Designing with Gendered Space: Incorporating Gender into the Scenic Design of Clybourne Park

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A thesis submitted in partial fulfillment of the requirement for the degree of Bachelors of Arts in Theatre from the College of William & Mary

by

Josh Blum

Accepted for Honors (Honors, High Honors, Highest Honors)

Matthew Allar, Director

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Introduction

My role as the scenic designer for William and Mary Theatre’s April 2014 production of *Clybourne Park* is to support director Francis Tanglao-Aguas’s vision by creating a believable world for the play. In my scenic design, my goal is to support the action of the play, as well as its themes, in ways that are academically interesting and visually effective. In this discussion, I will outline how the choices I made in set design were influenced by gendered space theory, why I chose to use gendered space theory in a play about race, and how the application of gendered space theory gives us a richer understanding of the play.

*Clybourne Park* is set in a house in one of Chicago’s evolving neighborhoods. Act One takes place in 1959 and tells the story of Bev and Russ Stoller, a White couple selling their house after the suicide of their son. Jim, a friend who is concerned for Russ, visits them as Bev and their Black maid Francine pack up domestic items. As Jim prepares to leave, another neighbor, Karl, arrives with his pregnant wife Betsy to urge Bev and Russ not to ‘ruin’ the neighborhood by selling their house to Black buyers. The act ends with Russ refusing to change their plans and kicking everyone out.

Act Two takes place in the same house fifty years later. The Stollers have long since gone, and the formerly White neighborhood is now predominantly Black. Act Two tells the story of Lindsey and her husband Steve, a White couple, who have purchased the house and are planning to rebuild it. The act opens with Lindsey and Steve negotiating with representatives from the neighborhood association, Lena and her husband Kevin, a Black couple, who try to discourage major modifications to the house because it will ‘ruin’ the historic nature of the neighborhood. With the assistance of their lawyers, Kathy and Tom, the two couples argue over what is and is not permitted by the zoning regulations. Lena
expresses her concerns about how gentrification will affect the neighborhood, leading Steve to bring up the question of racism. This sparks an argument over issues of race, gender, and class, and everyone ends up leaving the house angry at everyone else. The play ends with a flashback to Bev and Russ’s son writing his suicide note in 1957.

As would be expected from the above synopsis, the play’s primary theme is race relations, and the conflicts within the play mostly treat on the topics of white flight in 1959 and gentrification in 2009. White flight, which began after the Second World War, was the cause of a large portion of America’s current de facto racial segregation. Black families’ improved economic means enabled them to move into more upscale neighborhoods, sparking racial and economic fears among White community members, who would in turn flee city neighborhoods to the ‘safety’ of the suburbs. In Act One, the Stoller’s neighbor Karl represents and gives voice to these fears, while the story told by Black community leader Lena in Act Two shows how the neighborhood became a Black neighborhood following the departure of the White residents.

While Act One deals with White flight, the second act addresses racial concerns over the inverse process of gentrification. Gentrification, an ongoing process in American cities in which upper middle class families move into impoverished areas with good access to city centers, worries poorer residents because the rebuilding that accompanies the process often displaces longtime residents no longer able to afford the increased costs. Although gentrification, unlike White flight, is not by definition a racial phenomenon, it does tend to pit new, often White, residents against racial minorities who feel that they are being economically forced from their suddenly expensive communities. In Clybourne Park, this issue is the main topic of discussion in the second act of the play.
While the play primarily concerns itself with these racial themes, a subtler gender based dialog takes place in the background. As with the questions of race, the gender based themes tell the story of shifting power dynamics and prejudices over the past fifty years in America. The first act of the play presents what I am defining as ‘traditional’ gender roles. The women are subservient and deal with domestic issues and items; the men are in charge and deal with questions of business and politics. Women are barred from taking part in discussions and are excluded from access to knowledge. Act Two upends these stereotypes in much the same way that it subverts race dynamics. Act One may be dominated by White men discussing the fate of their community, but in Act Two the central community representative is a Black woman. Women in the second act are no longer homemakers and wives, but have professional careers, take part in and often control the conversation, and are involved in community politics.

In Clybourne Park, these gender issues can be brought into relief scenically through the lens of gendered space. In the discussion of gendered space, male and female roles in society are explored through the association of gender with specific spaces and objects, for example the association between women and laundry. In this example, laundry serves as both an object, the actual linens being washed, and the space, the laundry room. The idea of gendered space relates to traditional gender roles and the association of certain areas, items, or aesthetic qualities with these traditional roles. The gender themes of Clybourne Park present interesting opportunities to explore in a scenic design. By using ideas of gendered space to help inform the scenic design, I hope to reinforce the play’s more subtle discourse on changing gender roles, which will ultimately enhance the more overt themes of racial power dynamics in the play.
Gendered Space, Gender Roles, and Clybourne Park

A scenic exploration of how Bruce Norris addresses gender roles in Clybourne Park begins with an examination of how Act One represents gender roles. To understand how best to incorporate these ideas, my design uses a combination of gendered space theory, textual analysis, and visual research to help support the portrayal of gender roles and power dynamics in the play. This research has led to a division in the first act between the public male sphere of power and the subservient female sphere of domesticity. It has also helped to show how to juxtapose these divisions in Act One with a more open and egalitarian sense of interior space in Act Two.

