

7-3. Describe some key areas or objects around which gender differentiations might be said to unfold in domestic space.

Katherine James' response

The interior of the home has always explained a dual position for women: it is at once their essence, the spatial manifestation of their role as the heart or caretaker of the family, as well as the site of their entrapment in precisely this role. The home, specifically the bedroom, kitchen, and bathroom, is the site of woman as mother, woman as wife. These deeply interior, private spaces are analogous to a womb: places of retreat, of nurturing and privacy. The privacy of the home's interior is seen as uncorrupted and pure, and the urban street is the other half of this dialectic—the ultimate site of corruption. The treatment of architecture as a “form of covering” where “the spaces of (the) interiors cover the occupants as clothes cover the body” (Colomina, 265) again indicates the peep show that occurs with a departure from these spaces.

It is logical, then, that the French prostitutes in Benjamin's Arcades are called filles publiques. These are women in a subverted role—they are working rather than keeping the home, they are making public their private bodies, they have multiple personalities or disguises rather than one assigned identity. They have escaped the deep interiorities of the home as assigned to them in favor of the exposure and activity of the arcade.

In this dialectic of the home and the street, the threshold to the home becomes a charged element. Threshold can become a place of titillation- a liminal space in which the woman's normal close association with interiority breaks out and behavior may break from societal norms. Benjamin describes the rules applied to the threshold of a brothel: “With respect to the old woman at the threshold: ‘The second paragraph prohibits this woman from passing beyond the doorstep, because it often happens that she has the audacity to step out and intercept passerby’” (500). The move through the threshold is an indecent one. It is a move from covering, enveloping, to exposure and interaction with the street.

Benjamin also describes a method of removing the threshold from the prostitute's interaction with the street: “There are others more ingenious who close their doors and windows but send signals through glass panes unprovided with curtains; or the curtains are left open just enough to permit easy communication between outside and interior” (Benjamin, 500). Here, the prostitute relies on the fascination of the passerby with the interior. The fact that she is located in the woman's natural site, the interior, rather than on the street makes her still more alluring. The avoidance of the threshold, even with an effective venture into the street through visual connection, changes the impression of the woman within.

My sex, my ethnicity, my class

Nathalie Westervelt

Clothing seems to be a key signifier of gender defined as sexual identity in relationship to society and culture. In addition, by guising oneself in clothing of other genders, desire of otherness is aroused and satisfied.

Ann McClintock discusses the “domestic and racial fetishism” that structured the lives of Hannah Cullwick and Arthur Munby, archived by Cullwick’s journals and cross-dressed portraits, where she became a different sex, race and/or social class. The couple, comprised of two social classes pleased themselves through the transgression of gender while in the home, but in society, she was herself, a servant, unless abroad where she acted as the lady of society. Domestically, she and her husband blurred gender boundaries present at the time by Cullwick’s play-acting of them all. Clothing becomes the means by which the trans-gendered characters are realized.

The cross-dressing of French prostitutes in the Arcades (likened to an interior through the secrecy of females wearing masks in the hedonistic of gambling halls where the gambler is psychoanalyzed to be bisexual). "The woman who at eight o'clock is dressed in a rich and elegant outfit is the same who appears as a cheap grisette (trans. term for a working class woman derived from gris, French for gray in relationship to the cheap gray dress fabric common to servant wear) at nine, and who will show herself at ten in a peasant dress." (502 Benjamin) The term grisette exemplifies that clothing is so significant as to be a term for gender (class and sex). In this example, this woman transgresses the boundary of social class, thus confusing existing barriers and pleasuring the desires for something “other.”

The signification of clothing is implied again in this chapter in the example of Barrière and Thiboust's play. The display of costumes determines what kind of woman a lady is and this is explained further through the metaphor of the house (i.e. domicile). "In Paris there are two kinds of women, just as there are two kinds of houses." The dialogue goes on to say that one is leased - the other paid month-to-month. "How are they distinguished?...By the sign...the outfit is the sign of the female and there are outfits of such eloquence that it is absolutely as if you could read on the second floor the advertisement, 'Furnished Apartment to Let!'" (502 Benjamin) Again, clothing is a signifier of gender.

