

IDENTITY, INTIMACY AND DOMICILE

Notes on the phenomenology of home
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1 The architect's house: Peter Eisenman, House IV (Frank House), Cornwall, Connecticut, 1972-73.

2 The painter's house. Edward Hopper, High Noon, 1949, Ohio, The Dayton Art Institute.

The architect and the concept of home

We architects are concerned with designing dwellings as architectural manifestations of space, structure and order, but we seem unable to touch upon the more subtle, emotional and diffuse aspects of home. In the schools of architecture we are taught to design houses and dwellings, not homes. Yet it is the capacity of the dwelling to provide domicile in the world that matters to the individual dweller. The dwelling has its psyche and soul in addition to its formal and quantifiable qualities.

The titles of architectural books invariably use the notion of 'house'- 'The Modern House', 'GA-Houses', 'California Houses', etc. - whereas books and magazines that deal with interior decoration and celebrities prefer the notion of 'home' - 'Celebrity Homes', 'Artist Homes', etc.. Needless to say that the publications of the latter type are considered sentimental entertainment and kitsch by the professional architect. Our concept of architecture is based on the idea of the perfectly articulated architectural object. The famous court case between Mies van der Rohe and his client, Dr. Edith Farnsworth, concerning the Farnsworth House, is an example of the contradiction between architecture and home. As we all know, Mies had designed one of the most important and aesthetically appealing houses of our century, but his client did not find it satisfactory as a home. The court, incidentally, decided in Mies's favor. I am not underrating Mies's architecture; I am simply pointing out the distancing from life and a deliberate reduction of the spectrum of life. When we compare designs of Modernity with those of today's avant-garde, we immediately observe a loss of empathy for the dweller. Instead of being motivated by the architect's social vision, or view of life, architecture has become self-referential and autistic.

Many of us architects seem to have developed a kind of split personality: as designers and as dwellers we apply different sets of values to the environment. In our role as architects we aspire for a meticulously articulated and temporally one-dimensional environment, whereas as dwellers ourselves, we prefer a more layered, ambiguous and aesthetically less coherent environment; the instinctual dweller emerges through the role values of the professional.

Architecture and home



3 Vincent van Gogh: Vincent's room in Arles, 1888.



4 Marcel Breuer: dining room of th Piscator House, Berlin, 1926.

Architecture vs. home

The question arises: can a home be an architectural expression? Home is not, perhaps, at all a notion of architecture, but of psychology, psychoanalysis and sociology. Home is an individualized dwelling, and the means of this subtle personalization seem to be outside our notion of architecture. Dwelling, a house, is the container, the shell for home. The substance of home is secreted, as it were, upon the framework of the dwelling by the dweller.

Home is an expression of personality and family and their very unique patterns of life. Consequently, the essence of home is closer to life itself than to artifacts. The architectural dimension of the house and the personal and private dimension of life have become totally fused in our time of excessive specialization only in certain cases, such as Alvar Aalto's Villa Mairea, which is a product of an exceptional friendship and interaction between the architect and his client, an opus con amore, as Aalto himself has confessed ¹. Equally important, it is the expression of a mutually shared utopian vision of a better and more humane world.

Villa Mairea is archaic and modern, rustic and elegant, regional and universal at the same time. It refers simultaneously to the past and the future; it is abundant in its imagery and, consequently, provides ample soil for individual psychic attachment. In his book 'Poetics of Space' ², which deals with the psyche of space, Gaston Bachelard deliberates on the essence of the oneiric house, the house of the mind. He is undecided about the number of floors of this archetypal house; it has either three or four floors. But the existence of an attic and a cellar are essential, because the attic is the symbolic storage place for pleasant memories that the dweller wants to return to, whereas the cellar is the hiding place for unpleasant memories; both are needed for our mental well-being.

