James Tuedio

Ambiguities in the Locus of Home. Exilic Life and the Space of Belonging

> There is a tension built into the very dynamic of being human upon this
> earth, ever in the world, yet never of it. The problem is not just that we are
> alienated dwellers, but that we are irreducibly both dwellers and
> wayfarers…. Home is not a place; it is a posture, willing to be at home,
> whose forms in this life are never final and forever.
> --Erazim Kohàk[1]

There is something oddly difficult about the concept of home. As a species of 'lived
space', home appears to be an inherently ambiguous phenomenon. For starters, home
can reflect a context of dwelling that is dependent on walls, but it can also reflect a
context of experience completely free of physical determinations, as when we speak
of home in reference to a state of mind. On another level, homespace can reflect a
place of one's own, or a place of shared belonging. As a place of ones own, it can
provide a retreat from estrangement, or a base-camp for life-affirming adventures.
Home can be the place we have to leave if we are ever to find ourselves.[2] Or it might
reflect an ideal we yearn for but never seem to realize. Homespace can be a safe,
secure comfort zone, or a place of abuse and disruption. Home can be lodged in our
subjective life as a place of memories; it can emanate from the place '…where the
heart is'. Or perhaps it radiates from a place where the warm hearth of belonging
welcomes us. For some people, home is a fortress or sanctuary whose protection
requires constant vigilance. For others, home is a place where the human soul is
drawn, or where we feel emotional links to a greater community. In some cases, home
is a place of unconditional love where we are accepted for who we are; in less
desirable cases, home is the place where the expectations of others expose our most
disturbing vulnerabilities or dependencies.

Despite the common assumption that home space represents a comfort zone for living a safe and secure existence, home is often a place of ongoing contestation. It is also commonly a place where we learn to dance a fine line between domestication and innovation. While home can be a place of emotional attunement, it is often a place of anxiety. Home is often comprised of relations of power that sustain a context for interpersonal dynamics that are both within and beyond our control. Even so, our home space can offer us a private domain for preparation, withdrawal or resistance; it can also offer a shared field of experience held together by strategic alliances. Home can offer us a context for struggling with disruptions in our identity formation. It can also provide a context for opening ourselves to heterogeneous forces. Home can provide a place to escape from tensions or conflicts in our life, or it can serve as a place to visit when we need to 'find' ourselves, or reclaim a sense of being 'at one' with ourselves. And of course there are now homesites we can 'log on' to, as well as a veritable avalanche of public spaces of home where we can feel free to drop in unannounced and disappear into the anonymous flow of the modern labyrinth.

Yet despite all of these ambiguities, every sense of home would seem to manifest in some way a 'lived space' that gathers us within a 'field' of experience. What is the nature of this 'gathering' force of home, and what sense can we make of the 'field' of experience into which we are gathered by our relation to home? What is missing from a life that longs for home?

The longing for home is a dominant motif, not only with respect to the increasing numbers of displaced people in the world, but just as frequently in the lives of people who would appear on the surface to experience the greatest privileges of home. The menace of the unhomely strikes at all walks of life, unleashing nostalgic hunger, anger, violence, depression, withdrawal, social and political tensions, nationalistic fever, exilic immigration, refugee camps, and gated communities. The menace of the unhomely has even spawned a host of critical attacks on the seductive dangers of our dominant social ideals of home, on the premise that these ideals simply ensnare the masses within webs of servitude and exploitive forms of self-sacrifice. For all the challenges it presents, the drive to secure a safe and happy home remains one of the dominant and defining focal points of contemporary human existence.

Security and the Locus of Displacement

> The sense of moving on as expressing life's transitoriness, of settled life as
> a point of departure rather than a locus of stability, the feeling of
> inexhaustible space, creates a new nomadic conception of home …
> deterritorialization.
> --Edith Wyschogrod[3]

What else is home, if not a safe and secure place to seek shelter from the storms of life? How spontaneously we factor these calming contours into our image of home, as if they were essential, irreducible components of any home-experience! But what are the consequences of making security and comfort integral elements of our concept of home-life? What is the meaning of our longing to be at home in the world, or to be at home in our subjective experiences, when our overarching sense of home is framed in the image of safety and security? Why are these intuitions about safety and security so engrained in our concepts of home?

Safety and security are vested components, central to the latent or projected meaning of our most commonly taken for granted concepts of home. But if we were to question the implicit meaning in these concepts of home, we might be tempted to inquire into the value of our belief in safety and security. This, in turn, might reveal broader questions concerning the nurturing value, the preservational value, the recuperative value, and the transformational value of home. We might wonder why people invest in (or why people long for) the safety and security we so easily identify with home. We might begin to ponder what it means to make these investments, or what it means to want to preserve the safety and security of home. Have we not all yearned for the safe harbour of home in reflective or nostalgic moments of our lives?

But how healthy is it to think about home in this way? How healthy is this sense of home when so many people live in a world increasingly defined through myriad 'decentering expropriations' of human subjects as replaceable labour? What is this

concept of home to people who are reduced to instrumental roles or otherwise sucked through the cracks of exile, homelessness, or despair in the wake of a groundbreaking rupture or broken promise? From a place they can hardly fathom, what are they to make of this sudden awakening to the slippage of home, all the more so if in this awakening they find themselves suspended over an abyss of hallowed ground?

The traditional model of home as a domain of safe, secure and private existence is challenged by tensions inherent in the makeup of our contemporary world. Can we reconfigure the structural dynamics of homes pace in the aftermath of this interruption in the ideal of secure intimacy? What does it mean to conceptualize home space as a site of ongoing tensions, contradictions and ambivalent values?

The challenge is to acknowledge displacement as a constant element of the human dynamic, and to see how the fate of exilic existence touches us all in some way. But this recognition attacks the efficacy of the idealization of home as a personal, privileged domain over which one is entitled to exercise rights of inclusion and exclusion. If we factor in the increasingly exilic dimension of contemporary human life, how might this transform our sense of home as a space of belonging?

