



In Dwelling

Implacability, Exclusion and Acceptance

Peter King

ASHGATE e-BOOK

IN DWELLING

Design and the Built Environment

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In Dwelling

Implacability, Exclusion and Acceptance

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ASHGATE

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Published by
Ashgate Publishing Limited
Gower House
Croft Road
Aldershot
Hampshire GU11 3HR
England

Ashgate Publishing Company
Suite 420
101 Cherry Street
Burlington, VT 05401-4405
USA

Ashgate website: <http://www.ashgate.com>

British Library Cataloguing in Publication Data

King, Peter, 1960-

In dwelling : implacability, exclusion and acceptance. -
(Design and the built environment series)

1. Dwellings - Social aspects 2. Social psychology 3. City
planning

I. Title
307.3'36

Library of Congress Cataloging-in-Publication Data

King, Peter, 1960-

In dwelling : implacability, exclusion, and acceptance / by Peter King.
p. cm. -- (Design and the built environment)

Includes bibliographical references and index.

ISBN: 978-0-7546-4870-3

1. Housing. 2. Housing--Psychological aspects. 3. Housing--Social aspects. 4. Social
isolation. 5. Social integration. I. Title.

HD7287.K5585 2008

155.9'45--dc22

2007034126

ISBN 978 0 7546 4870 3

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*'And further, by these, my son, be admonished: of making many books there
is no end; and much study is a weariness of the flesh'
(Ecclesiastes, Ch. 12, v. 12)*

Preface

Retracing Our Steps



Jacques Derrida (1987), in preparing his readers for his *Envois*, tells us, ‘It is bad, reader, no longer to like to retrace one’s steps’ (p. 4). What Derrida seems to be saying is that we should avoid prejudging what he is about to say, that we should not necessarily think we know what is to come. We should not stubbornly venture along one track regardless of the evidence in front of us. Instead, as readers, we should be prepared to have our prejudices challenged and to go back to our initial starting point and set out again.

But of course, as any reader of Derrida must be aware, there is a chance, or more than a chance, a probability then, that Derrida will be playing with us: that he is deliberately putting up barriers, turning signs around and giving wrong directions. He continually tells us in his writings to doubt what others say and think what they mean. He is therefore offering both a rebuke and a warning. He wants us to know that things are not as they seem.

But let us for a moment assume that he is being straight with us and look at what retracing our steps might mean. No longer to like retracing our steps is to be against going home, rethinking or being prepared to start again. We are so convinced of where we are going that we take no precautions, we neither look back nor consider doubt worthy of us. We eschew the well-worn path that leads us back home. Whilst

we might celebrate adventurousness and a positive attitude – to move forward – to retrace our steps actually demonstrates a preparedness to look back and to question where we are and how we got there; it is where we admit our mistakes, face the fact that we might have gone wrong – we are up a blind alley – and so we have not done all we could, not achieved what we thought we would, not found what we thought was there. But, of course, when we do retrace our steps we also face the prospect of unearthing what we have tried to hide, where we are so honest and open with ourselves that we have to accept we have failed, that we are lost, and so we might unsettle ourselves and perhaps others who depend upon us.

So what is the purpose of retracing our steps? First, of course, we return to somewhere familiar, we diminish our risks and can again feel safe. But, taking up Derrida's apparent image of retracing, we can learn more about ourselves and face up to our losses and failings. We might see it as a form of housekeeping, of spring cleaning, or, to use one of Derrida's favourite words, as a form of *economy*, of balancing profit and loss, assets and liabilities.¹ It is where we come to terms with what we have done and are therefore able to assess what we have achieved. Perhaps we should suggest that it is only by retreating to our base that we can fully understand the nature of our journey; that we can see it in all its consequentiality.

This book is intended as such a retracing, not of work I have done in the past, but a circular passage through dwelling – *in dwelling* – seeking to examine how we can and could use it. It seeks for an economy of dwelling, to establish some balancing between assets and liabilities, between positives and negatives. Dwelling is here and now and always has been and always will be. There is always this going around in the present. We are always in dwelling. We can never leave the world and what we do in the world is dwell.

Being in dwelling is, quite naturally, about the inside of physical space, but not just this. It is more fundamental, about being in the world, so that we cannot properly talk of the world as distinct from us. We are not subjects distinct from objects, and there is no 'inside me' and separate 'out there'. It is all the same, so that dwelling is what we do, as we watch TV, read a book, catch a train to work, sit in a restaurant, or walk on a beach. Dwelling is the act of settling and keeping settled, and this is reiterative, circular, it occurs again and again and it is always going on and on.

Dwelling, then, means rather more than housing, or the private level of experience (King, 2004; Norberg-Schulz, 1985). Dwelling is about settlement, about moving in the environment, about making and keeping community, and about finding our place and keeping it. And dwelling is not just making places, but using space, and so it is a more neutral activity; it is the inertia that comes with habitude. It is not just about the possibility of being in, but the impossibility of not being in.

Dwelling, I shall suggest, contains three elements that make it what it is: these are *implacability*, *exclusion* and *acceptance*. Dwelling is neutral and so it can work either for us or against us. When it works for us we are able to exclude those we wish to be apart from and include those we love and care for. This exclusion is what makes dwelling habitable and habitual: it is what makes it *mine* and so it is mutual.

¹ Of course, 'economy' literally means rules of the house: it is housekeeping, hence the initial usage of *political economy* to differentiate it from the domestic sphere.

But implacability and exclusion can be negative as well as positive. We can use these faculties of dwelling to hide away from others and to shirk our responsibilities for others and ourselves. We need then to strike a balance, to understand both how to use dwelling and also its dangers. This means we have to accept dwelling as it is and our place within it. This idea of acceptance is about the establishment of limits, of setting down a clear boundary for others and ourselves to operate within and without. Dwelling is constrained, substantiated and maintained by these three concepts of implacability, exclusion and acceptance and this book seeks to discover why this is so.

Part of this journey of discovery, a walk that is out and back, is to understand and appreciate that dwelling is never general, it is not an abstraction, but a concrete and certain thing. Dwelling, we shall come to understand, is about things that are *mine* or *ours* and never non-specific: dwelling is always an action, an intention which carries with it some sense. Dwelling is always specific, particular and singular.

This book though is as much about method or approach as putting across a particular argument. Consistent with my earlier works on dwelling,² I have argued for a form of stasis, suggesting that dwelling is about complacency and security. This can be seen as a conservative position, which seeks to look back – to retrace one’s steps – rather than forward. Or rather it suggests that we cannot go forward unless we have something to fall back on and that we know where we are going. This is what I have referred to as the *roots* and *ruts* of the ordinary (King, 2005). But, in a review of the book in which I discussed these very concepts, Jan Forbes pointed to an apparent paradox in my writing. She rightly suggested that I am critical of both post-structuralism and social constructionism, yet my approach is entirely consistent with these ways of looking at the world. The method I have adopted, which relies on intuition, anecdote and the use of apparently paradoxical turns of phrase show a similarity or affinity with what I am supposed to be opposed to. She states that ‘King may be so deeply immersed in the practices of modern academia that he lacks the self-awareness to see how much a part of his own thinking reflects post-structuralist concerns’ (2007, p. 158). I therefore need to face up to this apparent paradox and deal with it. So, by way of introducing my arguments, I want to justify my approach and the thinking that lies behind it. My hope is that through this justification I can show something of the style and strategies that have motivated the book, as well as pointing towards some of the theoretical concerns I have in relation to dwelling.

Forbes’s review is as perceptive and fair-minded as any writer could wish for, and so I have felt the need to look at this apparent paradox. Indeed it was something that I had been aware of, but perhaps being so deeply immersed, I could not surface for long enough to consider the implications fully enough. In truth I have something of an ambivalent attitude to Derrida and other theorists such as Gilles Deleuze, Manuel De Landa and Slavoj Žižek, who might be seen as being rather more at the cutting edge of theory than Derrida is now. I do find some of Derrida’s work fascinating, intensely stimulating and challenging. His *Envois* in *The Post Card* (1987) is a wonderful and sometimes moving piece of speculative philosophy. However, I find his late political works are clichéd and add nothing to either his own reputation or the particular debates he is seeking to address. Also when I read others on Derrida,

2 *Private Dwelling* (2004) and *The Common Place* (2005).

who seek to justify and to codify his ideas, or to use deconstruction themselves, I begin seriously to doubt my own judgement: this idea of deconstruction as nihilistic, extremely relativistic and negative is not something that I have any affinity towards, and I would seek to argue against it (as I have in this book and in the past two). It is, of course, possible to trade quotes from Derrida to try to prove one's point and to get into a complex argument about the nature of a particular thinker or school. However, my view is that if an argument is useful and helps us, then we should use it, whether we wholeheartedly agree with everything else that thinker might have said, or what all others do in his name. Derrida is at his best, I believe, when he mixes autobiography with philosophical speculation; when he uses the singularity of a life – his life – as the starting point for his thought and so demonstrates that inside and outside, subject and object, are not distinct from each other.

But this does not let me off the hook: Forbes's comment is not just about using one particular thinker, but adopting a general method. So I need to deal with this problem of whether it is acceptable and consistent to make use of a post-structuralist (assuming that is what Derrida is, and that is another question that could vex us long into the night!) when I am opposed to what post-structuralism is meant to be about.

As a starting point, we should beware of those who call for purity, for complete consistency, so that if we are a conservative then it follows that we hold belief A about issue B, or that because thinker Y says X we should oppose him when he says Z. This can quickly lead to a closed mind and a reliance on generalities rather than encouraging us to continue with rigorous reading and thinking. But conservatives do not always agree with other conservatives on all counts (and neither do all post-structuralists or Marxists), and it might be that the most vehement debates are with those from whom we are not really very far. It is those closest to us who appear to present the clearest threat. As Roger Scruton (1998) argues, the Christian can ignore the Muslim or the Hindu but not another Christian who appears to be less than orthodox. This is because the latter is a threat to the integrity and certainty of the Christian by taking the shared position and altering it slightly.

But it does not follow that if we are conservative or progressive in one area that we are in all others. I know of several political progressives who enjoy ancient music, finding nothing after Bach worth listening to. Likewise, there are political conservatives who find contemporary classical music such as Beat Furrer and Bernhard Lang preferable to Purcell and Bach. They can still doubtless appreciate early music (something which is not always reciprocated by the devotee of Purcell, it must be said), but still have particular preferences for the contemporary. Likewise, I see nothing terribly wrong in enjoying the architecture of Quinlan Terry and agreeing with many of Roger Scruton's arguments on modern architecture, *but also* finding pleasure and significance in the works of architects such as Peter Zumthor, Enric Miralles, and even some of the works of Daniel Libeskind – as we shall see, what matters is the context and civility of the project. We should not assume that our

politics will always be mirrored in our taste in music or architecture, even though for some it might.³

In any case, Derrida is not just (or even) an iconoclast, but a commentator on the tradition. Whilst the effect of deconstruction calls into question the tradition, it also depends upon it, and Derrida's method necessitates looking backwards to consider what Plato or Freud or Heidegger meant and whether we can still believe it. We should remember that Derrida did not write books that offered a positive position, but rather his view became clear through the comment on the work of others. Derrida, like Gilles Deleuze in his earlier work, was a historian of philosophy, continually engaging with the tradition and reinterpreting it for his own purposes. But this is what philosophers have always done and so we should see Derrida as working within that tradition rather than against it or outside of it. His strategy is to force us continually to retrace our steps, but to do this he cannot take us somewhere that is totally unfamiliar. His work depends on our knowing where we are and having some appreciation of the landscape. As a result of walking and talking with Derrida, we may return home with a different view and with a part of us changed, but we are still in what is recognisably *our* home.

But of course, it is not as if the political significance of post-structuralism is uncontested. There are many on the left who regret the influence of these arguments on progressive politics.⁴ We should remember that Jurgen Habermas (1990) considered both Michel Foucault and Derrida to be reactionary or even conservative, in that their attempt to deride rationality and universalism had a negative impact on progressive politics and Enlightenment values. We should also not forget that a postmodern architect and theorist such as Daniel Libeskind has been considered right-wing because of his design for Ground Zero, with his plan for a Freedom Tower 1776 feet high that deliberately echoes the Statue of Liberty (Jencks, 2005). Needless to say, British Conservatives do not consider the designer of the aborted spiral extension to the Victoria and Albert Museum to be an ally. But this only goes to show how generalisations, be they political or aesthetic, are not always helpful.⁵

Of course, the obvious links between postmodernism and Counter-Enlightenment thought have been pointed out by many. As an example, Owen Bradley (1999), in his study of Joseph De Maistre, makes the links between Counter-Enlightenment thought and cultural relativism. Likewise, the linguistic ideas of Johan Hamann show similarities with modern post-Saussurian linguistics (O'Flaherty, 1967). The aims of Counter-Enlightenment conservatives, critical of rationality and universalism,

3 We need only look at the politics of some of the founders of modernist literature, such as T. S. Eliot and Ezra Pound to see that there is no contradiction between conservatism and innovation in art.

4 Martha Nussbaum in *Sex and Social Justice* (1999) recounts one such dispute between the Marxist historian, Eric Hobsbawm and a post-structural anthropologist who insisted on a relativist understanding of health at a UN conference. Hobsbawm made the connection between relativism and National Socialism; the relativists, unaware of who he was, tried to throw him out of the conference. I discuss Nussbaum's own critique of post-structuralism in my book *A Social Philosophy of Housing* (2003).

5 Charles Jencks (2005) makes the point that one reason for the distrust shown towards Daniel Libeskind was that he took to wearing cowboy boots – just like George W. Bush!

can therefore be seen as saying similar things to what the post-structuralists and postmodernists said in the 1970s and later. Yet, this strand of Counter-Enlightenment thought has had a considerable influence on conservative thought on the continent (Muller, 1997).⁶ However, not many conservatives, if any, openly support post-structuralism or feel content to attach the label ‘postmodern’ to themselves. Margaret Thatcher might have been called the first postmodern prime minister, but it is doubtful if this was something she would have asserted for herself, and neither would her supporters. David Cameron and his followers might seek to see themselves as postmodern, but this is perhaps a little too self-conscious to be taken seriously: they are still trying too hard to be iconoclasts, seemingly believing that the Conservative party can be made electable by throwing out their Conservative beliefs and annoying their natural supporters. We should wait and see what they actually do before coming to any judgement.

To try to come to some conclusion on this issue, and to return to Forbes’ critique, I now believe that what is relevant is not the politics of my position here, but the anti-positivism, and it is this that links with post-structural and social constructionist ideas. Perhaps what has influenced me most about post-structuralism has been one of style rather than content, what might be called a discursive and rhetorical approach to writing. Hence, I have been influenced by Derrida, in terms of style and in the manner in which I now approach an issue. I do consider the way in which I write about something – how I approach and circle around an issue – to be as important as the issue itself. It is not merely a matter of getting the words down and reaching the conclusion as quickly as possible. This, of course, needs some justification, and that is why the book really begins with a discussion on method.

But I do not consider myself to be a post-structuralist, and indeed if I were to be asked whether I am a relativist or a realist I would be tempted to say I am both. This is because, to an extent, both positions are right, just as both tend to slip into an almost theological adherence to their assumed rectitude. My view is that there is a real world, and we know this to be so. But how we approach that reality differs depending on our circumstances and how we now face the world. If pushed I would conclude that I consider social constructionism to be a banality, but realism to be fundamental. This, of course, is not really saying much and like a politician I would seek to change the subject.

What I have become more certain of in recent years is that I am no longer certain about anything. I used to worry about this: why did I keep changing my mind; why did issues seem so difficult; why was there merit on both sides of an argument; why were things not so easy and straightforward as they seemed when I was a student?

The first inkling I had of this was indeed whilst I was still a student in Bradford 25 or so years ago. I was at a meeting on Northern Ireland organised by the National Union of Students. This was in the period of regular bombings and shootings in the province and on the mainland of the United Kingdom. The view being professed by the speaker was that of negotiation based on the slogan ‘peace, jobs, progress’.

6 The influence of Counter-Enlightenment thinkers on British conservatism is less clear-cut. However, the modern thinkers I am here talking of here are French, not English, and so I think the link holds.

The NUS speaker argued against the revolutionary solution or the easy clarion call for a united Ireland which was the rather more standard position taken by the student Left at the time. This was, he argued, too simplistic and naïve in the face of the complexities of the issues facing people in the province. But Sam from the Socialist Workers Student Organisation bristled at this revisionism and wanted to know why it was that we could assume a firm and radical position on places like Vietnam, Chile or South Africa, but when it came to somewhere closer to home we were more wishy-washy and wanted to edge away from the radical position. Sam said that if we could be radical about Chile, why not about Northern Ireland. The speaker's response, I seem to remember, was merely to reiterate his position and patronise the bearded lefty. However, what struck me as a revelation was the thought that if the situation in Northern Ireland was rather complex and hard to sort out, then perhaps the same might apply to Chile, and that a clear and radically pure position might actually show ignorance and naivety rather than seriousness. Perhaps then, Sam had it the wrong way round: if the situation close to home could only be sorted out by negotiation and long hard work, why should we expect an issue to be amenable to a quick fix just because it was far away?

Over the years I have come to see this lack of certainty I have about things as a strength and not a weakness: I now see most issues that concern me as being close to home. They are all complex and difficult and slippery to get hold of. Socrates, of course, defined a wise person as one who knew how much they did not know. This, it seems to me in all my ignorance,⁷ is not really about knowledge but about self-awareness: is one prepared to learn, and be open to new ideas? As I consider in this book, what matters is whether we are prepared to accept what we are, where we are, and where we are going.

But because of my uncertainty I feel able and prepared to take risks. This is because I realise that the stakes are really rather low and the difference I can make is not that great. So I may as well go as far as I can, say what I feel I need to say, and mix and match a bit to try to create something that recognises complexity and the tentative nature of what we know about the world. And I consider myself a conservative because it is the only position that takes uncertainty sufficiently seriously to doubt itself.

This book derives from a particular strategy of reading and thinking. I tend to read books for the following reasons. First, there are a number of books I read – and re-read – because I know I agree with them. These might be called comfort books – ones that I read again and again to reconfirm my world view. One book I used to re-read regularly was John Turner's *Housing by People* (1976), but I seem to have gone past that now. Another one is Emile Cioran's *All Gall is Divided* (1999),⁸ which I must have read about 15 times since discovering it in 2000. This collection, made up of books by Paul Auster, Edmund Burke, T. S. Eliot, John Irving, Joseph de Maistre, Bernard de Mandeville, Robert Nozick and Roger Scruton, as well as several other

7 To claim wisdom for oneself is, quite obviously, to show how much one lacks it.

8 This title is the result of a rather dodgy editorial decision by the translator. A literal translation from the French would have been *Syllogisms of Bitterness*, which provides a better guide to the book's contents.

works by Cioran is, however, a rather small one.⁹ What I tend to read more of is the much larger group of books about things I know little about. I know academics are meant to be experts and to know a lot about a rather small area, but I find it rather troubling that academics seem to spend most of their time on things they already know a lot about, and not enough on things they are ignorant of. I am constantly amazed at the lack of intellectual curiosity I see with some academics.¹⁰ So I tend to focus on the many gaps I have in my knowledge and, of course, the more I read the bigger the gaps appear.

This raises the third area of reading I tend towards: those writers I know I disagree with. Reading about what you know about tends also to mean that you only read things you know you agree with. Again I find this problematical for an academic. I remember a discussion I had with a colleague who upbraided me for having a copy of Friedrich Hayek's *Constitution of Liberty* (1962) on my bookshelf. He thought this decidedly dodgy for a social scientist and must automatically mean that one was a 'believer': why else would anyone have it? His opinion appeared to be that to touch such a book would infect you and necessitate being put into quarantine. Interestingly, he saw no such problem with the copy of Marx's *German Ideology* at the other end of the shelf. I went along with him until it dawned on me that he was not really joking: he really did feel that reading books written by one's political 'opponents' was a suspect thing to do. He could see no intellectual merit in going to the original source to see whether it actually did say what Andrew Gamble and Martin Loney said it did. What I have found, however, is that his view is by no means unusual. Of course, I have colleagues who are open to new ideas and believe in genuine inquiry. But there is also a realisation that if you want material published, especially in social science journals, you get the politics right first and only then sort out the content.

But, regardless of the foibles of others, I spend a lot of time reading books by authors and about things I disagree with, be it Charles Jencks on postmodern architecture, Le Corbusier on the house as a machine, or Slavoj Žižek's Lacanian psychoanalysis. I feel it is incumbent on an academic to be open to new and different ideas. There is a danger that you might be converted, but as long as this is on the strength of an argument, why should this matter? But reading things you do not agree with opens you up to new ways of looking at the world and challenging your own world view. It makes us defend ourselves and address the weaknesses and build on the strengths of our own arguments.

A fourth area of my reading is academic (and non-academic) works that take a first-person narrative approach to an issue. The recent books by Roger Scruton (2000, 2004, 2005, 2006), linking autobiography, history and social philosophy demonstrate this, as does Paul Shephard's works on architecture (1994, 1997, 2003). It is also why the two books of Derrida I found most readable are *The Postcard* (1987), which includes *Envois*, and *The Work of Mourning* (2001) which consists of a series of

9 It only occurred to me after making this list that not one of the books I habitually return to is on housing. I have found nothing to replace Turner in my little canon of significant works.

10 I am not, of course, referring to anyone reading this book!

essays and obituaries for friends and colleagues who have died. All these books mix the subjective with the general, eccentricity with academic argument (and they also span the political spectrum). These books act as models for how I want to write. Partly, it is because these writers, who are certainly much more distinguished than I, confirm the approach that I have stumbled on myself. But it is mainly because this is a particularly effective manner to consider the sorts of issues I am interesting in writing about.

Lastly, I read books that have stood the test of time. If you want to know about architecture then read Le Corbusier, Ruskin and Vitruvius; on politics read Burke, De Maistre and Marx or Nozick and Rawls. Following fashion in your reading might mean that you stay up to date, but it also means you have to wade through a lot of what is indifferent or plain rubbish. It benefits us therefore to read something that we know is good and is good because it has been around for generations or centuries.

So my strategy, out of which comes this work and others, is a deliberate mish-mash, a rather eccentric and perhaps uncoordinated set of procedures based on personal prejudices and wilfulness. What is also very clear from a cursory glance at the bibliography is that if you are trying to write about a new subject then it helps not to focus on the old literature. As a professional necessity I read a lot of books and articles on housing policy, but I tend not to use them often in my writing on dwelling, and this is for the reasons discussed in the first chapter. I have become used to thinking, when I am reading a book by Scruton or Žižek, of how I can apply this to dwelling and the issues that interest me. I do not believe that the housing policy literature is of no merit – I rely on it for my teaching – but that it is important to approach issues in new directions in the hope of coming across new vistas and ways of seeing.

So I have had to think quite hard about how I proceed, and I have to retrace my steps. As a result of this analysis I would conclude that the basis of my approach is exactly what I thought it was: it relies on intuition. But instead of taking this for granted I have sought to outline my approach and then to demonstrate it. This approach can be read backwards as a justification for my previous books, particularly *Private Dwelling* (2004) and *The Common Place* (2005) – but it also presents a way forward for my work in the future and a positive statement for others to comment on.

I have also come to the conclusion that this method is integral to the subject I am considering. I would find it untenable to write about these things in a dry academic manner that relied on the traditional literature or methods. It would not take the discussion very far, and we would be left outside of the subject. Intuition is integral to the way in which we experience dwelling as something that is ordinary, as that which we are in the midst of. Rationalising this – trying to objectify it – will lead us to miss much about the real significance of dwelling. I appreciate this is controversial and that many academics would question the approach, asking whether it is in any way scientific. I would respond that of course it is not scientific, but why would I want to limit myself to such a narrow approach? Why would I deliberately ignore the wealth of insights from film and literature, as well as from my own experience? Why should I conspire to put some distance between myself and dwelling when closeness is precisely what dwelling is about?

What is important to me is that I now feel comfortable with this intuitive approach, and that I can see it as having a purpose. This purpose is to go round in circles, to retrace my steps, and come home again after a pleasant walk. All my books, as my children tell me, are about dwelling and they ask why it is that I cannot write about something else. This I have taken, whether intended or not, as a compliment. It shows a kind of consistency and tenacity of purpose to get to grips with the subject, to continually be writing about the same thing. But what it also shows, and it is typically perceptive of my daughters to notice it, is just how big a subject dwelling is. Indeed I would venture to say it is an endless one and we can go round in circles forever. And I intend to.

This book is loose-limbed: it is as loose as I can leave it and only just as tight as it needs to be. What does this mean? I mean that the book does not seek to get from A to B, or C or even Z, but shifts from stone to stone like walking across a lake. The various parts of the book – the individual stones, if you like – are connected up only by walking on them. It is you, the reader, who must make the connection, and when you get to the other side the utility and connectivity of the stones will hopefully have become obvious. So you have to do a bit of walking, retracing your steps where you need to or feel you want to, making sure, of course, you keep your balance as you go from stone to stone. But, what you will also find is that you end up where you began. The stones take you back home, but hopefully only after an enjoyable and healthy stretch. After all, *there is nothing like a good walk*. Most of the pieces in this book relate to each other: one stone leads on to the next, or at least the gap is not too large to risk getting wet (as long as you watch your step). But if you are sufficiently flexible or simply do not fancy a particular stone, well then, skip it until you find something firmer to stand on.

The first Chapter, ‘Closed’, introduces the main concepts and approaches I deploy in this book. The chapter outlines the notions of *implacability*, *exclusion* and *acceptance*. My aim is to show how they are linked and how they can be used. I see these as the elements that largely determine dwelling, for good or ill. They can be positive or negative: the implacability of dwelling is needed to keep us secure, but it can also provide a blank and unyielding face to others; exclusion is needed to prevent the unwanted intruder and allow us to be intimate with those we love and care for, but it can also leave others with nothing. This Chapter seeks to consider these issues and to provide some basis for the discussion that follows. This introductory chapter is aimed at setting the scene or detailing the targets. It outlines what is at stake in coming to terms with them.

The second Chapter, ‘In and Around Dwelling’ considers a method, an approach, a way of exploring the subjective subjectively. My aim is to identify what dwelling is and what it is not. I criticise the idea that we cannot have theories *of* housing and have to restrict ourselves to theory *and* housing. It is indeed significant that the word ‘social’ is not attached to theory here, but I do want to insist that we can create theories of housing and develop concepts that are specific to housing phenomena. This is a dangerous thing to suggest, but the rest of the book is intended as an example. I do not give this theory a name – I restrict myself just to using the term ‘dwelling’ throughout – nor do I aim to be particularly prescriptive. This is not a manifesto I have written, but a series of speculations around a theme. There is some

attempt at formality, but only enough to hold things together. The method demands informality and an acceptance of the intuitive. What I have sought to do is to outline my method and open it up to debate and critique.

The Chapter entitled ‘From machines to *mine*’ moves from the objective and the rational to the subjective, taking a small swipe at post-structuralism as it goes. I consider and criticise the machinic metaphor of Le Corbusier and link this to the theorising of Gilles Deleuze and Felix Guattari and their interpreter Manuel DeLanda. I then discuss the idea of origins in architecture as a means of opening up what we dwell for, and this leads to a consideration of the subjective and the idea of things that are *mine*. I italicise this consistently to show that I am using the term to denote the idea of *mineness* and not to refer to myself alone. We all have things that are *mine*, that are close to us, are meaningful, and which help to define us and our place in the world.

As with my previous works on dwelling I make much use of film as the raw material for my discussion. Whilst I discuss specific films in the first chapter, this tactic particularly evident in the last three chapters of the book. ‘The confinement of sense’ considers the idea of insulation and how we use the implacability of dwelling both to keep us secure and to keep us apart. I look at Brian Eno’s *Thursday Afternoon* (1984), with its slow and luxurious vignettes of security and comfort. My aim is to show how the implacability of dwelling can give us a sense of security and abandon. This is contrasted with Bela Tarr’s *Damnation* (1987), a bleak study of disengagement where all the characters seek to use others for their own benefit. This aims to show how insularity can breed contempt for the other.

The Chapter called ‘Hiding in the world’ looks at a more extreme position, where we flee from responsibility and use dwelling to hide away in. This Chapter is built around Gus Van Sant’s *Last Days* (2004) and Andrei Tarkovsky’s *Sacrifice* (1986) which both have central characters who are incapable of taking responsibility for their lives and connecting with those around them. They use their dwelling to hide away and to exclude others, and this only develops their selfishness.

What these two chapters show is that a balance is needed in how we use dwelling. The implacability of dwelling means that it can help us live healthily, but it can also magnify our faults, anxieties and neuroses. We therefore need to achieve some means to ensure that this implacability does not get out of hand so that exclusion becomes an end in itself. The Chapter ‘Open’ attempts to deal with this need for balance and seeks to do this through a consideration of a further film. I suggest that what we need to do is find some *acceptance* of what and where we are. I develop the idea of acceptance through looking at Hiroshi Teshigahara’s *Woman of the Dunes* (1964). I seek to show how we can come to some acceptance of our place, so that we dwell properly and use it fully and in a manner that is sustainable. My aim is to develop a view of dwelling as therapeutic, so that we are able to use implacability and exclusion positively and retain a balance between our needs as dwellers and the needs of others. This means we need to appreciate the idea of limits, and, using the philosophy of Epicurus, discover how we can separate out the necessary and the unnecessary. I end, perhaps rashly, with a set of principles of what dwelling does based on this discussion. This might appear to be unnecessarily programmatic, but I

think it is in keeping with the aim of this book: if I have defined a method, why not some 'core principles' to go along with it?

In as much as dwelling is reiterative, so this book should also be seen as coming full circle. It retraces its steps, casting shadows forward and back, referencing across to extend the overall argument, to insinuate some key overall themes and concepts, and to show how dwelling relies on habit and the tacit. I want to show through this approach that the significance of dwelling cannot be stated in the abstract, but only shown through how it is used, in what we do and why we remain *in* dwelling.

This book should be seen as a phenomenology of the ordinary. It seeks to provide a means of seeing, and of analysing our subjective understanding of what we are in the midst of. It deals with how we come to accept that we are not outside of the world. We cannot hope to understand or accept the world when we see ourselves as outside of it. As Franz Rosenzweig (2005) stated, we need to have our wonder absorbed into the world, so that we stop trying to look into what we see we are outside of. Instead, he argued, we have to come inside, and become a part of the thing we wonder at. We have to be a *part* of what is inside. This is where, and how, ordinary life is. So, much of what I have to say in this book is about the acceptance of where we are and why we are there, rather than encouraging a quest for difference and transformation. Going in circles, the very act of retracing our steps, means we will often end up where we started. But this, after all, is the very thing I had in mind.

Acknowledgements

Standing Together

I feel that every book I write might be my last. This, of course, could well be something earnestly to be wished for, but I fear it. I worry that I might run out of things to say. I admit this, not to garner sympathy, at least not entirely to do so; rather I do so to explain how this book came about, and who I have to thank for it.

It arose out of this sense of anxiety, the worry that I might have nothing left to say. We had just gone on holiday at Easter 2005. I had posted off the manuscript for one of my previous books with a certain satisfaction and relief, and then we had headed off to the coast for a week away. There are three things I remember about that holiday. First, towards the end of the week the east coast of England was battered by storms. The windows of the apartment we had rented rattled loudly and let in great gusts of cold air, so that what was ideal at the start of the week, with its glorious views out to sea, was now a source of minor annoyance. But this change in the weather was by no means all bad. The four of us stood above the sea wall and marvelled at the waves crashing into the sea defences and over the pier. We stood there, breathless into the wind, holding each other up, as we gasped and gawped at the sea's magnificent violence. The second thing that happened that week was the death of Pope John Paul II. We watched the pictures of the mourners gathering in Rome and the funeral at the end of that week, the calmness and serenity of the event so at odds with the violence of the storm outside our apartment.

And third, was my anxiety over not having a project to work on. I felt delighted at completing my last book, but I also felt that it had left a hole. I had been engrossed in this project for a year and a half and now it was gone. I was pleased with the result of all this work and relieved that it had all come together so well. But, as had been the case before, my mind quickly moved on to consider what I would do next. In truth, I had other projects to work on, but this last book had seemed special, and I wanted something equally significant or close to me to take its place. My children joked about this anxiety, asking me every day if I had an idea yet. But by day four of the holiday I could say that I had. It was tentative, just a tiny spark, the merest inkling of a project. And so I took out the pristine notebook I had brought with me and began to write, and I wrote and wrote. What I wrote about was anxiety, and memory, and how we move, and sometimes do not move, *in dwelling*; I wrote about how we deal with our environment and how we cope with key events that get up close to us. By the end of the holiday I had filled half of the book, by the end of the summer I was on my third notebook and I knew I had something solid to pursue. Indeed by Christmas 2005 my anxiety had driven me to notebook number six, with notes totalling over 100,000 words as I struggled to decipher my awful scribble and put them into some order. By then I also had two very messy draft chapters and, manna from heaven, a book contract.

The finished product is, of course, what follows. But whilst many of my early notes were concerned with anxiety and how this manifests itself, when I came to write the book I did not use much of this material. This may still appear to be an anxious book, or a book that deals with anxiety, or indeed both, but most of the direct discussion on anxiety has gone. I am not really sure why I did this, other than the fact that as the book developed it insisted on a certain track and I could do little about it. This did not particularly worry me – I quite liked where it was taking me and so I followed the signposts that seemed to spring up, and was happy simply to see where I would find myself. I think that what has come out of all this worrying is a clearer sense of what sits behind our feelings and our fears. Much of this relates to how we are settled, or what I now refer to as how we fit in dwelling. Anxiety is an end result not a cause, and what I have done, partially, temporarily even, is to search out this settling and make some contact with it, to get inside dwelling as something we can never ourselves get out of. Anxiety, like happiness and complacency, is a symptom of this settling, of how it works and how we understand it. It is about balancing the shining moments of standing together and marvelling at the world with the dark moments of being left all alone.

And so there are those three people who stood by me above the sea wall on that stormy day, who hold me up and share their gaze with me, who tell me not to worry and even listen to my silly ideas: to Barbara, Helen and Rachel, I can still only wonder.

Peter King

Chapter 1

Closed



An outline

I want to offer an outline here, like a child's drawing, a simple sketch, a naïve and open picture, of my position, that will point to some of the key ideas, arguments, themes and concepts that will pre-occupy me. And like a child's drawing this outline will be both simplified and archetypal: it will only provide the most basic elements, but these, I hope, will all be recognisable. For once we have the basic shape, a clear outline, and we have understood it as such, we can then start to add some complexity to the picture: we can start to deal with variation and speculate on different forms and functions. Once we have an outline we can add light and shade.

Children, so it appears, have a particular image of the house: we have all seen it and probably done it ourselves. It is simple and archetypal. The house is square, topped with an isosceles triangle for a roof, and probably with a chimney from which smoke spirals up lazily. It will have a door and a window on the ground floor and two windows above, all neat and ordered symmetrically. It will be surrounded by grass and flowers and a fence, with a path leading to the front door. The sun will be shining and birds will be flying across the blue of the sky.

What does this suggest to us? First, of course, that we have a particular image of the dwelling, which may well be ethnocentric, idealised, and it may certainly be unreal for many of us. Yet undeniably there is this image, and it has been consistent for generations: I drew these pictures, just as my children have. It is a common image used to convey a particular association, perhaps of rurality, of a garden idyll, or of security, or regularity and comfort. It is a symbol of how we might like to live, how we feel we do live, and indeed it is used as such. So, for instance, the Housing Corporation in England uses such a naïve symbol as its logo: it even has the sun shining in the background. This childlike image is therefore instantly recognisable as the way we want to live. It operates as a symbol to represent something meaningful for us individually and collectively. It is an object of solidity: a block, a cube, a square, as wide as it is tall, enclosed and enclosing, detached from others, yet presented as a common image of a type of dwelling. It is a physical shape, a recognisable representation of an object, yet not of something that has been built or has existed. It is an image – *the* image, perhaps – of private dwelling.

Perhaps this is part of its derivation: that we live as distinct units, centred on a dwelling, focussed on partners, parents and children; we are alone together in our house, distinct from any other, where we all do similar things differently (King, 2004). The image we have then is of a separate unit, isolated from others, where there is no encroachment on this idyll of domesticity, of being alone together.

I do not find it insignificant that the house is invariably drawn as an isolated object, which is separate from any others. It will normally be the only house in the picture. It is *the* house, not one of a terrace, not connected in any way to another, except, of course, in the sense of it being the archetype. This ideal house is always detached. This is not, I feel, a concern for status or class – children have little idea of or interest in house prices, location or the desirability of a dwelling – but the sense of a house as a discrete and separate entity.

This sense of separation is enhanced by a further aspect: the house is bounded. There is a definite boundary to it. It has sharp edges and a definition, so that the inside is separate from the outside. The fence keeps things in and other things out. The house is distinct, even if it is deliberately not distinctive. It is therefore an image of regularity, of symmetry, as well as enclosure.

What this childish image also shows is that we see the house as an object, and I mean this in the sense of something that has a representational quality, that denotes something: it is of a type, with a meaning that is extensive, so that we can move beyond this singular entity into a sense of the common and the ubiquitous. It is not just *a* house, but *the* house. It is something prototypical, something which we can associate with, whose meaning is given: *the* house, so to speak, stands for something foundational.

But does it matter where this meaning comes from? Can we ever do much more than speculate, or indulge in conjecture about where these representations derive from; can we ever avoid being mired in ideology when we try and locate the source of significance for those objects that are around us? All we can do, as Stanley Cavell (2005) reminds us, is to offer a testament to things and the world, to those entities that we have not ourselves created:

I do not make the world that the thing gathers. I do not systemize the language in which the thing differs from all other things in the world. I testify to both, acknowledge my need for both. (p. 244)

We do not ourselves create the significance of things, we merely recognise that they have meaning for us and declare it in the only way we can. We can speak beside them, perhaps on their behalf. We can talk of them, but only with borrowed words, whose meanings have already been asserted by others that came before us. But, of course, it is precisely because of this antecedence that we wish to join in the conversation.

Things have a meaning for us, and we can assert this – offer a testament to it – regardless of where that meaning comes from, regardless of whether others have felt it before, whether others still do, and whether others will do in the future; and regardless of whether we can fully articulate it, whether we write a wordy treatise or draw a naïve picture. And the triteness of what we enjoy does not make the object any less meaningful, and this is because what matters is *who* is aware of that meaning and not the fact that this meaning is widely shared, or how it might be articulated. Meaning is not determined by those who seek to judge it or offer external criteria. Banality does not set limits on the subjective signification of the thing; it is merely a testament – if this is the right word to show it – of the lack of sympathy of the observer. *Our* regard for the object, and *our* testament to it, is often not a matter of judgement or taste, but of utility and meaningfulness.

But here is a paradox: one person's object, what I want to call *my* house, is a mere thing for another person, a thing of little significance and of no great regard. And others demonstrate this disregard of *mine* through their testament to *their* dear object. Their ability to ignore the mere things of others is a function of the meaningfulness of a significant object: that object *they* too are able to call '*my* house'. And so a mutual, yet benign, indifference is maintained through the significance we give to a certain object and not to all things. What this suggests about the derivation of the significance of the object 'house' is that it comes out of our own signification with *my* house. The relationship we have with our dwelling is never in the third person. So when we generalise we abstract from the subjective. It is the active association of the specific to the general; the attachment of personal significance on to something we know to be common. That it is common to us means we can extend that commonality to all and therefore see *the* house as the prototypical object, typical of a relation we have with what we call *mine*, and to which the word *mine* can be so applied over and over again, in all its typicality *and* distinctiveness.

The place we live in becomes *mine* not because, or not only because, we own it, but because we are there, those we love are there, and it is where we want to stay. It is precisely, then, the first-person relation that is important here: it is that I am in the midst of it; it is my ordinary environment (King, 2005). It is the use, as an ongoing activity through time, and the meaning that develops from this, which makes it *mine*. This may appear the wrong way round: it would be more likely, we might think, to suggest that I can use it *because* it is *mine*, but we must not take up this simplistic position, we must not fall into this epistemological trap. In fact, it is the reverse position that holds: it is because of its utility and meaning – that it allows

us to meet, or strive for, our ends – that we see it, and properly consider it, to be *mine*. Owning can help, but this is not sufficient, or are we to suggest that tenants cannot feel attached to where they live, and that children cannot connect with their dwelling just because it is owned by their parents?

If we consider the relation that children have with their dwelling, with what they call *mine*, we can begin to understand this significance more fully. Children rarely if ever choose where they live. The dwelling may be a place which predates their memories: it might be the only place they have known, the only place they have lived in. Or, if they have moved, they would have had little say in why, where and when that move might have occurred. So their attachment to their dwelling is not linked to choice, or their ability to pay, or because they are the legal owners. Yet they still see it as theirs, they use the words *my* and *mine* as readily, and as legitimately, as their parents who do own it and who pay the bills. We need to understand what this is about and why this can be. It may be because it is all they know: as far as dwelling goes, this is the limit of their experience. They know that there are other houses, that people behave differently in them, and that their houses are different, but this house is still *their* only place.

But this answer is to an extent question-begging, and we need a more fundamental explanation. I would argue that *the attachment does not come from choice, but from the commitment which the dwelling has for them*. By this I mean that the attachment derives from what the dwelling accepts from them and allows them to do. It is the relational position of the dwelling, in its exact specificity with an individual subject, which matters here. Of course, there are the human relations within the dwelling, with parents and siblings. But there is also the longevity of the relation with the dwelling itself; this is where we live permanently. This place forms our ordinary environment, and as such there has occurred some moulding of the dwelling to fit us. We can now take the dwelling for granted; it is our space, our stage, our platform (King, 2005). Of course, we could commit to another space, and we would settle in other dwellings given the time and the opportunity and if the right conditions pertained, namely, that we were with those we love and that there was some promise and actuality of longevity. But, at the present, as it would now and foreseeably appear to us, this particular dwelling is *mine* because it is where I am and where I want to be.

This brief discussion has started to show some of the themes I wish to explore in this book. First, there is the concern with *objects* and the meaning of objects, with the use of objects and how they stop being mere things and become objects for us: of why the little word *my* and its cognates are so important in all this. And so we are studying the meaning of objects – of *objects-for-subjects*. This calls for a phenomenology of why a thing stops being just *anything* and becomes *this* thing, this object that is *mine*, not something, but the sum of things. This is an approach concerned with the finiteness of the object, and this means we need to appreciate that objects are enclosed and enclosing, why we have them enclose us, and how we cease to see them and take them for granted, even as we continue to revere them through their use. So, second, we are concerned with the only one, *the very thing*, the singular object we no longer see; with what it is to be singular, to be alone within the object and alone together, to use this object, that we cease to see, that becomes transparent,

as the thing that hides us; how it can be transparent to us but not to those outside. For those on the outside the dwelling is opaque: it offers a block to their gaze.

What I seek to do is to integrate the physicality of the house, the dwelling, into the subjective appreciation of dwelling as an activity; to recognise that the objective quality tempers, moderates, qualifies and quantifies the subjective. Indeed without the object there can be no subjective. Yet the object is not beyond, or outside the subjective: it cannot, properly speaking, exist for us without this overriding subjectivity.

And yet the dwelling does still hold us and we need to know why it can, why it does, and why we want it to. The third issue, then, relates to what the object, now seen in its singularity, does for us. It is the object that *insulates* us, that holds us apart so that we can be *alone together* with those special to us, so we can enjoy the intimacy of those we choose to care for and share with. But we must also look at the consequences of insularity, with the isolation it might bring. Dwelling can allow us to *withdraw* from the world and we need to understand what this means and why it matters, in what ways it damages us and others, but also why it might be positive, why it might indeed be necessary for us to isolate ourselves at times. We may seek solitude as a flight from responsibility, as a means of avoiding the world.

The implacable dwelling

Søren Kierkegaard (1980) portrays anxiety as the consequence of both freedom and finitude. We are free to make and take decisions, we have choices and we can be capable of making changes to our lives. Yet we are also aware of our finitude, of the inevitability of our own end. We are aware that we are mortals who have only so much time in which to play out our lives. What this draws out for us, what it makes all too explicit, as Jean-Paul Sartre tell us in both *Being and Nothingness* (1990) and *Nausea* (1965), is that choices have consequences. The freedom we have can take us down avenues – or one-way streets – and we must accept the responsibility for what we find there: we must take the consequences of our decisions. Yet, for both Kierkegaard and Sartre these consequences may well be things which we cannot entirely account for. We set things in motion, perhaps for the most arbitrary of reasons, but once they are started we cannot determine where they will lead, and so we fear that we might not retain control and that events will overtake us. So we have something of a fear of freedom, which creates an anxiety within us, a generalised ache inside us which makes us beware of change. We become all too aware that the world around us can make us pay for our choices. In other words, we see that the world is implacable to us, in that it responds to us neutrally, and that it may work for us at one time, but may then turn against us as circumstances change. This sense of a neutral world adds an edge to our responsibility: we begin to appreciate that things are open, and this is an opportunity and a threat, a possibility and a potential bottomless pit, so that what appeared open is now closed to us.

One way of dealing with this apparent implacability is to withdraw into that which is known to us, to that place we see as secure and private. We can therefore see dwelling as helping us to deal with anxiety, as protecting us from the threat posed

by neutrality. Yet hiding away may just feed the lack of responsibility: running and hiding means we never face the problem or come to terms with it. Accordingly, the world remains strange and hostile, and we abnegate any responsibility for dealing with it.

Now we find things turning in on themselves: in order to deal with the implacability of the world outside we withdraw into dwelling. But what this means is that we come to depend upon the implacability of dwelling, of its capability to repel the outside world, and that it stands solid against all others. It is precisely this quality – the exclusivity – that lies at the heart of the dwelling’s welcoming of us. It is not just its solidity, or that it works any differently for us than for others. Rather it is because it is *mine*, I can have it, and I determine how it can be used, and as long as this solidity holds, this implacability works for me and I can rely on it.

Yet there is nothing intrinsic to the dwelling that ensures this benefit – the dwelling can work against me just as effectively and implacably as it can for any other. So we need to add a nuance to this argument to make it hold. What is important here, the intrinsic element in this phenomenology of dwelling, is the subjective and meaningful relation we have with the object, and this depends on the implacability of dwelling, on the solidity of its standing for me as the one who possesses it as *mine*. So it is not the implacability we cling to but our confidence in the reliability of this implacability, and perhaps this is what subjectivity really amounts to.

