

Dear Paul:
Still absurd, after all these years

By

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declaration



I hereby declare that I am the sole author of this thesis. This is a true copy of the thesis, including any required final revisions, as accepted by my examiners.

I understand that my thesis may be made electronically available to the public.

abstract



I grew up in the suburbs, and perhaps I am embarrassed to admit it. But there is no use denying it. It's written all over my face. Even though I have been away for nearly a decade, the residue of that past life still lingers. I am civilized, programmed to perform in a manner that best suits society at this present time. I move in unison with the other bodies around me, abiding by the unwritten suburban rules of conduct to avoid any confrontation, as our daily routines follow our individual agendas. Suburbia follows me wherever I go. It is the only kind of person I know how to be. For fear of breaking any rules I retaliate only in my dreams. I hate this life.

I was *Growing Up Absurd*, like all the young boys, and all the young men social critic, Paul Goodman, describes in his book of the same title; a dilemma preventing these young boys from growing into real men with honor, purpose, without a real understanding of the society in which he is living, but rather, is conditioned to participate in a way that best suites his society. In *Walden*, Henry David Thoreau states, "The greater part of what my neighbors call good I believe in my soul to be bad, and if I repent of anything, it is very likely to be my good behavior. What demon possessed me that I behaved so well?" What *demon* indeed. The suburb, an invention of postwar culture that articulated a generation's need for security, peace, and privacy after a time of great tragedy, embodied a marketable product based on an illusion, the Dream Life, an artificial empire that has suppressed the imaginative possibilities for human existence. As an instrument to understand my own dissatisfaction with the suburbs, this thesis investigates the Psychogeography of this suburban landscape. It is as much a reflection of my own struggle to cope with such a lifestyle as it is an account of how the behavior of a suburban population can be conditioned to submit to the authority of their immediate built environment.

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To Rick Haldenby, for all your support, and encouragement throughout all my years as a student of Architecture.

dedication



This thesis is dedicated to all those who resist the confines of their suburban existence.

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In most books, the *I*, or the first person is omitted; in this it will be retained; that, in respect to egoism, is the main difference. We commonly do not remember that it is, after all, always the first person that is speaking. I should not talk so much if there were anybody else who I knew as well. Unfortunately, I am confined to this theme by the narrowness of my experience. Moreover, I, on my side, require of every writer, first or last, a simple and sincere account of his own life, and not merely what he has heard of other men's lives; some such account as he would send to his kindred from a distant land; for if he has lived sincerely, it must have been in a distant land to me.¹

Henry David Thoreau, *Walden*

I struggled everyday writing this thesis. There was no single moment where the words came effortlessly. Some days I simply stared at books, hoping a phrase, an image would ignite a thought, but that didn't happen, and those days turned into weeks, adding more stress to every deadline I never kept. Relentlessly, I battled with my own insecurities, constantly comparing my work to past critiques on the suburbs – citing the rise of the middle class, the suppression of women, the domestication of women, women as sex slaves, a population of slaves, and so on - but the bitterness of a wasted youth would not let me forfeit so easily. I was looking for some form of vindication, to look back on my suburban life and say I won. But what I struggled with most, as I remember this place – memories different from the accounts of my siblings who survived suburban life unscathed, with no resentment – were feelings of guilt: I was afraid I would offend my parents who raised me and provided me with every luxury. In fact I know I will offend them, and I hear their voices now living inside my head, whispering sad rebukes at my betrayal. Over and over, I wondered why this place affected me so differently, why I was so paralyzed by my environment. The answer is hard to find; I struggle to explain my absurd behavior.

I'm sorry if my stories sound so generic; perhaps that is simply a trick of memory.

there must be more



Here is my story.

I'm not comfortable talking about my childhood or adolescent years. Not because it was traumatic, filled with painful memories, eccentric or uncivilized: it was in fact the opposite. It was just boring, a blur of a life. There were no suburban teenage tyrants picking on me - the misfit kid - or others like me, forcing us to retaliate, and form our own band of brothers on the outskirts of town away from our parents' scrutiny. There was no epic battle - a baseball, football, or hockey game - that we won to prove our worthiness, and our place in this town. No, no, no, that was just in the movies I watched; to my disappointment it wasn't real. I would pretend to be the main character, a witty, confident tomboy, living alone with my misfit dad (played by Rick Moranis, my favorite movie outcast) in a makeshift house, living a tortured childhood, being told I couldn't play with the boys. That's how I remembered my childhood, a series of daydreams of extraordinary experiences, and epic triumphs, just to make up for that fact that my real life couldn't have been less like that.



Fig. 1 | *Honey, I shrunk the kids*, 1989



— Fig. 2 | *Little Giants*, 1994

I began by writing a hate piece, more of an attack on the suburbs. I was angry, resentful, and bitter about my wasted youth. For most of my childhood, my adolescent and young adult life I was bored. I was in the midst of learning how to live, overcome with a drive to explore, to run away, to get lost, when I was confronted by choices on how to participate in society when living in place like the suburbs. As the youngest of three siblings I could easily predict the course of my life. I had two examples ahead of me, along with all my peers at school to follow, and imitate. I already knew my options were limited. All choices led down the same road. There was a formula to this life, and as youth, every muscle in my instinctual self resisted this prescribed route, encouraging me to run, to get lost. But these muscles had never been used; there was no need for them in a place like this. I behaved exactly the way I was programmed to behave. Like muscle memory, my limbs imitated the bodies that traveled before me, while my frustrated mind dreamt of an escape from this place.

Here in the suburbs I watched different people - all shapes, sizes, and colors - live by the same suburban code of conduct. It's a place, that at first glance, provides the picture of pristine assembly, showcasing perfectly manicured small, medium, large and extra-large boxes, all preaching the same sermon of prosperity in a better life away from the chaos, crime, and costs of the big city. But here I was overwhelmed with boredom, feeling stuck in this normal and all too ordinary existence, mindful of who might be watching me. I began to dream myself out of this place. I dreamt of living an extraordinary life, in an extraordinary place, surrounded by extraordinary people, just trying to make up for the plain, dull life of my reality. It was in these imagined visions that I began to articulate my own dissatisfaction with the life I was living. It was my way of escaping this life without fear of breaking any rules, disobeying authority, a way to trespass beyond the borders of this existence. I dreamt in order to get myself out of the suburbs.

I've learned, while tinkering with the production of this thesis, everyone has something to say about the suburbs. Whether or not you have ever lived here the image of sprawling suburban developments, with rows upon rows of houses, manicured green lawns, fences, meandering sidewalks, parking lots, and big box shopping malls is somewhere catalogued in your memory. "Toronto's postwar suburbs, which are massive, are quite as baffling physically and incoherent socially as their counterparts anywhere, and fully as ecologically destructive and as ill-suited to service by public transportation".² The scenes illustrated in this thesis are all around us, and, while I use Brampton as my primary reference - for the narrowness of my own experiences restrict me to the boundaries of this particular city - with 80 percent of Canada's population calling the suburbs, or urban centres, their home, I want this rant to reach the ears of my neighbours everywhere, if only to distract them for a moment, to awaken the dormant seeds of the less absurd versions of ourselves.

The term *suburb* has garnered negative connotations with its evolution throughout the years. I'm not about to dispel these criticisms, or defend the suburbs. What began as a hate piece, with the bitterness, and shame of a wasted youth behind me, fueling my rage against this machine, has slowly evolved into a collection of stories that map my evolution into this pliable, model citizen, in hopes that I can resist this blind obedience in my future. It is my archaeology of the *Psychogeography* of the suburbs, defined by the author, and critic of urban geography, Guy Debord, as "the study of the precise laws and specific effects of the geographical environment, consciously or not, on the emotions and behavior of individuals".³ In conversation with a long list of credible critics and disobedient members of society, I hope to gain a deeper understanding of some of Brampton's mechanics - its history, its design strategies, diversity, community life, a general understanding of what this place called Brampton is, and how it became the instrument that so easily conditioned me

to be the person I have become, too willing to take up my role in this organized system, and obey the written, and unwritten rules of this society without resistance, hesitation, or protest, in hopes of understanding this place I could never call home.

It was this place that also taught me what kind of person I would be. I was being groomed, not just by my parents, but by my environment. I was *Growing Up Absurd*, like all the young boys, and all the young men that Paul Goodman describes in his book of the same title, a dilemma that prevented these young boys from growing into real men with honor and purpose, and a real understanding of the society in which he is living. In Richard Sennett's book, titled *Authority*, he states, "[...] we can always tell when a sense of authority exists in a society: it is when they *voluntarily* obey their rulers".⁴ I slowly began to realize that I didn't have a choice, I didn't even know it, but I was *Suburbanized*. It was this place that was fitting me to be a model citizen, voluntarily obeying my authority. It engrained in me a set of rules, or a code of conduct to live by that defined the civilized lifestyle of the suburbs, but it also followed me wherever I went. I was easily controlled in every environment I was in because I was already a model citizen. Even in my defiance I challenged this authority only in my dreams, too afraid of real confrontation, real punishment. The suburbs lingered in my veins, and I didn't know how to escape it. I woke up at the age of 25 with the bitter realization that I have nothing to say, feeling like I had nothing to offer this creative world, except to talk about the bitterness I harbor towards the suburbs. I was faceless, waking up every morning with an identity crisis. It is a tale as old as time, well as old as the suburbs, and have been a constant target for critics, from Paul Goodman in the 1950's to Rebecca Solnit in the 2000's, with many other uncivilized critics in between. And yet for all the resistance, after all these years I watch this dilemma grow with no real sign of stopping, no sign of opposition to it.

This book is written in resistance to my suburban past, and marks the beginning of my co-existence with it.

mapping the dream

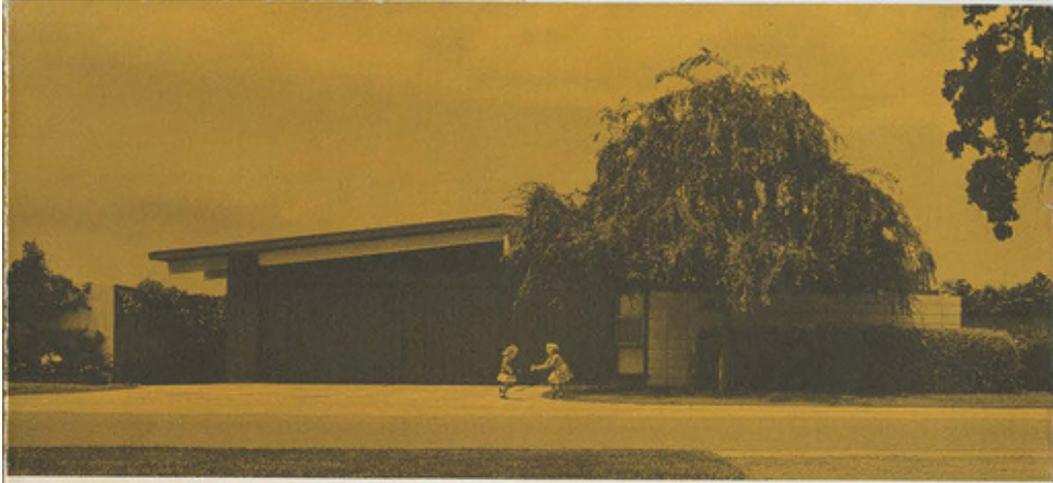


[...] we can always tell when a sense of authority exists in society: it is when people *voluntarily* obey their rulers.⁵

Richard Sennett, *Authority*, 1980

I am a spectator. I observe and catalogue. The people I see, songs I hear, scents I smell, stories I read, movies I watch are all compartmentalized in the most secret corners of my unconscious silently informing my own dreams and desires. It started when I was young. I had just seen Stephen Spielberg's, E.T. and was completely enthralled by the main character Elliot as he raced his bike beyond the boundaries of his suburban streets, deep into the forest that lay beyond, dodging police, weaving through unfinished suburban construction sites. Watching this movie was the reason I was so adamant on learning to ride my own bike. I had watched my older brother struggle to learn. I studied the way he gripped the handlebars, the speed he needed to maintain his balance, how he always had his foot ready to stop himself from falling. I watched as my father followed and guided him down the street. There was a red hand-me-down bicycle in our garage my father had been saving for me. I picked up my bicycle, and imitated exactly what I observed, without the guiding hand of my father. I tried until I learned my balance, and on the very same day I was soaring down the street with my brother pretending to be like the young, adventurous Elliot. I never rode beyond the edges of my street, but I imaged I did.

This memory returned to me the first time I ever saw an advertisement for Eichler Homes in Fairhill, a two-toned image of a suburban scene of well established homes barely seen through the flourishing landscaped flora, with no cars in the driveways. I loved the graphic presentation, the simplicity of its symmetry. But the main attraction was the children playing in the streets and riding their bikes, with no adult in site. It was innocent freedom. I wanted it. I wanted to be one of those kids living on that street, riding my bike again. Whatever lay beyond the frame of the advertisement didn't matter, and I didn't need a written explanation of what this place could offer me. I imagined myself again in a Stephen Spielberg movie being a wild child, imagining what kind of an adult I would grow up to be, rewriting my past living in that scene, and looking forward to a happy future.



EICHLER HOMES HEADQUARTERS • 2151 ST. FRANCIS DRIVE • PALO ALTO • DAVENPORT 1-1720



EICHLER HOMES IN FAIRHILLS

— Fig. 3 | *eichler homes in fairhill*

The real estate section of the Brampton Guardian - Brampton's free weekly paper delivered door-to-door - has a catalogue of advertisements dedicated to new homes. I have collected a number of these colourful illustrations as a record for my research, but struggled with the thought of including these images in the finished product. These gaudy images ruined the aesthetic I had envisioned for this book, with each ad tarnishing the clean white page it rested on - the tacky colours, and computer renderings of homes that look identical to one another. None of these images invoked the same desire I had seen in the 1960's ad by Eichler Homes Inc. I removed the images leaving only the text, which I then could manipulate to conform to my own aesthetic taste. But I lost this battle. These images are too important in what they reveal not only about the products they are selling but also the audience to whom they are selling to - the entire demographic of Brampton's population - with every image and every word building on a popular desire to own a home.



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kingcountry.ca



Fig. 4 | *King Country Estates*, excerpt from the Brampton Guardian New Homes

King Country Estates offers a fine blend of elegance, comfort and luxury living, all of which are reflected in the varied home designs and architectural elements. Choose from a wide selection of exquisite homes, adorned with distinctive French Provincial and French Country architectures that reflect timeless grace. All the homes will be crafted to perfection, with some, clay brick and stucco exteriors. Interiors will dazzle with spacious, flowing floorplans and only the finest selection of features and finishes that impart elegance to your home. Every home will be built to Energy Star Standards, and come with environment friendly and energy saving materials.⁶

King Country Estates



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DETACHED FROM THE \$540'S UP TO 3,800 SQ. FT.

Come choose from our impressively large lots up to 217 feet deep, and our perfectly spacious homes designed for the ultimate expression of affordable luxury.







www.royalcliffhomes.com

Fig. 5 | *Royalcliff Homes*, excerpt from the Brampton Guardian New Homes

Royalcliff's meticulous attention to detail is evident in every stage of the home-building process. Its unique designs consider lifestyle demands, thus providing its owners with comfortable living spaces that flow elegantly from one to another. These include spacious sun-filled kitchens, impressive two-storey foyers and family rooms, lavishly appointed master bedrooms with walk-in closets and luxury ensuite baths. Dedication to careful craftsmanship results in superb features and finishes. Royalcliff Homes offers the finest homes at the best value. Turn your dream into reality by looking no further than Royalcliff Homes. Our commitment to fulfill your dream doesn't end once you've purchased your home. We will continue to provide our customers with open communication, reliability and integrity by extending our relationship with after-sales service. Let Royalcliff Homes satisfy your search for a new home by meeting all your requirements of excellence and peace of mind.⁷

Royalcliff Homes

We're Open Today In Mount Pleasant North.
Make New Connections With Our New Release In A New Neighbourhood.



Brampton's highly regarded community of Mount Pleasant North is now open with a new release of 3-Storey Townhomes as well as 30' and 38' Detached Homes. You will find great savings on all our homes in Mount Pleasant North.

Save \$15,000 on all Detached Homes • Save \$5,000 on all Townhomes
Townhomes include Air Conditioning and 3 Kitchen Appliances

Mount Pleasant North is filled with great park spaces and natural features that add so much to a community. You are also connected to shopping, transportation and recreation within an easy walk of your home.

Visit us today and discover our new neighbourhood, make new connections and find a great home in our new release in Mount Pleasant North.



3-Storey Townhome, Plan 4, Elev. 'B', 1,741 Sq.Ft., \$332,990



30' WideLot™ Home, Plan 7, Elev. 'E', 1,832 Sq.Ft., \$409,990



38' WideLot™ Home, Plan 3, Elev. 'B', 2,380 Sq.Ft., \$467,990

Townhomes From \$304,990
Detached Homes From \$359,990



Presentation Centre Hours: Monday to Thursday 1pm-8pm; Friday 1pm-6pm; Saturday, Sunday and Holidays 11am-6pm

All illustrations are artist's concept. All dimensions are approximate. Prices, specifications, taxes and conditions subject to change without notice. EPCOR

Fig. 6 | Mattamy Homes excerpt from the Brampton Guardian New Homes

We are always flattered whenever homeowners tell us that a Mattamy community looks and feels different than other places they've lived. We think our home designs have a lot to do with that. From the moment you turn onto a Mattamy street, you'll come face to face with a diverse selection of architecture. You'll also notice inviting front porches and homes with large windows---lots and lots of them so the interior is bright and cheerful. Inside the home, we do everything we can to keep the space open and organic. We use kitchen islands and media centers in the Family Room to serve as natural gathering places. We keep everything in its place. For example, fireplaces are tucked away so they don't intrude into a room. Attention to detail is what sets a Mattamy home apart. We offer homeowners a great deal of choice because we believe that a home should reflect a homeowner's style, not ours.⁸

Mattamy Homes

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LOVE MONARCH.



