

# Shut the Door behind You

Yaron Lapid

Text: Dr. Chris Wright

Yaron Lapid's work documents the ways in which social space is effectively re-mapped through certain idiosyncratic changes to the architecture of individual houses in suburban London. It involves a kind of imaginative topography, a re-working of the social fabric that is revealed through the bright façades of terraced houses that stand out from their surroundings, whether uniformly gentrified, drab etc. These coloured façades demonstrate a kind of mapping that combines the architectural and the social, that overlays them so that any architectural remodeling is seen as an attempt at social re-fashioning. In this sense the reaction to such irruptions of creativity are seen as an affront both to the eyes and to notions of the acceptable social order - why do these people want to 'stand out' like that?

In a positive sense these kinds of houses are often locally renowned for their eccentricity – like houses covered in Christmas lights and decorations like electric singing snowmen and festive Santa's climbing up neon ladders – but under present circumstances this mythic quality is all too often lost in the negative effect such creativity can have on real estate prices. That house in the terrace may provoke knowing smiles and whispered comments, but it also has a dramatic effect on the prices of adjacent properties.

There is also a strange form of chromophobia, an aversion to colour, that is perhaps at work here (see Batchelor 2000), as if in painting their houses in these kinds of colours the owners were confronting our visual sense of uniformity and propriety. They are just too 'loud', and of course this chromophobia is also a class affliction – think of all those gentrified white dining rooms... In the late 19th and early 20th century large numbers of immigrants to Australia painted their houses in run-down areas of Sydney bright colours and, despite being seen at the time as an affront to the senses they have now become firmly part of the city's cultural heritage and some of its most expensive real estate (see Taussig 2006). The same story is played out in San Francisco with its brightly painted Victorian clapboard houses, once the haunt of hippies, now prime real estate. Perhaps the lack of colour on our streets has something to do with a kind of inherent English glumness? Sometimes there is a sense of critical social mass - if enough people paint their houses then it becomes quaint. A whole street of painted houses - as long as they were of a certain age (post-Edwardian houses in bright colours might present difficulties), and used a palette of acceptable muted colours (it is easy to distinguish between the colours that say student house, anarchist squat, working class 'attitude' etc., and those that say 'heritage') - could well bring property values up not down.

In drawing our attention to these architectural and colourful landmarks Lapid's work makes our own imaginative topographies visible. We are made aware of the ways in which we all too easily make assumptions about class, money, ethnicity and other social markers based on the façades of houses. The relationship between a city and its inhabitants is one that is hard to encompass intellectually or theoretically and, in demonstrating the kinds of mapping that take place, this work constitutes an alternative colour mapping of London's suburbs that importantly reveals some of the affective qualities of that relationship.



Yaron Lapid, *Shut the Door Behind You*, 2008, photographic panorama, courtesy the artist.

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