DANIELA NEGRIȘANU

THE DWELLING AND THE DWELLER. TOWARDS AN EPISTEMOLOGY OF INTERIORITY

As an excerpt of a bigger study, this text is evaluating the dwelling as a process, using the interiority as an analytical anchor. Architectural theory and practice are often criticized for stereotypical image of the habitation as an exogenous object, eluding what interiority has to offer. Centering the act of dwelling on the human subject, there can be revealed a complex dialogism beetween the two, disclosing a deeper individual reality, emphasized by each other's co presence.
Residential homeostasis, as the internal state of balance, is a tool of intercepting this fascinating relationship. Gathering all internal regulation processes, it seeks internal balance for individual and residential group, adjusting in the same time the residential shell, through the inside/ outside osmosis. On a temporal level, the adjustment between past, present and future and between family dynamics correlates expectations with residential ideal, bringing them in harmony with what present has to offer.

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Epistemology of interiority.



Figure 1 – Home (photo by author)

„… I build the urn around the perfume,
so that the perfume stays within."[1]

The excerpt above has a certain echo within each of us, as its impact lies in the unordinary gesture. According to this statement, interiority, as a determinant core, gains priority over any other associated logic. From this

[1] Antoine de Saint-Exupéry. *Citadela*. București: Junimea, 13.

perspective, the dwelling becomes a semantic halo, shaped around its inhabitants. The degree of relational reciprocity that can be generated between these two poles is the one that can make the difference between a static inclusion (*Sein-In)* and an authentic, assumed inclusion *(In-Sein)*[2]. In an ideal scenario, the dwelling and the dweller provide each other a voice[3], defining each other ontological.

In fact, what would dwelling be without its dweller?

The relationship between the dwelling and the dweller is not a relation *per se*. Essentially contextual, it manifests itself and evolves under the influence of a series of exogenous factors which confer it, one by one, a certain relational specificity. These widest (and the most researched) influential levels are connected to the generic background of the habitation and the inhabitant, contextualizing this relationship. In Hong Kong the dwelling process is radically different from the one in Australia.

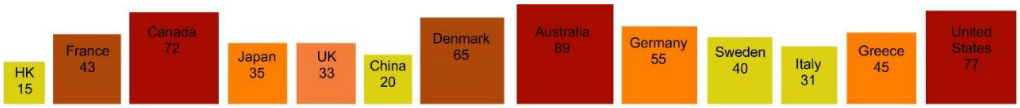


Figure 2 – Average surface/ inhabitant (reproduction by author) [4]

Narrowing the scale of determining factors, we get to the lowest level of direct influence (as a matter of fact, the most neglected as well), represented by the reciprocal relationship between the two, the habitation and the inhabitant. Through the transactions they conduct, they become subject to a sophisticated network of reciprocal determination, which

[2] The terms *Sein-In*, *In-Sein* excerpted from Martin Heidegger. *Sein und Zeit*. 1967. Max Niemeyer Verlag Tübingen.

[3] Mikhail Bakhtin in Aliona Grati. *Romanul ca lume postBABELică. Despre Dialogism, Polifonie, Heteroglosie si Carnivalesc*, 2009. Chișinău: Editura Gunivas.

[4] Source: http://shrinkthatfootprint.com/how-big-is-a-house, accessed on 14.07.2016.

generates, through particularization, the uniqueness of every residential/family system. A nuclear family with democratic, permissive family relations, will carry out entirely different residential narratives compared to a nuclear family with strong and rigid hierarchical relationships within the same home. Consequently, how could housing theory and practice elude this level of influence?

From the perspective of this different paradigm, as the title itself suggests, dwelling is meant to be an introjection of its interiority. It redefines itself in terms of value starting from within, contrary to some current stereotypes of architectural practice and theory. Dwelling is often accused of placing itself in an autistic and self-referential posture[5]. The architects are accused of displaying a self-sufficient attitude, a „*prince complex*"[6], which legitimizes personal conceptions, without any reference to the final user. Such tendencies can only lead to a narrow, reductionist vision. In order to give a fresh boost to dwelling, theory and practice should both be cut loose from the exogenous, simplistic logic, focusing on what interiority seems to have to offer. This text puts forward a dwelling epistemology from its interiority[7], by placing the inhabitant in the center of interest, with the aim of redefining values for housing. In this scenario, the human subject becomes a treasured resource for the dwelling. Once identified, understood and highlighted, the interiority can only boost dwelling's potential.

[5] Juhani, Pallasmaa. *Identity, Intimacy and Domicile: Notes on the Phenomenology of Home*. 1992.

