P1_Encounters and Negotiations
P2_A Tale of Undwelling:
The Death Masks of 67 Hallatt Street

Andrew Lewthwaite

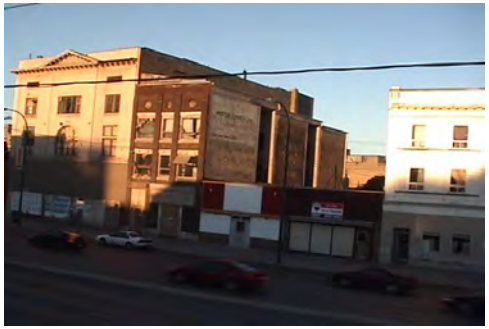
PMR Fall 2006

Encounters and Negotiations

Aims: A twelve day project intended to develop individual approaches to site and context and to develop an active approach to mapping time-based site conditions; to be able to observe, record and communicate personal observations about site...

The Game: The first member went out and collected sound data recordings in a random evening of events, one encounter which was chosen as the time keeping device for a series of video responses. The thoughts revolved around this initial encounter with a prostitute, and the subsequent video clips were chosen as responses to this theme. A dialectic of multiple "encounters" and "negotiations" plays out through the video responses, each of which is found within the Point Douglas site, ordered by the audio sequence and its repetition that is emblematic of but one way in which particular notions of time might be considered.

encounter

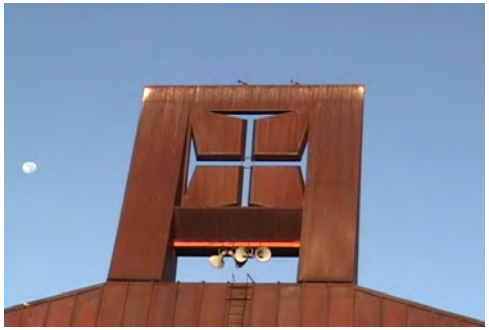


A: What's up which you?
B: Nothing.
A: You look familiar.
B: Ha, ha. Do I?
A: Ya. Ha, ha.
B: No... no. I... I'm just new to the city, ya know... so... yeah.
A: Oh.
B: Are you from around here?
A: Do you have a light?
B: I don't. Sorry. You don't have a light?
A: No.
B: No? Sorry.
A: A cigarette I got.
B: Oh, ya got part of a cigarette?
A: Yeah.
B: Yeah? No I don't got a light.
A: And um... So what are you up to tonight?
B: Uh... Just riding' around, getting' to know the city. What about you?

negotiation

A: Me... I'm a hooker.
B: Yeah? Ya workin'?
A: Yeah.
B: Busy?
A: No.
B: Not right now? Why?
A: Cause I can't break.
B: Ha, ha. Nothing going on?
A: I'm standing here.
B: Yeah. No one coming by, there's lots of traffic, no one's stopped?
A: I know, nobody's stopping.
B: Yeah.
A: Why? Do you have any money?
B: Well... I don't know. How much....
A: I'm a good girl.
B: You're a good girl?
A: Yeah.
B: What do you do?
A: Um... Are you a cop?
B: Nope.
A: Sigh... Do you have any money...?

encounter



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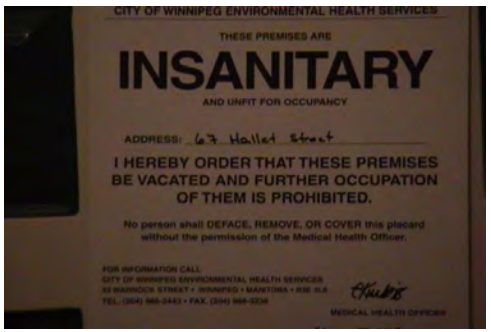
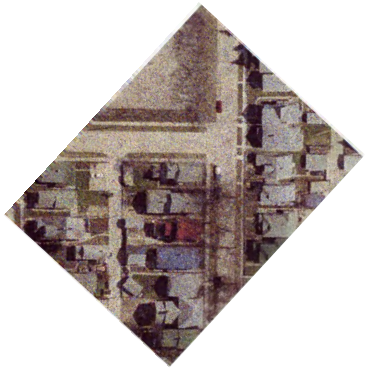


