

A Room of One's Own (for Any Season)

Ricardo Forriols

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1

Perhaps there is only space when that space is illuminated. At least that is what we have suspected many times since childhood, fearing, like Alice, the uncertainty in total darkness or imagining that things might be different, and our rooms could be the flexible vortex of the center of the world itself.

I will think about this while I come back from seeing the exhibition, for sure; I will think about it when I get home after walking between the pieces with a puzzled look, calculating the correct assembly of the everyday while turning on the light in my bedroom and writing in my notebook about what I think after seeing Ana's show.

2

"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."¹

I do not know if when Virginia Woolf published this popular reflection at the beginning of *A Room of One's Own* in 1929, she knew about the adventures of Xavier de Maistre in his *Voyage around my room (Voyage autour de ma chambre, 1794)*² and the following *Night Voyage Around My Room (Expédition nocturne autour de ma chambre, 1825)*. However, the need for this room to have a latch or to be locked from the inside ensuring calm in the case of Woolf, can be linked to the arrest of the Count de Maistre at his home in Via Po in Turin—convicted of dueling, deprived of space and time. This would motivate the famous descriptions of his particular journey through a room connected to the whole universe, stopping at the most particular details of the furniture, the objects and things, his memories, (all of them) found on his way. Strangely enough, Virginia Woolf wrote this essay on literature and

1 Virginia Woolf, *Un cuarto propio*. Madrid: Alianza, 2005, page 8.

2 Xavier de Maistre, *Viaje alrededor de mi habitaci—n*. Madrid: Funambulista, 2007.

women in October 1928, and on Friday the 26th, she looked through the also needed window of her bedroom to rest and get lost in a happy vision of reality, outside, perhaps washed by the still warm light of the autumn.

It is true, life activities are those which determine the space and its quality, rather than its requirements: at least a door that has to be closed and opened, a window to the outside —so romantic in its pictorial definition—the myriad of furniture and objects here with us, its order. Over all of it, like fine layers of dust, as invisible as persistent/obstinate, our surprised look falls towards reality.

3

In 1966, James Turrell rented the old Mendota Hotel building at the intersection of Main Street and Hill Street, next to Ocean Park Boulevard in Santa Monica (California). Turrell turned the building—today a Starbucks—into his studio and gallery, into a lab in which to work and, ultimately, a work in itself: he emptied it, built new walls, modifying the distribution of the space, and painted whole rooms with an emphatic white, including the floor. Strategically he blocked the doors and windows and made openings on the walls and ceilings to project the light from the outside (also flashes of commercial lights, traffic lights at night and the movement of the car lights) inside the rooms, manipulating interior lighting and combining its variations along the day.³ The *Mendota Stoppages* series of photographs (1969-74) is a study of these changes of light through space and time. Turrell invited some close friends to see them, and afterwards had them circulate, fascinated, among the phenomena of each of the rooms.

Sometimes, surprised by the emptiness and the unreal quality of light, I turned my bedroom into one of those experiences at Mendota Hotel, changing some furniture around, moving slowly as a ray of sunshine would move along in the afternoon, experimenting with the possibility of turning things around to see them upside down, in a different light.

4

That hole that Turrell made on the ceiling of the Mendota Hotel was the first of his career—afterwards more ambitious, complex and beautiful works came, where the ceiling disappears open to the sky and its clarity. At that time, the margins between sculpture and architecture were diluting, and Turrell proposals as well as Gordon Matta-Clark's posed a

3 See catalog AA.VV. [Jiri Svestka, editor], James Turrell. Ostfildern (Alemania) y Barcelona: Edition Cantz y Fundación La Caixa, 1992.

change in the language, from the eccentric minimalism to the conceptual project. Thus, Matta-Clark typed the following note in the early seventies: <<Completion through removal. Abstractions of surfaces. Not-building, not-to-rebuild, not-built-space. Creating spatial complexity, reading new openings against old surfaces. Light admitted into space or beyond surfaces that are cut. Breaking and entering. Approaching structural collapse, separating the parts at the point of collapse. »Translating the diagram into its structural context. What is there beyond the surface of the building? »Use walls rather than language. »Looking through the object. Ambiguity, what is there and what is not, as much as totality. Usurpable emptiness. What happens when weight is released? »It works, contained energy. »⁴

5

I noted down in my diary what I will think after seeing Ana's exhibition — always a fine and delicate sculptural work—and I have been adding notes that will allow me to construct a discourse that goes from the need of the space to the things that happen in it. It will lead, if possible, to the strange look that makes reality appear changing when introducing fiction and the impossibility of the space itself: *Rather than using language, use walls.*

In the end nothing is that complex, only the way we look at it is complex. The architectural sections that the structure offers us and some little details are echoes, fragments of a space that we must visit, look and go through, inhabit and live.

6

On a quiet day, the phone rang furiously in the house of architect Frank Lloyd Wright, who was then already over seventy years old. The caller was none other than Mrs. Liliane S. Kaufmann, the owner of the famous Fallingwater House that Wright designed and built for his family in the mountains near Pittsburgh in the late 1930's; the lady had a problem: she complained about the leaks that dripped water on the beautiful dining room table ...The architect's response was swift, it was clear: she should change the placement of the table. Leaks—an insignificant incident for Wright—have continued to besiege the wonderful house since then, since the beginning, as the patter of the Bear Waterfall does

4 Gordon Matta-Clark, "Completion through removal" [Finalizar eliminando], text without a date reproduced in AA.VV. [Gloria Moure, editora], Gordon Matta-Clark. Obras y escritos. Barcelona: Pol'grafa y MNCARS, 2006, page 89.

in any room. That is why the Kaufmanns ended up selling, but also because of the expenses and taxes. Today the workers of the Western Pennsylvania Conservancy must often move the furniture, while observing astonished everything that goes on inside the house depending on the season.

This text was published on the occasion of the exhibition “The Relative Size of Holes, Abysses, and Gaps”.

Translated from the original Spanish version by Ana Esteve Llorens.