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Homes for Canadians (I)

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Abstract

According to Giorgio Agamben, the Greek term for ‘habitual dwelling place,’ or ‘habit,’ is *ethos*. The rise to prominence in the twentieth century of the modern idea of the suburb, or ‘suburbia,’ held open the door to the potential realization of the American (and Canadian) dream *ethos* of universal home ownership. The tantalizing appeal of a the ideal of ‘home’ and ‘homeland’ have become key terms in the Post World War Two pursuit of a mode of ‘dwelling’ linked to consumer capitalism. Yet for Frankfurt School critics such as Theodor W. Adorno, the pursuit of this suburban ideal induced a deep sense of *ennui* such that to feel ‘at home’ in such a suburban environment challenged the very foundations of the dwelling place of Western civilization. “It is part of morality,” Adorno concluded in his book, *Minima Moralia*, “not to be at home in one’s home.” This text is an exercise in examining this question of “dwelling” and “home” through an allegorical poetical focus (drawn from Walter Benjamin and Charles Baudelaire) focusing on a newly completed suburb in the Canadian city of Halifax, Nova Scotia.

Keywords: Suburbia, Dwelling, Home, Utopia, Dystopia, *Flâneur*, *Modernité*, Memory, History, the Body, Chiasmus, Ruins, Ephemeral, and the Allegorical

“Large-scale ‘tract’ housing ‘developments’ constitute the new city. They are located everywhere. They are not particularly bound to existing communities; they fail to develop either regional characteristics or separate identity. These ‘projects’ date from the end of World War II when in Southern California speculators or ‘operative’ builders adapted

mass construction techniques to quickly build many houses for the defense workers over-concentrated there. This ‘California Method’ consisted simply of determining in advance the exact amount and length of pieces of lumber and multiplying them by the number of standardized houses to be built. A cutting yard was set up near the site of the project to saw rough lumber into those sizes. By mass buying, greater use of machines and factory produced parts, assembly line standardization, multiple units were easily fabricated.”

(Dan Graham, “Homes for America,” *Arts Magazine*, Dec. 1966-Jan. 1967, accessed March 12, 2020

[https://www.christies.com/img/LotImages/2016/CSK/2016_CSK_12724_0018_000\(dan_graham_homes_for_america\).jpg](https://www.christies.com/img/LotImages/2016/CSK/2016_CSK_12724_0018_000(dan_graham_homes_for_america).jpg))

“Our glance lingers over the debris of a triumphal arch, a portico, a pyramid, a temple, a palace, and we retreat into ourselves; we contemplate the ravages of time, and in our imagination we scatter the rubble of the very buildings in which we live over the ground; in that moment solitude and silence prevail around us, we are the sole survivors of an entire nation that is no more. Such is the first tenet of the poetics of ruins....”

(Denis Diderot, “The Salon of 1767,” in Brian Dillon, Ed., *Ruins: Documents of Contemporary Art*. London & Cambridge, MA: Whitechapel Art Gallery and The MIT Press, 2011: 22.)

“La crisi consiste appunto nel fatto che il vecchio muore e il nuovo non può nascere: in questo interregno si verificano i fenomeni morbosi piú svariati.”

(“The crisis consists precisely in the fact that **the old is dying and the new cannot be born**; in this interregnum a great variety of morbid symptoms appear.”)

(Antonio Gramsci, https://en.wikiquote.org/wiki/Antonio_Gramsci: accessed on May 31, 2019.)

“It made me think of the Law of Ruins.

I told Murray that Albert Speer wanted to build structures that would decay gloriously, impressively, like Roman ruins. No rusty hulks or gnarled steel slums. He knew that Hitler would be in favor of anything that might astonish posterity. He did a drawing of a Reich structure that was to be built of special materials, allowing it to crumble romantically—a drawing of fallen walls, half columns furred in wisteria. The ruin is built into the creation, I said, which shows a certain nostalgia behind the power principle, or a tendency to organize the longings of future generations.

Murray said, ‘I don’t trust anybody’s nostalgia but my own. Nostalgia is a product of dissatisfaction and rage. It’s a settling of grievances between the present and the past. The more powerful the nostalgia, the closer you come to violence. War is the form nostalgia takes when men are hard-pressed to say something good about their country.’”

(Don DeLillo, *White Noise*. London and New York, NY: Viking Penguin, 1985: 257-258.)

“Try to create in the literary or poetic work a stylistic structure whose internal tensions are a metaphor for the internal tensions and structural tendencies of a social ‘body’ moving by a revolutionary path towards its own ‘form.’”

(Franco Fortini, “The Writer’s Mandate and the End of Anti-Fascism” (1974), in Alberto Toscano and Jeff Kinkle, *Cartographies of the Absolute*. Winchester and Washington, DC: Zero Books, 2015: 242.)

