Design and Build to Destroy: Rachel Whiteread’s *Untitled (Room)* and its Representation

Rachel Whiteread’s *Untitled (Room)*, 1993 (*fig.* 1) was cast from a freestanding model of a room designed by the artist and built with prefabricated elements in her studio in Berlin.

*Fig.* 1. Rachel Whiteread, *Untitled (Room)*, 1993, plaster, 275 x 300 x 350cm, Museum of Modern Art, New York.

While her previous work *Ghost*, 1990 (*fig.* 2) cast from an existing room in a Victorian Terrace House, had its own particular architectural details to register, the design of *Room* was ascribed to Whiteread from genesis to completion.

*Fig.* 2. Rachel Whiteread, *Ghost*, 1990. Plaster and steel frame, 106 x 140 x 125 inches 269 x 355.5 x 317.5 cm. © Rachel Whiteread. Courtesy Gagosian Gallery Photographed by Mike Bruce
Room was the antithesis of Ghost, disavowing the elements of nostalgia that accompanied the casting of a historical subject. Room signalled a new means by which architecture could be interrogated, by constructing “a negative cast of a pre-fabricated non-place, constructed to be destroyed.”

Constructing to Destroy

Room solidifies a portion of space at the interior limits of a fictitious structure, reckoning place-less-ness as matter only then to shatter the host body. To facilitate this act of constructional nihilism, Whiteread created “a plywood mould for the room, as if it were a prop.”

The mould contained a window, a door and skirting boards, but no light fitting. Whiteread created her own impressions by design, decorating the facades of the room with wallpaper and paint prior to casting them.

Constructional errancy characterises this project. Decoration tends to signal one of the final stages in the completion of a room. After the structure is lined, the walls are plastered and the paint and wallpaper applied at the last. With Room however, the template of the finished room is again lined with plaster. This material, frequently employed in architecture to a smooth out undulations in wall surfaces, is utilised to capture the variances in surface topography it is usually intent upon eradicating. Whiteread’s returns the room to the interim state of ‘making good’ the interior.

A series of photographs depict her flicking plaster with the frenetic vigour of an action painter onto the plywood mould. (fig. 3)

Fig. 3. Rachel Whiteread, Untitled (Room) under construction, 1993.

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4 Neumaier, p. 263
The sculptor then prised sections of the cast away from the mould and exhibited the plaster walls of the fictitious room as exterior elevations, supported by an internal steel armature. *Room’s* multi-partite cast consisted of plaster elements of equal dimensions that, like *Ghost*, superimposed a grid of construction lines over the wall surfaces. Whilst in *Ghost*, significant architectural details such as the window and fireplace elements were drawn out of the regular grid and cast in pieces that reflected their singular proportions and significance, in *Room* a uniform grid overlays all architectural elements. This compositional gesture emphasises the standardised nature of the room.

The construction of the initial mould for *Room* was designed and built not as a site of intended occupancy but rather to enable the manufacture of its trace, achieved by casting its surface. The template for *Room* was operational only inasmuch as it transferred detail from one surface onto another. In this regard, the mould for *Room* operated in a similar manner to the grid, as it has been described by Rosalind Krauss.³

Whiteread designed *Room* to be “more monumental than *Ghost*, like a burial chamber or something you might find in an archaeological museum.”⁶ She based the idea of her ‘last room’ not on an idealised form, but rather on one that she’s described as, “utterly standard...just like a unit devised for people to survive in...I wanted to make something fundamentally dull and basic.”⁷ Whiteread accuses Le Corbusier of pioneering the reign of the prosaic room. She notes that *Room* was designed to be a cast of a room you would “find anywhere, whether or not you slept in it, whether or not you worked in it, just this mundane box, which, I suppose, someone like Le Corbusier was responsible for and which you now see everywhere.”⁸

Whiteread’s statement points to a critical position taken against Le Corbusier’s theories in regard to space and post-war mass-produced housing. She suggests that Le Corbusier made claims about space and the developments of mass production housing that failed. The mundane nature of her sculpture emblematises these failures. *Room* can thus be seen as a critique of modernism’s lack. It commemorates the vestigial spirit of modern architecture, whose heroic agenda has been extinguished through its mass-production and, in Whiteread’s instance, partial exhibition: as an interior module rent away from its ideological gestalt. In Le Corbusier’s polemical ‘Manual of Dwelling’ in *Towards A New Architecture*, the architect instructed the modern-minded citizen on what they must demand of a dwelling:

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³ Krauss writes: “The grid does not map the space of a room or a landscape or a group of figures onto the surface of a painting. Indeed, if it maps anything, it maps the surface of the painting itself. It is a transfer in which nothing changes place. The material qualities of the surface, we could say, are mapped onto the aesthetic dimensions of the same surface. And those two planes—the material and the aesthetic—are demonstrated to be the same plane: coextensive, and through the abyssa and ordinates of the grid, coordinate. Considered in this way, the bottom line of the grid is a naked and determined materialism.”
Demand bare walls in your bedroom, your living room and your dining room. Built-in fittings to take the place of much of the furniture, which is expensive to buy, takes up too much room and needs looking after.

Demand concealed or diffused lighting....

Demand a vacuum cleaner...

Keep your odds and ends in drawers or cabinets...

Teach your children that a house is only habitable when it is full of light and air, and when the floor and walls are clear. To keep your floors in order eliminate heavy furniture and thick carpets.

Take a flat, which is one size smaller than what your parents accustomed you to. Bear in mind economy in your actions, your household management and in your thoughts.9

Le Corbusier demands that the autographic traces left on the interior by the occupant are carefully policed. Emblems of the individual are assigned the status of odds and ends, and these must be concealed in drawers or cabinets. This demand for interior clearance is passed down to progeny, who are cautioned to leave floors and walls bare. Le Corbusier’s ascetic environment demands that the psychological interior of the occupant be similarly restrained. The household is to be managed as an enterprise where profit is garnered through loss: loss of floor area, loss of the autographic trace, with a subsequent gain in the ‘modern spirit’. Thoughts, also, are to be ‘held in check’ in the new dwelling. They must prescribe to the same paucity of means that his concept of the modern dwelling applauds.

Whiteread’s sculpture Room is haunted by Le Corbusier’s demands. It displays bare white walls, lighting that is not only concealed but entirely absent, and it abolishes the decorative predilections of the occupant. Yet Room also fills in space and stops the occupant from gaining access to the interior in a conventional manner. The dimensions of the artist’s room design, detached from a context, are also modestly proportioned. However, this room, emblematic of those that emerged in post-war mass produced housing, is small not by choice, but by necessity: due to financial hardship rather than voluntary aesthetic deprivation. Whiteread’s Room manifests a lack that underlies Le Corbusier’s conception of the ‘spirit’ of mass production. Le Corbusier petitions his readers to assist him in conjuring up the mass production spirit:

We must create the mass-production spirit.
The spirit of constructing mass-production houses.
The spirit of living in mass-production houses.
The spirit of conceiving mass-production houses.
If we eliminate from our hearts and minds all dead concepts in regard to the houses and look at the question from a critical and objective point of view, we shall arrive at the “House Machine”, the mass-production house, healthy (and morally so too) and beautiful in the same way that the working tools and instruments which accompany our existence are beautiful.
Beautiful also with the animation that the artist’s sensibility can add to severe and pure functioning demands”10


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With this incantation the architect summons the ineffable spirit of mass-production to materialise. At this ideational stage in his visionary program, the mass-produced spirit of modern architecture is characterised by lack, a lack that can only be remedied through the intervention of the artist-architect.

The visionary spirit of mass-production was, from the outset, fraught with difficulties. It lacked the artistic touch and the very means by which to come into existence. This was because there was a lack in the technical expertise required to construct many modern plans. As the artist-architect of Room, Whiteread sounds out mass-production’s lack. Eviscerating the room away from the veneers of architectural progress, she exposes a deficit at the ideational core of the mass-production spirit.

The anonymous qualities of Room that affiliate it to the mass-produced were achieved in part by the strategic subtraction of architectural details from the cast. Through the judicious subtraction of such details, Room foregrounds a deficit in the mass-production spirit. Gone are the fireplace, the light-switch, the picture rail, the cornicing, as too are the indexical signs of prior occupancy that characterised Ghost.

This subtraction of detail was, Mark Wigley notes, “the mantra for modern architects, as exemplified by their trademark white walls - smooth, uninterrupted surfaces that wrap and define space with a minimum of fuss.” White walls also constitute Room, but here they are rendered in a porous medium that bears the impression of the mould from which they were derived. The selection of plaster as a casting material runs counter to the mass-production spirit as the materials employed in constructing modern architecture were designed, as Le Corbusier notes, to “evade the attentions of the decorative artist.” In contrast, Whiteread enlists plaster to record minute variations in the surface topography of her interior walls. She captures the trace matter that many smooth, modern materials were intent upon eliminating.

