The Idea of Comfort

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This essay is a translation from Tomas Maldonado's book, *Il Futuro della Modernita* (Milan: Feltrinelli, 1987).

1) Although the term is obviously derived from the English *comfort* and this, in turn, from the French *confort*, its true derivation is from late Latin *confortare* derived from *com-fortis*, to render strong and, by extension, to alleviate pain or fatigue.

2) S. Kracauer recognized in his friend E. Bloch the rare intellectual merit of knowing how to enjoy the circus as a circus before denouncing it as an industrial enterprise. (Letter of S. K. to E. B., 7.8.1967, in E Bloch, *Briefe 1903 bis 1975*, vol. I (Frankfurt am Main: Suhrkamp, 1985), 399.

It is certainly difficult to imagine any discussion of the quality of life that is not, at the same time, a discussion on the "livability" of our surroundings. But this "livability" cannot be proposed (and still less attained) in all contexts in the same way. For example, in a social reality in which human beings are forced to struggle for the most elementary survival, in a reality in which hunger, deprivation, illness, violence, and physical and moral compulsion on individuals, in fact, rule, the program of "livability" is identified with efforts to change such a reality. There are, however, other contexts that are not characterized (at least not to a major degree) by indigence and repression. In these other contexts, "livability" has a very different meaning: practically, it means the services that a particular ambient reality can provide in terms of convenience, ease, or habitability. In short, comfort.[1]

But if we are to deal with the idea of comfort, some preliminary clarifications are needed, because although the idea of "livability" may appear relatively simple, all things considered, the idea of comfort is much more complex. Comfort is a modern idea. Before the Industrial Revolution, the need (or expectation) for comfort—in the sense indicated above of convenience, ease, and habitability—was the privilege of the few. But the progressive diffusion of comfort to the masses was not accidental. There is no doubt that it has played, from the beginning, a fundamental role in the task of controlling the social fabric of the nascent capitalist society.

We may say, then, that, in its most hidden recesses, comfort is a scheme for social control. But we must not push this statement to the point of repudiating comfort in the global sense. That would be a typical interpretative abuse that leads to a simplistic, reductive distortion. Whether we like it or not, we must admit that comfort (at least in some of its manifestations) includes *also* elements of substantial advantage to the daily life of humanity.[2]

One may consider comfort as one of the factors contributing to the process of modernization. But how is comfort functionally a part of the process of modernization? It is a question of knowing, in summary, why the process of modernization manifests itself mainly in the qualitative and quantitative increase

in the services that produce comfort. The answer isn't easy for the simple reason that comfort doesn't always come in the same way, but follows a dynamic that continually changes terms relating to supply and demand. It should be remembered that comfort, beyond a given critical threshold, can be transformed—as happens often enough—into the source of new hardships and sufferings. In short, comfort can flow into a negation of comfort. One thinks, for example, of the perverse collateral effects (pollution, traffic congestion, etc.) that the automobile has produced.[3]

Such subtle considerations, however important, must not lead us to undervalue (and still less ignore) the fact that there exists an undoubted relation of reciprocal dependency between the dynamic of modernization and the diffusion of comfort. There are "areas" in which this connection of reciprocal dependency is fully revealed: the city, habitations, the work place. In particular, the home considered as a microcosm perfectly exemplifies the relation between modernization and comfort.

It has already been pointed out that the concept of comfort may be understood as a device for social control. Concerning the domestic sphere, we note that it deals with a very special discipline. In this specific case, in fact, comfort is seen as a procedure with a compensatory function, that is, a procedure seeking to restore—as much physically as psychologically—the energies consumed in the hostile external world of work. With standards more or less formalized, more or less explicit, comfort serves to structure daily life, to ritualize conduct, especially the attitudes and postures of the body in relation to furniture and objects intended for domestic use. It may well be noted that comfort expresses, better than any other cultural contrivance, the "techniques of the body"[4] appropriate to modern bourgeois society.

