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Inhabiting the Memory: The Ineffable Contamination

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Abstract

Apropos the sculpture *House* by British artist Rachel Whiteread, Shelley Hornstein argues that architecture is something that is taken too lightly most of the time. Nevertheless, architecture accompanies our lives step for step. This accompaniment is independent of the intrinsic value of the objects in which we live. They are there and are part of our trajectory. The houses we live in are “living” witnesses to our emotions and lack thereof, our dreams and our nightmares. Houses, as witnesses, are essentially interior universes. Impregnable. Impregnable universes in which well-being and discomfort live side by side, and in which an uncomfortable feeling of strangeness can easily install itself. This uncanny strangeness, lives in our collective memory, contaminating it. *House*, the house that is not a house by Rachel Whiteread, and *Die Familie Schneider*, an installation by German artist Gregor Schneider, reveal that contamination. Whilst it is true that our habitation-related memory essentially lives off a cliché of happiness, it is no less true that in its recesses, in habitation, a less clean and clear tremble survives. The depth of architecture, its weightiness, is impregnated with humanity. This is a text about the relationship between memory and habitation, and how that relationship contaminates the understanding of architecture when it is lived in.

Keywords: memory; contamination; habitation; Rachel Whiteread; Gregor Schneider

1. The good, the beautiful and the horrendous

In the house there is room for the good, the beautiful and the horrendous. It is a matter of the affections. And a matter that affects all societies and cultures.

The fears and fascinations associated with turns of the century, above all the turn from the 19th century to the 20th, expose, generally speaking, the paradoxical sentiments that contaminate the collective memory, like something inherited, a heritage. Anglo-Saxon societies are a clear testament to this. Victorian houses – once again, the good, the beautiful and the horrendous – in an essentially urban environment, are associated with a certain grotesque ambience that is inherent to the city. A grotesque environment, but also a promising one with a certain degree of success. All things live in the house. And all persons live there. A healthy and a sick refuge. Comfort goes hand in hand with discomfort – a discomfort that is difficult to designate as such. The uncanny also lives with us in our houses. It invades the living unit and settles in the unfathomable recesses of the built structure. A structure which, too often, is fixed in our reveries, a kind of disconcerting anachronism.

The artistic actions by British artist Rachel Whiteread (b. 1963) and German artist Gregor Schneider (b. 1969), *House* (1993-1994) and *Die Familie Schneider* (2004) respectively, place us, almost a decade apart, in a contemporary London that is contaminated by Victorian paradoxes. They confront us with the chimeric theme of habitation, where emotions become profusely convulsed, rendering clear judgement more difficult. There is a sense of continuity, of inheritance, to that theme. As if the memory of living in something were a heritage of and for humanity. These works, and the social reaction to which they give rise, particularly in the case of *House* which received more exposure, offer fertile ground for speculation on this idea of heritage. One should underline that the notion of heritage includes that of inheritance and that the latter can have simultaneously a material and an immaterial dimension. Indeed, it is those two dimensions that these art works invoke.

The intensity of the collective reaction to *House* and *Die Familie Schneider* is an expression of the effect of the good, the beautiful and the horrendous on the 'id.' It is the 'id' that is most inflicted by that which is the most obscure and labyrinthine. The 'id' finds itself laid bare.

2. Uncanny

There's no place like home. Our house – home. Furthermore, no other place conceals within itself both the greatest of happiness and the greatest of our fears and anxieties. There's no place like home, our home.

The houses, or places, we inhabit generally have a strange effect on us. On the one hand, they function as an extension of ourselves, of what we are intrinsically; on the other, they are understood as entities that are strange to our bodies. We seek to mold them, with varying degrees of success, to what we are. We construct a universe within a universe and hope for the best.

There is an aura of conservatism around the places we live in, above all if we live in a home that belongs to us, is more personalized. While we would like to be 'modern,' integrated, our house would seem to reveal a feeling of comfort which is often associated with the soothing image of the non-modern. Even when it is new, a house too often succumbs to the image of what preceded it in the past. A paradox? A strange relationship. But this strangeness has very much to do with the separation we ourselves make between social life – the exterior –, and private life – the interior. And it is in that interiority that our darker side tends to reveal itself; it is in the dark interiority that we hide what is, at times, our distressing private lives. The house – our home – comforts us, like an impregnable refuge; however, unbeknownst to us, the house can also suffer from our fragile humanity.

