

at all. To become so fixated on image-borne data as a vehicle for purposive communication might lead us to forget the potential of the computing media for direct revelation through abstract light, colour and sensory immersion generally.

This abstractly immersive mode can be traced back in painting at least to J. M. W. Turner or, say, Frederick Church, the American Luminist. They responded differently to emergent technology: Turner enhanced steam engines and smokestacks in hazy glory, while the Luminists radiantly memorialised a virgin nature threatened by industrialisation and modern transportation. But all invited their viewers, through the blessing of light, to transcend their fragmented modernity and thus regain a unified, panoramic and sublime world-view. Continuing this transcendentalist tradition, Mark Rothko's paintings, ambiguously defined blocks of colour which appear to glow and shimmer, allude explicitly to the meditative potential of abstract luminosity. So does an artist much influenced by Rothko, James Turrell, who describes his work thus: 'it's not about light or a record of it, but it is light. Light is not so much something that reveals, as it is itself the revelation.'²⁵

Significantly, to achieve their transcendentalist aims, the work of both Rothko and Turrell tends towards the condition of the electronic screen and of architecture. Both deal in fictions, indeed illusions: Rothko aims to make immobile paint seem to shimmer, Turrell to make light appear as solid plane or volume. And both enclose the spectators' bodies to control the limits of their vision: Rothko by arranging sets of paintings around them, Turrell by constructing darkened interiors or artificial horizons to the sky.

This suggests an alternative response to the electronic invasion of domestic space: to welcome it in but radically change its character. In their current 'informational' role, the telematic media are sleepless, fidgety, and demanding. They are, in a precise sense, 'uncanny' in that they threaten the frontiers of selfhood. And they discourage that mental state of still coherence – achieved when we stare into a flame, gaze idly from a window, or watch shadows lengthen – which rebuilds the self.

Here, then, is a role for the architects of space and of software. To make that mental state easier to achieve, architecture (too long obsessed with its iconography) could borrow the luminous, vaporous splendour of the electronic screen. The electronic screen, in exchange, could borrow from architectural space its revelatory abstraction, its ability to register the flow of daily and seasonal time, and its capacity to cup light, like liquid, in its hand. Then, when the screen pours light over us like the pearly glow of Vermeer's interiors or the jewelled radiance of the Gothic cathedrals, we would not be reading but communing with it. We would be looking without needing to see.

Jane Rendell

doing it, (un)doing it, (over)doing it yourself

RHETORICS OF ARCHITECTURAL

ABUSE

In a love affair most seek an eternal homeland. Others, but very few, eternal voyaging. These latter are melancholics, for whom contact with mother earth is to be shunned. They seek the person who will keep far from them the homeland's sadness. To that person they remain faithful.¹

¹ W. Benjamin, *One Way Street*, London, Verso, 1992, p. 75.

DOING IT

I was taught the right way to do architecture. I was taught how to make things stand up. I was also told the amazing story of architecture, of how architects did architecture all on their own. As if by magic, they imagined architecture, and then, with minimal fuss, and certainly no mess, they made it, whole and perfect pieces of it – just like in their dreams. After they had made it, there was nothing to do, but dream some more and make some more.

The Architect, by his arrangement of forms, realizes an order which is a pure creation of his spirit.²

² Le Corbusier, *Towards a New Architecture*, London, The Architectural Press, 1985, p. 17.

I was also told that architects were important people, very important people, the most important people in the building trade. For architects, the building trade can be used metaphorically – to refer to the world.

(UN)DOING IT

For a while I swallowed this simple and straightforward story. But then I started to get suspicious, and thought there might be a twist to the tale. I thought the twist most likely involved those busy architects, dreaming and making, dreaming and making, dreaming and making . . . those busy architects who did not bother about the architecture once it was made, unless other people started doing things with it. These other people, the 'non-architects', were not to be trusted. They were involved in subversive activities which resulted in hideous and frightening things – they were attempting to (un)make architecture, to (un)do it completely, making it almost as silly as themselves. There was only one way to deal with this threat to architecture – ridicule. I went along with this – poking fun at their monstrous (un)doings worked a treat. Although occasionally I could have sworn that I had been involved in some (un)doings myself.

But then one day, in Moscow, something strange happened. I visited Mr Melnikov's house – a symphony of great architectural geometry. A safe haven I thought – no silliness here. But, in the marital bedroom, the very place which Mr Melnikov shared with his wife and two children, Mrs Melnikov had gathered together all kinds of decorative trappings, ornaments and lace, funny old beds and chairs, and, with complete disregard to her esteemed husband's dreamings and makings, she had made a mess. This was architecture (un)done.

If you dig beneath the surface then you discover the unexpected. This process can reintroduce the city to the urban dweller, offering an opportunity to discover something new, and through their own agendas and perspectives find a new mapping and a new way of thinking about cities. The strange becomes familiar and the familiar becomes strange.³

(Un)doing architecture made sweet disorder.

