CLOUDS

By Leigha Dennis

A photo essay on the other kind of storage.

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Photo: Leigha Dennis.

Clouds is a photo essay that documents the self-storage industry as cloud storage for domestic objects. If today's digital clouds provide data storage with remote servers, then what are self-storage facilities but the analog clouds for our physical homes? As a critique of the contemporary aestheticization of data centers and of consumer relationships with objects, *Clouds* investigates storage space as the embodiment of stagnant pasts and latent futures.

The photographs in this series were taken between New York, New York and Ann Arbor, Michigan—sites of the photographer's two homes—and exhibited at the University of Michigan's Taubman Gallery in 2014. All photographs are by Leigha Dennis.

Photo: Leigha Dennis.

The American single-family home has long been considered a territory for the domestication of postwar technology. The structure itself is prefabricated, duplicated and commodified—replete with televisions, coffee tables and dishwashers. Consumerism, embodied by the American Dream, has continued to fuel the commercialization of domesticity. Between 1960 and 2000, household consumption increased by 400%. Modernity is overabundance.

Photo: Leigha Dennis.

The American Dream is no longer what it once was. The economy could not sustain it. But as budgets decrease, consumption rarely wanes. As today's economic downtown results in joblessness and stagnant salaries, mass-production and mass-consumption persists. Households continue to acquire more objects. Homes are bursting at the seams. The multi-billion dollar self-storage industry services 1 in every 10 American households.[1]

Photo: Leigha Dennis.

We love our stuff. We hate our stuff. We dream of being free from it. Keeping email inboxes at zero and routinely cleaning the refrigerator, we purge for the cathartic impression of control, and the quest to find order in entropy. Yet, many of us own more objects than we realize. They are ambient, contributing to the atmospheres of our homes. They represent past relationships, and hold untapped potential. They possess histories and stories—some nostalgic, some banal, and some just meaningful enough to keep around. Ultimately, it is easier to house excess possessions remotely at a nearby storage facility then to discard them. In turn, the home can appear tidy and pure.

Photo: Leigha Dennis.

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"The great secret of safe and comfortable living lies in keeping yourself and everything about you in the right place." – Henry Urbach. [2]

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"To have and not to have, to own and to crave, finally collapsed in a single emotion." – Rem Koolhaas. [3]

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"All dwellings have something of the grave about them, but here the fake serenity is complete. The unspeakable house plants, lurking everywhere like the obsessive fear of death, the picture windows looking like Snow White's glass coffin, the clumps of pale, dwarf flowers stretched out in patches like sclerosis, the proliferation of technical gadgetry inside the house, beneath it, around it, like drips in an intensive care ward, the TV, stereo, and video which provide communication with the beyond, the car (or cars) that connect one up to that great shoppers' funeral parlour, the supermarket, and, lastly, the wife and children, as glowing symptoms of success . . . everything here testifies to death having found its ideal home." – Jean Baudrillard. [4] [5]

Photo: Leigha Dennis.

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1. Mooallem, Jon. "The Self-Storage Self." In *The New York Times*. 2 September, 2009 http://www.nytimes.com/2009/09/06/magazine/06self-storage-t.html?pagewanted=all&_r=0 ^
2. Gardner, E.C. *The House that Jill Built, after Jack's Had Proved A Failure*. New York, New York: W.F. Adams, 1896. In "Closets, Clothes, Disclosure," by Henry Urbach. *Assemblage*. No. 30 (August 1996). ^
3. Koolhaas, Rem. *Junkspace*. Quodlibet, 2006 ^
4. Baudrillard, Jean. "America." *Verso* 2010, 30-31. ^
5. Related project. "Common Ground" by AUDC. ^

Leigha Dennis is a designer and researcher in New York City, where she investigates the convergence of architecture and digital culture. She is a faculty member at Columbia University GSAPP, where she co-directs the Architecture Online Lab and was formerly the Cloud Communications Officer and a member of the Network Architecture Lab. She was recently the 2013-14 Muschenheim Fellow at the University of Michigan's Taubman College.