The longing for home as a secure refuge from the stresses and anxieties of contemporary life is a dominant motif of human existence in societies throughout the world. But more than ever before, the meaning of home is an enigma fraught with contradiction. We seem forever torn between a desire to live in a safe, settled place and a longing for engagements beyond the safe and settled space of our life. Our hunger for security and reconciliation inclines us to draw sharp boundaries between 'inside' and 'outside', forming walls of inclusion and exclusion. But in tension with this, we sense a tacit awareness of the limiting constraints of the safe and settled mode of life and seek to expand our sense of home beyond these boundaries. In the process, home becomes an ambiguous domain, something we can have, lose and long for all in the same breath of life. The increasing variety of home spaces we see emerging in contemporary life illustrates the creative lengths human beings will travel to produce a context in which to feel at home in the midst of their terminal exile from the longstanding seductive ideal of a safe and settled domicile.

The Gathering Force of Home

> The real secret of the ruby slippers is not that 'there's no place like home',
> but rather that there is no longer any such place as home; except, of
> course, for the home we make, or the homes that are made for us, in Oz:
> which is anywhere, and everywhere, except the place from which we
> began.
> --Salman Rushdie[4]

The concept of home is comprehensible only against the backdrop and constant vigilance of the unhomely in our lives. The never-ending risk of disruption and displacement threatens even the cosiest of home spaces. No matter how successfully we hold our decentring anxieties at bay, there is no way to erase them completely from our lives. As a result, we cannot take home space for granted. When we are fortunate enough to have a sense of being at home, we must work to preserve and protect our home against the erosions, corrosions, erasures and transformative energies arising from the ever-changing circumstances of our life. Thus, while home space offers protective insulation against the disruptions of the unhomely, it cannot secure the boundaries of home against the constant menace of displacement.

Even so, home space provides relief from our face to face encounter with the unhomely. As such, home is a crucial artifice in human life. It should come as no surprise that we long for home when we confront the absence of its protective insulation from the unhomely reminders of our contingent existence and become attuned to the ease with which a human life can lose its contextual (and centring) frame of reference. The ultimate value of home resides in the gathering force around which our life becomes centred and grounded within a place of existence that offers insulation against uncanny assaults on our vulnerabilities.

How we make a home will depend on choices we make concerning contingencies and vulnerabilities in our life, and on the needs and desires of those we choose to include

or exclude from our home space. The more home is organized around relations with others, the more the continuity of the home space will depend on the efficacy of those relations. In effect, the gathering force of home becomes a contextual frame of reference in support of the various interpersonal relations upon which it is dependent. To the extent that home provides contextual support for the various relationships upon which it depends for its continuity, the process of homemaking would seem to require a constant vigilance to the qualitative dynamics of the interpersonal relations upon which the preservation of home space depends.

Of course, those that we are in relation with do not by virtue of this association share our home space unless the home we make (or contribute to sustaining) gathers them into our centring frame of reference. It is certainly possible (and probably not so uncommon) for people in these relations to make separate homes of a common space, and so to live in different places (and separate homes) under one and the same roof. At the extreme, it is possible for certain people in the relation upon which my home space depends to be rendered homeless within the home, that is, captive to my home without the corresponding privilege of being at home themselves. In this case, the dominant partner establishes some form of domination over another person (e.g., by initiating terror, dependence, or practical consideration), the result being to elicit exploitive contributions to a home space from which the relational partner is effectively excluded. Here, the private 'silent' space of home can rear its ugly head to disenfranchise relational partners, all too often without initiating an overt, explicit dynamic of oppression. In these situations, the home space of the disenfranchised partner is transformed from a space of belonging to a space of isolation.

We have grown comfortable conceiving home in the insular image of the hearth. But perhaps the focal point of this cosy image of home lies in the flickering flames of the fire. Why not think of home as a cradle of change and transformation? When the hearth of our soul flickers with an emerging or pervasive sense of uneasiness in life, is it possible this sense of unease is our hunger for a new conceptual terrain of home? Is there a healthier signification of home for those who experience dis-ease in their life?

> Human beings do not perceive things whole; we are not gods but wounded
> creatures, cracked lenses, capable only of fractured perceptions. Partial
> beings, in all the senses of that phrase. Meaning is a shaky edifice we build
> out of scraps, dogmas, childhood injuries, newspaper articles, chance
> remarks, old films, small victories, people hated, people loved; perhaps it is
> because our sense of what is the case is constructed from such inadequate
> materials that we defend it so fiercely, even to the death.
> --Salman Rushdie[5]

Concepts of home grow out of different contours of our life. The material of home constitutes an investment in our identity. Our identity in turn 'territorializes' this investment.[6] In the classic instance we aim to translate our sense of home from heart to hearth. If feelings of warmth and security set the context for building a home in the space between determinacy and innovation, the ultimate challenge may be to feel at home in change while making a home of our fate. Our efforts to give style and texture to the circumstances of our life reveal exciting prospects for adventure, growth, and self-fulfilment; they also reveal the facticity of living with constraints and necessities. We strive to negotiate this facticity in ways that will preserve our health and well-being.

If we think of home as a place of safety, security, comfort and belonging, the loss of these factors (or perceived threats to them) will reflect a disruption of home and a rupture of trust that strikes like an earthquake to unsettle the taken-for-granted security of our inner sanctum. Disruptions of this sort 'deterritorialize' our concept of home and problematize the orientation we have taken for granted. This in turn reveals a new (uncanny) sense of home based on rejection, disruption, and the breakdown of expectations.

Once our orienting sense of home is ruptured, how does this affect our capacity to construct a new sense of home? If we lose our capacity to trust, how does this

influence our reconstruction of home? If we live in a space of fear or hatred, how does this play out as a longing for home? If home has always been the place we retreat to get away from troubling relations or the place we go to insulate ourselves from vulnerability, if home has been the place to limit outside influences and regain a sense of control in our life, how can serious displacement not stretch our concept of home in conflicting directions?

With the displacement of house and hearth as a site of safety and security, is it any wonder our concepts of home scatter to the inner sanctum of our hearts and minds? While we long for the secure, stable, and trusting environment of home, we cannot avoid the challenges posed by growth and change. In the course of negotiating these challenges, we can begin to see what it means to operate with unrealizable ideals of home, or what it means to hold people to expectations that conflict with the essential interplay between immanence and transcendence.

