

"The cultural experimenter in architecture and in ritual (that is to say, in inhabitation) who wants to know how uncanny sensibilities transvalue the norm need only build a small slice of habitation to posit his or her vision."

Anne Cline / **A Hut of One's Own: Life Outside the Circle of Architecture**

When people think of shelter or lodging, they often think in terms of protection from the approaching storm, whether literal or the metaphorical storms of culture, politics and the social. But what if shelter was in fact the exsanguinated home, the somewhat lifeless husk of a previously vital taproot structure. What if the new dispensation of shelter or lodging was a condition of mobility on all fronts, the domesticity of all interiors and subjectivities as well as the apparent exteriorities of politics and economics, all put out on a forced march. What if shelter and lodging was PART OF the approaching storm, and that 'shelter' no longer denotes a 'haven in a heartless world' but rather delineates a certain uncanny ambiguity entailing not only security, comfort, and stability but also, oddly enough, loss and abandonment. And why shouldn't that be the case since abandonment is one of, if not the, major motif of modernity?

"But why, then, does the city exist? What line separates the inside from the outside, the rumble of wheels from the howl of wolves?"

Italo Calvino, **Invisible Cities**

*"That is the longing: to dwell midst the waves,
and have no homeland in time."*

Rainer Maria Rilke, **die fruhen dedichte**

*"What are phenomena rescued from? Not only, and not in the main, from the discredit and neglect into which they have fallen, but from the catastrophe represented very often by a certain strain in their dissemination, their enshrinement as heritage.'
-- They are saved through the exhibition of the fissure within them--- there is a tradition that is catastrophe." [...]*

"That things are status quo IS the catastrophe."

Walter Benjamin, **The Arcades Project**

Another motif of the modern age, the uncanny, is directly related to shelter's relationship to the home. The word 'uncanny' comes from the German '*Unheimlich*' and can mean both 'un-homed' and 'un-secreted,' a displacement from the home creating a mobile, roving other that simulates the home, offering some of the blandishments but also the hazards which the home tries desperately to cover over and which the doubled shelter must perforce pick up on and make the dis-owned its own.

In even the most upscale scenarios of 'home' now, investment strategies, a sixty percent divorce rate, and hypermedia penetration have split the dwelling into its many opposable parts. Dwelling is simultaneously for and against itself, housing those inside while also in a sense throwing them back into the public sphere, the socius taking up residence inside. 'Housing stock' is now part of the growing pile of debris which Walter Benjamin's justly famous, beautiful, and frightening image of the Angel of Progress faces while it is being blown inconsolably and inexorably backward into the future.

One of the dominant emotions for the majority of those who live in the unease of split, doubled, uncanny times is nostalgia. Nostalgia, let us remember, is the yearning for a disappeared home, perhaps even a non-existent home. Shelter is the remnant of that disappearance, the sublimed halo that marks the faint etched spot where 'home' once was. And this residue is not only to be found in the favelas and camps around the world but in the most recently constructed simulated mansions that now dot the conurban landscape around every city. (The etymology of 'mansion' refers to immanence, permanence, all from the latin root *manere*, to remain; however, inherent to the manor house is a decomposable structure, inhabited by an archaic dwelling.) Under conditions of stress (the very homeland of the uncanny), the nostalgic shadow that inhabits that mere 'shelter' is easily separated from its sticks and stones, from the platonic cave that every

"Situated, as they are, on the margins of architecture, they alone constitute the realization of desires in which an excessively violent and cruel automatism painfully betrays the sort of hatred for reality and need for refuge in an ideal world that we find in childhood neurosis."

Salvador Dali on Jugendstil architecture

Shed

[...]

tho center
yellowed by furnace
outblast,
remains unmoved
by other engines,
teeth
the world
sink the skin

but know that I am true
I'm fucking wild
middle of dark corner,
and this blue shed
two walls collapsing
at center's edge.

On the Cave You Live In, Philip Jenks

"The newest is but the oldest
made visible to our senses."

Henry David Thoreau

*Cut out windows and doors
In the house as you build;
But the use of the house
Will depend on the space
In the walls that is void*

*So advantage is had
From whatever is there;
But usefulness rises
From whatever is not.*

Lao Tzu, **Tao Te Ching**

dwelling tries to confusedly be at one with, and yet which also attempts to flee screaming into the light of it's 'real' home, the 'nostos' of its homecoming.