“She went quietly out the side door of the House, past the vegetable patch, to the street. The narrow strip of sour city dirt had been beautifully

gardened and was producing a fine crop of beans and *ceëa*, but Laia's eye for farming was unenlightened. Of course it had been clear that anarchist communities, even in the time of transition, must work towards optimal self-support, but how that was to be managed in the way of actual dirt and plants wasn't her business. There were twenty farmers and agronomists for that. Her job was the streets, the noisy, stinking streets of stone, where she had grown up and lived all her life, except for the fifteen years in prison."

(Ursula K. Le Guin, "The Day before the Revolution," in Gregory Claeys and Lyman Tower Sargent, Eds., *The Utopia Reader*. New York, NY: NYU Press, 1999: 417.)

"The Greek term for 'habitual dwelling place,' or 'habit,' is *ethos*. The ethos of humanity is thus, for philosophy, always already divided and threatened by a negative. One of the oldest testimonies of a philosophical reflection on ethos characterizes the habitual dwelling of humanity with these words:

ethos anthropo daimon (Heraclitus...)

Daimon does not simply denote here a divine figure. Its etymology leads back to the very *daiomai*, to lacerate, to divide, so daimon signifies the lacerator, he who cuts and divides."

(Giorgio Agamben (Karen E. Pinkus with Michael Hardt, Translators), "The Eighth Day," in *Language and Death: The Place of Negativity*. London and Minneapolis, MN: University of Minnesota Press, 1991: 93.)

"While it is possible to draw parallels between the structure of a text and the structure of built space, a more vital and ultimately more socially thick relationship is in how the spatial/architectural meets the textual/poetic in the social space of meaning production. The mechanics of meaning

production—and the construction of a productive reader/dweller—runs through the binaries of determinism (architectural/textual) and agency and the structural and subjective. For the language poets in the early 1980s, an avant-gardist North American formation, this struggle begins with the rejection of the closed text and leads to the theorization of the productive reader who is given agency through the specific devices of the open text. In architectural theory, the binary struggle leads to the rejection of the instrumentalism of built space and a turn toward a more active dweller whose ‘flexible’ lifestyle will determine the space through more use. Yet, in both cases, the ‘primacy of form’ is conquered to be replaced by the primacy of another form: open replaces closed text, instrumental spaces are replaced by flexible or adaptable spaces. At stake, or under a speculative project, is the constitution of a model of a reader/dweller in relation to the social.”

(Jeff Derksen, “The Obvious Analogy Is with [Architecture],” in Jeff Derksen, *Annihilated Time: Poetry and Other Politics*. Vancouver, BC: Talonbooks, 2009: 177-8.)

“According to Derrida, architecture is the last fortress of metaphysics precisely because it sets up a concrete, established, and durable shape for identity, which is conceived of as a familiar and self-enclosed interiority or intimacy, engaged with the defense of itself. This identity has been determined since the origin by the analogy with a specific kind of architectural structure: the house/dwelling. In fact, if nowadays we consider natural the fact that dwelling is the end and essence of architecture, this is because, since the origin of metaphysics, namely, from Plato on, architecture has been submitted to the law of dwelling, of the *oikos*: dwelling as protection of the inside from the outside, of the familiar from the stranger. The house is built in defense of the institution of the patriarchal family, according to a precise spatial distribution of roles in relation to the management of the property.”

(Francesco Vitale, *The Last Fortress of Metaphysics: Jacques Derrida and the Deconstruction of Architecture*. Albany, NY: SUNY Press, 2018: 31.)

“The essential feature with which the new architecture began was openness; it broke the dark stone caves, it opened up fields of vision through light glass walls, but this will to adjustment with the outside world was undoubtedly premature. The de-internalization turned into hollowness, the southern pleasure in the outside world did not, at the present sight of the capitalist outside world, turn into happiness. For nothing good happens here in the street, in the sun; the open door, the tremendously opened windows are threatening in the age of growing fascism, the house prefers to become a fortress again, if not a catacomb. The broad view full of nothing but outside world needs an outdoors full of attractive strangers, not full of Nazis; the glass door right down to the floors really requires sunshine to peer and break in, not the Gestapo.”

(Ernst Bloch, *The Principle of Hope, Volume II*. Cambridge, MA: MIT Press, 1995: 734.)

“I grew up in a tiny version of hell called the suburbs and experienced the Universe of the Neatly Clipped Lawn. This is a place where anything and everything can do take place—and events such as torture, starvation, humiliation, physical and psychic violence can take place uncontested by others, as long as it doesn’t stray across the boundaries and borders as formed by the deed-holder inhabiting the house on the neatly clipped lawn. If the violence is contained within the borders of the lawn and does not mess up the real estate in any way that would cause the surrounding [property’s] devaluation, anything is possible and everything is permissible.”

(David Wojnarowicz, *Close to the Knives*, quoted in Kevin Floyd, *The Reification of Desire: Towards a Queer Marxism*. Minneapolis, MN: University of Minnesota Press, 2009: 216-217.)

“The starting point of all the coordinates in this entire story is, of course, the Ancient House. It is the center of the axial lines of all the X’s, Y’s and Z’s on which my whole world has been built of late. Along the line of X’s...I walked toward the starting point of the coordinates. All that had happened yesterday whirled like a hurricane within me: upside-down houses and people, tormentingly alien hands, gleaming scissors, sharp drops falling in the washstand—all this had happened, had happened at once. And all of it, tearing my flesh, was whirling madly within, beneath the surface melted by a fire, where the ‘soul’ was.”

