

THE PSYCHOLOGY OF THE INTERIOR

Agnieszka Mlicka

Extended Essay for the Bachelor of Fine Art 2006

THE PSYCHOLOGY OF THE INTERIOR

The working of our society depends to a degree on its structural division into institutions. Architecture, as a product of our material culture, makes this division and the maintaining of institutions possible, which are next subdivided into smaller compartments. These subdivisions are interiors in which the function of the institutions takes place. The meaning of the interior exists out of the relationship between the object – the material space with its objects – and the subject, which is the person inhabiting it¹. Artists have used architectural structures in their works in many different ways, but I would like to focus here on the interior, because in my view this entity is significant for the entire building. The interior as a unit is where the individual lives or works, and is therefore closely related to human behaviour. It is this private area in which the ‘private identity’ is developed, in contrast to the ‘public identity’². A good example of an interior in which the private identity is best developed is inside the home, a safe surrounding in which to grow up.

I would like to examine eleven works, both painting and photography (see images on pages 17-22), to consider what kind of vision of the interior has been put forward. Is the interior represented as a safe enclosure or rather as an isolating space? I see the interior on the one hand as a poetic place where one can turn away from ‘the other’ encountered outside, by which I mean for example the different and unfamiliar norms and values that are adopted by other people. The enclosing walls provide silence and separation, and the optimal place for daydreaming³. It is this positive idea of the interior as a shelter that I would like to contrast on the other hand with the interior as a kind of prison cell, in which power and control play a role. The interior is in this case disadvantaging the individual, and having a negative influence on his or her well-being, resulting, for example, in loneliness. The feeling could be strengthened by the presence of windows, because they offer a view on the outside world which could create an even stronger contrast between inside and outside. Seeing the outside will generate a longing in the person, and because it cannot be fulfilled it will make the atmosphere inside even harder to endure.

Additionally, windows allow for a view into the building. Not only can the human being look outside, but he can also be seen and observed himself. This kind of visual exercise of control is used in the interior of the Panopticon (fig. 1). The Panopticon, invented by Jeremy

¹ Markus, T.A., 1993. *Buildings and Power. Freedom & Control in the Origin of Modern Building Types*. London: Routledge, p. 30.

² Pelzer, B., Francis, M., and Colomina, B., 2001. *Dan Graham*. London: Phaidon Press, p. 121.

³ Bachelard, G., 1994. *The Poetics of Space*. First printed 1958. Boston: Beacon Press, p. 6.

Bentham in 1787, is explained by Foucault as an architectural system in which total control can be exercised over the human being. This system could maintain discipline by applying overall visibility and through individualising the madman, patient, criminal, worker or schoolboy⁴. This need for a certain kind of control to organise life in the growing cities in the eighteenth and nineteenth century, for example in the case of plagues, regarding Foucault results in the creation of power relationships and the growth of institutions. In the Panopticon, the asymmetrical surveillance creates these unequal power relationships. The cell of the prisoner is not a dark space between four thick walls without any daylight, but has on one side a window and on the other side the door, leading to the centre of the building. The tower in the centre houses the guard, who is himself invisible, but the optical asymmetry allows him to see every prisoner, backlit by the window of the cell. This illustration is of course far from a normal house situation, but the idea of being observed is nevertheless discomfiting and as a solution we use curtains.

The way humans organise their living and working space can be ironically illustrated by the artist Gregor Schneider. In his project *Dead House u r* (ongoing since 1985) he transforms his own house by restructuring the rooms and corridors into new, often unliveable, spaces. In some instances, this results in insulated spaces missing all doors and windows, so that no human being is able to come in to experience the room. The artists that I would like to focus on – Morgan Carver, James Casebere, Gregory Crewdson, Thomas Demand, John Grazier, Martin Kobe and Katherine Lubar – do in fact the same. They use the two-dimensional plane to build walls on, in order to create an optical space. Although the subject in the selected works seems so quotidian, I think that consciousness of how we create our space is crucial to how we live, how our life is structured and most of all, how we feel in our surroundings. Schneider believes himself that even the smallest “indentations on the finished surface of a wall can arouse a response in the visitor”⁵. In some of the works the focus is on the interior as an empty setting, whereas in others a narrative is being told by a figure. In any case, the interior tells something about the kind of enclosure and humanity’s relationship to architecture.

The photographs of James Casebere, who has been focusing on institutional spaces and relationships between social control and social structures since 1992, perhaps best illustrate

⁴ Foucault, M., 1991. *Discipline and Punish: the Birth of the Prison*. First printed 1975. London: Penguin Books, p. 200.

⁵ Schimmel, P., et al., 2004. *Gregor Schneider*. Milano: Charta, p. 37.

how different the impact of architecture can be. His images *Turning Hallway* and *Two Tunnels from Left* (fig. 2 and 3) are two totally different spaces. In *Turning Hallway* we see a space resembling a corridor, because from the viewing point the stairs lead somewhere further. A corridor is an in-between space, functioning as a connection between rooms. The presence of the turning stairs, illuminated by the incoming light, implies a forward movement, but there remains an uncertainty about what is behind the viewer and what is around the corner. The virtual movement could only be interrupted by the window, where one might stop to look outside. The window is the only light source, leaving the foreground in darkness. This dark space doesn't seem to be a normal living area and stays a rather unexplained room. The contrast between the dark and illuminated area emphasizes the hypothetical movement even more, as one would move towards the light for better visibility. The window frame, as well as the whole space, consists of straight and parallel lines that create a visual grid. Such hard shapes as well as the lack of detail in the form of decoration, remind you of a prison-like institution where the focus is on confinement of the human being. When public executions were abolished in the second half of the eighteenth century, they were replaced by the prison system. Foucault notes how prisons like the Panopticon could not only serve to exercise power and control, but also be used for carrying out experiments and to alter the behaviour of the criminal⁶. Putting the convict in solitude was meant to make him reflect on his act and become aware of his crime, instead of punishing his body. The simpler the interior is and the less the attention is drawn to visual stimulation, the more the focus lies on the internal dialogue of the individual.

