

THE POLITICS OF HOUSING METAPHORS: CHALLENGING IMAGES OF MIGRATION AND PATRIARCHY

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KEYWORDS

critical metaphorology, concepts of architecture, anti-migration politics, languages of patriarchy, the poetics of homelessness

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Abstract

Political metaphors condition social reality and mediate authority. One repeatedly used metaphor in discourses about migration and refuge is the misconception that ‘the state is a house.’ Far from only defining the modalities of inclusion and exclusion, metaphors of houses and housing evoke patriarchal political relationships between guests and hosts, homeless and homeowners, the household's head and his subjects, and the man and his women. Houses present themselves to us in ambiguous, even contradictory ways in that they both shelter and imprison. Furthermore, in spite of a general need for accommodation the state fails to provide material housing, only feigning the imagination of security. Therefore, ‘housing’ appears to be a key paradox of nationalist and chauvinist discourse. Figurative language is, however, unfinished, which is why our images of houses, charged with the theology, anthropology, politics, and language of foundations, buildings, and walls, may be challenged by critique and interpretation. Developing a critical metaphorology, committed to analyzing the framed arguments and underlying contexts of said discourses justifying patriarchy and nationalism, we describe the choice between inhabiting and abandoning ‘the house.’ Ultimately, we present counter-narratives about decaying structures of power and propose ways to take ‘housing’ issues to the streets.

1 Introduction

The most thorough efforts to arrive at an exact and unambiguous political terminology are destined to fail when it comes to formulating abstract ideas without using a language that is saturated with connotations, imaginations, or narratives. Philosophical metaphorology and linguistic phraseology theorize about the way our conceptions regarding truth and reality rely on figurative language, maintaining that metaphorical language constitutes the core of many theories about the world and society. Moreover, not only our ideas but also our actions appear to be mediated by metaphors that provide the social and cultural codes with which we refer to and interact with ourselves, others, and the world.

One source domain of metaphors that is, as we argue, crucial for the formation of society, its hierarchies, justifications, tendencies, or aims, may be termed ‘housing metaphors’ or ‘metaphors of housing.’ These metaphors seem to be critical when it comes to regulating society, exercising power, or building institutions. Regarding the idea of a possible egalitarian world society as well as issues of denied rights to asylum, the housing metaphors in question appear to inform, sometimes even determine, the con-

ditions of community and membership as well as the modalities of inclusion and exclusion. The way we talk about housing defines who is allowed inside and who has to remain outside. Demands to integrate non-citizens, to the right to have rights, limitations of cosmopolitan rights, or obligations to grant asylum to migrants or refugees depend on premises which are to an extent determined by the very language, terms, tropes, metaphors, and narratives politicians, journalists, and philosophers utilize.

Considering the importance of egalitarian geographical and social mobility in a globalized, yet limited, world as well as the meanings, conditions, and limitations of granting refuge, asylum, or free movement, it seems to be pertinent to problematize the language and the metaphors that underlie the idea of housing. Elucidating these claims, we aim to scrutinize the way in which the ideas of housing and house influence the conditions of economic dependence, political oppression, sectional social structure, and practices of exclusion. Developing a critical political metaphorology, we will first describe the way in which metaphors manipulate the understanding of concepts and frame arguments by embedding them in underlying contexts. Describing historical and contemporary reiterations of housing, we aim to expose the abyss of paternalism, exploitation, and inequality opened by the evocations of building houses, founding institutions, managing households, and defending homelands.

Focusing on the philosophical and linguistic aspects of housing metaphors, these theoretical considerations will only tangentially refer to empirically oriented discourse. Examining the genealogy of the house metaphor in Western philosophical and theological reasoning and problematizing how housing metaphors are heavily (mis-)used in philosophical deliberations about migration and refuge, we argue for a critical reflection on the figurative language most, if not all, reasoning about inclusion and exclusion relies on. Moreover, we are convinced that formulating questions about the current causes, experiences, and processes of belonging and alienation warrant arriving at a more appropriate imaginary of society that escapes the patriarchal suggestion that society is a house, opening the horizon of alternating old as well as inventing new images of society such as the city or the network. Exchanging the house for other images does not thereby neglect the demands for privacy, refuge, security, individuation, and preservation that housing metaphors incorporate, but calls to imagine spaces for these demands which remain in between the private and the public, attempting to avoid the violence, abuse, and alienation both these absolutes imply.

2_Metaphors as Acting Subjects in History

Philosophers of the twentieth century made efforts to include the inherent features of language-based communication in existing philosophical findings, developing a general, base level skepticism towards the perception that language was a transparent tool to mediate reality.¹ Instead, language came to be seen as a constraint which cannot be bypassed as all human search for meaning and insight is structured by it.² Therefore, following the argument of this linguistic turn, the focus of thinking and formulating philosophical theories needs to be on language criticism, as a reality that is external to language-dependent constraints is unperceivable. We “possess nothing but metaphors for things, metaphors which correspond in no way to the original entities,”³ as Friedrich Nietzsche famously maintains. Concepts such as ‘truth’ are nothing more than a

moveable host of metaphors, metonymies, and anthropomorphisms: in short, a sum of human relations which have been poetically and rhetorically intensified, transferred, and embellished, and which, after long usage, seem to a people fixed, canonical, and binding.⁴

More than just descriptions, metaphors appear to be actors in themselves, binding individual and collective subjects to language, provoking people and peoples to see the world through their lenses; they hurt and even heal, not instrumentally but as actors, i.e. as the very knots that bind the relational web of meaning, which appears to express and form reality. In description, approximation, and sometimes even in contradiction to each other as well as to actual experiences, metaphors condense and stabilize imaginations, which, as philosophers such as Helmuth Plessner or Martin Heidegger argue, condition reality. Thus, *Dasein* might be conceived as a being that is both ‘world-imagining’ (*weltbildend*)⁵ and simultaneously “conditioned by images.”⁶ Consequently, imagination is regarded as crucial for the conditioning of social realities as power relations, mediated and justified by phantasies contained in the metaphorical superimposition of fiction onto fact, i.e. juridical documents, political policies, and media productions. Not only semantic, but also syntactic and morphological rhetorical choices apply in this regard. For instance, evidence of racial bias in media coverage, such as the tendency for persons with black skin color to be predominantly portrayed in passive roles and actions compared to persons with white skin color,⁷ suggests that the active-passive (voice) opposition in grammar has its equivalent in conditioned reality of the imagined world.

