Impossible Totality and Domesticity: Designed Interiors as Monsters

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Abstract: The unbecoming is inevitable and necessary. Design seeks an encompassing totality of vision that treats the world as an interior. Ancient cosmologies order place from the familiar (home) to the beyond (divine). To approach the divine exceeds human capacity and is thus monstrous. Literary morality tales warn us of the hubris of our quest for perfection; contemporary design offers similar examples: uninhabitable minimalism; pastoral landscape simulacra; the unheimlich Modern; and anxious and oppressive transparency. The article presents three cases of unbecoming monsters: Nathaniel Hawthorne, John Pawson, and the claim for perfection; Narcissus, Marie Antoinette, and the reflexive gaze; Mary Shelley, Mies van der Rohe, and the Belgian Blue. Each exemplifies an overreach in design that abandons the domestic and whose resulting *unheimlichkeit* provokes an uncanny reaction. The concluding section addresses the process of designing from a position opposite to the desire for totality. Designing interiors for people embraces imperfection, not as a weakness, but as an antidote for creating divine monsters.

Fig 1: (left) Cubo.cc, *Creepy Girl*, 2008, virtual human replica; (right) Detail from Jacob Pieter Gowy, *The Fall of Icarus*, 1650, oil on canvas.

Introduction

In Greek mythology, Daedalus serves as a warning for the hubris of designers who fail to consider the consequences of their quest for design quality. Daedalus' name, not incidentally, means 'clever worker'; his skill was unsurpassed and his creations were exquisite, complex, and clever. And each ultimately led to tragedy. The complexity of his Cretan Labyrinth imprisoned the Minotaur and hindered efforts to slay the beast, yet was ultimately undone by a roll of thread. After designing the Labyrinth, Daedalus was himself imprisoned in a tower on Crete so he could not divulge the Labyrinth's secret. He crafted wings to enable him and his son, Icarus, to fly to freedom. Icarus, exhilarated by the technology, strayed too close to the sun, melting the wax binding the feathers in his wings, and plunged to his death in the sea. And Daedalus' jealousy of his nephew Perdix's growing design ability – Perdix had invented the saw and the compass - led him to kill the boy by throwing him from the Acropolis.

Literature and myth use the fantastic and the extreme to convey cautionary tales. The grasp for perfection into the realm of the divine, beyond human capacity, ends in rupture, a failure with severe consequences. Daedalus' stories are parables for the designer about unintended consequences, the limits of technology, and the hubris of total control. They have literature's license to inhabit the world of the fantastical from which to divulge tales of the prototypical designer's overreach.

But what of the real? Similar failures necessarily occur in the human realm - the real world, so to speak - but is hard to find such equally extreme consequences. Life-threatening failures tend to be of a technical rather than an experiential nature: structural miscalculation leading to disastrous collapse, for example. Icarus's plunge was precipitated by materials failure, yet the lesson is of Daedalus' hubris in designing a device for flight, a capacity not ceded to the non-divine in Greek mythology. Perhaps the critical failures are those which occur in the human

experience of dwelling and produce design outcomes so unbecoming as to be unsuited for their essential purpose of habitation.

Consider the titillating rumors that emerge from behind the scenes of architectural history: Edith Farnsworth famously unwilling to spend time in the retreat designed for her by Mies van de Rohe, for example, or John Pawson supposedly unable to live in the minimalist house he designed for himself. These stories serve as cautionary tales of the designers' quest for a totalizing absolute perfection whose product turns monstrous, overstepping the boundary of the human, the domestic, and the familiar to become strange, foreign, and *unheimlich*.

These stories may be so attractive because they bring the divine designer back to earth and serve as morality tales of hubris and overreach. Yet Edith Farnsworth did indeed live in her glass box (with or without Mies) as did John Pawson in his own minimalist residence. It is reasonable to assume that they did experience the fruits of their design labors, but perhaps something was just off enough as to keep them from fully inhabiting them. Perhaps it was an anxiety bred of exposure or the simple inability to toss laundry to the floor after undressing; in any case, the aspirations of the design fold back in on themselves, causing anxiety and resistance.

This phenomenon is remarkable because it reveals our sense of anxiety and unease as a recognition of the uncanny, something beyond our conception and belonging to the divine realm. We intuitively respond to the transgression of the strange, foreign, and divine into the familiar, the domestic, and the human. Having no place in our world, it appears as an abomination that should have remained hidden. In others words, a monster.

The same holds true for the process of design. As design reaches for divine perfection, its product becomes monstrous to us. But it is precisely because of the unbecoming that it will never fully leave the human realm. The unbecoming is a final, insurmountable boundary before the divine, one which may be transgressed in literature, but in the real world is a zone inhabited by monstrous designs. Like attempting to reach light speed, the experience is asymptotic – from the Greek meaning 'not falling together' – one of never-becoming, not of failure to achieve ends, but. This is the key argument of the article: the unbecoming is at once a quality, a state of being, and an active process preventing the creation of divine monsters, and domesticity is the antidote.

