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Who's He When He's at Home?

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WHO’S HE WHEN HE’S HOME

by

BRYAN PERRY

Under the Direction of Craig Dongoski, MFA

ABSTRACT

*Who’s He When He’s at Home?* is an attempt to explore the expressive capabilities of language and design through a consideration of philosophical and theoretical notions of *home*. It is an attempt to see how an experience planned and created using tools, techniques and technology of the design disciplines can allow understanding of such an abstract and personal concept.

INDEX WORDS Design, Graphic design, Experience, Home, Philosophy, Literature, Dwelling, Being, Experiential design, Installation design
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BRYAN PERRY

A Thesis Submitted in Partial Fulfillment of the Requirements for the Degree of

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DEDICATION

Who’s He When He’s at Home? is dedicated to my parents, Felton and Brenda Perry, and my wife, Karen Clement, without whom I would have only lived in houses.
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# TABLE OF CONTENTS

ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS ........................................................................................................... V

LIST OF FIGURES .................................................................................................................. VII

1 INTRODUCTION .................................................................................................................... 1

1.1 Why Home? ......................................................................................................................... 2

2 THE LITERATURE .................................................................................................................. 5

2.1 Martin Heidegger ................................................................................................................ 6

2.2 John Berger & Mircea Eliade ............................................................................................... 9

2.3 Gaston Bachelard ............................................................................................................... 12

2.4 John Brinkerhoff Jackson .................................................................................................. 15

2.5 Yi-Fu Tuan ......................................................................................................................... 18

3 THE EXHIBITION .................................................................................................................... 20

3.1 Title .................................................................................................................................... 20

3.2 Design ................................................................................................................................ 21

3.3 The Text Panels ............................................................................................................... 28

3.4 The Images ....................................................................................................................... 30

3.5 Sound ............................................................................................................................... 40

3.6 Title typographic treatment ............................................................................................. 41

4 CONCLUSION ....................................................................................................................... 42

WORKS CITED ...................................................................................................................... 44
LIST OF FIGURES

Figure 1 Childhood home ........................................................................................................ 3
Figure 2 Installation view #1 .................................................................................................. 22
Figure 3 Installation Detail #1 ............................................................................................... 23
Figure 4 Installation detail ..................................................................................................... 25
Figure 5 Installation detail ..................................................................................................... 27
Figure 6 Installation detail: text panels ................................................................................ 29
Figure 7 Text panel detail ...................................................................................................... 30
Figure 8 Galaxy ..................................................................................................................... 31
Figure 9 Earth ......................................................................................................................... 32
Figure 10 Birdseye view of childhood home .......................................................................... 33
Figure 11 Property marker .................................................................................................... 34
Figure 12 Tree bark ................................................................................................................ 35
Figure 13 Front door ............................................................................................................... 36
Figure 14 Living room ............................................................................................................ 37
Figure 15 Kitchen ................................................................................................................... 38
Figure 16 Bedroom ................................................................................................................ 39
Figure 17 Installation detail .................................................................................................. 40
Figure 18 Title typographic treatment .................................................................................. 41
1 INTRODUCTION

“We have to cease to think, if we refuse to do it in the prison house of language; for we cannot reach further than the doubt which asks whether the limit we see is really a limit” - Friedrich Nietzsche, *The Will to Power* (Nietzsche, Kaufmann, and Hollingdale 1968, 283)

A whole history of human thought and cognition is embedded in the above quote from Nietzsche. This history preceded his writing of *The Will to Power*, and the basic ideas of the quote have continued to influence thought and analysis of how we express, understand and, indeed, communicate. Nietzsche’s basic idea is that language is the framework through which humans make sense of the world: language is not just a means for expression, but is fundamental to all human logic and cognition. But how true is the essentialness of language in how we think and express ourselves?

Many philosophical and literary texts seem to be attempts to use language to express complex ideas that resist linguistic expression. Nietzsche himself resorted to the use of neologisms many times when he found the boundaries of German too confining. Many literary texts, too, push at the boundaries of language, attempting to communicate much more than the words on the page do alone. What is poetry’s use of figures of speech (especially metaphor) if not an attempt to express something that resists expression through the rules and logic of language? If language alone were enough to say all that we need to say, after the invention of the written word, there would be little reason for other forms of expression. The fact that we find it difficult to express everything with the written (or spoken) word has necessitated other forms of communication.

Design, like visual art, is an attempt to express ideas that are difficult or impossible to express through words alone. Advertising, of which much of graphic design is concerned,
combines imagery, text, audio, and other sensory stimuli to provide immersive communication which is difficult to achieve through words alone. Data visualization and infographics help clarify abstract numbers and other bits of information that are hard to understand through textual analysis alone. Experiential design, architecture, product design, etc. are all attempts to create experiences, enable interactions, and perform functions that are outside of the scope of language. Even the most essential of the designer’s tasks, typography, is a means of creating order and hierarchy – i.e. another layer of information – even though it directly deals with raw material of printed language.

*Who’s He When He’s at Home?* is an attempt to explore the expressive capabilities of language and design through a consideration of philosophical and theoretical notions of *home*. It is an attempt to see how an experience planned and created using tools, techniques and technology of the design disciplines can allow understanding of such an abstract and personal concept. Abstract topics available for such an exploration are as plentiful as the near-infinite number of topics philosophy has considered, but home is a fairly universal part of human experience and one that’s materiality lends itself to visual capture and analysis. It is also a topic that I have come to ponder often in recent years as aging, liminality, and various predictable – yet uncontrollable – circumstances have arisen in the lives of myself and my family.

1.1 Why Home?

The house I grew up in is on about an acre of North Carolina land surrounded by the wooded areas mostly owned by the Army Corp of Engineers. My parents purchased it when I was five or so, and although it was not the house that I was born into, it is the house in and around which many of the foundational experiences of my life revolve. It’s the house that I could
not wait to get away from as I moved into my teenage years, and it is the house in which I find much comfort upon my frequent returns.

