

WEEK 14: A Sense of Home & Homelessness

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URBST 222: Introduction to Urban Housing /URBST 723: Dynamics of Housing & Homelessness



What is the meaning of home?

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- According to Dupuis and Thorns (1998), the **meaning of home is:**
 - **Context-specific:** concerning the ideological, economic, and political importance of homeownership and the preoccupation with land and private property.
 - **Variable:** concerning age, gender, race, class, ethnicity etc.

Ontological Security: Definitions

- “...a sense of confidence and trust in the world as it appears to be. It is a security of being” (Dupuis & Thorns, 1998, p. 27)
- “..the confidence that most human beings have in the continuity of their self-identity and the constancy of their social and material environments...sense of the reliability of persons and things” (Giddens, 1990 in Dupuis & Thorns, 1998, p. 27)
- “...the need to experience oneself as a whole, continuous person in time — as being rather than constantly changing — in order to realize a sense of agency” (Giddens, 1991; Laing, 1969: 41–2 in Mitzen, 2006.

CONTINUITY

TRUST

ROUTINE

HABIT

RELATIONSHIPS

STABILITY

CONSTANCY

RELIABILITY

Ontological Security

- Giddens believes ontological security (OS) is emotional, rather than cognitive, and rooted in unconscious.
 - OS must be regrounded through personal ties with others in the modern world.
 - Unlike in the premodern world, there is currently less face-to-face interaction and daily routine; instead, trust is developed via, “abstract tokens like money and expert systems like professional expertise. Modern trust mechanisms therefore, have more to do with technical effectiveness, than the moral worth they had in times past” (Dupuis & Thorns, 1998, p. 27).

Ontological Security: Giddens Vs Saunders

- Giddens takes an anti-urban tone in arguing that OS has been undermined in a rapidly modernizing world.
 - He stresses importance of nature, but Saunders disagrees arguing that OS though life routines do occur in the modern world in environments both natural and constructed environments (like our homes!).
- Saunders argues OS can be maintained in the built environment and from there we can argue that home is a key site where OS is sought and maintained.

Maintaining Ontological Security

Per Dupuis and Thorns (1998), OS is maintained when following conditions are met:

1. home is site of **constancy** in social and material environment
2. home is a spatial context in which the day-to-day **routines** of human existence are performed
3. home is a site where people feel most in **control** of their lives because they feel free from the surveillance that is part of the contemporary world
4. home is a secure base around which **identities** are constructed

#1: Critiques in the use of the term “Ontological Security”

- 1. OS has been misused and shifted far from its original intended meaning** as introduced by RD Laing in his 1960 book *The Divided Self* about his work with patients suffering from schizophrenia. Patients experience OS as “being as real, alive, whole; as differentiated from the rest of the world in ordinary circumstances so clearly that his identity and autonomy are never in question”.
 - **OS then became adopted by housing advocates and decoupled from mental illness. But, simply having a home cannot inoculate one from mental illness.**

Critiques in the use of the term “Ontological Security”

- **Peter Saunders, drawing on Giddens’ definition of OS, made it popular with housing scholars.** Saunders argued “that owning/renting was a key cleavage in a sociology of consumption whereby home ownership offered the psychological benefits of “niche and belonging” compared to the “alienation from home” felt by tenants.
- **Saunders tenure-specific, gender-neutral meaning of home was not well received among several housing scholars.**

#2: Critiques in the use of the term “Ontological Security”

- 2. OS has suffered a lack of critical reflection regarding its definition and operationalization.** “Ontological security has always been notoriously difficult to operationalize...fueled by a reliance upon proxies [that] can be identified in much published work on the subject. The lack of a convincing and ongoing critique of how the term is operationalized and measured amongst housing researchers increases the risk that one generation’s mistakes are reproduced by the next”.

#3: Critiques in the use of the term “Ontological Security”

- 3. The literature on OS has largely overstated the role of home in providing such benefits.** “there is a dark-side of home which has been neglected in the meaning of home literature in favour of a series of relentlessly positive narratives of home or home-making... For many, home was revealed as a source of ontological insecurity. Beyond home, what of other sources of ontological security? Access to green or blue spaces, to job satisfaction, to social capital, to feelings of love, acceptance and belonging in a relationship or a community seem to offer many of the psycho-social benefits which have often been associated with home as a physical structure”.

Sources

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