

# Make/Shift

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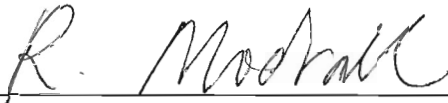
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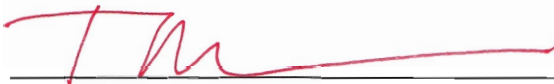
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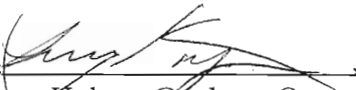
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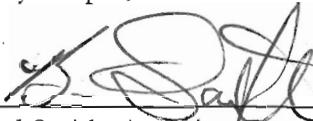
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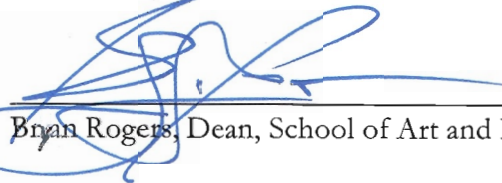
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# Make / Shift

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**Abstract:**

*Make/Shift* is a series of architectural sculptures and photography addressing displacement and its effect on the geography of home. Each object, assembled from salvaged furniture and construction materials, examines the intimate rituals and interactions occurring in rooms of the house. The objects have been installed in various locations outside of the gallery and documented. These accompanying photographs narrate their migrations and the longing for home. As a body of work *Make/Shift* suggests that the feeling of home is a sense of belonging with others. It speculates on the possibility to be at home, despite displacement, through sharing these intimate domestic spaces and habits with others.

**Keywords:** sculpture, photography, furniture, architecture, home, migration, displacement, longing, intimacy, domestic, space, place

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## Introduction

*Make/Shift* is a series of nomadic devices built through my desire to carry home with me as I move from place to place. Through the severing and ad-hoc reconstruction of furniture and domestic architecture, these uncanny objects open up the private spaces and rituals of home. They occupy the precarious border between interior and exterior, security and vulnerability, solitude and companionship. Architectural models, sculptural objects, and photographs create a dialogue between desired, metaphoric and literal inhabitation of improvised homes. They speculate on the possibility of belonging by making space for each other.

“Makeshift” is an improvised solution. After several moves across national and state boundaries I began questioning how I come to call a place “home”. In each new location I felt I was improvising a home through my housing, daily habits, and relationships. To “make” is this process of putting something together. To express my experiences of moving and longing for home, I make objects. These devices, assembled from second-hand furniture and construction material, are portable fragments of domestic space. “Shift” is a change or alteration. The devices act out the nomadic life of their owner. Accompanying photographs suggest the stories and situations that come from their travels. The “forward slash” is the relationship between words, between interior and exterior, between you and me. Exhibited together, these works explore the physical and psychological relationships of belonging.

This essay contextualizes *Make/Shift* through two distinct but corresponding voices. One voice situates the work within the disciplines of art, architecture, philosophy, and cultural studies. It examines the physical and ideological geography of home, as well as the effect that increased migration and displacement have on that space. A secondary voice speaks from personal experience and memory. It tells narratives of understated hope, desire and tenderness through experiences of leaving, longing, and attempting to reconstruct a home away from home.

1A  
**Framing Home**

“Home...is a *place*, a site in which we live. But, more than this, home is also an idea and an imaginary that is imbued with feelings.”<sup>1</sup>



1. Gregory Crewdson, *Untitled* (from Twilight series), 1998-2002

A home is a physical structure, with walls, doors, ceiling and floors that provide shelter as a fundamental human need. A home is also built on cultural practices that determine personal relationships and daily routines, such as gathering around a kitchen table for dinner. This ideological construction of home establishes familiar habits, thought of as ordinary, within personal environments. Physical space and social practices provide a basic structure to the otherwise complex

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<sup>1</sup> A. Blunt & R. Dowling, *Home*. London: Routledge, pg. 2

understanding of home. D.G. Hayward proposed one of the earliest explicit lists of properties defining home. These nine categories are listed in order of importance:

1. as a set of relationships with others
2. as a relationship with the wider social group and community
3. as a statement about one's self-image and self-identity
4. as a place of privacy and refuge
5. as a continuous and stable relationship with other sources of meaning about the home
6. as a personalized space
7. as a base of activity
8. as a relationship with one's parents and place of upbringing
9. as a relationship with a physical structure, setting or shelter<sup>2</sup>

Social dynamics are given the highest importance in Hayward's list. Home is a shelter for relationships with others. It is a place of belonging in which one feels accepted without judgment, where the inhabitant is free to be themselves among others. Home harbors personal identity as much as the physical body. Juhani Pallasmaa argues the concept of home belongs more to the fields of psychology and sociology than architecture.<sup>3</sup>

"It is evident that home is not an object, a building, but a diffuse and complex condition that integrates memories and images, desires and fears, the past and the present. A home is also a set of rituals, personal rhythms, and routines of everyday life."<sup>4</sup>

These rituals and routines are first taught to us in the homes we grow up in. They become habits, which are repeated in the future homes we inhabit. These develop into the memories and fantasies imbedded in the architecture of a home. Psychological conditions such as familiarity and comfort develop in a space over time. Home is both a spatial and psychological condition in which sense of self and supportive relationships reciprocate with familiar physical spaces. When one speaks of home, often it is the experience of *being at home*.

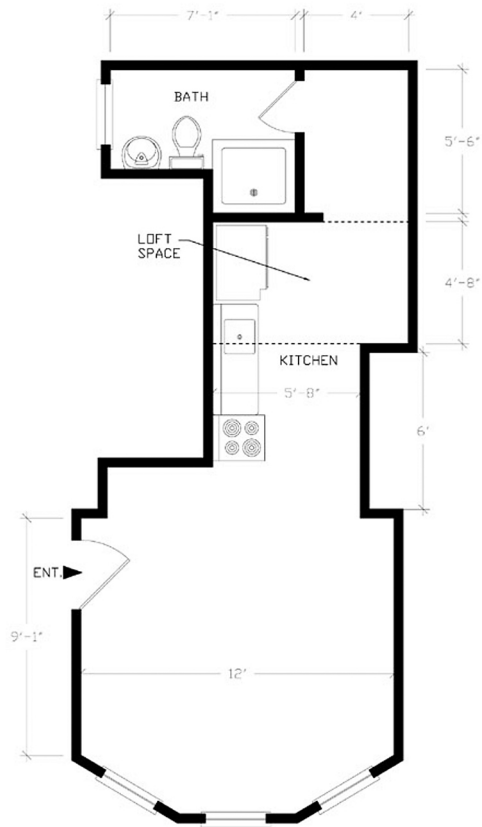
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<sup>2</sup> A. Rapoport, 'A Critical Look at the Concept 'Home'', The Home: words, interpretations, meanings and environments, Aldershot: Avebury Publishing Ltd. 1995, pg. 34

