

GOING PUBLIC: THE MODERN HERITAGE HOUSE ON DISPLAY

Hannah Lewi¹

¹ *University of Melbourne*

As modern twentieth century architecture ages and recedes into the realms of history, surviving examples have increasingly become accepted as valid additions to heritage inventories and protected sites.¹ In the particular case of modern houses deemed of significance, their 'embalming' as house museums for public display offers one kind of lifeline for future survival. The very act of preservation may be seen as antithetical to the ideals of modernist architecture; distinctive in its celebration of newness and ephemerality and its opposition to age and historicity. However the following account will not go down this now well trodden path analysing the paradoxes of conserving modernism.² And, as other commentators have pointed out, the conservation movement and modernism developed hand-in-hand, not merely as adversaries but rather more like antagonistic siblings, each with a different yet in some ways complementary response to progress.³ Nor is the particular program of conserving and restoring a modern house easily generalised as antithetical to the ideals of modernism; through their embalming and ongoing care, these houses can maintain some illusion of eternal youth and 'presentness' – not necessarily at odds with their original conception.

The public display of modern domestic exemplars also continues a number of modernism's central preoccupations. For instance, avant-garde and cubist movements experimented with the creation and staged display of interior modern rooms before and after WWI. And modern architects often exploited the genre of domestic display when showcasing radically new conceptions of living to a public audience: for example the display of designs at the Weissenhof Estate, Stuttgart in 1927; and the exhibition of novel pavilions at international expositions such as Charlotte Perriand's model modern apartment, shown at the Salon d'Automne in 1929. This custom of displaying experimental technologies for the home, and innovations for new lifestyles, gained further momentum in the mid-century through the likes of Buckminster Fuller's Dymaxion House, the Smithsons' 'House of the Future', and many other examples created for commercial technology developers.⁴

The genre of the house museum as a form of cultural display also has a long pedigree stretching back to seventeenth century antecedents of the 'open house'. Jeremy Aynsley has set out a useful taxonomy of three types of representations of rooms and interiors found in the twentieth century. First, there are ensembles taken from previous locations and reconstructed in museum interiors. These reconstructions place emphasis on the originality of the fabric that is seen as worthy of protection as a museum exhibit. Second, there are interiors that are preserved in their original locations as part of their extant architectural environs. These 'curated houses' may be part of a gallery or museum, owned by a heritage body or private foundation. Third, there are interiors that are drawn, filmed or modeled as representations through which to imagine or sell houses, furniture ensembles and so on.⁵ It is the second category of the 'curated house' or house museum that is of interest in this account. The basic functions of preservation, investigation and communication inherent in any museum can be found in a curated house. In a house museum, writes Magalay Cabral; 'the document (object/cultural asset) is the actual space/setting (the building), as well as the collection and the person who owned (or lived in) the house.'⁶ An understanding of the intimate relations between these three categories of setting, collection and owner are critical for the conservation, interpretation and display strategies adopted in house museums. Through a series of case studies of modern houses, the aim of this condensed summary of a larger research project is to tease out some of the connections between conservation, interpretation and display in these cases, alongside an understanding of the transformations enacted when houses pass from being loci of everyday living into sites of public display.⁷

The two main examples drawn from Australia are the Rose Seidler House in Sydney and Robin Boyd's Walsh Street house in Melbourne. The Rose Seidler House, designed by Harry Seidler in 1950 for his parents won the Sulman Medal for architecture in 1952. The building still maintains a significant place in the history of Australian modernism as a relatively early and provocatively European modern house. The property was gifted to the state in 1988, with the Historic Houses Trust of NSW maintaining a charter to manage it as a house museum. A full conservation plan for the building, contents and landscaping was prepared as part of this transfer to public ownership.⁸ Harry Seidler was involved in this process and key early decisions in the conservation and display of the property. The museum is open for regular public viewing, tours and functions. The second Australian case house was designed by Robin Boyd for his family in Melbourne in 1958. The status of this property is still presently under negotiation. It is currently under the care of the Robin Boyd Foundation which was formed in 2005 as a not-for-profit group dedicated to the promotion of design awareness, design literacy and design advocacy. The Foundation was constituted in a situation of some urgency when Boyd's widow offered the property for public sale in 2004, with the aim of transferring ownership to a public body that would take responsibility for the conservation and maintenance of the house and much of its contents. It is not envisaged that the Boyd house will function as a curated / museum house but rather will have a different management agenda of semi-public use associated with the promotion of design innovation.⁹