Domestic Spaces and Women

In the first act of Clybourne Park, women take on the traditional female domestic tasks and roles, dealing with items of housework and preparing food while the men discuss important matters. This restriction of women to the domestic sphere has ancient roots in Western society. As early as the 5th century BC, the Greek architect Xenophon had already codified domestic spaces within the house as female based on the reasoning that “the man must go out to work in the open air, while the woman remains inside.”1 This early division classifies the outdoor public area as male and the indoor domestic area as female. It also classifies the spaces and genders based on work – men work outside of the house, interacting with the rest of the world, while women work inside the house, restricted from accessing the exterior. This link carries on through the history of western architecture just as women’s restriction to the domestic side of life has continued as part of traditional gender roles. The

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15th century architect Leon Battista, author of one of the era’s most important treatises on architecture, still held that “women are to be confined deep within a sequence of spaces at the greatest distance from the outside world while men are to be exposed to the outside.” By the 19th century, little had changed in societal views of gender roles, with books of the day “glorifying the wife’s role in creating a calm and peaceful retreat for her family.” These ideas about the female link to the household transcend any particular time period, having lasted since ancient times, and because of this are useful as a definition of the ‘traditional’ female role. The direct correlation of the woman to the household frames her “primarily in terms of nurturance, other-orientation – altruism” and sets the primary traditional female role as a domestic one and the primary female spaces as those associated most strongly with domestic tasks.

Within Clybourne Park, this traditional domestic role appears heavily during the first act of the play, particularly in the area of the dining room and kitchen, where the women spend much of their time. The women in the first act almost exclusively take part in domestic activities such as preparing refreshments and packing up linens and silverware, fitting into feminist theorist Daphne Spain’s association between domestic work and traditional gender roles even in the 20th century. For example, Bev and Francine’s first interaction occurs in the

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2 Wigley 332. Wigley draws this reference from De Re Aedificatoria (On the Art of Building in Ten Books), by Leon Battista, a 15th century text on Architecture.
3 Spain 123. Daphne Spain here refers specifically to William Alcott’s The Young Wife and The Young Husband and Catharine Beecher’s Treatise on Domestic Economy, from 1838, 1839, and 1842 respectively.
4 Di Leonardo 48. “Those who focus on women’s work tend to envision women as sentient, goal-oriented actors, while those who concern themselves with women’s ties to others tend to perceive women primarily in terms of nurturance, other-orientation – altruism.”
5 Spain xiii. 3. “When I was young, it seemed natural that women stayed in the kitchen to clean up after a meal while men went into the living room.”
dining room over the topic of packing the very domestic items of silverware and candlesticks. Furthermore, Bev retreats to the domestic area of the kitchen throughout the play, either to serve her guests in some way or to have some sort of privacy, showing both her connection to the domestic task of preparing and serving refreshments and her greater level of comfort within the kitchen than in the public view. While the argument could be made that these examples have diminished significance because Bev is merely acting as a good host and that Francine is just doing her job, this female connection to the kitchen is also shown with Betsy, a guest. When Betsy arrives, she and Bev immediately proceed to the kitchen to get drinks for everyone. Furthermore, that Bev and Francine are chosen as the hostess and the maid in the play, rather than having a male servant or having Jim go to the kitchen, reflects the societal gender expectations of the era.

An exploration of advertising in the 1950s yields further connections between the female roles of the period and domestic settings and work. This visual research also begins to build the foundation for the scenic design as well. Images like Figure 1, a Tide ad from 1951, are significant mostly from a theoretical perspective, but also provide ideas for props and scenic elements.

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7 Norris 16 & 39
8 Norris 24-25
Figure 1

She spreads the cleanest sheets in town
... she swears by TIDE!

She spreads the cleanest sheets in town—
Tide gets them whiter, too.
Yes, cleaner... whiter! My, oh my!
The things that Tide can do!

Tide GETS CLOTHES CLEANER
THAN ANY SOAP!

NO SOAP—NO OTHER PRODUCT SOLD THROUGHOUT
AMERICA WILL WASH AS CLEAN AS TIDE!

JUST TRY TIDE in your washing machine. Wring out your
clothes, rinse them, and, lady, you'll hang up a cleaner wash
than you'll get with any soap—or any other washing product
sold from coast to coast! You'll get the cleanest wash in town!

NOT ONLY CLEANER—WHITER, TOO! Yes, Ma'am!
In hardest water, Tide will wash your sheets, shirts, curtains
whiter than any soap you can name! They'll be so shining white
... so radiantely clean, you'll never want to trust them to
anything else but Tide!

AND BRIGHTER! Just wait till you see how your wash
prints gleam after a Tide wash! The colors look so crisp and
fresh... the fabric feels so soft... true so beautiful, you'll
say there's nothing like Tide! And there ain't! Get Tide today
—and hang the cleanest wash in town on your line!

P.S., PREFER TO SKIP RINSING?

With Tide you can skip the rinsing, and save all that
time and work. Just wash, wring out, hang up. Tide
will give you the cleanest possible no-rinse wash!
The ad touches on two major aspects of the domestic responsibilities assigned to women in the time period: child rearing and laundry. The woman is not just seen dealing with laundry and cleaning duties, she is also shown teaching her daughter to do the same. Scenically, the ad yields two visuals. One is simply that of the laundry basket, something that might be included as a prop used by Francine or Bev as they move linens around to be packed. The other is, counter intuitively, the phallic imagery of the spindle bedposts. Looking at these bed posts as phallic, male objects framing the domestic tasks being carried out in the ad begins to bring up another aspect of female domesticity: subservience. Women, in traditional gender roles, are associated with domestic tasks and domestic areas, but are not truly given power in these areas. Instead, a woman in her home is subservient to the needs of others and is expected to be “a hostess in the living room, a cook in the kitchen, a mother in the children’s room, a lover in the bedroom, a chauffeur in the garage.”9 This advertisement is significant because it, possibly unintentionally, frames domestic work within a border of male imagery, demonstrating visually how female roles are confined by male hegemony. One of my goals scenically in the first act is to replicate this framing, not just showing the female spaces as domestic spaces of subservience, but also to show how they are confined within aesthetically male structures, just as women are confined by a patriarchal male society.