The work *Two Tunnels from Left* consists of a central point, which makes it feel more compact than the corridor. This central focus works like a secure natural shelter, inviting the viewer to enter the lit spot and stay there, with the possibility to turn into any of the corridors. The round archways create a soft atmosphere, rather more related to the anatomy of the body than the hard lines of machine production. Bachelard mentions how curves are warm and welcoming, whereas sharp angles reject the human being⁷. Here, the arched ceiling encourages lowering the head and getting into the foetus position, which will secure the body. The space itself resembles an internal system of soft round chambers connected with each other. This interior might be even more comforting if there was a plain wall to sit against to feel totally enclosed, and fewer corridors enveloped in darkness. It is probably this darkness that keeps the

⁶ Foucault, M., 1991. *Discipline and Punish: the Birth of the Prison*. First printed 1975. London: Penguin Books, p. 203.

⁷ Bachelard, G., 1994. *The Poetics of Space*. First printed 1958. Boston: Beacon Press, pp. 146-147.

attention on the core, whereas the light in the corridor in the first example leads the attention away, creating movement.

Both images by Casebere can be recognised as spaces that can be entered by the viewer, although the hallway feels more familiar. Nevertheless, the round, centre-lit interior could be more attractive to the human being, because it has a biomorphic shape. The doubt about its function in relation to its peculiar form makes it a very private space, one in which you can be just yourself. In my view, a binding factor between the two interiors – or in more general terms between the home and the prison – could be the idea of the monastery. Both images by Casebere could represent such an institution. In particular, *Two Tunnels from Left* has an atmosphere so typical of monasteries and churches. The curved archways can often be found in sacred spaces, and the warm lighting resembles candlelight. *Turning Hallway*, on the other hand, has the simplicity and coldness typical of places meant for contemplation and meditation. The people who choose to live in a monastery are prepared to live in segregation. Thus, an interior that is for some a prison to live in can at the same time provide others with just the right isolation for their kind of lifestyle.

Another interior, in which the quality of the line that forms the outlining of the walls is important, is the work *Sun in an Empty Room* (fig. 4) by Edward Hopper and the homage to this work by Katherine Lubar (fig. 5). Hopper has painted a familiar setting of one side of a room. There is a window with light coming through. Although there is no trace of furniture or any other human touch to it, one can imagine inhabiting these corners. The window, with a view on what seem to be trees, gives the possibility of being in touch with the outside, but one can also hide away in the dark, secure corner. Bachelard notices how the corner is one of the most important spaces in the home, because it provides us with immobility and solitude for the imagination⁸. The lack of much visual detail in the room is in a way balanced out by the vibrant brush strokes and the rich palette. I think that especially this richness of colour gives the empty room a lively character. Also, the use of the brush blurs the straight lines so that the whole looks less static. Both photographs by Casebere haven't got such a quality, as all outlines are well defined. The painting by Lubar comes perhaps closer to the photographs, because she puts a lot of effort into making straight lines when delineating the fall and pattern of the light and shadow. For every plane she uses one pure colour. Because of this very formalistic approach and simplification, the image can be said to be almost abstract. It is a

⁸ Bachelard, G., 1994. *The Poetics of Space*. First printed 1958. Boston: Beacon Press, p. 136.

composition of planes and lines, which because of their connection create a perspective, so that we see a space. The window is removed from the painting, so there is not much other detail to hold on to when imagining this as a real space. It makes it harder to enter the picture as a place we could inhabit. Hopper's painting feels, when compared to Lubar's work, much more accessible and human. A lot can be traced back to the working method: whereas Hopper is occupied with depicting American life and often works with topics like loneliness or alienation, Lubar focuses mostly on the visual structure of the image, and choice of colours is arbitrary and comes intuitively.

Lubar's second work *Prison Hallway* (fig. 6) is in set up similar to Casebere's corridor. The hallway doesn't provide any corner, but is a long straight hall. The repetition of the incoming light as well as the length of the space make the eye move to the front, till it can't go further, and back again. The eye cannot rest on anything calming. The colours are in strong contrast, thus the falling light is contradicting the dark interior so that one feels even more closed in. The bar-like structure and lack of other detail immediately remind you of a prison. Additionally, the quality of the painting, because it is not as realistic as a photograph, can be more easily seen as an internal landscape. In the artist's statement on her prison series, she says that "the prisons are not real prisons, but prisons of our mind"⁹. The visual space is thus representing the human psychological state, as it is ruled and constrained by society. It is interesting that a composition that is so straight and edgy can tell something about the state of the human being. I found this kind of connection between human psyche and interior more straightforward in Casebere's *Two Tunnels from Left*. In Lubar's image nevertheless, the form and function of the prison are strongly connected, because both speak of a kind of imprisonment. The grid form in the painting, created by the bars, is crucial to the atmosphere. It is immediately recognised as a closed off space, and creates a feeling of detachment and coldness. Krauss, when talking about the artistic grid, notices its absolute stasis which is also true of the foundations of buildings. It has qualities that enable it to apply order to elements that produce chaos. Prison buildings for example, where the framework consists of vertical and horizontal axes, can fix the criminal in place. The solid and static character of the grid creates a straight and easily overseen system that helps to maintain discipline. In contrast to the circle, the grid doesn't allow for a central spot and therefore every unit is a repetition of another one. All elements are put next to each other, without any hierarchy¹⁰. The artistic grid

