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The Cleaving of House and Home: A Lacanian Analysis of Architectural Aesthetics

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The Cleaving of House and Home: A Lacanian Analysis of Architectural
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Abstract

Drawing on Lacanian psychoanalysis and digital media studies, this thesis explores the radical disconnect between the home as a fantasmatic object of desire and the house as the space in which the fantasy of home is staged. By analyzing the house as a prosthetic replacement for our originary home (the womb), the aim is to uncover how architectural aesthetics of the Victorian, modern, and postmodern house respond to this irreconcilable gap, and why each aesthetic necessarily fails to create a more homely home. Considering recent trends in architecture, the thesis then examines the coincidence of the "small house" movement with the transformation of the house into a "media centre." New digital media technologies have opened up a new virtual world to explore that radically defies and blurs our conventional understanding of interior and exterior spaces. While such technologies open up new possibilities for reimagining our relation to the house, they are also potentially disruptive and dystopic.

Keywords

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In common usage, the terms house and home are nearly always interchangeable. Yet, there exists a hostility underpinning the relationship between the two that emerges when one attempts to manifest the house as home. This thesis examines the irreconcilable gap between home as a fantasmatic object of desire and the house as the stage on which this fantasy is enacted. By considering the architectural aesthetics of the Victorian, modernist, and postmodernist eras, the intention is to reveal not only how each of these movements both respond and attempt to mask the fundamental disconnect between house and home, but also why each architectural aesthetic necessarily fails. This failure is further examined by drawing on several literary representations of the house, as they provide a unique insight into our (uncanny) experience of architecture and its aesthetics, and how we psychologically inhabit these spaces.

Recent trends in architecture and technology, however, are radically altering our relation to the house. New digital media technologies have created a virtual world to explore that radically defies our traditional thinking about the boundary between interior and exterior spaces. The integration of these technologies into our domestic space has transformed the house into a "media centre." Likewise, the revival of the small house movement has incited a reconsideration of our understanding of the house as an enclosure, and consequently exposed the illusory nature of the boundaries between inside and outside. This approach to the problem of home signals a departure from our previous attempt to manifest the home at the level of the Imaginary, and suggests that is may be possible to form a more productive relation to the house in a manner that (uncannily) imitates analytic process itself.

1.1 Introduction

In *Privacy and Publicity: Modern Architecture as Mass Media* (1996), Beatriz Colomina proposes that "[t]he house is now a media centre, a reality that will forever transform our understanding of both public and private" (210). As new digital media technologies increasingly saturate the home, the necessity of analyzing the impact of these technologies becomes all the more urgent. Earlier media, such as television and radio, naturalized the permeation of the outside (the public) into the home, which prompted concerns about the possible negative effects of extended exposure to these media. Although these concerns still resonate today, more recent digital media technologies have transformed the presence of media in the home into a two-way process. Whereas older media offered a one-way transmission of programmed broadcasts to their audience (the classic communication model depicting the transmission of a message from sender to receiver[1]), new digital media technologies have since revolutionized this antiquated form of linear transmission into a dynamic, two-way exchange between users. Consequently, this new model of communication adds to concerns about the intrusion of these technologies in the home (the problem of there being too much "outside" inside) the additional problem of the inside now seeping into the outside. By reimagining the boundary between inside and outside through digital media technologies, the walls of the house have become more porous; as a result, not only have these media incited concerns regarding personal privacy (i.e., the movement of information from inside the private

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[1] See for example Shannon and Weaver's linear model of communication.

sphere into the public sphere), but they have also fundamentally altered our relation to the home.

By investigating the nature of our relationship to the home and its development alongside aesthetic changes to the house over the last century, the aim of this thesis is to arrive at an understanding of how the integration of new digital media technologies into the house has transformed our relation to the home. The desire to fully assimilate technology into the house has been a fundamental fantasy of Western society since the postwar era. The "House of the Future" became a recurrent motif in popular culture: featured in science fiction literature,[2] as attractions at amusement parks,[3] and in film. A typical example of this house can be seen in the short film and advertisement "Leave it to ROLL-OH,"[4] produced by Handy (Jam) Organization in the 1940s. The film offers descriptions of the "thinking machines" that may be found around the modern house: the kettle and toaster that are programmed to prepare food to perfection, and the "Fido-Feeder," a food dish with a timer to ensure the family dog is fed on time. In this modern home, the housewife enjoys more free time thanks to her new robot (commanded by a switchboard control panel) that carries out various tasks around the house, such as "wash dishes," "get hat," "fix furnace," and when it is finished, "scram!" The robot even comes equipped with vacuum feet and can-opener hands. With the aid of each of these service robots, one imagines that one would be liberated from the burdensome and mundane

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[2] See: *Danny Dunn and the Automatic House* by Raymond Abrashkin and Jay Williams (1965).

[3] See: "Monsanto House of the Future" attraction once featured as a part of Disney's *Tomorrowland* (1957). The house was made of plastic and featured futuristic appliances such as an ultrasonic dishwasher, cold zones to replace refrigerators, and other electronic devices.

[4] For the complete film, see: www.archive.org/details/LeaveItt1940

tasks of modern living and free to better enjoy one's life. Although we may not yet have our own "ROLL-OH" robot, there have been many significant developments aimed at improving our daily lives; for instance, dishwashers, laundry machines, and robovacs have all become naturalized components of the house —though one often still groans at the thought of unloading the dishwasher, or the mounds of laundry looming in the hamper. As such technologies become more and more a part of one's everyday life, many have become sceptical about whether these advancements in technology will live up to the expectations of the fantasy. Such criticisms, however, are hardly new; as Freud remarked in *Civilization and Its Discontents*, "[i]t seems certain that we do not feel comfortable in our present-day civilization, but it is very difficult to form an opinion whether and in what degree men of an earlier age felt happier" (736). This sentiment is often shared when one meditates on the achievements of modern technology. In spite of the nostalgia that one may have for the past, or anticipation for the future, it is hardly possible to determine whether one scenario would be preferable to another. Perhaps what one can extract from such a reflection is that there has always persisted a certain level of discomfort in the home.

If our attempts have failed to produce a more "homely" home through the remodelling and reshaping of the house, it is for the reason that such efforts merely address the symptoms of a much more deeply rooted issue. In order to conceive of an alternative means of responding to this discomfort, it is imperative to focus on not only this discomfort itself, but also its origin at the heart of the home. For this reason, it is necessary to devote considerable attention to the delineation of both *house* and *home*, as it is around these two terms that all else circles. By reframing the home as a problem of

desire, it become possible to properly address the role of the house (as that which regulates the boundaries between inside and outside) in producing this discomfort that Freud describes.

1.2 The Lost Object

House and home are at once intertwined and inseparable, and yet also secretly hostile. Home is both the place to which one returns each day, and simultaneously a fantasmatic space infused with the past and often projected into the future. In reality, however, these two dimensions (the physical and the fantasmatic) never intersect: the house that one calls home is only ever a distant approximation of its fantasmatic counterpart. This disconnect forms a fundamental and irreconcilable gap between the notions of home and house. If the home is a purely fantasmatic object of our desire, then the house is that physical space in which this fantasy is staged, and through which we attempt realize our desire for home by manipulating its aesthetic and interior configuration. We are incessant in our attempts to traverse this gap by subjecting our houses to renovation and accessorizing in an effort to make manifest the impossible home of our desire. Yet, such efforts are incapable of producing the sense of homeliness that one demands, as there always persists a remainder, some *thing* which brings to the fore this gap. It is precisely for this reason that architecture, literature, and philosophy have ceaselessly mulled over the notion of the home: its walls analyzed, torn down, and rebuilt again and again. In our work, and at the end of the day, we are forever returning to the home; and yet, in a certain way, we never arrive.

In rethinking the ties between happiness and civilization, Freud proposes that "the dwelling-house was a substitute for the mother's womb, the first lodging, for which in all likelihood man still longs, and in which he was safe and felt at ease" (*Civilization* 737). Beginning with Freud's assertion here allows for a more dynamic and somewhat polemic perspective of the home, for what Freud suggests here is truly quite radical. Opposing the conventional view of the house as foremost a shelter that protects one "against the violence of the forces of nature" (737), he argues that the origin of the house is a consequence of loss. The separation from this originary home, the womb, not only signifies one's irrevocable exile from home, but it is around this very loss that the house itself is structured. In *The Ethics of Psychoanalysis*, Lacan illustrates a strikingly similar concept using the analogy of a vase:

> Now if you consider the vase from the point of view I first proposed, as an object made to represent the existence of the emptiness at the center of the real that is called the Thing, this emptiness as represented in the representation presents itself as a *nihil*, as nothing. And that is why the potter, just like you to whom I am speaking, creates the vase with his hand around this emptiness, creates it, just like the mythical creator, *ex nihilo*, starting with a hole. (121)

Like a vase, the house starts with a hole, around which it quickly takes shape, containing and concealing its void. This empty centre of the house represents its own kind of Thing that has been named the home. For Lacan, the Thing is that piece of the Real that disrupts and escapes the Symbolic realm of signifiers: that marks an impossibility, or gap, in its logic. The emergence of such an impossibility is precisely what sets desire into motion;

in a certain way, the Thing is the cause of one's desire: it is the *je ne sais quoi* that excites one's desire for an object. Thus, it is precisely this desire to return home that guarantees that the house is much more than a mere utility, or barrier against the extremities of the outside; it necessitates that architecture be aesthetic as well as utilitarian. Yet, it is the very presence of the Thing's absence (its being nothing) that characterizes the relationship between house and home as hostile, as it is the Thing that marks the radical impossibility of the house ever becoming a home.

1.3 The Real Home

In order to better illustrate the relationship of the Thing to its outside, consider Lacan's example of courtly love. In the tradition of courtly love, a woman is taken by a lover as the object of a kind of flattery and devotion that, rather than highlighting her personal attributes, makes it seem as though her courter and all others are "praising the same person" (*Ethics* 126). Yet, if a woman is not pursued for her unique characteristics, one must ask, as Lacan does: "what was the exact role played by creatures of flesh and blood who were indeed involved in the matter?" (*Ethics* 126). The response can only be that in this fantasy, not only are women reduced to an object defined by men, but more radically, "woman," as such, "does not exist" (*Feminine Sexuality* 7). What is intended in this statement is that, as an object of patriarchal fantasy, there is no signifier to represent "Woman" (Fink, *Lacanian Subject* 115). In other words, the Lady of courtly love exists symbolically only insofar as she is defined by her courters; behind the praise of her qualities, there is no one, no*thing*: "this nothingness behind the mask is the very absolute negativity on account of which woman is the subject *par excellence*" (Žižek,

*Metastases*143). Many responses to Lacan's seemingly bold proclamation that "Woman does not exist" argue that it is a negative assertion against women; however, what is more accurately revealed in this statement is that Woman belongs to the register of the *Real*. In this sense, Woman cannot be wholly represented in the Symbolic realm because some part of her always escapes, unlike men, who "are defined as being wholly hemmed in by the phallic function, wholly under the sway of the signifier" (Fink, *Lacanian Subject* 107). It is precisely because Woman cannot be represented symbolically that she is the Thing, an empty centre (Lacan, *Ethics* 67). Like the vase that is constructed around nothingness, Lacan argues that what is constructed around the void of Woman is patriarchal society itself: "[t]he fact that 'Woman doesn't exist,' is not a result of the oppressive character of patriarchal society; on the contrary it is patriarchal society (with its oppression of women) which is a 'result' of the fact that 'Woman doesn't exist', a vast attempt to deal with and 'overcome' this fact, to make it pass unnoticed" (Zupančič 132). Patriarchal society is thus an attempt to mask the unbearable Real of Woman's nonexistence, and although various imperfect identities (e.g. daughter, wife), attempt to make Woman manifest in the Symbolic realm, the Real in her will inevitably emerge and disrupt these identities. Here, Alenka Zupančič provides the excellent example of insulting a chauvinist by alluding "to his sister's sexual activities. The mere thought that his sister is not just his sister, is not reducible to her symbolic identity, but may be something else as well . . . drives him mad" (132).

