

National College of Art and Design

Media, School of Fine Art

A Topography of Private Space:
Constructing identity from childhood memories and personal artefacts.

Fionn Doorly McErlean

18462972

Submitted to the school of Visual Culture in candidacy for the degree of BA (Joint Hons) in

Fine Art Media with Critical Cultures, 2022



School of Visual Culture

I declare that this **Critical Cultures Research Project** is all my own work
and that all sources have been fully acknowledged

Signed: Fionn Doorly McErlean

Programme / department: Fine art Media with critical cultures

Date: 30/01/22

Acknowledgements

I would like to thank my supervisor Dr. Rachel O'Dwyer for her helpful guidance and advice.

I would also like to thank my father Dr. Kelly McErlean and mother Esther Doorly for their help in creating the initial concept for the Research Document and also giving me my room, without it this wouldn't be possible.

Table of Contents

List of Illustrations	2
Introduction	3
1. Engaging with the Infra-ordinary using Photographic Fragments	5
Margaret and Tony: Family Relics	7
Orphan Image: Missing person	10
Holly's Letter: a blue summer's day	12
2. The Bed	14
Childhood	14
Dreams	15
Adulthood and Repetition	16
3. The Room	17
4.5 metre long 2.5 metres wide	17
La Chambre	17
The L-Shaped Room	19
Four Walls Make a Room	20
The Archive	21
Conclusion:	23
Bibliography:	25

List of Illustrations

(Fig.1) Scanned architectural drawing of house, Blackrock Co.Dublin [Illustration] given by the owner

(Fig.2) Sky view of room, Blackrock Co.Dublin. Fionn McErlean [Illustration] (O represents objects discussed, Margaret and Tony, Orphan Image and Holly's Letter).

(Fig.3) Scanned image, personal archive (Kelly McErlean) Photographer: unknown

(Fig.4) Scanned image, personal archive (Fionn McErlean) Photographer: unknown

(Fig.5) Scanned image, personal archive (Holly Pickering) Photographer: Holly Pickering

(Fig.6) Video still of a teapot and table, taken from La Chambre (1975), Directed by Chantal Ackerman [Film] Available at: <https://www.dailymotion.com/video/x7pybf8>

(Fig.7) Image of The L-Shaped Room by Lynne Reid Banks (1960). [Book] Available at: https://www.goodreads.com/book/show/960246.The_L_Shaped_Room

(Fig.8) Video Still of The L-Shaped Room (1962) Directed by Bryan Forbes [Film]

A Topography of Private Space:

Constructing identity from childhood memories and personal artefacts.

The word stanza means “room” in Italian— “a station,” “a stopping place”—and each stanza in a poem is like a room in a house, a lyric dwelling place. (Hirsch, A Poet’s Glossary)

Introduction:

This essay will explore the themes of Memory and Identity with particular reference to my room in my childhood home. Memories are triggered by familiar objects, and our ‘identity is influenced by memory. This work will explore the construction of identity, the unreliability of memory and the fluidity of our sense of self. It will consider Georges Perec’s ‘Infra-ordinary,’ the listing and classification of everyday objects, *“What’s really going on, what we’re experiencing, the rest, all the rest, where is it? How should we take account of, question, describe what happens every day and recurs every day: the banal, the quotidian, the obvious, the common, the ordinary, the infra-ordinary, the background noise, the habitual?”* (Perec, 1974, p.210). The Infra-ordinary will be explored through objects of the everyday - highlighting items that are unremarkable and undistinguished. This essay will be structured in three parts, firstly exploring (1) ‘Photographic Fragments’. As objects that capture a glimpse of time, photographs make up much of the room’s content - taped to walls, scattered on the floor, peeping out of books and piled in a corner, these photographs withhold and contain memories that for a moment had thought to have been forgotten - or as Perec puts it “approaching a reality of which I used to declare I had no memory” (Perec, 1974, p.128). The second part of this essay will be looking at (2) ‘The Bed’ is an object associated with rest and sleep, a central component of the bedroom. In sleep we recapture and relive memories. The bed will be explored through the theories of both George Perec and

Gaston Bachelard. The final part of this essay will be exploring (3) ‘The Room’ having explored objects within the space, the room acts as a container - creating an archive of memories.

