The house as symbolic representation of the self

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Introduction

In this paper I will first give an outline of my research topic by addressing methodology and methods, to be followed by reflections on the arts. From there I will then move on towards architects' and art therapy patients' art-works, focusing on notions of culture, and the self and culture within the context of mental health. I will end with tentative conclusions.

My thesis' research builds upon two concepts: the first being that the *house* and its aesthetic representations may symbolically represent the self since each human being is in some ways concerned with the presence, or absence of *house* in whatever form.

The second is that art therapy, art and architecture can be investigated to understand specificities within, but also relations to the other fields, and together represent a rich basis for interdisciplinary and cross-cultural knowledge production.

Methodology and Method

The overarching methodological approach to my research is mixed method, which combines qualitative phenomenological material with quantitative data. My phenomenological approach of inquiry is related to Carel, who suggests: "Studying lived experience is not a variant form of scientific enquiry, but a method for examining pre-reflective, subjective human experience as it is lived prior to its theorization by science" (2016, pp. 1–2).

The totality of qualitative material [1] will consist of a literature review regarding *house* specific art therapy literature, photographic documentation of participants' paintings and drawings, thematic analysis of their spoken narratives based on my observational note taking (written down after each art therapy session referring to each participant), registered and transcribed 29-item semi-structured interview questionnaire narratives (Wyder, 2015), registered and transcribed material stemming from the closing sessions, as well as psychiatrists' reports, and lastly photographic documentation of artists and architects art-works and written material (e.g. theory of architecture, art theory, artists' and architects' interviews and so forth).

Quantitative data is collected by means of two psychometric tests: the Impact of Event Scale-Revised questionnaire, a self-report measure by Weiss and Marmar (1997) verifying possible symptoms of Posttraumatic Stress Disorder; and the Basler Befindlichkeits-Skala by Hobi (1985) testing wellbeing. [2]

Furthermore, the *final analysis* will be performed according to phenomenological 'coding' based on the totality of the gathered material and data. In other words, this method comprises "scrutinising the material for commonalities that reflects categories or themes" (University of Hertfordshire, 2015, p5) referring to notions of *interiority* and *exteriority* and the space in between.

Fieldwork is carried out in several countries and cultures, as well as in either psychiatric clinics or universities, with adult populations, with the exception of Paris where the participants are adolescents. The communication language in all places / countries of my research between the participants and myself is that of the local culture. However, for example, during my fieldwork at the University of Vienna, architecture theory department, there was no Austrian student attending my focus group workshops; as a consequence, verbal interactions with students and/ or some interviews were carried out in English, French, Italian as well as German.

So far, art therapy fieldwork was carried out at the psychiatric clinic in Wil in Switzerland during six months in 2016. Two focus art therapy groups including eight patients provided first aesthetic and narrative material and

data. Last year's (2017) period of fieldwork took place at the Technical University in Vienna with architecture students. Current fieldwork is taking place at the Hôpital Pitié-Salpêtrière in Paris including adolescents, and my last period of PhD-related clinical fieldwork will be carried out in Tokyo again with adults in November 2018. To date, my focus group sample's participants are (at minimum) of French, French/Northern African, Croatian, German, Serbian, Hungarian, Swiss French and Swiss Italian cultures and countries.

The approach during all my periods of fieldwork is that of focus group sessions, in which up to five participants work in the same space-time situation. As described by Hogan (2014, p. 110) "the artworks are produced and discussed with the art therapist either individually or as a group". Hence, I 'visit' each participant several times throughout a studio session, which generally is of 90 minutes. At the same time, other verbal exchanges among the participants themselves, at times including me, at other times not, do take place. Each session is different and there is thus an on-going high requirement on the art therapist's ability to spontaneously and flexibly adapt to each new situation afresh, be it based on participants' artworks, their narratives, or interactions with self and others.

In line with Hogan's description referring to the inner and aesthetic process of art therapy (2014, p. 111), I consider that "the way the art work is constructed, reworked - areas obliterated and reshaped - can be deeply revealing, giving immediate access to areas of inner-conflict and ambivalence. Discussion of these aspects may come to the fore. How the work is subsequently handled or destroyed can also become relevant, as it is an object embodied with emotions".

Moreover, in line with Schaverien, (1999, p. 105) regarding the interpretation of artworks "there are, firstly, no rules governing interpretation of pictures", and secondly, "interpretation, like diagnosis, is a matter of relationship: that of patient to the picture and therapist; and that of therapist to patient and picture". Hence, I do not offer top-down or reductionist interpretations of participants' artworks.

Art material

The art material consists of water and acrylic colours, colour pencils, felt pens, various types and softness of graphite pens and pencils, Japanese ink (liquid and ink stone), rulers, pencil sharpeners, Asian ('sumi-e', or 'shôdo'), and 'Western' paint brushes, A3 and 50 × 70 cm sized paper.

The choice of Japanese ink has been made deliberately by me in order to offer this material to participants in Europe (participants of mostly, but not exclusively, European cultural backgrounds). The same material will also be provided to Japanese patients (or perhaps non-Japanese persons) in Tokyo at the end of this year. It was my intention to furnish a material that is traditionally not of European origin to the totality of this study's participants, and vice versa.

Artists' house representations

In order to address the topic of the *house*, cultural notions and the self, I will exemplify these in the following through *house* representations by artists' and art therapy patients' art-works, and by architects' built structures.

Miriam Cahn

To introduce the topic of *the house* I would like to start with an example coming from the arts via the Swiss painter Miriam Cahn, who is one of the artists I have interviewed (in her studio-house in the Swiss mountains). For years Ms Cahn's artworks and writing addressed war, feminism and forced displacement, but similarly, she said in an interview: "Throughout my life I reflected on simplification..." and she adds that "this "Baukörper" (built body, an architectural term) is the way I am thinking" (TR-ANSFER, 2018).

