

the wrong house;

a twisted guide to home



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2009/2010

abstract

In this paper the notion of home is examined not through the nostalgic, Bachelardian lens, but rather via uncanny and twisted narratives. From the scale of the family to a national scale home is paralleled with the 'un-home' due to internal dysfunctions or external powers. Home is considered in relation to notions of family, the human body, fiction, nostalgia and homelessness. The 21st century human is estranged from home and inhabits an unfamiliar, threatening environment. The paper seeks home in this contemporary, un-homely society. It concludes that those uncanny environments and experiences are those who strengthen the bond between an individual and one's home.

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2009/2010

''Home is the one place in all this world where hearts are sure of each other. It is the place of confidence. It is the place where we tear off that mask of guarded and suspicious coldness which the world forces us to wear in self-defence, and where we pour out the unreserved communications of full and confiding hearts.''

Frederick W. Robertson

*''For there we loved, and where we love is home,
Home that our feet may leave, but not our hearts,
...the chain may lengthen, but it never parts!''*

Oliver Wendell Holmes, Sr., *Homesick in Heaven*



fig.1 so this is love

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Acknowledgements

Since I started my research on the subject there were many people that influenced me and supported me.

First and foremost, I would like to express my gratitude to my parents who supported me during my long and intense endeavour the last year.

I am also grateful to my supervisor Adam Cowley-Evans for his helpful comments and suggestions.

I would like to address special thanks to Dr. Krzysztof Nawratek for introducing me to contemporary philosophers such as Emmanuel Levinas and Slavoj Žižek.

Lastly, I would like to dedicate this paper to my grandfather, Helias.

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Introduction to the "uncanny"

The uncanny emerged as a concept in the late nineteenth century by Jentsch and was later developed in Freud's essay 'The Uncanny' in 1918. The uncanny, categorized as a feeling of anxiety arose from the transformation of what once felt familiar into something unfamiliar, from *heimlich*, that is, into the *unheimlich*. As a modern phobia, the uncanny invaded spaces in literature, film and in the late twentieth century invaded the space of architecture. But what really is "the uncanny"?

Before defining the uncanny it would be useful to state that "people differ greatly in their sensitivity to this kind of feeling".¹ As Freud suggested the "[writer] must first put himself in the proper state of feeling and so put himself in the way of experiencing a sense of uncanny".²

1 It is a feeling that one needs to experience in order to comprehend it. It is linked to repressed memories and therefore is connected to personal experiences, see Freud S., *The Uncanny*, London:Penguin Classics, 2003 pp.124

2 Freud 2003 pp 124



fig.2 "the haunted house"

It is a state which is often associated with memories, dreams and the unconscious.³ It also belongs to the realm of the frightening nonetheless it creates a kind of fear that cannot be directly linked with an apparent threat.⁴ The state of anxiety that the uncanny creates can be linked to "not-being-at-home".

Uncanny abodes

*"If I were asked to name the chief benefit of the house, I should say: the house shelters day-dreaming, the house protects the dreamer; the house allows one to dream in peace "*⁵

3 Curtis B., "Venice Metro", in Borden et al(eds), *Strangely Familiar: narratives of architecture in the city*, London: Routledge, 1996 , pp46

4 Ferguson H., *The Lure of dreams: Sigmund Freud and the Construction of Modernity*, London: Routledge, 1996, pp147

5 Bachelard G., *the Poetics of space*, Massachusetts :Beacon Press, 1994 pp.6

Or does it?

*"The notion of the house is often related to the uncanny as it is 'the place of peace; the shelter not only forms all injury, but forms all terror, doubt and division'"*⁶

According to Porteous it is obvious why the German word (Geheimnis) meaning secret derives from the word for home (Heim). Because whatever takes

"uncanny...can be linked to 'not-being-at-home'"

place within the four walls of a house remains a hidden to everyone excluded from it.⁷ The word unheimlich is the standard German negation of heimlich and it is supposed

⁶ Ruskin J, *Sesame and Lilies*, Montana: Kessinger Publishing, 2003 pp.145-146

⁷ Porteous J. D., "Home: The Territorial Core", *Geographical Review*, Vol. 66, No. 4, American Geographical Society, October 1976, pp. 169

to be the exact opposite.⁸ What it really means though is directly implied by heimlich, which means familiar, homely, intimate, "arousing a sense of agreeable restfulness and security as in one within the four walls of his house". Additionally, what is familiar and secure is also hidden, secret and concealed from the outside, "kept from sight . . . withheld from others". By extension what is hidden is also frightful, threatening and "uncomfortable, uneasy, gloomy, dismal . . . ghastly" -that is the uncanny.⁹ Home may, in fact, entrap and then submerge the ego. This notion has been implied in

8 However, it turns out that heimlich has two meanings. The first sense is literal: meaning domestic, homely, intimate and the second meaning departs from the positive literal meaning and leads to a negative metaphorical sense of secret, hidden, forbidden, see Freud 2003 : 123-129

9 Dolar M., "I Shall Be with You on Your Wedding-Night": Lacan and the Uncanny ", *Rendering the Real* , Vol. 58, The MIT Press , October 1991, pp. 5

literature referring to particular social groups. Shakespeare suggested that "men are merriest when they are from home."¹⁰ Conversely, Shaw noted that "home is the girl's prison and the woman's workhouse."¹¹ The same sources, however, conclude that only the traveller who has rejected "homeliness" by leaving hearth can fully value the merits of it.¹² As a theoretical paradox, the uncanny confronts the longing for domestic security and a shelter with notions of homelessness and homesickness. In this paper I will attempt to denaturalize the idea of a safe and homey house seeking an answer to what is really home and capturing the difficult conditions of the theoretical practice of architecture in modern times. From the domestic scale of the home itself to the modern metropolis I seek the uncanny in relation to notions of family, human body, nostalgia and homelessness.

10 Porteous 1976: 387

11 Porteous 1976: 387

12 Porteous 1976: 387

"A house is made of walls and beams; a home is built with love and dreams"¹³

The scale of the house is the most obvious space to examine notions of uncanny as "the uncanny was...a sensation best experienced in the privacy of the interior"¹⁴ De Certeau believed that the

"what is familiar and secure is also hidden, secret and concealed from the outside"

"home designates both the house (the property) and the family (the genealogical body.)"¹⁵. Alfred Hitchcock used notions of family and home as spaces of entrapment as "in

13 William Arthur Ward

14 An example is classic detective stories. The setting is always a cozy and peaceful environment with underlying dark secrets according to Ernst Bloch, see Vidler A., *The architectural uncanny: essays in the modern unhomely*, MIT press, 1994, pp.4

15 De Certeau M., *The Practice of Everyday life*, translated by Rendal S., London: University of California Press, 1988 pp.215

several early films...tensions within the family undermine the idea of the home as a realm of security, stability and family relationships".¹⁶

I will examine this idea through two different cases of perverted family examples.

"home designates both the house (the property) and the family (the genealogical body.)"

