House and Home

The existential dimension in

Anders T. Andersen’s production of John Gabriel Borkman

Cécilia Elsen

Master’s thesis in Ibsen Studies
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Abstract

The topic of the thesis is the relation between the concepts ‘house’ and ‘home’ in Ibsen’s drama. I believe that the relationship between house and home is common to his oeuvre in general and not specific to some plays. I study the relation between the concepts ‘house’ and ‘home’ in *John Gabriel Borkman* based on a performance I saw in Teater Ibsen in Skien in September 2012.

In the first chapter, I support my claim that Ibsen's works have an existential dimension on the house/home concepts by drawing on Anthony Vidler (1992), Mark Sandberg (2001, 2007 and 2015) as well as Mark Wigley (1993).

In the second chapter I explain by Heidegger why Anders T. Andersen was provoked by Ostermeier’s version of *John Gabriel Borkman*. Andersen found that Ostermeier had no subtext – or in other words – no existential dimension. Although originally a Freudian concept I apply Heidegger's concept of the uncanny (*das Unheimliche*) in a metaphysical perspective drawing on Anette Storli Andersen’s master thesis based on Robert Wilson’s *Peer Gynt*.

In a third and last part this thesis examines the main changes in modernity and late modernity on the house and home concept based on Richard Sennett, Anthony Giddens and Hannah Arendt. One of the main changes affecting the construction of genres, I grew an interest for the problematic of manhood in *John Gabriel Borkman* in a sub-part based on Fredrik Engelstad (1994) and Chengzou He (2008).
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This thesis is the end of a long and decisive journey.

Cecilia Elsen

Oslo, May 2015
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Introduction

Même dans une cellule de condamné, ce moi que mon angoisse oppose à tout le reste apercevrait ce qui le précéda et ce qui l’entoure comme un vide soumis à son pouvoir.
- Georges Bataille, *L’expérience intérieure*

Presentation of the topic

The topic of the thesis is the relation between the concepts ‘house’ and ‘home’ in Ibsen’s drama. I believe that the relation between house and home are common to his oeuvre in general and not specific to some plays. I will, however, focus on *John Gabriel Borkman* – who is a prisoner in his own house and who dies when he finally decides to go out after many years of isolation. Other examples could have been: *A Doll’s House* which title contains itself the word “house”¹; *Hedda Gabler* – and her house-prison, the Falk villa; *The Master Builder* – the one who wants to build homes for people but who is not able to rebuild a home for his wife; *Rosmersholm* – the name of the play is already the name of the house; *The Lady from the Sea* – Ellida is not able to live in the house that was once inhabited by her husband's first wife. These houses always appear like spaces the characters never manage to make their own, as a “home”.

I am writing about house and home because a lot of Ibsen’s plays refer to housing (*A Doll’s House, Rosmersholm, The Master Builder*) and/or the characters refer themselves to house and home (*When we dead awaken, The Master Builder*). In *John Gabriel Borkman* the action takes place in the house. Home is supposed to be private and familiar sphere, according to a general understanding of the word, but I will attempt to discuss other ways to approach *home* and the relation between *home* and *house* in this thesis.

I will study the relation between the concepts ‘house’ and ‘home’ in *John Gabriel Borkman* based on a performance I saw in Teater Ibsen in Skien in September 2012. I have chosen this production of *John Gabriel Borkman* because the stage design and the use of the space in this

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¹ Although it is called *Et Dukkehjem* in Norwegian, literally “a doll home”
production established a clear impression that the house was no home, in the common sense of home – a familiar and comforting space. The materiality of the stage and more specifically the use of a mobile wall gave a very unfamiliar picture of the house depicted on stage. The performance rose a clear questioning on house and home which forms the basis for my thesis. Thus I aim to discuss house and home through philosophical, existential and sociological aspects. The central aspect being the metaphysical perspective with a connection to Martin Heidegger and Hannah Arendt’s philosophy, specifically Heidegger’s philosophy on house and home and his concept of Being-in-the-world as well as Arendt’s criticism of modernity.

Research questions, basic claims and hypothesis

When thinking about contemporary Ibsen’s directors, the name Thomas Ostermeier sticks to our mind. According to the database IbsenStage, Ostermeier is the contemporary director who has staged most Ibsen productions and they have been performed all over the world. One can wonder why an artist, as the Norwegian theatre director, Anders T. Andersen would compete with an international and acclaimed theatre director as Ostermeier. But, as Andersen claims, one theater director cannot take the monopole and even if Thomas Ostermeier is so strongly associated to Ibsen, it does not mean that we cannot criticize his work (Andersen 2014).

Andersen was in fact so provoked by Ostermeier's staging of John Gabriel Borkman² that he decided to stage his own version. Even though Ostermeier's version got good reviews, Andersen was not impressed. The twin sisters nagging each other during the second act of the performance reveal, according to Andersen, no sub-text in Ostermeier’s interpretation. “It limits the perception of the human beings if you only reduce them to one thing, bitterness” (Andersen 2014). After watching John Gabriel Borkman by Andersen in Skien, I became really intrigued by how he had worked on Borkman’s house. My discussion with Andersen a few months after I saw his production developed even more my interest³. The theatre director seemed obsessed with the dysfunctional family but he had not work on the house vs home consciously.

² Ostermeier’s John Gabriel Borkman was first staged in 2008 and was performed in Oslo in 2010.

³ I met Anders T. Andersen on the 20th of February 2014 for an informal discussion on his production. All the references made to Anders T. Andersen are from that day unless specified.
Hence, the basic questions that I will address are:

1. Is there an existential dimension in Ibsen based on the home and house concept?
2. How is Andersen’ production expressing an existential dimension in his production of Ibsen’s _John Gabriel Borkman_?
3. What sociological meanings may the concept of house and home process?

Therefore, the overall question that I will seek to answer in this is thesis is: Why is it relevant to study the house and home concept in Ibsen and how can we make the home and house concept relevant in a contemporary production?

I will support my claim that Ibsen’s work has an existential dimension on the house/home concepts through architecture with Anthony Vidler (1992), Mark Sandberg (2001, 2007 and 2015) and Mark Wigley (1993), sociological theories of modernity with Anthony Giddens (1990 and 1991), Richard Sennett (1977) and Hannah Arendt (1958) and metaphysical concepts as “Being-in-the-world” (Heidegger 1973). Finally, I will try to relate the relevance of staging house/home in Ibsen-performances today with Anders T. Andersens’s version of _John Gabriel Borkman_. I will not only describe the difference between home and house but also study what I will find out by means of this difference.

**Significance and previous research**

My starting point will be Mark Sandberg’s articles «Ibsen and the mimetic home of modernity» (2001) and «The architecture of forgetting» (2007) and his recent book _Ibsen’s houses_ (2015). In Sandberg’s articles, I have a scholarly support for studying the relation between house and home in Ibsen’s drama. Mark Sandberg develops the opposition house/home in Ibsen’s work through an interpretation of Ibsen’s dramas in an architectural perspective.

In his recent book _Ibsen’s houses_ (2015) Sandberg presents briefly the concept _das Unheimliche_ but this concept is not mentioned in his articles (2001 and 2007). The concept _das Unheimliche_ was first developed by Freud in his psycho-analysis and later by the German philosopher Martin Heidegger who interrogates the “Being-in-the-world” through a dynamic relation between _heimlich_ and _unheimlich_ (Heidegger 1973). I attend to develop and question _home_ in Ibsen’s drama by using a metaphysical perspective and Heidegger’s philosophy. As
the concept of home can refer to a feeling related to a space, as Gaston Bachelard explained in *The poetics of Space*, I also have to mention the architectural perspective. But unlike Sandberg who only read the architectural perspective in relation to Ibsen’s drama, I have chosen a contemporary performance because I want to focus on the concept of house and home in Ibsen from a performance perspective. By using Heidegger I want to examine the relevance of Heidegger’s philosophy in the study of performances based on Ibsen’s work.

