

MASS MEDIA AND BUILDING A FAMILY IDENTITY

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Abstract: The present study is part of a broader range of research focused on the interaction between symbolic goods (objects) and the social dynamics or design of the house. Specifically, we started from a 50s interesting study which sought to determine the place of television in London working-class family life. Its conclusions have proven to be unexpected: TV is getting less and less an instrument that provides information, and is becoming a gear that adjusts the leisure time and, sometimes, diurnal program. Besides some important findings on ritualization of media consumption in a virtual context, our article sets as a goal to attract attention of other researchers on this highly dynamic social field, able to inspire many scientific approaches.

Keywords: media culture, family identity, television, human settlement

The House – from simple shelter to home. It's not easy to talk about one of the most sophisticated symbolic buildings of humanity, the house. The very moment of its imagining – both functionally and aesthetically – coincides with the time when man leaving his natural habitat, chose to live in his own universe. A universe enhanced with elements of comfort, but also with some objects and symbolic spaces meant both to defend from evil spirits and attract the presence of the positive ones. Exiting the Gutenberg era and entering the Marconi one, man is seduced by the new lifestyle and begins to cultivate a new worldview and a new self-image. This way of perceiving is naturally, projected in all areas of daily or religious lifestyle. This process of going back to an oral type of culture, but this time, a culture transmitted through digital technology, calls for a new type of individual, setting and even a story. Man is a symbolic and thinking entity and thus can not exist outside the living environment. The relationship between him and the living space (natural habitat) or the one created by him (house and architectural environment) is a syncretic one, of mutual influence and interdependence. Analyzing both the structure of the house itself and the type of settlement in a diachronic perspective, we note that the attention paid to ambient aesthetics housing has evolved differently depending on the historical period, the degree of education / culture of the person / group, ideological political, religious system of the community etc.

Ethnographer Julius Lips, after numerous expeditions to North Africa and Western Africa, after studying the behaviour of Indians in the U.S., concludes that in these cultures, the idea of "home" does not coincide with the "shelter". The house represents a much wider living space. It is perceived as the whole tribal territory that is sacred and forbidden to foreigners. Thus, the home of a family it's not the piece of earth chosen to dwell on, but the entire space occupied by the tribe is the real home. The land belong everybody's and everybody belongs to the tribal land (Lips, 1958: 32).

The Hearth – matrix of any home. Research of primitive human way of thinking shows that "people are primarily dominated by naive faith in the omnipotence of ideas" (Freud, 1996: 105) The relationship of the human with the God he believes in – at a certain historical time – is reflected in the design of the dwelling – whether we are referring to the

man's house or the house *casa aeterna* associated with the return of the dead in the very womb of its mother, the earth, or the shape of the *ancestors*, dendromorphic, lithomorphic or zoomorphic ancestor spirit (Evseev, 1998: 428). Housing is thus an act of recognition, acceptance and worship of the god or ancestor.

On the other hand, the sign of the house is closely linked with the sign of the family. A variety of languages – especially romance languages – use the same root, *casa*, to designate the house (*casa*) and the purpose of the family (*casatorie*, *casar* etc, meaning both the action of getting married and having children, or in Spanish *to fit together*). In other languages the connection is not so obvious (*marriage*, from lat. *Maritus*- husband, suitor; *wedlock*-wed-pledge). In English language, for instance, the sign of the family (marriage, procreation) is linked with the sense of quietness after a period of restlessness or “to establish a settled lifestyle”, a feeling of *completeness*, *establishment*, *achievement* etc. (See *settle down* and *settlement*), the term *house* designates the building itself and the group of people living there (*household*) or a family lineage, especially a noble or royal one.

The variety of the idiomatic expressions using the term *house* in Romanian language is overwhelming: to make house with someone (to wed, to have children with him/her), to have a good house with someone (to live in harmony with somebody), to be for someone house and table (to have a peaceful, proper lifestyle), House of stone! (it is wide spread Romanian wedding wish which originally meant the couple to procreate), fir-tree house (the coffin) etc. All these symbolic presences in language show a certain way of understanding the family relationships – emphasis on the purpose and the peacefulness of the union while in Germanic languages this sign seems to be in a closer relationship with a sense of longevity of a clan or a larger community (family lineage), a sense of safety (as safe as houses), of order (put/ set one's house in order) or friendship (get along/on like a house on fire).

