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Queer Phenomenology in Sarah Oppenheimer's *W-120301*

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of the requirements for the degree of

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in

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by

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The Thesis of Cyle Michalka Metzger is approved:

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## *Introduction*

Art history is rich with figurative representations of queer bodies, identities, flirtations, domestic relationships, sexual encounters and cultural moments, but this project asks how queerness might be found in art history outside of figuration. Figurative works of art by artists like Robert Mapplethorpe and Catherine Opie contribute to an invaluable archive of queer culture. They give viewers the opportunity to see a range of queer people and queer relationships, and they make queer bodies part of a visual cultural landscape. They do not, however, give viewers the opportunity to experience a queer position for themselves. Viewers of these works can look at, gawk at, lust after, appreciate and contemplate these images, but they are not subject to the actions or implications of what these images contain. Viewers do not themselves experience the queerness they are seeing. Queerness becomes something to look at rather than to embody. The separation that these images create between viewers and their contents enables viewers to frame queerness as a quality observed in distant others rather than an experience they have in space. This paper focuses on Sarah Oppenheimer's *W-120301* as an example of a work of art that creates a queer experience for its viewers through the sense of visual and spatial disorientation it creates. This work functions outside of figuration to put viewers themselves in queer positions and give intimate access to many of the nuances of queer experiences that cannot be felt by looking at images.

Works by photographer Robert Mapplethorpe, demonstrate the growing resistance to the forced closeting of gay and lesbian people in the 1970's. The untitled photo collage from 1972 presents viewers with a vivid image of two nude men kissing (Figure 1). This collage uses silver spray paint to create a window through which viewers see their tongues delicately touching, while outside of the window they see a slightly greyed view of one of the men's genitals. This image

seems to illustrate the increased but still not complete visibility of homosexuality that sprung from the work of activist groups like the Gay Liberation Front and magazines like *Gay Power*. Mapplethorpe's 1978 and 1979 images of men engaged in different sadomasochistic and fetish scenes pushed this visibility to a much more dramatic level (Figure 2). Despite the intense censorship they endured, Mapplethorpe's images signify important and dramatic changes in the visibility of gay male bodies and relationships not only in art but also in daily life.<sup>1</sup>

Catherine Opie's *Being and Having* from 1991 gives viewers vivid images of queer culture that challenge rigid distinctions between masculine and feminine gender identities (Figure 3). From far away, these images appear to be of tough, uncompromising men. As viewers look closer, they see that the moustaches are fake, and the air of masculinity these faces project is constructed by not only the moustaches, but by the tattoos, bandanas, hair styles and expressions that adorn them. These images inspire viewers to question how masculinity has been composed within them, and to see that gender is constructed rather than something one is born into. Other portraits of Opie's show that queer identity in America is not only encapsulated by images of gay men but of shows us drag kings, leather daddies, butch lesbians, transgender people and other queer identities. *Jerome Caja* from 1993 is a portrait of a queer, punk drag queer Opie knew while she was a student at San Francisco Art Institute (Figure 4).<sup>2</sup> *Pig Pen* from 2009 is a portrait of an LA performance artist who set out with other queer performance artists to find a space for themselves outside of the gay-dominated neighborhood of West Hollywood (Figure 5).<sup>3</sup>

If viewers imagine themselves within Mapplethorpe and Opie's images, they can get a sense of what the figures within them may have felt. They can consider how they might find the freedoms the images demonstrate in their own lives, but they can never physically occupy the

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<sup>1</sup> Meyer, 191.

<sup>2</sup> Michelle Tea, "Catherine Opie for Rodarte," *Ironing Board Collective* (blog), May 1, 2015 2:17pm, <https://ironingboardcollective.wordpress.com/2010/08/29/catherine-opie-for-rodarte/>.

<sup>3</sup> Ibid.

space inside the image. The figures they encounter are representations of figures. Viewers are distanced from their space by the flatness of their surfaces and the dimensionality of their own bodies. The distance between the flat figures they see and their bodies begets psychological distance between their experiences and the experiences they see. This distance gives viewers the opportunity to characterize the figures they see as “others” who are separate from their experiences. Viewers can see those figures as having experiences that are separate from their own. Viewers are not forced to identify with those they see, the feelings they express or the behaviors they demonstrate. These images, while powerful and important within queer history, give viewers the opportunity to “other-ize” queerness.

Artist Felix Gonzalez-Torres recognized the distance that figurative representation creates between the subject matter and the viewer. Rather than showing his audience images of his partner Ross as he died of AIDS in *Untitled (Ross in LA)* from 1991, for example, Gonzalez-Torres turns multicolored candies into a metaphor for Ross’ body. He piles these candies up in the corner of a gallery and invites viewers to participate in his death by taking and eating them (Figure 6). Another work, *Untitled (Perfect Lovers)* from 1987, consists of “twin commercial clocks huddling on the wall tick[ing] out the time in perfect harmony.”<sup>4</sup> Each clock continues to “tick” along side the other, until the battery in one begins to fail (Figure 7). Watching the tandem movement of these two clocks, viewers get the sense that Gonzalez-Torres and Ross once “ticked” through life together, but as Ross got sick, he eventually slowed and passed away leaving Gonzalez-Torres to continue on alone. The work Gonzalez-Torres produced in the late 1980’s and early 1990’s (before his own death of AIDS) move away from figuration, they engage us with Ross’ death by presenting viewers with material metaphors for us to participate in, but

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<sup>4</sup> Nancy Spector, *Felix Gonzalez-Torres* (New York: Guggenheim Museum, 1995), 72.

they still keep them at a distance by using objects to represent his experiences. While they give viewers an intimate look at a queer experience, don't make the viewer feel queer.

Gran Fury used image and text to make experiences with AIDS in the gay community more deeply resonant than representation could on its own. Gran Fury produced posters that read "the government has blood on its hands: one AIDS death every half-hour" along side a red handprint, "read my lips" overlaid on images of same-sex couples kissing, and "all people with AIDS are innocent" above a symbol for medicine. These posters used a format that was reminiscent of commercial advertising to not only make queer people visible, but to make public the fact that they were being ignored by the Regan administration as they died of AIDS. Combining text and image, Gran Fury untied queer communities and forced viewers to confront the frustration and anger that comes with being continuously ignored. These works brought many queer people together and created allies of many non-queer people, but, as text is a form of representation, they, too, keep their viewers at a distance.

Considering works by these four artists and collectives gives rise to questions about addressing queerness outside of figuration: Can queerness be found in art outside of objects, images and text? What might queerness look like outside of figurative representation? What might it take to make the viewer feel queer? What might creating queer experiences for viewers of art do for our understanding of queerness as more than a description of bodies and relationships? This project explores these questions by looking at a 2012 work titled *W-120301* by artist Sarah Oppenheimer. *W-120301* is an architectural installation that Oppenheimer built into the walls of the Baltimore Museum of Art and that creates a sense of disorientation for its viewers.

Looking at *W-120301* is a queer and dizzying experience (Figure 8). Through it we see architecture from deviant angles. We see perverse perspectives on the existing structures that we

move within; our vision becomes a tool for subverting the opaque limitations of constructed spaces. These experience make viewer feel out of alignment with the architectural conditions around them in a way that parallels the often disorienting experiences of being a queer person in hetero- and gender normative cultural contexts. Contemporary queer theories articulated by theorists like Ahmed and Eve Sedgwick describe queerness as more than descriptions of bodies and relationships. Queerness, rather, describes experiences of misalignment and disorientation with dominant social models, be they gender, sexuality, race, or class. As *W-120301* causes viewers to feel disoriented within architecture, it puts us in a queer phenomenological position. Viewers become queer within their spatial disorientation. Using contemporary notions of queerness as a tool for examining *W-120301* presents a surprising and invigorating way of considering how queerness can appear in art outside of figurative representation by putting the viewer in a queer position rather than demonstrating a queer identity.

Loosely described, the body of this project is divided into three main sections. The first section outlines with careful detail the history of the work, its physical structure, the theoretical influences that informed its design, and what viewers might experience looking through its apertures and walking through the spaces around it. Unlike a photograph or a painting, *W-120301* cannot be reproduced to accompany a project such as this because its material is largely hidden from view and its effects can be experienced from many different positions in space. This first section is meant to give readers a strong understanding of the work so that its implications and effects can be thoroughly discussed in sections two and three.

The second section focuses on how the work functions as an apparatus, rather than an object. This section gives examples of paintings and sculptures that keep a distance between viewers and the work of art, and explains how *W-120301* does not. *W-120301* is not an object to

look at but an apparatus to look through. Using Giorgio Agamben and Jean-Louis Baudry's theories of the social and the cinematic apparatus, this section describes how *W-120301* controls vision and constructs as spatial experience as viewers look through it. Shaping *W-120301* as an apparatus rather than an object privileges its effects over its materials in a way that makes room for the consideration of how a work of art might create queer experiences for its viewers.

The third section focuses on how the *W-120301* might create a queer experience as viewers move through space and look through its apertures. By describing precisely how looking through the work disorients its viewers, this section focuses on disorientation as not a failure to be oriented, but as an independent and productive manner of occupying space. The notion of disorientation as productive is one Ahmed offers in her book *Queer Phenomenology: Orientations, Objects, Others*, and section three of this project uses Ahmed's ideas to frame how queerness might exist within *W-120301*. Rather than coming to definitive answers about whether spatial disorientation is directly translatable as a queer sensation, this section is intended to suggest that such a jump is possible and to begin to imagine how that might be visualized and experienced.

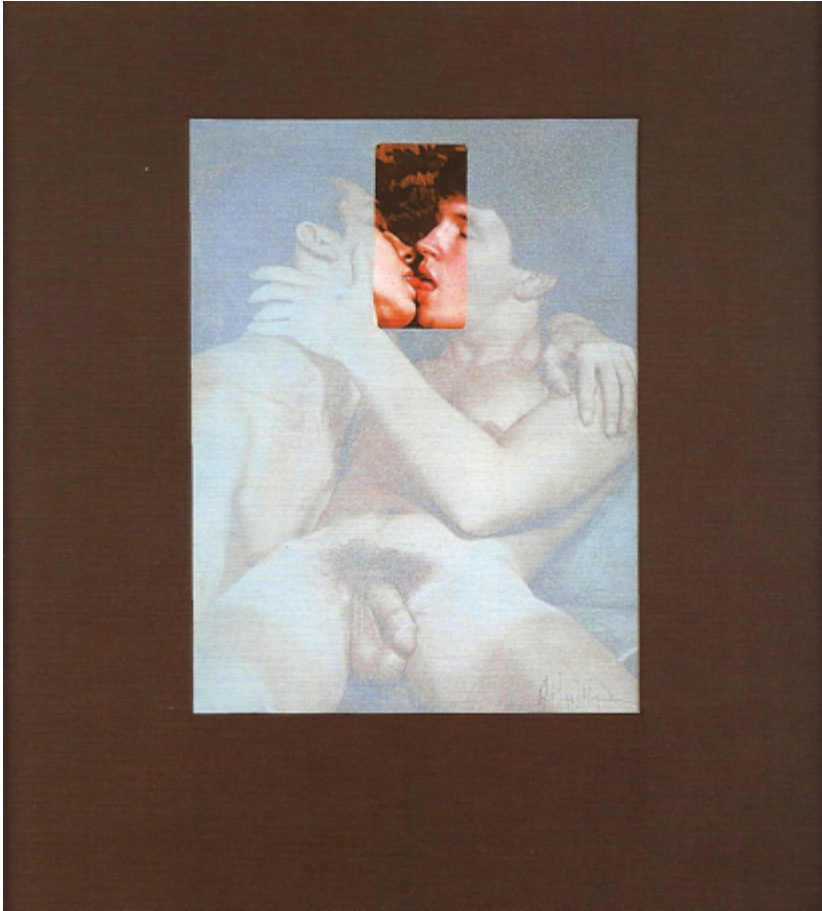


Figure 1: Robert Mapplethorpe, *Untitled*, 1972. Mixed materials. 11 x 9 inches. Image source: *Outlaw Representation*, Richard Meyer, 2002.

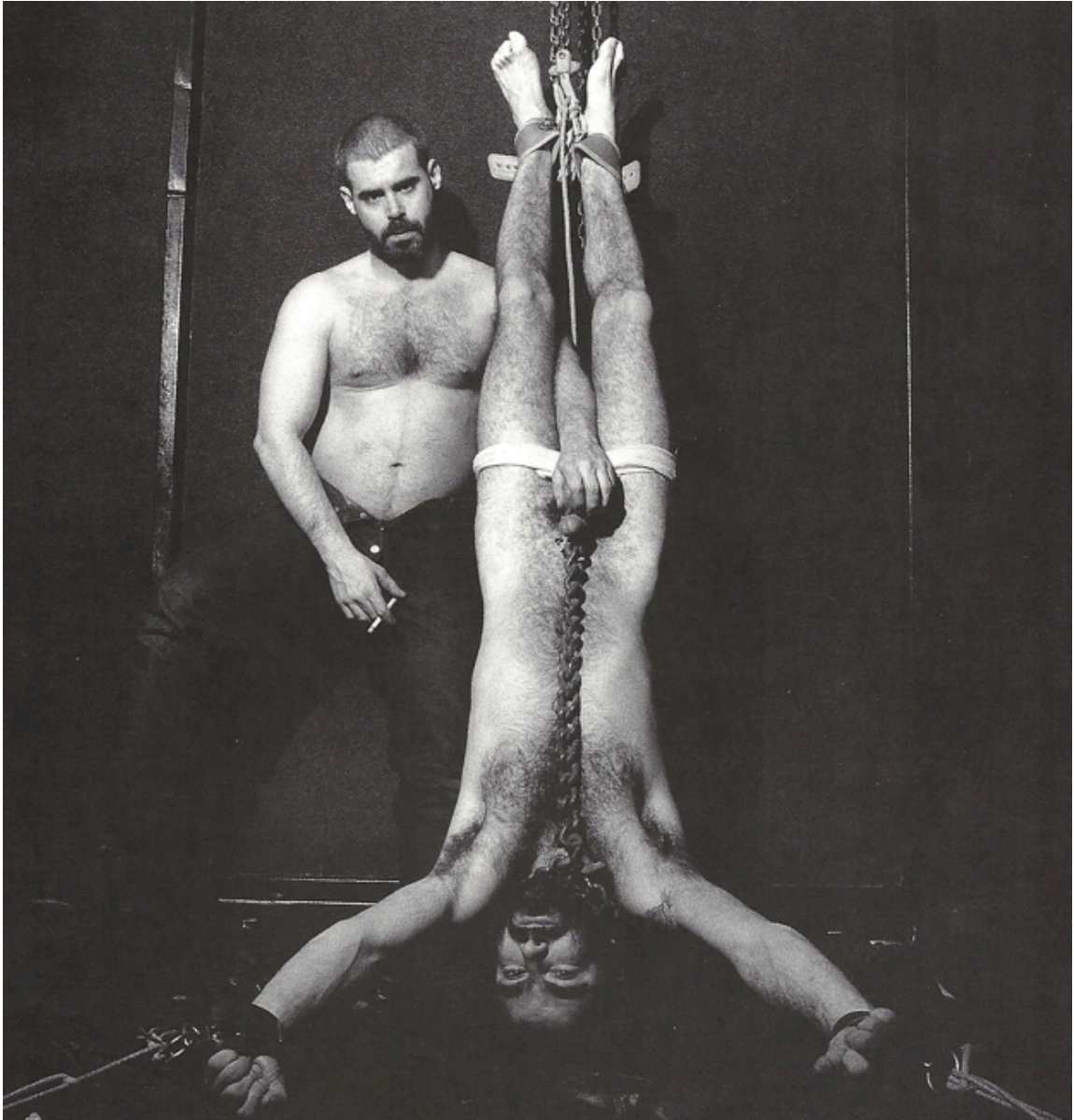


Figure 2: Robert Mapplethorpe, *Elliot and Dominick*, 1979. Gelatin Silver Print. 13 ¼ x 14 inches. Image source: *Outlaw Representation*, Richard Meyer, 2002.



Figure 3: Catherine Opie, *Being and Having*, 1991. Chromogenic Print. 17 x 22 inches each.  
Image source: [www.blogs.artinfo.com](http://www.blogs.artinfo.com).



Figure 4: Catherine Opie, *Jerome Caja*, 1993. Cibachrome Print. 19 x 14 ¾ inches. Image source: [www.magazine.ucla.edu](http://www.magazine.ucla.edu).

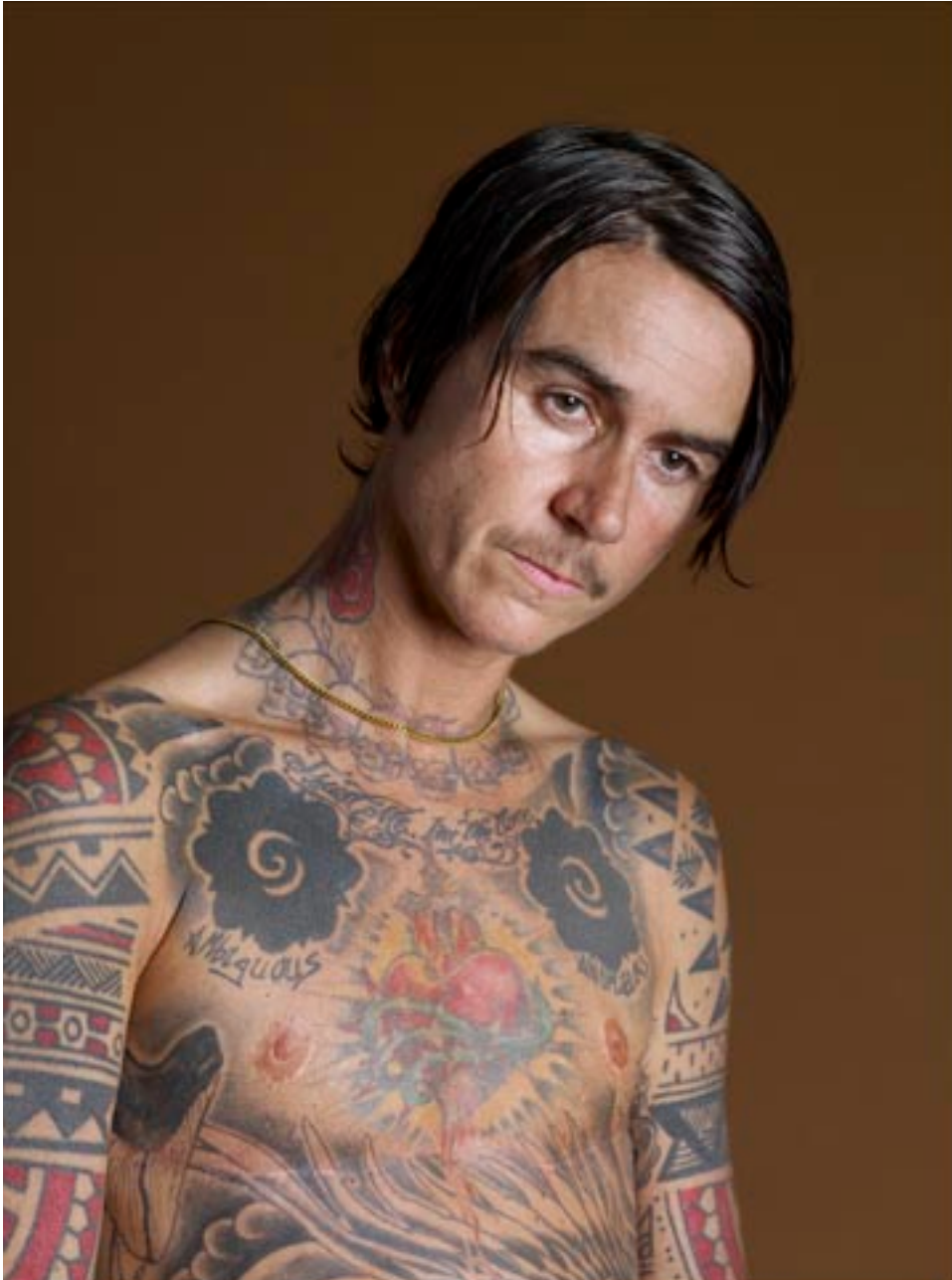


Figure 5: Catherine Opie, *Pig Pen*, 2009. Chromogenic Print. 32 x 24 inches. Image source: [www.artobserved.com](http://www.artobserved.com).



Figure 6: Felix Gonzalez-Torres, *Untitled (Ross in LA)*, 1991. Cellophane-Wrapped Hard Candies. Dimensions Variable. Image source: [www.brooklynmuseum.org](http://www.brooklynmuseum.org).

