

CHAPTER 5

The Archetypal Aesthetics of Dwellings

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Abstract: Images of houses resonate strongly in our culture as they are part of our national and social identity. What do the types of dwellings that surround us every day testify about? What meanings are embodied in the architectural shapes and surfaces? What echoes resonate through the building materials and the immediate surroundings of a house? The aim of this paper is to decode the speech of dwellings and determine the features of their archetypal aesthetics. This interpretative probe focuses on the basic types of houses in Slovakia, foreshadowing their shape and archetypal character.

Keywords: Dwelling, Archetypes, Memory, Environment, Material

1 Introduction. Archetype of the House-Home

An old house, a shadowy porch, tiles, a crumbling Arab decoration, a man sitting against the wall, a deserted street, a Mediterranean tree (Charles Clifford's Alhambra): this old photograph (1854) touches me: it is quite simply there that I should like to live. This desire affects me at a depth and according to roots which I do not know (Barthes 1981, p. 38).

Barthes' comment describes the feeling we have when we are faced with the image of a house. It is not important whether the house is real, fictitious or 'inhabited' through literature, film and visual arts. What makes the images of a house resonate so strongly within us? What is the nature of this aesthetic experience? If the images of a house go deep and follow roots that are unknown to us, can we term them *archetypal*?

The word 'archetype' (from the Greek *archétypon*) represents an original form, a blueprint, an original. In conjunction with architecture, an archetype can be understood as an 'original shape' (e.g. the archetype of the roof is a pyramid or triangle), but also as

a metaphor and allusion (e.g. a building is labelled a box). According to Carl Gustav Jung (1997), archetypes represent the primary structural elements of the human psyche. Archetypal motives are the patterns of thought and behaviour common to humanity across time and space, and they steer individual consciousness. They form the basic content of religious and mythological stories, fairy tales and legends. The archetypes of dwellings therefore capture the echoes of something *original* and *generic* at the same time; a certain kind of archetypal idea that goes beyond architecture and extends to socio-cultural anthropology.

It is almost impossible to search for some generic idea of a house, since it occurs in artistic expression and religious and mythological ideas in different cultures. However, art contains constant images of houses/dwellings where patterns of thinking and behaviour can be identified.

The Slovak word *dom* (house), for example, contains the root *dem*, which means 'to build' or 'construct.' The term house is therefore used in this study to mean a building or structure whose function and meaning lie in the meaning of the word *domov* (home). We generally understand a home not primarily as an architecturally constructed space (outside), but rather as an experienced space (inside).

While both concepts can be explained from a philosophical perspective, in this paper, however, I analyse basic types of houses that form the scenery of home, at least as we know it in my home country, Slovakia. I try to uncover the archetypal foundations that lie behind different types of houses and apartment buildings in Slovakia, identifying the symbolic and imaginative connections that link them to the specific environment in which they are located. To this end, I introduce some basic universal models that can be seen and experienced in different contexts, for example, as part of fairy tales, legends and stories, visual art and film works, book illustrations, spontaneous drawings of children, and so on. In all these different cases, my aim is the same: to show how images of real buildings resonate and overlap with images from our distant past.

2 Cottage Versus Tower

Most of Slovakia's population lives in detached houses or apartment buildings.¹ According to Abraham Harold Maslow (2014), both of these

¹ According to the 2017 research on housing in Europe, 51 % of Slovaks live in flats, 48 % in houses and 1 % in other properties. According to the same statistics, a similar situation can be observed in the neighbouring Czech Republic. (https://ec.europa.eu/eurostat/statistics-explained/index.php?title=Housing_statistics/sk). Another

options cover the basic human need to live. It is obvious that living in either an apartment or a house is characterized by different qualities. My goal is not to compare these qualities or evaluate the options available in the individual types of homes. I want to look beyond the colourful facades of the existing detached houses and apartment houses and unveil their *archetypal nature*. The houses and apartment buildings in Slovakia visibly relate to their prototypes – *cottage* and *tower* – in their basic architectural morphology.

According to the literary scientist Vladimír Macura (1997),² a cottage is an emblematic feature of the Czech (but also Slovak and Polish) culture. It is part of national self-reflection; it relates to the characteristics of the given nation and what its people consider 'theirs'. A cottage usually appears in the country's romantic imagination, visual and literary works, and it can be frequently found as a universal Christmas and winter motif in postcards.