⁹ www.katlubar.com

¹⁰ Krauss, R., 1996. *The Originality of the Avant-Garde and Other Modernist Myths*. 10th ed. Cambridge, Massachusetts: The MIT Press, p. 158.

form, as a work in itself, was first used by artists in the first half of the 20th Century, for example by Mondrian and Malevich. One can also think of cubism. The grid manifested itself as the basis of pictorial art, in that it returned the image to its flatness and repeated the coordinates of the wall and canvas. The grid was typical for modernist art that tried to break with narrative. This process culminated in minimalism, for instance in the works of Sol LeWitt. His sculptures seem to be bare structures. There is not much for the viewer to hang on to, and perhaps that's why the focus of these works shifted from the work's materiality to the relationship between viewer and work. This extreme simplification in three-dimensional art that occurred in the 60s is in my view the reverse of the aim of architecture. I think that the grid in our society is meant to be used as a basis on which the human being can build further according to his needs. The individual can fill in his private part of the grid to give it character and separate it off from other parts. For instance, we decorate our room in the house according to our own personal taste. Decoration, furniture, colour etc. can serve to build on the empty structure and make it one's own. We give the silence of the grid, as it were, its own voice and therefore a personal narrative.

In this context, the painting *Room, Amish Farmhouse* by John Grazier (fig. 7) is an interesting work. It is in composition quite similar to *Sun in an Empty Room*. Nevertheless, it feels warmer and more cheerful. The table breaks the emptiness of the room, as well as the lines of the walls which are slightly slanted. To understand such a space, it is helpful to know that Grazier lives in a remote rural farming area in Pennsylvania. His work is very clearly not based on city life and its rigid architectural structure. This painting is inspired by the lifestyle of the Amish, who are a closed religious society. They live without any modern technology or electricity and motor vehicles. One can feel this lifestyle in the painting, not only because of the traditional cloth on the table, but also because of the flexibility of the composition. Grazier avoids parallel lines on purpose, to create more movement in the image. He believes that an illogical placement of horizontal and vertical lines is more challenging and stimulating. Even more vibration in the image is created by the layering of warm and cold colours, resulting in a very dense surface. I think that all these visual elements are a good illustration of Bachelard's writing on the house of dreams, in contrast to his vision of the city as a 'geometric cube'¹¹ in his rejection of contemporary urbanism.

¹¹ Vidler, A., 1999. *The Architectural Uncanny*. 5th ed. Cambridge, Massachusetts: The MIT Press, p. 65.

Although round or oblique lines can feel more anthropomorphic, most of the buildings we live and work in consist of a mesh that is a necessary construction so as to be able to use the interior. Architecture's form and the created space are permanent. The function of the space on the other hand is not, depending on its use by the human being¹². It is this stability of the mesh – as three-dimensional grid – that can paradoxically both lend security as well as work as an imprisoning cage, as we have seen in Lubar's *Prison Hallway*. But the word 'mesh' relates not only to the fabric or the net that the construction consists of, but also to the open spaces in the net. In interiors these are the windows, which are significant to the isolated space. The opening in the wall is the only way to connect the interior with the outside world. The two opposites, inside and outside, come together through the transparent glass. The person who looks through the window will become aware of the self by distinguishing between what is familiar at home and what is different outside. This process takes place when you change the inside for the outside for the first time, for example when the child leaves the house for the first time to attend school.

I find this idea in the atmosphere of the image *Untitled* (from the series *Beneath the Roses*, 2003-2005) by Gregory Crewdson (fig. 8). The open suitcases next to and on the bed indicate that a journey will or has taken place. Clothes and accessories are spread through the room in a chaotic way, and the woman stands in a frozen position, naked, in the bathroom. She seems lost in thought, as there is no indication of any action; the motionless arms are hanging, the head slightly bowed. The photographs from the series *Beneath the Roses* show middle-aged women lost in their American small-town surroundings. They all show a darker side of the women's existence. The atmosphere is eerie, inspired by Hollywood films, which can also be found in Crewdson's working method, using a crew and set to create the image. The photographs look like film stills, of which a past and future have been cut out. Only the present, with its overflow of descriptive details, is given. Although the photographs can be seen as cliché representations of small-town life, in my view the story could take place in any kind of interior, even in the city. Freud's notion of the uncanny, as used by Vidler in *The Architectural Uncanny*, is linked with the experience of the modern city, but "The uncanny was, in this first incarnation, a sensation best experienced in the privacy of the interior."¹³ The term 'unheimlich' is in my view very accurate here, because it is etymologically rooted in the domestic environment. Vidler notices how the uncanny takes place on two levels: firstly, when

¹² Markus, T.A., 1993. *Buildings and Power. Freedom & Control in the Origin of Modern Building Types*. London: Routledge, p. 9.

