To Remember a House

reflections on place

Otso Prunnila

Contents

"Thus place, which is always spoken of as though it only counts when you're present, possesses you in its absence, takes on another life as a sense of place, a summoning in the imagination with all the atmospheric effect and association of a powerful emotion."[1]

[1] Rebecca Solnit, A *Field Guide to Getting Lost* (New York: Viking, 2005), 182.

"Can the true life of a building only be seen from imagined viewpoints that surpass the lifetime of a human being? What is the life of a building? Its own biography will be narrated through the assembly of blueprints / whatever documents survive of its construction, its renovations, its slow disintegration / the countless stories by and about its occupants (concealing the even larger number of stories untold) / the traces written into it and by its walls, beams, ceilings, doors... and the after-images that keep haunting the windows long after they've been blinded."[2]

[2] Bart Lunenburg, *This Creaking Floor and All the Ceilings Below* (FW:books, 2021), 310

Prologue

(on floorboards)

He steps on the wooden floor, and the wooden floor creaks in its expression of weariness, of the effect of the passing of time, of footsteps that have passed, wearing down the wood year by year, leftover wood that the original builder supposedly got to take home from the sawmill where they worked at, and with which they were able to build themselves this small house, with the leftover wood from the sawmill, and he steps on the wooden floor, and as it creaks he is reminded of his childhood and his childhood home, where the floorboards creaked in the exact same manner, and he remembers wandering around the house as a kid, afraid that the creaking of the floorboards would wake up his mother, who was, to put it lightly, a light sleeper, and who would always scold him for wandering

around the house in the night waking her up to the creaking of the floorboards, making it hard for her to concentrate at work the next day, tiring her down until one day she suffers a complete burn out and is forced to take some time off from work, and as he walks on the creaking floorboards of this small house he remembers a time when he had to go to the toilet in the night, but going up to the toilet would have meant risking waking up mother to the creaking of the floorboards, so he decides to hold it in, he'll go to the toilet in the morning, when she's awake, and as he falls asleep and the border between here and there blurs, he finds himself on a toilet, peeing, only to wake up a few seconds later to having peed in the bed.

Such are the sounds of the floorboards.

Introduction

Rebecca Solnit writes: ”In dreams, nothing is lost. Childhood homes, the dead, lost toys, all appear with a vividness your waking mind could not achieve. Nothing is lost but you yourself, wanderer in a terrain where even the most familiar places aren’t quite themselves, and open onto the impossible.”[3]

O, the protagonist of this story, wanders somewhere between dreams and waking life, in a terrain that to him seems quite unfamiliar at first, but which nevertheless, over time, manages to open up, evoking memories and thoughts both familiar and unfamiliar, as well as those that fall somewhere in between. He wanders about a house, a house that could be any house, though it has to be said that this particular house is located in Finland, over a hundred years old, wooden, derelict, worn down, on the brink of collapsing, about to

[3] Rebecca Solnit, A *Field Guide to Getting Lost* (New York: Viking, 2005), 182.

be demolished in a few months. The wooden structures are damaged by moisture and fungi. The house is barely holding together and thus has been reinforced with tension wires that cut through some of the rooms. What will be left of the house is the account O gives us.

I

(not quite day, not quite night)

The mask on his face resists the flow of oxygen in a way that is almost – almost, but not quite – suffocating. It's the not-quite that disturbs him the most. The way it tip-toes around the periphery of failure without ever fully arriving there. But he has to wear the mask, that much he knows, for the mold in the walls, stirred up by his moving about, is highly poisonous if breathed in for longer periods of time. Or maybe it's just the dust that shouldn't be breathed in. He doesn't know. No one really told him.

The light shining in from the windows on the right side wall filters through an orange tarp, which covers the whole eastern façade of the house. The door behind him is slightly open, and a sliver of blue light shines through.

The blue hour: "the period of twilight (in the morning or evening, around the nautical stage) when the Sun is at a significant depth below the horizon. During this time, the remaining sunlight takes on a mostly blue shade".[4] A not-quite he actually quite enjoys; not quite day, not quite night. Maybe he should reconsider his attitude towards not-quites, he thinks. Maggie Nelson writes about the color blue: "And so I fell in love with a color – in this case, the color blue – as if falling under a spell, a spell I fought to stay under and get out from under, in turns."[5] O feels something similar; as if under a strange spell. Rebecca Solnit writes: "The world is blue at its edges and in its depths".[6]

The light inside of the house dances between the warm orange light shining through the windows, and the deep, cold blue light seeping through the doorway. Which, now that he thinks about it, mirrors the colors of the house itself, when looked at from the outside, with its yellow walls and blue door.

[4] "Blue Hour," Wikipedia, last modified February 22, 2024, https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Blue_hour.

[5] Maggie Nelson, *Bluets* (Wave Books, 2009), 1.

[6] Rebecca Solnit, *A Field Guide to Getting Lost* (New York: Viking, 2005), 14.

He grabs his Stanley knife from the shelf, and proceeds to tear through the wallpaper, revealing layers of it stacked over each other over time, newspaper in between with typefaces from a century ago, advertisements for some remedies to illnesses he's never heard of, as well as carton and miscellaneous pieces of paper. He wonders if this house ever remembers its inhabitants, if each layer of wallpaper is saturated with memories of its past inhabitants, each new layer a concealment of that which came before.

Grocery list

Eggs
Milk
Bread
Rice
Mr.Muscle
Ground-beef
Onions
Filler
Plastic gloves
Earplugs
A mouse trap
Garlic
Cat food
Soap
Conditioner (frizz reducing)
Shampoo (no sulfites)
Toothpaste
Toothbrush
Comb
Lawnmower
Scented candles (vanilla and lavender)
Shaving cream
Micellar water
Dish soap
Soda
Butter
Lightbulb
Cream

a short note on deconstruction and architecture

Spaces frame and articulate, just as words do. Each room is a phrase, each closed door a punctuation mark. An open door a comma, perhaps, or an ellipsis... maybe a question mark? Windows colons, or perhaps semicolons; connecting the outside and the inside. Juhani Pallasmaa writes, "A building frames and structures, articulates and relates, separates and unites."[7] As he suggests, architecture is a verb, an action. It doesn't just exist statically; it acts, shapes, and becomes.[8] Mark Wigley's *The Architecture of Deconstruction: Derrida's Haunt* explores the intersections between deconstruction[9], as conceived by Jacques Derrida, and architecture. Wigley

[7] Juhani Pallasmaa, *The Embodied Image: Imagination and Imagery in Architecture* (Chichester: John Wiley & Sons, 2011), 123.

[8] "Deep architectural experiences are relations and acts rather than physical objects, or mere visual entities. As a consequence of this implied action, a bodily encounter with an architectural structure, space and light, is an inseparable aspect of the experience." Ibid.

[9] Deconstruction is a form of analysis that questions the fundamental conceptual distinctions, or oppositions that are dominant in Western philosophy, revealing how these binary oppositions are not fixed but instead rely on each other for meaning. Originating from the work of Jacques Derrida, deconstruction exposes the inherent contradictions and ambiguities within these systems of thought, showing instead the inherent unstability of meaning.

describes deconstruction as ”a form of interrogation that shakes structures in a way that exposes structural weaknesses, taking them to their limits.”[10] Derrida was highly aware of the architectural language embedded in deconstructive thinking and deliberately used terms like “structure”, “edifice”, and “foundation” to convey how deconstruction (the term itself holding architectural, or anti-architectural, connotations) destabilizes seemingly stable structures, much like the shaking of a building reveals its hidden instabilities.

