

An Architectural Inquiry into the Significance of Home

By

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I hereby declare that I am the sole author of this thesis. This is a true copy of the thesis, including any required final revisions, as accepted by my examiners.

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Abstract

What is home, and why are we drawn to spaces which elicit this feeling within us?

Why is it that we are immediately able to achieve a type of rapport with some spaces, while others remain indifferent to us?

What is it about home that makes it such a special place?

These are questions that would give pause to many designers. We spend so much time learning about the history of architecture, the science of buildings, and the economics of development, but how many of us can say with certainty that they can make a space in which an individual will feel at home? Can we tell our clients, in no uncertain terms, that we know how to make their lives better through design?

This thesis seeks to establish the importance of the concept of home to our development as individuals and our ongoing psychological and physical well being, as well as demonstrate the connection between what recent psychological study has found to make us feel comfortable or “at home”, and factors over which architects hold sway. While previously thought of as ethereal, the feeling and space of home are too important to continue to allow their creation be left to chance. Research, both empirical and otherwise has granted us knowledge of how individuals communicate with spaces, and we are thus able to create spaces which will be more in tune with our entire being. It is our responsibility to use this knowledge to the benefit of our clients and the credibility of our profession.

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Dedication

To my parents, for showing me what “home” is.

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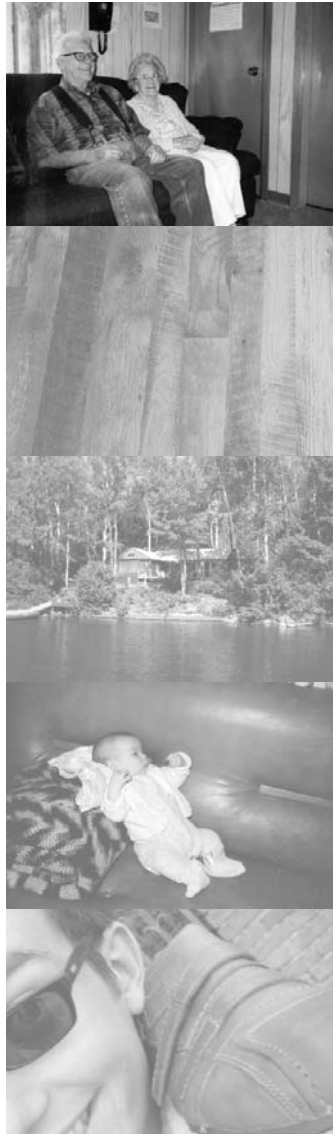
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An Architectural Inquiry into the Significance of Home



My Grandparents' Home

Whenever someone asks me about home I am always transported to my grandparents' kitchen: once again a five year old seated on the floor, all unbounded energy and corduroy pants on an uneven field of worn-out vinyl tile. Outside the walls of the house lay miles of rolling fields and dusty gravel roads.... a land of decaying family farms, their aging barns groaning in the wind with ramshackle lean-tos slumped against their sides. Covered with faded siding in red and white and sitting on a foundation of disintegrating concrete, their home was no architectural wonder in a general sense, but there was something about the place that transcended its humble appearance.

In the corner under the stairs was a closet, and in that closet was an ice-cream bucket full of what I suppose was one of LEGO's ancestors: a strange circular building block set that far pre-dated my own existence. It didn't matter that it was nearly impossible to construct anything useful from the oddly shaped pieces; I would sit there playing contentedly for hours as my Grandmother made lunch, heat blasting from the old stove even on the hottest summer days. Above me, in the world of the adults, my Grandfather would hold court from his dilapidated sofa, talking to my parents about the weather, the crops, the cattle, the neighbors and

any other topics that came to his mind. Not a large man by anyone's definition, he seemed a giant to me, even in my teenage years when I would come to tower over him by almost a foot. He dominated the kitchen from his throne across from the door. No one could enter or leave without coming under his gaze.

My Grandmother sat directly opposite him, right beside the door in her rocking chair, a welcoming presence for the many who crossed the threshold. Everything and everyone who entered that house lay between them, both literally and figuratively. It seemed to me that they were almost a part of the house, he on his sofa, and she in her chair. They defined the edges of the world you entered into: they were both in their house and of their house.

The house I grew up in is of course my home, but I have never felt the sense of home anywhere as powerfully as I did in that farmhouse. There was something timeless there, something powerful and calming. The ideas of "Tradition" and "Family" saturated that house, emanating from every nook. It was not just the many pictures of relatives on the wall, (some nearly 20 years out of date), but more subtle things as well: two toy cars found in a cereal box 30 years ago that still had pride of place above the sink in the kitchen, waiting for the next child to discover and drive them across the vinyl plain; the hand-pump beside the sink, green paint worn off the handle by 50 years and as many sets of hands coming in from the fields and preparing for lunch; the pencil sketch of the farm house my cousin Michelle drew, taped to the fridge for 15 years, the lines fading and the paper yellowing.

Yes, there was something special about that place, from the

dank cellar with the earthen floor (its ceiling so low that my Grandfather was the only adult I knew who didn't have to stoop when he walked), to creaking floors of the bedrooms upstairs, to the sublime front porch crammed with old vacuums and other household detritus, all shaded by seemingly immortal, towering maples.

Whenever my parents were traveling and I stayed with my Grandparents, they never had to send me to bed on nights when storms were rolling in. On those nights I was so eager to crawl into the tiny bed in the hall that my father had shared with his brother 30 years earlier to await the hail of liquid bullets on the steel roof. There was no more comforting sound than the drumming of the storm while I lay snuggled in the sheets, safe and dry.

My Grandparents passed away during my last year of high school: first my Grandfather and then my Grandmother six months later. Their farmhouse is no more more than five miles from the house I grew up in, and in which my parents still reside. Since my Grandmother's death, I have never gone back inside their house, or even stepped on the property. Though my uncle now owns the farm, and no practical barriers prevent me from visiting this wonderful place, I have not gone. Not once. It was not a conscious decision by any means, yet something prevents me from returning to my Grandparents' house. I think perhaps I haven't gone back to that house because on some level I knew it just wouldn't be the same. The house remains, but the home is gone.

In vain, great-hearted Kublai, shall I attempt to describe Zaira, city of high bastions. I could tell you how many steps make up the streets rising like stairways, and the degree of the arcades' curves, and what kind of zinc scales cover the roofs; but I already know this would be the same as telling you nothing. The city does not consist of this, but of relationships between the measurements of its space and the events of its past: the height of a lamppost and the distance from the ground of a hanged usurper's feet; the line strung from the lamppost to the railing opposite and the festoons that decorate the course of the queen's nuptial procession; the height of that railing and the leap of the adulterer who climbed over it at dawn; the tilt of a guttering and a cat's progress along it as he slips into the same window; the firing range of a gunboat which has suddenly appeared beyond the cape and the bomb that destroys the guttering; the rips in the fish net and the three old men seated on the dock mending nets and telling each other for the hundredth time the story of the gunboat of the usurper, who some say was the queen's illegitimate son, abandoned in his swaddling clothes there on the dock.

As this wave from memories flows in, the city soaks it up like a sponge and expands. A description of Zaira as it is today should contain all Zaira's past. The city, however, does not tell its past, but contains it like the lines of a hand, written in the corners of the streets, the gratings of the windows, the banisters of the steps, the antennae of the lightning rods, the poles of the flags, every segment marked in turn with scratches, indentations, scrolls.

-Italo Calvino ¹

Home as an Architectural Concept

TAKING A DRIVE down the 401 from Cambridge to points east of Toronto can be an interesting journey indeed. If one is not too intent on traffic or using their Blackberry, or is fortunate enough to be riding in the passenger seat, the view through the tempered glass can be revelatory. The scenery starts out mundane enough: rolling farmland, perhaps some low, rocky out-crops; the odd factory or warehouse as you move further along. Eventually, the ground grows steeper, and the out-crops higher until you can see the magnificence of the Niagara Escarpment off to the right at Halton Hills. The highway bends here, and it is soon after that you first see Them. First, just one or two, seemingly lost and misplaced on large country lots, then more. And more. Soon, They are everywhere, row upon row, covering the landscape for as far as the eye can see. For 100km, from Milton until the edges of Oshawa, the suburban tract houses reign.

Where did they all come from, and how did they become the dominant (and even desirable) typology of private residence? Every Saturday, if you open the paper to the “Homes” section, you will see article after article and advertisement after advertisement selling the idyllic lifestyle of the suburbs, surrounded by nature, or the chic downtown condo, where for \$300,000 you can have your 600 square feet of white drywalled luxury with a window looking out onto a building just like the one you are in. This is what we are told is “home”....this is what we are sold as “home,” but are these places really homes?

Italo Calvino’s *Invisible Cities* is a work which addresses the concept of home elegantly. Calvino’s Marco Polo spends the entire book in conversation with Kublai Khan, ostensibly relating to him the sum of his travels, but in reality attempting to truly describe both his home and the meaning of the concept. In the Mongol court far from that place he calls home, all that he has are his memories; the invisible cities which he relates to Kublai. Ever ethereal, his beloved Venice can not be captured by cartographers, categorized by urban planners or contained in a simple, exclusive explanation. There is more to his city than just its physical presence. Marco is able to bring his former home to life through a patchwork of stories, a collage of memories and desires, successes and failures in poetic vignette that together can capture the most improbable of cities. For one brief moment, the water and fog are still, and Marco and Kublai walk beside the Grand Canal.

The home that Calvino writes about is not a purely physical construct; it consists of relationships and stories that are written upon the built world like “the lines of a hand.”² Calvino seems to have had an innate understanding of both the meaning and importance of home, something that one could argue society as a whole now lacks. As designers do we



Fig. 1.1 - Suburbia

truly understand what it means when we talk about the concept of home, do we recognize its importance in the lives of the people we serve? Despite what we tell ourselves, the evidence suggests that the answer is negative. As the renowned architect Juhani Pallasmaa points out in his lecture entitled “Identity, Intimacy and Domicile: Notes on the Phenomenology of Home,” contemporary architects do not seem to be interested in claiming (or reclaiming) the role of home-creator.

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 dwellings 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.³

The fact that one could spend seven years in an institution of architectural learning and never have a discussion regarding that feeling one gets when one enters a special place, a place we honour with the word home, says much about the relationship between the concept of home and the profession of architecture. It would seem that even if there are individuals within the field who understand the importance of this concept and recognize the role that architects can play in creating spaces conducive to it, they are unsure of how to proceed, or are unable to demonstrate to their clients both the benefits of healthy, homelike spaces, and the professional’s role in making such spaces a reality.

The most unfortunate aspect of inability (or unwillingness) to claim home as an architectural concept (and home-making as a central mandate), is that everyone loses. Society as a whole suffers because the spaces that are being built are, at best, not as beneficial and healthful as they could be, and at worst, are potentially harmful to our collective psychological well-being. For its part, the profession of architecture suffers because of a missed opportunity to concretely demonstrate the power of good design in terms that the general public can understand, and thus show the value of properly trained design professionals.

Our craft has the power to manipulate the built world, and that power gives us the opportunity to improve the lives of those who live within it. To use our knowledge for less could be considered irresponsible.

There are many, however, both within the field and without who doubt the influence

of the environment over us, and who furthermore question our ability to intentionally create spaces which are beneficial for the user. In order to address and dispel these doubts, we will examine the feeling and concept of home with the intention of demonstrating the influence of the space we call “home,” the connection between the feeling and the space, and the fact that this feeling, the related space, and its consequent effects are largely the product of factors over which architecture exerts control. To begin this investigation, we ask two important and related questions:

Is home an architectural concept? And,

and, if by the current standards of architecture it is not,

is the concept of home important enough that we should be attempting to understand it and expand our role to incorporate home-creation?

The first question is one that Juhani Pallasmaa addresses directly in “Identity, Intimacy and Domicile,” and he seems to answer, rather unequivocally, in the negative: “Home is not, perhaps, at all at notion of architecture, but of psychology, psychoanalysis and sociology.”⁴ Certainly, as Pallasmaa points out, most architects make it apparent that they do not regard home as something that falls within the realm of their profession.

Pallasmaa is not the only person to express dismay at the inability of architects to recognize the importance of the act of home-creation, and see its obvious and central relationship to our field. Others, outside of the profession, have been perplexed by what they perceive as our stubborn refusal to address the concept of home, and our unwillingness to incorporate it into our designs. Alain de Botton, in his book *The Architecture of Happiness*, is concerned with the inability of contemporary architectural works to guarantee happiness or even a basic level of psychic comfort; concepts which he relates to the feeling of home.

Architecture is perplexing, too, in how inconsistent is its capacity to generate the happiness on which its claim to our attention is founded. While an attractive building may on occasion flatter an ascending mood, there will be times when the most congenial of locations will be unable to dislodge our sadness or misanthropy.⁵

De Botton attributes this to a failure to create spaces which “speak”⁶ coherently to us, and claims that this has been brought about by a fundamental misunderstanding within the field of architecture of both our own unconscious desires and needs, and the relationship between the individual psyche and the built world: “The failure of architects to create congenial environments mirrors our inability to find happiness in other areas of our lives. Bad architecture is in the end as much a failure of psychology as of design.”⁷ De Botton sees home as a concept that belongs to architecture, and he is frustrated at our seeming disinterest in the knowledge gleaned from modern psychological inquiry that would help us understand and facilitate this phenomenon.

Because home as a concept exceeds the base physical construct of the built world, we seem to believe that we are unable to act as home-creators. Currently, the profession’s understanding of the effects of the built world upon the psyche is limited if not entirely non-existent. Perhaps it is from this embarrassing ignorance that our reluctance to embrace the act of home-creation stems.

The Importance of Home

If home is not an architectural concept as we currently understand architecture, is home an idea that is important enough that architects should embrace it and expand the role of architecture to include home-creation?

The answer to this is simple: absolutely. Home is not a concept that we (either at the scale of society, or at that of our profession), can continue to neglect. The effects of home on our emotional and psychological well-being are multifarious and well documented. Home can be a mirror for our true self, and it can function as a framework through which we come to understand and know our world. Home (both the feeling and the space), is closely related to our very identities as individuals. Graham D. Rowles, Professor of Gerontology at the University of Kentucky, and Habib Chaudhury, Assistant Professor in Aging and the Built Environment at Simon Fraser University, address the many roles of the space of home in the identity-formation process in their introduction to *Home and Identity in Late Life: International Perspectives*:



Fig. 1.2 - Architect as Psychologist, Author, and Alchemist

Home experience provides the tools for both enduring and evolving possibilities for the self. Homes serve as referents for past life experience. They remind us, both as individuals and groups, of our past. This continuous reminding feeds into the enduring nature of our selves, preserves self-identity, and provides the critical thread for continuity into the future.⁸

It is important that we do not continue to misunderstand or dismiss home as merely a word, because there is evidence that this relationship between the built environment and the psyche, while obviously related to mental health, is furthermore linked to bodily welfare as well:

It is also increasingly acknowledged that a sense of being “at home” is related to health status and well-being and that disruption of this sense, through in situ environmental change (for example, change in an established neighborhood), relocation (either forced or voluntary), or through disruption of a more existential sense of being at one with the world, can result in significant changes in well-being. In many cases, involuntary relocation and separation from a sense of identity has been shown to have pathological consequences and to lead to increases in rates of morbidity and mortality.⁹

The importance of home, both to mind and body is increasingly apparent, so whatever the underlying reasons behind our reluctance to claim home as an architectural ideal may be, we need to put them aside. Home may not be a purely architectural concept as we currently understand architecture, but it unquestionably should be part of a new understanding. It is clear that the built world, the world of architecture, is at the very least related to the concept of home.

If one thinks of home, a place is what comes immediately to mind. Indeed, certain spaces can trigger a seemingly innate recognition of their homelike qualities: As Winnifred Gallagher, author of several books of the relationship between spaces and individuals writes in *House Thinking*, “We’ve all walked into certain homes and thought instantly, ‘No, I could never live here’ or ‘Yes, I could be happy here!’”¹⁰ These intuitive moments should act as signposts for us, giving us insight into the effects of the built environment on the psyche. Architects may not yet understand precisely how to facilitate home-creation, but we should recognize it as something that belongs to our area of expertise and be prepared to claim “home” within a new conception of what architecture is.

Architecture and Home-Creation

Home may not be a solely architectural concept, but it is intrinsically linked to the built world, which is the traditional realm of the architect. If we are open to re-examining both the role of architecture and the roles of other professions in the act of home-creation, and if we can change the way that we think about the role of architecture, we have an opportunity to re-establish our relevance. There is so much more to creating a home than simply putting up walls. If we do not learn to accommodate our unconscious as well as our conscious desires, we will never again make anything more than houses. As Pallasmaa puts it: "We build dwellings that, perhaps, satisfy most of our physical needs, but which do not house the mind."¹¹ This has to change.

Home is such an important concept, so intrinsic to our development as individuals, our happiness, and consequently the health of our society, that even though home has not traditionally been the concern of architects, the creation of spaces which are conducive to the fostering of the home-relationship should be one of the primary responsibilities of architecture, regardless the type or scale of project.

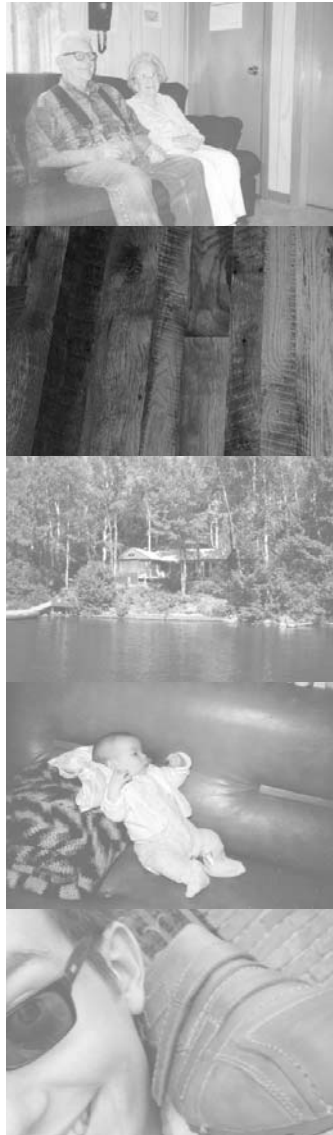
The continuing growth in the field of environmental psychology over the past thirty years has given architects an opportunity to look with clarity at the task of home-creation. No longer do we have to rely on intuition as we blindly search for a way to create spaces that feel like home. We can now begin to rationally explore the innate connection between spaces and the individuals that inhabit them; we can see the stories and memories that lurk in every corner, the "scratches and indentations" (as Italo Calvino so artfully put it) that we are constantly leaving on our environment. Advances in our knowledge of the psyche have allowed us an improved understanding of the self, an understanding that encompasses both the conscious and the unconscious. With this new-found knowledge, contemporary architecture can no longer continue to its practice of focusing entirely on conscious desires and concerns, as this results in a built world that is unbalanced and functionally deficient. It is the responsibility of architects to restore this balance by utilizing the incredible communicative power of the built environment.

I may believe in groundless nostalgia, but I still believe in the feasibility of an architecture of reconciliation, and architecture that can mediate 'man's homecoming'. Architecture can still provide houses that enable us to live with dignity. And, we still need houses that reinforce our sense of human reality and the essential hierarchies of life.¹²

By coming to a better understanding of Home, and by utilizing the tools that are now available to us, we can develop a whole new architecture, or, at the very least a new way of approaching and understanding our work in the world.



Fig. 1.3 - Home is more than this.



The Cambridge Apartment

When I first started my graduate studies, I rented a one-bedroom apartment above an antiques and collectibles store in the old center of the town. The building itself was rather impressive in an understated way: timeless red brick on a substantial (if sedate) facade that rose three very tall stories, fortress-like, from the street. Dead center on this elevation a little half-circle tower that bulged out above the entrance and soared proudly to its terminus above the parapet. On either side of the tower were twenty-one identical windows, aged but still-bright eyes gazing out under heavy stained-glass lids.

The intriguing, if stolid, exterior did not even hint at the grandeur that lay within: the interior of the apartment was a spectacular space. Thirteen foot ceilings, massive dark-stained trim framing heavy doors, and beautiful original hardwood floors. The floor in particular was a marvel: scratched and dented from 80 years of dragged furniture, stained with time (and not a few glasses of red wine). Perhaps in retribution for this history of disrespect, that floor had an uncanny ability to push out a nail head precisely where I was walking, determinedly catching and shredding pair after pair of socks in its anger. At times it seemed as though that floor and I were locked in a battle: it defiantly waging a guerrilla war against

my feet, while I spent hours crawling around on all fours, hammer in hand, quelling the steel rebellion.

It was not merely the floor that showed the indelible marks of the past, the entire apartment bore scratches and indentations, the evidence of human occupation. In the evenings, the last rays of the day would bounce off of the building across the street and enter through the dusty windows at low angles, bringing the pockmarked face of my dwelling into sharp relief: a poorly patched hole in wall where a chair impacted, thrown perhaps during a domestic dispute; a water stain on the ceiling caused by a burst pipe during the record lows of winters past; a dark area on the floor by the couch a reminder of the clumsy advances of a drunkenly amorous visitor. Silently and without judgment the apartment watched all these and more potential scenarios, fastidiously recording it all: innumerable memories in wood and plaster.

Too soon I had to vacate my storied home, and I moved out of the downtown and into a residential neighborhood. My new house was brand new: bigger, brighter, clean and fresh. It appeared to be perfect. After merely two weeks I felt like I was losing my mind: I couldn't focus on work, I couldn't sleep, I was constantly restless and uncomfortable. Where before I had curled up on the couch, reading a book or writing, now I stomped angrily around my brilliantly white abode, unable to find a place to work. I moved the couch, I re-oriented my desk, I moved the bed, I moved the desk into the living room, I moved the couch into the kitchen(!)...nothing worked. Eventually, one day in frustration I threw the book I was unsuccessfully trying to read clear across the living room, where it left a shallow mark on the perfect white gypsum. It was an

immensely satisfying moment. At the time, I believed that it was just the angry act that felt so relieving, but in hindsight it seems more likely it was the fact that I had made the first mark upon my world. For the first time there was irrefutable, physical evidence that I indeed existed! I had traded a figuratively verbose (if malevolent) wooden floor for smooth laminate faux veneer, chipped and stained plaster for flawless gypsum. There were no stories in this place.

