

## **Self Storage: A Contemporary Archaeology of Domestic Interiority**

Emma Filippides

New London Architecture  
United Kingdom

### **Abstract**

*This architectural historical study aims to interrogate rituals of contemporary inhabitation in the United Kingdom by tracing the rise of the self storage facility. While the proliferation of domestic self storage in the UK is derived from a web of correlations, this research considers self storage as a lens through which the subjective experience of inhabiting the neoliberal city, may be understood. Drawing from archaeological methods to conduct a material study of the contents of abandoned storage units, this study engages specifically with self storage as a long-term solution to domestic storage inadequacies. The material and theoretical engagements of this research raise three interpretations of the architecture of self storage and the material contents kept within, as situated in relation to domestic interiority. Pertaining respectively to excessive accumulation, intergenerational transference and emotional deferral, this research seeks to understand the span of motivations behind the depositing of domestic contents to self storage, thus exploring the psychic relationships inhabitants construct in response to this extended spatiality of the home's contents. Articulating a meeting point between the economic and the existential, this research presents modern forms of self storage as a deeply metaphorical spatial phenomenon which is able to produce a reading of contemporary patterns in an urban and suburban dwelling.*

*Keywords: self storage, domestic interior, economics, contemporary archaeology, eBay*

## Introduction

The self storage unit is a volume of rentable space external to the domestic realm, situated within a purpose-built or adapted-use facility which is used exclusively for short to long-term storage of private belongings. Rented month-to-month and accessible on a twenty-four-hour basis, the self storage unit is secured by the lock and key of a paying customer. Typically situated on the industrial outskirts of towns or cities in purpose-built steel warehouse buildings, the typology of the self storage facility can appear innocuous in the urban landscape. In locations where space is a prized commodity, facilities are covertly situated in repurposed industrial buildings and underground car parks. In examining the architecture of this obscured and uninhabitable location for the domestic contents of a home, contemporary storage practices are able to be explored at a material level.

Modern forms of self storage originated in the United States during the 1960s. This format of warehouse-style domestic self storage was eventually brought to the United Kingdom in the early 1980s. In the intervening years, the industry has proliferated steadily, fuelled by the growth of multi-site operators. Significantly, as of 2018, the United Kingdom has come to hold 48 percent of Europe's self storage market (Self Storage Association UK, 2018). As such, this study draws from the context of the United Kingdom—and the pressured spatial conditions pertaining to London, specifically—in the construction of its arguments.

To date, architectural history has not dealt with domestic storage from the perspective of the privately rented, externalised unit of domestic storage space—though the format pervades globally. Perhaps due to the fact that the direct and reflexive relationship between self storage and the domestic interior has not previously been recognised within the context of academic disciplines, no such study presently exists in any semblance of detail.

In examining the floor plan for Urban Locker (Figure 1), a self storage facility near Old Street, London, the vast density of occupation within these sites is revealed. Hundreds of individual storage units are lined up side by side, forming tight corridors within the converted car park. The units are variably sized to accommodate a breadth of individual needs with offerings of space between ten square feet (equivalent in size to a car boot) to over 300 square feet (equivalent in size to a single car garage, suitable for storing the contents of a two-bedroom home), filling all available area on the site (Urban Locker, 2018).