A painting of a house lit up inside, embedded in the snowy country, or a cottage on the edge of a forest, personifies *idyll*. The literary theorists Daniela Hodrová and Macura (1997) name the basic attributes of a cottage, which include modesty and *inconspicuousness* (small dimensions), hidden nature and secludedness from the surrounding environment (a house is surrounded by trees), and quietness. The image of a cottage allows the recipient to escape to safety and timelessness, it represents an abode of affection and love, a space bound with happiness, and it is analogous to the Bethlehem abode. In this perspective, the house-cottage is linked to the idyllic nature of childhood.

Since our birth, our dwelling is gradually becoming part of our known world. Gaston Bachelard (1990) states that our house is our first universe. A human being is protected in it and surrounded by a benevolent matter. An abode provides a *hiding place*, it is a *cozy refuge*, a *secret shelter*, and it invokes a feeling of safety. In the context of the above, can we talk of a kind of motherly (accept, nurture, facilitate growth) and fatherly (protection against rain, sleeping guard) aspect of a cottage. The motherly and fatherly positions form part of any occupied

research from 2011 presents the data on the number of occupied houses in the Slovak Republic: 905,815 (84.6 % of the total number of houses).

² Macura (1997) analyzed the cottage as a literary topos especially in the literature of the 18th and 19th century. His findings and observations, however, can be generalized and applied to characterize the cottage as an archetype.

space, including the tower.

A *tower* is defined in the dictionaries as a slender and tall building standing alone, or built into a fortification. Here, I use it as an archetypal image of an apartment building. The basic attributes of a tower include *uprightness* and *centrism*. Hodrová (1997) likens the topos of a tower to a vertical labyrinth, and she highlights several themes in it. Some of them also apply to the image of an apartment house. The theme of wandering (a helix spiral staircase in the tower and an ordinary staircase in the apartment building can act as a labyrinth); hidden identity of the character (neighbourhood anonymity of the residents from different entrances, but with a common wall); loneliness, separation, and isolation can be considered essential. In connection with the tower, Hodrová draws our attention to its introspection, its centre (figuratively, we could talk about some sort of egocentricity); she likens the tower to a *prison* (in an apartment building, this place is evoked by the cellar, but also the bars on the ground floor windows). The dynamic shape of a tower evokes growth – a residential building that at the time of construction evoked the prosperity of the state. If we admit that the tower can be viewed as an archetype of the apartment building, then we can also add the ‘Babel’ adjective to it. Both buildings are in fact characterized by the diversity and multiplicity of their population.

According to the publicly available statistics, the number of occupied houses in Slovakia totals one million, and the number of occupied apartments/flats is two million.³ Most houses are, of course, situated in the countryside, and apartment buildings are part of the urban environment. A house (an archetype of the cottage) versus residential apartment building (the archetype of the Tower of Babel) is one of the most striking contrasts in the Slovak *city – village* culture.

2.2 City Versus Village

The city-village binary opposition highlights some other characteristics of the cottage and tower archetype. I will attempt to illustrate these by referring to the works of Slovak artist Tomáš Džadoň’s *Monument of Folk Architecture* and Slovak cinematographer Juraj Chlpík’s *The Identities of Petržalka*. In the first case, we are dealing with an installation of a visual artist in Slovakia in Košice while in the second case, we are dealing with a film documentary by a Slovak director.

³ The data were taken from the census published by the Statistical Office of the Slovak Republic (2020). The census is held every ten years, and the 2021 census is currently in preparation.



Figure 1: Tomáš Džadoň: *Monument of folk architecture* (2013-2016), Košice, Slovakia.
Source: Photo by Palko Matia

The installation by Tomáš Džadoň called *Monument of Folk Architecture* (2013-2016) includes three authentic log houses (log barns from the villages of Liptovská Teplička and Párnica na Orave) placed on the roof of a high-rise apartment building in a Košice housing estate. The cabins/ log houses are located high above ground as something distant, unattainable, something we look up to, but they also represent something that we tend to overlook exactly because of its close proximity. The installation connects the original folk architecture with what came later, housing. Džadoň called the work a *Memorial*. It should therefore remind us of something we should not forget. “The Slovak villages still have plenty of traditional architecture that remind us of what we have lost among the ‘šumperák’ houses, brizolit cubes, or the modern ‘catalo’ houses” (Džadoň 2017, p. 135).