It is evident that the characteristics of the Oneiric house are culturally conditional but, on the other hand, the image seems to reflect universal constants of the human mind. Modern architecture has forcefully attempted to avoid or eliminate this oneiric image. Consequently, it is not surprising that Modern Man's rejection of history has been accompanied by the rejection of psychic memory attached to primal images. The obsession with newness, the non-traditional and the unforeseen has wiped away the image of the house from our soul. We build dwellings that, perhaps, satisfy most of our physical needs, but which do not house our mind.

Home and the inhabitant's identity



5 John Wayne's living room.

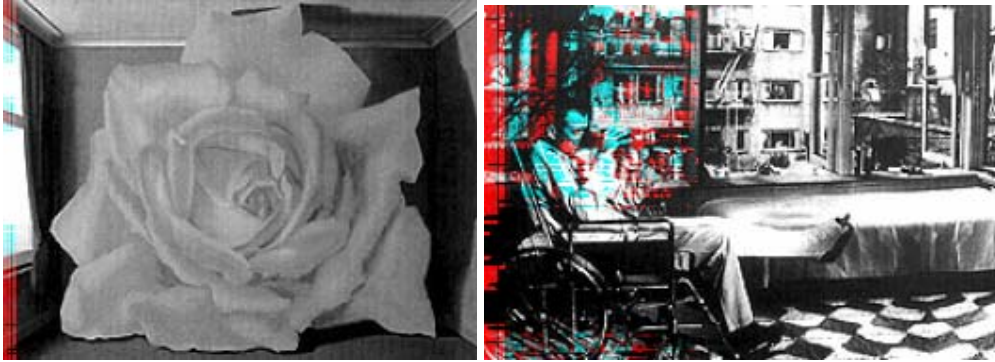


6 John Wayne.

The essence of home

It is evident that home is not an object, a building, but a diffuse and complex condition that integrates memories and images, desires and fears, the past and the present. A home is also a set of rituals, personal rhythms and routines of everyday life. Home cannot be produced all at once; it has its time dimension and continuum and is a gradual product of the family's and individual's adaptation to the world. A home cannot, thus, become a marketable product. Current advertisements of furniture shops offering a chance 'to renew one's home at one go' are absurd - they amount to a psychologist's advertisement to renew the mental contents of the patient's mind at one go. Reflection on the essence of home takes us away from the physical properties of a house into the psychic territory of the mind. It engages us with issues of identity and memory, consciousness and the unconscious, biologically motivated behavioral remnants as well as culturally conditioned reactions and values.

Home and fear



7 Rene Magritte: The Tomb of a Wrestler, 1960. Collection Harry Torezzyner, New York City. 8 Alfred Hitchcock: The Rear Window 1954.

Poetics of home - refuge and terror

The description of home seems to belong more to the realms of poetry, the novel, film and painting more than to architecture. 'Poets and painters are born phenomenologist', as J.H. van den Berg has remarked³. And so, in my view, are novelists, photographers and film directors. That is why the essence of home, its function as a mirror and support of the inhabitant's psyche is often more revealingly pictured in these art forms than in architecture. In the recent Berlage Papers (January 1994) the filmmaker Jan Vrijman makes this thought-provoking remark: '... why is it that architecture and architects, unlike film and filmmakers, are so little interested in people during the design process? Why are they so theoretical, so distant from life in general?'

The artist is not concerned with the principles and intentions of the discipline of architecture and, consequently, he approaches the mental significance of images of the house and the home directly. Thus, artworks dealing with space, light, buildings and dwelling, provide valuable lessons to architects on the very essence of architecture itself.

Jean-Paul Sartre has written perceptively about the authenticity of the artist's house: '(The painter) makes them (houses), that is, he creates an imaginary house on the canvas and not a sign of a house. And the house, which thus appears preserves all the ambiguity of real houses'.⁴ As well as being a symbol of protection and order, home can, in negative life situations, become a concretization of human misery: of loneliness, rejection, exploitation and violence.

