

O - TOWN HOUSE

Cerith Wyn Evans
The Changing Light at Sandover

Juliette Blightman
Baby, you're a firework

December 3rd, 2022 - January 14, 2023

Dreams never come true, and the instant they are shattered, we realize how the greatest joys of life lie beyond the realm of reality.

– Natalia Ginzburg

The stories we tell each other - the stories we hear over and over, the everyday tales chiseled in our memory - are what make us who we are. But who, exactly, is this *we*?

As Natalia Ginzburg once said in an interview, *family* is where everything starts, where the germs grow. This place - this so-called *family* (a home?) - at once flourishing and blossoming yet also ridden with failure and mould - is where a *lingua franca* is learned, acquired for life. As Ginzburg's own son Carlo reinforced in a meditation on his mother's oeuvre, specific linguistic forms are related to a form of truth. This truth that guides our experience through language, fostering the way we become ourselves, is formed at home. Truth here is *A Family Lexicon*, incidentally the title of Ginzburg's most fabled autobiographical novel. In an investigation of this notion of truth, Ginzburg sketches a familial portrait through her family's distinctive verbal style: its stories and story-telling. Every family has plenty of stories, but they also have a very specific way of telling them. This is a way of creating a familial-specific truth, a powerful form of memory and of survival. Families - forced onto us or deliberately chosen later in life - are knit together not only by the shared joys and sorrows themselves, but the very specific vernacular, chosen to express them. By what we have in common.

A carpet for your somersaults!

O - TOWN HOUSE

Our house, is a very, very, very fine house
With two cats in the yard
Life used to be so hard
Now everything is easy 'cause of you
– Graham Nash

During a brief and passionate romance in the late 1960s with Joni Mitchell, Graham Nash composed the enchanting *Our House*; now a classic Crosby, Stills & Nash song. While living together on Lookout Mountain in Laurel Canyon, Nash wrote the song in an hour after returning with Mitchell from breakfast at Art's Deli on Ventura Boulevard. Mitchell had bought a vase in a nearby shop, they took it home to put flowers in it. Nash was playing at the piano after staring at the fireplace and enjoying their *fine* house, embracing the precious and fleeting moments of everyday life.

Coming from a home, whether broken or nurturing (or both) is never painless. Owning a truth never is either. From the very beginning, we set out to free ourselves from that suffering. We instinctively strive to find or create new structures, new friends, and ultimately a new *family*. Hoping to finally eradicate those devils we know with the angels we still don't. We try our whole life. Succeeding doesn't seem to be the point.

Far over a decade ago, when I first stepped foot in MD72, the now defunct project space run by Alexander Schroeder in an excruciatingly charming Jugendstil apartment in Berlin Kreuzberg just two floors below his own residence, it felt as dreamy and spellbinding as the prospect of a new home, with all the excitement of discovering new love (which, let's be honest, is often the discovery of a new self).

MD72 was precisely one of those miraculous situations: an invitation to feel at home, a beckoning to engage with a place and to leave traces. The kitchen featured a 'teenage' room up in the attic above the pantry, created by Klara Liden, upholstered with black vinyl floors and walls, an ashtray and a radio.

O - TOWN HOUSE

There was also a bar: an iconic remnant of the fabled *Nova Popularna*, created and run by Lucy McKenzie and Paulina Olowska for a brief period in Warsaw around 2003 and modeled – not by chance – on artists bars and social clubs on the 19th and early 20th century. That kitchen (and all of MD72 for that matter), became a place for friends and colleagues to come together, hang out, drink, and discuss. Very much like Scott Cameron Weaver’s O-Town House. MD72 nurtured a kind of hearth where people could gather, and, as Alexander Schroeder might have said: embodied a sophisticated determination to build structures and ideas for art. These activities were partially inspired by late/great Colin de Land and were never too categorized or determinate. Instead, these events and gatherings constantly revealed potential forms that art – and the structures around (such as life itself) - may take. Such open-ended structures live beyond the logic of the market. They occupy a space beyond the restrictive gallery rubrics of *representation*. This rarified climate enables the focus to shift from selling art to prioritizing - and demanding - a more intensive and complex exchange, like the best kind of friendships do. Learning from Alexander Schroeder as a mentor, following his attitude and absorbing ways of understanding how and why we come together at all - is where, and how, my world first collided with Scott Cameron Weaver. Within those very walls our common lingua franca was forged. And also where I first encountered the work of both Cerith Wyn Evans and Juliette Blightman. MD72 was a place for fostering communal engagement and collective identity.

