Visual Enquiry 1

Jacqueline Anne Morgan - 1807554
BA Documentary Photography & Visual Activism

We the spectators, creators and critics are connected and limited by sites. A physical formation of places and spaces that exhibit our existence, we are governed by them both externally and internally. A site that intensely resonates with us, an essential social norm that takes pride of place on our mind's mantlepiece is the 'Home'. The 'Home' is a site which has no real place. But it is a site that has a general relation of direct or inverted analogy with a real space of Society and the spectacle. A site with a subjective map and mould, one which we consider ours, we take ownership of and responsibility for, it's purpose is multifunctional and conceptual, we use it as a base of comfort and commodity but it is also a place that enables us to survive within the natural world and thrive. It can also be used as direct reflection and representation of who and what we are, a place that connects us directly to our past, grounds us to our present and innervates our future; mutually actualizing our reality and identity. This site provides a common kinship and global sense of place, this is where we are first influenced by culture, education and connection and where we experience what we conceive as our understanding of the world.

"Places do not have boundaries in the sense of divisions which frame simple enclosures. 'Boundaries' may be of course be necessary, for the purposes of certain types of studies for instance, but they are not necessary for the conceptualization of place itself. Definition in this sense does not have to be through simple counter position to the opposite; it can come, in part, precisely through particularly of linkage to that 'outside' which it therefore itself part of what constitutes the place. This helps get away from the common association which makes invasion by newcomers so threatening." (Massay, 1991)

What I intend to address, and protest are the psychological social constructs that we inherit and the objectification of life through time and space. Our personal perceptions of what, where and who we define as 'Home' is orientated by our conception of space and place, this is in reference to the subjective and objective interpretations that we conceptualise based on precursory influences and development. Take, for example, the social construct that is the 'ideal home'; a personalised, constitutional preconception passed down through western ideological generations that is posed as a form of a tick off the necessity list to be societally accepted and considered as successful. It is only within these confines that you will find fine-print guidelines that propose idealised perfection in the form of family structures and inhabitable infrastructures. Both of which are greatly influenced by difference in environment, culture, heritage and economy but fundamentally constitute the possibilities of inequality and injustice.

"The politics of place is layered with emotional and aesthetic resonance that is hard to analyse. Its reciprocal nature is better expressed within a circle than on (a) line. 'Around here' is a circular radiating notion/motion. (Out there) is a line of sight, the view. Sitting at one's local centre, the pressing questions are about how to relate it to the peripheries. Or are the centre and the periphery indistinguishable, and if so, where does one stop and the other start? (Boundaries originally meant bonds rather than separations.) A multicentred society, understood as such (rather than a dysfunctional society that will never find its home) might bring with it a new understanding of difference that comes from inside, and from experience of very different landscapes and histories." (Lippard, 1995)

The age of modernism and post-modernism brought us new ideological thinkers, theories and awareness that has discouraged and therefore created discourse within these pre-set ideals, consequently creating cultural impact and affecting the way we now live. Ultimately it has broken the boundaries of social construct and bestowed confidence and comfort within non-conformity, but it is merely an integral starting point in the campaign against the depleting utopian and totalitarian society restrained by capitalist systems. The severity of our situation is hidden behind the spectacle and what I aspire to do is create a situation through a vulnerable lens, using the 'paranoia-critical' method to provoke reflexivity and connection in the spectator. The prominence of the site is to invoke a place of vulnerability.

