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DEFINING THE "HOME"*

Being "at home" goes beyond being merely a resident of a house or form of dwelling, it is the sense of feeling at home or the sense of belonging to place. It is the careful planning and designing of rooms in places. A home is not passive, it is being with other people and one's spiritual haven.

In the scientific study of the home, the most diverse intellectual traditions overlap. Sociologists consider the place of "home" in society. Philosophers ask about its essence and its existential role in human life. Economists are interested in property management and concern themselves with the home as a commodity, an investment, an object of speculation.

Phenomenology, religious studies, psychology, architecture, medicine and other disciplines each have their own epistemological lines of enquiry. The following article borders the humanities and social sciences and delves into the varied and historically changing social aspects of the question: What is a home in terms of space and place?

Home. An Approach. – How people live is an expression of traditions and habits, and also mirrors the time in which they live in and its associated current technologies. The oldest (ice-age) dwellings were holes in the ground or natural caves; in the stone age they were overhangs or huts made of brushwood and foliage. In the Neolithic period there were houses built on stilts in northern Europe, and there were roundhouses in the Bronze Age with simple conical roofs. After the development of more sophisticated building techniques, simple log buildings began to be erected (Wasmuth, 1929).

One common feature applies to all dwellings: they offer safety from the wind and the weather, the seasons, enemies and wild animals

* Translated from the German by R. Humphrey.

(Häußermann, Siebel, 2000). However, as well as physical protection, all dwellings possess a building style or vernacular. In the planning and design of a dwelling the architecture is of fundamental significance.

In the 20th century, the following key questions are associated with housing:

1. What does one do, when one is "at home"?
2. Who lives with whom?
3. How is the home experienced?
4. How does one *acquire* a home? (Häußermann, Siebel, 2000)

The meaning of "home" here is in relation to the bricks and mortar of a dwelling, the construction. Therefore in regards to the lives of homeless people, this raises the question of if, and how the homeless experience the concept of "home" (Hasse, 2009). In other words, must a home be confined by the four square walls of a building (be that the small apartment, the terrace house, or the sprawling mansion), or can it be a place on the streets within an urban area? After all, a garden accessible from a patio (no matter how small) belongs to a house, as does a balcony to a city apartment. Therefore a home cannot just be limited to interior rooms. "Outside" there are streets, shops, the market and the railway station.

Not every place in the public sphere however, may be considered as some form of home. The Philosopher Hermann Schmitz believes the *citizens* of a city (as opposed to mere "occupants") develop a feeling of belonging to the place they live. They don't just use city services as a means to an end (Schmitz, 2008). The threshold for becoming a citizen and laying down roots in a place, as opposed to just using the services there, has an almost atmospheric nature for Schmitz. The boundary between feeling "at home" or not (at least psychologically) is fluid and occurs due to events and changes to one's living situation.

In the 1950's an increase in mobility slowly led to changes in the way people live. Living in one place for life became less common (Meier-Oberist, 1956). However mobility affected and affects the lives of nomads differently to that of people in highly mobile and globalized societies. The meaning of "home" encompasses the aspects of *staying*, *sitting tight, of being content,* and also a sense of *well-being* (Grimm J., Grimm W.,

1991). However, "home" in its modern sense should not be misunderstood as a kind of "marooning" neither as a dreamy homage to a hometown. Rather, the late modern person is in a "*state of transition*" between being on the move and relaxing in one place (Joisten, 2003). A person feels at home here *and* there, but also (of their own choice) somewhere in-between.

Nomads who had to survive by raising cattle on the edges of deserts in challenging climatic conditions never settled for long but were almost constantly on the move. Nevertheless, there was stability and constancy in their lives thanks to the possessions they had which enabled them to create a familiar, homely atmosphere (within their tents). It is possible to furnish a sense of "home" (Guzzoni, 1999). The self-powered movement from place to place (nomadic roaming) helps form a life as vibrant as that of any within a changing modern society. As it is not possible to stay in one place for a lifetime, being part of, but even more so, becoming part of a place becomes that much more important. Therefore, according to Herrmann Schmitz people feel at home not only in the building in which they live but also as part of the urban space in which they live.