The physical presence of power remains precarious and powerless without the commanding authority of imagination, as e.g. Ernst Hartwig Kantorowicz's influential study, *The King's Two Bodies*, demonstrates with reference to Aristotelian political theory. According to Kantorowicz, society is essentially a phantasy, or expressed in the language of medieval theologians, which favorably borrowed the tangible materiality of body parts (head, blood, nerves, and limbs) to evoke and organize the collective subject of the body of society, "*a corpus mysticum [...] fictum [...] imaginatum [...] repraesentatum*," equivalent to a "*corpus morale et politicum*."⁸ Or, as Cornelius Castoriadis, demanding that critique focus onto ideology, writes: "The individual imaginary [...] finds a correspondence in a social imaginary embodied in institutions."⁹ Due to this, opposition against an existing unjust social order must not "run up against the police and, if the movement were to be spread, the army,"¹⁰ but challenge its imagined body, the phantasm that guarantees its authority.

This imaginary authority appears to be more than merely obstructing, confusing, or obscuring critical description or reflected understanding; it is also productive as it constructs, organizes, and structures perceptions, communications, and actions.¹¹ In this creative sense, metaphors are effective social machineries rather than surprising and beautifying, ornamental rhetorical tools; they do not represent similarities, they produce them.¹² What is more, in conversion, metaphors create dissimilarities and eliminate sameness to produce difference, which is to say that metaphors act, or compel, in as much as the tension between the metaphorically collated concepts remains. Metaphorical resemblance does not dissolve difference; it keenly invents relations by poetically collating imagination and language.¹³ Aware of these social and political implications of figurative speech, Hans Blumenberg extensively studied metaphors that describe recurring schematics of metaphorical language use throughout western philosophical history. He argues that persisting metaphors in philosophical writing, e.g. truth is light, are not mere ornaments of speech that can be translated back into their literal meanings, rather constitutive components of thought that can no longer be translated into a logical sentence.¹⁴ Metaphors never reach a definitive signification, as their essence is incomprehensible, which is to say their meanings, connotations, and interpretations remain ambiguous and essentially unfinished, for their "historical reality" evolves in "new readings, [...] new interpretations."¹⁵ Antonio Gramsci, who is cogni-

zant of the reliance of language on metaphors, argues that metaphors would shift attention from a literal meaning and clear significance to ideas, desires, and anxieties which lie outside the explicable context of a term: “All language is metaphor, and it is metaphorical in two senses: it is a metaphor of the thing or material and sensible object referred to, and it is a metaphor of the ideological meanings attached to words.”¹⁶ Moreover, metaphors are historical nature: “The whole language is a continuous process of metaphor, and the history of semantics is an aspect of history of culture; language is at the same time a living thing and a museum of fossils of life and civilization.”¹⁷

3_ Taming Contingency, Hiding in Houses

In some cases, metaphorical language is the only way of expressing inexplicable abstract concepts that grasp existential dimensions of human experience. In the case of political metaphors of housing, they appear to indicate a tendency to withdraw from public life to the alleged safety of private houses. The prominence of housing or architectural metaphors may therefore indicate a general condition of insecurity and existential homelessness in the age of globalization. The image of the house as a fixed reference point and space for private reflection and recreation contrasts with the unprecedented mobility as well as the alienation or emancipation of individuals from their familial surroundings, ethnic groups, and national communities. The phantasm of the house appears to express the key contradiction for the lamented as well as celebrated loss of an existential home; a loss that might explain the melancholia following the realization that full recognition of one’s essential identity remains unattainable, and it points to the longing for stable and therefore recognizable cultural codes and customs. Considering that we live in times and places which are more and more defined by the cohabitation of alienated, uprooted, and displaced people who simultaneously belong nowhere and everywhere; that a global economy, politics, and media define our social reality as transnational and polyglot; and that we are not alone with our fellow neighbors but part of a planetary community, the imagining a society mediated by an architectural metaphor is problematic, to say the least. Facing contingency, explanation and not description, definitions and not interpretations is what appears to provide stability. Conscious of the destruction of metaphysical certainties and aware that even in a ‘groundless’ culture the need for rooting has not expired, George Bataille writes that

“the absence of myth,” i.e. a thinking that has rid itself of grand narratives and conceptual metaphors, “maybe this solid ground under my feet, but maybe also the dwindling ground at the same time.”¹⁸ In other words, the elimination of metaphorical thinking might lead away from misorientation, yet it will most likely also imply disorientation. A metaphysically homeless culture has not yet created people ready to accept their autonomy under the contingent natural and social conditions, which are threatening but also offer freedom.