Public Spaces and Men

In contrast to the traditional restriction of women to domestic spaces, men are connected to the public sphere. The suggestion by feminist theorists such as Leslie Weisman is that the domestic zone of the home is subordinate to the public sphere of production, that

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9 Weisman 2
women keep the home so that men are able to go out and work. In both the Greek and the Renaissance models, women’s restriction to the interior is correlated directly to a need for men to venture out of the house to deal with the public world. However, the gendering of public spaces as male is not just connected to the traditional male role of breadwinner. In fact, in the context of Clybourne Park, the reservation of public zones for male use has to do more with decision-making and power, as the men take control of the living room and use it for a sort of impromptu town hall meeting. While real world gendering of public areas as male does not always reduce women’s power in the world so directly, the restriction of women from public view has served to diminish female status in various ways.

The main way that gendering public spaces as male supports hegemonic structures lies in restricting access to status. Men in public spheres are able to obtain status and influence, women, when restricted to domesticity, cannot. Public office, community decisions, and jobs, all markers of social status, require access to the outside, and women have been expected to stay inside. This shows again how lopsided the dynamics of gendered space can be. Public spaces are male, in essence, because men are traditionally associated with power, status, and control. Because these male public spaces are where one gets power and control, only men really have access to greater power, status, and control.

In the play, Norris shows the living room as male in part by associating it with the public, male functions of control and status. The public aspect of the living room is quickly established with the arrival of Jim and Karl, whose entrances underscore this public nature because neither one of them feels the need to get permission to enter. Jim makes his very first

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10 Rendell 103
11 Spain 43
appearance by simply opening the door and saying, “Ding dong?”[12]. Karl, who is denied an opportunity to knock on his first entrance, punctuates his return with the line “Took the liberty of not ringing the bell”[13]. These uninvited entrances, combined with the use of the room to entertain guests, begin to establish the public, and therefore male, nature of the living room in *Clybourne Park*. In contrast, Albert does ask permission and seems unwilling to sit or enter the room even when he is invited in[14]. While this might seem to undermine the argument for the living room as public, it actually shows that, in the 1950s context, Albert is not welcome in this public, male space. Albert, as a Black man entering a white household in the 1950s, does not have the power or status associated with White men and male dominated areas. Albert’s voluntary exclusion from the living room helps to establish a hierarchy based not just on gender, but also on race. While Francine fits into the female subservient role, Albert does not fit into the dominant male role because, as a Black, he is restricted from public status in much the same way that women are.

The discussion of how space influences status connects again to the idea of male hegemony, since men have traditionally higher status, they are more able to control the world. In *Clybourne Park*, we see this control demonstrated by Russ in the living room. Russ’s main spot in the first act is his armchair in the living room, from which he controls the goings on in the house. Even the other men defer to him here, because the living room is not just a male public space, it is specifically Russ’s space. Karl, for example, apologizes for giving orders, calling Russ “the king”[15] – the living room has symbolic power for him. He is

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[12] Norris 13  
[14] Norris 20  
[15] Norris 26
the only one of the men sitting in a real chair; Karl has to pull up a box to sit on. Russ also, uniquely in the play, exerts authority via force, knocking Jim over. Even over the other ruler of the house, Bev, Russ exerts authority, overruling her when she tries to tell Francine to help him with the trunk. This display of authority separates Russ’s authority from the house’s other resident, marking it as potentially representative of the 1950s male dominated culture of the play.

**Separation and Gender (In)Equality**

While the issues of white male hegemony and gender roles begin to surface with the examination of public and domestic spaces, the restrictions on women’s power come to the forefront when examining physical barriers between “male” and “female” spaces. By physically separating women from knowledge, jobs, and conversations, traditional American society maintains women as second-class citizens. One of the main hypotheses in theorist Daphne Spain’s book *Gendered Space* is that separating male and female spaces inherently creates inequality, the idea that, as she puts it, “women’s status is lowest if society is sexually segregated.” The concerns over this separation range from concerns over political power to job access to educational access. The division of the world into separate male and female spheres creates a situation in which separate is inherently unequal.

In the first act of *Clybourne Park*, the link between gender segregation and gender inequality shows itself most clearly in the exclusion of women from male conversations and, by extension, from the spaces in which the conversations take place. This exclusion of

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16 Norris 26  
17 Norris 39-40  
18 Norris 15  
19 Spain xiv
women from conversations is most explicit in Bev’s conversation with Jim, Karl’s dismissal of Bev, and Betsy’s literal muteness. The first instance, in which Bev denies herself the right to participate in the conversation, occurs when she, Jim, and Russ are talking. Jim justifies his and Russ’s collection of seemingly random facts by saying “Knowledge is power, Bev.” She responds that she chooses “to remain powerless.”20 This self-enforced restriction from knowledge links the play to the theory that women have traditionally been excluded from places of knowledge, such as a man’s study.21 It also links to the idea that societies in which items of knowledge, such as books, are placed in shared spaces are less unequal in their treatment of men and women.22 The motif of Bev being denied a voice in the conversation is established here as she undermines her own authority. Later on in the act Karl reinforces this lack of power when he excludes her from the conversation. As the argument over the Black family begins, Bev initially participates; however, the moment she starts to really challenge Karl, she gets shut out of the conversation when he says “Darling, I came to talk to Russ.”23 In both of these examples, Bev ends up having her right to participate in an intelligent conversation with the men questioned or rejected. The final example of how women are excluded from conversation and decision-making is Betsy. Betsy has a great deal of symbolic value for traditional female roles. She not only participates in the domestic activities of the house, going to the kitchen with Bev even though she is a guest, she is also pregnant, linking her to the maternal role women were expected to play. Furthermore, as a deaf mute, her ability to participate in the conversation depends almost entirely on others using sign