(OVER)DOING IT

My interest in Mrs Melnikov's Soviet bric-à-brac resulted in an architectural awakening, of sorts. My own architectural undoing did not pass unnoticed. But no-one thought it clever, least of all me. As an architect looking for work, celebrating the charmed and charming places created by non-architects was not clever.

Through telling new stories, the unknown, undiscovered city can be laid open to critical scrutiny, to new urban practices, new urban subversions. . . . The agenda is radical in its intent, but I would like to suggest that the unknown is not so easily known – indeed, it may be all too visible, right in front of our eyes, buried into the infrastructures of everyday lives, so intrinsic we hardly even feel their presence anymore. And when we do, do we really want to know?⁴

OCCUPIED TERRITORIES

But I've been (over)doing it. Let's start again. The architectural profession – the institution which protects the role of architects – encourages us to think of architecture in a certain way. The architectural profession insists that the real stuff of architecture consists of the bits which architects do. (Some of these bits are real enough to touch – walls, roofs, floors, bricks, timbers, tiles.) As architects, it is essential that we remain true to this ideal real structure, and ensure that we, and only we, do things our way. For architectural practice to sustain itself, doing architecture must be a privileged activity, carried out by certain people, at certain times and in certain ways – architecture is an occupied territory, occupied by architecture.

⁴ S. Pile, *The Unknown City* . . . or, an urban geography of what lies beneath the surface', in I. Borden, J. Kerr, A. Pivaro and J. Rendell (eds), *The Unknown City: Contesting Architecture and Social Space*, Chichester, John Wiley, forthcoming.

³ I. Borden, J. Kerr, A. Pivaro and J. Rendell (eds), *Strangely Familiar: Narratives of Architecture in the City*, London, Routledge, 1995, p. 9.

T. T. Minh-Ha, *When the Moon Was Red: Representation, Gender and Cultural Politics*, London, Routledge, 1991, p. 227.

*The waning of the hegemonic professional ethos is a necessary condition for the emergence of new relationships and complex forms of repressed subjectivities.*⁵

But we all know that architects are not the only doers of architecture. Most obviously, architecture is physically made by builders, and long after the building has been made the non-architects continuously do architecture. When we, as non-architects occupy a space, when we start to use it, we start to 'do-it-ourselves'. But we do this in an already occupied territory, where the activity of doing architecture has been classified and claimed by architects. The rules have already been established: rules about site and space; about permanence, structure and stability; about the relation of form and function, the design of details, the installation of services, the arrangement of furniture and the application of decoration. Other people cannot do architecture, their activities can only be categorised as (un)doing or (over)doing it. We also find that there are people occupying the territory as both users and architects — the territory is starting to get over-occupied.

OVER-OCCUPIED TERRITORIES

The (un)doing of architecture through use, and the (over)doing of architecture through critically attending to such abuse, creates rather dense territories of occupation. We need to think critically:

*Critical work is made to fare on interstitial ground . . . critical strategies must be developed within a range of diversely occupied territories where the temptation to grant any single territory transcendent status is continually resisted.*⁶

Thinking about time can help to redefine the territorial occupations of doing and using. The design and production of the building up to so-called 'completion', constitutes only a small part of architectural time. But instead we should consider architectural time as encompassing the use, reuse, destruction and decay of spaces and building components. New temporalities, ones which go beyond the construction of a set of pre-designed drawings, can also be created through consumption. Through consumption, the traditional logic of need, which requires the architect to design for perceived use, can be upset. Through the purchase of commodified buildings and fittings by the user, one set of territorial occupations can be undone. Consumption can be taken to be a simple economic act of buying and selling, but it can also be looked

at from a symbolic point of view. Goods represent social values. Consuming, acquiring goods, is a means of gaining a certain social status and constructing a corresponding social identity. The occupation and consumption of architecture reinforces who we think we are and who we would like to be.

*What am I going to do with my theories, all so pretty, so agile, and so theoretical. . . . All my more and more perfect theories, my shuttles and my rockets, my machines rivaling in precision, wit, and tenacity the toughest research brains, all the champion theories I have so carefully shaped, with such satisfaction, all of them?*⁷

Houses are by far the most expensive commodities which we buy. The houses we choose to live in, and the way we choose to live in them, distinguishes us from others by emphasising difference and/or by maximising similarity. Our choices are limited by all sorts of factors — by our gender, class, race, age, mobility, but not least by our internal desires. Nowhere do these desires resonate more spatially than in the place we call 'home'.