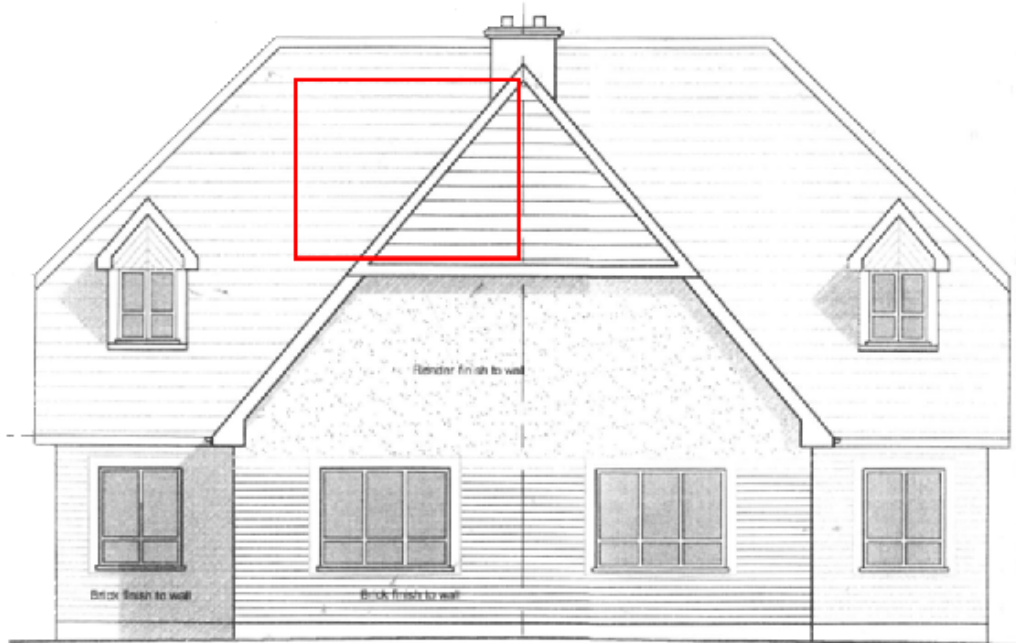


Fig.1

Chapter 1.

Engaging with the infra-ordinary using Photographic Fragments

In focusing on the objects of the everyday, Perec coined the term *Infra-Ordinary* - a type of philosophy of observation. Objects and scenarios that fall under the umbrella term of the infra-ordinary are present within our lives on a daily basis, particularly those we regularly encounter. Although coming into contact with these objects frequently, we rarely ever give them much thought. We are constantly engaging with the spectacle, news headlines, accidents and the extra-ordinary. Perec writes about this stating,

“What speaks to us, seemingly, is always the big event, the untoward, the extra-ordinary: the front-page splash, the banner headlines. Railway trains only begin to exist when they are derailed, and the more passengers that are killed, the more the train exists. Aeroplanes achieve existence only when they are hijacked” (Perec, 1974, p.209)

This is obvious to us, particularly since the introduction of smartphones, rarely do we ever give ourselves a chance to notice objects of the everyday. Perec asks us to give notice to the events as to which nothing happens, to think critically of spaces that hold no purpose, mundane scenarios of the everyday. In doing this, exploring this ontological way of seeing we become more aware of the self. Perec gives multiple examples on how someone may begin to start exploring the infra-ordinary, he states that,

“What we need to question is bricks, concrete, glass, our table manners, our utensils, our tools, the way we spend our time, our rhythms. To question that which seems to have ceased forever to astonish us. We live, true, we breathe, true; we walk, we open doors, we go down staircases, we sit at a table in

order to eat, we lie down on a bed in order to sleep. How? Where? When? Why? (Perec 1974, p.210)

I have engaged this mindset to my room and to the objects that are contained by it. In order for myself to recollect memories, I have collected three objects from my room that although important to me, I haven't for quite some time paid any attention to. My room acts as an archive for these objects, a space in which these objects and my memories can live.

Bachelard discusses the house as a storage of memories, the more elaborate the rooms, the clearer the memory, he states that,

"Of course, thanks to the house, a great many of our memories are housed, and if the house is a bit elaborate, if it has cellar and a garret, nooks and corridors, our memories have refuges that are all the more clearly delineated" (Bachelard, 2014, p.30)

