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Book Report: The Home: Words, Interpretations, Meanings and Environments

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*The Home: Words, Interpretations, Meanings and Environments*, David N. Benjamin (ed); Avebury Publishing Ltd., Aldershot, Hants, UK, 1995. 324 pages, 63 figures, US \$ 68.95 (hardcover). Distributed in the US and Canada by Ashgate Publishing Company, Brookfield, VT.

This book is a compilation of fifteen articles, fourteen of which were initially presented at a 3 - day symposium held at the University of Trondheim, Norway, during the period 20-23 July 1992, and titled: *The Ancient Home and the Modern Internationalized Home: Dwelling in Scandinavia*. A fifteenth article by Stefan Brink was commissioned later by the editor David N. Benjamin. The authors revised their work during the period 1993 - 1994, and the editor added an Introduction, and an Afterword. The result is a valuable volume on this important topic. It is published as part of the series titled: "Ethnoscapes: Current Challenges in the Environmental Social Sciences", which is edited by David Canter and David Stea. This is the 14th volume in the series. David Saile of the University of Cincinnati contributed a Forward to the book. The disciplines which are represented by the fifteen contributors are: anthropology, archaeology, architecture, ethnology, etymology, geography, human ecology, political science, and urban studies.

The editor has grouped the articles in four parts, whose contributors are indicated:

1-Home: Toward a Definition of the Concept Stefan Brink, Amos Rapoport, Roderick J. Lawrence, Bror Westman. 2-Home as a Cultural Interpretation Tool Ruth Tringham, Neil S. Price, Juhani Pallasmaa. 3-Home as a Reflection of Societal Contention and Change J. Douglas Porteous, Susan Kent, David Stea, Frands Herschend, Marjorie Bulos and Waheed Chaker. 4-Home and House: Lessons from the Past to the Present Jorn Orum-Nielsen, Tomas Wikstrom, Eje Aren.

David N. Benjamin, the editor who is a scholar and an architect, seems to be imbedded in the field of Environment-Behaviour Studies (EBS). His introduction and Afterword are written with the vantage point of the conceptual scheme which this field of study has established for itself. The field's goal being "the generation of knowledge and the discovery of processes and systems to understanding design-behavior interactions, and to develop a theory of the environment in relation to human activity" ; and the home is viewed by members of this discipline as "one of the archetypical places in place research of study empirically from the perspective of the user". (p.12).

The historical time frame which the editor and a number of the contributors

refer to is from the birth of Christ, about 2000 years ago, although hardly any reference is made to the literature and archaeological evidence available from the cultures and civilizations of the ancient Near East, Islam, India and China. Occasional reference is made of Greek sources such as in the article by Stefan Brink on "Home: The Term and the Concept from a Linguistic and Settlement-Historical Viewpoint". Most of the historical linkages are made to German and Saxon sources and Scandinavian roots. This is understandable as the symposium which generated these contributions concentrated on dwelling in Scandinavia as the primary locale. It should be noted however that seven of fifteen articles have value to an international audience who are interested or already imbedded in this topic. These are three articles in Part 1: Amos Rapoport on "A Critical Look at the Concept of Home", Roderick J. Lawrence on "Deciphering Home: An Integrative Historical Perspective", Bror Westman on "The Home and Homes". One article in Part 2 by Juhani Pallasmaa on "Identity, Intimacy, and Domicile: Notes on the Phenomenology of Home"; and three contributions in Part 3: J. Douglas Porteous on "Domicide: The Destruction of Home", Susan Kent on "Ethnoarchaeology and the Concept of Home: A Cross Cultural Analysis", and David Stea on "House and Home: Identity, Dichotomy, or Dialectic?". The rest of the contributions, eight articles, are primarily addressed to the Scandinavian context, and thus their relevance to an international audience is limited to the insight they provide as case studies. These are from Part 1: Stefan Brink on "Home: The Term and the Concept from a Linguistic and Settlement-Historical Viewpoint" ; from Part 2: Ruth Tringham on "Archaeological Houses, Households, Housework, and the Home"; Neil S. Price on "House and Home in Viking Age Iceland: Cultural Expression in Scandinavian Colonial Architecture" ; from Part 3: Frands Herschend on "The Origin of the Hall in Southern Scandinavia" Marjorie Bulos and Waheed Chaker on "Sustaining a Sense of Home and Personal Identity" ; from Part 4: Jorn Orum-Nielsen on "Denmark's living Housing Tradition"; Tomas Wilkstrom on "The Home and Housing Modernization"; and Eje Aren on "What Can We Learn from the Reconstruction of Pre-Historic Buildings?". The book therefore is primarily valuable to a northern European, specifically Scandinavian, audience and secondarily to a world wide audience of scholars and students in various disciplines pursuing studies or research on house and home.

In his Introduction the editor presents a brief synopsis of each contribution and attempts to place it in the context of this field of study. It is however in his Afterword that he synthesizes his perceptions of the contributions in this volume in five aspects related to the meaning of the term "home": as a word; the descriptive use of the word in the social science, humanistic, and architectural literature; the juridical meaning of the word; its place in psychiatric research; and as a cultural phenomenon in the individual and collective life of diverse human groups. The Afterword is valuable as an attempt to pull together the diverse points of view and the research experiences of the contributors. The editor, David N. Benjamin, correctly and wisely concludes that: "Perhaps the *home* should not be defined once and for all. Its role as a concept that encourages

scholarly study and creativity across the boundaries of many disciplines may be more important than what might be gained by holding down the meaning to one set of words.” (p.299).

I recommend this volume as an important reference to those scholars and students in many disciplines, particularly those in the Scandinavian countries, who are interested in this topic or who are imbedded in studies about habitat, housing, house, and home.

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