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THE REALITY AND UNREALITY OF THE HOME

RZECZYWISTOŚĆ I NIERZECZYWISTOŚĆ DOMU

A b s t r a c t

“It is impossible for a thing to be and not to be at the same time”, and yet it happens that the externality, the objectivity, the physicality of a residential building is not enough to call it home. Nevertheless, man and architecture are stuck with each other. They form a relationship, a mysterious bond, which is governed by interdependence, responsibility and concern.

Keywords: reality, unreality, space, home, exterior, interior

S t r e s z c z e n i e

„Jest niemożliwe, ażeby jakaś rzecz równocześnie była i nie była”, a jednak zdarza się, że zewnętrżność, rzeczowość, fizyczność budynku mieszkalnego nie wystarcza, aby nazwać go domem. Mimo to człowiek i architektura są na siebie skazani. Tworzą związek, tajemniczy kontakt, w którym obowiązuje wzajemna zależność, odpowiedzialność i troska.

Słowa kluczowe: rzeczywistość, nierzeczywistość, przestrzeń, dom, zewnętrżność, wnętrze

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1. THE REALITY AND UNREALITY OF THE HOME

“It is impossible for a thing to be and not to be at the same time,” and yet it happens that the externality, the objectivity, the physicality of a residential building is not enough to call it home. Perhaps this is so because a house is more than architecture. Its role as a shelter is admittedly the most primary human need, but at the same time the need is accompanied by an instinctive desire to also be “something more”.

We often react to the architecture of a house unconsciously, pure instinct. The knowledge of the building, its construction, the entire material reality is intertwined with the ignorance of the feeling of time, with the duration, the passing, the infinity.

The house is, on the one hand, its “fleshy reality”, with all the details, while on the other hand it is something that exists but we cannot name, or something that simply does not need a name. It seems true that most of us are moved more by reality than some vague, unreal aura, but in the case of this unique space that is the house, we are dealing with both the visible, as well as the metaphysical mystery.

The house is a place where we are reached by the awareness of two worlds, between which we find ourselves. It is a place where we can feel solidarity with both one space and the other. The architecture of the home gives us a chance to be on the border, to be on the one side and on the other. Both inside and outside. Inside – with familiar objects, furniture, works of art, and outside – with the sound of trees, passing cars, the houses on the opposite side of the street, or even further – looking at the sky.

These two areas give meaning to architecture. In all dimensions of the human world, we see this duality, although we do not appreciate its importance every day. It is not about the plain view from the window, but about the awareness of being in possession of the great whole, the space that, though separated multiple times, is never really anyone’s property. We are not in a position to decide which space is closer to us. Often we feel that there is no contradiction between what is inside and what is outside, what is “ours”, and “not ours.”

After risky expeditions, climbers feel the joy of being at home only for a moment. They feel that the space they are watching from the height of eight thousand metres is also their home, their space – so close that it leaves marks on the body. In a magical way, “thanks to climbing, we become the masters of landscape and we are left to enjoy this dominion. Who could feel lonely, when you have ownership of the whole world? To see, to watch – to possess. But without the inconvenience of having: we make use of this view almost as if we had stolen it. And yet no: we had to earn it by climbing” or by imagination.

“All I can see that extends in front of my eyes is mine. My possession goes exactly as far as my eyes. I am not alone: the whole world belongs to me, it is for me and with me.”¹

From the perspective of home, from our window we see outer space as a little compressed, narrowed. Sometimes we feel it as a kind of corridor through which we only go to the next interior – an office, a shop, a church, a hospital, and only occasionally we visit this space selflessly, just for the beauty of its streets, squares, parks... This space outside the window belongs to each and every individual. We do not envy one another the possibility of intoxication with any landscape. It seems that in the world there is no room for any “just mine.” The

¹ F. Gros, *Filozofia chodzenia*, Wydawnictwo Czarna Owca, Warsaw 2015, p. 63.

home space opens to the space of the surrounding world. It makes us the co-owners of the great whole, the great resources that we organise on a reciprocal basis.

