

architecture + interior:
a room of one's own
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Into the stream

'When you asked me to [...]' (Woolf 1993:3)

write about architecture and the interior I wondered where does one turn? What construction of history and theory is invoked when undertaking such a task? What position is given architecture and the interior in such writing? Might it be interiors and what they are like; might it be architecture and interiors they create; might it be architecture and interiors they write; might it be written by the interiors encountered and the books read? I am reading Virginia Woolf's *A Room of One's Own* and I read 'Lies will flow from my lips, but there may perhaps be some truth mixed up with them; it is for you to seek out this truth and to decide whether any part of it is worth keeping. If not you will of course throw the whole of it into the wastepaper basket and forget all about it' (Woolf 1993:4), a necessary condition for establishing a shift in thought and expression over that which is held as authoritative and immovable. Unexpected thoughts on the interior.

I turn back the page, a page in history, and read the deeply powerful and provocative opening line in which she remarks 'But you may say, we asked you to speak about women and fiction — what has this got to do with a room of one's own?' (Woolf 1993:3). Woolf's realisation is that writing by and for women can only be constructed when they write their own history outside patriarchy, epitomised by the need for independent means. Perhaps — and this is why I use her work — the same can be said of the interior. This line I read sitting in the 'architectural interior' of a Melbourne designer café, prompting the thought that perhaps the interior requires liberating from architecture and offered independent means: a room (*Raum*), or should I say a *room* of its own.

Further, her writing and intellectual position upholds the notion of woman as something discovered rather than built. Perhaps by acknowledging the role of women in relation to the interior, we might parallel this argument; the interior is discovered not built. Perhaps the interior, if it is to be displaced from architecture, needs to be sought, not necessarily in re-reading canonical

architectural texts from an interior perspective but in finding new modes of expression for the interior.

Reflections and weeds

'So thinking, so speculating, I found my way back to my house by the [...]' (Woolf 1993:3)

sea where the wind lashed the windows and rattled the boarding. Across the desk lay scattered notes, two pens and a broken pencil, books piled high and a coffee cup from Paris - a single cup, perhaps a Benjaminian reminder of the occupant as failed collector, after all he asserts 'The interior is the retreat of art. The collector is a true inmate of the interior' (Leach 1997:36). Does Benjamin, in suggesting that the interior is there to house our collections - our prehistoric markings on cave walls - see it as a conscious thing measuring one's knowledge and ability in relation to societies values? Or does he confuse enclosure with interior?

'This melancholy lady [Winchilsea], who loved wandering in the fields and thinking about unusual things...' (Woolf 1993:55),

a thousand pities. Thinking is never easy; not when laughed and sneered at, and forced to anger; not here in late October; when spring is coming and one wave intermingles with another as a thousand white-horses fringe the edge of the earth. I leave my room and make for the ocean hesitating momentarily to take from the shelf a *Thousand Plateaus*, Deleuze and Guattari's attempt to displace prevailing centrisms, unities and strata, and read how in *The Waves*, Woolf's 'Bernard' has an individuality designating a multiplicity: 'Bernard and the school of fish' (Deleuze 1987:252). Nothing seems static any more. Think. Think — that thinking involves 'a wrenching of concepts away from their usual configurations, outside the systems in which they have a home, and outside the structures of recognition that constrain thought to the already known' (Grosz 1995:129). Could interior be thought of as haecceity — an element of existence on which individuality depends? Might the non-human architectural body need to be rethought away from oppositional dualisms

such as structure/decoration, exterior/interior, masculine/feminine, etc., that continue an unhelpful homogenized binary position? For architecture (to have suggested that the inside is also the outside and the outside is also the inside) fares no better, since 'Bisexuality is no better concept than the separateness of the sexes' (Deleuze 1987:276). The architectural body. The body. The Deleuze and Guattari body is discussed not in terms of binary opposites but as a 'discontinuous, non-totalisable series of processes, organs, flows, energies, corporeal substances and incorporeal events, speeds and durations' (Grosz 1994:164), through 'the body without organs'. In suggesting that a body is not defined by the form that determines it, one could say that room becomes interior in a molecular or atomic sense and that becoming-interior is ever-changing.

