Rethinking "Stuff"

Jonathan Anthony

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rethinking ‘stuff’

design thesis
jonathan anthony

advisor: daniele profeta

thesis booklet
fall 2016, spring 2017
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
2016-2017
jonathan anthony

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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 minu-tia 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.
# Table of Contents

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Page</th>
<th>Section</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>7</td>
<td>Thesis contention</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>12</td>
<td>Stuff</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>16</td>
<td>Stuff in storage</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>30</td>
<td>Storage case studies</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>74</td>
<td>Narratives</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>128</td>
<td>Stuff in review</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>132</td>
<td>A log of stuff</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
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
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.
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.
good will 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
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 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 college fridge
fridge

filled with stuff

division

allocated

blurred

network

rere-thinking 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.

rethinking stuff

college fridge
suburban dwelling

rethinking stuff suburban home
Rethinking Stuff: Suburban Home

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.

re-thinking stuff suburban home
self storage facility
rethinking stuff storage facility

syracuse self storage facility
photo courtesy of google maps
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
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 retrieved
 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.
rethinking stuff narratives

‘the shed’

‘the lost and found bin’

‘the junk drawer’

jon anthony
thesis 2016-2017
‘re-thinking stuff’
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
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
rethinking stuff
rethinking stuff

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.
rethinking stuff

#132100 lost headphones

#427504 lost suitcase

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

lost skateboard
7.3 lbs
Black w/ yellow diamond engraving
Found on L train towards Rockaway
Submitted 6.12.17
Day 5/28
Currently at 64th & Broadway

'rethinking stuff the lost and found bin'

're-thinking stuff'
rethinking stuff

lost items check in @ the lost & found center

the lost and found bin
rethinking 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
bales
totems
fabric layers

the junk drawer
rethinking stuff

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

study model, junk drawer

the junk drawer
rethinking 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 invested affect is in no way inferior to that of any other variety of passion. Indeed, this everyday passion often outstrips all the others.’ Figuratively and most typically: the loved object.

It ought to be obvious that the objects that occupy our daily lives fact the objects of a passion, a passion of personal possession, whose passional affect is in no way inferior to that of any other variety of passion. Indeed, this everyday passion often outstrips all the others.

What is characteristic of this passion is that it is tempered, diffuse, and regulative: 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 dist the way we make use of them at a given moment, represent something more, something profoundly related to subjectivity: for object is a resistant material body, it is also, simultaneously real, a thing whose meaning is given by itself. 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 t that the refrigerator is defined in terms of a practical trans: an object so much as a freezing mechanism. In this sense, it is to possess it. Possession cannot apply to an implement, sir: to utilize always directs me back to the world. Rather it makes the object once it is divested of its function and made relative to this sense, all objects that are possessed submit to the s 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.
Friday, November 4
Conversation w/ Professor Profeta:
Sectional perspective of fridge sounds good
What is mood of residential drawing? Different layers of hierarchies? Piles static?
Are drawings too descriptive? Add second level of information.

Choose direction: interested in types of storage being different (hierarchies) 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, crumbles

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 isn’t 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 environment in presentation
Statewide Self Storage spreads out near Highway 4 in Antioch, Calif., a community between San Francisco and Sacramento. It's a phalanx of long buildings separated by wide driveways and lined with red doors. The company operates 453 storage units and is wedged between a car dealership and a Costco.

It was the last afternoon in May, and the sun scoured all the concrete and corrugated steel. Statewide's gate opened, and a man named Jimmy Sloan, the far corner of the property. Sloan, who dresses and styles his hair like John Travolta, is a part-owner of the Harley-Davidson repair shop nearby. He rolls up the door of a 10-by-30-foot unit, the largest Statewide offers. It was his ex-flat still under his name, and packed with, among other things, a partial shelving unit, some wicker items, a microwave oven, a box labeled "Mickey Mouse," a floor lamp, a television and a wooden child's bed standing on its side. It was hard to tell how deep the inventory went. "She hasn't seen me stuff in six years," Sloan said.

For five years, he stored most of it above the garage of his house. But he borrowed on the house to keep the bike shop running, and last year, feeling a head, he opted to sell the house and downsize before he fell behind and risked foreclosure. "Pretty much got out of that house at zero — didn't make a penny he told me with the kind of ascetic pride that wouldn't have made any sense our economically crippled era. Sloan's fiancée insisted he rent a storage unit, move everything over the garage into it for her. So he did. Then they split ...

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 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.

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 usefull 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 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 im moving in this direction...
JUNKSPACE

with

RUNNING ROOM

"If space-junk is the human debris that litters the universe, junk-space is the residue mankind leaves on the planet."

Rem Koolhaas / Hal Foster

Are We Collecting the “Right Stuff”?

by CAROLYN HEALD*

Introduction

I have called this article, “Are we collecting the ‘Right Stuff’?” because it is about stuff – objects, hold-in-your-hands artifacts that we as archivists collect, as well as 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 and others in the world of databases and automated access. We deliver information to people who are rapidly accessing the computer technology and micrographics, the content of records, as far as they are needed, is increasingly divorced from the form, and seemingly less dependent on the form.

Is this a good thing? Are virtual archives on the horizon? Does the idea of content/information over form/artifact reflect the professional archivist’s role? 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 dealing with the copious amounts of data that now come our way. Our method has concentrated on making increasing amounts of data available to the public and professional, on the use of computer technology, and turning ourselves into shiny, new “information professionals,” shunting data from archives to users on demand. Such a view...
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're-thinking stuff'