Finally, Adolf Loos’s design for the home for Josephine Baker, a woman often naked in public, becomes not architecture, but clothing. Throughout the article she is portrayed in the pool and viewed by the stranger – the voyeur who enters the house in a space that is neither interior nor exterior. Baker inhabits the exhibition space that is argued by Beatriz Colomina to be a void, the pool that is looked upon by the stranger. The house becomes her cladding, a monument to interiority through the exclusion of it. “Like the body, the [Josephine Baker] house is all surface; it simply does not have an interior. “ (280 Colomina) Baker’s exposed, slippery, brown body is the object enclosed by the building

where the stranger, a voyeur inhabits the walls. The aquarium where she is viewed is a test tube where her “exotic” gender is viewed (because in France at the time she is the other in ethnic, social and sexual levels). Loos’s architecture, like clothing, provides a barrier to one who is without clothing, and the building is a testimonial to Baker’s gendered position, and unravels the understanding of it.

Cullwick’s costumes and her sexual, ethnic and societal transgression, the many guises and masks of the prostitutes of the Arcades circa 1830 and their ability to signify the whore or disguise her class, and the Josephine Baker house, with its ability to display Baker’s gendered otherness represent how clothing as signifier allows the female to become trans-gendered and highlights the question of the relevance of gender and desire.

Catherine Fowlkes

Notions of women's femininity, propriety and virtuousness unfolded in the modern domestic sphere with its increased separation from public life.

“By the nineteenth century, a major transformation was under way as middle class men laboriously refashioned architectural and urban space to separate, as if by nature, domesticity from industry, market from family. Manufacturers slowly but steadily moved their houses away from the factories, shopkeepers stopped living above their shops, bankers set up separate banking houses and the suburbs were born.” (McClintock p167)

This heightened definition and drawing of boundaries between the domestic and the public realms cast women and men in more stringent roles of decorum. Women's constructed gender differences were in many ways a result of this relegation to the private sphere.

Removed from the spaces where modernity was in full swing – the crowded cafes, bustling streets and brothels, these women's femininity, propriety and virtuousness became tied to their restricted movement. Their lack of exposure defined these traits as stemming from a situation of protection. “For bourgeois women, going into town and mingling with crowds of mixed social composition was not only frightening because it became increasingly unfamiliar, but because it was morally dangerous.” (Pollock, p69)

The fact that men could move freely between these realms allowed them freedom not only of movement, but of behavior – thus avoiding such strict definitions, or at least enabling them to seek refuge in one when tired or constrained by the other. Within the smaller, static world of the interior, concepts of women became smaller and more static. “For women, the public spaces thus construed were where one risked losing one's virtue, dirtying oneself; going out in public and the idea of disgrace were closely allied.” (Pollock, p69) The interior spaces they occupied – the boudoir, the parlor, the balcony, the garden – were highly controlled and mediated by very private interactions.

The emerging gender definitions springing from the domestic was intrinsically tied to class, implicating those women who could not remove themselves to a private realm. Those who did appear in these public spaces were seen as less feminine, less virtuous, and less proper. Thus, the bourgeois and upper class defined women's “ideal” traits.

This tension between gender and class was further exacerbated by the emerging feminine ideals of idleness. “At some point during the eighteenth century...the spindle and loom were pried from her fingers and all the bustling labor of the previous century...were removed piecemeal to the manufactories...(and) the idea of the idle woman was born...For most women whose husbands or fathers could not afford enough servants for genuine idleness, domestic work had to be accompanied by the historically unprecedented labor of rendering invisible every sign of that work...the concealment of this work.” (McClintock p160-2)

The parlor or drawing room – “the threshold of private and public,” - where women could receive others, became a site of theater, where women would act as creatures of leisure as opposed to the male creature of labor. In these cases, external influences of other women’s interiors infiltrated the domestic, exercising even stricter definitions of female propriety.

- *Vision and difference; Femininity, Feminism and the Histories of Art*, Griselda Pollock, Routledge 1988.