In the opening chapter of 'Crime and Punishment', Raskolnikov visits the home of the old usurer woman, his future victim, and Dostoevsky gives a laconic but haunting description of the home, which eventually turns into the scene of the murder. Home turns from a symbol of security to a symbol of threat and violence.

The home interiors of Balthus reflect strange sexual tensions - the home has become eroticized - whereas Hitchcock charges the most ordinary home with extraordinary threat, as in the films 'The Rear Window', 'Marnie' and 'The Rope'. Home is an intra-psychic and multidimensional experience that is difficult to describe objectively. Thus an introspective and phenomenological survey of images, emotions, experiences and recollections of home seems to be a fruitful approach in analyzing this notion that we all constantly use, but rarely stop to analyze.

The painful memory of home



9 Andrey Tarkovsky: The Mirror, 1975. 10 Andrey Tarkovsky: Nostalgia, 1983.

The home of the memory

The word home makes us suddenly and simultaneously remembers all the warmth, protection and love of our entire childhood. Perhaps, our homes of adulthood are only an unconscious search for the lost home of childhood. But, the memory of home also awakens all the distress and fear that we may have experienced in our childhood.

'A house constitutes a body of images that give mankind proofs or illusions of stability'⁵, and, 'It is an instrument with which to confront the cosmos'⁶, Bachelard writes. And he is speaking about the home, a house filled with the essence of personal life. Home is a collection and concretization of personal images of protection and intimacy that help us recognize and remember who we are.

Home is a staging of personal memory. It functions as a two-way mediator - personal space expresses the personality to the outside world, but, equally important, it strengthens the dweller's self-image and concretizes his world order. Home is also a mediator between intimacy and public life. In their influential book 'Community and Privacy'⁷ of 1963, Christopher Alexander and Serge Chermayeff identified six spatial mechanisms between the polarities of private and public.

The image of home

Before I reached high-school age, my family moved several times due to my father's job and, consequently, I lived in seven different houses during my childhood. In addition, I spent my childhood summers and most of the war in my farmer grandfather's house. Regardless of having lived in eight houses, I have only had one experiential home in my childhood; my experiential home seems to have traveled with me and been constantly transformed to new physical shapes as we moved. I cannot recall the exact architectural shape or layout of any of the eight houses. But I do recall vividly the sense of home, the feeling of returning home from a skiing trip in the darkness of a cold winter evening. The experience of home is never stronger than when seeing the windows of the house lit in the dark winter landscape and sensing the invitation of warmth warming your frozen limbs. 'Light in the window of the home is a waiting light'⁸, as Bachelard has observed. The home has a soul. I cannot recall the shape of the front door of my grandfather's house either, but I can still sense the warmth and odor of air flowing against my face as I open the door.

In an essay entitled 'The Geometry of Feeling' (1985)⁹, I have dealt with the properties of lived space as compared to common notions of architecture. It seems to me that emotions deriving from built form and space arise from distinct confrontations between man and space. The emotional impact is related to an act, not an object or a visual or figural element. The phenomenology of architecture is founded on verbs rather than nouns. The approaching of the house, not the facade, the act of entering, not the door; the act of looking out of the window, not the window itself; or the act of gathering around rather than the hearth or the table as such seem to trigger our strongest emotions.

Nostalgia of home

I also remember the sadness and secret threat of leaving the home as we moved to another town. The greatest tragedy was the fear of facing an unknown future and losing one's childhood friends. It is clear that the experience of home consists of and integrates an incredible array of mental dimensions from that of nationality and being subject to a specific culture to those of unconscious desires and fears. No wonder sociologists have found out that the sorrow for a lost home among slum residents is very similar to the mourning a lost relative.

There is a strange melancholy in an abandoned home or a demolished apartment house that reveals traces and scars of intimate lives to the public gaze on its crumbling walls. It is touching to come across the remains of foundations or the hearth of a ruined or burnt house, half buried in the forest grass. The tenderness of the experience results from the fact that we do not imagine the house, but the home, life and faith of its members.

