

Critical review c

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March 22, The Controlled Environment of an Un-House in Philip Johnson's Glass House Philip Johnson's glass house in New Canaan, Connecticut demonstrates the concept of a controlled environment through an un-house structure. See Figure 1 for the glass house. In "A Home is Not a House," Reyner Banham talks about the two fundamental approaches to controlling the environment: avoiding it by living in a house or interfering with the weather. He argues that Philip Johnson's glass house is not a controlled environment because air-conditioning controls it and inhabitants naturally react only to their body heat needs. Frank Lloyd Wright would have agreed that Johnson controlled the environment efficiently through his description of what makes a house a house and avoiding too much control of the outside environment, as he discussed in the article, "The Jacobs House."

Banham is right to argue that the glass house is not a controlled environment, but an un-house, but Wright would have stressed that Johnson controlled the environment to some extent when he made a house that serves as a house without rejecting the outside environment's presence altogether. The glass house is an un-house because it has two basic elements, "a heated brick floor slab and standing unit which is a chimney/fireplace on one side and a bathroom on the other" (Banham 79). The house becomes a "service core set" (Banham 79). Banham means to say that this an un-house because it defies the traditional need for a visual enclosure and other gadgetries. The emphasis is not on control, but on living outside the European model of a monumental structure (Banham 79). Wright would note, nevertheless, that Johnson did control the house in terms of functionality and did not control it through its openness. The glass house is simple and cost-efficient in its design and remarkable for its openness.

Wright would appreciate that nonexistence of windows, and that the glass walls are the windows. Wright says that: “ The way windows are used is naturally the most useful resource to achieve the new characteristic sense of space” (262). Indeed, the glass house looks out to the space, which Banham calls the “ Great Out There” (79). The effect is the absence of division between the inside and the outside. The un-houseness of the glass house removes many obstacles that separate it from its natural environment. The irony of the controlled environment is having less control of the visible space through the nearly seamless interaction between the outside space and the inside space.

A house should serve its main purpose of sheltering people and does not need to have visible enclosures and roofs to attain this purpose. Banham believes that the glass house is more of an un-house due to its absence of visible enclosures and other facilities, but Wright would have asserted that it is also a means for control against too much control. Essentially, the glass house responds to basic shelter needs through an un-house structure that embraces openness of the “ Great Out There”.

Figure 1: Philip Johnson’s Glass House in New Canaan, Connecticut

Works Cited

- Banham, Reyner. “ A Home is Not a House.” *Art in America* 2 (1965): 70-79. Print.
- Johnson, Philip. *Glass House*. New Canaan, Connecticut. Web. 20 Mar. 2015.
- Wright, Frank Lloyd. “ The Jacobs House.” 1938. *Architectural Theory*, Vol. II. Ed. Harry Francis Mallgrave. Oxford: Blackwell, 2008. 261-262. Print.