Wigley expands on the links of architecture and deconstruction on both metaphorical and practical levels. As he notes, deconstruction is not simply about applying architectural metaphors to philosophy; it also offers a critical method to interrogate the structures of architecture itself. He prompts us to see deconstruction as a way of revealing the hidden spaces that architecture is built upon. He writes:

[10]Mark Wigley, *The Architecture of Deconstruction: Derrida's Haunt* (Cambridge, MA: MIT Press, 1993), 35.

The space of a building is constructed to enclose something that must never appear within it. The visible enclosure, the definition of a space with walls that makes things visible both inside and outside it, is first and foremost a mechanism of concealment that veils another kind of space inhabited by the prohibited other, or, more precisely, veils a space that is itself the other inasmuch as it disrupts the logics of inhabitation. By shaking architecture, deconstructive discourse forces this other out into the space that is supposed to conceal it, demonstrating that its effects can actually be found throughout that space in all the routine transactions that go on within it, and even that the space itself that routinely conceals it is its first effect.[11]

As O tears through the wallpapers layer after layer, reaching the framework of the walls, he notices the instability, precarity inherent in the original building technique – the so-called *plank end* technique. In this technique, short

[11] Ibid. 56.

planks of varying lengths are laid horizontally like bricks, with clay mortar in between. These types of houses were built in various parts of Finland, especially near sawmills operating around the turn of the 19th and 20th centuries. In these sawmills, timber was cut to specific lengths for sale, leaving offcuts of varying sizes as surplus. Workers were often allowed to take these offcuts for personal use, leading to the construction of workers' homes using the plank end method around sawmill areas.

The interior surface of the wall is covered with a rough plaster. Over this, planed and profiled vertical boards have been installed. It is all damaged by water and fungi by now – the wood crumbles when touched, the dust falling from O's hands to the floor on which he walks, as some of the floorboards dissolve under his feet, revealing small glimpses of the foundation underneath the house. Wigley writes: "The unbuilding that is deconstruc-

tion is not a form of demolition… To make a building tremble is precisely not to collapse it by subjecting it to some external force, but to explore it from within, even to consolidate the structure, imitating its every gesture, faithfully repeating its operations…"[12]

Bart Lunenburg writes that we build with materials as we build with words and ideas. He notes how we often think of theories and arguments in terms of buildings. They have foundations, they are constructed, supported. "Which arguments contain myriad rooms and long winding corridors? Whose theories have problems with the plumbing or a leaky roof?" he asks.[13]

[12] Ibid. 42.

[13] Bart Lunenburg, *This Creaking Floor and All the Ceilings Below* (FW:books, 2021), 143

II

(the mnemonic house (rooms that change when you're not looking))

'When I think about the phases of my life, it is a series of rooms behind me, each with a door to a previous room left open, behind which is another room, and another, and another.'
- Charlotte Wood[14]

The Method of Loci is a memory enhancement technique, originating from ancient Greece, used to improve the ability to recollect or recall information through the use of familiar spaces and environments. Example: you for some reason don't have the opportunity to write your grocery list down, and so you must memorize it. You can then proceed to place the different items on the list at specific locations in a familiar place, such as a house: a cow standing in the middle of the

[14] Charlotte Wood, *Stone Yard Devotional* (London: Allen & Unwin, 2023), 80.

living room, with someone milking it (milk); toilet dirty and thus in need of a cleaning product (Mr.Muscle); a loud songbird singing in the bedroom in the night (earplugs). By mentally walking through these locations, you can recall the items associated with each place. The method relies on memorized spatial relationships to establish order and recollect memorial content.[15]

O walks through the house, and each time he enters a room – which there are surprisingly many – he notices that the resemblance to the previous room is striking, seemingly identical, but if he were to go back to the room he was in five rooms ago, he would notice that there are indeed significant differences between the room five rooms ago and the one he inhabits at a given moment. The changes are so small that he finds it hard to pinpoint what it is exactly that makes one room different from the one preceding it. However it must be said that this mental process of

[15] "Method of Loci," Wikipedia: The Free Encyclopedia, last modified December 19, 2024, https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Method_of_loci.

recognizing or not recognizing, or the act of questioning, doesn't necessarily occupy his most urgent thoughts. It's more something that lurks beneath the surface, something he can feel, a certain uncanniness, but doesn't think about consciously. He takes a piece or two of wallpaper with him from each room, as well as sometimes a small piece of the crumbling floorboards, or a piece of wall from behind the layers of wallpaper. Sometimes he finds an object whose function is unclear to him, picks it up, inspects it through touch, sight, and sometimes smell. At times these inspections, for example, a whiff of the surface of a strange wooden object, shaped like a toothbrush but not
exactly, emits in his mind a memory-image that flashes on the surface of his mind for a brief moment, a *minuscule* moment even, and then vanishes, never to return.

The same thing happens often with the rooms themselves; a certain way the light from the

window illuminates or doesn't illuminate the space, the way the floorboards creak, the way the walls seem to cave in. These brief moments of recollection emerge as sensations, accompanied by an oftentimes blurry and shifting image, as well as emotions, such as a peculiar sense of longing, joy, or embarrassment. Sometimes the feelings he feels -it must be said that at times, perhaps most of the time, he finds it hard to understand his own feelings – could be described as nostalgic, or, as Thesaurus suggests as a weak match for the word nostalgic, *syrupy*.

Etymology of the word nostalgia; *nostos*, a return home, and *algos*, pain. Moyra Davey writes: "and that is what the word has always implied to me: unconsummated desire kept alive by private forays into the cultural spaces of memory."[16] She quotes Michel Foucault: "It's good to have nostalgia towards some periods on the condition that it's a way to have a thoughtful and positive relation to your own

[16]Moyra Davey, *Index Cards* (London: Fitzcarraldo Editions, 2020), 15

[17]Ibid, 16.

present."[17]
Davey also alludes to Svetlana Boym's division of nostalgia into two subcategories: restorative and reflective nostalgia. Boym writes: "Restorative nostalgia stresses nóstos (home) and attempts a transhistorical reconstruction of the lost home. Reflective nostalgia thrives in álgos, the longing itself, and delays the homecoming – wistfully, ironically, desperately."[18] Restorative nostalgia points to a kind of a rift between an individual and the present, which can lead to an intense longing and idealization of the past. Reflective nostalgia, on the other hand, looks at the past in ways that acknowledge its contradictions and irretrievability. Reflective nostalgia doesn't attempt to recreate the past but instead dwells in the longing itself, what it means to yearn for something that can never fully return.

Dylan Trigg writes:

Returning to a place after a long period of

[18] Svetlana Boym, "Nostalgia and Its Discontents," The Hedgehog Review: Critical Reflections on Contemporary Culture, Summer 2007, https://hedgehogreview.com/issues/the-uses-of-the-past/articles/nostalgia-and-its-discontents.

absence, we are often shocked by both the small and the vast changes, effectively alerting us to the radical indifference places have to the sentiment we apply to them. Here, our own selves can become the site of an internal quarrel as to how a place once was; by claiming to cognitively remember the feel of a place, our bodies can provide a different history of the past. The result is that a place can take on a life of its own, quite apart from the way it is experienced or remembered.[19]

Using familiar spaces as mnemonic devices, as the method of loci suggests, holds certain presuppositions regarding the nature of memory and place. O's navigation through the house, where the rooms feel familiar yet always slightly altered compared to the previous one, questions these presumptions. The method of loci assumes that space is stable, a constant, but what happens when the spaces of memory are unreliable, when they shift like the rooms O occupies, or when, as Trigg sug-

[19]Dylan Trigg, *The Memory of Place: A Phenomenology of the Uncanny* (Athens: Ohio University Press, 2012), 2.

gests, the body's return to a place generates a different history than the one we cognitively remember? Perhaps this is the core of the unconscious tension that O feels: the house presents itself to him not as a reflection of the stability of the past and memory but of their fluidity, or, to an extent, unreliability. Perhaps the act of collecting pieces of wallpaper, floorboards, miscellaneous objects, or fragments of the walls becomes O's attempt at stabilizing it.

