







CONSUMING INTERIORS

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CONSUMING INTERIORS

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CONSUMING INTERIORS A New Domestic Materiality

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Piet Zwart Institute
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Hogeschool Rotterdam

Rotterdam 2017

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Foreword

In this Master's thesis, I investigate a particular situation that might at first seem as quite specific but that I see as a growing trend: the dematerialization of the domestic interior. By dematerialization, I do not mean that the house has disappeared, for it remains a visible domain. However, the invisible intimate relationship that we would develop with private interiors, usually by occupying it with

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material objects, gives way to a passive consumption of houses which already come filled with objects of their own. Spaces that are advertised as ready to be inhabited can be considered the 'pret-a-porter' version of interior architecture: interiors that have been previously shaped for a prospective resident. As in fashion, these interiors are produced following standardized 'sizes' and put in the market as finished products 'pret-a-habiter'. This expression was used as the title of a debate

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at the Architectural Association in London in 2016, whose brief goes:

“Home, once a personal ‘fortress of solitude,’ now an online commodity everywhere, marks a tidal shift in a subtle transition towards a newfound sharing economy.(...) we must update the way we construct not just our built environment, but relationships among ourselves, and our possessions.” (Debate, 2016)

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For now, renting spaces which are ‘pret-a-habiter’ is a standard solution for exchange students or ex-pats. Technology, however, has proven itself capable of dismantling stable institutions, such as fixed office spaces and traditional newspapers, replacing them for more convenient solutions. Who knows what further changes technology, technological inventions and platforms like Airbnb may still cause to domestic environments?

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Throughout my studies at MIARD, I have been intrigued by the effects of technology in current society, and with the internet in particular. This interest was manifested in previous projects such as Expo Data Center, Trame Virtuali (tramevirtuali.nl) and Office for Invisible Work. For this Master's thesis, the repercussions of technology remain a fascination, for it is the main agent that provokes mobility and, at the same time, makes it possible. Although not

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necessarily directly mentioned, the effects of technology still remain the underlying subject of my research, in this case directed at the domestic environment.

Methodology

This Master's thesis is structured around five main keywords that generate respective chapters - Temporality, Object, Furniture, Room and City. Inspired by Ray and Charles Eames' film the Powers of Ten, made in 1977, each of the following chapters addresses and investigates the main theme of short-term inhabitation from a different spatial scale, to the finally altogether compose a growing

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gradient from time (which is spatially scaleless) up to the urban scale.

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Every scale (or chapter) corresponds to an independent publication, intended to be read as individual essays that form a collection, in any order or criteria decided by the reader. In that sense, the different scales are autonomous parts which can be organized, and therefore read, following the reader's preference: either independently, randomly providing different insights into the theme or as gradients that might zoom-in or zoom-out into the main subject.

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The publication does not have the appearance of a book - a durable, long lasting product -,it rather incorporates the form of a soft good, as a product to be consumed. In that sense, it works like a notepad with peel-off pages to be appropriated by the reader and used-up through time, where each chapter can be torn apart and therefore split into a separate notepad.

Project Description

Based on the research and ideas described in this Master's thesis, I propose an alternative way in which the domestic interior could retain its material connection with the resident, by restoring the traditional quality of a space in constant transformation provoked by the inhabitant, in the face of contemporary mobility dynamics and short-term pret-a-habiter living spaces.

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Pieces of furniture that are conventionally meant to store and accumulate material belongings, getting filled over time, turn into objects to be consumed and used-up. Thus, the interior remains a space in constant transformation, as traditionally occurs with objects that get gradually collected. This transformation, however, does not happen as customarily by the addition of new materials, but it rather develops by the slow subtraction of matter that takes place as these pieces

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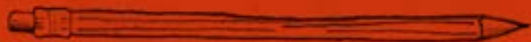
of furniture get to be used. This process allows for every individual that inhabits the house to have a distinctive and singular encounter, while also promoting continuous change in the interior.

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Following the same logic of the thesis chapters, I propose a collection of pieces of furniture composed by five products that grow in scale - from a simple wall hook to a wall shelf, followed by a bedside drawer, a table and a wardrobe.

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Pencil House.

Maria Fernanda Duarte (2017)

Image 1

The house is almost like a living organism constantly under transformation by the process of material accumulation.

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temporality

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My research deals with, in a broader sense, the relationship between domestic interiors and personal objects in the face of increasing mobility and a possible consequence of dematerialization of the home. The house has traditionally been a longtime "companion", a container of our possessions, one that would get progressively filled, rearranged and be carefully cultivated over time. A mode of accelerated mobility contrasts with this stable constellation of homes that accompany people over their adult lives, transforming the domestic interior into a product ready for consumption. What happens when the domicile is no longer perduring, but becomes fleeting and addresses are changed - due to employment and travels - in ever shorter periods of time?

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The furniture collection - *Consuming Interiors* - proposes an alternative way in which the domestic interior could retain its material connection with the resident, by restoring the traditional quality of a space in constant transformation provoked by the inhabitant, in the face of contemporary mobility dynamics and short-term pret-a-habiter living spaces.

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My grandmother's house was a place stuffed with objects: every single closet was packed with all sorts of things that potentially could be of some use, even though in reality most of it would never leave the interior of the closet.

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Of course, it did not happen overnight, the house for sure has not been like that from the start. Instead this empty “shell” must have been filled up, little by little, from the first day on after my grandparents moved into it. And over the course of forty-something years they have lived there, a period of time during which they collected and accumulated all those objects, things, personal belongings and memorabilia.

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Based on these memories, it seems quite clear to me how the passage of time and permanence have a direct impact in the domestic interior, an impact that is materialized and manifested in the form of personal objects. Anyone that has moved into a new house knows that it takes time to make it your own, it takes time to populate this sort of new found territory with several pieces of yourself.