It is this very same intrusion of the Real in our house, our sudden realization that the home (as Thing) is not limited to its symbolic designation that produces a kind of discomfort and "drives us mad." The house represents our attempt both to make manifest

our desire for home and to mask the fact that home does not exist. One's incessant

reorganization and renovation of the house not only serves to make the house more

"homely," but also simultaneously conceals the fact that achieving such an aim is

impossible by leaving open the possibility that there always exists some obstacle that

must first be overcome. This counterintuitive maneuver is necessary for the reason that

desire itself must never be fully satisfied; attaining the desired object entails the cessation

of that desire: the home, as an object of desire, is "a lost object which must be continually

refound" (Evans 205). To truly realize one's desire to return to the fantasmatic home (i.e.,

the desire to return to the womb) would in fact be quite horrifying; one need only to

consider the connotations of the colloquialism "be careful what you wish for" to reveal its

abject quality. Yet, not only would an actual manifestation of this desire be quite

alarming (in other words, a return to the womb in its most literal sense), but even an

analogous experience of the safety and security provided by the womb would produce its

own smothering and claustrophobic horror. Take for example the bomb shelter lifestyle

of the so-called "Doomsday Preppers,"[5] who attempt to create for themselves an

environment impervious to the threat of an apparently impending societal collapse. The

result of their efforts, however, are either tremendously inadequate, or if moderately

successful, produce an environment so isolated that they run the risk of experiencing

psychological traumas similar to "cabin fever." By barricading themselves in their houses

with stockpiles of food (as many of them chose to do), they are unwittingly recreating an

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[5] See for example: Nation Geographic's television show *Doomsday Preppers*.

environment akin to the womb. However, it is precisely the confined isolation that keeps them safe that induces a disturbed mental state.[6]

The very nature of the Thing is such that it incites both desire and revulsion. It is for this reason that the aim of desire is not to obtain its object, but rather to circle around it. As Žižek succinctly states, "we mistake for the searching and indecision proper to desire what is, in fact, the realization of desire. That is to say, the realization of desire does not consist in its being 'fulfilled,' 'fully satisfied,' it coincides rather with the reproduction of desire as such, with its circular of movement" (*Looking Awry* 7). Thus, the house serves as not only a means of approaching or staging our desire, but it simultaneously protects us from the abject Real of our desire. One's search for the Thing is filled with a series of substitutive satisfactions for the lost object; however, as Lacan writes, "complete sublimation is not possible for the individual" (*Ethics* 91). Rather than finding enjoyment in the search itself, one mistakenly pursues the object of desire with the belief that the object itself is necessary for enjoyment and that one would be able to obtain the Thing if only some constraint were removed.

It is precisely this view of desire that is frequently exploited in advertising, where one is subject to a kind of proof that others are capable of enjoying the desired object beyond the limits of one's own ability *to* enjoy. The fantasies that are staged in advertisements not only make it seem certain that obtaining the object of enjoyment is possible, but that one should feel guilty for not already possessing it. Fantasy serves an important means by which one is able to navigate the void of the Thing. By mediating the

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[6] For more on the effects of isolation, see William Haythorn's article "Together In Isolation."

desired object through fantasy one is able to approach the object while also keeping it at a distance. Contrary to its more conventional understanding, the term fantasy used herein is not to be understood as a simple indulgent hallucination, but rather in the psychoanalytic sense as that which separates drive from desire:

> . . . *fantasy is the very screen that separates desire from drive*: it tells the story which allows the subject to (mis)perceive the void around which drive circulates as the primordial loss constitutive of desire. It other words, fantasy provides a *rationale* for the inherent deadlock of desire: it constructs the scene in which the *jouissance* we are deprived of is concentrated in the Other who stole it from us. (Žižek, *Plague* 32)

In relation to the house, fantasy is the narrative that sustains the illusion that the home exists. It provides a justification for the absence of the home, while maintaining its possibility. For instance, home could be conceived of as a nostalgic scene from one's childhood, a distant memory to which one longs to return, or as a projection in which one imagines the idyllic life of the occupants of a mansion: if only one had more financial wealth, one would be able to construct the home of one's dreams — a parallel to Žižek's notion of fantasy as constructing an envious scene in which an Other deprives one of *jouissance*. Analogous to the lady of courtly love, when the desired object is compared to the object in its naked reality, the void emerges and the fantasy breaks down. In other words: given the opportunity to return to the home of one's childhood, the real thing would not stand up to the gleam of nostalgia, nor would a mansion turn out to be any more "homely" than any other house.

Despite such confrontations with the Real of our desire, we persist in the pursuit of this fantasy for the reason that our endless ability to manipulate our domestic space sustains its possibility. Topographically, this situates the house precisely on the gap between the Real and the Symbolic; and it is here that we unsuccessfully attempt to unite the signifier and the Thing through the Imaginary — to make the house a home. However, the mask that we apply to conceal the Real is always insufficient; consequently, the hostility between house and home emerges, and one experiences the "discomfort" that undermines the house. In Freud's work, this discomfort is more commonly known as the uncanny. Citing Schelling, Freud states that contrary to its commonplace denotations, "everything is *unheimlich* that ought to have remained secret and hidden but has come to light" (*The Uncanny* 345). As will be demonstrated in the following chapter, it is this uncanniness, literally "un-homeliness," that we attempt to conceal by the only means we can: through the prosthetic.

Chapter 2 – Das Ding About Architectural Aesthetics

2.1 Prosthetics

As Freud wrote, "the dwelling-house [is] a substitute for the mother's womb" (*Civilization and its Discontents* 737), this substitute, the product of our labour, is a prosthetic double for the lost object. The prosthetic, for Freud, is generally applied as a term for those technological developments that serve to extend or remove the limitations of the human body, such as writing, the gramophone, spectacles, and motor power: "things that, by his science and technology, man has brought about on this earth, on which he first appeared as a feeble animal organism" (737). Although not explicit, Freud's perspective on technology and civilization suggests that he had in mind the myth of Prometheus. This myth is referenced several times throughout the Freudian corpus, though it is most prominently featured in *The Acquisition and Control of Fire*, published two years following *Civilization and Its Discontents*, wherein Freud discusses the symbolism of the myth in relation to psychoanalytic theory. This particular myth is significant for thinking about prosthetics, as it depicts an origin of the human that is always already technological. As such, the myth of Prometheus is indispensable not only to the writing of Bernard Stiegler and David Wills (who will be discussed in this chapter), but also to theorists of posthumanism and cyborg ontologies, such as Katherine Hayles and Donna Haraway. In brief, Epimetheus (literally "after-thinker") is given the task of handing out traits to all of the animals, except that humans are forgotten and given no trait with which to defend themselves. To correct this fault, Prometheus ("fore-thinker") steals fire from Zeus and gives it to the humans, thereby providing them with the means

by which to create technology as compensation for their being merely "feeble animals."

Having been given the ability to create prosthetics, Freud writes that

> Man has, as it were, become a kind of prosthetic God. When he puts on all
> his auxiliary organs he is truly magnificent; but those organs have not
> grown onto him and they still give him much trouble at times.
> Nevertheless, he is entitled to console himself with the thought that this
> development will not come to an end precisely with the year 1930 A.D.
> Future ages will bring with them new and probably unimaginably great
> advances in this field of civilization and will increase man's likeness to
> God still more. But in the interests of our investigations, we will not forget
> that present-day man does not feel happy in his Godlike character. (738)

Here, again, Freud points to a displeasure arising out of the inability of these prostheses

to fully substitute for the object of our desire. In part, this is a consequence of the

insufficiency of these prostheses, but Freud also seems to suggest that at times we

become aware that they are only prosthetic substitutes ("those organs have not grown

onto him"), and that these moments cause a disruption in our perception of these

prostheses as natural.

In *Technics and Time: the Fault of Epimetheus*, Bernard Stiegler provides a much

more in-depth investigation of prosthetics through the myth of Prometheus and

Epimetheus. Stiegler argues that the prosthesis is not merely supplementary, but that it is

constitutive of the human being: "[t]he prosthesis is not a mere extension of the human

body; it is the constitution of this body *qua* 'human' (the quotation marks belong to the

constitution). It is not a 'means' for the human but its end" (152-3). Following Stiegler's

logic, the house would not merely be a substitute for the lost object in the sense that it attempts to take its place, but would very much be a part of the constitution of one's desire — it is, after all, the stage of fantasy that produces the home. Stiegler also argues, however, that part of our being prosthetic entails the forgetting of our prosthetic origin (3). This is to suggest that we are often oblivious to our prosthetics as technological appendages because we have become accustomed to their presence. However, it is precisely this forgetting that we are always-already prosthetic that allows us to maintain the possibility of attaining the object of desire; to be constantly aware of our prosthetic origin would mean having to accept that we have been permanently exiled from home. Only through forgetting is one able to momentarily escape the underlying uncanniness of the home; that is, the emergence of that piece of the Real that confronts us with the impossibility of our desire. With exile underpinning our desire to return home, we are, in a certain way, always already caught up in the gap between the Real and the Symbolic: always home, but never home; and thus, outside of ourselves:

> Man invents, discovers, finds (*eurisko*), imagines (*mékhané*), and realizes
> what he imagines: prostheses, expedients. A pros-thesis is what is placed
> in front, that is, what is outside, outside what it is placed in front of.
> However, if what is outside constitutes the very being of what it lies
> outside of, then this being is *outside itself*. The being of humankind is to
> be outside itself. (Stiegler 193)

This is precisely Prometheus' gift to the humans to compensate for their being forgotten: the ability to take what is outside of ourselves and to mold it for our purposes. Thus, it is from the perspective of the prosthetic that we invent, discover, find, imagine, and attempt

to realize the home. Through architecture, renovation, remodelling, re-envisioning, and reorganizing we attempt to confront and rid our houses of the uncanniness that emerges out of this disconnect between the physical and the fantasmatic. The particular means by which one approaches this gap, however, is not static. There is no single aesthetic that can be applied to suppress the uncanny — one's efforts will necessarily fail, and new aesthetics will emerge.

2.2 Pro(ae)sthetics

The link between significant shifts in architectural aesthetics and the *unheimlich* nature of the house is not an unfamiliar one. Even the most conventional example of the haunted house as an uncanny space effectively illuminates the dynamics at play in the struggle between our prosthetic achievements and the pursuit of the object of desire. Anthony Vidler's *The Architectural Uncanny* provides an excellent psychoanalytic perspective into several major shifts in architecture (Victorian, modern, and postmodern) and their link to the uncanny. As Vidler writes:

> Architecture has been intimately linked to the notion of the uncanny since the end of the eighteenth century. At one level, the house has provided a site for endless representations of haunting, doubling, dismembering, and other terrors in literature and art. At another level, the labyrinthine spaces of the modern city have been construed as the sources of modern anxiety, from revolution and epidemic to phobia and alienation. (ix)

Beginning with Victorian era, this chapter will follow a similar trajectory in mapping out the shifts to modernism and postmodernism in an effort to uncover how these subsequent

architectural aesthetics have contributed to and altered our relation to both house and home. Here, Vidler's consideration of literature to further explore the uncanniness of the house is also useful, as literature provides exceptionally detailed and personal expressions of uncanny experiences.

To continue with the example of the haunted house, what is of interest here are not the ghastly phantasms and eerie occurrences that reside within, but what lies beneath when the fantasmatic tales are stripped away: the Gothic/Victorian house. Such houses are typically characterized by dark, elaborate, and intricate designs, as well as ornate interiors, cluttered with furniture, family trinkets, and photographs. As an example, Vidler suggests the house of Edgar Allan Poe's well-known tale "The Fall of the House of Usher" (1839). Although this house is not a properly haunted house, its description would certainly lead one to believe that that was the case. As the narrator observes,

> . . . with the first glimpse of the building, a sense of insufferable gloom pervaded my spirit . . . I looked upon the scene before me — upon the mere house . . . upon the bleak walls — upon the vacant eye-like windows . . . with an utter depression of soul which I can compare to no earthly sensation more properly than to the after-dream of the reveller upon opium — the bitter lapse into everyday life — the hideous dropping off of the veil. (Poe 171)

Despite his initial dreary depiction of the House of Usher, once arrived, the narrator states that, ultimately, there was nothing especially unfamiliar about the house (173). It is for this reason that The House of Usher serves as such an excellent portrayal of the particular emergence of the uncanny (i.e., the Real) as it relates to the home as a lost object.