The Seidler and Boyd houses sit well within a comparable range of international case studies of modern house museums. In terms of the choice of these examples, this study is selective and based partly on opportunities of access. The English sites visited and closely examined to date include: 2 Willow Road in Hampstead London, designed by Erno Goldfinger (1939); the Homewood designed by Patrick Gwynne in Surrey (1938)¹⁰; and the Red House, Bexleyheath designed by Phillip Webb and William Morris (1853 - just squeaking in as Modern). All these properties are managed by the National Trust UK. Kettle's Yard, the former home of Jim Ede in Cambridge and now managed by the University of Cambridge as a house and art museum, comprises the final English example. Other European cases studied closely include the Sonneveld House Rotterdam, designed by the architects Brinkman and Van der Vlugt in 1933 restored under the auspices of the Stichting Volkskracht Historische Monumentum, and now managed by the Netherlands Architecture Institute in Rotterdam; and the Braem House Antwerp, 1958, now managed by the Flemish Government Heritage Department. Interviews were conducted with curators, managers and conservationists of these properties.

What unites these houses is that most were designed by the architects or designers themselves as their family residence and sometimes office, aside from the Sonneveld House which was commissioned by the industrialist client who also commissioned the famous Van Nelle Factory by the same architects in Rotterdam. Because of their basic similarities, their comparisons and subtle contradictions can be fruitfully drawn out. These comparisons centre on the aforementioned close relations between the buildings/ settings, collections and owners that have been critical for the implementation of conservation, interpretation, display and management strategies adopted in the house museums. This analysis places more emphases on the strategies of interpretation and management, and less on the details of their material conservation, which has been the focus of a number of other accounts.¹¹ However no one aspect can be examined in isolation, and the techniques and decisions surrounding material conservation are in many ways inseparable from those of interpretation and display management.¹² To order the following analysis, the themes of 'significance', 'completeness' and 'duration' are now outlined, followed by some concluding thoughts on the status of the houses as a particular form of public display and historical documentation.

Balancing Significance

The attribution of significance or value typically establishes a guiding program for the display and interpretation of properties. In the case of most modern houses, significance typically falls across on the one hand social and biographical value, and on the other architectural and design

significance. Some of the case study houses examined were intended, from their inception, as semi-public demonstrations of how life could be lived in innovative modern design, as well as private homes. Yet although these attributions of architectural and social significance are inevitably intertwined, they do instigate different and at times arguably conflicting curatorial strategies. Decisions around what emphasis to place on aspects of significance obviously depends in part on the pre-established architectural status of the property. For instance houses like Le Corbusier's Villa Savoye, or Gerrit Rietveld's Schroder House are heavily invested in the canonical narrative of modern international architecture, and have thereby called for less augmentation to evoke social significance and inhabitation in favour of architectural and design innovation.¹³ As a consequence these types of properties tend to project the somewhat stark ambiance of a 'young monument'.¹⁴

The caricature of the modern house as an unapproachable, even inhuman experiment, presents a dilemma for curators and managing heritage bodies. For example, curators from the National Trust UK assert that the general public finds it 'incredibly difficult to access architecture so needs other ways of understanding the property'.¹⁵ The austerity of neo-classical architecture and the abstraction of modernism are together attributed as occupying the pinnacle of such feelings of alienation: 'People respond more easily to painted interiors with light filtering through and its romantic associations'.¹⁶ However heritage bodies and curators appear keen to temper such public perceptions, and accordingly all the case study houses examined strive for some balance between the evocation of social or everyday interest and architectural value.

