

# LIVING LANDSCAPES (Landscapes for living)

Policies, Practices, Images

# PAESAGGI ABITATI

Politiche, pratiche, immagini

edited by Camilla Perrone

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For further information on the Conference programme and a complete list of speakers and presentations, please visit the website: paesaggiabitati.wordpress.com.

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#### Living Landscape. An introduction to the publication

Paesaggi Abitati. Un'introduzione alla pubblicazione Camilla Perrone

*Living Landscapes* is the title of a series of seminars aimed at creating a scientific arena for arguing on contemporary research's challenges related to landscapes as places to live-in, produced by living alongside planning practices. Each seminar has opened up a rich and interdisciplinary debate involving young and senior researchers, professors, activist, and professionals from different fields and disciplines. They have been offered the opportunity to reflect on contemporary living practices and the landscapes changing features, under a cross-cutting and trans-generations perspective. The idea of addressing seminars towards such issues has come from the shared need to investigate the many living experiences evoked by contemporary landscapes features (sometimes ordinary, sometimes unknown) within a new viewpoint of spatial planning, including the idea of the making of territories through everyday practices.

Current global and local forces are reshaping physical and social urban and regional landscapes, and the relationship between their own defining features. There is evidence that over the past decades a far-reaching change has been taking place in the very nature of the urbanization processes along with the landscapes shapes. It might be defined as a shift from a metropolitan mode of urban development to a post-metropolitan era. It opens up a new discourse on the ongoing planning challenges such as policies to manage the emerging issues on climate change and resilience; strategies to address a new approach on landscape planning that takes into account "beauty" in itself and "ordinary beauty" as a result of the everyday life practices; tools to include the "diversity" in the urban policy making, etc. The collection of papers presented in the following pages intends to provide a path for analysis and figuring out that might contribute both to the planning theory's debate on landscape and to practices' domain as well. It takes into account the contemporary debate on landscape planning and regional governance (ranging from the European guestion to other theoretical approaches), on living cultures and diversity, on housing and different way to live in the city (social housing; co-housing; self-build etc...); on the urban regeneration strategies and so on.

Basically all of the contributions and suggestions brought together in this anthology suggest a plural and cross-cutting concept of landscape and build up on the traditional theories. They include different meanings of landscape(s) and propose diverse planning perspectives. They give a picture of the contemporary research efforts of young and senior researchers on landscapes for living.

#### Papers are grouped in eight sections:

Living/Abitare Right to housing/Diritto all'abitare Local housing/Abitare locale Living-Moving through places/Abitare diffuso e abitare in movimento Living differences/Abitare le differenze Living bodies/Abitare i corpi Living the changing city/Abitare la città in trasformazione

Living territories/Abitare il territorio



# **1. Living**/Abitare edited by Camilla Perrone



Homeless houses Gabriele Corsani

The house between protection, oppression, and resistance Giancarlo Paba





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# **Homeless Houses**

## Gabriele Corsani

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This article asks questions as to the difference between inhabitation (abitare) and dwelling (dimorare), the house and the home, in relation to the metamorphosis of the primitive hut. Substantially synonyms, the two verbs have a slight semantic gap: while the first denotes the act of living in a house, the second adds an ideal tension that ennobles the everyday dimension, regardless the beauty of the house itself.

In this sense, a central role is played by the metamorphosis of Philemon and Baucis's hut, narrated by Ovid, recounted in the first epigraph, Models from the Ancient World: poor and small, it gives a full expression of the lives of the couple living in it, so much so that it is transformed by divine benevolence into the true home, that is, a temple.

The excessive identification with the house's architectural and political requirements outlined in the second epigraph, Flashes of Brilliance from the Enlightenment, goes so far as to deny the conditions for actual inhabitation.

Lastly, Homeless Houses in the United States of America mentions some ironic and apocalyptical contemporary interventions on the serial wooden cottages in the suburbs. The sense of home, expression of a reserve of gentleness and imagination, can be seen quite clearly in the lowly huts photographed by Walker Evans.

To inhabit (*abitare*) and to dwell in (*dimorare*) have analogous but not totally corresponding meanings. The Italian 'abitare', to inhabit, derives from the Latin *habitare*, in turn linked to *habere* and therefore with a reference to 'possession' of the place in which one lives, with the connected implications of duration and stability. In the same way, '*dimorare*', to dwell, is a direct calque from the Latin *demorari* and means to stay, linger, but also to wait. The oxymoron 'abitare senza dimora'<sup>1</sup> highlights an aspect of man's relationship with his everyday living space: the certainty of stable residence is not disconnected from a feeling of waiting and tension towards an elsewhere, integral to our existential settlement.