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Always home. | MONARCHGROUP.NET

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CALEDON

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Fig. 7 | Strawberry Fields Caledon excerpt from the Brampton Guardian New Homes

Where Highway 410 ends, a calmer way of life begins. Here, charming Family homes are delicately woven into an awe-inspiring fabric of neighbourhood parks, protected parkland, trail systems and liberating greenspace corridors. And yet schools and family conveniences are never far away, including a vibrant Village Centre that features quaint shops, a recreation centre, public spaces and the “Village Blue” Pond. Experience the charm. Experience life, naturally sweetened. Many already call Strawberry Fields home. Here’s your chance to call them neighbours.⁹

Strawberry Fields Caledon


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* Prices and other details are subject to change without notice. © 2012 Medallion Homes.

Fig. 8 | *Medallion Developments*, excerpt from the Brampton Guardian New Homes

We don't just build homes, we improve the lifestyle of Canadians. Medallion's recipe for success has been proven time and again: building top quality homes at reasonable prices in the GTA's most preferred locations. Thousands of satisfied homeowners have helped us establish a reputation for quality, value and excellence.

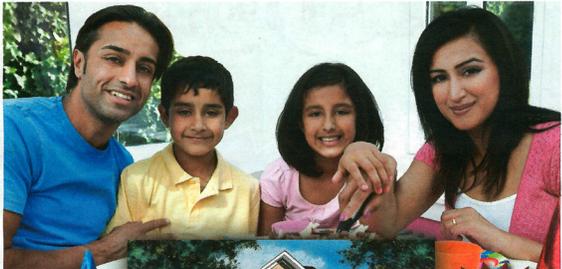
Medallion goes the distance to provide the best homes on the market today. Artfully designed and masterfully built, our homes are full of luxurious signature details, exclusive to Medallion Homes. Soaring 12 story ceilings, grand three story estate designs, and other extraordinary offerings are available in most of our outstanding communities.

With a proud tradition of past achievement and several new communities planned for the future, Medallion looks forward to major, new contributions to Greater Toronto's housing industry.¹⁰

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Directions: Go North on Gore Road. Take a left on Panhandle Drive and then left on Skyway Drive.

Fig. 9 | Georgian Group, excerpt from the Brampton Guardian New Homes

At the Georgian Group, we are passionate about the quality, beauty, and craftsmanship of each and every home that we build. For the past forty-four years, we have concentrated on designing and building homes for who we consider to be most important – you and your family.

Our philosophy is to build each and every home as though we are building them for ourselves and our families. The principals at Georgian are very committed to building homes that will exceed your expectations.

We research the lifestyles of prospective home owners and create a vision that reflects their needs and wants. Even after over forty years of building quality homes, we are still committed to continuously learning, innovating and adapting to make sure we incorporate the “latest and greatest” into our homes.¹¹

Georgian Group

He still had it with him after all these years, filed away in a box, safely hidden in the corner of his closet that he shares with my mother. He knew exactly where to look. With no hesitation he led me to where we could find what I was looking for. When I had first asked about its existence, I imagined - after he signed on the dotted line all those years ago, after he purchased this house - it would have long since been lost. But there it was, the rendered sketch of a suburban house my father chose. For 25 years my father held on to this image, the original black and white drawing of his future home. The pages had started to turn yellow, and I wondered if he ever returned to these drawings, besides to dig them out for me. He kept everything: the site plan of the neighbourhood, along with 17 other rendered sketches he could have chosen from to start his life here. I was looking at pictures of my families past, the beginnings of my history in this place. As I held on to this image of our family home, I realized this was not just a site my father chose, it was an image of a place he could call his own, a place he could belong to, a place he could settle with his family, and watch them grow. I was holding onto an image of a dream, his Canadian dream.

Learning to Adapt



The EMERALD

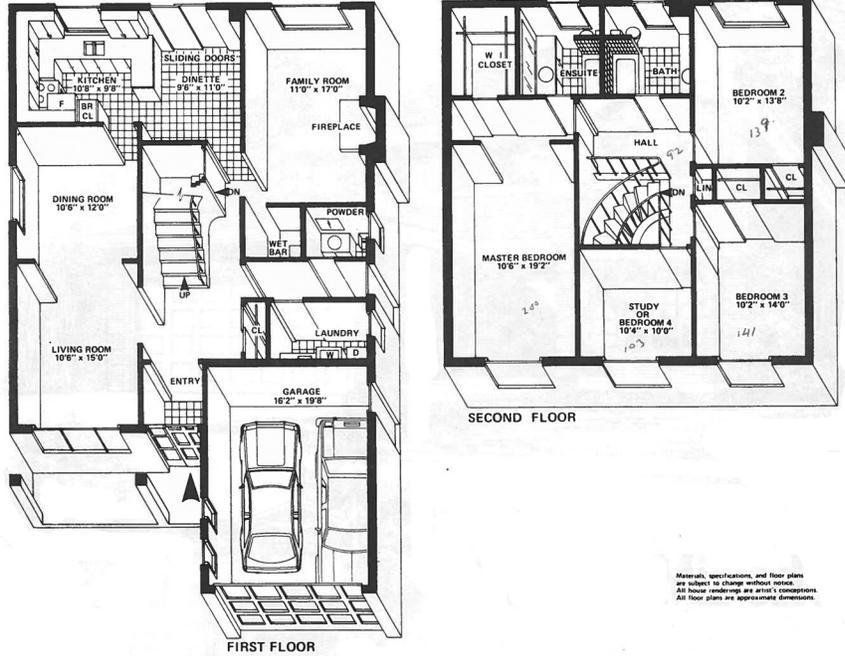


Formal rendered perspective and elevation of the model home - THE EMERALD, provided by the developer - showing two variations: a slight adjustment of the roof line above the garage, and framed by copious amounts of flora, with no representation of sky or surrounding context.

Fig. 10 | Carter's Homestead, *The Emerald*

The EMERALD

2260 SQ. FT.



First and second floor plans - as an axonometric drawing - labeled to show the layout of the home as well as room sizes, excluding furniture, leaving the rooms bare, with the exception of the garage, showing two vehicles in plan. Excluded from this drawing is the basement layout. No surrounding site context provided.

Fig. 11 | Carter's Homestead, *The Emerald*

My life began in the quiet suburban city of Brampton, Ontario. Shortly after my arrival, my family settled into a brand new, detached, two-story house equipped with the modern conveniences of middle class living right at our fingertips. It was the *Emerald*, a 2,260 sq. f. model house designed to include four bedrooms, two full bathrooms, a linen closet, living room, dining room, kitchen, a family room with a wood burning fireplace and bar, powder room, laundry room, unfinished basement with a cold cellar, backyard, and a garage. There the house stood, the *Emerald*, in all its glory. It almost looked like the rendered picture from the brochure, which my father has kept after all these years, we were surrounded by other houses that looked just like ours: The Pearl, The Sapphire, The Onyx, The Topaz, The Diamond II, The Opal II, and The Garnet - not real gems, just cheap imitations of the real thing, disguised as real treasure - instead of the lush forest that was rendered in the sketch. Actually there was no flora anywhere. Since the land had been cleared for construction, the grass hadn't been laid, or the trees planted yet; there were just piles of gravel, and relocated earth. There were no fences, and the backyards freely faced each other without obstructions to our view of the neighbours. It was just an open field of dirt. There were no sidewalks, just wooden markers in the ground showing where they would be placed, and our driveway wasn't paved. We looked like the first settlers back in 1989, all evidence of what once was pushed away. But this wasn't a scene from the Wild West. There was order already in this place, with so few occupants, and so many houses. Over time, men would come, and place the sidewalk, working late into the night. Others came and planted all the White Ash saplings that now uniformly line the street, and others with trucks filled with sod rolled up like swiss rolls, would come to lay down the grass. If you didn't watch carefully you would miss all the progress; the Canadian Dream was going into place overnight.

The suburbs, as an invention of postwar culture, addressed a generation's need for affordable housing, security, privacy, and peace after a time of tragedy and loss. The war is long now over, and the suburbs have become the tranquil, peaceful reminder of all the wonderful things life can offer, and Brampton was no exception. Brampton's conception as a satellite city began with the construction of Bramalea in the late 1950's. This planned community was built to accommodate 50,000 people with private housing, shopping centres, commercial businesses and industry. It was touted as "Canada's first satellite city"¹². In 1974, Brampton absolved Bramalea, and was officially classified as a city, reaching a population high of 100,000 by 1976.¹³ And so begins the campaign for Brampton as Canada's city of the future, with new homeowners showcasing images of a tranquil life, a traditional lifestyle with good wholesome values for Canadians – new comers (immigrants) and prospective homeowners - looking to get away from the cost, and chaos of living in the big city. Here everyone could belong to a community, a better life, with an easy commute into the city for the modern career man or women who can come home to a doting family, just in time for dinner: The Dream Life. As a young city, Brampton is growing and reinventing itself, leaving behind no evidence of what it was not so long ago, except for a few stately homes scattered across this suburban landscape to stand as a reminder that this place has a past, erasing from history that it was once a wilderness, described by the first surveyors "as low, swampy and covered with dense hardwood forest", largely untouched by formal settlement, and used by the Native's as hunting grounds along the Credit River and Humber River valleys.¹⁴ Brampton's location, with its connection to the main arteries of transportation, its proximately to the city of Toronto, as well as Pearson International Airport, has transformed this once open wilderness into valuable real estate for industrial growth and private housing. With its access to the major 400 series highways - 407, 410,



Fig. 12 | Carter's Homestead, *The Pearl*



The SAPHIRE

— Fig. 13 | Fig. 13. Carter's Homestead, *The Sapphire*



Fig. 14 | Carter's Homestead, *The Onyx*



— Fig. 15 | Carter's Homestead, *The Topaz*



DARCEL DEVELOPERS



ELEVATION 2



ELEVATION 1

ARTIST'S CONCEPT
TINKER, INC.

DIAMOND II
2130 sq. ft.

Fig. 16 | Carter's Homestead, *Diamond II*



DARCEL DEVELOPERS



ELEVATION 1



ELEVATION 2

OPAL II
2030 sq. ft.

— Fig. 17 | Carter's Homestead, *Opal II*

The GARNET



Fig. 18 | Carter's Homestead, *The Garnet*



— Fig. 19 | my house - *The Emerald*, 1989

401, 403, 427 - as well as commuter trains travelling to and from the big city of Toronto, Brampton claims to be an ideal destination for residents travelling into the city for work or recreation, and for the industrial market, with access to the major shipping routes.¹⁵

I've seen all those mad ads with the 1950's housewife, dolled up standing in her brand new kitchen "keyed for speed" and efficiency, to save her time, time she can use for her own leisure to fulfill her duties of a supportive wife, and now I would laugh at this unrealistic version of her domestic suburban existence knowing that this portrayal of domestic life was too good to be true.¹⁶ Even though I seemed immune to this image of blissful domestic life, perhaps it was the cartoonish hand drawn renderings, the vintage costumes, or exaggerated expressions, but somehow this form of advertising with its idealistic imagery and slogans of seductive promises, advanced the development of a product that would reach out to generations to come, all proclaiming the discovery of a new version of The Dream Life with all the conveniences of the 21st century. This image became the standard; the image of Canadian Identity in the satellite city. I saw the flyers in the weekly paper, the photo montage of a real life young, white Canadian family: the happy parents [a husband and a wife], smiling and enjoying the company of their small healthy children [a boy and a girl], with equally content grandparents looking on, all wearing matching pastel coloured clothes, well tailored to each person, and enjoying examples of blissful suburban experiences. Some of which include family bike trips along a well-maintained, paved bike trail, on a perfectly sunny day, or playing soccer on a well-manicured field, not a cloud in sight, or a blade of grass out of place. Somewhere behind the portrait of Canadiana perfection was a product being sold: the suburban house, a product that was a gracious improvement to the quality of life for everyone. And it was an easy image for me to settle into: This was the only image of

culture I really saw. Even my favourite TV shows – Growing Pains, Hogan Family, The Cosby Show, Family Matters, Dinosaurs, Full House, Fresh Prince, Road to Avonlea – all shared the same social structure surrounding the family home. I too began to dream the suburban dream imagining myself in the homes of all the characters I watched on TV.

The day I moved into this house at the age of three, from the townhouse we used to live in a short drive away, I became an active participant in this image of the Canadian Dream. This house became a stage, a space to showcase our Canadian identity slowly reforming us to the images I saw in the flyers, my oath of allegiance, although I did not know it yet. We all played along. It was almost immediate, marking the start of my adjustment on becoming suburbanized. Author and social critic, Paul Goodman, describes this process in *Growing up Absurd*.

On this view, growing up is sometimes treated as if it were acculturation, the process of giving up one culture for another, the way a tribe of Indians takes on the culture of the whites... More frequently, however, the matter is left vague: we start with a *tabula rasa* and end up with “socialized” and cultured. (“Becoming cultured” and “being adjusted to the social group” are taken almost as synonymous.) Either way, it follows that you can teach people anything; you can adapt them to anything if you use the right techniques of “socializing” or “communicating.” The essence of “human nature” is pretty indefinitely malleable. “Man,” as C. Wright Mills suggests, is what suits a particular type of society in a particular historical stage.¹⁷

The Emerald was more than just necessity. It was more than just shelter. It was our first step towards acceptance into Canadian society. We were now members of the Heart Lake Community.



Fig. 20 | *playing in the snow*, 1990



I don't have many candid photos of my childhood playing outside but these few photos of us frolicking in the snow. I remember my father telling me he learned about snow while he was in India. He was shown photos of telephone wires sagging under the weight of ice. He said the first time he saw snow in Canada was like a dream. I'm not surprised now that there are these photos of us playing in the snow, evidence of us adapting to our Canadian environment.

— Fig. 21 | *playing in the snow*, 1990

Sociologist, Richard Sennett, argues that it is this assurance of *fairness* that provides an image of control or guidance.¹⁸ As a family, we used this social image of the suburban lifestyle as assurance of our acceptance in this place. From the outside we looked just like our neighbours, living in a brand new suburban brick house with a matching brand new mini van in the driveway, and colourful flowers starting to grow in the front garden (our attempt to add our own touches to this new settlement). We wore jeans, and spoke English. Outside our home, we rode our CCM¹⁹ bikes from Canadian Tire up and down the street, avoiding cars, and dogs free of their leashes while my father mowed the lawn. We would run through the sprinkler while our parents worked in the garden or practice our skipping on the driveway while my father washed his car. When we were outside we were equipped with all our Canadian tools, ready to participate in this life, ready to prove we belonged here. I really did think we were like everyone else. But like most new families in the area, we kept to ourselves. I was a social kid, and an active one too, playing outside as much as I could. On rare occasions we would play with the other kids, whose names I don't even remember, under the protective watch of our parents or theirs. We were only allowed to play out front where our parents could see us, with no chances of exploring or getting into mischief, always expected to behave. My parents were wary of our neighbours and our neighbours of us. I saw our good behavior as a way of gaining others' trust, a way of winning acceptance in this place because we were not like them. We were different. We weren't white.

People Like Us

The smell of spices filled the house, traces of cumin, turmeric, curry powder, chili peppers, fried onions and garlic. The rich aroma creeping under our bedroom doors became our Saturday morning alarms. It was my mother's way of letting us

know we were being called for active duty. There were chores to be done. I made my way to the kitchen and watched as she laboured away, along with her mother, and sister, all preparing food for the family. My task was already laid out for me, a pestle and mortar filled with spices waiting to be ground, halved coconut shells waiting to be grated. I would sit at my mother's feet on a stool with a serrated metal lip in one corner (a tool I thought all homeowners had) and would grate the white meat off a coconut shell. After I had finished grating my father would collect the discarded shells: During the winter months he would use them as firewood for our fireplace. If I wasn't grating coconut for the ladies, I was shelling cardamom seeds, grinding them and other spices down to an appropriate fineness. These simple chores became my clues into a life I was slowly being separated from.

I was born into a family of immigrants. Here amidst the 1980's middle class families of Heart Lake Village, a predominantly white neighborhood, we were the noticeable difference in this homogenous landscape. We were the evidence of diversity spilling in as a handful of families like my own ventured out into this new territory as visible minorities. My father's immigration to Canada in the 1970's marked the beginning of a new identity for himself manufactured in part by the traditions of a past life and his dreams of making this country his new home. My mother arrived shortly after her marriage to my father in 1980, leaving her family behind in India, though would later join her in 1986, the year I was born. By the time of my arrival, my family was still new to this place, slowly adapting to all the new customs of Canada. But behind the front door was a different identity. Our family was changing, with two distinct identities flourishing within our home. Sheltered behind these brick walls my family was safe to converse in their native tongue away from the suspicious stares of neighbours, stares I didn't notice till I was older.