(Yevgeny Zamyatin, *We*. New York, NY: EOS, 1972: 92.)

“Air and hewn lots. The view
across and the walk back home. Blocks...”

(Clark Coolidge, *Quartz Hearts* (1978), in Michael Golston, *Poetic Machinations: Allegory, Surrealism, and Postmodern Poetic Form*. New York, NY: Columbia University Press, 2015: 98.)

“The poet is the ultimate hero of the modern city, for he or she incorporates all the others or, rather, plays at being them. The man-of-letters is the great actor on the urban stage. In adopting numerous guises, in playing the parts of all the other ‘heroes of modernity,’ the poet becomes the greatest hero of them all. *Flâneur*, prostitute and rag-picker all come to stand for him or her just as he or she ‘stands in for’ them. The counterpart in Baudelaire to the commodity as allegorical object is therefore the poet as allegorical figure. The poet as hero—this was the most satisfactory conclusion for [Charles] Baudelaire. Benjamin takes this

a step further. For him, it is Baudelaire's arrogant yet deeply ironical assertion of his own heroic stature, his hubris, his self-deception that actually, and paradoxically, make the poet 'heroic.' Baudelaire recognized the hollow sham of modern heroism, yet eagerly embraced it."

(Graeme Gilloch, *Myth & Metropolis: Walter Benjamin and the City*. Oxford and Cambridge, MA: Blackwell Publishers, 1996: 166-7.)

"When we begin to pay attention to the ways in which 'home' is constructed as a modern discourse that parallels the discourse of the nation-state, we begin to understand the imaginary of the nation. The notion that the home is an uncanny aspect of national life is a tenet of my own experience. As a Canadian who has always felt at odds with the nation and has never felt 'homed' in the traditional sense, I have often wondered about the exigencies of the discourse of belonging. Like most in my situation, I have secretly held onto a tenuous desire to 'belong.' all the while knowing that this very lack of belonging—or homelessness—affords me intimate insight into my own alterity, alerting me to the danger of propagating a cohesive discourse of national identity based on a homogenous notion of what it means 'to be at home.' Ironically, my personal sense of a certain territorial homelessness is not necessarily at odds with 'being Canadian.' Being Canadian has always presented itself to me as somewhat coterminous with homelessness, if one can gauge a nation by its incessant preoccupation with its own sense of elusive identity."

(Erin Manning, *Ephemeral Territories: Representing Nation, Home, and Identity in Canada*. Minneapolis, MN: University of Minnesota Press, 2003: xvii.)

"Mystery Man: We've met before, haven't we.
Fred Madison: I don't think so. Where was it you think we met?
Mystery Man: At your house. Don't you remember?

Fred Madison: No. No, I don't. Are you sure?
Mystery Man: Of course. As a matter of fact, I'm there right now.
Fred Madison: What do you mean? You're where right now?
Mystery Man: At your house.
Fred Madison: That's fucking crazy, man.
Mystery Man: Call me. Dial your number. Go ahead.
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Mystery Man: Call me. Dial your number. Go ahead."

(*Lost Highway*, Directed by David Lynch, 1997, IMDB.)

"A book is a loaded gun in the house next door. Burn it. Take the shot from the weapon. Ask yourself, What do we want in this country above all? People want to be happy, isn't that a right? Haven't you heard it all your life? I want to be happy, people say. Well, aren't they? Don't we keep them moving, don't we give them fun? That's all we live for, isn't it? For pleasure, for titillation? And you must admit our culture provides plenty of these... If you don't want a man unhappy politically, don't give him two sides to a question to worry him; give him one. Better yet, give him none... Don't give him any slippery stuff like philosophy and sociology to tie things up with. That way lies melancholy."

(Kingsley Amis, *New Maps of Hell*, (1960), in Bertil Mårtensson, "Paradoxes of Utopia: A Study in Utopian Rationalism," *Philosophy of Social Sciences*, 21, 4, 1991: 476-514.)



Geoffrey Howard, *The Village at Long Lake, Halifax, Nova Scotia, Canada.*
(2020) Digital Photograph.

“What might it mean to say that the solution of the housing problem is to embrace an unhoused state? Like Freud’s *Unheimliche*, Adorno’s philosophy of dwelling intuits in sensorial ways that there is something foreign at the innermost region of the self. And like the unconscious, it comprises an essential unknowingness at the origin of the ‘I,’ a non-identity not entirely its own. To embrace our essential ‘homelessness’ is to seek to live in ways that acknowledge the otherness of the self, the body, and the community.”

(Matthew Waggoner, *Unhoused: Adorno and the Problem of Dwelling.* New York, NY: Columbia Books on Architecture and the City, 2018: 160.)