Family Romances and Blue Velvet's oedipal syndrome

In his essay "Family Romances", Freud suggested that the theme of family relations plays a central role in children's games and later becomes a feature in many neuroses.¹⁷ Many syndromes are related to children's relations with their parents, for instance the Oedipal Syndrome. For this paragraph I have chosen to focus on

16 Jacobs S, *The wrong house: the architecture of Alfred Hitchcock*, Rotterdam : 010 Publishers, 2007 pp.32

17 Haughton H., "Introduction", in Freud S., *The Uncanny*, London : Penguin Classics, 2003 pp. xxvi

film specifically because film renders popular sentiments as allegories.¹⁸

In Lynch's films the "The home is a place where things can go wrong" "insecurity, estrangement and lack of orientation and balance are sometimes so acute...that the question becomes one of whether it is possible ever to feel 'at home' ".¹⁹ The mood that the director succeeds to convey to the viewers is that of intellectual uncertainty and that is where uncanny is expressed into its purest form. David Lynch in an interview stated that:

18 Jameson F., 'The Political Unconscious: Narrative as a Socially Symbolic Act', *Ithaca*, New York: Cornell University Press, 1982

19 Rodley C., *Lynch on Lynch*, London : Faber and Faber, 1997 pp. x

"The home is a place where things can go wrong. When I was a child, home seems claustrophobic but that wasn't because I had a bad family...there is a very innocent, naive quality to life, and there's a horror and a sickness as well" ²⁰

The opening scene of *Blue Velvet* depicts just the above. White picket fences and red roses, shown in slow motion in the beginning of the film represent the American Dream. (fig.3) The image of beauty and security of the American Dream is violently replaced by the protagonist's father accident. The next scene is even more uncanny as the director zooms into the ground showing that there are "dark unstoppable natural forces under the careful veneer of a small town". (fig.4)²¹

20 Lynch D. Cited in Rodley C., *Lynch on Lynch*, London: Faber and Faber, 1997, pp.10, pp.139

21 Atkinson M., *Blue Velvet*, British Film Institute, 1997 pp.18



fig.3 screenshot from 'Blue Velvet' depicting the American Dream suburban house

fig.4 screenshots from
'Blue Velvet' depicting the
ants that represent the
dark forces under the
deceptively beautiful town



That scene is an indication of what is going to happen next in the story. The Oedipal Family example is translated into its most perverted way in Blue Velvet. The protagonist, Jeffrey, represents the young boy. (fig.5) Dorothy, the singer that represents the mother, develops a sadomasochistic relationship with Frank, the criminal, which is the father in this perverted triangle.(fig.6) The "young boy" has a sexual relationship with "the mother" but then instead of punishing himself, like Oedipus, he kills his "father". With his schizophrenia and excessive violence, Frank was a threat to the father figure, through his masquerade as "Daddy."(fig.7) By killing Frank, Jeffrey rejects the "evil" side of his own personality and enters into a "normal" relationship with Sandy. The normal family values are restored when "the mother", Dorothy appears with her real son.

fig.5 screenshots
from 'Blue Velvet'
depicting Jeffrey
peeping through the
closet



fig.6 screenshots
from 'Blue Velvet'
illustrating the
perverted
relationship
"the mother" and
"the child"





fig.7 Frank Booth (Dennis Hopper) confronts the desire of Dorothy Vallens (Isabella Rossellini)



fig. 8 screenshot depicting Frank Booth as "Daddy"

The story of Medea

What is happening in Euripides' *Medea*? It is a story of love and revenge set into ancient Greece. Medea fell in love with Jason and left her father taking with her the Golden Fleece, his treasure, and followed Jason along with their two sons to Corinth. Jason, however, considering his social position, he married the princess of Corinth in order to produce a royal offspring and therefore have a more honourable future. Medea executes her revenge slowly. She first kills Jason's new beloved and then at home, at the "oikos" she stabs her own children.(fig.9) Euripides uses the following words to describe the mental state of Medea:

*MEDEA: Aiai. Wronged.
My wrongs call forth great cries of woe!
Boys, your mother's hated. Cursed boys,
I wish you dead, your father too.
Curse his whole house!"* ²²
Medea

22 "αἰαῖ, ἔπαθον τλάμων ἔπαθον μεγάλων ἀξι' ὀδυρμῶν· ὦ κατάρητοι παῖδες ὀλοισθε συγγεράς μητρὸς σὺν πατρί, καὶ πᾶς δόμος ἔρροι.", see Euripides, *Medea*, 111-115



fig. 9 Medea Kills
Her Children,
(Medee furieuse),
1838, Eugene
Delacroix

To convey the darkness and uncanniness in, Medea's house, a Greek director and choreographer, Dimitrios Papaioannou in his adaptation of Euripides's Medea uses water in the scene.(fig.10) In an interview he states that "water", a natural element invading the security of the house creates an uncanny feeling that evil and hostile powers lead Medea's actions.²³(fig.11) Medea deprives Jason from his children and his new wife. Jason cannot beget royal offsprings by his new bride, nor can he depend on the sons he already had with Medea. The sons' murder is considered as a kind of 'castration'. Slavoj Zizek considers Medea by these radical acts as the example of 'la vraie femme': a woman who deprives her husband of "the precious *agalma* around which his life turns".²⁴ The place where the crime is held, the "oikos" is transformed into an "un-home", a black hole inside the Greek Town.

23 "Interview with Dimitris Papaioannou, Director of Medea II", Interview, *City Weekend*, 1st Aug 2008, <http://www.cityweekend.com.cn>

24 Zizek S., *The Art of the Ridiculous Sublime: on David Lynch's Lost Highway*, Seattle: University of Washington Press, 2000, pp.8-9

fig. 10 setting on the performance Medea² by Dimitrios Papaioannou



fig. 11 the "dog" represents the dark side of Medea and is the character that urges her towards the crime



The "oikos" as a term refers not only to the domestic place but also to the family itself. As the woman was not involved in political - and social - life in ancient Greece, she took care of the home to guard the 'oikonomia'(the integrity of the house). It became thus, probable to the readers and viewers of Greek tragedy to draw a parallel between the darkness of Medea's house and Medea as a woman, even between the inside of the house and her body. The oikos as a body confuses and frightens the spectators. The spectator is then not looking straight to the house, but, as Slavoj Zizek calls it, he is looking 'awry'.²⁵

25 Zizek S., *Looking Awry: An Introduction to Jacques Lacan through Popular Culture*, The MIT Press, 1992

"I know this place, I've been here before" ²⁶

Bachelard agreed that "the house, the stomach, the cave, for example, carries the same overall theme of the return to the mother".²⁷ In another archetypal iteration, houses

also represent the human body itself or its extensions:

In Danielwski's cult novel "House

of Leaves" the house in which the

Navidson family lives is becoming

a trap. The homey feeling that

was once there was gone.

Danielwski emphasizes that

Navidson's house is an "incarnation of his own mother. In

other words: absent." ²⁸ He later states that:

house is an

"incarnation of his

own mother. In

other words: absent

26 Freud S., "The Uncanny," translated from German by Riviere J., in *On Creativity and the Unconscious: Papers on the Psychology of Art, Literature, Love, Religion*, New York: Harper and Row, 1958, pp. 153

27 Gaston Bachelard, *La terre et les reveries du repos*, Paris: Librairie Jose Corti, 1948, pp.75

28 Danielwski M., *The house of leaves*, Doubleday, London, 2000 pp.358

*"the adolescent boy's primary identification lies with the mother. The subsequent realization that he is unlike her ... results in an intense feeling of displacement and loss. The boy must seek out a new identity (the father)... Navidson explores that loss that which he first identified with: the vagina, the womb, the mother."*²⁹

"the folk's old home"³⁰

It often happens that neurotic male patients declare that there is something uncanny about the female genitals organs. However, this unheimlich place is actually the entrance to man's old home, a place in which everyone lived in the beginning.³¹ Freud jokingly wrote that "love is a longing for home" and if a man while dreaming of a particular landscape thinks: "I know that place, I've been

29 Danielwski 2000:358

30 Freud 1958: 153

31 Freud 1958: 153

here before", he is dreaming of his mother's womb.³²(fig.12) The uncanny continues here to be something once familiar. The following passage from the "House of Leaves" explains why men feel uncanny about the womb:

*"Notice only men go into it. Why? Simple: women don't have to. They know there's nothing there and can live with that knowledge, but men must find out for sure. They're haunted by that infinite hollow and its sense-making allure, and so they crave it, desire it, desire its end, its knowledge. They must penetrate, invade, conquer, destroy, inhabit, impregnate and if necessary even been consumed by it. It really comes down to what men lack. They lack the hollow, the uterine cavity, any creative life-yielding physiological incavation. The whole thing's about womb envy or vagina envy, whatever you prefer"*³³

32 Freud 2003:151

33 Danielwski 2000:358



fig.12 Leonardo da Vinci
Foetus in Womb, Windsor
Castle, Royal Library 1991

Kierkegaard agreed that: "without the woman man is a restless spirit finding no peace because he is nowhere at home"³⁴ Freud, on the other hand, associated the feeling of being buried alive with a fantasy of returning to the womb. Therefore, the womb and the tomb are what Freud referred to as "antithetical sense of primal words": that is words coming from the same root with apparently opposite meanings (a house for the dead soul, a house for the unborn soul), which originally expressed the same meaning.³⁵

34 Hubben W., *Dostoevsky, Kierkegaard, Nietzsche and Kafka*, New York :Touchstone, 1997, pp.36

35 "the fear of death is transformed into maternal/erotic love; death is transformed into sex; tomb transformed into womb. In a Freudian "heimlich maneuver," the uncanniness of death through burial is displaced onto the "canniness" of the mother's genitals, which in this context signify pleasure rather than death and burial" see Jonte-Pace D., "At Home in the Uncanny: Freudian Representations of Death, Mothers, and the Afterlife", *Journal of the American Academy of Religion*, Vol. 64, No. 1, Oxford University Press, Spring 1996, pp.79,pp.637

House as a mirror of one's soul

'Houses are also a representation of the human body or its extensions. In Edgar Allan Poe's uncanny story, "The Fall of the House of Usher" (1839), the gloomy, menacing, decaying House of Usher symbolizes the madness of the narrator and Roderick Usher. The man in Poe's story arrives in an environment into which somebody else's thoughts have been already projected. The uncanny is represented through the fact that the mind "possesses" the house. (fig.13) It is even more uncanny that the house is compared to a head and the observer who walks through the materialized form of another's mind.³⁶ In poetry, literature, and dreams, houses are invested with human qualities. According to

"the individual's house is a universal, archetypal symbol of the self"

36 Coates P., *The Gorgon's Gaze: German Cinema, Expressionism, and the image of Horror*, Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1991, pp.13

Jung, the individual's house is a universal, archetypal symbol of the self. The house reflects how the individual sees himself, how he wishes to see himself, or how he wishes others to see him. The house, then, is a means of projecting an image both inwardly and outwardly.³⁷ Bachelard also wrote, for "taking the house as a tool for analysis of the human soul".³⁸ Not surprisingly, therefore, literary houses and their spaces constitute archetypes of the psyche. The home itself becomes a medium to convey one's identity through manipulation of its exterior. Cooper, using Jung's psychoanalytic approaches, perceives the house as a symbol of the self.³⁹

37 Porteous 1976:387

38 Mezei K., Briganti C., "Reading the House: A Literary Perspective", *Signs*, Vol. 27, No. 3, The University of Chicago Press, Spring 2002, pp. 841

39 Cooper C, "The House as Symbol of the Self", in Lang J. et al (eds), *Designing for Human Behavior*, Stroudsburg: Hutchinson & Ross, 1974, pp. 130-146



fig.13 Poe, Edgar Allan, 1809-1849, "Fall of the House of Usher: House"

A house is not a[t] home

Sometimes, the uncanny is the outcome of external powers and not produced by the repressed memories of the familiar. This chapter attempts to find those uncanny characteristics in two houses, one fictional and one built.

Navidson's House, Ash Tree Lane, USA

One of the characteristics of the uncanny is the concept of the "doppelganger", meaning the double. The double is connected to notions of animate or inanimate objects which fit perfectly to the idea that the house can mutate and change according to the psychological state of anyone that enters it in the "House of Leaves". A fictional character Ruby Dhal calls the house in Ash Tree Lane: "a solipsistic heightener", explaining that "the house, the halls, and the rooms all become one, self-collapsing,

expanding, tilting, closing, but always in perfect relation to the mental state of the individual."⁴⁰

Another characteristic of the uncanny is, as I have previously stated the connection to the home, the intimate. Therefore, when the intimate, the shelter is intruded by alien forces the inside becomes uncanny. The Brothers Grimm, in their endless collection of folklore and myths they defined the uncanny with the following phrase: " At times I feel like a man who walks in the night and believes in ghosts; every corner is heimlich and full of terrors for him"⁴¹ Hence the house becomes a hostile place, the domesticity, the remains and memories of a

when familiar things are found in "a place that is not right", uncanny arises

40 Danielwski 2000 :165

41 Hugo V., "Les travailleurs de la mer", *Oeuvres completes: Roman III*, Paris: Robert Laffont, 1985, pp 119

family history, and the house's role as the most intimate shelter of privacy is contrasted by the terror of invasion by alien spirits. Amos Rapoport hypothesized that when a stranger approaches an unfamiliar house that raises the anxiety for both the stranger and the occupant.⁴² Slavoj Zizek commented on a different dimension of the uncanny. He stated that when familiar things are found in another place, "a place that is not right", a feeling of uncanny arises as if something happened that one cannot understand.⁴³ A passage from the "House of Leaves" describes exactly that feeling:

"In early June of 1990, the Navidsons flew to Seattle for a wedding. When they returned something in the house had changed. Though, they had only been away for four days, the change was enormous. It was not, however, obvious-like for instance a fire, a robbery or an act of vandalism. Quite the contrary, the horror was atypical.

42 Rapoport A., *House Form and Culture* , Englewood Cliffs: Prentice-Hall Inc ,1969

43 Zizek 1992: 145

*No one could deny there has been an intrusion, but it was so odd no one knew how to respond...what took place amounts to a strange spatial violation which has already been described in a number of ways - namely surprising, unsettling, disturbing, but most of all uncanny."*⁴⁴

Danielwski criticizing Heidegger's explanation of the unheimlich, states that the house in Ash Tree Lane is exactly what one could describe as uncanny: "neither homey, nor protective, nor comforting nor familiar. It is alien, exposed, and unsettling"⁴⁵

"something in the house had changed ... the horror was atypical"

The estrangement of human body is one of the characteristics of the uncanny that is harder to analyze. The uncanny as a term has been used in philosophy as well as in psychoanalysis to indicate a disturbing vacuous area. Heidegger described as uncanny that "empty space"

44 Danielwski 2000:24

45 Danielwski 2000:28

produced by "loss of faith in divine" images.⁴⁶ Man unable to reach "god's sphere of being" and not being able to set himself onto god's position leaves that place where, metaphysically speaking, god resides, empty. And thus another uncanny and unfamiliar space appears which is "neither identical with God's sphere of being nor with that of man".⁴⁷ The house in Ash Tree Lane bore a resemblance to that space.