<sup>3</sup> J. Pallasmaa, "Identity, Intimacy, and Domicile" (1992), excerpted, Arkkitehti Finnish Architectural Review, [http://www.uiah.fi/studies/history2/e\\_ident.htm](http://www.uiah.fi/studies/history2/e_ident.htm), paragraph. 5

<sup>4</sup> Ibid., para. 12





## A Floor Plan

*That's not exactly how this started. I was waiting to get the keys to my new apartment. It's a beige and forest green house split into six rental apartments. I'll move into number six on the last day of August, three weeks away. I walk by it embarrassingly often. I've been in Ann Arbor for the last month, in a sublet room, and not knowing anyone. To pass the time I come up with daily routines. Every afternoon I take a long walk, during which I inevitably pass my future home. I've never seen the inside. I found the place online and made my final decision based on the floor plan, which looked like an efficient use of a small space. I mailed my deposit and signed the faxed lease.*

*My possessions arrive next month. Last month I was staying with my parents in New Mexico. The month before that I was in Shanghai, wrapping up the two years I spent there teaching English. When I left, I packed as much as I could of the life I had made there into a few small suitcases. While staying with my parents, my Chinese apartment merged with my childhood home resulting in a pile of cardboard boxes on a moving truck headed for Michigan. Now I'm living out of two suitcases and a backpack. Just clothes, my computer, a few books. My first acquisition is a box fan, purchased after the first humid, sweat-soaked night without sleep. It's the first thing that I don't have a free hand to carry.*

*When the thirty-first arrives, I turn the key in the lock of apartment number six. Looking around the empty space I try to imagine that initial floor plan laid over what's in front of me. I notice the inconsistencies: some built-in shelving in the living room, a missing vanity mirror replaced by a smaller, ornate framed one. I put my fan in the window to disperse the stale smell of white paint and start unpacking. The belongings I could barely carry on my own now seem like specks of dust blown into the corners of the room. I spend the next three weeks in this empty apartment, my empty apartment, waiting for my boxes to arrive.*

## Dwellings

*Being at home* is a coupling of a sense of social belonging with a personalized, physical space. Phenomenology attempts to objectively study experiences of the world through conscious physical and emotional perceptions and judgments. Martin Heidegger's essay "Building, Dwelling, Thinking" set some fundamental grounding for phenomenological concepts of space and place. His analysis of dwelling is useful in understanding the experience of being at home. He asks two essential questions: "what is it to dwell?" and "how is building related to dwelling?"<sup>5</sup> Heidegger traces the etymology of "to dwell" to the Old English word *bauen*: to remain or stay, which is also the base root for the word "building". It is a way of being in a particular place and time. This experiential knowing of a place over time is similar to the familiarity one feels when at home.

Dwelling is not only to stay, but also to stay with things. This is done through building. Dwelling is a way of being in the world through building, which produces things. The thing is crucial for Heidegger, because it is through things that a place is defined. He uses the example of the bridge to explain how a built thing creates a place.

"Thus, the bridge does not first come to a location to stand in it; rather, a location comes into existence only by virtue of the bridge."<sup>6</sup>

As a thing, the house, once built, defines its site as a home. This site may then carry all the ideological and psychological associations of home. Humans build because they dwell in space, and through building they define specific places, such as the home. Building is the way that being in space becomes concrete.

What is important and equally problematic about dwelling is the fact that it is both a noun and a verb. It can refer to a built structure or the act of inhabiting. The word "building", which comes from the same root, is also both a noun and a verb. In

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<sup>5</sup> M. Heidegger, Poetry, Language, Thought, New York: Harper & Rowe, pg. 145

<sup>6</sup> *Ibid*, 154

order to understand the concept of dwelling this duality is critical. When Heidegger asks what is it to dwell, he is talking about dwelling and building as actions. These actions are ways through which humans belong to the world. But it is through the specific buildings and dwellings that create a place for us to belong over time. By placing the importance on the action of dwelling before the product, humans are not limited by their already constructed environment. Humans can, and have, moved away from familiar places to new ones only to dwell and build again. As nouns, building and dwelling imply permanence, and through the ability to gather space are anchored to their site. As verbs, building and dwelling can happen continually as humans move throughout their lives.





## A Fort in the Woods

Once, my family lived in a corner-lot brick house in Chicago. We didn't build it, but we lived there for eight years. Down one street was a dead-end butting up to a dense forest. Very few knew about the secret things past the initial line of trees, like the ancient railroad tracks forgotten and rusted over. John, his little brother Tom, and I knew they were hidden beneath the wet mass of fallen leaves. The Lithuanian twin sisters lived closest, but due to some old-world superstition they could never go further than the last concrete step of their stoop. Only the three of us understood that this place was special, and that it was our responsibility to defend it. We needed fortifications.

Once, I built a fort. Dad had unnatural radar for local construction projects. He sensed them and sought them out. Being an architect meant that you were allowed to walk right into someone else's house, that is as long as it was still under construction. I have a lot of memories spent with my father in half-built houses, running along the concrete foundation or climbing piles of displaced earth, I could pass from room to room like a ghost by squeezing through exposed wall studs. John and I were developing plans for our fort in the woods and we needed materials. Dad instinctively knew a neighbor two blocks down was rebuilding a retaining wall, and suggested we ask them for their unused bricks. One by one we carried those old, red bricks that I would later associate with Chicago, from their yard to a clearing among the trees. The fort took the shape of a rising turret, circular with a crack of an entrance in the back and small gaps for windows. By the end of the day we had built our defense.

## Longings

The 20<sup>th</sup> Century was characterized by an attempt to understand the growing instability of places of shelter and belonging. Heidegger's reflections on dwelling recognized the housing shortage of the 1950s, but felt that the real crisis at hand was philosophical. Eight years earlier, Theodor Adorno wrote that dwelling is no longer possible<sup>7</sup>. Both recognize the severity of physical homelessness due to destruction and relocation after World War II, but suggest that homelessness is becoming a condition of the times. Adorno feared that those who "evade the responsibility of dwelling" by living in hotel rooms or studio apartments "make a canny norm, out of the compulsory conditions of emigration".<sup>8</sup> Displacement and migrancy increased, replacing the familiarity of home. My experiences of moving and trying to feel at home in unfamiliar places led to making this body of work.

