

# The Morphology of Home: A Qualitative Research Study into the Interrelation of Space, Objects and Women

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**Background** The study ‘The Morphology of Home; Interrelation of Space, Objects and Women’ is a qualitative research into the female generated living spaces in large cities. In contemporary cultures, there is an indication that housing needs more various sections depending on the family types and people’s personality types. Thereby, the aspect of ‘home’ is a case by case interpretation of the idea rather than an objective logical interpretation; therefore, the research focuses on listening to the voices of living stories of people’s home as a qualitative research. In order to find an access to understand this abstract idea in physical reality, the chosen aspects attempt to take in consideration the surroundings that belong within the spatial aspects and objects that are around us.

**Hypothesis** In trying to describe the uncertain fragment, the category conducts to expose phenomenological aspect based on literature review that is exchanging between people and the relationship of object and space. In this thesis, it suggests seven themes of perceptions of the objects (within spatial-object relation) that are presenting different functions in the living spaces. The themes are; contain / dilative / illusion / reform / symbolize / inform / utilize.

**Method** The research is structured to use ‘Cultural Probe’ applied research approach to investigate the real life experience of home. The questions in the cultural probe intend to evoke person’s behaviors and emotions in living situation. The primary focus of a phenomenology is to gather a description of human experience and behavior as they are lived, carefully looking at everyday environment(Seamon, 1993).

**Aim & Summary** The aim of this thesis is to reveal the multi-layered perspectives in the complex home, and how that might be evoked by the interconnections between various objects in living spaces. The research conforms on a pathway, starting from (1) reviewing the literature to understand the three factors that overall face the idea of home, (2) creating a hypothesis of perceptions on the relation of the living space and object, (3) exploring the topic through the method of interviews and cultural probes with 28 women, and then finally (4) interpreting the results based on the hypothetical categories to analyze how do the home-objects relate to the notion of the idea of intimate home. I hope this research foster further research on designing intimate environments that might at least a slight contribute to the philosophical question of home.

**Keywords** Integrated Design, Design Research, User Experience, Gender Design, Perception, Spatial Perception, Home, Space, Objects, Intimacy

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**Citation:** Koh, N.Y. (2013). The Morphology of Home: A Qualitative Research Study into the Interrelation of Space, Objects and Women. Archives of Design Research, 26(3), 9-22.

**Received** Jan. 20. 2013 ; **reviewed** Jul. 27. 2013 ; **Accepted** Aug. 08. 2013

**pISSN** 1226-8046

**eISSN** 2288-2987(Online)

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## 1. Introduction

The concept of 'home' seems to be an abstract idea that might be differently interpreted by every individual. The topic has however attracted many authors and researchers to engage with and consider the potential meanings and ways of creation of the concept itself. My curiosity is rooted in the question of whether new meanings and values emerge out of our shifting surroundings. Does it mean that our engrained perceptions of the meaning of 'home' are being challenged and therefore changing? My starting point to explore these questions takes a point of departure in the ordinariness and specificity expressed through the objects in living spaces. It seems that what is important to discover is what mediates the living space and a person's intimate perception of it. This symbiotic phenomenon which emerges through the intimacy in homes seems to co-create the value for each other. Familiar artifacts and surroundings provide a new sense and experience of structure, and perhaps depending on the person, they will adapt themselves within the space or not.

Especially in the contemporary industrial environment, the objects have become deeply related with social changes, and have a psychological effect on users, creating the feeling of craving 'things' at home. This suddenness of economic movement might have 'twisted' the expected 'intimacy' in the home. It is interesting how people realize their 'home', investigating how they become aware of somewhere as having this value and meaning. The attachment, the desire of space, getting a feeling of belonging or settling down, grasping a feeling of what could be perceived as 'home', something which cannot be explained in one or two sentences. Perhaps because there exists no clear description for this vagueness of home, 'home' has its own way to implement itself into peoples' experience of 'living'.

As much as the domestic living environment is changing, perhaps

the perception that has been generated from old objects might be differently interpreted nowadays. For instance, the meaning of separation and connection in the technologically developed society might give different senses and emotions in the home. However, if this would be the case, then what would be connecting us within the physical space? That we build our own patterns that allow us to feel intimacy in domestic living? As much as the idea of home has attracted debates in the academic literature, the aspect of cognitive relationships seems not so much discussed and debating. Therefore, in order to contribute to this discursal gap, I argue in this thesis that there is a certain way of cognitive interconnection between the objects and the living space. To practice this idea of ‘interconnection’, I used the metaphors of how objects are ‘working’ or ‘taking role’ in the living space.

