Ree Morton and Feminist Installation Art: 1968 – 1977

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Abstract

This dissertation takes the artwork of Ree Morton (1936 – 1977) as a case study to investigate the significance of women making installation art in the United States in the 1970s. Since the 1980s, academics and institutions have foregrounded and prioritized the legacies of male artists in narratives of installation art. In reproducing these gender-biased histories many women installation artists and the wider impact of gender and feminist politics in the emergence of installation art histories have been overlooked. This study examines Morton's practice within the proposition of "feminist installation art" between 1968 and 1977 to argue that her and other women's installations developed in dialogue with key cultural issues such as domesticity, labor and space and therefore made valuable contributions to the emergence and development of installation art more generally. As the first sustained art historical study of the artist's career, Morton's practice is not only contextualized within adjacent histories of conceptual art, postminimalist sculpture, land art, installation art and feminist art, but her work is brought into dialogue with relevant discourses including women's autobiographical writing and art, feminine aesthetics and gendered domestic labor. This study furthermore takes a unique approach utilizing Morton's notebooks and artworks as equivalent objects of critical analysis to explore new ways of historicizing women's autobiographical art practices within theoretical frameworks of gendered subjectivity, agency, materiality and labor.

Résumé

Cette thèse prend l'œuvre de Ree Morton (1936 – 1977) comme cas d'étude pour se pencher sur l'importance des femmes auteures d'installations artistiques dans les années 1970 aux États-Unis. Depuis les années 1980, les universitaires et institutions ont mis de l'avant et priorisé les legs d'artistes de sexe masculin dans leurs récits retraçant l'histoire de l'installation artistique. En reproduisant ces histoires biaisées en faveur des hommes, de nombreuses artistes femmes, ainsi que l'impact au sens large des politiques féministes et du genre sur l'émergence de l'installation artistique, ont été négligés. Cette étude se penche sur la pratique de Morton au sein d'une proposition d'un « feminist installation art » entre 1968 et 1977. Elle soutient que Morton, ainsi que les installations par d'autres femmes ont été développées au travers d'un dialogue avec les enjeux culturels clefs de la domesticité, du travail et de l'espace et ont donc apporté une précieuse contribution à l'émergence et au développement de l'installation artistique en général. Dans cette première étude en histoire de l'art consacrée à la carrière de Morton, sa pratique est non seulement contextualisée au sein des histoires adjacentes de l'art conceptuel, de la sculpture post-minimaliste, du *land art*, de l'installation artistique et de l'art féministe, mais est également mise en dialogue avec les discours pertinents entourant l'écriture autobiographique des femmes, l'esthétique féminine et les dimensions liées au genre dans le travail domestique. Par ailleurs, cette étude adopte une approche unique en utilisant les cahiers de Morton et ses œuvres d'art comme objets d'analyse critique équivalents et explore de nouvelles manières d'historiser les pratiques artistiques féminines à caractère autobiographique dans les cadres théoriques de la subjectivité du genre, du pouvoir, de la matérialité et du travail.

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Introduction

The Proposition of 'Feminist Installation Art'

Feminist art and installation art have secured parallel legacies in post-war American art history as fundamentally interdisciplinary types of art. Developing simultaneously in the 1960s and 1970s, they each developed in different ways through interactions with other emerging multimedia art forms including conceptual art, performance art, land art, minimalist art, post-minimalist art, land art, video art and avant garde architecture. Recently a number of these art forms have undergone scholarly revision emphasizing the extent of cross-pollination between types of art occuring in this period. These new studies have not only highlighted the repetition of key themes, materials, and strategies across art forms, but they also show how their interdisciplinary legacies influenced art production thereafter.[1] However, to date, neither feminist art nor installation art feature in each others' early histories, despite as I go on to show, a number of issues, techniques and practitioners overlapping at their borders; it is at this intersection that the proposition of feminist installation art emerges.

Historicizing intersections of feminist art and installation art as they became consolidated in the 1960s and 1970s poses some methodological challenges as these art

[1] Examples of these kinds of revisionist and legacy studies are: *Rewriting Conceptual Art*, (eds) Michael Newman and Jon Bird (London: Reaktion Press, 1999); Suzaan Boettger, *Earthworks: Art and the Landscape of the Sixties* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 2002); Miwon Kwon, *One Place after Another: Site-Specific Art and Locational Identity* (Cambridge, Mass.: MIT Press, 2004); Jane Blocker, *What the Body Cost: Desire, History, and Performance* (Minneapolis and London: University of Minnesota Press, 2004); *Art After Conceptual Art*. (eds) Alexander Alberro and Sabeth Buchmann (Cambridge, Mass: MIT Press, 2006); Jo Applin, *Eccentric Objects: Rethinking Sculpture in 1960s America* (New Haven and London: Yale University Press, 2012); Anne Ring Petersen, *Installation Art: Between Theatre and Stage* (Copenhagen: Museum Tusculum Press, 2015); Catherine Elwes, *Installation and the Moving Image* (New York and Chichester: Columbia University Press, 2015).

forms resist straightforward characterization. Unlike more traditional models of twentieth century art genres for example, neither feminist art nor installation art may be clearly defined by a specific aesthetic style, medium, time-period, chronology or geography.

With regards to feminist art, it is important to note the term has several possible meanings. It may refer to feminist art objects, it may also refer to multiple "feminist" art practices, and it may refer to a particular canon of feminist artistic activity. Art historian Lisa Tickner broadly describes feminist art as, "work that is rooted in the analyses and commitments of contemporary feminism and that contributes to a critique of the political, economic and ideological power relations of contemporary society."[2] Given that "feminist art" may refer to objects *or* approaches relating to techniques, materials, and issues across different periods, cultures, and geographies, the term requires specificity in use.

In this study, I examine a particularly formative period in the history of feminist art making in the United in the 1960s and 1970s that is marked by its association with the activism of the Women's Liberation Movement, commonly known as "second-wave feminism." Art historians Norma Broude and Mary D. Garrard have referred to 1970s American feminist art as a "movement" in order to emphasize its activities were not limited to the production of artworks, but they also included curating exhibitions about female artists, art historical research about unknown women artists, and women-led art education practices, among activities.[3] Taken together, as cultural and political activisms, these activities were united in critiquing the structures of power relations that oppressed women. However, it is also important to take on board that this period encompassed many

[2] Lisa Tickner. "Feminism and Art." *Grove Art Online* (Oxford Art Online: Oxford University Press, 2012) http://www.oxfordartonline.com.proxy3.library.mcgill.ca/subscriber/article/grove/art/T027837. Accessed December 4, 2016.
[3] Norma Broude and Mary D. Garrard, *The Power of Feminist Art: the American Movement of the 1970s, History and Impact* (New York: H. N. Abrams, 1994).

different kinds of feminisms and many different forms of art. Subsequently, there are many ways to historicize 1970s feminist art, and given that American feminist art is one of the more dominant paradigms of Western feminist art, it is also one of the most contested and problematic.[4] Though I do not attempt here to rewrite a history of this period, I do challenge some of the assumptions in current historical registers of 1970s American feminist art and seek to expand its parameters. This is because, as I go on to explain, I understand 1970s American feminist art, like any other art historical narrative, to be already an unstable discursive construct consolidated over time by art historians, artists, curators, and institutional rhetoric according to the artists, artworks, theories, issues and strategies chosen to best exemplify its practices. The use of the term "feminist art" here acknowledges the range of meanings, activities, objects and histories and addresses the methodological challenges of intervening in these narratives by situating the term, where possible, specifically in the cultural discourse of the period.

Installation art too runs up against similar problems with definitive meanings. Like feminist art, "installation art" refers to both a broad range of artworks and practices that can't be defined by geography, historical period or style. In fact, so wide-ranging is its usage today, installation art historian Claire Bishop describes how "the sheer diversity in terms of appearance, content and scope of the work produced today under this name ["installation art"], and the freedom with which the term is used, almost preclude it from having any meaning."[5] I am less concerned in this study with how the term is used today, but rather I am interested in the fact that the term came into use by art historians much later (more

[4] For a succinct discussion of the issues at stake in historicizing 1970s American feminist art, see Laura Cottingham *Seeing Through the Seventies: Essays on Feminism and Art* (London and New York: Routledge, 2000).
[5] Claire Bishop, *Installation Art: A Critical History* (London: Tate Publishing, 2004), 6.

than ten years after this kind of art making "began" in the 1960s) as a means to categorize a type of art concerned with space, the placement of objects, and the bodily and sensory experiences of viewing art. Bishop notes the importance of the distinction between referring to the installation *of* art and "installation art", stating, the former refers to the arrangement of art objects in a space, whereas the latter has come to mean an artwork "into which the viewer physically enters."[6] She point out, "[w]hat both terms have in common is the desire to heighten the viewer's awareness of how objects are positioned (installed) in a space, and of our bodily response to this…this insistence on the literal presence of the viewer is arguably the key characteristic of installation art."[7]

This thesis examines some of the different kinds of American installation art practices of women from the late 1960s and 1970s that were made according to emerging ideas and contemporaneous debates concerning medium specificity, space, theatricality, architecture, gendered aesthetics, and sensory experience. I am also concerned with *how* histories of installation art of this period have sought to define early types of this practice in ways that have been exclusionary as evidenced by the lack of women as well as references to feminism that should, by my account, be present. By looking at some of the practices that overlap at the peripheral fringes of both installation art and feminist art histories in the 1970s, "feminist installation art" becomes a hybrid proposition with to interrogate interdisciplinary historical narratives.

Having outlined what is at stake in bringing together these two types of art, it is clear that methods of classification impact on how art historical discourses have come to determine what we mean by types, styles and genres of art. This raises another broader

[6] Bishop, *Installation Art,* 6.
[7] Ibid.

methodological and disciplinary issue about interdisciplinarity in art history. On the one hand, identifying new styles and movements where established genres overlap can usefully draw out new practices and artworks hitherto ignored. On the other hand, creating a genre requires new parameters that can also result in further exclusionary structures. What is becoming apparent in research addressing the interdisciplinarity in 1960s and 1970s artistic activities is that continuing to circumscribe periods and genres according to dominant canons is counterproductive as it negates the variety of hybrid conditions and contexts – both creative and socio-political – under which interdisciplinary practices materialized.[8] What's more, in many established genres of art history, canons have been shown to exclude minority artists and their artworks – especially women and people of colour – already marginalized in mainstream historical registers.[9]

The history of women making installation art in America in the 1970s have been deeply effected by rigid canonical approaches. As this dissertation will prove, installation art made by women in this period has been repeatedly omitted from early histories of American installation art. This omission serves to tacitly imply installation art making at this time was the domain of male artists, but this view ignores the diversity of practices, approaches and issues I argue are present in its past. As I set out to prove, the notable absence of women in wider surveys installation art (from 1960 to today) does not mean women weren't active in its histories. On the contrary, this study demonstrates a number of key examples of women making installation art in this early and formative period of its history. Taking the installations of Ree Morton (1936 – 1977) as a central case study, and

[8] For a good example of this kind of successful hybrid analysis in post sculpture see, Jo Applin, *Eccentric Objects: Rethinking Sculpture in 1960s America* (New Haven and London: Yale University Press, 2012).
[9] For a key critique of "canons" and their methods of exclusion in art history, see Griselda Pollock, *Differencing the Canon: Feminist Desire and the Writing of Art's Histories* (London: Routledge, 1999).

by deploying critical methods to address key instances of women's exclusions, I propose a number of ways that histories of 1970s American installation art can be critiqued and reconfigured in relation to its missing practitioners using feminist methods of analysis.

The key feminist art writers I go on to discuss including art historians Griselda Pollock and Amelia Jones, critic-curator Lucy Lippard and curator Helen Molesworth (among others), have been at the forefront of creating new theoretical and practical methods to address the marginalization of women and other minority groups in post-war art history by undertaking investigations into how canons were and continue to be constructed according to power relations. One notable effect of their (and many others') feminist scholarship can be seen in the recuperation of women into twentieth century art history. For instance, in the last thirty years or so, well-known Western movements and genres of art such as surrealism, abstract expressionism, pop art, minimalism and post-minimalism have been subject to historiographical scrutiny resulting in increased visibility and recognition for artists such as Louise Bourgeois, Eve Hesse and Agnes Martin in both research and exhibitions.[10] Indeed, to give just one tangible example of the effect of research on these artists, since 2000 all three aforementioned women have been granted major retrospective exhibitions at Tate Modern in London, England evidencing a belated

[10] For key discussions of the absence of women artists in these histories respectively, see Patricia Allmer "Feminist Interventions: Revising the Canon" in *A Companion to Dada and Surrealism*, ed. David Hopkins (Chichester: John Wiley and Sons, 2016), 366 – 382; *Women of Abstract Expressionism*, ed. Joan Marter (Denver Art Museum and Yale Unviersity Press, 2016); Belinda Grace Gardner, *Power Up: Female Pop Art* (Cologne: DuMont, 2010); *More than Minimal: Feminism and Abstraction in the 1970s*, ed. Susan Stoops (Waltham. Mass: Rose Art Museum, Brandeis University, 1996).

(though not unproblematic) model of "success" for women in the institutional mainstream.[11]

Installation art history stands to benefit from similar feminist revisionist interventions. Consisting of only a small number of historical survey studies, the literature of installation art history is severely lacking in *any* self-critical analyses of its discourses, particularly its moment of emergence in the 1970s. In a recent survey of installation art history art historian Anne Ring-Petersen remarks:

> [c]ontrary to the "old" discipline of painting, which still today inspires new debates theoretical revisions and scholarly re-mappings, the theoretical and discursive underpinnings of installation art are only occasionally developed, its regional differences still under-researched and the reasons for its ubiquity seldom questioned.[12]

It is true that with one or two exceptions, historians of installation art have broadly failed to reflect on their own structural exclusions where the gendered, sexual, racial and regional diversity of its practitioners are concerned. As a consequence this has left discussions of space, medium and objecthood (key concepts I will argue are bonded to installation art discourses) disconnected from social politics and its discourses of subjectivities. The knock-on effect has been that not only have an important spectrum of artists and artworks been omitted, but their socio-political critiques – as tethered to post-war social histories of identity politics – are being systematically overlooked.

Aiming to address this omission, this dissertation looks to the short career of American artist Ree Morton from 1968 to 1977 to explore a specific convergence of

[11] Solo retrospectives of Bourgeois's, Hesse's and Martin's work were held at Tate Modern in 2007, 2002 and 2016 respectively. The increased visibility of women's art in major shows Tate has been due largely to Francis Morris, Curator and Director of Collections: International Art.
[12] Anne Ring Petersen, *Installation Art: Between Theatre and Stage* (Copenhagen: Museum Tusculum Press, 2015), 17.

feminist art practice and installation art practice during each genre's formative years. Since her death from injuries sustained in a car accident in 1977 at the age of 41, Morton's life and career have been underrepresented in institutional and academic art histories. Looking across Morton's diverse body of work made only in nine years, it is clear Morton synthesized strategies drawn from post-minimalist abstract art, architecture, conceptual art and feminist art in her installation artworks. Though her hybrid practice produced over 40 extraordinary and unconventional works in a short period, it seems her legacy resists straightforward historical categorization. As such, her practice offers exciting possibilities not only for addressing what is involved in recuperating her artistic legacy, but in exploring the intersections of underdeveloped histories that materialize in this process.

In the last decade or so, Morton's legacy has been gaining more visibility. As I discuss in more detail shortly, her work has been shown in major international exhibitions, collected by major mainstream institutions, and she has been the subject of four substantial American and European solo retrospectives in 1981, 2008, 2009 and 2015. Yet only recently have curators and scholars begun to question reasons for Morton's absent legacy. To date, there are no monographs on the artist, no catalogue raisonné of her works and with only a few short academic essays in exhibition catalogue publications, there are no sustained academic analyses that contextualize her practice in 1970s art histories. As such, it seems Ree Morton's artwork "fits" everywhere and nowhere all at once.

Therefore, this study not only redresses this lack of scholarship on Ree Morton, but it interrogates the lack of scholarship about women making installation art more generally. In light of this, there are twofold aims in this study: to deliver a sustained and contextualized art historical analysis of Ree Morton's practice *and* to examine why and how

women such as Ree Morton have been omitted in installation art histories. To fulfill these aims I investigate many diverse contexts and conditions of women's installation art production in the 1960s and 1970s, including its relationship to 1970s feminist art to show how women were engaging with the medium of installation art much earlier and more explicitly as a form of social critique than has been historically recognized. Hence, this analysis of Morton's artistic methods, themes, materials and circumstances demonstrates just one example of the impact women and feminist artists had on the emergence of installation art in the 1970s.

In placing feminist art and installation art in close discursive proximity, the term "feminist installation art" emerged as central to this study. With no formal or recorded usage in postwar art history, the phrase and the hybridity to which it refers merit explication. As a new term, "feminist installation art" for the purposes of this study, is necessarily a discursive *proposition* rather than a classification of a new genre. There are two reasons for this. The first is that to simply conjoin the terms "feminist" and "installation art" presumes the stability of meaning, i.e., that each term has a clear, singular or constant definition, which as I have shown, they do not. Second, though closely related to the first point, is that to bring together these terms might presume their equivalency, i.e., that all "feminist installation art" is in the same way "feminist" or deploys the same strategies of installation art making. On the contrary, in yoking together "feminist art" and "installation art" I do not intend to prescribe an absolute style, strategy or trope across its aggregate subjects. Instead, the artworks explored in this study by Morton and others bear testament to the many different ways in which 1970s installation art practices were concerned directly and indirectly with issues emerging from the Women's Liberation Movement as

they articulated critiques of space, objecthood, and medium as gendered concepts; these works expand what might be deemed as "feminine", "feminist" or indeed, as "installation art." Thus, in relation to the artworks I bring together here, I explore the effect of using the term feminist installation art as a proposition or indeed as an interrogative paradigm by testing its use value and asking how this term might help or hinder the analysis of these artworks at the confluence of these histories.

However, this study is not a survey of all forms of work that might be included in a history of feminist installation art in the 1970s (though that project is a possible avenue for future research). Rather, this is a case study of one particular grouping of installation artworks made by different artists in dialogue with feminist issues that opens up a field of discursive questions about *one* intersection of 1970s feminist art and installation art practices. As such, this means operating within a kind of functional paradox in my approach to discourse analysis because "feminist installation art" is deployed in the knowledge that it is unstable and problematic. In this, the term serves a critical purpose to investigate the frictions it generates given that my intervention into "feminist installation art history" refers to both a new history of 1970s installation art engaging with feminist themes, issues and strategies, as well as my own feminist intervention into the history of installation art and its omission of women.

This critical approach to the problem of categorization is underpinned by an understanding of the way language structures knowledge and how, in turn, knowledge is conditioned by language according to Michel Foucault's theorizations of how taxonomies and classifications create exclusions. He argues:

> We must also question those divisions or groupings with which we have become so familiar….In any case, these divisions whether our own, or

> those contemporary with the discourse under examination are always themselves reflexive categories, principles of classification, normative rules, institutionalized types: they, in turn, are facts of discourse that deserve to be analyzed beside others; of course, they also have complex relations with each other, but they are not intrinsic, autochthonous, and universally recognizable characteristics.[13]

For Foucault, seeking to define the characteristics of something in language or speech reveals an act of marking difference that is ultimately underpinned by the desire to exert control through exclusion. This marking of difference is particularly applicable to art historical discourses where the discipline is characterized by a tendency to define art movements, genres, styles and structures by periodization relating these to individual artists and and geographies to determine who becomes part of a canon. Referring to such operations in histories of visual culture, Foucault sees this problem as further compounded by the nature of the relationship between between language and visual representation. To give a "proper name" to something visual he says is

> merely an artifice. It gives us a finger to point with, in other words, to pass surreptitiously from the space where one speaks to the space where one looks; in other words, to fold one over the other as though they were equivalents. But if one wishes to keep the relation of language to vision open, if one wishes to treat their incompatibility as a starting-point for speech instead of as an obstacle to be avoided, so as to stay as close as possible to both, then one must erase those proper names and preserve the infinity of the task.[14]

The term feminist installation art is deployed here as a similar kind of "artifice" to point to the spaces in between installation art and feminist art. This illuminates a set of previously unconnected visual art practices in order to, as Foucault puts it, "preserve the infinity of the task"— here of undertaking critical revisions — in challenging the restrictive structures of

[13] Michel Foucault, *The Archeology of Knowledge* [1969], trans. A.M. Sheridan Smith (New York: Pantheon Books, 1972), 22.
[14] Michel Foucault, *The Order of Things* [1966, trans. 1970] (London, New York: Routledge, 2006), 10.

historical discourse so that naming and classification of genres in this case can also be a critical act. In this dissertation, to deploy a "new" category within the given canons of twentieth-century American art history is then to also test the efficacy of what Foucault called the "reflexive categories, principles of classification, normative rules, institutionalized types" which are "facts of discourse that deserve to be analyzed beside others." In this case, can early installation art histories even accommodate 1970s feminist art practices? How does installation art history stand to benefit from incorporating feminist art? And similarly, what impact might installation art histories (especially installations made by women and feminists) have on historical canons of 1970s feminist art?

The inclusion of the word "feminist" in the term "feminist installation art" is therefore important. I have chosen not to refer to "1970s women's installation art" in this study because "women's art" has been a contested phrase, particularly in the 1970s, signifying the problem of a second tier or "canon" of art history using sexed identity as a means of division – an issue I discuss more in chapter three. Feminist art historians such as Linda Nochlin and Griselda Pollock have argued how art historical canons were built on a constructed value of "greatness" that was already a masculine concept.[15] As art historian Marsha Meskimmon suggests, we today need alternative narratives of canons altogether. She states:

> women artists and women's art are not benefited by any adherence to the exclusionary logic of the canonical tradition which forever cast them as second rate, peripheral and of little lasting value. The challenge for the historian is to critique those paradigms which marginalize

[15] See Linda Nochlin,"Why Have Their Been No Great Women Artists" (1973) reprinted in *Women, Art and Power and Other Essays* (London: Thames and Hudson, 1989), 145 – 178; and Griselda Pollock, "Firing the Canon" in *Differencing the Canon: Feminist Desire and the Writing of Art's Histories* (London: Routledge, 1999), 3 – 40.

> women artists and their work, while at the same time find alternative structures through which to configure histories otherwise.[16]

In a similar way, installation art can be said to contain multiple paradigms that, as Meskimmon says, "marginalize women artists and their work." As such "feminist installation art" — with my emphasis on the political and critical tenor of the term "feminist" rather than "women" — is my comparable attempt to "configure histories otherwise" by opening up (rather than shying away from) problems with using new terms and structures.

As such, the instability of "feminist installation art" permits and even *necessitates* a hybrid analysis because splitting genres, movements or medium-oriented practices up is itself an act of exclusion. This is what may have driven the marginalization of women's installation art from installation histories – "women's installation art" was seen as separate or other. In such a case, *more* criticism is needed of exclusionary paradigms that limit diversity in all kinds of art histories, and this requires examining how exclusions of women in installation art histories have already taken place within its given configurations.

Installation Art Histories

The number of historical surveys of installation art I go on to consider here in the following literature review is in fact relatively small given there are only six surveys that

[16] Marsha Meskimmon, *Women Making Art*: *History, Subjectivity, Aesthetics* (London and New York: Routledge, 2003), 13 – 14.

fully account for its advent in the 1960s and 1970s.[17] These surveys were published around the late 1990s and early 2000s, probably because the term "installation" only came into common usage in the late 1980s to denote the spatial arrangements of objects.[18] Prior to this "installation" referred to the physical placement of artwork in a gallery, not as a mode of art making. The more commonly used term before "installation art" was "environment" popularized by artist Allan Kaprow in the late 1950s.[19]

It should be noted the chronological literature review that follows is not a comprehensive historiography of the field of installation art history. Ann Ring-Petersen has recently undertaken this operation to excellent effect, and the conclusion of her insightful critique of these texts are summarized below. Instead, my study focuses more specifically within the literature by looking to where and how women artists and feminist art and politics have been included or omitted.

Julie Reiss's and Faye Ran's books from 1999 and 2009 respectively both take traditional chronological routes through twentieth century art histories, tracing the cumulative influences of various art forms to conclude with a definition of "installation art." In *From Margin to Center: The Spaces of Installation Art*, Reiss insists on finding "key

[17] There are other surveys of installation art not examined here as they start too late for my study i.e. in the 1980s and 1990s. They are: Graham Coulter-Smith, *Deconstructing Installation Art: Fine Art and Media Art, 1986 – 2006* (Casiad Publishing, 2006), www.installationart.net. (last accessed January 14th, 2016); and Nicholas De Oliveira, et al. *Installation Art in the New Millennium: Empire of the Senses* (London: Thames and Hudson, 2003) which surveys contemporary installation art from c.1990s – 2003. Other peripheral survey publications not examined here are: Julie Rebentisch, *The Aesthetics of Installation Art*, (Berlin: Sternberg Press, 2012) which examines installation art from the discipline of philosophical aesthetics; and Catherine Elwes, *Installation And the Moving Image*, New York and Chichester: Columbia University Press, 2015) which traces installation art history via technological and digital histories of the moving image.

[18] See Julie H. Reiss's discussion of the early terminology of "installation" in her book *From Margin to Center: The Spaces of Installation Art* (Cambridge: MIT Press, 1999), xii. Evidencing the period of research in installation art around the turn of the millennium, see the special edition of *Oxford Art Journal* dedicated to the subject: *On Installation: Oxford Art Journal,* Vol. 24: Issue 2 (2001).

[19] Reiss suggests that Kaprow's term of "environment" was too narrow in definition and thus had a limited capacity for interdisciplinary historicization. Instead, she writes, it was the more expansive possibilities held in by "installation" that permitted its entry into academic discourse and catalyzed historical analyses. See Reiss, *From Margin to Center*, xii.

characteristics" in order to locate the "autonomy of installation art" as a "genre."[20] Similarly, Ran's objective is to understand "the emergence, development, structure and functions" of installation art in order to "proffer a definition of the norms and the criteria for Installation Art…and offer a interpretation of the meaning it tries to create and communicate."[21] For these two authors the aim is to *define* installation art by locating its precursory activities in twentieth-century case studies.

Ran's study begins much earlier compared with Reiss's that starts in the mid-twentieth century. Ran takes Cubism in the early twentieth century as her starting point, going through the various European and American movements of modern and contemporary art that engaged with space and putting them in context with parallel advancements in technology and media. She only occasionally contextualizes these movements in social and historical histories. The study ends in the 2000s, without mention of feminism or feminist art.

In Reiss's text, the omission of post-war emancipatory politics is more glaring. Reiss notably centers her history of installation art around New York City and its (mostly male) artists between the 1950s and the 1970s, focusing on the relevance of happenings, Fluxus, earth and land art, minimalism, video art, performance art, conceptual art and process art as key influences. For Reiss, New York City was the epicenter where installation art began. Yet the fact that Reiss overlooks feminist politics and feminist art is highly peculiar given Reiss's period of study and location parallel the advent of feminist art in the 1960s and 1970s; New York City was one particular site where feminist art and interdisciplinary art

[20] Reiss, *From Margin to Center*, xiii.
[21] Faye Ran, *History of Installation Art and the Development of New Art Forms: Technology and the Hermeneutics of Time and Space in Modern and Postmodern Art from Cubism to Installation* (New York: Peter Lang Publishing, 2009), 3.

by women (especially dance, sculpture, conceptual art and performance art) proliferated at this time. It is further jarring that Reiss's text accounts for the impact of *other* social politics on installation art, but not feminism. For example, she discusses at length the project of the Art Workers' Coalition, a group of politically informed artists directly dealing with anti-Vietnam war and civil rights protests. Yet Reiss fails to mention the women's liberation movement despite that many AWC members based in New York City were involved in feminist politics too.[22] Neither Ran nor Reiss take into account feminism, feminist art or the impact of feminist activism on installation art. In both surveys only 17% of the artists surveyed are women (see the table of statistics on page 24).

Like Reiss and Ran, co-authors Nicholas De Oliveira, Nichola Oxley and Michael Petry in their book *Installation Art* of 1994 plot a trajectory of the various artistic movements and genres of art that influenced installation art.[23] The main survey text in the book by Michael Asher provides a situated historic account of installation art in the twentieth century, then later subsections of the book (divided by "site," "media," "museum" and "architecture") are illustrated mostly by images of artworks from the 1960s up to the mid-1990s. Asher's text is the first in all of the literature to consider — albeit very briefly — feminism and feminist art in the history of installation art, noting:

> …the fracturing of the artwork and the dispersal of its meaning across the cultural field…has its corollary in a challenge to the simple integrity of the viewing subject mounted by feminism. Far from being an anonymous or universal cipher, the spectator is sexed and the possessor of a personal cultural history which predisposes him or her to view things in the light of certain interests or assumptions.[24]

[22] For more on the role of feminism in the Art Worker's Coalition, see Julia Bryan-Wilson, "Lucy Lippard's Feminist Labor" in *Art Workers: Radical Practice in the Vietnam War Era*, (Los Angeles: University of California, 2011), 127 – 172.
[23] Nicholas De Oliveira, Nichola Oxley, Michael Petry, (eds.) *Installation Art* (London: Thames and Hudson Ltd, 1994).
[24] Michael Asher, "Towards Installation", *Installation Art,* 28.

Here, Asher refers to feminism as a theoretical framework for spectatorship which "challenges the integrity of the viewing subject," countering assumptions of the neutrality of spectators. While this is an important point and Asher does follow this discussion with a brief reference to feminist artists Mary Kelly and Susan Hiller, he doesn't actually discuss *how* their art is feminist by his own definition, nor does he address what kind of specific challenge this poses to the genre at large. Left undeveloped, this reference to feminism and feminist art (in comparison to his much deeper discussions of minimalism and performance art for example), is tokenistic. In this book, the majority of the women discussed are contemporary installation artists with work featured made after 1985 despite the more historical scope of the book starting in the 1960s. The implication is therefore that women artists before the 1980s didn't impact on the advent of installation art. In this book, 22% of artists discussed are women.

Interestingly, the same three author-editors of *Installation Art* from 1994 (De Oliveira, Oxley and Petry) revised the old book with new content in 2003. The second iteration was called *Installation Art in the New Millennium*. The book dispensed with Asher's text and revised the previous four categories of installation to five new categories including: "escape," "author and institution," "exchange and interaction," "time and narrative," and "the body of the audience."[25] Yet the percentage of women in the new book, compared to the old book, increased only modestly from 22% up to 29%.

In Andrew Benjamin's 1993 edited special edition magazine *Installation Art: Art and Design Magazine*, the short essay "On Installation" by de Oliveira, Oxley and Petry opens the

[25] Nicholas De Oliveira, Nichola Oxley, Michael Petry (eds.) *Installation Art in the New Millennium: Empire of the Senses* (London: Thames and Hudson, 2003).

issue by acknowledging the "debt owed" to "specific movements, among which Constructivism, Dada, Surrealism, Pop Art, Conceptual Art and Land Art take particular prominence."[26] What's more, in the edition the earliest installations mentioned made by women are both dated from 1988 (two works one by Helen Chadwick, another by Adrian Piper), again leaving the implicit suggestion there were not women making installation art before this time.

Mark Rosenthal's survey *Understanding Installation Art: From Duchamp to Holzer* from 2003 also takes a thematic approach, identifying four "poles" of artistic strategies in installation art trends which includes two "types" of "genus" that he says "talk literally or specifically about installation art, to chart the genealogy of a work, and to explore meaningful implications of each type of genus."[27] Although the subtitle of Rosenthal's survey might suggest a more balanced gendered view — it is called "From Duchamp to Holzer" (referring to female artist Jenny Holzer) — his book also only includes installation artwork by women from the late 1980s onwards with only 18% of artists included overall who are women.

Compared to the literature discussed above, Claire Bishop's book *Installation Art: A Critical History* from 2004 is a more comprehensive survey accounting for the cultural, philosophical and political contexts of installation art history. From the outset, she acknowledges the challenge of historicizing installation art, unlike the others who seek to define it. Bishops notes, "rather than there being one history, there seem to be parallel

[26] Nicholas De Oliveira, Nichola Oxley, Michael Petry "On Installation" *Installation Art: Art and Design Magazine* ed. Andrew Benjamin (London: Academy Group Ltd, 1993), 7.
[27] Mark Rosenthal, *Understanding Installation Art: From Duchamp to Holzer*. (Munich: Prestel Verlag, 2003), 28-29.

ones, each enacting a particular repertoire of concerns."[28] By opening out installation art history (in the singular) to installation art histor*ies* (in the plural) Bishop underscores a key operation in which my study also locates itself as one of these "parallel" narratives.

Bishop's book is structured around four experiences she perceives viewers to undergo in installation art. This is different from the other installation surveys that focus more on the strategies of artists. This shift in defining art not by technique or medium but by spectators' experiences hinges on Bishop's notion that installation art was part of a wider change in postmodern art production after the 1960s occurring in dialogue with the rise of poststructuralist theories of deconstructed subjects formulated by scholars Roland Barthes, Michel Foucault, Jacques Lacan and Jacques Derrida.[29] Bishop writes the emergence of installation art and theories in this climate sought to activate "a viewing subject" while at the same time "decentring their subjectivity."[30] Bishop also notes the effect of 1970s emancipatory politics like feminism and post-colonialism on the episteme of the subject. She makes an explicit connection between installation art's genesis and its early formal strategies and content, and relates them to socio-political movements by noting how the techniques of installation art sought to challenge the notion of a single point of perspective and privilege (in a similar way to Asher's aforementioned point).[31] Yet the examples she gives doesn't fully support her point. For example, her readings of the group-

[28] Bishop, *Installation Art*, 8.
[29] Ibid, 37. In Western postwar culture the concept of the authentic self and subject underwent an upheaval under poststructuralist critiques. Roland Barthes's essay "The Death of the Author" (1968) and Michel Foucault's essay "What is an Author?" (1970) mark these new ways of thinking about subjects and authorship as they maintained the meaning of a text was not solely determined by its author, but rather the text was interpretable by multiple readers and thus meaning held infinite possibilities. For a close reading of these theories see Jane Gallop, *The Deaths of the Author: Reading and Writing in Time* (Durham: Duke University Press, 2009).
[30] Bishop, *Installation Art*, 11.
[31] Bishop, *Installation Art*, 35 – 37.

made California installation *Womanhouse* (1972) and Mary Kelly's *Post-Partum Document* (1973 – 79) are simplistic compared to her analyses of the other works she discusses. Bishop creates an opposition between Kelly's work and Womanhouse. Bishop deems Kelly's conceptual psychoanalytic strategies in *Post-Partum Document* a proper installation because given the work's many panels the spectator can't perceive the work all at once. She compares this to *Womanhouse,* which is more "feminist" as the piece supposedly subordinates its formal concerns as an installation to its political content because of its "heavy-handed iconography."[32] This is an odd framing of these works. For one, describing Kelly's piece as an installation stretches a definition of this type of art, even by Bishop's own standards of multiperspective viewing. Rather Bishop seems to emphasize how Kelly creates a feminist approach to *the installation of her art* – as one imbricated in a political strategy that decentralizes a dominant viewpoint – rather than making a piece of feminist installation art that implicates the viewer in the politics the art object creates.

In doing so, Bishop pits these feminist installations at odds with each other and with other installations by pitting form against content. Especially in dismissing *Womanhouse* as focusing *only* on content, Bishop misses how *Womanhouse* too uses multiple viewing points and "decentred" subjectivities (her definition of an installation) in its use of multiple rooms made my multiple artists. This divisive gulf between installations' content and form is needed to overcome what I mentioned may be the reason that feminist art and installation art seem to be absent in each others' histories — the presumption is that their respective focus is on *either* content or form.

[32] Bishop, *Installation Art*, 37.

This problematic reasoning is also visible in the most recent book surveying installation art by Anne Ring Petersen called *Installation Art: Between Image and Stage* (2015). Ring Petersen's book is a substantial and comprehensive tome that develops a theoretical approach to tracing installation art history through discourses of performance and spectatorship. She provides in-depth analyses of historic and contemporary installations by describing patterns of meaning that materialized as the genre developed in particular historical contexts. Although Ring Petersen's critical overview of the field of installation art is the most comprehensive historiographical model to date, giving links and insightful discrepancies among the narratives built by the aforementioned scholars to identify elements of installation art theory and history hitherto unaddressed, her treatment of women, feminism and social politics in installation art is, in places, lacking.

Ring Petersen's book's most contentious point is her reaction to what she calls the "subordination" of aesthetics to the "discourse on the politics of art and identity."[33] She illustrates this with a critique of Jennifer González's book *Subject to Display: Reframing Race in Contemporary Installation Art* (2008), a text the author claims is typical of trends that do not contribute towards the "idea of installation art" but rather (what González calls) "ways to undermine race discourse and its colonialist logic."[34] To support her argument that aesthetics mustn't be subordinate to politics (or political content), Ring Petersen quotes Claire Bishop's lamentation that the "embrace of social history and identity politics" has denigrated the status of aesthetics in art history by conflating it with formalism, understood to "mask inequalities, oppressions and exclusions (of race, gender, class and so

[33] Ring Petersen, *Installation Art: Between Image and Stage*, 18.
[34] Jennifer González in *Subject to Display: Reframing Race in Contemporary Installation Art* (Cambridge MIT Press, 2008), 4, as quoted by Ring-Petersen, *Installation Art: Between Image and Stage*, 19.

on)."[35] Ring Petersen then cites Bishop again, noting these "arguments were necessary to dismantle the deeply entrenched authority of the white male elites in the 1970s, today they have hardened into a critical orthodoxy."[36] In other words, Ring Petersen doesn't desire an installation art (history) with a capacity to critique past or present social contexts. Rather, she and Bishop arrive at epistemological conclusions about what installation art "is" or means because of how it is experienced. This shift in the interpretation of installation art in terms of its materials and content moves away from seeing social value in art (and its makers' social contexts and politics) to the viewer's experience of her or his own subjectivity placing further emphasis on the reception of art or "spectatorship." While this approach may align with broader shifts in cultural studies in the last 30 years, it needs careful parsing in installation art histories. In line with this shift, Ring Petersen offers three analytic categories of installation art. They are: "phenomenological," "contextualist," and "performativity and reception aesthetics" (the latter is where she situates her own research). The contextualist position – where she places González's book, and which is broadly where my own research exists – implies contemporaneous socio-political values that give context to artworks' cultural and aesthetic conditions of production are important and linked. Particularly for a study of feminist art (or any other artwork with a political dimension) to assume a critical position that discounts the artist and their socio-political context is dangerous. For those practitioners already marginalized due to, for example racist and sexist exclusions in art histories, their works are liable to further neglect if the experience of the viewer is prioritized over, or instead of, the work of art's content and the

[35] Claire Bishop, *Artificial Hells: Participatory Art and the Politics of Spectatorship* (London and New York: Verso Books, 2012), 17, as quoted by Ring Petersen, *Installation Art: Between Image and Stage,* 76.
[36] Ring Petersen, *Installation Art: Between Image and Stage,* 67.

social conditions to which its artist(s) may have been responding. This isn't to say that that reception theory doesn't have an important role — it is clearly imbricated in theories of making and looking at installation art given how the medium engages spatially, temporally and affectively with viewers. But the binarizing operation of pitting contextualist and reception theories *against* one another as Bishop and Ring Petersen at times do, is reductive and unproductive for considering the work of marginalized female artists who engaged with social critiques in installation art works. In light of this it bears noting Ring Petersen does not consider the social or political context of the women's movement in in her study despite looking at some historical case studies of feminist art. Her discussions of installation artworks such as the now-familiar pieces such as Judy Chicago's *The Dinner Party,* Mary Kelly's *Post-Partum Document* or the group projects of *Womanhouse* are brief compared to other works. While Ring Petersen does note women are omitted from installation art history, she does not address this issue in her own survey. To wit, even though her inclusion of women artists is the highest of the books reviewed, still only 25% of the artists in her book are women.

Four conclusions may be drawn from this review. First, women artists are given little or no credit for influencing the advent of installation art in the 1960s and 1970s – its registers are dominated by men. Second, feminism and feminist art are rarely discussed in installation art history (as an influence or a relevant context) despite 1970s political movements like anti-war protests, civil rights protests, and labor protests noted as influential in its emergence. Third, installation art by women artists from <u>any</u> historical period are given far less critical analysis than male artists — this is best demonstrated in the table below. The fourth conclusion is the intention of these surveys seems to be to

define installation art by formal and experiential qualities. As such, the viewer's experience is prioritized (as a means of classification) over social and political contexts and critiques, as well as the work's relationship to its maker.[37]

Book Title (Author)	Year of Publication	Total Artists in Index	Percentage of Women Artists listed in Index
Installation Art (De Oliveira, Oxley and Petry)	1994	268	22%
From Margin to Centre (Reiss)	1999	46	17%
Understanding Installation Art (Rosenthal)	2003	67	18%
Installation Art in the New Millennium (De Oliveira, Oxley and Petry)	2003	215	29%*
Installation Art: A Critical History (Bishop)	2004	105	24%
A History of Installation Art (Ran)	2009	98	17%
Installation Art between Image and Stage (Ring Petersen)	2015	124	25%

Table 1. Number of women represented in key installation art surveys with title, year of publication, total artists included in the book based on artists listed in the index and the percentage of women of the total number of artists based on artists listed in the index. This is an imperfect method of collecting statistics of women represented as most publishing houses use different indexing techniques depending on how often an artist is discussed, included in an image caption, or simply referenced in passing. However, given that presumably male artists are also indexed in the same way, this method still points to the massive gender imbalance in installation art historical literature. *This figure suggests an increase of only 7% more women making installation in the 11 years since the first book by the same authors was published in 1994.

Ree Morton

My intervention in the aforementioned histories shows that not only were women making installation art in the 1970s, but feminist installation art is an important hybrid activity in art history for reasons that relate to critiques of domestic space. Ree Morton's art practice is a paradigmatic case in point from which to explore these ideas and highlight

[37] This is best seen when Ring Petersen tables installation art literature into the categories "Phenomenology", "Contextualist" and "Performative and Reception Aesthetic." See Ring Petersen*, Installation Art Between Image and Stage,* 76.

the shortcomings of the studies noted above. Morton's own unique trajectory in installation art that I trace here demonstrates how key techniques and theories of installation art are linked across feminist art practices and methods in the 1970s, in particular with regards to spatial arrangements of objects prompting viewers to explore the way an experience of space can be bodily, affective and gendered. As critic Carol Diehl noted when looking at Morton's work, "I was reminded of how much the way of working we now call "installation" has its roots in the women's art of the '70s."[38] Similarly, curator Helen Molesworth places Morton's autobiographical artworks amid the rise of both feminist art *and* installation art in the 1970s, suggesting that more broadly "feminist art had something to do with the rise of installation" and its continued trend into the 1980s and 1990s was related to "[1970s] feminist artists' uncanny replication of the domestic environment."[39] Diehl's and Molesworth's suggestions that Morton's engagement with feminist art, installation art and domesticity related to the early development of installation art are actively taken up in this study, for it is my contention that Morton's installation art work is a highly useful and critical tool for marking an intersection of installation art and feminist art histories which disrupts the prevailing view that installation art by women and feminists in the 1970s does not exist.

Helen Marie ("Ree") Reilly was born in Ossining, New York in 1936. Her art practice began atypically late in life, starting out as a hobby when she took a series of amateur adult evening classes for several years in her mid-twenties. In 1965, already married to naval officer Ted Morton, Morton enrolled in evening university classes to work towards a

[38] Carol Diehl, "Ree Morton at Alexander and Bonin Gallery" *Art in America* 86, no. 12 (December, 1998), 101.
[39] Helen Molesworth, "Sentiment and Sentimentality: Ree Morton and Installation Art" *Ree Morton: Works 1971 – 1977* (Vienna: Generali Foundation, 2009), 14 – 15. Molesworth's hypothesis in this essay about installation art and feminist art having an important but underhistoricized relationship in art history was a key starting point for this thesis. I am grateful to her for our discussions in 2012 that influenced this study.

Bachelor's of Fine Art at Rhode Island School of Art and Design. Morton had to balance her degree with childcare and domestic responsibilities because by this time she was a mother of three young children under the age of eight. In 1968 when Morton's marriage broke down she separated from her husband and finished her Bachelor's degree before moving to Pennsylvania with her children to begin a Master's degree in Fine Art at Tyler School of Art in Philadelphia, age 32. At Tyler, Morton became interested in the relationship between two and three dimensional space and objects, experimenting with strategies of abstraction in painting and sculpture closely linked to minimal and post-minimal art. Some of her first works such as her incongruously titled, *Shaped Painting* (1969 – 70) that was in fact a sculpture, show her early interest in multimedia and repetitive geometric forms and grid structures, discussed more in chapter one and three.

After graduating from Tyler in 1970, Morton remained in Philadelphia and sporadically produced artwork while balancing a teaching job with childcare. Between 1971 and 1972, Morton's practice substantially grew both in material ambition and scale and she developed a huge series of approximately 25 large-scale, abstract architectural installations made from large painted logs and branches which catalyzed her interest in space and natural materials that would remain key aspects of her practice; these early installations are discussed more in chapter two. Seeking more studio space and career opportunities, in 1972 Morton moved to New York City while her children went to live with their father. There, she met a number of artists who influenced her practice as she took part in feminist art networks and the group Anarchitecture (an avant-garde and interdisciplinary group of performance artists, sculptors and architects). These contexts influenced her approach to space, materials and encouraged new socio-political themes

such as gendered aesthetics and motherhood in her work. As a result, in 1973 and 1974, Morton established her reputation as an installation artist in respected institutions with a number of large scale pieces such as *Paintings and Objects* (1973)*, Souvenir Piece* (1973), *Sister Perpetua's Lie* (1973) and shortly after, *To Each Concrete Man* (1974), which I discuss in chapter two and three.

After 1973, Morton's works became increasingly autobiographical as her use of materials, forms and compositions related directly and indirectly to her family and friends, her domestic experience and to geographical locations she visited on residencies (*Bozeman*, 1974) and vacations (*Souvenir Piece*, 1973 and *Weeds of the Northeast*, 1974). In 1974, Morton began using a sculpting material called Celastic in a number of works relating to various hierarchies in fine art aesthetics. She explored motifs relating to feminine imagery such as bows and cakes in the *Beaux* series (1974 – 1975) and *Bake Sale* (1974) respectively. She used kitsch and folk imagery in the *Regional Piece* series (1976), and she explored emotions and sentimentality in artworks themed on friendship and love respectively in the installations *Something in the Wind* (1976) and *Signs of Love* (1976). These bigger and brighter installations works after 1974 which I explore in chapter three, were underpinned by a theatrical and kitsch aesthetic sensibility that the artist deployed both playfully and critically to conjoin polemical content and materials in her practice. In the spring of 1977 as her career was in its ascendency, Morton died from injuries sustained in a car accident at the age of 41.

Remarkably, in just over the nine years Ree Morton was working between 1968 and 1977, she produced upwards of 40 works.[40] During her life, her artwork was shown alongside the work of artists including Eva Hesse, Bruce Nauman, Robert Morris, Richard Serra, Lynda Benglis, Sol LeWitt, Joseph Cornell, Louise Bourgeois, Robert Rauschenberg, Joan Jonas and Hannah Wilke to name a few. Yet despite this, Morton's work and legacy has remained in relative obscurity to these aforementioned colleagues with far fewer posthumous solo shows and academic research of her work by comparison.

This eclectic list of artists with whom Morton worked and exhibited — whose works may be characterized across genres of post-minimalist art, pop art, feminist art, conceptual art, land art, architecture, installation art and performance art — speaks to the hybrid nature of Morton's own practice and to the challenge of situating her work historically. Indeed, the wide range of formal and technical strategies and themes and content that Morton drew upon in her work show the adeptness with which she responded to and participated within various artistic trends. As critic Lisa Liebmann said when reflecting on the occasion of the artist's first posthumous retrospective exhibition shown in 1981, Morton's work was "an idiosyncratic mirror of the formal, conceptual, and political concerns characterizing vanguard art of the recent past."[41]

As mentioned, Morton's legacy is now steadily gaining more recognition. At the time of writing this study between 2015 and 2017, several of Morton's larger installations are held in major museum collections in Europe and America (including the Museum of Modern Art in New York, The Whitney Museum of Art in New York, the Museum of

[40] This is an estimate. A number of works have been destroyed and records of works exist only in Morton's sketchbooks.
[41] Lisa Liebmann, "Innocence and Irony: The Art of Ree Morton" *Art in America* 69, No. 1 (January 1981), 88.

Contemporary Art in Los Angeles and the Reina Sofia Museum in Madrid) that have enhanced public exposure of her work in recent years.[42] She is represented by Alexander & Bonin Gallery in New York City and Annemarie Verna Galerie in Zurich who both promote her work and maintain her estate. Since her death, Morton has been included in many group exhibitions and solo shows where her work has been, and continues to be, favorably reviewed by critics.[43]

Therefore the legacy of Ree Morton, as it currently exists, is predominantly evident in her exhibition histories, rather than in academic books. Morton has been the subject of four major retrospectives including: the New Museum in New York (1981); the Generali Foundation in Vienna (2008 - 09); the Drawing Centre in New York (2009); and the Reina Sofia Museum in Madrid (2015). Each exhibition has a substantial catalogue containing research and essays that focus on the themes, materials and narratives running through Morton's work.[44] As such, these studies were key in laying much of the groundwork for her legacy.[45] Yet while these texts and exhibitions have started important discussions around Morton's legacy, there remain few sustained academic studies that have considered how Morton's work was part of (and reflected upon) the contemporaneous American cultural,

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[42] The most up-to-date information on the collections that hold Morton's work, see *Ree Morton: Be a Place, Place an Image, Imagine a Poem* (Madrid: Museo Reina Sofia, 2015), 183 – 194.
[43] For a comprehensive list of bibliography sources and solo and group exhibition histories up to 2007, see the publication *Ree Morton: Works 1971 – 1977* (Vienna: Generali Foundation, 2009), 194 – 200.
[44] The exhibition in 1981, *Ree Morton: Retrospective 1971 – 1977* at New Museum in New York was particularly instrumental in establishing Morton's career soon after the artist's death. For a good overview of the exhibition and the details of the five other locations to where the show travelled, see Lisa Liebmann, "Innocence and Irony: The Art of Ree Morton", 95. The other exhibitions listed here are: *The Deities Must be Made to Laugh. Works 1971-1977* held at the Generali Foundation in Vienna between December 12th, 2008 through March 1st, 2009; *Ree Morton: At the Still Point of the Turning World* was held at the Drawing Centre between September 18th, 2009 and December 18th, 2009; and *Ree Morton: Be a Place, Place an Image, Imagine a Poem* held at the Museo Reina Sofia, in Madrid between May 20th and September 28th, 2015.
[45] The exhibition catalogue for *Ree Morton: Works 1971 – 1977,* held at the Generali Foundation in Vienna in 2009 has been of particular assistance to this study. The depth of research undertaken for the catalogue that has been used here is gratefully acknowledged. See *Ree Morton: Works 1971 – 1977* (Vienna: Generali Foundation, 2009).

social and political landscapes of the 1970s. What's more, even fewer studies have attended to a specifically feminist art historical context in the 1970s for her practice.

There are a few notable exceptions, also addressed in more detail in the chapters that follow. One exception was an exhibition catalogue for Morton's solo retrospective show at The Drawing Centre in New York City in 2009 curated by João Ribas. The catalogue included two essays from feminist art critic Lucy Lippard, as well as an interview with curators Ribas, Allan Schwartzman (curator of Morton's 1981 New Museum exhibition with Kathleen Thomas) and with curator Cornelia H. Butler.[46] The discussion notably focused on Morton's relationship to feminism and to feminist art. This was probably due to the fact that just a few years earlier Butler, as curator, had included five of Morton's Celastic pieces in the blockbuster exhibition *WACK! Art and the Feminist Revolution* — an exhibition that marked significant historic visibility for 1970s feminist art.[47] Morton's inclusion in *WACK!* was important for placing her work within a wider feminist art history, particularly to contemporary audiences. Another significant publication was, as previously mentioned, Helen Molesworth's essay that contextualized Morton's work within a history of feminist art and installation art in 2008.[48] And a third significant study by Susan Richmond published in 2016 looked at just one work Morton made in 1976 – *Signs of Love* – in

[46] See "Cornelia H. Butler, João Ribas and Allan Schwarztman in Conversation" [June 2009] in *Ree Morton: At The Still Point of The Turning World* (New York: The Drawing Center, 2009), 12 – 47. The Drawing Centre catalogue also featured a reprint of an essay written by Lucy Lippard on Morton from 1973 and a new contribution from Lippard reflecting on Morton's contribution to art in the 1970s, that also helped contextualize her work in this period and in feminist art.
[47] The five works of Morton's shown were *Many Have Run Away, To Be Sure* (1974), *Maternal Instincts* (1974), *Of Previous Dissipations* (1974), Rocker with *One of the Beaux Paintings* (1975), *Too Beautiful (Run From the Infatuated River…Too Bewildered to Escape)* (1975). See, "Checklist of the Exhibition" in *WACK! Art and the Feminist Revolution*, (ed) Cornelia H Butler (Cambridge: MIT press, 2008), 505.
[48] Molesworth, "Sentiment and Sentimentality: Ree Morton and Installation Art", 12 – 21.

relation to feminist aesthetic debates in the 1970s.[49] These three studies, discussed later, were essential in highlighting feminist contexts for Morton's practice. However, aside from these short texts, there have been substantial gaps in Morton's legacy in relation to feminist art histories and installation art histories. In particular in the most recent retrospective exhibition of Morton's work at the Reina Sofia in Madrid in 2015, there was a complete blind spot to linking Morton to the feminist art movement and its aesthetic and social contexts in both the exhibition wall texts and the catalogue itself, which I discuss more in chapter four.

As this study will argue throughout, Morton was active in feminist activities and feminist art groups between 1972 and until 1977. She attended feminist consciousness-raising groups, feminist art lectures and meetings, and she formed friendships with key feminist artists, activists, critics and curators such as Laurie Anderson, Marcia Tucker and Lucy Lippard, among others. Furthermore, Morton engaged with feminist art themes and strategies her own work through her use of autobiographical content, and domestic and "feminine" themes. For example, her installations, often abstractly, represented or referred to her children, her travels, her relationships with friends and family, as well as her experience of being a woman artist and a mother. To wit, Morton once described her own life story as "a feminist classic: out of the kitchen and into the studio," framing her career in dialogue with the emancipatory politics of feminism and linking its effect to her choice to leave work in "the home," i.e. as a housewife and to undertake a career in the arts.[50]

[49] Susan Richmond, "The Sentimentality of Ree Morton's Signs of Love," *American Art* 30, no. 3 (Fall, 2016), 92 – 111.
[50] Morton, *Notebook* (RM05, 1974), 66.

Like other female colleagues in the late 1960s, Morton had entered a professional field of the arts dominated by men. According to a federal report commissioned by the National Endowment for the Arts in America in 1970 (the year Morton graduated from her Master's degree), only 31% of all those who listed their profession as "artists" on the census were women.[51] Though there were still more women taking degrees in art school than men, by the mid-1970s more and more women had been empowered by the women's liberation movement to begin careers as artists and support one another in doing so. Between 1970 and 1980, the number of women in America who described their profession on the census as "Painters/Sculptors/Crafts-Artists/Artist Printmakers" had increased by 117%; Morton was part of this new wave of women committing to making a career in the arts. Because of the women's movement that encouraged women and men to address personal issues, many artists including Ree Morton drew upon their status as working women and mothers in their artwork.

Domesticity and Feminist Installation Art in the 1970s

If then, feminist art and the feminist movement in 1970s America is a relevant context for Ree Morton's work, why has Morton's legacy been neglected in feminist art canons? How should her work be historicized in feminist art? How is the medium of installation art handled in feminist art histories more generally? And, is it useful to recuperate Ree Morton's work as feminist installation art? First, it is important to

[51] "Changing Proportions of Men and Women in the Artist Occupations 1970 – 1980", National Endowment for the Arts, Research Division. No. 9, March 4th, 1985. Accessed on February 22nd, 2016. https://www.arts.gov/sites/default/files/9.pdf

underscore a key bridge between installation art and feminist art which is the theme of domesticity in the 1970s.

Domesticity and the home became a particularly popular concern among the women's liberation movement in the 1970s with activists addressing the ideological site of the home and labor in terms of its mutual effect on the determination of gendered, raced and sexual identities. Catalyzing the movement, popular texts like Simone de Beauvoir's *The Second Sex* (1949), Betty Friedan's *The Feminine Mystique* (1963) and Pat Mainardi's 'The Politics of Housework" (1970), were integral in highlighting the pressures women faced in returning to domestic life after World War II to wider audiences.[52] These texts and others responded to issues like the common visual tropes in the media (particularly in advertising) of the "happy housewife" who found pleasure in domestic life and labor.[53] By the 1970s, this historic stereotype was seen by many feminists to be at odds with the lived experience of the drudgery of working in their own homes and this unequal division of labor prompted ideological challenges to the long standing assumption that women — not men — should be undertaking indoor domestic work. Furthermore, in the case of women who were not only working in their own homes, but working in other peoples' homes as well (proportionally more of whom were women of colour), the specifics of the site of domestic labor carried a range of meanings and implications.

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[52] See Simone de Beauvoir, *The Second Sex*, [1949]. Translated into English by Sheila Malovany-Chevallier (London: Vintage Classics, 2011); Betty Friedan, *The Feminist Mystique* (Harmmondsworth: Penguin, 1963) and Pat Mainardi "The Politics of Housework" [1970] reprinted in Estelle B. Freedman (ed.), *The Essential Feminist Reader* (Modern Library Inc, 2007).

[53] For more on media representations of the work of women and domesticity see Lynn Spigel, *Welcome to the Dreamhouse: Popular Media and Postwar Suburbs* (Durham: Duke University Press, 2001) and Ruth Schwartz Cowan, *More Work For Mother: The Ironies of Household Technology from the Open Hearth to the Microwave* (New York: Basic Books, 1993).

It should be noted that one commonly held assumption in popular characterizations of the women's liberation movement is that for all women in the 1970s, the home was a site of oppression and the lifestyle and "the housewife" was an identity to be rejected. Yet, as this study underscores, "home" for different women meant different things. In fact in many cases, such as those of women artists who had domestic studios that I go on to discuss in chapter one, domestic space was a far more complex and ambivalent site when it came to the notion of productive and unproductive work. Thus, while on the one hand it is true that the home according to many white and middle class feminists was felt to be a patriarchal site of oppression, on the other hand to non-white women and women from working class backgrounds, the home often held different concerns.

In the 1970s and thereafter, black feminists pointed out how populist feminist rejections of the home was not a unanimous position taken by all women. For example, activist groups like the National Black Feminist Organization founded in 1973 highlighted that black working women's experiences of labor in the home and outside the home (or in some else's home) was historically and contemporaneously very different to white women's experiences.[54] As Rita Felski notes, "[h]ome is not, as a generation of white middle-class feminists would have it, a space of female desolation and silent despair: rather it is where black women gather together for welcome communion and respite from exhausting labor. It is a refuge and a sanctuary rather than a prison."[55] In her introduction to the book *Home Girls: A Black Feminist Anthology*, black feminist activist and scholar Barbara Smith states, "[h]ome has always meant a lot to people who are ostracized as racial

[54] For more on the specific activism of black feminist groups in relation to the intersection of domestic and civil rights, see Kimberly Springer, "No Longer Divided Against Ourselves," in *Living for the Revolution: Black Feminist Organizations, 1968–1980* (Durham: Duke University Press, 2005), 45 – 64.
[55] Rita Felski, *Literature After Feminism* (Chicago and London: Chicago University Press, 2003), 81.

outsiders in the public sphere. It [home] is above all a place to be ourselves."[56] Black feminist activist and scholar bell hooks also highlights how, historically, "[t]he talk of making homeplace wasn't simply a matter of black women providing service [outside and inside the home]; home was a safe place where black people could affirm one another and by so doing heal many of the wounds inflicted by racist domination."[57] These comments by Smith and hooks underscore that home or "homeplace" wasn't necessarily something from which to escape – noting this is a conceit of white feminism – but rather that "home" for black women was a space to be reclaimed for, as hooks put it, "belonging" and as "a site of resistance" to subordination from both patriarchy *and* racism.

Taking into account the intersectional issues of gender, race and class that were then at stake for women negotiating a domestic identity, the artworks produced by women in 1970s responded to home in very different ways, especially with the theme of work. Feminist artists such as Martha Rosler parodied the image of the happy housewife. For example, in her 1975 video artwork, *Semiotics of the Kitchen*, the artist is seen wearing an apron while performing a deadpan alphabetical catalogue of domestic cooking tools, naming each object while simulating its action before nonchalantly throwing it behind her. In 1972, Betye Saar also appropriated a popular media image of a working women in her installation-tableau *The Liberation of Aunt Jemima*. Saar reimagined Aunt Jemima – a Southern black "mammy" stereotype of a domestic servant used to sell pancake mix – as a militant, radical and (as the title tells us) "liberated" woman.[58] Referencing both the history

[56] Barbara Smith, "Introduction," ed. Barbara Smith, *Home Girls: A Black Feminist Anthology* (New York: Kitchen Table: Women of Color Press, 1983), li.
[57] bell hooks, "Homeplace: A Site of Resistance" in *Yearning: Race, Gender and Cultural Politics* (Boston: South End Press, 1990), 42.
[58] I am indebted to my conversations with Cheryl Thompson in 2012 who brought to my attention the complex historical configurations of black domestic womanhood and its relationships to popular media

of black enslavement and the subsequent legacy of black women working as domestic help, Saar makes it clear that this Aunt Jemima – armed in one hand with a broom and in the other a gun – was undertaking a different kind of work: the work of resistance.

The different kinds of gendered experiences of domesticity and work I deal with in this study with regards to Ree Morton and notions of the home and labor relate predominantly to white women and white feminists, but even within this, it remains important not to presume homogeneity across women's domestic experiences either. There is currently a growing discourse among art historians exploring feminist domesticities as a concept and an approach in art history analyzing links between the the home as an ideological site of labor *and* creative expression.[59] As I also examine, how the different circumstances of individuals' articulations of home necessarily intersects with a issues relating to different kinds of corporeal identity and embodiment. The kinds of artworks I examine in this study by artists such as Ree Morton, Alice Aycock and Mary Miss are linked by what I suggest is the production of a kind of ambiguity and ambivalence to domesticity as an embodied space and as a site of gendered identity. I consider how these artists disrupted notions of the good and safe home as it is linked to female bodies.

Helen Molesworth notes that installation art can be considered a particularly apt medium in art with regards to the destabilization of domesticities. Installations, she writes, lend themselves particularly well to three-dimensional representations of the home spaces so as to deal with the history of what Molesworth calls "the bodiliness of women confined

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representations of characters such as Aunt Jemima. For more on Thompson's discussion the interventions of black feminist artists into the Aunt Jemima myth, see Cheryl Thompson, "Contesting the Aunt Jemima Trademark through Feminist Art: Why is She Still Smiling?" *N.Paradoxa: International Feminist Art Journal,* vol. 31 *Africa and its Diasporas* (Jan 2013), 65 -72.

[59] For a collection of recent articles exploring feminist approaches to domesticity in art history, see the special edition *Feminist Domesticities: Oxford Art Journal*, eds. Jo Applin and Francesca Berry, 40, no. 1. (March, 2017).

to these spaces."[60] Molesworth notes Ree Morton's practice was exemplary in this regard, stating how the artist "moved somewhat self-consciously from 'environment' to 'installation' partly by exploiting not only domesticity but a complicated suite of emotions regarding motherhood, loneliness, and place…her interest in installation and domesticity gave rise to an exploration of sentimentality."[61] Molesworth's reading crucially implies that installation art was not just a means of representing the home but it engaged a range of critical *feelings* about domesticity too.

As I go on to suggest in this study, Morton's installations and artworks were in many ways configured literally and symbolically around her experience of domesticity as a white woman transitioning from a more comfortable middle-class experience of the home as a married housewife in the 1960s, to a more unstable economic status as a mature emerging artist and single mother of three children in the 1970s. In chapter one, I explore how Morton's experience of labor – as an artist and a mother – are fundamentally linked to the development of her career and her installation art practice. As I contend, it is significant that during the early years of Morton's career she worked in studios in her home, but later when she had larger non-domestic studios, her work changed in scale and materials while keeping references to domestic spaces and work. For example, I examine Morton's hut and "shelter" installations as ambiguous representations of domesticity, as well as her installations relaying sentimental feelings for family and friends in a playfully "feminine" aesthetic way to show how the shifting discourse of domesticity and "women's work" in the climate of 1970s feminist art are key historical contexts for Morton's career.

[60] Molesworth, "Sentiment and Sentimentality," 15.
[61] Ibid.

In order to bring Morton's work into view within 1970s feminist artists' concerns with domesticity and space, it is necessary to note two better-known feminist installations including *The Dinner Party* (1979) by Judy Chicago and the *Womanhouse* project (1972) that deal with domestic issues relating to "women's work" in large-scale spatial and immersive ways that, as mentioned in the literature review, have been most commonly cited in surveys as examples of installation art made by women. I explore these artworks further in the later chapters of this study to situate Morton's installations within a key network of feminist practices and strategies that help to draw out the important links among domesticity, labor and installation in the 1970s. Yet, at this point, it is important to mention that these feminist installation works have been barely mentioned in early installation art histories. What's more, in histories of 1970s feminist art rarely, they are rarely linked to discourses or histories of installation art. This is not to say the material or visual aesthetic strategies of these works has not been considered (by the artists themselves, critics, or art historians) but rather that discussions of their formal spatial strategies do not tend to situate these works in dialogue with the contemporaneous emergence of installation art. In histories of 1970s feminist art, this may be due to the search for alternative means of historicizing art practices that don't rely upon recuperating women within male-dominated narratives (like installation art) hence they have remained ring-fenced within discourses of 1970s American feminist art, despite the fact that this too is a diverse field of practices. However what is lost in not realizing feminist installation art as forms of early installation works *as well as* feminist artworks is that their socially-engaged and political critiques of the gendered spaces of the home and its work are being overlooked. To wit, the range of installation artworks made by women who called

themselves feminists or demonstrate an affiliation to issues relating to gender inequality that I examine throughout this study demonstrate the very intersections of different social politics and emergent theories of space and objects in 1970s aesthetic debates absent from both histories of 1970s feminist art and 1970s early installation art. In effect, I contend domesticity is the missing link between feminist art and installation art histories.

Though these works by Chicago and the *Womanhouse* contributors are important points of reference in a wider history of feminist installation art, this study does not assume the task of writing a survey of the field either. As mentioned, the way I interrogate the idea of feminist installation art is not designed to create a finite definition of the term so as to make a canon, but rather it is intended as a provocative and open context in which to test and challenge the terrains of art history resistant to accommodating those artists to which it may apply. There are many installation artists marginalized and on the fringes of current surveys of installation art history who also are deserving of further study. For example, there are major omissions in installation art relating to queer, gay and lesbian art installation artists as well as installations artists of colour. Notable women artists of colour in the 1970s and 1980s who dealt with strategies associated with installation art and feminist art include Betye Saar, Howardena Pindell, Faith Ringgold and Yayoi Kusama. These artists addressed intersections of sexism, racism, civil rights and pacifism – all of which are also social histories neglected in installation art narratives too. I am aware that, in centering the "sub mainstream" issue of white middle class in feminist installation art, I also marginalize certain artists and make regrettable exclusions as well. Looking at the work of Ree Morton is just one attempt towards opening a much bigger critical

conversation that is needed about the limitations of installation art history more generally to point to ways future studies must interrogate their own exclusions.

In terms of recuperating feminist artworks into installation art histories, my hypothesis as mentioned, is that to date the field of installation art history has prioritized works and artists according to formal and spatial frameworks to the extent that it has obscured the content of art and the socio-political contexts in which it materialized. While this indictment of installation art requires a much bigger overhaul of the historical field than can be fully tackled here, it remains an important issue at stake when thinking about Ree Morton's (and other artists') omissions in these histories, as well as how to address where her legacy may be currently situated. To that end, this study has adopted approaches that take into account ways of not just examining how Ree Morton and other feminist artists were omitted from installation art histories, but *why*.

Methodology

The practical methods used in this study are linked to theoretical approaches relating to feminist historiographies of art, meaning I attend to how underrepresented women artists have been made invisible, or may be "made visible," and what the implications of these operations are today. Given the emphasis in Morton's legacy on how her autobiographical narratives frames her material practice it is important to underscore that this study, methodologically speaking, does not take the form of a traditional art historical monograph which would typically address the intertwining of the life and work of one artist. The model of the monograph poses particular problems in its application to women artists. As has been most persuasively argued by feminist art historian Griselda

Pollock, the very concept of the monograph and its sibling the *catalogue raisonné* — a complete record of the artist's works — have been historically built on models of artistic identity specific to male artists. Pollock broadly suggests that these models have sustained a link between life stories and an artist's practice art in linear and cumulative models of progress, success and greatness that have delivered narrow and homogenous forms of art historical canons that are broadly exclusionary to women and other underrepresented groups in art history.[62]

One of the dangers of a monograph for female artists is that biographical information can be used to make causal interpretation that explain the meaning of the artwork and/or her oeuvre. Yet, if these problems suggest the monograph is a problematic format for women artists, but the project of recuperating female artists is still needed because women are still marginalized, then what kind of model is more productive? Kristen Frederickson and Sarah E. Webb have proposed a model of a "feminist monograph" that openly acknowledges the multiple identities and ideological positions of the artist and her art, so as not to privilege a particular interpretation. Webb proposes that a feminist intervention in art history must not operate by "retrieving the artist who is also a woman, but [perform] a rethinking of the site of her inscription."[63] As such, a feminist monograph (that is feminist in approach, not referencing a feminist subject per se) can subvert a causal link between artist and art by instead considering how a single-artist study could deliver a more critical framework for addressing conditions under which artists articulate themselves and for examining how they are subsequently historicized.

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[62] See, Griselda Pollock, "Women, Art and Ideology: Questions for Feminist Art Historians", *Women's Art Journal* 4, No. 1 (Spring/Summer, 1983), 40.
[63] Sarah E. Webb "Epilogue: Mark Making, Writing, and Erasure" *Singular Women: Writing the Artist* (eds) Frederickson, Kristen and Webb, Sarah (Berkeley: University of California Press, 2003), 238.

These concerns over the efficacy of the monograph clearly apply to a study of Ree Morton's work. The artist's tumultuous life events frequently frame her work: her identities as woman, artist, mother, feminist and wife and indeed a tragic car-crash victim are often mobilized, but rarely problematized in the way her practice is interpreted. To address this, I deploy a similar critical model of a feminist monograph as laid out by Frederickson and Webb by couching Morton's artwork within the socio-historical and economic conditions in which she worked and being attentive to the way her work has been framed. As such, this study does not position itself as a monograph capable of delivering a comprehensive analysis of Morton's entire body of work in relation to fixed biographical "facts," but rather uses Morton's artwork, archives and other corollary sources to undertake what Webb called "a rethinking of the sites of her inscription" by looking at what is at stake in historicizing her legacy into, or outside of, feminist and installation art histories and taking on board the unique issues that arise in doing so. I draw on the work of other female artists to situate Morton within a new network of feminist and feminist-influenced practices. This allows me to explore alternative configurations of her historical legacy that don't isolate her practice or strategies so as to bring Morton's work and its approaches into dialogue with topical issues such as domesticity and labor as they are linked to cultural contexts of the 1970s.

Because there are two aims of this study — to deliver a sustained art historical contextualized analysis of Ree Morton's practice *and* to examine why and how women have been omitted in installation art histories — this study critically engages with the unique questions, issues and problems that arise in dealing with Ree Morton's legacy in art history as well as the bigger issues at stake in historicizing women's art and theorizing female

subjectivities within given art historical discourses. This study has been deeply informed by Marsha Meskimmon's theories that probe how female subjectivity, agency and materiality operate in relation to how we understand and historicize the ways women make art. The benefit of her approach comes from the way she examines how we engage with and interpret women's artworks with regard to specific material and aesthetic processes that inform our configurations of how female subjectivity and agency may be understood in art. By taking into account the way women make art and their specific material choices, this attends to what Meskimmon describes as "the double play between materiality and agency" that relates to a meaningful discussion of "how women's art comes to articulate sexual difference in its material specificity and at its particular historical locus."[64]

Meskimmon's understanding of "the double play between materiality and agency" in this study links Morton's autobiographical practice with its materials in two ways. The first is that I take seriously the way Morton's material choices and technical processes are meaningful in connection to theorizing the articulation of her agency and subjectivities as "autobiographical" within a "particular historical locus" in the 1970s, as feminist art and installation art emerged. By doing so, I connect Morton's practice in terms of content and medium to its social and political context and material processes in feminism and feminist art in the 1970s as well as the other modes of art making she drew upon. I also consider another link between agency and materiality in my analysis of Morton's notebooks and her material archives as a we encounter the labor bound up in her autobiographical practice. Meskimmon says that "[c]ritics, theorists and historians also participate in this double play

[64] Meskimmon, "Introduction" *Women Making Art,* 3.

of materiality and agency…the questions we ask of women making art participate in the meanings which are produced — we are implicated in the productive relation."[65]

These two meanings of materials and agency are important as they necessitate specificity in how Ree Morton and others made feminist installation art to connect both autobiographical content and processes *and* the formal qualities of the art object in relation to the artist and her cultural context. The permits a more useful approach to theorizing "women's art" or "feminist art" because it links specific practices by strategies, techniques, processes, themes and concepts rather by a notion of a visible gendered or "feminist" aesthetic as perceived by the spectator. As Meskimmon states, "[t]here is no one type of women's art, yet women's art resides at the nexus of materiality, subjectivity and agency and bears the traces and residues of its discursive positioning."[66] This study focuses on the ways "the traces and residues of its [women's art's] discursive positioning" may materialize by critically examining my own use of Ree Morton's autobiographical archive materials — her letters, notebook entries and photographs —when exploring her autobiographical installations. While this framing of Morton's work as feminist installation art invites us to take seriously the artist's articulations of how and why she made art, we must also analyze how women's autobiographical ephemera are sometimes instrumentalized to explain work or reduce it into certain kinds of homogenous "female" discourses.