[6] Amaral, Camilo, Prince Complex. Narcissism and Reproduction of the Architectural Field, 2015, This Thing Called Theory. 12th International Conference of the AHRA, Leeds, UK.

[7] *Epistemiology of interiority*, author's original syntagma, defining the dwelling knowledge related to dweller(s) that resides inside it.

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Residential homeostasis.

In day to day life, the relationship habitation/inhabitant unfolds on several levels which, though familiar, are often intertwined and hermetic. Trying to identify the way they work is close to impossible without implying social sciences and humanities.

Any physical or emotional gesture between the habitation and the inhabitant, regardless of cultural and social differences, is eventually justified by the same objective, that of achieving some balance between the two, meant to offer residential/ familial satisfaction and *in extenso* life satisfaction. In order to define this complex processuality the dwelling and the dweller get involved in, the syntagm *residential homeostasis* has been chosen. Taken from medicine, the term *homeostasis* defines the property of an organism to maintain the constants of the internal medium within a close range. Systemically speaking, all organisms tend to operate in a state of balance. Homeostasis sets in when all the variables come to a relatively constant stable state[8]. Similarly, the phrase residential homeostasis defines the internal adjustment to habitation of an organism, so that regardless of the alterations taking place in the external or internal medium a state of internal stability is aimed at. Any stimulus capable of amending internal homeostasis will be perceived as pleasant and any stimulus that alters it will be perceived as unpleasant.
A series of transactions identified within the family can be interpreted accordingly. All these internal adjustments are meant to set, maintain or restore a certain state of balance. When evaluating the family-residential system, one can observe a series of internal adjusting mechanisms, which allow triad adjustment between the individual, the group and the dwelling factors. Regardless of the way in which mechanisms are metabolized within

[8] Dixie Meyer, Sara Wood, Bethany Stanley. *Nurture Is Nature: Integrating Brain Development, Systems Theory, and Attachment Theory* in *The Family Journal: Counseling and Therapy for Couples and Families*. 2013. Vol. 21. Issue 2. 163.

habitation, regardless of the macro- and micro systemic differences they may involve, these mechanisms are developing on the same levels, to correlate expectations and permissiveness, ideal with real, past with present, interior with exterior and individual with group.

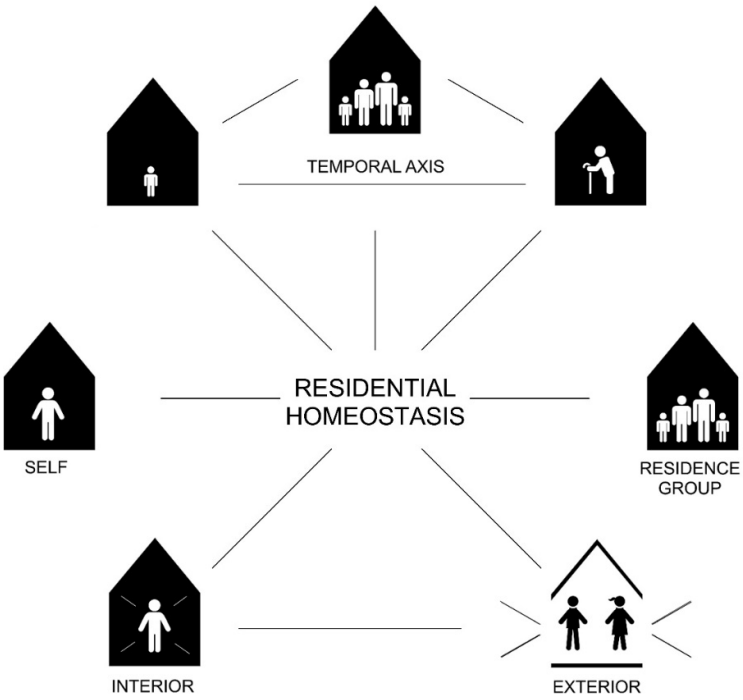


Figure 3 – Residential homeostasis (graphic by author)

Residential homeostasis has to do with adjustment between individual and family group, between interior and exterior, mediating the inside/ outside osmosis. The family and the individuals amend the porosity of the residential membrane until it reaches, even here, the convenient state of balance. On a different ground, the adjustment past/present/future correlates expectations with residential ideal, bringing them in harmony with what the present can offer. Similarly, on the time scale, adjustment is also needed in the family and habitation dynamics, taking over various changes of the residential group.

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Individual/ group.