In these notes I make central reference to On Adam's House in Paradise: the idea of the primitive hut in architectural history (1972) by Joseph Rykwert. The focal point of the book, as the author declares, is not so much a search for the original dwelling, as an observation of the long duration of a very ancient type of house: a volume on a rectangular base with a two-pitched or ridge roof, with its external and internal landscapes.

Therefore, I believe that, owing to its long duration, the primitive hut is the type that best expresses the tension, mentioned above. I shall divide this core theme into three sections. The first two, relating to ancient biblical and classical times (Models from the Ancient World) and to enlightened modernity (Flashes of Brilliance from the Enlightenment), have the role of epigraphs introducing the topic of Homeless Houses in the United States of America.

## First epigraph - Models from the Ancient World

In the Old Testament, the Jewish people experienced the tension between living as nomads and settling down. Abraham's tent migrated from Ur to the land of Canaan; the Ark of the Covenant, the 'house' that guarded the pact between God and man, followed the people throughout the forty years in the desert after their flight from Egypt. The memory of the precarious living conditions in that period still lives on in the Sukkot, the Jewish festival of the tabernacles. The entry to the Promised Land marked the end of nomadism and the epicentre of the settlement was Jerusalem, with the Temple erected on the rock.

In the New Testament, while wandering in the Promised Land, Christ announced another fatherland that would be the true home of man. In the Gospels and the Acts of the Apostles earthly houses are constant and appreciated presences, but they are dwelling places in a wait not lacking dramatic connotations, as shown by the words of Christ: "Foxes have holes, and birds have nests, but the Son of Man has nowhere to lie down and rest." (Matthew, 8, 20). The only house in which the "Son of Man" rested his head – the tomb – would be inhabited for a short time (forty hours, a new passage through the desert of death) before his entry to celestial Jerusalem.

Immediately after the resurrection of Christ, the role of the earthly house as a place of transit becomes even more explicit, as shown in the episode of the "supper at Emmaus". Two disciples have left Jerusalem saddened after seeing Christ's crucifixion. He walks beside them on the road and gladdens their hearts by speaking to them. On coming closer to the village of Emmaus the two invite the stranger to stay with them: "Stay with us; the day is almost over and it is getting dark". In Luke's Gospel the approach to Emmaus is rendered in Greek with "(...) eis ten komen", "going to a village", which also means "towards the place of rest". But there is no rest: as the supper begins, the two disciples recognise Christ as he breaks the bread and at the same time see him disappear. They immediately return to Jerusalem to tell the apostles and other disciples of the extraordinary event (Luke, XXIV, 28-35).

Paul of Tarsus, or Saint Paul, the apostle who spread Christianity through his preaching, writings and travels, was a builder of tents, that is temporary dwellings. The house shared by the Christians, the church, became the earthly anticipation of celestial Jerusalem. But, to underline the primacy of the afterworld, the

<sup>1</sup> Translator's note: this is the original title of the article, the Latin derivation of which is difficult to render in English. As a result, in order to get across the sense of existential settlement mentioned at the end of the introductory paragraph, I have used the term 'homeless' – which is indeed the usual translation of 'senza dimora' – contrasting the 'home' with the mere building where one lives, the 'house'.

community of the faithful around the church, the parish, were called upon to live in the world as if they did not belong there: in New Testament Greek paroikia indicates the manner of inhabiting the city as strangers. Of significance with regard to the dialectic between temporarily inhabitation and settlement in a place is the "hut of branches" that friar Francis had built in the garden of the convent of Saint Damian in Assisi, to sleep in contact with the earth without the mediation of stone, considered a dead material, like the "harsh crag" of Mount La Verna (Dante Alighieri, Paradiso, XI). The "hut" is the expression of a manner of inhabitation that demonstrates our precarious existence on earth in the precise moment man is required to have maximum contact with the earth, his consubstantial element. Let us also remember that Saint Francis, according to tradition, was the inventor of the nativity scene, where the hut/cave, with countless different interpretations in Western painting, is a place that is not just marginalised, but set aside for other uses.

In Greek mythology the houses of the gods are not just sumptuous dwellings. The minor god Poros, a poor vagrant, lived on the streets. Dionysus, a mysterious god insofar as he was conceived by Jupiter and Semele, a mortal woman, had no home and his lack of a stable dwelling provided eternal suffering to contrast his unbridled energy.

The living place was not without its inconveniences for men either: another lesser god, the impertinent Momus, criticised houses, an invention of Athena, because they were immobile and could not be moved in the event of a troublesome neighbour.