So we are concerned, *above and beyond all else*, with the *implacability* of an object, but one that is imbued, soaked, in our subjectivity: the implacability of that which is *mine*, that which exists for *me*, which can work for me and only me, but which does not complain when I leave it, that cannot be spurned but which can work just as well for you as it does for me. The book is essentially a study of implacability *and* subjectivity, of how something that is *mine* and only *mine* can hurt me and ignore others, just as I can use it to ignore others in case they want to hurt me. And so I am concerned with subjects who need objects, and with objects that are for subjects.

It is implacability that links all the parts of this discussion together. It connects the concept of objects-for-subjects – the fact that objects have meaning for us, but are still palpable, hard, physical objects – with the consideration of insularity, which shows how the implacable nature of dwelling helps and hinders us. This sense of the implacable reinforces the subjective yet palpable and concrete nature of the object.

To say that something or someone is implacable is to say that it or they cannot be appeased or pacified; they appear to us as inexorable, relentless, as things or people who cannot be persuaded by request or entreaty to change their position or yield to us. Something that is implacable shows an inflexibility and an intractability to our position: there is no possibility here of a compromise being reached. There is an impression of hardness in this concept and a sense in which we are thrown against something that is unyielding and which we have no opportunity to reason with. This might appear to be a rather odd concept to mix with the subjective: in precisely what way is our meaning moderated by this sense of the unyielding? Indeed what is it that is being implacable and unyielding here?

What I want to suggest is that implacability arises out of the context in which we can and do use our dwelling, or, to put it another way, implacability is a condition of the meanings we attach to our dwelling. An interesting example of this sense of

the implacable is seen in Charlie Chaplin's short film, *One A. M.* (1916). The plot is extremely simple: Chaplin plays a wealthy drunk returning home after a good night out, who tries to enter his house, to pour himself a drink, to light a cigarette, to climb his stairs, and go to bed. But in his drunkenness he continually finds himself incapable of achieving these simple and mundane tasks. He cannot master those simple everyday objects – a soda siphon, a match, a revolving table – that confront him, even as we know they belong to him and that presumably he uses them every day. Things which he has put into the house, and which he doubtless uses daily, now become obstacles that he struggles to overcome: he cannot open the door because he has mislaid his key; he cannot negotiate the stairs; he cannot walk on a rug without slipping over; he takes stuffed animals to be alive and a threat to him; he cannot understand how the shower or the drop-down bed are operated. Everything in *his* house is apparently now unfamiliar and seems to work against him rather than for him. Yet we must assume that this is the very dwelling he left earlier in the evening, and that he chose the furnishings and the décor. Indeed we assume that if he were not drunk he would know how all these things work.

What Chaplin's film shows – and, of course, this is where the comedy lies – is the fact that the dwelling and the things in it *can only respond and cannot themselves activate a relation with the user*. The things cannot actually help him unless he seeks to use them properly, nor are they capable of offering him clues or providing him with any short cuts. The dwelling and its contents are in this sense implacable: they are neutral objects unaware of any presence. They are open to use by anyone, but they can only perform according to the manner in which they are approached and utilised. So when approached by a drunk who is incoherent, uncoordinated and unaware of the things around him, they become not useful objects but obstacles. Chaplin appears not to recognise anything within the dwelling, except for the way to bed.

One of the main obstacles preventing Chaplin reaching his goal is the absurd pendulum clock beside his bedroom door, which swings across the door and makes entering the room a matter of timing and coordination. This gives us the idea of dwelling as an obstacle taken to its most absurd extreme: of an object of decoration actually detracting from the use of the room and preventing the user from doing ordinary taken-for-granted things. There is a similarity here with anxiety dreams, whereby a place of comfort is only accessible through a tortuous or dangerous route, be it jumping across a gap, climbing a rickety ladder or crawling through a pipe, so that we fear being cut off from our place of security. Chaplin turns this into comedy, but our eyes are drawn to the pendulum as soon as we are shown the house's interior and we are both struck by the absurdity of it (and hence ready for the comic use Chaplin makes of it), and also unnerved by it, as a thing that subverts the comfort and complacency of the dwelling. This is one thing that surely ought not to be as it is.

Of course, we might just see this as an absurd comic device, as a vehicle for Chaplin's slapstick and knockabout, allowing him to display his timing and physical dexterity. Yet we might also see in this device, contrived as it is, the precise manner in which the dwelling can be implacable. What the clock demonstrates to us is that context is everything. What could and should be an everyday object becomes an obstacle to be overcome. As a result of the context – Chaplin's drunkenness – the familiar has become thoroughly subverted, so that things which are otherwise normal

and ordinary in their everyday usage become absolutely alien to him when he is drunk. What is usually ordinary is unfathomable and is a source of wonder or threat: the ordinary becomes menacingly strange. The pendulum is merely an example of this taken to an absurd level, but which serves to show how the everyday can become an obstacle to us if we do not present ourselves properly before it and understand what it does and how this may limit our actions.

Indeed it is the actions and perceptions of Chaplin, altered as they are by his condition, which create the unfamiliarity, rather than the dwelling itself. The problem, such as it is, is in the neutrality of the dwelling, in that it can only respond to what it is faced with – it can only be used and not take any initiative itself. There are limits to its use, conditioned by its material nature, but what determines whether these limits are reached is the manner in which it is approached and not the object itself. We have to use the dwelling in a certain way for it to work for us.

We might perceive, as Chaplin's drunk no doubt does, that the dwelling is misbehaving in these situations. But throughout *One A. M.* we cannot suggest that any object is doing anything 'wrong'. It is doing nothing different from its inherent nature, from what would be expected of it. If you press the right lever the water comes on in the shower and if you are standing in it you will get wet. The shower is acting in a purely neutral manner. The consequences of this operation, however, are determined by the specific manner in which the object is used. Chaplin exaggerates this for comic effect, but we could all doubtless remember idiotic and embarrassing things we have done involving everyday household objects such as cutting ourselves on a knife, inadvertently leaving a tap running, missing our step and falling down stairs, banging our head on a cupboard door we have left open, and so on. Likewise we might have lost our keys and found ourselves faced with an implacably closed door, which is immovable to our entreaties and claims of ownership. In all these cases we might blame the object and take retribution against it – slamming the cupboard shut angrily or kicking the locked door – but we know that it is our fault, and that the object played no part in it other than as a passive observer of our forgetfulness and stupidity. There can be no blame attached to the object that only becomes animated by our presence and by our use.

So we should not see the house as an 'actor' in *One A. M.* It is crucial to the plot, but it does nothing. Rather it is Chaplin's actions and antics that matter, and nothing happens unless initiated by him. And so it is with us in our dwellings. The dwelling sits there, waiting for our actions and for us to place our impressions upon it.

But this implacability can also create impressions on others, and in particular it might create an appearance of indifference. We cannot see those on the other side of our wall or fence. We cannot see through mortar and brick, and so we are ignorant and unknowing of much that goes on outside our dwelling. This might, of course, mean that the indifference is not apparent but real. Yet this indifference is not malevolent; we are not intending any ill towards these people. Rather, if such a thing can be admitted, our indifference is benign. The issue is one of ignorance: the boundary prevents us from seeing out, and our gaze is reflected inwards, or absorbed by the solid boundaries of the dwelling. So whilst we know that others are out there, and we know that they have needs and cares, yet our own gaze is obstructed by the dwelling.

Open or closed?

But whether our indifference is benign or not, it still might be argued that we should look to live differently. If the dwelling prevents us from seeing out, then we should seek to make it more open, we should make it more inclusive. Instead of emphasising privacy and closedness, ought we not to be looking at ways in which the dwelling can be opened up to allow us to see those who might need our help, or even making it possible for others to gain access to the dwelling when they need to. The issue, however, is how this can be achieved: how can we succeed in making dwelling more inclusive, and what would be the consequences of doing so?

We can start to answer this, in what is hopefully not too trite a manner, by considering for a moment what it would mean when we say we are having 'open house'. When we say 'open house' we might mean that those people whom we have invited can come when they like instead of at a set time, and leave when they wish: the impression we seek to give is of a degree of informality. But what we do not wish to suggest is that we are allowing anyone and everyone entrance. We do not broadcast our invitation across the general community, but only to those we wish to come, and who exist within a deliberately chosen circle. But neither does it mean that we completely open the house up, to the extent of allowing people to use it as they will and as if it were theirs. We do not expect them to sleep in our beds (or use them for anything else), to take a bath, to raid the fridge, and so on. They are still guests and are beholden to our hospitality. So there are clear limits to our 'open house', and once the party is over we close the dwelling up again and it retains its private nature, and perhaps we do this with something of a relief that the house is completely ours again and we might even pledge not to do something like this again for a good while. The openness is therefore only relative and temporary: it is a special event, an isolated occasion, which we may repeat but not too often.

So, with our 'open house', we might wish to be inclusive for a time, to let down the boundaries of our privacy in order to celebrate some special occasion, or because we enjoy the company of family and friends. Yet this inclusivity is limited both in terms of 'who' and 'when': we only include those we want and only for so long as it suits us.

If we were to insist that our house was always open or 'inclusive', it would be reduced to a shell, incapable of offering support to anyone for long. If we could not prevent ingress and interference, we could have no intimacy, privacy, stability or certainty of comfort. Our relations with others would be unstable and unpredictable, with the constant threat or interruption and usurpation. The result of this 'inclusivity' would be competition, where the most powerful and resourceful would win at the expense of others.

Of course, I am not suggesting that this 'inclusive' house is being seriously proposed by anyone. It is very much intended only as a thought experiment to show the absurdity of a private dwelling being inclusive in a particular sense. What this thought experiment does is demonstrate that the exclusive house is indeed a banality; it is the default case, the normal situation of a dwelling that can be closed up by the occupiers and thus made secure.

But we can see the dichotomy of open and closed in a rather more fundamental sense, and I can show this through a further digression into film. Mark Cousins, in *The Story of Film* (2004), discusses the films of David Lynch:

The psychologically safe zones in his films are mostly archetypal small towns and comforting Americana. More, perhaps, than Ronald Reagan – whom he is said to have visited in the White House – he had an almost abstract fear of the outside world, of people and the things he did not understand. Lynch believed that as people get older their window on the world closes. (p. 397)

We can see this clearly in many of his films: the contrast between Jeffrey's family home and the singer's apartment in *Blue Velvet* (1986); the opening and closing 'circular' elements in *Lost Highway* (1997) where we see the apartment from the inside and then as an outsider as we follow the same person through the story; the dark corners and 'behind the radiator' in *Eraserhead* (1977) as a respite from alienation (and here we can contrast the home of the fiancé's family with the homes in *Blue Velvet* as differing exemplars of American family life);¹ the lack of privacy enjoyed by John Merrick in his hospital room in *Elephant Man* (1980); Alvin Straight's daughter's story of her lost children in *Straight Story* (1999), and the discussion between Alvin and the young woman whom he has left home who he meets on the road; and the use of apartments in *Mulholland Drive* (2001) to create different moods, particularly by the use of light and dark, and bright or dingy colours for the decor. In Lynch's films we see a form of closure, a constriction of the lives of the characters, particularly at times of crisis.

Cousins considers how Martin Scorsese spoke of trying to use cinema to 'open things up'. Film can make things more manifest, open them up to a more detailed and fully public view. Whilst this might be useful for Scorsese's purposes, and certainly Cousins sees it as significant too, Lynch is seeking to do the opposite, to create a cinema that is claustrophobic. Lynch uses film to close things down, to intensify, to bring the action down to its most basic, the elemental and psychologically pressing. He begins with a scenario apparently full of possibilities and which appears open. Yet then he uses the film to close it down, to internalise it. We can see this in the character of Betty in *Mulholland Drive*. She is a young actress just arrived in Hollywood. She starts full of hope, but appears naïve, literally with stars in her eyes. When we see her audition we feel she has a chance of a successful career: she is fresh and dynamic and impresses all around her. Yet in the second half of the film she is in a state of decline and going into degradation, as we see her as a failed starlet living a false dream in a cynical and manipulative environment, and watching opportunities passing her by. What is ambiguous in the film is the manner in which Lynch plays with time. One way of reading the film is to see the second half as taking place before the first half, or perhaps the first half might be seen as Betty's dream, where everything starts again, but this time with the possibility of success. However, we cannot be sure of much in this film, there being currents that run through both parts of it, which either tie it together or merely create further confusion. But whatever the sequencing of events, what Lynch does is to proceed from open to closed. One

1 I discuss *Eraserhead* again in the fourth Chapter.

way of viewing the film is as a closed circuit, where possibilities are offered and then closed down. Lynch uses space, moving from an open, airy and stylish apartment at the start of the film, to the dingy and dark atmosphere in Betty's apartment in the second half of the film. One apartment appears to offer opportunity and possibility, being airy and comfortable; the other is dark, with closed curtains and a minimum of light, and is, as we discover, a place of death. In the first part of the film Betty and Rita, who is an amnesiac struggling to remember who she is and where she has come from, try to find someone whom Rita thinks she might know. They find the apartment and break in to find the decomposing body of a woman. The women flee and from this point on the film becomes darker and more mysterious. But it is this same apartment that the second half of the film centres on. This is where Betty lives, and Rita, now apparently an emerging star, is her lover but is growing tired of Betty as her stock rises in Hollywood and she catches the eye of a young director. Perhaps we are to see the dead woman as Betty, or the film should be seen as archetypical, and the process of hopeful arrival leading to failure and death as cyclical.

Much discourse on housing is about trying to open out the field. Of course, the very acts of thinking about and writing on, exploring and investigating an issue are an opening out. This involves bringing certain facets of the problem to the fore; it consists of questioning what is, what we do and why, how we do it, how it could be different, and why we might want it to be so. It is as if we have lifted the front off the dwelling, like the front of a doll's house, so that we can see the rooms and the little people inside, with their tiny furniture and fittings, these 'model' human beings standing or sitting in approximations of domesticity. And once we have opened it up, we seek to play with it, to move the settings around and have the models doing different things. We try to 'improve' the setting and make it better: we move the dolls from room to room, pretending they are doing different tasks. And all the time we speak on their behalf, imagining conversations and scenarios for them to play out for us. We give them arguments and answers to these arguments, and we seek to resolve these problems in time for bed. Likewise, the academic opens up the dwelling and seeks to speak on behalf of the occupants, telling us (and perhaps them too) what they are doing, thinking and why, and of what it all means to them.

This sense of opening up brings us to the linkage between housing and the social sphere, so that housing discourse, as we shall discuss more fully in the next chapter, is not merely about one dwelling – *mine* or *ours* – but the embeddedness of housing in the social sphere in general (Kemeny, 1992). The issue here is the manner in which housing discourse sees the need always to link housing to things beyond dwelling and individual action, with an apparent belief that it can only be properly understood through a sense of the communal. As we have seen, there is a belief at work here that no issues or elements in our lives should be beyond discourse and the idea of the social. Thus social theory and social science should be capable of accounting for any phenomena within their own terms and within the remit of what constitutes the social. Hence housing is considered to be embedded in the social, and it needs to be understood in this context. This was the reason why Kemeny has argued against the idea of theories of housing: if we had housing theory this would no longer be social theory and so is illegitimate. The obvious problem with this position, of course, is that if everything is to be embedded in the social then the concept becomes a rather useless

banality that does not take us any further in our scientific study. If everything is social what use is the category?

But I think a further objection to the personal approach is connected to the idea that anything that seeks to retain its opacity to science, that resists opening out, is somehow discreditable. What happens at a personal level is opaque and resistant to ready categorisation and there is a tendency, therefore, to trivialise the personal or cognitive level not on the basis that it is insignificant, but rather because it is hard to accommodate it within the normalising categories of social science discourse.

Therefore the only valid activity is to open up the issue to the social, for this is the only manner that gives it any worth. We have to suggest that housing forms a part of the social. The private, that which stubbornly remains hostile to becoming embedded, that apparently stagnant residue of the inner world, is then trivialised and separated from what we now consider 'housing'. Perhaps we should suggest that one definition of what constitutes 'housing' is that which can be safely embedded in a theory of the social. Those elements which cannot be integrated are therefore excluded as trivial and unimportant. And so housing discourse seeks to meld housing into a communal entity, whose significance is determined in collective terms.

But is there not something of a contradiction, hypocrisy even, in trying to write about housing so as to 'close it down'? Is it not deeply problematical to see housing as being worthy of discourse, but wanting to see it as closed, and therefore, in a very real sense, not opened up for new discourse? In other words, when we say we want to close it down, what do we mean?

I mean it in the sense in which Lynch closes down the action in his films. Lynch does this to heighten the effect of a scene, and likewise a closing of discourse means to create a heightening. I wish to argue that this heightening occurs as a personal sensation, as a singularity rather than a general or shared condition. To close something is to put a boundary around it, to limit it, and so to intensify it. This creation of a limit means it is possible for the object to be properly *mine* or *ours* as a meaningful relation. But also to emphasise closure is to stress that this relation is private and thus something that is not to be opened up to the full sense of the social.

What this sense of closing means is that it is illegitimate for dwelling to be opened up like a doll's house with the aim of providing a full explanation of how it works and therefore how it can be better planned and regulated. It is illegitimate because we cannot open up dwelling without destroying it. We open up dwelling and it becomes disturbed, the contents become disarranged, and it stops being *mine* or *ours*.

The idea of closing also emphasises the finite nature of the relations around dwelling. The links that we have out of dwelling are not multiform, permanent or diverse. Dwelling is not linked into a diffuse network or a rhizome as Deleuze and Guattari (1988) have suggested. The links that dwelling has are solid, limited and often singular; the culture is particular, specific and evolving but only slowly. The idea of 'roots and ruts' (King, 2005) is what best captures this sense of a limited embeddedness: that we are anchored, and have foundations, and that we also travel down well-worn and predictable paths. This is not meant as a form of environmental

determinism, but acknowledges an awareness that we are limited, and that there are only certain parameters in which we can operate. To close things down, therefore, is to contain them, to limit them, to hold them so that they remain understood, under control and within bounds. It is where we do not allow the unwanted to transgress, to enter and pollute our sense of dwelling.

So we cannot open up the front, we cannot take the front wall away to show what is there. Dwelling, to be and remain as dwelling, has to remain closed, shut up and out of general view. If it is not closed it is not dwelling, it is a performance, a show, a game: there is no ‘fourth wall convention’ in dwelling. Dwelling can and should be acted on – it can be a stage, the background to the minor drama of our lives (King, 2005) – but dwelling itself can never, properly speaking, be staged.

The importance of being closed is not that it isolates, that it separates, but rather that it excludes and thus makes possession and meaningful use possible. Without this we would not be able to use it as we would wish, and protected intimacy (King, 2004), as a key purpose of dwelling, would not be possible. Unless we can separate ourselves, bolt the door, prevent ingress, we cannot live. This means that to close down means to leave things dark and quiet. It is to leave some things unseen and unsaid in order to protect others. This is because much of what I mean by this idea is not really about locking the door, but about keeping ourselves outside. In order for others to live privately we must allow ourselves to be excluded. We have to accept that we cannot gain access to their dwelling and neither should we unless we are invited. We need therefore to acknowledge that we cannot open dwelling up without destroying what is inside. What goes on inside occurs only because we – as the other of our neighbour – are on the outside of their place. We, as observers, as people who might conceivably see in, and might indeed want to, know we should not, that we should refrain from doing so and so leave things dark and unsaid. We need to be reserved in order for others to be accommodated (King, 2005).

So there are limits to what we can say, look at, and discuss in order to keep things closed. This is also why we have to rely on the subjective and the personal as our main source: it is this introspective method that encourages us to see private dwelling. It is up to us to open up voluntarily, to tell what we will, and about what we will. This may create problems, and might well limit us in how concrete, plausible, coherent and rigorous our statements can be, but the other alternative – of taking off the front – is not in anyway sympathetic to dwelling.

This idea of reservation, or of accommodation, is shown in recent Iranian cinema, and particularly in Abbas Kiorastami’s film *10* (2002). This arises out of the restrictions of the Iranian film censors, who insist that women are always veiled on screen as they can be seen by any man who subsequently watches the film. This, of course, makes realistic domestic situations impossible. Geoff Andrews (2005), in his study of *10*, considers that Kiorastami uses the car as a private space, allowing individuals to discuss intimate issues: ‘we may see and hear people inside the car, but we learn mainly about what happens behind closed doors’ (p. 60), such as marriage plans, including failed ones, relations with husbands and children, attitudes towards sex in and out of marriage, including a discussion with a prostitute.

Andrews goes on:

Since Islamic codes pertaining to cinema prevent so much of what occurs between women and men being depicted in a realistically plausible way, Kiarostami use the private/public space of the car to engage our imaginations ... about what may be happening elsewhere. In short, a major part of the film actually occupies a realm that is imagined and invisible. (p. 61)

This last sentence links directly with our discussion on closing things down: we are hearing about things we cannot see and which cannot be shown. But it is also a fascinating example of how the private can be demonstrated in a sympathetic manner under restrictive circumstances. It shows how an intrusion into the personal realm – in the form that women must be veiled in films as if they are in the actual presence of men – can be manipulated, in that the only manner in which these women can be shown talking about the personal in any way that can be seen as plausible, is in what might be seen as public space. Hence the one act of personal defiance in the film is so very moving. This is in the penultimate episode where a young woman removes her veil to show her cropped hair. She has cut off her hair in response to the ending of her betrothal by her fiancé. The woman had appeared in an earlier scene talking about her marriage hopes and the reluctance of her fiancé to commit himself. This scene is moving because it provides such a testament to autonomy and selfhood in a situation precisely determined to deny it.

Kiarostami's understanding of the use of space in *10* is little short of brilliant, with virtually all the action in the film taking place in the two front seats of a car. He has women discussing their personal lives, hopes, fears and longings in the car. On one level this is a public space – the car in being driven along crowded roads in a busy city and we frequently see people looking into the car as it passes. The woman is really driving in the streets of Tehran as she talks with her passengers. Yet the car is being used because it is where they can discuss the private. And it is precisely because it is nominally a public space, seen as such by both actor and viewer, that the scenario is not unrealistic and neither is it absurd to have women dressed as they are.

This shows that it is often not the space itself that determines what happens in it, but rather the manner in which it can be used. This is the other side of implacability, namely, the idea of neutrality. In this particular situation created by the director, the space is conditional upon the particular context in which it is used. The car is not here primarily a means of transport but a place for and of communication, and as a space in which the private views of women can be portrayed sympathetically and realistically. Andrews notes that Kiarostami actually initially intended the film to be of a psychoanalyst meeting clients in the car. So the idea of the film from the outset was to use a car as the space to talk: it is the conversations that are going places, not the car.

On one level Kiarostami's film shows the implausibility of trying to represent the domestic as it is: we cannot show the private without publicising it, without making some concessions to the spectator. When we seek to show the private and the ordinary we have to create a special situation, an exception, such as women talking as they drive around in a car. Instead then of seeing Kiarostami's situation as simply a contingent one, as a means simply of circumventing the strictures of the Iranian censors, I would argue that this is not a special situation but merely a more exaggerated example of the norm. It is a case where the impossibility of displaying

the truly personal is made more apparent and obvious by the censor's diktat. What it shows is that we must behave *as if* we are in public: all actors must behave as if they are being watched, for this is their role, and so observing the private as it is becomes impossible.

Kiorastami creates a situation in *10* where his actors are just talking about dwelling rather than being shown within it. What does it mean though to *just talk* about dwelling; how does this alter or create significance? Is this not an extreme example of 'closing down' where we do not actually see the dwelling, but only hear of it? Or is this not just the mere process of discourse at work? Do we not, when we communicate, always operate within limits, within forms and patterns, which hide as much as they give away? We are people who hide behind our ways of saying, as we hide behind our walls and doors. We may dress this dissimulation as principle, but it is an inevitable form of social interaction, in which we can elide the distinction between public and private. As a phenomenologist I want to suggest that we can only bridge this gap between the public and the private, the subjective and the objective, internally and through our acceptance of our place in the world, as beings that are in dwelling.

So I want to insist that dwelling cannot be open and inclusive and still be dwelling. This might seem to present us with an ethical dilemma, in that if we want dwelling we must have a closed door and therefore risk the possibility that someone is left outside. However, any ethical position needs to be grounded, to be placed in something that is solid, so we have some notion of what the face of the other is calling for, and why we might be obliged to respond. This grounding can only be provided by our ordinary world, by the common nature of our humanity, of which our dwelling is an ever-present and necessary manifestation. It is the nature of our dwelling, the ontical status of dwelling, that makes us aware of our obligation, of the nature of *homelessness* – of being without dwelling – and of being alone and bereft and without the care of others; of being without love. And it is through the stability and solidity of dwelling that we can afford to look about us. Without these foundations, this anchoring, we would have no capability to care. All we could hope for would be that someone else had the capability to care for us.

So, yes, dwelling will indeed block our gaze. But it is also an essential prerequisite for the capability to care. Without dwelling we cannot help others, but when we have dwelling we can insulate ourselves from the intrusion of the cares of others. We need dwelling to fulfil our obligations, yet we can use the dwelling, in its physicality and security and privacy, to hide away from obligation. Exclusivity can also be a ridding of concern.

Exclusion

We do have something of a dilemma then, of needing to face inwards *and* outwards, and we need to recognise the somewhat ambivalent role that dwelling plays here. Dwelling can fulfil an inward *and* an outward gaze, but it can also prevent either. It is in this sense that we need to understand the nature of dwelling as implacable, because it can as readily facilitate the one as the other. What this points us to is the

dichotomy of *inclusion/exclusion*; of the manner in which housing can include, with its finiteness and enclosure, and then how these boundaries can exclude others by preventing access. The boundaries of dwelling work to include our intimates, but to exclude the other. In both cases we can see the dwelling as the limit both to our intimacy and to a general access. What this means is that inclusion and exclusion are oppositional: my inclusion of intimacy demands and depends upon the exclusion of others. I must be excluded to ensure that others can be inclusive towards their chosen ones. Likewise, I cannot share my privacy without insisting on exclusivity, on the necessity of barring all unwanted others from this intimacy. We must insist on some barrier between us and the other.

But should we not worry about this? Does this not indicate a problem with the nature of dwelling, if it is indeed not only possible but necessary to exclude others? I would suggest that it does, insofar as some people may not be included anywhere. The oppositional structure of inclusion/exclusion operates to the benefit of all only so long as some are not excluded from all places; as long as we all have a right to be in some place, and cannot, under normal circumstances and through legal means, be excluded from this place (King, 2003).

I want to deal with this problem in something of a negative way by stressing the necessity of this structure of inclusion/exclusion, for without it we cannot maintain dwelling: I will go so far as to state that it is this structure that makes dwelling possible. It is therefore not sufficient merely to wish it away or to try to strike it down. It is not simply a form of nimbyism, or a hatred for the other. Rather, it is the manner in which dwelling operates, where parents put their children first; where lovers put each other even before themselves; it is where the caring, sharing and loving can come together. Most assuredly, we need to ensure that this insularity does not get out of hand and become unreasonable. In particular, we need to ensure that we do not infringe on the rights and autonomy of others. Yet the parochialism of dwelling is not a conceit or a malformation, but is rather its essential prerequisite; it is part of the structural integrity of dwelling (we need to remember that one meaning of parochialism is to be *close to home*). What is important here is that being well-housed does not mean we automatically reject or ignore the needs of others. Dwelling does not imply this, and so we need to suggest that it concerns *some* exclusion and a *limit* to the level of inclusion. It does not imply total isolation or complete insularity.

What we need to ensure then is the possibility, and indeed the actuality, that all of us can attain this balance of inclusion/exclusion, rather than just being excluded. Thus to say we are homeless is to state that we are excluded from all places, that there is no inclusion – we are not included in any place. Or, to put it another way, *when we are homeless we lack the capability to exclude anyone from our world*. So to be housed is to have the ability to exclude. Hence the significance of the structural dichotomy: to prevent us from excluding is to prevent us from being properly housed; exclusion prevents us from dwelling properly at all. And so we should not believe we can help the homeless by limiting the well-housed, or by excoriating those who seek to preserve their own privacy.

To exclude is to keep out or to refuse access to someone or something: it is a proscription that denies access. We can see terms such as omission, eviction and removal as cognates of the word. When we exclude someone we ignore or pass over

them, we ostracise them, we disallow their point of view or opinion. Exclusion is therefore a separation of ourselves from others so that we do not have to associate with them. Of course, we can turn this around to consider the excluded, where people instead of proscribing are proscribed, and instead of disallowing are disallowed. In either case we can see exclusion as a restriction on the action of some people as a result of actions by others.

This shows the active nature of exclusion, as something that is the result of an intentional act. But being intentional is not the same as suggesting that something has been done deliberately: things can have an effect regardless of any specific intention. Exclusion, as we mean it here, is not a case of someone deliberately and purposely denying something to another. It is rather the case that we ignore the other in the pursuit of supporting ourselves and our own: we are simply unaware of others, not because we are being malign, but because our lives are already full. Hence we should see exclusion as an act of omission rather than as something deliberate: we exclude others by not actively including them. We pass over others, ignore them and so shut them out, but this does not imply that we should change what we do, or feel guilty in any way. Rather all households are doing the same thing, and this, of course, is what makes exclusion bearable and indeed negligible for most of us: the exclusion, so to speak, is mutual.

We can see exclusion almost as a voluntary act, where we refrain from interfering in the private interests of others. It is not that we aspire to exclude; rather exclusion is the ontical state of dwelling: it is the practice of living in separate households. It is what we are already and always doing as households; it is what makes private dwelling sustainable and indeed possible. As soon as we take a partner we exclude; as soon as a child bonds with her parents she excludes. Setting ourselves up as a household is itself an act of exclusion; closing the door is also an act of exclusion. All these actions are as natural as they are innocent. Exclusion is part of the sustaining nature of these acts. Exclusion is not a by-product of privacy, but its essence, an intrinsic and necessary element of it.

So we can say that exclusion makes privacy: if we cannot exclude we cannot find privacy. Exclusion, therefore, is what is happening as we live out our ordinary lives. If we cannot exclude unwanted others, there is so much that we cannot do, and perhaps would not want to do. It would make any intimacy impossible or an embarrassing public show. Of course, what this shows also is that we quite often want and expect others to exclude us: we do not want to witness the intimate relations of others.

There is also exclusion, and the requirement for it, *within* households: children as they grow need a certain space to be themselves; different sexes need privacy and some certainty that they will not be intruded on, even by other family members; parents need privacy to be intimate; children need privacy to do homework, or if we work at home we may wish to be alone and make this known, likewise if we are reading, watching TV, listening to the radio or to music, and so on.

Expressed in this manner exclusion can appear banal, but it does show how basic the need to exclude is. It is not some huge controversial statement or shift from current practices, and it is not an expression of a political creed, extreme or otherwise. Rather it is a quotidian expression of our lives as individuals living in households. Exclusion, quite simply, is what we do every day that we set out to

look after our family and/or ourselves and make our world understandable. Without exclusion we would not be able to get beyond a basic scramble, a competition for things. Exclusivity allows us the security of the predictable use of things and thus the ability to develop them (Hegel, 1991). We can preserve things, ration them or invest them, rather than feeling we must consume them immediately before they are taken away by some individual or group that is stronger than us. As we have seen in our description of homelessness, the inability to exclude is a sign of weakness and vulnerability.

But, of course, much of what we seek to exclude is not, of itself, harmful to us. It would not damage us, and the people we exclude are not, so to speak, alien to us. We wish others no harm, and we may have much in common with them in the sense of shared values, language, interests, culture and so on. In other circumstances – in public space – we would respond differently. We would not shun others, but share our experiences and opinions; we would help them, be it with directions for their journey, by offering sympathy or information, or by sharing their burdens. It is just that our commonality can and should only go so far: there are limits to our sociability, and this relates to our need and desire to be ‘at home’, to be intimate and alone with only certain chosen persons. As such, one of the principal elements we have in common is our need to exclude.

So exclusion, like many of the banalities of our lives, should be seen as a practical capability: it is the ontical state of dwelling, such that without the capability to exclude there can be no dwelling. It is therefore something of a necessity, in that exclusion is the very practice of private dwelling. Exclusion is what we do when we practise dwelling as a viable activity. It should be seen not as some abstraction, but as a practical concept related to the ordinary we are in the midst of (King, 2005). We should seek to depoliticise it, and to reclaim the idea of exclusion from those who seek to socialise it. We should see exclusion not only in social terms, but in subjective terms, as what individuals require to constitute their lives into understandable and meaningful patterns; as the ability to control these patterns and limit external interference with them. We have become used to the term *social exclusion* as a polite alternative to poverty and inequality. Hence we have institutions of government such as the Social Exclusion Unit in England, charged with identifying and dealing with situations where some members of society are denied or excluded from full citizenship rights. The result of this attachment to the social is the belief that exclusion is necessarily an evil in need of remedy. But we should not see it as necessarily a pejorative term, or as something to be avoided. Just because we need moderation in our conceptions – we should no more ‘binge’ on exclusivity than alcohol – this does not mean that we should avoid the term entirely. As we have seen, for dwelling to operate, to exist in any recognisable and successful state, we need the ability to exclude.

Perhaps, as I have already intimated, what we should be seeking to attain is the reduction of the idea of exclusion to a banality, to a common-sense recognition of its ready application as the main means whereby we attain our privacy; that we all apply it, operate it and expect others to do likewise. This relates to my discussion in *Private Dwelling* (King, 2004) on the limits of charity and the calls that we can legitimately make on others. I argued that we would not expect someone to help us out, unconditionally and regardless of the consequences, merely because they have

the material capability to do so. We do not expect limitless and consequence-free relations with others, and neither should we. What we expect, and seek for ourselves and our own, are lives that are bounded by constraints and restrictions of our own making. We wish to erect and maintain boundaries that constrain others. Yet it is often the case that these constraints operate, and the boundaries are maintained by a form of self-imposition, a seemingly voluntary constraint on the behaviour of others delimiting them from imposing on us. These constraints likewise apply to us and limit the demands we place on others. We know, therefore, what are the limits of the demands we can place on others, what is reasonable, what is acceptable, and we know, maybe only implicitly but nevertheless effectively, that we rely on this self-abnegation in others to protect and sanction our sense of privacy and autonomy. As Robert Nozick showed in *Anarchy, State and Utopia* (1974), autonomy and the ability to exercise our rights are not due to something within, but to the restraint of others, and to say that someone has a right is, according to Nozick, to place a side-constraint on the actions of others in order to ensure that this right is exercisable.

The inclusion/exclusion dichotomy we have begun to identify here is central to the notion of implacability: it is how the implacability of dwelling makes itself known; it is how it shows itself. The same physical entities, the doors, walls, fences, hedges, that keep us safe and bounded, quiet and private, which allow me to include certain chosen ones within my intimacy, are also the things which exclude others I do not want or need close to me. The same virtues which insulate me and mine also exclude and isolate the other. These walls and doors are deaf to our pleading; they allow us to remain ignorant of the other who is outside; they prevent us from seeing, from hearing, from registering the existence of the other. The other can become, or be reduced to, a hypothetical one, an abstraction, an image transported in via the television, but not a person as such. And what adds to this is that our dwelling becomes imbued with meaning so that it is important subjectively. This subjectivity – the meaning derived through use – is bolstered by the unbreachable and unyielding implacability of the dwelling. We use it to protect ourselves and to help us develop meanings only pertinent to ourselves, and we can use this because the dwelling holds others off and, by keeping them distant, ensures that we are not disturbed. So this implacability is the means of inclusion and the cause of exclusion, the way we isolate others so as to protect ourselves. Yet we need to keep in mind that this structure of barriers works equally for all others: I am excluded from the intimacy of others, just as I exclude those others.

That a place can be made exclusive by its implacability allows us to use it. But it allows us more than this: it allows us to take, to grab, a place. By this I mean we can give it a meaning, where the use seems to extend the place and to take it to a new level of significance. It is no longer a mere place but one that belongs to us, to which we have an affinity; it becomes a place that we can associate with. The activity of dwelling, so to speak, takes a place to somewhere else: it takes a place out of what it was and into a new milieu; that of the human, the consciously acknowledged and meaningful, a place that is not merely there but which is *inhabited* (Bachelard, 1969). In so doing it confines not only us, but our actions confine it, make its context and mould them into a new set of meanings. But for this to happen a place must be compliant in its inanimate nature. In other words, its implacability needs to be

benign, working for us rather than against us. It is the implacability of a place that gives us the opportunity to develop a sense of meaning, for when we begin to use it, to make it ours, it cannot be another's as well. Accordingly, we might see dwelling as the successful accommodation of implacability. It is where the neutrality of place is at our disposal, or, even better, where we can use the neutrality and implacability to assist us, to hide, to exclude and to protect ourselves. We want to use the implacability of boundaries to control our dwelling and to ensure that its use is limited to those we love and care for, to those we wish to share with. As such we can conclude that private dwelling is the manipulation of implacability to create exclusion of the unwanted other.

And so we return to this apparently contradictory sense of the implacable: we need it so that we can exclude, and we exclude so that we can be properly inclusive. As with all discourses on dwelling there is circularity here, a feeling that we are constantly returning to key concepts and ideas, and that things are linked together. But then dwelling is an iterative process, which is based on regularity, habit and the ordinary sense of the world. We are circling around things, to which we give a meaning and significance by the very iteration of our contact with them. Yet we also know that what our habits depend upon is that we too are encircled by something, that we are enclosed, insulated and protected. This encircling object is both significant to us subjectively, yet also implacable: it is both necessary and neutral. And the more we look at it, the more we realise it is necessary *because* it is neutral. The more we look at this basic outline the more we see, and the more we want to look, and write. And so, implacable as ever, it goes on, like a circuit opening and closing.

Chapter 2

In and Around Dwelling



When housing is not housing

This is not a book *on* housing, but a book *in* housing. This is something that will need quite some explaining if I am not to be accused of either obscurity or of committing some semantic delusion. But it also presents me with an opportunity, and one that I do not intend to forego. This is a chance to be positive and not defensive, to make a clear statement of intent, both in terms of methodology, and also, most importantly, on *subject matter*. It is my view that the matters I discuss in this book, which take place in dwelling and which are concerned with the activity of dwelling, are actually about something *different* from most other books on housing, including several I have written myself.

Now this appears to be a big claim – of inventing a new subject, a new field of enquiry. But, of course, I am not really doing this, rather I am pointing to a clear distinction in the manner in which we use the word ‘housing’ and the implication that this has for the way in which we write and talk about housing, about who is

talking (and occasionally writing) and about whether we can understand each other.¹ The problem is that when I talk about housing I do not mean it in the way in which it is most commonly discussed in the literature and in housing education. When I refer to housing I am not talking merely about things, but about actions; and I am talking about singularities and not aggregates. I use the terms *my*, *mine* and *ours* a lot instead of terms like ‘housing stock’ and ‘social housing’. And I most definitely do not mean ‘housing policy’. What I am referring to is *dwelling* (King, 2004). Dwelling is more than housing, but that does not diminish what housing is. What dwelling does is to connect housing into a broader ontological condition and receptivity than can be grasped by a concentration on ‘policy’.

I can illustrate the problem with an anecdote: several years ago a colleague and I were discussing the last housing books we had each read. I am afraid I cannot remember which book my colleague had read, but I stated the last one for me had been Claire Cooper Marcus’ *House as a Mirror of Self* (1995). This book uses Jungian psychology and art therapy to analyse the relation individuals have with their dwelling. Marcus looks at why some people are attached to their house, whilst others find it difficult. The book is anecdotal (appropriate for an anecdote) and based on a small number of interviews. But this is precisely the book’s virtue, in that it gets close to the relationship between dweller and dwelling and shows it to

1 It has been pointed out to me that languages such as German and Swedish do not use the same word to mean both housing policy and the activity of housing, and therefore this division I have created is merely derived from a specific inexactitude of ordinary English language usage. If this were the case, of course, this would seriously damage the significance and extent of my argument: only in English is there this confusion between policy and the ordinary. However, what I hope becomes clear as I develop this argument is that what is at stake is the privileging of one form of discourse over another, and that this privileging does not merely depend on how these discourses are defined. The fact that they are described by the same term in English only heightens this privileging, but the argument does not depend on the use of a common word shared across this dichotomy. Were one writing in German or Swedish one would have to present the argument differently from the way I have been able to do here, which would not be begin from the manner in which ordinary language is used. This matter is somewhat complicated, of course, in that the language of international housing research is English, and accordingly the point about the differences in ordinary English language usage was made to me by both the German and Swedish academics using ordinary idiomatically correct English. The conference was organised under the auspices of the European Network of *Housing* Research (ENHR), and it would be interesting to see how the name of this body would be translated into German or Swedish. The ENHR secretariat is based in Sweden, but conducts all its correspondence and proceedings in English. A search of the abstracts from the conference showed that the vast majority of the papers deal with housing policy and not the subjective use of a dwelling. A final point to make here is that one of the biggest influences on my work on private dwelling is the late essays of Martin Heidegger, in the versions translated from the German. The argument of his late essays depend very much on his studies of the etymology of words such as ‘building’, ‘dwelling’, ‘thing’ and so on (Heidegger, 1993). Heidegger, of course, was notorious for his statement that ‘we think in German’. Whether this is true or not, German (and Swedish) academics, if they wish to reach an international audience, have to write in English and according to the conventions of ordinary English language usage.

be intensely personal. As I was about to wax lyrical on her book, my colleague interjected with the comment, ‘That’s not a housing book!’ The idea that a book on how we live in our house and how we respond to it, how we attach ourselves to a specific dwelling and deal with loss, love and sharing is not a ‘housing book’ is, to my mind, enlightening both in terms of what it says about ‘the literature’, and about attitudes to what constitutes the field of study we call ‘housing’. In essence what was deemed to be lacking in Marcus’s book – one of the few books genuinely to get past the front door (King, 2004) – is any discussion on policy: it is a book about how we live and not about how we make and pay for aggregates of housing. It does not deal with government action, housing agencies and subsidies. Instead Marcus’s book tries to consider the implications of living quietly, privately, in a place where one has chosen to be: it is about precisely what I want to concern myself with, namely how people dwell.

But my colleague’s comment was also a challenge, in that to accept this view would also be to admit that neither of my last two books – *Private Dwelling* (2004) and *The Common Place* (2005) – were ‘housing books’ (which is exactly what my colleague has said to me!). But if these books are not about housing, what do they deal with? And who are they for, and what purpose can they possibly have? It is in trying to answer these linked questions – and therefore to justify what I have been spending my time on – that has led me to question exactly what it is that ‘housing’ is, or could be, or should be. And so I have tended to the conclusion that there are indeed two different subjects here, two distinct areas of study, which may have some common jargon, similar arguments, and even be of some interest to each other. However, they are still, regardless of any similarities, different in what they are talking about, what they seek to establish, and, perhaps most importantly, what they mean when they use particular words such as ‘housing’, ‘homes’² and dwelling.

What I want to distinguish between is *dwelling* and *housing policy*, and so it may be useful to offer a simple sketch of what I consider these two distinct entities to be. Dwelling is about being settled on the earth, where we are accepted by the environment and where we ourselves can accept it. Part of it, what I term private dwelling (King, 2004), is an activity in which we use dwellings to meet our ends and fulfil our interests, to such an extent that this singular dwelling becomes meaningful to us. This is an activity in which we are all engaged, or wish to be so engaged, and we see it as seriously debilitating if we are not able to enjoy it (King, 2004, Nuttgens, 1989). Housing policy, on the other hand, is the concern for the production, consumption, management and maintenance of a stock of dwellings. The significant aggregations may be local, regional or national, but in each case housing is seen as an aggregated concept and one that is determined by standards set at one or all of

2 We should note that the use of the plural – ‘homes’ – is itself significant. Talking of ‘homes’ instead of ‘home’ radically alters how we perceive the term from the outset. A trend in the UK has been towards replacing the word ‘housing’, so that social landlords now build and manage ‘homes’. It has gone so far that the Housebuilder’s Federation in the UK has renamed itself the Homebuilder’s Federation. The pluralisation of the word has taken home from a condition to a collection of things and thus emptied it of much of its meaning and its significance.

these levels (King, 1996). Whilst this quick sketch might be said to simplify and to underplay the complexity inherent in both entities,³ it does serve to demonstrate that they should be seen as two quite distinct and separate activities. One – housing policy – aims to create rigid and formal analytical structures based on an attempt to understand the provision of entities and their consumption *in general*; the other – dwelling – is about the very specificity engendered by enclosure, by what the object we call a dwelling brings with it for us *in its singularity*. Housing policy only determines objects as a collection upon which we can generalise on their utility and purpose. Dwelling, however, is where we see *a* dwelling as *my* house. Housing policy is about what happens outside; dwelling is about what happens inside. And as my colleague's comment made clear to me, there are those adherents to policy who would also insist on this distinction.

But whatever side of this divide we are on, why should we seek out and insist upon this distinction between providing houses and using them? Why is the former seen as more serious, as 'proper housing', whilst studies of the personal are not? Is it that dwelling is seen as trivial, or too private, or perhaps even too personal and embarrassing? Or is it because it is hard to codify, to substantiate what it is we are really discussing? Unlike policy which is about aggregates – numbers – and definitive standards, dwelling is about meaning and feeling. It might then be that dwelling is denigrated because it is not based on facts, on specific entities that can be weighed and measured. Might it not also be a feeling, or a fear, that this form of analysis, of narrative and subjectivism, is something of an indulgence, that instead of dealing with important social problems such as affordability and homelessness, we are concerning ourselves with relative trivia and the interests of those already well-housed? In this way, this subjective approach can be dismissed as not being sufficiently serious or important, at least in comparison to the imperative issues. But this view, I want to suggest, is to misunderstand the importance of dwelling.

When we are challenged about what all this has to do with the sharp end of housing, with policies about helping people and the imperatives of social housing, we need to answer that this conceit about the place of housing policy is akin to someone scoffing at a discussion of human well-being and health and asking what has this to do with the way supermarkets sell food? Housing policy and housing organisations are in the same position as supermarkets. They are providers of something important, but what we are concerned with is the purpose of things and not merely the how and where of their provision: we want to use things for our ends, and this is what I am concerned with in this discussion on dwelling.

We can go on: why, we need to ask, do we – whether we are housing academics, housing professionals or just dwellers – put such a regard on high quality housing, which is above what is strictly required for our survival? If the imperative of survival were the only issue, there would not really be a housing problem in any reasonably developed country. The provision of mass dormitories would deal with it. But this is not what we want or need, and we ought to look at why we insist on a private

3 I define private dwelling in detail in *Private Dwelling*, and discuss its more general meaning in the third chapter of this book. I consider housing policy and its failings in *The Limits of Housing Policy* (1996) and *A Conservative Consensus?* (2006).

dwelling for each and every household, and this, I would suggest, involves the manner in which we use, and choose to use, housing.