The striking of this balance to satisfy a range of visitors, all within the limits of time, space and resources for interpretation, issues challenges to curatorial agendas for modern house museums. The architectural specialist may prefer to see a modern house as a study in spatial form or design connoisseurship akin to a monochromatic photograph. However it is assumed that the general public simply would not visit at all without some other evocation of social interest. Despite the rhetoric of balance presented by organizations like the National Trust UK, these potential conflicts in visitor expectations of interpretation may ultimately be irreconcilable. As one conservation architect interviewed on this topic stated:

'Well I am a member of the National Trust, and I go around to their country houses. And always find the family story line is massively distracting. Before you get into the dining room – you are being told that that person is the seventeenth cousin of the Fourth Earl of somewhere. I don't care who it is. What I want to know is what are the proportions of this room, and what relationship does this bear to the grand tour, and what was it before ... The default position in the Trust's presentation is "so and so begat so and so". You know it has to be done. But I wonder with the modern stuff if there isn't more of an opportunity to offer some sort of alternative narrative as well.'¹⁷

In the modern house museums investigated in this research, specialist design knowledge has been somewhat subdued in interpretation and displays; eclipsed not by the traditional themes of grand histories, but more through the slightly voyeuristic communication of the former domestic life of the owners and their place in society. This social interest is often justified by and provided through an interest in the life of the architects who designed and occupied the houses their biographies become a hook for displays that can both illuminate the architecture and extend beyond it to conjure a sense of 'personality' that shapes how the houses are received.¹⁸ In some of the properties examined, conventional information boards about the life and importance of the architect-owners are placed in rooms around the houses. Willow Road has such a room with changing displays, and also a film, which is viewed on arrival in the converted garage that strongly conveys the architect's voice. Other houses show architectural interest, less through formal didactic signboards and more through the showing of the architect's personal office – as in Renaat Braem's home-office. While the conservation architect for the Homewood has remarked that the removal of Gwynne's office, and restoration to its original function as a bedroom, was executed according to Gwynne's own strong wishes but was ultimately a mistake as it lost a natural opportunity to expose his architectural archive to visitors.¹⁹ Other properties like the Rose Seidler House offer a more incidental display of architectural drawings for visitors to look through.

What does appear fairly universal in the range of curatorial strategies adopted is the opinion that conventional signage and visitor-management strategies like guard ropes are seen as less appropriate and more intrusive in the intimate setting of a modern house, than in other types of heritage sites. To simulate an 'inhabited' home other genres of information communication therefore come into play. These include scholarly guidebooks with biographical and social narratives (which the National Trust UK are particularly adept at producing²⁰), and orchestrated visitor tours. For example, the tour on offer at the Red House when I visited was far more about William Morris's personal life at Bexleyheath than about his contribution to British design. While the tour at the Braem House gave many intimate insights into the architect-owner by the current curator who now lived in the house. Increasingly the short film is introduced as a primer to a visit, thus lessening the burden of interpretation in the rest of the house to follow. Very successful examples can be seen at Willow Road, the Sonneveld and Seidler houses.²¹

Returning to the issue of striking a balance between communicating social and architectural significance, the Rose Seidler house attempts such a balance through attention to the architectural and design value of the site, yet also through the inclusion of furnishings and objects that evoke something of the former everyday life of the house. There are, for example, a few slightly incongruous artifacts displayed in the house like the Viennese silverware set that Harry Seidler's mother Rose preferred to use (when her son was not around). These are seen as important in communicating, through their display, both the European ties of the Seidler family, and the agenda of 'total modern design' that their son sought to impose on family life.²² The house is however primarily a museum of architectural interest rather than a home that documents typical family life in the 1960s. Some researchers have perceived this 'subversion' of social everyday value in favour of architectural status as a shortcoming in the interpretation program of the Seidler House.²³ The Boyd House also aspires to invest the house with architectural and design significance befitting Robin Boyd's place in the history of Victorian and Australian modernism. However, in part due to the more relaxed informality of the original design, there is a strong anti-monumental agenda that drives the desire to exclude conventional museum-like signage or interpretation *in situ*, and to provide very few formal guided tours. An interesting alternative aim of 'incidental interpretation' has been articulated.