The cabins on the roof are as if they have been uprooted – as if their ‘base’ pushed them up and now carries them as a burden. They are secluded in an urban area, away from time and space where they rightfully belong. The buildings without doors and windows evoke the impression of being sealed, empty and lifeless. The contemporaries live in another puzzle – in a block of flats. The timbered barns reflect a way

of life that has almost completely faded away – the photographic work by Martin Martinček and a documentary by Dušan Hanák (*Pictures of the Old World*, 1972) are its memorial.



Figure 2: Juraj Bartoš: *Petržalka* (1977 – 1983), Bratislava, Slovakia.
Source: Documentary photograph, SNG

The prefabricated apartment houses have no dedicated ‘open-air museums’ yet, because we still live in them. However, living in an apartment block already has its documentary filmmakers. One of them is the photographer and director Juraj Chlpík with his copyrighted project *The Identities of Petržalka*, a suburb of Bratislava.⁴ “Most of the projects I know have depicted Petržalka from the outside, or in the entrances and underground passageways. I went inside - I wanted to show it as no one before,” says Chlpík, “I wondered how a person can affect an environment so uniform to feel comfortable in it, and also how the environment affects the person, and if at all” (Németh 2011).

In 2005-2006, Chlpík created portraits of people in Petržalka and of the apartments they live in. Large format diptychs, in the form of studio images of the inhabitants along with photos of their private

⁴ More specifically, Petržalka is a housing estate district in Bratislava, the capital of Slovakia. The area of Petržalka is 28.68 square kilometers and the population density is 23597.98 inhabitants/km².

space and the length of the period they lived in this estate, were installed on the New Bridge in Bratislava. In 2010 the project turned into a documentary, and in 2011 it was published as a photographic publication.

Most of Chlpík's protagonists were not born in Petržalka, as the construction of the suburb began in 1973. Petržalka (historically Engerau-Ligetfalu), as claimed by a historian Ján Čomaj (2008), is currently the largest housing estate in Central Europe and was originally the largest village in Czechoslovakia. During the construction phase, the native inhabitants of Petržalka had to abandon their homes, and almost all buildings were pulled down. Shortly thereafter (the first prefab panel houses were occupied in 1977), the area on the right bank of the Danube changed radically.

Like other socialist housing estates, Petržalka was not prepared for a mass influx of new residents. According to the testimonies from Chlpík's document, the housing estate had no roads and basic amenities, and the apartments in the blocks of flats only served mainly as a place for an overnight stay. Petržalka was seen as an inevitable dormitory for the new inhabitants of Bratislava, a concrete jungle, "a city without qualities" (Gindl 2011, p. 84). For many residents, it only represented a temporary housing solution. As Slovak philosopher Miroslav Marcelli (2011, p. 1) comments:

Increasingly, however, it becomes evident that Petržalka turned into a home for the first generation of inhabitants. At the same time, the generation of their parents grew old here. As a result, the inhabitants of Petržalka clearly differentiated and individualized themselves. They are no longer mere immigrants into the city, which accepted them, but maintains an aloof attitude toward them. They are searching for their own identity. And how this process marked their life attitudes, perceptions and behaviour patterns – that is a question for the theories dealing with contemporary social reality.

3 Archetypal Images of Houses in the Environment

Alain de Botton (2008, p. 60) has written:

To describe a building as beautiful therefore suggests more than a mere aesthetic fondness; it implies an attraction to the particular way of life this structure is promoting through its roof, door handles, window frames, staircase and furnishings. A feeling of beauty is a sign that we have come upon a material articulation of certain of our ideas of a good life.

De Botton also believes that architectural styles may become “emotional souvenirs of the moments and settings in which we came across them” (Botton 2008, p. 78). In this part of the study, I focus on the archetypal images of houses in the environment. Following de Botton, my standpoint is the resonance of images of real buildings scattered in Slovakia and their overlap with images from the distant past.

