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# OUGHT APARTMENT'S *MONUMENTUM MORI*

> *A Klee painting named* Angelus Novus *shows an angel looking as though he is about to move away from something he is fixedly contemplating. His eyes are staring, his mouth is open, his wings are spread. This is how one pictures the angel of history. His face is turned toward the past. Where we perceive a chain of events, he sees one single catastrophe which keeps piling wreckage upon wreckage and hurls it in front of his feet. The angel would like to stay, awaken the dead, and make whole what has been smashed. But a storm is blowing from Paradise; it has got caught in his wings with such violence that the angel can no longer close them. This storm irresistibly propels him into the future to which his back is turned, while the pile of debris before him grows skyward. This storm is what we call progress.*
>
> –Walter Benjamin, *Theses on the Philosophy of History* (1940)

## AT HOME IN THE GALLERY

*Ought Apartment* is simultaneously a sculptural project and an architectural space. The rotunda, saved from Francis Mawson Rattenbury's 1911 Vancouver Courthouse, is the only part of the building not refurbished during Arthur Erickson's 1983 transformation into the present Vancouver Art Gallery. An open ceremonial neo-classical beaux-arts space has been invested with the dense materiality of split-open domestic interiority. Not usually considered an exhibition space as such, the rotunda now has a piece imagined for it, carefully meshed with its towering cylindrical verticality.

A stack of six units, representing every decade since the 1950s, is built up into the rotunda. These are not exactly apartments, or condos, or houses, but cutaway fragments, generic and specific models of domestic interior spaces, assembled from common features, the things of their period. As spaces they are partial, both in their allegiance to their decades and in their incompleteness; they suggest continuity beyond the frame, while framing things internally. Each one is constructed with physical elements typical of its historical moment; each decade is composed of consumer and design elements that might have been made during those ten years. In the sections of the work representing the '50s and '80s, the Gallery becomes absorbed by the work, blended with it, matching it curve for curve, material for material.

*Ought Apartment* is a structural analysis of habits of consumption and allocation of institutional space, accommodating tensions and contradictions between the two. The particularities of each decade, when read as taxonomies of accumulated specifics, can indicate larger economic forces at work in the culture, the driving impulses behind consumerist desires for change. How society will choose to manage housing and consumption in the future is the interrogative premise behind *Ought Apartment*.

Meanwhile, a freely exposed scaffolded armature drives through every decade, temporarily holding them up and apart.

In the current decade of the oughts, the 2000s, incompatibilities of unlimited commodity-manufacture, unlimited resource-extraction and unlimited greenhouse-gas production crowd the prospects of ecological disaster into the foreground. Constantly-renewed consumption, vitally necessary for economic progress, is no longer reconcilable with vanishing resources and irreversible planetary degradation.

*Ought Apartment* encourages reflection on regimes of consumption, art production, institutions, the function of sculpture and representation, and on labour and work.

**CONSUMPTION: FROM FASHION TO STYLE AND BACK AGAIN**

> *Fashion*: Why, I am Fashion, your own sister.
> *Death*: My sister!
> *Fashion*: Aye; don't you remember that we are both the children of Frailty?
> *Death*: What have I to do with remembering — I, who am the sworn enemy of memory?
> *Fashion*: But I remember the circumstance well; and I also know that both of us are alike employed continually in the destruction and change of all things here below, although you take one way of doing so, and I another.
>
> Giacomo Leopardi, *Dialogue Between Fashion and Death* (1824)

In Walter Benjamin's abstract for his Arcades Project called *Paris: Capital of the Nineteenth Century*, in the section entitled "Grandville, or the World Exhibitions," he refers to commodity fetishism as the "sex appeal of the inorganic" and compares it to the corpse. Physiognomies of private domestic space are outlined in the following section, "Louis Philippe, or the Interior." Benjamin's ambition to recast history through attention to its objects and other cultural products (that a history of a place can be extrapolated from its material *facts*) ricochets through *Ought Apartment*. A contemporary paraphrase might go like this:

*Home at last. We enter. The door swings closed behind us; the soundscape of the ravaging streets drops behind. Inside is the melancholic refuge, the private interior (which is never private, composed as it is from the catalogic pattern-book of consumable culture). And the insidious impulse of income disposal, the black noise of consumption, rises like tinnitus against placidity and reflection, contaminating every choice within. Style and fashion turn over in every room like the dull clods from the seasonal plow, plowed under, plunder. Consumption, which promises a rest, an end to incompletion, can only deliver a contagion of restlessness, which arrives in a cardboard box, in a van. The lying promise, the good news of advertising: even if Benjamin was right about fashion and death, a weary exhaustion sets in, as we overconsume him too.*