Figure 1 Childhood home

The frequency of my home-going has increased in recent years because the Friday after Thanksgiving 2015, my father collapsed with heart failure while exercising on a trail near the college I attended as an undergraduate in my hometown of Durham, NC. A couple of nurses from the university’s hospital were just behind him on the trail and called for help. I was spending time in New Orleans when I got the call. My dad was taken to the hospital where he would spend that and several subsequent nights. I would physically spend the night hanging out on Frenchmen Street with friends, in a city that I have come to regard as a spiritual home, but my mind was trying to get back to that childhood home and to my father.
I started working for CNN in 2008 and between my start and termination dates I had acquired a new home (my first), a wife (my first), and I managed to climb my way up from low-middle management to higher-middle management. I was well-salaried, mostly interested in the projects assigned to my team, and well-regarded within the company. However, in 2013, as I was staring down my 40th birthday, I felt myself in a bit of a personal and career crisis. All these aspects of what could have been a successful and happy life were not adding up to one, so I applied to graduate school to expand my design thinking and have opportunities to consider projects outside of market pressures. I planned to continue working for CNN while pursuing my Masters of Fine Arts degree, a plan that only worked until the summer after my first year in the program when I was among several senior creative staff laid off to free up payroll.

Starting my second of three years in the MFA program, I was out of work with little likelihood of being able to find a new job that would allow me the leeway to continue school. A panic lasted for a few weeks that ended when discussions with my wife led us to the decision for me to focus on grad school and freelance work for my remaining two years in the program. While being in school is necessarily a transitional experience, the decision I made to continue school at risk to my career and finances, at 41-years old, added degrees of complexity to that liminality. Although I had considered family and home in previous graduate school projects, I found myself frequently mulling the theme in the wake of the family and personal tribulations I had recently faced.

The home I once tried so hard to flee when I was younger beckons – not just because of my father’s health, and my career indeterminacy, but also because it seems that to understand home means to gain a better understanding of myself – where I have been, where I am, and where I may be going. The place where I grew up doesn’t really exist any longer. Time and space
are entangled such that any change in one necessarily creates change in the other. The travails of growing older have worn a nostalgia-tinted patina on the memory of that place. The night I received the call of my father’s collapse, I found myself in the city in which I imagine a future life, a future home, but being beckoned to the home where my journey started. I found myself caught in a present bracketed by past and future.

*Who’s He When He’s at Home*, in addition to being an exploration of that expressive boundaries of various visual communications, is also my attempt to come to an understanding of how home functions. What is it about *home* as place that makes it distinct? How does it function in memory? What role does it play in the foundation of our identities? Are there cosmic and spiritual issues to consider?

In order to get started in my research I looked to “the literature” like I have done so many times throughout my life, so I begin with a review of the pertinent literature about home. I then provide a detailed description and analysis of the gallery installation, its structure and imagery. Finally, I have some concluding remarks about things learned along the way, design and personal, including many questions and possibilities for future exploration that have arisen over the project’s course.

2 THE LITERATURE

“Philosophy is really homesickness, the urge to be at home everywhere.” – Novalis (Berger 1984, 54)

Home is unique space, mental and physical, that holds special significance for humans. Our emotional and psychological attachments, along with logistical and utilitarian aspects, imbue home with an importance that few other “spaces” have. Because of the specialness of home, much has been written in philosophical and literary texts about its meaning as well as its various
cosmic, poetic, and experiential aspects. I attempt below to provide a brief summary and analysis of some of the ideas about home. I do not pretend that the collection of ideas to be exhaustive, rather they are simply the ones that resonated and proved helpful in thinking through the questions I have about home.

2.1 Martin Heidegger

For much of his career after World War II, Martin Heidegger concerned himself with two notions: 1) *dwelling*, 2) the *fourfold*. In his pre-war writings, epitomized by his most famous work *Being and Time*, he was concerned with how temporality affected human existence on a consciousness level. After the war, in the midst of a housing shortage, his concern with temporality was pushed to the background and he began to explore human spatial existence through an exploration of the notion of dwelling.

In his most famous lecture on the subject, “Building Dwelling Thinking”, he immediately relates dwelling to the concrete when he posits two questions he will explore in the lecture: “1) What is it to dwell?”; “2) How does building belong to dwelling?” (Heidegger and Krell 1993, 347) In the way the second question is posed, we can already discern the agenda at hand: building doesn’t precede dwelling, but rather is a part of dwelling: “For building is not merely a means and a way toward dwelling – to build is in itself already to dwell.” (Heidegger and Krell 1993, 348)

In the lecture, Heidegger provides an etymology of *bauen*, the German word for “to build”, that traces its origin back to the Old High German word *buan* meaning “to dwell” – to remain, to stay in place. (Ibid.) Here he shows how, through simple etymology, that the notions of building and dwelling are linguistically linked. But he pushes that connection further in
showing how the German word *bin*, “to be”, can also be traced back to *bauen* (“to build”) and thus further back to *buan* (“to dwell”). In this etymological turn, being, building and dwelling are all connected and one in the same. (Wheeler 2016) To build is to dwell and to dwell is be. Thus we can see the how Heidegger arrives at the importance of dwelling in his later philosophy: dwelling is the Being of humans on the earth: “The way in which you are and I am, the manner in which humans are on the earth, is buan, dwelling.” (Heidegger and Krell 1993, 349)

To know that dwelling is essentially being and building, and vice versa, is one thing – but what is the nature of dwelling. Toward defining this nature, Heidegger states “The fundamental character of dwelling is … sparing.” (Wheeler 2016) By sparing, he means “when we leave something beforehand in its own essence … when we ‘free’ it in the proper sense of the word into a preserve of peace.” (Ibid.) In making this association between dwelling and sparing, Heidegger takes us into the way in which humans relate to the natural world, which gets us to his notion of the *fourfold* that is at the heart of dwelling.

