

Soggiorno

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In the house, we are so alone that we are sometimes lost.

— Marguerite Duras, *Écrire*, 1993

If I were Esther Friedman, I might have something pithy to say about Berlin's era of experimentation and alienation, its specific psyche and temporal states, rushes of systemic interconnectedness and isolation, glittery love affairs with rock stars, and its naivety, but I can stretch only as far as this: with the large apartments on Hauptstraße now divided into four smaller studios, there is always a problem of storage and one thin wall separates my bed from a stranger's. It's anything but well adjusted. To my advantage, though, this sort of ambiguous domesticity is not uninteresting. The parting wall has become enough of a thing to accuse an inflated haunted myth, and a halfway toward the desire to be ever amid melodrama. Without the bitterness of knowing, myths are a mournful daydream that might return to consume the sanest of notions.

For days, I imagined a perfect heroine for this vague vertigo myth. She sits in her house, filled with barely desirable items for the modern home, where at all times she feels a presence that is not frightening because of its alien nature, but because it is so familiar. She's found a way to not be at home in her home. The unhomely feeling enters as she attempts to delineate the diffuse feeling of presence; it spooks when she manifests her double.

In the waking world, I can't help but obsess over the superficial. And this devotion infiltrates my imagined heroine, like the layers of thick plastic that Izumi Suzuki uses as a sadistic act of self-creation. Chantal Ackerman's phrase, "elsewhere is always better," reminds me that the new possibility for intimacy is what gives shape to our behaviours and relationships. But I tend not to overthink these things. I operate on mood alone.

Soggiorno means living room in Italian, and its verb *soggiornare* means "to stay." Both involve a body and a house, but they are separated by a gulf as wide as it is invisible. Only a hint at the enormous importance of rooms in Ackerman's films affords the living room the subliminal choreography of the house. So like its verb, the living room, no longer defined only by routine and passivity, offers a capacity for transformation and momentary belonging. But it's the oscillations between sickness and health, home and invader, that draws me back to the image of my heroine.

The house is divided, already internally contradictory, like her it's a jump cut between too far and far, an anxiety-inducing cycle of anticipation and deferral. One word paronym echo later, a hotel, the most basic level of "stay," is also a suspected double of the house. A hotel provides an established setting into which guests temporarily assimilate themselves, only to desert it with a little abrasion. It's a facade of comfort which, to a hexed amateur, the prolonged vacancy could only mean more layers. Nothing is preserved, but permanence is artificial, and accumulating the lack of coherence only extends the feeling of unease.

— Written by Minsuh Kang