

HOME: THINGS AND BODIES.

“Habitualisation devours work, clothes, furniture, one’s wife and the fear of war”.
Art as a device, Viktor Shklovsky, 1917.

In my experience as an architect, focused on the production of the domestic environment, I have always been fascinated with the potential of architectural representation for documenting and speculating about inhabiting narratives from a different point of view than the user’s perspective. Moreover, my personal interest in conceptual and performative art has encouraged me to test other medial practices, not only as a means to deliver content, but also as an aesthetic experience in itself. In addition to that, my participation in several Mindfulness-Based Stress Reduction (MBSR) workshops has helped me to refine my perception, and to become aware of my constant intimate interaction with the things that compose my personal domestic environment and my usual lack of perception.

Home is the site of our intimate lives (1). To inhabit a house is to inscribe it in our habits, and while we habituate to it, the domestic falls into the automatic perception of habitual use (2). The house becomes ours while we get used to the house, and it slowly starts to disappear in the background. As often said, home is where the heart is, but if we don't feel it beating, we may be homeless.

The big and small architectural conventions that shape our quotidian lives can be observed and questioned (3). By questioning them, we somehow question ourselves and we open a possibility for engagement and change (4). Modifying the implicit characteristics and relations of the objects that take part on our daily rituals can destabilise their meaning, and can bring them back to the foreground of our perception (2). Once they are here, we see them flowing free and open to new interpretations, creating a tension between the real and the possible, and giving us the opportunity to imagine new ways of inhabiting.

Relying on the daily MSBR training of my attention and on the potential of alternative representation techniques (collected from other fields and categorised in a catalogue of references), I may prove that there is a layer of meaningful information about real specific inhabitation needs that can be extracted from the documentation of the relationships between space, objects and inhabitant. Findings may indicate specific qualities of household objects and specific estrangement techniques with which to experiment in new designs in order to inform the context and trigger specific practices hitherto hindered.

1. Poetics of Space, Gaston Bachelard, 1957: regarding the identification between the house and the memories, and therefore between one’s house and oneself.

2. Art as a device, Viktor Shklovsky, 1917: regarding the economy of perceptive effort and the use of art techniques to recover the sensation of life.

3. Apparatus/dispositif, Michael Foucault, 1977: regarding the system of relations between various elements that organises society, and as Jaques Rancière suggests, the system of forms determining the sense experience.

4. Einfühlung, Verstehen, Verfremdung, Mimesis and related concepts, since 18th century: regarding the critical potential of empathy in order to actively reformulate reality and create a change.

