Rethinking "Stuff"

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rethinking 'stuff'

design thesis
jonathan anthony

advisor: daniele profeta
groupius wrote a book on grain silos, le corbusier a book on aeroplanes and charlotte perriant - it was said - brought a new object to the office every morning; but in the fifties we collected ads - peter & alison smithson

... but today we collect everything - sylvia lavin,

...but today we store everything - jon anthony, re-thinking stuff
rethinking stuff

design thesis
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as our methods of storing grow, our storage environments tend to not adapt. rethinking stuff contends that our established storage environments have the potential to be more closely correlated to the complex nature of our stuff today. this thesis attempts to leverage the effects of stuff in storage by capitalizing on three notions that stuff is increasingly challenging: ritual, temporality, and ownership.

as peter smithson mentions in his article in praise of cupboard doors, “rarely in architecture is the right level of attention – the sense of fit – to do with the individual and his/her specific possessions.” in this thesis, stuff is no longer a secondary consideration of a larger architectural conversation. the stuff we store will be embraced, exploited, and celebrated.
stuff – junk, data, things, information and matter permeate our everyday lives. oscillating between use and idleness, stuff finds itself in various storage environments in hopes of its’ possible futures. screenshots pile up on our desktop. materials accumulate in large warehouses and overfilled sheds. junk in our closets and cupboards remind us of our hyper obsessive tendencies to store.

we live in a time where as architectural theorist sylvia lavin mentions ‘we collect everything’. cabinets of curiosities, the sir john soane museum, and the television series hoarders, hoarding: buried alive remind us of our material obsession. while we have embraced a material culture, we’ve also quickly come to realize our stuff is more than we can possibly handle or like at one given time. so our houses adapt and supply us with more storage space. storage centers populate both urban and suburban areas. google drive, dropbox, pinterest, tumblr and ‘the cloud’ provide us with endless platforms to store our digital collections. data centers and digital farms become the architectural result of our digital hoarding.

‘stuff’ fills our building but rarely is part of the architectural conversation. ‘stuff’ as sigfried gideon points out is both an essential and often ephemeral element of architecture. as our methods of storing grow, adapt, die and live- our storage environments especially the big box storage facility tend to not respond to the minutia of stuff and the effects of stuff in the everyday. this thesis argues that today stuff is increasingly challenging notions of property, ritual, temporality, accessibility and materiality.
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stuff
	noun
1. matter, material, articles, or activities of a specified or indeterminate kind that are being referred to, indicated, or implied.

2. the basic constituents or characteristics of something or someone.

verb
1. fill (a receptacle or space) tightly with something.
why stuff?

“even though things do not at first appear architectural because they do not contribute directly to the construction or the inhabitation of the building, they set effects in motion that activate relations between bodies and objects in space, structure, the perception of space, and alter patterns of circulation and use.”

-sylvia lavin, architecture in extremis , log 18

what stuff?

stuff (physical)

junk
knick-knack
tchotchke
things
goods
trinket
souvenir
baggage
matter
rummage

stuff (abstract)

ideas
memories
information

stuff (digital)

matter
data
files
screenshots
stuff today, stuff in storage today
property

in our increasingly collective society, the idea of singular ownership is blurred by the increasingly fuzzy boundaries of property. whose stuff is it actually?

with this in mind ‘stuff is constantly re-interpreted. one person’s trash is another person’s treasure.

andrew zago, moma foreclosed
the ‘relaxation of site boundaries’, begins to combat traditional notions of property and ownership of space.

no stop city, archizoom
no stop city portrays an entirely interior world with an endless grid filled with stuff. tents, appliances and even natural artifacts (mountains) fill the interior. “mass production begins to produce infinite urban decors.”

shel silverstein, sharing
who owns the stuff?
time

rituals of stuff change the nature of storage throughout time, whereas traditional static storage containers do not reflect temporality.

specifically stuff in large storage facilities tend to stay in storage—often decreasing the chances of stuff to become animated—to go between being utilized and unutilized.
when we store stuff we perform a ritual in which we collect, archive, hoard, exhibit and accumulate. our storage environments are isolated experiences that currently tend to not reflect this ritual.
storage

noun
1. the action or method of storing something for future use.

2. the retention of retrievable data on a computer or other electronic system; memory.

