

The Feeling & Making of Home

Crafting Belonging in a Shifting Landscape

Bérénice Demiddeleer
5866103

Research Plan
Urban Architecture
Graduation Studio 2024-2025
Tutors: Chiara Pradel, Eireen Schreurs, Leeke Reinders

Low Town Down Town

This year's graduation studio focuses on Hoboken, a southern part of Antwerp that is developing and full of new hopes. Nowadays, Hoboken is a patchwork of old and new industries, workers' houses, social and middle-class housing experiments, rivers (Hollebeek and Schelde), and the Hobokense polder, a nature reserve that emerged unexpectedly on a site originally destined to be redeveloped in the seventies. Besides being diverse in its urbanity, Hoboken counts many different nationalities among its inhabitants, bringing an extra layer to consider in the redevelopment of the place.

The Lageweg site is at the intersection of these 'islands' of housing, parking lots, nature areas, rivers, and (old) industries, with the main one nowadays known as the Blikfabriek. Although the Blikfabriek is destined for demolition and redevelopment, it is temporarily repurposed as a cultural project, aimed at keeping the site lively, preserved, and appealing for future developments.

Among other initiatives, the 'Maakfabriek' has brought together 70 artists, giving them a place to express themselves. While visiting the site and meeting some artists, I realized that this place was not only a workplace for some but also a house (or a home?) for others, with some living in the hall or campervans parked outside the building.



author's drawing

While redeveloping, the Blikfabriek gentrifies. This can be seen as a positive development, bringing in new people, ideas, and lifestyles. However, it can also be scary for existing neighbors who may feel overlooked and excluded from the emerging projects. Some may have sentimental attachments to the place, such as having worked there, formed cherished memories, found refuge among the industrial surroundings, or grown up nearby.

Gehl's idea, *"First life, then spaces, then buildings. The other way around never works"*, suggests that environments gain meaning and value primarily through the people who inhabit them and the lives they live there. Therefore, I would like to explore the question of 'feeling at home and making of home' by investigating different ways of living in the area, such as community housing, "DIY" housing, modernist housing, co-housing, nomadic lifestyles, and workers' houses. I aim to understand how people connect with their homes, where they feel at home, and whether they truly feel at home in their (changing) environment.

Defining 'Home'

Throughout my life, I have always believed that home is intrinsically connected to family and beloved ones. However, moving away to pursue my studies has shifted my perspective. I discovered that I could feel at home halfway across the world, independent of my family, yet I still longed for a different sense of belonging. This shift challenges the traditional definitions of home as merely a place tied to one's origins or a fixed physical space. According to the Cambridge Dictionary, «home» is not just a location or structure, such as a house, but rather «the place where a person feels they belong.» This distinction between «house» and «home» highlights the importance of **belonging** and **emotional connection**.

French philosopher Gaston Bachelard, in 'The Poetics of Space' (1958), argues that home is not just a physical space but a psychological one filled with **memories** and **dreams**. He describes home as a «topography of our intimate being,» which reflects our self-identity and personal memories (Bachelard, 1958, p. 5).

If home is a deeply personal and evolving experience, then it is also something that changes over time. Bachelard's concept of «the house we were born in» shows how our first home shapes our understanding of belonging. As we grow and adapt, our notion of home can shift. Cultural geographer Yi-Fu Tuan explores how individuals re-establish a sense of home in new places, developing «topophilia,» or a love for a specific environment (Tuan, 1974). This sense of «rootedness» develops with time and emotional investment as we become familiar with the new surroundings.

Our understanding of «home» is influenced not just by personal experiences but also by cultural factors that give physical spaces symbolic and emotional significance. In a globalized world, the concept of home can go beyond borders, blending memories and connections from different cultures into a unique personal mosaic. Therefore, to understand what it means to «feel at home,» we must consider the relationship between personal identity, cultural heritage, physical space, and social connections.

Research goals & questions

The research I aim to conduct seeks to deepen the understanding of what it means to “feel at home” in both personal and shared spaces. This study will explore how this feeling emerges across various living arrangements, including permanent residences, mobile homes, and communal environments. By examining how individuals actively transform their spaces through personalization and adaptation, the research will uncover how people cultivate a sense of connection that makes a place feel like home. In the unique and transitional context of Blikfabriek’s mixed-use redevelopment, this research will also investigate how evolving environments influence the feeling of home, specifically looking at whether and how such spaces foster or hinder a sense of belonging amidst ongoing change.