20 Norris 15
21 Wigley 347
22 Daphne Spain actually suggests that the act of bringing books into shared spaces can be an act that directly reduces gender inequality. Spain 127
23 Norris 29
language or writing, and then being willing to read or decipher her response. That she is literally without voice represents very well how male dominated societies deny women a voice in the conversation and reinforces the presentation of this idea in the play.

The contrasting roles of men and women helps to illustrate why the transition between acts one and two of Clybourne Park is so important to the play. The barrier of gendered space, which is firmly established in the first act of the play, serves to keep women in the home and to limit their opportunities. Mark Wigley notes in his essay on housing and gender that the divide is not merely between public and domestic, but also between “male mobility in the exterior to female stasis in the interior.”\textsuperscript{24} This separation between the home world and the workplace is “the primary form of gender segregation”\textsuperscript{25} seen in the first act of the play. Because women have less access to the outside world in the first act, men have more control over jobs, knowledge and power. In the second act, when the male-public/female-domestic divide breaks down, we see a transfer of power and roles from men to women.

The final key to how gendered space interacts with gender roles is, of course, power dynamics. As in the discussion of Act One, here power and knowledge are linked. Wigley suggests that “the first truly private space was the man’s study,”\textsuperscript{26} which supports the idea that in order to maintain hegemonic control the dominant group needs to have sole access to knowledge. This theory would help to explain why “architectural space also plays a role in maintaining status distinctions by gender”\textsuperscript{27} – architecture that restricts female access to knowledge denies women power. Conversely, this also implies that architecture which

\begin{flushleft}
\textsuperscript{24} Wigley 334 \\
\textsuperscript{25} Spain 107 \\
\textsuperscript{26} Wigley 347 \\
\textsuperscript{27} Spain 7
\end{flushleft}
provides women with easy access to knowledge and debate also grants them power. This link between knowledge access and power is useful to the scenic design of *Clybourne Park* as a tangible change between acts one and two which would correlate to the changing gender roles.

The separation of women from spaces of knowledge appears explicitly in 1950s advertisements, which provide a great deal of historic scenic research. The juxtaposition of the two advertisements in Figure 2 and Figure 3 does an excellent job of showing how consciously women were excluded from knowledge, which was a male domain.
Figure 2

Figure 3

The first image, an advertisement for makeup, starts promisingly, with the words “Dorothy Gray goes to College.” Unfortunately, things quickly deteriorate as the ad equates their make-up to a college major, implying that being attractive is more important to a girl’s future than being educated is. The ad even suggests that their makeup will keep a girl looking “pretty for poems,” which makes it seem that the ad writers think that women go to college in search of romance, expecting that they will have men writing them poems. In contrast, the second ad is for sectional bookshelves and prominently features a man surrounded by trappings of masculinity. The main image has a man in his armchair smoking a pipe with a drink on the table next to him. He is holding a book and has a bookshelf easily accessible next to him. The armchair itself is a very rectilinear armchair, with no curves to it except for beveling on the edges, which aesthetically marks it as male. The drink and pipe also carried connotations of masculinity. In this ad, access to knowledge is part of the story of masculinity. The man, who works outside the house, whose chair is strong and linear, who drinks and smokes, this man also reads. The juxtaposition of the makeup ad and the bookshelf ad provide two important pieces of information. First, they visually illustrate the divide between male and female power vis-à-vis knowledge in 1950s America. The two advertisements perfectly illustrate the juxtaposition of how “the husband is given this space of immaterial knowledge while the wife is given a dressing room, space of material masks, off her bedroom.”28 Second, the advertisement for the bookshelf gives a very clear image of what a man’s armchair and its surroundings would have been in the 1950s. Russ, as a reader of National Geographic who spends most of the first act attached to his armchair, would

28 Wigley 348
probably have a similar arrangement, with his armchair, ottoman, side table, and lamp. Bev, on the other hand, would need to go through Russ to gain access to knowledge and power.

**Designing With Gendered Space**

The themes of gender in *Clybourne Park* led me to look at theories of gendered space as a way to inform the scenic design. The connections between traditional gender roles and gendered space in the first act have informed a restrictive space with sharper delineations between areas. This has resulted in a divide between a male dominated living room and a dining room and kitchen space to which women are relegated. To create this division, I employ visual signifiers of gender, power, and separation. These signifiers are based in visual research, like the examples in figures one through three, and on the work of the feminist theorists I used to analyze the play. Along with a consideration of the needs of the play, this has been crucial to my process for this design.