One justification for the dominance of policy is that it links with what is often referred to as *practice*. We can take this to mean the actual activity of managing a stock of dwellings. This involves the allocation of properties, their periodic inspection, the collection of rent, the maintenance of both the tenancies and the properties, and taking remedial action where necessary. Research and writing on housing policy, it can be suggested, are supportive of this activity, and are quite properly seen as important and necessary. These, we might say, are bread-and-butter activities, the most basic and necessary elements, and therefore what housing is essentially *about*. Of course, as Jim Kemeny (1992) pointed out, this link is only strengthened by the structure of housing education, which is based around the teaching of current or future housing professionals. The role of housing research, just like housing education, is to produce better informed and competent housing professionals, giving them the tools to carry out their difficult role more effectively. Research can therefore be seen to have the purpose and the possibility of dealing with clearly definable outputs. It would also provide an apparently powerful critique of discourse based on the notions of privacy and insularity which are at the centre of my argument here: critics are able to ask what is the link with practice, knowing that the response is likely to be that there is little or none.

But the question of a link – or even *the* link – with practice is a mistaken one, or rather it misses the point of what a discourse based on personal lived experience is reaching for. What we need to ask in this context is just what this ‘practice’ is that we apparently need so urgently to link with. If we mean the management of a stock of dwellings as discussed above, or the policies and the strategies for implementation of local, regional and national bodies aimed at supporting this, then we would certainly have to agree that there is very little or no link, or at least not in any direct sense. But then, I would suggest, this is not to say very much.

Instead what I would suggest is that the concept of dwelling is both broader and deeper than this shallow pursuit of relevance to ‘practice’. Dwelling is broader because it is about far more than time-limited policies, strategies and management functions. It is deeper than the superficial concern with fabric and facilities, and their accessing and policing. Dwelling is about the general relation we have with the world, or more particularly the earth, as settlers (Heidegger, 1993; Norberg-Schulz, 1985); it is about us as beings that stay awhile in between their wanderings over the earth. But it is also about the specificity of this relation to a place, of *me* in *my* house with *my* family and *my* things (King, 2004). This is not what policy does or is about. Policy can clear the path and enhance the possibility, but after this creation it can offer nothing. And we should not see this as a problem, or as something to remedy or rectify. It is precisely as it should be, because policy is external to the activity of dwelling.

The practice that I *am* concerned with is precisely that of dwelling itself. Dwelling in this sense is living privately and subjectively, and doing things in our own distinct units, connected by various means, some of which are compulsory whilst others are voluntary, yet still separated by the boundaries that dwelling gives us. And we can do this all without policies and housing practice. It is a practice based on familiarity,

on iteration and repetition, not step changes or action plans initiated by governments and regional boards.

As people who dwell in houses, housing policy simply passes us by: it does not affect us, or concern us, and this still holds even in the case of social housing tenants whose dwellings and tenancies – *but not their home* – have been ‘created’ by policy. Much of a tenant’s dwelling activity is outside the scope of policy. It may be established by it in the most general of senses, and it may be periodically assisted by policy, but for most of us, most of the time, there is a blissful ignorance of performance indicators, efficiency indices, rent plans, business plans, and so on. These are management tools which have little or no material effect on the practice of dwelling.

Dwelling, then, is simply something that we all do and which we need to do. It is about living in dwellings privately and separately, setting our plans according to the opportunities and constraints that face us, and all within broader public activities, all made meaningful by the specificity of place. The practice of dwelling is not an indulgence or a luxury, and certainly not a distraction, nor is writing and researching on it (or at least it is no more of one than writing about housing policy and practice). Rather, I would suggest that, from my perspective, dwelling is the principal activity, which policy can feed into if we let it, but which forms only a minor element, and which ought never to succeed in dominating. Housing policy cannot make dwelling; it can merely help along the way.

But there is another aspect to this debate, which is perhaps more about the politics of the field of study that we call ‘housing’. The very notion that there should be a consensus of what constitutes ‘housing’, that there is, or even should be, a dominant discourse, is of itself exclusionary as well as being inherently anti-intellectual. This is because such a discourse would appear to insist that we are already on the way to truth, that therefore we have the right answers, and that we have no need to look left or right or consider an alternative path. But is such a dogmatic, might one say almost theological, position in any way tenable? Is it not just an excuse not to think, and to disengage from the new and different, which, in any case, we might not fully understand? There is the danger here of complacency about the nature of what constitutes the field so that it can be controlled and managed.

Now it may well be that many are happy with this configuration, if only because it does allow them to operate within a limited sphere. Others may feel security in numbers and confidence in doing what many others are doing. Yet what this shows to me is a concern with the power of a particular discourse, rather than its veracity: a discourse is true or useful solely because of weight of numbers and we win an argument merely by counting the numbers in favour compared to those against. Yet as Robert Nozick argued in his *Philosophical Explanations* (1981), is this really a pleasant or indeed a civilised manner in which to conduct rational enquiry? Moreover, does it not already presuppose that we are correct, that we are unready to shift our view (because it is not necessary to do so), and therefore we have no need to engage in argument? Instead of listening and engaging, we should seek instead to destroy the opposing argument. But as Nozick rightly questions, what has this to do with truth? Are we to suggest that American foreign policy is right merely because America has the biggest army, navy and air force? Similarly, why should we expect

an argument or position to be true merely because of weight of numbers, or because of the vehemence with which its supporters push their case?

This being so, why should we be afraid to write about the personal, especially when so much about dwelling is precisely of a personal nature: it is *mine*, and it is not, properly speaking, communal. Yes, it is common, but only in the sense of knowledge – an epistemological quality – and not in the sense of ready replicability or accessibility. We do not hold our dwelling in common with those outside our immediate family. Yes, it is normal, but only to *me* or to *us*, and not to anyone else: what is normal to me would be recognisable to others, but would not be their normal way (King, 2004, 2005). We would recognise the activity of dwelling undertaken by others, but only in the sense of a family resemblance: we might know elements of the face but it would still be different, not absolutely familiar (but, of course, it would still be a face with all the normal parts in the normal places). But most importantly, whatever the similarities this new face had with the one we already knew, the one with the ‘new’ face would still be a stranger, who would not know us or recognise us, and would not even be expected to acknowledge us.

If we recognise the specificity in the general, the singularity that there is in each thing that appears so common and shared, we can then appreciate why the personal approach is so important in dwelling. This is not so that we can create a dominant discourse, nor so that we can exclude any others. Indeed we see no need to compete at all. Rather the personal approach is important in allowing us to address what it is to live as we do: to share the dwelling with certain others, but to do it in our own way. There is no rejection here of any other position, only an attempt at addition; no circumscription of possibilities, but an opening up of the possible. This is then a *different* subject from that of housing policy.

Let us for a moment be more singular: dwelling is something we all know about, that we know personally. It is what we do, where we retire to, one of the main supports to our lives. We can be bourgeois and see it in terms of its value, its cost to us, and what it says about us in terms of class, education and so on, but whilst we do that we can still put our feet up, talk to our children about their day and ours, read a book, listen to music, watch a film, and all in furniture chosen by us, in décor chosen by us, and for many in a dwelling chosen by us. This dwelling is *mine*, it is singular to me, and we should recognise this, explore the revelation and try to understand what is all around us – what we are in the midst of – and not take its significance quite so for granted.

So what I am talking about is what happens *in* and not around dwelling. I am interested in what takes place in a dwelling, with what we do there, and in how we use it. This is not because I want to displace any other form of research. It would be a mistake here to see the discussion as an either/or, that we must choose one form of discourse or another and then say that this is what ‘housing’ is definitively about. But equally, we should resist any attempt to decry the other approach as illegitimate or useless. We can disagree without refusing to see merit in the different views.

All I am intending to do here is to present what I see as a necessary corrective to those studies, which are by far the majority, that limit themselves to policy, and refuse to engage with what we actually have policies for. My belief is (and this may be overly naïve) that when we put the two elements together – the policy and

the use: housing policy and dwelling – we might then have a fuller, or even the full, picture: hence the sense of talking about being *in* housing, and not *of* housing. We are not going around housing, walking the outside, or looking at the external networks. It is indeed necessary that this be done and that many are so engaged. But what I am interested in is on the other side of the door, which we then keep closed. This involves a different and distinct approach from that which concerns itself with policy: it is about understanding our lives in dwelling. My aim in the rest of this chapter is to describe what such an approach might look like.

Using theory or making theory?

In order to get to where I wish to end up, I need to take a step back and return to what perhaps might now be seen as a rather old debate. It also may appear that I am immediately raking up an issue I have just dealt with. But there is, I hope, some method here in talking again about ‘housing’. As I hope will soon become apparent, what I am discussing here is no longer the ‘what’ – the contents of what we call ‘housing’ – but the ‘how’. In this particular section I want to make some comments about the ambition of housing research, about what it seeks to do and what it actually can do, and thus to lay the groundwork for a discussion on method in the final section of this chapter.

Jim Kemeny (1992), in his now seminal study of the nature of housing research in relation to social theory, argued that housing studies was confined to a narrow empiricism and, as a result, it has been left behind by advances in social sciences over the last 20-30 years. Kemeny stated that:

A central problem of much of housing studies is that it retains a myopic and narrow focus on housing policy and housing markets and neglects broader issues. Housing studies is still too isolated from debates and theories in the other social sciences and what is needed now is further integration into these. (p. xv)

His point was that housing researchers needed to engage with concepts and theories that were quite common in disciplines such as sociology, politics and economics, but which had apparently bypassed academic housing studies. In addition, he argued that there were several examples where housing researchers had claimed to have discovered something new, in apparent ignorance of a huge already existing literature on the issue in the mainstream social sciences. His means of dealing with this problem was to argue that researchers return to their parent disciplines and reconceptualise housing according to the theories and concepts prevalent in each area.

Since Kemeny’s book there has been a considerable growth in theoretical discussions of housing, some of which have sought to adopt Kemeny’s call for a return to disciplines. Kemeny himself has helped this development through his editorship of the journal, *Housing, Theory and Society*. This has encouraged a new generation of researchers in developing their theoretical work. This is encouraging, and suggests a more open-minded approach to theoretical applications. In particular, Kemeny has encouraged a considerable body of work in the area of social constructionism and discourse analysis (see in particular, Jacobs *et al*, 2004 for a useful collection of

this work). The importance of this work is that it begins to take seriously the role of human subjects in housing processes, rather than concentrating on structures and impersonal forces. It can therefore be said to open the way to the personal.

So we can reasonably suggest that theoretical housing research has developed considerably since the early 1990s. However, there is a problem with much of this work, which calls into question its durability and the manner in which it might be used. In general, the ambition of this work has not been the *creation* of theory, but the *application* of theory to housing issues. A researcher has taken a particular issue, be it homelessness, design or housing management practices, and applied a particular theory or concept to that issue. In the case of social constructionism, a concept like discourse is, as it were, imported straight into an existing policy debate. The theory is then used as a tool to shed light on this particular housing phenomenon. This, on one level, is extremely useful. One of the purposes of theory is to apply it to given situations. In this way, we can test the theory's utility, as well as improving our understanding of housing issues. We might suggest that if a theory has no application then what use is it; if it does not shed light on the social realm and help us to explain and account for it, then why have theory?

There is, of course, much merit in this argument. We clearly want theories that have some explanatory power. Yet this is not the problem I am seeking to elucidate here. It is not theory itself that is at issue, but rather the manner in which the theorising is undertaken.⁴ In particular, the problem is that housing researchers use ready-made rather than bespoke theory. And it is this, it seems to me, that presents housing researchers with a stark limitation. What we are apparently restricted to is a piecemeal approach of taking ready-made theories, summarising them concisely, and then applying them to our chosen context. We do this even in the knowledge that the theories have been constructed within a different context. As an example, we know that Michel Foucault developed his notions of discipline and the gaze in regard to incarceration and the treatment of criminal deviancy (Foucault, 1977), but this has not prevented housing researchers from trying to apply these concepts. Of course, these concepts can have a wider application, and they have been used to consider other areas as well, such as sexuality. Yet we do have to question how readily these concepts *fit* within the particular parameters of housing phenomena. These concepts were created by Foucault for a particular purpose, namely that of the nature of prison and incarceration. Accordingly, and unsurprisingly, they suit the debate on criminal justice rather well and we might expect these notions of discipline and gaze to be used by housing researchers in discussions on anti-social behaviour, for instance (Flint, 2004). But, why should we expect these notions to fit other housing phenomena in anything other than a tangential manner? (And, of course, we can question how far anti-social behaviour really is a housing issue.) More particularly, if Foucault was

4 I am aware that what I do not do here is define precisely what I mean by 'theory'. My reason for this is quite deliberate, and this is because what theory actually is and how it should be defined is itself a rather contentious debate and what I do not want to do is allow my arguments to be sidelined merely on the grounds that my definition of theory is not congenial to others. It is my contention here, that whatever definition we give to theory, the problem of theorising on and out of housing would remain.

able to develop a conceptual apparatus from his study of prisons, why do we not seek to develop concepts from housing phenomena?

The problem, it seems to me then, is precisely in attempting to remain within strict disciplinary frameworks, where there are already existing and established theories. As Bridget Franklin (2006) has stated ‘it could be argued that housing is so large in scope and impinges on so many areas of life, that it cannot be conceptualised under the rubric of only one discipline’ (p. 2), and what is needed therefore is ‘a more integrated and holistic conceptualisation of housing’ (p. 2). This suggests a multi-disciplinary approach that identifies a contextual approach ‘identifying geographical, cultural, social and individual variables in the use of space, and locating them within a historical perspective’ (pp. 2-3). She then proceeds to develop such an approach in her study of emerging forms of residential development. Franklin’s approach, of pulling insights from a range of disciplines is a considerable step forward, and allows for a richer and deeper understanding to be brought to established and emerging patterns of residential development. However, it still does not go far enough, and this is because Franklin still admits to a key limitation of housing research and its relationship to theory.

It is perplexing that what is seldom done is for a housing researcher to take a fundamental approach to the nature of housing phenomena themselves, and then to consider how this might be theorised. It is far more common to see a paper that seeks to apply the work of a particular thinker (say, Pierre Bourdieu or Foucault) or a particular theory or approach (postmodernism, critical realism, social constructionism) to a particular housing issue. Whilst I wish to reiterate that this is an entirely legitimate approach and one that has proved fruitful, to my mind the problem with it is that it does not allow for the theory to develop any further. It does not build anything new on to the theoretical edifice. Indeed, quite often the discussion of the theory remains at the level of description rather than critical engagement. All we can state from these discussions is that the theory can be applied or it cannot, and that the theory emphasises particular aspects of housing phenomena.

However, these aspects will not be new to the theory – *they do not extend it* – but are merely replications of it within the housing context. This means that the utility to be gained from engaging with theory is strictly limited. If we do not feel able to develop new theories or fundamentally extend existing ones, all we have left is to shift from one theory to another, applying them to the same housing issues to see if we can derive anything of interest.

What this means is that Jim Kemeny’s argument, that housing researchers remain unaware of developments in social theory, has been replaced by a new problem. Whilst many researchers are now undoubtedly more aware of theory and its possibilities, they are not themselves making theory, instead they are merely responding to it. This may be because, not unnaturally perhaps, researchers start from an interest in housing and not theory. They see themselves first and foremost as housing experts who use theory or theories to help them better to understand housing phenomena. This ought not to be surprising: we do not theorise for its own sake; we wish it to be grounded in something. Moreover, housing being a concrete issue relating to the daily living conditions of a population, we wish to have some

practical impact through our research and writing. Theory, then, should be seen as having some obvious utility.

But I would argue that this otherwise quite understandable view rests on a misperception of housing. This is the view that housing, being practical – about bricks and mortar and making peoples' lives better – is not substantial enough itself for theorising. Kemeny himself has argued that housing is not a discipline with its own set of concepts and methods. Allen and Gurney (1997) concur with this view, arguing that 'we should dispel any delusions of grandeur that housing is a 'discipline' – contrary to the beliefs held in some quarters, there is no such thing as 'housing theory'. (p. 4). Allen and Gurney believe that the basis of housing research should be its 'substantive' focus, by which they mean housing policies. Policy, therefore, should be the basis for theorising, such that 'there are not housing theories, but rather theories for housing' (pp. 4-5). Hence they point out that Kemeny has stated 'that the most important word in the title of his book is 'housing AND social theory' (p. 5).

So, according to this view, whilst we can apply already formed theory to housing, it is not a sufficiently solid field to allow us to create new theory. It does not have the necessary conceptual apparatus within it for theory building. It must instead rely on concepts from 'outside', and take a multidisciplinary approach to analysis. Housing stands there to be theorised upon, but not to build theory on or out of. We can only have housing *and* theory, but not theories *of* housing.

The obvious point to recognise here, particularly in the light of the discussion in this chapter, is that Allen and Gurney explicitly accept that the subject of housing is *policy*, and so they seem to neglect the view of housing as an existential activity I have sought to explore through the conceptualisation of dwelling. The view of housing being proposed here is therefore considerably narrower than that which I have sought to propound. In addition, I would suggest is something of a conceptual leap in itself to state that merely because housing is not a discipline there can be no theories of housing. As it stands Allen and Gurney's statement is a non sequitur which seems to suggest that theories can only originate from within established disciplines.

This misperception also lies at the heart of Kemeny's own argument against theories of housing. In Allen (2005) he argues that theories of housing would presuppose that housing was something distinct from the social, that it forms an entity sufficiently substantial in itself. For Kemeny, having theories of housing would be tantamount to arguing that housing is disembedded from the social. So instead of creating theories of housing, we should rather use social theory to help us explore the nature of housing phenomena within the social realm.

The key problem with this argument is that it is reductive. First, just what, we might wish to know, is not embedded in the social; what is not part of the social and therefore can only be understood by the application of a general theory of the social? In what way is housing different from any other field we might choose? Of course, there are those who take such an extreme position and see science as nothing more than a social construction to be deconstructed through the use of social theory (see Alan Sokal's wonderful parody and critique of this position in *Intellectual Impostures* (Sokal and Bricmont, 1999)). But, of course, if *everything* is embedded, then this becomes a banality, a trite and useless phrase that adds nothing to our knowledge:

concepts that do not permit any discrimination within them are scientifically worthless. Second, it seems to suggest that the only things we can theorise about are abstract generalities of the social realm, things such as power, class, and so on, rather than concrete elements within the social. But surely it is wrong to suggest that we can only theorise about what constitutes society as a whole – that which constitutes the embeddedness of entities – and not the particular entities themselves. Were we to accept this position we would have to contest the legitimacy of Foucault's theorising of the carceral system on the grounds that it disembeds punishment from the social. This is an extremely limited and limiting conception of the social and the role played by elements within it. Essentially it reifies the social through a rather naïve form of methodological holism, which is quite at odds with our own lived experience of housing: our housing, we should remember, with its bolts and window locks, is the one space where we can seek to 'disembed' ourselves.

But third, there is a particular conceit here that theory equals *social* theory. We need to avoid the danger – and we cannot blame Kemeny for this (he was, after all, a professor of sociology) – of insinuating that the only theories of housing are social theories. Indeed this to my mind is a key problem for housing research, which seems to ignore the contribution of philosophy, psychology, aesthetics, architecture and anthropology, all fields that are extremely well developed theoretically.⁵

What I am suggesting is that we seek to develop a more phenomenological approach to housing that draws on some of these other theoretical traditions, but which also concentrates on the phenomena themselves as detailed and specific entities. We should see these phenomena not only as the raw material for existing theories, but as the groundwork for theorising itself: we should start to pick apart what it is about housing – what housing experience amounts to – and seek to model this, not as a social construct or as an example of the gaze or habitus, but as a thing in itself. What I am seeking to do is to bring out the *cognitive significance* of housing as a substantive activity.

So what I believe we need to do is to create our own metaphors, rather than relying on those of others. We need to begin the work of concept creation ourselves rather than relying on off-the-shelf categories. Instead of using theory we have to begin to start *theory building*. Clearly this will not occur in a vacuum. Those of us interested in this area have an existing interest in theory and some knowledge of it. We would naturally use concepts and ideas that relate back to our parent disciplines and which we feel comfortable with. Also, all theory builds on the back of, or in reaction to, already existing theories and concepts. Thus we *should not* start from scratch. What we should seek to do, however, is to strip housing of all that is external to it, and from this position of phenomenological reduction to determine what housing is and does. If we begin with this analysis of the experience of housing itself we will be able to build – perhaps very slowly – a corpus of concepts and theories that describe housing more fundamentally than any 'outside' conceptions are likely to do.

5 It is indeed interesting that debates in architecture tend to centre on the very opposite problem cited by Kemeny. Writers like Roger Connah (1998) and Paul Shephard (1994) have argued that there is too much theory in architecture and seek to assert the point that buildings are not texts.

It may well be that this process of theory building limits the field of housing studies: that to build theory from the bottom up means that we exclude ourselves from some debates within the social sciences. But the benefit of this will be that we open up new avenues of enquiry and start up new debates about the significance of housing as something substantive that does not rely on theories developed for other fields. Like Foucault (1977), developing his notions of discipline and the carceral society out of an historical analysis of punishment in France, so too we should seek to develop new concepts out of the significance housing has for us. Like Foucault, we do not need to invent an entirely new syntax and grammar for our analysis – Foucault, we must presume, used words like ‘discipline’ and ‘gaze’ precisely because of the existing resonance of these terms: in any case he certainly did not invent the words. We should merely begin with a full appreciation that the phenomena that we are focusing on are substantial enough in themselves to bear the creation of a new form of analysis.

This perspective does not negate Jim Kemeny’s key criticism of housing studies, but rather suggests that his prescription was bound to be limited and limiting; that, if we really do wish to see housing research as attaining its due status and seriousness, we should not expect others to do our work for us. Neither am I suggesting that housing is not as embedded in the social structure as Kemeny claimed. Of course, housing is so embedded, and linked into other phenomena. But this should not diminish housing as an activity in itself, for, as I have suggested, what phenomenon cannot be said to be so embedded? The end point of this argument for embedding seems to be that if we aggregate all concepts we have somehow understood them. Yet if this is the case, there is no point in studying housing phenomena at all, because they can be of no real substance, either socially or intellectually, but are completely reliant on the larger social world extant beyond housing.

What I believe we need to do, both theoretically and strategically, is to make a case for the substantiality of housing as an activity and field of study in itself. Of course, this is a hugely ambitious project, and perhaps there is an element of folly in proposing it. It is not something that can be readily achieved by any one researcher, but depends on developing a different understanding of housing, or rather, the fact that housing can be many things, be it policy, dwelling, or something else. Yet it is something that I earnestly believe to be necessary if we are to take a theoretically committed housing studies onto the next stage of development.

It is precisely this form of theorising that I have been attempting in my last two books, and which I continue with in this one. As I stated in *The Common Place*, what I am attempting is to build theories and concepts *out of* housing; this means that I seek to develop theories that come from within the activity of housing. It is for this reason that I place such a reliance on lived experience and the personal. This approach, it seems to me, depends on paying close attention to our specific and singular response to the general condition of dwelling, rather than the application of something ready-made to already existing housing issues and problems. What I am seeking to do is to create new metaphors and concepts which we can apply, use, criticise and analyse. These are not merely additive for housing, but come out of it. They should be seen as a cumulative part of what housing is. Such concepts as *accommodation* and *the ordinary*, from *The Common Place*, and *protected intimacy*

and *private dwelling*, from *Private Dwelling*, are all notions that come out of housing and an analysis of living in it. They are not simply applications of something already existing. They are born at home, as it were, and thus they broaden and deepen our understanding and our vocabulary, rather than always treating housing as a given that can only be constructed using the jargon of already existing disciplines and theories. Like Foucault's concepts they carry with them a semantic history, so that we recognise something within these terms. They have some kernel already within them that creates associations, that allows us to hang things upon them, and which draw pictures for us. Yet they are associable as *housing* concepts and gain their theoretical significance from being *within* housing.

One consequence of writing in this manner – from within housing – is that one uses particular materials. The restriction to build from the bottom up and not to use ready-made theory limits us to what we can have recourse to. But like many forms of self-restraint, this setting of limits can be liberating, and makes us fall back on to our own resources. And the key resource we have is, of course, our own dwelling. Before considering this in more detail in the next section, however, I need to deal with an obvious criticism of the approach I intend to use here, and have used before. A reliance on personal experience, on film criticism and philosophical discourse seems to displace the traditional sources for the housing researcher. So I need to face up to the inevitable question, or rather exclamation, that follows from my approach: 'What, no housing literature? Where are the references, the links to key debates and issues, indeed how can it be linked in, where is the context?' The personal and rather impressionistic approach I have used appears to make very little use of the existing literature, and thus there is the risk of being disconnected, of not being properly *embedded* in the field.

My response to this exclamation is straightforward and simple, although I hope it is still polite: the housing, or rather, the dwelling literature I would want to refer to has not been written yet. What I am doing here is not so much responding to what has been written, but to what might be written, or what could be written with a flight of the imagination. As I have tried to suggest, what I am doing here is in some ways a new subject. This means that a new literature may need to be created, or new links forged with other literatures. I appreciate that this may seem either arrogant or ignorant, or indeed both, but it is not my intention to be either. All I am suggesting is that there may be some merit in looking at housing in a different manner, not instead of the more established approaches, but as well as. And so if we wish to build up concepts from within housing, from lived experience and the personal, then a literature should be geared to that and not to standard texts and issues that do not engage in this manner. Quite simply, much of the housing literature, including some of my previous work (King 1998, 2001, 2003, 2006), is on a different subject. Most of the literature, with some notable exceptions like the recent work of David Clapham (2005) and Bridget Franklin's work discussed above (Franklin, 2006), is concerned with policy and not dwelling.

If we are building up from the bottom, of theorising about housing, not alongside it, or using it merely as the case study, we should therefore take the risk of writing a book that ignores much of the housing literature as being irrelevant to us. The idea should be to find or to create new concepts, so to speak, in the raw, unmediated by

the literature. There is undoubtedly quite a conceit here. We have to ask to be taken on trust, and needless to say, much will depend on the ensuing results. All I can state at this early stage is that this practice is not gratuitous or excessively wilful. Instead, the non-use of the housing literature is a function of the distinctiveness, the difference, of the subject matter, of a book *in dwelling* and not on housing. By this I mean writing ‘from within’ housing: that it is about the phenomenology of personal lived experience and of building from this, and not the attachment of housing to theory. But what does this actually involve?

Writing the personal

There is a compulsion in book writing, be it on dwelling or anything else. When we have a project it takes over, it becomes the focus of our life, even if the end result is to little effect. Jacques Derrida in his *Envois*, part of his book *The Post Card* (1987), parodies this compulsion:

In effect I believe that the idea imposes itself, this is indeed the word, in any event imposes itself upon me and I want it (want it horribly, flight, no, to enclose myself in a book project, to deploy all possible ruses and a maximum of consciousness, intelligence, vigilance, etc., while remaining, in order to remain (as you said to me one day) enclosed in this puerile (and masculine) enclosure of naïveté, like a little boy in his playpen, with his construction toys. That I spend the clearest part of my time taking them to pieces and throwing them overboard changes nothing essential in the matter. I would still like to be admired and loved, to be sent back a good image of my facility for destruction and for throwing far away from me these rattles and pieces of tinkertoy) ... (p. 51)

There is here a mocking of the author, and we must presume that Derrida is writing of himself here, of the concern to play with one’s toys, of juggling them, of pulling constructions apart and building them up again in different ways, and being thought well of for doing so. Yet we feel that it is only half parody: Derrida was if nothing else a writer, whose reputation derived from and depended on his facility with words, and the way he used them to deconstruct the words of others. But he was also a theorist of writing and what it means to write rather than speak (Powell, 2006). His *Envois* are about the understanding and misunderstanding of writing and of where this arises: of Plato dictating to Socrates (Derrida, 1987). So there is also something serious here, and this is an evocation of the urge to write and the mental struggle it involves, as well, of course, as some of the egotism that writing brings with it. It shows that anxiety and struggle, as part of the striving to achieve, are not too far apart. What this quote also shows is the obsessive quality of writing and its insularity; that one can enclose oneself within a project and that it can exclude all else. But we do this so as to release – to hurl – something out into the world for others to catch (or be hit by?). And this is a particularly pertinent image for writing about housing.

I wonder how many housing academics write as I do, namely, *from within the dwelling itself*. Do many do as I do and write *at home*? Right *here* (or should it be *to write here*?) is a crucial comment on my subject matter. I am using the closed

and insular environment of my own dwelling to write about privacy, to discuss possible methods for writing about private dwelling, and so, *right here*, all the time I write here, is a demonstration of what I wish to write of. There is then more than one meaning of the notion of writing a book *in* housing, and this is by no means a trivial or facetious point. If we think of the compulsion needed to write, the need for solitude, for uninterrupted time to compose, think and organise, then where better is there than the dwelling in which this enclosure can be most certainly guaranteed? What I would like to claim therefore is that the ability to write on private dwelling (and much else) is a guarantee of its existence: to write of it we need to be in it.

Yet a book *in* dwelling cannot be entirely dependent on the conditions of its creation. This is not a book *in* dwelling merely because I wrote it at home. I have suggested that this book aims to develop notions from within dwelling, from within the context of their own generation and not as additions grown elsewhere. So whilst the fact that it is written at home may not be the main issue, the fact that we are at home and that there is such a thing as *my* house is entirely the point. What I want to suggest is that the method in writing *in* dwelling is a condition of personal lived experience, of the very privacy and insularity that cocoons us as we write. We write from personal experience *in* dwelling, because this *being in* is what dwelling amounts to.

But this still sounds too opaque, and so what I feel the need to do is to try to establish more formality or precision in the methods I have used in my more recent writings and which is also evident here. This may be dangerous, in that it may show how arbitrary the process is, and how reliant it is on introspection and its attendant problems of bias and generalisation. But there is also the opposite danger of making my approach seem more programmatical and less deliberately impressionistic than it is. And also how truly necessary is it: is not writing the books themselves enough? One thinks of Foucault writing *The Archaeology of Knowledge* (1972) as a form of justification for the methods used in his previous books: a text which has been undoubtedly influential, but which he promptly ignored and disavowed in his later works. This is though a risk that is necessary if these methods are to be disseminated more widely and if the approach is to be understood.

The basis of this method is a detailed and intense reflection on personal lived experience, to consider what meanings there are and how these come into consciousness. By personal lived experience I mean those ordinary, normal aspects of our life that are reiterated and regular. Furthermore, it should be of things that actually have happened or could conceivably have happened. A key criterion, therefore, is the ordinariness of the experience, in the sense that it is normal and forms a pattern. This does not preclude the abnormal or the 'one-off' unpredictable event, but such an occurrence should be assessed according to the manner in which it relates to or interferes with the normal and the ordinary. The peculiar should tell us something significant about our normal patterns. The key issue for us here is whether, and how far, we can see the lived experience as integrative of our dwelling. It should not be something outside of dwelling, but rather something that occurs as a result of dwelling. This, in itself, is not especially limiting as we shall see when I return to Jacques Derrida's *Envois* (1987) below. The experience need not even be 'about' dwelling as such – and it perhaps seldom will be – but instead it should be

about experience that could only occur because of dwelling, as a result of dwelling. In sum, we should eschew experiences that are extraordinary or eccentric and those which cannot be located in dwelling, and in their place seek experiences that are integrative of dwelling. These need not be intrinsically interesting. In fact, they ought not to be particularly revelatory or salacious in any sense, as this would then militate against the ordinary and reiterative nature of lived experience. The experiences that we obtain from this process are often impressionistic, questioning and rhetorical. We can see the results of these experiences as a series of questions or limits beyond which we find it hard to transgress, and which therefore help to form our future experiences.

When we speak of ‘personal lived experience’, whose experiences should we be talking about? Do the experiences have to be mine, in the sense that it is me who has experienced them? Certainly this offers a number of advantages as well as some difficulties. The advantages relate to the very closeness that we have to the experiences, and therefore the possibility of understanding and then expressing their meanings with an added clarity and verisimilitude. But of course, experiences need not be personal to me to remain personal to somebody else, and so they need not always be so close. We do not have to have experienced something in order to imagine and calculate its effects, just as we can see a character in a film and feel for their predicament even though we have not experienced it. We can therefore allow for a leap of the imagination, so long as the experiences we are discussing are linked to a person as such.⁶ Indeed our lived experience is as much about sympathy and empathy as it is about the facing of issues in themselves. Hence in *Envois* we are not told which letters, if any, detail actual things which happened to the person called ‘Jacques Derrida’, nor does this matter, because of the grounded and empathetic nature of the discourse.

But neither should we shy away from what is actually personal where we feel we can and should discuss it, so long as we maintain the connectivity of our experiences and seek to show how they relate to the ordinary world we are in the midst of, and are not against or outside of it. I have considered some of the issues at stake here in *The Common Place* (2005), where I discussed some of the properties of the ordinary, and, in particular, how we can see the ordinary at all without making it into the extraordinary. The telling argument here is that given by Stanley Rosen (2002) when he reminds us that we cannot ignore the practical limitations that are dictated by our psychology and physiology. We are very much subject to our common human nature and by what Rosen calls ‘common sense’ (2002, p. 263). This he sees simply as the most rational or plausible thing to believe, given what we already know. Common sense is what we appeal to when considering whether an action or belief is ordinary. There are certain things which are part of the very structure of our existence as human beings. What this means is that we are of a fundamentally similar nature or character to each other. We know this when we consider the efficacy of a medical treatment – we do not assume our physiology and psychology is unique or subjectively determined – and we know it, implicitly and perhaps even somewhat embarrassedly,

6 Hence the italicisation of ‘mine’ to refer to a singularity, which need not, so to speak, be mine.

when we aggregate social issues and make generalisations on human actions based on assumptions of the predictability of past human actions. If we are to persist with the idea of the social we must also take with us some sense of commonality, or how else are we to learn, to use and understand common languages and concepts, and know they are common; to read another's face for clues of their intentions; to read aggression or submission in a person's stance, and so on. These examples – of verbal and body language – are the basis for discourse, and for social interaction, the means we are told in which social reality is created. Yet for this interaction to occur, and for us to be able to understand each other, we must have intellectual and physical equipment in common and a means of knowing, assuring ourselves and believing that what we say means to others what it means to us.⁷ What this argument suggests is that, provided we maintain a grip on what constitutes an ordinary experience, we are likely to present examples which resonate with others who share the same faculties with us.

A related point is about the possible consequences of writing in a personal manner. Two questions arise here: first, is it not somewhat arrogant to assume that our own experiences will be worth sharing; and second, might we not be revealing too much? I think that it is possible to answer both these questions together. The whole essence of the position I am developing, of what I have elsewhere termed the ordinary experience of dwelling (King, 2005) is precisely that what we discuss is not exceptional, and if it were so it would not be a suitable topic for discussion. If an experience were not common, not ordinary, we would not discuss it. It is because these experiences have no intrinsic interest, outside of the fact that they are common and relate to dwelling, that they are acceptable as the raw material for discourse. What this means is that the stakes are really rather low, because what is being revealed is of little or no consequence. Moreover, whilst there is an apparent compulsion to write, no one is forced to write about the personal, or to reveal anything. We all have the choice over what we include and exclude, just as we have a choice over what we do and do not read, and what we do and do not believe or accept. The compulsion to write is always followed by the therapy of editing.

In any case, we can never be sure, as readers, how much dissimulation is taking place: we do not know how much has been left out to avoid a breach of confidence or to prevent embarrassment, or how much is just being said for effect. We might not even know what is true ourselves. Dissimulation is often part of our very identity, our attempt to stay sane and retain some dignity, and as such is very much a part of the ordinary itself.

And is it not the case that all writing is ultimately done for its effect? Is it not this that we are writing for, to have some effect on those who choose to read our work? After all, our purpose, as someone once said, is not merely to describe the world, but to change it. And since the 'death of the author', what does it matter if the experiences actually happened or not, if the 'I' spoken here is not me but someone else? Less archly, what matters is whether we connect with the personal experience of others, whether to say *my* is to share.

7 This is why, properly speaking, social constructionism is a banality.

To return now to the processes involved, in the initial stages at least, what this process of recounting personal lived experience may amount to – as, so to speak, the labour of it – is simply writing, the placing of thoughts into a narrative, and the working out of these thoughts through their collation, through their establishment as text. Only later can we begin to clarify, to extend the concepts and to seek means of joining them together. The purpose of proceeding in this manner is to retain some of the impressionistic quality of the first thoughts, of the singular lived experiences. We do not experience dwelling, or the world more generally, in a linear manner, but we tend to reconfigure it in terms of earlier or later events and through the power, the magnetic pull, of memory. We need, therefore, to retain as much of this quality as we can if we are to show dwelling in its fullness rather than as being a dry and empty husk.

We now have a series of concepts within a narrative, or as part of a narrative, for which we can claim some significance. Yet there may be no coherence here, no real connectivity between the various concepts we have developed. What we need to do therefore is to try to establish a conceptual apparatus to prise open an issue, to develop appropriate and enlightening metaphors, and in doing so seek to make connections and develop a narrative that coheres together. This is a process of critique in which we seek to apply these concepts to new experiences and to test one concept in terms of another. In this way we can begin to see their compatibility and whether there is any coherence in the discourse we are seeking to develop. We can follow Immanuel Kant here and describe critique as ‘an analysis which attempts to determine the legitimate range of application of a concept’ (Burnham, 2000, p. 7). This is a process of defining the limits of sense for a concept, the limits to which such a term can be applied and still retain its meaning. Our initial focus should be on the meaning of key concepts that come from this process of introspection. The first stage is to define the concepts we have chosen: to consider accurately and precisely how they are used and what it means to use them in particular ways. We need to see how they relate to other terms and concepts: what are its cognates and how does the meaning alter from one to the other. We need to think about what it means to be in a particular situation, to assess what is the significance of this lived experience: what is its meaning for us? We should seek to look at the issue from all possible angles to establish its limits, to isolate it from areas of noncontiguity, whilst ensuring we see its necessary connections. We need to assess the concept, as it were, in its place, as part of a set of relations. But we need to separate it from those things which may hide its significance. In this way we have already gone beyond pure introspection by achieving some common resonance between the concepts we see as significant. The questions we should be asking here include: *what do we use dwelling for?; why do we use it?; what are consequences of that use, and therefore, what does it mean to us?; what would it mean then to lose it?*

Having established these key concepts out of personal lived experience, and then analysed them, to proceed further we need some further means of generalising, some means of comparison, of linking the singular into the common. We need to ensure that these concepts, so significant to our experiences, have similar resonances in the experiences of others. This can be done through a connection with examples in literature, film and, where possible, the academic literature. What we seek to find are

echoes, sonorities that confirm, resonate with, question, or touch those experiences that we can recall. Perhaps what is being sought here – if this is not a complete oxymoron – is a form of *comparative introspection*, where the ideas and concepts coming out of our own deliberations and thinking are in some way corroborated in the literature and discourses we use.

We need to show care in the examples which we choose. It would be all too easy to find one example from somewhere which confirms an experience. But would this actually tell us much? We need to ensure that the works we use therefore have some merit and significance. This may be in terms of their literary, cinematic or intellectual value, or because they are well embedded into popular culture. Whilst we need to recognise that the issue of quality is important, and that the works of filmmakers like Ingmar Bergman and Andrei Tarkovsky have an emotional resonance and a complexity that is seldom matched by Hollywood blockbusters, we should not be too precious in our choice of examples. Films such as *The Matrix* (1999) and books like the *Harry Potter* series are popular because they say something significant about us and the manner in which we live, and do this in a manner we find appealing. But whatever examples we choose, we should seek to use several, from a diversity of sources, to justify the significance of lived experience. Hence in the discussion on memory and exile in *The Common Place* I used films as diverse as those by Tarkovsky, Bela Tarr, Gus Van Sant and John McTiernan, as well as the work of academics such as Paul Oliver (2003). In this book I use sources as diverse as Charlie Chaplin and the avant-garde Japanese director Hiroshi Teshigahara. In this way, it becomes possible to suggest something of a pattern, to highlight and confirm certain themes. This also means that we should not seek out the exceptional or overly specific. We should perhaps be cautious about using films that purport to be about housing as such, albeit that this is a limited genre. This is not because they lack truth – *Cathy Come Home* (1966) is extremely powerful and effective – but because they will be exceptional: to tell a story about housing would mean it had to be in some way exceptional, beyond the normal. This is precisely what *Cathy Come Home* is: it is a brilliant discourse on the consequences of poor housing and an unfeeling bureaucracy. Yet it is effective *because* it is so extreme. This is not to suggest that these things did not and still do not happen, but rather they are not the norm or the ordinary (which is the reason we find them so troubling in the first place, of course: they take us out of the ordinary). What we should seek out are examples in which dwelling is in the background, where the actions take place *in* housing rather than being on it.

We also need to ensure that we do not read back an artificial significance into our experiences as a result of the material we choose. To prevent this we need to have our concepts ready formed before we begin the process of comparison and confirmation. The literary and cinematic examples cannot be the sole basis for lived experience, but as *confirmations* of lived experience, and so we need to hold in view the fact that they are fictions. In mitigation, though, we can state that these fictions will themselves be subjective and personal visions, and where they work effectively it is because they resonate with lived experience. However, we should use them to extend and exemplify lived experience and not as the source of it. They may well be

substantive statements in their own right (Mulhall, 2002), but we are still using them for a purpose just as we would an academic text or policy document.

We can see this method as phenomenological, as the consideration of meaning and its perception, and as a form of introspection. Of course, introspection can be criticised as a process that is internal to the recorder, which depends on the recorder's own inner thoughts and not on any external sources. Whilst I have tried to show how my method goes beyond this by using other sources as tests of significance, the starting point for these deliberations is still personal lived experience. So some defence of this approach is necessary.

Phenomenologists such as Edmund Husserl and Martin Heidegger saw that we do not experience the world as inner mental representations or copies of things that exist outside the mind, as John Locke had argued, but rather our experience 'presents itself as the experience of engaging directly with the world' (Moran, 2000, p. 6). We are already part of the world, and so we are already within what we are experiencing. It is not possible, and therefore philosophically naïve, to seek to separate out the world from our experience of it. We cannot properly distinguish between the objective and the subjective. This means, as Moran (2000) points out, that phenomenology is a kind of introspection and thus vulnerable to all the criticisms of this approach. Yet Moran argues that the continuing appeal of phenomenology, and why it has been so influential in modern social theory as the bedrock for notions such as structuration and social constructionism, is precisely because of 'its attempt to provide a rigorous defence of the fundamental and inextricable role of subjectivity and consciousness in all knowledge and in descriptions of the world' (p. 15). Indeed 'subjectivity must be understood as inextricably involved in the process of constituting objectivity' (p. 15). The world comes to appearance not of itself but only through and in human consciousness; we can see the world in no other way than as part of ourselves. As Moran states: 'There is only objectivity-for-subjectivity' (p. 15). It is we as human subjects that mediate the appearance of things.

So with this insight from phenomenology we can tread with more confidence because we have nothing other than lived experience. But what makes this more effective for us as researchers is precisely that dwelling is so close to us. Much of our lived experience is within a dwelling, and we are all dwellers. In this way, we are particularly incapable of making any distinction between our subjective position as dwellers and any sense of an objective world of dwelling as distinct from this. So to write *in* dwelling is as natural as we are able to get.

Any method is only as useful as its results, and is as limited as its capabilities for analysis will allow. It would be difficult, for instance, to use this approach for policy analysis, although useful attempts have been made to use literary analysis to consider policy (Manzi, 2005). So we have to be clear about what manner such a method might be used most effectively. It is clear that the best use is in looking at the way in which we do actually live as dwellers within private space.

One way of framing this analysis is to return to some basic and fundamental questions, which were central to ancient philosophy, namely, 'What is a good way to live?' and, 'What does it mean to live in this way?' It seems to me that these are still thoroughly appropriate and necessary questions with which to commence a study of how we dwell. This process of questioning will inevitably centre on what *I* or *we*

are doing. They lead us to a critical reflection on how we live, centred inevitably and necessarily on anthropomorphic and therefore subjective and introspective processes; on those principles, concepts and sentiments that frame us, and the manner in which we present ourselves to the world. The ancients sought to develop key axioms or principles for living, a simple set of doctrines or dogmas to give a focus to their lives and upon which they could hang a more detailed and complex set of associations and concepts (Hadot, 2002). We might be less ambitious in what we intend to achieve, yet this idea of trying to identify how we live as precisely as we can offers a means of progressing. It would involve a calm, considered and detailed reflection – a prolonged introspective examination – of how we live and how we should and could live. This is precisely what Socrates had in mind when he stated that the unexamined life was not worth living. So what we are doing, in our smaller and more prosaic way, is examining *our* life, *my* life.

I have already made use of what I see as an interesting and searching example of this approach to thought, namely Jacques Derrida's *Envois* (1987). This forms the opening and longest section of his book *The Post Card* and consists of a correspondence between two or possibly more people, who may be, or may have been, lovers. These letters deal with the nature of communication, and with reflecting and reflecting back. They can be seen as a series of love letters, concerning love itself, of being apart, the pain and fear of losing love, yet they also form a commentary on writing, on representation, on appearances, on the notion of scriptural authority, on intention and meaning, on letters arriving and not arriving. They are all supposedly written on a post card that shows a medieval drawing of Plato directing Socrates in his writing. Derrida makes great play of this anachronism and infelicity with the philosophical tradition. But his *Envois* are also, to use Socrates' phrase, the examination of a life, but in the sense of Socrates *after* Freud, and so it is not restricted to one subject.⁸

There is a clear sense of the writing of personal lived experience in this work, but also a sense of dissimulation: it is the examination of a life, but whose life is it, and how much of it is Derrida's own? Derrida's *Envois* consists of apparently personal letters, but we do not know who is writing any of them, or whether any or all should be seen as representing Derrida himself. But then Derrida, we know, is the author; he has written them all and intended them as they appear. He knows what he wanted to reveal and, we must presume, has revealed just this much and no more. He has, so to speak, sent them to us for us to read, and wants us to see them. In this way – through the directness of the personal letter, but ones which are kept anonymous and therefore *impersonal* – we do not know what we should believe. But what Derrida has achieved here is a directness, or what we might see as a locating of the general – the issues of love and loss, memory and forgetting – in the singularity of a particular relationship. He reminds us that all emotion, all feeling, be it love or be it anxiety, is local. All feelings are singular to *that person at that time*. Through the anonymity of these letters we cannot ourselves locate these feelings, except in ourselves or in the other in general, and this is the precise virtue of Derrida's work

⁸ More properly, as Jason Powell (2006) points out, it is really Socrates after Lacan, and so the discussion is indeed *post*-structural.

here, to identify these general emotions and feeling in the singularity of their emoting and reception.

