

MA Textiles

Coexistent Perspectives (ADCD7001)

Question 2 – Explore the work of two contemporary artists, makers or designers and analyse the relationship they have developed between their art or design practice and environment, place and space.

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How do the opposing materials used by Rachel Whiteread and Do Ho Suh influence the emotional responses elicited by their work in relation to the space in which they are viewed?



Do-Ho Suh *'apartment A, unit 2, corridor and staircase, 348 west 22nd street, new york, NY 10011, USA'* (detail) (Designboom 2014)

Introduction

This writing will explore the work of the Korean artist Do Ho Suh and the British artist Rachel Whiteread. Both artists work with the concept of space and our interpretation of space, how we experience the structures in which we live our lives. They both delve into our relationships with our built environments and our personal experiences. The work they create uses very differing materials however.

Whiteread's method and material are solid, using predominantly concrete or plaster, her works have presence in a very fixed, immovable aspect. By creating a cast of the inside of a room or negative, unutilised space, she is forcing us to look upon that space as a physical entity rather than an empty space that has no form. Her sculptures give form to that which does not exist, working with the inside outside. Whiteread achieves the inversion of space.

Do Ho Suh also creates an inversion of space, but contrary to Whiteread he uses light weight, often ethereal cloth. His work has a much more intangible quality, fine, light diaphanous. He creates representations of buildings where he has lived, a very personal expression of space, a territory where he has lived his life, gone about his daily existence. Suh conjures up a space we can all relate to, where we can overlay our own memories and be absorbed by the work.



Do Ho Suh at work, Seoul, Korea, 2002. Production still from the *Art in the Twenty-First Century* Season 2 episode, *Stories*. © Art21, Inc. 2003. (art21 2011) (Fig 1)

In exploring the concept of space, particularly with the personal works of Suh, we also encounter the concept of memory. These two notions are inextricably linked through emotion. Our homes are the space in which we reside, simply a functional box perhaps, however our taste, the events of our lives are expressed through the way we live in our homes. In today's society they are very much an expression of who we are as people. Through our lives on social media we show images of our homes, new paint work, lovely garden, all expressing how we like to be perceived. All these emotions become tied up in the space we call home.

Suh and Whiteread explore space in contrasting ways but possibly they come to the same conclusion. It must be remembered that though concrete and textile may initially appear to be very separate materials, they often come together to provide reinforcing strength in buildings, an interesting link of otherwise disparate materials. 'Concrete and textiles are coming together in new and innovative ways, but the relationship between the two has existed for centuries'. (Jeffries 2018 p56)

In traditional building methods across the world fibres have been used in plasters and mortars to add strength to a building to lessen the risks of cracking and splitting. Suh and Whiteread have taken these materials separately but used them for a very linked conversation.

Do Ho Suh

Do Ho Suh uses woven cloth to interpret the home, the daily comings and goings, warp crossing weft, life persisting. Suh creates three dimensional soft light pellucid representations of homes he has lived in. Literally bringing the outside inside. His first foray into this form of sculpture was around constructing a representation of his parents' home in Seoul. He was feeling some homesickness when living in New York in the mid 1990's and was looking at ways to work through this. In an interview with art21 (2011) he explained that the work was 'about transporting space from one place to the other—a way of dealing with cultural displacement.'

The sculpture of his parents' home is called *Seoul Home/L.A. Home/New York Home/Baltimore Home/London Home/Seattle Home*, 1999. 'With each installation in a different city, or country, the piece acquires new dimensions, literally and figuratively.' (Corin 2002 p 31) (Fig 2)

Fine floating celadon silk could be construed as a physical representation of the Welsh word hiraeth. The childhood home, full of love, emotion and longing. A place to which we can never return. It sits within our memory. As *Seoul Home* is displayed suspended from the ceiling, floating lighter than air, so it is always just out of reach, just out of touch, there but not there, the embodiment of our childhood memories, those times of simplicity and innocence.