'You see emptiness here is the purported familiar and your house is endlessly familiar, endlessly repetitive. Hallways, corridors, rooms, over and over again...A lifeless, objectless, soulless place. Godless too' ⁴⁸
(fig.14)

46 Jackson R., *Fantasy the literature of Subversion*, UK: Taylor & Francis, 1981, pp.63

47 Buber-Agassi J., *Martin Buber on psychology and psychotherapy: essays, letters, and dialogue*, Syracuse: Syracuse University Press, 1999, pp.59

48 Danielwski 2000:359

fig. 14 the five and a half minute hallway, a corridor that leading to a maze, trapping the resident

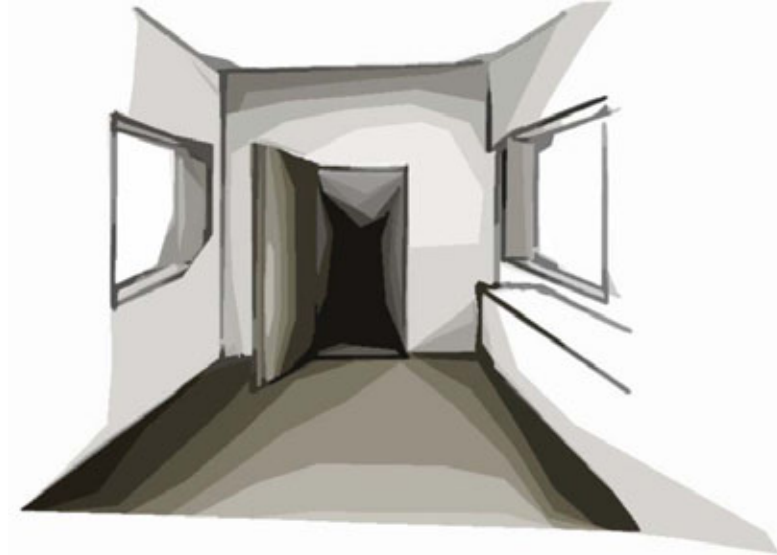


fig.15 the vast space of the Great Hall



A feeling of disorientation can be considered uncanny, especially if it is a movement in circles. In Elliot's *Wasteland* the circle symbolizes the uncanny totality:

"Crowd of people walking round in a ring ".⁴⁹

A feeling of disorientation, if experienced at home, can be threatening and fearful. In Navidson's house in Ash Tree Lane it is obvious that no compass can work because "the needle never stays still. North it seems has no authority there".⁵⁰ Furthermore, the house had different internal dimensions from the external ones. In a way the Great Hall was compared to: "the inside of some preternatural hull designed to travel vast seas never before observed in the world".⁵¹(fig.15) The same feeling was accomplished by Kafka's court in his book, "the Trial". The impracticality of orienting oneself thus increases the uncanny feeling that is already present.

49 Coates 1991:2

50 Danielwski 2000:90

51 The Great Hall is described as a vast space, empty, dark space that swallows its occupants into a infinite maze see Danielwski 2000:155

The Kafkaesque Court, that absurd, irrational place had to be "located precisely, in the surplus of the inside, in relation to the outside", in the space between as a non-existent floor.⁵² (fig.16,17)

" Kafkaesque
court... had to be
located...in the
space between as a
non-existent
floor"

Post- modernism brought uncanny qualities to built architecture. Deconstructivists such as Gerhy and Himmelblau created spaces of darkness and anxiety. However, there is not a better place to investigate the uncanny than the familiar, intimate space of a house. The example I'm exploring is Vanna's Venturi House in Pennsylvania designed by her son Robert Venturi.

52 Zizek S 1992 :15

fig. 16 The door leading to
The court in Orson
Welles adaptation of
Kafka's Trial, 1962



fig. 17 the space of the
court in Orson Welles
adaptation of Kafka's
Trial, 1962



Vanna Venturi House, Chestnut Hill, USA

Robert Venturi, as an architect and a theorist of architecture, aims at making space dialectical. He explores the space not as an empty and neutral area but rather as a space full of tensions and distortions.⁵³ Investigating the house under the same frame as the fictional Navidson's house I will attempt to define the four main characteristics of the uncanny: the doppelganger, the disorientation, the estrangement of the body and the familiar in the design of the house.

The concept of the doppelganger is expressed through the use and distortion of classicism in Venturi's design. According to the architect the house is an:

*"explicitly classical building in the substance of its plan and form and in the ornament of its elevation."*⁵⁴

53 Lefebvre H., *The Production of Space*, Blackwell Publishing, 1991 pp.145

54 Venturi, Scott Brown and Associates, *on Houses and Housing Architectural Monographs No 21*, New York: St Martins Press, 1992 pp25

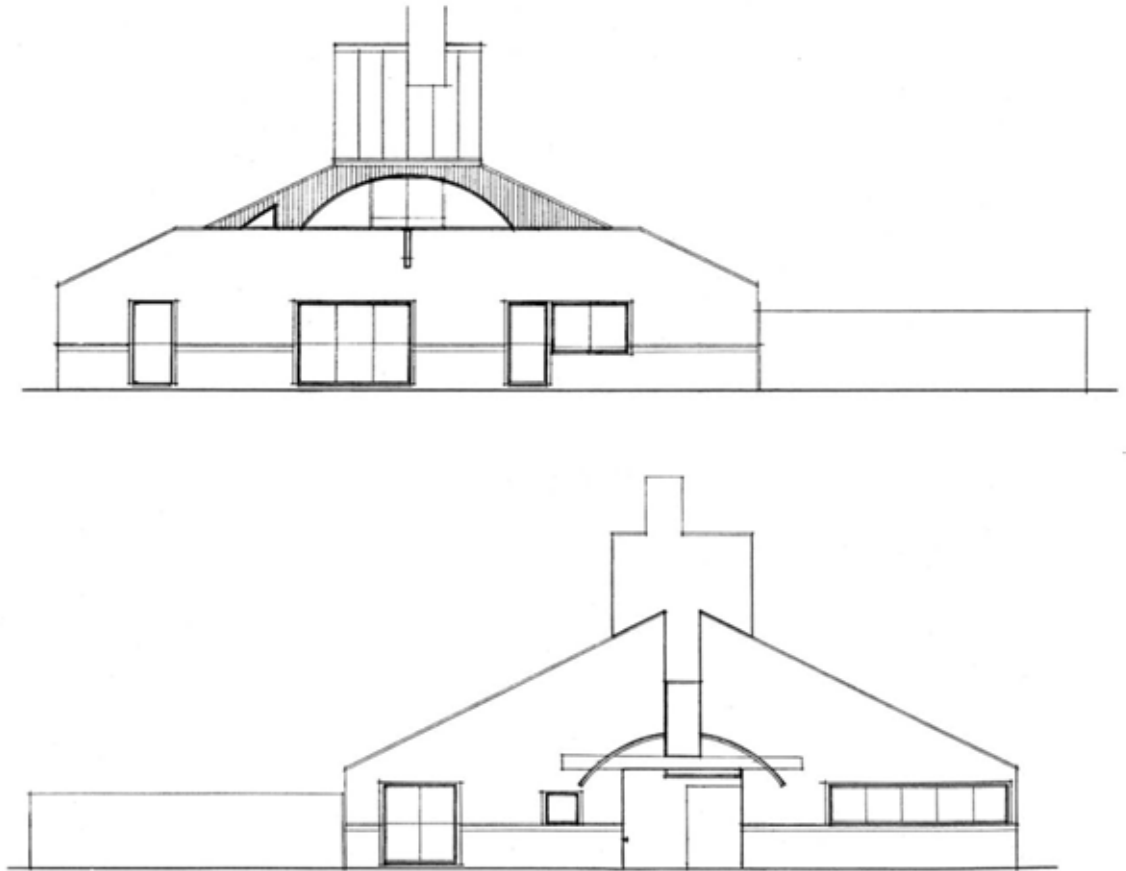
For instance, the front and the back elevations are almost classically symmetrical with strong central axis.(fig.18) Although the strong Classicism references, the elevations have a Mannerist effect of spatial layering, making the facades as disengaged signs. As the architect explains: "the abstract linear quality of Classical ornament applied to the smooth plaster walls...makes the facades look almost like drawings and enhances their quality as representations of Classical architecture."⁵⁵ At the same time he admits that: "there are important elements of this design which are not Classical, for example the industrial sash and the strip window of the kitchen."⁵⁶ The historical allusion in his design transforms into nostalgia, an escape and a "denial for history itself"⁵⁷.