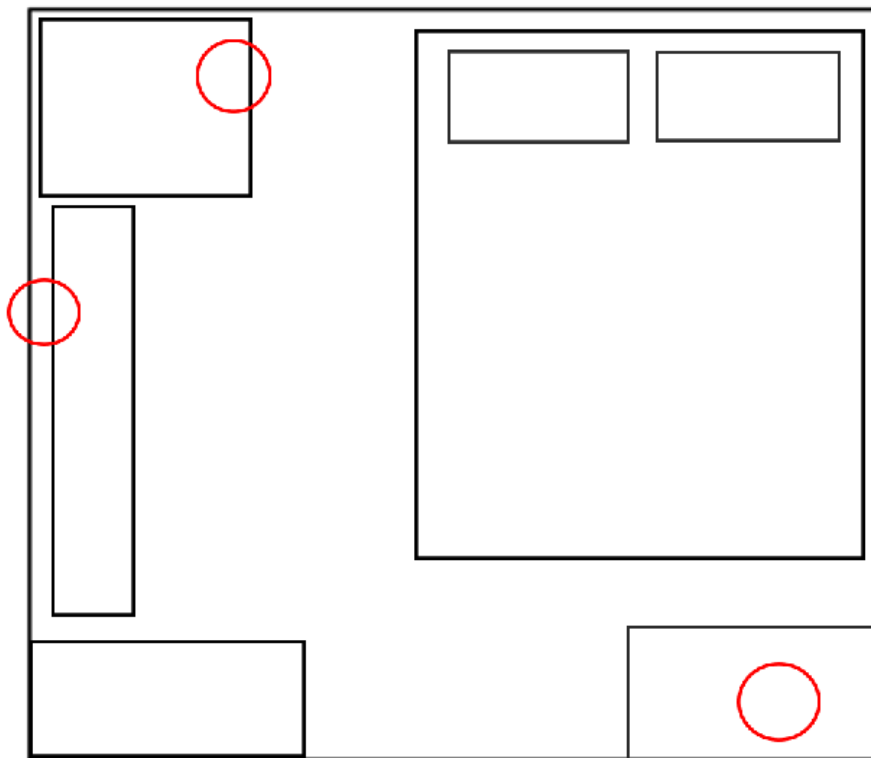


Fig.2

1. Margaret and Tony: Family Relics



Fig.3

In the book *“In Memory of Memory”* 2017 by author Maria Stepanova following the sudden death of her aunty, discovers a multitude of letters, diaries, postcards and family photos dispersed around the house. While uncovering forgotten memories, banal events and reliving childhood experiences, the author begins to document - summarising her memories and others into short lists. While documenting these memories (many of which aren’t her own but of memories described to her) Stepanova recounts that she always knew she would someday write a book about her family, bringing to life her family's collective experience. She states,

“I always knew I would someday write a book about my family, and there were even periods when this seemed to be my life’s purpose (summarising lives, collecting them into one narrative) because it was simply the case that I was the first and only person in the family who had a reason to speak facing outwards, peering out from intimate family conversations as if from under a fur cap, and addressing the railway station concourse of collective experience” (Stepnova, 2021, p.36)

This process of documenting collective experiences, collecting the fragments, storing bits and pieces of conversations have always been of interest to me. Since I was a child, I have found myself intrigued by collective conversations, not saying much but listening with great intent.

The image I have titled '*Margaret and Tony*' sits on the wall of my room, uncertain as to where it should be placed due to the unreliability of the blu tack that holds it against the wall.

The image is printed on a fibre-based print, a process of printing images that involves a light sensitive emulsion that coats the paper rather than layering it. The two people contained within the borders of the image are my Grandparents - Margaret and Tony McErlean.

Although it is not certain, due to the countless amount of images taken similar to this one, the photograph as recalled by Margaret was located in Butlins Mosney, an accommodation centre approximately 48 km from Co. Dublin. I'm unsure as to how this photograph came to be situated in my room, for some time it sat in a photo book titled 'Family Photos', playing its part in recollecting forgotten pasts within the assemblage of photographs. My dad keeps many of these photographs in books, stored away and kept in bookshelves, only to be seen from time to time. Similar to that of Stepanova when she recounts "*From time to time, always in the evening, and usually on a school holiday, or a day when I was recuperating from sickness, my mother would call me to look at the photo albums*" (Stepanova, 2021, p.40) My dad takes photos of everything, always carrying a camera around, he would constantly take photos of us (my family) wherever we went. These photos are stored all throughout the house, on the kitchen walls, shelves, and boxes. The best photos, possibly because we never really get to see them, are in the attic - this space is pure nostalgia.