Andrej Tarkovsky's film 'Nostalgia' is a touching record of the loss of and grievance for home¹⁰. It is a film about the nostalgia for an absent home that is typical of Russian sentiment from the times of Dostoevsky and Gogol to Tarkovsky. Throughout the film the central figure, the poet Andrej Gorchakov, keeps fingering the keys to his home in Russia in the pocket of his overcoat as an unconscious reflection of his longing for home. All of Tarkovsky's films, in fact, seem to deal with nostalgia for the absent domicile¹¹. In the Communist state, home turned from a refuge into a place of surveillance, a concentration camp. And home turned into a mystical dream that many Russian artists have described in their works.

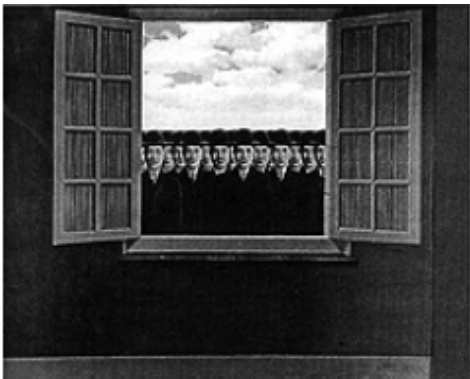
Home and identity

The interdependence of identity and context is so strong that psychologists speak of a 'situational personality'. The notion has been conceived on the basis of the observation that the behavior of an individual varies more under different conditions than the behavior of different individuals under the same conditions. The psycho-linguistic studies of the Norwegian born Finn, Frode Strömnes, have disclosed out further dimensions in the interdependence of psyche and context. In his research on imagery as the basis of linguistic operations, he has revealed that even language conditions our conception and utilization of space¹². Consequently our concept of home is founded in language; our first home is in the domicile of our mother tongue. And language is strongly tied up with our bodily existence; the unconscious geometry of our language articulates our being in the world.

Home is a projection and basis of identity, not only of an individual but also of the family. But homes, the mere secrecy of private lives concealed from the public eye, also structure social life. Homes delineate the realms of intimacy and public life. It is frustrating to be forced to live in a space that we cannot recognize or mark as our personal territory.

An anonymous hotel room is immediately personalized and taken into possession by subtly marking the territory -laying out clothes, books, objects, opening the bed, etc. The minimum home of the child or a primitive is the mascot or the personal idol that gives a sense of safety and normality. My five-year-old daughter cannot go anywhere without her scratching pillow, my American architect assistant traveled to Finland with four books (Joyce's *Ulysses*, T.S. Eliot's *Four Quartets* and two books on American poetry, by the way), while an American architect woman friend travels with her set of kitchen knives, which are her magical instruments for recreating a sense of home.

The intimacy of home



11 René Magritte: *The Month of the Grape Harvest*, 1959, Private Collection, Paris.



12 Edward Hopper: *Eleven A.M.*, 1926. Hirschhorn Museum and Sculpture Garden, Smithsonian Institute, Washington, D.C.

Intimacy and home

We have private and social personalities and home is the realm of the former. Home is the place where we hide our secrets and express our private selves. Home is our place of resting and dreaming in safety. More precisely, the role of home as delineator or mediator between the realms of public and private, the transparency of the home as it were, varies greatly. There are ways of life in which home has become a public showcase and the public gaze penetrates the secrecy of home.

Generally, however, the intimacy of home is almost a taboo in our culture. We have a feeling of guilt and embarrassment if we, for some reason, are obliged to enter someone's home uninvited when the occupant is not at home. To see an unattended home is the same as seeing its dweller naked or in his most intimate situation.

In his *Notebooks of 'Malte Laurids Brigge'*, Rainer Maria Rilke gives a powerful description of the marks of intimacy, the lives in a house that had already been demolished but which could still be seen in traces left on the wall of its neighboring building. These traces of life enabled Brigge to recreate his own past. Rilke describes with staggering force how life penetrates dead matter; the history of life can be traced in the minutest fragment of the dwelling.