3. space available for storing something, especially allocated space in a warehouse.
goodwillintl

Your stuff can help others. Your stuff can help fund job training and placement in your community. Donate stuff. Create jobs.

goodwill ad
digital & physical storing collide

world's largest chest of drawers
american home as storage furniture
storage of accumulation

infrastructural storage

storage of collections
little mermaid “you want thingamabobs? i’ve got twenty”

‘designed’ places of storage

digital storage

objects of storage
storage studies

documenting five different environments of storage – the honey-pot ant, the fridge, the suburban home, the storage facility, and the seed bank, the drawings begin to outline current methods of storing stuff. they also act projectively- animating the effects of stuff in their environments.

drawing from richard serra’s 1967-68 famous list of verbs - which implies generation of objects or form through action, my list of gerunds implies a generation of effects from objects (stuff).

stuff is collective, zoned and retrieved. stuff is maintained, active, dead, concealed, appropriate, and inappropriate. stuff blends in, nested, secondary, borrowed, inherited, and changed. stuff is blurred, flat, pseudo flat, and volumetric.
honey-pot ant
honey-pot ants

image source: Mike Gillam
stuff changes
stuff changes from being in storage to being put to use.
as food is stored in the honey-pot ant it gains
nutrients- ‘value’ during storage.

stuff is collective
all of the ants work together to create one shared
storage system.
stuff takes on an identity
stuff is no longer secondary but much more important. the honey-pot ant and the contents they store become one. stuff goes from being stuff to Stuff.
college fridge
fridge

filled with stuff
food and beverages get stored here

divided
fridge is divided to allow for easy supervision and惕ible property lines.

allocated
four rooms divide the fridge into storage areas.

blurred
sharing of food, leftovers, borrowing, property blurring.

network
the fridge is part of a storage network of shared storage spaces in the home.
Stuff is zoned
stuff is tied to issues of property. stuff often float between ownership and established property lines

stuff is collective
multiple owners share stuff
stuff is dead
stuff is no longer at its original state. Food and other items fall into disarray... stuff becomes unrecognizable. stuff is no longer relevant to its user getting pushed to the back of the shelf and out of sight.
stuff is maintained
stuff that prioritizes the life of other stuff first. baking soda is placed in the fridge to maintain the health of the fridge ecosystem as a whole.

stuff is blurred
property zones in the fridge become blurred in the freezer. the freezer becomes a free for all where both individuality of the item and who it belongs to is blurred.
- stuff is borrowed
  roommate temporarily takes ownership of other
  roommate's stuff

- stuff is inherited
  roommate gives leftover chinese food to other roommate. stuff gains a new owner.
suburban dwelling

rethinking stuff suburban home
rethinking stuff
suburban home
stuff is active
stuff is in play. stuff goes from being ‘stored’ in the garage to being put to use. stuff goes from one storage place to another storage space.
stuff is nested
stuff lives within other stuff. stuff secretly or not so secretly fills the insides of cupboards, drawers and ottomans.

stuff blends in
stuff and its ecosystem blend together. the garage floor gets painted in a jackson pollock style that begins to allow stuff to float freely and blend in with the ground.
self storage facility

rethinking stuff

storage facility
stuff is individual
zones of the storage facility explicitly highlight areas where an environment and the stuff inside belong to just one owner/group of owners

stuff is isolated
stuff is compartmentalized
stuff is maintained
stuff that prioritizes the life of other stuff first. surveillance, fences, and security keeps the health of the storage ecosystem.
seed bank

rethinking stuff

‘doomsday’ seed bank
rethinking stuff

svalbard international seed bank

photo courtesy of svalbard international seed bank
stuff is retrieved
the Syrian government retrieved seeds from the seed bank in 2015. What was largely understood as a stagnant collection transformed into something very differently.

stuff is nested
stuff is compartmentalized
by testing notions of ritual, temporality and ownership, three familiar storage environments, - the shed, the lost and found bin, and the junk drawer, rethinking stuff becomes a narrative of a reimagined future of storage.
the shed

‘The shed’, situated in a suburb in New Jersey proposes a spatial theater for the accumulation of stuff. Along existing property lines, shed structures accumulate until the original boundary lines become blurred. Junkyards, woodshops compost yards and guesthouses become places of collective storage where one person’s trash becomes another person’s treasure. The shed environment pushes stuff out of stasis and reactivates negotiations of property.
rethinking stuff

the shed
rethinking stuff

the shed
stuff is active
stuff is in play. stuff goes from being ‘stored’ in the to being put to use. the shed environment pushes stuff out of stasis and reactivates negotiations of property.