„*The whole is* other *than the* sum *of the parts*."[9]

A first residential homeostasis indicator is given by the way in which the relationship and the dosage between the individual and the residential group is managed, in terms of habitation. Inside the house, every person bears the mark of his physical, cognitive and emotional aura, shaped by his own personality and by the family-hierarchical permissiveness. A series of *trades* permanently take place, conferring the relational mark of the family.

The way in which the personal and group narration develop depends on the simultaneous fulfillment of several premises, strictly controlled by family hierarchies and spatial availability. Spatial identity and belonging, territorialization, control, spatial privatization, introjective and projective operations, relational and emotional processes all contribute to this individual and group identity construct, within every dwelling. The way these take shape in the residential landscape is radically different, yet the principle is the same. The need to carry out one's own narration manifests itself, in most cases, side by side with the need to mark the identity presence at the level of the residential group. One of the greatest qualities a home can be endowed with is that of allowing individuals to simultaneously place themselves, internally, both physically and emotionally in an autonomous position, as well as in one potentially cohesive one.

[9] Kurt Koffka, quoted by Dewey, R.A. 2007. *„Psychology: An introduction: Chapter four - The Whole is Other than the Sum of the Parts*".

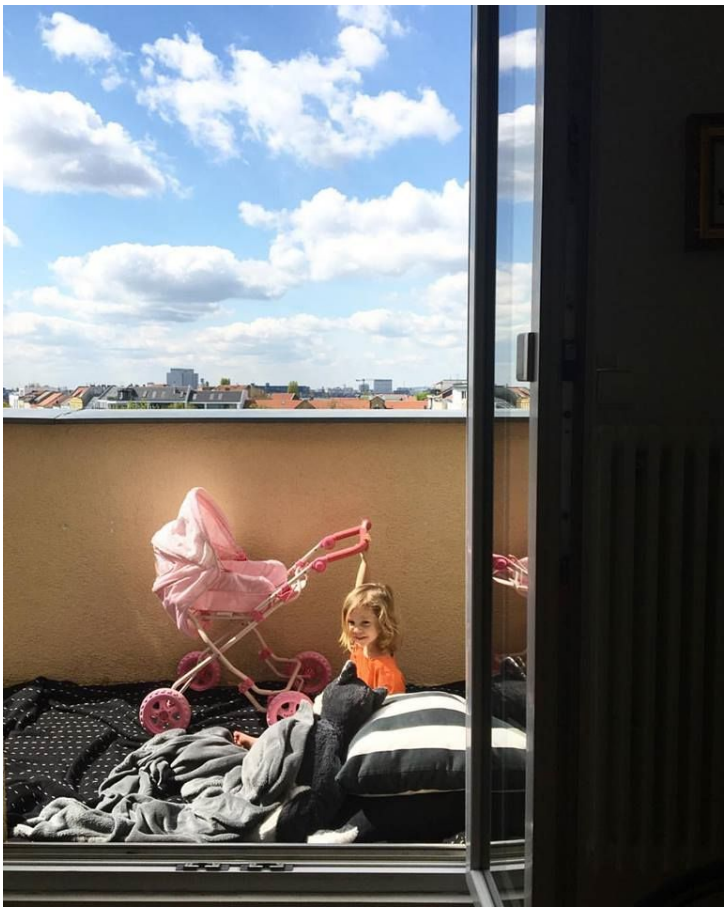


Figure 4 – Privatisation and control within the dwelling (photo credit: Lucuț Cristina)

It is precisely this cumulative hypostasis between *I* and *we,* this continuous mediation between part and whole that poses a real residential challenge, often ignored, which residential satisfaction depends on. Dwelling and the way in which it negotiates between *self and group* places the individual in relation to the world and to others[10].

[10] Irene Cieraad. *At Home. An Anthropology of Domestic Space*. 1999. New York: Syracuse University Press. 144.

The house as a porous textile.

Even though it brings to attention an old topic of architectural poetics, the inside/outside dialectics is evaluated here from the dwelling/ dweller perspective. The house membrane separates two worlds. On the one hand, it separates the house from the external world, from „*our house's home*"[11]. On the other hand, there is the interiority, *the core,* with everything it involves. This coating has to simultaneously fulfill two osmotic prerequisites: it has to be permeable enough so that it allows *breathing* from and towards outside yet protective enough to allow both the collective and the individual intimacy of the inhabitants.

The amount of exposure to the external medium depends on a series of exogenous factors, imposed by cultural, social or economic determiners, as well as endogenous ones, related to family, individuals and relational constellations. The residential shell, through its opening to the public and semi-public space, determines the way in which the interior relates to proximity and the way in which internal relations become visible in the exterior. The definition of the residential textile and of the limit between intimate and public space (a role often attributed to the front garden) can also translate the way individual and group narrations are developing inside.