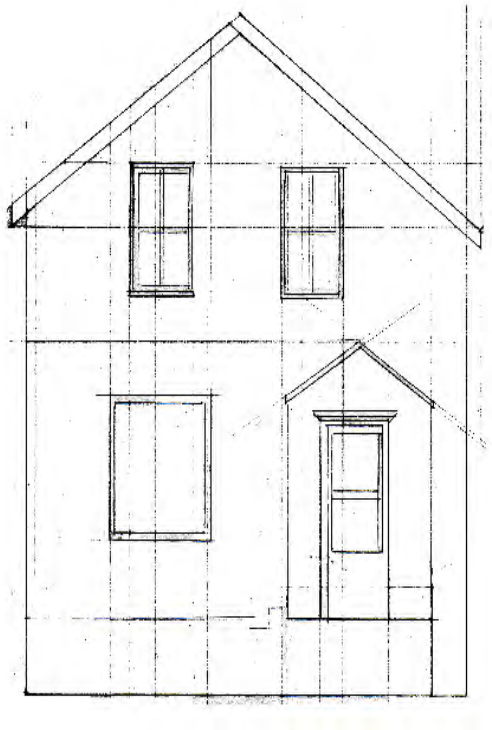
Condemned House: 67 Hallatt St

Site Selection: A house at the corner of Rover and Hallatt Streets was chosen as the point of investigation, partly as a result of it being owned by a friend and performer, but mostly because of its status as an unoccupied space, bereft of any dwelling activity.

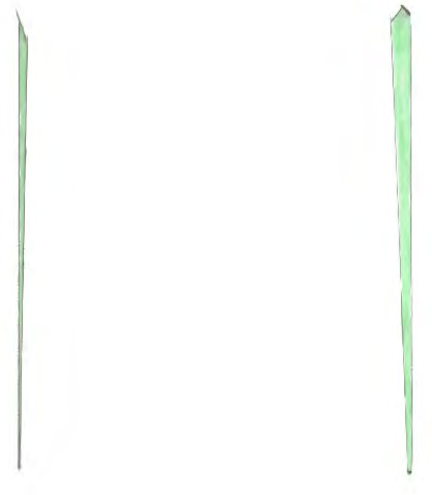
Documentation: Investigations began by collaging scaled photography with measured drawings. The disconnect between the two modes of representation (subjective, particular vs. objective, abstract) was examined with two-dimensional extraction and then the separate elements were weaved together in layers.



"Subjective" Representation

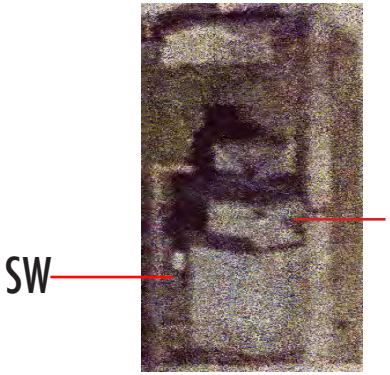


"Objective" Representation



"Space" of Disconnect

North-East Elevation



South-West Elevation

How does one dwell?

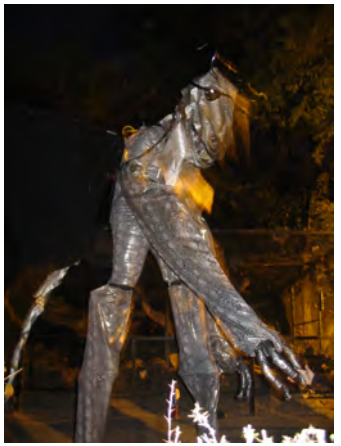
An interest in examining the ideas of dwelling and performance was sparked by a serendipitous encounter with the work of Chris, the owner of the unoccupied house who happens to be a performance artist. He takes ordinary plumbing and home repair materials and turns them into costumes, most notably a fire-breathing dragon, which becomes the basis of his performance. I was interested in the process that transformed these everyday materials into animated fantastical elements related to the anatomy of a dragon. Specifically, I was interested in the possibility of there being an architectural analogue to this creative process.