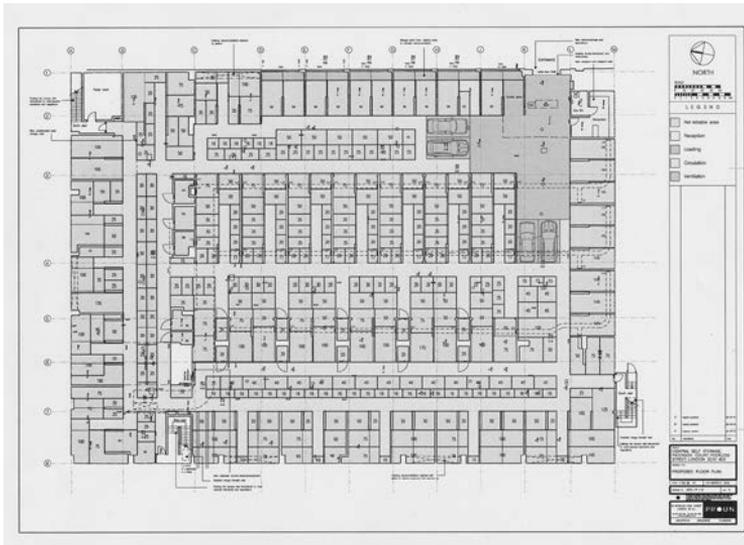


Figure 1  
Plan of Urban  
Locker self  
storage (Islington  
Planning  
Division, 2012)

As an industry, self storage is built upon the commodification of life's major punctuations. The 2017 annual report from the Federation of European Self Storage Associations (FEDESSA) makes clear the relationship of self storage to both economic and emotional framings, referring explicitly to the so-called "four Ds"—divorce, debt, downsizing and death—as transitional life occurrences which generate demand for the industry (FEDESSA, 2017, p. 13).

In weighing up the economics with the interior experience of contemporary living, this research interprets the phenomenon of self storage as a rational, spatial solution to questions which fundamentally pertain to an inhabitant's inner life: one's memories, histories, fantasies. By approaching the domestic interior through its overspill into self storage, this paper brings to light revealing negotiations between inner life and external demands. In doing so, each of the three sections of this paper will identify a motivation at the root of self storage rental: excessive accumulation, intergenerational transference and emotional deferral, respectively. Articulating a meeting point between the quantitative and the psychic, it is through each of the three motivations that the externalised experience of the architecture and contents of self storage, can be examined.

### Introduction to a Contemporary Archaeological Methodology

To discuss the material embodiment of identity in relation to the architecture and contents of self storage, this research draws

upon the identification of an 'archaeology of now' as a tool for understanding how abandoned self storage contents are situated within the contemporary culture. The alienated intimacy of the contemporary archaeological approach is key in this interrogation of material and architectural findings understood alongside the support of other more statistical and anthropological forms of knowledge.

This approach is particularly influenced by methods employed by anthropologists Victor Buchli and Gavin Lucas in their experimental 1997 study, *The Archaeology of Alienation: A Late Twentieth-Century British Council House*. Buchli and Lucas' study addresses the remnants of a British council house, recently and abruptly abandoned by a young single mother and her children. Though the study interrogates the absent family's practices of inhabitation, the conclusions that are drawn from the house, its remains and its societal context are gleaned solely from the evidence of material culture left behind. To compensate for absent subjects, a combination of secondary sources of contextual information are incorporated into the study where the archaeological method reaches its limits. The study undertaken by Buchli and Lucas makes evident both the degree of material complexity and the threshold of limitation posed by a contemporary archaeological methodology.

A similar such opportunity for material research is presented in the online phenomenon of the publicly accessible eBay auction of abandoned self storage contents.<sup>1</sup> In cases where a self storage customer fails to pay rent or vacate their unit, the contents of a storage unit are rendered abandoned. A selection of what are presumed to be the most valuable residual contents are photographed and described in vague approximations of detail by the employees of the self storage facility. Within the constraints of the eBay format, no more than twelve photographs will be used to convey the contents. The authenticity, quality, and functionality of the contents is to be taken at face value by potential buyers, and payment for the purchased contents is to be made upon arrival at the facility, within a week of winning the auction. The payment of a deposit is often required upon arrival to ensure the clearance of the unit. Once all items are cleared, the facility is once again able to rent the vacant unit afresh.

Contemporary archaeology is undertaken as a primary tool for this study of abandoned self storage units, hastily documented for sale on eBay by the employees at the storage facility. In this detached form of material interrogation—which manifests in observational,

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<sup>1</sup> A search for 'abandoned storage' on eBay.co.uk will reveal the breadth of abandoned storage contents up for auction across the UK.

speculative writing which prefaces each section—an encounter with an eBay listing of self storage contents is articulated. Due to the fragmentary nature of this method, interpretations of material findings are taken largely at face value, in the absence of the subject to whom the contents belonged.