Our relationship with the architecture of the house and the surrounding outside world are a kind of a tug of war between reality and imagination. Reality is on the side of architecture, and imagination on the side of the things outside, and at the same time the opposite is true. Here is the big task for an architect. The space stolen from the world must be newly understood. Separated, torn away, it creates relationships, bonds with all the existing and future elements co-creating the new system.

Space as the place, the border, the composition and the home in relation to the space and the borders, as part of the extent, in which the relationships of individual items are determined.

The interaction of architecture with the mystery of all components – all “small houses” making up the whole composition within prescribed limits – can extend far beyond these borders. It can make “the aesthetic experience of a given space turn, after years, into an existential experience of time.”²

“The presence of something in my mind is therefore, as if it were, submerged in a stream. It flows, it is temporary in nature, it is the unity of the present, the past and the future.(...) The awareness of what is now present, is not a pure “now”, a “point” in time, but the unity of all the three of roles of time: the future, the present and the past. Every little – but specific – element of consciousness, the every now is also the knowledge of what passes and the awareness of what is to come, the direct future (direct – because it is now present, it does not have to be the closest time indicated by the watch) and the immediate past. And if it is so, then the expressions “coming and going” will not be able to be fully separated from the “is.” As a result, the conscious as really present is flowing, it is happening.”³

Perhaps it is this feeling of changeability – linked to time, as opposed to what is related to the stability of architecture, creates a whole in which we must live, and that we are able to accept. The organisation of the world that we observe is only possible by the largest order, because otherwise the two realities – one associated with changeability, and one based on unchangeability, permanence, would mutually disturb each other and make each other impossible.

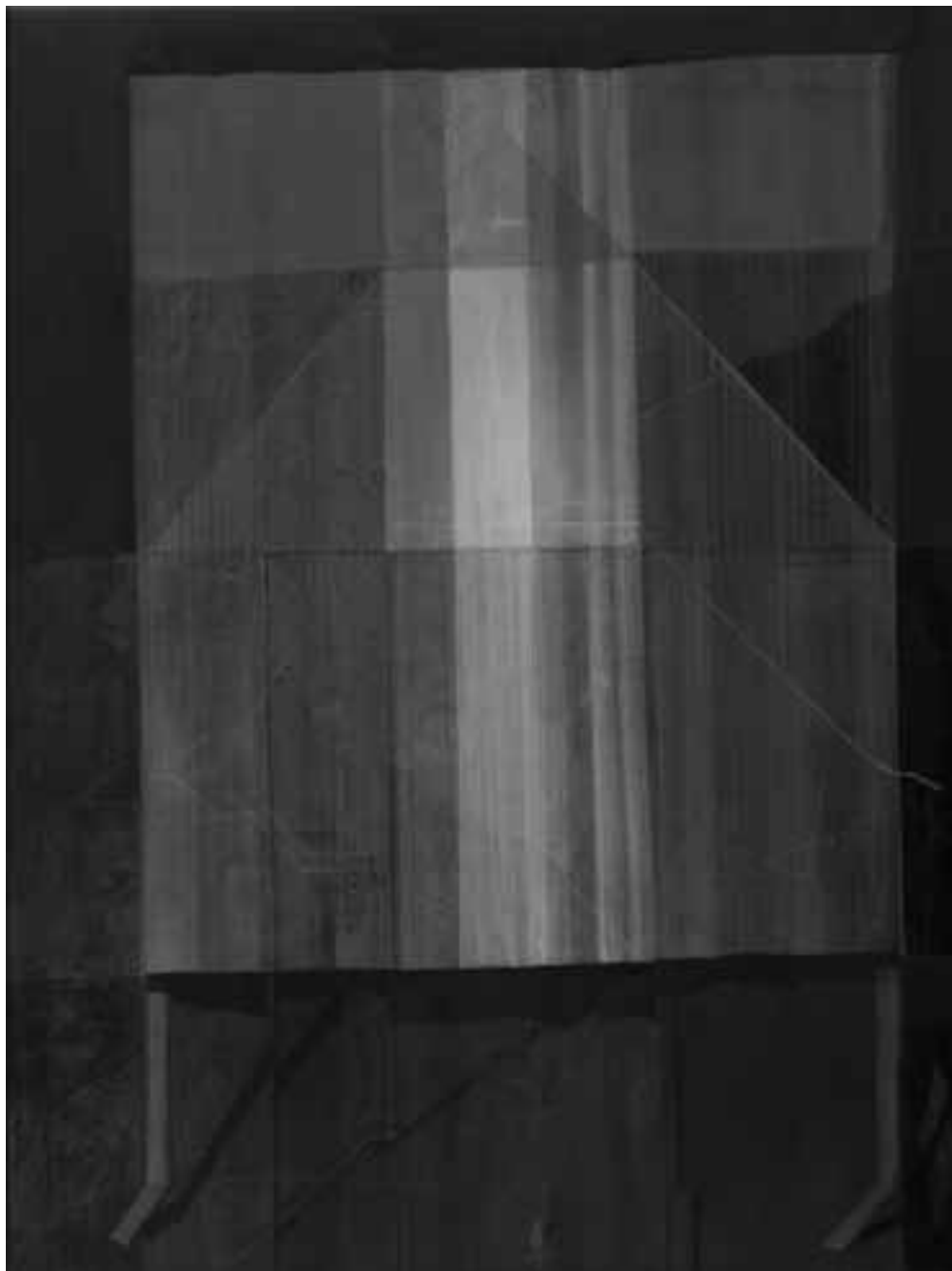
From birth we experience and feel this duality. We are immersed in it, at the beginning perhaps without realising what it is. The real world is not different from that of “the less real one”. They both have their own order and complexity, they both reveal to us their secrets and how far we are able to discern them.