My parents chose to live here. No one forced them into it this life. This was not a racial ghetto where they were pressured to

live among people of the same race or creed, segregated from a superior race, and forced into a life devoid of the modern amenities of the 20th century. They weren't denied a mortgage at a different location. My parents chose Brampton because this was where the rest of their family was. Here we were not alone. Scattered across Brampton's suburban landscape were the rest of the Varickanickals and Kanjirappallils - my extended family. I was surrounded by loving parents, doting grandparents, with uncles, aunts, and cousins close by. This was our social network, our community, not the boundaries of the suburban streets mapped out in the site plan my father held onto, but as far reaching as the furthest residence of a relative, each house a gathering place, our own version of a community centre, not our neighbors, but people like us, other immigrants from southern India, and their families. My neighbourhood became an edited version of my built environment, separating ourselves from our physical neighbours. Richard Sennett, addresses this behavior in his published book titled, *Authority*. He draws on Alexis de Tocqueville's definition of this behavior known as *individualism*:

[...] a peaceful and moderated feeling, which leads each citizen to isolate himself from the mass of his equals and to withdraw within the circle of his family and his friends. Further having created this little society for his immediate ease, he willingly abandons the larger society to go its own way.²⁰

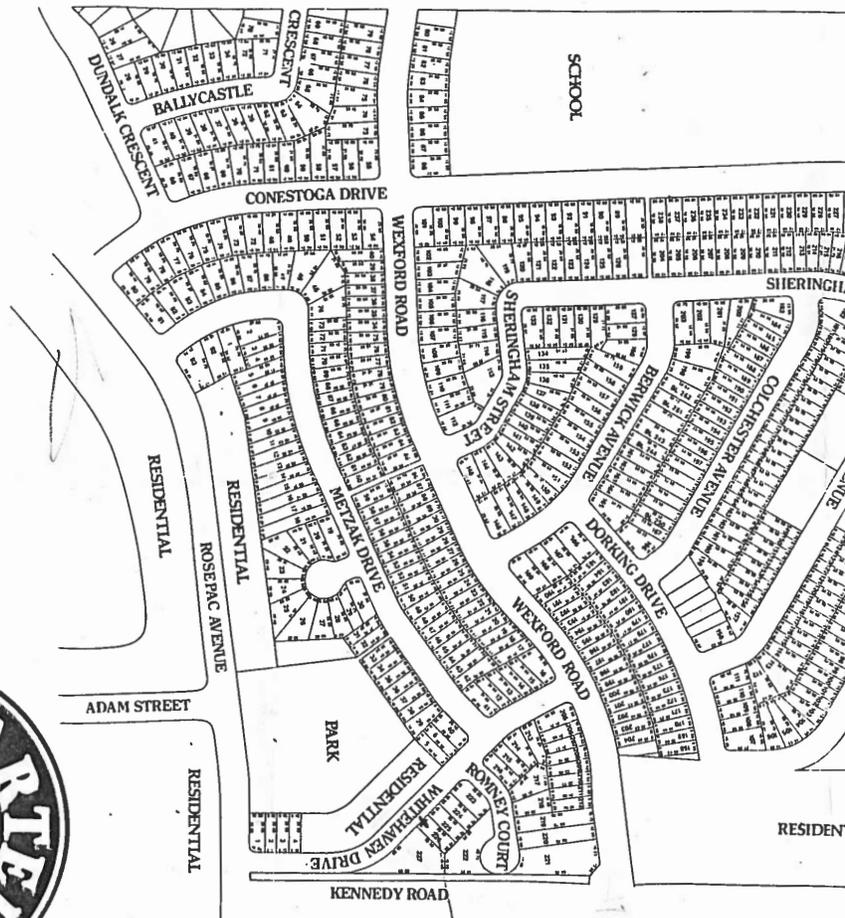
Inside the walls of my house was an evident separation from the images of Canadian identity which we imitated in public. This was my families attempt to hold on to the traditions and customs of another world, a world I didn't know or fully understand except through the interactions I observed between my extended family members. I remember standing in the living room staring out the front window, watching the cars line our street as my extended family arrived for

social gatherings at our house, a caravan of familiar faces. These gatherings were not spontaneous social calls but organized weekly events held every Saturday evening, rotating between each family home. We had a name for these get-togethers - Prayer Meetings.

The itinerary was always the same, singing traditional Christian hymns in English and Malayalam (my parent's native tongue), scripture reading, a short sermon conducted by Reverend Philip Philips - my father's eldest brother - followed by prayer. The men would sit in the living room on the sofas closest to the speaker, while the women sat in chairs around the dining room table or on folding chairs lining the walls in the foyer closest to the kitchen. The family room was used as a nursery or playroom for mothers with fussy infants who were drawing attention away from the speaker. The children and youth sat on the floor surrounded by all our parents'. There was a seriousness to these events, a formality in the meetings that resembled the rituals of a church service, and I learned from a young age to treat them with utmost reverence. Our etiquette too, reflected the somber atmosphere for we were all expected to be well behaved. God is watching.

As a child I willingly participated in these prayer meetings for its social incentives taking place after the formal service, like playing games with my cousins, and eating in the family room in front of the TV. As a child born in Canada my understanding of my parents' native language was limited to a few words I learned to communicate with my grandparents. To me every prayer sounded the same, evoking feelings of sadness or fear – it was in the earnestness of the prayers as I watched the men kneeling in prayer. But I knew when the prayers began the prayer meeting would soon be over, just waiting for the last long pause after my grandmother's closing prayer when we would all recite the Lord's Prayer that signaled the end. But it was when the eyes were closed in prayer that the kids got into mischief - writing notes with our fingers in the carpet to each

SITE PLAN



01/5
A



— Fig. 22 | Carter's Homestead, *Site Plan*





— Fig. 23 | aerial over brampton, ontario.

other to entertain ourselves, or giggling at a cousin who had fallen asleep while trying to keep their eyes shut. The moment the last Amen was said we the kids would rush out of the living room into to the family room - forgetting everything I had just heard, leaving behind the feelings of fear and sadness - and turn on the TV. Our family prayer meetings were often scheduled around the same time Looney-Tunes was on, and we rushed to catch what was left. The women would file into the kitchen to prepare the dinner that was provided, while the men remained seated and caught up with each other's lives.

We had control of our social agendas. Quickly the needs of this community became our priority, more so than the needs of our neighbours. In fact, participation in this community was expected, almost mandatory, but participating in my immediate built environment was not. Our weekly social gatherings were never questioned by our neighbours, for we never did disturb the image of fairness. We always stayed inside the house, or contained within the boundaries of backyard fences, never disturbing the suburban image of the Canadian dream life. Richard Sennett describes our desire for individualism as a tool to:

equalize the condition of power in society so that no one has the strength to intrude; if all are equal, all can go their separate ways.²¹

I knew my family had customs not usual to my Canadian neighbours. There was a higher image of morality that we followed, and even though the Christian traditions were similar to the traditions of this society, the severity to which we followed it was alarmingly different, with images of the Last Supper hanging in the dining room, and plaques of scripture verses adorning the walls of our house. But what I understood with more clarity than the teachings from these Saturday evening sermons was the unspoken gentlemen's agreement

of *minding ones own business*.

With Brampton's changing ethnic demographic the principles of individualism allow us to accommodate people who are not like us, visually or culturally so long as they do not intrude on the sacredness of our own identity and space - our own version of the Canadian Dream. The freedom of choice in this suburban setting is an image so different from where it was adapted from. This suburban image, 35 years earlier, was the poster for separation, and segregation. One of the earliest examples of suburban success was the development of Levittown, by builders Levitt & Sons Inc. The Levittown community was constructed to accommodate the need for affordable housing in America after World War II, with a growing population of veterans returning home from the war.²² Levittown however, restricted its entry to Caucasians only, turning away anyone of the African American race, or any non-white. In a *New York Times* article, published on December 28, 1997, titled, "At 50, Levittown Contends With Its Legacy of Bias," the author, Bruce Lambert, addresses mixed feelings towards the celebration of Levittown's 50th Anniversary. He states:

The whites-only policy was not some unspoken gentlemen's agreement. It was cast in bold capital letters in clause 25 of the standard lease for the first Levitt houses, which included an option to buy. It stated that the home could not "be used or occupied by any person other than members of the Caucasian race".²³

This blatantly racist language could not be more different than the existing suburban demographic of Brampton in 2013. As a city with over 175 ethnic groups, speaking over 70 different languages, Brampton openly articulates its acceptance of all races, and was designated an "International Safe Community" by the World Health Organization in 2007.²⁴ But under this façade of a multicultural



Fig. 24 | Time Magazine, *House Builder Levitt*, July 3, 1950

utopia lies an ugly truth. Brampton has not found the miracle cure for racism, social prejudices, and intolerance, but an ignorance for those not like us. The cover of freedom to choose whom we associate with has allowed us to willingly segregate ourselves from those who do not accommodate our dream of community. The image of acceptance - the new rebranded identity of Canadian suburbs - has become the tool we use to measure and enforce equality. It is an unwritten suburban code that we are free to do as we please within the boundaries of our home so long as we do not disrupt the image of Canadian suburban bliss - the mowed lawn, the manicured garden, and a car or two in the driveway - the authority or standard we now hold our neighbours accountable to.

I was sitting in a small pub in Bonavista, Newfoundland - a small coastal town of about 3,700 people - in the late spring of 2011. It was the end of a day filled with driving through the humbling landscape of Newfoundland's eastern coastline. I had made the journey from St. John's, stopping at picturesque fishing harbours along the way. The pub was almost empty except for the bar tender, myself, and my travelling companion - an acquaintance at the time who was familiar with the province and was no stranger in Bonavista. I followed her lead, trusting her as a guide and translator to my east coast adventures. I was having a hard time distinguishing the English words through the thick east coast Bonavista accents. Bonavista was an intimidating place for an obvious outsider like myself. Everyone who came into the pub acknowledged me, the outsider, with a stare or point, an etiquette I was not comfortable with. But slowly I found myself being introduced to these strangers who were in fact quite interested in where I was travelling from. I was having a conversation with a young local who had travelled across Canada working as a labourer and who was quite familiar with Brampton and its surrounding area. In fact he had lived in Brampton for a short time. He told me he wasn't comfortable being there, and I naively asked if it was because there were so many immigrants. He chuckled at this remark and said that Indian people don't bother him. It was After a few short weeks of living in Brampton, he said, did he realize that he was living in a "cook house", so he got out of there as fast as he could. I had no idea what a cookhouse was, and I think he noticed my confusion. He told me it was a Meth Lab.

suburban adjustment



There are tens of millions of people in North America who were physically born here but who are not actually living here intellectually, imaginatively, or morally.²⁵

Gary Snyder, *The Practice of the Wild*, 1990

I could hear their laughter amidst the music blasting from the radio: It wasn't coming from anywhere in this house. I quickly ran to my second story bedroom window, closing the door behind me and climbed onto my bed for a better view into the lives of these strangers. I was always poking my nose in someone else's world, hoping to get a glimpse of some great adventure that I might be missing out on, trapped behind these walls of my suburban existence, trying not to get caught for prying eyes. All I could do was watch as they play, so comfortable behind the security of their backyard fences, these kids my own age, my neighbours, running through the sprinklers trying to escape the summer heat, singing along to the radio, unaware of my existence as I watched from a not so distant window.



Fig. 25 | *view to the backyard*, photo by author



— Fig. 26 | *view to the backyard*, photo by author

I was seven years old when I first tried to run away, or I should say walk away, from home. It was the middle of summer and my days were melting into each other with no spectacular event separating the hours of when I woke up and went to sleep. I spent my free hours floating around the house looking for amusement, wandering from room to room rummaging through closets searching for my family's hidden treasures as my siblings were too preoccupied with their own activities to keep me company - my sister claimed the comfort of the family room sofa where she sat buried in a Nancy Drew novel, with a pile of five or six more books waiting for her when she was finished, and my brother, the eldest sibling, sat alone at the dining room table with all his papers sprawled out, lost in his own imagined world of x-men characters, creating villains and superheroes of his own imagination. My parents left us only three rules to follow - "don't answer the door for anyone", "don't ever leave the house", and "don't bother Ammachi (grandmother)." She too was preoccupied with her own daily rituals - mornings prayers, mid-morning Bible reading, afternoon transcribing of the Bible, lunch time exercises pacing the perimeter of our backyard (also confining herself to the same suburban boundaries). Her room was littered, in an organized manner, with binders full of her handwritten notes all passages of scripture that she had copied. She usually left us to our own devices as her role as an authority figure was merely decorative.

My decision to leave was premeditated. I imagined my adventures to be like that of Jesse Aarons, a character from Katherine Paterson's novel, *Bridge to Terabithia*, who fled to the woods with his new friend Leslie, to escape into the imagined world of Terabithia, where he could leave behind the hardships that came from his home life. I wanted to escape because I was bored and restless. It was a sunny afternoon when I decided to leave. I left alone and empty-handed out the front door. As I walked past these other suburban houses I noticed the street was empty - no kids playing in the front

yards, or other parents to notice me wandering alone - the only sounds of life coming from the backyards, blocked from my view. The front porches were only occupied with empty seats or hanging flower baskets, framed by a manicured garden. I didn't know where I was going, or where I would end up, merely following the sidewalk, a path that led me nowhere. My eyes were glued to the ground, careful to stay within the boundaries of this concrete path that traced the edge of my neighbours' green lawns and driveways - the invisible fence keeping from stepping onto private property. To step beyond that line felt like an act of trespassing, an unwritten understanding waved only on Halloween. I was circling the block when my sister, aware of my disappearing act, pleaded for me to come home reminding me that there would be repercussions if I were caught breaking one of my parent's rules. I was defeated by obedience and dragged myself home in time to reunite with my siblings for the afternoon marathon of cartoon shows. This failed attempt at an escape left me feeling immobile, defenseless against the boundaries of my house, but aware of my confinement.

Obedience was not the only instrument that convinced me to return home. I was aware that my growing distaste for my suburban life stemmed from a feeling of restraint, an inability to move beyond a certain point. Had I walked a little further beyond the boundaries of the sidewalk I would have found a playground to play on, an open field of grass to run through, or a wooded area to hide in, all similar scenes I encountered in the stories I read. But my ability to explore my surroundings, like the characters in my books, did not exist here at home in the suburbs. There was a different etiquette here; I knew it the moment I left my house. I wasn't comfortable walking in the suburbs. Paul Goodman describes this stunted progress in aptitude as a missed opportunity of progressive education. He says,

[...] the revolutionary program of progressive education missed out,

or I should not be writing this gloomy book. The most vocal and superficial objections to it came from the conservatives who said that it flouted the Western Tradition, the Judaeo-Christian Tradition, the three R's, Moral Decency, Patriotism, and Respect for Authority. But the damaging, and indeed fatal blows to progressive education have come from those timid within the movement itself, who feared that the training did not provide easy adjustment to life, meaning by 'life' talking one's role in the organized system. This opinion has gradually prevailed, and now the doctrines of progressive education that have made headway in the public schools are precisely learning to get along with people, tolerance, and 'real life problems' such as auto driving and social dancing. They are not those that pertain to passionately testing the environment rather than 'adjusting' to it.²⁶

An Education

I didn't learn about Brampton in school. I didn't know its history, or understand its value in Canada's broad culture. I was never informed of its political structure, or its significance to its neighboring regions. In school I learned the Canadian National Anthem, in English and French, and received a vague review of Canada's colonization with its two conflicting identities in English and French traditions. I learned a list of historical figures, past Prime Ministers, and iconic figures, like Terry Fox, and Clifford Sifton. I learned the names and locations of all the provinces and territories, and their capitals. It was however, my journey to school that informed me of Brampton beyond the boundaries of my edited suburban experience. It was my first taste of escape from the protective gaze of my parents and the conservative community of my extended family. It began with a one hour and twenty minute bus ride to school, excited, nervous, sitting quietly, faced pushed against the window with my siblings sitting next to me in the same seat, both peering over me to get a view, a glimpse

into the world of others besides our families. For the next ten years riding the bus everyday became the trusted guide to my suburban tour and an education into Brampton's organization. There I sat obediently from the age of four, so overwhelmed at the possibility of participating in this new world, wanting to be educated and informed by these moving pictures. These scenes from the suburbs were written in my memory, a blurry afterthought buried deep in my unconscious. I was again a spectator, the silent observer of the world around me as it passed me by, the same scenes repeating itself over, and over, and over again. I was always at the mercy of this touring bus as it carried me into Brampton's suburban landscape, mapping my life and my existence in this place. Had my parents been able to drive us, it would have only been an eleven-minute car ride. This bus ride allowed me to navigate through the everyday life of this place, and I would argue the only way one was meant to navigate through the suburbs; that is, on the road, in a moving vehicle. And for the time being, I was in love with being a passenger.

The tour began at the end of my street in the 1980's middle class homes of Heart Lake Village. There were only brick homes here, varying in tones of red to brown, with two-car garages, made of large wooden doors that opened mechanically, green lawns, and white ash saplings that uniformly lined the quiet street. From here, the bus ventured past our grocery store towards the townhouses close to where my grandparents lived. They were older homes, smaller versions of the suburban neighbourhood I was from. They were packed together and almost identical in nature, every home looking like a mirror of each other, a much smaller version than the newer homes with only space for one car to fit in the driveway. I remember the trees that lined the street. Like in my neighbourhood they too were uniformly placed along the street, but they were enormous Norway Maples, much larger than the saplings in my area, with trunks almost a foot in diameter with leaves hovered, like

canopies over the driveways and front lawns, sheltering much of the homes from the gaze of strangers, with their heavy branches hanging so low they would scrape against the roof and sides of bus as it passed by, littering the ground with a blanket of green seeds that twirled to the earth like propellers of a helicopter. The bus steadily moved on to the rental apartments next to the commuter train station and Brampton Transit's main bus terminal, where the GO and VIA trains passed by. In the mornings we could here the bells ringing signaling the arrival of a train. There was only one stop here and the bus never lingered, passing the empty abandoned stores with vandalized windows and businesses like Laundromats, lawyers offices, banks, tax clinics, and salons - the most memorable of shops being the adults only clothing store, "Aren't We Naughty". I can still remember the flashing neon red light display of a woman bending over. I always looked forward to seeing the seasonal displays showcasing scantily clad manikins dressed in Christmas', Valentines' or Easter's hottest and most seductive seller. Our view was quickly guided away as we headed toward the pricey historical district of Downtown Brampton, only one block away from the unpleasantness of the abandoned buildings, separated by Gage Park, where I had my first skating lesson in the outdoor skating rink. Here the homes were maintained in appearance, but mostly lay vacant or converted into commercial spaces, like lawyers', or orthodontics' offices, all in proximity to Brampton's city hall. Pushing forward we made our way towards Brampton's newest neighbourhood. It was next to the new movie theatre and COSTCO. These houses were brand new and could have been images cut and pasted right from the flyers, with the green lawn already laid, perfectly manicured to the curbs edge, and wooden fences already in place. These houses looked like carbon copies of each other with similar tones of grey brick and vinyl (the latest trend), a more plastic version of the now older suburbs, with smaller backyards and less spaces between houses.