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In the book *Species of Spaces and Other Pieces*, the French writer Georges Perec (1997) describes the domestic as “a space overfilled with my possessions: my bed, my carpet, my table, my typewriter, my books, my odd copies of the *Nouvelle Revue Française*”. In 1949, Romanian-American artist Saul Steinberg made a series of illustrations commissioned for an exhibition with the theme “modern living” at the Detroit Institute of Art. These images seem the perfect

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visualization for the statement made above by Perec. They show different floors of a building where each one of the interiors is totally saturated with all kinds of articles at sight: from paintings hanging on the walls to carpets on the floors, with lots of lamps and some clothes in the middle, every room is filled with objects that vary according to the taste and personality of its resident.

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However, for this identification between interior and resident to exist, and so, to become progressively solidified through the physical presence of materials, it takes time. The house is almost like a living organism constantly under transformation by the process of material accumulation, for it never ceases to “evolve”, whether unconsciously - by everyday activities like receiving mail and gifts, for example - or consciously - by the acquisition of pieces of furniture and

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decorative items, up to the extreme behavior of hoarders, excessive collectors who are not capable of throwing things away. As architecture theorist Edward Hollis (2016, p. 25) puts it, making a home “aren’t acts of building a building: they are acts of altering one”, it is “a continuous process of readjustment, as capricious, as changeable, as we are” (p. 46).

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This considerably romantic image of domestic interiors is in fact standard to me and still correspond to the first idea that comes to my mind when I think about a house. Nonetheless, it is not the reality that I encounter when I go home, for my own apartment has not been cultivated and filled over the years. The furniture and all kitchen utensils were already there when I arrived. Yes, I have been - unconsciously or even against my will - accumulating all kinds of things since I first

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moved in, but that was only a bit over one year ago. Therefore, most of the stuff that I own is less than a year old, and is probably not accompanying me when I move to another place - which is very likely to happen in the upcoming year, after I finish my studies and start looking for a job.

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Bearing it always in mind - the fact that I am only living in the space for a definite time -, all the effort that I put into making it “my” home is very limited. My house was therefore not cultivated, but rather inhabited “as found”. Not only do I share my personal space with objects that belong to someone else, but also all changes in the apartment must be communicated and agreed upon by the owner, which limits even more the degree in which I may appropriate the room.

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Hence, it is for me very clear that transience has a direct effect on how we relate to the domestic interior.

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Like me, many people live in the same condition of temporary occupation due to different reasons: as a chosen lifestyle, because of their work, to study... Uncertainty about the future also play an important role, as important shifts in the world in regards to the economy and the environment, as well as to our professions and relationships, are taking place in an increasing pace. If for my grandmother (and even for the generation of my parents), moving to a

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different neighborhood already seemed as quite a big change, for me it feels necessary to be prepared and to be able to quickly switch and move to another country or continent, without too many belongings to carry, if circumstances so require. In this case, renting a space that already has all the necessary inventory for my daily activities, where I can move in fast, looks much more appealing than starting and nurturing a home from scratch. Not to mention it being much less

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complicated when it is time to leave.

This contemporary condition of impermanence identified by Polish philosopher Zygmunt Bauman as the “liquid modernity” means to be in a constant in-between, temporary state. As Bauman (2000) puts it, “some of the world’s residents are on the move; for the rest it is the world itself that refuses to stand still”. Within this condition, from the perspective of an on-the-move resident, I

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do not see the domestic interior as it is traditionally looked at, as a container of material possessions that reflect one's personal taste and memories and that is, through time, subject to a fairly linear process of accumulation. Rather than a house for my collections, I cultivate a collection of different houses.

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In *Consuming Interiors*, pieces of furniture that are conventionally meant to store and accumulate material belongings, getting filled with time, turn into objects to be consumed and get used-up. By doing so, the interior remains a space in constant transformation as traditionally. This transformation, however, does not happen as customarily by the addition of new materials, but it rather develops by the slow subtraction of matter that takes place as these pieces of furniture get to be used. This process allows for every individual that inhabits the house to have a distinctive and singular encounter, while also promoting continuous change in the interior.

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Beautiful house in Santa Teresa
Rio is a million different pieces
of furniture in one: you can see it
changing as you make use of it! The
more you use it, the faster it will
transform!

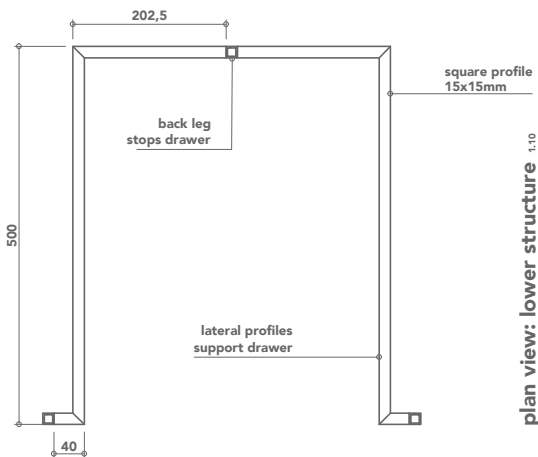
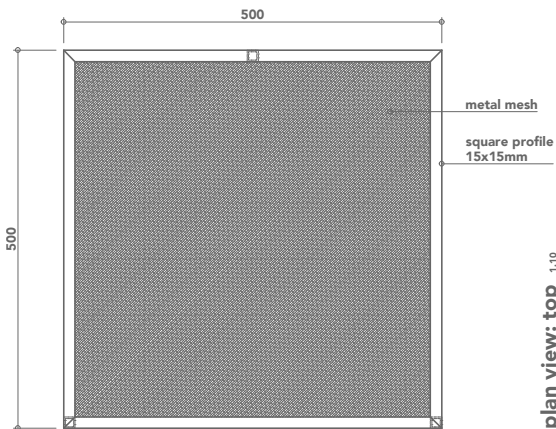