The *fourfold* is comprised of “earth and sky, divinities and mortals,” (Ibid.) and the location of dwelling is where the fourfold is manifest. “Earth is the serving bearer … spreading out in rock and water, rising up into plant and animal.” (Heidegger and Krell 1993, 351) Earth is thus the natural terrestrial world. “The sky is the vaulting path of the sun… the year’s seasons and their changes… the drifting clouds and the blue depth of ether.” (Ibid.) The sky is the natural celestial world. However, we must not think of this natural world posited by Heidegger as two parts of the *fourfold* as a scientific notion, but rather a poetic one. As Michael Wheeler states:

“What Heidegger's language here indicates is that the earth-as-dwelt-on and the sky-as-dwelt-under are spaces for a mode of habitation by human beings that one might call poetic rather than scientific. So, the nature of dwelling is the nature of the poet. In dwelling we inhabit the poetic.” (Wheeler 2016)
Of the other two parts of the fourfold, divinities and mortals, Heidegger continues, “the divinities are the beckoning messengers of the godhead… the god appears in his presence or withdraws into concealment.” And the mortals are “the human beings. They are called mortals because they can die. To die means to be capable of death as death.” (Heidegger and Krell 1993, 351-352) Of all four parts of the fourfold, he states when we are thinking of any one that we are already thinking of the other three, “but we give no thought to the simple oneness of the four.” (Ibid.) Mortals, human beings, play a special role “in the way they safeguard the fourfold in its essential unfolding. Accordingly, the safeguarding that dwells is fourfold.” (Ibid.)

Heidegger goes on to state, at the end of the first section of the lecture, “Dwelling, inasmuch as it keeps the fourfold in things, is, as this keeping, a building.” (Heidegger and Krell 1993, 353) Building and dwelling are essentially the same. In building/dwelling mortals are safeguarding the fourfold, and in so doing, they are sparing and freeing the essence of the constituent parts of the fourfold, including mortals themselves. Freeing ourselves to our own essence is the realizing that our existence, “Being on the earth”, is finite. That death comes and is essential to being mortal. Dwelling involves, among other things, freeing ourselves to the destiny of death: to dwell means to recognize that you will die.

But where does this dwelling occur? It occurs in places and things created, or built, such that they allow “a space into which earth and sky, divinities and mortals are admitted.” (Heidegger and Krell 1993, 357) Dwelling occurs in “things.” Toward an explanation of this notion of dwelling and building’s relationship to things, Heidegger posits the notion of a bridge across a stream. The bridge connects one side with the other over the running stream (the earth), and it allows mortals to pass from one side to the other. The piers, upon which the bridge’s arches are supported, are rooted in the bedrock (earth) and reaches skyward toward the divinities.
In this way, the thing that is a bridge allows for the admission of the *fourfold* and in so doing creates a space for dwelling. (Heidegger and Krell 1993, 354-355) “To say that mortals *are* is to say that in *dwelling* they persist through spaces by virtue of their stay among things and locales… The relationship between man and space is none other than dwelling, thought essentially.” (Heidegger and Krell 1993, 359)

### 2.2 John Berger & Mircea Eliade

Much of John Berger’s *And Our Faces, My Heart, Brief as Photos* is a meditation on the ways *home* has been affected by the social, political, and economic currents of the 20th century. The section about home/space in the essay is influenced by Martin Heidegger’s ideas around “dwelling” and Mircea Eliade’s thoughts about the cosmology of home.

Berger begins by stating that the twentieth century has been an age of displacement. One in which many people have been forced from their homes either by the muzzle of a gun, or the forces of capitalism. (Berger 1984, 55) We know much of the former through news reports of refugee crises caused by war or famine, but of the latter he states: “That industrialization and capitalism would require such a transport of men on an unprecedented scale and with a new kind of violence was already prophesied by the opening of the slave trade in the sixteenth century.” (Berger 1984, 55) For Berger, although the forces of capitalism create opportunity, and thus a decision, for the individual, there is still an implied violence when any system forces one to uproot themselves from their home. This negative side effect of modern culture should be lamented and resisted, where and when possible.

Berger traces the etymology of *home* to the Old Norse *Heimr*, German *heim*, and Greek *kömi*, meaning “village.” (Ibid.), but states that the term has been taken over by two types of
moralists: 1) those of the domestic sort that value protection of property that includes, among other things, the women of the family; 2) those of the patriotic sort for which homeland is the root of propaganda that coerces the many to do the bidding of the powerful few. (Ibid.) Both of these moralistic views of home hide the fact that the word originally meant “the center of the world” in an ontological, if not geographical, sense. As Mircea Eliade posits, home is “at the heart of the real.” (Ibid.) Home, for Eliade is where the two life lines intersect: the vertical one that extends from the sky to the underworld, and the horizontal one that indicates all possible terrestrial journeys. In being the “heart of the real” and “center of the world,” home is opposed to that which is not at the center: chaos, the unreal, the absurd. That which is “real” is home, and that which is not is unreal and threatening. To be without a home is to be not only without shelter, but indeed to not be at all because you are abandoned into the unreal. (Berger 1984, 56)

In being the center and “the heart of the real”, Berger is adding description and details to Heidegger’s notion of the fourfold previously discussed. The intersecting vertical and horizontal lifelines become visual descriptors of similar concepts as the fourfold. These lines are the origin point of a coordinate system on which the journey of our lives can be plotted. At home is the real, out in the world there is danger, the unreal, the absurd. It is the return to home that allows us to process and make real the experiences we have outside of home.

For one to emigrate means leaving the real and venturing into the unreal or “absurd,” according to Berger. When such emigration is forced, it means being coerced into giving up the center of the world and all that is real. It becomes a forced venture into the unreal. Voluntary emigration is equally a journey into the unreal and chaos although the new situation may be favorable: “to the peasant son the father’s traditional authority may seem more oppressively absurd than any chaos. The poverty of the village may seem more absurd than the crime of the
metropolis.” (Berger 1984, 56-57) Whether voluntary or not, “to emigrate is always to dismantle the center of the world, and so to move into a lost, disoriented one of fragments.” (Berger 1984, 57)

For Berger, the displaced not only live in the unreal, or chaos, but they live in a place uprooted from the history of choices necessary to make it a home: “without a history of choice no dwelling can be a home.” (Berger 1984, 64) Home held within it a history, remembered or not, that made it the place where the “the two life lines crossed,” and through these historical choices those who dwelled in the home were stating: “this is the center of the world.” (Ibid.)