The artist is one who attempts (or rather: finds no other choice but) to reside in all these cracks and crevices, to be both overtly within and without the dwelling. Perpetually homeless (those who find their home move on from the open which the artist always attempts -- unsuccessfully if they are to remain artists -- to convert to the closed). It is then no accident that the artist always finds herself on the side of abandonment and loss. "[...] for there are cruel abandons and gracious abandonments, some sweet, some pitiless, some voluptuous, frenetic, happy, or disastrous, some serene. Abandonment's only law, like that of love, is to be without return and without recourse." **Abandoned Being**, Jean-Luc Nancy

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One of the governing criteria for a way of life being called a 'civilization', according to archaeologists, is the presence of monumental architecture. The stone trace is a sure sign of a certain kind of arrival on the world stage, that organized labor, as either slaves or wage-slaves, even bureaucracies have arisen to co-ordinate efforts. (after all. 'city' derives its meaning from 'civilization')

Thus when folks talk about the glory of the old buildings in Atlanta, the ones destroyed (such as the old terminal building) or the ones always threatened with destruction (the Fox theater), they are always the places of 'civilization' and are always the effects of massive effort and money. The hut [or box, bungalow, cabana, cabin, camp, chalet, cot, cottage, crib, den, dugout, dump, hoochie, hovel, hutch, lean-to, lodge, log house, pigeonhole, rat-hole, refuge, shack, shanty, shed, shelter, summer house, teepee, wigwam] are seldom so celebrated. The only time that 'shelter' is celebrated in such a way is when it becomes monumental in those terms, those 'dwellings' which are more like temples, those of the Rockefellers or the Vanderbilts.



"His eyes are staring, his mouth is open[.] . . . His face is turned toward the past. Where we perceive a chain of events, he sees one single catastrophe which keeps piling wreckage upon wreckage and hurls it in front of his feet. The angel would like to stay, awaken the dead, and make whole what has been smashed. But a storm . . . irresistibly propels him into the future to which his back is turned, while the pile of debris before him grows skyward. This storm is what we call progress"

Walter Benjamin

"An emphasis on visual space has accompanied the search for an impression of weightlessness in architecture. [...] Once the effect of weightiness or massiveness upon which architects once depended has been abandoned, it becomes possible to break up and reassemble volumes arbitrarily according to the dictates of an architectural neoplasticism."

"[...] Everything opaque, all kinds of partitions, even walls simplified to the point of mere drapery, are destined to disappear. This disposition of things is diametrically opposed to the real requirements of the present situation. The sphere of private life ought to be enclosed, and have a finite or finished, aspect. Public space, by contrast, ought to be an opening outward. What we see happening is just the opposite."

The Production of Space, Henri Lefebvre

"A different history may appear in the cracks and ruptures of the history we still have. It may be a parallel history. Dangling between the histories of the past and the histories of the future, our memories are frayed."

Joan Grossman /**Blackout**

"If architecture is writing, the shack is a speech."

Lisa Robertson

The south was once an arcadia of shackdom, spotted up from the dampness like mushrooms after the heavy rain of it's history. The only problem is that the shack leaves a largely untrackable history, a history traced in genealogies and not in stone.

Capital does not seem to bemoan the loss of the shack. And nowadays even the modest bungalow of forty years ago can appear as a shack (leading one to suspect that even the MacMansions of today are on their way to shackdom, somehow holding that possibility 'inside' -- in itself, a problematic notion -- as a potential in futural anticipation.)

So no monumental architecture here, only structures on the fly, artistic fantasies that hold onto both a necessity (to invent, to keep moving, freedom) and an emergent potential, which is always only a haze on the horizon.

"The fact [is] that art's last line of resistance [...] coincide[s] with the commodity's most advanced line of attack..."

Walter Benjamin, **The Arcades Project**

One would be comforted (or discomforted, depending on orientation) to think that here, somewhere in these myriad anarchic and archaic fractures between lodging (the purely temporary), shelter (an emphasis on the protectiveness of the built); dwelling, (a more primordial thinking of permanence and transience); and home (the emotional and existential concatenation that draws together all contradictions and harmonizes them), that somewhere in the welter is a proper blueprint for protection, respite, restitution, and resistance, a plan for action that can be generalized to everyone. But here we have left that behind (or perhaps have been left behind or are left to develop in an entirely different temporal zone): that sort of generalization is a schematic for the managers, the planners, the developers, those who dig up and pave over. The conceiver of the shack, the hut, the teepee must make do with the cracks and fissures, an interstitial 'event' and hence hardly an event at all.

The hut, the shack, etc. (even as an artistic affectation or architectural fantasy) is the anomaly, the extreme singularization or personalization of 'dwelling' (which assuredly is a very generalized component of human existence. It is a diversification spreading along the economic bottom lands, bricoleurs of design all, even to the extent of anti-design and anti-dwelling, and not necessarily 'true' or authentic dwelling -- and anyway what could that possibly mean for an animal species which seems to be perpetually 'homesick'?)