“The walls of the first freestanding houses were originally not technically distinguishable from the myriad of stake structures that proliferated during the Neolithic period. Even mud-covered huts are still based on the initial

wood palisade frame in the wattle-and-daub style. This is because the kinetic function of the house is not radically different from that of the palisade. The house is a centripetal technology, a vessel junction or container for human beings and the flows they have been able to amass. It is, as archaeologist Dušan Borić describes it, a literal ‘capturing of the landscape.’”

(Thomas Nail, *Theory of the Border*. Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2016: 52.)

“The journey to the ‘center’ is fraught with obstacles, and yet every city, every temple, every house is at the center of the universe. The supreme rite of initiation is to enter a labyrinth and return from it, and yet every life, even the least eventful, can be taken as a journey through the labyrinth.”

(Mircea Eliade, quoted in Jeremy Biles, *Ecce Monstrum: Georges Bataille and the Sacrifice of Form*. New York: Fordham University Press, 2007: 84.)

“Where is the door actually located so that we might leave this Atrocity Exhibition?”

(Brad Evans, *Atrocity Exhibition: Life in the Age of Total Violence*. Los Angeles, CA: Los Angeles Review of Books, 2019: 172.)

“At the next crossroads, under the lamp at the corner of the pavement, a child has stopped. He is half-hidden by the cast-iron column, the thicker base of which in fact wholly conceals the lower part of his body. He is looking towards the approaching soldier. He does not seem put out by the storm, or by the snow that patches his black clothes with white, both his cape and his beret. He is about ten years old, and has an attentive

expression. His head turns with the soldier's advance, his eyes following him as he reaches the lamppost then passes it. As the soldier is walking slowly, the child has time to scrutinize him carefully from top to toe: ill-shaven cheeks, the visible exhaustion, the soiled and crumpled army coat, the sleeves devoid of stripes, the parcel in its wet paper held under his left arm, the two hands buried in the pockets, the puttees wound hastily, irregularly, the back of the right boot showing a gash..."

(Alain Robbe-Grillet, *In the Labyrinth*. London: Alma Books, 2012: 27-28.)

"...inscrutable urban space holds a fascination for people...when the key to the labyrinth has been discovered, or, in psychological terms, a cognitive map or model has been constructed, the relationship between the individual and the environment aspires to a new level. Once a place has yielded its secrets it facilitates empathy between mind and artifacts. Man and buildings become symbolically bound together."

(Paul Smith, *The Syntax of Cities* in Brian Jarvis, *Postmodern Cartographies: The Geographical Imagination in Contemporary American Culture*. New York: St. Martin's Press, 1998: 85.)

"In classical theory the (idealized) body, so to speak, directly projected onto the building, which both stood for it and represented its ideal perfection. The building derived its authority, proportional and compositional, from this body, and, in a complementary way, the building then acted to confirm and establish the body—social and individual—in the world. The principles of Vitruvius traced the origins of proportion to the Greek canons of bodily mathematics, to be incorporated by the architect-sculptor in the column and in the relations of the different parts of the order to the whole and thence to the building: his ideal of unity was described by the celebrated figure of a man with arms outstretched inscribed within a square and a circle, navel at the center. The theorists of

the Renaissance from Alberti to Francesco di Giorgio, Filarete and Leonardo subscribed to this analogy, which determined the search for centralization in all its aspects.”

(Anthony Vidler, “Architecture Dismembered,” quoted in Dillon, Ed., *Ruins*: 56.)

“The heroes of antiquity had such bodies, when they were seized by an unbridled passion and were ready to destroy or be destroyed. Italian Fascism and German National Socialism adopted the artistic program of making the medium of the body the message, and they made the message a political one. They sided not with convictions, theories, and programs, but with bodies—those of athletes, fighters, and soldiers.”

(Boris Groys, *Art Power*, Cambridge, MA: MIT Press, 2008: 131.)

“In his text, the writer sets up house. Just as he trundles papers, books, pencils, documents untidily from room to room, he creates the same disorder in his thoughts. They become pieces of furniture that he sinks into, content or irritable. He strokes them affectionately, wears them out, mixes them up, re-arranges, ruins them. For a man who no longer has a homeland, writing becomes a place to live.”

(Theodor W. Adorno, *Minima Moralia: Reflections from Damaged Life*. London and New York, NY: Verso, 1999: 87.)

“Postwar American consumers were increasingly deluged by news of contaminating fallout too microscopic to see and menacing atomic machines too complex for the average person to grasp. Much like wartime commercial propagandists, managerial experts from the federal civil defense program offered the key to coping with the uncertainties and demands of the new age. How-to manuals provided checklists for

survival, encouraging families to practice a routine that they would deploy when the ubiquitous air raid signals sounded. Civil defense instruction was intended to assure civilians that a nuclear Armageddon could be survived—as long as they practiced and followed the expert’s directions. The 1956 edition of *Home Protection Exercises: A Family Action Program* provided a step-by-step drill for civilians to follow: ‘The eight home-protection exercises described in this booklet are the foundation for a home defense action program... Keep practicing until you can conscientiously score the family performance as ‘excellent.’ Then review and refresh your preparations and practice at least once every 3 months.’

