THE EXTENSIONAL DOMESTIC: A SELF-INDULGENT, PSYCHIC EXCAVATION OF HOME AND ART

by

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Abstract

The Extensional Domestic relies on a psychological exploration of dwelling to dissect my visual arts graduate research and corresponding projects. Traversing experimentally and anecdotally, I use the overlaying theme of domesticity to question the meeting points of apathy, indulgence, memory, and self-destruction within the intimacy of private space. Using my upbringing in the suburban American Midwest as a key to understanding the themes of my graduate work, I position the idea of home as a site for emotional learning, and unpack the psychological and material intersections within my arts practice.

As individual projects are contextualized through contemporary material analysis, and diaristic omissions, I also call on canonical artworks, artists, philosophical and literary works to situate my practice. Esoteric architectural and psychological philosophies of spatial interaction are used to symbolically unpack the greater themes of my work. These examples intersect with storytelling and contemporary material investigation as a way to generate a dialogue about the contemporary commodification of domestic space. The presented research at once allows insight into personal projects, but also positions the various constructs of dwelling as tools for material awareness and self-psychoanalysis.
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**IT STARTS AT HOME**

I can’t remember how old I was when I was a bored stupid kid, obeying a dare to punch a hole through my friends bedroom wall. What I do remember is peeling dusty pink and green floral wall paper off fragments of detached drywall. I remember my faintly bleeding hand, and the two of us laughing hysterically while shining a flashlight into the pit to see pencil marked measurements on a nearby stud. I remember boasting over how it only took me a few tries to break, how it didn’t hurt that bad cuz I’m not a little bitch. We covered the hole with a poster of the beach, and probably something with a boy band on it. We finally had an abysmal hiding place, a time capsule stashed with irretrievable secret notes, and chewed up, spit out gum. I felt obsessed with our excavation, our clandestine trash can within a hidden labyrinth of sturdy armatures, upholding decorative surface treatments that came in 3 choices of brown brick, or 4 choices of beige siding.

My parents chose the brick with the most gray in it. I think it felt more neutral.

I grew up with mostly nice things and don’t remember much about my life before the first time [highlighted text] in the face and then [highlighted text] with a bleeding mouth, [highlighted text]. I do, however, remember being really into the fact that my neighbors had the coolest vinyl siding, and a golden retriever named Laser. They had the beige that was the most yellow, like the house we lived in before, only their downspout was blue. I
remember pressing my face on the boundary between the beige and the blue, and relaxing my eyes in a way that made them mix together.1

**BODIES AND CHOICES**

I’ve always liked homes. I like the way they each have a different smell. I’ve always been told this smell is the “family smell.” From what I’ve found on the subject, it’s essentially a genetic blend of cleaning products, and food, and general chemicals from the things we keep—books, grocery bags, cigarettes, vanilla cake batter perfume, etc.—that get trapped in the pores of bedding, and drywall, and cracks in the baseboards. I got a little click-baity and found this response on the Family Smell from a Quora post:

![Quora response screenshot](image)

I’m convinced that I used to wait on this person during my time as a midnight diner waitress at THE RED APPLE MOTEL. He was 50-ish, ordered well done scrambled eggs at 4am, sub. pancake for toast with 3 cups of coffee, and a James Patterson novel.

1 I’ve tried to guess the exact color names associated with this house from memory, with my knowledge of paint names from visiting the Home Depot so often. I think it was BHER in Thickened Cream and Helium. Anyway, for poetic reasons, that would be the most fitting combination.
Anyway, I think he provided the perfect answer to my googling “why do all homes smell different”, because his response accounts for the lingering odor from kept objects, food, and cleaning products as “your body and your choices.” By succinctly illustrating his choices, the author of this response gives us a great example of the way body is linked to spatial orientation, preference, decision, and perhaps, privilege. This is a response that uses science subjectively, psychologically, phenomenologically (and presumably un/consciously), because it solidifies the capacity of a domestic environment to exist as a deeply personal entity. The dialect between interior and exterior representation that form a site of dwelling is transformative through intention, through attention, through choice.

The home is a site of spatial, physical, and emotional learning. It is used to hide vices and violence, isolate, and pray. Importantly, it provides shelter for bodies, but also for select materials affected and effected by body and by choice. Laundry, batteries, text books, family photos, court orders, invisible shards of glass caught in broom bristles, plants, plans, heroin. Materials that inform a body’s physical orientation, but also conscious experience through the most private of spaces.

**I’VE LIVED IN 4 HOUSES, 9 APARTMENTS, 1 TENT, 1 MOTEL ROOM, 1 HONDA:**

Maybe because I like making sculptures, I’m excited by thinkers who view the tangible world as a collection of non-coincidental symbols that provide clues to understanding the
psychic, psychological dimension of physical reality. Once, when I was dropped out of undergrad, I started reading Carl Jung’s *Synchronicity* while waiting in the parking lot of the methadone clinic for my boyfriend. I remember feeling annoyed and guilty. Like I was being yelled at for crying at the Coinstar® machine, for spending all my money on pills, for being turned on when he showed up bloody, and bruised, and wet, in clothes that weren’t his, whispering “I burnt down that building” in my ear. I was vile and childish about everything back then. I was so pissed at Carl Jung for studying the *I Ching* and empirically positing the possibility that my psyche extended past my body and was in a symbiotic, causal relationship with my environment and the cosmic conditions beyond *my environment*. So. Fucking. Pissed.