What Derrida's *Envois* is not about is dwelling, and this is an important and telling point about the methods I have discussed here, and why they form a useful example for me. It may seem perverse to choose an example that is not *on* dwelling. But this is precisely my point. Derrida did not, to my knowledge, write directly on dwelling or housing issues (although he did write much on architecture, see for example his essay on Daniel Libeskind in *Radix-matrix* [Libeskind, 1997] and his collaboration with Peter Eisenman in *Chora L* [1997]). But *Envois* could only be written in the context of a protected intimacy, in the knowledge of security and privacy that is given by the enclosed dwelling. It is an intimate correspondence to be read by particular people only and in private. The things discussed in the letters, the intimacies, arguments, discussions, companionship, could only occur in private dwelling, and as such, private dwelling is the *condition* for *Envois*, even though this is quite properly not its subject matter. This is why Derrida's work is a telling example of lived experience: it is not about housing, nor on housing, but it is a discourse *in* dwelling.

One can question whether it is entirely appropriate to follow Derrida's lead when writing about dwelling, and indeed I have not gone as far as he did in this book: I have maintained most of the conventions of an academic text (if that term still really retains any meaning: if we can speak of objectivity-for-subjectivity, what meaning are to we take from the term 'academic', and does it matter any more?). What I have tried to do instead is to focus on the personal. Like Derrida, I am not beyond dissimulation: this is not autobiography any more (or less) than *Envois*, but I speak of things that spark off from my concerns and interests, and from my own lived experience. My method is then one that depends on narrative and on the personal. I too aim to combine the singular into the general, and in doing so demonstrate the key qualities of dwelling, that it is both ubiquitous and unique, both common and particular (King, 2004, 2005). This may, to some, appear distinctly singular, but then that is the point.

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Chapter 3

From Machines to *Mine*



A dwelling allows us to exclude because of its implacability in the face of the other. This makes the relationship I have with that dwelling a singular one. Yet, that dwelling is a physical object. It is hard, palpable, a collection of other objects, all with specific tasks. These objects could work for others just as well as they do for me. The boiler, the bath, the water pipes worked for the household who lived in our dwelling before us, and they will work for whoever comes after us. My neighbour's house has many of the same objects. It is a mirror image of my dwelling, the same size, with the same number of rooms. I imagine, when new, it was even painted the same colour. My dwelling, then, is not unusual in what it does, what it looks like and in what it contains.

Yet this dwelling, this hard object containing other objects, is *mine*. It is singular, special, and particular to me; the relationship I have with it is very precise and is non-transferable. In other words, this object is meaningful precisely because it is *mine*. In this chapter I want to explore this by moving from the object to the meaning it stores. What I wish to do here, therefore, is to begin by looking in more detail at subjectivity and how it connects with the physicality of dwelling. I want to explore how the appearance of dwelling is most significantly stated by this sense of the

singular, and so the dwelling becomes an object that matters precisely because of its subjective meaning.

A dwelling is an object. Dwellings are solid physical entities that we can touch and see. We cannot avoid this physicality if a door is locked, a window bolted, and we have no key; we know that the dwelling is solid if we trip and fall down the stairs, or if the boiler fails. This simple understanding of our dwelling as a physical object gives it some sense of objectivity. It is a hard, unyielding object which can present us with an implacable physical presence that we cannot avoid. We know that the dwelling would exist without us: when we leave it is still there, and it is still waiting for us at our return. Its existence does not depend upon our appreciation of it. We know also that the dwelling would continue to function if others were using it.

As a physical object the dwelling protects us and helps us to function fully (King, 2003). We depend upon the physicality of the dwelling to harbour us and allow us to live out our lives. Yet the dwelling can also behave as a restriction, in that it presents a boundary to us which can prevent us from doing all that we wish. We cannot just pass through the dwelling. Instead we have to go through it as it allows us, following its contours and respecting its openings. We can only go along with the physicality that the dwelling implacably presents before us. This is, we might say, a formal restriction on our ordinary lives. Our dwelling is the most obvious external entity which restricts us, which prevents us, refuses our entreaties, and limits us in what we can achieve. The dwelling is an implacable object, which is capable of nothing but a neutral response. It cannot initiate anything itself, it is merely *there*.

But it is this very sense of *thereness* that takes a dwelling beyond a mere object. This is because the dwelling is *there for* something. Objects cannot be separated from the experience of them. As phenomenologists since Husserl and Heidegger have shown, it is naïve to insist on a distinction between the world and our experience of it, between the objective world and its subjective appreciation (Moran, 2000). There can be no object that is not mediated through subjective experience, and this is the case even as we know that an object is implacable in its physicality. As human subjects we exist as part of the world, and our experiences of it are not distinct and separate. There is nothing but human experience of the world, and we know of things because of our engagement as beings in the world. As Moran (2000) has put it, ‘the world comes to appearance *in and through* humans (p. 15, author’s emphasis). The physicality of the dwelling matters then because it restricts me, prevents me from doing certain things, but also keeps me warm and secure. The fact that the dwelling is *there* takes on a personal significance for me and becomes inseparable from my subjective understanding of the world. The dwelling matters because of what I do in it and with it. The significance of dwelling emerges from how we can use it and the manner in which we can identify it as *mine*. This subjectivity places a boundary around dwelling and the environment in which we dwell, and through this boundary we grasp the meaningfulness of the relationships we have with the objects around us.

Whilst I find this way of seeing the world (and consequently dwelling) as self-evident, this is a view that needs some defending. The impact of modernism in architecture, with its denial of history and human scale, and that of structuralism and post-structuralism in social thought, with their rejection of subjectivity, have created a sense in which the possibility of engaged human action is treated with suspicion.

Indeed, even where recent attempts have been made to ‘resurrect’ the human subject, this has been done either by a ‘hollowing out’ of the subject (Žižek, 1999), leaving an empty husk to be filled by contingent experience, or through an over-prescriptive statement of human nature based on apparently ‘emancipatory’ collective action (Archer, 2000). Subjects, it appears, are either empty vessels or programmable vehicles for particular political objectives. What I feel I need to do, therefore, is to make a positive statement of objectivity-for-subjectivity as the basis for my more directed comments on dwelling later in this book. However, to do this I feel I need to begin by engaging with those who have sought to denigrate subjectivity. I have not the space, nor is it my purpose, to undertake a complete critique of these ideas, and so I have chosen to focus on what might be seen as the most famous and perhaps most influential example, namely Le Corbusier’s notorious statement that ‘A house is a machine for living in’ (Le Corbusier, 1927, p. 95). But this idea of the machine has also become a significant metaphor in social theory, particularly with the work of Gilles Deleuze and Felix Guattari (1988) and the manner in which their work has been interpreted by Manuel De Landa (1997, 2002). I want first then to consider the weaknesses of the machine metaphor.

A machine we try to live in

What does it mean to say that ‘A house is a machine for living in’ (Le Corbusier, 1927, p. 95)? It is undoubtedly a statement that all architects and most theorists are familiar with. If one were to ask anyone what they know about Le Corbusier it is likely that they would recount this statement of his. But what can we make of this notion that a house is a machine?

If we seek a definition of the word ‘machine’ we might arrive at something like:

an assembly of components arranged so as to perform a particular task, usually powered by some means, such as electricity; an apparatus using or applying mechanical power, having several parts each with a definite function and together performing certain kinds of work; an instrument that transmits a force or directs its application.¹

A house might be seen as an assembly of components, such as heating systems, shower, lavatory, water pipes, staircases, and so on. Some of these components have a power source, be it gas or electricity, although in some cases the power source is human in origin (turning handles, opening windows, etc). Of course, the house as an entity does not operate like this, but only parts of it, and so we might instead see the house as a collection of machines, or as a vessel which contains a number of machines. These machines can be taken separately and seen to fulfil certain tasks or have particular functions. In addition, we might introduce other non-essential machines into the dwelling such as DVD and CD players, PCs, TVs, and so on. These are all machines which help us to live, but which are not formally part of the house. Thus, we can more readily identify the idea of machines for living once we start to disaggregate the dwelling into its various elements, and when we look at the normal

1 This is a composite definition derived from Collins and Oxford dictionaries.

equipment with which we furnish the dwelling. However, once we have stripped these separate machines out of the dwelling, there is much that is left that has no apparent motive force, which is not powered. The largest mass of the dwelling is its structure of brick, metal, plaster, plastic and wood which is in no way machine-like. It does not move and its function is determined precisely by this static nature.

But this is perhaps taking the definition of machine somewhat literally. It is meant to be a metaphor and one that depends on taking the house as an entity rather than as a disaggregated set of discrete machines. Indeed, I believe that the only part of the definition that matters in this discussion is that of the machine as existing to perform a particular task or with a definite function. We are intended to appreciate the idea of the house as a machine aesthetically and therefore as a proposition that function is to be placed above all else. We can see this when we explore Le Corbusier's writings on the machine metaphor as presented mainly in his book *Towards a New Architecture* (1927).

The basis of Le Corbusier's argument depends on his idea that 'All men have the same needs' (1927, p. 135). These needs are determined by the modern world we live in which has changed the whole manner in which humans should relate to the built environment. Le Corbusier saw his role as ensuring that this changed relationship became recognised and acted upon. He criticised those people who insisted on living in old houses because they had 'not yet thought of building houses adapted to themselves' (p. 13). They needed to become attuned to the 'new age', which is characterised by the model of the American factory, which he saw as 'the reassuring first fruits of the new age' (p. 41).

In his later work, *The City of Tomorrow* (1929), he develops this idea further and makes his vision more transparent: 'The house, the street, the town, are points to which human energy is directed: they should be ordered, otherwise they counteract the fundamental principles round which we revolve' (p. 15). Modernity, according to Le Corbusier, has created a new set of principles, it has changed humanity, so that we need now to rid ourselves of old ways of thinking and acting, and enthusiastically accept a new modern form of living based on the industrial aesthetic of the large American factory. He offers no arguments as to why this transformation has occurred. Rather his books consist of a series of assertions and bold statements which he sees as self-evident and has no need to justify further. His writings are manifestos for a new world rather than reasoned tracts seeking to establish any real sociological or economic transformation. He saw the world in a particular way and insisted that this was how it now ought to be pictured by us if we were to be considered modern.

The key modern principle for Le Corbusier was function, and this is where the machine metaphor is so important. The idea of the house as a machine is that it fulfils a specific function: 'A house is a machine for living in. Baths, sun, hot-water, cold-water, warmth at will, conservation of food, hygiene, beauty in the sense of good proportion. An armchair is a machine for sitting and so on' (1927, p. 95). A house carries out a series of functions which are deemed necessary to living, just as an armchair has a necessary function. However, if we examine this statement more closely we begin to see that it is rather odd. Firstly, as we have seen, it demonstrates that Le Corbusier had no intention of arguing; instead he merely states or demonstrates what he takes as obvious. Secondly, he brings together a rather

strange combination of functions, outcomes and aesthetic qualities in his list. The list brings together outcomes (conservation of food and hygiene) and mixes them with services (hot and cold water), parts of the dwelling (baths) and what we could call a natural (as opposed to architect-provided) element (sun). There is no logic to this list and no sense of coherence between the various items either in terms of their functions. Why has Le Corbusier included this list of elements and left out others such as personal comfort, eradication of waste, access to nature, and so on? The list appears to be arbitrary rather than being based on any sound and comprehensive understanding of human functional capabilities.

Later in *Towards a New Architecture* he offers a different description of the functions of a house: 'A house: a shelter against heat, cold, rain, thieves and the inquisitive. A receptacle for light and sun. A certain number of cells appropriated to cooking, work, and personal life' (1927, p. 114). This is indeed based more on specific functions, yet it is hardly comprehensive or focussed on what most households might see as most essential. However, this description does concentrate more explicitly on the sense in which a house might operate. When Le Corbusier does describe what he considers the modern dwelling to consist of, in a section entitled 'The Manual of the Dwelling' (1927, pp. 122-3), he is almost absurdly prescriptive in what he states that a modern person should demand from their dwelling. He tells us that we should not put our pictures on the wall but store them away, only taking them out when we desire to look at them. And whilst he calls for a dwelling to be spacious, light-filled and airy, he also declares, with no regard to practicality, that we should 'put the kitchen at the top of the house to avoid smells' (p. 123) and that 'The gramophone or the pianola or wireless will give you exact interpretations of first-rate music, and you will avoid catching cold in the concert hall, and the frenzy of the virtuoso' (p. 123). Le Corbusier goes on to say that we should 'Demand that the maid's room should not be in the attic. Do not park your servants under the roof' (p. 123), although we might have thought that the practical bourgeois would have seen some merit in boarding the maid near the kitchen! What strikes us in reading his so called 'manual' is the sheer arbitrariness of his conjectures. His nostrums spill out one after the other, with no time for proof or supporting argument. He takes them as self-evident: we are modern; machines are modern; therefore we should have houses like machines.

And in apparently discovering how human beings should live, Le Corbusier saw no need to qualify this. He felt that the machinic metaphor was generally applicable to modernity, and thus his model of housing could and should apply in all cases. Modern human beings therefore have no other context than their modernity. Their needs could now be expressed free of geography, history, caste or creed. All these factors were deemed irrelevant in the face of modernity; to reiterate, Le Corbusier took it for granted that 'All men have the same needs' (1927, p. 135). Accordingly, the aim of Le Corbusier, and other modernists, was to remove any specificity from their architecture, to decouple it from its local environment. We can see this when we look at Le Corbusier's *Une Petite Maison*, a house he designed for his mother on the shores of Lake Geneva in 1923-4 (Baltanás, 2005). As José Baltanás states, this house 'asserted the autonomy of modern architecture over the impositions of the site' (2005, p. 37). What this means is that Le Corbusier made no attempt, and saw

no need, to blend in his architecture with the local surroundings. It was rather the case that the site should be made to fit the design.

This decontextualisation is further emphasised by the fact that the house was later covered in corrugated aluminium cladding:

of the type used in the construction of the fuselage of planes. It hardly need be pointed out that this modification was entirely to the liking of Le Corbusier, as it emphasised the metaphor of the house as a machine. (Baltanás, 2005, p. 38)

Consequently, the house, which sits right on the shore of Lake Geneva and offers truly stunning views across the lake, has the external appearance of a flat-roofed barn or a cow shed, its incongruity matched only by its ugliness. As a piece of architecture it can only be appreciated by viewing it without any context and without questioning how it fits into the site. Roger Scruton (1994) has argued that the overriding characteristic of modern architecture is its incivility. These buildings see no need to conform to their surroundings, to accommodate what was there before them or to fit into an existing street or façade. Instead modern buildings, because they wish to ‘assert their autonomy’, demand that a site be cleared and a space made for them so that they can make a distinct statement as a building and not as part of a community or a collective architectural inheritance.

The effect, as well as the aim, of this machinic metaphor is to denigrate the human subject. In Le Corbusier’s work it is about stressing uniformity, regularity and function. In some post-structuralist thought, particularly the work of Gilles Deleuze and Felix Guattari, the aim is to stress a materialism and an anti-humanism where the machine is a pre-subjective organising principle. Hence they developed the idea of the ‘machinic phylum’, a set of spontaneous organising mechanisms that operate outside or beyond human subjectivity. Pattern and organisation are deemed to emerge without the need for human agency. This idea has been further developed by Manuel De Landa, particularly in his book, *A Thousand Years of Nonlinear History* (1997), where the development of urbanism and population changes are described as flows of energy and matter. Humans are anonymised and reduced to material forces, and are shown as having no individual capabilities, aspirations or intentions independent of these material forces. Instead De Landa reduced history to a sort of computer game in which changes and development become inevitable once critical mass is attained. De Landa defines the ‘machinic phylum’ as ‘the overall set of self-organising processes in the universe’ (1997, p. 6), which is responsible for the creation of ‘spontaneous cooperative behaviour’ (p. 7). It is ironic that De Landa sees this approach as non-deterministic and anti-teleological, but only at the expense of reducing human action to the equivalent of an ant colony. This view, it seems to me, is trying to say much the same as Le Corbusier. De Landa’s approach, regardless of his avowed anti-determinism, is to highlight the idea of functionality. He stresses the necessity of parts to achieve a whole.

We can also see this functionalism in Deleuze and Guattari’s idea of the book as a ‘literary machine’ (1988, p. 4). This may carry with it the idea of an assemblage, a multiplicity of elements which are apparently non-determined, but it is also an idea of the co-ordination of all these parts, so they can be brought together for a

particular targeted effect. Hence Deleuze and Guattari describe a book as a ‘machinic assemblage’ (p. 4) and suggest that it is not a matter of what a book is about: ‘we will never ask what a book means’ (p. 4), but ‘we will always ask what it functions with, in connection with what other things it does or does not transmit intensities ...’ (p. 4). Deleuze and Guattari are trying here to maintain a sense of multiplicity, of something that is open, but they do this through the metaphor of the machine as a thing with a discrete function. Whilst Deleuze and Guattari appear to offer a more complex and more general metaphor than Le Corbusier, it still has a similar purpose, namely of reduction, of reducing complexities to their apparently observable and readily understandable functions. As with Le Corbusier, the aim is to void these relations of any trace of an individualised human presence, of humans as differentiated subjects all capable of using the words *my* and *mine*.

But, in criticising Deleuze and Guattari, who are not directly concerned in their theorising here with architecture and dwelling, we also need to ask on what level does the machinic work; in what manner does a machinic assemblage operate? In the case of a book, is this in an objective and deterministic sense, that it plugs in here or there, and therefore that we can say that in consequence it must mean certain things? If this were the case then it would seem to be at odds with Deleuze and Guattari’s sense of multiplicities. But when they state how a book plugs in, they do appear to be stating that it is what the authors write and not how it is used that matters: ‘But when one writes, the only question is which other machine the literary machine can be plugged into, must be plugged into in order to work’ (1988, p. 4). This is only maintained, and possible, for them because they go on to suggest that their book is of a rhizomic structure and not a root. They describe their book as consisting of a series of strata, which are apparently disconnected and which can be read in any order with equal facility and at any level. In this way, they can say that their kind of a book has no object.²

To see dwelling as a machine in the manner of Deleuze and Guattari would also be essentially to make the same point as Le Corbusier: it would be an assemblage of elements coming together in a consistency, namely, the boundary of a dwelling. It is precisely this sense of an assemblage that we see in the quote above from Le Corbusier when he talks of a house as consisting of ‘Baths, sun, hot-water, cold-water, warmth at will, conservation of food, hygiene, beauty in the sense of good proportion’ (1927, p. 95), and of ‘A certain number of cells appropriated to cooking, work, and personal life’ (1927, p. 114). The house is something that is made up of a collection of elements which become significant when made into a whole. This then has a function of itself: ‘a house is a machine for living in’ (1927, p. 95). Both these notions of the machine, therefore, imply a form of determinism based on the material, of the machine as a limiting and containing form, which imposes an order and an organisation forced by the coming together of its constituent elements. This may not be the intention of Deleuze and Guattari, to be tarred with the same brush as an arch modernist, but this is the consequence of their conception.

² See my discussion of Deleuze and Guattari’s metaphors of root and rhizome in *The Common Place* (2005).

The criticisms of Le Corbusier are now, of course, well known and have been frequently rehearsed. We can see the effects of his totalising vision, of the effect of building houses as if they were machines, of the reduction of aesthetics to functionality, and of the consequences of depersonalisation of the built environment. We can state that his universalising vision has failed, and this failure has been widely recognised (Harvey, 1989, Jencks, 1989, King, 1996, Power, 1987). Accordingly, this argument might be seen as merely academic. Paul Shephard, in his book *Artificial Love* (2003), states that ‘the period of wishing buildings were machines – and the idea of the machine aesthetic – is over’ (p. viii). We are no longer persuaded by the arguments of modernists like Le Corbusier and so, as Shephard states, ‘Buildings no longer have to look like machines because they can now look like anything, even themselves’ (p. viii).

But, as Shephard quickly makes clear, he is not suggesting that we can dispense with the machine metaphor: machines, he tells us, are everywhere. And Shephard makes clear that the reason we can now build as we do is because architects now use machines rather than pen and paper: buildings can look like anything because we can design them using machines. Hence we design and test the potential of buildings in a manner that would have been impossible only a decade before. This point is also made by Daniel Libeskind (2004) and Cecil Balmond (2002) who both make claims for the virtues of machines in the design process. So instead of Shephard’s statement being an announcement of the demise of the machine in architecture it is meant rather to be a statement of its pervasiveness.³ It is not that a building should appear as a machine, but that the machine becomes the pervasive metaphor for what architecture is for. Shephard argues that ‘Technology is a force of nature – it is the force of the human presence in the world’ (p. 112), and thus the machinic metaphor becomes pervasive and very nearly universal: everything becomes a machine. In this sense, there is a continuity between modernists such as Le Corbusier and postmodernists such as Shephard and Libeskind, in that the machine is the image of the human presence, of human action in the world. But whereas Le Corbusier saw the machine as representing modernity, Shephard argues that ‘The contemporary world ... is to its machines as the ancient world was to its temples and tombs’ (p. vii). He argues that there is no past, merely an ‘emerging present’ (p. viii) in which archaic forms such as tombs and temples exist alongside computers and jet planes: all are machines, being the result of technology as the evidence of human presence. The effect of this premise of emergence is to see the stock of technology as accumulative, with each element sitting alongside another and therefore with no sense of priority or dependence. We cannot say that one technology is the antecedent of another, or that one type of architecture presumes another. There is then a denial of judgement, such that we can see the present as equal with the past. So, the (possibly inadvertent) effect of Shephard’s argument is exactly the same as that of Le Corbusier in seeing what is here and now as what we should use: they both advocate the supremacy of the immediate, of that which is current. Shephard may not seek to place the current above the past, but the effect is the same by promoting the novel and the

3 Shephard’s book is subtitled *A Story of Machines and Architecture*. It is also, despite my comments here, a thoroughly engaging and original book, in style if not always in content.

newly possible over the established forms. The problem, we might say, is not that Shepherd wishes to hark back to the modernist vision, but that it is not possible to use the metaphor of the machine without the taint of modernist universalism: the machine is a totalising metaphor.

The metaphor of the machine has an appeal in that it resonates with modernity, with the present, and the functions that a dwelling fulfils. Yet the effect is to dehumanise housing by seeing it as an object that determines us, that channels us to particular ends. It presupposes that the purpose of a dwelling is set, just like that of any other tool. As Scruton (1994) has argued, the concentration on function actually limits the use of a building by preventing adaptation and development as a community's needs change. An old Victorian chapel can find itself transformed into a carpet shop and then later into apartments. However, Le Corbusier's strictures prevent any such development and transformation. The building only permits its original function and thus depends on the singular vision of the architect to predict and pre-empt the future needs of the community. We need not delve far into the history of modernist architecture to be aware of the limits of even the most visionary of thinkers (Harvey, 1989).

The conceit of Le Corbusier had nothing to do with style, but was rather due to his ambition. He believed that he could identify how humans ought to live and, having done so, could see no reason why individuals should not live that way. This is, of course, a manifestation of the authoritarian mindset so prevalent in modernism generally (Berlin, 1969). However, what this attitude invariably creates is the externalisation of value, of the replacement of human values with generalised abstractions which are attached to objects or imagined entities. So Le Corbusier translates human nature into the functional properties of buildings, just as Lenin linked the interests of the 'masses' to the Party. So, to generalise somewhat, the problem of modernist architecture was that it felt that it could lead and determine human actions by designing and building in a particular style. But this perverse form of rationality served not to transform humanity in line with Progress, but to alienate the dwellers from their surroundings. Modernism, again to generalise, ignored the activity of dwelling, in the belief that it was enough to build. However, it is only through understanding the connection between dwelling and building – the phenomenology and the physical structures – that we can understand an object as a dwelling full of subjective meanings. And, as with any survey of a dwelling, it is best to start with the foundations.

Foundations

In his essay *Building, Dwelling, Thinking*, Martin Heidegger (1993) argued that it is only when we can dwell that we can build. Building depends upon our settling, and this involves an understanding of our place on the earth. For Heidegger this necessitates an understanding of our relation to what he calls the fourfold of earth, sky, divinities and mortals. We might see this as an ecological understanding, although Heidegger might have preferred to describe it as poetic. However, Roger Scruton (1994) argues Heidegger's formula should be reversed. He insists that dwelling depends on building. Scruton argues that 'Only when we can build, only

then are we capable of dwelling. For building is one inescapable part of the process of making ourselves at home in the world' (p. 63).

This, we might think, is one of those chicken-and-egg conundrums, in that building is both an act of dwelling and the reason for it. Building and dwelling both appear to serve as the purpose for the other. Building is the means of dwelling, it is the active putting down of boundaries, and the action of building makes dwelling significant to us as individuals or as members of a society. So Scruton is correct: we dwell when we are capable of building, because without this we have no support, no evidence of dwelling; we have no permanence to our place. We can make nothing of the act of settling without building. Yet why would we build unless we realised the need to settle and come to terms with our place in the world? And does this not mean that Heidegger is right too?

What I want to suggest is that both Scruton and Heidegger are correct, or rather to put this in another way, it is simply not possible to have dwelling without building or vice versa. How can we practically have dwelling without building, and where would dwelling come from were it not from a desire to build? This might be seen as nothing more than a pleasant little conundrum which has no impact on how we live now: we have settled communities and we have buildings, so why should we be concerned with how this all began? But, of course, neither Heidegger nor Scruton is really interested in how or why building started. What interests them is the significance of building for individuals and for communities; what is it that building and dwelling say about our civilisations and our cultures, about our values and our sense of ourselves as beings that are aware of our surroundings (or, in Heidegger's case, as beings aware of Being)?

What interests me, as an antidote to the machine metaphor, and as a means of understanding private dwelling more fully, is the manner in which we can connect our values with what we build. Instead of externalising values I wish to explore how we internalise them into building, and this, I would argue, is when we see dwelling and building as inseparable. This, as I shall show later in this chapter, is precisely where we see objects-for-subjects. However, I have some work to do to justify this statement and I wish to do this through an exploration of one of the foundation myths of architecture.

R.D.Dripps, in his book *The First House* (1997), considers Vitruvius's description of the origin of architecture, or rather how architecture might have begun. What Vitruvius seeks to do is to establish how and why humans came to build. We can see this as a foundation myth, an attempt to rationalise how humans went from found shelters to sophisticated building. Vitruvius provided the first recorded or extant account of the foundation of architecture, but he is not the only one to have attempted this. As both Ann Cline (1997) and Joseph Rykwert (1981) have shown, the search for origins and the first building has been a consistent concern for theorists throughout the history of architecture.⁴ Cline refers in particular to the rationalist explanation provided by the eighteenth century French theorist, Marc-Antoine Laugier. He sought to provide a link between the primitive hut and the columns of

4 In this regard, might we not see Le Corbusier's 'discovery' of the house as a machine as his foundation myth?

classical architecture. The hut was seen as a distillation of nature and thus he could plot a rationalist course from nature to the formal orders: from tree trunks to wooden posts and on to marble columns.

As Dripps points out, the importance of these explanations is not that they are true (how can we know if a particular series of events occurred in pre-history?), but rather what it says about the nature of architecture. In essence, what they seek to show is that there can be no separation between architecture, dwelling and building: that to do one is to do the other. Therefore architecture can be said to have an entirely natural basis.

According to Vitruvius (1960): ‘The men of old were born like the wild beasts, in woods, caves, and groves, and lived on savage fare’ (p. 38). He suggests that ‘as time went by’ (p. 38), in a heavily wooded part of the forest, branches rubbing together burst into flame. The residents fled the fire, but once it had subsided somewhat they returned and found the fire warming and comforting. Accordingly, they kept it going and so others came close too. This, Vitruvius suggests, was the first gathering of humans who had hitherto led individual lives and so accordingly did not have a common language. Humans at this stage did not dwell but scavenged; they made no permanent mark on the earth.

As they stayed together these ‘men of old’ started to develop a common language by naming things in common use. So, according to Vitruvius, ‘it was the discovery of fire that originally gave rise to the coming together of men, to the deliberative assembly, and to social intercourse’ (p. 38). They thus began to develop conventions based on these commonly adopted names. Vitruvius goes on:

And so, as they kept coming together in greater numbers into one place, finding themselves naturally gifted beyond the other animals in not being obliged to walk with faces to the ground, but upright and gazing upon the splendour of the starry firmament, and also in being able to do with ease whatever they chose with their hands and fingers, they began in that first assembly to build shelters. (p. 38)

By observing the shelters of others they added details and complexity to their own and constructed better and better shelters:

And since they were of an imitative and teachable nature, they would daily point out to each other the results of their building, boasting of the novelties of it; and thus, with their natural gifts sharpened by emulation, their standards improved daily. (p. 39)

They learnt to make their dwellings watertight and strong enough to survive winter storms, and also to ornament them. And so from these primitive beginnings came more and more sophisticated building, with the use of more advanced materials, more embellishments and so on, ever onwards and upwards.

What we can note immediately is that there is no mention here of a dwelling as a machine, and neither is there any list of the functions that a dwelling might perform. Vitruvius argues that dwelling develops out of humans’ acting in society. Dripps makes the point that dwelling is closely linked to gathering, and so this is a myth that links the development of architecture to social and political organisation. Dwelling is a social act that is determined by social interaction and language. The point of the

story is that by looking at others, by emulation, teaching and competition, humans developed beyond their 'savage' or natural state. Yet the development of the first house also arises out of human self awareness, of their recognition that they were more gifted than other animals. What is important here is not the gifts themselves, so much as the awareness of them: humans became conscious of their place in the world. This is seen as a precondition for building, for taking from the world around us and making something new out of it. It is in this sense that we can talk of both building and dwelling. It is this self-consciousness that gives us our sense of awareness and the idea of being placed, and from this we begin to settle; and to settle is to build because, as Scruton shows, it is only through building that we have evidence of dwelling.

All this, of course, need not mean that Vitruvius' story is true. It is indeed a myth, but one based on what might be seen as natural human characteristics. We might argue that as humans are indeed sociable and capable of language development, of emulating each other and of learning, then it could be true: it is a plausible explanation based on human nature. Indeed what we need to note is that the development of building did not depend as such on the initial event – the fire in the forest – but on what followed from that incident. Instead building developed out of social practices which were made possible by that event. Implicit to the myth is that building develops out of language and sociability, which themselves depend on iterated processes rather than a specific event. So the specificity of the fire is incidental; what mattered was the fact that human beings came together (as if they were ever separate) and Vitruvius sought out some explanation for how this could have happened. But what this means is that there is no 'big bang' or foundational event that building depends on. The basis of dwelling is the vernacular, in that it is based on everyday practice, on the reiteration of practical and habitual events, whose purpose is validated in that they form the means for our own ends.

But Vitruvius's explanation also has implications for the manner in which we relate to building and to dwelling. Whilst the manner in which we use a dwelling can be determined by its design, this form of developmental explanation – based on emulation and teaching – depends rather on how the needs which we have determine the nature of dwelling. As Vitruvius hints at, we begin to use new materials and techniques because of their utility, not because of their architectural form: we emulate the things which work best and learn from experience. Similarly, we learn to embellish through watching and learning from others rather than through acts of original creation. As Dripps points out, the myth puts great store on to the social, showing how dwelling is based on emulation and teaching, and therefore that it is an ordinary activity based on shared practice, actions and forms, and not on the extraordinary event, which in Vitruvius's account quickly becomes incidental. This explanation is developmental and incremental, being based on the manner in which humans interact and learn by using their dwellings. In this sense, we can properly say that there was no start to building, but rather a development from building *into* architecture.

Indeed what we have in Vitruvius's myth, as in others (Cline, 1997) is something rather different from the first house. What he is describing is the foundation of architecture, and this is not the same as building. This founding, rather than being

a reiterative practice, depends on an initial public recognition of space, and where that space has a public function. This is similar to John Ruskin's distinction between building and architecture. He states that, 'Architecture is the art which so disposes and adorns the edifices raised by man, for whatsoever uses, that the sight of them may contribute to his mental health, power, and pleasure' (1989, p. 8). This gives architecture an entirely public function that transforms building into something with a social and cultural meaning. But if we accept this, it might be the case that the first building – where we mean building as architecture – was not a house but a public building such as a shrine. This is indeed the argument put forward by Scruton (1994) who provides what might be described (but not by him) as a foundation myth of the origins of architecture. Scruton's myth has architecture developing not from a need for shelter, but from the need for commonality, for the sacralisation of a common bond. It is only after the community is sheltered and safe from its enemies that it can build, and by this building Scruton means not simple shelters but architecture. What we have then straight away is a distinction between private and public dwelling, which is missing in Vitruvius's myth, despite its apparent reliance on the social. The first building then is a shrine for the material embodiment of the sacred, for a real place where a sense of community can be physically manifested and so made permanent. Only after this, as a settlement expands to include those who are not kin, and so becomes a community of strangers, do we then have laws and markets, and then politics. In this myth, if that is what it is, shelter is taken for granted and dwelling is determined by the need for a community to make its mark, as a gesture that embodies the community's sense of itself. Scruton here sees dwelling as a public or communal marker in which the aspirations and hopes of the community are gathered and offered up to some higher being. This too is not a myth of the start of building but of the formation of architecture, but it is one which has the virtue of making architecture the public embodiment of settlement, such that architecture develops out of dwelling, a marking of our permanence on the earth.

But there is, and can be, no single origin for dwelling, and any sense in which we can point to the first house will always be conjectural or mythic, if not downright nonsensical. This does not mean that Vitruvius's myth is unimportant, but that its importance is in pointing to the development of architecture, and so it helps us to separate out the idea of dwelling from that of architecture. It shows that the origin of dwelling is the vernacular and that what we might call formal architecture is a move away from the vernacular. With it comes the possibility of a denial of the vernacular, as has become all too obvious with modernism and its rejection of context. The importance of Scruton's description of architecture, however, is precisely that it does derive from the context in which we find ourselves: public dwelling derives from the context resulting from our private acts of settling.

Scruton (1994) suggests that our appreciation of architecture depends on certain things that do not and will not alter. In this list he includes the fact that we have eyes facing forward and that we are upright beings. As humans we pick out the meanings intended by others not merely by what they say but through their expression. Therefore the face they present to us is important in understanding and determining meaning. These basic elements of human physiognomy mean that we perceive the world in a particular manner, and can only do it in this manner. But this,

of course, cannot be taken to infer that humans always have lived and do live in the same manner. For most of human history we have lived without the great Gothic cathedrals or the neo-classical façades which Scruton so forcefully defends. This does not mean that Scruton is mistaken, but rather that these particular forms should be seen as representative of certain universals such as scale, proportion, appeal to the eye (ornament), connectivity and compliance with the surrounding environment and with what has gone before. We can see these forms as those which please us intuitively rather than being externally imposed abstractions. This, Scruton suggests, is the difference between the principles of *classicism*, discovered through the iterated actions of generations of artisans and built on the successive and successful virtues of the past, and *modernism*, with its formalism, essentialism and abstraction away from the vernacular. Modernism, as we have seen, is the deliberate decontextualisation of architecture in order to further a particular essentialist vision, in turn based on an abstract theory of how humans could and therefore ought to live. It is the distinction between discovery and invention, intuition and formal didacticism, between reiteration and innovation, and between shared and imposed values.

Scruton (1994) defines what he calls the classical vernacular as:

a tradition of patterns, adapted to the uses of the ordinary builder, and capable of creating accord and harmony in all the many circumstances of potential conflict. These patterns have emerged from the steady adaptation of the vertical Order – based on column, base, architrave and cornice – to the life of the modern city. The ruling principle has been civility: the creation of a public world of mutual respect, the boundaries of which are permeable to the private interests that are sheltered by it. (p. 25)

He goes on:

Its goal is not originality or self-expression but harmony, good-will and order. Buildings ought not to be designed for the *cognoscenti*, but for the mass of mankind; and the practice of architecture does not lie in the hands of geniuses, but in those ordinary and half-talented people whose task it is to make us feel at home. Architecture must call, therefore, upon what is widely understood, easily repeatable, and successfully combined. (p. 25)

Scruton argues that this style ‘imitates the proportions and features of man himself’ (p. 26), in that it has a face, it is based on the vertical line, and presents a civility and humility to the world. Accordingly, Scruton states: ‘If man is to be at home in the world, then he must make the world in his own image, and – occasionally – in the image of the angel he aspires to be’ (pp. 26-7). His idea of virtuous architecture can be summed up in his phrase: ‘that nobody will be forced against his will to notice it’ (p. 84).

These are undoubtedly contentious and unfashionable statements. Yet they are formed by an understanding of architecture, and of dwelling, that is based on the attachment of human values to place rather than the imposition of an abstract and universally intended ideal. The form of architecture Scruton seeks to defend has a history that can be traced back to the roots of Western civilisation and is based on looking backwards to inform how we should live now. It is a form of building that has no sense of progress, if progress is seen as the desertion of tradition. What this

form of architecture seeks to do – and this is consistent by definition with all forms of vernacular building – is to be normal and ordinary. It is architecture that does not stand out from its environment; that is not striving for innovation or difference; that is not concerned with progress. Instead it plays on what Scruton sees as a ‘permanent in human nature, which is the striving towards a shared normality’ (1994, p. 63). This normality, as Paul Oliver (2003) has shown in his compendious study of vernacular dwelling, manifests itself in different ways, but it shares the common features of being close both to those who build it and to the environment that it is in. This points to what might be seen as a moral ownership of this form of dwelling which cannot be found in the modernist formulations of Le Corbusier. This ownership, which we might also see as a form of trust, or as an endowment, is based on dwelling emerging from the iterated forms within a community which make these structures ordinary and the maintenance of them necessary. Dwelling depends on tradition, on the known roots and ruts of ordinary life (King, 2005), and we wish to have this expressed physically. We want our dwelling to take a known and accepted form, to be normal in a way that is shared amongst us as a community. This is, not unnaturally, anathema to most architects, in that it signifies anonymity and compliance with the market, and an apparently philistine lack of sensibility (because sensibility depends on the contemporary), rather than an encouragement to innovate and to show flair and originality.

But dwelling can only properly take place in objects that we understand and which we can comfortably take for granted. What dwelling cannot be is an object in itself, which remains distinct and separate from the users. It must become a tool, transparent to consciousness (Giddens, 1991; Heidegger, 1962) and so used without our being directly conscious of it, rather than a being a machine that seeks to direct us and make us slaves to Progress.

What ought to be clear to us now is that architecture is only of limited use to us as we seek to appreciate more fully private dwelling and its meaningfulness. Architecture indeed presents us with dangers in that it seeks to control dwelling rather than to understand it. The conceit of architecture, dominated as it is by modern and postmodern theories, is that it can succeed only through innovation and the creation of the new and the extraordinary, and that what is required is progress. However, as I shall now go on to develop, what is needed is precisely the opposite: that what we need is not for dwelling to be taken further from us but given back so that we can keep it close.

To dwell in place

What is it then to dwell closely with things? We can perhaps understand this if we return to Scruton’s consideration of the origins of architecture. In discussing the first building, which he saw as a shrine to the community’s gods, he makes it clear that the community was first settled. He puts it like this:

Imagine people who, having wandered among rivals and enemies, find themselves able to settle and protect themselves. After centuries as ‘strangers and sojourners’ they begin to

dwell in the land, and to assert their right to it. The conditions are in place that will permit them to build. How will they build? (1994, p. 105, author's emphasis)

We have already considered Scruton's answer to his own question in the last section, but what interests me now is the emphasis he puts on the word 'dwell'. Public building can take place because the community is settled, because it can dwell. We should note in particular that Scruton links dwelling with the assertion of rights over land, so that dwelling can be seen as making something *mine*. In the rest of this chapter I want to consider what this means. In this section I want to consider it in general terms by looking at how we see certain 'wild', open places as ours. My reason for first looking at the 'wild' instead of going straight to the domestic, is that I want to show the subjectivity of dwelling, as it were, in its generality. Hence I consider places that appear to be indivisible rather than exclusive. Wild places, which we do not and cannot own, can still be seen as *mine*, as being meaningful to us.

In this discussion I have already drawn heavily from Roger Scruton's work, *The Classical Vernacular* (1994), and used it to support my critique. However, there is a point that I feel he gets wrong, and this is the relationship that we have with the wild countryside, with space that is not tamed by human habitation. He states that:

The wild countryside may be open to unlimited human movement, but it has no point of contact with the private world, no point at which to announce public purpose. It is 'unbounded', not because it goes on forever, but because its perimeter has no mark. Lacking a boundary, it lacks public character; indeed it lacks a social identity altogether. Nature is neither private nor public, but merely beyond society. (p. 31)

Scruton is correct to point to the importance of boundaries and to use this to define the public and private. However, it seems to me to be profoundly wrong to suggest that the wild countryside has no point of contact with the private or has no public purpose. If we were to accept his point here we would be limiting the notion of dwelling to that of architecture, to building with a purpose. This would reduce the importance of dwelling and regard architecture as originary, even as we have seen that this is problematic.

It seems to me that there is a fault in Scruton's logic here. He informs us that people seek to settle and so to make their mark on their environment, and that they do this by building. But where is it that they settle? Unless we assume that they settle through taking over existing settlements – by force or appropriation – what way is there to dwell but to connect with the wild. Indeed dwelling is the process of 'unwilding' the countryside, of settling it.⁵ This does not mean that the wild has no purpose, but that its purpose alters as the wild becomes settled. Scruton implies this when he states that people 'begin to *dwell* in the land, and to assert their right to it' (p. 105). What I want to do now then is consider what this purpose might be by exploring the connection with the wild. Like Scruton I do not have a hard and fast definition of what the wild is. We might define it as that space which is unbounded, or where the mark of settlement is non-existent or limited. But what is clear is that

⁵ Ironically Scruton has written persuasively on this idea of settling in his book, *News from Somewhere* (2004).

the space both Scruton and I are referring to is space where humans can and do reach: it is not 'virgin' ground untouched by a human foot or hand. Rather it is space that is not built upon, it is space untouched by architecture. It is this last definition, in all its inexactitude that I shall take forward in this discussion.

The virtue of some places, at least some of the time, is that they cannot be tamed. This does not mean that we cannot exist in them, but rather that their meaning for us is that there are untameable. They are places that are wild, not in a threatening way, but rather in a magnificent sense. Of course, we can think here of truly grand landscapes like the high Alps or the Himalayas, but my meaning here concerns those wild spaces that are closer to us, within our reach, and which we can explore therefore readily but with due regard. We can think of parts of the coastline of a country, some made and shaped by human action, but still not under control, either by me as I walk along them or by humanity in general. The sense of beauty we get from these places comes from their refusal to submit. They allow us access but do not bend to us. These spaces are somehow beyond us, and present an apparently implacable face to us, even as we enjoy looking at them, and being within them. Sitting on the harbour wall in North Berwick in the east of Scotland, looking out towards Bass Rock, and the Fife coast across the Firth of Forth, with the Isle of May in the distance, one can remain in touch with the modern world – with the sound of cars in the distance, the sound of plastic rigging thrumming on metal masts – but there is also a sense of the primordial, and the awesome implacability of the natural world.

We see this implacability when we consider the quietness and the violence of nature. The sea can appear calm and still, yet it is merely at rest. It retains its power and can show its violence, and what was once gentle and still can turn menacing as it crashes against our attempts at controlling it. The sea, then, has no sense of reason, no means to communicate, and no possibility of our altering its 'nature'. We are left merely to respond and to wonder.

But we cannot, of course, respond to our environment as equals. As a whole, humanity might be affecting the environment for good or ill, but as individuals we must face up to these elemental forces as weak and impotent beings, who are only capable of putting up shelters to protect ourselves, of erecting defences, or moving to more benign climates and settling where nature can help rather than hinder us. But through all this we know that we cannot stop a wave. We can only accept it or run away; we can only climb over or go round the mountain and not move it.

Of course, technology and human ingenuity allow us to blast holes through mountains and build bridges over water. In doing this, as Martin Heidegger (1993) has argued, we can create a changed sense of meaning so that the mountain and water now exist for us in a different manner. Yet we also have to be aware of what we are doing. We feel, by means of these tunnels and bridges, that we are controlling nature, we are harnessing it, and we become complacent. We see nature as being plastic, as malleable to human control, and in doing so forget the power that is coiled up within the elements: the ability of the sea to break free, of mountains to try to heal up the holes in their sides.

So a particular stretch of coastline, such as that near North Berwick, has become habitable with effort over the centuries, but only because this place was prepared to let us dwell, that it would accept a settlement and help it. And perhaps it does this

only so long as we respect the place and honour it, and, so to speak, we remember our place. Indeed in time, just as the harbour wall appears to have grown into the rocks, there is a form of accommodation, so that the place and its inhabitants are melded together. We can see this as a fable of use and meaning, of the sense we gain from being there and so being us. This place is indeed open to human movement, but it is not unlimited and it is at this point that the place appears to become bounded. The limitation is part physical, in that we must follow and respect the contours of the space, but also part imaginary. The space is bounded by our imagining of it, by the placing of meaning in a place. To be human is to admit that we dwell: our condition is of 'being there', not as in Heidegger's *Dasein* as consciousness in time, but rather as *a consciousness in place*. The essence of this consciousness is that we are bounded by the place; it is not bounded by us. The danger, of course, is that we do not recognise this and so we see wild spaces as a resource and, as it were, anthropomorphise them. We reduce them to a human scale and see that they operate for our interests. This is where our relations with nature are seen as political rather than phenomenological: as a process of control and not of meaning. In this way we take advantage of one aspect of the implacability of the natural world: its inability to speak to us directly and instantly.

A particular example of this is the local controversy over the sea defences on the North Norfolk coast. A decision was taken in 2005 by the government that it is 'uneconomic' to maintain the Overstrand sea defences, and that resources should be targeted on larger resorts such as Cromer and Sheringham. Naturally the residents and businesses in Overstrand, a village just to the east of Cromer, are campaigning against this, seeing it as a threat to their community and livelihood, and indeed, in ten, twenty or fifty years there is the definite possibility of the cliffs eroding and the sea breaching the already rather beaten defences. The point for me here is not the correctness or otherwise of the decision or the campaign against it.⁶ What is at issue is rather the concentration not on our relation here with nature – the precariousness of a perch on a cliff above the sea and the need to be ever-vigilant against the invasion of nature – but on policy making. Whether Overstrand survives or not, according to this view, is not a matter of cliff erosion or sea-ingress; it is not seen as dependent on geology, but on policy and the decision making, budgetary control and executive capacity of government and its agencies. The conceit is that nature is under our control and that what conditions nature is our particular decision-making mechanisms. The meaning of a place, and of our relation to it, is reduced to political and economic considerations rather than any understanding of it as a place in itself.