Uncanny, an English translation of the German *unheimlich* – literally 'un-home-ly' – is a Freudian concept meaning that something that is familiar to us can, at the same time, be strange to us and result in a feeling of disquietude in relation to what is supposedly familiar. Anthony Vidler argues: "[a]s articulated theoretically by Freud, the uncanny or *unheimlich* is rooted by etymology and usage in the environment of the domestic, or the *heimlich*, thereby opening up problems of identity around the self, the other, the body and its absence: thence its force in interpreting the relations between the psyche and the dwelling, the body and the house, the individual and the metropolis. Linked by Freud to the death drive, to fear of castration, to the impossible desire to return to the womb, the uncanny has been interpreted as a dominant constituent of modern nostalgia, with a corresponding spatiality that touches all aspects of social life." [1 p. X]

This relationship between the body and the house, this Freudian desire to "return to the uterus" exposed by Vidler, evokes the strange relationship that sometimes is established between us and the places we inhabit. Vidler also emphasizes the issue of the relationship of the individual with the metropolis, in doing so making reference to Walter Benjamin (1892-1940), where the latter, referring to the term "uncanny," suggests that the growth of the large cities would seem to aesthetically dominate this "strangeness" by means of the "disturbingly heterogeneous crowds and newly scaled spaces" [1 p. 4]. They are cities out of equilibrium that cause our bodies to be unbalanced. Nevertheless, they do offer us new aesthetic standards: "from the 1870s on, the metropolitan uncanny was increasingly conflated with metropolitan illness" [1 p. 6]. It is not a question of illness; it is a question of the uncomfortable comfort. A deviation from the standard. That which is of the home, of the house, no longer is that – from *heimlich* to *unheimlich* [1 p. 6].

This imbalance, which seems to have asserted itself more categorially from the late 19th century on, both in the more immediate scale, that of our house, and in the more distanced scale, that of the large cities, is something that *House* by Rachel Whiteread claims for itself. This sculptural work, finished in 1993 and destroyed in early 1994, seems to contain the whole conceptual universe that Freud (1856-1939) evokes in his arguments on the uncanny; in other words, the discussion of the semantics involved in the terms *heimlich* and *unheimlich*. Given these concepts we find ourselves, in a double sense, where what is cannot be. As Shelley Hornstein argues: "In the first sense, *heimlich* conveys the familiar, or the known. But curiously, the other meaning of the word, *heimlich*, is that which is unknown, or which is secret. To further complicate matters, the term which is, in principle, its opposite, *unheimlich*, usually conveys that which is unknown and unfamiliar, but also that which is unconcealed or non-secret. Therefore, Freud's argument is that *unheimlich* or the 'uncanny' is that which is concealed, but also that which is known and familiar. Two opposite interpretations that overlap, that double, as one." [2 p. 56] *House*, the house that was, and at the same time was not.

3. House inside out

"What is the relationship of a thing to an idea, a house to a home? Rachel Whiteread makes things matter. She takes objects we think we know – a bed, a table – and makes them into something material that we no longer recognize." [2 p. 51]

Throughout Whiteread's career one can find all types of things exposed inside out, from the body, Whiteread's own body, to the architectural space. In this sense, *House* is a successful follow-up to *Ghost*