After all, he was an old, dead, rich misogynist. I think Benjamin even called him a fascist. But at the same time, I couldn’t turn back. It took longer than it should have, but after my lover killed the cat, I found a way out, and I started paying attention to my thoughts, and to the fleeting spaces I called home.

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2 During a studio visit with Angela Dufresne, she told me that Walter Benjamin referred to Jung as a fascist.
Following a Jungian model of psychoanalysis, French philosopher Gaston Bachelard initiated a conversation about the psychology of dwelling in his 1958 book, *The Poetics of Space*. Through application of his research in phenomenology, Bachelard revolutionized a dialogue surrounding domestic architecture, by analyzing spatial constructs with psychic consideration. Calling on examples from personal experience, his observations and criticisms are contextualized through examples in poetry and fiction. By anecdotally scrutinizing the function of domestic architectures, and even the furniture inside, he encourages a comprehension of spatial reality that mobilizes self-psychoanalysis. The definition of home, under Bachelard, becomes esoterically fragmented to understand the links between shelter, subjectivity, and imagination. The following remark from the chapter, *Drawers, Chests and Wardrobes* is one of my favorites:

“Wardrobes with their shelves, desks with their drawers, and chests with their false bottoms are veritable organs of the secret psychological life. Indeed, without these ‘objects’ and a few others in equally high favor, our intimate life would lack a model of intimacy. They are hybrid objects, subject objects. Like us, through us and for us, they have a quality of intimacy.”

This notion of hybrid objects or subject objects that Bachelard names within his analysis, assumes that emotional associations are configured within the experience of the inanimate world. Drawers, chests, and wardrobes, for example, become embedded with their owners personality, because they provide a physical space for sentimental, personal,

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or otherwise intimate items and information. These objects, existing in the most private of spaces, are connected with the identity of the subject, and are therefore interpreted as uncanny hybrids. If the terms of a hybrid subject-object are accepted, then the entire inanimate domestic sphere may be regarded as an extension of personal psychic reality, and can be analyzed accordingly.

Fig. 3 Personal photograph. Detail of my grandmother’s bathroom.
Fig. 4 Personal photograph. Full view of my grandmother’s bathroom.
Following Bachelard’s aforementioned research as a methodological inspiration for the formulation of her book, art critic Kristy Bell also responds to the psychological impacts of spatial happenings in *The Artists House: From Workplace to Artwork*. With a special focus on her fourth chapter, *Outside Walls: The House as Sculpture*, Bell extends a discussion on the function of exteriority in a way that structures the domicile through the logic of art-objecthood. With reference to architect and academic, Beatriz Colomina, she writes:

“The exterior wall, as the limit of both ‘outer’ and ‘inner’ states, is never a neutral surface, but rather a complex structural screen[.] It guarantees the privacy of the home while presenting a carefully articulated image of that home to the world at large. The exterior of the house, therefore is representation.”

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4 Gregor Schneider, VG Bild-Kunst Bonn, HAUS u r, Rheydt 1985
With this statement, Bell articulates a performative and spectacle-based role within the function of the home. The domicile becomes a public façade, a durable patina on top of vulnerability, a type of fiction articulating and complicating subjective narrative, and activating social and political criticality. By continuing the notion that image and representation form an embedded logic in architectural viewership, she posits situations where the domicile may be interpreted as artwork. For example, Gregor Schneider’s *HAUS u r*, an ongoing project where the artist uncannily distorts the interior architecture of an unoccupied suburban house once owned by his family in Rheydt, Germany.

Although Schneider’s family owned the home in Rheydt, they did not live in it. While he occupied the house to begin his project in the mid-eighties, there are rumors about the home being contaminated from the Schneider family’s lead foundry that once existed next door. Rheydt is furthermore famed as being home to the Minister of Propaganda in the Third Reich, Joseph Goebbels. These lingering features of the town, marked by the labor commissioned through Schneider’s family and also Goebbels, provide a narrative upholstering Schneider’s project with egregious spectacle.

I’ve only seen it in pictures, but from its exterior, *HAUS u r* appears to be a well maintained, normally operating domicile. The painted brick façade is worn, but sturdy, the windows are dressed with fashionable curtains and potted plants, the gutters seem clean. It’s also big. 3 stories, very rectangular, very German. On the inside, however, Schneider has fabricated rooms within existing rooms, many of them mimicking the function of the original. He’s dropped ceilings, inserted doors that don’t open, and also
doors that do open, but only to obtrusive walls. He’s installed false electrical outlets, ventilation components, made some rooms only enterable through closet doors. In a dining room (placed inside of the original), he installed a motor that allows the room to slowly spin. Even the windows are fiction- they’ve been placed in front of the originals, and inserted elsewhere. From the inside, the outside is simulated through curtains and light. From the outside, the truth of the interior is not. However changed, the rooms are for the most part, inconspicuous replicas. In pictures they are white walled, quaint, clean, unremarkable.

Fig.6 Interior view of Gregor Schneider’s HAUS ur, Rheydt, Germany.