[11] Tony Fry. "*Homelessness – A Philosophical Architecture*". Design Philosophy Papers Collection Three (ed. Anne-Marie Willis) Ravensbourne: Team D/E/S. 2007. 19-28





Figure 5 and 6 – Various negotiations of the house with public limit (photo by author)

In the equation of the complexity of the inside/outside dialogue there interposes the concept of interior layering, explained as the superposition of successive layers within. In the same habitable cell, internal adjusting of the individuals, to each other and to the group, reiterates internally, on a different scale, the same adjusting mechanisms they expose towards outside. Internal levels on different privacy degrees involves over layering or removing various protective membranes, in order to give autonomy or, on the contrary, strengthen residential group cohesion. All these successive levels of layering adjust internal osmosis, making it more exposed to other residential presences due to its variable density or, on the contrary, hiper internalized, as a result of its lack of porosity towards the others. Family-relational configurations, hierarchies and family roles are controlling the way in which these layers adjust. A strongly hierarchical family will prioritize the division of spaces into autonomous cells, while a family with horizontal relations will prefer bonding spaces.



Figure 7 – Taking over the house boundaries (photo credit: Lucuț Cristina)

The various layers of the house are in fact mediators between the individual and the exterior or between the individual and the group, as they decide the degree of spatial, sensorial and emotional continuity between the exterior and the interior or between different living spaces of the same house. Individual residential satisfaction depends to a great extent on the way in which the coating, as the first protective layer, meets the needs and necessities of contact and permeability towards the exterior and towards other housing members. Here intervenes this type of homeostatic mechanism, adjusting what the exterior has to offer to what the interior needs to get and adjusting what the interior has to offer to what the individuals need.

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Mother-house. Residential perequisites.

„A whole past comes to live in the new house...”[12]

In dwelling, personal narrations and affinities are, to a great extent, interconnected with previous residential experiences, especially with those regarding the mother-home from childhood. In variable degrees, the mother-home works like a referential prototype to other subsequent habitations. Consciously or not, the reference is done through duplication or distancing from the original prototype, depending on the quality of emotional experiences that have accompanied that first residential contact.

A series of studies in architecture and social studies and humanities analyze the impact with the mother-house. They reveal that there is a discreet, often unconscious connection between the initial habitation and the subsequent habitations, and there are similarities between the parents' habitation and the subsequent ones belonging to the children turned into adults[13]. Pallasmaa mentions the possibility that the adult period habitations could be nothing but an unconscious search for the lost childhood home, with all its associated values[14]. Furthermore, there may be an interconnection between memories, nostalgia, the present state and the future expectations[15].

[12] Gaston Bachelard, quoted by Israel, Toby, *Some Place Like Home. Using Design Psychology to Create Ideal Places*, 2003, Chichester, Wiley- Academy. 1.

[13] Clara H. Mulder, Nathanael T. Lauster. *Housing and Family: An Introduction*. Housing Studies, 2010. V:4. 434.

[14] Juhani Pallasmaa. *Identity, Intimacy and Domicile: Notes on the Phenomenology of Home*. 1992. 7.

[15] Findlay Alison. *Remaking homes: gender and the representation of place*. *Home Cultures*. 2009. 6:2. 116.

I.Cieraad, in an exercise of imagination with her students, concluded that most of the assumptions regarding the residential future were directly linked to recurrent childhood images and to details of the habitation at that time[16].

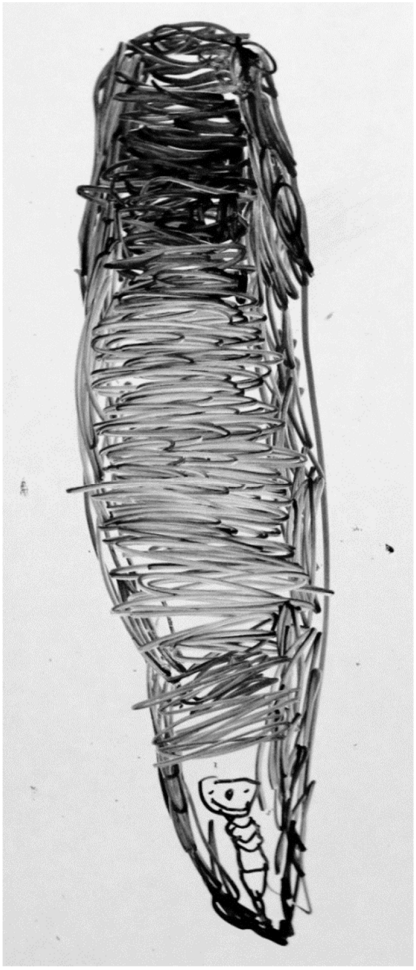


Figure 8 – "Me in my little home". Three year-old child's sketch (personal archive)

[16] Irene Cieraad. *Children's Home Life in the Past and in the Present*. *Home Cultures*. 2013. 92.