55 Venturi, Scott Brown and Associates 1992:26

56 Venturi, Scott Brown and Associates 1992:26

57 McLeod N., *Architecture and Politics in the Reagan Era: From Postmodernism to Deconstructivism* , Assemblage, No. 8, The MIT Press , February 1989 pp.8

fig.18 front and back elevation of the house showing the strong vertical axis



McLeod writes that the Vanna Venturi House, introduces many modernist references in Art Deco as well as in Post Modernistic Mannerism at its exaggerated features. It is also considered as a parody of functionalism with fenestration arranged in that way that an internal floor is expressed through the middle of a window. (fig.19) In that way Venturi is "introducing ambiguity into the polarity of inside and outside".⁵⁸

The house layout appears deceptively simple. It has a sense of symmetry, yet the symmetry is often distorted. For instance, the façade seems balanced with five window squares on each side. However, the way the windows are arranged is not symmetrical. (fig.20) As a consequence, the viewer is confused and disoriented. Another distortion of symmetry is can be seen in the core of the house. The chimney, the staircase and the fireplace, the three vertical elements are competing for the central position.

58 McLeod 1989 :8

fig.19 the internal floor
is visible through vertical
window

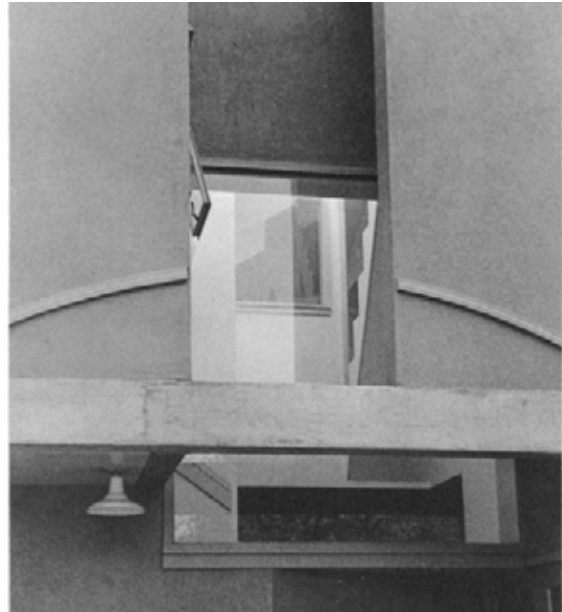


fig.20 the windows in the
main facade create a feeling
of disorientation as they
break the symmetrical axis
of the other elements





fig.21 the voided spaces that the pylons produce, create an uncanny effect

As a consequence its of these elements distort their shapes to blend into one vertical element. The sense of disorientation in a house, as I have previously mentioned is the uncanny in one of its most apparent forms.

The empty space and the voids between volumes create an almost hostile, industrial environment that cannot be related to home. One example, of the estrangement to

“the twin pylons, a duality promising easy passage by defining center as absence rather than object”

human body is the twin pylons, a duality promising easy passage by defining center as absence rather than object. The absence does not compete with the pylons' integrity; it is, on the contrary, its result. (fig.21) “The voided spaces above and below the lintel are thus both the same

and worlds apart, that above being a nothing and that below being a something".⁵⁹

All these characteristics of the house render it uncanny in its spaces and in our awareness of its form. The familiar and intimate feeling of a home disappears in the manifestation of uncanny spaces inside the house. The Vanna Venturi house inspired many postmodernists and it became almost a principle that in postmodernism the house is no longer a home, ran the refrain, a burden that has emerged.⁶⁰

59 McLeod 1989 :30

60 Vidler A., 'The Architecture of the Uncanny: The Unhomely Houses of the Romantic Sublime', *Assemblage*, The MIT Press, No. 3, July 1987, pp 26

"Home is where the heart is"⁶¹

Postmodernism managed to "deconstruct" the notion of home almost in a sarcastic way, although it was already transformed from a secure place to a disquieting one since World War I. A home is not always a space or a particular place; it is constructed as the amalgam of memories acquired during childhood. The "oikos" is "the nearby, the familiar, the domestic or even the national Heimlich" according to Derrida.⁶² Therefore, one's country can be his home, his shelter, his sanctuary.

the national heimlich

Freud's essay, "The Uncanny" was incidentally written the time that: "his sense of home was itself changing".⁶³ (fig.22) It was after the Treaty of Saint-German in March

61 Gaius Plinius Secundas

62 Derrida J., *Specters of Marx : the state of the debt, the work of mourning, and the New international*, London: Routledge, , 1994, pp.144

63 The results of the WWI in his country were only six weeks away see Gay P, *Freud: a life for our time*, California: Anchorbooks, 1989, pp.xlix

1919 that the South Tyrol in Austria had to be ceded to Italy that Freud wrote that: "to be sure, I'm not a patriot, but it is painful to think that pretty much the whole world will be foreign territory".⁶⁴ From 1915 Freud started commenting on the feeling of "unhomeliness" and how it generated anxiety and horror to the "entire homeland of Europe".⁶⁵ The "apparently secure house of western civilization" was threatened by its "barbaric regression", since the illusion of security that the unified "fatherland" of Europe promoted, was then disappeared.⁶⁶

64 With the phrase the "whole world" Freud is referring to the German and Austro-Hungarian territories as the first was separated and the latter ceased to exist after the war, see Gay 1989: 380

65 Freud S., 'Thoughts for the Times on War and Death', Standard Edition, 1915, pp.271

66 After the war Europe was no longer a unified power. A lot of countries lost territories and many countries ceased to exist, see Freud 1915: 271



fig. 22 many artists depicted the horror and the sickness of the war in their paintings, Otto Dix, *The Trench*, 1920-23

The no man's land

Homi Bhabha has similarly adapted the uncanny to the reality of the return of the "migrants, the minorities, the diasporic" to the city.⁶⁷ He developed a theory that the uncanny subverted traditional notions of "center and periphery", the form of the national, to argue how that boundary that secures the cohesive limits of the western nation may imperceptibly turn into a contentious internal liminality that provides a place from which to speak both of, and as, the minority, the exilic, the marginal and emergent.⁶⁸ That period the uncanny was reflected intensely in the German Cinema focusing on the Nazi years in the German-speaking countries. The place of the uncanny was not confined any longer to the intimacy of the house or even the city but is extended to the "no man's land between the trenches" or "the field of ruins left after the bombardment".⁶⁹ The central image of horror

67 Bhabha H, "DissemiNation: time, narrative and the Margins of the modern nation", in Bhabha H. Ed., *Nation and Narration*, New York: Routledge, 1990, pp. 319

68 Bhabha 1990: 320

69 Vidler 1994: 7

at that time was the concentration camp which reappears in mass culture as an abstract memory of the new world order and a threatening image of the collapse of our westernized, unified culture.(fig.23) If the above culture is "the home that is home no longer" it belongs to the realm of the uncanny.⁷⁰ In that moment of history, the uncanny was linked to nostalgia and longing for home illustrating the "transcendental homelessness" which was described by many writers after the war.⁷¹(fig.24) Constant Benjamin referred to the immigrants of war as: "individuals isolated from nature, strangers to their birth place, without contact with the past, living only in a rapid present... are detached from a fatherland that they see nowhere".⁷²

70 Coates 1991:x

71 More than 60 million people were mobilised during the war, see Vidler 1994: 7

72 Constant B., "De l'esprit de conquete et de l'usurpation dans les rapports avec la civilisation europeenne" in Constant B., *Oeuvres*, Paris: Bibliotheque de la Pleiade, 1957, pp.984



fig. 23 Teresa, a child in a residence for disturbed children, grew up in a concentration camp. She drew a picture of "home" on the blackboard, David Seymour, Poland 1948.



fig. 24 this picture is taken by the end of the war depicting a son and his mother expellees of Eastern Europe, courtesy of Bundesarchiv, Koblenz

Homesickness

"I long for home, long for the sight of home."