The initial investigations of *Make/Shift* included mental mapping of past homes, architectural renderings based on memory, and models made of cardboard and basswood. Through these sketches I reflected on my nostalgia for belonging and the associated architecture. Symptoms of displacement were apparent earlier than the 20<sup>th</sup> Century. "Nostalgia" was first diagnosed as a physical illness in 1688, often afflicting soldiers stationed abroad, international students, and domestic servants.<sup>9</sup> It was characterized by a longing for homeland while in a foreign land. By the 19<sup>th</sup> Century, nostalgia and homesickness were being considered pathological conditions. During this time, travel and migration were becoming more feasible. After leaving my childhood home to live abroad, and then returning to a new city within my own country, I felt this longing for home. Nostalgia for home imagines a utopian future-past, an imaginary location that cannot be inhabited because it only exists as a desired place.<sup>10</sup> These drawings offered a way to virtually inhabit these desired but absent homes.

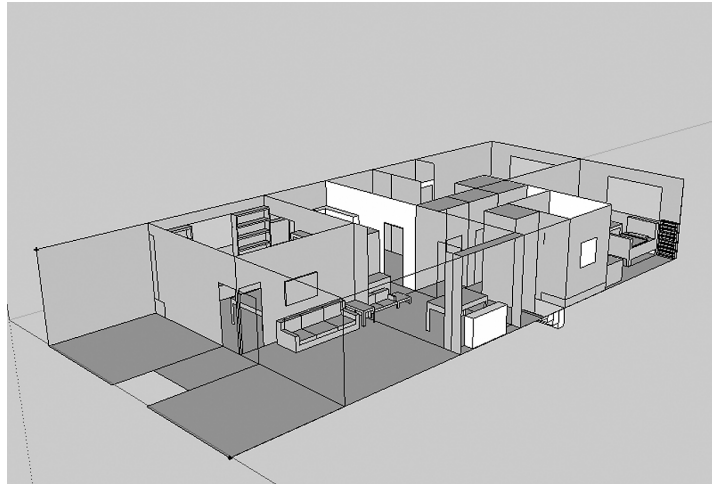
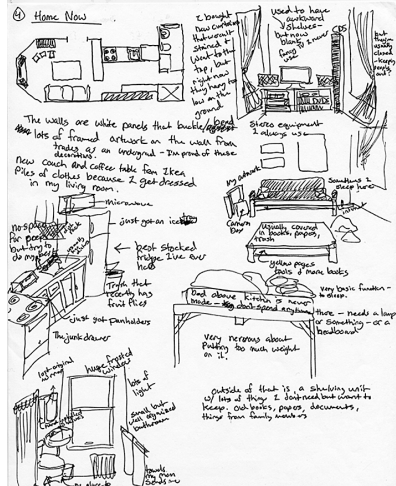
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<sup>7</sup> T. Adorno, *Minima Moralia: Reflections from Damaged Life*. London: Verso, pg. 38

<sup>8</sup> Ibid, 38

<sup>9</sup> S. Boym, *Future of Nostalgia*. New York: Basic Books, pg. 3

<sup>10</sup> S. Stewart, *On Longing*. Durham: Duke University Press, pg. 23



2. notebook sketches, 2010

3. Rendering of 1402 Silver, Albuquerque, NM, 2010

The feeling of being at home relies on friends and family. I was nostalgic for relationships in which I felt part of a supportive community. Heidegger and Adorno believed the crisis of dwelling was not due to lack of housing, but something more social. It is the inability to belong. Considering the numerous recent conflicts, ranging from protest to war, over different identities, the term “we” can no longer be used with confidence.<sup>11</sup> The questions about belonging that emerged in the modern era were not solved and have only become more complex and aggressive. The architectural devices in *Make/Shift* speculate that dwelling can be felt, despite dislocation, when personal space and intimate situations are shared with others. By reconfiguring domestic spaces, these objects attempt to momentarily shelter these interactions.



4. selected architectural models, 2010-2011

<sup>11</sup> J.L. Nancy, Being Singular Plural. Stanford: Stanford University Press, pg. xii-xiii



## A Shared Bathroom

*I just wanted a few extra minutes of sleep. But the bathroom, first thing in the morning, is a highly contested space in a house of twenty-somethings making our best attempts to live the nine-to-five workweek. After college the four of us rented a house together. We couldn't afford to live on our own, but this was a step up from the dormitories. After hitting the snooze button twice, I drag myself out of bed. Someone beat me to it. The shower is already running and I know the hot water is depleting fast. I'm kicking myself for enjoying those extra fifteen minutes.*

*Our kitchen cabinets are filled with mismatched cups and dishes that always end up stacked precariously. This is similar to our coat rack, which leans with the weight of more outerwear than the four of us could possibly use. Below the coats is a pile of sneakers and boots, many as mismatched as the bowls. None of us could have a home on our own, so we assembled this one from the scraps we brought with us. Someone had a TV. Someone else had a couch. I grab the first bowl off the top, feeling the whole tower shift underneath. Cups clink against our single wine glass on the second shelf. I find my favorite mug as the coffee machine grumbles out the final drops.*

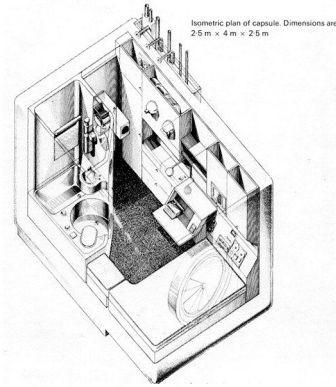
*Thank god there's milk in the fridge. Living like this you never know what will be in order and what will be in disarray. I pour the fresh carton of milk, and at the same time know the sink is overflowing with dirty dishes. Soon I'll add mine to the heap. We wait to see who gets irritated first, before they get cleaned and put away. My parents had the daily routine down pat. There always seemed to be an extra gallon of milk at the back of the fridge. Garbage was never thrown in without a liner. But we're just figuring this shit out. At times I doubt any humanity in my roommates, but that makes a new roll of toilet paper, or this milk, such a tender gesture. Half way through breakfast I hear the water stop. I throw my bowl in the sink and walk into the damp bathroom.*



## The Apartment

Just as home is both a physical and imaginary space, the problem of belonging that escalated throughout the 20<sup>th</sup> Century has both material and social symptoms. Considering the housing typical for transient living, as well as my own experiences, I focused on the studio apartment. This architectural form was meant to address the housing crisis mentioned by Heidegger. As the city evolved as the center for business and living, the need to accommodate the influx of residents increased. The high-rise apartment complex became a functional solution for this housing need. The initial plans for *Make/Shift* was made up of six modular structures, each addressing a single room of the house. Each room would open or unfold their cramped conditions to provide space for personal interactions. They would combine to make a full-scale installation.