The diaphanous silk structure embodies simplicity with the plain colour and clean lines, as a viewer we can see through the structure, through the wall, through the space, and out the other side, enhancing the feeling of otherworldliness. The house is obviously traditional Korean in style but rather than alienating western viewers this enhances the dreamy feeling of remembering our own past, fairy tales of childhood. To create *Seoul Home* Suh visited his parents' traditional style home and meticulously measured every aspect of the building.

For 348 West 22nd St., Apt A, New York, NY 10011 at Rodin Gallery, Seoul/Tokyo Opera City Art Gallery/Serpentine Gallery, London/Biennale of Sydney/Seattle Art Museum Smith College Museum of Art, Northampton/North Carolina Museum of Art (2000) he created a pattern from the building with carefully rubbed paper which he took back to Korea to have made into a cloth version of the building by the skilled craftspeople there. (Fig 1)

So the pattern is like Whiteread casting an impression of the building, a negative of every detail, buttons, knobs, grills. Once the work is finished however, he then has a fabric reincarnation. He has a complete building that can be folded up into a suitcase and transported around the world. When constructed in a gallery the fabric sculptures are supported on steel frames very like a tent, enhancing the representation of a nomadic life.

The work itself has a nomadic existence travelling from its original location to Korea and then on to all the exhibition sites around the world.



Do Ho Suh. *Seoul Home/L.A. Home/New York Home/Baltimore Home/London Home/Seattle Home*, 1999. Installation view at the Seattle Asian Art Museum, Washington, 2002. Collection of the Museum of Contemporary Art, Los Angeles. Courtesy of the artist and Lehmann Maupin Gallery, New York. (art21 2011) (Fig 2)

Theoretically Suh is transporting his home with him, as the title of the work extends with each venue expanding the space, breaking down the borders between lands, creating one large exhibition space as it all becomes part of the same venue. Does this then create a map of Suh's world, a trace of his travels? An impression of a permanent home carried around the world as we all carry connections with previous homes as we move from one space to another. So from being a very local site specific work, the piece becomes a global work, a home all over the world. It must also be remembered that not everyone gets to live in a building, some people's homes are simply tents.

Seoul Home was initially displayed in the Korean cultural centre in LA, suspended over the stairwell. 'everyone who came had to literally walk into the piece and experience it physically' (Corin 2002 p31) This marked the work out as a transitional space, a link between Seoul and the USA. This linking will crop up again in Suh's work.

In creating these two works Suh was looking at his nomadic lifestyle. How we become dislocated from our roots, the need to carry part of our former lives with us as we go through the world. To show the linking of these different parts of life Suh has now created a rose tinted corridor that links both *348 West 22nd St* and *Seoul Home*, two separate art works becoming one, a conjoined space. (artforum)

The machine stitched seam is simultaneously a join, the process of joining and an intertwined relationship of proximity. When considered in the terms of a passage between or a passage towards, seaming highlights the productive potential of such a process-space. The passage between could be said to highlight the separateness and difference of the fragments seamed together: in many ways the seam creates or foregrounds an edge.(Dormor 2020 p49)

Suh has chosen to do this with a 'rose-tinted' pink nylon fabric. Are our past lives always viewed through rose-tinted spectacles, is this how we view our childhood? Not for everyone.

The work of Suh could be considered in the context of Deleuze and Guattari with reference to smooth and striated space. The work, though consisting of woven cloth which may suggest striated in the terms laid out by Deleuze and Guattari, relates to the nomadic aspect of Suh's life so therefore may be equally interpreted as a smooth place. What is particularly interesting about this theory is that both the works of Suh and Whiteread can move between the two distinctions of space. No one description can bind either work completely. Smooth space is constantly being translated, transverse into a striated space; striated space is constantly being reversed, returned to a smooth space. (Deleuze 2019 P552). Deleuze and Guattari are equally clear that this is frequently the case with these theories of space. So the concept of whether a work exists in a smooth or striated space is in constant flux, whether viewed as inside or outside, convex or concave.