Certainly, the interplay between the house and its occupants reveals a strong parallel between the demise of Poe's characters and the subsequent collapse of the house; however, it would seem that there exists another subtext to be revealed. Consider here Leo Spitzer's approach to the text:

> Roderick and Madeline, twins chained to each other by incestuous love, suffering separately but dying together, represent the male and the female principle in that decaying family whose members, by the law of sterility and destruction which rules them, must exterminate each other; Roderick has buried his sister alive, but the revived Madeline will bury Roderick under her falling body. The "fall" of the House of Usher involves not only the physical fall of the mansion, but the physical and moral fall of the two protagonists. (Spitzer 352-53)

In Spitzer's analysis, like many others,[7] the fall of the physical house is seen to be symbolic of the fall of the text's protagonists. However, is it not equally plausible that, rather than the house serving as a metaphor for the decline of the characters, it is the characters who are a symptom of the disintegration of the house? Poe devotes considerable space to describing the eerie ambiance of the house. Yet, despite the apparent strangeness of the house, Poe writes that in reality, the house is otherwise unremarkable (173). Vidler, too, takes note of the mundane character of the house in his analysis of the narrative, stating that, "Poe's description, while evoking premonitions of 'shadowy fancies,' exhibited nothing untoward in its outer appearance . . . any sentiments

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[7] See also: Arthur Robinson's "Order and Sentience in 'The Fall of the House of Usher'" (1961).

of doom were more easily attributed to the fantasies of the narrator than to any striking

detail in the house itself. Indeed, when looked at objectively, its ancient stones, carvings,

tapestries, and trophies were all familiar enough" (Vidler 17). Yet, this vital fact is

overlooked in many analyses of the text. That the house has no supernatural quality is

significant. The narrative is not simply a tale of a mysterious house in which its

occupants meet an unfortunate demise, but rather is about the house and its occupants

suffering from a similar illness; in other words, both are symptomatic of an overarching

issue. The cause of this illness is, as Poe writes, "the very remarkable fact, that the stem

of the Usher race, all time-honored as it was, had put forth, at no period, any enduring

branch; in other words, that the entire family lay in the direct line of descent, and had

always, with very trifling and very temporary variation, so lain" (172). That is to say, that

the illness is the result of excessive homogeneity: generation after generation

perpetuating the incestuous tradition. With no connection to the outside, the house

becomes isolated and entombed. What is truly uncanny about Poe's story is not the eerie

house itself, but its congested interior that reveals the accumulated traumas of each

generation.

This critique of the Victorian aesthetic, however, is not unique to Poe's work. In

Algernon Blackwood's short story "The Empty House" (1906), he explores this view of

the contaminated house more explicitly.[8] The story begins by introducing the notion that

houses, much like the victim of a traumatic experience, internalize the horrors they

witness: "with houses the same principle is operative, and it is the aroma of evil deeds

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[8] See also: Charles Dickens' "The Haunted House" (1859).

committed under a particular roof, long after the actual doers have passed away, that makes the gooseflesh come and the hair rise. Something of the original passion of the evil-doer, and of the horror felt by his victim, enters the heart of the innocent watcher" (Blackwood). In the story, a man named Shorthouse and his Aunt Julia investigate a house that is supposedly haunted after an incident involving a marital affair that lead to a murder some years earlier. Like Poe, Blackwood too takes great care in describing the otherwise unremarkable façade beneath the fantasmatic narratives that had been ascribed to the old house:

> There was manifestly nothing in the external appearance of this particular house to bear out the tales of the horror that was said to reign within. It was neither lonely nor unkempt. It stood, crowded into a corner of the square, and looked exactly like the houses on either side of it. It had the same number of windows as its neighbours; the same balcony overlooking the gardens; the same white steps leading up to the heavy black front door . . . (Blackwood).

Despite the rather demure appearance of the house, its two visitors discover that it is indeed haunted. Although they see no apparitions, both Shorthouse and his aunt hear the sounds of footsteps and screams: sounds that no doubt signify the reenactment of the murder that had occurred in the house years earlier. Though the two are quite frightened, they do not appear to be in any danger.

Given Blackwood's representation of the house as a potential witness of the traumatic events that take place within its walls, one could argue that these nightly repetitions are a manifestation of the house's own psychological trauma. This act of

repetition, as will be considered in detail in a later section, signifies one's attempt to overcome a traumatic experience, although this act is not always productive. Nonetheless, like the house in Poe's tale, Blackwood's house is also the victim of a history that it cannot escape.

In the early twentieth century, a fascination with the mind and illness soon led to a realization that "like a body, buildings and cities may fall ill" (Vidler 71). This reconsideration of the house prompted a significant shift in architectural design that was not only a departure from the Victorian style, but a complete transmogrification of the house. The developments in architectural aesthetics that followed the Victorian era can be understood as a response to a perceived illness of the house, rather than a consequence of a natural and temporal progression of changing popular tastes. Undoubtedly, *The Fall of the House of Usher* points to an illness caused by the perpetuation of a temperament both "excessive and habitual" (172), and other maladies passed down through the family, thus producing a stagnant environment that is ultimately an impotent cul-de-sac. Consequently, the conclusion of Poe's text — unwittingly foreshadowing the project of modernist architecture — sees the decimation of the congested Victorian house and its contaminated aesthetic.

Although it would be decades before Poe's vision of the fall off the Victorian house would come to fruition, modernist architecture would eventually produce a new aesthetic to usurp the claustrophobic and self-contained aesthetic of the Neo-Gothic and Victorian era. Perhaps one of the best-known advocates of this project was the architect Le Corbusier. In contrast to the ornate and congested houses of its Victorian

predecessors, the architecture of modernism intended to release the house from the

burden of the past through an aesthetic characterized by simplistic and stark designs:

> . . . modernism proposed to consign the cluttered interiors and
>
> insalubrious living conditions of centuries to oblivion. By these means it
>
> was thought that disease, individual and social, might be eradicated once
>
> and for all, and the inhabitants of the twentieth century rendered fit for the
>
> marathon of modern life . . .
>
> . . . An open, fresh-air existence would finally address the causes
>
> of those pathologies so painstakingly treated on post-Freudian couches,
>
> purging society of its totems, taboos, and discontents. If houses were no
>
> longer haunted by the weight of tradition and the imbrications of
>
> generations of family drama, if no cranny was left for the storage of the
>
> bric-a-brac once deposited in damp cellars and must attics, then memory
>
> would be released from its unhealthy preoccupations to live in the present.
>
> (Vidler 63-4)

Much like how one today might perceive the pathological behaviour of a "hoarder,"

modernist architects saw the cluttered and oppressive aesthetic of Victorian architecture

as a kind of symptom of its being caught up in an unproductive repetition of tradition and

trauma (e.g. Blackwood's haunted house). In other words, the overwhelming presence of

memories embodied in, for example, family possessions instigated a reliving of the past

that prevented a productive moving forward into the future — like the hoarder who

accumulates possessions as a means of clinging to a past traumatic event that they have

not yet overcome. By clearing out this clutter, modernist architects imagined that society

would be liberated from its constrictive past. Arguably, however, this turns the problem of repetition into one of repression.

For Freud, the compulsion to repeat is an essential exercise in mastery. He first writes about the compulsion to repeat in *Remembering, Repeating and Working-Through* (1914), but it is not until *Beyond the Pleasure Principle* (1920) that he more fully develops his theory using the famous example of the "fort-da" game. In this example, a child, presumably his grandson, is seen to be reenacting the trauma of his mother's temporary absence by tossing a string (attached to a reel) out of sight and saying "*fort*," meaning gone, and then pulling the string back with "a joyful '*da*'['there']" (*Beyond* 14). This game of repeating the disappearance and return of his mother serves as an important process through which he may be able to master the traumatic event. As Freud states:

> At the outset he was in a passive situation — he was overpowered by the experience; but, by repeating it, unpleasurable though it was, as a game, he took on an *active* part. These efforts might be put down to an instinct for mastery that was acting independently of whether the memory was in itself pleasurable or not. (*Beyond* 15)

This compulsion to repeat, although necessary, is not always productive. In certain circumstances, instead of aiding one in mastering a traumatic event, one becomes caught up in the behaviour, and rather than working through the experience, one enters into a cycle of repetition that is detrimental. When this behaviour becomes compulsive it may be interpreted as a symptom of obsessional neurosis. Typically, the behaviour of the obsessive neurotic aims at the deferral of an encounter with a repressed trauma or a desired object; as Žižek summarizes, "it is the same in the obsessional's dealings with his

analyst: the goal of his incessant activity is to avoid or, rather, postpone indefinitely the confrontation with the abyss" (*Possible to Traverse* 109). In analysis, the obsessional neurotic speaks endlessly, overly fulfilling the analyst's request, in an effort to delay his or her progress in therapy. This behaviour, on the one hand, may serve to prevent the obsessional neurotic from having to confront a repressed experience. On the other hand, it also allows the obsessional neurotic to maintain the fantasy surrounding the object of desire, such that he or she does not have to acknowledge its impossibility. By avoiding this acknowledgement, the obsessional neurotic can indulge in the illusion that enjoyment of the object is merely deferred, such that it always remains at an elusive distance.

No doubt, the congested houses of the Victorian era were caught up in a similar cycle of repetition that, as noted earlier, was unproductive. Thus, by demolishing tradition, modernist architecture freed the house of its past, breaking the cycle of repetition. However, the houses of modernism were problematic in their own way. Le Corbusier's new houses (Figure 1) could only be described as "homely" in the derogatory sense, and were certainly no more home-ly than those dwellings that had heretofore stood. Le Corbusier's austere buildings were so antithetical to the houses of the Victorians that they succumbed to a kind of sterility: not only were they completely devoid of homeliness, but they outright demanded the repression of those aspects of family bric-a-brac and tradition that modernists presumed to be wholly negative. Yet, as Freud cautions, a drive[9] that is repressed will inevitably return: it "proliferates in the

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[9] Drive here refers to one's desire as it relates to the Thing (i.e., home).

dark,[10] as it were, and takes on extreme forms of expression, which when they are translated and presented to the neurotic are not only bound to seem alien to him, but frighten him by giving him the picture of an extraordinary and dangerous strength of [drive]" (*Repression* 570).

Figure 1: Le Corbusier's "Villa Savoye" (1931)

by Tim Brown, Poissy, France

Furthermore, one could argue that this act of repression is an unethical attempt at removing oneself from the problem of desire entirely. For Lacan, ethics is a question of whether or not one has acted in conformity with one's desire (314), and that "from an analytical point of view, the only thing of which one can be guilty is of having given

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10 In other words, the unconscious.

ground relative to one's desire" (319). If our persistent drive to return to the home is evidence of the circular movement of desire, by removing entirely its historical dimension and homely qualities, and thus turning away from the gap that constitutes the home, perhaps what one has truly manifested is that meagre and barren shelter that serves only to protect one from the wrath of nature.

One of the foremost grievances with modernist architecture, after all, is that it is unpleasurable (Ward 22). In their article "Home Is Where the Neurosis Is," Daniel Cho and Tyson Lewis criticize modernist architecture on a similar ground, arguing that the streamlining of modern housing produces identical and monotonous living spaces that act as "an empty and depersonalized container that is measured not to accommodate human proportions but rather to maximize profit" (74). Le Corbusier, however, was very enthusiastic about the possibilities of mass-produced housing.[11] As he asserts,

> If we eliminate from our hearts and minds all dead concepts in regard to the house, and look at the question from a critical and objective point of view, we shall arrive at the "House-Machine," the mass-production house, healthy (and morally so too) and beautiful in the same way that the working tools and instruments which accompany our existence are beautiful. (Le Corbusier 6-7)

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[11] Le Corbusier's vision of mass produced houses included five points for architecture: pilotis (concrete stilts to support the house), a free façade, an open floor plan (the layout of a concrete house is no longer dependent upon supporting walls), ribbon windows, and a roof garden. These points are developed in *Towards an Architecture* (1928).