It may be for this reason that metaphors associated with housing seem to become more prominent in debates of in- and exclusion, replacing other figurations of society that grasp social and political processes by borrowing from the fields of biology — the state seen as an organism that is threatened by infectious diseases — or technology — the state seen as a mechanism, a clockwork, a train, etc. that can be calibrated. This architectural metaphor of society evokes the phantasy that the state is a house whose gates can be opened and shut and which rests on the foundation of the economy, that borders are walls which can be fortified, while immigrants are trespassers and tourists guests. As Francesca Rigotti points out, organic metaphors of society predominantly appear in traditionalist and conservative rhetoric, naturalizing community or associating state interventions with medicine.¹⁹ The mechanical metaphor that society is a machine, computer, or clockwork frequently appears in Marxist rhetoric. In turn, liberal rhetoric comprehends society as contract, where for example the image of the scales associate political relations and justice with trade; nautical metaphors that relate society to a ship derive from the image of the church nave and are consequently charged with religious fervor and metaphysical narratives for the causes and aims of community.²⁰ Architectural metaphors also derive from a religious context: In Exodus 20:2 Egypt is described as “the house of slavery.”²¹ Community as a just social relation, the Covenant, is symbolized as the dwelling of God, as is the Jewish Temple in Jerusalem. Also Paul and Augustine repeatedly use edifice and edification as construction and elevation of the chosen community in which God dwells.²² For Augustine, God is the architect and the founder of the community of believers.²³ This image is draws on Plato's idea, constitutions would rest on a *krepis* (base), a foundation on which the legislator builds the structure of society.²⁴ In Islam the housing metaphor, signifying houses, abodes, and territories, appears in various political, legal, and theological concepts such as the *Dar al-Islam* (House of Islam), the *Dar al-'Ahd* (House of Covenant), the *Dar Al-Sulh*

(House of Treaty), *Dar Al-Maslubah* (House of Pillaged Land), *Dar Al-Bid'ah* (House of Heresy), *Dar Al-Baghy* (House of Usurpation), *Dar Al-'Adl* (House of Justice), *Dar al-Kufr* (House of Unbelief), and others, including the more popular *Dar al-Harb* (House of War).²⁵ Consequently, monotheist political and philosophical traditions hardly escape this religiously charged architectural terminology: the courts of justice, the houses of parliament, the government house, the chambers and cabinets, the ruling houses as the houses of the leading families, “the common house of Europe,”²⁶ the Fortress Europe, etc., all retain a certain connection to these antique interpretations.²⁷

4_Hosting Authorities

In *Strangers in Our Midst: A Political Philosophy of Immigration* David Miller argues for the legitimacy of violent measures to prevent immigration into state-controlled territories as well as the right of states to control borders and determine the future size, shape, and cultural make-up of their populations. His argument relies on comparisons, in particular with images of housing:

If I prevent a stranger from entering my house, he still has plenty of alternative places in which to seek accommodation. So, prevention needs much less justification than coercion, in general [...] If the immigrant enters illegally, he may become subject to coercive means to remove him, just as I may have to call the police to get rid of an unwelcome intruder in my house.²⁸

Miller's argument does not rely on actual procedures or justifications of a state monopoly on the use of force, but on metaphor as argument. He even calls this metaphorical contextualization of a normative argument for anti-immigration measures the “conceptual apparatus,”²⁹ which allows him to argue why border-control, -policing, and -custody are merely preventive and not coercive means and, therefore, justified even for democratic countries respecting the rights to freedom of movement and asylum.

This example demonstrates in what way metaphorical language, and in particular tropes related to houses and housing, function as arguments in discourses about migration and refuge. Considering the death of thousands of refugees drowning in the Mediterranean or dying of thirst in the Chihuahua desert between Mexico and the US, as well as the interrogation and imprisonment of migrants in overcrowded camps, this “conceptual apparatus” appears to be murderous and dehumanizing. Aware of the rationalization of derogatory or aggressive behavior through metaphorical language, George Lakoff famously concludes that one should bear in mind that “metaphors can kill.”³⁰

What is more, portraying the relation between migrants and nation states in the image of housing as the relation of hosts and guests falls into the same misleading trap offered by the political metaphor of the house. Jacques Derrida's work on hospitality suggests viewing demands for citizenship, democracy, and cosmopolitanism as a paradigmatic duo of strangers and hosts. Following Plato and Immanuel Kant, Derrida presents "the right of asylum" as "right to hospitality,"³¹ thereby collating what are at first glance resembling contexts, while ignoring the qualitative difference between the conditions or limitations of offering hospitality and granting asylum. However, at the end of his essay³² Derrida acknowledges that the metaphor of hosting strangers is "not only [...] a regulatory idea," but also "a conjugal model, paternal and phallogocentric. It's the familial despot, the father, the spouse, and the boss, the master of the house who lays down the laws of hospitality."³³

Discussing the demand for asylum as hospitality charges this political debate with the ideas and norms of patriarchal authority. Recalling the biblical story of Lot hosting the angels who were sent to seek just men (living) in Sodom, Derrida questions if the ethics of hospitality can become emancipated from their origins: "Are we the heirs to this tradition of hospitality? Up to what point? Where should we place the invariant [...]?"³⁴ The biblical story itself offers a possible answer: Instead of pressing the angels to accept his hospitality, and with it the paternalistic protection from his wicked neighbors in Sodom, Lot should have accepted their initial reply, "we can spend the night in the open street."³⁵ If these guests were angels, who would have succeeded in exploiting their precarious homelessness? What if accepting the metaphysical homelessness of modernity is just the beginning of creating a civilization that can also make do without the house of the state and its patriarchal authority?