**The Set**

My approach to this design started with a bird’s eye view of character movement, then developed into sketches, groundplans, elevations, and models. As the design has progressed, the groundplan has remained the most crucial reference for me, and it serves well in this context as a way to introduce the set. Figure four is my groundplan for Act One of William and Mary Theatre’s Production of *Clybourne Park*. 
Figure 4
The most downstage center area, closest to the audience, highlighted in red is the living room. It serves as the main male space in Act One, and the majority of the action of takes place there. Upstage of the living room, further from the audience, is the hallway, which is highlighted in yellow. Stage right, from the actors’ point of view, of the living room is the dining room. The dining room and the kitchen upstage of it are both highlighted in blue, and are the main female spaces in Act One. Stage left of the living room, again from the actor’s point of view, stand a wall with family pictures, a set of bay windows, and the front door, all highlighted in purple. Upstage of the hallway is a staircase leading to the second floor and a door leading to the basement. This layout, in Act One, allows for the separation of the areas from each other and the gendering of certain parts of the set, namely the living room as male and the dining room and kitchen as female.

**Barriers – How Architecture Restricts Access**

The separation of the male and female spaces from each other both allows for the spaces to be considered individually and serves to support the idea that divided societies create inequality. In Act One of *Clybourne Park*, when Jim tells Bev that “Knowledge is power,” he lampshades the importance of exclusive knowledge to male hegemony. Likewise, Betsy’s deafness and Bev’s lack of interest in knowledge show how the play restricts female access to knowledge and ability to participate in debate. To support this divide in access to knowledge and debate the male space of the living room, where conversations take place and decisions are made, needs to be visually separated from the more domestic dining room in order to emphasize the separation between the two main gendered spaces of the play.

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29 Spain xiv
However, putting full walls between playing spaces, while architecturally accurate, has the unfortunate side effect of blocking sightlines rather badly. The alternative of putting low walls between the rooms looked far too modern for a house built in the 1890s. In the end, instead of raising walls to divide the space, we lowered the living room, creating a step down into it from the rest of the house.
Figure 5 shows an early sketch for the show with low walls separating the rooms.
Figure 6 shows the set at the beginning of Act One, with all set dressing and furniture still in place. Particularly of note are the boxes to the left (stage right) and Russ’s armchair. This image shows how the change in height, along with the specific use of furniture, separates the two rooms.

Photo taken during final dress rehearsal, April 9, by Josh Blum.
Figure six shows the set during at the beginning of Act One. This image shows the changes in height between the rooms, as well as the overall shape of the scenery. Combined with figure four, this conveys fairly well the overall look and feel of the first act. While my various attempts at putting walls between the living room and the dining room ended up not being useful, the use of the step down to delineate the border seemed insufficient on its own. The barrier of the height change has therefore been reinforced by the moving boxes, which have been piled around the edges of the living room, creating a faux wall in places.

The scenic design establishes the living room itself as a unified space in several ways. Being the only area with rugs in it, not only gives the floor some visual interest, it also helps to make the room more distinct. The placement of Russ’s armchair in a corner observing the entire room serves a similar function, giving the room an identity connected to Russ as its main occupant. The combination of floor covering, height change, and physical barrier helps both to visually separate the living room from the rest of the space for the audience, and to make it more difficult for the female characters to participate in the conversations that happen in the living room during Act One.

While the main divide in Act One, between the living and dining rooms, could not be established with walls, the separation from the more interior domestic space of the kitchen could be. This second idea for creating restrictive architecture, blocking the kitchen off from the rest of the house, has been formed into a pair of walls in the upstage right corner of the set. These walls block off the more internal domestic parts of the house, in traditional definitions of gendered space the more female parts, from the areas where guests are welcomed. These walls play into the idea that women, traditionally, were to be kept hidden
from the outside world, ostensibly to protect them. These walls, like the barriers around the living room, prevent women from participating in conversations with men in the living room, effectively segregating the women in the kitchen from the men. For the audience, this barrier is emphasized through the use of only a partial, “saloon-style” door. This style door is useful for two reasons. First, the door allows the audience to somewhat see the action taking place upstage of it, drawing attention to the separation more than a closed door, which gives the audience no action to watch, could. The other benefit of the saloon style door is aesthetic. While the majority of the set is rectilinear, the saloon style door presents a curved, more feminine profile. Both of these aspects are intended to emphasize the female presence in the kitchen and dining room areas.

The overall shape of the set contributes in a small way to the restrictive sense of the first act as well. The rectilinear qualities of the shape of the pieces of scenery evoke a certain degree of masculinity. This surrounds the entire set, including the female spaces of the dining room and the kitchen, with male visuals, echoing the ideas from the tide ad in figure one, which showed domesticity enclosed by phallic symbolism. This symbolic surrounding of female space by masculine restrictions creates one of the key moments of tableau in this production: when Jim brings Francine into the living room to interrogate her, she has Karl and Jim enclosing her from either side and Albert standing protectively behind her, surrounding her with men who take on traditionally male roles of either domination or protection. Surrounding the playing space with such a masculine set creates a similar visual effect, both protecting and restricting the characters.

30 Wigley 332
How Knowledge and Power Interact with Space

The barriers and restrictive architecture of the set reinforce the patriarchal society of the first act of Clybourne Park by blocking women’s access to knowledge and power. In European and American history, reserving knowledge and decision making within male spaces, away from women has been a major part of the male hegemony, and links the study of gender, space, and power. The activities of Act One of Clybourne Park, especially the dialogue among Russ, Jim, and Bev, highlight the link between these topics. The barriers keeping women from easily taking part in male conversations from the domestic space of the dining room serve this idea well, but they fail to connect men to knowledge in any way. Although the script demands a certain degree of sparseness in the set, this connection can still be forged scenically through set dressings and stage properties. Figure seven shows Russ’s side table, with cigarettes, ashtray, radio, and National Geographic magazines.
Figure 7 shows Russ’s side table, with cigarettes, ashtray, radio, and National Geographic magazines. All of these items are signifiers of either knowledge or masculinity. The similarities to the items in Figure 3 (page 16) are particularly notable.