The theoretical framework for this argument lies within a critical phenomenological approach to the unbecoming and domesticity. Interiors and domesticity offer the possibility to live life as it is: individuals in motion and conditioned by time, space and interaction (intersubjectivity). An orientation based on other frameworks such as Critical Theory, Actor-Network Theory, or Feng-Shui would unfold other arguments. We rely upon studies about phenomenology and architecture written by architects and theoreticians who assume phenomenology as an inspiration for clarifying thinking about architecture, the experience of space, and for their own design practice. These include Gaston Bachelard[1], Otto Bollnow[2] and Christian Norberg-Schulz[3], as well as those who translate phenomenological themes into the practice of design, including Peter Zumthor[4], Steven Holl[5], Juhani Pallasmaa[6] and Alberto Pérez-Gómez.

In a phenomenological approach, the metaphor of senses replaces the priority of vision. It suggests the concept of a living space as one which humans can engage through a complexity of impressions, an intertwining of senses, an encountering of emotions, and a crossing of thoughts. Architectural theorist Eduard Führ argues that a phenomenological viewpoint brings us closer to architectural matters, the experience of day-to-day existence, and thereby empowers us to understand architecture 'as a part of our lifeworld'.[7]
Perceptive elements such as air flow, colour, texture, rhythm, and light are to be integrated with design elements such as planes, sections, site, slopes, and thresholds as well as programmatic elements such typology, structure, and form. In this way, imperfections and traces become the signs of the life of all days. Life thereby be-comes. Death is the unbecoming, the delta, the end, the totality.

The article first explains the interrelationship of perfection, the divine, and monsters, placing them on a continuum from the domestic to the divine. It describes unbecoming as an asymptotic

boundary condition much like to the 'uncanny valley' that occurs in robotics: a sudden drop in comfort as robots assume human characteristics, triggering anxiety in the observer. This state of unbecoming is illustrated with cases both within and outside of design, elucidating the characteristics of 'design monsters.' In the second section, three cases of such monsters are presented: John Pawson's uninhabitable minimalist house, Marie Antoinette's anxiety provoking cabinet of mirrors in the chateau of the Petit Trianon, and the world-as-interior created by Mies van der Rohe's Farnsworth House. Each represents an overreach that nearly annuls the domestic realm: time and freedom banished from Pawson's residence, the recursive, anxious gaze in the cabinet of mirrors, and conversely, exposure extinguishing privacy and habitation in the Farnsworth House. Each case is introduced by a literary morality tale that acts as a frame for the unbecoming to follow.

The article concludes by reflecting that design of domestic interiors can facilitate dwelling as home-becoming if it sees such space as a domain where individuals - alone or in community - may feel at home. The article aims to bind the concept of domesticity with home as territory where the individual may feel at 'his/her own' whatever it means for each one. Perfection, however, remains a divine matter.

Total design and divine monsters

At its apogee in the mid-20th century, the Heroic Modern movement's belief in rationality, technology, progress, and the power of design formed a critical mass that spawned the concept of Total Design. Its scope was all-encompassing, a practice of design that would envelop the breadth of human existence. It was the logical outcome of the project of Modernity: the rationality of science together with development of technology would enable universal advances in quality of life, and design would both embody this new world and shepherd its implementation. As its name implies, Total Design was totalizing, simultaneously implosive and explosive.[8] It would 'subject every detail, every surface, to an over-arching vision'[9] whose paradigm was a 'domestic interior completely detached from the chaotic pluralism of the world.'[10] At the same time, the designer's task would radiate out into the world, seen as a *Gesamtkunstwerk* in which 'The planet is transformed into a single interior, which needs design. All architecture becomes interior design.'[11]

The interiorized world, although illuminated in numerous anticipatory utopian visions by designers, would prove to require a level of domination and logistics beyond the capacity of even its most ardent proponents. The complete interior, by contrast, was realized on occasion. The large, undifferentiated, and windowless interior of the 1898 Vienna Secession Exhibition Building shuts out the profane city, 'intensifying the implosion of artistic energy'[12] within. The resulting intensity is, however, not without its costs. The visitor becomes stifled within the fully enclosed, complete world unto itself, This apparently happened to Adolf Loos, whose critique of the building 'thinly masks the fear of being overwhelmed by both the decorative excess and the absolute uniformity of style.'[13]

Total Design's ambition was to create a pervasive, seamless, and complete environment that would guarantee the full benefits of modernity to everyone, everyplace. It was a vision of design perfection, bringing the project of Modernity to its successful completion. But its totality proved impossible to achieve and its fragments proved *unheimlich*. And yet, interestingly, the ideal of perfection lies within the definition of *monster.* Long before its contemporary negative connotation, the 14th century definition of a monster also included 'something extraordinary or unnatural; an amazing event or occurrence; …a marvel' *[14]* whose qualities were so pronounced as to exceed human capacity. This quality of 'more than human and or ordinary excellence' and of 'surpassing beauty, perfection, excellence, etc.'[15] places this particular monster of perfection in the realm of the divine.