Understand the Feeling of Home, Investigate the Making of Home, Contextualize Home in an Evolving Space

Methodology

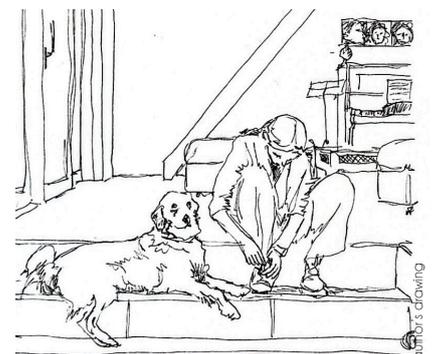
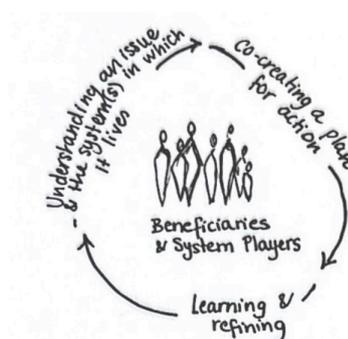
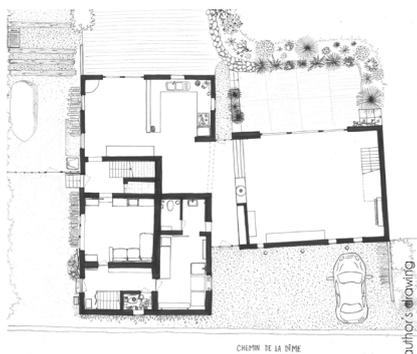
To begin addressing these questions, I want to reflect on my sense of home within my family house as part of a **preliminary self-study**. This step will involve identifying specific spaces and elements that contribute to a feeling of belonging and comfort, as well as noting how interactions with these spaces shape my sense of home. This introspective process will lay the foundation for understanding how personal connections to physical environments create a unique sense of identity and familiarity, which will inform the questions and approaches for future interviews.