As Dylan Trigg suggests, sometimes returning to a place from our past confronts us with changes, subtle or drastic, reminding us of how places and ourselves evolve but also how the past resists the narrative we wish to impose upon it. The house seems to tease him with its subtle shifts, reminding him that memory is never just clear recollection. Like space, it warps, bends, decays, and transforms.

Places are never fully ours, they always elude our grasp, even as they are intimately involved in the formation of our identity and our memory.[20]

[20] Ibid, 6.

III

The indecisive room

A room, made of separate, but conjoined spaces. One part bears a subtle similarity to a place from O's past, while the other seems more unfamiliar to him, distant, like a waiting room, or a fitting booth, or an office space. Yet, as these two spaces overlap, the other spilling and folding into the other, a strange synthesis is formed, where O's attachment to the room is hesitant about where to land -as if an image of a place were to surface on the mind, bearing a familiarity to it (that of mood, light, or the way things are arranged), but at the same time alienating; remaining unpinned, resisting categorization or familiarization.

A corner that is formed by the overlap of the spaces is shadowed in a way that brings

back a time when O cried in the corner of his family's house as a child, after the death of their cat. And sometimes the way the rooms overlap creates an empty space of sorts, illuminated by the cold light and the silent artificial hum of a tube light so bright that O's gaze can't rest on anything. The flow of his thoughts and memories is disturbed, tickled in a way that makes him more receptive to new, unfamiliar sensations. There is a sense of transition in the conjoining of these two spaces, as if the room hasn't fully decided what it wants to be.

Marc Augé coined the term *non-place*, in his book *Non-places: Introduction to an Anthropology of Supermodernity*, in opposition to the term *place*.[22] He argued, that the ways of modern living and spatial organization inevitably produce what he calls non-places, such as airports, malls, shopping streets; places which humans pass through as anonymous beings:

[22] Marc Augé, *Non-Places, Introduction to an Anthropology of Supermodernity* (New York: Verso, 1995), 77-78: "If a place can be defined as relational, historical, and concerned with identity, then a space which cannot be defined as relational, historical or concerned with identity will be a non-place."

a person entering the space of non-place is relieved of his usual determinants. He becomes no more than what he does or experiences in the role of passenger, customer or driver... subjected to a gentle from of possession, to which he surrenders himself with more or less talent or conviction, he tastes for a while – like anyone who is possessed – the passive joys of identity loss and the more active pleasure of role-playing.[23]

In the same way humans remain anonymous and without identity within them, the non-places themselves carry hardly any history, or identity, of their own. ''Everything proceeds as if space had been trapped in time, as if there were no history other than the last forty-eight hours of news, as if each individual history were drawing its motives, its words and images, from the inexhaustible stock of an unending history in the present."[24]

[23] Ibid, 103.

[24] Ibid, 103-104.

The geographer Yi-Fu Tuan popularized the term *topophilia* (derived from the greek words "topos", place and philia (love, or affection). He uses topophilia to describe the emotional and physical attachment individuals and groups form with specific places, emphasizing that these affections grow from the histories, memories, and the personal and collective narratives that become embedded into spaces over time, and from the way these spaces themselves hold and form these narratives.[25]

In the room, O feels the most affection, or *topophilia*, toward the spaces where the past presses into the present. The angle of the light through the window seems to pause time, catching him mid-thought. It is not just that these spaces feel familiar; it is that they make him feel seen, as if the room knows him. The sterile half of the room, by contrast, resists such a resonance. Its surfaces are too smooth, light too uniform, walls too white. There is nothing to hold onto, no texture or

[25] See Yi-Fu Tuan, *Topophilia: A Study of Environmental Perception, Attitude, and Values* (Englewood Cliffs, NJ: Prentice-Hall, 1974), 93-100.

detail to ground him. The points in which they meet create overlaps not just in space but also in the bodily and mental affections O experiences towards the space. The seam between one room and the other is marked by a slight shift in texture, from wood to linoleum, and in light, from warm to cold, while the shift in the spatial affect O experiences is accompanied by confusion and entropy. Augé points out that "Place and non-place are rather like opposed polarities: the first is never completely erased, the second never totally completed; they are like palimpsests on which the scrambled game of identity and relations is ceaselessly rewritten".[26]

Could time spent in this room fuse the conjoined but separate spaces together? If place anchors identity and non-place erases it, then what is left in the in-between? Does it make us weightless, free to remake ourselves, or does it cast us adrift, unable to land? The familiar gives way to the unfamiliar, and in

[26] *Marc Augé, Non-Places: Introduction to an Anthropology of Supermodernity* (New York: Verso, 1995), 79.

that shift, something new might emerge. Or maybe this space will always remain unsettled, undecided, a place that is happy to exist in the in-between. He takes a step, the sound of his footsteps changing as it crosses from one space to another. The shift is small but important – a reminder that even the slightest movements can mark, fuse, or blur, the boundary between seemingly oppositional polarities.

For all this time, O has been aware of a presence of sorts in the house. That feeling of being watched that one at times encounters when, for example, trying to sleep at night, but being unable to because of a gnawing feeling of someone staring at you.

IV

(are you in or are you out?)

"In actual fact, it was already too late to know whether you were indoors or out."
-Georges Perec[27]

One of the rooms in the house, which, again, there are surprisingly many in comparison to the size of the house when looked at from the outside (if one were to guess the number of rooms in the house based solely on outside observation, one would most likely guess somewhere between three to four, when in fact, based on O's experience, there are at least 10 rooms, maybe even 15), is strikingly peculiar, mainly because unlike in the other rooms, where the floors are sometimes wooden, sometimes linoleum, laminate, cork, or concrete, this room has grass as its floor. A lush, slightly moist, vibrant green field of grass covers the entire floor, and fills the

[27]Georges Perec, *Species of Spaces and other pieces* (Penguin Group USA, 1998), 38.

whole room with the earthy, fresh, somewhat damp smell, which is, according to Wikipedia – the most reliable of sources – ''connected through olfactory memory to past experiences involving the odour and may evoke *nostalgia*, eliciting associations with spring or summer."[28] And so O lays on the grass, stretches his arms and legs, closes his eyes, and falls into *syrupy* reminiscence, where the blurry idea of a memory of a warm summer night spent hanging out on a field of grass with friends doesn't really connect to any particular past lived experience of such, but instead remains an idea, an idealized version of the past. Instead, what happens is that, as the somnolent smell of the grass leads O's thoughts to daydreaming, his body seems to gain a new (temporary) form – that of a barn on a vast, flat field of grass. Maybe a hundred metres in front of him, a highway supports the fast-moving cars on it, as their collective sounds merge into one long monotonous sound, reminiscent of brown noise.[29]

[28] "Smell of Freshly Cut Grass," Wikipedia: The Free Encyclopedia, last modified December 19, 2024, https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Smell_of_freshly_cut_grass. (Cursive by the author)

[29] Which is, by the way, (kind of) proven to increase relaxation and focus.

IV.I (*solitary figures in the landscape*)

If one embarks on a travel through Finland, one immediately notices a particular presence in the landscape; that of countless abandoned barns, solitary figures in the vast, flat landscape of the countryside, forgotten, disregarded. Much like the non-places Augé describes, they are anonymous, strikingly similar to each other, uninhabited.

In 1999, the architects Sami Rintala and Marco Casagrande created a durational, public artwork called *Land(e)scape* where three abandoned barns were placed on 10-meter-high wooden beams, and thus separated from the land on which they stood.[30] The beams were placed in a way that mimics the act of walking, so that the barns appear to be fleeing the countryside, embarking on a journey towards the South – where the bigger cities are. The work came to an end in a ceremonial act of burning the barns, accompanied by the danc-

[30] https://hiddenarchitecture.net/landescape/

er Reijo Kela, who danced amongst the burning barns until darkness descended upon the land again.