It is helpful to note that the realm of the divine world has not always been as dualistic as in Western culture. The mapping of place and space in the cosmos of polytheistic mythologies extends from a center (the domestic, the home) through the periphery (a transitional zone to realms beyond human experience and control) to the beyond-the-periphery (the foreign; beyond human experience).[16] Humans inhabit the center; benevolent deities occupy the near ground; and divinities or monstrous forces strike from the periphery. While all the non-humans can be

considered monsters, a distinction is made between benevolent deities that are portrayed anthropomorphically or associated with domesticated animals and the destructive divinities who appear as fully non-human forms or undomesticated species such as serpents.[17]

The uncanny valley

Capricious forces inhabit the peripheral zone between the human and the divine realms. In the tales of Daedalus, for example, it was the goddess Aphrodite's intervention which led to the Minotaur, a monster with the head of a bull on the body of a man, and it was Athena, another goddess with human form, who transformed the doomed Perdix into a partridge. In both cases, the overlap between the realms of the human and the divine is populated by deities and monsters who serve to nonetheless clearly delineate the human from the divine. Whenever humans threaten to bridge the divide, something happens to keep them in their world. That this action is not infrequently unpleasant or frightening, though not always fatal, illustrates the asymptotic nature of the quest for perfection. While deities and monsters regularly traverse the human realm, humans themselves may never become fully divine. It is the gap – the unbridgeable space of the nearest possible moments – that manifests the 'unbecoming' of the never quite converging lines.

The mapping of the cosmos into three zones – center, periphery, and beyond-the-periphery - may thus provide a useful analogy for considering overreach in design. Having established the cautionary presence of a peripheral boundary zone, the task moves to identifying the analogous phenomena in the human experience of and response to monstrous design.

Roboticists striving to replicate human behaviors in machines have identified a similar phenomenon as their creations become ever more life-like. Dubbed 'the uncanny valley,' it describes the dip in comfort experienced when viewing robotic replicas of human form or action.[18] The concept is visually presented as a two axis with familiarity increasing on the vertical axis and human likeness increasing along the horizontal axis. Industrial and humanoid robots, found on the left side of the graph, are familiar and clearly not-human. Healthy humans are found on the far right side at the maximums of familiarity and human likeness. But shortly before maximum human likeness is achieved, familiarty undergoes a deep dip linked to discomfort: the epynomous 'uncanny valley.' Corpses and zombies first inhabited the minimum point. Though clearly possessing high human likeness, their simultaneous lifelessness provokes a cognitive dissonance. It is this 'unbecoming' quality of being not-quite human that causes anxiety and revulsion. As technologies improved, new generations of almost-human replicas crowded the dip. Yet the uncanny valley hypothesis holds that roboticists are struggling in vain to bridge the final, insurmountable gap. An entire genre of science fiction is devoted to the topic; much of it comprises morality tales of technological hubris ending dreadfully.

The uncanny valley represents the asymptotic boundary zone of never-becoming through un-becoming. That the uncanny valley has also been explained by association with the *unheimlich* – literally, 'the unbecoming' - is unsurprising. Sigmund Freud exploited the term's dual definitions as he elaborated the concept in psychoanalysis. Freud undertook a dialectic comparison of the *unheimlich* and its base *heimlich*. The latter word concurrently represents two distinct ideas: the familiar and agreeable of the domestic (the 'canny' in the Anglo-Saxon origin) and that which is concealed or hidden. The *unheimlich*, by contrast, is that which is beyond knowledge or conception (the 'uncanny') and that which ought to have remained hidden but which has come to light. Both meanings parallel the monstrous as belonging to the divine realm and as an abomination. The *unheimlich* acts as a signal rooted in the real (the familiar, the domestic, and the human, in contrast to the strange, the foreign, and the divine) which creates angst and anxiety when the boundary is neared.

Three cases of unbecoming monsters follow. Each exemplifies an overreach in design that abandons the domestic and whose resulting *unheimlichkeit* provokes an uncanny reaction. The works of design and their literary counterparts are not intended as definitive categories; rather, they are themselves parables, cautionary stories which leave room for the imaginative and deductive facilities of the reader to reveal other monsters.

Fig 2: (left) John Pawson, *Pawson House*, 1995, London; (right); W.E. Hill, *My Wife and My Mother-In-Law*, 1915, pen and ink.