A pacified manner of living, sheltered from earthly concerns and divine envy, was that, narrated by Ovid, of Philemon and Baucis, two elderly people content with the little that they had, who since their youth had spent their lives in a simple hut on a hill in Phrygia. The spontaneous and generous welcome reserved for the two vagrants, who turned out to be Jupiter and Mercury, turned away by the inhabitants of the area, won them divine recognition: while the underlying plain was submerged by the waters,

"Their little shed, scarce large enough for two, Seems, from the ground increased, in height and bulk to grow. A stately temple shoots within the skies, The crotches of their cot in columns rise: The pavement polish'd marble they behold. The gates with sculpture graced, the spires and tiles of gold."

(Metamorphoses, VIII, vv. 621-724 for the whole episode, translated by Sir Samuel Garth, John Dryden, et al). Philemon and Baucis asked to become the guardians of the temple; they died together at a very old age and were transformed into an oak and linden tree with intertwining trunks.

The metamorphosis of their house into a temple was the first and direct sublimation of the hut – elevated to the original home in Ovid's poem – restyled by writers of treatises and philosophers from the Renaissance to the Enlightenment.

## Second epigraph: Flashes of Brilliance from the Enlightenment

Towards the end of the eighteenth century some projects for houses appeared in which the meaning of inhabitation was interpreted in terms alien to the everyday dimension. With their symbolic and metaphorical forms, they were designed to portray, in a forcibly cryptic manner, the social role of the building/lodging's intended resident. For the usual functions these houses were impracticable, despite in many cases it being underlined that they could be carried out.

Exemplary in this category were Charles-Nicolas Ledoux's (1789-1790) projects for houses for the town of Chaux and the village of Maupertuis, amongst which the Maison du charron (The Wheelwright's House) and the Maison des gardes agricoles (The House of the Agricultural Guards). The form and social representation are provided through bizarre references: the House of the Agricultural Guards, a sphere with four openings in the cardinal directions at the widest diameter, is a panopticon overlooking the four cardinal points.

The *Maison* pour un Cosmopolitain (1785) by Antoine-Laurent-Thomas Vaudoyer, also a spherical shape, was held up by a double Doric colonnade which combined the requirements for physical stability with the "indifference" to settlement of both the spherical form and its cosmopolitan inhabitant, peregrinus undique as Francesco Petrarch would say.

The skull-shaped house, Projet d'une fabrique en vanité (end of eighteenth – beginning of nineteenth century), by A. Claris, overlooked a lake with a staircase in a romantic landscape of lush trees; the bottom-left corner of the water painting shows the floor plan and indicates the functions of the various rooms ('salle à manger', etc.). The depiction is enlivened by a scene of adieu: from the staircase a female figure bids farewell to a gondola heading into the distance.

Jean-Jacques Rousseau glorified the house on the islet of Saint Pierre on Lake Bienne, in Switzerland, not with regard to its form, or its decoration, but the enchantment of the place. In reality, for him it was not a home: he declared that he could stay there until the end of his days, but as if he were in a hotel, which can be left at any moment: the unpacked books were a sign of a 'temporary settlement' and in reality Rousseau only lived on his small island for two months (Les rêveries du promeneur solitaire, Cinquième promenade; ed. from 1926, pp. 89-107). Despite the contrast between the condition of the idle solitary Rousseau, and that of the inventor of the phalange, the hyperactive solitary Fourier, it is possible to see a parallel between the two in their indifference to the dimension of the interieur.

A concrete example of a "homeless house" is the Römisches Haus in Weimar, inspired by Goethe, by the architect Johann August *Arens*. Goethe was a passionate house enthusiast, as shown by his residence in the centre of Weimar. In the Römisches Haus there was no trace of interieur: the search for the ideal type of Mediterranean house, suggested by the duke to Goethe for his Italian journey (1786-1788), was resolved by planning and realising an architectural manifesto. Its pre-eminent function was as a place for observing the landscape, owing to its fortunate position on a rocky outcrop in the little valley of Ilm, on the outskirts of the town, in the park of the same name.

#### Second epigraph: Flashes of Brilliance from the Enlightenment

Can, in your opinion, there exist a true historicity without the possibility of spiritual invention? (P. Bigongiari, Postilla a Bocelli, 'Corrente', II, no. 17, 30 September 1939, p. 1).

In the colonies that would give birth to the United States of America, the model of house - cottages of the simplest layout - is the expression of a life hopefully in harmony with society and nature, as appears from views of the founding fathers' orderly towns. But even in the more intense modern experience of settlement on the land, the relationships established between the house, its inhabitants and society were not always virtuous.

In the middle of the nineteenth century, on the shore of Lake Walden, in the heart of New England, David Henry Thoreau built a wooden hut, depicted on the title page of his Walden; or life in the woods (1854) [Ill. 1], meticulously describing its basic layout and furnishings. This homeless house, used by Thoreau for around a year and a half as an observatory on the surrounding nature, is an outcome of the pull, the tension towards community participation, forced to find expression in temporary solitary collectiveness.