The house, together with its reality and unreality, exists as a “possible thing,” but it does not explain to us why. Each of us carries out the account of good and evil of this complexity. However, it may be an illusory conviction that we are able, thanks to empirical considerations, to finally resolve any doubts. We are surprised both by the stability and volatility, and the unity of these two concepts.

In the case of the architecture of the house, we can also think about the “best of all possible worlds”, where “possible” means acceptable – one in which we ourselves, although full of internal oppositions, contradictions, create a unique and an almost harmonious whole. And though we do not see it clearly, this is what makes us aware of the complexity that we see in all dimensions of the human world.

² T. Pękała, *Czas miniony jako doświadczanie przestrzeni*, Czas przestrzeni, edited by K. Wilkoszewska, Universitas, Warsaw 2008, p. 343.

³ K. Michalski, *Zrozumieć przemijanie*, Biblioteka Kwartalnika Kronos, Warsaw 2011, p. 137.



III. 1. „A Curtain 3”, 70 x 50, acrylic on plywood, 2006

The existence of borders and the ways to blur the divisions between the two worlds are varied. The inner world of the home and the outside world interpenetrate each other. The architecture constitutes a casing for easy transfer between these spaces, experiencing their similarities and differences. This transition and this experience is always done in a personalised way, both because of the variety of architectural forms, as well as because of our unique ways of thinking, as well as the fact that “the world is not a stationary, finite object, but remains a project in the process of becoming constant.”⁴

The border, while frequently exceeded, always remains. Even the “air is always specifically divided, heterogeneous, stratified: from the conditioned space, through the microclimate assigned to a specific, geographical location, to the air space that is the territory of countries and communities, whose breach without permission may cause fatal consequences, to the air space as a whole, i.e. the atmosphere of the Earth.”⁵

Navigating in a divided world, we are aware of reciprocity. The disruption of the relationship between the space of the house and the outside world makes it difficult for us to find ourselves both on one side and the other. Creating worlds other than those that actually exist in nature, imagining the house as an exceptional place requires consistency, which is dictated just by the reality of the real world.