In respect to her *house* paintings, she stated: "My house paintings represent myself". These depictions demonstrate rich, vivid colours that have simultaneously a dream-like quality. Further, her paintings are often

carried out in a translucent manner, where the inside and outside are at times almost suspended. The notion of the *house* as a physical built body providing shelter could thus be called into question as the paintings suggests that one could almost walk through the walls and penetrate into the inner space of the house. One might wonder how possible inhabitants of such houses might feel inside, whether they would feel safe, or whether Ms Cahn's houses are not intended to be inhabited by people? Do they perhaps 'only' serve as symbolic representations of the artist's own self, an artistic way of self-portrayal? Could this be the reason why there are never other persons visible in her house-paintings? If persons are depicted in her paintings it is mostly in relation to nature or war.
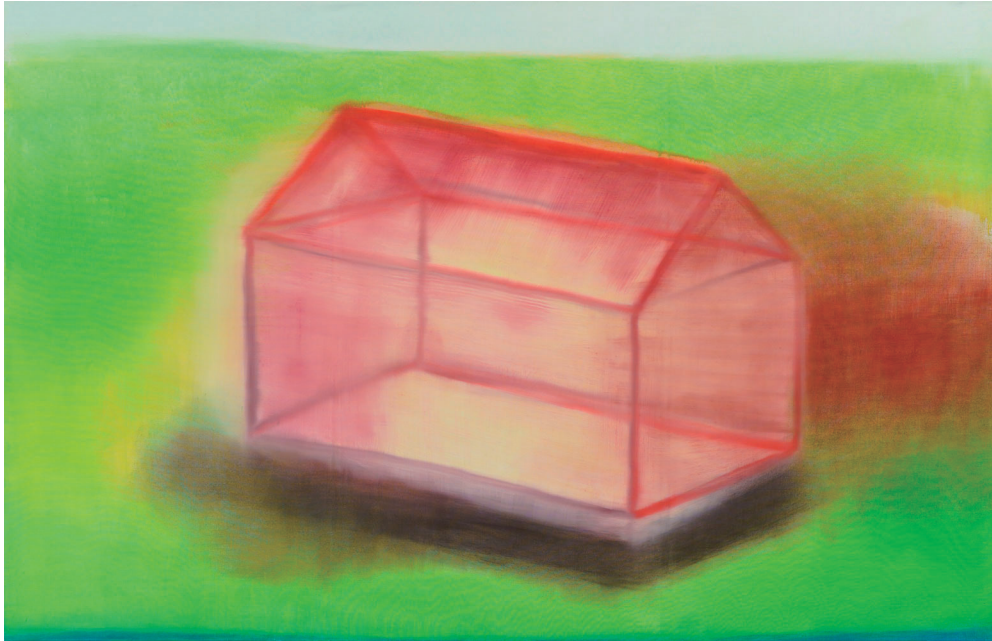
©Miriam Cahn, Bau (construction/building), 18.5.16
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In her early career during the 1980s, the house was already a topic of hers when she produced house-drawings in her hometown of Basel on the concrete pillars of a highway, which of course was illegal, and I suppose a political act.

Nowadays, Ms Cahn is living in the same village, Stampa, where the Swiss sculptor Alberto Giacometti was born. It is located in the Italian-speaking part of Switzerland named Bregaglia. There she acquired an industrial estate a few years ago and, in collaboration with the architect Armando Ruinelli, having his practice in a close-by village called Soglio, she conceived a project in common. The artist and the architect thus jointly designed her contemporary architecture studio-house; the concrete structure seems to be suspended in a similar way, as the above house painting seems to be floating above the ground.

Whilst interviewing Mr Ruinelli, he stated that it was a very interesting and unusual collaboration; the architect was thus working with a client who is not only an artist, whose aesthetic preoccupations are indeed houses themselves. Furthermore, regarding the geographical and cultural situation, he said in an interview: "Bregaglia is a dark, deep and very narrow valley, and that has an immediate impact; it affects the psyche of the people in general, and certainly also influences the architecture. I think a lot of the influences of the place where you live are subconscious. A valley like Bregaglia is something you carry within; it conveys very strong sensations of light, of loneliness, of *chiaroscuro* [there is no direct sunlight for weeks in Winter]. I don't think about these things every time I design a project, but they do influence the way I work" (TR-ANSFER, 2018).

Magazzino & Atelier Miriam Cahn, Architect A. Ruinelli,
Ansicht Nord, photograph＠Ralph Feiner, 7208 Malans, CH, n.d.

Heidi Bucher

A very different approach to address the topic of the house can be seen in the artworks of Heidi Bucher. Her oeuvre consists of sculptures, as here below the blue "Ahnenhaus" (ancestors' house) demonstrates, and also consists of performance and installations works.

Heidi Bucher, "Ahnenhaus" [ancestors' house] & 'peeled' off walls of parents' house, 1980-82 (swissinstitute.net)
©Collection Mayo and Indigo Bucher, Courtesy Freymond-Guth Fine Arts, Zürich

The above visible, hanging wall-work of Heidi Bucher is named, "Häutung" (skinning). She literally 'peeled' off the walls of her childhood and parents' house in Winterthur, Switzerland. Heike Munder wrote: These sculptures consist of a "... joint process of embalming and stripping elaborated by casting her parent's house walls with a latex embalmment. After making the skinning she hung it from the flagpole of the house like a trophy and

let it flutter like an animal's entrails". Hence, depending on the context, either the notion of *interiority*, or of *exteriority* applies.