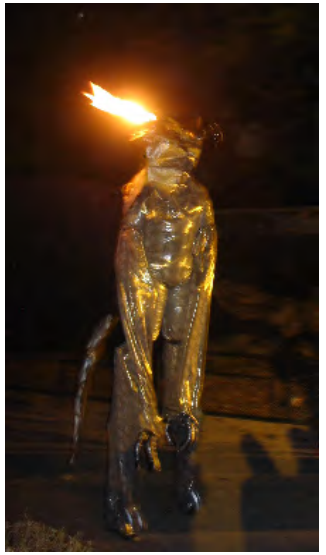
Does dwelling = performance = use?

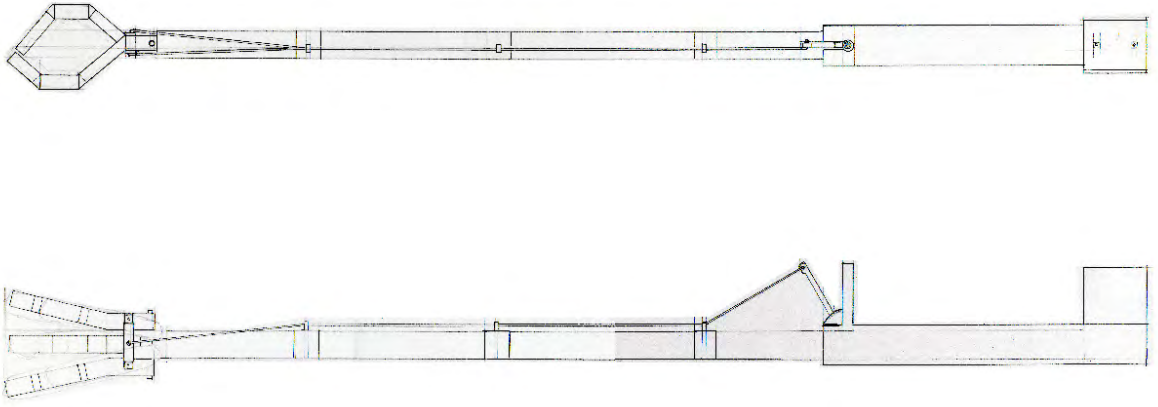
In documenting the creation of the dragon suit and subsequent performance, the potential for a retrofit of the house into a house for the dragon came to mind as a possibility to explore the idea of dwelling on two levels of reality; concrete and imaginary. The work of John Hejduk in The Lancaster Hanover Masque was examined to further this idea which looks at the relationship between inhabitant and habitat as such:

"Each object is designed as an autonomous architectural element, a prosthesis of the individual life of its specific 'inhabitant', the 'subject'."

Wim van den Bergh, "Icarus' Amazement or the Matrix of Crossed Destinies" . Hejduk, John. The Lancaster/Hanover Masque. London: Architectural Association & Canadian Centre for Architecture, 1992 pg. 83



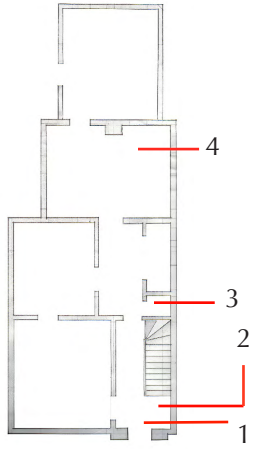




Dragon's Arm

How does a house perform?

To confront the potential for an architectural analogue to the alchemical processes of the making of the dragon, I began to examine the particular situation of this house with the dwelling = performance comparison in mind. I began to document conditions where the physical material was splitting, cracking, weathering or coming undone from its normal configurations. These fragments of different scales and textures could begin to inform one of an altogether different 'order' existing within the house, counter to the 'idealized' representations achieved through drawings.



