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Introduction

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“Home is a complex idea”

IRIS MARION YOUNG

“Domesticity” and a related concept of “home” doubtless belong among the pivotal ideas in contemporary cultural studies as evidenced, for example, in two seminal compendia: *Keywords for American Cultural Studies* (eds. Bruce Burgett and Glenn Hendler, 2007) – with an entry on “domestic,” and the 2005 *New Keywords for Cultural Studies* (eds. T. Bennett, L. Grossberg and M. Morris) containing an entry on “home.” Significantly, none of the two concepts was present in Raymond Williams’s classic *Keywords* (1976, 1983). Homes can be many, including ones that exist as ideas and/or feelings – independently of, or simultaneous with, the material homes. The meaning of “home” may go far beyond the individual house, or homestead: it may refer to the whole country, or region, where one feels truly “at home,” and which is marked as home town or homeland. Be it real or imaginary, a family home, or country-as-home, its inhabitants feel defensive about the encroachments and (mostly illusory) threats from what, in their perception, is not-home or not-homey. Along with the fear of change proceeds an idealization of home leading to an ideology of domesticity, strongly affected by culture-specific power relations. The mystique of domesticity, arising from a misplaced nostalgia for a past home that never was, tends to cover up for the usurpations of power of the dominant over the subaltern, the latter defined by the polarities of gender, class, ethnicity and other social categories.

The articles in this issue of *Kultura popularna* explore the mythos of domesticity in American culture, as reflected in a broad spectrum of cultural texts and practices. The sense of home, as argued by Agnieszka Kaczmarek in her reading of Edward Abbey’s non-fiction, may extend to the canyonlands of the American Southwest, with the writer’s actual homes, constructed amidst rock and sand, providing an anti-thesis to the usual expectations of “place-ness” as well as domesticity and its comforts. In contrast, as pointed out by Justyna Fruzińska, the American West could be constructed, as evidenced in the writing of a foreign visitor, Frances Trollope, as the not-home, lacking not only in the comforts of middle-class domesticity but also in the “European” sense of the picturesque and the pastoral sought in vain by the nineteenth-century British writer. In another cultural context, the nineteenth century home “out West” in the mythicizing perspective of Charles Loring Brace and the Children’s Aid Society was posited as the most welcome cure for the perceived distress of the proletarian children trapped in dysfunctional families in the overcrowded immigrant ghettos of Eastern cities. Adoption (or rather abduction) of the city children by foster families from the rural West was, as argued by Małgorzata Gajda-Łaszewska, an attempt to construct the image of the rural (and thus morally superior) domesticity at the expense of the “flawed” domesticities of the immigrant urban poor. The nostalgia inherent in the anti-urban ideology embraced by Children’s Aid Society found its parallel in the constructions of Japanese-American domesticity, discussed in Brygida Gasztold’s reading of Julie Osaka’s novel *The Buddha in the Attic*. In her reading of the novel, Gasztold focuses on the problems faced by Japanese “picture brides” negotiating and resisting their entrapment in the patriarchal structures of their domestic lives in California. Similar topics are explored in Agnieszka Gondor-Wiercioch’s reading of the short story “Eyes of Zapata” by Sandra Cisneros, where the heroine-narrator, like her *bruja* counterparts in the novels of Elena Garro, Rosario Castellanos

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and Juan Rulfo, takes on the injustices of the patriarchal domesticity and machismo symbolized by Emiliano Zapata.

Other contributions to this issue also deal with rebellion against various forms of domesticity. Mirosław Miernik provides a reading of the youthful dissent from suburban domesticities and normativities as reflected in the classic 1950s movies *The Wild One* and *Rebel Without a Cause*, while Daria Urbańska reviews Jack Kerouac's *On the Road* as a text about finding one's 'home' in life in motion, with the homeless hobo representing not so much the condition of deprivation as that of "transcendental freedom." In his reading of Henry David Thoreau, Paweł Stachura shows intriguing parallels between the American transcendentalist rebel's "rhetorical transformation of domesticity" and the imagery employed by the post-Romantic Austrian author Adalbert Stifter, with both writers, as argued by Stachura, using similar aesthetic to express discomfort with the cultural consequences of what Lewis Mumford called the modernity's "megamachine." A rebellion against machine-like functions of the post-September 11 society, including the elaborate and omnipresent system of surveillance on pretense of providing for "domestic security" (the latter notion arising from the nation-as-home trope), are the topics raised in Brian K. Vaughan's *Ex Machina* graphic novel series, as discussed in Anna Oleszczuk's article. Finally, the irony of the home emerging as a source of threat is discussed by Patrycja Antoszek in her reading of Shirley Jackson's short story "The Lovely House," in which the family home with its uncanny architecture and supernatural elements becomes the seat of oppressive and entrapping domesticity.