"The original form of all dwelling is existence not in the house but in the shell. The difference between the two: the latter bears quite visibly the impression of its occupant. In the most extreme instance, the dwelling becomes a shell. [...] The twentieth century, with its porosity and transparency, its tendency toward the well-lit and airy, has nullified dwelling in the old sense."

Walter Benjamin, **The Arcades Project**

The Pagurian

"The mollusc is a being--almost a--quality. It has no need of any frame-work but only of a bulwark, something like the color in a tube.

Nature in this instance renounces the presentation of plasma formally.

She shows only that she prizes it by carefully sheltering it, in a jewelbox whose inner face is most beautiful. It isn't then a simple bit of spit, but a most precious reality.

The mollusc is endowed with a mighty energy for keeping itself shut up. It is only to be truthful a muscle, a hinge, a blount and its door.

The blount having secreted its door. Two doors slightly concave constitute its entire dwelling.

First and last dwelling. It lodges there until after its death.

No way to pull it out alive.

The least cell of the human body clings so, and with this force, to speech,--and reciprocally.

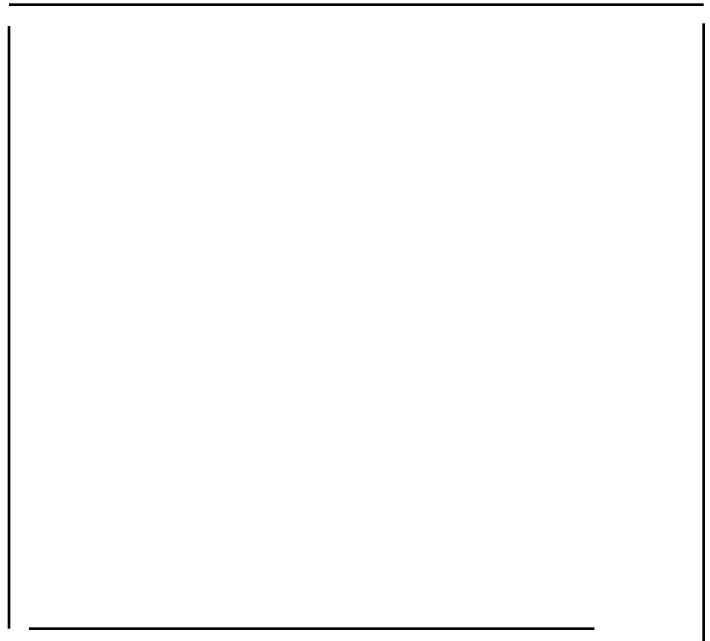
But at other times another being comes to desecrate this tomb, once it is all done, and settles there in place of the defunct constructor.

This is the case of the pagurian."

Frances Ponge

More than anything, this form of dwelling/anti-dwelling which this show presents, functions as a hole, a small, persistent (and persistent because small), even perennial, event in the fabric of architectural flow. They are not even mis-applications (that is, a failing of a test for sheltering) but a FALLING AWAY from the NECESSITY of systematic application.

This form of dwelling (which surely reaches beyond the merely banal materiality of 'having a roof over one's head') is one of any number of anarchic cracks moving through human life. They are improvisational-like persistences which seem to function like the Great Red Spot of Jupiter: a stable pattern anchored by something unseen and large on the surface (which is nevertheless at the bottom), unperturbed by the torrential chaos around it. Unlike such fixity however, this form of bottom dwelling has an improvisational quickness and liveliness about it, creating a great fluidity (through both space and time) around the apparent fixed necessity of not only WHERE can we live but HOW can we live in a perilous time of multiple abandonments, emergencies, catastrophes, and displacements.



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SHELTER opens with Marya Roland's cornucopia, constructed of newspapers. Actually one is not quite sure what it is: a yellowed horn of plenty or the fading shell of some loosened information creature? Perhaps something akin to Ponge's mollusc which has escaped (though for Ponge's creature escape is tantamount to death). At any rate, the ties between intimate home, home on one's back, home riven by an information society, cross and break on each. No longer having the assurance of Ponge's pagurian (a hermit crab, appropriating the homes of those who have fled, died, or been killed), the home becomes spectral in Karen Tauches and Jenn Brown's collaboration for 'Dead Letters', a tent for the scene of communication with the departed, harkening back to spiritualist culture at the turn of the century and another tent for sleeping,

dreaming through the wardrobe, among and past all its monsters. The past is never really past, perpetually crossing and haunting the present. After all, the largest population on the earth are the dead, their 'home' developing in tandem with the living (we are both the mollusc and the pagurian, each the residence of the other); the present, all of which is our problematic shelter, is the scene of a perpetual séance, the only place any sort of eternal return ever happens.



