

DISPATCHES FROM AN/OTHER PLACE



Dispatch 2:

"The homing sentiment"

Artist Louise Bourgeois working at home (click for more).

Dear students,

Inherent in the directive to “shelter in place” is the presumption of shelter, the notion of place. For some of us, this means that we are suddenly spending a lot more time in our everyday spaces, seeing them anew. For others, it has meant upheaval: many have returned to childhood homes, while others are crafting a semblance of home from a deserted dorm, a friend’s couch, or a relative’s guest room. Wherever it is we find ourselves, sheltering in place seems to have roused our most primal instincts of home-making – any nook can be a nest, any corner a cocoon, any room a refuge.

A look at how some others have thought about home:

Let's start with Gaston Bachelard's masterful meditation about home, [The Poetics of Space:](#)



And all the spaces of our past moments of solitude, the spaces in which we have suffered from solitude, enjoyed, desired, and compromised solitude, remain indelible within us and precisely because the human being wants them to remain so. He knows instinctively that this space identified with his solitude is creative; that even when it is forever expunged from the present, when, henceforth, it is alien to all the promises of the future, even when we no longer have a garret, when the attic room is lost and gone, there remains the fact that we once loved a garret, once lived in an attic. We return to them in our night dreams. These retreats have the value of a shell.

And when we reach the very end of the labyrinths of sleep, when we attain to the regions of deep slumber, we may perhaps experience a type of repose that is pre-human; pre-human, in this case, approaching the immemorial. But in the daydream itself, the recollection of moments of confined, simple, shut-in space are experiences of heartwarming space, of a space that does not seek to become extended, but would like above all still to be possessed. In the past, the attic may have seemed too small, it may have seemed cold in winter and hot in summer. Now, however, in memory recaptured through daydreams, it is hard to say through what syncretism the attic is at once small and large, warm and cool, always comforting.



More on the power of our memories to transform intimate spaces:

Memories of the outside world will never have the same tonality as those of home, and, by recalling these memories, we add to our store of dreams; we are never real historians, but always near poets, and our emotion is perhaps nothing but an expression of a poetry that was lost.

Always near poets. Breathtaking. Finally:

[If] I were asked to name the chief benefit of the house, I should say: the house shelters daydreaming, the house protects the dreamer, the house allows one to dream in peace.

He goes on like this for a few hundred more pages. And it's completely magical. I was surprised to find the entire book available at the link above; I promise you won't regret spending a weekend with it.

In [an essay for Granta](#), Vahni Capildeo remarks on the ability of books to transport the reader, “temporarily [giving] a double aspect to my sense of my own surroundings: how light falls, what languages people speak, what makes for threat or beauty.”

They describe similar feats of “microtravel,” tiny explorations that render our intimate spaces seductively unfamiliar:



The place I thought I knew best had become unknown territory, by the perhaps not-so-simple process of taking a few steps...This ‘microtravel’ felt deep, yet unexpectedly repeatable. It offered, beyond mere defamiliarization, a rerouting of my knowledge of ‘my’ street, and by extension the others in the city, which would never revert to not being known this way.

Or, conversely, offer the comforts of home in places unknown:



An assumption which I find disturbing... is that there is ‘home’, and then there is ‘away’. Perhaps especially today, but always in times of conflict, or in the pursuit of trade, or at places of mixing like ports and oases, there are intermarriages, relocations, retracings, which create multiple ‘homes’ and unravel the idea of ‘away’. We travel ‘between’, at least as much as ‘from’ or ‘to’. We may have different ways of being ‘at home’, in different places. We may learn, or know, how to make a home that is portable, carrying with us one shawl or one book or one prayer.

Capildeo calls this “a sense of dislocation-in-location, balanced by home-in-awayness.”
Microtravel: the perfect answer to quarantine, who knew?

If you'd like to explore this idea more deeply, I'd point you to the original observer of minute nuances, microtraveler extraordinaire [Henry David Thoreau](#):

"A man must generally get away some hundreds or thousands of miles from home before he can be said to begin his travels. Why not begin his travels at home? Would he have to go far or look very closely to discover novelties?"

Or [Edward Abbey](#):

"This is the most beautiful place on earth. There are many such places. Every man, every woman, carries in heart and mind the image of the ideal place, the right place, the one true home, known or unknown, actual or visionary...there's no limit to the human capacity for the homing sentiment"

Or better still, Annie Dillard, who [willfully disrupted the masculine paradigm of place-making.](#)



| TITLE | ARTIST |
|---|-----------------------------|
| This Must Be the Place (Naive Melody) - 2005 Rem... | Talking Heads |
| Make Me A Pallet On Your Floor | Gillian Welch |
| Home - 2019 - Remaster | Edward Sharpe & The Magn... |
| Welcome Home, Son - Remastered | Radical Face |
| California - Tchad Blake Mix | Phantom Planet |
| Take Me Home, Country Roads | John Denver |
| Homeward Bound | Simon & Garfunkel |
| This Must Be the Place (Naive Melody) | Bhi Bhiman |

[click to listen on Spotify](#)

I don't think there is any better conduit for microtravel than music. So I leave you this week with a playlist of a few favorite songs about home, a ticket to at least 31 minutes in another place.

Be well,

Tamanna Rahman
your friendly neighborhood nurse practitioner



Tamanna Rahman is a psychiatric nurse practitioner who joined the CAPS team in January 2019. She completed her nurse practitioner training at Yale University and holds a BA from Williams College in American Studies, where she studied social movements and literature. Outside of work, she enjoys engaging in activism, gardening, cooking and baking, and hanging out with her Russian Blue cat and giant Newfoundland dog.