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the dividual interior: surveillance and desire

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abstract

In his much-discussed short essay, 'Postscript on the Societies of Control,' Gilles Deleuze described a fundamental shift in power that occurred in the 20th century. Previously, Michel Foucault had argued that human behaviour was controlled by 'enclosed systems' of power: the family, the school, the factory, the barracks, the prison and the hospital. These comprised what Foucault considered a 'disciplinary society.' Deleuze argued that Foucault's 'enclosures' are in crisis, and that the current system is instead a control society, effectively governed by a single entity, the corporation. In this society of 'ultra-rapid forms of free-floating control,' people are reduced to data points. For Deleuze, individuals are 'dividuals,' and masses are data. This visual essay investigates the implications of control society on domestic space, exploring how digital applications and appliances, social media, and surveillance combine to form a dividual interior. Virtual space not only records and stores, but folds back into physical space, as images of domestic life online influence our perception of the built environment. The domestic interior, therefore, translates back and forth between the virtual and the real, each gathering information and informing the other.

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introduction

The domestic interior, like much of contemporary urban space, leaves digital traces of inhabitation collected from credit cards, smart appliances, phones, laptops and household utility usage. These traces produce patterns of behaviour and consumption, a digital residue, which accumulates into a detailed record. Virtual space not only records and stores, but folds back into physical space, as images of domestic life online influence our perception of the built environment. The domestic interior, therefore, translates back and forth between the virtual and the real, each gathering information and informing the other.

surveillance

In his much-discussed short essay, 'Postscript on the Societies of Control,' Gilles Deleuze described a fundamental shift in power that occurred in the 20th century.⁰¹ Previously, Michel Foucault had argued that human behaviour was controlled by 'enclosed systems' of power: the family, the school, the factory, the barracks, the prison and the hospital. These comprised what Foucault considered a 'disciplinary society.' Deleuze argued that Foucault's 'enclosures' are in crisis, and that the current system is instead a *control society*, effectively governed by a single entity, the corporation. In this society of 'ultra-rapid forms of free-floating control,' people are reduced to data points.

For Deleuze, individuals are 'dividuals,' and masses are data.

Figure 01:

Collage from photographs taken by Julian Braatvedt of his fridge, sent via Facebook Messenger, August 2018.

Figure 02:
Screenshot taken at 15:15 August
13, 2018 on insecam.com.

The 'smart home' is an example of the spatial implications of control society, representing a kind of dividual interior. This data-rich environment emerges gradually through numerous small exchanges of privacy for convenience: Google Nest home thermostats help consumers use less energy; Microsoft is developing counters that recognise foodstuffs and display recipes; mattresses are available that monitor sleep patterns. Less obvious than these high-tech appliances are apps that monitor domestic chores, step counts and period cycles. There is potential for both applications and appliances to betray their inhabitants: will health insurance premiums be linked to the number of steps taken on a Fitbit, the number of calories taken from a fridge? In *Honeywell, I'm Home*, Justin McGuirk argues that smart homes are designed not for the consumer, but for the corporation to gather as much data as possible.⁰² He predicts that, in the near future, all of these devices will cooperate in one large data harvest. By quantifying the minutiae of life, control society nudges us toward a desired norm in small ways that accumulate into a restrictive mould. These modulations, as Deleuze describes them, are decentralised and pervasive.

Figure 03 (left and below):
Screenshots taken between 14:30
and 15:00 August 13, 2018 on
insecam.com.

KAITAIA FIRE
PURCHASED 04/12/12
EXP 09/08/22
USAGE 1% PA
CALORIE 3
NET WEIGHT 29G

SESAME OIL
PURCHASED 04/12/12
EXP 09/08/22
USAGE 1% PA
CALORIE 3
NET WEIGHT 42G

FISH SAUCE
PURCHASED 03/10/17
EXP 09/08/22
USAGE 300% PA
CALORIE 40

APPLE CIDER VINEGAR
PURCHASED 09/10/17
EXP 09/08/22
USAGE 300% PA
CALORIE 40
NET WEIGHT 161G

BALSAMIC
PURCHASED 03/01/18
EXP 09/08/18
USAGE 10% PA
CALORIE 70
NET WEIGHT 97G

MALT VINEGAR
PURCHASED 03/01/18
EXP 09/08/18
USAGE 10% PA
CALORIE 70
NET WEIGHT 102G



BED
PURCHASED 09/10/11
RENEWAL OVERDUE
COST \$415
TIME SPENT 32%



YELLOW GLOVES
PURCHASED 26/02/14
WASHED 11/10/17
NET WEIGHT 43G

TEATOWEL
PURCHASED 26/02/17
WASHED 11/09/18
NET WEIGHT 83G

Figure 04:

Collage from photographs taken by Wilson Ong of his kitchen, sent via Facebook Messenger and other images found on 'flatmates wanted' listings on Trade Me, August 2018.