Almost every type of Romanian peasant house (boyars, merchant, royal or monastic), develop valuable constructive and decorative traditions of Romanian architecture. These architectural structures are considered as beings, this point of view is depicted first of all, linguistically. The buildings have *eyes* (windows), a *hat* (roof), a *sole* (a hard piece of wood placed at the foundation of the house) etc. (Stoica, Petrescu, Bocșe, 1985: 188). An interesting language fact is that in popular Romanian language, the rooms of the house are called *little house* (the room where the hearth was placed) and *beautiful/ clean/big house* (the cold room, where the festive attires were kept) (Stoica, Petrescu, Bocșe, 1985: 103).

The act of coming back home every evening meant gather up round the hearth of the house, to talk to each other, to eat, sleep, pray together, to connect to a special moment of bringing back together all the parts of the family, as one whole and to celebrate it. From a phenomenological point of view, home is the heaven column, *axis mundi*, the point of origin, se certainty of belonging and fitting in a family. In this way, man is becoming whole, capable to coagulate and release an amount of beneficial energies, capable of providing a “sense” of life itself .

Currently, the hearth of home is replaced by the screen (TV, phone etc.) and the feeling of joy and contentment – once called “feeling like home” is changed into the yearning “to just have a rest”. Moreover, because of “industrial nature of modern living, the members of these communities constantly migrate to cities, where their genetic markers will melt in the cosmopolitan crucible” (Wells, 2009: 184). This stunning process of moving back in a “big

global village”, where everyone speaks the same language, use the same tools, will have the same aspirations, will work in the same place, perpetually changing, will look at the same screen (or will be regarded as in Orwell 's Utopia) and practice the same kind of consumerist religion is easily planned alterations concept of “making a home”(getting married and having children). Modern man no longer wants to settle down, to “create a home” – that is, to marry, to have children and live in one place, getting familiar and familial space in which to live, to gain experience, to bequeath and finally, to die there. Modern man is everywhere and nowhere, like the cyberspace itself.

New virtual magic. The transition from one agnostic era to a virtual-magical is made by promoting a virtual environment. Virtually, everything is possible. Interior ambient can be computer generated, even people can acquire divine powers: they can turn may invent / accept new myths that serve to “affirmation relations” with divinity – a new corporate deity – and obviously it creates “exemplary behavior patterns”. All this happens without trying – as old myths used to in the past – to “explain surrounding phenomena”, to release man from “harmful instinctual pulsions”, to perpetuate the traditions, but also to provide justification for the social order and institutions etc.. "(Coman, 2008: 39)

The modern construction begins by destroying the magical archetype of the home and by replacing it with a new kind of comfort and charm. The modern man does not respect the nature anymore, nor adores or fears the gods, ancestors. These values are all deserted and in their place are set other rational values. If the old settlement involved a sacrifice, based on the idea that abode need a vital energy transferred to begin to live, nowadays the house is living creature devouring its owner (see the case of Romanians working abroad, sending money home, to raise grand villas which end up empty).

The modern world brings a series of changes that can be detected at each and every level of the society, especially with the rites of passage but also for the foundation rituals. The most important of all is weakening and even eliminating sacred symbols (Coman, 2008: 173) together with establishing a new social order and imaging a new type of house. A house without a fireplace, without a soul, disconnected from the vital flow of the earth. If the first half of the twentieth century, collective mentality still perceived abstract concept of the house, using stereotypical images of a happy family gathered round a housewife that was cooking, cleaning, making her husband and children happy, nowadays the state of being home occurs most often in the singular, with the desire to unwind, most of the times in front of the TV or shopping.