Nathaniel hawthorne, john pawson, and the claim for perfection

> *'As the last crimson tint of the birthmark--that sole token of human imperfection--faded from her cheek, the parting breath of the now perfect woman passed into the atmosphere, and her soul, lingering a moment near her husband, took its heavenward flight. Then a hoarse, chuckling laugh was heard again! Thus ever does the gross fatality of earth exult in its invariable triumph over the immortal essence which, in this dim sphere of half development, demands the completeness of a higher state.'[19]*

> *In Nathaniel Hawthorne's 1848 short story 'The Birthmark' a scientist becomes obsessed with a birthmark on his wife's cheek. His quest to eliminate that sole imperfection leads him to create a potion that, when applied, causes her to simultaneously achieve perfection but also to die. Hawthorne's characters cross into the realm of the divine – as hubristic creators and flawless objects –paying a steep price for the transgression. Hawthorne reflects on the impossibility of human perfection, writing, 'It was the fatal flaw of humanity which Nature, in one shape or another, stamps ineffaceably on all her productions, either to imply that they are temporary and finite, or that their perfection must be wrought by toil and pain.'*

The Minimalist aesthetic seeks silence and harmony through 'empty' interiors, eschewing decorative 'noise' and cacophonous materiality in favour of sobriety and purism. Its interiors are intended to induce peace and calmness. The aesthetic is defined by geometrical lines, natural materials, perfect and clean surfaces, and monochromatic colours, with white as a favourite. Only very few objects are allowed. There is a search for perfection through the purity of form, the exhaustive attention to each detail, and to the essence of elements. The house appears as a temple of silence, as a temple of no sensorial pollution.

John Pawson considers himself a Minimalist in both his design work and his own lifestyle. His design work manifests an intensified experience of such pureness, cleanliness, and sublime perfection. His own residence, the Pawson House, is a complete renovation of the interior of a traditional Victorian house in West-London. Indeed, the interior was almost completely removed by the renovation. In the new plan, 'the entrance is situated on the ground floor, which also incorporates the living room. The living room has a view over the collective gardens in the backyard. Pawson chose to place the kitchen and dining room in the lower ground, which gives entrance to the individual garden. This garden is rather a patio that doesn't reveal much of itself to the neighbors or the public in general. The two upper floors contain the master bedroom and the two bedrooms for the children. The stairs are designed like a one piece object, without seams. They separate the Pawson house from the neighbor's house over the full length of the house.'[20]

The left half of Figure 2 shows a room of complete, pure whiteness. There's a bench but it looks more a piece of art to admire than an object with a function. Framed by the verticality of the walls, the bench is placed in a discreet niche, almost losing its dimension and volume, while the stairs reinforce the geometric rhythm. The immaculate vision this room presents is emphasized by the interplay of light and shadow, offering the impression of attending a mystic experience. The interiors of Mies van der Rohe's Lake Shore Drive apartments have come under similar scrutiny; 'one perceives elegance, openness, and sobriety …[that] however, turns into exposure whilst the sobriety somehow equals glamour – thus erasing any feelings of warmth or enclosure that signal 'home' for most people'.[21] A totalizing vision such as that of Mies's hyper-designed interiors demands an invasive level of control to maintain the formal perfection after it is inhabited.

From a phenomenological view, the architectural attempt to rid a design of the effects of any imperfection leaves individuals unsettled state, unmoored in both time and place. One is left wondering if it is possible to reconcile such a full devotion to emptiness with the experience of dwelling: if the interior is so seamless as to cause the deepest sensation of visual silence, what space is left for the act of inhabitation? Dwelling anchors the experience of time and space by impregnating space with subjective traces and populating time with memories. For example, the concept of poverty in wabi-sabi philosophy embraces simplicity and imperfection in details, materials, and surfaces. Its intentional imperfection reflects its underlying principle of human fallibility.

Pawson's vision of the perfect interior differs fundamentally; his ascetic formalism springs from his ethical minimalism. His quest to realize the perfect interior is at once philosophical and aesthetic, leading him to a conundrum like that of Hawthorne's protagonist: achieving perfection annuls the thing itself.

Fig 3: (left) Chambre de Marie-Antoinette, 1700s, Petit Trianon, Versailles. (right) Detail from John William Waterhouse, *Echo and Narcissus*, 1903, oil on canvas.

Narcissus , marie antoinette, and the reflexive gaze

> *In the Roman poet Ovid's telling,[22] Narcissus was an exceedingly handsome young hunter whose high self-regard caused him to dismiss his many suitors. Amongst them was Echo, a nymph who had fallen in love with him after seeing him hunting in the forest. After Narcissus spurned her advances, Echo was devastated and withered away to just the whisper that bears her name today. Nemesis, the goddess of revenge, lured Narcissus to the pool where he would fall in love with his own reflection. Unable to pull away from the vision of perfection before him and never realizing he was gazing upon himself, Narcissus eventually dies at the edge of the pool.*

In her apartments in the chateau of the Petit Trianon, Marie Antoinette had operable panels installed to block the windows. Curiously, their interior faces were mirrors. Her quest was for privacy, a center in which she could find relief from her duties and the royal court, and her tactics had a clear spatial logic. The grounds of the Petit Trianon were themselves a retreat within the larger palace complex of Versailles. The chateau, one folly among several created there, held the Queen's apartments, a further private sphere. When the panels were closed within her chamber, a final personal space is created.