But in what way does all this relate to the texture of the work? Suh has chosen fabric partly because it will pack up small and be transportable, the transitional aspect of the work being very important to his concept. He has chosen different fabrics for different buildings. For *Seoul Home* as we have seen he has chosen silk with all its beautiful, mystical, sensuous qualities symbolising the deep emotion tied with his remembrances of his home. For *348 West 22nd St* he has chosen to use grey nylon,(Fig 3), a very impersonal fabric. In contrast to the silk, nylon is a synthetic fibre so is very unforgiving. Nylon does not drape well and

also is not a breathable fabric, maybe Suh sees the streets of New York as stuffy and stifling, without natural spaces to breathe fresh air. In as much as the silk evokes emotion, so the nylon conversely evokes detachment, industry and mass production. Silk arouses sensuous feelings, whereas polyester and nylon convey the opposite.



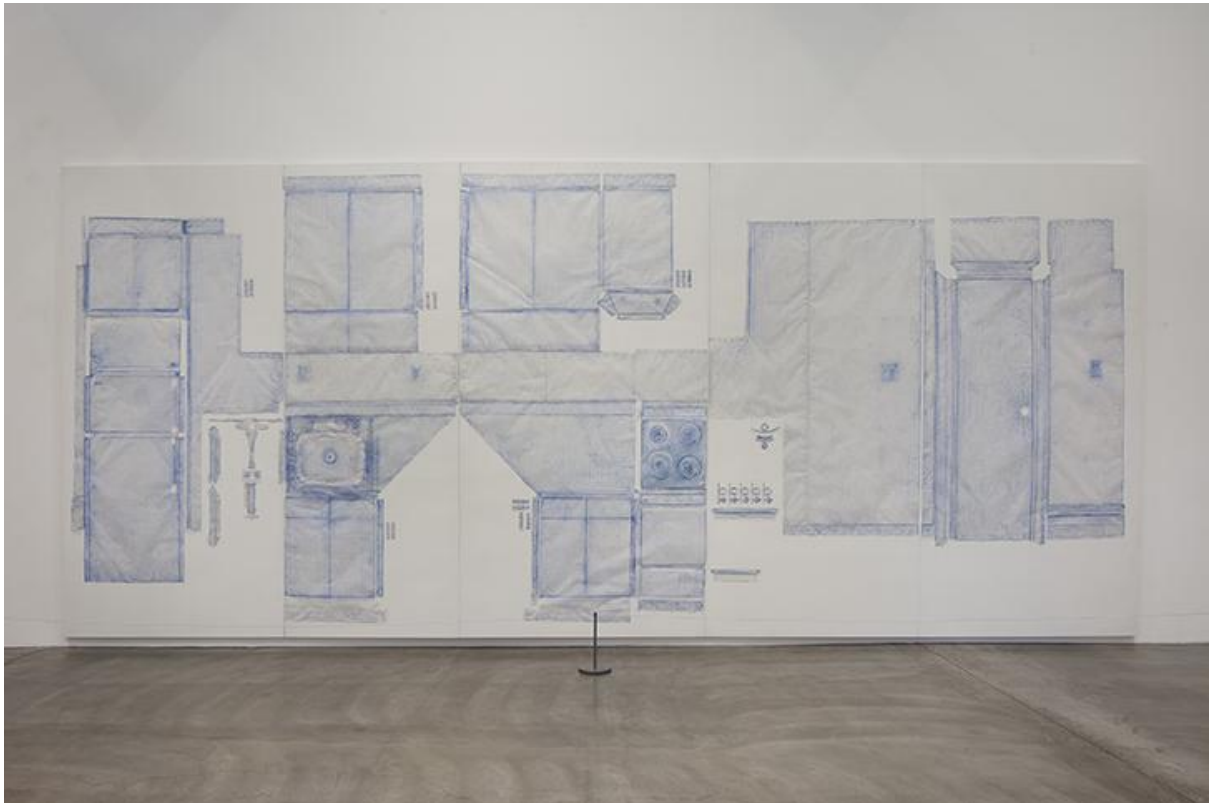
Do-Ho Suh Apartment A, Unit 2, Corridor and Staircase, 348 West 22nd Street, New York, NY 10011, USA, 2011–2014 (detail) (Victoria Miro 2015) (Fig 3)