I have often found myself spending time with photos or objects that were owned by family members. These relics, particularly those of which have been passed down from multiple

generations have become prominent objects within the containment of the household. Objects such as these are deserving of careful maintenance, they are one of a kind and are most often then not presented in such a way that portrays their importance. Family relics can be presented in any type of object, be it a photo, book, toy, bag or a glass - they are limitless. My relationship with these objects are due to my parents' continuous preservation of them, and will continue to be passed on to me and then to the next generation. I can't help but contemplate the importance of these objects in regards to my memory and identity. French born photographer Patrick Zachmann created a short film titled 'Mare Mater', the film is an interview of his mother who reflects on her life in Algeria before leaving for France. Zachmann's mother destroyed every object that she owned - sentimental or not, she took nothing with her. Zachmann, who interviews her describes his childhood home as without memory. The household was an empty container, having no images or any form of memorabilia within any of the rooms. This however, created his interest in photography as a medium in which to reconstruct some of these bygone memories. Zachmann often explores the loss of communal family memories in his photographs and films, many of which are interviews with his family members, this is often in hopes of reconstructing some of those forgotten or misplaced memories. When asked why he became a photographer Zachmann states that,

"I became a photographer because I have no memory. Photography allows me to reconstruct the family albums I never had, the missing images becoming the engine of my research. My contact sheet are my personal diary" (Zachmann, Patrick Zachmann)

I find it hard to process why someone would destroy everything that they own, particularly images or objects owned by relatives of the past. I think my partial reasoning for this comes from my parents. Objects of the past owned by grandparents, cousins, uncles etc have always existed in the house. In the case of Zachmann's mother, maybe she had a very valid reason for doing this - something about her past she didn't want to hold on to.

2. Orphan Image: Missing Person



Fig.4

An Orphan Image, better known as an Orphan Work, is a photograph or photographic print that is untraceable. The image titled *Orphan Image* was found in a market shop close to Mauerpark, Berlin. The image, when discovered, was placed in a container, filled with multiple unidentified and untraceable images - Orphan Works. This image consists of a little girl posing towards the camera, her pose suggests confidence, possibly proud of something that had happened earlier before the photo was taken - or even an event that triggered the need for a photo. In the background of the photo, there is only nature - in the centre a large tree, an oak tree or a beech. I bought the image along with three other photos, offered as a collection of found objects. Photographs, particularly when sold in markets tend to take on the role of the found object, Davey's quotes Sontag stating,

"Photographs are, of course, artifacts. But their appeal is that they also seem, in a world littered with photographic relics, to have the status of found objects." "A painting is commissioned or bought; a photograph is found (in albums and drawers), cut out (of newspapers and magazines), or easily taken oneself." (Sontag, cited in Davey's, 2020, p.50)

Maria Stepanova titles one of the chapters in her book, *A Handful of Photographs*. In this section Stepanova numbers each of the photographs she has collected from one through to twenty. Each photograph is given a description of the image itself and also a deconstructed analysis of the material and paper - like Stepanova I have collected multiple photographs. Although most of the photographs that I have collected are not of people or events that I have any connection with - like the *Orphan Image*. They are purely sentimental due to my ownership of them. Similar to scraps of paper, notes, letters, train tickets, brochures, posters and notebooks, I recall memories from these photographs, not because of the photograph itself but the physical object assembles forgotten memories. Like Stepanova, Davey's writes that,

"I am similarly drawn to fragments of an artist's oeuvre, a single image in a magazine or brochure. I tear these out and hold onto them. No doubt I also like the miniaturisation, and the possibility of possessing the thing."(Davey, 2020, p.49)

The collection of images that I have attained plays a major significance in the layout of my bedroom, when deciding to change or restructure my rooms objects such as my desk, bed, lamp, plants, drawer, boxes etc. The rearrangement of the images on the wall or on the shelves are typically the starting point, followed by the other objects. These objects, collected over a period of time, have become a part of my collective identity and will continue to stay with me for as long as I can keep them.

3.

4. *Holly's Letter: a blue summer's day*



Fig.5

“Here is a photo of you and a dog on Killiney beach many moons ago. Not an easter egg, but maybe better?” I keep this letter next to the image of my grandparents titled *Margaret and Tony*. Although originally a much lighter blue, the image on the front of the letter has changed in colour ever so slightly - now a much darker blue. This could be due to the sunlight coming in through one of the windows in my room, changing the pigment of the paper. *Holly’s Letter* is a cyanotype of a series of negatives that were taken one evening during a walk in Killiney beach. Also known as a Sun Print, cyanotypes require objects to be placed on top of the paper, in order for the sun to trace an outline of the objects. Similar to the way in which dust over a period of time will outline the objects that are placed on a shelf or counter. These objects often come out a lot clearer than expected, leaving the remnants of the objects’ time there. The paper used to make the letter was taken out from a diary - a torn out singular page. The page which was once part of a collection of pieces of paper, becomes a fragmentary form.