> What is left behind is a *house* "cleansed" of the traces of the past. The translucent, hanging wall-sculptures evoke themes of memory, in my view, of catharsis, of documentation and transformation of parental house spaces; it is a performative and auto-archaeological enterprise. The process of skinning is an appropriation of all the layers of patina, and, as a result, an opportunity to free oneself of the past. The house can then be occupied in a new way and we can rewrite history, Munder stated (2015, all citations, pp. 57, 58).

Furthermore, the curator Bice Curiger, who had worked for Heidi Bucher, stated in an interview regarding the "Ahnenhaus": "I felt very strongly that the past was kind of overpowering for her [Bucher]. So she took the skin of the past away, so to say". The interviewer Simon Castets said that: "A reading of her works that sees it as a sort of rebellious attitude toward the bourgeois conservatism of Winterthur society which her family was part of" (2015, p. 77).

'House' versus 'Home

At this point, I consider it important to differentiate between *house* and *home* but also to point out some culturally-grounded language distinctions.

In German, according to Grimm's dictionary, the word *house* refers to a common linguistic root with *skin* as well as blanket, rescue, clothing, armour, leather and shelter. It has thus a rather external connotation, which is either related to, or part of the body; hence, notions of inside and outside apply.

Interestingly, in some regions of Japan, in women's speech I (in the sense of referring to one-self) can also be expressed with the term *house*, that is *uchi*, which seems, according to Bonnin and Nishida (2014, p. 179), rather to point to *interiority*, as also the Japanese character for wife, "okusan", suggests, that it is the woman who is in the house, similarly as e.g. "Hausfrau" in German or "housewife" in English. The location of self, or rather the female self, seems to traditionally be situated in the *inside* of an inhabitable space.

In my opinion, and perhaps from a Westerner's perspective, the *human body*, this outer physical envelope, could be considered a metaphor for the *house* in the figurative symbolic sense. The *house* can thus be this exterior, structural form that can be representing the self in an individual manner; it may however also integrate other 'selves', that is auxiliary persons.

The *house*, as well as the *human body*, are generally perceived from the outside by most people; what happens inside remains largely hidden. Hence, one could suspect that there are *external*, visible properties that allow us to draw conclusions about the *interior*. A cracked facade suggests that it might not be an entirely new house, just as wrinkles on the skin of a human being indicate a certain age.

Finally, a *house* is always a *house* that can incorporate a *home*, or not. In contrast, a *home* can hardly exist without being located inside a *house*.

Architecture

The Japanese architect Sou Fujimoto (2013, p. 164) nicely elaborates: "Architecture is not simply about making interior space, nor about exterior space, but to generate relationships between the two".

These notions regarding the material built space, as well as the complexities of the inner, psychological space and how and why these are symbolically re-presented and lived by human beings is the endeavour of my research.

Since my research question addresses the *house* via two- and three-dimensional expressions, the inclusion of, or the extension into, the field of architecture does, in my view, impose itself. Architects' aesthetic and material

choices, sources of inspiration, socio-cultural backgrounds, reflections related to cultural and geographical locations, to name just a few, may provide further valuable theoretical insights and material along with that of art therapy patients and artists. Hence, such considerations provide a rationale to include architecture in this research. Victor Buchli clearly establishes a direct link between architectural structures and human beings by asserting that "bodies and buildings are difficult to disentangle". And he elaborates further: "The embodiment of built form serves as more than an anthropomorphic representation of the human life, or body, but is literally itself an extended and collective form" (2013, p.157).

Furthermore, some architecture theorists incorporate a phenomenological stance into their thinking by linking architecture to the human body and its lived experiences through our senses. Pallasmaa notes: "The eyes want to collaborate with the other senses. All the senses, including vision, can be regarded as extensions of the sense of touch - as specialisations of the skin. They define the interface between the skin and the environment - between the opaque interiority of the body and the exteriority of the world" (1996, p. 45). Interestingly, Pallasmaa also refers to the skin, which seems to have a common German linguistic referring to the *house*, as we could see above.

Architects' houses

Sou Fujimoto

The below photograph shows the architect Sou Fujimoto standing within his Serpentine Gallery's *'Cloud Pavilion'* (2013) in London. As is the case in Ms Cahn's painting, the Cloud Pavilion is characterised by permeability, transparency, but also emphasises structure. Due to this transparent form, the *inside* and *outside* are practically suspended, representing a notion often encountered in traditional, as well as contemporary Japanese architecture. Here, the see-through structure can be considered as filled space, but difficult to inhabit, whereas in Ms Cahn's house- paintings the interior seems to be void; the inner space could, however, or not, become occupied.

According to Yormakka (2003, 2006/7, p. 192) "the notion of emptiness or space in itself formed the basis of perhaps the most influential architectural theory of the early 20th century". He is referring to Hans Auer (1883) who wrote that "space is the soul of a building and that architecture is an art insofar as it deals with the creation of spaces".

Architect Sou Fujimoto poses with his Serpentine Pavilion — photo by Ben Stansall/Getty
http://www.curbed.com/2014/11/6/10026218/sou-fujimoto-innovators-award-serpentine-pavilion

The architecture theorist Pallasmaa critically examines (most likely) Western ways of perception via sight. He notes:

> The perception of sight as our most important sense is well grounded in physiological, perceptual and psychological facts. The problems arise from the isolation of the eye outside its natural interaction with other sense modalities, and from the elimination and suppression of other senses, which increasingly reduce and restrict the experience of the world into the sphere of vision. This separation and reduction fragments the innate complexity, comprehensiveness and plasticity of the perceptual system, reinforcing a sense of detachment and alienation (1996, p. 43).