The work suggests, much like Augé, that the fast-paced progress of modernity inevitably renders once-functional spaces obsolete, and comments on the desertification of the Finnish countryside – the majority of its landscape. "Modernity does not obliterate them but pushes them to the background. They are like gauges indicating the passage and continuation of time. They survive like the words that express them and will express them in the future."[31]

The abandoned barns, stripped of their original function in the landscape, become instead incentives for collective remembrance, as well as testimonials of the unstoppable development in modernity. At the same time, the way the barns warp and bend, prompts us to think of the uncompromising pace of time and decay. They remind us of the effects of the passing of time, the ways of nature and weather,

[31] Marc Augé, *Non-Places: Introduction to an Anthropology Supermodernity* (New York: Verso, 1995), 77.

and their power to transform.

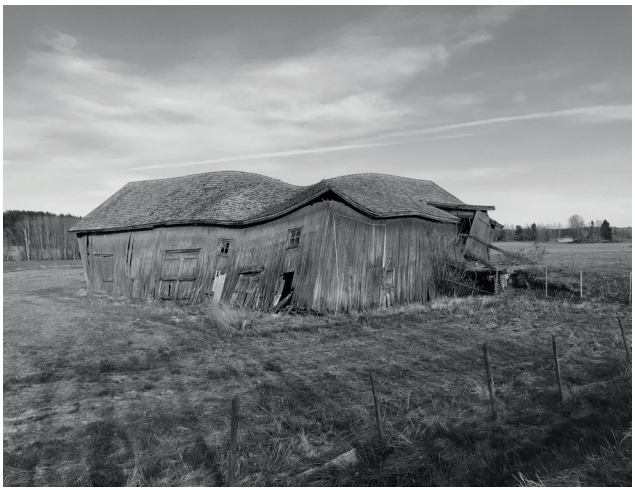
Tim Ingold writes, in his book *The Perception of the Environment*, about how landscapes are not merely static, or backdrops of sorts, but constantly shifting and transforming, shaped by – and shaping – the temporal flows of nature and human activity. He writes:

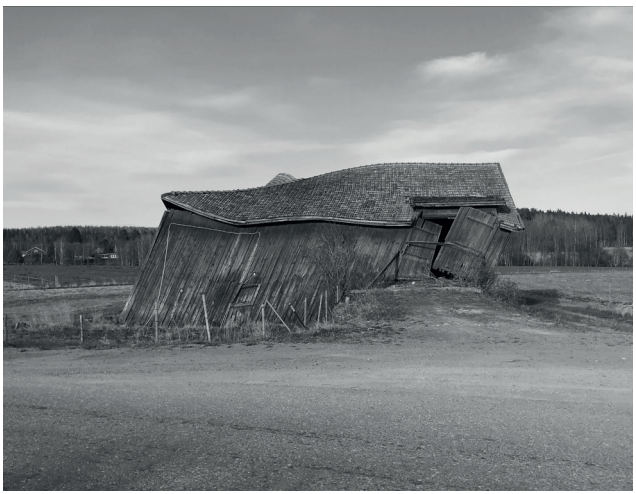
The landscape tells – or rather is – a story. It enfolds the lives and times of predecessors who, over the generations, have moved around in it and played their part in its formation… to perceive the landscape is therefore to carry out an act of remembrance, and remembering is not so much a matter of calling up an internal image, stored in the mind, as of engaging perceptually with an environment that is itself pregnant with the past.[32]

Ingold's thoughts paint landscapes as active participants in the recording of time, history, recording both presence and absence,

[32] Tim Ingold, *The Perception of the Environment: Essays on Livelihood, Dwelling and Skill* (London: Routledge, 2000), 189

prompting imagination and remembrance. The barns, though derelict, still have a particular significance in the landscape: holding onto collective and personal memory.





a recurring dream

Someone, somewhere has been having recurring dreams as of late, all connected to the house where she spent most of her childhood in, where different people from different parts of her life travel through the house. In these dreams, it feels as if she's the house itself, a spectator observing the different scenarios playing out inside of its walls. In one of the dreams, her childhood best friend is trapped in the attic of the house, while she's on the other side of the door, trying to break it open. The friend panics, bangs on the door and shouts that he does not want to stay there forever. She tries to reassure him, telling him that she'll find a way to open the door. But as time goes by, she forgets about him. New people come and go through the house, and when they hear his desperate voice from behind the door and ask who's there, she tells them that it's just a ghost. Just a ghost? they ask. Just a ghost.

[*] If you want to know more about her dreams, and how they connect to those of O, you can listen to the album made to accompany this thesis by scanning the QR-code at the back.

a short note on hauntology

Jacques Derrida introduced the concept of *hauntology*[33] (pun very much intended; in the French language, the letter H always remains silent, so that the word hauntology becomes homophonous with the word ontology), which, to put it simply, points to a certain kind of presence (haunting) of the past and the future in the present. Very much like ghosts haunt the living, or occupy the rooms of a haunted house, Derrida's concept of hauntology points to the persistence of unresolved pasts and unrealized, or yet-to-be-realized futures within the present. It destabilizes the simple binary opposition between absence and presence, showing how something can be both here and not here at once. Hauntology, in this sense, allows us to think about time not only as a linear progression, but as something folded and recursive. It suggests that the past is not simply the past, but

[33] The concept of hauntology is highly elusive and complex in its nature, and gains slight differences and nuances according to the context in which it is used. Rooted in Derrida's critical exploration of Marxism and its ghost-like lingering, the term has since evolved across various fields. I have tried my best to grasp the concept, while evidently using it in the context of architecture, but do apologize for any possible over-simplifications. For Derrida's original formulation, see Jacques Derrida, *Specters of Marx: The State of the Debt, the Work of Mourning, and the New International*, trans. Peggy Kamuf (New York: Routledge, 2006)

something that shapes the present in different ways. The act of reminiscing is, in itself, a kind of haunting – a dialogue with things that refuse to be left in the past.

Mark Fisher points out two ways of thinking about hauntology: one dealing with the past that is no longer present in actuality, yet remains effective as a virtuality, and the other with a future that has not yet happened but is already shaping the present. Fisher connects hauntology to Marc Augé's concept of non-places.[34] He suggests that just as non-places are spaces devoid of meaningful, personal connection, non-times are periods or experiences that lack clear meaning – times that feel disconnected, distant, fragmented. These non-times, much like non-places, strip the present of its identity, its saturation with the past, and reduce it into a perpetual now.

An encounter with a haunt in a space resists

[34] Mark Fisher. "What Is Hauntology?" Film Quarterly 66, no. 1 (2012): 16–24. https://doi.org/10.1525/fq.2012.66.1.16.

this reduction. Fisher writes that ”haunting can be seen as intrinsically resistant to the contraction and homogenization of time and space. It happens when a place is stained by time, or when a particular place becomes the site for an encounter with broken time.”[35] Haunting, in this sense, brings back a sense of time’s complexity, meaning that a place holds the marks or memories of past events, and the memories evoked by these traces disrupt the flow of time, as it is experienced in the living subject, which invites a kind of temporal resistance that challenges the steady, neat development of modernity’s time.

The house O wanders through doesn’t exist only in a one-dimensional present. It holds its past through its worn, crumbling floorboards, layers of wallpaper, its fragile architecture, and the dust that falls and stirs up with every movement, and the mask that O must wear because of this. These remnants allow time to reverberate within the space. At the same

[35] ibid.

time, the inevitable future of this particular house, that of demolition, haunts and shapes O's relation to it. Is he supposed to resist this future or allow it to happen, perhaps even embrace it?