“Les Goddesses was a love letter to my family” (Davey, 2020, p.190)

I am intrigued by the form of letters as a mechanism of capturing memories and snippets of events that have happened in the past. A letter which can be bought or made from scratch typically signifies a more personal engagement with the person you are sending the letter to - particularly handmade letters. From time to time, when I am looking through family relics, I often come across these letters, usually either on a piece of paper or at the introduction of a book. Most recently, I discovered a message within my Mum's copy of *Nausea* by Sartre stating "Now you can finally know what you're talking about when discussing Existentialism, Lots of love, Kelly x", a message from my father to my mother written on the introductory page. Although letters are typically confined to paper, Moyra Davey in her film *Les Goddesses* describes her film as a series of love letters to her family. Davey's film juxtaposes the familial experience between Davey and 18th century writer Mary Wollstonecraft, reflecting on experiences both families shared. *"I'm reliant on the words of others, and I glom onto the dead"* (Davey, 2020, p.188).

In the attic of my house is where my dad stores his collection of recordings from when he started Photography College in Birmingham, up until now. I have watched these recordings countless times. Most of the recordings are of my Mum, either travelling from location to location due to her acting job or snippets of my Mum and Dad becoming parents. These recordings, like how Davey describes *'Les Goddesses'* are letters, a series of them, capturing fragments of time. I'm unsure as to why I enjoy watching these clips. Sometimes it feels as though I am reliving someone else's memories, my parents' memories. Stepnova discusses this retrieval of memories saying, *"And yet I am still smitten with the idea of blindly retrieving and reliving scraps from my life, or from a collective life, rescued from the shadows of the known and accepted histories"* (Stepnova, 2021, p.36).

Chapter 2.

The Bed

“Bed: where unformulated dangers threatened, the place of contraries, the space of the solitary body encumbered by its ephemeral harems, the foreclosed space of desire, the improbable place where I had my roots, the space of dreams and of an Oedipal nostalgia”

(Perec, 1974, p.17)

Enter into my room and you will see the bed, in the right end corner of the room. Large in size with the capacity of fitting two people if so desired. The bed is placed on the ground, held up by nothing - taking up much of the room's space. The room is confined yet long in length. Unlike the bed which ingrains its presence as the object of all other objects within the room. Although having been repositioned countless times, marked and bruised through time, the bed that sits in my room has been there since I was a child. In the morning the bed is often subjected to countless morning routines, particularly those that involve some level of comfort or relaxation. To begin a productive day, the first objective is to leave the bed how I found it, refixing the sheets and placing the pillow and duvet in their desired spaces.

Childhood

“The resurrected space of the bedroom is enough to bring back to life, to recall, to revive memories, the most fleeting and anodyne along with the most essential” (Perec, 1974 ,p.21)

George Perec in his 1974 book ‘Species of Spaces and Other Pieces’ takes apart space, item by item - starting from the page (which he is writing on) to the world. Perec emphasises the importance of the bed in relation to the body, our bodies. The bed which is a *“rectangular space, longer than it is wide” (Perec, 1974, p,16)* is an essential component to any room, particularly childhood memories and experiences. *“I travelled a great deal at the bottom of*

my bed. For survival, I carried sugar lumps I went and stole from the kitchen and hid under my bolster (they scratched ...). Fear - terror even - was always present, despite the protection of the blankets and pillows” (Perec, 1974, p.17) In my childhood, I was always terrified of the bed, perhaps it had more to do with its association with night terrors, but the bed always scared me. I remember vividly one night in particular, due to a terrifying dream I had after watching an episode from the tv series ‘IT’ 1990. I found myself sleeping in the corridor between my room and my parents room, because of a scene in the movie that involved someone dying in a bed. I took my coat and a singular pillow for protection. Although having lived in the same space since I was younger up until now, my experience of the room as an adult is drastically different. Bachelard writes in his book Poetics of Space that, *“He experiences the house in its reality and in its virtuality, by means of thought and dreams” (Bachelard, 2014, p.27).* Bachelard here highlights the association between memory and dreams, stating that we often find ourselves dwelling on our childhood memories - particularly when in the presence of the bed.