Back the bus came through Conservation where the families of the upper-middle class lived built against a conservation park. Here the trees looked bigger and stronger. The houses looked different from one another, all differing in size, shape, and colour; a less uniform appearance than the larger newer suburban developments, with a combination of multi-story homes and bungalows, some hidden behind a fence of flora. I recognized it was here where our houses were copied from, just smaller versions of these palaces. There were more trees, more land around the houses, more garage doors. It was here that marked the end of my suburban tour. I realized then that my boundaries did not end at the edge of my driveway, or my street, or at the nearest intersection. It surrounded us, spilling further and further beyond my reach.

I was in a trance, my body moving to every vibration of the meandering bus. My body was learning to recognize when the bus stops at stop signs, railroad tracks, or red lights, when it rushed to slow down at an amber light, when it hit a constant stream of green lights, and when it was yielding to oncoming traffic, impatiently inching forward waiting to break through the traffic. I noticed that all traffic adjusted their speed when a cop car was present. I watched pedestrians using the same devices to know when to walk, when to stop, and when to hurry along, all of us abiding by the same rules that govern this landscape. I became mesmerized by these scenes, absorbed in the spectacle of the suburbs. With my elevated view of the streets below I became a surveyor of the organized. There was efficiency in this order - the matching houses uniformly spaced along the streets, lined with matching trees, with cars and people all moving in unison – with everyone obediently abiding by the rules of this suburban terrain, unaware that I too would be easily adjusted to this place. We were all organized here.

My observations were as superficial as the terrain I was travelling on. After all these years of touring this landscape, I hardly





— Fig. 27 | *Heart Lake Village Homes*, photo by author





— Fig. 28 | *My Grandparents Neighbourhood*, photo by author





— Fig. 29 | *Downtown Brampton Apartments*, image from Google Street View





— Fig. 30 | *Downtown Brampton Shops*, photo by author





— Fig. 31 | *Brampton City Hall*, photo by author





— Fig. 32 | *Heritage Estate*, photo by author





— Fig. 33 | *Conservation Homes*, photo by author





— Fig. 34 | *Old Conservation Homes*, photo by author

understood anything about Brampton. I hadn't seen Brampton exposed with its assembly spilling out. I was living in a finished product. I didn't grasp a sense of the history of this place, for there were no stories told of what this place once was, there were no rituals handed down from early settlers. I didn't know how this city operated, its political structure, where my drinking water was coming, or where my garbage was going, and I didn't ask. Not much was shared except for rules, some written in the law, some shared as general guidelines of etiquette in this society, all the while, pushing aside the vibrant culture brought with my family from India, which I knew very little of, barely speaking the language and unable to read it, only to make room for an education on how to participate in this life of order and efficiency. The tour was just the beginning of my adjustment to suburban life as I watched the same versions of the lives of different people, every morning and every afternoon, with each neighbourhood abiding by a version of this suburban code of conduct: where to stand, where to drive, where to walk, where not to walk, when to take out your garbage, with very little room for improvisation on this stage. So with this daily bus ride, I toured this landscape, observing, mapping, cataloguing, creating a library of suburban articles on domestic living. It was not free roaming. I failed to take that risk as a child, as a youth, and even a young adult. I was being taught only how to participate, not how to live, but merely exist in this place.

Beyond the Edge

I was lucky to be brought up in Nature. There, lightning strikes taught me about sudden death and the evanescence of life. Mice litters showed that death was softened by new life. When I unearthed 'Indian beads,' trilobites from the loam, I understood that humans have been there a long time. I learned about the sacred

art of self-decoration with monarch butterflies perched atop my head, lightning bugs as my night jewelry, and emerald green frogs as bracelets.²⁷

Clarissa Pinkola Estés

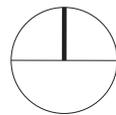
Women Who Run With the Wolves

My suburban bus tour ended at the crossroads of the Brampton-Caledon border, where the sprawl of the domestic dream life ended, and the open country began. I was not brought up in a world evident of nature. I hardly knew of its existence except for the planted trees, the manicured green lawns, the sculpted gardens and parks. But out in the countryside, resting on the edge of a farmer's field was my school, a stark contrast from where I had come from.

The school itself looked like any other I had seen in the suburbs - a brick building with a parking lot and a playground. But the landscape was different. There were no houses or shops in sight. I couldn't hear the steady hum of traffic. All I could see was grass, cornfields in the distance, and the wild brush. There were no paved trails or sidewalks here to know where to walk. There were no roads except for the one leading to the school. My boundaries became the ditch separating the field from the school with a wooden bridge to navigate over, the ravine cutting through the open field, the staggered edge of where the corn began to grow, or where the untamed brush began, and the farmland fences we could easily climb over. During the early spring, the smell of fresh manure wafting over from our neighbour's, a farmer's field next to us, all of us students groaning and making funny faces, blaming each other for the pungent smell.

The school was founded by Kennedy Road Tabernacle (KRT), a Pentecostal church located in Brampton that the school was also named after. It was a private school. We wore grey, white and maroon coloured uniforms – grey trousers for the boys and





— Fig. 35 | location of KRT School, at the brampton-caledon border.





— Fig. 36 | *in the fields*, photo by author, 2013





— Fig. 37 | *in the fields*, photo by author, 2013

grey jumpers for the girls - black dress shoes, a KRT monogrammed white polo shirt, and maroon cardigan. But here in the farmlands of Brampton and Caledon I was exposed to a different education, one that contradicted my suburban rituals. Our seasonal school fundraisers included the participation of local farmers who would bring their produce to sell. Others would have demonstrations on how to braid rope. There were sheep farmers who showed us how to shear sheep, removing the wool in one piece, and would have wool for sale with samples already cleaned and dyed. There were taxidermists and bakers too, surrounded by supportive suburban parents ogling their skills, ready to purchase their treasures. But, it was during recess that I noticed the differences between my suburban life and my school life. It was the way the boys and the girls played. The boys would hide in the brush on the outskirts of the farmers' field hoping not to get caught out there. They would be playing in the mud or hide among the abandoned farming equipment, away from the teachers view. They would play soccer in the fields, or have running races: always making use of all the open space. The girls restricted themselves to the playground, swinging on the swings, or gossiping under the built wooden structure. They would practice skipping or hopscotch on the blacktop. It was here I decided I wanted to be a boy. I could do all the things the girls did at home, but I couldn't roam like this in the suburbs. My classmates began calling me a tomboy, and I loved it. It was a title that gave me permission to do what the boys did: chase after field mice scurrying across the playground, dig through the sandboxes where we would find more mice that didn't survive the cold winter months. We scavenged for turtles in the creek separating the open field from the school. I too wandered through the abandoned farming equipment, and played soccer in the open field. I was one of the boys now. I had my very own band of brothers, like in the movies I watched.

This place exposed me to the wildness my childhood

needed: the messiness, the untidiness, and the unpredictability of it. In the winter we would have tobogganing excursion in the Caledon hills where the land began to descend into a valley, and science field trips at the start of summer to hidden ravines kilometers away from the school, buried deep in the brush. I remember that time we found a garter snake outside our classroom, crawling over our outside shoes. I had never seen one before, and didn't want to see one again. Or that one late winter afternoon when recess had been canceled and we were asked to stay inside because there was a coyote on the school grounds that must wandered in from the expansive brush next to us. I became very aware that we were not alone, keeping my eyes open for more trespassers, besides the mice and turtles we were becoming used to.

This school in the country became my consolation to the strict, and isolated suburban life I was living. I was part of a community I did not want to resist. I was well behaved and got good marks. My teachers liked me. I had friends. I had created a role for myself in this school community. I was Valedictorian of my grade eight graduating class, as well as winner of the girls' sportsman award. But the exposure to the open country only heightened the boredom and sterility of where I came from and was returning to. As I boarded the bus back to Brampton I left behind my knowledge from this place, not what I had learned in class, but what I learned out in the field. The bus ride home did not evoke similar feelings of an excited passenger as my morning tour. The afternoon bus ride was my preparation for reintegrating back into my suburban life, leaving a part of me behind, my wild self free to roam the bush. I was careful to keep both worlds separate for it was here that my skepticism of the strictness of home life began to grow. There were two standards preaching from the same book and I kept both separate from each other. It was this contradiction that made me choose sides and I chose school, slowly neglecting and eventually



Fig. 38 | *playing in the fields*, photo by author, 1998

resisting the social code of conduct of my suburban existence I was being adjusted to. But I was succeeding at adjusting, and I was happy.

In *The Practice of the Wild*, The author and American poet, Gary Snyder states,

We learn a place and how to visualize special relationships, as children, on foot and with imagination. Place and the scale of space must be measured against our bodies and their capabilities.²⁸

The uneasiness I felt as a child walking alone on the suburban street, which I mentioned earlier, was not from guilt of breaking my parents rules, it came from my assumption that walking had no purpose here, except for getting exercise for yourself, or for your dog. I had convinced myself from a young age that automobiles were my only tools for mobility in and out of the suburbs. In her book titled, *The Death and Life of Great American Cities*, author and critic of urban design, Jane Jacobs recalls the burdens of a suburban dweller who tells her, “*I have lost the advantage of living in the city...without getting the advantages of living in the suburbs*”.²⁹ I was at a disadvantage here. I had never lived in a city, and had no understanding of any other social behaviours besides the conditions of living in the suburbs. I had no other precedent to compare my frustration to. For many years my family had one vehicle, a 1988 Dodge Grand Caravan, which my parents shared. Any chance that came along for a ride I would tag along for the adventure, no matter where the destination, or the duration of the trip. I was a transfixed passenger under the spell of the road, the soothing vibrations that put me instantly at ease, forgetting my sense of restraint and free to let my mind wander; a taste I had acquired while riding the bus all those years ago. But the car was more than an instrument used to calm my nerves, it was a necessity my family depended on in the suburbs. It was used several

times a day, every day of the week. It almost seemed like our schedules revolved around the availability of the car. My father would drive my mother to work in the mornings, and pick her up in the evenings. On the weekends, when she didn't work, my mother would drive my father into work, so she could have the car at her disposal. They used the car to get groceries, visit family, to go to church on Sundays, give us rides to school or to a friend's house, for travel, to pick up and drop off family at the airport, and much more. Without the car, we stayed at home. My mother often talks about her experience of her days here living in the suburbs before she had her own vehicle. She felt trapped in the house, in a cage, her schedule dictated by the convenience of others, and now I realize that she was not the only one convinced of that. There are now four cars in my parents driveway, one for each resident – my father, my mother, my brother, and my sister – all varying in size, class and capabilities to satisfy each person's taste – a Chrysler Town and Country, a Jeep Compass, a Jeep Sahara, and a Volkswagen Golf. This dependency was sold on convenience. Using public transportation wasn't convenient; it was time consuming, as was walking. Everything was just a little too far away. The accomplished trespasser, Rebecca Solnit states,

[...] by now, I suspect, it's evened out, not because of feminism but because of fear. That is to say, girls have not gained what boys had; rather, boys are losing what girls lost.³⁰

This dependency is not restricted to gender or age, but affects all members of my family. I had disguised myself as a tomboy while I went to school in the country so that I could explore the school grounds with the boys. But here we were all immobilized in a car seat, ignoring those muscles that in me were beginning to twitch in an attempt to remind me that they were longing to be used, the same muscles that told me I was human. Solnit also describes this

dependency on cars as, “[...] *prosthetics for the conceptually disabled, disabled in their perception of space and self*”.³¹ However, so long as we had a vehicle I felt I had no limitations, but I also began to believe that my own body was incapable of wandering without the prosthetic of a car. For my second attempt at running away, at the age of seventeen, there was a getaway car waiting four houses away with its light turned off. That time I made it past my suburban street.

There were no two worlds that interacted with each other, and at a young age I learned to keep them all separate. There were no after school walks with peers wandering home, trespassing through fields and neighbourhoods that belonged to someone else. Instead we boarded buses that delivered us back to our house where we belonged. My school life was a secret I kept from my family, and for many years I kept my family a secret from my peers. It was my school life that challenged the social etiquette of the suburbs that I was adjusting to.

my social contract



The greater part of what my neighbors call good I believe in my soul to be bad, and if I repent of anything, it is very likely to be my good behavior. What demon possessed me that I behaved so well?³²

Henry David Thoreau, *Walden*

Just before my fourteenth birthday I accompanied my Aunt to a Mattamy Homes sales centre on the west end of Brampton where the new development was expanding. My Aunt was recently married and she and her husband were living in my parents' basement while looking for a place of their own. My aunt had always wanted a brand new home just in case the previous owners left behind any bad omens. This show room was decorated with rendered posters of Mattamy's model homes, 1:1 built kitchen details, and samples of interior finishes - paint colours, millwork finishes, countertop options and tile and carpet selections. We wandered the showroom floor on our own until a representative came by to answer our questions. My Aunt already seemed to know her financial limits and was immediately directed toward a distilled collection of catalogues with homes within her price limit. I sat and listened, as she was flooded with information on purchase packages with standard options versus the executive options. The only difference I saw was how much brick they used on the exterior – the standard option had a full front elevation of brick cladding, with vinyl siding on the other elevations, the executive option was all brick. Each model home already came with a designed floor plan, and the model home she picked also determined what lot was available to her as Mattamy Homes Builders had predetermined the quantity and location of each home model. We were both caught up in the excitement of picking colours and finishes never really realizing how superficial our involvement really was. Besides the high monetary value of the home, the experience for me was very similar to that of shopping for any product - a distraction of aesthetic preferences.

The *Dover*

30' WideLot® Homes



1434 *Sq. Ft.*
(Incl. 30 sq.ft. O.T.A.)



Brampton, Ontario

Fig. 39 | Mattamy Homes, *The Dover*

SINGLE CAR GARAGE HOMES

THE ASTORIA

1,459 SQ. FT.



CG3101



Calgary, Alberta

Fig. 40 | Mattamy Homes, *The Astoria*

The
SANDCHERRY

36' Homes

2283 SQ-FT.



Elevation D



Elevation A



Elevation B

WF3605

Kitchener, Ontario

Fig. 41 | Mattamy Homes, *The Sandcherry*

The **Wildflower**
1,924 Sq. Ft.
OT3006

30' Single Car Garage Homes



Ottawa, Ontario

— Fig. 42 | Mattamy Homes, *The Wildflower*

I've since gone back to visit Mattamy Homes' website to rekindle some of that excitement of purchasing a home, and have discovered that the very organization of the product - the suburban home - is catalogued according to location, model type (semi-detached, detached) and price with no evidence of what the product is until you pick a price. Maybe we don't need to see the image that has been engrained in our memories, the symbol of suburban living with evidence of each Mattamy Home poster showcasing the same design strategies with no regard to its location in Canada except in its title. We are not picking a home that suites our preferences and needs, we are picking a price tag, and the price tag then becomes a reflection of our value. It is no longer just a representation of acceptance or equality, but as become a manifestation of our own personal worth, our social standing. We are led to believe that we are responsible for our place in this world, that our successes and failures are a direct reflection of our own strengths and weaknesses.³³ For some reason I was led to believe that my house was a sign of a weakness.

Over the years I've seen many of my extended family members move away into newer neighbourhoods in different suburbs while my family remained stationary in our suburban existence. We were travelling further and further to see our family to perform the same weekly routines of our Saturday evening prayer meetings. But every visit to a new home was followed by whispers of comparisons that triggered some insecurity in us for what we had in Brampton. Every new home came newer interior finishes like hardwood flooring, and the latest trends in floor layouts that only reminded us what we didn't have. But I wasn't convinced that we were worse off for being here. I don't know what made me disbelieve what these new homes had to offer, but my guess is that it had something to do with the fact that I can remember more about the social seating arrangements of my family gatherings than the neighbourhoods and the homes themselves. As I travelled beyond the boundaries of Brampton I always expected to arrive and discover a new world, ready to embrace the challenges that follow culture shock, but my eyes always adjusted to the familiar scenes I had been cataloguing for many years while touring Brampton's landscape. Jane Jacobs addresses issues regarding homogenous in the urban landscape, as an esthetic problem. She states:

But homogeneity or close similarity among uses, in real life, poses very puzzling esthetic problem. If the sameness of use is shown candidly for what it is -sameness- its looks monotonous. Superficially, this monotony might be thought of as a sort of order, however dull. But esthetically, it unfortunately also carries with it's a deep disorder: the disorder of conveying no direction. In places stamped with the monotony and repetition of sameness you move, but in moving you seem to have gotten nowhere. North is the same as south, or east as west. Sometimes north, south, east and west are all alike, as they are when you stand within the grounds of a large project. It takes

differences -many differences- cropping up in different directions to keep us orientated. Scenes of thoroughgoing sameness lack these natural announcements of direction and movement, or are scantily furnished with them, and so they are deeply confusing. This is a kind of chaos.³⁴

I have a photographic memory, a useful gift for finding my way around Brampton, but my mother and brother needed explicit and detailed instructions in order to reach a destination - “Turn left at the house with red shed at the end of the street”, “Its next to the McDonalds on your way to Melissa’s house”, or “As soon as you cross over the four lane bridge, it’s the first street on the right”. Having lived in Brampton our whole lives, my brother has finally discovered a solution to navigate his way through this place, a GPS. But the disorientation I felt came while visiting friends and family who lived in other suburbs - Richmond Hill, Thornhill, Milton, Calgary, Yonkers New York -recognizing all the same building types and organization, making me believe I was still in Brampton, like I never left my own neighbourhood. I became disoriented when I realized I was nowhere. I was touring a place with no story, just a name, and it was everywhere.