The open/closed-pairing in *Make/Shift* has psychological implications as well. Peter Sloterdijk refers to the studio apartment as the materialization of individual, cell-like habitation<sup>12</sup>. The apartment provides shelter and support for the individual, freeing their personal space from constraints enforced by others. Referring to the apartment as an “egosphere”, Sloterdijk examines the ways in which this form promotes the insular relationship between inhabitant and his or herself. He points out the correlation between this architectural development and Heidegger’s dwelling.



5. Kisho Kurakawa, *Nakagin Capsule Tower*, 1972

“Existence in a one-bedroom apartment is nothing other than the being-in-the-world of one single case, or the re-embedding of the once deliberately isolated into his lebenswelt (lifeworld) at a ‘space-timely’ fixed address.”<sup>13</sup>

<sup>12</sup> P. Sloterdijk, *Terror From the Air*, Los Angeles, Semiotext(e), pg. 89

<sup>13</sup> Ibid, 91

The studio apartment sustains the physical needs of the individual resident, but disregards the personal attachments needed to feel at home. The objects in *Make/Shift* consider “open” and “closed” to be emotional, as well as spatial, conditions. Their transformations attempt to break apart the cellular individuality of the apartment, relocating private rituals into a shared, public context. Furniture and walls are cut and re-attached to expose the shifting relationships that play out in each space. The windows and frames in the pieces not only offer a view between interior and exterior, but also offer an intermediary space for people to interact.

The devices in *Make/Shift* highlight the isolation of living in a studio apartment. The renter develops particular relationships with furnishings that assist in solitary living. One strategy is to minimize possessions to a Spartan functionality, such as eating microwave dinners or drinking from a carton to avoid dirty dishes. This is an attractive option for the resident who anticipates moving frequently. Another strategy is what Sloterdijk calls “elaborate habits of self-pairing” that occur in the apartment.

“In order for the realization of self-pairing to take place, the media that can be identified as ego-technologies are a prerequisite. It is these contemporary media that sustain self-fulfillment and allow for their users to constantly return to themselves and eo ipso to the pair formation with themselves and their surprise inner partners.”<sup>14</sup>

The apartment dweller might use the television or radio to generate “voices” to fill an otherwise silent building. Through more complicated ego-technologies, such as the telephone, television and Internet, the resident can intentionally bring the outside world into a private space. By physically reconstructing domestic objects, such as the couch, bed and sink, *Make/Shift* challenges these strategies. Rather than establish relationships with self through these objects, they necessitate someone else to interact with them. By reinterpreting the function of these objects, they insist that private space is affected by others. Instead of offering an invisible convenience for solitary living, these devices point out that comfort is always relative.

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<sup>14</sup> Ibid, 97



## A Conversation

Getting off the L at Logan Square I meet up with Paul, unshaven and skinnier than two years ago. He gives me a tour of his neighborhood and the local farmers' market, before walking back to his apartment. We spend the next few hours shoving blueberries in our mouths and his scattered belongings into boxes and trash bags. It's the kind of last minute packing I hate. There's no consideration for space or organization, just frantic, impulsive shoveling. The rest of the house is filled with the heavy possessions of a long term resident. Paul's life is contained in his small bedroom. Soon these boxes and bags will be jammed into his white Corolla as he drives from Chicago to Denver and finally back to Albuquerque, where we first met.

While the car is getting a brake check and oil change, we eat eggs and hash browns at the bar of a cramped diner. He tells me about his frustration with Midwesterners. He thought Chicago would be different, more cosmopolitan, but ended up disappointed. We talk about the people around us like a different species, understood mostly through myth and hearsay. I'm on my way to Ann Arbor, Michigan, a city and state I have never seen. But I'm fairly certain the next three years of my life, the last years of my twenties, will be spent there, attending graduate school. Paul moved to Chicago two years ago and has just lost his job. I get the feeling the whole experience has worn on him.

We pick up the car and begin carrying all the boxes and bags down three flights of stairs. I finally meet his roommate, a serious, stylish girl about our age. Besides introducing me, Paul barely speaks to her. Later, I go with him to his farewell party. He seems cautious with his words, and my interactions with his friends, like he's worried I won't like them. Paul asks me how I'm feeling about my own move. I'm anxious. Paul asks if I will be living with roommates? I tell him no, that it's a studio apartment. His response reveals his own dissatisfaction with living with strangers. "Well, then it can only get so bad."

## Intimate Strangers

*Make/Shift* challenges the hyper-individualistic aspirations of the apartment by focusing on the personal relationships that define home. The models and drawings allow for an imaginary inhabitation of space, but I wanted that interaction to be sensory and physical. The objects suggest that being-at-home requires a level of intimacy with other people. Jean Luc Nancy's Being Singular Plural argues that *being* only occurs when one is with others, and has some understanding that they are different. He states that

“‘People’ clearly states that we are all precisely people, that is, indistinctly persons, humans, all of a common ‘kind’, but of a kind that has its existence only as numerous, dispersed, and indeterminate in its generality. This existence can only be grasped in the paradoxical simultaneity of togetherness (anonymous, confused, and indeed massive) and disseminated singularity (these or those ‘people(s)’, or ‘a guy’, ‘a girl’, ‘a kid’).”<sup>15</sup>

We understand ourselves, and our connection with the world, by interacting with others. Being in the world means understanding that people are indeterminately different but also share common understandings. Being is only ever *being together*.

Migration, and the resulting displacement, impairs the ability to dwell as Heidegger defines it. But there is still the possibility of belonging for the displaced individual if they acknowledge that others experience similar displacement. Svetlana Boym refers to this condition as “diasporic intimacy”, which is “not opposed to uprootedness and defamiliarization but constituted by it”<sup>16</sup>. In her research, the immigrant’s longing for home is a longing for intimacy with the world. Lacking a shared cultural background does not exclude experiencing closeness with others. The belief in “complete belonging” may be destroyed, but there are still potential to share experiences with strangers.<sup>17</sup> *Make/Shift* attempts to create spaces, partly physical and partly imaginary, in which brief moments of intimacy can be acted out between visitors.