Odysseus ⁷³

Originated from the Greek work nostos, which means return, and algos, meaning pain, nostalgia is a term that describes the pain that is imposed by an unconscious "impulse to go back, to return home".⁷⁴ The massive uprooting during the war created the modern disease of homesickness, the nostalgia for the true natal home. Investigating the depths of a "terrestrial unconscious, of la vie sous-terrine", Gaston Bachelard realized that "la maison natale", the home itself, was prompting his "nostalgic vision".⁷⁵ This home, thus, is "far away, it is lost, we inhabit it no more"; however, it still takes form in dreams, "it is a house of dreams, our oneiric house".⁷⁶

73 "Ὅμως περίσσια λαχταρώ, και το ζητώ ολοένα, να πάω στον τόπο, να χαρώ του γυρισμού τη μέρα", see Homer, *Odyssey*, Book 5, lines 229-33

74 Lowenthal D., *The Past Is a Foreign Country*, Cambridge, 1992, pp.10

75 Bachelard 1948: 95-96.

76 Bachelard 1948: 96

Nevertheless, many times in literature and history notions of homesickness resulted to "homelessness" as the home one once left is no longer the same home, is not even considered a "home".

*'The longing seemed to cut both ways.
We came to a large coastal suburb:
weather-beaten tract houses, a low sky,
blackbirds rising from patchy yards,
the winding little development streets
which lead only back to themselves.
A wind-blown town coldly familiar.
A resident watering his flower beds
shut off the hose upon seeing us.
Strangers, we kept on, not living there...But
when we came to the heart of it all, what we'd
missed, nothing was there".*

James Haug ⁷⁷

⁷⁷ Haug J., "'Homesickness'", *College English*, National Council of Teachers of English, Vol. 53, No. 5, September 1991, pp.536

Returning home to what?

In Homer's masterpiece *Odyssey*, the protagonist, Odysseus was offered many alternatives to home throughout his journey back to his country. However, Odysseus does not betray his birth place and his family and he arrives on the shores of Ithaca.(fig.25) Nonetheless, he no longer recognizes the island as his "home" and worries that he might be at the wrong place. (fig.26)

" Odysseus, awoke, but could not tell what land it was after so many years away ...

The landscape then looked strange, unearthly strange to the Lord Odysseus...

He stood up, rubbed his eyes, gazed at his homeland, and swore, slapping his thighs with both his palms, then cried aloud: 'What am I in for now? Whose country have I come to this time? . ..'" Odysseus ⁷⁸

78 "Ποιά γή 'ναι αυτή, και ποιός λαός; τι άνθρωποι εδώ γεννιούνται; νά 'ναι νησάκι ξάστερο κι αυτό, για μήπως άκρη,της καρπερής είναι στεριάς προς το γιαλό απλωμένη", Homer, *Odyssey*, Book Thirteen, lines 235-236



fig.25 Odysseus Resting
after Landing at
Ithaca, Odyssey
triptych, Friedrich
Preller the Younger ,
after 1868

fig. 26 "In The Return of Odysseus", Odysseus came home to a room that had been destroyed by the war, 1944



The Homeric model in Gogol's "Vij" reminds us that " 'home' (sweet home!) can be the most terrifying destination of all" when it is changed and transformed by others.⁷⁹

"I am a poor old stranger here;
my home is far away; here there is no one
known to me, in countryside or city."

Odysseus⁸⁰

79 The protagonist, Xoma experienced his own *Odyssey*, away from home, facing evil powers and returning home just to realize that everything has changed, see Nesbet A., "Coming Home to Homer: Gogol's *Odyssey*", the *Slavic and East European Journal*, Vol. 39, No. 3, American Association of Teachers of Slavic and East European Language, Autumn 1995, pp. 385-395

80 "Τυραννισμένος έρχουμαι και ξένος εδώ πέρα, από λημέρια απόμακρα, κι απ' ,όσους κατοικάνε τη χώρα και τη γής αυτή κανένα δε γνωρίζω", Homer, *Odyssey*, Book seven, lines 25-9

From nostalgia to homelessness

After the wars and the fast urbanization the notion of "home" had changed forever. Our century was stigmatized by estrangement and unhomeliness, the intellectual watchwords of our time either initiated by war, or by the unequal distribution of wealth. Capitalism raised the question of how its repressed content re re-appropriated the figure of the "un-homely" home in contemporary society. The uncanny home is now a symptom of the repressed truth derived from the alienating consequences of the private ownership. Marx claimed that the man has regressed to the "cave dwelling" in its malignant form as he feels as a stranger , or "as much at home as a fish in water".⁸¹ He continues stating that the cellar-cave-dwelling of the underprivileged man is a " a dwelling which remains an alien power"- a dwelling which can never feel as his own. ⁸²

81 Marx K., "Economic and Philosophic Manuscript of 1844", in Marx K. And Engels F., *Marx and Engels 1834-1844 Collected Works*, vol.3, New York: International Publishers, 1975, pp.314

82 Marx 1975: 314

Therefore, he concludes that the man is not actually at home but in someone else's house, in the "house of a stranger who always watched him and throws him out if he does not pay his rent".⁸³ The urban house is a prefabricated and "leaky" container invaded by frightening technologies, it is a place to temporary shelter one who is a permanent state of displacement. Adorno describes the urbanized modern home as a "living-case manufactured by experts for philistines, or factory sites that have strayed into the consumption sphere, devoid of all relations to the occupant".⁸⁴ (fig.27) Not to be at home in one's home became a trend, "homeliness" became a part of contemporary mentality.⁸⁵

83 Marx 1975: 314

84 Lewis T. and Cho D., "Home Is Where the Neurosis Is: A Topography of the Spatial Unconscious", *Cultural Critique*, No. 64 , University of Minnesota Press, Autumn 2006, pp.74

85 "It is part of morality not to be at home in one's home", see Jenemann D., *Adorno in America*, Minnesota: University of Minnesota Press, 2007 pp xxv

As Heidegger foresaw in his "letter of humanism" in 1947:
"Homelessness is coming to be the destiny of the world".⁸⁶

