

MASTER'S PROGRAMME IN DESIGN FOR THEATRE, FILM AND TELEVISION

SPACE THROUGH MEMORY

BY

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Abstract

In the following thesis you will read about a house that was built in the years 1975-1976 by Ilme and Madis Purik along with their three daughters Piia, Terje and Maarja.

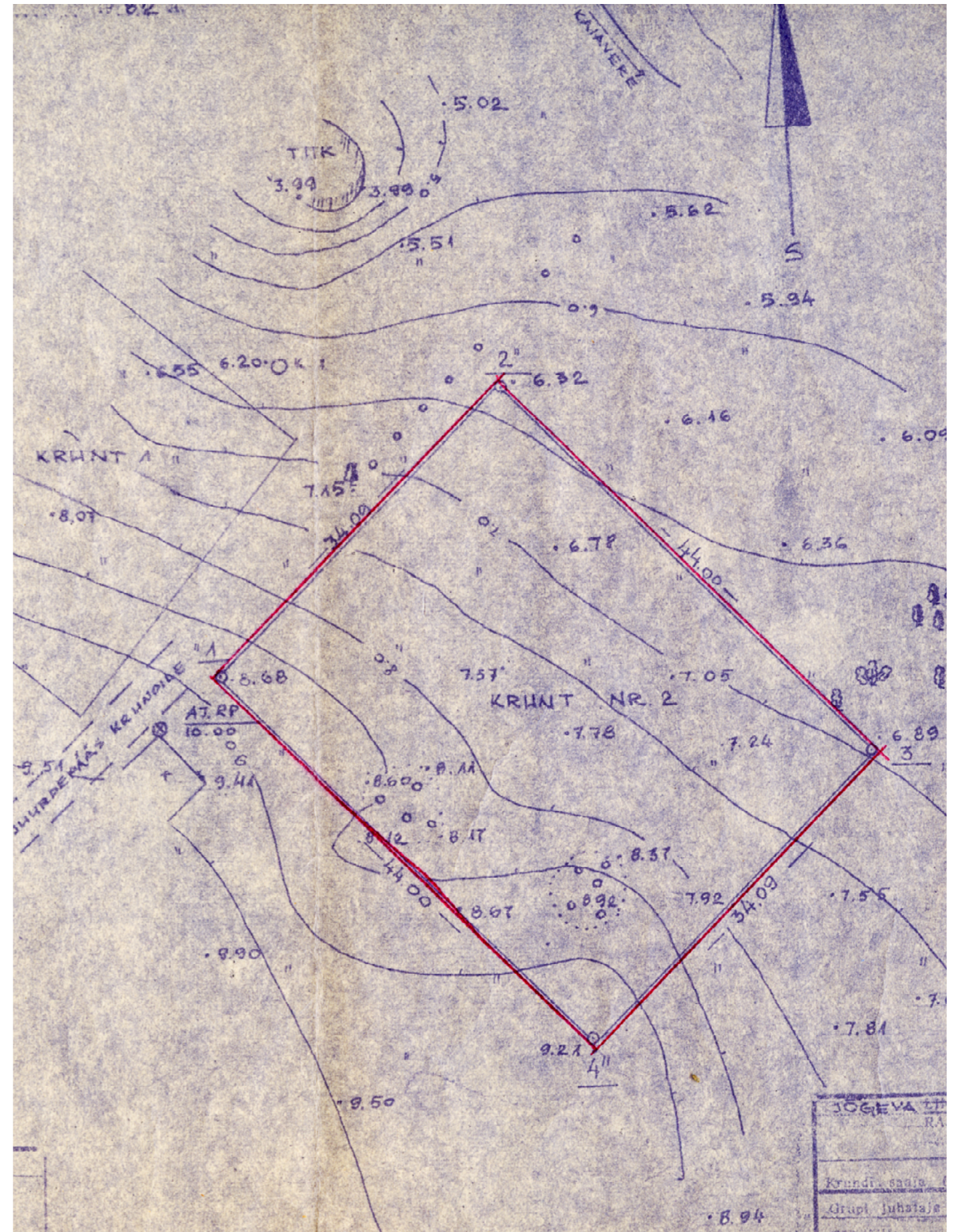
It's written through Ilme's and Madis' granddaughter's recollections, who is also the author of this thesis. Based on various visual and literary sources as well as the author's personal contact and memories with the subject, you will plunge into a poetically reminiscent journey through the house. You will learn about its doors, walls, sofas, stairs, get to know the rooms and how they have changed through-out the 38 years. You're invited to sneak around the corners, peak through the windows, make yourself familiar with the people inside, their relationship with the house and with each other.

Besides being a granddaughter, the author is also a production designer and has written this thesis as a deeper inquiry into the essence of space. As a person who works closely with characters, their spaces and atmospheres, she finds it very important to ask questions like: "What is space, how do people experience spaces, what makes a space, etc." At some point during her studies, she found out that she had been working on projects as a production designer, but never had wondered about such questions before. Space was solely a background, unnoticed when harmonious and disturbing when harsh and cacophonous.

The questions mentioned above are suggested to keep in mind when going through the next 60 pages.

The thesis is in dialogue with Yi-Fu Tuan, Georges Perec, Stephen Gardiner and Gaston Bachelard books, which will be mentioned later in the introduction section. The first author and philosopher Yi-Fu Tuan is considered to be the father of humanistic geography, he studied topography and researched human experience in space, their relationships with places and geographical environments. Georges Perec and Gaston Bachelard were both French philosophers who dedicated part of their work for understanding spaces and places through the poetics. There will also be photographs from the present time, taken by the author of this thesis herself, and photos captured by various family members from decades ago. In addition to that, there will be some sketches of the house which will help the reader navigate through the house with more ease.

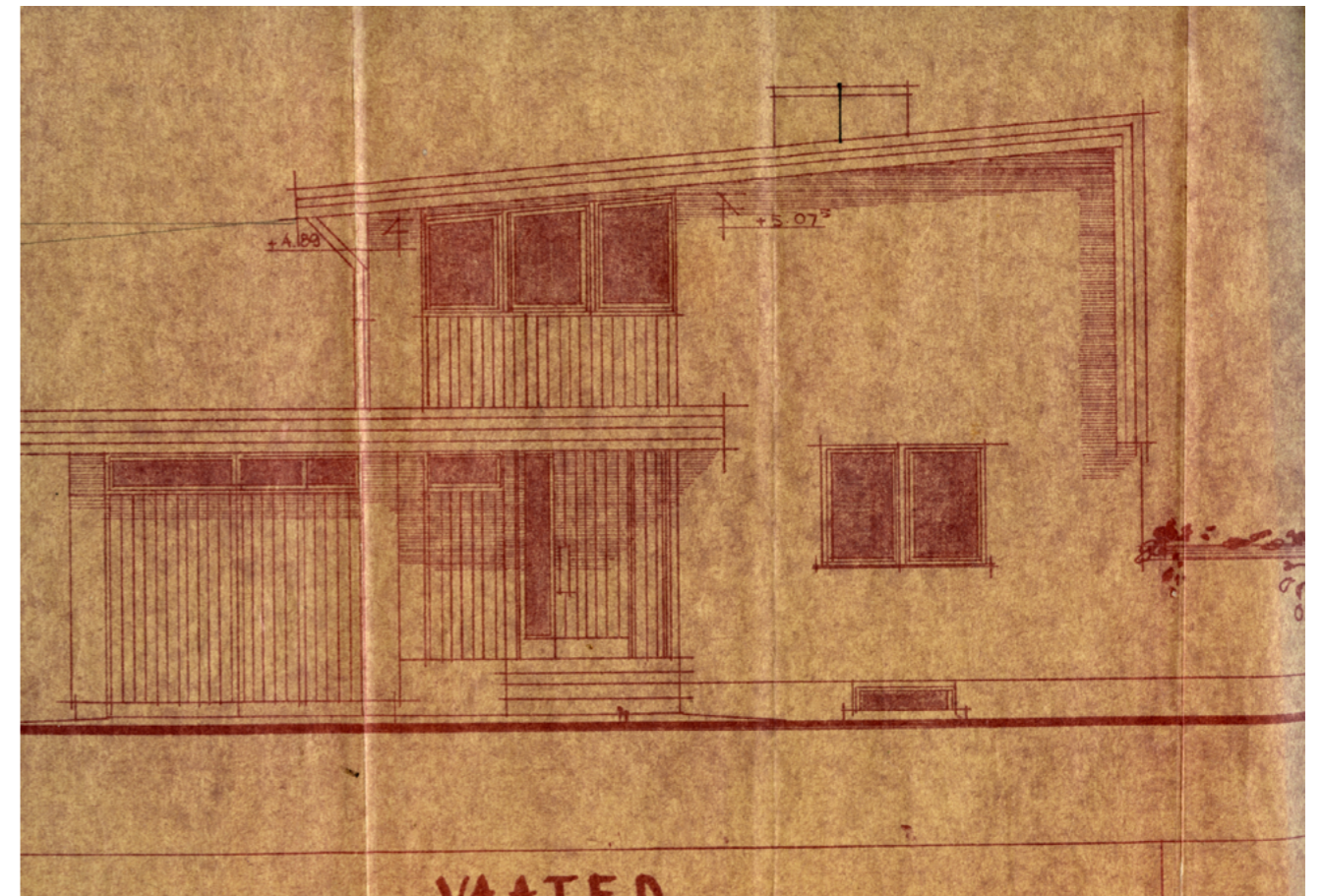
Keywords House, memories, space, place, topophilia, family, relationships, characters, reflections, time