The aim of this thesis is therefore to reveal the multi-layered perspectives in the complex home, and how that might be evoked by the interconnections between various objects in living spaces. From the research of identifying ‘the spatial’ through the objects, I look into the notion of similarity and also differences in behaving and perceiving the objects in these spaces. However, the aspect of ‘home’ is a case by case interpretation of the idea rather than an objective logical interpretation; therefore, the research focuses on listening to the voices of living stories of people’s home as a qualitative research.

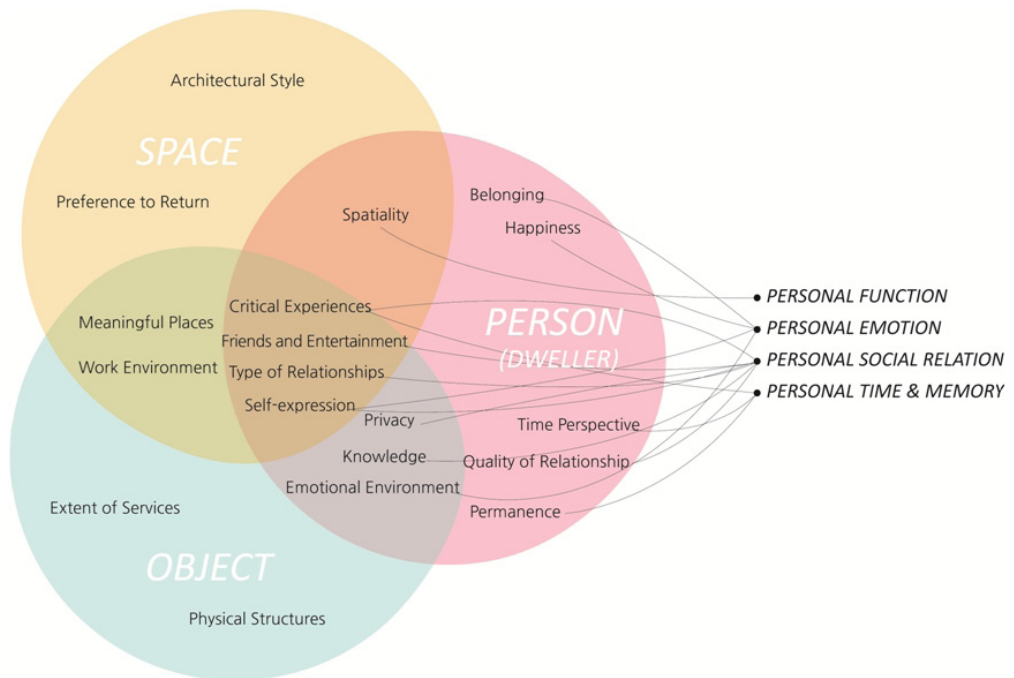
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## **2. Hypothesis**

### **2.1. Viewpoint of the Hypothesis**

The inner space of architectures, when especially within the term of ‘home’ has a value of dweller’s safety, comfort, reflection, physical and mental division, memory and habituation are all melted in. I had believed these points of meaning and representation of home, I wondered then what is

the process of this happening (of dwelling) might start and accomplish in a physical way. This perspective of looking the manifestation of home emphasizes interrelation between the space, object and the person in the living space. Regarding from this finding, the importance of how are the objects is perceived to the person's creation of meaning and memories had been discussed with considering through; the senses through objects, sensory experience and relationship with home.



