

Greer Honeywill: Dovetail dreams (or, Proclaiming Space)

Kit Wise

Artist, Academic, and Senior Lecturer, Monash University

Do we define pattern or does pattern define us? Any taxonomist in whichever field of research can be seen as a maker of patterns. We assume and trust that pattern is order, implying meaning; but mathematicians will admit that the identification of structure in a system is often only a mask for 'desire', that which is chaotic, contingent and ineffable. As a consequence, the archive is itself an 'erotic' space, brimming with assumptions and urges as well as information, as the clear-eyed critique of the predilections found in much nineteenth and early twentieth century theory demonstrates.

'Pattern-maker' is also the title for engineers responsible for precision machining, who creating the 'patterns', stamps of paradigms for mass-produced machine-parts. Such hard-edged templates are perhaps the foundation, or fabric, of the industrial world we live in socially as much as mechanistically. (The term is also an interesting counterpart to the feminist metaphor of women as mechanised labourers in the home). We find an unshakeable belief in pattern in the contemporary strictures and border-paranoia of our increasingly conservative politicians. Anything which threatens the crisp outline of our national 'pattern, is un-Australian, out of step; and will be violently, vehemently rejected.

Such 'nausea' is also found in Frank Lloyd Wrights 1930s critique of domestic space:

'Any house is a far too complicated, clumsy, fussy, mechanical counterfeit of the human body...The whole interior is a kind of stomach that attempts to digest objects...The whole life of the average house, it seems, is a sort of indigestion.'

Wright's statement apparently equates the notion of home with heart-burn; an excess, or more accurately a confusion of the domestic proving unpalatable, abject. Honeywill is, however, a self-confessed lover of another ambiguous, unstable zone, the sea, alongside which Australian homes have ideally been situated. "I have a sea-fixation - which is itself a quintessentially Australian condition ". This continent's surrounding oceans problematise and erode any notion of a fixed (Australian) boundary; as well as being perhaps the most sublime manifestation of peristaltic action.

Honeywill's story is however not one of extremes; but, like the median point of tidal variation identified by cartographers, is exactly typical: "my life is interesting because completely banal - the story of the suburbs ". In the sprawl of Australian (and also American) suburbia, we find the Modernist trajectory of the Bauhaus and De Stijl gone wrong, lost in a cul de sac. Many of the houses of these zones could be described as the bastard offspring of Donald Judd's philosophical dove tailing of high-art and

popular design; using an approximation of ingredients (both materially and intellectually) from what was to hand, with predictably uneven results.

Importantly, Honeywill preserves similar deviations and mistakes in the logic of her own work, such as the missing images in the series, *as if dreams are saleable real estate*, where the flaws remain in the pattern of photographs of desired sea-frontage houses; homes which, as a direct consequence of their design, also helped to reinforce the stereotyped (stereo-patterned) identities of their inhabitants - including the home-builder and the home-maker.

Such rigid identities are however not confined to the post-war, baby-boomer years: consider the resonance achieved by recent domestic icons Kath & Kim - whose credit-line culture is depicted with a grim pathos that underlines the black humour of the popular television show. Our laughter at their 'effluent' lifestyle, encapsulated in their suburban home, is decidedly hollow.

Honeywill seems well aware of the theatrics of the home, referring to: 'the constructed stage we richly embroider in the performance of our daily travails'. There seems a Shakespearean analogy here, equating the domestic identities with the assumed personae of actors, who 'strut [their] nervous hour upon the stage'. Her statement also serves as an accurate description of the *Sprawl* series, where sumptuous pattern interacts with architectural material, timber and emulsion. We are also reminded of the fantastical castles drawn by Eric Satie. The composer would ironically send his wistful doodles to newspapers, pretending they were bona fide properties for sale; a stack where discovered after his death by his relatives, accumulating on top of the piano where he would compose. Honeywill has borrowed from these reveries the title of her work: *as if dreams are saleable real estate*; as well as the drawn images used to patch her 'mistakes', within the work itself.

As Honeywill suggests, in acknowledgement of the ideas of contemporary Australian architect, Glenn Murcutt: "we proclaim space all the time," whether a picnic blanket on the ground, or the shadow of a tree on a lawn. This description could equally be applied to the series *Sprawl*, with its insinuations of a pre-cartographic evocation (or claiming) of space; or to the wooden apprentice models found incorporated into various guises in *Air Twist*, *Mothership (aberration)* and *In the middle somewhat elevated*. The intimate space described by these objects seems a curious conflation of the dolls-house, birdcage and prison cell; and are again redolent of Satie's fabulous houses. Further examples of 'pattern maker' craft, they lay down a template of both design and technique for the would-be home-builder; pre-fabricating the utterance of his proclamation.

As with any model, the tone of illusionism is also found in the work *The Short Street*. A perspectival rhythm is elicited from Marfa-esque constructions of timber and fly-wire; we feel we are looking across a projection of some new, lustrous housing estate as envisaged by Judd. Such subtle perceptual play is also found in the reflections and half-shadows of

real space, carefully combined with graphic elements, in the visual field of *In the garden of my mind...desire #1-10*. These delicate works, a study in grey, bring text, diagram, photogram and ourselves into oscillating alignment; suggesting a spider's web of interconnected, claustrophobic signification, nestling quietly in the garden on the fringe of a house.

Such perceptual and symbolic dexterity allows Honeywill to dovetail our social and personal space into the work itself, compressing fiction and reality into the same unit. Is this our dream home, or should we wake in fright?