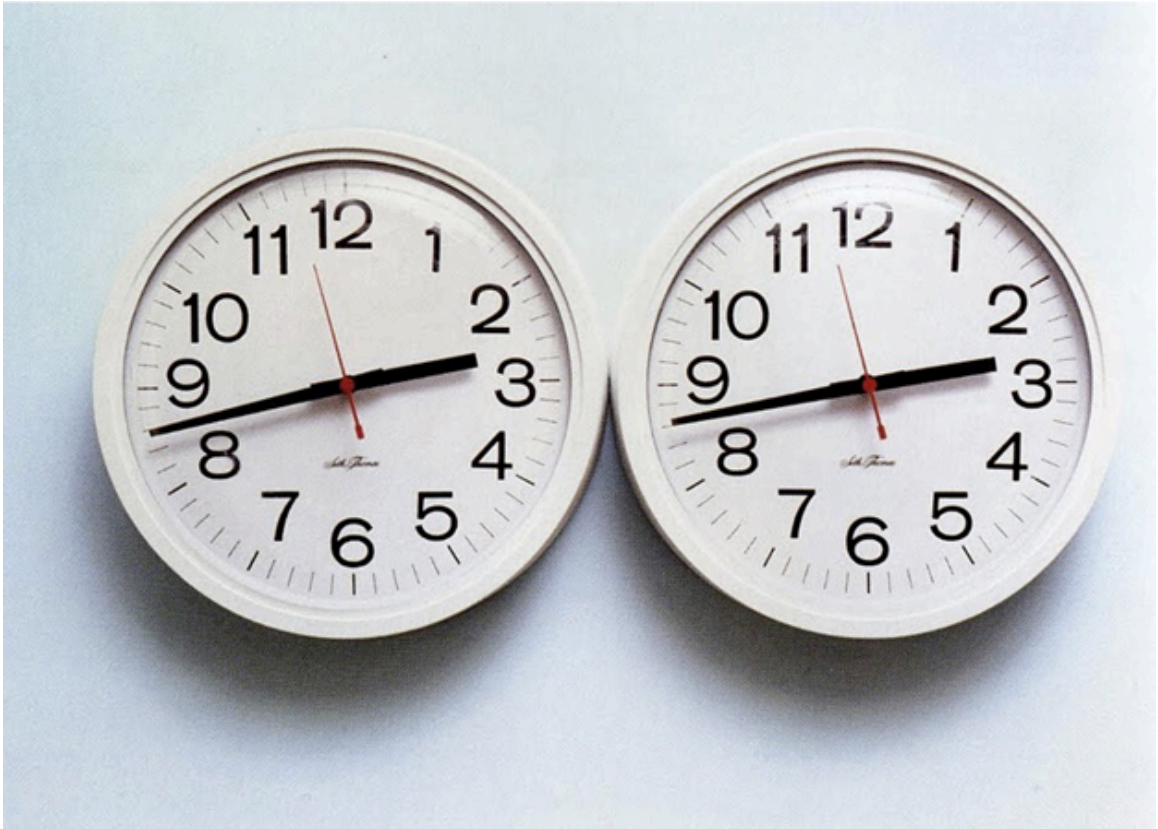


Figure 7: Felix Gonzalez-Torres, *Untitled (Perfect Lovers)*, 1991. Ready Made Wall Clocks. Dimensions Variable. Image source: [www.visualaid.org](http://www.visualaid.org).



Figure 8: Sarah Oppenheimer, *W-120301*, Baltimore Museum of Art, 2012. Glass, Aluminum, Existing Architecture. Dimensions Variable. Image source: [www.sarahoppenheimer.com](http://www.sarahoppenheimer.com).

*What is W-120301? How Does it Work? Where Did it Come From?*

*W-120301*, is a permanent installation in the contemporary wing of the Baltimore Museum of Art. *W-120301* is designed to generate new insights into the arrangement of space within the architecture of the museum and to address vision as a force which impacts our ability to understand, navigate and disrupt those structures. The apparatus is inserted into the existing walls of the contemporary wing, and its effects are visible from three different positions within its galleries. Together its three apertures create disorienting views of existing spaces, appear to rearrange the architecture of the contemporary wing and construct new visual relationships between viewers in spaces that are otherwise disconnected. The views of misplaced space found through the apertures of *W-120301* undermine the constructed order of space within the museum, force viewers to contend with the work's disorienting effects and ultimately put them in a phenomenologically queer position.

Oppenheimer was invited to design *W-120301* for the BMA during the early stages of planning the museum's 2012 renovation.<sup>5</sup> Oppenheimer worked with the architects of the renovation to create a piece that would fit as seamlessly into the architecture as possible without compromising its structure. This collaborative process consisted of conversations and compromises between both parties. In one example, Oppenheimer "shifted the bottom portion of her piece to avoid a major structural beam, while the architects widened the gap between the rotunda and the new gallery wall to accommodate her preferred geometry."<sup>6</sup> Following these negotiations, Oppenheimer designed *W-120301* in her studio using a combination of diagrams,

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<sup>5</sup> Julian Rose, "Mirror Travel: Julian Rose on Sarah Oppenheimer's *W-120301*, 2012" *Artforum*, April 2013, 241.

<sup>6</sup> *Ibid.*

digital 3D renderings and scale models. Its parts were fabricated outside of her studio and delivered to the museum space to be assembled on site. The work is made of black aluminum sheeting, glass and mirror. The aluminum sheeting was perforated along carefully placed lines that enabled them to be easily folded into their pre-planned position within the wall. The glass and mirrors were then installed at carefully measured angles that, when viewed through the three apertures, produce rearranged views of the museum's architecture and new connections to other viewers in the museum.

Though the apparatus as a whole is quite large – it measures approximately eight feet by eight feet by sixteen feet – most of its volume is concealed within the walls of the museum. Its effects, however, are visible through the apertures that are situated within the museum's galleries. These apertures are positioned in levels two and three of the contemporary wing and on the stairway landing that connects the two (Figure 9). They frame views of physical space and the people in those spaces in ways that spark visual exchange between those who are seeing and those who are being seen. Their effects are reminiscent of paintings like Velasquez' *Las Meninas*, Jan van Eyck's *The Arnolfini Portrait* and Paul Cadmus' 1930 self-portrait in that the views they frame activate the position the viewer occupies as much as they activate who and what is visible within them.

Moving through the museum, we first encounter *W-120301* through Aperture A, which emerges from the ceiling above and inside the main entrance to the contemporary galleries on level two. This entrance is the primary point of movement between the main building and the contemporary wing. Architect John Russell Pope designed the main building of the museum in the 1920s.<sup>7</sup> Pope is well known for his designs of the West Building of the National Gallery and the National Archives Building, both of which are styled after Roman temple architecture in an

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<sup>7</sup> "About the BMA," *Baltimore Museum of Art*, accessed December 23, 2014, <http://www.artbma.org/about/index.html>.

effort to evoke and establish connection between American collections and the history of European classical art and architecture.<sup>8</sup> The main building of the Baltimore Museum of Art was designed with the same sensibilities and an appreciation of traditional art forms is felt throughout its structure (Figure 10).

Contrastingly, the contemporary wing of the Baltimore Museum of Art, however, abandons classical styles in favor of modernist structures, shapes and materials (Figure 11). It was designed in 1994 by the Philadelphia-based architecture firm Bower Lewis Throver.<sup>9</sup> As we move westward through the main building's modern wing and into the contemporary wing, we arrive at a large, cylindrical atrium that connects the two spaces. This atrium is constructed of concrete that was poured-in-place and is reminiscent of the New Brutalist style of architecture that emerged in the 1950s. Brutalism, an architectural term coined by Reyner Banham, emphasized the primacy of form and raw material over the ornamentation and tradition of classical architecture.<sup>10</sup> The simplicity of form and materials within Brutalist architecture creates a much more immediate experience of the constructed space itself than is perceptible amidst the ornamentation of classically styled architecture.

The atrium is anchored at its center by the sculpture *Three Rings* by Henry Moore. This sculpture is made up of three asymmetrical orbs that range between three and four feet in height and width. We move past this sculpture to reach the main entrance to the galleries of the contemporary wing to our first encounter *W-120301*. Passing through the entryway, however, we are unlikely to notice the work, however, this is because the ceilings of these galleries are nearly

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<sup>8</sup> "About the Gallery," *National Gallery of Art*, accessed December 23, 2014, <http://www.nga.gov/content/ngaweb/about.html>.

<sup>9</sup> "Baltimore Museum of Art New Wing for Modern Art: The New Wing Inside Out," *Baltimore Sun* (Baltimore, MD), October 2, 1994. [http://articles.baltimoresun.com/1994-10-02/features/1994275222\\_1\\_museum-of-art-baltimore-museum-modern-art](http://articles.baltimoresun.com/1994-10-02/features/1994275222_1_museum-of-art-baltimore-museum-modern-art).

<sup>10</sup> Reyner Banham, *The New Brutalism: Ethic or Aesthetic?* (New York: Reinhold Publishing Corporation, 1966), 10.

twenty feet tall and Aperture A is tilted away from the museum entrance. Aperture A is largely out of our field of vision as we move from the museum atrium to the contemporary gallery spaces. Entering these spaces, we instead pass through the atrium and on to view works like Andy Warhol's *Last Supper*, Olafur Eliasson's *Flower Observatory* and Franz West's sculptures *Swimmer* and *Violetta* without noticing the presence of Aperture A.

Once we move past the works by Warhol, Eliasson and West, through works like Felix Gonzalez-Torres's *Untitled (Water)* and across Carl Andre's *Zinc-Magnesium Plain*, we can either exit the gallery space on level two by returning to the main entrance, or we can exit through an opening into a secondary foyer. Either option leads us back to the atrium where we find a stairway that ascends along the curved atrium wall. This stairway leads to the galleries on level three. Before we reach the entryway to those galleries, however, we encounter the second aperture of *W-120301*, Aperture B, on the landing halfway up the stairs (Figure 12). Though Aperture B is the second aperture we encounter, it is often the first aperture with which we consciously engage. The landing between levels two and three becomes the site of most of our first active encounters with the work.

Looking up into Aperture B we see a large, horizontal, rectangular sheet of black aluminum inserted into the wall. A small, framed aperture projects outward from the upper half of the sheet, and this aperture presents a reflection of a space that is located elsewhere within the museum. The space is relatively non-descript, but the flooring we see matches that of the galleries on level two. This indicates the space is located somewhere within the contemporary galleries, but the visual information within the frame gives little indication of its specific position.

Seeing these figures standing in an unknown space, they appear small and far away. We see the tops of their heads and a foreshortened view of their bodies. This aerial perspective is strange given that we must gaze upward to see it. Rarely does tilting our heads upward produce

aerial views. This disconnect between the viewing position and the viewing angle disorients our perception as we try to understand the spatial dynamics of the museum's architecture. Our visual experience is misaligned with our physical experience and we become lost in the difference between them. Here the work puts us in a queer position for the first time. With careful attention, we also notice that the figures seen within Aperture B never look up to return our gaze. Though we are generally unaware of this until later, we see the entryway to the galleries on level two and look upon visitors who do not know they are being seen. We become voyeurs to their movement. Our gaze becomes perverse as it is fixed on others without their knowledge or consent. Also unknown to us is that, on the landing, we are not visible to others. We are safe from the voyeuristic, perverse and defiant gazes of others. This absence of reciprocity creates further disorientation as we are used to the possibility of being visible to those we see. With the inversion of vertical and horizontal space and the absence of visual reciprocity, the view from the stairway landing gives us a queer sensation by disorienting our understanding of how the space of the contemporary wing is arranged within the purview of *W-120301*.

As we continue up the stairs to level three of the contemporary wing we find Aperture C amidst Robert Motherwell's *Elegy to the Spanish Republic CII*, Anne Truitt's *Lea* and the third aperture of *W-120301*, Aperture C. With its size, central position in the galleries on level three and the combination of views within it, Aperture C offers the most complicated viewing experience of all three apertures. Looking at Aperture C head-on, we see a parallelogram situated on the wall at a height that appears to be about fifty-seven inches from the ground at its center, a height commonly used in museums and galleries to hang works on a wall. This parallelogram measures approximately seven feet wide by three feet tall and is divided into four relatively equal

quadrants (Figure 13). The top left and bottom right quadrants are black, while the top right quadrant shows an aerial view of a space that looks similar to that which is visible within Aperture B, and the bottom left quadrant provides a view straight out to the cement wall of the cylindrical atrium (Figure 14).

In an article for *Artforum* published in 2012, Julian Rose describes viewing Aperture C of *W-120301* this way:

The upper left and lower right are black, as if you're just looking at the aluminum, while the other two seem to be open gaps. Strangely, though, in the upper right you see wooden planks, recognizable by gallery floor just like the one you are standing on, while through the lower left, you see cast concrete, clearly belonging to the wall of the rotunda you just passed through. Some how these two views have been collapsed or collaged onto the same visual plane: You are looking ahead and seeing both forward and down simultaneously.<sup>11</sup>

The sensation of simultaneously looking out and down within the same frame creates an arresting visual experience that leaves us, again, unsure of how the architecture is arranged. These two perspectives presented within the same frame do not appear to be of the same depth, orientation, or position, which disorients us as we look at Aperture C. The disorientation we experience looking through Aperture C produces a queer experience again as it upsets our previous understanding of the architecture around us and leaves us unsure of where we stand within it.

As we move around the space in front of Aperture C, we begin to notice that the image within the aperture moves along with our position in space. Approaching the aperture to investigate its mechanics, it becomes apparent that Aperture C is not just a hole – it is a void that opens into a large cavity within the wall. This space within the wall previously housed the building's mechanical systems, but it was left empty after a number of renovations to the building.<sup>12</sup> This void now houses the aluminum, glass and mirrors that make up the apparatus of *W-120301*. Leaning into this apparatus through Aperture C, the arrangement of the view of the

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<sup>11</sup> Rose, 242.

<sup>12</sup> Ibid, 241.

atrium and of the vertically oriented gallery space shifts but remains present. Adding to this visual experience, we also find a direct line of sight down to the gallery space below that is recognizable as the same space visible within the upper left quadrant of the parallelogram. Though it is not yet apparent, this is a view through Aperture A.

Looking down at the space below Aperture C while also looking at a reflected view of the same space just above it, it is not as easy as one might guess to immediately discern which view is a reflection and which is not. Oppenheimer used low-iron glass that would maintain color continuity between reflected views and direct lines of sight.<sup>13</sup> The anti-reflective coating on the glass further obscures such demarcations, as it eliminates any glare from the gallery lights. Logic suggests that the sensation of looking down into one of these views through Aperture C would make that vantage obviously the direct view, but the experience of looking up to look down within Aperture B makes it difficult to trust those habits of orientation within *W-120301*. Thus leaning into Aperture C presents us with the most complex experience of spatial disorientation within the work, yet. The complexity of this view into Aperture C also continues the queer sensation the work produces as it furthers the misalignment between our visual and physical experiences of space.

Leaving the gallery space on level three, we can either exit via an elevator at the end of the gallery space on level three, or, as most do, we can exit by returning the same way we came. Walking through the gallery and descending the steps that curve along the atrium wall, we find ourselves again on the stairway landing looking up at Aperture B (Figure 15). We notice that the space and the figures seen through Aperture B are those we saw through Aperture C in the gallery

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<sup>13</sup> Ibid, 242.

space below. We must look up to view the space we just looked downward to see, and the sense of queer disorientation *W-120301* provokes relative to the arrangement of the museum's architecture intensifies.

Continuing down the stairs, we seek out the galleries on level two looking for the space we just saw through Apertures B and C. Recalling the aerial perspective viewed within Apertures B and C, we now look up in search of the previously unnoticed aperture in the lower gallery. We quickly find Aperture A in the ceiling above the main entrance to the contemporary galleries. Through it, we see a strangely cropped and horizontally oriented image of the Robert Motherwell painting *Elegy to the Spanish Republic CII* that we observed hanging vertically in the galleries of level three (Figure 16). Looking up to see this painting we have already seen, now in a different location and orientation, has a similarly disorienting effect on our sense of spatial arrangement as the view through Aperture B on the stairway landing. The entryway to the galleries on level two therefore becomes yet another site of that gives us a queer sense of spatial disorientation.

When viewers in the level three galleries stand in front of Aperture C, they are visible to us through Aperture A (Figure 17). Their image is framed by the black aluminum edges of the aperture, and *Elegy to the Spanish Republic CII* becomes their backdrop. As viewers on level three lean into Aperture C, this portrait changes. Their gaze shifts and is directed downward rather than forward, and a second image of their form, this one looking straight ahead, becomes visible within the same frame (Figure 18). Here, both the portrait with downcast eyes and a forward facing view of the same are visible to us as we look up through Aperture A. The double vision that Aperture A produces becomes yet another instance of queer disorientation as this makes it difficult for us to discern which figure in our field of vision is a reflection or a direct view. This conflation of reflection and direct viewing in combination with the shift from a

vertical view of the Motherwell painting to a horizontal view distorts our perceptions of spatial arrangement within Aperture A and furthers the queer position we find ourselves in within *W-120301*.

The visual network within *W-120301* that connects viewers in Apertures A, B and C create is a product of Oppenheimer's ongoing investigation of the relationship between the visual and physical experiences occupants have within constructed spaces. Her investigation has included extensive research into cognitive science, architectural history and histories of urban development. In a 2014 article for *Art in America*, titled "The Array," Oppenheimer cites a project of American urbanist William H. Whyte in which he observed and recorded patterns of ambulation within urban situations across the United States. Whyte used time-lapse cameras mounted on urban buildings and street lights in different cities to record the movements and trajectories of their occupants.<sup>14</sup> Reviewing the images he collected, Whyte paid particular attention to city buildings, fences and barricades that shape pedestrian movement through a city. With this project, Whyte began indexing the relationship pedestrians have to the built environment, and Oppenheimer uses his work to explore how people relate to the boundaries they encounter within constructed spaces.

Oppenheimer observes that the boundaries pedestrians encounter within architectural space are not only physical, as in objects that limit their movement, but they are also visual. Buildings direct pedestrian vision through space just as much as it directs their physical paths. Oppenheimer explains that lines of sight within an urban condition are created through the positioning, height and distance of separation between buildings. These lines of sight enable city

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<sup>14</sup> Sarah Oppenheimer, "The Array," *Art in America*, May 2014, 40.

occupants to create a cognitive understanding of their environment that enables their movement within it. In doing so, sightlines become tools for city dwellers to negotiate their relationships to the urban environment.

In addition to the work of William Whyte, Oppenheimer also draws on work by the cognitive scientist William Warren and ecological psychologist J.J. Gibson.<sup>15</sup> Warren's work focuses on the visual control of locomotion and navigation through space in humans.<sup>16</sup> Using virtual reality, dynamical systems modeling and agent-based modeling techniques, Warren studies the organization of human crowds by following patterns of pedestrian interaction and their implications for architectural design and urban planning.<sup>17</sup> Gibson's 1979 *The Ecological Approach to Visual Perception* outlined what he terms "affordances" – "optical structures of information about the environment, structures that exist objectively but that must be defined in terms of the needs and potential behaviors of the individual."<sup>18</sup> Gibson's affordances are the objects or physical conditions of the world around the individual that give indication of the kind of movement a particular situation enables or requires.<sup>19</sup> An intersection, for example, requires pedestrians to either turn a corner or cross a street. Warren's research into vision and locomotion and Gibson's recognition of the importance of vision and perception in developing relationships between agents and their physical surroundings led Oppenheimer to create work that investigates the relationships between constructed spaces and their occupants.

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<sup>15</sup> "Sarah Oppenheimer / Fall 2010 Lecture Series Project," YouTube video, 13:22, posted by Rice University, December 6, 2010, <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=il7SNf0Zlq4>.

<sup>16</sup> "William Warren," *Brown University*, <http://www.brown.edu/Departments/CLPS/people/william-warren>.

<sup>17</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>18</sup> Julian Hochberg, *James Jerome Gibson 1904-1979* (Washington, DC: National Academy of Sciences, 1994), 13.

<sup>19</sup> James Jerome Gibson, *The Ecological Approach to Visual Perception: Classic Edition*, (New York and London: Psychology Press, 2015), 91.