¹³ Vidler, A., 1999. *The Architectural Uncanny*. 5th ed. Cambridge, Massachusetts: The MIT Press, p. 4.

the secure home is invaded by an alien presence and on a psychological level when “the other is (...) experienced as a replica of the self”¹⁴. I understand the latter as a doubling of one’s own identity, and seeing this second ‘self’ as an ‘other’ – familiar but different. In this photograph, I interpret the woman’s contemplative mood as a struggle with her own identity. It looks as if she has become aware of something that has disrupted her everyday life. The chaos in the bedroom implies that something has happened that has changed the woman’s emotional state. Could it be that she has returned home from a voyage and tries to deal with a new experience? Has this given her a new perspective to see herself in, a kind of critical self-awareness? This view can be supported by the focus on her naked body and the two mirrors. She is reflected in one of them, but not visible in the other one. The mirror plays a big role in the idea of the ‘doubled self’. In the image, it suggests that the woman might have consciously encountered her other self as a reflection. Freud explained the cause of the uncanny as something that has previously been repressed, but unexpectedly returned¹⁵. The woman might have repressed a vision of herself, but this has returned in a form that is alienated, and with which she now tries to cope. The mirror also indicates self-reflection – the space becomes one of internal dialogue or meditation. The home seems here to be a refuge, for safety, solitude and silence. This is emphasized by the covered window and the darkness – a self-inflicted isolation from the outside world. Vidler notes how the uncanny in the late nineteenth century shifted from the interior of the home to the interior of the mind. The symptoms of this type of uncanny are for example “spatial fear, leading to paralysis of the movement, and temporal fear, leading to historical amnesia”¹⁶. The former is noticeable in the interpretation of the woman’s position as being inactive, whereas the latter cannot be avoided in photography, which in contrast to film has no past, just a present.

Nevertheless, isolation that can seem to be necessary could turn into depression or madness. *The Yellow Wall-Paper* by Charlotte Perkins Gilman is such a fictive example of a woman who has to abandon her virtuous stimulating life to sit in a room with yellow wallpaper, resulting in her depression turning into madness. Her husband convinces her that staying inside the room will improve her health, and in the end she even locks herself up. Whether isolation has a positive or negative effect on the person depends a lot on whether it is self-inflicted or not and whether the isolation takes place at home or in an institution. The fictive story shows that even the home can become a prison and destroy the healthy mind. The

¹⁴ Vidler, A., 1999. *The Architectural Uncanny*. 5th ed. Cambridge, Massachusetts: The MIT Press, p. 3.

¹⁵ Ibid., p. 79.

¹⁶ Ibid., p. 6.

woman starts to see another woman in the wallpaper, but also through the window. The latter is clearly her own reflection in the glass, but the fact she doesn't recognise herself indicates a schism in her identity. In my interpretation of Crewdson's photograph, the woman might be trying to escape from society with its different views and aims. She has become aware how her original 'self' has been manipulated by the institutions she has had to go through. The longing for death in the most extreme case might not be a suicidal attempt yet, but a strong kind of nostalgia, in wanting to part with all the layers that have been put upon the 'self'. In this state, the most fearful awareness is that in a way, the home could be seen as an institution too. There are many different kinds of institutions, of which the educational ones would come closest to the function of the home. In the home, we are taught our first necessary life lessons, but also certain norms and values will be automatically imposed on us. These will make us behave in specific ways. The house will therefore always be remembered as the building representing all these things we have been taught. Nowadays, the home has become even more of an institution upon which power can be enforced because it is so easily connected to other networks. We decide to always be available to others through email, mobile phones and other media. The child who is sent to his/her room as punishment knows that he/she can keep in touch with the rest of the world through TV, computer, mobile phone and stereo. Ilya Kabakov noticed that "A person goes to a public place to be alone. And at home we do our public thing."¹⁷ But the open connections make us also vulnerable to abuse by others, as in the case of spyware on our personal computer. Baudrillard mentions these many networks that penetrate our home. The home being so accessible from the outside becomes like the cell in the Panopticon, in which the inhabitant is constantly on view. The Panopticon didn't need any strong bars, chains and heavy locks¹⁸, because the individualising observation and isolation were enough to maintain control. One can therefore easily compare it to the home, where the mind is continuously penetrated with information, advertising etc., without literally being locked up. This kind of panopticism can be found in our society in which the new screens (TV, PC) replace the window view. In contrast to prisoners, we seem to be free, but in fact it is a mental kind of prison.

The interior that is being opened up by different external forces can be illustrated by Martin Kobe's huge paintings of spaces – to call them interiors would be a mistake (fig. 9). These

¹⁷ Ilya Kabakov, interviewed by Robert Storr. In: Harrison, C., Wood, P. ed., 2003. *Art in Theory 1900-2000*. Oxford: Blackwell Publishing, p. 1180.