Almost a year later, I still reside in the same house, but it is not so fresh and new, nor is it so alien and uninhabitable. There is a sizable mark on the wall as evidence of the time Mike tipped over his chair while over-zealously making a point; the vinyl tile floor in the kitchen has been pierced by a table leg, the wound occurring during preparation for a dinner party; even the uncommunicative laminate floor has yielded a few scratches to my hockey bag in the hall. I no longer struggle as much to study and think, and sleep comes much more easily. It is not yet 'home' and perhaps this house lacks the necessary spirit to ever be, but the marks I have left upon this place are the beginnings of a story. Perhaps I have not even a written the first chapter, but it is at least an introduction.

In Ersilia, to establish the relationships that sustain the city's life, the inhabitants stretch strings from the corners of the houses, white or black or grey or black and white according to whether they mark a relationship of blood, of trade, authority, agency. When the strings become so numerous that you can no longer pass among them, the inhabitants leave: the houses are dismantled; only the strings and their supports remain.

From a mountainside, camping with their household goods, Ersilia's refugees look at the labyrinth of taut strings and poles that rise in the plain. That is the city of Ersilia still, and they are nothing. They rebuild Ersilia elsewhere. They weave a similar pattern of strings which they would like to be more complex and at the same time more regular than the other. Then they abandon it and take themselves and their houses still farther away.

Thus, when traveling in the territory of Ersilia, you come upon the ruins of the abandoned cities, without the walls which do not last, without the bones of the dead which the wind rolls away: spiderwebs of intricate relationships seeking form.

-Italo Calvino ¹

House, Dwelling, Home

IN ORDER TO get past the contemporary misunderstanding of the nature and complexity of home, we as a society must first examine and re-evaluate the way in which we talk about the concept of home, and the roles that various professions and individuals perform with relation to the act of home-creation. Home is not merely a shelter or a prudent investment. As Juhani Pallasmaa writes, “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...”² If this is the case, and the relationship between individual and space is a key component to the home-creation process, then why is it that this relationship is not emphasized when people are looking for a private residence?

A partial answer to this could be the economics of buying a private residence (or we might say, a faulty understanding of the economics). Individuals looking for a residence can too often get caught up in looking at what are called comparables (square-footage, number of bedrooms, size of lot), when such things are not guarantors of a proper place to live. As has been demonstrated by the explosion of suburban, cookie-cutter developments, house-buyers are mainly concerned what they consider to be the quantifiable qualities of a residence, seemingly checking off features on a mental list of what they believe a house should be. As we will see in later chapters, the problem with this approach is that finding a place to call home, instead of a mere house, requires that other more complex, yet perhaps still quantifiable factors be taken into consideration.

Architects, the professionals who work day in and day out with the built world and are educated in the nuanced effects of design, would seem to be the most likely candidates for creating and implementing designs that effectively interact with their inhabitants and fulfill the role of home more completely than a generic design. However, as the public (and even some of these same professionals) do not seem to comprehend what home means, what it can feel like, and how it can affect us, three-car garages and 60’ wide lots are valued more than spaces which make us feel truly at home.

Thus we are left with a situation where, because of a fundamental misunderstanding of the nature and complexity of the concept of home, architects are considered by much of the population to be superfluous to the act of home-creation. Meanwhile, all around us, buildings unsuited to the name and feeling of home, and potentially detrimental to the development and psychological health of their inhabitants spring up, as if conjured, in mind-boggling numbers. These houses, of course, are built by those who toil under the ironic label of “home-builder.”

As stated, it is Pallasmaa's belief (and the author's) that home cannot simply be built, so how has this oxymoron become so pervasive and why does it remain unchallenged?

In fairness to both the public and to the developers, part of the reason the situation exists as it does can be blamed on the fact that the profession of architecture has almost completely abandoned the field to the developers and interior designers. As Pallasmaa points out, even a look at the names of our publications gives insight into our attitude towards the private residence:

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. ³

Another reason for misunderstanding and confusion is that the terms House, Dwelling, and Home have come to be used interchangeably in common parlance. It is as if we no longer expect a connection to the built world, we no longer want our house to be an "individual dwelling" or a place of "rituals and personal rhythms."

Now, all that we expect of the private dwelling is a house, devoid of deeper symbolism, and our language betrays this resignation. This is truly a tragedy of low expectations.

House.

Dwelling.

Home.

Each of these words is unique, with important nuances, and the fact that those within the profession of architecture and society at large have ceased to utilize them as such is telling. How we speak imparts an impression of how we think, and by equating house to dwelling and dwelling to home, we devalue each of these words and demonstrate that we no longer know what it means to dwell, and how it feels to be "at home."

This should not come as a surprise to us. Where our dwellings were once both functional and full of symbolic meaning, now they are hollow shells, stages upon which we exist as actors. We have allowed ourselves to be sold a domesticity which is predicated on consumption and conformity rather than wholeness and a comfort that encompasses both mind and body. The fact that we have forgotten the true meanings of dwelling and home is merely symptom of this much greater problem.

If we are to explore home as an architectural concept, we require a vocabulary which allows us to communicate the difference between architecture which addresses the individual as an entity comprised of both conscious and unconscious desires, and those soulless spaces which either leave no room for the unconscious, or actively seek to alienate us from our true selves.

House.

Dwelling.

Home.

Each of these has a unique history, and an examination of the beginnings and evolutions of these words will lead us to a better understanding of the subtle (and not so subtle) differences in meaning, and will demonstrate why we need to truly comprehend and utilize all three words now more than ever.

House

House is a term with a broad definition and a long history. Derived from the Old English “hus” to which is ascribed the meanings of “dwelling, shelter, house.” The word has its roots in the pre-Germanic “khusan,” the origin of which has been lost, but may be related to “khudz” which meant “to hide.” Similar words, such as the Middle Dutch “huut” and the German “haut” mean “skin” or have connotations of covering or concealment. The Old English verb for “give shelter to” is “husian.”⁴

What is important to note is that all of these root words (unlike the roots of words like dwelling and home), refer only to physical shelter, there is no mention of any special bond with the shelter, nor any nuance of history or family. Even the contemporary definition of house from Merriam and Webster’s lacks these components:

house [n., adj. hous; v. houz]
–noun

1. a building in which people live; residence for human beings.
2. a household.
3. (often initial capital letter) a family, including ancestors and descendants: the great houses of France; the House of Hapsburg.
4. a building for any purpose: a house of worship.
5. a theater, concert hall, or auditorium: a vaudeville house.
6. the audience of a theater or the like.
7. a place of shelter for an animal, bird, etc.

–verb (used with object)

[8-22]

23. to put or receive into a house, dwelling, or living quarters: More than 200 students were housed in the dormitory.
24. to give shelter to; harbor; lodge: to house flood victims in schools.
25. to provide with a place to work, study, or the like: This building houses our executive staff.
26. to provide storage space for; be a receptacle for or repository of: The library houses 600,000 books.

27. to remove from exposure; put in a safe place.

–verb (used without object)

30. to take shelter; dwell.

—Synonyms 1. domicile. House, dwelling, residence, home are terms applied to a place to live in. Dwelling is now chiefly poetic, or used in legal or technical contexts, as in a lease or in the phrase multiple dwelling. Residence is characteristic of formal usage and often implies size and elegance of structure and surroundings: the private residence of the king. These two terms and house have always had reference to the structure to be lived in. Home has recently taken on this meaning and become practically equivalent to house, the new meaning tending to crowd out the older connotations of family ties and domestic comfort. See also hotel. ⁵

The number of potential meanings and uses for house are incredible, and the meaning of the word in architectural terms has become diluted. While dwelling and home are listed as synonyms for house, we must reject this characterization. House lacks the important connotations of history, family, and belonging that we should seek to imbue our architectural creations with, and thus is inadequate for describing spaces which are conducive to this goal. House is merely descriptive of a physical shelter with no aspirations to contain and shelter the psyche, a space that does not seek to participate in the process of identity formation. In order to refer to the types of spaces that we should be creating (those which aspire to shelter both mind and body), we will need words which exceed house.

Dwelling

Dwell has come to be a powerful a powerful and complex word. Originating in Old English as “dwellan,” it was initially a word that connoted deception, but this deceptive or misleading behaviour included a temporal dimension, (ie. trickery that lead to delay). Through Middle English, the meaning shifted from “hinder” or “delay” to “linger” (ie. to dwell upon), and then on to “make a home” around the year 1250. The first use of Dwelling with the meaning “place of residence” is thought to be in 1340. ⁶

Already we can begin to see how “dwelling” is an improvement over “house” when it comes to describing the nature of one’s family residence, as it incorporates a sense of history and time spent as opposed to simply referring to a sheltering object. The modern meaning, taken from Merriam-Webster’s, continues to include this temporal dimension and relationship to place:

dwell

–verb (used without object)

1. to live or stay as a permanent resident; reside.
2. to live or continue in a given condition or state: to dwell in happiness.
3. to linger over, emphasize, or ponder in thought, speech, or writing (often fol. by on or upon): to dwell on a particular point in an argument.

dwelling

–noun a building or place of shelter to live in; place of residence; abode; home.

[Origin: 1250–1300; ME; see dwell, -ing1]

—Synonyms See house. ⁷

While house is referenced as a synonym to dwelling, for the purposes of architectural discussion this practical equivalence should be avoided.

Even with its rich history of meaning, “dwelling” is a word that has fallen out of favor, both in common usage and within the profession of architecture. In fact, the most likely place that one will find dwelling these days is in a technical or legal document such as the building code. This is truly unfortunate because the word is so important (with its connotations of

remaining and the passage of time), that it should continue to be distinct from house which merely refers to an object of enclosure. Architecture needs to re-appropriate dwelling so that we when we talk about home-creation we can discern between residences which act as shelters for both the mind and body, and those which are merely physical shelters. The German philosopher Martin Heidegger and his follower, the Norwegian architectural theorist Christian Norberg-Schulz have both written about the significance of the act of dwelling, and it is to them that we should look for guidance as we reclaim this special word for our own uses.

Heidegger, when talking about technology and its Greek root of *techné*, believed that the act of building was related to the pursuit of truth. As evidenced by his writings in a paper titled “Building Dwelling Thinking,” he was also interested in dwellings as they pertained to the act of dwelling, something he likened to “being in the world” or leaning to “exist” instead always “doing.” As architects should be, Heidegger was fundamentally interested in the relationship between the act of dwelling and the act of building.

We attain to dwelling, so it seems, only by means of building. The latter, building, has the former, dwelling, as its goal. Still, not every building is a dwelling. Bridges and hangars, stadiums and power stations are buildings but not dwellings; railway stations and highways, dams and market halls are built, but they are not dwelling places. Even so, these buildings are in the domain of our dwellings. That domain extends over these buildings and yet is not limited to the dwelling place. The truck driver is at home on the highway, but he does not have his shelter there; the working woman is at home in the spinning mill, but does not have her dwelling place there; the chief engineer is at home in the power station, but he does not dwell there. These buildings house man. He inhabits them and yet does not dwell in them....⁸

For Heidegger, dwellings exceed the mere physicality of buildings. Dwellings have to be capable of engaging us, so that we might be able to truly dwell. For him the act of dwelling is a state of mind, a sense of being which is required before we can build properly: “Only if we are capable of dwelling, only then can we build.”⁹

Heidegger, although not an architect, makes an important distinction between buildings and dwellings, much the same distinction that contemporary architects should make between the latter and house. While maintaining the essence of remaining, —“to dwell, to be set at peace, means to remain at peace within the free, the preserve, the free sphere that safeguards each thing in its nature. The fundamental character of dwelling is this sparing and preserving.”¹⁰—, Heidegger has added a further layer of meaning beyond the temporal and the



Fig. 2.1 - Martin Heidegger's Hut, an exemplary "Dwelling".

physical: the act of dwelling is now recognized as fundamental to our very existence: “Dwelling, however, is the basic character of Being in keeping with which mortals exist.”¹¹ Buildings or houses are no longer acceptable, they are (in ways that we are just beginning to understand) functionally deficient.

Christian Norberg-Schulz has taken Heidegger’s thoughts on the nature of dwellings and what it means to dwell and he has clarified them for an architectural audience. While Heidegger knew the importance of the act of dwelling, and he recognized that certain structures were conducive to this act (or state of mind) and some were not, Norberg-Schulz has explored what this means in an architectural context.

To dwell in the qualitative sense is a basic condition of humanity. When we identify with a place, we dedicate ourselves to a way of being in the world. Therefore dwelling demands something from us, as well as from our places. We have to have an open mind, and the places have to offer rich possibilities for identification.¹²

If we are to dwell, and more importantly for architects, if we are to construct dwellings, we must be open to the ways in which we are affected by the built environment, and we must design with the intent to create spaces which constructively communicate with dwellers. Both dwelling and dweller must be receptive to their opposite. Perhaps Juhani Pallasmaa puts it best:

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... not homes. Yet it is the capacity of the dwellings 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.¹³

Home

The word “home” comes from the Old English “ham,” which meant “dwelling, house, estate, village.” “Ham,” along with the Germanic “heim” and Gothic “haims” has its origins in the Old Norse word “heimr.”¹⁴ What is truly interesting about this word, however, is that as Witold Rybczynski, architect and former professor of architecture at McGill University, points out, barring the few languages which co-opted the Norse “heimr,” there are almost no other languages in which one word conveys the full meaning that home possesses.

This wonderful word, “home,” which connotes a physical “place” but also has the more abstract sense of a “state of being,” has no equivalent in the Latin or Slavic languages. German, Danish, Swedish, Icelandic, Dutch, and English all have similar sounding words for ‘home,’ all derived from the Old Norse “heimr.”¹⁵

The modern Merriam-Webster definition of “home” includes the concept of shelter, family, refuge, and one’s “native place,” but it does not address that sensation of home that we can feel.

home

–noun

1. a house, apartment, or other shelter that is the usual residence of a person, family, or household.
2. the place in which one’s domestic affections are centered.
3. an institution for the homeless, sick, etc.: a nursing home.
4. the dwelling place or retreat of an animal.
5. the place or region where something is native or most common.
6. any place of residence or refuge: a heavenly home.
7. a person’s native place or own country.
27. at home,
 - a. in one’s own house or place of residence.
 - b. in one’s own town or country.
 - d. in a situation familiar to one; at ease: She has a way of making every one feel at home. (Abridged)¹⁶

If we are to investigate home as it pertains to the practice of architecture, we will need a definition which clearly states the nature of the concept, and hopefully concretely addresses the physical and psychological requirements for its attainment. The contemporary definition falls short of what architecture requires of it, and a look at the origins and history of this word and the associated concept will make this abundantly clear.

The Search For Home

Home, as we understand it, is a fairly new concept. Witold Rybczynski has researched the roots of this singular word in his book *Home: A History of an Idea*, and any discussion of the architectural conception of home is deeply indebted to him. He wrote his book after recognizing that something was missing from contemporary home design, something which he found in older houses:

It was only when my wife and I built our own house that I discovered at first hand the fundamental poverty of modern architectural ideas. I found myself turning again and again to memories of older houses, and older rooms, and trying to understand what had made them feel so right, so comfortable.¹⁷

Rybczynski's research led him from the middle ages onward, and he discovered that there were a number of historical elements that needed to converge before a special meaning of home was appropriate. A truly private and personal space was needed, and the creation of this was aided by separating the working and living spaces from one another, and the specialization of rooms for distinct purposes. The gradual segregating of the "family" from servants was also a key component, but this could not have happened without the recognition of childhood as a necessary and positive phase of life.

Today, we all have a place that we call home, and the word has a significant and distinct meaning attached to it. In many cases the word can even conjure up an emotional reaction. As Rowles and Chaudhury state, there is something in the word home that is singular to it:



Fig. 2.2 - Craftmanship and the weight of memory.



Fig. 2.3 - A medieval house interior.

The semantic core of the term immediately captures the popular imagination (it transcends such mundane terms as “setting,” “house,” “residence,” “apartment,” and “accommodation”). People relate to “home” because of its close relevance to their own life experiences and everyday usage on a level far transcending merely a physical structure. Precisely because of this emotional resonance, “home” captures the diversity, complexity, and richness of an essential aspect of being in the world.¹⁸

The word home only began to take on its current meaning about 300 hundred years ago, and while for us the concept of home is familiar and something that we talk about frequently, it is important to remember that this was not always the case.

The Middle Ages

In the middle ages the shelters that people lived in were quite rudimentary. The town bourgeois lived in houses that generally consisted of two floors above a basement, the main floor would contain a shop or a work space if the owner of the house was an artisan.

Upstairs, the living quarters of the house consisted of a one room “hall” in which as many as twenty people would eat, entertain and sleep. Obviously, with this density of population privacy was impossible, and the furniture, what little there was, had to be movable and adaptable: A trunk was used for storage, it would also serve as a seat around the table, and later would become someone’s bed. People slept four or more to a bed, if they had such luxury, and tellingly, there was no division between blood relatives and the servants and apprentices. As Rybczynski points out, “people did not so much live in their house as camp in them.”¹⁹

Family life was severely hampered by these conditions, and at the time there was no conception of childhood as we understand it. Boys as young as seven were sent from the family residence to work as apprentices; they would be fully trained by the age of thirteen. In a situation such as this, there is no privacy within the residence, no sense of personal space as we would understand it, and no conception of permanence or remaining. Words like “self-confidence” and “melancholy” are only a few hundred years old, demonstrating the lack of awareness of the individual in earlier times. Life was about survival, and consequently the people of the middle ages did not think about “family” as we do. Even “comfort” (something they rarely enjoyed), was not a concept that was understood for those living in the middle ages. “Home” did not exist as we understand it.

The 17th Century: The Beginning of “Home”

The beginning of the 17th century brought changes to the way that people lived and worked. The creation of rented accommodation denoted this shift: people no longer necessarily worked and lived in the same space. Because the house was slowly becoming a place solely for living, there was an increase in privacy, and consequently a “growing sense of intimacy, of identifying the house exclusively with family life.”²⁰ As Rybczynski writes, the private residence is still not in a form that we would recognize, as personal privacy was still not taken into consideration:

Salomon de Brosse, who was appointed royal architect to Henry IV in 1608 and who designed the Palais de Luxembourg, lived with his wife and seven children, and an unrecorded number of servants, in two adjoining rooms. These rooms were not only crowded with people, they were full of furniture...²¹

For the bourgeoisie, the house became a place of social theater, and while filled with more rooms and furniture, it was not arranged in such a way as to promote privacy. The interior of the Bourgeois house was for show, and priority was given to appearances.

By the late 17th century in Scandinavia, and more pointedly in the Netherlands, the burgeoning concept of domesticity was concretizing. By now, children (especially those of the middle class) were less likely to be leaving the home at an early age for apprenticeships, and started attending formal schools. While the education process was not lengthy, it still led to a relatively new phenomenon: parents watching their children grow up in the home. This led to an increasing conception of “family,” which is evidenced by the segregation of blood relatives from servants and apprentices within the home.

Dutch homeowners also began to practice an unusual hobby: making scale models of their homes. These re-creations were painstaking in detail, and included everything: furniture and even cutlery. For these people, there was something special, something new about their houses which needed to be explored and commemorated: “Home” (hejm) began to take on a special significance. As Rybczynski noted:

“Home” brought together the meanings of house and of household, of dwelling and of refuge, of ownership and of affection. ‘Home’ meant the house, but also everything that was in it and around it, as well as the people, and the sense of satisfaction and contentment that all these conveyed. You could walk out of the house, but you always returned home.²²



Fig. 2.4 - An example of a Dutch “dollhouse”.

The 18th and 19th Centuries

In the 18th century, the trends that had started in the Netherlands and Scandinavia began to take hold all over western Europe. An increasing desire for privacy had servants being pushed further away from those they served; servants now slept in separate wings or levels of the house, and were summoned with a bell rope. Dumbwaiters were invented, and the widespread replacement of fireplaces with stoves allowed the fires to be kept burning from rooms adjacent to the private bedroom without disturbing the master. In keeping with the Zeitgeist, Louis XV rearranged the living quarters at Versailles, privatizing his suite of rooms and limiting access.

By the 19th century, the desire for privacy had reached its epoch. In England, the private residence had become a warren of rooms, secret staircases and hallways. The 19th century house was a fortress of solitude, even close neighbors would send a note ahead, or leave their calling card before visiting. Life at this time was sedentary and house-centric, nearly every activity happened in the house. Rybczynski describes the 19th century as...

...the age of conversation – and of gossip. The novel became popular. So did indoor games; men played billiards, women embroidered, and together they played cards. They organized dances, dinner parties, and amateur theatricals. They turned tee from a Dutch word (and a foreign beverage; it was also known as China drink), into a ritual. They went on placid walks and admired one of their great accomplishments, the English garden. Since all of these activities took place in and around the house, the result was that the home acquired a position of social importance that it had never had before, or since. No longer a place of work as it had been in the Middle Ages, the home became a place of leisure.²³

The Modern Home

The 20th century brought about a movement towards efficiency and function. An increase in the types and number of jobs for women meant an increase in cost of hired help, and consequently a reduction in the number of servants a household could afford. In America, where higher wages and greater opportunity made domestic servants even more expensive, only the wealthiest of families could afford such help. This change meant that housewives would be given more responsibility with regards to maintaining the home. The advent of the electrical age brought labor-saving devices, but more and more houses needed to be designed in such a way as to limit the amount of work that was required to maintain them, and increase the level of comfort for those tasked with the domestic chores. This reorganization of domestic

responsibilities also led to a reduction in the size of houses, and a simplification of the plan; houses were now being designed around the user.

Initially slow to incorporate new technologies and ideas into house design, architects began to be seen as remnants of an archaic age, unable to address the modern concerns of homebuyers. This is exemplified by the fact that Ellen Richards, an eminent industrial and environmental chemist, and pioneer in the field of home economics seemed, in the words of Rybczynski, “skeptical of architect’s ability, or at least of their interest, in the area of domestic planning. Writing in 1905, she saw the need for a concerted effort to educate ‘house-experts,’ but pointedly did not include architects in this category.”²⁴ Architects had fallen behind and lost the trust of dwellers around the world; others (interior designers, descended from upholsterers) stepped into the void.