As I drive by billboards advertising tracts of huge new 'homes' for sale in a fast-growing town in the agricultural belt of California, I sometimes think of Maya Angelou's short autobiographical snapshot of three pivotal houses in her life: two classy California houses that broke her marriage to a man she loved, and an old house she relocated to in rural North Carolina which 'reeked of home' the moment she saw it, from 'an aroma of gingersnap cookies and fresh bread' that 'reached out to the landing, put its arms around me and walked me through the front door'.[7]

One of the California houses had swallowed up her prized possessions so completely that it left her in a vacuous space to face the real problems in her marriage. The cosy art-deco house she and her loving husband escaped to fell apart or frustrated her intentions so consistently it left her with the distinct feeling that 'the house hated us'. But the North Carolina house she escaped to was different. It gathered her into its homely space and helped her reclaim a 'settled' relationship to herself so decisively she was given to exclaim 'this is no longer my house, it is my home'.

> And because it is my home, I have not only found myself healed of the
> pain of a broken love affair, but discovered that when something I have
> written does not turn out as I had hoped, I am not hurt so badly. I find

that my physical ailments, which are part of growing older, do not
depress me so deeply. I find that I am quicker to laugh and much quicker
to forgive. I am much happier at receiving small gifts and more
delighted to be a donor of large gifts. And all of that because I am
settled in my home.[8]

Clearly the house alone does not make the home. In this sense, the billboards promise too much. But the people who design these billboards know what they are doing. It is enticing to think we can buy a new house and move into a home, but only because we long to be where we have not yet arrived, namely, in the settled space of home. Maya Angelou made it home, but not because she was looking to buy her way into a home. That approach had already failed her twice, when she was most expecting it to succeed. No, she made it home quite unexpectedly, suddenly finding herself gathered into the inviting, settled space and disposition of a homely life.

If home is our retreat from fragmentation, it will seem to us a place we can depend on for grounding. If we think of it as a place to recover from the stressful pace of life, it will become for us a place where we reassert our power in the wake of revelations of uncanny powerlessness ingested from other walks of life.[9] It will become a place where we rehabilitate our deflated confidence or diminished personal esteem. And if we think of home as a place to preserve connections between our past and present, is it not also the place where we must continually *reconstruct* these connections? Through the creativity we invest in preserving material or spiritual markers of our identity and sense of belonging,[10] our concept of home draws together the warp and weave of a tapestry of immanence and transcendence. Caught in a chiasmic relation of immanence and transcendence, we are assimilated to a dynamic interplay of familiarity and difference, as if we were weaving together threads of nostalgic security and transformative growth.[11]

Materializing Identity

Homemaking consists in preserving the things and their meaning as anchor to shifting personal and group identity. But the narratives of the history of what brought us here are not fixed, and part of the creative and moral task of preservation is to reconstruct the connections of the past to the present in light of new events, relationships, and political understandings.

--Iris Marion Young[12]

The appeal of customary, routine, traditional aspects of home and romanticized images of home seem to fuel a pervasive cultural authentification based on nostalgic concepts of domestic identity. These material or spiritual constructions of home speak of a familiar, self-evident atmosphere of trust and belonging.[13] But even as cultural authentification promotes our assimilation to a social or cultural form of immanence, it also provides a basis for adventures that expose us to the risk of transformative experiences. A chiasmic experience of immanence and transcendence provides an opening to reconsider our relation to home in light of new relations and experiences encountered along the way. But this exposure to the reterritorialization of home is not merely a consequence of our own travels beyond the sphere of immanence. We are also exposed when others upon whom we depend embark on their own movements of transcendence. In such moments of exposure we feel the transience of identity, and this can trigger the temptation to anchor ourselves in a return to familiar ground. What is the impact of this possibility on our concept of home? 'Is it possible to retain an idea of home as supporting the individual subjectivity of the person, where the subject is understood as fluid, partial, shifting, and in relations of reciprocal support with others'?[14]

In posing this question, Iris Marion Young is expressing a central philosophical curiosity. In the course of attacking the claim that homemaking is an oppressive constraint on our capacity to give meaning and purpose to our life, Young establishes a central hypothesis concerning the positive aspect of home-making: 'Giving meaning to individual lives through the arrangement and preservation of things is an intrinsically valuable and irreplaceable aspect of homemaking'.[15]

This 'process of sedimentation through which physical surroundings become home' produces a 'materialization of identity' through the practice of 'endowing things with

living meaning'.[16] Preservation refers here to a practice of 'renewing' our investment in the meaning of things. While functioning in support of our 'longing for a settled, safe, affirmative, and bounded identity,' creative preservation serves to inspire a dynamic cultivation of identity, which in turn contributes to promoting an affirmative, 'fluid and shifting' context for living: 'The activities of preservation give some enclosing fabric to this ever-changing subject by knitting together today and yesterday, integrating new events and relationships into the narrative of a life, the biography of a person, a family, a people'.[17]

This practice of remembering and integrating is, in fact, a practice of re-membering, which is not to be confused with 'nostalgic longing' as a 'flight from the ambiguities and disappointments of everyday life.' By re-membering our life through creative preservation, we affirm personal and cultural identity in ways that reverse or stem the movement of expropriation. The creative preservation of home-making sustains an affirmation of what brought us here.

> Homemaking consists in preserving the things and their meaning as anchor to shifting personal and group identity. But the narratives of the history that brought us here are not fixed, and part of the creative and moral task of preservation is to reconstruct the connection of the past to the present in light of new events, relationships, and political understandings.[18]

Home is the place we need in order to be creative in the dynamic cultivation of our identity. But the key conceptual move lies in our capacity to erase the expectation of sameness from our working sense of self-identity and to realign our sense of identity with notions like equilibrium and balance. These transformations trigger an affirmation of differences at sharp odds with the impetus to draw safe borders around the self.

For Young, the value of homemaking lies in the continual enactment of fields of meaning through creative acts of preservation. These practices affirm our powers of resistance, renewal, self-recovery, and self-affirmation, with home serving as the locus of adaptation. This in turn might provide an empowering context within which to situate Michael Foucault's 'practices of liberty' (assuming we can vanquish the more

prevalent practices of domination typically operating in human relations).[19] Young offers her affirmative reading of 'creative preservation' in spite of what she considers 'the real dangers of romanticizing home'. She recognizes the danger of falling into 'a nostalgic longing for an impossible security and comfort' we strive to achieve through the appropriation and expropriation of others.[20] Her analysis of preservational practices affirms a more inviting sense of home, where personal and collective identity find 'fluid and material support' in the values of homemaking associated with creative preservation. Young closes her discussion by placing an ethical emphasis on four normative values central to home. The values are: safety, home as a place where a person can feel 'physically safe and secure,' and somewhat protected from 'the dangers and hassles of collective life'; individuation, 'having some space of their own,' and being at liberty to reflect back to themselves their particular identity 'in a material mirror'; privacy, having some 'controlling access' in the home, as well as safe refuge against oppression; preservation, the most significant of the four values, with its central feature of creative affirmation.

