

Explore banhams
unhouse point
construction essay



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When your house contains such a complex of piping, flues, ducts, wires, light, inlets, outlets, ovens, sinks, refuse, disposers, hi-fi reverberators, antennae, conduits, freezers, heaters when it contains so many services that the hardware could stand up by itself without any assistance from the house, why have a house to hold it up 1. Reynar Banham sums up his essay within the very first few lines. He asked himself the very question, are structures still necessary based on the progress being made in environmental technology.

A home is not a house is written by Peter Rayner Banham an English architectural historian, critic, teacher and journalist. Written between 1964-1966, during his visit to Chicago on a research fellowship, the essay emphasises his appreciation of post-war American culture. The essay also expresses Banham s characteristics, his provocative, polemical style. To some extent how disillusioned he may have been with the architectural establishment during the 1960 s.

The essay eventually led to a book on environmental technologies The architecture of the Well-tempered Environment (1969), where Banham emphasises the opposition of building as structure vs. building as a power consuming device , which is turned into a foundation myth in this book.

Banham strongly criticised architecture as a monument so when the Well-tempered Environment was categorised under the title technology, Banham strongly objected to this. Banham like the futurists saw technology as redemption of design .

This essay sets out to review and question the environmental control in architecture. It will intend to analyse the Environmental Bubble . Also known as the Mylar airdome, the Environmental Bubble being a compelling home of the future concept was created by Rayner Banham and Francois Dallegret in 1969.

This essay hopes to look at how Banham turns to environmental systems to controversially question, if given the advanced state of engineering, is there any reason for houses to be constructed? I hope to explore Banham s unhouse point in detail the abandonment of the unconvincing mechanical invasion is a viable idea in theory.

Architectural systems that are currently used may not be necessarily the best solution but may be used because they are the most comfortable to utilise and everyone is familiar with that idea. Is there a potential way of resolving this? Altering systems or changing habit? For instance, are you doing things because you are comfortable with it or is it because you consider that this is the best possible solution? To what extent do you no longer consider aspects of life that stimulate you and more crucially enhance your relationship with what is around you? To search for comparisons that one may need to look in other areas such as art or technologies, one may need to branch out from one s comfort zone by working with people with similar thoughts or with those that have an alternative approach to similar problems to you. Coming up against modernism would often rely on exploring the unfamiliar.

Two basic suggestions are made by Banham when reviewing a home is not a house, on how he thinks the environment around us can be controlled.

Firstly he states, the issue of sheltering beneath a rock or by today's standards, a roof. This was the general view to architecture, keeping away from the subject of the environment altogether. The second point being considerably primitive, involves, actual interference with the meteorology, usually by the means of a simple campfire to create light and heat. 2

An example of Banham's home is not a house theory mentioned in his essay, is that of the glass cube house at New Canaan, Connecticut (1950) by Architect Philip Johnson, who he categorised as men of international culture. 3 Banham considered the house as being nothing but a monumental form, did Banham have a strong case? Is there a clear demonstration of an unhouse here? According to Banham, Johnson along with others have misleadingly linked the glass cube incorporating ideas from baroque spatial organisation, Greek planning, high modernism and renaissance fenestration as a precedent. Banham argues that the glass cube consists of the two permanent elements; a heated brick floor slab and a standing unit with a bathroom and chimney/fireplace either side. The two elements act as a service core, in fact the glass cube acts as a service core to which other elements hung from, in this case, glass. For this reason, it is in Banham's view that the glass cube house is unhouse.

It is widely regarded that Americans have a love for the great outdoors, whether it be a journey to the beach, or a camping trip. You would be prone to think that Banham would want to create the ultimate sustainable movement in architecture, by moving the home outdoors.

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Banham reveals that a cultural attitude in America towards cars would lead to it replacing, to some extent, the architecture as we know it in the European sense developing it into a travelling power plant . Beefed-up car batteries and a self-reeling cable drum could probably get this package breathing warm bourbon fumes over eden long before microwave power transmission or miniaturised atomic power plants come in (quote from?). An interesting point made by Banham, he talks about the drive-in movie house . He states that, Only, the word house is a manifest misnomer just a flat piece of ground where the operating company provides visual images and piped sound, and the rest of the situation comes on wheels. You bring your own seat, heat and shelter as part of the car. 4 This point is continued, The home, however, must accommodate the complex activities of multiple generations through all phases of life. 5 The idea of rejecting the home and resorting back to living by the light and heat of the fire in a caveman like style is depicted and to propose this new lifestyle despite of the technology, not taking into account climate changes in my opinion is a huge backward step and debatable. Perhaps by making these points, Banham wanted us to understand the new idea he had in mind, the Mylar airdome. 6

The Mylar airdome is a transparent plastic bubble which is inflated using conditioned-air output of your mobile package. This tightly sealed enclosure is designed for the ingress and egress of air pumped in, in effect it becomes its own world. The inflated element would protect the family within from the persistent unfriendly environment on the outside. Can this transparent element be justified as a sustainable living package? The boy in the image seems caged like an animal unable to adapt to the world around him. Would

this suggest that we should be in a bubble because we cannot adapt? The growth of the house is the reason for our adaptation so is this some sort of punishment, by suffocating us in a family sized polythene bag, or a cage for people to point and laugh at?

