

KEEPING ROOMS: IDEAS IN SPACE

Keeping rooms are a reproduction of an imaginary space, much like the museum without walls proposed by Malraux; Duchamp's *bûte de valise* and Le Corbusier's filing cabinet.

The essential function of the keeping room is a non-function. A monument to the insufficiency of nomenclature and memory - it exists, not to preserve the paraphernalia of a lifetime in perpetuity, but rather to allow for reminiscence and reflection. The keeping room is a knowledge system; a belief in an order of things; a personal collection of collections; an archive of archives; an archaeology of dreams, drawings, regrets, loves, traumas, the minutiae of a life, obsessions, ephemera, inventories and souvenirs... A slippage between the self-enclosed paradigms of abstract order and the materiality of the world. And every architect-designed house should have one - an entire space dedicated to the storage of things and matter.

'I am the space where I am.'¹

How to describe the geometry of the keeping room?

As a symbol of solitude for the imagination; the 'germ of a room, a house';² a place of refuge like Bachelard's corner. As a space for the projection of possible worlds in which *what might be* is no less significant than what is. A space in which to explore the idea of infinite contemporary universes where 'the feeling of today ... is made from accumulations of the past and the vertigo of the void.'³ Or as a place of emergence and withdrawal where nothing is ever empty. 'The dialectics of full and empty only correspond to two geometrical non-realities (and it is) the function of inhabiting (which) constitutes the link between full and empty.'⁴

The intimate is not a space but a relationship between spaces.⁵

A focus for desires and longing, belonging and exclusion; a point of origin and return; a place in the world; a non-place; a microcosm of all possible worlds... The keeping room defines the limits against which it is possible to construct masks and identities.

'The archive is private, history is public. Out of the archive history is produced, usually a carefully woven seamless story, when in fact all archives are partial, messy, fractured not sealed off by history.'⁶

Obsolescence. So much is lost from recollection. The creation of a space of representation reveals a formative social space. Human geographies become filled with politics and belief. Space has a history.⁷ And in the in-between spaces, memory, evidence and imagination are systematically linked.

'The secret form is that of the boundary: it is the thing itself and, at the same time, the cessation of the thing.'⁸

What kind of space results from the redrawing of boundaries between public and private, inside and out, museum and world? The modernist architect, Le Corbusier sees the museum as a kind of cultural recording mechanism. 'The true museum is the one which contains everything'.⁹ The accumulative institution is displaced into the processes and systems of classification. 'An almost infinite set of possible arrangements and recontextualisations,'¹⁰ the new museum is understood as both a physical and phenomenological reality; a space of nexus and engagement. An archaeology, a fiction, if you like.

Rooms. I know space, it contains things.

A notion of space that has nothing to do with an enclosure within certain limits - a space that recognises only points and directions: a network of fabric, a territory of connections. This notion is not geometric and does not rely upon the void and the surround, figure and ground. It is a space of relations rather than limits - a continuous flow of interminable links, a labyrinthine maze of passages with snakes-and-ladders-like shafts and leaps, stairwells and blind alleys - an interconnection of molecular and unconscious worlds.

"Matter thus offers an infinitely porous, sponge or cavernous texture without emptiness, caverns endlessly contained in other caverns: ... the totality of the universe resembling 'a pond of matter in which there exist different flows and waves.'" ¹¹

In the keeping room the uniform flow of narrative time is impeded. Spaces coalesce with the rhythms of time that pass without impatience or contingency.

Approaching the infinite.

Imagine the horror and delight of finding yourself closed within another's keeping room. Everything appears to be sewn just like a treacherous narrative that appears to connect the most disparate things. You notice odd groupings of objects like links or clues to a storyline. There are an infinite number of possible storylines to construct. Perhaps amidst the ephemera you lose yourself and inhabit the world of another. You dig deep and are most interested to see what lies out of reach and sight. You rummage and find treasures pressed safely inside cloth and envelopes, writings like scratching on threadbare paper.

To inhabit the room is to employ system; the structural role of contamination. Once entered the space is tainted, hermetic seal broken for the new. You try it on like a mask, a surface, costume, a sort of mimicry of character and geography - conscious and unconscious.

Rather than represent a reality, the keeping room produces a new reality in which we might access the unspeakable domain beyond the public and the private realms.

A space where 'the inexpressible... shows itself; it is the mystical.'¹²

You emerge from the room and celebrate the transitory aspect of living. And the truth of impermanence.

'Ours is a history of reading the world as a system. Ours is a history of using systems to read the world. Artists have queued to join in.'¹³

At the intersection of art and architecture, history and archive, reverie and storytelling, fluidity and stasis, totality and void lies the symbiotic relationship between the museum and object. Within a 'complex interplay of exposure and hiding, organisation and the chaos of infinity',¹⁴ a disparate collection of objects is made to narrate within the museum's walls. It is a space that exceeds knowing and constantly spills out; blurring boundaries and embracing ambiguity. A space of transformation which is never quite exhausted by the meanings with which we invest it. Space; as a medium of complexity and difference, doubt and multiplicity.

Image: Patrick Pound, *The Memory Room*, (detail), Centre for Contemporary Photography, Melbourne, May 2002.

¹ Noel Artaud quoted in Bachelard, G. *The Poetics of Space*, Orion Press, 1968, p.137.

² Bachelard, G. *The Poetics of Space*, Orion Press, 1968, p.137.

³ Calvino, I. writing on Georges Perec's *Life; A Users Manual* in *Six Memos For The Next Millennium*, Vintage Books, Random House, New York, 1988, p.121.

⁴ Bachelard, G. *The Poetics of Space*, Orion Press, 1968.

For a narrative of inhabited space see Patrick Pound's obsessive structuring of collections of a life - real or imaginary - into an archive of total visibility and digression, irrationality, chaos and humanity; *The Memory Room* exhibited at the Centre for Contemporary Photography, Melbourne, May 2002.

⁵ Colomina, B., *Privacy and Publicity; Modern Architecture as Mass Media*, MIT Press, 1994, p.28.

⁶ Anthony Tromp, *Systemation: towards a theory of everything*, 2002, Patrick Pound, exhibition catalogue, Australia Council for the Arts, p.9.

⁷ Lefebvre in Stewart, S., *On Longing*, Duke University Press, London, 1993, p.79.

⁸ George Simmel quotes Nietzsche in Colomina, B., *Privacy and Publicity; Modern Architecture as Mass Media*, MIT Press, 1994, p.21

⁹ Le Corbusier in Colomina, B., *Privacy and Publicity; Modern Architecture as Mass Media*, MIT Press, 1994, p.250 & p212.

¹⁰ Stewart, S., *On Longing*, Duke University Press, London, 1993, p.66.

¹¹ Deleuze, G. quoting Leibnitz in *The Fold, Leibniz and the Baroque*, University of Minnesota Press, 1993.

¹² Wittgenstein, I. *The Tractatus*, London, 1961, p.150.

¹³ Anthony Tromp, *Systemation: towards a theory of everything*, 2002, Patrick Pound, exhibition catalogue, Australia Council for the Arts, p.9.

¹⁴ Stewart, S., *On Longing*, Duke University Press, London, 1993, p.157.