5_ The Politics of "Homeland"

Housing metaphors, especially when used in political contexts, justify violent measures against migration. What is more, housing metaphors produce an imaginary that blends belonging and defense, domesticity and isolation. On the one hand, the association of home with house is a very tangible experience. Yet, on the other it recalls abstract concepts from a wide range of fields articulating historical and fictional connotations, which in turn point to political and economic interests. Home and housing inform words like 'home-land' or 'home-industry,' thereby blending existential needs such as

sheltering or being at home, economic procedures, budgets, households, and reproductive labor, with political territories such as the domestic image of a father- or mother-country.

Contemporary politics of exception repeatedly propagates the governmental phantasm that ‘home is the land.’ The equation of land and home creates the metaphor of homeland by referring to historical and fictional imaginations of belonging. This metaphor does not only contradict today’s social reality, which is determined by a global economy, transnational politics, and multicultural media, it is employed to justify dehumanizing measures taken to divide the people of the world into hierarchical spatial blocks, it legitimates the deprivation of civil rights, and it facilitates the collective amnesia of violent appropriation and continuing displacement. The metaphor of homeland might be emotionally soothing or artistically inspiring; as an image charged with emotions, it allows, as Frantz Fanon writes in an equally evocative style, the mind to “follow [...] up a blind alley.”³⁶

Another argument towards the hierarchical nature of the legitimization of nation states and their borders can be drawn from Martina Löw’s spatial sociological notion of relational space, demonstrating how placing objects and persons in relation, or better, into institutionalized spaces, such as the bordered territories of nation states, shapes and pre-structures social roles and conventions: “It is not simply the case that everybody spans their own individual space; but rather, the ways spaces are perceived, experienced and remembered, and how people place themselves and their objects is shaped and pre-structured by institutions.”³⁷

The desires to structure, regulate, and control the ambivalent multitude of peoples that are just as capable of committing atrocities as creating wonders leads to the obsessive project of overestimating similarities and exaggerating differences. As Edward Said argues, the hermetic collective subjects of race, nation, or ethnicity are images which would force a plurality of singularities into personified monolithic entities that have been purged of the myriad currents and counter-currents that animate human history.³⁸ For example, in the midst of the Yugoslavian civil war, the International Romani Union announced it would hold a peace conference in the besieged city of Sarajevo. In their invitation they demanded a conviviality of multi-ethnicity that abandons territorial identity.³⁹ This instance demonstrates the courage of anti-nationalists who do not fight for the possession of land or the foundation of houses but for the acknowledgment of

their culture and language. This imagination of culture without land, which gives credit to the multiple interrelated and constantly transforming contributions, escapes from the prison of nationalism and the idea of binding identity to the homeland. As Ngũgĩ wa Thiong'o comments in *Globalethics*, we have to take off the "straitjackets" of nationalism:⁴⁰ "Works of imagination refuse to be bound within national geographies; they leap out of nationalist prisons and find welcoming fans outside the geographic walls."⁴¹

The evocation of homeland, be it as the phantasy of a virgin garden or as contested by invading immigrants, diverts public attention from exercising active critical control over their elected leaders. Drawing attention to the immediate presence of danger or the exceptional nature of a historical situation neglects the past and the future, and invites forgetting all lessons learned from history and ignoring all doubts one could validly have regarding the long-term effects of acting as if the time, place, or mission at hand were exceptional. Referring to the colonial and racist past and present of the US, Robert Sirvent and Ian Diorio point out that the legitimation of "extraordinary acts of violence" committed in the name of the motherland is thereby coupled with blindness for the land's "history of oppression, violence, and homegrown terrorism."⁴² In defiance of constitutional rights and universal commitments, the metaphorically legitimated state of exception justifies all governmental measures available (including torture) to secure the integrity of the house.

6_Domestic Labor in the House of the Patriarch

Giorgio Agamben might be right in his claim that "the camp — which is to say, the pure space of exception — is the biopolitical paradigm" of modernity,⁴³ yet, it appears that the camp is merely a special manifestation of the house. The architectural language, in which Agamben attempts to condense his political theory, suggests that sovereignty does not only occur at places of totalitarian extermination or democratically legitimized reception centers. Rather, the house also represents a model for political organization as well as agency. Such a politics in the image of the house has a foundation, and by necessity, walls, fences, or other barriers and gates.⁴⁴

From an anthropological point of view, political organization in the image of housing might be described arising with the erection of the first houses as storage facilities. Thomas Nail argues that these first houses were directing a centrifugal force of collectors towards the house of the citadel, aggregating economic, religious, and military

power at one central place, the house.⁴⁵ Nail writes that prior to such an architectural foundation of political organization that fortifies by building brick wall houses, people were as disciplined as bricks, i.e. as homogeneous blocks of soldiers: “To build a wall one must first begin in a fragmentary way by creating human and territorial ‘bricks.’”⁴⁶ The equation of states with houses in this antique context suggests a centralized social organization and a condition where those not possessing the house and those who do not fit into the social soldier brick are marginalized and oppressed. Historically such forms of house-states were hardly democratic or egalitarian; on the contrary, the formation of economic and social life around one central building resembles the politics of plantations: One ruling patriarch, his relatives, henchmen, and slaves all gathered around the house.⁴⁷

All but soothing, this has not changed much. Silvia Federici's studies demonstrate that “[n]either the reorganization of reproductive work on a market basis, nor the 'globalization of care,' much less the technologization of reproductive work, have 'liberated women' or eliminated the exploitation inherent to reproductive work in its present form.”⁴⁸ The patriarchal politics of the house remains foundational for the erection and maintenance of states and economies based on exploitation. What is more, home-work, euphemistically framed as home-office, appears to become, as Federici writes, “partly due to the deconcentration of industrial production, partly due to the spread of informal work [...] a long-term capitalist strategy.”⁴⁹ Far from abandoning the ‘house of slavery,’ the politics of housing is not only deeply ingrained in language and imagination, the poetic imaginary of housing is actualizing and presenting itself in various contemporary contexts and power relations. In defiance of globalization, multiculturalism, and gender equality the metaphor of the house appears as a “tangible symbol of rampant capitalism”⁵⁰ that arbitrarily juxtaposes sexual and economic connotations, thus blending the authority of property, gender roles, and identity politics.