Completeness and Empathy

Aside from formal interpretation on aspects of significance, another curatorial dimension that reveals the intimate connections between contents, buildings and owner / designers is how 'complete' the houses are presented in respect to their contents. Through everyday artifacts, furnishings, interior finishes, artworks and so on, parallel narratives can be presented about the houses that are not conveyed didactically through text, signage or films, but rather are shown mimetically and communicated through the integral display of things in their interior and exterior spaces. The selection and placing of objects in rooms on display in a curated house assumes a curatorial plausibility and veracity akin to any conventional museum. Things and rooms take on the gesture of an orchestrated exposition that says to the visitor: "Look! ... That is how it is".²⁴ Thus in each of the houses studied, through the restoration work of conservation architects and curators, complete rooms are rendered eloquent as visual tableau of carefully considered themes. As Laan and Wierda have remarked in reference to the Sonneveld House: 'The only way to fully experience what the interior looks like today, and the only way to find out more or less what it must have looked like at the time, is to see the final result of the reconstruction with your own eyes.'²⁵

The condition of a house and completeness of its contents at the time of gifting or acquisition obviously has great bearing on the ensuing conservation and curatorial programs. It is interesting to note that large heritage bodies like the National Trust UK are now being much more selective about what houses they will accept and place on public display. Where once they may have acquired properties to protect them, with contents or not, they would now be unlikely to take on a house without a complete collection: it is the 'complete archaeological layering' of a house and its contents which are together deemed to be really significant.²⁶ This change is indicative of many

heritage organisations shift away from advocacy and towards public education and curatorial projects.

There is also no doubt that a rich collection will potentially satisfy a far wider audience than merely the architectural specialist. And a rich collection and level of interior finish encourages both empathy for, and envy of, the owners of the houses. For example the Sonneveld House in Rotterdam is valued for its display of 'luxuriousness' as rendered in a modernist language. When the wealthy industrialist family moved into their new modern home they took none of their old nineteenth century furniture with them, but instead entered wholeheartedly into a new conception of affluent modern living. Servants were still present, but accommodated under new social conditions, and lustrous surfaces and furnishings were fashioned in modern, industrial materials. Paul Overy writes: 'At this time modernisation, modernity and modernism could be marshaled to represent a variety of political and social fronts and positions – fascist/communist, upper middle-class villas / social housing etc.'²⁷ Similarly the Homewood house set in extensive garden grounds in Surrey recreates another English vision of the 'Moderne' plush estate. Here again there is no glimmer of socialist or functionalist notions of modern austerity, as characterised by much modern public architecture and housing. Rather this was a bespoke modern design for the bachelor architect-owner, complete with a wealth of modern furniture, the latest in home entertainment gadgets, a fold-away bar, mirrored walk-in robe rooms, and an exotic blue glass chandelier. At one time the servants' wing housed four servant helpers.

Willow Road also came to the National Trust with a rich collection of furniture, art and personal objects. More complete than Homewood, and on a less lavish scale in central Hampstead, Willow Road again certainly strives for a balance between architectural and social / biographical interest through its collection. Although the émigré architect Erno Goldfinger is now regarded as occupying an important place in British modernism, it has been acknowledged that the National Trust would not have accepted the house on the strength of its architectural value alone. Through the homely display of detailed collections of personal items, the house gives the impression of the owners having recently stepped out of the premises. Through little clues like the brand of Baked Beans left in the kitchen cupboard, visitors can empathise with the recent past. Similarly the Braem House in Antwerp came to Flemish Heritage with the complete contents of the architect-owner Renaat Braem who lived there for some 40 years. While Kettle's Yard in Cambridge is perhaps the most extreme example of a modern house where value resides in the meticulous maintenance of contents and art rather than the architectural design. The owner Jim Ede had accumulated a lifetime collection of modern British art, artifacts and everyday objects and he devoted his later years to maintaining an 'open house' in Cambridge for those interested in the arts. Ede's daily routine of cleaning and arranging objects was both ascetically and aesthetically driven: the artful placement of a ring of pebbles on a dresser articulated a much larger life philosophy. And it was this consciously designed tableau of the domestic environment as a 'total work of art' that contributes to the popularity of the house today.

A sense of completeness in the display of interiors in curated houses ultimately assists in creating an illusion of naturalism and quotidian intimacy that a once private home might be able to conjure to a public audience. For the National Trust UK this illusion occurs through what has been described as 'an uninterrupted connection between the eye and the actual; real objects that speak to you about the history of that particular place'.²⁸ For most curators and managers spoken to in this study, the impression of a temporary recovery of the everyday past is disrupted by overt *in situ* interpretation. Although others have critiqued this desire for 'naturalness', seeing it as indicative of a lack of curatorial guidance and innovation, and ultimately elitist in its presumptuous of prior knowledge.