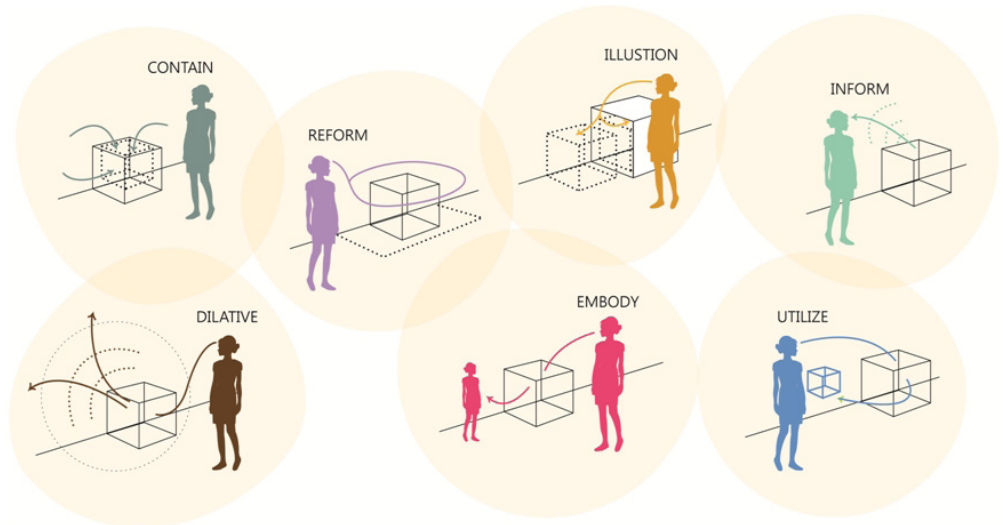
**Figure 1** 'Three Element of Home' base on J. Sixsmith's (1986) The Meaning of Home by Nayoung Koh

The framework for this category is proposed from observed aspects of theories mentioned on literature review. And it had integrated with perceiving meanings and senses in home environment. As all events have a doer and signifier, what home has been given us psychologically reflects our sophisticated reaction toward the things we have. This had brought up the hypothesis that the objects might have an ability to systematize the perception of the space.

## 2.2. Creation of the Hypothesis

Referring from schemas theory, the perception of each object become

more understandable in the framework of cognitive semiotics; such as we have the recognition of how the object might ‘work (i.e. function, role)’ in the space. The important aspect of the criteria for this categorization is that human interact with the surroundings for most efficient; either for mental or physical.



**Figure 2** The Seven Themes of Perception in Spatial-Object Relation  
by Nayoung Koh

In this thesis, I had suggested seven themes of perceptions of the objects (within spatial-object relation) that are presenting different functions in the living spaces. The themes are; contain / dilative / illusion / reform / symbolize / inform / utilize.

From this semiotic of the objects that are perceived sense, my question move into an examination of; how home objects deal to ‘work’ in sensory way within architected, idealized, and modernized home. For instance, perhaps, a chair is perceived as ‘containing’ things or person in this perspective. The reason for sometime people might put on her/his bag the chair is that the person had perceived that chair is able to ‘contain’. So, maybe it is possible to say there is a perception we had approximately had in our mind between the root of the object and the environment, and this had impact to occur the phenomenon describe as characteristic of the perception. The point of this practice is to think in a different perspective in which the role of certain objects in the living

spaces. In trying to describe the uncertain fragment, the category turned to 'themes' that represents the perception of objects. So it conducts to expose phenomenological aspect that is exchanging between people and the relationship of object and space.

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### **3. Research**

#### **3.1. Designing Research Method**

The research is structured to use 'Cultural Probe' applied research approach to investigate the real life experience of home. This method is demanding for participants, however, in the end they had honestly answered the questions to empathize the importance of what they have and why. To understand the intrinsic value of the home objects, my focus was to figure out what kind of objects will possibly reflect to be important in home.

The primary focus of a phenomenology is to gather a description of human experience and behavior as they are lived, carefully looking at everyday environment (Seamon,1993). According to describing a certain object, participant's point the view of their intimate home, can be extracted. The goal of the research is finding the intuitive aspects which guide the exploration of the hidden influences from the object to home.