In the twentieth century, the suburban and rural hut, often fitted out as a temporary dwelling, was a recurring subject in the photographic campaigns promoted by the Resettlement Administration (RA, 1935), the federal agency resulting from Roosevelt's New Deal, replaced by the Farm Security Administration (FSA) at the end of 1936. The aim of the RA, and then the FSA, was to help the families and rural communities struck by the farming crisis, caused by the collapse of Wall Street and a series of droughts of biblical proportion, through new settlements and the allocation of new lands.

The RA promoted vast photographic documentation on the state of the inhabitants and the environment in the south of the country. The inspiration behind the initiative came from the economist Rexford Guy Tugwell, enlightened collaborator of Roosevelt and firm supporter of planning interventions. Tugwell asserted the need to visually document poverty as a breakdown in the relationship between man and land, so as to provide support in focusing the interventions. The programme's guidelines were drawn up by Roy Stryker, who, as a student at Columbia University, had been struck by a course held by Tugwell on utopian socialism, then becoming his assistant and, in 1935, a member of his staff on the RA.



*Figure 1* | Title page of H.D. Thoreau, Walden, or Life in the Woods, Boston, Ticknor and Fields, 1854, with a drawing of the hut. source: web)

Figure 2 | Walker Evans, Home of Bud Fields sharecropper, Hale County, Alabama, 1936. source: web.

Through Tugwell and Stryker the attention to houses and the environment, the pivots of utopian socialism which precisely in the United States had given rise to many dynamic experiences, inspired a group of photographers which included figures such as Dorothea Lange, Walker Evans, Ben Shahn and Arthur Rothstein. What interests me here in particular is the work of Evans, also owing to his direct links with European culture through his professional training and frequenting the Nadar studio in Paris, and the influence of Eugène Atget, with his "sensitivity for the geometry of a city full of gaps." (Quintavalle, 1975, p. XIX) Evans loved to photograph the sharecroppers' houses using large-format plate cameras with a very closed diaphragm for a clearer definition of the outlines. This slow technique, which led to each shot being controlled with meditated preparation, helped to give an exemplary dignity to houses that were not just physically decayed but also lacking their primary function. There is no component of pity: Evans transmits no judgement of compassion or reprobation in the face of those examples of motionless fixedness. [Ill. 2]

The images taken by Evans in the summer of 1936 in Alabama are linked to two core themes: the faces of the inhabitants and the lowly wooden constructions. There is a correspondence between the two subjects. The members of the three families portrayed together with the writer James Agee on behalf of the "Fortune" magazine (however, not deemed fit to publish, the report instead came out in 1941 as a book) were raised to the dignity of Famous Men (Agee, Evans, 1941). In the marvellous correspondence of written text and image, their relationship with their homes and the places resulted in a frank account of the pain of living without a horizon:

"In Evans' pictures of temples or shelters the presence or absence of people who created them is the most important thing. The structures are social rather than artistic documents. The photographs are social documents.[...] The most characteristic single feature of Evans's work is its purity. Or even its Puritanism. It is 'straight' photography not only in technique but in the rigorous directness of its way of looking." (Walker Evans, 1938)



*Figura 3* | Gordon Matta-Clark, 'Splitting, 1974, dittico (particolare)'. Gordon Matta-Clark, exhibition catalogue edited by L. Fusi and M. Pierini, Cinisello Balsamo (MI), Silvana Editoriale, 2008, p. 16. *Figura 4* | Gordon Matta-Clark, 'Veduta di Bingo in fase di realizzazione, 1974' Gordon Matta-Clark, catalogue, cit., p. 57.

In more recent years, the architect and artist Gordon Matta-Clark, son of the Chilean painter Roberto Sebastian Matta Echaurren, was attracted by the typical US suburban house, the paradigmatic version of which he subjected to his building deconstruction/dissection in the early 1970s, at the time of a widespread crisis in the American dream. Among the most significant interventions, let me recall Splitting (1974) [Ill. 3], which consisted of separating a house set for demolition into two parts:

Splitting is an intervention on an abandoned house at number 322 on Humphrey Street in Englewood, New Jersey. Matta-Clark split the building in two with a vertical part cut from the basis of its median axis. The two-storey building, surmounted by a gabled roof, could be the prototype of the typical American home. Its design was so common and simplified in its lines, that it could have been drawn by a child. The Humphrey Street house, destined for demolition (...) revealed itself as the perfect subject for Matta-Clark's intervention. The simple two-storey wood framed house rested on a stone foundation. The structure, previously emptied of any furnishing, docilely complied to the will of Matta-Clark's chainsaw, as it cut from the roof to the basement. The one end of the foundation was bevelled down, lowering that half of the home so that the initial sliver became a wedge of light bisecting the entire structure (Fusi, 2008, pp. 50-51).