(Cynthia Lee Henthorn, *From Submarines to Suburbs: Selling a Better America, 1939-1959*. Athens, Ohio: University of Ohio Press, 2006: 214-215.)

“The concept of *assemblage* is helpful. Ecologists turned to assemblages to get around the sometimes fixed and bounded connotations of ecological ‘community.’ The question of how the varied species in a species assemblage influence each other—if at all—is never settled: some thwart (or eat) each other; others work together to make life possible; still others just happen to find themselves in the same place. Assemblages are open-ended gatherings. They allow us to ask about communal effects without assuming them. They show us potential histories in the making. For my purposes, however, I need something other than organisms as the elements that gather. I need to see lifeways—and non-believing ways of being as well—coming together. Nonhuman ways of being, are a place to begin, but they are not enough: ways of being are emergent effects of encounters. Thinking about humans make this clear.”

(Anna Lowenhaupt Tsing, *The Mushroom at the End of the World: On the Possibility of Life in Capitalist Ruins*. Princeton and Oxford: Princeton University Press, 2015: 23.)



*Geoffrey Howard, The Village at Long Lake, Halifax, Nova Scotia, Canada.
(2020) Digital Photograph.*

“Unless one likes complexity one cannot feel at home in the twenty-first century.”

(Rosi Braidotti, *Metamorphoses: Towards a Materialist Theory of Becoming*. Cambridge and Malden, MA: Polity, 2002: 1).

“To adequately subvert the language of the nation, we must develop an awareness of the conjunction between ontopology and the manner in which we negotiate time and space. It is only then we begin to appreciate the ways in which we reproduce the vocabulary of the nation within our personal circles of existence. For instance, even as many of us provisionally assume a political stance that refutes nationalism, we often

design our homes to mirror exclusionary aspects of the nation's (or homeland) remains one of the nation's most powerful ontological enunciations. If we refrain from questioning the validity of the political structures that guarantee our 'safety' within the discourse of the home, we are blinded by the ways in which the home mirrors the politics of state-sovereignty, offering protection from the outside by condoning an ethics exclusionary violence on the inside. We must therefore develop an awareness that, as we mortgage our lives and construct fences and walls, install security systems and guard dogs, we are offering unwavering support to a vocabulary that is at the heart of the imaginary of the nation."

(Erin Manning, *Ephemeral Territories: Representing Nation, Home, and Identity in Canada*. Vancouver, BC: Talonbooks, 2003: xvii.)

"The words we use to name ourselves are important. How we conceive ourselves collectively is a part of wider, more complicated discussions about who is included and who is excluded from our society. In Canada, we like to think of ourselves as having a fairly inclusive society; we pride ourselves on being open and accepting of difference. We talk about being polite and respectful and peace loving. And we lie by omission, because we do not talk about our country being built on the attempted destruction of other nations. We do not talk about the questionable legal and political basis of our country, our history, of profiting from invasion and dispossession. 'Canadian,' a notoriously hard-to-pin down concept, a nation that violently displaces others for its own wants and desires, a state that breaks treaties and uses police and starvation to clear the land. We need a name that can help us see ourselves for who we are, not just who we claim to be. For that we need a term that shifts the frame of reference away from our nation, our claimed territory, and onto our relationship with systems of power, land, and the peoples on whose territory our country exists."

(Emma Battell Lowman and Adam J. Barker), *Settler: Identity and Colonialism in 21st Century Canada*. Halifax and Winnipeg: Fernwood Publishing, 2015: 1.)

“The capitalist world ecology began in the long sixteenth century. Nearly everyone seems to have missed the geography of global environmental transformation as the decisive value to all other moments of transition. The environmentalists looked for the modern machine and found it: the steam engine and all the rest. The Marxists looked for the ‘right’ class structure—wage-workers, bourgeois property relations, and all that—and they too found what they were looking for. The economists looked for something that looked like modern markets and institutional mechanisms favoring a ‘modern economy.’ All these were very important. And all overlooked something very important: a new pattern of environment making.”

(Jason W. Moore, “The Rise of Cheap Nature,” in Elmar Altvater, Eileen C. Crist, and Jason Moore, Eds., *Anthropocene or Capitalocene?: Nature, History, and the Crisis of Capitalism*. Oakland, CA: PM Press, 2016: 97.)

“SUBJECTS

Apparently capable of observing the abyss, some observers insist that what is at stake for homeowners and taxpayers is either the experience of crisis or the crisis of subjectivity. These commentators urge us not to lose sight of the fact that the events of 2007-9 brought about a ‘subjective crisis’ (Hardt and Negri 2009), a crisis of the neoliberal subject (Clarke 2009), or a crisis of a form of liberal modern subjectivity (Grossberg, 2010). In keeping with the conviction that crisis denotes a situation in which the contingency of truth claims is revealed, or the grounds for truth claims are made bare and the limits of intelligibility are potentially subverted or transgressed, the epistemological crisis is manifest in the crisis of finance. According to these interpretations, the expropriated

homeowner is a subject in crisis, with no stable grounds of truth value, staring into the abyss of the limits of intelligibility.”