Young is not alone in casting home as 'the site of the construction and reconstruction of one's self.' But by emphasizing performative aspects of the 'materialization of identity,' she allows us to see a highly relevant dimension of home. The dimension where meaningful things operate as 'material mirrors' capable of reflecting back to us the embodiment of our ever-shifting narrative identity.[21]

Conflicting Desire: Staying and Leaving Homes

> We children of the future, how could we be at home in this today? We
> feel disfavor for all ideals that might lead one to feel at home even in this
> fragile, broken time of transition; as for its 'realities', we do not believe
> they will last. The ice that still supports people today has become very
> thin; the wind that brings the thaw is blowing; we ourselves who are
> homeless constitute a force that breaks open ice and other all too thin
> 'realities'.
> --Friedrich Nietzsche[22]

Even the materialization of home cannot always secure the sense of home we aspire to in these complicated times. People with materialized identities may still find themselves yearning for a lifestyle, for company, for social nourishment, for the vitality of community, and above all for meaning, belonging, and a sense of place. As self-evident traditions of home-life become less and less accessible, we become increasingly attached to a nostalgic sense of the meaning of home. In the process, we may anchor this sense of home in an appropriation of invented traditions, most noticeably when our connection to self-evident traditions begins to wane and take with it our sense of home place.[23] This is the point where we might begin to wonder how meaning works. And how the giving (and taking) of meaning works, especially in the context of the intertwining of past and present, as in the materialization of home or the appropriation of an invented tradition. What do we learn when the meaning-making process breaks down, when it ceases to appropriate or reanimate the meanings in which we have anchored our sense of home? Once we see how creative articulations of meaning contribute to the preservation of home as a centring environment, we can perhaps see what it means to experience a breakdown or deflection of this power of creative preservation.

Another interesting aspect of homemaking lies in the tenuous friction between our desire to have a place, a home, or a ground, and our desire to go beyond these structures, to leave our home, to be free for travel, adventure, and the experience of wildness. This friction reflects a kind of estrangement within the existing confines of familiarity. Sensing the trappings of immanence, we aspire to step outside and transition to a new sense of home, one that can only be framed within an awareness of strangeness, otherness, alterity, or the wild. The sojourner lives for this sense of home. Others merely vacation there. Some cannot step there at all.

In more extreme forms, we may experience a radical loss of equilibrium, or suffer significant disorientation with respect to our life situation. In such a case, we seem to 'fall out of [our] life' or fall out of our normal place in life. In contrast to this, we might refer, as Hans-Georg Gadamer does in his writings on health,[24] to the life in which a general feeling of well-being negates the question of health and carries us forward on the firm ground of a 'hidden harmony' or 'protected composure'.[25] When

we are at-home in the concealment of our good health, when we are functioning 'in our element,' Gadamer finds that 'we are open to new things, ready to embark on new enterprises' and in our forgetfulness of ourselves; we 'scarcely notice the demands and strains which are put on us.' 'This is what health is,' for Gadamer.[26] This is also for him the paradigmatic sense of being-at-home.[27] If for Gadamer home and health are a reflection of 'internal balance and equilibrium' and every loss of equilibrium promotes 'the search for a new point of stability,' nevertheless, it should come as no surprise that he would hold that 'in the vast technical structure of our civilization, we are all patients', all a little out of balance, that is. As Gadamer explains:

> Our personal existence is clearly something which is every-where denied and yet it is also something which is always involved in the attempt to regain that balance which we need for ourselves, for our lived environment, and for the feeling of being at home in the world.[28]

For Gadamer, the effort to regain our balance and equilibrium 'permanently confronts us' with the 'concrete task' of having to '(continually sustain) our own internal balance within a larger social whole, which requires both cooperation and participation'.[29] It also involves for him the capacity to listen, to be open to the realization that 'the other may not only have a right but may actually be right, may understand something better than we do'.[30]

This resonates with the thought of Henry David Thoreau. Thoreau's 'postmodern sensibility' lies in his sense of the importance of exposure to wildness, as a way to maximize opportunities for disorientation. Thoreau's message is a call to vigilance, to 'live deliberately' in relation to the situations we have created for ourselves, and to question the point of our societal structures, especially those that sustain social and intellectual conformities. Thoreau's writing urges us to seek out the unfamiliar in all we take for granted, to embrace the 'setting of surprise' as a site of wonder. But even here we encounter a search for balance in the tension between home and wild, between comfort and estrangement. The impetus to question conformity is clearly a call to self-fashioning, one that seeks after new ways of relating to ourselves, to others, and to our surroundings. Thoreau sees the necessity for refinements in our attunement to the ever-shifting fields of human experience.[31] But he values as well a

healthy tension between the call of the wild and the cautions of deliberation, attunement and domestication. Once again we see evidence of an ongoing dialectic/dialogue between immanence and transcendence (staying within and passing beyond). Here, following Iris Young, we might say we face the limits of our 'nostalgic longing for an impossible security and comfort' and must wrestle continuously with the complexities inherent in our ideal of home. For a while we might be tempted by the fantasy of a 'settled, safe, affirmative, and bounded identity', we are always creatively engaged in the dynamic cultivation of our identity. If we idealize home as the grounding support for 'a bounded and secure identity,' sooner or later we recognize it can only provide support for 'personal and collective identity in a more fluid and material sense'.[32] We need a sense of home that sustains equilibrium and balance, not sameness, if only because the creative demands of dynamic cultivation require us to ground our identity in things, people and places whose meanings change through time. We need a space of belonging in the midst of becoming.