Jane Jacobs describes this monotonous landscape as a *kind of chaos*, but it wasn’t so obvious to me because it wasn’t oppressive like the monotonous built forms in Fritz Lang’s 1927 film, *Metropolis*.³⁵ It was subtle like the posters of paradise destinations in Jacque Tati’s 1967 film, *Playtime*, each colorful poster displaying the same image, with a different destination: USA, Hawaii, Mexico, and Stockholm.³⁶ Brampton was just another poster of paradise with its own name. I understand now that this chaos, this disorientation, was muted by such an overwhelming image of order. I never could grasp the significance of each place, carrying with me my suburban etiquette: the universal language that deemed us socialized everywhere we

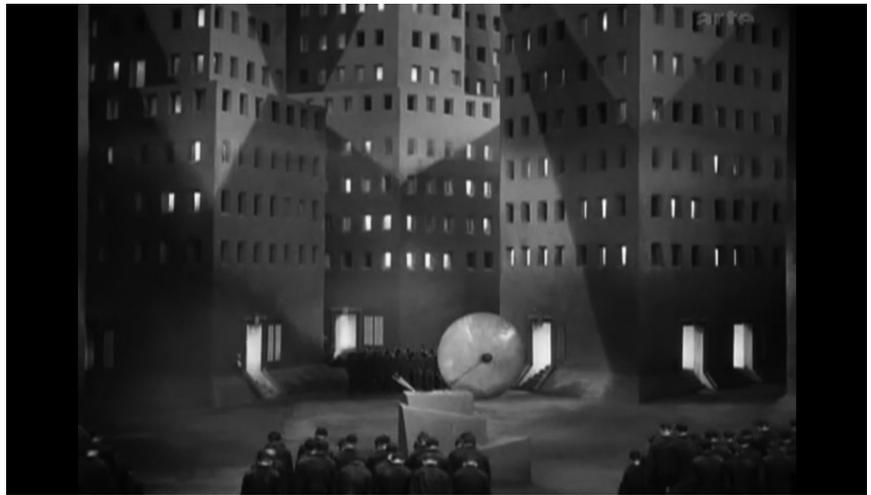


Fig. 43 | still from Fritz Lang's, *metropolis*, 1927



— Fig. 44 | still from Jacques Tati's, *playtime*, 1967

went. We could fit in everywhere. Even the habitual pattern of our family interactions always remained the same - the men socialized on the living room sofa, the women on folding chairs in the hallway and in the dining room, and the children on the floor or in front of the TV. The women never got to sit on the sofas. This always bothered me, and no matter the location, no matter how big the house was, how new or luxurious it was this seating arrangement never changed. I was following a road that always led me back to this paradise, never really able to escape the images of a life of convenience. All of us suburban dwellers organized in a space, reassured that if we follow the rules, and listen to authority everything will be ok. And we all acted like we believed it. I too was convinced. I was becoming like everyone else, like the people Melvina Reynolds' so eerily describes in her song, *Little Boxes*.³⁷ I was living in Nowhere, becoming no one. I was already *Suburbanized*.

Eventually our weekly Saturday meetings slowly turned into monthly meetings, and soon it was Easter, Thanksgiving and Christmas get-togethers. My community was changing, as the number of our social activities began to dwindle. We were forced to acknowledge our surrounding for the first time and my parents didn't like what they saw.

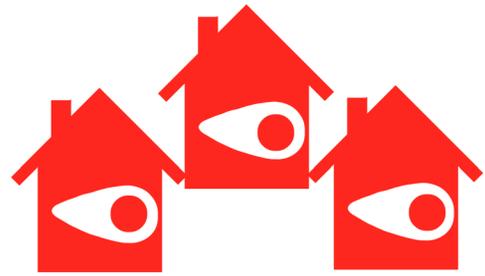
Brampton was no longer the ideal setting of their Canadian Dream.

Property Value

During my bus tour of Brampton I began establishing a social order. I could recognize the difference between the rich and the poor just by the homes they lived in, which I assumed was a correlation between size and wealth. I knew I wasn't the few at the top or the few at the bottom. I was the so many in the middle who all looked the same.

But I first learned about property value at home, not from the bold writing on the real estate flyers telling me the starting prices of a brand new home. It wasn't in a discussion about mortgage rates or financial planning in an economics class. It was in the quiet whispers of concern about the state of our street I heard between my parents. I could hear the critical comments about our neighbours who weren't upholding the written agreement of Brampton's Property Standards, By-laws NO. 104-96,³⁸ or maintaining the appearances of equality - letting their grass grow too long, having too many cars in the driveway, letting the paint peel off the garage door; Their neglect was somehow affecting us. The neighbourhood watch - which I only knew existed because of the sticker placed on our front window of three eerie red homes standing guard, watching you out of the corner of its all-seeing eye - took on new meaning. It wasn't for our own physical protection, but the protection of our investment. What I thought was propaganda - images of happy families living in paradise, I seemed too eager to imitate - was in fact a subtle clue into property value. These were images that evoked desire, an important element for any manufactured product for sale. My parents were no longer looking for acceptance; they were keeping up with appearances to protect their property value. This was the higher social contract I didn't know I had agreed to.

PREMISES
PROTECTED



NEIGHBOURHOOD
WATCH

Fig. 45 | *neighbourhood watch* —

I had never known Rufus to be much of a swimmer; on nights when some of the other stoners and I would hop the fences of neighborhood pools, he rarely participated.

-Do you even swim?

-Berman, nobody swims in these things. They're for floating. Fill them up with plastic inflatables and free-associate. Gentle swaying stimulates the brainpan.

I watched the pool guys pacing off most of his yard.

-Why not start with a hammock and work your way up?

-Sometimes I'm out here and I need to take a leak. But I don't want to go inside. The weather's nice. I want to stay out but I need to pee. Just for that the pool would be worth the investment.

-You could pee in the bushes.

-I'm a suburban homeowner, there's a social contract. Pissing in the pool is fine but whipping out your dick and irrigating the shrubbery is bad news. Its all about property value.³⁹

David Bezmozgis, *Natasha*, 1994



Fig. 46 | still from Randal Kleiser's, *honey i blew up the kid*, 1992

-
- Wait till the Vista Del Mar Standards Committee sees this.
 - Maybe we shouldn't bother with it. It's just a mailbox.
 - Little things have a way of becoming very big things Patty.⁴⁰

Dialogue from *Honey I Blew up the Kid*, 1992

I have never purchased a home, or experienced the responsibilities and excitement of having a place to call my own. I grew up watching my parents pour most of their time and income into our house. Although it was a new home I often heard my parents talk of our house as if it were a sick child that needed constant attention and care, talking openly to each other of its ailments and deficiencies that were depreciating its value. The house needed to be made better. This house was an investment; a commodity whose value could drop or increase at any moment. My father monitored the value of his house by collecting the pricing charts from the sales offices of Carter Homestead. He watched it value rise and quickly fall. Of all the remnants that still exist from the original collection of drawings of the *EMERALD*, the original pricing chart was not included. It was the only document my father thought to get rid of. He watched his largest investment to date crash in the late 1980's and early 1990's recession. He was crushed. He bought the dream they sold him, and soon found out it wasn't worth what he paid for. Since then my parents, my siblings, and myself have all worked to maintain the value of our house – painting the walls neutral colours, furnishing it meticulously, repairing any internal problems, upgrading our appliances and renovating any outdated rooms – maybe we were trying to rebuild our lost fortune. He still hasn't told me the original cost of this house. Thoreau made this observation in his book *Walden*. He states:

But men labor under a mistake. The better part of the man is soon ploughed into the soil for compost. By a seeming fate, commonly called necessity, they are employed, as it says in an old book, laying up treasures which moth and rust will corrupt and thieves break through and steal. It is a fool's life, as they will find when they get to the end of it, if not before.⁴¹

I know this *old book* he speaks of, and the proverb he mentions. I heard it all too often in our family Prayer meetings. It is a reference to Matthew 6:19, a passage from the Bible urging us not to hold so dear the treasures we have on earth, but to lay up treasures in heaven. “*For where your treasure is, there your heart will be also*”.⁴²

When the second recession of my lifetime loomed over the Canadian economy in 2008 I held my breath wondering how we were going to adjust to this fragile market. I heard of many architecture firms letting go of employees, and I wondered what my future would look like in this field. I was nervous for the first time of being unemployed. I was anxious too for my parents’ job security, imagining what our lives would look like if they lost their jobs. I soon started seeing commercials for Home Renovation Tax Credits (HRTC) of up to \$1350 in tax relief.⁴³ It was one incentive of Canada’s Economic Action Plan. My mother did lose her job as her place of employment - an American owned company - reassigned their jobs back to the United States, but my parents still renovated their kitchen. There was a Home Depot, Home Hardware, Beaver Lumber, Rona or Lowes in almost every strip mall ready to accommodate all our household needs. These flyers, showing the latest and greatest logos, only reminded us of what we didn’t have. We became so preoccupied by the need to adjust our home to latest trends - colour schemes, room arrangements, carpentry, hardwood floors vs. carpet, wallpaper vs. paint - and I watched my father mold this house into what it is today, ripping out carpet, retiling floors, finishing the basement and so much more, all in the name of property value. This was the unwritten social contract we all seemed too willing to obey. It was this contract that my family obeyed without resistance, hesitation, or protest. We were stripping our identity from this place trying to uphold an image of desire in order that we could in turn sell it for a profit. This was not my home anymore. It was just a product being maintained for resale. Even our heavenly rules



<u>MODEL</u>	<u>APPROX. SQ. FT.</u>	<u>PRICE</u>	<u>4 BEDROOM</u>
<u>30 FOOT LOTS</u>			
THE GOLDING	1637	251,990	253,990
THE LAWSON	1671	252,990	
THE WRIGHT	1777	253,990	
THE WRIGHT II	1857	257,990	
THE OAK	1900	263,990	
THE BIRCH	1944	265,990	
THE ROSE	2020	268,990	
THE ASH	2100	272,990	

40 & 45 FOOT LOTS

CORNER LOT	2029	265,990	293,990
THE OPAL	2033	292,990	
THE DIAMOND	2130	295,990	
THE GEM	2228	297,990	
THE EMERALD	2243	300,990	
THE JEWEL	2310	302,990	
THE SAPPHIRE	2322	312,990	
THE CORNER LOT	2465	307,990	
THE ONYX	2602	318,990	
THE TOPAZ	2852	321,990	
THE RUBY	3033	329,990	

SOME LOTS SUBJECT TO A PREMIUM CHARGE

PRICES AND SPECIFICATIONS SUBJECT TO CHANGE WITHOUT NOTICE

E. & O.E.

SPECIAL ADDED FEATURES

- ALL CLAY BRICK CONSTRUCTION
- VINYL CLAD WINDOWS
- CERAMIC TILES IN FOYER
- WOODEN GARAGE DOOR (40 & 45 FOOT MODELS ONLY)
- ROUGH IN VACUUM SYSTEM (40 & 45 FOOT MODELS ONLY)
- ROUGH IN 2 PIECE WASHROOM IN BASEMENT, DRAINS ONLY ON UNEQUAL 45 FT. HOMES

SALES OFFICE TELEPHONE: 846-6010

SALES OFFICE HOURS: Monday-Thursday 1:00-6:00 p.m.
Friday 1:00-6:00 p.m.
Saturday & Sunday 11:00-6:00 p.m.

SALES REPRESENTATIVES: Doug, Ann

MARCH 4, 1989

Fig. 47 | carter's homestead, price list march 4, 1989

16,800
0-1
8 3/4 - 213



874

MODEL	APPROX. SQ. FT.	PRICE	4 BEDROOM
<u>30 FOOT LOTS</u>			
THE HOWLAND	1434	199,990	201,990
THE GOLDING	1637	231,990	233,990
THE LAWSON	1671	232,990	
THE WRIGHT	1777	233,990	
THE WRIGHT II	1857	237,990	
THE OAK	1900	241,990	
THE BIRCH	1944	242,990	
THE ROSE	2020	244,990	
<u>40 & 45 FOOT LOTS</u>			
THE OPAL	2030	272,990	
THE DIAMOND	2130	275,990	
THE GARNET	2228	277,990	
THE EMERALD	2260	280,990	
THE PEARL	2310	282,990	
THE SAPHIRE	2552	292,990	
THE TOPAZ	2852	301,990	
THE RUBY	3030	309,990	

5000

20,000

16
2
40
215
18

SOME LOTS SUBJECT TO A PREMIUM CHARGE
PRICES AND SPECIFICATIONS SUBJECT TO CHANGE WITHOUT NOTICE
E. & O.E.

- SPECIAL ADDED FEATURES
- ALL CLAY BRICK CONSTRUCTION
 - VINYL CLAD WINDOWS
 - CERAMIC TILES IN FOYER
 - WOODEN GARAGE DOOR (40 & 45 FOOT MODELS ONLY)
 - ROUGH IN VACUUM SYSTEM (40 & 45 FOOT MODELS ONLY)
 - ROUGH IN 2 PIECE WASHROOM IN BASEMENT, DRAINS ONLY ON UNBUILT 45 FT. HOMES

SALES OFFICE TELEPHONE: 454-0070
SALES REPRESENTATIVES: ANA & KATHIE

SEPTMBER 24, 1990

& 3/4% MORTGAGE INTEREST REATE FOR 3 YEARS
OR
0% INTEREST FOR ONE YEAR

SALES OFFICE HOURS:
MONDAY-THURSDAY 1-8P.M.
FRIDAY: CLOSED
SATURDAY & SUNDAY 11 - 6P.M.

\$2000
INITIAL DEPOSIT

\$8,000.00 DEPOSIT 60 DAYS
TOTAL DEPOSIT \$10,000.00

Fig. 48 | carter's homestead, price list september 24, 1990

weren't strong enough against the capitalist ways of our society.

Identity Crisis

- Where are you from?
- Brampton.
- Oh Bramladesh!
- ... *laughter*

Where are you from, was the usually the first question I was asked when I had arrived to university. Our hometowns defined us in someway, and being from Brampton, also being brown, labeled me an immigrant from an immigrant suburb, particularly a suburb with a heavily populated Indian demographic. I had always considered myself Canadian, not Indo-Canadian, not Indian. Just Canadian. I had never heard the term Bramladesh before, and I wasn't immediately offended by this racial profiling. I was ashamed and embarrassed of where I was from, a reaction that made me think I wasn't Canadian enough for the white guys asking me about my address.

Over the course of the production of this thesis, Brampton's changing identity has steadily become a growing concern not just for my parents, but also for many of its residents. Yes Brampton is changing. We now accommodate the new sections in the grocery stores labeled "foods of the world", or "International foods" – aisles dedicated to the demands or the steadily growing immigrant population. There are now more authentic ethnic restaurants - Indian, Jamaican, Chinese, Vietnamese, Italian, even ethnic fusion foods – add to Brampton's a cultural diversity. We are even able to put our cultural differences aside and participate in the one phenomenon that brings this culturally diverse population together - COSTCO. I haven't seen a more crowded parking lot on a Sunday

afternoon in Southern Ontario. It is my parents' one-stop-shop for all their suburban needs, and have even designated Thursday evenings as their COSTCO night. The lure of wholesale prices on bulk food, high-end electronics, and free samples of edible treats while you shop, has won the hearts of this colourful population. Since it was incorporated as a city in 1974, even with a rapidly growing population, Brampton's identity remains consistent with the same images of domestic bliss circulating in the weekly flyers with homebuilders ready to provide the latest breakthrough in suburban architecture that are nearly identical copies of Brampton's original suburban homes. But what is changing is the constructed image of what people wanted Brampton to be for them. For some it is no longer a reflection of their image of success. This is no longer a place of *Two Solitudes*⁴⁴, an identity crises torn between our French and English identities, but a place of hundreds of thousands of solitudes; each family, like my own, in fact each person constructing their own Utopia - their own version of Brampton. In her book titled, *Addiction to Perfection*, Canadian author of female psychology, and Jungian analyst, Mariam Woodman describes societies value on its addiction to its own constructed environment.