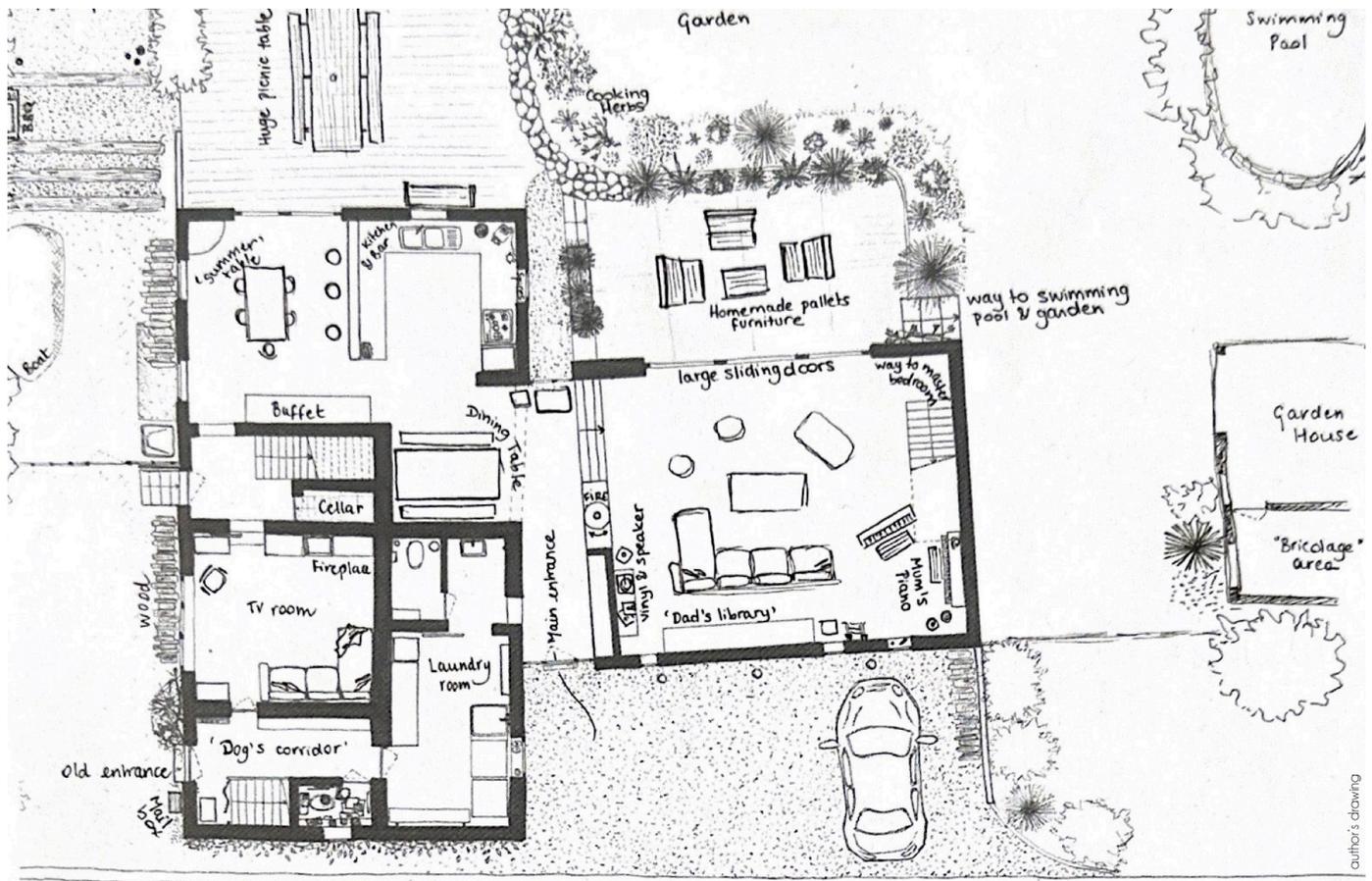
Using a **systemic design** approach, I aim to engage in **interviews and workshops** with all relevant local stakeholders, including artists, “squatters” (people living in or near the Blikfabriek without legal authorization), individuals in charge of temporary occupation (such as Joris), onsite workers (from Cantin, Vroembabriek, Pirre Kookt, the brewery, coffee company, and gymnastic club), neighbors, real estate agents, and representatives from cultural, social, environmental, and local associations. The goal is to organize sessions with a few stakeholders at a time, where exercises like mapping, drawing, writing, or simply conversing will allow them to express their feelings about home, as well as their needs and ideas for future development. These activities will help reveal their emotional connections, adaptations, and relationships with different areas, providing insights into how they experience and personalize their environment.

To enhance this understanding, photographic and visual documentation will be employed to capture the essence of the Blikfabriek’s spaces and the variety of housing types surrounding them. **Photography and sketches** will document the personalization, layering, and textures of various areas—both interior and exterior. This examination will reveal how feelings of home are expressed across diverse residential forms, from traditional houses to more experimental living spaces, offering a broader perspective on how different spatial types shape the experience of belonging and familiarity.

“How do spatial, social, and emotional factors influence the feeling of ‘home’ across permanent and transitional spaces within the Blikfabriek and its surrounding neighborhood?”

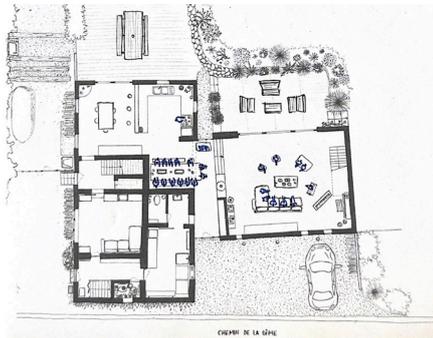
1. How do people define their personal feeling of “home” within **various types of housing, workspaces, and public spaces**?
2. Where, within the Blikfabriek and its neighborhood, do people feel most “at home,” and what are the **spatial, social, and emotional factors** contributing to this feeling?
3. What role does **personalization** play in creating a sense of home? What are the differences, if any, between spaces people inhabit permanently (e.g., houses) and temporarily (e.g., workspaces or communal areas)?
4. How does the **transitional** nature of the Blikfabriek site influence artists’ and surrounding residents’ ability to feel at home? Does the knowledge of **impermanence** impact their relationship to the space?