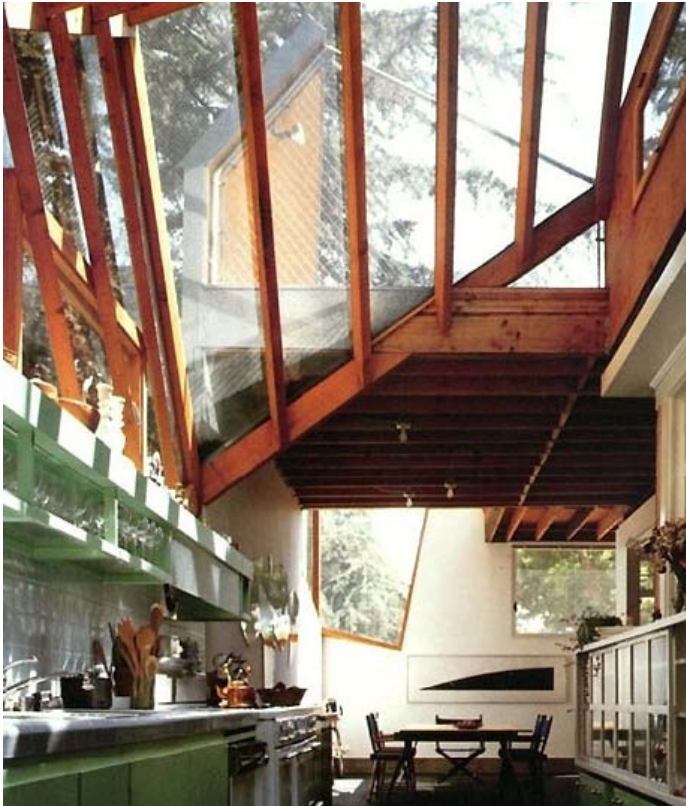


fig. 27 interior of
the Gehry House,
Santa Monica, 1978.

86 Vidler 1994: 8

"I long, as does every human being, to be at home wherever I find myself"⁸⁷

With the transnational migrations, global massification and the ubiquitous gentrification in urban clusters and the tendency towards a mobile, ever-moving society, homelessness created a growing sense of the uncanny nature of the home.

"the traveller is temporarily homeless; he ..carries souvenirs of home that "confer the feeling of home upon any temporary abode"

The traveller is temporarily homeless; he performs certain rituals and carries souvenirs of home that "confer the feeling of home upon any temporary abode".⁸⁸

87 Maya Angelou

88 Porteous 1976: 387

Immigrants try to reproduce home wherever they find themselves. Therefore, as one carries one's home with him in the city the house has "a merely historical- poetic reality rooted in folklore or in ethnology".⁸⁹

However, the city, the contemporary metropolis was never considered a place rooted in traditions. It is an amalgamation of cultures but still it is a place that arouses emotions of

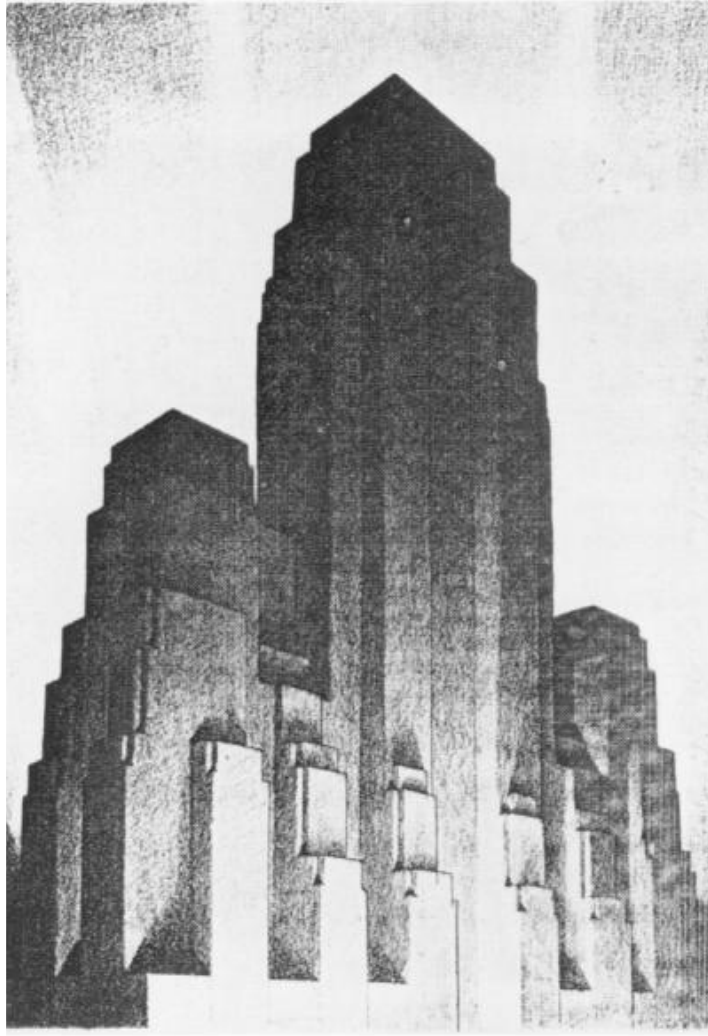
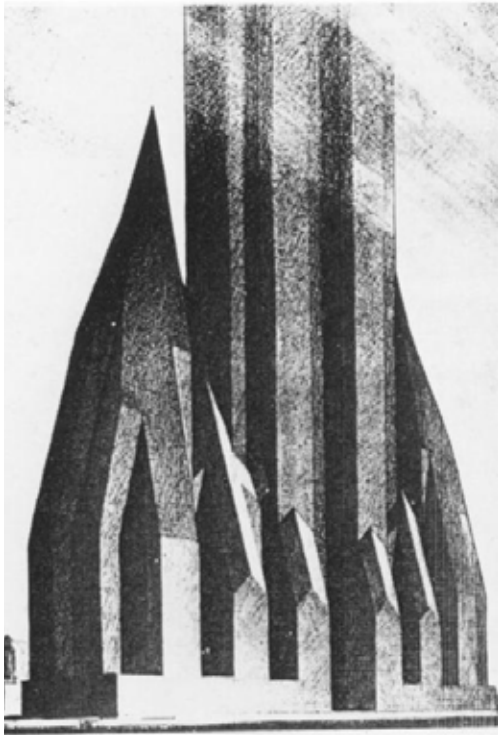
"the contemporary city is a place that arouses emotions of 'revulsion, and horror...'"

"revulsion, and horror...to those who first observed it".⁹⁰
(fig.28, 29)

89 Lefebvre H., *The Production of Space*, Blackwell Publishing, 1991, pp.120

90 Benjamin W., *Charles Baudelaire: a lyric Poet in the era of High Capitalism*, translated by Zohn H., London: New left books, 1973, pp.131

fig. 28, 29 threatening views of the future city, "the Metropolis of tomorrow", Hugh Ferriss, 1929



Heidegger described this phenomenon in his essay "Being and Time":

"Being-in was defined as 'residing alongside...', being familiar with...' This character of being-in was then brought to view more concretely through the everyday publicness of the "They", which bring tranquilized self-assurance -'being-at-home', with all its obviousness- into the average everydayness of Dasein.⁹¹ On the other hand, as Dasein falls, anxiety brings it back from its absorption in the world'. Everyday familiarity collapses. Dasein has been individualized, but individualized as Being-in -the-world. Being-in enters into the existential

91 The world Dasein was first used by Ludwig Feuerbach and meaning human presence originally. It was used by Heidegger in "Being and Time". "This entity which each of us is himself...we shall denote by the term 'Dasein'" see Heidegger M., *Being and Time*, Harper & Row, 1962, pp.27

mode' of the 'not-at-home'. Nothing else is meant by our talk about 'uncanniness'." ⁹²

Being home in the world can be a terrifying experience. Helen Ellenberger pointed that the victims of urban renewal grieve for the homes they left behind.⁹³