In chapter one, I follow Meskimmon's view that new configurations of agency and subjectivities materialize in each encounter made with artists' materials and spaces – that encompasses both artworks and the work that takes places around and in aid of making art too. As Meskimmon says this "enables us to ask new questions of vital importance to the

[65] Meskimmon, *Women Making Art,* 4.
[66] Ibid, 8.

future" because it locates the interpreter "as a partner in dialogue with women making art rather than in the position of a privileged interpreter, explicating the inherent truths of women, art and cultural history….not to reveal the essence of female subjectivity expressed in art (even if this were possible) but to explore the *work* of women's art, the work it can do in articulating histories, subjects and sensory knowledge's against the grain."[67] This study is indebted to Meskimmon's theory of "the *work* of art" that suggests a very significant reconceptualization of "work" as both a material art object ("the work of art") but also as appreciating the labor involved in making art and the labor involved in understanding it. This means interpretation can take multiple forms depending on how we understand artistic identity and gendered labor in making art and the other kinds of work that support or enable art making – like teaching or childcare and domestic labor. To attend to the intersectional kinds of *works of art* drives at the heart of how feminist theories of labor and subjectivity can be mobilized in feminist art histories in ways that are not reductive, such as I mentioned they can be in approaches that privilege spectatorship theory, but instead when we interpret art and artists and their processes, we must consider how women's labor is performed, visualized and articulated by subjects (like critics and historians) and furthermore how that labor is located and translated in art historical discourses.

For a study of Ree Morton's practice, this allows me to consider what it may have been like to make art about domesticity as a female artist and a mother in the 1970s and how her experience of labor and space relates to her art objects and installations. By attending to the spaces she worked in — especially her "domestic studios" — this allows me to interrogate the terms of *how* Morton worked, as well as where she worked, and on

[67] Meskimmon, *Women Making Art*, 4.

what terms work and life overlapped or were separate and what might be the implications of these questions in parsing the significance of theorizing labor in her practice when we encounter her artworks, her archives and her installation art legacy.

In order to explore these different facets of Morton's practice and feminist installation art more generally, this study critically engages with a wide range of primary sources and secondary sources. There are a vast number of primary sources written by Ree Morton, including 39 notebooks by the artist, as well as a few published essays and correspondences. Other sources used are the interviews I conducted with Morton's friends and colleagues for this study, some of which are included in the appendix. It should be noted these primary sources are treated with equivalency to Morton's artworks as I engage with the circumstances of her practice as much as her practice itself; no one material is treated as true or transparent about Morton and her intentions, or her artworks' meanings. As mentioned, Meskimmon noted that art historians do not need to explain art's meaning, but they are "a partner in dialogue with women making art rather than in the position of a privileged interpreter, explicating the inherent truths of women, art and cultural history" because they cannot "reveal the essence of female subjectivity expressed in art (even if this were possible) but [they] explore the *work* of women's art, the work it can do in articulating histories."[68]

One of these key primary resources analyzed here are the artist's 39 notebooks and sketchbooks spanning the years 1968 to 1977. No sustained study of these books to date has taken place in relation to Morton's practice, let alone a more theoretical analysis of the relationship they have to her legacy as a feminist installation artist. I suggest the notebooks

[68] Meskimmon, *Women Making Art*, 4.

are important because it was there Morton systematically recorded her working processes and artworks in writing and in sketches *and* she also used them as diaries to record her personal thoughts on art making and on the process of making artwork and of everyday life including her ruminations on gender roles, relationships and motherhood. Morton's notebooks are further complicated by the fact that the artist also exhibited the notebooks as art objects. How then to conceive of Morton's legacy in the notebooks when they are both archives *and* artworks? Because the notebooks play such an integral role in Morton's legacy as a key source of information but also as a way in which we encounter and learn about the artist, they offer a unique opportunity to consider practically and theoretically the way material archival ephemera is operationalized in the writing of art history.

Chapter Summaries

Each of the chapters in this study has been organized around a unique issue that has arisen in the process of studying Morton's career. The first chapter takes up the issue of Morton's notebooks and their role in her practice and in her legacy. As such, this chapter is not strictly about Morton's installation work, but focuses instead on the effects of using an artist's writing and this kind of personal primary material in a historical study. I give the first ever account and overview of Morton's notebooks and examine what they tell us about her practice and her conditions of production as she travelled around the United States. I suggest that not only were Morton's notebooks deeply implicated in the way she developed her practice as she travelled, but that they supported how she developed her early spatial strategies of installation art. I go on to consider the way these materials more generally pose issues for historicizing women artists, particularly the challenges of linking

autobiographical archive material to autobiographical (installation) artworks. I examine two recent feminist theoretical frameworks of women's labor and art to rethink Morton's notebooks as sites of work and of personal and political possibility where women's work, lives and art intersect. To connect these discussions to Morton's practice, I explore her artworks made on vacations with her children, how her work was affected by her various domestic studios, and her work as a mother alongside being an artist. I conclude by exploring how and why Morton showed her notebooks in exhibitions and I consider the way this reframes Morton's practice in dialogue with conceptual feminist art strategies about women's labor to contextualize her work with other feminist artists of the period engaging with domesticity and work in spatial ways.

Chapters two and three take a more chronological approach, splitting Morton's practice into earlier and later periods in the 1970s to explore themes such as gendered labor and domesticity in relation to relevant artistic and cultural contexts. The second chapter explores Morton's earlier period of work between 1968 and 1974, beginning with her interest in 1960s debates about medium specificity and space and tracing how key themes and discourses in installation art histories can be seen in her practice. I consider Morton's association in the 1970s with the Anarchitecture group in New York City and especially its feminist members and how this influenced her installation art practice as she explored themes of gendered space, autobiography and domestic architecture in her early installations. I examine these works in relation to Marsha Meskimmon's theoretical framework of domestic "thresholds" to suggest Morton's works were provocations of gendered domesticities. I examine Lucy Lippard's accounts of "architectural sculptures" and "shelters," to trace alternative trajectories of installation art in sculpture, land art and

feminist art histories. I consider two "shelter" installation artworks by artists Mary Miss and Alice Aycock to show how domestic space and gendered space were addressed in ambivalent ways in installations using strategies and techniques drawn from land art and large-scale sculpture. I reframe these works in terms of Meskimmon's "thresholds" arguing Miss's, Aycock's and Morton's installations are critiques of domestic work and space.

The third and final chapter looks at the later period of Morton's work between 1974 and 1977. I examine Morton's installations contextually within 1970s feminist art practices and critiques of gendered hierarchies of value, taste and formal materials. I consider how Morton's installations shifted in material and content towards more autobiographical and sentimental issues relating to her family and friends. I discuss her legacy in relation to postminimalist female artists, and I link her early work to her later work via a discussion of abstraction and gendered space. I suggest Morton's later installations critically addressed the notion of "female imagery" using Celastic (a theatrical prop material) in order to respond to kitsch, craft and "bad taste" aesthetic strategies. I link these material techniques to a broader discourse of theatricality. I conclude by critically reviewing her legacy as it is presented in her most recent retrospective in 2015.

In the conclusion to this study, I sketch out future avenues for research both in Morton's work and for installation art histories, identifying what the framework of feminist installation art ultimately means for this study and what stands to be gained from further consideration of its processes and practitioners.

Chapter One

"The Critical Link Between Thinking and Making": Artists' Notebooks and Autobiographical Art

In 1988, Franklin Furnace – an archive dedicated to the preservation of artists' books – acquired the 39 sketchbooks and notebooks of Ree Morton. They agreed to maintain the materials as well as promote and handle loans to exhibitions to advance the artist's legacy.[69] The books' deposit was followed soon after by an exhibition at Franklin Furnace's premises in New York City.[70] The show was not only significant in bringing Morton's previously unseen autobiographical material into public view (for the books had been in private hands for 11 years since the artist died in 1977) but the contents of the books offered insight into the working processes and lifestyle of the artist.

Franklin Furnace was a somewhat unusual organization for the deposit of this particular archive. When Morton's books were first donated there, the archive claimed to specialize in "the collection and preservation of artists' books, performance art and time-based media documentation" in order to "champion ephemeral forms neglected by mainstream arts institutions."[71] Morton's notebooks were not exactly ephemeral forms, nor were they made by Morton as artist's books and nor was Morton a performance or time-based artist. So why did they end up there? Exhibiting Morton's notebooks at an institution such as Franklin Furnace known for its avant-garde approach to art offers a way to frame Morton's writing *and* drawing as interconnected creative activities in her practice. The

[69]See http://database.franklinfurnace.org/~admin/ree_morton/history.html Accessed December 3rd, 2014
[70] The exhibition was held from July 7 to August 27, 1988 and was curated by Cynthia Carlson and Allan Schwartzman.
[71] See http://franklinfurnace.org/about/institutional_history/organizational_overview.php Accessed December 3rd, 2014.

books were the main focus of the exhibition, rather than her artworks, thus reframing the artist's ephemera, in a way, as art objects. This display of the artist's books detailed the many sketches and notations for what later materialized as sculptural or installation works of art. The exhibition also showed a number of diaristic vignettes where Morton wrote about her career and life as a single, working mother. As such, the contents of the book are mixed, showing (for the 1970s) an unconventional display of both personal and professional issues expressed in drawing and/or writing, evidencing how Morton's processes of work were framed by the social conditions of her practice. The very first exhibition of the notebooks at Franklin Furnace in this way offers an insight into what kinds of labor was involved — not just in making art, but in the other forms of work such as teaching and caring for her children that she wrote about, that as I will suggest, deeply impacted on the materials and themes in her practice.

What's more, because the notebooks carry short accounts by the artist of her own practice and working life this has further enhanced the prevailing view that Morton's work is autobiographical. Since the books' exhibition in 1988, critics, curators and historians have continued to heavily use the books' contents to provide explanations and meaning to Morton's artworks, especially in the case of her more abstract pieces. This approach was particularly evident in the last two major solo retrospectives of Morton's work in 2008 - 09 at the Generali Foundation in Vienna and in 2015 at the Reina Sofia Museum in Madrid where Morton's notebooks were displayed alongside the artworks to which they could be seen to relate.

While the books have come to be increasingly annexed to Morton's practice, they have yet to be critically or theoretically examined as to how their use may impact on how

she is inscribed as subject in art history. As I argue in this chapter, Morton's notebooks detail a huge range of information about how she went about managing her career as women and as a mother and how this affected the production of her artwork. This chapter considers that Morton's notebooks were not only implicated in her practice to the extent that they document her work and life, but as an integral part of her practice which informed how she developed her approach to installation art, they are a key part of her history and legacy.

As I go on to discuss, it is important to consider that biographical details are often too simply deployed from women's writing in interpretations of their artworks which can and has engendered reductive determinations about how their lives relate to their practice. Therefore, because sustained scholarly research on Ree Morton is scant yet her reputation is undeniably in its ascendency, it is timely to critically analyze ways of engaging with artist's notebooks' contents and the ways of historicizing female artists' legacies, especially one such as Morton's that is underdeveloped in art history. To be clear, it is not my intention to dismiss Morton's biographical narratives — far from it. That said, rehearsing them is not the primary aim of this study either. Instead this chapter contends specifically that Ree Morton's (or any other artists') notebooks do not provide clear cut answers about the artist or her art or indeed any direct correlation between them, but rather they enact new possibilities about how we encounter and theorize artist's identities, agencies, labors and processes of making when historicizing women make art.

The exhibition of Morton's notebooks at Franklin Furnace's initiates one way to think differently about the artist's autobiographical ephemera. Given that Franklin Furnace was an archive for "preservation of artists' books" is something to be gained by looking at

these materials and their mixed contents of drawing and writing not just as conventional archive ephemera, but instead as artists' books? Broadly speaking, the main difference between artists' books and artists' notebooks is that the former is typically thought of as an artistic medium — its status is that of an art object. The notebook on the other hand is deemed corollary to the artists' practice — it supports the artist's work and is used for research consultation. In art history at least, artists' notebooks, diaries and letters tend to be classified as archival material. Yet artists' books and notebooks share close similarities given that diaries, sketchbooks and notebooks cannot be easily distinguished from artists' books by the use of text vs images, nor by content. It tends to be the artist's designation of the book that determines its status.[72] In the 1960s conceptual artists intended the distinction between notebooks and artists' books to be unclear. The works sometimes *only* contained text notations and ideas for future artworks, such as in the case of Mel Bochner's *Working Drawings And Other Visible Thing on Paper Not Necessarily Meant To Be Viewed As Art* (1966), which simply displayed a binder on a plinth containing a number of artist's sketches for future works. The format of the book as art was intended to challenge the way in which art could be articulated as ideas (in drawings or words) instead of as a "fine art" object fabricated by skilled hand.

This chapter will argue that Ree Morton sought to complicate the distinction between her notebooks and her artworks in similar ways. In a set of activities undertaken by the artist that have yet to be discussed in relation to her legacy at all, it is known that

[72] For more on the history of artists' books, see Johanna Drucker, *The Century of Artists' Books* [1995] (New York: Granary Books, reprinted 2004); and Stefan Klima, *Artists' Books: A Critical Survey of the Literature* (New York: Granary Books, 1998).

Morton published and/or exhibited her notebooks as art objects no less than three separate times. As I will discuss, this brings Morton's practice into dialogue with conceptual art practices as well as feminist autobiographical art practices and begins to challenge where the art historical parameters of her practice lie. To wit, these contexts are rarely addressed in relation to Morton's legacy despite how, as I go on to argue, they offer crucial frameworks within which to historicize her practice in terms of labor and subjectivity.

Ree Morton's Notebooks: History and Overview

First, it merits discussing the specifics of Morton's notebooks as an analysis and overview of them does not, to date, exist. There are 39 items listed in Ree Morton's archives at Franklin Furnace that include: "22 sketchbooks, 16 notebooks and one folder of loose papers."[73] The books are almost all different sizes and shapes with some very small cheap lined notebooks, others have large ruled writing paper, and some have sketchbook-quality paper for drawing or painting. Some of the books are heavily used and full of notes, with dog-eared pages and finger-smudged covers, where other books are clean and barely used containing only a few brief notes as if used once and discarded. The books are dated by the estate between 1968 and 1977 and given unique reference numbers.[74] Of these 39

[73] Since writing this study, new items have been added to the archive including loose papers and exhibition material that were not able to be seen in time to be included in this study.
[74] I have used the term notebook throughout to stand for all the books. Differentiating between notebook and sketchbook serves little purpose as the books contain both drawings and writing. Second, Morton herself referred to the books as "notebooks". See Ree Morton, *Notebook* (RM15, 1977) Franklin Furnace Archives, 8. The format "RM##" is Franklin Furnace's catalogue notation for Morton's notebooks and all references to her notebooks in this dissertation are from this source. See http://franklinfurnace.org/ree_morton_sketchbooks/index.php. Accessed December 2016.

items, six are listed as address books, calendar books and teaching notes. The remaining 32 books form the body of primary material used for research in this study.[75]

Since being placed with Franklin Furnace in 1981, most of the notebooks have been digitized and are available for free to the public.[76] In the books no continuous dating system is used (as one might expect from a journal or diary) and Morton does not always indicate the location, date or time period of the entries. Some notebooks are dated by year(s) in Morton's handwriting inside the covers or on pages. Where dates are absent, Franklin Furnace has supplied dates and those dates have been observed in this study, unless otherwise stated.

The early notebooks dated between 1968 and 1970 seem to have been used for Morton's fine art courses. They contain preparatory drawings for artworks and notes about art history.[77] There is little personal information (compared to the later books) probably because they were submitted for formal assessment to her tutors, as is typical in fine art degrees. These books show Morton's interest in minimalist and post-minimalist sculpture and drawing during her Bachelor's degree undertaken at University of Rhode Island between 1965 and 1969. Other scholastic books from her Masters degree at Tyler School of Art at Temple University in Philadelphia undertaken between 1969 and 1970 show her

[75] RM17 is an address book. RM31 and RM38 are calendar books. RM06, RM26 and RM09 contain mostly notes about lecture plans, assignments, grading, comments on students' development or her own frustration or delight at their progress.
[76] See http://franklinfurnace.org/ree_morton_sketchbooks/index.php Accessed December 1st, 2016. The physical archive is now held by the Museum of Modern Art Library, acquired from Franklin Furnace's collection in 2011, the reference guide to which may be found here: http://www.moma.org/collection/artist.php?artist_id=4114 Accessed December 2nd, 2014. The responsibility for digital display, loans, permissions and rights remains with Franklin Furnace and the Estate of Ree Morton.
[77] Notebooks dated in or prior to 1970 are: RM10; RM13; RM21; RM22; RM23; RM25; RM27; RM28; RM36; RM45. See pages 340 – 342 for full bibliography details.

analysis of architectural and spatial theories and installation works (see chapter two for more discussion of these books).[78]

Very little appears to have been written between 1970 and 1971, which was the period after Morton graduated and was looking after her children in Philadelphia. Use of the books increased in 1972, and by 1973 prose about Morton's personal life appears more regularly. Between 1973 and 1977, Morton's notebooks include much more self-reflexive content, perhaps because of her activities with feminist consciousness raising groups and self-help therapy methods such as *EST*, both which encouraged auto-analysis.[79] In the years 1974, 1975 and 1976 Morton used her notebooks extensively with particularly frequent entries in this period. Only one notebook covers 1977 (Morton died in April 1977). However, the exact frequency with which Morton used the books is unclear because of the lack of consistent dates, though it is evident that she worked in several notebooks at the same time because the same artworks and dates appear in multiple books. For example, the installation piece *Something in the Wind* (1975) is referenced in seven different books between 1974 and 1975.[80] Other times, Morton would use one book for many years. For example, though RM12 spans 1971 – 1974, there are also 13 other books covering this same period. Therefore, because Morton was working in several books at once and in some for a long period of time, a neat chronology of the notebooks impossible to provide here.

Anecdotal sources provide some information about how Morton used the books. Close friend and colleague, artist Cynthia Carlson, observed that Morton's notebooks were

[78] See notebooks: RM10; RM13; RM21; RM22; RM25; RM27; RM28. See my bibliography for more detail.
[79] EST stands for Erhard Seminars Training which was a self-help therapy course popular in the 1970s. Good examples of confessional writing by Morton can be found in notebooks: RM02; RM17; RM29; RM30.
[80] See RM12; RM01; RM03; RM18; RM26; RM29; RM31.

"always at hand"[81] while friend and artist, Bill Beckley, remembered that she would "carry the notebooks around… they meant a great deal to her."[82] Shortly before she died Morton wrote:

> Data in these notebooks — accumulated over the years on a hit and miss basis using principles of selection mysterious to me which, furthermore, changes from year to year and which I could not recover if I wanted to. Sources questionable at best. My excuse for brazenly dipping into this preempted domain is that I have a special interest, one that does not recognize a difference in value between a good novel and a bad one, a comic strip or an opera. All are equally useful in explicating the character of styles of experienced activity.[83]

This is the only reference Morton ever makes as to why she kept notebooks aside from a brief note stating "just took a look back through and I'm happy I'm keeping a record."[84] The quoted passage seems explanatory, as if it was aimed at a reader. The date of this entry in 1977 is significant in this regard as the passage was written shortly after Morton began exhibiting her notebooks in 1976 and this may have been an indication she knew her books were going to be read or exhibited again (I discuss this more at the end of this chapter).

The passage also shows Morton's awareness of the eclecticism of her style and the variety of content in the books. Indeed, in the books, there is a huge range of subject matter covered such as: nonsensical poems; detailed drawings of carefully measured installations with itemized and costed lists of materials; recipes for soup; annotated newspaper cuttings of exhibition announcements; grocery lists; reminders about her children's birthdays; and emotional passages about her concerns of being a woman artist and a competent mother.

What becomes evident when reading through Morton's notebooks is her sustained

[81] Cynthia Carlson, in interview with the author, December 11, 2013.
[82] Cynthia Carlson, email to the author, December 9, 2013.
[83] Morton, *Notebook* (RM 15: 1977), 8.
[84] Morton, *Notebook* (RM29: 1975), 6.

documentation of these intermingling professional and personal circumstances as they occurred sometimes in harmony and sometimes in conflict. Reading her notebooks and the fragments of daily life that she chose to record (and wondering about those she didn't) profoundly foregrounds some of the challenges of being a working mother, not only in the 1970s, but in general. And indeed, it was some of these challenges which I suggest throughout this study became subjects for artworks.

Another notable aspect of Morton's practice in the books is the documentation that shows she travelled frequently for extended periods all over the United States to take up short and medium term work opportunities as a teacher or to exhibit artwork. Between 1972 and 1977, Morton was employed in nine teaching posts in seven states including Illinois, Connecticut, New Jersey, Pennsylvania, California, Colorado and Montana.[85] This precarious employment situation, coupled with the irregular childcare responsibilities she shared with her ex-husband meant Morton frequently travelled to live and work in different cities, sometimes alone and sometimes with one, two or three of her children.

After 1972, as Morton's lifestyle became increasingly peripatetic, this aligns with the time she used her notebooks more regularly. In the pages of Morton's notebooks there are references to the people she met, the places she travelled and the landscape geographies she encountered. These notations are interspersed among drawings of installations and lists of materials that I go on to discuss evidence how Morton's documentation of her surroundings played a key part in the development of her installations. In this chapter I examine in much more detail the effects of travel and a peripatetic lifestyle on Morton's practice and it is my hypothesis that Morton's notebooks served a very practical function in

[85] For more details on these locations, see *Ree Morton: Works*, 194.

that they were compact, portable and reliable spaces for working out thoughts and plans as she travelled. What's more, as Morton's works increased in scale and in autobiographical context, her use of strategies relating to installation, became more pronounced. Therefore, I not only suggest that Morton's notebooks were implicated in her practice to the extent that they supported her studio-based work, but it is my suggestion they very actively informed how she developed her early strategies of installation art. Before I explore case studies to elaborate on this idea, it is necessary first to critically consider what is at stake in using artists' autobiographical documents – or indeed using biographical information at all. This will enable me to examine more effectively Morton's notebooks and her artistic practice together.

Art, Artists and Autobiographical Material: Feminist Approaches

Artists' biographies have had a lengthy tradition in the history of art. Giorgio Vasari's *Lives of the Painters, Sculptors and Architects* (1550) was the first publication to narrate, at length, the biographies of male Renaissance painters and use these details to interpret artworks. Later in the eighteenth century, just as the academic discipline of the history of art was forming, the monograph – a study of one artist's career – simultaneously emerged as the accepted way to organize artworks around biography; ever since, the monograph has remained a dominant format in the discipline.[86] In his wide-reaching study of the history of the monograph, art historian Gabriele Guercio argues the persistent popularity of the genre has sustained the way life and art are mutually codetermined in the

[86] For more on the parallel emergence of the monograph and the discipline of art history, see Matthew Rampley, "Questions of Method" in *The Vienna School of Art History: Empire and the Politics of Scholarship 1847–1918* (Pennsylvania: Penn State University Press, 2013), 41.

study of the history of art.[87] Indeed, it wasn't until the 1970s that feminist art historians such as Linda Nochlin began to address how monographs had created models of artistic "genius" created by, and for, male artists exclusively.[88] Such critiques of the marginalization of artists by gender, sexuality and ethnicity in art historical canons led feminist scholars in particular to explore alternative ways to historicize subjects differently, putting the efficacy of the monographic tradition into question.[89]

Artists' writings or descriptions of their own lives and work – in a single publication like the monograph – are far, far less common. Although some (mostly male) artists have published memoirs, notebooks or collected writings, more often than not artists' autobiographical writing or first-person accounts of artists' lives are found in smaller and more intimate formats such as letters, diaries, interviews and oral histories.[90] These materials usually end up in archives and are rarely published (in book form) in full as you might see in other genres, such as the memoir or autobiography in literary fields.

Given that the inscriptions of autobiographical information take uneven forms in art history *and* there is much less autobiographical writing by women, this raises urgent questions about how these kinds of materials are being used in the writing of art history and how they inform the discipline. These questions about the effects of deploying

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[87] Gabriele Guercio, *Art as Existence: The Artist's Monograph and its Project* (Cambridge: MIT Press, 2006), 4.
[88] See Linda Nochlin "Why Have Their Been No Great Women Artists?" [1971] reprinted in *Women, Art and Power and Other Essays* (ed) Linda Nochlin (London: Thames and Hudson, 1989), 145 – 178.
[89] For a good overview of the key feminist critiques of the monograph, see Kristen Frederickson, "Introduction: Histories, Silences, and Stories" in *Singular Women: Writing the Artist* (eds) Frederickson, Kristen and Webb, Sarah (Berkeley: University of California Press, 2003), 1 – 20.
[90] One example of a project redressing the imbalance of primary sources regarding the histories of American women artists is the Elizabeth Murray Oral History of Women in the Visual Arts Project supported by Agnes Gund, philanthropist and president emerita of the Museum of Modern Art, designed "to produce oral history interviews of women artists, art historians, and curators who have had a lasting and significant influence on the American art world." See https://www.aaa.si.edu/inside-the-archives/elizabeth-murray-oral-history-of-women-the-visual-arts-project Last accessed May 10th, 2017.

autobiographical writing in art historical discourses are rarely discussed and yet there seems to be more and more interest all the time in artists' private lives. While this is a substantial area of study and one that this dissertation cannot fully investigate, it is worth pointing out that the general absence of critical analyses of autobiographical writing in art history suggests the need for future research.

This issue particularly poses pressing ethical questions for methodologies seeking to write new subjects into given discourses of art history while being aware of the problems that arise in doing so. We might ask, how are autobiographical materials strategically interpreted? What impact do they have on the formation of meaning in relation to artworks and artists? And what impact does the uptake, or the refusal, of autobiographical materials have on the way artists' identities, artworks and legacies are written into, or out of, art histories? In short, what of "the artist" matters (her/his identity, her/his life and her/his self-expression) to the analysis of artworks and why does it matter how we determine and theorize these connections in art history?

While these questions don't have straightforward answers, they indicate the complexities of theorizing the way the identities of subjects and their sexual, gendered raced, classed and bodily subjectivities are inscribed in art histories. Especially in the case where discriminatory mechanisms continue to deny visibility to marginalized artists. Thus, while artists' autobiographies may presume a connectivity of art and life, there is no self evident way to determine exactly how those relationships operate with regards to historicizing a subject. Understanding the links between autobiographical art and autobiographical writings is a unique project in each case; it behooves art historians to consider precisely how certain autobiographical interpretations are generated not just

from artworks, but from the ancillary sources, like notebooks, used in art historical research and in exhibition display.

Feminist art historians have made the most significant advances in this line of enquiry by asking why and how the marginalization of non-normative subjects in art history was (and is) connected to formations of artists' gendered, sexed and racialized identities. Griselda Pollock, in particular, has pioneered this field of historiography by attending to how canons have been built on a singularly constructed relationship between artist and art objects. Her argument here is worth quoting at length:

> The preoccupation with the individual artist is symptomatic of the work accomplished in art history – the production of an *artistic subject for works of art*. The subject constructed from the art work is then posited as the exclusive source of meaning –i.e. of "art" and the effect of this is to remove 'art' from historical or textual analysis by representing it solely as the 'expression' of the creative personality of the artist. Art is therefore neither public, social, nor a product of work. Art and artist become reflexive, mystically bound into an unbreakable circuit which produces the artist as the subject of the artwork and the artwork as a means of contemplative access to that subject's 'transcendent' and creative subjectivity. The construction of an artist subject for art is accomplished through current discursive structures – the *biographic*, which focuses exclusively on the individual, and the *narrative* which produces coherent, linear, causal sequences through which an artist subject is realized.[91]

Pollock points to how certain tropes and formats of biographic narratives in the monograph seek "coherent" models of identity in relation to artworks. The monograph, she also argues elsewhere, bolsters the myth of the "singular, solitary genius" which maintains this coherent model of artistic identity gendered as male, but not available to women.[92]

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[91]My emphasis in italics; Griselda Pollock, "Artists Mythologies and Media Genius, Madness and Art History," (1980) reprinted in *Picture This: Media Representations of Visual Art and Artists*, ed. Philip Hayward (London: John Libbey, 1988), 76-77.

[92] For more on the unavailability of artistic identity for women, see Linda Nochlin,. "Why Have Their Been No Great Women Artists" (1971) reprinted in *Women, Art and Power and Other Essays* (ed) Linda Nochlin (London: Thames and Hudson, 1989), 145 – 178.

This, she states, repeatedly reifies the broad concept of "the artist" as what she calls "a social ideal, a complement to and embodiment of the prime bourgeois myth of the universal, classless Man."[93]

Guercio, author of a survey of the monograph I discussed in the introduction chapter, also suggests the chronological format of the monograph was designed to track the progress of art and artist together, linking art and life in a causal way. This, he suggests, secured a mutually assured coherent evolution of art's style and the artist's identity. The focus on the interdependency of these narratives, he states, has often resulted in an eclipse of social and cultural contexts.[94]

The model of writing in the monograph to which Guercio refers is broadly known as "biographism" which is a literary term referring to the explanation of a work of art or text relying on information known about the artist or author's life.[95] Importantly, those who write monographs have relied heavily on archival materials to legitimize their use of biographism, sustaining assumptions that "truths" about artists are evident in autobiographical material. Therefore, if the interconnected legacies of the monograph and the methodologies of biographism have affected the ways in which historians read autobiographical materials as factual i.e. containing answers and truths which create interpretive frameworks, then by extension, is it presumed artists' diaries and notebooks also hold such truths? As I go on to argue, this assumption needs to be resisted.

Feminist literary scholarship on autobiographical writing is useful to consider here briefly as it shows how different forms of autobiographical writing by different subjects

[93] Pollock, "Women, Art and Ideology", 40.
[94] Guercio, *Art as Existence*, 7.
[95] For more on biographism in art history, see Mieke Bal, "Narrative and its Discontents," *Louise Bourgeois' Spider: The Architecture of Art Writing* (Chicago & London: University of Chicago Press, 2001), 35-37.

require different approaches.[96] There are two key issues at stake in the analyses of women's autobiographical writing: one is historical, the other methodological. The first issue is the historical assumptions about women's writing and its contents. Scholars often refer to any kind of autobiographical writing as "life writing" to more broadly encompass its many different forms. In the past, women's life writing took different forms than men's. Women kept diaries, journals, travel logs and notebooks and wrote letters because these formats weren't presumed literary enough for publication. This was partly due to the assumption that women's life writing was confessional, personal and sentimental both in style and content discussing domestic and/or trivial topics. As such, women's life writing was denigrated as "low" and "non-literary" and became associated with anti-intellectual modes of creativity.[97] Some scholars have argued that women's writing was in fact formed in *opposition* to the more accepted "public" and "authentic" (published) forms of writing like novels, novellas, essays and autobiographies by male authors and through this binary, women's writing was designated within the domain of the domestic, i.e., the "private."[98]

The second key point to be drawn from feminist analyses of life writing is methodological. Feminist scholars have looked to formats such as diaries and letters to consider how sexual difference and agency can be theorized following poststructuralist critiques of the subject and (the "death" of) authorship.[99] Since the 1990s, feminist scholars across many disciplines developed critical and ethical approaches to researching and

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[96] For a good overview of the field of feminist approaches to life writing, see *Tracing the Autobiographical*, eds. Kadar, et al., (Waterloo: Wilfrid Laurier University Press, 2005).
[97] For more on the diary as a feminized form, see Rebecca Hogan "Engendered Autobiographies: The Diary as Feminine Form," in *Autobiography and Questions of Gender*, ed. Shirley Neuman (London: Frank Cass, 1991), 95 – 107; Jennifer Sinor, *The Extraordinary Work of Writing: Annie Ray's Diary* (University of Iowa Press, 2002).
[98] Marlene Kadar, "Introduction," in *Essays on Life Writing: From Genre to Critical Practice* ed. Marlene Kadar (Toronto: University of Toronto Press, 1992).
[99] See my summary and references for these theories on on page 19, footnote 29.

writing about subjects by taking account of the forms from which those subjectivities issue. Two such methods includes standpoint theory and theories of autoethnography, both of which account for the ways interpreters' perspectives condition their framing of subjects and texts.[100] Standpoint theory in particular has been important in theorizing marginalized subjects because its methods address the dynamics of power relations between subjects with regard to the authority or privilege one assumes when writing about another.

Feminist life-writing scholar Marlene Kadar argues that autobiographical materials such as diaries and notebooks are often configured within binary models such as truth vs fiction, masculine vs feminine and public vs private. She notes this tendency has effectively constructed false parameters where the life writing of women is determined as fictive, private and thus "domestic." Seeking another approach, Kadar suggests instead that "life writing is best examined on an 'uneven continuum' of objectivity and subjectivity, and fiction and non-fiction. There is no search for truth or the 'real' but a mutual construction of knowledge between what the writer gives and what the reader understands."[101] Indeed, recent scholarship on the unreliability of archives has referred to autobiographical writing as "silent," challenging the presumption that these materials "speak" truths.[102] Kadar's approach therefore resists an author's presumed mastery over speaking for its subject and for this reason, she proposes using the term "auto/biography" because, it "implicates self

[100] For an concise introduction to autoethnography and standpoint theories, see *Critical Autoethnography: Intersecting Cultural Identities in Everyday Life,* eds. Robin M. Boylorn and Mark P. Orbe (Routledge: London and New York, 2016), 123 – 124.
[101] Kadar, *Essays on Life Writing,* 6.
[102] See David Thomas, Simon Fowler and Valerie Johnson, *The Silence of the Archive* (London: Facet Publishing, 2017).

and other(s) in a context in which a dialectic of relationality is both acknowledged and problematized."[103]

In a similar way, feminist scholars Sidonie and Julia Watson have developed a model looking at autobiographical articulations across different art forms including fine art. They specifically consider how gendered subjectivities are constituted by readers or viewers through "autobiographical acts" that operate as " visual/textual interfaces." They explain:

> …autobiographical acts at the interface work intersubjectively. That is, they foreground us as viewers, who are addressed in and by the works, to participate actively, and oftentimes uncomfortably, in negotiating the politics of subjectivity. They invite us to confront our own participation in 'othering' the text, the image, and the "woman" embodied before us. They invite us to re-vision the spectacle of femininity and to remake women as cultural agents of the autobiographical interface.[104]

"Auto/biography" and "interface" are useful concepts in this study as they both underscore the extent to which agency, authorship and gender are constructed and enacted through embodied encounters with autobiographical material (writing or works of art). These are important points for art historical analyses of autobiographical sources such as artists' notebooks in art history. For, if women artists' notebooks also are understood as site of encounter where the "mutual construction of knowledge" is generated between subjects, this helps to concretize notebooks as an "interface" between the artist and readers' subjectivities. What's more, because of the negatively feminized history of notebooks, diaries and journals as trivial, domestic, anti-intellectual and sentimental, the interface is a powerful alternative tool for reconfiguring women's autobiographical

[103] Kadar, *Essays on Life Writing,* 3.
[104] Sidonie Smith and Julia Watson "Introduction," in *Interfaces: Women, Autobiography, Image, Performance* (eds) Sidonie Smith and Julia Watson (Ann Arbor: University of Michigan Press, 2005), 36 – 37.

material in new models of agency, authorship and public spheres according to encounters that occur i.e. *not* as a series of binary oppositions of masculine "public" truths.

This kind of model of exchange is already visible in feminist art historical discourse with regards to artworks as interface, but it not has been taken up with regards to artists' writings or archives. Given, as Kadar notes, legacies of public male agency dominate discourses of authorship, then women artists' autobiographical writings and autobiographical ephemera may be still inured in these outmoded traditional ideas about life writing being a lowly form. Therefore, it bears appreciating *how* women artists' autobiographies are already tethered to historic discourses of female authorship and artistic creativity even in feminist art histories.

One particularly salient example of the complex interplay between life writing and art can be seen in the case of Eva Hesse, whose diaries have been put into service extensively in the interpretation of her art. Ree Morton and Eva Hesse are apt comparisons, not least because both artists had short careers and kept notebooks, but the two artists also died young (both born in the same year in 1936; Hesse died age 34 in 1970, Morton died age 41 in 1977). In the case of an early death like Morton, Hesse was also unable to answer questions that came later about her work; this may be why her diaries took on a central role in her legacy. As I discuss more shortly, Hesse's biographical events have been heavily utilized to interpret her artworks. Her life story is indeed complex and dramatic: as a child Hesse escaped from Nazi Germany, her mother committed suicide, and Hesse suffered the extended effects of a brain tumor which later resulted in her death.[105] The details of these

[105] For more about Eve Hesse's life, see Beth Turk, "Chronology of Eva Hesse's Life" in *Eva Hesse: Sculpture*, eds Elisabeth Sussman and Fred Wasserman (New York : Jewish Museum and New Haven : Yale University Press, 2006)

events play out in the artists' own words in her extensive diaries.[106] Notably, the content of these books has been heavily instrumentalized by art historians seeking to deploy the artist's traumas as a kind of interpretive framework. This is a method broadly known as psychobiography.

Psychobiography is a subset method of biographism that refers to the model developed by Sigmund Freud in the early twentieth century based his study of Leonardo da Vinci's notebooks.[107] Psychobiography broadly presumes a work of art (or any creative output) is a manifestation of the artists' psychic interiority. This model has persisted in art history in different forms and has become particularly commonplace in institutions, for example when artists' writings are shown alongside their artworks as if to explain the work's meaning. In some cases an artist's notebooks, diaries and letters are a main focus of an exhibition (instead of artworks) supposing to deliver "insights into the mind" of the "real" artist.[108] In the case of Eva Hesse whose notebooks and diaries were recently published in full, one critic exemplified this tendency to conflate artist's mind and notebooks by remarking that now Hesse is "an open book."[109]

One challenge leveled at psychobiographies is the pathologization of artists by overemphasizing negative, tragic or traumatic elements of their life in order to interpret their artwork. In the case of artist made by women, scholars have suggested this risks a

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[106] In 2016, Hesse's entire diaries were published. See *Eva Hesse Diaries*, ed. Barry Rosen with assistance from Tamara Bloomberg (New Haven: Yale University Press, 2016).
[107] Sigmund Freud, 'Leonardo da Vinci and a Memory of His Childhood' [1910], in *Art & Literature*, Penguin Freud Library 14 (London: Harmondsworth Books, 1985).
[108] Take for example, the revealingly titled exhibition, *The Real Van Gogh: the Artist and his Letters* at the Royal Academy in London, UK in 2010. The rhetoric of the institution and critics revolved around the authenticity and truth of artistic identity of the artist available in the letters. See the exhibition catalogue *The Real Van Gogh: The Artist and His Letters* (London: The Royal Academy of Art, 2010).
[109] Benjamin Sutton, "A Psychological Portrait of Eva Hesse," *Hyperallergic,* May 4, 2016; available online: http://hyperallergic.com/294315/a-psychological-portrait-of-eva-hesse/ Accessed November 2015.

victimization, not just of the subject, but of the feminine subject in particular.[110] A debate between two art historians speaks to the contested use of pathology and psychobiography in Eva Hesse's notebooks and artwork in relation to her legacy. In 1994, Anne Wagner published an article in the art theory journal *October* detailing her critique of Hesse scholarship which had made her "mistrustful of the assumptions and reductions at the heart of Hesse's reputation."[111] Wagner names several writers, accusing them of "martyrology" and of "collapsing the artist into her art," suggesting Hesse's own admission in her notebooks of the "interconnectedness" of her art and life had tacitly permitted scholars to draw on the traumas Hesse had suffered as a means to interpret her art objects.[112] Thus, Wagner argues, these writers construct Hesse as a symbolic "wound," suggesting the artist's gendered identity and her work have come to doubly pathologize her reputation through her trauma and femininity rather than historicizing Hesse as a successful post-minimalist artist.[113]

Shortly after Wagner's essay was printed, the editors of *October* published a letter by art historian Anna Chave responding to Wagner's criticisms of her scholarship on Hesse. Chave's letter responds with an equally pointed critique of Wagner's own feminist politics (or lack thereof) in her own scholarship on Hesse. Chave states that Wagner's criticisms broadly proposed an unethical framework, wherein art historians may claim to know

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[110] For a close analysis of feminist theories on biographical interpretation, see Kristen Patterson, *Framed Receptions: The Biographical Discourses of Eva Hesse and Ana Mendieta*, PhD Thesis in the History of Art (London: The Courtauld Institute of Art, University of London, 2008). For a discussion of ways to counter reductive psychobiographic readings of women's art, see Griselda Pollock, *After-affects | After-images Trauma and Aesthetic Transformation in the Virtual Feminist Museum* (Manchester: Manchester University Press, 2013).

[111] Anne Wagner, "Another Hesse" *October* Vol. 69 (Summer, 1994), 59.

[112] Wagner identifies the key events which Hesse wrote were: her terminal cancer from which she died at the age of thirty-four; her Jewish identity; her failed marriage and her fraught childhood in Germany from where she had to flee Nazi persecution; and her mother's suicide. Anne Wagner. "Another Hesse", 49-84.

[113] Wagner. "Another Hesse", 55 – 67.

exactly how to separate a woman artist's lived experience from her artwork. Chave further questions how one can measure how much "life" is extrapolated from an artist's writing and who legitimizes the instrumentalization of identity when interpreting artwork. Chave goes on to caution Wagner against the negative impact this policing would have on the legacy of women artists more generally, particularly those who battled sexism and racism (as Hesse's did as a Jewish woman), if we *didn't* consider the circumstances of the artist's life and her autobiographical agency in relation to how her work was produced. [114]

This clash in views characterizes an acute anxiety in mid-1990s feminist scholarship regarding the use women artists' autobiographical art and writing, showing different approaches with regards to Hesse's legacy. But it is important to note both historians' positions still indicate a belief that an authentic or coherent identity is to be found in Hesse's diaries and in her work. To wit, doesn't Wagner's rejection of all the Hesse "myths" equally suggest she believes there is a Hesse "truth"?

This comes back to my earlier point made via Kadar's theory of "auto/biography" where women writers or artists and their autobiographical writing need a new framework that doesn't rely on concepts of truths or myths. Kadar's comment about women's life-writing can equally be applied to women artists' notebooks. Kadar said writing need to be examined along the "uneven continuum of objectivity and subjectivity, and fiction and non-fiction. There is no search for truth or the 'real' but a mutual construction of knowledge between what the writer gives and what the reader understands."[115] Seen in this way, the dynamics between artists' autobiographical writing and their artworks needn't be viewed as disclosing truth or fiction, or as confirming authentic identity. Instead, seeing the

[114] Anna Chave, "Letter to the Editors", *October* No. 71 (Summer 1995), 146 -148.
[115] Kadar, *Essays on Life Writing,* 6.

autobiographical material as a site of encounter – as an interface - between subjectivities permits more open-ended interpretations that don't pathologize or victimize the subject because there is only room for one (traumatic) interpretative framework. Instead, resisting biographism allows women artists' notebooks and diaries to materialize as creative articulations of experience. This permits more useful ways of thinking about artists' agencies in autobiographical writing without resorting to finding a coherent, authentic and genius model (as in the monograph) especially when this is antithetical for women artists who didn't follow conventional means of a career route or those who used alternative formats for writing. This approach to archival material is key to this study and indeed to overall approaches to women's writing because it implies women artists' notebooks are not a material repositories of answers about artistic identity or feminine subjectivity, but they open up a field of theoretical questions about gendered, raced, sexed (and other) constructions of authorship and agency inscribed within specific social and political contexts in art history.

In the case of Ree Morton's notebooks these approaches open out a triangulation of relations among the artist, her writing and her artworks to more expansive questions about interpretation and the formation of meaning according to the kinds of encounters we create with female subjects that inform what Kadar called the "mutual construction of knowledge" about art more generally. My approach to Morton's writing falls closely in line with that of scholars Kristen Frederickson and Sarah Webb as previously mentioned, who have deployed a similar model in their feminist rethinking of the format of the artist's monograph. They contend the single-artist monograph for marginalized subjects like women must encompass a "matrix" where the relationship between art historian and the

artist-subject is configured as a dialogic and collaborative – what Webb calls "the convergence of authors' and artists' voices."[116] Like Smith's and Watson's "interfaces" these interactions are necessarily unique depending on author and artist and the material and embodied relationship produced. What's more, the kind of autobiographical material available (the quantity or formats, for example) further enact different encounters that may guide, but not dictate, the terms on which meaning is made. In this, there cannot be a "one-size-fits-all" approach to a feminist monograph or women artists' writings for that matter, as each artists' and authors' "convergences" creates narratives anew.

In this process, Frederickson and Webb claim there are necessarily gaps, misunderstandings and contradictions which occur in the reading of autobiographical material. This method is exactly what Wagner rejected in her excoriation of "myths" and her assertion there is (and by titling her article as) "Another Hesse." Webb particularly suggests we embrace the anomalies and fantasies that arise from writing about artists and these, she says, offer a creative space of encounter and therefore multiple possible readings of "the feminine" because in each encounter with a female subject, "she" is constructed in different ways. For Webb, this opens the feminist monograph as a project not designed for "retrieving the artist who is also a woman, but [as] a rethinking of the site of her inscription" noting we must ask "how are her notations, her works, recorded, valued, made visible, qualified or erased?"[117]

These ways of thinking and questions about the feminist monograph are key for critically theorizing the legacy of Ree Morton's practice and legacy as my approach to Morton's overall practice encompasses both artwork and notebooks to underscores the

[116] Webb "Epilogue: Mark Making, Writing, and Erasure", 239.
[117] Ibid, 238.

multiple sites of articulation of subjectivities and the need to problematize rather than pinpoint truths or "myths" of agency and authorship. It is therefore the suggestion of this study that artists' notebooks have a distinctly critical purpose in a feminist approach to the legacy of Ree Morton; notebooks may be mobilized as "interfaces" and "collaborations" in order to engage with "the site of inscriptions" of historic feminine subjectivities, but not determine art's meaning or the intentions of its maker.

There is one further way in which notebooks may be considered. Art historian Briony Fer usefully describes artist Gabriel Orozco's notebooks (and her encounter with them) as "disobedient objects" because they resist providing the answers she asked of them about the artist and his work.[118] She suggested that notebooks seen in this way productively resist truths about its maker and notebooks can be engaged with more effectively precisely because they invite us instead to "reflect on the conditions of art's production."[119] This, she says, foregrounds the artists' working processes of making art more clearly in notebooks than the identity of the artist that is ultimately unknowable.

Fer's strategy about reading for process and "the conditions of art's production" in notebooks can be coupled productively with Webb's view of the gendered inscription of women artists in monographs to enable an approach to Ree Morton's practice as seen through a lens of process-based labor. This model attends to how Morton's notebooks and artworks articulate her art making processes, enabling us to "rethink the site of her inscription" as a woman and a mother working within a socio-cultural climate of the 1970s. Together, the writing and the artworks activate Morton's "conditions of art's productions."

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[118] Briony Fer, "Constellations in Dust: Notes on the Notebooks," in *Gabriel Orozco*, ed. Ann Temkin (New York: Museum of Modern Art, 2009), 24.
[119] Fer, "Constellations in Dust", 24.

In this study Morton therefore may materialize as a subject through her processes of work and our encounter with them as an interface regarding how we perceive work in her writing and artworks. Seen together, these are indexical traces of her thinking and making which constitute immaterial and material labor of making art. Considering Morton's conditions of production means noting the locations where we position her different forms of work too. This calls forth the circumstances of work engendered by her lifestyle as she moved to different cities for employment, her various home-based studios and the instances she made art on her vacations with her children.

The *Work* of Art and ArtWork as Methodologies

In the last decade the terms "art" and "work" have been configured in different ways with regards to theories of gendered labor as methodological tools for art history. In what follows, I compare Marsha Meskimmon's theories of the "*work* of art" and art historian Angela Dimitrakaki's notion of "artWork" to consider the relationship between Ree Morton's practice and her notebooks to argue for new ways agency emerges intersubjectively through attending to the processes of art's "work."

In her book *Women Making Art: History, Subjectivity, Aesthetics* Marsha Meskimmon argues that "the *work* of art" can be understood to have multiple meanings: it is both a material object made via the artist's labor *and* it is also a process of interpretation performed by the viewer. Meskimmon suggests that engaging with women's art, because it is marked by sexual difference, fosters a specific intersubjective process that constellates the work of the female artist with the work of the viewer through a "double play of materiality and agency." This acts to locate the viewer as "a partner in a dialogue with

women making art rather than one in a position of a privileged interlocutor, explicating the inherent truths of women, art and cultural history."[120]

Meskimmon proposes that shifting the locus of analysis towards the way in which meaning is produced through encounters rather than searching for what an object means, results in expanding the definition of the *work* of art as dialogic between artist and interpreter. This, she notes, requires us to think about the new kinds of knowledge produced in each encounter in order not to "define in advance what women's art can mean," but to look at the ways in which we may work "*with* women making art…to create specific configurations of ideas, objects, images and texts."[121] Meskimmon summarizes, arguing that this dynamic "forges the critical link between [the artists'] thinking and making, between the materiality of the objects and the agency of artists and participant observers."[122] This focus on agency and materiality links closely to Kadar's, Smith's and Watson's, and Webb's ideas about the "interface" between viewer and autobiographic material and the way in which these encounters ("working *with* women making art") allow us to resist mastery over a subject. While Meskimmon's theory is not specifically about autobiographical art or writing per se, her relational approach to the mutual configurations of *work* easily extends to Morton's notebooks and artworks as they bring about what she calls the "critical link between thinking and making."

In a comparable model Meskimmon's notion of "the *work* of art," feminist art historian and Angela Dimitrakaki considers artistic labor using her term "artWork." Where Meskimmon focused primarily on the relationship produced between artist and viewer,

[120] Meskimmon, *Women Making Art*, 4.
[121] Ibid, 6.
[122] Ibid, 4-5.

Dimitrakaki's "artWork" positions the art object as configured between artist and her or his gendered labor according to art market economies. She examines how female artists specifically (at different points in history) have become what she calls "economic subjects" mitigated specifically through their gendered circumstances of work. She explains:

> The term "artWork" is intended to take further feminist art history's partial displacement of the delivered artwork as the exclusive origin of meaning and rethink what "process-based work" can possibly describe… artWorks engage with social phenomena associated, in many different and not always transparent ways, with globalisation as well with the processes and contexts of art making, including if, and how, a "global imperative" has transformed the social role of the artist as a gendered individual.[123]

Dimitrakaki foregrounds how reading labor in art genders processes of making and equally how assumptions about gender influence interpretations of labor and art. Thus to remove the art object as "exclusive origin of meaning" refers to looking beyond the one-way causal relationship between the artist and her art, and instead looking to her labor as a process that, Dimitrakaki explains, can "locate women artists within a broader framework of artistic production."[124] Dimitrakaki notes this broader framework is important because it takes into account the material *and* immaterial labors of women artists as linked to the denigration associated with women's domestic labor more generally. Bringing to bear the historical erasure and visibility of all kinds of women's work in different ways and different forms, Dimitrakaki suggests, helps "in tracing *how* the articulation of art as a gendered field of production is connected with gendered labor beyond art."[125]

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[123] Angela Dimitrakaki, *Gender, ArtWork and the Global Imperative: A Materialist Feminist Critique* (Manchester: Manchester University Press, 2013), 11.
[124] Dimitrakaki, *Gender, ArtWork and the Global Imperative,* 57.
[125] Ibid.

Both Meskimmon's and Dimitrakaki's theories of art and work have meaningful implications for Ree Morton's art and notebooks. Meskimmon's model of the *work of art* provides a way to analyze Morton's "double play of materiality and agency" in her art objects and notebooks as a means to explore her labor and processes. This approach to autobiographical art and writing circumvents the pitfalls of reductive biographical readings by reinforcing the fact that work in these sites of encounter is dialogic and meaning is in process. Reading Morton's notebooks in this sense reveals them as as an interface of labor and makes explicit what Meskimmon describes as "the work done by art at the interstices of materiality, subjectivity and agency."[126] Bringing in Dimitrakaki's expanded concept of artwork also opens up Ree Morton's practice and her "work" as situated within its wider historical conditions of gendered labor in the 1970s. This allows me to later consider to how Morton's domestic childcare labor for example, is not merely corollary to art making (or as Dimitrakaki puts it, as "labour 'beyond art'"), but that childcare is relevant as part of discussions about how overlapping forms of labor effect the way we understand the *work* of women making art. This legitimizes examining Morton as a subject produced by her gendered and economic context and exploring how the circumstances of her work — in the studio and at home — affected and informed her autobiographical work as well as our understanding of its processes.

To relate the theories outlined above to Morton's practice, I explore three key circumstances in Morton's career relating to different kinds of work. This includes Morton's production of artwork during and after her family vacations (what I have called "vacation work"), the production of art in her domestic studios ("home work"), and her work as a

[126] Meskimmon, *Women Making Art*, 4.

mother ("women's work") that impacted on her art making. I amalgamate Meskimmon's and Dimitrakaki's ideas to explore Morton's labor and art in these three contexts and as it plays out in her notebooks *and* artwork. Together, these approaches get at the heart of how *work* can provide a lens in feminist art theory to encounter women's autobiographical art: I contend that we must pay attention to how women artists' forms of labor are inscribed, articulated and interpreted in art and in art histories and in turn how the understanding of those labors produces subjects in different ways, especially those subjects outside of conventional registers of art history.

"Vacation Work"*: Souvenir Piece* and *Weeds of the Northeast*

During her career, Ree Morton faced a number of challenges when it came to finding work routines and space compatible with childcare responsibilities. After graduating from her Masters program in Philadelphia in 1970, Morton remained in the city with her children to support her art practice by earning money as a teacher. She first lived in a suburban house with a live-in studio space, later renting a separate studio away from her house downtown. In 1972 Morton decided to move to a big studio flat in New York – a vibrant centre of experimental American art at this time – to both accommodate her larger work and, in her words, to "concentrate fully on my work." [127] But to make this transition, Morton was forced to temporarily relinquish custody of her children. They went to live

[127] Ree Morton, NEA grant draft, 1975. As seen at *Ree Morton: Be a Place, Place an Image, Imagine a Poem* in Madrid at the Museo Reina Sofia, 2015 in a vitrine of archival documents.

with their father in another state because Morton's studio-loft wasn't suitable for children — an experience she was known to have found very difficult.[128]

Living in a one room studio-loft was the kind of haphazard lifestyle in the early 1970s typical of young art graduates, but it would have been challenging for a working artist who was also a mother. Morton's open-plan loft in Greenwich Village was archetypal of the rough-and-ready live-in industrial studios rented by artists in the 1970s. These large spaces were cheap as they were located in old factory buildings in run-down parts of lower Manhattan. Artists (often illegally) converted the spaces themselves to suit their studio needs, as well as making them suitable for living to save renting accommodation elsewhere. As Katy Siegel has observed in her study of live-in artist studio lofts in the 1970s, despite domestic renovations most of the industrial warehouse-lofts were still "a workplace to live in" not "a home to work in."[129] In Ree Morton's case this was also true, as Morton's friend Cynthia Carlson recalled in these same terms when noting Morton's loft "wasn't a home in the sense that the domestic and work spaces weren't separate. They were mixed together. It was a complete mess. She had a little bed and a little table, but really everything was work."[130]

The New York studio-loft remained Morton's base until her death in 1977, though due to sessional teaching work or residencies Morton took up outside the city, she was often away travelling for extended spells across the United States for the promise of a few

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[128] Cynthia Carlson noted "When she [Morton] decided to come to NY and give the three children to her husband for a year or two and try to do something serious in terms of making it a professional goal, she got a lot of shit from a lot of people, from in and out of the art world…That was not easy for her. So it was very much in her mind what it meant to be a mother." Cynthia Carlson in interview with the author, December 11th, 2012.

[129] Katy Siegel, "Live/Work," in *The Studio Reader: On the Space of Artists.* Eds. Mary Jane Jacob and Michelle Grabner (Chicago University Press: Chicago and London, 2010), 312.

[130] Cynthia Carlson, in interview with the Author, March 4, 2014.

months of paid work. In fact it is notable that, as previously mentioned, between 1971 and 1977 Morton worked in nine different art schools in seven different States, showing the kind of unstable and peripatetic lifestyle that posed a challenge for both her art practice and maternal responsibilities. In terms of the latter, because Morton's loft space wasn't well-suited to extended periods of childcare, she had to find other ways to spend time with her children and one way she did this was by taking her children on vacation.

In 1973 Morton spent the summer vacation with her children at a house on the rural coast of Newfoundland, Canada – a trip she later described as "the happiest summer of my life."[131] Not only was the vacation a time for Morton to spend with her children (who at this time were living with their father) but the trip inspired a substantial new body of work including an installation and a series of drawings on paper about the natural world.

The installation *Souvenir Piece* (1973) (fig.1) consists of various sculptural objects arranged in four relatively self-contained segments or zones around the fringes of a room.[132] When the work was first exhibited in Artists Space in New York in October 1973, Morton used the full scope of the room by placing objects both on the walls and around the floor whilst using a range of media set at different heights to create dynamic material and spatial relationships between the different components of the installation. One of the clusters of objects in *Souvenir Piece* is a short green table (fig. 2) set near a wall upon which there are small stones and one clunky piece of driftwood – all items salvaged from the Canadian shore by Morton and her children.[133] The stones, most of which are no bigger than a child's hand, rest on even smaller wooden plinths of various heights, displaying the

[131] Ree Morton, as quoted by Marcia Tucker in interview Allan Schwartzmann and Kathleen Thomas in November 1979, see *Ree Morton Retrospective: 1971 – 1977,* 32.
[132] The entire installation is not longer extant, with some of the components missing or destroyed.
[133] Morton's daughter Linda recalled "new foundland[sic], thank you wyn, collecting rocks on the shore." See "Morton's Recollections and Reflections" in *Ree Morton: Works 1971 – 1977*, 79.

rocks as if abstract sculptures. The height of the low green table (standing only 50cm from the floor) coupled with the museological display aesthetic make the piece reminiscent of a child's tea party-turned-gallery of memorial objects, marking them as the eponymous "souvenirs" from the summer.

Another piece inspired by the vacation, sometimes thought of as a companion piece to the installation (though not intended as part of *Souvenir Piece*), is a series of five works on paper Morton called *Newfoundland Drawings* (1973) (figs. 3, 4, 5).[134] Each drawing shows a number of abstract circular forms rendered in pencil, with further shapes and line details protruding from or around their cores. Given the title, with its topographical implication, the drawings resemble a cartographer's illustration of the rocky Newfoundland coastline as seen from an aerial view.[135]

What I want to emphasize here is that in spite of being on vacation with her three children, Morton used the time to develop ideas for artworks. Her notebooks from the vacation period contain sketches and semi-abstract drawings of coastlines as well as notes about plants, people and found objects from the vacation showing she was working on *Souvenir Piece* and *Newfoundland Drawings*.[136] For example, a series of drawings titled *Bark Portraits* (fig. 6 and 7) show tightly cropped pencil drawings of anthropomorphized knotted tree trunks — Morton annotated them with the phrase "emphasize these warty eyes".[137] One of the *Bark Portrait* is almost identical to one of the *Newfoundland Drawings*

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[134] There are five *Newfoundland Drawings*. The other two not included in this study belong in the collection of Brooke Alexander, Alexander and Bonin and Annemarie Verna Galerie Zurich. See http://bombmagazine.org/article/1696/newfoundland-drawing. Accessed on February 287th, 2017. Information on the second drawing can be found in "List of Works," in *Be A Place, Place an Imagine, Imagine a Poem,* 192.
[135] Both *Souvenir Piece* and the *Newfoundland Drawings* are discussed more at the beginning of chapter three.
[136] See the entire notebook Ree Morton, *Notebook*, (RM07: 1973 – 1974).
[137] Ibid, 30.

suggesting may have Morton modeled one on the other (see figs. 4 and 7). This amalgamation of tree "portrait" and coastal map based on her observations of rural Newfoundland landscapes underscores the hybrid and abstract forms developing in Morton's practice at the time that seemed to have catalyzed her fascination for the natural world. In a draft for a grant application written shortly after the trip, Morton said "a recent trip to NFLD [Newfoundland] has had a profound influence on my work, and keeping in mind topographical surroundings greatly affect my thinking."[138] Thus, not only was Morton's practice responding to the geographical location she visited, but she was developing techniques, styles and strategies in her art practice *because*, not in spite of the fact, she was creatively working whilst caring for her children.

This overlap of art and life on vacation must have been deemed a success by the artist, for in the following summer of 1974, Morton took her children on vacation again, this time to Tannersville in New York State. Shortly after this trip Morton developed two series of works based on two different botanical textbooks she had bought for her children in Tannersville. The first series was *Weeds of the Northeast* (1974) featuring ten works on paper each showing a variety of leaves native to New York State. The piece was based on scientific illustrations Morton found in an educational book of the same name.[139] However, Morton's drawings are unlike the scientific illustrations in the books. Her interpretations are bright, colorful and simply drawn in a combination of pencil, crayon and watercolour. Each drawing is captioned with colloquial names. For example in *Weeds Of the Northeast #2*

[138] Morton, *Notebook* (RM30, 1973), 79.
[139] Cynthia Carlson noted "There was a show called *Weeds of the Northeast* that was a book, a publication that placed all the weeds in a Victorian context so they all had associated morals. The book was given to her children." in interview with the Author, December 11th, 2012. The original name of the book *Weeds of the Northeast* has been credited by the authors of *Ree Morton: Works 1971 – 1977* as *Weeds of the Northeast: Aids to their Identification by Basal-leaf Characteristics* by Claude Ellis Phillips and V. J. Fisher, published by the University of Delaware, Agricultural Experiment Station, 1970 [first published in 1956].

there are names such as "coren cockle," "sticktight," and "teasel" (fig. 8). Each leaf drawing is set against a bright pink and red patterned background and contained in a frame decorated in glitter. The gaudy ornamentation of such a mundane topic as leaves is on the one hand sweetly naïve, but on the other hand shows a deliberate amateurism as if to refract a childlike wonderment or sentimentality of the natural world.

The second series of works on paper made after the Tannersville trip were inspired by another botanical book called *Wild Flowers Worth Knowing* by amateur botanist Neltje Blanchan originally published in 1917. Blanchan's book features vibrant watercolour illustrations of flowers with poetic descriptions of their features, origins and uses, along with associated folk myths of their meanings. For example, one entry for the "Large Purple Gerardia," which Morton copied out in her notebooks, evidences the author's dramatic language that must have appealed to the artist: "[n]ature brands sinners in the vegetable kingdom by taking away their color, and perhaps their leaves, as in the case of the Broom-rape and Indian Pipe; but the fair faces of the Gerardias and Foxgloves give no hint of the petty thefts committed under cover of darkness in the soil below."[140]

Altogether, Morton made approximately fourteen artworks inspired by Blanchan's book between 1974 and 1975, including seven works on paper and seven Celastic sculptures each which took their titles from a plant's name or a phrase in the book (fig. 9). Yet unlike *Weeds of the Northeast* where Morton represented the leaves or flowers as images, in these Celastic works she only represented the flowers as text, not as images.[141]

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[140] Neltje Blanchan, *Wild Flowers Worth Knowing* (New York: Doubleday, Page & company, 1917), 16.
[141] There are 14 works with titles taken from *Wild Flowers Worth Knowing*. Those on paper are: *Jack in the Pulpit* (1974), *Yellow Clintonia* (1974) *Trumpet Weed* (1974) *Broom-Rape Family* (1974), *Bitter-Buttons* (1974), *The Stems, Too Are Restless* (1974) and *Love Me* (1974). The Celastic works are: *Solitary or Rarely 2* (1974), *The Plant That Heals May Also Poison* (1974), *Terminal Clusters* (1974) *Fading Flowers* (1974), *Antidotes for Madness* (1974), *Many Have Run Away To Be Sure* (1974) and *Devil Chaser* (1976).

This was a new turn in Morton's work towards using text. In a work on paper called *Trumpet Weed* (1974) (fig. 10) three banners proclaim the phrases "the ranks of floral missionaries need recruits," "conspicuous advertisements," and "trumpet weed." Behind the banners in the background Morton drew and painted a woodland landscape in pale muted tone of watercolour, which appears at odds with the bold text floating in the foreground. Morton's notebooks show she cut and matched passages from different parts of Blanchan's book in this work; instead of fidelity to the author's observations or indeed to the natural world itself, Morton reconfigured the plants' attributes as if to fictionalize nature by her own design.[142]

In the seven Celastic pieces also inspired by *Wild Flowers Worth Knowing*, Morton this time selected shorter words or phrases which she then embossed onto three-dimensional banners. Celastic was a pliable material, with a finished appearance similar to papier-mâché. It was originally used for making theatrical props because of its malleability. The material came in fabric-like rolls imbued with a gelling agent. When wetted with acetate, the Celastic had to be quickly contorted freehand or molded or around objects before it quickly set as a rigid and robust cast that could then be painted or embellished. Morton used the material to emboss words into the surface of the banners, first making clay letter-molds to sculpt text along the shape of a banner. The banners were hung across walls or splayed across horseshoe-shaped sculptures which sat propped upright on the floor. Morton painted the banners in bright colours and sometimes decorated with light bulbs such as with the piece *Solitary or Rarely* 2 (1974) (fig. 10). The work took its title from a phrase in the description of the Rockrose flower in the botany book. Other banners

[142] See Morton, *Notebook* (RM01: 1974), 49 – 54.

included decorative flowers like *Terminal Clusters* (1974) (fig. 12) and others had ribbon bows and glitter like *Fading Flowers* (1974) (fig. 13). All these works deploy similar aesthetic strategies as seen in Morton's series of works on paper, *Weeds of the Northeast*.

By isolating the words and endowing them with a sense of archetypally feminine theatricality in the use of bright colours, glitter flourished and "female" symbols like flowers and bows, Morton seemed to be cloaking the wild flowers in a kind of gendered aesthetic language, obscuring the original source of the botany book. In an interview in 1975 Morton explained "I got involved with the language because it's very moralistic about the flowers' attributes. The reference to flowers also seems to pertain to people."[143] As with the *Bark Portraits* that anthropomorphized trees, Morton related the attributes of flowers to people. She even twice called them her "Autobiographical Wallflower Series" in her notebooks insinuating these works were not just about "people" but about herself. [144]

It is tempting to read these works as metaphors of Morton's own life given that Morton herself seems to permit this reading by calling the flowers "autobiographical." Take for example the paired phrases in *The Stems Too Are Restless* (1974) (fig. 14): "some are doomed to stay in prim, rigidly cultivated flower beds forever" and "the stems, too are restless."[145] Do these phrases metaphorically refer to Morton's domesticated past as a "prim" and "cultivated" suburban housewife and her "restless" longing to escape, as Morton once put it "out of the kitchen, into the studio"? Yet, tempting as this reading may be, this is the kind of reductive biographical analysis to be resisted. As previously discussed in the case of Eva Hesse, relying on causal links between art and artist only serves to return to a

[143] Ree Morton, in interview with Barbara Schwarz, Hannah Wilke, Jim Cobb, Alan Saret and Eddie Shostak "Methods and Materials: New and Old", *Craft Horizons*, 35 (December, 1975), 48.
[144] Morton, *Notebook* (RM29, 1975), 50 and *Notebook* (RM18, 1975), 8.
[145] Morton, *Notebook* (RM01, 1974), 47.

conventional biographical approach, what Griselda Pollock called the "unbreakable circuit which produces the artist as the subject of the artwork and the artwork as a means of contemplative access to that subject's 'transcendent' and creative subjectivity." [146] Here, as a case in point, we cannot presume Morton's "autobiographical flowers" tell us something definitive about the artist and her intentions in these works simply because she frames them as "autobiographical." Instead, the evocation of autobiography — that they relate to her life and her work — can engage us to think about what is at stake in the *work* of art.

Following Meskimmon's notion about attending to our encounter with Morton's processes and subjectivity, this means interfacing with "the autobiographical" to think about what was involved in making the work given her circumstances. We know from her notebooks that Morton conceived the ideas for these works while caring for her children on vacation, observing the natural landscapes and being influenced by the topographies of her surroundings that, as she said herself, "greatly affected her thinking." Indeed, it was Morton's study of botanical books and the forms and ideas she found there that she translated into her notebooks and then subsequently linked, however abstractly, with her own life as "autobiographical."

The issue then is not exactly *how* these works are autobiographical, but it is our knowledge of the autobiographical frame which is cultivated in our encounter with her work that we, as viewers, become aware of the ways - however transparent or opaque - her familial experiences informed her material, thematic and aesthetic choices. For example, her decision to represent flowers in such a playful, amateur, feminine and self-referential way as she does in *Weeds of the Northeast* invites us to consider that her vacation and her

[146] Griselda Pollock, "Artists Mythologies", 76-77.

childcare and the pleasure of this combined experience are all part of her *work* of art. This animates both Morton's notebooks and artworks as what Marsha Meskimmon called "the critical link between [the artists'] thinking and making, between the materiality of the objects and the agency of artists and participant observers," because this expands the notion of art merely as an object, to art as imbricated within a much wider set of processes, pleasures and circumstances concerning labor. We might then ask how our understanding Morton's conditions informs our reading of these works when we think about the paradox of making art (i.e. working) while being on vacation, typically a time spent *not working*. Seen in this way, Morton's pieces allow us to reconsider productive and unproductive labor in art making as we encounter her creative processes overlapped with her maternal responsibilities so we may ask how motherhood may result in making art differently.

This kind of thinking follows Dimitrakaki's concern for "*how* the articulation of art as a gendered field of production is connected with gendered labor beyond art." For if, as in the case of women artists caring for their children and making art on family vacations or at home, this may requires us to to seek alternative models of artistic labor when they are reconfigured within across and between realms of maternal work and artistic work. Seen in this way, Morton's child-like and naïve drawings of leaves and flowers made while on vacation with her children not only show how she balanced making artwork with childcare, but more importantly they legitimize her sentimental documentations of a happy summer spent with her family as a model for making art.

"Home Work": Domestic Studios

There are other examples where we can see how Morton's social and economic circumstances of work effected her material practice. Early in Morton's career when she was living alone in Philadelphia between 1968 and 1972 after separating from her husband, she relied upon the help of colleague and friend Cynthia Carlson for help with childcare. Carlson would take care of Morton's children when she went to teach and in return Carlson would stay for free in Morton's house when she came to the city to teach. Thus, in the absence of childcare support and affordable accommodation, the two artists not only supported but enabled each others' creative and paid work by an economy of exchanged unwaged labor. In a notebook entry from 1975, Morton reflected on balancing work and home life noting, "women are not any more part time than anyone else — very few artists of any sex do not work at the something other than their art to earn a living, though its true that women often have three jobs instead of two."[147] In this statement, Morton may have been paraphrasing critic and friend Lucy Lippard, who a few years earlier had written, "women often have three jobs instead of two: their art, work for pay and the traditional unpaid 'work that's never done'."[148]

Indeed, Morton had been balancing "three jobs" with a studio practice, teaching work and caring for three children, at times as a single parent. When it came to her studio practice in the late 1960s, because of her constraints around childcare Morton worked at home in domestic studios. An anecdote by neighbor and friend Janis Porter described

[147] Morton, *Notebook* (RM04, 1975), 11.
[148] Lucy Lippard, "Twenty Six Contemporary Women Artists" in *Twenty Six Contemporary Women Artists*, exh. cat. (Ridgefield, CT: Aldrich Museum, 1971) reprinted in Lippard, "Prefaces to Catalogues," in *From the Center: Feminist Essays on Women's Art* (New York: Dutton, 1976), 41.

Morton's very first domestic studio space in Norfolk, Virginia in 1964 when Morton was taking amateur painting classes:

> The small house had no ideal spot for her to paint, and with three small children around, privacy was at a premium. However, Ree found refuge in the large unfinished bath just off the ground floor playroom. This workspace must have been below sea level, because frequently the bathroom was swamped as the septic tank overflowed up through the shower drain….she took refuge in her bathroom studio.[149]

Although Morton hadn't yet gone to art school by this point, these are nevertheless the less-than-ideal conditions under which her practice developed and it was these practical skills balancing art and childcare in the same space which she would later rely on. To wit, the "bathroom studio" perfectly illustrates the challenges of making art in combination with domestic labor. In 1964, Morton's three children were aged two, four and seven at this time. This is exactly the kind of situation Dimitrakaki addresses in her querying of "how the articulation of art as a gendered field of production is connected with gendered labor beyond art." Morton's case was not uncommon for women artists, but it was far more unlikely in the case of men. As Lucy Lippard once remarked of women artists in general, "I went to a great many women's studios and my preconceptions were jolted daily. I thought serious artists had to have big, professional looking spaces. I found women in corners of men's studios, in bedrooms and children's rooms, even in kitchens, working away. I thought important American art was large. I found women working small both out of inclination and necessity."[150] It wasn't until two years later in 1966, when Morton aged 30

[149] Janis Porter, "Marionette" *Ree Morton: Retrospective 1971 – 1977*, 81. Porter knew Morton in Norfolk, Virginia in 1964. Both of their husbands worked away (in the US navy) and both had young children.
[150] Lucy Lippard, "Changing Since *Changing* (1976)" in *From the Center: Feminist Essays on Women's Art* (New York: E. P. Dutton & Co., 1976), 4.

enrolled in a Bachelor's degree in Fine Art at Rhode Island School of Art and Design, that she could devote time and space to her art (though she was still primary caregiver).

In 1968, Morton finished her Bachelor's degree, separated from her husband and moved with her children to Pennsylvania to begin a Master's degree in Fine Art at Tyler School of Art. In Philadelphia, she still had domestic studios. In her first year of graduate school in 1968 Morton moved into a small house with a large basement that doubled as an art studio. Feminist curator Marcia Tucker, who at the time was Morton's art history teacher and friend at Tyler, remembered Morton as "literally working behind the washer/dryer in the basement of this suburban home."[151] This scenario, coupled with the "bathroom studio" situation in Norfolk, points to Morton's ongoing spatial overlapping of artistic and domestic work, and visualizes exactly what Lippard described as women artists' predicament of having "three jobs…their art, work for pay and the traditional unpaid 'work that's never done'."[152] Far from ideal working spatial conditions — imagine the awful noise a 1960s washing machine must have generated — Morton's compartmentalization of art making in bathrooms and behind washing machines was not merely pragmatic but it was necessary as she had to also look after her children and do housework. It stands to reason then that much of the artwork made during this time were paintings and some small sculptures. I discuss these works more in chapter two and three, but it is sufficient to note for the time being that these works evidence Morton's working

[151] Marcia Tucker, in interview with Ree Morton, *Ree Morton: Retrospective 1971 – 1977*, 10.
[152] A notable comparison can be made here with New York feminist artist Ida Applebroog, who like Morton also had children. Between 1969 and 1974, Applebroog made ink sketches of her vagina in her bathroom most nights after putting her children to bed and taking a bath. This evidences a similar "bathroom studio" scenario to Morton. This information is paraphrased Applebroog's own description of these activities as discussed in a live interview with Jo Applin at the Courtauld Institute of Art on the 10th of October, 2016 on the occasion of a screening of the film *Call Her Applebroog* (2016, directed by Beth B.) For a discussion of these drawings, see Julia Bryan-Wilson, "Our Bodies, Our Houses, Our Ruptures, Ourselves", *Mona Lisa* (New York: Hauser & Wirth, 2010), 10 – 25.

conditions and show the constraints of choosing materials and methods suitable to a domestic environment with children.[153]

Unsurprisingly then, Morton's first non-domestic studio had quite the effect on her practice. Morton rented a studio in downtown Philadelphia shortly after completing her Master's degree in 1970. Friend Robert Rohm remembered it as "a second floor over a three-car garage… It was Ree's first studio separate and away from the house. She loved that space."[154] The larger scale artworks and new materials seen in Morton's work from 1971 onwards are, I would argue, a direct result of this change in studio. For example, sculptures from this period, discussed more in chapter two, were made using very large branches and logs cut with chain saws. Rohm remarked how at this time Morton "was so intent on using power tools."[155] Having a non-domestic studio allowed Morton's use of power tools (otherwise unsuitable around children) and coupled with having much more space, it was around this time that Morton effectively began making installation art. By the time she would arrive in New York in 1972 to a much larger loft-studio, her work was taking up whole rooms. It is my hypothesis then that for Morton this departure from the domestic studio was poignant for her the development of her practice and how she engaged the techniques of installation art, but I want to suggest it was also important for Morton's own estimation of her professional identity as an artist too.