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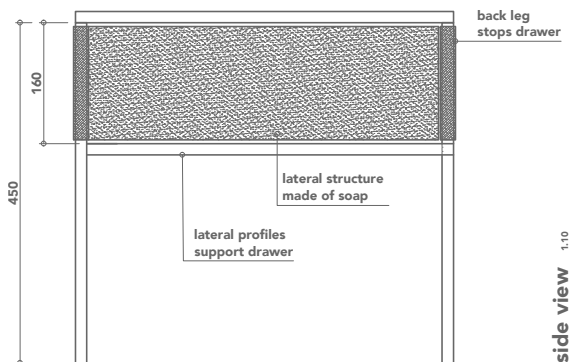
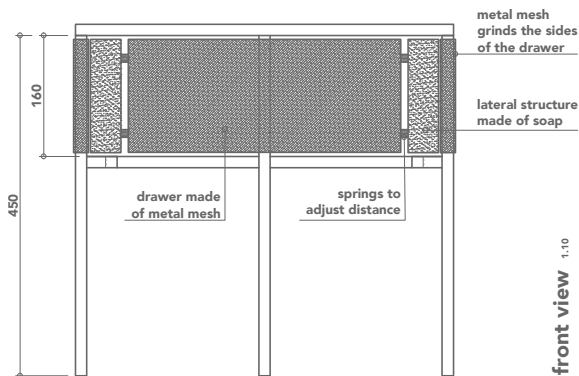
Airy looking and built with a minimum amount of material, this bedside drawer is perfect for keeping all your dearest belongings close to you as you sleep. As the drawer is opened and closed, you can see how it starts to get a new intriguing appearance.

Its particular scent highlights the transitory character of the changing patterns as it creates a memory that is immaterial but sensorial.

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The Art of Living.

Saul Steinberg (1949)

Image 2

Nevertheless, it is still really difficult to resist the charm of material objects, their touch and presence, and the desire to surround myself with them, claiming the surrounding territory as my own.

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object

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We occupy space not only with our bodies, but also with our objects. To place an object is to occupy territory. It can be as simple as placing a jacket on a chair as in to say: this is my place now. This territory, one that might or not belong to us, gets temporarily claimed, appropriated by filling the once available space. This is also probably why, when you forget something at a friends' house, they want to give it back to you as soon as possible. They don't want you to occupy their private

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space for longer than desired.

If, as Polish philosopher Zygmunt Bauman (2000) says, during early modernity “to conquer space was the supreme goal” and “territory was among the most acute of modern obsessions”, it makes sense to imagine the house then as a territory to be repeatedly conquered and the saturation of the domestic interior with personal belongings as a reiteration of ownership. By constantly filling up the space

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with all kinds of objects, as my grandparents used to do, they were reaffirming their place in the world, establishing a universe of their own. Modernist architects must have been aware of the impact of belongings in space, as I see their dislike for cluttered rooms as a manner to protect their immaculate design against appropriation by the residents.

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Things, objects - stuff - and its heavy physicality, however, do not match the lightness of a world in constant flux. Today, I need to stay mobile. I have to be able to move to a new country to follow a study that will give me more possibilities. I must stay open to changing location, if my job so requires. And God only knows how long it will take until the next economic crisis comes and I will need to move to a place in a better situation... Of course, it helps that things that once were material now

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can be simply stored digitally in your computer or in the cloud: pictures, songs and films, for example, but also most documents like bank extracts and tax reports (not to mention mails) were liberated from their attachment to physical space, for they no longer require a fixed address. Nevertheless, it is still really difficult to resist the charm of material objects, their touch and presence, and the desire to surround myself with them, claiming the surrounding territory as my

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own. I usually follow on the internet discussions of people about how to live minimalistic regarding your possessions to make life easier when packing and moving, but still it takes a lot of conscious effort. So, in the end, in fluid times, any belonging that is not easily portable becomes immediately discardable.

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A whole new market has emerged to cater to the needs of the so-called ‘on-the-move’ residents, as convenient solutions to the historically burdensome practice of moving goods: from Ikea’s cheap, flat-pack, modular and easy to assemble furniture, that is practically disposable, to the booming of short-term housing that comes fully-equipped. Aimed precisely at addressing and catering to the needs of the Ho-Bo or precarious creative class and the so called “ex-pat

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community”, these spaces offer, indeed, all the functional and a bare minimum of decorative objects that one would normally have at home. In that case, the house as a whole becomes discardable, an environment to be made use of whenever suitable and to be left behind when no longer needed.

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Instead of slowly conquering the space by gradually placing and displacing things in it, and therefore exerting power over the territory, while establishing a relationship of familiarity, as it generally occurs; the resident of a pret-a-habiter interior remains detached from the surrounding environment, for the objects that co-inhabit the space possess no particular meaning to him. They were already selected and placed beforehand, and they should remain as found when one

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leaves the house. These objects are therefore unable to create the same feeling of belonging in the dweller that a 'conquered' domestic space, one that was build over the course of time, would.

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Edward Hollis (2016) claims that making ourselves at home means intervening in the environment that surrounds us, in order to make it more suitable to our particular needs: “Home (...) is less attached to bricks and mortar, cushions and curtains, than to a sense that we deserve to belong in our surroundings, to shape them, to change them, and in doing so, to dwell in them”. I think he has a good point: in a survey that I have conducted with residents from the service

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platform titled Rotterdam to Stay, an organization that rents fully-furnished studios and apartments for students and young professionals in Rotterdam, 76% of the residents had replaced the original position of the existing furniture. In the lack of a personal attachment to the individual objects, one can create a sense of ownership by simply rearranging them and thus imposing a new order.