(Janet Roitman, *Anti-Crisis*. Durham and London: Duke University Press, 2014: 85-6.)

“*Envois*

“Imprisoned by four walls
(to the North, the crystal of non-knowledge
a landscape to be invented
to the South, reflective memory
to the East, the mirror
to the West, stone and the song of silence)
I wrote messages, but received no reply.”

(Octavio Paz in (Henri Lefebvre and Donald Nicholson-Smith, Trans.), *The Production of Space*. Oxford and Malden MA: Blackwell Publishers, 1991, n.p.)

“Phenomenologically, the traditional city is an extension of the house. The house, the basic structure of shelter and domestic life, has a roof to ward off rain, snow, and sun, walls to keep out the winds and the neighbors. Ideally, the city is a community of interconnected houses serving these purposes, with the sense of stable shelter enhanced by the walls that surround most ancient and medieval cities.”

(Robert Alter, *Imagined Cities: Urban Experience and the Language of the Novel*. New Haven, CT: Yale University Press, 2005: 95.)



*Geoffrey Howard, The Village at Long Lake, Halifax, Nova Scotia, Canada.
(2020) Digital Photograph.*

“CLEANING UP IN FRONT OF ONE’S HOUSE

“First, trash has to be sorted. ‘We forbid,’ says Article 4 of the Edict of 1539, ‘all emptying or tossing out into the streets and squares of the aforementioned city and its surrounding of refuse, offals, or putrefactions, as well as all waters whatever their nature, and we command you to delay and retain any and all stagnant and sullied waters and urines inside the confines of your homes. We enjoined you to then carry these and promptly empty them into the stream and give them chase with a bucketful of clean water to hasten their courses.’ All liquids, even thick ones, must be made to circulate. Herein lies the vain aspect of waste. But let us not, in our haste, overlook the fact that where water’s vanity is concerned, the lot of urine is superior to that of stagnant waters.”

(Dominique Laporte (Nadia Benabid and Rodolphe el-Khoury), *History of Shit*. Cambridge and London: The MIT Press, 2000: 27.)

“Construction Site

It is folly to brood pedantically over the production of objects—visual aids, toys, or books—that are supposed to be suitable for children. Since the Enlightenment, this has been one of the mustiest speculations of the pedagogues. Their infatuation with psychology keeps them from perceiving that the world is full of the most unrivaled objects for children’s attention and use. And the most specific. For children are particularly fond of haunting any site where things are being visibly worked on. They are irresistibly drawn by the detritus generated by building, gardening, housework, tailoring, or carpentry. In waste products they recognize the face that the world of things turns directly and solely to them. In using these things, they do not so much imitate the works as bring together, in the artifact produced in play, materials of widely differing kinds in a new, intuitive relationship. Children thus produce their own small world of things within the greater one. The norms of this small world must be kept in mind if one wishes to create things specially for children, rather than let one’s adult activity, through its requisites and instruments, find its own way to them.”

(Walter Benjamin, “One-Way Street,” in *Walter Benjamin: Selected Writings, Volume I*. Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 2004: 450.)

“From the time a building is completed, its destruction begins.”

(Frederick Gutheim in *Architectural Record*, (1949), in Jeff Byles, *Rubble: Unearthing the History of Demolition*. New York, NY: Three Rivers Press, 2005: 16.)

“Every civilization gets the monuments it deserves. The triumph of bourgeois capitalism seems most apparent in the massive constructions of

iron and steel that celebrate the union of technology and profit: the railroad terminals, exposition halls, suspension bridges, and skyscrapers. One does not look to suburbia for the modern equivalents of the Baths of Caracalla or Chartres cathedral.”

(Robert Fishman, *Bourgeois Utopias: The Rise and Fall of Suburbia*. New York, NY: Basic Books, 1987: 3.)

“The house, the street, the town, are points to which human energy is directed: they should be ordered, otherwise they counteract the fundamental principles round which we resolve; if they are not ordered, they oppose themselves to us, they thwart us, as the nature all around us thwarts us, though we have striven with it, and with it begin each day a new struggle.”

(Le Corbusier, Frederick Echels, Trans., *The City of To-Morrow and Its Planning*. New York, NY: Dover Publications, 1987: 15.)

“Most utopian experiments suffered because the membership consisted of a select group and so lacked the full range of skills that makes a society function. To get things done, they had to disregard the axioms of social reorganization that had brought them together and resort to some of the very evils they abhorred in the old social order: expedience, coercion, and inefficiency. In *La Réunion*, for example, when they needed housing, the leadership handed out saws and hatchets to members who knew nothing heavier than a pen, and told them to be carpenters.”

(Seymour R. Kesten, *Utopian Episodes: Daily Life in Experimental Colonies Dedicated to Changing the World*. Syracuse NY: Syracuse University Press, 1993: 46.)