But comfort, in so much as it regiments daily life, also contributes indirectly to disciplining the family, radically transforming it, to facilitate its becoming nuclear or its modernization. Comfort, giving emphasis to the sense of the pleasure of private life, ratifies the central position of the home as the place for social activity and contributes to the formation and consolidation of the modern nuclear family. In summary, comfort is the new model for life proposed by the bourgeoisie; it is the new lifestyle. This hypothesis is fully confirmed by recent studies of the process that constitutes the "modern (nuclear) family,"[5] particularly those that dwell on the microcosmic influences of such a process. There is, in fact, no doubt that the new familial order at first appears narrowly tied to changes in the habitational space. It is sufficient to remember the structural changes in lodgings that came about during the transitional period between the traditional family and the modern family. From an open living space of fluid, imprecise, fugitive confines, typical of the environmental context of the traditional family, it

3) T. Maldonado, "L'automobile: merce regina," in *Avanguardia e razionalita* (Turin: Einaudi, 1974). Another argument in defense of the automobile is the assertion that it assures a high degree of personal mobility. On the ideal plane, this should mean the democratization of mobility, the absolute freedom of everyone to travel anywhere. In reality, however, as has been shown in the last few years, possible mobility is in conflict with probable mobility. Theoretically we can use the automobile to travel, but increasing traffic congestion is such that the practical probability of traveling by car becomes ever more illusory.

4) M. Mauss, "Les techniques du corps," in *Sociologie et anthropologie* (1934) (Paris: Presses Universitaires de France, 1950), 363. As to what concerns the present disciplinary role of comfort in a particular habitational context (the living room), see the excellent and now classic empirical investigation of A. Silbermann, *Vom Wohnen der Deutschen* (Cologne: Westdeutscher Verlag, 1963).

5) On this topic, see E. Shorter, *The Making of the Modern Family* (New York: Basic Books, 1975); L. Stone, *The Family, Sex and Marriage in England 1500-1800* (London: Weidenfeld and Nicholson, 1977); and Emmanuel Le Roy Ladurie, *Montalliou* (New York: Braziller, 1978).

6) The "sociofugal" role of domestic isolation is denounced by B. Disraeli in *Sybil, or the Two Nations* (1845) (London: Oxford University Press, 1975).

7) G. Bachelard, *La terre et les rêveries du repos* (Paris: Librairie J. Corti, 1948). Also important in this book is the stimulating chapter IV, "The Natal House and the Dream-Like House."

8) Concerning this, see M. Douglas, *Purity and Danger* (London: Routledge and Kegan Paul, 1967). See X. Rubert De Ventos, *Ensayos sobre el desorden* (Barcelona: Kairos, 1976).

9) The risk in excessively ideological use of such categories as hygiene, comfort, and order are well laid out by M. Roncayolo, *Propos d'étape*.

10) P. Gay, *Education of the Senses*, vol. I (New York: Oxford University Press, 1984). See in regard to this, J. H. Hagstrum, *Sex and Sensibility* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1980).

11) P. Gay, *op. cit.*, 438.

passed, with the birth of the nuclear family, to a closed space, articulated in a system of rigidly fixed functions.[6]

And the purpose is clear: to block the excessive instability of the family, to shelter it from external intrusions, anchoring it to a precise location, tying it then to an *interior*. But creating an interior, enclosing a space, isn't enough. It is equally necessary that the new space, due to its particular structure, be capable of promoting a new ideal of domestic life. In its emergent phase, the bourgeoisie, aware of this requirement, rushed to define the form and content of its ideal life: a life centered on privacy, on "the atmosphere of privacy." Yet bourgeois privacy is not defined solely in terms of intimacy. It certainly recalls the traditional spiritual values of private life, of values realized as the fruits of interiority. But at the same time, the dream (for it is a dream) of bourgeois privacy is based on a close regulation of material things. In practice, as Bachelard says, it is a *rêverie de l'intimité materielle*[7] (a reverie of material intimacy).

