REMOTE HOMES: TOWARDS A NOMADIC URBANISM?

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"If home is not necessarily a spatial concept, it is nonetheless often lived out as if it were such."

David Morley, 2000

The question of home placement is relevant to our contemporary structures of lifestyle since two important phenomena have destabilized the traditional notions of home and identity: globalization and the Internet. Contemporary western society is fluid; a teleological construction of time and space has been transformed into more mobile and immaterial structures. Thus mobility and virtuality are two key components of social configuration.[1] If we take these ideas into consideration the following questions arise: How do virtual realities affect the notions of identity in space? How is identity structured in a highly virtualized and mobile society? Are we obliged to transform and remodel our identities constantly?

OF HOMES AND ISLANDS

The novel *Mundo del fin del Mundo*[2] depicts the voyages of three nomadic travelers through the inhospitable islands of the Chilean "Land of Fire". All have lost their homes; all long for them and their past. One particularly interesting anecdote is the story of a seaman whose home was a sunken boat in the middle of the sea:

> The *Paso del Ona*[3] was a low keel cutter that my father had bought after a storm had destroyed the Fiona against the reefs of Punta Diego. I was born in the *Paso del Ona* and until now I felt/knew it as the closest idea of home. But this boat does not exist anymore. When my father died, I did as I should: respecting his manners and myths, I tied the body to the rudder and I sunk the boat in the deep waters of the Gulf of Sorrows.

The notion of "home" is therefore comparable to a remote island; both are entities created from narratives. Islands are locations onto which we project our fantasies, places that are better dealt with through literature than through science[4]; the same can be said about "home." "Home" can never be defined as a unique and stable entity; it is movable, remote, intangible. What is home for one is not home for another. There are almost as many notions of what constitutes the home as there are people on this planet.

THE MIGRANT, THE EXILED AND THE TRAVELER

Ultimately, there are three principal identities within contemporary society: the migrant, the exiled and the traveler. These three figures are integral to the discussion about the distribution and conformation of space, especially in urban contexts. Many factors have led to the exponential growth

of people inhabiting places that are "not their own" – from where they are not natives. World politics issues (dictatorships, wars, civil-wars, etc.) have led to increasing numbers of exiled people; world economic issues (poverty, lack of opportunities in education and work, dangerous environment etc.) to immigrants; and faster means of communication (Internet, airplanes, English as a "global" language, etc.) for travelers. These three identities raise questions wherever they are and challenge traditional notions of identity and nation. For example, how do the current 200 million immigrants in the world[5] deal with their "foreignness" and how do they settle in new environments? "Home is wherever you have a job,"[6] said a Turkish migrant in Germany. Typically, families migrate to richer countries to provide their children the opportunities they didn't have: education, health services and proper nourishment. The historic tendency of migrants to consolidate nation-of-origin based communities and constitute "little" countries of their own (Little Italies, Chinatowns…) is changing. Increasingly, neighborhoods, especially cosmopolitan neighborhoods, are not nation-based, and continuous research is done to understand new neighborhood dynamics. This provides an even more complex sense of identity for the inhabitants of each district and city.

The most radical identity is that of the exiled, as they don´t have the opportunity to return to their place of origin. For them, "home" - conceived of here as their national birthplace – might as well be a sunken boat. They must reformulate their identity and their notions of belonging. Home is banned for them, placed in the land of nostalgia and memories. When something irreplaceable is forever forbidden it becomes an integral part of your daily life: in this case, the pursuit for the lost home. Exiled people and refugees generally leave their places of origin, their homes, in an abrupt manner, leaving them without any belongings with which to start their new lives. Refugees, asylum seekers and exiled people are forced to find a new place of residency and make it their home in a short period of time. Entire villages and cities living in precarious situations has become the norm, temporal accommodations turned into everyday living settlements.[7] A considerable amount of the temporary refugee camps end up as permanent villages; settlements that modify the identity of the natural environment as well as the identities of the refugees.

Finally, the traveler, the so-called perpetual tourist who is always on the road, visits new countries and cities, working temporary jobs to continue the journey. The traveler holds a passport and collects a profit from it by gaining stamps on its pages; in many cases the traveler does not pay taxes due to their continuous movement. The consolidation of the traveler's identity has come from the boom of ever faster means of transport, widespread virtual communication, and the merging of different cultures and languages into one common language, the "broken English." Travelers have also contributed to new distributions of spaces; nowadays, hostels, restaurants and pleasure/party facilities are found in areas that were once "closed," for example remote beaches in Southeast Asia and Latin America. Alongside this move, international food and culture has boomed and spread throughout the world. An "exotic and extravagant home" has been established, repeating itself in different places, culminating in what could be called 'tourist gentrification'.

