

Memorised architecture and how art interferes with it

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INTRODUCTION

Just what is this intolerable passage, this change that brings both growth and destruction?

*What is this journey that even the most powerful among us is forced to take and over which we have no command or control?*¹-Paul O'Kane

Mostly architecture and time are related to qualities such as materiality (age of a material or building) and fugacity or eternity.

Or in other words: the physical aspects are more taken into account.

But is it not essential to point out how essential memories based on experienced space are to our perception?

David Hume defines this methodology as empirism and is convinced that human beings can be referred as a blank unwritten page at the moment of their birth.

According to Hume, everything we experience, will define our interpretation of knowledge.

We cannot talk anymore about objectivity, it is our personal point of view, which defines our cognition.

Subjectivity is an accepted party of knowledge in Hume's view.

It also refers to spaces or experiences we live, our perception is linked to it ².

So what makes a space memorable and how is time an important element to it?

These main questions were substantial in order to formulate the topic for my final essay.

When I first entered the art museum of Bregenz, designed by Peter Zumthor, I was completely astonished. It is not about the architectural accuracy used by Zumthor, where I was impressed. Moving through space and experiencing the incidence of light and how it was experienced through the materials, made me dumbfounded. I was happy for this particular moment.

This moment expresses how I am captivated about the impact space influenced by events and memories developed from our experience through time.

Even how long we are spending time in a building, house etc. determines the equation of our memories.

Everything we experience is unique and cannot be compared to someone else's view.

¹O'Kane, Paul. "Ruin lust". Art and Christianity (2014): 10-11

²"David Hume", Stanford Encyclopedia of Philosophy, Last modified May 21, 2014, <http://plato.stanford.edu/entries/hume/>.

SCOPE OF WORK

Which memories or thoughts are related to a particular space?

For this essay I will investigate further human presence through time in a design space and focus on dwellings. I chose not to work on bigger buildings, because a house represents in our society the definition of a private zone. We conceive a house as a hide-away of our everyday life.

We can be ourselves and we do not have to show the perfect image of us.

Concerning my approach, I focus on how the art scene is dealing with this striking topic.

Different kinds of interventions can be done, such as change of use, physical transformation or demolition of an existing building, highlight the feature of decay or the creation of a new form of the existing space.

For this essay I study the works of Gordon Matta-Clark, Gregor Schneider and Rachel Whiteread.

How did they deal with capturing moments with architectural means?

All three artists occupy themselves with the notion of architecture and time, but everyone of them in a different way. I will discuss the different methods and ideas for every artist and conclude at the end, what characterises in my opinion our memory for space.



SPLITTING

First of all, I examine *Splitting*, a 1:1 artwork, accomplished 1974 by Gordon Matta-Clark, an architecture graduate of Cornell University.

At first glance, this sliced house has resemblance with a cut fruit and a question arises: Why?

In order to understand his approach, we have to take a closer look to Matta-Clark.

During the 1970's he belonged to the group '*anarchitecture*' (anarchy + architecture); Matta-Clark and his group members were against the way of how architecture was conceived, as a tool of representing success or failure in the built environment ³.

Essentially '*anarchitecture*' were focused on finding a way how to overcome the modernist ideas of creating plans. In its point of view they were too stagnant and did not record the more important parts of architecture, mentioned by Matta-Clark as '*dynamic orders and disorders*' ⁴.

³ "The Anarchitecture Group-Group, New York, United States-1972-1975", Spatial Agency, <http://www.spatialagency.net/database/the.anarchitecture.group> .

⁴ Walker, Stephen, "Gordon Matta-Clark: Drawing on Architecture," Grey Room, No. 18 (2005): 117



What is actually the background for this project?

Splitting, suburban house in New Jersey, reminds us of the "*American dream*" of living a harmonious and quiet life outside congested cities. A glorification of the new gained prosperity after the World War II. Suburban or urban homes symbolised during the 1950's and 1960's the definition of independence and peace.

Here architecture is linked to social and political changes and time captures these changes.

Everyone should own their own house and live their dream of privacy and freedom.

The middle class considered them as a blessing, but Gordon Matta-Clark had seen dangers in perceiving the rise of capitalism as a positive part.

Concerning these trends, he criticises the way of massproduction and wants to fight against objectifying a home in his projects ⁵. These arguments clarify why Matta-Clark most American works are dealing with small-scaled vernacular architecture ⁶.

⁵ Zevi, Adachiara, and Truglio, Maria R. "Object to Be Destroyed: The Work of Gordon Matta-Clark by Pamela M. Lee". *The Art Bulletin*, Vol. 83, No. 3 (2001): 569-574

⁶ Graham, Dan. "Gordon Matta-Clark," in *Shrinking cities, Volume 2: Interventions*, ed. by Philipp Oswalt (Ostfildern: Hantje Cantz Verlag, 2006), 91



Matta-Clark decompose the building into two components. From the exterior, just a cut is visible.