¹⁸ Foucault, M., 1991. *Discipline and Punish: the Birth of the Prison*. First printed 1975. London: Penguin Books, p. 202.

spaces are created by an open structure, so that it is not totally clear if they show an inside or an outside. It is representative of the way we build nowadays, with open offices, glass walls and even the home being more and more open-planned instead of consisting of little dark rooms. Kobe's paintings cut the space up in parts, reminiscent of cubism. The contrast to Hopper's empty room is huge. The main difference is the use of colour and style of painting, which create a very high-tech touch, almost as if created on the computer. There seems to be a lot of reflection and transparency. Although it doesn't evoke claustrophobia, this kind of space creates confusion. Nothing is fixed and secure; there is no area where one could isolate oneself. This is, in my view, a good example of the postmodern notion of the 'unheimlich', which like in Freud's initial description of the uncanny focuses on the connection between psyche and dwelling, or body and house. The use of the body in architecture as referent and figurative inspiration has returned in postmodern architecture, after it had been totally neglected in modernist architecture in which the mechanically constructed house was seen as just a shelter. But although humanist architecture referred to the proportions of the human body as a unity, nowadays this architectural body is fragmented. The buildings are devoid of a unity or a centre and feel like dismembered bodies, with no distinction between interior and exterior¹⁹. In Kobe's paintings walls are not walls anymore, but planes that touch upon each other, that connect, then disconnect, etc. Experiencing such spaces is uncanny, because one cannot relate it to one's own bodily structure. It is a fragmented and dismembered, if not mutilated, body. The architecture feels familiar but at the same time alien. I think that the word 'edifice' can be applied to this kind of architecture, because this word means both "building, especially one of imposing appearance or size" and "elaborate conceptual structure"²⁰. The idea that form and space are permanent isn't valid here. To experience the painting is almost like 'browsing' through, skipping from one space into another, all the time moving on between connected areas. In this sense, the work can evoke excitement as when we encounter quickly flickering and constantly changing images on the TV or the internet. I see Kobe's works as a kind of visual model of our world, consisting of movement, but also of the many layers of reality that our culture creates. It is not clear what the foundations are, because all planes seem of equivalent importance. The original structure – if there was one at all – might have ceased to exist. It is like in Gregor Schneider's building project, where the new walls hide the old ones, or replace them. It is impossible to reconstruct the original configuration of the rooms. This confusion between reality and fiction is another aspect of the postmodern uncanny

¹⁹ Vidler, A., 1999. *The Architectural Uncanny*. 5th ed. Cambridge, Massachusetts: The MIT Press, pp. 69-70.

²⁰ <http://dictionary.reference.com>

explored by Baudrillard. He calls the loss of the original in modern society the “hyperrealism of simulation”²¹. It is like the idea of the 1:1 scale map of which the original land has disappeared. Just the map is left as a representation. Interesting in relation to this is the working method of both Demand and Casebere, who make models for their final work. Demand first of all builds paper models from pictures he finds in the media. Next, another layer of representation is added when the picture of the model is taken. His models are 1:1 scale and his final prints often are too, but we are far removed from what we think is the original. In the process a lot of detail is taken out. The photographs therefore feel real and surreal at the same time, familiar but manipulated. This is the picture effect we know so well. We seem to know the most distant places before we have ever been there, because we have seen the images of them. Demand’s photos make us aware of how misleading this can be.

In the above description of Kobe’s work it is hard to find Bachelard’s poetic home descriptions, which are in the end quite out of date (written in 1958). We are more used to moving around, travelling from destination to destination, whether for work or during holidays. Less time is spent at home and people move more often. Our beloved corners are exchanged for new ones all the time and thus they lose their meaning, so that the symbolic value of ‘home’ could disappear. Perhaps the home is becoming a commodity as well, something that has a market value and can easily be exchanged. Objects seem to take over control of our lives. Baudrillard mentions the fading of our proximity to other people, whereas we are increasingly surrounded by objects, which seems the case in Crewdson’s *Untitled* where the lonely human body is surrounded by dead matter. *First Cut* by Morgan Carver (fig. 10) deals foremost with objects in a space, as a figure is missing. The presence of a person who could lead the narrative has been taken over by objects, in this case a chair – perhaps someone was sitting there and escaped through the open door? – and a toy robot. The latter becomes almost alive in this nearly sci-fi setting with a deserted street and huge shadows coming from a hidden light source. Could it be a metaphor for how objects have taken over our lives and do our work, as is the case with computers? Then, in a sense, uninhabited works reflect our state in society: the human being is not actively part of it anymore and is dismissible.

An empty interior evokes the feeling of something missing, as in Carver’s painting where one expects a person to sit in the chair, because we are used to architecture being a natural

²¹ Baudrillard, J., 1993. The Ecstasy of Communication. In: H. Foster, ed. *Postmodern Culture*. First printed 1983. London: Pluto Press, p. 128.

surrounding for humans. In the arts, the medium of painting has most often used the room as a setting for one or several people, as is the case with works by Vermeer or De Hoogh. But in an empty interior there is no face and eyes with which to align our emotions. Whereas Crewdson gives an immediate narrative, in the works of Hopper and Lubar one has to decode other given elements like colour and line to translate it into a meaning or interpretation of the space. The lack of a figure creates a sort of expectation.

Thomas Demand's photographs in particular carry this kind of expectation in the empty spaces he reconstructs. His choice of places that have been published in the media means that the places have a history. The scenes, emptied from all indicative details of the incident, still seem to be loaded with a story. Although *Drafting Room* (fig. 11) hasn't been the focus of sensational media attention, it has historical significance for Demand. The photograph shows an architect's office where plans for the rebuilding of Munich were made after the war. The theme is implicitly and explicitly the reconstruction of the architecture of post-war Germany, in which Demand grew up himself. This interior is built without grandiloquence or symmetry, two aspects that were valued in post-war architecture²². Like Kobe's space, this one allows the light and air to flow freely through the space, merging the outside with the inside. The open windows indicate that the office is still open and that someone could occupy the space any time. Why is it empty then? The silence in the image creates a kind of expectation in the viewer to see the room being used. The materials spread on the tables imply that people have worked here before. The scene seems to be awaiting action.