In her master’s thesis Anette Storli Andersen (2005) has applied Heidegger’s philosophy in a study of Robert Wilson’s production of *Peer Gynt*. She did not claim that Wilson was influenced by Heidegger, but she saw a relevant connection between Heidegger’s philosophy and Wilson’s work (2005, 20). As in my case, I don’t think Anders T. Andersen was influenced by Heidegger when he produced *John Gabriel Borkman* but I see a relation between his production and Heidegger’s philosophy. I cannot, however, apply the same method as Storli Andersen. She followed the whole production process of Wilson from the very first production meeting and during the later performances. I have not followed the working process of Anders T. Andersen’s *John Gabriel Borkman* production and have only seen one performance.

Marinette Grimbeek’s master's thesis “Homes for human beings – A spatial reading of Ibsen's *The Master Builder*” (2007) has also a topic relevant for my thesis. Grimbeek argued, that “the spatiality of the play is to a large extent dominated by the image of the house” (2007, 12). I do agree with that, but I aim to write about something quite different than her as she focuses on space and my focus is on a theatre performance and philosophical approaches.

**How will I answer my questions and support my claims?**

To answer my questions I will base my thesis on the same pattern as Anette Storli Andersen uses in her article «Robert Wilson’s *Peer Gynt* - just a Monumental event? » (2007). I start with a performance of *John Gabriel Borkman* in Skien, which for me developed some existential meaning in Ibsen on the house and home concepts associated to Heidegger and sociological theories related to Heidegger. Storli Andersen’s pattern is relevant as she starts

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4 She refers to *The Master Builder*
from a concrete example of a staging that gives meaning to a reading of Ibsen. She analyses Wilson’s performance with Errol Durbach’s article «The Modernist Malaise; “Nichts og ingenting” at the Core of Ibsen’s Onion» (1994) as her point of departure. Durbach uses himself Heidegger’s philosophy and the concept of “Being-in-the-world”. Like Storli Andersen, using Durbach’s article to make a link between Heidegger and Wilson's staging of Peer Gynt, I will use Sandberg's articles (2001 and 2007) and his book (2015) to make a link between Heidegger and Anders T. Andersen's staging of John Gabriel Borkman. Like Storli Andersen, I will start with the concrete elements I saw on stage to go to a deeper philosophical questioning using relevant theories and linking theatre to philosophy.

Using philosophical theories, I will on the one hand define house/home in positive terms with Gaston Bachelard’s La poétique de l’espace (1992) and then question the idea of the house with the couple Derrida/Heidegger. Further on, this leads to the philosophical concepts das Unheimliche and Being-in-the-world. Freud's uncanny can be a starting point to introduce the concept of das Unheimliche. Jacques Derrida's work will be of a great help since I can read them in my mother tongue and the French philosopher was hugely inspired by Heidegger. Derrida’s own philosophy is based on a discussion of German concepts in philosophy. He devoted a book to Heidegger De l'esprit. Heidegger et la question (1987) and his works be a solid base to understand Heidegger's philosophy. Derrida’s work Demeure (1998) is particularly interesting for my topic as it deals with the old French word demeure and the closely related verb demeurer means “to remain, to dwell” but it is also related to the verb mourir “to die”. I will return on this point later in the thesis.

**Design of the thesis**

In the first chapter, I will support my claim that Ibsen's works have an existential dimension on the house and home concept. By using Anthony Vidler’s book The architectural uncanny. Essays on the modern unhomely (1992), Sandberg’s book (2015) and articles (2001, 2007) as well as Mark Wigley’s book The architecture of deconstruction: Derrida’s haunt (1993), I will explain Uncanniness - das Unheimliche - in my understanding of Heidegger’s philosophy, as the basic kind of Being-in-the-world. Then, I will look closely at Anders T. Andersen’s John Gabriel Borkman production. In this thesis, I will explore the concept of house and home mainly in writings on Heidegger and Derrida’s house philosophy and as well as Gaston
Bachelard’s phenomenologist approach of the house.

I will explain in the second chapter, through Heidegger, why Anders T. Andersen was provoked by Ostermeier’s version of *John Gabriel Borkman*. Andersen claims that Ostermeier had no sub-text – or in other words – no existential dimension. I will then develop why I was intrigued by his production – because it had an existential dimension/perspective on the home/house-relation. The philosophical perspective will bring an important contribution to explain the concept of home and house. Can we say that Ibsen’s characters do feel at home at all? And why? Heidegger's concept will be extremely important in my reading. Although originally a Freudian concept, I will use the concept uncanny (*heimlich/unheimlich*), through a metaphysical perspective with the couple Heidegger/Derrida. I am aware that *das Unheimliche* – as “the uncanny” – is a concept used by different authors and in different contexts, but I will mainly use Heidegger on this point. In this second chapter, I will not claim that Anders T. Andersen’s staging of *John Gabriel Borkman* is based on Heidegger’s philosophy, but that his *John Gabriel Borkman* production is structurally similar to Heidegger’s concept of *das Unheimliche*. Anders T. Andersen did not work on the house versus home consciously.

The existential problem of *das Unheimliche* which Sandberg points out in Ibsen's drama, is not a result of Anders T. Andersen’s reading of the play *John Gabriel Borkman*, but a result of the structure - of modernity. Modernity and late modernity will be discussed thoroughly with Richard Sennett (*The fall of public man*, 1977), Anthony Giddens (*The consequences of modernity*, 1990 and *Modernity and self-identity*, 1991) and Hannah Arendt (*The human condition*, 1958). The sociological perspectives will place *John Gabriel Borkman* in its historical context, namely modernity. At Ibsen's time, the wellness of a home was a very important social matter for the bourgeoisie. The success you had in the public area should be reflected in the intimate sphere. Of course there is a shift from Ibsen to Andersen, and in this sense I should be able to discuss further on in my thesis that no sex, no gender, no social position can escape the house/home conflict.

By discussing these three chapters, I will attempt to show that what Ibsen expressed in the text

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5 I am not choosing a psycho-analytical perspective in the thesis, though I am aware that is where the uncanny is rooted from.
was shown concretely and physically through Anders T. Andersen's production of *John Gabriel Borkman*.

**Limitations of the thesis**

If one wants to treat the house in Ibsen’s plays, it has to be done by the dialectic concepts of home/house. Sandberg grounds his essay «The architecture of forgetting» (2007) on biographical research on Ibsen. In my thesis I do voluntary omit this part as I do not wish to use Ibsen’s biography and discuss in which grade it may or may not have influenced his work. I will try as much as possible to stay away from the possible intentions of the author. Although I do not want to have a feminist perspective, I cannot help pointing out that the female characters are those who are making the contrast between house and home in Ibsen's texts. On the contrary, I am interested in manhood in *John Gabriel Borkman* which I will briefly develop in a sub-part based on Fredrik Engelstad (1994) and Chengzou He (2008). In his article «The defeat of failure and the failure of success gender roles and images of the male in Henrik Ibsen’s last four plays», Engelstad (1994) points out that Ibsen also redefines male roles when he redefines female gender roles. Solness, Allmers, Borkman and Rubek have in common “the fate of failing their own projects”.