In a grant application made in 1972, soon after her move to New York City, Morton chose to effectively narrate her biographical trajectory noting she had started making art

[153] I am grateful to my student Katherine Perrins, a painter and a mother, for bringing to my attention the nuances of the material and temporal constraints when painting around young children. She remarkes that watercolours suit parents with babies as they can paint at home quickly, in between naps or feeding and with less risk of toxicity as opposed to other materials.
[154] Robert Rohm, *Ree Morton: Retrospective 1971 – 1977*, 82.
[155] Rohm, *Ree Morton: Retrospective 1971 – 1977*, 82.

with "three children, a naval husband and a home in a boring middle class development in Norfolk, Virginia," concluding with describing her story as, "a feminist classic: out of the kitchen, into the studio."[156] It is significant that Morton marks her professionalism at this point as a spatial transition from one space of work to another, leaving domestic labor in the kitchen and moving to the perception of "real" labor in the studio. In the same grant application Morton noted how she "learned to use power tools and learned to know the difference between when I needed help and when I just thought I did. I got a teaching job. I got loft in NYC." She ended the grant with the statement "not bad, for a girl."[157]

These comments show Morton's perceived measure of artistic success: earning money, using tools, and being able to afford a space to live and work. This also demonstrates her triumphalism in spite of a perceived bias against her gender and even perhaps as a working mother. Speaking in an interview in 1974, Morton described how she had not seen herself as a professional artist in the early stages of her career in the late 1960s:

> I was still not able to call myself an artist. I mean, I was a housewife, right? I was a mother, I had children, I had a family to take care of. And [being an artist] was something I did in my extra time. It was taking up a lot of time by then…The teachers would talk a lot about commitment, being committed to your work and somehow that word had a lot of implications that I couldn't accept…I would never say that I am an artist.[158]

Morton's difficulty in naming herself as an artist is symptomatic of the social illegitimacy of women's participation in the creative workforce in the 1960s and early 1970s. In her conflict of balancing domestic labor and artistic labor, Morton's comments illustrate what

[156] Morton, *Notebook* (RM05, 1974), 66.
[157] Ibid, 66 - 67.
[158] Ree Morton, in interview with Kate Horsfield and Lyn Blumental, *Ree Morton: An Interview* (1974) Video Data Bank, The School of the Art Institute Chicago.

art historian Alexandra Kokoli deems as the "misrecognized labor" in women's art practices. Like Dimitrakaki, Kokoli underscores the importance of recognizing the many different kinds of labor that are involved in making art work — it is not just the actions towards an object per se, but the corollary forms of work that facilitate the art practice and the life of the artist such as paid teaching and unpaid domestic work like childcare. Kokoli therefore suggests we reconsider assumed distinctions normally attached to artistic labor that prioritizes paid productive labor over unpaid unproductive labor and professionalism over amateurship, thus reconfiguring the opposition between what she calls "real" work versus a "labor of love."[159]

Speaking to the same distinctions Kokoli identifies, Angela Dimitrakaki argues that these binaries of productive and unproductive work have been historically cleaved along spatial and gendered lines in the case of women making art. Qualities associated with the "professional" male artist and his productive (paid) labor are sustained in opposition to women's "private", amateur, unpaid art or "hobbies" taking place in the home. This distinction Dimitrakaki writes, renders an "emphasis on the dialectic between 'public' and 'private' in the constitution of gendered subjectivity and, in relation to issues pertaining to women's association with the private rather than the public…women [artists] were very much associated with the first term 'the private', as in 'the garden', 'the kitchen', 'the bedroom'."[160] Therefore, in not perceiving herself as a professional because of her domestic labor responsibilities, Morton deprecated herself — as an amateur — because art was "something I did in my spare time" in domestic studios when in fact, at this point Morton

[159] Alexandra Kokoli, "The Work of Art as Labour" [June 2011] http://discussionsart.wordpress.com/2011/06/22/the-work-of-art-as-labour/. Last accessed: August 2016.
[160] Dimitrakaki, *Gender, ArtWork and the Global Imperative,* 115 – 116.

was exhibiting artwork and earning money as a teacher. Similarly, Morton tracked her own transitions in the same gendered spaces of work Dimitrakaki outlines – going "out of the kitchen, into the studio" – showing just how entrenched these gendered divisions were according to the perception of creative labor in the private and domestic sphere as amateur *verses* work in the studio as public and professional realm. This emphasizes the extent to which the very notion of the domestic studio has been, in effect, a kind of cultural oxymoron as a site of labor. "Serious" art, it was presumed, could not be made in the home. Recall Lippard's observation: "I thought serious artists had to have big, professional looking spaces. I found women in the corners of men's studios, in bedrooms and children's rooms, even in kitchens, working away."[161]

Mainstream art historical canons have also maintained similarly masculine discourses of the space of studio and its labors. Only more recently have scholars emphasized the negative effects of these discourses of labor on women artists.[162] For example, art historian Caroline Jones notes how the paradigm of the solitary male genius at work in his studio was a common and romanticized construct in the 1940s that was particularly facilitated by the erasure of domesticity and sociality in the studio.[163] Photographs of male artists' studios that appeared in magazines, newspapers and books showed them alone and without the domestic trappings of a "home" despite the fact that these studios too were often located in homes, or were live-in studio-lofts.[164]

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[161] Lippard, "Changing Since *Changing*", 4.
[162] For example, see: Griselda Pollock, 'Painting, Feminism, History', in M. Barratt and A. Phillips. (eds), *Destabilizing Theory: Contemporary Feminist Debates* (Stanford University Press, 1992), 138-76.
[163] Caroline Jones, *Machine in the Studio: Constructing the Postwar American Artist* (London and Chicago: University of Chicago Press) 7, 372.
[164] For a more detailed discussion of the construction of gendered identity in the photography of artists in their studios see Darsie Alexander's essay "Reluctant Witness: Photography and the Documentation of 1960s and 1970s Art", *Work Ethic*, 53 – 66; and Jones, "The Romance of the Studio", *Machine in the Studio,* 27 – 41.

Scholar Katy Siegel suggests the culture engendered by these kinds of images created a fantasy of a studio disassociating domesticity from artwork. She notes that this happened in spite of a parallel ideology supported by many artists regarding the importance of collapsing distinctions between art and life, embodied by those "life/work" studio-lofts of the 1960s and 1970s.[165] In this, Siegel suggests, "configurations" of art and life still relied on divisions between the labor of (art) work and the labor of home as it was split along gendered lines. Indeed, as art historian Caroline Jones argues in her study of the "romance of the studio", the myth of the male "autonomous genius" alone in his studio working without interference is largely a model of studio practice "predicated on the exclusion of others."[166] This myth of "romance" continued at the expense of women artists, who in clear cases such as that of Ree Morton, had no choice but to balance art work and domestic work, giving further credence to the "unserious" business of women making art as a home hobby. These narratives of the studio as a solitary male domain not only implicitly erase domesticity from a studio discourse, but they point to the alienation of gendered domestic labor or "women's work" in a discourse of labor in post-war art too.

If, as I've suggested, a masculine discourse of artists' studios has configured a particular relationship between working space and gendered labor that has conditioned beliefs about the artist's agency and the objects made in the studio, how do we think about other spaces of work like those that exist *beyond* the studio? What kind of non-traditional work spaces might exist – temporary or otherwise – that might activate a different space of encounter with the *work* of art? Given that I have suggested that Ree Morton's notebooks are a site of productive and unproductive labor, can they too be conceived of as a space of

[165] Siegel, "Live/Work" *The Studio Reader,* 312.
[166] Jones, *Machine in the Studio*, 40, 372.

work? And if so, to use Siegel's terms, can they "configure" art and life differently from the studio to think about the links between autobiographical art and labor?

It is the suggestion of this study that Morton's notebooks are an alternative site of labor and they offer new possibilities to theorize the *work of art* by women and mothers. For, despite Morton's own studios regularly changing, she continued to use her notebooks regularly (and on vacation) for documentation, figuring out ideas, planning and thinking simultaneously about artworks and childcare (and other overlapping professional and personal issues). For example, in series of adjacent entries in a notebooks from 1974 a list reminds Morton, "pay bills", "plastic holders for slides", "Scott's birthday", "call archives" and "laundry soap" (fig. 15). Two pages prior is a draft of ideas for teaching workshops dubbed by Morton as "personal lectures" for "self-portraits" and "personal bibliographies".[167] Not only do these pages show the juxtaposition of work and life, but the way in which the two were integrated intentionally because there was a deliberate decision by Morton to bring the aspects of her personal life into her creative work and visa versa. As if to further concretize this point, on the page prior to the aforementioned notes is a list of "working ideas" to develop in Morton's practice: the first lists "mapping" and the second states, "studio – work and relationship to environment" (fig. 16).[168] Morton's entry points to the fact that the studio is a place where *any* work is relational to one's environment – be it domestic or otherwise. In this, her notebooks not only attend to the complex interplay of the demands of her different kinds of work, but the notebooks also show a highly practical function for the artist too: they were compact and portable spaces to generate ideas, i.e. to

[167] See Ree Morton, *Notebook* (RM05: 1974), 50 – 54.
[168] Ibid, 49.

work, and as such, the notebooks can be characterized as a kind of extension of the studio themselves.

Placing Morton's notebooks within a new discourse of studios and gendered labor has two useful functions. One function is to expand the remit of where we locate women artists' work and what kinds of work are meaningful – as per the suggestions of Dimitrakaki and Kokoli. Can Morton's notes, sketches, documentation and half-formed thoughts about artwork and personal subjects be realized as forms of productive, process-based autobiographical art work? Can this new form of work resist the aforementioned gendered distinctions between public and private, as in the masculine discourse of studios? The notes and sketches in Morton's notebooks about her life and work such as those discussed earlier invite us to think differently about how her lifestyle and its changing working spaces and domestic responsibilities conditioned the outcome of the autobiographical installations she produced and similarly how her artworks might have also conditioned her use of notebooks. This does not determine meaning in her artworks, but highlights the conditions under which they were produced. The second function of thinking of notebooks as extensions of the studio is to consider Morton's incorporation of text and process-based strategies in her practice as political. As I discuss shortly, the appearance of text and process-based activity in her work has links to feminist conceptual art strategies common in the 1970s when dealing with gendered forms of domestic labor. The fact that in 1976 Morton exhibited parts of her notebooks to the public, brings both her artwork and notebooks together – as mutual forms of *work* - into dialogue with our

rethinking our encounter with her different forms of labor.[169] This is important because, as I discuss shortly, the aesthetic display of notebooks challenges the assumption of oppositions between public and private realms imbricated in discourses of autobiography and gendered forms of art *work* which bears on how Morton's subjectivity as an artist, a woman and a mother are materially and thematically inscribed in her work and encountered by viewers. As Morton developed new techniques intertwining image and text both in notebooks and in installations, this multimedia approach allows us to look more broadly at where, when and how we engage with the work of women making art and indeed, "women's work" in general.

Knowing the issues at stake for Ree Morton and her domestic studios helps to bring into view the challenges women artists with children faced not just on a day to day basis in making art, but those more ideological and wide-reaching social frameworks engendered by the social culture of "women's work" that affected (and continue to affect) the professionalization of women as artists. Therefore, if issues of gendered labor are at stake in analyzing Ree Morton's notebooks, it is key to contextualize these concerns within both socio-historic discourses of labor in America in the 1970s and within art historical contexts of feminist artists who addressed their experience of being social and economic subjects in the 1970s.

[169] Morton exhibited her notebooks in galleries on two occasions: *Private Notations: Artists' Sketchbooks* at the Philadelphia College of Art, 1976, and for *Preparatory Notes - Thinking Drawings* at Woman-Centre in Boulder, Colorado in 1976.

"Women's Work" in Feminist Art: *Maintenance Art* and *Post-Partum Document*

In the 1960s and 1970s, the concept of work and labor underwent a transformation in the U.S. as the country moved into a post-industrial society after the post-war economic boom of the 1950s and early 1960s. Despite prosperity for the growing middle class, the inequality of access to work manifested in public discontent among sections of the working classes. The period saw an intensification of strikes with factory workers protesting low wages and working conditions that took place in parallel with wider national protests demanding pay equity for new categories of labor such as migrant and domestic work.[170] This redefinition of labor shifted along particularly class-based, gendered and racial lines. Anti-war protests, civil rights movements for Black and Chicano Americans and the women's liberation movement challenged who had access to different kinds of work in the United States. For example, protesters confronted military conscription (as forced labor) in the Vietnam War and the widespread discrimination against women and people of colour seeking access to equal pay.[171]

The women's movement played a substantial role in the reshaping of women and men's relationships to work in the post-war period. Feminist activists, scholars and artists articulated many of the key concerns about the legitimation of women's paid and unpaid labor, as well as the need for women's rights within public and private spheres. With the increasing number of women participating in the work force in the 1960s and the introduction of the birth control pill, a massive socio-cultural paradigm shift in familial and

[170] Melvyn Dubofsky and Joseph A. McCartin, "Restructuring the Labor Force" in *Labor in America: A History,* 9th Edition (Hoboken, NJ: John Wiley and Sons, 2017), 344 – 349.
[171] For an overview of these issues, especially as they relate to women, see, *Race, Gender, and Work: A Multi-cultural Economic History of Women in the United States* (eds) Teresa L. Amott and Julie A. Matthaei, Revised edition (Boston: South End Press, 1996).

social relations was underway; by the 1970s, a woman's "place" was no longer considered to be in the home doing "women's work."[172]

In this climate, artists addressed the terms of their own labor and its value in society some with more emphasis on social politics and others more interested in the meaning of authorship. In her excellent study of the political meaning of "work" to artists, scholar Julia Bryan-Wilson characterizes art from the 1960s and 1970s as being driven by artists' desires to go from "artist" to "art worker."[173] This shift in the social role of art, she explains, re-identified artistic function within alternative networks, such as the Art Workers Coalition, the members of which rallied against the increasing commodification of their labor in a capitalist economy, rejecting what they saw as the cooptation of art for private profit.

Broadly speaking, strategies of conceptual art cemented in the 1960s also attended to the issue of labor in the deployment of found objects or "readymades" – a term first introduced by Marcel Duchamp in the early twentieth century – which referred to objects produced by someone else and/or not necessarily made with the intention of being "art." With its revival in the 1960s, the readymade was thought to have brought about a major paradigm shift in art making because of the effect of a disconnect between the need for artistic skill and authenticity of authorship in fine art. The view was taken by some that artwork could be anything and anyone could make it. For example, in 1968, critics Lucy Lippard and John Chandler characterized a turn towards what they called "the dematerialization of art" and the emergence of "ultra-conceptual art" wherein the idea

[172] For an analysis of this shift, see Ruth Milkman "Women Workers, Feminism and the Labor Movement since the 1960s" *Women, Work, and Protest: A Century of U.S. Women's Labor History* ed. Ruth Milkman (New York: Routledge, 1985) 300 – 322.
[173] Bryan-Wilson, *Art Workers,* 13 – 40.

behind art was prioritized over the object and its materiality. They envisioned "dematerialization" would render art objects obsolete if intellectual processes were preferred over material form resulting in art that could overcome commodification.[174] Reflecting on this new definition of artistic labor, art historian John Roberts argues the readymade was a particularly significant strategy in conceptual art in this regard as in it exemplifies how this deskilling of art posed a fundamental challenge to the premise on which artistic "work" had long been based. In this dematerialized mode, labor was conceptual, intellectual and process-based – meaning it was immaterial because generating ideas was work, instead of the actual facture of objects.[175]

Looking broadly at the creative climate in America in the 1970s, Bryan-Wilson proposes that this dematerialization of the object successfully yoked together a new and radical ontology of "art" and "work." This placed an emphasis on the production of art and its processes that allowed the labor to be as much a set of activities, plans or intentions not necessarily resulting in finished or material objects. In this, the work of art was not only invested with new questions *what* art can be and *who* can make it, but it challenged *what* constitutes the conditions of its production and *who* determines its meaning.

Several feminist artists in the 1970s such as Mierle Laderman Ukeles and Mary Kelly approached labor as a gendered and political issue. Their artworks responded to domesticity and the historic tradition of "women's work" to critique assumptions of gendered labor in dystopian, satirical or ironic ways to highlight the unfair naturalization of this work as feminine. Furthermore, Ukeles' and Kelly's artworks particularly exemplify

[174] Lucy Lippard and John Chandler, The Dematerialization of Art" *Art International* 12, no. 2. (February 20, 1968), 31–36. Also see Lucy Lippard, *Six Years: The Dematerialization of the Art Object from 1966 to 1972* (New York: Praeger, 1973).
[175] For more on artistic labor and "deskilling" in conceptual art in the 1960s and 1970s, see John Roberts, *The Intangibility of Form: Skilling and Deskilling in Art after the Readymade* (London and New York: Verso, 2007).

critiques of domestic labor in the 1970s that provide important art historical contexts for Ree Morton in terms of their autobiographical process-based conceptual strategies that related to the experience of being a housewife and a woman artist, and the taboo subject of maternal labor in 1970s feminist art.[176]

Mierle Laderman Ukeles (b. 1939) made some of the most explicit artistic commentaries on gendered labor in 1970s America with her Maintenance Art series. Begun shortly after the birth of her first child, Ukeles first wrote *Manifesto For Maintenance Art 1969! Proposal for an Exhibition "CARE"* in 1969. The proposal detailed how she would live in or visit a gallery with her husband and baby to "maintain" its spaces by doing chores likes washing floors, dusting and garbage disposal just as Ukeles would were she maintaining her home. Though this piece wasn't actually performed, other similar works soon followed. Her first public work was realized in 1973 where Ukeles washed the outdoor steps of a large public museum in Boston. Later inside the gallery, on a megaphone Ukeles recited a previous conversation she'd had that day with her babysitter: "for the good of my family I must do my work. To do my work I need a babysitter. It's ok to have a babysitter so I can do my work. For my good too, finally, I can do my work."[177] Ukeles then printed this statement onto paper and hung it up in the gallery "like laundry on a washing line."[178]

Ukeles states the impetus for this work had come from the experience of being shunned as an student at art school when she became pregnant. She said "people only saw

[176]For more on the taboo of motherhood in art in the 1970s, see Andrea Liss, *Feminist Art and the Maternal* (Minneapolis and London: Minnesota University Press, 2000), xiv.
[177] Mierle Laderman Ukeles, "Mierle Laderman Ukeles in conversation with Alexandra Schwartz" in *From Conceptualism to Feminism: Lucy Lippard's Numbers Shows 1969 – 74* (London: Afterall Books, 2012), 287. The performance took place at The Institute of Contemporary Art in Boston in 1973 as part the show Lippard curated called *c.7,500*.
[178] Ibid.

me as a mother. The culture had no place for me. There were no words for my life. I was split into two people: artist and mother. I had fallen out of the picture. I was in a fury."[179] Written in one sitting after the birth of her son, the manifesto from 1969 states:

> I am an artist. I am a woman. I am a wife. I am a mother. (Random order). I do a hell of a lot of washing, cleaning, cooking, renewing, supporting, preserving, etc. Also, (up to now separately) I 'do' Art. Now I will simply do these everyday things, and flush them up to consciousness, exhibit them, as Art…. The exhibition area might look "empty" of art, but it will be maintained in full public view. MY WORKING WILL BE THE WORK.[180]

Ukeles's equation of *working* with *work* bolsters her critique about the debasement of women's work as low paid and deskilled. By conflating maintenance work with artwork and the actions taken in the home with those in the gallery, Ukeles elides the distinction between artwork and housework by levelling *everything* she does as labor. Or is everything she does artwork? Ukeles's performance of unskilled and low-paid cleaning as a form of work done by an "underclass" of women and men on the one hand elevates cleaning as *artwork* but on the other hand, she debases the cherished ideals of fine art such as skill and beauty by its association with the manual labor of cleaning. Helena Reckitt described this paradox as follows: "the artist's work was hidden in plan sight. Its everyday nature was so convincing that many viewers did not recognize it as art."[181] If the fact that Ukeles's performances in the galleries usually went unnoticed by gallery goers as Reckitt suggests, then this seems to evidence how much the dual invisibility of women's work as art *and* women's art as work was in play not just in a gallery but in American society.

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[179] Ukeles in interview with Andrea Liss, May 19th 2000. See Andrea Liss, "Maternal CARE: Mierle Laderman Ukeles's Maintenance Art" *Feminist Art and the Maternal* (Minneapolis and London: Minnesota University Press, 2009) 52.

[180] Ukeles, "Manifesto for Maintenance Art", 1969. Courtesy Arnolfini Gallery, Bristol. Accessed February 28th, 2017. http://www.arnolfini.org.uk/blog/manifesto-for-maintenance-art-1969/Ukeles_MANIFESTO.pdf

[181] Helena Reckitt, "Forgotten Relations: Feminist Artists and Relational Aesthetics" *Politics in a Glass Case: Feminism, Exhibition Cultures and Curatorial Transgressions* (Liverpool University Press: Liverpool, 2013) 131.

Another key work addressing women's labor, especially the labor of motherhood, is Mary Kelly's piece, *Post-Partum Document* (1973 – 1977).[182] In each section of this six-part work, Kelly (b. 1941) documented her relationship with her infant son through certain his stages of development, such as his acquisition of language and his eating and fecal habits. The documentation was presented in diagrams on 26 different panels Kelly devised based on her reading of Jacques Lacan's psychoanalytic theories of human sexual development. The panels, each 20cm by 25.5 cm, bore a mixture of writing, drawings, graphs, charts and evidentiary objects of her son's maturation with display aesthetics reminiscent of an ethnographic museum as if the objects were catalogued artifacts. Each panel was arranged uniformly around the walls of an otherwise blank gallery, meaning viewers moved around the periphery of the room to follow the consecutive panels in keeping with the changes Kelly records as a mother and as an analyst of her son's development. When speaking about the piece, Kelly maintains that the work wasn't only about her son — the piece was also about her understanding of her relationship to her son's maturation and to her "feminine psychology" that was "scaled by the sexual division of labour in childcare."[183] Kelly describes the piece as "an effort to articulate the mother's fantasies, her desire, her stake in that project called 'motherhood'."[184]

These two artworks bring important contexts to Ree Morton's work that relate to her use of processual and repetitive actions referencing domestic labor and parenting. In doing so, not only did both artists address the issue of visualizing domestic work in artworks intended as political statements against the debasement of women's work as

[182] For images of the work, see Mary Kelly, *Post-Partum Document* (London: Routledge and Kegan Paul, 1983).
[183] Ibid., 1.
[184] Ibid., 17.

trivial, but they create a paradigm of domestic labor *as* artwork and artwork as labor. Both Ukeles's and Kelly's works emphasize the dialectic between housework and artwork deploying feminist documentational strategies of their unique gendered experiences of labor. Both artists used the repetition of actions to foreground to the viewer the processual nature of making these works and the repetitive tasks of domestic work. This seriality emphasized the everyday and the ordinariness of maternal and domestic labor, but specifically, as labor common among women. Kelly's use of identical panels in all of the six sections stages the repetitive processes of childcare. In one section about the baby's digestion, Kelly chose one type of object and framed it in a series of panels – her baby's dirty diaper liners. Though the liners and the light traces of fecal matter imprinted there were entirely everyday to Kelly, British tabloids refused the idea that dirty nappies could be "art".[185] Likewise, Ukeles's Sisyphean toil of washing outdoor and outdoor public spaces wasn't coded as art either. In these works as in 1970s society at large when "women's work" was called art it was dismissed. Thus when women's art was coded as maintenance labor, it also went unseen. Keeping the various forms of work and labor that went into making these artworks in view, these pieces stage their feminist critiques of gendered work by inviting viewers to identify with the nature of the work performed.

Andrea Liss's book *Feminist Art and the Maternal* read both of these pieces by Kelly and Ukeles as showing "the complexities of the mother's subjectivity and intersubjective relationship between the mother-artist and her child."[186] While this is true and an important point that bears on the historic underrepresentation of maternal subjectivities in art, Liss's approach doesn't take into consideration how these artists' pieces brought

[185] See Roger Bray, "On show at the ICA...dirty nappies!" *Evening Standard* (1976) 14 October 1976.
[186] Liss, *Feminist Art and the Maternal*, 5.

motherhood into view within a gendered discourse of labor. Commenting on Liss's reading in this manner, Angela Dimitrakaki notes these kinds of readings are far more common in feminist art history (especially in the readings of *Post-Partum Document*) as they tend to focus on the representation of affect in motherhood. Instead, Dimitrakaki calls for a rethinking of "the mother as a laboring subject" which approaches, as I've also argued, art's "work" more expansively.[187]

Realizing "the mother as a laboring subject" is an important point for this study. In the case of artists who are mothers, the emphasis when looking at their work need not only be only on what kind of maternal subjectivity is represented, but attending to how, why and where the mother-artist was enabled (or not) to produce art in the first place. Thus with Kelly's work, it isn't only her articulations of subjectivity at stake, but the way the piece evidences an intersection of artistic and parental labors. Kelly bring her experience of art into mothering and mothering into art. In this, autobiographical art by mothers isn't merely a direct representation of the artist and her "true" feminine and/or maternal subjectivity, but their art is also the interface of an encounter with the intersecting labors of artistic production and interpretation. This conditions our understanding of what was involved in making art and being a mother in a particular socio-historical moment where sexism, racism, classism and other forms of discrimination affected the production of art. This is because for women and particularly artists who were mothers in the 1970s, choosing to be an artist was in itself a radical political gesture. Not only was women's artwork annexed to dominant discourses that deprecated its activities as a hobby, but the generally accepted way of working as an artist was at odds with parental responsibilities.

[187] Dimitrakaki *Gender, ArtWork and the Global Imperative,* 115.

As such, the representation of the labor of motherhood in art in the 1970s is a platform to ask where and how we engage with women's work in its myriad forms.

My approach to Ree Morton's work similarly seeks to foreground how her artistic and domestic labor can be read in her practice across her artworks *and* her notebooks. I'm interested in how Morton's autobiographical strategies relating to her family, which materialized in her installations around 1973, can be read in a way that highlights "the mother as a laboring subject" – a notion of a female artist that, as Ukeles remarked in her experience of being a pregnant art student, was perceived by many to be incompatible. If Ukeles politicized how "working will be the work," then Morton's notebooks enact this proposal in another way. The notebooks are documents of "working" and by this token they are "the work." This brings me to an example in Morton's practice when she began to integrate the aesthetic strategies of notebooks and note-taking into her artwork that presaged the exhibition of her notebooks as art objects themselves.

Shortly before Morton went to Tannersville, she took up a six-week teaching post at Montana State University in the spring of 1974. While she was there she made only one artwork called *Bozeman, Montana* named after the small town at the foot of the mountains where she lived. The work consists of eleven sculpted Celastic words scattered across a wall, bracketed by two large sculpted parenthesis-shapes covered in colourful light bulbs (fig. 17). The words each refers to people she taught or colleagues at the school ("Lowell," "Scott," "Curt," "Mike," "Sylvie," "Manuel," and "Richard"), activities she did in Bozeman in her spare time ("Pool," "Beer," "Fish") or the geographical features of Bozeman like its mountains ("MTS") and "Sky." These references to people, place and activities shows an interplay between art and life commemorated in words. Morton's notebooks describe

Bozeman as a "tone poem," a term referring to a narrative device in musical scores. An adjacent notebook page listed the categories of "homages," "souvenirs," "commemorative," and "memorial" with the note "cheap sentimentality…sayings as a way to remember friends."[188]

If *Bozeman, Montana* is an act of memorialization, it is similar to *Souvenir Piece* made the year earlier with her display of found objects from the beach during her family vacation in Newfoundland. Yet *Bozeman, Montana* is more sentimental and more celebratory in its aesthetic form than *Souvenir Piece* is with its organic abstract shapes. In *Bozeman, Montana* the brightly coloured Celastic imitates cheap, shiny candy bar wrapping paper embellished by glitter. The use of single words to denote a memory is reminiscent itself of the kind of note-taking or short hand documentation made in her notebooks. This links the aesthetic of text and notes in her notebooks to its transformation from private writing into sculpted Celastic words crafted to be affective in its "cheap sentimentality."

It is also important to examine *Bozeman, Montana* in relation to teaching work. Morton brought Celastic with her to Montana for purpose of teaching but ended up making her own work from it as well. In an interview she recalled, "I took some Celastic to Montana to demonstrate the potential to the students. I made my name out of clay and pushed the Celastic around it. As soon as I saw the words embossed on a hard surface, well, that was it."[189] This was Morton's first use of Celastic that prompted the work in the period that followed when Morton made the banner works based on Blanchan's book in 1974.[190] For the rest of her career, Morton continued to use Celastic for it became an important material

[188] Morton, *Notebook* RM01, (1974 – 1975), 20 – 32.
[189] Morton, quoted by Schwartz in "Methods and Materials: New and Old", 46 – 49.
[190] Morton first used Celastic in *Bake Sale* (1974). See my discussion of this in chapter three.

with which to emphasize kitsch and craft aesthetics, sentimentality, femininity and affect (see my discussion of this in chapter three).

Though Morton produced only this one work during this teaching contract, anecdotal evidence suggests this was also a challenging time. The six-week teaching stint was apparently a period of "artistic crisis."[191] Morton's daughter Linda remembered her mother wearing a t-shirt at the time that read: "I'd rather go fishing." A postcard Morton sent from Bozeman to her friend and lover at the time, Gordon Matta Clark, mentioned only that she was playing pool (fig. 18). This is one example of a very *material* effect Morton's teaching contracts had on her work. In this case, teaching students how to use Celastic not only prompted Morton to use the material in a very particular way (sculpting text), but in this case, *Bozeman, Montana* was also in part *about* her work and her affection for the students she taught. This work exemplifies the overlap and relationality between Morton's art practice and other forms of labor like as teaching, as these circumstances effected (and affected) her aesthetic choices.

Exhibiting Notebooks

In 1974, Morton wrote in her notebooks she had "a need to confess – in a public place."[192] The three years that followed saw a sustained period of autobiographical artwork that characterize the later half of her short career. I explore many of these works in more detail in other chapters, but here by way of conclusion here, I draw together my previous discussions of autobiography and labor to consider Morton's unusual decision to exhibit her notebooks in three different instances between 1976 and 1977.

[191] See *Ree Morton: Works 1971 – 1977*, 184.
[192] Morton, *Notebook* (RM01, 1975), 31.

Morton's wish to "confess" comes from a passage in her notebooks detailing the development of the work *Something in the Wind* in 1974 (fig. 19 and 20). This was an installation piece for which Morton made over 100 hand-sewn and colourfully-painted flags for "each person in my life that I have good feelings for…[as] a celebration for them and a means of identifying and locating myself in the world."[193] Morton's flags each bore the name and a unique drawing of the individual it named and the flags were flown on an old schooner moored in South Street sea port in New York City in the summer of 1975.

The affected tone of *Something in the Wind* follows on from *Souvenir Piece*, *Bozeman*, *Montana* and the Blanchan-inspired banners all of which are works that memorialize places and people. These works chart a sustained interest in sentimentality in Morton's artwork related to the way personal topics such as her children, friends and students etc. manifest in her practice. Because Morton's notebooks document the overlap of her thinking and writing where she linked art and life, to exhibit her notebooks on these terms frames her "need to confess – in a public place" as a relational act – she wanted people to encounter her labor.

In the first exhibition of her notebooks in October 1976, Ree Morton included one book in the exhibition *Private Notations: Artists' Sketchbooks* at the Philadelphia College of Art. [194] The show featured the notebooks, sketchbooks and diaries of a wide range of approximately 60 well-known artists.[195] Curator Janet Kardon introduced the exhibition by stating:

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[193] Ree Morton, in *Attitudes Towards Space: Environmental Art* (Los Angeles: Mount Saint Mary's College of Art Gallery, 1977) unpaginated, reprinted in *Ree Morton: Retrospective 1971 – 1977*, 51
[194] Morton's book is listed in the catalogue as "May 1974 – June 1976, 14 x 10¾" See Janet Kardon, *Private Notations: Artists' Sketchbooks* (Philadelphia: Philadelphia College of Art Press, 1976) unpaginated.
[195] For a full list of contributing artists see the exhibition catalogue *Private Notations: Artists Sketchbooks II:* (Philadelphia: Philadelphia College of Art Press, 1976)

> For this exhibition books were collected from painters, sculptors, dancers, performance and video artists, representing a range of diverse sensibilities…For some artists their sketchbooks are portable easels or studios in which they work constantly; while for others, keeping a notebook is a discrete activity which may include working drawings for a specific project or commemorate an isolated experience. A turn of the page may juxtapose mundane jottings, recipes, shopping lists, addresses with serious visual or verbal observations. These informal "autobiographies" often contain found objects: photographs, postcards, memorabilia – souvenirs of a specific time or location…There is no beginning, middle or end, but rather an aleatory storage arrangement of segments of time.[196]

Here, in referring to the exhibition of artists' notebooks as "informal autobiographies" Kardon speaks to the focused interest in areas of 1970s art where the process of making art was privileged over the finished art object. Many of the artists included in Kardon's exhibition, including Sol LeWitt, Joseph Kosuth, Vito Acconci and Michelle Stuart, used documentary-style techniques to record, observe and represent objects often deploying language and text the way one might find record information in a notebook or journal. This conceptual use of language is described by scholar Liz Kotz as a tendency towards seeing text as a kind of material, where "words were treated [by artists] in some sense like objects – to be looked at, and also to be accumulated, built up, moved around and broken apart."[197] Imbricated in this trend was a particular development of the format of the artist's book – a genre first realized in the early twentieth century – that appeared again in the late 1960s and early 1970s.[198] In 1972, Italian art historian and critic Germano Celant published his survey *Book as Artwork: 1960/1972*, specifically framing the use of writing within conceptual models of art making and emphasizing an intersection with systems of

[196] Kardon, *Private Notations,* 3.
[197] Liz Kotz, "Introduction", *Words to be Looked at: Language in 1960s Art* (Cambridge, Mass.: MIT Press, 2007), 2.
[198] The trend of the artist's book, or the "livre d'artiste", can be traced to activities in the early twentieth century in movements such as Russian Futurism, Dada and Surrealism. For a history of the genre, see Johanna Drucker, *The Century of Artists' Books* [1995] (New York: Granary Books, reprinted 2004).

documentation. He wrote: "The recognition of language as the maximum artistic abstraction, begun in 1966… …1966 was therefore the year in which systems of logic and artistic process began to define themselves through the written and published language of books and other publications."[199]

Within this climate of systems of textual documentation, it follows that many artists embraced the format of diaries, notebooks, journals and sketchbooks that carried specific own temporal systems. For example, durational performative works became popularized in the 1970s with artists documenting banal and monotonous daily activities or repetitive tasks.[200] These actions were often undertaken by the artists themselves and recorded in video, photography or other indexical forms, creating the "blurring of art and life" as Allan Kaprow called it, bringing private everyday activities into public view *as art*.[201]

The inclusion of Morton's notebooks in *Private Notations: Artists' Sketchbooks* brought her work in dialogue with this impulse in conceptual art to document systems and processes linking her "need to confess – in a public place" with an emphasis on the immaterial and the material processes and ideas of art's work. The exhibition represented an artist's "thinking" that marks Morton's and others' notebooks as the material traces of immaterial labor. Choosing to exhibit one's intellectual or thinking processes in a gallery in this way enacts Smith's and Watson's proposition mentioned earlier that artworks and texts are indeed interfaces that perform "autobiographical acts" fostering unique

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[199] Germano Celant, *The Book as Artwork 1960/1972*, translated from the Italian by Corine Lotz, (London: Nigel Greenwood Inc, 1972) 14.
[200] Just a few examples of artist's using diary or notebook formats are Dieter Roth's dairy series (1964 – 1988); On Kawara's *Date Paintings* (1966- 2014); Lee Lozano's *Write-Ups* and *Pieces* (1968 – 1971) Hanne Darboven's *One Month, One Year, One Century* (1971); Annette Messager's "Collection Albums" (1972 – 74); and Eleanor Antin's *Carving: A Traditional Sculpture* (1972) and Andy Warhol's *Time Capsules* (1974 – 1987).
[201] See Allan Kaprow, *Essays on the Blurring of Art and Life,* Expanded Edition, (eds) Allan Kaprow and Jeff Kelley (Berkeley: University of California Press, 2003).

intersubjective encounters. What's more, this links Morton's notebooks back to their 1988 exhibition at Franklin Furnace as discussed at the beginning of this chapter where I suggested her notebooks were institutionally framed as artists' books not necessarily as archive ephemera. Seen in this way, the notebooks take on a much more active and dialogic role in Morton's oeuvre, encouraging us to engage with her practice by thinking about the where we locate the traces and indices of her labor.

The second exhibition of Morton's notebooks was for the show *Preparatory Notes - Thinking Drawings* curated by Michele Amateau Amato and Amy Snider. The show featured the work of predominantly women artists, including Judith Bernstein, Cynthia Carlson, Barbara Kruger, Joyce Kozloff and Louise Bourgeois among others. The show began at Woman-Centre in Boulder, Colorado in May 1976 and later travelled to 80 Washington Square East Galleries in New York University in February 1977.[202] The exhibition featured artworks on paper as well as notebooks and sketchbooks, the pages of which were turned every few days by gallery staff.[203] Morton sent approximately six works on paper to the exhibition along with three or four of her notebooks.[204] Curator Micaela Amateau Amato recalled:

> Ree and I went over her journals together in her studio and we discussed them with much excitement/ pleasure/humor. I think we chose together which pages would be open, and which ones would be opened the following days. I don't remember now which specific three/four books we chose to exhibit. She loved the idea of the show and I believe she found it perfect for her own creative impulses…the layered process from the recesses of her imagination quickly jotted onto paper and then to real space (that included everything) was a

[202] For more information on this exhibition, see *Ree Morton: Works 1971 – 1977*, 197.
[203] Micaela Amateau Amato in an email to the author on March 25th, 2014.
[204] Amateau stated "The drawings of Ree's were about 24 x 36" on heavy paper with pencil-washes and coloured pencils for "Let us Celebrate While Youth Lingers and Ideas Flow" and "Of Previous Dissipations" and "weeds..." and "Bozeman, Montana" installation. There were at least five or six pieces....text on all of them. They were hung vertically I think, as a piece in itself." Email to the author on March 25th, 2014.

blueprint of this comprehensive creative process for her.[205]

The artworks included in this exhibition were *Bozeman, Montana* (1974) and *Weeds of the Northeast* (1974) and two banner works, one of which was *Of Previous Dissipations* (1974). Although it is not known which of Morton's notebook pages were shown in the exhibition, it is likely that they were pages that referred to the drawings and plans of the finished artworks also on view. In juxtaposing the art and notebook, Morton made explicit the link between the "work of art" and art's work because notebooks (like art) are both objects *and* indices of processes of work. The title of the show *Thinking Drawings* further frames this relationship between intellectual and embodied processes of drawing and the material and immaterial labors that go into making artwork. That this show almost exclusively exhibited the "thinking drawings" of women artists further politicizes the visibility of women's intellectual and material labor, legitimizing a connection between the embodied cognition of art making and female subjectivity.

In the third and final instance in 1977 where Morton made her notebooks public they were not shown in a gallery, they were published as excerpts in a book. Morton was one of fifteen artists included in *Individuals: Post-Movement Art in America* edited by Alan Sondheim. He described all the artists included as "cross-disciplinary" with "an emphasis on procedure, on 'going through the work' as opposed to a perfected final product."[206] The artists in the book appear to have been given relative freedom to include materials they felt

[205] Amateau, in an email to the author on April 9th, 2014.
[206] Alan Sondheim, "Introduction", *Individuals: Post-Movement Art in America*, Alan Sondheim (ed.) (E.P. Dutton & Co. Inc.: New York, 1977), xv.

best represented their practice.[207] Morton included a mixture of photos and drawings of her artwork, as well as photographs of archive ephemera including an annotated postcard from California and the title page of book from 1872, as well as three pages that appear to be from her notebooks.[208] Morton named her book chapter *Analects*, a term which typically refers to a collection of philosophical treatises. Her chapter is broken down into nine parts titled "Locations", "Recitations", "Narrations", "Observations", "Definitions", "Notations", "Illustrations", "Commemorations" and "Prescriptions" for reasons that I believe relate to the methods of analysis she extracted from the studies of plants in the aforementioned botanical books, *Weeds of the Northeast* and *Wild Flowers Worth Knowing*.[209] The "Notations" section features pages resembling notebooks (fig. 21) which are a composites of text and nine drawings of different banners works, all based on phrases taken directly from Blanchan's book *Wild Flowers Worth Knowing*.

It bears noting Morton did not photocopy pages directly from her notebooks either. *Analects* must have been made especially for the book using a typewriter as only handwritten text appears in Morton's notebooks. Instead, it seems Morton arranged phrases especially for the publication. A selection includes:

> memory and fantasy
> affection for the work

[207] Although the book was published in 1977 (the year of Morton's death) the front matter states the copyright is with Morton. The text would have almost certainly been submitted before her death, therefore I am working on the assumption that Morton was the sole author of this work.
[208] Ree Morton "Analects", *Individuals: Post-Movement Art in America*, 226 – 243.
[209] I believe these subtitles refer to the same categories Neltje Blanchan applied to flowers and plants in her 1917 text *Wild Flowers Worth Knowing* (the same book Morton used in her works on paper of autobiographical flowers). I think these subtitles in *Analects* are Morton's interpretation of the format Blanchan used for each of the specimen's entry. In her book, Blanchan gives the geographical origins of the species (Morton summarizes this as 'location'); the latin and colloquial name is given ('recitations'); the 'story' (i.e., how the plant obtained its name or its mythic/folk history; 'narration'); a description of its visible characteristics ('observations'); its 'meaning' i.e. its value within its histories ('definitions'); its medicinal properties ('prescriptions'). Morton seems to have applied this analysis to her own work and come up with this format for the chapter.

sweet and sour color
found words
fragments not coalesced into sentences or sentenced
sources outside of oneself, in order to get at oneself
love the romance
memorials to lost intentions
sentimentality
incorporate your existence
find the meaning, change the meaning, contradict the original meaning
advertising things painful and private
invest with meaning, signs or tokens of a thought, a sentiment, or an event
art from the heart [210]

These words, phrases and colloquialisms read like obscure poetic statements of a dada artist's manifesto. There is no order, syntax or structure. However, the phrases do disclose a kind of sincerity, personal and affective, as if they are Morton's slogans or mantras about making artwork like "art from the heart" and "advertising things painful and private". Other phrases seem to gesture to the organization (or lack thereof) of *Analects:* "fragments not coalesced into sentences or sentenced" and "found words."

Yet these are not random "found words" in the way the readymade is a found object manufactured elsewhere. Morton reused partial phrases from her own notebooks, mashing them up with other texts and typing them out anew. In this, the notations section in *Analects* is a kind of autobiographical restaging of Ree Morton's own "thinking". It is a meta-performance of her own language of work from previous notations, here reformed. *Analects* seems to be an artwork in many ways *about the work of making art,* or as Ukeles put it how "working will be the work." As such, *Analects* offers up a final paradigm to think about how to approach Morton's practice more generally in terms of process, labor and autobiography.

[210] Morton, "Analects", 240 - 242

I've argued that Ree Morton's notebooks materialize as sites of work, bearing traces of her artistic labor as marked by gendered and maternal subjectivities. I've also suggested they stage the material and creative processes we encounter. I've noted the corollary labors involved in making art that include in Morton's case, teaching work and domestic labor that supported (or at times inhibited) Morton's ability to make artwork, indicating the array of challenges faced by artists who were mothers in the 1970s. I've argued that these various kinds of work informed the material, thematic and aesthetic choices Morton made that mitigate our understanding of her autobiographical references in her works of art.

Because Morton chose to present collaged excerpts of her notebooks as a piece of artwork, the notations in *Analects* explicitly invites its viewer to engage with Morton's practice as a series of subjective labors *in process*. She makes known her methods and motivations in the notations section: "advertising things painful and private", "sources outside of oneself, in order to get at oneself", "art from the heart" and "love the romance." These phrases do not only perform affectively next to the drawings of her banner works about flowers also included in *Analects*, but they frame the material techniques and themes Morton presented in the book chapter next to photographs of her more abstract postminimalist installations. In this, Morton alludes to her work as personal and autobiographical, but she doesn't give us details about how or why these details relate to her or her work. This is part of the cryptic and compelling facets of encountering (and researching) Ree Morton's work and life. Her juxtaposition of semi-obscure autobiographical references in her abstract forms, text and representational images seem to confound one another as a uniform collection of *one* artist's strategies — such as when bark portraits are coast lines, flowers become people, people become memorialized in

sculpted text or in emblems on flags. With these strategies we may encounter the artist's sentimental "labors of love" characterized by her experiences of childcare and teaching, but the abstract forms and unusual materials also deflect a specific meaning from forming. The incoherent notations in *Analects* especially foreground this contradiction as her notebook aesthetics buttress text and image to show the processes, unique thoughts and private feelings involved in making art. Yet as Morton shows, her "notes" do not fully reveal her identity or the precise contours of specific emotions either; the words are clearly sentimental but they are also abstract as they don't refer to a specific subject or feeling. In this, Morton's artworks and notebooks together disclose a sense of those powerful affective states to which we can't often give a name.

Morton's use of notebooks in these affective and sentimental ways nod to the historical legacy of women's life writing being written in confessional and emotional tones with personal and private content. I would suggest that Morton, with more than a hint of irony, embraced these assumed feminine qualities not only in her writing in *Analects* about "art from the heart" but in her artwork too. As I noted in relation to *Weeds of the Northeast* and *Bozeman, Montana,* Morton's aesthetic choices of bows and flowers and her materials of shiny Celastic and glitter communicate the capacity of sentimental imagery to imply a gendered framework assumed in the autobiographic impulse. By exhibiting her notebooks and her inscription of gendered labor in a public way (in a gallery), Morton refuses her work's marginalization in the private domestic realm and instead enacts that, in the case of women artists' notebooks, the personal is also political. This circles back to my argument about autobiographical artwork evidences what Meskimmon described in women's art as

"the double play between materiality and agency."[211] Because Ree Morton's notebooks and artworks together as "work" participate in the formation of feelings but not clear meanings they activate a dynamic encounter with Morton's labor and work together as a means to see her as a subject materializing in process in our encounter with her art and writing. As an interface among artist, autobiography and art, Morton's "work" engages Meskimmon's reference to the "critical link between [the artists'] thinking and making, between the materiality of the objects and the agency of artists and participant observers" because these objects draw out questions about where we look to see the *work* of art and how intersubjective encounters create meaning which materialize from these operations.[212]

The above discussion concerning the autobiographical framing of women's art, agency and materials suggests a complex signification of gender and labor at play in Ree Morton's installations in the 1960s and 1970s. That materialist feminist critiques like Meskimmon's and Dimitrakaki's have surfaced in the last decade in art history to address these issues across a number of historical and contemporary practices indicates persisting anxieties about how women and feminist artists' labor continues to configure and complicate the relationship between the artist and artwork. Our understanding of artistic labor and process – in whatever forms it may take – is implicated in the meaning produced between autobiographical artwork and the artist who made it. Indeed, there can be a productive discrepancy between how art's labor appears to us and what it meant to the artist who enacts and delivers artwork. This is the nuance of thinking about the *work* of art and artWork as it brings to bear on our material encounter with objects and how that informs the inscription of meaning when writing the legacies of artists.

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[211] Meskimmon, "Introduction" *Women Making Art,* 3.
[212] Ibid, 4 – 5.

Chapter Two

Domesticity in "the Expanded Field": Early Installation Art by Women, 1968 – 1974

In 1969 as a graduate student Ree Morton queried the relationship between painting and sculpture in a series of entries in her notebooks. One entry asked "what is painting? what is sculpture?"[213] Another stated "paintings are too flat. paintings are objects. ok. after that, what?"[214] A third entry mused "space, real, imaginary, illusionary" from which Morton had drawn an arrow that pointed to the phrase "air plus objects."[215]

Morton's notes speak to key debates taking place among American artists and critics in the 1960s regarding medium specificity, objecthood and space. Particularly at the end of the 1960s and into the early 1970s, distinctions between painting and sculpture began to collapse and artists became increasingly interested in how viewers' experiences of art extended to the space surrounding art objects too. The space around art objects was increasingly understood to be part of the artwork, the way the viewer became immersed and implicated as a viewing subject became foregrounded. These debates were particularly formative for the development of early discourses of installation art. By the 1970s, artworks using multiple objects in a room were known as "environments" before the term later gave way in the 1980s to what we now call "installation art."

It was in this period between the mid-1960s and early 1970s — dubbed by art historian Claire Bishop as "the decade in which installation art comes of age" — that Ree Morton began her artistic career.[216] The artworks Morton made between 1968 and 1974

[213] Ree Morton, *Notebook* (RM21: 1969), 30.
[214] Morton, *Notebook* (RM28: 1969), 44.
[215] Morton, *Notebook* (RM21: 1968), 30.
[216] Bishop, *Installation Art,* 13.

can be characterized by her intervention into the aforementioned debates about medium and space but also by her interest in feminism and feminist art. A discussion of these early artworks and their cultural contexts form the basis of this chapter. I examine how Morton departed from more mainstream painterly and sculptural activities due to her interest and participation in feminist concerns in art making. This brought about autobiographical approaches in her practice that relate to representations of domestic spaces resulting in large-scale installations resembling shelters. I consider the way the shelter was also a common trope among other artists at this period and how this aligns Morton's practice debates in feminist art, architecture, sculpture and land art. I suggest that by combining strategies and themes from the modes of art making, Morton (and others) developed approaches to early installation art relating to domesticity that have been hitherto overlooked.

As discussed in the introduction to this study, the histories of installation art have broadly neglected the practices of female artists during this time and there are few existing frameworks suitable in which to discuss women's contributions. This chapter proposes two key narratives in which women's early installation art histories can be retraced. I look to the discourse of the "architectural shelter sculpture" developed by Lucy Lippard in the late 1970s to explore the way large-scale immersive sculptures made by women are linked to concerns of domestic space and female bodies. I then look to the very few historical studies of women land artists to examine how women's artistic contributions in this genre are relevant to installation histories too. The overall argument of this chapter is that women installation artists challenged historical associations of women with merely inhabiting and

maintaining interior spaces of the home by becoming the active makers of domestic space, not the passive occupiers of its domain.

Situating Morton's early installation works in dialogue with these key art historical and social discourses enables me to offer an alternative constellation of reference points for one particular strand of women's installation art history. Not only is this important in demonstrating Morton's marginalization in particular art histories, but this also shows a need for new intersectional narratives for installation art history more generally to challenge histories which have (and continue to) excluded the art practices of women.

Early Installation Art Discourses

Shortly after Morton wrote that "painting are objects" in 1969, she made a note to read art critic Harold Rosenberg's book *The Anxious Object: Art Today and its Audience,* first published in 1964.[217] Rosenberg proposed a mounting crisis in art practices in the 1960s was occurring due to a lack of "secure identity" in medium specificity. What he means was that art practices were becoming increasingly interdisciplinary and traditional notions of painting and sculpture were changing, and in some cases, merging. For example, Rosenberg notes a trend in calling artworks an "object" that came about because "the term 'art' has become useless as a means for setting apart a certain category of fabrication."[218]

Rosenberg was one of a number of critics and artists who, in the mid-1960s, took up strong positions for or against new approaches to sculpture and painting. Sculpture historian Alex Potts characterizes this period in the 1960s as one of "tensions between the

[217] Morton, *Notebook* (RM13, 1970), 1.
[218] Harold Rosenberg, *The Anxious Object: Art Today and Its Audiences* [1964](New York: Collier Books, 1973) 17.

modernist insistence on medium specificity and the avant-garde negation of traditional medium-based categories."[219] The minimalist art works and companion piece writings by Donald Judd and Robert Morris from the mid-1960s are frequently cited as examples of those in favor of collapsing distinctions between painting and sculpture, while modernist critic Michael Fried is a well-known detractor of these same ideas.[220]

These debates merit briefly rehearsing here for two reasons. The first reason is aspects of these debates closely link to Ree Morton's own investigations into medium specificity and the space around art objects in the late 1960s and form a context for her early work in the late 1960s. The second reason is that these debates and their interlocutors are regularly rehearsed as the main foundational discourses for installation art histories (again, see footnote 214). Although Judd, Morris and Fried may not have set out with the intention to define "installation art" at the time – the term wasn't in use before the 1970s – their specific articulations of "objecthood", space, perception and spectatorship are mobilized as key discursive reference points for artists in the 1970s now historicized as early installation artists. Aligning Morton's work in and against these debates therefore not only positions her legacy in relation to the given registers of installation art's histories, but in doing so I also show the way Morton departed from certain canonical ideas and charted her own course making installation art.

[219] Alex Potts, "Tactility: The Interrogation of Medium in Art in the 1960s", *Art History*. Vol. 27. No. 2 (April, 2004), 286.
[220] Authors who frequently rehearse these specific debates in installation art history include: Reiss in *From Margin to Center*, 60; Ring-Petersen in *Installation Art Between Image to Stage*, 67; and Bishop, *Installation Art*, 50 – 54.

In 1965 artist Donald Judd heralded what he called the arrival of "the new three-dimensional work" that was "neither painting nor sculpture."[221] Judd's "new work" refers to objects that take into account the space that surrounds them, what he calls the "real" or "actual" space. Judd suggests that placing an object on the floor without a plinth enhances its three-dimensional quality by drawing attention to the "actual" space in and around the artworks, while in addition, the material and shape of the object lent a "specificity" that activates the features of the work. Judd notes:

> Three dimensions are real space. That gets rid of the problem of illusionism and of literal space, space in and around marks and colors – which is riddance of one of the salient and most objectionable relics of European art…Actual space is intrinsically more powerful and specific than paint on a flat surface. Obviously, anything in three dimensions can be any shape, regular or irregular, and can have any relation to the wall, floor, ceiling, room, rooms or exterior or none at all. Any material can be used, as is or painted.[222]

Here, Judd opens up the definition of an artwork not just to its visible qualities, but to the perception of the art object's "actual space" constituted by its spatial relationship to the "wall, floor, ceiling, room." Judd's own minimalist sculptures from the mid-1960 speak to these qualities. His large angular three-dimensional geometric forms exhibited on the the wall and floor that jut into the room's space resist traditional associations of the flatness of a canvas and adding to the effect of a painting as a sculpture hung on the wall.

Robert Morris's essays from 1966 "Notes on Sculpture: Part I and Part II" were written shortly after Judd's essay and address similar themes regarding "actual space." Yet Morris saw the benefit of maintaining distinctions between sculpture and painting because he believed sculpture created different perceptual demands on the viewer. Morris notes

[221] Donald Judd, "Specific Objects" [1965] in *Donald Judd: Complete Writings 1959 – 1975* (Nova Scotia: NSCAD Press, 2005), 184.
[222] Judd, "Specific Objects", 184.

that sculptures evoke a "tactile" interaction whereas paintings relies only on "optical sensibilities."[223] By evoking the language of bodily cognition (the "tactile") as a preferred mode of viewing, Morris argues that spectators would have to approach three-dimensional forms differently depending on the how bodies inhabit the "actual space" that extends around the object. He states:

> One of the conditions of knowing an object is supplied by the sending of the gravitational force acting upon it in actual space. That is, space with three, not two coordinates. The ground plane, not the wall, is the necessary support for the maximum awareness of the object.[224]

Morris, like Judd, insisted that an art object was constituted by the space around it and that by placing objects on the floor without a plinth viewers would move their bodies around the room to gain to solicit the "maximum awareness" and "knowing" because they were using their bodies as a measure of space. In "Notes on Sculpture: Part II" (1966) Morris further suggests:

> The better new work takes relationships out of the work and makes them a function of space, light, and the viewer's field of vision. The object is but one of the terms in the newer esthetic. It is in some way more reflexive, because one's awareness of oneself existing in the same space as the work is stronger than in previous work, with its many internal relationships. One is more aware than before that he himself is establishing relationships as he apprehends the object from various positions and under varying conditions of light and spatial context.[225]

Morris's own minimalist sculptures from this period speak to these concerns regarding "one's awareness of oneself existing in the same space as the work." His piece *Untitled (L-Beams)* made in 1965 is often paired with his writing, especially in installation art histories,

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[223] Robert Morris, "Notes on Sculpture: Part I" [1966, in *Artforum*]; reprinted in *Continuous Project Altered Daily: The Writings of Robert Morris*, October Books (Cambridge: MIT Press, 1993), 223.
[224] Morris, "Notes on Sculpture: Part I" [1966], 224.
[225] Morris, "Notes on Sculpture, Part II" [1966] in *Continuous Project Altered Daily,* 15.

to illustrate the way minimalist art deployed large scale geometric forms and industrial materials to supposedly draw the viewer into its "real space." Furthermore, Morris's point that the viewer is "establishing relationships as he apprehends the object from various positions and under varying conditions of light and spatial context" is a key discursive antecedent for installation art histories which would later describe the "medium" of installation art as a spatial experience without a single object or focal point, or a single determined perspective from which to view the work.[226]

A third key early interlocutor of what would become a central concept in installation art history was critic Michael Fried in his essay "Art and Objecthood" published shortly after Judd's and Morris's essays in 1967. Fried takes issue with Morris and Judd's artwork and their theories of new minimalist sculpture (what Fried called "literalist art") because they create an undesirable "theatrical" mode of spectatorship. He notes how the large scale of Morris's and Judd's artworks force what he calls their "objecthood" upon the viewer's sense of space and time, creating a fraught relationship between the art and the sensing body. He notes, "the work refuses, obstinately, to let him [the viewer] alone – which is to say, it refuses to stop confronting him, distancing him, isolating him."[227] By creating this situation, Fried concludes that the "literalist espousal of objecthood amounts to nothing other than a plea for a new genre of theatre, and theatre is now the negation of art."[228] This essay, despite its active critique of this style of minimalist sculpture, became an important

[226] For more on debates about medium specificity and sculpture in the 1960s, see Applin, *Eccentric Objects*, 28 – 31.
[227] Michael Fried, "Art and Objecthood" (1967, in *Artforum*), *Art and Objecthood: Essays and Reviews* (The University of Chicago Press: London and Chicago, 1998), 163-164.
[228] Ibid, 153.

articulation in installation art histories of the way the viewer's body engages with the spaces around sculpture in a "theatrical" way.[229]

A fourth (and lesser known) essay by another New York based critic, Lucy Lippard, also discusses the relationship between of painting and sculpture in a way that helps to bring Morton's work back into view. In 1967, the same year that Fried published "Art and Objecthood", Lippard published her essay "As Painting is to Sculpture: A Changing Ratio" where she examines how new forms of sculpture were taking on aspects of painting. Lippard's position is closer to Judd's and Morris's in her belief in the "emphasis on painting as a three-dimensional object" because it engages with the viewer's body by demanding a physical interaction with its spaces (like sculpture).[230] Lippard characterizes these new works as what she called "the structural 'third stream' (which includes some shaped canvases)."[231] "Shaped canvases" were canvases that were not square or rectangular. Some had more than four sides and were not necessarily flat or two dimensional either with more than one plane on which to paint.

Lippard's lesser-known essay draws on something that Morris, Judd and Fried do not — Lippard relates these "structural third stream" shaped canvas paintings to architecture. She notes:

> The notion of painting as object has two interpretations. First as a specific surface but without connotations of volume and physicality, second as an actual three-dimensional thing. Both contributed to the idea of a non-sculptural sculpture, that is, a sculpture which rejects the history of sculpture as precedent in favor of the history of painting, and at times, of architecture and engineering.[232]

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[229] For an example of Fried's essay's pedigree in installation art history, see Bishop, *Installation Art*, 53 – 54.
[230] Lucy Lippard, "As Painting is to Sculpture: A Changing Ratio" in *American Sculpture of the Sixties,* ed. Tuchman. exh. cat. (Los Angeles: Los Angeles County Museum of Art, 1967) 31.
[231] Ibid.
[232] Ibid.

Lippard's reference to architecture and engineering at the intersection of the new relationship between painting and sculpture is significant because it brings to bear a social and humanistic framework back to this discourse. Where Morris's, Fried's and Judd's essays deal with much more formal and abstract spatial qualities of the works, Lippard's links shaped paintings to the "actual spaces" bodies actually inhabit ("architecture") or indeed those space that bodies build ("engineering"). This has important ramifications for thinking about Ree Morton's early work because, in what follows, I discuss how Morton also made shaped canvases which I suggest shows a similar social link to the spatial and architectural relationship between painting and sculpture which led Morton to develop her own early installation art dealing with domestic spaces.

Ree Morton's Early Work: 1968 – 1972

Between 1968 and 1970 Ree Morton made a series of shaped canvases. Morton's art history teacher and friend Marcia Tucker surmised that in this early period Morton "explored the paintings and the sculptures separately to see if she had to make a choice and then finally she put them both together."[233] As noted previously, when Morton asked in 1969 "what are paintings? what are sculpture?" and stated that "paintings are too flat. paintings are objects. ok. after that, what?", her dissatisfaction with medium specificity is evident. The fact that she noted "paintings are objects" not only suggests Morton was aware of the aforementioned objecthood debates, but indicates Morton probably read Fried's writing, for it was Fried in 1965 who wrote that "paintings are objects in the world."[234]

[233] Marcia Tucker, quoted in *Ree Morton: Retrospective* (New York: New Museum, 1981), 11.
[234] Michael Fried, "Three American Painters" (1965) reprinted in *Art and Objecthood: Essays and Reviews* (The University of Chicago Press: London and Chicago, 1998), 232.

The first shaped canvas Morton made around 1968 called *Early Piece* (fig. 22) consists of two angular yet curved flat panels of purple and green stripes mounted on the wall. This work is more in keeping with 1960s colour field paintings – a mature off-shoot of abstract expressionism known for expansive and unconventionally shaped canvases. Morton referred to *Early Piece* as her "silly Stellas" referencing artist Frank Stella's series of shaped canvases made between 1965 and 1971.[235] Morton's second work *Shaped Painting* (1969 – 1970) (fig. 23) is a three-dimensional, multi-plane canvas made from a series of structured wooden frames. The effect is a topography of undulating surfaces and apexes, alluding to minimalist sculptural qualities of geometric forms and hard, straight lines, speaking to Morton's statement that "paintings are objects." *Shaped Painting* aligns with the aforementioned debates by Judd and Morris with regards to their evocations of "actual" or "real" space. Morton's own notes on "space, real, imaginary, illusionary" with the phrase "air plus objects" points to her awareness of how spatial compositions of objects operate in relation to floors, walls and the space of a room to activate the viewers' perceptual experience. Recalling Morris's propositions that objects be placed on the floor without a plinth in order to activate and structure space ("the ground plane, not the wall, is the necessary support for the maximum awareness of the object"), Morton also placed *Shaped Painting* directly on the floor, effectively turning it from a painting into an (sculptural) "object."[236]

A series of Morton's notebook entries from around 1968 – 1969 (fig. 24) shows her interest in relating objects, materials and space within a more clearly defined architectural

[235] Morton, *Notebook* (RM21, 1968), 46. For an example of Frank Stella's shaped canvases, see Frank Stella, *Ifafa II* (1968) Metallic powder and acrylic on canvas. See, https://www.artsy.net/artwork/frank-stella-ifafa-ii Last accessed July 2017.
[236] *Shaped Canvas* has since been destroyed. See photographs of the work in *Ree Morton: Works 1971-1977*, 181.

framework that I suggest can be linked more specifically to domestic space. A notebook page entitled "things that come from the ground" shows drawings captioned as "trees", "flowers", "rocks", "telephone poles", "pipes", "hose", "springs", "beds", "floors" and "chairs."[237] These are not abstract shapes or geometric forms as one sees in Morris and Judd's minimalist works, but rather they are everyday items one might find within close proximity to indoor and outdoor domestic spaces. Later in the notebooks in iterative drawings these same "things that come from the ground" morphed into larger geometric abstract objects rendered in three-dimensions (echoing the shape of *Shaped Painting*) while other "found" objects remain unchanged.[238] Although most of these drawings weren't made into sculptures, they document how domestic found objects served as Morton's starting point to connect the wall to the floor animating a spatial dynamic in an abstract way. This is a key instance that marks a new direction in Morton's three-dimensional work away from the more formal and material-based concerns of Judd and Morris — it is an early use of domestic objects in her practice that relates to a social realm of architecture and domesticity. This interest in connecting the wall to the floor with found objects relating to the home is important as as it was a method that persisted as her installations developed.

Opening out Morton's objects into a social and domestic framework allows for new discourses relating to sculpture and architecture. Marcia Tucker said of Morton's work at this time:

> I think she realized she was neither a painter nor a sculptor, therefore the forms of painting and sculpture weren't really of interest to her. At that point she started getting into this really

[237] Morton, *Notebook* (RM21: 1968) 22.
[238] Morton, *Notebook* (RM21: 1968), 20 – 32.

> arcane relationship to her work: more mystery, more romance, more eccentricity. By working very quickly she absorbed every idea she could about painting and sculpture per se. I think from that point she went outside those areas for her inspiration.[239]

The significance of Tucker's point is not whether Morton was a painter or a sculptor (or both or neither), but that she went beyond the media-based discourses (as seen in the writing of Judd, Morris and Fried) by going "outside those areas" and relating her abstract forms to everyday domestic objects. It is my suggestion that this same playfulness Tucker notes with "specificity" and "abstraction" that links Morton's use of household objects to social and autobiographical referents. As I will demonstrate, as Morton's approach to materials and objects developed she further destabilized the dialogue between painting and sculpture, between floor and wall, and between modes of representation and abstraction to create an idiosyncratic approach to installation artworks relating to domestic space. Taking a closer look at Morton's early works made after 1970 opens up these ideas further.

Morton's first significant public exhibition after graduating was *Twenty Six by Twenty Six* held at Vassar College of Art in New York State in 1971. According to curator Mary Delahoyd, all of the works delivered "new sculptural possibilities in the process of definition" that conveyed "the emergence of a new sculptural attitude."[240] The show featured works by Gordon Matta Clark, Lynda Benglis, Jackie Winsor, Dorothea Rockburne and Italo Scanga (Morton's mentor from Tyler art school) among others. Morton's piece in the show *No Title* (1970) (fig. 25) consisted of a three-tiered open structure made from

[239] Tucker in interview with Allan Schwartzman and Kathleen Thomas on November 1979, as quoted in *Ree Morton: Retrospective 1971 – 1977*, 11-12.
[240] Mary Delahoyd, *Twenty Six by Twenty Six*, Catalogue for the exhibition held at Vassar, Poughkeepsie (New York: Vassar College Art Gallery, 1971), 3.

plywood, canvas and screens suspended by rope from a wooden T-shape support with spaghetti-like twigs spilling out of its structure. Morton supposedly took inspiration for this work when she found diagrams of food drying racks in the back of an old cookbook. Using the same materials specified in the cookbook, she abstracted the rack, describing the process as "a wonderful way to work" to make "a very weird object."[241] In an essay included in the catalogue for *No Title*, critic Margeurite Klobe wrote:

> Every piece in this show demonstrates to some degree a very definite breaking down of all barriers between the spectator and the work of art…like Ree Morton's piece, they often bridge the space between ceiling and floor or wall and floor by occupying parts of both. In most of these works the material is arranged casually so that the floor, ground or wall forms an integral part of the piece.[242]

Klobe's emphasis on Morton's work's relationship between wall and floor, and painting and sculpture implicates her art within of this trend in sculpture and the "breaking down of barriers between spectator and work of art" — ideas which have a key lineage in what would later become a central tenet of installation art discourse – but also show another example of abstraction from a domestic reference point.

Morton's interest in space continued after 1970 and her pieces began growing in scale, using new experimental materials and techniques. This new dynamic time in her practice can be seen in drawings in her notebooks that document approximately 25 large-scale installation works Morton made in her studio in downtown Philadelphia (away from her home) between July 1971 and November 1972 (figs 26, 27, 28).[243] Of these 25 installations, twelve used large wooden logs, plants and heavy branches (some well over

[241] Ree Morton, as quoted by Carol Squiers, "Ree Morton: Antidote for Madness," *The New Examiner* 2, no. 4 (January 1975), 4.
[242] Margeurite Klobe, "The Components of 26 x 26," *Twenty Six by Twenty Six*, 9.
[243] This figure is given in *Ree Morton: Works 1971-1977*, pp. 63. Many of these works were made and shown in her studio but never exhibited in galleries.

her body size) arranged to bisect her studio space in different ways. The result was a series of new large spatial environments which were, in effect, Morton's earliest installation works. The photographs and dates of these installations suggest they were spaced apart by approximately a month. Morton seems to have continually recycled the same materials, experimenting for over a year with these objects in new iterations.[244] Speaking to her working methods around this time, Morton remarked:

> I have things around, and then as I work, it's almost a kind of drawing process. It involves picking something up, placing it over there, looking at it, putting a third thing in, taking it out. It's a really physical manipulation of those things as lines or areas or zones or whatever they do, and then working from there.[245]

Three artworks particularly illustrate what Morton may have meant by the "physical manipulation of things as lines." For example, in *Untitled (July)* (1971) (fig. 29), Morton suspends a branch from the ceiling by wire to hover just above the floor. The branch's roots are placed at the junction where the floor meets the wall and because the branch's base is surrounded by a mound of dirt, there is an illusion that the branch has grown up from the wall's apex into the room and then back down into the floor again. Underneath the branch, rocks and bricks form a semi-circle on the floor, echoing the curvature of the arc of the branch above. Perhaps to further contrast the two sets of curved "lines", a straight thin path of dirt runs along the floor into the corner of the room to the base of another emergent tree rising from the floor up to the ceiling. This composition cleverly triangulates a series of

[244] Morton's many black and white photographs of these installations show how she carefully documented her works. Most images seem to have been taken in the artist's studio given that the same floor can be seen. See *Ree Morton: Retrospective*, pgs. 13 – 24. As described in the last chapter, Morton moved her studio from the basement of the house she lived in with her three young children in Philadelphia to a bigger studio space separate from her house. This had a significant impact on the size of the materials she could store, how she could manipulate her materials with tools (especially power tools that were unsafe to keep around children) and this impacted the extent to which she could construct sizable installations.

[245] Ree Morton, in *Ree Morton: An Interview* (Dir.) Kate Horsfield and Lyn Blumental, 1974, Video Data Bank, The School of the Art Institute Chicago.

coordinates as if linking lines across points in a drawing so that the neutral white space of the room is both carved up into "zones" and opened out by these marked lines creating new "areas." This is also due to how Morton's mismatched materials – branches, dirt, bricks – are carefully arranged. Morton bisects the space diagonally twice, once with the arced branch raised from the floor and then again with the dirt line drawing the eye back along the ground and into the corner. This spatial construction animates the materials as if they are lightly drawn lines and relates her the delicate touch of her sculptural forms to the medium of drawing. Indeed, as Marcia Tucker describes, these works have "a certain kind of perversity" because "sculpture could be non-substantive, that sculpture didn't have to deal with volume or with weight, that you could draw sculpture and that you could sculpt drawing…it could go all over the place."[246] She concludes aptly that Morton's strength was that she "put things together that didn't go together."[247] Two other installation works from this period illustrates further how Morton developed, what I suggest, was a particular kind of logic of materials that produced an enclosed spatial effect that is specific to her technique of making installation art.

Untitled (October) (1971) (fig. 30) and *Untitled (December)* (1971) (fig. 31) both employ similar arrangements of large and small objects that extend along the floor and up the wall. Yet looking closer at the arrangements in both works, there are connections between the objects. What I want to emphasize is the way Morton bridges the space between the wall and floors in these works by using materials and forms that echo what is seen on the floor, with what is seen on the wall. For example, in *Untitled (October)* the short wooden stubs on the floor protruding vertically are arranged in a 4 x 4 grid. On the wall

[246] Tucker, quoted in *Ree Morton: Works 1971 – 1977,* 19.
[247] Ibid.

behind them there are four more of the same stubs in a frame extending horizontally. Assuming we are standing in front of the work with the floor stubs below us and the frame around chest or eye height in front of us, Morton seems to be showing us another view of the stubs if we are lying prone on the ground and seeing the grid from the perspective at ground level. On the white wall behind the work, Morton has also repeatedly drawn short lines on the wall that are the same size as the stubs, imitating another iteration of the stubs in a different medium.

A similar strategy is used in *Untitled (December)*. In this work a grid of stubs appears again on the floor, but this time instead of a wooden frame on the wall Morton has placed a painting with a charcoal grey background upon which fifteen irregular white circles are painted, also in a loosely gridded format. The painting of white circles on the wall echoes the formation and size of the real wooden stubs on the floor directly underneath, but again, as though the viewer is seeing them from an aerial view. In this work Morton complicates the relationship between painting and sculpture not only in medium, but in the perspective use of space. The circles in the painting seem to be representations *of* the sculptural stubs underneath it, but as could be said to be equally true, the sculptural stubs are a three-dimensional representation of the forms as seen in the painting. One impression given is that Morton may have painted the canvas *with* her sculptures using the stubs as stamps, *and* painted onto her sculptures.[248] In this, there is a circuit among the materials and their modes of representation in spectatorship; the sense of multiple perspectives is enhanced by a kind of logic that plays out between the painterly and sculptural forms in this parallel

[248] Morton did not in fact make the work on paper with the stubs – this drawing was made two years earlier in 1970 but the white-tipped stubs would have been made to echo their counterpoint shape on the canvas. Morton sketched a different installation with similar forms and made explicit directions for putting on the wall "marks made by dipping stick in paint and printing". See Morton, *Notebook* (RM12, 1973), 10.

strategy of representation. As one critic Rosemary Mayer put it, Morton's work was "an elaborate joke about materials and about process art…a jibe which deals with showing the inherent qualities of certain materials."[249]

These strategies set up a specific connectivity between the media of sculpture and painting, between the spaces of the floor and wall, and as a result created a semi-contained three dimensional spaces for the viewer inside the existing interior of the room, making a kind of room enclosed within a room. The way the viewer is placed between these "rooms" reinforces the way Judd's "actual spaces" and Morris's "real space" engage the viewer's body using its perception of scale as a measure of perspective within the space. These strategies in Morton's installations create a kind of circuitous logic of forms and a looping of systems of representation that are contingent on the viewers' bodily position. By seeing two different views on the floor and the wall the viewer's perspective is split and fractured. Claire Bishop characterized this exact mode of spectatorship as typical of installation art because, she said, it relied on "multiple perspectives" which "deny the viewer any one ideal place from which to survey the work."[250]

Morton's other installations *Untitled (March)* (1971) (fig. 32) and *Untitled* (1972) (fig. 33) drew on similar formal strategies to the previous works, but in both of these pieces, Morton used the corners of the rooms instead of arranging the objects along a wall. In these two works, she drew lines with heavy pencil (vertically in the former and horizontally in the latter) to create grids that look like wooden fretwork on the walls, as well as "doorways" and "windows" drawn with pencil or represented with wooden frames.