Christian Kerez

Rather in stark contrast to Fujimoto's Serpentine Pavilion is Christian Kerez's "House with Lakeview" in Thalwil, Switzerland. It distinguishes itself via enwrapped, concrete and dense materiality.

In an interview with psychoanalyst Dr Knellessen, Kerez refers to the "corporeality of bunkers". He said: "This physical presence is not something dull or formless, but rather a shape which is first directly physically perceived, and only discloses itself intellectually or mentally at a second glance, that is it can only become meaningfully, or mentally perceived and defined with time. And to this extent, it is the *body* that interests me - as a *hiding place*".

His statements could be seen as an analogy of encounters between human beings and of the therapeutic process; the unearthing of inner material, but also of deeply buried unconscious content that may remain inaccessible for the person her-himself, as much as for the outside observer. However, giving new aesthetic forms to such meanings may lead to, with time, a fruitful personal transformation and to better being.

Art and art Therapy

For a very long time in human history, individuals have used various art forms to express themselves during healthy times or to survive their suffering through rituals of passage and transformation. Art making can thus be considered as a profound human expression and strategy to celebrate life, as well as a coping strategy of survival in response to crises. One might think of the prehistoric Lascaux cave paintings where e.g. a multitude of hands could be understood as individuals' wishes to demonstrate their existence and as a way of communication; hence, art is, and was, clearly of crucial importance for human beings (Foresta, 2018).

More recently, during the 20th century, the works of psychiatric patients aroused particular interest in psychiatrists such as Walter Morgenthaler in Switzerland, Marcel Réja in France, Hans Prinzhorn in Germany, or Leo Navratil in Austria. These psychiatrists realised that artistic expressions can allow people to express their fears, concerns, memories, traumas, which can be difficult to verbalise. A patient may not always be aware of his or her issues, but things may emerge in the form of a painting. Such artworks allow patients to communally address possible pains together with art therapists through a means of aesthetic and verbal communication within a safe and protected space.

Art-making can however also be, or become a new form of persons' ways of being, and can lead to accessing, or rediscovering personal resources and hence in becoming more resilient. Furthermore, art can also be situated in the realm of beauty, not in a superficial sense of aestheticism, but linked to a philosophical form of human expression.

Further, by linking phenomenology to psychotherapy, and in my view also to art therapy, Thomas Fuchs writes:

A phenomenological stance is indispensable if we want to gain a genuine, unprejudiced understanding of the patient's experience. A [art] psychotherapist inspired by phenomenology will move away from trying to change the inner states of the patient and instead focus on his *lived space*, i.e. his pre-reflective or implicit way of living with others. And they will, in particular, use the therapeutic relationship as a field for extending the patient's lived space and for changing his implicit relationship patterns (2007, p. 423, 424).

According to Fuchs "in play and in art" the person "enters a world of *'als ob'* ('as-if'), a kind of alternative world (Scheinwelt), not in the illusionary-deceptive sense, but in the sense of freedom from immediate oppressive, or unbearable reality" (2008, p. 203), which might be an explanation for the observed phenomena. By becoming active in sculpting or drawing, this creative process can represent a way to emerge from a passive, suffering state by transforming it into a more active, individual, and self-determined position. Fuchs writes: "The pictorial and artistic production is the externalisation of this inner freedom, the retransmission of the imagination into the material and visible world - an act that always remains an experimental and experiential act, 'Probehandeln', since it situates itself in the framework of art" (2008, p. 204). In other words, e.g. art therapy sessions allow patients to explore individual ways of being through the use of art media in a safe and protected environment, which in this case can be considered as a safe *Spielraum* (referring to a physical and mental play-space-time experience) where new patterns and forms can be explored and tested.

Furthermore, becoming active is related to the ability of "play", which has been conceptualised by Gadamer, who wrote (1977, pp. 29–30):

The first evidence we need to make is that play is an elementary function of human life, so that human culture without an element of play is not conceivable at all. It is worthwhile visualising the elementary givenness of human play within, related to its structures so that the play element of art becomes visible not only as a negative freedom of functional, expedient connections or purposes, but by becoming apparent as a free impulse.

When do we talk about play, and what is implied by it? Certainly, it is first the continuously repeating back and forth of a movement. ... It is obvious what characterises the back and forth, that neither the one end nor the other end is the goal of the movement in which it comes to rest. It is also clear that such a movement is characterized by a specific play-space (Spielraum).

As an example, one might recall one's own childhood and the pleasure-provoking experience of swinging back and forth on a large swing, or of repeatedly climbing up and sliding down a slide!

Gadamer further wrote,

...this will give us special consideration for the question of art. The freedom of movement, which is meant here, also implies that this movement must have the form of self-movement. Self-movement is the basic characteristic of the animate ('des Lebendigen'). ... Play now appears as a self-movement, which by its movement does not seek purpose and objectives in itself, but the movement of the movement, which is, so to speak, a phenomenon of surplus, the self-representation of actively partaking of life ('Lebendigseins').

Hence, Knill elaborated, the goal of art therapy (or in his case expressive arts therapy) is to achieve a "Spielraumerweiterung" (2005), an expansion of the patient's space of play; it suggests to ridding oneself, ideally,

of these inner constraints that restrain free play. These notions have to be understood as an analogy of humans' ways of being in the world, to the freedom, or ease one hope to acquire through play and art therapy.

Art therapy patients' house representations

Suggesting a specific theme, in this case the *house*, may allow to work through previous difficult, or even traumatic experiences by offering the person a framework, or structure within a space-time continuum in a reassuring and safe situation. The topic can provide participants with a sense of structure, as it also allows construction, a holding space, as well as an accompaniment via the art therapist's inner stance (innere Haltung).