I specifically selected *John Gabriel Borkman* from Ibsen’s plays because of Anders T. Andersen’s production that I saw in Skien. I thought seeing the performance live placed me in a better position to work on it on this thesis. I will, however, write more about it as a production than a performance as I saw it almost three years ago, and analysing a performance implies a more direct direction to it.

This thesis builds on different concepts such as house and home, the uncanny or again modernity. These concepts will be developed in the body of the thesis under different chapters and/or parts. In order to provide the reader with a basic understanding of the terms house and home – as they are in title of the thesis, I give here basic definitions (that will be later discussed) taken from the Oxford English Dictionary and the Oxford dictionaries. According to the Oxford English Dictionary, the house is either “a building for habitation, and related senses or a building for human habitation, typically and historically one that is the ordinary place of residence”. This last definition offers to look for the term “Home”. In the Oxford Dictionaries, house is “a building for human habitation, especially one that consists of a
ground floor and one more upper storeys. It is, in this definition the people living in a house, a household.” In the Oxford English dictionary, home is “the place where a person or animal dwells. It is also a landed property, an estate, a manor”. In the Oxford Dictionaries, house is “the place where one lives permanently, especially as a member of a family or household. Home is also the family or social unit occupying a permanent residence.”

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6 Consulted on-line on the 1st of May 2015
Chapter 1

From Sandberg to Heidegger: Existential dimension in Ibsen’s work on the house/home concepts

We would like only, for once, to get to where we are already.
- Martin Heidegger, Language

In this first part, I will support my claim that Ibsen's works have an existential dimension on the house/home concepts through architecture, drawing on Anthony Vidler and Mark Sandberg’s works mainly, and relate it to Heidegger's concepts of heimlich/das Unheimliche.

1.1 House and home: architectural roots

Since I will discuss the notion of house, I will first focus to architecture in this chapter. Today, Sandberg seems to play the role of a key figure in the discussion of house and home in Ibsen’s works. His work will be a good start for my thesis as it provides solid basis and allows a discussion on this topic.

In his articles «The architecture of forgetting» (2007) and «Ibsen and the mimetic home of modernity» (2001), Sandberg approaches the terms of heimlich and unheimlich, terms which are always repeated when reading on house and home. It is, however, the case that Sandberg’s perspective on heimlich/unheimlich remains quite unclear. I will trace back the origins of heimlich/unheimlich as concepts created by Freud and which was later developed in Heidegger’s philosophy. I agree with Sandberg’s thinking and his linking of home/house to exile. But what I would like to explore, however, is the “inner-exile” of the characters. How the dialectic heimlich/unheimlich, resulting in the uncanny7 – is experienced by Ibsen’s characters? I will use the above-mentioned articles to further develop the challenges of house/home in Ibsen today. There is a strong philosophical thought behind the concept of

7 The uncanny will be discussed in the last part of the chapter.
house and home. This is why I will read Ibsen with a philosophical perspective, especially through Heidegger's “Being-in-the-world”. While Sandberg links very cleverly and in depth the loss of home to (modern) architecture, I relate this “loss” – if there is one – to a feeling, which is the result from social changes. Modern architecture is only being a part of these social changes.

In his article «Ibsen and the mimetic home of modernity» (2001) Mark Sandberg makes very interesting parallels between the absence of home in Ibsen’s houses and architectural metaphors. Why “loss of home”? When did they actually have a home? I am concerned about the condition prior to the loss of a home. Where are we “at home”? It is actually very relevant to note the architectural metaphors in Ibsen’s plays. Buildings often give their names to Ibsen’s plays: The Pillars of Society, A Doll’s house, Rosmersholm to name a few, whilst other plays such as The Master Builder and Ghosts concern building projects.

Sandberg focuses on the buildings mentioned in the dialogues in John Gabriel Borkman – especially “the pillar of shame”. But the structure of the house itself already says a lot about the use of the space and Ibsen’s abilities to give meaning and information about the characters through inside architecture. As Sandberg (2007, 5) notes “Ibsen choses mostly negative notions of confinement”. Sandberg does not seem so focused on the self and the relation between house/self as we can find in philosophy and in particular through the language. Nor does he go in details of Heidegger’s philosophy, but I consider Sandberg’s contribution as an important link with house/home and Ibsen.

John Gabriel Borkman is really interesting when it comes to the centrality of the house and how the building is used to give meaning in the play. Borkman, the main character, incarcerates himself voluntary in a house he no longer owns after being imprisoned for a crime he committed. Sandberg focuses actually on the building mentioned in the dialogues and not on the actual structure of the house as it is presented in Ibsen’s play. This is really interesting that the most obvious architectural form of the play is put aside in favour of a metaphorical building only mentioned in the dialogues. I got really intrigued by the way these characters live in this house, as how they are structurally presented as it does not seem realistic. Is it possible to incarcerate yourself (unless you are mentally sick) and is it possible

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8 Sandberg actually sees it as a loss. I will question later in thesis in which extent we can talk about a “loss”
for two people to live in the same house without ever meeting each other? The house seems to be a space of architectural exclusion resembling a physical cage which could represent the struggle between the restrictions of society and the freedom of the individual.

Sandberg’s references to architecture are informative and contextualize Ibsen in his time and place. He has a really interesting architectural approach. In my thesis, however, I will focus instead on a philosophical/existential approach in order to understand this point from a contemporary angle. I will not look at house/home at Ibsen’s time but at the challenges we face in understanding and staging house/home in Ibsen today. My aim is to show the relevance of Ibsen today, in our contemporary society. Reading Ibsen whilst considering Heidegger’s philosophy helps to bring a contemporary perspective on the house/home. Alongside Heidegger, Anthony Vidler will provide a strong foundation to build my thesis on with the most recent book written on the modern uncanny helping to understand uncanniness in modern architecture. However my main approach, in this first part, is philosophical and based on Heidegger, Derrida and Bachelard in order to understand all the challenges in the concept of the house. Sandberg writes about a certain period of time while I write about another. My point is not to understand Ibsen in his own time but to demonstrate the relevance of one of his recurrent themes for us. Sandberg mentions the existential perspective but does not develop it. I want to present house/home in Ibsen from an existential perspective through the concept of house and home in philosophy.

It does not mean that I do not have to mention the architectural perspective, but I will not develop it because Sandberg’s work is quite complete. Sandberg does not mention Heidegger even though he mentions the concept of being-in-the-world in his article «The architecture of forgetting», but he is a trustful Ibsen scholar and as Sandberg has already pointed out the house/home in Ibsen, I have an academic support to write a whole thesis on that topic. Why is house/home in Ibsen still challenging today? Modernity has changed our way to be in the world. That is why I must also use a sociological approach, which will be the main perspective in the third chapter. I will also see the changes in modern society through the concepts of heimlich/unheimlich. In modernity all the spheres are becoming unfamiliar starting with the structure of the family and Ibsen’s dramas are all about family and heritage. I use Sandberg to discuss and to go further on an existential perspective. Modernity has
consequences and the result is that the whole human condition is affected. Ibsen will be understood as an early sociologist\(^9\) and thinker.

Vidler has interesting theories on the uncanny on modern architecture. Most of his book (*The Architectural Uncanny. Essays in the Modern Unhomely*, 1992) considers examples on houses and what they represent. He actually shows the relevance on studying houses to understand uncanniness and modern architecture. The constant changes in the relation between house and home lead to a general questioning on social and individual alienation through the theme of the uncanny (1992, ix). Vidler continues by highlighting that the relationship between the psychological and physical home is tricky (xi) and claims that the past is inscribed in houses. The past of a house is like the memories of the brain/mind. If there were no past/memories, we wouldn’t be so preoccupied to live in the present, but the present time exists only in relation to the past. There is a present because there is a past (64).