Home as a Field of Experience

> Many of the questions of 'what you mean by home' depend upon specification of locus and extent, in what might be likened to a set of Emersonian conceptual concentric circles…. The feeling that one's home is itself really the center of a series of radiating circles of hominess becomes most apparent when we consider how one returns to a slightly different sense of 'home' from the one which one ventures forth from.
> --John Hollander[33]

Our most prevalent senses of home are often tied to specific locations. The locus of home is commonly identified with a specific living space over which we exercise or claim the right to exercise significant degrees of control. But in the context of social identity and radical displacements of large populations there is a competing tendency to trace the locus of home to a specific region of social-political identity, most often a nation or geographical concentration of ethnic heritage. In each case, the emphasis is

on access to a space with which we identify, ideally a space within which we feel a sense of belonging, relating us to a place where our existence enjoys a significant degree of acknowledgement and refuge. To be at home in this sense is to belong to a field of interrelatedness. Living in this field, we experience and acknowledge bonds of commitment, obligation and affection. The interconnections sustaining these bonds reflect our investment in a complex relational economy of concerns and attunements that lodge us within the intimate horizon of involvements we experience as the locus of our sense of home.[34]

Of course, there is plenty of relatedness and connectivity to a human life that does not find itself 'at home' in the world. We can be plenty invested in a complex relational economy of concerns, and just as easily captured within bonds of commitments, obligations and affections, without experiencing the privilege of being lodged within an intimate horizon of homely involvements. So what is there about the connectivity and relatedness inherent in this field of experience we associate with home space that makes these elements central to the special place of intimate involvements we identify with our sense of home? Establishing how connectivity and relatedness are central to our sense of home will provide a basis for expanding the range of contexts and places increasingly associated with the space of home. This in turn may help us comprehend the prevalence of homelessness in the lives of so many people who live in a room or space of their own with a roof over their heads.

In rethinking the concept of home to cover a broader range of human experiences, we should take care to separate physical space from home space. The space of home is a life world space, not a geometrical space. As a field of intimate involvements, home gives context and orientation to our unfolding life by establishing and sustaining an openness that invites, gathers and assimilates us to relational elements upon which so much of the meaningful character of our life depends. When this gathering orientation is lacking in our life, we are struck with a sense of homelessness, perhaps also a longing for home, and where the gathering orientation eludes us, we seek to escape from our sense of disorientation by fleeing into a preoccupation with other matters in our life. What is this 'field of experience' we can rightfully call home?

Placement and Displacement

> 'Being home' refers to a place where one lives within familiar, safe, protected boundaries; 'not being home' is a matter of realizing that home was an illusion of coherence and safety based on the exclusion of specific histories of oppression and resistance, the repression of differences even within oneself.
> --Biddy Martin and Chandra Mohanty[35]

The philosophical problematic of home opens onto a field of discovery. In our exposure to discovery, we risk displacement from the seductive constructions of home reflected in our longing for 'spaces of safety and withdrawal'.[36] We gravitate from a sense of home as a conceptual/spiritual space of unity/integrity (offering up comforting horizons of safety and security), and the collateral sense of a well-ordered/welcoming/dependable space of family unity held in orbit by the warm attraction of the cosy hearth, over to a sense of home as a space of internal divisions, strategic alliances, re-negotiated boundaries, and ongoing struggles of identity formation. But what is the meaning of this decentring negotiation of home as a locus of discovery? What is the meaning of this shift of emphasis from security to openness? What is this sense of home as a place of shifting amplitudes and transfigurations of goals, aspirations, expectations, commitments, resistances and overcomings? Is there no remainder to the centring location of home? Or can we still lay claim to a residual sense of home as the locus of 'withdrawal, resistance, and preparation' for the battles and challenges of everyday life?[37] In recognizing the ongoing dynamic of placement and displacement, what happens to our sense of home as a place to reclaim our identity, integrity and dignity? Can we salvage a hybrid sense of home that would reflect the ongoing tensions between building up and tearing down? Such a hybrid would displace our familiar concept of home (as a conceptual-spiritual space of integrity lodged safely behind boundary walls) and locate home at the nexus of identity/difference dynamics. The effort to re-signify home along postmodern lines follows swiftly on the heels of efforts to lodge identity-formation in the facticity of contestation.

For Bonnie Honig, human subjectivities develop and evolve in relation to a dynamic interplay of personal, family, social, cultural, and trans-cultural 'boundaries and categories'. Subjectivities form and evolve as makeshift coalitions born out of intra-subjective as well as inter-subjective negotiations, alliances, and contestations, and often straddling the boundaries of inner and outer. These boundaries and categories aim 'to define and contain' our subjectivity. But the active/passive dynamic implicated in the ongoing production of our subjective constitution, working in combination with social factors of interaction, cuts through any privilege we might afford a subject-centred mode of analysis. Honig draws attention to some of these factors in her analysis of the 'orchestrating' function of 'political and moral projects of ordering subjects, institutions, and values':

> Human beings are constituted as subjects not just by their own groups but *also against* them, as well as by and against multiple and often incommensurable groups, and by and against meta-narratives of rationality, gender, citizenship, and sexuality that are larger than any single community or nation-state. The subjects formed by and against all these processes are constituted by multiple and often incommensurable identities and differences.[38]

Honig's analysis of decentred subjectivity reveals people 'riven by plural, incommensurable identities and differences' who must 'continually renegotiate their boundaries and affiliations with the nations, communities, groups, networks, discourses, and ideologies that partly constitute them and enable their agency'.[39] Human subjectivity is an open system of loose-fitting alliances comprising values and commitments embroiled in tribal contestation. My subjectivity is not 'already formed' by the time I engage in commensurabilities. Instead, these 'inescapable conflicts' and 'ineradicable resistances' continue to 'cross-cut the formation of subjectivity itself, forming and shaping "differences" that trouble and resist identity from within.' Honig draws a striking implication for concepts of home. If we accept that resistance, adjustment and negotiation are basic elements of subjective constitution, we should 'give up on the dream of a place called home' if by home we mean

[…]a place free of power, conflict, and struggle, a place – an identity, a private realm, a form of life, a group vision – unmarked or unriven by difference and untouched by the power brought to bear upon it by the identities that strive to ground themselves in its place.[40]