In complete contrast to the presentation of domestic completeness, the Red House by Webb and Morris was somewhat controversially purchased by the National Trust UK on the open market and has little remaining by way of interiors. Morris only lived there for five years and quite a lot of his original finishes and furnishings were seen as 'experimental' and 'theatrical'.²⁹ What did remain was irrevocably altered by subsequent owners, and in some rooms the Morris wallpapers

date well after he actually occupied the house. This lack of completeness contributed to the serious reservations that some held about taking on the property, given the importance of furnishings to the legacy of William Morris and the expectations of the local visiting public for a 'complete' house and garden. In addressing this curatorial challenge, it is currently thought that rather than gather replicas and reconstruct earlier fabric, much will be left largely empty along the lines of the presentation of McKim Mead and White's Bell House in the USA, however complex questions around what period to display the much altered house at remains a dilemma.

Duration

The conservation of all sites presents choices as to which particular date or period to restore back to. Because of their relative newness it would seem that modern houses hold fewer of these dilemmas than normally inherent in older buildings that are typically a complex palimpsest of additions and accretions. Modern houses therefore offer, in theory, an opportunity to present a 'single snap-shot', and a closer approximation of original design intent and 'authenticity'.³⁰ Despite less choices being apparent, the complexities of capturing a sense of duration and 'lived time', within the typical demands of conservation and the cessation of aging, are still profound in modern house museums. Modern construction methods and materials are often less durable and more unstable than older robust methods and therefore more difficult to conserve. These technical conservation issues have been well discussed elsewhere, but they also extend to curatorial issues in modern house museums – take for instance paperback book collections and soft cork floors. In the case study houses examined, approaches range from the total restoration of the house to simulate it as it was when newly designed, towards the self-conscious display of wear and tear over time. Guidance on such approaches depends largely on resources available, owner's intentions for future use, and the documentation available to restorers. For instance in the case of the Sonneveld House, a thorough set of detailed photographs of the house just after completion provided a reference-point to restore the house back to a semblance of original newness. The decision was taken to show visitors the house of 1933 as testament to the architect's original intention to design a unique 'Gesamtkunstwerk' of that moment in time. While at Willow Road, the duration time that the Goldfinger family lived in the house is partially captured, and similarly at the Homewood, where the decision has been made, for example, to retain the rather extraordinary dark brown kitchen added in the 1970s.

House museums, like other heritage sites, have been criticised for their tendency to 'freeze' the histories of buildings and objects into just one specific context.³¹ For Aynsley, the reconstructed modern room tableau recreated in a museum setting delivers this 'frozen moment': it is not possible to incorporate the ways that the occupants lived in and customised the architect's work into a reconstruction. In contrast the complete house museum does offer some opportunities to attempt the transcendence of such a fixity of moment.³² This can be approached in a number of ways, from the core conservation strategies about what to restore and remove and how to resolve building fatigue, to the display and interpretation strategies that follow. At Willow Road for instance, the time lived in the house by the Goldfinger family is recreated – used bars of soap received delicate curatorial attention, and new cork pin-up boards were stained with tea to resemble natural fading.

Another way of countering the deathly hand of fossilisation can be found in the ways that houses are visited and used, for how long, and for what purposes. Across the case study houses examined there appears indeed considerable variation in the management and duration of use by the public and by tenants of the properties. Accessibility ranges from the highly staged tour, to the free-roaming visit, to opportunities to stay in the houses or use them for extended functions. These differences are amplified by and highly contingent upon the original donors' wishes and the current managing bodies' resources. At Willow Road, despite outward appearances of homeliness, it is now a public urban museum, and has had to accommodate all the logistics of this official change of status. Similarly the Sonneveld House now forms one of a collection of public museums in the heart of Rotterdam managed by the neighbouring NAI. In contrast, upon Patrick Gwynne's insistence, the Homewood remains an inhabited property, preferably by a

family tenant.³³ This was presumably motivated by a wish to avoid the total 'museumification' of the house. It has had significant impact on how it can be displayed and visited. The current tour-guide for the Braem House was very much involved in its conservation and now lives there, and his occupation has also affected visitor accessibility. Likewise, to date, the Boyd House has been occupied in various capacities and the intention is to foster appreciation of the property through use, rather than the fleeting and staged tour. The jury is still out on such a strategy, but it provides a promising model for the appreciation of 'duration'. And while provision for a live-in tenant, and extended private uses for properties obviously places many other challenges on the conservation of furnishings and contents, the benefits brought may be a richer appreciation of domestic inhabitation and messy liveability.