In his book, *Ibsen's Houses. Architectural Metaphor and the Modern Uncanny*, Sandberg (2015) seems to agree on Vidler’s thinking that houses are a representation of our memories. He highlights that houses lead to feelings of nostalgia: “We can view it (home) as an object of compensatory desire; as nostalgia for history and origin; and as belief, against mounting evidence to the contrary, in the possibility of secure dwelling” (Sandberg 2015, 20). Sandberg, along with Vidler, provides the house with the power of the past. He continues by writing that modernity makes us think “of home as the deceptive façade rather than as a secure emotional anchor” (Sandberg 2015, 20). Later in the book Sandberg specifies this point when he claims that Ibsen’s process is “the dislodging of home from its privileged association with domestic ideals and the testing of “home” as a modern alternative, a more contemporary and contingent form of inhabitation” (2015, 85). Even though Sandberg seems to make a distinction between “house” and “home”, he actually sticks to his idea of a whole concept when he writes: “Ibsen’s treatment of home and house was an extended experiment that deconstructed the most “natural” domestic ideologies of the late nineteenth century and tested the viability of his opponent’s positions” (86). But somehow, Sandberg hints that “home” is much more complex than that it seems to be: “Several of Ibsen’s characters see a distinct advantage in the neutral ground provided by the term “house”, a way of defending oneself from the negative

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\(^9\) Ibsen’s son, Sigurd, was 1896-97 actually the first to give lectures on sociology at the University of Kristiania (Oslo), but he was not accepted by the university commission to be the first professor of sociology in Norway (https://nbl.snl.no/Sigurd_Ibsen).
encumbrances of ‘home’” (2015, 87). Sandberg makes a very interesting comment on what seems to be Ibsen’s vision of “home”:

Ibsen suggests in his plays that the notion of a true or “proper” home was a borrowed concept, an image, an idea, or an assumption about ideal families that did not proceed from real experience. His idea is that talk of a true home correlates directly with not feeling at home; in other words, whatever a true home is, it is not this – true homes are always elsewhere (Sandberg 2015, 87).

As I understand this quotation, Sandberg says that for Ibsen, home was only an idea based on what an ideal family should be, without it ever existing. The ideal family is an illusion. Ibsen’s home is actually a place where the feeling of not being at home appears. In that sense, Sandberg concludes that a “true home” is not what is presented in Ibsen. This is a very interesting point as I will be discussing the nature of home. Is “home” what we think it is? Does home come from the ideal family? Sandberg does not dissociate home from family, as if the nature of the family makes a home a “home”. I have questioned the nature of home and the power of language – its limits being implicated – and the next parts will therefore present “house and home” in philosophy and attempt to make a distinction between the two concepts.

### 1.2 House and home in philosophy

For a long time I have been associating house to home and home to house, thinking of these as a whole and finding the concepts of house and home paradoxical. Then it occurred to me that there was probably something more than one concept behind that. As a result, I always asked myself: Why does the idea and the image of the concept not match? I then started to change my approach and think of “house” and “home” as possibly two different things. As I kept on reading on this matter, it became obvious that home was not a fixed concept or idea and that there was more to be found. At the same time, “home” does not seem to be dissociated from “house” which brought me to question house as well.

Home and house in positive terms will be studied on one side, and then in more negative terms with both Heidegger (*unheimlich*) and Derrida, whose philosophy was clearly influenced by Heidegger. Heidegger and Derrida’s house/home are explained by Mark Wigley. Bachelard’s thinking presents house as a comforting space (namely home) whilst Derrida questions the whole concept of home and sees it as a place for anguish. So anxiety
would be attributed to home, the opposite approach to Bachelard. But the two approaches seem to agree that home is where the self is constructed.

1.2.1 House and home in positive terms

The ambiguity of defining “house and home” is to be found both in literature and philosophy. As concepts, it seems as though they cannot be studied apart from their contexts. As American critic and writer Akiko Busch (2003) wrote in her book *Geography of Home: Writings on Where We Live*: “There are times when the very idea of home seems an impossible proposition. There are other times when our home express infinite possibilities, when they reflect exactly who we are and what we might be” (14).

Gaston Bachelard’s *La poétique de l’espace* (1994) is particularly relevant for my topic as this book presents a phenomenologist approach of the house. It describes the house as constitutive of our thoughts and memories. Bachelard emphasizes that *la rêverie* (daydreaming) is central for humans in order to be able to integrate their past, a past, in their existence.

French philosopher Gaston Bachelard (1994) sees in the problematization of the poetic of the house an answer on how to picture intimacy (18). Bachelard actually questions the material house to understand the human mind. He sees infinite possibilities in the structure of the house and the different rooms:

> Les questions abondent : comment des chambres secrètes, des chambres disparues se constituent-elles en demeures pour un passé inoubliable ? Où et comment le repos trouve-t-il des situations privilégiées ? Comment les refuges éphémères et les abris occasionnels reçoivent-ils parfois, de nos rêveries intimes, des valeurs qui n’ont aucune base objective ? (Bachelard 1994, 18)

For him, the image of the house reflects a principle of psychological integration. He goes on: « Examinée dans les horizons théoriques les plus divers, il semble que l’image de la maison devienne la topographie de notre être intime. » I understand here that he sees the metaphorical space of home as a representation of the self.

For Bachelard there is some evidence of using the house to analyze the human soul:

> Mais, du fait même qu’elle se développe si aisément, il y a un sens à prendre la maison comme un instrument d’analyse pour l’âme humaine. […] Non seulement nos souvenirs, mais nos oubliès sont « logés ». Notre inconscient est « logé ». Notre âme est
The house appears as a space where our memories are host and fundamental for the mind to locate its past. For Bachelard, our memories and our unconscious are “housed” in the soul. In other words, the soul is like a house in which we can meet the unconscious in one room, the memories in another. Bachelard goes on to associate intimacy to the house. The house and intimacy seem to be inseparable and Bachelard insists on the relevance of studying home to understand the self: “Pour une étude phénoménologique des valeurs de l’intimité, de l’espace intérieur, la maison est, de toute évidence, un être privilégié, à condition, bien entendu, de prendre la maison à la fois dans son unité et sa complexité en essayant d’en intégrer toutes les valeurs particulières dans une valeur fondamentale. ». The way I understand it, Bachelard means that the house is a good medium to analyse the being but it has to be studied in its whole and its complexity. No room should be forgotten (23). He points out the power of images that the house emanates: “une sorte d’attraction d’images concentre les images autour de la maison”. Bachelard insists on the way houses translate the essence of the being:

A travers les souvenirs de toutes les maisons où nous avons trouvé l’abris, par-delà toutes les maisons que nous avons rêvé habiter, peut-on dégager une essence intime et concrète qui soit une justification de la valeur singulière de toutes nos images d’intimité protégée ? Voilà le problème central. (Bachelard 1994, 23)

Bachelard asks that studying the houses we lived in, more than studying the houses we dream to inhabit, allows us to free an inner and concrete essence that explains the value of our pictures of intimacy. For Bachelard, the house protects intimacy; therefore studying the house is a way to understand the human soul. He insists on the fact that it is not a question of describing houses in detail and explaining why they are cozy:

[… ] il ne s’agit pas de décrire des maisons, d’en détailler les aspects pittoresques et d’en analyser les raisons de confort. Il faut, tout au contraire, dépasser les problèmes de la description – que cette description soit objective ou subjective, c’est-à-dire qu’elle dise des faits ou des impressions – pour atteindre les vertus premières, celles où se révèle une adhésion, en quelque manière, native à la fonction première d’habiter (Bachelard 1994, 24).