7_ Leaving the Ruins, Searching for another Future

Similarly to the aforementioned theorists, Judith Butler, referring to Jacques Lacan, emphasizes the influence of metaphorical language when it comes to scrutinizing imagination, stereotypes, and discourse, asking “what determines the domain of the phantasmatic, the rules that regulate the incommensurability of the Symbolic with the

real?”⁵¹ Although home and homeliness refer to experiences and imaginations of familiarity, domesticity, and stability, the term is extremely ambiguous. As Sigmund Freud stresses, “homely” and “un-homely” should not be perceived as polar opposites, since “the uncanny [or unhomely] is that class of the frightening which leads back to what is known of old and long familiar.”⁵² Architectural metaphors in politics, and the collation of housing, home, identity, and community, demonstrate the fact that not the possession but the loss of home (due to warfare, catastrophes, indebtedness, etc.) is an existential issue for many people around the world. The fiction of homeliness represses homelessness; a repression which causes us to feel displeasure at the sight of displaced people, a phantasm that haunts us by inducing a general suspicion against everything that does not fit into the homely image of the home of the state as house or homeland.

In an essay dedicated to the phenomenology of the wall, Vilém Flusser attempts to grasp the ambiguity of housing: a house is a grave just as well as a uterus, a protected place, prison, “limitation and protection, resistance and refuge, dungeon and dwelling, fear and security, claustrophobia and prevented agoraphobia.”⁵³ What is more, Flusser's psychogramme of houses describes the decision to “either step out of them in order to conquer the world and lose myself in the process, or to remain in them to find myself and lose the world in the process.”⁵⁴ Even if windows and doors seem to relativize this decision, the ‘existential dilemma’ between publicity and intimacy remains. Challenging the idea of the house in this ethical context, Flusser points at a crucial question for imagining politics as housing: “If engagement in the world is an attempt to change the world, according to which model do I change it if I only commit myself reservedly?”⁵⁵

A possible answer to this question is the proposal of counter-narratives to the understanding of space, time, and politics within the metaphorical horizon of housing. An example for such attempts to change language and imagination are Zineb Sedira photographs of ruins, titled *Haunted House*.⁵⁶ Her narrative uncovers the aristocratic layers of housing metaphors, aiming to interrupt and disturb, or even sabotage, solidified understandings of institutions, or other buildings of power, indicating that they are much less stable as their architectural imaginary suggests. Dwelling, for a moment, in the phantasy that the nation is a building equalivalent to the bombastic symbolic exteriors of state institutions, we might as well imagine it as a ruin full of waste, covered by sand or moss. It seems that the alteration between various, complementing, contrasting, or

even contradicting iterations of housing (shelters, shacks, palaces, etc.) exposes a puzzling picture, a stereoscopic imaginary. A reflecting image that exposes the contingency of houses, and their history of erection and destruction. What remains might be grasped as the basement underneath, the haunting and haunted place, where the foundations of life, former communities as well as their gradual destruction before their final extinction, become visible.

Given that the image of the house is an empty one and the house never provides the stability it evokes, and considering that the homeland too is lost, or better, that it has never been ours, other metaphors may be presented to symbolize human experience more accurately. Accepting that the imagination of identity is caught in a deadlock of our desire to find stability, it depends on poets and philosophers to invent new languages and symbols, kindling the poetic spark to transform the realm of imagination, and with it the mentality and the way of thinking. Opposing the metaphorical collation of states, nation, or societies with houses, counter-narratives might not just critically disrupt but refine or even redefine the political imaginary of housing.

8_Sobering Up the Phantasm of Society

Housing metaphors produce semantic obscurity and confusion. Yet, it appears to be unlikely that such semantic fallacies can completely be eliminated in order to tie moral and legal philosophical reflection to a concrete and sound terminology. The undetermined pre-cognitions of metaphorical language resist being explicated and resolved into definitive concepts. It seems to be impossible to arrive at a finite number of common explications of housing and the richness and diversity of its connoted terms, from which some seem to be, even when they are antiquated, still effective as palimpsests.⁵⁷ However, in the study of these highly politicized metaphors, their associated semantic fields and structural positions might indicate the points where arguments build on “iconological fallacies,” and the conclusions that are deduced from metaphors. As Bernhard Taureck argues, the disciplinary project of limiting the poetic potential of language to create exact definitions and terminologies as well as disambiguate science from religion or politics from law — be it Platonic or Baconian — has not lost its validity.⁵⁸ Or, as Umberto Eco stresses, the persuasiveness of metaphorical language can be gradually more honest or deceiving, more philosophical or propagandistic, which is why its study and critique, not their abandonment, appear to be reasonable.⁵⁹

Far from underestimating the possibilities to arrive at a more accurate terminology by dissecting metaphorical arguments, the diversity of figurative language and fictional connotations demands a more detailed description of the various relations between contexts and imaginations encompassed in metaphors.