"But the walls themselves were the most unforgettable. The stubborn life of these rooms had not allowed itself to be trampled out. It was still there; it clung to the nails that had been left in the walls; it found a resting-place on the remaining handbreadth of flooring; it squatted beneath the corner beams where a little bit of space remained. One could see it in the colors which it had slowly changed, year by year: blue into a moldy green, green into grey, and yellow into a stale, drab, weary white.

But it was also in the places that had kept fresher, behind the mirrors, the pictures, and the wardrobes; for it had outlined their contours over and over again, and had been with cobwebs and dust even in these hidden retreats that now lay uncovered. It was in every bare, flayed streak of surface, it was in the blisters the dampness had raised at the edges of the wallpapers; it floated in the torn-off shreds, and sweated out of the long-standing spots of filth. And from these walls once blue, and green and yellow, framed by the tracks of the disturbed partitions, the breath of these lives came forth - the clammy, sluggish, fusty breath, which no wind had yet scattered. There were the midday meals and the sicknesses and the exhalations and the smoke of years, and the stale breath of mouths, and the oily odor of perspiring feet.

There were the pungent tang of urine and the stench of burning soot and the grey reek on potatoes, and the heavy, sickly fumes of rancid grease. The sweetish, lingering smell of neglected infants was there, and the smell of frightened children who go to school, and the stuffiness of the beds of nubile youths.¹³

I apologize for the lengthy quote, but I wanted to point out how life penetrates verbal images of a great poem as compared to the sterilized images of contemporary architecture. In its emotional power, Rilke's description reminds one of Heidegger's famous description of the epic message of van Gogh's Peasant's shoes.¹⁴ The later questioning of the relevance of Heidegger's interpretation by Meyer Shapiro does not diminish the poetic power of his description: he has pointed out that van Gogh actually painted his own shoes and, besides, he did the painting during his short stay in Paris. What is important, however, is the artist's extraordinary dense imagery that reflects an authentic form of life.

In the intimate polarity, Bachelard points out a bodily experience of the home: 'Indeed, in our houses we have nooks and corners in which we like to curl up comfortably. To curl up belongs to the phenomenology of the verb to inhabit, and only those who have learned to do so can inhabit with intensity'¹⁵.

The fascination of the world of personal intimacy is so great that I recall the AD Magazine in the late 1960s having reported on a minute theatre in New York where the audience was watching through a one-directional mirror the daily life of a normal American family living in a rented flat unaware of being on stage. The theatre was open 24 hours a day and continuously sold out until it was closed by the authorities as inhuman.

The recent four-volume book entitled 'A History of Private Life'¹⁶ traces the evolution of the private realm from pagan Rome to the Great War on its nearly 2800 pages and makes the reader understand the cultural relativism of even the most personal and intimate life. Not much can be taken as given in human reality.

Ingredients of human life

Home seems to consist of three types of mental or symbolic elements: elements which have their foundation in the deep unconscious bicultural level (entry, hearth) elements that are related to the inhabitant's personal life and identity (memorabilia, inherited objects of the family); and social symbols intended to give certain images and messages to outsiders (signs of wealth, education, social identity, etc.). It should be clear by now that the structuring of home as a lived-in institution differs from the principles of architecture. The house is composed by the architect as a system of spatial hierarchies and dynamics, structure, light, color, etc., whereas home is structured around a few foci consisting of distinct functions and objects. The following types of elements may function as foci of behavior and symbolization: front (front yard, facade, the urban setup), entry, window, hearth, stove, table, cupboard, bath, bookcase, television, furniture, family treasures, memorabilia.

The poetry of the wardrobe

The meaning of each element can be phenomenologically analyzed. Bachelard's analysis of the essential task of drawers, cupboards and wardrobes in our mental imagery sets an inspiring example. He gives these objects - rarely considered as having architectural significance - an impressive role in the world of fantasy and daydream. 'In the wardrobe there exists a center of order that protects the entire house against uncurbed disorder', he writes¹⁷.