Dreams

The bed is a space of dreams (Perec, 1974), it encompasses my body during moments of rest and gives me shelter when entering into new worlds. When I am asleep, most nights I will find myself in these dreamscapes, it is thanks to the bed that I am able to do this. Both Bachelard and Perec speak about the bed and it’s correlation with dreams, describing the bed as a mechanism in which dreams are triggered and stored. Bachelard writes,

“Through dreams, the various dwelling-places in our lives co-penetrates and retain the treasures of former days. And after we are in the new house, when memories of other places we have lived in come back to us, we travel to the land of motionless childhood” (Bachelard, 2014, p.28)

When I am reflecting on childhood memories, I find it difficult to decipher between my

memories and dreams, both of which are interconnected in my mind. During my childhood, I used to have one recurring dream, which sometimes, even now I contemplate whether it actually happened or not. My dreams are stored in a dream diary, which I keep on the right side of my bed. The diary allows me to keep a record of my dreams, as without it, the majority of these dream worlds would be lost.

Adulthood and Repetition

I have become accustomed to the daily routine of the morning. Typically a very mundane process, the mornings usually begin with getting out of bed, this process is deconstructed by Rachel Donnelly when discussing repetition of the everyday saying, *“I get out of bed. I get out of bed and pick up my phone.. I get out of bed, pick up my phone and walk to the kitchen. I get out of bed, pick up my phone, walk to the kitchen and fill the kettle. I get out of bed”* (Donnelly, 2021, p.26.) Sometimes, only when I have planned it the night before, will this routine change.

As said prior, when I was a child I never liked my bed, it was an object I always associated with boredom and solitude - having to sleep early the night before school. Now that I am older, I have come to appreciate it. The bed, like some of the photographs and objects in my room, is a relic of past experiences that really can only be associated with the bed itself. I still view the bed as a space of solitude, but instead of boredom I find myself in need of these moments of loneliness. The bed during this period of my life, has become a significant object and it is only my own bed that holds enough importance.

“And all the spaces of our past moments of solitude, the spaces in which we have suffered from solitude, enjoyed, desired and compromised solitude, remain indelible within us, and precisely because the human being wants them to remain so” (Perec, 1974, p.31)

Chapter 3.

The Room

“My birthplace, the cradle of my family, the house where I may have been born, the tree I may have seen grow (that my father may have planted the day I was born), the attic of my childhood filled with intact memories” (Perec, 1974, p.91)

4.5 metre long 2.5 metres wide

My room is longer than it is wide, a sizable 4.5 metres long and 2.5 metres wide. Having spent more than fifteen years in my current room, from the age of five till now, my room is the only space I have that is securely my own. I spend a lot of time in my room, often I use up most of my mornings attending to my room's needs, fixing the bed, watering the plants, putting objects in their rightful place - my room requires a lot of maintenance. Although the majority of the objects within my room have their rightful place, from time to time, maybe from a need for change or just boredom I will change the location of these objects in arbitrary ways. *“When, in a given bedroom, you change the position of the bed, can you say you are changing rooms, or else what? (Perec, 1974, p.24)* I have often contemplated this, more so relating to the objects I rarely come in contact with. Is it possible for your memories to be affected, purely by moving the position of one object? I think so, but then again it is easy to have those memories retraced - by placing that object in its rightful place.

La Chambre

Chantal Akerman in her 1974 film ‘La Chambre’ explores the subject of the room (Ackermans bedroom) as a space of housed objects and intimate pasts. Shot in 16mm film, the camera is placed in the centre of the room, sat on a device that allows it to rotate 360°. The camera does not shy away from capturing everything within the scene, a red wooden

chair, hanging coats, a note on the wall, a kettle and Akerman herself - all contained by the camera, with little movement and complete silence. La Chambre is often referred to as a ‘film poem’, due to its structural simplicity and poetic rhythm. The room is accumulated by an abundance of objects - objects that have been collected and stored by Ackerman, through her time there. The room in this case acts as a container - an archive of objects, that are a reflection of the person living within the room. Perec refers to this as residue left behind by a person through the passage of time, he states,

“The passage of time (my History) leaves behind a residue that accumulates: photographs, drawings, the corpses of long since dried-up gel pens, shirts, non-returnable glasses and returnable glasses, cigar wrappers, tins, erasers, postcards, books, dust and knickknacks: this is what i call my fortune”

(Perec, 1974, p.24)



Fig.6

Through the eyes of the camera and the slow pace at which it rotates around the room, the viewer is inevitably faced with the passage of time. *“Space melts like sand running through one’s fingers. Time bears it away and leaves me only shapeless shreds”* (Perec, 1974, p.91) Ackerman uses the objects scattered around the room as a documentation of time, similar to contemporary artist Tracey Emin’s piece ‘My Bed’ where the objects, although removed from

their original setting, when remade in a similar order from where they were discovered reveal a moment in time - similar to that of a still life painting.