The facade of this anonymous dwelling seems except of this cut undamaged, but what about the interior?

Regardless of the consequences, Matta-Clark cuts through everything: balustrade, windows, roof system, and installation of the track-supporting layers are decomposed.

Through the cut, light beams enlighten the entire house and by deconstructing the space, a new feature of the space emerges. * The inside appeared like a sacral and holy place.

In addition, Matta-Clark wanted to link inside and outside, to blur in some way the limits between the restrictions between each component ⁷.

Dan Graham claims that the artist wanted to '*reconstitute [the] memory*' of the structural elements hidden through architectural beautification ⁸. Besides Matta-Clark considered his '*cuts*' as studies by foregrounding never seen information about our contemporary culture. By showing the hidden layers, the artist creates complexity by subtracting structural elements. A pattern based on existing structures ⁹.

Deconstruction instead of construction.

⁷ "Matta-Clark, Gordon (1943-1978)", A Dictionary of Modern and Contemporary Art (2 ed.), Oxford Reference., Last modified 2014, <http://www.oxfordreference.com/view/10.1093/acref/9780199239665.001.0001/acref-9780199239665-e-1711> .

⁸ Graham, Dan. "Gordon Matta-Clark," in *Shrinking cities*, Volume 2: Interventions, ed. by Philipp Oswalt (Ostfildern: Hantje Cantz Verlag, 2006), 92

⁹ Graham, Dan. "Gordon Matta-Clark," in *Shrinking cities*, Volume 2: Interventions, ed. by Philipp Oswalt (Ostfildern: Hantje Cantz Verlag, 2006), 86, 89



HAUS UR

Gregor Schneider, a German artist born in 1969 in Mönchengladbach-Rheydt, is notably known for his work *Haus ur* in Rheydt, Germany¹⁰. Schneider started his project *Haus ur* at the age of sixteen, when his father died. Some speculations have arisen from critics, that Schneider wants to process from his trauma. Perhaps it is true, but this personal approach was essential for *Haus ur* to develop it as it is right now. Probably it is Schneider's way to deal with it. After finishing the main parts of *Haus ur*, Schneider used *Haus ur* as a precedent for *Dead House ur*, designed for the Biennale in Venice 2001 and was awarded with the Golden Lion afterwards¹¹.

From the outside, this house does not appeal as an extraordinary dwelling, but Schneider disabuse. From 1985 until 1997, Schneider transformed his family's house in the system of '*freewheeling action*'¹². Schneider's work method is characterised by changing and adding components through time¹³ and he never allows a work to be finished. Philipp Auslander defines Schneider's never-ending work-in-progress in Richard Schechner's terms as "*performance consciousness*." The philosophy behind these words is to believe in alternatives, improvements and the feeling, that the work is unsettled. Furthermore the "*process of rehearsal*" can be referred to Schneider's work: *Haus ur* can be regarded as a play, which never stops and always waits for new changes in order to improve¹⁴.

¹⁰ Loock, Ulrich. "Gregor Schneider. Haus ur Fotos und Videos", ed. by Stiftung DKM (Duisburg, 2002)

¹¹ Lack, Jessica, "Artist of the week 28: Gregor Schneider," *The Guardian*, February 11, 2009, accessed December 1, 2014, <http://www.theguardian.com/artanddesign/2009/feb/10/gregor-schneider-artist>.

¹² Jones, Alice, "Behind closed doors," *The Independent*, September 21, 2004

¹³ Harris, Garreth, "Gregor Schneider: Fotografie und Skulptur, Sadie Coles gallery," September 15, 2010, accessed 10 December 2014,

¹⁴ <http://www.telegraph.co.uk/culture/art/art-reviews/8004153/Gregor-Schneider-Fotografie-und-Skulptur-Sadie-Coles-gallery-review.html>.

Auslander, Philipp, "Behind the scenes: Gregor Schneider's Totes Haus ur," *PAJ: A Journal of Performance and Art* Vol. 25, No. 3 (September, 2003): 86-90



Let's take now a deeper look to the inside of *Haus ur*. His intervention consisted of replicating rooms within rooms by subjoining walls on walls. Additionally, he adds cul-de-sacs and enclosed windows in order to coin unlivable spaces ¹⁵. Living in this place. I don't think so.

The artist vanishes the boundaries between existing and new rooms. It is not clear anymore where the original room is situated. Schneider simulates in rooms like Kaffeezimmer (coffee room) light situations and daylight artificially. The beholder is stuck in this neutral, naked room. No sign of individuality concerning the interior. No sign of human occupancy. It is not clear how long this enclosed room exists and how time affected it. Boredom takes over Kaffeezimmer ¹⁶.