The conceptual geography of home takes on a new complexity when we factor in Honig's notion of 'dilemmatic spaces'. Honig analyses the commonly understood notion of dilemmas, calling them 'situations in which two values, obligations, or commitments conflict and there is no right thing to do'.[41] She finds a direct correlation with the common tendency in social/political/ethical theory to think of dilemmas as 'the spectral bearers of fragmentation from which unitary subjects must be protected.' Taken together, these two notions implicate the traditional concept of home as a space of safety and withdrawal. But daily life is 'mired in dilemmatic choices and negotiations,' and such choices and negotiations are not discrete events, but spaces 'which both constitute us and form the terrain of our existence'.[42] Subjective constitution unfolds 'on conflictual axes of identity/difference' within a space 'where difference looms as incoherence and engenders unending and never quite mastered struggles of resistance, adjustment, and negotiation'.[43] These spaces cut across our home-life with varying intensity and gravity arising as 'eventful eruptions of a turbulence that is always already there,' and reflecting 'the periodic crystallizations of incoherencies and conflicts' that are always operating, most often implicitly, 'in social orders and their subjects.' By conceiving dilemmas as spaces of ungovernable 'undecidability', Honig challenges the common notion that whenever possible, one should 'withdraw from dilemmas for the sake of their integrity'. Her notion of a pervasive 'dilemmatic space' recognizes the resistance factor at work in all dilemmas ('resistance to ordinary rule-governance'), which enable dilemmas

to serve as a site from which to interrogate and perhaps even to transcend the very decidable ordinary rules and cultural constructions that support and stabilize conventional gender differences [and role-expectations], value pluralism, agentic integrity [including the 'safe spaces of predictability and order' this affords a moral subject], and the construction of 'homes' as spaces of safety and withdrawal from the tumult of politics.[44]

But what does it mean to 'transcend the construction of homes' that promise us calm respite from the 'tragic' challenges of ongoing negotiation, conflict, struggle, and 'radical undecidability' inherent in all moral experience? What remains of our concept of home if we transcend the concept of home as 'only occasionally interrupted by the exceptional, tragic incursion of undecidability' and adopt the concept of home as a living site of tragic undecidability?[45] Can we re-signify home on the axis of identity/difference? Once we recast home in 'coalitional' terms as 'a differentiated site of necessary, nurturing, but also strategic, conflicted, and temporary alliances,' how can we ever hope to ground our concept of home?[46]

Honig's re-signified home becomes a 'differentiated site of coalitional partnerships' born out of mutual dependencies, ruled by 'temporary alliances,' and producing 'a set of relations marked simultaneously by rage, struggle, mutuality, and debt.' Here, in the lap of embracing estrangement, *'life itself is at stake'*.[47]

If Honig is on the right track, we cannot eliminate difference or conflict from identity. We often presume we can, and we bank on this when we configure our sense of home by analogy to the womb. But, as Honig points out, 'the traditional figuration of the womb as a site free of difference, conflict, and struggle' is every bit as fanciful as 'the perfect, homeful bliss with which the mother-child dyad is conventionally viewed'.[48] She reminds us of how the biological relation of mother and foetus is 'a series of genetic conflicts, a set of struggles over the resources needed for survival.' Clearly the womb is a coalitional space; still quite literally a home in which mutual dependencies and internal differences 'cross-cut and inhabit each other, cooperating with and waging war against each other in a perpetual motion of mutuality, engagement, and struggle'.[49]

The danger of holding to the traditional dream of home as a 'well-ordered and welcoming place' turns on our will to preserve integrity by means of a centring move, or detachment/withdrawal from difference/Otherness. This radical transfiguration of home becomes a danger when it 'engenders zealotry, [or] the will to bring the dream of unitariness [as] home into being,' or when it 'leads the subject to project its internal differences onto external Others and then to rage against them for standing in

the way of its dream'.[50] And just like that, the emphasis on grounding our sense of home confronts the challenge of resisting assimilation to concepts of home that rely on 'positing spaces of freedom which […] inevitably mask someone else's servitude'.[51] The danger arises when we tie our sense of home to a 'space of identity' whose existence depends on 'the displacement, conquest, or conversion of the difference and Otherness that relentlessly intrude upon us.' Honig draws a sharp analogy to the international scope of home/identity to set a context for her collateral analysis of our 'cross-cutting intra- and inter-subjective' yearnings for home:

> The social dimensions of the self's formation as a subject-citizen require and generate an openness to its continual re-negotiation of its boundaries and affiliations in relation to a variety of (often incommensurable) groups, networks, discourses and ideologies both within its 'home' state and abroad.[52]

An ethic of home that remains vigilantly 'responsive to the ineliminability of conflict, incommensurability and difference from the human condition' privileges the decentred moment of subjectivity as a source of vital new energies and freedoms, despite the subtle and tragic proportions requiring renegotiation of our coalitional partnerships. This view engages and challenges traditional seductions of home[53] by conceiving home sites as a tangle of distinct and variable relations of power and points of resistance,[54] and by recognizing the interplay of identity/difference 'in which one is always already entangled in the forces one opposes'.[55] The political challenge is to press 'claims of justice, fairness, fidelity, and ethicality on behalf of the kinds of differences to which social democratic regimes tend to become deaf in their eagerness to administer to represented identities that are established, stable, and familiar.' In the process, we gain distance from two dominant social propensities with regard to conflict (namely, a tendency to withdraw from conflict and disorder from the desire to retreat into the safe, secure comforts of home, and a counter tendency to conquer conflict and disorder from an eagerness to preserve our integrity and identity).[56]

Relations of Power and Relational Being

To resignify home as a differentiated site of coalition and to accept the impossibility of the conventional home's promised safety from conflict, dilemmas, and difference is not to reject home but to recover it for the sake of an alternative, future practice of politics. The recovery does, however, admit and embrace a vulnerability that may look like homelessness….

--Bonnie Honig[57]

In effect, we are speaking of the two distinct relationships of power emphasized by Michel Foucault in his writings and interviews on 'care for the self'.[58] Foucault's position distinguishes between 'practices of domination' and 'practices of liberty' while focusing on the on-going constitution and renegotiation of 'games of truth' and 'practices of power' (the 'strategic games […] by which individuals try to conduct, to determine the behaviour of others'.)[59] Practices of domination seek to close down the potential for reversibility, as when we make a child 'subject to the arbitrary and useless authority of a teacher, or put a student under the power of an abusively authoritarian professor'.[60] Foucault values the strategic relationships of power that encourage us to play with 'the minimum of domination'. Yet, he recognizes it is 'free individuals who try to control, to determine, to delimit the liberty of others'. In a complex society like ours, where the games for determining behaviour are dynamic and numerous, we find 'a great temptation to determine the conduct of others'. Foucault considers this central to understanding the dynamic of these games:

The more people are free in respect to each other, the greater the temptation on both sides to determine the conduct of others. The more open the game, the more attractive and fascinating it is. […] Philosophy [he goes on to assert] is precisely the challenging of all phenomena of domination at whatever level or under whatever form they present themselves – political, economic, sexual, institutional, and so on.[61]