The four walls of the artist’s room are cast into a homogenising mould so that all aspects of the interior are treated as materially uniform. The architectural details within the room are also subsumed into a grid of construction lines. These gestures can be understood as a critique of the mass production of modern architecture. They suggest that there is no room left for the particular, for the marks left on the interior surfaces of architecture by its occupants.

10 Le Corbusier, Towards A New Architecture, p. 211.
11 In order for this spirit to manifest itself states of mind must be altered and technical specialists ready to nurture it. Lamenting the lag in specialization that would enable this transformation from the ephemeral to the material Le Corbusier declares: “The right state of mind does not exist.
The state of mind for mass-production houses, the state of mind for living in mass production houses, the state of mind for conceiving mass-production houses.
Everything must be begun from the beginning, nothing is ready. Specialization has hardly touched the domain of the dwelling-house. There are neither the workshops nor the technical specialists. But at any moment, if once the mass-production spirit came to life, everything would quickly be begun.” Le Corbusier, Towards A New Architecture, p. 211.
13 Le Corbusier, Towards A New Architecture, p. 266.
Whiteread’s strategic subtractions served not only to ascribe her model room a generic quality but also to deprive the interior of any connections to the outside world, existing in a state of solitary confinement. *Room* excoriates the veneer of architectural progress to demonstrate that in the modern interior no ‘room’ has in fact been gained since *Ghost*. This suggests that the mass production of modern architecture is more a form of window dressing than architectural innovation. Modern architecture disguises the same meagre proportions within the interior. For example, in terms of its size and scale, Whiteread’s design for *Room* approximates the nineteenth-century room from which *Ghost* was cast. Whilst their interior details are different, the size of the interior space they contain is very similar.\(^{14}\)

*Room* emblematises an ambivalence toward the mass production of modern architecture: particularly its grandiose claims for transparency and openness, and the insinuation that more ‘space’, the ultimate modernist material, necessarily furnishes more ‘room’. Developments in post-war mass housing in Britain provides evidence for this claim.\(^{15}\) By delaminating the room from the veneers of architectural progress, Whiteread’s representation of a ‘mundane box’ illustrates that some of the innovations championed by post-war architecture were skin-deep.

**Room’s Anonymity**

As her work has developed Whiteread has become more interested in the anonymity of spaces.\(^{16}\) This search for a generic quality has also been identified in the work of the American photographer James Casebere, who takes photographs of meticulously crafted architectural models made with Styrofoam, foam board, plaster, and usually white paint.\(^{17}\) *(fig. 4)*

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\(^{14}\) *Ghost* measures 269.2cm (h) × 355.6cm (w) × 317.5cm (d), with a total floor area of 11.3 square meters. In comparison, *Room* measures 275cm (h) (5.8cm taller than *Ghost*) × 300cm (w) (55.6cm smaller than *Ghost*) × 350cm (d) (32.5cm deeper than *Ghost*), with a total floor area of 10.5 square meters. Overall, the floor area of *Room* (1993) is 0.80 square meters smaller than that of *Ghost*.

\(^{15}\) Andrew Saint has identified a similitude between the internal planning of the early British Boundary Street Flats (1890s) and their antecedent, the Park Hill Housing Estate in Sheffield (1957-61) one of the largest post-war public-housing projects of its generation. Saint comments, “At both Boundary Street (1890s) and Park Hill (1957-1961), behind the radical elevations may be found dwelling-types and room sizes all but determined by previous experience and rules.”

\(^{16}\) Trevor Fairbrother described Untitled (*Room*) as, “A fictitious, newer-looking, and even more generally anonymous space.”

Fig. 4. James Casebere, model of Pink Hallway series under construction in artist’s studio, 2000. Image Courtesy James Casebere and Fox/Jensen Gallery, New Zealand.

The scale of Casebere’s photographs is such that they profoundly affect the gallery spaces in which they are installed and permit the viewer to occupy the spaces they document rather than merely viewing them passively at a distance.  