To organize her ideas about how vision functions within constructed space and to generate a series of propositions for how she might use her observations to intervene in architectural systems, Oppenheimer developed what she calls a “dictionary of holes.” “Holes” refer to a particular type of intervention into architectural space that Oppenheimer has designed to create an asynchronous relationship between our physical and visual experiences within that space. These holes describe physical cuts into the walls of existing architecture. They make rooms that are adjacent to one another visible in ways they had not been before. They obscure vision to complicate understanding of the relationships between these architectural spaces. Each type of hole offers a specific and unique dissonance between how viewers experience space as they move through it and how they experience space through the sightlines it creates.<sup>20</sup> Examples of the three basic types of architectural intervention that Oppenheimer classifies in this dictionary are “cinema holes,” “horizon holes,” and “wormholes.”

A cinema hole (Figure 19) is one that connects two adjacent spaces. The opening on one side of a cinema hole is a vertical rectangle and the other is a horizontal rectangle. Together these apertures create a single visible square. As viewers walk past this square, the dimensions remain static, but what is visible through the square appears to move continuously through the frame the square provides. As such, a cinema hole recalls experiences of viewing a moving picture on a television screen. Oppenheimer’s 622-3367 is a cinema hole installed at the Islip Museum in Islip, New York in 2007 (Figure 20). It connects viewers within the museum to the outside landscape around it through two rounded rectangular openings, one on the inside of the gallery and the other on the outside façade.

The vertical edges of the interior aperture combined with the overlapping horizontal edges of the exterior aperture create a fixed frame for a changing view of the outside landscape.

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<sup>20</sup> “Sarah Oppenheimer / Fall 2010 Lecture Series Project,” 19:19.

Though the frame of the aperture does not change, the view within the frame of the aperture appears to pan from left to right as viewers walk past the interior aperture. This is because the edges of the exterior aperture are set much wider than the edges of the interior aperture, granting a wider view than the singular aperture alone can provide. Because that view cannot fit within the frame of the interior aperture, viewers must move past that opening to see all that the exterior aperture provides. *622-3367*, therefore, stages a cinematic experience within a static architectural environment.

Horizon holes (Figure 21) consist of a periscope-like mechanism inserted into a wall. A standard periscope consists of a tube with two mirrors angled toward each other at forty-five degrees and mounted inside the tube at its top and bottom ends. Within a periscope, viewers on one end can see those above them who are out of their line of sight (Figure 22). A simple periscope consists of two apertures. Position A describes the viewing position created by Aperture A. Position B describes the position created by Aperture B, the position of that which is being viewed. To look through the periscope at Position B, the person in Position A holds his or her eye near Aperture A. Because the viewer in Position A is in such close proximity to Aperture A, he or she is not visible to a person in Position B. Therefore, the visual relationship between the person in Position A and the person in Position B is not a reciprocal exchange. Position A is always the site of the viewer while Position B is always the site of the one being viewed. A typical periscope is, therefore, an apparatus of one-way exchange.

Oppenheimer's horizon holes typically increase the scale and complexity of standard periscopes in ways that make reciprocal exchange within them possible. This periscope apparatus consists of four apertures in total – two on either side of the wall. Two corresponding apertures show a direct view through the wall to the space on the other side, while the other two show reflections of the bottom or top halves of the adjacent space. These apertures are designed to

confuse viewers' perceptions of where the top and bottom segments of a visible space are located. From a distance, the space visible through a horizon hole appears doubled to those standing in front of the other two apertures. These apertures also tend to collapse the space viewed through it, turning each into views of similar and strangely compressed spaces. As viewers move closer to the work, the two images begin to invert. What appeared in the lower half of the space on the other side of the wall becomes visible through the upper aperture and vice versa. Standing in close proximity to the work viewers see bisected and flipped views of the space on the other side of the wall. By compressing space and inverting its horizontal order, the horizon hole creates experiences of confused spatial arrangement.

Oppenheimer's *P-41*, installed at the Museum of Contemporary Art, San Diego in 2009 is an example of a horizon hole (Figure 23). This work consists of two pairs of rounded rectangles visible on either side of a gallery wall. The rectangles that make up these pairs are arranged vertically on two sides of the wall. The top aperture of one pair is positioned at the same height as the bottom aperture of the second pair. The view through these two apertures is an unmediated view straight through to the space on the other side of the wall. Views through the bottom aperture of one pair are connected to views through the top aperture of the opposite pair through the periscopic arrangement of angled mirrors within the wall's interior. The view through these periscopically related apertures make the bodies of viewers on one side of the work appear to be bisected and stacked on top of each other to the viewers standing on the opposite side of the aperture.

The third type of hole Oppenheimer outlines is a wormhole. The term "wormhole" in the study of physics refers to "a hypothetical interconnection between widely separated regions of space-time." Oppenheimer's wormhole (Figure 24) creates a direct visual connection between two architectural spaces that are typically adjacent or proximal but that one must walk a

significant distance in order to move between. While positioned relatively close to one another, their architecture permits no points of direct physical access between them. Often consisting of a simple hole cut in a wall that adjoins two spaces, this type of hole is meant to make this adjacent space accessible visually before it can be accessible physically.<sup>21</sup>

Oppenheimer's 2007 piece *522-1251* installed at the American Academy of Arts and Letters is an example of a wormhole (Figure 25). This work is a molded plywood structure that has been inserted into a wall at a point where it has been bisected on one side by another wall that stands perpendicular to it. This aperture frames a single view on one side of the aperture of the two spaces created by the bisecting wall on its other side. From this viewing position, viewers have visual access to three spaces from one spatial position. This creates what Oppenheimer refers to as a "mnemonic shortcut" between these three spaces. "Mnemonic" is defined as "of or relating to memory," and a mnemonic shortcut eliminates viewers' need to use their memory to assemble how each space fits together in order to understand the arrangement of the space around them.<sup>22</sup> While these holes give rise to a number of Oppenheimer's works, they are never used in the same way twice. Oppenheimer adapts the structure of each hole to fit different architectural conditions. The typology of holes, therefore, provides a storehouse for a range of approaches that Oppenheimer uses to call attention to the relationship between our physical and visual experiences of constructed space.

Working from a both her dictionary of holes and the architectural conditions of various sites, these works are neither exact reiterations of previous projects nor completely site-specific installations. Site-specific installations tend to be works generated specifically for a particular location. Oppenheimer's projects are significantly tailored for the conditions of each new space she works in, but the ideas she employs carry between different projects. When asked whether her

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<sup>21</sup> "Sarah Oppenheimer / Fall 2010 Lecture Series Project," 20:27.

<sup>22</sup> *Oxford English Dictionary*, online ed., s.v. "mnemonic."

work is site specific by Daniella Salvioni, a correspondent with Art International Radio, during a 2010 interview, Oppenheimer replied:

I've been interested in how a site can actually shape or inform not only the space of a work but also the space of a viewer's interaction with the work, but I've also felt that the problem of understanding a work as site specific is that it basically makes the work limited to a specific location. It starts and ends with the constraints of a given locale.<sup>23</sup>

Oppenheimer then describes how the dictionary of holes she has developed operates as a tool she uses to work with many of the same approaches to space, but with openness to the considerations of a particular architectural environment:

The typology has developed ... in response to [the] problem [of site specificity]. It has developed in order to allow me to develop a series of operations that can be performed in these ... spaces and to apply those operations to a specific location. That said, if I apply a general rule to a specific location, it is not the same thing if it is reapplied in a new site.<sup>24</sup>

Projects like *622-337*, *P-41* and *522-1251* began with templates of ideas and viewing objectives that have been used in different spaces but have also been adapted for the specific conditions of each space. Each work Oppenheimer produces is, therefore, not strictly site specific, an idea that is applied to different projects and of considerations of both the features and demands of different locations. In *W-120301*, Oppenheimer combines the connective aim of the wormhole with the periscope-like apparatus of the horizon hole to create a relationship that is more spatially confounding than either template could offer on its own. Within *W-120301*, Oppenheimer has expanded the structure of the basic periscope within a horizon hole to include a third position, Position C, in addition to Positions A and B (Figure 26). *W-120301* uses this expanded periscope to create a wormhole that connects the vertically adjacent spaces of the galleries on levels two and three of the contemporary wing. In doing so, Oppenheimer gives the

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<sup>23</sup> Daniella Salvioni, *Clocktower Radio – Sarah Oppenheimer Interview*, podcast audio, Sarah Oppenheimer Interview, MP3, 3:07, accessed December 23, 2014, <http://clocktower.org/show/sarah-oppenheimer>.

<sup>24</sup> Salvioni, 3:35.

opportunity to traverse the space of the contemporary wing in a manner that diverges from the order that was pre-ordained by its architecture. This undermines the orchestration of movement by architectural conditions and presents the possibility of alternative experiences within its walls.

For Oppenheimer, all architecture is a site of power and exchange, as its arrangement is paramount to occupants' agency within its walls. In her conversation with Daniella Salvioni, Oppenheimer also described how she sees her work functioning both within and against that exchange:

You have within any site a set of power relations that are scripted into a place and those power relations often are either so normalized that we find them invisible, or they are actually concealed. By opening up what we call a set of adjacent cells or stacked [architectures], what you're actually doing is you're making visible, not only another space, but ... a spatial hierarchy. You're making visible how ... the viewer situates themselves within permissible and non-permissible zones. In that sense, vision, or a porousness of what is previously sealed off has a liberatory potential.<sup>25</sup>

By constructing a number of different visual relationships with varying degrees of exchange and reciprocity within *W-120301*, Oppenheimer demonstrates how the architectural space of the contemporary wing is hierarchically ordered.

In her article *The Array*, Oppenheimer describes that architecture is made up of a series of spatial divisions that directly dictate the experiences occupants have within them. Oppenheimer states that the ways in which these divisions are arranged creates order within each building. She refers to this order as "the array."<sup>26</sup> As a noun, "array" is defined as "an order of position." Oppenheimer uses the term to describe how different interior spaces relate to one another, how occupants move from one space to another within them and what lines of sight are available to occupants at any given moment in any given position. Not all movements or sight lines are possible within the architectural array. The physical boundaries of the array shape its

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<sup>25</sup> Salvioni, 4:58.

<sup>26</sup> Oppenheimer, 40.

architectural conditions such that occupants are forced to move along its hallways, only changing course at the prescribed openings and corners the space provides. Similarly, occupants in any given location within the array can only see as far into neighboring spaces as its construction allows.

Oppenheimer argues that the power an architectural condition asserts typically goes unnoticed.<sup>27</sup> She points out, “much like user-friendly software, [the] ubiquity [of the array] naturalizes the dynamics of spatial division [within it].”<sup>28</sup> Because the urban environment is constructed by architectural space, occupants can see little outside of the array. The array is so pervasive in the urban context that occupants rarely recognize its presence. The ubiquity of the array makes the limitations that its boundaries place on the movements of its occupants appear to be unquestionable and unchangeable. The assumption that these boundaries are fixed reinforces the power that Oppenheimer describes as embedded in architectural structures. Oppenheimer further asserts within her third assumption that because the array goes unnoticed, “[it] constitutes a spatial authority,” which she writes, “invit[es] rupture within the patterned progression of space.”<sup>29</sup> This rupture in the force the limitations of architectural space is exactly what Oppenheimer seeks to produce with her installations. Projects like *622-337, P-41* and *522-1251* all create ruptures that cause the queer sensation of disorientation as they disrupt the constructed visual order of the architectural spaces. *W-120301* creates a rupture within the walls of the BMA where the two floors of its contemporary wing and the stairway all merge, and it turns those locations into sites of queer disorientation.

In approaching the contemporary wing of the BMA as a site of spatial authority, Oppenheimer recognizes the divisions within its architecture place limits on the movements that

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<sup>27</sup> Ibid.

<sup>28</sup> Ibid, 41.

<sup>29</sup> Ibid.

are possible within its walls and the relationships between its occupants. She further recognizes that the only movements and relationships that are possible within the museum space are those that fit into the architectural conditions of levels two and three of the contemporary wing and the stairway that connects them. With *W-120301*, Oppenheimer attempts to disrupt the limiting forces of the architecture of the contemporary wing. By providing a visual short-cut through the boundaries of the museum's constructed space, *W-120301* makes the space of the level three galleries accessible from level two, it makes level three visible from level two and it makes the stairway landing a site of voyeuristic observation of viewers as they enter the contemporary wing. Through these views viewers experience the space of the contemporary wing in a different order from the way it was constructed. These rearranged views give viewers access to multiple spaces from one position, altering their perception of where those spaces exist and visually reorganizes the space of the museum in such a way that they have disorienting experiences and find themselves in queer positions that undermine the spatial authority the space asserts onto its occupants.

*W-120301* manipulates sightlines in order to raise significant questions about how a work of art can function as more than an object but as a tool for vision and how a work of art can shape viewer experiences. In doing so, it places viewers at its center. Its materials exist only to facilitate the movement of light through them. The aluminum and glass that make up its interior twists our vision, shows us new perspectives of the people around them and makes our own forms visible to others. Standing in front of the apertures of *W-120301*, we see gallery spaces that we have walked through but renders them unfamiliar. Our queer position emerges as we lose sense of how the spaces that we see and the spaces that we have moved through relate to one another, and, in the process, they lose sense of where we stand within the contemporary wing. Their visual relationships to physical space become unstable as we look through *W-120301*, and the role of

vision in our understanding of our position in physical space is called into question. We become disoriented looking through its aperture, and this disorientation comes to characterize our experience. We are left in a queer position that forces us to find our way within the strange experience it creates.

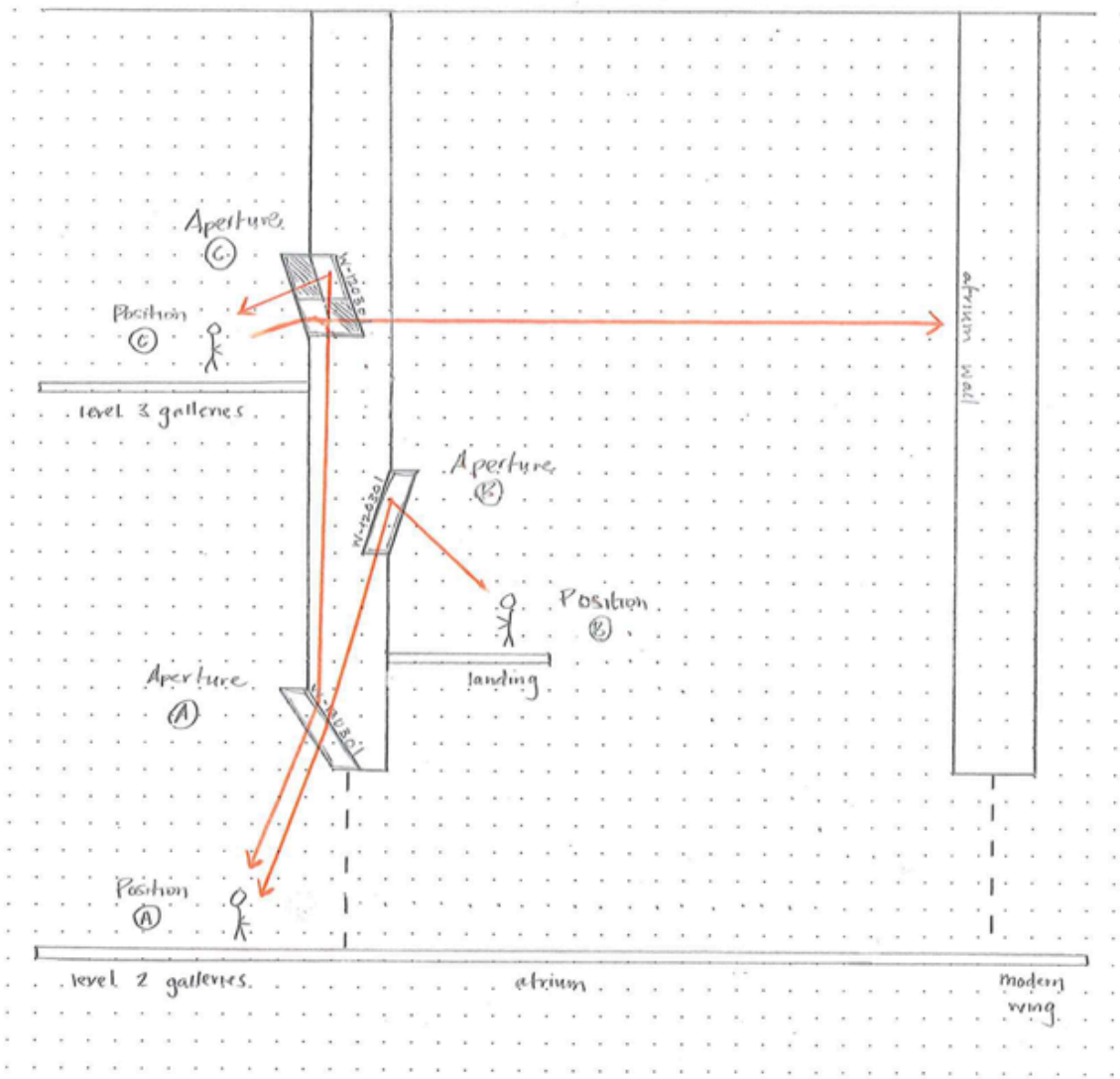


Figure 9: Diagram of W-120301. Drawn by the author.



Figure 10: Baltimore Museum of Art, Main Building, John Russell Pope, 1929. Photograph taken in 2014. Image source: [www.whiting-turner.com](http://www.whiting-turner.com).



Figure 11: Baltimore Museum of Art, Contemporary Wing, Bower Lewis Thrower Architects, 1994. Photograph taken in 1994. Image source: [www.blta.com](http://www.blta.com).



Figure 12: Sarah Oppenheimer, *W-120301*, Baltimore Museum of Art, 2012, view of Aperture B.  
Image source: [www.sarahoppenheimer.com](http://www.sarahoppenheimer.com).



Figure 13: Sarah Oppenheimer, *W-120301*, Baltimore Museum of Art, 2012, view of Aperture C.  
Image source: [www.sarahoppenheimer.com](http://www.sarahoppenheimer.com).

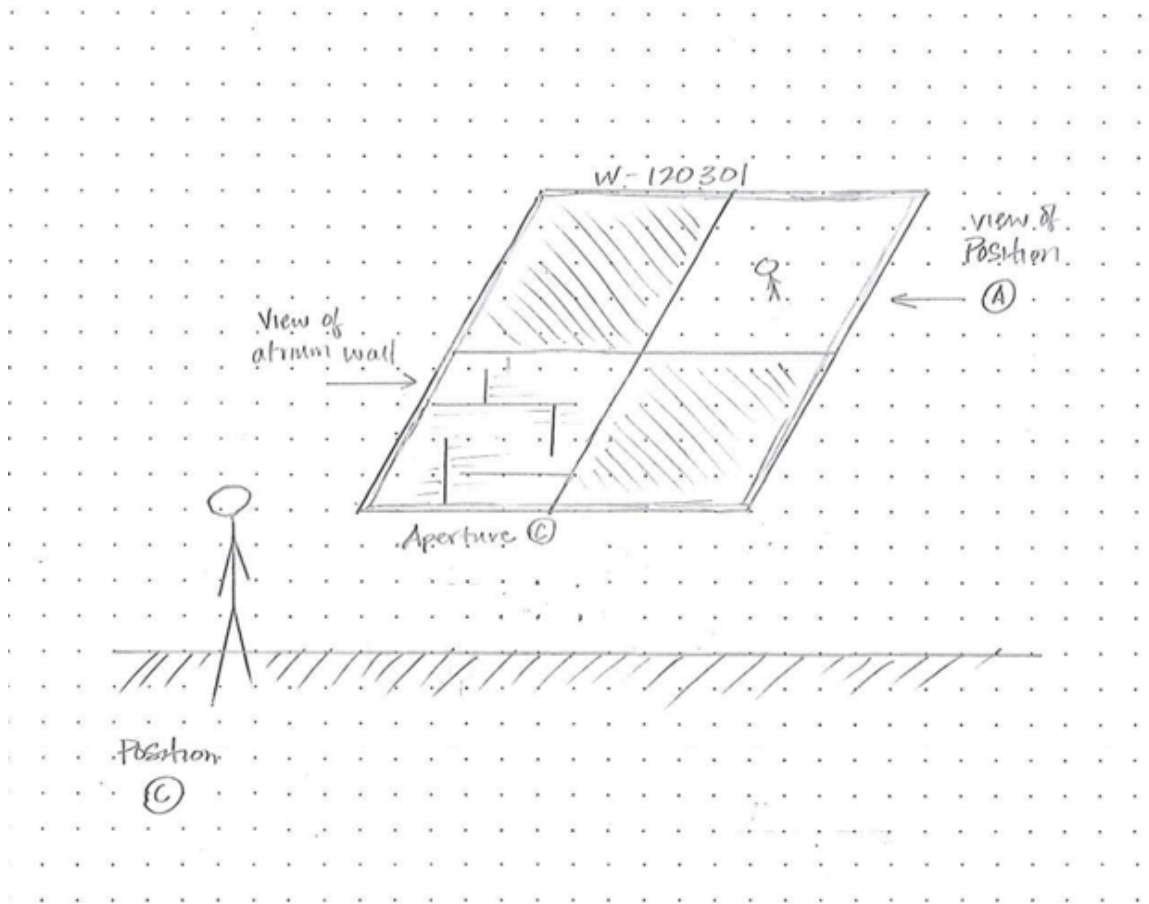


Figure 14: Diagram of view through Aperture C. Drawn by the author.