It would seem that with very few exceptions (Le Corbusier being one), people have no desire to live in such a "House-Machine." The inevitable deterioration of individuality in this kind of environment produces an effect that can only be described as dehumanizing.

In a blog post concerning the work and theories of Le Corbusier, Leo Hollis recounts a story in which the intended homeowners of a series of houses, designed by Le Corbusier, refused to move in. It was only when the houses were offered to "poorer workers" that they finally became occupied. As Hollis writes,

> Almost immediately these new tenants started to adapt and improve Corbusier's designs: traditional wooden shutter [sic] were added to the plain facades as well as stone cladding; window boxed [sic] bursting with flowers blurred the clean, modernist lines of the building; walls were knocked down and rearranged to make more space for internal rooms; sloping, tiled roofs replaced the flat concrete covering that was starting to leak; windows were replaced to let less light in, and keep the houses cooler. It is a story that is often washed out from history of architecture, and should not be ignored. In time, the Le Corbusier Foundation would blame not the architecture but the sales methods of 1928 that allowed a low class of house buyer into the neighbourhood. (Hollis)

The housing project that Hollis refers to here is *Les Quartiers Modern Fruges* (1925) constructed on the outskirts of Bordeaux. The houses built as a part of this project were intended to solve the problem of producing low-cost housing by creating affordable living spaces that could be mass produced. Le Corbusier, however, had fully anticipated that the workers would not receive his architectural style with enthusiasm; as he wrote:

"Let us have no illusions. The workers . . . will be horrified by our houses. They will call them boxes" (qtd. in Teige 68). Yet, the reaction of the workers was not merely critical, it was active. As Lefebvre describes:

> Instead of installing themselves in their plastic containers, instead of adapting to them and living in them "passively," they decided that as far as possible they were going to live "actively." In doing so they showed what living in a house really is: an activity... What did they add? Their needs. They created distinctions . . . They built a differentiated social cluster.
>
> (qtd. in Milgram 275)

The workers did not begrudgingly accept the houses they had been given, but instead radically transformed the structures into more homely houses. In his design, Le Corbusier thought only of the House-Machine and its needs for efficiency, perhaps hoping that its occupants would concede to his vision.

If there is anything that has been illuminated thus far, it is that one can have too much of a good thing, be it homeliness or efficiency. Hollis is certainly correct in his concluding assessment that: "ignoring life is what so much of the history of urban planning has been about; yet as can be seen here life has a way of coming up from the streets" (Hollis). Le Corbusier's aesthetics fail for the reason that he imagines the house as supplementary to its inhabitant, and not as a prosthesis that "is the constitution of this body *qua* 'human'" (Stiegler 152). The House-Machine strips away all that is human, thus neglecting its imperative role in staging desire. As Lorens Holm appropriately states in *Brunelleschi, Lacan, Le Corbusier: Architecture, Space and the Construction of Subjectivity*, "architecture is primarily concerned with housing the subject and its

fantasies" (xii-xiii). Therefore, when all human character is removed from the house, as is the case with the House-Machine, architecture cannot house the subject psychically; in other words, the house can never feel homely, much less be a home.

2.3 The Return of the Repressed

Following the formal and austere contributions of Le Corbusier, a new architectural aesthetic flourished. This contemporary architecture, often labelled as deconstructivist, or postmodern, is a direct challenge to the modernist aesthetic. Contemporary architecture differs fundamentally from its predecessors in that it disregards purpose in favour of discontinuity and impracticality — the very characteristics that Le Corbusier's aesthetic sought to repress. As an example, one could consider works by Canadian-American architect Frank Gehry, such as the "The Dancing House" located in Prague (Figure 3), or the "Vanna Venturi House" in Philadelphia (Figure 2) designed by Robert Venturi. Rather than being concerned with tradition, function, or the need for a homely house, contemporary architecture instead constructs houses that express the very fragmentation at the heart of the house; that is, the impossibility of its ever being a home. In doing so, these houses point directly at the radical falsity of previous attempts to mask this impossibility. In his "Nonstraightforward Architecture" manifesto, Robert Venturi writes that "[a]rchitects can no longer afford to be intimidated by the puritanically moral language of orthodox Modern architecture. I like elements which are hybrid rather than 'pure,' 'straightforward,' ambiguous rather than 'articulated,' perverse as well as impersonal . . . redundant . . . I am for messy vitality over obvious unity" (Venturi 16). Venturi's statement is an excellent sketch of the

Figure 2: Robert Venturi's "Vanna Venturi House" (1964)
by Emily Geoff, Philadelphia, PA

fundamental aspects of postmodern architecture. It is precisely through this aesthetic of

nonlinearity and hybridity that these architects are able to create and design a space that

reconsiders our discomfort in the house, and also recognize that this experience is

intrinsic to our desire, and therefore cannot be resolved through aesthetics. Therefore,

rather than attempting to manifest or repress this desire for home, contemporary

architecture, through its fragmented, pluralistic, and eclectic approach, instead renders the

gap itself visible. The incongruencies present in the postmodern aesthetic demonstrate the

fundamental disconnect between the physical and the fantasmatic. As Holm aptly points

out, "[p]sychoanalysis is not interested in how the subject sees the world, but in how the

Figure 3: Frank Gehry's "The Dancing House" (1996)

by discopalace, Prague, Czech Republic

subject represents the world by word and image, to itself and to others, most notably, the

analyst" (Holm 12). And it is only by forming a new means of representation (e.g. the

fragmentation of postmodern architecture) that a new relation to desire can be explored.

Fragmentation, as a concept, figures most prominently in psychoanalytic theory in

Lacan's formulation of the mirror stage, though it also serves a crucial role in the process

of transference. In the mirror stage, a child begins to understand its own image by both

seeing itself in a mirror, and also through affirmations made by others (e.g., family). This

self-image is perceived as whole in contrast to the child's perception of its body, which

due to its lack of coordination is perceived as fragmented. The child then identifies with

this specular image and (mis)recognizes itself as whole: "[t]he anxiety provoked by this

feeling of fragmentation fuels the identification with the specular image" (Evans 67). It is

precisely this misrecognition that marks the formation of the ego. However, this desire to

be whole, like the desire for home, cannot be fulfilled; the ego is but an imaginary

construction that parades as the locus of control, in the same way that the house

masquerades as a home. In the process of going through analysis, this image breaks down

and the analysand comes to form a new relation to desire. As this occurs, the analysand

will inevitably experience a kind of transference: a significant stage that allows the

analysand to confront the past through his or her relationship with the analyst. One form

of expression that transference may take is negative: in this case, in the form of an

aggressive affect, rather than as an act of resistance on the part of the analysand:

> . . . the anticipation of a synthetic ego is henceforth constantly threatened
>
> by the memory of this sense of fragmentation, which manifests itself in
>
> 'images of castration, emasculation, mutilation, dismemberment,
>
> dislocation, evisceration, devouring, bursting open of the body' which
>
> haunt the human imagination. These images typically appear in the
>
> analysand's dreams and associations at a particular phase in the treatment
>
> — namely, the moment when the analysand's aggressivity emerges in the
>
> negative transference. This moment is an important early sign that the
>
> treatment is progressing in the right direction, i.e. towards the
>
> disintegration of the rigid unity of the ego. (Evans 67)

One can parallel this form of transference with the fragmentation that typifies contemporary architecture. By designing dismembered and fragmented houses, one is in fact representing the house as it truly is, instead of attempting to impose on it an imaginary mask of wholeness (i.e., the ego). Rather than concealing the gap that emerges between the Symbolic and the Real, so as to maintain the possibility of obtaining the lost object, one can find enjoyment in the circling around and continually re-finding this object, without becoming wholly buried by or separated from it. In this sense, one thus enjoys the house *as* a house:

> . . . the ethics of desire is the ethics of fidelity to a lost enjoyment, the ethics of the preservation of fundamental lack that introduces a gap between the Thing and things, and reminds us of the fact that beyond all ready-to-hand objects, there is 'someThing' which alone would make our life worth living. To the extent that it persists in its unsatisfaction, desire preserves the authentic place of enjoyment, *even if it remains* empty. (Zupančič 240)

For the reason that it preserves and manifests this gap between the Thing (home) and things (houses), contemporary architecture suggests that perhaps the relationship between the house and its occupants is being positively transformed.

Chapter 3 – A (Re)Turn to the Uncanny Home

3.1 The Prosthetic and the Dorsal

Thus far, this thesis has progressed in a forward and linear direction. Presently, however, an abrupt turn will be made to disrupt this trajectory with the aim of bringing to light that which has heretofore remained hidden — this, of course, alludes to a return to the discussion of the uncanny. Although there are many articulations of the uncanny, the focus herein will be on the particular emergence of the uncanny as it relates to involuntary returns of (and returns to) the repressed. Previously, I have discussed this notion of repetition and the return of the repressed in relation to architecture; however, I now want to pursue these notions from the perspective of our own experience with these spaces. The unconscious compulsion with which we (re)turn to and (re)present the house to ourselves demonstrates all the more powerfully its relation to Freud's uncanny. As Freud further develops his psychoanalytic theory, he relates the compulsion to repeat and the uncanny to the concept of the *death drive*. These notions of repetition and uncanniness serve as a fundamental mechanisms of the death drive which, he argues, "tends towards the restoration of an earlier state of things" (*Beyond* 44). Restated, the death drive is the continuous repetition of an act that attempts to return to an earlier state, or stasis. As such, this concept is congruent with the notion of the desire to return home as a desire to return to the womb. As previously illustrated, a literal fulfillment of this

desire would produce at best a kind of uncanny horror, and at worst, a successful return to this earlier state would imply death: hence, the death drive.[12]

This notion of a return is investigated in David Wills' *Dorsality: Thinking Back Though Technology and Politics* (2008), wherein he too argues, influenced by Freud, that "the desire for home [is] a desire to return to the womb" (71). Wills' primary concern in this text, however, is a rewriting of the conventional means of thinking about technology through what he refers to as the dorsal turn, or *dorsality*. Wills situates his formulation of dorsality as the antithesis to the prosthetic. To recapitulate, Stiegler's notion of the prosthetic, in addition to its relation to the technological, is that which is at once outside, in front of, and constitutive of the human (Stiegler 193). In contrast, the dorsal is defined as the "name for that which, from behind, from or in the back of the human, turns (it) into something technological, some technological thing" (Wills 5). Despite their opposing directions (in front of and from behind), these two perspectives share an understanding of the origin of the human as always already technological, the consequence of which is our being exiled from home. Taking a liberal interpretation of Freud (68), Wills states that the unborn child is a "prosthetic attachment" to the mother, and as such "[t]he child, or humankind in general, would thus be born into exile with respect to its own naturality, always already a prosthesis, always already biotechnological" (68). In opposition to Stiegler's notion of the prosthetic, however, Wills argues that it is the very turning back, the return to the womb, that is constitutive of the individual, and not solely the prosthetic means by which one unsuccessfully attempts to attain the object of desire. Prosthesis, by

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[12] That is, the return to an earlier state in which one did not exist.

its very name, implies a being in front of, and forward movement; yet, the direction of our desire is always pointing backward to the home.