3.1 House in the Field (and Houses Made of Clay)

The image of a house in the field includes the oldest image of a human dwelling. A house in the field is a proof that human beings have felt the land and farming and have begun transforming the landscape. A hunter was turned into a shepherd and farmer, and religious concepts also were transformed. During the formation of the first human settlements, the cult of the Great Mother was formed, and the life-giving generative power of the earth was worshiped.⁵

In the archetypal images, a house in the field is inhabited by simple and hardworking people. Their existence is tied to the natural course of events and cycle of seasons. Life is mainly lived outdoors in the fields and the house is used as a place to prepare food, spend the night and rest during the long winters. The house personifies humility, balance and conscientiousness, solidarity, cohesion of the family and self-sufficiency. It is quiet, cozy and connected with nature and the earth in its basic maternal principle. The house is ‘rooted’ in clay and in the mass, with the immanent process of creation and demise, which enables growth.

Clay is the most accessible material to build homes. In Slovakia, clay houses were built mainly in the lowlands and lower valleys of rivers (southern and southwestern areas and the Eastern Slovak Lowland). The original fully or partially buried houses, Slavonic dwellings of the Great Moravian period with a square or rectangular layout,⁶ were gradually replaced by stacked houses, houses built by mud injection,⁷ houses built

⁵ In Slovakia, the Slavic goddess of fertility and long life Mokoša/Mokuša/Živa/Siva was venerated. The cult of the Great Mother is directly linked to the rich agrarian cult, which, as Slavkovský claims (2002), had been present in Slovakia until the first half of the 20th century.

⁶ The houses were partially buried in the ground. A typical single-room dwelling was formed by a columnar structure planted vertically in the ground, horizontally placed twigs, sprayed with kneaded clay. This method of construction was used in the southern regions of Slovakia for centuries. For more information, see Mjartan (1975), Thurzo (2004).

⁷ The walls of homes built by mud injection were approximately one meter wide and built by gradually injecting clay mixed with straw between the wall plates, which were removed after the wall dried.

by stacking cylinders of wet clay and dried mud/adobe bricks, and later of burnt bricks.

Older clay houses had thatched roofs covered with straw or reeds. The chopped straw and chaff were mixed with clay and shaped into cylinders and bricks, making the field an essential part of the dwelling. The image of a house in the field can be freely linked with the image of a house on the *meadow*, *pasture*, in the *vineyard*, *orchard*, but also in the *garden*. The garden in this case is an extract of the field and symbolizes abundance thanks to its content (flowers, vegetables, fruit trees), it is a *locus amoenus* (a gracious place, a place in the care of humans), an *Elysium*/*Elysion*/*Champs Field* in the Greek mythology and Eden in the Bible.

3.2 A house on the Edge of the Forest and in the Forest (and Wooden Houses)

The topos of a *house on the edge of the forest* marks the boundary between civilization and wilderness. This house stands between the cultivated, subdued and serving field and an autonomous and boisterous forest. One surface is represented by human-planted crops in organized lines or slick lanes on a well-defined stretch of land, the other is represented by trees, shrubs, grasses, herbs, fungi and mosses usually in rough terrain. The house on the edge of the forest is thus situated somewhere on the border between order and chaos, openness and closeness, light and gloom. The image of a house in the woods, as discussed below, refers to the boundary in a different way.

The archetypal image of a *house in the woods* personifies the proclivity to wildness. The forest is a natural habitat for wild animals and not humans. According to Czech aesthetician Dušan Šindelář (1978), human beings in an arranged environment usually feel the confirmation of themselves as human beings. The forest, a disorganized and seemingly chaotic environment, can thus evoke innate dispositions and instincts.

In the archetypal images, a house in the forest is inhabited by humans with certain animalistic attributes (e.g. impulsiveness and intuitiveness). We assume they have a reclusive, introverted, and perhaps misanthropic nature, or the archetype of a shade in Jung's theory. In fairy tales and superstitious narratives, the forest is inhabited by characters with an ambivalent personality (e.g. a witch, magicians, characters enchanted into animal form, a werewolf etc.), giants with exceptional physical strength, wild women (goddesses, grgálica, Runa

etc.).⁸ The rich representation of forest spirits and creatures in the fairy tales, historic tales, legends and superstitious concepts proves that human beings perceived the forest as a dangerous and unpredictable place – known as a place of horror, or the *locus horribilis*, in literary topology.

