

## *Nostalgia really works for me*

A compound is a substance made up of more than one entity; a mixture with a shared purpose.

It is also a place that I grew up in.

I didn't have a street, a village or a town. There would have been a district, but I never asked its name and no one thought to tell me.

As a child I lived on a compound in the desert; a square territory situated in sand surrounded by a white wall ten foot high. The entrance (or mouth) was a large mechanised gate that let out an aggressive clunk each time one of the two brown men - who's job it was to guard - pressed the release button. Behind the wall and the gate were forty villas.

Inside the compound everything functioned uniformly. A smooth concrete road mapped out a single grid that separated an inner and outer circuit of semi-detached homes. The plan was designed around geometric shapes, right angles and rows that were aesthetically pleasing. No space was without purpose.

Greenery of trees, shrubs and sub-shrubs were allocated, planted at regular distances in identical configurations. The symmetry of this vegetation, in a landscape with no rivers, added to the orchestrated farce that was living in this place.

The villas were bite size chunks of sameness from foundation to finish. Residents choose their own toppings. Siamese twins joined in the middle, the villas had flat roofs and beige stucco walls the texture of which I would pick at until my bitten fingernails bled. All the external wood was varnished a dark mahogany, the heat making its lacquer peel. I picked at this too, pulling away large flakes to expose the wood's untreated surface. The palette of the compound was neutral, the finish was new, unused, unweathered. The past happened to other places. Unforgiving materials reassured us of this: marble stairs and tiled balconies; surfaces hostile to young wet feet. My knees are still a cross hatch of fine silver scars.

In the compound we lived a mirrored wonderland of synthetic minimalism. Authentic space was an alien concept, the differences between residents were leveled by the architectural harmony of our community. We did not own the things in our homes, little had sentimental value. The company provided everyone with the same, from the breeze blocks in the walls to the furniture in our rooms. I was brained by my Dad for scratching my name with a drawing pin into the bedside lampshade; these things weren't ours to claim and where you lived wasn't who you were.

The hot air outside was full of dust but the house we lived in was always clean. My mum, who was a nurse, had her own preoccupation with death. Dust irritated her allergies so she worked hard to make sure our house didn't have any. Mum was also preoccupied with the cigarettes smoked by Tony and Teresa (our homebrew drinking fun time neighbors) which she swore we passively inhaled through the inches of concrete that was our common wall.

It hailed once and the sky produced frozen stones as big as gobstoppers. They shot down fast filling the shallow gutters quickly, driving piles up our front steps, pushing at the edges of our door. One summer there was a swarm of locust. My sister and I crunched them dead, green guts spilling, as we walked to the school bus. Mangled bodies covered the ground in excess. The sky lost focus vibrating grey, they hit against our cheeks and our ears filled with their piercing song. In the playground that day as the temperature rose to thirty and with inches of dead locust under our feet, we said a prayer for a class of children in Dunblane.

My fear of bedtime had started before I lived on the compound but it escalated after we moved there. The wall made my borders more palpable, what was inside and what was out, what belonged and what did not. I never wanted to be awake when my parents 'shut the house down' and I often got out of bed to sleep in my sister's room. The night time was too quiet and too still; alone in the dark I would imagine all the different ways it was possible to

die. Mostly I feared what I couldn't see but thought must be there: a stranger in the night.

My young fears grew from stories of ambiguous men: the Incredible Hulk, Frankenstein and Edward Scissorhands. These were not straightforward killers but tormented souls stricken by bodily difference. I couldn't forget the sight of Banner's shirt shredding across his green mutating muscles, or the slicing digits of Edward's hunched figure waiting alone.

It wasn't just the terrors you could wake up to - the stranger in your room or the monster outside your window - I was anxious about the atmosphere. In bed your body was prone; vulnerable to asphyxiation by carbon monoxide or smoke from a fire.

How well I slept would depend upon whether I had completed the routine correctly. Had I tapped my hands 100 times under the running bathroom tap? Had my parents said 'goodnight, god bless, see you tomorrow' in the right order? A fearless sleep would depend upon whether I had checked the smoke alarm was working or the front door was

locked or what I had read that day. Even now, I sleep with scissors under my pillow (in previous years a hammer) and the front door keys by my bed.

No one cares about where you are from.

What I am trying to say is that order was everywhere and still I imagined chaos. What I am trying to say is that the wall was no use; it didn't stop the hail or the locust and it didn't stop my fear of the stranger in the night.

What I am trying to do is read the connections between how we live and what we feel. What will you forget? When people ask what it was like to live on a compound, the first thing I say is that it wasn't real. Then I quote Zygmunt Bauman: 'order and chaos are modern twins'.

Rob Chavasse  
Slow dance

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Rob Chavasse (1984, UK), lives and works in London. Selected solo exhibitions include: Holy motors, Hong Kong (2016), Jupiter Woods, Vienna (2016); Interstate Projects, New York (2016); Sunday Painter, London (2015); The Royal Standard, Liverpool (2014). Chavasse is represented by Sunday Painter, London.

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