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I want, however, to propose a different way through which to re-establish the lost connection between inhabitant and interior. If dwelling no longer implies filling up space with material belongings, is it possible for the material that is there instead to react to use? An interior that, as occupied by its inhabitant, stays in constant flux, changing its appearance according to one's routines? And that, by being in continuous change, would also be able to remind the transient

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resident of the temporality of his
or hers occupation?

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Bright&Central, Friedrichshain
is the perfect kind of closet for those
short-stay guests!



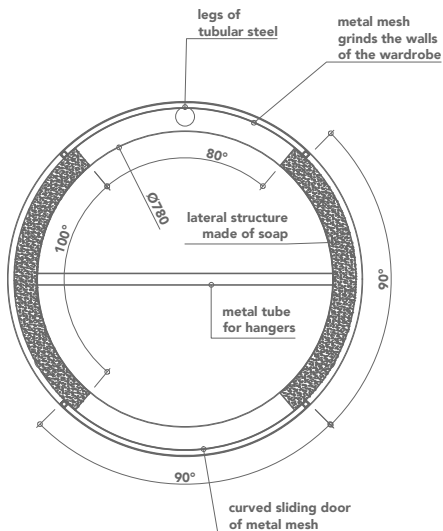
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With minimal interior space to hang your clothes, its shape allows it to be open from opposite sides by its sliding doors, imposing its presence in the space.

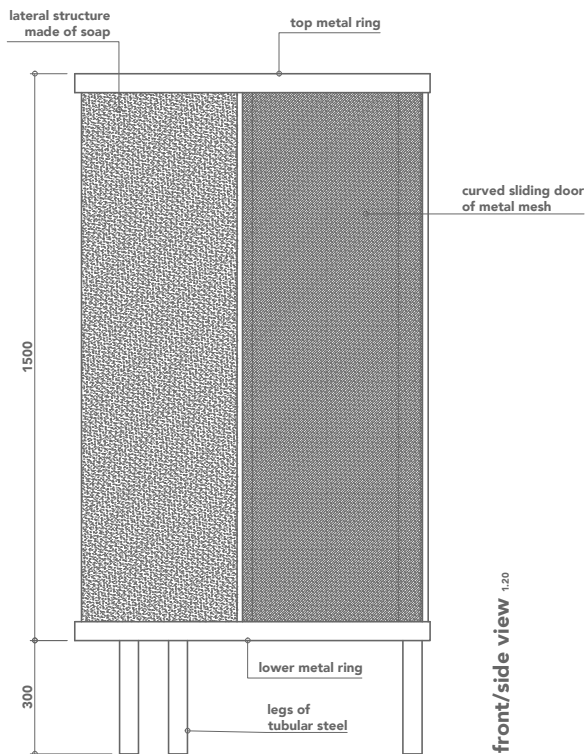
The opening of the doors generates a friction that slowly grinds the sides of the wardrobe, imprinting the activity of the user on the material. As a result you have an ever changing surface, making this closet a piece of furniture that interacts with the dweller.

Its open top and bottom also help to avoid the hoarding of any undesired matter, making it a great solution for temporary stays.

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Superpainting.

Madelon Vriesendorp (2008)

Image 3

Consistently personal belongings are said to express one's personality, sense of taste and private history, but the way how these articles are distributed in the space is just as important for the atmosphere of an interior as their simple presence.

CONSUMING INTERIORS

furniture

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CONSUMING INTERIORS

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CONSUMING INTERIORS A New Domestic Materiality

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Rotterdam 2017

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My research deals with, in a broader sense, the relationship between domestic interiors and personal objects in the face of increasing mobility and a possible consequence of dematerialization of the home. The house has traditionally been a longtime "companion", a container of our possessions, one that would get progressively filled, rearranged and be carefully cultivated over time. A mode of accelerated mobility contrasts with this stable constellation of homes that accompany people over their adult lives, transforming the domestic interior into a product ready for consumption. What happens when the domicile is no longer perduring, but becomes fleeting and addresses are changed - due to employment and travels - in ever shorter periods of time?

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The furniture collection - *Consuming Interiors* - proposes an alternative way in which the domestic interior could retain its material connection with the resident, by restoring the traditional quality of a space in constant transformation provoked by the inhabitant, in the face of contemporary mobility dynamics and short-term pret-a-habiter living spaces.

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When I think about my house, I find the degree to which interiors are customarily shaped by objects to be often underestimated. Consistently personal belongings are said to express one's personality, sense of taste and private history, but the way how these articles are distributed in the space is just as important for the atmosphere of an interior as their simple presence. As described by American architecture critic Sylvia Lavin (2014), "the interior is produced not by walls or

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other boundaries but by the order, array and number of objects within”. This is precisely the function performed by furniture. Depending on the nature and quantity of material goods one has at home, a number of particular pieces of furniture will be desired, while other types might be regarded unnecessary, and those eventually selected will in the end give shape and specific functions to rooms. Lavin (2014) continues: “even though ‘things’ do not at first appear

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to be architectural because they do not contribute directly to either the construction or the inhabitation of buildings, they set effects in motion that activate relations between bodies and objects in space, structure the perception of space, and alter patterns of circulation and use". As I see it, furniture is what makes the bridge from human-scale spaces into object-scale ones, creating the necessary platform for the interaction between the two.

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If I look into history and remember that the some of the very first pieces of furniture - chests can be dated back to the 15th century BC in Egypt - derived from the need to store objects, I can rather clearly identify the connection between things and the quality of interior spaces. In the great halls of the early medieval period, for example, chests were kept lined by the walls and would be brought up to the center of the room to be used as seats when it was time to

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eat, or be covered with blankets and be used to sleep (Seamster, 1980). The chest was thus the predecessor of some of the most ubiquitous furnishings of our time, such as chairs, cupboards and bookcases. It is also the existence of furniture that attributes specific functions to the rooms of a house, as sharply pointed by French writer Georges Perec (1997): “a bedroom is a room in which there’s a bed; a dining-room is a room in which there are a table and chairs” .