We are not done with things and they are not done with us. Within *Ought Apartment's* laborious monument, yesterday's discarded objects turn up at the door to object. Terris proposes a reflective look at things to serve further purpose, illuminating our relationship to material culture and labour. Just at the moment of the most triumphant global production of material goods in the history of mankind, an economic firestorm ravaging worldwide markets couples with the spectre of environmental and resource collapse, giving birth to a demand for stepped-up consumption to preserve failing economies. This profoundly unreflective conclusion is countered by *Ought Apartment*'s act of criticism. Any future for consumption, judging from the work's lessons about the past, will have to become an ethical one.

The turnover of things is like the endless wave of trash curled over by the front-end loader on the seagull-swarmed landfill; both share a mulching of history. The garbage of disposable income–no one thinks of it that way–presenting each new object spinning clean in the bright gyre of the constructed moment, of cold-pressed virgin consumption, where longed-for belongings long to belong. To have a few things means you can take care of them. To have too many things means you have to *replace* them.

Capital development insists: a nice place to live is not a blameworthy ambition, right? Everyone wants something better, and no one wants what they've got. Enter, stage right, *Fashion* (its fission and *frisson*) and *Style* (its steal, it's *stale*), the home-wreckers, the demolition contractors of renovation and make-over. And then their constant companion, *Advertising*, whose screeds and screens of two-dimensional media's commercials and publicity are the unleashed contents of the panderer's box. Clear the decks, reshuffle and deal again. Count on these three to help you get your seamlessness straight: the right *look* of the moment down to its palette, up from which Madame Death springs erect. Product placement, everyone!

The tidal ebb and flow of contemporary consumption and disposition is the cyclical condition of capital life. Wrangling with stuff has its tastes and its distastes: we want, we don't want. Producers understand this and things are marketed with this in mind. Our dissatisfaction is produced for us. This manufactured distraction produces two things: objects of consumption fulfill desires as well as actual needs, and consumption creates fugitive feelings of satisfaction. We need only step into the tidal race of commerce to be swept up. In its flux there is *this*, not *that*, until *this* becomes *not that*, and the cycle spins round, agitating to begin again.

In the *Dialectic of Enlightenment* (1944), Max Horkheimer and Theodor Adorno end their sclerotic discursus on the culture industry with this note: "The triumph of advertising in the culture industry is that consumers feel compelled to buy and use its products even though they see through them."

Aspirations set by advertising and publicity, once realized, demand to be replaced with other aspirations: this is the genius of consumption. The rushing torrent (torment) of commercial media bursting out of television, newspapers, magazines, films, books and internet has created a commodity tsunami inundating its beached consumers with twisting choices and swirling options. Unlimited choice circumscribed by markets takes

on the appearance of freedom. Later, the spontaneous combustion of money, fired up in the excitement of hapless consumption and contrived buying–which almost seemed reasonable, seemed so *right*, at the time–inspires a slack-jawed, puzzled bemusement: *what happened? where did it go*?...and a bewildered longing for a return to that newness, that fresh start.

Relentless and presumptive imperatives of progress (new, improved, better) driving manufacturing and consumption ahead of them make their collective appearances in the things of the domestic interior, and in such a specific way that we can point to something and determine its date with uncanny precision. These mercantile microshifts have been branded into our lived experience; our recollected consciousness retains the taxonomy of design particularities and specifics inflecting a period. *Ought Apartment* takes advantage of this collective knowledge. But out of style, out of date: the turnover is managed with egregious care, adjusted to what the market will bear. (“What the market will bear” already suggests pocketbook pressures of inadequacy, piled on themselves by consumers, a gnawing irk only briefly liquidated in the exquisite release of consumption.)

A sense of ephemeral value infecting many consumer choices displaces a sense of objects serving more pragmatic and essential long-term necessities: perceived versus pragmatic usefulness. The earlier idea of durable goods independent of disposability presumed a different trajectory of actual purposefulness. Things made to last were necessary things, often passed on for other lives. This caring for objects was part of a larger social matrix of responsibility, as things were built to be repaired or kept up (before these activities themselves were integrated into the consumer process–product insurance! maintenance contracts!). Owners once anticipated upkeep as a matter of course, a continuous demand on call everywhere entropy showed up. (The word *maintenance* has at its root the sense of the hand [*main*] and manual labour, coming to grips with this problem, holding on, grappling with the stuff of our lives.) But by removing possibilities for repair or maintenance, contemporary protocols of manufacturing have effectively separated people from enduring relations to objects even as they consume them, even if people would prefer the choice of looking after their own things. This leads consumers to an unresolved relation to disposal. Letting things go is always cheaper; if they can’t be looked after, they must be gotten rid of. The back lane, on the other hand, offers dubious moral territory–feeding an underground economy of dumpster divers, shopping-cart people, a self-recruited homeless underclass of hardworking recyclers.