[249] Rosemary Mayer, *Arts Magazine*, New York City (February 1973, Volume 47, No. 4) 71 – 72 reprinted in *Ree Morton: Retrospective 1971 – 1977,* 87.
[250] Bishop, *Installation Art,* 13.

In both works Morton arranged stepping-stone discs of wood on the floor that both invite entry but also with branches bisecting the space as if to delimit where the viewer can move. In this, Morton reinforced the permeable nature of installation spaces while at the same time orchestrating viewers' movements around its contours.

The fact that Morton made these room-like installations around the same time as she was negotiating working in domestic and non-domestic studios links the development of her work to its origins in the home and domestic space. These abstract interior installations, with their carefully constructed compositions that control the movement of viewers' bodies around objects and spaces, perhaps not only animates the absent artist's body and its containment within domestic configurations, but also symbolically speaks to the lived domestic corporeal experience of some women more generally. When Kathleen Thomas and Allan Schwartzman wrote an essay for Morton's retrospective exhibition catalogue in 1981, they described these particular works as creating "a highly interiorized space" through the "physical openings", "symbolic doorways" and "unbounded edges" rendered in the arrangement.[251] Like Lippard's "third stream", these pieces show how Morton adopted a distinctly architectural approach to space in terms of structures arranged to guide viewers according to lines that demarcate doors, windows and paths — all of which resemble thresholds between the inside and outside of a home. Bringing Morton's installations in dialogue with domestic space in this way is a key strategy in this study with regards to how I suggest her earlier works around 1971 and 1972 (with their more direct references to the architecture of rooms or perhaps a domestic interiors) distance Morton's work from installation art historical discourses related to abstract

[251] Kathleen Thomas and Allan Schwartzman, *Ree Morton: Retrospective 1971 – 1977*, 19.

minimalist geometric forms of Morris and Judd, and instead draw her early installations into closer dialogue with the politics of gendered domestic spaces and feminist critiques as they were framed around social architecture and gendered bodily experience.

Anarchitecture and Shelters: *Thresholes* and Thresholds

Architectural ideas became more significant in Morton's practice between 1973 and 1974. This was almost certainly due to her association with the Anarchitecture group after she moved to New York in 1972. "Anarchitecture" was the name adopted by a loose group of artists dancers, musicians and affiliate collaborators in SoHo in New York around 1973 who were interested in avant-garde architecture.[252] The group was founded by Gordon Matta Clark, who had trained as an architect but, while still at school in the early 1970s, rejected architectural traditions. The group's interests involved ways of synthesizing artistic media and approaches to sculpture, land art, dance, performance art, video art and conceptual art as they related to space and the built environment. Group activities ranged from performances and exhibitions inside derelict and decaying industrial buildings in New York, to informal seminar-style gatherings to discuss art, architecture, the built environment, philosophy and topical cultural texts.[253] The exhibitions and seminars largely

[252] Members' affiliation with Anarchitecture tended to be quite casual. Those who have been linked with the group include: Gordon Matta Clark, Laurie Anderson, Trisha Brown, Jean Dupuy, Michael Goldberg, Neil Jenney, Joan Jonas, Robert Grosvenor, Cynthia Carlson, Joel Fisher, Tina Girouard, Suzanne Harris, Jene Highstein, Lucio Pozzi, Susan Rothenberg, Keith Sonnier, Lynn Umlauf, Bernard Kirschenbaum, Richard Landry, Max Neuhaus, Richard Nonas and Alan Saret; Jeffrey Lew, Carol Goodden, Ree Morton and Keith Sonnier. See Robert Pincus-Witten "Gordon Matta Clark: Art in the Interrogative" in *Gordon Matta Clark: A Retrospective,* (ed.) Mary Jane Jacob, Chicago: Musuem of Contemporary Art, Chicago May 8th – August 18, 1985.

[253] Though the group had named themselves Anarchitecture (supposedly a hybrid of "anarchy" and "architecture"), membership was informal and fluctuated, predominantly revolving around socializing and collaboration rather than creating collective actions or manifestos.

took place in Matta Clark's gallery 112 Greene Street as well as the artist-run restaurant-gallery called *Food*, where many of the artists involved worked and socialized.

As spokesperson for the group, Matta Clark summarized Anarchitecture's activities as "an attempt to clarify our personal awareness of a place."[254] He noted "Anarchitecture does not imply anti-architecture, but rather is an attempt at clarifying ideas about space which are personal insights and reactions, rather than formal socio-political statements."[255] The description shows the emphasis on subjective "personal" experience and an "awareness" of and "insights and reactions" in relation to places and spaces in collaborative and social forms of artistic activity. As Matta Clark said "Anarchitecture was about making space without building it."[256]

Morton took up with the Anarchitecture group around 1972 or 1973. She had met Matta Clark previously when both artists exhibited work at the exhibition *Twenty Six by Twenty Six* in 1971 and it is thought she may have exhibited at his gallery 112 Greene Street in 1971.[257] Morton attended Anarchitecture meetings mostly between 1973 and 1974 and became his lover around this time (see my discussion of this later in this chapter). While Morton is not typically cited as a core member of the group, her name and her picture appears in Anarchitecture archives showing she attended meetings (fig. 34) .[258] Many members of Anarchitecture became Morton's close friends, colleagues, and collaborators as evidenced particularly by one of Morton's installations *Something in the Wind* (1975)

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[254] Gordon Matta Clark in a letter to Robert Lendenfrost, dated Jan. 16th, 1975. Archives of Gordon Matta Clark, Canadian Centre for Architecture, "Gordon Matta Clark Letters: PHCON2002:0016:003:008".
[255] Gordon Matta Clark in a letter to Robert Lendenfrost, Jan. 21st, 1975. Archives of Gordon Matta Clark Canadian Centre for Architecture, "Gordon Matta Clark Letters: PHCON2002:0016:003:017"
[256] James Attlee, "Towards Anarchitecture: Gordon Matta Clark And Le Corbusier", *Tate Papers*, (2007) Spring 3, http://www.tate.org.uk/download/file/fid/7297 (last accessed March 21, 2016).
[257] See my discussion of this on page 144.
[258] A photograph of Morton (back turned to the camera) attending an Anarchitecture meeting can be seen in *Gordon Matta Clark: A Retrospective,* 10.

where she included many Anarchitecture members' names on the 100 personalized flag panels made for the piece.[259]

While Anarchitecture and Gordon Matta Clark have become synonymous with a radical intersection of art and architecture in New York in the 1970s, the cohort of women artists associated with Anarchitecture are rarely discussed in literature on the group. Affiliated dancers and performance artists including Trisha Brown, Joan Jonas, Tina Girouard, Laurie Anderson and Suzanne Harris are known to have been involved with Anarchitecture between 1973 and 1975. Even less discussed in histories of the group is the fact that most of these women considered themselves feminists and were making art relating to bodies and sexual politics.[260] In particular, the practices of Brown, Anderson, Harris and Jonas related space to a gendered experience of the female body. Looking at the works these artists produced in 1973 (the year Morton met the Anarchitecture group) are socio-cultural contexts for Ree Morton's own practice.[261]

For Trisha Brown, architecture was a stage for her semi-improvised performances. In the case of one performance of her piece, *Woman Walking Down a Ladder* in 1973 a woman was suspended on a harness to walk "horizontally" down a vertical ladder on the side of a water tower, pointing to how women move around space differently to men.[262] That same year Suzanne Harris made *Flying Machine* which rigged two harnesses into the ceiling. One was for her and the other for a performer (specified as female) to literally and

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[259] *Ree Morton: Works 1971-1977*, 133 – 137. See fig. 36.
[260] For a discussion of dance and Anarchitecture, see *Pioneers of the Downtown Scene New York 1970s*. There is very little discussion of gender or feminism in this text.
[261] Trisha Brown, Laurie Anderson and Tina Girouard all studied with experimental improvisational dance pioneer Anna Halprin. For more on the emergence of live art, dance and feminism in the 1970s, see Peggy Phelan, Violence and Ruptures: Misfires of the Ephemeral" in *Live Art in LA: Performance in Southern California, 1970 – 1983***,** ed. Peggy Phelan (London and Los Angeles: Routledge, 2012), 1- 38.
[262] For an image of this work, see http://www.museoreinasofia.es/en/collection/artwork/trisha-brown-woman-walking-down-ladder

symbolically "puppet" each other hanging in the air.[263] Again in 1973, Laurie Anderson produced and exhibited a series of texts and photographs called *Fully Automated Nikon (Object/Objection/Objectivity)* documenting the men in her neighborhood in New York City as they accosted her or commented on her appearance.[264] Lastly, in a series of performances called *Mirror Check*, Joan Jonas used mirror props to look at her own nude female body and later, video projection screens were set up as spatially constructed immersive installations forming stage areas for performances where she explored ways her body could to be simultaneously looked at by herself and her audience.[265]

In these works it is clear each artist had a distinctive take on what Matta Clark called a "personal awareness of a place" but from a specific perspective of the female body. These different art forms — performance, dance, video, text and photography — each explicitly manifest a female-specific experience of moving or experiencing space. This emphasized how gendered subjectivity is implicated in the built environment and how women might experience space and their bodies differently from men.[266] What I want to suggest is that this gendered approach to embodied space encouraged Ree Morton to bring her own "personal awareness of place" into her work at this time.

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[263] For an image of this work, see, Claire Barliant, "112 Greene Street" in *The Paris Review*, July 25, 2012. http://www.theparisreview.org/blog/2012/07/25/112-greene-street/ or *112 Workshop: 112 Greene Street: History, Artists & Artworks,* eds Robyn Brentano and Mark Savitt, (New York: New York University Press, 1981), 18.

[264] See Lucy Lippard's discussion on Anderson's work in *From the Center: Feminist Essays on Women's Art* (New York: Dutton, 1976), 102-103.

[265] *Mirror Check* was first performed in 1970 at the Emanu-El, YMCA, New York and the University of California, San Diego, California. See http://www.stedelijk.nl/en/artwork/92004-mirror-check Last accessed July, 2017.

[266] For more discussion on how women sculptors were influenced by dance in New York in the 1970s, see Alexandra Schwartz, "Mind, Body, Sculpture," in *Modern Women: Women Artists at the Museum of Modern Art* (New York: the Museum of Modern Art, 2010), 412 – 427.

It is significant that Morton remained close friends with Laurie Anderson.[267] Morton probably met Anderson when she moved to New York in 1972 as both artists attended feminist consciousness raising groups together around 1973. One particular video-performance work by Morton, *Untitled*, made in 1972 (only one of two video-performance pieces she ever made) shows Morton experimenting with filming herself which may have been because of her exposure to Anderson's video and performative practice around the same time. In the video work of 1972, Morton filmed herself moving slowly through one of her installations (fig. 35). She can be seen performing the actions originally used to make the installation. For example Morton mimed the act of drawing over her works on paper, as well as cutting wood and simulating moving objects around the space.

Morton's second video-performance work was staged in front of a live audience at Artpark, an outdoor art venue in New York State, during a residency in 1976. The work was called *Maid of the Mist* (fig. 36). Morton made brightly coloured Celastic sculptures of ladders and lifesaver-rings used as props for what she called "a symbolic rescue" of a mythic indigenous "maid" who was said to have been sacrificed into the Niagara gorge.[268] In the performance, Morton stands on the shore with the lifesaver attached by rope to her waist as it bobs in the river. In the film of the performance, Morton can be seen standing still for a long time until she finally cuts the lifesaver loose. The artist and the audience wait for the lifesaver to slide over the waterfall and the performance ends.[269]

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[267] Laurie Anderson dedicated a verse from her song "Walk the Dog" to Ree Morton after her death. "I went to the movies, and I saw a dog thirty feet high/ And this dog was made entirely of light/ And he filled up the whole screen/ And his eyes were long hallways/ He had those long, echoing, hallway eyes." See Laurie Anderson, "Reminiscences" *Ree Morton: Retrospective* (New York, New Museum, 1980), 75.
[268] *Maid of the Mist* is also the name for the boat that takes visitors to see Niagra Falls.
[269] The video was watched by the author at the *Ree Morton Retrospective* at the Reina Sofia in Madrid in 2015.

Although *Maid of the Mist* was made after Morton's time with the Anarchitecture group, the legacy of her association with its female practitioners can still be seen. For example, as her female Anarchitecture colleagues had done, Morton too framed the performance in a gendered way, noting it "a gesture towards being female."[270] Interestingly, these two video works are the only artworks by Ree Morton where you see her body or any body represented. In Morton's practice the body is very rarely directly shown and when it is, it is abstracted in forms or shapes. The fact that in this medium of video is the only time Morton's corporeality is so explicit means these works may be situated alongside those feminist works of Jonas, Brown, Anderson and Harris, who all also performed in their own works too. The significance of Morton's own body appearing in a video performance should be therefore understood within the politicized framework of feminist art in the 1970s where imaging of the female body was a political reversal of the previous tradition of women being imaged by men. To wit, Suzanne Harris's *Flying Machine* metaphorically captures this shift in power in the 1970s — here, it is two women who control each others' movements and bodies in space.

Morton's alignment with the female members of Anarchitecture and their feminist contexts helps to bring her work closer to feminist art contexts in New York. When Morton moved to New York in 1972 she is known to have attended feminist consciousness raising groups hosted by Marcia Tucker. She also attended meetings at the feminist and women-only gallery A.I.R. where she first met feminist critic Lucy Lippard and she later attended lectures by Linda Nochlin and Joyce Kozloff, both of whom lectured on the unequal

[270] Ree Morton, "Statement" in *Artpark : The Program in Visual arts*, (ed.) Sharon Edelman, (Lewistown, N.Y. : Artpark c.1976), 164.

situation for women artists.[271] Morton ultimately did not chose long-term affiliation with A.I.R. or other feminist groups. Friend Cynthia Carlson recalled: "They [A.I.R. members] interviewed both Ree and I and we discussed it together and decided against it…we were nervous to be called a 'woman artist' and we just wanted to be 'artists'."[272] However, the fact that they chose not to be called "women artists" didn't mean that Morton, Carlson or fellow artists who made the same decisions weren't involved in feminist art or its debates, yet in some cases this fact has obscured them from feminist art histories. On the contrary, around 1973 Morton began making work about feminist debates of gendered aesthetics and motherhood (I discuss this problem of the marginalization of some women artists in feminist art history itself more in chapter three).

These circumstances in 1972 up to 1974 highlight the importance of Morton's participation in feminist activities *and* her involvement with the Anarchitecture group and concerns with space, gender and the body that empowered her to explore domestic autobiographical narratives within her own installation art. Therefore it is worth attempting to understand more about how Morton's interest in architecture informed her installation art to appreciate how her material and conceptual approaches to autobiographical content materialized.

Going back to Anarchitecture, domesticity was a commonly addressed theme in Gordon Matta Clark's own practice too. At his gallery 112 Greene Street, Matta Clark's early works exhibited included *Live House* (1971), *Open House* (1972) and *Bronx Floors* (1972), all of which centered around ways to destroy, reuse and inhabit domestic spaces of disused

[271] Morton wrote in her notebooks about these lectures. Morton, *Notebook* (RM04: 1975), 8.
[272] Carlson, in interview with the author, March 4th, 2014.

downtown SoHo buildings in New York City.[273] Matta Clark's intervention in urban domestic infrastructures was a way of taking apart what he called "Non.u.memtal" spaces, referring to everyday and mundane spaces.[274] He called these architectural interventions a process of "undoing a building" which typically consisted of cutting away parts of walls, ceilings and floors in an act antithetical to the traditional notion that architecture is intended to "build".

In 1972, Matta Clark began a multi-part project called *Bronx Floors* where he created large holes in ceilings, floors and internal and external walls in an abandoned domestic loft without consent from the landlord. One sub-section of this piece was titled *Threshole*, in which he cut a wide hole into a floor directly across the threshold of a doorway between two rooms.[275] The aperture extends two feet into both rooms and allows natural light to flow between the rooms and from the exposed floor below. As the portmanteau title of the work implies — splicing the terms "thresholds" and "holes" — "threshole" is a paradigm of both space and non-space. If both holes and thresholds are distinguished by borders and open areas, they also instruct a kind of transgression across and between the designated spaces. In the case of Matta Clark's *Threshole*, both the vertical and lateral holes between floors and rooms invite passage.

This paradigm of spatial and aesthetic transgression was also underpinned by political intent. Matta Clark undertook these works as guerrilla actions (without the landlord's consent) which involved in once case occupying an abandoned loft. This work is

[273] For more details on these works, see *112 Workshop / 112 Green Street,* 16, 28.
[274] Gordon Matta Clark, "Building Dissections" (date unknown) reprinted in *Gordon Matta Clark: Works and Collected Writings* (Barcelona: Poligrafa, 2006), 132.
[275] Images of this work were not able to be reproduced in this study, but can be seen on the webpage http://www.tate.org.uk/research/publications/tate-papers/07/towards-anarchitecture-gordon-matta-clark-and-le-corbusier Last Accessed July 2017.

said to refer to the affordable housing crisis in New York in the 1970s when gentrification was pushing out local residents while at the same time, old buildings remained derelict and undeveloped. Artists, especially the Anarchitecture members, regularly squatted in these disused industrial buildings in SoHo, sometimes illegally converting them into domestic dwellings and studios. It is therefore important to understand Matta Clark's inhabitance or "undoing" of a loft or home as not just as a formal or aesthetic innovation, but also as a radical critique of the capitalist economies controlling the housing market that many considered at fault for the housing crisis. By cutting up and literally taking apart or repurposing some of the disused industrial spaces of Manhattan, Matta Clark's actions drew attention to these abandoned spaces during a period when the price of rents were soaring and people couldn't afford homes in the city.[276]

Between 1972 and 1974 Morton had been been reading literature on alternative forms of architecture, some of which was almost certainly as result of an Anarchitecture group meetings where these kinds of ideas were discussed.[277] Morton said

> …at the time I was doing these pieces I began reading books on architecture and was using vocabulary…There were words like boundaries and zones and pathways and entrances…I really resist the word environment because environmental means to me that you go into that space and these spaces are meant to be viewed…spaces which are set aside for a specific purpose, or are unavailable in a certain way.[278]

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[276] For a detailed discussion of Matta Clark's works and his critiques of the economy and the housing market, see Andrew Strombeck, "David Wojnarowicz, Gordon Matta-Clark, and the Fordist Crisis in 1970s New York" http://post45.research.yale.edu/2016/10/david-wojnarowicz-gordon-matta-clark-and-the-fordist-crisis-in-1970s-new-york/ Last accessed April 28th, 2016.

[277] In an interview with Cynthia Carlson who was also an occasional attendee of Anarchitecture meetings, Carlson said "Gaston Bachelard's book *The Poetics of Space* was popular. 112 Greene Street was a venue for people that didn't have commercial galleries so they worked with those ideas of space. The Anarchitecture group were interested in those things. Richard Nonas used to be an anthropologist before. Thinking about cultures and thinkers like Levi Strauss was talked about all the time. And installations poured out of that thinking on space." Carlson in interview with the author on March 4th, 2014.

[278] Morton as quoted by Squiers, "Ree Morton: Antidotes for Madness", 4. Squiers notes the quote is taken from a lecture Morton delivered at Artemesia Gallery in Chicago on November 7, 1974 or in conversation with the author.

Interestingly, Morton's architectural research seemed to come from books that were not strictly interested the formal practice of architecture but instead examined alternative approaches to making domestic structures. For example, looking at Morton's notebooks we see she read books about primitive dwellings from fields of Anthropology, Psychology and Philosophy. These books broached critical ideas such as the psychoanalytic theories of domestic interiors (Gaston Bachelard); an anthropological study of ancient dwellings built by "untrained architects" (Bernard Rudofsky); the emergence of primitive "shelters" emerged through social processes sustained through cultural epistemes (Paul Oliver); and the relationship between domestic architecture and phenomenology (Christian Norberg-Schulz).[279]

Rudofsky's and Oliver's books in particular seemed to stimulate Morton's interest in the shelter or the provisional dwelling. Notebook entries from 1972 show notes and drawings copied directly from Rudofsky's book *Architecture without Architects*, which was an anthropological analysis of prehistoric houses. It seems that before Morton even met the Anarchitecture group, she was interested in these ideas. Her drawings including tents and temporary hut-like structures made from sticks and logs. These sketches materialized into finished called drawings from 1972 called *Untitled (Rudofsky I)* (fig. 37) and *Untitled*

[279] Between 1972 and 1974, Morton quoted or make annotations in her notebooks on the following: Gaston Bachelard's *Poetics of Space* (1958, trans. 1964); Kevin Lynch's *The Image of the City* (1960); Bernard Rudofsky's *Architecture without Architects* (1964); Paul Oliver's *Shelter in Society: New Studies in Vernacular Architecture* (1969); Christian Norberg-Shulz's *Existence, Space and Architecture* (1971); Waldron Faulkner's *Architecture and Colour* (1972).

(Rudofsky II) (fig. 38) which both depict structures from Rudofsky's book alongside his quotes in Morton's handwriting.[280]

Morton's fascination with the shelter is best seen in four significant artworks made between 1971 and 1973 that signal an important period in her work relating to domesticity and architecture. *Untitled* (1971) (fig. 39) is an installation Morton made in 1971, likely exhibited first at Matta Clark's gallery 112 Greene Street.[281] The work includes two tall Y-shaped branches pinned against the wall that support seven branches each six-foot long and painted in different pastel hues. Inside the "frame" made by these branches are six pieces of paper evenly spaced in two rows of three pages. On each page is a drawing of tightly patterned Minimalist-style grids made with gouache, colour pencil and crayon. A second version of the work was made in 1973 also called *Untitled* (fig. 40) for an exhibition at Oberlin College. The show was called *Four Young Americans* and featured the work of emerging fellow female sculptors Jackie Winsor, Anne McCoy and Mary Miss.[282] The overall effect of both of Morton's shelter works is one of a basic structure or perhaps a doorway or entrance, though it is not clear if it leads inside or outside. The roof and walls in both pieces are rudimentarily rendered in branches and the arrangement of the drawings (especially in the 1971 version) unmistakably refer to windows.

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[280] Morton copied a drawing from this book based on a diagram of a tent taken from J. Chapelle, *Nomades Noirs du Sahara*, listed as in Bernard Rudofsky, *Architecture without Architects*, 44. These two works on paper were exhibited at the Reina Sofia retrospective in 2015.

[281] It is been suggested that Morton exhibited a piece of work at Matta Clark's gallery 112 Greene Street in 1971, though no details are given on which work was shown (see *Ree Morton: Works 1971-1977,* 196). In an image of *Untitled* (1971) on page 64 of the same catalogue, you can see the work against dark concrete walls which appear similar to those at 112 Greene in the same period (as opposed to Morton's studio which had white walls). Given both artists' interest in trees in 1971 and also Morton's penchant for recycling materials, I think it is likely the 1971 version of *Untitled* (1971) was the work exhibited at 112 Greene.

[282] Morton's new version of *Untitled* replaced the six pages of "windows" with one large sheet of paper (roughly the same size as the six sheets put together) on which two Y shaped-lines have been drawn that clearly echo the forked branches pinned to the wall.

Two other shelter works of note are *Untitled (Germantown Piece)* (1972) (fig. 41) and *Untitled* (1972) (fig. 42). These two installations, like the two versions of *Untitled* from 1971 and 1973, utilize the same structure of the rudimentary hut or shelter, but these works communicate a house more clearly by adding articulated doorways, ramps, gateways, walls, slatted roofing, and in *Untitled* (1972) (fig. 42) with picket fencing. Yet these installations are not homes in the sense of a solid, permanent structure in which to dwell. In *Untitled (Germantown Piece)* (fig. 41) the roof is incomplete and shoddily constructed like a kind of ramshackle awning. In *Untitled* (1972) (fig. 42) "walls" are built from bowed branches that seem barely able to prop up the slatted roof adding a particular structural precarity. As if to further emphasize instability, inside those branches is another set of smaller branches, like spindly legs, as if precariously propping up the "window" drawing, as if it is an autonomous internal structure, or a delicate building on legs.

Why represent domestic space in this dilapidated way? Morton's own reference I quoted earlier to "boundaries and zones and pathways and entrances and doorways" offers another way to think about these works. Consider that rather than being representations of homes, if they are instead "pathways and entrances and doorways" that don't actually lead anywhere. If these installations evoke a home that is both falling down *and* that can't be entered perhaps this is not a representation of "home" at all, but a visualization of a *threshold* state of being and feeling.

To evoke the language of thresholds circles back to Matta Clark's paradigm of the *Threshole* that is useful to apply to Morton's shelter installations. It is relevant that the meaning of the term "threshold" is twofold: threshold can mean "a piece of wood, metal, or stone that forms the bottom of a door that you walk over as you enter a room or building"

and "the point or level at which something begins or changes."[283] In this, threshold is both an object that delineates the point between inside and outside a space, but it is also a spatial proposition of transformation. "Threshold" in this case holds evocative possibilities regarding an affective framework of domesticity in Ree Morton's installations.

I suggest that Morton's repeated interest in thresholds broadly run in parallel to her relationship with Matta Clark and his interest in the politics of urban domestic architecture. Matta Clark's notebooks from around the time period he knew Morton show sketches of diagrams with abstract drawings using broken lines (fig. 43); this graphic style produces images that are very similar to Morton's use of lines in drawings such as *Untitled* (1973) (fig. 44) Broken lines may be understood as thresholds here specifically because this is the way doors and windows are drawn in architectural schematic diagrams. Given that Matta Clark was formally trained as an architect he would have been familiar with drawing in this way.

Broken lines reappear frequently throughout many of Morton's drawings and installations between 1971 and 1974. For example, in installations where there are rows of picket fences or borders as in *Untitled (Germantown)* (1972); *Untitled* (1972)*; Souvenir Piece* (1973); *To Each Concrete Man* (1974); and *See-Saw* (1975). Especially in Morton's *Untitled (Line Series)* drawings from 1974 (figs 45 and 46), broken lines appear in circular formations and look like organic cells, suggesting the body (like a building) is a structure. The broken lines in Morton's work are thresholds that mitigate inside and outside. As simple drawings contours seem to be porous or permeable walls, as skin is the border of the body. This link between architecture and bodies is further put into play considering the

[283] See Merriam-Webster dictionary definition, http://www.merriam-webster.com/dictionary/threshold Last accessed April 7th, 2016.

relationship between Matta-Clark and Morton too. The artists knew each other between 1971 and 1974 during which time they also became close friends and lovers.[284] Sexuality and creativity are corporeally linked across intellectual and physical thresholds. As such, the way Morton referred to, "borders," "zones," and "pathways" in her installation may be as much configured within the realm of the body and sensuality as they are in a formal language of materials and shapes. Even Morton's 1972 video performance discussed above where she moved around her own installation and slowly simulated the actions she used to create it imparts a sensuality in the materials and processes of her work. This connection between abstract lines and embodied thresholds is implied in one notebook entry where Morton stated "drawings based on the mating habits of lines/mating season/the orgy/psychic attraction between lines."[285] Understood in these ways, thresholds materialize as a conceptual paradigm in Morton's work denoting borders that refer not just to inside and outside, but to the home and the body. I also emphasize that in Morton's four installation works discussed here, thresholds are foregrounded to create an ambiguous feeling and reference the paradoxes of safety and threat bound up in the concept of "home."

It bears reiterating that "home" is a complex and symbolic site where Morton underwent her own transition from housewife to artist and from sculptor to installation artist. As mentioned previously, Morton once described her trajectory from mother to artist as "a feminist classic: out of the kitchen and into the studio."[286] This shift happened between 1970 and 1973 when Morton graduated and began intensively making large "shelter" installations in a studio not based in her home. In her own words, Morton frames

[284] A postcard Ree Morton sent from Bozeman, Montana to Gordon Matta Clark on May 21st, 1974 reads "…It has been snowing for two days and cold and I'm wishing for spring and for you…" See Matta Clark archives at the *Canadian Centre for Architecture*, files marked "Correspondences: PHCON2002:0016:002:087".
[285] Morton, *Notebook* (RM07, December 1973), 95.
[286] Morton, *Notebook* (RM05, 1974), 66.

her transition in spatial and embodied terms, referring to the kitchen as *the* domestic site par excellence and her move into the professional space of the studio. Thresholds then, are symbolic of Morton's own change in domestic identity and professional status, but they also simultaneously relate to her manipulation of material and structural *thresholds* of painting and sculpture which opened her work out to spatial installations. Framing this period of her practice in terms of these different thresholds objects and states of being points to the way Morton's relationship to medium and materials *and* her break from full time domestic life characterizes how installation art began to develop and materialize in her practice. This is important because it indicates Morton's practice changed because of her working and living circumstances.

In this case, we might therefore revisit Morton's four works made between 1971 and 1973 as articulating a particularly complex series of threshold states for a mother entering a career and taking on a professional identity in the early 1970s and as a woman negotiating a new symbolic relationship to her domestic realm. As I've discussed in chapter one, Morton's peripatetic teaching activities meant that she was rarely living or working in the same place for very long. Her childcare cycles (trading off with the children's father) were intermittent. And because Morton's homes often doubled as a studio space, her work and living spaces frequently overlapped. To wit, not only were Morton's own threshold states of home, work and motherhood constantly in flux, but so were her approaches to hybrid media and materials.

To be clear, this is not to say Morton's shelters and thresholds must be read as representations of her own personal sense of home or self either. This is the causal and reductive reading between artwork and autobiography I caution against in Chapter 2.

Rather, I propose Morton's situation underscores specific challenges facing women artists with children and how these circumstances might have affected their approaches to representing domesticity, personal space and feminine agency in their work. I want to emphasize that Morton's treatment of domestic spaces as temporary shelter-huts are ambiguous representations of home specific to her circumstances and as such point to the way individual relationships to domestic space change over time; Morton's "homes" are not reducible to being "bad" or "good" but perhaps can be seen to be positioned, janus-faced, at a threshold state of change.

Rethinking Ree Morton's shelters in relation to thresholds helps to consider her work and other women artist's representations of the home as a much more complex, critical and ambivalent approaches to domesticity. This is a nuanced framework that has been lacking in the few narratives of women's installation art that cut across abstract sculpture and land art histories that have dealt with themes of domestic space in broader homogeneous ways. Shortly, I call on Marsha Meskimmon's theorization of the "threshold" in artworks where she suggests thresholds elide binaries of inside/outside and public/private, which, as I go on to discuss, have important implications in women's artists representations of domesticity in installations in the 1970s. Before I address Meskimmon's framework, it merits considering the concept of the shelter, which became a significant motif in art in the 1970s; considering debates about the shelter helps more fully to explore the art practices relating to architecture, femininity and domesticity.

Lucy Lippard's Shelters

The shelter is an unusual form of domesticity. It has particular connotations of a basic and primitive version of "home" that is protective but temporary. Often in Western cultural histories the "hut" or shelter has represented a place free from the distractions of society, symbolizing autonomy and freedom and a disdain for urban and public life.[287] In her book on the cultural history of the hut, Jennifer Johung has suggested that the popularity of the shelter in the 1970s in particular was linked to a nostalgia for a "back-to-nature" approach to home life. Johung further suggests that the interest in huts in art in particular was borne from a desire for an "origin" narrative to "reconstitute an intimate relationship between bodies and their changing spatial environment."[288]

This "intimate" model of the shelter could be said to parallel Ree Morton's interest in domestic space and architecture. Around 1973, Morton copied out quotes from Martin Heidegger's famous essay "Building Dwelling Thinking," which described "man's relation to places and through places to spaces consist in dwelling."[289] In a summary of her installation art she had made up to 1974, Morton described her practice as "Architecturally directed/Lines in Space/ Shelter – Personal Space."[290] These terms aptly bring together key themes about space, architecture, form, domesticity and autobiography in her work. For Morton, the shelter or the hut then seemed a concern with representing a kind of semi-abstract feeling of domesticity as connected to a private and personal feeling of space or

[287] Gill Perry, *Playing at Home: The House in Contemporary Art* (London: Reaktion Books Ltd, 2013), 129.
[288] Jennifer Johung, *Replacing Home: From Primordial Hut to Digital Network in Contemporary Art* (University of Minnesota, Minneapolis, 2012), xx.
[289] Morton, *Notebook* (RM12, 1971 – 1974) 93. Morton is quoting Martin Heidegger, "Building Dwelling Thinking" in *Poetry, Language, Thought,* translated by Albert Hofstadter (Harper Colophon Books, New York, 1971), 55.
[290] Morton, *Notebook* (RM05, 1974), 34.

place. And it was not just Morton who articulated this link to shelters, but art critics picked up on this idea in her work too.

Athena T. Spear, curator of an exhibition featuring Morton's 1971-1973 *Untitled* work (see fig. 40) said Morton's "doorways, fences and benches are clearly visible, little sanctuaries and alters erected, topographical plans evoked. Her open ambiguous spaces are transformed into peaceful protective shelters."[291] That same year for a review in *Artforum*, Lucy Lippard also described Morton's installations made between 1971 and 1973 as "roofs, shelters, paths, gates, and yards [that] imply architectural plans and an ambiguous area between interior and exterior space…the spaces are compact but welcoming, like little shelters for the expanding imagination."[292]

It is significant that both critics refer to Morton's work as "shelters" and in doing so draw on a language of domestic architecture. Lippard's review is particularly important in this regard given that it was one of the earliest critical accounts in the 1970s of Morton's artwork in a major publication (*Artforum*). As such, the piece instantiated a domestic and autobiographical connection between Morton's spatial and architectural strategies. Lippard wrote in the same review that "Morton seems to be topographically mapping her own exposed zones making Japanese gardens of her fantasies, within the limitations of her loft and house life."[293] Lippard had been to visit Morton's loft studio and is referencing her

[291] Athena T. Spear, "Some Thoughts on Contemporary Art with reference to Ann McCoy, Mary Miss, Ree Morton, Jacqueline Winsor, Chris Burden, Scott Burton and Joan Jonas" in *Allen Memorial Art Museum Bulletin, Oberlin College: Festival of Contemporary Arts* (Spring 1973), 94.
[292] Lucy Lippard, "Ree Morton: At the Still Point of the Turning World", first published in *Made in Philadelphia* in March 1973, later reprinted in expanded form in *Artforum* (Dec. 1973), 48 – 50.
[293] Ibid.

personal domestic situation as an artist and a mother. In doing so, Lippard inscribes two these two modes of being in her framing of Morton's shelter installations.[294]

Lucy Lippard is a key figure in Morton's history who can be credited with bringing her early installation art (and other women's) into public view in the late 1960s and 1970s. As a curator and critic Lippard promoted artwork made by women in exhibitions and wrote about this work, making her an important articulator of certain ideas framing women's large-scale installations at this time. This was especially important for Morton as Lippard, along with curator and writer Marcia Tucker, were early supporters of her work who not only wrote about Morton's work in magazines but also included Morton's work in exhibitions during her lifetime and posthumously.[295]

At the end of the 1970s Lippard wrote a series of three essays detailing how and why shelters had become important tropes among women artists in the 1970s. She described them "a series dealing with inside and outside space and nature."[296] The trio of writing consisted articles each published separately in an exhibition catalogue, a magazine and a book that outlined a new artistic trend in the 1970s where abstract large-scale sculptures referencing domestic spaces were predominantly being made by women. The

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[294] Lippard remembers visiting Morton's studio to see many of the works discussed in her review, though most of these works were never exhibited outside her studio. Lucy Lippard, in email with the author, July 27th, 2015.

[295] In her work as a curator, Marcia Tucker delivered a solo exhibition of Morton's work at the Whitney Museum of Art in 1974 and then at the New Museum in New York in 1981 after the artist's death in 1977. Notably, when the New Museum's opened in 1977 under Tucker's direction, the mandate was to support emerging "living artists"; Ree Morton was the first exception to this rule. Tucker noted that Morton's solo show in 1974 was a particular triumph in getting "first-rate women artists" into the Whitney at a time when museums rarely gave women solo exhibitions. See Marcia Tucker, "Director's Statement" in *Ree Morton: 1971 – 1977* (New York: The New Museum, 1980), 93. Lucy Lippard also wrote many essays about Morton's work before and after her death. Her essay "Ree Morton: At the Still Point of the Turning World" was first published in *Made in Philadelphia* (March 1973) unpaginated and later reprinted in expanded form in *Artforum* Vol. 12, No. 4 (December, 1973), 48 – 50 and later reprinted again in Lippard's book *From the Center: Feminist Essays on Women's Art* (New York: Dutton, 1976), 196 – 201.

[296] Lucy Lippard, "Body, House, City, Civilization, Journey" in *Dwelling,* Philadelphia Institute of Art, 20 October – 25 November, 1978), 11.

connective thread among these three essays is Lippard's understanding of the interplay between interior and exterior spaces of "shelter" sculptures as doubly symbolic of domestic interiors *and* of the (female) body. It is this relationship between home and body noted by Lippard which, I posit, serves an important context for Morton's work here. Taken together, these three essays provide one of the earliest discursive frameworks to explore the links among the female body, domesticity and architecture in American women's abstract sculpture and installation art in the 1970s.

Lippard's first essay "Body, House, City, Civilization, Journey" lays out what she sees as the connection between the home and the female body. Published in a catalogue for the art exhibition *Dwellings* (1978), the essay focused on representations of the home in contemporary sculpture. Lippard describes this as the "growing interest in inside forms as well as in confrontational facades in sculpture and in the beliefs of architectures of other cultures," going on to remark how this trend is "extremely relevant to the large number of artists working today with room, architecture, shelter, and house images toward a closer relationship between landscape and environment."[297]

Lippard underscores this intertwining of the domestic, architectural and ecological components with an in-depth analysis of the works by the female artists featured in the exhibition. Six out of the 15 artists in the show were women, including Alice Aycock, Alice Adams, Donna Dennis, Harriet Feigenbaum, Jody Pinto and Katherine Sokolnikoff. The works presented ranges from clear representations of homes such as the middle-scale architectural models of hotels by Donna Dennis, to the more abstract huts made from

[297] Lippard, "Body, House, City, Civilization, Journey", 5.

branches by Harriet Feigenbaum, to contained structures with steps leading to excavated spaces by artists Jody Pinto and Alice Adams.

In this essay, Lippard makes explicit what she sees as the symbolic and psycho-sexual relationship between the home and the female body, particularly citing the internal spaces and orifices of the body as recurrent motifs or forms in abstract sculpture. Lippard further aligns women's interest in the domestic with the emergence of 1970s feminism stating: "woman-built and body-identified architectures have become particularly attractive to women artists since the new feminism" because "dwelling is, of course, the classic symbol of the female body – maternal and/or sexual; it is frequently described in terms in inclusion and exclusion, fear and desire of the womb."[298] Here, Lippard highlights what had become an increasingly frequent trope in postwar artwork by women by the late 1970s — the literalization of the paradigm of the relationship between the female body and the home. This paradigm was quite widespread in post-war art by women and can be seen in examples as early as the 1940s in Louise Bourgeois' *Femme Maison* [*Woman House*] series of drawing sand painting (1947 - 1994). Later in the 1960s there was Carolee Schneemann's *Parts of the Body House* (1966), Lygia Clark's installation *A Casa É O Corpo: Penetração, Ovulação, Germinação, Expulsão* ("The House is the Body: Penetration, Ovulation, Germination, Expulsion") (1968) and in the 1970s Faith Wilding's crocheted environment *Womb Room* (1971) installed as a component part of the group project *Womanhouse* (1972). These artworks and their titles riff on the relationship between body and house and indicate a lineage of artworks and ideas concerned with the spatial and architectural aspects of the (mostly white) female body and the home that represent a

[298] Lippard, "Body, House, City, Civilization, Journey", 6.

particular lived experience of gender, domesticity and embodiment. That is, these works address how bodies are affected by the spaces they inhabit and how the spaces we live in are informed by the bodies who live there.

Lippard's second essay "Complexes: Architectural Sculpture as Shelter in Nature" was published in *Artforum* in 1979, and further develops the connection between home and female body by reinforcing the spatial relationship between femininity, abstraction and what she calls "architectural sculpture" within the specific trope of the "shelter."[299] Of the 14 different artists Lippard discusses in "Complexes", 11 were women. The full roster included Alice Aycock, Louise Bourgeois, Collette, Mary Beth Edelson, Harriet Feigenbaum, Richard Fleischner, Suzanne Harris, Audrey Hemenway, Nancy Holt, Jody Pinto, Keiko Prince, Alan Saret, Charles Simmonds and Susana Torre. Notably, many of these artists' works were built outdoors and made from natural materials like logs and branches and, as Lippard notes, this put them in dialogue with trends in land art. If Lippard's "Body, House, City" essay notes a proclivity in 1970s art towards domestic sculptures by *some* female practitioners (noting the *Dwellings* artists were chosen by a curator, not Lippard), then "Complexes" makes the point that this trend – which she now also extends to land art, earthworks, public sculpture and inside "environments" – is dominated by women artists influenced by feminism. She states, "most of the artists raising the issue of the shelter in sculpture are women…they so often choose organically inspired forms or fuse their shelters with natural surroundings."[300] This relationship among nature, femininity and female bodies underpins the ideas in her essay "Complexes". Lippard elaborates that,

[299] Lucy Lippard, "Complexes: Architectural Sculptures in Nature" *Artforum* 67, No. 1 (January/February, 1979), 86 – 97.
[300] Ibid, 88.

"architecture is called 'the mother of the arts' and was probably invented by women. Its history is the journey from womb to erection and it is no accident that the relationship of female to male, matriarchal to patriarchal values."[301] She concludes "the 'shelter sculpture' is in fact the architectural impulse feminized."[302]

It is significant that almost all the artworks Lippard discusses in these texts are immersive "shelter sculptures" meaning they are significantly sized with articulated openings creating doorways that can be entered by at least one adult spectator (though not all the artists actually permitted this). By way of explanation, Lippard suggests that entrances are symbolic of female orifices, stating "the prototypical shelter is a cave…caves have no exterior; they are all hole – a unique kind of space. In many cultures they continue to be sacred to fertility and childbirth, and in more sophisticated societies they offer metaphors for the birth of the self."[303]

Lippard's third essay "Centers and Fragments: Women's Spaces," published in 1978, zeros in on this "feminized impulse" by artists to make shelters and "holes" but also takes a more essentialist approach to domestic space, femininity, art and architecture.[304] This essay was written for a book called *Women in Architecture* edited by architect-artist-curator Susana Torre (whose art work was also featured in "Complexes"). The book came from the exhibition *Women in American Architecture: A Historical and Contemporary Exhibition* organized in 1977 at the Brooklyn Museum by a collective of feminist architects

[301] Lippard, "Complexes", 88.
[302] Ibid, 86 – 88.
[303] Ibid, 87.
[304] Lippard, "Centers and Fragments" *Women in Architecture: A Historic and Contemporary Perspective*, ed. Susanna Torre (New York: Library of Design, 1978), 186 - 202

called "The Architectural League of New York's Archive of Women in Architecture".[305] Their mandate was to "look at the work of women in architecture in the context of issues such as domesticity, private and public life, and the relationship of space to gender relations."[306] Although the book features essays mostly about the issues facing women in the industry of architecture, Lippard's essay extends the theme of building and construction to women artists' desires to make "shelters". The artists listed include: those belonging to the California Institute of the Arts' Feminist Art Program collective, Mary Miss, Jackie Winsor, Tina Girouard, Jacki Apple, Patricia Johanson and Ree Morton, all of whom were more publically vocal about their affiliation to feminist groups or projects than the artists Lippard previously discusses.

In this essay's context, the relationship between fine art and architecture is framed in explicitly feminist terms in a way the other essays only hinted at. Indeed, the definition of "building" or being an "architect" for Lippard is, in this case, metaphorical as she includes artists who create physical environments as well as "building" social situations. By way of an example, Lippard discusses Ree Morton's work *Something in the Wind* (1975), a public installation work. As noted earlier, Morton's installation consisted of handmade flags, each designed for someone "she had good feelings towards" which were hung on a nineteenth-century schooner in New York where people could stay and socialize.[307] By extending the

[305] The two projects were guided primarily by Susana Torre with support from other founding members of the Archive including Phyliss Birkby, Regi Goldberg, Marjorie Hoog, Naomi Leff, Dimon Liu and Mimi Lobell. They stated this "emerged out of a desire to present the range and quality of women's work, as both practitioners and commentators, in the fields of architecture, planning and design. " See http://archleague.org/2014/07/women-in-american-architecture-1977-and-today/ Accessed April 29th, 2016.
[306] For the mandate by the The Architectural League of New York's Archive of Women in Architecture, see http://archleague.org/1977/07/women-in-american-architecture-a-historic-and-contemporary-perspective-exhibition/ Accessed April 29th, 2016.
[307] Morton, *Notebook* (RM01, 1974 – 75), 31.

metaphor of the architect to one who builds social space which can constitute an artwork, Lippard relates the practice of architecture, in effect, to the production of installation art.

It is relevant in this regard that Lippard describes *Something in the Wind* as "a content-oriented evolution of motives in closer contact with real life" indicative of what she saw as a "personal/communicative mode" based on a "long and generally unacknowledged tradition that is innately female."[308] This echoes Lippard's earlier statement in the same essay that "women architects were interested in housing rather than houses" meaning that as architects, women didn't just build houses, but that by way of creating affective, social environments they were making *homes*. While Morton's installation on a boat is not "a home" in the typical sense for Lippard, the work still "builds" an environment out of (and for) sentimentality. Domestic space here in this more expansive definition is not merely a structure of walls and a roof, but it is defined as a the building of place where care, sociality and affective relationships exist between people.

Therefore, whereas Lippard's first two essays "Body, House, City" and "Complexes" focus on representations of domestic sites and the female body in abstract sculptures and installations by considering *how* this manifests materially and symbolically, the third consecutive essay "Centres and Fragments" clearly configures a line of questioning asking *why* women artists were making shelters in the 1970s and what relationship this has to a socially and biologically sexed experience (as a woman) of the home. Lippard summarizes this idea neatly when she remarks:

> Living space is an extension of the body, as biological as well as social experience influences a woman's preoccupations with the relationships among outside, entrance, and inside. Many women artists, whether or not they choose to acknowledge the role of interior space and the central

[308] Lippard, "Centers and Fragments", 197.

> core imagery that so often unconsciously reflects the biological and social space of a female, are consciously preoccupied with formal relationships between inside and outside.[309]

This excerpt is a revised version of an essay written a few years earlier by Lippard in 1976 in her book *From the Center*. In the original version of the essay, Lippard initially names Ree Morton as an artist participating in the kind of work she outlined. The original version said: "Many women artists, whether or not they choose to acknowledge the role of the interior space and central core imagery, are consciously preoccupied with formal relationships between inside and outside – among them Louise Bourgeois, Mary Miss, Ree Morton, and Jackie Winsor."[310]

The significance of Morton's inclusion in Lippard's roster of women's shelter installations underscores the kind of language and ideas indebted in part to theories of essentialism that underpinned debates about abstract sculpture and installation art by women at this time. In as much as Lippard's rhetoric is important for Morton, I want to highlight here how Lippard's "central core" paradigm constructs a problematic binary framework of male/female, outside/inside and exterior/interior around these shelter works.

This naturalization of the relationship between (white) women's artists' bodies and the forms of shelters (what Lippard called "the architectural impulse feminized") is imbricated within debates about essentialist theories of feminist art. Lucy Lippard's writing in the 1970s is sometimes associated with these ideas as she was one of the key interlocutor of the artworks by feminist artists Judy Chicago and Miriam Schapiro, who first proposed formulations of the "central core" in the early 1970s – a concept that is frequently

[309] Lippard, "Centers and Fragments", 188.
[310] Lippard, "Fragments", *From the Center: Essays on Feminist Art* (New York: Dutton, 1976), 73.

and often problematically linked to discourses of essentialism in feminist art.[311] Lippard not only wrote about the central core in Chicago's and Schapiro's art, but she deployed it as a framework throughout the 1970s and 1980s in discussions of art made by other women too. It is this contested framework of essentialist in feminist art which I argue has encircled Ree Morton's installation work and legacy as well as the work of other women installation artists in ways that require further analysis.

Essentialism and biological determinism continue to have a controversial place in feminist art's histories. Only relatively recently has it been argued that essentialist positions are still frequently oversimplified in many registers, especially in art history more generally. Amelia Jones has written extensively on the matter, noting how "the subtleties and complexities of the feminist debates of the 1970s are generally lost in accounts" that "regard feminist art of the period as simply and reductively essentialist."[312] Jones's rethinking of the responses to Judy Chicago's 1979 installation *The Dinner Party* underscores how this work was, and still is, one of the most common targets of problematic anti-essentialist feminist critique. Jones argues that 1970s feminist "cunt art" or "central core imagery" have been too simplistically grouped under homogeneous and simplistic banners of essentialism in order to vilify its politics. She suggests these theories and the artworks associated with them are being too quickly dismissed in feminist art history as

[311] See Judy Chicago and Miriam Schapiro, "Female Imagery" in *Womanspace Journal*, vol. 1, no. 3 (Summer, 1973), 11 – 17.
[312] Amelia Jones, "The 'Sexual Politics' of *The Dinner Party*: A Critical Context" in *Sexual Politics: Judy Chicago's 'Dinner Party' in Feminist Art History*, ed. Amelia Jones, UCLA at the Armand Hammer Museum of Art and Cultural Center in association with University of California Press, Berkeley (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1996), 97.

outdated without appreciating the nuances of the encompassing debates and cultural contexts.[313]

Judy Chicago is one of the most prominent artists to have presented the idea of central core imagery in the 1970s. In her artwork from this period she uses motifs of circles, holes and domes that she claims are evidence of her "feminine sensibility". She stresses these round forms were not directly representative of female genitalia or body parts, but that they are created because of her experiences as a woman (as linked to women's bodies having a vaginal "core"). This led to the term "female imagery" as explained in her essay co-authored with Miriam Schapiro where femininity has been "formed around a central core and to have a secret place which can be entered and which is also a passageway from which life emerges" further describing "a central cavity which defines them as women as the framework for an imagery which allows for the complete reversal of the way in which women are seen by the culture."[314] Despite Chicago and Schapiro clearly emphasizing the core as "a framework for an imagery" which they would call "female imagery", the visual motif of the circle (and its variations) are often reductively taken by others to be merely a representation of a vagina rather than a conceptual model for rethinking the objectification of women's bodies, as well as creating a model relating women's common experience of their bodies to their gendered approach to art making.

It is interesting that Chicago and Schapiro's comments evoke a spatial and architectural language in their bodily terminology such as "passageways", "core", "place", "cavity." For Chicago and Schapiro, space is deployed both theoretically and politically to

[313] For an extensive discussion on the evolution of essentialist theories in feminist art and feminist art theory, see Amelia Jones, "Essentialism, Feminism, and Art: Spaces where Woman 'Oozes Away'" in *Companion to Feminist Art and Theory*, ed. Hilary Robinson and Maria Elena Buszek (Oxford: Blackwell, forthcoming).
[314] Chicago and Schapiro, "Female Imagery", 13.

draw attention to the way in which women see themselves through their centralized "core" of their anatomy. Seeking to "reverse" the ways in which "women are seen by the culture" the authors imagined a way to shift power dynamics away from those who sought to disempower women by demonizing the hole, dome, or circle as symbolic of feminine sexuality. Instead, Chicago wanted to reclaim the "core" as a potential symbolic metaphor to empower those who had been historically disenfranchised by that very operation.

For those who disagreed with the "central core" concept, such as Cindy Nemser, this idea could "reduce the work of women artists to a simplistic biological formula" which, she says, negate the complexity of the issues at stake.[315] In the 1970s, Lippard seemed aware of these kind of debates and she notably addressed this topic directly in her essay on women in architecture "Fragments". She wrote:

> These images most frequently appearing in women's art have biological and sexual sources, to the horror of those who fear biological determinism. The central focus or aperture (not necessarily a "void"), domes, spheres, cylinders, eggs, ovals, containers, phalluses…yet those [symbols] listed above are ubiquitous in large groups of work by women in and out of the New York or Los Angeles art worlds – far more so than in any body of work by men. Whether or not this is due solely to conditioning, or whether other elements are in question, cannot be decided yet, but must surely be investigated.[316]

What is evident throughout these essays is how Lippard used her discussions of "shelters" in 1970s artworks by women as a way to link abstract sculptural forms to the debates about feminine aesthetics relating the production of art about domestic spaces to biologically female bodies. To wit, it is not my concern here to critique Lippard's formulations of essentialism per se, for they are couched within specific ideas prevalent in

[315] Cindy Nemser, "The Women Artists' Movement" *Feminist Art Journal 2* (Winter 1973-74) 9. As quoted by Jones, *Sexual Politics*, 93.
[316] Lippard, "Fragments", 69.

feminist thought at this time. Rather I am concerned with how her three essays are fundamentally important articulations of the emergent intersections of architecture, abstract sculpture, feminist art and land art which together, forms the basis of a history of early installation art by women. As I go on to discuss, the framing of these early "architectural sculptures as shelters" by Lippard has been parsed through particularly binary frameworks that naturalize "woman" in relation to the "body" and "home."

This critical analysis of Lippard's discourse of shelters is necessary otherwise simplified essentialist rhetoric will continue to frame Morton's and women's installation art within paradigms causally linking female bodies and domestic space; this framing obscures the way in which these works not only offer important social critiques of the changing relations for women to the concept of "home," but they also show women artists' diverse representations of the domestic realm too. To wit, the list of artists in Lippard's three essays constitutes an important early roster of art practices at the intersection of sculpture, architecture, land art and feminist art, but I argue they need to be anchored to the histories of installation art in more socially and politically grounded ways.[317] My overarching point is that these shelter works were not made by women artists who were compelled by their biology to represent interior spaces because of their experiences as women and Lippard might have it, but rather that these works offer ways to think about a transitional and threshold moment in women's and women artists' histories when the spaces of the home were represented as deeply complex social sites of female agency, labor and familial relations.

[317] The complete list of artists Lippard discusses across her three essay are: Alice Aycock, Alice Adams, Donna Dennis, Harriet Feigenbaum, Jody Pinto and Katherine Sokolnikoff, Louise Bourgeois, Collette, Mary Beth Edelson, Suzanne Harris, Audrey Hemenway, Nancy Holt, Jody Pinto, Keiko Prince, Susana Torre, the artists of *Womanhouse*, Mary Miss, Jackie Winsor, Tina Girouard, Jacki Apple, Patricia Johanson and Ree Morton.

Looking closer, Lippard can be seen to draw on the architectural and spatial terminology and language deployed first by Chicago and Schapiro in 1973 in their theory of the central core into her own formulation of women's sculpture and installations as architectonic. When Chicago and Schapiro remarked that "in order to understand the preoccupations with building structure, one has to understand it as a metaphor for a housing or casing of the soul or the body," this matches Lippard's statement that "dwelling is, of course, the classic symbol of the female body."[318] Indeed, so much was this paradigm of the female body analogous to the home, Lippard used one of Louise Bourgeois' *Femme Maison* images – one of the first "woman-house" artworks – for the cover of her book *From the Center* in 1976.

In Lippard's third essay "Fragments" where she articulates the idea of "shelter architecture", her conception of the "core" in these works across the 1970s gives way to a series of clear binary positions:

> …traditionally, the inside represents female, outside male. Attention has already been drawn to the male concern with façade and monument, the female concern with function and environment; the male concern with permanence and structural imposition, the female concern with adaptability and psychological needs; the male concern with public image, the female concern with biography and autobiography.[319]

Lippard's positioning of female qualities against male qualities suggests that the production of women's artwork is driven by a biological impulse to recreate a "core" experiences of womanhood by making contained architectural spaces. This creates a more general problem: we as participants who seek meaning from these artworks would be therefore compelled by this logic to look for causal link between the artists' "feminine" body and a

[318] Chicago and Schapiro, "Female Imagery," 11 – 17.
Lippard, "Fragments", 14., and Lippard, "Body, House, City, Civilization, Journey", 6.
[319] Lippard, "Centers and Fragments: Women's Spaces", 186.

notion of "home", as if these were fixed and knowable entities. As I've argued in the introduction and in chapter one already, this is a problematic approach to art made by women, for neither femininity nor domesticity has stable meaning at the intersections of gendered, raced, sexed, classed and bodily identities. In the case of women's installation art, if we make a causal link between the production of space in art and the bodily identity and psyche of its maker we risk trying to define a single or true version of the artist's self within the works created. Although this outcome probably wasn't Lippard's intended result, nevertheless we must see how the desire to align the production of "woman" and "home" together in this way would seem to rely on a singular, Eurocentric and probably white, middle-class paradigm of a female artist, her body and her home that only further marginalizes those artists and their practices who don't adhere to this model.

Since the 1970s, feminist theorists have gone to great efforts to challenge the fixity of women, domesticity and corporeality as stable concepts and emphasize these are complex constructs with even more complex relationships to each other that produce a range of intersectional identities. I argue that shelter installations also evidence a range of mutable representations of women, domesticity and corporeality that point to a variety of issues at stake for different women artists and especially for women artists with children. Lippard did acknowledge the ambivalence that comes from these positions noting, "it is only in the last five years or so that the notion of the shelter as a tempting, embracing, encompassing, welcoming or threatening connection between art and nature has fully entered the sculptural vocabulary."[320] Yet, it is also here that the problematic nature of an underlying essentializing discourse is most evident, where Lippard links women's shelter

[320] Lippard, "Complexes", 88.

artworks to "art and nature" and makes a causal link between art making and a generic female body.

Instead, as I am proposing, shelter artworks needs to be more functionally underpinned by culturally specific and contextualized constructs of art, women and domesticity. The different representations of shelters I go on to discuss point the variety of approaches women artists took to domesticity and its spaces, many of which perform a kind of ambiguity to the topic. The works I discuss not only demonstrates the unique approach of the individual and how her personal history of home impacted on her material and aesthetic representations of shelters, but it also shows that it is fundamental reject the fantasy that there is a shared common experience of home and of being a woman; in encountering a range of artworks about domesticity, the fixity of the concepts of the artist, the body and the home unravel as they transect with social, political and economic circumstance. As such, Morton's and other women artists' shelter artworks from this period require critical approaches to the wider issue of art by women and their domesticities which refuse simplistic binary distinctions of good/bad, inside/outside, interior/exterior and female/male. I will show that is more productive to frame these works as *threshold* states which are a places of transformation and change, rather than a universal sites or symbols of female bodies in domestic spaces.

A Threshold Methodology

Returning to Marsha Meskimmon's theorization of the "threshold" is highly useful for overcoming binary models of domesticity and gendered space in women's installation art. As I already touched upon in my discussion of Lippard's essays, the qualities associated

with women's "shelter" art in the 1970s included models of femininity linked to interior and private space relating to the domestic realm. Lippard's model was based on an historic association between the male and the public realm pitting, in opposition, the female to the "private" realm. During the time these debates about female imagery were underway, a contemporaneous study from 1974 by feminist scholars Louise Lamphere and Michelle Zimbalist Rosaldo emphasized the negative effects of naturalizing the female sex within the interior and private spaces of home and its corollary domestic frameworks of child bearing, child rearing and domestic labor. They argued that this historic model had created a "structural framework" maintaining an "opposition between 'domestic' and 'public'" which supports "a very general (and for women, often demeaning) identification of women with domestic life and men with public life."[321]

Marsha Meskimmon's book *Contemporary Art and the Cosmopolitan Imagination* deals with women's representations of domesticity in contemporary art. She theorizes the problems associated with the historic relationship between home and women and explores how certain contemporary art practices challenge the fixity of links between domestic spaces and feminine qualities. The value of Meskimmon's approach lies in her conceptualization of "women" and "the home" as mutable concepts that inform the way we understand the relationship between the built environment and its individual feminine subjects.[322] She notes "spaces and subjects are mutually constituted in a dynamic exchange" and therefore certain artistic interventions allow us to see that "homes are not fixed objects but processes of material and conceptual engagement with other people and

[321] Louise Lamphere and Michelle Zimbalist Rosaldo, "A Theoretical Overview", *Woman, Culture, and Society* (eds) Louise Lamphere and Michelle Zimbalist Rosaldo (Stanford: Stanford University Press, 1974) 23 – 24.
[322] Marsha Meskimmon, *Contemporary Art and the Cosmopolitan Imagination* (London and New York: Routledge, 2011) 6.

different places."[323] This emphasis on the shifting and co-determined relationship between the materiality of "home" and agency of those who identify as "woman" is the reason Meskimmon summates why "making homes" relates to "making subjects."[324]

This approach linking artistic process to the formation of subjectivity bears on two key configurations I apply to 1970s installation art made by women. The first is that shelters made by female artists need to relate to nuanced and specific inscriptions of feminine agency, artistic agency, corporeal agency and domestic agency by taking into account the individual's identity and lived experience with regards to sexuality, race and class. This means femininity, creativity, body and home are not fixed entities or universal concepts that operate in the same way to drive the production of artworks by women, but rather for each artist these are co-determined constructs which exemplifies why "spaces and subjects are mutually constituted in a dynamic exchange."[325]

The second configuration is how Meskimmon reimagines the term "home-making." She takes the term which typically refers to women's domestic labor *inside* the home, to literalize its meaning to one who *builds* homes. This foregrounds women's artistic representations of home as active not passive interventions into domestic realms. In this way, the term she says, relates "the banal acts of domestic labor with collective social economies."[326] This reformulation of labor acknowledges that domestic space and work has been historically gendered as female and therefore is inherently embroiled in power relations. Space and work as theories addressed in art must be seen as contingent on

[323] Meskimmon, *The Cosmopolitan Imagination*, 8.
[324] Ibid, 16.
[325] Ibid, 8.
[326] Ibid, 17.

legacies of gendered, classed and raced inequalities in these realms.[327] To see women as "home-makers" in Meskimmon's way negates women as passive dwellers or maintainers of the domestic site, but rather sees them as active makers *and* inhabitants of its spaces. This point is clearly important in thinking about women installation artists who built their own architectural shelter sculptures. As I will go on to discuss, this approach shows that for the female artists I examine, making shelters enacts Meskimmon's notion of "home-makers" because, whether or not the artist claimed her work to have critical or political intent (and some women artists often didn't), their shelters are nevertheless intimately connected to a social and political reconfiguration of domesticity specific to their gendered and socio-economic circumstance in the 1970s. For example, women's liberation movement campaigners advocated for access to contraceptives so women could choose if or when to bear children, as well as advocating for childcare subsidies and equal pay so women could do paid work (and be compensated fairly) if they so chose.[328] The artworks from this period that pertain to domestic space and the active and physical work that created them needs to be situated within paradigm shifts relating to different women's changing relationships to domestic space and work, including those expressions of ambivalence or ambiguity in whether the home was a safe or threatening space.

This framework is readily applicable to the case of Ree Morton and aligns with my discussion earlier about appreciating how and why Morton's own complex domestic

[327] In terms of inequalities for women in the home with regards to work, this takes a very different forms depending on the subjects. For example the American history of the treatment of black female bodies in relation to domestic space is clearly not the same as white women, wherein for example, the history of North American slavery and has a racialized legacy in the history of black women's employment as domestic maids, nannies and cooks.

[328] For more information on campaigns in the American women's movement, see Linda Gordon, "The Women's Liberation Movement" *Feminism Unfinished: A Short, Surprising History of American Women's Movements*, (eds) Dorothy Sue Cobble, Linda Gordon and Astrid Henry, (New York: WW Norton and Company, 2014), 74 - 108.

situation effected her working process, particularly her development of shelters and use of installation art formats. I outlined in the last chapter how Morton's frequent travels to teach and care for her children away from her home resulted in relational and autobiographical artworks that responded to her changing environment. Morton's artistic projects in the early 1970s that engaged with dilapidated shelter thresholds speak to Meskimmon's point that "homes are not fixed objects but processes of material and conceptual engagement with other people and different places."[329] Meskimmon also developed a theoretical framework regarding the threshold that is extremely useful to bring into play with Morton's four shelter artworks that I already mentioned can be thought of as thresholds states.

To address the link between home making and art making, Meskimmon proposes four "architectonic figurations" which refer to both "the built environment and the transformative structure of knowledge systems." [330] These include "foundations", "passages", "thresholds" and "landings" which are "connective tropes" designed to think about "the mutually constitutive interactions between places and subjects in material and conceptual formations of 'home'."[331] "Home," for Meskimmon, as a doubly material and conceptual threshold implies both an object *and* an idea, a duality which is echoed in the term threshold itself — recall the common meaning of a threshold is both a "a piece of wood, metal, or stone that forms the bottom of a door that you walk over as you enter a room or building" *and* "the point or level at which something begins or changes."[332] The double implications of threshold for installation art by women is that shelter structures

[329] Meskimmon, *The Cosmopolitan Imagination*, 8.
[330] Ibid, 9.
[331] Ibid.
[332] See Merriam-Webster dictionary definition, http://www.merriam-webster.com/dictionary/threshold Last accessed April 7th, 2016.

may be understood both physical sites symbolizing domesticity but also a spatial proposition referencing transitions relating to intersectional domestic agencies. In this, there are transgressions between inside and outside spaces of home, what home means in terms of public and private and also perhaps transitions between affective states of "good" and "bad" feelings about the home.

A dual framework of material and conceptual domestic thresholds as sites of transition necessarily challenges binary discourses of space where a general concept of "woman" is linked to essentialist ideas of the interior and the private. Applying this, shelter-artworks made by women are not beholden to homogenous or binary models of identity. Destabilizing rhetoric, as Meskimmon does, unfixes domesticity, femininity and corporeality as universal concepts. Instead, we may rethink those concepts as concepts in process and contingent so as to underscore the necessary differences in the way domesticity manifests across different aesthetic strategies of representing the home. For, in each case, the artist is situated and embodied within her own models of home, woman and body. It is as Meskimmon said, that "making homes" relates to "making subjects."[333]

Critically for discussing installation art, Meskimmon suggests art which foregrounds the instability of thresholds (by material compositions that mitigate inside and outside) result in compelling the viewer's interaction with its spaces. Referring to Doris Salcedo's installation *La Casa Vuida VI* (1995), which she uses to flesh out this idea, she explains "the power of the object resides in the transformations, the segues, that mark the limits of the material, spatial and conceptual traces to which we [viewers] bear witness."[334]

[333] Meskimmon, *The Cosmopolitan Imagination*, 16.
[334] Ibid, 36.

This has key implications for thinking about installation art, a form of art that relies on the viewer to engage and immerse herself or himself in spatialized ways. Similarly, in this case of Ree Morton's installations, her half-built abstract shelters might be said to compel viewers to physically and psychically encounter a form of domestic space, while the abstract representational strategies leave gaps to allow viewers to complete these falling down homes with their own desires. And what, in this case, does this kind of temporary home symbolize in a wider social sense? Morton's shelters installation in the early 1970s offer a semi-formed model of a home (specific to her) for us to also temporarily inhabit while we process and explore — spatially and conceptually — how we feel about our own homes and bodies too.

Rethinking Ree Morton's installation art in relation to Meskimmon's notion of thresholds, suggests representations of the home are not made because of causal links to the female body or a universal female experience of home or femininity. Instead, they can be reconsidered as more complex and ambiguous inscriptions of individual agencies linked to both the transitional relationship between gender and domesticity in society, as well a new wave of women artists in the 1970s empowered to be full time artists, like Morton, who described herself going "out of the kitchen, into the studio."

In what follows, I closely examine two installation artworks by Alice Aycock (b. 1946) and Mary Miss (b. 1944) made in the 1970s. Both artists were contemporaries of Ree Morton who dealt with thresholds and domestic structures in their immersive and large scale outdoor shelter installations. These works disclose similarly complex and ambivalent configurations of the home as described in Morton's installations, relating to what

Meskimmon called "the mutually constitutive interactions between places and subjects in material and conceptual formations of 'home'".[335]

Alice Aycock: *Low Building with Dirt Roof (For Mary)*

Alice Aycock's work *Low Building with Dirt Roof (For Mary)* (1973) (fig. 47) is a shelter artwork buried in the ground. The outdoor piece was built on Aycock's family farm in Gibney, Pennsylvania, and involved Aycock digging out large sections of earth to make a substantial hole. There she constructed a wooden structure with timber walls and fieldstone joined with mortar, topped by a pitched roof covered which was then covered in dirt. From the outside, the structure appears to be a house that has sunk into the ground with only its roof poking above the earth. The interior of the house is penetrable, but only by a single small articulated entrance, just about big enough for an adult to enter but not stand upright (fig. 48). According to Aycock "the body posture of anyone moving into the building ranges from a crouched hand-and-knees to a flat horizontal position on the ground."[336] Once inside, the interior height is at its lowest at 30 cm and at its highest near the entrance at 76 cm, requiring the viewer to stay low to the muddy ground and in relative darkness. With no door, windows or flooring, the shelter is primitive and provisional, like a half-finished home. What does this shelter represent?

Several of Aycock's works featured in Lucy Lippard's essays on shelter discourse outlined earlier. In a section of Lippard's essay "Complexes: Architectural Sculptures in Nature" (1979) that was devoted to a number of works by Aycock Lippard wrote, "Alice

[335] Meskimmon, *The Cosmopolitan Imagination*, 9.
[336] Alice Aycock, as quoted in *Alice Aycock: Sculptures and Projects,* ed. Robert Hobbs (Cambridge and London : MIT, 2005), 89.

Aycock's work, virtually all of which has dealt with some aspects of shelter since 1972, gives contradictory signals." [337] She went on to describe Aycock's pieces as "ambivalent shelters" that "turn out not to be sanctuaries at all" but "claustrophobic crawl spaces" and "nightmarish spatial surprises."[338] These affective conditions Lippard describes are closely related to the material specificity in Aycock's work. In the example of *Low Building*, the basic wooden structure half-submerged in the ground requires the physical comportment, agility and willingness of the viewer to cross its threshold and enter its dark space and contemplate their psychological and corporeal dwelling in its space. The tight space forces the viewer's body to be parallel with the presumably muddy and damp ground. Yet this is still a shelter, enclosed and one would imagine if the weather was inclement, shielded from wind and rain.

Aycock readily acknowledged "the pitched roof was the signifier of house and domestic architecture."[339] She claimed the work was based on a series of domestic spaces including "frontier homes, the tunnels and tombs of Mycenae, the myth of Clytemnestra and Agamemnon, dreams, the memory of my grandparents' attic" adding "I also have a shelter concept—a sort of physiological need for a 'first house'."[340] The dedication in the title of the work, *Low Building with Dirt Roof (For Mary)* refers to a child in Aycock's family who died prematurely. These details and the title of the work frame its form and material choices within the artist's personal stories and memories. Similarly, Aycock claimed that building her structures according to personal content was particularly significant for

[337] Lippard, "Complexes", 89.
[338] Ibid.
[339] Alice Aycock interview "Modern Women: Alice Aycock" Plowshares Media for The Museum of Modern Art. https://www.moma.org/explore/multimedia/videos/110/830 Last Accessed February 3rd, 2017.
[340] Alice Aycock, "Alice Aycock" at Storm King Art Centre http://collection.stormking.org/artist/alice-aycock/ Accessed February 3rd, 2016.

women making large scale outdoor structures. She described architecture in the 1970s as "a means of expression" further stating:

> women opened up that avenue of exploration, which I think to some degree that is now taken for granted….We had certain experiences we had that were unique as women…we wanted to open everything up for exploration as opposed to being relegated to sexual politics or sexual identity. What I do think women did as a group, was because they had been outsiders for so long and they weren't allowed to join the discourse, they brought content back.[341]

Aycock intimates that, not only did her own personal narratives about home inform her architectural structures, but she also relates a wider artistic return "back" to content as linked to women's marginalization from making architecture and outdoor sculptures in the first place. Aycock seems to insinuate that the very act of framing one's approach to domesticity as personal and gendered allowed her to make space in new ways.

This emphasis on making space is further enhanced by the fact Aycock did most of the fabrication and labor of her outdoor works herself. She said "I got a carpenter on loan from my father that showed me how to construct things and build things…I taught myself carpentry."[342] It was unusual for female artists at this time to embrace these kinds of skills and tough manual labor, yet Aycock chose to emphasize that the physicality of her bodily experience was significant. The artist said "the work is designed in terms of my own body, the construction tests the limits of my physical strength. I often feel I am in over my head. The works are a synthesis. They give me pleasure."[343] As Aycock herself indicates, the material, conceptual and bodily specificities of her domestic representations are

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[341] Alice Aycock interview, "Modern Women".
[342] Alice Aycock in interview with Avis Berman on March 11, 2009, for the GSA and Archives of American Art Oral History Project. File 3. See http://www.aaa.si.edu/collections/interviews/oral-history-interview-alice-aycock-15676 Last accessed on May 7th, 2016.
[343] Alice Aycock, "Work" (1975) in *Theories and Documents of Contemporary Art: A Sourcebook of Artists' Writings*, eds. Kristine Stiles and Peter Howard Selz (Berkeley and London: University of California Press), 661.

interlinked in *Low Building* in a way that points to the significance of not just *any* artist making large immersive sculptures, but particularly the importance of women making outdoor architectural shelters, *by hand*, at this time.

Mary Miss: *Perimeters/Pavilions/Decoys* (1977-78)

Mary Miss's oeuvre in the 1970s is similar to Aycock's in terms of her repeated approach to large spatial architectural installations. Many of Miss's works from the late 1960s into the 1980s are threshold-like structures and also made outdoors. The titles of her works from this period indicate her preoccupation with inside and outside threshold spaces: *Grate* (1966), *Filter* (1967), *Ladders and Hurdles* (1970), *Room Fence* (1970), *Wall/Door* (1977), *Screened Court* (1979) *Staged Gates* (1979), *Arrivals and Departures: 100 Doors* (1986).[344]

Perimeters/Pavilions/Decoys (1977-78) is one of Miss's largest outdoor works that explicitly dealt with threshold spaces. The piece, no longer extant, was built at Nassau County Museum Roslyn in New York and was described by Miss as "three tower-like structures, two semi-circular mounds, and an underground courtyard, built using vernacular construction techniques and materials…within a four acre clearing."[345] Viewers could explore the vast area by foot, walking around the site to the three towers each of which when climbed gave a new vantage point to other built components including a view into the underground courtyard. This courtyard was accessible by descending by ladder through a sixteen-foot-square opening in the ground that opens out into a wider forty-foot-

[344] A comprehensive list and images of Miss's works can be found at www.marymiss.com. Accessed January 9th, 2017.
[345] Image permissions were not given for this work. For photographs, see http://marymiss.com/projects/perimeterspavilionsdecoys/. Accessed on December 29th, 2016.

square underground space with a network of subterranean corridors. Miss describes the experience "as though you are walking under a thin skin of the earth. You can't tell how far back the excavation extends because of the darkness, so you don't know how far the ground you originally walked across is undermined. I think it is interesting all of a sudden to be unsure of the limits of a space."[346]

Perimeters relies on the viewer to explore its constituent parts one at a time, never allowing for a view of the work as a whole. Each part of the work contains a different experience of moving between and in and out of spaces; whether one is entering the towers to climb to a new height, descending to the underground courtyard, or moving in between the component parts of the piece, the viewer enacts multiple acts of crossing thresholds. As such, this creates a model of participation contingent on physical and sensorial movement through spaces, through states of lightness and darkness, and across "perimeters" by moving in and out as well as up and down in the various tower "pavilions" or courtyards.