stuff is shared
junkyards, compost yards, woodshops and guesthouses become places of collective storage where one person’s trash becomes another person’s treasure
rethinking stuff

compost yards

the shed
the lost and found bin

Unpacking every neglected bin in our offices, the collective lost and found bin spans items along a conveyor belt down Broadway Avenue in New York City. The conveyor belt interacts with the everyday life in the city through a series of existing civic intersections. Our experience with storage relocates to the heart of the city. The new Lost and Found Center will be situated at the Southern tip of Manhattan as both the origin and destination for the conveyor belt. After dropping off a found item, the item is scanned, catalogued and exhibited along a 1-month journey along Broadway. A living archive calls into question ownership, value, and constantly changing locations of stuff.
#132100 lost headphones

#427504 lost suitcase

rethinking stuff

the lost and found bin
30 day Lost + Found conveyor belt

rethinking stuff the lost and found bin
rethinking stuff

lost items check in @ the lost & found center
rethinking stuff

the lost and found bin
rethinking stuff

lost gold USB, day 22, hr 18

the lost and found bin
rethinking stuff

study model
covered conveyor belt

the lost and found bin
the junk drawer

Things pile up in our junk drawer for purposes of preservation. We often keep things for the memory that is attached to them. An island facility recycles and repurposes our stuff. Here we can preserve our stuff forever. Located off of Red Hook in Brooklyn, environments pile up to create a visual stratification of time, material and memory.
rethinking stuff
rethinking stuff

the junk drawer

dunes
bales
totems
fabric layers
rethinking stuff

the junk drawer
stuff changes
what is the life of an object? what is an object’s future?
rethinking stuff
rethinking stuff

the junk drawer

study model, junk drawer

junk drawer

cut FEAK stakly
rethinking stuff
room enviornment for review

the thesis prep review is used as a platform to begin rethinking enviornments of stuff in storage
log

the log documents the process of the thesis -- readings, conversations, images and other stuff...
The System of Collecting

Jean Baudrillard

Among the various meanings of the French word objet, the dictionary gives this: ‘Anything which is the cause or subject of a passion; the object of a passion, whose passion reigns supreme in the absence of any rival. What is characteristic of this passion is that it is tempered, diffuse, and regenerative: I only guess at its fundamental role in keeping the lives of the individual and of the collectivity on an even footing, and in supporting the project of survival. In this respect, the objects in our lives, as distinct from the way we make use of them at a given moment, represent something more profound, something profoundly related to subjectivity: for the object is a resistant material body, it is also, simultaneously, a realm over which I hold sway, a thing whose meaning is given to me by myself alone. It is all my own, the object of my passion.

THE OBJECT DIVESTED OF ITS FUNCTION

The fact that I make use of a refrigerator in order to freeze things that the refrigerator is defined in terms of a practical transformation, an object so much as a freezing mechanism. In this sense, it alone directs me back to the world. Rather it is the object once it is divested of its function and made relative to a process of disintegration that all objects that are possessed submit to the operation and participate in a mutual relationship so that they refer back to the subject. They thereby constitute themselves on the basis of which the subject seeks to piece together their personal microcosm.

At Home in the Museum?

My title is at once personal – as it has been less than a year since I joined the Museum of Modern Art in time for its 75th birthday of its Department of Architecture and Design, and an homage to Phyllis Lambert on her 80th. I thought of it as an homage to the founder of an institution that exhibits and displays architecture in ways that have repeatedly stretched the boundaries of a museum and the conveniences of architectural exhibitions, some reflections on episode the history of the world's first Department of Architecture in an art museum.

Somewhere along the way my title acquired a question mark, even as I ponder over, nearly daily, the perennial questions of bringing architecture into the gallery and the challenges of representing architecture when, more than ever, it has become a cultural field in which building is only one of the many other activities. As a historian, I frame things in longer trajectories, and thus I want to show that tensions surrounding the function and the technics of architectural exhibitions have accompanied the rise of modern architectural institutions at least since the mid-century, when for the first time the French Salon regular included architectural exhibitions – relatively empty galleries by all accounts (although Charles de Wailly reports that he was fond of hiding behind the curtains of the display to overhear the public's comments, which were few and far between, to judge by reports of the generally deserted architecture gallery). Architecture was not fully at home in the Salon, and when Alexandre Lenoir founded the famous Musée des Monuments Français in 1791, he quickly dismantled parts of buildings confiscated from ecclesiastical and aristocratic settings, deploying them as both picturesque and didactic fragments, but effectively elevating them to a status of sculpture rather than dealing with the complex organization of the building of which they were so many moments. The paradox was no less present in the very first attempt to make architecture comfortable at home, the remarkable house museum of Sir John Soane, where the fragments came together not only with one another but also with Soane's own fine mented and illusionistic architecture, making a rich pers...
friday, november 4

conversation w/ professor profeta:
sectional perspective of fridge sounds good
what is mood of residential drawing? different layers of heirarchies? piles-static?
are drawings too descriptive? add second level of information.