“Our dreams of the future are henceforth inseparable from our fears... Today, reconciled with the terrible, we are seeing a contamination of utopia by apocalypse: the heralded ‘new earth’ increasingly assumes the aspect of a new Hell. But this Hell is one we are waiting for, we even make it our duty to precipitate its advent. The two genres, utopian and apocalyptic, which once seemed so dissimilar to us, interpenetrate, rub off on each other, to form a third, wonderfully apt to reflect on the kind of reality that threatens us and to which we shall nonetheless assent with a correct and disabused yes. That will be our way of being *irreproachable* in the face of fatality.”

(E.M. Cioran, *History and Utopia*, quoted in Anthony Vidler, “Air War and Architecture,” in Julia Hell and Andreas Schönle, Eds., *Ruins of Modernity*. Durham and London: Duke University Press, 2010: 36.)

“What did you see, wanderer?
I saw a fold in the ground. Thousands of years ago there must
have been great upheavals of the earth’s surface here.
The granite lay exposed.
What did you see, wanderer?
No bench to sit on. I was tired.”

(Bertolt Brecht, in Karl Willett and Ralph Manheim, Eds., *Poems: 1913-1956*. London and New York, NY: Methuen Press, 1987: 358-9.)



*Geoffrey Howard, The Village at Long Lake, Halifax, Nova Scotia, Canada.
(2020) Digital Photograph.*

“He lay on his bed racked with homesickness, homesick for the world distorted in the state of similarity, a world in which the true surrealist fact of existence breaks through. To this world belongs what happened to Proust, as well as the deliberate and fastidious way in which it appears. It is never isolated, rhetorical, or visionary; carefully heralded and securely supported, it bears a fragile, precious reality: the image.”

(Benjamin, *Selected Writings, Volume 2*: 240, in Ferris, *The Cambridge Introduction to Walter Benjamin*. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2008: 82.)

“During the twentieth century the single-family house has been the most prominent domestic aspiration of my class. The convention of garage, front yard, living room, kitchen, dining room, corridor, bathroom, modern bedroom, auxiliary bedrooms, and backyard are the locus of the modern family. It is more important for the house to lack some of its components than it is for it to be complete, since this propels the yearning for a better

life. The house plan is thought of as nature—as an unquestionable datum upon which both architecture and family exist. This distinct economy of spatial relations began in the late eighteenth century, only to become full-fledged in this century. The family narrative with its endless flow of birth and death is tattooed into the mythical weave of this plan. The gender mechanics, fear, gloom, and happiness are exercised as if the family was still in paradise. My work is a planned assault on this mythical nature, not ultimately to change it but to expose the little tactics of the habitat.”

(Lars Lerup, “Planned Assaults: Reflections on the Detached House,” in Chiara Briganti and Kathy Mezei, Eds., *The Domestic Space Reader*. Toronto, Buffalo, and London: University of Toronto Press, 2012: 303.)

“The city in its particular geographical, architectural, spatializing, municipal arrangements is one particular ingredient in the social constitution of the body. It is by no means the most significant. The structure and particularity of, say, the family is more directly and visibly influential, although this in itself is to some extent a function of the social geography of cities. But nonetheless, the form, structure, and norms of the city seep into and effect all other elements that go into the constitution of corporeality and/as subjectivity. It effects the way the subject sees others (domestic architecture and the divisions of the home into the conjugal bedroom separated off from other living and sleeping spaces, and the specialization of rooms are as significant in this regard as smaller family size), as well as the subject’s understanding of, alignment with, and positioning in space.”

(Elizabeth A. Grosz, “Body Politic and Political Bodies,” in Sharon Meagher, Ed., *Philosophy and the City: Classic to Contemporary Writings*. Albany, NY: SUNY Press, 2008: 187-8.)

“Paradise is neither awaited nor put forward as a possibility in itself. The angel is not in charge of anything. The mode is not nostalgic, at least not

in a believing way. Paradise is faint; it is becoming more and more distant and inaccessible. Thus, the possibility is not one of restoration, but of the creative construction of a critical dialectical image in which the modern is identified with the catastrophic archaic origin of history. The absoluteness of negativity that this image reflects forces thought to take a new stand. The messianic moment is the sudden light that emerges from the constellation between the angel and its impotence despite its position above history. It is a light that, for Benjamin, is tied to a new view of nature, things, history and subjectivity in the framework of the impotence of human language.”

(Mattias Martinson, “Adorno, Revolution, and Negative Utopia,” in Elena Namli, Jayne Svenungsson, and Alana M. Vincent, Eds., *Jewish Thought, Utopia, and Revolution*. Amsterdam and New York, NY: Rodopi Press, 2014: 44.)

“In modern civilization, the space-time of private life was harmonized in the space-time of myth. [Charles] Fourier’s harmony responds to this perverted harmony. As soon as myth no longer encompasses the individual and the partial in a totality dominated by the sacred, each fragment sets itself up as a totality... In the dissociated space-time that constitutes private life—made absolute in the form of abstract freedom, the freedom of the spectacle—consolidates by its every dissociation in the spatial absolute of private life, its isolation, its constriction.”