If one is very attentive, the question of privacy is seen to touch directly on the theme of comfort as a means of discipline. At this point further observations come to mind. There is no doubt that privacy appears, in many ways, conditioned by the ideology of comfort, but there is also another ideology that has a strict relation to it: the ideology of hygiene. One thing is certain: privacy without comfort and hygiene is vanishing. But what do comfort and hygiene have in common that, when missing, diminishes the quality of privacy? The answer is simple: order.[8] Comfort and hygiene are indicators of order. Moreover, they are suppliers of order.

In this vision, comfort could appear as a restrictive design that does not allow opportunity for the diversification of individual actions.[9] On the contrary, a new sensibility begins to make itself felt as an essential part of this design; in other words, a subtle, progressive change in sensibility, modes of being, preferences, and, at the same time, a modification of the collective and individual imagination is shaped. In respect to this, one speaks of the birth of a diverse sensibility (and sensuality) connected to the new procedures of personal cleanliness, to new means of relaxation, to the use of new artifacts: "Bourgeois things are the vehicles for the bourgeois sensibility."[10] Not by chance, with all the transformations this indicates, occurs equally "the destruction of the body" in favor of the formation of the "person." Progressively, though slowly, these changes become widespread, introducing themselves by way of the middle classes, ultimately to become a model for the less moneyed classes as well. "Perhaps the most obvious new reality with which middle class families can compete with one another," notes Peter Gay, "is what I would call the democratization of comfort."[11]

Now it is necessary to consider *the technology of the quotidian*, or the union of the technical and the practical that is at

12) On questions of domestic material culture, see the stimulating essay by G. Martinotti, "L'informatica domestica," in A. Ruberti, ed. *Tecnologia domani* (Bari: Laterza, 1985). Critically adapting Giedion's celebrated work on the contemporary development of domestic technology, Martinotti proposes some very original interpretations on the past and future of electrical household appliances. See T. Maldonado and E. Wahl, *Grundsatzuntersuchung uber Haushaltgerate* (Ulm: Hochschule für Gestaltung, 1966).

13) I. Joseph, "Tactiques et figures disciplinaires," in I. Joseph and Ph. Fritsch, *Disciplines à domicile: L'édification de la famille*, in *Recherches* 28(November 1977):29-208. See G. Heller, *"Propre en ordre": Habitation et vie domestique 1850-1930: l'exemple vaudois* (Lausanne: Edition d'En-Bas, 1979). On the "disciplinary" role of material domestic culture, with particular emphasis on women, see the pioneer contribution by B. Taut, *Die neue Wohnung: Die Frau als Schöpferin* (Leipzig: Klinkhardt und Biermann, 1924).

the heart of domestic material culture.[12] Even if we forget the very obvious fact that beyond a more or less rigid articulation of functional divisions (dining room, living room, bedroom, kitchen, bath, etc.), the living space is also a material regimen, an arrangement of movable and immovable objects (equipment and utensils for the making and saving of food, for the care and assistance of children, for hygiene and cleanliness; installations for the control of temperature; gadgets for recreation and communication; furniture; household goods; etc). Daily domestic life is, to a great extent, a continuous putting on of such a regimen with such a regulation.

These themes are certainly not new. Many scholars—archaeologists, ethnologists, sociologists, and historians of the family, technology, industry, and architecture—have made and continue to make important contributions to this area of research. An attempt not yet fully realized is the effort to integrate these bits of specialist knowledge into a complex vision of domestic material culture with particular reference to late capitalist society.

