

Living in Rhythms

By Sander Manse

Our lives are stitched together by steady rhythms and cycles, perhaps most rigidly in the home. Some of the activities that used to be a part of the act of living in a home have gently vanished from today's domestic programs. Rhythms operate as interfaces for the exchange of information - organising interactions between people, animals, plants, things and spaces. Through time, the fireplace, the radio and the television all have functioned as the beating heart of the home. Decades of living were marked by the concept of a nuclear family sitting around their TV set, tapping into a carefully scheduled entertainment program that could span numerous hours and channels. The rhythm and length of the commercial breaks would determine the interspersed time spent in the kitchen or bathroom. Furniture was carefully arranged around the TV set so that every member of the family had an optimal view. The couch took on an important role in organising this activity. A history of the couch reveals a steady transformation from the 'active' upright sofa (sitting) to semi-bed (lounging). Couches grew massively in size, the L-shape of corner sofa's already determine their place in the living room: living means lounging.

Now that entertainment devices have become mobile and content can be streamed on-demand, the family rhythm is not necessarily bound to the dominant schedule of the television, and the predominant function of the couch can be changed again. Through time, programs and rhythms are shuffled around, and (re)structured around new kinds of media. Work does not have to take place outside of the house (thanks to seasonal/freelance work and flexible working schedules). Cooking does not have to take place inside the house, while eating still can (Deliveroo, Foodora, Uber Eats). We can invite strangers to live inside a part of our house so it can function as a source of steady income (Airbnb). Our home has turned into a vehicle for personal style, expression and status (Instagram, Freunden von Freunden). There is a voice in our home that only speaks when spoken to (Alexa, Google Assistant, Siri). Meanwhile we move beyond the corporate and state ideology of the nuclear family as fundament for society. Who still aspires to live the full-time housewife or househusband life? What kind of new rhythms does this allow for, and how will people reconfigure the shape, size and content of the home to support those new patterns?

There are several layers of rhythms at play to which we choreograph our lives - some are very deep, others ephemeral. A ground rhythm is linked to climate and season — in summer the house opens up and the home provides cool shelter, in winter we retreat and the home is a source of warmth. Gardens blossom and decay. There are life cycles of the creatures and organisms living inside the home - hominids grow older, get born, pets live and die, plants blossom and grow and die, the battery of the automated vacuum cleaner runs out, machines break down, carpet wears out. A home requires constant maintenance and careful manicuring. There are daily rhythms of almost mundane tasks and needs - five workdays and a weekend, eating, sleeping, showering,

opening and closing our curtains, our windows, our doors and cupboards. These are the fundamental and rigid rhythms of home-life.

A home encompasses a different timezone compared to the rest of the spaces we visit during the day. In the home we gravitate towards slowness and unstructured time: no strict obligations or schedules. There is regularity, structure, but it is not compulsory. The home offers the luxury of saying no, of retreat and of ease. It is about practicing the essential act of living together. With fellow humans, animals and other organisms. Plants offer us a way to tap into deep slowness of vegetal life. There is something comforting about living with gradually growing organisms that respond to the impulse of the house at a leisurely pace, demanding care without urgency, appreciating nourishment without demanding it at a certain time. The rhythms of plants adapt to the tempo of the home.

In a similar way, the home can adapt to our changing habits as well. New ways of living open up new ways of organising things inside spaces and spaces themselves. Rooms do not necessarily have to be enclosed but can flow into each other. As active and passive programs blur they can physically blend, or be accommodated by more ambiguous furniture. Spaces are freed from their traditionally assigned program - a rearrangement in rhythms affords us to have different interpretations of the typical domestic spaces at hand, allowing for more abstract shapes and forms that respond to many strange novel uses.

In the heart of all this shuffling and shifting, the kitchen can be considered to function as the centre of house. Multiple deep and steady rhythms interact here: fire, water, processes of cooking, baking, and boiling. It simultaneously functions as a truly social space, oscillating between serving a simple desire (hunger or thirst) and offering a place for interaction and rest. We gather for breakfast, lunch, dinner or coffee, but the kitchen is also turned into a place for work, to read or to talk. If you think of the kitchen as a set or stage for collaborative production and consumption, it can turn into a meeting space for all residents, neighbours and friends.

As we move into a future full of flexibility and change, the house opens up to less functionally defined spaces and more atmospherically differentiated experiences through material expressions of warmth and comfort. We'll long for intensity and resonance: a home that serves our direct needs but also leaves room for expression and improvisation. While the material structure of the home undergoes constant change, living inside a home will always mean participating in domestic rhythms, synchronised with other beings and seasons within that place. We'll always structure our lives around other lives.