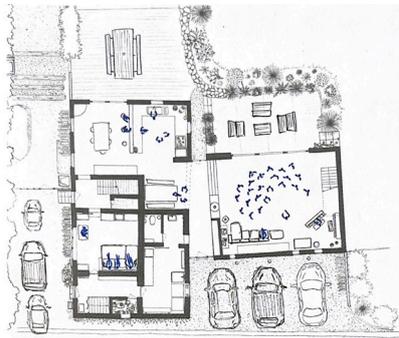


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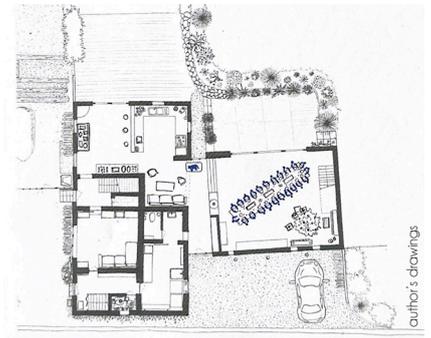
CHEMIN DE LA DÎME



Friends and/or family over

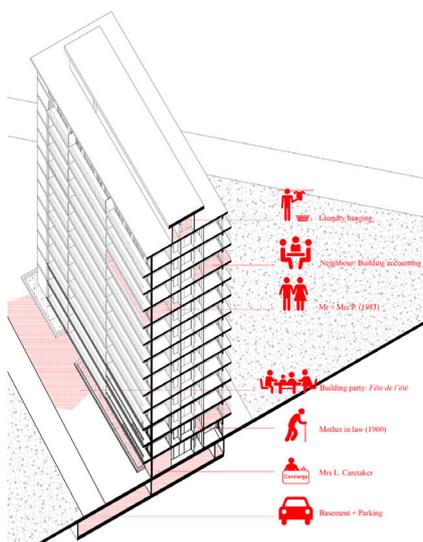


Choir night



Christmas Family Diner

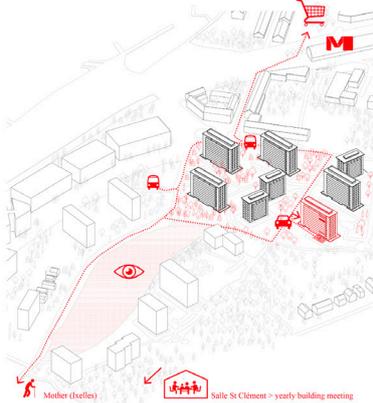
author's drawings



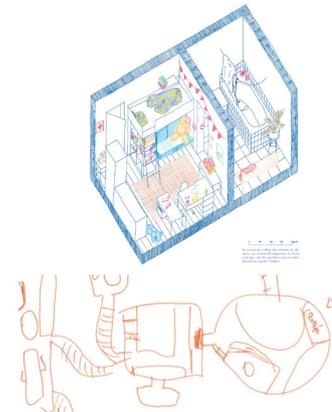
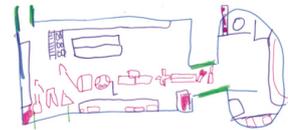
Example of a post meeting report



NAME (anonymous)
 AGE 70
 WORK Retired
 HOUSEHOLD SITUATION Father of a 40-year-old daughter (in couple, separated)
 STATUS Inhabitant
 ARRIVAL 1981
 PREVIOUS HOUSING Penthouse, individual
 DWELLING SURFACE 74 m² (+ terrace 15 m²)
 DWELLING TYPE 2 bedrooms, 9th floor
 OWNER Owner
 Co-ownership
 ENTRY Free Realities/
 Mother-in-law on the 1st floor
 Views on the lake



Audley Courbeboise



old personal work, child interview

«Draw your room»

Theoretical framework

- **Placemaking and Identity Formation**

Placemaking theory suggests that people create meaningful connections to their environments by actively shaping and interpreting them. Scholars like Jan Gehl emphasize a human-centric approach to urban design, which can inform my analysis of how diverse users personalize the site.

- **Theories of Gentrification and Displacement**

I will explore David Harvey's concept of the "right to the city," addressing power dynamics in urban spaces. For residents, gentrification can threaten their sense of "home" and emotional ties, especially in historically significant areas.