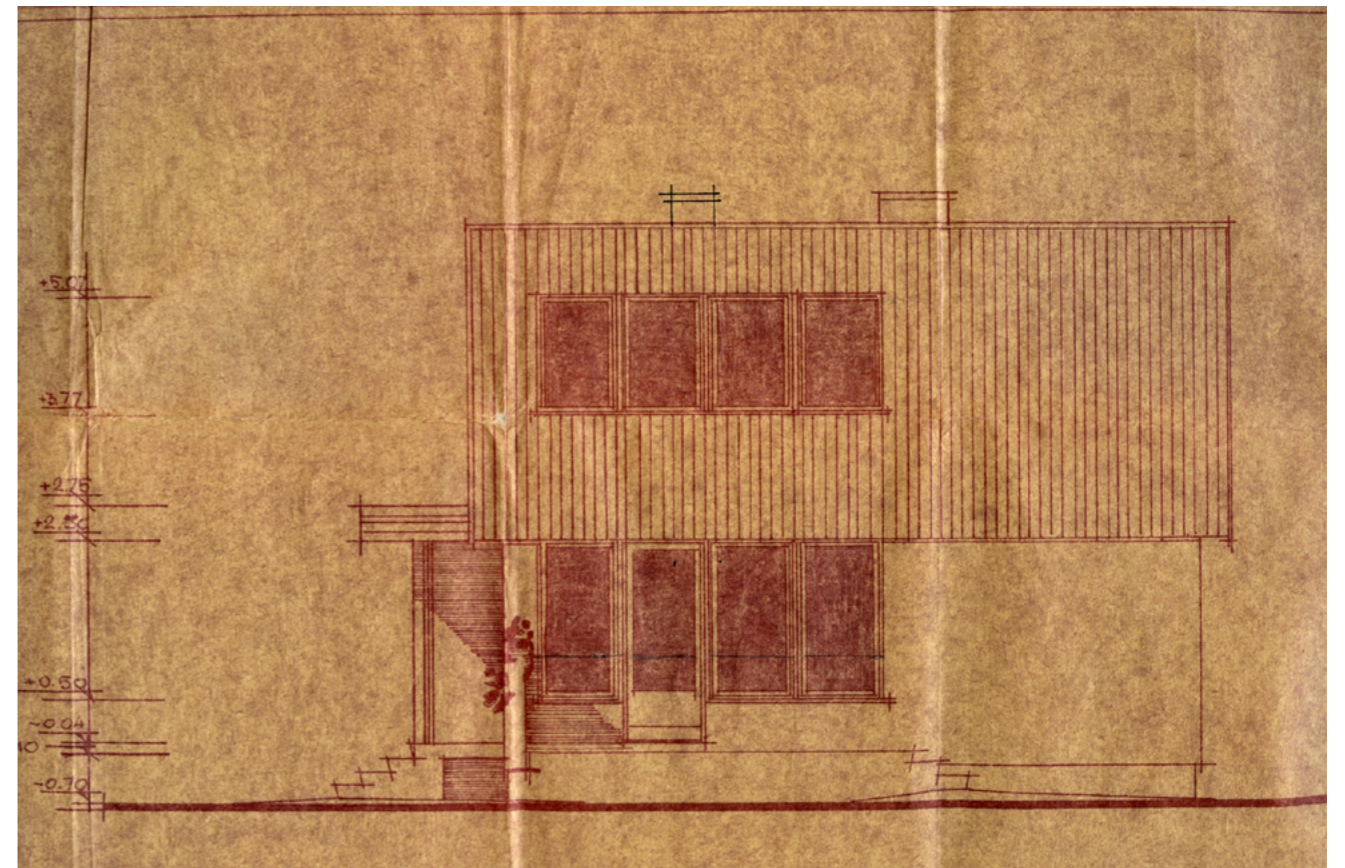
Topographic¹ map of the land for the house. 1985

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Original blueprint of the house - front view. 1985



Original blueprint of the house - right side view. 1985

Introduction

In this thesis I am trying to decipher the meaning of space² through my grandparents' house. I chose this topic because my work as a production designer revolves around different fictional territories where I constantly need to navigate. These spaces are every time one of a kind and very specific to its inhabitants. When I'm working on a script, I pay attention to every detail that's mentioned about the characters because it all will be told through the space, the visual language of the movie around our protagonists and antagonists. Keeping that in mind, I have become more alert and attentive of my surroundings wherever I am. I gather visual info about the nature of the space and decode the characteristics of the people or a person who are existing in it.

During a course called *Spatiality in Screen Arts*³ which was part of my Master's studies in Aalto University, I started to think more in depth about the essence of space. To put it bluntly, I became obsessed with thinking and trying to understand it more and more. This was an indicator for deciding the topic for my thesis. I was thinking about different spaces and places in my life, and how my experience has been living in them. After some time I realized that my grandparents' house would be a great source to gather insight about the space and how people relate to it. More so, it's a place that's housing my first experiences in a space. My first contact with colours, textures and shapes. How I perceive space nowadays is largely influenced by that house.

A house where people have lived for almost 40 years is quite clearly a mirror of its inhabitants which is my main purpose as a production designer - to create the space so well that it becomes a reflection of the story and its characters.

I have called my thesis "Space Through Memory" because of the many layers of history that my grandparents' house carries, both in physical and mental aspect. I try to see the house as it is right at this moment and at the same time let the past and my recollections of how it used to be influence my attitude towards it.

This thesis is based on autoethnographic research method. I have gathered information by reading space and topophilia⁴ related books (*Poetics of Space* by G. Bachelard, *Species of Spaces and Other Places* by G. Perec, *Evolution of The House* by S. Gardiner, *Space and Place* and *Topophilia: A Study of Environmental Perception, Attitudes and Values* by Yi-Fu Tuan), watched movies about stories that are space driven (*Playtime* by Jacques Tati, *Still Walking* by Hirokazu Kore-Eda, *Causeway* by Lila Neugebauer, *The Umbrellas of Cherbourg*), deep dived in my memories, spent time in the house and had conversations with my grandparents.

The approach for the style of writing is an essayistic form. This has allowed me to navigate freely around the house and in my memory. Already from the beginning my writing naturally started taking a poetic path. It seems to create the perfect bridge between the past and the present. The structure of my thesis is a written journey through the house. It starts from entering from the front door and exiting from the back door. Everything that stays in between these two doors is put in text in the nine chapters starting with *Beginning the Journey*.

Sensing Out Space and Place

By nature and with the influence of working in the world of visual creativity, I have become more and more sensitive with the everyday sightings around me. I have started to appreciate the effort of making our surroundings more beautiful, more harmonious, more thoughtful. And it irritates and disgusts me, if I see recklessness and soulless work in designs that influence our lives whether we consciously notice it or not.

For my luck, I haven't had to experience careless dirtiness nor soulless decorative homes during my 28 years of living. I have always had warm and caring atmosphere around me. Thanks to that, my perception of space is rather open and trusting.

"Space is experienced directly as having room in which to move," says Yi-Fu Tuan in his writings⁵. So space, to my understanding is something intangible, something that surrounds us, gives us the freedom to exist in. I think that I have had plenty of space to move in throughout my life. I have experienced the freedom of coming and going. Freedom of running and staying still. Freedom of standing up and going to the toilet, which I'm about to do right now.

Place on the other hand is something from the material world. It's physical and therefore easier to comprehend than the meaning of space. For example, when we're walking. We're walking, walking, walking and suddenly stop, then the spot where we have stopped is a place and the walking-walking-walking part is happening inside a space. Place is possible to point a finger at, and space is perhaps possible to just feel out with our senses.

"Space is a doubt: I have to constantly to mark it, to designate it. It's never mine, never given to me, I have to conquer it." Perec, G. Species of Spaces and Other Places, p. 91

Is it possible for anyone to ever own a space? How does past experiences in a space influence one's relationship with it? These are some questions I find myself wondering about every now and then.

I came to a realisation that my grandparents' house is the closest I get when pondering about the idea of space and claiming it your own.

My grandparents have built their space from zero to one hundred. Throughout the years, the house has grown with its people inside. It's a mirror of my grandparents' relationship by showing its hardships and joyous times, telling the story of the family inside. I spent half of my childhood playing in its garden, in the sand box, dancing in the living room, going to see the cows down on the meadow, playing video games with my cousin early in the morning.

So, naturally when thinking of a space, I come back to the one house that is so intertwined with my life. It's an important subject for me and I see a great chance to dedicate this time of writing my thesis in honour of this house.

I'm hoping to find the unnoticed, hidden corners and be surprised when diving into the memories of space of myself, my grandparents, my family.

Down and Up

When I think of my childhood I imagine it in bright green colours, so vibrant and captivating. I lie on a light coloured pastel blanket outside on the soft grass that's been cut a few days ago, the blades are long enough to create a comforting cushiony mattress underneath my blanket. Grandmother is somewhere around, perhaps making porridge that I will eat later with butter and salt. The sky is blue, no clouds, birds flying around. Sparrows. Storks are sitting in their nest on top of the electricity pole. It's always been there, as long as I can remember, and every summer a new couple of storks find their home in it.