As visitors to view the work in galleries it is not accepted to touch the work but we can equally, though differently, touch with our eyes. So is the work tactile? Deleuze and Guattari describe haptic as ‘a better word than ‘tactile’ since it does not establish an opposition between the two sense organs but rather invites the assumption that the eye itself may fulfil this nonoptical function.’ (Deleuze and Guattari 2021 P572)

So as we view the nylon and feel it with our eyes it is a cold cloth, not comforting but chilling, very much the opposite of the silk. So though Suh had a good relationship with his New York landlord it could be surmised that he did not feel for his New York apartment with the same depth of emotion as for his childhood home in Seoul. Again using the choice of cloth to highlight the differences between the locations.

However the importance of touch within this work is not that of the viewer and their interaction but that of the artist and his interaction with the work during the creation. The first

stage of 348 West 22nd St was to create a paper pattern. Suh emptied the apartment then carefully covered every surface with fine white paper. He then painstakingly rubbed every surface with pencils and pastels creating a rubbing of the entire apartment. These papers were used to create the patterns for the apartment but are also works of art in their own right, displayed as '*Rubbing/Loving Project*'. With each slow careful rubbing, Suh has caressed every inch of his apartment to collect every detail.



Do Ho Suh, Rubbing/Loving Project: Kitchen, Apartment A, 348 West 22nd Street, New York, NY 10011, USA, 2014, colored pencil on vellum pinned on board, 143.25 x 332.125 inches (overall). Installation view of Do Ho Suh at the Museum of Contemporary Art San Diego, downtown location. Photo: Pablo Mason. Courtesy of the artist and Lehmann Maupin, New York and Hong Kong (School of the Art Institute of Chicago 2018) (Fig 4)

How personal is a personal space if you can see straight through it? As you walk through the apartment as displayed in a gallery surely there is a very strong urge to touch the switches, knobs and buttons, all so familiar to us, yet looking so unreal and unfamiliar almost in a separate dimension.

Rachel Whiteread

Whiteread's first cast architectural piece is 'Ghost' 1990, (Fig 5) cast from the parlour of a Victorian house on Archway Road, North London, close to where Whiteread was brought up. First exhibited in the Chisenhale Gallery London in 1990 (Chisenhale 1990). The house was due to be demolished for a road widening scheme, though it still stands today. In her application for funding she explained that she wished to 'mummify the air in the room' (Dennison 2001 p52). This is an ongoing main concept for her work, marking time, from liquid to solid. Filling something up, holding space, the solidity of space, of trapping the air and holding it in time, encasing it and preserving it safe contained in one space. So she has captured the space, solidified the air. Within the cast block of a room all the moments are entrapped. If you touch the work, are you touching the past? Has the past taken form in the plaster? The inside space has become outside, 'I've become the wall' (Dennison 2001 p52) realised Whiteread. Though the casting is heavy and awkward to transport, like Suh's work it is displayed in galleries supported on a metal frame. In creating *Ghost*, Whiteread worked very like Suh, touching each part of the space, she layered on plaster with scrim and smoothed it into each tiny crack running her fingers over each singular detail of the room, 'building it up and securing it with scrim, a tactile process. It was like covering a broken limb.' (Dennison 2001 p133)

The plaster makes contact with the building to produce the impression it picks up all the fine detail from the room, picture rail, skirting boards, but also lots of detail around the fireplace, soot from the back of the fire. This soot reminds you that this is not just a model of a room but a space in which people have lived, gone about their daily lives for generations. 'Smothering of social space and consequently life, of memories trapped within' (Mullins 2004 p115)

As '*Ghost*' was her first cast architectural work, it was a method she would develop as time progressed. With '*Ghost*' there are aspects such as light showing between the joins in the plaster panels, in further works Whiteread fits a ceiling so this does not happen, though it could be construed as time attempting to escape.