The masses live mostly in cities within serially produced large residential complexes. The architecture of such "residential factories" is due in part to the *Athens Charter*[1]. Here people, like buildings, are seen to be comprised of functions. The world is mechanical. This typically modern thinking has kept the organisation of reasonably affordable housing in cities in check up until the present day. The buildings created under the power of the industrialisation movement always mirrored social and political programs. The aim of these programs was to give the residents of such large housing estates (in East Germany socialist housing and in West Germany social housing) a sense of place and identity.

The home as a reflection of the individual. – The home (and the design thereof) reflects the socio-economic and cultural life of a person, family

[1] The "Athens Charter" was adopted at the International Conference for New Building 1933 in Athens. It was considered a manifesto for the construction of the functional city. One of the main original thinkers was Le Corbusier. Their theories found new relevance in the "car-friendly city" and the large housing estates of the 1960s and 70s (Ciam, 1933)*: Charta von Athen – Lehrsätze*, in Conrads, 1975).

or social group. The home also situates its inhabitants. Until the early 20th century the landowner lived with his family and servants on the farm, the families of the nobility lived in aristocratic buildings (manor houses, palaces or castles), the farm workers in simple cottages, the maid in her quarters, and the staff and workers in a rented apartment (tenancy). This rather simple hierarchic model then imploded: Elderly people now live in in care homes *or* in residences. Employees either rent *or* buy family houses *or* they camp – in caravans and mobile homes. The young and self-employed either join alternative housing projects *or* ensconce themselves in post-modern luxurious apartments, which have their own doormen. The "communes" of the 1960's also lived in "homes"; but they were less interested in having a roof over their heads, rather they «attempted to revolutionize civil individualism» (Bookhagen *et al.*, 1969) – to discover an alternative way of living.

Not all forms and styles of home are deliberately chosen or wished for. Those who float from place to place such as the homeless who do not have access to a half decent life, are altogether different to the economically privileged who share the same urban spaces. Those who do not have a home live mostly "on the streets" in public spaces. These homeless people are twice stigmatised – through the nature of their lifestyle and (as a result of their categorisation as destitute) are socially excluded from the bourgeois milieu of society. Thus, the improvised life in the elements, without possessions, without security, let alone beautiful views; is deprived of concerns but also only as an exception aware of substitute, temporary or emergency accommodation. But it is precisely this accommodation of homeless people in public and semi-public spaces, which makes the concept of what a "home" is questionable.

If we consider the thoughts of Wasmuth (against the background of the global economic crisis in the late 1920s), that «A designated "living room" is not necessarily required in a medium-sized apartment in today's economic situation in Germany» (Wasmuth, 1929, p. 724); then it implies a change in what a home was – similar to the historical changes taking place to life in general at that time. Until the middle of the 20th century the living room was almost mythologized as a *must have* of contemporary living and was furnished and decorated by a multifaceted industry which adapted its wares to the latest fashions like clockwork. Behind the concept of technological postmodernism, the purpose of the "living"-room

had morphed-from the social space of the "us" to a conversation-deprived television and entertainment-media bubble. There was no more social-interaction but instead an immersive and boundless flood of mass-media produced images.

Building a home. – Having a home requires a building, because humans have to situate their home. People who are homeless or are fleeing cannot have a home *as long as* they are on the move. Their (enforced) mobility is not a recognised cultural trait such as the roaming of nomadic folk. Fleeing does not help to establish oneself in space and time. However, this does not mean to say that nomadic tents can be considered as a "building".

Shelters of cardboard, blankets, waste wood and building materials left lying around do serve the homeless, protecting them against wind and weather-they are as such improvised constructions.[2] Are they therefore also places where people are "at home"? The short stay of nomads in their portable dwellings offers, thanks to their home furnishings and personal possessions, a comfortable, homely shelter. Not least because of this, the term *yurt* (for a round tent) also means "home". In contrast, drifting through public space is no haven but rather forces the homeless into the elements and offers no "home" comforts.

