

Alex Morrison

Housewrecker

Housewrecker documents a group of youths enacting the destruction of the house that they live in. The owners have neglected the house for years, the lot appraised for development and the building slated for destruction. A 'housewrecking party' is thrown. The work seeks to frame these actions as performance or happening.

Housewrecker is a formal exploration into concepts of the architectural uncanny as well as youth culture's enactment of sublime or euphoric states. Within the context of this work I have chosen to present notions of the sublime as cultural readymade. In *Housewrecker* the sublime is an externalized, vertiginous fear that must be exorcised ritually through ecstatic gesture. The sublime normally requires or implies transcendence but here the wild remains restrained and its limits quantifiable as in Jeff Wall's *Destroyed Room*. What results is a staged and ritualized masochism as a symbolic attempt to subvert perhaps imagined social constraints. This pantomimed destructiveness requires architecture as its prop. Architecture acts here as complimentary embodiment of hegemonic ordering of spatial and social experience. At the same time, the domestic setting describes a familial, localized, or every-day, ordering of space.

While the subjects play at this critique there is revealed a tendency towards the gothic through their perceived anxiety over notions of property-ownership and the domestic. In gothic literature, one finds the idea of the 'sick' or haunted house where even domestic privacy is no longer a safe haven from the outside. The fantasy of the haunted house is a desire for the domestic sphere to become suffused with illogical and irrational fears. This fear of the other or that which falls outside of the cognitive frame, in turn, becomes domesticated. It is brought home and given a familiar gloss. An inverse desire for discomfort or fear is being played out here. Where that, which we might find solace in, actually oppress us. This oppression must be addressed. Traditionally the gothic allows for a playful relationship with terror, spatial anxiety and the uncanny. The gothic character imagines these moods and acts them out. With the self-consciousness of theatrical display, the subjects of my work do the same. They are caught somewhere between what they might consider the authentic¹ and its' representation. The implied radicality of their action is the intersection of play, social conscience and romantic escapism. For them, the conflict between pragmatism and idealism is tragic, even if their actions can provide an heroic alternative to their disenchantment. *Housewrecker* focuses upon the evident contentions and similarities between 'party' and 'protest'.

A youth endlessly smashes his skateboard against the wall of a room, while an audience looks on. He will never be successful in his attempt to smash through the wall. The trauma of his impotence is constantly returned to. It is the paradox latent in the romantic desire to convey the tempest by static or aesthetic method. The house will never be truly destroyed, but its imagined destruction can be performed. The architecture of the house becomes a stage for this performance. Another loop shows the outside wall of a room shaking and buckling from the pressure of revelers on the other side of it. A section of music accompanies the loop. It drones

on in a monotonous, continuous crescendo, never reaching any resolve. The subjects are caught inside the gap between an aesthetic goal and the possibility of achieving it. A sense of the uncanny erupts from within this gap because the subjects are playing at radicality using avant-garde techniques devoid of their original ideological impulse. What results is a fulfilled aesthetic revolution stripped of its promise of social redemption creating the condition for uncanny¹ sensations.

What appears to be irreverence or nihilism is actually quite the opposite. There is a distinct identification with this particular house in the sense that to create a ruin out of it is thought of as re-possession. Here, it is better to die with your ideals intact. The trauma of this realization is constantly returned to. Similar to the paranoiac on a bad drug trip trapped in an endless "thought loop"; self-destruction is acted out as symbolic empowerment in the face of inevitable disintegration of subjectivity.

Poached is a series of photographs documenting the 'poaching' or mainstreaming of a subculture. In skateboarding vernacular this term implies stealing photo or video documentation of skateboarding. The act is considered theft because the documentation of their 'actions' hold a monetary value, the images that features them will be sold to various media outlets that present skateboarding.

This term also implies the desire of a subculture to control the dissemination of its representation. Notions of authenticity are of particular importance. Where once, this desire was a type of self-definition in the face of a wider image culture that chose to ignore it, now it resembles something more akin to "retaining copyright" in the face of wide spread media attention.

This series of photographs documents the staging of skateboarding for an American television series. The series employed local skateboarding talent as background actors. This 'staging' of skateboarding, foregrounds the staged aspect of the concrete skatepark. Skateboard parks, built and funded by the city, are intended to lure skateboarders into a single enclosed area away from the downtown core. At the same time the city passes laws that make skateboarding illegal within the city center. This expenditure with no material or capital gain comes under scrutiny.

The park becomes just another place to neutralize surplus energies, which now become devoid of any potential social-consequence. As a site the park domesticates and concretizes the energy of rebellious youth. It is rebellion as cultural readymade.

Similar in theme to *Housewrecker* these photographs seek to illustrate the 'wild' as quantifiable and bound. Like the frame of the narrative being constructed by the director, heretofore un-knowable or misunderstood, elements of culture are packaged for easy consumption within conventional narrative tropes.

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