Photo taken during second dress rehearsal, April 8, by Josh Blum.
The radio, besides connecting the living room to the male dominated outside world, also connects Russ to his dead son, Kenneth, who is shown with his own radio in the flashback at the end of Act Two. The National Geographic, like the radio, is a connection to the outside world. It also is a source of knowledge, and is specifically referenced in the play as the source of Russ’s knowledge. Placing both of these signifiers of knowledge near Russ supports the idea that he, and by extension the other men of the first act, control knowledge. They also serve to connect the living room with these ideas of knowledge and the outside world.

The living room can be further emphasized as a space of knowledge and power by connecting it to the decision making process for the outside world. I am achieving this by making the physical access to the outside, the front door, easily accessible to the living room. In contrast with the side of the room bordering the dining room, which is anchored by Russ’s chair and built up with boxes, the upstage edge of the living room is free from impediment, allowing for easier entry to the living room from outside the house than from the dining room or kitchen. Essentially, emphasizing the public nature of the living room makes it a forum for debate, and therefore more of a space of male power, where decisions get made.

Russ – King in his Castle

While the national geographic and radio help to connect the living room to the concept of knowledge, they do not fully gender the space as male. To create the sense of a masculine aesthetic with minimal furniture, I have used Russ’s armchair to visually and symbolically gender the living room as male. Although some of the original ideas for the chair actually intended to undermine Russ’s authority, in the end the chair has been used to support the director’s characterization of Russ as a strong male figure, ruling over his
domain. Figure eight shows Russ’s chair and its surroundings, which are modeled on the advertisement from figure three.
Figure 8 shows Russ’s armchair and its surrounding furniture. This setup is the center of much of the dialog and action of the act.

Photo taken during second dress rehearsal, April 8, by Josh Blum.
With the goal of supporting Russ as an emblem of male hegemony in Act One, I decided first of all to use his chair to anchor the corner of the living room between the living room and the kitchen. This position helps to firmly establish the barrier around the living room. It also places Russ very nearly dead center, emphasizing his position of power. Finally, the chair, like the saloon door in the dining room, helps to gender the space it is in aesthetically. While the saloon door curves in a feminine fashion, Russ’s armchair is as rectilinear as possible. Its colors are heavy and its pattern is also rectilinear, all of which marks it as male. Even the lamp behind the chair, from an audience perspective, is rectilinear, having a cylindrical rather than tapering shade, aesthetically being both a phallic and a rectilinear object. The entire arrangement, with the table, lamp, and chair with ottoman also replicate the typical advertisements of the 1950s with a man in his armchair, as seen in figure three.

As the only real furniture in the living room, Russ’s armchair and the associated table and lamp establish the gender of the space through their aesthetic “maleness” and by supporting Russ’s hegemonic control over the house.

**Domesticity and Gendered Space**

In contrast with the public, decision-making aspects of traditionally “male” spaces, traditionally “female” spaces have connotations of domesticity and subservience. Within the world of the play, these attributes are shown in the behavior of Bev, Betsy, and Francine. In the first act, the scenery can help to support this portrayal.

The scenic design emphasizes the domestic and subservient role played by the women in the first act in several ways. First, through the use of domestic furniture in the female spaces. Second, through restricting women not just from the public space of the living room,
but also to the domestic world of the dining room and kitchen. And third, in support of the first two methods, by using props and set dressings to show the domestic nature of the work the women do throughout the act.

With regards to furnishing, the major pieces of furniture in the dining room exhibit feminine qualities, either symbolically or aesthetically. One of these pieces, Bev’s stool, shown in figure nine, is a direct contrast to Russ’s armchair.
Figure 9 shows both Bev’s stool (left) and Russ’s armchair (right). These two seats are intended as a visual juxtaposition of male and female roles and power.

Photo taken during second dress rehearsal, April 8, by Josh Blum.
Aesthetically, Bev’s stool is juxtaposed with Russ’s armchair. Bev’s furniture is small, frail, light, and mobile. It can be moved on a whim and provides her with a much less secure seat of power over Francine than what Russ has over the house as a whole. The wire frame of the stool and its curves and floral patterns give the stool a less solid and a more curvaceous look than the armchair. This shows both the femininity of the space and the lack of power that Bev has relative to Russ. The other pieces of furniture in the dining room and kitchen, the china cabinet, Bev’s folding table, and the kitchen table upstage, all carry strong domestic connotations. The china cabinet, which Francine and Bev are in the process of emptying, carries feminine meaning because it has a domestic function, holding dishes, silverware, and other items associated with housework. Bev’s folding table, likewise, is a place where she works at packing domestic items. Lastly, the table in the food preparation area upstage particularly serves as a site where the women, Bev and Betsy, go to prepare drinks for the men. As with Russ’s chair, the sparse furniture emphasizes the importance of each of these pieces, all of which help to connect the women to domestic work and to place them below the men hierarchically.

The second way that the scenic design helps to establish the dining room as a domestic “female” space is by restricting the women to that area. Besides obvious physical barriers between the spaces, the stage business suggested by the scenic design will keep the women in the domestic areas, hopefully highlighting the divide between male and female spaces in the first act. Stage properties and set dressing will both be particularly useful toward the end of giving the women activities which emphasize their restriction to “female” spaces. Pictures on the wall, silverware, linens, and china all suggest the domestic nature of the space. The necessity to pack these items for the move will help to restrict the women to
areas where they have work to do. Once again, this activity not only helps to gender the space it takes place in, but also juxtaposes the women’s constant work to the men’s talking.