The history of architecture shows that many times reality has stood against imagination, only to reverse the trend again after a few years. The great eruption of imagination usually ended with a return to non-fiction, or its inverse. Housing architecture, if it is a home is both a witness of reality and allows one to forget about reality. It creates tensions between both.

All the processes that take place between me and my house are reversible processes. We are subject to the influence of time, judgments, beliefs. Our perception and also our feeling of architecture desire, with imagination on one hand, and on the other a desire for comfort, functionality and practicality. On the one hand they desire risk, and on the other hand it is security and peace. Between the inner space of architecture and the outer space of the world, there are relations analogous to those between the space of the house, its perception and every exteriority that we perceive as foreign but possible to embrace. What is internal is usually narrow and individual, while what is external is usually ubiquitous and universal.

The architect embraces the whole. He does not deal in separated spaces. He sees it in the context of the whole. His role is to see, to understand and to take into account all the phenomena that, through architecture, affect our quality of life. In a changing world, we are heroically looking for a constant element, one on which we could rest. We yearn for home, for its protecting aura, for the four walls that make us throw away from our consciousness – “the pathetic component inherent in the very roots of human existence – the consciousness of a dog that has lost its master, a confused animal that does not know either where it is, or what to do.”⁶ Architecture of the home can soothe the anxiety and share the responsibility for our mental comfort. The architect must therefore unravel the mystery of our desires, of our most extravagant behaviours and ideas for life. He must restore the proper proportions, compare

⁴ A. Kuczyńska, *U źródeł ponowoczesnej fascynacji „Epoką przestrzeni”*, Czas przestrzeni, edited by K. Wilkoszewska, Universitas, Warsaw 2008, p. 180.

⁵ M. Bakke, *Przeciw pustce-sztuka pamiętająca materialność powietrza*, Czas przestrzeni, edited by K. Wilkoszewska, Universitas, Warsaw 2008, p. 296.

⁶ Ortega y Gasset J., *Ewolucja teorii dedukcyjnej*, translated by E. Burska, słowo/obraz terytoria, Gdańsk 2004, p. 273.

them with many other desires and habits, turn to what is possible, grasp what is universal and use it practically.

In designing a house conceived for many people, many families, it may seem that we are going toward the impossible, that our goal is the realisation of some vague idea that requires a complex knowledge on the verge of technology, construction, building mechanics, as well as philosophy, psychology and art.

Will such architecture not become a hybrid of the real and unreal? Is it not doomed to failure, although built so painstakingly? Its assessment can be done using a normal scale. The rising of a building is some success in itself. Even the most sophisticated, or on the contrary, the simplest forms, if any, are subject to the assessment of what a thing is and under what conditions it is presented. Firstly, the style: "Awareness of the style is the consciousness of the form in which we live or want to live. The sense of chaos, of disintegration that we feel so often today, also stems from the experience of stylelessness... The struggle for style is the struggle for the quality of life."⁷ Secondly, is the building only what we can capture at first glance for what we can use practically; is it authentic architecture, the idea, the home, the real philosophy of life enclosed in walls, ceilings, floors? Thirdly, is it something more than the material shell, or is it what Wittgenstein described saying that "the inexpressible is inexpressibly contained in what is expressed"?⁸

If residential architecture has the characteristics of a truly common place, and at the same time a place from which we enter our own separate world – it becomes a space where there will be the process of acceptance – of the most desirable part of our lives. "The man who considers himself the centre of the universe, at any altitude imagines himself to be on top"⁹ is ready to accept the home as a place worthy of being this centre. But only with the house they yield a new dimension to the inhabited space. They make it both real and unreal, metaphorical and literal. They make it both successful and a failure. Hazards that lurk in the hollow space will not always leave us when we find shelter at home. The awareness of the dependency, in which people are to each other – starting from relations with neighbours, and finishing with global contacts – recedes the sense of independence and self-sufficiency, it enhances the impression of the unreal network, in which we are immersed.