(McKenzie Wark, *The Spectacle of Disintegration: Situationist Passages out of the Twentieth Century*. London and New York, NY: Verso, 2013: 74.)

“I found...home, and all the longing for home that is innate to us welled up in me. The boredom that calmed me was archetypal, definitive—welling not up but deep down to some endless school holiday that now stretches off...”

(Chris Moss, “Homeland,” in Ross Bradshaw, Ed., *Utopia*. Nottingham: Five Leaves Publications, 2013: 73.)



*Geoffrey Howard, The Village at Long Lake, Halifax, Nova Scotia, Canada.
(2020) Digital Photograph.*

“And the buildings being constructed were denied the right to be born;
their scaffolding was also taken down.”

(Viktor Shkolovsky and Richard Sheldon, Trans.), *Knight's Move*. Dallas, TX: Dalkey Archive Press, 2005: 13.)

“At a point when the capitalist world is coming apart at the seams, we may pause and ask ourselves: what has happened to serious Leftists protests against the unjust and dehumanizing logic of global capitalism? For the last few decades, any attempt to criticize the inner dark logic of capitalism has been simply dismissed as passé (or un-American). But now, as we perch precariously on the brink of total financial-capitalistic collapse, we may wonder why and under what cultural conditions true critiques from the Left have been systematically marginalized into non-existence. Has not the academy utterly failed to name and identify the perils of greed built into the very heart of the structures of capitalistic commodification? Can anyone, or any discipline, speak up?”

(John Milbank, Slavoj Žižek, and Creston Davis, *Paul's New Moment: Continental Philosophy and the Future of Christian Theology*. Grand Rapids, MI: Brazos Press, 2010: 1.)

“A piling up of heterogenous places. Each one, like the deteriorating page of a book, refers to a different mode of territorial unity, of socioeconomic distribution, of political conflicts and of identifying symbolism... The whole, made up of pieces that are not contemporary and still linked to totalities that have fallen into ruins...”

(Michel de Certeau, *The Practice of Everyday Life*, cited in “Relics, Places and Unwritten Geographies in the Work of Michel de Certeau (1925-86),” in Mike Crang and Nigel Thrift, Eds., *Thinking Space*. London and New York: Routledge, 2000: 151.)

“Fragments not as discontinuous but as overlays, pleats, folds: a chordal poetics in which synchronic notes meld into diachronic tones.”

(Charles Bernstein, “How Empty Is My Bread Pudding,” in Louis Armand, Ed., *Contemporary Poetics*. Evanston, Ill: Northwestern University Press, 2007: 9.)

“Although there is perhaps some aesthetic precedence in the row houses which are indigenous to many older cities along the east coast, and built with uniform façades and set-backs early this century, housing developments as an architectural phenomenon seem peculiarly gratuitous. They exist apart from prior standards of ‘good architecture’. They were not built to satisfy individual needs or tastes. The owner is completely tangential to the product’s completion. His home isn’t really possessable in the old sense; it wasn’t designed to ‘last for generations’; and outside of its immediate ‘here and now’ context it is useless, designed to be thrown away. Both architecture and craftsmanship as values are subverted by the dependence on simplified and easily duplicated techniques of fabrication and standardized modular plans. Contingencies such as mass production technology and land use economics make the final decisions, denying the architect his former ‘unique’ role.

Developments stand in an altered relationship to their environment. Designed to fill in ‘dead’ land areas, the houses needn’t adapt to or attempt to withstand Nature. There is no organic unity connecting the land site and the home. Both are without roots—separate parts in a larger, pre-determined order.”

(Dan Graham, “Homes for America: Early Twentieth-Century Possessable House to the Quasi-Discrete Cell of ‘66’,” in Richard Noble, Ed., *Utopias*. Cambridge, MA: MIT Press, 2009: 183.)



*Geoffrey Howard, The Village at Long Lake, Halifax, Nova Scotia, Canada.
(2020) Digital Photograph.*

“The essence of the modern consists in a *creation out of nothing*.”

(Friedrich Schlegel, *Philosophical Fragments*, in Rebecca Comay, *Mourning Sickness: Hegel and the French Revolution*. Stanford, CA: Stanford University Press, 2011: 20.)

“The house is gone.”

(Adorno, *Minima Moralia*: 39.)

“The lot is now a place of pictorial memory, a chimerical souvenir of the city before abstraction: on its blank wall is the imprint of a demolished house.”

(Peter Conrad, *Art of the City: Views and Visions of New York City*, in Kenneth Goldsmith, *Capital New York: The Capital of the Twentieth Century*. London and New York, NY: Verso Press, 2015: 484.)

“The most beautiful world is like a heap of rubble, tossed down in confusion.”

(Heraclitus, fragment 124, in Byles, *Rubble*: 6.)

“A dwelling that does justice to the existential situation of the present is located somewhere between the extremes of the container and a floating palace.”

(Bernhard Siegert and Geoffrey Winthrop-Young, Trans.), *Cultural Techniques: Grids, Filters, Doors, and Other Articulations of the Real*. New York, NY: Fordham University Press, 2015: 163.)