Labour, the forgotten ghost in this perpetual machine, has itself been displaced, not just in the work force, but with objects themselves. That the hand has become invisible in the making of things contributes to a loss of attachment and diminished commitment leading to increased disposability. Hierarchies denigrating physical work reappear, with manual labour low on the scale. Industrial production relocates elsewhere; a downturn in regional blue-collar resource-extraction industries and an upturn in local white-collar service industries separates labour from its objects. Certainly no one anticipates a nostalgic return trip to a symbiotic golden age of work and labour conflated for everyone. But lessons from the past continue to inform the present and preamble toward a no-longer-assured future.

*The more people become invested in the things of their material advantage, the less committed they become to the things in themselves*.

This is probably not the final irony of commodities, but it is an important one: the creation of an *inverse relation to worth*, a concept of fugitive ownership. All assets become liabilities. Hoarding in self-storage demonstrates belated allegiance to residual perceived value, a concept not readily relinquished, while replacements clamour at the door. In hard economic times, job loss may mean mortgage default leading to unpaid storage fees and the auctioning off of property making up a personal history. The crash of a hard drive can vaporize a family album (never printed). Capital's commitment to objects as a source of profit leaves their post-consumption disposition open. What happens next is somebody else's business (the next generation, digging itself out of the avalanche from below: don't forget your shovel!).

In contemporary cultures, a trained addiction to consumption–behavioural lessons learned with rigour and vigour around the bonfire of the television–now turns around to teach the world and conspire in its unravelling. Here in the pileup of *Ought Apartment* are the local lessons of untrammeled consumerism. What this decade will bear is superseded by what the *next* decade will bear. The babbling tower can be seen in reverse: each decade bears the weight of the succeeding one in a crushing downward press. But *Ought Apartment* also appears as the opposite: an upward ascendancy, an *aspiration* toward some infinite future, taking the weight off and rising into the present. A buoyant act of surfacing, coming up for air. It is heavenly, unlike the hellish descent into the past of the unwanted. Coming face to face with the past always contains a cringe factor, an echo of resistance to what we left for dead–the *undead*. Yet the past is ever with us. Not only do old objects continue to scramble around us (Craigslist, Value Village, Sallyann), but so does the flotsam and jetsam of their reconstituted appearances. Cultural retro-industries flourish; things continue to resurface imagistically in the present, impossible to overcome. History drags everything back into the present.

*Things spun down into the maelström will be flung back out*, says Poe. *Clinging to the coffin*, adds Melville, who then quotes Job: *And I alone am saved to tell you.*

**REECE TERRIS: A CRITICAL EDUCATION AND AN EDUCATION IN CRITICALITY**

Reece Terris is both an artist and a building contractor. Having thought about *Ought Apartment* for several years, he spent the last two and a half putting it together. Much of any domestic renovation contract work involves demolition. In time, the business of endless trashing and destruction worked on him. He began carefully removing and saving materials, appliances, cabinets, fixtures and decor from various job sites, with no idea for them beyond that they shouldn't be thrown away, that they had value, no longer in themselves, but for what they could represent. His uncle owned some barns out in the Fraser Valley, and Terris talked him into storing these things there. Gradually he came to see this accumulating salvage as the core of a potential work. It was the image of the Vancouver Art Gallery's rotunda that focused the concept: a vertical stack, a low-rise collection built to represent sixty years of construction, renovation and home decor, with each floor a decade, up to the present.

Born in Vancouver in 1968, the son of working-class parents, Terris grew up in the suburbs of PoCo and North Burnaby. He began building young, working on bikes, go-karts, tree forts... As a kid he dragged materials off local building sites into the forest at the end of the street. At seventeen he was an apprentice in carpentry at BCIT, and by twenty-one had his own construction company, which he now runs with a partner. His apprenticeship was a pragmatic education, a combination of formal training and self-taught techniques–very similar to artist's training, sharing many of the same haptic and perceptual skills. When he later chose to take up art as a practice, construction and art making began to work together.

