

Intersection of Interacting Fields in a Social Dynamic of Home

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*Each one believing that love never dies
Watching her eyes,
and hoping I'm always there*

To be here, there, and everywhere...

--Paul McCartney

The purpose of this presentation is to explore ways that Field Being Philosophy can be applied to the idea and experience of being home and having a home, and how doing so might clarify some aspects of the dynamics of family relations, both functional and dysfunctional.

To save time I am following the line of thought set forth in the presentation by James Clement van Pelt concerning fields of Field Being as they occur in our experience. More specifically, when we deconstruct experience from a Field Being perspective, the three most prominent fields are the physical, affective, and mental. We encounter any situation in the phenomenal world as being and becoming in these three fields, and our own sense of self is experienced as an interaction of sensations via our physical senses, affective feelings via our affective capacities, and intangible forms such as thoughts via our mental processes. A person is not merely the sensations, feelings, and thoughts she has, but does tend to identify her being with the changes occurring from moment to moment within and among those interacting fields.

In this presentation, I attempt to extend some principles of Field Being Philosophy from the general experience of persons to the most universal set of

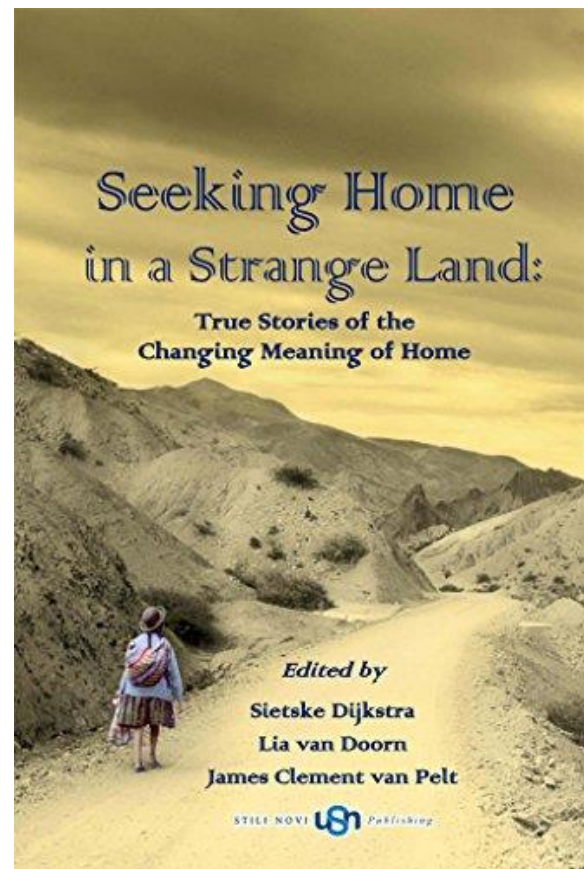
particular experiences: the experience of the set of fields bound together and constructed into that which we call home.

The Home Field

Between a person and the world is a very special zone of experience known as home—both a place separate from the person and an extension of the person created when that person indwells that place. A person can feel at home in her body, or not; at home with friends and family, or not; at home in a certain set of rooms or a certain house, or even being homeless. The experience of home in its physical, emotional, and mental fields is so close to personal identity that people will risk serious injury in dangerous residential conditions to avoid being uprooted and displaced. And we see how lost the immigrants arriving on European and American soil can be when they have been forced by violence to leave their home countries.

These observations are drawn from the essay "Meanings of Home and Identity" that I contributed to the book *Seeking Home in a Strange Land: True Stories of the Changing Meaning of Home* (Dijkstra, Van Doorn & van Pelt, 2017). It addresses the paradox that one's family domicile may not always be a safe haven; a house is not always a home. The concept of "house" extends beyond a building of wood or brick or other materials, for it is always linked to identity. Households that inhabit a house turn out to be a transitory assemblage of individuals. Those individuals at their best can bond into families, but there is also a need for seclusion and contemplation.