Demand doesn't provide in the titles any clues to the topics of his photographs. To understand such an interior one has to interpret the elements that are given. The objects that Demand leaves in the rooms often give a clear indication of their function. Nevertheless, there is not enough information given to place the picture in historical context. Also, it lacks an explanatory text which the media always provide. One can only guess what it is about by adding a short kind of narrative to it. I believe that in a certain way, we implicitly impose human action and use of space onto the empty interior to understand it. The objects are helpful, because they hint at a certain kind of action, consequently explaining the function of the room. That way, a short kind of narrative is added to the image. You could even call such empty works 'absence portraits'²³. The rooms are illustrative of human work and behaviour. The artist can manipulate the image to indicate an emotional state of a possible figure, in the

²² Bonami, F., Durand, R., and Quintin, F., 2001. *Thomas Demand*. London: Thames & Hudson, p. 62.

²³ Darwent, C., 2005. Absence Minded. *ArtReview*, April, pp. 54-59.

way Lubar did in her prison series. The focus of Demand's works is not necessarily on the psychological space, but the silence of the images implies a suspension of human action.

I believe that incompleteness in interiors, or on the edge of abstraction as in Kobe's works, has potential to portray the psyche of a possible inhabitant. In general, such works can tell us something about the position of the human being in our society. The image of the Panopticon and Crewdson's photograph do that very literally, whereas Kobe's and Lubar's works are more suggestive. I think that the fact that the latter images, as well as Carver's, are devoid of a figure makes them even stronger. Their topics, or in Kobe's case the painting style, could reflect on how our society manipulates our lives and behaviour. Machines and digital technology have totally changed our way of living, if not partially taken it over. This content is emphasized by the absence of a figure. One can furthermore question what the role of the home is nowadays. Does for example Bachelard's idea that "All really inhabited space bears the essence of the notion of home"²⁴ still have any bearing? The works I interpreted here show different approaches testing this assumption by leaving out the inhabitation. On the one hand they illustrate how the interior has become interconnected and actively part of a bigger system; the home as a moving unit, from which we can travel virtually to all other connected units. On the other hand, the homely atmosphere of Grazier's work, or in a more abstract way Casebere's *Two Tunnels from Left*, illustrate Bachelard's nostalgic vision of the home. This view, in which the home becomes a memory, a house of dreams, developed out of a critique of such modern progress. Casebere's cave-like space is like a metaphor for the modern need to search for a refuge, for example in returning to the home, the cave or the womb, as a result of the anxiety created by the architectural uncanny. Crewdson's photograph, although in a very complex way, also shows in my view how the home can work as a protective shell. It is this kind of home that allows us to develop certain norms and values which are a necessary basis when leaving it. Nevertheless, there seems to be a gap between the traditional mental image of the home, and its actual, material aspects in our postmodern society, in which not all interiors provide favourable conditions for the human being. The view of the home itself seems to be fragmented. Perhaps as long as the human being is prepared to adapt to an interior, a certain kind of essence of the home can be found. In looking at these works, I believe that already by trying to interpret the interiors from my own, human perspective I have in a certain way automatically mentally inhabited the spaces and made myself more at home with them.

²⁴ Bachelard, G., 1994. *The Poetics of Space*. First printed 1958. Boston: Beacon Press, p.5.

BIBLIOGRAPHY

- Bachelard, G., 1994. *The Poetics of Space*. First printed 1958. Boston: Beacon Press.
- Basar, S., 2005. Power Play. *ArtReview*, July, pp. 56-61.
- Baudrillard, J., 1993. The Ecstasy of Communication. In: H. Foster, ed. *Postmodern Culture*. First printed 1983. London: Pluto Press.
- Belsey, C., 2002. *Very Short Introduction: Poststructuralism*. Oxford University Press.
- Bonami, F., Durand, R., and Quintin, F., 2001. *Thomas Demand*. London: Thames & Hudson.
- Caputo J., Yount M., 1993. *Foucault and the Critique of Institutions*. Pennsylvania State University Press.
- Darwent, C., 2005. Absence Minded. *ArtReview*, April, pp. 54-59.
- Eisenman, P., 1987. *Houses of Cards*. Oxford University Press.
- Eisenman, P., 2004. *Eisenman Inside Out: selected writings, 1963-1988*. Yale University Press.
- Foucault, M., 1991. *Discipline and Punish: the Birth of the Prison*. First printed 1975. London: Penguin Books.
- Gutting, G., 2005. *Very Short Introduction: Foucault*. Oxford University Press.
- Harrison, C., Wood, P., ed., 2003. *Art in Theory 1900-2000*. Oxford: Blackwell Publishing.
- Jameson, F., 1993. Postmodernism and Consumer Society. In: H. Foster, ed. *Postmodern Culture*. First printed 1983. London: Pluto Press.
- Krauss, R., 1996. *The Originality of the Avant-Garde and Other Modernist Myths*. 10th ed. Cambridge, Massachusetts: The MIT Press.
- Marcoci, R., Demand, T., and Eugenides, J., 2005. *Thomas Demand*. New York: Museum of Modern Art.
- Markus, T.A., 1993. *Buildings and Power. Freedom & Control in the Origin of Modern Building Types*. London: Routledge.
- Merrick, J., 2005. The Walls Came Down. *ArtReview*, July, pp. 66-71.
- Parsons School of Design / Architecture, 1999. *Excerpts from: Jeremy Bentham (1748-1832) PANOPTICON; or The Inspection-House (1787)* [online]. Available at: <URL: <http://cartome.org/y2pstudio/panopticon1.htm>> [Accessed 26 November 2005]
- Pelzer, B., Francis, M., and Colomina, B., 2001. *Dan Graham*. London: Phaidon Press.