"The construction of situations begins beyond the ruins of the modern spectacle. It is easy to see how much the very principle of the spectacle – non-intervention – is linked to the alienation of the old world. Conversely, the most pertinent revolutionary experiments in culture have sought to break the spectators' psychological identification with the hero so as to draw them into activity. The situation is thus designed to be lived by its constructors. The role played by a passive or merely bit-part playing 'public' must constantly diminish, while that played by those who cannot be called actors, but rather, in a new sense of the term, 'livers', must steadily increase." (Debord, 1958)

'The ideal bourgeois family (called middle class in the USA, Victorian in England, Biedermeier in Germany, and other names in other places) begins with the nuclear family: parents living together and sharing responsibility for their children and for each other. In addition to being a nuclear family, the bourgeois family has the following characteristics: an emphasis on high moral standards, especially in sexual matters; an enormous interest in the welfare of children, especially their proper education; the inculcation of values and attitudes conducive to economic success and personal responsibility; at least the appearance of religious faith; a devotion to the "finer things" in life, especially in the arts; a sense of obligation to redress or alleviate conditions perceived as morally offensive. [7][1]

'This set up, in which the income of only two workers is supposed to finance and maintain the lives of four or more people is what drives our economy and maintains capitalism. By separating citizens into small families supported by only two adults, capitalism is able to force employees to work in less than desirable conditions. Workers at the head of nuclear families often cannot afford to demand fair treatment because they have families who rely on them to have consistent incomes. By creating a society that is so divided, capitalism forces us into a family plan that requires workers at all times. A recent survey conducted in 2016 by the Bureau of Labour reveals that "Among married-couple families, both the husband and wife were employed in 48.0 percent of families." This statistic is so high out of necessity; nuclear family guardians do not have the economic freedom to choose if or when they want to work. The nuclear family structure is setup to ensure that there will always be labour for the system. Each nuclear family is a miniature replica of the major capitalist structure that we live in; this is necessary for our capitalist society to run as it currently does. If the structure of the family were to change and become malleable, citizens would have more freedom, especially in regard to their supply of labour.

My research began with my unprocessed response to and representations of the site. This was a film-reel like recollection devoted to and surrounding one object in particular; the kitchen/dining table. The kitchen table has acted as a direct symbol and been a feature of importance in reference to the 'Home' and our perception of it. We resonate as a united culture when it comes to sitting around a dinner table and eating a meal, it is something that is embedded in our earliest memories and a specific space that we can identify with through time. The table isn't only a foundation of time and place, but also an evolution of culture and its diversity and our relationship to that.

'The Greeks were among the first to recognize that eating in secluded comfort reinforced status and class cohesion. Elite men of the most powerful *poleis* gathered on fragrant evenings in rooms especially designed for feasting. Ancient Romans similarly took their meals in a special room called a *triclinium*; whose couches had evolved to accommodate women as well as men. Whim and the season determined their location. In the stifling Mediterranean summers they were chosen for their ability to catch breezes; in winter, to block drafts. Some of them might offer a view of the sea; others, vast plains. The Romans sometimes even set up their dining rooms outdoors in order to enjoy al fresco their swallow's tongues and other delicacies. The most luxurious dining spaces bred ease and amazement in equal measure. *Triclinia* in Pompeii featured fountains from which water splashed and streamed from each table. Guests of one Loreius Tiburtinus plucked tidbits from large basins in rooms bearing brightly painted images of mythological figures.'

'Comfort grew with increased trade, and with it changed notions of home and hearth. Parlours, "dining chambers," and other spaces amenable to dining began appearing in architecture plans. Each nation seemed to have its own idea as to what constituted a proper dining room. The great Renaissance architect Leon Battista Alberti wrote that it "should be entered off the bosom of the house," advising further that, "[a]s use demands, there should be [a dining room] for summer, one for winter, and one for middling seasons." Some two centuries later Englishman William Sanderson would recommend that a "Dyning-Roome" be hung with pictures of kings and queens.'