Grandfather is doing something down in the barn. Probably cleaning after the animals, or going down to the meadow to relocate the cows, so that they would have a new area of hay to eat from. Cow excrement in the hay. We used to call it "cow pie". It's a big, maybe 20-30 cm wide round blob of brown stuff that lies flat on the ground, like a burnt pancake.

Down was the barn, the apple trees, the hazelnut tree, the chicken coop, the occasional fox stealing some of our chickens, the firewood for winter, the greenhouse, the angry rooster who once, I'm pretty sure, wanted to kill me, the berry bushes, the smoke oven, the bushy area that I never really went to explore, the wide stone steps leading from the house to the barn, the not so nice but bearable smell of animal excrement mixed with the sweet smell of jasmine bush that was in full bloom right next to the huge mound of animal faeces.

Up was the two tall birch trees that symbolically stand for the grandparents, the bonfire spot, the endless grass, the storks, the cherry and plum trees, the flowers, the blanket on the grass, the two dogs: *Maks ja taks*⁶, the half empty plastic pool with stale water, the small, broken down house of an old lady who used to live there before I was born, the occasional coins and human bones that my grandmother would find when digging in the soil to prepare the flowerbeds. There was the car, the stairs on which we would sit and drink coffee after lunch or in the evenings. There was the door that me and the cousin would sometimes knock on, pretending we're the married couple who lived nearby and the grandparents were close friends with. The door that lead to the house of the grandparents'. The house that they built from ground up, from having no house to having a two story house with 8 rooms, a kitchen, a toilet, a bathroom, a hallway, a stairway, a garage and a cellar with a sauna.



Mother spinning Freda in the air. The house could almost be visible on the right side of the photo. 1998

The Journey:

*"Therefore I know, this house will never have any other habitants after I'm gone.
The house certainly knows it, too." Taperson, K. Sirp 2023*

It's very easy to slam it shut, but with a little bit thought applied to the motion, one is able to close the door without shaking the whole house. A door in front of me, a door to my right, a door to my left hiding behind the corner. A stairway to my left. One, two, three steps. Leaving the shoes on the mat. The door in front of me is opened. It's usually always opened. Well, these days it's always opened.

One, two, three, four, five steps. Standing in the middle of the cooking related supplies and furniture. Spacious. Something under my feet, some crumbs.

Always. Better to wear slippers.

Sitting on a wood stove next to the electrical stove. "Sõidab vankreid värvilisi mööda maanteed," pancake, "sini-puna-rohelisi, mööda maanteed." Pancake. "Säädeleevad seelikud ja kõrvarõngad, kirkaks muudab tuli tuhmid eeluulõõngad..." pancake.?

Twelve steps. Leather couch, dining table, foldable couch, fireplace, chairs, cupboards, window, wine barrels, TV in the corner of my eye, window, window, window, window. Window, window.

Terrace. Concrete. Plum trees, sweet pinkish plums. Stairs, grass, green grass. Cherry trees, cherry trees, plum trees, spiky cherry tree shoots hiding in the grass, cherry, cherry, cherry, plumplumplum.

Planket

Planket, planket

Soft cushion

Grass, on the green grass

Stairs, go up the three steps

Concrete

Grey, hard, warm

Sun

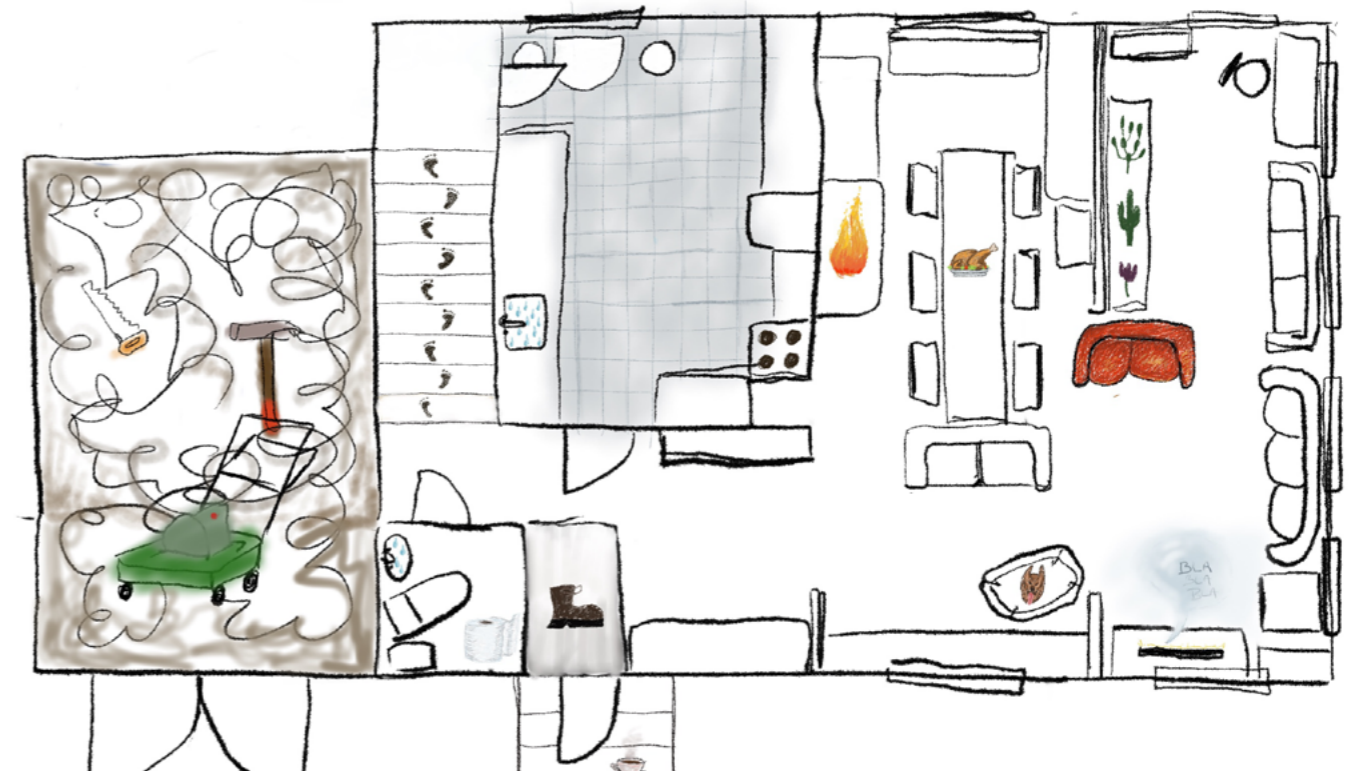
Shade, leaves, trees, plum trees

Plum trees, plum trees, plum trees

Red sofa, three-seater red sofa, three-seater leather sofa. Thirteen people on the sofas. Nine watching out the window. Five sitting around the dining table. One by the computer. One on a chair. Four tying shoelaces. Two sitting at the kitchen table. One of them looking out the window. One entering the bathroom.

One walking back and forth hands full.

Thirty seven. Full house.



Sketch of the floorplan on the 1st floor, by Freda. 2024



Sketch of the floorplan on the 2nd floor, by Freda. 2024

One, two, three, four..., eleven, twelve steps up the stairs. A glass door in front of me, stairway behind my back, a door to the left and a room opening to my right.

Crying

Crying out of sadness

Crying out of sadness, because my favourite girl band didn't win

Crying out of sadness, because my favourite girl band didn't win the competition to represent Estonia on Eurovision.

2003

It used to be a living room, a room where we watched TV. A yellow soft edged large stain on the wall. Thirty-forty centimeters above the sofa's backrest. Grandmother talking about it. Grandmother telling Grandfather to go to sleep. Grandmother washing it off. Grandmother trying to wash it off. The stain merging into the painted wallpaper's structure, into the paint. Not washable. Grandmother talking about it. The wall gets a new cover of paint.

The door has to stay open, so that we can hide you behind it, otherwise she will get terrified again by the sight of you. And, can you please stay quiet as well. Thank you.

Aunt's husband terrified the baby with his presence. Lively personality, loud voice, round face, large eyes, large mouth. Saved by the door with a hazy opaque glass in between the small and the huge.

People sitting on the sofas watching TV

People sitting on the sofas having a chat while watching TV

People sitting on the sofas having a snack, talking to each other

People sitting on the sofas holding a baby, talking to each other, having a snack

People sitting on the sofas holding a dog, slouching curled up with a dog, holding a baby

People sitting on the sofas holding a baby, entertaining the baby, watching TV

People sitting on the sofas talking to each other, reading the newspaper

People sitting on the sofas watching TV, laughing together

People sitting on the sofas taking pictures of the baby

People sitting on the sofas being serious

People sitting on the sofas

A glass door in front of me leading outside. A glass door in front of me leading outside, but there is nowhere to step on, just plain air. Not recommended to step outside, if outside is just plain air with nowhere to place your foot on.

There have always been the question of the existence of that door. Why add it to the house. That question have always remained inside of me. I haven't put it outside. But I'm gonna.

I'm gonna ask grandmother why they added it to their house. Logically thinking, they might have had an idea of a balcony, perhaps. Perhaps, indeed.

I'm gonna ask grandmother and not grandfather because decisions are made by grandmother, naturally, happily, drainingly.