*Home is that place which enables and promotes varied and everchanging perspectives, a place where one discovers new ways of seeing reality, frontiers of difference.*⁸

OVER-OCCUPIED TERRITORIES, OR, HOMELANDS

On a leafy street in Clapham, minutes from the common, is a terraced house which was my home for two years. Scattered all over London, all over England, all over the world, are other homes, houses where I once lived. In some still standing, I return and revisit past lives and loves. Others have been destroyed, physically crushed in military coups, or erased from conscious memory only to be revisited in dreams.

*Of course places can be home, but they do not have to be thought of in that way, nor do they have to be places of nostalgia. You may, indeed, have many of them.*⁹

In all the places I have lived I recognise parts of myself, my body in parts, but this particular house represents something very special to me. It was, and still is, a spiritual home. Its spaces echo my attempts to resist the domination of social systems, like patriarchy and capitalism. The ever changing, neglected and decaying fabric of my home and its strangely disparate and changing occupants challenged stultifying

⁷ H. Cixous, *The Book of Promethea*, Lincoln, University of Nebraska Press, 1991, p. 6.

⁸ b. hooks, *Yearning: Race, Gender, and Cultural Politics*, London, Turnaround Press, 1989, p. 148.

⁹ D. Massey, *Space, Place and Gender*, Cambridge, Polity Press, 1994, p. 172.

10 I. Eberhardt, *The Passionate*

Norma: The Diary of Isabelle

Eberhardt, Boston, Beacon Press,

1988, p. 36.

Perhaps the strange side of my nature can be summed up in a single trait: the need to keep searching, come what may, for new events, and flee inertia and stagnation.¹⁰

Through its fragile structure this house physically embraced my need for transiency, and it was perhaps this unhomeliness, which made it feel more like home to me than any other. This home, and the friend I shared it with, showed me, what I can only call 'the rhetorics of architectural abuse' (a term borrowed from Pierre Bourdieu, and abused).

THE RHETORICS OF USE

11 P. Bourdieu, *Distinction: A Social Critique of the Judgement of Taste*, Cambridge, Harvard University Press, 1984

According to Bourdieu, the social construction of identity and patterns of lifestyles and consumption can be explained through the 'social dynamics of negative distinction'.¹¹ The display of status symbols is as important as their possession. Distinctions are created not just through buying more goods, but by creating ever more subtle distinctions, by playing with an existing 'vocabulary' of material signs through the development of a 'rhetoric' of use. Distinct social identities of resistance and difference can be represented through the use (and re-use) of space and materials. Particular kinds of occupational activities develop different rhetorics of architectural use, some reinforce dominant modes of spatial behaviour, others choose to resist them. One of the causes, but also the consequences, of social comparison through distinction, is desire. Desiring creatures transgress the boundaries of natural needs. Desiring Practices¹² resist conventional ways of thinking about architecture, a 'desiring practice' undoes architecture: it is a form of architectural abuse.

THE RHETORICS OF ARCHITECTURAL ABUSE

The doing, (un)doing, (over)doing of 'home', transgress architectural and social definitions of domestic space and time, implying blissful and dangerous notions of disorder and impermanence. These spatial and temporal rhetorics of use are strategies of resistance. They stem from a desire to challenge ideas, within architectural practice and integral to patriarchal and capitalist society, about the ways we occupy and inhabit space. Paralleling feminist and socialist critiques, the spatial

rhetorics of use in this house in which I once lived, challenged, through alternative forms of occupying territory, the ways architects do architecture. Here making space meant taking it apart, doing-it-yourself meant both undoing it and overdoing it. These are rhetorics of architectural abuse.

Spaces can be real and imagined. Spaces can tell stories and unfold histories. Spaces can be interrupted, appropriated, and transformed through literary and artistic practices. As Patricia Parra notes, 'The appropriation and use of space are political acts.'¹³

BORROWING NOT BUYING

Squatting is an activity which resists property ownership and chooses to occupy without buying. It involves the use of premises without permission, without wishing, or being able, to pay rent. Squatting questions issues of purchase, property and occupation. Squatters may use places in ways that may differ from the original design intention. The occupation of places through squatting is more transitory than other forms of residence. Connections are easy to make with moving homes, barges and boats, buses and vans, but here, although the home may not be tied to one specific place, the relationship of occupier and place is often one of ownership.

London has not had many urban squatters. The attitude of English property owners towards squatters is very different, for example, to the regime of 'repressive tolerance'¹⁴ Edward Soja has described in encounters between the authorities and the squatting communities of Amsterdam. David Carr-Smith gives an intense account of the 'architecture of psycho-physical effects'¹⁵ in the squats of Amsterdam's dockland community, Edel Weiss, KNSM and Silo, conjuring up spaces of real physical danger but also of real physical community. In London empty buildings stay empty, the homeless remain on the street. It is in other cities that these places are inhabited, in other cities where there are communities of squatters. But other cities are strange to us and so hold more utopian appeal.

