceptance of craft, ornament, and domesticity, and more importantly, when they do welcome craft material, they almost never include craftspeople, even professional studio ones. Accumulation of belongings is also at the heart of the following essay, Stephanie Radu's discussion of Sean Cordeiro and Claire Healy's 2003–06 series of dismantled and reorganized domestic spaces and materials. The radical reinterpretation of the everyday in their sculptures underlines how dwellings are complex products of "cultural preferences, geographical conditions, social realities, personal desires, and stylistic traditions" (130). Their work addresses our attachment to property and our desire for stability, paralleling Robertson's thoughts on contemporary tents.

The fourth and last part is devoted to model houses, miniature or full-scale representations of existing or imaginary architecture removed from its context and available to be played with. The first discussed is Inigo Mangano-Ovalle's 2009 half-scale model of an unrealized Mies van der Rohe house. Suspended and inverted, and thus impossible to occupy, the house nonetheless contains numerous traces of occupations. The artist also puts the house in relation with excerpts from Yevgeny Zamyatin's early dystopian science fiction novel *We* (1921). Trista E. Mallory's essay argues that Mangano-Ovalle's work signifies that we cannot go back to the utopian dreams of modernism; if it is impossible to predict the outcome of the housing crisis that was happening at the time the work was created, the

upside down house/model promises for her another model for the future. It is a metaphor for a revolution that would impact both the shifting orientation of the house and a larger world order. Malin Zimm's essay discusses another interpretation of existing architecture: it examines the ways in which some famous architects have "sampled," "remixed," and "fictionalized" architecture of which they were fans. Whereas fan fiction usually bridges the gap between community and individuality, and is thus an act of creating and building, she sees fan architecture as a process of destruction and decay, using as examples chains of architects from Monsú Desiderio to Sir John Soane and from Adolf Loos to Rem Koolhaas. Zimm uses contemporary concepts as a way to understand historic processes, but, apart from Koolhaas, she does not really discuss contemporary projects. While she argues that "fan fiction allows anyone to challenge male domination, both in the production of the canon and its narratives" (169), her attempts to show that similar challenges are brought to architecture are somewhat diminished by her discussion solely of male architects, all clearly part of the canon, except for two women, Ines Weizman and Madelon Vriesendorp (whose work is discussed in relation to her ex-husband Rem Koolhaas's writings). Zimm seems instead to suggest that, in architecture, fan fiction is more often about admiration and beloved mentorship. The book ends with Elliott's essay on three of the artists from the *Breaking and Entering* exhibition: Wyn Geelyne, David Hoffos, and Heather Benning. The three have taken up the dollhouse typology and use spatial displacement to critically question conventions. In opposition to the "digital dollhouses" that are increasingly present in our culture, Elliott insists on the materiality of the works discussed. These three artists resist the desire to create "beautiful" homes; they play with the dollhouse—by opening it up, by

adding videos, by scaling it back up, by destroying it—reflecting the collection's title. In addition to ending the book with a direct discussion of the exhibition, Elliott, by focusing on dollhouses—toys that also mirror models used by professional designers—bridges the gaps between artists and architects, between representations and lived spaces, and between the fictionalized and real domestic environments that are present in almost all of the essays.

The broad themes presented in *Breaking and Entering* reflect the very diverse and sprawling nature of recent thought on the home. The domestic is omnipresent in popular publications such as Witold Rybczynski's *Home: A Short History of an Idea* (1986),² in countless home and decoration magazines, in the works and writings of numerous architects,³ in exhibitions in art galleries, architecture centres, and anthropology museums,⁴ and in scholarly research discussing domesticity very broadly or in very precise ways. One book in particular, Jennifer Johung's *Replacing Home: From Primal Hut to Digital Network in Contemporary Art* (2012) is an attempt, like Elliott's collection, to examine how contemporary art accounts for changing understandings of the home, and more particularly the emergence of portable and temporary architecture. The success of other recent exhibitions that have used the home to present critiques of broader societal themes, such as Michael Elmgreen & Ingar Dragset's domestic environments for the Venice Biennale (2009) and the Victoria & Albert Museum (2013), also highlights the rich aesthetic potential of the deconstruction of domestic structures. Such a diversity of accounts renders sustained narratives harder to grasp, but this might be exactly the point: the domestic is impossible to pin down, its diverse components enmeshed and constantly being transformed by their recombinant relations.