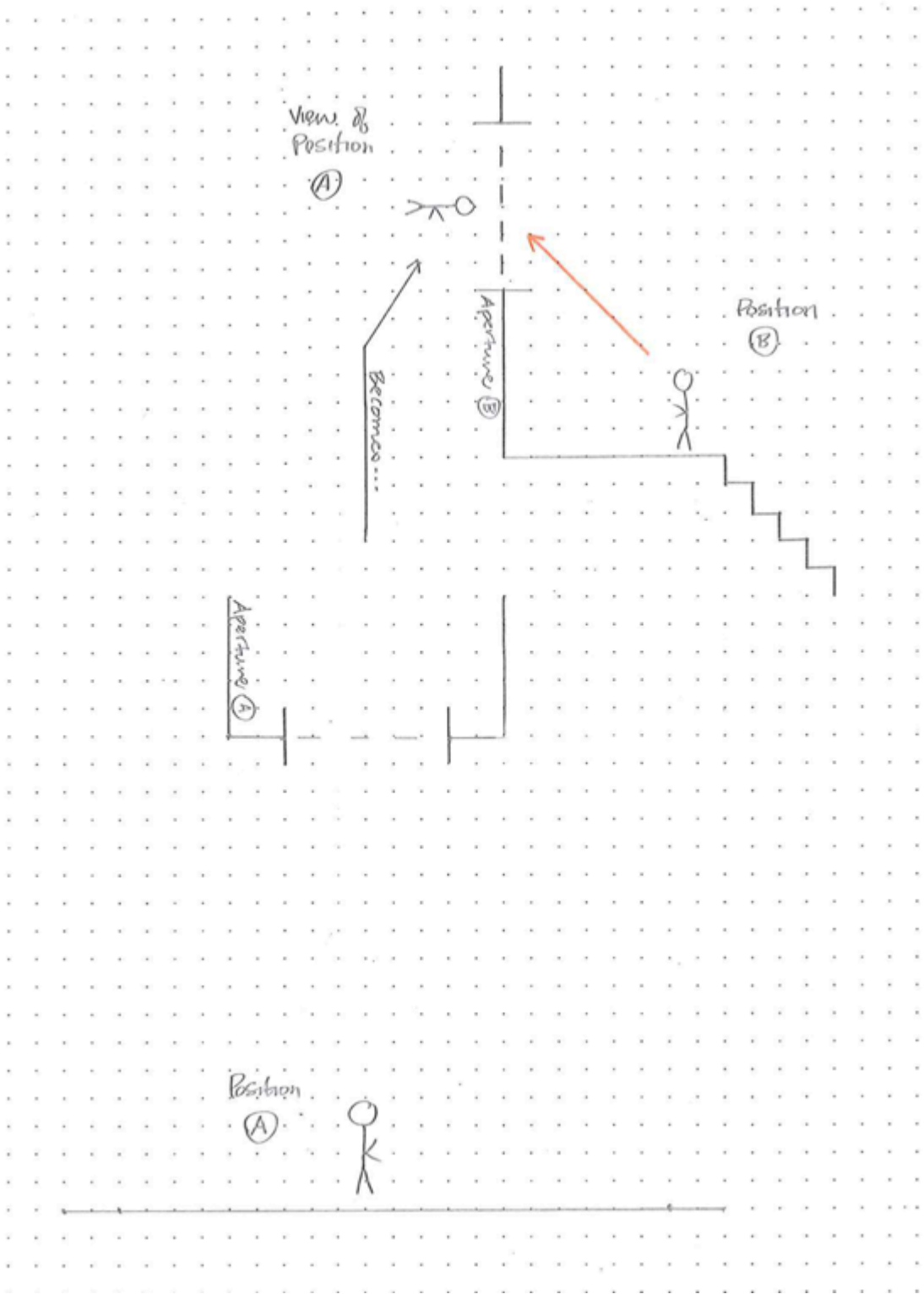


Figure 15: Diagram of view through Aperture B. Drawn by the author.

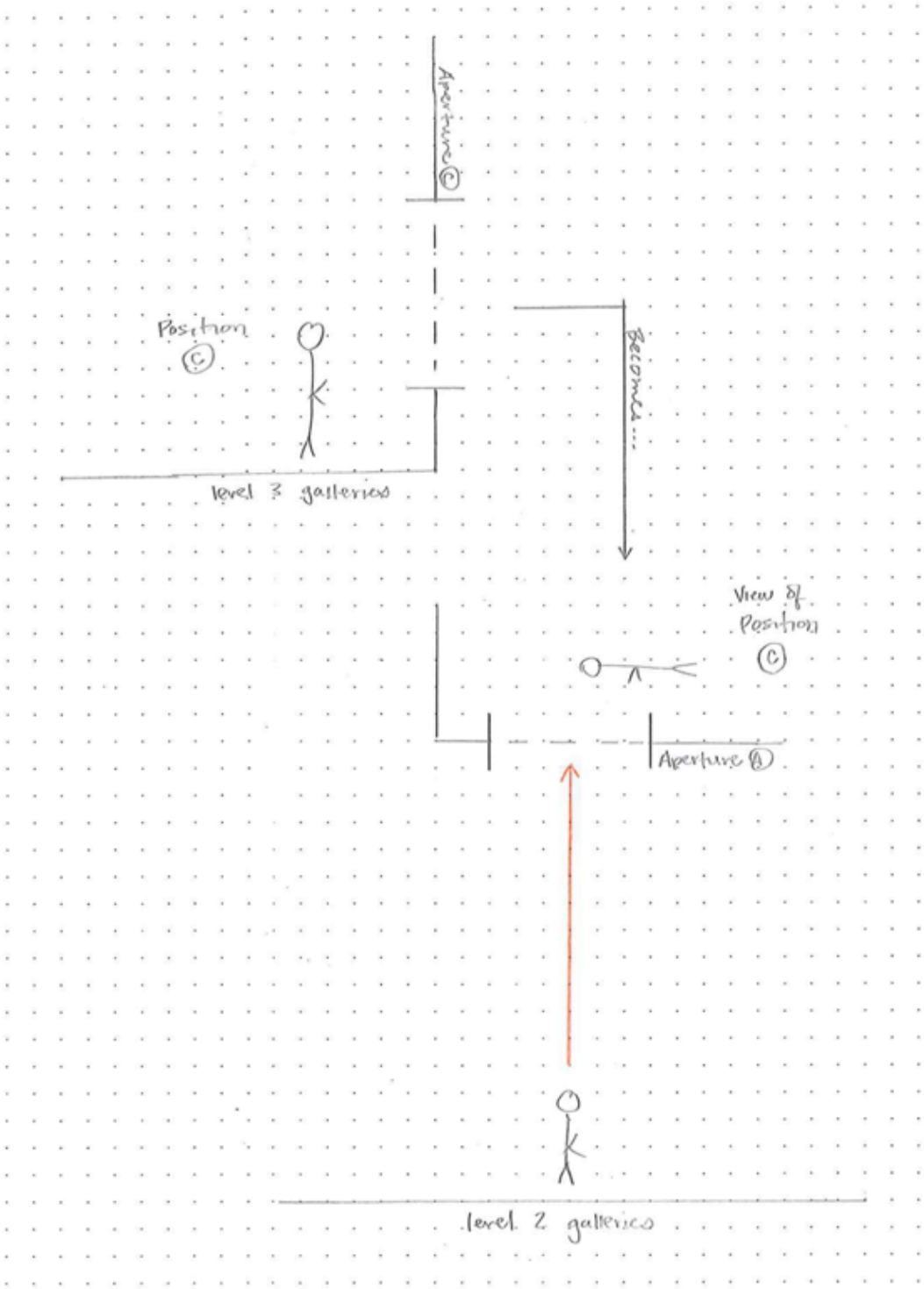


Figure 16: Diagram 1 of view through Aperture A. Drawn by the author.



Figure 17: Sarah Oppenheimer, *W-120301*, Baltimore Museum of Art, 2012, view of Aperture A. Image source: [www.sarahoppenheimer.com](http://www.sarahoppenheimer.com).

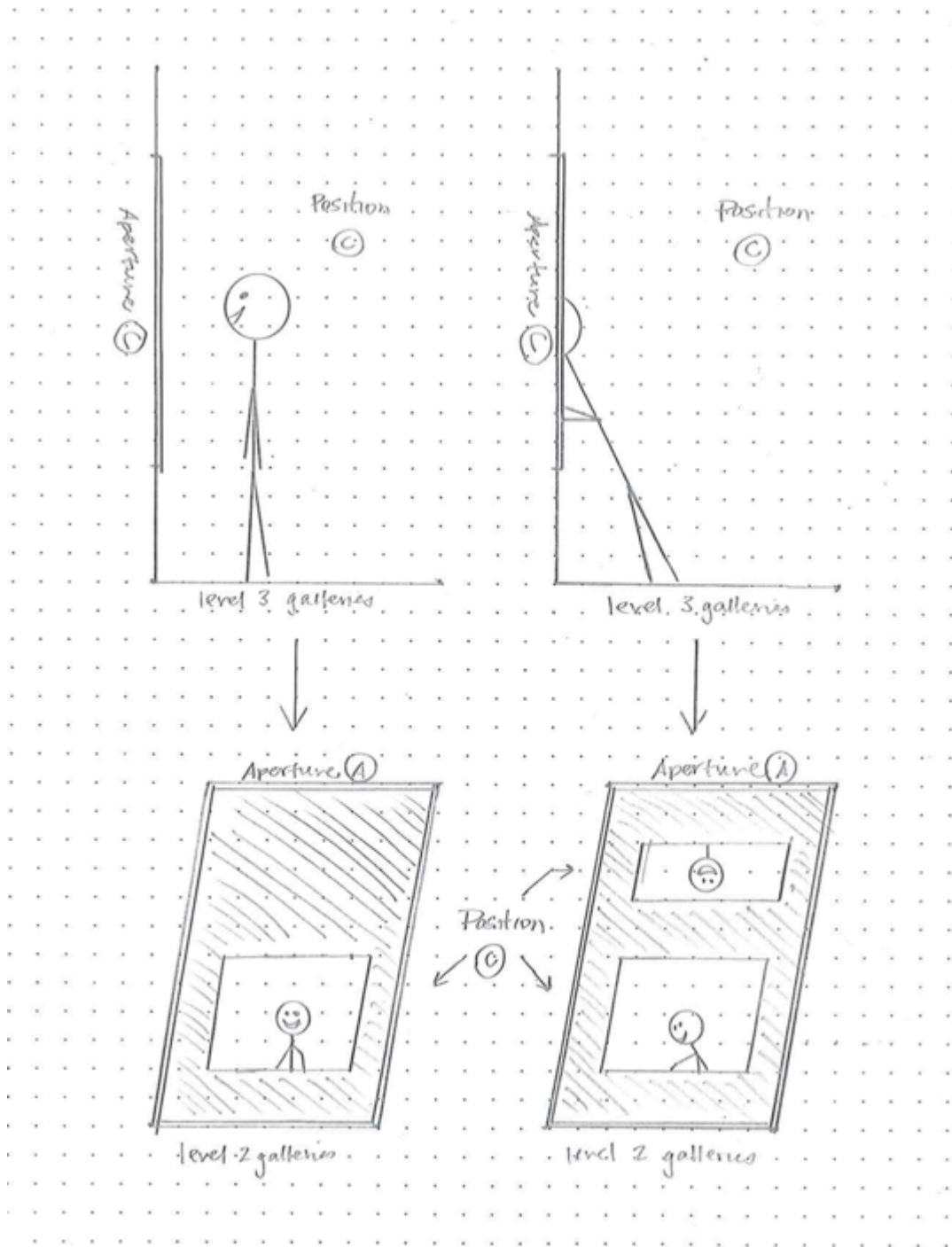


Figure 18: Diagram 2 of view through Aperture A. Drawn by the author.

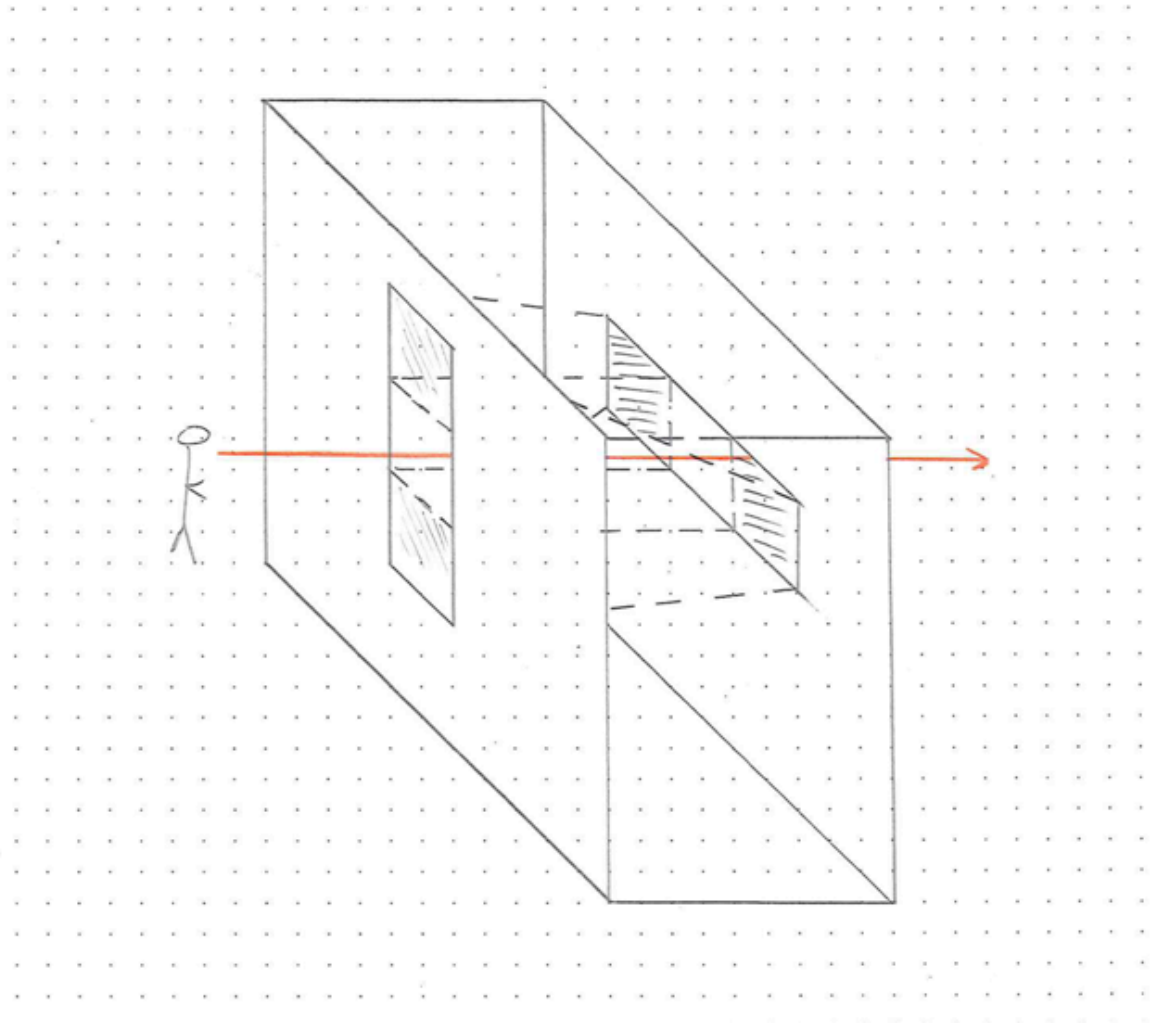


Figure 19: "Cinema Hole." Drawn by the author.

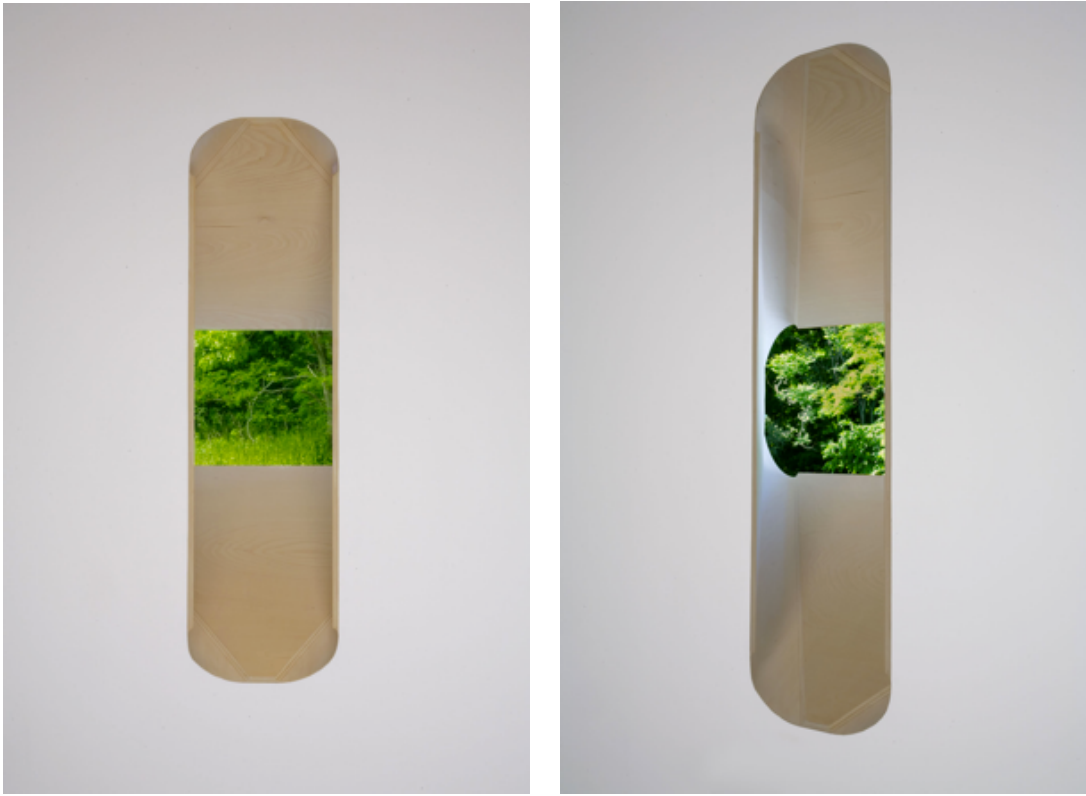


Figure 20: Sarah Oppenheimer, 622-3367, Islip Museum, 2007. Glass, Wood, Existing Architecture. Dimensions Variable. Image source: [www.sarahoppenheimer.com](http://www.sarahoppenheimer.com).