"A guest, upon entering his host's home, may go straight to the picture window and admire what lies far beyond the house," and "After all, the guest is admiring his prospect, and prospect means both a broad view and future promise." Tuan, Y. Space and Place, p. 124

That glass door has a view. It holds a prospect, a promising future. That door is showing the horizon and beneath. A way to the future. It's an unfinished thought, a dream, an ideal. To sit on the balcony with the morning coffee, lunch coffee, evening coffee.

Let's drink it on the stairs outside.

A step to the left. A room with an unusually low ceiling. A one person sofa bed with iron detailing, a desk with a non-working computer that from the years back had people fascinated with the games like *Minesweeper*⁸ and *Solitaire*⁹.

One, two, three, four, five, dirty laundry basket, toilet, shower, wash basin, washing machine, a tiny dark spot on the upper part of the wall that from the corner of the eye looks like a spider. Every time when brushing my teeth, I see it from the mirror's reflection and think that it's a fat, juicy, fast moving spider there. Every time I am relieved because it turns out to be a tiny dark spot on the upper part of the wall that from the corner of the eye may look like a spider. I'm not actually afraid of spiders, but a tiny black spot on a wall arises some suspicions.

Sitting on the toilet after a night's sleep, preferably with an open door. It's left open for the sitter to see outside the window from the opposite room. The view allows to look far ahead on to the field, towards the horizon. It also allows to take a sneak peak to the forest animals' territory. Sitting on the toilet, the viewer is wishing to see some shy minding their own business forest animals while looking far ahead to the horizon, wondering of what's to come.

One, two, ..., five, six, seven. A foldable sofa bed with its cover removed. Above the sofa bed, a window with a unique sight. A rare sight. Looking at a familiar meadow, a farm house, a forest, but from an unusual spot. Grandmother wishes to see a bear through that window some day. These unusually low ceilinged rooms along with the room with the imaginary spider, are a new addition to the house. They weren't there originally. They weren't needed originally, because the three bedrooms, one living room, a kitchen and so on, was enough for the family.

And this room with an unusual sight is an extension, a signification of the family growing. The need of people to acquire more space. The need to have an excuse to build, the need to do something, the need to stay sane.

No sight of the bear this time. One, two, three, a some years old picture of a now separated young family. About time to take it down, not to rub it in the face. On the left a double bed.

On the right, a closet holding old things.

Step, step, step,..., fifteen, sixteen, seventeen, the TV, the glass door with the promising horizon, the smudgy yellow stain on the wall, eighteen, nineteen,..., twenty four, twenty five, twenty six: a space for sleeping, a space for loud snoring, a space to walk through, a space for the baby, a space for dining, a space for celebrating.

A double bed, a long dark brown wooden cupboard, an electronic clock with red numbers, a photo of a man holding a baby, pale walls in the colour blue. Stand there, feel the air and time staying terrifyingly still.

A luscious white peace lily growing so well in here. "Good thing I brought it from my place, it was withering away."

"Kata shat on the pillow again. What is wrong with this cat..."

"I" woke up in my sleep feeling as if someone was suffocating me and saw a white translucent form leaving the room."

Dinner, Christmas, afternoon naps, dinner, playtime, presents, New Year's eve, cats, dinner, afternoon naps, wallpaper, waking up, sleeping, sleeping, playtime, sleeping.

There used to be a door to walk through to another room. Now you go in, stop, sleep, go out. If possible, not to go in, not to sleep, only to get out.

One, two, steps out. TV, glass door with the horizon, etc. A door to my left, some steps in that direction. A large closet to my right, an opened doorway leading to the other room to my left. Floral wallpaper, another floral wallpaper, behind the corner: a few strips of wallpaper imitating a stone wall and a photo wallpaper of the Eiffel Tower!

A double bed with iron details in one room and another double bed and a sofa bed with iron details in the other one. Books, books, books, books, books, books, books and books, some angel figurines, a glowing angle figurine to shine a light on grandmother during her sleepless nights. An electric clock with red numbers and an analog clock showing the right time. Old books, a book about Tarot cards, some books about a war. The Eiffel Tower on the wall opposite of the bed.

A dream, a wish, a prospect or a thought of an alternate life. An escape from the country, to be among the people, to feel the history, art, culture.

Playing cards in bed. Grandmother and granddaughter playing before sleep. One more!

"Tell me about your childhood. Tell me about the time before this house. Tell me about how you and grandfather met. Why did you choose him? How was life in Siberia?"

One, two, three, four, five, six, seven, eight, nine, ten, eleven, twelve places to lay your sleepy body on for a good night's rest.



Grandparents' bedroom, nowadays the room with the Eiffel Tower. 1999



TV room upstairs, glass door leading nowhere behind the corner on the left. 2024

Cup of Coffee

Let's drink it on the stairs outside.

Instead of a prosperous, wondering about the future cup of coffee out on the non-existent balcony upstairs, there was a reminiscent, pondering about what was and is cup of coffee on the front stairs outside. A let's be ready to go, let's be ready to see, let's be together and drink the coffee cup of coffee. A steady and grounded cup of coffee instead of an elevated, wishful, getting lost in the horizon cup of coffee. A coffee time of not escaping, not wishing for something better, but staying and figuring things out.

"I have longed for a balcony where I could take the duvets and pillows to let them sit in the sun and feel the fresh breeze. They need some beating and airing out from time to time, and if I would get tired of working on the blankets, I would sit there on the balcony upstairs and drink a cup of coffee."
Grandmother smirks.

It has mostly been grandmother guiding, making decisions. It has been her straight forwardness, stability and determination. The search for security and stability. Search for four-eight-twelve-sixteen-twenty walls, a roof, a floor, a door, a staircase, a door, a door, a window, a sofa. The door with an imaginary balcony. Out of character. An alien, a misfit within all the other doors with a realized step beyond. Besides that door, everything else in the house seems to serve a purpose. One builds a house out of necessity, it carries their values. A house for the family.

"I would have wanted the house and all the rooms to be close to the ground, on one level but our lot that we were given was too small for such a house. Besides, concreting is very expensive. Easier to build many stories on top of each other than everything on one level, across the ground."
States grandmother.

Grandparents built their house with the help of their kids and someone with an excavator. They started in summer 1985 and moved in the next year. How mind blowing to see that house now and think this all was built by a man and a woman and their three young daughters. Grandfather's short reply to the praise was: *"Well, we did what we had to do."* They had to because maybe otherwise they would have split up and divided the daughters.

So, they dragged the stone blocks one by one to its places and built the walls, laid the concrete for the floors and covered window holes with plastic for the winter and made a house. Grandfather figured out the plumbing and grandmother the order of the rooms. They even made the kitchen furniture together, grandmother did the drawings and grandfather built and assembled.

"Grandfather has been doing everything I have come up during our years. Never has he been questioning me or saying it's too much."
She admits.

The land they became owners of, belonged to a wealthy father with three daughters. When the daughters got married, the big lot was divided into three. Now two third of the original land

belongs to grandparents along with three fields and parts of forests. It's a lot and throughout the years they have maintained all of it with care and attention. They built another house down by the meadow for the animals: two-three cows, some pigs, chickens and sheep.

"Come to the kitchen, let me show what we brought here, you might already hear their little squeaking sounds." There's a big box full of little tweeting chicks under a warm light. A small yellow chick is put into the little girls hands. It's so cute and soft and there's so many of them waddling around.



Cousin, Maks and Freda running towards the house. 2003



Grandfather and his three daughters sitting on the front stairs outside. 1991



Grandmother on the foreground, Freda minding her important business in the back. 2000

The Buried Walls

A house is being built from the ground up. A big hole with big dreams is dug. Walls are buried in the hole. This part of the house is going to be the scariest, we all know. It's a parallel world that remains underground, humans are not able to live there. It's where the dead bodies are put and no natural light can't get through. There's no way a cellar can not be scary.

Ascending down the stairs, step by step going deeper and deeper under the ground. It's a part of the house where forever or temporarily useless things are hid into the shadows.

The world of limitless imagination, anything could happen in the swallowing darkness. The unknown deep black creates fear and excitement, especially for the wondering minds.

It seems to never be light enough in grandparents' cellar. So many hidden corners, unknown territory, avoided places, secrecy. Even so, it also holds care, thoughtfulness, practicality and cherry compotes. One cherry compote, two cherry compotes, three, four, five. Here's a refrigerator that stopped working, some empty boxes, bottles and many more things. It's ugly and dark, one has to escape the horrid dusty space as soon as the necessities are attended to.

Turn on the light immediately!

Pickled cucumbers, jars and jars of letscho, apple jam, apple jam, apple and pear jam, apple jam, apple jam, apple juice, black currant juice, apple juice and apple juice. Big freezer, hiding sometimes ice cream. Worst place to have to go for ice cream. Better not eat ice cream. A few corners that remain foggy in the mind.

Next room - the heating system! Grandfather's territory. Always has been, always will be. He's adding wood to the fire, keeping the warmth. Always has been. Grandmother is watchful for the times grandfather is sitting in that room.

Stacking apples for winter. Getting an apple for the sauna. Sitting in sauna, eating an apple, telling a story. Grandmother telling a story in the sauna about the humble girl, the greedy girl, the smart mouse and the devil.

Hot summer day. Escaping from the heat. Grandmother and her two grandchildren playing cards on top of a four-legged stool in the changing room in front of sauna. Red tiles, wooden benches, blocked window, mirror with a shelf carrying sponges and unopened soaps.

