



Jordan Derrien

Windows as Spaces of Density

There is a building in the Bwari Pottery Village in Nigeria where its unglazed windows are in the shape of arrows pointing up. Ever since I saw a picture of it last year, I couldn't stop obsessing over it, trying to decipher why the common rectangular or square shape has been replaced, what are they pointing towards, what might they reference. Looking at the building from the outside, the arrowed windows immediately make one look up, directing the gaze to the palm thatch roof. Looking at them from the inside of the building, they point to the sky, making one come closer to it, deciding on the direction of what the eyes should be looking at.

Does the shape of the window encourage a moment of reflection as we look up at the sky; an antidote to the life we see on eye level? Or maybe it is inviting a moment of fantasy, a world we can make up, drifting away from current affairs into an imagined reality?

That moment of imagination that looking through a window can offer can be also found in the construction of Alain Robbe-Grillet's novel *La Jalousie* (1957). The secret narrator, who never reveals himself, is obsessively watching the encounters of his wife – only known as A... – with their neighbour Franck, through a window in his house. The narrator's repetitive observations leave the reader confused between what has actually happened and what is the result of the narrator's fantasy, blurring smoothly the lines between reality, fiction, interior and exterior.

In *La Jalousie* a window becomes something other than an architectural element – a portal to fantasy, frustration, love and jealousy. It's a space that allows another reality to form, one that is constructed by emotions, it's an active space rather than a surface, obstructing and enabling at the same time, as the structure is also limiting.

Derrien's interest in the work of Alain Robbe-Grillet enabled the artist to borrow forms and behaviours found in *La Jalousie* that have shaped the new body of work. Windows have the potential to be framing devices that dictate what we see and how we see it, carefully arranged in buildings that shape both the exterior and interior and by extension – points of views and experiences. In that they are not dissimilar to paintings or drawings, where figurative or abstract elements are arranged in a certain way that allows us to interpret them in a variety of ways and make space for our thoughts and emotions to influence the reading.

In his attempt to make a portrait of the mysterious A..., the depicted character doesn't offer a coherent image, but rather opens more possibilities of looking at it. The collaged drawings that contain only fragments of information resemble almost a visual investigative board – a mystery that is yet to be solved. Another exercise where imagination is key. Do you look to the inside of the letter A or to the seemingly empty space that surrounds it? Is there only one way to write A? One way to read A...?

In 1992 James Turrell made a work titled *Space That Sees*, which is permanently installed at The Israel Museum in Jerusalem. It is one of the works in his *Skyspace* series, where the visitor is invited to spend time in an empty space and look up through a rectangular or circular hole in the ceiling at the constantly changing sky and light. This performative piece ensures that each time the experience of being there is different, as the title suggests the space is an active participant in the viewing, allowing a different choreography of natural elements that alters the surrounding space. In here, the 'viewer' is an element that is seen by the space. The hole in the ceiling becomes an entity in itself, more than a connector of the inside to the outside.

In his recent body of work showed across two exhibitions – *Bushels of Goodness and Warmth* at V.O Curations in London (2022) and *Wonderfulness/dogma/sash/both* at Les Bains-Douches in Alençon (2023) – Jordan Derrien continues the exploration of spaces that contain or confine. In both cases the works have also directly responded to the spaces where they are installed – building up on the existing architectural elements. Artworks and windows in the gallery are in dialogue with one another, with the hierarchy between them bent. In this sense, the space is also activated through the works that turn it inside out.

Natalia Grabowska