Cities new to us are full of promise. Unlike promises we make to each other, the promise of the city can never be broken. But like the promise we hold for each other, neither can it be fulfilled.¹⁶

In Amsterdam, Silo is to be converted to luxury apartments. The squats, ad hoc bars and cafés in east Berlin which I spent time in just after the wall had come down are

¹⁴ Edward Soja, 'The Stimulus of a Little Confusion: On Spuistraat, Amsterdam', in I. Borden, J. Kerr, A.

Pivano and J. Rendell (eds), *Strangely Familiar: Narratives of Architecture in the City*, London, Routledge, 1995, p. 30.

¹⁵ D. Carr-Smith, 'Silo: An Architecture of Psycho-Physical Effects' (unpublished paper).

¹⁶ V. Burgin, *Some Cities*, London, Reaktion Books, 1996, p. 7.

now permanent fixtures. Squatters may occupy marginal spaces through social circumstance or political aspiration, but it is important not to over romanticise. Squatters are not always lovely people. My mother's family home was squatted, they ripped tiles from the floors, plants from the garden, timbers from the floor to make fires. Some of the squatters I have known did not live an easy co-existence with each other, let alone the wider community. In north London, the occupation of abandoned houses scheduled for demolition due to road building plans, resulted in rising tensions. Rival gangs, who protected and controlled the rights to certain properties, emerged, resolving disputes over territory through violence. Problems of exclusion, of poverty, and the physical hardship of living without decent heating, lighting and sanitation cannot be overlooked.

17 Massey, *op. cit.*, p. 169.
*The identity of a place does not derive from some internalized history. It derives, in large part, precisely from the specificity of its interactions with the outside.*¹⁷

REFUSING RENT

Many of the houses on the street where I lived had, up until the time I came to be there, been squatted. Gradually they were bought by respectable families, repaired and restored. The woman who owned the house where I lived, refused to accept rent. Although her house (my home) was quite large, five stories including the space directly under the roof, she preferred to live frugally off her pension, in two first floor rooms. She had shared these rooms with her sister, for a short while with her sister's dead body, but most recently she was alone. Although her presence filled the house in a physical way, her occupation was predominantly psychic. She lived in a world just beyond the everyday, where spirits controlled the use of space.

18 C. Clement, *The Weary Sons of Fraud*, London, Verso, 1987, p. 58.
*To regress, that is, to step out of daily life, to be recognised as mentally ill – pure paradise.*¹⁸

These spirits, which she called, 'the powers that be', decided on home improvement plans and DIY. The 'powers' were not very adept in the material world, their decisions were made at random and often for no apparent reason. The plans they made concerning the rearrangement of large pieces of furniture occurred nightly, and they could order unwanted objects out at any time. Plumbing, electrical installation and general household maintenance followed their erratic management systems. The 'powers' refused offers of council money for repairs – this would only have disturbed

the natural karma of decay. Following this schema, rent money was also rejected – after all what could you do with money?

*The gift has no goal. No for. And no object. The gift – is given. Before any division into donor and recipient. Before any separate identities of giver and receiver. Even before that gift.*¹⁹

19 L. Ingary, *Elemental Passions*, London, The Athlone Press, 1992, p. 73.

SHARED SPACE

My home challenged conventional ideas about property ownership and renting, and also shed some light on the problem of shared spaces in domestic life. This house was home to quite a number – friends and strangers – all people who, in their own ways, set themselves outside conventional codes of living. Two young children, with their mother, then their father, and finally joined by the mother's lover, lived in the basement. Nearby they ran a ramshackle restaurant selling pulse and rice dishes and some obscure, mainly south American, beers. Once a year, the kids plus the restaurant were moved to Glastonbury. Two young women, to whom I smiled but rarely spoke, lived on the ground floor, and most recently two homeless young Polish men moved in. Most of the time, we lived in a pleasant, though remote, harmony. But there have also been conflicts, and a number of vicious attempts to wrest control of the property.

I lived on the top floor with my friend. He was the one who originally discovered the house, derelict with a pigeons' graveyard in the roof. He was the one who did and (un)did it, who made it home for me.

*She entered the book. She entered the pages of the book as a vagrant steals into an empty house, or a deserted garden.*²⁰

20 S. Germain, *The Weeping Woman on the Streets of Prague*, Sautre, Cambridgeshire, Deedus, 1993, p. 27.

There was a garden, not so much deserted as intermittently habited. It changed according to season and in relation to the attentiveness of the occupants. Sometimes vegetable stripes cut through the tangle of lengthening grass, rotting armchairs, rusting bicycles, abandoned 'Fisher Price' toys and sad old Mexican hammocks pinning for the Caribbean. There were other shared spaces, in between places. Coming in off the street you entered the hallway.