Wardrobes, cupboards and drawers represent the functions of putting away and taking out, storing and remembering. The inside of a cupboard is an intimate and secret space, and it is not supposed to be opened by just anybody. Little boxes and caskets are hiding places for intimate secrets and as such are of significance for our imagination. Our imagination fills out compartments of rooms and buildings with memories and turns them into our own personal territories. We have just as great a need to keep secrets as we have to reveal, know and understand them. One of the reasons why contemporary houses and cities are so alienating is that they do not contain secrets; their structure and contents are conceived at a single glance. Just compare the labyrinthine secrets of an old medieval town or any old house, which stimulate our imagination and fill it with expectation and excitement, with the transparent emptiness of our new cityscape and blocks of flats.

In his book 'One-Dimensional Man'¹⁸, Herbert Marcuse considers that buildings of our time are unerotic compared with the erotic imagery conjured up by an environment of nature or traditional buildings. One can compare, for instance, the fantasies provoked by a meadow outside ancient town walls or an old attic with the numbing no man's-land of a new housing area or the anonymity of a flat cramped between concrete walls and floors. Marcuse believes that the flagrant and violent sexuality of our time is a result of the growing lack of erotic imagery in the environment.

The space and image of fire



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13 Teun Hocks: Untitled (Man at Fire), 1990. **14** Antonio Gaudi: Casa Batlló 1904-06.

Hearth and fire

The significance of hearth or stove for the sense of home is self-evident. The image of fire in the home combines the most archaic with the most present. The power of the symbolism of the hearth is based on its capacity to fuse archaic images of the life-supporting fire of the primitive, experiences of personal comfort and symbols of togetherness and social status. Maurice Vlaminck, the Fauve painter, has written: 'The well-being I feel, seated in front of my fire, while bad weather rages out-of-doors, is entirely animal. A rat in its hole, a rabbit in its burrow, cows in the stable, must all feel the same contentment that I feel.'¹⁹

The fireplace is a bourgeois symbol of the separation of fire for pleasure from the fire for preparing food, whereas the symbolism of the stove has peasant-like connotations. Having spent my childhood in a farmer's home, I can still vividly recall the role of the stove in structuring family life, in marking the rhythm of the day and in defining the male and female roles.

The power of the image of fire is so vivid that hearths are often built as sole symbols in the form of mere mantles without any possibility of actual fire. The image of the hearth also has immediate erotic connotations. No wonder that Lewis Mumford discusses the influence of the invention of the oven on sexual behavior in his book 'The Culture of the City'. In the modern home the hearth has become flattened to an object with a distant and decorative lumetion. Fire itself has been tamed and turned into a framed picture devoid of its essential task to give warmth. We could speak of a cold fire of the modern home.

The table in focus



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15 The Holy Grail appears to the knights of the round table, 14th century. **16** Deric Bouts: Meal at Simon's house mid-15th century.

Functions of the table

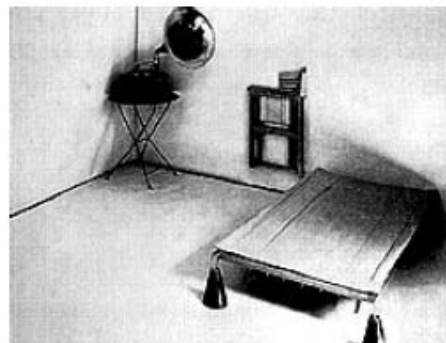
The structuring function and symbolic role of the table have also largely been lost to contemporary architecture. The significance of the table, however, is powerfully expressed in painting and poetry. Again, I vividly recall the heavy, unpainted wooden table of my farmer grandfather. The remembrance of the table is stronger than that of the room itself.

