... Phœnix, Faust, Narcissus: In Search of Home

Anne Buttimer
Kulturgeografiska Institutionen
Sölvegatan 13
223 62 Lund
Sweden

The major issues of "home" addressed in the present volume evoke at once the cosmic horizons of the anthroposphere and at the same time those which surround the intimate settings of everyday personal life. Phenomenology invites reflection on lived experience, and more explicit recognition of the values implicit in our ways of life and thought. Such awareness, it was hoped, could point the way toward more authentic modes of being-in-the-world on the one hand, and a clearer elucidation of everyday "data" on the other. Today one might ask where this adventure has led us, and what conclusions might be drawn from phenomenologically-inspired research efforts in geography and the human sciences to date. Such a review could help us to better assess the challenge which the future may hold.

Phenomenology in the twentieth century could well be regarded as a cri-du-coeur emanating from central Europe at a time when many inherited certainties were breaking down. Indeed the First World War marked the end of an era; many traditionally-accepted truths were questioned and eventually rejected. Vain promises of Empire and Revolution, subsequent migrations and urbanization, agrarian reform and industrial development, all undermined inherited social benefits. On the scientific front, inherited certainties based on mechanical laws of physics and the vitalistic claims of biology, were also challenged. While positivism gained ground as potential deliverer of truthful statements about reality, the spiritual world was still suffering from a pervasive sense of nihilism. Already toward the end of the ninetieth century Nietsche announced the death of God; by the middle of the twentieth, Levi-Strauss would announce the death of the human subject. Sisiphus-like, many an existentialist sought to proclaim freedom for the individual *(L'Etre-pour-soi, Being for itself),* as alienated stranger in a world of material reality *(L'Etre-en-soi, Being in itself)* which was absurd, unexplainable by human reason, and anyhow doomed to death *(Sein zum Tode).*

There has perhaps been some confusion among empirically-oriented human scientists about the respective stances of existentialism and phenomenology. The convergence of these two streams, however, within human geography at least, has led to new ways of approaching the study of space and time in human experience. Echoes from both streams have prodded awareness of moral, emotional and aesthetic aspects of life experience, quite as much as they have heralded new conceptual orientations. For that crisis of European science recognized by Husserl reflected a much deeper existential crisis, and it beckoned a need for redefining humanity's relationship to nature and the physical environment. The Second World War and its aftermath witnessed an

intensification of these crises and the quest for alternative ways of knowing and dwelling. For almost two decades now there have been attempts to practice the *époché* in studying human experiences of space. It would seem prudent indeed to evaluate the results of these efforts before speculating on what the future might hold.

In order to gain some perspective on the postwar revival of the phenomenological spirit one really needs to broaden horizons beyond those of the twentieth century. The multi-facetted crises which phenomenology sought to address have deep roots in our western traditions. In fact, one of its central goals was precisely that of evoking awareness of those myths and practices which underlie Western interpretations of nature, space, and time. Clearer self-understanding is a pre-requisite for the understanding of others. And questions of "home" for humanity globally can scarcely be envisioned without human dialogue based on mutual understanding among civilizations. It is with this aim in mind that I suggest the following mytho-poetic account of the western legacy; a trilogy of themes which have been helpful in elucidating the career journeys of individuals as well as the history of western humanism[1] . They might also shed some light on our postwar efforts to explore phenomenological aspects of home.

Phoenix, Faust, Narcissus

Phoenix symbolizes the song of liberation or rebirth, promise of a clearing in the thickets of our lives and ways of thinking. Now and then Phoenix arises from the ashes of oblivion, oppression, or injustice; now and then it comes gratuitously, with a prophetic voice about alternatives for the future. Often, indeed such messages are not comprehensible within concurrently taken-for-granted modes of being and thought; hence Phoenix has to die, or be consumed by fire, before it is reborn at a later time. Once heard, however, the emancipatory cry gives rise to movements, steered by a Faustian myth of progress. Like his mytho-poetic ancestor, Prometheus, Faust constantly seeks to improve the human condition and to build institutions and legal guarantees for the future promotion of this fresh idea. If ever he were to pause in his efforts, as the Goethe version told, Mephistopheles would be there ready to steal his soul. Eventually tensions arise between the initial liberation ethos on the one hand (Phoenix) and the maintenance and reproduction of structures (Faust) on the other. At this point Narcissus appears, critically reflecting on the past, on contradictions between spirit and letter, seeking clarity on his own identity and "home" within the contexts surrounding him.