Furthermore, in times when political and private discourses, facts and fiction, teem with affectively argued and symbolically loaded opinions, the reaffirmation of truth is, as Alain Badiou as well as Paul de Man argue, political and ethical. The Platonic opposition between rhetoric and truth intervenes against relativist and obscuring agendas and establishes a fixed reference point for subjects that otherwise have to rely on pragmatic opportunism and the floating signifiers of metaphorical language.⁶⁰ Only the control of language and its figuration can establish the epistemological ground on which truth or truthfulness is possible.⁶¹ Therefore, sentencing hate crimes, blocking racist, nationalist, or sexist accounts and webpages, censoring the language of hate and exploitation might provoke protests against the limitation of freedom of speech, yet, it appears to be crucial to reach a point of truthfulness to counteract not only deception and manipulation but also the language of antipathy in political discourse.

To conclude, the metaphors and ideas examined demonstrate the way in which we are trapped between the desire to find a stable home and a nationalism that utilizes the uncertainties of globalization. Thus, we are forced to depend on state institutions to have an identity, forget the atrocities committed in the name of protecting the gates of our homes, and are blinded to the injustices of globalization. Is there a way to protect the thinking about the conditions of belonging from the blinding evocation of political metaphors of housing? Are people capable to identify where, when it comes to control of state borders, talking about walls digresses from a conclusive argument of association with the protection of households? Whether we will continue to bind identity to houses — and disregard the interrelation between existential homelessness and globalized modernity — or interrupt the political poetics of housing seems to depend on our ability to imagine new or boldly alter old metaphors. In his *Gay Science* Friedrich Nietzsche evokes a departure from foundations that can no longer ascertain our freedom:

We have left the land and have embarked. We have burned our bridges behind us indeed, we have gone farther and destroyed the land behind us. Now, little ship, look out! Beside you is the ocean: to be sure. It does not always roar, and at times it lies spread out like silk and -gold and reveries of graciousness.⁶²

This poetic language describes the possibility of liberation, its necessity, and tragedy: “But hours will come when you will realize that it is infinite and that there is nothing more awesome than infinity. [...] Woe, when you feel homesick for the land as if it had offered more freedom-and there is no longer any ‘land!’”⁶³

Finding identity *and* truth requires that we abandon the readymade phantasm of housing and start looking. As Vilém Flusser convincingly argues the paradigmatic “gesture of searching” is one “in which one does not know in advance what one is looking for. [...] It is not a search for anything that has gone missing. It searches for who knows what. It has no goal, no ‘value.’ It can't be an 'authority.’”⁶⁴ Yet, because we are “immersed in the world and interested in changing it,”⁶⁵ we are forced to decide and bring this search into a crisis. In the face of social isolation, mass evictions, and unjust state violence, ‘pure’ searching, a neutral search without prejudices, “becomes criminal.”⁶⁶ The crisis of taking sides disrupts the gesture of searching and it opens up the possibility, as Jacques Derrida argues, to accept that technology and globalization dissolve the “interiority of the home [,][...] the integrity of the self.”⁶⁷ Considering that housing cannot continue to be the image and model for politics, especially not in regard to migration, might give us the chance to reconcile with the fact that “we are no longer at home”⁶⁸ by consciously choosing “another future.”⁶⁹

Frantz Fanon's warning that, because cosmopolitan liberalism is “incapable of extending its vision of the world sufficiently, we observe a falling back toward old tribal attitudes,”⁷⁰ seems to have come true. Nationalist and chauvinist world leaders appear to be symptoms of regression, as writers reflecting on the rhetoric of populism maintain,⁷¹ deciding on politics with a patriarchal phantasy of houses that provide shelter from so-called natural disasters, be they storms, pandemics, or financial crises. It seems that progressive politics has lost on the ground of discourse. Political decisions are taken by those who are able to launch compelling housing metaphors, be they the conciliatory metaphor of the house of Europe or the contemptuous metaphor of the migrant on your doorstep.⁷² For the marginalized, the homeless, and the expelled, other metaphors of housing, which could discharge the patriarchal and nationalist connotations, ‘houses’ are ‘the houses of others’: rent flats, shelters, prisons, and ruins, certainly not foundations for justice or a protective roof against crisis.