Transformations

Three concluding points are raised here and left open for further interrogation. First, while all conservation involves profound change and reconstruction, these changes are particularly acute when enacting any transformation from a private dwelling to a public amenity and museum. At Kettle's Yard for instance, all efforts have been made to maintain the routines of everyday life established by Ede. However, as Sebastiano Barassi has suggested, the trajectory of change after Ede's departure is one of inevitable 'transformation from a private home to a professionally run organization.'³⁴ These transformations – wrought through both conservation and curatorial strategies – result in inevitably uncanny representations of domestic and intimate settings of everyday life. Anthony Vilder has explored the implications of the uncanny as the *unheimlich* or 'unhomely', and the intimate relations between the homely and the unhomely, or the familiar and the strange in the history of architecture. Vidler explores the uncanny home through themes like haunted houses and ruins, homesickness and nostalgia produced as a reaction to the 'geometric cube' houses of modernism.³⁵ To Vidler's exploration we could add the curated modern house as another powerful exemplar of the architectural uncanny; a meta-museum of the unhomely, where former functions, personalities, daydreams and mess have been permanently expunged. This sense of unease emanates from the representation of the familiar image of a house that is in fact no longer a house and no longer homely. It is arguably this perception of the unhomely that is precisely what curators and heritage organisations strive to counter, but its shadow never quite departs. As a visitor today, one approaches these houses with mixed expectations of both the authority of a museum and the voyeuristic pleasures of visiting a 'home-open'. This uncanny mixture of associations is felt acutely at the Sonneveld House that is now a recognised public 'young monument' in the middle of the city centre. Yet it is one that tells an intimate story, in part made possible by the involvement of the family's grandson in the project, who has remarked on his strange experience of returning to the now restored house of his childhood memoirs.

Second, in the transformation from private house to public amenity, all the case study houses have, despite deceptive appearances, undergone profound changes that aim to purify original design intentions and to distil coherent narratives from their original chaotic state prior to their restoration. As Cabray has suggested, house museums often preserve the 'leftovers' of everyday life that don't belong in other institutions or archives. The preservation of these leftovers in curated houses inevitably involves, as in any museum, tactics of selection, alteration, distillation and fabrication. A number of commentators interviewed in the course of this research have referred to the desire to preserve some semblance of the muddled vitality of the original houses. For instance the conservator of the Braem House described the most confronting issue of the restoration project as the sorting and sifting of objects deemed of value or junk in an over-stuffed and decaying property.³⁶ While the somewhat incongruous florid Austro-Hungarian candelabra at Willow Road, which sits on an elegant modern designed sideboard designed by Erno Goldfinger, is included as evidence of the idiosyncrasies of personal life. As one curator said; 'it is part of the package, so you don't try and alter it, you show what people are – which is a mess'.³⁷ Similarly, the inclusion of the Viennese silver set at the Seidler House has already been mentioned. However these curatorial decisions are exceptions, and usually highly orchestrated deceptions. In fact all the houses displayed have, by necessity, been completely and utterly altered, edited, distilled and purified from the muck and tumble of everyday life into clean exemplars of

modernism. A statement by the curators of the Sonneveld House powerfully illustrate this point: 'It is necessary to reconstruct the original state perfectly if the atmosphere, hygiene and comfort of this house are to be conveyed as clearly as possible...reconstructed in as pure a form as possible.'³⁸

Paul Overy has eloquently summarised that period rooms are 'no longer those rooms or houses themselves, however much they resemble them, or the photographs by which they are so often known.'³⁹ So if these curated houses are no longer quite houses in the common sense we understand houses to be, what kind of places documents or monuments have they become? Through their restoration and interpretation, curated houses and their contents have been transformed from 'found objects' into *both* historical documents *and* a kind of monument that communicates architectural and social significance to others. Michel Foucault speaks of this transformation as fundamental to the very processes of making modern histories, through which the work enacted on material documentation (books, texts, accounts, registers, acts, buildings, institutions, laws, techniques, objects, customs, etc.) change them into historical monuments of our time:

'where, in the past, history deciphered the traces left by men, it now deploys a mass of elements that have to be grouped, made relevant, placed in relation to one another to form totalities... it might be said that in our time history aspires to the condition of archaeology, to the intrinsic description of the monument.'⁴⁰

In the case of significant house exemplars discussed in this account, such transformations enacted by conservation, interpretation and display allows them to be absorbed into the historical canon of architectural precedents. Yet it also renders their definition complex and unique; as a genre of representation they slip between the original built artefact and its simulation. Thus in conclusion, the peculiar form of display exhibited in curated modern houses resides somewhere between an authentic facsimile of reality, a display or illusory theatre, a set of historical documents, and a monument.

¹ Nigel Whiteley, 'Modern Architecture, Heritage and Englishness', *Architectural History*, vol 38. (1995), pp 220-237. Whiteley is commenting on the National Trust UK's decision to acquire Willow Road by Erno Goldfinger, and in this review launches a stinging attack on the, at that time, rather sudden embracing of examples of English modernism into the sanctioned canon of English heritage.

² See for example Hannah Lewi, 'The Paradoxes of Conserving Newness' and other chapters in Hilde Heynen and Hubert Henket (eds) *Back from Utopia*, Rotterdam: 010 Press, 2004.

³ For one discussion on the links between exhibiting modern rooms and modernism see Jeremy Aynsley, 'The modern period room – a contradiction in terms?' in Trevor Keeble, Brenda Martin and Penny Sparke (eds) *The Modern Period Room: the construction of the exhibited interior, 1870 to 1950*, Abingdon, Oxon and New York: Routledge, 2006, p 14.

⁴ Hannah Lewi and Wally Smith, 'The Magic of Machines in the House', *The Journal of Architecture*, vol 13: 4, (2008) pp.633-661.

⁵ Aynsley, 'The modern period room – a contradiction in terms?', 2006. p 9.

⁶ Magaly Cabral, 'Exhibiting and communicating history and society in historic house museums', *Museum International*, UNESCO Paris, vol 53: 2, (2001) p 41.

⁷ This account does not attempt to summarise basic histories of the case study houses as these have been well documented in many other sources.

⁸ *Mid Century Modern: Rose Seidler house Wahroonga 1948-50, Conservation Plan*, Historic Houses trust of NSW: Sydney, 1989.

⁹ Although at first being under the auspices of the National Trust of Victoria, who assisted in gaining a mortgage for the property, the Boyd Foundation did not initially succeed in raising enough finance to support the mortgage on the property and the status of the house remained uncertain. The Foundation has recently become independent from the National Trust, and is hopefully gaining more financial support from individuals and corporations to maintain the property in public hands. Without this security the Foundation has not been able to enact a

complete conservation plan as yet, or full strategy for the maintenance of the property and contents.

¹⁰ The conservation program and restoration work for both Willow Road and Homewood have been carried out by John Allan and Avanti Architects, UK.

¹¹ See for example Susan Macdonald, 'Contemporary conservation Methodology and Modern Architecture: the Rose Seidler house, Sydney' in *The Conservation of Twentieth Century Historic Buildings*, Institute of Advanced Architectural Studies, York: University of York pp85-91; *Conservation of Modern Architecture* Susan Macdonald, Kyle Normandin, Bob Kindred (eds) Dorset UK: Donhead, 2007; Theodore Prudon, *Preservation of Modern Architecture*, New Jersey: Wiley, 2008.

¹² Interview with representatives, curators and conservation architects at the National Trust UK offices in London, July 2007.

¹³ Paul Overy 'The Restoration of modern life: Interwar houses on show in the Netherlands' in Trevor Keeble, Brenda Martin and Penny Sparke (eds) *The Modern Period Room: the construction of the exhibited interior, 1870 to 1950*, Abingdon, Oxon and New York: Routledge, 2006, p. 77.

¹⁴ *ibid* on 'young monuments'.