Three wooden doors. One opening to the sauna, another to the jams and jarred pickles and the third to the small dark room with the terrifying noise. The room that had to be avoided at all costs. *Little one drying herself in the changing room after the sauna. Happens to be alone in there. Hoping to be so quick that the terrifyingly dark room won't start with the noise. It's ok, grandmother is right next door and she will be out in a second.*

A small room under the stairs that startled the small wondering mind every time. The door leading in didn't have a handle. Not meant to enter. A big secret in the eyes of the little one. Sheep. There's sheep in there for sure. That's what the mind was certain of because grandparents were keeping big plastic bags of sheep wool in there. The older the thinker got, the calmer she

became about the room under the stairs. But still, to this day this room has been left to mind its own business. No other business has entered, because there just are some rooms and corners and nooks in the house that have their own important business which cannot be disturbed.

"Without such nooks and crannies to muse and mope, to linger and loiter, there is nowhere to begin anew." Kearney, R. Introduction for Bachelard, G. Poetics of Space, p. 18



Sketch of the basement's floorplan, by Freda. 2024



Changing room in front of sauna. 2024



Changing room in front of sauna. 2024



Compotes, pickles, empty cans and bottles in the basement. 2024



Grandfather's protection mask for welding, in the basement. 2024



The heating room - grandfather's chair! 2024

The Still Center

*“Vertical elements in the landscape evoke a sense of striving, a defiance of gravity, while the horizontal elements call to mind acceptance and rest.”
Tuan, Y. Topophilia, p. 28*

The house with its architecture appears calm and steady. It seems to be in the middle of the two axes - vertical and horizontal meeting point. It's like a big cube or a big rock lying somewhere heavily stuck in the ground, standing still for years and years, if it moves, it's not visible to the eye. One can't help but think of the Kaaba, a cube-shaped stone building near the center of the Great Mosque in Mecca. Islam's holiest site where people gather to confirm and strengthen their faith, or draw parallels of some sort with early Chinese way of building a house which was based on their belief that the universe is a cube¹⁰.

The house takes up a lot of space, a lot of land. In its green camouflage, it tries to hide in the middle of grass, trees and bushes. With its little flaws here and there, it's not too aesthetically beautiful, but it certainly is big and taken care of. It doesn't tell too much to the onlooker - just a big house surrounded by a few smaller houses. Nevertheless, it's easy to guess that the house is for a family, or at least was at some point.

Troughout its years, the house has carried many layers of wallpaper, flooring and sofas. There is only one room, where the wallpaper has stayed on for a long time: downstairs' toilet has had a very curious wallpaper for almost two decades. With its abstract brownish lines on creamy background, it serves as a great basis for an interested mind. Seemingly bland enough wallpaper has brought out figures like clowns, long-haired mermaids, foxes, flying witches, serious men and the list goes on.

Wallpapers are a hot topic in the house. As the years go on, the wall coverings seem to carry more vivid colours and more chaotically lustrous patterns. All of these patterns seem to collide in the grandmother's bedroom. It's because before she moved in that room, a teenage daughter of grandfather's brother's daughter was meant to move in. She had lost her parents and grandmother took her in. And let her choose the wallpaper.

Grandfather's room on the other hand is uninvitingly monotone and pale. This was a walk-through room once, now it's just a walk-in-walk-out kind of room. It had many people going there, even if just to get into the back room, it still had different energies passing by. A long time ago, in the 90s, it used to be a little girl's first room in this world and after that a dining room where people gathered to celebrate.

It used to have blue wallpaper with dreamy mansions and princesses on it. Now the walls are covered in similar tone, but have lost the lulling graphics. During night-time, when grandfather is asleep, there's a red hue shining through the opaque glass door. He uses the light to scare away anguishing darkness as well as possible other-worldly beings that have visited him over the years. Worth mentioning is the odd thin branch hanging by the bed. It's from a mountain ash tree and according to the wisdom of the old times, that tree has healing and purifying powers and a new branch needs to be brought in after some time has passed.

The land where the house is built on, carries a lot of history. Grandmother has always talked about a possible treasure that is buried or scattered around there somewhere. The remains of the rich father of three daughters. Grandparents' neighbour could tell that the father had gathered everything valuable like coins and jewellery in a box, gave orders to his three girls not to peak outside the window and then hid the treasure box somewhere underground. Grandmother has found a beautiful silver brooch and many German coins dating back to 1794. One coin from 1946 she gave to her cousin living in Australia who was born in Germany in that same year. There are also remains of German soldiers that grandmother has found during the years of digging here and there and further back there and here and over there. A piece of a skull, some parts of forearm, in total a small bucket full of human bones. It appears that there was an unfortunate German soldier blown up somewhere nearby and buried afterwards and it happened to be on the land where grandparents chose to build their life. None of us have ever made the buried soldier into a big deal. The bones are there and that's that. Maybe because it's been grandmother making the discoveries and as long as I can remember she has always been dealing with the ethereal side of our lives. And perhaps she has engraved her sober wisdom and tranquil composure to us through her stories and selflessness. It's worth to note down that she was 8 months old when forced to move to Siberia in her mother's arms. She spent the first 7 years of her life in poverty and uncertainty living in a small room underground. Her mother told the kids it's still night and to keep sleeping so that they didn't have to eat three times a day. She has come a long way of barely surviving to giving life, building it and growing with it.



A view with four different wallpapers. 2024



Freda and mother in Freda's first room with princess wallpaper, now grandfather's bedroom. 1998



Wallpaper in the toilet downstairs - colour drawings added by Freda. 2024



Freda and grandfather in the dining room, previously Freda's room and now grandfather's bedroom. 2000



Wallpaper in the toilet downstairs - colour drawings added by Freda. 2024

House as a Mirror

A white 20 litre bucket full of stale water with minerals prepared for the plants upstairs, small dried up garlic pieces run on a thread and hung up on a door - for protection, about a dozen small angel figurines on a glass shelf - for protection, a reused plastic box full of potato and carrot peels, apple hearts, onion bits and cucumber ends kept on the edge of the kitchen counter, next to the back door, ready to be thrown outside, a catalogue bought assemble-yourself cupboard with a crooked drawer. It has to be lifted slightly when sliding back in. This drawer has a place for forks, knives, big spoons, small spoons and possibly some other random bits and bobs. Another drawer on the other side of the kitchen. Working fine, but the situation inside is close to a small chaos, for a bystander's eye at least. There's a torch, maybe another one, maybe both of them need new batteries, there are the good pair of scissors, but sometimes they're not there, a roll of black isolation tape, the forgotten spoons, forks and knives, a plastic reused butter box holding some lonely screws, buttons and such. And such and such and such. *"Grandparents are fond of being comfortable,"* say the five sofas in the living room. They also might be fond of their space and prefer other people not invading it, if possible. Everyone gets their own sofa to spread the limbs as much as the sofa allows.

Table runner on the dining table, place mats on the table runner, crumbs on the table runner, coffee cup from the morning, neatly folded up, used and soon to be reused napkin. No dust, never any dust on counter tops or shelves.

A box of candies hidden by grandmother in the cupboard. Grandfather would otherwise eat too much candy. Too much candy is not good. A bottle of brandy hidden by grandmother in the cupboard. Grandfather would otherwise drink too much brandy. Too much brandy is not good.

"The wall is no longer what delimits and defines the place where I live, that which separates it from the other places where other people live, it is nothing more than a support for the picture. But I also forget the picture, I no longer look at it, I no longer know how to look at it. I have put the picture on the wall so as to forget there was a wall, but in forgetting the wall, I forget the picture, too."

*"There are pictures because there are walls."
Perec, G. Species of Spaces and Other Places, p. 39*

Lots of photographs on the wall, many different faces, small children and grown up children. A figurine of a white bunny making a somersault, a figurine of a white frog stretching and a figurine of a green frog meditating. Annual Christmas gifts from their daughter's partner.

In the beginning of the house, there were five people. The sixth was expected, but never stayed with the rest. Now, decades later there are seventeen people.

In the beginning there were five rooms, now decades later there are eight rooms. Plus a cellar and a kitchen and this and that, but no attic.

The house has no attic. On top of the bedrooms, there is just a roof cutting off the possibility to grow higher. The people in the house have preferred to stay close to the ground and not rise higher, just in case. For protection. Perhaps its people don't need to store a lot of stuff. On another thought, there are other houses around the house, which are keeping all the stuff that are no

no good inside the house. There once even was a small house that grandfather built for the small girl to play in, which later turned into an "attic" for the toys. There's also a summer house, where all the other sofas that didn't make it to the main house have found their spot. The summer house has a small kitchen corner where the grandmother is making apple jam and apple-pear jam in early Septembers. There's an old cycling trainer, put away and never used. Grandparents like to be close to the ground instead of cluttering stuff in the air. The highest level is for sleeping and thinking and talking.

In the beginning there was a kitchen in brown colours. Now it's blue with a freshly changed tile flooring, but the joint gaps need still filling in. It's nice to make a hot sandwich in the mornings. A slice of bread is put in the microwave with butter, tomato or a slice of ham and cheese on top. The microwave used to have a place in the corner next to the oven, right side of the kitchen. Now it has a new place on the left side, on top of the dishwasher. Sometimes when entering the blue kitchen, legs still walk to the right. In that moment of realization a short melancholy overcomes the hungry breakfaster.

And now, the fridge has switched places with the assemble-yourself cupboard with a crooked drawer. Grandmother, sometimes when in need of some plates or soup bowls goes up to the fridge. It makes her laugh and also, feel a bit stupid. Her muscles still remember the old order of things.