Perkins Gilman, C., 1998. *The Yellow Wall-Paper, and other stories*. First printed 1995. Oxford University Press.

Poster, M., ed., 1988. *Jean Baudrillard, selected writings*. Stanford University Press.

Schimmel, P., et al., 2004. *Gregor Schneider*. Milano: Charta.

Searle, A., 2005. *Too much information* [online]. The Guardian, 19 April 2005. Available at: <URL:<http://www.guardian.co.uk/arts/critic/feature/0,1169,1463147,00.html>> [Accessed 20 February 2006].

Vidler, A., 1999. *The Architectural Uncanny*. 5th ed. Cambridge, Massachusetts: The MIT Press.

Wakefield, N., 2005. Sites Unseen. *ArtReview*, February, pp. 65-69.

Interview with **Katherine Lubar**, 22 November 2005, London.
(and website: www.katlubar.com)

Email exchange with **John Grazier**, January 2006.

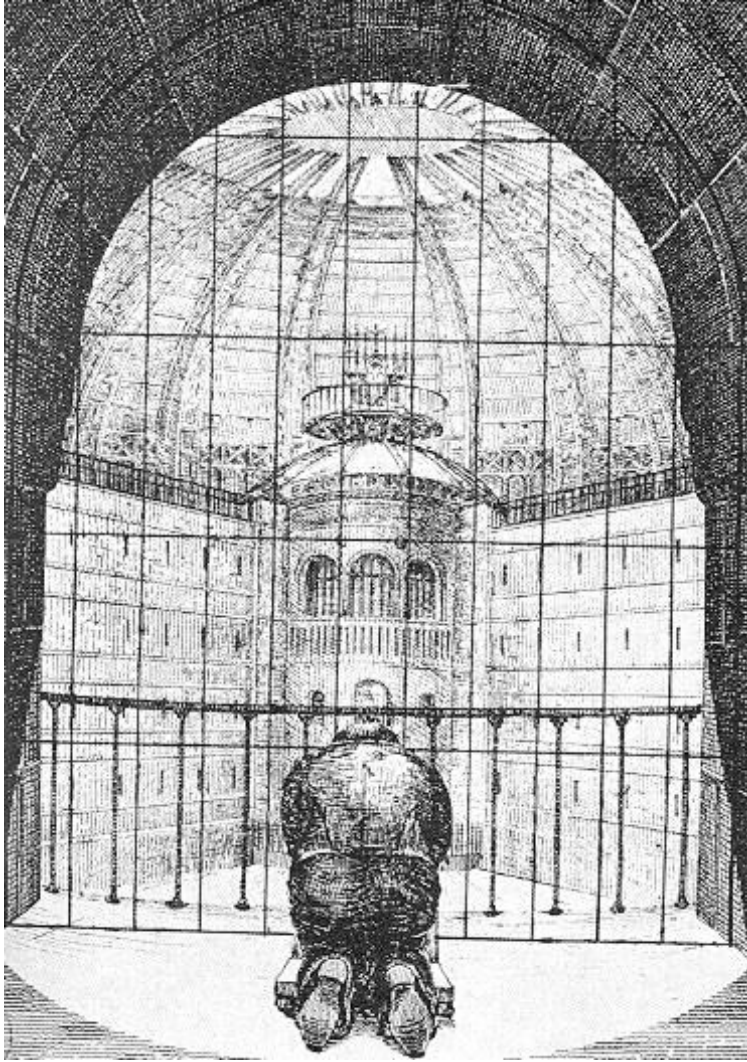


Fig.1 N. Harou-Romain, plan for a penitentiary, 1840
A prisoner in his cell, kneeling at prayer before the central inspection tower.
(Shows the Panopticon as invented by Jeremy Bentham in 1787.)



Fig.2 James Casebere, *Turning Hallway* (2003)



Fig.3 James Casebere, *Two Tunnels from Left* (1998)