### Excessive Accumulation: "To 'Self Store' Means to Leave Traces"

*25 square feet*

*Black bin bags, tubs, suitcases and boxes brim with things. A man's things? A woman's things? Children's things? Some contents are typologically discriminated by their container. A collection of high heeled shoes, sandals and boots fill two bin bags, a suitcase, and a red tub. A selection of eight formal dresses are sorted together, eight pairs of trousers, a skirt, a sweatshirt. Fourteen handbags of various styles, sheens, sizes; synthetic and natural materials. Children's books. Sports equipment. Two sets of hair straighteners, plastic cords wound around the flat irons.*

*Sold after 19 bids for £73.02. Contents valued at £2.92 per square foot.*



Mouse over image to zoom



Figure 2  
Image of  
online listing  
– excessive  
accumulation  
(eBay)

The self storage facility offers a commodified unit of rentable space—as much a site for, as it is an object of, domestic consumption. The contents of self storage could fairly be interpreted as a material manifestation of these modern patterns of over-consumption. In exploring examples of excessive accumulation, it becomes apparent that self storage can be read as the site of overflow for the consumerist practices related to commodified inhabitation.

Teasing out the notion of ‘commodity fetish’ in capitalist culture, Walter Benjamin’s essay *Paris, Capital of the Nineteenth Century*, frames the sticky associations between identity, rootedness and consumption within the domestic interior (Benjamin, 2002). Benjamin engages with the concept of domestic ‘traces’, which can be helpfully employed in understanding the relationship between capitalist modes of consumption and identity, as expressed materially within the domestic interior. In the bourgeois interior of the nineteenth century, Benjamin observes the advent of an intricately defined and distinguished place of dwelling, produced in opposition to the capitalist efficiency demanded by the male space of production. In this opposition, Benjamin recognises the role of the interior in sustaining inhabitants’ illusion of refuge from the workplace. He argues that the alignment of an individualist identity with decoration and material goods further sequesters the self from the world that lies beyond the domestic realm. With this, Benjamin states that the interior “is not just the universe but also the *étui* of the private individual. To dwell means to leave traces” (Benjamin, 2002, p. 39).

Benjamin speculated that inhabitants settle in the interior as though encased within in a shell. While recognising this to be a deeply personal and ritualised process, he notes that these internalised values are essentially linked to the capitalist values of property, ownership and ostentation. The architecture and the conditions of rental pertaining to self storage follow the very same values of individuation and privacy, suggesting a resonance with the bourgeois domestic practices elaborated in Benjamin’s critique.

For Benjamin, to live authentically is to do away with the commodified object of the interior, embracing an alternative that would point productively in the direction of a classless society, as transparent and adaptable as the light-filled, open plan interiors of its dwellings. In her essay, *“Leaving Traces”: Anonymity in the Modernist House*, Hilde Heynen (2009) posits that the “mess of life” wrapped up in daily domestic rituals may not be compatible with the ideals of streamlined modernity (p. 125). Contemporary conditions of dwelling, she determines, requires “the constant shaping and reshaping of [the] shell” (p. 126). Contrary to the

bourgeois interior of the nineteenth century, the process of material accumulation is no longer a slow and stable process, but rather one which reflects modern conditions of changeability in the home. As such, the notion of “reshaping the shell” resonates with prevailing conditions of twenty-first century inhabitation in the UK, typified by factors such as short term tenure, reduced space standards, and the consequential demand for flexibility in patterns of inhabitation.

Considering Heynen and Benjamin’s reading of the interior, one might consider that these practices represent a deeply embedded desire to cling onto commodified material traces as a way to seek stability through the illusory shell of the domestic interior. Following this argument, it can be interpreted that self storage units which represent the deferral of primarily ‘excessive’ contents might indicate an irrational, if not pathological, dependency on the repetitive process of manifesting a ‘shell.’