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Furthermore, how overtly possessions manifest themselves in the interior is likewise a question of choice of furniture, of deciding for display or concealment. When arranged at sight, objects influence the disposition and character of the space in a more straightforward manner; still even when tucked away things might dictate what happens in the room. It is certainly not very common for people to store clothes in the kitchen cabinet or cooking pans in the bedroom wardrobe. As

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Andy Warhol puts it, cupboards can make rooms feel deceptively empty: “I like the Japanese way of rolling everything up and locking it away in cupboards. But I wouldn’t even have the cupboards, because that’s hypocritical” (Warhol, 1977). Despite objects which are kept inside a piece of furniture become temporarily excluded from their immediate environment, their character still commands what will take place in the surrounding setting, whether we can see them or not.

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It gets even more “hypocritical” in the case of built-in closets, for example. In that case, the presence of the piece is to some degree veiled but still it exerts influence in the space, by determining fluxes and necessity of access.

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If, back in the Middle Age, chests would travel with their owners, and furniture therefore facilitate the relationship between humans and objects in the space, this is not the case anymore. We travel more often, and the amount of time one spent travelling has shrunk. In order to move that fast, we do not take our furniture with us, for even the inherent movable characteristic of these furnishings could not keep up with the extremely accelerated pace. In this case, we usually

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resort to interiors that are already furnished, pret-a-habiter: simply a hotel room, an apartment booked via AirBnb, a short-term rental, and so on... Originally meant as temporary accommodation, the model of ready-to-live homes is in frank expansion, either as a new section of the 'sharing economy' (Stott, 2016) or as a convenient solution for people who do not want to settle permanently (O'Brien, 2016), due to the uncertainties of liquid modern times (Bauman, 2000), which is

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my case. I currently study and therefore live in Rotterdam, but who knows where I will be in one year from now, after I have acquired my degree? The answer might depend on a combination of different factors, such as an employment offer, my personal connections, my family's health, my legal status as resident and so on. Consequently, I need to keep my options open, be flexible and remain mobile, which also means to have fewer possessions (as carrying as little as possible makes moving

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uncomplicated and cheaper) and so, to choose for “access over ownership”. The motto of the so-called ‘sharing economy’, “access over ownership” is a consumption model based on the idea that you can pay less for the momentary use of a good rather than permanently acquiring this good for a higher price and having the (so-considered) drawback of having to select, assemble and maintain it.

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What I can see now is that, by doing so, we subvert the logic that furniture is there to accommodate our objects and to ease our interaction with them. 'Furniture follows things' turns into 'things fit into furniture'. Suddenly, our possessions and performances must adapt to the available affordances of the space, originally intended to fit either someone else's belongings and needs or the ones of a generic, anonymous subject. And then, probably, the display or concealment of a certain

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object will not be a matter of choice, but simply a coincidence, because it was the only place it fitted. In this mode of temporary residence, the dweller gets therefore disconnected from the domestic space, for the interior is no longer reactive to human inhabitation, and to individual preferences. A room can be someone's home for a few weeks, months or years, period after which it will be occupied by someone else; still will the interior remain exactly the same, regardless of the personalities

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that have lived in there as well as despite the passage of time. However, because the situation is faced as a transitory condition, as a house with expiration date, it is in some way accepted, tolerated.

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From this perspective, contemporary furniture fails to serve us as well as medieval furniture did back then, as a facilitator and mediator of how people and objects occupy space. While these appliances are used to provide functions to a space, we still use kinds of furnishings that care more for permanence and accumulation, rather than for fluidity and parsimony, as transient residents have less and less material possessions. Is it possible to conceive something that, rather than remaining

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inert and resistant to change, is able to react to the dwellers and their belongings? An interior in continuous transformation, so that every temporary resident would experience a particular space - as generally expected in any domestic interior?

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In *Consuming Interiors*, pieces of furniture that are conventionally meant to store and accumulate material belongings, getting filled with time, turn into objects to be consumed and get used-up. By doing so, the interior remains a space in constant transformation as traditionally. This transformation, however, does not happen as customarily by the addition of new materials, but it rather develops by the slow subtraction of matter that takes place as these pieces of furniture get to be used. This process allows for every individual that inhabits the house to have a distinctive and singular encounter, while also promoting continuous change in the interior.

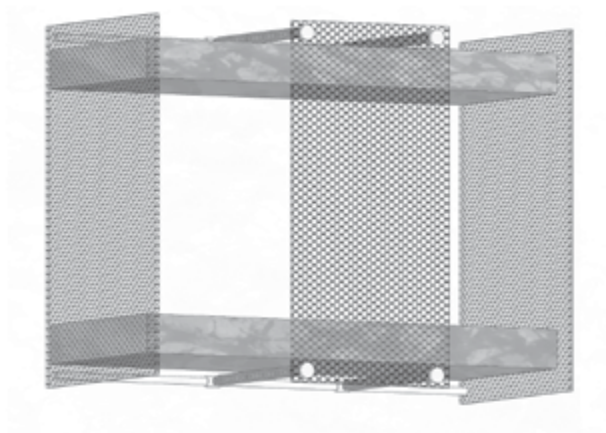
CONSUMING INTERIORS

Montmartre Paris 2 rooms 2-3

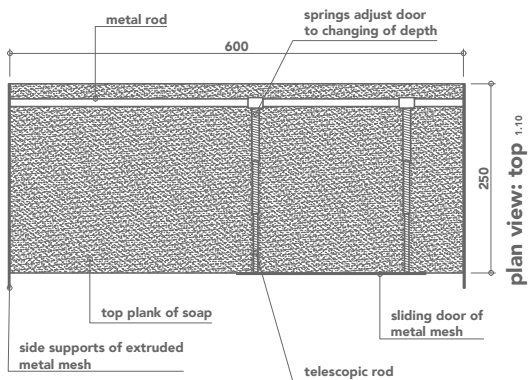
Pers is an extremely versatile piece of furniture. Whether set on the floor, in the living room, or hanging on the wall of a bedroom, this shelf unit is the perfect item to lift your space to another level.