V

(atmospheres)

In her essay *Space as Atmosphere*, Alice Van der Wielen-Honinckx writes: "Yet despite their vague, ungraspable nature, atmospheres are also very concrete and specific. They always have a singular 'color', or 'taste': a specific degree and combination of being, for example, cold, warm, serious, playful, holiday-ish, gloomy, dreamy, tropical, school-ish, mysterious, cozy and so on."[36]

Since atmospheres can sometimes be quite hard to describe with words, I want to try to extend the list she lays out, so that whenever you find yourself in the unfortunate position, where you have to quickly describe a specific characteristic of an atmosphere of a place, you can simply consult the following list.

[36] Alice Van der Wielen-Honinckx, "Space as Atmosphere, Floating in a Molecular Bath," in *Slow Spatial Reader*, ed. Carolyn F. Strauss (Valiz, Amsterdam, 2021), 89.

Hazy
Boring
Scary
Totalitarian
Nostalgic
Syrupy
Labyrinthine
Electric
Transient
Liminal
Anxiety-inducing
Claustrophobic
Extravagant
Spectral
Carnival-esque
Buoyant
Melancholic
Feverish
Stagnant
Haunting
Like someone's
memory of a town,
and that memory is
fading
Weathered
Dreamlike
Mundane
Absurd
Political
Silent
Disquieting
Serendipitous
Convivial
Ominous

Regal
Feral
Tender
Otherworldly
Oppressive
Uncanny
Aggressive
Radiant
Hyper-modern
Non-place-esque
Anarchic
Mythic
Daydreamy
White cube-like
Intimate
Fragile
Warm
Cold
Lukewarm
Chilly
Bleak
Harmonious
Alarming
Playful
Dystopian
Utopian
Tense
Relaxed
Welcoming
Surreal
Whimsical
Mournful
Worn-down
Heavy

Spacey
Trippy
Nauseating
Hypnotic
Gloomy
Oozy
Foggy

VI

(through the still room, slowly)

O notices that the space -that invisible something between the walls, floor, and ceiling- seems to gain a more viscous form. Time, his body, thoughts, and the one songbird flying around the room, all move in slow motion. The drowsy pace of O's thoughts prompts his attention to turn outwards. Sunlight shines through the window on the wall, creating a mirror image of it made of light on the wooden floorboards. The bird's singing is a couple of octaves lower than usual as it traverses the space slowly. Dust particles float in the air, illuminated by the sunlight. The wallpapers are in pristine condition, which he finds odd, and the floorboards are coated with shellac apparently just recently, since the faint, sweet, somewhat fruity smell still floats in the air. Other than these things, the room is seem-

ingly empty, and – consulting the list on the previous page – stagnant.

Alice Van der Wielen-Honinckx expands on Pauline Oliveros' concept of Deep listening[37] by introducing what she calls "deep perception", prompting a multisensorial engagement with our surroundings. This encompasses impressions of touch, smell, taste, and kinesthetic sensations, which are ""listened to' with the whole body-mind".[38] Deep perception requires us to rethink the notion of time, especially in relation to space, as it requires us to enter into a different symbiosis with space and to recalibrate our common thought models. "We need to slow down; allow experiences of perception to take the time they take. To not rush over them and barely notice, but to taste them fully and allow the experience to unfold at its own pace."[39]

[37] Deep listening is a practice, coined by the composer Pauline Oliveros, that emphasizes fully immersing oneself in the act of listening, going beyond passive hearing to engaging with sound on a more intentional level. For more information, see Pauline Oliveros, *Quantum Listening*, (London: Ignota Books, 2022).

[38] Alice Van der Wielen-Honinckx, "Space as Atmosphere, Floating in a Molecular Bath," in *Slow Spatial Reader*, ed. Carolyn F. Strauss (Valiz, Amsterdam, 2021), 90

[39] ibid.

How do we develop a different relationship with time – and thus with space – in our modern ways of living, which push us towards an increasingly fast-paced life, rewarding constant productivity, an almost athletic dedication to filling every moment? Here, the concept of duration, as conceived by the French philosopher Henri Bergson, might prove useful.

Bergson developed the concept of duration to question the divisible, quantitative, linear notion of time measured by such things as clocks and calendars. For him, duration is the qualitative, continuous, inner flow of time as it is directly experienced in the living subject. Instead of consisting of discrete, divisible moments, duration is seamless, an experiential time that is constantly evolving and can't be cut into measurable units without losing its essence in the process. Bergson saw duration as the core of the lived experience, which to him consists of constant overlaps of thoughts,

emotions, and memories that co-exist simultaneously. Duration considers time as it's experienced from within, emphasizing that each moment carries the memory of previous moments, and is informed by the emotional and mental states of the experiencer, as well as their memories. "For our duration is not merely one instant replacing another; if it were, there would never be anything but the present – no prolonging of the past into the actual, no evolution, no concrete duration. Duration is the continuous progress of the past which gnaws into the future and which swells as it advances."[40]

What happens, if we think of space in a similar way? Elizabeth Grosz notes, that "space in itself,..., is not static, fixed, infinitely expandable, infinitely divisible, concrete, extended, continuous, and homogenous, though perhaps we must think it in these terms in order to continue our everyday lives...Space, like time, is emergence and eruption, oriented

[40] Henri Bergson, *Creative Evolutionn* (Macmillan and co., London, 1922). 5.

not to the ordered, the controlled, the static, but to the event, to movement or action"[41] She invites us to consider space not as something static or purely measurable, but as a kind of duration of its own, an unfolding process, a continuous emergence.

If we think of Bergson's duration as time experienced from within, then space, too, might be something lived, something that is experienced rather than something that simply is. Space in this sense is less a container and more a process, something that shifts and transforms as events and bodies move through it, and that, in turn, activates and shapes those events happening within – and outside – of it. This suggests that space is not only limited to its grids, boundaries, or blueprints, but is instead something that gathers meaning as people and objects move through it, as interactions occur, as memories and sensations accumulate. To think of space this way means seeing it as intimately connected

[41] Elizabeth Grosz, *Architecture from the Outside: Essays on Virtual and Real Space* (Cambridge, MA: MIT Press, 2001), 115.

to time and to lived experience – space that is not only about spatial organization, but also about unfolding moments; something that responds and reacts.

Honinckx writes about resonant spaces as ''situations where experiences of resonance can reoccur, so that 'axes of resonance' can appear."[42] Resonance is here understood, through the sociologist Hartmut Rosa as a kind of positive, reciprocal symbiosis with the world and an individual, where ''the world 'speaks back to us' instead of 'remaining mute'; when we are at the same time actively relating and passively being affected".[43] Resonance, then, becomes a vital aspect of both duration and space, suggesting that when we enter these resonant spaces, we attune to an active, immersive experience where the boundaries between us and our environment soften, allowing for a more harmonious interaction with the world.

[42] Alice Van der Wielen-Honinckx, "Space as Atmosphere, Floating in a Molecular Bath," in *Slow Spatial Reader*, ed. Carolyn F. Strauss (Valiz, Amsterdam, 2021), 90

[43] ibid.

O tries to remember how he arrived here, piecing together the memory of each doorway and corridor, trying to construct a kind of mental blueprint of the house by attempting to memorize the relative location of each room. He moves through the room slowly, as if moving through honey, air pulling at his limbs. The light shining from the window feels similar; almost solid, tactile. The bird flies slowly around in the air, mapping it, marking points of movement and stillness, singing a song (O thinks the melody reminds him of Umbrella by Rihanna, but he's not sure). He jumps in the air, to see how it feels to float in the air and finds that it in fact feels oddly similar to floating on water.

