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PROJECT

Interiors at Risk: Spaces of the Self in Contemporary Art

My project discusses the recurrent trope of the precarious interior in contemporary art. I am considering, among others, the work of artists such as Krzysztof Wodiczko, Jane and Louise Wilson, Pipilotti Rist, Andrea Zittel, and Janet Cardiff in order to explore the meaning of these spatial constructions as symptomatic of an ongoing transformation of interiority. I suggest that, although there are different issues at stake in these projects, they share a concern for what happens to the imagination of the self in the recent context of rapid political, economic and social change. These works, I argue, suggest a profound psycho-cultural transformation in the ways that an individual and collective subjectivity is conceived and I want to examine the forms of these new conceptions so as to address several questions. Are we witnessing the end of interiority as a space? How to imagine subjective autonomy in the era of cultural mobility? Should inner spaces be protected or shared? Do we even need depth?

Recommended Reading

Lajer-Burcharth, Ewa. *Necklines: The Art of Jacques-Louis David After the Terror*. New Haven, Conn.: Yale University Press, 1999.

___. "Interiors at Risk: Precarious Spaces in Contemporary Art." *Harvard Design Magazine*. What About the Inside? Fall/Winter 2008/2009, 12-21.

___. "Multi-Story: Mary Kelly." In *On Fidelity: Art, Politics, Passion, and Event*, edited by Milada Slizinska. Warsaw: Center for Contemporary Art, 2008.

___. "Image Matters: The Case of Boucher." In *Dialogues in Art History*, edited by Elizabeth Cropper. Washington: National Gallery of Art, Center for Advanced Study in the Visual Arts, 2009.

Interiors & Interiorities

The precarious, invaded or otherwise challenged interior has emerged as a recurrent trope in contemporary art produced in a recent decade or so. The British artists Jane and Louise Wilson stalked the abandoned quarters of STASI in the former East Germany to create, by means of a double-screen projection, a haunting tour of these defunct spaces. ("Stasi City", 1997) The Swiss artist Pipilotti Rist produced several video installations in which interior spaces are inscribed from within by images of exterior life. (e.g., "Himalaya's Sister's Living Room", 2000). American artist Andrea Zittel creates custom-made trailers understood as ironic bastions of the hyper-consumerist self. Other examples include the Canadian artist Janet Cardiff's soundscapes and acoustic interiors (e.g. "Opera for a small room", 2005 in collab. with George Bures Miller); the Polish artistic tandem Aneta Grzeszykowska & Piotr Smaga's "surveillance" plans of inhabited apartments; and the American Mary Kelly's "Multi-Story House", a spatial representation of women's subjective experience of feminism, exhibited at Documenta 12 in Kassel last year. I consider these aesthetic engagements with interior space as a symptom of an ongoing radical transformation of the notion of interiority. There are, of course, differences among these European and American works which address a broad range of issues, some explicitly political, other ethical and technological in nature and global in scope. But what they share is a persistent concern with the notion of interiority figured as a precarious, endangered, or overprotected space. What these works point to is, then, not only the far-reaching social, political and economic changes that have recently been occurring in Western democracies and beyond. They also suggest a profound psycho-cultural transformation, a major shift in the imagination of individual as well as collective self. It is precisely with the new forms of this imagination that I would like to engage.

Are we witnessing the end of interiority as we know it, or is it simply a change in how it is conceived-e.g., a shift from the notion of spatial depth to the idea of surface or an interface? Is technology the force behind, or the vehicle of, the ongoing transformation? How are we to imagine subjective autonomy in the era of cultural mobility? Should inner spaces be protected or shared? Do we need depth? These are some of the questions that I would like to consider.

On Tuesday, I will focus on the work of two artists: Krzysztof Wodiczko's video installation "Guests" (2009), exhibited at the recent Venice Biennial, and Chantal Akerman's film, "Là-bas", (Down there, 2006) presented also in the form of an installation. The first uses interior space to examine the place of the stranger-the immigrant worker, the refugee--in Europe's collective cultural imaginary. The second is the artist's interiorized investigation of her complex relation to Israel, and to herself. Though different in means and purposes, both works share an interest in the notion of interiority non-identical to itself, the first considering it as the basis of a non-identitarian community, the second, as a personal necessity.

Lajer-Burcharth, Ewa (Berlin,2011)

Chardin material

<https://kxp.k10plus.de/DB=9.663/PPNSET?PPN=682227501>

Lajer-Burcharth, Ewa (2009)

Image matters : the case of Boucher

<https://kxp.k10plus.de/DB=9.663/PPNSET?PPN=1817354213>

Lajer-Burcharth, Ewa (Washington,2009)

Image matters : the case of Boucher

<https://kxp.k10plus.de/DB=9.663/PPNSET?PPN=1726783693>

Lajer-Burcharth, Ewa (2009)

Borders

<https://kxp.k10plus.de/DB=9.663/PPNSET?PPN=670716618>

Lajer-Burcharth, Ewa (2009)

Granice

<https://kxp.k10plus.de/DB=9.663/PPNSET?PPN=67071660X>

Lajer-Burcharth, Ewa (New Haven, Conn. [u.a.],1999)

Necklines : the art of Jacques-Louis David after the Terror

<https://kxp.k10plus.de/DB=9.663/PPNSET?PPN=251353648>