The Mylar airdome is a well constructed, well thought out design by Banham and Francois Dellegret. It is a man made climate made possible through developing technologies like electricity and domestic air-conditioning, as opposed to architectures time honoured role as the sole creator of environments for living through its physicality, where the bubble would act as a wall, a facade, which could manage the aspects of energy exchange, motion and perception. Unlike the Camp and Dolce Vita architects, it is combined with a technical ultra-sophistication to break down accepted conventions and generate change. ⁷ He conjured up a radical, rational belief in another kind of architecture, one that proposed to do away with aesthetics altogether.

The thought behind the Mylar airdome was to offer everyone with all the requirements of modern life (shelter, food, energy even television) without the need for a permanent structure. As Charles Jencks evaluates, it may be doubted whether the mood controlled environment was exactly what he (Banham) was proffering, but there can be no doubt what with the eight century trend toward a sensate culture and the present possibility of stimulating the pleasure centres of the brain that certain groups will be tempted to construct it. What exactly it would look like is best left to the imagination. ⁸ What I get from this is that Charles Jencks believes that by

developing current traits to new heights you in effect begin to acknowledge what is currently there to the extent where you actually appreciate it.

Are these sophisticated technologies not making it a home still? Although the Mylar airdome is made up of a flexible, collapsible plastic bubble (one entity), it still contains walls, a roof and a platform which in effect makes that the floor. It just becomes a new type of house. It seems the true meaning of unhouse is the absence of a house and its structure altogether. This brings me back to Banham's initial thought of living by a campfire and being surrounded by luxuries, but in essence being exposed to elements, does not support this theory. From American Architecture, Banham shows his dislike for the single large spaces made within a house compared to the walls that politely subdivide spaces within a European design. Americans rapidly learned to dispense with the partitions that Europeans need to keep space architectural and within bounds, and long before Wright began blundering through the walls that subdivided polite architecture into living room, games room, card room, gun room, etc., humbler Americans had been slipping into a way of life adapted to informally planned interiors that were, effectively, large single spaces. ⁹ This design is clearly turning out to be one that Banham did not initially want, or agree with the house definition.

It is an interesting essay indeed; a home is not a house does contain contradicting statements. a domestic revolution beside which modern architecture would look like kiddibri, because you might be able to dispense with the trailer home as well. ¹⁰ Just pages later into the essay Banham goes on to recommend the reinvention of Buckminster Fuller's Standard of living package where he suggests it provides an easier, simpler way to life. What <https://assignbuster.com/explore-banhams-unhouse-point-construction-essay/>

was suggested was that the foundations of earth was the floor, trees as walls and the sky for a roof not to forget heat and light provided by a simple campfire sounds straightforward. Banham even acknowledges that the ice maker discretely coughing out cubes into glasses on the swing-out bar 11 is missing from this picture. Banham chooses to sway away from this point by introducing, a source of between 100 and 400 horsepower the automobile . The sustainable concept is thrown out of the window for the preference of a mini cargo transporter to carry ones luxuries to the campfire using a bed of air. He later moves from the above two suggestions for a third idea, through the use of a transparent Mylar airdome, a response to the contemporary Machine Age. A radical idea of having an inflated transparent plastic bubble inflated by air-conditioning output wrapped over a vehicle, preferably a convertible or pickup truck, it takes very little pressure to inflate a Mylar airdome, the conditioned-air output of your mobile package might be able to do it, with or without a little boosting, and the dome itself, folded into a parachute pack, might be part of the package. Banham did reiterate that this is not in fact a home, making the point that you can't bring up a family in a polythene bag a simpler more realistic suggestion is put forward. He brings the essay full circle introducing a more stable platform for the Mylar airdome. anchored to such a slab just as easily as could a balloon frame, and the standard of living package could hover busily in a sort of glorified barbeque pit in the middle of the slab. You could say the process taken with his initial idea of a simpler way to life and then to the proposal of a Mylar airdome wrapped around a vehicle of some sort led to a preferred solution of adopting the two creating a more anchored approach. In his view perhaps he was proposing a family home for the future.