He wonders how it is he's still in midair when he thought he would land back on the floorboards in a matter of a couple dozen seconds. He feels a different relationship with the room, floating there in the air, for his body no longer requires support from the structures

of the space. He floats there, watching the bird drift slowly by. He tips his weight slightly to the left, and the movement sends him into a gentle roll. He turns there, in the air, slowly, like some unidentified flying object in a half-forgotten dream, one with the space around him.

The rolling starts to subside, and his body becomes still again. He realizes he's been holding his breath, his whole body attuned to this quiet, empty moment in the still room. He lets out a long sigh, and feels his muscles relax, his body softening. He turns his head back towards a door, which is still there, reminding him of the option of leaving, of walking out into a different room, returning to more usual time. Perhaps he'll go back to the room with the grass floor, he thinks. Not that he feels any great need to move. Instead, he floats still, in the air, allowing himself to rest in the thickened air, letting it settle around him. Both him and the room content to wait,

to see what unfolds.

VII

(It's like the dream is coming to life in the dark and the world has come to a close)[44]

So it is dark. And silent. And it is in the darkness and silence where O loses all orientation of his body and thoughts. And time and space. He must have fallen asleep while floating. He does know he is in the house, and what he can gather about time is that it's somewhere between midnight and 5 am, since it is really so completely dark. And here in the dark, O's body becomes a ghost of sorts, an entity whose presence he can no longer confirm through sight.

In this place, O feels a deeper, subtler, perhaps paradoxical presence press against him: that of nothingness. Dylan Trigg suggests a way to look at nothingness through a temporal lense:

[44] This sentence was formed entirely by the prompts iPhone's autocorrect function provides.

Encountering the nothing, we simultaneously encounter ourselves, forgotten before being rediscovered... if thinking about the Nothing in spatial terms is possible, it is with reference to a representation of which is limited to temporal conditions. We discover only what has been experienced in a specific temporal space and not what has yet to be experienced.[45]

Nothingness, then, becomes not just spatial, but also finds its way to temporal forms, in that nothingness is not static; it exists within a flow of time, shaped by what has come before rather than being a pure empty space. Nothingness holds memory; an understanding of nothingness is formed by the collision of the past and the present. O feels this temporality flow through him.

Trigg further notes:

Silence, like the Nothing, is absent upon inspection: we do not find it "there" as such.

[45] Dylan Trigg, *The Aesthetics of Decay: nothingness, nostalgia, and the absence of reason.* (London: Bloomsbury, 2012), 18.

Silence, again like the Nothing, is contextual and perpetually relates to what it lacks. It exists, as the Nothing does, as an echo of its origin, as a shadow of a past place. What is silent, therefore, must stand as a repercussion of this non-silence just as Being arises from the resonance of the Nothing. To encounter the Nothing we must be led by silence. The space that this silence leaves must be our guide.[46]

Slowly O gives in, stops resisting, stops trying to find points of orientation. The house, which he can't see, becomes, in its darkness and silence, a site of boundless imagination, for darkness is never completely dark, and silence is never completely silent, nor "without the recollection of what preceded it".[47]

In Japanese culture and language, the word *Ma* refers to these intervals, gaps, silences, and absences, which give shape to the whole. ''It has been described as a pause in time, an interval or emptiness in space. Ma is the

[46] Ibid, 12.

[47] Ibid, 38.

fundamental time and space from which life needs to grow."[48] In Japanese architecture, these intervals are not seen as mere emptiness, but are experienced as "spatio-temporal interval[s] filled with change and movement."[49] Ma is a lived space that is both spatial and temporal. Unlike Western views of absence as lack or emptiness, Ma holds an active quality, an agency.
Ma invites a relational understanding of space. Each ephemeral event that occurs in a space is an essential constitution of that space. "[Ma] is about the life that occupies the space."[50] For O, standing (or floating?) in the darkness, these voids manifest as spaces of connection, places where his presence interacts with the house's memories.

These thoughts help paint absence as an essential part in the constitution of our understanding of place. The tangible materials of a building – its walls, doors, furniture – are resonant with the voids, gaps, and silenc-

[48] Kiyoshi Matsumoto, "Ma: The Japanese Concept of Space and Time," Medium, August 22, 2019.

[49] Renske Maria van Dam "Practicing full emptiness in architecture" in *Slow Spatial Reader*, ed. Carolyn F. Strauss (Publisher, Year), 104.

[50] Kiyoshi Matsumoto, "Ma: The Japanese Concept of Space and Time," Medium, August 22, 2019.

es that lie in-between. Thus absence isn't merely pure emptiness but something that defines how we understand physical space. In a house, the structure's solidity depends as much on its materials as on the spaces in between -the Ma, or gaps, which hold the building together. In confronting this nothingness, O begins to sense how absence shapes his perception of presence: the negative space not only frames his perception of a thing, but actively defines the meaning of it. Thus, absence becomes a presence itself, an invisible architecture constructed of memory, absence, and silence -the ghostly framework of the house.

It starts to rain.

O thinks of those nights in the bedroom of his childhood home, where the curtains were drawn and the lights shut, and all he could orient himself towards was the sound of rain, coming from somewhere from the other side

of the window. This sound was – and is, in the temporal present he is inhabiting at the moment – the one thing separating sound from silence, something from nothingness. And this precarious oscillation between something and nothing, past and present, prompts O's thoughts to enter that state somewhere between imagination and memory. "Because of this endangered temporality, consciousness acts swiftly, often entering the half-imagined, half-remembered place before the state is broken."[51]

And O is there in the house, not the house he physically inhabits at the moment, but another kind of house, one that finds its foundation in the home of his childhood, but which is ultimately formed, built, by all those spaces he has inhabited and imagined thus far. The sound of the rain brings him deeper and deeper into the past. Trigg, describing beautifully the experience and complexities of the dream-image taking flight writes:

[51] Dylan Trigg, *The Aesthetics of Decay: nothingness, nostalgia, and the absence of reason.* (London: Bloomsbury, 2012), 18.

in this ambiguous place, we are beyond boundaries, yet simultaneously dependent on those previous boundaries in order to navigate our way through the fractured terrain. An altered existence emerges, now altered and disembodied. Sheltering in the unreality of the imagined memory, thus we remain for as long as the equilibrium can be preserved. Out of this displacement, we experience time from the inside-out. Divested of its exterior order, the clean line of time, divisible and rational, comes undone. In its absence, there is no liberation. Instead, we discover remnants, disused but not dispersed: the old place now stretched beyond its geometrical limitations, cluttered and without the volitional consciousness suppressing it.[52]

[52] Ibid.

VIII

(the house elf)[53]

Then, just like that, there is a light. A dim, small light, similar to a firefly, appearing in O's peripheral vision. The light hovers there against the darkness, and starts to illuminate the space little by little. The present moment takes over, as the soporific state of O starts to subside, and with it the vividness of the past. The light starts to move towards the attic, and O follows it, up the stairs, which have now appeared in front of him, and which to him seem unable to hold his weight, but for some reason he's not scared of them collapsing, no, does not think of it any more than that as he climbs up the stairs to the attic, guided by the little light. As the space slowly gets brighter, he makes out a silhouette of someone in the corner of the room. An elf-like creature, with pointy ears, white hair and a red hat. The creature is quite tiny, maybe three feet tall.

[53] In traditional finnish folklore, house elves were household spirits, entrusted with various tasks to ensure the home's happiness and well-being.