Le Corbusier exploded onto the architectural scene in the 1920’s, bringing with him his incredibly minimalist view of the private residence. Everything that wasn’t functionally necessary was removed: decoration was abolished, personal objects had to go, any evidence of human occupation or the potential for such evidence should be avoided. The home was now what Corbusier called a “machine for living”, designed to meet the physical needs of its inhabitants.

Corbusier’s vision, however, would not dominate the century. While his ideas for modern housing towers can be seen (for better or worse) in most large western cities, the suburban tract house became the choice of the majority. Originating as the Garden City movement in the 19th century, these suburban developments were to be planned, self-contained communities surrounded by greenbelts, with a mix of residential, commercial, and industrial uses. These developments were seen a type of modern utopia, a panacea for the ills of the turn-of-the-century city. The post WWI period marked the first explosion of this housing type, but the real inundation began after WWII, when the burgeoning car culture, inexpensive loans, returning war veterans, and the consequent baby-boom made for a perfect storm in which new and affordable housing was needed immediately, and suburban developments were able to fill that role. Unfortunately, these new developments ended up being the degenerate offspring of the earlier visions. Where craftsmanship in the homes, and careful, holistic community planning had been the ideal, these were replaced with quick, cheap, mass-produced houses, and developments that were nothing more than bedroom communities, with only residential areas. These developments expanded and morphed into the suburban developments of the 1970’s, with the individual houses growing larger, while the lots grew smaller, until we find



Fig. 2.5 - Le Corbusier’s pure housing form.



Fig. 2.6 - Levittown promotional material.

ourselves with the situation as it is today, with generic monstrosities on 40' lots. What started as a vision for idyllic communities with the benefits of both the urban and rural style of living have become generic, mass-produced housing units whose success is based on a misinformed sense of what home is and what it can be.

Home as an Architectural Concept

It has been a lengthy journey to arrive at a moment when we can say with confidence that we understand the history of home. From its beginnings in the middle ages, a time when even comfort was an alien concept, to the lush but hollow interiors of the 18th century, to the “machine for living” of the modern age, that special feeling of home has followed us and grown. So, what then is home for us? What is home in an age of self-aware individuals who have the benefit of modern psychological knowledge? Why do the types of residences we find populating the suburbs of our cities in ever increasing numbers fail to evoke the feeling of home? Rybczynski writes that

...hominess is not neatness. Otherwise everyone would live in replicas of the kinds of sterile and impersonal homes that appear in interior-design and architectural magazines. What these spotless rooms lack, or what crafty photographers have carefully removed, is any evidence of human occupation.²⁵



Fig. 2.7 - Where is the evidence of inhabitation?

In a way, it does seem that we do want to live (at least consciously) in these “sterile and impersonal” environments. People buy these condos and houses (erroneously referred to as “homes”) because they believe that all they can expect from the private residence is a house, a standard living unit in a standard community. We must disabuse people of this notion, and demonstrate that architecture holds the promise of more: a home which contains and responds to both the mind and the body, a home which is uniquely constructed for unique individuals. A home is more than simply walls and a roof, it is more than merely a shelter. For Pallasmaa, A home is also a set of rituals, personal rhythms and routines of everyday life. Home cannot be pro-

duced 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.²⁶

The concept of home exceeds the spatial and typological constraints of house or apartment. What we feel as “home” is indicative of a relationship between individual dweller and dwelling.

A Vocabulary for Home-Making

Having explored the origins of these three distinct words, the misnomer that is “home-builder” becomes abundantly clear. How can one who constructs suburban “cookie-cutter” houses, and turns the private shelter into a mere commodity call themselves home-builder? By the same token, how can those trained to understand and create space be content to build only houses?

It would seem that we have all forgotten the power of the built environment, and we have resigned ourselves to inhabiting spaces which are mere shelters. Martin Heidegger recognized the beginnings of this when he considers the rush to rebuild Europe in the aftermath of World War II:

We are attempting to trace in thought the nature of dwellings. The next step on this path would be the question: what is the state of dwelling in our precarious age? On all sides we hear talk about the housing shortage, and with good reason. Now is there not just talk; there is action too. We try to fill the need by providing houses, by promoting the building of houses, planning the whole architectural enterprise. However hard and bitter, however hampering and threatening the lack of houses remains, the real plight of dwelling does not lie merely in a lack of houses..... The real plight lies in this, that mortals ever search anew for the nature of dwelling, that they must ever learn to dwell. ²⁷

The degradation of our language in this area, the convergence of definition between these three words (house, dwelling, home) is symptomatic of two larger issues: we have forgotten how to dwell, and we no longer aspire to create dwellings. Without dwellings, we lack spaces with which we can form the relationship of home, and ultimately, we will find that this situation has detrimental effects. If we are to begin to create spaces which shelter both the body and the mind, a new vocabulary, or rather a return to the historical understanding of the vocabulary that pertains to space-making is required.

For the purposes of this thesis, we will ascribe modern and useful definitions to the following words:

House

A house refers to a private residence which does not have an atmosphere conducive to dwelling and consequently, home-making. The house will have been designed with no thought given to the concept of dwelling, and the house will not aspire to contain or be responsive to unconscious desires. The house will only reflect the conscious mind or persona of the owner, and thusly it is functionally deficient. The house is only suitable as a physical shelter, and is the result of negligence on the behalf to the designer.

Dwelling

A dwelling is a private residence which has an atmosphere conducive to home-making. The dwelling will have been designed with the intent to shelter both the body and the mind. These dwellings will reflect the true self of the owner/dweller, and will in fact encourage the act of dwelling or simply “being” within it.

Dweller

A dweller is an individual who is perceptually open to the influence of the built environment, and accepts its significance in his or her life. A dweller should be someone who knows themselves in the fullest extent and is at peace with that knowledge.

Home

Home is a feeling that we attribute to a physical space, but which in fact occurs in the relationship between a physical space (dwelling), and an individual psyche (dweller). Home is a sense of belonging which is triggered when the values and unconscious desires of the psyche are present in the space and are reflected back to the psyche through spatial relationships, objects, and symbols. Home requires the presence of a dwelling in the Heideggerian sense (a place of being and remaining), and as described by Pallasmaa: a structure onto which we can “secrete” the substance of home (namely, memories and stories). Home is a place of personal continuity and identification. “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." ²⁸

Now that we have an appropriate vocabulary to discuss the concept of home and home-making in an architectural context, we must now explore why this concept should be so important to designers. In order to do this we will be looking at the influence of home, successful examples of dwellings, and the mechanics by which dwellings interact with dwellers to create a sense of home.



The Sheppard Cottage

The name of the lake is Kawagama. Cool water slaps gently against the side of the canoe making a faint resonance, drum-like, within its shell. It would seem that the lake has something to say to me. The midday sun is turning the back of my neck red, and I squint against the light reflected off a thousand waves. Reaching to my right, I pull towards the shore where evergreens cascade over the steep, rocky incline before pulling up suddenly, surprised, scratching and clinging with their roots, trying desperately not to fall into the inky depths of the lake.

Continuing to paddle, I can begin to make out a building through the the almost impenetrable forest. Dark itself, it seems to belong to the place, as if conjured by man straight up from the rock it sits upon. I make it to the dock, and tying off, I stride up the incline towards the cottage. Timeless, the forest has claimed it as its own. Leaping up the steps to the porch, I push through the door marked "Sheppard" and am greeted with the smell of a hundred summers. There is a chalkboard hanging on the wall that is marked with the initials of those who have visited this year, but evidence of even more names, and other summers surrounds me: worn-out furniture, a collection of pipes, a musty captain's hat. The place

itself holds memories of those who have come before in ways far more enduring than white chalk.

Turning around, I look back out to the bottomless lake surrounded by a topography pulled directly from a group of seven paintings. I can see no one and no thing. The earth is still.

Leaving the cottage itself, I walk, barefoot along the path that leads to the point. I feel every stone and root beneath my feet. I am aware of the world around me in ways that elude me elsewhere. Emerging from the friendly shadows of the forest, I move along the ramshackle wooden bridge that leads to the massive rock outcrop that protects the shore from the relentless waves. The stone is hot from the bleaching rays of the sun, and rough beneath my feet. Walking forward down the slope, I enter the dark, welcome coolness of the lake. Another step and the water is to my knees, my mind beginning to clear. One more step and the waves lap at my waist, I am forgetting the petty concerns of life. Deeper and deeper I walk into the crisp depths. Soon I will understand this world.

Those who arrive at Thekla can see little of the city, beyond the plank fences, the sackcloth screens, the scaffoldings, the metal armatures, the wooden catwalks hanging from ropes or supported by sawhorses, the ladders, the trestles. If you ask, "Why is Thekla's construction taking such a long time?" the inhabitants continue hoisting sacks, lowering leaded strings, moving long brushes up and down, as they answer. "So that its destruction cannot begin." And if asked whether they fear that, once the scaffoldings are removed, the city may begin to crumble and fall to pieces, they add hastily, in a whisper, "Not only the city."

-Italo Calvino ¹

Home, the Self, and Identity

IN EXAMINING THE GENESIS of the concept of home we found that there was more to this word, this very familiar idea, than perhaps we expected. Home is more than a simple brick and mortar proposition, it is a place with which we have a special relationship, and a place with which we identify.

If we are to fully comprehend the importance of home and the need to claim this concept under the jurisdiction of architecture, we must explore the nature of this relationship that exists between space and the individual. To accomplish this goal, it makes sense to begin by examining precisely what it is that constitutes our individual identity, how it is formed, what the consequences are of either an ill-formed identity or a total lack thereof, and the role that the home (both as a concept and a dwelling), plays in this process. Looking at the work of the psychologist and neo-Freudian Erik Erikson will aid us in this task. Erikson was one of the originators of Ego psychology, and his work is still highly respected.

In the Eriksonian framework of identity, the individual identity is broken into three related parts: ego identity, personal identity, and the social or cultural identity. If we attempt to define these concepts without grossly oversimplifying, the different aspects of this threefold structure break down thusly:

Ego Identity is the sense of personal continuity, it encompasses all that we are, individually, and all that we have been. It is the “I,” the self.

Personal Identity includes both the individual idiosyncrasies that express our differences from others, and our own personal view of our ego identity. If ego identity is the self, then personal identity is our self-worth.

Social or Cultural Identity is our understanding of the world, and specifically our place within it.

These component identities (that which we are and have been, the way in which we see and value ourselves, and how we understand the world and view our place and role within it), this is who we are, and it is absolutely critical that these components are healthy and balanced if we hope to be happy, functioning individuals. In the words of Erikson, a healthy personality “actively masters his environment, shows a certain unity of personality, and is able to perceive the world and himself correctly.”²

A poor self-image or a fundamental misunderstanding of the world around us and/or our place in it can be a crippling disability which can lead to self-doubt, anxiety, restlessness, and even frustration and anger at one's inability to comprehend their world. We, as individuals have certain identity-related developmental needs, and if those needs are unmet or disrupted it can result in serious and lifelong psychological trauma.

In the past 50 years the links between home and the healthy development of identity have been explored, and it has been discovered that the home plays a crucial role in identity formation. Let us examine these links with an eye towards concretizing our understanding of the importance of home.

Place and Identity

In the preamble to the 1972 version of the Constitution of the State of Montana lies a curious statement:

We the people of Montana grateful to God for the quiet beauty of our state, the grandeur of our mountains, the vastness of our rolling plains, and desiring to improve the quality of life, equality of opportunity and to secure the blessings of liberty for this and future generations do ordain and establish this constitution.³

Why did the people of Montana (or rather, their representatives) feel that it was necessary to include this beautiful description of their state in the preamble or their updated constitution? Why is the “grandeur of (their) mountains, the vastness of (their) rolling plains” important enough to begin a document that codifies who they are, what they believe, and how they are to be governed? In his book *If This is Your Land, Where are Your Stories?*, University of Toronto professor J. Edward Chamberlin asks similar questions and quotes the historian Daniel Kemmis in his response: “(Perhaps) the way they felt about the place they inhabited was an important part of what they meant when they said ‘we the people.’”⁴ While at first this statement may seem strange to us, if we think back to our own experiences we may find similar sentiment attached to places we called “home.” Where we came from, and the place in which we find ourselves now both hold immense influence over how we come to understand the world, and how we understand ourselves. These influences may not be immediately obvious, but that fact does not diminish their power. As Winnifred Gallagher, author of several books on the relationship between people and places writes:

The reasons why we feel at home in certain places...have less to do with aesthetic fashion than with evolutionary, personal, and cultural needs of which many of us are unaware. ⁵

Our homes are the original spaces in which we experience belonging, and they are the framework through which we learn to understand the world and our place within it. From an early age, and continuing throughout our lives, the places we call home help shape and define our very identity, and those who are deprived of this experience suffer greatly for that loss.

Home and the Self

As we discussed in the previous chapter, home is not merely a structure or an area, it is a place with which we have a multi-dimensional, symbiotic relationship. Rowles and Chaudhury state that “it is now widely accepted that home provides a sense of identity, a locus of security, and a point of centering and orientations in relation to a chaotic world beyond the threshold.”⁶ Though there are some of us that may have an intuitive understanding of this relationship and its importance, the fact remains that most designers are ignorant of both its considerable power and effects, the investigation of which the psychological community has been fruitfully occupied with.

“Home” is where we belong. It is in our experience, recollections, imagination, and aspirations. Home provides the physical and social context of life experience, burrows itself into the material reality of memories, and provides an axial core for our imagination. The experience of home environments, the relationship of the experience with self-identity, and the evolving meaning of home over the life course have received increased attention from scholars in recent decades. ⁷

This increase in focus from the psychological community should be of great interest and help to designers. The home is instrumental in shaping our individual identity, and thus it is a concept that we can no longer afford to disregard. It is our responsibility to gain and understanding of the effects of the home and make home-creation one of our goals when designing.

Interpreting the World through the Home

Christian Norberg-Schulz writes that “in the house, man experiences his being part of the world.”⁸ Though he uses house where we would now more accurately use home, he correctly points out one of the important roles that the home plays in our development: Home is critical to the development of our identity. All spaces speak to us, but it is those which we call home that speak the loudest, and tell us the most about ourselves and our place in the world. Norberg-Schulz continues by observing that...

...the world is complex and changing and distinguished by a multitude of incomprehensible nuances. To understand this world, the general explanation of public architecture is not sufficient; here man also needs an image which offers security in his daily life. That is, he needs a house which is simultaneously refuge and an opening on the world.⁹

Why is it that in our times of greatest turmoil and difficulty, so many of us choose to return “home,” either to our childhood home, or a retreat into our current abode if the former is no longer available? What is it exactly that we are hoping to find amongst the emotional and mnemonic detritus of our early years? What draws us back to this space, and how can we expect to be able to extract anything from an inanimate objects and spaces? We go home because as Chamberlin writes: “At the end of the day, it is the place we call home, a place with both sacred and secular significance, that provides our most reliable point of reference for understanding these conflicts...”¹⁰

What he means by this is that the home acts as the original framework through which we come to understand the world and our place in it. Our very identity is built upon on that understanding of the world, and thus every decision we make, and every emotion that we feel will be shaped to some degree by that first place of total understanding and belonging: the place we call ‘home.’

Through identification man possesses a world, and thus an identity. Today identity is often considered an “interior” quality of each individual, and growing up is understood as a “realization” of the hidden self. The theory of identification, however, teaches us that identity rather consists in an interiorization of understood things, and that growing up therefore depends on being open to what surrounds us. Although the world is immediately given, it has to be interpreted to be understood, and although man is part of the world, he has to concretize his belonging to feel at home.¹¹

The influence of the home is strong and multifarious. Extending far beyond the basic functions of sheltering us from the weather and providing us with a place of personal, physical security, the private dwelling finds one of its most important purposes in this “interpretation” of the world. It is our anchor, a center outside the self in which we are able to concretize our sense of belonging. In order for a residence to provide these important functions, it must be more than a mere house, it must be a dwelling: a space attuned to the crucial process which is unfolding within it. The home is critical to our development because, in the words of Norberg-Schulz, “The house gathers the chosen meanings which are intended by Wittgenstein, when saying: ‘I am my world.’ By means of the house we become friends with a world, and gain the foothold we need to act in it. As an architectural figure standing forth in the environment, the house confirms our identification and offers security.”¹²

Walden Pond

In July of 1845, Henry David Thoreau left his town life behind him, made his way to the woodlot of his friend and colleague, Ralph Waldo Emerson, and began construction on a modest hut whose diminutive size belied its coming fame and lasting impact. Thoreau found the consumerist and materialist tendencies of the society in which he lived (mid-19th century Concord, Massachusetts) distasteful, and he feared the dehumanizing effects of the burgeoning industrial revolution. In order to escape this particular reality, he decided to build himself a cabin in the woods outside of town with an eye to both coming to understand the society he distrusted, and learning how live in a less frantic, overcomplicated way.

Thoreau ended up staying at Walden Pond for a little over two years, and while there he lived a simple, agrarian lifestyle while working on his novel *A Week on the Concord and Merrimack Rivers*. While many misunderstand his intent and believe that Thoreau retreated from the world and lived as a hermit for those two years, the opposite is actually true. He entertained many guests, and frequently went into town to visit family and friends or to catch up on the news about the community. Thoreau’s physical isolation actually caused him to become more aware of the world around him, and it was this closeness to nature, the discovery of his true needs and desires and the world in general that he cherished. His cabin was not a fortress, it was a connective node which brought the environment to Thoreau and allowed him understand and begin to identify with the surrounding woods. For him it became an example of what Frank Oswald and Hans-Werner Wahl, both psychologists at the University of Heidelberg call a “...physical frame and conceptual system for the ordering, transformation



Fig. 3.1 - Henry David Thoreau.

and interpretation of the physical and abstract aspects of domestic daily life”¹³

It was the simplicity, the transparency and lightness that he truly enjoyed about his little hut. The first winter he waited for as long as he could physically hold out before building a hearth and plastering the walls, so much did he love the breeze and sunlight filtering through the knotty wooden envelope, and the woodland creatures who would occasionally venture inside. Here he describes the wonderful airiness of his home as the cold weather begins to set in:

The north wind had already begun to cool the pond, though it took many weeks of steady blowing to accomplish it, it is so deep. When I began to have a fire at evening, before I plastered my house, the chimney carried smoke particularly well, because of the numerous chinks between the boards. Yet I passed some cheerful evenings in that cool and airy apartment, surrounded by the rough brown boards full of knots, and rafters with the bark on high overhead. My house never pleased my eye so much after it was plastered, though I was obliged to confess that it was more comfortable. ¹⁴

In Thoreau’s cabin we find a perfect expression of home as locus: a literal and figurative center of his reinvented self, a filter through which he could utilize his newly attuned senses to understand the world and his place within it. The cabin came to embody his new vision for himself and for society at large: simplicity and economy rather the materialism, knowledge of the self and of the world through solitary contemplation. Thoreau’s woodland home became an extension of himself, as structure that embodied both his desires and dreams.



Fig. 3.2 - Re-creation of Thoreau’s Cabin.

Heidegger's Hut

When Martin Heidegger's professorship took him to Marburg, he sought to create a retreat for himself in the familiar woods of his childhood on the edge of the Black Forest. There was something special about the place, something that allowed him to focus and open his mind to the philosophical nature of the world.

On a deep winter's night when a wild, pounding snowstorm rages around the cabin and veils and covers everything, that is the perfect time for philosophy. Then its questions become simple and essential.”¹⁵

The hut itself is of a simple design, a 6 x 7m rectangle containing four approximately equal rooms: dining room, kitchen, bedroom, and study. Tucked into the side of a hill overlooking the village of Todtnauberg, the hut is a classic example of geographer Jay Appleton's "Prospect/Refuge" theory. The hill that encircles it from behind, and the copse of trees which partially obscures views to the hut from the surrounding hills provide the "refuge," while the hut's placement high in the valley provides a sweeping "prospect" of the valley and town below. Compact and earthy, it is easy to see why one would enjoy spending time in this place, and yet Heidegger's relationship with the hut and its surroundings transcended mere enjoyment or relaxation. In the hut he was able to have insights about himself and the universe at large that were otherwise inaccessible to him.

As at Walden Pond for Thoreau, Heidegger's hut became a vessel for this thought within the landscape and an instrument for internalizing the straightforward logic of nature. His experience of the changing seasons, the primal power of the weather when it assaulted the valley, and his observation of the simple relationship the farmers who lived in the surrounding hills had with these forces shaped and influenced how he thought and consequently what he wrote.

This is my work-world....Strictly speaking I myself never observe the landscape. I experience its hourly changes, day and night, in the great comings and goings of the seasons. The gravity of the mountains and the hardness of their primeval rock, the slow and deliberate growth of the fir-trees, the brilliant, simple splendor of the meadows in bloom, the rush of the mountain brook in the long autumn night, the stern simplicity of the flatlands covered with snow – all of this moves and flows through and penetrates daily existence up there, and not in forced moments of "aesthetic" immersion of artificial empathy, but only when one's existence stands in its work.¹⁶



Fig. 3.3 - Heidegger in his hut.



Fig. 3.4 - A place of prospect and refuge.

In the hut at Todtnauberg, Heidegger experienced a new way of being. It was a place of incredible importance to him, and he guarded his solitude vigorously. He eschewed visitors (except for a few graduate students early in his time as a professor, or close friends), and even limited how often he brought his family with him to the hut, perhaps out of a fear of disrupting the relationship he had developed with the place which allowed him such great insight and focus.

People in the city often wonder whether one gets lonely up in the mountains among the peasants for such long and monotonous periods of time. But it isn't loneliness, it is solitude....Solitude has the peculiar and original power of not isolating us but projecting our whole existence out into the vast nearness of the presence of all things.¹⁷

There is no question that his time at the Black Forest hut greatly influenced Heidegger's work. Some scholars, including Adam Sharr (author of *Heidegger's Hut*, the definitive publication of Heidegger's relationship with his hut), even go so far as to make the argument that the "fourfold" Heidegger talked about in "Building Dwelling Thinking," which consisted of Earth, Sky, Divinities, and Mortals, was modeled upon the fourfold wholeness of the hut (Kitchen, Bedroom, Study, and Dining Room). Whether or not this particular connection is valid is not something that has progressed beyond the realm of speculation, but there is no doubt of the hut's impact on his philosophy. In the mountains and trees around him he perceived all that he was attempting to understand and philosophize. The answers were already there, waiting, ready to be liberated by his pen. The hut was his link to and mediator with this world.