We have to exceed details of description too, whether it is objective or subjective, if we want to access to the original function of the house, which is to provide the being with a place to dwell.

On the one hand, Bachelard seems to present home as a metaphor of happiness but on the other hand, this perspective on home does not seem to work at all with Ibsen’s plays. I chose
to develop on Bachelard’s theory on houses because it explains why “home” is often thought of as “cozy” and why “house and home” seems for many to be conflicted concepts. As in Ibsen, houses end up not at all appearing in the way Bachelard describes them and Ibsen seems to present them as the opposite of happiness. Aline Solness lost her kids and she will never be happy anymore. Aline actually misses her dolls, not her kids. She is thus longing for something that is already dead. The house and its ownership are discussed in Borkman. The house is absolutely central in a conflict and it is a link between the characters as they all gravitate around it. The sisters Ella and Gunhild in Borkman argue about the ownership of the house. Erhart, Borkman and Gunhild’s son just wants to get away from the house. One can say that it is absolutely not how we describe a happy place and therefore questions the nature of house and home. We could say that Ibsen’s characters express a deep sense of inner exile from within their own homes as it is not experienced as comforting and happy place.

In a completely different field, the relation between the concept, idea of the concept, image of the concept and the inaccuracy of language (through metaphors) are again being discussed. Wim Dekkers (2011) wrote about the importance of “home” in dementia care. He based his article «Dwelling, House and Home: Towards a Home-Led Perspective on Dementia Care» on predominant phenomenologists like Heidegger and Bachelard. “Heidegger […], Bachelard […] belong to those phenomenological philosophers, who have given home a central place in their writings” (2011, 293). Dekkers also points out the ambivalence of home. It is not a fixed concept and can represent: (1) one’s own house (2) one’s own body (3) psychological environment (4) spiritual dimension, in particular, the origin of human existence (292).

Even though his field has originally nothing to do with Ibsen, it is really interesting to see that the house/home is common to completely different fields and that can help understand each other. Dekkers claims that being a person means to be contextualized:

The SEA-view (Situated-Embodied-Agent view) of the human person means that to be a person is to be situated in a culture that has its own traditions and norms, in a personal history that includes one’s wishes and psychological make-up, and within the social context of family, friends, and neighbours. To be a person is also to be an embodied agent (Dekkers 2011, 292).

Dekkers also insists on a very interesting point: that beyond the context a person lives in, a person is first of all an embodied agent. This point of Dekker is vital for the rest of the thesis, as where we actually are at home is discussed. He then goes on with the relevance of studying house and home:
In my view, it is worthwhile to specifically focus on house and home as an exemplary way of describing the human’s being spatiality, its lifeworld, and the human condition as such. [...] Our experience of being at home in a bodily way is essential to our nature as being in the world (292).

In this quotation, I understand that Dekkers points out that we are first at home in our body, and that it is important to experience the body as our primary home in order to be able to experience ourselves as being in the world. Bachelard saw the human soul as the house of memories but Dekkers goes even further in presenting the being in a material way. Being a person is having a body. A person is not only a mind, it is concrete.

We will now see in the next part that house has not always been thought of in positive terms.

1.2.2 House and home in negative terms with Heidegger and Derrida

Why choose Heidegger and Derrida to discuss house and home? First, the theme of the uncanny - heimlich/unheimlich - comes out of house and home in Ibsen. It seems like there is no study of house and home without heimlich/unheimlich and this is one of the fundaments of Heidegger’s philosophy. Therefore, it seems relevant to go back to the origins of the uncanny. Heidegger is not chosen randomly. When it comes to Derrida, his philosophy was largely and openly inspired by Heidegger’s philosophy, which provides us with another perspective to better understand and discuss Heidegger’s work.

The figure of the house is of great importance in both Derrida and Heidegger’s philosophy, and this is why I use them both. They question the house and the Being, which is what interests me in Ibsen for this thesis. Derrida departs from Heidegger in his thinking of the house but Heidegger provides Derrida with a solid ground to discuss it. Thus, without Heidegger’s house there would not be a Derrida’s house.

Mark Wigley (1993) has written a, for me and for my topic, extremely relevant book, The architecture of deconstruction: Derrida's haunt, about Derrida’s philosophy based on architecture. It actually also says a lot on Heidegger’s philosophy as well as Derrida founded a very important part of his philosophy in reaction to Heidegger’s thinking. Wigley is also precise on where the two philosophers share common thinking and where they depart from each other. Wigley’s book, especially the chapter “The domestication of the house” is a great
source for my project. Here, Wigley redefines the question of deconstruction and architecture. This work is not only relevant because it offers a dialogue between Derrida and Heidegger but also because it presents a passionate discussion on the house and housing through both Derrida's and Heidegger's philosophy. Wigley (1993) has emphasized the reference to the structure of the house that Heidegger makes in late work about language which, by extension, interrogates the relation house and language as well.

Architecture is usually defined as space but here this “evidence” is questioned. The space of the house taking as such, and the question “can it be such as a space of the house?” reveals a deeper condition from which we have been estranged. Heidegger’s philosophy departs from other thinking on modern life. It points out that the process of estrangement (“alienation”) is rooted in ancient times and manifests itself in modernity. The home is seen as a space of estrangement and therefore it houses the original homelessness. So to be at home in the house is actually to be homeless since the house is an alienating space (Wigley 1993, 98).

As mentioned by Wigley (1993, 100), Derrida identifies the figure of the house as one of the main objects in Heidegger’s work and uses it to ground his own theory. Heidegger actually departs from a traditional philosophy by thinking about house in different terms. Derrida supports his claim that Heidegger actually stays in the field of metaphysics when using a series of metaphors that enclose the house. He also underlines the use of metaphors in Heidegger’s discourse, where we find a “metaphorics of proximity”. This is the result of a “metaphorics associating the proximity of Being with the values of neighboring, shelter, house, service, guard, voice, and listening”. It shows how important the choice of words and metaphors are for producing meanings. Being is central in Heidegger’s philosophy and Derrida\(^\text{10}\) points out that the meaning of Being is produced through a metaphorical insistence (Cited in Wigley 1993, 100):

> By making the house thematic, Heidegger identifies the figure that organizes the tradition he attempts to dismantle, but in the end he fails to dismantle the house. On the contrary, he repeatedly advocates a return to it, a withdrawal to the primal shelter, the site of unmediated presence, in order to take refuge from the modern – which is to say technological – age of representation that is condemned inasmuch as it produces a generalized “homelessness” (Wigley 1993,100).

\(^{10}\) Jacques Derrida, *Letter on Humanism*, cited in Wigley p. 100
Does Heidegger try to deconstruct the house? Wigley argues that Heidegger fails to do so. Heidegger makes house become a theme in philosophy by identifying it. Wigley argues that Heidegger fails to deconstruct the house by always coming back to it. Here the modern age is associated with technology. According to Wigley, Heidegger always returns to the house as our first refuge from the modern age and introduces “homelessness” in modern times.

Does Heidegger try to not think of the house as a space of interiors? Wigley (1993) claims that Heidegger rejects the traditional sense of the house, and that Heideggers wants to deconstruct the house but he actually does the opposite. Heidegger dismisses “the modern sense of house as a special interior” (101). Wigley points out the strong use of the house in philosophy to illustrate concepts.