Beyond the meta-analysis of dividual data, there is the potential for more targeted breaches of the dividual interior. For example, insecam.com live-broadcasts thousands of hacked home security systems worldwide. An endlessly refreshing stream of domestic videos can be flicked between or observed at length. The illustrated screenshots from one 30-minute hack show two men working at a dining table and then, unexpectedly, two women making the same dining chairs into ad hoc beds and falling asleep.⁰³ This series demonstrates not only that domestic spaces are no longer traditionally private, but also that the lines between residential and commercial space are blurring. The dining room is used for eating, working and sleeping.

If data is the new oil, the home is the next Texas.

– Joseph Grima

'Home is the answer, but what is the question?'⁰⁴

Joseph Grima argues that the domestic interior is a site of 'virtual encounter between everyday life and global economic infrastructure,' with the house evolving from a 'sanctuary from prying eyes' to a 'geo-tagged broadcasting studio.'⁰⁵ For Grima, the house has been entirely financialised; its primary function is to accumulate value on the market, and behaviour within it is collected by devices, translated into data, quantified, and sold back to us.

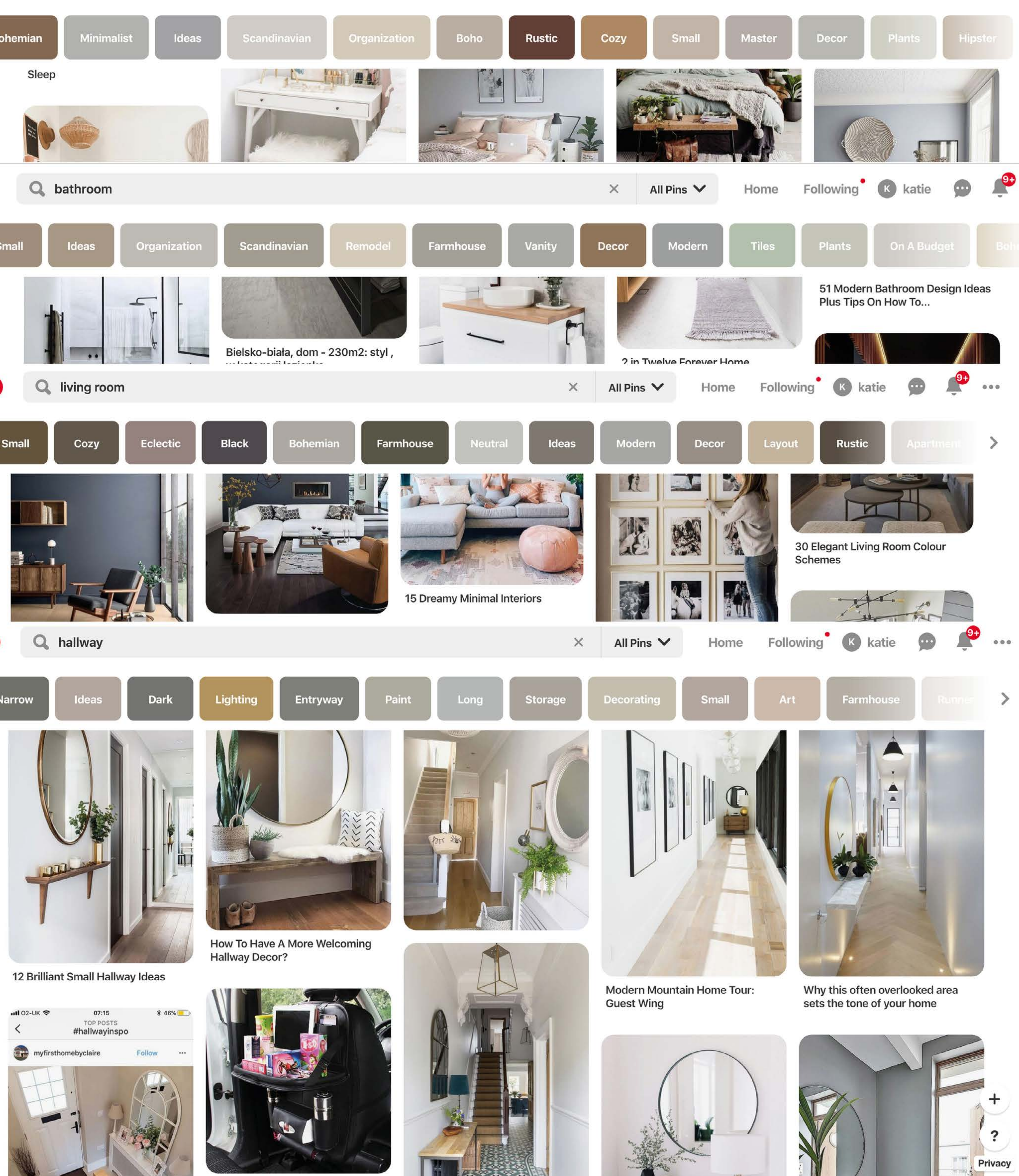


Figure 05: Screenshots of various search queries in Pinterest reveal the repetitive aesthetic of the online house's rooms, February 2019.

desire

Kurt Ivasen and Sophia Maalsen argue that, rather than replacing disciplinary forces, control society functions in conjunction with disciplinary society in a complex combination of discipline and modulation.⁰⁶ They argue that individuals are datafied into dividuals and then reassembled into individuals, who are controlled by both fluid modulations and traditional institutions of power.

In the same way that Ivasen and Maalsen argue there is a risk of overstating the decline in the disciplinary forces described by Foucault, there is a risk of oversimplifying the house's function as a factory producing data. The domestic interior still functions as an individual's territorial space: it is physically lockable, sheltered from weather and subject to interior decoration by its inhabitant. However, this physical interior exists in constant dialogue with a corresponding digital interior.

Figure 06:

Collage from photographs taken by
Wilson Ong of his house, sent via
Facebook Messenger. August 2018.

Figure 07:

Collage from photographs taken by
Wilson Ong of his house, sent via
Facebook Messenger. August 2018.

Figure 08:

Soul Beauty, 'Stanky Breath=Not Cute,' published January 9, 2011, YouTube video, 03:53.