In setting out to conquer conflicts, it is tempting to re-establish order by masking displacements. To accept the challenge of negotiating and re-negotiating our boundaries and alliances, to accept struggle (and the relative freedoms entailed by

this), we open ourselves to interruptions in our schemas of expectation – disruptions outstripping the scope of our schemas of familiarity. We also expose ourselves to elements of relational belonging, and perhaps become more sensitive to the subtle movements and shifting influences impacting our ever-provisional stratifications of home: the geology and climate, the erosions and sediments, the interruptions and displacements, the hospitality and exposure.[62]

The philosophical problematic of home promises to draw us further into the uncanny and exilic dimensions of home and identity. Even so, increased attunement to the stabilizing/destabilizing interplay of inner/outer boundaries and centred/decentred subjectivities offers nourishment to the 'promising ambivalence' of identity/difference relations and amplifies our receptivity to intra- and inter-subjective dimensions of human contestation.[63] Drawing these concerns into a context of philosophical openness enhances possibilities for translating personal issues and concerns into reflections on the relational dynamics of identity/difference, home/exile, place/non-place and security/insecurity.

How we come to have a sense of place in life, to be at home with ourselves and our surroundings, and the extent to which we can sustain this against the tides of change and contestation that stretch and wash over the boundaries and categories which aim to contain us, opens up a rich domain of philosophical reflection with respect to themes and concepts of home and identity. The urgency with which we engage these reflections will reflect the restlessness, discontent or unhappiness in our life. But also, it will reflect the extent to which we are open to engaging critical engagements with the defining and constraining concepts of home and identity that give shape and focus to determinations of meaning and sense in our life. Clearly, the dominant meta-narratives of 'home' and 'identity' drop a serious weight on our life, and a great deal of frustration and turbulence results from ill-considered attempts to find our way home in life or to preserve our integrity in the face of life's complexities. By directing careful attention to the boundary zones of home-identity, one can learn to bring reflection, creativity, and wonder to bear on the never-ending search for home.[64]

Bibliography

Angelou, Maya 1998, A House Can Hurt, a Home Can Heal, in *Even the Stars Look Lonesome.* New York: Bantam.

Bennett, Jane 1994, *Thoreau's Nature: Ethics, politics and the wild*. Thousand Oaks, CA: Sage Publications.

Bulkin, Ely, Pratt, Minnie Bruce, and Smith, Barbara 1984/1988, *Yours in Struggle: Three Feminist Perspectives on Anti-Semitism and Racism*. Ithaca, NY: Long Haul Press/Firebrand Books, pp. 11–63.

Butler, Judith 1996, Universality in Culture, in Martha Nussbaum (ed.) *For Love of Country: Debating the Limits of Patriotism.* Boston: Beacon Press, pp. 45–52.

Deleuze, Gilles and Guattari, Félix 1987, *A Thousand Plateaus*. Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press.

Deleuze, Gilles and Guattari, Félix 1994, *What is Philosophy?* New York: Columbia University Press.

Douglas, Mary 1993. The Idea of a Home: A Kind of Space, in Arlen Mack (ed.). *Home.* New York: New York University Press.

Evernden, Neil 1985. *The Natural Alien: Humankind and Environment.* Toronto: University of Toronto Press.

Foucault, Michel 1988, The Ethic of Care for the Self as a Practice of Freedom: an Interview with Michel Foucault on January 20, 1984, in *The Final Foucault.* J. Bernauer and D. Rasmussen (eds.). Cambridge MA: MIT Press, 1–20.

Gadamer, Hans-Georg 1996*, The Enigma of Health*. Stanford, CA: Stanford University Press.

Haughton, L. Rosemary 1986, Hospitality: Home as the Integration of Privacy and Community, in Rouner 1996, pp. 204–216.

Hollander, John 1993, It All Depends, in Arlen Mack (ed.) *Home*. New York: New York University, pp. 36–37.

Honig, Bonnie 1994, Difference, Dilemmas, and the Politics of Home, *Social Research,* 61(3), pp. 563-97.

hooks, bell 1990, Homeplace: A Site of Resistance, in *Yearning: Race, Gender, and Cultural Politics.* Boston: South End Press, pp. 41-49.

Jackson, John Brinckerhoff 1994, *A Sense of Place, A Sense of Time.* New Haven: Yale University Press.

Kaplan, Caren 1987, Deterritorializations: The Rewriting of Home and Exile in Western Feminist Discourse, *Cultural Critique* 6 (Spring 1987), pp. 187–198.

Kohàk, Erazim 1996, Of Dwelling and Wayfaring: A Quest for Metaphors, in Rouner 1996, pp. 36–45.

Lauretis de, Theresa 1994/1990, Eccentric Subjects: Feminist Theory and Historical Consciousness, in *Feminist Studies* 16(1), pp. 115-50.

Martin, Biddy and Mohanty, Chandra 1986, Feminist Politics: What's Home Got to Do with It?, in Theresa de Lauretis, (ed.), *Feminist Studies/Critical Studies.* Bloomington, IN: Indiana University Press, pp. 191–212.

Merleau-Ponty, Maurice 1968, *The Visible and the Invisible*. Evanston, IL: Northwestern University Press.

Nietzsche, Friedrich 1995/1874, Schopenhauer as Educator, in *Unfashionable Observations.* Stanford, CA: Stanford University Press.

Nietzsche, Friedrich 1974/1887, *The Gay Science*, Walter Kaufmann (trans.). New York: Vintage Books.

Nietzsche, Friedrich 1886, 'Preface' to the second edition, in *Human, All Too Human.* Cambridge: Cambridge University Press.

Platt, Katherine 1996, Places of Experience and the Experience of Place, in Rouner 1996, pp. 112–127.

Pratt, Minnie Bruce 1984, Identity: Skin Blood Heart, in E. Bulkin, M. B. Pratt and B. Smith, *Yours in Struggle: Three Feminist Perspectives on Anti-Semitism and Racism.* Ithaca, NY: Long Haul Press/Firebrand Books, pp. 11–63.

Reagon, Bernice Johnson 1983, Coalition Politics: Turning the Century, in B. Smith. (Ed.), *Home Girls: A Black Feminist Anthology.* New York: Kitchen Table: Women of Color Press, pp. 356–68.

Rich, Adrienne 1983, In the Wake of Home, in *Your Native Land, Your Life*. New York: W. W. Norton, pp. 56–60.