In 2000, Terris entered Simon Fraser University's visual arts program in the School for the Contemporary Arts, which offered a pedagogic model of theory integrated with practice. Aspects of the program were informed by writings produced in critical theory and the social history of art from the early part of the 20th century, and by socially-conscious and activist art practices of the latter part of the century. In the program, Terris' ambitious solutions to problem-driven projects inevitably reflected his increasingly sophisticated understanding of theoretical texts he was reading, and shifted his thinking toward social critique. His subject became the immediate architectural environment of Vancouver, the urban territory he was intimately familiar with through his business. His company was started in the unprecedented construction boom of the '80s, generated by Expo 86, which ran up through the present Olympic boom of the 00s, a period during which time most builders had more work than they could ever handle. Consequently he was aware of the city's practical and pragmatic demands for new residential construction, high-rise condominiums, social housing and domestic renovations; and of its flawed utopian visions and practical failures as well, its speculative over-building, flipped real estate, leaking condos, pseudo-heritage facades, bonusing trade-offs, offshore marketing, unsustainable code-driven practices and economies of waste and surplus. An impulse to uncover the tensions and contradictions of this severely impaired building economy impelled Terris toward ambitious and productive ideas for artworks.

Demolition and renovation are two sides of the same coin, the subtractive and additive forms of a crude archaeology, working through layers of accumulation and accretions of materials stratified through time. Refurbishing, renewing and upgrading, constants of home ownership, add their fraught cyclical contributions. First, the destruction. The contractor gazes down into a gaping hole with equanimity, as every opening-up uncovers the not-so-unexpected: rotting wood, corroded plumbing, frayed wiring, all to be made good. After a while nothing is surprising, only another problem to be fixed.

Renovation is the flipside, the upside of the business. Let's do a make-over! In the domestic interior, materials with a life of ten or twenty years (perhaps less than half the life of the mortgage) mix with things good for thousands of years. Ceramic tiles, descendants of the 5000-year-old potsherds of the ancient world–and just as durable–are smashed out and thrown away after a few seasons, directed by the vague authorities of fashion and impulse. Each year, Vancouver sends half a million tonnes of waste to the Cache Creek landfill, now nearly full (current plans are to double it from 48 to 88 hectares). This routine form of cultural brainlessness struck Terris as an imperative that

needed a form; only as *form* could its implications for consumers be identified and presented for consideration. Materiality engenders responsibility.

*Making* has given Terris a means of exchange with the world, a *lingua franca* of infrastructural syntax and vocabulary for reading and responding to the materially given, allowing him some traction and control over its unregulated ubiquity. Making itself can turn aside for a moment the unrelenting imperative to *choose* from the always-given of mass production; but making something is never from scratch, always entailing its own micro-managed set of choices. Every decision in manual production coalesces with all the others toward the object, and every choice implies an ethical responsibility. For Terris, producing sculptural contexts for made things, showing how they resonate in the common culture, becomes a type of activated knowledge, of *communicative action*, in Jürgen Habermas' sense. In *Ought Apartment*, the shifting of objects from an original context into *this* context allows for a reconsideration of the objects themselves, a v*erfremdungseffekt* of making the familiar strange. The associative and contextual presence of objects and the untangling of meanings initiated by this arrangement engenders an analytic function within the work.

If Terris is more sensitive than most consumers to the presence of things in the world, it's because he has to deal daily with the disposition of more stuff more often. Owners avoid this problem by passing their relinquished responsibility on to contractors and service providers. As ownership becomes further separated from production, the disposition of stuff becomes easier. As a result, projects are dogged by a compulsory immorality of landfilling; destruction and construction meet at the dump. Unlike sanitary engineers, contractors did not voluntarily choose to become the planetary middlemen of unwanted stuff.

**THE WORK WORKING**

Culture, considered as the self-expression of a society–*how a society shows itself to itself*–reveals its contradictions and tensions within a material body on which critical attention can operate. Contributions made to culture remain open to analysis, appropriation and interpretive flux. This mutability of cultural production is *Ought Apartment*'s opportunity.