Regardless, because one can only ever manipulate what lies in front of oneself, the prosthetic is one's sole means of engaging with one's desire. In order to overcome this exile from the home, one constructs in its stead a prosthetic double that can only ever point forward like a tangent that always misses the centre. It is only the dorsal that manifests as a turning back into the void: as "a turning back in the sense of a return, which also signals an original turning of the back, the senses of departure and abandonment. It is deployed along the axis that links home to exile, which . . . defines home as originary exile" (13). The prosthetic and the dorsal, however, are not mutually exclusive; as Wills states: "*there is no notion of the womb without the notion of the house*, and vice versa" (68); after all, there can be no vase without empty space. The role of the house is to give form to our fantasy by creating the illusion that the house is home -— an illusion that is exposed by the emergence of the Real in the form of the uncanny. This deception, however, is essential to maintaining desire itself, and through this form mediates the boundary between inside and outside:

> Human organization could be said to become politics once the family
>
> depends on the construction of a house. That is to say that the house,
>
> paradoxically, not only consists of four walls to shelter and protect the
>
> family but also, necessarily, constitutes an appeal to an authority outside
>
> the house to respect and accredit those four walls . . . Thus this means
>
> there is no politics without a certain technologization of the family. (13-
>
> 14)

With its boundaries configured, or politicized, in this way, the house, like the body, becomes a mediator between the inside and outside, public and private. Thus, our efforts to renovate and redesign the house, though they do not manifest the object of desire, have significant consequences for the boundaries that are mediated by the house. It is precisely through this distinct understanding of the house as a mediator, and the dorsal as a turning back to the home (the object of the death drive), that the circular movement around the impossible gap between the two can be better understood in relation to our desire.

It is necessary, however, first to better clarify how Wills situates his concept of dorsality, not only in opposition to the prosthetic, but also by means of its particular relation to the human, the figure performing the turn. As he writes:

> What comes from behind comes from beyond the simple perspective of the human and hence, from the point of view of perspective and of vision in general, it comes from another point of view, from outside the field of visual possibility. For the human, that means from behind. Although the human cannot necessarily see everything that comes from in front, *it necessarily cannot see anything that comes from behind, or at least not short of a turn.* (7)

Following this assertion, Wills questions what the meaning of a technology would be that "the human had not produced in front of itself and in view of itself?" (7). To this he responds:

> "it would mean again taking conceptual account of the extent to which, in increasingly explicit ways, technology defines and redefines the human and does so downstream from the point at which a given technological

creation was brought into effect. It would therefore mean turning to see the technology of the human itself, inside itself" (7).

Though Wills is quite literally referring to the vertebral column of the human performing the turn, the influence of Freud on Wills' thought suggests another possible emergence of the dorsal that is both within and beyond oneself: the unconscious.

Like the dorsal, the unconscious too emerges in a similarly clumsy way, from behind (temporally and psychically) and yet also from within one's back. Consider Wills' description of the apparently forward motion of a human:

> [In] the articulation of limbs of a human biped, the turn would be the deviation that occurs — naturally, as it were — within the seemingly automatic advance of ambulation or locomotion. It turns as it walks. Technology as mechanicity is located . . . in the step. In walking [the human] is with each step correcting its bearing, limping from one foot to the other, realigning its center of gravity, compensating for the disequilibrium of each movement, as it were turning one way then the other in order to advance. (4)

When the unconscious appears, it causes an analogous awkward and stumbling movement in the form of, most drastically, physical symptoms, but also verbally as slips of the tongue and in those jokes that unintentionally reveal a certain hidden truth.[13] As Wills writes, "Freud discovers the unconscious like some self-produced biochip that controls (and derails), as if from behind, the conscious" (10). Through the development

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[13] See Freud's *Jokes and their relation to the Unconscious* (1905).

of the drives and the unconscious, Freud attempts to theorize a negotiation between inside

and outside, conscious and unconscious. By proposing that it is the unconscious that

disrupts and derails the linear experience of the ego, Freud challenges the conventional

understanding of the ego as the locus of control.

Wills' own approach to these very same dynamics of inside and outside is

analogous to that of Freud: through the prosthetic and the dorsal — front and back —

Wills sets out to demonstrate that it is the dorsal that disrupts the apparently forward

movement of the prosthetic. The stumbling effect produced by the dorsal, like the

relationship between the unconscious and conscious psychical systems of the subject,

serves as a "resistance precisely to a technology that defines itself as straightforward, as

straight and forward, [as] straight-ahead linear advance . . . We should reserve the right to

hold back, not to presume that every technology is an advance" (6). In C*ivilization and*

Its Discontents, Freud raises precisely this very same concern, stating that with every

apparent technological progression, there are often unforeseen consequences that emerge:

> If there had been no railway to conquer distances, my child would never
>
> have left his native town and I should need no telephone to hear his voice;
>
> if travelling across the ocean by ship had not been introduced, my friend
>
> would not have embarked on his sea-voyage and I should not need a cable
>
> to relieve my anxiety about him. (736)

Although Freud was hopeful about the possibility for technology to transform and

improve our lives, he was also quite wary and sceptical about these apparent

achievements — with every step forward, there is a step back. In our attempt to manifest

a more homely home, one can see how the dorsal (as it relates to the unconscious) emerges and disrupts this process in the form of neuroses.

3.2 Cleanliness and (Dis)Order

To elaborate on an earlier illustration, recall the obsessional neurotic, whose behaviour aims at deferring an encounter with a repressed trauma or desired object. The behaviour exhibited by the obsessional neurotic (as it relates to his or her struggle with home as the lost object of desire) is clearly exemplified in the archetypal figure of the homemaker.

The homemaker is a permanent fixture in the house, tending to it incessantly, and obsessively, ready to suppress, or ward off, any sudden returns of the *unheimlich* character that underlies and underpins the porous walls of the house. But this uncanniness reveals itself not only in the form of dirt and disorder, but is itself a consequence of the capitalist architecture that produces the "depersonalized containers" (Cho and Lewis 74) in which we live, and which, as Marx reminds us, are often owned by someone else:

> the cellar dwelling of the poor man is a hostile element, "a dwelling which remains an alien power and only gives itself up to him insofar as he gives up to it his own blood and sweat" — a dwelling which he cannot regard as his own hearth — where he might at last exclaim: "Here I am at home" — but where instead he finds himself *in someone else's* house, in the house of a *stranger* who always watches him and throws him out if he does not pay his rent. (Marx)

Marx's account provides yet another contributing factor to the feeling of discomfort in civilization. However, this dimension only increases the desire for the one to make a space one's own. In addition to habitual cleaning and (re)ordering of the house, the homemaker must also decorate and furnish the house, thus giving shape to its blank and vacant walls. For this reason, Cho and Lewis argue that the popularity of home décor television shows depends upon the "unbearable reality of the impossibility of being at home in the modern home" (Cho and Lewis 74). The fervent activity of the homemaker serves to mask the void at the heart of the house in the same way that the obsessional neurotic attempts to "postpone indefinitely the confrontation with the abyss" (Žižek, "Possible to Traverse" 109). It is worth noting that Freud was also concerned with the role of order and cleanliness in the operation of civilization:

> . . . we are not surprised by the idea of setting up the use of soap as an actual yardstick of civilization. The same is true of order. It, like cleanliness, applies solely to the works of man . . . The benefits of order are incontestable. It enables men to use space and time to the best advantage, while conserving their psychical forces. (*Civilization* 739)

Although it is true that cleanliness and order serve an important role in ensuring the organization and functioning of society (e.g. bureaucracy relies heavily on a systematic process in order to provide services), this statement is so uncompromising that it is easy to see why Deleuze and Guattari criticize psychoanalytic theory as "taking part in the work of bourgeois repression" (*Anti-Oedipus* 50). Freud's assertion of the benefits of order implies a neglect of the role of the disagreeable disorder, dirt, and filth that is also

present in society. After all, the aesthetic of cleanliness and order is not necessarily desirable to everyone.

      Consider Bukowski's poem "Metamorphosis," wherein he recounts an anecdote about the unwanted intrusion of a girlfriend tidying his home, handymen repairing its faults, and the resulting "perfection" of their efforts. In the conclusion of the poem, Bukowski describes the disturbing effect of their intervention into his space:

> now I sit in all this perfection.
>
> . . .
>
> I felt better when everything was in
>
> disorder.
>
> It will take me some months to get back to normal:
>
> I can't even find a roach to commune with.
>
> I have lost my rhythm.
>
> I can't sleep.
>
> I can't eat.
>
> I have been robbed of
>
> my filth. (*Pleasures* 14)

For Bukowski, the house is most uncanny when it is in this state of perfection: there is nothing "normal" about perfection, it is necessarily abnormal and inhuman. The normal to which Bukowski refers is flawed and human; there is, after all, something very personal about a house in disarray. Each mess is uniquely one's own: it possesses a logic of disorder that cannot easily be made sense of by others. Nevertheless, even someone who prefers the aesthetic of order can certainly appreciate the displeasure of having one's

space disturbed. After all, both order and disorder serve the same purpose: they are a means of responding to and struggling with the uncanniness of the house.

Bukowski's poem also illuminates a deficiency in Wills' theorizing of our desire to return to the home. Wills overlooks the possibility of different conceptions of the home, such that he seems to assume not only a particular kind of home, but also a particular relation to that home to which one desires to return. Ultimately, as the object of the death drive, the home demands a return to an earlier state (e.g. a kind of stasis, the womb); however, this drive is first filtered through fantasy, which then (re)stages our desire — "literally 'teaches us how to desire'" (Žižek, *Parallax* 40). It is through this process that the home becomes manifest in various representations; thus, not all homes are experienced, or are related to, in the same way. It is thus necessary to consider other returns, turns of the back, and their relation to the home; for instance, those homes that embody the very opposite of the safety and security of Wills' notion of home: those under the threat of war.

3.3 ( )holey Spaces

In his article "The Militarization of Peace: Absence of Terror or Terror of Absence," Reza Negarestani describes a military strategy which produces, in a strict sense, an uncanny horror: the militarization (or weaponization, as he uses the terms interchangeably in this article) of *Taqiyya*. The term Taqiyya designates a "strategic (dis)simulation – a justified concealment of true beliefs in situations where harm or death will definitely be encountered if the true beliefs are declared (the wider meaning of Taqiyya being 'to avoid or shun any kind of danger')" (57-58). However, the intended

protective function of Taqiyya has been reinterpreted by extremist Jihads for use as a

tactic in war: here, Taqiyya is used not only to conceal one's beliefs in the moment of

immediate danger, but also to hide oneself among the enemy — a tactic Negarestani has

named "Hypercamouflage." Such a clandestine tactic allows one "to pursue to even the

most attenuated extreme, a fighting and a surviving alongside the enemy. It invariably

indicates a total withdrawal from the perception of friends and a dissolution into the

enemy: the rebirth of a new foe" (56). This new enemy inevitably transforms what is

conventionally understood to be the safe home into an uncanny and paranoiac home.

Here the uncanny designates an emergence of that which defamiliarizes what has been

accepted as familiar, and therefore reconstructs the home as an un-homely space:

> Taqiyya becomes a politics aimed at drawing the war out of the battlefield
> (In this extremist Jihad, war must be put to work everywhere but the
> battlefield; war is external to the conventional battlefield. "War is not a
> theater, you infidels," Faraj shouts). This is to be achieved by introducing
> the Jihadi entities to civilians and all other seemingly militarily irrelevant
> political economic or cultural entities, by blending with the crowd which
> exists far from the front lines. (Negarestani, "Militarization" 60)

This blurring of enemies and civilians creates a hole in what should be the boundary

between inside and outside, between home and the battlefield, and breaks down this

distinction. By disturbing the flow of inside and outside, suddenly, the home becomes at

once an unhomely and "( )holey" space.

This notion of a "( )holey space" is developed in Negarestani's *Cyclonopedia*,

published in 2008. According to the author of the preface, Kristen Alvanson, the

manuscript for *Cyclonopedia* was mysteriously discovered in a hotel room during a trip to Istanbul. The work itself is categorized as theoretical fiction: a blend of narrative and philosophy. For the most part, the text is concerned with the petropolitics of Earth and oil, and examines the Earth as a porous space forming a narrative of oily proportions. Though the home is a supplementary plot in the petropolitical narrative of the Earth, the discourse that Negarestani employs serves as a useful means of speaking about the mechanics of the uncanny home. ( )holey space describes a kind of collusion around an emergent hole, disrupting the regular movement from inside to outside, and vice versa. As Negarestani writes:

> . . . holey space or ( )hole complex (with an evaporative W) as the zone through which the Outside gradually but persistently emerges, creeps in (or out?) from the Inside. A complex of hole agencies and obscure surfaces unground the earth and turn it to the ultimate zone of emergence and uprising against its own passive planetdom . . . "Great holes secretly are digged where earth's pores ought to suffice, and things have learnt to walk that ought to crawl." (*Cyclonopedia* 44)

This concept of ( )holey space is an excellent correlate to the understanding of the house as a porous space. As a mediator and regulator of the flows of inside and outside, the house, like the earth, is a ( )holey space. These holes that appear, that are "digged," create a greater permeation of the house: for things to 'learn to walk that ought to crawl'; or in other words, for things to come to light that "ought to have remained secret and hidden." Negarestani's depiction of the outside creeping in and out from the inside is analogous to the emergence of the dorsal as both outside and behind. Likewise, both ( )holey spaces

and the dorsal blur the boundaries between inside and outside (conscious and unconscious). This dynamic is particularly evident in Wills' notion of the "dorsal chance:" "the dorsal as the chance of what cannot be foreseen, the surprise or accident that appears, at least, to come from behind, from out of range or outside the field of vision, challenging that technocratic faith or confidence and calling into question its control" (Wills 7). The dorsal chance is that which emerges from the inconsistencies (the holes) in our thoughts and expectations concerning technology, and points to the deception that implies technology is progress.