Forests have become home to those who are not afraid of the mysteries of nature, respect it, and are able to use it for their own benefit (herbalists); those who did not dull their hunting instincts (hunters), or those whose brute strength, pride and resilience is mirrored by the forest (loggers and foresters). The forest has also become home to those who for various reasons sought shelter from the human community, i.e. the robbers, soldiers, and as evidenced by Kroutvor (2015), even the philosophers.

Unlike houses in the field, the house in the forest is never dominant, it is small and hidden under trees or surrounded by bushes, which confirms the fact that a human being is not the master in this area. Forest dwellings also have a temporary character, as if the humans naturally adopted a visitor status and accepted the fact that the forest has been around for much longer and will be around for longer. The forest does not allow us (metaphorically and literally) to look far and build homes for the next generation. The wood used for the construction in the forest is subject to rapid degradation.

Dwellings in the forest (as for instance in forester's lodges, cottages, shelters) are not surrounded by fences, and they are often unlocked. These complexes are increasingly perceived through a romantic or horror filter. This romantic or horror optic can also be applied to the environment of the forest itself, and our movement in it.

The memories of the forest are also conveyed by log homes and wooden buildings. How much forest is preserved in one cabin/log house and how much magic is left of it? In Slovakia, log houses were primarily built in the northern mountainous areas where conifers grow in abundance. The shingles covering the roof were also made of wood. In some regions, wooden houses were decorated by painting or carving ornaments and symbols. The image of a house in the forest also resonates well in the Robinson-like tree houses, in the backyard wooden shed, in a shack on the outskirts, or in a house overgrown with creepers etc.

⁸ Each of these characters has its own specific characteristics, which overlap in certain cases. *Grgalica/grgolica* is a local Slovak demon that suffocates its victims and manifests itself through a drawing hoot.

3.3 A House by the Water (and Glass Houses)

The archetypal image of the house by the water takes many forms. It covers the images of *houses at the wells, streams, rivers, ponds, lakes, marshes, seas or oceans*.⁹ Water symbolizes purity and it is the “medium used in ritual purification and baptism, rebirth and regeneration” (Ibid.) A dwelling at the spring evokes the idea of miraculous water and its healing effects and life-giving properties. A house by the river abounds with joy, spontaneity, constant happenings, movement and life. The mills are most frequently seen around rivers. The river, its flow and momentum determined where the mill would be positioned. The mass of water spun the mill wheel and drove the mechanism of the machine. The mill architecture is directly tied to the river, its strength and ferocity.¹⁰ The clicking of the mill machines is accompanied by the splashing of river water, jabber and gaiety. The archetypal image of a house by the river is inhabited by a miller, his family, children and helpers. A house by the river embodies freshness, variability, boisterousness, and accumulation of a lot of energy.¹¹

Houses at the lake are characterized by silence and peace. Standing water provides moisture for the trees and plants in their vicinity, and it emanates seriousness thanks to its green colour. A swamp is a certain mix of stillness and moisture. A lake, on the contrary, activates. It invites us for a swim, it purifies and clarifies the mind, and mirrors the surroundings. The phenomenon of water (especially in the form of a pond or lake) includes the feminine life-giving element, plasticity and transient nature. The feminine element also inhabits the archetypal images of houses near the pond, lake, marsh mythical characters of water fairies, rusalkas, bewitched virgins, etc.). Houses by the water can be found in almost every town in Slovakia. Although the river waterways were regulated and their branches diverted or hidden in underground pipes, one can still find streets that mirror the curve of dead riverbeds.

⁹ Due to my focus on Slovakia, the last two images will not be discussed. Also, we will omit the archetypal images of *houses at waterfalls* (typical for alpine countries, Iceland and Japan).

¹⁰ In Slovakia, the traditional *riverfront mills* were built with artificial water channels - water feed channels running in parallel with the river and forming the so-called mill islands, *coastal edge mills* and *ship mills*. Edge mills were concentrated on the Little Danube waterway and were its regional specificity. For more information, see Mlynka (2006).

¹¹ The energy contained in a flowing river was used not only for grinding cereal grains, but also for wood cutting etc. Currently, several mills have been converted to hydropower plants.