Rachel Whiteread *Ghost* 1990 Plaster and steel frame
(Gagosian Quarterly 2018) (Fig 5)

By way of her interpretation of space, Whiteread gives form to memory within the space. She forcefully pushes other thoughts aside and invites the audience to experience her work and confront their memories in the space, whether it be outside in the lived environment or inside in a gallery setting. The solidity and grounded nature of the sculptures gives depth to their presence in their setting, anchored in the landscape, work to be confronted. As with Suh's work, when it is displayed in a gallery space you cannot touch it.

Whiteread won the Turner Prize for her work 'House' in 1993, (Fig 6) the first female recipient. This entire terraced house cast in cement stood for 10 weeks on Grove Road in East London. (artangel 1994). This work was controversial but placed Whiteread amongst the greatest artists of her day. Responses to the work were mixed in the community, there was graffiti on the sculpture for and against it remaining. This work takes all the themes developed in *Ghost* and enlarges them, takes them out into the world, away from the hallowed space of an art gallery into the environment and community. By naming her work *House* rather than home, Whiteread is making a point of being detached from the emotions of home, space rather than place. The work was never intended to be permanent and was demolished on 11 January 1994 (artangel 1994)



Rachel Whiteread *House* 1993 (Architectural Review 2017) (Fig 6)

A year after this, Whiteread won the commission to create a lasting legacy in Europe. The siting of the '*Holocaust Memorial*' (2000) (Fig 7), in Judenplatz Austria, though the site was not chosen by Whiteread, is of specific relevance to the piece of work. Working in the outside, Whiteread is not looking at fitting work into a space but looking at how her work will relate to the space that exists around it. The square is of great historical importance in the lives of Jews in Austria, it sits at the centre of old Vienna amidst architecture with a long Jewish history. Also beneath the memorial are the remains of a mediaeval synagogue. The contrast of the brutalist style of the sculpture with the array of buildings of the square draws the viewer up short. This aids their contemplation of the horrendous brutality of the deaths of over 65,000 Austrian Jews in the Nazi death camps, all the relevant camps are named around the base of the memorial. The monument is at both times a monument specifically for the Jews for acts of remembrance, also for the whole world so we do not forget. With this work Whiteread has successfully created a space where people can come to express their acknowledgement and grief; they are permitted in this area to make their grief visible.

"It's actually very moving how people have reacted to it. I had expected graffiti, but people are leaving candles, stones and flowers on the memorial. I think it's already become a place of pilgrimage." (Dennison 2001 p61)

Spaces such as these are essential in society to allow a coming together, a focus for emotions, an opportunity for the outward expressions that for most of our time we keep closed down inside ourselves. People can stand, close their eyes, become one with the wall, become the wall, and lay their hands on the books so they can become absorbed into the work. Focussing their minds and absorbing the emotions of all those who have gone before, but also recognising the future. Memories and records passed down and stories untold are symbolically and symbiotically recorded in the library, allowing those who are living to move forward in their lives with the knowledge that all that is important about what has happened is held in a safe repository, which they can return to at any moment of their lives.

Whiteread invites the visitors to touch the *Holocaust Memorial* to focus their thoughts be they memories or empathy. 'Whiteread hoped people would feel compelled to touch it, the way they do religious buildings. This surface pointedly focused, rather than told the stories of others'. (Dennison 2001 P139) The touching of the monument helps the visitors to connect between the past and present, the surface of the monument, the pages of the books that hold the stories, told and untold, the links with the past present and future, all the energy focused as it passes between the fingertips and the concrete.