Displaced persons are those lacking the vertical life line that marks home, and instead live only on the horizontal line. In their inability to make a proper home, they turn in circles to “preserve their identity and improvise a shelter.” (Ibid.) This circle-turning and shelter improvisation is made of “habits… the raw material of repetition turned into shelter.” (Ibid.) These habits – “words, jokes, opinions, gestures, actions, even the way one wears a hat” (Ibid.) – may be tied up in physical objects and nearby spaces, but the habit itself is what protects identity and improvises home in the absence of one. For the displaced and underprivileged, these habits are a way of enacting memory, the memory of the home now gone. As Berger states, “the mortar which holds the improvised ‘home’ together– even for a child– is memory.” (Ibid.)

To the displaced and underprivileged home is not a house but is the carrying out of these habits, the exercise of memory through a set of practices. They may be forced from one shelter to another, but through these practices a permanence is found that is more solid than the one provide by a house: “Home is no longer a dwelling but the untold story of a life being lived.”
2.3 Gaston Bachelard

In the chapter “House and Universe” from Gaston Bachelard’s book *The Poetics of Space* he posits the notion that spaces such as houses and rooms are “readable” in the sense that they “are psychological diagrams that guide writers and poets in their analysis of intimacy.” (Bachelard and Jolas 1994, 38) Embedded in this notion is that close reading of a space can help discern the narrative of the intimate lives that are lived there. These intimate lives consist not only of the actions taken and rituals carried out, but also the psychological stories that unfold in a given space that leave a material trace that allows us to read and analyze.

Much of what allows for such readings of the space of a house is the dialectic created between inside and outside, between the house and the universe. What happens in houses is markedly different than what goes on outside. In speaking of a house in winter from a Baudelaire poem, Bachelard states:

“outside the occupied houses the winter cosmos is a simplified cosmos. It is a non-house in the same way that metaphysicians speak of a non-I, … The house derives reserves and refinements of intimacy from winter; while in the outside world, snow covers all tracks… The dreamer of houses knows and senses this, and because of the diminished entity of the outside world, experiences all the qualities of intimacy with increased intensity.” (Bachelard and Jolas 1994, 40-41)

The house is thus a special place of intimacy, but the levels and types of intimacy are influenced by that which is outside. The nature of the house, although defined by that which is not outside, is still dependent on what is outside. With the outside world’s detail being negated by the layer of snow, the intimacy of the house is heightened. Seasons affect the nature, psychology and poetics of the house.
But what of the “dreamer” mentioned in the previous passage? What type of being is the dreamer? Bachelard’s dreamers are the inhabitants of the house, for it is in the house where we are allowed to daydream. He quotes at length from a letter from Rilke to a musician friend where he describes being frightened of hurricanes when he is in a city house because the storm does not seem to “see” the house in the city, however, in the country “they do see a lonely house… they take in their powerful arms and, in that way they inure it.” Rilke’s reaction to the nature of the storm and house in the country is where the (day)dreamer becomes apparent: “when you are there, you would like to be out-of-doors, in the roaring garden, or at least, stand at the window and applaud the infuriated old trees that twist and turn…” (Bachelard and Jolas 1994, 42) Here the house provides the haven in which the inhabitant is allowed to daydream by projecting himself into the storm and the outside trees being battered by that storm.

This example gets us to one of the key notions Bachelard posits: houses provide the safety and intimacy to allow us to daydream. Daydreams are different from dreams. Dreams are the actions of the unconscious and are the realm mined by psychoanalysis. Daydreams, on the other hand, are the combination of imagination and memory – both conscious functions of the mind. The more a house is a sanctuary, the more likely it is to encourage daydreaming. Thus our oldest and first homes usually provide the most opportunity for the coming together of memory and imagination: “we know perfectly well that we feel calmer and more confident when in the old home… than we do in the houses on the streets we have only lived as transients.” (Bachelard and Jolas 1994, 43)

Through providing safety and encouraging daydream, houses also allow us to have the strength to confront the danger of the universe outside of the house– to indeed be an inhabitant of that cosmos as well. Bachelard states, “come what may the house helps us to say: I will be an
inhabitant of the world in spite of the world.” (Bachelard and Jolas 1994, 46-47) Houses perform functions larger than their architecture and geometry indicate and provide for: “Inhabited space transcends geometrical space.” (Bachelard and Jolas 1994, 47) In the dialectic between house and cosmos, man is made and remade, neither alone can do the job: “the cosmos molds mankind… it can transform a man of the hills into a man of the islands and rivers, and that the house remolds man.” (Ibid.)

It is mainly through the daydream possibilities of houses that man is made and remade. The contemplation, through imagination and memory, of the cosmos from the safety of home is foundational to making the subject. In this way, homes are more than their material function would indicate. Even an accurate drawn likeness of home can evince the extra-material function of home: “Daydreams return to inhabit an exact drawing and no dreamer ever remains indifferent for long to a picture of a house.” (Bachelard and Jolas 1994, 49)

In surpassing its material functions, homes also release from temporal specificity. They are allowed to live on and exercise metaphysical functions in the memory that we bring to daydreaming – “the houses that were lost forever continue to live on in us; that they insist in us in order to live again, as though they expected us to give them a supplement of living.” (Bachelard and Jolas 1994, 56) Though we likely would like to revisit life in the old houses – we didn’t day dream enough when we were there– and though facts tend to clutter up our memory of those places, they are not lost for “if we have retained an element of dream in our memories… bit by bit the house that was lost in the mists of time will appear from out of the shadow.” (Bachelard and Jolas 1994, 57) The material and geometric aspects of the house become scattered and atomized in memory. Bachelard quotes Rilke at length on this:
“I never saw this strange dwelling again. Indeed, as I see it now, the way it appeared to my child’s eye, it is not a building, but is quite dissolved and distributed inside me: here one room, there another, and here a bit of corridor which, however, does not connect the two rooms, but is conserved in me in fragmentary form. Thus the whole thing is scattered about inside me, the rooms, the stairs that descended with such ceremonious slowness, others, narrow cages that mounted in a spiral movement, in the darkness of which we advanced like the blood in our veins.” (Ibid.)