*Ought Apartment* is the solid form, melting into air, of constructed memory and imagination. The physical experience of the work is that of seeing through its enfolded punctures of times and spaces and the petrified amber of its things. The percipient has the opportunity to be inside or outside the work, to walk, stand or sit, to touch or look, collecting views and alignments from a variety of angles and vantages, from above or below or across or through. While climbing stairs or riding escalators, gazing over balconies or reflecting in mirrors, the viewer's askance glances afford glimpses through windows and doorways as other visitors appear and disappear. A coincidence of things viewed across three or four decades coalesce into sense. The slightest shift in a line of sight causes specific associations to glide into others; registration of remembrance leaps ahead. Around every turn or look, other pasts well up. This dynamic and peripatetic reception allows the careful placements of objects to slide in and out of focus and

arrangement, reassembling or dispersing through time, as intentional overlays and careful positionings laminate histories together, then tease them apart. This extends even to the *Ought Apartment*'s position in the Gallery, as a view from the fourth-floor south balcony down through the decades moves up through the rotunda's arched windows, to a tower crane outside the building: *the work goes on*.

For the viewing body, moving through the spaces of the work visually and physically encourages the eyes' ability to perceive depth or flatness, and locating things spatially and temporally becomes an act of creative cognition. Visual binocularity, always at work in a three-dimensional space, causes these complex overlays to continuously collapse together as two-dimensional fields (at a distance), or reconstitute as discrete and separate three-dimensional presences (up close). Within *Ought Apartment*'s spatial mass, collage aspects shift into assemblage, then flatten again; relationships in a plane contest with relationships in a volume. This complexity of three-dimensional experience matches the physical agency of the viewer against the purposeful disposition of objects in real space as a critical ontological dynamic.

*Ought Apartment* is a material history with intent, constructed with Situationist *detournament* and available for *dérive*. Things taken out of context are turned to new purpose, and a meander through its rooms is a premeditated cut through uninhabited space. The resonances of its specifics are arranged for the viewer's slow consumption and reflective reconsideration. While the work's overlaid mnemonic appears as nostalgia and sentiment, this initial impression, arising through identifications made by the viewer with features of the work's objects, offers a limited satisfaction. For the attentive spectator, a broadening comprehension of a larger program gradually rises in the form of a more urgent and objective imperative. Within a collection of recalcitrant *facts,* embedded social implications are carried forward for critical response.

Theory separated from purpose renounces any obligation to carry through its imperatives in real life. Making critical work that does not in the process disenfranchise the percipient requires the concept of intentionality to be so integral to the work that viewers taking it in do not feel taken in by it, but recognize what it might have to do with them and their lives. A work, in other words, must be realistic enough to allow identification and access for the viewer, but critical enough to engage their considered reflection and, potentially, alter their point of view and even behaviour. Any work of art can be theorized; not all works are theoretical. Work that illustrates theory is no work at all. The practice of art is not a record of the application of concepts, and the reception of work is not necessarily a theoretical proposition. In the present historical moment, the now-routine absorption of cultural critique into art has enabled profound reflections on the complexities of contemporary life. But to a degree, this has also been responsible for the gaping and yawning tunnel deeply bored between work and viewer, who is sometimes left standing right beside something that may as well be on the dark side of the moon, so obscure and arcane are its referents.

The historical attempt to develop a concept of theory that would have an active, direct and immediate relationship to social experience and a critical relationship to cultural forms emerged in Europe during the 1920s and '30s, through a drawn-out conversation

involving Marxist thought, Freudian psychology and Weberian sociological analysis. This genesis of critical theory was argued at length by writers directly and indirectly associated with the Frankfurt School for Social Research. A particular example is Herbert Marcuse's essay *The Affirmative Character of Culture* (1937), in which he observed culture's role in affirming society's dominant characteristics, especially its support of deleterious and counterproductive aspects. In other words, within culture is an imperative to reaffirm and sustain problematic social forms that exist, and to relegate possibilities for actual change to a never-to-be-arrived-at future. Marcuse points out that traditional artworks embodying perfection and beauty as transcendent categories tend to encourage the separation of these ideas from the lives and actions of ordinary citizens and everyday experience. But because culture is a dynamic and contestatory set of forces, he argued, these positions are neither fixed nor inevitable, and can be changed through active oppositions. Producing works that disrupt affirmations of bad situations becomes the work of critical theory and negative dialectics in the present.

*Ought Apartment* is informed by a legacy of hybrid sculptural-architectural artworks and critical theories that have contested these cultural affirmations over the last century. Residing at the core of critical theory was its attention to the productive and inseparable link between *theoria*, represented by philosophy, sociology, psychology and history, and *praxis*, the immediate and socially active form of practice. Unlike the repetitive behaviour of practice, praxis suggests the necessity of applications of theory to practical problems of everyday life, realized, as Henri Lefebvre suggests in *The Critique of Everyday Life* (1947), as direct and active transformative social engagement.