In such involuted circulations between concepts and the image of a house, which regularly punctuate the tradition of philosophy, the sense of the house as an interior never goes away, even in Heidegger’s texts, despite their insistent attempt to discard it. The house is always first understood as the most primitive drawing of a line that acts as a mechanism of domestication. It is as the paradigm of interiority that the house is indispensable to philosophy, establishing the distinction between the interiority of presence and the exteriority of representation on which the discourse depends (Wigley 1993, 104).

Philosophy uses the house to picture exterior/interior. Is the house assimilated to domestication as familiar interior, or is domestication automatically situated in the house in a mode of thinking? Wigley underlines here the importance of house for philosophy, and this shows that my way to treat the house in Ibsen though a philosophical perspective, is justifiable. It is by the metaphor of the house that philosophy can discuss interiority and exteriority through language. House is a particular example of interiority and it is language that allows us to make a distinction between the inside and the outside of the house. Philosophy needs language to study house as a concept.

According to Wigley (1993, 107), Derrida implicitly and indirectly questions the word “house” in itself by questioning the language. Heidegger actually highlights the question of the meaning of the house which provides Derrida with a solid ground to discuss it. But Derrida defers from Heidegger when he sees that the apparent structure of the house hides an

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11 In the last chapter, I aim to define what modernity is.

12 Reference to Plato and Heidegger’s techne “to be entirely at home”
orderly domestic violence. This violence restrains a transgression that Derrida places implicitly in the structure of the house.

We can then go to the questioning of “did home ever exist?” Wigley underlines that in order to question house in Derrida’s work means to first question the “idea of the house”. Has Erhart, or any other of Ibsen’s characters ever felt familiar with their environment? Maybe Aline who misses her family house? It seems like the young generation – the children – did not have the chance to experience something familiar where they were supposed. It could be explained by: “The uncanny is literally a 'not-being-at-home', an alienation from the house experienced within it” (Wigley 1993, 110).

This because we meet the uncanny in houses that Dekkers also emphasize the need to distinguish the concept of house from the concept of home to understand the relation between them:

   Although “home” and “house” have often been used interchangeably, it makes sense to make a distinction between the two concepts. The notion of home emphasizes much more than the notion of house its psychological significance to individuals and its cultural, normative, and moral meaning (Dekkers 2011, 296).

Following Derrida on this thinking, Dekkers claims that we have to separate house from home and home from house in order to understand and question the concepts as such. As I understand Dekkers, individuals put in home more emotional and subjective meaning than in house. Home is therefore related to a feeling. This is why the concept of home an individual has should be contextualized to be understood.

Home and house appear then as two different concepts. Instead of questioning “house and home”, philosophy questions “house” and “home” as two separate entities.

1.2.3 Home as a place to understand the self

To continue on the distinction between “house” and “home”, it seems important to point out the use of metaphors to make ideas familiar. In fact, it underlines the importance of language as a system of integration. Dekkers writes about the term “home”, and emphasises that it is a concept used in different domains related to the study of the being. He points out that home is mostly used as a metaphor. We use the term home in our narratives about our lives, but in a
metaphorical way to make our experiences understandable for ourselves, even though the experiences are not necessarily related. Dekkers writes that:

Metaphors may help us to construct a conceptual image of matters, affairs, and situations that are difficult to describe in a more rational way. Metaphors are pervasive, not only in everyday language and thought, but also in action and everyday activities. We find ourselves using metaphors because they already mean something to us and to those around us (Dekkers 2011, 291).

The concept “home” in language is something everyone can relate to, and it can be used to explain and compare our experiences in an understandable way. Dekkers also points out that home is actually a transitional concept. Homes, more than anything, are symbolic spaces. We can say that “to be at home is to be familiar with things”. “Being at home” means something else than the more concrete “staying at home.” And most of us would say that “being in the world” is a more fundamental notion than being at home” (Dekkers, 291).

Along with Dekkers, Busch claims that home has to be placed in a context to be understood. Home is changing all the time. Once again, there is no fixed definition of home as a concept. But clearly, home is always linked to our relation to the familiar.

So any definition of home today must consider how new attitudes and values come up against the familiar; how our needs are served by what we know, as well as by what we remember. That nostalgia plays a part in the way we structure our homes and lives […] (Busch 2003, 20).

Like Bachelard, Busch insists on the fact that by maintaining our memories we also maintain our concept of home in our lives. Being at home is a fundamental aspect of human existence. Home is social context. Home is a place to understand our self. In fact, Dekkers develops how important the relation to “home” is for a human subject and how the human mind constructs its self in relation to it: “The idea of home is connected to many other notions such as: roots, house, environment, family, dwelling, intimacy, privacy, protection, security, comfort, sacredness, and paradise” (Dekkers 2011, 292).

1.3 Heidegger and Derrida’s houses of language

The house is a major figure in Derrida’s work. The French philosopher uses the metaphor of the house to write about language: We can always question the house, its foundations and groundings, but what is inside will remain. We can question the foundations of the house “without disturbing its capacity to house” (Wigley 1993, 100).
The house cannot be minimized to a metaphor. It is not only a matter of language and how we picture ideas. The house, Wigley argues (106), belongs to philosophy as it creates the sense of interior on which the metaphysical tradition is based. House and metaphysics are bound to each other. Wigley also says that the necessity of a secure house is implicitly addressed by the necessity of stable construction. The house is not only a metaphor and cannot be limited to that. The house opens on metaphysics.

As mentioned earlier, Wigley (106) points out that without being an obvious questioned object, the house is recurrent in Derrida’s texts. Functioning as a subtext, the house is used in different frameworks and with parsimony. The traditional figure of an edifice built on solid ground always becomes a secure domestic cage. Domesticating the unruly play of representations is achieved by retaining them as to ground a structure is like building a house. He goes on to say that Derrida makes multiple but intermittent references to the edifice and identifies speech as structural while writing would be superstructure. His references to the house identify speech as inside the house, whereas writing is outside (106).

By being able to define inside and outside, the house domesticates. According to Derrida, the logic of the house organizes the “outside” of it and makes therefore the outside remain inside the house. “By being placed outside, the other is placed, domesticated, kept inside. To be excluded is to be subjected to a certain domestic violence that is both organized and veiled by metaphysics” (Wigley 107).

Wigley (109) argues that the uncanniness behind and of the familiar is mainly responsible for the alienation of social life. According to Wigley, the house is a very ambivalent space:

It is because the house conceals the unhomeliness that constitutes it that the “mere” occupation of a house, which is to say the acceptance of its representation of interior, can never be authentic dwelling. Those “residing” in the home – “the merely casual possession of domestic things and the inner life” – are not at home. Home is precisely the place where the essence of home is most concealed (Wigley 1993, 114).

There, Wigley underlines the whole paradox between house and home. Based on Heidegger and Derrida’s philosophy, Wigley deconstructs the most common sense of home and shows why the concept has to be re-thought. The way I read Wigley, I understand that he means that house is uncanniness in itself because it is at the same time both familiar and unfamiliar. We picture the house as where home is hosted, but actually the home exists without the house.
Further, Wigley considers the home as something more than being the concrete representation of being outside or inside a house: “Within the spatial interior there is another kind of interior, within which the essence of the home resides. The home is therefore ‘mysterious’ to those who occupy it: ‘proximity to the source is a mystery. To be at home is precisely to be at home with this irreducible mystery.” (1993, 114) According to Wigley, the house then seems to refer directly to the uncanny, which I will develop in the next part. Wigley seems to think that it is only distancing oneself from the home that we can understand it: “It is only the poet’s exile from the home that can establish its strange condition, the unfamiliarity of its apparently familiar enclosure” (114).