"Comfort is the only thing our civilization can give us." –Oscar Wilde

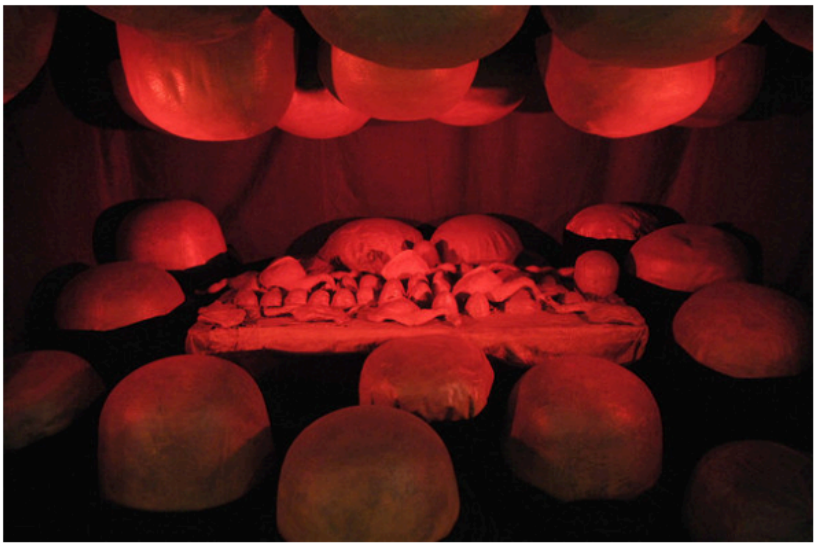
'For all the talk of appointments fit for royalty, perfection of the dining room came only with the rise of a middle class. Between 1350 and 1560 people began to eat and live better, thanks in part to greater availability of meat and dairy products in the wake of the Black Death, and to the development of a market economy. Where meat and milk abounded labour was scarce. Pay went up as a result. In some parts of England, for example, laborers saw their wages grow four or fivefold in just a few years. The workers of Cuxham Manor in Oxfordshire went from earning two shillings a week in 1347 to more than 10 shillings a week three years later.'

'With higher wages came increased consumption of goods, among them furniture and cooking utensils. In time there developed a culture peculiar to the newly affluent. One of this culture's hallmarks, the dining room offered a place where family members could discretely enjoy each other's company. As such, it reflected what Italian theorist Mario Praz calls *Stimmung*, a German word that denotes the sense of intimacy and personal character evoked by a room's arrangement and decor. Victorians would take *Stimmung* to an often unbelievably cluttered extreme. They spent lavishly on their dining rooms, outfitting them with upholstered chairs, mahogany sideboards, pewter jugs, bone china, linen napkins and tablecloths, and silver cutlery. They read architectural guides and kitchen utensil catalogues as thick as phonebooks. Mealtime for them was an event, and they staged the satisfaction of their appetites in surroundings as comfortable as they could afford.'

"Is it progress if a cannibal uses knife and fork?" –Stanislaw Lec

"There are families in which few meals are completed ... without some member leaving the table in tears, anger, or disgrace." While many enjoy their time with family at the dinner table, it is also a space where one can freely air one's grievances to other family members. These kinds of dinners are accepted — and even celebrated — by a modern sensibility.

For example, artist Louise Bourgeois' 1974 sculpture ***The Destruction of the Father*** represents a violent reaction to the kind of dinner idealized in ***A Date with Your Family***. As Bourgeois frequently described the work:



"This piece is basically a table, the awful, terrifying family dinner table headed by the father who sits and gloats. ... The mother, of course, tries to satisfy the tyrant, her husband. The children are full of exasperation. ... So in exasperation we grabbed the man, threw him onto the table, dismembered him and proceeded to devour him."

'Anti-patriarchal cannibalism may not occur at most tables, but everyone can relate to a mid-dinner outburst.'

'Film and television also revel in the less-than-docile nature of modern family dinners, which make for perfect theatre. Take, for example, the tense dinner scene in ***American Beauty***, or family dinner scenes in ***The Sopranos***, which rarely pass without a disagreement of some kind. Victorian Americans may not have envisioned this kind of behaviour when they made the dining table a pillar of social values, but the beauty of the family dinner is that, time and again, it proves that family dynamics cannot be controlled. The dining table has become a stage for all kinds of human emotion — even discontent.'