From my professional experience studying and dealing with family arrangements and domestic violence, I know first-hand that a home can be a prison in which power, control, and powerlessness are critical elements. Drawing on the thought of scientist-philosopher Michael Polanyi, I have seen



the need for professionals on the front lines of domestic disharmony to develop experiential knowledge in the form of "tacit knowing" to achieve a prudential approach to violence within an intimate circle. Applying the perspective of the founder of Field Being Philosophy, Lik Kuen Tong, I can see the value in considering home to be a physical-affective-mental construction whose importance is second only to a person's own body. In particular, I can see that misaligned and distorted fields within a family can result from, cause, and exacerbate the disruptions that make home a place of chaos and terror rather than comfort and nurturing harmony.

Here I explore the idea of home as a particular kind of interpersonal, rooted, constructed, identifying field constituted by the intersection of two ontologically different sets of interacting fields. One set is the physical, affective, and mental fields described in the previous presentation. The other set is three fields relevant to the social field that binds together communities at every scale, the supreme example of which is the idea of home. Those three fields are: relationships, places, and purposes. Each of these fields has its physical, affective, and mental attributes, which fluctuate in the manner of subfields, and each is itself a subfield of each of the three primary experiential fields. The experience of home centers on the intersection and interaction of these two sets of fields.

What and where is home? Who gets to define it? To whom does it belong? Is home merely the walls, floor, and ceiling-roof that provides the protective shell that humans otherwise lack, or the concealing space in which misery and abuse is enacted? Or could the traveling troubadour be speaking truly when he sings from the road, "Home to Me is Anywhere You Are"? (Paxton, 1980)

Home is one's dwelling place, which may be shared with one's family or other close ones, where one expects to feel safe. Home can also refer to one's hometown, street, or neighborhood, or one's homeland. Feeling at home can also refer to something one is good at and familiar with — the experience of home that contributes to defining one's identity. One can feel at home in a landscape, as in the Cole Porter song:

*Let me ride through the wide-open country that I love,
Don't fence me in!
Let me be by myself in the evening breeze,
Listen to the murmur of the cottonwood trees,*

*Send me off forever, but I ask you please,
Don't fence me in!*

In a bureaucratic sense, home is the address one enters on forms; in a commercial sense, it is the space for which one pays each month; and in a technical sense it is what presents itself on the screen when we start up our electronic talisman; “home is where you don’t need a password to connect”. In a spiritual sense, home is wherever one draws closer to one's most intimate source and grandest purpose, whether in a great cathedral or a tiny chapel, a meditation spot or a woodland path, a day with family or a time of harmonious fellowship or silent solitude or selfless service... the place we feel most "at home". Paradoxically home can also be what one willingly surrenders for reasons of non-attachment and humility; the Buddha spoke of the exercise of homelessness, and Jesus said of himself, “The offspring of humanity has no place to lay his head.”

Home seeking in a strange land

The poet Gary Snyder says "Nature is not a place to visit. It is home." No, Robert Frost replies, "home is the place where, when you have to go there, they have to take you in." Sometimes it is the homeless among us who know that best.

A person might spend a lifetime living on the family homestead, but more likely will have a series of dwellings, and sometimes more than one at a time. To move from one homeplace to the next means turning one's back on familiar surroundings to become immersed in a strangeness both intimidating and promising; the home left behind could have been a comfortable abode, or a scene of torment, or some of each.

From a global perspective, in every nation rural populations struggling to make a living in the countryside must bid farewell to their children, who turn their backs on the farm and flock to the cities, trusting they will find a better life there. And every day brings news reports about the millions struggling to survive amidst deprivation, chaos, and war, and the tens of thousands of them who give up everything they've known, who risk everything they cling to, even their very lives, to cross as refugees into the strangeness of safer, richer lands, trusting in governments and NGOs trying to balance compassion and pragmatism.

For most of us that four-letter word “home” has a positive ring to it. A house is what a builder constructs, whereas a home is made by those who live there: "It takes a heap o' livin' to make a house a home" for "home is where the heart is." Home is often combined with other terms: coming home, feeling at home, supporting the home team... the preferred term for the housebound spouse is "homemaker", and in some cities your true friend is your "homeboy".