*Doors
 banged.
 He entered,
 sprayed by the street's gaiety.*²¹

21 V. Mayakovsky, *The Bedding and Selected Poetry*, London, Wiedenfeld and Nicolson, 1961, p. 129.

The hallway was sad and shabby, as any other communal hallway. Naively generous in their financial decisions, the 'powers' were strict about hygiene. Daily, they demanded that the staircase was cleaned with a powerful detergent. Any dirt or dust on the steps, the handrail, the intermittent patches of orange and brown lino was to be stripped away. Despite this intense domestic labour, the hallway was an interstitial space which to me, still smells of neglect.

22 P. MacKaghten and J. Urry, *Contested Natures*, London, Sage, 1997, p. 14.

*What thus needs investigation are the diverse 'smelscapes' which organise and mobilise our feelings about particular places (including what one might also call 'tastescapes'). The concept of smelandscape effectively brings out how smells are spatially ordered and place-related. In particular, the olfactory sense seems particularly important in evoking memories of very specific places.*²²

Everything flapped, the front door on its broken hinges, the letter box until its flap got lost, the streamers of dark white wallpaper and me. I flapped when the lock, which always needed fixing, bothered me. I'm not good with locks, nor with tools. I found it best to watch and wait and see what happened. Unclaimed papers piled up (fast). Dust accumulated (incredibly fast). Wood rotted (slowly). No-one broke in (as far as I noticed).

'LIVING ON THE EDGE'

Squatting can say things about the construction of identity, the display of a distinct social status in relation to conventional lifestyles. Architecture too can speak of the desire to be different. Desiring difference means doing architecture differently, intentionally (un)doing and (over)doing it. Often it is those trained as architects, but who feel they do not fit in, who challenge most purposefully, through their everyday inhabitation of the occupied territories of architecture, traditional ways of designing and making spaces. In search of their own identity, through their desire to do it differently, they refuse standardised rules, the principles of structure, services, construction and detailing, and resist ideologies concerning functionalism, space division and decoration.

Spaces evolve through more amorphous living arrangements, the placing of boundaries which re-negotiate the conventional divisions of public and private domesticity – privacy and secrecy are rethought with reference to bodily wastes and pleasures – *secretive display*. Standard details and materials are questioned. Services are installed in a way which challenges institutional codes and ideals of low

maintenance and instead opts for a high degree of strenuous user involvement – *form follows*. . . . Structural elements, such as timber members and walls, are taken as superfluous extras, whilst decorative features fulfil the roles of construction – *de-stabilising structures*. Collection, scavenging, recycling and bricolage, bizarre hybrids of junk shops and designer pieces, replace buying goods for the sake of it and buying goods only to be used in specific ways – *wandering objects*. Temporality is redefined, subjects and objects are linked through non-specific uses and random juxtapositioning, as fluid spatial processes – *wandering subjects*.

Distinction is constructed through a self-conscious and eccentric relationship with architectural principles and components. Designs are never fit for the purposes they were intended, form never follows function. This means living and using space in often contradictory and difficult ways, ways which follow the trajectory of the artist as bohemian, outsider or tortured soul. Notions of architecture as the other who completes the self are rejected.

*The loss of the other here too brings the implosion of the self. The other has been necessary as text, lover and life-blood. The performance of identity has been dependent on a partner who acts both as accomplice and audience. In his/her absence, the mask falls and the self is no longer clothed in her identity and his desire.*²³

²³ E. Wilson (ed.), *Sexuality and Masquerade: The Dadaist Book of Sexual Ambiguity*, Sawtrre, Cambridgeshire, Dadaist, 1996, p. 25.

The simple pleasures of commodity consumption are ripe for elaboration. 'Texas Homecare' and other (sub)urban sheds (on circular roads around towns) offer a satisfying Sunday afternoon solution to the malaise of house proud home-owners. These week-end picnic spots are veritable bazaars, jammed full of purpose-made tools and a glittering array of easy-fit, ready-to-fit, components which slip superficially into domestic bliss. The bricoleur is a home-maker who finds new uses for found objects and, with defunct tools, collages them randomly into space. The bricoleur does DIY differently. Doing it differently desires the (un)doing of the commercialisation and commodification of traditional DIY. It is a spatial practice which signifies an act of resistance, which attempts to establish identity by celebrating difference.

SECRETIVE DISPLAY

Living space is usually divided up according to a number of social conventions about domestic life, where sleeping is divided from playing, playing from living, living from eating, eating from cooking, cooking from sitting, sitting from sleeping, and so on. Every activity has its compartment, mapping and defining social relations very precisely

in space. In my home the boundaries which control and contain public and private activities were intentionally blurred and transgressed.

