A Participatory World

When humans enter a room, any space, the first thing they do is to check whether there is another human being in that room. In general, in their daily life humans are primarily interested in other humans. Spatial experiences are secondary to their group instinct. Basically, according to a group of quantum physics, we are collapsing the higher dimension of the quantum state of the universe, which allows for billions of possible observed universes, into a three dimensional space that unfolds in time, by the way we perceive the universe, the world, and our immediate environment through our sense organs. We are only human, imprisoned by our senses. In that collapsed world, one's peers are the most important entities of reference.

More on the surface of their existence, in their professional life, humans might shift their focus towards a narrower band of interests. Architects may have developed a professional anomaly to look at the proportions, materials, atmosphere of the room itself, before noticing anything or anyone else. Interior designers - the writer of this book Martin Pot is trained as an interior architect - might focus on furniture and interior finishings in the first place. Such a professional deviation has its advantages, since one notices things that others do not see. When architects visit a city, they typically want to see that one special building, that just finished masterpiece of a much published colleague, they go straight to that special place in the city, before paying attention to anything else, before seeing the people walking the streets. Regardless of the fact that people and their doings are actually shaping the character of the city. By their education, architects and designers seem to have unlearned to look at their immediate environment the same way as daily users of that same environment do.

In this book Martin Pot focuses on the notion of home, which is an renewed attempt to bring back the human factor at the forefront of the profession. Pot is not blind to recent technological development, notably to the digital invasion into the privacy of the home, and believes that the notion of home needs to be redefined. This book reads as an extensive introduction to an open question. How should the home and privacy be redefined? Realizing that the new citizens have become international nomads who find their home wherever they are, wherever they work, wherever they live for shorter or longer periods of time. Basically the new technology allows the new citizens to take home along with them. That aspect of the new nomadic international citizen certainly is part of the necessity of a thorough redefinition of the notion of home.

But there is more, it goes in two opposite directions, the societal developments that are taking place are bi-directional. Since the world has become a deeply networked place, human beings bring the world into their private space called home. Home is a hideaway that a single person or a group of people living intimately together have exclusive access to. The material householder has the key to the front door, while the virtual home user has the password. Home thus becomes a merged real and virtual realm that is somehow imagined to be fully private. Yet, since the human user has allowed a variety of electronic devices in the room and apps running on cellphones and laptop computers to have access to cameras, contacts, telephone numbers and a range of "private" data, the big tech companies and the government are looking over the shoulder into the privacy of the

personal space. Martin Pot argues that one should have more control over one's immediate environment, both the physically built environment and the sensorial sphere one lives in. After all, home is a lived space connected to the Internet of Things and People.

One way of exercising control is to shut down all digital devices, refrain from using mobile phones and disconnect from the Internet. The other more constructive way is to find ways of establishing a bi-directional relationship with the tech companies, governmental bodies and shared communities, which must become a process of give and take, a process of interaction. The digital revolution has this one big promise, which might give the clue to the redefinition of private space. This one big promise is the potential for user interaction, for level playing field participation, for co-design, for co-production. No longer should we be considered as consumers, but as prosumers instead. We are actors in an actor network. One could consider the struggle for privacy as a game of life whereby the actors play by the rules according to their own skill levels and preferences, and occasionally change the rules when there is a consensus to do so. The more creative people will challenge the game of life and would want to rewrite the rules of play while playing. Writing a book is already an attempt to rewrite the rules of play, or at least a contribution to form a critical mass of structural proposals that eventually converge into a substantial change in the set of rules. Less creative but nonetheless participating persons might be happy to play by the rules. Professionals may develop a high level of skill, they may enforce admiration, and eventually propose an amendment to the set of rules. While the recreational player will be satisfied to just enjoy the game. Yet, they are both playing the same game. To interact with the space called home is the initial condition for the game of life.

Everyone has a notion of home, even the homeless, for whom the physical aspect of home is almost non existing, and everyone participates in this game, while some are much more actively participating in changing the rules of the game than others. I believe that the solution to the privacy crisis lies in the development of participatory design instruments on all levels of the development of the domain that is called home. I prefer the word "instrument" over the word "tool", while an instrument can be played in many different ways, open for composers and interpreters alike, all can play their own tune, according to their own interest and preferences, whereas tools are per definition monofunctional. The hammer is always looking for a nail to hit. Participatory design instruments include the participation of highly skilled professionals and laymen alike. Participatory design methods are inclusive by nature. Both the professional designer and the user are considered experts, playing in the same level playing field. The user has the expertise of daily life that the professional often lacks, while it is clear that a professional has a special skill that is indispensable. The game of life is a multiplayer game. In a participatory design process envisaging to build homes, there are many different experts involved: the user, the designer, the banker, the environmentalist, ngo's, the material supplier, the circularity expert, the fabricator, the manager, the referee, basically any stakeholder for that particular project. They all should be included in a level playing field, supported by a real time unfolding serious game. The game of life is an open set of rules with many parameters, which can be set by the players in real time according to their personal stakes.

The game of life is transportable, meaning that the participation is not confined to one physical home, but to the mobile privacy sphere that people bear with them wherever they go. In the digital participatory future there will be no more coming home, but only taking home along. Home is where you are, where you live, where you work, where you interact with your environment, digitally and physically, where you socialize with others. Home is as quiet or as busy as the parameters you set for your own interaction with the world around you. Returning to the place that you once left, will most likely not be the same anymore after a while. The world around you is changing fast, not in the least because you are changing yourself, and you can only have influence on it's pace of change by interacting with your immediate environment in real time. You can live fast, make many connections and become an influencer, or you can live slow and live a secluded life, it is up to you in a participatory world.

Kas Oosterhuis, Nagymaros, August 2020