<sup>15</sup> J.L. Nancy, Being Singular Plural, Stanford: Stanford University Press, pg. 7

<sup>16</sup> S. Boym, Future of Nostalgia, New York: Basic Books, pg. 252

<sup>17</sup> Ibid, 255



*Make/Shift* is made up of three sculptural devices: *Window/Seat*, *Bed/Lean*, and *Wash/Closely* as well as analogous photographic series. While they address the habits and interactions that occur in various rooms of the house, each device begins with a piece of second-hand furniture. These are the familiar furnishings of the itinerant student. Experiences of migration are varied and significantly unique, but Boym encourages interpreting displacement from a broad perspective.

“The development of their consciousness does not begin at home, but at the moment of leaving home. After all, every teenager dreams of leaving home, and often that first escape determines the map of one’s dreams as much as the architecture of home”<sup>18</sup>.

My experiences of migration are particular to an upwardly mobile, American citizen. I moved away from a supportive childhood home to attend college. I was able to live abroad as an English teacher. I returned to the United States to continue my education. Each of my relocations came out of agency and progress, but resulted in an aching separation from familiar places and people regardless. The immigrant is perhaps best suited to survival with this bifurcated sense of belonging. However even those who have never left their nation or village can experience a longing for being at home. *Make/Shift* emerged from this longing and resulted in a body of artwork about this desire for belonging.

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<sup>18</sup> Ibid, 255-6



A Few Gestures

REMS "It's the End of the World" is playing at the bar. I'm singing along, drunkenly, arm in arm with Zack. If you know the song, you can imagine we stay focused on chorus. I'm trying to convince him to stay for another year, like the rest of us are. But he won't. He says we can all stick around another year, but things won't be the same, and he'll only be disappointed.

I'm struggling to pack all the things I've accumulated over the last two years into a couple suitcases. There's so much I won't be able to carry with me. Eimear smiles and tells me she goes through this every couple years. She tells me what she always tells herself: only keep what you can't live without!

I take one last lap in the pool and the sun is already drying the water off my skin. Worm is coming back from a hike. Saying goodbye, I tell him that time just flew by so fast. I didn't get a chance to get to know him. He hugs me, holding the side of my head against his. He says I think that's a good thing, to remember that we never have enough time to really get to know someone.

I hadn't spoken with anyone in a few days. I was angry and upset. My best friend just moved away. I didn't expect it to bother me so much but there were a lot of things I never got to say to him. Maybe I wanted him to change his mind and decide to stay. But he didn't. A few days later his ex-girlfriend knocked on my door. She asked me if I would come over and fix the sink. It got me out of my room. She knew I wouldn't say no.

**Devices: Window/Seat**

*Window/Seat* is a small, house-like structure emerging from a blue, plaid couch. The couch is secondhand, similar to one found in college housing. This found object is cut in half. The two seats have been reattached with hinges in the middle, allowing each side to pivot 180 degrees. They can be positioned side-by-side, as a conventional couch, or rotated inward until they face one another. Walls are built onto the planes created by splitting the middle, and continue around to the back of each seat. A pitched roof, also cut in half, covers the structure. The painted vinyl siding and wood trim of the exterior wall has the qualities of a quaint, suburban home. Fragments of living room walls partially enclose the sitter. When the two seats are placed side-by-side, the walls form a solid backdrop. The space between the two sitters is only slightly interrupted by the edges. When the two seats are pulled together to face one another, symmetrical openings create a large square window frame. In this position the exterior is revealed with the large window in the center.

The cut dividing the piece in half initially reads as a destructive act. It suggests the dismantling of home that results from moving to a new place. But it is also a reinvention. By taking the couch and architecture apart, *Window/Seat* suggests that personal relationships can physically alter the space. These relationships are embodied in the position of the two seats, which can either pull the structure apart or together. This work references the “house cuttings” performed by Gordon Matta-Clark in the 1970s. In *Splitting* Matta-Clark bisects an abandoned home from top to bottom, tilting the rear of the building back on its foundation. By cutting the house in half he erases the functional aspects of the space and in the process raises questions about the meaning of home. Both work with pre-existing domestic objects (the house and the couch) and use the vertical cut to question the unity and continuity of home. Matta-Clark’s work addresses the physical interior and exterior of the house and the sensory experience of moving through that space. *Window/Seat* uses slivers of domestic space but focuses on the personal interactions that happen between those on the couch.



6. *Window/Seat* (open), 2011



7. *Window/Seat* (closed), 2011



8. *Window/Seat*, 2011

Matta-Clark relied on documentary images to bring his site-specific installations into the gallery. The series of photographs accompanying *Window/Seat* depict it being pushed through a parking lot, being situated in the front yard of a similarly painted existing home, and being occupied by a man and woman drinking coffee. They suggest that the object has an existence outside of the gallery as well. It moves from place to place, looking for somewhere to belong. Much like the concept of home, these artworks express both a physical and imaginary experience of domestic space. The photographs of *Window/Seat* offer hints at the history of the object. The salvaged furniture carries the traces of previous owners. Frayed fabric and slight stains suggest the accumulation of history over the object. This history is evocative but elusive. Like all found objects, its traces provide hints of a mysterious previous life. The photographs offer a different kind of trace. Through these images, we can see the kinds of interactions that have happened around this object as well as the places it has been. They tell partial stories about the accumulation of time surrounding the work.



9. Gordon Matta-Clark, *Splitting* (exterior), 1973



10. Gordon Matta-Clark, *Splitting* (interior), 1973





11. *Window/Seat (photograph #1)*, inkjet print, 2011



12. *Window/Seat (photograph #2)*,  
inkjet print, 2011



13. *Window/Seat (photograph #3)*,  
inkjet print, 2011

*Window/Seat* retains its function as seating, but its reconstruction introduces a more complex relationship between occupants through their position. The hinge facilitates this shifting relationship. Depending on the interaction, each individual might pull his or her side towards the other creating a more intimate enclosure. Allan Wexler explores the reconfiguring of furniture and relationships in his artwork. In

*Bed/Sitting Room for an Artist in Residence*, a wall between two adjacent rooms has openings through which two beds and overhanging lamps can partially or fully pass. Each side of the bed can be pulled out fully on either side, or rest halfway between offering sofa seating to both sides. This work



14. Allan Wexler, *Bed/Sitting Room for an Artist in Residence*, 1988

provides a literal function for the inhabitant of each side of the wall, but also raises the idea of balance and cooperation. Alex Schweder and Ward Shelley's installation *Stability* also deals with the physical embodiment of personal relationships. During a one-week performance, the two artists lived inside a small house-like structure with a bedroom on each end and a kitchen and bathroom in the center. The whole structure is suspended in the middle like a seesaw. The two inhabitants learn how their movements affect the opposite side, and over time adjust to living in balance with each other. Like these works, *Window/Seat* uses flexible space and repositioning as physical metaphors for personal relationships.