24 D. Levy, *Swallowing Geography*, London, Jonathan Cape Ltd, 1993, p. 73.

*A border is an undefined margin between two things, sanity and insanity, for example. It is an edge. To be marginal is to be not fully defined.*²⁴

The bath sat in the centre of the roof space. The roof space was bedroom, workroom and living room, and many other places all at once. From the bath you could look up into the sky, and down into the toilet, or directly onto the stove, beyond it to those eating at the table, and further through the window into the street. The beauty of lying in the bath and being able to talk to the person lying in bed next to you, or downstairs to the person preparing food in the kitchen, showed to me the importance of rethinking the kinds of divisions of spaces which we so readily accept.

25 L. Aegon, *Paris Peasant*, Boston, Exact Change, 1994, p. 53.

*At the baths, a very different kind of temperament tends towards dangerous daydreams: a twofold mythical feeling that is quite inexpressible comes to the surface. First, there is the sense of intimacy in the very centre of a very public place, a powerful contrast that remains effective for any one who has once experienced it; secondly, there is this taste for confusion which is a characteristic of the sense, and which leads them to divert every object from its accepted usage, to pervert it as the saying goes.*²⁵

Some New York and more recent London 'loft style' developments completely miss the point – the excitement of living in huge places is about using them differently. Why else would you want to sleep in a foundry? In new loft living everything is re-compartmentalised for you, but in my home, walls were removed rather than built. This was not to enable the free flow of pure space as in the modernist open plan, but rather to intensify the occupation of space by overlaying one kind of living over another – the way the place should have been used, with its (un)doing. We might call this a new mapping of domestic space, a questioning of the boundaries of bodies and places. Architecture is soft like a body if you (un)do it.

26 Charles Baudelaire quoted in E. K. Kaplan, *Baudelaire's Prose Poems*, Athens, University of Georgia Press, 1990, p. 27.

*A room that resembles a reverie, a truly spiritual room, where the stagnant atmosphere is lightly tinged with pink and blue. Here the soul takes a bath of laziness, perturbed with regret and desire. – Something like twilight, bluish and pinkish, a dream of voluptuous pleasure during an eclipse.*²⁶

Sitting on the toilet is probably the most private activity that takes place at home, the one place where we do expect a degree of privacy from prying eyes, ears, noses. All

these expectations were contradicted. The door was spliced like a swing door in a saloon bar. This tiny deep blue room had no ceiling, it opened directly to the roof space. To flush the toilet, you placed your hand through a smooth circular hole in the wall out into the stairwell, where you grabbed a wooden spoon hanging from the ceiling on a rope. Bare bottomed in an intimate and private space, your arm was extended into a public void, as if raised in greeting to a visitor. Coming up the stairs to the front door, searching for the door knob, your hands would meet fingers wrapped around a spoon.

*... space is broad, teeming with possibilities, positions, intersections, passages, detours. U-turns, dead ends, one-way streets. Too many possibilities indeed!*²⁷

²⁷ W. Benjamin, *One Way Street*, London, Verso, 1992.

FORM FOLLOWS

To do architecture we play by certain institutionalised codes – planning and building regulations, for example. To use architecture we follow these rules – we attach appliances in the right way, we sort out the plumbing as we are told we should. The most immediate work carried out by my friend, which made the spaces inhabitable, involved installing toilets, gas appliances, electricity, and so on. This it seemed had been done in a straightforward way. But I soon learnt that everything was of a quirky nature, sometimes following rules of simplicity rather than those of artifice. The soil pipe gushed diagonally through the stairwell and out of the rear wall of the house. In other homes it would have been hidden, but here it was proud feature of the hallway.

*However difficult, I must live out my theory of limiting one's needs.*²⁸

In other cases, rules had been grasped in order to be undone. In the same way that ideas about danger and safety were challenged, so too were ideas about structure and decoration, purpose and utility. Treating structural fabric as surface, as malleable and mouldable, meant the place was decorated by the cracking of the brickwork, and the revealing of rubble over a hundred years old contained between the splintering timber battens and studs of the partition walls. On the ceiling, jagged metal rivets worked to hold the old and decrepit plaster together, at night they shone like stars.

²⁸ I. Ehrenhaft, *The Passionate Nomad: The Diary of Isabelle Ehrenhaft*, Boston, Beacon Press, 1988, p. 14.

DE-STABILISING STRUCTURES

To occupy the roof as a habitable space, a truss had been removed. There were only three and this was the central one. To connect the two floor levels, the second floor and the roof space, a huge hole was cut out of the ceiling. There were structural implications, not least the fact that the roof space had not been designed for occupation, nor for bathing.

But danger was a driving force. The removal of structural members from the roof and the ceiling, the stripping back of partition walls to reveal the studwork – all decreased the stability of the house but allowed a myriad of potential interconnections.

She may go anywhere and everywhere, gaining entrance wherever she chooses; she sails through walls as easily as through tree-trunks or the piers of bridges. No material is an obstacle for her, neither stones, nor iron, nor wood, nor steel can impede her progress or hold back her step. For her, all matter has the fluidity of water.²⁹

²⁹ Gammah, op. cit., p. 27.