Rivers in the past served the town as a source of food and water, they also served as a security boundary and a traffic artery. At present, the rivers and their surroundings are mainly used as a recreational area and they can greatly influence the sense of identity of the citizens of the town/city the river flows through. The rivers co-create the face and shape of many Slovak cities (e.g. Piešťany, Košice, Žilina, Bratislava, Nitra). Some riverbanks are converted into nature and others are built up, but no mills can be found anymore.

The general visual qualities of water include clarity and ability to reflect light - they mirror and make the illusion of an image. Same qualities can be spotted in houses/buildings made of glass (administrative and shopping centres, hotels), which are part of larger cities just like rivers. There are many analogies between glass buildings built at the intersection of thoroughfares, houses by the water and the characteristics of rivers, and some of them are more prominent than others. A glass aluminium (for example, the shopping centre *Mlyny* in Nitra) provides no shelter and its walls are transparent. The surfaces (walls, floor) are smooth and shiny and reflect light. One can see a parallel between the flow of escalators and visitors and the fluidity of a river.

The river in the past represented a link with remote places and it enabled the formation of business trade routes, provided fresh and new ideas and exclusive merchandise, and linked the polarity between 'our' and 'foreign'. However, it also represented a border between the two banks and two parts of the city. The paradox of simultaneous connecting and separating also applies to the archetypal images of the river as a border between two worlds (dimensions) and a pond, lake, spring (well) as a passage between them.

3.4 Home in the Heights (and Houses Made of Concrete)

Only a few would dispute the effort of the builders of a *house in high places* (on the rocks, on top of the mountain) when building it. When we ascend a dwelling on top of the hill (e.g. a castle) and enjoy the scenic view, our view is free from the view of the castle lord and the people who served in the castle. According to architect Tomáš Valena (2018), mountains are a remote and secluded place for the inhabitants of the valley, which is visually present but in actuality it is away from everyday life. Valena states that mountains in its extremes (rock, snow, ice) can be hostile to human beings; they "express the unattainable nature and

mysterious isolation and fill us with dread; their genius loci appears to be powerful and majestic – an undisputed ruler of his place” (Valena 2018, p. 42).

In the archetypal images, a house in the heights is inhabited by the characters such as kings, semi-divine beings, ghosts, knights and giants, all exceeding the dimensions of an everyday person one way or another. To live ‘up’ means to live closer to ‘heaven’ and closer to the divine elements, although it is questionable to what extent we can reflect on the sacred and secular approaching/ascent to the divine/God. A mountain has a sacred character; in Christianity is a place where ongoing conversations with God (and his revelation) are held and where sacrifices are made. It has a similar significance even in other religions. A house in the heights loses contact with the ground (the fertile soils in the lowlands), it stands on the strong stony ground or on the rock with almost no vegetation. It promotes a feeling of loneliness, for while a plain is sufficiently large and hospitable for all, there is not enough space on top of the mountain.

A dwelling in the heights is naturally singled out from the country and it literally protrudes out of it; it does not belong to the horizontal plane of the country, but rather to its vertical features. Typically, no straight road leads to it and one needs to climb gradually in switchbacks, i.e. walk ‘back and forth’ (just like by stairs in a block of flats). A block of flats/apartment buildings is the most prominent equivalent of a house in the heights. Its concrete walls are gray and monolithic just like rock; its residents (people of indoor type) live ‘high above ground’, in isolation, and have limited contact with the environment.

3.5 Home in the Depths (and Houses Made of Rock)

The common feature of houses in the depths (caves, underground bunkers, houses excavated in rock) is their unobtrusiveness. They cannot be bypassed because the outside is not visible. The habitable cavities are part of the natural whole and they are adapted to life in concealment. Valena (2018, p. 44) distinguishes two types of natural places - material and spatial. He considers a cave a perfect natural spatial place.

It is immersed in the ground, completely surrounded by rock, yet seemingly effortlessly defying the immense pressure with its concave and infinitely spatial shell. The cave creates a space in its sheer spatial absence, thus offering protection, but the incalculable risk of being crushed is equally omnipresent. This dichotomy is an essential feature of the cave.

Space inside the cave is not readily discernible for humans. To navigate the maze of long rising and falling corridors, large halls and deep passageways is not easy even for the visitors of accessible sections of the cave without a guide. How does the cave labyrinth affect a speleologist and what feelings did its discoverers have? According to Valena (2018), the space in a cave is denied by perpetual darkness. The darkness is only removed, says Valena, when light is brought inside, and only to a limited extent.