The sense of home has to do with the mental, emotional, even bodily memories evoked by certain places, events, and experiences. Art, music, traditions, and sense perceptions combine to make home the main thing that links a person's identity to a particular environment. How people experience the *mélange* of homely associations determines the attitudes and preferences that define who they are, or think or feel they are. Thinking of home quickly leads to the realization that the idea of home encompasses much more than physical shelter: William Faulkner wonders, "How often have I lain beneath rain on a strange roof, thinking of home." It has much to do with the familiar, trusted, habitual intimacy of the indoor world, but inextricably just as much with the world outside that inspires us with the hope to indulge that uniquely human passion to explore the unknown, setting out from the most-known—from home.

In a recent course on the importance of home for professional practice, I invited a group of over forty child-therapists to bring in some object that they associate with home. Photos, stuffed animals, a favorite pot, pajamas, a stone, candles, keys, even a pair of socks—each was somehow associated with narratives of home. Laid out together on a blanket on the floor, it reminded us that a home field can contain a great diversity, expand, but also contract. It is reshaped according to the ways we change personally in response to how other people and their surroundings affect our sense of belonging ***somewhere***. "Somewhere" is implicitly contrasted with "here" — which too often is not the protective, comforting, nurturing home place, but rather a darkening zone where the opposites prevail: strangers and estrangement, alienation and danger. Home is an identity field that shelters, nurtures and conditions us, for better or worse, for our encounter with life.

In a comparative analysis on "feeling at home in the neighborhood" Van der Graaf and Duyvendak (2009)⁵ say that the feeling of being "at home" is usually inexpressible, and often tied to a specific place: "a house, a neighborhood, a city, a park bench... Much less is known about why we feel at home in a certain

place. That is because "at home" is often an unspoken feeling – or too elusive to put into words. We only become aware of this when we leave the place we associate with home, or when the place itself changes and the rapport has gone."

Changing meanings of home

Homes and identities are dynamic fields: their meanings change, come and go. Home underlies us and floats around us, fluid in its definition as circumstances change around and within it. What was once familiar can become remote; what was once trusted can become uncertain. The fields of home and the unknown are locked in symbiosis, such that the home field is multi-dimensional, with endless unplumbed depths and an inexhaustible field of meanings. Just as the substantial and changeless dance in Field Being with the non-substantial and ever-changing, so too do the fields of home and identity.

In the introduction of *Seeking home in a strange land* (Dijkstra, Van Doorn & Van Pelt, 2017), three themes especially reveal home as an ever-fluctuating field of fields. The first is about variation in relationships: home is not a universally positive concept. The home field can be a haven, a warm nest, but it can also be a suffocating, unsafe, even perilous place. As the news reminds us every day, people can be cast out of their home or even their homeland. The second theme is that the field of meanings attached to the home field are as dynamic and changeable as the home field itself, yet both are attached to the experience of “placeness”. A place that is unknown or not what we expected can become home, while a former home or an old identity can become alien. The third theme is about the ways the home field is intertwined with the fields of personal identity, linked together by a field of shared purposes. From a distance, home may be as temporary as a packed suitcase, and playing with identity does come with a price tag: choices must be made from moment to moment according to the purposes of the individual interacting with those of the household, each of which re-shapes both interpersonal and personal home fields in subtle or even radical ways. Some comments on each of these field themes may be helpful.

Relationships are sometimes so constitutive of what defines home that even when the house and neighborhood and even home country are lost, home is found in the physical presence of the family members as long as they can stay together. This was well illustrated in the classic book of loss of home, *The Grapes of Wrath* by John Steinbeck. Dispossessed of their home, they transfer their home field to their car:

Each member of the family grew into his proper place, grew into his duties; so that each member, old and young, had his place in the car; so that in the weary, hot evenings, when the cars pulled into the camping places, each member had his duty and went to it without instruction: children to gather wood, to carry water; men to pitch tents and bring down the beds; women to cook the supper and to watch while the family fed. And this was done without command. (17.14)

...