The sheer physical labor involved in making this work is undeniable. Miss didn't do all the work herself, but she did orchestrate the work, contributing to some of the manual labor alongside hired assistants using excavation machinery. It is important to state that Mary Miss, like Alice Aycock, saw the physical labor she undertook onsite to make her outdoor works (and spaces) as relating to the marginalization she felt as a woman artist working in the field of sculpture and land art dominated by men. She noted that she used vernacular construction techniques and materials because this challenged the stereotype of a female artist using traditional "indoor" media like paint or handicrafts.[347] Miss attributed

[346] Mary Miss, *Mary Miss: Projects 1966 – 1987*, eds. Mary Miss and the Architectural Association (London: Architectural Association, 1987), 59.
[347] Mary Miss, Avis Berman "Space Exploration" *ARTnews* (November, 1989), 77.

this desire to reject feminine stereotypes to her interest in feminism. She said "I think my early involvement with women artists and our struggle to gain credibility has made me very conscious about the content of my work. The idea of doing work that is public, outside of the restricted cultural zones of galleries and museums, is very important to me." [348]

The fact that Miss emphasizes the importance of making "public" work and doing so in such a physical way is relevant to my earlier discussion about the disassociation of women with the public sphere and manual labor. It bears considering that if both Aycock and Miss (among other) were making public art outdoors, especially architectural structures that resemble domestic spaces, then these works can be seen as a critique of the expectation of women artists (as Miss notes) to paint or make crafts which are typically considered "indoor" hobby activities.

There are two key points of comparison between Aycock's and Miss's works worth drawing out here. The first point is that both of these architectural shelter installations create models for framing installation art made by women as politicized thresholds of inside and outside domestic spaces. The second point is that both artist's indicated their domestic thresholds are connected to the sexism they experienced as women manually making installation art.

First, both *Low Building* and *Pavilion* enact thresholds materially. Aycock's *Low Building* literally invites the viewer to cross the threshold of the submerged building to get inside its dark and damp "claustrophobic" spaces. Aycock reinforced this point noting "the works are set up as exploratory situations for the perceiver. They can be known only by

[348] Mary Miss in interview with Susan Stoops (October 1995) in *More than Minimal: Feminism and Abstraction in the 1970s*, ed. Susan Stoops (Waltham. Mass: Rose Art Museum, Brandeis University. 1996), 65. According to Lucy Lippard, Miss was a co-founding member of the feminist group Heresies Collective and its journal *Heresies* in 1976. See Lucy Lippard in interview with Susan Stoops, in *More then Minimal*, 31.

moving one's body through them."[349] Similarly in Miss's *Perimeters* her viewer traverses the breadth of the site going inside and outside various structures to explore the installation's spaces. The entry into the sunken courtyard perhaps most emphasizes the crossing of the threshold of the earth by going below ground into a dark space. In this way, both *Low Building* and *Perimeters* use comparable strategies of dark, abject underground large immersive interior rooms, adding a psychological dimension to the work as the viewer is enveloped in dimly lit spaces. Yet, as much as these are not warm and welcoming shelters, neither are they enclosed or contained spaces. Both are porous and actively encourage the viewers' passage across thresholds. This is important as the physical act of crossing thresholds enacts embodied models of the domestic spaces which evoke symbolic models of public and private spheres and their gendered histories of transgression. As the works' material strategies require movement between these different material and symbolic states, they underscore thresholds of home are not merely demarcated by a line or one's position inside or outside "home", but thresholds evoke the fluidity of being *between* spaces which relates to a more open notion of domestic subjectivities in process.

This is significant for women working as artists and women generally in the 1970s amid the paradigm shift of women naturalized in certain domestic space and roles. Bolstered by the women's movement, many refused the historic association of women singularly with the domestic private sphere; female subjects whether working in the home or not, were not merely private workers but also public citizens. These art works evoke more fluid models of home and symbolically open thresholds which show movement between inside and outside and between public and private spaces. As Mary Miss said of

[349] Mary Miss in interview with Susan Stoops, *More then Minimal,* 31.

her outdoor artworks "I feel most strongly about…letting the public and private coexist, or play off against one another" pointing to the importance of the way gendered concepts of spatial spheres are not oppositional binaries but rather interlocutors of each other.[350]

This model is even more significant when considering that the act of producing large public shelter artworks outdoors also refuses the historic association of women with only indoor domestic space and labor. Aycock's and Miss's intense physical exertions involved in making the structures of their artworks further reject traditional forms of "women's work" such as the maintenance work of cooking, cleaning, childcare etc. As Alexandra Schwartz said in her discussion of the sculptures of Alice Aycock, Mary Miss and Jackie Winsor, "[t]he very choice of creating monumentally scaled, laboriously constructed sculpture could be seen as feminist, since most middle class women of their generation has been raised to eschew professional careers and physical labor."[351]

The point about the physical labor undertaken in the making of these works is important too as it demonstrates how paradigms of strength and masculinity had developed around the late 1960s in association with minimalist sculpture and process art. As Anna Chave argues in her article "Gender, Sculpture and the Value of Labor," the physical and tough labor thought necessary to produce large scale art works was implicitly presumed masculine. She notes the importance of recognizing the way in which women sculptors in the 1960s and 1970s "aggressively emphasized their labor," which, she argues, should be read as a "counterstatement" to the assumption that strength was a masculine

[350] Mary Miss, quoted by Sandro Marpillero, 'Photo/Drawings as Clues" *Mary Miss* (New York: Princeton Architectural Press, 2004), 73.
[351] Schwartz, "Mind, Body, Sculpture", 417.

quality.[352] This idea can be clearly related to Miss, Aycock, Morton and many of the artists Lippard lists in her essays on shelters, emphasizing that women's physicality building architectural structures undermines any binary models of women being associated singularly with the private, interior, domestic work.

Meskimmon's term of "home-makers" is further usefully transposed here. Her suggestion is that the term can be reconceived to mean women making homes (like an architect) rather than the more traditional meaning of maintaining the home. By doing so, female agency and feminine subjectivity is foregrounded as active, rather than women merely dwelling in (and maintaining) the home in a passive way. Feminist philosopher Iris Marion Young argues in her discussion of the implications of the lack of female architects was that "those who build dwell in the world in a different way from those who occupy the structures already built, and from those who preserve what is constructed."[353] Young concludes that building space forms an embodied identity within that space and therefore "building is the means by which a person emerges as a subject who dwells in that world, then not to build is a deprivation."[354]

If the act of building relates to the emergence of individual gendered and domestic subjectivities, then the fact that Alice Aycock built *Low Building* according to the measurements of her own body invites an embodied dimension to the work that is specific to her female corporeality. Aycock said "the body was important and my size was important, because that's all I had to gauge by."[355] Aycock's insistence on immersing the viewer in "claustrophobic" shelter space built to the scale of her own petite body (and built

[352] Anna C. Chave, "Gender, Sculpture and the Value of Labor" *American Art* (2010, 24:1), 29.
[353] Iris Marion Young "House and Home: Variations on a Feminist Theme" *On Female Body Experience: "Throwing Like a Girl" and Other Essays* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2005), 127.
[354] Young "House and Home," 127
[355] Alice Aycock, as quoted by Schwartz, "Mind, Body, Sculpture", 426.

by that body) shows the importance of underscoring that a shelter installation work of this kind was not merely an experiential, abstract structure built by anyone, but it was an encounter *with* a symbolic domestic space very firmly rooted in her experience and subjectivity of her female body.[356]

It is therefore important to read Miss's and Aycock's work as installations made by women's labor so that their strategies are understood in alignment to contemporaneous social and political contexts of work. If women are the active makers of domestic space and architecture in outdoor public art this contravenes the historical expectations that women do not have power or ability in these activities or spaces. Furthermore, both Aycock and Miss actually made it very clear that their gender mattered most in the making of their art (not necessarily in the experience of it) because the way they felt marginalized as women affected how they actually went about making their work in such a physical way and how they chose to make it outdoors and in public.

Mary Miss made a particularly poignant comment when she said "for me, the 1970s were about dismantling things, about taking structures apart, whether these structures were the roles of women, the idea of sculpture, or the notion of appropriate content. It was a rich period, full of optimism when it still seemed possible to take things apart. If someone set limits, you just figured out how to go around them."[357]

Not only did *Low Building* and *Pavilion* set up frameworks of physical thresholds for viewers to cross, but the labor and work that went into making these works also deeply transgressed the limitations of what the "work" of women — and indeed, *women making*

[356] A similar work made according to the artist's body is Jackie Winsor's *Cement Sphere* (1971). Winsor made a concrete sphere weighing the same as her body. See Dean Sobel, "Jackie Winsor's Sculpture: Mediation, Revelation, and Aesthetic Democracy" in *Jackie Winsor* (Milwaukee: Milwaukee Art Museum, 1991), 24.
[357] Mary Miss, in interview with Eleanor Heartney in 1999, "Beyond Boundaries", *Mary Miss* (New York: Princeton Architectural Press, 2004), 9.

art —could look like and what "home making" could produce. These artists not only overstepped the material and conceptual thresholds of what was considered acceptable for women artists to physically do, but in the process of pushing against these gendered biases they made larger and more ambitious forms of sculpture, architecture and land art that is undeniably some of the earliest forms of installation art. Therefore, *it is* fundamentally important we consider how these installations developed as critiques made by women that reject the clichéd associations of women with private, domestic interior space as lacking in public value. It seems fitting that, when Mary Miss was asked to define her work, she said it was "not art, not architecture, not landscape architecture…I wanted to occupy a new territory, one that I could go out and construct for myself as a woman."[358]

Women Installation Artists in 1970s Land Art and Earthwork Histories

When Lucy Lippard elaborated on the trend for "architectural sculptures" in the 1970s she explained this meant "artists working today with room, architecture, shelter and house images toward a closer relationship between landscape and environment."[359] I've already examined the way Lippard's shelter discourse elaborated on architecture and domestic space ("house images"), but the link these works have to landscape and environment is also important because many of the female "shelter" artists Lippard discussed have been since historicized within narratives of land art and earthworks and not in histories of feminist art or installation art. The last section of this chapter looks briefly to these histories to see how women's shelter installations were discussed in

[358] Mary Miss, *Mary Miss* (New York: Princeton Architectural Press, 2004), 16.
[359] Lippard, "Body, House, City, Civilization, Journey", 5.

problematic ways that has further obscured how these works related to social and domestic themes, and further marginalized them from installation art histories.

Shortly after Lippard's "Complexes" essay was printed in 1979, critic Rosalind Krauss published her famous essay "Sculpture in the Expanded Field," musing on the changes sculpture had undergone as a medium during the 1970s.[360] Krauss details new artworks that made particular use of scale and space and were often built outdoors which led her to ruminate on the way viewers' perceptions of those spaces constituted part of the artwork (in keeping with the arguments put forward by Michael Fried in "Art and Objecthood" discussed earlier). Krauss's essay is considered a foundational text in the field of installation art for its phenomenological approach, which maintains the importance of the body in the spatial process of viewing art. And so, it is notable that, within this canonical text, Mary Miss and Alice Aycock are the only two women whose works are discussed.

Miss's *Perimeters/Pavilions/Decoys* is fittingly introduced by Krauss in the very first paragraph of the essay as archetypal of the "rather surprising things that have come to be called sculpture."[361] Yet despite being included in this essay, Miss's work is absent in histories of installation art unlike the other male artists in the essay. I want to suggest that Miss's omission has been an effect of Krauss's legacy of methodologically framing works such as Miss's *Perimeter* as a form of land art or sculpture that is gender neutral because of her supposition that the identity of the artist is irrelevant. As I hypothesized in the introduction to this study, this approach has had a wider knock-on effect leading to the lack of women's contributions in installation art histories.

[360] Rosalind Krauss, "Sculpture in the Expanded Field" *October*, No. 8. (Spring 1979), 30 – 44.
[361] Krauss, "Sculpture in the Expanded Field," 30.

Central to Krauss's approach in this essay was the way viewers' experiences of sculpture are universal. Although their experience of space is defined as fundamentally bodily, the gender, sex, race, class and bodily ability of the spectator for Krauss was irrelevant. So too are the particularities of artist's identity ignored, which in turn created a kind of neutralizing account of viewing and making sculpture.[362] As such, Krauss's reading of Miss's work presumes all bodies experienced the underground courtyard space of *Perimeters* in the same way and in turn this erases the artist as a subject whose lived experience were relevant to the building of the work itself. By neutralizing the identity and agency of both the artist and spectator in early critical accounts of what has since been understood as a formative text in installation art histories, it would follow that content-specific social or political critiques of domesticity or feminist politics related to shelter installations would be erased. In this, Krauss's approach ultimately participates in the marginalization of women installation artists by suggesting that bodily identities and subjectivities don't matter in spectatorship or in authorship.

In "Sculpture in the Expanded Field" Krauss also created a set of new formal terms for artworks that she suggests "suspend" the modernist notion of sculpture. She designated four models for these new sculptural archetypes including: "Complexes", "Site-Constructions", "Marked Sites" and "Axiomatic Structures."[363] ("Complexes" is likely Krauss's term Lippard borrowed for her essay's title in 1979). For Krauss, this specifically referred to artworks on an axis of landscape and architecture and to give examples Krauss

[362] This anti-autobiographical strategy is discussed by Krauss herself, see Rosalind Krauss "In the Name of Picasso" *October*, Vol. 16, (Spring, 1981), 5-22.
[363] Krauss, "Sculpture in the Expanded Field," 36 – 37.

listed a short number of artists including Mary Miss and Alice Aycock.[364] Krauss clarified that for her, Miss's *Perimeter* "is more precisely an earthwork."[365]

It seems that Krauss's proclamation about *Perimeter* being an earthwork would come to define the reception of Mary Miss's sculptures in later years. For it follows that Miss's outdoor works were historicized within narratives of land art, earthworks and sculpture and not as installation art or feminist art, despite the fact that, as I've shown already, Miss's installations *were* made in dialogue with wider social and political issues relating to women, labor and space, and indeed to the women's movement itself. As I said in the introduction, more attention needs to be paid to the cross-pollination occurring between types of art and their cultural contexts. This is not to say Miss's works are definitively "feminist art" (this insistence on singular categorization is, as I've repeatedly argued, unhelpful), but that her works challenge the parameters of where histories of installation art and feminist art begin and end. Moreover, the problematic framing of women's contributions to land art in the 1970s exemplifies wider exclusionary operations in art history that may have obscured other women installation artists.

In 1978, art critic April Kingsley states in her article "Six Women at Work in the Landscape" that in land art "women seem to be making most of the really innovative moves in this art form at the moment."[366] Art historical narratives, however, do not follow this view. For there is a distinct lack of women artists represented in land art and earthwork

[364] It is notable that Lippard's essay "Complexes" was published only a few months before Krauss's and also featured Aycock's work (Miss's work was included by Lippard a year earlier in her essay "Centers and Fragments" of 1978). Even though Lippard did take the artists' sex into account where Krauss did not, these searches for new terminology at the end of the 1970s signal a desire to characterize new modes of work would later come to be broadly called installation art (though it wouldn't be until the 1980s that the term "installation" would begin to be put in use as a general term for this range of work).
[365] Krauss, "Sculpture in the Expanded Field," 30.
[366] April Kingsley, "Six Women at Work in the Landscape" *Arts Magazine* (Vol. 52. No. 5 , 10 April, 1978), 108.

histories and an almost a complete lack of women of colour. This is significant because installation histories (of which I am accusing a similar discrimination) themselves have borrowed heavily from land art histories.[367] Kingsley's essay showcases the work of Cecil Abish, Alice Aycock, Mary Miss, Nancy Holt, Mary Shaffer and Michelle Stuart, noting that these artists were "only a sample [of artists] taken from a much larger population of women working in similarly diverse modes within this genre."[368] Paralleling Lippard's publication of her three essays on shelter sculptures in the late 1970s, Kingsley charts a similar trend in land art and earthworks by women that had specific qualities associated with the feminine body, the feminine psyche and interior space. Kingsley also emphasizes the fact that women were undertaking the physical labor themselves to make the work. Almost all of the works included in the essay were large, immersive and outdoor works that required the viewer to interrogate interior spaces built in the landscape. Kingsley concludes that the reason for this trend among women was that they "seem to want to build the kinds of places they'd like to be in themselves, and to build them with their own hands wherever possible."[369]

Kingsley suggests the physical strength required of the female artists to excavate the site and build large-scale work created a different result than land art made by men. She notes "there remain definite differences of intent and content between the male and female artists" because "male earthworks are public objects that externalize the values of society

[367] Sometimes the distinction is further blurred between installation and land art. As one definition even suggests "Installation Art invariably refers to interior installed works; exterior pieces are referred to as Land Art." See *Installation Art*, http://arthistory.net/installation-art/ Last Accessed January 16th, 2016.
[368] Kingsley, "Six Women at Work in the Landscape," 108.
[369] Ibid.

in the traditional way art has always done, whereas women's works are private places made for interiorizing values and universal experiences."[370]

While Kingsley's essay, like Lippard's, is useful as she identifies key works by women artists and gives legitimacy to their practices, this text is also problematic because Kingsley frames land art by women in similarly binary ways to Lippard when she links internal and external space to private and public space and assigns the pairings along gendered lines. This follows a similar pattern to Lippard's linkages among feminine corporeality, nature and the domestic interiors. In both sets of contemporaneous texts from the 1970s, the women who make land art or architectural sculptures are still associated with a different set of spatial and social values to men.

In more recent assessment of the history of land art and earthworks more generally, art historian Suzaan Boettger discusses the absence of women in these histories. Boettger's rationale for the dearth of women in land art and earthwork histories (including in her own survey) is simply that there were "none at that time making earth or land art."[371] She explains this is because women were not believed to be, or perceived themselves to be, capable of undertaking such physically demanding labor to make these kinds of large-scale works. Therefore, although certain women's art can *now* be considered land art (Boettger, writing in 2008, lists work by Mary Miss, Alice Aycock, Agnes Denes, Nancy Holt), in the

[370] Kingsley, "Six Women at Work in the Landscape," 108.
[371] Suzaan Boettger, *Earthworks: Art and the Landscape of the Sixties* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 2002), 147. Boettger later contradicts herself stating "women did not make earthworks" but that "by the 1970s, they [women] had the interest, assertiveness and support systems to engage with the demands of constructing Land Art" at which point she refers to the practices of Holt, Miss and Aycock. See Boettger, *Earthworks*, 240.

1970s when the works were made, they were not able to be called "land art" according to accepted 1970s definitions.[372]

Boettger attributes land art's association with tropes of masculinity as owing to this problem. She states "the earliest contemporary Earthwork environments were not only produced by artists who were male, but also the sorts of physical activities performed to create them and often in wilderness terrains, required aggression, strength and stamina – characteristics of a traditional male type of overt power that was termed *macho*."[373] Boettger proposes women artists internalized this model of "macho" masculinity, stating:

> Women may have perceived artistic activity in earthworks as demanding of a level of physical labor and even assertiveness for which they were not equipped. Those qualities may not have actually been necessary, but being prominent characteristics of artists who did make such earthworks might have appeared to be needed. Then again, distances had to be traversed and the weight of earthen materials relocated, either for the local purposes of sculpturing [sic] land or for being transported back to a New York gallery, requiring developed muscles and heavy machinery or the means to hire them.[374]

Boettger implies that tough work was not seen to be viable for women artists, which stands in direct contrast to the evidence I provided earlier that Mary Miss, Alice Aycock and Morton did most of the physical work on their installations themselves. Boettger even chose to cite Miss and Aycock's work in her study as examples of women engaging with aesthetics associated with land art and yet seems to have done so without proper research into their practices.

Boettger's approach has perpetuated several problematic models about women land artists that has served to further obscure women's early installation artworks in these

[372] Boettger, *Earthworks*, 146 - 147
[373] Ibid, 148
[374] Ibid, 150.

fields. First, she separates her discussion of female and male artists, excluding women from thematic or chronological trajectories so that art made by women stays within discussion of gender and doesn't extend to the intersection of race nor sexuality which implicitly presumes a homogenous straight whiteness of its laboring subjects. Second, although Boettger blames the culture of masculinity for marginalizing women, she never actually interrogates the terms of this kind of masculinity on which she draws this distinction. To wit, artists displaying "power", "aggression" and "stamina" are not inherently characteristics ascribed to bodies designated as "male" but these are stereotypical attributes assigned to social constructions of masculinity. By falling back on such stereotypes herself, Boettger is merely repeating and fixing gendered models of land art, erasing the social and political context of laboring subjects, as well as reinforcing the association of male artists are with public and outdoor space. This model where women artists perceived themselves as incapable because of their "feminine" bodies is an assumption which I have shown, via the work of Aycock and Miss, to be incorrect.

Another recent attempt to flesh out the lack women in land art history was in the exhibition *Decoys, Complexes and Triggers: Feminism and Land Art in the 1970s* from 2008.[375] The show presented the work of Alice Adams, Alice Aycock, Lynda Benglis, Agnes Denes, Jackie Ferrara, Suzanne Harris, Nancy Holt, Mary Miss, Michelle Stuart and Jackie Winsor. Despite promising much in its title, the exhibition in fact failed to link any of these works meaningfully to feminism or feminist art. While the curators acknowledge that many of the artists in the exhibition didn't see themselves as "feminists," they bizarrely state that these women's works are important simply because "…they [women artists] produced

[375] The exhibition at the Sculpture Centre in Brooklyn was guest-curated by Catherine Morris and scheduled to coincide with *WACK! Art and The Feminist Revolution* held at PS1 in 2007.

work of equal scale, ambition, and critical intentionality as their male peers."[376] Rather than addressing the connections between this work and feminist strategies, the exhibition's curator instead chose to focus on work with "oblique references to the body, subjectivity, and self-portraiture."[377] With no catalogue and no further text by the curator available, audiences were pressed to connect this model of (white) feminism and land art themselves.[378]

Again, this women-only model has created a separate canon of land artists who are measured against the "equal scale, ambition, and critical intentionality as their male peers." This not only suggests the primary model of what made a good land artist is already defined by the attributes of male artists, but it overlooks the importance of fleshing out what is meant by masculinity or femininity and (perhaps most importantly) how this related to the politics of using the term "feminism" in the exhibition's title without acknowledging to what kind of feminism it refers. Reviewing the *Decoys* exhibition, Suzaan Boettger suggested linking feminism and land art wasn't useful in the first place. She stated, "the works in this show, and Land Art by women in general, do not display an explicit relation to gender and sexuality in their subject matter."[379] She also noted "spatially and materially, a number of women sculptors' oeuvres are not distinctly feminine: the large

[376] See the Sculpture Centre's website http://sculpture-center.org/exhibitionsExhibition.htm?id=10090 . Last accessed May 16th, 2016.
[377] See the exhibition website: http://sculpture-center.org/exhibitionsExhibitionEvents.htm?id=10090#body Accessed May 16th, 2016.
[378] There seemed to be an event designed to address this called, "Paradigms and Parallels: Feminism and the Politics of Structure", but no transcript was available. The website states "*Decoys* Curator Catherine Morris and *WACK!* Curator Connie Butler speak with exhibiting artists about making sculpture in New York in the 70s, the ways in which feminist content is or is not manifested in their work and how they see their relationship to feminism then and now." Accessed May 16th, 2016. http://sculpture-center.org/exhibitionsExhibitionEvents.htm?id=10090#body.
[379] Suzaan Boettger, "Excavating Land Art by Women in the 1970s, Discoveries and Oversights", *Sculpture Magazine* (November, 2008), 44.

scale of the works, the rough, industrially associated materials, the architectural forms, and the constructive procedures are aspects traditionally associated with masculinity."[380]

My overarching concern with the rhetoric from both contemporaneous accounts in the 1970s (Lippard and Kingsley) and much more recent discussions in the last 10 years (Boettger and *Decoy's* curators) is that these narratives continue to naturalize assumptions: these assumptions are about art's labor and bodily strength as narrowly feminine or masculine propositions detailed without references to intersectional issues like class, sexuality and race that are imperative in discussions of labor. Furthermore, these same one-dimensional gender propositions are uncritically aligned with outmoded values of private and public spheres. I contest Boettger's assumption that women weren't considered to have been making land art according to given definitions of the term in the 1970s and therefore further contest that women's work can't be historicized within land art histories. What I have shown is that, even though women's shelter works may not have been called "land art" or "installations" at the time, their artworks and practices contribute to new ways of appreciating nuanced intersections of domestic space, architecture and "sculpture in the expanded field" in ways that not only intersect with current land art histories, but that challenge and diversify them too. The way these women's works were framed in a series of binary gendered concepts by critics and art historians may have been what has kept their works (and others) from being more visible in corollary historical accounts.

Enacting Meskimmon's theoretical model of the threshold in these works points to ways to overcome these binaries while theorizing how women's installations ascribe active

[380] Boettger, "Excavating Land Art…", 44.

agency to women artists as "home-makers" who in this case are literally making (domestic) spaces. To examine these models of domestic thresholds in installation art made by women is to realize what Meskimmon called "the mutually constitutive interactions between places and subjects in material and conceptual formations of 'home'."[381] The material and conceptual strategies through which Ree Morton, Alice Aycock and Mary Miss developed early forms of installation art relating to abstract domestic spaces are meaningful to address. Their work didn't create barriers between inside and outside, or private and public, but rather invited viewers to take part in crossing borders, authorizing social and political transgression of the domestic that relates to threshold states of being according to the complex dynamics created within the concept of "home".

Ree Morton's Installations: 1973 – 1974

By way of a conclusion to this chapter there are four installations by Ree Morton made between 1973 and 1974 – *Paintings and Objects, Maternal Instincts, Sister Perpetua's Lie* and *To Each Concrete Man* – that merit analysis in order to draw together what has been discussed in relation to Morton's wider body of work. In this chapter, I have shown how Morton's early concern for the relationship between painting and sculpture in the late 1960s led her to investigate medium-specificity and space which I suggested became integral to her development of installation art in the early 1970s. These formal concerns came to align with the realization of spatial possibilities of installation as it related to domestic spaces and structures and autobiographical content. Looking across Aycock's and Miss's work too, I showed how these artists developed a similar approach to Morton's with

[381] Meskimmon, *The Cosmopolitan Imagination*, 9.

her architectural structures, where the artists' experiences of being marginalized as (white) women artists also related to their configurations of indoor and outdoor space built by physical processes. My discussion of the thresholds of domestic space in these works pointed to the ways in which materials and concepts can create strategic modes of spectatorship in installation. When artists create spatial thresholds for viewers to physically cross, these embodied actions facilitate symbolic meaning in relation to new domestic realms.

The representations of thresholds in Morton's, Aycock's and Miss's architectural structures have been broadly framed here as "domestic" though these works don't directly read as "house" or "homes". Instead, I discussed how the term "shelter" reframes these architectural sites as more complex, temporary and ambivalent spaces in ways specific to their own experienced of home as white middle class women. I suggested their works enact the point that inside and outside are not so easily defined, private and public are blurred, and the that home is a site of complex relations with regards to labor and identity. To underpin the importance of their artistic strategies, I argued that installation arts' material qualities need to be read in line with their social and political contexts of 1970s domesticities, stressing how the home had been a historically complex site for different groups of women but still commonly cleaved by spatial binaries associating women with interior, private spaces of work. I argued the installation artworks made by Morton, Miss and Aycock offered up specific challenges to reject "natural" and one dimensional links between women and domesticity.

It is important to underscore the installation artworks discussed here are, to a large extent, *abstract* images of homes; these houses are bleak and representations of empty

domestic space. But even in their simple and crude rendering with wooden beams and branches or flagstones which hint at a roof, a door, or a floor, they still refer to a place to dwell. It may be said that *any* suggestion of a home or shelter, no matter how abstract, has the capacity to evoke domestic imaginaries in its viewer – a subject to which we cannot easily remain indifferent. In this, viewers' intimate and personal emotions relating to "home" may come to psychically inhabit these empty spaces.

If, as Iris Marion Young and Marsha Meskimmon both suggest, building space is how subjects are formed and identities negotiated, for these particular artists in the 1970s, building structures may be seen as a challenge put the historic view of women passively occupying the domestic, but that it is a multifaceted space composed of different and mutable suites of emotions, histories and indeed creativities; thus "home" is necessarily complex, specific and ambivalent. Indeed, the translation of Sigmund Freud's oft-used term "uncanny" from its original German word *unheimlich* translates literally into English as "unhomely." In Freud's definition, the uncanny creates a tension between the familiar and the unfamiliar.[382] As Alice Aycock said of her own practice, in building architectural structures she was constantly searching for "a physiological need for a 'first house'" to inhabit.[383] Domestic space and its representations, however abstracted and stripped of ornament and in the barest representations of home (such as Morton's, Miss's and Aycock's) still conjure uncanny memories of interpersonal pleasures and pains, as well as the domestic politics of labor at stake therein.[384] It is this broader definition of "domestic"

[382] Sigmund Freud, "The Uncanny" *The Pelican Freud Library*, trans. James Strachey 14 (London: Harmondsworth Books, 1985), 340.
[383] Alice Aycock, "Alice Aycock" at Storm King Art Centre http://collection.stormking.org/artist/alice-aycock/ Last Accessed February 3rd, 2016.
[384] For a fascinating discussion of "unhomely domesticity," and the feminist uncanny in art, see Alexanda Kokoli, *The Feminist Uncanny in Theory and Art Practice* (London: Bloomsbury Academic, 2016).

— as a material and conceptual site of fluid and complex social, political and familial relations between people and objects — that I want to suggest underpins four later installation art Ree Morton made between 1973 and 1974.

In January 1973, Morton produced a large installation called *Paintings and Objects*, made soon after her rapid experimentation of 25 large scale installations in her studio (as discussed earlier). *Paintings and Objects* consists of three compositions displayed in three different parts of a room.[385] Each section, as the title alludes, included one painting and (at least) one object. In each of the three sections the painting and the objects relate to each other in shape and form, creating a series of tableaux or "scenes". This approach can be best examined by looking in one section of *Paintings and Objects*, the only fully intact section still extant today (fig. 49). The main feature here is a painted but un-stretched canvas stapled crudely to the wall. Around the edges of the painting broken lines of acrylic yellow paint run like road markings around its edges extending out of the canvas onto attached wooden struts lying on the floor which extend into the room. Inside the painting are three top heavy "T" shaped-forms. Two of these forms were drawn with dotted lines and the third is made from a small canvas collage tacked onto the big canvas. There are two more little of wood struts painted yellow propped against the canvas's lower corners.

Looking at the overall composition, the three "T" forms are contained inside the larger form of the canvas which echoes or mimics the smaller "T" shapes inside it. This echo effect is enhanced by the two sets of 2 x 2 inch wooden struts, like "legs", pushing out into the room from in front of the smaller canvas; these are parallel to the larger 4 x 4 inch

[385] That the works are contained is speculation as two of the sections are no longer extant. The evidence for the three sections comes from a series of photographs in *Ree Morton: Works 1971 – 1977* (1981), 26 – 27. Morton's exhibition at the Reina Sofia showed the surviving sections as well as images of the destroyed pieces. See *Ree Morton: Be A Place*, 36 – 38.

white wooden struts that are double the size of its yellow counterparts. Here, sculptural objects are painted upon and connected to the canvas, while the canvas also becomes a three-dimensional object itself through its entanglement with the wooden struts which appear an extension of its painterly surfaces.

What interests me here is how these multiple forms create a series of material and conceptual threshold relationships to one another. The visual "echo" between painted canvas and painted wooden beams is one set of formal relationships, but the fact that these forms are also figurative suggests that they also engage in an intimate exchange with one another. Curator Susan Stoops best describes the composition of objects in *Paintings and Objects* as an "encounter" with "a place and situation conceived as a site of social interaction." [386] She refers to the "the 'internal dialogue' between the three drawn silhouettes of sibling-like figures who are held within the parent-field of canvas."[387] This reading is compelling as her assessment of formal materials here extends to a wider reading of the sensuous, the social and the familial. In this way, Morton's composition is not merely a representation of her family per se, but the forms are symbolic of interpersonal, familial and domestic relations.

The circumstances of this period involved Morton's relatively recent separation from her children when she moved to New York in 1972 to, in her words, "concentrate fully on my work."[388] Her children went to live with their father, but Morton would spend summer holidays with them. What I want to suggest here, is *not* that Morton made these works specifically to represent her children or her feelings of separation to them — there is

[386] Susan Stoops, "Ree Morton" in *More Than Minimal,* 69.
[387] Ibid.
[388] Ree Morton, NEA grant draft, 1975. As seen in the archival material shown at the exhibition *Ree Morton: Be a Place, Place an Image, Imagine a Poem* in Madrid at the Museo Reina Sofia, 2015.

there no evidence for this and I've already made the argument against simplistic psychobiographic or causal readings that impose the artist's intentions onto the work's meaning. But rather, I want to suggest, that knowing these details of Morton's professional lifestyle as a mother and an artist can impart (but not determine) a way of reading of her spatial compositions and objects in the way that Stoops describes them as "a situation conceived as a site of social interaction." As such, the three differently sized small forms in *Painting and Objects* enveloped by a larger form may be characterized as a complex configuration of thresholds relations between people and things, between "paintings" and "objects" and between artwork and life.

This reading becomes further compounded in other artworks where Morton which used similar strategies. In 1973 and 1974 Morton made several installations indirectly referencing her situation as a mother with the use of abstract forms. This includes: *Souvenir Piece* (1973) discussed more in chapter one where Morton displayed small found objects collected by her children on a family vacation at the beach; *See-Saw* (1974), a large but immobile version of a child's playground fixture; and *Maternal Instincts* (1974) which is perhaps the most direct allusion to her children of all.

In 1974 Morton's three children Scott, Sally and Linda were respectively 12, 14 and 17 years old. *Maternal Instincts* (fig. 50) is the only piece by the artist that clearly memorializes her three children by using their names. The piece is one of Morton's Celastic banner works, bearing the embossed and capitalized words "Maternal Instincts". The yellow banner decorated in glitter arcs over three small light bulbs each half-nestled inside a Celastic wrapper marked by the letters "L", "S", "S" which stands for the initials of her children's names ["Linda", "Sally", "Scott"]. The shape of the banner is positioned over the

bulbs in such a way that it appears as shelter, or an embrace; the form and composition enacts a "maternal instinct" to protect.

The arrangement of three small objects inside a larger object continued in Morton's work between 1973 and 1974. The installation *Sister Perpetua's Lie* made in 1973 is one of Morton's most compositionally complex pieces as well as her most narratively driven work. The piece is based on Morton's interpretation of the events in the novel *Impressions d'Afrique* (1910) by Raymond Roussel, though far from using figurative representations, Morton abstracted the characters and events into shapes and forms. The work spans two bisecting walls, with two elements on the longest wall, one of which is a cage-like structure (fig. 51). Inside are three circles painted in bright orange on the floor and in the middle there is a tree stump painted in matt grey. The three circles appear to be traces of perhaps what was once present, as the fourth grey stump signals what remains. These four forms are then echoed in another set of three circles painted outside of the "cage" on the floor in white chalk, with a fourth circle overlooking the others from the perpendicular position of the wall. The double configuration of the two sets of four forms has been said to be Morton's interpretation of the four prisoners in Roussel's novel, as well a symbolic representation of Morton and her children.[389]

Another large installation Morton made during this period is *To Each Concrete Man*, first shown in a solo exhibition at The Whitney Museum of American Art in 1974. The large space in the gallery allowed Morton to be highly ambitious in scale and this piece was the largest work she ever made. The work not only takes up the whole room, but Morton incorporated the room itself into the work. The walls of the gallery were painted dark grey

[389] See Rolf Wienkötter, "Sister Perpetua's Lie", *Ree Morton: Works 1971 – 1977*, 83; and Allan Schwartzman, *Ree Morton: Retrospective,* 31.

to create what the artist called an atmosphere of "soft space" which was enhanced by the use of low spot-lighting (fig. 52).[390] In the room, there are two arrangements of objects on either side of the long room with a large, empty space in the middle. One arrangement contains what appears to be a stage, slightly raised from the floor with a low-lying serrated fenced around its perimeter (fig. 53). On the "stage" there are four figurine-like wooden objects of differing shapes and sizes, each with distinct rectangular "torsos" and protruding "legs." Above these figures there is a string of bulb-less light fixtures that provide a theatrical effect in the arrangement but with a melancholy note as the four figures stand in darkness, their faceless figures blankly face an audience of none, until viewers who stand in front of them unwittingly become their audience. On the opposite side of the room, another four objects are grouped together (fig. 54). These are squat, roughly cut wooden log stumps, raised off the floor by short thin pieces of wooden doweling "legs". The stumps are covered in rawhide and above them are brightly lit hanging lamps covered with more rawhide focusing a low light on the stumps if they were a "table". One critic put it that these objects appeared like anthropomorphic tables awaiting guests at a "Lilliputian picnic ground."[391] Another described the space as "a nightclub for forest gnomes."[392]

The two sets of four figures face one another on opposite sides of the room with a large open space in the middle; the viewer is caught between the scenes, asking how these small abstract objects relate to each other. Morton claimed she intended for the viewer to

[390] Morton, in interview with Lynn Horsfield said "I have certain feelings about the mood of the space at the Whitney as being very soft space". Quoted in *Ree Morton: Retrospective*, 40.
[391] This was the observation of critic Nancy Foote who reviewed the work in 1974. See Nancy Foote, "Ree Morton at the Whitney" in *Art in America* 62, No. 4 (July – August, 1974), 81 – 82.
[392] Peter Schjeldahl, "Of Primitive And Enigmatic Mysteries" *The New York Times*, Sunday April 14th, 1974: D23.

be "alone" and "in the middle of the work between those two pieces."[393] As such, standing in the center, the viewer is placed at the threshold between these arrangements and implicated in the dynamics between the eight small semi-figurative forms. By virtue of this arrangement, this is not an installation where the viewer may remain disinterested, but rather they are confronted by their own intermediary position between the scenes.

There is an anthropomorphic quality to the objects in the "scenes." From Morton's notebooks and photographs we know she made a series of maquettes of the small figures in this work. In one drawing Morton labeled the figures on the stage as "woodman" and called the stump-tables "little creatures" (figs. 55, 56, 57).[394] The woodman are perhaps the most characterful, almost toy-like in scale and size, with white canvas rectangles for a "face" and colour pencil dots or lines in the middle for "eyes." Because of the figurines' small scale, it is hard not to read them as representations of children. Yet, this doesn't mean the "woodsmen" or "little creatures" are direct representations of Morton's children either. Looking at the work of sculptor Louise Bourgeois (b. 1911), to whom Morton is frequently compared, is useful here. Louise Bourgeois's *Portrait of Jean-Louis* (1947 – 49) is a life-sized rendering of her nine-year old son, yet Bourgeois did not represent her son figuratively but instead, the "portrait" represents his body as a small building. The small form made from wood and painted white is just 90 cm tall, is a sky scraper with windows tapered at its peak which is leaning slightly to one side as if growing on fragile and unstable stilt-like legs. Art historian Mignon Nixon has usefully suggested that, whilst the sculpture is indeed a "portrait," it is also an architectural "totem" of the artists' feelings towards her

[393] Morton, quoted in interview with Lynn Horsfield (1974). See *Ree Morton Retrospective 1971 - 1977*, 40.
[394] Morton, *Notebook* (RM09, 1973), 15 – 27.

child who is about to mature into early adulthood.[395] If Bourgeois's petite and fragile architectural structure is the artist's way of actualizing her changing relationship to her son as he grows, then relating this to Morton's woodsmen, they also may be understood of as "totems," symbolic in form and material of the range of meanings and feelings constituting maternal subjectivity.

Coupling this notion with my earlier discussion of Bourgeois's *Femme Maison* series and the analogy of body to home, Morton's depiction of three small figures brings us back to Susan Stoop's suggestion of how "we encounter a place and situation conceived as a site of social interaction." [396] Applying this, the two "scenes" Morton depicts in *To Each Concrete Man* can be read as constellation of familial relationships and affects materializing as "totems." It is compelling that Morton continued to deploy the 4-figure configuration in her installations over so many works in 1973 and 1974. As I have suggested throughout this chapter and others, the influences of the Anarchitecture group and Morton's association with feminist groups encouraged her to adopt a more personal approach to her forms and content. As such, it might be said that from these influences Morton permitted herself to explore different symbolic configurations of maternal subjectivities as they played out in material and formal arrangements of her installations. This proposition might be fleshed out by referring back to Meskimmon's point that "spaces and subjects are mutually constituted in a dynamic exchange."[397] Ree Morton's compositions are spatial encounters between subjects informed by her own "dynamic exchange" with the familial spaces of "home" and labor. Following this, when Meskimmon stated that "making homes" relates to

[395] Mignon Nixon, *Fantastic Realities: Louise Bourgeois and a Story of Modern Art* (Cambridge, Mass: The MIT Press, 2008), 157 – 159.
[396] Stoops, "Ree Morton" in *More Than Minimal,* 69.
[397] Meskimmon, *The Cosmopolitan Imagination*, 8.

"making subjects", we might further suggest that for Ree Morton, these compositions and small figurative objects such as Morton made in *To Each Concrete Man* relate to a literal and metaphorical architecture of social relations in installation art.[398] This comes back to my expanded definition of domesticity in Morton's installations - a home need not be simply defined as walls and a roof where one lives, but "home" is also a spatial site of social interactions between people, memories and places.

Recalling April Kingsley's and Lucy Lippard's suggestions that shelters are tropes used by women who are exclusively driven by their biologically sexed desire to "nurture," the same counterargument I gave to those views stands here when reading the composition, materials and meanings in Morton's four large installations. The repeated sets of three small shapes inside one large shape are not evidence of her biology compelling her to represent her family or her children, nor were they predetermined by an innate feminine or maternal desire to represent shelter (what Lippard called the "architectural impulse feminized"), but rather Morton's abstract domestic installations bear the sentimental imprints of her circumstances of artistic production, where her overlapping roles as a mother and artist working (at times) in domestic studios informed her creative practice at a specific nexus between her life and art.

I have pointed throughout this chapter to alternative ways to think about women's installation art and its emergence in the early 1970s as being more closely imbricated within socio-political critiques of gendered domesticity and space. I also argued that, using the examples of Mary Miss and Alice Aycock, women artists' understanding of their own marginalization in sculptural and land art practices in the 1970s led to the development of

[398] Meskimmon, *The Cosmopolitan Imagination*, 8.

spatial and architectural installations that can be seen as challenges put to the gendering of private realms as singularly feminine. Taking into account that certain installation art practices developed in dialogue with these issues, a new pattern of artistic activity by women emerges at the intersections of several narratives of art histories (including architecture, land art and sculpture and feminist art) that show how installation art *did* in fact engage with a gendered politics of space more than its current historical registers have accounted for.

Chapter Three

Staging Feminine Aesthetics Debates in Installation Art: 1973 – 1977

Between 1973 and 1974, Ree Morton's practice changed significantly. Her work entered a distinctly new phase in both content and materials that lasted until 1977, a change which this chapter suggests was largely due to her engagement with feminist aesthetics and its debates. In the previous two chapters I argued Morton's association with feminist artist groups during the period 1972 and 1974 impacted substantially on the material, conceptual and ideological trajectory of her practice. In chapter one I examined the way Morton's practice embraced autobiographical content after 1972, which allowed her to reflect on her own status as a woman, a mother and as a professional artist in her works of art in increasingly conceptual and abstract ways. In chapter two I proposed that Morton's engagement with Anarchitecture (and especially the art practices of women members of Anarchitecture) introduced her to the politics of gendered space and domesticity in large scale sculpture which shaped her specific material approaches to making installation art.

In this chapter I examine how the artworks Morton made after 1973 can be characterized by a turn towards exploring feminist debates about gendered aesthetics. I consider how Morton represented topics like femininity, friendship, love and motherhood through frameworks of sentimentality. This chapter considers five key artworks Morton made before her death in 1977 to explore how her early interest in postminimalist abstraction later intersected with these 1970s debates about feminine and sentimental

aesthetics which I suggest influenced the way Morton theatrically staged representations of feeling and form in the medium of installation art.

Contextualizing Morton's work in this chapter specifically within 1970s feminist art debates holds significant strategic value. As I argued in the introduction to this study, Morton's work has yet to be properly historicized properly within a feminist art historical narrative — even in recent major exhibitions and publications on the artist, Morton's relationship with feminist art has been overlooked and in some cases dismissed. This chapter argues that Morton's work did in fact engage with issues and debates relating to feminism, feminist art and gendered aesthetics in visual cultures and therefore her practice benefits from closer historical contextualization within these discourses.

Before I examine these debates in more depth, it is important to first briefly ground the emergence of Morton's early practice in the late 1960s and early 1970s at the confluence of two different modes of art making: postminimalist art and feminist art. This is important because it bears on Morton's later strategic use of abstract and "feminine" aesthetics in her installations, which I suggest relate to her engagement with debates about the merits of gendered imagery.

Postminimalist Art and Feminist Art: *Souvenir Piece*

A recent retrospective of Ree Morton's work at the Reina Sofia Museum in Madrid in 2015 exhibited 23 rarely shown early works made while the artist was obtaining her Master's degree in Philadelphia between 1968 and 1970.[399] Because previous retrospective exhibitions of Morton's oeuvre had only shown work dated from 1971 to 1977, the Reina

[399] For details of this exhibition see the exhibition catalogue, *Ree Morton: Be a Place, Place an Image, Imagine a Poem* (Madrid: Museo Reina Sofia, 2015).

Sofia exhibition was important in demonstrating the relevance of this body of earlier work which evidenced Morton's interest in minimalist and postminimalist painting and sculpture and emphasized the legacy of these influences in her later work.[400] Extending the timespan of Morton's practice back even three years into the late 1960s underscores an important context in which Morton was educated as an artist. As discussed in the last chapter, in the latter half of the 1960s (her BFA lasted between 1965 and 1968, her MFA from 1968 to 1970) the East Coast of the United States was where many key practitioners of minimalist and postminimalist art worked and exhibited and where Morton developed an early interest in its strategies.

Among the 23 pieces the Reina Sofia displayed were several works on paper that seem to be Morton's investigations into the nature of repetitive mark making organized into grids. There are works such as *Untitled* (1970) (fig. 58) and *Untitled ("Line Drawing")* (ca. 1968 – 1970) (fig. 59) with graphite or colour pencil lines, dashes and dots organized in rows and columns. Also, there are two large paintings both called *Untitled* made in 1970 that represent grids made from hand-drawn uneven lines (figs 60 and 61).[401] The use of the grid or a regular geometric-shaped format was a common strategy in minimalist art, signifying order, control and structure as, for example, with the measured paintings of Agnes Martin or the neatly arranged brick sculptures of Carl Andre. Among postminimalist artists the grid reappeared but was disrupted. For example, Eva Hesse's painting *No Title* (1969) shows her heavy and imprecise application of gouache between gridded lines,

[400]In both the 1981 New Museum exhibition *Ree Morton: Retrospective 1971 – 1977* and the 2008 - 2009 Generali Foundation exhibition *The Dieities Must Be Made to Laugh: Works 1971 – 1977*, were the two biggest retrospectives of Morton's work to date with the earliest works shown from 1971. For images and details of all 23 works shown at the Reina Sofia exhibition, see the exhibition catalogue *Ree Morton: Be a Place*, 16 – 27; 191.

[401] For images of these works, See *Ree Morton: Be a Place,* 19.

emphasizing a visceral and embodied reaction to the clean order of the minimalist aesthetic.[402] This was typical of postminimalist art in the late 1960s and early 1970s that frequently deployed organic and sensual abstract forms evoking sensual and bodily qualities. Morton's artworks in the late 1960s adopted strategies similar to Eva Hesse (b. 1936). The wobbly and messy lines that make up the grids of Morton's own two paintings discussed above can be seen as an equally irreverent take on the mathematic geometry of minimalist art. Morton continued to use variations of abstract forms with formal compositions as her paintings and sculptures became larger in scale. As the objects' spatial arrangements took on more significance when displayed in and around the spaces of rooms around 1972, as I've argued in chapter two, they became in effect what we now call "installation art." It was shortly after this spatial change in her work, around 1973, that Morton started to draw on strategies of feminist art — bringing personal and autobiographical issues into her work — while maintaining characteristically postminimalist abstract forms.

This confluence of Morton's interest in these two modes of making art can be contextualized in the period that postminimalist art and feminist art also concurrently emerged in the very early 1970s. The term "postminimalism" became accepted during a period of pluralist artistic activities where artists sought to account for an emerging cultural interest in bodily experience that didn't prioritize form over content. This resulted in abstract forms made from highly tactile and sensual materials, giving rise to what Lucy

[402] The work referenced here is: Eva Hesse, *No title* (1969). Gouache, watercolor, silver, and bronze paint on paper; 21 3/4 x 17 1/4 in. Agnes Gund Collection, New York. © The Estate of Eva Hesse. Courtesy Hauser & Wirth. See, https://www.clevelandart.org/events/exhibitions/converging-lines-eva-hesse-and-sol-lewitt Last Accessed July 2017.

Lippard called "sensuous" and "eccentric" abstraction.[403] The critic Robert Pincus-Witten coined the term "postminimalism" in an essay in 1977, outlining the strategies by key practitioners including Eva Hesse, Jackie Ferrara, Dorothea Rockburne, Jackie Winsor and Lynda Benglis, among others. Notably, Pincus-Witten acknowledges feminism in the emergence of postminimalist aesthetics.[404] He states:

> [t]he new style's relationship to the women's movement cannot be overly stressed; many of its formal attitudes and properties, not to mention its exemplars, derive from methods and substances that hitherto had been sexistically [sic] tagged as female or feminine, whether or not the work had been made by women.[405]

However since then, art historical narratives of minimalist art and postminimalist art have been reticent to acknowledge the role of women, let alone the role of the women's movement in its development.[406] Only in recent years have scholars examined the significance of the female practitioners who overlap at the borders of feminist art and postminimalist art and hinting at reasons for their exclusions.[407]

One of the few in-depth studies of the relationship between feminism and postminimalist sculpture can be seen in the exhibition *More than Minimal: Feminism and Abstraction in the '70s* held at the Rose Art Museum at Brandeis University in Waltham, Massachusetts in 1996. The exhibited showed work by Lynda Benglis, Jackie Ferrera, Nancy Graves, Eva Hesse, Ana Mendieta, Mary Miss, Michelle Stuart, Dorothea Rockburne,

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[403] Lucy Lippard's terminology of "sensuous abstraction" came from her essay for a show she curated in 1966 called *Eccentric Abstraction* which is a key text of postminimalist art history in the 1960s. See Lucy Lippard, "Eccentric Abstraction" [1966], *Changing: Essays in Art Criticism* (New York: Dutton, 1971), 98 – 111.
[404] This point was made by Susan Stoops, "More than Minimal" in *More Than Minimal,* 8.
[405] Robert Pincus-Witten, *Postminimalism* (New York: Out of London Press, 1977), 16.
[406] For more on the omission of women in minimalist and postminimalist art histories, see Anna Chave, "Biography and Minimalism", *Art Bulletin* 82, no. 1 (March 2000), 149-163.
[407] For a discussion of re-historicizing minimalism and postminimalism through the work of women, see the essay by Lynn Zelevansky, "Sense and Sensibility: Women Artists and Minimalism in the Nineties" in *Sense and Sensibility: Women Artists and Minimalism in the Nineties* (New York: The Museum of Modern Art, 1994), 7 – 35.

Hannah Wilke, Jackie Winsor and Ree Morton. The show was curated by Susan Stoops, who also organized the extensive catalogue of critical essays, which offered a range of insightful analyses into the artists in question and to their omissions in postminimalist art histories. In her introductory essay, Stoops notes the show "brings together formative works by eleven women who are part of a generation of artists whose visual sensibilities were strongly shaped by the abstract aesthetics of minimalism during the sixties and whose lives and art were empowered by feminist principles…[who] legitimized the role of female subjectivity in a fundamentally abstract aesthetic."[408]

Stoops clarified the phrase "more than minimal" in the exhibition's title, which was intended to encourage a dialogue about how the growing interest in the politics of the women's movement and feminist art related to the use of abstraction in postwar aesthetics. The intersection between postminimalism and feminist art was, for Stoops, a "a fusion of abstract form and cultural meaning," where artists articulated issues relating to women with the creative use of systems, materials and processes.[409] This was significant as the exhibition took on board the importance of materiality and the nature of the process-based work of the artists, examining how forms relate to female subjectivities.

One of the reasons Stoops suggests many of these artists were overlooked in both postminimalism and feminist art histories is that feminist art was typically understood to use more polemic and representational strategies to be political. Minimalism and postminimalism on the other hand is thought abstract and therefore apolitical. Bridging some of these concerns, Stoops developed a particularly useful notion of what she called "content-oriented abstraction" in relation to these artists' art works. She explained:

[408] Stoops, *More than Minimal*, 6.
[409] Ibid, 9.

> In order to fully appreciate the achievements and practice of this generation as "more [than minimal]", we must first consider how the cultural position of "woman" shaped the experience which they [the artists] lived and from which they worked as individual artists and how their art articulates a "both/and" discourse – that is, both a feminist and an affirmation of the human relatedness of an abstract aesthetic. As we consider their embrace of abstraction as a representation of female subjectivity, we must also refer to the context of "minimalism" and "feminism" as historical experiences rather than stylistic categories.[410]

Considering feminism "as a historical experience rather than a stylistic category" is a useful way to think about "content-oriented abstraction," for it relieves content — abstract or representational — from being causally linked to one definition of "feminist art." Instead, if "feminism as a historical experience" informs art making, this allows for thinking about feminist strategies of abstraction to be understood as those that engage critically with notions of "the feminine" as a myriad of complex meanings. This, Stoops explains, can "attest to a feminist identity [in art] while proposing no essentialist notion of the 'feminine' nor fictions of formalism."[411] Taking the "historical experience of feminism" as a way to circumscribe a series of artistic practices – rather than simply applying a one-size-fits-all label or rules of "feminist art" as if it is either functionally polemical or not – allows the inscription of women artists' subjectivities to be legible within the embodied processes and materials of art making as it intersects with cultural and aesthetic value.

This also means that "content-oriented abstraction" in artworks by women are linked to the expression of female experiences, which refuses early twentieth century modernist beliefs about the universalism of abstraction. This refers to the modernist view that in twentieth century abstract art the lives and (gendered) identities of art makers were irrelevant; the forms and visible qualities of the work interpreted by the viewer

[410] Stoops, *More than Minimal*, 7.
[411] Ibid, 10.

mattered foremost. Stoops argues that minimalist artists had adopted a similar modernist position in this way with a focus on formal and aesthetic qualities. Thus in positioning the artists in her show as "more than minimal," Stoops argues these artists had embraced the "the human relatedness of an abstract aesthetic" that could still distinguish a gendered experience in the making and viewing of art by women. [412]

The inclusion of Ree Morton's work in *More than Minimal* provides an important framework for her practice within postwar abstract art, 1970s postminimalist art and 1970s feminist art contexts that relates to the inscription of gendered subjectivities and "content-oriented abstraction" in her installations.[413] Stoops noted of Morton that, "while the term 'feminist' was not regularly assigned to her practice at the time, it was in the context of a feminist erosion of Modernist principles that her aesthetic was shaped."[414] There are two other artworks by Morton not included in the exhibition that I want to suggest open out to what Stoops called "content-oriented abstraction" and feminist art in this way.

Morton's installation *Souvenir Piece* (1973) and the series of drawings called *Newfoundland Drawings* (1973) made in the Autumn of 1973 mark a memory of the artist's summer vacation with her three children in Newfoundland, Canada. As discussed in chapter one, Morton developed the ideas for these works in her sketchbooks whilst on vacation with her family, evidencing not only the artworks' autobiographical references, but the way her practice was integrating life and art into its processes. For example, the small "found" objects of stones and driftwood in *Souvenir Piece* (fig. 2) Morton and her

[412] Stoops, *More than Minimal*, 7.
[413] Morton's work *More than Minimal* included: *Wood Drawings* (1971) and *Paintings and Objects* (1973). See *More than Minimal,* 70 – 71.
[414] Ibid, 69.

children collected from the beach as souvenirs are not only placed on the low-lying table on delicate little plinths like miniature sculptures but as if to reinforce the reverence afforded to the stones and driftwood as *objet d'arts*, behind the table are five acrylic paintings placed at varying heights on the wall that image the same found objects on the green table, rendered in a simple, almost cartoonish, two-dimensional and semi-abstract painterly style. Similarly, the *Newfoundland Drawings* are relatively abstract in form; the large graphite sketches of rounded circular shapes drawn in striated thick and thin lines appear to be at once both coastal topographies of the land and sea as seen from an aerial view, as much as they looks like bulbous, amorphous shapes abstracted from the natural world (figs. 3, 4, 5). These works are reminiscent of what Stoops, noted above, called "the human relatedness of an abstract aesthetic" in "content-oriented abstraction" made by women. In Morton's case her organic forms in these works as well as her materials are implicitly linked to the people, spaces, relationships and memories of the family visit to Newfoundland. More specifically, it can be said that not only are the small objects on the table souvenirs, but the installations and drawings themselves are also abstracted material traces of the inscription of her maternal subjectivity too. Given that for Stoops, "content-oriented abstraction" was the way women "legitimized the role of female subjectivity in a fundamentally abstract aesthetic," [415] this frames Ree Morton's semi-abstract approach to installation art more generally as poignant for not only legitimizing the expression of female subjectivity in this spatial and material way, but as I argued in chapter one and two, she validates the expression of a sentimental maternal subjectivity in installation art too.

[415] Stoops, *More Than Minimal*, 5.

Souvenir Piece and *Newfoundland Drawings* can be said to be some of Morton's first explorations of the relationship between sentimental feeling and abstract form – a quality that characterize several of her works after 1973. As such these two works mark this significant shift in Morton's career where she began to explore the relationships among abstraction, sentimentality and gendered aesthetics using the medium of installation art. As I discussed in chapter one and two, this shift occurred following a period where Morton had moved to New York in 1972 and became familiar with the New York feminist art scene, attending consciousness raising groups led by Lucy Lippard and Marcia Tucker, where women artists were encouraged to openly discuss personal issues and "woman-related" topics. Morton's notebooks from this period show that these groups discussed issues facing women making art, as well as discussions about the political and artistic strategies of feminist art as they relate to representing the experience of being a woman.[416] It is therefore significant that in *Souvenir Piece* in 1973 Morton addressed her familial relations and maternal subjectivity during a period when debates became particularly active about what constitutes "feminine" and "feminist" aesthetics. As I go on to show, it was to these debates that Morton turned to develop a new style and content in her work.

"Feminine" and "Feminist" Aesthetics

These debates, as suggested earlier, bring up the complex issue of what "the feminine" means when applied to artwork made by women. As the women's movement gained momentum in the early 1970s and challenged gender inequalities, specific debates emerged among artists about the efficacy of defining "feminine aesthetics" in order to

[416] Morton, *Notebooks* (RM04, 1975), 8 – 17.

address the imbalance of women's representation and status in the art world. In 1972, Patricia Mainardi summarized the general tenor of the debate, stating: "[s]o now the artworld is asking itself if there is a feminine sensibility in art."[417] Artists and critics identifying with the women's movement addressed different positions in this debate that expounded views that were broadly for or against the term "women's art." I explore these views in more depth shortly. Thus, while some women agreed they had different lived experiences compared to male artists and that this affected their creative expression in some way, there was a lack of consensus in the 1970s about the way that art made by women should be evaluated, how it should be (re)considered in art history and how women address these issues in their artworks specifically.[418]

Marsha Meskimmon has distinguished between the two respective sides of the debate, designating those seeking a "feminine aesthetic" as art made by a female body and in a specifically "feminine" way, as opposed to those seeking a "feminist aesthetic" who sought to communicate feminist issues but without necessarily evoking a "feminine sensibility." The proponents of a "feminist aesthetic," Meskimmon explains, were those who wished to "define a mode of practice or form of representation which could mobilize the political potential of art for women" and it was more common among feminist conceptual, performance and installation artists as these were relatively new artistic modes with innovative material strategies that could carry this "political potential" more easily than abstract painting, for example.[419] The "ideal feminist aesthetic" Meskimmon

[417] Patricia Mainardi, "A Feminine Sensibility?", *Feminist Art Journal*, Vol.1, No. 1 [1972] 4, 25 reprinted in *Feminism Art Theory 1968 – 2014* Ed. Hilary Robinson (John Wiley and Sons: Oxford, 2015), 227 – 228.
[418]
[419] Meskimmon, *Women Making Art,* 132 – 133.

says, was ultimately a wish for "a mode of making and representation which could never be appropriated against the interests of women."[420]

Meskimmon argues that ultimately neither position was sustainable in feminist art as both ideas were based on homogenous orthodoxies of "feminine" or "feminist" which only created further exclusionary categories. Instead she notes how these terms and their nuances locate specific debates in the 1970s and how the various positions taken on the topic later gave way to an overarching discourse and academic interest in the wider subject of "feminist aesthetics" (in the plural). This subject, she outlines, has since become more than just a series of debates about a feminine sensibility in art, but it is now a field of study vital to academic feminist theories and methodologies that seek to more fully account for the variety of positions from which issues pertaining to bodily experience and corporeal subjectivity was (and can be) critically articulated in art production. As a field of study that has developed since the 1970s, feminist aesthetics has questioned how "aesthetics" and "gender" were and are themselves historically situated concepts too. This is a question with which this study is also concerned. Meskimmon's overview of these terms is therefore useful because "feminist aesthetics" does not concern itself necessarily with definitively claiming what is or isn't "feminist" or "feminine" qualities in art, but rather here, I also take an approach that relies upon a terrain of critical investigation of terms attending to how the use of language historically determined cultural debates and effected the historicization of subjects. Therefore tracing some of the ways these debates materialized in the early 1970s in relation to Ree Morton's works is necessary in order to show how her practice

[420] Meskimmon, *Women Making Art*, 133.

responded to the scope of the debates in her installations and, in turn, how her installations add nuance to these debates as well.

"I Know the Whole Rap About Female Imagery": *Bake Sale*

While Ree Morton was working at the Philadelphia College of Art in March 1974 she was invited to be part of the first ever "Women's Faculty Show." The invitation was met with mixed responses. Some of the faculty refused to participate on the grounds the show was tokenistic for women, however Morton chose to submit a small installation called *Bake Sale*. The piece consisted of a low-lying U-shaped table, covered in glitter, "jube-jube" candies and homemade cakes that had been baked and decorated by Morton's students for the show (fig. 62).[421] Above the cake table was a rickety, thin wooden frame that extended vertically up the wall, topped with gaudy pink drapery (fig. 63). On the wall behind the table were twelve three-dimensional colourful bows made from Celastic alongside a small and cheap reproduction of a seventeenth-century portrait of a princess framed by frilly paper doilies (fig. 64).

The work was completely unlike anything Morton had produced before and stood in stark contrast to her other works made around the same time in 1973 and 1974. While these other works such as *Souvenir Piece*, *To Each Concrete Man* and *Sister Perpetua's Lie* used natural materials such as wood and stone to create abstract and postminimalist forms in spatial arrangements, *Bake Sale*, on the other hand, seemed to take its material cues from the *unnatural*. Morton used cheap, mass-produced craft materials to stage a scene of a

[421] These materials for the show were listed by Ree Morton. See Carol Squiers, "REE MORTON: Antidote for Madness", *The New Art Examiner* (January 1975) Vol 2. No. 4 p.4 reprinted in *Ree Morton Retrospective* (New York: The New Museum, 1980), 93 – 94.

"fake" bake sale. The sickly pastel colours, the faux "lace" from the doilies, the reproduction Renaissance princesses, the glittery bows and the pink iced cakes all created a highly theatrical spectacle of kitschy femininity.

According to fellow artist and friend Cynthia Carlson, who was also invited to exhibit her work at the same show but declined, Morton had apparently only participated "in the spirit of irony, as a joke or a dig."[422] Carlson recollected a conversation with Morton where "we talked about it and I refused to be in it. And she [Morton] said, 'no I'm going to be in it, I'm going to do something' so she came up with that idea. And that was the beginning of opening a whole new door to the work that was quite flamboyant and decorative and feminist."[423] When Morton was asked about the impetus behind *Bake Sale* in an interview in 1975 she said she'd included the piece to show her dislike of the idea of a "women's show" insisting the language was too polemical that the work was only linked to the category of "women." She stated "I thought they [the faculty] were being really chicken shit about putting their work out. They wanted the show to be self-explanatory and I thought that that was terrible to finally have a chance to show your work and to insist on remaining a teacher."[424]

Though *Bake Sale* appears to be a pithy response to a show based on gender, the work also marks the first of many direct interventions Morton would make into debates about feminine aesthetics and the controversies of a feminine sensibility in the 1970s. It is interesting that when asked about the show, Morton flatly stated, "I know the whole rap about female imagery – I'm almost involved in it because I don't believe in it. I think it's

[422] Cynthia Carlson, as quoted in *Ree Morton: Retrospective 1971 – 1977*, 40 – 41.
[423] Cynthia Carlson, in interview with the author, December 11th, 2013.
[424] Ree Morton in Carol Squiers "REE MORTON: Antidote for Madness", 93 – 94.

quite possible that there is (a female image) and I think it has nothing to do with what I see identified as female imagery at this time."[425]

As discussed in the last chapter, "female imagery" was a term and concept brought about by Judy Chicago and Miriam Schapiro in their essay of the same name published in 1973, shortly before Morton exhibited *Bake Sale* in 1974. Chicago and Schapiro articulated "female imagery" in alignment with their notion of "central core imagery", which they described as the "the feeling of being a woman" that was formed around a bodily and psychic experience of an "inner space" where the "central core…defines them as women as the framework for an imagery."[426] This for them formed "the hallmark of her [women's] iconography, it establishes a vehicle by which to state the truth and beauty of her identity."[427]

Chicago's and Schapiro's notion of "female imagery" informed the production of their artwork in the 1970s and 1980s, much of which became a target for criticism of a perceived essentialist rhetoric where it was believe to unify women's art within this term would homogenize the experiences of women and attempt to codify what was visible as "feminine" in art. Schapiro, for example in the piece *Atrium of Flowers* (1980) used a number of strategies including stereotypically female symbols, signs and colours such as roses and hearts rendered in red and pink fabric and paint, using craft materials and techniques such as quilting to refer to the traditional domestic labor of "women's work." Schapiro's female "signs" and methods are one illustration of how "female imagery" was

[425] Ree Morton in Carol Squiers "REE MORTON: Antidote for Madness", 93 – 94.
[426] Judy Chicago and Miriam Schapiro, "Female Imagery" [1973] Reprinted in *The Feminism and Visual Culture Reader* (ed) Amelia Jones (London and New York: Routledge, 2003), 56.
[427] Ibid.

supposed to not only indicate the artist was a woman, but that her experience of her body informed her art production.[428]

"Female imagery" therefore became a central concept in 1970s feminist art debates that queried whether women produced art in a specific way because of their anatomically sexed bodies and/or because of their lived experiences as women. Generally speaking, for those who believed in the possibility of a "female imagery" or a "feminine sensibility" these feminine signs and symbols were seen as a positive way of legitimizing the female experience in art.

Those who spoke out against of this model included, as mentioned previously, Patricia Mainardi who rejected the idea that there was a "feminine sensibility" in art. She suggested female imagery equated with a biological determinist position which resulted in universalizing the experience of being a woman and therefore homogeneous ways of making art like a woman.[429] Art writer Cindy Nemser also argued that what had been designated as "feminine" or "female imagery" in art was already based on a series of constructed patriarchal "myths" about women's art being substandard that had "hardened into stereotypes so deeply ingrained in the consciousness of society as to scarcely bare questioning."[430] These debates for and against the existence of a "female imagery" in art underpinned broader disagreements over the use of the term "women's art." Did this refer to *any* art made by a woman? Or did it refer art that *looked like* it had been made by a

[428] For more detailed analyses of how Judy Chicago's work, especially *The Dinner Party* (1979), generated discussions about "female imagery" and essentialism in 1970s feminist art, see Amelia Jones, "Sexual Politics: Feminist Strategies, Feminist Conflicts, Feminist Histories" in *Sexual Politics: Judy Chicago's 'Dinner Party' in Feminist Art History*, ed. Amelia Jones. UCLA at the Armand Hammer Museum of Art and Cultural Center in association with University of California Press (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1996), 20 – 38.
[429] Patricia Mainardi, "A Feminine Sensibility?" [1972] reprinted in *Feminism Art Theory 1968 – 2014* (ed. Hilary Robinson), 228.
[430] Cindy Nemser, "Stereotypes and Women Artists", *Feminist Art Journal* 1 (April, 1972), 1.

woman because it had "feminine" qualities? Was the term "women artists" a useful term that could be used to differentiate its maker as female or was it an exclusionary and separatist category?

These questions can't have been far from Morton's mind in 1973 and 1974. For example, in May 1973 Morton's work was exhibited at Oberlin College for an exhibition held each year promoting the work of four emerging American artists. In a press release for the exhibition, curator Athena Tacha Spear stated "[s]ince for the first time our 'Young Americans' are all women, one might ask the question: Is there anything particularly female about their art?"[431] Yet some women, including Ree Morton, were quite clear about refusing to be called a "woman artist".[432] As Morton said, she only wanted to just be called "artist."[433] Critic April Kingsley's echoed this sentiment in 1973 when she said, "every woman artist I've spoken to hates the whole concept of feminine art, possibly because… 'women's art' has been, and is, by definition, inferior art."[434] Indeed, historically it is true that artwork was believed to be substandard because it either appeared to look "feminine" because it was thought amateur in skill or technique, or the content was considered feminine because it might contain for example, images of flowers or children.

This is where Meskimmon's differentiation of "feminist aesthetics" from "feminine aesthetics" can be useful to frame those artists such as Morton who wanted their art to challenge gender inequalities in the art world without necessarily having to use what

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[431] Athena Tacha Spear, "'Four Young Americans' show – All Women" *The Oberlin Review*, Saturday May 26 (1973), 5.
[432] For more discussion on female artists such as Bridget Riley and Helen Frankenthaler who resisted the term "women's art" or the identification of their work with women-artist activities see, Cindy Nemser, *Art Talk: Conversations with 12 Women Artists* (New York: Charles Scribner's Sons, 1975), 4.
[433] Cynthia Carlson remarked in reference to her and Ree Morton being called "women artists" saying "we [her and Ree Morton] just wanted to be 'artists'." Cynthia Carlson, in interview with the author, March 4th, 2014.
[434] April Kingsley (1974) as quoted by Susan Stoops, *More than Minimal*, 18.

was considered techniques and styles that connoted Chicago's and Schapiro's definition of "female imagery." This marks the intentions of the artist as being linked to *feminist* aesthetic strategies of art making that are political and intend to disrupt sexism rather than using feminine images and signs designed to signify that the art was made by women.[435]

This may relate to why Ree Morton refused the term "women artist" when she wished to be just an "artist." If, as Morton stated previously, she was involved in "female imagery" because she didn't "believe in it" this perhaps meant that simply by being a woman making art for a "women's faculty show" she was implicated within these debates whether she wanted to be or not. Therefore, instead of shying away from how "women's art" as a term might denigrate her practice, she embraced the tokenism of the faculty show with more than a touch of irony in her hyperbolic riot of feminine stereotypical objects like cakes, glitter and pink roses and bows. In this way, *Bake Sale* might be seen to stage an interesting paradox that may have existed for women artists at this time regarding how to position themselves in these debates. Can there be a *feminist* aesthetic that uses *feminine* visual stereotypes? If, as Meskimmon explains a "feminist aesthetic" was "a mode of practice or form of representation which could mobilize the political potential of art for women," then *Bake Sale* does just that by enacting the very difficulties of making art as a woman in the 1970s amid these debates without necessarily wanting to position herself for or against the very specific version of "female imagery" and "central core" as put forward by Chicago and Schapiro.[436]

Another way to think about this staging of the feminine aesthetics debate is in terms of materiality in *Bake Sale*. Morton emphasized in an interview that "all the parts in this

[435] Meskimmon, *Women Making Art,* 132 – 133.
[436] Ibid.

piece are fake…the wooden supports that hold the awning up are covered with contact paper…I made lots of bows out a material called Celastic…and did them with glitter and nail polish and buttons and stars."[437] Added to this was the paper "lace" doily frame on the cheap historical reproduction of a princess-portrait. In her use of fake and cheap craft materials, is Morton ironically representing the *unnatural* construction of feminine stereotypes and clichés?

In 1972, Cindy Nemser detailed how "myths" about women's art and femininity had materialized over centuries in art history. This included myths generated about women's lack of creativity and professional skill in art (i.e., their amateurism and hobbyism), that their choice of images was limited to children and flowers and that they had a penchant for craft and pretty decorative techniques and styles. Nemser described how these myths had become "hardened into stereotypes."[438] Morton's use of Celastic in *Bake Sale* might be said to materially enact Nemser's point. As mentioned in chapter two, Celastic was a molding fabric that solidifies into hard forms after being wetted with acetate and sculpted and was commonly used in the theatre for making props. For Morton, using Celastic might be said to reify how symbols of femininity – such as a pink bows, roses and cakes – were literally and metaphorically being "hardened into stereotypes." Celastic offered Morton a material for feelings to take form. During the year 1974, Morton continued to use Celastic to make a number of pieces presenting sentimental slogans. In December 1974, Morton presented her first solo show of entirely Celastic works at John Doyle Gallery in Chicago.[439] This announced the new and extensive use of Celastic that had been in development for nine

[437] Ree Morton in Carol Squiers "REE MORTON: Antidote for Madness", 93 – 94
[438] Cindy Nemser, "Stereotypes and Women Artists", 1.
[439] For a complete list of the works exhibited, see *Ree Morton: Works 1971 – 1977*, 183.

months and its sentimental aesthetic in her practice that had developed since she first used the material in *Bake Sale* at the beginning of the year in March 1974.

