

Working Paper

Home and Belonging

A case study by Gali Faber

1. Place and Placemaking

What is a place and what makes a space function a place? A place can be defined as practiced space. Merrifield (1993), who wrote in regard to the writing of Lefebvre, defined space as a social dynamic in constant movement, which changes and develops dialectically. **Place** is not constant and apriori in space, meaning that a sense of place does not emerge prior to the spatial flowing movement but is a momentary manifestation of it, which appears as a synthesis of the spatial motion.

Placemaking is a process that is usually referred to in the fields of urban studies, design, and architecture. It assumes that not every space is a place, and that in order to construct a physical place, social and environmental considerations must be taken into account. Placemaking is therefore a process situated as a junction between personal-subjective experience, physical space, and cultural and spiritual heritage.

Andrea Zittel is an artist that explores the practice of placemaking and the concept of home. Zittel's sculptures and installations transform everything necessary for life—such as eating, sleeping, bathing, and socializing—into experiments in living. “I am always looking for the gray area between freedom—which can sometimes feel too open-ended and vast—and security—which may easily turn into confinement.”¹

2. Home and belonging

South Korean artist Do Ho Suh's textile houses² are replicas of homes he inhabited over the years. He refers to these foldable sculptures as “suitcase homes,” as they both physically and mentally accompany him on his journey through life. The interconnected structures form a timeline of his life, each space having its own significance and memories attached.

¹ <https://art21.org/artist/andrea-zittel/>

² <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=EnYDCgYf7no>

In the research of migration, questions about home and belonging play a key role (Taylor 2015). Individuals who are relocated to new countries, willingly or unwillingly, often face displacement, unbelonging, and a loss of home. Instead of understanding home and belonging as essential notions connected to strictly national, ethnic, or racial origins, migration researchers understand home and belonging as dynamic relationships, and argue that the meanings of home and belonging should be understood as shifting and multiple.

Belonging refers to the way individuals see themselves in relation to others and to the places they inhabit or inhabited (Amit & Bar-Levi 2015).³ **Home**⁴ can be considered as a desire for belonging that allows people to feel at home in place or to feel a home-like connection with various places at the same time (Amit & Bar-Levi 2015). Recent works on home and migration have shown that home is more than just the physical dwelling in which one lives, and **Home** is both “lived” and “imagined” (Taylor 2015). Wollentz (2017) argues for the need to see beyond only spatial factors for the ‘making of home’, and therefore considers temporal factors such as heritage in forming narratives, which combine temporal and spatial relations. People can experience both a physical presence of home as well as a yearning for home, through the multiple lived and imagined relationships with places and other people. Home can incorporate a multitude of places that involve not just where people are from, but where they have travelled to, where they currently are, and where/what they desire their home to be in the future. But it can also encompass feelings of estrangement and unbelonging (Taylor 2015). Different parallel visions of home may lead to a multidimensional experience of home, and people can cultivate multiple senses of home and

³ Belonging and “belongingness” are terms loaded with multiple meanings, from a personalized sense of belonging—being part of a community—to the coining of politics of belonging that refers to various definitions of formal practices of exclusion/inclusion related to hegemonic and non-hegemonic discourses. Senses of belonging various materialized scales: the body, the home, the street, neighborhood, city, nation/state. Rose (2004) calls belonging an “emotional paradox,” describing how subjects negotiate “being” and “becoming” in the diaspora with nostalgia for an imagined home/land (Penster 2013, p. 163).

⁴ The definition of home suggested uses identity, memory, and emotions as explanatory terms: “A material and an affective space, real or imagined, that is formative of personal and national identity, shaped by everyday practices, lived experiences, social relations, memories, and emotions.” Blunt and Varley (2004: 3) argue that “as a space of belonging and alienation, intimacy and violence, desire and fear, the home is invested with meanings, emotions, experiences and relationships that lie at the heart of human life.” These are just two of the many definitions of home current in the literature, some of which relate to daily conceptualizations of comfort, belonging and commitment of different “registers of affiliation” (Penster 2013, p. 161).

belonging that can change based on the context in which they are continually (re)produced (Amit & Bar-Levi 2015).

The material homemaking and Objects' Intermediary Role

The material level is understood as the primal stage of homemaking and as the start of a lifetime cycle of home inventions, that is based on the intermediary role of objects, and on the object's hidden power to trigger memory not only in reviving memories of past homes, but in linking present homes to future homes (Cieraad 2010).

Reinventing home and constructing a sense of belonging are an ongoing process of linking the present to the past and the future. It entails not only remembering past homes but also projecting future homes. Though these notions may be highlighted uniquely by the case of immigration, my intent is to apply them to society in general, migrants and natives, making use of these notions in my effort to establish a pedagogical practice of placemaking among schoolchildren. The multiple meanings and dimensions that we can attribute to the concept of home in the academic immigration discourse, has a degree of resemblance to the way art research and contemporary curatorial practices relate to the concept of "artwork" in general and "art exhibition" in particular. If a sense of belonging is defined by relationships between individuals and between individuals to places, within the context of the contemporary art field, curating is a craft that generates relationships between audiences, objects and space in order to produce meaning.

In this research I curated a selection of artworks that address the issues of place, home and belonging through personal rituals and performative acts that sometimes result in object-making. These acts and objects emphasize on the relationships between people to their physical surroundings merging the poetic dimension with the functional of these issues.

3. Research questions

- What are the conditions required for us to feel "At Home"?
- What is a place?
- How do we establish a sense of belonging?
- Is home something that you carry along with you?

4. Methodology

Interpretive research

5. Theoretical framework and Key concepts

- **Place and Placemaking** (Merrifield 1993, 1995; Pierce and Martin 2015)
- **Home and Belonging** (Fobear, 2016; Amit and Bar-Lev 2015; Taylor 2015; Cieraad 2010; Fenster, 2013).

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