(1990) – the space, presented as a negative of the Victorian room; the material used, plaster, indicates the ghostly presence of a being that is not here. Whiteread's next step was to move on from what was still an 'object' – Ghost – to something which, in the words of Hornstein, was "more not really more, yet more so" [2 p. 51]. In other words, to move from what was still an 'object' to an object *in situ*. This shift, from the objectified thing that could be exhibited in a museum to something in and of its place, took more than two years, the time the search for that which would serve as a mold lasted: a Victorian terraced house, a typical example of a London working class residence. This house, number 193 in Grove Road, was one of three houses still standing, although already condemned, that were to be systematically demolished, so that the whole block could be turned into a garden. The house chosen by Whiteread was the middle house, the most intact of the three. In August 1993, the process of deconstruction and construction of *House* began. This was a very particular process that raised an anonymous condemned house to the status of mold – "[t]he cast for *House* was the house at Grove Road itself (its walls, floors, staircases, in short, the surfaces of its complete interior). Filled up with liquid concrete, the private insides (of the outside) registered the impression of the surfaces, nooks and crannies, onto its surfaces" [2 p. 58]. The house, now 'free' of its inner organs, or gutted, so to speak, remained for some time as a shell that was empty, void, more fragile than ever in its materiality, awaiting a future, no matter how short-lived that future would be. That shell became a mold, in the sense of something waiting to be filled in, and in the sense of something that fixes a memory; a two-fold thing, like Whiteread's house. Mold and material confront each other. The filling can be seen as the devolution of our object and our material culture [2 p. 58]. *House* was, thus, a revelation, a kind of performance where, through the opening up of its shell, or the exterior, an interior is presented as a negative in the material used, concrete. *House* is a house turned inside out, freed of its innards but not of the memory of them. We are faced with a naked, exposed interior where all its virtues and defects are revealed to the public. A house that is naked to all, even to its own residents. And this naked house is a bipolar house, in that it is a house and at the same time is not one. Hornstein says that "[o]nce the outside was demolished, the inside stood, bare and revealed. The bipolarity of the process requires that one of the two parts is removed from its place, rendering the notion of place placeless." [2 p. 67] In addition to the duplication of objects using molds, such objects being in the right, Whiteread also seems to work the idea of loss, or even that of death drive, something that was mentioned above in relation to the uncanny and Freud. The loss of the *homely* to the *un-homely*, in order to show the home, or house that no longer is, but which affirms itself as: *House*. As Shelley Hornstein points out: "[t]he original house was removed and replaced – but not exactly" [2 p. 56]. In the place of the house, is now the filled-in version of what was once the space of its architecture. Here the artist plays with what appears to be a duplication that in the end is revealed to be false. The original space is evoked, constructing a representation of something that is missing in exactly the location where that space had its existence. *House* is a provocation of the memory in the sense that it evokes memory, so as to follow it and disturb it. The house that is there, whilst contaminated by memory of itself, is no longer the house that was there. Understanding *House* goes beyond the uncanny. Its solitariness engenders a sense of hopelessness. The seemingly challenging presence of *House* in the space that is now gutted, is an image of weakness and abandonment. It is an image of a certain pain that goes beyond the human condition. In the end run – the good, the beautiful and the horrendous.

Perhaps it is important to imagine: imagine the interior of the shell, which is the exterior of the house, of the original house, being filled in; imagine the concrete being shot, filling in all imaginable remains of space – the space of a gap in a lock, the ridge of a small crack in the wall, the empty space of a screw head, the space reserved for an electric switch. Everything that is mundane, relevant, or irrelevant, is revealed clearly before our eyes; it is revealed through the persistence of the filling matter. A matter that grows as far as the exterior limit, the shell. And this matter is also used to present the house's final state of nudity. A house shamelessly exposed. The nudity of the house is reflected in our own bodies, like a pain. The pain of a body, with secrets, that presents itself in all its weakness; or the pain of the body that is turned inside out. The interior exposed. At any rate, we are exposing a world of intimacy that demands non-exposure. We do not want to be surprised by the image of our aged bodies, just like we do not want to be surprised by the exposure of the aged space in which our lives take place. Our houses, the interior of our houses, become fragile as they expose our human condition and we, as a society, do not want to make visible what at the outset is not meant to be seen. In this sense, the house functions as an extension of the body. It is 'another' body.

As Beatriz Colomina writes, Whiteread performs an emptying of herself with her work: an emptying of her body; her memories; her pains [3 p. 71]. She, her body as a whole, is expressed clearly and openly in her work. Her body is also a body in abstraction, "a body treated like a piece of furniture, a set of joints" [3 p. 71]. One should note that, while still an art student, Whiteread used her own body as a field of experimentation, rehearsing the filling in of spaces associated with her body: the empty space left by the fold of a leg; the empty space between the fold of an arm and the forearm. Voids that are filled in. The body – her own or those of objects exterior, but with a relationship, to it – and the void are decisive.

But the desire to fill in the void would also seem to have to do with that which is not palpable, with memory. Giuliana Bruno states: "Whiteread, so to speak, turns to the memory of life" [4 p. 149].

The house, *House*, reveals itself like a film that tells stories, a narrative about arrivals and departures. The matter that composes it has the physical property of leaving vestiges in its dried mass. But those vestiges, those stories, can be understood as something that is constructed only to later dissipate. There emerges an analogy to film itself, revealing itself to be a tactile continuum. As Bruno writes: "a tactile continuum – a haptic hyphen – between the house and the house of pictures" [4 p. 183].