Overstrand has an association within our family that makes this decision important to us – we would not want this place to be lost – but this places helps to demonstrate another more phenomenologically attuned manner in which we might view the world around us. My wife has always talked of how, when staying in Cromer as a child and teenager, she had made 'the walk to Overstrand'. This is a round trip between Cromer and Overstrand of about four miles in total where one habitually goes one way along the beach when the tide is out (this way being otherwise impassable) and the other along the cliffs above the beach. Therefore the walk is not really 'to'

6 Although we signed the petition against the decision.

anywhere, but is really about 'going there and back'. I have since joined my wife on this walk several times and enjoyed her reliving of this experience, her pointing out landmarks and reminiscing about events that occurred on the way. Indeed we now have our own memories and places to stop and ponder as a result of our joint walks along the beach and the cliffs, so that on our frequent trips to the Norfolk coast it was something we always talked of doing again. For our daughters this walk had taken on something of a semi-mystical quality, of a thing that at some stage they would be able to do, but not yet. On one occasion I looked after the children for an afternoon whilst my wife and her sister walked the route. After watching a film we sat on the pier eating sweets, and the girls looked out towards Overstrand to the east, hoping or even expecting to see their mother and aunt. Overstrand was something that appeared within reach: it was just visible, and walking there was something that the girls could and would do one day, but not yet. Like so much in a child's life, circumscribed as it is by the limits placed by parents and others in authority, this was something for the future. But by 2005 their parents had now decided they were 'capable' of the trip and it was therefore essential that we do it, which on a windy, cloudy day in early April we duly did. The girls made no great fuss, showed no great emotion, but there was still a heightened sense of togetherness: there was now something else that the girls could share with the grown-ups, like eating proper food in proper restaurants and staying up until midnight on New Year's Eve.

So the walk to this place, this small and rather anonymous village on the top of a North Norfolk cliff has, in some ways, become meaningful almost as a rite of passage, of our daughters being seen as capable and responsible enough, of a small contraction of the distant between child and adult, of one more token for our daughters that less and less separates them from adults. This walk is now one more possibility rather than a restraint, something they can do instead of it being deemed to be beyond them. The 'walk to Overstrand' is now something that is theirs as well, and so for the family it is now fully *ours*.

Hence we would want to keep Overstrand as it is, safe from erosion and ingress from the sea. But the significance of this place for us is as a place of arrival and as part of a journey, and is not created by its relative standing with the larger Norfolk seaside towns, or as one element in an economic value system that seeks to determine its relative importance with other parts of the coast. Overstrand is something that is linked to our dwelling, conditioned by memory and, so important now as it stretches over three generations, it represents the sharing of memory. We can see this as a communion, a relation with the particular – *this place* – that grants meaning by the specificity of that communion and how these memories are relived, which then become, in turn, the celebration of that communion.

So I would suggest that Scruton is wrong to state that these wild places are unbounded. They are indeed bounded by our experiences of them, and so in a way become *mine*. The place, even as we do not control it, and we have no more rights over it than anyone else, can be seen as *ours* because of how we can use it and thus how we inject that place with meaning. Scruton is correct to suggest that a place needs to be bounded, but this need not be by building upon it, although this can indeed be so. Rather it becomes bounded by our dwelling on it, by the use we can make of it. And this use need not mean the exploitation of the place, so that we

determine its meaning by any economic calculation. It is how this place becomes wrapped up in our sense of self, and in our sense of togetherness as a family or community. So a place that we visit only once every few years, that we do not own, that we might not even think about much between times, is seen as *ours* because of the memories of it that we store and share.

Dwelling, then, is about connecting with a place, and this connection gives it a boundary, one that is doubtless arbitrary and based on the images, meanings and illusions we grant to things to make sense of them. This boundary can be shared by taking others to that place and being with them there, and this may even heighten the meaning the place has. The place, therefore, becomes significant as much because of *who* we are there with. The place would, of course, be there without us, offering itself to whoever else might pass through, but meaning – for us or anyone else – can only be experienced subjectively. Hence we can say that the boundaries of dwelling can be positioned subjectively, and this applies even as those boundaries are shared.

Making things *mine*

In a particular sense I see the ‘walk to Overstrand’ as *mine*, and I would hope that my daughters now do the same. But, of course, I do not own it and do not undertake the walk particularly often. So how much stronger would I feel towards a place that I both own and live in? This is what I want now to explore to try to come to some conclusion about the nature of a private dwelling as an object. What I feel is that this object is significant because of how I relate to it subjectively. My dwelling is an object that I experience subjectively, that I call *mine*, and it is this sense of *mineness* that is crucial to understanding dwelling. It is not function, nor particularly form that matters to us, but the fact that the dwelling is *mine*. Of course, amenity is important, just as the terrain over which we walk matters, but this is not what we remember and see as significant. Instead it is what this place means to us that makes us want to hold it close.

This relatedness to a dwelling is the very opposite of the machine metaphor. Instead of acknowledging that function determines use, I want to argue that our use dictates functionality. The way we relate to place, the way we approach it and seek to engage with it for our purposes sets the parameters for the place rather than the reverse being the case. This sense of use determining function is encapsulated in this notion of *mineness*.

When I say *mine*, I am not trying to be autobiographical. I am not writing about myself exclusively, but about what I take to be a singular relation between a person and dwelling. So I need to explain what it is that I mean by this use of *mine* in this sense, and why I feel the need to use it in this way. My use of the term connotes with the singularity of use: *for each of us dwelling is mine and only mine*. Importantly, this does not preclude sharing, but is meant to show that sharing does not detract from this singularity.

This idea of *my* is meant to resonate with the idea of possession, but not because of any particular ideological concern. This discussion is not tied to any particular type of tenure (all tenures, after all, are property relations of one sort or another;

it is just that some are more exclusive than others), but is rather about our use and the specificity of this relationship. Being in possession of something means that we can use it, and that what we do with it is, within reason and in a qualified way, legitimate. It is this specificity – this singular relation of *me* using *this* – that I wish to point to and emphasise with the use of *mine*. This object I call *mine* will often be shared, but this does not diminish the possession nor its specificity, as long as those I share with are also, so to speak, *mine*. The manner in which I see the relation is a phenomenological one, being about the meanings embodied in and by use, and how these can be conditioned, enhanced and modified by sharing, but not necessarily diminished. This is because the exclusivity is managed within a household. Whilst there are partitions within the household – barriers are needed to protect personal integrity – there are also shared barriers which serve to protect the exclusivity of the relation between household and dwelling. These barriers are mutual, shared and are themselves necessary to allow for the internal negotiation of space divisions based on the need for autonomy for individual household members.

So the use of *my* is suggestive of the specificity of the relation with an object, a relation that is made meaningful precisely by being specific and which is not materially diminished, or better, is not perceptually or phenomenologically diminished but is actually enhanced, by sharing with others who can also say *my* with regard to this thing. This is the essence of sharing with regard to dwelling: that we can all point to the dwelling and say *mine*, and feel enhanced by the mutuality rather than seeing it as a threat or a competition or a cause for fighting. As with the ‘walk to Overstrand’, doing it or being there together makes the relation with that place even stronger for each of us.

When we use the terms *mine* or *my* or even *ours* with regard to a dwelling we are therefore referring to a number of things. First, we say that the dwelling is something we possess or have control over. We have it in the sense of grasping it, but also in the sense that it is legitimate for us to do so. Second, there is the sense of keeping something, so that it feels as if we have a permanent relationship with the dwelling. Third, it means sharing the dwelling with those we love, care for or have obligations towards. But this sharing carries with it exclusivity: the dwelling is not there for all to share, but only for us. The dwelling is part of the world, connected to it, but is something from which we can exclude others, and so feel that we are an inclusive whole. Fourth, there is an absolute specificity, a oneness, a particularity about the relation with a place. My locatedness is concrete, it is grounded in a very precise place, where being somewhere else would not do: it must be this place and no other. It is not just any dwelling, but this dwelling which is *my* home, where my loved ones are and where I ought to be. This applies even if I live alone: it is still where I ought to be and need to be. It is this sense of *appropriateness* that provides the significance of *this* place as *mine* and is the significance of place as such. So we can say that place is subjective, but also that place subjectifies. Subjects are located in time and place, and can be no other. Likewise, we can only encounter the other in a place which, because of technology, is increasingly the other’s dwelling. As Jeremy Waldron (1993) has argued, we cannot be without place. We have to be somewhere and therefore the idea of *me* is always located, and without place there is no identity, no *me*, no means of expression.

Place, then, brings with it the possibility of expression, of giving voice to a being. Without place we are voiceless and voice is a located property. Sound comes from somewhere; we need to trace it, to find it, to place it, and we do this by finding the voice. Finding our voice, and being heard, is to be located, to be in a place. This place confers on us some legitimacy, so that we can be heard, that we should be listened to. So having a place means that we can be heard, that we can be noticed, that we are citizens. For us to use the term *mine* with regard to a place is a condition of citizenship, or stated negatively, not to have a voice is to exclude us from citizenship, and to be homeless is to be unable to say that any place is *mine*.

But once we have this voice we are able to hide and so be silent, and in doing so we can choose to ignore, or not to hear, those other voices outside. It is this capability to connect the word *mine* to place that allows us to hide and to exclude others. The very notion of us now as citizens with a voice allows us legitimately to exclude, for us to say that this is *mine* and therefore it has nothing to do with any others. Having *my* place allows me to exclude others, to separate myself and not to be put out by others. This is because the community, through granting us a place for our voice, thereby legitimises the exclusion.

According to Hegel (1991), it is the possession of things that gives them meaning. We are socialised, by our relations to, and rights over, things and the exclusivity this brings. Expounding on this Hegelian notion, Scruton (2001) makes an explicit link to property rights:

Ownership is the primary relations through which man and nature come together. It is therefore the first stage in the socialising of objects, and the condition of all higher institutions. It is not necessarily a product of greed or exploitation, but it is necessarily a part of the process whereby people free themselves from the power of things, transforming resistant nature into compliant image. Through property man imbues his world with will, and begins therein to discover himself as a social being. (p. 92)

Without property we cannot identify any object in the world as our own, and hence we have no right to use any object, nor can we expect others to allow us access to it (not that they could, of course, because they would have no rights over it either). Without rights of ownership everything is merely an object of desire, and all objects are capable of being expropriated by those most capable of acting on their desires. Objects without ownership can play no part in social relations: there can be no exchange, no gifts, and no transfers from one person to another. There can only be struggle, conflict and uncertainty without rights of exclusion over things.

Accordingly, Scruton argues that if people are to become fully aware of themselves as agents who are capable of independent action within a social whole, then they need to see the world in terms of rights, responsibility and freedom. He suggests that it is ‘The institution of property (that) allows them to do this’ (2001, p. 93). By making an object *mine* I can now use it for my purposes. I am able to be more active because my possibilities have been increased. But I am also given a responsibility, for I now have to determine how it can be used, whether I should share my access with others, how I can protect what I have, and so on. As Scruton states, ‘Through property an object ceases to be a mere inanimate thing, and becomes instead the focus of rights and obligations’ (p. 93). Through property ownership ‘the object is lifted out of

mere ‘thinghood’ and rendered up to humanity’ (p. 93). It bears the imprint of social relations and reflects back to the owner ‘a picture of himself as a social being’ (p. 93), as someone now having the wherewithal – the capability – of relations with others. Property ownership is therefore seen by Scruton as a primary social relation. It is what allows us access into the social world, as beings able to achieve our ends. This, I would suggest, is what it means to have a voice, to be a citizen.

Having given this justification of property ownership Scruton then identifies the main form of ownership we experience. Ownership, as it were, grounds the self into the social world. As he states, instead of being at loose in the world, an individual is ‘at home’ (p. 93). He goes on:

It is for this reason that a person’s principal proprietary attitude is towards his immediate surroundings – house, room, furniture – towards those things with which he is, so to speak, mingled. It is the home, therefore, that is the principal sphere of property, and the principal locus of the gift. (p. 93)

The most important form of property is the dwelling, as this is the primary relation. It is what we live amongst and what therefore becomes part of us. When we own those things around us – the dwelling and its contents – we are better able to control our surroundings and disburse our personal and social obligations. The family unit is where we show responsibility to others, where our primary obligations are held and where we are most able to express our generosity.

But the idea of *mine* is not just about owning, but about the legitimacy of use and so of belonging. It is where we are able to say ‘I can be here’, ‘I should be here’ and ‘I will be here’. There may be no legal ownership, but it can still be *mine*. A majority of owner occupiers in the UK have their deeds lodged in the safe of their bank or building society beyond their control until they have paid off their loan, and would doubtless be charged to have sight of them. Yet the house is still seen as *mine* in the sense that it is proper for *me* to be there: I think it proper and so do others (including the bank). But we need only think of the position of children and their relation with a dwelling to see that the notion of ownership and a feeling of the dwelling as *mine* do not depend only on a legal relationship. Most of the things that children have are gifts or things provided for them. They live in a dwelling that does not bear their name and has, in all probability, been purchased without their express consent, yet to which they are still very closely attached. We would not chide our children for saying that the place where they live is *mine*, and would perhaps be rather worried if they did not. What is important for children is that they can use the dwelling, feel secure and have a sense of permanence about being in this place. This is provided through the property rights exercised by their parents, not on their behalf as such, but for them.

When one shares a dwelling, so that several can say it is *mine*, it is practically inconceivable for those others not to be there. The very sense of the dwelling being *mine* now necessitates these others being there. It would be diminished were it now to become *mine* and no one else’s. This is so long, of course, as we have these relations, but once they exist they matter and are crucial to the meanings we attach to what is *mine*.

Not only might this singular place be shared with others who see it as equally singular, it also might not be the only place we have or will see as *mine*. Over our lifetime we will live in different places and thus transfer our attachment from the old to the new. But this new home, as it were, stays *mine*. We quickly form a new attachment through the imposition of our old regularities, through reiterated use and personalisation, so that this new home becomes singular. Our sense of *mineness* is transferable. But also, in an important way, the old house also still remains *mine* too. This, of course, is not in any legal sense, and we retain no rights over it. But we will still leave traces on it, and vice versa, even as these are eroded by the new residents and the use of our new dwelling. When walking past my old flat with my children I still refer to it as *mine* (as I have done already in the sentence – ‘my old flat’; but how else could I refer to it?). This use of *mine* is a shorthand for a whole register of meanings significant in our family, even though I moved away before the children were born (to them it is simply ‘daddy’s flat’ and has no sense of *mineness* to them: they often need to be reminded exactly which flat it is). This is a singular place as many important things in my life happened there, some which I look back on fondly, whilst others not. But I cannot remember these things without them being placed there.

We do retain memories of an old dwelling which remain even if most or even all of the traces of our habitation are expunged. Indeed, how can we know what has been done to the dwelling, as we can never legitimately go there now. However, we remember it as it was, we can describe it, we connect with it still because of what we associate with being there; certain events come to mind, happy or otherwise, which we may still look back on fondly or regret. This old dwelling, as it were, hangs in space before us, still *ours* in a way, as it was but now is not. Perhaps we will have several such places, some glowing brighter than others, some where we have merely the sketchiest of memories which we dare not trust or rely on, whilst there are other places where we have a much fuller recall. Dare we suggest here that the more we recall the more *mine* it feels to us, and the greater the attachment? Or is this too simplistic? Yet what this shows, whether we can precisely analyse and delineate it or not, is that our attachment to a dwelling, and also to other things and people, does not end once the formal relationship ends. We still look back on it, refer to it, memorialise it, dwell on it, and continue to know it. We might even continue to love it over and above what is currently *mine*, so that most of all we regret its loss.

Andrei Tarkovsky is adept at showing this sense of *mineness* in his films. Often he makes a connection between a character and a place and uses this to drive a plot or to deal with issues such as loss and memory. Tarkovsky often demonstrates the inability to maintain the singular relation with a place, because of its loss, due to exile as in *Nostalghia* (1983), to war in *Ivan’s Childhood* (1962), or the passage of time in *Mirror* (1974). What is interesting is that Tarkovsky uses the strength of this attachment to demonstrate the negative consequences of change. So, in *Ivan’s Childhood* we see Ivan approach what appears to be a derelict house in the middle of a field of mud. The house is burnt out, a casualty of the brutal war being fought between the German and Soviet armies. As Ivan approaches we see that an old man is walking about the ruins of the house and we appreciate that the house is his. The old man, clearly driven mad by war, is searching for a nail amongst the rubble so that he can put up a picture on what is left of a wall. He is concerned to make the

house look homely, so that it will be ready for his wife's return. Ivan, only a child but one who knows the reality of war, says nothing to disabuse the man, but we see in the coldness of his glance from the man to the rubble around him, that there can be no reunion between man and wife in this place, amidst this war. Yet, we also sense that the man can in no way be convinced of this and therefore Ivan leaves him to his labours.

What this brief scene shows is that a sense of *mineness* can be a liability. The old man's house has been reduced to rubble and is beyond repair. The only sane thing to do is to leave it and find safety away from the battlefield. Yet for the man to leave would be to give up everything he sees as his, and this is not just the dwelling, but also those he shared it with. If he were to leave the dwelling he would also have to leave his wife behind. Presumably she is already dead, but he will not accept this as long as he is within what they shared together. For this man, and in a sense for all of us, the dwelling and those within it are all one has and one can have no other. If the old man leaves he has nothing left, not even hope. And so his dwelling, or his attachment to it, keeps him at risk.⁷

Our dwelling is indeed often all we have. We can get used to this because we only really have need of one, it is where we want to be, and it is shared with whom we want to be with. But if this is lost there is no ready and quick alternative. The issue of cost is by no means negligible here, but what concerns me more is the emotional and psychological effects of this loss. We can find another dwelling, and in time we can remake what we have. But the strain of achieving this, and of leaving behind what we have lost can be scarring for us. Whilst we might look back fondly on our past dwellings and see them as stores of memory (King, 2004), we might also harbour a sense of loss in that the dwelling we most identify with, which we see most especially as *mine* is now irretrievably lost.

Tarkovsky shows this loss and its effects in *Mirror*.⁸ The hero of the film, Alexei, whom we only see as a child, seeks to reconnect with his childhood and particularly the dacha where he lived with his mother before the war when he was very young. The film contains a series of scenes from different times in Alexei's childhood intercut with scenes of him as an adult talking – always off camera – with his ex-wife and his son. The effect is impressionistic, in which reality blurs with dreams or with visions. There is no narrative as such or any simple chronology to the film.

But what is especially interesting here is that Tarkovsky had the dacha made for the film as a replica of the place he had stayed in with his mother and sister before the war, basing the design on old photographs and memories (Synessios, 2001). This was a place he was so attached to that he based his film around it; he felt so compelled by the association that he made this film, which is both so very personal and yet so universal in its imagery and sentiment. The film is therefore not just about attachment but is a real example of it.

⁷ I consider the idea of acceptance, and find something positive in it, in the sixth Chapter.

⁸ I have discussed this and several of Tarkovsky's other films in chapter 5 of *The Common Place* (2005).

The sense of *mineness* constructed by Tarkovsky in *Mirror* is based entirely on memory of a long-lost place, one that cannot be recreated as it was (at least, not outside the cinema), but which we can hold on to (precisely because it is a film). Perhaps though the real brilliance of Tarkovsky's achievement with this film is how he deals with the manner we seek control over memory and how this affects this sense of what is *mine*. The memories that we have can be called *mine*, in the sense that we own them. Yet in what manner, properly speaking, can I control these things that are *mine*? Can I control my unconscious (and it still be unconscious?) and what it allows to leak into consciousness? This is clearly not possible. I cannot open up memories at will. Perhaps once I have remembered something it remains in consciousness, but I cannot control the flow, or go searching for something as in a database or card index. Indeed, how can I know what memories I am supposedly looking for unless I already know of them? But for all this, it is still correct to say that they are *my* memories, whether I can access them or not, and they are only *mine*. Perhaps this is why, when many people first see a film like *Mirror*, they are initially perplexed and confused by it, unable to grasp the changes in time and the fact that the same actors portray different people and one person is portrayed by two people. Natasha Synessios (2001), in her study of the film, describes how it went through over twenty edits before it was permitted release in the Soviet Union. Critics of the film found it obtuse, wilfully difficult and obscure. Yet when we start to analyse the film, to see its rhythms and grasp the connections, we can see the significance of its statements. And when we do this, we see that this is how memory works: it is partial, erratic and incomplete, and one memory sparks off others, which appear disconnected but which actually relate to something significant and meaningful. Our job is to locate the meaning and to hold on to what these memories bring out.

It is precisely this sense of *mineness* that I am trying to establish here, this notion of the singularity, the specificity of a connection, but one that is common, general, ordinary. It is where the possibility – and probability – of the connection is shared, if not the specific memory or connection itself, and this is why we are so capable of associating with the vision Tarkovsky puts before us. We too have lost places but are still attached to them. These may be childhood places; they are evocative, full of longing, and we would seek to return to them if we could, especially when our equilibrium in the 'here and now' is disturbed. We see Alexei on his deathbed and come to see what these memories amount to and why he is looking back. It is his being-towards-death, his coming to terms with finitude, the very singularity of this inevitability, which we all share in common. Everything is singular, but nothing is particular, in Tarkovsky's vision.

This sense that something is singularly *mine*, however, can never be unlimited, in that use will nearly always impinge on others. This applies both within the dwelling and without. There may be competition between siblings to use the PC or the TV; there may be a queue for the bathroom; we may have to share a bedroom and this prevents us from doing all that we might. These disputes might be more fundamental, such as deciding if and when to move house, and even lead to violence and abuse. The fact that several people see the dwelling as *mine* does not negate the possibility of power relations. It may actually increase the stakes because all parties feel that change matters singularly to them. Outside the dwelling there may be disputes with

neighbours over access, noise and nuisance which prevent one party from using the dwelling as they wish. The behaviour of one household, using their dwelling as they wish, might prevent others from doing what they want. What is appropriate, of course, might itself be a matter of dispute, and might mean the intervention of a third party to determine what is reasonable and whether actions can be justified.

But what we need to appreciate is that it is the normal state of affairs for use to be limited. It is sociopathic to seek untrammelled and unlimited use of our property regardless of the consequences it has on others. On a desert island or through living as a hermit we might be able to act in an unlimited manner, but only if we accept significant limitations in other aspects of our life, be they in terms of amenity or social contact. The virtue of limits, or what Robert Nozick (1974) termed side-constraints, is that they protect others from our unlimited actions. To say our actions are limited or constrained is to be responsible for the consequences of our actions. This means that much of what we can do is because of limits imposed and/or accepted by others.

Mineness, therefore, does not depend on freedom but rather on restraint, on voluntary self-exclusion so that others leave us be. This will not be complete: there will be breaches of our privacy, and times when we need to seek some external body to enforce our exclusive use over things. But use need not be perfect to enable it still to work; it need only be the presumption, the default case, so that we can seek a remedy if and when we are prevented from acting as we wish. Following Hegel we can see that having exclusive use of an object – possessing it – alters the meaning that we attach to it, and that this condition exists and persists regardless of the limits placed on it from outside. We need only think of people who have bought art treasures illegally: they can never show them off to others – their paintings or sculpture can never be seen in public as they were meant to be seen – but these people still doubtless get great pleasure from owning them. It is a condition of the arrangement for gaining the treasure that it remains hidden and secret, yet this limitation does not remove or limit the desire or the pleasure. The same applies with objects we have attained legally, but which we can only use in a responsible manner, such as a car or a dwelling.

Furthermore, we should not seek to connect this sense of *mineness* with anything unique about what we do. It ought to be obvious that most, if not all, dwellings have the potential to become *my* house, in that we could live there, we could settle if possibilities and circumstances allowed. This does not mean that we covet all these others, or want to live there rather than where we do now. Rather it shows that it is not the house itself, but the relation we have with it that matters, and this is what the phenomenology of dwelling, of objects-for-subjects, in essence means. When we say *mine* we are not pointing to something that is unique, merely something that is singular, and which derives from the specific relation between myself as a subject and the object that I have grasped and over which I have exclusive use.

But also the manner in which we use our dwelling, as exclusive as this is, may be little different from that of others. Dwelling is a ubiquitous activity (King, 2004), so whilst we are being exclusive, we forget that everyone else is too busy doing it to notice us. However, our sense of *mineness* might also need some form of validation by looking at how others live. As an example of this, my wife told me how she relishes taking my daughter to her clarinet lesson held in the teacher's house. His

house is wonderfully cluttered with files in the hall, most of the work surfaces in the kitchen covered with papers, and the carpets and furniture all well-used and lived-in. As she was telling me this we both looked around our living room, with its mix-and-match furniture, papers strewn on the floor along with the children's books, toys and pens, numerous DVDs and CDs, sickly plants and a range of ornaments all slightly askew; and we felt there was at least one other family that lives *properly*. We then discussed other people we know who take the minimalist approach to décor and who seem never to touch anything, so perfect and pristine does it appear. We wondered how hard the legs are kicking under the surface to keep this serene image intact, and then we got on with our lives and carried on ignoring all the clutter we had made.

Whether one prefers minimalist or make-do, there is still a sameness to dwelling, and this is merely another way of describing it as ordinary, as what we are in the midst of (King, 2005). However, we can see this sameness as appearing in two distinct ways. First, we can see it as an unchanging quality, and this is what we can take comfort in. Dwelling will be there, and things will tend to stay as they have ever been, and as a result we can rely on them. Put another way, it becomes transparent to consciousness, allowing us to meet our ends without deliberating over the background (Giddens, 1991; King, 1996, 2005).

But, second, we can see this ordinariness as drudgery, so that the unchanging quality becomes the problem. Instead of a comfort we see it as a treadmill, of things being continually repeated. In a sense, we cannot have one without the other: we cannot gain the sense of comfort without the reiteration and repetition. We might see this as simply a matter of attitude, of whether the glass is half-full or half-empty. But is it more fundamental than this? Clearly we could try to create a greater significance by emphasising such things as differing gender roles and the manner in which men and women use the dwelling differently (Morley, 2000). However, without seeking to diminish this debate, what is more interesting in terms of my discussion is that these feelings of 'half emptiness' and, at other times, 'half fullness' are often experienced by the same person: we can have these conflicting feelings within ourselves. So, we might feel that the dwelling is a place of drudgery before we go on holiday, but see it differently when we return. The break from the dwelling and the change of scenery alter our feelings towards it and make us see it differently, albeit only for a short time before routine habits fully take over again. But once away from the dwelling we might also welcome returning to it. We now see it principally as a place of comfort, where things are known and in their right place; we might admit that it is not perfect, and that it is nice to get away, but it is also very reassuring to know that we can return and that things are as they are. The holiday is no less enjoyable for this sense of returning. Indeed it might be said to help in validating the comfort gained from the dwelling.⁹

9 I am aware that this is by no means a universal feeling. Even within my own family there are opposing camps: whilst I hold the view stated here, my wife feels the sense of drudgery even more acutely when she returns. My two daughters are likewise divided on the virtue or otherwise of returning from holiday. However, when we are at home we all look at our dwelling differently from when we are away from it.

But, however we view the sameness of dwelling, and however much we might seek something different from what we have now, what we do not do is wish to be *outside* dwelling, give up on it, or to leave it behind. At most, we might want to reform it, or have it work differently, to serve some higher or better purpose. But what we cannot do is to wish it away, or seek to change dwelling into something it is not, like a machine for producing the ‘right’ sort of human beings. Dwelling is as it is because of how we are and therefore how we have to live. Dwelling functions as a result of the uses we put it to. These uses can be good or bad, healthy or unhealthy, positive or negative. But, in all cases, what determines them is not design or architecture, but the subjective attachment we have to our place.

We cannot, of course, take use for granted. How we use the dwelling has consequences and impacts both on ourselves and others. Use can therefore be positive or negative: it can help us to live well or it can prevent this. If we accept the legitimacy of dwelling as being *mine*, we need to be concerned with the sense in which this is manifested. The rest of this book takes up this issue. I want to consider what happens *in* dwelling, to look at some of the ways in which it is used and how these can be unhealthy and socially dysfunctional as well as positive and beneficial. There are three particular aspects of dwelling I want to explore here. First, I look at the idea of using implacability to insulate us. I describe this positively and negatively, suggesting that we need it but have to be careful how we use it. Second, in ‘Hiding in the World’ I look at the more extreme case of solitude, of withdrawing, where we exclude everyone, and what happens when this is attempted. I seek to look at the difference between being lonely and being alone, and how dwelling can magnify our selfishness. I am also concerned about how we can deal with the isolation of others, and where the responsibility lies. Third, and finally, I look at how we can use dwelling as therapy, and achieve this through acceptance, through an accommodation of our place with others and in the environment. This involves the establishment of clear limits or boundaries for our actions. This results – if that is the right term – in a set of principles of what dwelling is. These principles stress the subjective; indeed they come out of the appreciation that there is a dwelling that is *mine*.

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Chapter 4

The Confinement of Sense



Adventures in a safe place

As a young child in bed at night I would imagine myself on some adventure deep in space, with my bed as the craft. This craft, of course, was special, being able to travel as far and as fast as I wished it to. But what was really special about this craft, as I imagined it, was that it was completely insulated and invulnerable. No matter where I went on these adventures I would be impervious to attack from outside and could not be harmed. I could face any foe, with the only limit being my imagination, and yet remain completely safe.

However, I soon realised that there was a problem here. What I wanted – or thought I wanted – was adventure, going far away into the unknown. But, in inventing the rules for my game, I had made sure that my safety and security could be guaranteed. I wanted to travel but only if I was completely protected. I suppose this really showed that I did not want to go anywhere at all, and that what mattered most was the solitude. If I were to try to analyse myself and my motivations here, what this game might show is not a yearning for adventure at all – I have no real recollection of doing much other than travelling somewhere and blasting the odd asteroid – but it was instead a means of keeping insulated. The real purpose was

not to go out and do things, but to be protected from the world of strangeness: what I wanted was not adventure but the all-encompassing security and comfort of complete insulation. This started to become clear to me when I realised that, in order to maintain my invulnerability, I could never venture out of my spacecraft, and thus any adventure would have to be extremely minimal and limited. I could not be insulated *and* adventurous at the same time. Hence I was brought up against the absurdity of the fantasy (and a fantasy with limits is indeed both a failure and an absurdity).

I had thought that this fantasy was particular to me, but my children tell me of similar fantasies, of apparently seeking adventure, but only if they can feel that it is safe. Other people I have spoken to about this also seem to have similar recollections, perhaps not as well-developed as mine, but there none the less. Of course, this is anecdotal, and I am not seeking to develop this into some full-blown theory about safety. Instead I see it as a useful stepping-off point for a discussion on insularity and insulation. It may well be that I am what might be called a 'low-risk person', one who is more inclined to watch than participate, whose first reaction to anything is to want to read about it, ideally in the comfort of an armchair in my study.

However, what I want to suggest is that this might be an entirely natural search for security, even if it is perhaps a little overdeveloped in my case. Even if this sense does not always apply, or apply to everyone, there are some of us, some of the time, who prefer the low-risk option, who will only take action once it is so contained and protected, with a safety net and alternative options. Most of us, most of the time, are not reckless thrill-seekers who are prepared to jump without considering the consequences. We all, I would argue, want some sense of security, and even those who do take risks, be they explorers, professional soldiers, or players of dangerous sports, are usually able to quantify that risk and insure against it by using the proper equipment, doing the training and ensuring that there is some backup in place.

So we can see this childhood fantasy as being about security and not adventure. But it also has a further significance in that it shows that security is limiting. If we wish to be invulnerable, if we want complete security, then the price is enclosure. We can only be safe if we refrain from doing dangerous things, and if we want to be completely safe then we have to refrain from doing most things. There is then quite a cost to being invulnerable and completely safe, in that the safer we are the less we experience. This again can be mapped on to our every day experiences: if we are parents we always have to balance offering new experiences to our children with the possibility that they may be upset or even endangered, and some parents will be more cautious than others in what they allow their children to experience. What we want as parents is for our children to have adventure, to experience new things and to be stretched. We know that children learn only when they are taken beyond their current capabilities. But we want these adventures to be in a safe place.

I stopped playing out my fantasy after a while. Presumably the limitation of it became too glaringly obvious to ignore, and so it could no longer work as a fantasy of adventure or of comfort. Yet the fantasy does say something important about dwelling. Whilst we can seek to be invulnerable, and we can seek risk and adventure, we cannot do both at the same time. When we insulate ourselves it is as if we inoculate ourselves against risk, and to take a risk means we are not as

secure or as protected as we might wish, so that we open ourselves up to something unknown and unpredictable. We cannot be both free and safe, and we have to seek a balance between the two, to find the safe place for our adventures. The safest place for most of us, most of the time, is a private dwelling. Indeed it is so safe that it allows us to fantasise about adventures we might take. The capability to exclude, and the implacable face that the dwelling presents to others, provides us with safety, and with a freedom for fantasy. But if we are honest, this also presents us with a limitation: we can only maintain the fantasy as long as we exclude others. What this might mean is that we can only maintain ourselves as we would like – being, as it were, invulnerable – by excluding the reality of the world outside, and by neglecting to connect with this world of risk and unpredictability. But putting this round the other way, it means that, when we recognise that we need to connect with the world, we are less able to maintain our fantasies and this can be problematic for us.

A dwelling is a confined space, and in that confinement we find some sense of our being. But this sense, I want to suggest, can be either real or illusory. This is not merely about looking inwards or outwards – although this is undoubtedly part of the problem – but is concerned with how we use dwelling to protect and project ourselves, to insulate us and to support us. Our dwelling is how we make sense of the world, and this works through the operation of boundaries, with their permeability and their opaqueness. Dwelling confines our sense of things, and this means that we need to be insulated. But we cannot live by insulation alone and so we need a balance. However, how can we find that balance when we remain on the inside?

Insulation

To be insular is to suggest that one is not responsive to change, that one is separated or remote like an island. Most definitions tend to suggest negative connotations, such as being narrow-minded, unresponsive, lacking contact, and appearing to be ignorant or indifferent to cultures, peoples and experiences outside of one's own experience. If we search a thesaurus for cognates, this negativity is merely reinforced with words such as blinkered, circumscribed, closed, inward-looking, isolated, limited, narrow, narrow-minded, parish-pump, parochial, petty, prejudiced and provincial. There is nothing here that can be seen as positive, such that we could call an insulated person pleasant, well-adjusted or likeable.

Does this mean that insularity is always negative, and if this is the case, does this present a problem for my position on implacability and exclusion? Is it something that we should always guard against and seek to eradicate? Can we be insular and be responsible members of society; can we still be open to the views of others? As with the other concepts I wish to consider in this book, I want to argue that this is a question of degree, a matter of balance. We need insularity, and when we need it, it should be as complete as possible. But this should not be taken as meaning that we need to be insular all the time and always. There are things that we cannot do without insularity; however, nothing but insularity would prevent us from doing much that is considered ordinary. This means that insularity ought to have a positive sense as well

as a negative one. This comes across clearly when we look at the idea of an island as the very ideal of insularity.

An island is separated, isolated from other land. It is kept apart by a surrounding sea, which offers some potential for keeping others away. Indeed the image of an island is suggestive of independence, of either wanting to be self-sufficient, or of having to be. We must rely on what is available on the island or in the nearby waters. We can see an island as isolated within emptiness, as being the only place that is habitable and inhabited within the surrounding nothingness. Perhaps we could say that it is the only thing knowable. The island can be seen as being cut off by the surrounding sea, a sense which might be emphasised by the implacability of the sea as a wild and uncompromising element which we are unable to influence. The sea, therefore, presents us with a model of implacability to match the isolation of the island. This sea can be seen as threatening and dangerous, as something only passable with great care and good luck. It has a scale we find hard to comprehend and with which we cannot compete. In the face of this implacable threat we may withdraw to what we know to be safe and secure. Yet the sea can also calm and inspire us.

If the island can be seen as the jail, the sea could be seen as both our jailer and our only means of escape. We may be held there, through our fear of it, or the lack of the right equipment to tackle it, or because we have no means of navigating across it, even assuming we know what is on the other side of the ocean. Yet despite all this, the sea is still the only means that can carry us back to civilisation. Whilst it separates us, it is also what we will need to traverse if we wish to escape.

But it is important not to see the sea as what causes our insularity. The sea will often appear to us as limitless, as so open. We cannot see its end, or see what might be beyond it. It is this very openness that we find challenging and which causes us to retreat inwards, which prevents us from taking a step off the island. It is we who do the enclosing in the face of this huge expanse of openness around us. So the sea does not insulate us, rather we insulate ourselves against its openness. This is because we know the power that lies beneath it; its calmness can change, and is merely a cover for its violence, its implacability and its unforgiving and neutral nature. Likewise, when we look out of our dwelling we can see that all is open and apparently calm. Going out of the dwelling might be something to relish and enjoy. Yet we know that there are hidden dangers, unpredictability and things that are unknown.

We can suggest then that the sea puts us in our place, and hence it is useful as a metaphor for our awe at the complexity and implacability of the world around us. We see the majesty of the sea. But also sense the implacability it has and the fact that we need to proceed with care, to watch our step close to the shore. We need to keep a sight of land, so that we can be reassured and gain confidence from the proximity of safety. This is akin to knowing that we are close to home, physically and ontologically. We may experience this as a physical need, to be in touching distance of our dwelling, to see it, to know that we are literally close to home. Or it may be ontological in the sense that we know – and need to know – that it is still there, that it is waiting for us to return, and that we can readily return to it; what comforts us here is that it is there for when we need it, that there is the ready possibility of dry land and solidity under foot.

The shore offers us solidity even as we look out to sea. It gives us a base from which we can reconnoitre, spy out the world around us. So it is with dwelling, with its solidity, yet also with its aspect for looking out, for viewing what is around us. We do not then need to cut ourselves off – dwelling is not about this – but it gives us this option, and the ability to look out on our own terms, at times and in ways of our own choosing. We can control the level, the amount of insularity just as we decide how close we go to the edge of the water, or how far in we go. We may fear being up to our necks, but we do not have to go in as deep as that, for it is most often a matter of our choosing. We can sit safely on the shore and worry what it might be like to be out there and be unable to return, just as we can sit at our window and worry about the wildness of the world despite its apparent calm.

So an island can be seen as a place of safety, as somewhere we can cling to and find safety. We can hide away from what we think threatens us, but we can also see it as a place of comfort, where we are able to relax, safe in the knowledge that danger cannot touch us. This might give us a sense of tranquillity, of insularity from the cares of the world. Likewise, a dwelling can act as an island, as a place of calm in the face of an outside that is implacable to our insignificant needs and wants.

We can show this tranquil – and positive – sense of insularity by looking at Brian Eno's film *Thursday Afternoon* (1984), which consists of seven video paintings of the photographer Christine Alcindro. The film shows very slow reflections of a person at ease: she is seen drying and combing her hair, smoking a cigarette and luxuriating in a bath. There is little movement in the film, matched by little change in camera position, which is just left to observe the woman as she takes care of herself. Only in one of the seven video paintings does the camera move, whilst in others the settings are altered to affect the colour and contrast. The videos show very little change in the scene and contain no idea of any development or plot. Several of the individual scenes appear to be circular, to be on a loop, so that they refer quite specifically to what is reiterative and habitual. In at least one of the scenes the film is not looped but seemingly played forwards and then backwards to create successive mirror images. But this looping and reversing is done subtly and without any jarring. The ambition is to create a stasis and a sense of calm so that we see that the paintings show Christine Alcindro's normal, uninhibited and unreflective actions. All the video paintings are in ultra-slow motion and sometimes the action appears to stop altogether. So there are no sudden movements, rather a sense of a gentle meandering and a repetition. The images are presented in a portrait format and so on a normal screen appear to be enclosed within a strong boundary or frame. The image therefore appears contained by a solid black mass which heightens the sense of insulation and enclosure of the scenes.¹

What this film therefore emphasises is a tranquil sense of solitude, rather than any sense of prejudice, narrow-mindedness or pettiness. There is no anxiety in these situations, just a sense of rapture, of luxuriating in the comfort of complete solitude, of the certainty of not being interrupted. The woman is at ease, without any sense that she has to rush, or to have any concern other than her immediate ones. She is uninhibited, relaxed, ostensibly with no aim other than to do what she is currently doing, be it

1 However, in one scene the action is contained within multiple frames, each inside the other.

combing her hair or lying in her bath. We can therefore see the film as a study of calm, but also of aloneness, of self-possession and security in being alone. She is insulated, protected, as if in a womb, especially when we see her lying in water.

Eno heightens this sense with his use of extremes of light which give a diffuseness, a gossamer quality, as well as a distance to the images. Eno's aim was to explore the extremes of light and dark dictated by what was relatively primitive video equipment. But this lack of visual clarity, with some sections too bright and others too dark or apparently out of focus, adds to the sense of separateness and gives the woman a greater aloofness and distance. She is unapproachable, kept away from us even as we watch her doing things we would all consider to be private.

Even though there is little development we find the scenes beguiling. This is not, I feel, in any voyeuristic sense: even though the woman is semi-naked for much of the film there is nothing here that is erotic or titillating. Instead we see the images as graceful but essentially abstract, and this is because of the manipulation of light. Eno's film is a study of light and colour and not of action. We find ourselves flowing along, being lulled and calmed by the film's slowness, repetition and sheer beauty. This beauty is not because, or not entirely because, Christine Alcino is an attractive woman, but because of the slowness, quietness and calm self-assurance of both subject and context. The film is supported by Eno's ambient music, which is also repetitive, calming and lacking any apparent development.

I want to suggest that what makes this film so interesting and beguiling is precisely that nothing happens. If there were any development or sudden changes the spell would be broken, and the effect of the film lost. Only in one of the seven scenes is there any real change, and this is where the colour slowly leaks out of the picture to create an abstraction of the woman's body as the film is deliberately overexposed, so that the image becomes one of almost pure shapeless light. This change is slow, incremental and not immediately perceptible. But even here we begin to look at the film differently, to start to anticipate some development and change, speculating on where we are being led. This is, I feel, a mistake on Eno's part and out of character with the rest of the film. This is because what is so effective is precisely that there is no change and that things remain, or return to, where they were. Alcino's actions are repeated, time after time apparently endlessly, and so we are drawn in and lose ourselves, just as she has done.

This film shows the positive aspect of insulation, and so why we need it. On one level we can take this literally, in that without privacy Alcino could not act in this way.² If she were sharing her space, or thought that she would be interrupted at any time, we would not get this sense of tranquillity and repose. But we need not rely only on this literal sense. The dreamlike atmosphere of the film, supported by the ambient music, offers a sense of calmness and quietness where things do not change, do not develop, and this is precisely what we seek from the privacy of our dwelling. The film presents us with the unchanging quality of our dwelling, where the fact that things remain where and as they are allows us to act in an untroubled and unconcerned manner. The dwelling is background, where we can be lulled and

² Of course, as with all film, we must ignore the fact that these actions are only visible to us because someone was there filming her.

not fear that we will be jarred into action by anything unpredictable. This might be seen as boring – and some may see Eno’s film accordingly – but without this dullness many of the activities we take for granted would become difficult for us. It is the predictability of dwelling, in terms of both form and function, that allows us to lead our normal lives. Hence what might appear to be self-indulgent or selfish actions in this film are in fact basic actions. This is shown by the title of the film – *Thursday Afternoon* – which has the implication of normality and regularity. We can see this as just *any* Thursday afternoon: this is what the woman does at this time, and so it is nothing special. Hence there is no need to dramatise it, or even to condense it, because it does not lead anywhere, Alcino’s actions are not the preliminaries for anything else. These actions are ends in themselves, made possible by the insulation offered by a private dwelling.

This film demonstrates an important sense of insularity. The dwelling, as an insular object, allows nothing to leak out. The dwelling, like the film, has a solid and defined boundary, which emphasises the difference between inside and outside. This prevents things from entering to disturb us, but also prevents any leakage out. The dwelling seals us in and keeps others out. This positive sense of insularity is one of *insulation*, and we should perhaps emphasise this element rather than the negative sense of parochialism or narrow-mindedness. The aim of insulation is to isolate, to detach or to set apart. We can see insulation as preventing any transmission between one area and another, as in the case of an electrical current, heat or sound. It also carries with it the idea of detachment. Clearly several of these senses can be seen as negative, but insulation generally has more of a positive sense than insularity. This is seen when we look at some of the cognates of insulation, which include cocoon, cushion, close off, cut off, cotton wool, protect, shield, sequester. Many of these are distinctly positive and necessary, and relate well to the notion of private dwelling as a place that protects us and provides protected intimacy. We have also seen when looking at Eno’s film, that privacy can be used to cushion and cocoon us, and where we can be wrapped up as well as rapt.

Insulation can be seen as a shield, so that we can hide away, sequestered or secreted out of view and out of harm’s way. A cocoon is used to hide in and keep an immature organism safe. This allows that organism to develop and come to terms with the mature world of that species. We can see that this cocooning is essential: without it the organism cannot develop. This insulating is therefore for the benefit of that organism, to protect it, to shield it making it safe and allowing it to grow. So this idea of the shield is an important one. We want, and do, insulate children from horror, from graphic images and representations, from things that we know or fear will disturb them. We actively shield and protect them, and there is a particular sense of wrapping up the very young, who are otherwise defenceless, in cotton wool. All children to an extent are cocooned, in that they are supported economically, morally, physically. Yet as they get older and move towards adulthood we question whether they still need or should be so insulated. In order for children to learn and develop they need to be open to new experiences, even though this might involve some risk. The work of parents here is to manage that process, controlling the risk as far as possible whilst offering new possibilities.

However, for an adult to be insulated in the same manner as a child would appear problematical. We presume adults are capable of negotiating their way in the world, and that they should be so. We assume they are independent and competent, and that they are rational and able to understand or appreciate the level of risk and threat they face. We presume that they need to negotiate a series of relationships in order to make their way in the world. Adults need to go out into the world and interact with others, including their children, for whom they may need to confront risk in the act of protecting and insulating them. This is why we see those who are overly insular as presenting a problem, if only to themselves (although it is likely to impact on those immediately around them), and why we might even see extreme insularity as a social problem or even an illness to be challenged and overcome.