- **Home as a Psychological and Social Space**

Gaston Bachelard's 'The Poetics of Space' presents "home" as an extension of self and identity. This aligns with my interest in how individuals experience belonging in both private and shared spaces. Yi-Fu Tuan's idea of topophilia highlights the emotional connections to places that can evolve.

- **The Social Construction of Belonging**

Pierre Bourdieu's habitus theory will guide my analysis of how social ties and collective identity shape the sense of belonging in communal housing and co-living arrangements.

- **Emotional and Sensory Experience of Home**

Environmental psychology emphasizes the role of sensory experiences in shaping feelings of comfort and identity. Juhani Pallasmaa argues for the importance of engaging with space through sight, sound, and touch. This raises the question: Is there a universal feeling or fundamental condition that is necessary for everyone to feel at home?

- **Methodology Framework: Ethnographic and Participatory Approaches**

Ethnographic research and participatory design methods will help me understand residents' perceptions of "home," documenting their emotional connections and ideas for future development through tools like visual sociology and participatory mapping.

- **Methodology Framework: System Thinking**

By mapping the relationships and interactions among different community members—such as artists, squatters, local businesses, and residents—Systems Thinking reveals each group's unique needs and values. It also highlights how these interconnections shape the overall experience of home. This perspective helps identify patterns, feedback loops, and areas of conflict or harmony. It provides valuable insights into how redevelopment can promote inclusivity and resilience while preserving a sense of continuity for those with deep connections to the site.

Expected outcomes

The research aims to enhance our understanding of «home» as a complex and evolving experience shaped by social, spatial, and emotional factors, particularly in the transitional context of Hoboken. The study will highlight how personalization, adaptation, and community connections foster a sense of belonging by examining various living arrangements, from permanent residences to communal and temporary spaces. It will also investigate the effects of gentrification on residents' attachment to their surroundings, capturing the mix of excitement and fear of displacement that occurs amid redevelopment. The findings will help inform strategies for inclusive placemaking, underscoring the importance of flexible, user-centered design that honors historical and emotional connections. Additionally, visual documentation of Hoboken's changing landscape will complement this analysis, capturing both the aesthetic and sensory dimensions of "home" and providing a compelling record of the area's ongoing transformation.

Bibliography

Literature

- BACHELARD, G. (1958). *La poétique de l'espace*. Presses Universitaires de France.

This philosophical work can help me examine how intimate spaces, like the home, shape our experiences of life, memory, and dreams.

- BOURDIEU, P. (1977). *Outline of a theory of practice* (R. Nice, Trans.). Cambridge University Press. (Original work published 1972)

His concept of habitus can offer insight into the impact of social and cultural backgrounds on attachment to evolving spaces such as Hoboken.

- COURBEBAILLISSE, A. (2022). *Socio-Anthropologie de l'habiter. Lessons* conducted at LOCI, Université Catholique de Louvain in Brussels, in February 2022.
- Cambridge English Dictionary. (n.d). Definitions of "home" and "house". Retrieved from <https://dictionary.cambridge.org/dictionary/>
- DOUGLAS, M. (1991). The Idea of a Home: A Kind of Space. *Social Research*, 58(1), 287-307. <http://www.jstor.org/stable/40970644>

Her insights on home as a "cultural construct" can deepen my understanding of how different people in Hoboken perceive and make meaning of "home" across various environments.

- GEHL, J. (2010). *Cities for People*. Island Press.

Jan Gehl has worked for many years on transforming urban environments by focusing on how people use their living and working spaces. His book could provide valuable insights on methods to redesign uninviting urban areas into people-centered landscapes. Gehl's vision of urban spaces that engage all five human senses and are experienced at a walking pace resonates with my own vision for urban redevelopment.

- HARVEY, D. (2003). The right to the city. *International Journal of Urban and Regional Research*, 27(4), 939-941. <https://doi.org/10.1111/j.0309-1317.2003.00492.x>

David Harvey's emphasis on community involvement aligns with my goal of engaging residents in shaping their environment to reflect their emotional connections. By balancing innovation with continuity, his ideas promote urban change that respects community character and fosters a sense of belonging. Additionally, his call for adaptable spaces aligns with my interest in enabling residents to shape their surroundings and feel more at home amidst change.