Might one not describe the phenomenological turn of the latter twentieth century as the twilight song of Narcissus en route to consult the Muses on Mount Helicon? Then the challenge could be construed as one of critical choice between fixation on one's own image out of reverence for the past on the one hand, versus that of self-awareness and the courage to transcend the certainties of one's Faustian phase and open a clearing for a new Phoenix on the other.

Through the 1960s there was indeed a Phoenix mood surrounding the idea of lived experience as focus for research on human habitat. Geographers, architects, and social scientists enthusiastically explored personal and cultural variations in the perception of environments as sources of fresh insight into patterns of overt behaviour

[1] These themes are elaborated in "Geography, Humanism and Global Concern" forthcoming in *Annals of the Association of American Geographers.*

in space. This mood also included a radical critique of the modernistic and opaque accounts delivered by "scientific" geography of the early postwar period. By the early 1970s a Faustian will was apparent in the building of new research specialties and the growing popularity of ethno-methodological approaches within existing fields. By the early 1980s it was obvious that the initial *esprit de corps* and collaborative attitudes displayed by pioneers of those areas was notably absent among the next generation. Functional specialization and at times competitive attitudes toward substantive foci of research, sponsors and audience, replaced the shared quest for new horizons of a general nature which had characterized the 1960s. Some turned to philosophical and hermeneutic reflection; others explored language and the dynamics of symbolic interaction; and post-modernism invited displays of texts mirroring texts.

Even a superficial evaluation of the past few decades' efforts would reveal the futility of such fragmentation (whatever its power-political rationale), and the relative paucity of insight yielded on humanity's home. Despite rhetorical commitment to evoking self-awareness, and to understanding reality from the human subject's vantage point, certain lingering biases have, in fact, endured. Among those, the following could be identified:

(a) Anthropocentrism and individualism in the interpretation of human behaviour: a tendency to focus on the human subject *(L'Etre-pour-soi)* as (i) opposed to society or at least to the tyranny of collectivist ideologies, oblivious to (ii) its roots in the present or past, and of (iii) its relationships to other living species in the biosphere

(b) the primacy accorded to experience of space, with little consideration of the lived experience of temporality

(c) the central emphasis laid on visual perception and representation of environment, the attempt to elucidate these in rational and cognitive terms, and the virtual omission of other sensory modes of experiencing the world.

The hermeneutic turn has, of course, yielded a growing awareness of the basically reflexive character of all empirical methods. This awareness shines through in most of the contributions to this symposium. Though a fundamental gap still separates those who are primarily interested in environmental design and landscape on one side and the philosophically-inclined human scientist on the other, what we share is a common legacy of thought and practice, viz. that of Western civilization, in this tiny corner of the anthroposphere.

Phenomenological aspects of home

Home, as Graumann and Villela-Petit remind us, is a term which can evoke a wide variety of meanings: "to live in" or "to stay at" are not the same as "to feel at home". Cultural and personal differences in the meaning of "home" could, they suggest, be traced through a scrutiny of language and speech. Does this imply that conceptions of home are ultimately culture- and/or language-bound? On this question the humanist and the structuralist would surely disagree. For if, for Wittgenstein *et al.*, language could be construed as a prison, it could just as feasibly be construed as game, as in Gadamar's *Das Spiel*, offering opportunity for experiments in communication and mutual comprehensibility across cultures.

The "linguisticality" of all being, to use the hermeneutic expression, corresponds to its sociality, as most of the contributions in this symposium attest. Does this suggest that one has matured, conceptually at least, in approaches to lived experience, emancipated perhaps from the monopoly of psychological and individualistic modes of analyzing environmental perception? To communicate about questions of identity and home across linguistic barriers demands a certain understanding of sociality, viz. the relationships between individuals and their social contexts. This was scarcely conceivable with earlier notions of existential subjects who were alienated from society, and indeed a few generations have perhaps over-emphasized the antagonistic stances of "insiders" and "outsiders" as well as that of "resident" and "planner" in questions of residential area design. Korosec-Serfaty dares to open this potential Pandora's Box, revealing interesting cultural differences in how people orchestrate their zones of cordiality and reserve in home-based activities.