Rituals on whatever level are very important part of daily life. We love our little routines that help us to float through a day. We imagine we are conscious when we wake up. We move through our ablution rituals, we exercise, we have our coffee, orange juice and toast. We move from bedroom to bathroom to kitchen. Then one morning there is a guest in the house. We can't get into the bathroom. We go to the kitchen and drop our favorite coffee mug. We're cranky. We hate small talk over breakfast. We miss our bus. The whole day is shot. On such small details we build our profane rituals, rituals to which we are basically indifferent until they go wrong. Then we realize how unconscious we can remain so long as we have those

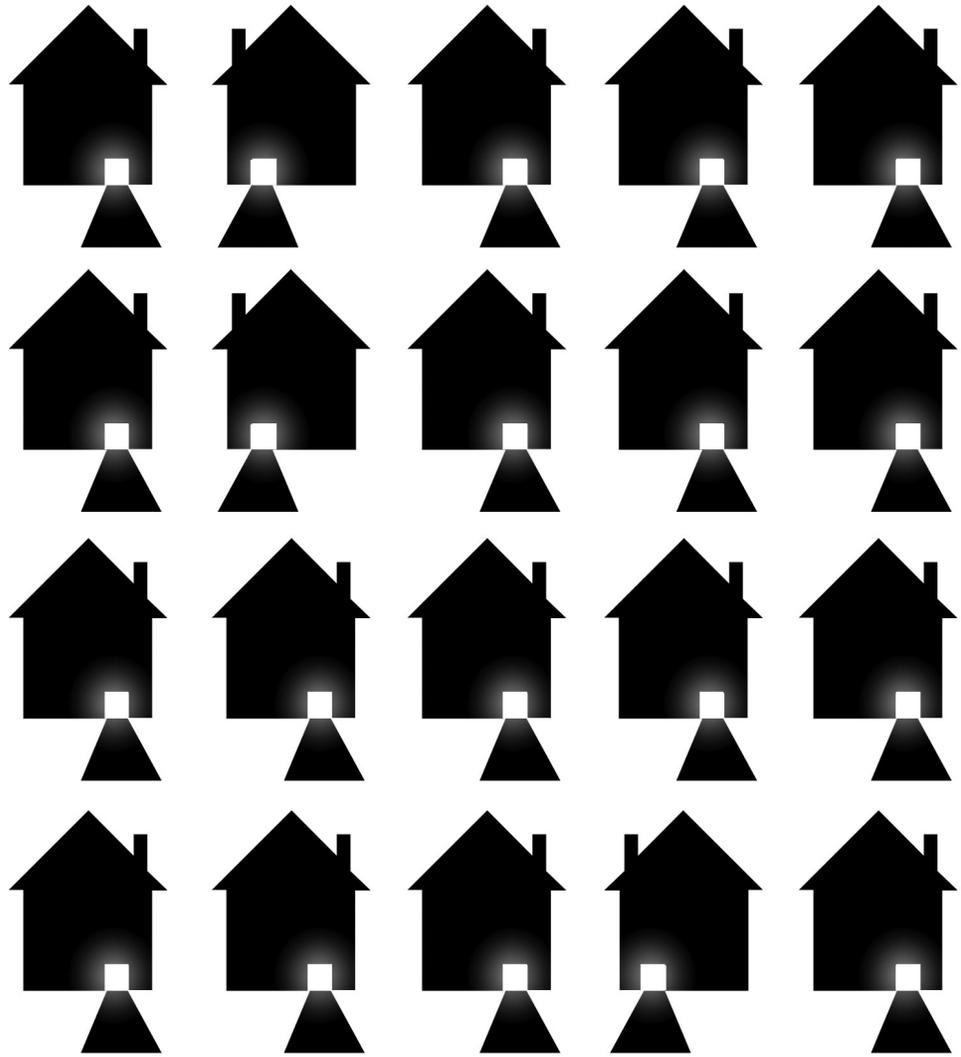
repetitive patterns to hold our world together.⁴⁵

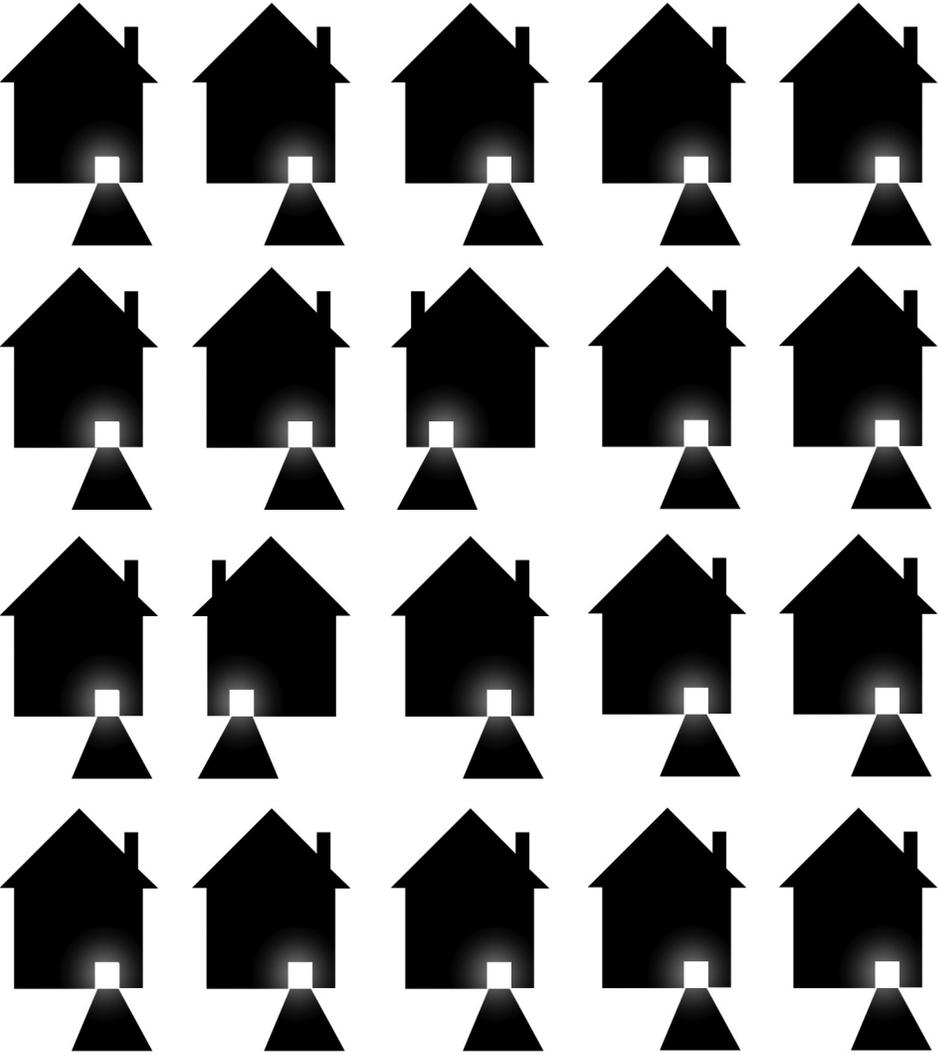
We become so addicted to the careful tinkering of our lives, the constant editing and control of our environment that our world turns to chaos at any rift in our carefully manicured identities. We obsess over the organization of our own circle of trust, isolating ourselves, and ignoring the needs of people not like us that the instant we no longer feel the equality enforced by the conditions of individualism we feel threatened. When others not like us intrude on our own personal rituals we lose our sense of place, and the definition of *people like us* begins to change. It has become more about who we were trying to be like, and for my family we were trying to separate ourselves from the immigrant identity that seemed to define Brampton, an image more powerful than the corporate identity Brampton has given itself as the Flower City, paying homage to its brief history in floral exports.⁴⁶ Now there are whispers of residents being uncomfortable with the increase of immigrants, even articles in the *Toronto Star* commenting on concerns of Brampton's identity crisis rooted in the myth of *white flight*, a topic few dare to speak aloud regarding the slowly declining white population in Brampton.⁴⁷ This article made me livid when I read it, for it only added fuel to old racist ways of thinking that immigrants were devaluing property by making Brampton a less desirable place to live for residents who were looking to move up on the social economic ladder. Was my presence as a visible minority devaluing our property? There is a fear I associate with that thought that I will always be looked at as an immigrant, even though I was born here, and no matter where I am, I will be someone to be in fear of, coming to depreciate my neighbour's property value.

After 24 years my parents have never really settled here. Even with all the work, time and money they invested into their house, they

were always talking about moving away, wanting to find something bigger, or smaller, just different, trying harder to find ways to separate ourselves from the stereotypes that were projected onto us by aggressively imitating the people we were trying to be like - the happy white family in pastel coloured clothes, yet hardly ever physically associating with them. Even the new advertisements in the weekly paper included images of a Canadian-Indian family: the happy parents (a husband and a wife), smiling and enjoying the company of their small healthy children (a boy and a girl), wearing matching pastel colored clothes. They are not dressed in traditional Indian clothes, but the same western style seen in similar flyers. They talk about times in the past, when their street used to be one of the nicest in the area. People used to take more care of their property, and now its looking a bit more run down, with people coming and going, never really staying long enough to care about this place. My parents always seem to be looking through the real estate sections of the paper, comparing prices, looking for another ideal offer, another dream life. They want the house to be prepared, always staged to sell and ready for our departure. How could I ever be settled here?

These models represent the sacred image of desire, order, efficiency, equality - the authority we hold our neighbours and ourselves accountable to on this suburban stage. Even hidden in our homes we decorate and cover our differences, performing the suburban dance of a productive consumer.





— Fig. 49 | *my imagination*, poster, by author



Fig. 50 | *my imagination*, model, by author



— Fig. 51 | *my imagination, model, by author*



Fig. 52 | *my imagination*, model, by author



— Fig. 53 | *my imagination*, model, by author

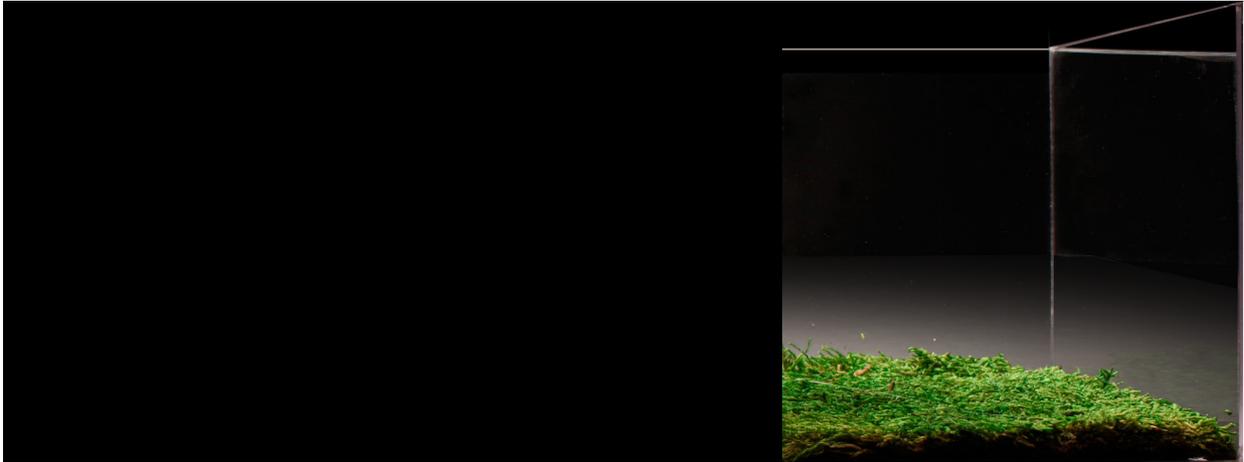
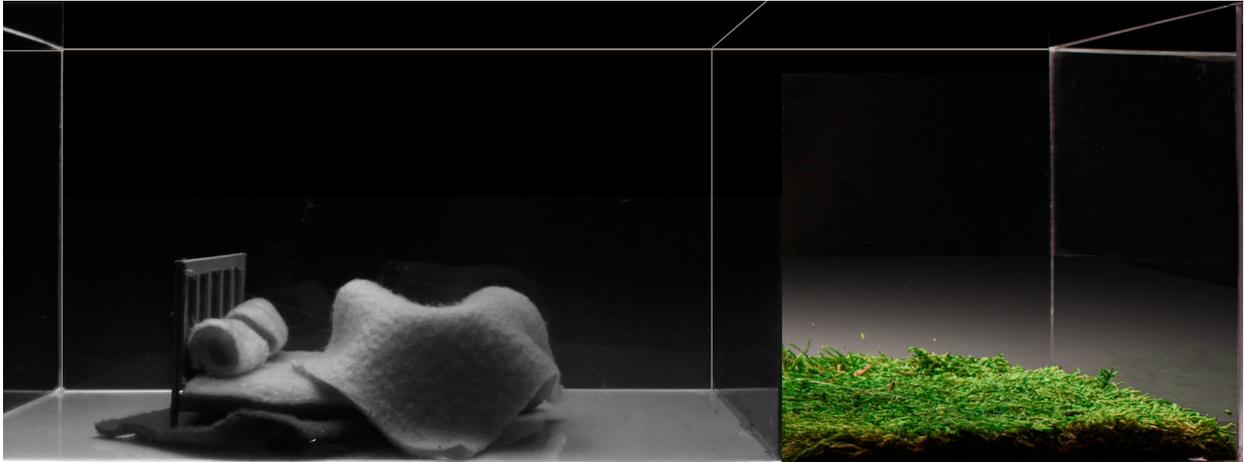


Fig. 54 | *my imagination*, model, by author



— Fig. 55 | *my imagination*, model, by author

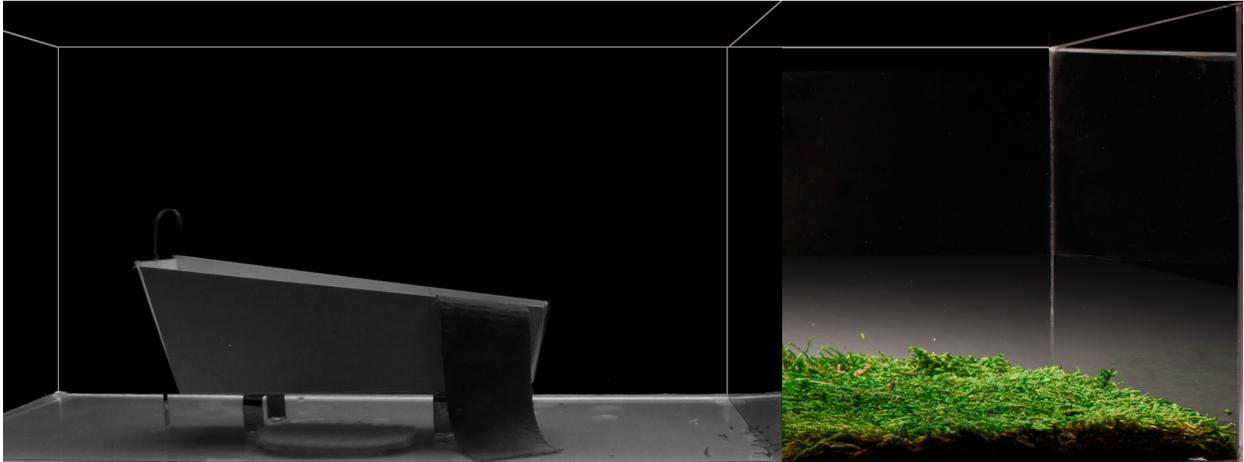


Fig. 56 | *my imagination*, model, by author



— Fig. 57 | *my imagination*, model, by author



Fig. 58 | *my imagination*, model, by author

-Remember when we were kids, you'd see cars, everyone looked so different, every car looked so different, so unique unto itself. This whole...this is just oatmeal.

-Ya they're grinding all the edges off Jerry, just the same thing they're doing to us.⁴⁸

...*Laughter*...

Dialogue between comedians Jerry Seinfeld and Joel Hodgson,
"A taste from Hell on High"

reisting authority



Can you really think artists and writers are the only people entitled to lives of their own? Listen: I don't care if it takes you five years of doing nothing at all; I don't care if you decide after five years that what you really want is to be a bricklayer or a mechanic or a merchant seaman. Don't you see what I'm saying? It's got nothing to do with definite, measurable talents – it's your very essence that's being stifled here. It's what you are that's being denied and denied and denied in this kind of life.⁴⁹

Richard Yates, *Revolutionary Road*

I found my escape. I was wandering through the wilderness of Northern Ontario among the tall pines and rolling rocks of the Canadian Shield, gazing out into the dark abyss of one of its many lakes, feeling the cold breeze whip over my skin, making my hair stand on edge. I was dressed comfortably for the hike but I was never quite warm enough, huddling as close as I could to the glowing fire. There were so many stars, and I searched for the familiar constellations, like looking for familiar faces. I was with my closest friends travelling across this majestic landscape driving, hiking, canoeing, exploring a land seemingly untouched by other humans, telling stories along the way of our mischievous past, and sharing our hopes for the future. This was our uncivilized adventure. I was at peace here. I was free for the first time, only to awake to the noises around me, my eyes adjusting to the artificial light, recognizing the familiar walls of my bedroom. The blinds were drawn, and the radio still on adding a soundtrack to my disappointed realization that it had all been a dream. None of it was real.

Daydreamer



Fig. 59 | still from Sofia Coppola's, *the virgin suicides*, 1999

The girls' only contact to the outside world was through the catalogues they ordered that started to fill the Lisbon's mailbox with pictures of high-end fashions and brochures for exotic vacations. Unable to go anywhere the girls travelled in their imaginations to gold-tipped Siamese temples, or passed an old man with a leaf broom tidying a moss carpeted speck of Japan.

We ordered the same catalogues and flipping through the pages we hiked through dusty passes with the girls. Stopping every now and then to help them with their backpacks, placing our hands on their warm moist shoulders, and gazing off at the highest sunsets. We drank tea with them in a water pavilion. We did whatever we wanted. Cecilia hadn't died. She was a bride in Calcutta. The only way we could feel close to the girls was through these impossible excursions, which have scarred us forever, making us happier with dreams than with wives.⁵⁰

Dialogue from *The Virgin Suicides*, 1999

I don't remember much of my early adolescent years, the years my skepticism of this place and for my authority began to overwhelm me. It was around the same time I started going to school in the suburbs, leaving behind my memories of friendships, long bus rides, and my only view outside the boundaries of the suburbs. It was also around the time I decided I could no longer act like a boy to get away with exploring this place. I wanted to get out. But the most memorable emotion of my adolescent years was rage; however, when I look back at my journals from High School - an agenda my homeroom teacher distributed to every student at the beginning of the semester - there is no evidence of any of my distaste. There is a schedule I had taped to the inside cover with my name on printed on it evidence that I was in fact a student at Notre Dame Secondary School. There were no stories written down, no passing thoughts, no feelings expressed, merely a point form activity log of my daily priorities.

I had trouble adjusting to my full-time roll in suburban life. I was starting a new school where no one knew my name and no one cared, unless it was to take attendance. I didn't have many friends, but that didn't bother me. I noticed the speed of life changed in the suburbs, and there was hardly any time to react. I watched it happening all around me. Every year the competition for getting good marks, to get into a good university, to get a good job that paid well began filling my head with an unrelenting pressure to succeed, and we were competing against all graduating Canadians, not just our own peers. Our school officials hired successful athletes, and businessmen to address the school assembly proclaiming the same sermon - "STAY IN SCHOOL", and "WORK HARD". We did once have someone come in who encouraged us not to drink and drive. I was beginning to buckle. I wasn't ready to get so serious with any deviant behavior always threatening my chances for a successful future. I was a smart kid. I got good grades, but there were no rewards

for my good behavior. My parents too were overly cautious of my future as if it would crumble at any second. It was the pressure to behave myself for fear of jeopardizing my future that bothered me with my teachers and parents always threatening discipline. There were students who didn't behave and they had a permanent record of their deviant behavior attached to their university application. I wasn't learning anymore, just stuffing my head with information I could regurgitate all in the name of getting a good grade. My classes were silent as we copied notes, never questioning what we were learning except to know if the information would be covered on a test. There was no discourse here. I was losing confidence in this place.