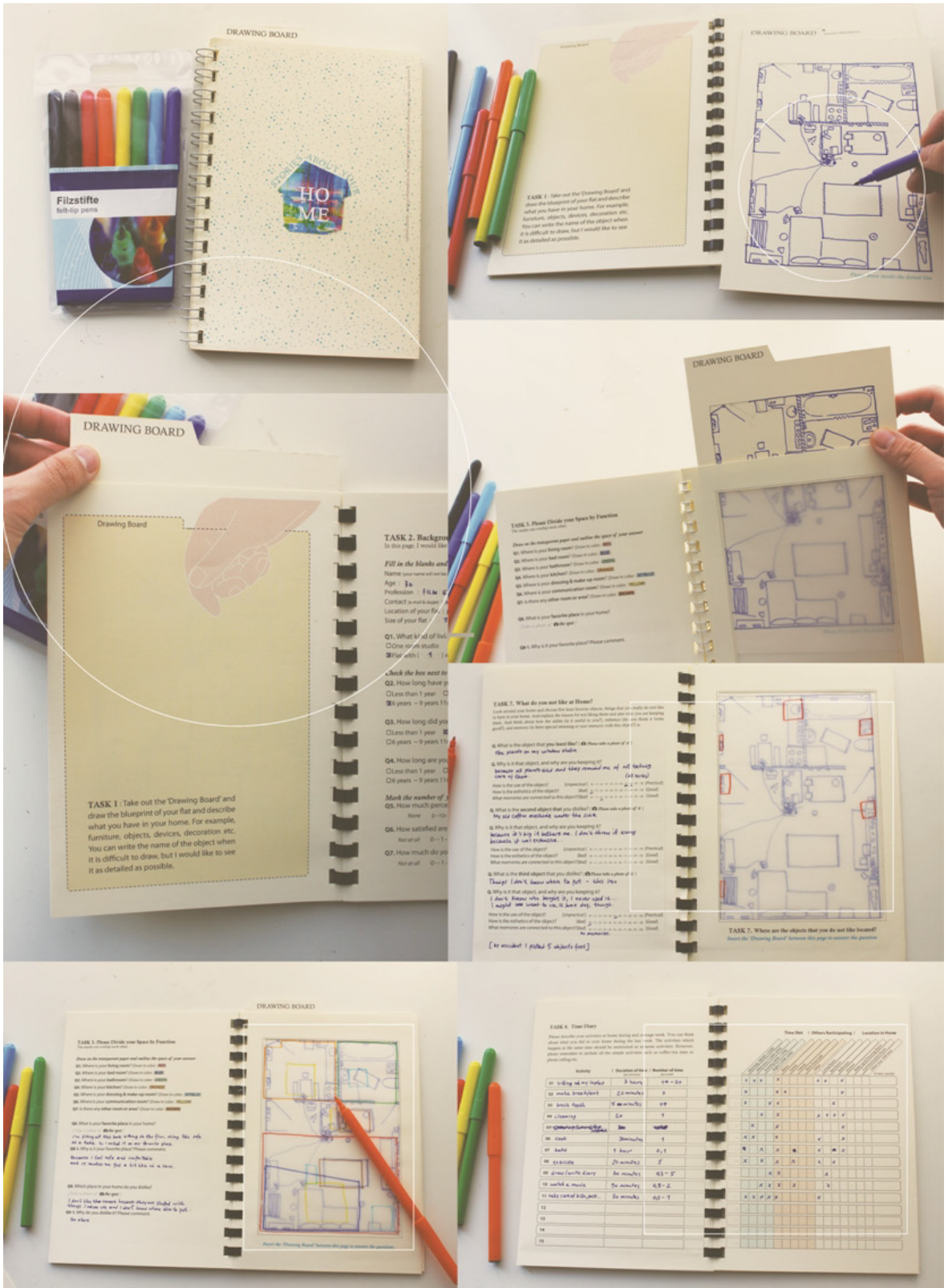


Figure 3 Cultural Probe Design for 'The Morphology of Home' Research

### 3.2. Analysis & Interpretation

Within this thesis, the analysis is based on an approach to grounded theory, the relevant reason of using grounded theory is, it allows to emerge research questions during the research process, which not only find the hypotheses from the theory. On execution of the research, the apprehension about the relationship between the hypothetical categories are developed and examined. When collecting and analyzing the data, it had constantly carried out related substitutable hypothesis. However, the key concept of the approach is that reflecting on the reality that might constantly refined the intrinsic face of the living space. My primary idea is that empathizing empirical data gives the insight to demonstrate concept which redefine the whole concept of home. I refer to Vera Bitsch (2005) on this idea, in her paper 'Qualitative Research: A Grounded Theory Example and Evaluation Criteria', she points out on effort to explain grounded theory that theory generation is not based on the raw data; it is based on concepts and categories being developed out of the raw data.

Since the cultural probe involves a wide variety of individuals, many women and their objects are shown to be interlinked, also partly given that their home and habituation are different. Thereby, my concept for processing this analysis is underlining the objects, delving into different aspects of women's situation as shown through mosaic-like pieces of homes. As I collected pieces of stories that have been found from the cultural probe, the analysis is based on two macro stages and these two stages are constructed in three and two different micro aspects.