Around 1922-1925, André Derain painted a series of great still life representing kitchen utensils and characterised by a static construction and dark hues where the colour brown dominates. This *Table de cuisine [Kitchen Table]* is one of the most important in the series; it was displayed and reproduced starting in 1927 and quickly gained success. Art critics in the 1930s drew similarities between this still life and Caravaggio's paintings (1571-1610) marked by contrasts of light and dark.

‘For centuries in Italy — the cradle of Renaissance masters — women with artistic talent were not allowed to enter academies. And the names of the few female artists from centuries past have mostly faded into oblivion.
During the Renaissance, Falcone says, "Women didn't have citizenship. They couldn't produce art as a profession. They couldn't issue invoices. They couldn't study anatomy." So, she says, "No in-the-nude figures, for example, because it just wasn't considered appropriate. The inability to study in the same forum as male artists is very significant." And yet the artists persisted. A few Italian women were able to study painting in their fathers' studios — most notably Artemisia Gentileschi, daughter of the 17th century painter Orazio Gentileschi.

AWA is responsible for restoring David and Bathsheba, one of her paintings that was found after being hidden in a Florentine palazzo's attic for 3 1/2 centuries.
The group also rediscovered a 21-ft.-long canvas depicting 13 life-size males — the only known Last Supper painted by a woman. It is by the 16th century Dominican nun Plautilla Nelli — whose workshop was inside a convent in Florence.

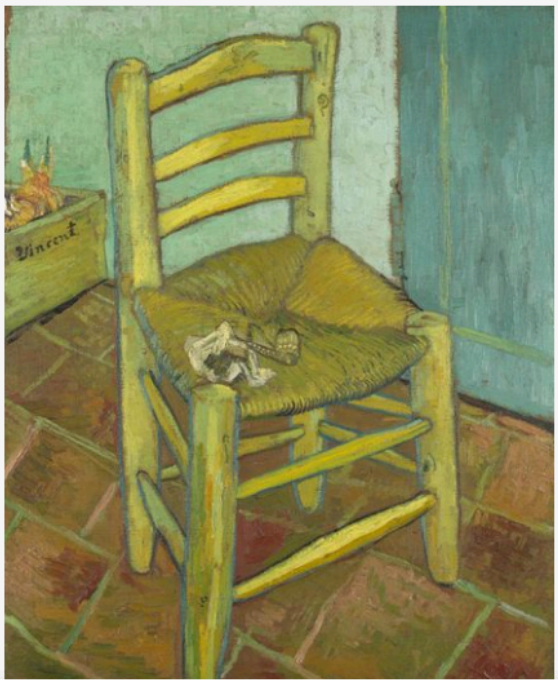
Florence has a long Last Supper painting tradition. But, says Falcone, most of the works are static. "Whereas," she says, "Nelli actually chooses sort of the key moment in which Christ announces his betrayal. And you have all of the apostles feeling the emotion of that very serious news. And so she is able to do a study of their responses, of their psychological responses." And, unlike most Last Suppers by male artists, Nelli puts food on the table, says Falcone. "She has lettuce, she has salt cellars, a lot of wine, bread for every apostle and knives and forks and beans and lamb — she did a Last Supper were people were meant to eat, first of all," she says.’

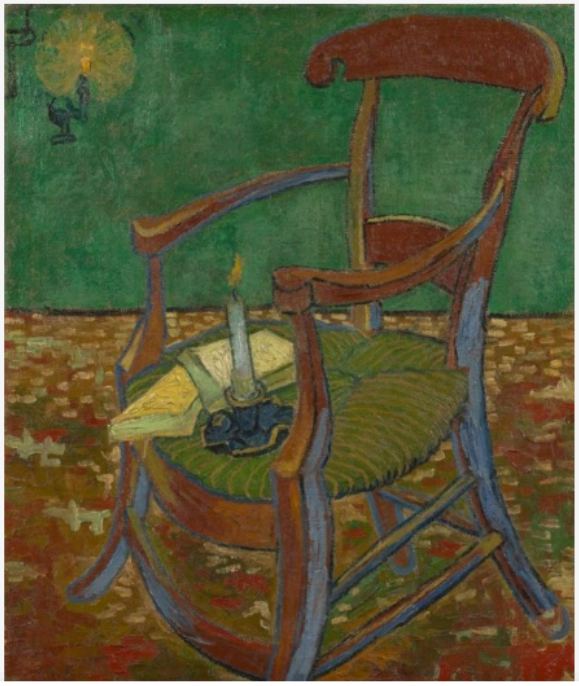
‘It is significant that the table is at the centre of religious practices - in Judaism, in the home, in Christianity, at the altar - and our language of course is replete with metaphors using tables as proverbial meeting places and negotiating platforms. We put a deal on the table. We drink someone under the table - and then we turn the tables on them. The table is the place where we interact with others - with family, friends, colleagues, rivals - and enemies.
The value of a table, like all pieces of furniture, lies in its history. We might make it, but furniture in turn makes us. It shapes us, defines us, and determines our everyday lives.’