The situation for insular adults is that they, as it were, have no parents to cover for them. They do not have anyone they can rely on, or rather they make unfair and unreasonable demands on those around them – on partner and family – as if these people were in the parental role. They, in a way, become like children; they become infantilised by their insularity. This creates an imbalance in their household, altering the relationships between family members.

The problem of extreme insularity is that there is no proper connection: the insulation prevents any transmission inwards or outwards. Insulation aims not to be permeable, to allow nothing in or out, and it therefore isolates the object. Yet we need to remember that this form of insulation might be rare,³ and is the result of illnesses such as depression and anxiety. However, for most of us, most of the time, insulation is never total and things do get through to us. Therefore the insulation sometimes fails, or is incomplete. Of course, this is because we deliberately leave gaps, or on occasion we remove the insulation to allow things to reach us. We can say that, quite literally, insulation has a time and a place.

This means that there is a need for a balance to be struck. We do not always wish to be insular: this is not safe or sustainable for us, either materially or mentally. We need to venture into the world, to contact and meet with others so that we can earn a living, find a partner and fulfil the basic necessities of life. This, however, should not lead us to neglect the virtues of privacy and, what we might call, a more measured insularity. Much of what is personal to us, what is integral to us, is based on a singular private relation, what we have called *mineness*, and for this to exist we need to be enclosed.

Most of us, most of the time, are not anxious or depressed, and we do not need to hide away behind extreme insulation. But we all need privacy, space for intimacy and the opportunity to share. Sharing with others we love enhances rather than diminishes the privacy and the insularity. We want to be away from others' eyes and to be free to speak intimately and in a manner that would not be appropriate in public and would most likely embarrass us or the one it is aimed at. We might see this as a need to keep things out, a prevention of ingress, of ensuring that nothing unwanted, nothing dangerous enters and ruins the regularity, the flow that is needed to run and manage our lives. There are things that we want and need to do which can only be

3 I discuss these rare occurrences and what flows from them in more detail in the next chapter.

done free from interference from outside, which need regularity and stability, and so we need things to be in a steady state. We want nothing to leak out, but also nothing to invade, to affect this steady state, or to create a situation that we cannot control, understand and deal with. Insulation is therefore a condition of safety and security, a means of ensuring stability, integrity and the free flow of our lives.

What we need, then, is not to lose sight of the actual use we make of our dwelling and therefore why we need it. There may be greater imperatives and more pressing questions in our lives, but only on the assumption that we are well-housed and have adequate insulation. This might be taken to mean that we can ignore the rest who are not well-housed, but the reverse is the case. It is only this state of being adequately insulated, free from ingress, that we are able to look outwards. It is when we have sufficient complacency about how we dwell, and where we can take it for granted, that we can concern ourselves with those who are not stable and secure and who do not have what we have. So a condition of our concern for and capability to help others is that we are insulated from the very things impinging on those we are trying to help. Thus to insist on our own comforts is not purely out of selfishness, but a necessary prerequisite for dealing with others, for establishing and then exercising a capability.

So we need to isolate ourselves on some occasions, and this is a permanent and a regular need. What we tend to do, however, is to refrain from referring to this as insularity or isolation. We call it privacy, quiet enjoyment or security. We give this occasional isolation and insularity a more forgiving and affirming label, a more benign inference. But whatever it is called we still do insulate ourselves.

Insulation is important to us because it provides an order, where the dwelling acts as *the confinement of sense*. It provides a boundary that allows us to act freely and without this imposing on others. It is therefore through confinement, the very idea of limiting ourselves behind some form of insulation, that gives us a sense of rightness, that things are properly placed within a world that is otherwise disordered and fathomless. It is in this sense that insulation actually serves to protect us from isolation rather than being a manifestation of it. A private dwelling provides the means of bounding our relation to the world, of confining the world to the manageable, to what is known and can be known, to what we can make sense of. And when the world appears hostile, when we cannot reconcile ourselves to it, we then seek to draw in the confines of our world, to what we feel we can be sure of.

This confinement is not merely physical, although this is undoubtedly important. It is also in a way ontological, in that it allows us to develop the meaning we have with our surroundings. The confinement – the describing of this space as *mine* – allows us to understand what we have, and to come to terms with it and what is around us. We should see the confinement of sense, therefore, as being about circumscription *and* awareness. The space is given shape by its confinement and this allows us to measure its meaningfulness for us. Confinement gives definition to a space, which becomes a staked-out territory, contiguous with our meaning of things as *mine*. It is where we put a boundary around us so that we can understand and make sense of our place in the world. Confinement of sense means deliberately looking inwards, of locating meanings to those things close to us, and equally deliberately pushing other things further away. Once we have this base, once we have constructed and

secured meanings, we can then look outwards with some sense of security. It is from this position that we are able to see the world as it is and our relationship with others in it.

Absence

But we cannot, so to speak, consider the insulated person in isolation. Insularity is always *away from* or *without* something or someone. It is therefore a relational state. In the world as we have it, to be insular is to be away from others. We do not live in a world without people, but rather in a crowded world in which we cannot avoid human contact. It is this simple fact, of course, that makes insulation so necessary in the first place. Yet we should remember that insularity is always where we are away from others, without others, or where we have been rejected or made unwanted by them. So to be aware of insularity is not to forget the world beyond our boundary, but to realise that it is there beyond us, and to see this as consequential. It may not be a presence that activates us, but an absence, yet this is a consequential absence in that we can visualise someone being there with us; we know that we need not be alone. This may manifest itself as a fear of invasion or violation, or it may be a yearning loss for someone now gone. But however it appears to us, insularity always carries with it an absence.

What I want to consider in this section is this sense of absence, or what we might see as the relational aspect of insularity. In some ways this is to stress the negative aspects of insularity, where we can properly portray it as isolation. The first thing to consider is what it is that is missing; what is there an absence of? We might see that there is an absence of conviviality, of being together, of sharing, of being able to join in with others. It is where we have no one who is there *for us*. But absence might also relate not to people but to our own sense of lethargy. What we might suffer from is an absence of aspiration. It might be that we no longer wish or hope for change. This is where we have little or no expectation that our situation will change, or perhaps that it will only change for the worse. Therefore what we might have is an absence of any joy, or we may see it as a lack of promise or possibility. So instead of a resistance to change we find that change resists us.

But it might be something specific that is absent, such as a certain person, be they a lover, a partner, a friend, a child. These might be people with whom we used to share our life, and who would be there still were it not for some event or something we did or said. We might have excluded them or driven them way, or there might have been some tragedy. But whatever the reason, we have a sense of loss that is not general, or not merely so, but is quite specific.

Finally, the absence might be present even whilst the partner and family are present. We still live with them, but there is no responsiveness, no consanguinity, and no real being-together. This could be because we have drifted apart, or find that we no longer have much in common except our habits and our inertia. What this final example shows is that it is possible to be insular, to exclude the other, without being physically separate. We can live in the same dwelling, but still feel apart from others. This, I would suggest, is the most negative sense of insularity.

This sense of absence, dwelling strongly on a sense of disconnection with others is shown in Bela Tarr's film *Damnation* (1987). This is a rather bleak but brilliant study of isolation: individuals, even though they can come together, have sex, talk at length with (or rather at) each other, are still incapable of connecting. It is as if all the people in this film are isolated islands, and they are not here surrounded by a tranquil sea but by a rising flood, and we can find little that is positive in their separation.

The film starts with a long single shot of coal carts moving on an overhead cable: we hear low-level industrial noise and a regular clanging and whining from the carts. The camera slowly pulls back to show that we are actually inside a dwelling. We see a window frame, and as the camera pulls back further we see the back of a man's head in silhouette. He is motionless, just staring out at the monotonous scene beyond the window. This man is the film's main protagonist, a rather dissolute individual named Karrer. Even at this early stage, we sense sadness, darkness and some tension, generated mainly by the unnerving sound. We hear this low-level industrial hum and the clanking of coal carts throughout the film, particularly in moments of insular reflection. This sense of disquiet is only emphasised when the scene cuts to a close-up of Karrer's lathered face in a mirror, with his cutthroat razor out of focus in the foreground. We see him trying to shave off several days' growth, and we wonder what he intends to do with the razor as he moves it across his cheek and towards his neck. He looks closely and deliberately at himself in the mirror and we wonder if he is just aiming to shave.

But we see nothing more of his domestic interior. In the rest of the film he is either outside prowling or waiting, drinking in a bar or club, or in the apartment of a nightclub singer with whom he is having an affair. Karrer often hides behind things such as walls and windows, often looking round things, so that he can see but not be seen by others. In most of the external scenes it is raining heavily, creating a noise that accords with the industrial hum and clatter of the overhead coal carts. Indeed at the end of the film the industrial noise and the sound of the driving rain appear to merge to create one sound that is inexorable, driving, implacable, limitless and unnerving.

The camera mirrors the attitude of Karrer. A common means of changing scene is to go behind a wall and into blackness. Often the camera is placed outside and so cannot penetrate walls and windows, and our view is often limited and constricted by the physicality of space. The camera tends to be still and so we see a scene only from one viewpoint. When we are watching a conversation between the characters there is no shifting of the camera's position to show how one character reacts to another, or to show different points of view. Instead we are left outside the relationship, as voyeurs and not participants. This makes it harder to take sides, to sympathise with one character more than another. When the camera does move it is slow and allows us to take in the fullness of a scene. But there are no rapid cuts or shifts, and all the movements are within the possibility of human vision: a move up or down or side to side. The result of this inaction is a sense of slowness and melancholy, which is entirely in keeping with the actions unfolding in front of us.

The plot of *Damnation* involves Karrer's attempt to continue his affair with the nightclub singer. She, in turn, is dissatisfied with her highly indebted husband and her provincial lifestyle. She clearly feels less for Karrer than he does for her. We

feel that she goes along with his advances reluctantly for want of anything better to do. A bar owner tries to persuade Karrer to collect a package from abroad, which he is not prepared to do. However, he proposes that the singer's husband goes, and sets this up. Whilst her husband is away Karrer visits the singer, they argue and get back together. In the early part of the film Karrer is frequently seen in the rain, for instance when he is waiting for the singer's husband to leave. This idea of Karrer waiting for others, waiting for his opportunity to appear, is a constant theme in the film. In another recurring element throughout the film, dogs are seen running wild throughout the town scavenging from bins and drinking from puddles.

After the husband returns all the main protagonists go to a dance and get drunk, and the singer is seen going off with the bar owner, presumably because he has money and can offer her what neither Karrer or her husband can. The film ends with Karrer visiting the police to report the smuggling activity of the bar owner, and then he is seen walking in waste ground outside the town. Suddenly he challenges one of the stray dogs, getting down on all fours and barking at it. Having faced down the dog he gets up and walks off and this is the end of the film.

Karrer is the only character in the film who is named, and we get the impression that the other characters only exist for his benefit; but then other films could be made of the other characters and they would act in just the same way as Karrer. Taking Karrer's perspective might here be seen as arbitrary, in that he is no more heroic or worthy of our attentions than any of the others in the film. This insularity is made clear when the bar owner says that Karrer should learn that there are others in the world apart from him, and that he should stop seeing everything only from his viewpoint. Karrer, however, is clearly unconvinced by this. The bar owner asks whether Karrer seriously thinks that he is the only one touched by tragedy. But Karrer is so engrossed in himself that he cannot appreciate this: all he wants is another drink before closing time. Yet, we might wonder whether he really is any different from any of the other characters: they too are self-absorbed with their desires and ambitions to escape or to get what they want. Like the bar owner, who ends up with the singer, he does not think beyond his own needs. There is no warmth towards others, no fellow feeling, only cold calculation. In the scene where Karrer and the singer have sex there is no sign of love, despite their protestations of it. Whilst their bodies touch there is no emotion, no overt pleasure, and no sense that they are together as they look vacantly into space over each other's shoulder. There is only mechanical action. Like the dogs running around the town and rooting around for scraps, the humans too are seen as scavengers, for love or for money. There is no real difference between them and the pack of dogs roaming through the rain and the puddles. And so it is appropriate that at the end of the film Karrer acts like a dog: he too is a scavenger, facing down others with shows of aggression. He is base and has descended to the level of a dog.

An important element in the film is rainfall, which soaks the characters and the town. There are puddles and mud everywhere: the landscapes are of run-down or derelict buildings and empty streets. So all the exteriors are wet: it is either raining or has been raining. All is bleak and lifeless; everywhere is churned mud and concrete, all with the foreboding industrial hum from the overhead coal carts. In the external scenes there is an emptiness, a void filled only by rain. There is rarely more than one character in shot at a time – and where there are more, often only one person is in

focus. The rain isolates, creates distance and discourages human contact, creating a sense of deceit: Karrer skulks around towards and away from the singer. He moves quickly in the rain, and usually away from the camera.

Tarr portrays a hostile environment, where there is no comfort and no opportunity to rest. The only figures we see standing still are Karrer waiting furtively for the singer's husband to leave, and two policewomen outside the police station, who are bored and listless. The lack of comfort and rest means that the characters appear as scavengers, moving from place to place like the pack of dogs, taking what they can get. This is what all the characters in the film do: taking what they can get, competing against each other for the few available scraps. There is a sense of inner tension shared by the characters. We detect an anxiety, a nerviness that prevents any real connection between people. There is little dialogue or conversation in the film. Instead the action is interspersed with a series of directed monologues, where the characters talk at rather than to each other. Karrer in particular does not expect a reply, except when there is a confrontation, as when the singer tells Karrer that she wants nothing more to do with him.

The interiors, however, only emphasise this bleakness. The stark black and white of the film helps to maintain this sense of desolation. The film is in harsh contrasts, with deep blacks and spots of light on the characters which seem to emphasise their interiority. The light has a depth that seems to permeate into the murk and shadow of the soul of Karrer and the others, and what we are shown is not pleasant. What we have in this film is a linkage between insularity, anxiety and sadness. This creates an odd connection of nerviness when Karrer has to move. He is almost manic at times, and this is offset by an almost complete immobility at other times. His movement is due, we feel, to his desperation – a need to fulfil his desires – which explains his declaration to the singer that he will do anything for her, accept any humiliation and degradation if she will take him back. This she eventually does, and without any conditions, only to desert him, and her husband, for the bar owner at the end of the film. Karrer's immobility comes as a result of his realisation of failure, that he cannot fulfil his desires. All he can do then, as we see when he goes to the police to report the actions of the bar owner, is to destroy those who defeat him. In this way, Karrer is very much 'the dog in the manger', making sure that no one else can succeed in their dreams if he cannot. This is only emphasised at the end of the film when he is amongst the dogs, barking aggressively at them, goading another dog and chasing it off. But what does he do this for? It is apparently merely to possess a piece of muddy ground, to claim a higher rung than the other dog, to have sole access to some scrap or dirty puddle. He is merely trying to prove that he is stronger, that he is top dog. Karrer, in damning his friends, damns himself. But in a way all the characters are equally damned, with no prospects of redemption. This is shown very effectively and poignantly at the beginning of the long dance scene in the last part of the film. The camera pans through a full circle beginning with rain falling down a wall, to show doorways crowded with people looking at something in the square. But they are staring blankly, with no interest, no humour; there is no life in them; they are sad and show no signs of hope. But what is so effective here is that these people appear to be looking out of the film, to the audience, perhaps offering us a mirror to our own

melancholy and hopelessness. But then the tables are turned and it is we who are looking at them as they dance and drink together.

The overall feel of the film is of dampness: of hopes, ambitions, and the human spirit dampened or doused, crushed by a weight of water falling inexorably on them. They are soaked through, ruined by this encroaching water. Tarr appears to be using water in the opposite sense to that of Andrei Tarkovsky. Peter Green (1993) suggests that water denotes not just the traditional concept of purification, but is also associated by Tarkovsky with the idea of home and homesickness. Hence, in *Nostalghia* (1983), there is a pond before the Russian farmhouse, and the dream sequence takes place whilst Gorchakov is beside water within a ruined building. Similar associations are made in *Stalker* (1979) where we see the stalker himself sleeping on a tiny island amidst a pool of water. Likewise in *Solaris* (1972) we see Kris Kelvin lingering beside a pool in the garden of his dacha before setting off on his long and perilous journey into space. In both *Stalker* and *Nostalghia*, but also briefly in the dream scenes in *Mirror* (1974) and *Solaris*, we have flooded interiors adding a particular atmosphere to buildings, most of which are houses. The water is always gentle: it is still or meandering; it is clear and non-threatening. But Tarr uses water in *Damnation* in a different manner, as threatening, dispiriting. Instead of Tarkovsky's gentle streams and still pools, Tarr shows harsh and unyielding rain, falling heavily and unrelentingly. This rain does not cleanse, but rather it muddies and creates mess. It is the very opposite of purification. The characters are assaulted by the rain and trudge through it. It is not still and there is no gentleness to it, rather a sinister insidiousness.

The rain can only be said to purge in the biblical sense, as an oncoming flood to wash away the human and non-human filth, to clear away the damned of the world. Yet there is no one here who is to be saved, to build an ark to save the best of creation. There is only an old woman, who tries to talk to Karrer – she calls him 'son' – and realises the danger they are all in, but she makes no attempt to escape, and sees no reason to. The old woman is fatalistic, especially as she sees that no one is really listening to her and that her warnings are being ignored. She is very much the prophet unheard and not respected in her own country. She talks to Karrer on three occasions, warning him of the singer and of the state into which he is descending, but he does not listen to her warnings and he carries on regardless.

We sense the pointlessness and futility of human action when we see two men dancing separately at either end of the long dance hall sequence. Both men are on their own, apparently oblivious to the world around them. In both cases the dominant sound is of feet splashing in water. One man at the start of the scene is in the courtyard, and is apparently the object of the crowd's rather indifferent stares; the other man, at the end of the scene, dances somewhat manically, stamping his feet on the wet floor of the dance hall whilst going round in a tight circle. Both men are absorbed in their dance, focused, yet obviously engaged in a pointless and inexplicable activity. Perhaps this is like all of us, and we are to think that there is no difference between them and the rest of us: we are all engaged in some pointless, meaningless dance. They, and we, are like puppets, being manipulated by others and unable to control their own actions.

Damnation shows the insularity of people unwilling or unable to connect with others. They can find no point of contact, no common interest, and so they withdraw into their own world. There is little comfort to be found there, but they are at least out of the deluge, away from the immediate effects of the flood. Yet this still leaves them with their own thoughts and fears. There being no possibility of reciprocity, no ability to learn about the other, they find no way to moderate their self-centredness. There is an important speech by Karrer that demonstrates this lack of connectivity. After having rather joyless sex with the nightclub singer, he talks at length about his distance from others. He says that he has been sitting looking out of the window for years (as in the film's opening scene), each moment thinking he will go mad. But madness does not come, nor does he fear it, for to fear it would mean that he would have to cling to it, and as he says, 'I cling to nothing, but everything clings to me', just like the cloying mud everywhere in the town. Everybody, he states, wants him to look at them, to watch as a scruffy dog does out of a window, at what he calls 'all this pitiful effort'. He then tells the singer about a former lover he lived with, whom he nearly told of his wish to cling to nothing. Instead he began to criticise her, for her conventionality, and her normal clothes. He says that he deliberately tried to drive her away, getting harder and crueller. The girlfriend went from following him around pleading with him in tears, to being curled up in a ball, and then she went into the bathroom. Karrer says he knew what she was doing in there, and all he comments on her suicide is that he did not realise that the human body contained so much blood. His speech is deadpan and without any compassion. The only sense we have is of his own self-pity. We feel that he really does not wish for anything to cling to, no sentiment, no love, no feeling. All he wants is his own desires to be fulfilled. Of course, the irony is that we have just seen him pleading with the singer, promising to do anything if she will take him back. He has not told this story because he feels the need to confess anything, nor does he feel that he deserves to be reproached. In any case, the singer herself just listens dispassionately, eating, but offering no opinion and no criticism, indeed hardly any response at all.

There is a similarity between aspects of Tarr's film and David Lynch's *Eraserhead* (1977), particularly the harsh industrial landscapes, the stark black and white contrast and the low industrial hum. But it goes beyond these obvious points of atmosphere and style. Lynch's film also shows a lack of engagement between people caused by insularity and internalisation. The main character, Henry Spencer, looks not to the real world for solace, but finds it in what we must presume to be an imaginary woman behind the radiator. In a scene near the start of the film, when he visits the home of his girlfriend, Mary X, and she tells her parents she is pregnant, we see all four characters around the dining table. When the girlfriend and her mother leave for the kitchen, her father maintains a fixed immobile grin as if to mock the forced bonhomie of conventional relations between people who do not know each other well, and who do not know how to connect. The effect of this grin is unnerving and disorientating. It might appear funny, yet we feel that there is something deeper, a questioning of the possibility of human relations.

We might see *Eraserhead* as being about a flight from responsibility, or rather a desperate and failed attempt to avoid responsibility, which is depicted as a nightmare from which we try to escape. Hence the significance of the 'monster' child (the

result of the pregnancy) that horrifies the Spencer, but which he feels responsible for and must try to look after. The fantasy scenes, or reveries, of the woman behind the radiator are about the escape from his responsibility, of going into himself to avoid the harshness and grimness of the world with its industrial landscapes, hard humming sounds and lack of human warmth and understanding. He is on his own and has only his fantasies to rely on. He goes inside his head, trying to erase what is outside.⁴

Both films depict insularity, and see it as a form of escape, as a response to the external world that faces them. But in *Damnation* we sense that the characters are responsible for their plight, that their problems are of their own making. Karrer's insularity is not because he is threatened, but because he cannot respond properly to others, and so because of his selfishness and lack of concern, he will be alone; he feels no need to connect properly and fully, but merely to use others. However, in *Eraserhead*, the 'hero' is not really culpable – or we have no reason to see him as such – rather he goes through the world in a bewildered and uncomprehending fashion.

Bela Tarr in an interview⁵ refers to *Damnation* as a 'circular dance', an obvious reference to the dance scene, but also to the manner in which the main characters circle each other, like dogs wary of each other, but looking for an opening. Karrer, in particular, ends where he started; it is just that, as the audience, we now see his situation more clearly. Tarr sees time, the scenery and the rain all as protagonists in the film. The effect is to create a pervasive mood in which the characters can be seen as individuals lost in a world that they cannot understand or control, and where the only response is to look inwards. They perhaps feel that they can save themselves, or progress somewhat, if they keep themselves apart and instead look for the possibility of advancement through using others around them. But as they are all doing it, there is a pointlessness, a sense in which all attempts will end in failure because no one is prepared to offer anything to anyone else.

The feeling we have after watching *Damnation* is of an absence of care. Neither Karrer nor any of the others in the film, apart from the old woman, show any concern for any other. What their insularity has left them with is a hole where once might have been compassion, empathy and sympathy. However – and this is crucial for understanding insularity – they do not really show any deep or violent hostility to each other. Karrer showed no hatred when talking of his ex-lover's suicide. When he goes to the police, this is not seen as a hot-headed move, rather it is calculated. What predominates, therefore, is an absence of any feelings, be they negative or positive. What the characters show, and what is such a major part of insularity, is indifference: what we might see as a calm and quiet unknowing of the other.

Unknowing

We might find some solace in indifference. We might, for example relish the solitude of being hidden by a crowd, of not being seen in this mass of humanity. We are anonymous and able to lose ourselves. We are, so to speak, hidden by the benign

4 I consider the idea of fleeing from responsibility in detail in the next chapter.

5 Included on the DVD version of the film.

indifference of the crowd. We are inconsequential in this crowd, incapable of registering on this huge mass. The crowd, however, does not oppose us, at least as long as we go along with it, as long as we choose to hide. But, properly speaking, this is not threatening to us, and this is especially so when we realise that indifference is shared by the multitude. They too, as individuals, are being ignored as they proceed along.

This crowd does not oppose me, but then neither does it register my presence. Of course, people move out of the way, as I do for them. Perhaps there might even be some eye contact, and from time to time there will be people we have seen before or even know. So we might stop to talk, and this, we might say, takes us out of the crowd: the fact that someone takes notice of us, and we of them, causes the crowd to melt away to leave just the two of us. The difference here is between the general and the specific, between being in a mass and being with someone we view as an individual presence.

Crowds operate, as it were, by indifference, but an indifference that is benign. It is not that people are necessarily being callous or misanthropic, but rather that they are concerned with their own affairs, and to do this they have to negotiate the crowd, and this is made easier with civility. Yet it also means that their attention is elsewhere; they have no interest in those about them, except as people to get around. In a crowd we see others as less important than our aims. This does not mean that we seek to harm them or would use them, but rather that they do not register: we do not differentiate between one member of the crowd and another. The people before us are neutral, and we too appear as neutral towards them.

We are ambivalent towards most of humanity: we do not wish to harm them, and we may even wish that they thrive. Yet for most of us, most of the time, we do not hold many others in mind. Perhaps we feel that if we take care of our own we are doing all we can, and if everyone did this then most or even all people would be cared for.

Most of the time we do not engage with many others, even as we know that engagement is possible. We have a particular circle, or series of circles, in which we operate, which involve relations with certain people. New people are added to these circles and others leave from time to time, but these circles are unlikely to expand dramatically. This is, of course, unexceptional and is what is meant by an ordinary life (King, 2005). The full complexity of our life is an unknown to most people, and this is something that we are grateful for. There is a relatively small number of people with whom we seek to share our cares and triumphs, and who we would hope would naturally reciprocate. Yet to most others we are indifferent in that we do not know them well or at all, and so we do not expect and would not wish them to share their secrets with us. We want others to keep a distance from us, just as we keep ourselves separate from them. We wish them no harm, but at the same time would wish them to keep away. This might change in time if we get to know them and begin to trust them. But here and now, we would not see it as appropriate and we might be embarrassed were they to confide in us, and we would perhaps respond with hostility if they asked us to confide in them.

Our lives can be ordinary, and we can take them for granted because we can rely on the implacability of crowds, and the fact that our indifference will be

reciprocated. Of course, if there is a crisis, if we fall over in the street, we hope others will come to help us, just as we would help them. But for much of the time we are absorbed with our own interests and so do not pay attention to those around us, other than to navigate our way. We want others to be indifferent to us, only to show a certain interest in us, to limit their knowledge of us, not to interfere or to feel that they are part of our household. We want to keep some distance, to keep apart from them and they from us. What makes this possible, indeed probable, is our own preoccupations, the fact that we are too concerned with ourselves and our own to be aware of what others are doing and why. This is not and should not be seen as in any way malicious or heartless: the indifference we exhibit is benign, even necessary. It does not harm, or is not intended to, and does not prevent us from acting and being neighbourly or intervening if need be. However, we do it when invited or when there is an imperative, or when we can help without giving offence. But we also back off quickly and do not expect that the singular event allows us to generalise.

This indifference is unlike that shown by Karrer and the other characters in *Damnation*. In Tarr's film the indifference is not benign, and shows how insularity can lead to selfishness and where we use others for our benefit. This, as Karrer's monologue about his ex-lover shows, is destructive, showing a pathological disregard for the welfare of others. Likewise, we sense that Karrer is really just using the nightclub singer for his own purposes, and she is doing much the same. But the manner in which we show our insularity is less aggressive, and we must admit that there are degrees of indifference, ranging from the ordinary to the pathological.

But whatever the degree, and even as we admit that some insularity is both legitimate and benign, it still involves a lack of thought, a disengagement. We do not hold others in mind, and indeed actively seek to keep some distance between us and others. Insularity is therefore where we erect a boundary that keeps us separate from others. We might let this barrier down for some, and we might even share much of our life with others. This, however, should be seen also as a sharing of insularity and not a rejection of it. The intimacy of sharing involves the capacity to keep others away and so intimacy does not mean an 'open house'. The insularity that we need for our dwelling, therefore, should not be seen as an absence of others but a relation between dwellers. Our insularity will doubtless have consequences for us, in terms of what we can partake of, what we can share in, and perhaps even the standard at which we can live. Insularity can affect whether we can be cared for, and the number of people we can rely on; if we are insular, what we can achieve on our own becomes the main limitation and control on us. But if we think how we actually live, we soon appreciate that we are limited and we do face controls on our actions. But we also quickly realise that without these limits our life will lose much of its meaning. We are free only if we set ourselves limits, if we are prepared to circumscribe our lives to a narrow path and can subsist within it. This is to argue that we need both roots and ruts if we are to live a life that is recognisable (King, 2005). Limits provide us with predictability and a known course.

But these limits that we impose on ourselves, and find imposed on us, also ensure that others can act free from coercion and can set about meeting their own ends as we do. Our insularity – our setting of boundaries – allows others to live their ordinary lives. There is then a mutuality in insularity and we need to recognise this. We,

of course, need to guard against the almost pathological disengagement we have seen in *Damnation*: we need to differentiate between absence and indifference, to recognise what is benign in our actions and what is hostile. Yet we cannot ignore our insularity, and so we cannot forget that others depend on our ignoring them.

So one of the main virtues of dwelling is its anonymity, the fact that it can hide us, and keep us both unknown and unknowing. In so doing the dwelling need not be distinctive, and perhaps should not be so. If it does not draw attention to itself, we can hide successfully. We can then use the dwelling as we wish, with those we wish to share it with. We can luxuriate in the anonymity of the dwelling and the safety it brings.

Dwelling, we need to remember, is a simple thing: it is so banal and straightforward. It is ordinary and something we take for granted. Yet it is also a labyrinth of memories, feelings, relations, secrets, promises, hopes and regrets. Like a labyrinth it can be a place of safety, where we can lose the attentions of others. But it can also be a place where we can get lost, where no exit is visible, and from which we fear we may never escape. Karrer is perhaps in this condition of seeing no escape, of feeling that he is about to go mad and can find no relief. But for most of us, most of the time, there is no real wish or need to escape. The labyrinth is a place of comfort and security; it is something in which to luxuriate, a form of pleasure. It is not the complexity of dwelling that concerns us, but its depth and its layering, so that we are in the midst of the memories, feelings and relations it holds for us.

Perhaps what we ought to suggest is that we can never really leave the labyrinth, and this is because much of it is internal. It does certainly depend upon a physical space, and is conditioned by it, but it is not solely made up of the space. The house is a receptacle of complexity: it contains depth, but this comes from the use we make of the dwelling and not the dwelling itself. This is what it means to say that a dwelling is the confinement of sense.

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Chapter 5

Hiding in the World



Implacability allows us to hide, and this may not be good for us. We can, so to speak, abuse the implacable: we can take exclusion too far. In this situation the insulation becomes total. Or rather, this occurs when we try to make the insulation total and worry when it cannot be so. We want the boundaries to be solid, unbreachable and invulnerable, and so placing a boundary becomes the principal purpose of dwelling itself. We can see this as a flight from responsibility, as a refusal to take our place in the world. The dwelling is the perfect place to run to, and the ideal place to hide. We will often be left alone, and we can lock ourselves in, refuse to answer the phone and keep ourselves completely to ourselves. We can rely on the conventions of others to leave us in peace, to respect our private space, and so we will be left alone.

Most of us, though not most of the time, will seek solitude. This may be because we are working – writing a book, perhaps – or because we are depressed and so feel that we cannot tolerate the company of others. But some of us will feel the need for solitude more than others, and a few may feel that they wish to be in this state most if not all of the time. We may have grown distant from others, curmudgeonly in our old age, or so used to making do with our own company that we cannot respond properly to others. We have grown used to insularity and so cannot get out of ourselves; perhaps we would even feel anxious about being with others.

Most of us, most of the time, would consider a life of solitude to be, at best, unsatisfactory and, at worst, downright unhealthy. Yet this way of living is eminently possible, and is so because of the limits that the dwelling places on others. The ability we have to exclude others and the implacable face that the dwelling then presents to them allows us to achieve isolation, and the more we seek to live like this, actively pursuing insularity, the more likely we are to achieve it.

Implacability allows us to run from responsibility. When we close our door we can put the cares of the world behind us and relax. This is an enduring cliché of the private dwelling, that we knock the dust of the street from our feet and settle down to our home comforts. Being a cliché, this idea has a lot of truth to it: we are able to relax and, in so doing, ignore the world outside. Or rather, *we can choose to do so*. Private dwelling does not necessitate seclusion and a turning away from the world. It does not follow that once we close our front door we will avoid all contact with others and play no part in the affairs of the world. What I mean rather is that this is possible, and we can do this, or attempt to do this, with the full complicity of the dwelling. We may never achieve complete isolation, but we can try, and the dwelling, with its definitive boundary and with a full panoply of rights attached, will help us. We can leave our responsibilities at the front door, and they will then struggle to enter.

But what is wrong with doing this? Why cannot we just ignore others and use our dwelling as we like? If this means that we forget about others, or if it means that we neglect ourselves, why should we not do so? After all, if we succeed in our complete insularity we will not be able to see what is outside, nor will they see us.

But even as we hide we are still in the world. We are not outside the things of the world; rather we are using the implacability and exclusion of our dwelling to hide us, to keep us away from others. The world is made of separate things, but it is still the world. So we can separate one part from another, remaining in a separate part away from what we seek to avoid or ignore. We can disconnect our dwelling from other things in the world, but this is a social action in the sense that we remain within the processes that allow that separation. We can say that privacy and solitude are needed because we are in the world, and there are others with whom we share it, and from whom we occasionally need to be apart.

In this Chapter, mainly through the discussion of just two films, I want to explore these questions and suggest that what we need is some balance between looking in and looking out. We need to find some accommodation, and this is ultimately an acceptance of the needs and the care of others. This idea of acceptance, and the possibility of it, will exercise many of my thoughts in the last chapter of this book. But before that can be done I need to make clear what are the consequences of a lack of acceptance, of a running away from responsibility for ourselves and the other.

An internal consistency

Once we have achieved our flight from responsibility we need to maintain it, and the longer we succeed, the more necessary it becomes. Responsibility becomes more onerous the longer we have been free of it: it weighs heavier because of the lightness

of our existence without it. Perhaps this explains how we slide into solitude: it might start as something temporary – a rejection from a lover, or a reaction to loss or grief – but once it has begun, and we find that there is some relief in the silence and lack of others, we begin to relish it and fear a return to our former life. As a result we lose contact with friends and family, find reasons not to interact, and so we get forgotten and our solitude gets locked in. Perhaps this then leads to a fear of contact, because we are no longer used to it, or because we fear that it may bring with it the unpredictable and what we might struggle to control. Søren Kierkegaard (2004) talks of ‘an internal consistency’ (p. 141), so that the drunk fears the consequences of being sober, and the demonic person has the fear of ‘someone stronger in the good’ (p. 141). The demonic person is fearful because, as he has this internal consistency, he ‘has a totality to lose’ (p. 141). Only by continuing fully on this path can he remain unweakened. To face our opposite, to have our way challenged is therefore to disturb ourselves, to weaken the totality of our view. So, as Kierkegaard points out, the sinful person is held together by their sin. Thus this internal consistency, the completeness of our life, perpetuates what from the outside might be seen as harmful behaviour. Our behaviour feeds on itself, growing more and more as we rely upon it and refuse to have it challenged. It is all too easy to retain the established patterns, and much harder to envisage or even tackle an alternative that challenges these presumptions. We believe that we have no reason to challenge ourselves because we feel whole, and, in the case of solitude, there is no one around to do the challenging. We can therefore convince ourselves that we are doing nothing wrong simply because we are never told that we are, because we refuse to put ourselves into a position of being challenged.

Without being too literal, we might see private dwelling as offering much of the ballast for this internal consistency: it is what helps to prevent ingress and so ensure that we are not challenged. This demonstrates the ambivalence of implacability, that it can keep us deluded just as readily as it keeps us safe and secure. The complacency offered by private dwelling can be destructive, even as we see it as beneficial to most of us, most of the time. It is the implacable quality of dwelling that allows us to use it, but this does not mean that the manner in which we use it will always be beneficial to us or to others. What may be internally consistent for us, and so what may be important for us to cling to as the one certain thing in our life, may actually be what is destroying us. And what is complicit in this, what helps us and hinders others, is private dwelling.

But there is a further twist here, and this is the very real probability that our lack of care will extend to the dwelling itself. We may want the dwelling to cover and protect us, but only so that we can hide. We do not, however, seek to maintain it or improve it, and so, just as we may decline into ill-health, the dwelling may decay and begin to fall apart. In time this will mean that it may fail to protect us, and we can no longer rely on it. The reason for this, I would suggest, is that there is an expediency to withdrawing from others: we concentrate on the short cut, the quickest exit, and we have the shortest of time horizons: our desire to escape trumps all else. This desire is demonstrated, as it were, to destruction in Gus Van Sant’s *Last Days* (2004), a film about one person’s desire to escape commitment and responsibility at all costs, even unto death.

The main character, Blake, is apparently a rock star just out of rehab. However, we are told nothing of his life up to this point: we do not know why he is in this state or what has happened to him. Yet, we are left in little doubt of Blake's predicament, be it from the very title of the film or the very open acknowledgement that the film is a fictionalised account of the last days before the suicide of Kurt Cobain. It is not meant to be an accurate reflection of Cobain's last days and there is no attempt to tell a story, to look for reasons or justifications, or to put together a definitive narrative. There is no attempt to explain anything in the film. As with Van Sant's previous two films, *Gerry* (2002) and *Elephant* (2003), all we are given is a slice of time, with no attempt to use hindsight or to place significance on some past event. These three films all explore the deaths of young men, and do this through a deliberately rambling, disorientating and non-narrative structure, in which there is no certainty over time, no continuity, and no sense of a satisfactory conclusion. These films show a concern for those outside any normal society and who no longer have any connection with those around them, and this disconnection leads to a breakdown of values.

In *Last Days* we follow Blake as he walks aimlessly around his decrepit mansion and its grounds, avoiding contact with a number of hangers-on who sponge off him, and others who keep trying to meet him. We see him playing some musical instruments, but the music he creates is dissonant and has no development: it is leading nowhere. We see him having conversations with a number of people: his manager, a couple of evangelists, a salesman, a friend who tries to take him away and care for him, and his supposed friends who share his mansion. These conversations are desultory and have Blake as a reluctant participant, where he only reacts and does not initiate any dialogue. Consequently, the other party to the conversation gives up, seeing no point in pursuing things further.

Blake spends much of his time and energy avoiding responsibility, be it towards those who sponge off him in his decrepit mansion, a private investigator wanting to speak to him, or his manager regarding forthcoming concert dates. He rushes away from these engagements, seeking instead to be alone, to perpetuate his solitude. Interestingly, we see his interactions with his friends in the mansion from a number of perspectives, and Van Sant only gradually allows fragments and inklings of the motivations and interests of the various players to emerge. As a strategy to avoid contact Blake often hides in a greenhouse, and at the end of the film it is here that he is found shot and we appear to see Blake's soul climbing out of his body. The film ends with his 'friends' driving away so they cannot be questioned or involved, their faces blank. The film is not therefore a coherent narrative and it tells no story. It is rather a study in disorientation and it shows this as much through structure as the images on the screen.

Although we might try to connect with Blake, even as we struggle to follow him, there are no other sympathetic characters in the film, except for the woman who comes to help him and to take him away with her. We sense that she might care for him, particularly when she asks if he has spoken to his daughter. She clearly knows him and what he has been through. But all the other characters just want something from Blake: they wish to use him in some way rather than offering to help him. In this sense we can understand why he wishes to flee: his friends have become leeches. The woman is the only person who shows any concern for Blake.

The film, like both Bela Tarr's *Damnation* and David Lynch's *Eraserhead*, is a study in disengagement, in avoidance, in the internalisation of a character who only subsists through avoiding things. But the situation that Van Sant creates is more extreme than that of Tarr or Lynch: he takes the avoidance further, showing Blake defeated by the madness that Karrer only feared. Van Sant often films Blake in the distance, from behind, or with his face covered by his hair. We hear his mutterings – he has no coherent dialogue in the entire film – and these often appear to be recriminations, claims that he is not understood, and sudden revelations on his plight and the motivations of others. Yet we struggle to extract anything meaningful from these ramblings. What we are being shown is the false clarity of a deluded person, in a world of his own and who cannot see the world from any perspective other than his own. Blake may consider that he has found out something significant about the world, that he has made some revelation, but in truth, he makes no sense and there is no means for us to gauge whether he is correct, or even sane.

In fact we have no grounds to believe that Blake is really misunderstood: we are given no external confirmation other than the small glimpses of the behaviour of others. We are never told how and why Blake got into this state. Perhaps we are to see it as archetypal, or Van Sant may be relying on his audience knowing the story of Cobain's disintegration and death, and thus able to provide the back story themselves. But whether this is the case or not, we sense that Blake's fall is self-induced, due to drugs and self-abuse. However, the only direct reference to drug dependency is the plastic hospital wristband he still wears.

Blake has withdrawn into himself so far that all things appear alien or as a threat to him, and this applies to his own dwelling, which is unkempt and in decay. We might see his mansion as a mirror of his own decline. Outwardly it retains its grandeur, with its gardens maintained – it is the gardener who finds Blake's body – but inside the paint and plaster are peeling and everything is neglected, with broken furniture and clothes strewn about. Blake uses the house as the most basic of resources: he lies where he can; he puts on the nearest garment, whether it is a negligée or a pair of jeans; he finds whatever food is there that can be prepared instantly. When he is faced with a situation he responds: if someone comes to the door he tries to avoid them by running away; he is hungry so he gets himself some cereal or pasta. His reactions are always basic; there is no premeditation, no planning, no thought, and it is always on the spur of the moment that he acts. When he is spoken to by his friends – all of whom want something from him, be it money, drugs, or help with a song – he is passive and merely reactive. He cannot refuse them, but then neither can he offer them much help. The only place where he finds real solitude is the greenhouse, where we see him on several occasions, sitting or writing. It is in this place where, as the camera closes in on his face and he begins to cry, we see him finally overwhelmed by the hopelessness of his life and the weight of things being pushed towards him, and the next morning the gardener finds his dead body lying on the floor.

The essence of Blake's life is expedience, the short term, the immediate response to stimuli. This concept is one that we see more generally when we look at those who seek to hide. When we are faced with an apparently insurmountable problem that is beyond our resources or competence to deal with, we can react by denying it: if we run away, if we refuse to face it, then the problem does not exist. We cannot

face the enormity of a problem and so we deny it altogether. This is a common issue in housing management, as elsewhere, particularly with tenants in rent arrears. The problem initially seems small and not something to worry about, and so it is neglected by the tenant: it can and will be sorted out eventually and so need not be attended to just now. As a result the problem grows larger, so that the tenant now owes several hundred pounds, and they cannot pay it back without a huge effort and over a long period of time. The problem now appears insoluble, and the recourse is to run away from it and hide, to refuse to discuss it or to respond to warning letters and demands from the landlord. But obviously the problem does not go away, rather it gets larger and ultimately there is a crisis, and a point is reached at which the issue has to be faced, where it cannot be denied any longer. The stakes are perhaps lower than for Blake, who went to the ultimate in running away. Furthermore, unlike Blake's position, the debtor's crisis is not purely internal but comes from the outside, from the demands of the landlord seeking their rent, and from the courts and the bailiff (although the problem is seen as the tenant's responsibility – *they* have to pay *their* rent – and so this is regarded by outsiders as having an internal cause).

Debtors can often use the dwelling as a means to hide, by using their privacy, by refusing to open the door. They use their rights to privacy and autonomy to prevent the problem from gaining a hold on them, and anyone from presenting them with the truth about their situation. We might frame their situation as one in which they take the rights due to them, but do not accept the responsibilities that come with those rights: they hide behind their property rights, but refuse to accept the reciprocal responsibility on which these rights are founded (King, 2003). The dwelling allows them to delude themselves and to push the truth away, to keep it out. Yet they also know – they must know – that the problem is still there, and they have the worry constantly nagging at them, of having to face it at some time in the future. Debtors can only avoid dealing with their problem for so long, and they are aware of this at some level. It is just that it is easier *not* to face the problem and to put it off for the next day.

The way to survive like this – as shown by Blake in *Last Days* – is by reducing their time horizon to dealing only with the immediate issue in front of them. They see life as a series of short-term obstacles to be overcome. They have to get over a potentially difficult encounter as quickly and as painlessly as possible, with as much dignity and self-belief left intact as they can manage. They will offer little resistance to officialdom, if it means that they can get away quickly and therefore put some distance between them and the issue, where they can be free from facing the problem again. They will make promises: they agree to pay off the debt with regular weekly payments and they say that they see the importance of doing so. Yet their chief aim is to get out of the room without catastrophe, and with their illusions intact. These may be seen as little victories, but they come with a cost, in that the debtors have had to sell part of themselves. We see this with Blake, where his passivity and desire to be rid of any commitment allows his friends to take what they want from him without any feeling of guilt that they are abusing him. Likewise, the landlord thinks that the arrears will now be dealt with, that an agreement has been made, and his or her expectations will alter accordingly. The 'next time' will therefore be made all the harder by what has been agreed in the past. Blake will find it harder to refuse: having

given way once, it is difficult to take a stand next time. Yet at *this* moment of escape, of release, this does not matter. The entire strategy regarding the encounter is to get it over with. It is a hurdle to be negotiated and nothing is seen beyond it. This hurdle is all that matters, because the alternative is for the whole edifice of deceitful self-respect to fall down leaving nothing but a mess. Perhaps this is what Blake finally saw: that there was in fact no way out; that there was going to be no change, and that there was no possibility of resisting the pressures that he was under. He could only hold off the responsibility of his actions for so long, and so he took the ultimate withdrawal that is suicide. What Blake lost was his internal consistency: his own sense of totality was finally seen as a self-delusion.

But we need to question how far it is possible to maintain any consistency only from the inside. Blake's withdrawal can be seen as an almost complete internalisation, so that he cannot connect any longer with others, nor they with him. He has withdrawn from human interaction and is now left only with his own thoughts and feelings. He connects with the world only at the most basic level. From the outside his actions make no sense, and this is because we can only see the outward manifestations of his intentions. They may well appear logical and patterned to him, and he may see a purpose in what he is doing, but this is not something that we can share in or even see. He is unpredictable and acts apparently without reason. His friends and those he meets are perplexed by his behaviour (insofar as they appear to notice). There are no norms, no predictability, and no attempt to connect: all sociability and communication are lost. Blake is, properly speaking, alienated, just as he is within his own dwelling. All things appear strange to him, as if they are new; people and things come to him as if by accident, rather than there being any purpose or intent. He does not seek for anything: he may find things but this is only by accident. Blake ceases to animate the dwelling (King, 2004), and so we see it as a hollow shell, barely capable of sustaining life. Blake does not really engage with it any more; it is just another place, where any place would do, so long as he could be alone in it.