Equally, self storage offers the opportunity to elude the process of sorting excessive accumulations of domestic contents. Depositing excessive contents to self storage speaks to the emotional patterns of avoidance involved in expelling contents from home and decanting them within the domestic extension of the storage unit. In this practice, the ‘mess of life’ is not directly dealt with, though it is indeed relieved for a spell of time. This might suggest the demand for an ‘aesthetic’, though not necessarily an authentic ‘practice’, of a measured and sustainable level of domestic consumption.

This raises the question of why an inhabitant would choose to deposit belongings, excessive and unnecessary from the outset, into self storage. Benjamin writes that when freed from the ‘drudgery’ of usefulness, belongings are re-coded as materials of identity, pleasure and recreation (Benjamin, 2002, p. 39). In this, the bourgeois interior and its related practices of inhabitation are grounded in a desire for the interior to represent the self. In observing the excessive bags of ‘junk’ which fill the abandoned storage unit (Figure 2), similar speculations can be drawn. In the very fact that the contents have been proactively removed from the home and deliberately re-accommodated into self storage, one can deduce a certain level of care or attachment on the part of the inhabitant. On the one hand, it could be understood that there is some degree of symbolic significance embodied in the contents stored. Equally, the deferral of the contents to self storage could be interpreted as an expression of a sort of paralysis brought on by the overwhelming prospect of dealing effectively with the contents.

In these cases, it can be argued that the expectation of a future reunion of contents within a home is not intrinsically implied in

its motivation. In the contemporary context, where the illusory domestic interior is subject to commodification itself, the mere practice of collecting goods might act as a powerful, ritualistic practice which asserts and reaffirms one's sense of freedom. Perhaps in the context of precarious domestic situations, a sense of ownership of material 'things' of a controllable scale is treasured all the more.

Regardless, if the commodified home is a privilege for those who can afford it, the commodified unit of rentable space serves to reflect the same patterns of access. The phenomenon of self storage could be read as an extension of a sensibility of bourgeois privatism, which, through external economic and political forces on the home's physical scale and psychic role of stability, manifest an architecture of equally private, uninhabitable storage units. Upon inspection of the case study of the abandoned storage unit subject to auction, the deserted contents could be interpreted as a representation of the fallout from this privilege.

One could consider whether excessive domestic 'junk' contents would be understood in such a way if they remained within the original site of the usefulness of the home. Peter Smithson's long-term study for the Put-away House (Figure 3) provides a conceptual architectural counterpoint to the externalised spatiality of self storage (van den Heuvel & Risselada, 2004).<sup>2</sup> In the Put-away House, storage is situated at the core of the domestic realm. Framed critically in response to the problem of material 'glut' within the home, the drawings for the house reveal an attentiveness to the problem of accommodating the immense number of belongings people keep. A detailed inventory of the belongings which need storage within the Put-away House is depicted within the axonometric drawing. Ingested in the form of a central box room, the storage room eliminates all corridors and hallways. Smithson notes, "The heart of the plan is the large-item store, with access direct from outside, available to every room without passing through another room" (in van den Heuvel & Risselada, 2004, p. 176). The storage Smithson prescribed was to make up for about 22 percent of the entire house.

Fixated as the Smithsons were by the minutiae of the rituals of inhabitation, Peter Smithson devised the Put-away House concept as a critique of commodified inhabitation in the 1990s. Though, in what appears to be less of a critical approach than an observational one, the dwelling form is intricately and sympathetically adjusted

<sup>2</sup> Though the Put-away House concept was slowly realised in drawing by Peter Smithson between 1993 and 2000, the idea of the Put-away House had been described by Alison Smithson as early as 1958, in an article titled *The Future of Furniture* (van den Heuvel & Risselada, 2004, p. 176).

to fulfil the needs of the culture in question. The degree to which the problem of materialistic 'glut' is spatially ingested within the Put-away House is telling of a deeply symbolic significance of consumerist influences upon the function and practices of the home. In a culture where inhabitants practice identity, aspiration and freedom through consumerist rituals of material acquisition, the proliferation of the externalised form of the rented self storage unit is even more of a testament to the expressions of identity imbued in practices of material consumption.