In this case, is is key to recognize how Morton's very first use of Celastic in *Bake Sale* became a way for her to materially dramatize the issues at stake in feminine aesthetics debates. In *Bake Sale*, Morton wasn't necessarily commenting on what was or wasn't "good" or "bad" female imagery but rather it might be said *Bake Sale* skillfully encodes the impossibility of a woman artist contributing meaningfully to a "Women's Faculty Show" because, in such a gendered category, Morton seemed to know her works of art will always be inured under "feminine" images, signs and materials anyway. *Bake Sale* then, in its theatrical overstatement, seems to suggest the artist was self-aware of the paradox of putting work in the show and chose to deliberately signify the *excess* of clichéd feminine tropes in such a theatrical way as to render any truth of "femininity" or "female imagery" false or fake under the weight of exaggeration. As such, the work cleverly performs the contradictions inherent within the debate of feminine aesthetics by "staging" (under a pink awning!) the impossibility of representing femininity and feminine experience meaningfully as "women's art" when all that seems available for the sign of the feminine are signs of fake excess.

On another occasion Morton wrote, "if what you want is not to present graphically a resolution of a theory, but to lay out all that wild input of sensations, complications, contradictions and the old, already dog-eared word, ambiguity, that continually comes rolling in off the beach, then why does that meet so much resistance?"[440] In light of this comment in the case of *Bake Sale*, Morton may not be presenting her "resolution" of what

[440] Ree Morton, [February, 1975] quoted in *The Mating Habit of Lines*: *The Sketchbooks of Ree Morton* (Burlington: University of Vermont: Fleming Museum, 2000), 52.

female imagery is or isn't, but she is laying out the ambiguities, the contradictions and the "wild-input of sensations" in the experience of being a female (artist) and not necessarily being specific about how her gendered or sexed identity frames her work or her intentions in it. Morton seemed interested in ambiguity as a concept. A single line in her notebook from 1975 simply states, "the essential ambiguity of experience itself."[441] Yet another entry in Morton's notebooks quotes Harold Rosenberg, stating: "in art it is always a mistake to push a concept to its logical conclusion. Art comes into being not through correct reasoning but through contradiction of reason in the ambiguities of a metaphor."[442]

Echoing this language, critic Manuela Ammer describes *Bake Sale* as having "an aesthetics of ambiguity."[443] She remarks the work stages feminine clichés that both embrace and critique the signs of femininity it represents.[444] An "aesthetics of ambiguity" in this way is a useful term in thinking about Morton's practice if her staging of these paradoxes in feminine aesthetic debates is viewed as more of a critical interrogation of their nuances. This means that ambiguity and ambivalence in Morton's installations relays the impossibility of authentically representing a women's experience in a patriarchal visual culture, rather than offering up a single solution or strategy about how to do so. Therefore, while *Bake Sale* might have been intended as a light-hearted "joke or dig" in 1974 for the Women's Faculty Show, I would argue the work nevertheless offers serious and instructive ways to think about how the visual codes of more mainstream feminine aesthetics like Chicago's and Schapiro's were being challenged by other female artists in the 1970s.

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[441] Morton, *Notebook* (RM17: 1975), 63.
[442] Morton, *Notebook* (RM12, 1971 – 74) 13. Morton is quoting Harold Rosenberg in *The New Yorker*, May 25th, 1968.
[443] Manuela Ammer, "From Silly Stellas to Signs of Love: Ree Morton's Take On Form, Feeling, and Fake," *Ree Morton: Be Place,* 153.
[444] Ibid.

Craft, Kitsch and "Bad Taste": The *Beaux* Paintings

Morton carried strategies forward from *Bake Sale* into new works in 1974. These included similarly "feminine" symbols, materials and colours such as bows, ribbons, glitter and the use of the colour pink. The motif of the bow seemed to have particular interest to Morton. After bows first appeared in *Bake Sale*, more materialized in a work made shortly afterwards called *Many Have Run Away, To Be Sure* in 1974 (fig. 65). In this work, small Celastic bows are pinned to the wall scattered around another Celastic sculpted banner bearing the words "Many Have Run Away, To Be Sure" above which a pastel pink ribbon fringes the text. A line in Morton's notebooks direct her to "paint the bows like butterflies" testifying to the bows' composition as they "flutter" over the wall.[445] If the bows in these earlier works connoted a certain ironic sign of the feminine, Morton's series of paintings of "portraits" of bows made one year later in 1975, indicates her continued interest in its symbolic capacity.

In the fall of 1975 Morton moved with two of her children to San Diego to take up a one-year teaching post at the University of California. Among the earliest works she made there were a series of oil paintings called *One of the Beaux Paintings*. In a letter to friend Jeff Way, Morton wrote, "[d]id two weird paintings…I liked them so much I cut some more plywood and will do six more…they're frontal portraits of some very obnoxious bows."[446] In the *Beaux*, Morton used a mixture of oil paint and enamel to create stylized cartoon-like bows on square wooden boards. In each of the eight large paintings, a bow is placed squarely in the center of the composition. Some of the paintings have decorative, patterned

[445] See *Ree Morton: Works 1971 – 1977*, 151.
[446] Ree Morton, in a letter to Jeff Way dated October 15th, 1975. See Jeff Way "Recollections and Reflections" in *Ree Morton Retrospective 1971 – 1977*, 84.

backgrounds (fig. 66), while others have painted Celastic fabric pinned to the surface of the painting imitating chunky frames (fig. 67). In another painting, a Celastic bow is tied to the top corner of a *Beaux* painting, showing Morton's playful exchange of painterly and sculptural media (fig. 68).

All of the *Beaux's* colours are bright, garish and brash. Stylistically their forms are simplistically drawn, appearing naïve or amateur. It is significant that all eight paintings carried the same name: *One of the Beaux Paintings*. This was a playful pun on the word "bow" and the French term "beaux" meaning "beautiful" and also "boyfriends". In referring to the bows as "beautiful" or "beaux-art", Morton seems to punning on kitsch, craft and bad taste aesthetics; indeed they are, as Morton noted, "very obnoxious bows."[447] Is Morton signifying here the low and high distinctions between craft and fine art? By painting the "low" and craft object of a bow in the "high art" or "beaux art" medium of paint does Morton celebrate or critique the bow as a kind of feminine symbol? Why paint the bow repeatedly in this way? The repeated motif of the bow calls to mind the more well known series of bows made by Morton's contemporary, feminist artist Lynda Benglis (b. 1941) who made a series of what she called "knot" pieces around the same time. I discuss these works in the next section of this chapter, but first it bears knowing more about Morton's bows and their circumstances of production.

A photograph of Morton's studio in California from this time shows images of swans and flower bouquets cut from magazines, postcards of sunsets and samples of flowery wall paper (that also featured bows) (fig. 69). These objects suggest Morton was investigating stereotypical sentimental feminine imagery that had kitsch, craft and decorative qualities.

[447] Ree Morton, in a letter to Jeff Way, in *Ree Morton Retrospective 1971 – 1977*, 84.

Given that the *Beaux* were made in this context, are they too satirical experiments in an iconography of femininity? It is interesting that the one time Morton actually exhibited all the *Beaux* together (in her lifetime) was when she showed the paintings at the Woman's Building in California later in 1976. Morton stated the the show was "a celebration for Woman's Building."[448] She transformed the large exhibition space into an installation, placing not only *Beaux* on the floor and the walls with other Celastic banner pieces, but Morton also decorated the room with Celastic streamers, garlands and roses that were wrapped around the building's features as if to create a party atmosphere (fig. 70). In the exhibition, Morton hung a number of works adjacent to the *Beaux* that were also variations on the bow motif. These included the pieces *Devil Chaser* (1975) (fig. 71) that had colourful garlands and knotted fabrics scattered across the floor designed to "to ward of demonics," and another work called *Let Us Celebrate While Youth Lingers and Ideas Flow* (1975) (fig. 71) a Celastic wall piece with the title of the work's text emblazoned on pink draped ribbons that were cocked to one side as if caught in the wind. This use of Celastic to emulate textile and tied fabric was an ongoing technique.

Although these works were all shown in one large open room, they are considered individual works. Yet as a composite display with bawdy garlands wrapped around the columns in the room, the overall impression given is that of an amateur theatre set. A photograph of Morton installing the exhibition heightens this performative element of the work. In the image Morton smiles widely for the camera with a one hand holding a Celastic ribbon on a stick high in the air, while the other hand grips a Celastic rose and adopts a

[448] Ree Morton, *Notebook* (RM18, 1975), 21.

triumphant pose. Here Morton whimsically performs in her installation like it is a stage, animating the objects like props (fig. 72).[449]

However, Morton's adornment of the exhibition space can be seen as more than just a "celebration of the Woman's Building" if placed within a historical context of the aforementioned debates about feminine aesthetic and seen within the institutional framework of the exhibition space. To wit, the remit of the Woman's Building was not only to promote the artwork of women, but to create a space where women could network and discuss the issues at stake for them – as Morton can be seen to be doing in a photograph showing her speaking at a workshop there in 1976 (fig. 73). Judy Chicago played a considerable role in the operations of Woman's Building and issues like female imagery would have been well known. In which case the room where Morton's work was installed can also be seen a site specific installation of the kind of aesthetics of ambiguity I've been referring to, relating to Morton's ironic use of female imagery.

Where *Bake Sale* seemed a more acerbic and pointed critique of the concept of the "women's faculty show" in Philadelphia, the Woman's Building exhibition in California made a highly stylized feminine kitsch aesthetic production of objects and paintings that were, on the one hand joyful and playful, but on the other, perhaps also a little mischievous. The material and manipulated feminine gaiety in such a specifically gendered site such as the Woman's Building likely would have been legible to those seeing her work as an intervention within the topical debates about feminine and feminist aesthetics precisely because the work affected a kind of artificial naïveté of them. Morton's craft and prop-like

[449] The idea for the absurdist posing with art objects is indebted to Anna Chave's essay "Striking Poses: The Absurdist Theatrics of Eva Hesse" in *Sculpture and Photography: Envisioning the Third Dimension*, ed. Geraldine A. Johnson (New York: Cambridge University Press, 1998), 166 – 180.

Celastic materials and girlish symbols theatrically perform "female imagery" to the point of irony in this way.

Morton was aware of how clichés and stereotypes worked in this context of "good" and "bad" art. She once wrote in a notebook, "it is impossible not to be dealing with clichés when drawing flowers. How to do that and let it show?"[450] This wish to communicate the function of cliché — a term usually used as a pejorative descriptor in art criticism — shows Morton's keen awareness of how symbols demarcate a kind of "good" and "bad" aesthetics of the feminine in the same way Morton quoted Harold Rosenberg saying "art comes into being not through correct reasoning but through contradiction of reason in the ambiguities of a metaphor."[451] For example, early on in her career, in her notebooks Morton had made a column of "dislikes" (in art) which included the phrase "good taste".[452] Morton's negotiations of the boundaries of good and bad aesthetics show she was interested in how decorative and feminine aesthetics can be provocative to the hierarchies of fine art. This was in keeping with the way several female and feminist artists in the 1970s used decorative strategies to political ends in their work, drawing on techniques and imagery associated with the Pattern and Decoration movement and craft aesthetics.[453] Artists such as Cynthia Carlson, Pat Lasch, Harmony Hammond, Mary Beth Edelson and Pat Steir among many others are examples of artists working with kitsch, feminine, romantic, decorative and abstract forms, materials and subject matter in a variety of media to challenge aesthetic norms throughout the 1970s – these are also artists with whom Morton has since

[450] Morton, *Notebook* (RM02, 1973), 41.
[451] Morton, *Notebook* (RM12, 1971 – 74) 13. Morton is quoting Harold Rosenberg in *The New Yorker*, May 25th, 1968.
[452] Morton, *Notebook* (RM21, 1968), 30.
[453] For a broader discussion of feminist art and decoration, see the exhibition catalogue *Pattern and Decoration: An Ideal Vision in American Art, 1975-1985.* Exhibition Catalogue. Ed. Anne Swartz (New York: Hudson River Museum, 2007)

been historically linked to in both art historical literature and exhibitions regarding women making decorative art in the 1970s.[454]

Such challenges to values of "good" and "bad" aesthetics aligns with a more widespread interest in "bad taste" in art making that materialized in the second half of the 1970s. For example, in 1978 curator Marcia Tucker (Morton's mentor and friend) curated a show called '*Bad' Painting* that evidences how these concerns had become prevalent in artistic practices. In the catalogue Tucker wrote:

> The freedom with which these artists mix classical and popular art-historical sources, kitsch and traditional images, archetypal and personal fantasies, constitutes a rejection of the concept of progress per se. . . . It would seem that, without a specific idea of progress toward a goal, the traditional means of valuing and validating works of art are useless. Bypassing the idea of progress implies an extraordinary freedom to do and to be whatever you want. In part, this is one of the most appealing aspects of "bad" painting — that the ideas of good and bad are flexible and subject to both the immediate and the larger context in which the work is seen.[455]

Although Morton wasn't included in Tucker's show, the *Beaux* fit into Tucker's definition of "bad" painting taste precisely because they "reject the concept of progress" that otherwise affords value and taste in fine art according to patriarchal codes. In this case, Morton's investment in exaggerated feminine tropes show that "bad" artworks can be simultaneously critical, celebratory, sarcastic and serious about feminine aesthetics.

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[454] For example, in 1984 Morton's *Regional Piece* (1976) was included in an exhibition featuring a number of these same artists. The works were framed around the way women artists in the 1970s were specifically seeking a new visual language "to evolve a more personally meaningful imagery and style. See *The New Culture: Women Artists of the Seventies: Dottie Attie, Cynthia Carlson, Mary Beth Edelson, Harmony Hammond, Ree Morton, Miriam Schapiro, Joan Snyder, Pat Steir, May Stevens, Michelle Stuart* (Terre Haute, Ind. : Turman Gallery, Indiana State University, 1984).

[455] Marcia Tucker, *'Bad' Painting* (New York: New Museum, 1978).

Perhaps this was, as Morton stated in 1975, what it meant to be "light and ironic on serious subjects without frivolity."[456]

This approach differentiates Morton's strategies from those of feminist artists such as Judy Chicago and Miriam Schapiro. Their version of "female imagery" was more invested in finding a visual language *for* signifying the feminine that showed how and why women make art. Morton's work, on the other hand, stages the *impossibility* of finding a visual language for that same project; her work allows for play and humor ("light and ironic on serious subjects without frivolity," in her words) and ushers in some of the complex issues at stake in visually expressing gendered subjectivities.

In this case, were the *Beaux* paintings made deliberately, not just in bad taste, but in specifically *feminine* bad taste, to challenge these particular aesthetic debates? And what would be the significance of this in relation to her intervention into debates about feminine aesthetics as seen in *Bake Sale*? I want to suggest that it was in the *Beaux* paintings and some later works that followed, that Morton's interest in feminine aesthetics took up the issue of bad taste in relation to craft, decorative art and kitsch.

In the 1970s craft and decorative aesthetics had become increasingly popular in American culture as part of the do-it-yourself, ecologically-minded, "hippy" culture based on a return to nostalgic forms of traditional and manual labor. For artists, the "hand-made" skills traditionally associated with crafts such as macramé, hooking, ceramics, knitting and weaving were being used by artists in a political way to challenge twentieth century modernist distinctions between fine art and craft. Craft and art historian Elissa Auther has

[456] Morton, *Notebook*, (RM17, 1975) 17. This is a quote taken from "Sampson Under Many Skies" *Hamlet's Mill: An Essay on Myth and the Frame of Time*, Giorgio de Santillana and Hertha von Dechend (published 1940, reprinted 1969), 177.

emphasized how the history of craft in the twentieth century was maintained by two interrelated hierarchies: one is the distinction between the values ascribed to "high" and "low" art i.e. craft being "low", and the other is the way those same values of high and low were linked to gender, where lowly craft was further aligned with the feminine. Craft therefore was, as Auther suggests, "a critical node of activity responsible for sorting out the artistically legitimate from the illegitimate."[457] Indeed, in the early twentieth century under prevalent modernist rubrics, techniques or aesthetics associated with craft made by women were thought to be widely inferior to those associated with fine art made by men. As Auther states, when "women's artistic practices [are] categorized as craft, [fine] art's privilege and supremacy are doubly ensured."[458]

Although this model would seem to secure the lowly status of craft, for some feminist artists in the 1970s for this same reason craft aesthetics offered a subversive challenge to the masculine domain of fine art as a means to recuperate decorative and ornamental aesthetics as specifically for women.[459] This had particular ramifications for reclaiming historic traditions of "women's work" such as sewing, embroidery and quilting as more than just domestic labor or utilitarian object — instead craft could be considered legitimate creative and artistic (art)work.[460] With this in mind, some feminist artists worked deliberately within the parameters of what could be coded as "feminine" techniques and symbols. For example, Miriam Schapiro and Melissa Meyer coined the term

[457] Elissa Auther, *String/Felt/Thread: The Hierarchy of Art and Craft in American Art* (Minneapolis and London: Minnesota University Press, 2010), xx.
[458] Auther, *String/Felt/Thread:* xxix.
[459] For more on this topic in a wider historical scope, see Rozsika Parker, *The Subversive Stitch: Embroidery and the Making of the Feminine* (London : Women's Press, 1984).
[460] For a wider discussion of this, see Anne Schwartz, "Pattern and Decoration : An Ideal Vision in American Art" [2007] in *Pattern and Decoration: An Ideal Vision in American Art, 1975-1985* (Hudson River Museum, 2007), 98 – 99.

"femmage" in 1978 to define an interdisciplinary mode of art making that incorporated styles and methods of facture from craft.[461] The authors believed "femmage" was a singularly female style of making which restaged the historical tradition of women as craft producers, suggesting for example, female quilters were the original abstract artists.[462] This intended to use women's craft specifically to disrupt values of high and low in art, but it framed these debates within a discourse of gendered aesthetics. This followed on from the notion of "female imagery" where Schapiro and Judy Chicago described how specific *forms* were linked to female artists' bodies. Schapiro, this time working with Meyer, developed "femmage" in the arena of craft so as to codify certain *techniques* (such as collage and sewing) in association with, i.e. to signify female makers and the "feminine."

Some men were also using craft aesthetics and materials in the 1970s yet their works were known as "fibre art". Lucy Lippard made the salient point in 1977 that in craft exhibitions at museums when works by major male artists such as Kenneth Noland and Frank Stella were shown, the activities used to make these works – weaving, braiding, sewing and knotting — were seen as gender neutral and were not linked to a history of women's textiles or labors at all. Lippard remarked "when a man makes, say, a macaroni figure or a hand-tooled *Last Supper*, it tends to raise the sphere [of craft to "art"] rather than lower the man."[463] Artist Faith Ringgold, working in the 1970s onwards at the intersection of craft and feminist art with quilting and sewing techniques to represent images of black women, points out that it wasn't necessarily the art object's qualities that

[461] Miriam Schapiro and Melissa Meyer, "Waste Not/Want Not: An Inquiry into What Women Saved and Assembled – Femmage" in *Heresies* 1. No. 4 (Winter 1977 – 78), 66 – 69.
[462] Ibid, 67 – 68.
[463] Lucy Lippard, "Making something from nothing (toward a definition of women's 'hobby art')" *Heresies: Women's Traditional Arts and the Politics of Aesthetics*, Vol. 1 No. 4 (Winter, 1977 – 1978): 64.

designated its status as craft, but it was the gendered and raced identity of the artist, stating, "it's who's doing it that makes it craft."[464]

Even as craft was being reconfigured as a new form of art making in the 1970s, craft made by female artists was still very much signified in the wider art world as being at best in the domain of "women's art," and at worst it was "hobby art" i.e. made at home. It is important to underscore how this link to domesticity affected the way women's labor in craft was specifically debased, for as Auther suggests, craft was thought the clichéd epitome of art made by a housewife noting how, "the housewife is a key signifier for amateurism and a lack of creativity."[465] Auther notes, these qualities considered lacking are all sustained by their opposition to the traditional hallmarks of the esteemed (male) fine artist's presumed professional skill and originality as he works in his (non-domestic) studio.

Addressing this stereotype of the housewife, in 1977 feminist art magazine *Heresies* published a special issue devoted to "discussing the history of women in the decorative arts, the notion of the feminine aesthetic, the sexual division of labor and its relationship to artistic production, and the politics of women's domestic hobby art."[466] For the issue (which notably included Schapiro and Meyer's essay on "Femmage") Lippard wrote an essay on hobby art and the amateur artist, suggesting that craft was not debased but rather subversive because it celebrated art made for personal pleasure rather than for commodity

[464] Faith Ringgold, quoted by Auther, *String/Felt/Thread,* 119.
[465] Auther, *String/Felt/Thread,* 119.
[466] See *Heresies: Women's Traditional Arts and the Politics of Aesthetics*, Vol. 1 No. 4 (Winter, 1977 – 1978).

value or museum standards of taste. This denigration of craft, she argued, denied value to the creativity of women who worked at home.[467]

These narratives of domesticity and amateurism relate to Ree Morton's practice and *Bake Sale*. Not only did the artist have a history of making art in her home-based studios where her children sometimes lived with her, but Morton also admitted she had internalized her amateurism in her own identity as an artist. In an interview where the artist reflected back on her early career she said, "I was still not able to call myself an artist. I mean, I was a housewife, right? I was a mother, I had children, I had a family to take care of. And [being an artist] was something I did in my extra time."[468] That Morton deployed craft aesthetics in *Bake Sale* in the use of Celastic and cheap materials in such a deliberately amateur way, imbricates this work this (perceived) culture of women's domestic hobby art, but with a critical edge; it is as if Morton's *Bake Sale* enacts a satire of the hobby art of a housewife-artist who is only capable of making cakes instead of art.

Morton's comment is in keeping with Lippard's essay on women's hobby art published in the aforementioned special craft edition of *Heresies*, where she suggests that craft's denigration is not just related to the professionalism or skill of the artist (as implied by the term "hobby"), but it is linked to a wider discourse of gender, class and taste that actively excludes women's art from "fine art." Lippard asserts the more "domestic" an art object appears i.e. the more it evidences having been made in the home, shown in the home, or made *for* the home — the more it enters the realm of "bad taste" and kitsch.[469]

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[467] Lippard, "Making something from Nothing", 63 – 68.
[468] Ree Morton, in interview with Kate Horsfield and Lyn Blumental, *Ree Morton: An Interview* (1974) Dir. Kate Horsfield, Video Data Bank, The School of the Art Institute Chicago.
[469] Lippard, "Making Something from Nothing", 63.

Clement Greenberg's sharp critique of the principles of kitsch aesthetics in his essay "Avant Garde and Kitsch" (1939) is a key modernist text that articulates the perceived hierarchies between craft and fine art. Although this text was written in the 1930s, it is exemplary of the modernist and traditional views that were sustained in fine art discourses throughout the mid- and late twentieth century. Greenberg's notion of "kitsch" is predicated on its association with craft which he maligned as a specific form of visual culture rooted in values associated with populism. Because of this, kitsch had no intrinsic content, only effect, because it draws from what Greenberg called a "reservoir of accumulated experience" in popular culture.[470] As such, he claimed, kitsch can only mimic and copy, stating, "kitsch is mechanical and operates by formulas. Kitsch is vicarious experience and faked sensations. Kitsch changes according to style, but remains always the same."[471] In this text and others written in the decades thereafter, Greenberg went on to conflate the decorative and kitsch with qualities such as fine detail and precision, the ornamental, and processes of art making that involved repetitive or mechanical labor such as those associated with craft and – crucially for this study – he associated these qualities with art work made by women.[472]

Elissa Auther has carefully analyzed the politics at stake in Greenberg's criticisms of kitsch. She cogently argues how specifically through the excoriation of the qualities associated with the decorative in line with paradigms of bad taste and bad art, these

[470] Greenberg, "Avant Garde and Kitsch" (1939) in *Clement Greenberg: The Collected Essays and Criticisms* Vol. 1, Ed. John O'Brian (Chicago and London: University of Chicago Press, 1986),12.
[471] Ibid.
[472] For an overview of Greenberg's texts and its pejorative discussion of kitsch and decorative in terms of gender, see Elissa Auther, "The Decorative, Abstraction and the Hierarchy of Craft in the Art Criticism of Clement Greenberg" *Oxford Art Journal* 27: no. 3 (December 2004), 339 – 64.

qualities were also associated with the feminine.[473] These discourses on bad taste and kitsch had important implications for the reception of women's art in the 1970s. The binaries Greenberg set up between art and craft, originality and skill, and good and bad further ensured respective distinctions between good art made by men and bad craft made by women. Auther argues that even though feminist artists were intentionally using craft and "bad taste" to challenge these hierarchies, because these binaries were so entrenched in twentieth century art criticism, aesthetic techniques associated with the decorative, the kitsch and the feminine were effectively weaponized *against* feminist artists, which had the effect of undermining or neutralizing the politics assigned to their use in the first place.

Knots and *Beaux*: Abstraction and "An Aesthetics of Ambiguity"

Art historian Susan Richmond has explored how feminist art in the 1970s was implicated within what she calls the "middlebrow" aesthetic (i.e. between "high" art and "low" craft) that was related to a "gendered and classed category affecting women's contemporary cultural and artistic production."[474] Richmond's account takes seriously how suburban middle-class domestic art culture was not only devalued at the time by critics, but she she considers how middlebrow women's art has also been eschewed in art histories. Just as Lippard noted that art which "evidences being made in the home, shown in the home, or made for the home…enters the realm of 'bad taste'," Richmond suggests the

[473]Auther, "The Decorative, Abstraction and the Hierarchy of Craft in the Art Criticism of Clement Greenberg", 353 – 357.
[474] Susan Richmond, *Lynda Benglis: Beyond Process* (London and New York: I.B. Tauris, 2015), 99.

aesthetic territory of "the middle" was gendered female when synonymous with the "vapid, superficial, and excessive" association to the leisure time of women in the home.[475]

Evidencing this point, Richmond takes artist Lynda Benglis and her *Knot* series as a case study to demonstrate a feminist artistic strategy that exposes how the "middlebrow" was presumed to be made in "bad taste." Benglis's series of *Knots*, made between 1972 and 1976, were three dimensional sculptures. The earliest forms were made from a base of aluminum screen and cotton bunting, where the artist pulled, twisted, contorted and tied off the forms, before adding a decorative treatments to its surface. The early knots from the so-called "Sparkle Knots Series" were made between 1972 and 1974 and were painted in bawdy-colours with glitter, as can be seen in her piece *Zita* from 1973. In the later *Knots* made between 1973 and 1976, Benglis used a metalizing gun to spray metalic paint. This added a "fake" shiny, monochromatic surface upon which she added Mylar sparkles and fake gemstones, as can be seen in pieces such as *Omnicron* (1974); Richmond characterized these later *Knots* as having a "dime-store aesthetic" within "the arena of mass cultural commodity."[476]

When Richmond describes how 1970s critiques of Benglis's *Knots* evidence the way the "middlebrow" was deployed pejoratively, she suggests the negative criticism the *Knots* engendered was actually desired by Benglis. Richmond explains she believes Benglis's aesthetic techniques solicited the viewer to make the link between kitsch aesthetics and feminine craft motifs because the *Knots* range "from the charmingly delicate to the grotesquely awkward, from the breathtakingly elegant to the unapologetically tawdry,

[475] Richmond, *Lynda Benglis,* 99.
[476] Ibid, 98 - 102.

these works ultimately position taste as something to be embraced and simultaneously challenged."[477]

Lynda Benglis's *Knots* series and Ree Morton's *Beaux* series clearly have a lot in common. First, both artists use single motifs to repeatedly exaggerate representations of feminine objects — given that knots and bows themselves both refer to the acts of tying and looping fabric or clothes to make something stronger or more secure, these forms reference a gendered history of domestic labor and textile production. Second, both artists comparably decorate their *Knots* and *Beaux* with gaudy adornments like glitter and pink paint to materially signify a stereotypical sign of femininity positioned within kitsch and bad taste aesthetics.

When Richmond indicates that Benglis's *Knots* "ultimately position taste as something to be embraced and simultaneously challenged," this is something I've already suggested is true of Morton's work too. This framing of Benglis's *Knots* aligns with how I suggested Manuela Ammer framed *Bake Sale* as having an "aesthetics of ambiguity" because it staged feminine clichés in motifs and materials that seemed to both embrace and critique the model of the feminine it represents.[478] Framing the *Knots* and the *Beaux* in a paradigm of an aesthetics of ambiguity shows more broadly how these artists were aware of contemporaneous debates about "female imagery" but that Morton and Benglis were challenging how nuances of good and bad taste, high and low culture, and abstract and representational art, intersect with the cultural production of the category of "women's art."

[477] Richmond, *Lynda Benglis*, 98 – 99.
[478] Ammer, *Ree Morton*, 153.

In this case, the *Beaux* and *Knots* aren't merely operating with an aesthetics of ambiguity as if the works don't present any opinion about female imagery or feminine aesthetics. Rather these works produce a hyperbolic and ironic construct of a feminine aesthetic — part fake and part sincere — that is simultaneously celebratory of "women's art" as a polemical political tool, but also critical of the exclusivity of the category and the restrictions the term might engender. In teasing out the problems at stake in visually representing femininity, this kind of aesthetic overstatement might be seen in fact as a specifically *feminist* strategy according to Meskimmon's definition of a "feminist aesthetic" that can "mobilize the political potential of art for women."[479]

It is interesting that as a point of comparison to Ree Morton, Lynda Benglis's career (still ongoing) has recently undergone more critical scrutiny in scholarly historical research and exhibition visibility with regard to how her abstract works from the 1960s and 1970s challenged modernist notions of good and bad taste with strategies that addressed the way styles and techniques in painting and sculpture were deemed masculine and/or feminine.[480] Benglis clearly has a keen sense of how materials challenge gendered aesthetics norms. For example, in what she calls her "fallen paintings" made in the late 1960s, Benglis poured latex paint directly onto the floor where it pooled and hardened into abstract forms. Susan Richmond has carefully tracked how critics and historians framed these works either in relation to Jackson Pollock (relating Benglis's work to a masculine tradition of physical and gestural painting), or they emphasized how the act of pouring was

[479] Meskimmon, *Women Making Art*, 132 – 133.
[480] Richmond's book on Lynda Benglis, cited here, is an excellent example of a monographic study that gives a properly contextualized account of Benglis's work with regards to 1970s critics' responses and aesthetic debates. A retrospective exhibition of Benglis's oeuvre at the Barbara Hepworth gallery in Wakefield in England in 2016, curated by Andrew Bonacina, gave a similarly contextualized account of the artist's practice as it related to feminist and feminine aesthetic debates in the 1970s. See http://www.hepworthwakefield.org/whatson/lynda-benglis/ Last Accessed March 3rd, 2017.

erotic and alluded to, what one writer called, "a blatant proposition of femininity and female sensuality."[481] In the *Knot* pieces, made just a few years after the "fallen paintings," Benglis's deliberately exaggerated feminine flourishes of glitter and pink, by extension, seem to challenge the long standing masculine tradition of sculpture too.

To bring Morton's work in dialogue with Benglis's gendered politics of materiality allows us to see how works like *Bake Sale* and the *Beaux* are also potentially engaged with these kinds of strategies of ambiguity that operate as feminist critiques. This is precisely because Morton's works, like Benglis's, raise questions over the legitimacy of perceiving materials, techniques and images as gendered. Yet, it is only more recently that Benglis's more abstract works have been historicized in relation to material strategies in feminist art making given the way they bring about these kinds of questions. This points to a wider issue about how abstract artworks by women are or aren't theorized and/or categorized in histories as "feminist" when their content or meaning isn't so easy to discern. This is a key issue for Ree Morton's legacy given that many forms in her oeuvre are partially or sometimes fully abstract and her materials varied, but they engage with feminist themes relating to the critique of gender and power in aesthetic hierarchies.

In this case, what Ammer called an "aesthetics of ambiguity" and the wider technique of abstraction and materiality in art may be conceptually and politically linked. Abstract art by definition obscures or removes content so as defer meaning to feeling. Ambiguity too relies on an inexactness and a lack of precision of meaning. How then can artworks that deploy abstract techniques and this kind of aesthetics of ambiguity be contextualized as "feminist," when (historically speaking) that term has a relatively defined

[481] Susan Krane [1991], quoted by Susan Richmond, *Lynda Benglis*, 40 – 44.

set of political meanings, intentions and frameworks? Those artworks by women that are abstract yet challenge gender stereotypes or clichés in formal techniques (like pink paint) or process-based strategies (like sewing) also risk being overlooked in art historical narratives where more polemical feminist art that using representational strategies has garnered visibility in historical registers because they were thought to better communicate a feminist project.

The view that abstract art wasn't "feminist" was prevalent in 1970s American feminist art networks. As feminist artist Mira Schor recalls:

> …in general, representation and, more specifically, figuration have proved more useful than abstraction to those wishing to discuss gender difference and feminist issues in visual art. Feminist content has been easier to perceive when iconographic analyses of representation and image-based narratives can be brought to bear on the work. Consequently, much to the dismay of women working in abstraction who consider themselves feminists, they are often not included in exhibitions and panel discussions on feminism and gender representation.[482]

Schor points to a systemic problem even within feminist art wherein political content and techniques of abstraction are presumed to be at odds with one another. This view was corroborated even by Lucy Lippard who remembered that in the 1970s, "I wrote less and less about abstract art because there was less there to get my teeth into…it's just harder to see the subversion and the confrontations in an abstract framework, even when the artist is politically supportive of feminism."[483]

If abstract art by women in the 1970s was perceived as less polemical and therefore less political (even by feminist artists and critics like Lippard who have been enormously influential in promoting women abstract artists' careers), this may have created further

[482] Mira Schor "Some Notes on Women and Abstraction and a Curious Case History: Alice Neel as a Great Abstract Painter," in *Differences: A Journal of Feminist Cultural Studies* Vol. 17, No. 2 (Summer 2006), 133.
[483] Lippard, in interview with Susan Stoops, *More than Minimal*, 31.

discursive parameters of exclusion in historical registers in relation to what is legible both as "feminist" and as "feminist art." As Schor qualifies, it was only those more mainstream and feminist artists like whose established "codes of representation of femininity" came to be perceived as most exemplary of feminist art.[484]

Another artist who offered a powerful rejoinder to the view that abstract art couldn't be political was Harmony Hammond who published the essay "Feminist Abstract Art – A Political Viewpoint" in *Heresies* in 1977. Hammond argues that abstract art becomes political when its method of making and materials are taken into consideration. Specifically, this meant bringing women's abstract art into dialogue with *embodied* techniques associated with crafts, because the history of craft was associated with the physical labor of sewing, weaving and knitting — all skills historically deployed (and passed on through generations) by women. Hammond crucially relocates a history of abstract art made by women in the 1970s and its processes within historical paradigms of "women's work" rather than early twentieth century formalist modernist paradigms of abstraction that pertained to be gender neutral. Hammond noted, "for women, the meaning of sewing and knotting is 'connecting' — connecting the parts of one's life, and connecting to other women – creating a sense of community and wholeness…if our lives and our art are connected, and if the 'personal is political' in the radical sense, we cannot separate the content of our work from the form it takes."[485] Indeed, much of Hammond's own work used methods of knotting, tying and painting fabrics to make colourful abstract sculptural forms, such as one of her best known pieces, *Floorpiece V* (1973), which used traditional rug-making techniques.

[484] Schor, "Some Notes on Women and Abstraction", 142.
[485] Harmony Hammond, "Feminist Abstract Art – A Political Viewpoint," *Heresies*, No. 1 (1977) 68, 70

The *Beaux* and the *Knots* might be therefore also reconfigured within Hammond's paradigm of "connecting." Given that bows and knots are also ways of tying, securing or connecting which, by Hammond's use of the term, annexes Morton's and Benglis's pieces to being conceptual *modes* and material *nodes* of making art related to "women's work." Feminist art therefore does not have to be content-based if one takes into account how materials and processes may be linked to a gendered history of making and as such are therefore further inscribed by feminist strategies and modes of production. This links back to my earlier discussion of what Susan Stoops called "content-oriented abstraction" in postminimalism, a notion she suggested that relieves content — abstract or representational — from being causally linked to a definitive mode of making feminist art *or* abstract art. Instead, "content-oriented abstraction" allows for thinking about feminist strategies of abstraction to be understood as those which engage theoretically and materially with notions of "the feminine" as a myriad of complex and ambiguous meanings that can take meaning through processes and materials, which as Stoops noted, "legitimized the role of female subjectivity in a fundamentally abstract aesthetic."[486] As such, Morton's bows and Benglis's knots are not *either* abstract *or* feminist forms, but they are connective symbols of a critical *node* of feminist polemic in these histories too.

Helen Molesworth suggests these discourses have effected histories of feminist art. She considers the way certain preferences in styles and techniques for content-driven aesthetic have become intractable within narrative canons of 1970s feminist art that have been responsible for exclusions of other artists. She asks what kind of "feminism" is being instrumentalized in writing histories of feminist art and in exhibitions of feminist art that

[486] Stoops, *More than Minimal*, 6.

serve to shore up certain feminine aesthetic values in content-driven art work. Molesworth explores this issue in the catalogue for the blockbuster feminist show *WACK! Art and the Feminist Revolution* (2007 – 08), where she looks at the work of 1970s abstract painters Mary Heilmann, Howardina Pindell and Joan Snyder who she claims, "share an identification as feminists, all the while participating in the rigorous abstraction associated with modernism."[487] Crucially, Molesworth frames these painters' use of pink paint hues as a self-conscious critique of painterly conventions associating pink with femininity, not necessarily as a nod to the gender of the artist per se. She suggests the use of pink instead highlights the naturalized assumptions about gender and class because of the kitschy "bad taste" signified by pink was mobilized to undermine and threaten the masculine authority of modernist "universalism" associated with colour field painting and abstract expressionism.[488]

Molesworth concludes "paintings that are both feminist and abstract suffer from a kind of illegibility" in historical records because the works were neither properly "abstract" nor (because they are abstract) properly "feminist."[489] However, she also suggests this dual invisibility can be powerfully used to alter the way in which these kinds of works and their artists can be understood today. Molesworth notes that, because these works didn't have to adhere to any specific conventions of feminist art *and* refused to make a clear commentary on the position of what is "feminine" by using abstract techniques, they could occupy a specific territory of "ambivalence" which allows a capacity for criticality. This means being

[487] Helen Molesworth, "Painting with Ambivalence," *WACK! Art and the Feminist Revolution*, (ed.) Cornelia H Butler (Cambridge: MIT press, 2008), 429.
[488] Ibid.
[489] Ibid, 430.

neither for nor against a specific mode of feminine aesthetics.[490] She suggests that, even though at the time this meant artists' works were dismissed by many as merely "bad art," to revisit them now is to give them critical traction in new formations.

This is precisely the way in which I suggest works such as *Bake Sale* and the *Beaux* paintings by Ree Morton need to be revisited. Although Molesworth uses the term "ambivalence" instead of "ambiguity" the point remains that these works afford a range of feelings and responses, precisely because as I've noted they both embrace and critique models of feminine aesthetics, in the way Richmond describes for Benglis "taste as something to be embraced and simultaneously challenged."[491] As such, these two works by Morton need to be thought of as capable of having critical capacity in historical registers by enacting these debates but not necessarily enacting an explicit polemic – they challenge our notion of what we think feminine qualities are in art, not telling us what the feminine must look like. Therefore, these cakes and bows covered in glitter and coloured pink were definitely not silly or spurious representations of womanhood, but rather they engaged with the paradoxes in presenting the *unrepresentability* of feminine aesthetics. They are as Morton stated, a way of being "light and ironic on serious subjects without frivolity."[492]

Therefore, based on Molesworth's hypothesis about ambivalence, it could also be said that Morton's exclusion from feminist art histories and wider art histories more generally has been in part because of what this "illegibility" of works that were not perceived as "properly abstract" nor "properly feminist."[493] In this case, to follow Molesworth's point that if an artist didn't have to conform to certain techniques or

[490]Molesworth, "Painting with Ambivalence," 430.
[491] Richmond, *Lynda Benglis,* 98 – 99.
[492] Morton, *Notebook*, (RM17, 1975), 17.
[493] Molesworth, "Painting with Ambivalence," 430.

standards of "good" or "bad" or "masculine" or "feminine" because they deemed themselves outside of certain aesthetic categories of production, they could be more open to adopting a kind of critical aesthetic ambivalence – say, with the use of pink. By excessively overstating belabored stereotypes of "women's art" in pink paint, glittered finishes, or using bows or flowers this shows how "female imagery" or "women's art" is a debate attended to Ree Morton in her artwork — one that challenged orthodoxies across the mainstream categories of "woman" and "feminist art." To be clear, ambivalence and ambiguity in Morton's artwork is not apathetic or apolitical in as much as I've shown abstract art is not apolitical either. Rather, it depends on the way artistic materials, images and processes are framed within, or against, particular aesthetic strategies, cultural contexts and historical discourses of labor and gender. Properly contextualized within these key art historical debates about gendered aesthetics, Ree Morton's *Bake Sale* and the *Beaux* paintings materialize as a feminist critique of feminine aesthetics.

Regional Piece **and "The Excessive Sentimentality of Kitsch"**

An interrogation of a hierarchy of aesthetic categories continued in Morton's practice. Between 1975 and 1976 Morton developed a series of paintings each titled *Regional Piece.* The works began when Morton was in California around the same time she made the *Beaux* works. The *Regional Piece* series were made in a set of five paired paintings. Each set consists of two paintings paired like a diptych, except they were exhibited one above the other instead of side by side and each was framed by a Celastic draped frame (fig. 74). Both paintings in each set followed the same format of what Morton called "sunscapes" and "seasets". The seasets (always the painting on the bottom) included

one large colourful fish painted in loose and gestural brushstrokes, whereas the sunscapes featured a dramatic vista of the ocean horizon where the sky met the sea. To mark the occasion of the works, Morton published a poetic essay detailing the pleasure she gained from California ocean panoramas and the benefit they had on her life and work.[494]

While the *Regional Piece* series did not deploy the kind of feminine decorative flourishes seen in the *Beaux* paintings and *Bake Sale*, these paintings show Morton's interest in testing the parameters of good and bad taste of "American" aesthetics. The titles of these works reference the tradition of American Regionalism, a painterly movement in the 1930s depicting state-specific rural and urban scenes of American progress. In the movement artists sought to find a distinctly "American" style of painting that used similar techniques and narrative content similar to European traditions but with a geographically located ("regional") subject matter.[495] If, as I've suggested, Morton's *Bake Sale* and *Beaux* paintings offer an interrogation of the debates of feminine aesthetics, the *Regional Piece* series could be said to deploy similar ambiguous approaches to the subject matter that both embrace and critique what is "American" about American art. The weighty Celastic drapery that surrounds the *Regional Piece* works nods to theatre curtains, emphasizing the dramatic panorama of the elongated canvas. The garish colours of the paintings bring these works into dialogue with the mechanical reproduction of the ugly and cheap kitsch commodity similar to what Richmond calls a "dime-store aesthetic" or what Greenberg calls kitsch's capacity to communicate "vicarious experience and faked sensations". Given

[494] See Ree Morton, "Places" published in *Journal* (Southern California Art Magazine, the Los Angeles Institute of Contemporary Art) March/April (1976) republished in *Ree Morton: Retrospective 1971 – 1977*, 56.
[495] Erika Doss, *Benton, Pollock, and the Politics of Modernism: From Regionalism to Abstract Expressionism* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1991), 1.

that the *Regional Piece* works deploy some visual strategies of "bad taste," at same time, like the *Beaux* paintings, they relate to a kind of an aesthetics of ambiguity.

Therefore as kitsch objects, rather than being devoid of feeling or modeled on Greenbergian "faked sensations," the *Regional Piece* series might be said to affirm Morton's "real" or sincere affection for California landscapes with the piece's chintz and "bad taste" aesthetic. Again, this interplay between celebration and critique operates along an axis of an aesthetic of ambiguity; is Morton making fun of American Regionalist style or is she sincerely embracing kitsch qualities that communicate her sentimentality for the California coast? This uncertainty questions not just the construction of values of taste of quality in art, but the assumptions that the production of "bad art", kitsch or hobby art is incapable of communicating "real" feelings. Exemplifying this view, *New York Times* art critic Hilton Kramer haughtily wrote when seeing Morton's *Regional Piece* series in 1976, they were "suspiciously easy to like."[496]

This tendency in cultural studies to dismiss kitsch and sentimental images as vacuous, fake and false has been more widely examined more recently by Monica Kjellman-Chapin, who broadly explores the mechanics of how such aesthetics in visual culture and the media are configured as apolitical. "One of the arguments," she writes, "frequently put forth about (and against) kitsch is that it can never be critical. Its status as aesthetically, morally and intellectually bankrupt would seem to ensure this." [497] Looking more specifically at art, Kjellman-Chapin notes, "the use of kitsch by postmodern artists can be understood as provocative gesture fully invested with the gravity of cultural critique; such

[496] Hilton Kramer, "Art: Suspiciously Easy To Like" in *The New York Times*, 1976.
[497] Monica Kjellman-Chapin, "The Politics of Kitsch," *Rethinking Marxism*, Vol. 22, No. 1 (January, 2010), 38.

artists deliberately trade on the excessive sentimentality of kitsch in order to produce trenchant social and political commentaries."[498]

I want to suggest that Ree Morton's work very explicitly draws on a similar notions of the "excessive sentimentality of kitsch in order to produce trenchant social and political commentaries" as it relates to debates in feminine aesthetics. In what follows, I consider more fully installation art used by Morton for its theatrical capacity that allowed her to explore the notion of "excess" and "sentimentality" as a cultural commentary on gendered aesthetics. Although "sentimental", "romantic" and "emotional" are terms frequently applied to Ree Morton's artworks, I argue here that they have not been subject to adequate discursive interrogation.

In cultural histories spanning the eighteenth, nineteenth and twentieth centuries, the "sentimental" has been a term aligned closely with femininity. The term itself refers to those qualities relating to something or something that evokes affect or feeling. Sentimentality also has had a longstanding historic association with the notion of femininity in "excess." For, to be sentimental, is never seen as the right amount of feeling but is considered too much. Furthermore, sentimentality if often couched within the private realm, as opposed to men and a lack of emotion being linked of the public realm.[499] When sentimentality and femininity intersect in visual culture they are often paired within these paradigms of "excess" and therefore often viewed as debased and illegitimate, as they have been with the concept of with kitsch in discourses of craft.

[498] Kjellman-Chapin, "The Politics of Kitsch," 38.
[499] See Deborah Knight's discussion of excess in "Why We Enjoy Condemning Sentimentality: A Meta-Aesthetic Perspective", *The Journal of Aesthetics and Criticism*. Vol. 57 No. 4 (Autumn, 1999), 418.

In early twentieth-century art and aesthetics, modernist critics made sustained rejections of sentimental images, claiming them anti-intellectual, irrational, indulgent and bourgeois, frivolous and distinctly *un-serious*.[500] Robert C. Solomon in *The Defense of Sentimentality* suggests that in this way, the artistic expression of sentimentality was a variation of the discourse of kitsch. Here, positive "feelings" such as a state of happiness or joy either visible in the content of an image or understood as produced by the image (the emotion felt by the viewer) historically were equated to "bad taste, a paucity of arguments, sniveling morals, and an absence of backbone."[501] However, Solomon suggests that it isn't necessarily the *amount* of feeling generated by art objects that is objectionable (i.e., feelings in "excess"), but it is in fact the solicitation of a desire to feel good by artists. This is, according to him, because to feel something as supposedly simple and wholesome as "good" when looking at or evaluating art, historically implies a lack of sophistication, complexity and profoundness.[502]

Philosopher Deborah Knight has gone further in her examination of the social effects of sentimentality by suggesting that, rather than trying to ascertain what is sentimental about cultural objects per se, more is revealed in its cultural condemnation. She suggests the on-going refusal to dismantle power structures that create and maintain hierarchies of taste, exemplifies the systematic binarization between "good" and "bad" for the purpose of sustaining power relations. This, she says, materializes particularly in gendered language of

[500] Alexandra Novina. "A Swell of Sentiment" (2005) reprinted for DeCordova Museum and Sculpture Park for the Exhibition Catalogue *Pretty Sweet: The Sentimental Image in Contemporary Art.* Last accessed on August 31st, 2016. http://www.tfaoi.com/aa/5aa/5aa192d.htm
[501] Robert C Solomon, *In Defense of Sentimentality* (New York: Oxford University Press, 2004), ix.
[502] Solomon, *In Defense of Sentimentality*, 241 – 244.

the sentimental, to which the feminine is frequently linked, so that the feminine positions stays debased as "low" through alignment with excess emotions and the fakery of kitsch.[503]

This proposition obviously has far reaching effects on theorizing feminine aesthetics in art history, not least because it suggests the active marginalization of women artists who dared broach the artistic representations of emotion, or the decorative, the kitsch etc. in their artwork. The genre of sentimental art, mostly seen in painting, was not understood to be capable of being subversive to undermine the status quo prior to the late twentieth century. Sentimental painting was a genre deemed suitable for women in the eighteenth, nineteenth and early twentieth centuries where they might depict flowers or children because those topics were already deemed "feminine" themselves.

Curator Alexandra Novina considers a change in attitudes has occurred more recently in contemporary art towards sentimental imagery. In her essay for the exhibition she curated called *Pretty Sweet: The Sentimental Image in Contemporary Art* (2005) she notes sentimentality is "only now being recognized and discussed seriously in contemporary art circles as a vital aesthetic phenomenon."[504] Novina acknowledges, unlike Solomon and Knight, the important role 1970s feminist artists played in addressing the illegitimacy of sentimental topics in visual arts by engaging directly with its imagery and content. She saw these feminist artworks as a vehicle for "ironic political and cultural commentary" of the patriarchal power exerted on the discourse on beauty. As she notes, it was feminist artists who predominantly challenged assumptions that topics such as childhood, family, nostalgia and romantic love were simple, straightforward and uninteresting topics for art.

[503] Knight, "Why We Enjoy Condemning Sentimentality", 418.
[504] Novina. "A Swell of Sentiment". Unpaginated.

Therefore, rather than seeing sentimentality as excess, Novina's recuperation of the sentimental realizes a critical framework provoking questions about how and by whom the boundaries of legitimate feeling are determined and moderated in aesthetics. How do these arbitrations effect the historicization of sentimental art by women? For, if to be sentimental is to derive pleasure in the experience of emotion and the sentimental is linked with an encounter with feminine pleasure, is a refusal of the legitimacy of a sentiment aesthetic also a denial of female pleasure both in art making and in its spectatorship? As Amelia Jones has written "central to the maintenance of masculinist critical models is the insistence on the impossibility of a work of art that is both sensual and conceptual, both corporeal and theoretical, both eroticized and politically critical at the same time."[505]

To deny the qualities Jones outlines would be a particular problem for theorizing Ree Morton's installation art. As I argued in chapter one, not only does installation art in general rely on the sensual experiences enacted by the bodies of spectator's in its spaces, but as I've argued throughout this study Morton's work creates an encounter with the hierarchies of ambiguous feelings and forms as feminine, or as Jones put it, Morton's work is "both sensual and conceptual, both corporeal and theoretical, both eroticized and politically critical" by virtue of its engagement with feminine aesthetics as linked to the embodiment of installation space. In this way, Morton's installations not only challenge those masculine models that would see sentimentality and pleasure as an impossibility in "serious" work of art, but as I will argue, her work reinforces installation art is an immersive format that particularly enables sentimentality and feminine bodily pleasure to be politicized by making viewers inhabit its spaces in an embodied way.

[505] Amelia Jones, "Feminism, Incorporated Reading 'Postfeminism' in an Anti-Feminist Age" in *The Feminism and Visual Culture Reader*, ed. Amelia Jones (London and New York: Routledge, 2003), 325.

Two of Ree Morton's later installations best demonstrate these qualities. They actively solicit sentimental emotions and pleasure by representing in "bad" taste feminine aesthetics the themes of friendship and love. Respectively, these themes play out in *Something in the Wind* (1975) and *Signs of Love* (1976) two of Morton's most ambitious installations in the last years of her short career. While the works chart different paths materially and spatially and explore different kinds of personal relationships, Morton simultaneously addressed the contradictions of representing sentimentality aesthetically by juxtaposing symbolic tropes of femininity with her dual critical and celebratory modes as described above.

Something in the Wind and Sentimentality

1974 had been a prolific year for Ree Morton. By the end of the year, she had completed and shown several large installations including: *See-Saw*; *To Each Concrete Man; Bake Sale*; *Bozeman, Montana*; *Maternal Instincts*; the *Weeds of the Northeast* series; *Terminal Clusters; Solitary or Rarely 2; The Plant That Heals May Also Poison*; and *Fading Flowers*. During this industrious period Morton wrote a grant proposal for a new project she described as "an outgrowth of the work I have been interested in for the last few years...I would like to do a picture-word history of my life – to make a flag for each person and place which has been important in my life up until this time."[506] In this same proposal, Morton expressed she wanted to exhibit the work at the Rockefeller Center in New York City because "it is a highly trafficked public space – it is crucial to this piece that the personal nature of the flags (autobiography) be presented in a public space." The "gaily

[506] The proposal was awarded and funded by a Creative Artists Public Service Program (CAPS) grant. For photographs of the proposal, see *Ree Morton: Works 1971- 1977*, 135. See figs. 7 and 8.

coloured" flags Morton planned in a rectangular arrangement with "family" flags on one side and "friend" flags on the other to create a "relaxed, festive atmosphere…it is a commemoration, a celebration, a statement of affirmation."[507]

The work that materialized from this proposal was *Something in the Wind*, which as I discussed on page 107 of this study, was made from more than 100 flags that Morton had each emblazoned with a single hand-sewn, appliquéd emblem as well as its referent's name in painted letters (fig. 20). Morton's research for the work included renaissance heraldry, noting flags were "the language of emblems – historically of tribes, families and nations."[508] Each flag in the work carries an emblem individually designed for the person it names. The emblems are esoteric and strange icons: a bird for Gordon Matta Clark, a fan for Mary Delahoyd, a dragon for Barbara Zucker and an Egyptian head for Laurie Anderson (bottom right corner of fig. 20). Morton would later write "I made a flag for each person in my life that I have good feelings for, or who I feel connected to in some way. It was a celebration for them and a means of identifying and locating myself in the world by naming the persons who surround me."[509]

In the end, the finished work wasn't exhibited at the Rockefeller Center plaza on flagpoles. By the time funding for the project was released almost six months after the grant was secured, the flags were strung up along the ropes of nineteenth century schooner docked at South Street Seaport Museum in New York in June 1975 (fig. 19). The new site suited Morton's humorous sensibility and she toyed with alternative titles for the work

[507] See *Ree Morton: Works 1971- 1977*, 135.
[508] Ibid, 135. See Fig. 7.
[509] Ree Morton, in *Attitudes Towards Space: Environmental Art* (Los Angeles: Mount Saint Mary's College of Art Gallery, 1977) unpaginated, reprinted in *Ree Morton: Retrospective 1971 – 1977*, 51.

including: “The Relation-Ship”, “Identification Piece,” and “Personal Location.”[510] The flags strung up on the historic boat only added to the sense of commemoration and memorial, as if the flags ceremoniously announced her own personal fleet.

Morton’s admission to representing “good feelings” squares her work off with the sentimental. The deliberately amateur-ish rendering of the esoteric personal emblems in hand-sewn designs on bright cheap nylon fabric signifies her embrace of a kitsch aesthetic, rebuking those detractors who would equate kitsch with false and fake meaning — these works Morton tells us, do not lack in sincere feeling but on the contrary, Morton celebrates them by literally “flying the flag” for sentiment and love between people. She called the work an “affirmation” of feeling, but in another sense, it is also an affirmation of how emotion is strongly communicated with the aesthetic strategies of kitsch and “bad taste.”

Seen in this way, this work enacts a challenge to the hierarchies of fine art aesthetic values along gendered lines. *Something in the Wind* is, as Novina said of sentimental art, an “ironic political and cultural commentary” on a discourse on beauty and femininity that would otherwise find this kind of aesthetic to be insincere, ugly and fake. The flags then refuse accepted notions of taste, content and style. Morton’s girlish “bad art” amateur, handicraft forms and sentimental topic of friendship with its joyful tone in *Something in the Wind* is both celebratory in the feelings it expresses but with a self-awareness of the form it must take in order to do so. The use of flags might be seen to further characterize this idea given that flags in popular cultural have a long tradition of being both for celebration and for protest. They might be used for announcing an individual or a group — as an emblem of identity — as well as being a means of communication for protest as you might see in

[510] See *Ree Morton: Works 1971- 1977*, 137.

signage or banners (also a trope Morton used). That Morton chose to sew and paint the flags herself, as opposed to have them manufactured industrially, underscores how in craft-based processes sewing (as Hammond implied in her polemic on process-based abstract art) is not just a historically feminine form of domestic work, but it is also a conceptual way of "connecting" to other people. Just as Morton described making *Something in the Wind* as "a means of identifying and locating myself in the world," the people represented in the flags evoke a sentimentality in the finished display, as much the laborious process understood to have gone into the making the 100 flags, which enacts a kind of "labor of love" itself.

Morton kept the flags for one year for exhibition purposes, after which time she gifted each flag to the person it named.[511] She said, "[e]ach flag is a present for the person it's about. The work goes full circle. I got to think about each person as I made the flags, then I flew them together; then I gave the person that time and that object."[512] Morton underscores how the process of making and gifting each flag was underpinned and indeed driven by affection, pleasure and the desire for self-actualization ("locating myself in the world"). Thus, rather than making an art object as a commodity intended for the market, Morton made her flags as ephemeral tokens of sentimentality to be given away.[513]

In the previous chapter I examined how Morton's use of abstract forms and compositions in her installations were in part related to the familial configurations of her three children and herself. I discussed how the arrangements of four forms could be viewed

[511] They were first exhibited at a private home (location unknown), then shown at the Woman's Building in Los Angeles and then at an exhibition in the University of Rhode Island in Kingston. See *Ree Morton: Retrospective*, 137.
[512] Ree Morton, quoted by Schwartz in "Methods and Materials: New and Old", 48.
[513] Video footage filming the exhibition of *Something in the Wind* shows Morton and friends enjoying the atmosphere and sociality of the installation in the summer. Video courtesy of Cynthia Carlson.

as what Susan Stoops called a "situation conceived as a site of social interaction," [514] wherein these "situations" were conceptual and material "totems" of Morton's maternal feelings. In *Something in the Wind*, the notion of the totem and the "site of social interaction" follows through into this work too, where the flags each relate to a person important to the artist. The flags flying in neat rows along the crisscrossing ropes of the boat configures a networked constellation of relationships with friends and family. When the artist invited her friends to the opening of the exhibition and they stood together observing their flags flying in the wind overhead, the work must have beautifully enacted how Morton had arranged both a symbolic representation of a "site of social interaction" and a literal one too. Here, in the flags, feeling and relationships are symbolized as emblems and totems, they are as temporary monuments to the artist's "good feelings" and her emotions and memories in a way similar to how *Souvenir Piece* and its small found objects commemorating the family's summer vacation at the beach. Though celebratory in tone, the artist makes a reference in the work's title to the intangibility and indescribability of her "affectionate" feelings that exist in this fleeting way, as "something in the wind."

Signs of Love **and Theatricality**

In the fall of 1976, Ree Morton made and exhibited *Signs of Love* (1976). This was the penultimate installation made just seven months prior to her death that would occur in

[514] Stoops, *More Than Minimal,* 69.

the spring of 1977.[515] The work has been described as one of Morton's "most complex visual orchestrations" in her oeuvre owing to its vast range of signs, symbols and imagery related to the representation of love that sprawls across two walls.[516]

Signs of Love consists of several colourful paintings and sculpted Celastic objects arranged in a tableau configuration along two long free-standing and intersecting walls and along the floor (fig. 75). Hanging on the walls are several "paintings," including a clunky Celastic sculpture *made to look like a painting*, as well as a pair of "renaissance-style" portraits of a prince fringed with blue trim and princess in fringed in pink with both portraits further enclosed in a wide flowery decorative border (fig. 76). There is also a painted checker-board with magazine collage prints of illustrated swans and a painted panoramic landscape vista with a large rose in its foreground. Casually leaning against the walls are large (almost life-size) sculpted yellow ladders made of Celastic tied with colourful streamers, while Celastic roses tied with ribbons punctuated the few blank spaces remaining on the wall. Over the cluttered arrangement hangs intermittent swags of fabric — more Celastic manipulations — that drape the arrangement at intervals like a partial theatrical frame. On the floor there are wooden laundry baskets laden with more Celastic ribbons, decorative fabrics and roses that spill into the floor; the baskets appear abandoned, as if the artist stepped away in the middle of installing the work (fig. 77). Finally, among the busy and eclectic composition of paintings and objects, Morton also

[515] In her lifetime, Morton exhibited the work twice. The first time was for a solo show at the Fine Arts Center at the University of Rhode Island October 12 – 30, 1976. The following year the piece was shown again at the Whitney Museum of Art's Biennial Exhibition from February 19 – April 10, 1977. In these two exhibitions, *Signs of Love* was arranged in different ways and included slightly altered components. Most posthumous restagings of this work have combined elements of the two original compositions. Images of the earlier and later version can be seen *in Ree Morton: Be A Place*, pgs 130 – 131, and 152 respectively. Recently, individual components have been exhibited and sold separately.

[516] Allan Schwartzman and Kathleen Thomas, *Ree Morton: Retrospective*, 65.

included the nine words and phrases: “Poses”, “Symbols”, “Settings”, “Gestures”, “Atmospheres”, “Pleasures”, “Objects”, “Moments” and “Signs of Love.”[517]

By way of a conclusion to this chapter, the following discussion of *Signs of Love* draws together the many formal and thematic concerns I’ve already outlined in relation to Morton’s work after 1974, to suggest that this work not only marks out a particular conclusion in the artist’s investigations into the realms of feminine aesthetic debates and representations of sentimentality, but that the overwhelming lack of critical attention paid to this work and others like it — as a work that embraced “the excessive sentimentality of kitsch” — underscores how installation artworks bearing emotional, theatrical and feminine traits have been systematically excluded from territories of installation art history.

Signs of Love is, above all, an installation that more than any other in Morton’s oeuvre addresses the problem of representing sentimental feeling. The artwork’s theatrical and decorative flourishes are carefully honed techniques Morton transferred from previous works in keeping with the aesthetics of “low” or “middlebrow” women’s art that she had begun to investigate first in 1974 with *Bake Sale*, then later in *Beaux* paintings, in the *Regional Piece* series, and in *Something in the Wind*. In 1976, Morton’s performance at Artpark *Maid of the Mist* (discussed more in chapter two) involved the construction of enormously one long yellow Celastic ladder (fig. 36), which, when hung on the side of a

[517] In the two exhibitions Morton changed the way the eight phrases were displayed along the walls. In the first version of 1976 the phrases are painted with a brush in “handwriting” on boards, where in the second version of 1977, letters have been cut out from black paper unevenly, clearly by hand and stuck on the wall. Images of the earlier and later version can be seen *in Ree Morton: Be A Place*, pgs 130 – 131, and 152 respectively.

gorge, dramatized the artist's symbolic "rescue" of the legendary "maid of the mist."[518] This same yellow ladder reappeared in the installation *Signs of Love* but it was broken up in pieces and arranged in separate pieces, enacting its own symbolism as a "ladder" from one artwork to another. In *Signs of Love*, made only a few months later, the yellow ladder is no less theatrical and performative for being taken from a performance work into the gallery given that the extensive use of Celastic in *Signs of Love* that is particularly striking as a strategic device in this work that enhances a tone of the theatrical.

Morton's interest in the theatre can be seen in her other activities in 1976 around this time. When Morton began *Signs of Love* in New York City that autumn, she was already involved in a number of theatre and performance projects. For example, Morton was part of the V.A.C. group (Visiting Artists Collaborative) which included Laurie Anderson, Jeff Way, Theodora Skipitares, Elke Solomon, Garry Rich and Frank Owen, who offered collectively taught courses or lead panel discussions on performance art, mask making, mapping and colour.[519]

At the end of 1976 and into the winter of 1977, Morton also worked on the set of *Dressed Like an Egg*, a play based on the writings of Collette produced by Mabou Mines Theatre company under the direction of JoAnne Akalaitis, painter Nancy Graves and composer Phillip Glass. Morton made costumes and props from Celastic including the eponymous "egg" dress (fig. 78).[520] Akalaitis recalled that while working together, she and

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[518] Morton described the gesture as a "symbolic rescue." See Ree Morton, "Maid of the Mist" in *Attitudes Towards Space,* n.p.

[519] Morton collaboratively taught courses on "mapping" and "color and pattern" as well as leading a panel discussion on "Women in Art" with Elke Solomon and Laurie Anderson for "open dialogue regarding personal and public problems affecting women in the arts." V.A.C. documents are from the personal archives of Jeff Way, Xeroxed and given to the author in interview with Jeff Way, December 2012.

[520] The opening performance of *Dressed Like An Eg*g was in May 1977 at Public Theatre's Old Prop Shop, after Morton had died though her props and costumes were still used. For an image of the costume made by

Morton "were talking about romanticism. I was interested in the fact that she was dealing with romantic narrative and style. We talked about the problems of the theatre piece, how to formalize romanticism and maintain its emotional energy."[521]

In relation to these concerns, Celastic seemed to be a means for Morton throughout her practice for turning romantic and sentimental feeling into form. In *Signs of Love*, Celastic is the key material with which these symbols of "love" are not just fabricated, but they are theatrically dramatized. The artist once wrote in her notebooks "[t]heatricality, i.e., deliberate show is a work for the real – a poetically heightened artificiality."[522] Morton's skillful ability to manipulate the pliable textures of Celastic meant that she could deliberately exaggerate a kind of artifice in the shiny surfaces of the sculpted curtains, ribbons, streamers, ladders, roses and knotted bows. These unequivocally clichéd, stereotyped and romantic tropes made from a material used for theatre props, added a sense of romantic melodrama into the installation as if it is an empty scene is waiting for actors to animate its expectant "signs of love."

Morton's deft use of theatrical material and spatial strategies here are important to return to more generally with regards to the display of the work across and between walls and floors – i.e. as an installation. The historic relationship between installation art and theatricality has already been outlined in this study in chapter two where I examined what Michael Fried saw as the negative impact of minimalist sculpture on the spectator when it was "theatrical." Fried excoriated how the smooth, hard surfaces of the oversized

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Morton and for more on the scope of the production see Roger Copland, "Where Theatrical and Conceptual Art Are Blended", *The New York Times* (Sunday May 1st, 1977), 2 – 4. As seen in Janet Kardon Papers (1975 – 1990) in The Archives of American Art, Smithsonian Institution.

[521] JoAnne Akalaitis, as quoted in *Ree Morton: Works 1971- 1977*, 187.

[522] Morton [1975, Black Sketchbook]. As quoted by Susan Richmond, "The Sentimentality of Ree Morton's Signs of Love," *American Art* 30, no. 3 (Fall, 2016), 101.

geometric forms and their detached non-emotional qualities fostered a distinctly bodily encounter that refused to "let him [the viewer] alone – which is to say, it refuses to stop confronting him."[523] This was what Fried saw as a desperate "plea for a new genre of theatre, and theatre is now the negation of art."[524] Fried's rejection of the theatrical has been since overwhelmingly sustained in installation art histories as one of the foundational discourses upon which the medium developed, as minimalism embraced the kind of theatricality Fried dismissed. Yet, this theoretical and aesthetic model of theatricality upon which installation art was said to have been built is one that is still tethered to the cold and confrontational forms of minimalist sculpture. It is therefore the hypothesis of this study that this more traditional aesthetic model of minimalism which has continued to be thought of as integral to installation art's inception in the late 1960s and early 1970s has not only dominated the narrative of theatricality in installation art history and theory, but it has dramatically affected assumptions of *what installation art looks like* in this period.

In this case, how are we to integrate a work like Ree Morton's *Signs of Love* — as an overwhelmingly effusive, decorative and hand-crafted installation celebrating feminine sentimentality — into a history of installation art, if the accepted models for early installation artworks in the 1960s and 1970s are linked to minimalism's aesthetics and practices and based on qualities diametrically oppositional to those we see in Morton's work? I want to suggest that Morton's work offers a very necessary alternative to think about Fried's canonical notion of theatricality and its relationship to feeling and form in a discourse of installation art. Not only do Morton's installations such as *Signs of Love* lay out a model for how installations function to spatially and temporally stage and engage its

[523] Fried, "Art and Objecthood", 163-164.
[524] Ibid, 153.

viewer in an *encounter* with affect and emotion, but Morton does so in a way which addresses social and aesthetic politics of sentimentality and gender in art. Adopting this feminist approach offers a way to challenge how the given histories of installation may have have actively omitted works relating to feminist themes and feminine techniques like Morton's.

This approach also reconfigures installation histories more closely in line with other modes of art making that overlapped with theatre and performance activities. This is in keeping with the way Anne Ring Petersen — as discussed in my introduction to this study — sees a key historic overlap between installation art and the theatre too. She underscores that rather than only annexing installation discursive histories of 1960s sculpture or painting, installation art histories need to be written intersectionally in dialogue with theatre, dance and performance art. The benefit of this is that installation art histories can take engage with broader models of theatricality – referring to the way time, space and spectatorship are linked to social, historical and political contexts. For Ring Petersen, a more diverse and wide-ranging history of installation art can incorporate a wider variety of practices and situated meanings of "installation" — an objective which this study shares with regards to its connections with feminist politics and art.

The theatrical strategies Morton deployed in her installations such as *Signs of Love* can further help us to see how Morton's strategies of critique about feminine aesthetics foster a much closer connection between installation art histories and feminist art histories than previously thought. To explicate this point, it is useful to note how critics identified and reacted to themes of theatricality, sentimentality and femininity in *Signs of Love*. Susan Richmond has very recently published a detailed analysis of *Signs of Love*, offering one of

the first critical studies to take on board how Morton's approach was situated within a context of feminine and feminist aesthetics of kitsch, craft and bad taste. Her study usefully surveys the range of comments the work engendered, from derogatory to the complementary.[525] For example, Richmond evidences two critics who unfavourably compared the work to a greeting card. One critic said in 1978 that the work was "like a poetic valentine brought to stage-set proportions," whereas the other critic similarly remarked in 2012 how *Signs of Love* "looked depressingly like a Hallmark valentine." [526] Critic Hilton Kramer in 1977, when the work was shown at the Whitney Museum of Art, suggested the work was especially pleasing to school kids visiting the museum, admonishing the work for its appeal to childish taste.[527] A further critic later in 2001 remarked on the naiveté of the *Signs of Love*, stating that "much of Morton's work looks like high school prom decoration."[528] Another critic in 1989, when the work was shown at a group show, commented that Morton's installation was "too saccharine in the company of the tough stuff."[529]

These male critics seem to be particularly perturbed by *Signs of Love*'s specifically consumerist, amateur and sentimental approaches without considering the work's context within 1970s debates about kitsch, decorative and gendered aesthetics. In ignoring the context in which the work was made, these critics have dismissed the work without pausing to consider that it might have any critical dimension. It is, as Monica Kjellman-

[525] Susan Richmond, "The Sentimentality of Ree Morton's *Signs of Love*," *American Art* 30, no. 3 (Fall, 2016), 92 – 111.
[526] Michael Auping, *Matrix/Berkeley 2* (Berkeley: University Art Museum, 1978) n.p. and Karen Rosenberg, "A Haunting Tour, One Room at a Time," *New York Times,* January 21 (2011), C31., as quoted by Richmond, "The Sentimentality of Ree Morton's *Signs of Love*," 95.
[527] Hilton Kramer, "This Whitney Biennial Is As Boring As Ever," New York Times, February 27 (1977), D27.
[528] Ken Johnson, "Art in Review – Ree Morton" *The New York Times*, September 14th, 2001. http://www.nytimes.com/2001/09/14/arts/art-in-review-ree-morton.html Accessed Nov 16th, 2016.
[529] William Zimmer [1989], quoted by Richmond, 96.

Chapin noted with kitsch aesthetics more generally, as if they "can never be critical. [Kitsch's]… status as aesthetically, morally and intellectually bankrupt would seem to ensure this."[530]

One (female) critic who did acknowledge the artist's use of feminine aesthetics in this work was Lisa Liebmann, who noted that the piece "confront[ed] 'femaleness'" but she concluded that "engaging through this voice is, the choice [of aesthetic] was perhaps unfortunate. By having identified and aligned herself, Morton ultimately made 'a woman artist' a term that fits her more conclusively than she would have perhaps liked."[531] Again, the critical value of this work is lost and *Signs of Love* was once again dismissed because of, not in spite of, its representation of a feminine aesthetic.

Richmond's survey of these critiques comprehensively argues how critics' readings of *Signs of Love* indicate how sentimentality and femininity were culturally interpreted and misinterpreted in this work both contemporaneously in the 1970s and 1980s and more recently, suggesting the ongoing need to interrogate sentimentality today. Richmond also usefully examines how in *Signs of Love* Morton ironically used tropes and images of the feminine sentimentality to refer to clichés of love in mass cultural production. She calls Morton's piece a "conscious move to inhabit the conventionality of the sentimental" as the artist "unpacked the clichés through which women were encouraged to identify with…the sentimental narrative."[532] She concludes, "Morton ultimately brought a tongue-in-cheek brand of sentimentality; in wanting to rehabilitate feeling in her artistic practice, the artist

[530] Kjellman-Chapin, "The Politics of Kitsch", 38.
[531] Liebmann, "Innocence and Irony: The Art of Ree Morton", 93.
[532] Richmond, "The Sentimentality of Ree Morton's Signs of Love," 99.

did not entirely vanquish the utopian fantasy of love but, rather, productively managed its tropes."[533]

However, aside from Richmond's astute analysis, interpretations of *Signs of Love* by critics more recently have ignored this work's and others' capacity to disrupt gendered aesthetic conventions. The same neglect can be said for Morton's other sentimental pieces. These include: *Maternal Instincts* (1974) where the artist symbolically represents her three children as light bulbs bearing the initials of their names; *Don't Worry, I'll Only Read You The Good Parts* (1975) (fig. 79) where Morton hand-painted the tender title of the work on a Celastic swag, adorned with an oversized orange flower; *For Kate* (1976) (fig. 80) where Celastic streamers and roses decorate the corner of a room, in dedication. In these works made after 1974, Morton reaches for visual hyperbole of sentimentality to push the way in which we question our encounter with the artworks as sincere, fake, feminine other otherwise. Yet none of these works have been placed in the aforementioned kinds of discourses about gendered aesthetics, feminist craft or kitsch politics. In fact, recent critics have been actively dismissive of contextualizing of Morton's later practice within a history of feminist art production or feminist aesthetic debates that relate to this demonstrable sentimentality.

In the most recent retrospective of Morton's work at the Reina Sofia in 2015 (recalling there have been only four major retrospectives of the artist's whole career since her death in 1977) the accompanying catalogue included two scholarly essays about Morton's work between 1975 and 1977. While both of these essays broadly cover the period and the same works I have discussed in this chapter and both included discussions

[533] Richmond, "The Sentimentality of Ree Morton's Signs of Love," 99.

of *Signs of Love*, I want to emphasize their broad omission and rejection of the women's movement, feminist art and feminist aesthetics as valid frameworks for this period of Morton's work.