Human subjects, however, are just as much part of nature as they are of society. The Body Subject, to use Merleau-Ponty's expression, relates to environment in sensory-motor as well as cognitive ways. These, as well as the aesthetic and symbolic aspects of environmental experience once noted by Dardel and Bachelard, all find an important place in the presentations of Sauzet and Amphoux & Mondada. In both papers horizons are opened for more fertile exchange between the philosophical and architectural streams of enquiry into the nature of home. Both re-open those enduring curiosities about the relationships between civilization and the physical environment, questions about which twentieth century geographers, by and large, preferred to remain silent. Shivers of horror provoked by environmental determinism of late nineteenth- and early twentieth century led to an emphasis on space as *tabula rasa*, the geometry and morphology of landscape as central focus of disciplinary enquiry. The phenomenological movement has helped heal such attitudes, and point toward ways in which the question may again be posed.

Also welcome in the presentations of this symposium is the re-affirmation of temporality as a vital component in the lived experienced of environment. Cultures vary in their modes of temporal orientation and representations, but in all there is the challenge of negotiating public time, as measured by clock, calendar, or work-routines, with varying personal and cultural images of time, and harmonizing these with the cyclical and rhythmic time of our neurophysiological and emotional life. The desynchronization of rhythms resulting from modern modes of life, and the juxtaposition of incompatible agenda in time as well as in space, is surely one of the key features of westernized culture today.

Each of the contributions to this symposium sheds a particular light on questions of home. Each calls for a pluridisciplinary dialogue. But there is still much to be learned from reflections on history. Villela-Petit invites reflection on the history of western imagination as expressed in literature and theatre, and it is perhaps in this realm that the greatest challenge lies, if the gap which separates our dreams for home today are to be reconciled with those for global humanity tomorrow.

From Narcissus as Twilight to a Phoenix Dawn

"Home": for what and for whom? by what or by whom?

What constitutes "home" for our minds, for our hearts, for our bodies, for our projects? An unequivocal identification of one place/time in reply to these questions

could scarcely be imagined today. Neither would the response to these questions omit reference to nature. Apart from the dilemma of orchestrating these diverse "homing" meeds, there remains the professional dilemma for those of us with a research concern about environmental design. The built environment and physical infrastructures of dwelling remain fixed for considerable lengths of time, imposing their configurations on the habitable environment and screening bodies from nature, while human aspirations and cultural styles change, people become more nomadic in their aspirations and behaviour and demand more flexibility and social justice in the design of home.

The quest for home, conceptually and experientially, and the twilight reflections of phenomenology, should help direct attention toward new aspects of human identity, and a healing of those inherited attitudes toward being-in-itself as potentially manipulable or absurd. Nature and environments, too, have life and dynamism. Narcissus-as-pilgrim has been singing the song of the absence, evoking a nostalgia for ways whereby humans could participate more gently in the natural rhythms of the biosphere, as partner in the perennial recreation of sociality and varied forms of dwelling.

These final years of the twentieth century have witnessed a Phoenix-like thirst for regeneration through contact with nature and visions of a "re-natured" humanity (Pelt, 1977). Humanity can no longer be construed as *L'Etre-pour-soi,* indifferent to world; nor can its behaviour be fully elucidated via analyses of spatial activity patterns or images of environment. Humans also participate in the rhythms of time and physical processes within the biosphere. Humans are capable of transcending those rhythms through imagination and through reason, even though the Promethean myth has often pushed them to technological folly and imperialistic enterprise. What is specifically human is the moral sense of life, the awareness of a reality which transcends time, personal experience, and the bio-ecological cycles which bind humans with other living beings.

> "Man is at the point of intersection where personal time meets eternity" (Kohàk, 1984).

The moral sense of nature is a lesson to be found in the texts of many human civilizations, including the Western one. To feel "at home" in the world, then, not only should imply bonds with the natural environment, but also with past generations, whose archeological remains continue to fascinate scholars today. It is perhaps from such bonds that one can derive the strength to deal with that other cornerstone of nihilism, the *Sein zum Tode,* characterizing the brief span of our human lives.