Figure 3  
Axonometric drawing of the Put-away House (van den Heuvel & Risselada, 2004, p. 178. Image courtesy of Soraya Smithson on behalf of the Smithson Family Collection)

### Intergenerational Transference: Self Storage as a Ritual Site

*35 square feet*

*Brown cardboard boxes and plastic crates are stacked neatly in three distinguishable rows. Unpacked and grouped for itemised photographs, the contents reveal a curious collection. A small selection of bronze and unpolished silver antiquities are photographed side by side, perhaps handed down through the family, or purchased as antiques. The next photo shows the box of a Super 8 film recorder, a slide photo viewer, two*

small film cameras, and a telescope. Next, a collection of more contemporary electronic items: a small pink laptop computer, a digital radio, a laminator, a cordless home telephone. Also pulled out to be photographed are an antique-style globe and a silver scroll, presumed to be a true antique. Of the nine cardboard boxes packed full with books, title topics range from christianity (*The Concise Bible Handbook*), nature (*David Attenborough's The First Eden*), and handicrafts (*The Complete Book of...*). The listing includes two crates of 'rubbish', which must have been of use to somebody, at some point.

Sold after 28 bids for £205.00. Contents valued at £5.85 per square foot.



Mouse over image to zoom

Figure 4  
Image of  
online listing –  
intergenerational  
deferral (eBay)



To define the term 'inalienable wealth', anthropologist Annette Weiner draws from sociologist Marcel Mauss' original conception of the term, *immeuble*<sup>3</sup>, meaning that the cultural worth of certain

<sup>3</sup> In the English translation of Marcel Mauss' *Essai sur le Don*, *immeuble* is translated as 'indestructible' (Weiner, 1985, p. 210).

ritual objects cannot be detached from their origins. She argues that the essential value of inalienability is expressed through the ways in which objects embody the power to define one's identity in a historical sense. She argues that with these indestructible qualities, an object:

Acts as a vehicle for bringing past time into the present, so that the histories of ancestors, titles, or mythological events become an intimate part of a person's present identity. To lose this claim to the past is to lose part of who one is in the present. In its inalienability, the object must be seen as more than an economic resource and more than an affirmation of social relations. (Weiner, 1985, p. 210)

The handing down of materials of inalienable wealth pertains to a deeply ritualised act of identity-making. Recognising custodial practices in the efforts to keep an inalienable object within a family group, Weiner (1985) argues that, "Age adds value, as does the ability to keep the object against all the exigencies that might force a person or a group to release it to others" (p. 210). By delving into the anthropological roots of inalienable wealth, it is possible to open up an interrogation into how self storage facilities can act as an operative tool for analysing this form of social relation. In the transformation of contents from alienable wealth (subject to the demands of economic value) into contents which represent symbolic forms of inalienable wealth (valued on an intergenerational basis), it is arguable that the spatiality of the self storage unit functions as a ritualistic depository for intergenerational wealth.

Archaeologist Julia Hendon (2000) lays out a compelling approach in her essay *Having and Holding: Storage, Memory, Knowledge & Social Relations*, which builds upon conceptions of inalienable wealth. In this paper, Hendon studies utilitarian forms of household storage through ethnographic and archaeological examples, in terms of their spatial and social meanings. With this, she argues for a furthering of our conceptions of utilitarian storage to include the immaterial qualities of memory and knowledge. In this wider framing, she argues for an expanded definition of storage as a form of situated practice through which groups construct identities, remember, and control knowledge as part of a moral economy. Hendon asserts that rituals of storage acquire a moral dimension in that they connect material resources with people's needs and desires, drawing together the utilitarian and the mundane with the personal and ritualistic.

Through a continued 'practice' of stewardship, a donor or beneficiary preserves the isolated domestic contents kept in self storage. In these

contexts, Hendon's argument can be directly applied to contents of intergenerational transference. While isolated from the domestic interior of the family group, the symbolic relations between stewards and contents are secured through the relinquishment of practical use that is produced by this form of isolated retreat. It could also be argued that the very practice of continued stewardship towards the self storage contents might cultivate an additional perception of value.