15. Alex Schweder & Ward Shelley, *Stability*, 2009

In *Window/Seat*, the couch stands in for the living room, a place where guests are welcomed. It is a social space mediating the inhabitant and their company. Splitting this space in half points out the boundary between visitor and resident. Rather than establishing a firm boundary between who does and does not belong inside of a home, the couch offers a place where a belonging can develop between two people. As audience members participate in the piece, the suggestions of walls and window are seen out of the corners of their eyes. If a conversation between the sitters develops, imagination fills the rest of the space creating a temporary living room in an unexpected place. As seen through the photographs, *Window/Seat* is a nomadic object. It is installed in various situations, offering the same potential interaction but with constantly changing people and surroundings. Whether it is in a gallery, a front lawn, or outside a coffee shop, *Window/Seat* offers a temporary space for people to sit and talk. The participants are likely to be strangers to the object and perhaps to each other. It offers a space for intimacy between strangers attempting to feel at home with one another.



## Push and Pull

*I carry this couch with me every time we sit together. It doesn't matter if we're in my house or yours, at a party, a coffee shop, or a movie theater. It's just that I am next to you and I can't help but read into every nuance of your position. Your hand touches the worn fabric over the sofa's arm. I uncross my legs and cross them again. We're sitting side by side, facing forward, looking forward to something but never facing each other. I turn on a movie. You idly scan the blank walls, painted over and over and over again with each new renter. We talk about something or other.*

*It's comfortable. We settle in to the seats and we could settle for this, content to pass a few hours this way. Or we could change our arrangement. What if we turned towards each other, rather than the sparse landscape of the room? I could reach over to your side. There are a few awkward moments trying to make this shift. We rock back and forth in order to get the thing moving. You're not sure how to pull yourself in. My hand crosses your lap, reaching for a handle that would provide me some leverage. We could figure this out. I could finally look you in the eye and describe the perfect little house built around us. We could sit there, face to face, with a roof over our heads, and be at home.*

*Getting closer, our knees start to touch. The ground beneath us is disappearing fast. Replaced by uncertainty. A couch doesn't work like this. We're afraid of losing our footing. Do we keep pulling, and find some way to accommodate each other's bulky legs? Sitting entwined in this little boat of a house, enclosed, protected, staring out the window. Or do we push back, demanding our space? The distance is easier. You might decide to stand up and walk away. Letting me stretch out and take a nap in the space of your absence. Throughout this constant push and pull, we make our own choices and movements. But I know there's a hinge holding us together, that your movements affect me and mine affect you.*

## 7A

### Devices: *Bed/Lean*

*Bed/Lean* is the right half of a mattress and bed frame, which folds up inside of a bedside dresser. The wood frame is cut down the middle leaving enough space for a single body to lie down. A thin mattress with white and blue striped sheets, a pillow and a few mismatched blankets furnish the bed. The sheets and pillowcase are sewn by hand from found sheets. The frame has no headboard. Instead it rests inside a hollowed-out, bedside dresser. The interior of the dresser looks like a bedroom with textured walls, corner molding, and a single dome light in the ceiling. The ceiling light can be turned on and off with a small pull chain. The sleeper's head rests inside this small offering of a bedroom space. The left half of the bed is absent, replaced by ornate metal hooks at the head and foot of the frame. With the right side supported by the legs of the bed frame and dresser, the whole object leans down on these hooks. The mattress and frame can fold up into the dresser and be secured with a set of small brass hooks. The base contains a single set of wheels, allowing the closed device to be rolled.

*Bed/Lean* addresses metaphors of movement and attachment. The metal hooks on the left side of the bed connect with other pre-existing bed frames. This is necessary for the device to lay level. This physical reliance on another bed suggests



16. Andrea Zittel, *A-Z Living Unit*, 1994

the emotional need to share a bed with another. Through her A-Z series, Andrea Zittel has built numerous small-scale, collapsible structures that provide the comfort and functionality of home. *A-Z Living Unit* consists of a series of unfolding boxes that contain a bed, a small writing desk, and a few shelves. Zittel's approach embraces self-sufficiency and utilitarianism for the inhabitant. *Bed/Lean* questions what





17. *Bed/Lean* (open), 2011



18. *Bed/Lean* (closed), 2011



19. *Bed/Lean* (detail), 2011

might be lost or gained from the need for shared domestic space. Michael Rakowitz' *ParaSITE* is an inflatable bed for homeless people. It is designed to attach to exterior exhaust vents, which inflate the plastic shelter with warm air otherwise lost to the atmosphere. All of these devices propose bedding for mobile residents. *Bed/Lean* addresses the specific emotional needs of sharing one's bed with another person. Rather than compensating for the lack of home, it requires that someone share his or her bedroom with the object.



20. Michael Rakowitz, *ParaSITE*, 1998

When folded up the bed moves on a set of wheels. A wooden bar, used to hold a pair of pajamas, also functions as a push handle. In its collapsed state, *Bed/Lean* can be carried from home to home like an elaborate sleeping bag. The photographs depict *Bed/Lean* in its search for attachment. The series shows the device hooked onto to various beds, in different homes. The images highlight the subtle height differences when attaching to a stranger's bed. When the frame is slightly higher, *Bed/Lean* seems to be pulled up off its legs. If the other bed is low, the object leans in slightly, seeming to nuzzle up against the larger bed. This search for partnership through objects is present in Gabriel Orozco's series *Until You Find Another Yellow Schwalbe*. This series documents the artist's daily journeys in Berlin. Every time he came across the same model of his yellow scooter the artist took a photograph of the two side by side. Orozco's lighthearted record shows a desire to find similarity with strangers through physical belongings. The photographs of *Bed/Lean* are metaphors for this longing. The beds become anthropomorphic substitutes for sleeping bodies.