My rage came swift. I was manic and destructive, my house being the victim of my frustration. I could only describe my outburst as a cry for help, and act of survival. I was suffocating in this place. I yelled. I screamed. I slammed doors. I rammed a chair through a bedroom door. I kicked through a glass partition. But the house never fought back, humbly taking my abuse. My father, over time, would repair the damage I had done. I had no reason to keep pretending I had respect for this place, and the house's indifference to my suffering only infuriated me even more, even though my older siblings seemed to be adjusting just fine. I had nowhere to run and escape to, and no one to run to. I needed my life to slow down, I needed a moment to reflect, but there seemed to be no time for that. I was looking for control, which Richard Sennett describes as,

[...] personal confrontation reduced to its lowest common denominator: a struggle for self-possession. The content of authority, what authority should be, is cast aside.⁵¹

I fought endlessly with my parents and their asphyxiating grip on the choices I made in life. I forfeited. I was crippled under the fear of

jeopardizing my future. I began to fear the future, fear the unknown. It was easier to behave, to take solace in my dreams, these impossible experiences, in hopes for a stable future. It was the suburbs that taught me to dream, to imagine beyond the boundaries of this self-imprisoned existence. Clarissa Pinkola Estés, an American poet and Jungian analyst, describes this behavioral disorder stating:

“Normalizing the abnormal causes the spirit, which would normally leap to correct the situation, to instead sink into ennui, complacency [...]”.⁵²

I felt paralyzed, so I dreamt myself out of here, wandering through landscapes that to me represented freedom - the open wilderness, the open road, and bonfires in the country field. I imagined encounters with characters from books I had read, films and TV shows I had seen, all coming alive at my command, participating in whatever dream I had playing in my head. These were my friends, my mentors, and my comrades. I dreamt of death, my own and of loved ones. I dreamt of the destruction of my suburban neighbourhood, becoming a wasteland at the hands of an apocalypse or of war. I dreamt of survival, and comradeship. I dreamt of simpler times, relying on each other for survival. I spent my free time at home in solitude, hiding from my family, fostering these dreams, never writing them down, merely replaying the same scenes over and over again in my head till my sentence was up. I should have read *Dharma Bums* when I was thirteen.

But there was wisdom in it all, as you'll see if you take a walk some night on a suburban street each with the lamplight of the living room, shining golden, and inside the little blue square of the television, each living family riveting its attention on probably one show; nobody talking; silence in the yards; dogs barking at you

because you pass on human feet instead of on wheels. You'll see what I mean, when it begins to appear like everybody in the world is soon going to be thinking the same way [...] Only one thing I'll say for the people watching television, the millions and millions of the One Eye: they're not hurting anyone while they're sitting in front of that Eye. But neither was Japhy [...] I see him in future years stalking along with full rucksack, in suburban streets, passing blue television windows of homes, alone, his thoughts the only thoughts not electrified to the Master Switch.⁵³

Jack Kerouac, *Dharma Bums*, 1958

I was one of them obsessed with the *One Eye*. It was all I could do to numb the boredom. The more restrained I felt the more I trusted the *One Eye* for comfort, for distraction from my own frustration. I was imprisoning myself, letting myself feel like a victim of my suburban prison. But staying inside was not enforced by law, it was a choice my ego believed to be the easiest, to avoid confrontation; a choice that became the catalyst in the disintegration of my ability to address the needs of human nature. I never asked these kinds of questions about basic human instincts. I lacked any real understanding for the magnitude walking had on my development. Even now when I return home I still find myself constricted by these imaginary forces that keep me inside.

I was sitting in front of my interview panel, overwhelmed with uncertainty and helplessness. Across from me sat two professors, Dereck Revington and David Leberman, and sitting next to me was a masters student, Dennis Fanti. We were all collected in a small office on the main campus of the University of Waterloo, ready to begin my admissions interview for the School of Architecture.

Inescapable

Applying here was my secret plan of escape from what was bound to be another ordinary existence, and it was the only school of architecture I applied to. I wasn't anticipating I would be called for interview so I didn't think to mention the application to my parents fearing they would protest in hopes of a more stable career choice. But the letter did come, and my confused and weary father accompanied me to the interview. I was unprepared only bringing two items for the required portfolio submission - a quickly drawn still of articles I found around the house, and an abstracted cube I had build out of plywood with one side that opened on two hinges. I painted the outside black and the inside white. I said it was a representation of my house. Meanwhile in the room adjacent to mine we could all hear the musical expertise of another interviewee playing the violin. I didn't think I had a chance here. The odds seemed to be piling up against me. I had rehearsed so many responses to a number of generic questions they could have asked me but when they asked me why I wanted to be an architect I froze. All I could think about was my house. I panicked and immediately began talking about my love of films. How the hell did I get in here?

I thought I was free the day I moved out of the suburbs. I was eighteen. It wasn't a real escape. I was going off to university. I got myself an apartment. It had two bedrooms with no windows, a kitchen, a bathroom and smelt of sewage. It wasn't very pretty. In fact, it was a dump but it was a dump out of the suburbs and the rent was cheap. I was alone for the first time with no parents to supervise me anymore. The ringing in my ear that existed in the suburbs, the ringing that let me know my thoughts were being fondled, shaped and warped in ways I could not understand, began to subside. Perhaps it was the hum of electricity coming through the television. I didn't have a TV anymore, or Internet. There was just silence and the smell of sewage, and I was beginning to feel lonely. I was used to turning on the TV and turning off my thoughts, or escaping into a daydream. I arrived on a Saturday and didn't have the courage to leave my apartment till Tuesday when my first class

meeting was scheduled. I didn't know how to wander, because I was still uncomfortable walking. I just couldn't bring myself to leave without a destination in mind. I wasn't free at all. Estés compares this "*learned helplessness*" to experiments scientists conducted in the 1960's on animals to explore theories of flight risks in humans.

In one experiment they wired half the bottom of a large cage, so that a dog placed in the cage would receive a shock each time it set foot on the right side. The dog quickly learned to stay on the left side of the cage.

Next, the left side of the cage was wired for the same purpose and the right side was safe from shocks. The dog reoriented quickly and learned to stay on the right side of the cage. Then, the entire floor of the cage was wired to give random shocks, so that no matter where the dog lay or stood it would eventually receive a shock. The dog acted confused at first, and then it panicked. Finally the dog "gave up" and lay down, taking the shocks as they came, no longer trying to escape them or outsmart them.

But the experiment was not over. Next, the cage door was opened. The scientists expected the dog to rush out, but it did not flee. Even though it could vacate the cage at will, the dog lay there being randomly shocked. From this, scientist speculated that when a creature is exposed to violence, it will tend to adapt to that disturbance, so that when the violent ceases or the creature is allowed its freedom the healthy instinct to flee is hugely diminished, and the creature stays put instead.⁵⁴

Although I had not been exposed to violence as a child, I was conditioned to not need to leave the house, remembering my uncomfortable attempt at running away. But I slowly learned how to adapt. I had done it before, looking the part in order to fit in with the other kids, except this time I was desperate for their approval. There

was a clash of my personalities - my suburban self and my idea of what a non-suburbanized person was. This clash produced a person that was truly absurd with both personalities resisting each other. I would act out and feel guilt and shame for my behavior almost immediately. There was always this wild behavior followed by shame, guilt and regret. I lived for the rush but the taste of guilt lingered. I became obsessed with the stories other people told – stories of their uncivilized adventures from their youth. The more crooked the tail was the more I followed and imitated them, trying desperately to shake my suburban image. I wanted to be something, to stand out. I became overly social. I partied hard, and drank hard. I was loud. I wasn't going to be well behaved anymore; the characteristic I believed defined my suburban identity. I was out of control trying to add some edge to my normalcy. I was lost in one of the many identities I created for myself. At the time I could not understand this suburban dance, the constant performance of dependency and defiance. I was always resisting some projection of the suburban image, yet always reliant on it to justify my rebellion. I was only hurting myself. Estés describes my behavior in her book, *Women who run with the wolves*. She states,

When she is starved, a woman will take any substitutes offered, including those that, like placebos, do absolutely nothing for her, as well as destructive and life-threatening ones that hideously waste her time and talents or expose her life to physical danger. It is famine of the soul that makes a woman choose things that will cause her to dance madly out of control [...].⁵⁵

After first year of university my rebellious behavior began to subside. I feared for my academic standing, afraid that my delinquency was ruining my chances of success here. Behaving adventurously and overly social did not make me more intelligent, or more aware of

who I was. It only made me appear to be adventurous and overly social. I was still lost in some other version of myself. I was holding on to my suburban constraints, it followed my like a shadow. My rebellion was ineffective and so was my resistance to my suburban self.

exisitng in this place



Perhaps prison is anything that severs and alienates, paradise is the reclaimed commons with the fences thrown down; and so any step toward connection and communion is a step toward paradise, including those that take route to jail.⁵⁶

Rebecca Solnit, *Storming the Gates of Paradise*, 2007

Six days after my twenty-fifth birthday, I was at a bar celebrating another birthday of a close friend. I had recently arrived in Cambridge to begin Masters, after spending the last eighteen months commuting everyday between Brampton and Toronto, in an attempt to save money for school, my mornings and evenings dictated by the limiting schedule of GO Transit. I was on my own again, relishing the fact that I no longer needed to stare at the clock, timing my departures based on how long it would take me to walk to the station to catch the last bus home to Brampton. Here, in Cambridge, I could simply take myself home by walking. Suddenly a feeling came over me that made me feel invincible. I can only describe this sensation by comparing it to the Mario Brothers Nintendo game where one discovers the invincibility star and if captured, for a few seconds your player is immune from any outside force which acts to cause harm. One can simply push forward unafraid of any external negative threats. No, this was not side affect of being intoxicated. I wasn't even buzzed. I was barely halfway through my first drink, but it was a high I could never forget and possibly the first time in my life I felt what freedom was. But, like in the video game, the super power soon wears off, and I was again left feeling exposed and vulnerable to some invisible dark force acting against me. But in those few hours of bliss I had stopped looking for acceptance, for approval, and for recognition. I was free. Free of guilt. Free of shame. Free of regret. This was the first memory I have of my detachment from the influences of my authority. I understood, for a moment, who and what I regard as authority and the power it has had in influencing my own life, and for me, all these years, it had been a self-induced psychological slavery.

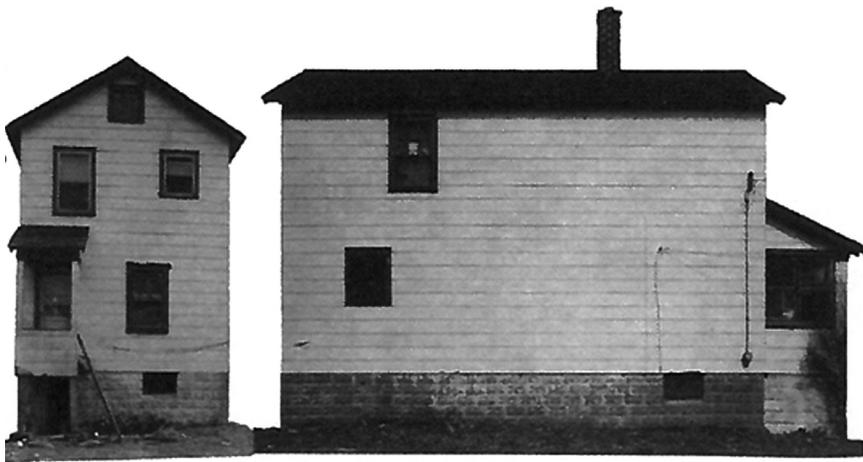
Recognizing Authority

My understanding of art in social context is as an essentially generous human act, an individually positive attempt to encounter the real world through expressive interpretation. The value of art as it services and sometimes flourishes in our system is so closely related to occidental beliefs in individual rights of free expression that one can accurately speak of the state of art as a measure of the state of freedom in our society. It is upon such fundamental convictions that I approach my work hoping herein to clarify it through a discussion or artistic intervention in the urban fabric.⁵⁷

Gordon Matta-Clark, "My understanding of art", 1975



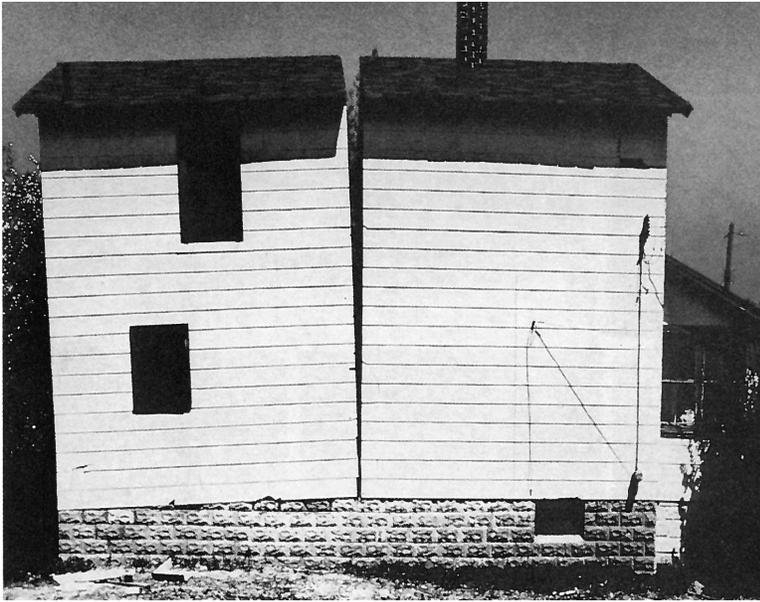
Fig. 60 | *Splitting*, by Gordon Matta-Clark, 1974



— Fig. 61 | *Splitting*, by Gordon Matta-Clark, 1974



Fig. 62 | *Splitting*, by Gordon Matta-Clark, 1974



— Fig. 63 | *Splitting*, by Gordon Matta-Clark, 1974

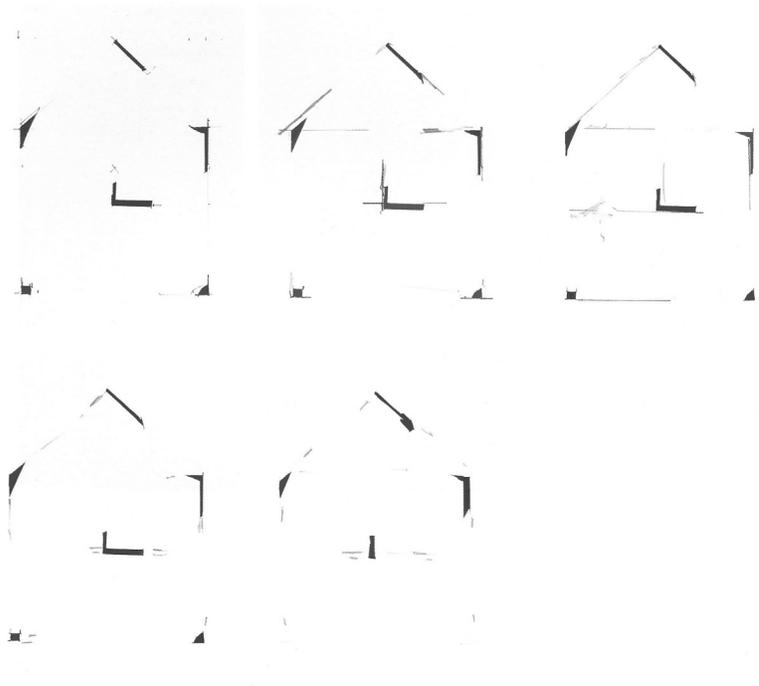
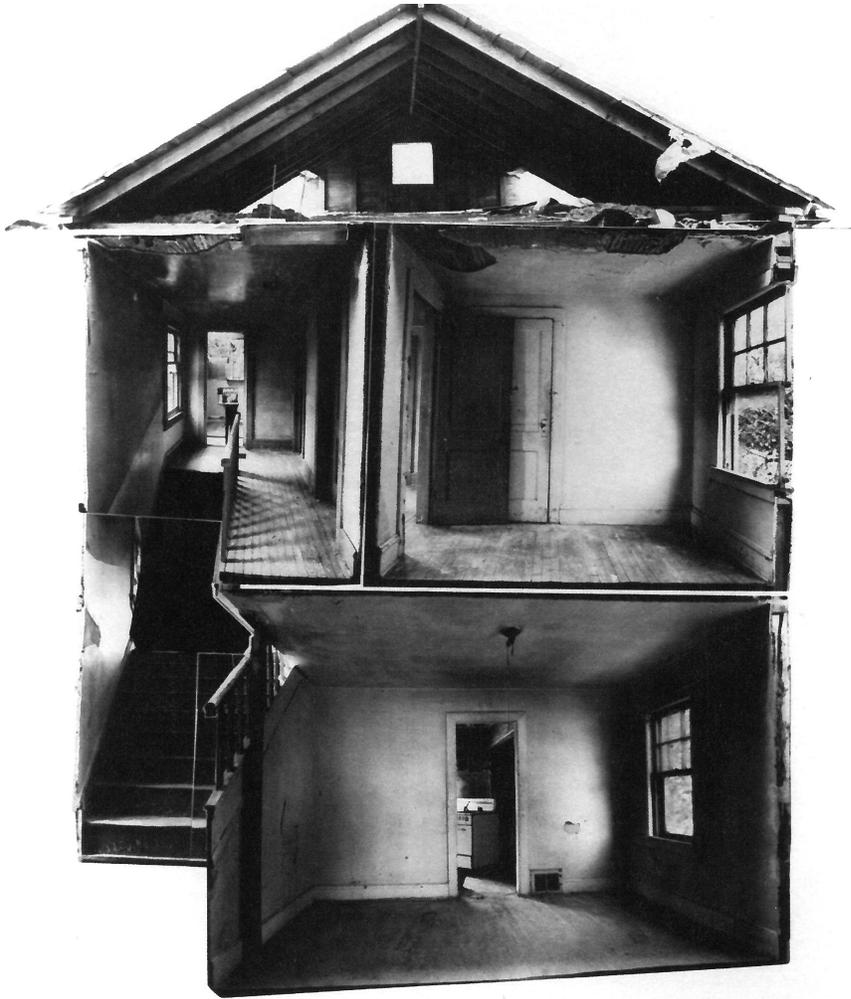