Asserting the fabric of the building as a living component of the space meant interacting closely with materials, existing in a state of close symbiosis with inanimate objects. It meant existing in the time of decay. Architecture, normally solid and dependable, here was transient, lacking in permanence, incapable of providing us with reliable shelter – architecture as fragile as we were. We existed in the time of a house whose walls were falling out. We survived on trust.

³⁰ R. M. Rilke, *Letters to a Young Poet*, New York, Vintage Books, 1986, p. 92.

And only if we arrange our life in accordance with the principle which tells us that we must always trust in the difficult, then what now appears to us as the most alien will become our most intimate and trusted experience.³⁰

Challenging the propriety of structure questions the ordered comforts of domestic routine, but also starts to tip the balance of safety and danger. Life lived with unstable physical materials becomes fraught with physical danger. Compared to the terrifyingly dangerous environments of the Silo homes described by Carr-Smith this was child's play. Compared to the risks some people have to take daily this was a farce. But this life was still a challenge, a challenge to the way we occupy space and to the social relationships we take for granted. It was a rejection of comfort and laziness. There was no room for complacency. You felt your own body in every moment of occupation. Using architecture felt like an *écriture féminine* – a writing from, and on, the body. The ladder to the upper floor was far too short, it had missing rungs, and in one place a

thick piece of sharp cold iron. Vertical movement, especially at night, took place as a series of jolts and slipped footings.

Admitting that writing is precisely working (in) the in-between, examining the process of the same and the other without which nothing lives, undoing the work of death, its first of all wanting two and both, one and the other together, not frozen in sequences of struggle and expulsion or other forms of killing, but made infinitely dynamic by a ceaseless exchanging between one and the other different subject, getting acquainted and beginning only from the living border of the other; a many-sided and inexhaustible course with thousands of meetings and transformations of the same in the other and in the in-between, from which a woman takes her forms.³¹

³¹ H. Dinos, *The Laugh of the Medusa*, London, Harvester, 1981, p. 46.

One morning I awoke to a horrible crash and scream; a friend unfamiliar with the intricacies of the household, had missed her step and fallen three metres to the kitchen floor below. Her head narrowly missed the cast iron stove. She spent months in hospital.

Most people have (with the help of conventions) turned their solutions toward what is easy and toward the easiest side of the easy; but it is clear that we must trust in what is difficult; everything alive trusts in it.³²

³² R. M. Rilke, *Letters to a Young Poet*, New York, Vintage Books, 1986, pp. 68–9.

Trusting in the difficult, was proving emotionally too difficult. I moved on shortly afterwards.

WANDERING OBJECTS

Chopping into timber joists with no respect for structural forces challenges laws of physics, laws which go beyond the definition of the relationship of architect and user. Sometimes doing things in non-conventional ways is madness. But there are other rules which we follow for no good reason. As users we adhere to all kinds of codes in architectural territory just because we are told to do so. We buy and use spaces, we buy and use objects, in the ways they were designed, for certain purposes, with no intention of using them for anything else.

The house was heated by open fires. But terrified of the rusting circular-saw lying in its wood pile lair (an assortment of deck chairs) in the garden, improvisation was called for. Mighty, I carried the fire from one room to another in a large baking tray, puzzling over myths of the campfire as the original organising feature of social space.

33 Levy, op. cit., p. 72.

*Each new journey is a mourning for what has been left behind. The wanderer sometimes tries to recreate what has been left behind, in a new place.*³³

Service elements, usually fixed, certainly in function, often in space, were given flexibility. The spaces themselves functioned flexibly. Using the attic as a bathroom is not perhaps a radical mis-use of space, but coming home to a kitchen performing as a public café was more surprising. A limited number of possessions provided a catalyst to achieve this degree of flexibility through transformation. In a matter of days, a table had gone from being the crowded focus of a lively drunken evening, to being rearranged as a number of smaller tables as in a restaurant, to framing candle-lit icons to be sold in a Saturday street market. At last it was left to blaze in the grate on a particularly cold night. This shifting relation between spaces and their potential utilities produced a continuous sense of doubt and uncertainty. You could never be sure exactly what something was and what it was not. This heightened my awareness of the ever-changing nature of static objects. Settled things can be wanderers too.

