Programme – Artist Talks
Bernice Donszelmann and Mary Maclean
10 November 2010
Wednesday 2 pm

Natasha Kidd, Tim Renshaw and
Camilla Wilson.
20 November 2010
Saturday 2 pm

Private View Night
4 November 2010
Thursday 6 am–8 pm

Opening Times
2 November–27 November 2010
Monday–Friday 10 am–6 pm
Saturday 12 am–4 pm
Entry is free.

There is limited parking space on
 campus (including disabled bays) and
 full disabled access to the gallery.

Herbert Read Gallery
University for the Creative Arts
New Dover Road
Canterbury
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CT1 3AN

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Exhibition organised by
Outside Architecture
Of Harold Rosenberg’s characterization of Abstract Expressionist painting, Rosalind Krauss remarked on “… the analogy between the inaccessibility of illusionistic space and an intense experience of the privacy of the individual self.” In other words, the analogy of the spatial interior with subjective interiority equips it with a privileged aesthetic moment. For Krauss, commenting in 1977, Minimalism’s significance lay in its clear rejection of any metaphysical or illusionistic reference to interior space, whether that be in sculptural or pictorial form: for artists like Robert Morris the new sculpture was to be public rather than private; it was to be ‘exterorized’; it was external in its reference rather than internal. In the years that have ensued, while remaining well clear of expressionist models, the dialogues that post-Minimalist practices (including the monochromatic wall or floorcape) have reached have produced important shifts of register from the original impetus of Minimalism as defined by Krauss. The relation of the subject to thresholds of inside and outside, to surface and to depth – whether literal or metaphorical – is regularly reanimated. The interior space (and with it ‘interiority’) is clearly, however, conceived as a historically shifting object of enquiry rather than an analogy for a privileged moment.

A figure huddles in the shadows of the flimsiest of shelters and feels comforted that she is enclosed, safe and protected. Another figure, protected by a surround of monolithic concrete walls, feels exposed and terrified. One should never make the mistake of assuming that the physical boundary, which is experienced as such is produced only by the physical enclosure of four walls (Henni Lefebvre notably decried the regression of the use of the term inhabiting – habiter – into that of habitation). Instead, we see a transformation in the understanding of a form that had once been understood as a passive process into that of a passive noun, a place. In Antonella da Messina’s painting St Jerome this decorative study in question comprises a space within a space: a wooden platform housing the saint and the paraphernalia of his study is itself located within the expanse of the imposing architecture of a cathedral which stretches above and beyond. Of this configuration of the saint’s study Georges Perec notes that it represents the inhabitable in the midst of the uninhabitable. ‘The whole space is organized around the piece of furniture (and the whole piece of furniture is organized around the book). The glacial architecture of the church … has been cancelled out. ... Surrounded by the uninhabitable, the study defines a domesticated space inhabited with serenity by cats, books and men.’ The uninhabitable interior is produced not by the architecture that protects against such a surround of monolithic concrete walls, but these are the same means by which he bypasses the literal, by which he can imaginatively inject his interior space with an absence of physical limits and always be elsewhere at the same time as here.

Adolf Loos’ essay ‘Principles of Cladding’ has long been overshadowed by the fame of the book – in particular its title – ‘Ornament and Crime’. Ornament in Loos, contrary to popular opinion, should not be understood through a simple dichotomy of surface and structure, however. His is not a modernism founded on a principle of truth to tectonics structure. Rather, surface itself becomes spatially structural (it is only ‘mere ornament’ when it fails in that role). Loos’ discussion of the literal wall and the wall as surface, as forms of cladding, carpet and wood play a key role within his architectural design. Unlike the literal wall, the specificity of surfaces like wood, carpet or floorcape can be understood as spatially generative. The materiality of these surfaces functions itself to articulate and form space – including shifts between enclosure and openness – as something both physical and symbolic and its new materials aids in these aims, superseded and overcome. Technology is newly viewed as if an obstacle to be overcome, ‘Contemporary art that argues with the wall itself – be it in the form of the pure surface of a thin layer of paint on a canvas, or in the form of a solid cross wall of steel by Richard Serra weighing tons – stimulates the fundamental question of habitus that the wall poses: in other words, about what is left of the aesthetic force and architectural potency of the wall.’

Berrine Donzelmann

‘For the wall is not primarily a wall but … It is a mirror man, a projection screen on which he wants to abandon himself to his illusion and recognize himself’ (Oskar Bie). The occupation or inhabitation of a space might, as such, be understood ‘as a gradual movement toward the appropriation of surfaces for such projections – and the failure of ‘dwellings’ as a failure of this appropriative grasp. (This may go some way to explaining why those decorative elements intended to brighten up hotel rooms always have the reverse effect, of making especially un-homely a space never destined to be homely in the first place. If the way the surfaces with which we surround ourselves are clad is a means by which we project ourselves, the impossibility of any such form of reflection is what makes the hotel room painting an especially disturbing object),’ Bie continues: ‘The basic feature of wall decoration is conquering the wall itself … ‘ The desire is always to trick it out of existence. And from this deception springs the art of wall decoration. This deception is the dream of freedom that man projects onto the wall. The implications of this are complex. The projections Bie describes are part of man’s means of inhabiting his space but these are the same means by which he bypasses the literal, by which he can imaginatively inject his interior space with an absence of physical limits and always be elsewhere at the same time as here.

In the late eighteenth century August Schmarsow declared that the principal concern of architecture is ‘... always the spatial enclosure and Compression.’ Some sixty years later Gaston Bachelard made the explicit analogy between the site of the interior dwelling, in particular the secure Ur house of childhood and the interiority of the ego – the housed psyche. Bachelard’s reflections were made in direct response to the rise of Modernism in architecture. Modernism posed a fundamental challenge to conceptions of the privacy of enclosure as the architectural ‘act’. In its quest for transparency, for air, light and movement, the opening or aperture becomes the focus of wall design over and above enclosure. The wall with its enclosing function, in other words, finds itself newly viewed as if an obstacle to be superseded and overcome. Technology and its new materials aids in these aims, opening up possibilities for surfaces and to architecture that almost dissolves before the eye. The critiques that followed – that the subject is exposed and alienated as a consequence of finding him or herself confronted with places of residence that were transformed ‘... into transitional spaces of every imaginable form and wave of light and air’ – were inevitable. But the idea of enclosure can be treated as something both physical and symbolic or metaphorical, making these critiques open to question and revision.

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5 ibid, 255–251.
7 Georges Perec ‘Species of Spaces’ in Species of Spaces and Other Pieces, trs. J. Starrock (London, Penguin, 1995), 88 (his emphasis).
10 ibid, 24–25.
11 Neumeyer, ‘Head First’, 252.
12 ibid.