What seeps through these holes is of uncanny character, it seeps from behind, from a point beyond the perspective of the human, just like the enemies that conceal themselves under Taqiyya. These enemies permeate the borders of our nation in an effort to dissolve the boundary between home and the battlefield. Contrary to what one may expect, the purpose of this tactic is not to conceal the fact that society has coalesced with the enemy, that it has become infected. Instead, the intention is to allow for the secret to secrete, to seep into the consciousness of society, such that the enemy's presence is known, but indistinguishable from the rest of the population: such that it is at once inside and yet beyond perception. It is only when this secret is known that it has power. In describing this tactic, Negarestani compares Taqiyya to the *dieback disease* that affects areas of plantation. The progression of the disease has several stages: paranoia, dereliction, and self-destruction, which he amends accordingly to envision the affect of militarized Taqiyya on society:

> [The] various stages in the dieback of a civilization would be: paranoia; lack of investment; civilians as primary targets for both fronts; dereliction.

All of which result in a reactionary response from the infected tree which,

rather than aiding recovery, is self-destructive. ("Militarization" 65)

The role of paranoia in Negarestani's work is an important one. As he states, "for both

archaeology and Freudian psychoanalysis, the process of emergence and its immediate

connection with the formation and dynamism of surfaces — namely, ( )hole complex —

inevitably coincides with paranoia" (55). When one experiences the sensation of the

uncanny, it is almost always accompanied by a feeling of paranoia. Take for instance, the

experience of the lights suddenly going out in one's house. Instantly, the former

familiarity of the space is obscured by darkness. The feeling of paranoia that surfaces as

well, however, is not specifically related to the darkness per se, but rather is connected to

the perceived permeability which the darkness offers, the (dorsal) chance that some *thing*

could emerge. It is only when the boundaries are disrupted that something which ought to

have remained hidden can come to light.

In her eerie account of her journey to Istanbul, where she discovered the

manuscript for *Cyclonopedia*, Kristen Alvanson writes about her experience of the hotel

room as a permeable space in which boundaries between public and private are distorted.

Her depiction of the uncanniness of the hotel room takes up a significant portion of her

preface to the text. Although the hotel room is at once very much a "home away from

home," it is also a vaguely public space, in the sense that it is never one's own. It is a

liminal space. For those who travel frequently, the hotel becomes a kind of home. One

comes to know the particular subset of hotel that one frequents quite well: the room takes

on its own set of familiarizations and peculiarities, such as the similar arrangement of the

furniture, or the distinctive hotel smell. For Deleuze and Guattari, the mobile and

temporary character of a hotel might be seen as something desirable in comparison to the limiting and oppressive nature of the house. The traveller could be seen as a modern day nomad who subverts the controlling mechanisms of society, both physically and conceptually. However, as Cho and Lewis suggest, the nomad can no longer be a useful concept, for they argue that "with the rise of sprawl and the explosion of homelessness into a real epidemic (especially for immigrant populations forced into exile by sovereign powers), it is not certain whether the nomad can still be as subversive as it once was thought to be" (71). The desire to return home is not a drive that can be simply avoided by removing oneself from the equation; one must not forget that one is always already exiled from the home, regardless of whether one imagines oneself a nomad or not.

Nevertheless, the hotel is of interest on its own as a transient home-away-from-home. Alvanson's own analysis provides an especially insightful perspective on the uncanniness of the hotel room. As she writes, not only do these spaces "have their own approaches to time" (*Cyclonopedia* xiv) which are fantastic to diagram, but are places to be "digged," a place in which to find and bring to light some*thing* that has been hidden: "Hotel rooms are Xanadus of things to be exhumed (the cheaper the price, the more oddities you might run into). Found something very interesting in the wardrobe of 302" (*Cyclonopedia* xix). This of course is the very circumstance out of which Negarestani's text supposedly emerges. According to its preface, the text was found by Alvanson in the depths of her hotel room, revealing itself as an uncanny thing that came to redefine the purpose of her travels, and inspire her preface to the text.

It becomes apparent, however, as Alvanson's narrative progresses that the room begins to take on an unusual character. Her descriptions of the room capture an intrusive

quality that emerges even from within the drapes, which cause the sun's deep orange colour to infect the room. Soon after excavating the manuscripts and its accompanying materials, she unsuccessfully attempts to move to a different room: "Try to change my room as 302 is really getting to me. There is someone in the window across the way who keeps looking over at me" (xvi). What Alvanson expresses here is not that it is the someone peering into her window that "gets" to her, but specifically that the room itself is the source of discomfort. Is Alvanson phrasing things this way merely for rhetorical effect, or is she experiencing what has been developing throughout this analysis? That it is not "the someone" peering into her room that causes the discomfort, but instead the failure of the space to effectively mediate inside and outside that produces paranoia and uncanniness.

In Negarestani's outline of dieback disease, he describes the dereliction that occurs several stages after paranoia, and, along with it, self-destruction:

> In a system this self-destruction (or malfunctioning self-recovery) can be defined as breakdown of the mechanisms responsible for self-tolerance, and the induction of an immune response against components of the self. Such a cataclysm leads to the reprogramming of the (immune) system to damage the self. ("Militarization" 65-66)

Individuals, having grown up in the paranoia of the void — our impossible desire for home — abandon the house. Though they still live within its walls, they are aware of the vacant stare that underpins its porous structure and the furnishings with which they have filled it. As Žižek states, "They know that, in their activity, they are following an illusion, but still, they are doing it" (qtd. in Myers 67).

For this reason we are left to continually stumble and limp back home,

unwittingly caught up in the circle of desire, while (re)negotiating the gap between house

and home in an attempt to master the porous and ( )holey space of the house that seeps

and oozes uncanniness from without and within — a space that one confronts as it relates

to and mediates one's desire, as a solid constituted and inextricably bound by its own

impossibility:

> *. . . void excludes solid but solid must include void to architectonically*
> survive. Solid needs void to engineer its composition; even the most
> despotic and survivalist solids are compositional solids, infected by the
> void. . . . Although the void devours the solid, the solid feasts on the void,
> i.e. its outsider. In compositions, the solid becomes hysterically gluttonous
> for the void. (*Cyclonopedia* 44-5)

Negarestani's depiction of the relationship between solid and void is one of both

dependence and hostility. Void infecting solid. Solid feeding on void. What remains to be

seen is how the interplay between solid and void — the porosity of the house — affects

one's relation to the house as a home; that is, as it relates to our desire. As I have

demonstrated thus far, regardless of the attempts one makes to repress the uncanny

through architectural aesthetics or a particular organization of the house, the repressed

will inevitably return in some form. Yet, the dynamics of the porosity of the house are

changing: the contemporary house is no longer a simple mediator, but is now a "media

centre" (Colomina 210). As new digital media technologies are integrated into the house,

the boundaries and dynamics between inside and out, solid and void, will inevitably be

altered. Consequently, if unhomeliness is thought to emerge at the moment when the

boundaries of the house are obscured or transgressed, what will be the result if such

boundaries are intentionally blurred by technology?

Chapter 4 – Open Enclosures

4.1 Real Memories of Virtual Experiences

Unlike their predecessors, new digital media technologies allow for a two-way transmission of information. Through computers and other digital devices, users are able to access a wealth of information that was heretofore nearly unimaginable. Developments in new digital technologies are quickly changing our perspective of the world in a way comparable only to viewing those first images available of the Earth:

> Sir Fred Hoyle, the great British cosmologist, rightly predicted in 1948 that the first images of Earth from space would change forever our view of our own planet. 'Earthrise' encapsulated the fragility of a place that seems so immense to the people who live there, but so tiny when viewed from the relatively short distance of its natural satellite. (Connor)

Likewise, contemporary digital technologies are expected to initiate a re-evaluation of our place in the universe. The first images of the Earth highlighted not only the uniqueness of our planet, but also its isolation and our sole reliance on its resources, which consequently inspired a newfound concern for the welfare of the environment. If seeing the Earth for the first time made us realize how small and seemingly insignificant we are in the grand scale of our galaxy, new technological developments that provide an even more scrutinizing perspective of the globe will no doubt further expand upon these initial reactions. Take for example recent digital imaging technologies such as Google's satellite and street view that allow for the public to access highly detailed depictions of the surface of the Earth. By allowing users to quickly and easily navigate the whole of the globe (with the exception of a few select government restricted areas that have been

obscured for reasons of national security), one is struck by the compactness and vulnerability of all that is in view. No doubt, the unusual perspective made possible by such technologies reveals how truly small our planet is, and how limited our available resources are.

As Jenny Odell notes in the introduction to her digital art project titled "Satellite Collections" (2009-2011), "[t]he view from a satellite is not a human one, nor is it one we were ever really meant to see. But it is precisely from this inhuman point of view that we are able to read our own humanity, in all of its tiny, reliable and repetitive marks upon the face of the earth" (Odell). This particular selection of Odell's artwork features collages consisting of pixelated images of artefacts that she has found on Google's satellite view, each work is themed according to a specific object; for instance: nuclear cooling towers, airplanes, waterslide configurations, and empty parking lots. What is most impressive about her work is that by collecting these recurring landscape objects, one begins to apprehend the invasiveness of this technology. That one can survey cities with such detail that one can seek out every basketball court in Manhattan is a little unsettling, and demonstrates the power of this inhuman perspective to blur what were once the boundaries between public and private, inside and out; for instance: the fences once constructed to obscure the contents of a property are now subverted by this top-down perspective.[14]

Yet, the stream of information available online not only brings the world into the house, but also enables one to also enter into and interact with these spaces in a way that

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[14] The implication here is that similar technologies can be used for surveillance purposes. For instance, it was discovered recently that one is able to track movement inside of a house by measuring the signal strength of a common wireless router (Hambling).

was once only possible through physical travel. In another project titled *Travel By Approximation: a Virtual Road Trip*, Odell explores the possibility for Google's satellite view to demonstrate the ability for one to not simply intake factual information about the world, but to explore it as a virtual space: to experience the outside from the inside. *Travel By Approximation* is an account of a fifty-five day road trip across America to places Odell had never been. Using countless online resources, Odell creates a travel narrative, scrapbook, and video log of her (virtual) adventure, including hundreds of photo(shop)s of her visiting famous destinations, such as the Grand Canyon.[15] Very diligent in her work, Odell planned her virtual vacation according to the parameters of any real road trip: ensuring that the distance travelled and the hours driven for each day were restricted to a realistic and practical timeframe. Describing her experience, Odell states that "the feelings of discovery, novelty, fear, and exhilaration that I encountered along the way were as real as any I have ever had. At the end of a virtual experience of real places, I am left with real memories of virtual experiences" (*Travel: Virtual Road Trip*).[16]

What Odell's project highlights best is not that a virtual adventure is comparable to an experience of physical space, but that it is nevertheless a kind of valid and memorable experience of its own. Certainly one could argue against the quality of these experiences and point to concerns about the significant time that users spend engaging

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[15] *Travel By Approximation: a Virtual Road Trip* is self-published by the author. A preview of the text is available here: http://www.blurb.com/books/1262410

[16] This quotation appears in the "about this project" section of the text.

with digital media instead of the "real" world.[17] The purpose here, however, is not to

dispute the value of these experiences, but to acknowledge that these technologies

provide a new and virtual venue for expanding one's view of the world. As cities become

more and more crowded, and available space begins to shrink, these technologies provide

a nearly limitless playground for connecting to the world with family and friends, and

exploring new spaces and places:

> . . . the Internet offers possibilities to substantially re-imagine the very
>
> notion of community. Cities have become too big, too fractured, too scary
>
> — and the Internet offers a safe space to build new communities in. In
>
> sum, in the face of all this disembedding, detraditionalizing, globalizing
>
> uncertainty, we need to find a new way to belong — and the Internet is on
>
> hand to provide exactly that. (Bell 97)

This potential for the internet to create a virtual social space is no doubt the most

significant contribution to the transformation of the house into a media centre. The

internet is an open window that extends the interior of the house beyond and in defiance

of its physical exterior. It is unknown, however, if a vast virtual world can serve as proper

compensation for the encroachment of the city on one's physical space.