Obviously, this relationship is very difficult to identify and quantify, as it is equally difficult to understand to what extent the source-home influences the subsequent habitations. What is certain is that images or cliches associated to the childhood home come up recurrently in the adult's residential depository. The symbolic image of the house is thus often associated to the maternal womb, as a symbolic guarantor of security and unconditioned protection[17]. Mother-home represents *the locus of the self's first adjustment to habitation*.

This retroactive homeostatic repertory reverberates in the present habitation to the extent in which some gestures can be translate as residential regulation with the past. The homeostasic regulation with the past is often needed in order to be comfortable in present, to imagine the future and to validate our sense of self. Our first home offers us the first version of living which afterwards, through subsequent dwellings, we reiterate or amend.

[17] Michael Allen Fox. *Home: A Very Short Introduction*. 2016. Oxford University Press. 61.

The residential-family dynamics.

„Habiter n'est pas familier, c'est l'insolite même.
Jamais lui-même. En transit."[18]

Throughout time, domestic space and objects end up becoming witnesses of family life course[19], placing the dwelling as an active part in this process. The past-present-future dynamics highlights the need for homestasic adjustment on the temporal axis, in which habitation is a construct that can empower and support individual and group development in time.



Figure 9 – Family dynamics (stages taken from J.Zilbach (graphic by author) [20]

Each stage in the cycle of family life is accompanied by functional specificity derived from needs, necessities, responsibilities and roles. Social studies identify a range of family development thresholds, which provide the ground for the explanations regarding personal and group needs connected to habitation, as well as to generational dynamics[21]. The preliminary stage, marking the detachment from the parental nest is succeeded by a stage of

[18] Ph. Lacoue-Labarthe in Benoît Goetz. *La Dislocation. Architecture et philosophie*. 2001. Paris: Les Editions de la Passions.

[19] Giorgi Sabina, Padiglione Vincenzo, Clotide Pontecorvo. *Appropriations: Dynamics of Domestic Space Negotiations in Italian Middle-Class Working Families*. Culture Psychology. 2007.13:2. 150.

[20] Joan Zilbach. *The Family Life Cycle. A Framework for Understanding Family Development.* In: *Textbook of Families and Couples Therapy. Clinical Applications*. 2003. Arlington, VA: American Psychiatric Publishing, Inc.

[21] Ibid.

coupling, in which the nuclear family or group is enlarged or consolidated. The middle stage is characterized by expansions, separations or partial breakaways, while in the final stage the core comes back to the initial dimensions. The dwelling, in order to include human identities in a continual personal and relational dynamics, needs to detain the ability to take over all these *becomings.* Habitat, through its very physical boundaries, limits, allows or imposes on its inhabitants a certain way of living.

For all the types of family configurations, the residence needs a surface that can grow organically (possibly with detachable modules), reaching the climax in the middle stage, after which it decreases dramatically, compressed to the dimension of the conjugal stage. Within the same house along the life course, a major challenge of residential space is to accommodate the augmentation of needs specific to family's expansion stage and the contraction specific to final stage.

Every family appropriates differently the space and spatially expresses family needs, differently regulates the relation between individuals and the group of residence, adjusting to internal and external dynamics. All these tactics confer uniqueness and individualizes the dwelling.

In an ideal scenario, the house we live in not only comes to accompany our feelings and ritual events that are part of our daily living, but can also take over and compensate for internal and external dissatisfaction. In this hypothesis, dwelling and dweller manage, through complementarity, to complete themselves, defining each other ontological. The architect often appears as a factor that interferes with this relationship, thus influencing a substantial part of the residential and family habits, affecting housing satisfaction degree. Architects need to consider this relationship, to regard it as a process, as a continuum between the two sides, always searching, always adapting, always redefining themselves.

We live our homes and, in time, they end up living us. We give and take at the same time, both physically and emotionally, both ourselves and our homes. All these internal transformations accrue to the extend that they should be perceived as treasured perfume, around which architects build their urn.

Note: this text has been extracted and adapted after the PHD thesis of Daniela Negrișanu. ”*Dwelling as family introjection*”. Politehnica Timișoara Publishing House. 2018.