Endnotes

- ¹ On the criticism of terms such as representationalism, realism, Platonism, objectivity, epistemology, metaphysics, essentialism see Richard Rorty, *The Linguistic Turn: Essays in Philosophical Method* (Chicago, IL: University of Chicago Press, 1992).
- ² See Michael Losonsky, *Linguistic Turns in Modern Philosophy* (Cambridge, MA: Cambridge University Press, 2006).
- ³ Wilhelm Friedrich Nietzsche, “On Truth and Lies in a Nonmoral Sense,” in *Philosophy and Truth: Selections from Nietzsche's Notebooks of the early 1870's*, ed. Daniel Breazeale (Atlantic Highlands, NJ: Humanities Press, 1979), 79–97, here: 83.
- ⁴ Nietzsche, *Philosophy and Truth*, 84.
- ⁵ See Martin Heidegger, *Die Grundbegriffe der Metaphysik: Welt — Endlichkeit — Einsamkeit* (Frankfurt am Main: Vittorio Klostermann, 2010), 397–416.
- ⁶ See Helmuth Plessner, “Zur Anthropologie des Schauspielers,” in *Gesammelte Schriften*, Bd. VII, *Ausdruck und menschliche Natur*, ed. Helmuth Plessner (Frankfurt am Main: Suhrkamp, 1982), 399–418, here: 417.
- ⁷ The killing of George Floyd, a man the police killed in May 2020, was more commonly referred to as a man that *was killed* in police custody, describing an action without any active constituent. For stereotyping on the basis of ethnicity in media coverage of the hurricane Katrina, see Shannon Kahle, Nan Yu and Erin Whiteside, “Another Disaster: An examination of portrayals of race in hurricane Katrina coverage,” in *Visual Communication Quarterly* 14.2 (2007), 75–89.
- ⁸ Ernst Hartwig Kantorowicz, *The King's Two Bodies: A Study in Medieval Political Theology* (Princeton, NJ: Princeton University Press, 2016), 209–210. Also Christina von Braun convincingly argues that the social body and the human body clutter each other in such a way that no one would know which is the original and which the reproduction. Society creates in its *corpus fictum* self- and counter images; images of normality and disease that define the experiences of both those who fit into the frame of the body and those who do not. See Christina von Braun, “Der christliche Kollektivkörper und seine ‘Sleeper;’“ in *Säkularisierung. Bilanz und Perspektiven einer umstrittenen These*, eds. Christina Braun, Wilhelm Gräß and Johannes Zachhuber (Berlin: LIT-Verlag, 2007), 171–191, here: 183.
- ⁹ Cornelius Castoriadis, *The Imaginary Institution of Society* (Cambridge, MA: MIT Press, 1987), 386.
- ¹⁰ Castoriadis, *The Imaginary Institution of Society*, 385.
- ¹¹ Susanne Lüdemann, *Metaphern der Gesellschaft: Studien zum soziologischen und politischen Imaginären* (München: Wilhelm Fink, 2004), 15.
- ¹² See Lüdemann, *Metaphern der Gesellschaft*, 40; Max Black, “Mehr über die Metapher,” in *Theorie der Metapher*, ed. Anselm Haverkamp (Darmstadt: Wissenschaftliche Buchgesellschaft, 1996), 379–413, here: 405.
- ¹³ See Paul Ricoeur, *The Rule of Metaphor: The Creation of Meaning in Language* (London: Routledge, 2003).
- ¹⁴ Hans Blumenberg, *Schiffbruch mit Zuschauer: Paradigma einer Daseinsmetapher* (Frankfurt am Main: Suhrkamp, 1979), 75.

- 15 Hans Blumenberg, *Wirklichkeiten, in denen wir leben: Aufsätze und eine Rede* (Stuttgart: Reclam, 1981), 21 (author's translation).
- 16 Antonio Gramsci, *Gefängnishefte*, Bd. 4, eds. Klaus Bochmann and Wolfgang Fritz Haug (Hamburg: Argument, 1994), Q7, §36, 892
- 17 Antonio Gramsci, *Gefängnishefte*, Bd. 5, eds. Klaus Bochmann and Wolfgang Fritz Haug (Hamburg: Argument, 1994), Q11, §28, 1431.
- 18 Georges Bataille, *Henker und Opfer* (Berlin: Matthes & Seitz, 2008), 81 (author's translation).
- 19 Francesca Rigotti, "The House as Metaphor," in *From a Metaphorical Point of View: A Multidisciplinary Approach to the Cognitive Content of Metaphor*, ed. Zdravko Radman (Berlin: DeGruyter, 1994), 419–445, here: 438.
- 20 Rigotti, "The House as Metaphor," 438.
- 21 *Holy Bible. English Standard Version* (Wheaton, IL: Crossway Bibles, 2001), Ex. 20:2.
- 22 The practical advice of Ephesians 2, 19-22 recalls the following: "19 Consequently, you are no longer foreigners and strangers, but fellow citizens with God's people and also members of his household, 20 built on the foundation of the apostles and prophets, with Christ Jesus himself as the chief cornerstone. 21 In him the whole building is joined together and rises to become a holy temple in the Lord. 22 And in him you too are being built together to become a dwelling in which God lives by his Spirit." (*Holy Bible. English Standard Version*).
- 23 Augustine, *De Civitate Dei: The City of God*, ed. Patrick Gerard Walsh (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2005–2014), 48-49.
- 24 For the politician, Plato reserves, however, other metaphors, such as the coxswain of a ship, a weaver or doctor, while he preserves the metaphor of the architect for the legislator. See *Plato, The Republic* (New York: Books, 1943), 403b and 427b; *Plato, Laws*, ed. Malcolm Schofield (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2016), 736e; *Plato, The Statesman*, eds. Julia Annas and Robin Waterfield (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1995), 301 and 858b.
- 25 Ahmed Khalil, *Dar Al-Islam and Dar Al-Harb: Its Definition and Significance*, accessed June 13, 2020, english.islamway.com (2002), <<http://english.islamway.com/bindex.php?section=article&id=211>>.
- 26 Mikhail Gorbachev quoted in Andreas Musolff, "Political Imagery of Europe: A House without Exit Doors?," in *Journal of Multilingual and Multicultural Development* 21.3 (2000), 216–226, here: 218. With the metaphor of the "Common European Home" Gorbachev famously suggested that a doctrine of restraint should replace the doctrine of deterrence. See Jim Hoagland, "Europe's Destiny," in *Foreign Affairs* 69.1 (1989), 33–50, here: 38.
- 27 See Rigotti *The House as Metaphor*, 429.
- 28 David Miller, *Strangers in Our Midst: A Political Philosophy of Immigration* (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 2016), 119.
- 29 Miller, *Strangers in Our Midst*, 120.
- 30 George Lakoff, "Metaphor and War," in *Peace Research* 23 (1991), 25–32, here: 32. Presenting the intervention against Iraq, arguably a colonial undertaking aimed to control petrol production, as "Rescue Scenario" and a "heroic" mission of righteous people against "wicked villains," the military-industrial complex of the US succeeded in convincing the public and Congress to support this war and justify the killing and displacement of thousands. Lakoff, "Metaphor and War," 27.
- 31 Jacques Derrida, *Of Hospitality: Anne Dufourmantelle invites Jacques Derrida to Respond* (Stanford, CA: Stanford University Press), 61.