Further, devoting one's self to the topic of the *house* can provide an aesthetic and inner access to all kinds of past or current experiences. These may also consist of early painful childhood memories, trauma, or posttraumatic stress symptoms (PTSD) and their long-term consequences; as is often the case at the time of the traumatic occurrence, the person might have been literally speechless and thus art therapy can allow to aesthetically, as well as verbally express such issues. Yet, how, when and why (or possibly not at all) participants embrace the topic is within their own hands.

Regarding the topic, as well as inner content, one might refer to Gaston Bachelard (1957, p. 6) who wrote: "It [*the house*] is one of the greatest powers of integration for the thoughts, memories and dreams of mankind".

Patients' vignettes

Ms M.S. "Elternhaus" (parents' house)

For some years Ms M.S. (42 years) has suffered from multiple sclerosis and attended the psychiatric clinic in Eastern Switzerland due to her depression, alcohol dependence, and personal neglect issues. It was in this clinic where I did an extended period of fieldwork (two weekly sessions during five months).

Ms M.S. had grown up in Southern Germany in a beautiful old mansion, with a back and front garden. As her parents got divorced Ms M.S.'s mother, together with her and two younger siblings, moved to Eastern (Swiss German speaking) Switzerland, where she first had, a) to learn the local language (as it is very different from the German spoken in Germany), and b) got called names by her fellow school children, as she didn't understand them, and had an accent in the earlier days of living in this area.

Furthermore, having settled in a high-rise apartment block in a small town, the new family living situation was in stark contrast to their previous one, a rather bourgeois house. Ms M.S.'s narratives about her childhood and youth were impregnated with sadness, anger, and imposed responsibilities she had to perform in regards of her younger siblings, as the mother was often ill.

Ms M.S., "Elternhaus" (parent's house), 2016

Towards the end of the period of my clinical fieldwork and after having worked together for five months, it appeared that Ms M.S. might also have a Jewish background, which according to her, had never been talked about in her family.

The painting shows Mrs M.S. primary family house (2016). On the left is the ill-loved, almost detestable front facade of the house; in the middle, the floor where Ms M.S.'s room was; and on the right, the inner backyard, preferred by Ms M.S. All three paintings are excerpts of the family's *house* and *home*.

Interestingly, Ms M.S. referred to her father when speaking of the left, exterior painting, by saying: "Aussen hui, innen pfui!" In German this saying indicates that behind a beautiful façade hides the "real", that is ugly, "face" of a person.

One could thus say that for Ms M.S. concentrating on the topic of the house over an extended period of time represented a process of coming to terms with her own past, as well as alleviating her current inner, as well as bodily suffering. Very importantly, however, she had succeeded to access her own creative resources and discovered herself as an artist; she started painting not 'only' in the clinic, but also at home, and even succeeded to publicly show her paintings.

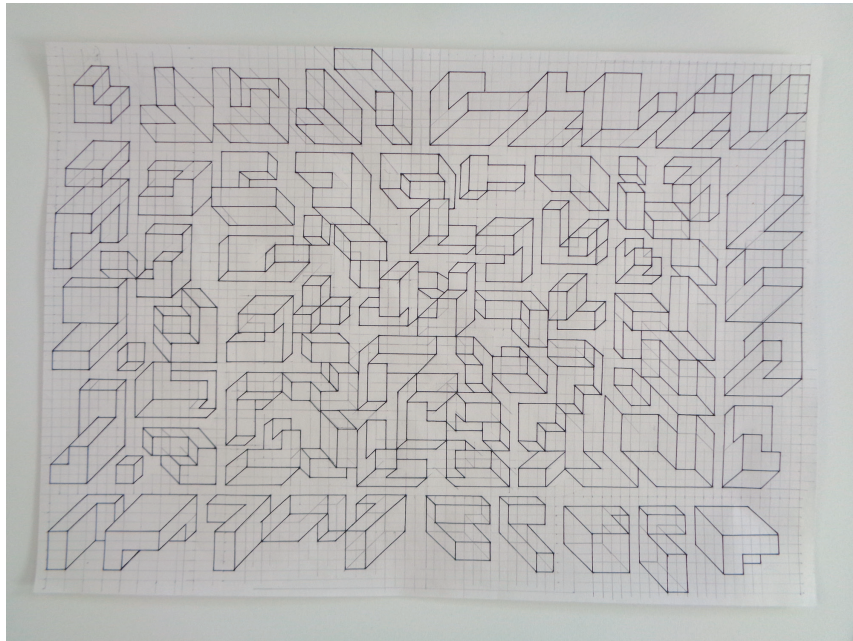## Mr Kn.'s "Nachbarschaften" (neighbourhoods)