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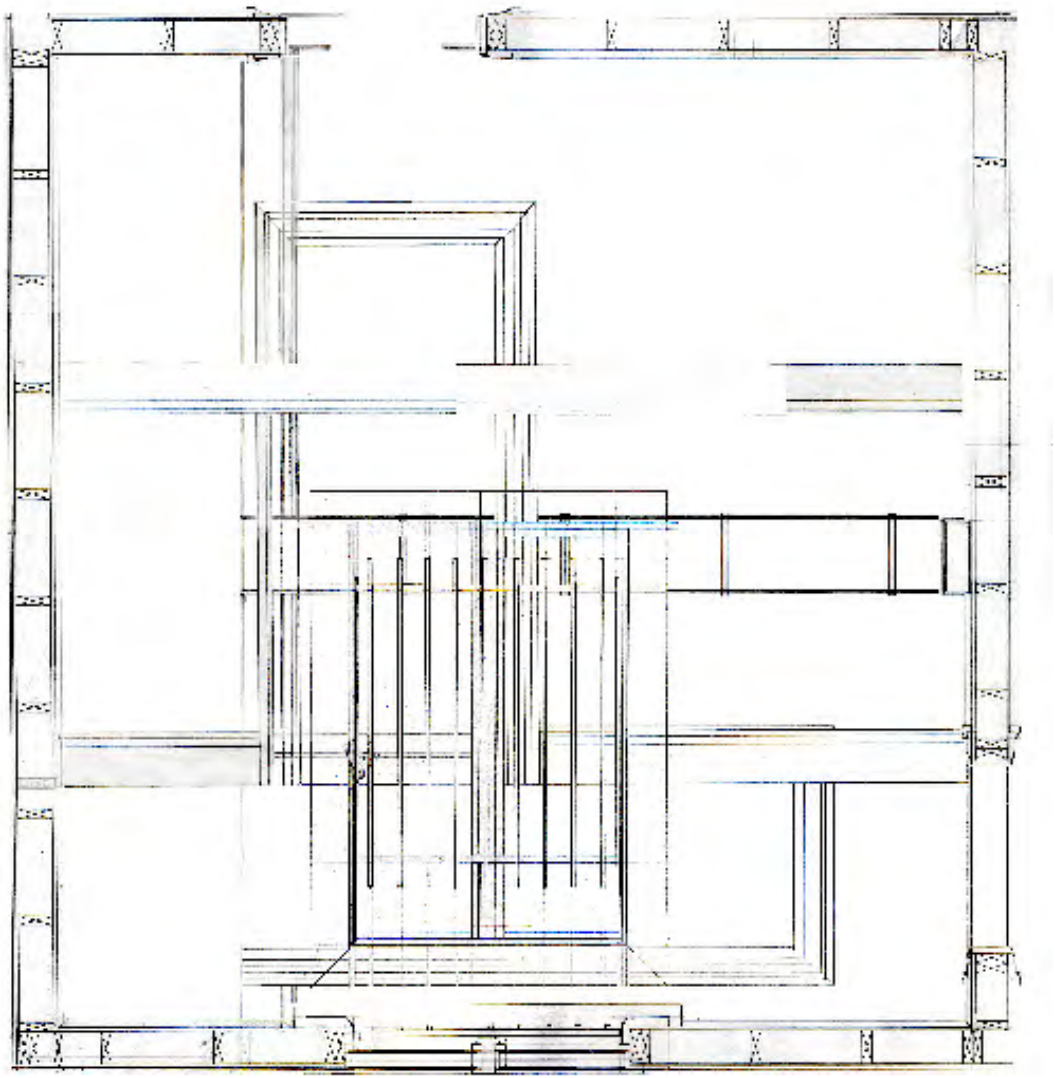
How does one undwell?

To continue the investigations into representation of the house, drawings of more detail including speculations into the construction of walls were completed.

The "living" room was chosen as the focal point to continue the drawings, due to its title's insinuation of some form of "living" occurring within its spaces, and also because it provided the richest variety of architectural elements within the house such as windows, doorways, and surface textures that fit into my investigations into fragments.



Collapse of "Living" Room Plans and Interiour Elevations
Scale 1/2" = 1'0"

Plaster Casting

The method of tapping into the more articulate order of the house and its possibilities was to cast those elements in plaster. The displacement of these elements by way of grafting, of receiving the negative or impression of each particular situation provided a very rich potential to begin to answer some of the questions driving my inquiry.

Casts of transition zones (doorways) and those conditions where the house was cracking, splitting or breaking apart were of particular interest.