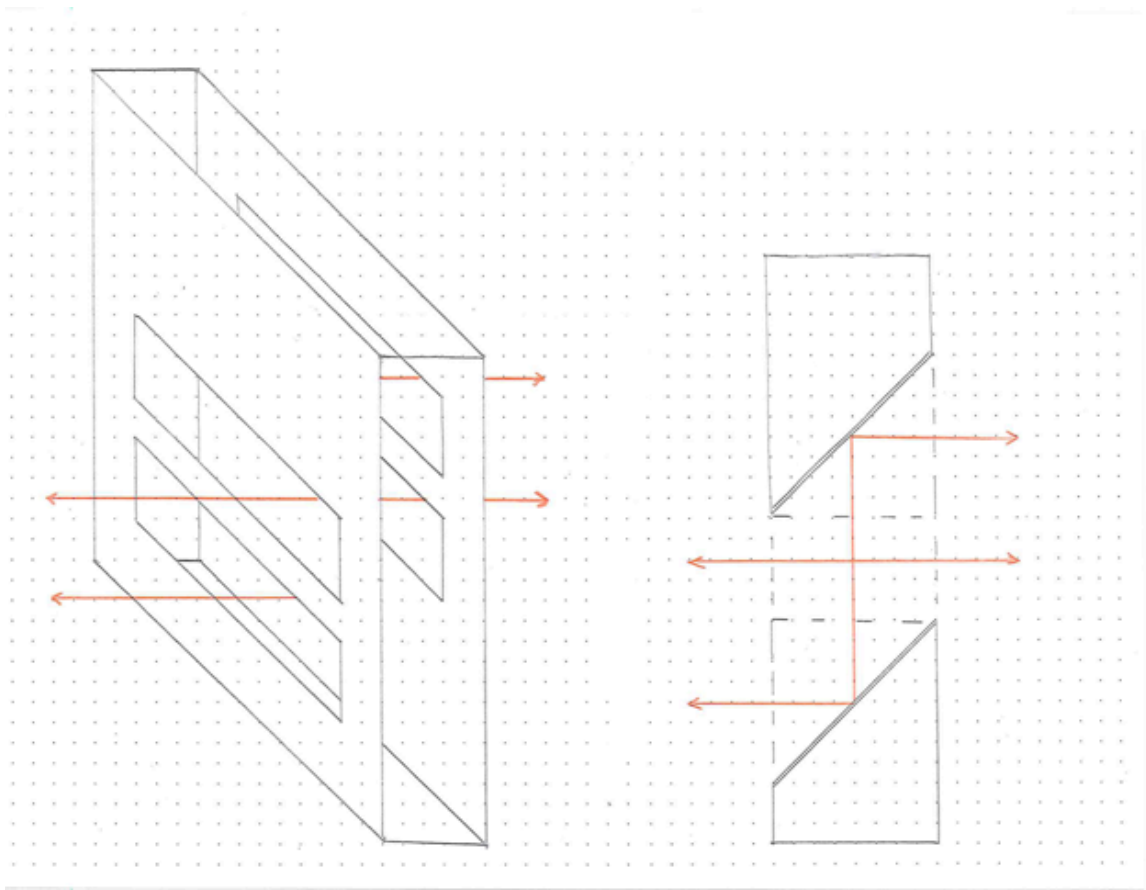


Figure 21: "Horizon Hole." Drawn by the author.

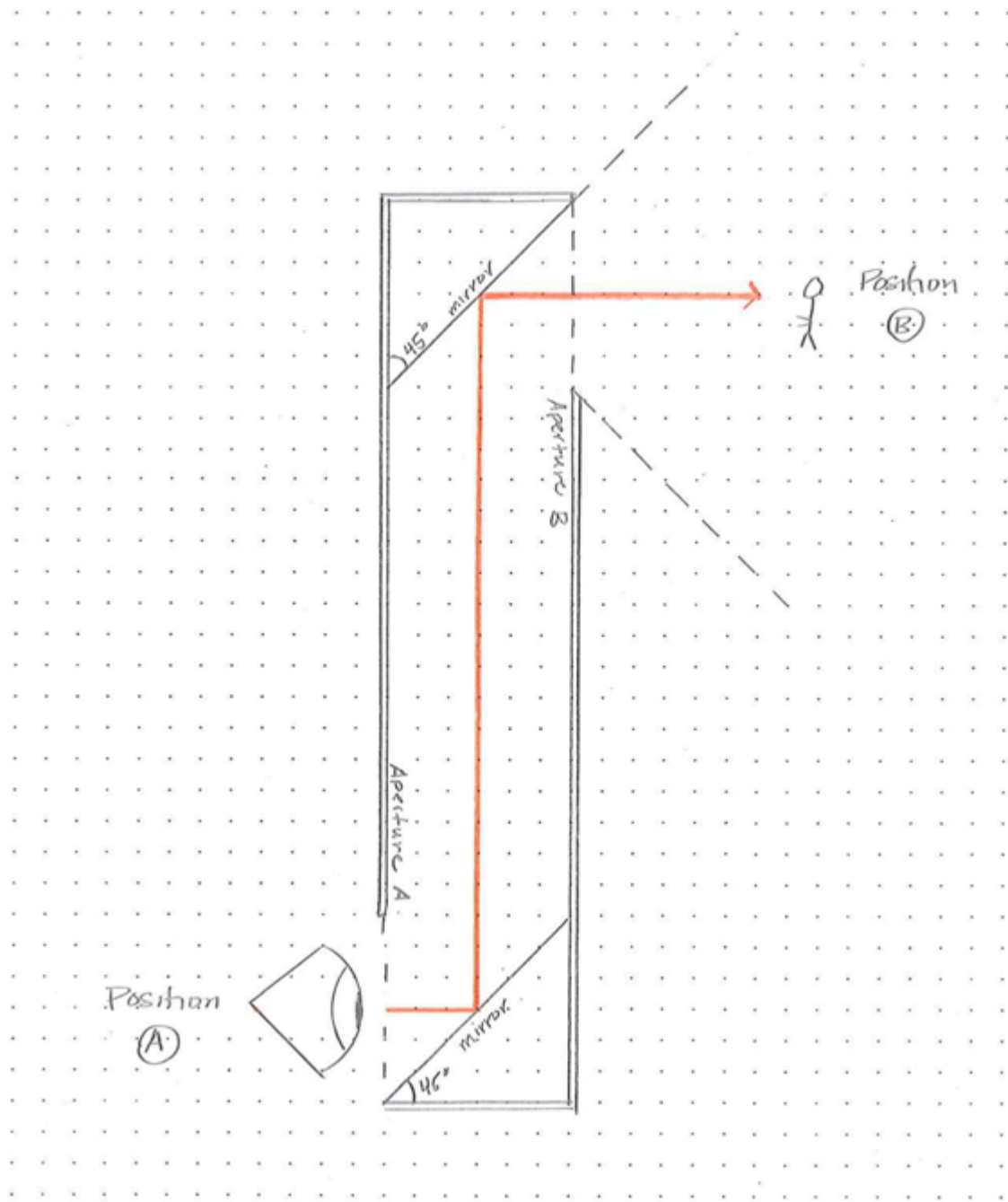


Figure 22: Periscope. Drawn by the author.



Figure 23: Sarah Oppenheimer, *P-41*, Museum of Contemporary Art, San Diego, 2009. Glass, Wood, Existing Architecture. Dimensions Variable. Image source: [www.sarahoppenheimer.com](http://www.sarahoppenheimer.com).

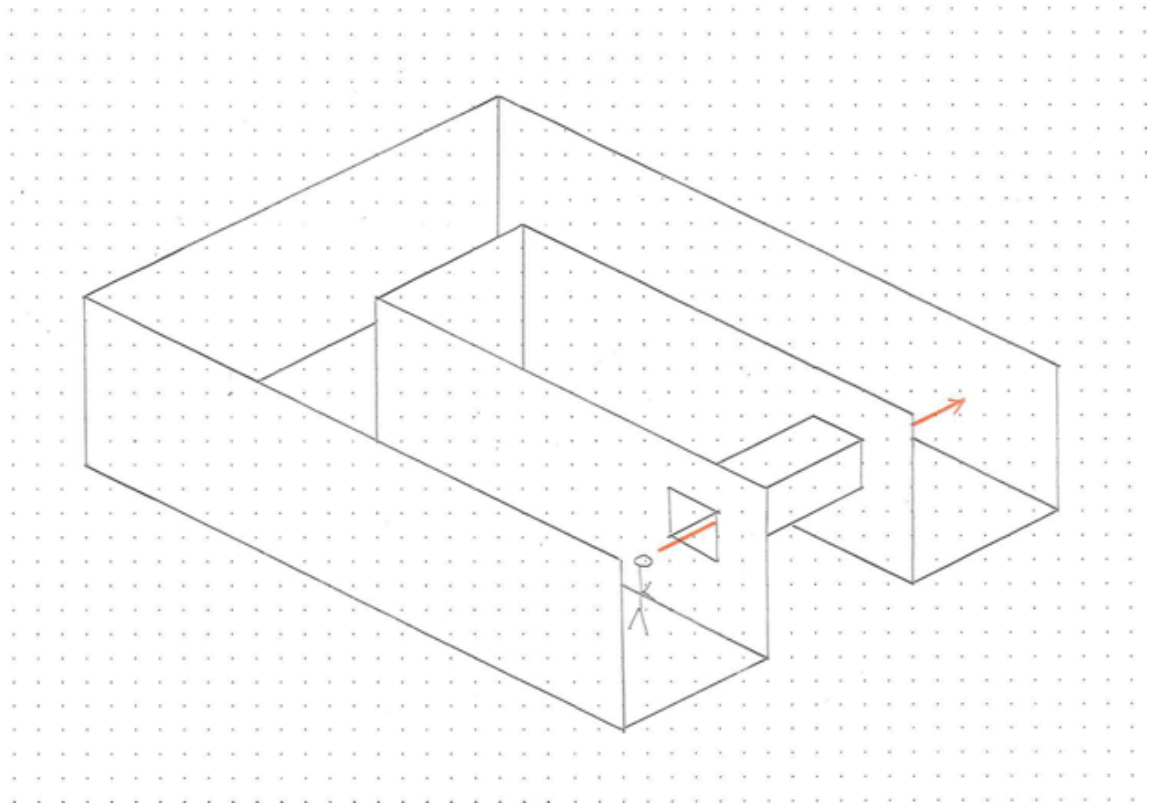


Figure 24: “Wormhole.” Drawn by the author.

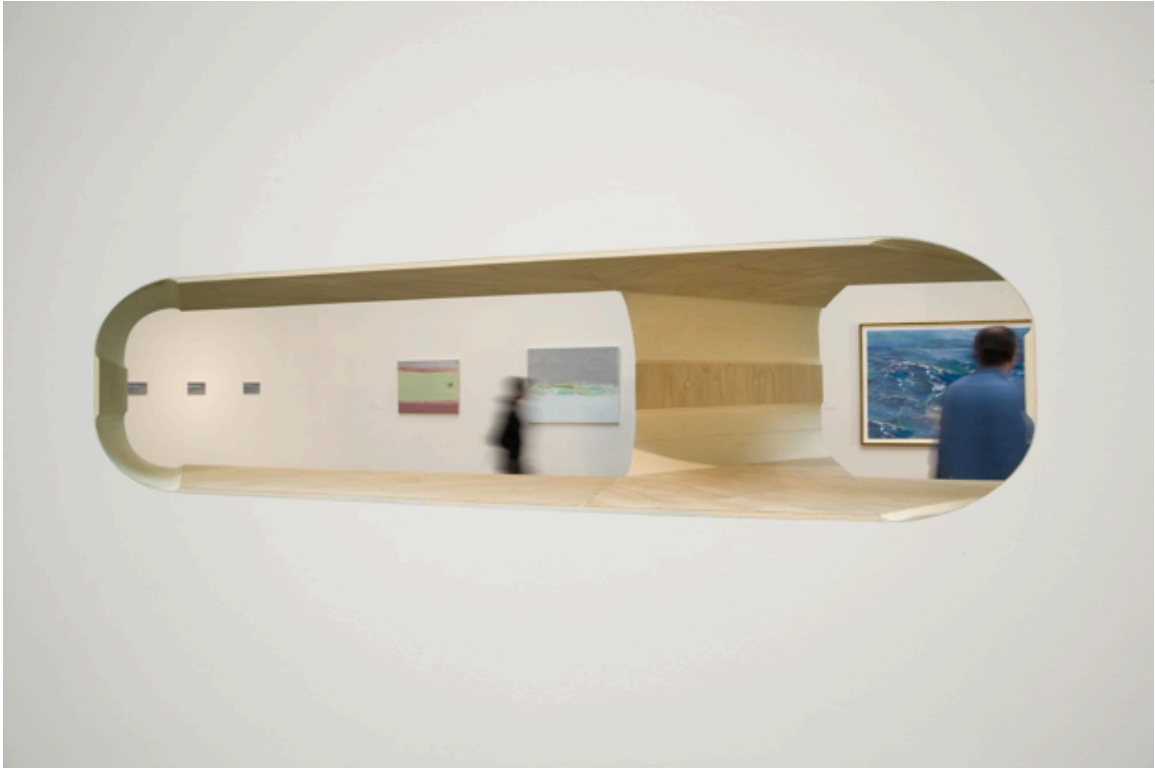


Figure 25: Sarah Oppenheimer, *522-1251*, American Academy of Arts and Letters, 2007. Wood, Existing Architecture. Dimensions Variable. Image source: [www.sarahoppenheimer.com](http://www.sarahoppenheimer.com).

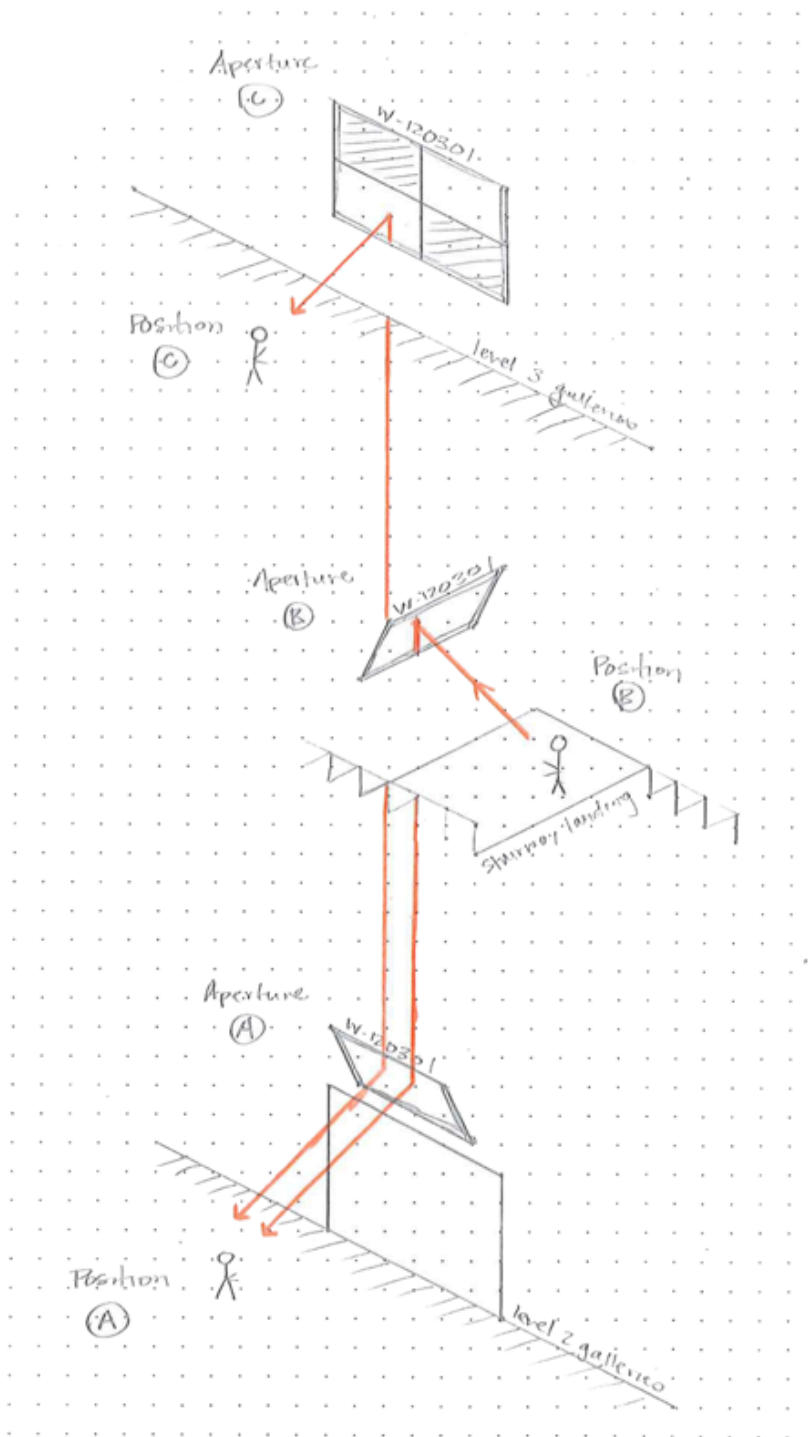


Figure 26: Diagram of W-120301 viewing positions. Drawn by the author.

## II

### *The Work of Art as an Apparatus*

As we encounter *W-120301*, we are faced with a work that we can't quite look at. We instead find a work that requires us to look through a strange column of aluminum, glass and mirror toward the people and spaces on its other end. This work is not an object in the way that Henry Moore's sculpture, *Three Rings*, sitting in the museum's atrium is an object. *W-120301* is, rather, an apparatus that directs our vision beyond its own form and material in order to open visual connections between people in adjacent space. By pointing our attention to other viewers in the museum and to the museum itself, *W-120301* subverts an "art-as-object" model that shapes viewers as observers of a work rather than participants in its production. *W-120301*, instead, demonstrates an "art-as-apparatus" model. This chapter focuses on how *W-120301* functions as an apparatus that produces queer sensations and how the work of art as an apparatus can be situated within the history of art and architecture.

In the art-as-object model, works of art are discrete objects. In a definition that dates back to the seventeenth-century, "art" is characterized as "the expression or application of creative skill and imagination, typically in a visual form such as drawing, painting, or sculpture, producing works to be appreciated primarily for their beauty or emotional power."<sup>30</sup> In conjunction with "discrete," meaning "something that is separate, detached from others, and individually distinct,"<sup>31</sup> and "object" meaning "something placed before or presented to the eyes or other senses,"<sup>32</sup> the work of art in the art-as-object model is, therefore, an object that is complete in its own form, independent from other forms, and, most importantly, meant to be perceived for its

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<sup>30</sup> *Oxford English Dictionary*, online ed., s.v. "art."

<sup>31</sup> *Ibid*, "discrete."

<sup>32</sup> *Ibid*, "object."

form by its viewers. This distinction between viewer and object correlates to Martin Heidegger's distinction between "beings" and "things." For Heidegger the viewer is a being whereas the art object is a thing.<sup>33</sup> Heidegger defines a being as one who consciously perceives the world through his or her own form and consciousness.<sup>34</sup> Things, on the other hand, exist in the world without perceiving what is around them. Things have no consciousness; therefore, they do not actively perceive the world. Following Heidegger's definitions, the art object in the art-as-object model is defined by its perceptibility to the viewer and the viewer is defined by his or her ability to perceive the art object.

Within this model, viewers see the art object and consider its formal and conceptual qualities, but they never disrupt the distinct existence of the object in the world. The object and the viewer never blend together. Looking at Henry Moore's *Three Rings*, viewers see an art object that consists of three marble forms resembling boulders that have been extensively smoothed, polished and hollowed. These forms simply sit in space to be looked at, walked around, and considered for what they are (Figure 27). This work is unchanged by our presence, and it does not engage with viewers in any direct way. As viewers look at *Three Rings*, it does not look back at them.

Figurative paintings and sculptures are objects that do not look back at viewers either, but their forms give the impression that they do. Standing before Édouard Manet's *The Railway Station* (Figure 28), for example, viewers are presented with the illusion of visual exchange. The woman in the painting looks out at them from within the edges of the work. Her gaze appears to meet theirs as she looks up from her book. As viewers study the shape of her face, the angle of her hat, the volume of her dress and the puppy asleep in her lap, they get the impression that they

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<sup>33</sup> Martin Heidegger, *Poetry Language Thought*, trans. Albert Hofstadter (New York: Harper Collins, 1975), 55.

<sup>34</sup> Martin Heidegger, *Being and Time*, trans. John Macquarrie and Edward Robinson (New York: Harper Collins, 1962), 49.

are sharing a glance with her. The woman does not see them, however. Her form is simply an instance of figurative representation, and her gaze is, likewise, a fiction.

Similarly, as viewers look at Bernini's *Medusa* (Figure 29), they engage with a work that appears to look back at them as they look at it. As they walk around the sculpture, they observe the complexity of her form, see the intricacy of her serpentine tendrils and read the agony in her expression. Her eyes give the impression that she sees them just as they see her, but her gaze is a fabrication. Her eyes do not move inside of her head, nor are they imbued with any sense of perception. Viewers are engaging with an object, not a person. The bust is merely an object that resembles a perceiving being. As viewers stand in front of *The Railway Station* or circle *Medusa*, they are looking upon static objects that only appear to look back at them.

Within *W-120301*, the experience of visual exchange that viewers felt in looking at *The Railway Yard* or *Medusa* becomes real. When we look into *W-120301* we are not looking at an object that represents figures as if they are looking back at us. Instead, through the apertures of *W-120301*, we see other viewers who actually see us as we see them. Looking down into Aperture C, we share a glance with viewers as they look up through Aperture A. Looking up into Aperture A, we see viewers as they look down through Aperture C and meet our gaze. When we see other viewers return our gaze, *W-120301* becomes a tool for connecting with other viewers rather than a static object for us to take in. In forging these connections, *W-120301* becomes an example of a work of art that functions as an apparatus rather than an object. *W-120301* is an apparatus for generating experiences for viewers that expand beyond the materiality of the work itself.