The presence of the mirrors (Figure 3, left hand image) make this a strangely recursive space, not only shutting out the world but intensifying the experience of the self within. It is easy to imagine Marie Antoinette, free at last from prying eyes, gazing with relief into the mirror and able to finally see only herself. And then, perhaps, she notices the birthmark or becomes aware of her many selves staring back at her. Jacques Lacan, drawing upon Freud's development of the *unheimlich*, described this sudden moment of self-awareness as the experience of anxiety.[23] Lacan argues that the revelatory moment heralds the subject's recognition that he or she is not autonomous and shatters Narcissus's impasse as the spell of self-adoration is broken. In the stories of Narcissus and Marie Antoinette, failure follows the attempt to attain a truly autonomous, and hence divine, state of existence. In fiction, this state can be achieved, with Narcissus left trapped until he himself withers away. In the designed interior, however, the transgression is inexorably averted by the appearance of anxiety, the signal of the real.

In the 19th century, this type of interiorized private space would find its way into bourgeois culture as the gender distinct refuges of the boudoir and the *sale d'antiquites*.[24] Their intensification produced fetishistic 'cabinets' that showcased the bourgeois fashion of world creation, putting its subjects - trinkets, artworks, or the people themselves - on display .[25] It was these complete-unto-themselves worlds of excessive accumulation which sparked the Early Modern ethical and aesthetic countermovement for purity, sobriety, and *Existenzminimum* dwellings.

Fig 4: (left) William Leftwich, *Mies van der Rohe, in gallery, with Edith Farnsworth Residence model,* 1947, photograph, Museum of Modern Art, New York; (right) Still image from *Bigger, Stronger, Faster*, 2008, documentary film.

Mary shelley, mies van der rohe, and the belgian blue

> Hubris proves the undoing of the clever worker at the heart of Mary Shelley's 1818 novel 'Frankenstein; or the Modern Prometheus.' Seeking both social and literal immortality, Victor Frankenstein experimented with creating life through technology, first assembling and then successfully animating a human representation. His creation is at first unselfconscious of his appearance, but grows resentful at his treatment by human society, eventually fleeing to the Arctic. Frankenstein himself suffers tragedy: his (other) son is killed by his creation and he spends his life thereafter looking over his shoulder for the monster he believes is pursuing him.

In 1945, Edith Farnsworth, a Chicago doctor, commissioned Mies van der Rohe to design a house for her country property. In 1951, construction was completed on a deceptively simple glass-and-steel house floating lightly above the site's expected flood level.[26] The design expressed the ideals of the International Style and of Mies himself - transparency, structural clarity, and lightness – all reduced to their essences. The use of floor-to-ceiling glass, an unobtrusive structural system, and the excision of traditional elements such as doors, windows, superfluous furniture – and even rooms and walls – was intended to create a seamless, transcendental interpenetration of house and Nature.[27]

Edith Farnsworth was not to experience the peaceful encounter with Nature she intended when she commissioned the country retreat. Her house had become an icon of Modern architecture even before its completion, attracting unwanted visitors. 'A less than happy Edith Farnsworth moved into her now famous house. In the morning she would come out of the bathroom in her robe to find uninvited Japanese tourists looking in not at her but at the house. Students would rent boats and row over to her house. Devoted students and professionals would hop over the gates when they thought she wasn't there.'[28] And van der Rohe, moved by the natural setting, privileged the visual connection of inside and outside but overlooking the privacy of the inhabitant, also allowed views inside. The Farnsworth House is a tremendous manifestation of the Modern ideal of transparency, but this aspect is pushed to an extreme degree. Farnsworth's commentary is a clear expression of the anxiety of exposure her glass box provoked: 'The truth is that in this house with its four walls of glass I feel like a prowling animal, always on the alert. I am always restless. Even in the evening I feel like a sentinel on guard day and night'.[29]

Yet the sensation of the *unheimlich* is not caused by exaggeration alone; it manifests itself when the intensity of individually coherent parts makes the cumulative object itself strange to human experience. Shelley exaggerates certain qualities by visually intensifying them to convey the monstrous outcome of Victor Frankenstein's hubris. Frankenstein used technology to assume a role of life-giver reserved for the divine. His creation, in turn, was seen as monstrous by humans because its assemblage registered as not quite human. Its proportions were off kilter, its scale exaggerated, and evidence of its construction made visible. A similar cognitive rupture occurs when regarding Belgian Blue cattle, a livestock bred to exploit a genetic mutation that doubles the typical number of muscle fibers and also substantially reduces body fat. The Belgian Blue's selective enhancement exaggerates features that are typically invisible, resulting in an excessive, unsettling version of a familiar domestic animal.