First stage of the analysis is focused on the statistical number of the responses, and the three micro aspects are considered: (1) the number of common answers of size, type, length they live in, and a comparison of the intensity of attachment and satisfaction of their current home; (2) the information that the women described about their current living space, and the objects that they chose as different preferences (e.g. like, dislike, important) are statistically compared with the intensity of attachment and satisfaction of home. From this stage, the hypothesis "perceivable



theme of object” appears to be found in the numbered details about the women’s view of the objects; and finally (3) goes through the common or rare activities of women that have connection to home objects. Also, the behaviors in different sentimental statuses sketch out a realistic idea of the women’s home. In between, the findings focus on acquiring proof of the hypothetical perceptions between the objects and living space.

The second stage of the analysis is directly connected to the search for the perceived ‘themes’ from the data from the cultural probes: (1) Seeking to collect the factors that are based on the issues that are pointed out from the literature review (e.g. memories in the objects, concept of dividing space, time issues of dwelling); and (2) finalizing the argumentation, distinguishes the objects that are engaging, adapting, imparting meaning, and reenacting to the idea of home.

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## **4. Findings & Insights**

### **4.1. For Young–Adult Women, Home is a Nomadic Hub**

For the modern young-adult women, living alone in the big city is not a confrontation. From the overall view of the research I discovered the idea that home is changed in the single-female living space. The women were neither too much obsessed with their objects, nor did they have an extreme nostalgic representation of childhood through the objects. Their objects help them to establish the sense of self, and the interior living space is a uniform which women chose by themselves and for themselves. In the same way, they are also open to find new objects, and to project those into their living spaces. Their idea of home is a space that they chose for themselves and the place where they can plug in their loving things.

### **4.2. For Young–Adult Women, Home is a Wonderland**

Especially the current home for the young-adult women is a development

of the self and 'supportive friend'. Within this research, the women were choosing the objects that attracted them (regardless of time) rather than thinking about what others might think. So their living space was influenced by the object, and also by the way that they felt about themselves. With this in mind, their homes functioned as a wonderland of themselves rather than a theater.

#### **4.3. For Young-adult Women, Home is a Diary**

However, the living space for these women was also a diary where they spoke and listened only to what they want, so the freedom and the awareness of self made their own 'home'. In the case of the Korean women, none of them had negative feelings towards the fact that they were living alone, and nobody mentioned caring about what others think about that fact. Nevertheless, in façade, women are excited about the freedom and flexibility in their current home, however, this independence sometime seems to result in longing for social communication. So unless they cannot engage mentally with other people and cannot find something to love, then the home could follow everywhere with them. In this sense, according to my findings, home for young-adult women (especially Korean women) is a combination of sense of self-authority and staging the others.

#### **4.4. For Young-adult Women, Home is a Non-Gender Space**

Additionally the findings generated the meaning that the female has toward their objects in the home. I am not quite sure what would be if I had done a comparative research on male and females. However, in my result, some parts of what could be considered 'feminine aspects' also emerged, but this I did not always interpret as making the woman's home completely feminine. My reason for this is that the fact that they have famine interests toward some object (e.g. manicure, cosmetics) does not mean that their home is feminized. In fact, most of the women were not interested in stereo-typically feminine activities (e.g. cleaning, cooking, caring for others), while there is no such debates happening in the individual's living space.

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## 5. Conclusion

### **The Two Faces of the Home Objects: Perception & Memory**

In extracting the relationship between the object and the living space, my assumption was that the object acts as a spirit that inhabits with us. After all, twenty-eight women's answers were a good indicator for testing whether it is visible to observe the perception of the relationship between the objects and the living space. Although twenty-eight women's statistic of the object is in no way an absolute general, the diverse and at times extreme cases have shown certain patterns of women's common reactions and perceptions. Moreover, it was discovered that the significant meaning of the object was nothing much related with the cognition of the object. Whenever the participant explained their objects, it was clearly divided into a pragmatic scene and an emotional scene. At the beginning of the research, I was expecting to interpret the in-depth feelings towards the women's home objects. Indeed, they mentioned a lot of intimate objects, however, the reason for the intimacy was focused on the significance of memory. The memory which creates the intimacy in the living space in these cases was mostly influenced by another person. So this fact made it difficult to interpret the objects by their single context in the space. Although that was my concern of observing cohabitation, this issue has also raised in the single living space.

However, taking in consideration that 'home' is ineluctably engaged with the memory of (staging) others, I had to conclude that there are two different faces of objects that are emerged in the living space. One face is as was assumed in the hypothesis: There is a part in which we can perceive that the objects are related to the function of space; and the other face is that when there is a memory that occurred through the third party, then it overlaps and shakes the pure (or logical) role of the objects in the living space.

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