The home’s function in memory and the foundation of our subjectivity is impressionistic. The diagram of its meaning would look much different than its blueprint. “The house… is a ’psychic state,’ and even when reproduced as it appears from the outside, it bespeaks intimacy.” (Bachelard and Jolas 1994, 72)

### 2.4 John Brinkerhoff Jackson

In the chapter “Mobile Home on the Range” in his book *A Sense of Place, a Sense of Time*, John Brinckerhoff Jackson considers historical and contemporary dwellings in New Mexico. Jackson’s concern is not purely with the architectural or archaeological aspects of these homes as those approaches concentrate more on the material aspects of the home and its contents. Rather, his focus is on “how the house was used in daily life, how it was related to its working landscape.” (Jackson 1994, 53) The average home in New Mexico is “small and as works of art or architecture hardly worth close examination.” (Ibid.) They tend to be the homes of the working-class and are usually made using simple construction methods, yet they “give (the) landscape its character.” (Ibid.) The simplicity of the homes and the cheapness of their construction tells the tale of a labor force that needs to be mobile to follow economic opportunity.
A prime example of this type of simple home can be found in the Spanish-American villages scattered throughout the New Mexican landscape in the early twentieth century. They were usually situated near a stream that provided hydration for the inhabitants and irrigation for the crops that were grown. (Jackson 1994, 54) Communal land that surrounded the village was used for grazing livestock. The village was situated in such a way as to allow for the basic living necessities to be attained in a communal way. The house itself, in these settings, mainly serves for sleeping and storage of its inhabitants’ small amount of possessions. “The house was rarely associated with memorable family events: aside from religious images, it contained neither mementos of the past nor provisions for the family future.” (Jackson 1994, 57) Many of the functions of the home that we associate with middle and upper-class living were not conducted within the walls of the house. (Jackson 1994, 56) Rather, these functions were carried out in the communal spaces of the village: e.g. washing in the stream, family celebrations at the church, etc. Daily living consisted of being mostly “out”: “at every house everybody was out; being ‘out’ meant taking some part in the life of the village.” (Ibid.) The house was purely functional. Domesticity transcended the walls of the house. “Community mattered more than the house.” (Jackson 1994, 57) In this way, being home was about carrying out one’s function within the larger community.

These village houses “served as supplements to the larger, shared spaces of the community… fragments of a much more complex unit.” With much of the function of home being outsourced to the public spaces within the village, the whole village – including the house – becomes the home. The house “depended on its immediate environment for the satisfaction of daily needs.” (Ibid.) These needs were, of course of a utilitarian and psychic nature.
Skipping to modern day, “a great deal of (the) new housing in New Mexico – and for that matter throughout the whole country – consists of trailers.” (Jackson 1994, 58) Although these trailer homes are many times arranged in clusters similar to the earlier villages, the way in which the house functions within the collective has changed. The automobile has allowed for one’s labor to be located distances away from the home. Modern conveniences such as electricity and indoor plumbing mean that the trailer’s inhabitants are less dependent on the communal resources. As Jackson states, the new arrangement is less communal and more “like that of friendly but self-sufficient neighbors.” (Ibid.)

Although different from the earlier village in many ways, the trailer communities do share commonalities with the earlier mode of dwelling. “The trailer is quite small and cramped, and… fails to provide a half-way satisfactory arrangement of rooms for the family… it can never be a self-sufficient, autonomous dwelling…from its first day of occupancy it spills its contents – and occupants – into its surroundings.” (Jackson 1994, 60) Much of the private, domestic function we associate with home, must necessarily take place in the public areas of the trailer community, just as they did in the earlier Spanish-American villages. “Certain traditional relationships–between the house and the family, the house and the community, the house and the community… had changed little at all.” (Jackson 1994, 63-64)

However, unlike the houses of these earlier villages “the trailer has no real attachment to place.” They are, by definition, mobile, and usually built of cheap materials that are easily destroyed by fire or wind. They are usually acquired or occupied with a notion of impermanence and transience. Even with these seemingly negative attributes, the trailer does offer newness, convenience and comfortability to its occupants. It also offers the promise of consistent experience as one moves from one trailer to the next. When moving between trailers there is “no
change or expansion in the traditional domestic routine.” (Jackson 1994, 62) The impermanence of the trailer, and the ease of leaving and moving to a new one, also affords the mobility needed by inhabitants to follow economic opportunity where it leads. In essence, the trailer is a practical home for occupants who have not the time or resources to deal with impracticality.

Although offering comfort and amenities not available in the earlier village houses, the spatial configuration of trailers still does not accommodate daily functioning in the way that middle to upper-class homes do. “The garage serves as a storage room, then becomes a workshop. The kitchen is where we watch television and cook and eat; the dining room… is for homework.” (Jackson 1994, 65) The trailer, or working-class house, “has been largely immune to the appeal of mono functional space.” (Ibid.) The trailer’s inhabitants adapt its space to their needs as they see fit.

Jackson calls such concept of space vernacular: “a space has no inherent identity, it is simply defined but the way it is used.” (Ibid.) The space of the vernacular home lacks pretense found in higher-class dwellings. It serves “as a refuge from the workaday world, a place for rituals of privacy, not for the pursuit of influence and power.” As stated before, such a dwelling necessarily “delegates as many functions as it can to the public realm” (Jackson 1994, 66) and in this way it negates the traditional autonomy afforded to home by instead achieving “completeness by relating to its environment.” (Jackson 1994, 67)

2.5 Yi-Fu Tuan

Although only hinting at direct notions of home, Yi-Fu Tuan’s Space and Place: The Perspective of Experience has much to offer our considerations of home. At the beginning of the book he states, “Place is security, space is freedom: we are attached to one and long for the
other.” (Tuan 1977, 3) Home is a place, in Tuan’s paradigm, where we belong and to which we are attached. Space shares much in common with Berger and Eliade’s notions of the chaos of the world outside of the home, except formulated in Tuan’s terms it takes on a less menacing aspect and becomes freedom. For Tuan, space is where we go to have experiences and place is where we come to process those experiences and develop as humans. The home is the base from which one leaves to experience the world and to which they return to make meaning from those experiences.