According to Heidegger a home does not require protective walls, but it does require construction. In old High German "*bauen*" meant*:* «The way you and I are, the way by which we humans are on *Earth,* is a building, the home» (Heidegger, 2000, p. 33). Building enables man to create a home. «A home and building reflect the relationship between purpose and means» (Heidegger, 2000, p. 32). Even if a building does not have complex technical requirements, it still demands commitment, because it does not just provide the (material) requirements for way people live on Earth and how they lead those lives. The process of building also leaves

[2] Building never required just solid materials such as wood, stone, iron and glass alone. Rather, the history of technology in architecture is essentially rooted in perishable materials such as branches, reeds, skins, and ice blocks, which promise good effects in achieving aesthetic effects (e.g., fabrics and foils). Gottfried Semper has already pointed to the common etymological roots of wall and garment, thus implicitly referring to the protective-sheltering function of textile structures or of wickerwork (Semper, 1851).

traces in the form of rubbish, holes and voids-problems for those who follow. Individuals, businesses and companies ultimately rely not only on *their own* resources, but also on shared resources: finite substances of raw materials and the *man-power* of third parties. Furthermore, because the social nature of the home started to fracture in a socio-economically critical way, a critical evaluation of the what a "home" purports to be, is necessary. Where the production of homes only serves the maximisation of profits through exorbitant rents which themselves impoverish even the most frugal of lives, the relationship of construction to housing must be reconsidered.

Disparate home cultures. – Even in the urban societies of pre-Christian Rome and Athens, living conditions were not equal, but determined by social class. In the neoliberal late modernity, the gap between poor and rich has expanded and lifestyle is increasingly determined by wealth. In the 19th century, the home was still the centre of the extended family; since the millennium, there has been a dramatic increase in single-occupant housing (more so in urban areas than the countryside).

The social fragmentation of society is echoed in the face of the urban landscape which clearly shows how and where people are settled. Skyscrapers lure the rich to fashionable metropolises with a dream-world of living par excellence. Illustrious names like *Onyx, Omni Tower, Tower 90, One Forty West* or *Praedium* symbolise maximum extravagance and represent the highest forms of "culture". Square-meter prices of (at present) about 14,000 euros guarantee an exclusiveness which reveals any potential political "inclusion" rhetoric to be ridiculous.

The underbelly of the glamorous presents itself in the form of homeless-cities, temporarily situated beside the pillars of city highway bridges, in the dirty entrances of demolished real estate and ´grey` areas including the underpasses of urban and underground railways. They are temporary and superfluous spaces which are allotted to the homeless – "gifted" in a sense, because no transaction takes place. In these unhomely spaces the collateral damage of an unleashed neoliberal economy are revealed: lives that tragically went out of control, and also those lives of the lowest of means which stayed "on track".

In contrast to the homeless, the profiteers in a world of fast money lead an extremely privileged life in hyper-elegant apartments, which hov-

er at heights of over 100 meters, "above" the city as it were, or in penthouses which are raised high above the masses. Homeless people get a warm meal at the soup kitchen and often they do not know how they will survive the next night in the winter frost. Many globalization winners live in oversized, luxuriant glass boxes and take advantage of a variety of services to further enhance their daily comfort. It is personal wealth that dictates life and sets the scope of what is possible in it.

There remains housing that lies between these two extremes, the experimental homes of the middle classes for example. An example of an original and innovative approach are so-called "Tiny Houses", which are designed to create the maximum living benefits in the smallest possible space and are therefore affordable in cities with high rental costs. Characteristically, the Renaissance of this old idea[3] is occurring not only in the United States, but as a necessary tactic in crisis-hit housing markets wherever they are. The variants of this type of housing in Germany impress, if only through their downright brazen reinterpretation of the existential crisis facing the housing market. If, in 2015 or 2016 the German Federal Ministry for construction promotes the of construction of so-called "Variowohnugnen" (Apartments which are flexible in terms of who they can accommodate, be that students, pensioners or refugees) of 14-30 m2, the "micro apartment" will also raise much interest in the aforementioned target groups; the reason being that such apartments are far more affordable than current standard accommodation on the property market.

Projects such as these – especially if they are initiated in popular urban centres such as London and Amsterdam – may be considered as "hip"; however in reality, they are less of an *innovation* and more of a *resignation*. Disguised in the architectural garb of the "new-wave of postmodernism" they illustrate most impressively the shrinking leeway politicians and governments have to influence housing markets. Also, when the model of *cohousing* or *co-living* is celebrated with post-critical innocence as a renaissance of the *communes* (a hybrid of apartment-collective and hotel), this can only be viewed as a *misinterpretation* as a genuine "alternative" way of living. Collectivist metaphors, utopias of renewability and grass-

[3] So-called "kleinhäuser" (small-houses) already existed in Berlin at the beginning of the 20th century (Wasmuth, 1929).

roots democracy, as well as idealised ideas of "Gemeinschaft" only serve to disguise (often with a powerful dose of esotericism) the social hardships of a suffocating housing market (Gottsauner-Wolf, 2013).