Going about my child business in the brown kitchen. It's safe, cozy, homey, warm and big. Something is boiling, something is sizzling on the pan and my grandmother with my mother and aunts are making blood sausages or something of that sort. A pig has been killed, it's maybe one month before Christmas.

On tiptoes, my eyesight reaches just high enough to see to the counter tops. I see the pig's head in the sink and it's smiling at me.



Sketch drawn from the memory, by Freda. 2024



Freda on the brown kitchen's floor, minding her important business, again. 1999



Cousin and taks on the blue kitchen's floor, tasting granda's cottage cheese. 2006



Freda in the brown kitchen, above the sink. 2000



Grandmother and another cousin in the blue kitchen. 2024



Cousin in the blue kitchen. 2024



Grandfather in the brown kitchen. 1993

Corners

"For our house is our corner of the world." Bachelard, G. The Poetics of Space, p. 26

A mischievous kid is put standing, facing against the corner. The kid has to take some time to rethink, pass time, calm down, recollect her little kid's big emotions. This kind of action requires an empty corner in the house. Grandparents' house has no such thing as an empty corner. There's cupboards, shelves, tables and sofas filling the corners. In the grandparents' house a kid was never put standing in its corners. A kid was never scolded or discouraged. The house had corridors, stairways and sofas for the kid to play and fall from. The house was giving a free way.

"Let the kid explore, let the kid laugh, let the kid be bored," reminded the house.

Running excitedly from the kitchen. Escaping from the chasing grandfather. Laughing, yelping hysterically. Running excitedly from the living room to the kitchen. Escaping from the chasing grandfather. Laughing and yelping hysterically for the grandmother, someone to save me from the chasing grandfather. Running from the kitchen, escaping from the grandfather. Laughing, yelping and falling into the red bucket with water in the corridor. Falling, butt first into the red bucket with water that was meant for washing the floors. Grandmother comes out of the kitchen.

The house is the first playground, the first hiding spot, housing the first learning lessons, answering the first questions of a curious little mind. *"It is body and soul. It is the human being's first world."* states Gaston Bachelard in his book¹¹. It's cradling the kid with its endless walls, spread out floors and sheltering ceilings. The house is creating a soft spot to land on, it's offering a safe welcome in return from the disappointments, setbacks from the wild-wild outside.

Strolling around in the stroller upstairs. Too close to the stairway, testing the limits. Mother is around, keeping an eye. "Thump-thump-thump-thump-thump-thump-bamm!" Lying in the stroller downstairs. Mother, grandmother, grandfather come to the rescue.

That's what happens if the stroller is being strolled too close to the stairway.

One, two, three, four, five....twelve steps on the stairs. The tenth stair is a bit more orangey than the rest.

Sitting on the fourth step watching mother cutting grandmother's hair. Sitting on the sixth step watching mother cutting aunt Maarja's hair. Sitting in the chair below the stairway looking mother from the mirror cutting my hair. Grandmother, aunt Maarja and cousin sitting on the stairs watching mother cutting my hair. Chatting. Talking. Remembering.



Cousin and Freda on the stairs. 1998

These days the stairway is a path between the living rooms and the bedrooms. The rooms downstairs where people are sitting, eating, conversing, playing, thinking, slouching, talking, thinking, eating and watching TV and the rooms upstairs where people are sleeping, thinking, praying, thinking, talking, listening, sleeping and thinking. There's no way on earth that one could be eating in the rooms where people are sleeping, thinking, praying, thinking, talking, listening, sleeping and thinking. No way that one could be slouching in the rooms where people are thinking, sleeping and praying. No. No. No! No way that the dog could go up to these rooms. No! Years ago these rooms were for eating, celebrating, sleeping, talking, eating, playing, watching TV, talking, getting lost in the fascinating world of computer games like *Minesweeper* and *Solitaire*. Even the dog could visit up there. Yes!

This change of order makes sense. Grandparents are getting older.

What was it like to be in the house some years back? Footsteps going up the stairs, footsteps going down the stairs, walking in the room upstairs makes the ceiling lamp shake downstairs. The rooms in the house have gone through many changes. The rooms have housed many people. There is a room upstairs that once had an old lady with an Alzheimer's disease. During that time no one really entered that room besides the old lady and the grandmother. The room had a com-mode chair, a portable toilet chair. It was white with arm and back rest. It looked odd and made the room seem very unapproachable.

That room used to be grandmother's before. She used to play console games on the TV with her grandchildren in there. Sometimes during her sleepless nights she used to hear a ghost walking in the front room.

Now she's sleeping in a room with a wall-sized Eiffel Tower facing her bed. It's picturing a dream for something different, a dream of getting out of the house. The experience of the Eiffel Tower in the form of a photo-wallpaper might as well be as real and tangible as someone visiting Paris in physical form, but only seeing the Eiffel Tower as a reflection¹² on a glass door of a modern building.

"The house shelters daydreaming, the house protects the dreamer, the house allows one to dream in peace." Bachelard, G. Poetics of Space p. 28

From the dreamer's point of view, letting your mind wander out the house, completing scenarios of "what ifs" is a very comfortable and safe pastime when surrounded by the protecting walls and angel figurines. Sometimes its hard to appreciate the habitual environment and people tend to want more, be it excitement, inspiration from unexpected happenings or assurance that home is the best place in the world. Other times people really need a change and let go of the old, because perhaps the old seems to be never-ending and suppressing. The old suffocates and keeps the vicious circle circling real good. There's a time when the house shelters and protects and there comes a time when the house is making the people part of its furniture and hides them in corners.

Grandmother has taken on a hobby of checking new estates online and is imagining herself in a cosy rowhouse somewhere closer to a public centre.

"I would like to let go of all old things. Sometimes I'm thinking of letting go of the old man too." Says grandmother half-jokingly .



Grandmother's bedroom with the Eiffel Tower reflecting from the mirror. 2024



Maurice, B. (Producer) & Tati, J. (Director). (1967). Playtime [Motion Picture]. France: Specta Films, Jolly Film

A Time for Everything

*"There is a time for everything,
and a season for every activity under the heavens:*

*a time to be born and a time to die,
a time to plant and a time to uproot,*

*a time to kill and a time to heal,
a time to tear down and a time to build,*

*a time to weep and a time to laugh,
a time to mourn and a time to dance,*

*a time to scatter stones and a time to gather them,
a time to embrace and a time to refrain from embracing,*

*a time to search and a time to give up,
a time to keep and a time to throw away,*

*a time to tear and a time to mend,
a time to be silent and a time to speak,*

*a time to love and a time to hate,
a time for war and a time for peace." ¹³*

Is there somewhere to go, to wander elsewhere, to take a break from the house? If one wants to go for a walk, one needs to find a pathway. A trail guiding the wanderer away, giving time and chance to think outside the house. Unfortunately, no pathways are to be found near the house, just green grass, fields and forests. An asphalt coated road for cars coming and going. There's plenty of potential to finding a nice secluded trail with trees, bushes, birds and shy forest animals, but it takes too much effort. The wanderer is either stuck in the house or going much further away than the forest roads could take. The house gives an ultimatum - stay put and dedicate the time to the house or leave.

*"Because we must also give an exterior destiny to the interior being."
Bachelard, G. Poetics of Space p. 32*

Sun is setting, sun has just set. A bunch of people are walking on the asphalt coated road. Taks ja Maks are sniffing their way ahead alongside the people. People walking side by side, people walking arm in arm, people walking, people talking. People digesting shashlik with ketchup and potato salad. People making funny faces for people taking pictures of people making funny faces. People talking, talking talking talking talking

In summers, the endless plains of grass is enough for an escapist. There's always something to do, something to work on and improve. The warming sun and enlivening fresh air is inviting and the house seems to be forgotten. With a promising look forward, the door seems to close with ease behind the optimistic eye.

In winters, the endless white scenery is hinting that it's better to stay inside. The house becomes a refuge from the freezing cold. Its thick protecting walls are saving the light and keeping warmth. The house becomes a little oasis in the middle of the icy landscape. It seems almost impossible to escape from the house. It draws you back in, locks you in its arms and keeps you there until the high temperatures of the outside overshadow the warmth kept indoors.

Awakening from a good night's sleep. It's snowing outside. Grandmother is downstairs already. I know that breakfast food is on the table. All I need to do is drag my sleepy feet to the toilet, to the wash basin and then downstairs. "Tsau!" to grandmother, "tsau!" to grandfather around the corner. Seating my bosom at the table. Sandwich, coffee, something sweet. Talking, talking talking. Let's go outside. But only for a little while. I feel restless, I feel lazy of not doing anything useful, I feel guilty for eating more calories than my body will use during the day, I'm waiting for the evening to come because then I can feel at ease for just lying on the sofa, watching TV and talking to grandmother.

Taking a break from the house comes through finding new little "projects". There's no end to improving the house, taking it apart and rebuilding it time after time. During the thirty eight of the small-scale excavation works around the garden, grandmother still finds comfort in digging new beds for the flowers, bushes and trees. There's still a lot to do. There will always be lots to do: new windows for the old barn house. Attack and eliminate the mole-rats. Cut grass. Rake the leaves. Plant stuff in the green house. Cut grass. Drag the fallen branches into the fireplace. Lit the fire. Cut grass. Keep the flowers blooming. Collect tomatoes, cucumbers. Cut grass. Fight with mole-rats, again. Fight with dandelions. Collect berries. Think of what to do with all the berries. Cut grass.