Beyond the concrete thing – memory reflected in matter – the house also reveals a sensorial world in abstraction: "[r]emembered and forgotten, the stories of the house constantly unfold on the wall/screen. They are sculpted in the corporeality of architecture, exposed in the marks of duration impressed on materials, inscribed on fragments of used brick, scratched metal, or consumed wood, and, especially, in the non-spaces. They are written in the negative space of architecture, in that lacuna where the British artist Rachel Whiteread works, casting the architectural void of everyday objects, and the vacuum of the domestic space" [4 p. 183]. *House* is a work about forgetfulness and remembrance, about presence and absence. Between the body and the object of architectural dimensions, Whiteread's work encompasses a whole range of furniture – the filled-in spaces thereof –, 'peeling' wallpapers, turned inside out or photographed, negative space of mattresses. Probes of the void and time; probes of life. Life itself is exposed, as Colomina argues: "[n]ot a table, a bed, a sink, a bathtub, or a cupboard as such (what Whiteread has called the 'furniture of our lives'), but the space trapped by these familiar objects." [3 p. 71] The negative space is also exposed.

Whiteread's work process is linked to intimacy and secrecy, where these are related with mundane life – earthy, literal, even coarse. The negative spaces can thus be crudely thrown at a reality that is made of matter. In her analogy with architecture, Whiteread refers to buildings as bodies, but, as Colomina points out, those bodies are not the ideal, canonical bodies inherent in the classical architectural treatises. They are bodies in good shape, but exercised to excess, something that is intrinsic to contemporaneity [3 p. 74]. We are left with old, spent bodies, with bodies that are excessive in terms of their affirmed musculature. Bruno argues that Whiteread is essentially seeking to construct a museum of private life [5 p. 355]. But said museum, in Hornstein's opinion, should not be seen as a nostalgic universe: "[t]he mere reference to the term 'house' as opposed to 'home' announces this position. As a monument to the idea of 'house,' this work challenges concepts of community, place, and security. [...]. The qualities of nostalgia often associated with imagining home are rejected forthright, indeed repelled. To force this trajectory of thoughts is one of the ways in which *House* subverts any idea that where we live is a simple and comfortable, even neutral, territory" [2 p. 55]. We could probably understand said museum as a raw universe that is open in the way that it crudely reveals the private life and, at the same time, the private body. It is true, as Hornstein points out, that the idea underlying the revelation of the interior of our lives by Whiteread is the subversion of the understanding that the spaces in which we live privately are neutral places, places of comfort. But despite the brutal opening, there would seem to exist a sealed and sensitive universe that means we have to face paradoxes. Thus, the perplexity associated with the exposure of our lives can live in the paradoxical universe of the uncanny.

In this sense, Hornstein reflects on what is a house, and above all on what is a house in terms of Whiteread's work. She thus places *House* in the category of the uncanny. It is a house that is not a house. "That is, this *House*, by Rachel Whiteread, is in a class of those things we consider frightening: as a result, this object leads us back to what feels comfortable, what is known and familiar. The conundrum is that we cannot determine what is known and familiar about this house because it is entirely unknown and cannot ever be known [...]. It is full and its insides – or its 'fullness' – are now on the outside. The internal mass of the house has *de facto* become its exoskeleton forming a barrier, a kind of – in this case – opaque cage, that excludes penetration and protects the mythical interior" [2 p. 55].

The public's or local residents' reaction to *House* would seem to corroborate that feeling of uncanniness and the difficulty in dealing with the existence of the huge, sensitive exoskeleton the house, or *House*, has become. We are dealing with a house with no residents, where all habits are reduced to the vestiges left in the gray mass of the concrete – molded, stuck, faded. Those habits and vices are revealed to all – and to no one, given that no one can walk through the house's spaces. Bodies are repelled from the interior, which is now completely inaccessible, to the exterior, which is the representation of an interior. Life extinguished. *Unhomeliness*. The general reaction was brutal. A blind reaction, like the blind windows of *House*. What kind of house is this? This is a house I cannot live in.