Fig 5: Lina Bo Bardi, *Casa de Vidro*, 1951, Morumbi, Sao Paulo, Brazil

There are, of course, other ways to integrate landscape and a glass house. In 1951, the Brazilian architect Lina Bo Bardi designed her own Glass House (Casa de Vidro) for herself and her husband Pietro Maria Bardi. She treated the landscape as a constructive element as decisive as material, light, proportion, shape, detail, or temperature. The house is '"hidden in a portion of the Atlantic Forest on one of the highest hills in the suburb of Morumbi (…) it is a sober, rational design, one might almost say it is 'Miesanic' (deriving from the architect of the Bauhaus, Mies van der Rohe), but already rendered Brazilian by the Nature that embraces it,

more organic and more feminine. Feminine in the delicacy of its details, in the sky blue vitrotil of the flooring, in the curtains replacing walls, in the subtle curve of the roof and in the care for comfort. It is a house to welcome people. 'It is an open house', said Lina countless times".[30]

As may be seen in Figure 5, the 'Miesanic' reference most likely stems from the similar use in both structures of large windows allowing an overview of the surrounding landscape. But the two houses are quite dissimilar concerning the phenomenon of inhabiting and heimlichkeit. The Glass House comes alive through and immersion with objects and the neighbouring landscape: "The years of a life lived by this house are represented by the art works, by the objects with or without artistic or commercial value scattered everywhere. The 'junk', as Lina would point out, should mingle with 'high culture'. A cheap glass bottle in the form of the Jules Rimet football cup rubs shoulders with a baroque angel: a little peasant's bench keeps company with a Chaise Longue by Le Corbusier, a little plastic car, a child's birthday present, rests at the feet of a sculpture by Ernesto de Fiori, and so on. Objects collected throughout more than 50 years inhabit this moving space of exceptional modern architecture that in a relationship of respect shows up the beauty of the Atlantic Forest and the necessity for its preservation".[31] (Figure 6)

Fig 6: Lina Bo Bardi, *Casa de Vidro*, 1951, Morumbi, Sao Paulo, Brazil

Bo Bardi's home, so unlike the Farnsworth House, reverberates with the phenomological experience of emotion and reason, imperfection and order, and interior and exterior space.

Designing for imperfection

This concluding section addresses the process of designing as the outcome of an attitude opposite to the desire for totality. Designing interiors for people is the antidote of designing monsters. Designing to allow imperfection is not a weakness. Rather, it is the wise consequence of considering time, atmosphere, memories, intimacy, transformation, ambiguity, fragility, and liquidity when designing a space, especially domestic ones. While it is not the aim of this article to deepen methodologies or techniques to design allowing the inscription of imperfection of daily life, we do seek remind designers of the non-objectification of spaces to inhabit and to encourage them to explore parameters like materiality, texture, light, shadow, colour, detail, rhythm, sound, landscape, balconies, terraces, windows, and doors as elements that mediate the experiencing of dwelling as an experience in motion.

Interiors justified by need and desire portray lifestyle scenarios and enhance the experience of time. They are bonded with present events, occurrences, memories of the past, and promises of the future. Because the individual both represents and is represented, creates and is created, s/he actively engages in what makes time a unique and subjective sensation.

'Home' is the space for memories and the continuity of identity - even while accommodating changes. Everything works together to create an atmosphere that awakens feelings of emotional appropriation – even if only for a brief moment. Peter Zumthor, in his book 'Atmospheres,'[32] relates the experience of interior space as a territory of perceptions resulting from a choice of materials, volumes, and forms that unfolds a phenomenology of senses.

The desire for home is for a place of security, where identity can be unfolded and traces are left behind as signs of a personal life. Gaston Bachelard identifies 'house' with 'home,' the place of daydreaming (rêverie). The house is not only the house of the present. The house shelters all the houses where the individual lived and also all the imagined or desired houses.

> And after we are in the new house, when memories of other places we have lived in come back to us, we travel to the land of motionless Childhood, motionless the way all Immemorial things are. We live fixations, fixations of happiness. We comfort ourselves by reliving memories of protection. Something closed must retain our memories, while leaving them their original value as images. Memories of the outside world will never have the same tonality as those of home and, by recalling these memories, we add to our store of dreams; we are never real historians, but always near poets,

and our emotion is perhaps nothing but an expression of a poetry that was lost.[33]

According to Bachelard, the house is meaningful because it is where the individual finds the resonance of intimate life. This intimacy can be found in a room, attic, closet, simple drawer, or in a window. The house is the interior space celebrated to stimulate those experiences while also protecting them. The house sustains the continuity of the intimate life of the individual, sheltering the past, present and future through memories and dreams. Without it, the individual would be a discontinuous being made of fragments and contingences. '[The house] maintains him through the storms of the heavens and through those of life. It is body and soul. It is the human being's first world. Before he is 'cast into the world' (…) man is laid in the cradle of the house. And always in our daydreams, the house is a large cradle. (…) life begins well, it begins enclosed, protected, all warm in the bosom of the house.'[34]

Bachelard's phenomenology matches a deep optimism with a contagious *joie de vivre*. He associates warm emotions and memories with the house, namely the first house: the house of birth and the house of the childhood. This primordial house is the refuge for the most intimate memories, such as those associated with sensations. These memories are very personal and intransmissible, though they blur with the passage of time.