This is surely a difficult task, and I make no pretense of confronting it. On this subject, I only wish to indicate some aspects concerning the technology of the quotidian, particularly those that can aid us in better perceiving the nature of structural (and supportive) elements of such a material culture, in strict relation to the process of modernization. Let's begin with a first statement: the technology of the quotidian is not today, and never has been, neutral. It actually belongs to that type of device for social control that Joseph, following Foucault, has called "tactics and disciplinary figures for the home."[13]

Now we must ask ourselves how and when the tactics and figures that govern our daily domestic culture are going to emerge, that is, the control mechanisms that aid in structuring, and in the final analysis, stabilizing daily life in capitalist society; how and when, in other words, the system of values and norms that today is at the heart of all modern ways of considering useful objects, of prefiguring behavior, of articulating living areas will burst into the surge of history.

The answers to these questions can be sought in Victorian England. In fact, it is in that country—and in that particular historical moment—that one can verify the decisive turn in the constitutive process of tactics and figures mentioned above. After the devastating social impact of the first phase of industrialism, there surfaced in England an ever greater anxiety over the effects that such an impact could have in the long run on the reproduction of the work force. Remember that the panorama presents more alarming aspects: the drastic reduction in the average length of life; the elevated rate of infant mortality; the imposing increase in the number of abandoned or neglected children and elderly people, vagabonds, beggars; the propagation

of epidemics through poor nutrition, promiscuity, and the absolute lack of domestic hygiene; the ever greater diffusion of the exploitation of women and children in the market place; and the spreading phenomenon of alcoholism, prostitution, and juvenile crime.

Confronting this dramatic state of things, already described in his time by Engels,[14] the dominant class responded with the introduction of some strategies to contain these phenomena. It created more varied relief institutions: homes for children and the elderly, almshouses for beggars, asylums for the "mentally ill"; it put into operation a vast number of hygienic-sanitary measures in the districts and dwellings of the masses (the opening of wide streets, canalization, drains, etc.); it enacted laws relative to the length of the work day and to hygiene and security in the work place. In sum, capitalism, even if involuntarily, made concessions. As Engels said, "Big business, in its external aspects, is moralizing."[15]

Many tactics and disciplinary figures of the Victorian era, in particular those "within the domicile," seem initially strongly conditioned (or even determined) by the new typical-ideal construction, the ideology of comfort. The endeavors of those years, tending to guide the reconstitutive process of the working class family, can be identified with the attempt to set up, even justify, a model of material domestic culture. Such a model would have to, on the ideal plane, mediate between a rich and a poor culture; to promote a descending acculturation, a transfer of values from the upper to the lower classes. Not by chance, all of the grand projects to rationalize the working class home anticipated the maintenance within the small quarters of the same activities—and thus of the same distributive typologies— anticipated for upper middle class homes. Even if forms, qualities, and dimensions were "proportional" to the needs of proletarians, this transfer of habitational models also included the transfer of those categories of privacy, hygiene, and comfort that had already been acquired by the higher echelons of society. The fact that contributed the most to the success of such a project was precisely the ideology of comfort.[16]

As I've already observed, the ideology of comfort appears closely involved with at least two parallel categories: hygiene and order. Given their independent nature, it is very difficult to sketch a straightforward history of them, defining priority and derivations. We can, nevertheless, designate the central moments and the determining passages of their evolution. In the outline briefly sketched above of the historical phase immediately following the initial impact of industrialism, large-scale strategies are mentioned that were used to confront some grave problems connected with the urbanization of great population masses— schemes that have been called strategies for containment. Among these, the most significant operations are those connected with

14) F. Engels, *La situazione della classe operai in Inghilterra* (1845) (Roma: Editori Riuniti, 1973). See J. H. Treble, *Urban Poverty in Britain 1830-1914* (London: Methuen, 1979) and M. J. Daunton, *House and Home in the Victorian City* (London: Edward Arnold, 1983).