L-Shaped Room

“A woman must have money and a room of her own if she is to write fiction; and that, as you will see , leaves the great problem of the true nature of woman and the true nature of fiction unsolved” (Woolf, 1929, p.4)

Set in a Bedsit in London, England. *The L-Shaped Room* tells the story of Jane Fosset - a French woman who has left her father's home in order to pursue a new life. Almost entirely shot within the bedsit of Jane's L-Shaped Room, the film represents the importance of individual space and the vulnerability of someone who isn't granted solitude. The room is crammed with stuff, confined to have only the essentials, having Jane's bed, drawers, clothes and kitchen supplies all in one space. Jane, during her arrival to the building, is greeted by the residents who reside in the multiple spaces that make up the bed sit - here Jane discovers that her neighbour (Johnny) can hear everything that happens in her room, due to the narrowness of the walls that make up the room. The walls and the occupants that are situated behind them represent Jane's lack and need of privacy - creating an environment in which she has no space to herself.

The L-Shaped Room also explores the room as an ever changing space, adapting to needs and wants of the occupant that lives within it. Jane, although unsure of the space at first, when coming back to visit the room towards the end of the film, begins to unravel and reflect on the importance of such a room for herself. Bachelard discusses this, suggesting to the reader to think about the room as a space in flux, due to the occupants within. In the 1994 edition of the *Poetics of Space*, John Stilgoe states that,

“Bachelard admits that every house is first a geometrical object of planes and right angles, but asks his reader to ponder how such rectilinearity so welcomes human complexity, idiosyncrazy, how the house adapts to its inhabitants” (Stilogoe, 1994, p.ix)



Fig.7

Four Walls Make a Room

“I no longer know that in my apartment there are walls, and that if there weren’t any walls, there would be no apartment. The wall is no longer what delimits and defines the place where I live, it is nothing more than a support for the picture.” (Perec, 1974, pg.39)

In this section titled *Walls* Perec describes the wall as “what delimits and defines the place where I live” (Perec, 1974, pg.39). The walls that make up a room are something that in many ways go unrecognised, often unnoticed due to the objects and images that are placed in front of them. The walls are essential to any room, creating the shift from outside to inside - sectioning off oneself from the outside world. However, In *The L-Shaped Room* the walls don’t operate in this way. Although giving the impression of privacy, Jane is never truly alone when she is in her room. This is particularly evident around the central part of the movie, when Janes neighbour Johnny hears a great deal of commotion coming from Janes room during the night, vomiting, coughing and constant movement - Johnny deduces that Jane might be pregnant. This scene has a lasting effect on the protagonist Jane, as her

secret, something that she had managed to keep hidden from the other occupants within the bedsit for quite some time, has been revealed by the thinness of the walls. The walls of a room creates the illusion of security and solitude, this is explored by Bachelard when he states,

“We shall see that the imagination functions in this direction whenever the human being has found the slightest shelter: we shall see the imagination build “walls” of impalpable shadows, comfort itself with the illusion of protection - or, just contrary, tremble behind thick walls, mistrust the staunchest ramparts” (Bachelard, 2014 p.27)



Fig.8

The Archive

“Often the thing I’m searching for is of dubious significance, but I persuade myself that the flow of life cannot go on until I have located the object. The search can be for something of very recent vintage, or it can cut across deep time into a twenty-year archive of negatives. The ritual is about creating a lacuna, a pocket of time into which I will disappear. When I find the object, the relief is palpable” (Davey 2020, pg.17)

The room, like an institutional archive, is the collection and storage of objects. Although much of what comes in and out of my room is not of sentimental value, such as cups, dried

up gel-pens and rubbish - really only acting as a documentation of my time there. The objects that are stored there and the memories that they encompass are an external representation of myself. In his 1995 book *Archive Fever*, Jacques Derrida summarises the word archive by tracing its roots within its Greek terminology, he states,

The meaning of "archive," its only meaning, comes to it from the Greek arkheion: initially a house, a domicile, an address, the residence... it is at their home, in that place which is their house (private house, family house, or employee's house), that official documents are filed" (Derrida, 1995, pg.2)

