

Snail, vinyl, bells, wallpaper

A snail is at risk of being stood on. The shell, cracking into pieces
under the force of a foot, puncturing the thick flesh and pushing it
oozing into the concrete.
Without the snail a shell is a shell and without the shell the snail is
dead.
But you are not a snail.

Your home lives within you, not on top.¹
The architecture of the home lives inside.
It is a place that is capable of movement.
It moves with you.
You are the space where you are.
In the corners of your mind, where the dust gathers, you hold the
memories.
You do not need to see or touch to take yourself away.
Think of the corners.
Visit places that no longer exist in this time, in this space, in this
place.²

¹ Bachelard, 1957 'But over and beyond our memories, the house we were born in is physically inscribed in us'. p.36 Bachelard puts this in terms of stairways. We encounter so many anonymous stairways in our lives, but our default movements are of that 'first stairway'. There are 13 stairs in my childhood home, I know which ones creak louder than others, I run up them in pairs.

² Perce, 1974 'all I need to do, once I'm in bed, is to close my eyes and to think with minimum application of a given place for the bedroom to come instantly back into my memory'. p.20 By Perce's count he has spent his nights sleeping in beds that fit into 9 different categories. How many beds within each of those categories even he cannot tell us, but he can remember one with such clarity.

You sit in the kitchen. The air is damp and close. The cold tap drips, not seeming to stick to a certain pattern.

In the far corner of the room the plastic vinyl covering has blistered and started to fall away from the wall.

You imagine taking the corner in your hand and pulling it back, you have to tug at it slightly, it makes a gentle sucking noise as it comes away.

You tug again.

Underneath, it looks damp. A light brown stain slowly creeping across it. You reach out to touch, soft on your palm. Your fingertips brush against it. You move your hand across, as if running your hand down someone's back.

You continue to pull, exposing more and more of the warmth emitting from under the vinyl.

You stop pulling and step back.

The wall seems to move, writhing.

You step back again. It struggles softly against the vinyl. A noise escapes your mouth, or was it from the wall?

You sit at the table for a period of time. You stare at the wall that you have uncovered. It is a comforting sight.

Resuming your pulling, you begin to wrap yourself in the vinyl, it lies heavy on top of you, a comforting weight. You close your eyes and allow your body to fall slack. It is still warm from the heat of the wall.³

The chiming of a bell brings you back to the present.

³ Georges Perec explains how in 1969 he picked 12 places in Paris and decided to write a description of two of these places once a month. One of these descriptions is written whilst in the place, describing what/who is around, the houses, the posters etc. and the other is written somewhere away from this place, written from memory, '...do my best to describe it from memory, to evoke all the memories that come to me concerning it, whether events have taken place there, or people I have met there'. p.55 I wonder if I were to go back to this place what I would see.

Rendell, 2010 talks about her own response to Elena Brotherus's photographs through her writing and the creation of her own work. 'sense of yearning...backwards gaze of nostalgia...melancholic desire' p.149. In reaction to Rendell's response it made me recall a house I once lived in that when there sparked nothing in me, no sense of belonging but since leaving I have felt nostalgic towards that place - A house I lived in for 5 months of this year. The vinyl was horrible, a light green colour, a bit like snot. It covered the entire wall, from floor to ceiling. It was sticky, the ceilings were high, no way to reach the top to clean.

In this place we put ourselves, our things, we leave an imprint of our lives.⁴

You stand in the living room, looking into the cupboard.
Where's this one from?
Holland, I think, does it not say on the inside?
oh yeah, it says Delft Holland.
You place the bell back on the shelf.
*We tried to get one from every country we visited, these bells are an anchor for my memories of those places.*⁵

These anchors sink deep deep down, tethering us in time.⁶
Tethering us to the past, pulling us back with such strength that we are overcome and succumb to the force.
There is comfort in having these anchors, they become a part of ourselves, an extension of us.

The past becomes the present, we live with our things, we live through our things, we live in the past until there is nothing but the past, everything goes past, time slips past, it's almost half past.

But we can only really live in the past, we know nothing but the past.

If our dreams are our second life, then surely so are our memories?⁷

⁴ Halbwachs, 1925. '...the physical objects of our daily contact change little or not at all, providing us with an image of permanence and stability.' p.47 Halbwachs goes on to say that within the family as a group in the event of a death or marriage, as it changes size or location, the collective memory of the group cannot be kept the same. It is constantly under threat of being lost.

⁵ Pollak, 2011. In talking about a rolling pin her grandmother once used, 'the evocative object is transitional in the fullest sense of the word – it can bring together generations, anchor memory and feeling, and evoke attachments that have long been forgotten'. p.230

⁶ Haraway, 2016. 'Tentacularity is about life lived along lines and such a wealth of lines' p.32 Looking back these anchors are maybe just string and string can be broken so easily.

⁷ Patti Smith, 2019 The name of a piece of work by Belen Gauche, *Aurelia: Our dreams are a Second Life*. A 6-minute video of a character on the game Second Life walking around different locations; the streets of Paris, across planets, through a German club all the time reading a poem. This in turn was taken from Gerard de Nerval's novel, *Aurelia*. The first line of his novel reads, 'Dream is a second life. I have never been able to cross through those gates of ivory or horn which separate us from the invisible world without a sense of dread.'

where did the bells go?

the bells?

yeah remember the cabinet in the corner use to have all your bells in it.

She looks to the corner where the cabinet had stood.

I don't know about that; I don't think I've ever owned any bells.⁸

When asked, no one can remember the bells.

⁸ Conversations with Gran. The second part of the bell conversation happened this year in October on her 84th birthday. Susan Pollak starts her piece about the rolling pin in *Evocative Objects* with an extract from Marcel Proust's, *Remembrance of Things Past*. '...after the people are dead, the things broken and scattered...more fragile but more enduring, more unsubstantial, more persistent, more faithful, remain poised a long time, like souls, remembering, waiting, hoping, amid the ruins of all the rest...the vast structure of recollection'. Proust actually brings us back to Perec and his bed, as he says, 'the space of the bedroom works for me like a Proustian madeleine'.

You find them in the loft, delicately wrapped in tissue paper to keep them safe.⁹

⁹ Gaston Bachelard, 1957 // 'Up near the roof all our thoughts are clear. In the attic it is a pleasure to see the bare rafters of the strong framework' p.39 the loft in my house has always been a place of disorder, dim light and cold air. But when finding the bells in my grandparents' house I understood what Bachelard was saying.

*We had this put up in 2003, we knew it would probably be the last time we did the wallpaper in this room.*¹⁰

You dig your fingernail into the wallpaper, it's squishy interior bends under your weight. A permanent dent is left, bold and apparent against the pristine white of the rest of the wall. You stare at it for a long time, hoping no one notices what you have done. They don't. This display is for you and you alone.¹¹

¹⁰ Another conversation had with my Gran, not recently.

¹¹ Palmer, 2015. 'I'm entirely engaged with visceral encounters, heightened descriptions and the sensuality of things.'

References:

- Donna J. Haraway, *Staying with the Trouble*, 2016.
Gaston Bachelard, *the Poetics of Space*, 1957.
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Katrina Palmer, interview on thewhitereview.org, 2015.
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2012. *Space and the Collective Memory*, 1925.
Patti Smith, *Year of the Monkey*, 2019.
Sherry Turkle. Susan Pollak, *Evocative Objects. The Rolling Pin*, 2011.