György Lukács' *Realism in the Balance* (1938) developed a concept of realism as a critical method in opposition to expressionism; realism he regarded as the form most capable of addressing concepts of social critique, while modern formalist abstraction could neither replicate nor analyze problems of social reality. Realism's mimetic fidelity to recognizable originals could reproduce social experience and act as a vehicle for criticism within it. Modern abstract formalism's transcendent and universalizing ambitions, on the other hand, are contested by objective reality–the conditions of the world.

In the '20s the concept of *faktura,* developed by Constructivist and Productivist artists, indicated the objective and fabricated quality of their socially oriented work, in their effort to develop an art of pragmatic social agency. El Lissitzky's *Proun Rooms* (Berlin,1923; Dresden,1926; Hanover,1928) and Alexander Rodchenko's *Soviet Workers' Club* (Paris, 1925) proposed dynamic and progressively functional relationships between spaces, their objects and their uses.

In the late '60s a revived interest in concepts of critical theory was integrated with renewed developments in a social history of art. Certain avant-garde and neo-avant-garde works combined organization of space and perceptual effects with forms of sociopolitical content. Some pop, minimal, conceptual and process practices reflected these approaches: Claes Oldenburg's *Bedroom Ensemble* (1963); NE Thing Co.'s *Bagged Place* (1966); Marcel Duchamp's *Etant Donnée* (1966); Michael Asher's *Pomona College Project* (1970) and *Project for Münster* (1977); Bruce Nauman's *Green Corridor* (1970), *Floating Room* (1972) and *Yellow Room (Triangular)* (1973); Mowry Baden's

*Adelbert's Bet* (1971), *Vancouver Room* (1973) and *UBC Rooms* (1974); Gordon Matta-Clark's *Bronx Floors* (1973), *Splitting* (1974), *Day's End* (1975) and *Circus* (1978); Dan Graham's *Picture Window Piece* (1974), *Two Adjacent Pavilions* and *Alteration to a Suburban House* (1978); and Rachel Whiteread's *Ghost* (1990) and *House* (1992).

These works bring together contextual relationships between architectural space, physical object and viewer experience, moving forward the psychological, kinesthetic and phenomenological possibilities of sculpture as analytic social experience. Cognitive demands are made on artists and percipients alike, beyond immediate passive optical engagement. Such sculpture articulates the fundamental relationship between active viewers and real materials and real spaces, realized as intelligible exchange within the social sphere.

Ideas in art can be revealed spontaneously in moments of unexpected reflex, but are sometimes so thoroughly embedded that they surface only under the thoughtful gaze of sustained reflection. Both engage the percipient's own reality and experience, but critical responses initiated through identification with the realism of a work suggest particular possibilities for transformation. As a paradigm, critical realism anticipates active interventions in social realities and cultural systems by its percipients. *Ought Apartment*'s object lessons indicate to an attentive visitor how these processes of analytic cognition can be brought to bear on a bad present and regimes of unfreedom. Consequence remains in the action of the beholder.

**THE RAW AND THE COOKED**

"Presentation" suggests a first appearance–the thing is *present*. "Representation" suggests a remove, a *re*-presentation, or stand-in. In *Ought Apartment,* presentation and representation are mixed; both contribute to the work. Its purpose-built construction, presented to direct the viewing, also represents its eras, and mixes with a consumerist cornucopia of presented saved things, representing their moments of first appearance.

*Ought Apartment* purposely imitates other similar forms of presentation and representation, to interrupt a habit of taking them for granted by lifting them up for scrutiny. Its mimesis recalls, but is unlike, the *mise en scène* of the film set, the stage set, the showroom, the model home, the staged condo, the trade fair, the dressed window, the false front, the scenic backdrop, the diorama, the tableau, the prepared photograph. All of these representations accept self-contained totality as a condition of their appearance. They count on the effects of self-conscious seamlessness, where everything conforms exactly to its moment and nothing is dragged forward or back in time, with anachronism avoided, and nothing falling outside the frame. In *Ought Apartment*'s reality, inadvertent temporal slippages occur as things visually and physically overlap in time and space. Included are the ripped and the chipped, the glued and the screwed, the torn and the worn–the hand-rubbed patinas of age that any used thing takes on–pieced back together with care, like archaeological artifacts presented for study. Things constitute time *over* time, hanging around outside their moment.