¹⁵ Harris, Garreth, "Gregor Schneider: Fotografie und Skulptur, Sadie Coles gallery," September 15, 2010, accessed 10 December 2014, <http://www.telegraph.co.uk/culture/art/art-reviews/8004153/Gregor-Schneider-Fotografie-und-Skulptur-Sadie-Coles-gallery-review.html> .

¹⁶ Loock, Ulrich. "Gregor Schneider. Haus ur Fotos und Videos ", ed. by Stiftung DKM (Duisburg, 2002)



Jessica Lack asserts that Schneider hints to sex and death, in Bernard Tschumi's terms eROTicism¹⁷, and compares *Haus ur* with Josef Fritzl home, where he kept Natascha Kampusch for eight years prisoned. She presumes that Schneider would argue that we are creating these atrocious thoughts in our mind¹⁸.

He lays out what has been forgotten and brings out their worst nightmares.

Schneider makes it impossible to deny the past and creates spaces, which confront us with our biggest fears.

Gregor Schneider is painstaking in reference of how is recording his work. Every moment and every corner has to be kept digitally. He wants to show every step of his intervention., everyone has to see it. No one can escape from it-that is exactly Schneider's aim.

Moreover he describes his method as 'freezing everything', the created space is captivated at a particular time for eternity.¹⁹

¹⁷ Tschumi, Bernard, "Architecture and Disjunction", MIT Press (1994): 70-76

¹⁸ Lack, Jessica, "Artist of the week 28: Gregor Schneider," The Guardian, February 11, 2009, accessed December 1, 2014, <http://www.theguardian.com/artanddesign/2009/feb/10/gregor-schneider-artist> .

¹⁹ Harris , Garreth, "Gregor Schneider: Fotografie und Skulptur, Sadie Coles gallery,"September 15, 2010, accessed 10 December 2014, <http://www.telegraph.co.uk/culture/art/art-reviews/8004153/Gregor-Schneider-Fotografie-und-Skulptur-Sadie-Coles-gallery-review.html> .



HOUSE

The very first thing, which came up in my head when I have seen *House*, was how massive this monolithic steel-framed sculpture appears from the outside. It rises on an extensive, empty field, independently, surrounded by different types of housing from different decades.

Rachel Whiteread, born 1963 in London, created this enormous concrete manifesto outside of the congested city centre of London. But did she come with this idea?

Initially, she has been inspired to develop *House* by the creation of an earlier work of her, named *Ghost* (1990). For this previous work, she did a casing of one room and exhibited it in a windowless gallery. Whiteread managed to find the right proportions for the plastered cube in comparison to the exhibiton room²⁰. Space is not anymore seen in its original terms as an void, open feature, but the artist used the cast in order to quantify space. She defines space in a new way by creating a physical cast for it. Space and time are captured in one single sculpture²¹. After the success of this art piece, Whiteread evolve out of *Ghost* her next project²².

She wanted to take the ideas of *Ghost* to an advanced level and execute them on an entire house.

The venture *House* was born.

²⁰ Sinclair, Iain, "the house in the park: a psychogeographical response," in Rachel Whiteread's *House*, ed. James Lingwood (London: Phaidon. 2000), 18

²¹ Bird, Jon, "Dolce Domum," in Rachel Whiteread's *House*, ed. James Lingwood (London: Phaidon. 2000), 121

²² Sinclair, Iain, "the house in the park: a psychogeographical response," in Rachel Whiteread's *House*, ed. James Lingwood (London: Phaidon. 2000), 18



We will take now a closer look to how the location for Whiteread's art work has been chosen.

After several abortive attempts, a temporary permission had been given on 193 Grove Road for a half ruined half remained Victorian house. Whiteread started her work in August 1993 by creating a negative of the inside using the external walls as a formwork. By creating *House*, a specific moment had been captivated by architectural tools²³. Supporters of this projects were convinced that Whiteread integrated very deliberately her piece to the specific place. Both components would match together and complement one another²⁴.

Whiteread's work deals with how to memorialise the past for the present²⁵. We can assume that *House* is in a way a memorial to memory, where architectural structures are not as important as the meaning, the moments experienced spaces²⁶. *House* has been regarded as a remembrance to everyday life, to our lives, which are far behind us. Whiteread wanted to keep the memories physically, she shares similar ideas than Matta-Clark by breaking a cycle imposed by the society and to make people aware about themselves. It is not about celebrating a special event or a fancy building, the simple life should be shown. There are parallels between Rachel Whiteread's work and the approach about realist painters of the nineteenth century. Realism in art is marked by the desire of communicating the true and objective view of contemporary life²⁷.