Gregor Schneider, HAUS ur, Rheydt, 1985
As an artwork is often commanded to exist in galleries, *HAUS ur* has been exhibited off site several times. After being exhibited at Kunsthalle Bern a decade after the project began, the work made its way to the 1999/2000 Carnegie International, and then won a Golden Lion at the 2001 Venice Biennale. In order for this to happen, entire rooms have had to be removed for exhibition, before being delivered back to Rheydt and restructured inside the house. Where this obviously poses questions around maintaining the structural integrity of the work in its multiple sites, it would seem plausible that the exhibited sections were copies (of copied rooms). Gregor Schneider, however, has evaded questions about the assumed reproductions, and has left this part of his exhibited (and sold) work unconfirmed. As he continues to expand on the project, Schneider has

7 Gregor Schneider, *HAUS ur*, Rheydt, 1985
additionally restricted most visits to the *HAUS u r* which sits in Rheydt. It has only been seen in its entirety by a few people, all with conflicting descriptions and experiences of the interior. The home is mythologized by countless replications of an original that is known to exist, yet never experienced. I often wonder what the *HAUS u r* smells like.

**WHAT IT'S LIKE**

Just underneath and to the left of the nostalgic nosebleed that comes from the place I most commonly refer to as “home,” is a saturated bite of the not quite Midwest, mostly Rust Belted, American suburban dream. Driving in, everything appears camouflaged in McDonald’s and Sunoco (you know, those self-affirming flickering yellow signs with a little red). With the windows down and the heat cranked up in spring, there’s the soft smell of dead grass beneath snow melt, reviving itself with Christ love and bird shit and cigarette butts in Monster cans. There’s a deli named after a punch line, and an ice cream parlor where I learned how to hide my first hickey. There’s a coffee shop next to the market that used to be a post office, a Taco Bell, and a shop with a pink storefront that sells dolls, doll houses, and miniatures of every single home and building in the neighborhood, itself included. Once, a boy I knew, house-sat for a woman who had her whole block in hand-painted, wooden, exceptionally detailed and well carved miniature form on a long shelf in her kitchen. He brought me into her basement one afternoon for sex, and her Golden Retriever ate my underwear. When the dog crapped it out the next day, she brought it over to his house in a brown bag, and fired him. Anyway, downtown there’s a water fountain filled with pennies, and a park, and my orthodontists house, my

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8 She was a teacher at my high school, but I never had her and rarely saw her.
elementary school, my middle school, my high school, and a school bus lot. There’s the
Knights of Columbus where I bought a CB radio for 4 dollars, and a motel I used to hang
out in every Sunday afternoon when I was 16. There’s a church, and a church, and a
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church, and a church, and a church9.

9 There are 33 churches in the area, according to a head count on a google maps search.
https://www.google.com/maps/search/church+plymouth+-+canton+mi/@42.3714698,83.4837046,14z/data=!3m1!4b1.
10 “NorthRidge Church Plymouth MI,” https://www.joinmychurch.com/churches/NorthRidge-Church
Picture everything punctuated by train tracks. I love’d that train, those tracks. Those tracks we used to follow into the woods, on top of the concrete tunnels, where we could dangle our feet over the river. Where no one would look for us. Where no one knew where we were. Where we could smoke bad weed and take the pills we used to steal from Amy’s dad, and break the occasional bottle, and talk about the boys we blew, and the girls we’d kissed, and our overprotective parents, and never ever leaving our secret heaven. Sometimes I have dreams about walking there, on the tracks, passed the freeway, by the water, under the crooked tree. Just like we used to. But, I heard it was built over. I heard they filled the creek in after that one kid pulled his gun on those other kids executioner style (just playing around, of course). I heard our only safe place was found out and damned by a fence, and a security camera, and Satan’s fucking pilgrims.11

Architecturally, the landscape is averaged and resuscitated with rinse and repetition. It’s completely tasteless and sterile, yet somehow appetizing and entrancing. Like color changing LED’s under a kitchen island. Like little bunt cakes apathetically twisting on a lazy-Susan. The homes are built in unison, nudging the earth beneath their foundation into a single filed faith. Not prefabricated, but laid in tract. They come in four not so noticeable variations; each a privileged object, each seamlessly plugged into the soil at a swing-set distance apart. Neighborhoods are sub-devised with idyllic namesakes: Deer Creek, Rolling Oaks, Hunters Park. Before my family moved on and up, into the two sizes too big brick house in the Old Orchard Drive cul-de-sac, I lived in Sunflower Village.

11 Also a pretty good band, if you’re into that sort of thing.
I’ve always had a thing for namesakes, for titles. I wonder what Bachelard would say about it. Do these labels set a precedence for interpreting exterior function? If exteriority is a function of a home, and the home is an intimate and complex entity in space, and if poetry (no matter how bad) prompts the sentimental pathways which guide the soul through the multi-functions of space, then do these namesakes provide a texture of imagination by which exteriority, sense of place, and sense of self are understood? I guess my point is, if it’s true, as Bachelard speculates, that “imagination augments the values of reality”\textsuperscript{12}, and there are no Sunflowers in Sunflower Village, and Old Orchard Drive is a swamp with a few skinny trees, then the values of reality in these segments of space are charged with an impossible cost. Fuck it.