The concept of multiplicity leads to theorists like Robert Venturi, who defended complexity and contradiction in architecture. He criticized architecture realized in a puritan language, pointing out that clarity of meaning results in simplification, order and rationalization, hence for perfection. Venturi writes: 'I like elements which are hybrid rather than 'pure', compromising rather than 'clean', distorted rather than 'straightforward', 'ambiguous rather than 'articulated', perverse as well as impersonal, boring as well as 'interesting', conventional rather than 'designed', accommodating rather than excluding, redundant rather than simple, vestigial as well innovating, inconsistent and equivocal rather than direct and clear. I am for messy vitality over obvious unity'.[35] This statement that embodies the motto 'less is a bore'[36] – the antidote to Mies van der Rohe's 'less is more' – arguing that architecture cannot be separated from experience of life. For Venturi, this means integrating fragments, paradoxes, contradictions, tension, improvisation… in a word: ambiguity. 'Ambiguity and tension are everywhere in an architecture of complexity and contradiction. Architecture is form *and* substance – abstract *and* concrete – and its meaning derives from its interior characteristics and its particular context'.[37]

In the age of liquid modernity,[38] 'efforts to keep the 'other', the different, the strange and the foreign at a distance, the decision to preclude the need for communication, negotiation and mutual commitment, is not the only conceivable, but the expectable response to the existential uncertainty rooted in the new fragility or fluidity of social bonds.'[39] *Heimlichkeit* not only shelters memories, it integrates the fluidity of the present with the uncertainty of the future. Within this flow, bubbles metaphorically represent the territories within which an individual performs. Bauman's concepts of 'fluidity' and 'liquefaction' are features of our time that enlighten the way of living home as well: '(…) the collapse of long-term thinking, planning and acting, and the disappearance or weakening of social structures in which thinking, planning and acting could be inscribed for a long term to come, leads to a splicing of both political history and individual lives into a series of short-term projects and episodes (…)'[40]

Fragility and liquidity are more than features of an epoch; they are expression of the human condition. Imperfection is the human protection to live, as illustrated by Hawthorne closing comment on his protagonist's fate: 'Yet, had Alymer reached a profounder wisdom, he need not thus have flung away the happiness which would have woven his mortal life of the selfsame texture with the celestial. The momentary circumstance was too strong for him; he failed to look beyond the shadowy scope of time, and, living once for all in eternity, to find the perfect future in the present.'[41]

Bauman's notions of 'fluidity' and 'liquefaction' evoke Aldo van Eyck,[42] a voice profoundly critical of architecture separated from people. His targets included the transformation of modernism into an international style 'universally applied without respect to history, human nature, context, climate, culture or building tradition'[43] as well as postmodernism and deconstructivism, which exhibit 'the same unconscionable irresponsibility toward the people who inhabited architecture'.

[44] Van Eyck called for what he named 'built homecoming ,' an architecture of everyday experience that embraces life as a continuity with ruptures and fragmentations.

Designing for mankind must approach domestic interiors as subjective creatures that allow dwelling to be a transitive place of its own story. As Juhanni Pallasmaa states, 'The ultimate meaning of any building is beyond architecture; it directs our consciousness back to the world and towards our own sense of self and being. Significant architecture makes us experience ourselves as complete embodied and spiritual beings.'[45] This defends the notion that what differentiates a non-place from a place are the traces and signs, the evidence of a person with a daily life in a space where 'things' take place. From a phenomenological point of view, 'experience ourselves as complete embodied and spiritual beings' means a process of exchange between the self and the world of life (the *Lebenswelt* in Husserlian terms) influenced by the transformations of space and time.

Domestic interiors actively participate in individual biographies, in stark contrast to the non-place within which the individual experiences no relations and where no story unfolds. Designing for imperfection allows a personal life and a subjective representation of the world to emerge; it enables a transformation of dwelling to home be-coming in potential forms of interaction with the otherness.

NOTES

[1] Gaston Bachelard, *The Poetics of Space* (Boston: Beacon Press, 1994 [1958]).

[2] Otto Bollnow, *Mensch und Raum* (Human Space, 2011, Stuttgart: Kohlhammer, 1963).

[3] Christian Norberg-Schulz, *Genius Loci, Towards a Phenomenology of Architecture* (New York: Rizzoli, 1980).

[4] Peter Zumthor, *Atmospheres: architectural environments, surrounding objects* (Atmosphären. Architektonische Umgebungen, die Dinge die uns herum, 2006, Basel: Birckhauser, 2006); *Thinking Architecture* (Architektur Denken, 1999, Birkhäuser, 2006a).

[5] Steven Holl, Juhanni Pallasmaa, and Alberto Pérez-Gómez, *Questions of Perception. Phenomenology of Architecture* (San Francisco: William Stout Publishers, 2008); Steven Holl, *Architecture Spoken* (New York: Rizzoli, 2007); Steven Holl, *Intertwining* (NY: Princeton Architectural Press, 1996).

[6] Juhanni Pallasmaa, *The Eyes of the Skin. Architecture and the Senses*, (New York: John Wiley, 2005), 11.