Mr Kn. (34 years) was suffering from a bipolar affective disorder, with at times heavy periods of depressive episodes with psychotic symptoms. He experienced himself as an outsider, describing himself to have been exploited and "instrumentalized" by his adolescent colleagues. Once, he had also attempted suicide through jumping from a high bridge. As a consequence, Mr Kn. was constrained to use a wheel chair for some time; nowadays he is however able to walk again even though he is slightly limping. During the time he attended my workshops (for a duration of three months) he got married to an African lady, and found a part-time job.
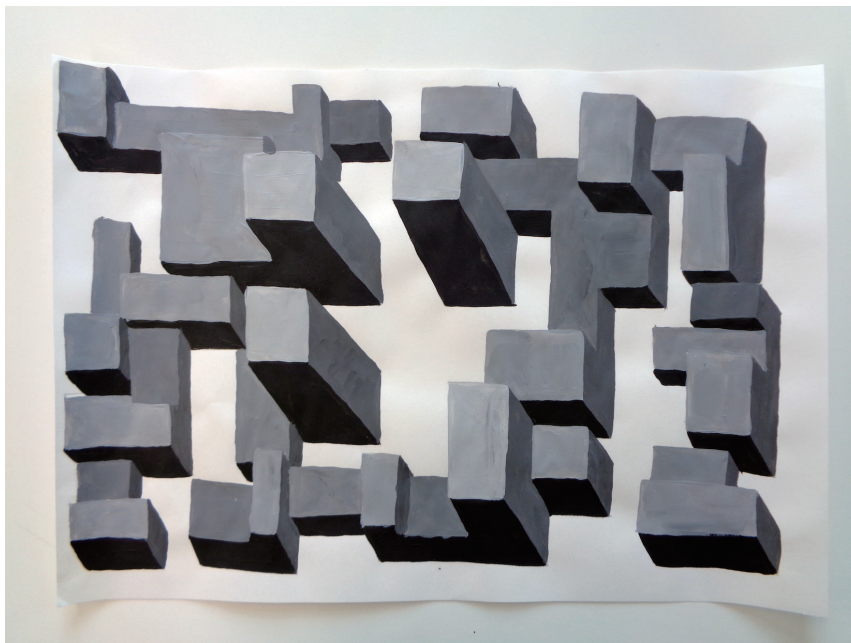
Mr. Kn. "Nachbarschaften (neighbourhoods), 31.5.2016

When I went to 'visit' him (that is, sitting next to him at his table) during the art therapy workshop, he said that he had wished to expand the area of the "neighbourhoods". Then he said he wanted to spread it out in mirror-inverted form but that he had made a mistake. He showed me the spot on the drawing and it seemed to me as if the house structures would rather be an interior empty space.

Mr Kn. explained that he wishes to merge the two forms of neighbourhoods as he did before into one drawing, but also to integrate a perspective (he does not use the word perspective), which would go in opposite ways, that is, showing four dimensions.

Mr. Kn. "Nachbarschaften (neighbourhoods), 28.6.2016

As he is incapable of drawing straight lines due a tremor, I suggested taking a photograph of his initial hand drawing, which he thereafter reworked with his computer, in order to obtain "straight" lines. So he did (above, 2nd drawing, 2016), and was extremely pleased to have achieved what he had in mind.

With time, Mr Kn. started to talk more with the other patients' present during the studio workshops. His taciturn and withdrawn way of being started to slightly be opening up towards the exterior world.

My impression was that the topic of the *house* allowed him to go beyond the individual closed-in, anxiety-loaded self (city spaces). At the same time it seemed to have provided him, literally speaking, with an internal structural support 'system', or grid.

As Buchli pointed out (2013 p. 71), with the influence of the work of Claude Lévi-Strauss, architecture begins to reassume a central significance in the understanding of human societies through his concept of "house societies".

The self

Gallagher and Zahavi (2008, p. 219) start their chapter 'self and person' with the fundamental question of asking: "What is a self"? They continue this inquiry: "Does it exist for real, or is it a mere social construct or perhaps a neurologically induced illusion? If something like a self exists, what role does it play in our conscious lives, and when and how does it emerge in the development of the infant?"

Addressing "neuro-scepticism and the no-self doctrine", Gallagher and Zahavi write that the French philosopher Sartre claimed

that a correct phenomenological investigation of lived consciousness will simply not find an ego, whether understood as an inhabitant in, or possessor of consciousness. ... When I am absorbed in reading a story, I have a consciousness of the narrative and a pre-reflective self-awareness of the reading but, according to Sartre, I do not have any awareness of an ego. As long as we are absorbed in the experience, living it, no ego

will appear. The ego emerges only when we adopt a distancing and objectifying attitude to the experience in question, that is, when we *reflect* upon it. As Sartre put it, the ego appearing in reflection is the object and not the subject of reflection' (2008, p. 220).

Culture

There are various definitions of what culture can be; this includes perspectives of similar notions, however also rather divergent ways of conceptualising it. Personally, I feel relatively comfortable with T.S. Eliot's definition of culture, even though the term 'class' needs to be seen, I suppose, in respect to his Zeitgeist. He noted:

> The term culture has different associations according to whether we have in mind the development of an individual, of a group or class, or of a whole society. Culture of the individual is dependent upon the culture of a group or class, and that the culture of the group or class is dependent upon the culture of the whole society to which that group or class belongs. Therefore it is the culture of the society that is fundamental, and it is the meaning of the term 'culture' in relation to the whole society that should be examined first' (1948, 1962, p. 1). In respect to contemporary times, Mathews (2007, p. 47) points out: "Cultural borders have become porous, with people, goods, and ideas ceaselessly moving across societal boundaries". And he adds (p. 48): "Cultural identity today is in this state of flux, neither culturally "pure" nor culturally "free", but somewhere in the middle".

Notions of self and culture

With respect to the *cross-cultural nature* of my inquiry, even though I refer to *Eastern* and *Western* peoples, and also to *exteriority* and *interiority* regarding aesthetic, as well as inner content, I do not consider these notions as dichotomous but rather as belonging to a spectrum of perspectives.

My stance regarding the notions of 'Eastern' and 'Western' cultures are in accord with Bhui's (2012, MSc audio lecture) definition:

> Similarities across cultures should never be underestimated, and generalisations have dangers particularly in that it leads to stereotyping of individuals. I don't see any other way of exploring this without generalising, saying "Western", and "Eastern". However by doing so I am not implying that East and West are anymore than traditions from the past. These are current states of mind rather than the geographical regions, and there is East in the West, and West in the East.