But what is the nature of places such as home? What sets them apart from other parts of space? “Places are centers of felt value where biological needs, such as those for food, water, rest, and procreation, are satisfied.” (Tuan 1977, 4) But to only consider places as the location where biological needs are satisfied is reductive. Places have meaning largely because of the special way we experience them as part of the larger world. As experienced by humans, places have auras that transcend their material existence. The aura of place largely comes about as “we get to know it better and endow it with value.” (Tuan 1977, 6) This endowment of value makes places, such as home, “a special kind of object. It is a concretion of value, though not a valued thing that can be handled or carried about easily; it is an object in which one can dwell.” (Tuan 1977, 12)

Although place becomes differentiated from space through this endowment of value, space and place are symbiotic, they “require each other to have definition.” (Ibid.) From within a place, we are aware of the freedom of the space outside. Freedom means, among other things, ability to move, and in considering this, we see that “place is pause.” (Ibid.) Being stationary does little for experience, but it does much for contemplation and processing of experiences. Just as home (space) is not complete without the space surrounding it, our understanding of home,
and ourselves, is not complete without experiences of both place and space: “Long residence enables us to know a place intimately, yet its image may lack sharpness unless we can also see it from the outside and reflect upon our experience.” (Ibid.) As we traverse between place and space, we bring mental and physical evidence of our experiences back into the home. In so doing, our lives become inscribed in our homes: “Place can acquire deep meaning for the adult through the steady accretion of sentiment over the years. Every piece of heirloom furniture, or even a stain on the wall, tells a story.” (Tuan 1977, 33)

3 THE EXHIBITION

3.1 Title

“Who’s he when he’s at home?” is a saying, originating in Britain and Ireland, that basically means “who is he really.” It tends to be used when talking about someone who thinks highly of themselves or who is being publicly, and perhaps falsely, exalted. It is a method of cutting someone down to size, knocking them from a high horse. Within the saying is the notion that when one is at home one is more real than they are in public.

My first contact with the saying came while reading the first of the Leopold Bloom episodes in James Joyce’s Ulysses. In the episode, episode four, Leopold has returned home from procuring breakfast items and is in with his wife in the bathroom when she asks him to fetch a book that has fallen to the floor and explain a word she doesn’t understand:

“–Show here, she said. I put a mark in it. There’s a word I wanted to ask you.

–Met him what? he asked.
–Here, she said. What does that mean?
He leaned downward and read near her polished thumbnail.
–Metempsychosis?”
–Yes. Who’s he when he’s at home?
–Metempsychosis, he said, frowning. It’s Greek: from the Greek. That means the transmigration of souls.
–O, rocks! She said. Tell us in plain words.” (Joyce 1992, 64)

This scene is just before breakfast commences and Leopold departs the house for his daily peregrination. Molly uses the phrase to mock a word she doesn’t understand. However, taken at face value the phrase seems apt to a novel, loosely based on Homer’s *Odyssey*, about a man’s leave and return to home. “Who’s he when he’s at home?” is a question that could be asked throughout the day of Leopold, as episode by episode evinces new characteristics. To be at home, in the novel as in life, is to be the whole of all the smaller parts that you play in various scenarios outside of the home.

The quote comes in the first episode of the Leopold part of *Ulysses* (there are three introductory episodes that are analogous to the Telemachiad in the *Odyssey* in which the son goes in search of ways of finding his father). Leopold then leaves for the day and will not return until late that night. Upon his return and eventual slumber, Molly awakes to speak the soliloquy that forms the five prominent text panels in the exhibition. The story told in *Ulysses* represents home-leaving and homecoming in a way that mimics the structure and design of the gallery installation, as well as human daily rhythms, thus important passages from the novel’s beginning and end mark the two endpoints of the gallery experience.

3.2 Design

*Who’s He When He’s at Home?* is an attempt to design and install an immersive experience of various recurring philosophical notions of home and “dwelling” within the confines of the gallery space. The visual content for the show predominantly consists of interior and exterior photos of two homes, the one in which I grew up and the one where I currently
reside, as well various photos taken from the outer and inner space, arranged spatially as a journey from the distant cosmos to the interior of the home and the minutiae therein. In addition to the photos, five panels along the end of the gallery closest to the home interior images display text of the final chapter of James Joyce’s *Ulysses*: Molly’s soliloquy.

*Figure 2 Installation view #1*

Rather than installing the imagery and panels directly on the walls, as is customary for gallery display, a framework attached to the ceiling allows the images to float in space using monofilament. Each image, as well as the text panels, hang from the metallic framework attached to the ceiling, and are anchored to the floor with strips of milled wood. This method of
display is intended to emphasize the spatial quality of home, while also creating a virtual coordinate system in which images are arranged with degrees of proximity to the home. Having the photographic panels float in the space also is intended to be another evocation of the metaphysical aspects of home from the philosophical texts. Floor markings indicate the crossing of two axes in front of an image of my home’s front door, the boundary point between outside and inside. A door mat also resides at this axial juncture, indicating a site of ritual happens when transitioning from outside to inside. The virtual coordinate system and floor markings are intended to imply the recurring notion of home as a nexus point that is found in much of the philosophical writings about home and dwelling.

Figure 3 Installation Detail #1
The philosophical notion of home as a nexus of various energies, ideas, and currents has slight variations throughout the philosophical literature, but the basics revolve around the notion that home is where the physical and metaphysical intersect. For Martin Heidegger, a place of “dwelling”, such as a home, is “a space into which earth and sky, divinities and mortals are admitted.” (Heidegger and Krell 1993, 357) Heidegger calls this the *fourfold* and it is one of the central notions of how humans reside in the world. To truly dwell is to truly *be* in the world, and is to be at the site of this *fourfold* – a dwelling.

The exhibit uses metal conduit framework above and pieces of wood below to anchor each image and panel to the floor and ceiling: the interior analogues of the earth and sky portions of the *fourfold*. Additionally, the two materials, wood and metal, are traditional of building, which, for Heidegger, is one and the same as *dwelling*. Metal and wood are from the earth and are used to create a home, or a place to dwell, thus reinforcing home’s connection with the natural. Within the exhibition, they are also meant to provide textural reminders of home, as our experience of home is based on touch as much as any of the other senses.
Similar to, and likely influenced by, Heidegger’s *fourfold* is Mircea Eliade’s notion of home being a sacred place that man establishes as the center of the world:

“Nothing can begin, nothing can be done, without a previous orientation– and any orientation implies acquiring a fixed point. It is for this reason… man has always sought to fix his abode at the ‘center of the world.’” (Eliade 1987, 22)

For Eliade, the cosmos lacks meaning without the establishment of a center from which the world can be measured and understood. Outside of the center is chaos and irrationality. The establishment of such as center as an “abode” is to allow man to create understanding of the chaos that lies outside of its walls.