The Threshold, Gender, and Domestic Space

Robert Campos

Threshold conditions abound in domestic space, and they are in every instance the site of complex operations of gender differentiation. The threshold is a boundary, a limit in physical space that often inscribes sociopolitical limits. McClintock: “the forbidden meeting across social limits reveals itself as a recurrent theme in the domestic and racial fetishism that structured...Victorian society at large” (133). The threshold is a structure, or at least a structuring element, within the larger structures of the social realm.

McClintock identifies the operations of Victorian fetishism as inhabiting “the borders of double disavowal...”(138). Hannah Cullwick could have, McClintock makes clear, chosen to “enter society”, to pass out of her class into another, but chose to inhabit the threshold between the upper-middle and the working class—just as she did the areas between domestic, slave, and wife, or indeed between female and male—as performance, and as fetishization.

Fetishization of what, exactly? Dirt, McClintock tells us, or more generally, dirtiness. “Dirt, like all fetishes, thus expresses a crisis in value, for it contradicts the liberal dictum that social wealth is created by the abstract, rational principles of the the market and not by labor” (154). “Dirty sex” and “dirty money” become preoccupations of Victorian society, with the domestic threshold one boundary between the “dirty” and the “normal”.

“Dirty sex” and “dirty money” were everywhere to be found in the arcades of Paris, as Benjamin and his sources make clear. Inasmuch as the arcades themselves could be considered thresholds between public and private space, the “old woman at the threshold” of houses of prostitution became an issue of great concern to public officials and their legislation (“The second paragraph prohibits this woman from passing beyond the doorstep, because it often happens that she has the audacity to step out and intercept passersby” (500)). The transgression of the threshold is the “audacious” crime here, not the prostitution itself.

The gallery around the swimming pool of the house for Josephine Baker is itself a threshold. In her article on Loos, Colomina explains how “the raised alcove of the Moller house and the Zimmer der Dame of the Muller house not only overlook the social spaces but are exactly positioned at the end of the sequence, on the threshold of the private, the secret, the upper rooms where sexuality is hidden away. At the intersection of the visible and the invisible, women are placed as the guardians of the unspeakable.” (page?)

Not unlike the Sphinx perched outside of Thebes—herself a threshold between male and female, human and beast, guardian and destroyer.

Jimmy Shen's response

The Victorian period may be characterized as one which embodied the contradictions in a society struggling to deal with the affects of industrialization and the growth of middle class society. There was incredible conflict between the widespread cultivation of a superficial dignity and restraint and with that which was considered socially deplorable. In relation to gender, the resulting affect of the industrial revolution was the taking away of manual labor from woman's life in that work such as "tailoring, millinery, straw-weaving, lace making... were removed piecemeal to the manufacturers." (McClintock p160) The labor in woman's life in the middle class was then replaced by the act of playing a character role involving the concealment of large amounts of work involved in the cleaning and management of their large houses. The effects from the creation of these social extremes during the Victorian period were manifest in areas found throughout domestic space.

One of the thresholds where the woman's private image of work and the public image of leisure was found to transform can be located at the parlor of a house. It is a transitional space between the exterior and interior where the introduction of the home is made and the first opportunity to find the woman of the household "fresh and pretty... presiding at table." (McClintock p162) It was also the space where one could find on display the prized possessions of the household; objects resembling objects of use but in reality only serving only as objects for display. The parlor was a "domestic space for the display of commodity fetishism. (McClintock p162)

Houses typically were also designed with a strict separation of women from men's rooms such as the library, billiard room, gentleman's room, study, smoking room, and gentleman's odd room. And many of these rooms had their own bathrooms and cloakrooms to allow for an independence from the women's end of the house. The men needed a male territory that served as the sanctum for which they could retire to. The "increasingly large and sacrosanct male domain in Victorian estate houses was one result of Victorian chivalry; women had to be protected from scandalous talk of business or politics." (Spain p115) This served to support the suppression of both upper and lower class women by preventing them from hearing discussions that would allow for the possibility to gain higher social status.

Domestic space during the Victorian age was therefore strewn with examples of the separation of public and public life of the woman both in relation to work and to their social status as manifest in the function and spatial configuration of the rooms within the home of new bourgeoisie.

