

## Home is a belief

In earlier times a home within which proper rituals were kept and within which household spirits were honoured with prayer or devotion, would not just thrive but would prosper. This was because the home was linked into a wider belief system, it was part of a matrix of universal interconnectedness; be this a Greek, Roman, Sumerian, Celtic or earlier animist traditions. These ancient traditions are of course now regarded as being unscientific. Modern societies it is argued, no longer need to refer to or use the archaic rituals that used to be central to day-to-day domestic existence. However when I was making work in relation to household conversations, it was apparent that a vitalist or animist set of beliefs were still being used in order to negotiate domestic life. In particular the world of children's play clearly opened doors into ways of thinking about household objects and interiors in a way that tapped into systems of sympathetic magic that have long been thought of as being no longer part of our daily lives, but which in reality are clearly still not just present, but very central to the ways in which we come to terms with reality.

The artist Garry Barker has been having conversations and making drawn responses to what he regards as animist modes of thinking; types of behaviour he has found in a wide range of situations, from people inhabiting what are seen as stable, middle class English homes and the associated objects and furniture that these homes are traditionally associated with, to people that have been totally dispossessed of all their worldly goods and who have had to seek new homes in often strange new environments. He uses conversations made alongside the making of 'objective' drawings in order to come to some sort of 'understanding' of what is happening, conversations that then inform the direction in which he takes the drawings he makes. The resulting images are also used as narrative interjections back into the conversations held and they are then used to help formulate what could be described as imagery for secular myths.

People build relationships with objects, either because of a physically close relationship and or because in their imaginations, certain things begin to hold great significance, even if as yet they have no real physical contact with the thing they have imagined. In both cases people can develop deep emotional attachments to objects that can help them channel animist concepts of security and safety, or threat and insecurity. Some of these ideas relate to the myths of having a home and others are associated with the myths of finding a home. In both cases 'feeling' is central to how individuals understand or find meaning in these situations.

Central to animist belief is the idea that objects can mediate between individuals and the wider world, the house and its contents for example, can be used as an externalised mind that reflects the belief systems of those that occupy it. Those that are seeking refuge, often have ideas of the types of places within which they would like to find themselves, these imaginary places are also in many ways structures that reflect the belief systems that people have. They become rather like imaginary memory theatres, spaces within which to project a continually growing and reforming set of concepts about the world.

The material turn in theoretical debate has to some extent eroded 'the boundaries or distinctions between bodies, objects and contexts' (Coole and Frost, 16) this encourages an artist to poetically inflect the complex interconnectivity between allegorical thought, theology, history, sociology and anthropology. In particular the social system called 'home' can be represented to reflect an interconnectedness into

a host of other surrounding complex, self-organising processes. The, what has been called by Coole and Frost, 'naively representational' approach being used to present the poetry of these interconnected experiences as a valid form of understanding. Various connections establish an enmeshed tangle of relationships between various entities that indicate something more than objects having separate existences. A room in a Leeds house, is embedded into the wider world, and it is a focus around which drawings are used to reflect upon a complexity that can appear to be at times magical. A small space in a sinking boat at sea, requires by contrast a sharp focus that in an experienter's memories long after the event, now reminds them of the physical reality of geobiological interdependency and the continuing relationship of that experience to what they now think of as 'home'. Both these relationships it is argued are experienced and embodied within us as a form of animist thinking.

The Romans believed that spirits inhabited their kitchens. They protected food and in many ways inhabited or became embedded into the foodstuffs that a family ate. The fridge/freezer is seen in the artist's images as a modern day object that is also a spiritual inhabitant of the kitchen, it is a go between. The Lares Familiares and Domestici, (spirits of the family and home) are also discovered to still exist, for instance a plastic duck doubles as a clothes brush and as a reminder of a long dead mother, a polished shell case channels a memory of a grandfather soldier. Umbrae (shades) are still present in contemporary homes, ghosts of the past relay information to present inhabitants.

For those that have found new homes their old ones still exist as ghosts, the trauma of passage and the disappointment of arrival, informing allegorical visions of a present reality. The solid walls of a block of flats, eroded away in someone's mind, until they are seen as thin shells surrounding a spiritual emptiness, not as a comforting home.

In this presentation, two sets of drawings are compared, one of interiors of a terraced house occupied by a young family and another set made in response to conversations with refugee families now living in temporary accommodation in a repurposed high-rise block of flats. In both cases drawing is used to reveal narratives that can emerge from human/object relationships and two different world views are articulated, but revealed as being as much to do with fiction as reality.

#### Reference

Coole, D. and Frost, S. (2010) *Introducing the New Materialisms* New Materialisms, Ontology, Agency and Politics pp.1-43. London: Duke University Press

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