We agree to the partial loss of our independence, provided that, already at the doorstep of our homes, the connections with people and the space of the world will loosen its ties. However, the imaginary world of unlimited freedom turns out to be imaginary within the four walls of our home. In it also, through the computer, the telephone, the TV, the radio, we do not break off the ties with what is on the outside.

The real space and the unreal one form, in our contemporary world, more and stronger relationships. If, however, our house is to become a "real home" we must turn the virtual space into one that is waiting outside the window, outside the door. "Inside the walls, the anxiety, rather than dispelling, keeps growing. The dependence of the well-being of the citizens on new and increasingly sophisticated technological inventions is also growing... The more of these inventions are around, the higher the concern that some of them may not work properly... The less tolerance and curiosity we have for the unexpected, for what is outside, the

⁷ M. Janion, *Czy będziesz wiedział, co przeżyłeś*, Wydawnictwo Sic!, Warsaw 1996, p. 60.

⁸ *Ibidem*.

⁹ Ortega y Gasset J., *Ewolucja teorii dedukcyjnej*, translated by Burska E., słowo/obraz terytoria, Gdańsk 2004, p. 258.

less the chance that we will get to know, experience and appreciate the richness, the diversity and the dynamics of urban life and we develop a liking for it.”¹⁰

When the thresholds of our house become hospitable, we can easily recognise what is both its reality and its unreality.

Both ways of home's existence carry their own reasons. It is difficult to say that between its reality and unreality there is no contradiction, but when there is one, the other one for a moment loses its *raison d'être*.

The actual existence of an architectural thing sometimes stands in front of us as if devoid of sense, incomprehensible. The irrationality of a situation where we are not able to discern what appears to be a house, as a whole, as a naked fact – from the foundation until its aura – the product of our mind, lending it an unreal being. Perhaps our mind also does not know whether it is dealing with an authentic way of being of that thing, or a way that is imperfect, accidental, ambiguous or imaginary. Each of the two possibilities of existence demands a co-possibility. Both mutually determine each other. Each of them has its inner content and inner reason. They both form a structured system. They realise themselves in our eyes and perceptions, although in a completely different way. In the case of what is real, we are dealing with the fact that we are able to describe, take measurements of, and calculate. In the case of unreality, we can speculate, infer and analyse. That “something” is beyond the obvious fact of existence. Its contours are blurred. The perspective is reversed. To describe it, we need to use other tools, for example, the already mentioned philosophy, psychology and art.

The chain of cause and effect, in which the real and the unreal are intertwined into one whole, into one sequence, once again shows the complex and maybe only the dual nature of the home. Reality imposes restrictions, it calms, while unreality arouses emotions.

We cannot fully know the infinite number of relationships between what is spiritual and what is made of concrete, brick, glass, steel or wood. And although we are sure of the real and the unreal, of what is not a rational product, we have an obligation to verify our knowledge and ignorance about their existence. We will never get to the point when the reason of reality is revealed completely – as the only one possible, nor to the point where the reason of unreality will bring us closer to what could be regarded as definitive. In both reasons lies their constantly new understanding, a new interpretation. We can only conclude the frailty of our knowledge and the way of our describing it and the finity of human perspective and of human looking at the world. Only seemingly we will be getting closer to the heart of the description. At a time when it seems we have grasped its meaning, it turns out, however, that is not quite available to us, and that no description is guaranteed to make us reach the essence of things.

“Creating a new language means the renewal of the world, because a verbal language is not used to describe the world, but it creates it. Erasing the world is tantamount to erasing the words that establish it – they have the primary strength and the pragmatic function: one speaks in order to operate, the word is equal to the thing. Thus the search for a new language also means the search for a new world”¹¹.

¹⁰ Z. Bauman, *44 listy ze świata płynnej nowoczesności*, translated by Kunz T., Wydawnictwo Literackie, 2011, p. 258.

¹¹ V. Valentini, *Rejestr brzmień i głosów w Teatrze Societas Raffaello Sanzio*, w D. Sementowicz, *To nie jest obraz*, translated by T. Kiereńczuk, A. Sierbińska, Fundacja Malta/Korporacja Ha!Art, Poznań, Kraków 2013, p. 173.