Sabine Folie (who also curated the major retrospective exhibition's of Morton's work at the Generali Foundation in Vienna in 2008 - 2009) contributed an essay about the "allegorical impulse" in Morton's later work via the artist's deployment of "sign-based systems."[534] This included a brief discussion of *Signs of Love*, as well as Morton's other text-based Celastic pieces, to which Folie acknowledges the artist's intentions towards an affected feminine naiveté which was a "an ode to femininity…deconstructive 'commentary' on or critique of typical female characteristics."[535] Yet, despite her analysis of Morton's use of cultural signs, symbols and language in this "deconstructive" mode, Folie does not place the artist's techniques, strategies or influence within, or even in reference to, a history of feminist art and feminist aesthetic debates.[536]

The other essay is by Manuela Ammer which has been briefly discussed in this chapter with reference to her analyses of Morton's "aesthetics of ambiguity." Ammer's essay is broadly concerned with artifice as a device in Morton's practice. Her discussion of how Morton deals with stereotypes of femininity in her material and thematic concerns is underpinned by notions of the "fake." *Bake Sale* and *Signs of Love* both feature heavily in Ammer's argument towards evidencing what she sees as Morton's ambiguous approach in representing kitsch and decorative stereotypes that seek to "ennoble" feminine clichés,

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[534] Sabine Folie, "Performing Sculpture, Performative Language: The "Allegorical Impulse" in Ree Morton's Work, in *Ree Morton: Be a Place, Place an Image, Imagine a Poem* (Madrid: Museo Reina Sofia, 2015), 156 – 181.
[535] Folie, "Performing Sculpture", 171.
[536] Folie lists the art movements which she suggests Morton as having "absorbing impressions" from that include "Minimal Art and Post-minimalist, along with other parallel movements such as Pattern and Decoration or Fiber Art". See Folie, "Performing Sculpture," 157.

rather than expose them as "false."[537] Ammer sets these two works across an art historical between modernist and postmodernist narratives by Clement Greenberg and Harold Rosenberg respectively (the former rejected by Morton and the latter embraced). Ammer notes, *Bake Sale* needs to be seen as "more than a charming gesture of feminist protest. It shows the production of ambiguity, which interests Morton as an aesthetic category. "[538] Ammer stages this point as key to her argument that Morton's work "must be seen in the context of contemporary discussions surrounding 'illusionism' of painting and the 'theatricality' of minimal art."[539] While I agree with Ammer's conclusion that these works do not reveal a clear intention or meaning about kitsch, decorative or feminine symbols and as such stage an "aesthetics of ambiguity," Ammer's argument is based on a patronizing dismissal of "charming" 1970s feminist aesthetics and its politics. What's more, in doing so, Ammer reverts to the traditional Friedian model of theatricality in installation art I argued against applying so broadly as a contextual framework for all installations in the 1970s.

In the essays in the Reina Sofia catalogue, the complex theoretical frameworks speak to highly academic audience thus offering themselves up as the most contemporary scholarship on the artist to date in 2015. And yet they (and the whole Reina Sofia exhibition to a similar extent) have, I would argue, served to situate Morton artistic legacy within a pre-existing patriarchal historical register of art making using reference points from a suite of formal art movements that serves to negate the substantial impact of the feminist movement and its social and political activities on Morton's practice in terms of themes, materials and concepts. Without socio-cultural contexts to ground these gendered aesthetic

[537] Ammer, "From Silly Stellas to Signs of Love", 147 – 149.
[538] Ibid, 148.
[539] Ibid, 151.

politics in feminism and feminist art activities, Morton's use of sentimentality, theatricality and "content-oriented abstraction" in works like *Signs of Love* risk being historicized within the given narratives of 1970s theatricality and gender-neutral space that obscure how Morton responded to debates as a woman and a mother that informed her material and conceptual choices in her installations.

When Morton said in 1975, not long before she made *Signs of Love* in 1976, "sentiment and feeling continues but we are without the means of expressing them,"[540] what then to make of an installation explicitly called *Signs of Love*? In this paradox, the installation is indeed Morton's most complex orchestration not merely because of its clichéd images and symbols (which Folie's and Ammer's essays see as part of the artist's interest in semiotics and allegories), but because *Signs of Love* is a meaningful feminist celebration of a failure to find an authentic gendered aesthetic that does justice to the complex suite of emotions and feelings involved in love and affect between individuals at a time when women's pleasure in sentimentality was all but dismissed as illegitimate. This last point circles back to my discussion of Marsha Meskimmon's term "the *work* of art" from the first chapter of this study, where she elaborates on how our encounters with art objects are intersubjective and relational because they are mitigated by understanding the mutual labor undertaken between how the artist made the work and the viewer's work of interpreting and reacting to the art object. I discussed the way Morton's autobiographical art acts as this kind of interface between the artist and the viewer in terms our experience of her process-based work – for example, how Morton made artwork on and in relation to, her family vacations. Yet in works like *Signs of Love* and *Something in the Wind*, there is a

[540] Ree Morton, *Notebook* (RM29: June, 1975), 36.

distinct encounter that takes place that *is* affective; Morton's pieces animate the way that feelings may materialize in awkwardly and naïvely in human relationships, but that this is a profound and beautiful process.

When Meskimmon suggests that engaging with women's art by knowing it is marked by sexual difference fosters a constellation between a female artist's identity and the viewer through a "double play of materiality and agency," this extends to the way a material like Celastic for Ree Morton when pressed into the service of making "signs of love" appeals to sensing affective labor in our encounter with the artist's emotions that inspired the work and how we interpret those emotions through our own experiences of love. This dialogic encounter, Meskimmon notes, requires us to think about the new kinds of knowledge produced, not to as she says, "define in advance what women's art can mean" or in Morton's case, what she meant by "love," but to look at the ways in which we may be "a partner in a dialogue with women making art rather than one in a position of a privileged interlocutor, explicating the inherent truths of women, art and cultural history."[541] This implies that emotions enacted in installation art such as love and friendship exist to be encountered in the domain of sensation and the body more than intellectual or rational cognition. As such, the emotions Morton stirs up are therefore not easily visually represented, but rather felt.

In this case, *Signs of Love*, *Something in the Wind* and *Bake Sale* are all installation works that have borrowed theatrical strategies to create ambiguity between "the real" and "the false" in order to dramatize a kind of paradox of the unrepresentability of female emotion Morton seems to communicate the importance of ambiguity and ambivalence in

[541] Meskimmon, *Women Making Art*, 4 – 6

creating signs and symbols just legible enough within paradigms of sentimental, private and feminine codes, but also those that are alienating as "real." This encourages viewers to question Morton's use of these motifs in spatial arrangements. As Lisa Phillips said, *Signs of Love* was as equally a display and a solicitation of "vulnerability and strength" from making a feeling such as love which is so commonly thought of as a private, and making it public.[542]

By staging love, affect and friendships in a theatrical way Morton's work points to the provocation of legitimizing a feminine sentimentality while also underscoring the problems in doing so in a climate hostile to multiple definitions of feminine aesthetics. Morton's title even implies the paradoxes involved; love and feeling can only be alluded to through abstract "signs" that must rely on tired clichés - overdone done to the point of excess – such as abundant red roses, girlish bows and pink princess portraits. Perhaps this is why Helen Molesworth wrote that "Celastic opened up Morton's work to the lump in the back of your throat – bittersweet and melancholic." [543] If Celastic aspires to be both "fake" and "real" as a theatrical material, then to visualize signs of love in this form is melancholic in cultural climates in the 1970s, and perhaps still today, where to be sentimental is considered excessive and insincere.

It is this ambivalence about the affective relationship between form and feeling that makes Morton's work so compelling to encounter in the context of feminist art and its aesthetics; the artist underscores how patriarchal constructions of aesthetic taste determine hierarchical value of materials, processes and content in fine art that sustain the impossibility of representing "female" emotions in a "feminine" or "sentimental" way – both terms are too couched in gendered histories and stereotypes to be useful. Morton's pieces

[542] Lisa Phillips, "A New Acquisition: Signs of Love" Leaflet (New York: The Whitney Museum of Art, 1990).
[543] Molesworth, "Sentiment and Sentimentality", 17.

shows that the wish for a "female imagery" will always in some sense fail because it is shackled by a cultural system of signs hostile to the legitimation of the sentimental and the corollary pleasure associated with the feminine as rooted in the body.

This is why I have maintained that there is the value of looking at Morton's body of work within the remit of debates about feminist and feminine aesthetic in the 1970s. Morton's treatment of love, sentiment and affect have been shown to be at risk of being written off as naïve, or as "a charming feminist gesture" without taking heed of the more critical operations I've suggested are taking place. Looking at the main artworks I've arranged within the trajectory of these debates show how Morton's installations challenged, provoked and explored the efficacy of feminine aesthetics as a *useful* and *useless* proposition for women artists in the 1970s. This point returns to my earlier argument towards considering Morton's work in the paradigm of feminist installation art. The installations discussed in this chapter show just one kind of feminist approach to the medium pointing to its critical and affective capacity to defy contemporaneous 1970s hierarchies of aesthetics. Furthermore, Morton's installations when seen in the critical and interrogative model of "feminist aesthetics" I've outlined, show how her installations challenge the homogeneity of current discursive terms in installation art history such as theatricality that can't accommodate her practice. By re-reading "theatricality" in Morton's work in a gendered and affective dimension (rather than a minimalist and Friedian framework), I have shown how Ree Morton's work and "feminist installation art" as a paradigm highlights the sexism that results in exclusions in installation art histories as its authors resist incorporating more socially and politically contextualized discourses such as feminism and feminist art into its narratives.

Conclusion

There were two main aims in this study: to deliver a contextualized art historical analysis of Ree Morton's practice from 1968 to 1977 and to explore why Ree Morton and other women are marginalized in installation art histories. A corollary outcome of the latter aim was to suggest a change to the way we think about how installation art developed in the 1970s. Where previous surveys provided interdisciplinary narratives of installation art from already heavily male-dominated genres, movements and subcategories, I argued the need to permit new themes, concepts and issues like gender, domesticity and labor into its histories to show how certain cultural and socio-political contexts such as the women's liberation movement and the feminist art movement had informed early installation works, especially those by women. The installations of Ree Morton and others I discussed demonstrate the importance of looking at the intersections of installation art history and feminist art histories where a range of valuable artworks and practitioners materialize.

To gesture towards ways to critically approach the overlapping histories, I used the interrogative paradigm of feminist installation art to begin to examine the subcategory and its mechanisms of inclusion and exclusion in the writing of a different history. Yet what also became apparent throughout the course of research and writing was that this study wasn't merely interrogating the lack of women in installation art histories via a case study of Ree Morton. It became clear that the idiosyncrasies of Morton's practice — as they related to the circumstances of her life and work as an installation artist in the 1970s — illuminate a much broader range of interrelated debates about what was at stake in writing about feminine and maternal subjectivities in art history. This issue not only extended to the

historicization of women and other marginalized groups in installation art but is also applicable to methods theorizing gaps in other interdisciplinary art histories too.

Initially, I wished for Morton the same visibility and recognition many of her 1970s female and male peers enjoy today. I sought to organize her diverse body of artwork and legacy into a format compatible with art historical conventions. My initial research discovered Morton's work in major exhibitions and collections and I found positive reviews of her work by respected critics as well as plenty of associations between her and well-known artists; I was satisfied Morton was a subject worthy of study. However, after reading the work of feminist art historians who convincingly argued against recuperating women artists within conventional models of success and value such as those by which I'd first appraised her practice, I understood these models as acquiescing to market-driven and institutionalized standards of quality more associated with male artists. Incorporating Morton more visibly into given histories of postwar art was clearly not enough.

Methods of feminist art historiography in particular were essential in thinking about alternative ways to write the histories of women making art in the 1970s. What became apparent is how art histories in their current registers struggle to accommodate difference as structurally and materially determinant to how art is made, interpreted, exhibited and historicized. Understanding this aided me to seek apposite methods that attend to the unique and specific issues that arose when encountering Morton and her work. As such, I saw the stakes of asking different questions of artists such as Ree Morton and the value in looking to alternative and often overlooked sources such as notebooks or sketchbooks to address these items theoretically and materially. One of the most pertinent question that emerged in this study in this regard was, "what was it like to work as an artist and be a

single, female parent in America in the 1970s?" Looking to Morton's own writing, her artworks and the cultural and historical contexts in which she worked and responded to enabled a field of enquiry to emerge in order to explore how and why her social and economic circumstances informed her production of installation art.

Although this study of Ree Morton still, at times, capitulated to acknowledging traditional notions of art world "successes," I sought to do so with a measured criticality, noting the specific implications these frameworks and discourses had on her legacy and how they affect understanding her practice today. To that end, the historiographical method employed in this study that involved close analyses of primary and secondary sources was key to bringing Morton's practice into dialogue *with* contemporaneous 1970s issues, themes, movements, strategies of making and other related practitioners, but *not* attempting to claim or confirm her work within any one given art historical genre, group or discourse.

Using "feminist installation art" as a kind of interrogative paradigm (not necessarily a new classification of practice) helped me probe why those installation practices by Morton and other women engaging with themes and strategies related to, or influenced by, the politics of feminism and feminist art weren't, or couldn't be, accommodated in registers of installation art histories or indeed conceptual art histories, land art histories and in some cases, the more dominant feminist art histories we have today too. In many ways it emerged that not only does "feminist installation art" highlight the narrow scope of so many art historical narratives that can't account for complex iterations of interdisciplinarity, but Morton's practice was also capable of this kind of criticality too — the fact that her work didn't really "fit" anywhere historically (and indeed, her practice

seemed to actively resist conforming to any one style or movement) meant that altogether different questions emerged about what to do with her practice and its legacy.

To address these historiographical facets in the study and to deliver a situated account of Morton's work, each of the three chapters in this study engaged with key art historical contexts and discourses including conceptual art, avant-garde architecture, sculpture, land art and feminist art. This helped me investigate how Morton's multimedia installation practice emerged from her sampling and critique of different modes of art making and its debates to examine how she called upon specific techniques, processes and ideas before autobiographically reconfiguring methods and materials to suit her practice.

Key findings that came out of this particular line of investigation included the importance of Morton's regular use of notebooks in her practice as it was linked to strategies of autobiographical documentation out of 1970s conceptual and conceptual feminist art, and the value of Morton's engagement with minimalism and postminimalism and debates about medium specificity. I suggested her installation works developed from dialogues with discourses on space, objecthood and architecture which later informed her installations with regards to addressing feminine experiences of domesticity. Finally, by looking at feminist art debates about feminine aesthetics, I examine Morton's use of abstract postminimalist material techniques as they related to feminist politics and suggested Morton's theatrical and sentimental installations staged interventions in these cultural debates by exploring gendered aesthetic discourses of kitsch, "bad painting", craft and "middlebrow" art.

In this study, domesticity was an arc that linked "feminist art" and "installation art." I demonstrated the significance of specificity in theorizing domesticity for different women

artists in the 1960s and 1970s, particularly for working mothers. I argued the home is a socially and culturally contested site of identity and agency for different women in the 1970s, showing how embodied experiences of domestic space and labor – those positive and negative and ambivalent – were cleaved between distinctions of public and private realms and as reified within paradigms of interiors and exteriors and male and female. Installation art (itself a spatial proposition of interiors and exteriors) proved a highly suitable mode of art making for feminists artists to enact representations of domestic space and experience, strengthening my point about the significance of women's contributions to the emergence of installation art at this time.

In terms of Ree Morton, I looked at how domesticity was a significant issue in her own life as a working mother and in her installation practice. In chapter one, I specifically examined how Morton's domestic studios informed her practice, suggesting that the close spatial overlap in studio work and domestic work resulted in objects, materials and strategies that promoted, albeit sometimes abstractly, this overlap between art and life. In chapter two, I explored Morton's "shelter" artworks that I suggested were brought about by her interest in domestic space, female experience and the female body. I looked at sculpture and land art works by other key installation artists like Alice Aycock and Mary Miss who made their own large structures and were influenced by feminism, to suggest their works and Morton's needed to be read more closely as political critiques of domestic space and labor. In chapter three, I examined domesticity as it was linked to Morton's artworks that related to her familial relations and the ambiguous but affective representations of emotion, sentimentality and love. I examined how Morton's installations critiqued domestic stereotypes about women and mothers who were artists and how

Morton's kitsch and craft aesthetic strategies in her works confronted the arena of women's hobby art as perceived as having lesser value for being (or presumed as being) made in the home.

These ways of thinking materially and politically about "home" within the paradigm of feminist installation art highlighted the importance of considering how to relate domestic and feminine subjectivities to artworks and artist's legacies in art histories in ways that were effective and ethical. For Ree Morton, I argued this meant not only placing her work in dialogue with a field of practices relating to feminist critiques of domesticities, but also very closely examining in her own life and work how her circumstances as a housewife, artist, mother, teacher and woman impacted on the way her installation practice materialized in, and responded to, the culture of the 1970s.

New queries and issues arose: What challenges had Morton faced in her profession as a woman and as a mother? Did her autobiographical processes and multimedia techniques in making installation art relate to her engagement with feminism and feminist art? What I discovered was that material and immaterial traces of Morton's labor — both in her studio and at home — were to be found in her notebooks *and* in her artworks, showing how her artistic strategies and material choices in her installations were tightly bound to the circumstances of her life as a female artist and a single working mother. Together, Morton's 39 notebooks and her 40 (or so) artworks, produced a dynamic multimedia platform of sketches, quotations, diagrams, banners, symbols and more, to develop a framework about the different kinds of labor and work of women artists and how this related to the way their gendered subjectivities and autobiographical expressions materialized in our encounters with their art and working processes.

Marsha Meskimmon's theories of female subjectivity, agency and the importance of materiality underpinned my methodological approach to gendered labor and domesticity in exploring how Morton's practice and legacy are linked to her working circumstances. Meskimmon's concern with "how women's art comes to articulate sexual difference in its material specificity and at its particular historical locus" was instructive to examine, for example, Morton's negotiation of teaching work, childcare and her professionalization as a female artists in the 1970s. I considered how this framework of labor revealed not only the kind of art Morton wanted to make, as well as the kind of work she *could* make.[544] Looking at Morton's notebooks through a materialist feminist framework like this – that legitimated new kinds of labor in art historical enquiries – allowed me to consider how we may engage with and interpret Morton's installations with regards to specific material and aesthetic processes that inform configurations of female subjectivity and agency. By taking into account the way Morton made her art in specific circumstances and cultural climates, this enacted what Meskimmon describes as "the critical link between [the artists'] thinking and making, between the materiality of the objects and the agency of artists and participant observers."[545] This framework further allowed me to highlight several idiosyncratic issues in this study highly unique to Morton and as such I developed approaches to her practice and her legacy that foregrounded theorizing the specific challenges in historicizing these issues, as well as thinking more broadly about how they may relate to writing histories of other women making art. For example, I chose to focus significantly on Ree Morton's notebooks as objects of analysis, looking at their relationship to her practice and critically exploring their role in her legacy. I considered their properties, content and specifically

[544] Meskimmon, "Introduction" *Women Making Art*, 3.
[545] Ibid, 4-5.

what was known about how she used them to provide an analysis of her archives materials the first of its kind in scholarship on her work. I examined broader questions regarding the use of women's autobiographical and archival material in art history more generally and I used these discussions to develop a theoretical framework about the notebooks as a site of encountering artistic labor. One key outcome from this approach was to look at Morton's exhibition of her notebooks as paradigmatic of how autobiographical art and autobiographical archival material are complex interfaces between gender and labor when theorizing women's (and mothers') art making in the 1970s. This aspect of the study contributes to a relatively limited field of theoretical writing on the use of artists' archival and autobiographical materials in art historical writing.

In the introduction to this study I claimed Ree Morton's work seems to fit everywhere and no where all at once. While I have gestured to ways to think about her practice and legacy in relation to other narratives in post-war art history including feminist art, performance art, conceptual art and land art, I don't believe my position has changed. In fact I think there should remain no clear-cut conclusions to exactly where Morton's work should now belong; until there are major adjustments in the diversity of practitioners and theme in installation art histories, Morton's and other marginalized installation artists' works may continue to address this problem.

One of the contributions this study made to the field of installation art history then, was not only my discussion of how women's installation artworks were marginalized, but in identifying several avenues in which future research may take place on installation artists and histories. One of my hypotheses was that feminist installation art posed a challenge to the lack of feminist art in installation art histories. I contended that neither

feminist art histories nor installation art histories have been adequately addressed in each other's narratives because installation art predominantly has maintained a respective focus on form over content. I suggested that installation art history's continued emphasis on spectatorship and experience rather than considering the artist's intentions or social circumstances has pushed out certain political artworks dealing with autobiographical transmissions of personal experience. This study showed that when installations are reframed social *and* aesthetic spatial realms as in the work of Morton, Miss and Aycock, future surveys have to historicize the emergence of installation art more closely in alignment with installations dealing with identity politics like those influenced by feminism and feminist art.

Therefore more studies are needed on other women installation artists to show how feminist art and feminism contributed to the emergence of diverse forms of installation art in the 1970s, with a keen and developed sense of the way materials, forms and spatial arrangements create psychological, affective *and* political experiences of space. In chapter two I listed to the many artists Lucy Lippard had championed in her three essays about women making architectural sculpture, most of whom are under-recognized artists who would make for important future studies including: Harriet Feigenbaum, Donna Dennis, Jody Pinto and Alice Adams, Collette and Susana Torre. To wit, here is a huge dearth of research across land art, earth art and outdoor sculpture by women such as those listed here that also need to be addressed. Much more could have been said for example about how their site-specific installations relate to environmental and eco-feminist concerns.

As mentioned in the introduction, another future avenue for research would be research into other omissions in installation art relating to gay, lesbian and queer art

artists and artists of colour and particularly women artists of colour. Jennifer González's book *Subject to Display: Reframing Race in Contemporary Installation Art* (2008) is one of the very few in the field to address the issue of race in installation art but her book doesn't address historical practices per se. It is not necessarily my suggestion to come up with more new categories or subsections of installation art according to identities either, but my argument is that much more diversity and scope is needed to account for the myriad practices deploying spatial and multimedia strategies engaged with bodies and identities historically marked as different. Given that installation art is deeply concerned with the way bodies experience objects in time and space, it is wholly contradictory that its histories remain so disconnected from body and identity politics and the artists associated with those cultural contexts from the 1960s to the 1980s.

As with looking forward to future research avenues, in looking back there were limitations to this study as well. One of the limitations of this research could be said to be the primary focus on one white American female artist. While focusing on one artist allowed me to investigate Morton's under-recognized practice in considerable depth and within given art historical registers in need of reassessment, the vast majority of attention in feminist art history is still paid to white (English speaking) European and North American artists. The effect of this is not only the occlusion of key works that cross over between installation art and its associated disciplines but the perpetuation of homogeneous histories of white, Euro-American feminist art canons. Given this narrowness of my own study, it is regrettable that for example, I was able only to gesture towards the interdisciplinary work of Betye Saar and other female artists of colour like Faith Ringgold and Ana Mendieta who engaged in innovative material and political strategies to concepts

such as space, gender and domesticity at the same time as Morton. It was my belief that, to do justice to these artists, their works, and the importance of the socio-historical contexts to which they responded, a fuller and more comprehensive model was required than was possible here. Another example of a group of artists who merit further study are Central and Eastern European feminists like Ewa Partum, Natalia LL, Valie Export and others whose practices spans genres of site-specific installations, conceptualism, film and performance art in the 1970s thereby introducing a number of additional multimedia practices corollary but relevant to this study.[546]

In terms of more practical limitations to this study, there were some issues with access to resources on Ree Morton. Much of this research was conducted during the time a major retrospective exhibition on Morton was being mounted in Madrid and as such the artist's photographic archives were not fully available to see and use. Similarly, files at the Getty Research Institute in the process of digitization were unavailable. As is the way with research, one cannot necessarily access all existing data. With archives and institutions relating to Morton being in North America and Europe, there were geographic restrictions to what could be retrieved. While I am satisfied that this study put to good use the material and resources available to me, I have also made available new material for others interested in scholarship on Ree Morton. In the appendix to this study there are two interviews I conducted with Morton's close friend Cynthia Carlson that illuminate a number of aspects of Morton's life and career, as well as Carlson's too. Through a coincidental encounter with an individual who had worked with Gordon Matta Clark's archives, I

[546] For an excellent new survey of this particular field of interdisciplinary art by Eastern European artists many of whom are women, see Amy Bryzgel, *Performance art in Eastern Europe since 1960* (Manchester: Manchester University Press, 2017).

discovered that he and Ree Morton had been lovers around 1974. A visit to Matta Clark's archives at the Canadian Centre for Architecture not only held useful references to Morton, but also contained information about her association with Anarchitecture that buoyed my argument about the significance of her association with its feminist members and the impact this had on her installation practice, bringing new archival material to light.

It is my hope that a study of Morton's work such as this — enabling provocative questions of installation art history — will encourage others to research in a similarly critical and open-ended way. By showing that histories stand to benefit from the relational impact of the overlaps among various modes of art making, challenge may be put to other closed post-war art historical narratives too. Morton's work is a profound case study that proves the very real contribution women made to early installation art history – a contribution almost entirely ignored in accounts of the genre.

By approaching the practice of Morton beyond the traditions of a monographic study, I explored Morton's practice and legacy in order to provoke questions and generate some answers about the way we constitute new female subjects within given art historical narratives. As such, this study will prove useful to those wishing to embark on research with autobiographical and archival material in ethical and theoretical ways. By navigating the use of artists' writings and archival ephemera in writing art history, I demonstrated the significance of how artists' socio-cultural circumstances impact on historicizing their practices and legacies in ways that go beyond just their art objects. It is my hope that this line of enquiry into gendered subjectivity, agency and materiality in Ree Morton's practice may allows others to take on board the complex signification of gender and labor that materializes when we ask new questions about the *work* of women making art.

Illustrations



Figure 1. Ree Morton, *Souvenir Piece* (detail), 1973.



Figure 2. Ree Morton, *Souvenir Piece* (detail), 1973.



Figure 3 Ree Morton, *Newfoundland Drawings*, 1973.

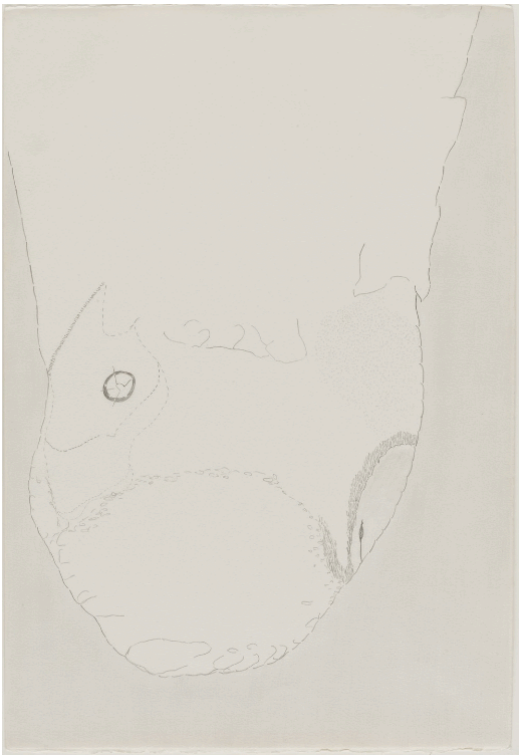


Figure 4. Ree Morton, *Newfoundland Drawings,* 1973.

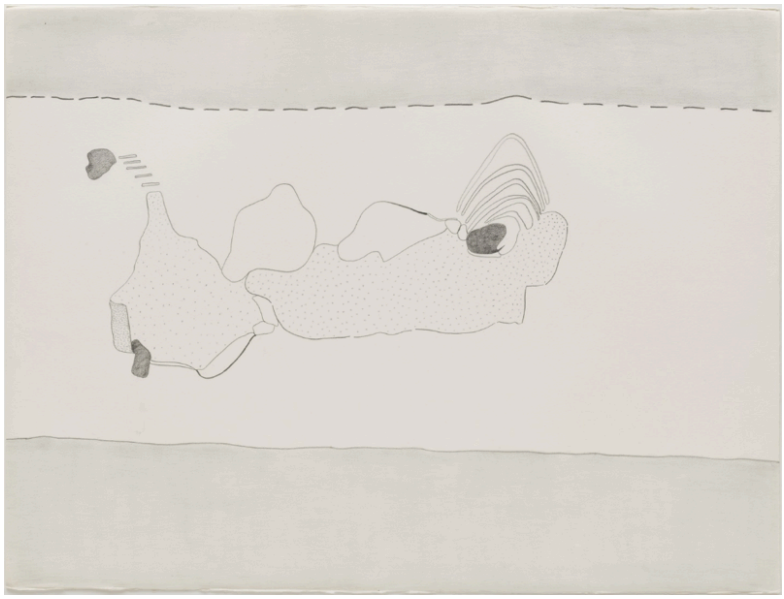


Figure 5. Ree Morton, *Newfoundland Drawings,* 1973.

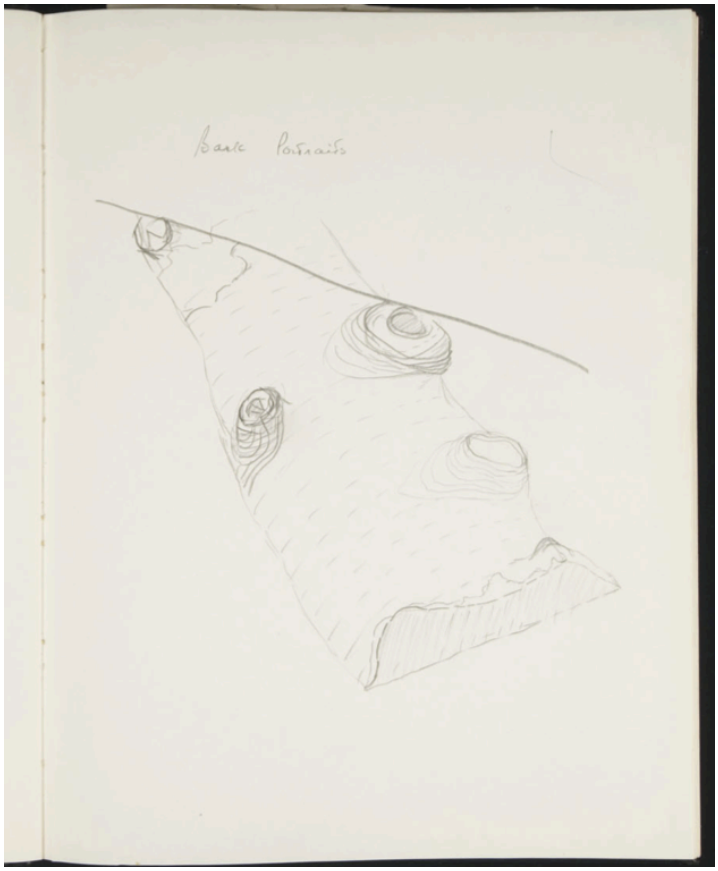


Figure 6. Ree Morton, *Bart Portraits*, 1973.

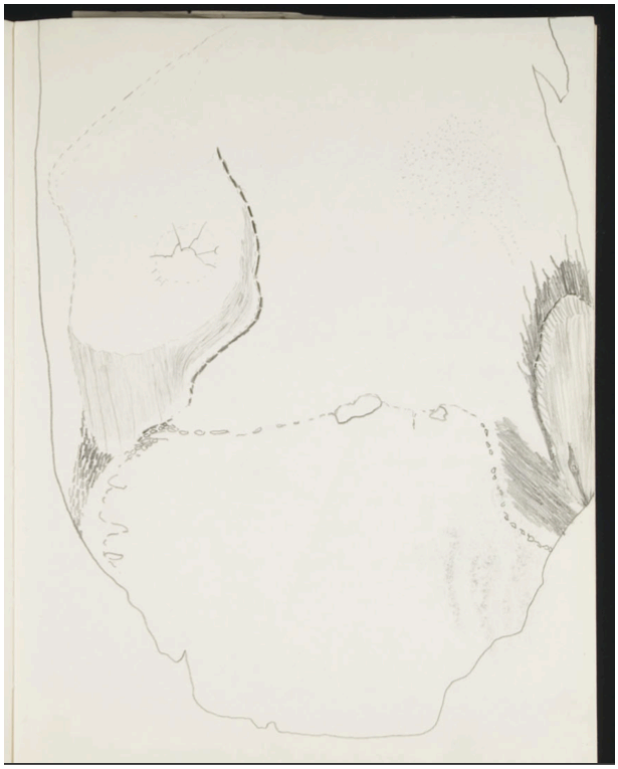
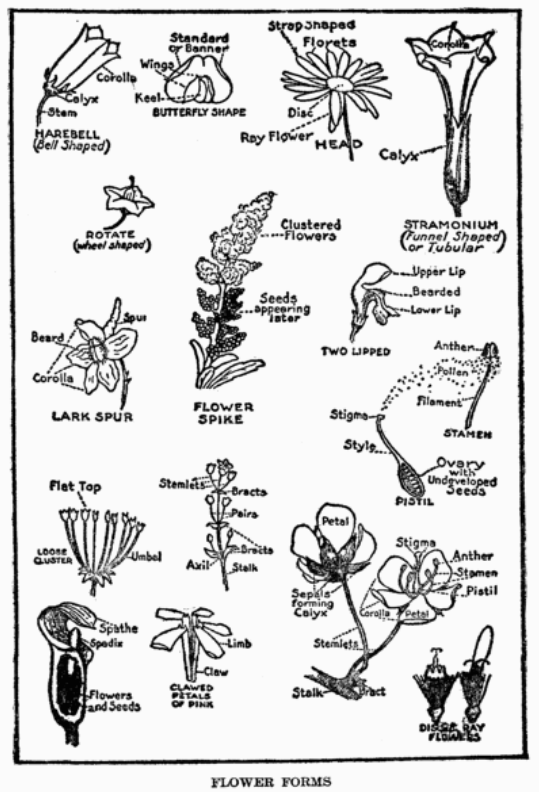


Figure 7. Ree Morton, *Bark Portraits*, 1973.



Figure 8. Ree Morton, *Weeds of the Northeast* #2, 1974.



FLOWER FORMS

Figure 9. Neltje Blanchan, *Wild Flowers Worth Knowing* (detail), 1917.



Figure 10. Ree Morton, *Trumpet Weed*, 1974.



Figure 11. Ree Morton, *Solitary or Rarely* 2, 1974.



Figure 12. Ree Morton, *Terminal Clusters*, 1974.



Figure 13. Ree Morton, *Fading Flowers*, 1974.

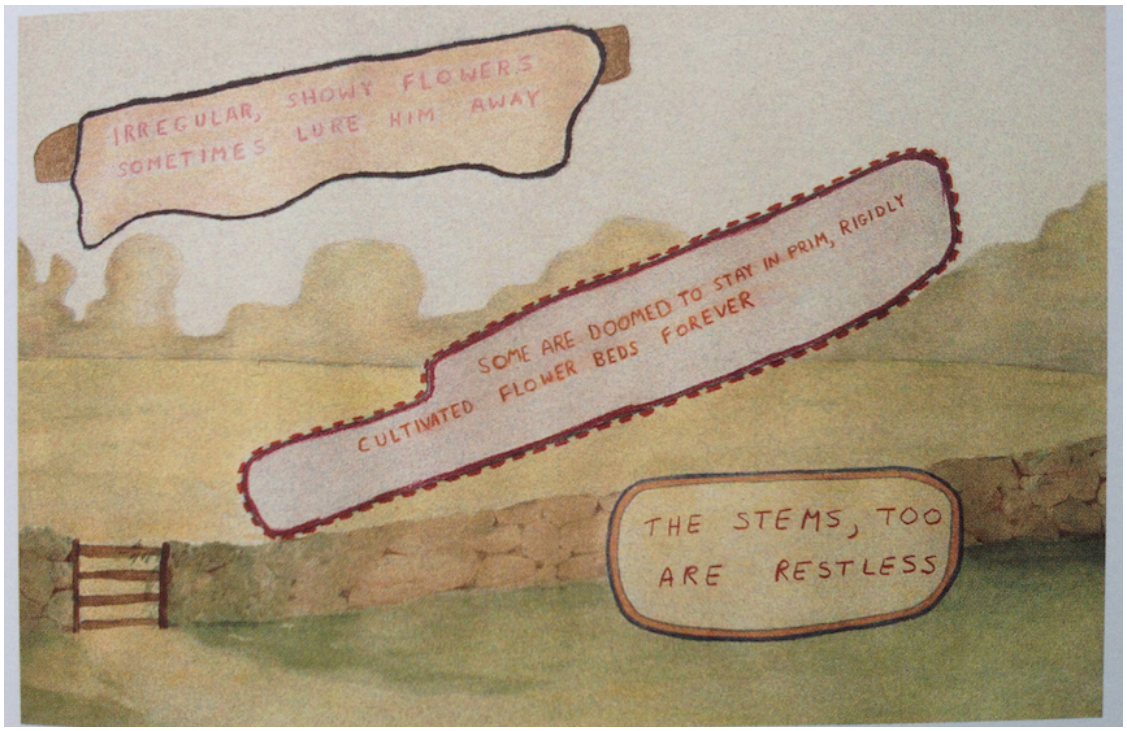


Figure 14. Ree Morton, *The Stems, Too Are Restless*, 1974.

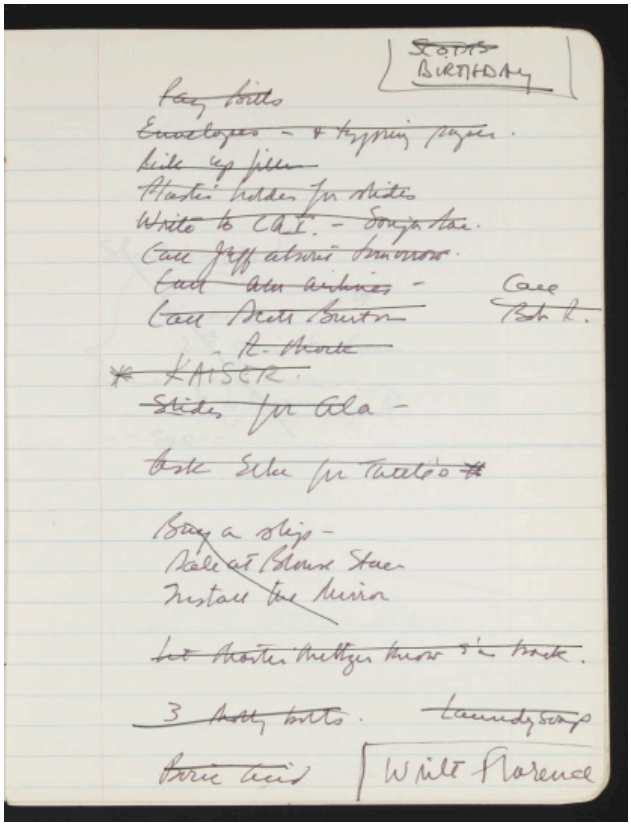


Figure 15. Ree Morton, *Notebook*, RM05, 1974

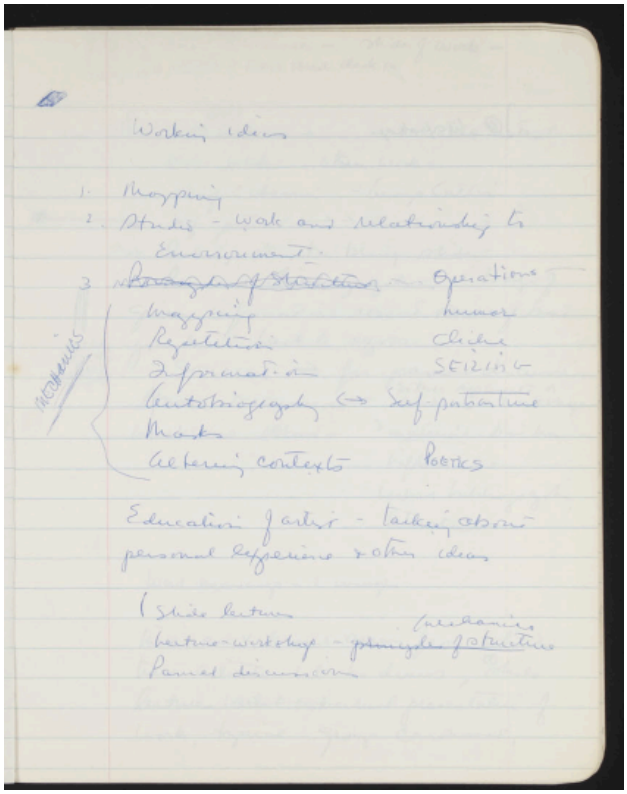


Figure 16. Ree Morton, *Notebook: RM05*, 1974



Figure 17. Ree Morton, *Bozeman, Montana,* 1974.

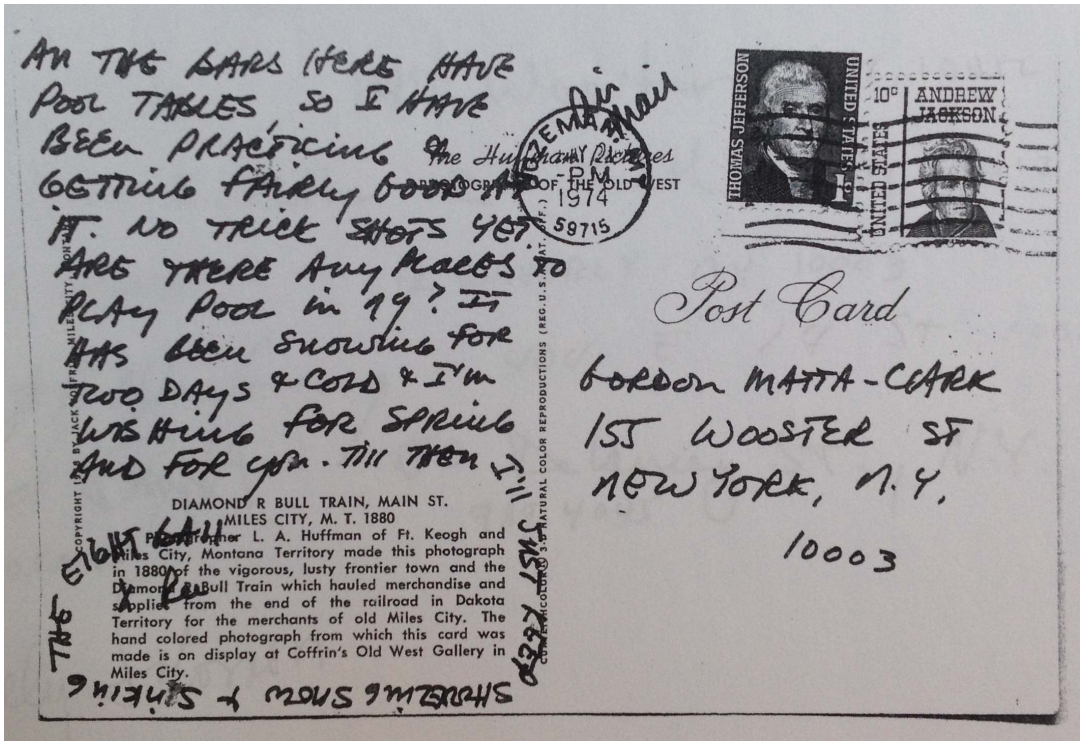


Figure 18. Postcard from Ree Morton to Gordon Matta Clark, dated May 1974.



Figure 19. Ree Morton, *Something in the Wind* (detail and installation view, 2016), 1975.


Figure 20. Ree Morton, *Something in the Wind* (detail and installation view), 1975. South Street Seaport Museum, New York.

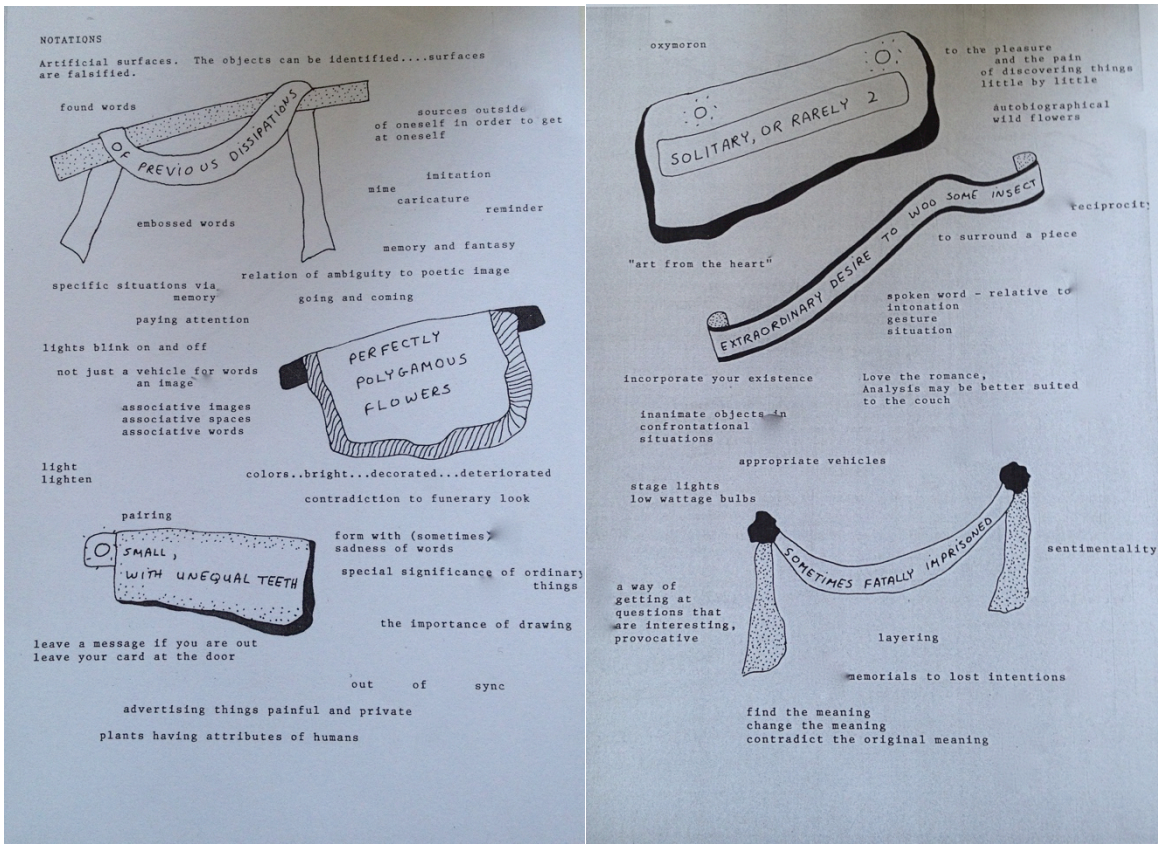


Figure 21. Ree Morton, *Analects*, 1976.


Figure 22. Ree Morton, *Early Piece*, c.1968.

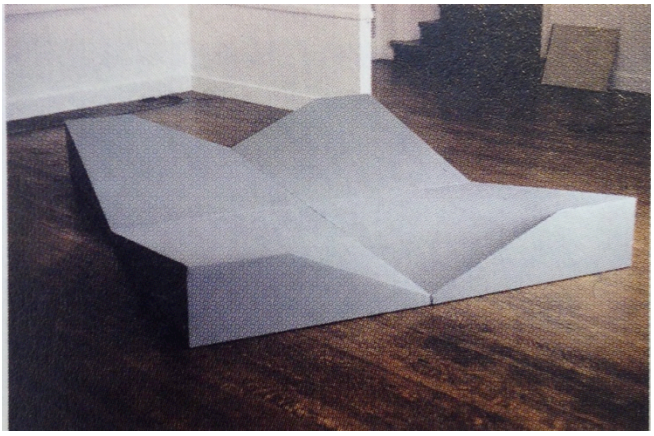


Figure 23. Ree Morton, *Shaped Painting,* 1969.

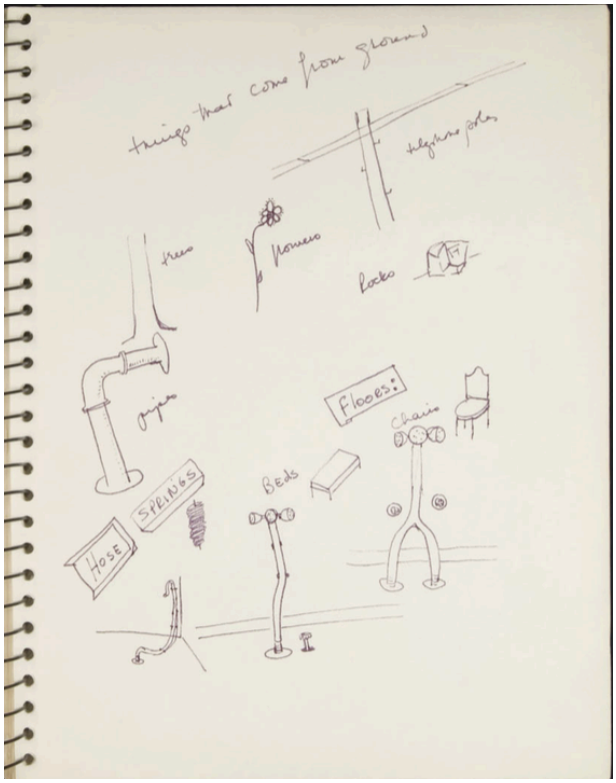


Figure 24. Ree Morton, Notebook RM21, c. 1968. p. 22.

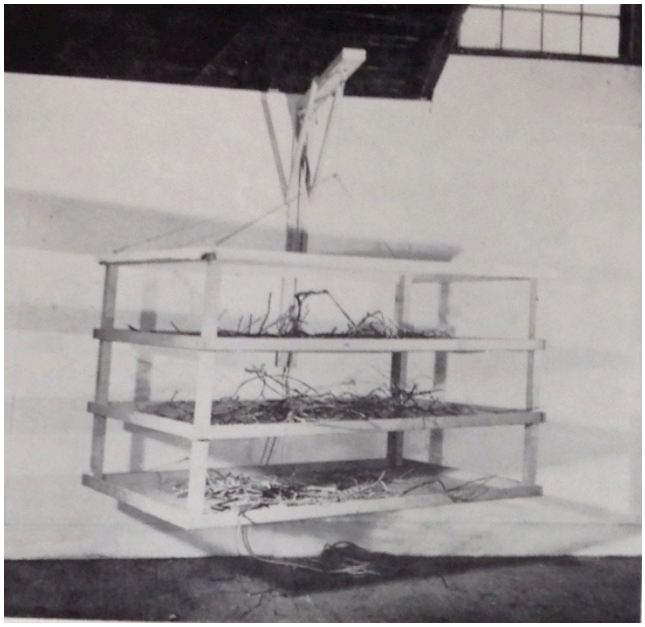


Figure 25. Ree Morton, *No Title*, 1970.

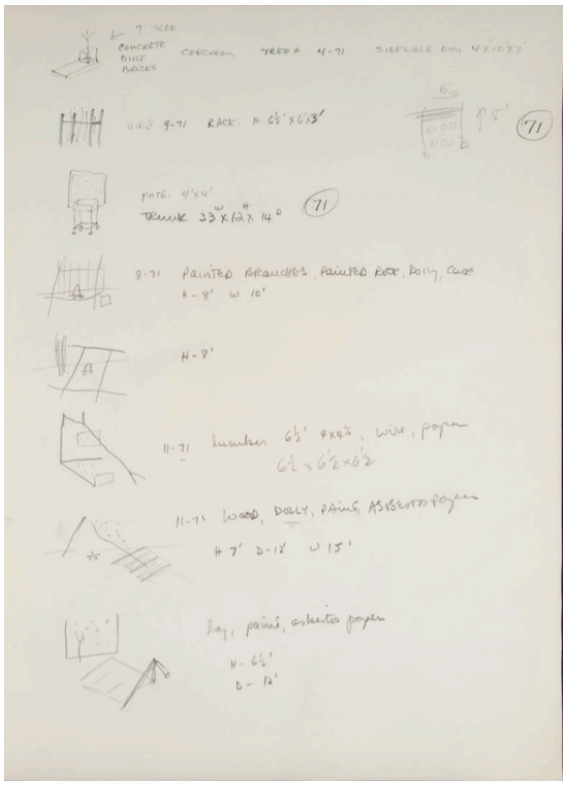


Figure 26. Ree Morton, *Notebook: RM12*, c. 1971 – 74.

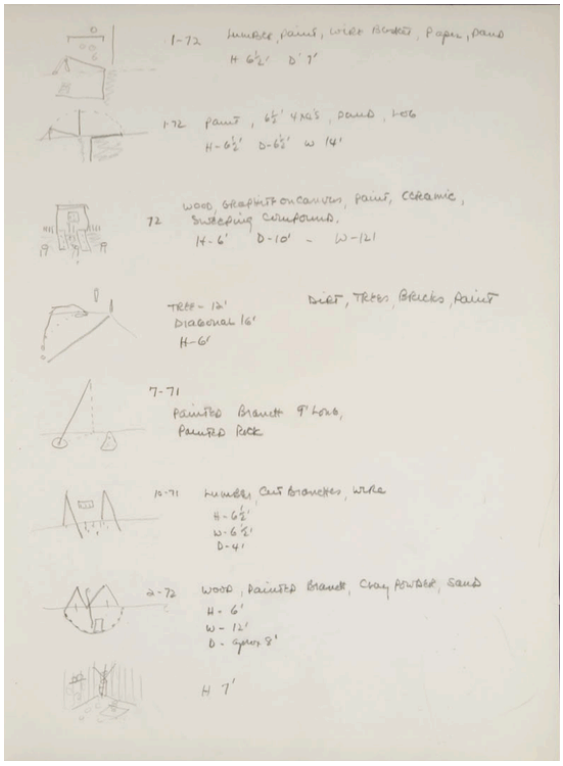


Figure 27. Ree Morton, *Notebook: RM12*, c. 1971 – 74.

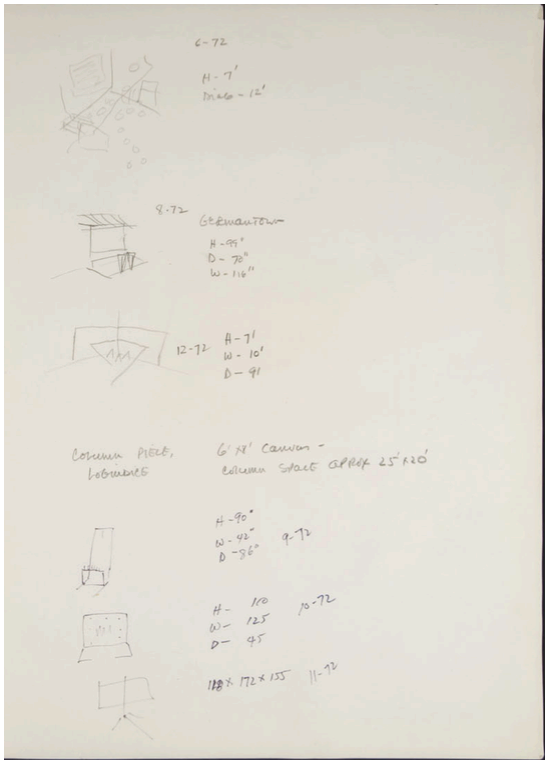


Figure 28. Ree Morton, *Notebook: RM12*, c. 1971 – 74.

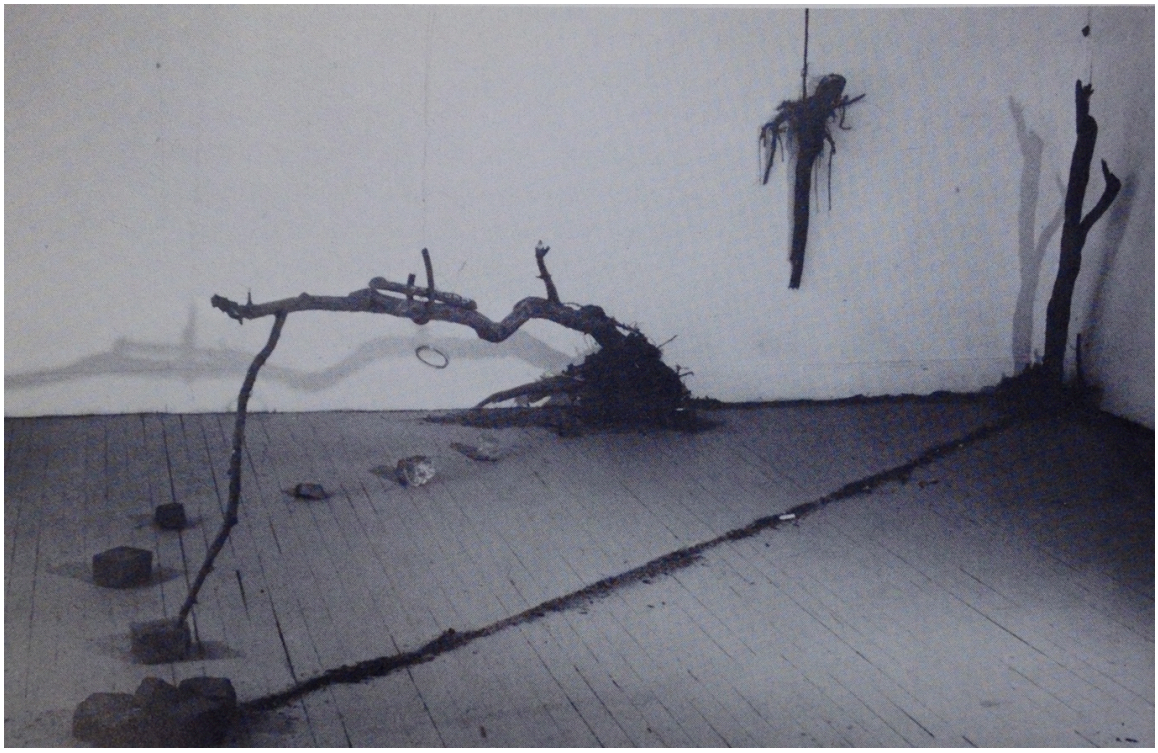


Figure 29. Ree Morton, *Untitled (July),* 1971.

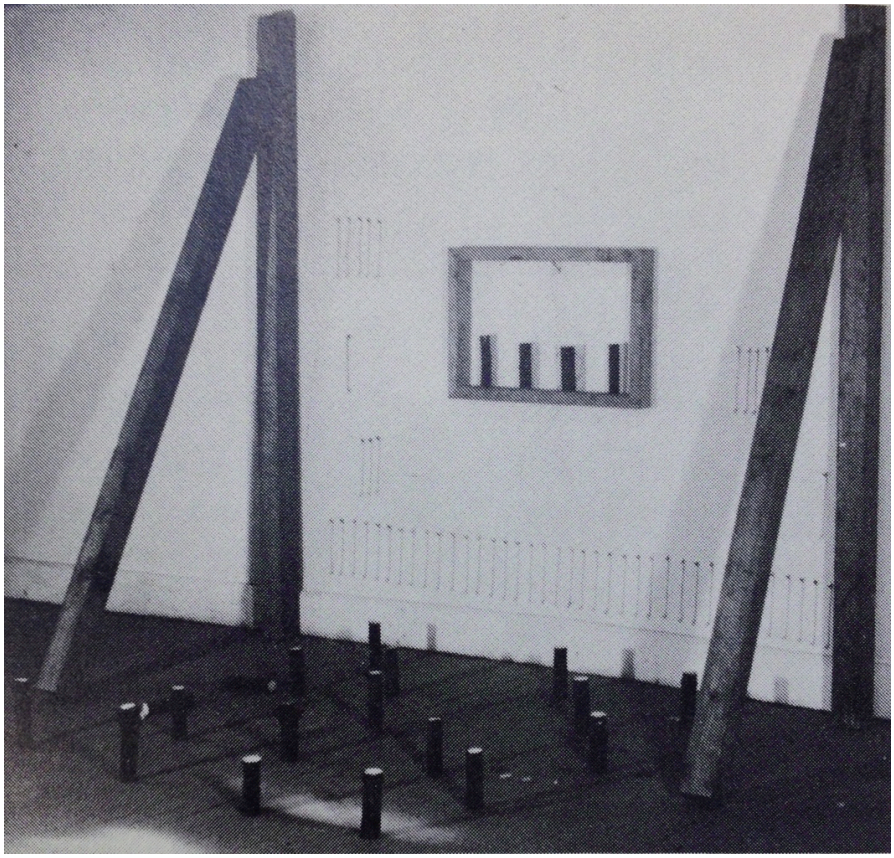


Figure 30. Ree Morton, *Untitled (October),* 1971.

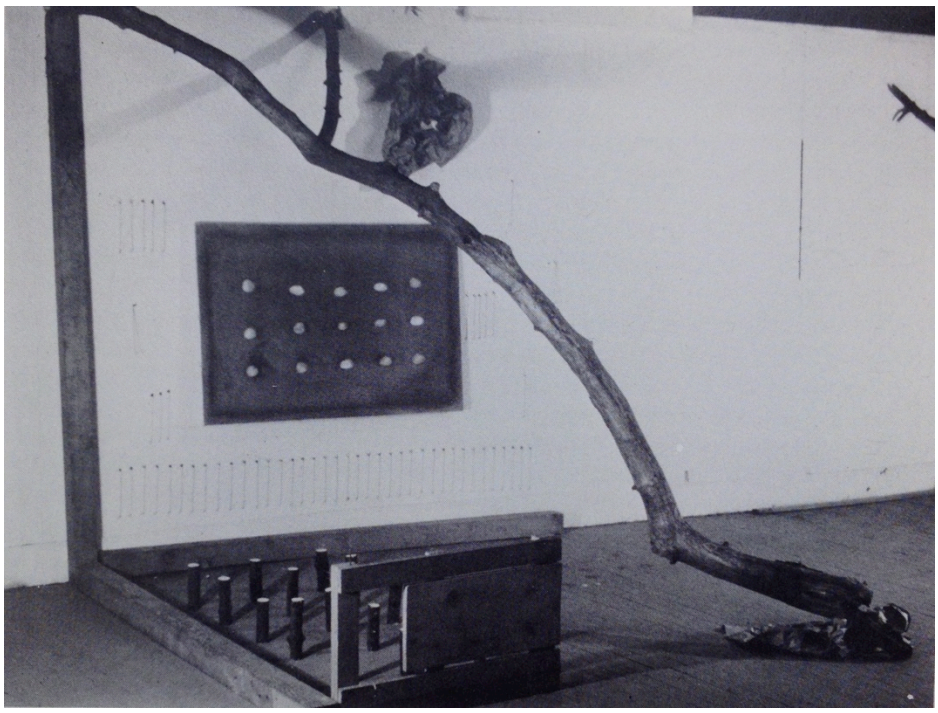


Figure 31. Ree Morton, *Untitled (December),* 1971.

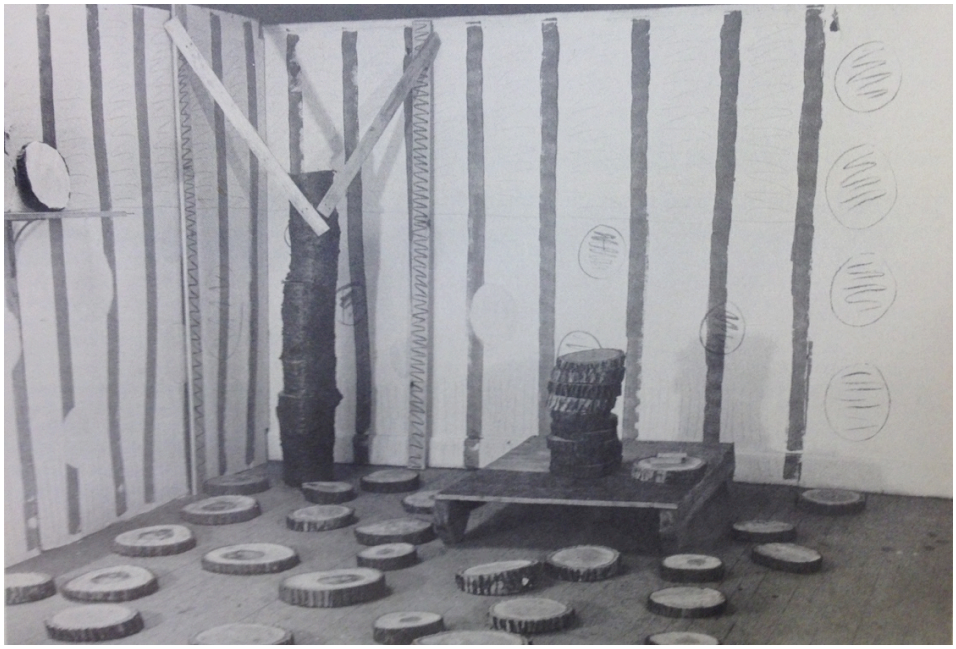


Figure 32. Ree Morton, *Untitled (March)*, 1971.

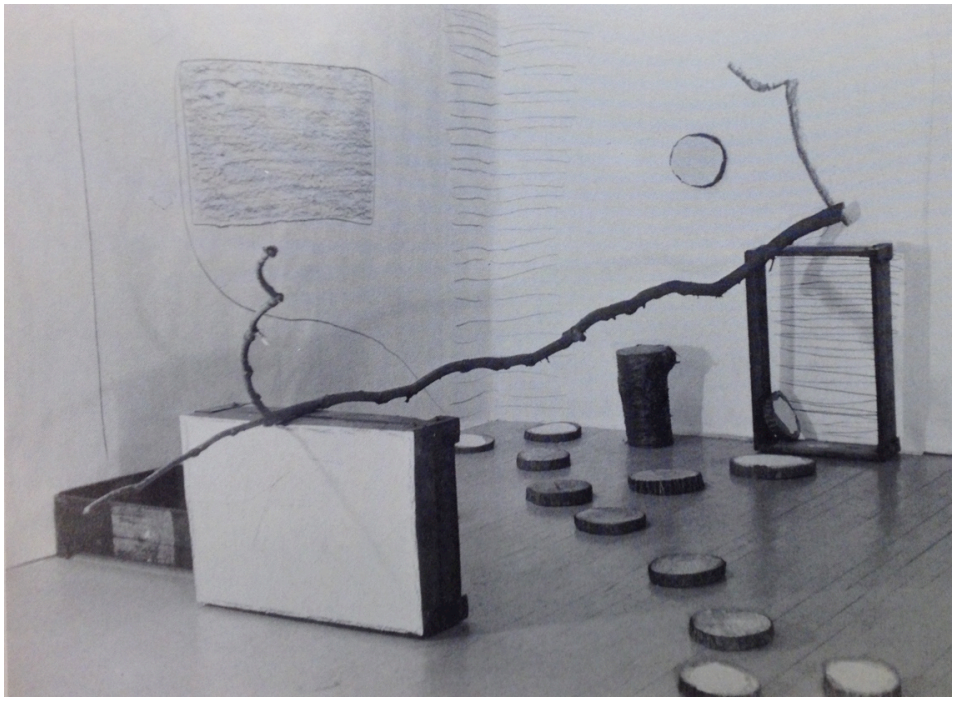


Figure 33. Ree Morton, *Untitled,* 1972.



Figure 1. A meeting of the Anarchitecture group. Left to right: Suzanne Harris, Ree Morton (back to camera), Jeffrey Lew, and Gordon Matta-Clark, 1974.

Figure 34. Photo of Ree Morton, Suzanne Harris, Jeffrey Lew and Gordon Matta Clark an Anarchitecture meeting, 1974.

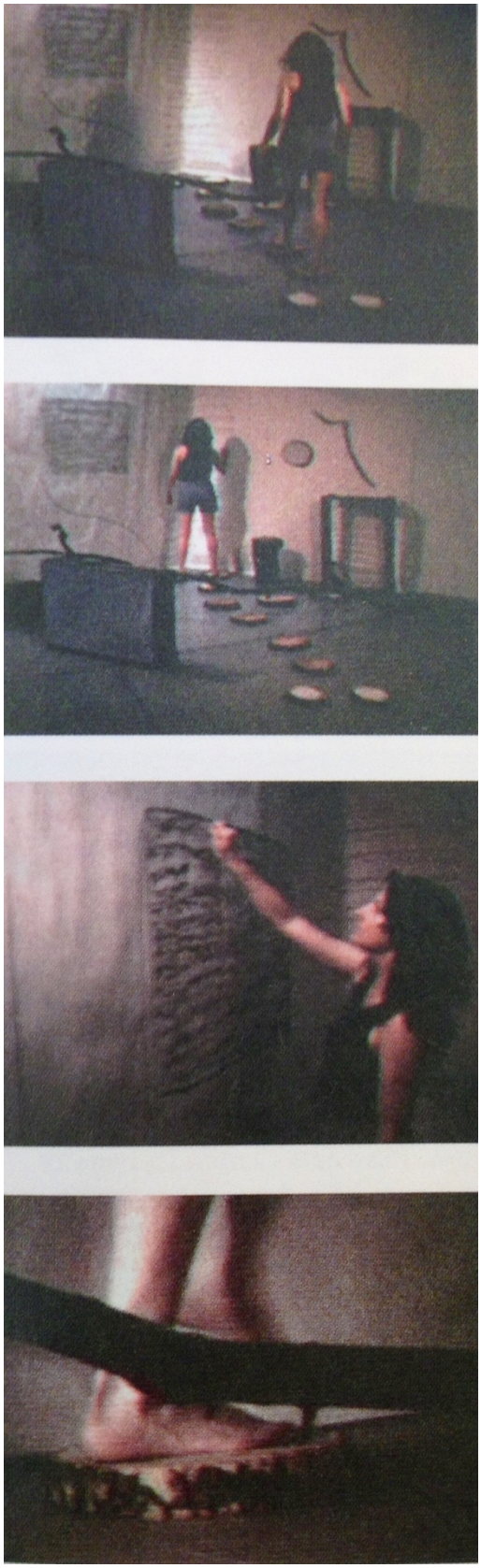


Figure 35. Ree Morton, *Untitled* (Film Still), 1972.



Figure 36. Ree Morton, *Maid of the Mist,* 1976.

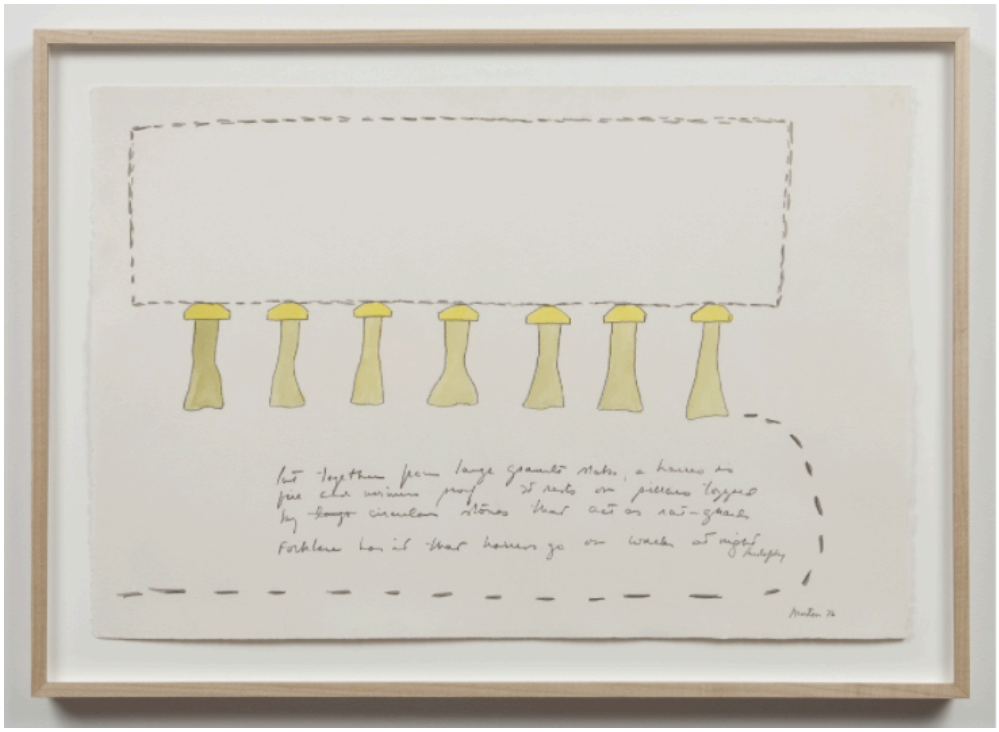


Figure 37. Ree Morton, *Untitled (Rudofsky I)*, 1972.

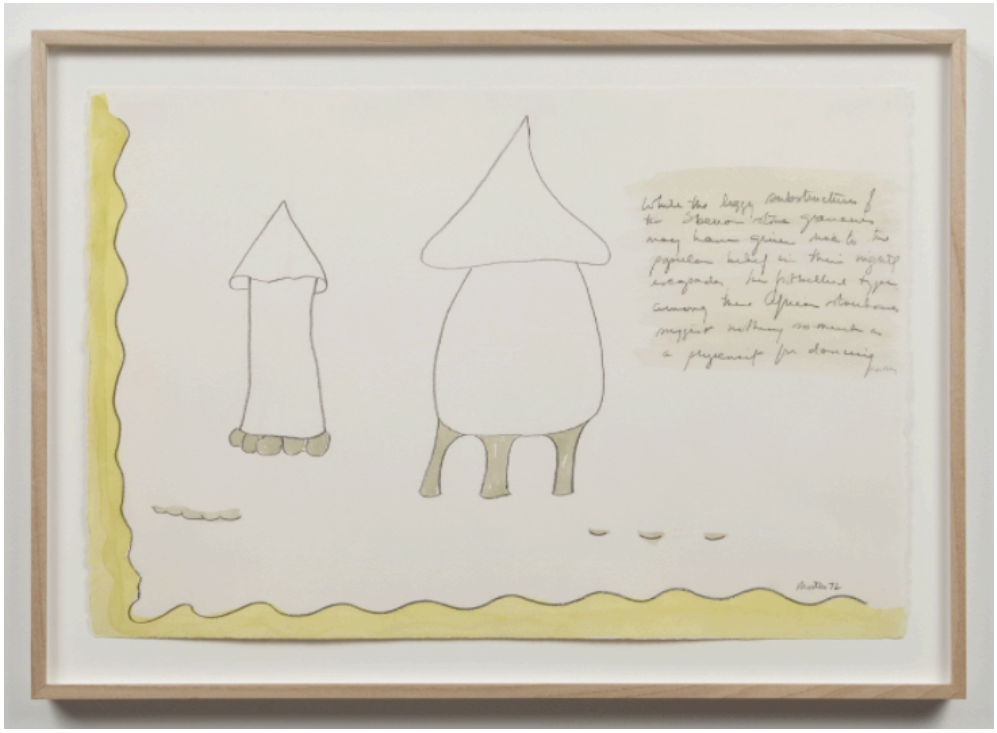


Figure 38. Ree Morton, *Untitled (Rudofsky II)*, 1972.