\textbf{ART DAD}

In Robert Smithson’s \textit{A Tour of the Monuments of Passaic, New Jersey}, the suburbs are seen as a pervasive pestilence. While the neighborhoods of Passaic were just forming,
Smithson visits as a kind of pilgrimage, beginning his essay by romanticizing his one-way ticket purchase with ritualistic detail. His descriptions of landscape meander through tangential prose. He uses the term “monument” without warning, satirically rhapsodizing oil derricks, concrete braces on the freeway, parking lots and smokestacks over the river. He describes the dogmatic existence of the sublime suburbia before him with a sense of disbelief. Smithson is deliberately trespassing, and also somehow stuck in time. He becomes an angsty teenager, kicking the flowers out of a lawn that doesn’t exist. Through his clear disgust with the flimsy spectacle, the half built promise of a perfect and convenient rapture- he slips as if to accidentally describe a lingering pulchritude in the wreckage.

While aptly estimating the destructive future of this suburban landscape, Smithson does not inhibit his simultaneous adoration within it. For me, this text is among the most astounding in its presumably inadvertent description of the art process, as Smithson’s unrestrained descriptions of the landscape point to an all-consuming trance any artist hopefully knows well. By alluding to his infatuation through monumentalizing banal, and even harmful structures, he underscores the inexplicable majesty of what it’s like to be irrationally in love with form. As an artist, he is speaking through his eyes; making predictions about a despondent future, because he is stricken by new materials in a derelict and transcendent state. He sees these textures for dwelling, new forms for a new spectacle of mediocrity under the senseless and relentlessly ordained structure of the American dream. All the while, he is enamored with the spectacle that repulses him.
After fixating on pipes in the river, he cynically though enigmatically describes the view before him:

“Across the river in Rutherford, one could hear a faint voice of a P.A. system and the weak cheers of a crowd at a football game. Actually, the landscape was no landscape, but ‘A particular kind of heliotypy’ (Nabokov), a kind of self-destroying postcard world of failed immortality and oppressive grandeur. I had been wandering in a moving picture that I couldn’t quite picture, but just as I became perplexed, I saw a green sign that explained everything:

YOUR HIGHWAY TAXES 21
AT WORK

Federal Highway Trust Funds 2,867,000
U.S. Dept. of Commerce Bureau of Public Roads State Highway Funds 2,867,000

New Jersey State Highway Dept.

That zero panorama seemed to contain ruins in reverse, that is—all the new construction that would eventually be built. This is the opposite of the “romantic ruin” because the buildings don’t fall into ruin after they are built but rather rise as ruins before they are built. This anti-romantic mise-en-scene suggests the discredited idea of time and many other “out of date” things. But the suburbs exist without a rational past and without the “big events” of history. Oh, maybe there are a few statues, a legend, and a couple of curios, but no past—just what passes for a future. A Utopia minus a bottom, a place where the machines are idle, and the sun has turned to glass, and a place where the Passaic Concrete Plant (253
River Drive) does a good business in STONE, BITUMINOUS, SAND, and CEMENT.”

Where Smithson presumably understands the basics of linear of time, he uses a hypothetical structure of time to convey affect and trigger a readers imagination. He inserts a hopelessness and uncanny sentiment pertaining to a larger human condition, while didactically explaining what a construction site of a new neighborhood looks like. By fictionalizing time, denying the future of a past, he provokes an emotional state. Subjectively, his words trigger the sentimental experience of my youth, and I experience his fiction as an attainable realization in memory and in intuition.

While I love so much of this essay, I understood the substantial descriptions of Smithson’s interactions with Passaic through my own experience of a different suburbia in the same condition, over thirty years into the future. As kid, I was a new resident in a neighborhood in progress, and I loved it. I played on construction sites, took scraps of wood, ran up and down dirt-mounds and voids, strutted along unfinished concrete inlays, and wondrously stared into mazes of pipe work. Years later, when I turned 14, my dad got a big promotion and we moved to the even newer side of town. Here, I was once again a witness to my new home being built. One day, I went with my mom to visit. As a culturally superstitious, first generation American-Turk, she threw religious objects into the framework before the drywall went up. I got lost in the maze of lumber and steel, excitedly trying to find my new room, feeling disconnected to my mom’s traditions, and scared of the transition to come. In this even more recent subdivision, a suburb within a

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suburb, I learned to lie about bruises, and boys, and drugs, and my outfits, and act polite. This amalgamation of time and contradicting experiences, placed within the concrete development and social implications of a new future, strike a chord with Smithson’s opposing interests in identical architectural states. Our narratives miss each other in time, only to greet each other in some kind of convoluted riddle. Smithson speaks about this ruinous landscape in a past I never knew, but that I experienced in the same phase, in a future that was supposed to exist without it. And so, my subjective experience of reading these words does something to collapse emotion, and memory, and hypothetical reality, and truth to transcend time and unite me with one of my art dads.14