The melancholy wafting through *Ought Apartment's* rooms inspires an emotional pathos brought on by spontaneous memory and involuntary identifications with real things, places and events that do not exist here as such. This typology reflects a quintessential demonstration of the vanitas, the *memento mori*: the transitory reminders and vain aspirations of mortality. The work takes on the uncanny quality of remembered specificity without being specific. Its objects lead us to recall this kitchen, but this kitchen never existed before. Families, neighbours, relatives, friends have just left. This might be their place, their stuff. I remember they had one of these...but no, it can't be.

There is a displacement of recognition here. The tableau is incomplete, so that what is there can be seen with clarity. Rather than every artifact of the period being crammed into a kitchen, as one might experience in a museum display, the discrete objects chosen reveal a high coefficient of strangeness. Many stand out for their peculiarity: *that is really odd*. Their objectness rises to attention, as their reappearance here causes them to be seen separated from their practical functions. This making strange is a Brechtian subterfuge, reminding viewers of things in their own lives now tangled with the work in front of them. Objects here mimic their past selves.

This spatial and cognitive dialectic extends to insides and outsides, to surfaces and substances. Part of the collective memory of an era is its slow change in materials, sometimes recalled as nostalgic loss. We no longer have *that*, now we have *this.* It is a commonplace that new materials copy forms of their predecessors, a protective mimicry that ensures their adoption. The new form is often a bad imitation, underlining the fact that the *ersatz* material has no form of its own, obscuring its actual physical qualities. The very word *plastic* emphasizes this shape shifting, and is the same word used to describe the malleable aspects of sculpture.

*Ought Apartmen*t is a visual catalogue of the ambivalent nature of materials. They usually reveal their inherent and intrinsic properties through their surfaces; but in contemporary life artificial materials equivocate between the obvious and the unknown, as internal content is often rendered obscure through overlaid surfaces. This is part of the work's dichotomy. Viewers, encouraged by the continuous motif of the cutaway, make their own incisive imaginings, becoming conscious of a disparity between what they see on the surface and what might be underneath. Nylon looks like silk, particleboard looks like wood, vinyl looks like siding, Naugahyde looks like leather, acrylic looks like wool, melamine looks like paint, polycarbonate looks like glass, silicone looks like rubber. Each transmogrification of their forerunner is produced with a new set of environmental and sustainability problems–all dependant on oil. Tar baby sands: we're stuck here, and getting unstuck from the past will mean more wreckage. Each slippage from the real cleaves through reality.

The problem is not new. In *Society of the Spectacle* (1967), Guy Debord quotes Ludwig Feuerbach from 1841: "But certainly for this present age, which prefers the sign to the thing signified, the copy to the original, representation to reality, the appearance to the essence...*illusion* only is sacred, *truth* profane."

The present triumph of flat-screen life and two-dimensional digital representation pushes real things away, toward Trotsky's garbage heap of history. But it's the garbage heap where the problems show up. The object *in the present* insists that the real demands responsibility; to refuse the real exacerbates the current situation, allowing sense to be overrun by managerial and bureaucratic metrics.

If overconsumption is to survive, it is important to not face this problem. An unreal commitment to the hegemony of virtual representation, which the current cultural and historical moment insists on, elides critical questions of how *in fact* material things continue to produce and bear meanings of consequence, and whether we are prepared to face the fallout, the *abfälle*.

*The work is not the photograph, and the photograph is not the work*.

Like much else, *Ought Apartment* will, as Susan Sontag anticipated, exist in the future as a photograph, which is not what it is now, and not what it was made to be, but it too will succumb to an electronic inevitability. The same can be said for *American Standard* (2004) and *Bridge* (2006), two previous works by Terris, now archived as photographs. As part of their critical intentions, both were labour-intensive site-specific installations made in their locations and made to be experienced directly. *Ought Apartment* is also that real thing in real space, not the half-life of a sidestepping two-dimensional representation. Whether it survives in its intended form underlines a current crisis for sculpture: will institutions commit to large-scale spatial objects employing direct physicality as a necessary part of their function? The real can't compete with the virtual when it comes to storage, but the virtual can't compete with the real when it comes to experience.