We might see that there is always a disparity between the internal and the external, between how we see things and how they actually are, or at least how they appear to others. However, for most of us, most of the time, we can appreciate that this disparity is possible, and we can come to terms with the fact that our internal sense might differ from the external gaze. But for those of us who have withdrawn might the problem be that we are incapable of connecting the internal with the external, the way we see things compared with others who see those same elements, but from a different perspective? This disconnection becomes particularly severe in its consequences when we are unable to articulate this sense of ourselves to those around us: we find it impossible to put across our view of ourselves, which we see as valid, important and accurate. We wish to explain ourselves and to assert our point of view, our perspective, which we see as entirely logical, reasonable and worthwhile, yet others do not or cannot grasp the point. Other people seem impervious to our perspective, and they stubbornly insist on seeing the world differently from us. In response to this we might despair and move even further away from others, so that we do not have to come up against this apparently unreasonable and unreasoned opposition. Or perhaps we might seek to assert our perspective more vociferously. We want to be reasonable, and we believe that we are. We want to be understood

because we feel that our view is valid: it is important, and it is more significant than the alternatives being offered. Yet we are not allowed to do so. Our view does not have the impact that we feel it deserves: people just cannot see it, and this must be their fault.

But of course, our view might have no impact because what we see as important, lucid and logical, as perceptive and meaningful, is in fact banal or even incoherent mumbling, as we see in the case of Blake. He can apparently make sense of his situation, yet to us it is gibberish and so we discount it as meaningless. Perhaps we are right to do so, but someone like Blake is unlikely to see this as valid. Indeed it might even confirm his opinion that he is right but misunderstood. What Blake lacks is any perspective, any ability to understand and to be understood, to connect up fully and purposefully with those around him, and because he cannot connect, because he feels misunderstood and traduced, he withdraws further and eventually takes the ultimate step. But there is no possibility of any perspective unless we are capable of stepping outside ourselves and seeing the world from a different – shared – perspective. The problem, then, is not that others cannot see our view, but that we make no effort to see theirs, and cannot understand why we should.

In some ways this is a childlike state, a return to the illusion that young children have that they are at the centre of things, and that the world revolves around them. It is a necessary part of growing up for children to realise that they are not the centre of the universe, and this adjustment comes readily to most. But for withdrawn people, when they glimpse the reality that the world does not behave in this manner, instead of accepting this reality and coming to terms with the collapse of their illusions, they, unlike the child, seek to restore these illusions by blaming others, or they become resentful. Instead of taking the obvious course, of seeing that they are being foolish and admitting to their delusions, they argue that the world is wrong. Their resentment at being misunderstood is therefore a form of defence, a means of supporting the self. In the same way the tenants in arrears lock the door and refuse to engage: they put up the barricades and refuse to face what their proper responsibilities are. They use what resources they have – both physical and mental – to prevent any ingress from the unpleasant and unyielding world outside. They do this because it is easier than getting to the root of the problem. Withdrawing inwards, where we can rely on our remaining certainties, be they delusional or not, seems a surer path than dealing with the issue. This path is one that is perhaps more predictable: it is known and clear to us. It is where we are not challenged, and this is important to us, because to be challenged is something that we just cannot cope with.

There may be occasions when we appreciate the reality of our situation and it is not pleasant. We are not who we thought we were; we are not where we would like to be, or even where we thought we were. In these moments of lucidity we see ourselves as others might see us, and our insignificance, our weakness and our shallowness worry us. So we try to blank all this out and return to our certainties: we cling to what we know and can rely on, and we try to bring these things closer around us. What we do not wish to do is to face our problems full on. We still find it easier to retreat into our certainties. We may even convince ourselves that we are not deluded but are doing the right thing, even if people do not understand us – after all, how could they, as they have caused the problems for us? And so our lucidity is only

temporary and we fall back on delusion. There is, of course, a considerable degree of selfishness here, even as we convince ourselves of our rectitude.

This sense of selfishness mixed with martyrdom can be seen in Andrei Tarkovsky's last film, *The Sacrifice* (1986). Or, at least, this is one reading of what is a complex, intellectually sophisticated, yet flawed film. When the world is on the brink of nuclear destruction Alexander makes a pact with God to remain silent and to give up all that he holds dear – his family, his friends, the family house – if God will stop the war and return things back to where they were. Alexander is a writer, a lecturer in aesthetics and a former actor: a man who has lived by using words. But he now lives in a malaise, in doubt and in fear for what has become of the world. And so, with the world on the brink of disaster, he turns to God and prays for the safety of the world in return for all that is important to him. The next morning Alexander wakes to find that the world does indeed seem to be as it was before the threat, and his family and friends are full of their own plans and concerns, apparently oblivious to any threat of war, even as they panicked and cried hysterically the previous evening. The world, it seems, has been put right. However, no one but Alexander has any knowledge that there was ever a threat to the world. Alexander goes on with his pact of keeping silent and burning down his house, having first made sure that everyone is out of it. This, quite naturally, is taken by his family as a sign of madness, for what evidence is there of his act of faith, of his pact with God to put the world back together? His sacrifice is therefore of his sanity, of the manner in which he can be seen and considered by others. He has sacrificed his place in the world as someone who is and can be responsible, even as he took responsibility for the world on to himself. Not only has he sacrificed his place in the literal sense of burning down his house, but also in terms of his standing as a husband, father, friend and citizen.

Should we see Alexander as a deluded madman, or as a visionary and a saviour of mankind? How can we resolve this, and bring together the internal consciousness of Alexander – his newly found faith, his sacrifice – and the external perception of his apparently mad act? This appears to be the very reverse of Gorchakov's comment on the 'holy fool', Domenico, in Tarkovsky's earlier film, *Nostalghia* (1983), that what he suffered from was not madness but faith. Likewise, Alexander (interestingly, played by the same actor, Erland Josephson, who took the role of Domenico) might not be mad but showed an act of faith. But how could anyone around him, seeing his act from the perspective of a cured world, know this to be the case? In some respects our position as the audience is more complex. We have seen what Alexander's family has not: we have followed him on his journey from fear to faith, but how do we know that Alexander did not dream the whole episode of war and the pact with God, and thus his act was indeed delusional and quite mad? We have no means of adjudicating between this possible conclusion and the alternative that Alexander did indeed make a pact, and so saved not only his family but the entire world. But what is interesting is that the consequence in either case remains the same: he is deemed to be mad. We, like Alexander, can see that there is no way out of madness here, and Alexander's sacrifice is therefore to be, and to remain, misunderstood: to succeed, his pact must be unstated and unknown. His actions must, therefore, appear to be completely and utterly insane. We as an audience can see this dilemma, yet we cannot affect it, or resolve it.

It is this sense we have that gives the film its moral weight, and it plays precisely on the gulf between the internal and the external. It begins to dawn on us as we watch the film that Alexander cannot communicate his sense and certainty to anyone and be believed. He is alone in his pact and cannot share it, and hence there is confusion and incomprehension. We know there is no way that anyone else will accept his version of events because for the others – as they are now – there was no threat of war and therefore no need to plead with God. All this has been wiped away, but not for Alexander who has to proceed silently with his part of the bargain. How could he possibly convince anyone else now that the world has changed; what evidence could he possibly have? His act therefore appears to be wilfully perverse, an act of destruction that has no meaning. Most certainly it is an act that could not possibly be construed by others – his wife, daughter, friends – as an act of love, which is precisely what Alexander takes it to be. What compounds this sense is Alexander's determination and even pleasure in carrying out his part of the bargain. He is no reluctant player here, but a willing and happy participant.

As the watchers of the film, we cannot be certain whether it was a dream or reality, whether it did happen or whether Alexander is indeed mad. We do not know if the film is showing us the internal workings of a madman, or the bitter consequences of faith. But it does allow us to see the disjuncture there is between one who withdraws inwards and the external world beyond. We cannot appreciate or understand what is locked away from us, and this applies nowhere more fully than in the head of another. So we can see *The Sacrifice* as a film that deals with incomprehension: Alexander gains his faith, but he cannot share it, and the other characters have no means to share Alexander's epiphany. The tragedy of the film is that Alexander's actions must be met with incomprehension and his life ruined for his act to have any purpose. Indeed to fulfil his purpose his actions must be seen as purposeless.

We might see Tarkovsky's juxtaposition of faith and madness, seen in both Alexander and Domenico, as a critique of modernity, where it is impossible to see faith, to literally see it in others, which is why Gorchakov's comment about Domenico in *Nostalghia* is taken by his companion, Eugenia, as being odd and incomprehensible. Her response is to an extent setup for us when we see her refusal to kneel in a church at the start of the film. Eugenia admits to having no faith and she is clearly too self-conscious to feign any outward sign of devotion. Faith can only be met with misunderstanding, because the modern world relies on rationality and on science. Yet, for Tarkovsky, these cannot be relied upon: what is modern warfare but the ultimate in rationality and technological development? Tarkovsky's late films are all pleas for the acceptance, or re-acceptance, of faith, for a return to the idea of the transcendent quality of human life and our relationship with God. But as we see with Alexander, this can only be achieved through a turning inwards, a retreat into a contemplative relation with God. But in a self-consciously modern world, this is a form of otherness that cannot be countenanced. This is because, in the modern world, faith has become internalised; it can only be shown by individual acts and not by some grand gesture from God: God, as it were, has grown silent. There can be no collective faith-sharing. This is why Eugenia deliberately stands apart from the service in the church: not only does she not wish to take part, but she wishes it to

be seen that she is not a part of it. In consequence, faith can readily be dismissed as madness, as a form of aberrant behaviour to be dealt with psychologically.

Alexander's actions in *The Sacrifice*, we should note, are the very opposite of expedience: he is thinking and acting for the long term, or what he believes it to be. His actions are grounded in long-term consequences, rather than being an immediate reaction. When he acts he knows that he will have to pay, that if he has faith it will have tragic consequences for him and for those around him, and that to save them he will have to condemn himself, even in their eyes, as mad. Alexander acts deliberately and consciously, so that we feel he is all too aware that for his faith to work he must be denied by those he loves. For Alexander, then, there is no expedient, no easy way out: it is either annihilation or madness. Of course, we might suggest that Blake in *Last Days* was in many ways more morally clear-sighted, in that his actions inflicted less on those around him. This point has been made by critics of *The Sacrifice*, such as Vida Johnson and Graham Petrie (1994), who find it hard to understand why Alexander's pact would involve such an apparently unfair effect on his family: they were not party to the pact and can never understand it, and so why should they lose their home? Is not Alexander's act actually one of selfishness, more concerned with his own redemption?

But, however we see it, Alexander destroys that which means so much to him. This house is the place where he has found some peace. He tells his young son that when he turned the corner of the road and saw the house he and his wife knew that they had to live there. It is indeed a beautiful house, full of beautiful things. Alexander's attachment is such that he is given a perfect scale model of the house as a birthday present. Yet he still chooses to destroy the house, to sacrifice what is the foundation of his peaceful life, the only source of stability which contains all that he cares for and loves, and to do it in such a way that condemns him as mad and separates him from his family.

A similarity between the two characters discussed here, which I see as significant, is that Alexander, like Blake, sneaks around the house and outbuildings, avoiding being seen. He does this particularly at the end of the film to ensure that the family and guests go out to find him, and so he is then free to burn the house down. But he also spends much of the film walking about inside the house, moving from room to room, often unseen and unheard. Alexander, like Blake, avoids those who would complicate his actions, challenge him and divert him from his purpose. In both cases their physical avoidance of others is a manifestation of their internalisation. This is how their internalisation – of madness and/or faith – can be shown by the film maker. It heightens the solitary nature of the characters and their isolation from others, and it shows that their interests differ from the rest who live in the same place. Alexander and Blake are searching for something difficult and they need a separate physical space distant from others to achieve it. We associate togetherness and closeness with the combined interest of a household acting together. Yet neither Alexander nor Blake act as a part of the household. They seek the opposite of what is sought by the rest of the household, who are more concerned with themselves and their mundane concerns. Neither Alexander nor Blake wishes to be drawn into these concerns, to be absorbed into the lives of others. But this physical separation also allows us to question the grasp on reality that these two characters have. Is their separation from

others symptomatic of something deeper, and not just a need for space; is it because they cannot connect or be understood, and so is not physical distance necessary to show this?

So Alexander, as well as Blake, might be acting entirely selfishly. Alexander's motives may be internalised; they may be due to his own failings and not love of others and the world. He may be dreaming and therefore incapable of connecting up with the world as it is. Blake is entirely lost in his inner world, with barriers of his own making, be they through drugs or some other cause. So we draw back from complete sympathy with these characters, and this is perhaps because we realise the consequences of their actions: that the depth of their internalisation is ultimately destructive to the self and to others around them. We cannot, without reason, expect others to understand and accept our actions, especially when these actions are so consequential and will hurt others as well as us. We can see suicide as one of the most selfish acts imaginable, as the complete abandonment of responsibility, and failure to meet the demands of others. Likewise Alexander's more ambiguous actions will leave his family homeless, their certainties shattered, and without a father and husband.

But even if we were to accept Alexander's act as a selfless one – that he did act to save the world – the consequences remain the same. Both his actions and those of Blake have similar consequences: they both cause incomprehension and isolation. We can see that these two extremes – selfless sacrifice and selfish suicide – both depend on an almost total internalisation of feeling, of a turning inwards into oneself, and thus the near complete separation from others. We might still share a common space, but we have withdrawn, excluded ourselves from the world, so that even those who love and care for us cannot comprehend us. And we see as much madness and suffering arising from the selfless act as the selfish one.

We can see a selfish act as an attempt to abnegate responsibility, whilst an unselfish one is to accept or even to take on responsibility, to make it one's own. So we *might* see Blake's suicide as a flight from responsibility, but Alexander's act as the opposite. Yet both were tragic in the *only* way they could be perceived by those looking on: from the outside we would see the death of a very young but famous and talented individual, and the fall into madness of a former actor with a family to care for. Alexander destroys the care, stability and peace of his life, and that of his family. He takes away the complacency, the structure of the family, for without a dwelling there can be no security and comfort. What this shows is that as soon as we externalise Alexander's actions they become incoherent and lose much of their meaning. They can only have their power and sense if we admit to seeing the world through Alexander's eyes. Only if we share his existential malaise, or at least accept his fear and concerns and how they are represented, can we understand and even attempt to condone what he has done. We therefore have to take on Alexander's perspective and accept it over and above the external world as we would normally see it. This is something that we can do as an audience, yet it is not something that we can do from within the same world as Alexander, and this is why his actions *must* appear to be selfish.

We might suggest that what Alexander is looking for, as with many of Tarkovsky's characters such as the stalker (*Stalker*), Kelvin (*Solaris*), Gorchakov and Domenico

(*Nostalgia*), is the grand gesture – the magnificent demonstration of faith – that transcends the mundane. However, as soon as we socialise or externalise these acts – Gorchakov taking the candle across the pool, the stalker’s demonstration of the Zone’s inner room, Domenico’s self-immolation – they become incomprehensible. This is because these are all acts to be seen not as social, but as personal and as internal. They are matters of faith and conscience not of representation. The significant acts of Tarkovsky’s heroes are not social, but are of personal importance, which can then be translated into some universal purpose. They are not iconic or heroic as such, but are about personal transformation and deliverance (or its failure, as in the case of the stalker). From each personal act, Tarkovsky wishes to point to the general human condition. Yet we can only really appreciate this if we accept the wake around the person as incidental, the effect of the stalker’s lifestyle on his wife and daughter, and Alexander’s action being particular cases of this. *The Sacrifice* therefore works on two levels: as an internal narrative with its own coherence and structure, or as an external social vision in which we see and judge Alexander by more general standards. On the first level we see how things appear to Alexander (and perhaps to Tarkovsky), and we are perhaps being encouraged to see these as somehow representative or typical of the human condition. Alexander can therefore be seen as, at best, heroic or, at worst, as a holy fool. But on the second level, he is still a fool but now a rather dangerous one: he is a mad destroyer of his family’s peace. It is this dichotomy that is important here, in terms of opening up the effects of an individual’s internalisation. The reaction of the family at the end of the film shows us this impact – the hysteria, disbelief, shock and chaos – and this is something that seems not to have occurred to Alexander. Indeed the ending of the film, whilst it is certainly not played for laughs, does not emphasise any sense of tragedy. Alexander acts in an almost whimsical manner, seeming almost to enjoy what he is doing. There is no sign of any grimness or of a sense of tragedy in his demeanour. He almost appears triumphant in tricking his family to leave the house so that he can get on with its destruction. Later, when the house is burning down and the family returns, an ambulance suddenly and unaccountably appears and Alexander is chased around the field. As he tries to escape from the ambulance, there is an element of slapstick to the action – more Bennie Hill than the slow, deliberative and sombre moments we expect from a Tarkovsky film. As Johnson and Petrie (1994) state, this ending, and how Alexander acts more generally, appear callous and out of proportion. His actions appear to make light of the family’s loss, even as we know that they do not deserve it. What this film does show, and again we might surmise that Tarkovsky did not intend this, is the impact that internalised actions have on others, and how this can be trivialised by the withdrawal from these others. By emphasising Alexander’s existential malaise Tarkovsky highlights that internal actions have consequences even as the perpetrator is incapable of seeing this and reacting accordingly. Internalisation leads to us ignoring the needs of others, even when they are physical and emotionally close to us.

We should therefore see Alexander’s actions as a flight from responsibility, just as Blake’s actions are. Alexander cannot see the social consequences of what he does, choosing instead to maintain his own internal consistency. Like Blake, he makes a further turn inwards. The boundaries around both these characters are so tightly

drawn and so thick that nothing can penetrate and there is merely incomprehension from those looking on.

An important issue here is how far it is the responsibility of others to try to bring the withdrawn person back. If an individual wishes to withdraw, do they not have a right to, even if it harms them, or should we always seek to help them, even if it is against their will? Perhaps the most immediate problem is how this can be achieved; precisely how can the withdrawn person be drawn back in? As we see in *Last Days*, it is easier to go along with a person's whims and expressed needs, than to fight them. The only remotely sympathetic character in the film is the woman who tries to persuade Blake to come away with her. She appears to know him and his predicament, and is aware of what he has been through, as we see when she asks if he has been in touch with his daughter. But even though she tries to persuade him to leave the mansion, she does not attempt to force the issue with him. After his incoherent refusal, we see her leaving, a regretful and sad expression on her face as if she knows what is to come. This scene shows more than any other in the film the inability to penetrate, or even to enter very far into the consciousness of another when that person is doing all they can to prevent it. Yet how could Blake's sympathetic friend, the only one person whom we see actually trying to help him, do more than she did? Could she have used more emotional pressure, the needs of his daughter, for instance? Might she have been more persistent or got angry instead of sorrowful? But just how could she have broken through the carapace and got inside Blake's mind, to impress upon him that he would be better with others who could care for him and look after him? Of course, at one level, she was just as culpable, in that she left someone knowing him to be ill and in need of help. Yet do we really blame her for not physically taking him?

Perhaps we do, but what this scene and the film generally show is that the very act of withdrawing is self-perpetuating. After a period in which we have sought to avoid contact and have failed to respond to others, we may find that they stop trying and they walk away. After all they are merely acceding to our wishes, and we are supposedly grown up and capable of knowing what we want. As in the case of those friends sponging off Blake, they can console themselves with the fact that they were only doing what they were asked to do. Accordingly, they have no conscience or sense of culpability in Blake's death, only a need to get away so as not to be incriminated to or have to deal with a difficult situation. But how far, if at all, should we blame them? Blake was not exactly calling for help. Rather many of his actions involved avoiding these people along with everybody else: most of his actions were aimed at avoiding help.

But the mere fact that someone says that they do not want help is not necessarily sufficient grounds to ignore them. A person might say that they do not wish to be helped, yet they may need it in an objective sense. What they are doing is not good for them or for their loved ones. It is a form of self-destruction, but also an act of aggression against others, as was clear with Alexander's actions. Yet in Blake's case at least, other people have been given every excuse to walk away, and even if they were to persist and try to care, they would be likely to face more resistance, perhaps even abuse. Offering help would not, we fear, be a pleasant process, even if the eventual victory might be worthwhile for carer and cared for. So many may not

bother and will indeed walk away. This gives the withdrawn person what they want – they are not challenged and can maintain their internal consistency – but perhaps not what they need. Therefore Alexander might be getting what he needs when he is carted off to hospital. On the other hand, Blake seems to get just what he wants rather than what is actually best for him.

We can say that both Alexander and Blake are suffering from an illness, and we might say that they should be treated regardless of their views. If they are ill, and if this so clearly affects their judgement, can they be said to retain their competence and autonomy, and therefore should others retain the same expectations towards them? Or is it acceptable to allow these individuals to act as they will? Is the test that of *harm*: whether any harm is being done to an individual or to others? Of course, this is often very difficult to determine other than in hindsight, as in Alexander's case.

What compounds this is that, as we have suggested, withdrawal is not something that just happens, but it is incremental, a lifestyle choice that becomes an eccentricity, and which may then descend into mental illness. There is a considerable difference here in the scale of the problem, and people may range from being a bit solitary to dangerously ill. The behaviour of most people who are insular may well appear normal and healthy, but by increments, and over time, it may shift into something more serious. There may be no pattern or inevitability in this process that we can discern, and we should remember in all this, that what this person wants is to be alone, and so there may well be no one to notice. However, we could expect there to be some drift towards exclusion. We can also suggest that this condition feeds on itself; it becomes self-perpetuating, so that insulation becomes an end in itself. This is because we do not wish to break it, it becomes normal and ordinary, and so to alter it becomes a huge challenge for us, a major intervention, and the longer this goes on, as with the debtor, the bigger the disruption will appear to be. Isolation takes strength from solitude, and all the time we are resisting contact with others. The isolation magnifies the scale of any intervention, there being no comparator, no sense of proportion, no means to judge one event against another. What this means is that the internal view of the isolated person, the one who is withdrawn, will differ from how others view the situation. If those around Blake knew how near he was to suicide would they have so readily left him alone, or given up so easily in persuading him to come away with them? But because he had disassociated himself so well from others, because he had done so much to separate himself from the outside world, there was simply no one there. He was certainly not calling out and there was no plea for help, and so only someone very close to him could have read the signs. Furthermore someone could have only become close if they had cared enough to ignore the shrugs and evasions, and persisted to discover the root of the malaise Blake was suffering. In other words, they could not look to Blake to help them to help him, and this would be the most off-putting aspect of this situation. The problem for Blake, then, was that because he tried so hard, and succeeded, to flee from responsibility, there was no one left around to pick up that responsibility from him, to take on the job of caring for him once he had decided not to bother himself. He was just too successful in persuading people that they did not have to care.

Lonely or alone?

When Kierkegaard talked of the internal consistency of the sinner he was not implying that it was a virtue, but as an explanation of why individuals can persist with behaviour that society knows, and the individual *ought* to know, is destructive or immoral. What he is describing is a psychological condition that prevents an individual from acting in the socially expected and desired fashion, because to do so would be an absolute challenge to this person and it would leave them with nothing. But we should also see this as a form of delusion, whereby an individual convinces themselves that their actions are necessary, justified and proportionate. But not all people are sinners just because they prefer to live alone, or because that is how they now find themselves. Indeed, in neither of the fictional cases I have considered has the individual been evil. They may be inconsiderate and selfish, and their actions thoroughly irresponsible, but they did not particularly set out to do anything wrong. This mitigates their actions somewhat, even if it makes it no easier to help them. But what about people who are not apparently deluded, who are not harming themselves or others, but are just alone; what should we make of them?

An example: my wife is back in touch with a former work colleague, whom she had not seen for several years. This woman, whom we shall refer here to as Eve, is single and in late middle age. She gave up her job several years ago to take care of her aged parents, moving into their house for the purpose. Both parents have now died and she remains in the house on her own. Much of Eve's time is spent doing IT training, apparently for no other purpose than that she has found somewhere she enjoys being several times a week: she does not see it particularly as leading towards a job. Since regaining contact my wife has met up with her several times, but always in Eve's house. My wife has invited her to our house and made it clear that she is always welcome. My wife rings her from time to time for a chat, but Eve never reciprocates. Indeed she seems averse to making any arrangements at all, preferring instead that my wife just pops in whenever she can, almost as if she wants to be surprised. My initial thought on hearing this was that she obviously did not really wish to see my wife. However, my wife feels that whenever she does visit, Eve is genuinely effusive, talkative and generous with her hospitality, as one might expect from someone who rarely gets the chance to talk to others much. She happily made a quick lunch when my wife turned up uninvited (as she had been exhorted to do on several occasions) and at Christmas had a gift ready wrapped, even though again it was not a pre-arranged visit. She clearly then wishes people to visit and enjoys company. So why is she not more active in ensuring that people come to visit? Why is she so loath to make definite arrangements or even keep in touch by phone? Why does she expect my wife to do all the arranging and make the effort, even though she is all too ready to make an effort once the guest has turned up? She must surely know that she is taking a risk in not keeping up contacts herself: if my wife decides that it is too much to bother with, then Eve would lose the friendship.

So is she just being selfish and relying on others to make the effort? Or might it be that she is fearful of rejection, that if she were to invite someone they would refuse to come, or they would forget? It might appear much better then to sit at home in the hope that a visitor will appear – and what a pleasure it is when it happens

– even if it happens very rarely as a result of Eve’s rather passive approach to friendship. Perhaps the pleasure in a surprise visit is so great that she prefers this rare event to something more planned and regular. Or it might be that the problem is one of shyness, although this can be seen really as a variant of the above, a fear of a negative response to an invitation. It may be that Eve has few social skills, or thinks she has few, and so backs away from the difficulty of making arrangements and commitments. Yet, of course, her very approach makes this a certainty, in that some might be put off by the one-sided effort of keeping in touch.

Yet her delight at a visitor is such that one would have thought she would do more to engineer a more regular stream of them. Is the problem then one of self-perception, of a misguided or false self-image? Does she feel that she is much more personable than she actually is and so simply expects people to come flocking round? But surely after several years of being alone she must be disabused of this by now. Or is it a case of shyness mixed with optimism, wherein each day offers new hope, as with Miss Flyte in *Bleak House* (Dickens, 1996). But this would seem to be unfair: Miss Flyte was mad, driven so by external pressures and her inability to deal with them. It is not reasonable to see Eve in this light. So instead might the problem simply be an inability to connect with others and to know how to make things happen for her, and so she remains passive, waiting for someone to visit her. Perhaps she wants to be different from how she is but does not know how to be, as she does not have the facility.

Or again, is it that she has been burnt by experience? Has she been taught to fear the external gaze because of something that has happened to her? But if this were the case why would she welcome people who just turn up; would this not be even more frightening? Might it be that the surprise involved in this type of visit, does not allow her to consider the consequences of social engagement, or rather, she is thrown into it before she can consider whether it is wise or not, whereas inviting someone round would involve planning and then dwelling on the possibilities and pitfalls of social intercourse. But if a visit is unplanned she has not time to dwell on this and instead falls into an easy conviviality.

Now all of this might be a complete misreading of the situation – one finds it hard to ask a direct question to the person involved. Eve might be desperately lonely and unhappy; she might be so lacking in confidence, so short of self-esteem, that she could not just ring someone up and make plans to meet. She hopes for a visitor, to the extent even of having a Christmas present wrapped just in case, but has not the self-confidence or assurance to arrange anything more certain. This is the sadness of solitude, where there is loneliness rather than being alone, where there is not a choice but a predicament; where one is left without the solace of company rather than finding solace in solitude.

The dwelling for such a person offers the same potential for security, comfort and amenity as for a gregarious person, yet one might not find these things there. The four walls hem us in rather than providing cover: they appear bleak and dull. We do not see the dwelling as a means of protecting us, but we see it as a prison, as a dull and dreary backdrop to an equally dull life. Dwelling becomes all too regular: we feel what we have is not complacency but indifference. The dwelling does not offer possibility but puts an end to it. It still keeps us as warm and dry as it ever

did, but when we are forced to be alone we react differently to the place where we live. The choices do not seem to be ours; we are alone rather because of the choices made by others, none of which include or consider us: potential visitors choose to go elsewhere rather than visit us. We are aware that things are contingent, and that therefore they could be different – people could come to me rather than to someone or somewhere else. Yet this does not happen, and soon what was possible becomes improbable.

The dwelling becomes the apparent source of our inertia as well as the loss of our freedom. Being alone is no longer a source of apparent freedom, or a flight from responsibility, but a burden that prevents us from acting. This is because much of what we wish to do depends on other people. We want to do things with others and if we cannot then we do nothing at all. Nothing stops us from visiting museums, galleries, cinemas, or going on holiday, but why should we bother to do these things on our own? Our loneliness consumes us and leaves us with no surplus. Or so we think, and we have no means to get out of ourselves to disprove what we think. Being wrong or misguided does not come into it: we are just alone and we can see no escape from this.

Being alone is not the same as being lonely. We can want to be alone and see it as a positive, or we might see being alone as a price worth paying to avoid something or someone worse; or it might be necessary to achieve something that cannot be achieved by any other means. Being alone is not then necessarily, or even often, a negative. All of us choose to be alone at certain times: because we are doing activities we see as private, or things that we are ashamed of others knowing; because we do not know how others will respond or react; or because we want the unalloyed pleasure that comes from not being side-tracked or distracted by the presence of others. We need to concentrate, to be undisturbed, and so we need to be alone.

Being lonely is the opposite of this. It is when we wish to do things with others; we wish to share with them, to join in, to show them what we are doing; to tell them what we think, *but there is no one there*. Of course, we can feel both at different times, so that no condition dominates. Yet there are some people who are solitary, who feel that they benefit from solitude. There are those who choose not to associate with others when they could readily do so, or who actively relish solitude. They may be perfectly sociable if they need to be, but prefer to be alone. This is not the condition we have considered in looking at Van Sant's *Last Days*, where Blake was seeking to shirk all responsibility and so to be alone, but it was not a sustainable condition. However, to repeat the question, if solitude is not harmful, and if it allows us to live as we choose, then what is wrong with this?

I want to argue that there are virtues in solitude, but there are also costs, and these must be balanced. The principal problem, it seems to me, is that we can only have solitude if others allow it. It might be, as in the case of Eve, that this can be achieved readily, but is it certain that this is what she wants? For most of us, most of the time, permanent solitude is not what we want.

Much of the work I do depends on solitude, on working alone with a notebook, reading a book or being in front of a computer. This is work that cannot be shared whilst it is in process. Only in the final stages do I really rely on others to help in preparation, be it to provide comments on ideas and content, or to proofread,

typeset, edit and so on. Much of the formation of my work is done alone; this has to be so and I want it to be so. I do not feel that much of it can be shared, even though some authors do write together. Of course, I write in a shared language, using common idioms and expressions and knowing – or hoping – that what I write will have a particular resonance and be understood in a particular way. But there is also commonality on another level: when I write I often work with others around me. My children might be elsewhere in the house, reading, playing or working, and my wife may well be working or relaxing in another room. Might this be called not so much a companionable silence, but *companionable solitude*? I am being left alone, but there are others around that I can readily talk to, or help if they need it. It is important for me to have them there, to know that they are there, close by but without any direct contact. We can see this as the gentlest form of solitude, one that is based, as it were, on pretence, where we can be alone without the risk of any consequences. The solitude here is a choice and comes about by mutuality, a shared sense of togetherness in which each member of the household is carrying out their own activities in a safe and secure environment where they can gain companionship if they wish to. Much solitude is, as it were, voluntary. It is something we choose to have, and it is possible because others choose to leave us alone. This, then, is really just giving each other space to be, and so we are forgoing very little. The presence of others in the house is a necessary element in our feelings of safety and security.

What is more problematical, however, is where the desire for solitude is not shared, or where one person seeks to be alone whilst others wish for companionship. Indeed, it is unlikely that any household would be so harmonious as not to have clashes over space, and where the need for quiet is not shared. Likewise, we can envisage relationships that have changed over time so that the partners have drifted apart from each other, and now have different needs. So it might be that a person seeks to be alone, but still share his or her life with others. It might be that for some reason this person has changed and turned inwards, and so there is now a clash of intentions. The solitary person has become, as it were, a silent partner in the relationship. There is now a split in the structure of responsibility within the household, whereby the internal needs of one partner diverge from those of the other, and what is lost is the mutuality, the togetherness in the relationship. As needs diverge, so do interests and what each wants from the relationship alters. What matters now is not the positive aspects of the relationship, the mutuality, but what cements the relationship together in a rather more negative manner: it is about being kept in place whilst perhaps no longer having the enthusiasm or desire that once existed. What keeps them in the relationship might be inertia, or it might be children; it may be, probably will be, that the relationship is unequal and so one partner is less able to assert his or her position than the other, and this inequality might be economic, physical or emotional. The one who has become solitary might well see no issue here so long as they have sufficient space. Rather it is the person who has not changed, and who suffers the loss of companionship, togetherness and mutuality, that bears the brunt of this change.

Yet even though a person might become more solitary, this does not mean that the dependence on another has gone, and this applies even if one is the partner with the economic, physical and emotional advantages. What does change, however, are the conditions of dependence on the other. Even though one partner might

have changed and wish to be alone more often, the need for the other may be as strong, even as it cannot be articulated in the same manner. The problem though is precisely in this change of condition and different articulation, in that one person cannot simply expect the other to accept the change, or be aware of, or appreciate the causes. Often this is because the change is never stated as such: it is not itself articulated, and neither has it come about because of some dramatic event. The changes have been incremental, a gradual withdrawal. Or the change might have been masked by something else, such as an illness after which the person does not return to the old forms of behaviour. What was felt to be temporary becomes rather more permanent, but without there being any planning or forethought in any of this. Over time the changed form of existence becomes normal. What might then exist in the one household is someone who is alone and another who is lonely: one for whom solitude is desirable and the other for whom it is a loss, a gap. In a way we might say that the solitude is being shared, but it is not mutual. One party does not want the change to be permanent, but wants a return to the old ways and habits and sense of togetherness. But the question is, how can this be managed? Often it means breaking into the solitude, forcing an admission of change from someone who likes the new state and wants it to continue, and who sees no problem with life as it now is. Moreover, as these changes are imperceptible and have occurred over time, and because they have been chosen, it is often difficult for the solitary person to admit to any change or to appreciate the effects of that change. So the other party is confronted with the same problem as at the end our discussion of *Last Days*: of how to break in and succeed in offering care.

Get out of yourself

My mother used to talk of the need to ‘get out of yourself’. In my teenage years, full of myself and with my elementary interest in philosophy, I considered this to be a wonderful idea: that I could be able to stand outside of myself and look down as I went about my business. I saw this as being ‘the ghost outside the machine’. But of course, this was not really my mother’s intended meaning. What she meant was that I should stop internalising things, dwelling on things, and centring on myself and my problems. Instead I should get out into the world and do something active. I should take my mind off the issue and then, she would assert, the problem would dissolve away; once I got some sense of perspective on the issue it would appear differently, less threatening or worrisome. Perhaps then, in a way, what my mother was suggesting was that I actually should get outside of my body, or at least my mind, and look at what was preoccupying me as others would. If I did this I would then see how absurd my pretensions and conceits were, that they were mere affectations that looked petty and inconsequential from the outside even as they appeared important and substantial from within. I would see that I was not unique, that I was not suffering in a manner that no one had ever felt before. So if I saw myself as others did – which is *only ever* from the outside – I would gain a proper perspective on things. Of course, like any teenager, I would ask her what she could possibly know about the matter.

Yet there is something in this call to ‘get out of yourself’. Is the problem for someone who is solitary that they simply cannot get out of themselves? They cannot gain perspective or lose the internalised sense of where the world is merely the self and self is all there is to the world. So how can we get out of ourselves? What means do we have to step outside of ourselves?

Perhaps the main way in which we see ourselves ‘as we are’ is by the reactions others have towards us: do others react in the manner we think they should, or do they look confounded, angry or amused, or behave in any way inappropriate to our own self-image? But if we are alone we lose all this and so we can remain more readily in our deluded state. So it is through context and through relationships that we are best able to see ourselves from the outside and gain a greater sense of perspective about ourselves and our situation.

But this is precisely the thing that we are not prepared to do, as this would be to break our solitude. Getting out of ourselves is the last thing we want to do. What if we do not like what we see? What if our worst fears are proved correct? What if it ruins the cosy and safe view we have, that our carefully garnered self-image is nothing but an illusion, a trick caused by not getting enough natural light? We prefer to keep ourselves closed in, to stay within ourselves, grasping firmly on to our sense of self, the security of the known and the safe. We do this even when we know that we ought to do something other, that we should change. Yet we are not convinced of the cost, we are not sure that the risk to our self-image is worth a look outside.

So perhaps what is more of a problem is that we simply do not realise that we have a problem: the reinforcing of solitude – being alone helps to keep people away – means that we just do not realise what state we are in. Does this mean that we cannot, properly speaking, get out of ourselves, but have to rely on others to do it for us? What is needed is for others to persuade us, to cajole or shock us out of our complacency and tell us how we ‘really are’. This takes us back to *Last Days* and the sympathetic woman. What we can see as the problem here – and it is perhaps not her fault as we are not told anything of the relationship – was that her link with Blake was conditional. Whilst she tried to talk to him and persuade him, whilst we felt that she knew and cared for him, something stopped her from going too far, or rather, far enough. She would not or could not take him by the throat and drag him out. We might say – and again this may be unfair – that it did not matter enough for her, just as it did not matter enough for Blake.

What creates the possibility of getting out of ourselves, is our starting to appreciate that things other than ourselves matter. By this I mean the state in which we are so involved, so engaged with another and they with us, that we cannot and do not wish to withdraw. Solitude brings with it neglect, of ourselves and our relationships. It may appear that we do not care, that others do not matter to us any more. Yet this is, I would suggest, a problem of our failure to see, to be aware, to think things through, to come to terms with the consequences of our actions. In particular, what we cannot see is that we are actually more dependent, more reliant on those we are close to, than we are prepared to admit. So what is different from a normal relationship is the lack of reciprocity. We may feel that we are solitary, and that we want to be so. We might even feel that we are forced into solitude by a lack of the other’s understanding. However, what is actually the problem is that although

we can and do receive care, and can be understood, and are wanted, we just do not notice that this is available for us. What we need to do is accept our position and the role of others. This means listening, being aware of those around us and starting to see their needs, their concerns, and their anxieties on our behalf. This awareness is about realising the effects we have had and are having, both on others and on ourselves. We need to realise that our withdrawal is not a defence, it is not justified, but is actually punishing others, ruining our family, and our relationships, creating distance when what we need is closeness, to care and to be cared for. It is about reintegrating ourselves into the household, to see it as a whole rather than a unit with one person missing.

So in order to get out of ourselves we need others, and we need to accommodate them. This notion of *accommodation* is about being placed somewhere specific, but is also about where we find an acceptance of ourselves in that place (King, 2005). We can see this as being about love, as where we achieve some common end: ‘It is a mutual acquiescence, which at best becomes a single thread. Perhaps more commonly, we believe we have enough to keep us together and wish to preserve it for each other’ (p. 22). The unconditionality of our love for this other, and theirs for us, means that we can accept them and the situation they create. We need to centre ourselves on to others rather than on to ourselves. What we need, I would suggest, is a *singular unconditionality* – a specific relation with another, and we need the space to achieve it. This relation cannot be with just anyone, but only with *this one*. We might have this relation with our mother and father, our children, our partner: it is what we might see as a happy dependency, a non-transferable need that is singular in that only that person will do.

Aristotle in *The Politics* (1990; book II iv 1262b22-24, p. 111): tells us that ‘There are two impulses which more than all others cause human beings to cherish and feel affection for each other: ‘this is my own’, and ‘this is my delight’’. What he appears to be saying is that politics begin in the home, with the things and people that are closest to us. It is here where attachments are formed and where they remain at their strongest. Martha Nussbaum (1994) makes this explicit with her gloss on Aristotle’s words: ‘There are two things above all that make people love and care for something: the thought that it is all yours, and the thought that it is the only one you love’ (p. 68). Nussbaum uses this as a way of explaining why we feel particularly towards certain people and not just anyone with similar or even identical characteristics. Once we have a partner, once a commitment is made, no other person will do, regardless of what qualities our partner may have compared to others. This commitment might not be endless or unbreakable, but it is an elastic one. Our relationship, being so singular, can take much that someone less committed would not be prepared to withstand. But this closeness also means that we have a privileged insight. As Nussbaum states, ‘Parental education is superior than public education, Aristotle argues, because it begins from a grasp of the child’s particularity, and is thus more likely to hit on what is appropriate’ (p. 68). The point here is the rather obvious one, that a parent knows their child better than anyone else possibly can and so is the best judge to determine what is and is not appropriate. We may contest whether this applies to all aspects of a modern curriculum, but the point remains that a parent, like a partner, has a singular relationship that cannot be matched by any other. What this means is that the sense

of *mine* comes to be replaced by *ours* and *us*. It is this sense that can get us out of ourselves and help us to deal with solitude. It necessitates a commitment on the part of others, and so is not necessarily entirely determined by ourselves, and this is why the figure of the sympathetic woman in *Last Days* begins to loom so large. But it also reiterates the selfishness at the heart of Alexander's actions in *The Sacrifice* and why the criticisms of Tarkovsky's film cast such a shadow over it, in particular, the criticism that Alexander's actions *against* his family are entirely disproportionate.

We want to characterise a family as consisting of a sense of togetherness, as a network of consciousness and conscience, responsibility and humility, that appears to form a pattern and seems to have a wholeness to it. This wholeness is not to suggest uniformity but completeness. An image that helps here is to see the family as a patchwork, as a collection of different materials, differently sized, with contrasting textures and patterns. But all of these different parts are stitched together to form a whole. Not all the elements are equally connected – some are edge pieces and others are in the centre and completely surrounded – and no patch is attached to another by more than one side. The patches are not, of course, stitched seamlessly together. We can expect there to be places where there is some stress, where the patches seem to be pulling apart. And, most important, the divide between two patches is all too clear: the purpose of a patchwork is to show these clear separations. Yet despite this the patches remain together and form a whole. Within a patchwork, therefore, there are borders within borders; there are edges that touch where the differences in texture, pattern and colour are all too apparent. But, as it were, these *patches work*. They come together into a whole that we will see and use as such. It is not diminished by the clear distinction between its elements. Instead what gives it its utility is the way in which the diverse parts are stitched together.

So we might say that the whole purpose of a patchwork, beyond its derived utility, is the placing and the stitching together of disparate elements to make a whole, even as the different parts remain distinct. This is why it makes a good analogy for a family as a body bound together as a whole, which presents itself to the outside world as an entity which is singular and where identity is derived from membership. Yet like a patchwork, a family is clearly made of distinct and different elements. These elements need to conform to a considerable extent. Their edges need to fit against the others and this involves some compromise, and perhaps even some reshaping. This inevitably leads to some diminution to the whole, so that one particularly colourful patch may be lost in the pattern of the whole. Yet there are still clear differences and sharp divisions between the pieces.

Any discussion of the idea of family is politically charged and can be too easily characterised by the use of particular terms – husband or wife instead of partner; family instead of household – and one can also be challenged on issues of demography and social change. The fastest growing type of household is indeed that of single persons and we need to be careful how we characterise the significance of family. So we should resist stereotyping and making value judgements to ensure that we do not exclude many households, or consign ourselves to irrelevance. Yet we also need to remember that the overwhelming majority of single-person households have, at one time or another, been part of families (however defined), as children or partners, and so the issue is not reducible to current demographics, let alone future

trends. So my point here is not to consider what a family is and whether there are any necessary elements to it, but to explore the idea of the internal dynamic of a family in a general sense. Patterns exist within any household, however it is constituted. By pattern I mean that there are internal regularities within the household. Within the patchwork there is a discernible pattern within the overall shape. This does not depend on any typology of households, but on the general condition of what it is to be together and remain together for those individuals in that singular relationship. So what concerns me here are the regularities *within* the household rather than any suggestion of regularities (or differences) between households, or of any definitive, concrete and complete typology. This means that the patterns are limited, but not reduced to stereotypes. The limits are to the shape, to the form itself. These are the boundaries of the household in physical terms, but also in terms of the very concept of 'household' itself as that entity which encompasses 'this is my own' and 'this is my delight'. If the patches are to come together they must commit to some discipline and order which then holds the whole together into what appears as a pattern.

If we return to the two main characters of our discussion in this chapter for a final time we can recast their problem in terms of this preparedness to commit. Blake, we can state, simply cannot commit. All his actions are concerned with escaping any responsibility and there is no acceptance of others around him. It is also only too true that this sense of acceptance is lacking in these others. There is one person who attempts to support Blake, but she cannot commit herself, and perhaps this is because her ties are too slight. Perhaps she is part of a different patterning, and the pull of that pattern is too strong for her to commit to another. However, she receives no encouragement from Blake and this can justify her withdrawal. But we have to state that for Blake there is nothing that he can call his own, that he can call his delight. Should this sense of ownership be forced upon him; should he be made to stand up to his responsibilities? But who is going to force that? As for Alexander, he thinks he is committed, and that he is acting selflessly to save not just his family but the world. But is he still connected, and what is his commitment to? His world appears to be insular and he is cut off from his family, so that he cannot communicate his motivation to them. We need to ask why did he not involve them, why was it so important that this be an act of *individual* faith? What does it say to them that he is prepared to sacrifice his own and his delight, and in a manner that so alienates them, that destroys their trust and security as a household? Alexander uses his household for what might be seen as an external purpose, whilst Blake admits of no externalisation, but wishes to keep all things to himself. Neither character is capable of accommodation, of recognising any significance, or the full significance, of others who are placed before him.

What makes it possible for Blake and Alexander to do this is the implacable nature of dwelling, which allows them to exclude others: they use their privacy to magnify their isolation and therefore to fulfil their desires at the expense of others. There is therefore an element of our equation that is missing, and we need to deal with this gap if we are to achieve some proper balance in dwelling. This balancing is not intended as a cure for illness, nor do I claim that it will prevent solitude, let alone suicide. My point is to argue that what we need to do is precisely what both

Blake and Alexander are incapable of, namely to *accept* what and where they are, to take the world as it is.

We can use the implacability of dwelling and hide behind its ability to exclude others and the responsibilities that they bring. We can stay within ourselves and internalise our lives. But to do so is dangerous. Instead what is incumbent on us is to accept our place in the world, our place in a patchwork of relations that can exist within a dwelling. I want to argue that this acceptance of dwelling as an accommodation of the other is therapeutic. Moreover, this does not involve a rejection of the implacable and exclusive nature of dwelling, but is rather to use them positively.