According to Rosenberger's research elaborated in Japan (1994), which could in my view symbolically be associated to or with the topic of the *house* because of its references to the *inside* and *outside*:

> The self is born and reborn through positioning in various sets of cultural ideas and practice. Self's meaning derives from its position in relation to other meanings - meanings of other selves, other relationships, other groups, and so on - and from its movement among these positions (Henriques et al. 1984, Smith, 1988, Weedon, 1987) (Rosenberger, p. 67).

> Interestingly, in her view the

> "third dimension of self [in Japan]", which she refers to movements in psycho-spirital energy, ki, movements in relationship through the taking and giving of indulgence, *amae*, and movement in context of formality and

informality (Rosenberger, p. 67).

A third dimension of self played out through positioning within different contexts, signified such as outer/ inner *(soto/uchi)*, front/back *(omote/ura)*, and on-stage meaning/off-stage meaning *(tatemae/honne)* (Lebra 1976, Doi 1986, Bachnk 1987).

Contexts are more outer *(soto)* if they are organized according to rules agreed upon by the group and if social hierarchy is emphasised. These are more public situations in which people affirm the formal or stage meanings of their groups, often in relation to other groups.

Contexts are more inner *(uchi)* [house] if they are organised to encourage emotionally expressed harmony and intimate relations. Here people affirm their informal, backstage relations with others, forming an inner group of people (Rosenberger, p. 69).

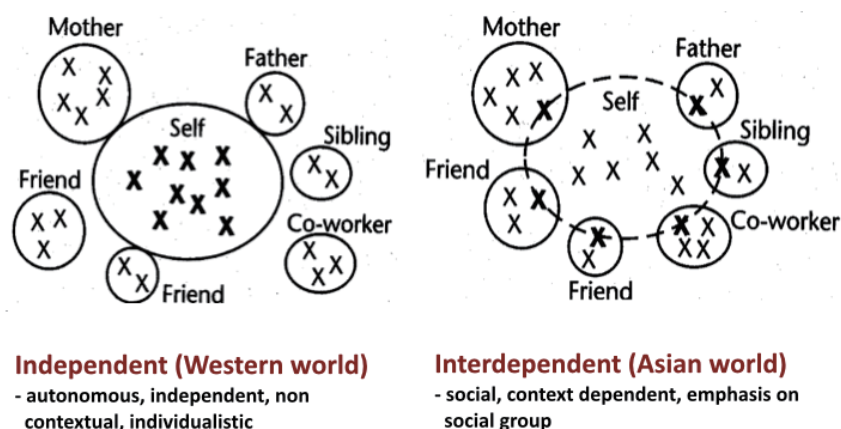**Two types of self-definition according to Markus & Kitayama, 1991**

In line with Markus & Kitayama (1991, p. 225) "Western notions of the self as an entity containing significant dispositional attributes, and as detached from context, is simply not an adequate description of selfhood". ... According to them "independent construals", are also referred to as "individualistic, egocentric, separate, autonomous, idiocentric, and self-contained"; they link it to a rather "Cartesian, dualistic tradition in Western thinking". In contrast, the "interdependent construal of the self" shares notions of "socio-centric, holistic, collective, allo-centric, ensembled, constitutive, contextualist, connected, and relational". This kind of selfhood is considered to be grounded in Confucian, Hindu, or monistic philosophical traditions (pp. 227–228).

Kühnen writes in his chapter "Kultur und Kognition" that "individuals' understanding of their ego, or the self, plays a central role in the emergence of cultural differences in thinking". According to him, "culture influences our understanding of ourselves, and the mental representation of one's own person···(2014, p. 190)".

Hence, he is referring to Markus and Kitayama and writes, whilst addressing Eastern and Western Cultures: "The extent of individualism, respectively the collectivism of a culture is accompanied by differences in the self-conception of its members, that is along the dimension of independency and interdependence".

"Through the combination of cross-cultural studies", Kühnen (2014) writes that "independency favours a

Two types of self-definition according to Markus & Kitayama, 1991

Independent (Western world)
- autonomous, independent, non contextual, individualistic

Interdependent (Asian world)
- social, context dependent, emphasis on social group

Ulrich Kühnen, 2014. Kultur und Kognition. Wie das Selbst das Denken formt.

generally context-independent perception and judgment tendency, but interdependence promotes context-dependent, and more holistic thinking (p. 203)".

Culture and Mental Health

Not only within one culture (if culture could still be considered as 'solitary' notion in contemporary times), but also within different cultures, the way *how* mental health is perceived varies. What is considered to be 'normal' within a specific culture or society can be dramatically different across the world. Also *how* ways of people's sufferings are being expressed varies widely and can lead to misunderstandings if the mental health worker isn't aware of these distinctions.

The, in my view, very useful following points have been elaborated by Oyedeji Ayonrinde (all citations: MSc lecture 2012). They represent an important approach for raising cultural awareness and sensitivity for mental health professionals:

○ Culture sanctions what behaviour, attitudes or thoughts would be acceptable within a population. Culture plays an etiological, or contributory role in some disorders; it influences clinical presentation *and* interpretation of such presentations.

○ Culture plays a role in determining, the recognition, labelling, as in names given to, an explanatory model of disorders, how people make sense of the disorder.

○ Culture determines the treatment options, and care pathways within a society, and sanctions of what would be acceptable as a form of treatment, or not.

Discussion

Drawing on the above examples stemming from the art therapy patients', artists' and architects' art-works, as well as from additional preliminary material from several periods of fieldwork, it appears that the topic of the *house* is a promising approach in investigating notions of ill health, PTSD or trauma. Working with psychiatric patients via art therapy allows them to express a wide range of emotions, past and present painful ones, as well as to also address positive experiences. Further, this allows to look back and re-examine earlier paintings, which are the witnesses of the patient's mental state at a given time, which can additionally reveal a possibly occurring transformation.