When later I survey this room in an evening light that hides things in shadows and catches others in lingering rays, it is day becoming night: and this room is my life's wealth, it is 'decorated' by numerous things self-gathered and inherited, both consciously and unconsciously, it is room *becoming* interior; after all with a room of one's own, one is free to do this. Are these really 'collections' or the emphasised traces that Benjamin (Leach 1997:36) asserts we leave behind in the interior along with everyday imprints on loose covers and protectors? Or, as Woolf observes 'there are many rooms — many Bernards,' and that the room could determine our way of being, with different rooms reflecting different aspects of character, or character changes to suit the room (Miller 1988:84). The desk and reading, the room and anger, the door and coming and going, the threshold and pausing. Multiple narrations are now possible that subvert the form of the room (as internal) for the interior.

'Lamps were being lit and an indescribable change had come over [...]'
(Woolf 1993:35)

the land as I draw the blinds and light the lamp, not of power or reason, nor the one 'in the aspine [that] does not light on beef and prunes' (Woolf 1993:16), but of the interior the vast inner land, the outback; the outcast.

With this in mind I opened Edith Wharton's *Decoration of Houses*, to find an advocacy of classical regularity made through an appeal for a rationally determined relation between architecture and its parts. She reveals that the ordered plan removes unexpected encounters and expresses carefully controlled patterns of movement, forming a 'projection of the idealized self, a retreat, a series of protective enclosures' (Wharton 1892:73). Planned in relation to social traditions her own house 'The Mount' constructs the interior in relation to patterns of movement, but which in turn can be read as 'patterns of stillness' (Wharton 1892:74). And the interior is a result of decorating in relation to a controlled and ordered set of spatial constructs, that places social and societal encounters at the mercy of a greater force. But what of this argument that advocates decoration as adding to: yet is subservient to architecture; does it realise the dilemma faced by the interior; does it release the interior from the bounds of architecture? You see whereas Wharton depicts the plight of women from a woman's perspective no such position is afforded the interior which is still 'in a certain sense, 'inside' architecture and its history' (Grosz 1995:136).

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Cautiously hauling in

Looking back I saw that Woolf's writing on the room is made in relation to the outside, the room is a refuge, a place of order, 'dry land,' whilst the outside is dark and watery, the site of psychological and physical chaos (Miller1988:78). I pondered this, took my dry Parisian cup and made some dark watery coffee understanding as I did her reference to the 'deep waters of depression' and the 'dark places of psychology' (Miller1988:78). The room as a metaphor for the mind is sometimes full and occupied, but what if it is locked or even empty, because for Woolf although empty rooms are rooms 'devoid of human beings,' they still endure. Could it be that the interior is constructed in relation to a physical and mental being; a place of reflection and withdrawal from the chaos of 'out there'? But what if 'out there' becomes ordered and controlled, as occurred with renaissance planning and the interior became re-described from the city, then there would be no withdrawing for they are spatially the same. Might the

descent of Lily Bart, the heroine of Wharton's *The House of Mirth*, from a rigidly ordered plan to one of complete disorder culminating in her tenement room suicide, be evidence of the necessary beneficial correlation of order for the interior, in which dominance and continuity are maintained, or the inevitable ending for one that strives to subvert an order that is endemic in a patri-architectural society? Was her 'downward path... through a series of actual houses' (Fryer 1986:75) an inevitable descent? Is the nineteenth century practice of covering surfaces both a cry and an attempt to escape this imposed order that in certain circumstances leads to madness and suicide?

But then again this refuge, this fortress protecting from the confusion without, may also be 'a prison, constructed of conventions and illusions' (Miller 1988:81), that we return to with predictability. And what if that confusion and pointlessness is brought within the prison or place of confinement, generating madness as befell the heroine of *The Yellow Wallpaper* (Gilman 1981)? Might this be the same pointlessness of bringing the city within the home, and its haunting ability to control a situation in a curious undefined way? Might our sense of 'interiority', our interpretation of the interior depend on whether we, as inmates, are confined of our own accord, have encounters we initiate, and the manner in which we relive memories and are moved by them?