In the art-as-apparatus model, the work of art as is meant to direct attention toward something beyond its own physical form, rather than to be looked at for its material or representational qualities. The term "apparatus" is defined in the Oxford English Dictionary in a

number of different but related ways: “the work of preparing,” “the things collectively in which this preparation exists, and by which its processes are maintained,” “the mechanical requisites employed in scientific experiments or investigations,” and finally, “materials for the critical study of a document.”<sup>35</sup> These definitions all broadly describe an apparatus as a tool for the investigation of something other than itself. As an apparatus, *W-120301* is a tool for the investigation of three primary elements of viewer experiences within the museum environment. First, *W-120301* is an apparatus that enables us to investigate the spatial authority of architecture, revealing the ways that the placement and material of ceilings, walls and floors impose limitations on what we can see, where we can go and with whom we can make contact within them. Second, *W-120301* is an apparatus that functions like a camera without film, extending our vision beyond our physical capabilities, compressing our perceptions of space in to a single, directed experience and reminding us that our experience of vision is always shaped by the structures we use to see the world. Third, *W-120301* is a phenomenological apparatus that renders us both seers and seen at the same time, enabling us to investigate our existence as simultaneous perceiving beings and as visible objects in the world.

In opening new lines of sight outside of the constructed conditions of the Baltimore Museum of Art, *W-120301* is an apparatus that shows us that architecture is not simply a neutral spatial condition, but a space that shapes our experience along a particular trajectory. Walking through constructed space, our trajectories are shaped by what kind of movement the architecture allows. The long, open Grande Gallerie that houses Italian paintings in the Louvre, for example, creates a direct trajectory through space and long, uninterrupted lines of sight. The sharp turns and asymmetry of the Jewish Museum in Berlin, on the other hand, create an unpredictable path through space and short lines of sight within smaller segments of the museum. The large galleries

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<sup>35</sup> *Oxford English Dictionary*, online ed., s.v. “apparatus.”

on levels two and three of contemporary wing of the Baltimore Museum of Art are divided into a number of different smaller spaces that, like the Jewish Museum in Berlin, keep sightlines short and viewers moving through them along meandering paths. Furthermore, stairs encircle half of the cylindrical atrium of the BMA, and they are buffered between two cement walls; this creates a narrow and circuitous experience of looking and moving between these two galleries.

In *Power/Knowledge*, Michel Foucault writes: “the nature of an apparatus is essentially strategic, which means that we are speaking about a certain manipulation of relations of forces, of a rational and concrete intervention in the relations of forces, either as to develop them in a particular direction, or to block them, to stabilize them and to utilize them.”<sup>36</sup> Within Foucault’s definition, an apparatus is not just a tool for the investigation of something other than itself. An apparatus is a tool for building intentional relationships between two or more things in a way that serves the purposes of those who designed, own or manage the apparatus. Foucault’s description of the apparatus renders the museum itself an apparatus. The museum space sets the stage and shapes the nature of how viewers experience the objects they display and thereby mediates the relationships that can emerge between the two.

By creating visual experiences that give us queer sensations and disrupt how we perceive the architecture around us is arranged, *W-120301* becomes a counter-apparatus to the museum as an authoritative apparatus. Cutting through its opaque surfaces and making viewers in one space visible to us as we stand in other spaces, *W-120301* destabilizes the authority the museum architecture has to dictate who and what viewers can see within its walls. *W-120301* enables us to see through the opaque boundaries that the ceilings, floors and walls create in order to develop alternative understandings of spatial dynamics and develop social relationships across previously

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<sup>36</sup> Michel Foucault, *Power/Knowledge: Selected Interviews and Other Writings*, ed. C. Gordon (New York: Pantheon Books, 1980), 195, quoted in Giorgio Agamben, *What is an Apparatus and Other Essays* (Stanford: Stanford University Press, 2009), 2.

opaque boundaries. The queer disorientation cultivated by these new visual pathways both brings our attention to the ways that the constructed space of the museum dictates our sensorial experiences and provides us with visual experiences that cut through and dismantle the authority of those structures.

In his essay, “What is an Apparatus?” Giorgio Agamben expands Foucault’s definition of an apparatus to include “literally anything that has in some way the capacity to capture... behaviors, opinions or discourses of living beings.”<sup>37</sup> As an apparatus, *W-120301* captures glimpses of viewers’ movements through the space of the museum. As viewers stand beneath Aperture A, the opening frames views of their behavior and makes it visible to us as we look through Apertures B and C. Looking either ahead toward Aperture C or down into the interior structure of *W-120301*, Aperture C also frames viewers and makes them visible to us as we stand below Aperture A. Viewers are visible within these apertures because light is reflecting off of glass and mirrors inside the apparatus.

By using glass and mirrors to reflect light and frame viewers as they move through space, the apparatus of *W-120301* functions similarly to a camera. The apparatus of a camera captures light as it comes into its viewfinder. That light bounces off of panes of glass and mirror that have been mounted inside the dark body of the camera and exposes light-sensitive film. This film creates a negative that will be made into a positive image at a later time. As light moves through the apparatus of *W-120301*, it also bounces off of glass and mirrors, but instead of hitting light sensitive film, it hits the eyes of people standing in the spaces below or in front of its apertures. *W-120301* is therefore a kind of camera without film that functions in real time. Instead of making a permanent image of viewers in other spaces that can be both reproduced and taken out

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<sup>37</sup> Ibid, 14.

of the museum, *W-120301* provides viewers standing on one end of the apparatus with real-time views of people standing on the other end that are only possible within the museum space.

In “Ideological Effects of the Basic Apparatus,” Jean-Louis Baudry examines the effects a movie camera and a projector have on viewers as they perceive their images. “The camera,” Baudry writes, “occupies an intermediate position in the work process that leads from raw material to finished product.”<sup>38</sup> He explains that in this intermediate position, the camera is not visible within its finished product; therefore its image is falsely taken as identical to vision. The camera is forgotten because viewers watch the film it has produced. Baudry argues that, as the camera disappears from the images it produces, these images are taken to be accurate representations of vision, but, because human vision is a binocular process and a camera is a monocular apparatus, the camera cannot seamlessly reproduce vision.<sup>39</sup>

The apparatus of the camera is rooted in one-point perspective and the projection technology of the Renaissance, both of which represent vision produced from a monocular single point.<sup>40</sup> Because we see through two eyes, our vision is a product of two ocular points, and we see images that are much more complex than a simple one-point perspective. Baudry argues that with the difference between the camera and binocular vision, the camera produces an idealized form of vision, rather than an accurate reflection of how we see.<sup>41</sup> The Oxford English Dictionary defines “ideal” to mean “existing as an idea or an archetype.”<sup>42</sup> A film is a representation of idealized vision. The camera, therefore, has an “ideological effect” on the spectator because it presents an image as an accurate reflection of a visual experience, and viewers are put in a position of taking its ideology as reality. Baudry describes that this ideological effect is enhanced by viewers of

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<sup>38</sup> Jean-Louis Baudry, “Ideological Effects of the Basic Cinematic Apparatus,” in *Narrative, Apparatus, Ideology*, ed. Philip Rosen (New York: Columbia University Press, 1985), 287.

<sup>39</sup> *Ibid.*, 288.

<sup>40</sup> *Ibid.*, 287.

<sup>41</sup> *Ibid.*, 287.

<sup>42</sup> *Oxford English Dictionary*, online ed., s.v. “ideal.”

photographs or cinematic images' tendencies to forget the apparatus that produced them and take their images as unmediated glimpses into a lived visual experience. In other words, the ideological is made most effective as the camera itself is forgotten, which leads viewers to concentrate instead on the work it produced.

Like a photograph or a cinematic image, *W-120301* also hides much of the apparatus that produces its effects. Looking through its apertures, we can see the black aluminum sheeting that creates its structure. We can see that aluminum sheeting as it lines the architectural cavity within which it sits, but we cannot see the glass and mirrors that have been meticulously shaped and positioned to produce the views we see through *W-120301*'s three apertures. As we look at other viewers through the apparatus, our attention is not on its mechanics. Like looking at a photograph, we focus on what *W-120301* produces rather than the structure of its apparatus. As consideration of the placement of the glass and mirrors within the apparatus is absent from our experience of *W-120301*, the work produces its own idealized effect. When we look up through Aperture B, we are not actually looking directly at viewers below us in the lower galleries; we are looking at an idealized view of their forms and the space that they are in. When looking up through Aperture A at viewers standing in front of Aperture C, we are also seeing an idealized image that has been mediated by glass and mirrors.

Part of the effects that a camera produces in Baudry's assessment is a false sense of continuity between sequential views it creates. "What is important in a film," he says, "is the feeling of continuity which joins shots and sequences while maintaining unity and cohesion of movements."<sup>43</sup> The time it takes to shoot a film is often many multiple times longer than the length of the finished product. Scenes in a film are also shot in a different order than they end up in the film. A cinematic apparatus, therefore, produces the illusion of sequential and ordered

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<sup>43</sup> Baudry, 293.

events that happen over a constructed span of time. Viewers are not privy to the actual time and space of the film, so the image they see is an idealized image. The idealized image the apparatus produces leaves out the reality of the time and space within which the film was shot. What viewers see instead is an image that presents a false continuous flow of events.

Part of the queer sensation *W-120301* creates for us as we look through its apertures is a sense of false continuity between the spaces the two viewers share on either side of the apparatus. Looking down through Aperture C or up through Apertures A and B, *W-120301* erases the space between the place that we stand and the space of the viewers we see. By making the space of the lower level galleries visible as part of the work that adorns the walls of the upper galleries and making the space of the upper level galleries visible in the ceiling of the lower galleries, the apparatus of *W-120301* functions like a film camera in a very abstract way. The film camera compresses the time and space that exists between cuts and scenes to construct a specific narrative, whereas *W-120301* compresses architectural space. *W-120301* brings the two viewers on either side of the apparatus together in a way that erases their spatial distance the same way a film camera erases the actual time and space that it took to produce its images.

In its similarity to a film camera, *W-120301* presents viewers with a visual experience that conflates their own vision with the effects of the apparatus. Baudry describes the film camera as so central to the experience viewers have looking at its final piece that the camera and the viewer become almost indistinguishable: “[the viewer’s] place is taken by the camera which constitutes and rules the objects in this ‘world.’ Thus the spectator identifies less with what is represented, the spectacle itself, than with what stages the spectacle, makes it seen, obliging him to see what it sees.”<sup>44</sup> One definition of “identify” is “to regard or treat as identical,” and as spectators identify with the apparatus that produces their visual experience, spectators take that product as identical

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<sup>44</sup> Baudry, 295.

to their own vision.<sup>45</sup> As viewers identify with the views that the camera produces, the camera as an apparatus becomes an extension of their own vision. Looking through *W-120301*, we also identify with the views the apparatus provides, which turns the work into a similar extension of our own vision rather than an art object that only receives our gaze. In this sense, *W-120301* becomes a tool for understanding how the frames through which we see the world have a significant influence on how we identify ourselves with the world.

In addition to functioning as an apparatus for deconstructing the force of museum architecture and a camera without film that enables viewers to directly look at others, *W-120301* is also a phenomenological apparatus through which we can come to understand ourselves as both viewers in the world and as visible objects to others. As we look through the apertures of *W-120301*, we see other viewers as they move through the museum galleries. If we remain in the queer positions these apertures create and look into their frames for long enough we might recognize that we moved through the spaces these viewers occupy on our way from the lower gallery to the upper gallery and back again. As we look up at Aperture B on the stairway landing, we recognize the entryway we walked through to enter the galleries on level two. We see another view of this familiar space as we look both straight ahead at Aperture C and down through its interior. We see the space that we walked through as we entered lower galleries, and we watch other viewers move through spaces we have already been. In this moment, we realize that we are not only viewers within this work of art, but we are also in the position of being viewed. In this way, *W-120301* is not only an apparatus that enables us to see others, it is an apparatus that enables us to understand ourselves as perceptible objects as well as perceivers of the world at large.

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<sup>45</sup> *Oxford English Dictionary*, online ed., s.v. “identify.”

Because we typically expect to only look at objects in a museum, not to be looked at through them, our recognition of ourselves as objects within *W-120301* might be jarring. This strange reminder of our own objectness is reminiscent of Jean-Paul Sartre's description of his own process of recognizing himself as both a viewer of the world and an object viewed. In *Being and Nothingness*, Sartre describes himself looking through a keyhole and being unaware of himself as anything other than one looking through a keyhole. As he pushes his face against the door, his attention is completely enraptured in his experience of what he is seeing and he forgets that he could be anything other than one who sees. "My consciousness sticks to my acts, it *is* my acts; and my acts are commanded only by the ends to be attained and by the instruments to be employed. My attitude, for example, has no 'outside'; it is a pure process or relating to the instrument (the keyhole) and to the end to be attained (the spectacle to be obtained), a pure mode of losing myself in the world..."<sup>46</sup> In this moment, the keyhole is an apparatus that causes Sartre to forget his own visibility. As he looks through it, Sartre does not conceive of himself as a visible self, only a perceiving self. Sartre cannot see his own body as he sees the bodies of others, and he is too absorbed in what he is seeing to think of his own form.

Sartre's total emersion in his perceptual experience breaks, however, as he hears footsteps come up behind him.<sup>47</sup> With these footsteps, Sartre recognizes that he is being looked at while he is looking at others. In this experience, Sartre describes that he is no longer pure consciousness, but he has become a self to himself: "I see *myself* because *somebody* sees me," he says.<sup>48</sup> Through this analogy, we see that our ability to perceive others generates our awareness of

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<sup>46</sup> Jean-Paul Sartre, *Being and Nothingness*, trans. Hazel E. Barnes (New York: Washington Square Press, 1956), 259.

<sup>47</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>48</sup> *Ibid.*, 260.

ourselves as objects in the world. We recognize that just as we can look at the material forms of other people as if they were objects, those people can look back at us and make the same assessment.

As we look through the apertures of *W-120301* and observe people in spaces that we have occupied, we recognize that our form was also visible to others when we stood in those spaces. We recognize that our bodies are as visible to those we see as their forms are to us. Standing in front of Aperture C, we are not only watching the movement of viewers who pass below aperture A, those viewers also see us. The same is true when we stand looking up at Aperture A. Tilting our heads back, we not only see views of Motherwell's *Elegy to the Spanish Republic II* and of viewers standing between the painting and Aperture C, we also receive the gazes of those who look down at us. By diverging from the art-as-object model, *W-120301* produces a queer disorientation that brings attention to much more than its nature as an object. The queer sensation *W-120301* provokes brings our attention to our bodies as both tools of vision and objects viewed.

Maurice Merleau-Ponty describes his existence as both a seer and one seen in the world in *Visible/Invisible*, as he writes: "My body as a visible thing is contained within the full spectacle. But my seeing body subtends this visible body, and all the visibles with it. There is a reciprocal insertion and intertwining of one in the other."<sup>49</sup> Two definitions of "reciprocal" are "existing on both sides; felt or shared by both parties" and "moving backwards and forwards alternately."<sup>50</sup> The sensation of seeing and being seen is felt by both parties in a visual exchange, and each party moves from the one seeing and being seen constantly. It is because our bodies are, themselves, objects that we are able to perceive the world around us. Our eyes allow us to see, and our brain allows us to comprehend what our eyes take in. In writing that there is a "reciprocal

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<sup>49</sup> Maurice Merleau-Ponty, *The Visible and the Invisible*, trans. Alphonso Lingis (Evanston: Northwestern University Press, 1968), 138.

<sup>50</sup> *Oxford English Dictionary*, online ed., s.v. "reciprocal."

insertion and intertwining of one in the other,” Merleau-Ponty suggests that our bodies are seen because they are capable of seeing, and, reciprocally, our bodies have the capacity to see because we can also be seen.

Within *W-120301*, we are able to see others because we have bodies that enable us to walk up to the apertures and look inside them. We have heads that tilt upward or downward to see its angles. We have eyes that take in the light around us, and we have brains that allow us to make sense of that light. For Merleau-Ponty, our body is as much a part of the full spectrum of all that is visible in the world as the objects we see. As we can see and are seen simultaneously within *W-120301*, this work as a phenomenological apparatus enables us to see that, as Merleau-Ponty puts it, “our body is a being of two leaves, from one side a thing among things and otherwise that sees them and touches them.”<sup>51</sup> Merleau-Ponty further wrote that this recognition of our own bodies as visible objects is significant because “it teaches us that each calls for the other.” Understanding our own visibility in the world puts us in a closer union with other similarly visible people in the world. As a phenomenological apparatus, *W-120301*, therefore, enables us to recognize our own body as both a viewing object and an object viewed and helps us to understand the synchronous relationship we have to the world around us.

The notion of a work of art functioning as an apparatus rather than an object of viewers’ attention is not entirely new. It emerges out of significant precedents set by works made in the 1970s. Gordon Matta-Clark in *Conical Intersect* from 1975 and Michael Asher’s 1970 piece at Pomona College enlist the absence of an object as an apparatus for revealing the structural conditions that shape architectural experiences. Both Bruce Nauman’s *Live-Taped Video Corridor* from 1970 and Dan Graham’s *Time Delay Room* from 1974 use video cameras, televisions and architectural space as apparatuses that extend the reach of viewers’ vision and

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<sup>51</sup> Merleau-Ponty, 137.

make viewers' forms visible to themselves and other viewers. While very different from one another, all of these works function as apparatuses as they draw viewers' attention toward something other than the works themselves. Our attention is instead directed toward either the constructed spaces in which they stand or how viewers relate to one another in these spaces.

Matta-Clark produced *Conical Intersect* in 1975 for the Paris Biennial by removing a cone-shaped section of two conjoined and abandoned seventeenth-century buildings.<sup>52</sup> From the street, viewers could see up into the cone-shaped absence, through multiple floors and across the two structures. The two buildings once served as housing for middle-class Parisians but had since become derelict slums. By opening their interiors to the views of the passing public, this work made the interior space of bourgeois life visible to the outside world. Though the Paris police barred access to the interiors of the building after the work was completed, the work, theoretically, also brought light and the surrounding environment into a typically dark bourgeois domestic life.<sup>53</sup> *Conical Intersect* is therefore a work about opening boundaries between two distinct spaces: the interior space of private life and the exterior space of the public sphere. As it opens questions about the relationship between the public and private sphere, it becomes an apparatus for such an investigation.

Michael Asher's 1970 exhibition at the Pomona College Art Gallery, on the other hand, consists of two rooms, both in the shape of right triangles. Viewers enter the first of these triangular spaces, not through a formal entryway, but through an opening made by the total removal of the gallery wall. Viewers then move into the second triangular space through a narrow opening that sits at the juncture and connects the two triangles at their apexes.<sup>54</sup> With the natural light and sound of the exterior space pouring into the first gallery and the darkness of the second

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<sup>52</sup> Pamela Lee, "On the Holes of History: Gordon Matta-Clark's Work in Paris," *October* 85 (1998): 70.

<sup>53</sup> *Ibid.*, 73.

<sup>54</sup> Barbara Munger, "Michael Asher: an Environmental Project," *October* (1970): 162.

room made by the walls that separate the two spaces, viewers experience the first room as full of light and the other as intensely dark. This stark difference brings viewers' attention to the dramatic and distinct effects of the presence or absence of exterior conditions within interior space. With this, the opening of the exterior wall and the angled positioning of the gallery architecture becomes an apparatus for understanding how light, sound and the distinction between interiority and exteriority shape their experience of architectural space.

Like to *W-120301*, these works also become an apparatus for the investigation of the authoritative influence architecture has on its occupants. *Conical Intersect* makes the divisions between and sequestration within spaces of bourgeois Parisian domestic life visible to passersby in a way that rebuts the growing culture of privacy and propriety their opacity promoted.<sup>55</sup> Michael Asher's work similarly brought attention to the ways the gallery space distances its occupants from the space outside of its walls by making the space itself an object of attention. Both of these works alter the existing architecture of their setting in ways that are similar to the influence *W-120301* has on its viewers. Unlike *W-120301*, however, *Conical Intersect* and Michael Asher's 1970 piece do not use any additional materials beyond those of the architectural spaces themselves to produce this critical effect. Both works, indeed, change the spaces significantly, but they do not introduce anything that can itself be called an apparatus. The apparatus of these works is found, instead, in the creation of a void of materials that were once present. This absence becomes a tool for investigating the differences between interior space and exterior space and the effects of removing divisions between the two.