In the following quotation, Wigley discusses the idea of house and its image. Again, we find a limitation of the language on the idea of the concept and its image:

Philosophy familiar image of presence – the house – becomes doubly unfamiliar when it is no longer seen as an innocent image of innocence, separable from the arguments it is attached to (…). In this way, that which is most familiar becomes unfamiliar. The house is no longer the paradigm of presence. It is first and foremost a representation (albeit of the absence of representation). It is not just the house’s status as an institutionally produced and sustained image is simply exposed, but that the familiar itself becomes an image (Wigley 1993, 117).

The nature of house is being questioned in philosophy and consequently the image of house and its representation. Wigley points out that the house is the representation of the familiar and of home. If we question the concept of home and house, we are actually questioning the essence of the familiar and of the unfamiliar.

According to Wigley, Derrida deconstructs the house and the language:

To remove the metaphorical status of the house fundamentally displaces the tradition of metaphysics that maintains it as such. The whole economy turning around the house is disrupted. “Being,” that which is, by definition, nearest is no longer simply explained by the image of that which is nearest, the house. But, as Derrida points out, nor is the house to be simply explained by the study of Being. Both are made strange (Wigley 1993, 117).

While Bachelard saw in the house a foundation to study the being, Derrida claims that the house cannot be restricted to that. Derrida seems quite sceptical of the metaphor of the house whereas Bachelard gives a much more reliable meaning to it. Even though the link between house, law, economy, and family is pictured as something familiar, Derrida is placing this link within metaphysics, and in that way he sees an unfamiliar structure in what we picture as familiar:
The link between the house, law, economy, and family is an important theme throughout his work. The house is always invoked as the familiar abode, the abode of the family but equally the abode of the familiar. But although he repeatedly identifies the chain of house-economy-law-family with metaphysics, a familiar image that offers access to unfamiliar conceptual structure (Wigley 1993, 118).

Further, Wigley comments that Derrida follows Heidegger in the way that Derrida places the unfamiliarity of familiarity within metaphysics:

On the contrary the metaphysics is, if anything, a kind of metaphor of the family, the familiar means of access to the endlessly strange structure of the family. In this Heideggerian gesture, the very familiarity of the family is the product of metaphysics, which is no more than the institution of domestication itself. It is the violence of the “household” of metaphysics that produces the family in producing the image of individual subjects independent from the house whose interior they occupy (Wigley 1993, 118).

It is by the familiar that we gain access to the unfamiliar. This works as dialectic, one does not exist without the other. As I read it, Wigley means that Derrida follows Heidegger when he sees in the familiar space of the family the domestication itself. Are domestication and familiarity different? As a result of this, Wigley claims: “The house no longer houses. The paradigm of security becomes the site of the most radical insecurity – indeed, the very source of insecurity. Security becomes the uncanny effect of the repression of insecurity” (Wigley 118-119). Through Heidegger and Derrida the house as a secure space described by Bachelard is deconstructed. Lastly, Wigley comments on Derrida's writing: “It is important to note here that before it begins to speak of architecture, all of Derrida’s writing is a rethinking of interiority” (Wigley 1993, 120). This is why using Derrida to talk about home and house in Ibsen is relevant. Since home is associated to a subjective and mental experience it is question of interiority, and Derrida is a thinker of interiority.

In this first part, I have tried to study important philosophical theories on house and home that I see as relevant when applied to Ibsen’s houses. I have tried to present house and home from two perspectives, the positive thinking on house and a more negative thinking. I also pointed out, mainly with Derrida, that to question the concept of house and home we should first question “house” and “home” as two different concepts. Even though we find through philosophy different approaches on house and home, the concept seems to always appear as a relevant way to study the relation between language and the representation of an image, as well as providing a tool to study the human being.
Several times I have mentioned the term “uncanny” and promised to return to it. In this last part of this chapter, I aim to give a definition of the uncanny, which is an important concept in this thesis. Houses in Ibsen are often described as uncanny houses and thus, I want to focus somewhat on this concept. I wrote earlier about the familiar and the unfamiliar and will explain in the next part that the relation of the familiar with the unfamiliar leads to a discussion on the uncanny.

1.4 Uncanniness - das Unheimliche - the basic kind of Being-in-the-world

As I was writing earlier, I will now return to the subject of “uncanniness”. I will explain this topic by using Vidler’s theory on modern architecture, Freud’s original concept of the uncanny referred to in both Vidler and Sandberg, as well as Heidegger’s uncanniness as a mode of “being-in-the-world”.

In The Architectural Uncanny. Essays in the Modern Unhomely, Anthony Vidler (1992) goes back to the origin of “the uncanny”:

As articulated theoretically by Freud, the uncanny or unheimlich is rooted by etymology and usage in the environment of the domestic, or the heimlich, thereby opening up problems of identity around the Self, the other, the body and its absence (Vidler 1992, x).

Vidler claims that the uncanny is etymologically core to the domestic. Here again it is question of the domestic, defined as heimlich – “familiar” in English. Vilder links the question of the familiar to the question of our identity. In his book, Mark Sandberg gives a definition of Freud’s uncanny following Vidler, summarizing that etymologically heimlich is something that is secret and at the same time something familiar. The uncanny – das Unheimliche – is not about the familiar made strange but about the connection between them. “The uncanny is the reappearance of something formerly familiar that has been made strange through the process of repression” (Sandberg 2015, 19). The English translation, Sandberg says, misses the word “home” which is central in Freud’s concept. Something heimlich is more than something familiar, it invokes the notion of domestic comfort. By extension, Sandberg writes that things situated outside of the family then become unfamiliar. He also refers to Anthony Vidler’s book in which the author prefers the word “unhomely” to “uncanny” because it includes the word “home” as in German (Sandberg 2015, 20).
In his book on Derrida, Wigley presents a definition of the uncanny by Derrida inspired by Freud’s original concept:

In a footnote in “The Double Session”, Derrida identifies its account of undecidability as a “rereading” of Freud’s essay “The Uncanny” (Das Unheimliche) which, as is well known, describes the uneasy sense of the unfamiliar within the familiar, the unhomely within the home. Freud pays attention to the way the term for homely (heimliche) is defined both as “belonging to the house, not strange, familiar, tame, intimate, friendly, etc.” and as what seems at first to be its opposite: “concealed, kept from sight, so that others do not get to know of or about it, withheld from others (Wigley 1993, 108).

In these two definitions of the uncanny, Vidler and Wigley seem to agree. Derrida’s footnote goes on to say that “we find ourselves constantly being brought back to that text” (Wigley 1993, 108). Derrida points out that we always have to go back to Freud’s texts. We cannot talk about unheimlich without Freud. Therefore I chose to name it even though I am not choosing the psychoanalytical perspective of Freud’s uncanny.

For Derrida, according to Wigley (1993, 108-109), the family and the house, as constituting the familiar domain, are where violence occurs. So the original “familiar” space is always rendered “unfamiliar”. That is how the uncanny occurs, by locating the violence within the familiar. It makes the familiar unfamiliar. We can therefore question the language if family is made unfamiliar. Heidegger already presented the concept of the uncanny in 1925 as the fear that “one no longer feels at home in his most familiar environment” (Wigley 1993, 109).

Derrida, as Heidegger, places the uncanny within the house. The house hosts the uncanny. So Wigley (116) questions the house “in itself”, if we can ever talk about the house as such. Deconstructing the house would be to question the difference we make between the material and the metaphorical house. If we want to question architectural spaces through the literal house, Derrida suggests that we first question the idea of the house before questioning the house itself.

