

Homecoming

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Marco Polo imagined answering.. that the more one was lost in unfamiliar quarters of distant cities, the more one understood the other cities he had crossed to arrive there: and he retraced the stages of his journey,

and he came to know the port from which he had set sail, and the familiar places of his youth, and the surrounding of home, and a little square of Venice where he gamboled as a child.

Italo Calvino, Invisible cities

Home vs. Away

Whenever we venture out into the world, we set out from home, and compare the unfamiliar things we meet, with things that we already know. Home becomes our model, our reference point ingrained onto our minds from a very early age. When we are away from home we encounter opposite aspects of ourselves. We are reminded of the dualities of our human experience. From humility and simplicity to superiority and extravagance. From security and safety to freedom and adventure. This experience of opposites while we are away from home provides us with a 'mirror' to see who we really are, or who we were as in the case of the traveler in Calvino's tales.

Home

Our human mind and soul governs not only how we interpret space but also how we experience it. Our psyche is intertwined with our perception of the built environment around us and thus, adds layers of meaning to our understanding of the house as a home. These layers can give a space characteristics which are very different from the physical ones. These only relate to ourselves, our feelings and our state of mind.

Gaston Bachelard in the Poetics of Space explored extensively the home as a metaphor for humanness. He beautifully illustrates with countless reference to poetry, how a house, once inhabited and experienced will transcend geometric space, and that all inhabited space bears the essence of the notion of home.

When a house becomes a home, it is a place of memories, where our association of past events will alter our perception of a place or objects in a place.

A home is a mirror of the self. It reflects our nature our aspirations and our dreams. The same adjectives that we use to describe a house can be used to describe the nature of its inhabitants. In its transparency or otherwise, the objects we collect around us, reflecting our inner needs, desires and aspirations

A home is a shelter for ourselves as well as our dreams and day-dreams . It is a place for the imagination to thrive.

Where we, especially as children, construct our own versions of home in our minds and spend hours playing in this constructed virtual house. Bachelard explains that a sheltered being experiences the house in its realities and virtuality, by means of thoughts and dreams.

An example of such a constructed house is illustrated by Carl Jung in his autobiography, Memories Dreams and Reflections. He describes his dream of a house with many levels and the desire for the vertical movement from attic to cellar and then to vault. Jung sees the house as a representative of the mind with its many levels of consciousness; the upper level being consciousness. The descent downwards into the lesser known realms of the unconscious is represented by the ground floor, cellar and vault beneath it. A final descent leads to a cave cut into bed-rock, a part of the house rooted in the earth itself.

Here, we can visualize a vertical axis extending from the depths of the earth to the top of the house or tower, looking towards the sky where both worlds are infinite. The sky represents the spiritual and contemplative level of the conscious and the bowels of the earth being the unknown world and the unconscious. The ground, at the centre of this hypothetical axis, represents our physical world and our environment.

Thus when we live on the ground we are close to our surroundings and nature. We feel part of it and firmly-rooted in it and this gives us security. As soon as we raise ourselves from the earth we feel light and free and closer to the sky. Here we are aspiring towards a higher consciousness.

Going back to the hypothetical centre of the vertical axis, if we go outwards we encounter horizontality. Here we are dealing with the horizon on the outer edges and with our immediate environment towards the centre. Again the fear of the unknown forces us to protect ourselves, creating an inside and an outside. The inside being familiar and controllable, is filled with possessions forming a focus on our feelings and memories. In contrast, the outside is hostile, unpredictable and uncontrollable.

The dividing line between in and out is the boundary, where the notion of home lies within. The shape and form that this boundary takes varies; whether it acts as a thin light membrane or a strong protective stone wall or fortress, depends on our feelings of security at any given time.

As the stairway was the means for the vertical movement, here the openings and thresholds through the boundary are the means for the horizontal movement. Both of these physical, practical elements hold so many layers of meaning at an emotional level.

If we visualize the vertical axis diagrammatically, as

representing a scale of the levels of consciousness. Then, the horizontal axis represents a scale between security and freedom, where security is at the centre of this scale and is replaced by freedom as it diminishes towards the edges.

Considering this abstract idea or diagram as a representation of our mind or psyche relative to space then, as we move in space in any direction, at any given point, we can find our state of mind relative to these two scales.