Future phenomenological research on home could therefore extend its horizons to the global scale of Gaia, that other manifestation of a Phoenix mood in the latter years of the twentieth century (Lovelock, 1979). Let us pursue our explorations of micro-spaces, keep our secret places, share autobiographical reflections. Without some anchoring in lived experience of everyday life, conceptions of a living Gaia would be rather vacuous. On the other hand, would we not remain prisoners of Helicon waters if we did not seek better understanding of the global connotations of home for humanity? Gaia, after all, might be so clever that her survival would not be threatened if humans, those later arrivals in the biosphere, were to vanish!

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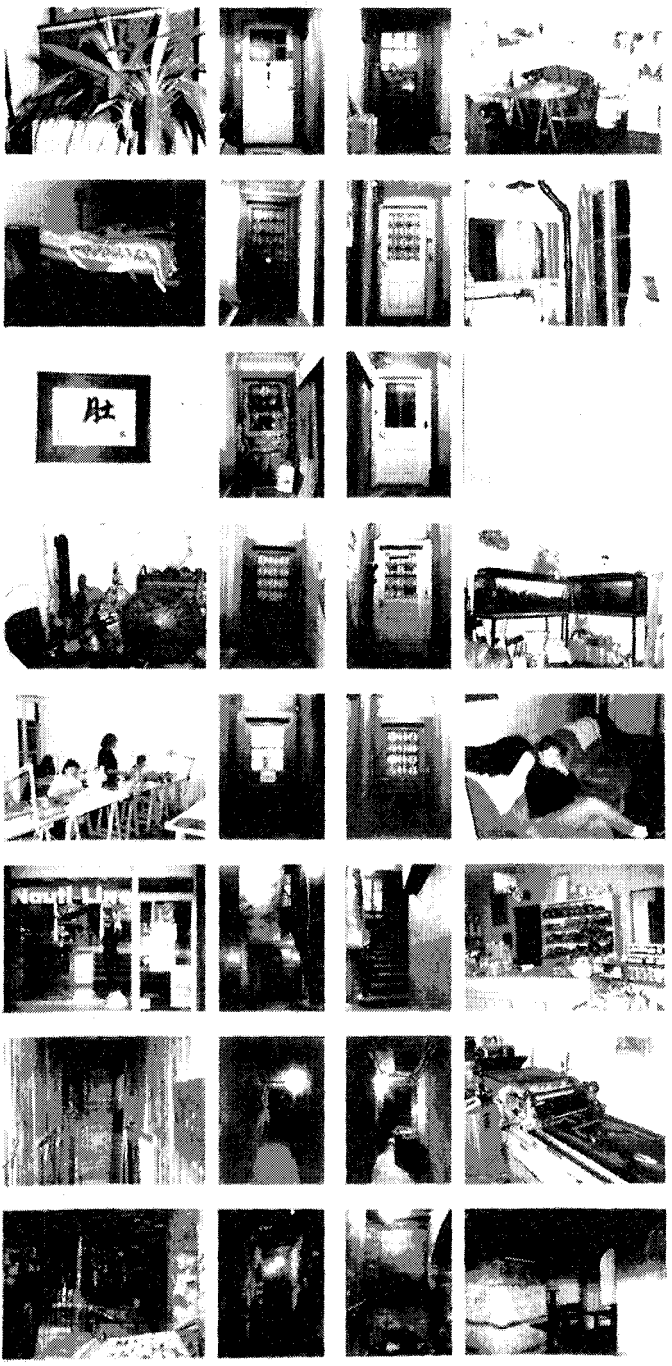
Fig. 4 Vues intérieures d'une maison d'habitation, rue du Tunnel, Lausanne: montage photographique, 1988. Atelier Barbey/Diener (EPFL): S. Decker, P. Mivelaz, M. Rampini, I. Rossi.

Inside view of a residential building, rue du Tunnel, Lausanne: photo-montage, 1988. Workshop Barbey/Diener (EPFL): S. Decker, P. Mivelaz, M. Rampini, I. Rossiey/Diener (EPFL): S. Decker, P. Mivelaz, M. Rampini, I. Rossi.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