- KAUFMANN, J. (2016). *L'entretien compréhensif*. <https://doi.org/10.3917/arco.kaufm.2016.01>

This manual will help me conduct comprehensive interviews and develop an interpretative framework.

- PALLASMAA, J. (1994). *An Architecture of the Seven Senses*. In *Questions of perception: phenomenology of architecture* (July 1994 ed, pp. 27-37)

Pallasmaa argues that architecture should engage all the senses, not just sight, to create spaces that feel truly "lived-in" and meaningful. This multisensory approach can allow me to explore how residents of Hoboken connect emotionally with their environments through everyday sensory experiences, including textures, sounds, scents, and lighting.

- PINSON D, « L'habitat, relevé et révélé par le dessin : observer l'espace et son appropriation », *Espaces et Sociétés* « L'observation dans tous ses états », n°164-165, Paris, 2016

This book will help me understand the role of drawing and observation concerning spatial appropriation and personal connections to place.

- TUAN, Y.-F. (1974). *Topophilia: A study of environmental perception, attitudes, and values*. Prentice-Hall.

Tuan defines topophilia as the deep affection and attachment that individuals develop for specific places, which can grow through familiarity, memory, and personal connections. This concept can assist me in exploring how different residents—such as artists, squatters, and long-time inhabitants—form unique attachments to spaces like Blikfabriek and the surrounding neighborhood.

Systemic Thinking/Design

- CoLab. (2016). Follow the rabbit: A field guide to systemic design. Edmonton: Alberta CoLab.
- DFITZGERALD. (2022, July 8). Systems Thinking Toolkit - FSG. FSG. <https://www.fsg.org/resource/systems-thinking-toolkit-0/>

Art

- «The Kitchen Table Series» by Carrie Mae Weems (1990)
Kitchen Table series. (n.d.). <https://www.nga.gov/collection/art-object-page.209288.html>

This black-and-white series “explores family, identity, and womanhood, emphasizing how relationships shape personal experiences”. It can be a great reference when it comes to taking pictures of the homes I’ll get to visit.

- «The Architecture of Density» by Michael Wolf (2005)
Wolf, M., La Galerie Particulière, Dr. Ernest Chui, Lynne D. DiStefano, Natasha Egan, Lee Ho Yin, et Michael Wolf, Natasha Egan, Geoff Manaugh et Michael Wolf, & Ute Eskildsen. (2009). Michael Wolf. In Michael Wolf – Hong Kong Inside Outside [Book]. Asia One Books et Peperoni Books. <http://lagalerieparticuliere.com/cspdocs/contact/files/DossierPresseWolf.pdf>

His work illustrates the tension between private and public spaces and questions the feeling of home in such dense spaces as high-rise apartments in Hong Kong.

- «House Hunting» by Todd Hido (1998-2001)
House hunting. (n.d.). <http://www.toddhido.com/househunting>

Hido’s eerie nighttime photographs of suburban homes, shot from outside with glowing lights inside, evoke curiosity and questions about the lives within.

- «Home Within Home» series by Do Ho Suh (2013)
Home Within Home Within Home Within Home Within Home (2013), by Korean artist Do Ho Suh, at the MMCA Seoul. (2015, July 11). Cranium Corporation. [https://craniumcorporation.org/2014/08/28/home-within-home-within-home-within-home-2013-by-korean-artist-do-ho-suh-at-the-mmca-seoul/#:~:text=MMCA\)%20in%20Seoul,Home%20Within%20Home%20Within%20Home%20Within%20Home%20\(2013,structures%2C%20the%20contemporary%20art%20museum.](https://craniumcorporation.org/2014/08/28/home-within-home-within-home-within-home-within-home-2013-by-korean-artist-do-ho-suh-at-the-mmca-seoul/#:~:text=MMCA)%20in%20Seoul,Home%20Within%20Home%20Within%20Home%20Within%20Home%20(2013,structures%2C%20the%20contemporary%20art%20museum.)

Suh’s translucent, fabric-based installations recreate the homes he has lived in. These ghostly renderings explore the sensation of being between places, emphasizing themes of transience and cultural identity.

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