Passageway

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Neel's research is based on making zeolite membranes used to separate hydrocarbons from one another. These membranes are used as an alternative to distillation, which is more energy-intensive and leads to a higher carbon footprint. This made me wonder if membranes could replace distillation in the production of high-proof alcoholic beverages. Distillation to create these beverages is used to separate alcohol from other, unwanted compounds. If membranes replaced distillation, how would the lack of heat affect the flavors of the ingredients? For instance, in a gin, distilled coriander seeds impart a citrus flavor discernible towards the end of the gin. In a membrane separation, which ingredients would we use to produce the flavors that we are familiar with? Or would we arrive at entirely new flavors, untethered from previous reference points? Zeolites are crystalline minerals that have specific pores, allowing only certain molecules to pass through them. As nanoporous solids, zeolites are known as molecular sieves. I often imagine a house made of these nanoporous solids, a house made of zeolites.

Rosemary Waldrop's essay *Alarums and Excursions,* about disruptions and possibilities that emerge in the act of writing, begins with a description of what the title means. She says, "'Alarums and excursions' is an Elizabethan stage term for off-stage noise and commotion which interrupts the main action." While being homebound during the COVID-19 pandemic, the interior of this house, our main action, our personal stage, has been long devoid of interruption. At a time such as this, disruption would be welcomed, even invited. Neel and I have sought to devise ways to allow the outside in. Much like the structural pores of this house such as the windows, screens and doors that ventilate our home, our imaginations rupture the casing of our heightened interiority. By carving orifices, sphincters, and cavities through the walls, our imaginations aerate our very being.

In the craft of cocktail making, aeration of contents happens between two tin shakers. In a two-part Parisian shaker, the ingredients of a cocktail are poured into the smaller tin, and the larger one is filled with ice. The two receptacles are then sealed shut and shaken until the cocktail is emulsified, diluted, chilled, and aerated, infusing the contents with air bubbles to create a foam and to give it a smooth texture. This foam lasts longer with a higher protein content in the cocktail, such as with egg whites in a sour.

Upon entering the main door of our house, one steps into a narrow passageway with six doors and one opening. Previously a muddy green, this passageway is now an ultra-pure white. From the passageway, the seven orifices lead to the exit, the garage, the coat closet, the furnace room, the storage closet, the half bath, and an opening into the dining area. The seven pathways to enter, exit, store, procure, defecate, eat, hang, heat, and to check and fix oneself make this passageway pregnant with possibilities, a provisional space between intentions and action.

If we were to turn the house inside out like a coat, this would be its long and narrow sleeve. This is where we would begin inverting our home: from the inside of the passageway, by holding the main door frame and by pulling it inwards.

Unlike the corridors in Chantal Akerman's *Hotel Monterey*, this passageway is free from her still, lurking, voyeuristic gaze. It has a different temporality. It isn't a space to rest, pause, or settle but to scuttle through. It is here that people are either welcomed, bid farewell, or shut out. Where greetings and goodbyes are said. It is at this elongated cusp that we transition between the inside and the outside. With the long panel of frosted glass that runs alongside the front door, this is also a place of covert waiting: for something or someone to arrive or take us away. It is our long threshold between what is considered ours and not ours. With each step across this passageway towards the inside of the house, ownership and proprietorship reverberate louder.

In his unfinished text *Passagenwerk*, Walter Benjamin says: "The threshold [die Schwelle] must be sharply differentiated from the border [die Grenze]. The threshold is a zone. Change, passage, and ebb and flow are embedded in the word schwellen ['to swell']. Etymology can prevent us from noticing these meanings. On the other hand, it is necessary to acknowledge the immediate tectonic and ceremonial context that has given the word its meaning."

Our vestibular threshold is a space for hanging and placing, not for dwelling. We place our footwear in a corner. We hang our coats along the wall. It protects the interior from direct exposure to exterior elements. It allows us the time and space to insulate from the weather. It is here that safety measures are installed to protect us from the outside and from the inside. The smoke alarm on the ceiling, the security camera outside the door attached to the now defunct doorbell, the half bath, our tsukubai, is where we sanitize ourselves of the coronavirus before entering the house. This "before" despite its interiority, reifies the liminal quality of this space within the house.

About the doorbell, Benjamin says, "Even the despotic alarm of the doorbell that reigns over the apartment gains its power from the magic of the threshold. A shrill sound announces that something is

crossing the threshold." This shrill sound is now replaced by the mellow ping on the phones triggered by the movement outside the door. Live images of the moving object can be seen approaching on our phones even before it triggers the notification. The outsider has been brought inside on our devices, not upon arrival but preemptively. The camera expands the threshold to the limits of its kino-eye.

A small framed photograph of the interior of the Rothko Chapel in Houston hangs on the wall, perpendicular to the front door. This photograph is an eighth entryway that the passageway opens on to. It is a portal to a geographically disconnected room, one with its own set of fourteen portals. This is the first thing that one notices upon entering the house, and here, upon arrival, begins an endless journey. To embark on this disjointed mode of travel requires us to assume image as location. If photographs could function as portals to geographically disconnected spaces, what would it do to hang a photograph of the lake, that is located at the opposite end of the house, in this passageway? To reach this lake from the entrance of the house requires one to follow a linear trajectory. One enters the passageway through the main door, walks past the dining and living rooms, across the kitchen, on to the deck, and then out over to the lake. Would this photograph in the passageway, this portal, collapse this trajectory? Could the beginning and end of the house meet in this intermediate space?

This intermediate quality between the front and the back, or between the inside and the outside of the house, also exists between ceiling and floor where it is emphasized by the art of self-suspension. I see it in the seemingly simple but challenging tanuki tsuri, a Japanese rope bondage suspension tie, where one is lifted with all limbs tied towards the top with the body folded forward at the hips. Once lifted, the suspended subject can invert themselves into a face-down arch-like reflection of Louise Bourgeois' headless, sexless male figure in the *Arch of Hysteria,* a cast of Jerry Gorovoy's body. In these suspensions, the upright, forward-moving body is freed from unidirectionality and is given the freedom to swivel, turning the body into a compass that points in directions which the tied body can no longer pursue.
At the threshold, we are always vertical, never horizontal. Our dog, Mochi, has helped us break out of our upright axis as she slides across the length of the passageway, chasing a piece of ice, headfirst, and slams against the door, over and over again. She stretches out and rolls over. She leaps and bounds across the length. This is her only long strip of space in this house to gather momentum and express it until she comes to a crashing halt. She activates this space, aerates it. She is the protein that sustains a stable foam on this space as it turns still and stale over the pandemic, as greetings and farewells dwindle.

What movements would *I* create in response to this threshold? The liminality of the passageway is a reflection of my own recent transition from India to suburban United States. Can I transcend this persistent feeling of transience while being on the inside of the house, through my imagination, by drawing in commotion, by stringing words, such as this text, and initiate movement that may lead me to either side of the threshold, inwards toward finding home in a new place or as an exit back to India. Would the relationship between the words and movements be like Angelo Badalamenti and David Lynch's conversation while making *Laura Palmer's Theme* for *Twin Peaks,* where Lynch described, and by way of describing, created, a scenario for Badalamenti to respond to with melody. Similarly, would *this* text offer an impetus for movement? If so, what movements would I make for this threshold?