Fig. 64 | *Splitting*, by Gordon Matta-Clark, 1974, drawings from notebook 1069



— Fig. 65 | *Splitting*, by Gordon Matta-Clark, 1974

Early on in the writing of this thesis I was directed towards the artistic works of the American artist, anarchist, and student of architecture, Gordon Matta-Clark. Upon my first glance of his work, I understood his frustration, but more so, that someone understood my frustration. I take great comfort in the words of the critics who have already disassembled the destructive and oppressive vernacular of suburban living, from social critics to artist to comedians and musicians. Their stories, and their insight have become my mentors on understanding how I have been conditioned to be the model citizen. But it was my first study of Matta-Clark's, *Splitting*, that I thought maybe there was legitimacy to discussing my own dissatisfaction for this place. In his project "Splitting", Gordon Matta-Clark attacks the sacred image of our society, the fabric of my cultural identity: the suburban home. It was a representation of my own imprisonment in this society. In an undated, typewritten statement He States:

By undoing a building there are many aspects of the social conditions against which I am gesturing. First to open a state of enclosure which had been preconditioned not only by physical necessity but by the industry that profligates suburban and urban boxes as a context for insuring a passive, isolated consumer—a virtually captive audience...although I would not make a total distinction between the imprisonment of the poor and the remarkably subtle self-containerization of higher socio-economic neighborhoods. The question is a reaction to an ever less viable state of privacy, private property, and isolation.⁵⁸

I had seen images and videos of abandoned homes, suburban homes being bulldozed and have felt no sympathy for the destruction of this property. Bulldozing a house can be seen simply as an act of retaliation, a barbaric gesture towards the structure and to those associated with it including the suburban homeowner. I was still

more than happy to see it go down, but Matta-Clark's act of rebellion, although a scene of destruction was tactical not savage. There was an acute awareness for the house, evident with every surgical incision made, manipulating the object rather than completely destroying it. It was an act of recognition, an intelligent commentary on the authority that has suppressed the lives of suburban dwellers. By leaving behind remnants of the architecture of the building - the cladding, the foundation, the staircase, the doors, the doorknobs - we are able to associate with something that is familiar to us. It was a complete understanding of the Authority bestowed on the image of a house. He understood the structure, exposing the strata of a suburban house - the foundation, the wall structure, and the roof structure - a complete acknowledgement of what it is physically and contextually. This is no longer a magical object, but a revelation to how this perpetuated object comes into existence, stripping it of its supernatural hold on me. By recognizing that this suburban existence was the tool that kept me subdued and complacent, I can no longer point blame at it for my own self-imprisonment. My anger for this place was rooted in my inability to recognize my authority, and therefore unable to peacefully co-exist with it. I was fighting against everything that was associated with this place - my religion, my good behavior, my role as a woman. When I speak about my disappointed suburban life it is not a reflection of the quality of life provided for me. I was abundantly cared for. I had a roof over my head, clean water at my disposal, an abundance of food, and a bed to sleep in. In every sense of the word I was spoiled. My dissatisfaction was and is rooted in the inexplicable feeling of being conformed in way my body and mind most desperately tried to resist. I felt I had no control of where my life was heading or how to live it, and when I was given a choice to explore, I chose to follow for I was not brave enough to venture out into the unknown. I chose to follow the crooked tales of other people's lives in order feel some sense of

a meaningful life without risking my own. The problem was I could not recognize my own susceptibility to such snares that trapped me in my suburban state of mind, blaming others and this place for my learned helplessness.

My first exercise in attempting to uncover the constraints that I so easily allowed to influence my state of mind - these imaginary forces that I believed were keeping me inside – was the simple task of going for a walk. Walking has been a common theme among the collection of authors, and disobedient critics mentoring me through my rehabilitation. When Solnit wrote about walking, she “*learned that one version of home is everything you can walk to.*”⁵⁹

Where does it start? Muscles tense. One leg pillar, holding the body upright between the earth and sky. The other a pendulum, swinging from behind. Heel touches down. The whole weight of the body rolls forward onto the ball of the foot. The big toe pushes off, and the delicately balanced weight of the body shifts again. The legs reverse position. It starts with a step and then another step and then another that add up like tops on a drum to a rhythm, the rhythm of walking.⁶⁰

Solnit’s evaluation of walking is a precise account of my first observations. I was aware of every movement I made, conscious that these houses and their inhabitants could be watching me, and reliving the memory of my first runaway attempt. It was a late Saturday afternoon and I encountered no one. I could see people in the distance but our paths never did cross. My only confrontation was on the road, being at a stand-off with the idling cars, and a race against the changing lights always weary of the flashing hand counting down my pedestrian authority in this place. I was the only spectacle in this monotonous landscape, exposed on a sidewalk against a backdrop of fences lined with trees protecting the views of

houses from traffic, only a curb and some grass separating me from four to six lanes of traffic rushing past. I cheated. I brought my dog with me as justification for my pedestrianism, hoping its presence would in some way camouflage my own. But I was left still feeling vulnerable, fully aware that I was the slow wander compared to the speedy beasts of the road. I did not encounter much, and it took several attempts at walking with my dog before I was comfortable wandering alone.

But walking alone has enormous spiritual, cultural, and political resonance. It has been a major part of meditation, prayer, and religious exploration. It has been a mode of contemplation and composition, from Aristotle's peripatetics to the roaming poets of New York and Paris. It has supplied writers, artists, political theorists, and other with the encounters and experiences that inspired their work, as well as the space in which to imagine it, and it is impossible to know what would have become of many of the great male minds had they been unable to move at will through the world.⁶¹

Rebecca Solnit
Wanderlust, 2000

Walking is the great adventure, the first meditation, a practice of heartiness and soul primary to humankind. Walking is the exact balance of spirit and humility.⁶²

Gary Snyder
The Practice of the Wild, 1990



Fig. 66 | *kennedy street north*, photo by author



— Fig. 67 | *kennedy street south*, photo by author



Fig. 68 | *my neighbourhood*, photo by author



— Fig. 69 | *my neighbourhood*, photo by author



Fig. 70 | *my neighbourhood*, photo by author



— Fig. 71 | *my neighbourhood*, photo by author

Those of us who allow these experiences room in our psyches, who do not refuse or deny them, know we are walking a narrow ledge with psychosis on one side and scientism on the other. It is a dangerous journey we gladly make, putting one foot carefully before the other, our arms out to maintain our balance, our concentration on the path absolute. The world is more wonderful than any of us have dared to guess, as all great poets have been telling since the invention of poetry. To discover these truths we don't need to scale Mount Everest or white-water raft the Colorado or take up skydiving. We need only go for walks.⁶³

Sharon Butala

The Perfection of the Morning, 1994

For me, the practice of walking did not make wandering in the suburbs more desirable, however, the choice to leave my house on foot, rather in a car, became easier. I now use these quotes as reminder that the practice of walking is the first step towards freedom.

The momentary detachment I felt from the influences of my perceived authority was the first step Richard Sennett describes in recognizing our authority, a state of mind he defines as the *unhappy conscious*.⁶⁴ It was in this temporary disengagement from my battles - me verses my environment, me verses my parents, me verses racial stereotypes or me verses people not like me - that I recognized my years of absurd behavior. I had willingly given the social norms of my suburban lifestyle the dominant authority know as paternalism, defined by Sennett as:

[...]a parade of benevolence which exists only so far as it is in the interest of the ruler and which requires passive acquiescence as the price tag of being cared for.⁶⁵

I was projecting this form of authority onto all aspects of my life, giving any hero from a book or movie, any friend, any boss, anyone I aspired to be like authority to influence me, and with many of these influences I felt required to relinquish something from myself in return for acceptance, approval or recognition. Sennett argues that it is with an understanding of which influences are legitimate that one can truly find liberty, and liberty can only exist when the recognition I give to a person, or type of architecture, does not subtract something from myself.⁶⁶ Finding liberty is the only way I could learn to co-exist in this place.

I had been back at my parents' house, my childhood home, for three days, and I still hadn't taken the camera out of its case. I was already thinking about my final defense presentation, and I came back here with the intention to document my suburban neighbourhood the way I had experienced it, as a passenger with a view through the window of a moving vehicle. The decision to capture these scenes from the suburbs through film was an easy one, but carrying it out made me nervous and uncomfortable, hence the three-day delay. It was Sunday afternoon. I only had a few more hours left in the suburbs before heading back to school. Over the course of the weekend I had been methodically planning the exercise in my head – which streets to drive through, where the camera should be positioned, how I would fasten the camera to the car, and most importantly who's car I would be driving – for the time being keeping the intentions of my excursion a secret from my family; I thought they would disapprove for fear of what others would think of my prying eyes. It was that fear of disapproval that enticed me to use a GoPro camera for this exercise. I had watched my classmates become so preoccupied by the camera's discrete presence in documenting their own adventures

Co-Existing

in trespassing that I thought it would be subtle enough for a drive through the suburbs. I briefly thought about going around my neighbourhood with a camera and tripod to record the evidence of this place – framing each scene, walking from one house to the next - but the thought left me feeling too exposed and obvious to any other suburban spectator. I was still learning how to walk in the suburbs. I didn't want to attract any attention, or to be approachable for my neighbours to vocalize their displeasures, with no way of escape except to run away. I imagined scenarios of being chased down by an angry neighbour furious at my inconsiderate invasion of privacy. Wandering on foot in the suburbs, taking photographs of homes that were not my own did seem like a blatant invasion of privacy. I am too polite a person to meddle with someone else's privacy, not out in the open anyways. In a car I was mobile and in a way unapproachable by others and allowed me not to have to ask for permission. Here I could easily blend into this suburban scene, like the many times I watched my neighbours from my bedroom window.

I was counting in my head. I had set the camera to take one photo every second - which allowed me to move at a steady enough pace that happened to follow the 40km/hour speed limit of these streets - mindful not to make any sudden movements, and was always conscious of what the camera was capturing. The camera had no display. I didn't know how much it could capture, if the scene was framed properly, how long the battery would last; I was just hoping something was being recorded. My nervousness was overtaken by adrenalin. I really did feel like I was trespassing, or breaking some kind of social suburban code of "minding my own business". In the back of my head I knew my fear didn't lie in the breach of my social contract, or in the capacity of the technology I was using, I was afraid of what would be revealed in the images I captured. The photographer Robert Adams says, "[...] *the effort we all*

make, photographers and nonphotographers, to affirm life without lying about it'.⁶⁷ I was afraid that I would find a different truth, one that would reveal me as a fraud - my memories and assumptions of this place crumbling under the weight of the obvious truths hidden in these photographs. I hadn't yet seen the pictures before I began to doubt my own perception of the suburbs.

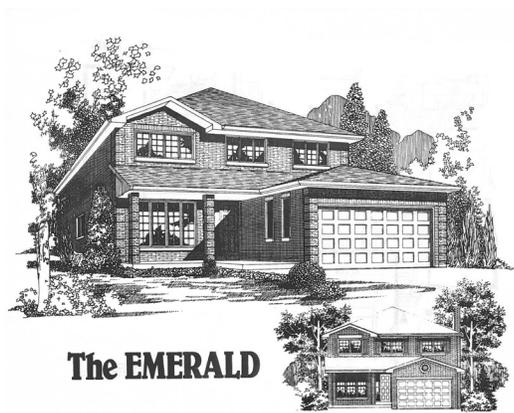


Fig. 72 | Carter's Homestead, *The Emerald* —



— Fig. 73 | photos by author





— Fig. 74 | photos by author



Fig. 75 | Carter's Homestead, *The Sapphire* —



— Fig. 76 | photos by author





— Fig. 77 | photos by author

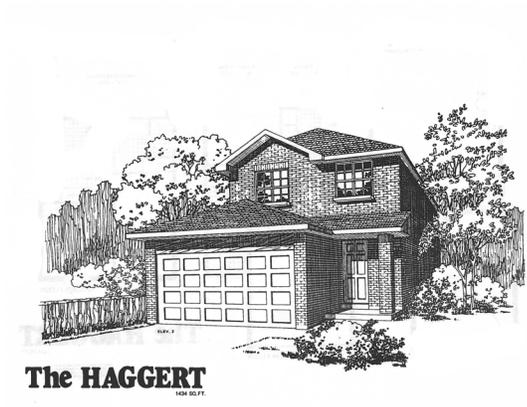


Fig. 78 | Carter's Homestead, *The Haggert* —



— Fig. 79 | photos by author



Fig. 80 | Carter's Homestead, *The Golding*



— Fig. 81 | photos by author



— Fig. 82 | photos by author



Fig. 83 | Carter's Homestead, *Opal II*



— Fig. 84 | photos by author



— Fig. 85 | photos by author



Fig. 86 | Carter's Homestead, *The Topaz* —



— Fig. 87 | photos by author

The GARNET



Fig. 88 | Carter's Homestead, *The Garnet* —



— Fig. 89 | photos by author



Fig. 90 | Carter's Homestead, *The Pearl* —



— Fig. 91 | photos by author





— Fig. 92 | photos by author

The HOWLAND

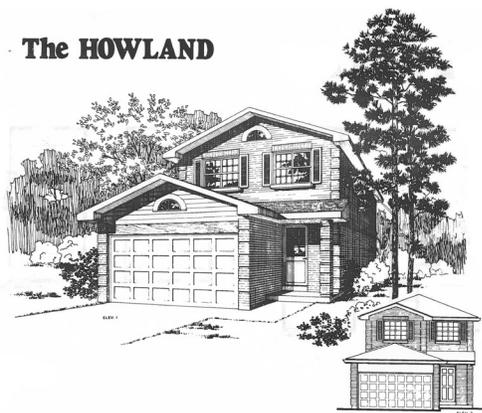


Fig. 93 | Carter's Homestead, *The Howland*



— Fig. 94 | photos by author



Fig. 95 | Carter's Homestead, *The Bovaird* —



— Fig. 96 | photos by author





— Fig. 97 | photos by author



Fig. 98 | Carter's Homestead, *The Onyx* —



— Fig. 99 | photos by author



Fig. 100 | Carter's Homestead, *The Lawson* —



— Fig. 101 | photos by author



Fig. 102 | Carter's Homestead, *The Carter*



— Fig. 103 | photos by author



— Fig. 104 | photos by author

I wasn't alone during this suburban survey. I was accompanied by my father, whose car I was borrowing. When I told him I wanted to film this neighbourhood he was eager to come along for the ride, showing no signs of disapproval, giving advice along the way of what side of the street I should capture, and commenting that I was so lucky it was such a nice sunny day for filming. But for most of the ride we didn't say much. I was glad for that. I couldn't yet explain what I was trying to capture, and I thought the topic of my thesis would hurt or offend him.

When we were returning home I had inquired if he knew anything about the developers of our neighbourhood, and it was then that he revealed to me that he still had with him, after all these years, the entire collection of the Carter Homestead's marketing package, plans, elevations, perspectives, site plan, and pricing charts. Soon, he was telling me stories of my childhood, how he and my mother couldn't afford furniture for this house, at one time sharing one double bed with my mother, and all his children, or missing the first payment of his brand new Caravan. Looking at these images, I was astonished at my own reaction. I felt a surge of pride in my father for all that he was able to provide for us, and what he went through to claim a place of his own in this country. In that moment my bitterness washed away. After all these years of being imprisoned in the suburbs the resentment I had let build inside of me, began to crumble enough to allow me to remember that before I developed into this cynical, twenty-seven year-old studying Architecture, dreaming of a creative life of solitude to pursue my own tale of self discovery, even before I became a resentful high school student, dreaming about my grand escape from my life in the suburbs, before all that bitterness, somewhere buried deep in my past, I was a happy kid: a happy kid growing up in the suburbs.

Like my father, I too have a Canadian dream. In fact I have had many

visions of what my future in this country could look like. I finally asked myself, *who's dream am I dreaming?* And simply moving away is not the answer. To escape the restrictions of suburban living, one must learn to resolve the emotional and behavioral symptomologies of this life: our dependencies on the automobile, our fear and paranoia of others not like us, individualism, and status anxiety – my illegitimate influences of authority. I have come to realize that this will be a life long battle, one that cannot simply be cured over night. This image of the suburban dream life in Canada has become such a strong symbol of my Canadian identity, and only continues to grow. Brampton stands today as the 9th largest, the 3rd fastest growing city in Canada, and in 2013 is home to 523,911 people, 154,663 private dwelling units and counting. Brampton's expansion as a settlement for new arrivals, and new industries is written into its history, and in 2013, it is still writing the same story, bulldozing forward without looking back. Brampton's true identity is not what it is now, or what it was in the past. Its identity lies in its future, defined by the targets of a projected growth, the projections of an imagined story of what could be with an estimated population capacity of 738,000 people, and 217,000 private housing units by the year 2031.⁶⁸ My parents were not alone in this new world in the suburbs for there were others like them, all drawn to their own manufactured dreams of the Dream Life. Thoughts of abandoning this life sometimes feel unpatriotic, barbaric, backwards - being trapped in the illusion of the privileged life, advertised in the papers, reiterated in Hollywood lifestyles, and preserved as a sacred image, enforced by the capitalist production of this desired product we choose to uphold to protect our own property value. But now I hear whispers of underground sari shops, beauty parlors, tailors, flourishing in the basements of Brampton's suburban homes; a new generation of Canadians, learning to use their house to their advantage. From his book titled, *Making Do*, Paul Goodman says,

[...] for him – and not only him – there was in our society No Exit. When he had asked his germane question, and fifteen experts on this dais did not know an answer for him. But with ingenuity he had hit on a painfully American answer, Do It Yourself. If there is no community for you, young man, young man, make it yourself.⁶⁹

I am still fighting the urges of my ego, to follow what is easiest: the standards set before me by my society, what I'm told is right, what I'm lead to believe is risk free. I stand now at a crossroads, designing for myself a new lifestyle, even if it is one that is not made easy in this society.

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notes



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