**BUILDING BLOCKS**

14 I’m using this term colloquially, to signify a complicated yet deep fondness for an artist in a patriarchal cannon of practitioners. Where my practice deviates quite drastically from Smithson’s, he is a particularly important figure in my education and development as an artist, as his work has informed my relationship to spatial discourse, scale, and minimalist compositional gestures.
The Pulte Corporation, the still reigning US housing development company aesthetically responsible for over two thirds of my up-bringing, was birthed in the metro-Detroit region where I’m from. A phenomenon of the 1950s, “everything you could want from suburban living” began as one spacious bungalow built by the then 18 year-old Bill Pulte in 1950. When the bungalow sold for a fast ten-thousand dollars, Bill used the cash to build more custom homes in the area (for whites only, of course). By the late 70s, Pulte dominated the newly affordable, dream-come-true housing market in Detroit, Washington, D.C., Chicago, Atlanta, Colorado Springs, Denver, Cleveland, Harrisburg, Baltimore, and Puerto Rico. By the early 90s, the company established “Pulte University,” acquired First Heights Bank in Houston, and became the largest home builder in the United States. Soon after, they initiated a joint venture with General Motors, agreed to brand all of their homes with General Electric and became a Fortune 500 company. Of course, they continued to create and enter markets accordingly (Las Vegas, central New Jersey, various cities in Florida, Arizona, Virginia, you get the point). In 2010, under the name PulteGroup, Inc., the company celebrated its “60th anniversary of building homes and delivering the American dream of home ownership.”  

As of 2017, Pulte started their new series of luxury smart-home townhouses in Atlanta. Like true contemporary industrialists, they promote their Smart Neighborhood™ with clean energy solutions, while maintaining ongoing interests in coal.

In a moment where the threat of gentrification is high in most U.S. cities, Pulte’s hand in promoting volunteer based “blight” clean-up sites on their twitter account, so they can then flip foreclosed neighborhoods, is concerning at the very least. Where a capitalist housing regime composes a systemically racist and classist social mesh, I am interested in the material trends which dictate the fashionable appearance of these architectures. If there is a psychological dimension within our spatial relationships, how deeply may we decompose and analyze their material vernaculars?

Fig. 11 Composite screen shots of exterior options from Pulte.com.

16 Pulte exterior options, “Elevation tool,” pulte.com/design/design-center.
Since there’s really not much to do during wintertime in Western Pennsylvania, I decided to have a drink at the 2019 Pittsburgh Home and Garden Show, with the hope of answering this question. Each one of the 1700 performing vendors had a display board with bullet points that all seemed to underscore the same guarantee; *Engineered for Perfection, A Legend in Every Design, BROKEN PROMISES END HERE.* A man from the Timberline® Shingles booth handed me a brochure titled *Surprising Colors That Reflect The Beauty Of America’s Heartland.* Underneath the title is a picture of a sun setting over a field, with roofing tiles scattered upright amongst bales of hay. The colors of the dozen states, presumably accounting for this said *Heartland* according to Timberline®, are hardly distinguishable. Also, each one seems to pair perfectly with beige. My favorite section is dedicated to *Nantucket Morning.* Here, you can find a Louisa May Alcott quote plastered across a sizable dusty blue house with neatly arranged white wicker patio furniture. The caption reads, “The power of finding beauty in the humblest things makes home happy and life lovely.” Alas, the company’s pamphlet also prominently advertises its reception of the 2012-2017 Women’s Choice Award® for roofing products. Girl power is so on trend. Even for that shaky, sweaty dude standing on a red carpet square, peddling me shingles in Pittsburgh.

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19 This is especially wonderful, since Nantucket is in New England, not the Heartland, which generally refers to the Midwest.
**AS LONG AS WE’RE POLITE**

Personal integrity has a close public relationship with perceived affluence, and this bond seems to be most classically signified through the appearance and location of one’s home. When you see how easily a crystal chandelier can cover up black eyes and suicide while emanating rainbows into a foyer, it’s easy to see the advantages of this suburban system of denial, over other, less privileged types. The repeated tactic of commodifying both the Self and human necessity is somehow unremarkable, and I think that’s a funny thing to overlook. To focus again on Kristy Bell’s claims regarding the significance of exteriority within the view of domicile as object, “[the] façade-as-mask is part of a self-conscious costuming, designed expressly to stand out in public, to be in the picture.”

In other words, once this happy picture is taken, posted to Instagram, receives its highest ever B+, and is subsequently hung on the refrigerator door for all the neighbors to see over a book club meeting, does it then prevent a mother from telling her daughter to “wash up before any of the guests sees you, you smell like sex and you’re high” after she was raped? No. All it does is patch rage with a polite social convention. This process of fantasy that is so deeply engrained in home ownership, and location envy, and clean kitchens adorned with fake succulents and granite islands, and emotionally vacant, heat pressed oil prints of Tuscany; is at once fallible and misunderstood.

**EVICTED**

In January of 2019, I was invited to create a site specific work in a home, undergoing renovations in Braddock, Pennsylvania. This seemed reasonable, since my work takes on

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a domestic vocabulary. I have no connection to Braddock, so it was a little weird at first-uncovering my project based interests and reconciling them with my place in a community I knew nothing about. Researching the history of the area felt like the most rational place to begin. Not unlike many other cities across the country, Braddock declined along with the steel industry collapse beginning in the late 70’s. The following crack epidemic also took issue with Braddock residents. Within the past decade, a flashy mayor Fetterman promoted revival efforts, and noted his plan for the city as being “gentrification proof.”

My time working in the city was complicated. Where there are strong efforts to prevent gentrification and maintain community activism, my interactions with young and new Braddock residents made me doubt whether the city was safe from being violently overrun by 6 dollar oat milk chai lattes. As terms like racist redlining and colonization whisper and choke in the history of real-estate, home groups such as Pulte survive (as do analogous corporations with interests in domestic building materials). The potential profit to be gained off of low-income and largely black Braddock population, by real-estate groups and corporate enterprises attracting high-income and mostly white base within the Braddock region, is a prescient threat. My realization of the uncertain future of the home I was working in, and self-awareness as both a white graduate student and a complete outsider to the area, became a primary concern in developing this work.