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Chapter 6

Open



Acceptance

Hiroshi Teshigahara's film *Woman of the Dunes* (1964), set in contemporary Japan, is about a woman who cannot face leaving a place and about a man who comes to accept that same place after he is forced to live in it. The man wishes for nothing but escape, whilst for the woman no other place is tenable. Yet at the end of the film it is the woman who leaves and the man who stays. *Woman of the Dunes* shows dwelling as a constraining element, yet still a necessity. For the woman ideas of freedom and choice do not seem to be particularly important at all. Her priority is one of maintaining her dwelling and its immediate environs as a place to live, indeed where life is tenable, even though this involves continual back-breaking toil and appears to an outsider as completely senseless. The man's priority, as a modern educated city dweller, is to get back to the city, his job, his apartment and his responsibilities.

The man portrayed in the film is a teacher using his holiday to collect insects in the dunes on the coast. We see him roaming the dunes and collecting specimens, the very model of the modern rationalist. On his searches he meets a villager and converses with him briefly. He falls asleep and we see him dream about a woman, who appears estranged from him. Perhaps it is his wife who has left him, or a former

lover. When he awakes he is told by the same villager he met earlier that he has missed his last bus back to the city. However, the villager says he can find him a place to stay. The man goes along with this plan, even when it means staying in a widow's shack at the bottom of a deep sand pit into which he has to descend using a rope ladder. The young widow lives alone in the pit, sleeping in the day and spending the night shovelling sand out of the pit, from where it is carted away by other villagers. She has to do this to stop the sand's encroachment, saying that if her house disappears it will endanger the next one in the village. She tells the man that her husband and young child were buried in a sand slide, but that she still feels she has to carry on living in this place. The man is patronising about her life and her opinions: when she tells him that the sand causes things to rot he scoffs. However, he accepts her hospitality and spends the night there.

In the morning the man awakes to find no rope ladder and no one to pull him up. He tries to climb the slopes of the sand pit but slides down, and he comes to understand that he is not a guest but a prisoner, trapped there to help the widow who is struggling to keep the sand at bay on her own. He has in effect been assigned by the villagers to help her, and so he finds that he has to stay. The film is about his coming to accept his situation, his anger turning to resignation and then accommodating himself to the place. In much of the central part of the film he is concerned with finding a means of escape, and makes one failed attempt. The film also charts the relationship between the woman and the man, which is highly charged erotically, but also full of misunderstanding and deceit, particularly on the part of the man. Yet by the end of the film, even when a rope ladder is left dangling into the pit and he climbs it and walks on the dunes again, he comes back down and stays. And he does this even though the woman leaves. There is an ambiguity here, in that the woman is taken off to see a doctor when she miscarries, and the last we see of her is when she is winched out of the pit. We are not told whether she returns, but are left to draw our own conclusions. The film ends with a legal notice tidying up the man's affairs now that he has been missing for seven years.

During the course of the film the man comes to accept the world view of the woman. At the end when he climbs out of the pit we see him looking across the dunes and out to sea at the distant horizon, and it is as if at this moment he comes to see that the much smaller horizon of the shack in the pit is what he wants. He is no longer a rational man, a scientist searching for the new discovery, but comes to accept that his horizon is limited and should be limited, and seems to find a kind of happiness in this acceptance.

The woman sees her shack in the bottom of the pit as a place that she cannot possibly leave: it is home, and therefore a place to be preserved at all costs, and she insists on this even though she has lost her husband and child to the sand. Her horizon is circumscribed by the walls of the pit around her, but that is how her world is. It is not something to fight against or seek to change. She tells the man that many young people have left the village for the city, but she has no yearning for this. When the man asks her if she lives to shovel sand, or shovels sand to live, she does not answer, as if this is incomprehensible or meant as a joke.

We can, of course, see the woman as being naïve: her tight horizon means that she cannot understand what is beyond the sand dunes. But we can also see her as

being so attached to her hut in the sand that there is no purpose in doing anything else: where would she go, and what else would she do? She knows little other than life in the village; it is normal and that is how life is. For her, home is to be preserved at all costs, and the fact that this is back-breaking, Sisyphean, pointless work is an irrelevance. Perhaps we are being encouraged by Teshigahara to see all our lives in this way, and that there is really little difference between life in a sand pit and life in the city.

But we should not in any case ignore the attachment merely because we see the woman as naïve. Perhaps we can only be so attached if we are to an extent naïve ourselves. Attachment is about putting our trust into one place, about investing all our emotional intensity into it, and this involves a degree of naivety, a simplicity in accepting things at face value rather than speculating on hypotheticals. We see this in her incomprehension in response to the man's jibe about why she is shovelling sand. But it is also there in her inability to consider escaping, and the plaintive and vulnerable look she wears when she is lifted out of the pit at the end of the film.

The film is about the limits of freedom, and how, on the part of the woman, we accept what we have. We do this because it is all that we know, or all that we can have, and because we have no choice or ability to change these things. The woman has to shovel sand, she has to take precautions against it, and, more particularly, she has to stay where she is because that is her home. She accepts this because that is how she has always lived. The man, however, only comes to accept where he is and why he is there over time, as he gets used to the life and what it means for him. We see his priorities changing from those of his past life and we realise at the end of the film, when he is declared missing after seven years away, that he will never leave, and that he has now found home. He is no longer searching for anything: he stops being the rational collector and instead turns his mind to the practical matters of subsistence.

He has come to this acceptance of place simply through being there. This might be partly due to inertia: you get used to what you have, and if there are no options then why contemplate change? But we feel that there is more to the man's transformation than this, and this is shown when he chooses not to escape. It is no longer that he cannot escape, but that he does not want to any more: he would now have to give up more than he would gain. He now takes what he has as ordinary and commonplace (King, 2005). His life is now built on regular routines and habits, and he has grown used to this, seeing it now as normal and worth investing his life in because of what he has already put into it. But he can also see a future for himself there, as we see when he plans a water capture and irrigation scheme for the village. This may be impractical, but it keeps him there and gives him some sense of purpose. This, for him, is the equivalent of shovelling sand, and we could now ask him whether he collects water to live, or lives to collect water.

At the start of the film he dreams of the estranged woman, and we can surmise that he might be, or had been, in a relationship. He is certainly employed and had responsibilities. Yet despite his claims about being part of the modern world, whose role will be missed, no one comes to look for him. We get a sense of failure, of something unfulfilled, and this is emphasised by his searching in the dunes for insects. He is looking for a new species so that he can get an entry in an encyclopaedia. We

feel though that he is searching for more than insects and what he perhaps needs is regularity, stasis, a place where there is little or no change. This may lead him to a life of drudgery and where he is hemmed in by a continually dangerous environment, but he seems now to be at peace.

The sand is perhaps one of the most implacable of environments that we can imagine. It is harsh and presents a constant threat which the villagers must continually guard against. Their life is essentially one of shovelling sand, eating and sleeping. To stop shovelling is to accept the end of their community and there can be no negotiation about this. The sand will find its way into their dwellings and will fill up the pits if they allow it to. The villagers have no option but to accept the implacability of their environment. Like the man, we can try to climb these dunes, but we will slide down again, bringing ever more sand down on top of us. But this is both a natural relation with the environment and an inevitable one – and this inevitability is crucial to an understanding of the implacable nature of dwelling. Once we accept that this is how the environment is, we then see it as less fearsome and that it is possible for us to live there. We must still respect it, but we can live within it. It might not be as comfortable as other places, nor can we ever take it for granted, yet it can, after a fashion, be accommodating. The villagers can live there as long as they take the necessary precautions and work to keep the sand at bay, and despite the hazards and the dangers, a sense of normality can come with this understanding of the nature of the environment. This is not, we are led to believe, a new community, but one that is now well adapted to its environment. We see this after the man escapes but becomes lost in the dunes and needs to be rescued from quicksand. The villagers know how to undertake such a rescue: they have developed the right equipment and have a confidence that comes from living constantly in this environment.

The woman shows her understanding of the sand in the way she protects the dwelling and its contents; in the way she sleeps under an umbrella or with a cloth over her face, and sleeps naked so that the sand does not cause a rash; and with her statement that the sand rots things. This latter knowledge runs against conventional wisdom and can only be gained from direct experience. The man scoffs at this view – the sand is absolutely dry and so how can it rot things? The woman's expression in the face of the man's scoffing is one of quiet assuredness: she knows that she is right – she has seen things rotted away by the sand – and therefore sees no point in arguing or seeking to persuade the man. He will find out soon enough for himself, and indeed we soon see him taking the same precautions and acting to minimise the sand's ingress into the shack. He too must accept the environment as it is in this place.

But this acceptance, as it were, is not reciprocated. The sand remains neutral towards the villagers: they can come to terms with it, learn its ways and how to manage their place in it, but the sand does not really accept them. They can keep it at bay only with constant attention and care. They cannot ignore it or take it for granted as they might a more conventional environment. And no matter what precautions they might take, this will not prevent the effects of a slide, a storm, or the slow, steady and inevitable ingress of the sand.

This returns us to the question of just why anyone would choose to stay there. If the environment is so dangerous, and if tragedies like the death of the woman's husband and child are inevitable, why do the villagers remain? But in trying to

answer that question we come up against how circular this discussion can be, and how we cannot get any deeper with our speculations on the nature of dwelling. In other words, it shows how we must rely on intuition to help us. The villagers stay because they must, because they know no other life; they do not know what is outside or what it might mean to leave, or indeed whether they would be capable of dealing with a different environment. But they know what they have now and what it means to stay there. This is not a proper answer to the question, as we see with the man's scepticism at the start of the film. He knows that an alternative is possible because he has lived it. He sees no necessity for the villagers to stay, no purpose in their drudgery. Yet, he chooses to stay there, to circumscribe his horizon to the top of a sand pit.

Perhaps what we ought to suggest is that the man stays because he *can* rather than because he must. He realises that he can live there. He now knows what it takes, what is involved and is prepared to accept it. Being able to stay is not just about the physical conditions of a place, but about accommodating ourselves to a particular place, about finding how it is liveable in. In doing this we find that it is sustainable, a place that can hold us, where we can see our future, and this future involves staying *there*. In short, it is where we feel we belong.

What matters is a realisation on the part of the man that he is now free, not in an absolute sense with complete licence to do as he pleases, but in the sense that he is where he chooses to be. He lives within an order that he can both understand and help to maintain, as we see at the end of the film when he lays out his plans for an irrigation system. He says that he will tell the village elders about his scheme, and that he can escape later. And we know that he never will, that he is there for good: why develop a long-term scheme to irrigate a village of sand if you intend to leave it?

What we are not told is whether the woman returns. Considering that she was to have his child, and there is a strong physical attraction between them, this is odd: we would have expected there to be some return for the woman and we might have thought that this would validate his decision to stay. Indeed, would the man stay there without her? We might suggest that this ambiguity about the woman's return is there so as not to adulterate the director's vision of the man's transformation into accepting the place: according to this view, the film is intended to be about coming to terms with a place and not getting used to another person. Yet if this is the case, what does it say about the role of the woman in the film? Is she merely a cipher, a caricature that helps to put forward a particular view, and that the film is really 'about' the man despite its title? But if this is so, how should we take her statements about attachment and her inscrutability in the face of the man's early scepticism? Is she herself intended as an example of the implacability of the environment, of the sheer unavailability of what is necessary for survival in this place? But this emptying out of the woman's character would seem to take no account of the erotic quality of the film and the developing relationship between the couple. Before the woman leaves we see several scenes that show them as a couple sharing their domesticity. They have their allotted tasks and routines, and have adopted a familiarity in each other's company that is markedly different from the eroticism earlier in the film. They have accepted each other and so seem to be partners, talking about the long term and bickering over trifles.

Yet even though this is the case, the man does not come to accept the wisdom of the woman by the strength of her arguments or by her powers of persuasion. Rather he learns that they are true through experience and by example. It is through his own experiences that he comes to understand that what she told him at their first meeting is correct. He comes to accept things not because he is told that he should, but because he sees that is how his new world is. His city arrogance has been ‘sanded down’ by the persistence of the environment and the woman’s stoical acceptance of it. Might we not see the woman’s position as the banal but quite fundamental point that ‘life goes on’? She represents continuity and doing what is necessary to ensure that life can continue, bringing the environment and dwellers together as closely and as purposefully as possible.

The woman, as it were, teaches the man, offering a lesson to someone who is modern and yet isolated from others. The man uses the dunes as a laboratory, as a place to find things, to explore, so that he can understand how the world is. He is also concerned to get his name in an encyclopaedia for discovering a new species. He wants to be recognised for his efforts rather than seeing them as sufficient unto themselves: he is not living to collect, but collecting for recognition and status. This sense of modernity, of trying to find things out, of understanding and controlling the world, and being seen to do it, is opposed to the woman’s view of taking the world as it is, of accepting the environment she is in and coming to some accommodation with it.

After the woman’s instruction, the man deliberately limits himself. He gives up modern comforts and amenities in order to keep something he now has. Or perhaps it is truer to say that he no longer recognises their loss. That he can do this is not because the dwelling in the sand pit is better than any other, but because he has become used to it as normal, as where he is at home: he can accept it as being satisfying for him. This does not mean, however, that there is virtue in the basic or in struggle, or in placing necessity above higher standards. The film is about finding out both what is appropriate and what is enough. This is something decided only empirically, through experience and on the basis of the man’s relation to a specific place. To use the jargon of this book, for the man, the place becomes what it has always been for the woman: he can call it *mine*.

What the film shows is how we move from implacability to acceptance, from being in an apparently unyielding environment to having an accommodation with it. When the man first stays there the environment shows itself in its full implacability. It is harsh unyielding and unforgiving. It is hostile and to live there seems to him a joke. But once forced to remain there he comes to accept the environment and the possibilities that it offers. This possibility does not involve opening up in the sense of the broadening of the horizon. Instead it involves an opening up to the nature of the environment and how he can dwell there, and learn what it takes to find accommodation there. This is partly a relationship with the sand, but also with the woman, in the sense of the man accepting the place-wisdom of the woman.

What the woman seeks to do above all is – what her accommodation involves – is to maintain, to keep her place. Her role, as she sees it, is to ensure that her place remains, that it is passed on. She sees it as incumbent upon her to strengthen the roots and ruts which she is in the midst of (King, 2005). She is determined that the footprint of her community is not eradicated from the sand, despite the precariousness of this

endeavour, of making anything last in this shifting environment. I take this as a key message of the film: that we have a responsibility to find and then to take care of our place. We need to maintain the roots we have made and which have been established for us by past generations. And the more precarious these roots are, the harder we have to work to preserve them. This idea of *place keeping* is a way of linking the past with the present and the future. We should preserve what has been handed down to us, and in turn forward it on to those who will follow us. This creates a link to place as something broader than just a piece of land: the woman is concerned to preserve a pattern of life, a community and a history.

Can we say that the man is a better person at the end of the film than at the start? And if he is, what is the allegory here? I would suggest that if being at peace with the world is a virtue, then the man is a better person. He has found a place where he belongs. But more broadly, as an allegory, we should read the man's transformation as a recognition of the need for limits in how we live. The man thought he was free and that he was pursuing a rational and fulfilling path. Yet he comes to see both his freedom and his searching as equally empty, and he arrives at this conclusion by becoming hemmed in, by being trapped in an apparently hostile and alien environment. He comes to find that human purposes are close to us and do not involve treks into the unknown, and it is only through limits, through a tight horizon, that he comes to see this.

I want to suggest that we should see dwelling as being about limits and not about possibility. I have discussed at some length the problems of insularity and hiding away. In *Woman of the Dunes* both the woman and the man are hidden away, one by choice and the other as a prisoner. Yet the prisoner comes to accept his capture and to relish it, to appreciate that the limits placed around him have opened him to his place in the world. What this suggests is that openness and closure are not matters of physical boundaries as such, but the manner in which we use them and can come to terms with them. We can use our implacable walls to hide and to insulate us from others, or we can use them as the base from which we step out into the world. When we wish to go out into the world we need to open our door, closing it, of course, as we leave. Likewise, when we need to return again the door must first be opened. An opening creates a means of exit and of return. It is our means of allowing or denying others access into our exclusion, and the choice is ours. The door then becomes the very image of implacability and our control over it. It is we that open and close the door and therefore decide who may or may not enter: we determine who can or cannot come within the boundaries of our dwelling. The boundaries are ours and we should use them, we should seek to find some therapy within them. I want to argue that we can do this by the positive use of the limits of our dwelling.

The therapy of limits

Acceptance is about coming to terms with how we must live. It is about how we accommodate ourselves to those around us and in our environment. The man, at the end of *Woman of the Dunes*, could say 'this place is *mine*', just as the woman could. Another way of describing this situation is to say that the man has found what

is positive in his dwelling. He is able to understand it and to make use of it. He no longer seeks to fight against it or to escape, and instead he wishes to stay. There is a peace about the man because he has learnt to dwell. The example of the woman and the place itself have worked their therapy on him, easing his anxiety so that he is no longer searching for anything that cannot be found where he now is. It is this positive aspect of acceptance that I want to explore here, and I wish to do so by moving from Japan in the 1960s to Greece in the fourth century before Christ.

Pierre Hadot (1995, 2002) has argued for a return to philosophy as it was perceived and practised by the ancients. Instead of it being the preserve of professional philosophers with academic qualifications and positions at universities, philosophy, according to Hadot (1995), is a way of life. Following the Greeks, he sees philosophy as a non-professional, life-questioning and life-changing exercise. It is an examination of how we can and should live. Philosophy can present us with a means for living, through the development of a set of principles or dogmas – what might be called spiritual exercises – by which we can run our lives. Hadot is particularly critical of thinkers who divorce what they say from what they do, be they Marxists who own their own property and live in bourgeois family groups, or environmentalists who drive cars. He felt that ancient philosophers would find this behaviour of divorcing argument and practice as both incredible and hypocritical.

Hadot's argument – that philosophy is a way of life and not just an academic exercise – is one that is particularly amenable to the discussion here on acceptance. It also connects with another metaphor used to discuss ancient philosophy developed by Martha Nussbaum (1994). This is the idea of philosophy as therapy, as a practical means of assuaging maladies of the soul. Philosophy, as practised by Epicureans, Sceptics and Stoics, was about ensuring that individuals were healthy in both body and soul. So Nussbaum too argues that philosophy is about helping us to live well. Both Hadot and Nussbaum note that the spiritual exercises of the ancient philosophers were based on a concern for the here and now, for how we live in the present. If we were to live well now this would hold us in good stead for the future. So I want to suggest that what ancient philosophers were concerned with was, amongst other things, how we dwell.

I believe that we should be concerned to understand the notion of *enough*: of what constitutes a sufficiency of dwelling. We should be aware of the level we need not go below, but also the level we should not go above without fear of dwelling getting out of hand, or of breaking down those elements that are necessary for dwelling to work at its proper level. This idea of what is enough is not simply a question of reductionism, of levelling up or down to some externally determined point, but of appreciating those elements in dwelling that are vital and necessary and those which are the veneer, the dressing. We must also understand that a concern for the veneer is destructive to the base.

The basis for the idea of *enough* is found in the few remaining words of the Greek philosopher, Epicurus (ca. 341-271 BCE).¹ Despite his later reputation, as evidenced

1 Many of Epicurus's writings, which were apparently voluminous, have been lost and most of what remain are from later texts which have used Epicurus as a reference. Epicureanism was the main competitor with early Christianity and, of course, lost!

by the term ‘Epicureanism’ to denote a devotion to sensual pleasure and the good things in life, Epicurus’s writings were actually concerned with how one can reduce pain and increase pleasure, and so lead a life that is untroubled by anxieties and unfounded desires. He stated that:

He who understands the limits of life knows how easy it is to remove the pain that results from want and to make one’s whole life complete. As a result, he does not need actions that bring strife in their wake.’ (Epicurus, 1993, p. 72)

His proposal of pleasure as a guiding principle was not therefore a licence to hedonism, but, as Alain De Botton (2000) puts it, an understanding of what makes us happy. Epicurus saw this understanding as every bit as fundamental as a realisation of what makes us healthy. But he realised that human beings are bad at appreciating these fundamentals, and so his philosophy is concerned with helping us to understand just what does make us happy.

What we should seek to achieve is *ataraxia*. This is defined by Martha Nussbaum (1994, p. 109) as ‘freedom from disturbance and anxiety’. *Ataraxia* is the state in which we wish our soul to be free from pain just as we wish our bodies to be so. These two elements, freedom from an anxious soul and freedom from bodily pain are, according to Epicurus, the two things that a person seeks. Nussbaum states that, for Epicurus, the goal of an uncorrupted person is ‘the continued undisturbed and unimpeded functioning of the whole creature’ (p. 109).

This shows what Epicurus meant by pleasure, which is a freedom from pain and disturbance. It was not hedonism, but rather a freedom to pursue our life without mental or physical pain and suffering. Pleasure is the unimpeded functioning of a person in terms of their body and soul. Part of this functioning is the use of reason, which again mitigates Epicurus’s reputation for unthinking hedonism. Rather we should actively be able to use all of our faculties and capabilities free from the impediments of pain. However, this sense of reason is not an abstraction, but grounded in our normal daily activities. As Nussbaum states:

But what apparently would not be a part of the end [of human life] would be any specialised or socially tutored use of reason, anything beyond its healthy functioning as a faculty of the human animal. This *ordinary use*, Epicurus frequently suggests, is closely tied to bodily functions and usually would consist of awareness of and planning for bodily states. (p. 109, my emphasis)

This mention of ‘ordinary use’ is interesting in that appears to relate directly to the sense of the ordinary I have considered elsewhere (King, 2005). It is what we normally do as a matter of course; it concerns that milieu that we are in the midst of. It relates to the capability of maintaining a normal life with routines and reiterated practices grounded on common sense (Rosen, 2002) and our basic human needs (King, 2003). I shall return to this idea of the ordinary later, but first I wish to explore Epicurus’s ideas in a little more detail.

Epicurus, as with other rival schools of ancient philosophy such as Scepticism and Stoicism (Nussbaum, 1994), was concerned with controlling desire, and with the development of precepts that would achieve this control. Nussbaum identifies

two forms of desire in Epicurean thought. First, there is what she terms ‘natural’ desires. These are ‘those whose appropriateness is witnessed by their presence in the uncorrupted creature’ (1994, p. 111). An uncorrupted creature is one which is normal and behaves according to its nature, and so these desires can be seen as what it is normal and acceptable for a human being to have. Second, Nussbaum identifies ‘empty’ desires, which she defines as the ‘products of teaching and acculturation absent from the uncorrupted condition’ (p. 111). This is part of what Epicurus referred to as ‘empty striving’, based on false beliefs or vanity. As Nussbaum states, this empty striving arises in people:

because they are infected with the falsity of the evaluative beliefs that ground them; and also because they tend to be vain or self-defeating, reaching out for a “boundless” object that can yield no stable satisfaction. (Nussbaum, 1994, p. 112)

This empty striving for objects is boundless and we can find no end to it. The person whose values are out of kilter with what is both necessary and possible, continues to strive for and to search for things regardless of what they now have or what their capabilities are. As Epicurus put it himself: ‘Some men spend their whole life furnishing for themselves the things proper to life without realising that at our birth each of us was poured a mortal brew to drink’ (1993, p. 79). In a later fragment he states: ‘We must not spoil our present estate by longing for what is absent but realise that this too was one of the things we hoped for’ (p. 80). His point is that we should not ruin or waste what we now have on a vain pursuit for what we do not have. This striving is often pointless because it is constantly renewed; once we have one thing we then strive for something else. Epicurus states that we should remember that what we now have was, at some point in the past, something we had hoped for. At one time we desired it and were able to attain it. So what now makes it inadequate for our needs? If it is not good enough for us now, what has changed? What has altered in the mean time to denigrate this object or our desire for it? Rather than the object changing, might it not be that we are the one who has changed? Accordingly, Epicurus warns us against continually striving for something new and states that we should be satisfied with what we already have. When we first obtained these things they were what we wanted, they fulfilled us, they made us happy, and they were enough for us, and if they were able to do so then, why should they not be able to now?

The problem, as Alain De Botton (2000, 2004) has argued, is that we strive for that which is absent *precisely because it is absent*. We want it because we currently do not have it, but others do. We feel that we have to compete, and that we must measure ourselves against others rather than against what we actually need. What we are suffering from is a comparative lack, or what De Botton (2004) refers to as *status anxiety*. But in looking at what is absent, and hoping for something different from what we now have, we forget what it is we do have. Instead what we have now is taken for granted; we see it as too ordinary and seek to replace it with the extraordinary, to replace the common with the designed. We forget why we have these ordinary things in our rush for the new and different. But in doing so we end up with rather little. Because our striving is boundless and we continually struggle for the next rung up the ladder, we never have what we hope for, *but neither do we*

fully use what we have. We fail to see the virtues of the things in front of us because we are looking so far away.

Unlike ‘empty’ desires, which are boundless, ‘natural’ desires can be satisfied. As Nussbaum states, for Epicurus, ‘the “natural” operations of desire “have a limit” – that is, they can be filled up, well satisfied, and they do not make exorbitant or impossible demands’ (p. 112). This notion of limits is a crucial one to the therapeutic role of dwelling. We can satisfy our desires, and do so without an effort that is debilitating of our resources:

Their end is simply the continued healthy and undisturbed operation of the body and soul of the creature. But this, Epicurus believes, can be achieved with finite and usually modest material resources that are usually ready to hand. False social beliefs, on the other hand, teach us not to be content with what is ready to hand, but to long for objects that are either completely unobtainable (immortality) or very difficult to procure (luxuries and delicacies) or without any definite limit of satisfaction (the money-lover will never be satisfied with any definite amount of wealth, the lover will never enjoy the possession he desires). The nature of empty longing is, then, not “limited”, but “goes off into infinity”. (Nussbaum, 1994, p. 112)

Hence Nussbaum says that, for Epicurus, ‘much of our pain and all of our anxiety come from corrupt ways of thought’ (p. 113). We do not appreciate that what we properly need is already to hand, but instead insist on that which is far off and difficult to attain. However, we need some means of dealing with these ‘corrupt ways’.

In developing such a means, Alain De Botton (2000) outlines a simple five-stage method for gauging whether what we desire is ‘natural’ or ‘empty’. He bases this method on one of Epicurus’s Vatican Sayings (no. 71): ‘The following method of inquiry must be applied to every desire: What will happen to me if what I long for is accomplished? What will happen if it is not accomplished’ (Epicurus, 1993, p. 84). De Botton states that first, we need to ‘identify a project for happiness’ (p. 63), which might be a new house or a holiday. Second, we should ‘imagine that the project might be false. Look for exceptions to the supposed link between the desired object and happiness. Could one possess the desired object but not be happy? Could one be happy but not have the desired object?’ (p. 63). So would the new house make us happy; what if we spent all this money and committed ourselves and found that it did not improve our life as we had hoped? The third stage is to reflect that ‘if an exception is found, the desired object cannot be a necessary and sufficient cause for happiness.’ So if we were to feel that we would be happy in our old house as long as we were with someone we loved, then why are we moving? This leads to the fourth stage, which states that, ‘in order to be accurate about producing happiness, the initial project must be nuanced to take the exception into account’ (p. 64). So we need to state that we would be happy in the new house *only* if we were with those we loved. This leads us to the concluding fifth part: ‘True needs may now seem very different from the confused initial desire’ (p. 64): our happiness depends on whom we love and their being with us, rather than having the new house, and so we should question whether we actually do need it.

The key issue, then, is the idea of ‘boundlessness’, of not realising what it is possible for us to achieve, but persisting with the idea that we can never have enough. As Epicurus states, and this quote almost sums up his philosophy:

Happiness and blessedness do not belong to abundance of riches or exalted position of offices or power, but to freedom from pain and gentleness of feeling and a state of mind that sets limits that are in accordance with nature.’ (p. 101)

We must always be striving for more, continually desiring better, and therefore always falling short, never being sated or able to rest. Instead of this view, and in following De Botton’s five-point plan, we should restrict ourselves to ‘natural’ striving, to those things that are necessary, possible and achievable. What this means is that we set ourselves limits. The therapeutic quality I am seeking to develop here therefore concerns coming to terms with our limits, with what we have now, with what we need now, and with what we can achieve. It is about being aware of our horizon and ensuring that this is close to us and that it encloses what we need. In other words, it is about our acceptance of our place.

What stops us accepting our place is our ‘corrupt thinking’, our not thinking straight about what we can and ought to have and do. We forget to place limits on our desires and instead aim too far off: we seek for that which is unrealistic. And this is corrupting because it harms us in the present. We become dependent on our dreams and aspirations and we lose the ability to support ourselves as we are.

So, much of what Epicurus states is about living in the present. We should not look for gods or idols. We should not fear what we cannot control, and we should not hope for things that are absent, for what we cannot have. The present is what we do have, where we are and where the limits of the possible are clear. What is important is to recognise what is sufficient to our lives. What this suggests, so to speak, is that *dwelling is what dwelling does*: what matters is how we are able to use it, what we are able to do with it as it is. This is shown particularly well in Jacques Tati’s film, *Mon Oncle* (1958), with the contrast in the dwellings of the Arpels and Hulot. The Arpels’ house is in the international style, rationally designed to a particular image of the modern, such that its use has to be moderated to suit its design. The furniture is uncomfortable, and the house appears bare and unwelcoming. In contrast Hulot’s dwelling, an apartment at the top of an old tenement which is reached by a complicated series of steps up, down and across, has an almost organic quality to it. The house appears to have developed in a haphazard and piecemeal fashion to suit the needs of the moment. Hulot’s dwelling is not trying to make any statement; it is not aspiring towards something. Rather, it just is.² This film helps us to recognise what dwelling is for, and what it does for us. It reminds us in its gentle way of what happens if we lose sight of functions: like the Arpels we might become anxious about what others think of us and whether we are appearing as we should. The problem for them, the cause of their anxiety, is not any failure on their part, but an unpreparedness to accept only a sufficiency. They cannot accept that for dwelling to

2 I have discussed this film in more detail in *The Common Place* (2005).

work well it has to be ordinary (King, 2005). As I argued in *The Common Place*, the Arpels are examples of a 'lack of acceptance' (p.99). This occurs when:

we are not prepared to accept what we have, and hence we try to design something new out of our existing environment. We feel that, because the dwelling is ours and is therefore special to us, we should make it distinctive and special *in itself*. Yet what is actually special about this dwelling is that it contains us and our own, and this is sufficient in itself. (King, 2005, p. 99)

We should concentrate not on the dressing, or the veneer that can overlay dwelling, but on what is necessary – what is enough – and come to appreciate that it is this that makes dwelling work. The extras – when they are there – may or may not get in the way, but the yearning for them when they are absent will damage us, as it prevents us from enjoying what we have. Properly speaking, the sufficient dwelling is not basic in an absolute sense. It is not lacking in terms of its amenities. Rather it is that which enables us to meet our normal ends, without imposing on others, and without invading their privacy. The basic, the sufficient – or in current jargon, the sustainable – is that which is our ordinary and commonplace environment. This ordinary dwelling provides the limits, the secure boundary that allows us to exclude, that helps us achieve sufficiency. It offers this secure boundary as a means to ensure that we are free.

Epicurus is concerned that we remain within bounds and keep ourselves grounded; that we live according to what is necessary and essential in our life. He argues that certain things are easily obtained and this ease is for a reason. Likewise, difficult things are difficult for a purpose and not without cause. What we need is already all around us and comes to us without our striving. What we need is the ordinary world of taken-for-granted things, as opposed to the extraordinary imaginings of desire, the absent and unobtainable. It calls to our attention the significance of the *thereness* of dwelling as an entity that we are in the midst of, of that which is common and ready to hand for us. We can see Epicurus as being concerned to eradicate desire, or, more properly, the ill effects of desire. He seeks to deal with the unrealisable and to persuade us to lead a life that is both reasonable and tenable, a life that is in keeping with our environment, our surroundings and our fellows, and which is based on what we have around us and not on what we cannot easily obtain.

Epicurus suggests that we should withdraw from public life, and this has a resonance with the idea of exclusion. Epicurus can help us understand why we need a degree of exclusion if we are to dwell securely. To withdraw means to exclude ourselves from certain activities and the wider society, from public life and politics. But it also suggests that we exclude the outside world from our daily affairs, so that it has no part in what we might do. What this suggests is a separation between public and private, between what we do and the world beyond us. It is about putting a barrier between what we can readily control and what is beyond our reach. Of course, we are still in the world, we are a part of it, inextricably linked with others and the affairs beyond our boundaries: the world beyond us helps to define these boundaries and so to shape our actions. Yet we seek to restrict its influence, to maintain our boundaries against it, and to keep some control over the way we perceive the world and how

we are perceived by it. Epicureanism, therefore, should be seen as concerned with maintaining control, and this is why we continue to point to the importance of sufficiency and limiting the striving for what is absent and beyond us. Epicureanism is about being able to locate ourselves and remain within a defensible and definable sphere; it is about limiting ourselves to the possible and not desiring what might well be beyond us and will cause us pain.

In more overly political terms we can again see a connection with the concept of *side-constraints* as discussed by Robert Nozick in *Anarchy, State and Utopia* (1974) (and as we have discussed in the first and third chapters of this book). Side constraints can be defined as limits to our own actions in order to preserve the rights of others. In turn, therefore, we depend on the side-constraints placed on others to allow us to fulfil our own ends. These side-constraints permit the integrity of individual actions to be sustained, maintained and further developed. We can see side-constraints as boundaries which are erected around us as a result of the restraint of others. But because the action of others also results in the creation of boundaries, it is linked into the social and the political. And crucially, there is a mutuality here, whereby we respect the interests of others as the price of our own rights. By placing limits on ourselves, we ensure that our own rights are protected and maintained. The idea of side-constraints then, properly understood, is a sign of mutuality rather than atomism: it is a way of characterising the social as being composed of individuals responsible for each other's freedoms by placing limits on themselves.

The important element here is that of limits to the self, of putting limits on our own actions. Epicurus sees the important discipline in life – the therapy – as a self-limitation, as a knowledge of what is enough and what is too much. We need to remain aware of what breaches the boundaries of others and ourselves, and so becomes impossible to manage because we can no longer keep things in their place. By placing limits on ourselves we might well succeed in fulfilling our ends, in achieving more than we would otherwise. This is because the ends that we then devise are themselves bounded. They are limited and thus realistic: they are aimed at sufficiency rather than any maximal outcome.

This notion of limits can be seen as a form of withdrawal from the social and the political, yet it is also that which makes society and the political possible. This is because boundless striving can be oppressive to others. Our striving can override the ends of others if we are more powerful, more aggressive or more clear-sighted in our desire than they are. Boundless striving, we can argue, leads to a disregard of the other, to a blinkered and ignorant refusal or inability to accept the needs and rights of others. It leads to our failure to acknowledge any constraints on ourselves, to see any need for limits. We are too self-absorbed, self-centred and irresponsible to see the effects of our striving and so it leads to a lack of sympathy with the other, and a concern only for ourselves. In the jargon of post-structuralism (Deleuze and Guattari, 1988), 'empty' striving can be equated with transgression, or the radicalisation of desire aimed at breaching the conformity of the bourgeois order. The effect, however, is to transgress on the weak and the powerless, even as we might claim to be furthering their interests (King, 2004, 2005).

The importance of the therapy of limits can be further explicated by looking in more detail at the idea of sufficiency, and in particular at the differences between *self-*

sufficiency and *sufficiency for ourselves*. Superficially the terms appear to be similar, but there are significant differences. Self-sufficiency is ensuring that we deal with our own needs ourselves: it is being independent. Sufficiency for ourselves is having enough for our requirements, but this need not be obtained by ourselves; we need not be independent of others, and we might indeed be very reliant on others. Both concepts, however, deal with the placing of limits. In the case of self-sufficiency, we are limiting the *processes* of provision and consumption; with sufficiency for ourselves we are limiting the *levels* of provision and consumption. Of course, limiting the processes might also, and probably would, limit the level as well. Yet this is not the purpose, which is control over processes, first and foremost. Likewise we might minimise our reliance on others by limiting the level of consumption, but again, this is not the main purpose.

The key difference, however, is that one concept is about withdrawing from the world in the attempt to create our own subsistence, whilst the other retains a level of relation with others in seeking to control the level at which we subsist. Sufficiency for ourselves is therefore both a relational and a relative notion: it is concerned with how we relate to others as well as being dependent upon what we feel we can legitimately have – what we need and can justify – and about what we feel is good for us and which helps us to flourish. It is to understand what can reduce anxiety, insularity and isolation, whilst retaining the necessary privacy, intimacy and security of dwelling. What is important is that we examine our lives and our dwelling activity, keeping in mind the distinction of Epicurus regarding the necessary and the unnecessary, and the natural and the empty.

Therefore I would contend that the idea of sufficiency for ourselves concerns how we use limits. We need to recognise that we are bounded and not boundless. What is foremost in our minds is what is achievable and has been achieved, and what is necessary and fits within natural boundaries. Of course, we need to be aware of what is sustainable, but also what is sustaining, to be aware of what fortifies us as well as what endures. Part of this – and this links with the idea of side-constraints – is that we do not lose sight of the needs of others, and that we do not impinge upon them. We should neither ignore nor coerce others.

To be explicit, the basis of dwelling as therapy is to recognise where the boundaries are and to use exclusion positively, to reclaim it as a necessary means of controlling our desires as well as access. We should see it as a form of benign proscription, a gentle shutting out, or a passing over, which is necessary to achieve our aims, and which we tend to respect quite naturally in the process of pursuing our own ends. The therapy involves our learning and coming to acknowledge that we determine the limits ourselves, that we exclude ourselves by our insistence on acting privately: this is the side-constraint. Behaviour becomes anti-social when our actions cease to be appropriate in relation to the privacy of others. This occurs when we breach the side-constraints placed on us so that our private actions become publicised, and they begin to interfere with the private relations and activities of others. Our behaviour becomes unwontedly inclusive. It is a forced inclusivity, where we have unreasonably taken others over, where we have included them in our activities and ourselves into theirs, but without their consent. We are socialising our private behaviour, and it becomes antisocial because it is no longer private. So

antisocial behaviour is that which destroys private life, and it is behaviour that is no longer, and cannot be, private.

This discussion on Epicurus helps us with the issues we have considered in this book: the disconnection of insularity, the excess of solitude and the flight from responsibility. These are all made possible by the implacability and exclusion of dwelling, and can be seen as the result of an inability to accept what we are and where we are. In each of these discussions we have suggested the need for balance: we need a degree of insularity; we can benefit from solitude and there is a difference between being lonely and alone, but that taken too far solitude can and will be destructive. All the elements discussed here can be described as essential for dwelling, yet taken to extremes or used wrongly, they can be harmful to us. We therefore need a sense of perspective, some means of moderating or limiting this situation without ridding dwelling of the necessary and helpful aspects of these elements. Insularity is needed, but should be kept in check to prevent us from withdrawing entirely. Withdrawing and leading a quiet life where we separate the public from the private is, as Epicurus tells us, part of limiting our desires and reducing empty striving. This is assisted by the exclusionary capability of dwelling. Yet to withdraw entirely, out of anxiety or even fear – to use dwelling to hide behind – is to become entrapped, to lose a sense of proportion, and to decouple ourselves from our fellows and their society. It is a form of self-imprisonment, a dependency on dwelling, rather than being sufficient to oneself. We need then to keep in clear sight what we have dwelling for, and more so than ever this returns us to our starting point, to the idea of the implacability of dwelling. Dwelling is an object that is palpable and hard. It can and does exist for us, but it would still exist without us. It can be for us or against us in its implacability. And so what matters is not its objectivity, not just that it is a thing, but that it is a *meaningful* thing, a *useful* thing. It has a meaning and so we use it. But of course, it gains a meaning because we *can* use it. So instead of just *thereness* – its physicality – we perhaps also ought to suggest its *readiness*, its ability to give meaning through use, and its being a receptacle of the things that make up our ordinary world, and so it is that which we are in the midst of.

It is in this way that we become sufficient for ourselves, as beings who can create meaning through the use to which we put things. And when we withdraw – when we seek to attain a degree of exclusion – we do so not out of any malign intent, or to hurt others who cannot enter, but because we need this in order to create and maintain meaning, so that that we can create dwelling as it is intended to be, as a place where we can be with those we love and insist on no others being present.

The point of all this, I would suggest, is that much depends on how we use dwelling, and this is not a matter of design or building – although that can help or hinder – but of making use of the dwelling so that it does for us what we want and need. So dwelling could not ‘save’ Blake, the main character in Gus van Sant’s *Last Days*, nor would dwelling ‘redeem’ Alexander in Andrei Tarkovsky’s *The Sacrifice*, or help us to determine whether he was a holy fool or just plain mad. What it can do is hold us so that we are able to act, and it is how we act and respond to whom and what is around us that matters. By setting proper limits – which Blake was singularly incapable of doing, as we saw in the disorder of both his mansion and his life generally – we might be able to use insulation to protect us and keep us secure

rather than to accelerate our decline. By placing a boundary around ourselves, and properly regulating its porosity, we might be able to control our relations with the world and connect more fully with others, so that we do not feel forced into the selfish (or self-sufficient?) act of Alexander.

What we need to do – and this is the therapy – is to use the implacability and exclusionary qualities of dwelling positively so that we can control the way we live, so that we can survive and thrive. This is the end point of Hiroshi Teshigahara's *Woman of the Dunes* where the man comes to the same acceptance of his environment as the woman does. He accepts the horizon – the boundary – around him; he deliberately chooses the tight, constrained horizon of the sand pit rather than the far horizon of the sea meeting the sky. The dwelling he was forced into has worked its therapy on him, it has dealt with his malaise. It is as if he has followed Epicurus's prescriptions – the five-point method – and found that what he thought he wanted was not the route to happiness. Instead of searching for scientific discovery and professional recognition, he has come to realise that this means nothing without a secure sense of place.

In our mercifully milder and placid environment, where the walls and roof hold fast and we take our long walks along the beach and back along the cliff, we too can come to recognise that the implacable and excluding elements of dwelling can protect us. It is these elements that allow us to feel secure, to nurture others, to be intimate in a protective environment, and to go out into the world with some sense of assurance and certainty. Without dwelling taking this form and being just as it is, none of this would be possible. Yet we can also get wrapped up in dwelling: we can use it to hide away from others, to prevent interaction, to keep the world out, or as a rock to hide under. This is what the therapeutic sense of dwelling is aimed at avoiding.

Once we realise *and accept* that dwelling is implacable and also a means of exclusion, we can appreciate how it can be both destructive and supportive, that it can protect both the good and the bad. This means we have to question it, in particular how we use it, what we use it for, and what meaning it has for us. When we see dwelling as therapeutic we mean this sense of the positive, of dwelling not as a cure – because, after all, this is only a metaphor (Nussbaum, 1994) – but as living well and properly. In particular, we should see it as a means of assuaging the overly material on the one hand, and the pathologically subjective or internal, on the other.

By setting limits on dwelling, on what we exclude or allow in and why, and so how we manage the dwelling's implacability, we can hope to live well and free from anxiety. We have to train ourselves to see what is positive in dwelling and how we use it, and to place limits on that use to ensure that we remain aware of others.

What dwelling is

And so I want to end this Chapter – this whole project – by making a dangerous move. This discussion on Epicurus opens up the question of what dwelling does, and makes the need for an answer to the question explicit. If we wish to be more mechanistic, this leads us into a discussion on what makes housing work, and so

we return to Le Corbusier's fantasy of housing that fits us as we 'ought' to be. I do not want to fall into the trap of writing a 'manual for dwelling'; you can put your pictures where you like, or even give them to the servants. But what I want to do – and this may be just as facile and naïve as it was for a 1920s modernist – is to try to establish a set of principles for the acceptance of dwelling as it is. Or, if it is not possible to determine some principles, then some means by which we might identify, and perhaps necessarily idealise, a series of implications that flow from our use of our dwelling. So here it is, a set of propositions, in all their tentative idealism, about what dwelling is, could be, might be, or even has to be:

1. We are more concerned with use than the 'show' of dwelling.
2. The use of dwelling creates meaning.
3. Dwelling provides us with a sense of belonging, where there is a reciprocal investment, so that we become entwined with the dwelling.
4. There is a robustness and resilience in dwelling: it can take our use and accommodate us as we are in our lack of concern and impudence towards what we depend upon.
5. It is adaptive and changes as we do.
6. It has permanence and is always there for us. Wherever we are, our dwelling still is, and we gain comfort from that, from the thought that we can return and that our loved ones are safe there.
7. The permanence of dwelling is enhanced because it settles in memory, and so we retain past dwelling whilst living in the present.
8. Dwelling is not often made-to-measure, but is arrived at piecemeal. In this sense it can be both settled and yet never finished. Dwelling can never be created whole, even when purpose-built to our own design. Only when we begin to live in it and to use it do we start to create it as a dwelling in its fullest sense.
9. It keeps our secrets and protects our modesty. It hides us, and prevents the gaze of others from denuding us. We can be intimate without embarrassment, and embarrassed and embarrassing without unwanted intimacy.
10. It offers us security and so keeps us physically, emotionally and ontologically safe.
11. Dwelling accepts us readily when we accept it.

Coda

Out and Back



I have now retraced my steps and come home. The only thing predetermined in this journey, the only inevitable part of it, is that I would return home. For what else could I have sensibly done; what else do I have to rely on? Whether we want to do policy or theory, whether we are positivists or constructionists, realists or relativists, Marxists or conservatives, we all eventually come home.

But of course, this has a double meaning. I have returned, quite literally, to a number of certainties – there are eleven of them – which state my views on dwelling. It is these that the method used to begin my journey was aimed at bringing forth. But I knew what these certainties were before I started – I really was certain – and my implacable support for them has only been helped by a good walk.

And so when we go out, we do this so that we can come back. What we are doing is working our way around a circuit, seeing some interesting sights, taking in the view, perhaps seeing some things in a new way as the seasons change and the colours brighten or fade. Our mood may alter our perception as much as the seasons do, and so we can always be expectant, not knowing how we might see things when we look.

This is what dwelling is. It is out and back: out along the beach and back along the cliff. The sea glistens in the sun, the white horses rising and falling in the distance; the sky is a perfect blue and the sand underfoot accepts us, marking our journey,

telling everyone where we have been. And we look up to the cliff and anticipate the view, where perhaps, once we are there and if we are lucky, we can see our own footprints before the tide washes them away.

But what makes the journey worthwhile, what gives it its meaning, is taking others with us, and pointing out to them the colours, the contrasts, the wildlife, the way ahead and where we have been. And then we all go home, back to the familiar place, which has remained unchanged, and we open the door – because we can – and then close it – because we should.

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