'And I looked at the bookcase again. There were [...]' (Woolf 1993:78)
the classic architectural theorists, Vitruvius, Alberti, Laugier, Le-Duc, Chambers, Le Corbusier and many others; great men who had experienced anger, sorrow, pain, suffering, joy, love, birth and death from both afar and within their rooms, within their memories. Could the same be said of these men? I pictured them in their chambers described by ornaments and decorations; the surfaces enriched with their traces; how they moved from room to room as their minds went from thought to thought; how they escaped inclement weather and drew chairs close to fires; how much time was spent within the buildings yet none thought to include a chapter,

book or lamp on the interior. Did Alberti as he divided the whole into homogenous parts, through *partitio*, *area* and *proportio*, think ornament only in relation to physical form when he so beautifully suggests it 'has the character of something attached' (Alberti 1988:156). The-wind-blows-the-curtain; the-door-creaked-as-it-opened? Did Alberti cleanse the room and re-surface it white in order to arrest and mask the fluidity of becoming-interior? Did the 'Abbé' use the frontispiece Muse to illuminate an architectural ambiguity between structure and decoration, in order to objectify and fix a fluid state? Let us look closer at Laugier's 'influential' image that was used to 'point out' or 'point to' the ancients as the object of desire, in the process of which an opposed organism, a dominant history is fabricated (Deleuze 1987:276) for the primitive hut, one in which structure and form is privileged over the decorative and ornamental. Would Laugier's sister have 'pointed to', if she could have produced an equivalent work? Might she be tempted to see not objects and 'forms,' but relations of movement and rest, moments of walking, crying and singing that occur alongside things; becoming; a moment that sees room becoming-interior, as when Woolf cried 'The thin dog is running in the road, this dog is the road' (Deleuze 1987:263)? Might the Muse be Laugier's sister, that would amuse. As Woolf realised, Shakespeare's sister could never be, so is the fate of Laugier's sister who would find her maternal space obliterated and her destiny sealed behind masculine modes of thought. This as Grosz (1995:121) observes, is the construction of an 'artificial' concept of architecture utilizing a spatiality that reflects men's own representations. Further, if one transposed her argument one could say that architecture in disavowing this maternal debt has left the interior in dereliction, homeless; it has touched itself from the outside (the city) in order to homogenise and recapture the sensation of the inside of a body; it has hollowed out its own 'interiors' and projected them outward and now requires interiors as supports for this hollowed space.

'Thus I concluded, shutting [...]' (Woolf 1993:50)

Marc-Antoine Laugier's life and pushing away the rest. I mused how the ex-Jesuit priest's desire for order, simplicity and naturalness reflected a male-centred Spartan existence; one that accorded with a desire by theorists to bring the wild excesses of women, home and decoration under control. Perhaps the classic architectural theorists, still in the bookcase, could not write the interior because it lacks determination: like hecceities they are indeterminate. But I wonder is there — in this text — a nugget of pure truth to take away, shepherded from an avalanche of books. Or has it remained distracted, caught up in a web of its own making. I turned to Woolf again to see what light she cast in the text and found it near the window. That is, in another use of light. Used to differentiate between types of light, the window is protective and transparent revealing both the external light of nature and the controlled light of within, from which the sun's light is associated with truth while candles and lamps foster illusions and circumscribe our world (Miller 1988:80). This world-of-within I like. When we encounter this candle-lit world, one is struck by the manner in which the interior concerns 'capacities to affect' (Deleuze 1987:261), rather than it being defined or described by fixed moments or things such as geometry, order, artifacts and objects. But it becomes events, 'in assemblages that are inseparable from an hour, a season, an atmosphere, an air, a life' (Deleuze 1987:262).

Never again will Mrs Dalloway say of herself,
'I am this, I am that [...]' (Woolf 1976:13)

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