Many of the essays look back to the past, and more particularly to the

modernist era, to discuss the present situation. Tellingly, in the introduction Elliott points the reader to *Housing and Dwelling: Perspectives on Modern Architecture*, edited by Barbara Miller Lane (2006), in order to situate the collection. As such, *Breaking and Entering*—in its book form, the exhibition being less concerned with the past—is not very far from *Yesterday's Tomorrows*, a 2010 exhibition curated by Lesley Johnstone at the Musée d'art contemporain de Montréal: both even include works by Iñigo Manglano-Ovalle that play with Mies van der Rohe's houses. To Johnstone who asks why so many contemporary artists have returned in recent years to the forms, ideas, and aspirations of modernist architecture and design, Elliott replies by asserting that current artists have no choice but to engage with issues that have long histories; by tackling modernist utopian ideals—or what remains of them—they create diverse dialogues with the past that highlight sometimes divergent readings of the present.

I opened this review by pointing out how the house is a constant source of ideas not only for architects, but also for artists. What *Breaking and Entering* does is to highlight the complex meanings that support our understandings of the house. It also clearly shows how artists use the home as a site of critical thinking in a much more explicit way than architects can. It is not that critical architecture cannot exist, it is that "cutting, splicing, and haunting" can be done only with difficulty in a more permanent setting. Artists' engagements with architecture should thus not be only unidirectional, but should instead, like most of the examples discussed in this collection, become sustained dialogues between the two disciplines, so that artists' critical readings may be used to complete architects' attempts at transforming domestic environments.

Olivier Vallerand is an architect with 1x1x1 Creative Lab and teaches at the École d'architecture de l'Université Laval.
—olivier.vallerand@gmail.com

1. See for example Shelley Hornstein, "Destroyed Sites: Places and Things inside Out," in *Losing Site: Architecture, Memory and Place* (Farnham, Surrey, & Burlington, VT, 2011).

2. Witold Rybczynski, *Home: A Short History of an Idea* (New York, 1986).

3. Many architects, including major figures such as Le Corbusier, Philip Johnson, and Peter Eisenman, launched and shaped their careers through their obsessions with the domestic. See for example the writings on how their domestic designs relate to architectural design in general: Le Corbusier, *Une Maison – Un Palais: "À la recherche d'une unité architecturale"* (Paris, 1928); Peter Eisenman, *House X* (New York, 1982); Philip Johnson, "House at New Canaan, Connecticut," *Architectural Review*, September 1950.

4. Looking only at the Museum of Modern Art's engagement with the theme is sufficient to demonstrate the importance of the house in art and architectural discourse, for example: the exhibition houses by Marcel Breuer (1949) and Gregory Ain (1950); the exhibitions "The Un-Private House" (1999) and "Home Delivery" (2008), in combination with further prefabricated exhibition houses by Kieran Timberlake Architects, Lawrence Sass, Jeremy Edmiston and Douglas Gauthier, Leo Kaufmann Architects, and Richard Horden. Terence Riley, *The Un-Private House* (New York, 1999); Barry Bergdoll et al., *Home Delivery: Fabricating the Modern Dwelling* (New York, 2008).

AUTOMNE 2016
**La nature du naturalisme:
un questionnement
tranhistorique**

Sous la direction de Sarah Guérin et Itay Sapir

PRINTEMPS 2017
Numéro général

Les manuscrits peuvent être envoyés à la directrice de la revue, Ersy Contogouris (racar@racar.ca), avant le 10 janvier 2017. Veuillez consulter www.racar-racar.com pour les directives de soumission.

FALL 2016
**The nature of naturalism:
a transhistorical
examination**

Guest edited by Sarah Guérin and Itay Sapir

SPRING 2017
General issue

Manuscripts can be sent to the managing editor, Ersy Contogouris (racar@racar.ca), by 10 January 2017. Please consult www.racar-racar.com for submission guidelines.