Again in 1974, in Bingo [Ill. 4], Matta Clark (here together with David Zwirner) removed the façade of a house awaiting the same fate at Niagara Falls, New York, to uncover the interior spatial layout. In *Splitting* and *Bingo Matta Clark* seems to have been looking within those icons of the American myth for the existence of a "significance" and an *interieur* likely to give intact revelations, despite their stereotypical repetition. But no charm or virtuous and/or heroic sedimentation were uncovered by the gaps and sections, and Matta-Clark's interventions were the only ones capable of conferring an aura to those houses before they wholly ceased to exist.

To round off these notes on Matta-Clark I shall recall the photos that bear witness to his passion for small precarious buildings, or more precisely, the rural huts in the Genoan hinterland (1976) [Ill. 5] (Fusi, Perini, 2008, pp. 146-149, 154). If, as Rikwert asserts, the hut model recurs in different peoples and times, it is significant that this architect/artist seeks their exemplary forms in a Mediterranean landscape.



*Figura 5* | Gordon Matta-Clark, 'Little Houses in Genoa, settembre-ottobre 1976', Gordon Matta-Clark, catalogue, cit., p. 126, detail.

Lastly, the wooden cottage finds a contemporary parable in the dramatic works of Thomas Doyle, who depicts them with maniacal precision in minute plastic models: one hovering on a spur of land while a visitor rests, unaware and bewildered, on a lawn before the small entrance porch [Ill. 6]; one resting on a 'column' of earth, while two other similar "columns" support two trees either side of the façade; one devastated by a cataclysm which has scattered the tiny components of its interior into the surrounding garden; another overlooking an abyss outlined by the rubble of its completely destroyed front part, in a tragically traumatic section; ...



*Figura 6* | Thomas Doyle, Acceptable Losses, 2008, in American Dreamers exhibition, Florence, 9 March-10 July 2012, leaflet)

Through the cottage's metamorphoses, Doyle proposes a social critique not lacking in ironies, amongst which the glass protection (from jars to semispherical or oblong calottes) for his creations. The disintegration of those buildings – physical or virtual: even the suspended cottage is an intact ruin – conjures up ancient fears and we could think that it is an ancient way of exorcising the fear of revolutionary uprisings. In any case, Doyle depicts an alien apocalypse and a truth that definitively subverts the quiet appearance of the domestic "inhabited landscapes".

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## **Further Information**

#### **Copyright - Captions**

- 1. Title page of H.D. Thoreau, Walden, or Life in the Woods, Boston, Ticknor and Fields, 1854, with a drawing of the hut (source: web).
- 2. Walker Evans, Home of Bud Fields sharecropper, Hale County, Alabama, 1936 (source: web).
- 3.Gordon Matta-Clark, 'Splitting, 1974, dittico (particolare)' (Gordon Matta-Clark, exhibition catalogue edited by L. Fusi and M. Pierini, Cinisello Balsamo (MI), Silvana Editoriale, 2008, p. 16).
- 4. Gordon Matta-Clark, 'Veduta di Bingo in fase di realizzazione, 1974' (Gordon Matta-Clark, catalogue, cit., p. 57.)
- 5. Gordon Matta-Clark, 'Little Houses in Genoa, settembre-ottobre 1976' (Gordon Matta-Clark, catalogue, cit., p. 126, detail).
- 6. Thomas Doyle, Acceptable Losses, 2008 (American Dreamers exhibition, Florence, 9 March-10 July 2012, leaflet).



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# The House Between Protection, Oppression, and Resistance

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The relationship between home and population has changed dramatically in recent years. International migration, changes in family structure, the emergence of new lifestyles have transformed the very idea of home. However, the conquest of a house, or many pieces of home all over the world, still remains an objective of populations. The paper analyzes the modifications of the house needs in recent years, and the way in which the house can be at the same time a place of oppression and a site of resistance.

## House and Body

In the seventies it was common to travel to Turkey by car, along the long road that went from Italy to Istanbul through Belgrade. In the old Yugoslavia one had to face a dangerous highway, especially in summer when the flow of tourists was far surpassed by the constant stream of Turkish immigrants' vehicles that ran continuously in both directions. Accidents were frequent and the fields bordering the road were littered with traces of disaster, with old wrecked cars and gutted suitcases scattered everywhere.

On the Turkish border tourists were channeled to customs, which was annoying, but relatively fast, while the Ford and Volkswagen transit vans of Turkish workers from Rüsselsheim, Wolfsburg and Stuttgart, where they worked in the big car factories, were methodically emptied and checked by the customs officers. An incredible amount of stuff spilled onto the asphalt around each vehicle: consumer goods, small appliances, furniture, everything considered necessary for their distant home of origin. On the way back, the vans would be filled with traditional products and everything that the people would miss, once they had returned to Germany. Emigration linked two territories, two houses, and the migrants' bodies moved in a box on wheels which was also a kind of mini-home, an extension of the individual or family body.