The precious free time which is a time of relaxation and it automatically becomes magical, and the space of performance is almost always within the house. In the arsenal of modern magical objects of this virtual sorcery used by contemporary humans are the screen and the credit card. The screen, in all its forms (mobile phone, TV, monitor, BookReader, tablet, iPads etc.), works as a magical gate that connects to a virtual world, always surprising and versatile. The credit card has the power to fulfill every desire with a simple touch and it is a substitute of the old magic wand. Both of them are part of a new magical universe of man. Not incidentally, the French sociologist Lipovetsky (2008: 8) wondered, noting the speed with which mankind has passed from *show- screen* to *communication- screen*:

“What are the effects of this proliferation of screens in the relations with the world and with others, body and feelings? What is the cultural and democratic life as announced by the triumph of digital images? What is the destiny of thought and artistic expression in this context? To what extent this plethora of screens restructures contemporary human life itself? With the establishment of global screen era is about to produce a huge cultural mutation affecting more and more aspects of existence itself”. It mostly affects, we may add, the domestic space, the space of intimacy and withdrawal from social uproar.

The act of dwelling includes symbolically the essential act of feeding, of sleeping, as well as other basic needs: the need to feel safe and to feel surrounded by the others members of family. The sense of belonging to something – a particular people, a special place known since childhood (loaded with memories and activated by emotional ties) undergoes various transformations today. Thus, if in the past “the house of the old/ the old house” (the place where the grandparents and parents used to live) was perceived not only as a temporary covering of parents and ancestors – but as a living entity that was meant to carry forward a type of traditional, holy, full wisdom and intelligence lifestyle.

The sense of impermanent, the eternal changes, lack of steadiness is a trademark of the twentieth and twenty-first century. This feeling is manifesting in a more and more corrupted perception of the concept of family, its unity (a steadily declining number of marriages and divorces growing in the world), its functions (biological, economic, social, cultural and educational) and also the architectural transformation of living space. The nowadays house, the postmodern house currently offers almost everything. Outings, outdoor exercise can be simulated even inside the house. Same virtual environment turns everything into anything, even in a garden or a sport field through 3D TV (2011) or Wii (2006). Sociologists (see Lipovetsky, 2008: 302, 305) talk about “ubiquitous screen era” which requires a reconfiguration of direct living, a lifestyle replaced by a virtual “second life” and an exacerbation of the spectacular existence.

There’s clearly no doubt that “television has already crept into our lives, in our daily gene”. The world as a continuous and amazing show can not be thought outside the primacy of the image and democratization of the unbounded media, the online community especially. “The world of appearances is now bathed in a legitimate *glamour* suited for almost any age. Image and television have imposed their rules. People want to be seen as their idols shining in full screen frame (...) Until recently, the dresses were presented in the discretion of the major fashion houses. Today everything takes place in a hyper- show, with light installations, scenery and hi-fi music. Even commercial architectures do the same: shopping malls, restaurants, places to meet people are organized like movie sets or television sets (...) Even the centres of large cities are treated as sets, lit by light games projectors and planed by urban-designers”.

Screen-space living relationship is sometimes synergistic. Television and its actual receptacle, the TV set – is no longer an optional accessory of the “comfortable” house. The screen is a new window, binding and a new type of shelter. Through it one can travel, one can dream or even play (Wii) and this function becomes magical. Through it, however, one may dissipates itself of the most important human qualities of generosity and social dimension of existence. Several images are used in advertisements for TVs (smart TV, 3D TV etc.) using a

current dichotomy: “There's no place better than home”. “There’s No Place Like Home”. There’s no TV like home. No house without its screen.

The ceremony and homage of the show. The present research of media influences on TV consumers shows so far that the small screen is mostly influencing the relationship parents - children. Television is the family, the most banned type of media. Control is exercised more by the mother than the father, and this process happens within average families and less within poor ones, where TV becomes the cheapest source of knowledge. However, if for parents TV involves a relationship with an educational ideal, for youth TV is a sign of the desire for independence. Through its qualities (dynamic, inexpensive, hoarder, varied offer), TV is connected to many social issues such as a phenomenon analyzed by Dayan and Katz (cited Coman, 2007: 38) televised ceremonies such as Pope’s visit or Diana Kennedy’s funeral , Olympics, live wars etc. Ceremonies form a heterogeneous set of events, according to:

- The frequency degree program: cyclic (football championship) or “hot” (war, death);
- The temporal proximity: present, future (election campaign), past (memorial);
- The nature of the proposed scenario, dramatism, suspense and so on.