Fig. 5. James Casebere, Tunnel #2, 2003, digital chromogenic print, 48 x 60 inches & 72 x 90 inches. Image Courtesy James Casebere and Fox/Jensen Gallery, New Zealand.

Like Whiteread’s room-scale sculptures, Casebere frames his photographs to sever them from a context. Both artists’ works are frequently characterised by their neutral colouration. Comparisons might also be made between their uses of architecture as artists. Wigley writes that Casebere deploys “the resources of the architect...to subtly disturb architecture. Or, rather, to reveal something already disturbing about it.”

18 Weinberg notes that the photographs Casebere exhibited in the Addison Gallery (2000) ranged from forty by thirty inches to eight by ten feet, having “a physical presence that causes viewers to negotiate them not so much as pictures of spaces but as spaces.”


Both Casebere and Whiteread disturb architecture by divesting it of detail. Many of the
tabletop models Casebere photographs are based upon existing structures, which are altered
through a series of subtractions. Wigley writes, “If each model begins as a realistic
approximation of a building, details are progressively taken away until the critical sense of
haunting suspension is approached.”

Wigley identifies a moment when the model hovers delicately between the real and the
illusory, when surface detail and the indexical signs of habitation are progressively sheared
away and eroded. It is this representational space that Whiteread’s Room also occupies. Its
interior walls are furnished with the bare minimum. A window, door, and baseboard
punctuate the calcinated monoblock, yet resolutely disavow any point of entry into, or exit
from the interior. Even the keyhole is absented from the cast.

Productive Destruction

The mould made to produce Room was designed, constructed, and then destroyed by
Whiteread. This form of productive destruction and erasure also characterises the artist’s
drawing practice. Her gouache studies in correction fluid and ink on graph paper, were
executed concurrently with Room. The artist describes them as:

Getting rid of the drawing: I used Tippex pens...It was all about drawing a line, not being
quite right, always using ink and then getting rid of the line with quite a fine white line,
building things up in that way and then using a lot of watercolour on top.

The addition of this desiccated whitewash on top of the grided picture plane could be
construed as recognising some form of lack in the surface to which it is applied. Or, alterna-
tively, the object represented on top of the grided surface could be identified as the
erroneous architectural body: representing the flawed interior, constructed to be destroyed.
As the sculpture Room can be seen as a critique of the innate ‘lack’ that characterised the
mass-production spirit, the drawing studies of this sculpture can be seen as mapping out this
‘lack’ in a complementary medium.

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20 Wigley, “Inside the Inside,” p. 16.
21 The minimal detailing of Room impacted upon how it was received in galleries. For example, when it
was shown in the ICA Gallery in Philadelphia in 1995, Nancy Princenthal wrote that Room, “was
deposited in a yawning, high-ceilinged space where it achieved a nearly absolute expression of spatial
nullification and emotional withdrawal.” Princenthal, Nancy. 1995. “All That Is Solid,” Art in America, 83,
July: 56.
22 Friedrich Meschede comments that these drawings were, “not diagrams, sketches or instructions for
the three dimensional translation of an idea, but works which have emerged analogously to her three
dimensional art.”
Gouache Studies for Room

Whiteread’s drawings are employed as a means to analyse, design, and develop her sculpture. The form and proportions of the drawing must be determined within the correction fluid’s rapid curing time. Her gouaches, like her sculptures, are cast in a window of fixed temporal duration, signalling a shift in state from fluidity to inertia.24 Their methods of construction mirror many of those in evidence in her sculpture and incur some of the paradoxical qualities that can be seen in her inside-out cast.

The Removal of a Ground Line

In all of the gouache studies for Room, Whiteread elected to dispense with the articulation of the ground plane beyond the limits of the object described. Like her sculptures of rooms, her drawings of rooms divest this domestic cell of a specific site and context.25 This sense of displacement is exacerbated in Room Study, 1993 (fig. 6) which represents two views of the same room; one where the room is upright, and one where it is tipped on its side.

Fig. 6. Rachel Whiteread, Room Study, 1993. Correction fluid and ink on graph paper 19 1/2 x 28 5/16 inches, 49.5 x 72 cm © Rachel Whiteread. Courtesy Gagosian Gallery

Free of a ground line, the room can re-orient itself at will. By removing the datum that provides the subject with a place to stand, Whiteread emphasises the disembodied qualities of the space.