21. *Bed/Lean* (photograph #1),  
inkjet print, 2011



22. *Bed/Lean* (photograph #2),  
inkjet print, 2011



23. *Bed/Lean* (photograph #3), inkjet print, 2011

With each interaction the beds take on different human characteristics. Placed next to a neatly made bed, *Bed/Lean* also has nicely folded blankets. At times the other bed frame is too high or too low, resulting in an imbalanced partnership. Using the bed as a surrogate body, *Bed/Lean* shows the desire for an equal and supportive attachment to share one's bed.



24. Gabriel Orozco, *Until I Find Another Yellow Schwalbe*, 1995

Seen in the gallery, without a bed to attach with, *Bed/Lean* is unfolded, blankets rumpled, with the dome light illuminated. The mattress leans at an angle, its' metal hooks resting directly on the floor. In this state the object also takes on anthropomorphic qualities. It limps like a wounded animal. Without an attachment it appears crippled and without crutches. It solicits a sympathetic bond between the viewer and the pathetic object. This device does not extend itself to provide space for another, but rather asks others to care for and nurture it. The audience must ask whether they would welcome this strange object into their bedroom and, by extension, what kind of person would be offered that space. As a solitary object, *Bed/Lean* embodies an unfulfilled longing to cohabit in an unfamiliar place. Through its attempts at attachment it asks the audience to sympathize with this longing for home.

The bed is the primary object of the bedroom, which sustains the residents' most intimate relationships with others. Small apartments often lack the necessary space for a bed and for those moving frequently, a bed is a difficult furnishing to carry. Built-in loft beds, Murphy beds, and mattresses placed on the floor are familiar in these temporary dwellings. These types of sleeping solutions can carry social



stigmas with them. Home is closely associated with family. Whether the occupant is a student, a migrant, someone unwed or recently separated, the apartment suggests someone without family, without stability, without attachment. *Bed/Lean* embodies this interim position of desiring both mobility and attachment. The photographs document its attempts at finding a family. It moves from home to home, “hooking up” with other beds. The object’s promiscuity is not self-indulgent. Instead it seems to be questioning what defines a family. Through various attachments, *Bed/Lean* reveals the desire, intimacy and endeavor of sharing a bed with someone.



## Attachments

*You invited me to spend Thanksgiving at your place. The five-hour drive felt like nothing after years of being thousands of miles apart. I haven't had Thanksgiving with blood relatives in years. I'm always too far and the time off is too brief. But these dinners with friends feel like family, a family pieced together when you're far away from home. When I arrive you meet me at the front door, smiling ear to ear. You give me a hand maneuvering my bed up the narrow flights of stairs. Your apartment is on the top floor of course. We swear and sweat as it bangs against walls. It's picked up a few more scrapes from this visit. Trying to get it through your front door requires advanced geometry.*

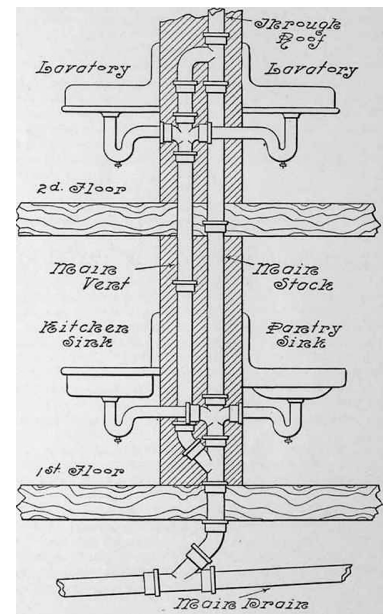
*We pass the time till your husband comes home from work. You give me a tour of the place. You've set up a little corner of your office for me to stay. I unpack my things, unfolding my mattress and laying out my blankets. I recognize all the furniture and decoration from your old place in Albuquerque. I notice the refrigerator magnet you stole from me. I don't bother bringing it up. At this point I'm glad you have it. When your husband comes home the three of us cook dinner. We eat and have a few beers. I ask what you think of the city. Who have you been in touch with? Hours pass laughing and talking. And the days of my visit pass just as fast.*

*On the last night I sheepishly suggest we combine our beds in the living room and all fall asleep to a movie. What was I saying? Here I am, a grown man, single, asking to have a sleep over with a married couple. I try to bring it up so casually that it could easily be dismissed. But you love the idea. You both do. And not in a weird swinger type of way, but with an innocent longing for us all to be together again. My little mattress, barely able to lift itself off the floor, leans against your frame for support. Your perfectly made, queen-size bed, neatly ordered with his and her sides. We laugh at the monstrosity we've put together. It's like no family we've ever seen. But it feels like home.*

### Devices: Wash/Closely

*Wash/Closely* is a human-scale section of a domestic bathroom, specifically the area around the bathroom sink. There is a sink with small cabinet below, a vanity mirror, towel rack, soap dish, and tile wall. Walking around to the other side reveals a mirror image of this arrangement, with a slightly different color scheme. Standing out from the otherwise ordinary furnishings is the sink, which has no faucet or handles. There is no back at all. Instead the basin continues fluidly to the opposite side. Only a single drain in the middle distinguishes one side from the other. Above the sink, a window is cut through both walls, providing a view to the opposite side. Each side of the cabinet below the sink has a hinged door that pulls down towards the floor. The inside is covered in floor tile. When open, these become platforms, resting on drawer pulls, slightly above the ground. They provide the feeling of tile below the viewer's feet. The cabinet houses the sink's drainpipe and a metal bucket to catch excess water. Opening the vanity mirror reveals another window. The mirrors attach to a single vanity cabinet. If both are open at the same time, the occupants can see one another through the shelving.

The bathroom is an extremely personal and private space. Each device in *Make/Shift* attempts to move the private rituals of home into a public, or shared, position. However, bathroom routines are rarely shared. It is a space that offers seclusion from even the closest of relationships. The contradiction of this privacy is the water pipes that run between apartments, homes, and neighborhoods. Although hidden behind walls, water connects our experiences in the bathroom with those around us. This becomes more obvious in apartment complexes where running water or singing in the shower can often be heard through thin walls. It is common for the design of



25. diagram of continuous venting for multiple floors



26. *Wash/Closely* (closed), 2011



27. *Wash/Closely* (open), 2011



28. *Wash/Closely* (detail), 2011

high-rise apartments to place adjacent apartments bathrooms back to back. A single water line can be run through the building that each apartment shares. The design of *Wash/Closely* imitates this arrangement. Each side of the device provides an individual experience except for the sink, which breaches the separate spaces. The shared sink is a physical exaggeration of the shared water in an apartment complex, which can be made apparent by sounds of running water behind thin walls or a hot water failure that affects multiple tenants in the same building.