Heidegger felt that there was an inherent honesty and purity in the simple hut and the primal power of its surroundings. He felt these traits express themselves within his own being as well during the times that he resided there, and expressed dismay at the layers of persona one was forced to wear over one's true self while in the more complex world below.

I'm off to the cabin – and am looking forward a lot to the strong mountain air – this soft light stuff down here ruins one in the long run. Eight days lumbering – then again writing....It's late night already – the storm is sweeping over the hill, the beams are creaking in the cabin, life lies pure, simple and great before the soul...Sometimes I no longer understand that down there one can play such strange roles.¹⁸

In the hut, Heidegger was able to simply remain in his true self, commune with the natural world that surrounded him, and find a place of respite and shelter from the difficulties of the outside world.



Fig. 3.5 - Mediator of the landscape.



Fig. 3.6 - Heidegger's work world.

Interpretive Dwellings



Fig. 3.7 - An Ontario cottage.



Fig. 3.8 - What is special about these moments?

Both Thoreau's cabin at Walden Pond and Heidegger's Black Forest hut serve as excellent examples of the way in which a dwelling can become a place we honor with the word "home" through its interpretation of the world around us, and its revelation of the self. The home is a critical component in the process through which we become healthy, functioning individuals, and as such the concept of home is something we must endeavour to more fully comprehend.

Interestingly, both Thoreau's cabin and Heidegger's hut are simple, primal structures, closely related to what we in southern and central Ontario would call a "cottage." The term "cottage" originated in the middle ages and denoted housing for agricultural workers ("cotters"). By 19th century England, the use of the term had shifted and was generally used to describe small, cozy houses in rural settings (although these were sometimes in villages). In Canada and parts of the United States, the term refers to a summer residence, and although many of the early cottages were small, simple, and sometimes inaccessible by road, small size and coziness are no longer prerequisites.

It is, perhaps, within these original style of cottages (or camps, as they are referred to in northern Ontario) that we find that our understanding of home has not been completely lost. The experience described at such a cottage retreat in the personal narrative that precedes this chapter is one that those fortunate enough to have come in contact with one of these special place are likely familiar with. Away from the vicissitudes of urban and suburban life, we are able to find ourselves and relate to our world in these simple dwellings. Why we are able to construct such positive and responsive dwellings only outside the confines of our normal life is a question worth asking. Perhaps, like Heidegger, we are so used to playing "such strange roles" "down there" ¹⁹ that we do not investigate what it is about these places that make us feel whole again, and why we do not seem to be able to recreate this sense in our permanent residences.

If, indeed like Norberg-Schulz wrote, the home is the means by which we all "become friends with a world," if it is so crucial to the development our very identities, then as designers, as people who have grown up within this framework, and now have become its creators, should we not be intensely interested in how the people we design for are "being introduced to the world"? Truly, what could be more important than understanding exactly how the spaces that we create and live in shape our understanding of and reactions to the world around us? While we may not all desire to live in simple huts, this does not mean that we are incapable of creating contemporary dwellings which can serve the same function for us as the primitive residences of Thoreau and Heidegger did for them. Our home lets us understand the world, and it profoundly shapes the people we are to become. If our mission is to create buildings for people, then there is no more important concept for us to understand.

Home as a Representation of Self

We have seen the importance of a healthy identity-development process, and we have seen the role that the home can play in this process as a locus; a center and framework through which we come to understand the world and our place in it. Although this function of the the home is undeniably crucial to our development as individuals, we should be mindful that the home's relationship with us goes beyond this.

To have a healthy self-concept means that we have been able to have some insight into our true selves, and that by and large we appreciate and enjoy that image. This does not mean that we gloss over those parts of ourselves that we are not happy with and wish to change, it merely means that we have found a semblance of peace with the person we understand ourselves to be. When this is the case, we often find that we are most comfortable with others who share traits with us, or see the world in a similar fashion. The same is true with spaces. As De Botton writes, "The buildings we admire are ultimately those which, in a variety of ways, extol values we think worthwhile."²⁰

Our interactions with a space leave indelible marks upon it, and over time the dwellings which we inhabit can come to take on a resemblance of the dweller: "From birth on, persons interact with their social and physical environment, leading to a meaningful representation of the self within the environment."²¹ In fact, if we think about our own experiences it is likely that we are able to recall many spaces (perhaps the homes of others), that are surprisingly accurate reflections of those that dwell within them. When this mirroring or representation is present we will find that more often than not, as de Botton phrased it, "those places whose outlook matches and legitimates our own, we tend to honour with the word 'home.'"²²

If residences that reflect our values or mirror our identities seem (at least anecdotally) to be places that feel like home, it would make sense that this would be a phenomenon that we should investigate and potentially encourage if the correlation holds up to scrutiny. This process of mirroring between dwelling and dweller has historically tended to be an organic process and can take a significant amount of time, but perhaps we can accelerate this natural process by attempting to intentionally create dwellings in the image of the dweller. While this may seem to us an intuitively difficult task, we can be comforted by the fact that it has been accomplished before.

The two examples of home as representation of self we will be looking at are Casa Malaparte on Capri, and Carl Jung's tower complex at Bollingen. Both of these dwellings tackle the problem of home as self-representation, but they do so with different goals, and with different understandings of the self. Nevertheless, each ended up becoming places their creators called "home."

Casa Malaparte: A House Like Me



Fig. 3.8 - What is special about these moments?



Fig. 3.10 - An austere, prison-like interior.

Casa Malaparte is considered by many to be a modernist masterpiece. Perched proudly on a rocky outcrop that overlooks the green waters of the Bay of Naples, the clean lines of the uncompromising other edifice immediately give the impression that something special has been created in this place. What is not immediately obvious without knowing the history of this building and visiting the interior is exactly why it is both an excellent example of a style, as well as a special place. What we find at Casa Malaparte is a house that clearly and accurately represents the concept of house as symbol or representation of self.

The house, as mentioned, is of an undeniably modernist style (in no short measure owing to the involvement of rationalist master Adalberto Libera and Malaparte's own interest in the modern aesthetic), but the obvious care put into the task of self-symbol creation is far in advance of contemporary thought at the time. Marida Talamona, in her book *Casa Malaparte*, writes:

The house was Malaparte's private space, a physical reminder of his political confinement to Lipari during fascism, an "image of my nostalgia" for the prison. It was, at the same time, many houses, depending of the moment and the poetic theme: the empty and surreal hall is next to the decadent room of the favorita; a room with a big Tyrolean majolica stove that suggests the Stube of an alpine cabin contrasts with the house's total immersion into the natural setting of a Greek tragedy. Yet the controlling idea was one of a unity that embraced contradictions and incoherence: a "house like me," Malaparte called it.²³

What definition of the self can we find that surpasses "a unity that embrace(s) contradiction and incoherence" in both accuracy and brevity? Unquestionably apt for even the most even-tempered and grounded of us, this definition was especially accurate in regards to Kurt Erich Suckert, also known as Curzio Malaparte. Malaparte was at varying times in his life a writer, propagandist, soldier, film director, actor, and playwright. A polarizing figure in Italian culture, his interest in politics was piqued early in his life and his zeal for the topic (and his undeniable love of the spotlight) would be a central force in shaping his development.

A leader in the Republican Party's youth movement, he moved on to radical nationalism before he began a tumultuous relationship with the Fascists in 1922 when he joined their party. Various a hero and a heretic within the party, he was responsible for many fascist publications, and was tasked with remaking *La Stampa* into a Fascist paper. Ever the fearless contrarian, at the height of his influence in 1930-31 he published a series of papers and articles that alternately praised the Soviets and picked out certain fascist party leaders for

ridicule. Malaparte even went so far as to mock *Il Duce's* taste in neck ties, and while there is no empirical evidence to suggest that this was the insult that resulted in his fall from influence and eventual imprisonment, it is not hard to imagine this being the final straw. Whatever the order of events, he was accused of “subversive activities” and arrested in 1933. A very outgoing and social man, his imprisonment, while perhaps mild by any reasonable standard, took a serious toll on him psychologically. His experiences would stay with him for the rest of his life.

His incarceration (followed by a stint where he was merely confined to the Island of Lipari), lasted less than two years, split between the aforementioned Lipari and Forte di Marmi, but it was his time in Lipari that awoke in him a need to own a house on the bay of Naples. While still in prison he began to look for a house to buy, but ultimately could not find one that both suited his needs and his budget. Malaparte was released from prison in 1935, and was allowed to begin writing again, but even in his new-found freedom he could not shake the haunting solitude of prison, nor could he overcome his deep-seated desire to live on the bay of Naples.

In 1938, Curzio contacted Adalberto Libera and tasked him with designing and constructing a modern house on a rocky promontory he had purchased on the island of Capri. In the popular history of the house, Libera is credited with Casa Malaparte, but more recent research (such as the work done by Marida Talamona) disputes Libera's authorship of the house as it exists. While Libera undoubtedly submitted the original documents that were approved for construction, the final house shares very little in common with those drawings, and an examination of the correspondence between the architect and client shows a chilling of the relationship early in the process, and practically no correspondence after 1939, well before completion. It is important to note that Libera himself did not claim Casa Malaparte as his own design.

It now appears that the design and execution of Casa Malaparte was a collaborative effort between Curzio Malaparte and a master builder by the name of Adolfo Amitrano. Over a period of four years between 1938 and 1942 Malaparte devoted much of his time and all of his wealth (including several hundred-thousand lira that were from a loan that was supposedly taken out to pay for his mother's medical care) to the construction of this house-as-portrait. The process was highly intuitive, and rarely used drawings. When words were insufficient, Malaparte would scratch a rudimentary sketch into a photograph illustrating his desire. As the house was built, Malaparte would continuously shift things, remove and add elements, changing colors and textures until it suited him. Several windows were built and then filled in, the sail on the roof patio was constructed in at least three different configurations (including

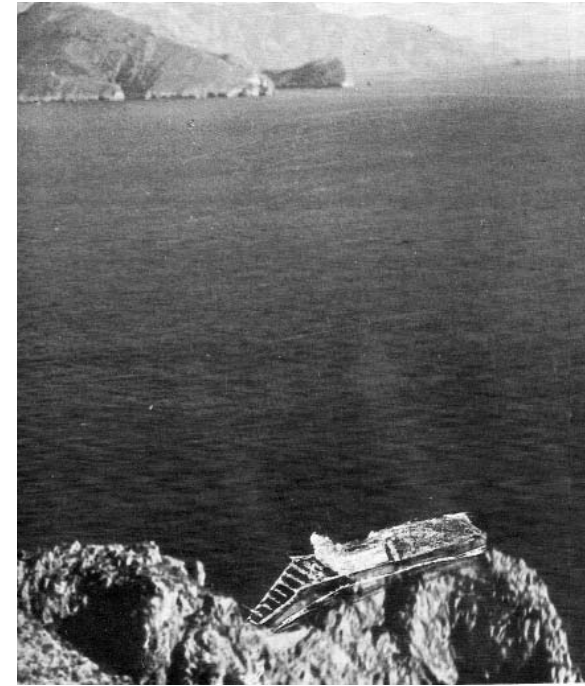


Fig. 3.11 - Sketch of the house on a photograph.



Fig. 3.12 - The Church on Lipari - a recognizable staircase.

being completely removed at one point), the house was painted red, then white, and the red again, and the original entrance actually pierced the enormous “stage” stairs that give the house its famous profile.

The stairs are of particular interest to us, not only due to their fame and fantastic suitability to the shape of the site, but because they are a window into the autobiographical nature of the house.

Malaparte’s time of imprisonment, while trying for him in the moment, later morphed into a memory of a time of simplicity and welcome solitude. His time on the island of Lipari, particularly, became a warm recollection, and elements that that echoed his experiences made their way into the house. Talamona writes:

Four years had passed since the winter of 1934 and Malaparte, by then definitely absolved from his sentence, conjured up that time as one “rich with sentiments and memories,” as “a free and happy period, gone forever.”²⁴

There is a photograph of the writer from 1934 taken in front of a church on Lipari, and what is immediately striking about the photo is the staircase that leads up to the church. Quite narrow at their base (where Malaparte stands), they widen as they rise until they become as wide as the church itself at the top. This trapezoidal shape is very similar to the one Malaparte designed for his house, and is too unusual to be a coincidence.

The influence of his confinement on Lipari was not limited to the staircase. The simple aesthetic of his cell also contributed to the austere feel of the house. Never feeling that he had truly left that time of incarceration behind, he consciously made the decision to echo his surrounding from that year in his new home. As Malaparte himself wrote, paraphrasing his own memoir of the time:

Today more the ever “I feel that cell n.461, 4th wing of Regina Coeli, has remained inside of me, becoming the secret form of my soul.” Today more that ever I feel “like a bird that has swallowed his cage. I take my cell with me inside me, as a pregnant woman carries her baby in her womb” ...Today I live on an island, in a harsh, melancholy, and severe house which I have built alone, lonesome on a cliff hanging over the sea: a house which is the ghost, the secret image of the jail. The image of my Nostalgia.²⁵

Malaparte lived in his house on Capri until his death from lung cancer in 1957. Though his politically active writing continued to take much of his time (now devoted to a communist ideal), as Talamona writes, he would always find time to write and talk about his favorite creation: his magnificent Capri home.

He would never get tired of speaking, in his novels and letters, of his house in Capri, that “adventurous house that is so much like him” (as Sibilla Aleramo observed)...More than any of his other works, Malaparte recognized in the architecture of the house the outline of his own portrait, the essential components of his private and professional biography.²⁶

On his deathbed, Malaparte gained acceptance into the communist party of China, and also made a last minute conversion to Catholicism. For a man whose home’s austere prison-aesthetic made him feel free, it seems fitting that he would take two final extreme and opposing actions to end his life. Casa Malaparte was indeed a “house like me.”

Bollingen: A Confession in Stone

Carl Gustav Jung was one of the great minds of the 20th century, and to him we owe much of our knowledge of the self and of the unconscious. From an early age, Jung felt that he had a special relationship with the universe, and if he did not yet comprehend exactly what this openness and receptiveness to signs and symbols in the world meant, he recognized that it was important, and in the end he dedicated his life to understanding it. Jung described his life as “a story of the self-realization of the unconscious,”²⁶ and one of his core beliefs was that the unconscious, this inner world of the true self, was constantly seeking outward manifestation in the world.

One of the ways in which Jung experienced this manifestation was in his seemingly mystical awareness of place. His first experience with this intuitive understanding was with a large stone embedded in a hill near his father’s residence in Klein-Huningen. As a child he would often sit upon the stone and ask questions about the nature of the self:

I am sitting on top of this stone and it is underneath. But the stone also could say “I” and think: “I am lying here on this slope and he is sitting on top of me.” The question then arose: “Am I the one who is sitting on the stone, or am I the stone on which he is sitting?”²⁷

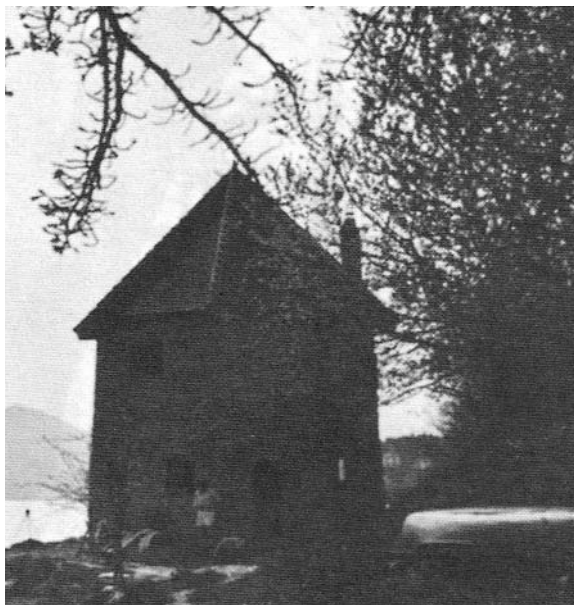


Fig. 3.13 - The original tower at Bollingen.

Even many years later, upon returning to his childhood home, he would say that he had “no doubt whatsoever that this stone stood in special relationship with me.”²⁸

This was not the only special association that Jung had with a place or an object early in his life. Jung’s family life had become unstable, and though he as a child could not fully understand why his father and mother fought, or why they began to sleep apart, he acutely felt the underlying tension and discord. Without knowing why, Jung took it upon himself to carve a little figure of a man from the end of his ruler, eventually cutting it free from the rest of the wooden straight-edge and going so far as to make a small jacket out of wool for this man-in-miniature. He placed the figure in a pencil case along with a “smooth, oblong blackish stone from the Rhine,” which he had “painted with water colors to look as though it were divided into an upper and lower half.”²⁹ Jung understood this stone belonged to the wooded figure, much in the same relationship as he had with the stone near his home. He then took this assemblage and climbed to the reaches of his home’s “forbidden”³⁰ and rotting attic, visiting this private and elevated space in secret whenever he felt wronged or sad; always bringing an offering to the figure on a little rolled up piece of paper.

These relationships in which Jung participated had a profound effect on him as a youngster, but the lasting impact of his stone and the attic shrine were demonstrated later in his life.

In 1922, Jung bought a parcel of land on Upper Lake Zürich near the area where he and his family had been camping in the summers, initially planning to make a simple African-style hut in which all activity would be gathered around a central hearth. He desired a hut of this type for its primitive and womb-like space, but soon he felt this design inadequate to fulfill his now increased ambition for this project:

Gradually, through my scientific work, I was able to put my fantasies and the contents of the unconscious on a solid footing. Words and paper, however, did not seem real enough to me; something more was needed. I had to achieve a kind of representation in stone of my innermost thoughts and of the knowledge I had acquired. Or, to put it another way, I had to make a confession of faith in stone. That was the beginning of the “Tower,” the house which I built for myself at Bollingen.³¹

When he found the hut concept too primitive, he returned to his childhood connections with stone and the secret heights of the dilapidated attic, and decided that a second floor would be required. The building material would be stone.

Construction started on the first round tower in 1923, two months after the death of his invalid mother, and immediately Jung found a sense of “repose and renewal”³² in his new dwelling. Soon, however, he found that this dwelling did not fully embody the concept of the unconscious as he wished it to, and so four years later, in 1927, he added what would become the central section, replete with a tower-like annex. Again he eventually felt the structure to be unsatisfactory, and after another four year span he expanded the annex with a second, low tower so that he might have a private room for himself, that no one was to enter unless invited. So jealously did he guard his solitude that he alone had a key to his “retiring” room.

Still unsatisfied with his “confession in stone,” and desiring a space that was open to the sky and yet still enclosed, in 1935 he built a courtyard and the loggia at the lake. The complex remained thus until 1955, when, with the death of his wife, Jung felt “an inner obligation to become what I myself (was),”³³ and he added an upper story to the central, smaller section which he had come to recognize as himself. Now alone in the world, he felt that he could no longer hide behind the skirts of what he called the “maternal” and “spiritual” towers of the dwelling. He now inserted the self into the tableau, and his work felt complete. Finally, he had achieved his goal, the tower as “a symbol of psychic wholeness.”³⁴

Jung’s experience in building his towers at Bollingen is extraordinary, and it is a testament to his perceptive and persistent nature that he was eventually able to create in stone that which existed within himself. What Jung was able to accomplish is astounding given that he had no formal architectural training, but what he did possess was a keen sense of place, and incredible insight into himself.

Like Thoreau’s cabin at Walden Pond, and Heidegger’s Hut, Bollingen was a locus for Jung, a place through which he could rationalize the world:

At times I feel as if I am spread out over the landscape and inside things, and am myself living in every tree...silence surrounds me almost audibly, and I live in modest harmony with nature. Thoughts rise to the surface which reach back into the centuries, and accordingly anticipate a remote future.³⁵

More than this, however, Bolligen was a place in which he could understand himself and his place in that world. As he himself put it, at Bollingen “I am in the midst of my most essential being, I am most profoundly myself.”³⁶

The Tower succeeded as a locus and framework, but it also shared a trait in common with Curzio Malaparte’s dwelling on Capri: it too functioned as a representation of self.



Fig. 3.14 - A “confession in stone”.

There is nothing in the Tower that has not grown into its own form over the decades, nothing with which I am not linked.³⁷

Unlike Malaparte, however, Bollingen was not a static image of the self. As Jung's identity continued to shift and grow, the complex itself had to be expanded and re-imagined in order to keep pace. Jung's constant re-modeling underscored both the ever-expanding boundaries of the self, and Jung's personal belief in architectural form as a means to express the unconscious. It is telling that Jung dedicates a chapter of his memoirs solely to the tower, for it is perhaps his most powerful intellectual manifestation. Here his ideas were clearly represented in stone and viscerally experienced: "It gave me a feeling a feeling as if I were being reborn in stone. It appeared to me like a concretization of earlier premonitions and a representation of the individuation process."³⁸

The Suburbs: Home and Identity in Contemporary Society

What does the contemporary house say about our society? If we now understand the link between identity and the home, what can we learn about our values from the houses we choose to inhabit? Avi Friedman, author and professor of Architecture at McGill University, wonders if we can learn about society's values by looking at what home-buyers demand.

Homeowners, it seems, would rather spend on a whirlpool bath with a built-in TV than on crafted metal or detailed woodworking. Some might not even be aware of the architectural features available, but they'd surely appreciate them years later when the house ages gracefully....When I visit tract housing, I wonder why the builders or designers stopped including such details in their blueprints. And why do home buyers no longer demand them? What does this reveal about society's value system?³⁹

If we now understand the link between identity and the home, who are we then, that we prefer quantity over quality; a veneer of wealth over quality construction?