- Gendered Spaces, Daphne Spain, The University of North Carolina Press 1992.

the domestic interior

Nicole Vlado

...only the figure of a woman is “complete” and clearly there, in the space. As if to indicate, once more, that in modernity it is the male subject, or rather the construct of masculinity itself, that no longer knows where to stand. The threat of modernity, how to master the uncontrollability of the metropolis, is that of castration. (1)

In her essay, *Interior*, Beatriz Colomina describes the anxiety of the male subject in the public realm of the city. The above is a passage taken from the essay, in which Colomina reads/interprets a photograph taken in 1901 of Loos’ Goldman & Salatsch men’s store. The men in this photograph suffer from the ambiguity of their role as men in a place lacking spatial and social order. The public, or exterior, is defined by Benjamin throughout his *Arcades Project* as a space of potential debauchery. The loss of control of the male subject in the public realm is enhanced by such lures as prostitution and gambling, as suggested in the *Arcade’s* chapter bearing the same name: “That the number of filles publiques at first seems very great is owing to a sort of phantasmagoria produced by the comings and goings of these women along a routine circuit, which has the effect of multiplying them to infinity...” (2)

In response to this loss of control, and subsequent questioning of masculinity, Colomina describes Loos’ domestic interiors as exhibiting (the illusion) of the control of the male through the gaze. Of course these spaces have inherent within them the potential for subverting the control of the male inhabitant, as the user of the space is manipulated by the slippage within the plan. It is here that the distinction between object and subject is no longer fixed. (3) It is in the theater boxes of Loos’ domestic interiors, those spaces identified as female spaces (4), that the woman participates in the act of gazing, watching others move through the interior of the (her) home. Still, as not to grant this woman full control of the domestic interior, she is observed – her gaze is not hidden, or protected, rather it is framed.

Subversive actions within the domestic interior provide the opportunity for the unfolding of gender identifications. Within the home, sexual practices, such as those described in Anne McClintock’s *Imperial Leather*, need not reflect the social controls of the exterior. Role-playing and S&M practices provide an opportunity for intended (temporary) shifts in gender identification. In addition to these mutual acts of exchange, subversive actions can be exhibited through passive forms of rebellion within the logic of the domestic interior.

In her essay *Bad Press*, Elizabeth Diller narrates six scenarios in an instructional for “dissident ironing” (5). While describing the shift in the role of women’s work as one becoming more “masculinized” from the 1920s on, Diller presents the opportunity for the mechanized body of the woman to challenge the social constraints on her identity. Through the “dysfunction” enacted by the body of the housewife, the role of the woman, as an extension of the culture of industrial production (one controlled by the economics

of the household), rebels (does not reject) by performing her task of ironing ineffectively. In this work, the shirt defines an “unspoken social contract” between the men and women of the domestic interior. Worn outside of the home, the marks left by the process of dissident ironing present a breaking of this social contract – a mark of folding that acts to unfold the role of the woman in the domestic sphere. It is perhaps here that these creases defined by Diller present a symbol of defiance of gender roles, similar to the leather slave band worn by Hannah Culwick(?)

Taken from “Bad Press” (p 393): From the popular game show Family Feud...”Name one of the first warning signs that a marriage is going on the rocks.” The top six answers are on the board: Constant Arguing, No Communication, Stops Cooking, Lack of Sex, Stops Ironing, Infidelity.

A Steak in the home

Michael Ramage

Colomina focuses on interior, comfort, and the presence of the exterior in the house as theater box. There is no shortage of objects and spaces for which to find gender differentiation in interior spaces, but it is important to consider also the role of gender differentiation in exterior domestic space.

Specifically, I am interested in the suburban home's surrounding, the quintessentially American site of folly, flowers, and food. Jeffrey Klineman writes about the man's place in the yard and the patio. In the post-war suburban home, Klineman claims that the barbecue defines the man's relation to his family, both as provider of food and sociability. He is entirely designed out of the interior space, and the interiority of the exterior patio allows him to maintain his role in the family. This is achieved through the picture window and the sliding door which serve to bring the outside in. Thus, as he goes about his business in the yard, Dad is simultaneously connected to the family within.

Klineman, Jeffrey. "Keeper of the Flame: an analysis of suburban barbecue, house design, and gender roles" Unpublished article, Yale University 1993