VIRTUALLY AND SIMULACRUM

We live in a fluid society where social institutions such as "home" have become elusive due to many factors, amongst them high-speed and low-cost means of communication and continuous mobility[8]. Furthermore, post-modernist and post-structuralists thinkers have highlighted that these new

technologies (e.g. Internet, virtual environments, city computing, etc.) have destabilized the paradigm of representation.

In modern times (1789-1914) knowledge was based on a subject-object relationship where science and evidence played an important role in the construction of reality. In the so-called post-modern times[9] the subject-object relationship was challenged and fractured leaving only signs that refer to other signs, no utter reality. Jean Baudrillard notes that we live in a world where there is only simulacrum. He argues that the subject tries to understand the object, but since the object can only be understood through signs, the object can never be fully attained. Instead, the subject is seduced by the object. Seduced in terms of its original Latin meaning: "to move away." Therefore, when attempting to understand human life we end up being seduced by it, drawn towards a simulation, a state of hyperreality:

> Abstraction today is no longer that of the map, the double, the mirror or the concept. Simulation is no longer that of a territory, a referential being or a substance. It is the generation by models of a real without origin or reality: a hyperreal. The territory no longer precedes the map, nor survives it. Henceforth, it is the map that precedes the territory – precession of simulacra – it is the map that engenders the territory…It is the real, and not the map, whose vestiges subsist here and there, in the desserts which are no longer those of the Empire, but our own. The desert of the real itself.

A clear example of this hyperreality is the new emphasis in architecture on rendering models. An architecture project nowadays can be restricted to its rendering. Within the renderings are depictions/simulacra of virtual/real spaces, bringing some discussion points to the table: Does rendering promote new utopic concepts? Does rendering distance itself from the "real" space of architecture? Furthermore, it is interesting to see the distinction between a rendering close to reality and a more "distanced" one. The notion of Accurate Visual Representation (AVT), refers to the necessity of developing architectural renderings that are as close as possible to reality, that depict the building as it would actually look when built into the city, land, or territory.

To further explain the concept of simulacra, Baudrillard distinguishes between simulation and dissimulation. Dissimulation supposes a presence that needs to be covered or falsified; simulation supposes an absence that needs to be simulated or created. How can the "true" simulated features be distinguished from the "true" real ones? Simulation implies production, falsification and, above all, replacement. The architectural renderings are simulations of space in the most radical way. They simulate true buildings in true spaces. Renderings simulate reality in a hyperreal way, by its own fabrication of reality, it goes to the extreme of classifying them as more or less real depictions of reality.

In 1994 Paul Milgram developed a scale that ranged between virtuality and reality called the "virtuality continuum"[10], and which aimed to measure the position of a certain entity or environment within its own parameters. The scale makes the following distinctions; real environment, augmented reality, augmented virtuality and virtual environment. Augmented reality is regarded as the depiction of a real environment through computer-generated input. Like the GPS app that generates a complex database of directions and strategic points into the city, or the real-time statistical matrix displayed in a football match broadcast. Augmented virtuality would then be "real" effect portrayed into virtual

environments, such as the projection of a non-virtual object into a virtual environment through different technological strategies. These two notions merge with the fluid notion of the 'real'. Can the "simulated" – virtual – home be replaced by the "real" – material – home, and vice versa?

How does virtuality configure home spaces nowadays? Is simulation of togetherness part of our new notion of home and space? The attitudes of Skype users can tell us about communication habits in private households in Europe:

> While the phone call often required the narration of events and was therefore focused on past events that were not necessarily shared by the two speakers, the Skype sessions are focused on the present. They allow people to be together in the present and often collectively, a few people on either side of the webcams. The change of time frame supported by the webcam and the low cost of long connections, modifies the sense of participation. By enabling people to go on doing things at home without being uniquely focused on the conversation, people rekindle the sense of intimacy that is created by sharing a space with someone you care for.[11]

If we take into consideration these ideas, we come to the question; how are strategies of 'home' developed in a hyperreal world? Could we think of apps that allow you to wake up listening to the songs of the birds of your native town? Could there be a way of living in rendered virtual spaces that come closer to new notions of identity and place? Could there be hyperreal dinner tables where all the members of the family could meet even if they reside in different continents? Furthermore, could it be feasible to imagine the creation of hyperspaces that adjust to individual desires and identities?