Tiny-houses are an example of mass-media produced housing-aesthetic. Another example being the mobile caravan lifestyle (Hasse, 2009). However colourful "vintage" trailers are not just the trendy creations of Lifestyle magazines. In their miniaturized form they are more like *think tanks*. This does not prevent the authorities from perceiving such "camps" as a highly visible alternative to their own ideas and therefore, as a nuisance. They are a thorn in the side of civil society. In contrast to every "trendy" mode of housing or lifestyle, travelling corrals represent an experimental spirit from which communities can sample alternative lifestyles.

Do we need ethical homes? – Enough would be gained if living and building were to become *questionable* and therefore *memorable* (Heidegger, 2000, p. 48).

Heidegger's wish, to question the concept of "home" naturally leads to the consideration of "home-ethics". The aim of every human being is to lead a happy life which is expressed in the way they live at home and as well as the form of the home. However, an ethical home is not meant to promote the *individual* pursuit of happiness, but to seek standards by which people can live well *together*.

Since the "open pursuit" of happiness is hard to ascertain, the evaluation of how people think and their wants – is therefore necessary. It is clear that feelings play a leading role here, which is why such feelings would also have to be the basis of a critical examination of the consequences of a (complete) realisation of housing requirements. The standard measure of evaluation can only be within the *limits of* possible homes, which reflect the unspoken interests of all those who are living now and all of those who will live in the future. Aristotle notes: «That the happiness of the dead is not influenced at all by the fortunes of their descendants and their friends in general seems too heartless a doctrine, and contrary to accepted beliefs» (Aristotle).

An ethics of home would thus amount to a program of socio-ecological evaluation. Heidegger uses the word «conservation» (Heidegger, 2000, p. 37) as an expression for the existential «concern»

(Heidegger, 1993, p. 58) of such a multi-dimensional culturally thoughtful preparedness and consideration. Everyday-politics obviously lack such multi-perspective and evaluative thought. The seemingly "democratic" right of individuals to achieve self-fulfilment should be seen in a critical light. Regardless of this, it is evident that life in the metropolises is heading toward a duality of crises: *First,* the social fracturing of society and the surrender of civil society's harmony and *secondly,* the sober truth of the practical contradictions within the categorical objectives of sustainability. On the one hand the homes of the rich (and soon to be richer) are becoming ever more luxuriant to the point of obscenity. On the other hand, the ever-increasing problem of homelessness reveals a politically legitimised destruction of "homes".

The rapidly increasing numbers of those affected by homelessness[4] draws attention to the fact that housing and housing policy has long ceased to be about segregation and social differentiation, but about the question of the availability of affordable urban accommodation. The problem of the recent housing shortage is exacerbated by unexpectedly high and unregulated migration. In the debate about the city social-organization of housing for ethnic groups, a reflection on the limits of the political utopia of *possible* integration is urgently required.

Making a home requires furniture as much as a regular supply of energy and drinking water. However, *what is essential* (according to Martin Heidegger) is how people live (with everyone else) on earth: «The relationship between man and space is none other than the essentially imaginary concept of a home» (Heidegger, 2000, p. 45).

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[4] According to the *BAG Wohnungslosenhilfe e.V., there were* 860.000 homeless people in Germany in 2016. For the year 2018, 1.2 million are forecast: http://www.bagw.de/de/themen/zahl_der_wohnungslosen/index.html (25.03.2018).

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Defining the "Home". – The article addresses the question of dwelling as an expression of life. Must a home be confined by the four square walls of a traditional building, or can it be a place on the streets within an urban area? Modes of dwelling are reflecting the socio-economic and cultural life of a person, family or social group. Also they situate the inhabitants. On the one hand the homes of the rich are becoming ever more luxuriant to the point of obscenity. On the other hand, the ever-increasing problem of homelessness reveals a politically legitimised de-

struction of "homes". Thus we need ethical homes. This is not meant to promote the *individual* pursuit of happiness, but to seek standards by which people can live well *together*.

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