*Conical Intersect* and Michael Asher's work at the Pomona College Art Gallery both work within existing architecture to create works that function as apparatuses, rather than art objects. *Time Delay Room* and *Live-Taped Video Corridor* also function as apparatuses rather

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<sup>55</sup> Lee, 67.

than object, but they introduce closed-circuit video and television screens to mediate viewer's experiences of architecture and other viewers. *Time Delay Room* consists of two rooms, and each room has two cameras mounted near the ceiling across from two television screens that are nested in the wall near eye-level. Each camera is pointed to the center of its respective room, capturing the activity of viewers within that space. That activity is then made visible on the screens in the adjacent room. One of the screens shows the scope of one camera in real time, while the second screen displays the scope of the other camera at an eight-second delay. As viewers enter one room, the first television screen presents the activities of those in the adjacent room as they are happening. As viewers proceed to view the second screen, they see the same activities from a different angle and at an eight-second delay.

In *Live-Taped Video Corridor*, viewers walk down a long narrow hallway, and as they do, they approach a pair of stacked televisions sitting on the floor at the end of the corridor. The bottom television displays a pre-recorded video of the corridor without viewers present. The top television displays a live stream of viewers as they walk down the corridor. The camera that has captured these images is mounted at the entrance to the corridor, opposite the televisions. The top television therefore displays viewers from behind as they walk. As viewers approach the televisions, they not only see their own body from behind, but they see their own image walking away from themselves. While viewers see other viewers on the television screens of *Time Delay Room*, in *Live-Taped Video Corridor*, viewers watch their own form moving within the space of the television screen.

The video cameras, televisions and constructed spaces of *Live-Taped Corridor* and *Time Delay Room* are all apparatuses that capture, orient and intercept the behavior of their viewers. The cameras capture the images of viewers as they move through space and display them on the television screens. The walls around viewers orient their movement within the confines of their

geometry, and the images on the televisions intercept viewers gaze as it might be directed elsewhere. Similar to *W-120301*, these apparatuses exist as objects that frame views of existing space and of the viewers in those spaces. *Time Delay Room* brings viewers' attention to other viewers as objects in space. Viewers come into contact with other viewers through closed-circuit television within *Time Delay Room*, whereas viewers of *W-120301* come into contact with others through a periscopic apparatus. Despite the technological differences between these works, they both produce visual relationships between viewers. *Live-Taped Video Corridor*, however, differs from *W-120301* as it brings viewers into a relationship with their own form, rather than the forms of others. Through all three of these works, viewers come to understand that, as they are able to see the bodies of others, they are also visible to those around them.

Following the significant precedents that these four works have set for the work of art as an apparatus, the question arises: Why does *W-120301* resurrect this model in 2012, four decades later? Why is the art as aperture model important within contemporary art now? What can our interaction with an apparatus that draws our attention to the people and spaces around us do for our present understanding and experience of the world we find ourselves in today?

The art-as-apparatus model is not about viewing an object; it is about creating relationships between viewers and their environments. In generating new connections between viewers and the people and spaces around them, viewers become active participants in the work. The experience viewers have with the work is foregrounded, and viewers come to find new views of others and reassess their own understanding of the spatial conditions around them. As viewers reconsider these relationships, their perceptions of the world outside of their bodies shift, and their understanding of how their bodies are situated within that world inevitably shifts along with

it. The work of art as an apparatus, therefore, shows that the way viewers conceive of themselves and their position in the world is deeply intertwined with the way they perceive and understand that world.

Since the 1970's, discourses on identity have developed to argue for the same interrelationship between a person's sense of his or her personal identity and his or her cultural context. In *The History of Sexuality*, for example, Michel Foucault describes how a homosexual identity did not emerge until the conservatism of the Victorian era and the medical discourse that emerged out of the nineteenth century created it:

There is no question that the appearance in nineteenth-century psychiatry, jurisprudence, and literature of a whole series of discourses on the species and subspecies of homosexuality, inversion, pederasty, and "psychic hermaphroditism" made possible a strong advance of social controls into this area of "perversity;" but it also made possible the formation of a "reverse" discourse: homosexuality began to speak in its own behalf, to demand that its legitimacy or "naturalness" be acknowledged, often in the same vocabulary, using the same categories by which it was medically disqualified.<sup>56</sup>

The term "homosexual" emerged in medical discourse to characterize a person "by [his or her] sexual propensity for [his or her] own sex."<sup>57</sup> Though sexual attraction and interaction between people of the same sex has a timeless history, the characterization of a person through their engagement in those activities did not occur until relatively recently in modern discourse. Only when the term "homosexual" emerged within cultural discourse and language did it become an identity that individuals could claim for themselves.<sup>58</sup> Here we see how the conditions of particular cultural and discursive contexts directly relate to and shape individuals' sense of personal identity.<sup>59</sup>

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<sup>56</sup> Michel Foucault, *History of Sexuality*, trans. Robert Hurley (New York: Random House, 1978), 101.

<sup>57</sup> *Oxford English Dictionary*, online ed., s.v. "homosexual."

<sup>58</sup> "Identity" in this instance refers to the definition listed in the *Oxford English Dictionary* online, which reads: "the condition of being a single individual; the fact that a person or thing is itself and not something else; individuality, personality."

Using the art-as-apparatus model in 2012, *W-120301* translates contemporary notions that our sense of ourselves as situated in the world comes from our experience of the world into a visual and spatial experience. By inserting an apparatus that mediates our experience of architecture and other people within physical space, Oppenheimer's intervention brings our attention to our own positions in space through our perceptions of the other people and spaces around us. As we look through *W-120301* and experience the queerness of its disorienting effects, we become aware of the effects it has on our vision. We come to see that the things that frame our vision or our understanding of what lays in front of us are not neutral in their effects, but they orient us in space and toward other people according to their ideological effects. As we recognize that our vision is shaped by this objectless work, we come to see that our sense of space and place are as well.

Reviving the art-as apparatus model that originated in the 1970's in 2012 enables us to address relational understandings of identity within contemporary art. Identity is not just a matter of representing what a particular "type" of person looks like; an identity is a way of experiencing the world. By creating queer sensations, the art-as-apparatus model provides a way of getting beyond figurative representations of identity to produce viewing experiences that more directly reflect the experiences of different non-normative identities. *W-120301* brings us into a phenomenological investigation of how we are effected by the people and spaces we see and experience in the world.

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<sup>59</sup> This relationship is not limited to the development of sexual identity, as similar examples can be found throughout studies of gender critical race theory, ethnic studies, gender studies and disability studies.



Figure 27: Henry Moore, *Three Rings*, 1966. Red Soroya Travertine Marble. 114 inches in length.  
Image source: [www.henry-moore.org](http://www.henry-moore.org).



Figure 28: Édouard Manet, *The Railway*, 1873. Oil on Canvas. 36  $\frac{3}{4}$  x 44 inches. Image source: [www.nga.gov](http://www.nga.gov).



Figure 29: Gian Lorenzo Bernini, *Medusa*, 1638-48. White Marble. 19.7 x 16 x 15 inches. Image source: [www.artstor.org](http://www.artstor.org).

### III

#### *Spatial Disorientation as a Queer Sensation*

Looking through *W-120301* from its varied and multiple positions, the apparatus leaves us feeling disoriented amidst the constructed space around us. We feel disoriented as the work requires us to look up to look down, makes other people visible in miniature and obscures perceptible differences between flat space and dimensional space. The work also fragments our vision while we remain standing in one place, renders reflected views of people and spaces indistinguishable from direct views and thwarts our visual relationships to other viewers in space. *W-120301* turns our sense of direction within constructed space upside down, and it twists our understanding of where we stand within it. The work challenges our ability to discern how the space around us is laid out, which makes it difficult for us to know where we stand within it. As our relationship to space becomes volatile and our vision confused, disorientation becomes our way of occupying space. The disorientation we experience within *W-120301* puts us in queer positions as it upends our phenomenological relationships to space by leaving us feeling unmoored and unstable within these effects.

One way that *W-120301* disorients us is by forcing us to look up or to look forward to view a space that is located directly below our feet. From the stairway landing we look up at Aperture B and tilt our heads back to access an aerial view of people standing in the space below Aperture A. This backward tilt is dizzying, as we are used to such a glance producing a view from below. We experience a sensation that the world has been turned upside-down. We have a similar, though slightly less dramatic, sensation when we look forward at Aperture C. Here we also see an aerial view of viewers in the space below us, but this time it hangs vertically on the wall, as if on a television screen. Looking at the tilted spaces within Apertures B and C, we

become unsure of where the viewers we see are located in space, and, as a result, we come to question where our own bodies are positioned. Are the spaces we occupy below or above the spaces we see through these apertures? Are they tilted in space or have we entered space that has somehow shifted without our noticing? This deliberately skewed relationship between the spaces we occupy and the space we see leaves us uneasy about our own location within physical space.

A second way that *W-120301* disorients us is by making the people and spaces we see appear in miniature. The figures we see through Apertures B and C look to be much smaller than we are. They fit within relatively small frames, and we can watch them move around in space with room to spare. Logically we know that the people we see are not as small as they appear, but no objects are present within these spaces for us to use to determine the size of the people we are looking at. Not only does the absence of comparative objects leave our sense of scale within the frames of *W-120301*'s apertures continuously unsettled, we also find ourselves questioning our own size within the physical space around us. The objects we see in the galleries, therefore, become not just objects for intellectual analysis, but they become phenomenological tools for grounding our understanding of the size of our bodies.

Viewing others in miniature also confuses our sense of connection to the spaces we see within the frames of *W-120301* and to the spaces around us. In *The Poetics of Space*, Gaston Bachelard describes looking at the miniature as both connecting us to and distancing us from what it is we see:

I feel more at home in miniature worlds, which, for me, are dominated worlds. And when I live them I feel waves that generate world-consciousness emanating from my dreaming self. For me, the vastness of the world has become merely the jamming of these waves. To have experienced miniature sincerely detaches me from the surrounding world, and helps me to resist dissolution of the surrounding atmosphere.<sup>60</sup>

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<sup>60</sup> Gaston Bachelard, *The Poetics of Space*, trans. Maria Jolas (Boston: Beacon Press, 1969), 161.

The miniature world is one that we might hold in our hand but are not ourselves a part of, while the world around us is one in which we are entrenched and that can easily overwhelm our whole body. Viewing people and spaces in miniature, we find ourselves both relieved by their manageable size and perhaps saddened by our detachment from them. These views only leave us unsure of our own sense of scale within the spaces we see and occupy, they also leave us with a contradictory feeling of being both in command of what our vision encapsulates and being eons away from it.

A third way that *W-120301* disorients us is by splitting our vision so that it extends into different spaces while we remain standing in one location. Standing in front of Aperture C, we see that the aperture is split into four quadrants. A frontal view of *W-120301* looks like a television screen that has been split into smaller frames to facilitate real-time conversation between talking heads who are situated in different geographic locations. The top right quadrant of Aperture C gives us the aerial perspective of other viewers as they stand under Aperture A, while in the bottom left quadrant, we find a direct view of the concrete wall of the cylindrical atrium. The other two quadrants are filled with a rich black color from the aluminum structure of the apparatus. In these subdivisions, we see down into the space below us within frame of Aperture C, and we see a view of what is on the other side of the wall in front of us simultaneously. Our bodies stand in one place, but our vision reaches into two.

Standing below Aperture A, we experience a split in our vision once again, but this time with even more confusing effects. Gazing up through Aperture A, we first see viewers as they look forward at Aperture C. We see their heads and chest anchored along one edge of Aperture A. They appear to us in front of a cropped detail of Motherwell's *Elegy to the Spanish Republic II*. As viewers in front of Aperture C move forward to look into the cavity of the apparatus, however, we suddenly see two views of their forms within the frame of Aperture A simultaneously. This

produces a strangely cubist effect. We see the same figure from two different angles and in two different positions while we stand in one place. Like a cubist painting, the apparatus of *W-120301* enables us to see two perspectives on the same figure without moving our bodies in space. This split between our bodies that occupy a single physical position and the two views we see upends the synchronicity we previously felt between our visual and physical experiences of the space around us. Not knowing how our visual experience is produced in space leaves us disoriented trying to understand where we stand relative to the views we see above us.

A fourth way that *W-120301* keeps us in a disoriented position is that it makes it difficult for us to tell whether the spaces we are looking at are flat or three-dimensional. Looking at the bottom left quadrant of Aperture C, we see a direct view of the concrete wall of the cylindrical atrium. This view crops the expansive surface of the atrium wall into a smaller plane of identical concrete shapes. Because this view is only a small piece of the surface of a larger three-dimensional structure, we cannot see the whole of the atrium. We cannot see how its wall curves in space to complete the cylinder. It becomes a field of color and line. The lines that separate each shape appear to arc across a pictorial plane, rather than curve in the physical space of the atrium. However, these lines move in space as we move around Aperture C giving the opposite impression that this field of color is actually dimensional. Not being able to see how the grey field of color extends beyond the edges of the frame of Aperture C, we have difficulty discerning just how dimensional it might be. We are left to vacillate between seeing color and line as depicting volume or seeing these elements as flat surfaces.

Looking up at Aperture A and watching viewers lean into the cavity of *W-120301* from Aperture C, we see another instance of ambiguous spatial depth. When viewers are not leaning into Aperture C, we see a frontal view of their form framed by what appears to be a flat black frame. This black color has no surface variation to indicate that it is anything other than a flat

field of color. When viewers lean into the interior of *W-120301*, however, this flat black color becomes alarmingly three-dimensional. The second view of the viewer appears in front of this plane that initially appeared flat, revealing that it is rather quite voluminous. The black color contains within it enough room for the upper body of the viewer to occupy. This surprising experience of flat color becoming spacious gives us an experience of disconnect between our ability to discern flat planes from three-dimensional space within the frames of *W-120301*.

A fifth way that *W-120301* puts us into a disoriented position is by confusing our ability to discern between reflected and unmediated views of space and other viewers. Leaning into *W-120301* at Aperture C, we experience literal double vision. We see the space below us and viewers in it both directly and through an identical reflection that appears vertically within the interior of the apparatus. The interior of *W-120301* is made with specialized glass, the presence of which is nearly undetectable, which makes this identical view possible. The low iron content of this glass keeps it from distorting the color of the people, spaces and objects that we see through it. The surfaces of the glass have also been treated in order to prevent it from reflecting unwanted light. With these two modifications, the glass itself becomes invisible. Unable to see this glass as it produces the visual effects we see, we have a disorientingly seamless experience of double vision.

Looking up at Aperture A, we also cannot tell whether the two perspectives we see of viewers as they lean into Aperture C are reflections or direct views. Is the first frontal view we see of the figure standing in front of the Motherwell painting a reflection? Is the view we see when viewers look into the apparatus a reflection? Are they both reflections? It is difficult to tell initially. Looking long enough and remembering on our experience looking through Aperture C, we can discern that second figure is unmediated by glass because the figure is actually looking down into the space below them and we are looking up to meet their gaze. Our orientations align

in a way that lets us know that this view is one of direct connection. This is not an easy dynamic to figure out, and in the process of trying to understand the nature of what we are seeing, we find ourselves strangely visually disoriented.

A sixth way that *W-120301* creates an experience of disorientation for us is by creating unpredictable moments of thwarted visual connections between us and the other viewers we see through its apertures. Looking up at Aperture B, we see other viewers but they do not see us. These viewers gaze up in our direction, but the structure of the apparatus keeps their gaze from meeting ours. We find ourselves seeing other figures who could be looking at us but are not. This sensation is a bit like the strange feeling we have when we see a person waving in our direction, only to learn that they were waving at the person behind us. Standing in the direction that viewers in Aperture B are looking but not being able to catch their gaze, we end up marooned on the stairway landing full of unmet potential for connection.

Looking up at Aperture A, gives us another experience of thwarted visual connection. Initially, our gaze meets those of other viewers as they look forward at Aperture C. We can wave at each other and playfully engage one another. Viewers' gaze suddenly breaks with ours, however, as they turn their heads to look into the cavity of *W-120301*. In this position, viewers are no longer looking at us, but a second view of their form appears. Keeping our eyes trained on the first view we saw of their form, their gaze disengages with ours, but we find connection again as our attention moves to the second view. As viewers look down into the interior of the work, we again engage in a visual exchange, but the surprising shift in the direction of other viewers' gazes is confusing. We find ourselves both being looked at and ignored by the same figure within a single frame.

The experiences of dissonance between our physical and visual perceptions of space that we have as we look through *W-120301* force us to abandon the understanding of the space around us that we developed by walking through it. These apertures challenge us to understand the how the apparatus is functioning and how the views that we are seeing come together. As these views do not come together easily, we find ourselves lost within them. We come to doubt the reliability of our visual perception, and we are reminded that our vision and our sense of spatial positioning are inseparable. Our sense of how the architecture we occupy is arranged is opened through the visual experiences *W-120301* creates, and the apparatus renders us unfamiliar with the spaces they make visible. The familiarity we developed with the space around us by moving through it dissolves. We become unfamiliar with the rooms that we just walked through, and we find ourselves lost in the places that we stand. Our sense of spatial orientation is thrown off. We become disoriented. *W-120301* puts its viewers in a position where the sense of orientation we developed while walking through space fails, and we are forced to accept disorientation as positionality in and of itself. We become oriented within disorientation.

Becoming oriented toward anything in the world is a process, and becoming disoriented is perhaps the endless duration of that process. Disorientation might describe always seeking a stable sense of orientation but never finding it. Definitions of “to orient” given in the Oxford English Dictionary are “to bring into a defined relationship with known facts, circumstances, etc.; to give orientation or bearings to; to put oneself in the right position or relation; to ascertain one’s bearings, become familiar with one’s situation.”<sup>61</sup> By these definitions, orientation is a process we endure in order to understand how we relate to things around us. It is a process of becoming familiar with whatever circumstances we inhabit. Those circumstances can be either conceptual or physical, as “bring[ing] into a defined relationship with known facts” suggests a process of

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<sup>61</sup> *Oxford English Dictionary*, online ed., s.v. “orient.”

research a person has conducted in order to become oriented within a particular field of knowledge, whereas “to put oneself in the right position or relation,” “to ascertain one’s bearings,” and to “become familiar with one’s situation” apply to spatial conditions as well as discursive contexts.

Whether becoming oriented in a discursive or spatial context, orientation is not a fixed position in which we reside, but it is a process of coming to know the conditions we inhabit. In *Phenomenology of Perception*, Merleau-Ponty calls this coming to know our starting points:

It is easy to show that there can be a direction only for a subject who takes it, and a constituting mind is eminently able to trace out all directions in space, but has at any moment no direction, and consequently no space, without an actual starting-point, an absolute ‘here’ which can gradually confer a significance on all spatial determinations.<sup>62</sup>

The “absolute ‘here’” is a location in space from which our movement or trajectory through space begins. This starting point anchors us as we move, and it becomes a point to which we can refer back to in describing our subsequent positions to others or ourselves. Becoming oriented within a space is, therefore, about coming to understand and learning to describe our physical and proximal relationships to our starting points as they exist in the world around us.

As the world around us is constantly changing, our starting points and spatial anchors are constantly appearing and disappearing. Our relationships to starting points are constantly being disrupted, and single, unchanging starting points slip through our fingers over and over. We find ourselves detached from our starting points again and again, and we are continuously becoming unmoored. Our sense of stable orientation dissolves just as quickly as it is constructed. We are continuously *dis-oriented*. “To disorient” is defined in the Oxford English Dictionary as “to cause one to ‘lose one’s bearings;’ to disconcert.”<sup>63</sup> If orientation describes a process of coming to

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<sup>62</sup> Maurice Merleau-Ponty, *Phenomenology of Perception*, trans. Colin Smith (London: Routledge & Kegan Paul Ltd, 1962), 247.

<sup>63</sup> *Oxford English Dictionary*, online ed., s.v. “disorient.”

know the spaces one occupies, then disorientation is what we experience before we become familiar with our surroundings, or what we experience when our surroundings change. In a state of disorientation, we are in the midst of the process of orienting ourselves, and we are forced to find new anchoring points in space. Disorientation is, therefore, a matter of remaining unresolved in our relationships to the space and objects around us.