The concept that seems appropriate now is the one of the hologram, also addressed by Baudrillard[12]. He discusses how holograms destroy the game of illusion through the game of reproduction; they represent the destruction of the "real" by the creation of its double (stand-in). Does the simulacrum (hologramatic image of the other) of sharing the same space create a notion of a hyperreal home? Or could we think of an identity not related to space, that is closer to ideas and people?

CONCLUSION: NOMADIC HOMES?

We live in a world shaped by fast means of communication and constant social and economic mobility. These new conditions have contributed to a new view of the world in which the modern subject-object relationship has been shifted to give priority to a post-modern paradigm where signs only refer to other signs without a "reality" (in hard terms). This new representational paradigm and the new world conditions have led to a destabilization of notions of identity and home; and since there are millions of people that now reside in localities outside their birthplaces (immigrants, exiles and travelers) the question regarding home settlement strategies is becoming ever more relevant.

Therefore, "home" is an elusive and, to some extent fictional, term that involves cultural practices and is a term that cannot be captured in one definition. Thus it becomes problematic to question the possibility of a new, and fixed, notion of home. Living in a fluid society has transformed the pursuit of happiness from an enlightened wish of humanity into an individual desire. The anchoring of the individual as the primary social unit has created the necessity of formulating and transforming life according to that individual's wishes or desires. Individuals are therefore forced to create their own

surroundings and to adjust them to their desires. This process of territorial displacement calls for new adaptability tools and skills.

For example, faster means of communication such as the Internet enable virtual coexistences which can create intimate atmospheres for people living in different places around the world, such as long Skype calls. Could we consider these forms of communication and adaptability nomadic?

If we take a closer look on a nomadic people, such as the Mongols, we find some interesting concepts for approaching the physical/virtual creation of space for elusive identities and roaming fixed spaces[13]. A part of the Ulaanbaatar urban landscape to date still maintains *ger* districts, where basic supplies (such as water and electricity grids) have been installed in some parts of the city. These supply grids match the nomads' behaviors by remaining even when the *gers* are not there, in order to receive the nomads again the following year. These nomadic settlements question the traditional notion of home as a constant place. Refugee camps, migrant districts, hostels and virtual realities do the same. "'there' (where you are not) has ceased to exist in a planetary scale and we now inhabit a massive 'here' that we inevitably and without alternative share with the rest of humanity."[14]

The issue of nomadism has not yet been solved in our society since nomadic behavior is seen as the behavior of the outcast who defies notions of property, nationality, belonging and citizenship. Often nomads are seen as homeless and uncivilized (when taking an extreme position); but more and more inhabitants of cities and towns around the world engage with nomadic behaviors.

> To categorize nomads as homeless seems to reflect an outside view on nomadism. It has also traditionally been thought that nomadic peoples do not own their land, a view that has not been shared by the nomadic people themselves. To understand nomadism as homelessness and landlessness is constructing the 'nomad' as the other to the settled people and the culture that staying put creates.[15]

Self-made and improvised homes can be seen everywhere: slums are chaotic and undefined grids that emerge out of necessity in a very fast manner (e.g. Mumbai, Calcutta, Mexico City, Manila, Lagos); refugee camps also are implemented in question of days out of the state of emergency.

It is important to analyze these structures and to learn from them as well as to observe the appropriation of places and the development of rituals used to settle/define homes. These home-making rituals could be, among others, the placing of belongings in a familiar manner; long-intimate Skype calls with beloved ones, community settlements of people with the same or similar cultural background.

Are we as individuals (citizens) forced to elaborate, create and simulate our own "homes" and identities permanently? And if so, can architecture suggest new practical/hyperreal structures for making the world livable? Will physicality continue to be the most important premise when planning the distribution of spaces in cities? Should emotional relation to place of residency be taken into account when envisioning new neighborhoods? Furthermore, can we truly imagine a non-physical placement of our emotions? Is nomadism the new form of living, and if so, how will contemporary society and urbanism adapt to it? These questions refer to the basic inquiry of space construction; time will show the impact of virtual space in relation to the production of identities and homeliness.