That is, looking at participants' paintings together with the art therapist allows to refresh a person's aesthetic, narrative and inner individual realm and can facilitate a newly emerging sense of selfhood. Hence, the topic of the *house*, by its universal qualities, as well as by the nature of its corporeality, allows for a large spectrum of personal aesthetic, as well as narrative explorations, which would be rather difficult to address, if the theme would e.g. be *tree*.

The works of the patients involved in the study to date indicate that the topic has triggered reactions, and has allowed them to visually and verbally address very personal issues. For example, one patient who had experienced the war in Serbia as a child painted a house whose roof remained open, and one corner of the house seemed to have been bombed, exposing the living room and its covered up furniture. As Hogan writes: "There is the opportunity to be immersed (in the flow) using intuition, serendipity, spontaneously enjoying the tactile embodied nature of the experience - what many call 'creativity' (though often without defining what they mean). In this indeterminate space individuals or groups of people can become highly attuned to what is emerging - it is an emergent space" (2017, p. 157).

Extending this notion of space, Steets (2015, p. 192) in regard to architecture suggests: "When buildings become 'symbols', they stand for something that transcends the reality of the everyday world and that can not be adequately expressed in linguistic signs, such as an abstract moral principle, a collective idea, or even the presence of something 'holy' ". Her statement clearly suggests that architectural space can lend itself to symbolise various inner, as well as societal and cultural contents. For Ms M., after having spent six months in a closed ward, the topic allowed her to initially draw the interior community space of the clinic, before thereafter depicting a 'house' incorporated in a horse's belly, thus starting to venture into an outside space.

An interesting example of culturally embedded materiality linked to the topic of the house is Urs Fischer's *bread house*; it is, as the title suggests, entirely made out of bread loaves and has the size of a cottage. In my view, given this construction material, his house is clearly situated in Western culture. Furthermore, the selection of a material by an artist, architect or art therapy patient can thus be seen as an indicator, or representation of her/his cultural background. Additionally, this house's materiality could also be used in order to raise questions of culturally grounded 'prohibition', of what and why some aesthetic expressions are (or not) acceptable by a given society. For example, a person following a strict Christian belief may be disturbed by the use of bread as a construction material. That is, which material or visual expression is selected by a person or study's participant can be highly emotionally and culturally charged and could even be perceived as disturbing by some.

An example of Eastern notions of a culturally embedded *house* are the tea house sculptures of the Chinese artist Ai Weiwei, as these are entirely made of compressed Pu-Erh tea-leaves. The sculptures consists of one ton of densely accumulated tea-leaves (2009), which firstly points to a type of Chinese tea, and thus to notions of food-related origins, and of course possibly to the tea ceremony as well. It could however also be seen as a culturally loaded reference to Chinese history because of the sculpture's physical weight. Further, both *house* sculptures, Ai Weiwei's as well as Urs Fischer's bread-house, establish a link to the sensorially and culturally grounded characteristics referring to both European as well as Chinese cultures.

Finally, I would like to come back to the inner correspondence between architecture and the psyche. As the architect Kerez (2012, p. 139) said in an interview regarding the relationship between architecture and psychoanalysis: "This process is not just a journey of discovery on which you go from one unforeseen wonderful encounter to the next, but rather describes a dungeon-like turning, which is however not machine-like - the tenth round is simply different from the ninth and the first. Each repetition involves the chance of a realization, one might say, and I think that's the way it is done in conceiving [architectural ideas] as well." Hence, art-works therefore not only lend themselves to investigate the individual self, but represent also a means to address inner, cultural, as well as societal constructs and aesthetic expressions.

Conclusion

My research addresses the question whether (or not) the *house* may be considered as a symbolic representation of persons' selves in European and Japanese cultures, but also within similar cultural and geographical locations. So far, based on several observations, it appears that art-works depicting the *house* may indeed be linked to persons' individual ways of being, but also seem, at times, to express past or current traumatic life events. Future analysis after having terminated the periods of fieldwork by the end of this year should provide more insight and will allow a more detailed analysis of representational *house*-related phenomena.

However, following my ontological stance, I assume that human beings have an *interiority*, and thus *house* representations that can only partially be accessed. This implies that, at best, gathered knowledge will be fragmentary and – in spite of any attempts at gaining objective knowledge – it will remain *incomplete and subjective*, allowing for divergent, but nevertheless equally valid observations, analysis, and knowledge production of obtained data and material.

The obtained multi-dimensional data will hopefully generate an extended understanding, and lead to recommendations for art therapy practice and theory cross-culturally in terms of *if*, *when*, *how*, and *for whom* art therapy settings suggesting the topic of the *house* can prove to be helpful in terms of addressing, and ideally overcoming past traumatic experiences by aesthetically *constructing*, or *rebuilding persons'* selves.

Finally, it is my goal and hope that the findings of my research will also be useful in order to raise cultural, and ethnic sensitivity and awareness in order to avoid unhelpful preconceptions.

To conclude, I wish quote the French philosopher Henri Maldiney who extensively wrote about art and psychiatry: "La présence marginale du thérapeute, par le climat de confiance qu'elle ménage, non seulement autorise, mais libère l'informe".

"The marginal presence of the [art] therapist, by the climate of confidence that she/he ensures, not only authorizes, but frees the amorphous / formless" (2009, p. 8). "The formless" in my sense can either refer to inner content, as much as to human beings' aesthetic and verbal expressions; through the art therapy process, ideally, transformation of this inner form can emerge, leading to restoration of the suffering self.

Notes

1) After ethical clearance and participants' consent has been obtained

2) Gesamt-Antrieb

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