‘Furniture contains numerous traces of what we are and who we are and who we think we are. Cupboards, for example, contain our past - as well as our regrets and secrets. Keys which fit no locks, pieces of paper with obsolete phone numbers and pin numbers written on them, stray playing cards, inexplicable plastic things and old French francs. Why we keep any of this stuff I do not know, except as something to hand on to our own children, to keep in cupboards of their own - our endless inheritance of waste.

Furniture also has an emblematic and symbolic function - think of Van Gogh's famous paintings of two chairs, Gauguin's chair and his own, which vividly represent what he imagined to be the difference between him and his friend. Gauguin's chair is a dark brown-red, with generous curved arm-rests, its seat loaded with books and with a candle set upon it, erect and flickering - an image of warmth, wealth, contentment, learning, potency and power. Van Gogh's chair, on the other hand, is yellow, plain and rickety - it looks very much as though it has been made by someone who could do with a little more practice on their mortise and tenon joints. It is a simple man's chair - a poor man, but an honest man.

The two chair paintings are his greatest and most innovative still life’s, after the Sunflowers. But for Van Gogh, empty chairs represented the person who would sit in them, so in a sense, they are equally portraits—telling us about the two artists who shared nine weeks together in the Yellow House in Arles. The chairs would have stood in the front sitting room, where Van Gogh and Gauguin gathered in the evenings after a long day at their easels. It was there that they would talk, and often argue, about the future of modern art.’





‘Emblematic of Dalí’s emerging Nuclear Mysticism, this large painting was the sixth in the series of monumental history canvases Dalí initiated in 1948, and it is the first to depart from their strictly religious subjects. Taking five months to prepare and paint, the composition is a post-atomic variation on Dutch artist Floris Van Schooten’s (1590-1655) *Table with Food* (1617). Dalí’s painting is shattered into individual objects that float and rotate in space, disintegrating yet held in a suspended balance. This process has also been termed corpuscular, describing how Dalí breaks down the composition into smaller particles.

This concept of space-time is illustrated in the halted motion and spatial separation of the objects in the painting. While it may appear chaotic initially because of the multitude of disparate objects, for the overall composition the objects obey a greater mathematical order derived from the golden section. Dalí was fascinated by *The Geometry of Art and Life*, a study of esthetic proportions by the Romanian mathematician, Matila Ghyka. Based on the golden section, these proportions define Dalí’s arrangements of objects, in turn providing a greater aesthetic unity to the contained chaos.’

‘By the time Dali painted this work, he had left Surrealism behind and was fully immersed in what he called "Nuclear Mysticism." Dali felt that the art of his contemporaries was spiritually barren, and he was determined to reanimate art with spirituality. He was convinced that the emerging theories of physics and molecular biology could reveal the mysteries of religion.’

‘In the first years of the atomic era following World War II, Dali was fully absorbed by scientific discovery and mathematical theory. This painting incorporates math and science in two ways. First, it illustrates that our world of solid objects is made of subatomic particles in constant motion. To visualize this, Dali chose to reinterpret a traditional still-life painting much as he did in The Basket of Bread thirty years earlier. Familiar still-life objects - a table, fruits and vegetables, a glass, a dish, and cutlery - circle each other in suspended animation. Though elements in the composition are in motion, there is a sense of suspended time. This is further reinforced by the title, "Nature Morte Vivante," a still life in motion.’

