

ABSTRACT: BEING A HOME

The initiative for my diploma was to explore phenomenal qualities of home-ness, and what it means to possess these qualities - *being a home*. This is connected strongly to sheltering, spatial autonomy and material ownership - but also to general feelings of belonging, safety and connectedness. It felt like a topic that was important for an aspiring architect like myself to explore.

I have in previous material processes worked with black paper in a way that afforded a quality of void-ness, explored the phenomenon of surviving chimneys, as well as plant vines and their utilization of trellis structures - some built for that purpose, others appropriated by the plants.¹ These explorations still reverberate strongly, and have informed this diploma.

Concurrently I've had, like all sentient beings, countless immaterial processes. The impressions of books, dreams, conversations, culture - things that were never intended to be part of a material process are no less reverberating, as if waiting to be applied or manifested.

We are used to thinking in such dichotomies; immaterial/material, mind/body, dream/reality, etc. Vitruvius described architecture as the child of many things, of which practice and reasoning are the parents² - the merging of one such dichotomy. Is reasoning also an immaterial practice - or practice a form of reasoning, with a non-verbal logic appearing in dialogue with a material?

Dichotomy became a method in this diploma, pursuing simultaneously a *material* and *immaterial* practice, exploring intuitively if they would inform and feed off each other - sometimes on diverging paths, sometimes converging, starting with the same initiative.

The immaterial process started with storytelling, exploring the essence of *being a home* through fiction. At the same time I was populating my

1 See more of this work in Appendixes One and Two

2 "Ea nascitur ex fabrica et ratiocinatione". Book 1, Chapter 1, paragraph 1. *Ratiocinatione* is in the english version translated as *theory*.

workspace with used objects and materials from others people's real homes, given away through an internet market place.

Gradually, I began to explore more directly the *mind itself* that experiences; I sought bodily reminders of the mind, of the boundlessness of consciousness and the constraints of space. My confrontation of the *experiencing self* became literal when I took up making self-portraits in a mirror. This led to transforming my workspace into a 1.5 m x 2 m 'infinity room' with mirrors as the inside walls, using materials I had collected. ³

Working in this new physical space inspired the revisitation of a conversation between philosophers David Chalmers and Sam Harris⁴ on consciousness. They referenced the 1974 paper *What is it like to be a bat*⁵ - which inspired Chalmers' *the hard problem of consciousness*⁶ that in turn stimulated the revival and further development on the topic of *panpsychism*⁷. A sense of familiarity when reading further on these subjects pointed towards Louis Kahn's *Essential Texts* and his language that appeared to sympathize with many of the concepts. The seemingly comparable dichotomies of mind/body, immaterial/material, immeasurable/circumstantial, order/orderliness, form/design⁸, formed a deeper landscape that I started writing an essay on. ⁹

My semi-open workspace was added a dome made of chicken wire and became something else: I became more attuned to the relationship between inner and outer sources of light, and changes in air temperature. I began to close off the gaps in the walls, isolating the 'boundlessness' of the mirrors, and increasing the 'otherness' of the space. Alien as it was, it also started to feel more as a home. I produced more of the black 'void' paper material that contrasted the endlessness of mirrors and repaired a broken LED light string that I draped across the dome. It became a paradoxical space, both cavernous and infinite. This became both a home and a site for further explorations.

3 Documented in *A Vast Emptiness Vastly Filled*

4 Podcast episode #34 - *The Light of the Mind*. 2016. SamHarris.org

5 By American philosopher Thomas Nagel

6 David Chalmers. 1995.

7 Particularly parts of Hedda Hassel Mørch's 2014 PhD thesis on the topic

8 Most of these are examples from Kahn's language.

9 Readable in "Part two: The Immaterial process"

Kahn's descriptions of finding *form*¹⁰ harmonized with the psychological concept of *spatial cognition*¹¹ - how we essentially 'try on' the world in a sub-conscious bodily assessment as the very cornerstone of our capacity for thought. Further strengthening this notion was the neuroscience of *navigating the affordance landscape*¹², a terminology that to me also strongly harmonized with the material practices i had experienced at AHO. Re-reading Kahn's words on "what a thing wants to be", prompted the question: if a brick wants to be an arch¹³, what does a body want to be?

How the mind/body relates to the material world, led back to exploring more about how the mind relates to *itself*. Revisiting the psychology of self-actualization, as explained by Scott Barry Kaufman, PhD¹⁴, I was reacquainted with Maslow's hierarchy of needs (and among them *belonging, safety* and *connectedness*), and how *peak experiences* are central to growth and well-being in life. Peak experiences are intimately connected to the complex topic of *transcendence*, which in turn is embedded in *spirituality*. As tainted as some may view these two concepts, either by religion or new-age superstition, they have long been the subject of serious humanistic inquiries in philosophy, science and architecture. Maslow made efforts to clarify the topic for a secular audience, and Kahn's way of using these terms is also humanistic.¹⁵ In typical Kahn-lingo he even uses the word *religion* in a secular meaning.¹⁶ Can peak experiences and transcendence also tell us something about being a home? Is home-ness a spiritual phenomenon?

As distant as these subjects often are perceived, behind layers of interpretation and reflection, there usually is something there - something I also saw in the material process. Transcendence was itself a integral part

10 Especially the Unitarian Church in Rochester, NY. *Essential Texts*, p 109.

11 Barbara Tversky, PhD, *Mind in Motion - How Action Shapes Thought*. 2019.

12 Research by G. Pezzulo and P. Cisek on assessment of physical affordances as a cognitive underpinning and even helpful in long-term planning. 2016.

13 Famous notion from Louis Kahn's *Essential texts*

14 Furthering the research of Abraham Maslow in the book *Transcend: The New Science of Self-Actualization*.

15 "Transcendence", p. 179 & 203; "Spirituality", likened to "monumentality", p. 22 in *Essential Texts*

16 One example: "Not ritualistic religion. I mean religion from which we derive such feelings as nobility. That religion." *Essential Texts*, p. 58

of the materiality I was working with; in the boundlessness, the void, the infinite. This connection grew stronger as it led to exploring meetings between gold leaf and a brick, the making of a shrine to things lost to time, a house for a well that doesn't exist except in a mirrored reflection, a gilded handle mounted on a piece of coal, a spiral staircase leading to an infinite room, an arched trellis utilized by a LED filament acting like a growing vine seeking light, and an endless hallway.

The phenomenon of peak experiences with architecture became interesting to investigate, leading to making a questionnaire that got 87 responses. This provided some insight into local architectural experiences as well as general reflections around them.

It became clear that peak experiences isn't necessarily connected to *being a home*, but perhaps to the act of *getting there*. Another important piece of Maslow's psychology was that of the *plateau* - seeing the sacred in the ordinary, as opposed to seeking the extra-ordinary as a boost for progression. Acceptance, contentment, peace - things one can only appreciate if learning to let go of the hunger for *more*, and seeing what is already there. Being able to do so is for many a task that is impossible to relate to, which is where the peak experiences can function as wake-up-calls and inspiration to examine life healthily. I explored this further in the aforementioned essay.

I ended up perceiving a landscape, populated with Kahn's language, works in philosophy and neuroscience, and Maslow's psychology. The only way to describe it, is being a landscape of peaks and plateaus. This landscape is vast, and I have just begun exploring, something I reflect upon in the Epilogue.