In considering the spatiality and visibility of the self storage facility in relation to the domestic interior, it is possible to consider that stored contents, sequestered as such from the demands of capital, might accrue inalienable worth through the process of ritual visitation. Survey results from the 2018 Self Storage Association UK (SSAUK) report can be employed to attribute to this argument. According to the report, 68 percent of customers will travel 20 minutes or less to their self storage unit. Only nine percent will travel less than five minutes, which suggests that 59 percent of customers will travel between five and twenty minutes to pay a visit to their self storage unit. A trip infrequently made, 78 percent of customers will visit their storage unit once a month or less (Self Storage Association UK, 2018). As much as the spatiality of self storage demands a procedure of visitation, its isolation encourages a level of focus and reverence.

The ritual necessitated by self storage visitation can be extrapolated in relation to another form of intergenerational ritual. Like the cemetery, intergenerational modes of self storage practices are rooted in a will to perpetuate the identity of a family group. A resting place of sorts, the self storage facility is an individualised private space, situated in the compact yet definitely delineated proximity to numerous other ritualised private territories. A plan of gravesite plots at London's Highgate Cemetery (Figure 5) proves an uncanny resemblance to the floor plan of the Urban Locker self storage facility (Figure 1), and perhaps it is no coincidence that both sites function as forms of symbolic storage for the perpetuation of intergenerational memory and identity. In the comparison of these two sites, one could discern that intergenerational wealth can be practised equally as effectively at exteriorised ritualistic sites, as within the bounds of the domestic interior.

The contents of the abandoned self storage unit (Figure 4), apparently deferred for reasons of intergenerational worth, can operate as a failed example of this repeated process of visitation. With abandonment comes the conclusive determination that this process of intergenerational succession has been permanently ruptured, meaning that the stored contents will never be reconstituted within the bounds of the domestic interior. Disassociated from the

continuity of relationship between stored contents and inhabitant, the objects within the self storage unit will now most likely come to be subject to the wills of the professional 'storage buyer', or other interested parties looking to make a small profit from the abandoned contents.<sup>4</sup> With the intergenerational bond broken, objects will again be released back into a market economy and valued on the basis of perceived economic worth.



Figure 5  
Highgate  
Cemetery,  
resting places  
of sorts.  
(Sally Fincher,  
University of  
Kent)

While economic value is inherently contradictory to the concept of intergenerational wealth, it is important to consider that self storage deferral of intergenerational contents often results from the liquidation of domestic property at the end of life. It is through the dematerialisation of the home that the rentable space offered by self storage comes to be required. Further to this, the symbolic, personal worth of domestic contents may be considered all the more concentrated as a result of the home's dematerialisation and the isolation of its contents. When the architecture of a home is repeatedly liquidated into parcels of financial inheritance as it shifts from one generation to the next, symbolic meaning is deposited all the more into domestic contents—evading economic forms of value through the very continuation of these relationships. An oscillating exchange between bricks and mortar and liquidated capital, the intergenerational transference of economic wealth further cements the dominance of the single-family dwelling through this linear

<sup>4</sup> The U.S. reality television series *Storage Wars* follows this procedure, whereby contents of auctioned storage units are purchased for resale by professional 'buyers.' The programme follows the buyers as they place bids on the contents of storage units on the basis of a five-minute inspection from the doorway of the unit in question. Once auctions have been won, the winning buyers sort through the belongings in detail to determine accurate resale prices. The cost of the self storage contents is calculated against value, to measure a buyer's net profit or loss.

pathway—sustaining, it could be argued, the requirement for self storage during periods of intergenerational transference.