The Sinopia as a Site of Correction

Whiteread’s plaster sculptures and gouache drawings have a kinship to the sinopia, or ‘underdrawing,’ which was a strategic site of correction employed in Renaissance fresco

24 Meschede notes that these gouaches have, “been ‘cast’ in the same material as the corresponding sculptures.” Meschede, Friedrich. 1995. Rachel Whiteread Gouaches. Stuttgart: Cantz Verlag, p. 8.
25 “In a pure-line drawing without shade and shadows discernible differences in line weight can aid in suggesting depth of planes. The heavier the delineation of an element, the farther forward it appears; the lighter the delineation, the further it appears to recede. A strong profile line helps to silhouette the buildings overall form. Profile lines should always continue along the ground plane for a distance sufficient to indicate the environment within which the building sits.” Ching, Frank. 1996. Architectural Graphics, New York: Van Nostrand Reinhold, p. 42.
In the process of making a fresco, an initial layer of coarse plaster, the *arriccio*, was applied to the wall. The sinopia is the final preparatory drawing that is made on the arriccio. A layer of smooth plaster, the *intonaco*, is then applied on top of the arriccio. The finished fresco is painted on the surface of the intonaco. The sinopia, concealed beneath the fresco, could also be detached from it. *Sinopia* were “mere adumbrations and were never intended by the artist to be seen, but to the modern eye they often have a greater vitality than the completed works and are always of considerable interest.”

Peeled away from the fresco, the sinopia are drawings that demonstrate rapid draughtsmanship. They are concealed within the wall. To bring them to light is to reveal the mechanisms of the fresco’s construction, eviscerating and then exhibiting a site of editorial annotation that had been walled up and was never intended for visual consumption. The act of recovering the *sinopia* draws up the ideational provenance of the artwork, ghosted beneath the surface of the fresco.

Whiteread’s drawings of *Room* share several qualities with the sinopia. They too draw up the ideas that informed the sculpture’s construction. They peel the walls of a room away from their surrounding context and expose them to scrutiny. Many of the drawings for *Room* also grid up the wall surfaces as was the practice in the construction of the netto that marked out the walls on which the *sinopia* was drawn.

It is the *sinopia*, as a strategic site of correction, laid out in accordance with the grid that is of interest in relation to Whiteread’s gouache compositions, especially in light of her comments that she sought to “get rid of the drawing”: a process characterised by the construction and attempted blotting out of her own inscription.

The grid of construction lines that inscribe the final fresco painting are an index of duration. These grid lines make it possible to “estimate the time taken to produce a fresco by examining the joins between the plastered areas representing a day’s work.” Like the fresco, the composition of Whiteread’s sculptures and gouache drawings are subject to the hardening times of her chosen media.

**Room: Creating Disturbances in the Picture Space**

Whiteread’s perspective drawings of *Room* are drawn on grid paper. The perspective drawing technique that Rosalind Krauss has described as “the science of the real,” is superimposed by the artist onto the grid. Krauss has identified the grid as the “mode of withdrawal” from the

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28 Ugo Procacci has described the netto’s construction: “A fine cord, soaked in red paint, fastened at each end and pulled taut, was pressed or ‘beaten’ against the wall, so that it left a mark on the arriccio. This established the centre of the space to be painted. When the space was large, the cord was used more than once to make a number of vertical and horizontal divisions in it. The artist then drew in charcoal, directly onto the arriccio, the design of the painting he was to make, correcting it if necessary until he was completely satisfied.” Procacci, Ugo. *Frescoes from Florence*. 1969. London: Arts Council of Great Britain, p. 23.
real. By juxtaposing her renderings of the science of the real atop the mode of withdrawal from it, Whiteread iterates the ‘in-between-ness’ of the sculpture Room. The drawings situate the room and its representation between the realms of the ‘real’ and the ‘illusory,’ just as Whiteread’s sculpture Room hovers between these two realms.

The alterations to convention that characterise Whiteread’s gouache drawings compliment those at work in her sculptural representations of rooms. Both are fraught with perceptual anomalies. For example, the artist’s predilection for transforming architecture into a collection of surfaces and thereby flattening out space can also be seen in her use of mixed-system drawings, which employ two or more drawing systems within the same composition. Mixed-system drawings play the illusion of depth promoted by perspective against the true height of orthographic projections.