Visitors are always and repeatedly enchanted by the height of the individual halls, shapes, colors of the cave formations, ambience, sound properties of the cave space, its clean air, illusions of reflection in the see-through lakes, and they can experience the “inner workings” of the Earth. However, they move in a humanized space (the walk is made easy thanks to the paths, stairways, bridges, lighting, etc.). The movement of the discoverers is much more cautious than the movement of visitors – it reminds us of toddlers – climbing, crawling, movement in the dark. How were the caves discovered by our distant ancestors? How much magic was revealed through the flickering light of the fire and dancing shadows?

The original hiding place of our ancestors was shaped by water. Later, when man intervened, the inner space was arduously accommodated to the human shape and scale. Cliff dwellings, however, retained some of the features of the caves (stable lower temperature, humidity, darkness etc.).¹² To a lesser extent, the features of the caves are also preserved in houses made of stone.¹³ In the archetypal images, a house in the depths inhabited by hermits, chthonic gods, demonic beings (connected with the night and darkness) and miniature figures of dwarfs and elves.

4 Construction Materials and Their Meaning

According to ethnographer Ján Mjartan (1975), the oldest materials used in Slovakia to build dwellings are osiers and clay. The choice of material in the past was based on the natural conditions of a particular locality, the way of life, level of economy, cultural traditions of the region; nowadays it is more a question of personal preference. The new

¹² The oldest rock dwellings in Slovakia are found in the volcanic Štiavnica Hills near Štúrovo in the village of Lišov and Brhlovce. To this day, many of them are still inhabited or used for food storage.

¹³ The dwellings made of worked stone were mainly built in the area of Central Pohronie.

buildings and historic homes, however, are linked to the principle of combining materials, with one of them being dominant. Another common denominator is the granting or denial of the very nature of the material. The buildings from the last decade are typical for new materials and imitations of the original (e. g. the use of tiles imitating stone). Can the imitations of materials capture the vibrations of its foreshadow? Where is the mass memory anchored? How does the material nature of dwellings reveal their archetypal aesthetics? The answers to the above questions are yet unknown. However, partial answers can be found in the revelation of archetypal nature in the material.

Clay refers to the field and unevenness of the earth. It is permanently inhabited by a number of microorganisms. In connection with water, soil provides the plants with space, matter and nutrients for growth, and then takes them back. The experience of modelling clay and experiencing its malleability, the precariousness of walking in mud experiencing its compliance, of grinding dry lumps under the weight of the foot experiencing its fluidity: all points to the timeliness and apparent strength of (our) shape since childhood.

Wood refers to the forest, a diverse community of plants, mosses, lichens, fungi and animals. A log house (or parquet floor) remembers the links between the root systems, symbiosis of species, nests in the treetops and lores between the roots, and the balance between herbivores and predators. Each piece of wood (the body of a tree) is unique. It reminds us of the existence of ourselves as a fibre and the interconnection of the particulars and the whole.

Glass (also in a fragmented state) refers to water. It is transparent, clear, cold, crisp, smooth and hygienic. The rainbow-like reflections, gaiety and carelessness of glass form a counterweight to the depth of clay (earth) and extraction of wood (forest). Glass is, just like water, a variable substance (having its liquid and solid form). Does the illusion of mirroring remind us of the two faces of the world? Does an optical illusion teach us not to rely merely on what we see?

Stone refers to mountains. In the properties (coldness, hardness, density), we can feel the remoteness, distance, uncollectibility, stubbornness (similar to the properties of metal). Stone is stable and solid, and it forms a tangible support, the basis for construction. With its durability, it reminds of eternity.

5 Conclusion

In this paper, I focused on different types of environmental dwelling in the Slovak cultural and social context. The archetype of the cottage versus the archetype of the tower represents a basic contrast in Slovak culture - the town versus the village. The connections between dwelling and environment, related to images of houses within the environment - the house in the field by the water or in the forest, the house located high above and in the depth and the connections between dwelling and a certain material (clay, wood, stone, glass, metal, concrete) have been crucial for this investigation. Studying these connections provides a valuable strategy to connect the past and the present with awareness of their reciprocal continuity, as well as a way to experience the environment more meaningfully.

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