Come on in.
O stares at the elf, perplexed.
It's okay. I'm no mean elf. Well, as long as you don't agitate me too much.
An elf?
A house elf. That's what I am.
What is a house elf, if I may ask?
Well, I suppose it's quite evidently stated in the name. I am the elf, a spirit of sorts, of this house. I make sure things run smoothly and all, although I must say lately I haven't quite lived up to my duties. See, I've just simply been so very tired. Absolutely exhausted. And it was fine and all, since it's been so quiet in here lately. Until you came.
O doesn't know what to say. Should he apologize?
You came in here and started making all that noise! You're lucky I'm not like other house spirits. Were you to start making all this noise in any other household in the whole of Finland...[54]

[54] "The elves were believed to observe the life of the household very closely and judgmentally. If the household members did not live in a well-behaved and diligent manner, the easily irritated elf could remind them of its existence, by causing disturbances. At worst, the elf could leave the ill-mannered house altogether, taking happiness away from the house." The National Museum of Finland. "Elves - the National Museum of Finland," n.d. https://www.kansallismuseo.fi/en/items-of-the-month/2022/tontut.

He breathes in deeply, holds his breath for about 30 seconds, his cheeks ballooning out like a toad, and lets out a huge sigh.
One sure doesn't want to indulge in such imaginaries.
I apologize. I didn't know there was someone else in the house as well.
It's fine. In all honesty, I have been craving some companionship as of late. See, it can get rather dull in here all by oneself, even though us house spirits are solitary creatures. But then again, I suppose I'm not entirely like others. Do you know how us house elves come to be?
I'm afraid not.
Usually, we are the spirits of the house's first inhabitant. The first one to light a fire in the fireplace of the house, to be exact. But I was born in quite an anomalous way. See, I am the spirit of a person trapped in the attic of this house.
Trapped in the attic? By who?
I was trapped in this attic in a dream of my dear friend, some hundred years ago.

I'm sorry to hear that.
No need to be sorry. I've lived a good life in this house, and believe I have found a great lot of meaning in my life through living up to my duties as the house elf.
There is a moment of silence, as the House elf strokes its beard, seemingly lost in thought.
But I think my time is coming to an end, as all lives inevitably must. Even us house elves. There is a common misconception amongst the ordinary folk, even amongst some of the younger elves themselves, that a house elf is an immortal creature. This, of course, couldn't be further away from the truth. Our lives are deeply intertwined with the houses we inhabit. If the house dies, so do we. And this house, that both you and I inhabit, as we both know, is facing demolition.
The house elf continues stroking its beard. He gets up and starts to pace around the attic. The floorboards creak.
Were this house not demolished soon, it would die by its own means. Natural death, as they

call it.
It strokes its beard more, almost aggressively now. It looks into the ceiling, into a hole covered by a tarp that extends throughout the whole eastern side of the house.
Do you know what happened here? With the hole in the ceiling I mean.
No, I don't. Did something fall on it?
A birch tree. Smashed through the roof while I was sleeping one night, around five years ago. Things have started deteriorating ever faster from that point on. That particular tree, the only one near the house, had been standing there for hundreds of years. And then one night, just like that, it was all too much, and it surrendered to the strong wind that had been blowing the whole day.
The House elf sits back down and continues stroking its beard.
Can I ask you something? O asks the elf.
Ask away
What am I doing here?
The elf looks at O with a slight confusion on

its face.
Have you not figured it out yet?
I have not.
To put it simply, you are here to notice the house before it is gone. To form a memory of this house, one that lives in time, if only for a brief moment, and resist its fall into complete oblivion.
But why?
Because something should remember that this place was here. Not to preserve it, but just to notice it before it's gone. Things disappear all the time. Most do without anyone paying attention. You're here to make sure it's noticed, even if only for a moment. That's all it is -just noticing.

INTERVAL

The songbirds dream of a house

An essay written by a House-elf

In dreams I have been an eagle and a green finch, have met a three-headed coyote, wolves, foxes, lynxes, dogs, lions, songbirds, fish, snakes, cattle, seals, many horses and cats, some who talk, a woman giving birth by cesarean to a full-grown stag that ran away, still wet with the juices of birth, down a dark, three-shrouded road, a gazelle fawn that a woman breast-fed, a brown bear who married a woman.
- Rebecca Solnit[55]

I once read somewhere, that when songbirds sleep, they dream of singing; rehearsing, perfecting their songs for the next day. I wonder if we are doing something similar in our sleep, speculating on possible scenarios in order to prepare us for what's to come. What functions do dreams hold? Can we find a way to think of dreaming as a 'valid' epistemological methodology? When our day-to-day logic, tendencies, and thought patterns dissolve, can we find new, meaningful possibilities for alternative ways of knowledge-making - a

[55] Rebecca Solnit, A *Field Guide to Getting Lost* (New York: Viking, 2005), 82.

place where we explore scenarios, embody alternate selves, or work through unresolved things and situations from our lives? ‘’If daily realities guide and narrate our dreams, then could this also work vice versa?” [56]

I have been occupying this house for the duration of my life as a house elf. I was trapped in the house in a dream of my childhood best friend – though it must be said that I do not think of it in terms of ‘being trapped’ anymore – and during this time, I have attended to the house, and its multiple maintenance tasks, but lately have found myself unable to do so for multiple reasons. Instead, I have spent most of my time dreaming – which one might find odd since I am already living inside a dream of sorts. I often dream of my family house – a different house to the one I nowadays inhabit and the one O has been wandering about. I do not remember much from my past life, but fragments of it and this family house come back to me in my dreams quite

[56] Cecilia Casabona, “Introduction,” in *Dreams of Dreams of Dreams*, eds. Cecilia Casabona and Natasha Rijkhoff (Eindhoven: Onomatopee Projects, 2024), 14.

often nowadays. In these dreams, the house shifts and transforms according to the people and scenarios that play in it.

The house was built after the war against the soviet union during the reconstruction period. These type-planned houses are a noticeably familiar sight in the Finnish countryside landscape, for in the 1940s, after the war – when over 120 000 houses were destroyed or left on the territories given to the Soviet Union[57] –, these houses were built rapidly by the veterans and their families in the post-war reconstruction period. The houses are more or less identical to each other; wooden, small houses with a saddle roof, consisting of a living room, kitchen and a bedroom, as well as an attic. The blueprints to these houses, as well as the building plans and instructions, were made and handed out by the Finnish government, but the building of the house itself was left for the families – with the help of neighbours and the local community. The

[57] Kirsi Saarikangas, *Model Houses for Model Families: Gender, Ideology and the Modern Dwelling. The Type-Planned Houses of the 1940s in Finland* (Helsinki: The Finnish Historical Society, 1994), 7.

materials were oftentimes sourced from the surrounding land, and old nails and such straightened and reused. These houses also represented a form of living that deviated from tradition. The core element was seen as the nuclear family formed by the father, mother, and children, whereas traditionally in rural areas, people had lived in extended family groups that included grandparents, daughters-in-law, and sons-in-law, along with farmhands and maids. These houses have become sorts of nostalgic icons of the Finnish landscape, symbolizing resilience, unity and independence, at least in the eyes of some.

Vida Rucli contemplates, in her essay Soft Utopias, on what constitutes the opposites of dreaming. ‘’If dreams are something light, airy, suspended and imaginative, are their opposites maybe the most concrete of actions, such as making, assembling or building?”[58] She continues, ‘’if I think of them as being unfocused, slightly messy, fragmented and

[58] Vida Rucli, “Soft Utopias” in *Dreams of Dreams of Dreams*, eds. Cecilia Casabona and Natasha Rijkhoff (Eindhoven: Onomatopee Projects, 2024), 98.

nonlinear, then intentionality, planning and designing would seem as their opposite."

One of the main aspects of these houses was functionality and efficiency. This can be seen, for example, in the way the rooms are placed around a single fireplace, so that having the fire on would mean that each room gets warmed up simultaneously.