Rachel Whiteread *The Judenplatz Holocaust Memorial* 2000 Vienna
(Architectural Review 2017) (Fig 7)

...mediate between the fibrous body and the fabric of architecture. They articulate subtle physical sensations between substance and surface, and are most closely known to us through their relationship to the skin and to the sense of touch...(Hemmings 2012 p11)

With this memorial library casting Whiteread has created an accessible inaccessible place in a public square. Folds of buildings, folds of books combined. The inside is not visible but you want to see in, get in, be inside, protected, enveloped in another world. Safe enclosed within. All the books face inward, the spines are hidden, the contents are to be imagined, be they diaries, photographs or records of inmates. This building represents a physical expression of memory. The anonymity of the casting allows visitors to lay their own imaginings and memories onto the grey concrete exterior. This relates to the Jews as the People of the Book (Dennison p 140).

Deleuze describes these physically inaccessible spaces with reference to Leibniz that Monads 'have no windows, by which anything could come in or go out.' They have neither 'openings nor doorways.' (Deleuze 1993 p27) The space therefore is solid, the doors, though visually present, have no handles, but are inverted, doors but not doors. Whiteread's spaces again relate to the issues of smooth or striated. With the casting of the negative space she is creating a new positive. So what is the space now, is it one thing or the other? Is a smooth space captured, enveloped by a striated space, or does a striated space dissolve into a smooth space, allow a smooth space to develop?(Deleuze 2021 P552)

The space has become inverted but still in its new form holds as much, if not more presence, it provokes people to question that space they did not see, in giving form to the negative space Whiteread causes the viewer to notice and begin to understand its relevance and purpose.



Rachel Whiteread Detail of *The Judenplatz Holocaust Memorial* 2000 Vienna
(Architectural Review 2017)

By way of her interpretation of space, Whiteread gives form also to memory within the space. She forcefully pushes other thoughts aside and invites the audience to experience her work and confront their memories in the space, whether it be outside in the lived environment or inside in a gallery setting. The solidity and grounded nature of the sculptures gives depth to their presence in their setting, anchored in the landscape, work to be confronted.

Conclusion

The physical sensation that a person experiences when touching an art work, such as a sculpture, greatly enhances their experience and understanding of the work. There is a visceral experience as the fingers make contact and caress the fine details as the artist has done. It can enable the visitor to maybe feel at one with the artist. Through looking at the work of Do Ho Suh and Rachel Whiteread it can be understood that the choice of materials can elicit different responses from the viewer. At the same time both artists are creating a world separated from the everyday but one that can be viewed and experienced from a personal perspective. Corrin (2002) talks of Suh creating 'Places on the periphery of inhabited spaces' this can be a construct attributed to both artists, both creating work on the edge of experience. A translation of understanding. Each artist is studying how we relate to our home spaces and how we move through our lives, with many similar but many differing perspectives.

The work of Suh stretches and enlarges with each new corridor added and each new venue displayed. The work of Whiteread is much more solid and fixed. However, looking at the more recent work of Whiteread the similarities seem to be much closer. The US Embassy in London commissioned a piece of work to display on the wall, *US Embassy (Flat pack house)*, 2013–15. (Fig 8)



Rachel Whiteread, *US Embassy (Flat pack house)*, 2013–15, permanent installation, US Embassy, London (Gagosian Quarterly 2018) (Fig 8)

The similarities and contrasts between this work and *Rubbing/Loving* of Suh (Fig 4) are unmissable. Whiteread shows a house before it has been constructed, before it has become a space full of memories, whereas Suh shows us all the memories unwrapped and spread out in front of us. Still Whiteread's work does not appear to have the warmth and familiarity of Suh's though they are making similar statements.

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