Vidler, in reference to the uncanny, does not fail to reference the popularity of the haunted house [1 p. 17], which, even with its 19th century overtones, is still a source of nostalgia and fear. The house, as a place where past lives were lived, can take on a particular life of its own, leaving us at the mercy of its discomforts and its moods. When Whiteread revealed the spatial volume of her house by giving it its mass, she also revealed its discomforts and moods. Something that should only be communicated, if communicated at all, on the quiet. Like a secret. Vidler points out: "[t]his characterization [uncanny] would have it that the very traces of life extinguished, of death stalking through the center of life, of the 'unhomeliness' of filled space contrasted with the former homeliness of lived space (to use the

terminology of the phenomenologist-psychologist Eugène Minkowski) raised the specter of demonic or magical forces, at the very least inspiring speculation as to the permanence of architecture, at most threatening all cherished ideals of domestic harmony – the ‘children who once played on the doorstep’ variety of nostalgia so prevalent among Whiteread’s critics” [6 p.146]. The blind windows, or, as Anthony Vidler calls them, the “‘blank’ windows” [6 p.147], along the inverted staircases of *House* rule out “normal” participation of the body. They rule out habitation in the strict sense of the term – the negative space of the empty milk bottles on the steps sends an unequivocal message. This is no longer a house; this house scares me, suffocates me. As Vidler states: “Whiteread constructed a blindingly suffocating space that, rather than receiving its contents with comfort, expelled them like a breath” [6 p.148]. The suffocating house takes us back to Benjamin and to the relationship between the uncanny and the new industrial cities of the turn of the 20th century. Suffocating houses, accomplices in agoraphobia – the illness of the new housewife [6 p.148]. A degenerative illness that began in the 1870s and reached its apogee in the course of the 20th century.

4. House inside in

The silent illness would appear to be inherent to the universe explored by Gregor Schneider in *Die Familie Schneider*. Strangely enough, it is an installation also set up in London. Once again, we find ourselves in London’s East End and once again, we are dealing with terraced houses. But the scenario that Schneider has staged here has a different content that is more cerebral, more clinical and, perhaps, more cynical. But it is a scenario that directly recalls the illness that be behind comfortable living. A discomfort, a trembling. A misaligned universe – uncanny.

In Autumn 2004, two houses in Whitechapel, London, numbers 14 and 16 in Walden Street, were opened to the public, with pre-booking for visits. Two houses identical in all ways, obsessively worked in anonymity by Schneider – nails in the exactly the same place on two identical walls in the two houses; identical cracks in the plaster on the two walls; towed bathrobes hanging on both bathroom doors; the same cleaning agents behind the toilets; the same contents in both fridges: pie boxes; jars; what looks like chocolate bars; round packs of processed cheese. The house spaces were altered by Schneider, so as to be slightly smaller. Just a bit smaller, but sufficiently smaller to render the feeling of perturbation, of discomfort, more real, more suffocating. In the two houses we find three pairs of identical people carrying out the same tasks, in the same positions, with the same oblivious look on their faces. A woman in the kitchen with her back to the door; a child, or perhaps a teenager, in a bedroom under a covering of plastic; a man showering in the bath, standing up but bent over, probably masturbating.

This is the general scenario. The public are given 10 minutes to visit each house, no more. One house at a time, and only once, no more. Two persons at one time in each house, meaning two keys to be exchanged. In those 10 minutes, times two, discomfort overtakes us. Conflicting feelings, between attraction and repulsion, between wanting to walk through the house and wanting to get out of it. In this 10-minute period, the three residents in each house say nothing; they are alone in the tasks they are carrying out, isolated. The door closing behind us marks the beginning of a journey that is simultaneously pregnable and impregnable. A journey through the innards of life – even if it is a staged one. That is of no interest; the creepiness is real. Andrew O’Hagan writes of his visit: “[t]he black front door and the weathered bricks made me realize very quickly that I was looking at a contained narrative, a deeply embedded work of suggestion and memory and wonder, and putting the key into the lock I imagined, among other things, that I was opening Proust’s great book. There was an immediate sense of the basement, whose windows had peeped onto the street as if embarrassed – certainly shy – of what remains below. The atmosphere of the basement crept into every area of the Schneider houses, and in the hall of number 14, with its poor English light and brown panels, one felt that the world had suddenly been sucked into a void at our back with the closing of the door” [7 p.156].