4.2 Beyond Small Spaces

If there is any evidence to support the possibility of virtual space supplementing

our need for physical space, it is in the re-emergence of the "small house movement,"

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[17] For a thorough exploration of these concerns see chapter 5 of David Bell's *An Introduction to Cybercultures.*

which coincided with the increased availability of the internet. This interest in developing smaller houses illustrates not only that people are now less resistant to the notion of living in a smaller space, but also that our perception of the house and its function is shifting.

The small house movement is directly inspired by the work of American architect Frank Lloyd Wright (Figure 4). Wright's *Usonian* architecture was originally developed in the 1930s as a cost-effective means of producing houses in the war and postwar era (Lind 9). [18] For Wright, the house was first and foremost "a liveable interior space" (qtd. in Lind 13) that, despite its small size, "gave their owners sense of dignity and pride in their surroundings" (13). In contrast to the larger suburban houses that would come to dominate the landscape of the United States, Wright's houses were characterized by their economic size, incorporation of organic materials, and creation of open living spaces (15). Unfortunately, Wright's houses would never experience the same popularity as those large suburban houses that persist even today. The small house movement, however, has witnessed a resurgence in the late '90s as a response to renewed economic and environmental concerns, and has maintained steady interest since. This architectural aesthetic, very much like Wright's Unsonian houses, focuses on using space qualitatively, rather than quantitatively, to create efficient and economical spaces. As Sarah Susanka states in her book *The Not So Big House* (1998), "the impulse for big spaces is combined with outdated patterns of home design and building, the result is more often than not a

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[18] Wright was not the only advocate of small houses at this time, there was significant interest in building more cost efficient houses and therefore smaller houses: see, for instance, the debates concerning Loucher's Law (1928) that offered floor plans totaling 49m^2 and stipulation that the cost must not exceed 40,000 francs (Teige 67-8).

house that doesn't work" (3). For Susanka, these exorbitant houses are part of a fantasy that designs houses not with the intention of being homely, but to impress and to publicly display social standing; for this reason, these houses fail as homes: "[w]e are all searching for home, but we are trying to find it by building more rooms and more space" (10). Susanka's own architectural designs are centred on realistic spatial requirements, with emphasis on detail and functionality. Examples of the implementation of this model can be found all over the world, although due to especially high living costs and the abundance of small "depersonalized containers" (Cho and Lewis 74), cities provide an

Figure 4: Frank Lloyd Wright's "John D. Haynes House" (1952)
by HaynesHouse, Fort Wayne, IN

exceptionally rich ground for uncovering small living spaces.[19] For instance, those New

York City apartments that are made up of less than 100 square feet[20] provide some of the

most impressive examples of how to use space effectively. However, these small houses

are often criticized for their claustrophobic size. Etgar Keret, whose housing project in

Warsaw measures only four feet across at its widest, and twenty-eight inches at its most

narrow, is criticized for attempting to live in a space well below the regulations set by

building code standards for residential housing. As Robert Krulwich writes, "He's

certainly not following one of the basic rules of ecology, called the 'Size/Abundance

Rule,' which says bigger animals live farther apart, smaller animals live closer together.

Mr. Keret is hundreds (maybe thousands) of times bigger than a finch. His home territory

should reflect that. Midsize mammals shouldn't live like midsize avians" (Krulwich).

While it is true that there is a limit to the space in which one can thrive, an exact

measurement would be difficult to pin down.

     The architectural design of these small houses reflects a clear understanding and

consideration of not only the physical, but also psychological needs for space. Because

every inch of these small houses is significant, the design process is highly innovative

and technical. Take for example the recently completed "House in Takadanobaba" by

Florian Busch Architects (Figure 4). This particular house was designed to fit in a

confined space between two buildings, leaving a width of only 4.7 metres for its

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[19] See for example Kirsten Dirksen's documentary *We the Tiny House People*

[20] See Gorrell citation for video of apartment interior.

Figure 5: Florian Busche Architects' "The House in Takadanobaba" (2011)

by Hiroyasu Sakaguchi, Tokyo, Japan

construction. In order to make the house appear more spacious, the building was

modelled after the folding of a piece of paper,[21] with the usual partitioning between

rooms omitted, leaving only curtains to create privacy when needed. In describing this

project, the architects state:

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[21] See website for illustrated layout and design: http://www.florianbusch.com/projects/folded-house/

When the brief asked for a wide open living space where breathing within the confines of the city was possible, we proposed an architecture of the exterior that claims the space around it by extending beyond its limits. The House in Takadanobaba is a departure from understanding housing as enclosing: the urban exterior continues in an open fold of fluidly interconnected spaces for living in the interior of the exterior. ("House in Takadanobaba")

The discourse used by the architects to explain their design reveals a very similar logic of the blurring of the boundaries between inside and outside that has been explored throughout this thesis. When confronted with a diminishing physical space, one must reconsider conventional ways of thinking about space and re-evaluate how that space is used. The small house movement has significantly innovated the design of the interior and exterior of the house, and as a result has not only created a new understanding of space, but also challenged our traditional relation to the house.

Unlike the earlier architectural aesthetics of the Victorian, modernist, and postmodernist eras that, respectively, emphasized excessively ornate design, the repression of tradition, and eclecticism and fragmentation,[22] the architects of the small house movement aim to construct a house that works within its limitations, and one that is tailored to and anticipates the needs of its occupants. What truly sets this movement apart from its predecessors is how it responds the uncanniness of the home through its use of space. Its designs do not simply regulate the mediation of the inside and the

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[22] Postmodern architecture is generally characterized by its mixing of architectural styles and eclectic ornamentation that draws from various eras and fashions.

outside, but fundamentally redefine and play with these very boundaries; in doing so, this model alters how the space of the house functions. This is not to suggest that small houses necessarily elude uncanniness altogether, but rather that they avoid the usual pitfalls of being too self-contained, or too machine-like, by reframing the problem of the disconnect between house and home as one of boundaries and not aesthetics. The aesthetics of a house can never fully mask the gap between the lost object of desire and the house — each deception will necessarily fail. Thus, in order to break the cycle of repetition — to form a new and more productive relation to the house — one must consider the very boundaries that constitute the relationship between solid and void. As Susanka argues: "[h]ouses are getting bigger and bigger, and because square footage is all that is required, they are being built without the level of detail so important to humanizing life" (14). Precisely because they resist the envious desire for pretentious, over-sized houses, and limit excess space, the architects of small houses must necessarily appeal to the intended occupants of the house in order to design a space that is truly functional, thereby humanizing and personalizing each house. In the end, rather than having a house that signifies affluence, one is left with a house that, first and foremost, is intended to be lived-in.

The most difficult part of developing a functional small space, however, is ensuring that it does not feel as small as it really is. In order to create the illusion that the interior is larger than the limits of the exterior, architects blur the boundaries between these two apparently distinct spaces. As demonstrated by the House in Takadanobaba, this technique of folding the space and opening it to the exterior is exceptionally effective in creating a space that is perceived as larger than its true dimensions. This overlapping

of spaces creates the effect that "[f]rom the inside, looking out, there is a layering of places that range from completely interior to partly exterior to completely exterior" (84). Another way in which Susanka achieves this effect in her own designs is through what she calls an "interior view." This technique entails a thoughtful arrangement of the interior of the house such that it produces a picturesque view within, thus extending the traditional view of the outside toward the inside of the house as well: "[h]ouses are usually designed to take advantage of outside views, with windows in just the right places to capture various scenes within the landscape . . . the composition of 'interior views' is equally important" (83). By creating these "interior views," one avoids not only the congested and cluttered aesthetic of the Victorian era house, but equally the stark, unhomely aesthetic of modernist architecture.

4.3 HomeOS and the House of the Future

The transformation of the house into a space that defies its boundaries is unmistakably analogous to Colomina's vision of the house as a media centre. Both the technologization of the house and the small house movement share the same vision of the house as a space that challenges its traditional enclosure through the disintegration of its interior/exterior divide. What remains uncertain, however, is whether there is a connection between the coincidence of an interest in limiting our physical space with the emergence of an expanding virtual world, and if is it even desirable for the virtual to serve as compensation for the limitations placed of our physical space. Speaking to Donna Haraway's *Cyborg Manifesto*, Anthony Vidler states that, in the context of home computing, "the spatial order of the home carries less and less meaning, and its traditional

'rooms' and their furnishings even less" (161). This statement, however, seems rather

dubious. As personal computers become better integrated into the house, it is likely that

— as with the addition of the television or the radio — there will be a reorientation of the

living space. Although it is difficult to determine the precise impact that such

technologies will have when included in the layout of the household, would the result

necessarily be negative, as Vidler suggests? Unfortunately, he does not elaborate. Vidler

does, however, go on to argue that these new technologies will transform the house from

Le Corbusier's "machine for living in" "into a potentially dangerous psychopathological

space populated by half-natural, half-prosthetic individuals, where walls reflect the sight

of their views, where the house surveys its occupants with silent menace" (161).

Although it is clear from this statement that Vidler is excessively apprehensive about the

advancements of technology, certainly it is best to have a cautious approach to

technology rather than a blind acceptance of its supposed benefits. As Heidegger warns,

> Everywhere we remain unfree and chained to technology, whether we
>
> passionately affirm or deny it. But we are delivered over to it in the worst
>
> possible way when we regard it as something neutral; for this conception of
>
> it, to which today we particularly like to do homage, makes us utterly blind
>
> to the essence of technology. (4)

Vidler's vision of our future house is strikingly similar to that presented in Ray

Bradbury's short story "August 2026: There Will Come Soft Rains" (1950). This text

warns against the unexpected consequences of the technological progression signalled by

the 1940s fantasy of the automated-home. Bradbury's narrative imagines the world after

a nuclear holocaust, in which nothing is left behind save for what could be described as

the "haunted" house of the future. A lone, fully-automated house persists in fulfilling its repetitive cycle of making breakfast, rushing no one off to work and school, cleaning, and reading poetry before bed; the house is completely indifferent to the absence of its occupants. At a later point in the story, a falling branch strikes the house and causes a fire. Despite its efforts to extinguish the fire, and the house burns down and "dies." Nature, however, continues on: echoing the lines of Sara Teasdale's poem, from which the story takes its name, "There Will Come Soft Rains:" "Not one would mind, neither bird nor tree, / If mankind perished utterly" (qtd. in Bradbury). As Robert Dominianni summarizes, "[Bradbury] is opposed to letting the machine enter the *human* aspects of life. The machine no longer serves humanity in 'There Will Come Soft Rains'; there humanity is subservient to machinery" (49). Though the apparent benefits of living in such an automated house may be tempting, one must not forget what we have already learned after Le Corbusier: that a machine for living in is not as desirable as it sounds.

"August 2026" is now closer to the reality of our ability to actually produce the automated home about which the text only prophesizes. The term "smart house," first coined in 1984 by the American Association of House Builders (Harper 1), is used today to describe those houses that integrate technologies to automate household activities. More specifically, as Richard Harper outlines, "a home is not smart because of how well it is built, nor how effectively it uses space; nor because it is environmentally friendly, using solar power and recycling waste water, for example. A smart home may, and indeed often does, include these things, but what makes it smart is the interactive technologies that it contains" (1-2).