²³ Lingwood, James, "introduction," in Rachel Whiteread's *House*, ed. James Lingwood (London: Phaidon. 2000), 7

²⁴ Lingwood, James, "introduction," in Rachel Whiteread's *House*, ed. James Lingwood (London: Phaidon. 2000), 11

²⁵ Lingwood, James, "introduction," in Rachel Whiteread's *House*, ed. James Lingwood (London: Phaidon. 2000), 7

²⁶ Shone, Richard, "Rachel Whiteread's *House*," *The Burlington Magazine*, Vol. 135, No. 1089 (Dec., 1993), 838

²⁷ "Nineteenth-Century French Realism," *The Metropolitan Museum of Art*, http://www.metmuseum.org/toah/hd/rlsm/hd_rlsm.htm .



Whiteread had probably these ideas in her mind, while she was developing *House*. But instead of capturing the real, authentic moment on a painting, she realised it by entombing *House*'s history, life in concrete.

A dynamic space became static, monolithic due to the encroachment.

She intended to reach people through her work, in my point of view *House* should provoke unforeseen reactions.

Whiteread used the architectural language in order to activate the unconscious feelings.

Over and above this tool, she tried to communicate her intentions through a sensible way of integrate the object for itself in the existing setting²⁸.

Rachel Whiteread received 1993 the Turner Prize, but simultaneous the Bow Neighbourhood Council decided after a vote that the exterior artpiece should be demolished²⁹.

The reactions to this decision were immense: supporters and opposition members were muckraking against each other. At the end, on 11th January 1994³⁰, *House* had been demolished with the presence of Whiteread³¹.

Even its destruction, monument lives on in books and photographs. *House* evoked a new kind of awareness to its environment by accepting also the ordinary life as an important part of our lives.

²⁸ Shone, Richard, "Rachel Whiteread's House," *The Burlington Magazine*, Vol. 135, No. 1089 (Dec., 1993), 838

²⁹ Lingwood, James, "introduction," in *Rachel Whiteread's House*, ed. James Lingwood (London: Phaidon. 2000), 7

³⁰ Lingwood, James, "chronology," in *Rachel Whiteread's House*, ed. James Lingwood (London: Phaidon. 2000), 144

³¹ Lingwood, James, "compendium of press and cartoons," in *Rachel Whiteread's House*, ed. James Lingwood (London: Phaidon. 2000), 139

CONCLUSION

It is interesting now to compare these three artists between each other. All of them dealt with the notion of time and the architectural language in order to express a specific aim.

The investigation between the different artists shows that they all try through interfering in the built environment to break the history, the content, the context. So are there more closer links between each other or not? Matta-Clark focused on the deconstruction of the built environment in order to fight against the inserted instruments of capitalism. However Schneider most works (except *unsubscribe*, where he demolished the inside of Goebbels birthplace) deal with the aim of creating unlivable spaces.

Rachel Whiteread in turn wants to remember to unmeaningful spaces in the public's view. Additionally she intends to form a sort of resurgence of a lost space. The cased spaces, *Ghost* and *House* holded on a forgotten space, where people lived and experienced their lives, but seemed not reachable anymore.

It is interesting how Whiteread and Schneider pursue in equal measure the same aim; both of them want to freeze the moment of their art pieces. Everything should be captured for posterity.

In contrast, Matta-Clark was convinced use anarchy in architecture in order to break through the envelope of the real, authentic structure. He created by that, a new kind of art. Matta-Clark opened new ways for installation art and he experimented with photo collages new possibilities in order to show his ideas.

For his works, Matta-Clark intended destruction and subtraction of existing structures as meanwhile Whiteread didn't expect it. Interesting is the effect of *House* demolition, it is not anymore kept physically, but the memories and thoughts about this piece still are creating reminiscences of an unknown past. I was too young when this masterpiece was demolished, but due to pictures and readings, I still can build up my own kind of memory to it.

Due to the three art pieces discussed in this essay, I analysed the different features for memorised architecture and want to conclude my observations with a self-formulated equation:

memory = time + size of space + sensory perception + experience + feeling + direct/indirect occupancy

Time distinguishes the intensity of our memory. The dimensions of a space are also essential, a big room imparts easiness often whereas a small one could submit constriction. It is undeniable that sensory perception has a big impact to our interpretation of space. Without them, we can't quantify space or feel it in a physical way.

Everything would be too abstract, unreachable. Experiences and feelings are related to each other and shape in an important way our memory. Of course they will be people, who will not agree with me with this equation, but is true, that they are several mechanisms in our mind. *Splitting*, *Haus ur* and *House* are all art installations showing or dealing with this kind of mechanism. Art awakens our most unconscious emotions.

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