Architecture, perhaps more than any other art, is completely intertwined with the everyday lives of people. Kirsi Saarikangas writes, in her book *Model Houses for Model Families* which explores the ideologies behind these types of houses, that "A dwelling is an organized space, which can be read as a form of speech (parole) that contains the hierarchical structures of a certain housing ideology; it is a way of organizing everyday life and privacy."[59] Linking this idea to the type-planned houses, she writes:

[59] Kirsi Saarikangas, *Model Houses for Model Families: Gender, Ideology and the Modern Dwelling. The Type-Planned Houses of the 1940s in Finland* (Helsinki: The Finnish Historical Society, 1994), 31.

the type planned house is a standardized, private space constructed in accordance with the existing >>housing norms>> – a dwelling that is on the one hand extremely private and personal, but simultaneously also generic and prevalent. It is both a physical space and the locus of the everyday lives of its occupants.[60]

We have now established the notion of architecture as a way of prompting the everyday lives of a building's inhabitants. The way the rooms are structured and placed in relation to the other rooms and their functions has a direct connection to the ideas with which tasks are to be performed in the building. What then happens in these dreams of mine, where the house of my past – a type-planned house- twists, shifts, gets turned inside out, where the rooms change and transform according to the things that are performed in it, or the people that inhabit it?

In these dreams, the fireplace, the presumed center of the house, sometimes turns into

[60] Ibid.

a lighthouse, sometimes a birch tree, or at times migrates to the forest, and instead of having a fire burning inside of it, houses now a small snowfall. Rooms collapse into each other, a bedroom folding into a kitchen, a kitchen spilling into a field or a forest. The bathroom turns into a cinema where Love Actually is played on a loop for eternity.

As the blueprint handed out by the government gets dissolved by the dream images, a place where I recall what-I-thought-to-be-forgotten moments of my past life is allowed to emerge. But somehow I feel that these dreams are not entirely mine, they might carry traces of others' dreams, too. Although it's hard to know, since I don't remember that much from the time before this. Maybe they are the dreams of other house elves?

Over time, these houses have become a kind of mixture of the collective and the personal; saturated with the personal lives they shelter,

while still carrying the weight of the history of their public purpose. These houses were built with a very specific function in mind: to impose order on the chaos of post-war displacement and trauma. Their structure was, in this way, a kind of a discipline; walls arranged to contain families in a specific way, to center them around the practical heat of the fireplace.

In these dreams of mine, where the house comes back to me always in a slightly different form, I've noticed how these structures transform through lived experience and dreams. The relationship between collective and personal memory becomes more complex.

In this way, dreams might not be the opposite of making or building, but instead, a kind of remaking, a loosening of boundaries that allows for reimagining together. And perhaps my dreaming is no different from the songbirds rehearsing their songs in their dreams. We are not just recalling what has been but

composing what might yet be.

IX

(the birds sang about archiving)

O places the pieces of wallpaper in plastic sheets, and arranges them carefully on a shelf. He takes the pieces of the floorboards, the walls, and miscellaneous objects he found in the house, and places them on the shelf too. Outside, the evening starts to settle, the blue hour approaching (the word hour seems to be a little bit misleading in this context, since the blue hour actually only lasts about 20 minutes. So maybe we should call it the blue 20 minutes instead).

He wonders what this archive will amount to. How it will live on after the house is gone, after he is gone. O's archiving might be seen as a form of holding onto something that's being lost, but can this act become more one of letting go, of embracing loss, than one of preservation?

Derrida suggests that archiving is driven by

both the desire to remember and the fear of forgetting. He writes, ""There would indeed be no archive desire without the radical finitude, without the possibility of a forgetfulness which does not limit itself to repression. Above all, and this is the most serious, beyond or within this simple limit called finiteness or finitude, there is no archive fever without the threat of this death drive, this aggression and destruction drive."[61]

Could the act of forgetting become a meaningful, fulfilling way of engaging with memory? The more we seek to preserve, the more aware we become of what escapes. Derrida reminds us of the archive's inevitable failure – that even in preservation, something is always lost, both intentionally and unintentionally. Perhaps, then, forgetting is not the opposite of memory, but its accomplice. Rebecca Solnit writes: "Some things we have only as long as they remain lost, some things are not lost only so long as they are distant. "[62]

He looks at the shelf, and in that moment,

[61] Jacques Derrida, *Archive Fever*: A *Freudian Impression* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1996), 19.

[62] Rebecca Solnit, A *Field Guide to Getting Lost* (New York: Viking, 2005), 82.

decides that it should stay where it is. That when the time of demolition arrives, this shelf will stand right here, in this room, as a testament that someone noticed the house's existence right before its demolition. The blue hour (20 minutes) deepens, the light shifting gradually, soon to be gone entirely. O steps outside, and takes his mask off. The sky above is turning a darker shade of blue now, the last light of day slipping away. He takes a long breath of the cool autumn air, feels it filling his lungs, and then lets the air slowly out of his lungs, as if letting go of something he can't quite name, but knows has already passed.

Epilogue

(demolition)

The house comes down piece by piece, plank by plank, as the massive iron claw tears through the structures, starting with the roof, the claw – rusty at the edges, yellow with age – swinging out, reaching toward the roof, pinching at the edges, pulling down a long strip of shingles and wood that falls with a soft, crumbling thud, and the house comes down in a way that resembles the game of Jenga, though instead of careful consideration of which piece to choose, the iron claw tears through everything it sees without much consideration – or care –, so actually it is the complete opposite of Jenga, and the house does not seem to resist this demolition, but accepts it silently, compliantly, its open rooms now bare to the sky, dust swirling through the broken places where windows once reg-

ulated, and the walls held, the light, and the claw swings back, as if to catch its breath, then resumes the demolition, now with even more force, aggression even, and the noise of the machine fills the air with a sense of violence, and still the house seems to wait, as if it knew this was always how it would end, as if the walls knew they were only temporary, and a songbird flying in the air wonders: there was a house here, wasn't there? yes, a yellow house with a blue door, and a voice, too, wasn't there? yes, the sound of footsteps, and an elf too, wasn't there? yes, a short elf with a white beard and a red hat, but now there is no one, except a big machine and its loud, grinding noise, the sharp crack of wood, the iron claw tearing through what's left, and the house comes down piece by piece, plank by blank, as the massive iron claw tears through the structures, and a stray cat wanders around the pile of wood on the ground, confused, as it wonders: where is the house? the house that gave me shelter, and where is

the elf? the elf that gave me food, and where is that ghost? that ghost who spent its time wandering about the house aimlessly, and the stray cat meows at the machine, though its meows get lost in the noise of the machine, powerless, as the house comes down piece by piece, plank by plank, the massive iron claw tearing through the structures, and the sky is grey, uniform grey clouds covering the whole sky, and then something starts falling from the sky: tiny white snowflakes, and the tiny white snowflakes start covering the pile of wood, and the machine and the claw, and the claw stops now, and a person comes out of the machine and looks to the sky in confusion, for it is only september, and for a moment, everything stops, time freezes for a moment, the claw hangs in the air, still and quiet, the dust begins to settle, only the sound of the wind passing through the empty space is heard, the space where the house once stood, the space that is no longer a house but something else, something unformed, waiting, waiting for

what comes next.

Acknowledgments

Warmest thanks to the house (which this paper is loosely based on) in Kotka, Finland, for welcoming me within your walls one last time before your demolition.

Special thanks to Tiina Halonen for allowing me to spend time in the house.

Heartfelt thanks to Onno Schilstra for the conversations and feedback throughout the process.

Sincerest thanks to Iivari Mikkonen for helping me navigate InDesign and the whole design process.

Huge thanks to Femke Dekker for the invaluable support, feedback, and conversations during the process of making the accompanying album.

Here I want to also acknowledge the highly influential *Poetics of Space* by Gaston Bachelard, which I read a couple years ago, and that has undoubtedly shaped my understanding of space. Although it doesn't appear directly in this paper, I feel the paper wouldn't be what it is without me having read the ground work the book laid out.