Grandparents had to cover the house's exterior walls with wood and paint it green, because on a visit to Australia they had told the relatives that that's how the house looks from the outside. After that, grandparents had six months to get it done before the relatives payed their unexpectedly rushed visit to Estonia in return. Along with the recovering of the walls they had decided to extend the living room twice the size as before, so they built a new room to the house. Years later, when another relative from Australia was planning to visit, grandparents built two new rooms along with a bathroom upstairs on top of the garage. Some might notice a pattern here. Australia plays quite a big role in the history of the house. It sure becomes apparent after a brief observation around the house: a clock with the figure of the land of Australia, which by the way shows Australian time! Toothpicks with Australian flag on top. Small kangaroos hanging from the curtains. What an unexpected collision of different worlds and cultures in a seemingly very Estonian house in a very Estonian location in the middle of Estonia. People visiting from the south.

There used to be a storks' nest just outside of the fence around the garden. Close enough to see and count the stork nestlings. It's been a small tradition every spring to count and talk about the storks. Some years have been more memorable because there has been a third stork fighting over the nest, but most of the time a seemingly decent stork couple have found their home for the summer in there. Usually the male stork would stand on top of the ridge of the roof of an old farm house on the grandparents' lot. Grandmother was glad that their nest is a bit further from the garden because storks carry snakes among everything else up to their always hungry hatchlings. These big birds are beautiful and the sight of them brought comfort. Perhaps it assured people of something. Maybe the high electricity pole with a huge nest on top was a symbol of stability.

The pole carried more than the stories of the storks and sentimental value. Sometimes a newlywed couple would come there to tie a white ribbon for good luck, the higher they were able to climb, the more promising their future of unison would be.

A few summers back the pole and everything with it was removed and changed for a newer post with new electricity lines. It left a bitter mark.



Untouched handle of the glass door leading nowhere. 2024

8:30
grandfather wakes up, goes downstairs to the bathroom

8:35
grandfather goes to the kitchen, takes breakfast food out of the refrigerator and starts making coffee

8:45
grandfather sits at the dining table and eats breakfast, drinks coffee

9:00
grandfather goes to the computer to play solitaire

10:30
grandmother wakes up, goes upstairs to the bathroom

10:35
grandmother goes to the kitchen, washes whatever's left from yesterday and tidies up the kitchen

10:45
grandmother sits at the dining table and eats breakfast, drinks coffee

11:00
grandmother cleans up the table, puts breakfast food back into the refrigerator

11:15
grandmother checks her phone for messages

11:15
grandfather is still on the computer

11:30
grandmother has a phone call with her Russian speaking student learning Estonian

12:00
grandfather gets up and goes to the TV to watch news about Ukraine

12:15
grandmother joins grandfather

12:45
grandmother goes outside to work on her flowerbeds

13:00
grandfather goes outside to fix the greenhouse plastic roof that got damaged last winter

14:00
grandmother goes to the kitchen and starts to prepare food

14:30
grandfather comes inside, goes to the computer

14:30
grandmother picks up her phone and answers, talks for 15 minutes

15:30
grandmother sets the table and calls grandfather to eat

15:40
they eat



Reflection on the cupboard downstairs, in the dining room. 2024



Some of many angels in the living room. 2024

16:00

grandfather gets up, takes his plate to the kitchen, then goes to the sofa and turns on the TV

16:05

grandmother cleans the table, puts dishes to the dishwasher

16:15

grandmother goes to the computer to check her social channels and online bank

16:30

grandfather goes to the bathroom

17:00

grandmother goes outside to work on her flowerbeds

17:15

grandfather goes to the computer to play something

18:00

grandmother comes back inside, tidies up the kitchen, snacks on something

18:20

grandmother goes to the bathroom

18:30

grandfather goes down to the basement to turn on the heating

18:40

grandfather goes to the living room and turns on the TV, watches news about Ukraine

18:45

grandmother joins grandfather

19:15

someone calls grandmother, she talks for half an hour

19:45

grandmother joins grandfather

19:50

grandfather goes to the bathroom

19:55

grandfather snacks on something in the kitchen

20:00

grandfather joins grandmother watching TV, they watch a movie

21:35

grandfather gets up, grandmother tells him to go and turn off the heating in the basement

21:35

grandfather goes downstairs to the basement and turns off the heating

21:45

grandfather goes upstairs to his bedroom, confirms out loud: "This in my home!" and falls asleep

23:55

grandmother gets up from the sofa, tidies up the kitchen, takes a few sips of red wine for good night's sleep, brushes her teeth and goes upstairs to her bedroom

00:20

grandmother lying in her bed, listening to the news about Ukraine through earphones, then switches on the plastic glowing angel and tries to fall asleep



Grandmother in the blue kitchen. 2024



Grandmother and grandfather in the blue kitchen. 2024



One of the red sofas. 2024

Stretching Out the Limbs

Whenever life makes me move to another place, one of my main concerns is if there's enough space to unfold my yoga mat and if I'm able to spread my limbs freely in every direction. In my current living situation I'm sharing a flat with two other girls who by the way are very nice people to have as flat mates and I have a good enough size room, where I can roll and spread however I please.

I was lying there yesterday thinking to myself, how in my future home I want a lot of free space everywhere. I want to be able to lie on the floor, to feel the space around me, stretch and move. I also want space for my mind. I want to create a home that allows my thoughts to wander around, to not get distracted or stuck on the cluttered shelves and stuffed corners in the space. With the littlest effort possible, I want to be able to vacuum the annoying dust rolls that accumulate annoyingly fast. I want air and space. Big space. Abstract space.

I want a room just for thinking,

I want a room just for sketching,

I want a room just for stretching. In an ideal world. In a privileged world.

"How to expel functions, rhythms, habits, how to expel necessity? I imagine myself living in a vast apartment, so vast that I could never remember how many rooms it had (I had known, in the old days, but had forgotten, and knew I was too old now to start again on such a complicated enumeration.)" - Perec, G. Species of Spaces and Other Places, p. 34



Leather sofa with a pillow dedicated to taks. 2024

Grandmother has always said how she adores big, open spaces. High ceilings, tall windows allowing lots of light to enter. In her ideal world she wanted to live in a big old mansion that she would have restored throughout her years. That's the dream. Right now she's living in a house with multiple rooms, big kitchen and so on and so forth. She feels blessed to have all that.

The house has no high ceilings, no tall windows and it's not a mansion. Everything is regular-sized. Everything is normal. That's the reality.

"Sometimes the house of the future is better built, lighter and larger than all the houses of the past, so that the image of the dream house is opposed to that of the childhood home."
Bachelard, G. Poetics of Space, p. 81

Starting from the life in Siberia, following by teenage years in foster home, grandmother had to get by with very little. The first two decades in her life, she was forced to live in scarcity and heavily unsteady environments. Her memory of space is to hold on to whatever she's given, to not ask for more, but to work for it. It's telling her to build protective walls around herself as well as her family, and not to let go. Her memory of space gave her a strong instinct and yearning for security, which she found in grandfather. A big man coming from a home. A big man with the strength and determination to build and feed a family. A man coming from the city and who now is reluctant to move back in there.



Grandmother taking a break on one of the sofas. 2024

Patriotism - Rural Privacy

A house made with one's own hands, ten fingers, strong arms, back and thighs. The whole body exhausted for the house. Grandfather lost his three fingers while working around the house, he has made sacrifices in order for the house to endure. He's shed liters of sweat, milliliters of blood and some body parts for the house. And now he's saying that he's not willing to move away.

"There are two kinds of patriotism, local and imperial. Local patriotism rests on the intimate experience of place, and on a sense of the fragility of goodness: that which we love has no guarantee to endure." Tuan, Y. Topophilia, p.101

He has built and destroyed in order to bring new life in the house. There used to be three big fire ovens upstairs and downstairs, made by grandfather. Replaced by the new central heating system, two of the ovens have been demolished, despite its uselessness the last one was kept for sentimental values. It's standing proudly upstairs in between two rooms, sturdy like a mountain. On top of it, unseen to the eye, lie few pairs of teeth from grandchildren's mouths, thrown up there for good luck.

Lying on top of grandfather's back looking into the first flames of warmth, while he's on all fours, blowing air into the oven. He's making sure we're all kept cosy and warm. He's so strong that he can carry me on his back like that.

This oven and the rest of the house has grown so deep into grandfather's being that it's become an extension of his personality. He lives and breathes through the house in his peaceful solitude, away from the buzzing city life of other people.

*"A man's belongings are an extension of his personality; to be deprived of them is to diminish, in his own estimation, his worth as a human being."
Tuan, Y. Topophilia, p. 99*

Grandmother once commented on his worn-out, dirty sweatshirt. She wanted him to change it for a new one but grandfather stated that this dirty shirt is part of the life. One simply cannot wear a freshly washed and ironed clothes when living in the middle of fields and forests, no.