The examples of Thoreau's cabin at Walden Pond, Heidegger's Hut, Casa Malaparte, and Jung's Tower at Bollingen have clearly demonstrated the relationship between individual and place. We have seen how the home can be a mirror of the self, and we have come to understand the important role that the home plays in the process of self-identification, and so we must ask ourselves, looking at the built world now, what are we being taught about the



Fig. 3.15 - This is just an image, not reality.

world by the modern house? What stories does it tell, and with what biases?

First, let us narrow the dialogue by focusing on the most prevalent of contemporary home types, that which Sarah Suzanka calls the suburban “McMansion.” Though there is a great range of qualities, sizes, and styles of suburban houses, Suzanka uses this term to refer to the swaths of over-sized, under-designed, and poorly constructed suburban abodes that are found in the seemingly endless fields of tract housing that surround our major cities.

An individual identity is precisely that: individual, and as it has been conclusively shown (both through scientific study, and more anecdotal sources), the home is inextricably linked to that identity. Knowing this, what does it mean from a identity-developmental standpoint when the home is just merely one of a hundred or a thousand identical or nearly identical units?

In order to answer these questions, we must look at the ways in which we identify with our homes. In a paper by M. Joseph Sirgy, professor of Marketing at Virginia Tech, *et al* entitled “Explaining housing preference and choice: The role of self-congruity and functional congruity,” these forms of identification are explored. Sirgy *et al* hypothesize that self-congruity (congruence between image of self, and the image of the home) is at least as important as functional congruity (the congruity of the physical attributes of the home to projected activity) during the process of home selection and purchase. More importantly for us, they break down the ways in which we identify with a house, in a parallel structure to the threefold of the self that Erik Erikson described: ego identity, personal identity, and social identity. For Sirgy et al, the structure is this:

1. **Actual Self-Congruity** – the extent to which the house conforms to our true identity.
2. **Ideal Self-Congruity** – the extent to which the house conforms to the image of who we wish to be.
3. **Social Self-Congruity** – the extent to which the house conforms to the image of ourselves we wish others to see.

The “McMansion’s” success is predicated on its fulfillment of the latter two, but its neglect of the first is troubling. In our consumerist society, the house has become a commodity, an investment from which to get a quick return. The suburban tract house has been sold to us as



Fig. 3.16 - Reality. Is this who we are?



Fig. 3.17 - This is not a space, it is an idealized self-concept.



Fig. 3.18 - *Is this me?*

a status symbol, something to show ourselves (and others) that we have “made it.” Everywhere the billboards tell us how for \$399,000 we can move out from the dirty and dangerous city to the bucolic paradise of the suburbs. These over-sized, and nearly identical houses are the projection of collective consumerist persona, a manufactured dream. Developers and real estate agents know this because they are, surprisingly, quite far ahead of designers when it comes to understanding how the home can function as a symbol of self. They are already utilizing “social psychological concepts and models to predict residential housing selection.”⁴⁰ The problem is that many of these developers are not interested in constructing and selling houses that cater to actual self-congruity, and are most likely unaware of the potential for said congruity. Contrary to the billboards and the ads in the newspaper, these houses are not “home”, they are an image of it. As Sirgy *et al* found, “Ideal self-congruity affects housing preference and choice though the mediating effects of the need for self-esteem. That is, homebuyers who experience a match between the residential occupant image of a home and their ideal self-image are likely to express preference for that home and feel motivated to purchase that home because doing so satisfies their need for self-esteem.”⁴¹ The houses of the modern suburban subdivision, with their excess of space, check mark comparables, and false sense of privacy and individualism are a manifestation of this need for a self-esteem that is built on an ideal and social identity that has been foisted upon us by marketers. It is based on the fallacy of an idyllic suburbia; a safe and sun-filled world where we will be surrounded by like-minded individuals.

This is enormous problem, not only for those within the design community, but society at large. To paraphrase Avi Friedman from earlier in this chapter, what does the choice to live in these too-generous houses (a choice that hundreds of thousands of families, if not millions, have made) say about who we are, and what we value? It is easy to say that architects need to “educate” their clients, but giving people a dwelling, and consequently the home that they deserve (if indeed we convince them of our good intentions at all) almost seems like throwing a pebble into the ocean compared to what developers do every week. There needs to be a shift in thinking about the place of home, about what is really valuable to us in that space, and it needs to happen at the scale of society.

The low-quality, over-sized suburban house is the anti-Bollingen. Instead of true symbols of self we have row upon row of generic, cookie-cutter houses, symptoms of a hollow dream. How can something generic and mass produced serve as a representation of self? How can the contemporary suburban house function as a framework through which we come to understand the world and our place in it? The answer to both these questions is somewhat

terrifying: it cannot, but it does.

Whether we like it or not, and whether we decide to build houses or dwellings, these buildings are going to have a profound impact on those that inhabit them. The contemporary suburban home does not function either as Walden Pond-like framework through which to understand the world, nor can its anonymous architecture conceivably act as an appropriate self-representation. How can one develop a healthy self-identity in such an environment, and what will be the results of this non-specific self-representation? How will those who grow up and call these places home understand themselves and their place in the world?

These large suburban houses are emblematic of a society-wide misunderstanding of the importance of home, and they will be a detrimental force in many lives for years to come. Hopefully we will survive the consequences.

Building the Home

The home is unquestionably critical to the process of identity-formation. We, like the citizens of Montana, intuitively understand that we have a special relationship with the space we call home, and relationship that both dwelling and dweller must be prepared for. Thoreau and Heidegger recognized that the home provides “a sense of identity, a locus of security, and a point of centering and orientations in relation to a chaotic world beyond the threshold,”⁴² and the connection they were able to establish with the world through their home was something the both cherished. Malaparte and Jung each manifested images of themselves in stone, two radically different dwellings, but places that each was able to call “home.”

A healthy individual identity is necessary in order for us become healthy, fully functioning adults, and that identity is inextricably linked to the home. Thusly, if we are to build, we must take it upon our selves to be home-builders, not in the false sense of the “McMansion” developer, who builds house that serve as a projection of an idealized social-self, but designers who aspire to home-creation by building dwellings that we can identify as “home”: those which reflect and encourage the true self.



The Orange Couch

In the house I grew up in, there is a couch that will not let me go. It is nothing at all to look at: faded orange vinyl that has cracked and split over thirty years; a mangy, two-tone brown afghan thrown over it to hide the duct tape that holds it all together. Many times now I have saved it from the landfill, first when I moved it from the basement to my old bedroom, and then seemingly every time I speak to my mother on the phone, for she is always wondering when I will finally let her throw it out. And yet I will not let this couch be discarded. There is something about this seemingly innocuous object, some sort of special connection.

My first conscious recollection of the couch is from my childhood. I am about four or five years old, and it is early on a Saturday morning. Dressed in my NHL pajamas, I pad down the stairs to the living room, eager to watch my cartoons. I stop as I pass the kitchen table, as there is someone lying asleep on the couch. It is Gerry, still there after coming over to watch the game with my father the night before. Now I know I cannot watch cartoons, because it will disturb his sleep. Disappointed in the way that only a five year old can be, I return to my room.

On that day, I probably wished the couch wasn't there (or was at least not so close to the television), but most of my memories of the couch are positive. Whether consciously or not, I have always understood that there is something unique about this particular piece of furniture, and for as long as I can remember I have sought its countenance on sleepless nights. Even as a child, when the still, humid air of summer evenings chased me from my second floor bedroom, I would always find rest within the couch's cool embrace. Slung low to the ground, and long enough that even now I can stretch out fully and not hang over the end, it draws you in, pulling you down the sloping seat, enveloping you entirely, hiding and protecting you from the world. As I grew older, the incredible effects of my vinyl friend did not diminish. In the darkness of the basement, no matter how my mind raced, or how my thoughts lingered on the troubles of the day, my mind would be calmed, and sleep would always come to me when I curled up on the orange couch.

It was these apparently magical abilities that have caused me to hold on to the orange couch so firmly, no matter how dilapidated it became. I craved its comfort, and its ability to take me away from my thoughts, and yet I really did not understand why it possessed these

abilities at all. It was only as I was flipping some old photograph albums that I found the genesis of the couch's power. In one of the photographs, faded with time, lay a dark-haired infant, held securely within the clutches of an orange couch. Memory has become desire.

At Melania, every time you enter the square, you find yourself caught in a dialogue: the braggart soldier and the parasite coming from a door meet the young wastrel and the prostitute; or else the miserly father from his threshold utters his final warnings to the amorous daughter and is interrupted by the foolish servant who is taking a note to the procuress. You return to Melania after years and you find the same dialogue still going on; in the meanwhile the parasite has died, and so have the procuress and the miserly father; but the braggart soldier, the amorous daughter, the foolish servant have taken their places, being replaced in their turn by the hypocrite, the confidante, the astrologer.

-Italo Calvino ¹

The Feeling of Home

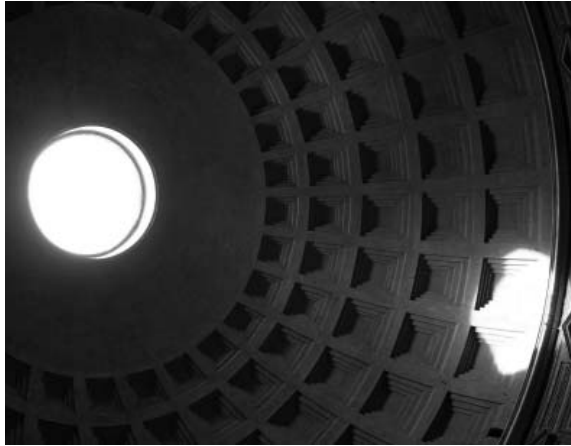


Fig. 4.1 - There is something special here.

CHRISTOPHER ALEXANDER, architect, professor emeritus at the University of California, and noted architectural theorist, has dedicated much of his work to trying to understand how buildings can evoke emotional reactions within us, how some spaces intuitively seem “right.” Here he talks about what he calls “the quality,” the thing that these special places must possess:

All these moments in my own life – I only know them now, in retrospect. Yet each of us knows from experience the feeling which this quality creates in us. It is the time when we are most right, most just, most sad, and most hilarious. And for this reason, each one of us can also recognize this quality when it occurs in buildings.²

When Alexander talks about “the quality,” the way in which he expresses how it feels, and what it means to us is unsurprisingly similar to how we each would describe the feeling of connection we experience in the places we call home. This feeling is so comforting to us; when we sense it we immediately relax, we are settled. We crave this feeling, and no more so than when we find ourselves in a place of “anti-home,” one of those places in which we can forge no alliance with the space that surrounds us. It is often in these spaces which do not make room for us in which we most keenly understand the importance of the feeling of home. To exist within a home-like space is so natural we sometimes take it for granted, but to be confronted with a hollow, unforgiving space is painful to us, and our desire for home is piqued. Intuitively we understand that something is missing from these “anti-home” spaces, but what is this “quality,” and what does the feeling of home mean, concretely, from a psychological and physical standpoint?

As discussed in the previous chapter, the relationship that we have with the feeling of home is a complex and powerful one. The unique connotations that are ascribed to the word are well earned by its role in the identification and individuation process, and from this perspective alone the home’s influence over who we become and how we view the world is astonishing. This role in the process of individuation, however, is not the full extent of the power of “home.”

The home affects us in concrete ways, and the lack of home can be detrimental to both our physical and psychological health. As Winnifred Gallagher, author of several books on the relationship between the individual and their environment writes in *House Thinking*, “Some places just feel like home. As soon as you walk through the door, you want to stay.”³ But what does the home mean to us? In the last chapter we established that there can be a special relation-

ship between dwelling and dweller, and we saw the role that the home plays in the process of identity-formation, but what are, if any, the effects of home? As Clare Cooper-Marcus, professor emeritus in the departments of architecture and landscape architecture at the University of California, Berkeley writes: “A home fulfills many needs: a place for self-expression, a vessel of memories, a refuge from the outside world, a cocoon where we can feel nurtured and let down our guard.”⁴ If the home is such an important place, then what happens when it is taken from us, or if we are unable to ever experience it?

In order to answer these questions, we will first examine what Gallagher termed “The Power of Place.” We are intrinsically linked with the place we call home, so how do people experience this connection, and what does it mean to them? How do the spaces we live in affect our emotional state and our behaviour? To begin, we must examine both the positive effects on the mental and physical health of people who experience home, and the detriment to those who do not (either because they have to home at all, they live in a residence that is unsuitable, or because they have been forcibly removed from the place of this special relationship).

The previous chapter addressed the role of the home in the identity-formation process, but the home affects us in a multitude of ways. This chapter seeks to examine the concrete effects of home from both psychological and physical standpoints, and the consequences that result from the relationship with the place we live either being dysfunctional or entirely lacking.

The Individual and Space

We can all recognize the feeling which is elicited by the spaces we recognize as “home-like,” but what we may not recognize is the influence which these (and all other spaces) exert over us. Indeed, as Gallagher writes, “the only universal truth I’ve discovered during the past few years’ work is that the recipe for the good life that Mihaly Csikszentmihalyi and all the rest of us imagined as children calls for being in the right place at the right time as often as we can manage.”⁵ While the phrase “right place at the right time,” has perhaps become cliché, the inherent wisdom of her words has not been invalidated. All the spaces that we inhabit (even those that we merely pass through), have a profound effect upon our mood and our behavior. As Gallagher writes: “a house or apartment is not just a piece of real estate but a place that provides important experiences – that can change your life.”⁶

These effects of these experiences manifest themselves in a number of ways, some of which will be immediately recognizable to us, and some which are more subtle though no less



Fig. 4.2 - Medicinal space.

potent. There is an undeniable sense of relief when we arrive home after a difficult day and collapse onto our couch or our favourite chair. There is a familiarity, a sense of centeredness which is calming. This is not the case with all spaces, and the difference between them can be jarring. For Gallagher this juxtaposition became apparent after a stay in the hospital: “A week’s stay in the anti-home that is a hospital confirmed the importance of making the most of the home’s peculiar power over our bodies, minds, and spirits.”⁷ From this experience she intuitively recognized that a proper space, which is in tune with the self, and filled with mnemonic triggers can have a profound effect on both one’s mental and physical health. Indeed, as she writes in *House Thinking*, she eventually “absorbed the idea that not unlike medicines, places have effects, and that when accurately ‘prescribed,’ they can make us feel better.”⁸ Removing herself from the sterility of the hospital, and returning to the comfortable and well-lit space of her bedroom, the space of her home had a concrete and recognizable effect on her mood and health:

In my room’s dappled sunlight that was so different from the hospital’s fluorescent glare, I took in the photographs, art, and emotion-laden flotsam and jetsam that remind me of who I am and what it’s all about. I smelled lavender in my soft old sheets and watched the shadows move across the apple-green walls I had painted myself. My daughters brought me tea in my favourite cup and sprawled across my bed. For the first time in many days, I felt just right. If a doctor had sat on my bed and monitored my metabolism, I’m certain that he or she would have watched my level of cortisol, heart and respiration rates, and other signs of stress drop as my spirits rose and I relaxed into at-homeness.⁹

Selves, Roles, and State-dependant Learning

As Christian Norberg-Schulz understood, the environment can affect not only how we feel, but it can also activate different behaviours and moods within us:

Our life consists of changing activities which demand changing surroundings. This implies that the environment will “look” different according to our immediate state or “role.” To take into consideration this relative and variable relation between man and his environment, it is necessary to stress the question: How does architecture (the environment) influence us? It is a truism to say that the environment influences us and determines our “mood.” That architecture is a part of our environment is just as evident. If we take this point of departure, architecture has not only an instrumental purpose, but also a psychological function.¹⁰

Gallagher's experience of home vs. anti-home is more than simply one person's intuition, or a singular response to a particular situation. It has been established that spaces, especially those with which we have a personal connection, can activate different selves or roles within us: "The home and other important settings in which we have significant emotional experiences help activate the personality's different selves and states. According to a dynamic called state-dependent learning, we remember best when we're in the same state we were in when we first absorbed the material. Environmental cues help evoke that condition, and thus the memory..."¹¹ These selves and roles are brought out in us everywhere, from the consumer at the mall, the student at school, the business person at our place of work. We are constantly receiving and interpreting cues from the built environment, and these cues affect changes in how we feel and how we think.

In a study mentioned in *The New York Times* and conducted at Stanford by the psychologist Aaron Kay. Students were pitted against one another in an investment game, and researchers found that by merely introducing an object with associated business-like connotations (a briefcase), into an otherwise empty room, the students participating in the study would begin to play in a much more conservative manner. The students were picking up cues from the briefcase, and in this case they began to make certain associations (completely on an unconscious level), that altered their behavior.

If we are to create and live in home-like spaces, we must begin to think differently about the process of design, and incorporate this knowledge of the influence of home into our process. To foster and preserve both mental and physical health, we must exist within spaces which are in tune with our self. We need spaces which "meet our physical and psychological needs."¹²



Fig. 4.3 - The role of consumer.



Fig. 4.4 - The role of employee.

Space and Development

Certainly we are able to recall a space that immediately puts us at ease, or one, conversely, that makes us uncomfortable. The positive spaces are those which Alexander would say have “the quality.” He also believes that a space with the quality could evoke it within and individual: space and inhabitant are a symbiotic system.

We need only ask ourselves which places – which towns, which buildings, which rooms, have made us feel like this – which of them have that breath of sudden passion in them, which whispers to us, and lets us recall those moments when we were ourselves. And the connections between the two – between this quality in our own lives, and the same quality in our surroundings – is not just an analogy, or similarity. The fact is that each one creates the other. ¹³

The bond between space and individual is stronger than we might ever imagine, in fact, by the 1960’s psychologists found that the individual and his or her environment were more easily comprehended “not as separate entities but as a dynamic feedback system.” ¹⁴ This knowledge completely altered the way that the relationship between individual and space was thought about in hospitals and with particular respect to premature births. Contemporary studies done with monkeys had shown that the quantity and type of stimulation provided by the environment had lasting effects on the health and behavior of newborns. The experiment (now standard reading in high school science classes), was conducted at the University of Wisconsin by Harry Harlow. Infant monkeys were separated from their mothers and put into environments that were devoid of stimulation save for an apparatus for feeding purposes. The basic apparatus was made of wire, another was padded, and a third, in addition to being padded had a mechanism by which it rocked back and forth during the feeding process. As Gallagher writes, the study found that the monkeys provided with the padded feeding mechanism were healthier, both mentally and physically than their counterparts that had the wire version, and that those infants who we provided with the feeding mechanism which was both padded and rocked did better still.

As a result of this data (and that from other, similar studies) NICU (Neonatal Intensive Care Unit) policy and design were both radically altered. Where these spaces had been sterile and harsh, experiments were conducted in which the pre-mature infants were stroked and talked to, had music played for them, more colourful rooms, etc.. While in some cases the stimulation became overwhelming, follow-up studies found that the babies from the modified nurseries were “better at organizing behavioral states, such as sleep and wakefulness,”¹⁵ and were

generally healthier and better adjusted than those from the older, more sterile, and unchanging nurseries.

Incredibly, in both cases it had been found that infants, who had previously been thought to be completely unaware of their surroundings were, in fact, highly susceptible to the stimulation of the environment even if it was not on a conscious level. In addition, their sensitivity had a direct impact on their future physical and mental health. This showed conclusively that there was a direct connection between environment and health that extends beyond the level of the conscious mind.

Home and Homelessness as Concepts

The concepts being discussed here are not abstract. We are talking about concrete and measurable influences on our emotional state and the way in which we act on a day to day basis. From how we feel about ourselves, whether we want to get out of bed in the morning, how we relate to our family and friends, all the way down to minutiae like what we want to eat for breakfast...all of these things are influenced by the places we inhabit, and as designers we must always be mindful of this influence.

Already in this chapter we have seen, briefly, how cues that we pick up unconsciously can affect our emotional state and our behavior. There is an unquestionable link between the spaces we inhabit and the way in which we act, and this leads us to an important question: If any space, even ones that we are just passing through can have a powerful effect over the way we feel and act, then how great is the influence of the place we call home? What are the effects of the place we call home, and furthermore, what are the tangible consequences when we lack such a place? In order to address these questions, we will have to again clarify what we mean by “home,” and “homelessness” before we can explore the effects of home and the various ways in which we can come to be without it.

When we speak of home and homelessness in the context of architectural theory, it is important that we do not think of these concepts as entirely exclusive of one another, nor should we limit ourselves to the standard societal definitions of these words. In this context, as John F. Watkins, professor of Gerontology at the University of Kentucky, and Amy F. Hosier, professor of behavioral science at York College of Pennsylvania write, “Home and homelessness are not exclusive categories, rather they represent ends of a continuum of possible existential states”, and “an individual’s state will shift along the continuum through life in response to changes in the person and that person’s context or environment.”¹⁶ Simply put, one’s relation-



Fig. 4.5 - Pruitt-Igoe was not a “home”.

ship with their residence is not merely with home or without (either physically or existentially), but it varies on a scale between “home” and “homeless” dependent on the strength and type of relationship that one has with the residence in question.

As we have repeatedly found, there is more to home than just a roof over one’s head. The effects of home extend beyond that of mere shelter, and so “notions of home and especially homelessness must embrace more than a state of permanent residence...”¹⁷

Watkins and Hosier found that the strength of the relationship with the residence, and consequently the relative position on the home/homeless continuum are related to another, psychological, relationship between what they call the “experienced home” and the “imagined home”:

When a person describes her or his sense of home, what we hear is not necessarily a description of the current living environment and situation. Dovey (1985), for example, discusses a yearning for an idealized home and the process of becoming at home. From this we suggest a need to distinguish between the experienced home and the imagined home.¹⁸

Similar to the differences between of personal, ideal, and social selves of the Eriksonian model that we discussed in chapter 3, the “imagined home” is the mental image that one holds of what one thinks home consists of, and the “experienced home” is the place in which one actually resides. This place can be either a house or dwelling as we have defined them. The imagined home is based on what the individual has experienced as “homelike” in his or her youth, their preferences, and their aspirations for themselves in the future. It can also be influenced by social pressures, and as Watkins and Hosier conclude, “individuals may be ‘trained’ to accept a particular image of home that has been constructed by society. This image generally may include the 3-bedroom, 2-bath ranch house in the suburbs, with white picket fence and 2-car garage.”¹⁹

Again, similar to the mechanics of the Eriksonian model, the closer the relationship between the imagined and experienced homes, the closer we become to positive end of the home/homeless continuum, and the higher the likelihood of personal happiness and psychological

health. Images of home foisted upon us by society and the media may not be what we truly need and desire, and the pursuit of these images can have deleterious effects. Furthermore, it is not enough to merely have a house, a shelter in none but the physical context, as such a residence will not fully embody the imagined house and will be psychologically disruptive. Alexander would say that such a house is “dead,” and that it would undoubtedly have a negative impact on its inhabitants.