In addition, presenting the description of the real and the unreal of the house is not entirely clear; it escapes being formed in a logical law. It is only our perspective in which the real and the unreal reveal to us our subjective point of view, our description, which finally makes us conclude that it does not fully express what we intend to express, because that “it” is inexpressible.

Do we succumb to illusionary thinking? “Supposedly on the one hand there was the world, and on the other hand its various depictions, whose shape is conditioned by the construction of our senses or possibly by the properties of the mind... Since the time of Descartes there has still been appearing the insoluble problem: how to find contact between the expandable matter and non-expandable mind. It is a mysterious contact, indecipherable”¹². However, we feel that we are able to react to certain images more or less strongly.

The door of the house opening to us reveals its interior – the shape of the space, the colours of the walls, the objects and the decor, as well as the light, the smell, the air temperature. Our perception is not purely cognitive, it responds to the system of images and the whole area of stimuli to which our senses react. “However, you can still distinguish other elements that complicate the world of images and their mutual relations. The body reacts differently to different images. What is more, it has the opportunity to choose between movement, it does not transfer movement mechanically, but suspends some actions whereas it launches others. It makes a selection of images. The more the brain is developed, the word choices are wider... It forms a kind of perception, which should be called a conscious one. It also cuts into the landscape of images, but a cut in a clearly delineated area. Basically, the perception could be unlimited, but the activities of the body must focus on only certain images, turn off those that currently do not matter. Hence the aware perception is as though poorer, narrower.”¹³ On the other hand, the “less aware” one tries to capture the inexpressible, and, what is sometimes much more important, which includes, besides palpability, also the memory, recollections and emotions. It introduces us to a new plane of experience that reveals in the description of the architecture of a house, apartment, part of the building, new areas of sensory impressions evoked by the “real home”. Experiences, however, do not depend only on the type of stimuli, but also on many of our bodily functions as performed by the nervous system; they always have an individual touch, they also define the very “essence of the contact of a living creature and the world.”¹⁴

In this context, it may be a surprise that, in certain philosophical considerations – the aware perception becomes narrower, more restricted than the unconscious grasping of the world and, consequently, an attempt to describe it.

We are not able to read the final meaning out of the jigsaw puzzle of props, out of their ordering and cataloguing. In an abstract way, groping blindly, we assume that the reality and the unreality of the home is possible, but we do not know what exactly this possibility is.

Intuition suggests that the reading of images that the house reveals to us – in the broadest sense of the word – is associated with its deepest meaning. This meaning is a chain whose links have many different meanings. We may arrange them freely, combine them in many configurations, but they will always be a weave of the real, the calculable and the unreal, the one that defies a simple description.

¹² B. Skarga, *Czas i trwanie. Studia o Bergsonie*, Wydawnictwo Naukowe PWN, Warsaw 2014, p. 143.

¹³ *Ibidem*, p. 147.

¹⁴ *Ibidem*, p. 150.

The real home is not perfect, just like us, it has many faults. The walls of the house are cracked, but just by this imperfection, this crack, there is seeping in our direction some meta-physical anxiety that not everything is subject to strict rules, and that there are inconceivable areas in our lives.

An architecturally most humble multi-family housing block may consist of the most beautiful homes, and vice versa – a great apartment block – beautiful and intelligent, cannot contain a single real home. The tool of logic loses its usefulness here.

The lack of a name to determine what is the unreality of the home provokes us to seek new words and meanings. Compared with creative thinking, language always remains archaic. We are trying to cope with the concepts so difficult to define. The language of geometry, of a drawing, of an image, of art helps us express, describe the unimaginable and the barely expressible.

The architecture of the home is seeking unity in diversity, which is the world. Each subsequent project is another possible world. The world demands the possibility, the possibility demands the world, and the house demands to be a home. Is it the architect who is to give us a guarantee that the attempt to create a true home will be successful?

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