The fire oven upstairs. 2024



Grandfather with his grandson and 10 fingers. 1994



Grandfather and 7 fingers building a small play house for Freda. 2002

My Needs, My Desires and My Necessities

I want four walls. I want a door and some windows. I want light and warmth. I want to know that it's there tomorrow and the day after that and the day after that. I want a carpet and a sofa. I want a corner for the plants. I want a cupboard on which I could place some photographs in nicely sculpted frames. I want to hang a mirror and a calendar. I want a night stand on which I could rest my book and my thoughts before I fall asleep. I want a pendant light with an orange glass dome shade. I want music and I want smiles around the house. I want to cook for you and pour a second glass of wine. I want to fall asleep knowing that tomorrow will be the same. I want a kitchen with a window looking to the back yard. I want to cook there for you and share my thoughts. I want a timer on the stove that tells me when the meat is done. I want a large table where all the people in our family would have a place. I want to sit and drink my coffee in piece. I want to think and walk around in piece. I want to be loved and I want to love. I want to feel the warmth and I want to give my care. To you. To myself and to you.

I want to have a lot of tea pots that will never be used, but look beautiful. A lot of different kind of drinking glasses for different kind of drinks. A lot of DVDs that once was on constant replay, but nowadays will be looked at and skipped. A lot of angel figurines, for protection. A lot of 3000 piece puzzles to complete once and then put away. A lot of this and a lot of that. It's not a lot actually, it's not a lot. I started this paragraph with the assumption that grandparents have a lot of stuff, but no, all of those things would in fact be fairly easy to gather together and store away in some boxes. By writing that, I realise that I'm already preparing myself for the time when I have to say good-bye to the house. Grandparents want to, or more so grandmother wants to move somewhere closer to the city and the children. She is ready to move out of the house. Grandfather is not ready to move on. In their age, they are taking steps towards tying the ends, winding down, taking it more easy and letting go.



Sketch of the kitchen, by Freda. 2024

Grandmother was telling me how they were changing the flooring of the kitchen the other day. The work required squatting and kneeling on all fours, grandfather has always been a confident squatter in the family but now it takes a while. To my recalling, their kitchen floor was decent looking, but something told them to work on the kitchen floor and to change it.

Grandmother and grandfather moved to the house on the breaking point of their marriage, the house fixed it and in return they have been fixing the house and will be until the end of the house.



Grandmother, her two daughters, dog, cat and ducks on the back stairs. 1988

Closing the Door - A Conclusion

Is it possible for anyone to ever own a space?

Some day, grandparents will close the door behind them and move out of the house. Someone familiar from inside the family or a complete stranger will take on everything that's left. Maybe the house will be demolished, maybe renovated or maybe it will suit just as it is for the newcomers. Whatever the case, it feels so wrong to think that someone completely new would sit on the same sofas, would walk from the dining table to the kitchen to prepare the afternoon coffee to digest the lunch with. What if they, too, would have it on the stairs outside... It brings tears to my eyes just to think of that. This house was and is the space of my grandparents' and their descendants. It's not a space for strangers with a different past.

Maybe a space, in the end, has nothing to do with the material world. Maybe it's what people create within each other through time. During the 38 years of the house, the inner spaces of its people have tied together so tightly with the outer, material space that everything in that space have become completely and utterly their own. The only option would be to demolish the house, dig everything up and make a crop field out of the land. That's the only option.

With that I realise that time plays a big role of the experience of space. It's like chocolate with coffee or peanut butter and jelly, one perfects the other. In production design, we focus, perhaps unconsciously, on showing the passage of time. It's what gives the depth to the visual story and makes the character whole. We build layers on top of each other, some physical and some imaginary, unseen to the eye, but the knowledge of their existence enriches the history and background of the character, like my grandparents' house with its multiple layers of wallpaper from different times. The many layers are not seen to the eye, but maybe there happens to be a corner on the wall where the new wallpaper has peeled off a little and underneath it is a hint of the time that once was.

Some months ago, I was working on a feature film in the props department, and learned that aging and patinating every single little detail is important and requires a lot of attention. Or else, the final product will be lifeless, strange and unrelatable.

When designing a space around a character, we always need to know the back story. We need to know the reasons behind why he or she has made such decisions to have this or that coloured wallpaper, why some books might be more worn out than others or perhaps there's no books at all. A lot, if not everything about the character is pictured through their space. But what happens if the space is designed to the character but the real life actor's characteristics are not suitable for the space?

That's something I discovered when working on my latest MA film in Aalto called *Special Kinda Bad Feeling*.¹⁴ I had designed the space to the character from the script, everything seemed to be in its right place, but after seeing the final product, I realised that the actress didn't fit in her character's space at all. She felt like an elephant in there. It's something I hadn't thought about before at all and I'm very thankful for that mishap.

I have become much closer to space. I have learned to understand and read it better, to be more sensitive with it. I have learned that space requires a lot of care and attention, as well as patience in order to notice the details that make the atmosphere in it. Space needs time to merge and form connections between the material and the spiritual world.

In autumn 2023 I was browsing through an old book shop and came across a book about the history of houses. It seemed a good way to ease into writing about a family house. "Evolution of The House" is a book by Stephen Gardiner, a British architect, teacher and writer. From his book I got to know where and how people started building the first houses. I learned that the most basic way of constructing a house is to make it round, like a dome. Gardiner was talking about how people were naturally inspired by nature-like forms. That the familiarly shaped rectangular and cubical houses appeared years and years later, it stemmed from people's need for a more structured lifestyle. I learned that the common way of how the rooms are set in a house nowadays dates back to the Neolithic period, about 10 000 - 2000 BC in Cyprus to a settlement called Khirokitia. Due to the people's basic needs and the desire for order, the bedrooms were put upstairs and the kitchen with all its mess downstairs, so it would be easier to keep everything tidy. My grandmother has definitely taken that aspect very seriously.

During the writing of this thesis, I learned that a door can mean so many things and lead to many other places than just what seemingly appears behind it. Based on a brief look, the balcony door in my grandparents' house that leads to nowhere looks like just another unfinished plan. But on a deeper inquiry, one could find out about the many possible reasons behind it. To me, this door opened up my grandmother's idea of an ideal.

How does past experiences in a space influence one's relationship with it?

In Jacques Demy's musical romantic-drama film *The Umbrellas of Cherbourg* the characters blend in with the walls in their home, leaving a somewhat claustrophobic and smothering notion. It feels as if the house wants to swallow up its people. On the other hand, it shows how intertwined and merged the people's lives have become with the house that they live in. People spread their limbs, thoughts, wishes, nerves, secrets, sweat and tears into every corner, every pore of the house, which the house absorbs up like a sponge, full of water and ready to burst any second.



Grandmother in the corridor downstairs. 2024



Bodard, M. (Producer), & Demy, J. (Director). (1964). The Umbrellas of Cherbourg [Motion Picture]
France: Madeleine Films, Parc Film, Beta Film

Notes

1. **Topography**, the art or practice of graphic delineation in detail usually on maps or charts of natural and man-made features of a place or region especially in a way to show their relative positions and elevations; topography combines top- with graph-, a root meaning "write" or "describe". [source for the definition: <https://www.merriam-webster.com/dictionary/topography>]
2. **Space**, a period of time; a boundless three-dimensional extent in which objects and events occur and have relative position and direction. [source for the definition: <https://www.merriam-webster.com/dictionary/space>]
3. **Spatiality in Screen Arts**, a lecture for Production Design major in Aalto University. The specific lecture that's talked about in this thesis took place in spring semester, 2023. Lecturer: Tomi Lauri.
4. **Topophilia**, a strong sense of place, which often becomes mixed with the sense of cultural identity among certain people and a love of certain aspects of such a place. [source for the definition: [https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Topophilia#:~:text=Topophilia%20\(From%20Greek%20topos%20%22place,aspects%20of%20such%20a%20place.](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Topophilia#:~:text=Topophilia%20(From%20Greek%20topos%20%22place,aspects%20of%20such%20a%20place.)]
5. "Space is experienced directly as having room in which to move." Tuan, Y. *Space and Place*, p. 12
6. **Maks ja taks**, family dogs in grandparents' house. *Maks* is the name of a dog and *taks* is a dog breed, dachshund in English.
7. **Värvilised vankrid**, Rembowski, S. (author). Karmo, H. (translator). Kuut, M. (performer). [Link to the song: https://soundcloud.com/user-629130640/marju-kuut-varvilised-vankrid?in=ess10/sets/est&utm_source=clipboard&utm_medium=text&utm_campaign=social_sharing]
8. **Minesweeper**, a logic puzzle video game genre generally played on personal computers. [Source for the definition: [https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Minesweeper_\(video_game\)](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Minesweeper_(video_game))]
9. **Solitaire**, is a card game for only one player. [Source for the definition: <https://www.collinsdictionary.com/dictionary/english/solitaire#:~:text=Solitaire%20is%20a%20game%20for,game%20for%20only%20one%20player.>]
10. "Universe is a cube", S. Gardiner wrote in his book *Evolution of the House*: "In China the universe is a cube and the tile designs were plans of it; and if there is a central pillar it is more abstract and is associated with the line of memory connected with time and ancestral worship."
11. "It is body and soul. It is human being's first world.", G. Bachelard book *The Poetics of space*
12. **Reflection of Eiffel Tower**, a reference to Jacques Tati film *Playtime*. Still shot of the scene can be found on page 39.
13. **Verses 3:1-8** from Ecclesiastes book in the Bible.
14. **Special Kinda Bad Feeling**, Rintala, S. J. and Koskinen, R. (Producers). Varpama, R. (Director). [Short film] Finland: Aalto University

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- All blueprints, photographs and sketches in this thesis are from Freda Purik's and her family's personal collection.