Inside the main gallery the escaped info creature seems to have landed on Alice Dicerto's covering, forming its own traumatic listing, threatening, warning, and protecting all at once. And all in ominous proximity to Amondine Drouet's children's box diorama's of shelters for pets and others --- even displacements and dislocations of the most thwarted community shelter has children somewhere in the mix. Just so, Kyle Dillehay's water recycling process through condensation and composed just of a pile of dirt and plastic is a necessity.

Like the spidery, shattered fiberglass wall divider (indebted to the fragmentary and eschatological writings of Fehta Murghana and Walter Benjamin) the SHELTER participants pull from the debris mounting in western life AND from the spiritual dislocation bequeathed the modern age, to form a SORT of community in transit. (From Murghana's episodic **RULES OF THE FUTURE:** #38 - "Far enough in the future, everything will seem to be in the past")

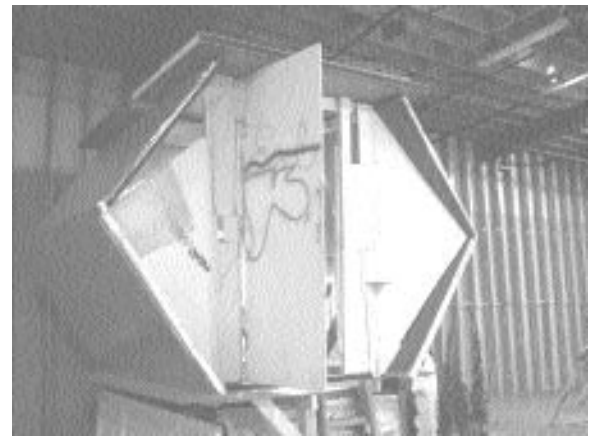
Shelter is everywhere, while always threatening to be nowhere. Steve Jarvis's inflatable plastic tent packs into two suitcases and is powered by solar power,

paen to 'let's just leave NOW!' --- Much like the paddle teepee of Michael Murrell, Lewis and Clarking it, metaphorically always pointing AWAY, even when grounded. Or settling down in Corrine Mensof's bamboo yurt for a few moments of karmic bliss but oh so modern and TAKEN OUT with the telemetric eye hovering overhead, moving time and space in order to CREATE a resting place for time and space.

In such haunted ephemera, the huts of the Mad Housers come to seem like the mansions on the hill, ready to service the truly homeless in areas you or I (let's not kid ourselves) wouldn't be caught dead in. Haunted yes, but by the haints of capital and class and those who can't or won't make it. Get thrown out of any upward stance and we'll see how you scamper into their palatial and dry ten foot rooms. Luxury.



The archaic and the modern meet in Carlos Tardios and students' contemporary cliff dwelling, met as you approach from the outside, stacked, fragmented, open, and heeding Lao Tzu's advice, ALMOST seeming to be one of those American Indian structures to feed the dead to the gods, funneling and connecting energies from above and below. And if that formulation bothers you, think lightning. And before you even reach the gallery building, Stan Woodard's memorial and ceremonial hut, similarly open but Japanese, aerodynamic, and ritually devotional (fed by solar power) greet you to the side of the gate.



Satchel Mallon's construction shares the ambivalence of many structures in SHELTER, one thing on the way to becoming something else. At first glance it seems to be a gypsy wagon, stranded without steeds. Then one realizes it seems the cell of a honeycomb, capable of replication, and hookup in some potential vast hive, capable of conversion modularly into instant village.

And don't miss Susan Cipic's shelter of the imagination and memory, in the 'bomb shelter,' a Cornelian cornucopia or Duchampian valise, ready to be clasped shut and taken on the road, self-contained, intimate and yet always ready for exposure, the perennial hazard AND somewhat perverse pleasure of being on the road.



Everything in SHELTER is on the move, from Johnny D'Farmer's office bunk, ready to be folded up, unbeholden to anyone, and taken on the road, to Mike and Peggy Dobbins' photo-reconstruction of a worker's travel wagon, to the celebratory tent of Elizabeth Zappa.

And then there is the somewhat enigmatic chance taking of Evan Levy's piece, a house of mirrors played over games of chance, under a street lamp, reminding us of the old joke perhaps of the guy who lost his contact lens in the dark but finds it easier to search under the light of the lamp. And then also Etienne Jackson's small translucent wedge of a hut that has a devotional feel to it, a moment taking out of the stream of time to reflect on some of the fundamental qualities of life.

So, some have not yet made it, some won't make it, and some just don't want to, folks coming and going, some unaccountably missing, some unaccountably present: the nature of any community which resists community -- and perhaps don't even have that much in common, other than a certain primal interest in Keepin' It Movin', and carrying the shell-ter with them. (The French will call it '*désœuvrement*,' a certain ecstatic inoperability). It's a legacy left to those who were born during the great 'March of Progress' (i.e., all of us) and must find other means of stepping back or to the side of the March.

Rock on.

Robert Cheatham
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