23 Community activist collective, Transformasium, and shared collaborative General Sisters, an alternative grocery store focused on public need and alternative consumer practices, have maintained self-aware and anti-gentrification politics in Braddock; however, there is still a lingering fear of displacement.
Once, the homeowner had a friend stop by. He was from somewhere else, out of town, far enough to have stayed the weekend, rather than an hour. He came into the room where I was working, and we made small talk. Before exiting, he said something like “I love it here, it’s so great. It’s so cheap! There’s so much potential for all of these empty spaces.” I said “nice meeting you,” and he went his way. I started to think about this illusion of emptiness. Sure, there’s a vacant lot across the street, an abandoned middle school next door, but that emptiness isn’t real. I sat outside for a while, and realized I couldn’t hear anything but the train and the static hum of the nearby steel mill (and the occasional bird). The train and the mill are always operating. They are dependent on human activity, they are main providers, sources of work. The labor provided by the local mill is especially important to the specific region. But, to those not directly connected, the mill and the train are ambient noise, part of the landscape. The workers inside can easily become invisible, their personhood supplanted by industrial architecture.

For the next few days, I sat for different lengths of time, and recorded the sound as it appeared from the door step. I put each recording on three different speakers, stacked on top of each other in the center of the room. In an attempt to point to the way emptiness in Braddock is false and harmfully, yet also (seemingly) unconsciously fabricated, I deliberately fictionalized the presence of the outside world. This became my starting point, my punctum for developing the rest of the installation.
The project became a sort of deliberate pun. The house was in the process of being flipped, so I flipped it some more by hanging vinyl siding on the interior. I painted the siding in a soft gray to orange gradient, and lined the baseboards, door frame and windowsill with violet hues. Color became important, both affectively and linguistically. Where the rest of the home was precariously disheveled with dust, drop cloth, and scraps of lumber, this room was clean and bright. In theory, the colors I chose did not formally belong together. However, given their intensity, especially in contrast to the dilapidated appearance of the rest of the home, they were initially attractive, or at least demanded attention. Once sat with, the contradicting gradients became quickly uncomfortable, visually acidic and repulsive to many. Semantically, paint names were revealed as an accidental consumerist poetry, a subtle warning, a sticky ready-made. Gray to orange became *White Wash Oak* into *Cheesepuff*. A simple combination of violets became *Perpetual Purple, Hopeful Dream, and Future Vision.*
Fig. 12 Personal photograph. Installation view of *Come In*, 2019.
The room was out of sight, out of mind, with the door closed and the window blocked. In part, the surfacing became a distorted mirror, as reflective silver foil insulation entirely bandaged the ceiling, slipped through the patchwork in the siding and redirected artificial light. My intentions were to stage, to reflect, to sell and to barricade. The materials list for the project, titled *Come In*, read like junk mail, bullet pointing the installation with unnecessary exclamation marks, WordArt, curated BEHR® paint names, and quotations from builders websites. Not to my surprise, after the installation was up for a couple months after the opening, the homeowner evicted the project so he could rent out the room.

**WHERE TO?**

There is an erroneous an often unconsidered definition of normalcy perpetuated through a marketable need for comfort, and newness, and the endless ideal of an emotionally vacant domestic object and it’s voice activated, security locked environment. Where millennials are apparently still flocking to the suburbs, the dream of a clean, yellow box on a trimmed lawn has faintly transformed. Domestic trends seem to be following a march dictated by the ever growing convenience standards of tech corporations. The ever trendy portion of my generation working for Silicon Valley startups apparently refuse a future with the “visual monotony and social conformity of postwar manufactured neighborhoods.”

town-houses and boxy condominiums that look like they were manufactured on a
Microsoft Word resume template.\textsuperscript{25} You know, the ones complete with a gym, a compost
chute, an atrium
and a tunnel to
Starbucks. Within
this dream,
underneath the
choice between
\textit{White} and \textit{Ultra}
\textit{Pure White}\textsuperscript{26}, there
is a profit to be

gained by “Faith-
based leaders, civic groups and citizens” proclaiming to “save our urban neighborhoods
from viral blight!” (\textsuperscript{@pulte}, March 22, 2019).\textsuperscript{27}

There is a choice to consume information and to become a part of it. While, the
interpretation of a given home may be questioned in terms of economic class and signify
social orientation, the representation of home may also be considered archetypally; as a
symbol based tool for psychoanalytical mining and artistic language. The construct of
dwelling therefore also takes on a behavioral dimension, with respect to each spatial

\textsuperscript{25} Google Maps, “Bakery Square, East Liberty, Pittsburgh.”
\textsuperscript{26} “Explore BEHR Paint Colors,” BEHR, accessed March 15, 2019,
\textsuperscript{27} Bill Pulte (@Pulte), “What is happening in our inner cities right now is nothing short of miraculous!
Government is coming together with faith-based leaders, civic groups and citizens to save our urban
detail existing as an endless revision in memory and in desire. Each segment, each surface, each version of exteriority in body, in mind, and in space, is instrumental to a dynamic performance of subjectivity. Bell’s contemporary excavation of home as art object, and Bachelard’s study of phenomenological occupancy in architectural space, conjure a representation of spatial dwelling that is both experientially subjective and psychologically rooted.