Whereas in *House* the body is expelled, and only through imagination are we able to calculate the unmentionable secrets and horrors we may encounter, in *Die Familie Schneider* we are hurled into them without mercy, even if the secrets and horrors are only implied. The feelings associated with the uncanny superimpose themselves on logic. We are taken over by the nostalgia of not being able to return to the womb – the safe place par excellence – and by the fear of dead things coming back to life, as Vidler argues [6 p.147]; we fear the fragmentation of everything one associates with the idea of comfort. Whiteread’s subtlety is that of literally barring entry to that which one sees so clearly, thus increasing the feeling of discomfort: uncanny. The idea of disease and evil, or of evil as a disease, seems to remain present in the universes of Whiteread and Schneider. In one interview, the British artist mentions how, on one specific occasion, she was planning to visit the house that gained notoriety as the “The House of Horrors”, where numerous young girls were murdered. They were then dismembered and hidden under the bathroom, kitchen and cellar and buried in the garden. Whiteread says: “[a] friend of mine, Gordon Burn, is writing a book at the moment about the Fred and Rosemary West case. He asked me to go down to Gloucester with him to see the Wests’ house at 25 Cromwell Road. From television coverage of the case there was the suggestion that it bore a relationship to ‘House.’ While I was deliberating about whether to go or not, I dreamt that I was a wall in the house, like the image in

Polanski's 'Repulsion.' I dreamt I witnessed the horrific events of the past fifteen years. I woke up screaming and decided not to go." [8 p. 34] Whiteread's dream places her in a wall in the "House of Horrors" and that wall is a witness to at least 15 years in the life of that house. Whiteread assumes herself as the boundary between being and not being. It is a wall that is suffocating. Suffocated by matter and memory.

Gregor Schneider is exterior. With him, when we enter number 14 or number 16, we do so as an outsider. We are also "exterior". With Whiteread, however, we can be matter. We are there in some form. Whiteread's inverted taxidermist experiment does not ignore the world of childhood and its memories – being underneath the bed, inside the closet. What does Whiteread do? She visually imprisons the voids, the dark voids of the childhood room. We thus also become a witness. And the rooms breathe because we are also the darkness or the walls. Once again, we detect a certain ambiguity: we can be a wall, just as the wall can be a living body. We can be walls, electrical circuits, plumbing. Colomina points out that "Whiteread talks about buildings that not only breathe, hum, lose fluids, and get sick, but have skeletons, intestines, nerves, bladder, blood vessels, tear ducts" [3 p. 76]. In the words of Whiteread: "I think of houses in terms of skeletons, the plumbing and electricity as nerves and blood vessels.... The water tower might be the bladder. Or perhaps the tear ducts" [9 p. 99].

All these bodies are fragile, even those with an excess of musculature, and accessible to illness. Indeed, Colomina writes that the principles associated with filling in the void spaces recalls barium ingestion [3 p. 79], a medical procedure for examination of internal organs by x-ray. Metaphorically speaking, it is as if the house in Grove Road had ingested concrete in order to make the visualization of its internal organs in the search for an illness possible. Or as if *House* were an interior that is suspended in taxidermic terms between conservation and decomposition, where fluids negate each other between, once again, conservation and decomposition. Whiteread makes clear references to fluids: a water storage tank that could be the bladder of a house; the sweat and urine stains on the mattresses she uses in her works [10 p. 13]. What better way to make us confront the human condition than through the stains on an old mattress? Urine stains, sweat stains, semen stains. Stains that give us the chills through the medium of an old object, like a mattress, left in the street – disheveled, dirty, stained, the seams bursting, torn, marked, destroyed – waste, but also a place where bodies rested, slept, dreamed. The human condition also exposed.