15) F. Engels, Preface to 1892 edition, *La situazione...*

16) On the role of the ideology of comfort in the Victorian period, see F. Beguin, "Les machineries anglaises du comfort," in *L'haleine des faubourgs* in *Recherches* 29 (December 1977):155-86. See also J. Lavater, *The Age of Optimism* (London: Weidenfeld and Nicholson, 1966) and J. and F. Fourastie, *Histoire du confort* (Paris: Presses Universitaires de France, 1973). One must furthermore recommend the now classic study of S. Giedion, *Mechanization Takes Command* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1948).

urban infrastructures. Hygienic preoccupations that were being pursued since the late eighteenth century, accompanied by the results of medical research and of scientific discoveries in chemistry, produced a radical change in living conditions in the great urban centers.

Disinfectants and deodorants, sewers and paved streets, the elimination of noxious gases in urban areas, safe water related to problems of the supply and distribution of drinking water, sources of illumination—these are all qualifying moments of such a transformation. At the same time, a specialist literature began to address the themes of public hygiene, the functional city, medical aspects of epidemics and social ills, including social morality. The binomials hygiene-morality, cleanliness-dignity, physical health-mental health began to take an impressive form, first applied to the system of public, social, and urban hygiene, then gradually transferred to the system of domestic hygiene. A clean city is also a combination of clean houses. City and house are then an intimate part of the same system of hygiene.

It must not be forgotten, moreover, that there were also technological and productive conditions that allowed for the affirmation of a new domestic organization. An industrial system developed that was quickly able to furnish equipment for lighting, heating, the distribution of water, mass-produced furniture, and chemically produced cleansing products. In a kind of reciprocal conditioning, living spaces and the new household appliances began to constitute what would be the model for urban middle-class habitations.

Equipment for hygiene condition the dislocation of living spaces and redefine their use and function, even when the new order and composition of the family is in consideration. The appearance of the bathroom as a locale specifically used for personal hygiene became possible due to running water, heating, and the furnishing of "sanitary" equipment. At the same time, the bathroom modified the relationship of human beings to their own bodies and to all their physiological functions: the elimination of wastes became private activities. Thus there came into being one of the central pivot points for modesty and privacy unknown to earlier social norms.

Beyond any hygienic preoccupations, an increasingly emphatic intolerance for unpleasant odors—or those that were deemed unpleasant to the new sensibility—led to the enclosing of spaces that had traditionally been left open. Obviously this process also applied to other living areas besides the bathroom.[17]

The kitchen underwent a radical transformation following its progressive reduction in size and the loss of its role as the central living space within the home. Equally decisive were modifications in the techniques of preparation and preserving of

17) See A. Corbin, *Le miasme et la jonquille* (Paris: Aubier Montaigne, 1982) and G. Vigarello, *Le propre et le sale: L'hygiéne du corps depuis le Moyen Age* (Paris: Seuil, 1985). Relating to the kitchen, see N. Chatelet, *Le corps a corps culinaire* (Paris: Seuil, 1977).

18) J. P. Aron, "Cucina," in *Enciclopedia*, vol. IV (Turin: Einaudi, 1978), 4. With the expression "alimentary topography," Aron designates the places where the *rite* of alimentation is accomplished. The variation in number, distribution, and importance of such places not only indicates changes in status and ways of living, but defines the degree of alimentary civility for a social group.

food, facilitated by the new equipment. Thus arises the process of rationalization of "the kitchen space" that, more than others, has been a theme for dispute and research. It suffices to mention the attempt to apply the principles of Taylorism to work in the kitchen by designing furniture and devices to ease the accomplishment of domestic activities.

The process of mechanization, standardization, and rationalization of the kitchen area, in fact, sanctions its functional specialization, the atrophy of its role as the vital and metaphorical center of the house, and, therefore, its definitive isolation within the home. Thus was performed the process that J. P. Aron has called the evolution of the "alimentary topography,"[18] which would have its definitive ratification in our century. In this way, the kitchen, relegated to the place where food is prepared and separated from the place where it is consumed, precisely indicates the tendency toward differentiating work and service areas in the house from those of genuine and proper habitation.