[7] Shirazi, M. Reza, 'On Phenomenological Discourse in Architecture' *Environmental & Architectural Phenomenology*, Vol. 23, no. 3 (2012): 11-15.

[8] Mark Wigley, "Whatever Happened to Total Design?" *Harvard Design Magazine*, Summer 1998, no. 5 (1998): 1-8.

[9] Ibid., 1.

[10] Ibid., 1.

[11] Ibid., 3.

[12] Ibid., 3.

[13] Ibid., 3.

[14] Oxford English Dictionary Online, #2 s.v. "monster" (accessed December 2012).

[15] Ibid., #5b s.v. "divine".

[16] Mark S. Smith, *The Origins of Biblical Monotheism: Israel's Polytheistic Background and the Ugaritic Texts* (NY: Oxford University Press, 2000), 27.

[17] Ibid., 32.

[18] The concept of the 'uncanny valley' was first hypothesized by Masahiro Mori in his 1970 article, "Bukimi no tani" (Trans. "The Uncanny Valley"). Original publication in Japanese in *Energy*, no. 7 (1970): 33–35.

[19] Nathaniel Hawthorne, "The Birthmark", in *Mosses from an Old Manse* (first published 1846), (Modern Library Classics edition, 2003) 28-43.

[20] Tim Verhetsel, Fatima Pombo and Hilde Heynen, "Emptiness as potential. Different conceptions of the sober interior." *Architectoni.ca 2* (1) (2013): 35.

[21] Hilde Heynen, "Leaving traces: Anonymity in the modernist house," in *Designing the Modern Interior. From the Victorians to Today*. ed. Penny Sparke et al. (Oxford: Berg, 2009), 119.

[22] Ovid, Book 3 of his *Metamorphoses*.

[23] Jacques Lacan, in his seminar 1962–1963 "L'angoisse" ("Anxiety"), (5 December 1962).

[24] Diane Periton, "The Interior as Aesthetic Refuge: Edmond de Goncourt's La Maison d'un Artiste", in *Tracing Modernity* (Routledge, 2004), 137-155.

[25] Emily Apter, "Cabinet Secrets: Fetishism, Prostitution, and the Fin de Siècle Interior", *Assemblage*, June 1989, number 9 (1989): 6-19.

[26] The house nonetheless experienced occasional flooding. "It was known that the site chosen, next to the river, flooded. The floor was built six feet above the ground or two feet above the highest known flooding. The house flooded a few times ruining the silk curtains and furnishing. Except for planting wild-flowers, almost no landscaping was done. The road used for construction was left and not moved to a more appropriate location". In Donald von Fennig Wrobleski, *A Little House in the Country. The Farnsworth House*, (The Chicago Literary Club, February 23, 2009), unpaged.

[27] Alice T. Friedman, "Domestic Differences: Edith Farnsworth, Mies van der Rohe, and the General Body", in Christopher Reed (ed) *Not at Home. The suppression of domesticity in modern Art and Architecture (1996):* 184.

[28] Von Fennig Wrobleski, "A Little House in the Country. The Farnsworth House", unpaged.

[29] Friedman, "Domestic Differences: Edith Farnsworth, Mies van der Rohe, and the General Body" in Christopher Reed (ed) *Not at Home. The suppression of domesticity in modern Art and Architecture (1996):* 188.

[30] Lina Bo Bardi and Marcelo Carvalho Feraz, "Casa de Vidro/The Glass House" (Lisboa, Editorial Blau, 1999), unpaged.

[31] Ibid., unpaged.

[32] Peter Zumthor, *Atmospheres: architectural environments, surrounding objects*, (Basel: Birkhäuser, 2006).

[33] Bachelard, *The Poetics of Space*, 5-6.

[34] Ibid., 7.

[35] Robert Venturi, *Complexity and Contradiction in Architecture*, (New York: Museum of Modern Art, 1977), 16.

[36] Ibid., 17.

[37] Ibid., 20.

[38] Zygmut Bauman, *Liquid Modernity*, (Cambridge: Polity Press), 2000.

[39] Ibid., 108.

[40] Zygmut Bauman, *Liquid Times. Living in an age of uncertainty*. (Cambridge: Polity Press, 2007), 3.

[41] Hawthorne, "The Birthmark", 43.

[42] Aldo van Eyck (1918-1999) was one of the principal founders of Team 10 in 1953. Team 10 was a group of architects defending a more historical and contextual informed architecture and urbanism planning, positionating themselves away from CIAM. For the writings of Aldo van Eyck see Vincent Ligtelijn and Francis Strauven (ed.) *Alvo van Eyck: Writings*, (Amsterdam: SUN Publishers, 2vol., 2008).

[43] Robert McCarter, review of *Aldo van Eyck: Writings* by Vincent Ligtelijn and Francis Strauven, *Journal of the Society of Architectural Historians*, vol 67, number 4 (2008): 615.

[44] Ibid., 615.

[45] Pallasmaa, *The Eyes of the Skin. Architecture and the Senses*, 11.

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