John Berger – in *And Our Faces, My Heart, Brief as Photos* – directly references Eliade when he states:
“Home was the center of the world because it was the place where a vertical line crossed with a horizontal one. The vertical line was a path leading upwards to the sky and downwards toward the underworld. The horizontal line represented the traffic of the world, all the possible roads leading across the earth to other places.” (Berger 1992, 56)

Home becomes the intersection of spiritual and terrestrial life: the place where man is closest to gods and spirits, as well as the beginning and ending point of all journeys. In this formulation of the two intersecting lines at the site of home, we also hear an echo of Heidegger’s *fourfold* where earth, sky, gods and mortals are all simultaneously present, and are all one.

The crossing floor markings of the exhibit are intended to be an indicator of Eliade’s notion of home being the center of the world. They cross under the floor mat that stands in front of the image of the door, the traditional threshold from which entry into and exit from the home takes place. The longest of the two lines in the exhibit traverses the long wall of the gallery and thus progression through space from the outer cosmos to the minute details of home. The shorter line connects the threshold of the home with exterior images, on the facing wall, of the two homes featured in the exhibition: my childhood home, and my current one. These two photos server as markers of past and present and thus introduce a temporal element into the exhibit.
Although he doesn’t directly posit home as a complex intersection of the physical and metaphysical in his book *Space and Place*, Yi-Fu Tuan wades in the same waters as Heidegger, Eliade, and Berger when he posits the notion of place being safety and space being freedom: “We are attached to one and long for the other. There’s no place like home.” (Tuan 1977, 3) Home in Tuan’s formulation is safety and belonging. Space is freedom, yet chaos. It is the thing into which we venture to gain experience, only to return home (to place) to process those experiences, grow and develop. Although the spiritual dimension is less prevalent in Tuan’s formulation, the idea home as the center of man’s existence is still easily discernible.

The arrangement of images from macro to micro is intends to provide an experience of the difference between space and place as Tuan posits it, as well as the notion of chaos that exists
outside of the home that we find in Eliade and Berger. Starting with outer space, we see the
notion of entropy and chaos, but also expansiveness and infinity: freedom. As we descend closer
into Earth and home, we see landscape and cities: places of experience. Once fully in the home,
we see sofas and blankets, trinkets and other memorabilia: the items that provide comfort, safety
and memory-keeping. Finally, there are the text panels with the soliloquy from *Ulysses* that
could only be spoken within the most intimacy of home: a place of mental safety, as well as
physical.

3.3 The Text Panels

In James Joyce’s *Ulysses*, after Leopold has returned home from his day about Dublin –
and his companion, Stephen Daedalus, has left – he retires to bed. It is then that Molly awakes
and delivers the soliloquy that ends the novel. Her speech is a fever dream of memories,
mundanities, fantasies and projections in which she recalls, among other things: when she and
Leopold met, her and Leopold’s sexual infidelities (her most recent earlier the same day),
conversations between the two of them, her fantasy of sexual congress with Stephen, the memory
of that mornings breakfast, her love for Leopold despite the indiscretions, etc. In the soliloquy,
she falls back in love with her husband, ending with a rhythmic and rhapsodic incantation of
memory and projection of their future life, punctuated repeatedly by the word “yes.”

The soliloquy is akin to the type of daydream and processing of experience, posited by
Gaston Bachelard and Yi-Fu Tuan respectively, that is only possible in the safety of the home. It
is a combination of memory and imagination. It is a processing of memory, and thus experience,
and laying of groundwork for a future. It is existential reckoning and redefinition, and can only
be done from a place of safety. In the gallery experience the panels displaying this most-intimate
indication of home comes after traversing through the cosmos, into the house, and down through the microscopic material details of home. The panels display details of home that are personal and immaterial, but just as essential to the understanding of the notion of home as any of the visual details on display.

Figure 6 Installation detail: text panels

The panels are printed on six-foot vellum scrolls using the Mrs. Eaves typeface. These choices of form factor and typeface are meant to create a monumental experience, in a literal sense, at this end of the exhibition. The panels are the largest ones in the exhibition and when placed together provide a gravity similar to inscriptions on monuments found throughout the world. Additionally, Mrs. Eaves, set in capitals, has the feel of Roman capitals used in monumental engravings, while at the same time having enough humanist aspects to allow for
easy legibility and appropriate tone for the subject matter conveyed. Although displayed on their own, the text panels are installed using the same method as the image panels, indicating an equivalency between the material and immaterial experience of life within the home.

3.4 The Images

As stated above, the image panels are arranged so as to show a decent from the outer cosmos to very granular details within the home. We talk of living within a universe, on a home planet, at a specific location, in a home – and within these decreasing levels of magnitude we come to see that the boundaries of what constitutes home are far from clear. I use a door to indicate the physical boundary between the world and the interior of the home, but, to a certain
extent home is not fully contained within those physical walls. Our notion of home, and the subject-making that happens there, is a symbiotic experience of what goes on “out there” as well as “in here” as we see throughout the philosophical literature. Although I will not go through detailed explanations of each image choice in the exhibition, I would like to take some time to talk of the rationale behind a few of the images.

![Figure 8 Galaxy](image)