Its single sliding door creates spots with different degrees of visibility, making it ideal for placing both the objects that you want to show as well as the ones you want to conceal. By playing with the position of the door, the shelf unit acquires always a new look, as its surface is continuously scraped.

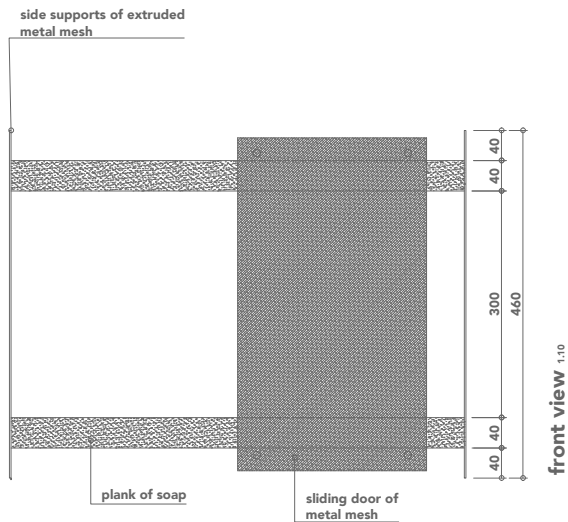
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An Alternative Timeline of Furniture.

Maria Fernanda Duarte (2017)

Image 3

If, back in the Middle Age, chests would travel with their owners, and furniture therefore facilitate the relationship between humans and objects in the space, this is not the case anymore.

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room

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Following the commodification of the domestic sphere arguably initiated with AirBnb, I can now easily choose online where to live from a wide catalog of interiors pret-a-habiter. Ready-to-live spaces, with all the necessary inventory to perform everyday household activities for a monthly fee, are becoming a new domestic paradigm made possible thanks to the sharing economy - to be able to make use of something, without all the hassle of having to prepare it beforehand and

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taking care of it later.

Especially as a convenient solution to the burdensome practice of moving stuff, furniture and all other belongings, pret-a-habiter interiors are the concept of access over ownership taken to its maximum. It would certainly cost me more effort to rent an apartment the traditional way: look for advertisements in newspapers, go for seeings, signing a two-year contract, and in the end, I would still only have simply empty rooms.

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At least, then, I could start planning transport for all the other goods... But really, an apartment that is ready to live one can find online, from any distance - and it will be ready for you when you arrive.

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I must warn you, however, that even though these places might resemble the classical domestic interiors depicted on Romanian-American artist Saul Steinberg's *Art of Living* (1949) and they would seem to fit the description by French writer Georges Perec (1997) as a “space overfilled with my possessions”, this feeling is elusive. The physical dimension of these spaces operates but as a virtual space, a secondary but indispensable environment for subjects to perform their

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(mostly electronic) lives. Still representing an image of a home, these rooms are set as a stage, for imagined occupants who are expected to perform certain patterns of behavior and inhabitation, instead of a direct reflection of their inhabitant's personality. So you get a big screen TV in the living room, even though you actually prefer watching it in bed, and the rectangular table attached to the wall is really disturbing when playing cards with your friends. If customarily domestic interiors

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are the result of a process of inhabitation and sedimentation, are cultivated and carefully built up through time; here these settings are pre-produced to be already complete and used as-found for a certain limited time. And in the same way, to be left behind - ideally untouched - when the contract expires, so that the next resident can immediately occupy it.

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Browsing through different catalogues of spaces for short-term rent, I frequently come across arrangements which are the materialization of certain thematic styles that might either represent specificities of the place where it is located or the kind of lifestyle that the space is supposed to impersonate. Just like in historical period rooms, in this case the domestic ambience is forged by the curated presence of objects that simulate a personalized space, but that

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at the same time discourage further personalization. At Roam Coliving, for example, rentable rooms are deliberately not equipped with closets to “remind residents that they are no longer permanently tied to a space” (Stott, 2016). They are, however, populated with different kinds of objects, including decorative items that at first sight do not perform any necessary function, like vases, frames on the walls and plants. These objects are part of a static composition, one

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that residents are expected to passively make use, consuming it as if they would be watching a movie, without the possibility to interact with or intervene in it.

Another possibility, more commonly popular among offers for longer residents, is the “template” interior: an interior that is presented as “complete” and ready to live but is in fact an archetype or a skeleton. It’s a hyper generic space that presents itself empty as prepared to host the inhabitant and its belongings, planned according

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to the standard way of living for the average human, and following all conventions of what one should have at home, like coffee tables and shelves, but that is actually unable to adjust to people's individual necessities. What is common within both models, however, is that the most striking character of the house as an eternal work-in process, as the creation of its residents, is ignored and even unwanted. Here, there is no room for one to create one's universe, rather he or she needs

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to fit into a certain structure,
and not make any modifications
in the process.

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However, if objects are really capable of tying people to a specific place, acting as a connecting tissue between people and interior spaces, through the image they recall or recreate, here the image becomes the object to be collected.

By means of digital pictures, which are easily transportable whenever I have to move, I can appropriate the objects that surround me when living in a ready-to-inhabit space. I can 'collect' them by taking pictures and sharing online. And then,

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when I get bored, I just have to start browsing for the next destination.