92 "In our first indication of the phenomenal character of Dasein's basic state and in our clarification of the existential meaning of 'being- in' as distinguished from the categorical signification of 'insiderness', Being-in was defined as 'residing alongside...', 'being familiar with...'. This character of being-in was then brought to view more concretely through the everyday publicness of the "They", which bring tranquilized self- assurance -'being-at-home', with all its obviousness- into the average everydayness of Dasein. On the other hand, as Dasein falls, anxiety brings it back from its absorption in the 'world'. Everyday familiarity collapses. Dasein has been individualized, but individualized as Being-in -the-world. Being-in enters into the existential 'mode' of the 'not-at-home'. Nothing else is meant by our talk about 'uncanniness' see Heidegger M., *Being and Time*, Harper & Row, 1962, pp.233

93 Ellenberger H., "Behavior Under Involuntary Confinement", in Esser A. H.(ed) *Behavior and Environment*, New York: Plenum Press, 1971, pp. 188-203

Furthermore, Foucault mentioned that making one at home in the heart of the world, is pushing oneself towards one's end, toward one's own death.⁹⁴ However, artists were inspired by the unhomeliness that created being at home in the world. Osorio's bed- "la cama"- "a place of dwelling", was located between the uncertainty of the unhomeliness of migrancy and the paradox of belonging to

94 Foucault M., *The Order of Things*, London: Routledge, 2008, pp.282
Also, this is a concept extensively analyzed in Heidegger's "Being and Time". The "individual", Dasein faces the "they", the world. Dasein, is constantly in a state of displacement whereas the "they" acts as though it "knows everything". Death is a possibility for Dasein but an actuality for the "they". If Dasein makes death an actuality then it is no longer death. Therefore, when Dasein that is a Being-in-the-world becomes a Being-towards-death, is no longer a part of "they". On the contrary, is individualized. Taking into account the inner desire of man to be an individual, being-in-the-world pushes Dasein to his finitude, towards death, see Heidegger M., *Being and Time*, Harper & Row, 1962, pp.233

the metropolis, for the New York/Puerto Rican artist.”⁹⁵ (fig.30) When one tries to find home in the city, one may seek oneself in the reliance on others. “No one is at home” in the city, declared Levinas.⁹⁶ “The memory of that servitude assembles humanity”.⁹⁷

95 Pepon Osorio is the “father” of migrant art. He is known for his large multimedia installations that combine baroque, decorative aesthetics and politically charged commentary. Working with mixed-media he manages to create a hybrid cultural space that celebrates in a way the nostalgia and the homesickness of living in a foreign country. *La cama* (the bed) “turns the highly-decorated four-poster [bed] into the primal scene of lost-and-found childhood memories, the memorial to a dead nanny Juana, the mis-en-scene of the eroticism of the “emigrant” everyday”, see Bhabha H.K., *The Location of Culture*, London: Routledge, 2004, pp.11, 18

96 Levinas E., *Humanism of the Other*, translated by Poller N., Chicago :University of Illinois Press, 2006, pp.66

97 Levinas 2006:66

fig. 30 "La Cama" ("The Bed"), by Pepón Osorio, nexus New York: Latin/American Artists in the Modern Metropolis , Robert Stolarik , the New York Times



What is home?

In that stressful environment "home" loses its original meaning. One can occupy a place daily but not feel at home in it or near it according to Heidegger.⁹⁸

"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. In today's housing shortage even this much is reassuring and to the good; residential buildings do indeed provide shelter...but do the houses in themselves hold any guarantee that dwelling occurs in them?"⁹⁹

98 Sharr A., Heidegger for Architects, Routledge , London, 2007, pp.39

99 The Heideggerian meaning of "dwell" is not the same as the word "inhabit". According to Heidegger humans do not "inhabit" like animals but rather they "dwell," and that "dwelling" takes place not so much in an "environment" as in a "world", see Heidegger M., Building Dwelling Thinking, New York: Harper Colophon Books, 1971, pp.145-146

Sometimes a coffeehouse, public gardens, a restaurant or even the woodlands that surround the city can act as substitutes for the home as a place of diversion.¹⁰⁰

Nonetheless, only a few people have more than one 'true' home. One may feel at home in a work area, but it is a place that is constantly occupied by co-workers, cleaners, and generally others who may claim the space. With such a place that is regarded as "home away from home" one can never really identify in the same degree as with one's real home.¹⁰¹ Respectively, for Freud, "The Uncanny" is a reminder to us that not only "there is no place like home", but that in other words, "there is no other place".¹⁰² Furthermore, In Rusdie's version of "The Wizard of Oz" he argues that once we have left our birth place and our childhood memories, equipped only with what we are, we realize that "the real secret of the ruby

100 May A.J., the Habsburg Monarchy 1867-1914, Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 1951,pp.307

101 Porteous 1976: 386

102 Gay 1989: 380

slippers"¹⁰³ is not that "there's no place like home". The real secret is that "there is no longer any such place as home: except of course for the home we make, or the homes that are made for us, in Oz: which is anywhere and everywhere except the place from which we began".¹⁰⁴(fig.31) Contrary to the above quote T.S Elliot suggested that "life is a constant journey home and I think that if I could be back where I started I'd be where I'm going" meaning that wherever one is should create a home from the beginning. ¹⁰⁵

103 *The ruby slippers are the shoes that Dorothy (Judy Garland) wears in "The Wizard of Oz". The magical power of the shoes are revealed by the Good Witch of the North. Dorothy can return home to Kansas, by clicking her heels three times and repeating "there's no place like home", see Rusdie S., "Out of Kansas," in Step Across This Line: Collected Nonfiction, 1992, pp.57*

104 Rusdie 1992: 57

105 T. S. Eliot: Little Gidding, in *Collected Poems, 1909-1962*, London: Faber, 1963, p. 222



fig.31 screenshot from the Wizard of Oz depicting Dorothy opening the door to enter from the black&white Kansas to the Technicolor Oz world

Conclusion

Plenty commonplace phrases illuminate the meaning of home: it is a fortress to defend oneself ("Every man's home is his castle"), its meaning was imbued with emotion ("Home is where the heart is"); it disintegrated itself from the house ("A house is not a[t] home"); it can be mobile ("to be at home wherever I find myself"); it is the hearth of our existence ("The old folks at home") to which we constantly return. The house was always a place to engender myths and secrets. The traditional house propagates familial haunting and the urban home highlights the fragility of the threshold between the public and the private and houses phobias and diseases. Contemporary houses solidify the uncanny feeling of homelessness and estrangement of everything that once was familiar. The inconsistencies within the concept of home somehow generate a displacement, and it is the displacement itself that constantly reminds us of a lack

that underlies our relationship to home. This gap in the relationship between an individual and one's home is splendidly expressed in a Beatles' song "Golden Slumbers/Carry That Weight": "Once there was a way to get back homeward."¹⁰⁶ Nonetheless, this estrangement from the traditional values of home and all the darkness and uncaniness of postmodernist, virtual life, forms a stronger, deeper desire to find home again and re-establish it in our minds.

*"We shall not cease from exploration
and the end of all our exploring
Will be to arrive where we started
and know the place for the first time"*¹⁰⁷

T. S. Eliot

106 "Golden Slumbers", The Beatles

107 T. S. Eliot: Little Gidding, in *Collected Poems, 1909-1962*, London: Faber, 1963, p. 222

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evangelia athanasiadou

the wrong house;

a twisted guide to home

''uncanny...can be linked to 'not-being-at-home' ''

when familiar things are found in ''a place
that is not right'', uncanny arises

The traditional house propagates familial haunting
and the urban home highlights the fragility of
the threshold between the public and the private
and houses phobias and diseases

Contemporary houses solidify the uncanny feeling of
homelessness and estrangement of everything that
once was familiar