*Figure 8 Galaxy*

At the most cosmically-grand end of the exhibit is an outer space photo of a distant galaxy. The photo is meant to conjure a general recognition of the infinite expanse of the space in which we reside. The photo was displayed as a four-by-four-foot panel, one of the largest in the exhibition, because it was to be immersive enough evoke the awe that space often does.
Scaling down in magnitude, there is a standard image of the Earth as taken from outer space. This the first indicator in the exhibition of a precise location of home. It is not as precise as an address, latitude and longitude coordinates, or a dot on a map – but when considered in the expansiveness of space shown in the previous image, Earth is a fairly specific cosmic location.
After aerial imagery of cities and a parachute descending to Earth, we finally come to the first image of one of the “protagonists” of the exhibition: my childhood home as scene from above. This image places the home within its surrounding landscape, and through the details of the garage, deck and out buildings gives the first indication of the type of lives that may be lived within. The vantage point helps to reinforce the home’s connection to the sky, part of Heidegger’s *fourfold* and Eliade’s notion of center of the world, as well to situate the home on the Earth and attached to the land.
This image of a property marker indicates the intersection of two lines that mark one corner of the land on which my childhood home rests. It is located in the wooded area behind the house and dates from more than a decade before my parents took ownership of the property. It visually and legally indicates property being of the land, of the earth, while at the same time showing that land, like the humans who live on it, has a history. Elements of space and time are implied through an otherwise mundane part of the inhabited landscape.
A detail of tree bark on my parent’s property provides texture while also providing an image of the unprocessed raw material out of which many houses are constructed. It is an image of the immediate exterior to a rural home, some of the first visual indicators or the space outside when departing from the safe place of home.
The front door marks threshold between outside and inside, space and place. Here we see the wood present in the detailed tree image once it has been processed into a functional component of the home. A hasty repair to the bottom right window pane is an indication of life within and the traces we leave on and in our home that becomes available for analysis in the way Gaston Bachelard speaks of our home. A narrative is implied in the repaired window: Why was it broken? Why fixed in this way? Was anger or criminality involved? Were the keys lost?
A tidy living room indicates a fairly standard urban living style, but closer look reveals the church portrait of my parents on the table to the left. Prints on the right wall were purchased while traveling. The blanket in the back-right corner of the room was made by a friend’s grandmother. The house becomes home through the accretion of memory. Mementos from travel bring the experiences from outside into the house. Handed down artifacts and family portraits indicate the passage of time: the past is present and alive in the home. Home is the convergence point of its inhabitant’s experience of time and space.
Although not likely the first thing the audience notices, the two rolls of paper towels on the counter provide mystery and implied narrative. Why was one put into use before the other was finished? Was it cleaning day? The counter appears fairly clean, but there is a vegetable peeler not put away. Oven mitts show the stains of long-term use. Meals have been cooked and dishes cleaned and put away. The kitchen, in many homes, serves as the hub around which the rhythms of domestic life revolve.
The bedroom is the most private and intimate part of the house, many times only used by the inhabitants, off-limits to visitors. In this image of my parent’s bedroom, the two coat hangers indicate preparation for the day has been done after awakening. The indentation in the bed on the left is a trace of that dressing and life being lived, a banal sight seen in any number of home at a similar time of day.

In addition to these key photos of the exhibit, there are detail photos that change the scope of view to a more granular detail. The detail of a blanket appeals to the sense of touch while offering a different view of an artifact in the home that appears in context in the living room photo. A photo of the shadow made by light coming through the blinds reveals extended impression that the material blinds, pictured elsewhere, leave within the home. The photo also
shows an electronics power supply unplugged from its device. A detail of the face of a stuffed animal provides texture but also shows the wornness only possible through the years of handling a childhood toy brought into adulthood and the adult home. Time, memory and history are all embedded in the single artifact. It is a measure of the time and distance the inhabitant has traveled to be in that home at this time.

Figure 17 Installation detail

3.5 Sound

Just as the imagery is arranged to represent a journey from the cosmos into the details of the home, accompanying audio creates another level of sensory immersion toward the same end. Four channels of audio each play a separate audio track that repeats approximately every ten minutes. The end with outer space imagery is accompanied with audio from radio telescopes.
Many of the sounds sound like static and random electrical interference. Occasional bleeps break up the relative homogeneity of the white noise background. As we move closer to the entry to the home, the sounds are from the nature found outside of the home: birds, rain, wind and various industrial and automotive noises found in a city. Moving into the house we hear the voices of people in conversation, televisions and radios. As the detail level of the home increases, the audio does too with sounds of the machinery of home: washing machines, dishwashers, and clothes dryers. In addition, recordings of the electrical interference created from various electronics equipment are projected. These sounds, like the outer space recordings, are characterized by static with various beeps and harsh noises. Although the sounds from space and electronics are somewhat different, their similarities indicate that our world, listened to at the grandest and smallest scales, sounds almost the same. Electrical impulses pervade the macroscopic and microscopic in our surroundings.

3.6 Title typographic treatment

![Image](image_url)

*Figure 18 Title typographic treatment*
The title panel of the show was created through a three-dimensional manipulation of the Univers typeface. The colors used are green and blue to represent earth and sky. The colors rendered at various levels of opacity so that when combined with the three-dimensional effect allows the letters to seem to change perspective depending on vantage point and lighting fluctuations. The letters are intended to feel like individual spaces, akin to rooms in a home, and the changing perspective is meant to mimic the way that different vantage points show different aspects of home, as evinced in the imagery of the exhibit.

4 CONCLUSION

A comprehensive exploration of the limits to and possibilities of visual design and textual communication is beyond the bounds of this or any project. Who’s He When He’s at Home? is an attempt to lend a few lines to an ongoing dialog of such limits and possibilities. Many of the ideas articulated in the philosophical texts that are the basis of the exhibition are impressionistic in nature. The writers of the texts are able to articulate, via text, some of their ideas around home fairly clearly. With other ideas, however, they have to resort to poetic language and metaphor that strain the capabilities of language. In attempting a visual and aural installation experience I wanted to try to capture the aura of home that seemed to be common to all of the texts. The imagery and sound used throughout the exhibition aimed to create a tonal understanding of home that is hard to express solely through language. It was attempt to discern the essence of home through a look at and listen to very specific examples—to prove that many parts of a specific home can have a synecdochic relationship with the larger concept of home.

However, when I got down to the most intimate articulation of the type of experience allowed by the home, Molly’s soliloquy, I was forced back to use language and text. Part of the
reason is, of course, I was quoting a literary text, but in trying to think of ways to non-textually represent that intimacy, imagination, as well as the speed at which the mind works in such a daydream state, language was the only medium that worked. Although language may not be capable of representing all things about our world with the greatest clarity, it does work for articulation of innermost thoughts, feelings and secrets. In this way, I have found that Nietzsche’s notion of “the prison house of language”, that the way we understand the world and express that understanding is based on language, may be truer than I originally gave credit for. After all, *Who’s He When He’s at Home?* is an exhibition about home that needed these forty-plus supplementary pages to explain.
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Non-fiction.