choose direction-- interested in types of storage being different (heirarchies) (1) or equal - 'mat-ness' - flatness (2) or pseudo flatness (3)

is drawing about retrieval, cleanliness?
order v. chaos
mat flowing- clue like connections?
Some sort of color archival?
levels of security
visit a storage facility

put in effort into fridge drawing-- screws, crubbles

tuesday, november 8

conversation w/ professor profeta:
include crumbles/ rotten food - 'one man's trash is another man's treasure in fridge drawings
representation in house/fridge should be similar
stuff should read more.. put efforts into two drawings, make storage center as quick as possible so panel knows this isnt a residential project

storage facility drawing should also be vertical
adjust fridge opening
notate more heavily, give narrative

later on items can be projected onto drawing
curate envirnoment in presentation
professor brown - questions attention to individual objects in drawings, mentions i seem most interested in fridge, interested in both flatness of stuff but also volumetric. mentions drawings may begin to reflect notions of temporal effects. stuff is also about accumulation - stuff is about residue and not always about collecting. fridge is interesting because it is apart of the everyday. day to day- ritual should be embedded in drawings. each scale has positive and negative things you can learn from. not just storage facility is all bad.

professor louie - seems like a power of 10 is going on. where do you stop? perhaps the end goal of the thesis is not a storage facility. mentions joseph cornell boxes and gursky's 99 cent store. using stuff as both noun and a verb. begin to define my interest/definition.

professor profeta- doesn't see a problem with using the storage facility as an exercise for the bigger picture. thinks project will still be effective if experience is embedded in presentation- room filled with stuff--
**Friday November 18**

Conversation with Professor Profeta,

- Sketch out room for final thesis/final prep room
- Will there be models? Performance? What do I need? Technically? Do I need 402? This will help with to do list
  - *Not making a building but an ecosystem*
- Project is not about efficiency of stuff
- Possible narrative for project in the future
- Narrative was too linear in verbal presentation—needs to reach conclusions quicker, possibly re-write verbal prep presentation
- Drawings
  - Need to be taken to one more step graphically
  - Tone? Texture? Projection?
- Proposed 2 more drawings (xs, xl)
  - These scales are useful as they give ways of storage that we are not inherently used to
  - xs—ant storage: body of ant—community
  - xl—seed bank: who is it stored for—under what property—storing property—collection for preservation
- These drawings should link to other drawings
- These drawings should give more than what the other drawings are doing
- Make website, learn with dabota Adobe Muse
- Get the work out there—how do I position my project in world?

**Thursday, December 1**

Conversation with Professor Profeta,

- Seed bank drawing
  - Property lines—retrieval
  - Cutting through geology
  - Exhibition thesis prep room
  - Why carpet? What connotation does the carpet conjure?—residential space?
  - Understand room as storage areas of exhibition v. areas of unconcentrated/typical carpets as sanitized area vs. more didactic?
  - Boxes for typical storage

- Extract ideas from drawings
  - Material, temporal, accessibility, property boundaries
  - Website and room should pull from these findings

- Projective steps forward, dry run
  - As an intervention where do I come in
  - This is all productive for me because I’m moving in this direction...
Are We Collecting the "Right Stuff"?

by CAROLYN HEALD*

Introduction

I have called this article, "Are we collecting the 'Right Stuff'?" because it is self-perception has come about in recent years. The medium of the stuff—objects, hold-in-your-hands artifacts that we as archivists collect, as opposed to information, which is ephemeral and perceived only by the intellect. In other words, the article is about artifacts vs. information, or the age-old dichotomy of form and content.

We are told that we live in an information age; increasingly archivists are to re-invent themselves as purveyors of information. We are information managers or information specialists; we provide access to information. It is easy to understand why this self-perception has come about in recent years. The medium of information is becoming more ephemeral, less fixed as we continue to immerse ourselves ever more deeply in the world of databases and automated access to perform more and more daily tasks. Information is coming from a wide variety of sources, and with the advent of computer technology and micrographics, the content of records, as far as people are concerned, is increasingly divorced from, and seemingly less dependent on, the form.

Is this a good thing? Are virtual archives on the horizon? Does the fact that a fragment of content/information over form/artifact reflect the professional archival mission? Are we as archivists in the information business or the artifact business?

Content vs. Form

With the dawn of the so-called "information age," archivists have been forced to change their strategies for dealing with the copious amounts of data that now come our way. The method has concentrated on making increasing amounts of data available; this has been done by way of the use of computer technology, and turning ourselves into shiny, new "information professionals," shunting data from archives to users on demand. Such a way...