The frame was derived from the 1″=1′0″ plan drawing of the "living" room as a method of deriving consistent 12″ x 13 1/4″ samples. This physical connection provided the link between the two modes of representation in the project.

Death Masks of 67 Hallatt St

Andrew Lewthwaite

Undwelling and the death mask of a house...

A total of thirty-one casts were taken from the house, each a fragment of time frozen and immortalized, displaced from its original context, denied its proper place and demanding reinterpretation.

The notion of a "death mask" became a working concept with which the casts could be interpreted, and I began to explore the possibilities of creating a space in which the masks could be displayed.

Traditional death masks, which attempt to capture the expressions of the recently deceased in order to preserve their 'character' for purposes of sculpture or history, are attempts to foil the processes of decay that time sets in motion at the end of ones' life. The 'death masks' created in this project are counter to tradition as it is decay itself that is captured and frozen in frame, subverting what future attempts might be made to erase from memory the state of the house as it currently sits, empty and broken. In this way, the masks may be looked at in terms of giving life to a final performance, one that in some ways, speaks to the life of this house, its 'dwelling' or 'undwelling' in new ways.

Framing of the Masks

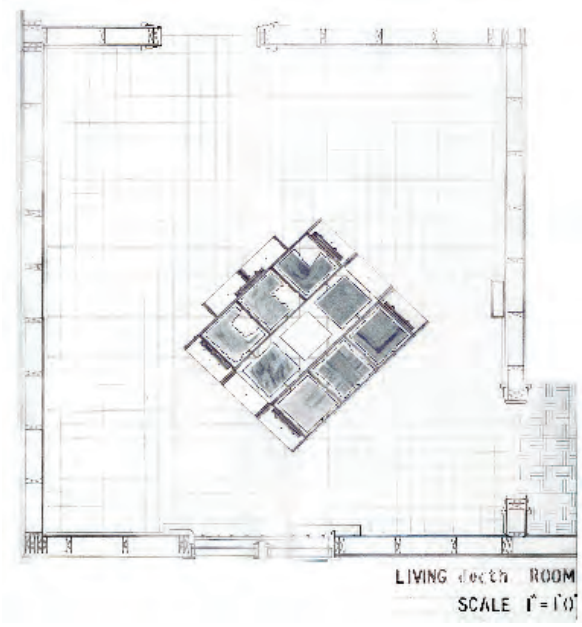
The notions of the ossuary and cemetery were inherent in any attempts to frame the masks, and it was decided that they would be assembled as a collective piece in a grid-like structure. Decisions about materials and detailing focused around simplicity, contrasting the frame and the cast, and most importantly, unity and consistency. Trial frames such as those above were fashioned out of planed dimensional lumber, but the final result was built using plywood for its depth, with the casts suspended on steel rods within the frame, allowing for rotation and a space to exist between the cast and frame.

"You reach a moment in life when, among the people you have known, the dead outnumber the living. And the mind refuses to accept more faces, more expressions: on every new face you encounter, it prints the old forms, for each one it finds the most suitable mask..."

(Italo Calvino. "Cities and the Dead 2", Invisible Cities)

A Tale of Undwelling: The Death Masks of 67 Hallatt Street

The masks as such are only fragments; they offer only glimpses of what may have been. It is possible that memories of late evening wanderers or children darting from room to room may be stirred up by wear on the floor...or perhaps a remembrance of the hollow sound of a slamming door, the wrenching creak of a floorboard in the dead of night... One might reminisce about a secret hiding spot, or the sense of excitement when passing through doorways into potential surprise...A dwelling may have memories as well... like the slow but constant pressure from the shifting ground below which causes a mighty floor to yield to its overpowering strength in cracks and ripples...One may consider the magical ability of sunlight to reveal hidden matrixes of lines, patterns and textures on a deceivingly smooth surface; or the appearance of the thousands of tiny particles of matter upon their crossing paths on a sunny afternoon with a ray of light passing through the window...



Death in the Park

A final setup was done in the park next to 67 Hallatt Street to escape the confines of the small living room, and to allow for the project to exhibit its mass and volume while blending into the frozen winter landscape.