From the body to the wall, or from the houses to the body. The painful materiality of architecture and its life is expressed in various ways. Vidler writes that the ruins of Pompeii seem to reveal extreme conditions of *unhomeliness*. The particularly domestic character of the city, the state of preservation of 'life in suspension' and, above all, the ultimate form of suffocation that is being buried alive, are the reasons behind that condition. Indeed, Freud points out that, for some people, the idea of being buried alive by mistake would be the supreme expression of the *uncanny* [1 p. 45]. The discovery, excavation and subsequent exposure of Herculaneum and Pompeii bring to our imagination the vivid and harsh reality of something we ourselves did not experience, something that fascinates and repels us simultaneously and dramatically. Life is presented in instantaneously mummified form, the house is mummified almost instantaneously, taking us with it, enclosing us in a vacuum with it – as Andrew O'Hagan writes on *Die Familie Schneider* [6]. Vidler backs up this idea by recalling the universe of the 19th century: "[m]uch travel and fantasy literature of the nineteenth century circled around this point: the life-in-suspension represented by the mummified traces of everyday existence. A cartoon of the Whiteread *House* by Kipper Williams fed on just fear, that of being trapped inside a space filled so violently, the space and air evacuated around a still-living body" [4 p.146]. Strangely enough, or not, Whiteread repeatedly uses the word mummified, as Colomina points out, in allusion to her works of a more architectural nature [3 p.72]. Time and space are captured in a petrified, mummified instant. A type of ruin going back to a past where, in the future it – the physical past – remains. As a monument. There is a certain degree of monumentality in *House*; above all there is a weight.

When we look at the images of the last days of *House*, which was demolished in January 1994¹, we are taken over by nostalgia. However, it is a different kind of nostalgia. A strangely fragile body, like an abandoned monument – the inside-out version of the house was the last remaining vestige of the row of terraced Victorian houses to which it belonged. Now vulnerable, exposed to vandalism, and completely defenseless. A mute body, on the edge of a new lawn. A stretched-out, weighty body that is perpendicular to the street, somehow innocent. A body that is alone, sensitive, poetic, and humanized in its new condition – a second life, perhaps; but a body that is alone and fighting for itself in this deaf and dumb battle. We would like to have that body back, as if believing that we need it, as if it were a

¹ On 23 November 1993 two important but very much opposing decisions were reached in London: the decision to award the Turner Prize 1993 to Rachel Whiteread; and the decision to demolish *House*, with immediate effect, by Bow Neighbourhood Councillors. The world of the arts and the world of the ordinary London resident in collision. Despite all efforts to the contrary, *House* was demolished on 11 January 1994.

being from the past long since gone, where the memory of it is reinvented on the basis of a photograph or a photogram in which it exists and at the same time no longer exists. Its weight, its materiality served no purpose. *House* now belongs to the world of the sensitive, continuing to be without being.

Alberto Pérez-Gómez and Louise Pelletier state: “[t]he experience of works such as *House* eloquently reveals the fallacies of both a constructivist and a naturalist view of culture; without returning to a metaphysics of presence, it speaks about the impossibility of an absolute cultural relativism, defining the ‘ground’ as our capacity to understand the co-occurrence of presence and absence, space and substance, light and shadow. Meaning is on the surface, yet not every surface reveals poetic depth. The poetic and ethical intention of the maker is crucial, as is plainly demonstrated in Whiteread’s work” [11 p. 326]. The poetic depth identified by Pérez-Gómez and Pelletier in Whiteread’s work is echoed by Hornstein: “[t]aken all too lightly most of the time, architecture – an object, a frame, a shell, a placemaker – is often ignored. Whiteread’s house-that-is-not-a-house demonstrates this powerfully” [2 p. 55].

5. Conclusions

The sculpture *House* and the installation *Die Familie Schneider* violently confront us with the complexity of the relationship between habitation and memory. The lethargy of everyday life swaddles us in a form of escape or refusal, where we avoid what we find unpleasant. We protect ourselves against certain types of contamination. *House* and *Die Familie Schneider* drag us out of this abruptly. That is the reason for the repulsion we feel in relation to these works. Under the surface, the everyday grows in depth, forcing us to recognize and understand the good, the beautiful, and also the horrendous. By recognizing the horrendous we also recognize another side of the beautiful. After all, the everyday is made up of all those things. And if architecture measures and simultaneously constructs our everyday life, then these works also confront us with the depth of architecture. This is where the chimeric thread of habitation comes in. The opportunity to see architecture as ‘architexture,’ a term coined by Giuliana Bruno [4 p. 183] is confirmed. In houses, where everything and everyone lives, there lives the echo of time. And the echo of time lives in me. This echo reverberates in the materiality and in the breath of the space; it reverberates in me, for good and for bad. It is a contaminating reverberation, like an illness. It stays in me, in my memory. In your memory. The difficult requisite of immateriality for a given heritage, such as that of memory, should not be a reason to relegate it to oblivion. We summon contamination. Only if you accept you are contaminated can memory construct heritage.

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