In a splendid paper, Ferruccio Gambino reconstructed the changes that have occurred in recent decades in the relationship between the bodies of migrants and their baggage. In nineteenth-century migration, "the voyage allowed migrants carry with them not only their children, but also a reasonable amount of luggage, and therefore manifest themselves both in their family and social identity, and in their acquisitive potential of new wealth" (Gambino, 1998).

New migrants are instead victims of a process of spoliation, "the migrants without papers traveling illegally by land arrive bare, as the guides who require them to 'travel light', almost as light as those members of jet society with a number of apartments and wardrobe and so many clothes and citizenships as there are the cities that never fail to visit" (Gambino, 1998, p. 25). For foreigners who migrate by sea today, the smugglers inflict complete self-spoliation: it is a raw and basic migration of bodies without an identity. On the southern coast of Italy, you can occasionally find clothes that the boat people have abandoned on the shore to replace them with some dry clothing protected while traveling in a plastic bag. From the shore, these bodies without their "proprietary prosthesis" - to borrow another of Gambino's expressions - begin a human and spatial adventure that will eventually restore a body dressed in identity and history, a body which can be extended into a family, a home (or a relationship between houses in the world), a settlement.

## The Body as a house

We saw in the previous point that, like in the reduction of a migrant's existence to a simple traveling body, home corresponds to the body, at least in one stage of life. Sometimes, on the contrary, the house itself can be considered as an extension of the body. Jules Michelet provided an extraordinary description of this, in an old book from the mid-nineteenth century. It is an example which may seem inappropriate, because it speaks of animals, but in the description of how a bird creates its nest, the relationship between the house (its material, but also its symbolic form) and body of the dweller-builder intentionally takes on a very human meaning:

"The instruments are very defective. The bird has neither the squirrel's hands nor the beaver's tooth. Having only his bill and his foot (which by no means serves the purpose of a hand), it seems that the nest should be to him an insoluble problem. The specimens now before my eyes are for the most part composed of a tissue or covering of mosses, small flexible branches, or long vegetable filaments; but it is less a *weaving* than a *condensation*; a felting of materials, blended, beaten, and welded together with much exertion and perseverance; an act of great labour and energetic operation, for which the bill and the claw would be insufficient. The tool really used is the bird's own body – his breast – with which he presses and kneads the materials until he has rendered them completely pliable, has thoroughly mixed them, and subdued them to the general work. And within, too, the implement which determines the circular form of the nest is no other than the bird's body. It is by constantly turning himself about, and ramming the wall on every side, that he succeeds in shaping the circle. Thus, then, his house is his very person, his form, and his immediate effort – I would

say, his suffering. The result is only obtained by a constantly repeated pressure of his breast. There is not one of these blades of grass but which, to take and retain the form of a curve, has been a thousand and a thousand times pressed against his bosom, his heart, certainly with much disturbance of the respiration, perhaps with much palpitation." (Michelet, 1869, pp. 248-249)

It is a beautiful text, in my opinion. For Michelet, the house is the very same person, amplified into the physical and emotional dimension of shelter, conquered by fatigue and suffering, and a thousand times it causes disturbances and movements of the heart during the process of construction or conquest.

The same thing happens in the world of men and women, or at least it is what happened until now, because we are talking about the traditional house, or the traditional way of considering the house. The house as a means of fixation to the ground, the earth, the family home, the extended family home, the bourgeois cradle-home described in Gaston Bachelard's oft-quoted topoanalysis: "In the life of a man, the house thrusts aside contingencies, its councils of continuity are unceasing. Without it, man would be a dispersed being. It maintains him through the storms of the heavens and through those of life. Before he is 'cast into the world,' as claimed by certain hasty metaphysics, man is laid in the cradle of the house. And always, in our daydreams, the house is a large cradle. [...] Life begins well, it begins enclosed, protected, all warm in the bosom of the house." (Bachelard, 1994, pp. 6-7).

Le Corbusier launched a frontal attack on this conception of the house. Modern man is a nomad, his horizon is movement, circulation, change. At various stages of life, housing needs change, and in the same way the characters of space that can satisfy it. The traditional house has no reason to exist, "the family home is a demagogic illusion" (Le Corbusier 1987, p. 90). The concept of home, *maison*, must be abandoned, modern men need *logis*, housing.