ENDNOTES

[1] Zygmunt Bauman was born in Poland in 1925; in 1971 he fled to his country of origin due to anti-Semitic policies. Now he lives and works in England. Bauman is a recognized sociologist who coined the terms "liquid" and "solid" modernity to describe contemporary society. Liquid modernity refers to the lack of ulterior meaning of structures and the end of a belief in progress and closure of human development. On the book *Liquid Modernity*, Bauman reflects upon identity: "The search for identity is the ongoing struggle to arrest or slow down the flow, to solidify the fluid, to give form to the formless. Yet far from slowing the flow, let alone stopping it, identities are more like the spots of crust hardening time and again on the top of volcanic lava which melt and dissolve again before they have time to cool and set." Zygmunt Bauman, *Liquid Modernity* (Cambridge: Polity Press, 2000)

[2] Luis Sepulveda was born in Chile in 1949. Since his youth he travelled as much as he could, always taking a notebook with him. In his youth he was a leader of the student movement in his home country and in 1973, after the coup d'état lead by Augusto Pinochet, he was imprisoned for two and a half years. Thanks to the help from the German branch of Amnesty International he was relocated in home arrest which he managed to flee, and subsequently went underground for one year. International entities again helped him and he was sentenced to eight years of exile in Sweden. He flew to Europe but on the first layover in Buenos Aires he managed to escape and remained in Latin America until 1979 when he changed his residency to Germany. He has lived in Europe for over three decades, and regularly writes about Latin America. The book quoted here narrates his first journey back in Chile since his departure in 1977. Luis Sepulveda, *Mundo del fin del Mundo (*Madrid: Tusquets, 1994)

[3] The Ona People was one of the last aboriginal groups in South America to be reached by Westerners. They were located in the now-called Land of Fire of Chile and Argentina. The mother of this seaman was part of the Ona people.

[4] Judith Schalansky was born in the German Democratic Republic (DDR) in 1980. When she was a child she spent hours looking at maps and fantasizing about going to "exotic" faraway places. She lives, writes, and is an artist in Berlin. "An island offers a stage: everything that happens on it is practically forced to turn into a story, into a chamber piece in the middle of nowhere, into the stuff of literature. What is unique about these tales is that fact and fiction can no longer be separated, fact is fictionalized and fiction is turned to fact." Judith Schalansky, *Pocket Atlas of Remote Islands: Fifty Islands I Have Not Visited and Never Will* (Essex: Penguin Books, 2009)

[5] Information retrieved from the International Organization of Migration, http://www.iom.int/.

[6] David Morley was born in 1964 in England and still lives there. He narrates that during his childhood his home turned around the television; it was the instrument that kept the family spatially together and was the means to bring the external world into the privacy of their lives. He is an anthropologist and a poet and has focused his attention on the phenomenon of home placement and identity. Morley, David, *Home Territories, Media, Mobility and Identity* (London & New York: Routledge, 2000)

[7] According to UN Refugee Agency (UNHCR) there are currently 42.5 million of forcibly displaced people, thus refugee camps are sprawling across the world: http://www.unhcr.org/pages/49c3646c11.html.

[8] Bauman, Zygmunt, *Liquid Modernity* (Cambridge: Polity Press, 2000)

[9] Numerous thinkers have criticized the notion of "post-modernism"; one of them was Zygmunt Bauman who defied it with his notion of "liquid modernity" mentioned above. Bauman, *Liquid Modernity.*

[10] Milgram, Paul and Herman Colquhoun, "A Taxonomy of Real and Virtual World Display Integration," *Mixed Reality: Merging Real and Virtual Worlds,* ed. Yuichi Ohta and Hideyuki Tamura (Tokyo: Ohmsha and Berlin: Springer Verlag,1999), 5-30.

[11] Stefana Broadbent, digital ethnographer, has made different studies of how new technologies affect human behaviors. Broadbent, Stefana, "Transforming the Home,*" L'intimité Au Travail* (Limoges: Editons FYP, 2011)

[12] Kellner, Douglas "Jean Baudrillard", *The Stanford Encyclopedia of Philosophy* (Spring 2013 Edition), http://plato.stanford.edu/archives/spr2013/entries/baudrillard/

[13] Willenius, Annu born in 1974 in Finland; has made different analyses on some urban strategies developed in Mongolia, especially in Ulaanbaatar. Mongols have been closely thought of as the ultimate stereotype of nomadism, since the Mongolian Empire lead by Genghis Kahn adopted many of the nomadic tactics of their people to attack and conquer its opponents. In 2008, as Wilenius notes, 57% of Ulaanbaatar's population lived in *ger* districts (31% in self-built houses); this is an indicator of a highly nomadic behavior. The Mongolian *ger* is a traditionally used structured used by nomads in the steppes of Central Asia; it is made out of a wooden circular frame with a wool felt cover which resists the harsh climates of the region. These structures can be transported

and its construction takes about 2 hours. *Ger* districts are settlements (communities) of people that arrive and live in the peripheral areas of the city. Willinius, Annu, "In Search of the City / Nomad / Understanding Freedom," *Mongolia: Perception and Utopia* (Kerva: Kerava Art Museum Publications, 2008)

[14] Ibid.

[15] Ibid.

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