We have been taught that there is no objective difference between good buildings and bad, good towns and bad. The fact is that the difference between a good buildings and a bad building, between a good town and a bad town, is an objective matter. It is the difference between health and sickness, wholeness and dividedness, self-maintenance and self-destruction. In a world which is healthy, whole, alive, and self-maintaining, people themselves can be alive and self-creating. In a world which is unwhole and self-destroying, people cannot be alive: they will inevitably themselves be self-destroying, and miserable. ²⁰

Someone who is truly at home will have both their physical and psychological needs met, and someone who is housed improperly or unsatisfactorily is someone who is conceptually homeless.

Now that we understand that the home/homeless question is not an either/or proposition, we can begin to look at the psychological and physical ramifications of the two ends of the continuum.



Fig. 4.6 - A “dead” space.



Fig. 4.7 - Healthy, Whole, Alive.

The Effects of Home and the Consequences of Homelessness

Home is more than merely a physical space. As Juhani Pallasmaa writes, “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 behavioural remnants as well as culturally conditioned reactions and values.”²¹ Home is where we belong, and the relationship that we have with the space of home contributes substantially to both our mental and physical health.

As addressed in chapter 3, the home has a myriad of psychological impacts upon us. Rowles and Chaudhury state that the “home experience provides the tools for both enduring and evolving possibilities for the self. Homes serve as referents for past life experience. They remind us, both as individuals and groups, of our past. This continuous reminding feeds into the enduring nature of our selves, preserves self-identity, and provides the critical thread for continuity into the future.”²² Watkins and Hosier propose that the home’s ability to influence self-identity and evoke “such feelings as belonging, control, comfort, or security whether it involves individuals or much larger groups of people”²³ is critical to the developmental process, and any disruption of the relationship of home can result in depression, anxiety, and a general existential crises. As De Botton writes, “the failure of architects to create congenial environments mirrors our inability to find happiness in other areas of our lives. Bad architecture is in the end as much a failure of psychology as of as of design.”²⁴

This feeling and experience we call home is critical to our health, and this is why, as Rowles and Chaudhury write, “residential care environments such as assisted living and long-term care facilities strive to create a homelike physical and social environment within an organizational/institutional framework.”²⁵ The data gathered on the effects of the home (both anecdotal and scientific), all points to the importance of home, and yet the profession of architecture still considers the concept to be ethereal and beyond its mandate. Health care professionals, however, recognize the power of home, and they are already aware of its healing affects upon those they treat. Architects should take their cue from them.

While the home has many positive effects, as one would expect, lacking a true home is problematic. In fact, being what we call existentially homeless is detrimental to one’s mental and physical health. Again, it is important to remember that when a psychologist or social worker talks about the homeless, they mean those without a roof over their head, and that they are not as immediately concerned with the existential qualities of the residence. We do not want to imply that housing the “houseless” is in any way an ignoble cause, but to do so with

no thought towards providing appropriate spaces with which the tenants can create the bond of home is perhaps a little short-sighted, and it does not suit the context of this argument. In the context of architectural theory, as Heidegger pointed out, merely putting roofs over heads is not enough. While his context (post-war reconstruction in Europe) is different from ours, his underlying concern regarding the quality of “dwelling” is not any less valid.

We are attempting to trace in thought the nature of dwellings. The next step on this path would be the question: what is the state of dwelling in our precarious age? On all sides we hear talk about the housing shortage, and with good reason. Now there is not just talk; there is action too. We try to fill the need by providing houses, by promoting the building of houses, planning the whole architectural enterprise. However hard and bitter, however hampering and threatening the lack of houses remains, the real plight of dwelling does not lie merely in a lack of houses.....The real plight lies in this, that mortals ever search anew for the nature of dwelling, that they must ever learn to dwell.²⁶

It does not take much of an intellectual leap to understand that someone who is physically without shelter will suffer mentally and physically. What is intriguing, however, is that there are similar symptoms found in those who are “homeless” in the existential sense of the word that we have been investigating.

While growing up and living in an appropriate home has measurable benefits, growing up homeless, in addition to the obvious physical problems, wreaks havoc on the developmental process. As Dr. Rosemarie Downer, social worker and project officer at the United States Department of Agriculture’s Food and Nutrition Service, and of *Homelessness and Its Consequences: The Impact on Children’s Psychological Well-Being* writes, “homelessness is an ever-growing social challenge that has a negative impact on all of its victims, particularly the children. In order for children to grow up to be functioning and contributing members of society, they must develop adequate cognitive, physical and psychosocial skills. Homeless children...are deprived of the basic experiences that foster healthy development.”²⁷ Thus deprived of the stable and nurturing environment of the home during the crucial developmental phase, homeless children, and those who live in social housing programs (existentially homeless) have higher incidences of developmental delay: “nearly half [of those studied] studied evidenced one major developmental delay, while one-third had evidence of two major developmental delays.”²⁸ The homeless children in the study also presented with a greater number of sleep problems and showed evidence of anxiety, severe depression, and learning difficulties.



Fig. 4.8 - Cause for concern.

The stability that those who experience home possess, the sense of belonging and rootedness, even the sense of personal continuity...these are not available to those without a dwelling to inhabit. Watkins and Hosire suggest that "...the idea of being homeless... evokes certain emotions – despair, isolation, hopelessness, grief – and variably presents such images as poverty, alcoholism, mental illness, and social deviance. Just as having and being at home equates with life stability and some measure of success, being homeless translates into transience, turmoil, and failure in life."²⁹ The lack of home strips from the individual their locus, or any potential for one, and often results in an "existential despair."³⁰

Homelessness (existential or otherwise), does not only affect residents' mental health, it affects their physical health as well. In a study done in New York City in 1992, it was found that "significantly more of the homeless females (16%, versus 11% in public housing and 7% of all females) had low birth-weight babies. Infant mortality was also high: 25 deaths per 1000 live births among the homeless females compared with 17 per 1000 for housed poor women, and 12 per 1000 for women city wide."³¹ It is of course logical that the physically homeless will suffer the affects of an unsheltered lifestyle, without a roof overhead or a warm place to sleep in the winter, people are more susceptible to infection and other ailments, so seeing an increase in infant mortality will not surprise us. However, what is interesting about this study is that the "housed poor," who are likely to be in social housing projects, also show signs of decreased health. What is the meaning of this trend? We can ascribe these findings to economics (and as Downer points out, most policy makers and service providers do), but we may be missing a larger indicator if we continue to "ignore the clinical bases and effects of this negative life experience."³² Perhaps there is more to home than we imagine.

The Loss of Home: Infirmity and Exile

Another way in which we can demonstrate the power and influence of home is by examining those who have had the relationship of home with a dwelling, and have been forced to leave that dwelling behind, either at the end of a gun (metaphorically or not) in the case of an exile or refugee, or by the onset of old age and infirmity.

As we shall see, the loss of home is as traumatic an event as one can ever experience. To be separated from a space which holds so many memories and has so profoundly shaped one's very identity is devastating to both mind and body. As the German poet Friedrich Schiller writes:

Cling to your native land, to what is dear, / Hold fast to it with your whole heart and spirit. / Here are the robust roots of all your strength, / There in a foreign world you stand alone.³³

With great similarity to Watkins and Hosier's understanding of homelessness, K.C. Cirtautas, author of *The Refugee* (a book based on his own time as a refugee in Europe) writes: "Who is a homeless person? Not only those who are technically classified as 'displaced persons,' but every human being who is compelled to live away from his homeland..."³⁴ The exile and the refugee, men and women driven from their place of home and forced to start again in an alien world. For the exile, home exists in another place, a place to which they cannot return, but it still exerts a powerful influence over us. As J. Edward Chamberlin, professor at the University of Toronto writes, "home is like our language, compelling us to think and feel in certain ways and giving us the freedom to imagine other ways and other places. It is who we are and where we belong."³⁵ For the exile, the loss of home can initiate an existential crisis of sorts. Their dwelling, the framework through which they learned to understand and interact with their world has been taken from them, and they are lost without it. For the exile, "His real self seems to be somewhere else...Where is it? At home...".³⁶ As Cirtautas writes:

There is a difference between a felled tree and a felled human being. The tree is also powerless: the life-giving sap has run away, it is doomed, and decay will destroy it in time. An uprooted human being may be equally powerless, but he is conscious of his fate and will struggle against his disintegration as far as his strength will permit. He may, indeed, rise again but he will not stand as firmly as he once did. He cannot be as sturdy as the person who has never been forcibly transplanted. A nervous sensitiveness will remain, even in such fortunate individuals as were able to take root in the new soil. An experience of such traumatic severity leaves physical and mental marks which are indelible.³⁷



Fig. 4.9 - This is not their home.



Fig. 4.10 - The devastation is not just physical.

Crises of an existential nature are not all that the exile has to fear, as the psychological impact of the loss of home is potent as well. As one would expect, the loss of one's locus has an unsettling effect on the psyche, and like a lover scorned the exile is reluctant to pursue or even expect that the feeling he or she had with their home. Their "fundamental attitude is one of distrust, born of the countless disappointments which have brought [them] to his present plight. [They] no longer dare to trust anyone, not even [themselves]."³⁸ An exile is a person who has lost the identity shaping force that is the home, without it, he or she no longer has the physical echo of their true selves. Everything they believed, both about themselves and about the world has been called into question. When this happens, one can lose oneself completely and feel and behave quite differently than before:

...he neglects himself, gives offense, is no longer what he once was. It is both cause and apology for his decline. At home he was sheltered and protected, honored and wanted. He could translate his good intentions into actions, and he respected the restrictions which home placed upon his passions and instincts; the dimensions of his life were staked out by the civilization to which he belonged.³⁹

In short, for the exile the loss of home can be psychologically catastrophic. We have seen the fundamental role that the space of home plays in the individuation process, and for those of us lucky enough to never experienced the loss of this space, the concept is almost unfathomable. While the trauma surrounding forcible exile might be unimaginable for some of us, there is another way in which we can lose home that may be more immediately recognizable.

Sometimes in the later years of life, the elderly may reach a point at which they can no longer care for themselves, and the decision is made to leave the environs of home and move, either to the residence of a family-member, or to an institution. This particular moment is in many cases preceded by the death of friends and spouses, which leaves the individual more alone than they have perhaps ever been before. This sense of isolation alone would be enough to emphasize the relationship with the space of the home, the known and familiar, but is not the only way in which the home becomes even more important in late life. With a loss of mobility, the elderly spend more time, on average, within the home than their younger counterparts. In addition, the mnemonic qualities of the home take on a greater importance as some of the earlier events of one's life begin to fade from memory. Within the dwelling there are a plethora of spaces and objects which are associated with cherished people, places, and

events...the home truly becomes a record of one's life. Together, all of these factors combined make the home a place of singular importance in late life, and the loss of this relationship can be incredibly traumatic and damaging to the individual.

When the move happens, a series of changes are undergone within the individual which can lead to psychological distress. Watkins and Hosier write that "a disruption in the person or place causes an attempt to adjust to a new relationship (Rowles and Watkins, 2003). If the adjustment fails, the result is homelessness and an associated 'existential despair for the individual.'" ⁴⁰ For the individual forced by infirmity from their home, they have, as Chamberlin writes, "no stable base of life; every personal affiliation [is] lamed; every group structure [is] put out of kilter; no social network [has] a point of fixture left." ⁴¹

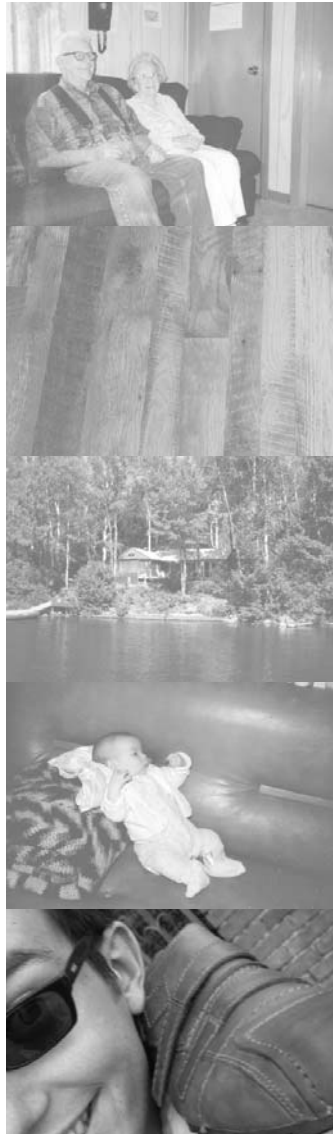
The negative psychological and existential effects of the loss of home amongst the elderly should be enough to convince us that home is a place of extreme importance to us as individuals, but there is even research which shows, as Rowles and Chaudhury write, that "a sense of being 'at home' is related to health status and well-being and that disruption of this sense, through in situ environmental change (for example, change in an established neighborhood), relocation (either forced or voluntary), or through disruption of a more existential sense of being at one with the world, can result in significant changes in well-being. In many cases, involuntary relocation and separation from a sense of identity has been shown to have pathological consequences and to lead to increases in rates of morbidity and mortality." ⁴² Truly, home is a concept worthy of our interest. As Cirtautus writes of the refugee:

He did not leave voluntarily; he was driven out. Driven – from what? His homestead, his city, his place of work, his school. He was expelled by force, put into the street, turned out into the cold without food or shelter. His immediate reaction was a sense of overwhelming anxiety. ⁴³

It should not be surprising that the loss of home could have such negative effects. To lose the place in which one has so much invested, the space which is so closely tied to one's own sense of identity, even, is a shocking and traumatic turn of events. For those who are forced from their home, either at the end of a gun or by time's unflinching hand, the trauma is real and measurable. Home, the place of total and original belonging, the space which has come to shape and reflect one's identity is not something lightly lost. For both exiles and the infirmed, as Cirtautus writes, "One must sympathetically enter into the mental processes of these people before one begins to understand them. They live by a new order of values. For them it is no longer true that 'in the beginning was order (logos)." ⁴⁴

In Conclusion: Home and Wellness

Winnifred Gallagher asks, “How do you calculate the effects of poorly proportioned houses, and ill-conceived spaces that don’t fulfill your functional needs?”⁴⁵ We have surveyed the effects of the various spaces we inhabit, and particularly those of the place we call home, but perhaps we still cannot yet comprehend their far reaching impact. We are constantly taking cues from our home environment, and those cues activate within us various roles and selves. Our home can make us happy, and the lack of the feeling of home can lead to depression and anxiety. The space of our home is critical to our development as individuals and consequently our ongoing mental and physical health. The tangible effects of home are undeniable, and as the concept and feeling of home permeates our society, it is essential that the field of architecture begins to look seriously at this phenomena with an eye towards creating spaces which are conducive to this home relationship.



Sieneese Shoes

I was in Montreal for St. Patrick's day last year. It was a bitterly cold evening with a strong wind coming down off the river, and three of us were walking along a street in one of the older areas of the city. With our collars turned up against the wrath of mother nature and Irish whiskey on our breaths we laughed and sparred with one another as we hurried to the next pub. Lost in the moment, I didn't notice that the pavement was giving way to cobblestone until I felt the uneven pavers beneath my feet. In an instant I stood not on a windy winter street in Quebec, but in a sun-drenched piazza half a world away. I always seem to enter my memories of Italy feet first: all it takes is a rough patch of concrete, or more potently, a few steps across some uneven cobblestones and I am immediately transported across time and space.

When I first arrived in Italy, a novice traveler, I stepped off the plane in a brand new pair of black adidas. I had bought the shoes about a week earlier specifically for the trip: They were well padded, sturdy, and had a thick rubber sole. I knew from talking to people who had previously been in the Rome program that there was a great deal of walking involved, and I would thusly need a pair of comfortable walking shoes. When I had gone to look for said appropriate footwear, I explained my

situation and was assured by the helpful salesperson that I “wouldn’t feel a thing” even if I was walking and standing all day.

This turned out to be the truth. For two months I trekked all over the city of Rome and into the Italian countryside cheerfully following Rick through the ruins of the forum, across the sharp cliffs of Capri, and down the dusty streets of Pompeii. Never did those shoes let me down, not once did I begrudge the endless walking.

It was mid-November when we arrived in Siena, tumbling off the coach bleary-eyed from travel. Taking an opportunity for solitude, I set off alone amongst the gently undulating streets. For half a day I hurried about the city beneath ocher tile roofs, taking pictures, sketching, and occasionally peering into the many storefronts that line the clean, gray passages; always the tourist, always in a rush. One of these storefronts in particular caught my eye. It was filled with footwear in styles I had never seen or even dreamed of before. In particular my eyes fell upon a pair of red-brown shoes with sweeping, aggressive lines, that appeared to be in motion even as they sat, static. I had to have them. Ten minutes and 100 Euro later I strode out of the shop with my trusty pair of adidas in a box under my arm. As soon as my feet hit the roadway, I knew that my life had changed.

No longer insulated from the world by thick rubber, for the first time since I arrived I experienced the world through the impossibly thin soles of my Sienese shoes. I felt every stone, every broken paver, every worn step. The world became a different and more rich place. In the Sienese shoes, I no longer walked, I strolled. I did not hurry, I sauntered. No longer the rushing tourist, I spent idle hours in cafes and lounged

on church steps with reptilian languor. A simple evening perambulation became a joy as I soaked up the city through my feet.

For over a year I wore those shoes everywhere and for every occasion until they became so scuffed and unkempt that I had to retire them from regular use. Worn out though they are, I still have them, and every once in a while I put them on and go for a stroll, hoping I suppose, that some cracked concrete or uneven sidewalk will awake in me memories of one of the happiest times of my life: Italy, a country experienced through the soles of my shoes.

You walk for days among trees and among stones. Rarely does the eye light on a thing, and the only when it has recognized that thing as the sign of another thing: a print in the sand indicates the tiger's passage; a marsh announces a vein of water; the hibiscus flower, the end of winter. All the rest is silent and interchangeable; trees and stones are only what they are.

Finally the journey leads to the city of Tamara. You penetrate it along streets thick with signboards jutting from the walls. The eye does not see things but images of things that mean other things: pincers point out the tooth drawer's house; a tankard, the tavern; halberds, the barracks; scales, the grocer's. Statues and shields depict lions, dolphins, towers, stars: a sign that something – who knows what? - has as its sign a lion or a dolphin or a tower or a star....Your gaze scans the streets as if they were written pages: the city says everything you must think, makes you repeat her discourse, and while you believe you are visiting Tamara you are only recording the names with which she defines herself and all her parts.

However the city may really be, beneath this thick coating of signs, whatever it may contain or conceal, you leave Tamara without having discovered it. Outside, the land stretches, empty, to the horizon; the sky opens, with speeding clouds. In the shape that chance and wind give the clouds, you are already intent on recognizing figures: a sailing ship, a hand, and elephant...

-Italo Calvino ¹

The Language of Home



Fig. 5.1 - Home as storyteller.

THE SPACES THAT WE INHABIT are constantly communicating with us, and we are, in turn, responding to them. We have an important and symbiotic relationship with space, and when that relationship reaches a certain maturity it manifests itself as a feeling that we refer to as “home.” As Avi Friedman, professor of architecture at McGill University writes here, there is an intangible feeling that can envelope us in well-crafted spaces:

We’d bought the old home because we liked the neighborhood and we could afford it. But there was something else that made us like the place: the distinctively old atmosphere embedded in the house itself. We appreciated the craftsmanship expressed in its interior details and felt that these simple ornaments made it an objet d’art. There were many not-so-hidden signs that turned the house into home. ²

It is of equal importance within this excerpt that Friedman seems to understand that this feeling, though itself intangible, is tied to tangible signs, spaces, and objects that we intuitively read. The feeling of home is an important signpost because it makes us aware of the spaces in our lives that are having a beneficial impact on our development as individuals. As has been often demonstrated in previous chapters, home is much more than than simple physical shelter, and should be understood in all of its complexity as “...a physical structure, as a territory, as a locus in space, as self and self-identity, and as a social and cultural unit.” ³ The place or places in which we experience the feeling of home are in fact so crucial to our continued psychological development, that it is “increasingly acknowledged that a sense of being “at home” is related to health status and well-being.”⁴ Buildings speak to us, and whether we acknowledge this fact consciously or not, healthy communication of this nature is critical to our well-being.

That the feeling of home is fundamental to our development as individuals and our very well-being should be clear to us by this point. The effects on our psychological and physical health are real, and they have been observed and documented by esteemed individuals from varying fields. While we intuitively understand that this critical feeling is linked to space, we have yet to demonstrate conclusively that home is an architectural concept.

When we ask if home is an architectural concept, what we are trying to determine is if the built world can be designed with characteristics that make it more or less conducive to the evocation of the feeling of home. Is it possible for architects to create home-fostering spaces, can we make our designs dwellings? We feel home, we recognize when it is present and when it is lacking, but is that recognition tied to architectural form, or what we might call spatial

relationships? We have already seen that spaces can affect our mood and our behaviour, but without seeing and understanding the mechanics by which space can affect us, we can not be sure of the place of home within the realm of architecture, nor can we formulate designs which will foster this feeling.

The criticism that will be leveled at any study regarding something as supposedly ethereal as the feeling of home (and that feeling's relationship to architecture) is that home is specific to the individual. We each have experienced home, and we can imagine both the feeling and the space that evoked it within us, however, because these spaces are not the same for all of us, because home seems so intensely personal, we may believe that while a model of design that hinges on psychological investigation followed by enlightened design could be used in very specific instances, we might think that such a model is doomed to collapse if we expand it beyond one individual and one space.

It is true that the places we call home are as varied as own individualities. Like us, they are both more and less similar than we imagine. The key for us is determining which parts of us are shaped by experience, which parts of our behaviour and response to stimuli are based on a more ancient knowledge, and then learning how to design in such a way as to take advantage of this knowledge. Discussion of home and its influence upon us is not immune to the well-worn nature versus nurture debate; ultimately our emotional and psychological responses to space are grounded in both the learned and the innate.