**THE END OF LABOUR AND LABOURING TO THE END / THE (ALMOST) LOST MONUMENT**

The careful assembly of *Ought Apartment* was undertaken in a derelict turkey barn in Langley, with the  decade rooms built side by side in a hundred-metre-long space. The specific dimensions of the gallery and the locations for the scaffolding towers were laid out to scale on a purpose-built floor, and the rooms painstakingly worked and reworked. Last December, the day after the piece was finally completed after a year and a half of hard labour, the barn came down under a load of snow and ice, crushing the work underneath. Volunteers and friends dug through a flurry of snow, crawling under sodden wreckage with flashlights, jacks, crowbars, through a toxic dust-cloud of turkey-fecal air, to disentangle and dredge to light the still unbroken, the not-yet-smashed articles of faith, the things of our lives, the future work.

Like labour itself, the Monument to Labour is never finished. Pieter Breughel the Elder's *Tower of Babel* (1563) shows work winding down in garrulous digression; Auguste Rodin's maquette for a proposed *Monument to Labour* (1898) never reached its funding goal; Constantin Meunier left unfinished his *Monument to Labour* in Laeken, near Brussels, when he died in 1905; Jules Dalou was also working on a *Monument to Labour* when he died in 1902; Vladimir Tatlin's *Monument to the Third International* (1920)

proposed an avant-garde model for the emerging Socialist State, an unrealized promise; Vera Mukhina's *Factory Worker and Kolkoz Woman* (1937), a 25-metre-high triumph of heroic Socialist Realism in stainless steel, has been dismantled for conservation. *Ought Apartment*, recovered, rebuilt and resurrected, recalls these long-awaited monuments, but is not so transcendent. Its own transitory and temporal state consolidates an idea of un-monumentality, of structural ephemerality and the impossibility of the absolutely monumental–the nonument.

Art-historical conventions of figurative representation include images of workers labouring or resting. In the Soviet Union in the late '20s, Socialist Realism forced a return to figurative imagery, after the suppression of the avant-garde and its anti-figurative abstract formalism. These latter works produced by Constructivists and Productivists clearly recognized the critical dilemma created by figurative representation as such: the affirmation of *someone else* doing the work. An objectified other replaces active physical engagement for the percipient. As a form of reification, it absolved the viewer of participatory responsibility; an affective identification with the imagistic subject disengaged the viewer from concomitant action. One does not imagine–the imagining has already been done.

Tatlin is the first to propose a structure about work and labour that eschews prototypical representation, the image of workers working; labour could be glorified in non-figurative ways, with viewers imagining themselves into the work. But it is El Lissitzky's first *Proun Room* from 1923 that offers a space where the observer becomes active, completing the work through reflective presence. Inside that work, material, object, image and space surround the viewer. Memory and recall enable its discursive components to be reassembled by a self-conscious producing *subject*, the percipient at work, thoughtfully putting the piece together.

In *Ought Apartment*, the uncountable hours of construction constitute an interiority of the piece in which resonances of work are never absent. The trusswork construction scaffold that is the work's armature stays with viewers as they spiral up and around and through the piece in their revolving ascension. For Breughel, Rodin and Tatlin, the vertical helix was the form taken by the monument to labour. Tatlin, once a sailor on square-riggers, remembered his first image of a screw propeller, turning endlessly through water.

*Ought Apartment* is a construction foregrounding *work*, of Terris and his crew and untold anonymous others who made every object in the piece. It includes the usually hidden labour of the household, of renovation and art production. Its saved objects, things that would come to naught, which once seduced, are now saved from abandonment. It is this attention to production and products of labour that resonates through the work's objects and their realities. Even the building of *Ought Apartment* paralleled the worldwide drama of collapsed and imploded markets and fugitive property investments–it became its own real-estate crisis, with bastard financing, forced evictions and no place like home on the horizon.

A history of ideas embedded in and revealed through the physically real–in *things*–as nineteenth-century Paris was for Benjamin, continues to press for meaningful

consideration in the present. Right now, the physical reality of our situation in the world is the real-time demonstration of absolutely fundamental changes to the planet, wrought by a distracted and destructive humanity not fully convinced of any material crisis. *Ecology* and *sustainability* have become buzzwords of fading efficacy in popular culture, so unlike *Ought Apartment*'s lively internal critique of unreflective and unregulated affirmative consumption.

*Ought Apartment*'s provocative critical realism suggests a working alternative to the prevailing insistence that *only* virtual derivatives and toxic assets of substitution and representation can give meaning to and make sense of the complex experience of contemporary life. *Ought Apartment* is Terris' resolute and emphatic response to the current material crisis, framed within an uncommon and paradigmatic ambition for contemporary sculptural practice.

*Gift*: in German, the word for poison; our tainted present, where we find ourselves.

GREG SNIDER

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