Bachelard and Le Corbusier thus appear to have an opposite view of the house, and this certainly is the case, in many ways: for the first home is a way to deal with the cosmos, for the second it is a *machine à habiter*, a device for living. In fact, Le Corbusier does not diminish the role of the house's psychological or aesthetic character: "The house is a necessary product to man", it is "the place where beauty exists and provides the spirit of the peace that is indispensable" (Le Corbusier 2003, pp. 33, 75).

Perhaps it is interesting to ask whether there is something that unites Bachelard and Le Corbusier. Bachelard emphasizes the "joy of living" embodied in homes and bourgeois accoutrements (the attic, the basement, drawers, chest, cabinets), but also notes that "the house is a body of images that give the man reasons or illusions of stability", and again, with a precision that needs underlining, he makes this beautiful definition: "all really inhabited space bears the essence of the notion of home". What matters is to live, to find some reason for, or some illusion of stability: it is in this sense that the construction (and even the mere temporary acquisition) of a "really inhabited space" can lead to the trouble and the heart's palpitation spoken of by Michelet.

Exclusion from housing ranks top of all forms of exclusion; it is the first, and often decisive, link in a chain of deprivations. The lack of a decent home at a fair price is often the cause of many other social and urban ills: no home = no life. And even when our life is filled with something (some precarious work, some form of income, a minimum level of survival), the instability and inferiority of housing keep those affected from having full recognition of citizenship and membership, in a zone of exclusion, of a diminished and defective existence.

The house is in fact not just one thing, a shelter, pure and simple. On the contrary, it is a complex object, a collection of material and symbolic goods. Pierre Bourdieu has defined it effectively:

"So, to treat the house as a mere capital good, characterized by a particular rate of amortization, and to view the purchase of a house as an economic strategy in the narrow sense of the term, ignoring the system of reproduction strategies of which it is one instrument, would be to strip the product and the economic act of all the historical properties, effective in certain historical conditions [...]. What is being tacitly asserted through the creation of a house

is the will to create a permanent group, united by stable social relations, a lineage capable of perpetuating itself over time in a manner similar to the durable, stable, unchangeable residence. It is a collective project for, or wager on, the future of the domestic unit, that is, on its cohesion, its integration or, if one prefers, on its capacity to resist break-up and dispersal. And the very undertaking that consists in choosing a house together, fitting it out, decorating it and, in short, making it a 'home' that feels to be truly a 'home of one's own' – among other reasons because one loves in it the sacrifices of time and effort it has cost" (Bourdieu, 2005, pp. 19-20).

Certainly Bourdieu's mention of the stability of domestic roots is now dated, and does not take into account the mobility of contemporary housing, but I think that the sense of his reasoning remains broadly valid: the house - in a different way from the past since now it is desired - remains "the visible attestation of a common project", and the effort of conquest, with direct involvement in giving it a form (in a broad span of possibilities ranging from deciding on the furniture to purchasing the house on the market, from squatting to self-building), makes a strong contribution to rooting the new inhabitants in the urban community. In the contradictory manner that has always characterized the role that houses have in our lives: the home as "habit, loneliness, Negritude", but also as a "showy and absorbing root" in which to sink, modifying and adapting it to our body and our sensitivity, "because it is impossible to live only functionally, without small gestures of comfort, without an odor of care, without some type of richness" (Sereni, 2005, p. 164-165).

The contemporary forms of nomadism, in the world of migration in particular, but also in the overall organization of settlements, transform, but do not cancel, the desire for a house (houses). *Home is the search for a home (homes)* and corresponds to the complicated (spatial, economic and mental) route that even today men and women must follow to conquer a place to stay or the places through which it is necessary to transit. There is nothing romantic about traveling in contemporary itinerant living: "home, be it defined as a dwelling, a homeland, or even a constellation of relationships, is represented as a spatial and relational realm from which people venture into the world and to which they generally hope to return. It is a place of origin (however recent or relative) as well as a point of destination." (Mallett, 2004, p. 77).

The waves of immigration conquer networks of houses, in a first phase, transforming them into places of recognition and survival, and subsequently into places of rootedness and development. The new houses are added to the homes of provenance without annulling their material and symbolic importance: the house becomes a network of houses, stretched in a wider geography, both reticular and unpredictable.

Blunt and Dowling summarized the diversity of housing conditions resulting from the explosion of migration flows in the concept of transnational homes: "The lived experiences and spatial imaginaries of transnational migrants revolve around home in a range of ways: through, for example, the relationships between home and homeland, the existence of multiple homes, diverse home-making practices, and the intersection of home, memory, identity and belonging" (Blunt & Dowling, 2006, p. 199).

Research shows a very wide phenomenology of housing situations, from refugee camps to temporary detention centers, from the shanty towns in the interstices of the metropolis to the many forms of inferior housing, to the monster homes of the Chinese bourgeoisie in Canadian cities (Perrone, 2003, p. 160-163).