The photographs accompanying *Wash/Closely* show it sited outdoors. In one photograph it stands next to a hot dog stand. The window over the shared sink mimics the window through which food passes to consumers. Washing your hands before and after eating is habitual at home. Sidling up to the food stand, *Wash/Closely* offers the opportunity to act out this routine for passing students and workers picking up a quick meal along their daily commute. Another photograph illustrates a visual phenomenon that occurs when two people occupy each side of the sink. Each mirror reflects back on the viewer. The opening above the sink provides a window to see through to the other side. When two individuals stand on either side there is illusory merger of one's own face with another's body. The photographs depict interactions that occur when a private bathroom is placed in a public context. *Wash/Closely* asks the casual passerby to question the daily rituals around the bathroom sink, and what happens when those intimate acts are shared with others.





29. *Wash/Closely* (photograph #1), inkjet print, 2011

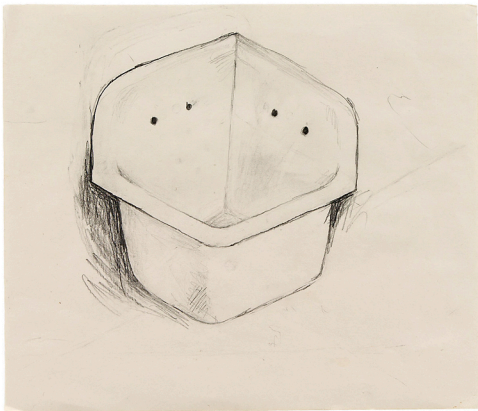


30. *Wash/Closely* (photograph #2), inkjet print, 2011



31. *Wash/Closely* (photograph #3), inkjet print, 2011

*Wash/Closely* introduces one of the few original fabrications in the body of work: a sculptural replica of two sinks mirrored back to back. The rear walls of each sink, the faucets and the handles have been removed. Instead there is a single basin and drain spanning across the doubled sinks. Unlike wood or fabric, ceramic resists being taken apart and reassembled. Because of this it was necessary to construct the shared sink by hand. This references the work of Robert Gober, who focused specifically on the typical domestic sink from the years of 1983 to 1992. His sculptural sinks are also built without faucets or drains. Through numerous iterations he examined the subtle psychological effects that emerge from simple alterations, such as extending the backsplash, doubling or tripling the sinks, or altering its angle and position.<sup>19</sup> The sink in *Wash/Closely* is an uncanny object. At first glance it appears to be an ordinary sink, but closer inspection reveals marks of the artist's hand. There are subtle indentations and traces of brush strokes. Much like the cuts in wood and construction material, these traces show that the object was constructed to satisfy a longing that conventional furnishings do not provide. In the case of *Wash/Closely*, the sink illustrates the longing for a shared experience of washing across from an unknown neighbor.



32. Robert Gober, *Untitled*, 1984



33. Robert Gober, *Double Sink*, 1984

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<sup>19</sup> R. Gober, Robert Gober: sculpture + drawing, Minneapolis: Walker Art Center, pg. 11-12



All of the devices of *Make/Shift* offer a momentary space of belonging by bringing intimate domestic objects and actions into a shared context. *Wash/Closely* transports the private acts around the bathroom sink into public settings. Like Guber's sinks, it asks the viewer to reconsider the daily action of hand washing, something normally done within the secure enclosure of home. Even the experience of washing one's hands in a public bathroom is granted the privacy of an individual sink. *Wash/Closely* ask the passerby to question how comfortable they might be washing their hands next to, and possibly brushing up against, the hands of a stranger. It is an interruption to Sloterdijk's ego-sphere apartment, suggesting that domestic actions are also dependant on others. The boundary between private and public is not determined by walls but rather via the choice to interact with others. If this opportunity is taken, belonging can form in a temporary situation. A sense of home can be carried from place to place.



## Running Water

Every morning it's the same routine. I wake up, roll out of bed, and stand in front of the bathroom mirror. I look at myself like a familiar stranger, unshaven and bleary-eyed. My hair coils out in every direction like untamed snakes. This is a face no one else sees. The façade before the daily renovation, crusty eyes and bad breath, sleep lines imprinted on my cheek. I look at the face in the mirror like someone I might see passing on the street. I subject that reflection to a barrage of criticism that I imagine others might throw at me throughout the day. And by resolving those problems, one at a time, I make myself presentable. My reflection and self become the same.

But you are a part of this too. I don't know what you look like. But I know when you run the water in the sink. I can hear it rushing through the pipes, the pipes that run from underneath both of us, through my apartment and eventually into yours. I don't know if you are brushing your teeth, washing your face or cleaning your hands. But I know you are standing across from me. Looking in the mirror just as I am looking in mine. We are like separated twins following the same motions, but invisible to each other. I know when you flush the toilet, because the water in mine bubbles slightly. I can hear you turn on the shower. It makes me uncomfortable, having this audible access to these personal rituals, but chances are you hear me too.

Through these sounds we have shared private moments. Things we keep hidden from our family and our partners. We may have never spoken. This apartment has new tenants every year. People come and go. I don't know what you look like, or your name, or where you work. But I know something about you, because we share this time in our bathrooms, separate and together. I know you are washing your hands while I'm brushing my teeth. The running water ties our homes together. And it doesn't matter if I move, or if you move. Every time I stand in front of the mirror and I hear the sounds of water running, I imagine you standing there across from me.

## Conclusion

My creative work, including built devices, architectural models, and photographs, makes room for others. I take apart expected forms of furniture, architecture, and text to point out multiple positions and voices that are needed to make a place feel like home. By reconstructing these fragments, I show that comfort and belonging are relative. The built devices and photographs of *Make/Shift* developed from my experiences of moving and longing for a place to call home. The sculptural objects, made of salvaged furniture and construction material, offer a physical shelter for the participants. By being dismantled and reassembled, these devices shift like relationships between people and feelings of belonging. The photographs of the objects in-situ are metaphors for the longing for home.

After three years of making work about the search for home, I'm now facing the palpable fact that I will be moving again in a few months. As I pack my belongings into cardboard boxes, it's hard avoid the irony in now having three more large and heavy pieces of furniture to move along with the impossibility of carrying the intangible connections with people I have built while living here. But the potential of my work lies in this dialog: between making and longing, and to see these seeming contradictions as supporting relationships. Home is about carrying the attachments to people, places, and objects with us, and understanding that their inevitable loss is also the potential for reconstruction. My work makes space for this endeavor.

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