**THERE’S NOTHING TO DO**

While working in Braddock I finished another, smaller installation. The title, *Let’s Play a Game Besides Eating Toothpaste and Sucking on Tangerines* imaginatively (or nostalgically) directs a senseless, humorously self-deprecating action from the side of childlike fascination. The subjective narration within this title, essentially calling on the viewer as a participant in a hypothetical game, is refracted through an experimental language of the materials list, which reads:

“Fluorescent Grenadine, Just a Fairytale, and Double Click on vinyl siding and crown molding. Also, very badly hung drywall, a video playing from my iPhone, Band-Aids and a swing-set chain.”

This language prioritizes satire and whimsy as an entry point into the work, matching the physical properties of the installation which take on a gentle perils of play.

Staged in a small gallery space, a 10 by 5 foot panel, approximately 2 inches deep, hung unevenly and diagonally from a swing set chain attached the ceiling. The front of the

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28 If you’ve ever swallowed mint toothpaste right before consuming citrus in your adult life, perhaps you understand that it’s a game with less risk than snorting a gram of molly throughout a day spent driving down country roads until you hit Kentucky, but it still doesn’t provide a real alternative.
panel, positioned closest to the gallery’s entrance, was covered in vinyl siding that was slickly painted in a violet to gray gradient. Color in this work was primarily used to exploit superficiality within a commonplace material signifier of dwelling. It also took on an alchemical pathology through paint color names, beginning at the bottom with *Just a Fairytale*, and ending at the top with *Double Click*. Scaling in staccato, the patina mimicked a digitized translation of color, as each step of altering hue was individually applied to a rung of siding. The other side of the panel was meant to impersonate a humdrum, hopelessly slapstick, and ad-hoc interior. I crookedly hung unevenly cut ¼ inch sheets of drywall, slapped Band-Aids onto their cracks, and limply framed the scene with a hyper-sweet Fluorescent Grenadine molding. The sides of the panel were left bare, exposing 2 by 4’s and construction screws. For me, these casual gestures highlight the shaky and ephemeral nature of reminiscence, recollection, and storytelling.

Elementally compatible to *Come In*, this work relied on the texture of sound upon entrance to the space. A muffled voice and a loud panging click radiated from an iPhone.
video of my dear friend shooting beer cans in his basement. Approximately 30 seconds and on a continuous loop, the video embodied the familiar quickness and choppy return of a social media story. This component of the work was, in technical terms of object-oriented scale, the smallest and most casually oriented piece of the installation. However, it was loud, annoying, attention seeking, and therefore managed to occupy the most space. The content of the video, displayed nothing short of a regional norm for coping with boredom during a crippling snow storm. While there was something obviously violent about the video, the element of play was clear in the tone of his voice (plus, he was only shooting a BB gun). Presenting this clip on my iPhone felt like an appropriate way to examine the arm-chaired relationship between violence and boredom in a post-internet American dwelling. The completion of this project prompted me to articulate the narrational undercurrents of my work, while allowing me to address my affinity for storytelling through objecthood.

Fig. 15 Personal Photograph. Detail image of video from, Let’s Play a Game Besides Eating Toothpaste and Sucking on Tangerines.

29 Harison Zamperla, a person I’ve loved and grown with, through many difficult episodes of boredom, in many basements, bathtubs, cars, on many bedroom floors, rooftops, and one 25 dollar inflatable raft down the Huron River.
Lawrence Ferlinghetti is my favorite storyteller, poet and romantic anarchist. In his loosely autobiographical 1960 novel, *HER*, he represented first person psychosis and a dangerous obsession with a woman. Roaming unsteadily through the streets of Paris, Ferlinghetti’s consuming alter ego is a traumatized ex-pat, describing his encounters in a way that uncannily revise physical and spatial interpretations of reality. In this part of the book, he describes falling asleep and having a dream where he becomes a house:

“It was the quicksilver dark at the back of a mirror, and the number of my door had been close to the number of my years, and thus *her* door was close by, perhaps in the same block, perhaps in the next building where there were skylights too. Her studio, on the other side of these walls. I would hear her voice through these walls, even if I had never heard it awake. I recognized her now, saw her, imagined her, that ‘classic face,’ strange coif of hair, sweet tit. In the semi-dark. In the great place of my sleep where sperm of light still fell. De-silvered mirrors lay about, face up, each a window, and these windows no longer blind. Each was an open eye on myself, each revealed a part of me, each a window in the house of myself. It was a tall, tall house. But inside, all the floors had been taken out, so that my pudgy fat body filled up the frame of the house from basement to roof. My body filled every corner of it, I was a huge balloon of a man, similar to one of those huge blown-up figures in carnival parades, swaying and tottering in the sky. The walls of my body pressed against the walls of my house at all points. Why was I so fat? I sweated too much, the walls of the building sweated, like the concierge’s little fat pig-dog that panted and sweated
and had one blind eye and panted and sweated and barked and blinked and rolled over on the cobbles outside the concierges cubicle. Every morning the little fat dog was there, sunning itself on the cobbles and panting and blinking and sweating and rolling over with its blind eye on the sky, a real *chien d’Andalou*. I felt a little pain in the lower regions. Something like a straightened-out inner tube was blown up too tight inside of me. I wanted to release a little air from it, and there was no valve. But if the partitions all had been taken out inside of me, if all the walls inside had been taken out, then all I had to do was to let air out at any point and the pressure would be relieved all over. I could let some air out of the upper windows just as well as below, and the whole swelling would go down. The whole swelling of myself. The windows were not all open, as I had supposed. They were all filled with the glass of mirrors from which the quicksilver had run off. But there was one thing that was free, one I could look through. My sleeping, seeing-eye could see."