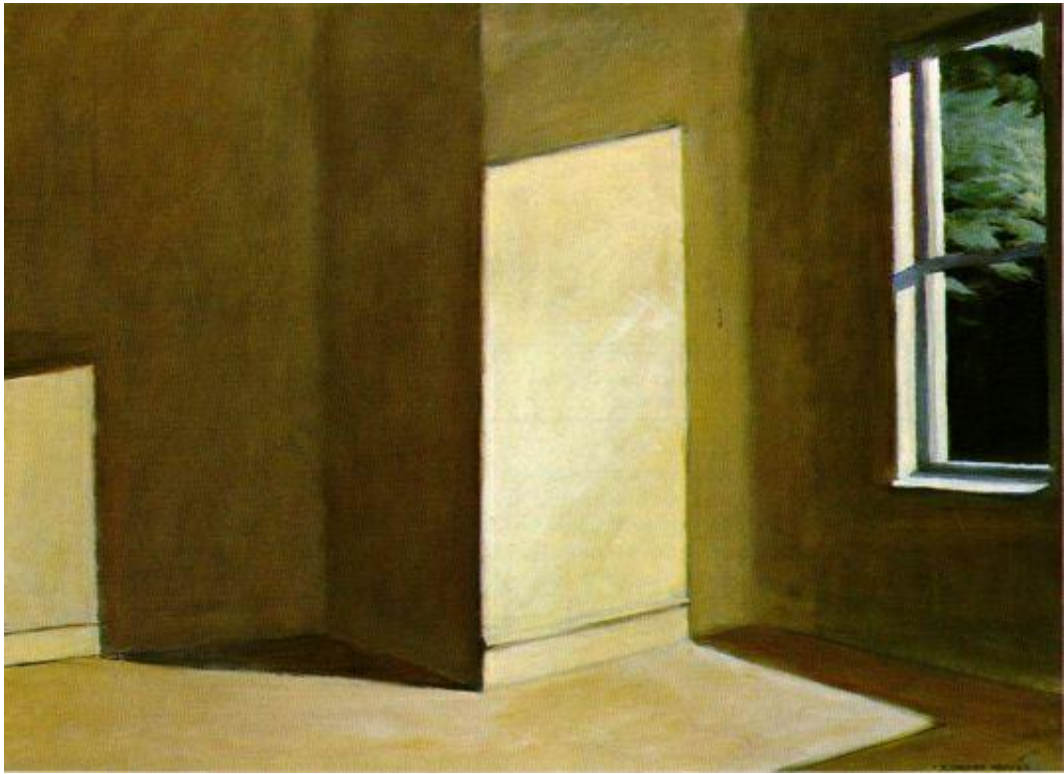


Fig.4 Edward Hopper, *Sun in an Empty Room* (1963)

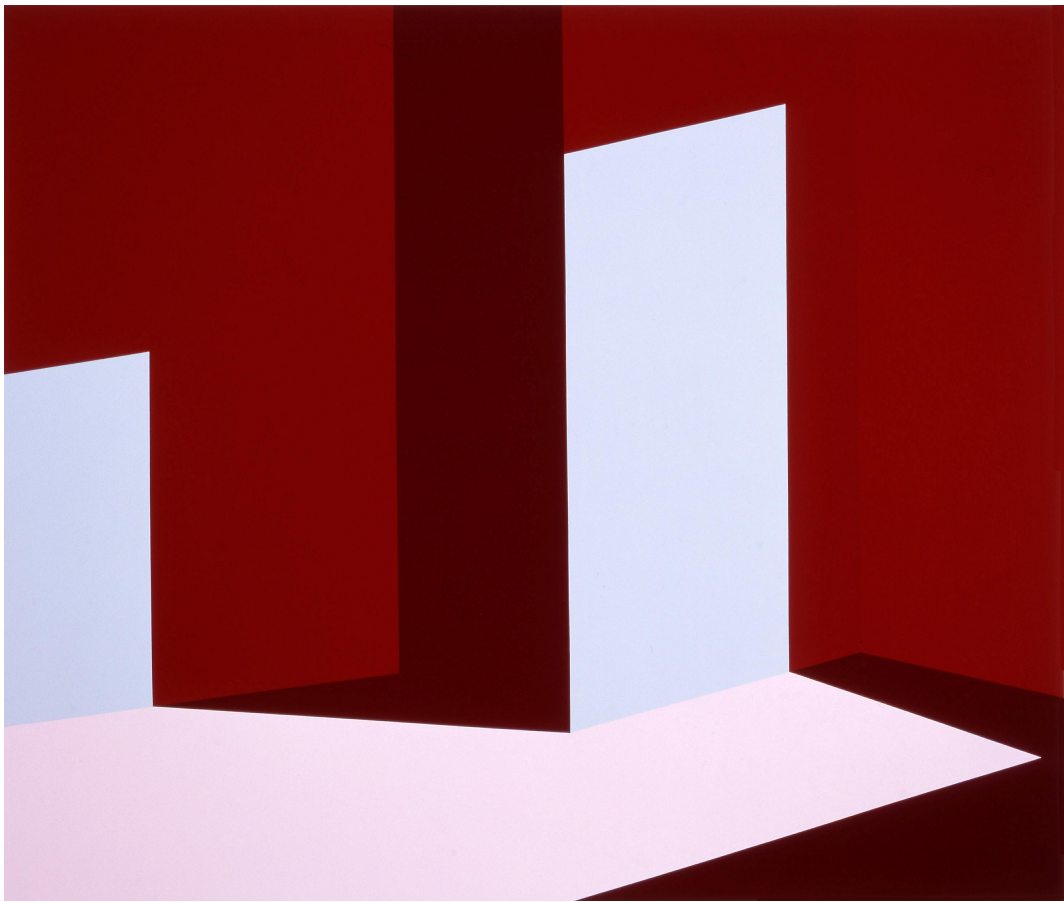


Fig.5 Katherine Lubar, *Homage to Hopper: after "Sun in an Empty Room"* (2004)



Fig.6 Katherine Lubar, *Prison Hallway* (1999)



Fig.7 John Grazier, *Room, Amish Farmhouse* (2005)



Fig.8 Gregory Crewdson, *Untitled* (2005) (from the series *Beneath the Roses*, 2003-2005)



Fig.9 Martin Kobe, *No Title* (2003)



Fig.10 Morgan Carver, *First Cut* (2005)



Fig.11 Thomas Demand, *Zeichensaal (Drafting Room)* (1996)