Some studies suggest that in the middle of life (economic and emotional) investment in houses is of great importance. Garber argues that among people in their forties the house is the favorite subject of discussion and desire among American men and women (with an emotional over-investment similar to sex). A mixture of desire, dreams and emotions characterizes the housing market, a very particular market in which not only do the sellers lie (to sell more, as usual), but the buyers also lie to themselves (to buy the house of their dreams): "Buyers, it seems, lie about their financial situation, about the sum they are willing to spend, about their desires, and even about their preferences in location. They will say they are only interested in house or apartments on the east side of the town, and then call up weeks later to report that they have bought – through another broker – a property on the west side. They will insist on keeping to a strict dollar limit and they buy a house (from someone else) for a hundred thousand dollars more" (Garber, 2000, p. 7-8).

Many recent social changes (for example, the weakening of the traditional family and new styles of sexual behavior) affect the features of the home environment and its organization, but not the importance of the

home in the way of life. Carrington analyzes, for example, the subdivision in house management between kin work (linked to relations with relatives) and kith work (linked to the network of friends and acquaintances) with regard to different types of family and cohabitation. This study shows that in gay-lesbian families kith work prevails over kin work, and this fact gives the house new, more comprehensive aspects than the traditional ones, which require a change in how domestic space is organized, while at the same time confirming its centrality (Carrington, 2006).

#### The house as a prison or place of resistance

Hence, the house has a dual meaning: in the contemporary mobile societies the house is abandoned and continually sought, and it is experienced contradictorily as a prison or shelter, both comfortable and disturbing, in different places or moments of life.

Steve Jacobs has devoted a study - called *The Wrong House* - to the meaning of home in Hitchcock's films, in which the house is not only a component of the set, but it is the protagonist of the story. These are houses rebuilt in the studio as archetypes of the big bourgeois home. Jacobs sees Hitchcock as an architect in the proper sense, as a designer of true, albeit ephemeral, domestic spaces. *Right* houses, perfect (almost an embodiment of Bachelard's vision, with the items necessary for every feeling and "the places of secrets and concealments"), which become *wrong* when feelings and emotions become bad. This duality is typical of any domestic space (and also of the community, the village, every closed social institution): what is known and familiar can suddenly become alien and disturbing (Jacobs, 2007).

This contradiction does not just concern the large Victorian house. The house can be both a prison or an instrument of liberation for ordinary people in the cities of the world, in relation to gender, age, race and social status. I will address this contradiction with the help of two important scholars, Iris Marion Young, and bell hooks, exponents of radical thought in American culture, two contributions which I think should be considered not as alternative, but two complementary aspects: the story of a struggle inside the house (Young) and the positive role of the house in the dispute between marginalization and freedom in the ghetto of an American city (hooks).

Young's book is made up of a mixture of essays, one of which is dedicated to the house. I cannot dwell on the nevertheless interesting general arguments, and I will only make reference to the biographical digression contained in the middle of the essay. Young tells of her mother's rejection of the house, a refusal expressed through her complete neglect of every kind of domestic work: her mother just did not ever clean the house, and this habit was the cause of many problems and led to the social workers taking her children away from her. Unfairly, because Young recalls her mother's many other activities and her substantially positive relationships with her children: "My mother spent her days reading books, doing a correspondence course in Russian, filling sheets of calculations and codes" but also playing and using domestic spaces as places of relationships and affection. But the house remained dirty: her refusal to do domestic work was her rejection of the house as the female prison (Young, 2005).

That of Young's mother was, therefore, resistance to the house, whereas, on the contrary, in the other essay, the home is thought of as a site of resistance. Gloria Jean Watkins, the radical African-American feminist known as bell hooks, devoted a chapter to the house in one of her books. Even in the most difficult situations of greatest contrast between classes and race, the house is "a site of resistance", where our wounds can be healed (hooks, 1998).

Bell hooks recalls the dangerous trip across town to get to her grandma's house as a journey through segregation and fear in a hostile city, but in her mother or grandmother's house, even in conditions of hardship and poverty, it was possible to survive. Women were locked into the house, but the house could become an "area of care and nourishment" to set against racist and sexist oppression. The house, for bell hooks, was the only place in which it was possible to free one's humanity. In the house "a community of resistance" was formed, in which a different and better life could begin.

The house is therefore a crucial stake in liberating the new urban citizenship. Rootedness and belonging to

the city start from the house, from accommodation in decent housing. From house to city the way is shorter and easier: from the site of resistance to the city as a place of coexistence and open relations. Living in a safe and relatively stable house makes it possible to hook one's life to the networks that extend the house to the public places of the city: from school to the health institutions, from public spaces to urban facilities, and so on.

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