They met at the most important place, near the truck...this was the new hearth, the living center of the family. Chapter 10, pg. 127

In *The Grapes of Wrath* Tong's idea of the universal perspective, referred to in the previous paper, takes on new meaning as the family loses its focus on the placeness of a geographically rooted home field:

And still the family stood about like dream walkers, their eyes focused panoramically, seeing no detail, but the whole dawn, the whole land, the whole texture of the country at once. (10.204)

And here Steinbeck refers to the way the home field interacts with the greater field of home, meaning *community*:

In the evening a strange thing happened: the twenty families became one family, the children were the children of all. The loss of home became one loss, and the golden time in the West was one dream. (17.2)

Home Page, Home Field, and the Fall of Home

The Internet is a matrix or web of information, but it functions as a space of places called websites. Each site has a home page, both the entry point and the center of the site. Likewise, a baseball field is a space that has a home from which people venture forth to face the world. These and many other examples recreates the field of space in which home is a sub-field functioning as a virtual or imaginatively imposed replica of physical space on which we impose affective attachments and mental meanings.

The following chart shows how the two ontologically distinct sets of fields—the physical, affective, and mental fields, and the fields of place, relations, and purposes—intersect in the meaning and experience of home.

FIELDS OF HOME	<i>Physical field (sensations)</i>	<i>Affective field (feelings)</i>	<i>Mental field (thoughts)</i>
<i>Field of place</i>	Enclosure: house, room	“Home is where the heart is”	What defines home
<i>Field of relations</i>	Bodily encounters; “favorite things”	Who feels at home here	Who belongs here
<i>Field of purposes</i>	House as household’s “machine for living”	Home where the feeling of common purpose is rooted	How to survive and flourish together

The most straightforward way to think of this intersection is by considering the distinction between space and place. There is physical space, affective space, and mental space: “Please give me some space” can refer to any of these, or a blend of several. A place is a particular, specifiable location in space that is identified with a person or group in a specifiable way—as a nest, a refuge, a storage site, a theater of comedy or tragedy, or the scene of breakdown and even terror. The field of place is a network of such locations to which people and other beings are identified or attached.

Considering home as the intersection of sets of interacting fields can be useful in attempting to understand how domestic dysfunction can result from a misalignment or defect in that intersection. The following chart maps out principal ways such dysfunction can occur:

DYSFUNCTIONAL FIELDS OF HOME	<i>Physical field (sensations)</i>	<i>Affective field (feelings)</i>	<i>Mental field (thoughts)</i>
Disrupted <i>field of relations</i>	Broken down dwelling, neighborhood	Fear, anger, revenge Domestic conflict, divorce Fixation, repetition, contact-breaks	Mistrust, betrayal Rejection, alienation, domestic violence
Displaced <i>field of place</i>	Forced migration, dislocation	“Absent presence”, feedback loops	Controlling behavior, parental alienation
Uprooted <i>field of purpose</i>	Wrecked community and its common purpose	Desperation of the refugee/ exile seeking home	Disorientation of homelessness
Combined fields: <i>relations, place, purpose</i>	Existential threat from domestic violence	“Present absence” (submission to malicious domination)	Family invisibility (no family space or place)

Applying Field Being Philosophy to the social dynamics of home can help to clarify the modes by which such disruptions, displacements, and uprootedness affect those who are subject to them, and may help social professionals charged with addressing domestic dysfunction in several ways. First, the field view provides a reminder not to overlook any of the different kinds of effects people can experience. Second, the field view locates those effects so solutions can address the misalignment or other defect in the various social fields. Third, by highlighting and locating those effects, the complexity of each case is revealed, suggesting that “one size fits all” solutions are inadequate responses in the majority of cases.

Connecting Field Being Philosophy with the increasingly common phenomena of domestic disruption, displacement, and uprootedness can demonstrate its practical application to pressing social issues. The high yet largely hidden costs of domestic disruption and alienation; the hopes and fears of the displaced persons seeking home in a strange land; and the changing meaning of home when the old meanings are uprooted along with the family, sometimes by compulsion and violence, sometimes for a new life and new freedom—all of these can be seen in new ways when a field perspective reveals their embedded structure and how to repair, abandon, or leave it alone.

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