**The Second Act: Shaking Things Up**

In the second act of *Clybourne Park*, Bruce Norris upends the traditional gender roles portrayed in the first act. The racial changes to the neighborhood, and the corresponding change in interracial interactions in the play, are accompanied by a similar change in gender roles. While women in the first act are restricted to domestic duties and largely barred from important conversations, women in the second act work outside the domestic sphere and exert a great deal of influence over the conversation. They are no longer silent and subservient, instead showing themselves to be at least equal to the men with regards to status and knowledge.

The goal of portraying the disruption of white male hegemony from Act One to Act Two has guided many of the scenic changes that occur between acts. Some of these changes show the racial shift in the neighborhood, a shift which takes up most of the direct focus of the dialog. Another set of possibilities is opened by looking at how theories of gendered space correspond to the shifting power dynamics and gender roles Norris shows in the second act.

One of the biggest changes between acts one and two is the women’s jobs. While in Act One the women are either housewives, in the cases of Bev and Betsy, or domestic workers, in the case of Francine, in Act Two the women have jobs outside of the home. In Act One, Russ’s constant refrain is that his commute will take six and a half minutes, as opposed to half an hour.31 In Act Two, Lindsey repeats this exact piece of dialog, talking

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31 Norris 17 & 42
about her own job and commute time.\(^{32}\) Likewise, Kathy is employed outside of the home as a lawyer. Similarly to Lindsey, Lena has also taken a man’s role from the first act: Karl’s. In Act One, Karl is the community organizer with deep roots who is concerned about the potential damage to the neighborhood from changes. In the second act, Lena is the person concerned with the ethnic changes to the neighborhood, and speaks proudly of her great aunt, calling her a “pioneer.”\(^{33}\)

These changes in the play match up well to real world changes. They are a reversal of the gender segregation shown in the first act, giving women access to the workplace and public world.\(^{34}\) In order to show these changes, I have endeavored to reverse many of the scenic choices that made the first act particularly reflective of gendered space, intentionally de-gendering much of the space. Choices such as removing barriers between spaces or adding items of knowledge to formerly female spaces are intended to portray some of the ways that modern homes show women’s changing status.\(^{35}\)

Another aspect of the second act is a racial change in the neighborhood. Although the racial themes of the play are not the primary concern of my thesis, they are very important to the play, and have been addressed in the scenic design. There is, of course, a relationship between race and gender, especially in terms of power dynamics. Hegemony in America is not just male, but white, heterosexual, wealthy male, and a person’s place on the proverbial totem pole is determined by race and class distinctions as well as gender ones.\(^{36}\) Within Clybourne Park, this can be seen in Lena’s role. Lena reflects a reality of the Black

\(^{32}\) Norris 46

\(^{33}\) Norris 60

\(^{34}\) “The primary form of gender segregation created by capitalism is the separation of home from workplace.” Spain 107

\(^{35}\) Spain 127

\(^{36}\) Spain 234
community, especially in Chicago: there is a tradition of female community leadership dating back at least to the Chicago Black Renaissance, a role which has become even more emphasized in the wake of drug and gang related crime. While these racial topics are important to the play, and are interrelated with the gender themes, they are not crucial to this discussion of gendered space.

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37 Knupfer 2
Figure 10 depicts one of the main spaces where gender and racial themes overlap on the set.

The bookshelf serves as a part of the change in gendered access to knowledge, the kente cloth behind the bookshelf is a signifier of a Black family connected to their African roots.

Photo taken during final dress rehearsal, April 9, by Josh Blum.
The Set

The second act of *Clybourne Park* shows the house after some years of abandonment. Although a black family had owned the house for some time, the audience sees the house only a few days before it is to be demolished. Part of the challenge of the scene change between acts has been to tell the story of fifty years of racial and economic changes in the neighborhood, while also making the setting believable. Part of the goal in this act is to create a single space, rather than the rooms of Act One. The different spaces are connected to each other by seating the cast throughout the space, creating a situation where the conversation and action naturally encompass the entire space. The removal of barriers, including the walls that previously separated the kitchen from the rest of the house, has been a related goal. Overall, the set is more open in the second act, with less furniture, fewer walls, and fewer barriers.
Figure 11
Figure 11 shows the second act groundplan. The kitchen walls have been removed, and furniture has been spread throughout the space, connecting what had previously been intended as separate rooms.

Figure twelve is a picture of the set during the second act. The placement of the different participants in the conversation throughout the space visually converts the set from being multiple divided rooms into being a single large room.