### Emotional Deferral: Negotiating 'Value' in the Architecture of Self Storage

*75 square feet*

*A neat arrangement of musty pinks, beiges and browns make for a soothing palette upon first confrontation. A double mattress stands upright against the corrugated wall. The pinkish material has turned blue and brown, bruised with layer upon layer of aged stain. The end of a rolled length of discoloured carpet flops exhaustedly over a pine bedside table, revealing its spots and smears. A vertiginous mass of tangled clothing creates an artificial topography. Staking its claim atop the textile mound, a threadbare armchair digs its legs into the unsteady mass below. The gold of the chair is illuminated by a rare peek of light. Lengths of timber and disassembled components of a brass bed lean against the wall. A cardboard box brims with opened letters and envelopes. Two white china tea cups and a broken milk jug sit upon the pine dresser, next to the tangled wires of a disused television satellite box.*

*Sold after five bids for £60.00. Contents valued at £0.80 per square foot.*



Mouse over image to zoom



Figure 6  
Image of  
online listing  
– emotional  
deferral (eBay)

To investigate the place of emotional value in relation to the commodified framing of the self storage facility and the home, discussions by sociologist Georg Simmel in his essay *Exchange* operate as a productive resource. Straddling the economic and the emotional, Simmel's discussions help unpack the various value forms produced through human associations with the materiality of domestic contents. Interrogating the relationship between symbolic and economic understandings of 'value', Simmel discusses the need to produce a form of psychic separation from the subject, to enact the transformation of objects from emotional stimulus into material contents of value. He discusses how "trade in economic values could never have arisen if every desire was satisfied without struggle or exertion," arguing that human desire itself is necessitated by the same process of delayed satisfaction (Simmel, 1971, p. 56). If one applies the struggle to satisfy desires to the contemporary domestic context, it is possible to understand how strained economic conditions; whether bred from limitations on space, insecurity of rental tenure, or the financial requirement to liquidate the monetary value of a home following death, might cause an inhabitant to defer a greater degree of perceived value onto the domestic contents which are potentially at risk of loss.

Simmel continues, "It is only the postponement of satisfaction through impediment, the anxiety that the object may escape, the tension of struggle for it, that brings about the cumulation of desires to a point of intensified volition and continuous striving" (p. 56). Considering the motivations behind such practices of deferral, one can apply Simmel's argument to the context of self storage. I would argue that the emotionally imbued contents of self storage units accumulate additional value through their isolation and distance of proximity. In the process of purging contents from the home in the effort to keep them, one can recognise anxiety, even a painfulness, surrounding the prospect of discarding contents in any conclusive manner. By locking contents away inside a self storage unit, a clarity of relation between inhabitant and the emotional value of stored contents may be revealed. Through this process, necessitated by the temporal and spatial postponement, contents which begin as a jumbled, chaotic collection, have the chance to accrue a symbolic quality of value from which an inhabitant may be able to make conclusive decisions. Equally, with the clarity provided by time and distance, an inhabitant may discern that the contents do not bear the emotional value once thought during an earlier stage of the home's reevaluation or dissolution.

The emotional and economic worth of most domestic contents is both fleeting and individuated, as demonstrated by the eBay

auction for the abandoned storage unit shown in Figure 6, sold for £60.00. The contents of what could be speculated as the material culmination of a 'liquidated' home, is deemed nearly entirely devoid of monetary value once detached from the people who harbour its emotional ties. Abandoned, and thus dissociated from the roots of personal identity, both the economic and emotional forms of the value of the stored domestic contents are likely to be affected in conjunction. Perhaps in future, when the various contents have been disassembled and unbounded from their former associations of emotional worth, the side tables and bed frames will regain a new lease of economic value, alongside a new personal and emotional association.

The economic value of domestic space, on the other hand, embodies a powerful market-based motivation which overwrites the intricacies of emotional value and personal association. The integral links between the 'rationality' of economics and the 'irrationality' of emotional associations to domestic contents, converge within the literature produced by the self storage industry.