In a self-indulgent trance, the unnamed protagonist is overpowered by his own delirium. He is exhausted and searching for a woman who is never named, changes form, and splits into multiple people throughout his story. This passage begins by noting a mysterious darkness, witnessed behind a mirror. He cannot see himself, but is projecting unknowingly onto the world outside, as he is desperately combing the streets for “her” studio. When he is reminded of his age, he rests and imagines that he’s close to her. Her form is ambiguously described, her breast has a sweet taste, implicating this mysterious woman as a mother (just before this excerpt, she is even described as a sculptor-a Creator). The trite feminine archetype is revealed in this moment, and therein lies the
protagonist’s urgent need for protection. The dark space he wanders through is fertile.
The obfuscated mirrors he cannot see himself through are transformed into windows that expose him. As his body transitions into a house, a building which may offer him the protection he craves, he becomes overpoweringly absorbed and consumed by the outside world. He becomes the un-private interior behind a façade, painfully and uncontrollably expanding with air- an invisible life force which suffocates him inside of an empty home. He is paranoid and imploding, alone in the dark. A vision of the chien d’ Andalou, disturbs him. The dog is a carnal and raucous archetype. It’s a crawling Freudian skin, a fantastic and ceaseless mockery of his obsessive agony. He is a home without partitions or floors. A discreet entity, an empty space behind a façade, standing alone on a street, perhaps unremarkably ignored by the bustle of the everyday. After all, he is desperate and abandoned after the second world war. He cannot seek refuge behind a locked door, there are no wardrobes for his keepsakes. He is growing and growing, sweating and sweating, he might shatter, but his subconscious self-awareness releases him. In this rare moment, he is able to clearly see outside of himself, his body and his mind self-soothingly recognize one another. He is integrated, and he is safe.

*HER* provides a narrative that is as nuanced and divergent, as it is deranged and honest. Punctuation and grammatical formalities are ignored, as disturbing, obsessive, and saccharine delusions are jammed within painterly descriptions of restlessness. Ferlinghetti details the time at a crosswalk, on the bus, at the café watching people and pigeons. His frantic language breaks down boredom with incessant spectacle, and exposes the logic of desire with grave error. His writing is all at once meandering, and
dark, and saved by the shorthanded grace of satire. His story is breathless, vibrating. Past
faults, present slips, and future speculation collapse into an elusive plotline with no real
sense of time or place. This is how I want to make art.

I am just as captivated by stories and prose as I am by art objects. I’m excited by
Bachelard’s explanation of phenomenology because he uses anecdote and poetry as a
way to excavate the emotional capacity of space. Like Jung, and Ferlinghetti, and Bell,
he questions the tangible world as a series of symbols. With the same inquiry, Smithson
deconstructs the suburban condition as a hollow and bottomless façade. He is undeceived
by the new and improved promise of utopia because he is able to see the flatness of the
mirror before him, reflecting subjectivity in a way that glimmers in the sun, while
indifferently exploiting eternity. The suburban spectacle is one that echoes “a kind of
cliché idea of infinity”. Schneider makes a house within a house, copying copied copies
until the whole structure is a crawl space to hell. He confronts the construct of home with
a practiced and ritualistic banality, as if to umbilically attach himself to the nuanced
violence subtly hiding in the cracks of the sidewalks, in the foundation of the house his
family lead poisoned.

Objects are described and believed. As they are self-assuredly present in space, they may
be just as quickly decomposed in the posture of their psychological receipt. Within this

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30 One time, when I got rid of all of my things and took a 30 hour train ride to Texas, I pitched an easel in a
tent, in a studio apartment that I lived in with 6-8 people (depending on the day), and got a job selling
tickets to the rodeo (an integral part of the county fair). I read Einstein’s Theory of Relativity on the bus,
and learned to appreciate it as a great literary work as well as a mathematical triumph, since his
explanations of space time punctuate calculus with gorgeous anecdotes about trains.
contingency are the elastic strings of memory, the intractable existence of the Self and Other. In the space of the “sleeping-seeing eye” resides the non-physical spectrum of consciousness, the power to interpret corporeal and material obtrusions as symbols for greater awareness of the choices spreading from bodies. The emotional, ontological analysis of space braids the inanimate, the subjective, and the non-human into a world extending beyond itself. Existence is a tangled and distorted plot, panting beneath the routine function of the everyday. The realization of home is a realization of a transformative and self-indulgent archetype. One that surrealistically blurs the behavior of mind and body with analyzable matter; matter that is separate from self, but also connected to it.

The truth is intricate and pressed in heavy folds of spectacular propaganda.

Fig. 16 Video still. *Un Chien Andalou*, 1929.

31 Luis Buñel, Salvador Dali, “Un Chien Anadolu” from IMDB
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