Living spaces adapted to moments of sociability, relationship, relief, and repose would constitute a discourse in itself as regards the compensatory function that comfort assumes in confronting the external world. It is even possible to draw a subtle line of originally unwavering demarcation between the spaces of domestic work; of feminine competence; and of domestic rest, which is of a markedly masculine character. In the first case, comfort is, for the most part, configured as an aid and alleviation of the labors of domestic toil. In the second case, it is configured as a restorative function. In short, something comparable to the "repose of the warrior." Thus, for example, the most comfortable furniture was intended for the use of males, which is quite clearly shown by their very rich and occasionally grotesque functional specialization, which, in the Victorian era, found expression in quite a vast range of furniture. We recall the reading chair, the smoker's chair, the siesta chair, the digestive chair, etc. The areas of the home were, moreover, classified into masculine and feminine areas.[19] The spaces for men were more comfortable than those for women for the simple reason that the most comfortable furniture was found in the former.

19) J. Gloag, *Victorian Comfort* (Newton: Abbot, David and Charles, 1979).

It must be said that this tendency weakened over time. In fact, a progressive specialization of living areas and furnishings occurred, and a greater simplification of furniture led to a new "heart" of the home: the parlor. The parlor constituted the most characteristic typology of the new style of middle-class life. This marked characteristic is accentuated by the presence within the parlor of the so-called "corner of the sofa," which constituted the "heart of the heart": an area that independently and compulsorily preordains the place in which conviviality should unfold.[20]

One may now ask whether there exists a connection between the development of the habitational microcosm and that of the

20) See M. Warnke, "Zur Situation der Couchecke," in J. Habermas, ed., *Stichworte zur "Geisten Situation der Zeit"* (Frankfurt am Main: Suhrkamp, 1955).

urban macrocosm? In other words, are the compartments to be rigidly external and internal or, on the contrary, are there two interactive regions? Some reflections on the urban lifestyle can contribute to explaining many important aspects of what happens within quarters, especially middle-class quarters.

We can record Georg Simmel's notes on the city as an example in this sense. "There is perhaps no psychological phenomenon," wrote Simmel, "that is so characteristic and exclusive of the city as being *blasé*. . . . The essence of this disenchantment is in the obtuseness to the difference between things, not in the sense of being unaware that they exist, as with idiots, but in that the significance and value of these differences between things, and thus of the things themselves, are felt to be null, irrelevant. To the *blasé*, everything is of a uniformly gray, faded shade, and nothing merits being contrasted to other things."[21]

Anticipating D. E. Berlyne's[22] psychology of curiosity by fifty years, Simmel then confronts the theme of the relation between privation and satiety in perception; what is surprising is that he treats the argument not only in terms of individual perception but principally in terms of social perception. The large city, Simmel essentially says, is perceived, not apperceived. That is because there are too many, not too few, messages today. Thus satiety of perception leads to privation in apperception.

Examining a "large city"—Paris in Baudelaire's time—Walter Benjamin comes to conclusions very similar to Simmel's. But he doesn't stop here. In his attempt to "botanize the asphalt," in the sense of examining a city's life as meticulously as a botanist, he moves on to "botanizing the parquet," in the sense of examining internal life with the same meticulous care. In other words, Benjamin doesn't restrict himself to viewing the *flâneur* (idler) on the streets, but also within his home. So from Baudelaire, the external *flâneur*, he passes on to Proust, the internal *flâneur*. For Benjamin, there exists continuity between the streets and the internal world. The street and the internal world become part of a single labyrinth, the "labyrinth of merchandise" of middle-class society. That doesn't mean that Benjamin doesn't recognize the difference between working and private environments. On the contrary, he denounces the conflict between private and working environments, but without identifying the city *in toto* with work.