Leafing through the colourful graphs, survey findings and statistics which comprise the SSAUK 2018 annual report, it becomes discernible that a great deal of attention in the report is paid to the current and speculative future state of the UK property market. The statistics reveal the teetering balance between the emotional and economic value forms upon which the self storage industry is built. With an average tenancy length of 3.9 years in the UK private rental sector (PRS), over 24 percent of the privately rented housing stock in England and Wales is re-let on a yearly basis. Overwhelmingly, this suggests that a quarter of all people living in privately rented homes in the UK move house each year (Self Storage Association UK, 2018, p. 14). It is telling to set this statistic—which hints at a deeply emotional condition, extrapolated on a mass scale—against another one contained in the report: that a third of self storage customers in the UK have maintained the same self storage unit for three years or more.<sup>5</sup> The fruitful opportunities presented by the private rental market is extrapolated further within the self storage industry literature, where it is stated that "As over 70 percent of the PRS stock is either flats or terraced houses, a growing number of families are having to live with less and less space at their disposal" (p. 15). Within the context of the annual report, such statistics have been included to be advantageous or informative for those who have vested—or prospective—economic interests in the self storage industry.

<sup>5</sup> "32% of customers have had their unit for three years or more, with 47% having taken their unit in the last 12 months". (Self Storage Association UK, 2018, p. 40)

The information contained within the self storage industry reports contributes to the argument that the self storage industry is first and foremost a form of property investment which is based upon the emotional attachments of inhabitants to interior space and domestic contents. In this way, the reports make clear that self storage is an industry that consciously prospers in the UK on the basis of domestic instability and change. What for many millions of people is the deeply individuated experience of securing housing, represents a profitable opportunity for the self storage industry. The statistical and graphical information included in the reports points to a detached and abstracted process which sees deeply individuated patterns of inhabitation translated into quantifiable information. To varying degrees, all of this is co-opted into the phrasing and the statistical information unfurled within the self storage industry's literature, promoting rented self storage units as a logical extension of the commodified domestic realm.

In a market-based economy, supply and demand are the two impersonal factors which determine the financial value of a rented self storage unit. By contrast, time and distance are the fundamental determinants of whether the emotional value will sustain in the relationship between an inhabitant and the contents they store. With high quotas of emotional value come the motivations to protect and retain—a phenomenon which infers an inclination towards longer-term usage of self storage. The industry literature makes clear that there is a market of opportunity in inhabitants' emotional trappings. As can be gleaned from these materials, the industry's use of statistics surrounding dwelling conditions and tenant insecurity suggest that emotional value is just as much of a commodifiable entity as empty space.

## **Conclusion**

Self storage represents a varied and complex palette of an inhabitant's associations to home, belongings, and intimate domestic space in relation to wider social and economic pressures. Through studying self storage and its related practices, not only is one able to reveal the kinds of domestic contents inhabitants take great lengths to retain, but also the methods by which this process is undertaken.

Drawing from contemporary archaeological methods to engage with self storage on a material level, the identification of motives and pressures, both emotional and economic, has opened up an intricate insight into the architecture of self storage and the material contents kept within. As such, this research poses self storage, and

domestic storage practices in general, as a valuable lens through which meaningful and revealing work on the interior condition may be examined.

On the surface, self storage may appear to be a practical solution to a simple problem of space. This paper has argued to the contrary, revealing that the problems and solutions pertinent to the monthly rental of a self storage unit might not be as straightforward as one might immediately assume. Why would people pay such steep fees to deposit seemingly unnecessary things? The only answer to this disconnect is that an inhabitant must deem their belongings valuable enough to store. As has been explored within this research, 'value' may well attribute towards a span of ritual, social, temporal and spatial forms which perform alongside, or in opposition to economic worth. In this way, the contents of self storage speak to our enduring attachments to objects and the emotional and psychic desires which drive inhabitants to acquire, keep, and pass along belongings.

Nestled in this way between rational and irrational human motives, self storage performs a valuable and unprecedented role in capitalist society. As a means of examining interiority, self storage offers a spatial representation of the reflexive conditions, both internal and external, private and public, psychic and material, which mediate an inhabitant's subjective relation to the domestic contents stored. This paper has only begun to probe the interrelated conceptions of economic and symbolic value within the commodified home and the ways in which the extended spatiality of domestic self storage practices mediate the psychic relationship between an inhabitant, the domestic interior, and wider social and economic conditions.

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