Rethinking "Stuff"

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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

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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 minuitia 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 (digital)**

- matter
- data
- files
- screenshots

**stuff (abstract)**

- ideas
- memories
- information
stuff today, stuff in storage today
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.

property

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.
ritual

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.

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
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 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

rethinking stuff

fridgadator

xs s m l xl
Rethinking Stuff

College Fridge

Image source unknown
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
pods accumulate in front yards
photo courtesy of google maps
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
rethinking stuff

storage facility

individual pod
stuff leaves the house and put in a pod like container

multiple 'pods'
multiple individual pods are grouped together

close but not together
individual owners put their respective containers, can be seen as many different pods.
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
to prioritize the life of other stuff first. Surveillance, fences, and security keeps the health of the storage ecosystem.
seed bank
svalbard international seed bank

photo courtesy of svalbard international seed bank
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 compartamentalized.
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 lost and found bin’
‘the junk drawer’
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 andreactivates negotiations of property.

stuff is active

stuff is collective

stuff is borrowed

stuff blends in

stuff is inherited

01
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 the shed
rethinking stuff

the shed
compost yards

rethinking stuff

the shed
rethinking stuff
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.
rthinking stuff

#132100 lost headphones

#427504 lost suitcase

the lost and found bin
lost skateboard
7.3 lbs
Black w/ yellow diamond engraving
Found on L train towards Rockaway
Submitted 6-12-17
Day 5/28
Currently @ 64th & Broadway

30 day Lost + Found conveyor belt

"the lost and found bin"
rere-thinking stuff

the lost and found bin
rethinking stuff

lost gold usb, day 22, hr 18

the lost and found bin
rethinking stuff

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

dunes

totems

bales

fabric layers

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

the junk drawer
Rethinking stuff the junk drawer

Study model, junk drawer
rethinking stuff
re-thinking stuff

the junk drawer
room environment for review

the thesis prep review is used as a platform to begin rethinking environments 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, that of personal possession, whose invested affect is in no way inferior to that of any other variety of investment’.

It is to be obvious that the objects that occupy our daily lives fact the objects of a passion, that of personal possession, whose invested affect is in no way inferior to that of any other variety of passion. Indeed, this everyday passion often outstrips all the other passion. What is characteristic of this passion is that it is tempered, diffuse, and regulative. It only guess at its fundamental role in keeping the lives of the subject or of the collectivity on an even footing, and in supporting the project of survival. In this respect, the objects in our lives, as distant as the way we make use of them at a given moment, represent something profoundly related to subjectivity: for an object is a resistant material body, it is also, simultaneously, realm over which I hold sway, a thing whose meaning is given to me alone. It is all my own, the object of my passion.

THE OBJECT DEVISED OF ITS FUNCTION

The fact that I make use of a refrigerator in order to freeze something that the refrigerator is defined in terms of a practical transaction. An object so much as a freezing mechanism is, in this sense, I utilize always directs me back to the world. Rather than once when it is devised of its function and made relative to its operation and participate in a mutual relationship in so refer back to the subject. They thereby constitute themselves on the basis of which the subject seeks to piece together 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. It is also an homage to Phyllis Lambert on her 80th. I thought to offer as an homage to the founder of an institution that selects and displays architecture in ways that have repeatedly stretched the boundaries of a museum and the conven of architectural exhibitions some reflections on episodes in the history of the world’s first Department of Architecture in an art museum.

Somewhere along the way my title acquired a quirkiness, even as I ponder now, nearly daily, the perennial of bringing architecture into the gallery and the challenges of representing architecture where, more than in the history of modern architectural institutions at least since the mid-century, when for the first time the French Salon regular included architectural exhibitions — relatively empty orators by all accounts (although Charles de Wailly report 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 sculptures). Architecture was not fully at home in the Salon, and when Alexandre Lenoir founded the famous 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 the sculpture rather than dealing with the complex organizational building of which they were so many moments more paradoxical to the very first attempt to architecture comfortable at home, the remarkable houmuseum of Sir John Soane, where the fragments come not only with one another but also with Soane’s own fitment and illusionistic architecture, making a rich per
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 (heirar-
chies) (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 trea-
sure 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 enviornment in presentation
re-thinking stuff
thursday, november 10
thesis review two: conversation w/ professors profeta, brown + louie

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 w/ 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 w/ 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 uncentered / typical space?
Carpet 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 relates 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 print is becoming more ephemeral, less fixed as we continue to immerse ourselves and further in the world of databases and automated access to perform more daily tasks. Information is coming from a wide variety of sources, and with the use 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 form of content/information over form/artifact reflect the professional archival model? 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 developing 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 and the use of computer technology, and turning ourselves into shiny, new “information professionals,” shunting data from archives to users on demand. Such a view...