Everyone had his or her place at the table, my grandfather sitting at the inner end. The opposite end of the long table, closer to the entrance, was left empty and was occupied only by the occasional guest. The table was the stage for eating, sewing, playing, doing homework, socializing with neighbors and strangers, etc. The table was the organizing centre of the farmer's house. The table marked the difference between weekday and Sunday, working day and feast day. We could similarly and extensively survey other focusing images of the home, but we do not have the space on time on this occasion.

The bed as space and as horizontal element



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17 Renaissance heds from Milan about 1540. **18** Unidentified illustration.

Dilution of images of home

I simply want to add a remark on the dilution of the image of bed from a miniature house, a house within a house, symbolizing privacy to a mere neutral horizontal plane, a stage of privacy, as it were. This makes one recall Bachelard's observation that the house, and,

consequently, our lives have lost their vertical dimension and become mere horizontality²⁰. Again, innumerable images in historical paintings and drawings reveal the essence of the bed.

A less self-evident but utterly poetic and essential experience of home is the window and, in particular, the act of looking out of the window of the home at the yard or the garden. Home is particularly strongly felt when you look out from its enclosed privacy. The tendency of contemporary architecture to use glass walls eliminates the window as a framing and rationing device and weakens the essential tension between the home and the world. The ontology of the door has been lost in the same way.

Lack of concreteness

I live in an attic flat under a tin roof. The strongest and most pleasurable experience of home occurs during a heavy storm when rain beats against of the roof, magnifying the feeling of warmth and protection. At the same time the beating of rain just a foot away from my skin puts me in direct contact with primal elements. But these sensations are lost to the dweller of the standard flat.

Cooking by fire is immensely satisfying because one can experience a primal causality between the fire and the hearth. Again, this causality is lost with the electric stove or even more so with the microwave. In the contemporary home the function of the hearth has been usurped by television. Both seem to be foci of the social gathering and individual concentration, but the difference in quality is, however, decisive. The fire links us to our unconscious memory, to the archaeology of images. Fire is a primal image, and it reminds us of the primary causality of the physical world. At the same time that the flames stimulate meditative dreaming, they reinforce our sense of reality.

The television alienates us from a sense of causality and transports us into a dream world which weakens our sense of reality, of ourselves and the ethic essence of togetherness. Instead of promoting togetherness, television forces isolation and privatization. The most shocking experience of the negative impact of television was the Gulf War, which was telecast in real time around the globe as dramatized entertainment.

An analysis of television as a structuring device of the contemporary home is, of course, essential for the theme of this Symposium, but I do not have time to elaborate on it. And, I am sure, it will be dealt with in other presentations. The overall weakening of the sense of causality threatens modern life. The menace represented by our brave new world lies in its lack of concreteness. Even fear is acceptable as long as it has its understandable cause or it symbolizes something, and as long as it is not cloaked in apparent order and wellbeing. The irrational fear in our cities grows out of the meaninglessness of the environment to our reason and its incomprehensibility to our senses. We are losing the primary causality in our sensory experience of the world. 'Symptoms (of an illness) are, in fact, degraded symbols, degraded by the reductive fallacy of the ego. Symptoms are intolerable precisely because they are meaningless. Almost any difficulty can be borne if we can discern its meaning. It is meaninglessness which is the greatest threat to humanity', writes psychologist Edward Edinger²¹. This meaninglessness, a hypnotizing emptiness and absence of locality and focus, the existential vacuum, has become a recurring motif of contemporary art. It is alarming; indeed, that the favorite theme of art today is the total isolation of man disrobed of all signs of individual identity and human

dignity.