The purpose of this chapter is to explore the mechanics by which the feeling of home is elicited within us, as well as the ways in which that feeling and its associated space affects us psychologically. To accomplish this, we will explore the languages with which the space of the home communicates with the individual. Starting at the level of personal attachment and increasing in scale, we will explore the relationship between cherished objects and our dreams and desires, the mnemonic qualities of the family home, the cultural influences captured in patterns of space and activity, and primal desires expressed in Jay Appleton's theory of Prospect and Refuge. Ultimately we shall find that the feeling of home (which has been shown to be important to us in numerous ways), is something which is directly connected to and affected by the built environment. Furthermore, this connection is not mystical in nature. While it is complex, it is logical and comprehensible and thus can be analyzed and then utilized to help us create spaces which shelter our whole being. Indeed, much information has already been gathered about this relationship by people in diverse fields of study, but an unfortunately large portion of this knowledge has not yet made it into the mainstream of architectural thought.

We have seen how the feeling of home is fundamental to our wellbeing from both psychological and physical perspectives, but how can we as designers act upon this knowledge? How can we harness the power of home? In order to implement our new understanding of the importance of the the feeling of home, we will need to understand not only that home (and the space to which we attach this moniker) has lasting influence upon us, but also how this feeling and associated space affect us. What we need is a new way of thinking about how the relationship between space and individual forms, and we should explore any existing techniques which would allow us to shape spaces that are healthy and suitable for dwelling, not simply living. In tongues both ancient and modern, the space of we call home speaks to us. By examining precisely how this happens, we will finally become confident of home's place as an architectural concept and also perhaps find some clues as to how we can design in a way conducive to fostering a positive and healthy relationship between space and individual.

Remembering with Objects

With her introduction to *Evocative Objects: Things We Think With*, Sherry Turkle, Abby Rockefeller Mauze Professor of the Social Studies of Science and Technology at M.I.T., touches upon the special nature of the relationships that we can form with the objects that surround us, and the meaning that is hidden within them.



Fig. 5.2 - What stories do these hold?

I grew up hoping that objects would connect me to the world. As a child, I spent many weekends at my grandparents' apartment in Brooklyn. Space there was limited, and all of the family keepsakes – including my aunt's and my mother's books, trinkets, souvenirs, and photographs – were stored in a kitchen closet, set high, just below the ceiling. I could reach the cache only by standing on the kitchen table that I moved in front of the closet. This I had been given permission to do, and this is what I did, from age six to thirteen or fourteen, over and over, weekend after weekend. I would climb onto the table in the kitchen and take down every book, every box. The rules were that I was allowed to look at anything in the closet, but I was always to put it back. The closet seemed to me of infinite dimensions, infinite depth.

Each object I found in the closet – every keychain, postcard, unpaired earring, high school textbook with its marginalia, some of it my mother's, some of it my aunt's – signaled a new understanding of who they were and what they might be interested in; every photograph of my mother on a date or at a dance became a clue to my possible identity.⁵

The experience that Turkle is writing about above is certainly one that we can relate to. Whether it is the types of memories stirred up by sorting through boxes of one's possessions after a divorce, or the more primal and unconscious emotional response to a piece of furniture from our childhood, it is evident that in some way cherished objects have the ability to capture and retell our stories. Objects bear some of the scratches and indentations of our lives: our successes perhaps marked with awards, our failures denoted by a dust-covered piano we never learned to play, or a trinket given to us by a partner in a failed relationship. We are surrounded by our past as manifested in our myriad of "stuff," and these objects can have a profound impact upon our emotional state due to their mnemonic qualities. As Turkle writes, "We live our lives in the middle of things. Material culture carries emotions and ideas of startling intensity." ⁶

It was not always this way. For much of history, the number and variety of objects within the space of home was limited both by relative poverty and a lack of the industrial complex which provides us with the mountain of things we find in contemporary dwellings. As Andrea Branzi, noted architect and theorist writes, "Until the end of the eighteenth century architecture was the sole representative of the world of construction. The only non-natural objects in man's environment were architectural buildings, houses, palaces, monuments, and roads. Other objects were rare and absolutely secondary. Chairs, tables, others items of furnishing and implements used for work represented a minor adjunct. The number of them found in people's homes was small." ⁷ Now, however, our dwellings are brimming with these former afterthoughts of the built world, and thus we need to understand the incredible cumulative effect that the objects of our lives can have upon us.

We find it familiar to consider objects as useful or aesthetic, as necessities or vain indulgences. We are on less familiar ground when we consider objects as companions to our emotional lives or as provocations to thought. The notion of evocative objects brings together these two less familiar ideas underscoring the inseparability of thought and feeling in our relationship to things. We think with the objects we love; we love the objects we think with. ⁸

For too long, designers and society at large have ignored the influence that our cherished objects wield. Increasing our understanding of the mnemonic phenomena that surround objects will shed more light on the ways in which the built environment affects our behaviour and mood. Designers who come to understand the nature of these effects will be better able to construct spaces which are appropriate and healthful for their occupants.



Fig. 5.3 - Memories, desires, failures and successes manifested in our homes.

Proust and the Science of Memory

Marcel Proust intuitively understood the link between the senses and memory as well as the importance of memory to personal identity. His famous recollection of the madeleine beautifully captures the way in which a scent or taste can awaken a deep-seated memory within us:



Fig. 5.4 - Marcel Proust.

I raised to my lips a spoonful of the tea in which I had soaked a morsel of the cake. No sooner had the warm liquid mixed with the crumbs touched my palate than a shudder ran through me and I stopped, intent upon the extraordinary thing that was happening to me. An exquisite pleasure had invaded my senses, something isolated, detached, with no suggestion of its origin. And at once the vicissitudes of life had become indifferent to me, its disasters innocuous, its brevity illusory – this new sensation having had on me the effect which love has of filling me with a precious essence; or rather this essence was not in me it was me....

And suddenly the memory revealed itself. The taste was that of the little piece of madeleine which on Sunday mornings at Combray (because on those mornings I did not go out before mass), when I went to say good morning to her in her bedroom, my aunt Leonie used to give me, dipping it first in her own cup of tea or tisane. The sight of the little madeleine had recalled nothing to my mind before I tasted it; perhaps because I had so often seen such things in the meantime, without tasting them, on the trays in pastry-cooks' windows, that their image had dissociated itself from those Combray days to take its place among others more recent; perhaps because of those memories, so long abandoned and put out of mind, nothing now survived, everything was scattered; the shapes of things, including that of the little scallop-shell of pastry, so richly sensual under its severe, religious folds, were either obliterated or had been so long dormant as to have lost the power of expansion which would have allowed them to resume their place in my consciousness. But when from a long-distant past nothing subsists, after the people are dead, after the things are broken and scattered, taste and smell alone, more fragile but more enduring, more unsubstantial, more persistent, more faithful, remain poised a long time, like souls, remembering, waiting, hoping, amid the ruins of all the rest; and bear unflinchingly, in the tiny and almost impalpable drop of their essence, the vast structure of recollection.⁹

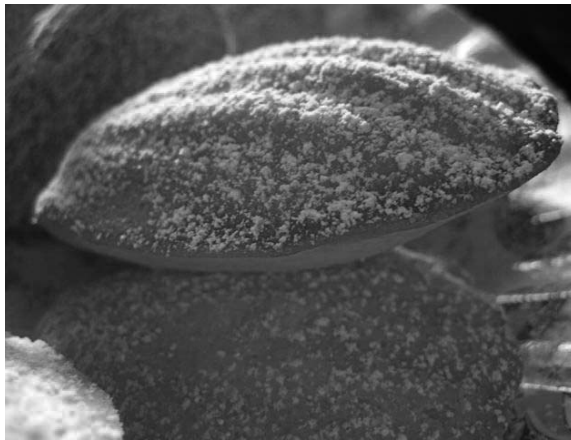


Fig. 5.5 - A pastry that contained a memory.

Proust correctly surmised that sensory input could act as a trigger for memories, and his experience demonstrates the way in which these nearly-forgotten recollections can affect our emotional state. As soon as the “crumbs touched [his] palate” a powerful emotional response is conjured up from within, and this emotional response precedes the actual recollection of the memory. In the immediate time-frame, Proust feels only the “exquisite pleasure”, it is

only later that the memory of his days with Aunt Leonie in Combray reveals itself. Turkle writes that “most objects exert their holding power because of the particular moment and circumstance in which they come into the author’s life,”¹⁰ and this is one of those cases. Like Malaparte seeing himself in his home on Capri, Proust recognizes something of himself in that momentary taste. It is not that the madeleine itself is a reflection of his identity, but the object is a vessel for sensory inputs which cause a part of himself, long-buried, to again resurface.

When Proust writes about his experience, he takes care to mention the special retentive abilities of taste and smell:

When from a long distant past nothing subsists, after the people are dead, after the things are broken and scattered, taste and smell alone, more fragile but enduring, more unsubstantial, more persistent, more faithful, remain poised a long time, like souls, remembering, waiting, hoping, amid the ruins of all the rest; and bear unflinchingly, in the tiny and almost impalpable drop of their essence, the vast structure of recollection.¹¹

Modern neuro-science has validated his interest in these two oft-neglected senses. As Jonah Lehrer, neuroscientist and former Rhodes Scholar writes, “Rachel Herz, a psychologist at Brown, has shown – in a science paper wittily entitled ‘Testing the Proustian Hypothesis’ - that our senses of smell and taste are uniquely sentimental. This is because smell and taste are the only senses that connect directly to the hippocampus, the center of the brain’s long-term memory.”¹² Proust’s experience with the madeleine, where a recollection was tied to an object and entered into through his senses can now also be explained:

Our memories exist as subtle shifts in the strength of synapses, which make it easier for neurons to communicate with one another. The end result is that when Proust tastes a madeleine, the neurons downstream of the cookie’s taste, the ones that code for Combray and Aunt Leonie, light up. The cells have become inextricably entwined; a memory has been made.¹³

What Proust calls the “exquisite pleasure” found in that moment of recollection is something we all experience. Memories become identity, and identity reflected in the built world becomes a place we call home. As Lehrer writes, “...in the mind, everything is connected. As a result, a madeleine can easily become a revelation.”¹⁴ If certain senses have been neglected in contemporary architecture, then in order to make room for the self within our buildings,

we will need to be mindful of their influence. When even a cookie from one's childhood can "become a revelation", we must take care in our designs to remember the role of memory in home-creation. Understanding the power of objects and their associated sensory inputs will allow designers to truly create dwellings that communicate with us on an intensely personal level.

Priming the Unconscious

Proust's intuitive leap is also supported by studies investigating the concept of unconscious priming. As was touched upon in an earlier chapter, there have been a series of recent studies which have linked unconscious object-associations with behaviour. Aaron Kay's experiment at Stanford generated concrete proof that we associate particular behaviours with objects and types of space (something that most people would no doubt understand from their own experience). In our discussion of state-dependent learning we saw that within each of us there are many selves or roles that can be activated by our surroundings. Those studying the mechanics of unconscious priming are merely looking for a way to explain how our environment can affect us in this way. Once again, the fruits of these labours should prove invaluable to architects as we strive to create spaces that evoke a sense of home.

The ability of the environment to alter our behaviour and mood is not limited to unconscious associations we make with observed objects. Research has found that we can have selves and memories activated through stimulus from any of our senses, in particular those of Proustian interest (taste and smell). Evidence of this was found during a study conducted in the Netherlands and written about in the New York Times: "Dutch psychologists had undergraduates sit in a cubicle and fill out a questionnaire. Hidden in the room was a bucket of water with a splash of citrus-scented cleaning fluid, giving off a faint odor. After completing the questionnaire, the young men and women had a snack, a crumbly biscuit provided by laboratory staff members. The researchers covertly filmed the snack time and found that these students cleared away the crumbs three times more often than a comparison group...."¹⁵ The mere hint of a scent activated associated behaviours within the subjects. Importantly, Carey also writes that "Psychologists say that 'priming' people in this way is not some form of hypnotism, or even subliminal seduction; rather, it's a demonstration of how everyday sight, smells and sounds can selectively activate goals or motives that people already have."¹⁶

The success of these techniques further underline the necessity for designers to comprehend the power of the built environment and responsibility to design and construct in a

pragmatic and conscientious fashion. As Rosemarie Downer, author and social worker writes, “All personal experiences are intrinsically connected to their particular place of occurrence. The specific feature of those places – objects, sounds, people, and ambiance are all unique distinctions that make direct contributions to their lives; their cognitive, social, and emotional development, and their personalities.”¹⁷ If choices that we make have the potential to affect our clients emotionally and behaviourally, then designers should learn to be much more cognizant of the associations that may exist with objects. It is important that we understand the surprisingly crucial role of what we might erroneously deem sentimental detritus plays the home-making process since such knowledge could change the way we create spaces for people.

Stories, Home, and the Self

As we saw in Chapter 3, the space of home can become a representation of the self within the built world. Like Jung (though perhaps not quite as literally), we seem to have a compulsion to carve our own image in stone. Our lives can be complex and seemingly chaotic, and instinctively we search for ways to order and humanize the events which transpire. The home, in being the original place of belonging (and also in fulfilling its role as a framework through which to understand the world), helps us perform this task. We need to be able to make sense of our lives, and the home can act as a stable center for us, a place from which we can weave together the necessary cohesive tapestry of memory from life’s disjointed events. Interestingly, storytelling also fulfills a similar role for us on both personal and cultural levels. As Richard Kearney, holder of the Charles B. Seelig Chair of Philosophy at Boston College writes:

When someone asks you who you are, you tell your story. That is, you recount your present condition in the light of past memories and future anticipations. You interpret where you are now in terms of where you have come from and where you are going to.¹⁸

Storytelling is a tradition as old as humanity itself, and stories themselves are integral to our daily modern life. We tell stories to explain past successes and failures, we tell them to help interpret our lives, and we tell them to help give us a sense of purpose and personal continuity. Stories help us rationalize lives that can appear chaotic and meaningless by linking together a series of singular events (which may be of such scale that we have difficulty



Fig. 5.6 - The ancient Sumerian story of Gilgamesh.



Fig. 5.7 - Scratches and Identations.

even comprehending them) into one cohesive whole. These stories form the basis of our very identity, and because of this, like the space of the home, they have incredible power over us. As J. Edward Chamberlin writes, “In many ways, home is an image for the power of stories. With both, we need to live in them if they are to take hold, and we need to stand back from them if we are to understand their power. But we do need them; when we don’t have them, we become filled with a deep sorrow.”¹⁹

Initially it may seem strange that stories and storytelling can be so fundamental to our psychic wellbeing, our understanding of the world, and our place within in it, but our experience with the power of home will hopefully have left us open to this revelation. The similarities in content and effect on the self and our emotional and psychological well-being between stories and home is intriguing, and ultimately within this similarity we may find clues as to how the space of home communicates and affects us in the ways that it does.

Telling Stories with Spaces

In *Invisible Cities*, Italo Calvino was able to aptly (and quite poetically) describe the way that spaces can capture stories and retell them:

As this wave from memory flows in, the city soaks it up like a sponge and expands. A description of Zaira as it is today should contain all Zaira’s past. The city, however, does not tell its past, but contains it like the lines of a hand, written in the corners of the streets, the gratings of the windows, the banisters of the steps, the antennae of the lightning rods, the poles of the flags, every segment marked in turn with scratches, indentations, scrolls.²⁰

As we have seen, stories have the power to rationalize and give scale to our lives, and this ability is important to our emotional and psychological health. Stories also have a strong relationship with space, which is demonstrated by the fact that some spaces seem to have the ability to capture, contain and retell stories. Often, these spaces tend to be those that we honour with the word “home.” Recognizing this, we can come to see the home as a place of storytelling, and perhaps begin to understand why people create the spaces that they do. The relationship between stories and the place of home may even be a key to explaining the previously intangible feelings of belonging or discomfort that can wash over a person when they enter a space. Memories and desires, these inhabitants of the psychic world and components of the self-continuity narrative, can be and are manifested within the physical realm. As Pallas-

maa writes, “the substance of home is secreted, as it were, upon the framework of the dwelling by the dweller.”²¹ The stories of one’s life can be captured in a house or a room, and they are in the case of the spaces we call home. In a sense our physical surroundings and our possessions are a mnemonic medium capturing moments both joyous and traumatic.

The stories of our lives make up our identity on both personal and societal levels, and the evidence of these stories can be found in the built world. Indeed, we are naturally very perceptive of this evidence, and it is simply a matter of being open to the idea and then recognizing, collecting, and interpreting the information that already exists and is available to us in the built world. This information can tell us much about ourselves, or (from an architectural perspective) our clients, and conversely, we can work to imbue spaces (if not directly and literally with our stories), with a capacity for containing stories.

Chamberlin writes that “...the fact is that stories keep us sane and steady in a world in which we are always having to face loss and unhappiness....Home – the idea as well as the reality – has something of the same power...”²² As objects have the capacity to capture memory; the space of home contains all these discreet recollections and aids us in the necessary process of transforming these singular events into a cohesive narrative. The name we give this narrative is identity. It is through this process of narrative creation that a space begins to reflect our image and become home.

In Chapters 3 and 4 we saw the general importance of the space of home to the identity-formation process. Stories perform a strikingly similar role, and as both objects and spaces have the ability to capture and relate stories, it would seem logical to say that perhaps narratives are the mechanic by which spaces reflect our selves and thus become home.

If we accept this, then we must ask ourselves what we can do with this information. How can we know enough about the people we design for in order to create spaces that reflect their true self (and can thusly become home for them), and even if we can extract this information, how do we implement it? Gaston Bachelard, French philosopher and author of *The Poetics of Space* may have at least partial answers for both of these questions. To begin, we revisit a concept we have seen several times, which is the ability of a dwelling to act as a mirror to the self. Bachelard demonstrates in *The Poetics of Space* his understanding of this mirroring. He too recognizes the way in which we mark the world around us, saying that “...we cover the universe with drawings we have lived,”²³ and also the way in which we carry our home with us:



Fig. 5.8 - What's left over tells a story.



Fig. 5.9 - We mark the world around us.

But over and beyond our memories, the house we were born in is physically inscribed in us. It is a group of organic habits. After twenty years, in spite of all the other anonymous stairways; we would recapture the reflexes of the 'first stairway,' we would not stumble on that rather high step. The house's entire being would open up, faithful to our own being. We would push the door that creaks with the same gesture, we would find our way in the dark to the distant attic. The feel of the tiniest latch has remained in our hands. ²⁴

In order to be able to design with the specificity required to encourage this reflection, we will need to know more about the people we are designing for. Paraphrasing the ever-eloquent Curzio Malaparte, we "carry our home within us," and we are reflected in the space of our home. Thusly, we can learn about people from spaces, and how to make spaces from people. Bachelard himself suggests that we turn to both psychoanalysis and what he calls topoanalysis, which he defines thusly:

I should like to give the name of topoanalysis to this auxiliary of psychoanalysis. Topoanalysis, then, would be the systematic psychological study of the sites of our intimate lives. In the theater of the past that is constituted by memory, the stage setting maintains the characters in their dominant roles." ²⁵

The people for whom we build are more than simply a label such as "family of four", they are complex individuals who require (and deserve) a space that is tailored to their specific needs. These needs go far beyond mere conscious desires, and Bachelard underlines our responsibility to investigate and truly learn about our clients and their needs. Recognizing these needs is the only first step, and from there we must then be able to translate our knowledge into the built realm. It is, however, an important step, and the necessary tools to achieve this understanding are within our grasp.

As was stated at the beginning of this section, the built world speaks to us, and what these buildings have to say (in particular, those which we call the home) has an enormous impact upon us from emotional, psychological, and physical standpoints. The ability of spaces and objects to capture and relate stories of personal and collective continuity is an integral part of this communication, and thus we must be interested in the mechanic by which it functions. A space that leaves no room for stories leaves no room for the self. It is not a dwelling, and can therefore not become home.

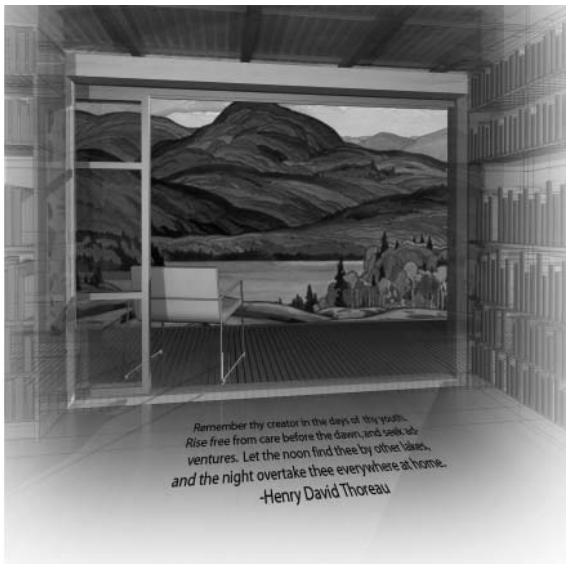


Fig. 5.10 - "Home" sits at the intersection of the place and the story of our life.

We must be able to leave what Calvino called “scratches and indentations” upon our environment. These markings are significant not only because they exist, but more importantly because of what they point to. Like shards of pottery at an archaeological dig, they lead us towards a greater understanding of things in the built world that may be hidden from view: conscious and unconscious desires. The evidence of our hopes, dreams and fears exist all around us: poor decisions, roads not taken, failures hiding in a box in the attic, and successes sitting on our mantle. Sometimes all that we have are memories and half-forgotten desires, and yet it is these very desires and their physical manifestations that are the key to regaining our sense of belonging.

These memories and stories are the mechanism by which a dwelling can become a home, and it is necessary that we make room for them in our designs. The dwellings we design should not be merely looked at, they should be looked past. Every room, every nook, every object should be a window onto the self. This thesis does not propose a new “style” of architecture, merely a way of thinking about how we design, and the effects of the spaces we create. The built environment, if carefully considered has the ability to accept layer after layer of memory and become a narrative that echoes our own life. This process, if successful, can have an incredible positive impact upon the health of the inhabitant, and therefore it is at the very least the duty of designers to try and understand this process and work towards techniques which can make spaces conducive to it. Our dwellings must allow us to dream, and they must also make room for the darkness. We are complex beings with complex needs, and a dwelling must be able to encompass all that we are.