They all include: *innovation, show* (fast) and especially *conflict* (confrontations). In some cases we deal with a particular emotional positioning of the receiver: *tenderness, indignation, self-reflection* (vicinity). Public propensity to severe and bloody events is growing. If in April 1986, 2.1 million Americans watched the attack on Libya CNN, a few years later (January 16, 1991) when the Gulf War started, 61 million American families watched the speech President George Bush in various positions television (Coman, 2007: 83).

Without necessarily to propose to demonstrate this, the studies actually wonder how far TV has infiltrated our lives, changing our behavior and emotional reactions or the consumerist, technological reality is to blame. To answer as correct as we can, we must have a picture of a society increasingly globalized, indifferent, hasty, careful not to individual, as the common interest. Part of the OTV (Romanian television channel) and “micro-sidewalk” broadcasts success may be explained through confessions, accusations or statements, the individual is redefining its importance (even illusory one) and television is offering a new social identification of *privacy*. According to sociologist Dominique Mehl (cited Coman, 2007: 62), within the screen cohabit many TV models: *message, relationship, mediation, enforcement*.

People learn a certain social behavior (good or bad), they are identifying with their models, they solve some frustrations and disappointments. Unfortunately, everything is under the mark of the fictional. “You believe what you see and see what you think”. Going forward, we may say that all TV media genres are hybrid. This premeditated mixture may be found anywhere: in the magazines or comment on behalf of a summary of news of a day or a week; the debate with mini-reportage insert, followed by an analysis in the set (“special Evoy”) or in any interview. The “reality shows” are another great example. They mix the reportage with the rebuilding the facts through actors on the set or debates about “Talk Shows” which mix political analysis with entertaining humor and tiny reportages. And yet, a TV that is on is not necessarily looked at. The TV has become a radio with images. It broadcasts news or music while the host is entertaining the guests, while eating or confessing. Sometimes, people admit

that they listen to the TV shows while reading the newspaper or reading the breaking news. Postmodern world is a vivid image of the mixture itself: newspaper and TV channels are the true embodiment of the mosaic type of structure. But zapping must not be mistaken for the fragmented reading.

“Television, radio, newspapers, advertising are a *discontinuum* of signs and messages (...) a sequence in which world history alternate with figuration of some objects. Fortunately, the radio log is not a mixture as it seems. Its systematic alternation requires a single scheme of perception, which is the journalism consumption” (Baudrillard, 2005: 154).

In conclusion, our study proves that, under the influence of dynamism and practices of media consumption, the house loses more and more its significance. Under the pressure of consumerist globalization, the house becomes a repetitive construct, made of modules and standard architectural solutions (see Ritzer, 2010). Beyond its inventory or selling value the house no longer represents *a home* – as the answers of the respondents has proven. People see the house as a “simple refuge” (62%) and 43% of them would move to another place without any regret. From the attitude of respondents (mostly young ones, up to 30 years), we deduce that the living space of the modern man is like an automated tent, almost volatile, aspiring to fit in a phone “sim card”.

Nowadays man is always looking for material gains and he is willing to adopt a nomadic and minimalist lifestyle. At any moment he is ready to pack up and go to another destination and another house. A still simpler house, emptier, more and more liberated by objects and people. A house that can turn at any time in a studio in an apartment with several rooms – fan house (dg24.ro). Or a house with double walls that always leave room to another type of space. Such a house (“smart home”) shall have a communication network connecting electrical devices and services that allow them to be controlled, monitored or accessed (housingcare.org) remote; a space covering six key areas: environment (heat/ water, electricity), security (alarms, motion detectors , detectors medium), home entertainment (audio visual, internet), household appliances (cooking , cleaning, maintenance alerts), information and communication (telephone, internet) and health (nursing home). Smart homes can be controlled (via a remote control integrated with networked devices or even by voice, gestures or movement). It can also be “programmed” to react to a certain time or by different sensors, as they can learn from those who live and can take various decisions for people who live to save energy and defense in cases of a robbery or kidnapping attempts (physorg.com).

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