Presently, Microsoft Research is developing an operating system for the house named "HomeOS." The intention of this project is to bring "smart home" technology to the "masses" (Microsoft). Although Microsoft's system is not yet able to prepare breakfast, it does allow one to program and regulate many features of one's house such as lighting, thermostats, and home security. Demonstrations of its ability to create complex chains of activities with its user-friendly interface have largely been successful.[23] However, the failure of interoperability between varied devices is delaying the release of a complete and fully integrated smart home to the public (Dixon et al. 1). Due to the heterogeneity of the market, the multifarious devices and applications available are unable to interconnect. For instance, the application that one uses to control an appliance (e.g. a lamp) will not also work with another device used to adjust the temperature if each is produced by a different developer. This problem is analogous to the frustration of having multiple remote controls for the television and its peripherals prior to the invention of the universal remote: an epidemic that no one is interested in recreating.

Thus far, these technologies have not decreased the discomfort we feel in the house; consider David Scott's experience in his article "From Europe: Bauhaus with Brains." Herein, Scott is given the opportunity to explore the Dutch House of the Future, and after examining its many technological enhancements, he concludes that: "As I take a final look, I wonder if I'd want to live here, despite the appealing technology. It has no cozy corners, and is so exposed" (Scott). The convenience of being able to program and automate the appliances and devices in the house may seem vastly unlike the grim vision

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[23] Bill Gates's house is perhaps the best example of a fully-functional smart home.

of Bradbury's text. Yet, its message remains poignant: one must think critically about the supposed benefits of any given technology, and, above all else, one must not, as Bradbury warns, become objectified by this technology. The integration of a technology into the house inevitably alters the dynamics of that space. As Neil Postman argues, "a new technology does not add or subtract something. It changes everything" (18). In other words, the introduction of new digital media technologies into the house does not simply expand the ability to transmit information (e.g. the transformation of one-way media into a two-way exchange of information — television to the internet); it changes everything.

As Jenny Odell's project *Travel by Approximation* demonstrates, new digital technologies are challenging how we perceive and interact with the world by offering us an inhuman and prosthetic perspective that defies traditional limitations and boundaries. Following Neil Postman, the integration of these technologies into the house does not simply produce a house with a computer, but instead radically alters our relation to house and home. Thus, what remains to be considered is how the blurring of the boundaries between interior and exterior spaces — through the architectural aesthetic of the small house and its coincidence with the integration of new media digital technologies — has transformed our very relation to the house.

4.4 The End of Analysis

To reiterate: the aesthetic of the Victorian and modernist architectures were characterized by a fundamentally neurotic relation to the house, as a consequence of their efforts to conceal the gap between the physical and fantasmatic dimensions of the home. In response to this approach, postmodern architecture instead manifested the gap itself

through its fragmented aesthetic, which suggested a step forward in the analytic process of resolving this neurotic relation through its realization that the house is but a mask concealing the nonexistence of the home. This moment serves as a breaking point, and is a recognition of the futility of our efforts: one can never return home. This break dissolves the fantasy of the house *as* home and marks the disintegration of the signifier. There are at least two possible responses when confronted with this knowledge: one may undergo a *passage à l'acte*, or continue to progress toward the end of analysis.

For Lacan, the *passage à l'acte* is an impulsive action that responds to the knowledge gained in transference. Using the example of the home, the knowledge that emerges in transference is the realization that "home," as such, does not exist. Consequently, this incites a loss of meaning in the imaginary (Shane) and signals the disintegration of the signifier; after all, what would be the meaning of a house without the notion of the home? The *passage à l'acte* is thus fundamentally a self-defense against the anxiety that arises from this knowledge: instead of responding to the question concerning the meaning of the house without the home, one retreats and reconstitutes oneself in a new image. The response of the modernist architectural aesthetic to the Victorian house can be seen as a kind of *passage à l'acte*, for rather than uncovering the source of the uncanniness at the heart of the Victorian house, it instead advocated for the eradication of the former aesthetic in favour of creating a new image through which to stage the fantasy of home: Le Corbusier's austere "House-Machine." Based on his assessment of cyberspace, it would seem that Slavoj Žižek would argue in favour of this turn to the boundless aesthetic of the small house and digital media as a *passage à l'acte*. Žižek writes:

Is cyberspace, especially virtual reality, not the realm of perversion at its

puresy[sic]? Reduced to its elementary skeleton, perversion can be seen as

a defense against the Real of death and sexuality, against the threat of

mortality as well as the contingent imposition of sexual difference: what

the perverse scenario enacts is a "disavowal of castration" — a universe in

which, as in cartoons, a human being can survive any catastrophe; in

which adult sexuality is reduced to a childish game; in which one is not

forced to die or to choose one of the two sexes. As such, the pervert's

universe is the universe of pure symbolic order, of the signifier's game

running its course, unencumbered by the Real of human finitude. So,

again, does not our experience of cyberspace perfectly fit this perverse

universe? Isn't cyberspace also a universe without closure, unencumbered

by the inertia of the Real, constrained only by its self-imposed rules? In

this comic universe, as in a perverse ritual, same gestures and scenes are

endlessly repeated, without any final closure, i.e. in this universe, the

refusal of a closure, far from signalling [sic] the undermining of ideology,

rather enacts a proto-ideological denial. (Žižek, "The Cyberspace Real"

par. 3)

Following such an analysis, one could conclude that the dissolution of the boundaries of

inside and outside function as a means by which one may escape having to accept the

Real of fantasy. However, Žižek's many characterizations of cyberspace are problematic,

as he says of his own work: each theory has its own shortcomings, for "both standard

reactions to cyberspace are deficient: one is 'too strong' (cyberspace as involving a break

with Oedipus), while the other is 'too weak' (cyberspace as a continuation of Oedipus by other means)" ("Possible to Traverse" 116-17). The failure of these theories is no doubt a consequence of his attempt to totalize our interaction with cyberspace; that is, his thinking about cyberspace approaches it from the wrong perspective. Attempting to theorize cyberspace as a cohesive and homogenous space is analogous to the equally futile attempt to characterize reality as fundamentally corresponding to a single perversion or neuroses. Our interaction with cyberspace, like reality, is too dynamic to be conceptualized under one totalizing perspective. At times our interaction with cyberspace may be perverse — the pliable identities that can be adopted online are evidence of this fact. But most often users are simply carrying out everyday activities, such as sending correspondences, banking, or shopping. Therefore, despite the fact that the aesthetic of the small house signifies a blurring of boundaries (similar to that found in Žižek's analysis of cyberspace), this alone is insufficient evidence to characterize this movement as a flight from the Real: from our knowledge concerning the void at the heart of the home.

If this response to the dissolution of fantasy is not a *passage à l'acte*, then it signals our progress toward the end of analysis, and a new relation to our desire. In her paper "'Babe' and the End of Analysis," Anna Shane provides a comprehensive reading of Lacan's account of the end of analysis through Chris Noonan's film *Babe*. She begins by stating that

> Lacan says very interesting, but seemingly mysterious things about the
> end of analysis. He tells us that at the end of analysis, you must cross your
> fantasm. He says that at the end of analysis the subject is left with

depression and anxiety, because there has been a fall of the ideal image

that no longer serves the subject. The subject finds him or herself between

two deaths. The subject is then left to redistribute his or her drives. At the

end of analysis, there is a need to become reinvested in the world. (Shane)

In the film, Babe comes to realize that as a pig, his purpose is to be eaten: "that the

purpose of life is nothing more than death" (Shane). When confronted with the realization

that the object of our desire does not exist, should our response be to accept this destiny

or to flee from this knowledge and reconstitute our desire in a new image, only to repeat

the trauma?

      The answer is intertwined with our treatment of the boundaries between the

interior and the exterior of the house. When the boundary between the two is perceived as

a very real and rigid divide — that is, when one represses the fact that a gap exists

between these spaces — the more the repressed unhomeliness and uncanniness that

inevitably coincides with the house will return. In contrast, the aesthetic of the small

house architecture purposefully blurs the distinction between the interior and exterior in

defiance of this notion of the house as an enclosure, thereby acknowledging the always

already illusory nature of these boundaries:

      No longer are we fooled by the promise of the house as a bubble-container

      that frees its human contents from the vicissitudes of external

      environment: neither the Dymaxion dome nor the spacesuit reflects the

      infinite permeability assumed by the contemporary skin, or the

      interchangeability of body part and technical replacement, or the spatio-

      mental reconstruction implied by the cyberspace. This complex and

impure system of existence, indeed, offers neither the luminous promise of

technological utopia nor the dark hell of its opposite. (Vidler,

Architectural 148)

This recognition suggests that we have accepted the destiny that the house cannot be a

home. For Babe, accepting his destiny transforms him; he is "no longer a pig of

metonymy, where each part of him has value and can be exchanged, but a pig of endless

metaphor, who may be whatever he likes, as long as he knows he isn't" (Shane).

Similarly, the house must also go beyond its own metonymy: the house, as a signifier,

must become a metaphor; in other words, "the passage of the signifier into the signified,

the creation of a new signified" (Evans 112). Instead of perceiving the house as a striated

space of related rooms through which we arrive at the sum of the house, the house itself

must become a metaphor for home — the house must come to substitute the desired

object. By moving away from this notion of the house as an enclosure, the house is free

to "be whatever [it] likes, as long as [it] knows [it] isn't" (Shane). That is, after all, the

aim of the small house: not simply to be a home, but to be the largest, small home that it

is not:

> This is the end of analysis. This is what you find out when you cross your
>
> phantasm, because a phantasm is, after all, a signifier. A privileged
>
> signifier, with ties in the imaginary, but still a signifier, covering the
>
> [R]eal. In recognizing this knowledge, the subject assumes his destiny,
>
> which actually amounts to the same thing for all subjects. We are all faced
>
> with lack of meaning anywhere outside the signifier, which merely refers
>
> to other signifiers, not to some great and guaranteeing truth. (Shane)

The aim of the end of analysis is not truly an end in itself, but instead marks the preparation for the analysand to become an analyst (Lacan, *Ethics* 303): "[t]he end of analysis entails a shift in the analysand's transference, from the figure of the analyst, via the real, onto the cause of psychoanalysis itself – meaning that every analysis is, retroactively, a training analysis" (Aikatsurama). In the position of the analyst, the analysand is able to reconfigure his or her fantasy, and consequently form a new relation to this desire (Fink 70).

Although Shane's analysis is concerned with the subjectivity of the analysand, the question of our relation both to home and to our own subjectivity is linked to the problem of the Real concealed beneath the signifier. Our struggle to negotiate the gaps that emerge in the Symbolic (through which the Real appears) is an attempt to master not only the uncanniness at the heart of the house, but the very void of our own subjectivity, which Hegel perhaps captures best:

> The human being is this night, this empty nothing that contains everything
> in its simplicity — and unending wealth of many representations, images,
> of which none belongs to him — or which are not present . . . One catches
> sign of this night when one looks human beings in the eye — into a night
> that becomes awful. (qtd. in Žižek, *Metastases* 145)

Like the house, our own subjectivity is congested with empty representations, none of which ever reconcile our status as a divided subject: only in the Imaginary can we misrecognize ourselves as whole. It is perhaps because of this very parallel between the home and subject that we are so passionate about our houses. Both the house and the subject are a porous and ( )holey space that seeps and oozes uncanniness from without

and within; thus, the unhomeliness that emerges in our house is but a reminder of the void that constitutes our own subjectivity. Precisely because our only means of effecting change in the world is through the prosthetic, our obsessive and repetitious ordering, disordering, and aestheticizing of the house functions as an attempt at the mastery of our own void. If the beginnings of the small house movement are an indication that we are in fact moving toward the end of analysis in terms of our relation to the home, then our persistent restaging of this struggle with the house — and perhaps the void of our own subjectivity — is a productive repetition. Nevertheless, as we move forward, we must be cautious of the unexpected consequences of the very technologies that have opened up this possibility.

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