Photo taken during final dress rehearsal, April 9, by Josh Blum.
Removing Old Barriers

The main contrast between the acts of the play is in the levels of freedom of movement throughout the space. This movement, shown physically in the act as people wander to take phone calls or to argue in more privacy, goes hand in hand with the idea that barriers restrict gender equality, and removing them aids it. Framed in the importance of architecture to societal controls on women, opening up the set for the second act, when women have gained a modicum of power, becomes particularly important. I am achieving this several ways in our production of *Clybourne Park*. First of all, as has already been mentioned, Russ’s armchair, which was the cornerstone of the barrier between the “male” living room and “female” dining room has been removed. Similarly, the boxes and rugs that were helping to divide the house have also been removed and have not been replaced. More dramatically, the walls that were separating the offstage kitchen area from the more public areas of the house have been removed. Besides symbolically opening up the house and removing impediments to female access to public spaces of discourse and power, removing the walls also supports the story this production is trying to tell between acts. The aspect of the scene change that does the most to erase the barriers of Act One is the arrangement of seating. The participants in the conversation in Act Two have been spread throughout the space, joining what had been the living room, dining room, and hallway into a single space. The openness of the arrangement links to the idea that less restrictive architecture, by its nature, reduces gender inequality by giving women access to knowledge and to status in the public sphere.\(^{38}\)

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\(^{38}\) Spain 127
Knowledge as Shared

In order to support the idea that men no longer control access to knowledge in the second act of *Clybourne Park*, the scenic design includes a single, important site of knowledge in the second act: a bookshelf. This bookshelf is symbolic in many ways. First of all, the bookshelf blocks the door to the basement. This blocks off an area that used to belong to Russ, the basement where he kept his tools, and tells the story that Lena’s great aunt, as an entrepreneurial woman, might have rented out the lower level of the house and blocked the connecting door for privacy’s sake. The bookshelf also replaces the wall that was removed. Symbolically, this replaces a barrier which kept women from accessing knowledge with a provider and store of knowledge. Finally, with the addition of kente cloth left behind when the house was abandoned, the bookshelf can be used to show the Black culture of the family that lived there between acts.

Replacing Russ

In Act One, Russ’s armchair serves as the centerpiece of the male dominated living room. Its aesthetic maleness and its symbolic use as a literal seat of power both contribute to the sense of male hegemony in the first act. The use of the chair to anchor a corner of the living room is also important to maintaining the visual and symbolic barrier between male and female spaces. In the second act, Russ and the other men have been removed from their seats of power. In the more modern setting, power is shared, mostly amongst the three women. This is reflected in the seating arrangement of each of the pairings. Lena and Kevin share a single box as a seat, with Kevin normally standing unless Lena has risen to speak. This is a moderately equitable relationship, which supports their portrayal in this production. In sharp contrast to Lena and Kevin’s relationship is the relationship between Steve and
Lindsey. Lindsey dominates this relationship, constantly belittling Steve.\textsuperscript{39} To support this dynamic, Lindsey is given a folding chair with a comfortable pillow and a vibrant red color to draw attention while Steve has to sit on an overturned paint bucket. Finally, Kathy, who sits in the center next to Tom, brings her own stool to sit on, while Tom sits upon another cardboard box. The reversal from the Act One seating arrangement, where Bev, as the woman, has a stool and Russ, as the man, has his armchair, represents the shift in power from the men to the women.

Conclusion

My application of gendered space theories to the scenic design of \textit{Clybourne Park}, while certainly interesting for me, has been of questionable success. In terms of final product, certain aspects of the design demonstrate better than others the effectiveness of my use of gendered space as an interpretive approach to this scenic design, and I feel that much of my intention does not carry through strongly enough. In terms of process, however, I have been strongly influenced by the ideas of gendered space in ways that, while they may not have conveyed the gender meaning I intended, were interesting scenic choices in their own right.

The elements that I feel were best executed were the various chairs, especially Russ’s armchair in the first act. Aesthetically, the chair looks like a man’s armchair, with its straight lines and darker colors. Its central location supports Russ’s position of power, and its placement relative to the edges of the living room do a good job of establishing the space. The association of the armchair with items of knowledge may or may not have read to the audience, but the overall setup matched my visual research very well. The contrast of Russ’s

\textsuperscript{39} Norris 45
chair to Bev’s stool, and the contrast between the seating arrangement in Act One and the seating arrangements in Act Two are also, I think, effective.

While I think that the use of seats to denote power, gendering, and control was effective, other aspects of my design did less to convey the ideas of gendered space as a factor in power dynamics and gender roles. The wall treatments and paint colors could have been more overt, as little thought went in to connecting them to either the racial or the gender themes of the play, as I instead chose to focus on the technicalities of the intermission change. The borders between the rooms in the first act could also have been more firmly established, but the need to have the actors use more of the space overrode the attempt to divide the house according to gender. Because the division between male and female spaces was not firmly enough established in the first act, I do not think that the removal of those barriers was necessarily self evident during the second act.

While I am not entirely satisfied with how well my scenic design conveyed the ideas of gendered space, I still believe that the choice of gendered space as a theoretical approach to this scenic design was useful to my process. In seeking to divide women from the conversations and knowledge of the living room during act one; I created a stage with three distinct levels in the main playing area, which has allowed for a very dynamic staging by providing the director with many options for shifting focus. The goal of bringing knowledge into a shared space in the second act created an area where Black culture and the African heritage of the community could be shown, even though the house is vacant. An awareness of gender relations helped to inform seating choices, which were useful to the director and the actors in establishing relationships between characters.
My scenic design may not have been as effective as I would have liked in reinforcing the gender themes of the play, and I think that I failed to create obviously gendered spaces on the stage, but I think that my attempt to support the gender themes of *Clybourne Park* was still worthwhile. There are certain aspects of the scenic design which have carried through the ideas of gendered space, connecting the ideas of hegemony and power relations to the space. The theories on how gendered spaces are formed also helped me to create a dynamic storytelling space. I do not know whether or not the audience will see how the use of boxes and elevation changes separate women from knowledge, or whether or not they will recognize the symbolic shift in power from men to women by way of chairs. I do know that many of the design elements of which I am most proud were born in my attempts to create or overturn gendered spaces, regardless of whether or not I was successful in reinforcing the play’s discourse on changing gender roles.
Bibliography