- 32 Derrida, *Of Hospitality*, 149.
- 33 Derrida, *Of Hospitality*, 149.
- 34 Derrida, *Of Hospitality*, 155.
- 35 Derrida, *Of Hospitality*, 153.
- 36 Frantz Fanon, *The Wretched of the Earth* (New York, NY: Grove Press, 1963), 220.
- 37 Martina Löw and Gunter Weidenhaus, "Borders that relate: Conceptualizing boundaries in relational space", in *Current Sociology Monograph* 65.4 (2017), 553–570.
- 38 Edward Said, "The Clash of Ignorance. Labels like 'Islam' and 'The West' serve only to confuse us about disorderly reality," in *The Nation*, April 10, 2001, accessed June 13, 2020, <<https://www.thenation.com/article/clash-ignorance/>>.
- 39 See Édouard Glissant, *Poetics of Relation* (Ann Arbor, MI: The University of Michigan Press, 2005), 46.
- 40 Ngũgĩ wa Thiong'o, *Globalethics: Theory and the Politics of Knowing* (New York, NY: Columbia University Press, 2012), 8.
- 41 Thiong'o, *Globalethics*, 58.
- 42 Robert Sirvent and Ian Diorio, "America Akbar," in *Homeland and Philosophy: For Our Minds Only*, ed. Robert Arp (Chicago, IL: Open Court, 2014), 209–217, here: 209.
- 43 Giorgio Agamben, *Homo Sacer: Sovereign Power and Bare Life* (Stanford: Stanford University Press, 1998), 78.
- 44 These are all phenomena highly charged with political and theological meanings as Agamben's reading of Franz Kafka's *The Castle* and *Before the Law* also demonstrates. The housing metaphors of the castle and the gate are central to present power as space and law as foundation. See Agamben, *Homo Sacer*, 64–65.
- 45 See Thomas Nail, *Theory of the Border* (New York, NY: Oxford University Press, 2016), 54, 76–77.
- 46 Nail, *Theory of the Border*, 66.
- 47 See Sharon D. Wright Austin, *The Transformation of Plantation Politics: Black Politics, Concentrated Poverty, and Social Capital in the Mississippi Delta* (Albany, NY: State University of New York Press, 2006), 25–26.
- 48 Silvia Federici, "The Reproduction of Labor: Power in the Global Economy and the Unfinished Feminist Revolution," in *Revolution at Point Zero* (Oakland, CA: PM Press, 2012), 91–114, here: 108.
- 49 Federici, "The Reproduction of Labor," 109.
- 50 Juliet Wigmore, "From 'das Haus Österreich' to 'Häuser in Österreich': Local, Transnational and Global Images of House, Home and Heimat in Works by Ingeborg Bachmann, Elisabeth and Elfriede Jelinek," in *Local/Global Narratives*, eds. Renate Rechten and Karoline von Oppen (Amsterdam/New York: Rodopi, 2007), 63–79, here: 76.
- 51 Judith Butler, *Gender Trouble: Feminism and the Subversion of Identity* (London: Routledge, 2007), 71.
- 52 Sigmund Freud, "The 'Uncanny,'" in *Writings on Art and Literature* (Stanford, CA: Stanford University Press, 1997), 193–233, here: 195.
- 53 Vilém Flusser, *Dinge und Undinge: Phänomenologische Skizzen* (München/Wien: Hanser, 1993), 27 (author's translation).

- 54 Flusser, *Dinge und Undinge*, 28 (author's translation).
- 55 Flusser, *Dinge und Undinge*, 29 (author's translation).
- 56 Zineb Sedira, "Haunted House," (2006), accessed June 13, 2020, <<https://www.zinebsedira.com/haunted-house-2006/>>.
- 57 Susanne Lüdemann, *Metaphern der Gesellschaft: Studien zum soziologischen und politischen Imaginären* (München: Wilhelm Fink, 2004), 27.
- 58 Bernhard Taureck, *Metaphern und Gleichnisse in der Philosophie: Versuch einer kritischen Ikonologie der Philosophie* (Frankfurt am Main: Suhrkamp, 2004), 137–138.
- 59 Umberto Eco, *Einführung in die Semiotik* (München: Fink, 1972), 178.
- 60 See Alain Badiou, *Über Metapolitik* (Zürich/Berlin: Diaphanes, 2003).
- 61 See Paul de Man, *The Resistance to Theory* (Minneapolis, MI: University of Minnesota Press, 1986), 3–20.
- 62 Friedrich Nietzsche, *The Gay Science* (New York: Vintage Books, 1974), 180.
- 63 Nietzsche, *The Gay Science*, 180–181.
- 64 Vilém Flusser, *Gestures* (Minneapolis, MA: University of Minnesota Press, 2014), 148–149.
- 65 Flusser, *Gestures*, 150.
- 66 Flusser, *Gestures*, 152.
- 67 Jacques Derrida, *Das andere Kap, Die vertagte Demokratie, Zwei Essays zu Europa* (Frankfurt am Main: Suhrkamp, 1992), 53 (author's translation).
- 68 Derrida, *Das andere Kap*, 53 (author's translation).
- 69 Derrida, *Das andere Kap*, 29 (author's translation).
- 70 Fanon, *The Wretched of the Earth*, 158.
- 71 See Heinrich Geiselberger, ed., *Die große Regression: Eine internationale Debatte über die geistige Situation der Zeit* (Frankfurt am Main: Suhrkamp, 2017).
- 72 See Nicolas Busch, *Baustelle Festung Europa: Beobachtungen, Analysen, Reflexionen* (Klagenfurt: Drava, 2006).