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The essay contains much more historical content on sustainability, to the degree where the values of architecture have been completely rejected and to some extent accepted. Four stages to this essay are covered by Banham; the architectural adaptation since the beginning of time; the caveman era with the romantic seat by the campfire; to the free Winnebago of the swinging 60 s and to his final solution of a modern day transparent home, a lot of which has become more and more apparent today. This is an enjoyable read with a concept which is liked, but Banham has gone on to propose an open space within the bubble, an idea which he clearly resented about American culture. Banham also detests the unsustainable way of life incorporated in American society, yet his modern day home would require far more power to run than the more conventional American home and with its complete transparent shelter, it would effectively create a green house effect within the bubble.

In conclusion, Banham has reduced the concept of a home to a controlled environmental bubble, with the house acting as a powerful device, which is required to control and adapt to the local climate. Nevertheless, an intelligent environment is to some extent an automated environment, which we have yet to come up with a concrete solution to an intelligent environment.

Banham had a general interest in America from a young age and this deepened during the 1960 s along with his admiration of Buckminster Fuller, who had in 1927 developed a Dymaxion House, which was a human life protecting and nurturing scientific service for industry. 12 Then later with the

much more known geodesic dome during the 1940 s, a structure which created an artificial environment in which humans could live with ease.

Numerous attempts have been made to conceptualise this, with such examples as the Tron-hyper intelligent building in 1987 along with a much recent idea by Microsoft in 2007 to produce the Home of the Future ? The Microsoft home envisages a world where everything within the home is done by the touch of a hand held remote. From electrical uses to solar shading glazing which removes the need for shading. These ideas can only be successful if people are convinced by it. Everyone is accustomed to replicate others or a simpler way of putting it, to follow the crowd . We tend to stick to what we are familiar with, in keeping with our comfort zone. It would take only a minority to change the views of others around them. Any drastic change will only confuse and bewilder!

I grand lesson can understand from Reynar Banham s theory essay, the idea of a unhouse . He is simply explaining that the ideal house is in fact nature itself whereby the natural landscape becomes the condition of enclosure and in doing so the house then also becomes the competitively adaptive conditions of the nature at its wildest. ¹³ He modified architecture, and created a new set of forms, lines and reasons for living in harmony with the new age of machines. You do begin to wonder; has Banham gone away from the idea of one house and in its place generated yet another house?

1 Banham, Peter. R. A home is not a house (1965) as quoted in Braham, William W. & Hale, Jonathan. A. Rethinking Technology. A reader in architectural theory. Routledge 2007 pg 167

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2 Banham, Peter. R. A home is not a house (1965) as quoted in Braham, William W. & Hale, Jonathan. A. Rethinking Technology. A reader in architectural theory. Routledge 2007 pg 170.

3 Banham, Peter. R. A home is not a house (1965) as quoted in Braham, William W. & Hale, Jonathan. A. Rethinking Technology. A reader in architectural theory. Routledge 2007 pg 168.

4 Banham, Peter. R. A home is not a house. 1965. as quoted in Braham, William W. & Hale, Jonathan. A. Rethinking Technology. A reader in architectural theory. Routledge 2007 pg 171.

5 Braham, William. Do Houses Evolve? Neo-Biology at House_n. University of Pennsylvania, 2002 pg 2.

6 Banham, Peter. R. A home is not a house. 1965. as quoted in Braham, William W. & Hale, Jonathan. A. Rethinking Technology. A reader in architectural theory. Routledge 2007 pg 172.

7 Jencks, Charles. Modern Movements in Architecture. Penguin Books. 1986 pg 239

8 Jencks, Charles, Architecture 2000 (1969)

9 Banham, Peter. R. A home is not a house. 1965. as quoted in Braham, William W. & Hale, Jonathan. A. Rethinking Technology. A reader in architectural theory. Routledge 2007 pg 169.

10 Banham, Peter. R. A home is not a house (1965) as quoted in Braham, William W. & Hale, Jonathan. A. Rethinking Technology. A reader in architectural theory. Routledge 2007 pg 170.

11 Banham, Peter. R. A home is not a house (1965) as quoted in Braham, William W. & Hale, Jonathan. A. Rethinking Technology. A reader in architectural theory. Routledge 2007 pg 171.

12 McLuhan, Marshall, Buckminster Fuller Chronofile (1967) in Meller, James, ed., The Buckminster Fuller Reader. London: Pelican, 1972 pg 30

13 Braham, William. Do Houses Evolve? Neo-Biology at House. University of Pennsylvania, 2002 pg 7.

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