Well, that is what life does. I stare
A moment longer, so. And presently
The massive volume of the world
Closes again.
(...)
But the dull need to make some kind of house
Out of the life lived, out of the love spent.
– James Merrill

O - TOWN HOUSE

As Dan Chiasson wrote about James Merrill, people are supposed to 'make' houses out of blossoming aspirations and love, before busting them in resignation and defeat. In fact, yes, Joni Mitchell did break up with Graham Nash and ultimately made him move out of 'their house'. It has also been said that James Merrill was a poet praised as much for his fashionable style and elegance as for his ability to transfigure autobiographical moments into elaborate reflections, reshaping the quotidian into beautiful, composite meditations. Merrill was poet of the everyday, whose personal life and commitment to art and poetry were inextricably intertwined. Very much like Alexander Schroeder.

In 1982 Merrill wrote the most ambitious American poem, a seventeen thousand-line epic cosmology entitled *The Changing Light at Sandover*. This remarkable work was supposedly composed over more than 20 years together with his lover, David Jackson, transcribing a multitude of *communications* collected using a ouija board. This opus is also the starting point for Cerith Wyn Evans' work on view at Scott Cameron Weaver's home-cum-exhibition space O-Town House, directly quoting a significant selection of the text in light, transposed into Morse code: 'Trace me back to some loud, shallow, chill, underlying motive's overspill'.

In 2011, at a London gallery called Hotel, where I was working at the time, Juliette Blythman invited her close friends to contribute to an exhibition by choosing objects of sentimental value, loaded with a story behind them, around them, all over them. The critic David Bussel (a.o. former long time partner of Wyn Evans), selected a text by Sergei Tretyakov; the publisher and former gallerist Gregorio Magnani lent an exquisite carpet he had acquired in a period of existential transition, just after closing his gallery and kissing art dealing forever goodbye; Cerith Wyn Evans (whom Blythman had assisted for many years), added a sound piece, *The Curves of the Needle*, composed of tracks selected from the record collection found in the Mexico City home of the Modernist architect Luis Barragan; finally Lulu Norman provided her contribution in the form of a gifted painting by her mother, the artist Anne Norman.

O - TOWN HOUSE

By staging this exhibition, it has been argued, Blightman redefined the gallery space (the exhibition) as a calm, quasi-domestic setting, a realm the artist herself has called “a place to think for a minute or three”.

Blightman, who has worked extensively with Cerith Wyn Evans, Scott Cameron Weaver, and Alexander Schroeder throughout her practice and life, possesses a whimsical capacity to draw our attention to the precious moments of life’s marginalia, to the quotidian and transient simple gestures making up our days – and nights. Suddenly, we are watching life pass by but also experiencing it all in real time.

And here we encounter an acute urge to document and archive life - and the experience of it -, in all the glory and demise of its purported truth, as a way of celebrating the marvel and fleetingness of existence. ‘Life is a *souffle*, one blow and its gone.’

‘Where the posthumous fate of dropouts is concerned, love can make all the difference because the way individuals remember each other, if at all, determines much of what makes it onto the historical record.’

– Sarah Lehrer-Graiwer

Full disclosure: I just had a baby six weeks ago. They say that priorities shift, life changes like never before. They say it’s the greatest adventure of all. I’m not sure about such superlatives just yet. I’ll let you know. A friend recently told me that babies know everything. They know where we come from and where we’re going. I think about that a lot. I think about why and what we do it all for, the work, any kind of it. Do we have a chance of becoming our best self, the truest to ourselves? I digress, surely, but questions - always more questions - seem to be the only consistent linguistic form filling my life lexicon of late. I found a message to Scott after I started thinking about this show, about O-Town House, Cerith, Juliette and Alexander, about family: we remind each other, as often as we can, that we do it for the love.

– Marta Fontolan, December 2022