Fig. 5.11 - Looking past design to desires and memories.

Learning from Patterns



Fig. 5.12 - Timeless grandeur.

Having explored the connections between the environment and the individual at the level of cherished object and the personal/familial dwelling, we now progress to the scale of culture or community. While specificity in our designs is desirable (a tailored suit always fits better), there will be instances in which we will not have enough information to create a space that immediately reflects the individuals who will inhabit it. We may find such circumstances when building apartment buildings, or libraries, or schools, and in these cases our designs must contain what we might call generalized specificity, or specific flexibility. Being unable to tailor the spaces in a way that we know to be most healthful, we must strive to create spaces which will positively react with and influence the inhabitants in a more general sense.

Christopher Alexander, architect and author, recognized that some buildings had an essence about them that others did not. He came to call this essence “the quality without a name,” and he believed that it was of incredible importance to our health and enjoyment of life, indeed, he refers to as “the root criterion of life and spirit.”²⁶ Those who have designed buildings (or cities) that evoke this quality were utilizing what “the timeless way of building,” a technique that he believes can be rationally understood, and should be sought by all designers.

There is one timeless way of building. It is a thousand years old, and the same today as it has ever been. The great traditional buildings of the past, the villages and tents and temples in which man feels at home, have always been made by people who were very close to the center of this way. It is not possible to make great buildings, or great towns, beautiful places, places where you feel yourself, places where you feel alive, except by following this way. And, as you will see, this way will lead anyone who looks for it to buildings which are themselves as ancient in their form, as the trees and hills, and as our faces are.²⁷

For Alexander, this way of building is based on patterns of space which we can only understand when we recognize that places are given their character by “certain patterns of events that keep on happening there.”²⁸ The events and the spaces are intertwined, and they are best thought of as one unit. At its core, Alexander's theory rests on an understanding that behaviour and spatial form are related in way that is concrete and observable. By observing patterns of activity and the spaces that they take place in, you learn something about that relationship, and you can determine patterns of space that, from a design perspective can be re-utilized in similar situations in the future.

One example that Alexander uses in his book *The Timeless Way of Building* is that of a nook off of a larger room. In traditional northern European farmhouse design, such small, personal spaces were often found around the edges of the main room of the house. As Alexander points out, there was a pattern of behaviour associated with this design characteristic: these nooks afforded individuals a modicum of personal space in which to engage in activities of interest, such as reading or knitting, and yet they were still in contact with the rest of the family. Individuals had space of their own, but they were not cut off from the social aspects of the home. Contrast this with a contemporary “McMansion,” where the spatial configuration has family members running to separate rooms to pursue their interests; children to their bedrooms to message friends, one spouse to their office to complete work, and the other perhaps flopped on a couch in the entertainment room. Our society laments a lack of family time and cohesion, so in this case a disciple of Alexander would perhaps propose that we look to the pattern of nooks of a main room as a way of bringing the family back together in a dwelling. Alexander’s Pattern Language is ultimately about looking at spaces that work, analyzing why, and then using that template to implement a logical design solution in a similar situation. This seems like a sensible approach, but it has never really been empirically tested, thus one could remain skeptical.

The question of whether or not houses designed using elements of Alexander’s pattern language would make for superior dwellings, and thus be more desirable is something that researchers at the University of Waterloo are investigating currently. Entitled “Assessing Spatial Preference and Behaviour in Architectural Settings in Active House-seekers,” the study is a collaboration between professors from the Department of Psychology and the School of Architecture. Led by Professors Colin Ellard, Thomas Seebohm, and Mark Zanna, the study seeks to find out if different spatial typologies and relationships have an impact on an individuals’ emotional state and behavioural response. In addition, they will be exploring how these reactions to spaces affect the overall desirability of particular houses.

One of the house chosen for the study is the Milstein House, which was designed by Sarah Suzanka, a designer and successful author. The others houses chosen for the study are a typical suburban house from Milton, Ontario, and the Jacob’s House by renowned architect Frank Lloyd Wright. Suzanka is in a way a disciple of Alexander’s, and she utilizes his technique of pattern recreation (including that of the nook, which was discussed earlier), within her designs. How subjects react emotionally within her house, and how desirable they find it in relation to the suburban house and Wright’s work (which is an example of applied Prospect/



Fig. 5.13 - Suzanka’s Milstein House.



Fig. 5.14 - Computer rendering of Suzanka’s Milstein House from ongoing study at the University of Waterloo.

Refuge theory, something we will address in the next section) will help us finally empirically evaluate the effectiveness of the Pattern Language.

Ultimately, whether or not one subscribes fully to Alexander patterns, learning to keenly observe successful spaces (those which evoke the feeling of home, or Alexander's "quality") and their associated activities is a good habit for all designers to have. The finite and surprisingly small number of patterns that he outlines may not prove useful to us, but there is no reason that we can not use his methodology to describe patterns of our own. Indeed, it could be a very useful technique if we were to observe the activities of our clients, and take note of the defining characteristics of spaces they find to be comfortable. Alexander's quality, like the feeling of belonging in one's home, may at first seem intangible, but the anecdotal evidence suggests that there may be a rational basis for it. For architects, such knowledge could play an important role in the design process as we strive to create spaces which their inhabitants will honour with the word "home."

Hiding from Lions

Our preferences and emotional reactions to space are not just determined at the level of culture or community. Like Winnifred Gallagher talks about in *House Thinking*, there are times that we walk into a space (whether it is an individual residence, a public building, or an exterior landscape) and we feel either an immediate sense of belonging, or conversely, an uneasiness with our surroundings. In many of these cases this reaction cannot be explained by our identification with significant objects or spaces, or even a recognition of a learned pattern of space and activity. The feeling conjured up by our confrontation with these spaces comes from a much more primal place, a place that we all share. Understanding our innate emotional and behavioural response to these spatial relationships is yet another way in which designers can tailor spaces both large and small to be comfortable, supportive, and conducive to home-making.

Jay Appleton, an English geographer and author who has already been mentioned in this thesis, is someone who has been exploring our preferences for spatial typologies and relationships, and our behavioural reactions within them. Appleton's work originated in a study of landscape painting as a way to analyze and understand the landscape compositions. From this study he derived two opposing characteristics, "Prospect" and "Refuge," which Appleton consistently found in juxtaposition within these paintings. Refuge can be defined



Fig. 5.15 - Painting showing Prospect to the right, and Refuge to the left.

as shelter and protection, a place in which one can feel safe and secure. A space of refuge is easily defensible, whether against the predators our ancient ancestors dealt with, or strangers at a house party. A place of prospect is one from which one can observe a great swath of territory from, we can see many interesting things and threats will be recognized at a safe distance. A proper combination of prospect and refuge makes for a space of comfort, whether for a primate on the Savannah, hiding from lions, or a student in a lecture hall. A desire for spaces with appropriate amounts of each characteristic has been programmed into us over the many millennia of our species' evolution, and thusly Appleton posits that one's emotional response to a work of landscape painting would be determined by the ratio of prospect to refuge within the work, and the correlation of that ratio to the amount each the individual desired.

Appleton did not originally intend for his system to be used to analyze architectural spaces, but architect and author Grant Hildebrand felt intuitively that Appleton's insights could be applied to explain what he calls "innately appealing architecture." In particular, Hildebrand felt that the houses of Frank Lloyd Wright could be better understood by using Appleton's technique, so he embarked on a rather in-depth analysis of Wright's houses. In addition to prospect and refuge, he and his colleagues at the University of Washington (Appleton himself, psychologist Judith Heerwagen, and the biologist Gordon Orians) added some criteria of their own, namely "complex order," "enticement," and "peril." However, for the purposes of this thesis, and simplicity's sake, we will focus on just prospect and refuge.

Hildebrand's research found that Wright's houses could not only be analyzed using Appleton's criteria, but that aspects of prospect and refuge showed up in nearly every house built after 1902, and the handling of their juxtaposition became increasingly refined as time went on. Even with the volumes of Wright's correspondence that have been published, and the many biographies of this architectural giant, we do not know how Wright came to his understanding of these spatial criteria (he of course would not have called them as Appleton and consequently Hildebrand now do), or even whether he was consciously manipulating his designs with a similar intent. We do, however, know what the results of his technique were. As Hildebrand writes, the clients for whom Wright created house were almost universally happy with the end result. Setting aside, of course, the many technical, budgetary, and personality-related issues that plagued Wright's work, his designs generally made for excellent homes. In fact, his designs had such an impact, that in some cases "...houses were bought back again by the same people who had sold them, because they could not feel at home in any other".²⁹ Many clients also returned to Wright for second or third houses, so pleased were they with earlier results. There is just a certain something about Wright's work. As Hildebrand writes: "I began

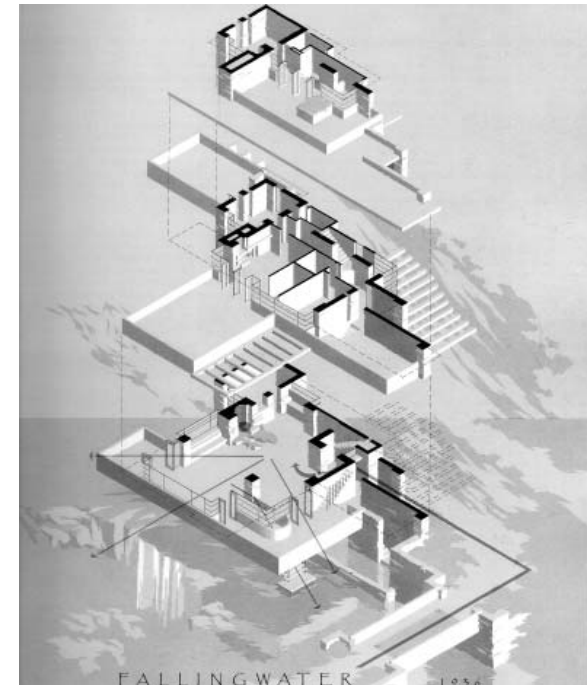


Fig. 5.16 - Exploded Axonometric showing analysis of Fallingwater by Hildebrand.



Fig. 5.17 - Frank Lloyd Wright's Jacob's House (1936).



Fig. 5.17 - Jacob's House Computer render, looking out to the living room from kitchen area.

to recognize that Wright had developed with consistency and richness an architecture that stimulated powerful, genetically driven responses of Homo Sapiens.”³⁰ Perhaps this richness is something that all designers can strive for with an understanding of prospect and refuge.

Research into the mysteries of successful spaces has not stopped with Appleton and Hildebrand. The ongoing research project being conducted at the University of Waterloo which was touched upon in the previous section is, in a way, carrying Appleton's and Hildebrand's ideas even further. One of the houses chosen for the study is the Jacob's House, one of Wright's earliest Usonian houses. As with Alexander's Pattern Language in the previously discussed Milstein house by Sarah Suzanka, subjects' reactions to a design imbued with a classic juxtaposition of prospect and refuge will be recorded and analyzed. When subjects are asked to find spaces that they feel comfortable in, and when the galvanic skin response data is correlated with physical locations within the virtual models, it will be interesting to see the relationship between spaces of high prospect and refuge and occupant comfort level / emotional state. Hildebrand's work would make it seem likely that there would seem likely that there would be a high degree of correlation between the level of juxtaposed prospect/refuge and comfort level, and if the study bears this out concretely it will be both very interesting and useful information for designers to have.

Once again, we as designers are confronted with the reality that choices we make can have a direct and significant impact on the well-being of those who would inhabit our designs. Our innate desires for types of space is something that should at the very least be considered during the design process. It is not to say that there is one relationship of prospect and refuge that we must always strive for, in fact, the opposite is true: if we are to use these criteria in our designs we must be analytical and flexible (indeed, different personality types have differing preferences for the amount of each characteristic, and the type of space and activity can alter our desire for one or the other).

All of this information must be taken into consideration during the design process, but at its most basic, what is important for us to understand is the following:

1. people innately judge the spaces they inhabit by certain criteria,
2. these criteria can affect our mood and behaviour, and
3. designers have the ability to manipulate these criteria.

This thesis does not propose that juxtaposing characteristics of prospect and refuge in a design is the sole way to create dwelling spaces, as we have seen throughout this chapter, there are a host of ways in which the built environment can impact our emotional state and behaviour. In many cases these associations are learned, but there are some reactions to space with are innate. A clear understanding these characteristics gives architects one more way to rationally design spaces with an eye towards inhabitant comfort, and ultimately, home-creation.

Whether it is at the scale of a cherished object, the family home, learned patterns within a culture, or innate responses to spaces, we have seen the mechanics by which the built environment can affect the emotional and psychological state of the individual. The mechanics discussed are all such that architects have direct design control over them, and can thusly use that control to create spaces that are appropriate and healthful for their occupants.

Coherent Dwellings

This chapter is not an outline of a particular way of building, it hopes to be an outline of a way of thinking about the process of design. Hopefully, by demonstrating the links between the built world and the individual, and by exploring how those links are formed and maintained, any architect or student of architecture who deigns to read this thesis will at least leave the experience considering the importance of the feeling of home, and perhaps recognizing their ability create spaces conducive to the act of home-creation. The buildings that we design and inhabit are speaking to us constantly. Whether those buildings speak coherently or not, and whether they leave room for our side of the conversation is completely up to us as designers. Now that we understand the importance of spaces with which we can identify, spaces that allow us to order our lives and understand the world, it would be nothing short of negligence for us to ignore this knowledge. What we do may not be mystical, but it certainly is of incredible importance. We would do well to remember, at the very least, to do no harm.

When a man rides a long time through wild regions he feels the desire for a city. Finally he comes to Isidora, a city where the buildings have spiral staircases encrusted with spiral seashells, where perfect telescopes and violins are made, where the foreigner hesitating between two women always encounters a third, where cockfights degenerate into bloody brawls among the bettors. He was thinking of all these things when he desired a city. Isidora, therefore, is the city of his dreams: with one difference. The dreamed-of city contained him as a young man; he arrives at Isidora in his old age. In the square there is the wall where the old men sit and watch the young go by; he is seated in a row with them. Desires are already memories.

-Italo Calvino ¹

Home and Architecture

WE BEGAN THIS JOURNEY with two deceptively simple questions:

Is home an architectural concept?

And, if, by the current standards of architecture it is not,

Is ‘the concept of home’ important enough that we should be attempting to understand it and expand our role to incorporate home-creation?

In the strictest definition of architecture, the answer to the first question, currently, is “no,” nor has it really ever been. There is an inescapable temporal component to the feeling of home, like Pallasmaa says, “it cannot be made all at once,”² and so we may begin to think that architecture cannot be held responsible for what happens within its spaces. Home is, however, related to the form of architecture, and it has been demonstrated that appropriate spaces can make an incredible impact upon the process of home-making. As we have seen, the feeling of home is related to a recognition of self within the built environment. The self is essentially a personal narrative, a story we tell ourselves and others about who we are, what we have done, and what we hope to do. This narrative is formed through a process of rationalization and ordering of memories of events both large and small. We have seen that spaces and objects have the capacity to contain memories, and as they fall under the purview of architecture, it could be argued that home, that critical feeling, thusly is a concept which architecture should claim.

With regards to the second question, there can no longer be any doubt of the power and influence of the space that we honour with the name ‘home,’ and the feeling that is related to that space. After seeing the integral role that home plays in the identification process, both as a mirror of self and as a locus in the world; after exploring the benefits of home to our psychological and emotional health, and witnessing the detrimental effects to those who must go without or are forced to leave their home; after all this, how can we possibly question the importance of home? It must be clear to us by now that continuing to ignore the fundamental ways in which we interact with and are influenced by our environment is perilous to not only our professional relevance, but the health and welfare of society at large. We can no longer allow an image of home, either in the form of suburban developments, or hollow, unresponsive condominiums, to be sold to us as the real thing. The effects of true dwellings, spaces conducive to the act of home-making, are far too great for us to allow poor design (or a complete lack thereof) to dictate the way in which we will understand and interact with our environment.

The Responsibility of Architecture

Now that we understand the importance of home as a concept, and we have seen that we as designers possess the ability to create spaces that are more or less conducive to fostering this feeling, what are our responsibilities? Before we answer, let it be clear that this thesis does not propose a new 'style' of architecture, it is meant to be a thought-provoking exercise. Indeed, the goal of this thesis is akin to those set out by Jay Appleton and paraphrased by Grant Hildebrand:

I seek to bring the argument to a level of plausibility at which other scholars competent to pursue further inquiry, including a wealth of empirical inquiry, might find here a framework based on sufficient prima facie evidence to warrant their attention.³

What is desired is that the reader will begin to look at and understand the built world in new ways, and thus attempt to utilize some of the knowledge and techniques outlined in this paper.

In addition, however, this thesis seeks to outline the power (and thus responsibility) of the profession of architecture and its practitioners. The evidence of the power of home that has been outline here, and the relation of the feeling of home to space demonstrates clearly that architects have the ability to concretely influence the quality of our clients lives through a built medium. It is not just that we can put a roof over their head, we can create for them a dream dwelling, and indeed we have a responsibility to do so. It may be that some experienced designers already intuitively understand the concepts and techniques that are outlined in this thesis, but the rest of the design community should become aware of them as well. In this era we have before us tools and knowledge that generations before us did not. It would be negligent to squander this gift.

All individuals have the ability to form a special relationship with their environment, and this relationship (when positive and nurturing), has been shown to have extremely beneficial effects. Heidegger said that we need both dwellings and dwellers, and while architects may not be able to influence the latter, we certainly have a responsibility to create the former. In order to do this, we need to emphasize a real connection between inhabitants and our designs. As Juhani Pallasmaa writes:

The sense of self, strengthened by art and architecture, allows us to engage fully in the mental dimensions of dream, imagination, and desire. Buildings and cities provide the horizon for the understanding and confronting of the human existential condition. Instead of creating mere objects of visual seduction, architecture relates, mediates and projects meanings. The ultimate meaning of any building is beyond architecture; it directs our consciousness back to the world and towards our own sense of self and being. Significant architecture makes us experience ourselves as complete embodied and spiritual beings.⁴

Our profession has the mandate to create these significant buildings, and we need to become more sensitive to the ways in which the built world communicates with us so that we might be able to do so in a reasonable and pragmatic way.

Similar to how we read body language, so do we read the environment we inhabit. Architects, when utilizing the techniques touched upon here, have the ability to determine what it is that we read. Our designs must leave room for both the body and the mind, and we must be constantly aware of the messages that our spaces and objects are transmitting. Especially at the scale of the individual dwelling, we should be able to create spaces which are truly comfortable and nurturing. At larger scales we lose some of the specificity required in the home-making process, but we still have knowledge of what we innately desire from space to guide us during the design process. Ultimately, no matter the scale or use, our responsibility is to make spaces for people, spaces that will improve their lives. Our work's influence is too great for us to continue to ignore it any longer. Our buildings speak to their inhabitants whether we intend them to or not, and to be unaware of that message and its potential effects is to be negligent in our duties. Perhaps, like doctors, we should take an oath to, at minimum, do no harm.

Of late, the sustainable movement within the field of architecture has taken off, and has truly become ubiquitous. The techniques of sustainability are not complicated, and while they may require that a premium is paid during the construction phase, the rewards that are reaped from this investment (both in savings on energy bills, and more importantly, increased health among those that work and live in sustainable buildings), are more than compensatory. Indeed, it is to the point that designers who do not incorporate sustainable elements in their designs are seen as at best out of step with the times, and potentially negligent in their duties to the client and society at large. With our newfound knowledge of the influence of the environment, the power of the place we call home, and the potential ramifications to our

psychological and physical health, it would seem only natural that a similar movement towards “psychologically sustainable” design would be appropriate. Furthermore, mainstream recognition of the influence of our environment, similar to that of sustainable design, can be a way in which we can demonstrate the importance of architecture to the well-being of the public in terms that are concrete and comprehensible to them.

Juhani Pallasmaa writes, “Home is not, perhaps, at all a notion of architecture, but of psychology, psychoanalysis and sociology.”⁵ We have, however, seen how fundamentally important home is to our personal development and the many ways in which it shapes our identity and our behavior. We have witnessed the incredible influence that the feeling and space of home exerts over our ongoing psychological and physical health, and the detrimental effects of the loss of home (whether through infirmity or exile) have been demonstrated to us. The feeling of home and the space that we associate with that feeling have incredible power. If home is indeed a notion of “psychology, psychoanalysis and sociology,” then architects need to find a way to incorporate the knowledge of these fields within their scope.

Endnotes

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7. *Ibid*: 248.
8. Rowles, Charles D. and Habib Chaudhury, “Between the Shores of Recollection”: 13.
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2. Pallasmaa, “Identity, Intimacy and Domicile”: 4.
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21. *Ibid*: 39.

22. *Ibid*: 62.

23. *Ibid*: 107.

24. *Ibid*: 167.

25. *Ibid*: 17.

26. Pallasmaa, “Identity, Intimacy and Domicile”: 4.

27. Heidegger, Poetry, Language, Thought: 161.

28. Pallasmaa, “Identity, Intimacy and Domicile”: 4.

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3. “The Constitution of the State of Montana” (Retrieved Mar 10, 2008). Montana State Legislature.. <http://leg.mt.gov/css/mcode_const/const.asp>: (Pre-ambule, 1972 Version).

4. Chamberlin, If This is Your Land, Where are Your Stories?: 27.

5. Gallagher, House Thinking: 4.

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8. Norberg-Schulz, The Concept of Dwelling: 8.

9. *Ibid*: 10.

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11. Norberg-Schulz, The Concept of Dwelling: 20.

12. *Ibid*: 91.

13. Frank, Oswald and Hans Werner-Wahl, “Dimensions of the Meaning of Home in Later Life”: 22.

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17. Heidegger as quoted in Sharr, Heidegger’s Hut: 65.

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3. Gallagher, House Thinking: 3.
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30. *Ibid*: 16.

Chapter 6: The Responsibility of Architecture

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