Whiteread employs mixed-system drawings creating disturbances in the picture space. Dubery and Willats suggest that the use of oblique projection and perspective within the same composition can be employed to render distemper within the terrestrial realm. Whiteread’s mixed-system drawings, like her room sculptures, also operate to ex-centre the viewer, destabilising the viewer’s conventional relationship to rooms and their representation.

**Between Sculpture and Drawing: Whiteread’s Developing Surfaces**

The graphic representations of Room and the sculpture itself can also be seen as mirroring certain priorities afforded by the developed surface interior. This drawing type depicts the interior of a room detached from its surroundings, which Whiteread’s inside-out rooms also do. Developed surface drawings are, “an orthographic (i.e. non perspectival) system of rendering to show all upright sides of an interior arranged radially on a single sheet of paper.” Robin Evans has observed that this form of representation was utilised:

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30 Krauss writes of the difference between perspective and the grid, citing the 15th and 16th century studies by Uccello, Leonardo or Durer: “Perspective studies are not really early instances of grids. Perspective was, after all, the science of the real, not the mode of withdrawal from it. Perspective was the demonstration of the way reality and its representation could be mapped onto another, the way the painted image and its real-world referent did in fact relate to one another—the first being a form of knowledge about the second . . . . . . . . Everything about the grid opposes that relationship, cuts it off from the very beginning. Unlike perspective, the grid does not map the space of a room or a landscape or a group of figures onto the surface of a painting. Indeed, if it maps anything, it maps the surface of the painting itself. It is a transfer in which nothing changes place. The material qualities of the surface, we could say, are mapped onto the aesthetic dimensions of the same surface. And those two planes—the material and the aesthetic—are demonstrated to be the same plane: coextensive, and through the abyssa and ordinates of the grid, coordinate. Considered in this way, the bottom line of the grid is a naked and determined materialism.”


31 Dubery and Willats cite its use by the surrealist artist De Chirico, specifically in his painting *Mystery and Melancholy of a Street*, 1914, where mixed systems are enlisted to achieve, “a particular expressive effect . . . to show an all too earthly society at odds with itself.”


As a way of turning architecture inside-out, so that internal rather than external elevations were shown........the illustration becomes completely hermetic; nothing outside can be shown - in this case, not even the thickness of the walls. It is an imploded representation that discloses more of the interior and less of everything else. Like the conventional section, the developed surface interior is a three-dimensional organisation reduced to two-dimensional drawing, but it is much less easy to restore apparent depth, because while the section merely compresses space, the developed surface also fractures space and destroys its continuity.33

Whiteread has produced one developed surface drawing, Untitled (Paperbacks) 1997. (fig. 7).

Fig. 7. Rachel Whiteread, Untitled (Paperbacks) Technical, 1997, Collage and pencil on two sheets of graph paper, 48 3/8 x 36 3/8 x 1 13/16 inches (framed), 123 x 92.5 x 4.5 cm (framed) © Rachel Whiteread. Courtesy Gagosian Gallery

It shows the layout for her installation at the British Pavilion at The Venice Biennale in 1997. The installation was comprised of over one hundred casts of the space between books and bookshelves, which lined the walls of a room in the pavilion. In this drawing, the tongue and groove floor surface has been developed in detail. In contrast, the book modules and their dimensions are outlined on the walls surfaces in a manner akin to a construction drawing. This work mixes working drawing techniques with those of developing a surface in detail. Competing representational systems are grafted together.

One can find a number of similarities between the developed surface drawing and Ghost and Room. For example, both Ghost and Room turn architecture, in the simplest terms, ‘inside out.’ Both also present internal elevations, but in this instance exhibit them as de-centred,

external elevations. Both forms of representation used to describe the room (the drawn and
the sculpted) are also contingent upon the hermeticism of the interior, which is removed from
its surroundings. Like Ghost and Room, the subject of the developed surface interior drawing is
often divested of it’s ceiling to enable the interior to be scrutinised.  

The developed surface drawing, popular in English architectural practice of the 18th century,
was used to distinguish each individual room from another, in order to counter the
homogeneous spaces afforded by the circuit planning. Differences were, Evans notes, “forced
into existence afterwards, one by one, room by room. The developed surface interior makes it
much easier to contrive these differences by detaching the room from its situation.”

