

## **My Big Leak**

By Jordan Tannahill

A few days after I first laid eyes on the proposal for Joele Walinga's installation, *Bigger Leak Than Expected*, I experienced one. My roommate woke up to water pouring out of the light fixtures in our bathroom and kitchen at four in the morning. The power cut out and water crept across our floor in the dark like a scene from *Titanic II*. As I write this, a steady stream of workmen, plumbers, and electricians are traipsing through my apartment. It's not quite the gay porn fantasy it sounds like. They are ripping up the drywall, the flooring, and the ceiling, using ear-splitting belt sanders and Aerosmith to get the job done. My clothes are covered in a centimeter of white dust. The kitchen and bathroom faucets have been turned off - I made a cup of coffee this morning from the back of the toilet. In short: I've been feeling pretty upended.

So what happened? Well. Our upstairs neighbour had been asking management for over a year to replace her hot water tank. Like me, it was twenty four years old and occasionally made strange noises. The building manager informed her that it was Enbridge's responsibility to replace all the hot water tanks in the building. But because Enbridge is on contract to replace them at no cost to the tenants, they refuse to act until it is absolutely necessary (i.e. until it is no longer working). So she complained, and nothing happened. And then it exploded, filling her apartment with ankle-deep water and flooding eight units below it.

In the week following the incident, dozens of tenants and their oversized dogs had to be put up in nearby hotels as industrial sized fans were brought in to dry out their apartments. Hundreds of thousands of dollars in insurance payouts ensued. And all because those responsible for preventing the proverbial leak were too lazy to be bothered to act in a preventative manner, and thus exacerbating the problem immeasurably for countless others.

The manner in which an unduly amount of extra work was generated from an initially half-assed commitment to problem-solving embodies the absurd proposal of Walinga's *A Bigger Leak Than Expected*. The piece captures a seemingly universal fixture of contemporary bureaucracies (whether a condo or a government): a solution that maintains an untenable situation and perpetuates the problems it purports to fix. Using my building's as a microcosm for such a dysfunctional bureaucracy, I decided to sit down with my property manager, Tom Laggan, and

ask him about his impressions of Walinga's *A Bigger Leak Than Expected*. What did he see of himself, the situation, or other situations communicated within it? Here is a transcribed excerpt of our conversation:

Tom

"Did she make this because of the- of our incident?"

Jordan

"No. This has nothing to do with the condo flood."

Tom

"She just made this-"

Jordan

"It's an art piece that was made before, or at least conceptualized, before any of this."

Tom

"It's supposed to be funny. Is it?"

Jordan

"Well its supposed to be absurd. There's a comedic nature to it. But do you think it says anything-?"

Tom

"You mean that we're all a little bit stupid, maybe. *(Laughs)* Yes I can see that. A bit Monty Python. I've actually worked- I've been in buildings with situations like this. That looked a lot like this."

Jordan

"You mean multiple buckets on stairs?"

Tom

"Multiple leaks, yes."

Jordan

“But this is actually one leak managed with three pails. Connected with these hoses here-”

Tom

“But I’ve seen- there’s a white, twenty story job on Jarvis where I think one summer, whenever it would rain, really any time of year, there would be five or six pails in the stairwells. It was not a well-sealed building. We could caulk and caulk and it would still come in. They probably scrimped when they built it, but that’s the way with a lot of these buildings from the 60s, right? We had a woman who slipped and she- I don’t remember, but she was older- she tried to sue the building and I don’t- I don’t know what happened to that, but I think it was dropped. And in a way, even though the buckets weren’t connected, it was still one leak. One leak with multiple buckets. Because the water was probably getting in from one spot and working its way down and instead of finding that- that source, that spot, we spent all our time, you know, up ladders calking in the stairwell. But to repair the roof would have been, well-”

Jordan

“A lot of work.”

Tom

“And money.”

(...)

Jordan

“Has this experience made you rethink anything?”

Tom

“Nothing changes.”

Jordan

“In what way?”

Tom

“This is not the first time this will happen; it won’t be the last. I’ve seen a lot worse.”

Jordan

“But you want to prevent things like this from-”

Tom

“Well yes, of course, but then when you think of it- I mean from Enbridge’s standpoint why should they change what they’re doing? They don’t have to pay a cent when things like this happen. It’s all up to the insurance companies.”

Jordan

“And there’s costs for you-”

Tom

“Sure, but there isn’t any incentive for (Enbridge) to change. In fact, it’ll always be more cost effective for them to let (hot water tanks) explode because then they aren’t replacing them for no need. Sometimes they might even make money on it because a tenant may upgrade or need their natural gas piping replaced, if it was damaged.”

Jordan

“They might actually make money if they explode?”

Tom

“Potentially.”

Jordan

“So the system is set up to fail.”

Tom

“Right.”

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