*She is the wanderer, burn, émigré, refugee, deportee, rambler, strolling player. Sometimes she would like to be a settler, but curiosity, grief and disaffection forbid it.*³⁴

Deciding just how and when to use an object in a certain way provokes interesting questions. At what point does a piece of furniture become firewood? The same questions apply to the (re)use of other people's waste. Re-using products can be a matter of economics – it can save money. The roof was lined with newspaper; this was cheaper, less of a pollutant, but less effective and rather more of a fire hazard than standard insulation. Re-using objects for traditional purposes involved finding specific items. Only in an area like Clapham where there were pockets of wealthy inhabitants could fine furnishings be found abandoned in the street; rugs, three piece suits, four poster beds, washing machines, tables, duvets. My friend had a detailed knowledge of the geography of the local skips. Re-using waste relied on availability but also on plentiful scavenging time and the fertile imagination required to create the new uses. But when objects had no fixed relation to their potential use, then the task of the finder was more demanding. The finder, my companion, had a remarkable gift for this kind of search.

³⁵ A. Breton, *Maid Love*, Lincoln, University of Nebraska Press, 1987, p. 15.

*You only have to know how to get along in the labyrinth. Interpretive delirium begins when man, ill-prepared, is taken by a sudden fear in the forest of symbols.*³⁵

Combining objects derived from many sources compares to postmodern intertextuality, the weaving of quotations. Placing found objects in new contexts encourages us to make connections we would not normally make. Everyday items become lively, animate and communicate in new ways. In his account of the Sipo, Carr-Smith describes in great detail this, the 'psychic' life of objects. Designer condoms in brown paper jackets rested comfortably on the mantle piece, next to an Italian gelatine mix and three steel tart cutters. The imagination creates these fluid relationships, rejecting the constraints imposed by rules of domestic order where 'everything has its place'. The dividing line between messiness and tidiness is blurred. Inside is outside. The seams are the decor.

*In any case, what is delightful here is the dissimilarity itself between the object wished for and the object found. Thus trouvaille, whether it be artistic, scientific, philosophic, or as useless as anything, is enough to undo the beauty of everything beside it. In it alone we recognize the marvellous precipitate of desire.*³⁶

Placing things and bodies in unusual combinations, positions us in new uncharted territory. Lost in space, our cognitive mapping devices de-stabilised, we imagine a new poetics of space and time. We understand anew the world we occupy, the relations between dreams and realities, between mental life and social relations, between objects and subjects. This space-time is unlimited, it is not stagnant with the inscriptions of specific and expected responses. Such potentially opposes the autocratic architect's pompous regimes of mono-functionality and also rejects the banality of highly flexible multi-purpose spaces designed for anything (but nothing) to happen in. The accidental and continually shifting juxtaposition of apparently unconnected things produces a density of interpretation. The layering of different daily patterns of understanding and using invoke architectural time as transient. There is no moment of completion, rather you are aware everyday of the continually widening cracks, the disintegration of the building fabric, the shifting spaces and roles of the furniture contained within them. Links are made between real objects, real and imagined objects, and real and imagined subjects – dreams are lived, lives are dreamt.

*It is only by making evident the intimate relation linking the two terms real and imaginary that I hope to break down the distinction, which seems to me less and less well founded, between the subjective and the objective.*³⁷

³⁷ *Ibid.*, p. 55.

³⁶ *Ibid.*, pp. 14-15.

WANDERING SUBJECTS

Although economics determines much of the recycling of waste, so too does a desire to subvert the system of consumption and to transgress the logics of economics. A decision to cut a number of roof lights for starlit baths meant waiting. We waited through a few writers, finely tuning the exact design details and spending the money we saved to buy the expensive components.

*The separation of art and life, so peculiar to the West, has been violently denounced since the beginning of the century in all artistic domains. To live and not to irritate – this necessity which has become a keyword in all intellectual circles, seems nevertheless to have suffered the unchanging destiny of ideas which remain at the level of a concept.*³⁸

We stapled and re-stapled blue plastic sheets over the twin holes, but the wind blew in and rain water dripped onto the edge of my bed. Still, the sky was a blissful fantasy blue. Finally, glass sheets were laid to rest directly on slim timber linings rising just proud of the roof slates and the sky was revealed un-obscured and incredibly blue. Elegant steel yachting hooks and rope delicately attached the glass to the frame, carrying through in the details the transparency from inside to outside. But alas too delicately for bathing *en plein air*. Lifted to allow in balmy air on a sunny morning, one pane shattered directly into the soapy water narrowly missing a tender skinned bather. We had many disagreements about the unsuitability of nautical details for domestic requirements. Finally I threatened to (re)do it, to buy a 'Velux' roof light, possibly from 'Texas Homecare'.

³⁹ Ibid., p. 137.

*Undoing, doing, and redoing interact mutually in their dispersion and continuity.*³⁹

For my friend, his living patterns were formulated through his habitual re-occupation of architecture. His rhetorics of architectural abuse were strategies of resistance. By performing DIY through the undoing of architecture his home expressed a desire to be different. But a point had been reached where the forms created followed anything but function – had we been overdoing it? Doing it, then (un)doing it and finally (over)doing it . . .

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