Whilst this technique sought to draw out differences in the face of the circuit plan, Whiteread
intended with Room to fabricate a ‘mundane room’ that is the antithesis of Ghost, and in fact
the antithesis of a room. She materially re-evaluates, reverses, and displaces a standardised
interior of her own making. This critical practice foregrounds the room’s verisimilitude, rather
than uniqueness, in the face of the non-hierarchical, mass-produced plan. It also suggests that
the place of the architect in relation to the mass-production spirit is characterised by an
absence or lack.

In the developed surface drawing, rather than the illusion of depth, the illusion of flatness is
sought, inducing, according to Evans, “facile, specious, superficial architecture that sucks as
much out of the world as it is able into flatness.” Whiteread’s use of a grided form of
composition, in both Ghost and in Room, exacerbates the flatness of these projects. The corner
detailing also exacerbates this flattening out of the interior used in Room. Rather than the box-
detail enlisted in Ghost, which betrayed the thickness of the cast, Room has mitred corners. In
the developed surface drawing, the corners of the room “are like seams which can be ironed-
out or unpicked in such a way that all sides of the room can be viewed flattened into a single
plane.”

This drawing type disrupted the continuity of the space it represented, requiring ‘cuts’ to be
made between adjoining walls to splay them flat. Whiteread’s room-scaled casts erect the
splayed out interior walls of the developed surface and literally turn architecture, treated as

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34 Jacobus quotes the neo-Palladian architect and writer Isaac Ware espousing the merits of the laid-out
interior drawing:
“The four sides of the room being laid down on paper, with the space or proportion of floor between,
the figure represents at once to the eye the whole and its several parts: they are easily seen to be
uniform or disagreeable; fancy can at pleasure raise them perpendicularly, and see the room in
miniature; divested of its ceiling. Thus let the architect consider it as well as in the plane: it is a view
which no other will ever look upon the work, because the room will not be finished in reality without its
ceiling; but the view will be useful to him in the highest degree, for the true method of seeing the
proportions with a geometrical regard is to view them in all lights, and under all advantages.”
Isaac Ware in Jacobus, “On ‘Whether a Man Could See before Him and Behind Him Both at Once,’” p.
154-5.
35 Evans, Translations from drawing to building, p. 209.
36 Whiteread comments that producing her sculpture Room was “almost like making the antithesis of a
room, something that was just so particular and so much part of what we experience now as
architecture. So it looks like blank architecture.”
Neumaier, “Everything is Connected,” p. 263.
sculptural object, inside out. However, the room’s reconstitution, under Whiteread’s direction, affords the representation of a room an even greater sense of illegibility. Its spatial and material re-evaluation seeks to further disrupt the continuity of space that is emblematic of the developed surface technique.

The evacuation of all interior incident to the perimeter of the room in the developed surface drawing is also evident in Whiteread’s room castings. Evans comments:

The developed surface...is a way of spinning architecture and its appurtenances out to the periphery of available space, consequently opening up a void in the centre of the room, towards which everything faces, non-specific and empty yet very much in evidence, the more so, in fact, because of the withdrawal of all else to the perimeter.\(^{39}\)

Whilst this drawing technique enabled the viewer to see the interior from all vantage points, Whiteread’s sculpture separates each constituent interior wall. The viewer can still occupy the room’s original centre, however, it is now found at four discrete points surrounding the work.

Conclusion

Whiteread’s sculpture and drawings sounds out a room designed and built-to be-destroyed. Room is a critique of the mass production spirit espoused by Le Corbusier and put into action during post-war housing developments in Britain. Whiteread creates a room of her own design in order to reveal that beneath the dissimulating veneers of progress little room has been gained within the interior of post-war architecture.

Her drawings for this ‘inside out’ cast employ media that complement her use of plaster in the sculpture. They operate as strategic sites of correction, like the sinopia hidden beneath the grided walls of the Renaissance fresco. As with the sinopia, the drawings are displayed away from the walls of the sculpture, in separate environments. Many of the drawings for Room employ mixed techniques that create disturbances in the picture space and irrupt architectural conventions.

Room and its graphic representations allow us to think about the productivity of moving and reading between sculpture, building, and drawing: looking at these practices as complementary. Working outside the discipline of architecture, Whiteread critically appraises quotidian aspects of the built environment that have been mass-produced. If Ghost returned from the past to haunt the present, Room, through its subtraction of architectural details that helped to make the house a home (divesting the room of access to heat and light) suggests that the mass-produced modern spirit sometimes failed to fully manifest itself.

\(^{39}\) Evans, Translations from drawing to building, p. 212.
References