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It feels like Andy Warhol's 15 minutes of fame applied to the home: why commit to one single house when you can always experience a new way of living? On the online catalog, the options of location and style are virtually endless, which allows me to switch from a romantic studio in Paris to an industrial loft in New York with some clicks of the mouse, without the need to settle for a specific one. I start collecting virtual houses: virtual not because displayed

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on the internet, but because they represent images of houses, ‘made to appear’ domestic environments that ‘belong’ to no one. But how to be able to fully accomplish it, if not by avoiding attachment to any definite place? Warhol says that “everything in your closet should have an expiration date and once it passes, you should throw it away” (Warhol, 1977). In a mode where everything gets to be easily commodified, things also get easily discardable and replaceable.

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The way I see it, these new domestic models are the reflex of a liquid modernity and, as “fluids do not keep to any shape for long and are constantly ready (and prone) to change it; (...) for them it is the flow of time that counts, more than the space they happen to occupy: that space, after all, they fill but ‘for a moment’” (Bauman, 2000). In this world in constant flux, can we maybe stop thinking about the interior as a static recipient for these liquids and start looking at it as something that is also

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reactive and prone to change?

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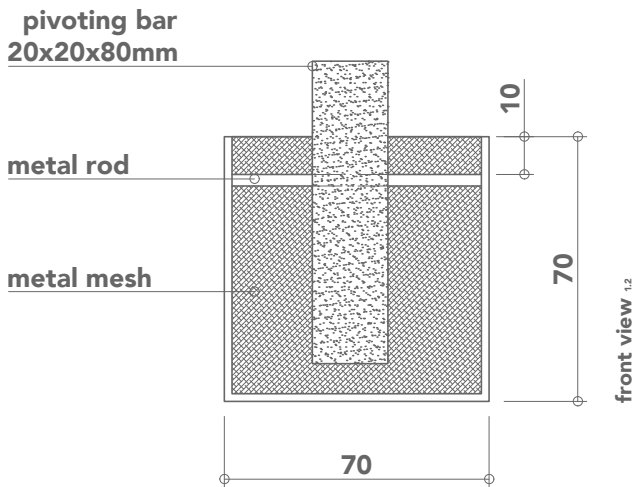
Romantic central apartment on canal is a unique piece for your wall. This coat hook, with its discreet but convenient presence, adds personality to any space.

Composed by a metal structure and a body made of soap, this small accessory will leave a pleasant and remarkable aroma on any item you hang in it. These items will also imprint their mark on the hook, for every use provokes a small tear on the soap, as it touches the metal structure to support the weight of the object one places on it.

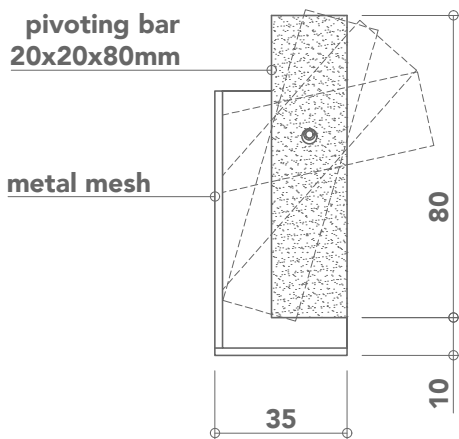
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Without Cabinet.

Helmut Smits (2003)

Image 5

Following the principles of digital cloud storage, self-storage generates volumes of space whose function is completely disconnected from its content and owner.

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city

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CONSUMING INTERIORS

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CONSUMING INTERIORS A New Domestic Materiality

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My research deals with, in a broader sense, the relationship between domestic interiors and personal objects in the face of increasing mobility and a possible consequence of dematerialization of the home. The house has traditionally been a longtime "companion", a container of our possessions, one that would get progressively filled, rearranged and be carefully cultivated over time. A mode of accelerated mobility contrasts with this stable constellation of homes that accompany people over their adult lives, transforming the domestic interior into a product ready for consumption. What happens when the domicile is no longer perduring, but becomes fleeting and addresses are changed - due to employment and travels - in ever shorter periods of time?

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The furniture collection - *Consuming Interiors* - proposes an alternative way in which the domestic interior could retain its material connection with the resident, by restoring the traditional quality of a space in constant transformation provoked by the inhabitant, in the face of contemporary mobility dynamics and short-term pret-a-habiter living spaces.

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In the last months, a new kind of space dedicated exclusively to storage has received some attention from urbanism and architecture critics - examples of publications that have addressed the subject are Harvard Design Magazine and Volume. Still destined to the safe-keeping of personal belongings, these environments are, however, not remotely comparable to a domestic space. I wonder what French writer Georges Perec (1996) - who once described his house as the place

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where he kept his possessions -
would find of this recent trend.

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Self-storage - defined by Google as “a system whereby individuals rent containers or units of space within a large warehouse to store possessions” and referred to by Nick Axel (2016) as “cloud urbanism” - allows you to save extra stuff without the need to give away physical space within the domestic sphere, on the opposite trend of keeping belongings to a minimum (Axel, 2016), or maybe exactly as a reaction to that. For people who - like me - need to stay mobile, it can be rented

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as a cheaper solution to store belongings while you are free to move around. In the meantime, you can live in different cities, rent fully-furnished apartment and be surrounded by other objects, that will be useful and necessary, but will not fundamentally have a particular meaning for you. It can also be faced as a market solution for the combination between overconsumption and shrinking houses (Kalliala, 2016). The way I see it, it is a striking evidence of how the domestic interior

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is becoming increasingly dematerialized.

Following the principles of digital cloud storage, self-storage generates volumes of space whose function is completely disconnected from its content and owner. If objects were once responsible for determining the disposition and use of the space, as I argue in *Furniture*, here they become merely a mass filling up rooms. For it makes no difference what fills the storage unit.