Robbins, Bruce 1993, *Secular Vocations: Intellectuals, Professionalism, Culture*. New York: Verso. The quotation is from Honig (1994), p. 588.

Rouner, Leroy 1996, *The Longing For Home.* Notre Dame, IN: Notre Dame University Press.

Rushdie, Salman 1991, *Imaginary Homelands*. London: Granta, p. 12.

Rushdie, Salman 2002, The Wizard of Oz, in *Stepping Across This Line: Collected Nonfiction 1992-2002*. New York: Random House.

Rybczynski, Witold 1986, *Home: A Short History of an Idea*. New York: Penguin Books, pp. 1–13.

Tuedio, James A. 2002, Thinking About Home: An Opening for Discovery in Philosophical Practice, in H. Herrestad, A. Holt and H. Svare (eds.), *Philosophy in Society*. Oslo: Unipub Forlag, pp. 201–215.

Wyschogrod, Edith 1996, Dwellers, Migrants, Nomads: Home in the Age of the Refugee, in Rouner 1996, p. 187-203.

Young, Iris Marion 1997, House and Home, in *Intersecting Voices*. Princeton, NJ: Princeton University Press, pp. 134–164.

[1] Kohàk 1996.

[2] I use the familiar voice ('we') rather than the informal voice ('one') throughout this discussion, recognizing that I cannot possibly speak for 'all' or 'anyone'; nor do I mean to extend my comments beyond the context of home-life saturating EuroAmerican socio-cultural lives, as if to include reference to all cultural and personal relations implicating a sense of home. On the other hand, I do not intend simply to reference those who share an affinity for my analysis of home, either. The scope of my familiar voice aims to cover the full range of experiences of home harboured in EuroAmerican socio-cultural life. But there are interesting and very compatible discussions of 'home-life' utilizing other socio-cultural contexts to illustrate dynamics of home reflective of my discussion. See, for instance, Katherine Platt's examples of 'home' in Middle Eastern cultures, especially for Iranian women of Doshman Ziari and Palestinians displaced from their land in 1948, in 'Places of Experience and the Experience of Place' (Platt 1996). In this respect, I am referencing the 'we' of intersecting voices (cf. Young 1997).

[3] Wyschogrod 1996, p.188.

[4] Rushdie 2002.

[5] Rushdie 1991, p. 12.

[6] The notions of territorialization, deterritorialization and reterritorialization are developed in the writings of Gilles Deleuze and Félix Guattari 1987 and 1994. Compare to Iris Marion Young 1997.

[7] Maya Angelou 1998, p. 9.

[8] Ibid. 9–10.

[9] See bell hooks 1990.

[10] This theme is developed with considerable insight in Young 1997.

[11] See Merleau-Ponty 1968.

[12] Young 1997, p. 154.

[13] See Rybczynski 1986.

[14] Young 1997, p. 141.

[15] Ibid. 149.

[16] Ibid.

[17] Ibid. 153.

[18] Ibid.

[19] See Foucault 1984. See also bel hooks 1990. See Rich 1993, for a poetic response to this appealing concept of home as a site of self-recovery and safety.

[20] Young 1997, p. 164.

[21] Ibid. 161–163.

[22] Nietzsche 1974/1887, p. 338.

[23] This point is developed insightfully by Rybczynski 1986. For a related discussion, see John Brinckerhoff Jackson 1994, especially the chapter 'The Mobile Home on the Range' where he reflects on the slow erasure (and subsequent reterritorialization) of the 'vernacular' sense of home (e.g., of home as extending into the village common).

[24] See Gadamer 1996.

[25] Ibid. 116.

[26] Ibid. 112.

[27] Ibid. 78–81.

[28] Ibid. 81.

[29] Ibid. 81

[30] Ibid. 82.

[31] See Bennett 1994.

[32] Cf. Young 1997, pp. 157–158, 164.

[33] Hollander, John 1993, pp. 36–37.

[34] This sense of home parallels Neil Evernden's discussion of the self as a "field of care" in *The Natural Alien* (Evernden 1985). See pages 74-76 and 118-22. Evernden's discussion traces back to Martin Heidegger's analysis of Dasein's worldhood and fundamental homelessness in *Being and Time* (New York: Harper & Row, 1962).

[35] Martin and Mohanty, 1986, p. 196.

[36] Honig 1994, p. 570.

[37] Ibid. 583–589. Cf. bell hooks 1990.

[38] Honig 1994, p. 565.

[39] Ibid. 566.

[40] Ibid. 567.

[41] Ibid. 568. See pp. 568–70 for Honig's discussion of 'dilemmatic spaces' and pp. 579–589 for a careful application of this discussion to her analysis of home. More tentative discussions along these lines can be found in several classic writings in the cultural/feminist/critical studies movement. See Martin and Mohanty 1986, pp. 191–212; Minnie Bruce Pratt 1984, pp. 11–63; Kaplan 1987, pp. 187–198; Reagon 1983, pp. 356–68.

[42] Honig 1994. Compare to Douglas 1993, a broad collection of home writings. For a discussion of this theme in terms of displacement see Platt 1996, pp. 112–127.

[43] Honig 1994, p. 569.

[44] Ibid. 570.

[45] Ibid. 573

[46] Ibid. 583, *my emphasis.*

[47] Ibid. 584–585*, my emphasis.*

[48] Ibid. 583.

[49] Ibid. 587.

[50] Ibid. 585.

[51] Ibid. 588. Cf. Robbins 1993, p. 10ff.

[52] Honig 1994, p. 589.

[53] Ibid. 570.

[54] Theresa de Lauretis in Honig 1994, p. 579.

[55] Honig 1994, p. 579.

[56] Ibid. 589.

[57] Ibid. 586.

[58] For a concise presentation of these themes, see Foucault 1988, pp. 1–20.

[59] Foucault 1988, p.18.

[60] Ibid. 18.

[61] Ibid. 20.

[62] For an interesting discussion of hospitality and exposure, see Haughton 1996, pp. 204–216.

[63] The concept of 'promising ambivalence' is derived from a short discussion with Judith Butler 1996, pp. 45–52.

[64] In framing this discussion of home, I am deeply indebted to Irene Klaver for drawing out the complexities of the theme and opening my eyes to so many different levels of the problematic. An earlier treatment of these issues appeared in Tuedio 2002, framed with respect to issues of method and practice in philosophical counselling.