All of these opposing needs of security and freedom, of primitiveness and higher consciousness exist in us at different times. In fairy tales, just as the humble peasant dreams of living in a palace, the king dreams of living the simple life of a peasant; he even disguises himself as one in order to live his dream. Similarly, just as the traveler, passing by our lived-in home, yearning to be inside; we often watch the world from our window and dream of being free, of being away.

Away from Home

Mass mobility of the second half of the twentieth century has roots in the natural human desire to have new experiences through the exploration of new places, both in the earlier high-society traveling, and in the modern pursuit for leisure and pleasure. Moreover, Chris Rojek, and John Urry, in Touring Cultures: Transformations of Travel and Theory outlined that "travel and tourism can be thought of as a search for difference". Also Dean MacCannell, in his book, The Tourist, agrees that the primary reason for someone to go away from home is the search for a new experience.

If we return to the concept of the diagram of the mind and place our home in the centre, representing security, familiarity and comfort, and then superimpose the idea of moving away from the centre in order to experience a different aspect on these hypothetical scales we would find ourselves fluctuating from feelings of security to freedom, from familiarity to strangeness from lightness and openness to groundedness and coziness. If all of these aspects represent, in varying degrees our ideas of home at varying times, then the following scenarios represent possibilities for the tourist to go way from home.

The Substitute Home

If we experience anxiety or disorientation when we move away from the centre, away from home, then we would be inclined to find a substitute home, in a familiar hotel chain. Here, we know what to expect from it and how it will be even if it is in an unfamiliar distant part of the world. We can choose to venture into the foreign environment in a controlled manner, but when we are confronted by the strangeness of the place we are reminded that we are a long way from home. Then we can quickly and safely return to our "substitute" home. We may even choose not to venture out of the centre and to spend our entire trip within the confines of the hotel chain in our temporary substitute home.

The Return to the Tower

The longing to ascend towards the sky would take the tourist to places where he can dominate the horizon and feel

the supremacy above the surroundings. Whether it is on a visit to a tower, a castle or a skyscraper in the built environment or being on top of a mountain in nature . It is a return to lightness and freedom. The ascension upwards representing our aspirations and dreams to reach higher levels of consciousness.

The Return to the Cave

If we are away from the ground and feel disconnected from it, we may long to come back close to it. To return back to earth, back to nature. Here we move down to the centre towards the earth. We may long for the primitive aspects of living while staying in a tent or for the security of being part of nature while staying at a cozy cottage in the countryside.

The Return to dreams and fantasy

If we live in a hostile environment and feel alienated in our home or our cities, we may long to experience a fantastical environment that we may have constructed in our minds. However, failing to find the fairyland of our imagination we may resort to going away to a themed land or a "Disney" land where it has been constructed especially for that purpose.

The Return to Self

If our environment no longer resonates or reflect ourselves and we feel disconnected from who we really are, we may long for this connection. We may go way to a secluded resort or a retreat set in a beautiful part of nature. Here, the intimacy that we find with nature provides an opportunity for intimacy and connection with ourselves.

All of these possibilities above would serve to fulfill desires and experiences different from those found in our ordinary lives, our environment and our homes. For the traveler and the tourist, they would equate to a return to an aspect in themselves that they may long to experience. To the universal yearning to experience the opposite side of our duality and to complete the human experience. It equates to a return to centre, a return to home, a homecoming.

Captions to possible Images to accompany text.

- 1.Security; the predictable Hotel Room.(image of typical 3-5 star hotel room)
- 2.Supremacy; On top of a tower (image of views from top of tower)
- 3.Humility; Closeness to earth (image of a tent)
- 4.Fantasy; Imaginations and Dreams (image of a themed park/hotel)
- 5.Intimacy with self (image of a resort in nature)



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Sumaya is a Saudi architect who lived her formative years in the UK. She studied architecture at Bath University under the guidance of the late Peter Smithson and Ted Happold.

She was the Project Architect for the award winning Childrens' City in Dubai while at Schuster Pechtold and Partners. In parallel, her understanding of the inner world developed through her study of psychology, counselling and yoga.

Sumaya's quest to integrate the inner world with the outer world continue to shape her current practise of mindful architecture.