Architecture of tolerance

If architecture and home are conflicting notions, as it seems, what then is the architect's margin of facilitating 'homecoming' that Aldo van Eyck has so emphatically demanded. In my view, architecture can either tolerate and encourage personalization or stifle it. There is architecture of accommodation and architecture of rejection. The first one facilitates reconciliation, the second attempts to impose by its untouchable order. The first is based on images that are deeply rooted in our common memory, that is, in the phenomenological authentic ground of architecture. The second manipulates images, striking and fashionable, perhaps, but which do not incorporate the personal identity, memories and dreams of the inhabitant. The second attitude may create architecturally more imposing houses, but the first provides the condition of homecoming. Furthermore, there is a significant difference in how and to what extent an architectural design can allow and absorb aesthetic deviation without resulting in undesirable conflict. The architecture and furniture design of Alvar Aalto are an encouraging example of design, which has a great aesthetic tolerance, yet, it is artistically uncompromising.

The virtue of idealization

My acknowledgement of a conflict between architecture and the intrinsic requirements of home could, perhaps, be interpreted as support for the view that the architect should faithfully fulfill the explicit requirements and desires of the client. I want to say very firmly that I do not believe in such a populist view. Uncritical acceptance of the client's brief only leads to sentimental kitsch; the architect's responsibility is to penetrate the surface of what is most often a commercially, socially and momentarily conditioned desire. The authentic artist and architect consciously or unknowingly engage in an ideal world. Art and exhilarating architecture are lost at the point at which this vision of and aspiration for an ideal is lost. In my view, only the architect, who creates his ideal client as he designs can create houses and homes that give mankind hope and direction instead of mere bourgeois satisfaction. Without Frank Lloyd Wright's 'Fallingwater', Gerrit Rietveld's 'Schöder House', Le Corbusier's 'Villa Savoye', Pierre Chareau's 'Glass House' and Alvar Aalto's 'Villa Mairea' our understanding of modernity, and of ourselves, would be considerably weaker than now. It is when these masterpieces concretize the possibilities of human habitat.

Coming home



19



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19 Interior of a Shaker-house. Hancock, Massachusetts. 20 Henry Matisse: Goldfish (Les poissons rouges), 1912.

Feasibility of a homecoming

Authentic architecture is always about life; man's existential experience is the prime subject matter of the art of building. To a certain degree, great architecture is also always about architecture itself, about the rules and boundaries of the discipline itself. But today's architecture seems to have abandoned life entirely and turned into a pure architectural fabrication.

Authentic architecture represents and reflects a way of life, an image of life. It is thought provoking that today's buildings appear empty instead; they do not seem to represent any real and authentic way of life. Today's architectural avant-garde has deliberately rejected the notion of home. 'Architecture must dislocate ... without destroying its own being, while a house today must still shelter, it does not need to symbolize or romanticize its sheltering function, to the contrary: such symbols are today meaningless and merely nostalgia, declared Peter Eisenman in an interview some years ago²².

Beyond the rejection of issues of domicile, today's avant-garde architecture has neglected problems of mass-housing, which were a core issue of the Modern project. Our post-historical era has ended historical narratives, the notion of progress and a view of future. This loss of horizon and sense of purpose and shortening of perspective have turned architecture away from images of reality and life into an autistic and self-referential engagement with its own structures. At the same time architecture has distanced itself from other-sense realms and become a purely retinal art form.

I may believe in groundless nostalgia, but I still believe in the feasibility of an architecture of reconciliation, an architecture that can mediate 'man's homecoming'. Architecture can still provide houses that enable to live with dignity. And, we still need houses that reinforce our sense of human reality and the essential hierarchies of life.

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³ *ibid*, p. XXIV

⁴ Jean-Paul Sartre, *What is Literature?* Peter Smith, Gloucester, Mass., 1978, p. 4.

⁵ Bachelard, *op. cit.*, p. 17.

⁶ Bachelard, *op. cit.*, p. 46,

⁷ Christopher Alexander, Serge Chermayeff, *Community and Privacy*. Doubleday & Company, Garden City, New York, 1963.

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⁹ Juhani Pallasmaa, *The Geometry of Feeling: a look at the phenomenology of architecture*. *Arkkitehti* 3/1985,

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oneiric \oh-NY-rik\, *adjective*:

Of, pertaining to, or suggestive of dreams; dreamy.

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