¹⁵ Interview with representatives, curators and conservation architects at the National Trust UK offices in London, July 2007.

¹⁶ Interview with representatives, curators and conservation architects at the National Trust UK offices in London, July 2007.

¹⁷ Interview with representatives, curators and conservation architects at the National Trust UK offices in London, July 2007.

¹⁸ Interview with representatives, curators and conservation architects at the National Trust UK offices in London, July 2007.

¹⁹ Interview with representatives, curators and conservation architects at the National Trust UK offices in London, July 2007.

²⁰ *The Red House*, The National Trust: London, 2003; *2 Willow Road*, The National Trust: London, 1996; *The Homewood*, The National Trust: London, 2004.

²¹ Interview with representatives, curators and conservation architects at the National Trust UK offices in London, July 2007. At this meeting one area discussed was the role of films in interpretation, with one participant commenting that the film seemed appropriate at Willow Road as they had footage available which gave a sense of the architect's voice: 'The Willow Road film was hugely successful ... But there were then lots of other properties thinking "we want a film" – where there was just going to be what I call BBC tea and cake faded shots of roses.'

²² Michaela Richards 'Mid-century Modern interiors: Architecture as 'lived' social space the 'inside' story on the Rose Seidler House', in *Australian Antique Collector*, no 48 July-Dec (1994) p. 45.

²³ For a discussion on the evocation of social everyday value in the Seidler House see Alexandria Teague, *Materiality and the Immaterial: social value and the conservation of recent everyday places*, PhD Thesis University of Melbourne, 2006, p. 130.

²⁴ Mieke Bal calls this assumed authority of exposure 'apo-deictic': 'affirmative, demonstrative and authoritative on the one hand, and opinionated on the other'. See Mieke Bal, *Double Exposures*, Oxon and New York Routledge, 1996, pp 2-3.

²⁵ Barbara Laan and Sjoerd Wierda, 'The Interior of the Sonneveld House Then and Now' in *The Sonneveld House: an avant-garde home from 1933*, NAI Publishers: Rotterdam, 2001, p 133.

²⁶ Interview with representatives, curators and conservation architects at the National Trust UK offices in London, July 2007.

²⁷ Overy 'The Restoration of modern life: Interwar houses on show in the Netherlands', 2006, p. 81.

²⁸ Interview with representatives, curators and conservation architects at the National Trust UK offices in London, July 2007.

²⁹ Interview with representatives, curators and conservation architects at the National Trust UK offices in London, July 2007. 'The philosophy that we are gradually evolving is that that is its

moment of real significance as the cauldron and crucible that fed into Morris & co and that to import Morris things from a later period would be to dilute and undermine that essence.'

³⁰ Interview with representatives, curators and conservation architects at the National Trust UK offices in London, July 2007.

³¹ Life is not reproduced in a house museum, it is represented – like any other museum, which is, par excellence, the space for representing the world and its things. Moreover, objects have histories and trajectories, and the reconstruction of ambience 'freezes the objects into just one specific context.' See Cabray, 'Exhibiting and communicating history and society in historic house museums', (2001) p 42.

³² Aynsley, 'The modern period room – a contradiction in terms?', 2006, p. 18

³³ When I visited the house in 2007, it was not yet open to the public in part because of delays in finding a suitable tenant that could live in, and have open access to, all parts of the house.

³⁴ Sebastiano Barassi, *Kettle's Yard House Guide*, Cambridge: University of Cambridge, 2002, p. 12

³⁵ Anthony Vidler, *The Architectural Uncanny* Cambridge Mass.: MIT Press, 1992, pp. 27 & 65.

³⁶ Interview with conservator and curator of the Braem House, July 2007.

³⁷ Interview with representatives, curators and conservation architects at the National Trust UK offices in London, July 2007.

³⁸ Willem Jan Pajmans and Joris Molenaar, 'A Modern Villa from 1933 in 2001 "As if nothing has happened"', in *The Sonneveld House: an avant-garde home from 1933*, NAI Publishers: Rotterdam, 2001, p. 159.

³⁹ Overy 'The Restoration of modern life: Interwar houses on show in the Netherlands', p. 74.

⁴⁰ Michel Foucault, *The Archaeology of Knowledge*, New York Routledge, 1994, (1972) p. 7.