In the Baudelairean esthetic of the *flâneur*, the city is full of spaces that are absolutely extraneous to productive work—that is to say, spaces of gratuitous use. But the alienation that invalidates the private environment provides by its very nature, according to Benjamin, an intentional alternative to the working-place environment: "Under Louis Philippe," he writes in *Paris, the Capital of the Nineteenth Century* "the private person makes his entrance onto the stage of history. For the private individual, the living space is for the first time contrasted with the work place. . . .

21) G. Simmel, "Die Grosstadte und das Geistesleben," in *Jahrbuch der Gehestiftung*, IX (1903); reprinted in *Brücke und Tür* (Stuttgart: Koehler, 1957).

22) D. E. Berlyne, *Conflict, Arousal and Curiosity* (New York: McGraw Hill, 1960).

23) W. Benjamin, "Paris, die Hauptstadt des XIX Jahrhunderts," in *Gesammelte Schriften*, vol. V-1 (Frankfurt am Main: Suhrkamp, 1982), 52. See also W. Benjamin, "Das Paris des Second Empire bei Baudelaire" (1937), in *Gesammelte Schriften*, vol. I-2, 511.

The private individual needs to be intimately lulled by his own illusions. . . . This gives rise to internal phantasmagoria. For the human being, this represents the world. In this he gathers in the distant and the past. His parlor is the stage of the universal theatre."[23]

Later in the same essay, Benjamin describes this internal phantasmagoria. The melancholy disorder of the city surreptitiously penetrates into the home, and there is found, to a minor degree, the same *blasé* attitude explained by Simmel in *Grossstadt*. It is the *blasé* universe of middle-class interior life: a universe enclosed in a "small box." Here the perception of the "diversity of things" also impedes the apperception of things. They are no longer objects, despite their material presence. There remain only the traces that we leave on them. The interior, Benjamin essentially says, is not only the universe, but also the care of the private individual. To inhabit means to leave impressions, and to acquire internally implies giving a certain relief to some perceptions. So we invent quantities of sheaths, bindings, boxes, and cases, on which are impressed the imprint of objects used every day. Thus the tenant's impressions are stamped within, and so arises the police investigations that exactly follow these clues.

Not by chance, Benjamin explicitly recalls Edgar Allen Poe, who is considered the first "physiognomist" of the interior life, as well as the father of the thriller genre. And that isn't all, for Poe opens a new interpretative avenue relative to comfort. For him, in fact, the display of conspicuous comfort is a form of "the display of wealth,"[24] an idea anticipating Thorstein Veblen's concept of "conspicuous consumption."[25]

24) E. A. Poe, "The Philosophy of Furniture (1840-45)," in *Selected Writings* (Harmondsworth: Penguin Books, 1967).

25) T. Veblen, *The Theory of the Leisure Class* (London: Macmillan, 1912). For a more detailed treatment of this aspect of Veblen's theory, see J. Dorfman, "New Light on Veblen," in T. Veblen, *Essays, Reviews and Reports* (Clifton: Augustus M. Kelley, 1973), 48 *passim*. On the (positive) role of ostentation in dress and furniture, see Q. Bell, *On Human Finery* (London: The Hogarth Press, 1976).

As to the configuration of objects, the interior of a house is just a segment of a vast system of the material culture of society. But it is not a simple segment. Of course, external conditions that arise from the system to which they belong are decisive; yet, it would be absurd to deny every form of autonomous selection to the dwelling. Within certain limits, the consumer within a given habitational microenvironment can decide, as indeed happens, the generative modality of the segment of material culture that is assigned to him, the nature and position of the objects and the degree to which they fit his needs. For that reason, the consumer is compelled each day, more or less consciously, to judge the surroundings against his own model of happiness. One should not be surprised that an accurate investigation of the role of comfort in the habitational microenvironment calls upon a theory of material culture, as much as a theory of happiness—as much upon ergology (the study of material cultures) and eudeamonics (the doctrine of happiness).

Translated from the Italian by John Cullars.