The room is an archive of the self, acting in accordance with your memories. When you explore the room's archive, particularly when in moments of arranging your objects or in waves of boredom you find yourself entering into forgotten memories. This process of dipping into the personal archive can be both anxiety inducing and fulfilling, leaving you with an array of thoughts and emotions. This is stated by Davey when she says,

"Dipping into the archive is always an interesting, if sometimes unsettling, proposition. It often begins with anxiety, with the fear that the thing you want won't surface. But ultimately the process is a little like tapping into the unconscious, and can bring with it the ambivalent gratification of rediscovering forgotten selves" (Davey, 2020, p.51)

Living in the same space from when I was five years old, I have managed to keep a lot of the objects that would have been important to me - now sentimental. These objects are in containers and boxes, stored within the archive of my room. Although I enjoy spending time in my room, at times it can be quite an overwhelming space to be in. The room itself has always been lived in, being categorised as a bedroom since I have lived here. I am curious as to what may happen when I leave this room and return at a later time. What will I experience? What will happen to my memories when I leave the room? Maybe all my memories will come back at once, enclosing themselves onto me, welcoming me back home.

Conclusion:

The bedroom is a space of dreams, a memory container, withholding objects that construct and establish my identity. By becoming aware of the infra-ordinary, I have developed an appreciation for the objects in my room, a more heightened awareness of their existence and their presence in my daily life. The three objects chosen have been put back in their rightful place. During the course of writing this essay I have carried these objects with me, spending parts of my day observing them and taking notes. Although seemingly mundane, these objects are filled with information, recovering forgotten memories with ease.

I have always been observant of the bed. The bed: an object of solitude, when not being shared with someone else. A carrier of dreams, a space of virtuality.

The room has been observed and studied in countless Films, Novels, Art and Plays, it's capabilities are endless. The room where I spend most of my time however, is a space of seclusion and comfort, it's an archival storage of sentimental objects.

Soon, I will leave this childhood place. But when I return, I know that a plethora of visceral memories that live within its walls will once again greet me and come alive in my imagination.

Bibliography:

Woolf, V., 1929., *A Room of One's Own*. Hogarth Press first edition

Davey, M. and Linnert, N., 2020. *Index cards*. Fitzcarraldo Editions.

Perec, G. and Sturrock, J., 1974. *Species of Spaces and Other Pieces*. Penguin Classics

Stepanova, M. and Dugdale, S., 2021. *In Memory of Memory*. La Vergne: Fitzcarraldo Editions.

Derrida, J. and Prenowitz, E., 1995. *Archive Fever*. The University of Chicago Press

Bachelard, G., Jolas, M., Danielewski, M. and Kearney, R., 2014. *The poetics of space*. New York: Penguin Books.

Bachelard, G., Stilgoe, J., 1994. *The poetics of space*. Boston: Beacon Press

Sontag, S., 1977. *On Photography*. New York: Penguin Books.

La Chambre (1972) Directed by Chantal Ackerman *[Film]* (accessed 25/11/2021).

Available at: <https://www.dailymotion.com/video/x7pybf8>

L-Shaped Room (1962) Directed by Bryan Forbes **[Film]** England: British Lion Films

Donnelly, R., 2021 *Accumulated Hours*, Mirror Lamp Press (accessed 26/01/2022)

Available at:

<https://static1.squarespace.com/static/601fdff033789301b0561414/t/60dc3f52cdb0812b1dd9c0b6/1625046877879/MirrorLampPress-no2.pdf>

Vigier, J., 2020. *An Artist Who Delights in the Minor Key* - (accessed 11/01/2022)

Available at: <https://www.nytimes.com/2020/05/29/t-magazine/moyra-davey.html>

Trela, B., 2020. *Dust and Light: On Moyra Davey's "Index Cards"* - (accessed

11/01/2022) Available at: <https://www.clereviewofbooks.com/home/dust-and-light>

Rosenberg, N., (2020) *Women's Day: 'La Chambre' (1972) by Chantal Akerman*

(accessed 12/01/2022) Available at: <https://ultradogme.com/2020/03/08/la-chambre/>

Moran, J., (na) *'Infra-ordinary' Intellectual Self Defence* (accessed 21/01/2022)

Available at: <https://intellectualselfdefence.wordpress.com/neologisms/infra-ordinary/>

Hirsch, E., (na) *A Poet's Glossary*. Poets.org (accessed 26/01/2022) Available at:

<https://poets.org/glossary/stanza>

Zachmann, P., (na) *Patrick Zachmann*. (accessed 26/01/2022) Available at:

<https://www.magnumphotos.com/photographer/patrick-zachmann/>