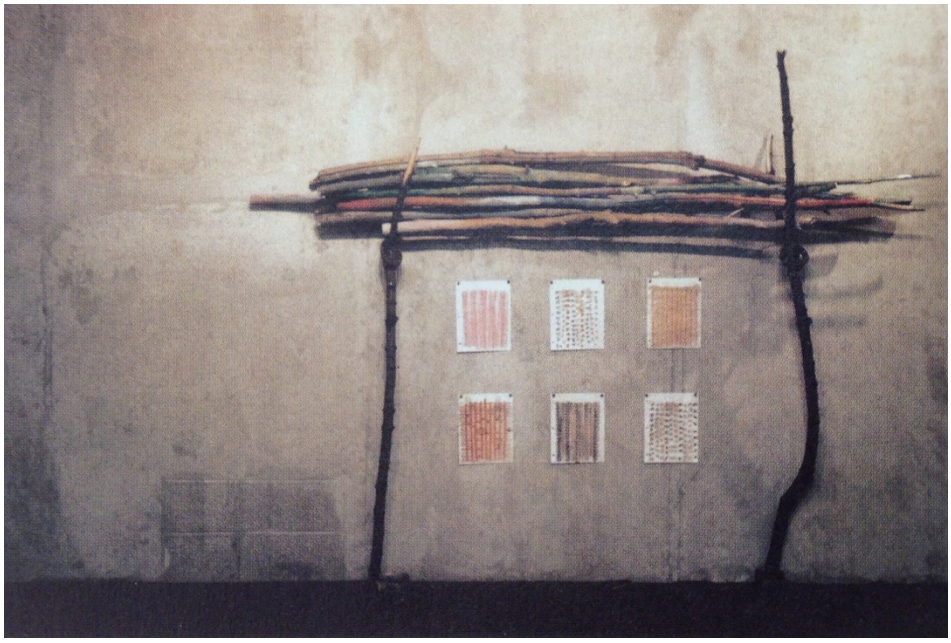


Fig. 39. Ree Morton, *Untitled*, 1971.



Fig. 40. Ree Morton, *Untitled*, 1973.

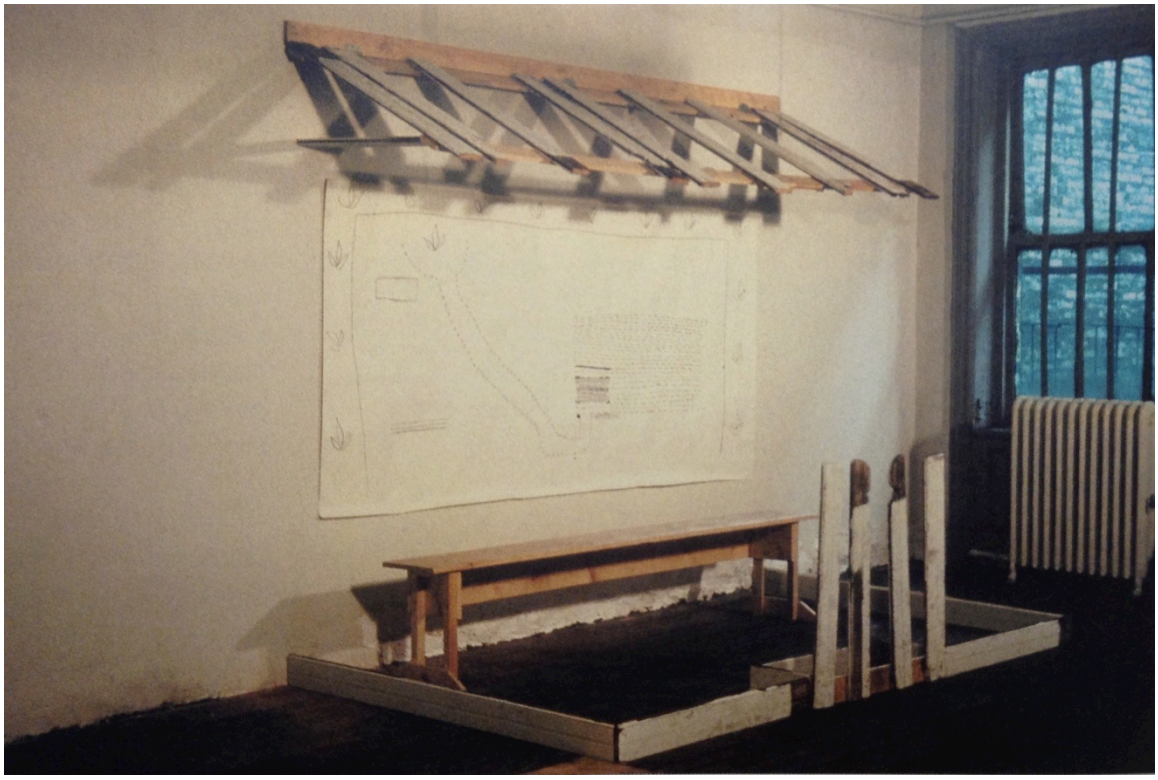


Figure 41. Ree Morton, *Untitled (Germantown Piece)*,1972.

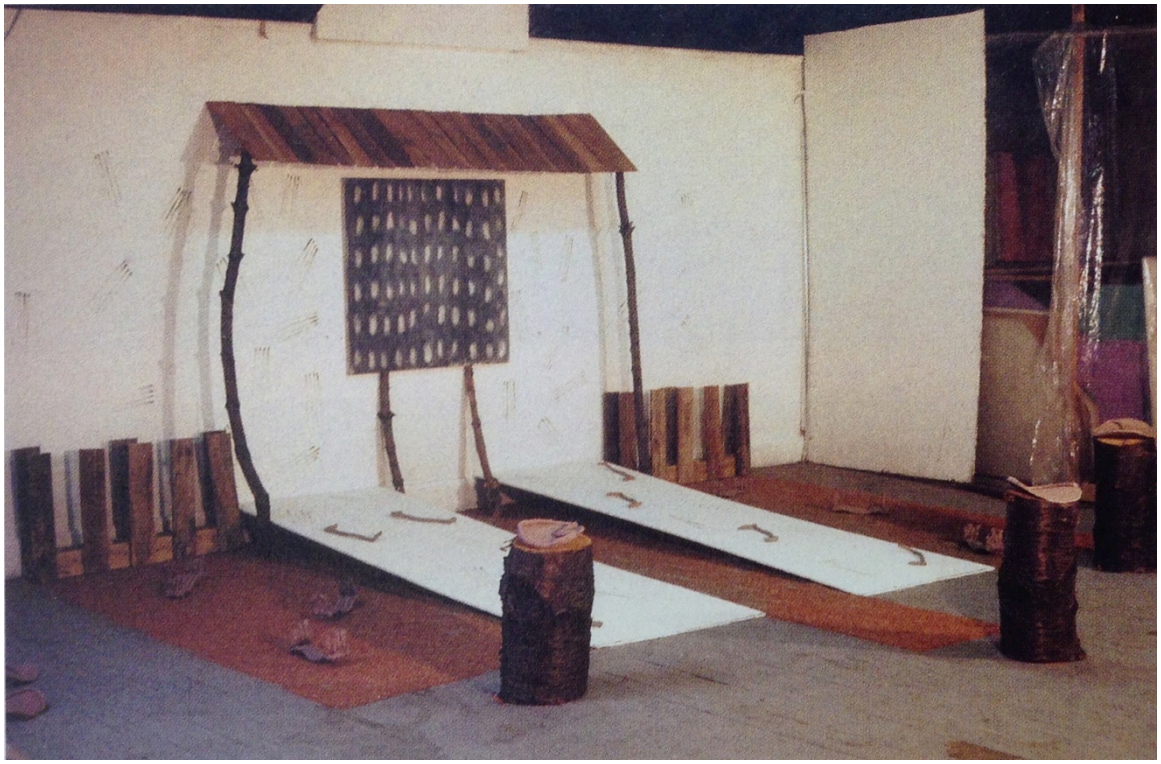


Figure 42. Ree Morton, *Untitled*, 1972.

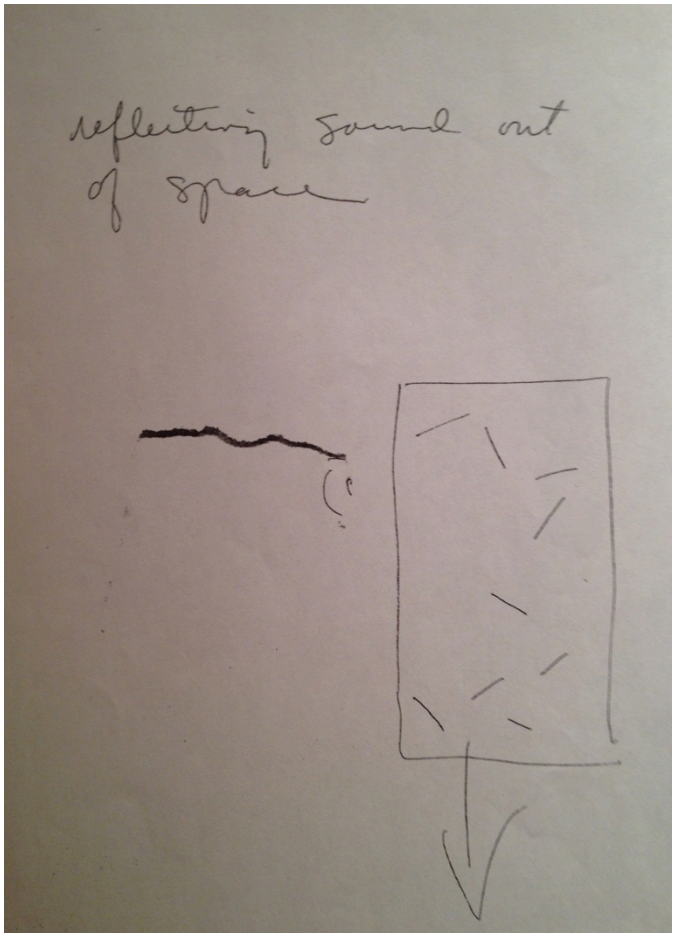


Figure 43. Gordon Matta Clark, *Notebook*. 1971 – 1974.

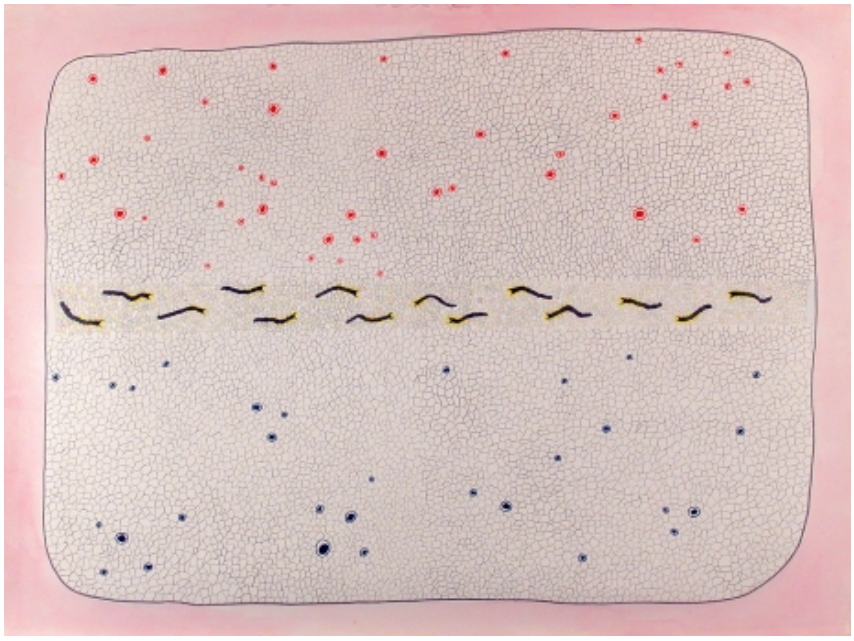

Figure 44. Ree Morton, *Untitled,* 1973.



Figure 45. Ree Morton, *Untitled (Line Series)*, 1974.

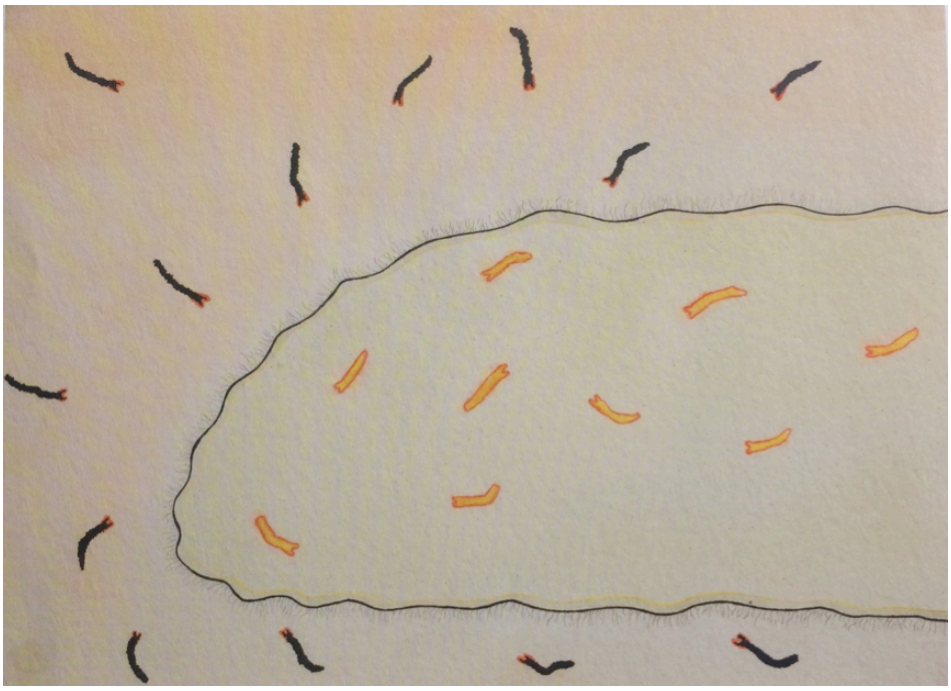


Figure 46. Ree Morton, *Untitled (Line Series)*, 1974.

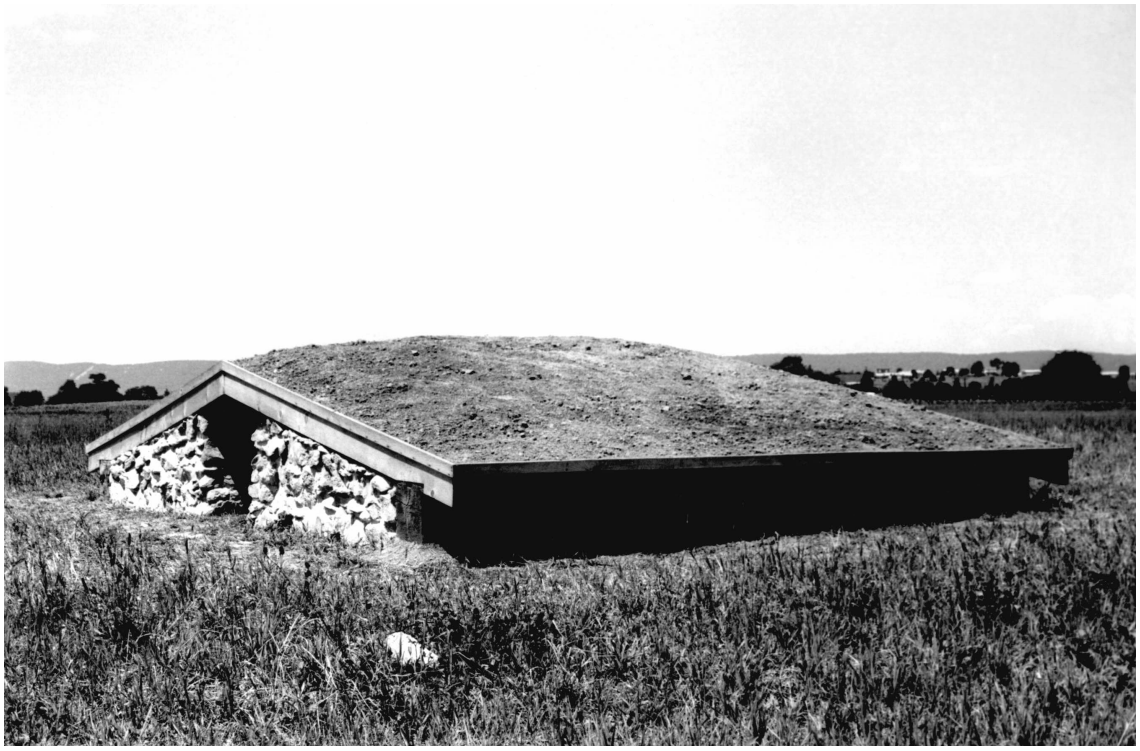


Figure. 47. Alice Aycock, *Low Building with Dirt Roof (For Mary)*, 1973.



Figure. 48. Alice Aycock, (detail, interior) *Low Building with Dirt Roof (For Mary)*, 1973.

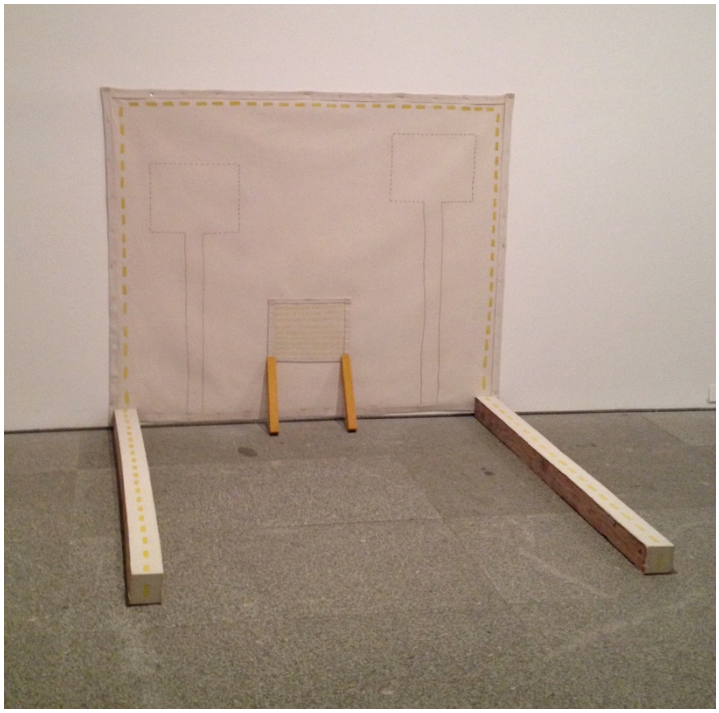


Figure 49. Ree Morton, *Paintings and Objects,* (detail), 1973.



Figure 50. Ree Morton, *Maternal Instincts,* 1974.



Figure 51. Ree Morton, *Sister Perpetua's Lie*, 1973.



Figure 52. Ree Morton, *To Each Concrete Man*, 1974.



Figure 53. Ree Morton, *To Each Concrete Man* (detail), 1974.



Figure 54. Ree Morton, *To Each Concrete Man* (detail), 1974.



Figures 55, 56, 57. Ree Morton, (Woodman) Studies for *To Each Concrete Man*, 1974.

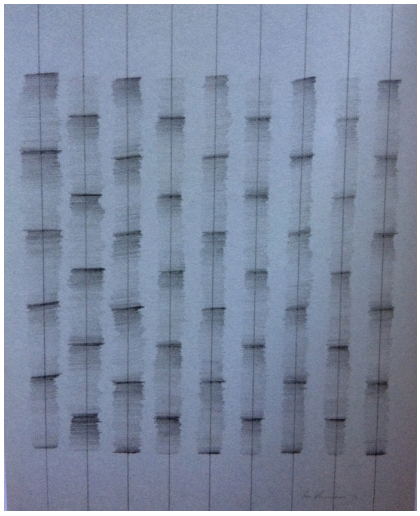


Figure 58. Ree Morton, *Untitled*, 1970.



Figure 59. Ree Morton, *Untitled ("Line Drawing")*, ca. 1968 – 1970.



Figure 60. Ree Morton, *Untitled*, 1970.

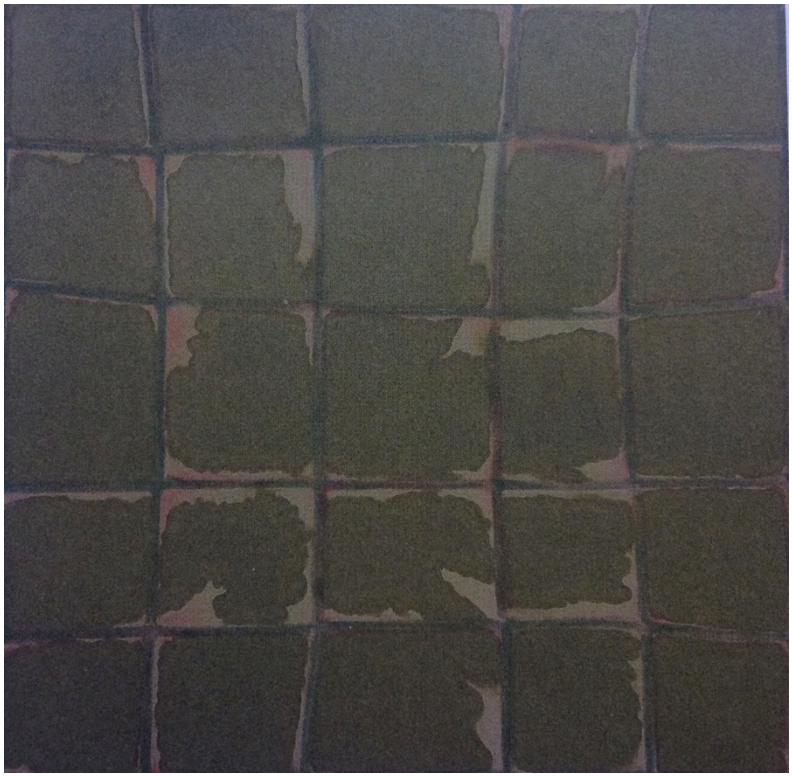


Figure 61. Ree Morton, *Untitled*, 1970.



Figure 62**.** Ree Morton, *Bake Sale*, 1974.



Figure 63. Ree Morton, *Bake Sale*, 1974.



Figure 64. Ree Morton, *Bake Sale*, 1974.



Figure 65**.** Ree Morton, *Many Have Run Away, To Be Sure***,** 1974.



Figure 66. Ree Morton, *One of the Beaux Paintings (#4),* 1975



Figure 67**.** Ree Morton, *One of the Beaux Paintings,* 1975.



Figure 68. Ree Morton, *One of the Beaux Paintings,* 1975.



Figure 69. A photograph of Morton's studio in California , 1975.



Figure 70. Installation view of Ree Morton's exhibition, Woman's Building. 1975 - 76.



Figure 71. Ree Morton, *Devil Chaser* (foreground), 1976, *One of the Beaux Paintings* (middleground) 1975, *Let Us Celebrate While Youth Lingers* (background) (Installation view. California Woman's Building. 1976. Photograph.



Figure 72. Ree Morton, at the Woman's Building, c. 1975 - 76.



Figure 73. Ree Morton speaking about her work at a Feminist Studio Workshop at the Woman's Building in California, 1976.



Figure 74. Ree Morton, *Regional Piece*, 1976.



Figure 75. Ree Morton, *Signs of Love,* 1976.



Figure 76. Ree Morton, *Signs of Love,* 1976.



Figure 77. Ree Morton, *Signs of Love,* 1976.



Figure 78. Ree Morton, dress costume (rear figure) for *Dressed Like An Egg,* 1976.



Figure 79. Ree Morton, *Don't Worry, I'll Only Read You The Good Parts*, 1975.


Figure 80. Ree Morton, *For Kate*, 1976.

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Ree Morton’s Notebooks

Notebooks are listed below in chronological order according the earliest date given in the book.
All notebooks were seen at http://franklinfurnace.org/ree_morton_sketchbooks/index.php Last Accessed June 2017. Names and dates of each item are listed as they appear in on the Franklin Furnace website listed above, unless otherwise stated with [AS] after the author’s edit to indicate a revised date.

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1969

_____. *#2 Morton Green Graph Sketchbook*, RM-25, ca 1969. Ree Morton Notebooks, Franklin Furnace Archive.
_____. *’69 Small Black Sketchbook,* RM-27, 1969. Ree Morton Notebooks, Franklin Furnace Archive.
_____. *Semester Composition Notebook*, RM-28, 1969. Ree Morton Notebooks, Franklin Furnace Archive.
_____. *Red Cover Spiral Notebook*, RM-22, 1969 – 1970 [AS]. Ree Morton Notebooks, Franklin Furnace Archive.
_____. *Blue Cover Artist Sketchbook*, RM-10, 1969[AS] - 1970. Ree Morton Notebooks, Franklin Furnace Archive.

1970

_____. *Dark Green Large Sketchbook*, RM-23, 1970. Ree Morton Notebooks, Franklin Furnace Archive

_____. Small Blue Sketchbook, RM-24, ca 1970. Ree Morton Notebooks, Franklin Furnace Archive
_____. *1970 Small Blue Sketchbook*, RM-13, 1970. Ree Morton Notebooks, Franklin Furnace Archive
_____. *Large Black Soft-cover Ring-bound Sketchbook*, RM-14, 1970 - 1972. Ree Morton Notebooks, Franklin Furnace Archive

1971

_____. *Green Graph Sketchbook,* RM-11, February 1971. Ree Morton Notebooks, Franklin Furnace Archive,
_____.*Large Black Hard Bound Sketchbook*, RM-12, 1971[AS] - 1974. Ree Morton Notebooks, Franklin Furnace Archive.

1972

_____.*Vernon Royal [Maroon & White Notebook*] RM-05, ca 1972 – 1973[AS]. Ree Morton Notebooks, Franklin Furnace Archive
_____. *August 72 - Jan 73 Large Brown Sketchbook*, RM-08, August 1972 – January 73. Ree Morton Notebooks, Franklin Furnace Archive.

1973

_____. *Strathmore Shelburne Sketchbook*, RM-09, 1973. Ree Morton Notebooks, Franklin Furnace Archive
_____.*"73-74" Small Black Sketchbook,* RM-02, 1973 -1974, Ree Morton Notebooks, Franklin Furnace Archive
_____. *June ' 73 - Feb 74 Artist Sketchbook*, RM-07, June 1973 – February 1974. Ree Morton Notebooks, Franklin Furnace Archive
_____. *Square Deal Notebook,* RM-30, ca 1973 - 1974. Ree Morton Notebooks, Franklin Furnace Archive
_____. *"167 AVA" (very small brown notebook),* RM-37, 1973 - 1974. Ree Morton Notebooks, Franklin Furnace Archive

1974

_____.*Large Black Hard Bound Notebook*, RM-01, May 1974 – June 1975, Ree Morton Notebooks, Franklin Furnace Archive
_____.*Strathmore Alexis Sketchbook*, RM-03, c. 1974/1975, Ree Morton Notebooks, Franklin Furnace Archive
_____. *1974 Daily Calendar*, RM-31, 1974. Ree Morton Notebooks, Franklin Furnace Archive

1975

_____. *1975 Black Notebook*, RM-18, 1975. Ree Morton Notebooks, Franklin Furnace Archive

_____.*Auto Trips Notebook*, RM-04, ca 1975. Ree Morton Notebooks, Franklin Furnace Archive
_____. *1975 Largest Sketchbook*, RM-20, 1975. Ree Morton Notebooks, Franklin Furnace Archive
_____. *Red 'Take Me Along'' Sketch Book*, RM-26, ca 1975. Ree Morton Notebooks, Franklin Furnace Archive
_____. *JAN 1975 Record Notebook,* RM-29, 1975. Ree Morton Notebooks, Franklin Furnace Archive
_____. *1975 Calendar Appointment Notebook*, RM-38, 1975. Ree Morton Notebooks, Franklin Furnace Archive
_____. *1975 Record Notebook (black + maroon),* RM-17, 1975 – 1976[AS] Ree Morton Notebooks, Franklin Furnace Archive

1976

_____. *Morton 1975-76 Sketchbook*, RM-06, 1976. Ree Morton Notebooks, Franklin Furnace Archive
_____. *76-77 Artist Sketchbook*, RM-15, 1976[AS] - 1977. Ree Morton Notebooks,Franklin Furnace Archive

1977

_____. *Manipulations of the Organic Notebook*, RM-16, 1977. Ree Morton Notebooks, Franklin Furnace Archive
_____. *1977 Black Sketchbook,* RM-19, February 1977. Ree Morton Notebooks, Franklin Furnace Archive

Dates Unknown

_____. *Campus Turquoise Cover Notebook*, RM-32, unknown. Ree Morton Notebooks, Franklin Furnace Archive
_____. *Very Small Green Notebook (number 243 and doodles on cover),* RM-33, no date [1973 AS]. Ree Morton Notebooks, Franklin Furnace Archive
_____. *Very Small Green Notebook (Handi notes),* RM-34, no date. Ree Morton Notebooks, Franklin Furnace Archive
_____. *Very Small Green Notebook (torn cover),* RM-35, no date. [AS] Ree Morton Notebooks, Franklin Furnace Archive
_____. *Very Small Green Notebook (Lucio Pozzi hand written on cover* RM-36, no date. [AS] Ree Morton Notebooks, Franklin Furnace Archives.

Appendix 1

Cynthia Carlson Interview with Abi Shapiro

December 11th, 2013. Cynthia Carlson's Apartment, New York City.

AS: Can I first ask about situating Ree Morton's work in an art historical context. Her name crops up in brief reference to feminist art, installation art, conceptual art, sculpture and architecture, but it never gets a full or satisfactory discussion in any of those contexts. Why do you think that is?

CC: There's also the decorative context. She was not really connected to the period of decorative work fully as I think she may already have been dead by that time. But certainly her work fell into that category.

AS: Absolutely. Thanks for mentioning that, it's important. I don't think there is enough conversation among all these categories but yet perhaps that's what makes her work so exciting – its hybridity. Women artists are so often missed out of publications detailing these interconnected histories, particularly in installation art histories.

CC: I feel a little bit that way myself of my own work.

AS: I can see that connection in your work, with your wallpaper and the installations that you were doing. It seems so poignant that so much installation work by women isn't acknowledged in art history!

CC: Well, that's very interesting. Because you're right…although I have not followed the linear written history of installation art, but I think you're right. And a lot of it now is so very attached to video…it came out of a "hands on" all of it was hands on… and now its not so much hands on.

AS: Yes. I was really struck by this aspect of Ree's work, where there is no denying her work takes on this architectural, installation and structural dimension in the early seventies that is so reminiscent of early installation works. One exciting thing I've come across recently was some information about Ree in Gordon Matta Clark's archives.

CC: Yes, they knew each other. They were friends.

AS: Yes, I could see that in the documents. And I came across some material, letters and postcards and photographs that he had taken of her and I came across her involvement in his Anarchitecture group and it struck me that no one has writing about the connections among architecture and sculpture and feminism at this time.

CC: That's true. And Richard Nonas was another person who was a friend of hers in that enclave.

AS: And you met her in Philadelphia when you were teaching together?

CC: I never actually lived in Philadelphia, I was commuting. There was a mutual friend who started teaching at the PCA and we met and became friends and I started staying with her [Morton] when I went down there. I was always fishing for a place to stay. And that became where I stayed until she died. And I was taking care of the kids too. When I was staying we didn't have our teaching days the same day, we tried to do that intentionally so that on those days when I was staying overnight she could then go to New York and see some art and get to know people, which she did very well. She was really a very capable person, not in any sort of conscious or manipulative way. She was very easy to talk to and smart, she fit in easily and met people.

AS: That seems to be what everyone wrote about her – that she had a very magnetic personality.

CC: Yes, she did.

AS: When you met her she was teaching and beginning to make work and this was in the early 70s?

CC: Yes, she was beginning to work on some of those things when she was wrapping trees, it was very conceptual. I was not terribly interested in those works myself, I was more of a painter. But she really opened my mind a lot through our friendship. She did a lot to take me out of a much more prejudicial…I sort of think of her, she was a few years older than me, maybe ten years, but I sort of think of her as a mentor and that was not the nature of the friendship and if I told her that she would have been very angry about it. And there was a group in Philadelphia, including Italo Scanga who then later moved to California and is now dead. That's the problem with a lot of the people that were good friends from then, they've all kicked the bucket. And Raphael Ferrera, who was another dynamic person who was extremely unfriendly and by the time Ree died, he was behaving very badly towards her, that's a whole different story. There was another guy, Don something, he was electrocuted a long time ago and he was part of that group.

AS: And these were all Philadelphia people?

CC: Yes, all Philadelphia people. That was an enclave of people. Ferrera was very, very colourful and outspoken, he was friends with Bob Morris. The thing about Raffi was that after he made friends with people, as part of the dynamic of his personality, he then fell out with them. He started putting them down and breaking off friendships and he ultimately did that with Ree. But he was really out there and it was a real group, I was part of that group insofar as I didn't live in Philadelphia but Ree and I were good friends. It was a very energetic group of art ideas bouncing around. At that time, Raffi Ferrera was working conceptually on things, so that was an important influence on Ree, not in the way that the work looked but in terms of conversation.

AS: Right, because she started incorporating text in her work so there does seem to be a dialogue in her art with conceptual art. That's what I like about Morton's work -- she borrowed elements from different places. So I want to think about how she was moving around these circles and being influenced in that way. There is so much documentation in her diaries about books and things she read, it has a very process-based overtone.

CC: Readings were very important to her. We were all passing around the same books, we were all reading the same thing. At that moment we were all thinking about Claude Levi-Strauss or Raymond Roussel.

AS: I wanted to ask about the Women's Faculty show at Philadelphia College of Art. She put in a piece called *Bake Sale* in 1974?

CC: Yes. All the students made something. She made a stand, you know a fair – a country fair-style stand and all the students brought something. We had a discussion about that, because the faculty and the gallery at that point, all of it was so conservative, that it was long after feminism that they decided to have a woman's show [laughs]. Get on the bandwagon, what took you so long!? And we talked about it and I refused to be in it. And she [Ree] said, "no I'm going to be in it, I'm going to do something", so she came up with that idea. And that was the beginning of opening a whole new door to the work that was quite flamboyant and decorative and feminist.

AS: That's interesting. I've been trying to think about her feminist politics. I have a picture of her at the Woman's Building in California and I know she was involved in the AIR gallery in New York City, is that correct?

CC: Well, she was and she wasn't. That was another discussion that we had. Barbara Zucker and Susan Williams started the AIR gallery. Michelle Stuart was, I forget why, but she kept a huge archive of women's work, slides and I guess they picked out people from those slides that they wanted to interview about being in the gallery. They interviewed both Ree and I and we discussed it together and decided against it. Wrongly so I think, in historic terms. Well, we were nervous to be called a 'woman artist' and we just wanted to be artists. I think that was stupid and naïve on our part. It turned out to be a historic and credible gallery with a lot of good people coming out of there; very important women artists. In any case, that's how she [Morton] got to know Barbara Zucker too.

AS: That makes sense in her notebooks, it is clear she is reading feminist literature, going to lectures, etc. She transcribed several passages from texts about Old Masters about what it was to be a male artist. She was clearly thinking about gender.

CC: Yes, very much.

AS: It also struck me that she would have been a bit older around the time AIR was setting up and she was a mother by that point, so her relationship to her work was different by that point and perhaps had a different resonance for her than younger feminists. Is that fair?

CC: When she decided to come to New York in 1972 and give the three children to her husband for a year or two and try to do something serious in terms of making it a professional goal, she got a lot of shit from a lot of people, from in and out of the art world. Mothers don't give up children. People that did or didn't have children had big opinions about that. That was not easy for her. So it was very much in her mind what it meant to be a mother. For many of us artists, had not necessarily made a decision, but didn't have kids. And we were younger. She already had three kids. She was playing catch up and she was in a bit of a hurry for that.

AS: And of course this particularly coincides with the moment of the women's movement where these kinds of issues were very topical.

CC: And probably the time she spent in California. Miriam Schapiro and those people were really gung-ho, probably played a major role in putting her in the middle of that.

AS: And what was your experience in New York of having that California contingent working with decorative art? Of course they both travelled to NY too…

CC: Yes, they were here. I knew more of them because I was invited by the NEA [National Endowment for the Arts] to go to California and interview various organizations and write a report to determine whether or not they should have NEA grants. And the Woman's Building was one of them. They were not all feminist. But one was a feminist gallery. In Santa Barbara maybe. That was my first direct experience with the group. There was a great deal of vitality within the group, although I didn't know any of them personally. There was a show called *The Decorative Impulse* in San Diego. It started at the ICA in Philadelphia and travelled around, ending up in Chicago.

AS: Those seem like quite significant places for feminist activities and places that Ree Morton was travelling too, especially Chicago.

CC: Yes, she was a visiting artist there. In fact, that's where she was when she died. She was working on a show. The installation had taken place with a couple of friends and they went out and celebrated and they had too much to drink and that's when she got in that awful automobile accident.

AS: I'm very interested in the way she was moving around so much and how her travels influenced her work so much.

CC: It did. She was not narrow minded about the art world being only in New York. Can we go back to the earlier question you asked about before and this is something I hadn't thought about, about why there had not been more attention and so on and something popped into my mind. Two of her friends (and they were good friends) were offered flags. She had done that flag piece and those flags were to be returned – he didn't care about his, they didn't like her work. They liked *her*. They were part of the second generation abstract expressionist artists. I think there were a lot of artists that were drawn to her but could not

understand her craziness and I don't mean it literally, I mean in terms of her experimentation. They couldn't get it, some of the artists she knew were minimal – Richard Nonas and Doug Sanderson, good friend of hers – I don't know that they "got" her work. But I don't know that. But it didn't quite fit, although it fit the 1970s when there was a sense pluralism but then I remember being on a panel about pluralism and reading an article about it by Hal Foster in *Art in America* and I looked at it from a feminist point of view and all the words that were being used to put down pluralism were things like "whoreish" and "promiscuous", words like that. I remember at some point I made a list of them somewhere. It was dismissed instead of a kind of systematic linear progression.

AS: And it really seems that in art history texts, they can't handle this kind of crossover either.

CC: No, they cannot.

AS: I wonder if there's a gender component here too. Taking someone like Gordon Matta Clark who was working among architecture and sculpture and fine art. He is talked about in a very different way to a woman. There seems a messiness of complicating interdisciplinarity with feminism. I'm particularly interested in why we don't have term "feminist installation art" for this reason, which is really the crux of my work. I use the term tentatively, not wanting to necessarily put a label on certain works, but it seems an omission of sorts nonetheless. And Morton's work for me hinges on many of these ideas – conceptual, feminist and architectural – expanding spatially and taking on skill sets of how to manipulate materials in unusual ways.

CC: That's one of the things that amazed me about her, what the fact that she could move in and out of materials and get a feeling for them. When she started painting, she painted as if she has always been painting, I was really jealous! Those seascape sunsets pieces were based on living in California, those were so good. And her handling of the material Celastic was so painterly, she wouldn't have kept working with that, it was a very bad material. Very bad. Because it's a theatrical facemask material, comes in sheets like a cross between cardboard and felt and when you dip it in acetone it becomes completely malleable and slimy and will take whatever form you put it over. So that's why it was used for facemasks. And acetone of course was extremely toxic. And it's not a permanent material, so I don't know long those will last in history, they are extremely fragile.

AS: How long does it take to set?

CC: Within a minute or two.

AS: So it would have been a very fast sculpting process?

CC: Very fast! I don't know how she did that really, I should have been watching. She made roses and all kinds of things.

AS: Celastic doesn't seem available anymore though, or at least it's not used in fine art.

CC: It was a German company who sold the Celastic called David Hamburger in sheets, somewhere in the West twenties. It may have disappeared as a material because of the toxicity.

AS: And Ree was involved with a theatre production too, Mabou Mines?

CC: Yes. JoAnne Akalaitis is another person who was a good friend of hers. She knew Ree and commissioned her to make a dress for their show.

AS: That's interesting that she made costumes too. I sense that influenced her work, expanding the areas of "art" in Celastic. There was the ArtPark piece too, *Maid of the Mist*, that seemed very performative too. Where you there?

CC: It was performative. Yes, I was there.

AS: What do you think that was like for her to shift into performance work?

CC: I look back on a lot of performance art and it was very naïve. Video was the same, there was a lot of dreadful works, like people throwing a camera back and forth! I don't think we thought of performance as very serious – I don't mean that it was a joke – that it was a new things and we didn't know what to do with it. A lot of it when you look back on it was very boring. But hers was very simple. She made this beautiful ladder, the *Maid of the Mist* was an Indian tale, in which the sacrifice was the maid of the mist that went over the falls, so she made this ladder and an inner tube and threw them into the water. Niagara falls was a few miles down from Artpark so it was quite a dramatic place. The inner tube was for the Maid of the Mist so that she could get up and out with the ladder, the performance was a bunch of people all walking down to the point and taking it back again.

AS: There was some nice documentation of that in the Artpark catalogue. And you had a gingerbread house piece as well there?

CC: Yes. Ree was also good friends with Jim Roche, a Florida artist. He came up with a truck, it had a billion little things in it, like souvenirs and he made this huge thing that was like an Indian sand painting made out of these odd materials. Ree and I went to Artpark together to see that, we had such a good time, such good fun! It was like art camp for kids. And I thought, I'm a painter, what am I going to do in Artpark? I though I'd make a structure and I'll just go in it and paint and at that point I was doing decorative things.

AS: How big was the house?

CC: It was a large size, you could walk into it. It was a scale for a child, so the doorway was big enough to enter into. It was about 13 feet high all together.

AS: I'm really struck by how women artists at this time were making very structural and architectural work about houses at this time.

CC: Do you know Donna Denis's work? Very architectural, very much a feminist. I have a catalogue and she just had a big show of her installations. Alice Aycock did things like that too in the 70s. She has a piece downtown, she worked with a landscape architect on the water in the financial district on the river.

AS: I'm still struck why these women aren't called installation artists. Particularly given the very clear influence of architecture here. Ree Morton's time with the Anarchitecture group and Gordon Matta Clark seems important to her work for this very reason.

CC: Well, they were talking to each other about these sorts of issues. One of the books that meant a great deal to Ree was Gaston Bachelard's *Poetics of Space* and in that he talks a great deal about domestic space. And there were a couple of shows too, I don't know if Ree was in that show, but I was. It was called *Home Work* at the downtown Whitney. [full show was *Homework: The Domestic Environment Reflected in Work by Contemporary Women Artists*, Joe and Emily Lowe Art Gallery, Syracuse University, 1981].

CC: Ree also had a good sense of humour!

AS: That is very apparent in her artwork and notebooks.

CC: Before she died, she said "it's time to move on and get serious." And I really wonder what the turn was, what would have happened. Because she realized she had been working in this very flamboyant way, all that time. And I don't know what she meant by that. And I don't think she did either…you know, where she was going to go with her work. And I'm really sorry that she didn't last longer so we could see.

AS: But you really think that was about to be a major turning point for her?

CC: Yes. She really said she wanted to go in another direction. That Louis Sullivan piece is very architectural.

AS: I have a bibliography that I'm compiling of all of her text references. I'm making transcriptions of the diaries so I can keep track of where they are all located. So many quotes and references are there but without the names of the authors attached to them. She made her own annotations around them. That process of research is very interesting it seems for her own process of work.

CC: Yes reading was a big part. There was a show called *Weeds of the Northeast* that was a book, a publication that placed all the weeds in a Victorian context so they all had associated morals. The book was given to her children or was for her children. One of the most profound pieces she made in Celastic was *Let Us Celebrate While Youth Lingers*. How did she know that? It's really true, there's a certain way you can operate in the world before you turn a certain corner and then things begin to close down physically and mentally. I keep thinking of that. I don't know how old she was when she made that piece. But she always had her finger on the pulse of something. I feel like so much of the work I've done,

while it doesn't look like hers, I was fishing around in similar areas but years later. I think "oh yeah, Ree was thinking about that."

AS: That's a beautiful way to think about a working process -- that someone is always with you and chases you as you move along through your own spaces.

CC: It's true.

AS: I wanted to ask more about her diaries and how they were used in her work and as part of her working process. It's such a problem in art history about how we use these materials to write about life and artwork – with all the biographical and personal information contained there, what do we do with it and how do we use it responsibly? Eva Hesse's diaries for example, have been heavily used with much controversy in order to interpret meaning in her work. I want to think instead about how notebooks and diaries can tells us something about *how* an artist worked. For Morton, they seem like a documentation of her movements; her travels and her research and so on. Of course there are issues of privacy too.

CC: I don't know how she would have felt. There was one book [belonging to Morton] that had to do with personal things. It was labeled "do not look at this book." It was a time in my life when people were taking EST. It was a time in my life when things weren't going well and probably a broken relationship…and I did this EST where everyone sits in a room and people scream at you and people are supposed to have these revelations. It's gone now and the guy – Werner or something who has since been disrepute – but I maintain it was useful in figure things out. And Ree did the seminar too. And I think this book had things in it that she recognized about her past. Just like when you would go to a shrink or something. And that book said "don't read that." And I had it for years and I didn't know what to do with it. I couldn't destroy it. I finally gave it to her daughter. I wasn't going to read it and I don't know if you will or not, but it didn't belong to me. But I think a lot of deeper things were in there. Which makes me think that maybe she didn't mind, because those journals were things that had art in them. She was smart, she knew that would be a part of her history. She wanted to be in history. So, I have a feeling some of those things she would not have minded being public or being part of her. But we'll never know.

AS: I feel a real need to think about an ethical and feminist approach to this. I don't want to write about her as only an artist, she was a woman who lived a life and it so clearly influenced everything she made.

CC: Yes, very much. As did her children.

AS: Absolutely. So, I don't want to sensationalize the "story" around her life details. So, I'm interested in treating the diaries as evidence of how women artists were bringing in maternal experiences into their working practices. So, that borrows from conceptual art, do you think?

CC: Yes. But the men were doing it differently. They say something on their mind, but it's not personal. Women are more vulnerable and open to vulnerability. Like Hannah Wilke, she's such an example of that. I knew her as a complete narcissist, which she was, but then she turned that camera to her when she was sick and ugly and she didn't stop, she put it out in public. That's when I really understood what she was trying to do. There is a difference there, mean keep self-reflection to an intellectual tone even when it sounds like it's something that's confessional.

AS: Sure. Comparing male artists at the time who were keeping notebooks ad sketchbooks and how that was such a different vehicle for them to record or document what they were doing. How did you observe Ree using the notebooks? Did she take them with her a lot?

CC: Yes. They were always at hand.

AS: They seem so important as a way to record experience. In particular, the piece with the flags on the boat, *Something in the Wind*?

CC: That was a great piece.

AS: Do you remember the other spaces it was exhibited in? I have records it was shown on the boat.

CC: It was also shown on the wall. As a separate piece. For the boat, there were people who helped especially with that. But she had help making the flags too. That was an installation that was part of a grant. When most of us had grants like that, you had to put something back into the community so most of us just gave a lecture somewhere. But she took it to heart and made a serious piece. And it was a celebration of friendship. She was very definite. We went through a list of people that she knew and there was a guy next door, another artist Ira Joel Haber. He was a real curmudgeon, but I really liked him. But he wasn't a nice person. And we went through people's name and Ira's name came up and she said "no, he doesn't get a flag, he's not my friend." She took it very seriously – the separation between people that she knew and people that she had warm feelings about. She wasn't prejudiced. There was an artists and I don't remember who it was but I was over at her loft and the artist came over and the artist said "I'm sorry I missed your opening" but she show hadn't opened yet. Instead of being pissed about it, she thought it was funny. She did have that list in one of her sketchbooks about likes and dislikes and people.

AS: I wanted to ask about an exhibition curated by Janet Kardon.

CC: Yes, they knew each other in Philadelphia.

AS: Yes, that makes sense. She curated a show called *Private Notations: Artists' Sketchbooks* in 1976, do you remember Ree being in it?

CC: I remember that show.

AS: Why do you think artists, specifically Ree, were interested in showing their sketchbooks in it?

CC: The question has an obvious answer: it's about process. Artists are always interested in process. Much more than art, I think that's behind our fascination with autobiography and memory. It's often time as interesting and sometimes more than the work itself. My husband was reading about Yeats and the period around him and some of the writing can be a little perverse. It's the way perhaps that we like to watch the people we like blunder and we enjoy that, makes them more human. I don't remember the catalogue.

AS: There was a part one and part two, the show split over a few years. Kardon only chose pages from the books, but I can't find out which ones. I know the specific notebook but not the pages.

CC: It was a very good show. At that time, I wasn't thinking about what you were talking about at the time but I wish I had. Have you seen all the notebooks?

AS: Yes, they are all available online through Franklin Furnace's website.

CC: Good, Ree would have wanted them to be available for research.

AS: They even photographed pages that had been ripped out, it's very comprehensive and interesting as I think it tells us something about her process; she self-censored and edited her own notebooks.

CC: Well, then we know she was interested in having them seen. I had all of them in my cardboard box in my studio and occasionally I would just look through them. When I think of what I had and I was just so cavalier then. I gave them [the estate] everything I had.

AS: Do you think there are any more unseen books?

CC: No. I was there. She was with Droll Kolbert [gallery]. The children and I were the ones who went over after she died and emptied out the loft. And we were all in such a terrible state of sadness and horror. We made horrible mistakes about what we kept and what we threw away. Everything personal went to the kids. We should have been done much more carefully. But there was no money. We only had until the end of the month because the rent was up. A lot of bits of work should have been saved now as work. One moment you might see a table on wheels that would be part of an installation and the next time in her studio, that's what she was using to cart around her pots of paint. So things had different meanings at different times and were recyclable. Those were the kinds of things that we didn't know. We needed to do a lot more research and archival information about what it had been but we couldn't.

AS: That's something that's been picked up on in writing about her work. That she reused materials. Do you think that was conscious for economic reasons – that materials were expensive or did it mean something more?

CC: [laughs] We didn't know anyone was going to take us seriously! I remember Ree and Barbara Zucker and I were sitting around at a table in my loft kitchen having coffee and we talking about the successful people and selling out. And I got quieter and quieter because I had started selling my work. There was that prejudice about people who got too successful. So I think none of us anticipated there would be any value in any of these things. And that was part of the freedom of the spirit of the time. You just did it and it wasn't permanent. There were all those installation spaces. Twyla Tharpe. Climbing walls. You didn't expect it to last. You took a couple of pictures and that was it. It was archival in that sense but it wasn't a precious object. That always upset me about Gordon Matta Clark, after he died they all went after the little pieces of house. He never thought about it in that context. I don't know where I sit on it, but he never meant it to be art.

AS: Yes, things are taken out of context a lot. Eva Hesse's "studio" works ended up controversially being called art objects too. Although they weren't exhibited as finished works. I think maybe that impulse becomes most interesting?

CC: It's like putting your thoughts out. The diaries, the sketchbooks, the notebooks the sitting around and talking about ideas. With Gordon Matta Clark, it's made to sounds like this group that got together and sat around and theorized and philosophized. We were smoking dope! And laughing. We had hysterics. I was at one of those meetings. We were all high. That doesn't mean that ideas weren't there. There were a lot of drugs.

AS: That was part of the landscape of making art a lot then wasn't it? The creativity and the freedom that came with new ways of thinking.

CC: I don't think Ree nor I made art when we were high. Maybe sometimes she did, I don't know. Nobody turned into an addict.

AS: I was reading about Lee Lozano recently. She had a piece in the mid-70s about artists coming in and out of her apartment and smoking dope and she recorded it all and that was the work. Did you ever meet her?

CC: She was crazy. I did not know her, but there were two collectors. Helen and Milton Brutton – they were Philadelphia collectors. Do you know the Vogels? Well they were like Philadelphia versions of that. Ree knew them and I knew them. I used to stay at their house. I traded them art for a place in their house. That's where I went after Ree died. They had this big old house. At some point Lee Lozano really liked Milton. He was very charismatic. He was a child psychologist and was very enthusiastic about art. And she liked him and his paintings but she didn't like his wife. She didn't like women!

AS: Yes, she made a piece about cutting out women from her life.

CC: People who knew her said she was mad as a hatter but very hostile. I love her art though. The paintings.

AS: I like her drawings a lot. She had all those conceptual pieces that involved people she liked and those she didn't.

CC: But drugs were a bit part of the time. One of my favorites by Ree was *To Each Concrete Man* at the Whitney. The scale of it was so beautiful, low and small. There was a lot of opera in it. Quite magical.

AS: There was some of those items in the pictures from her studio, weren't there?

CC: Yes, that's an example of some of the things that were just lying around in her studio.

AS: She changed and manipulated a lot of the items she found didn't she? You can see that in the items in her studio too. The piece I was most struck by was *Souvenir Piece*, that seemed to be gently manipulating pieces of wood and so on?

CC: I loved those too, those little pieces and their legs were so fragile. That came out of a trip to Nova Scotia, very early on.

AS: And this came out of the time she spent there with her children?

CC: Well, that's what she did when she took them back and went places with them. That's when she died, she had just accepted a job at the University of Colorado. She was planning to move out there and take the kids back, she thought it was time thinking "I need to be in their life again". And then she died, so that was very, very hard.

AS: It is profound to me that she was using things in her immediate experience – her family, her children, her home or lack thereof – and you don't see that very much in feminist work at that time, the complex representation of 'family'.

CC: No, you're right. A lot of it was more political. Making a statement, but it wasn't holistic.

AS: It was interesting that the piece of hers included in the *WACK! The Feminist Revolution* show at MoMA, they chose her to put her piece *Maternal Instincts* in a category called "family stories." I thought that was an unusual choice.

CC: No, they didn't get it. They asked me for a painting that I couldn't find. So I couldn't be in the show, but I wanted to. I thought it was very strange, I don't know who curated it. Of course, you've always got your own lists of who you want there and it's personal.

AS: Ree Morton's exhibition at the Drawing Centre here in New York City in 2009 had a publication where the curators, in an interview, talked about her inclusion in the *WACK!* show and how that had only presented one particular version of her work in this 'maternal' category. In my work I want to be able to situate her work in a much broader context and

look at its breadth as well as its depth, despite the short time she was working she really covered a lot of territory.

CC: There were a lot of young artists that died from brain tumors. Nancy Graves, Eva Hesse, Marcia Tucker and some others.

AS: I was talking to another art historian recently about this and she thought it was because they were working with toxic materials.

CC: Marcia Tucker wasn't though.

AS: No, but she spent a lot of time in studios, or so her autobiography says.

CC: That book was a lot of fun to read, there was a lot of gossip in it!

AS: Yes. I went to see her archives at the Archives of American Art in D.C and saw that she had set up a memorial fund when Ree died for young artists.

CC: And she gave her the show at the New Museum too. After she died, the family didn't know anything about art but they were interested in having their mother's works shown so Linda, the eldest appointed me, Marcia, Nancy Graves, Donald Droll and maybe Allan Schwartzman. And we were in charge of the art estate – not the Estate, but the art advisory committee. She had some representation in galleries at that time, but they were just out to make a buck. Now, her gallery with Ted Bonin is much better and they treat their artists with a lot of respect. Anyway, it was very hard to get Marcia around – she was very busy – there was no stopping her, she was one of the most amazing people I've ever met. When there was a bee in her bonnet, that was it. She was a good friend of Ree's. She gave her a leg up. That was an important show because it got the work together and it made a cohesiveness. There was a lot of "stuff" of Ree's and this forced the necessary research, they did a good job. And then the pieces were really something then.

AS: That exhibition catalogue was very good. I liked how they brought together her life and work. The letters from friends and family at the back was so nice. You had a lovely piece of writing in there!

CC: Yes, Allan and someone else were very good at putting that together. It was a little cramped, they just didn't have the space. The document that Barbara Zucker and the Vermont gallery put together on her notebooks was good. It was really good they did that.

AS: It seems so important to be able to see those notebooks alongside her work, given how important process seemed to her?

CC: Yes. I don't think you need much wall text for Ree. It's helpful, but it's not necessary. It's really all visual.

AS: And she seemed to reuse items in her work, you can see that she took a lot of pictures of her work from different angles and then she would go back and write about it and she seemed to be working something out. I made a conscious choice not to read the notebooks in order.

CC: Yes, that seems quite right. There was a metamorphosis of materials and how she worked. There was a back and forth.

Interview ends.

Appendix 2

Cynthia Carlson Interview with Abi Shapiro

March 4th, 2014. Cynthia Carlson's Apartment, New York City.

AS: I wanted to follow up on why Ree went to California in 1976. Can you tell me more about that time?

CC: The biggest reason she went was because she was paid to. She went where she could make some money, she had expenses with her children of course. Art schools notoriously underpay relative to universities. And also because she had an enormous curiosity about places. And because it was a way of being with her kids, she took them with her. And she wanted to understand the west coast art world. Italo Scanga was there and she knew him from Philadelphia. And there were a number of feminist things going on there.

AS: So she knew about that?

CC: Oh yes. David and Eleanor Antin were there. I think they really respected her. And because she was open to going anywhere and her work really fed off of that. There was something you can see in her decorative seascapes and sunset paintings with those decorative borders. There was a nod to the vernacular. A kind of insistence on being totally absorbed with an intellectual side of whatever was going on and also the domestic side in terms of the importance of her own family. I know she loved the American landscape show she saw there.

AS: Why do you think she was so drawn to those sorts of landscape and regional works?

CC: There was something "outside" the art world about it; the linear written histories of European didn't include American landscapes. There was something charming and naïve about it that I think she connected to, something individual.

AS: So, do you think she resonated with something of the "outsider", something beyond traditions?

CC: I had been very drawn to that. I think that was something very much of the Chicago school. I did a lot of documenting of environmental folk art, all over the country. I was giving lectures on that with slides. I talked to Ree about that and she became interested in it too.

AS: It's good to hear about these kinds of practical ways she absorbed ideas as well as the pragmatism in her decisions. For example, knowing she went to California because of money primarily is an important part of understanding the economic needs of artists as much as their desires to be in certain locations.

CC: Yes, well we all had those concerns. None of us came from wealth. So when there was a chance to make some money from a lecture or a talk that got us out there – it was a way of establishing a reputation in other contexts and also a way of seeing for us to see what was going on in other places.

AS: It seems to me too, that Ree travelled to keep her work in flux. She didn't seem to want to stay in New York or Chicago even though perhaps she could have. She didn't seem to want to stay and be part of a movement or a particular group in that sense, did she?

CC: No, I don't think she ever wanted to be part of a movement. Only that she wanted to be part of her time but not a movement in particular. I mean, she liked driving around – in California she liked driving and playing loud music and just enjoying road trips.

AS: That reminds me of a piece of writing Ree published called 'Places' where she talks about moving around and letting ideas combine and come together when they are ready. So travelling wasn't just a feature of her life, but it seemed to fascinate her in the way it affected her practice.

CC: Yes. I mean the landscape was romantic for her. She was drawn to romance. Perhaps that was a little reaction to minimalism.

AS: She was involved with minimalism very much in her early days. What do you think made that switch for her?

CC: I think she was trying to find a place as a woman artist…in a very deep way. She was asking what that meant and how you could embrace romance but make it smart and not pejorative. I think probably all that started with *Bake Sale* because that was a big radical switch in her work.

AS: She did write in her notebooks about sentimentality being something she was trying to work out and what a feminine aesthetic was or wasn't. It seems a major turn in her own aesthetic as well and perhaps the romance of the landscape was her way of working through that. Do you recall any other trips – like California – having a similar impact?

CC: There was a trip to Nova Scotia when she took her kids. She went up there, I think, because of Mabou Mines, the theatre group who had a place up there. She did a dress piece for them. And NSCAD [Nova Scotia College of Art and Design] was a radical school for conceptual art at that time. Lucy Lippard taught up there and was very involved in conceptual art here and there.

AS: Can we go back to her trip to California for a moment. I want to pick up on something you said about her children coming with her and being part of her life and work there. How do you think she found those periods in terms of her artistic productivity? She certainly seemed to make artwork when they visited and the work was often about them, so childcare and her role as a mother seem to play a particular role at those times.

CC: Some women artists kept those things very separate. Some gay women had a more radical approach to the family and sexuality even if they had children.

AS: For some women, I guess it was a negotiation depending on childcare. Ida Applebroog for example would sketch in the bathroom when she could get some time alone. I think Ree also wrote about snatching moments to sketch and write behind the washing machine.

CC: Oh that's funny! But it makes sense. Different women artists handled it differently, but I do remember Joyce Kozloff and Arlene Slavin and Barbara Zucker talking sometimes about their kids but in the moments we met, we were mostly talking about art.

AS: Yes, because those were their *jobs*. It must have been hard balancing those different kinds of work and roles – as a mother and as an artist. That's why the 1970s is so interesting to me, where you see women artists really grappling with what it meant to be a woman artist right at a time when it became a little bit more common.

CC: Well, many women had more than one job and the job as an artist was not always the main job. It's like having three things as a woman artist: you have the job you do to make money, the job at home raising kids or housework and then you have to find time for yourself to make artwork. It was a struggle.

AS: That reminds me of a quote from an interview with Ree: "I was still not able to call myself a woman artist. I mean, I was a housewife right? I was a mother, I had children, I had a family to take care of and being an artist was something I did in my extra time. But it was taking up a lot of extra time by then. My teachers would talk a lot about commitment and being committed to your work and somehow that word had a lot of implications I couldn't accept. I would never say that I am an artist.".

CC: Well, that was when she was in school. This was all very gradual. She started taking little art classes and making little paintings. She did that at the beginning because there was time and she wanted to have something that she owned herself. I'm sure that quote comes out of that dilemma of "who am I?" and "what is its [art's] role in my life" and it ended up being very serious as we know! Of course when I met her in Philadelphia, she had already crossed into that serious stage, so the quote must be from before then. There's not doubt in my mind, when I met her she was a fellow artist.

AS: And she was comfortably calling herself an artist by then?

CC: Oh yeah. That was in the late 60s. I mean, in Ree's case, she had an identity as a mother already. She had married this man, given up nursing and was going to be a mother. And then he was gone all the time and so I guess she had a lot of questions about what is *my* life then?

AS: And do you think that the moment of the Seventies and its feminist beginnings fostered enough of a community then for more and more women to really dive in and pursue art because there was a model for it and more so for peer support?

CC: Yes, but it was gradual. For me, my students were the ones harping about feminism, I wasn't that interested to begin with. But I knew enough about the inequalities. When I was out of graduate school, I wrote about 100 letters looking for teaching work and I knew enough to sign them C. Carlson, not Cynthia. And of course, they often came back addressed to Mr. Carlson. And it never occurred to me there was anything wrong in doing that. But I think Ree was much more aware of that because she was living that other world, so she was aware that there was inequality. It never occurred to me that anybody wouldn't take me seriously and I don't know why that was.

AS: Do you remember becoming aware of feminism in the art world outside of your school and students?

CC: Well, I remember AIR gallery going up because those women were mad that they had nowhere to show their work. So they started a gallery.

AS: And I remember you saying you and Ree had conflicting feelings about being called women artists?

CC: Yes, we just wanted to be "artists". We were wrong in that, I think. It was a good gallery, we were invited to show there. It ended up being a good place.

AS: I can understand that though - that you wouldn't want to be forced to have to claim a gendered identity?

CC: That's why a lot of the artists from the generation before refused it. Like Grace Hartigan, Joan Mitchell, Elaine De Kooning, Alice Neel and that ilk; none of them were feminists and nor did they want to be. And some of them were quite hostile to feminism. Lee Lozano was one. They were rampant about it. They wanted to be like the boys. Joan Mitchell particularly…she had to drink more and swear more or so people said. Some married artists too, some didn't come from money.

AS: So for you and Ree, what the moment of the sea change of feminism when you really started thinking about these things? Like being called a woman artists?

CC: There was a stridency about it, demanding to be called artists. And behind it there was a certain amount of anger as there was with other social and civil rights movements at the time.

AS: And how do you remember women artists feeling about their jobs at the time? Was it common to have many other jobs on top of selling work?

CC: I was very lucky to have a full time teaching job. And Ree had one sometimes. And Donna Denis, she did picture research and so on.

AS: And did that have a positive or negative impact on your artwork?

CC: It affected the work, sure. It was the men who just would go in, teach and leave. They felt their presence in the room was enough to be part of the curriculum! But Ree and I never felt that way – we liked the interactions. We put a lot into teaching. Every woman I know put a lot into teaching. And part of that was a nurturing part. But I certainly would have done less if I hadn't of needed the money.

AS: Ree certainly seemed to get a lot out of teaching, she wrote about it and related it to her own work in a kind of feedback loop. As if she was generating ideas for artwork and teaching at the same time.

CC: The early Celastic pieces represented that time with her students, it was their names on the pieces. Men stepped away from those things. It was not uncommon that the wives of male artists did a lot of their paperwork and took photos etc. In my own case, I don't think I would have ever wanted to make art full time…to be in your head all the time. Not having children, I was out in the world all the time. It's much more interesting relating to other human beings than being alone all the time. I don't know if men have that issue. And in their later careers, male artists are less likely to donate their time for charitable causes than woman.

AS: Well, that comes back to the question about what work is and how you qualify it. Does work have to be paid to be work and does it have to have a product or can it be actions. I wonder if for women in the 1970s, the terms of work were changing so much – unpaid to paid or collaborative or supportive - but we are still using an old fashioned version of work that can't really apply? Like how you and Ree helped each other out – you looked after her children while she went to the studio or to teach. You were both doing work, but of a different kind.

CC: Yes, for women in general we have to change the terms. Women form communities. One person might say, "today I'll take care of all the kids and then someone else will do it another day."

AS: Yes. And this is what's striking about that period, women were finding alternative ways to work by shared labor – these are creative ways to work – that hadn't been seen in the same way for artists before. But I'm getting off topic. Can we go back to her exhibition in 1975 at the Woman's Building in California. Do you remember Ree talking about being influenced by the work being done there? I'm trying to work out how she had been engaging with feminist art at that time and some of the other artists working with domestic spaces.

CC: There were a lot of shows in New York about the domestic. Called "Homework: The Domestic Environment" (1981) and "Out of the Home"… it was in the air. I had a show that was all wallpaper in the early 70s. Harmony Hammond was doing rugs, they were really nice pieces.

AS: Yes, craft and decorative artwork is really important in these histories.

CC: That was a big thing for Miriam Schapiro, the craft.

AS: Yes and of course it has a history also in unpaid work; craft was not thought of as fine art but as "women's work" that was done alongside domestic work as a hobby. Art as paid labor was fundamentally not associated with women. I think this is partly where the critiques of the domestic space comes from then, the direct challenge to what a woman's role in the home looked like.

CC: I remember things from Ree's sketchbook that were very sad about how she saw her home life – that she was giving up, not deliberately, but that she didn't now how to figure out a way to have a relationship with a man that was a fundamental part of a home. She was figuring out if there was room for that too, if it was possible to be an artist and did that mean having to give that relationship up. There were plenty of men who wanted to sleep with her, but I don't know how many would have made that permanent because she had three kids. But there was an element of sadness in that she wondered if she had to choose. That was part of every woman's dilemma – can they have a home too?

AS: It can't have been easy, especially with moving around a lot. But she seemed to adapt to wherever she was, making the most of her circumstances, or making art about her surroundings.

CC: She did, she had a great positive public profile. But these things – her concerns - just weren't on public view. She was in a consciousness raising group too, those first groups that were about how to be a person, have a relationship.

AS: Were those feminist in nature? Were they explicit or did they become that way?

CC: That's hard to separate. They were called consciousness raising groups, but it was mostly friends and friends of friends and people talked about their lives.

AS: How organized was it?

CC: Marcia Tucker started one, that's the one Ree was in. And Elke [Solomon]. There were offshoots. Jenny Snyder was in another one.

AS: Did you attend them?

CC: Yeah, I was in one.

AS: How did you find it?

CC: It was a woman from graduate school, it was at the Whitney. She approached me and asked me if I wanted to be in the group they were forming. It was very good. It was a lot of airing….it was like going to a therapist, but it was a group of women talking about their lives and their relationships and the things about it. It was a place to vent about how the

relationships of men to women worked. But it didn't mean that everyone didn't like men, but how to negotiate that was complicated.

AS: Was it predominantly artists?

CC: Mine was, yes. It included Marina Urbach the curator, Arlene Slavin and Pam Adler who was my dealer for many years and Jenny Snider and maybe Nora Ephron and maybe her sister. Ree's group was Pat Steir and Elke Solomon. It was mostly people in an artistic realm. A lot of the conversation revolved around how to get our work out and how to make it as women.

AS: Was it useful?

CC: For me it was about a community of like-minded people. It was a support group for being a woman and a professional. We helped each other through relationships and divorces. It was all very personal. The group I belonged to in Colorado was more about focusing on the professional and how to get women's work out there. Can we make shows together. We weren't doing that in New York, because we wanted to just be part of the art world there but there was no art world in Boulder!

AS: I do have some more direct questions, so I'll switch over to those for a little while. Can I ask about Ree's time with the Anarchitecture group, anything you have to add or comment on about that time in her life and work? What do you think architecture meant to her?

CC: I think one of the main intellectual ideas of the moment was space and how you think about space. The *White Cube* book by Patrick Ireland was discussed a lot. Gaston Bachelard's book *The Poetics of Space* was popular. 112 Greene Street was a venue for people that didn't have commercial galleries so they worked with those ideas. Same with PS1 when it started, it was crude and its space was different. Alanna Heiss was someone who put together shows with an ad hoc feeling in temporary spaces. The Clocktower was like that. The people in the *Anarchitecture* group were interested in those things. Richard Nonas used to be an anthropologist before. So, thinking about cultures and thinkers like Levi Strauss was talked about all the time. And installations poured out of that thinking on space. It was just starting out, pretty uninteresting things at the beginning but it was just starting out. But it seemed space was the core issue in that group. And Ree would have fit into that in her own way.

AS: So space to her was really important at that time? Lucy Lippard framed her work as a shelter at one point, making a kind of implicit reference to the domestic.

CC: Yes, but I don't think she made spaces like the others. I think she took spaces and created a world in them. Like Donna Denis makes structures that are architectural, but Ree put her items in places and created an ambiance, a world which related to various domestic kinds of issues. Some more than others. *To Each Concrete Man* does it more like a fairytale space.

AS: How do you think she viewed her relationship to her own domestic spaces?

CC: When she left Philadelphia and her home there she didn't really have an anchor as a home. Her loft in New York wasn't a home in the sense that the domestic and work spaces weren't separate – they were mixed together, it was a complete mess. She had a little bed and a little table, but really everything was work. I don't know if there are pictures. That was another thing we didn't do, we didn't take pictures of the place that she lived. We were too hysterical [when she died] to think about anything. But things like that have a very pointed relation to her work, the space she worked in.

AS: Was that typical of lots of artists, to have that kind of mixed space?

CC: Most artists had lofts that they lived in. It's all about the work. And there was some honor in that. They were not legal, the original ones. You had to sleep in secret, they were industrially zoned and not for residential use. That's where the letter's A I R came from, those buildings were for the fire department so they knew that someone lived there.

AS: I didn't realize Ree had lived and worked in the same space. How long was that for?

CC: From the time she moved to New York in 1972 she was at 12 Waverly Place, until she went to Colorado. She may have sublet the space out when she wasn't there so make money from your spaces when you weren't in them; but I'm sure she didn't give it up.

AS: There's a wonderful piece by Annette Messager from 1971 where she drew a faux-diagram differentiating between the domestic space of her apartment and her studio, when of course the distinction never really existed but she called them 'the bedroom works' and 'the studio works' to highlight the fictional difference for her audience.

CC: I did that here in a way. I put up the wall when I lived here with my first husband so that I could keep the domestic space and the work space separate. Most artists didn't build their lofts to code, but they were just big empty spaces when we bought them and people learned how to fix them up. Lots of male artists learned plumbing and wiring…cowboy stuff, no one really knew what they were doing and they were illegal, but it was cheaper.

AS: Was it hard for you – in your first loft – having no distinction between the living and work space?

CC: No, I had the studio at one end and the bed at the other end.

AS: I wonder how much that still has an effect on the way the work is made, it's an inevitable blurring of life and art. Would Ree's children have some to stay with her in the loft?

CC: Yes. They must have had sleeping bags or something, because she just had a bed like a couch.

AS: Would she have worked while they were with her?

CC: I think she took them time off to spend with them in the city, but maybe.

AS: I suppose I'm thinking of how they would have been a part of her studio space; they would have seen her work as it was being made, she would have talked with them about it maybe?

CC: I'm not sure they ever understood her work. I don't know how much she tried to explain to them either, I just don't know. They certainly knew it was serious.

AS: I wonder if they influenced her work – spending time around children makes you see the work through their eyes. And we know she made pieces about her kids - reflecting on the time they spent together, etc. so it was obviously something she wanted to bring into the work. Works like *Maternal Instincts, Souvenir Piece and To Each Concrete Man*, and *See-Saw* seem to very clearly gesture to a maternal subjectivity.

CC: Yes, *Souvenir Piece* was very important in that way – picking up little things and seeing them, like a myth or fairytale. Also the wood pieces, the early ones. That had the same kind of innocence.

AS: The Generali exhibition called that her earliest work.

CC: *See-Saw* was good too.

AS: Yes, that had a naïve but sinister kind of quality didn't it? It always bothered me you couldn't sit on it!

CC: [laughs] You're right, you couldn't.

AS: *Souvenir Piece* had a much more precious quality about it, for me. Even though her children were a bit older in the summer in Newfoundland, the little 'souvenir' piece are those of very small children – that age of wonder where a stone can be a "spaceship." She treated each object with respect and reverence, giving it space on the table and redrawing it on the wall. She took the objects seriously.

CC: That's really nice. I never thought about that; you've given it new light.

AS: It seems to chime with her interest in sentimentality, as a very serious thing. As if something is a joke, she thought it can still be taken seriously. There seems to always be fine line between the serious and the frivolous for her.

CC: Sentimentality has a serious role to play in everyone's life. An 'intellectual' climate would try to put that down, deny it and make it second rate.

AS: And that seems so connected to a feminist moment where women's experiences were taken seriously, at least among each other. So sentimentality could be taken serious. For Ree motherhood was a very serious business as well as a sentimental one. So finding a way to tie that into her aesthetic and represent it in a way she was comfortable with seemed to be part of her artistic journey. It was playful.

CC: Do you want to see one of her flags? I have it in my studio [shows flag].

AS: It's quite big! How did she make them?

CC: They were all the same size. She did them on the sewing machine. She'd cut out the pieces and then she painted on them and sewed them on. They were made to fly, not to be seen up close. And then they were given to the people they referred to as gifts.

Interview ends.