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Built to satisfy people's needs for material possessions in a world where the physical increasingly loses space to the digital, where simply having items listed on a screen is satisfying enough, self-storage facilities reiterate the increasingly disconnection between interiors and their inhabitants. It creates a physical space for virtual storage, for the objects which I do not need close to me, but that I like to know that I own. While we are able to shove away things,

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which are difficult to throw away, but that we do not want in our surrounding, we lose the traditional connection we have with our house as a place of memory, identity expression and personal history, as a cultivated interior that develops through time. One's objects are no longer co-inhabitants - and therefore co-creators - of one's environment, but rather detached things to be used when needed and to be sent away when not.

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One could argue that these storage spaces are not far from the modern version of basements, a hidden place where unwanted things can be kept out of sight. But basements for me have a much more important role: they function like an opposite, parallel world in the house, where one, as a child, can build a hideaway or spend an afternoon looking for treasures. Directly connected to the life of the house, objects found in the basement are a reflex of the history of its residents and

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translate the memory of the family.

When all unnecessary objects are removed from the domestic space into self-storage facilities in remote places, what will happen to the relationship between occupant and interior? Will it make any difference who lives where? As I see it, self-storage spaces are a manifestation of how the physical environment is increasingly losing relevance. As long as digital profiles

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broadcast personalities and screens provide me with the images and memories that I crave, the tangible is suddenly not that important anymore. Why surround me with objects that might have some meaning but without a proper function, if they can be transformed into digital images and stored online, accessible from any available screen?

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This way, by simply taking a picture, I ‘acquire’ new belongings, such as that gorgeous AirBnb apartment where I stayed last time I was in London.

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In *Consuming Interiors*, pieces of furniture that are conventionally meant to store and accumulate material belongings, getting filled with time, turn into objects to be consumed and get used-up. By doing so, the interior remains a space in constant transformation as traditionally. This transformation, however, does not happen as customarily by the addition of new materials, but it rather develops by the slow subtraction of matter that takes place as these pieces of furniture get to be used. This process allows for every individual that inhabits the house to have a distinctive and singular encounter, while also promoting continuous change in the interior.

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***3000 SQ FT DAZZLING
SHOREDITCH LOFT, BEST LOCATION*** is
a desk with a twist.

Made almost entirely out of metal, this *escritoire* allows you to keep your favorite equipment and writings safe when not in use, while the enclosing grid makes sure that your belongings are always at sight.

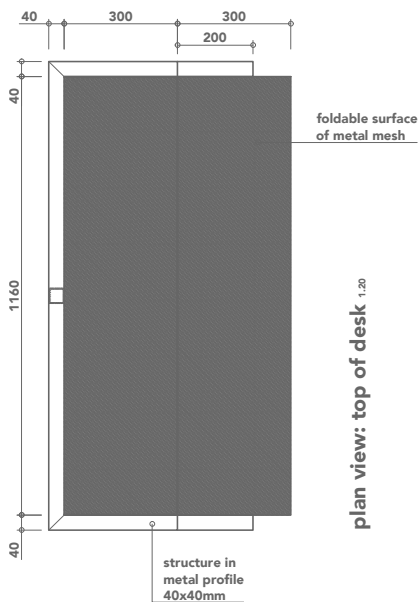
As you open and close the folding top, the innovative material of the curved back surface changes its appearance, showing always a different new pattern, just for you!

Don't forget to take pictures so you can collect and store them all!

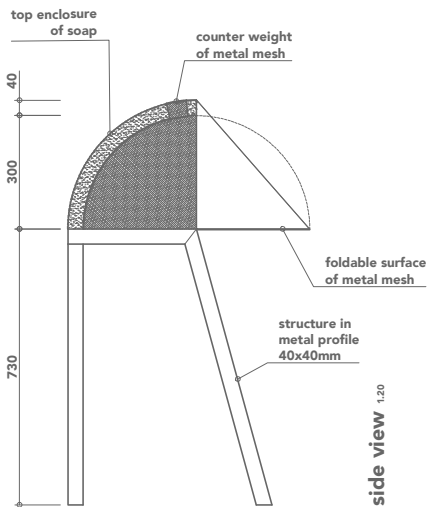
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Afterword

During the five chapters of this thesis, I have analyzed the kind of influence that personal belongings have in the domestic interior, considering different spatial scales: whether as a materialization of the passage of time, as a physical manifestation of personality and demarcation of territory, or determining uses and spatial dynamics. This analysis used as a background the specific reality of what I have called ‘pret-a-

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habiter' spaces or commodified interiors, rooms in which the presence of personal objects is kept to a minimum as they are advertised and rented including pre-selected functional and decorative items. Within this reality, the need for mobility is a key factor that demands minimal and portable personal goods, while the rest remains discardable, including the house itself, or kept in self-storage spaces.

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In this framework, the customarily intimate relationship between inhabitant and domestic interior, - traditionally established by the material presence of personal belongings and supported by the pieces of furniture that accommodate them -, gives place to a passive consumption of images of houses, chosen from the virtually infinite options available on online catalogues. Cyberspace of instant communication that both generate and support the

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urge for mobility, the electronic environment has managed to eclipse the physical one: my digital connections, data and profiles are thus of higher importance than the matter that surrounds me. And for me, self-storage spaces are clear evidence of how more and more the logics of the internet dominates the physical territory.

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With the furniture collection *Consuming Interiors*, I propose an alternative way in which to restore the disappearing connection between resident and domestic space - habitually constructed with the co-presence of matter - by introducing a collection of interactive pieces of storage furniture. In this collection, rather than the amount and nature of the material objects that are placed in it, what is important is the manipulation exerted by the user. The acts of

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opening and closing drawers, sliding doors and hanging objects have visible effect on the surfaces of these items, while consuming the material. If, as argued by Hollis (2016) and confirmed with my survey at Rotterdam to Stay, the act of transforming a space creates a sense of homeness and ownership, the constant metamorphosis of the interior is an attempt for recreating a bond between user and space—, disappearing in face of - what I see as - an increasing

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commodification of the
domestic space.

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