‘Dalí's major contribution to the Surrealist movement was what he called the "paranoiac-critical method," a mental exercise of accessing the subconscious to enhance artistic creativity. Dalí would use the method to create a reality from his dreams and subconscious thoughts, thus mentally changing reality to what he wanted it to be and not necessarily what it was. For Dalí, it became a way of life.’

‘The **paranoiac-critical method** is a surrealist technique developed by Salvador Dalí in the early 1930s. He employed it in the production of paintings and other artworks, especially those that involved optical illusions and other multiple images. The technique consists of the artist invoking a paranoid state (fear that the self is being manipulated, targeted or controlled by others). The result is a deconstruction of the psychological concept of identity, such that subjectivity becomes the primary aspect of the artwork.’

‘The surrealists related theories of psychology to the idea of creativity and the production of art. In the mid-1930s André Breton wrote about a "fundamental crisis of the object". The object began being thought of not as a fixed external object but also as an extension of our subjective self. One of the types of objects theorized in surrealism was the phantom object’.

‘According to Dalí, these objects have a minimum of mechanical meaning, but when viewed the mind evokes phantom images which are the result of unconscious acts.’

‘The paranoiac-critical arose from similar surrealistic experiments with psychology and the creation of images such as Max Ernst's frottage or Óscar Domínguez's decalcomania, two surrealist techniques, which involved rubbing pencil or chalk on paper over a textured surface and interpreting the phantom images visible in the texture on the paper.’

"My whole ambition in the pictorial domain is to materialize the images of my concrete irrationality with the most imperialist fury of precision..."

"Paranoiac-critical activity organizes and objectivizes in an exclusivist manner the limitless and unknown possibilities of the systematic association of subjective and objective 'significance' in the irrational..."

"..it makes the world of delirium pass onto the plane of reality"

- **Symbolism of Thorns**

‘Denoting sin, sorrow and hardship, the thorn is one of the most ancient symbols in the world; together with the ROSE, it represents pain and pleasure, and the thorn is an emblem of Christ's passion, as with the crown of thorns.’

‘What is probably the earliest recorded parable is Jotham’s parable of “The trees choosing a King.” The first tree to be offered this distinction was the Olive, but the Olive was concerned with the business of producing oil, and so the Vine was approached. The Vine was too busy producing wine, and eventually the Bramble was requested to accept the offer, and the Bramble having nothing better to do, affably agreed.‘Blackberries have multiple meanings across religious, ethnic and mythological realms. In all Celtic countries taboos attend the picking of blackberries; mid-Mediterranean folklore claims that Christ’s Crown of Thorns was made of blackberry runners. The deep colour of the berries represents Christ’s blood. They have been used in Christian art to symbolize spiritual neglect or ignorance. ‘‘Some folklore associates the blackberry with bad omens. European stories have claimed they are death fruits with ties to Wicca. They can also symbolize sorrow. In an old proverb they signify haste. A man is so excited to pick the berries that he jumps into the bush and the thorns cause him to lose his eyesight. He regains it, however, upon jumping back out of the bush.’‘Greek mythology contains a legend similar to this. When Bellerophon, a mortal, tries to ride Pegasus to Olympus, he falls and becomes blind and injured upon landing in a thorny bush. This is his punishment for trying to take the power of the gods. Therefore, the fruit also symbolizes arrogance.’

I feel as though inspired by my research I have pushed myself to experiment with different techniques, using different artists’ influences. This has enabled me to create an impassioned response, I’m unsure yet if it’s sentiment will be directly impactful as a body of work, maybe more as a technique to develop further. I feel as though my interpretation of the site is a starting point, I intend to look at other perspectives and evolve it into a body of work that I can exhibit, in what form yet I’m not sure.