Social media platforms, such as Instagram, Tumblr and Pinterest, are aspirational online interiors. As Alexandria Lange states in *Edited Living*, 'the house that might result from a series of Pinterest pins would be home as a series of events, stage sets for performing particular tasks with maximum beauty.'⁰⁷ Lange observes how images on Pinterest boards circulate in a closed loop, resulting in a homogenous aesthetic across digital platforms that directly inform a global homogenisation of interior design. In lieu of a physical permanent house, the Pinterest Board becomes a substitute space to curate idealised domestic interiors collaged from decontextualised stills.

Figure 09:
Perspective drawing of the
augmented interior, drawn by
the author, 2019.

As data is absorbed by the smart home, and imagery is absorbed by consumers of social media, a passive interchange between the virtual and the real emerges. Beyond this digital/physical osmosis, however, exists a far more active engagement in digital domesticity, as content creators willingly perform online. The YouTube video, 'Stanky Breath=Not Cute' has almost 336,000 views.⁰⁸ Strikingly intimate, this video depicts a woman in her bathroom demonstrating how to use a tongue scraper. Voluntary breaches of personal privacy are normalised and neutralised by a saturated media environment.

Perhaps as individual data points, these banal details are benign. It is only when it is reassembled into a legible whole that the digital interior is suddenly powerful and terrifying. As architects we can choose to ignore the virtual and stubbornly plough forward, constructing 'monuments to a lost physicality' as theorist Mark Wigley described the profession in a recent interview.⁰⁹ Or we can resist it in practical ways, for example, by introducing digital blackout curtains in the form of faraday mesh and radio jammers into the physical interior.¹⁰ Deleuze argues that 'there is no need to fear or hope, but only to look for new weapons.'¹¹ Opportunities exist in the blurred spaces between interior and exterior, virtual and real. Productive outcomes must begin by understanding that the contemporary interior is inextricably linked with digital space. Understanding that to watch, to be watched, to consume, and to perform are intimate desires succumbed to in our intimate spaces. Understanding, also, that in the cold glare of the algorithm, this public domesticity is endlessly recorded.

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author biography

Katie Braatvedt completed her Masters of Architecture Professional (Hons 1) in 2019 from the University of Auckland. Currently teaching at AUT and practising at Stevens Lawson Architects, she has also previously worked at 31/44 Architects in London and WeShouldDoItAll in New York.

notes

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