While spatial orientation and disorientation describe the states of our relationships to the spaces around us, the ramifications of these orientations expand much farther than mere descriptions of spatial relationships. In *Queer Phenomenology: Orientations, Objects, Others*, Sara Ahmed characterizes orientation and disorientation as forces that shape our bodies. In this endless effort to situate itself in the world, she writes:

The body gets directed in some ways more than others... [and these] turns are repeated over time; bodies acquire the very shape of their direction. It is not that bodies simply have a direction, or that they follow directions, in moving this way or that. Rather, in moving this way, rather than that, and moving in this way again and again, the surfaces of bodies *in turn* acquire their shape. Bodies are ‘directed’ and they take the shape of this direction.<sup>64</sup>

Ahmed offers the example of the writer taking the form of “one who writes” as he or she turns his or her body toward the writing desk.<sup>65</sup> The activity of writing gives the writer his or her shape and identity. Likewise, in their attraction to other people of their same sex, gay men and lesbians take the form of homosexuals. Further, in being drawn towards objects and clothing typically associated with genders that do not align with their biological sex, gender variant people embody a range of gender identities. Each direction we face as sexual and gendered beings, therefore, shapes our bodies and characterizes our identities. Our continued orientations toward other people as objects of sexual desire produce our identities relative to our sexual orientations, and the clothing and gendered objects we gravitate toward shape our gender identities.

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<sup>64</sup> Ahmed, 15-16.

<sup>65</sup> Ibid, 30. She gives this example via Husserl.

For Ahmed, the word “orientation” within the term “sexual orientation” not only describes the genders we are typically sexually or romantically attracted to; it also describes the directions we turn in order to form gender identities and intimate relationships with others in the world:

It is not simply that we have [sexual orientation]. To become straight means that we not only have to turn toward the objects that are given to us by heterosexual culture, but also that we must ‘turn away’ from objects that take us off this line. The queer subject within straight culture hence deviates and is made socially present as deviant.<sup>66</sup>

Sexual orientation is therefore as much a matter of who or what we direct our attention toward as it is a matter of whom or what we do not direct our attention toward. These directions shape our positioning in the world relative to dominant models of sexual orientation. Queer children become deviant when they want to wear clothing that does not match the gender associated with their biological sex. Queer adolescents become deviant as they begin to develop crushes on kids of their same gender while most of their peers are interested in kids of opposite genders. These children and adolescents become queer as the objects they are drawn towards (clothes or other people) fall outside of those that most of their peers pursue.

To become queer, the queer subject, therefore, turns toward objects that are not presented within a dominant culture. The queer subject is twisted in space, relative to “straight” orientations. Ahmed writes: “queer, which comes from the Indo-European word ‘twist,’ is, after all, a spatial term, which then gets translated into a sexual term, a term for a twisted sexuality that does not follow a ‘straight line,’ a sexuality that is bent and crooked.”<sup>67</sup> The queer subject turns away from those objects and becomes twisted, divergent and deviant (in the sense that “deviant” is rooted in “to deviate from”) relative to the directions most other people are facing. The queer subject is oriented differently than straight subjects.

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<sup>66</sup> Ibid, 21.

<sup>67</sup> Ibid, 67.

Early on, the word “queer” was used as an epithet for homosexuals and for people who dressed and behaved in ways that were typically associated with people of their opposite sex. This pejorative use is largely rooted the definition of queer as: “strange, odd, peculiar, eccentric; of questionable character; suspicious, dubious.”<sup>68</sup> Queers were considered abnormal. Same-sex attraction and gender deviance was thought to be an indicator of mental illness.<sup>69</sup> Michel Foucault describes this as rooted in the normalization of sex in the later seventeenth century:

The legitimate and procreative couple laid down the law. The couple imposed itself as a model, enforced the norm, safeguarded the truth, and reserved the right to speak while retaining the principle of secrecy. A single locus of sexuality was acknowledged in social space as well as at the heart of every household, but it was a utilitarian and fertile one: the parents’ bedroom.<sup>70</sup>

Relationships between people of opposite sexes became the benchmark for proper or normative sexuality.<sup>71</sup> Deviations from this benchmark model were criminalized and pathologized. By the 1980’s, however, the negative connotations that the word “queer” carried with it began to shift. Gay and lesbian groups like ACT UP and Gran Fury uses the word to describe themselves as they waged campaigns that fiercely criticized the United States federal government for ignoring AIDS as it was killing swaths of gay men across the country. In reclaiming the word “queer,” gays, lesbians and gender variant people turned it from a pejorative to a term that unified a community.

When straight orientations are used as the model against which all other genders and sexualities are defined, Ahmed asserts that the queer subject is *dis*-oriented within heteronormative cultures. Ahmed’s assertion of queerness as a kind of disorientation is built upon theorist Eve Sedgwick’s framework of a queer identity as a liberatory and productive alternative to heterosexual regimes. In her 1993 book *Tendencies*, Sedgwick characterizes the very idea of

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<sup>68</sup> *Oxford English Dictionary*, online ed., s.v. “queer.”

<sup>69</sup> Homosexuality was first listed in the American Psychiatric Association’s Diagnostic and Statistical Manual of Mental Disorders in 1952.

<sup>70</sup> Foucault, *History of Sexuality*, 101.

<sup>71</sup> *Ibid*, 41.

queerness as a refusal to adhere to confining models of identity and as a celebration of plurality within gender and sexual identity. She describes queer as referring to “the open mesh of possibilities, gaps, overlaps, dissonances and resonances, lapses and excesses of meaning when the constituent elements of anyone’s gender, of anyone’s sexuality aren’t made (or *can’t be* made) to signify monolithically.”<sup>72</sup> For Sedgwick, queer describes a complex identity that is formed through more than one guiding model, that includes both alignment and misalignment with others and that is more about possibility than it is about concrete definition. By articulating queerness as a productive category of identity, Sedgwick introduces language through which queerness become its own ideal (or perhaps anti-ideal), rather than an identity that can only be described through its failure to meet dominant ideals of normative genders and heterosexuality.

In *Queer Phenomenology*, Ahmed sets out to build a relationship between discourses on queerness and phenomenology. In the process, she characterizes queerness as a productive form of disorientation that opens new possibilities for queer lives and social identities. Ahmed’s notion of queerness embraces a failure to align with dominant models of social and cultural identity not limited to gender and sexuality, but that include in equal measure experiences of racial, ethnic and cultural difference and inequity. She describes the failure to orient towards a heterosexual model as a productive embodiment of disorientation within gender and sexuality. She also describes racial, ethnic and cultural identities that are deemed distant, foreign and outside of the purview of whiteness to be productively disoriented within dominant Western social and political ideologies. Within this framework, disorientation itself becomes a way of situating ourselves in the world that opens new possibilities for alternative futures outside of the limitations of heterosexuality, normative gender presentations and racial hegemony.

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<sup>72</sup> Eve Sedgwick, *Tendencies* (Durham: Duke University Press, 1993), 8.

Disoriented queer subjects deviate from these models, and they can be described as having lost their way within a world of straight, white orientations. Ahmed frames the notion of losing our way as not a devastating loss of direction, but as a means of finding ways of being in the world that we do not yet know:

We talk about losing our way as well as finding our way. And this is not simply a reference to moments when we can't find our way to this or that destination; when we are lost in the streets, or in rooms that are unfamiliar; when we don't know how we have gotten where it is that we are. We can also lose our direction in the sense that we lose our aim or purpose: disorientation is a way of describing the feelings that gather when we lose our sense of who it is that we are. Such losses can be converted into the joy of a future that has been opened up.<sup>73</sup>

Disorientation enables us to conceive of ourselves beyond what we can imagine within the models of orientation we see around us. This productive disorientation enables us to make room for alternative futurities and new ways of conceiving of ourselves in the world. In thinking of queerness as disorientation, we find the freedom to explore new ways of defining our gender identities (or not defining them), engage in intimate relationships and sexual activities with people of all genders if we want, and sustain our cultural identities according to other structures we would rather follow. We are empowered to imagine new ways of turning our bodies in ways that originate in our own desires, curiosities and histories rather than models of normative orientations. Queerness as disorientation allows us to live lives that are not possible through adherence to traditional and dominant models of sexual, gender and cultural identities.

Using Ahmed's articulation of queerness as a position defined by disorientation, we become more than just disoriented subjects of *W-120301*; we become queer subjects while we are within range of its influence. Engaging with the apparatus of *W-120301*, we come to reside in the disorientation rather than residing in a place where our orientation is clearly legible in the space around us. As our vision is directed in ways that leave us lost in the world around us, our

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<sup>73</sup> Ahmed, 20.

experiences with the work echo experiences of queer orientations within a world of straight orientations. We embody a queer disorientation within the scope of this work; we use it to find new ways of understanding how we are positioned within the world around us. We become queer subjects as we look through the apparatus.

The experience of fruitful disorientation within a queer identity parallels the expansive disorientation we experience looking through the apertures of *W-120301*. *W-120301* twists our view of the architectural conditions around us. It directs our vision towards spaces that we cannot otherwise face, and it splits our vision in a way that leaves us unsure of which way to turn. Our sense of orientation in space dissolves as we look through the apertures of *W-120301*. The work never directs us back toward a position of stable orientation. *W-120301* keeps us disoriented throughout our experience with it. The apparatus disrupts our understanding of the space around us, and it leaves us disoriented as we endlessly try to regain a sense of where we stand within it.

The experiences we have with the disorienting effects of *W-120301* also mirror the innumerable disarming, dizzying and often negative experiences of disorientation in public space that comes with being an LGBT person or a person who is not white in a hetero-, gender and Anglo- normative culture. Needing to use the bathroom, for example, can generate feelings of instability and of being out of place in public spaces for transgender, genderqueer, butch, or otherwise gender variant people. Simply deciding which bathroom to enter takes some thought, and unless a unisex, single-stall bathroom is available, none of the options are well suited for such individuals. Whichever space a person chooses can have its own set of challenges. Entering a women's room, butch or transgender women can receive hostile looks and comments from other women, or entering a men's restroom transgender men can stir up fears of assault or even arrest. For black men in another example, simply walking down a city street can bring attention from police or other people that generate feelings of instability and of being out of place in public

space. These dis-orientations make using public space tricky. Not only do these queer bodies appear to be out of alignment with the expectations that are built into these spaces, but they also have to twist (or closet) their own orientations to fit within and successfully move through them.

In producing experiences of disorientation that are similar to experiences that queer bodies have in gendered space and cultures regulated by white, heteronormative standards, can the disoriented subject in *W-120301* be called a queer subject? Because the roots of the very idea of queerness are in the act of twisting or turning away from that which is typical and *W-120301* twists our visual perception of space in a way that disorients us within it, it seems as though it can. Queerness is a matter of alignment, or misalignment, and that misalignment produces disorientation whatever the context might be. Whether a subject is out of alignment with a social structure or a physical structure, the disorientations that are produced look and feel very much the same.

Though we might become queer subjects relative to *W-120301*, the queerness that is produced within *W-120301* is not in our bodies, the material of the work, nor is the duration of its effect entirely certain. The queerness of our experiences within *W-120301* resides in our *experiences*. Queerness in *W-120301* resides in the disorienting effects it produces for us as we look through its apertures. Furthermore, in rendering us its queer subjects, *W-120301* is not itself a queer object nor does it produce a “queer space.” The physical object of the apparatus incites questions about our relationships to space, not its own relationship to the architecture around it. The effects of these questions are not found in that architecture; they are found in our experiences. These experiences put us in strange positions that force us to find our way in a visual environment that impedes familiar orientations. Queerness emerges in *W-120301* via these disorienting experiences we have within the museum’s architecture, and this is what renders us queer subjects within its purview.

Posing the question of whether *W-120301* produces a queer subject leads to a further question about how lasting these effects might be. When we leave the space of the work and the museum, are we still queer subjects of *W-120301*, or do we return to a normative orientation? What would that normative orientation be within the framework of *W-120301*? What would it mean to remain a disoriented queer subject in the world, despite the specifics of our gender or sexual identities? Can the viewer of a work of art be its subject even when the viewer is no longer viewing it? These questions will remain open, as the very notion of what queerness is remains open. Queerness is itself about possibility, and *W-120301* leaves open the possibility for the continuation of its effects or their closure at the end of our experiences with it.

Other questions that arise about bringing spatial disorientation together with queer orientations will also remain open: Can we think about queerness as a phenomenon detached from an actual queer body? Do all experiences of disorientation equate to queer experiences? These are important questions, as they require us to think about the limits of queerness and the implications our use of the term and notions have on our experiences with other people and spaces in the world. Queerness is, after all, not merely a matter of how we appear to others in the world around us. Queerness is more deeply a matter of how we experience the world when our own orientations do not fall in line with those built into the physical and social structures within which we reside. Queerness is an experience, not an image. *W-120301* makes that experience accessible to people in ways that works rooted in objects and representation can.

Theorists like Jose Muñoz, Jack Halberstam and Sara Ahmed have built upon the works of Judith Butler and Eve Sedgwick to create a queer discourse that goes beyond describing queer bodies and relationships. Their collective projects have shown queerness to be a nuanced experience wrought with generative possibility that goes far beyond simple comparisons to cisgender heterosexuality. Works that produce queerness outside of representations of bodies,

relationships and political histories have the potential to turn these ideas into corporeal experiences that foster understanding of queerness through visual and phenomenological experiences. Articulating the queer subject position in *W-120301*, therefore, creates important new connections between art, architecture and queer discourse. Works like *W-120301* also have the potential to generate new questions about the spatial and visual implications of queerness that queer discourse has only just begun to address.

## *Conclusion*

To be queer means to be situated outside of normative social structures and boundaries of identity. Queerness expands beyond particular physical characteristics of a given identity to address the positionality of being counter to or outside of a dominant social structure, and, because of this, queerness cannot be clearly represented through figurative representation. Figurative representation, by definition, focuses on the appearance of a body and uses it to deliver an idea or story about that body. To use figurative representation as the only means of representing queerness first limits the focus of queerness in art to the gender and while leaving out the racial, ethnic and cultural qualities Ahmed includes, and second, it inadvertently leaves out the nuances of experience that come with a queer existence within a white, hetero- and gender normative social context. Works of art that cause viewers to experience these sensations rather than witness them come much closer to addressing the sensations of being out of place, deviant, perverted, strange, or motivated to move toward objects outside of dominant social expectations.

While this project suggests that *W-120301* is an example of how a work of art can put viewers in queer positions rather than just showing them queer images, it is certainly not the only work that can challenge viewers' sense of spatial and social orientation in this way. Artist David Hammons' 2002 work *Concerto in Black and Blue* asks viewers to find their way through a series of empty gallery spaces with only the use of a small blue light to guide them. The rooms of the gallery space are dark and cavernous. The voices of viewers echo through the empty rooms as they talk to each other and move through them. In a recording for the art blog *Studio 360*, when asked if he found anything in the gallery space, one viewer said "Nothing. Absolutely nothing. I

just felt very lonely.”<sup>74</sup> Another pair of viewers was recorded as they debated whether the work of art was the blue light, or if they were, themselves, the work’s focus.<sup>75</sup> Yet another viewer described the strange sensation of looking for art on the walls but continually finding that looking at an object is not the point of the work.<sup>76</sup>

This work creates a queer experience for viewers as it thwarts their expectations for what they should find in an art gallery. The pervasive darkness and the intermediate blue light makes the dynamics of the space viewers occupy indeterminable, and the cavernous sound of the space envelops viewers in a way that makes the space feel endless. Like *W-120301, Concerto* is not about spectatorship. It is not about looking at another person, perceiving their form and discerning their story or their experience. It is about participation. It is about having an experience of one’s own. Also like *W-120301, Concerto* is not about objects; it’s about viewers. The only objects involved in the work are the little blue lights that viewers carry around with them to navigate their way through empty and partially invisible space. In *How to Look at Art in Total Darkness*, Darby English remarked “to perceive the work, one had literally to become a part of it, all the while carefully negotiating a physically demanding circumstance.”<sup>77</sup>

For English, *Concerto* engages blackness on both a phenomenological and relational level:

*Concerto*’s... blackness falls outside and between bodies and peoples and cultures... In the important conceptual space *Concerto* opens up, we find a remarkably capacious blackness: quite literally discolored, comingled with its contraries, contradictorily populated, the yield of a certain theatricalization. As art, then, *Concerto* accounts for blackness only insofar as it is relationally defined and erratically constituted in the social...<sup>78</sup>

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<sup>74</sup> *Studio 360 – Concerto in Black and Blue*, podcast audio, *Concerto in Black and Blue*, MP3, 00:13-00:16, accessed May 7, 2015,

<http://www.studio360.org/story/116168-concerto-in-black-and-blue/>

<sup>75</sup> *Ibid*, 00:26-00:33.

<sup>76</sup> *Ibid*, 00:40-00:48.

<sup>77</sup> Darby English, *How to Look at Art in Total Darkness* (Boston: MIT Press, 2007), 1.

<sup>78</sup> *Ibid*, 2.

Though Hammons' oeuvre consists of work that address the materiality and visual history of blackness in the United States, the blackness in *Concerto* is not in its material. English argues that the blackness of this particular piece is found in the dark, empty space that separates bodies and that disappears with the presence of light. Blackness in *Concerto* becomes ungraspable, hidden and easily erased. Viewers feel this as they watch the erasure of darkness that comes with the movement of the small blue lights they carry. They feel the volatility of black identity and they continuously bump up against its irreparable outsider position.

English's articulation of the social and capacious roots of blackness is precisely the approach to identity that this project takes to queerness. In *How to Look at Art in Total Darkness*, English embarks on an investigation of the boundaries that surround the works of black artists with regard to the knowledge and histories they are assumed to address. He looks at ways that black artists are often tied a very limited scope of cultural ideologies and experiences, and he argues that these limitations act as a "repressive regime[s] targeting the work's right to difference."<sup>79</sup> English makes much needed room to legitimize black artists outside of cliché's of African-American art.<sup>80</sup> This project argues that many notions of what constitutes queer art have a similarly choking effect on the breadth and depth of queer experiences. By suggesting that queerness exists outside of figurative representation, this project seeks to make room for subtle and deeply experiential approaches to queer identity that are begging to be made visible.

Reading *W-120301* through a queer phenomenological lens shows that queerness is not just about what bodies look like; queerness is rather about experiences of being in constant transition, opposition and negotiation with social and ideological apparatuses. Queer artists like Micha Cárdenas and Graham Coreil-Allen recognize this and produce works that resist the

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<sup>79</sup> Ibid, 9.

<sup>80</sup> Ibid, 7.

dominant modes of existing in space, both real and virtual. Micha Cárdenas' work is largely concerned with investigating the ways technology extends the body, asking why some technologies are supported while others are suppressed and expanding the relationship between queerness and technology. In her 2008 work titled *Becoming Dragon*, she immerses herself in the online three-dimensional world of Second Life and takes the form of a dragon avatar named Azdel Slade via a motion-capture system for three hundred and sixty-five hours. Viewers can both watch her performance in real time and space and interact with her avatar in Second Life. With this project, Cárdenas questions the requirement that transgender people live for three hundred and sixty-five consecutive days as their chosen gender before they are allowed gender reassignment surgery and to make the experience of transition accessible to viewers through a condensed and virtual platform.<sup>81</sup> Though viewers are not themselves living as the avatar Cárdenas creates, this project gives viewers the opportunity to engage with the queer space she creates and makes queer experiences visible to audiences outside of representations of human figures.

Graham Coreil-Allen also gives viewers the opportunity to engage with space in a new way and to have queer experiences in space by orchestrating poetically scripted tours of mundane urban spaces in order to reactivate a sense of pedestrian freedom and connection within them. *New Public Sites* is the moniker he has given to these projects. By bringing his participants to abandoned lots, vacant freeway underpasses and ambiguously delineated intersections, Coreil-Allen disorients their relationship public space, demonstrates new ways of moving through it and to names these spaces in a way that enables them to claim these spaces as their own. Like *W-120301*, *New Public Sites* is a participatory project that upends normative perceptions of space by

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<sup>81</sup> "TEDxDelMar 2012 Micha Cardenas – The Transreal: Our Networked Bodies," YouTube video, 4:08, posted by Kenan Azam, February 6, 2014, <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=3dRZGIsRhQY>.

bringing viewer attention to the structural devices that frame their perceptions of the world around them and present them with ways of undermining the limitations they impose.

Works like those of Hammons, Cárdenas and Coreil-Allen give further examples beyond *W-120301* of how queerness can be found in contemporary art outside of representation, and they demonstrate the importance and timely presence of the questions this paper asks. These questions seek to create space within discourses in contemporary art to think about identity in new ways and to give attention to the subject-shaping influence of space and place. Locating queerness outside of figurative representation shows that queerness is not just about bodies; it is about experiences: experiences of disorientation, of confusion and of finding oneself lost in radically new territories. Works that provoke these experiences enable viewers to have queer sensations for themselves and perhaps find their own sense of productive disorientation while also deepening cultural understandings of queerness in ways that images alone cannot.

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