As we already mentioned with home, the uncanny is also developed in different fields. Vidler chose to talk about the uncanny “as a literary aesthetic, philosophical, and psychoanalytical concept” (1992, xi). Uncanny and home seem to never be thought of without each other. The symptomatic way in which Heidegger’s questioning of the familiar through a questioning of home, begins to slide into a questioning of the house can be seen when in his 1935 essay «The Origin of the Work of Art» he locates the uncanny danger within the very comfort of home:

We believe we are at home in the immediate circle of beings. That which is familiar, reliable, ordinary. Nevertheless, the clearing is pervaded by a constant concealment in
the double form of refusal and dissembling. At bottom the ordinary is not ordinary; it is extraordinary, uncanny. (Heidegger in Wigley 1993, 110)

Here we have another way of describing the dialectic between familiar and unfamiliar as Heidegger talks about the “ordinary” as being uncanny. The familiar is ordinary and the ordinary is uncanny. However, according to Wigley “Heidegger is not speaking about literal houses, that is, spatial enclosures erected on particular sites. Significantly, he always describes the home as a kind of interior, but it is the very sense of spatial interior that masks the interiority he is describing” (Wigley 1993, 111). To support his interpretation Wigley quotes Heidegger:

> We are taking the strange, the uncanny [das Unheimliche], as that which casts us out of the “homely,” i.e. the customary, familiar, secure. The unhomely [Unheimliche] prevents us from making ourselves at home and therein it is overpowering” (Heidegger in Wigley 1993, 112).

The uncanny is what throws us out of the familiar. The unfamiliar, the unhomely – das Unheimliche – is a stronger force that the familiar as is prevents us from feeling at home. Vidler underlines the differences between Freud’s and Heidegger’s use of the “unhomely”: “For Freud13, ‘unhomeliness’ was more than a simple sense of not belonging; it was the fundamental propensity of the familiar to turn on his owners. Suddenly to become defamiliarized, derealized, as if in a dream” (Vidler 1992, 7). While, “For Heidegger, the unheimlich, or what Hubert Dreyfus prefers to translate as ‘unsettledness’, was, at least in his formulation of 1927 a question of the fundamental condition of anxiety in the world – the way in which the world was experienced as ‘not a home’:

> In Dreyfus’s terms, not only is human being interpretation all the way down, so that our practices can never be grounded in human nature, God’s will, or the stricture of rationality, but this condition is one of such radical rootlessness that everyone feels fundamentally unsettled (unheimlich), that is, senses that human beings can’t never be at home in the world. This, according to Heidegger, is why we plunge into trying to make ourselves at home and secure” (Vidler 1992, 7–8).

The way I understand this quotation, human nature is fundamentally rootless as all individuals feel unfamiliar. This is why human beings are prevented from being at home in the world. Since Das Unheimliche – the uncanny – is actually the most basic way of being in the world, we always try to reach its opposite. Human beings try endlessly to be at home in the world, in other words, they are aiming for something unreachable.

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13 Essays on the uncanny published in 1919
Heidegger claims that the uncanny is always looking for the existence and the threat. The anxiety – resulting from the uncanny – appears in the most harmless situations. It is not something darker than that even though one usually feels uncanny more easily in the dark. In a significant way, there is nothing in the darkness “to see, although the world still and even more intrusive is “there”.

Following that point, Vidler (1992, x) claims that the uncanny is a metaphor for the fundamentally unliveable modern condition:

The uncanny emerged in the late nineteenth century as a special case of the modern diseases, from phobias to neuroses, variously described by psychoanalysts, psychologists, and philosophers as a distancing from reality forced by reality. Its space was still an interior, but how the interior of the mind, one that knew no bounds in projection or introversion (Vidler 1992, 6).

The way I understand Vidler, he follows Heidegger’s thinking on the paradox of human nature always trying to make itself at home. This impossible reach gave birth to an explanation of the modern diseases of the mind such as neuroses and phobias by psychoanalysis and philosophy. The uncanny actually takes place in the human mind, it is also something experienced inside of the being as we discussed earlier regarding the feeling of home.

To sum-up this first chapter, I would like to bring the attention on the fact that the uncanny is originally rooted to modernity – in the 19th century precisely and this is why we will later focus on modernity at that time in the third chapter. In the 19th century “The house provides an especially favoured site for uncanny disturbances: its apparent domesticity, its residue of family history and nostalgia, its role as the last and most intimate shelter of private comfort sharpened by contrast the terror of invasion by alien spirits” (Vidler 1992, 17). This point of Vidler is in accordance with Heidegger who sees the house as a place where the uncanny occurs and thanks to that, we learn better to-be-in-the-world. This is why I started the thesis with a point on uncanniness in architecture. We saw that uncanniness in architecture brings
automatically a discussion on the concept of the uncanny itself. By locating the uncanny within the house, Heidegger and Derrida’s philosophies lead to a questioning of the nature of home and its relation with the house.

This interest on the nature of the relation between house and home in Ibsen has been treated in Sandberg’s work. The next chapter will focus on a contemporary performance dealing with the theme of house and home in Ibsen: Anders T. Andersen’s John Gabriel Borkman. This thesis aims to outweigh the literary interpretation of the uncanny and turn the light on a specific production in order to understand house and home in Ibsen from a stage perspective.
Chapter 2
From Martin Heidegger to Anders T. Andersen

Le caractère angoissant de la mort signifie le besoin que l’homme a d’angoisse. Sans ce besoin la mort lui semblerait facile.
- George Bataille, L’expérience intérieure

This second chapter will begin with a description of the performance of Andersen’s John Gabriel Borkman seen in Skien in September 2014. This aims to provide the reader with a clear mental picture of the performance. In this first step, I will limit myself to a description. I will not make any interpretation or analysis so as to not influence my reader’s understanding. In the second part, I will look closer at Andersen’s John Gabriel Borkman. By doing so, I will analyze the elements described in the first part. This second part will be divided into sub-parts, each one focusing on some aspects or elements of Andersen’s John Gabriel Borkman. In the third part, I aim to give an understanding of Andersen’s production through Heidegger, read by Storli Andersen. Starting with Heidegger, this third part will also lead to Hannah Arendt and one of her main works The human condition (1958). Arendt was a former student of Heidegger so her philosophical thinking is influenced by him. I already mentioned that the uncanny is a concept related to the modern age.14 The human condition is a quite negative approach of the human being in modernity and introduces important concepts such as work and labor. Arendt believes that the public sphere is in decline in favor of the individual. Arendt’s dark vision of modernity is explained by her personal experience of the Second World War and totalitarianism in the 20th century. Of course Arendt can be criticized, but I find her relevant here, as she was already so interested in the separation of the public and the private in the early fifties. Things have changed a lot since her time, but she wrote in almost immediate reactions to WWII and the early years of the Cold war, and tries to understand how totalitarianism could actually occur. As already said, I did not pick Arendt out of other philosophers randomly, but because of her relation to Heidegger. I experience her as a continuity of Heidegger’s thinking, a thinking that she criticized and present with other aspects. In the fourth and last part, I will focus on the symbolic of the house in Ibsen.

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14 I will focus on modernity in the next chapter.
2.1 Description of the performance

Before I start with my analysis, I will describe the performance, starting with a description of the stage and the props (what is visible), but not describing so much the storyline in the four acts in detail as Andersen follows basically the same storyline as Ibsen. I will also describe the music and try to link it to the content and the storyline of the performance. This description is relevant to provide the reader of the thesis a clear picture of Andersen’s production. This is also meant as a foundation to build further on.

Andersen rewrote the text of *John Gabriel Borkman* into a contemporary version. The text is modernized in different ways. One way he has modernized it is by adjusting the speech style to how people talk today; for example, among other things he included a number of swearwords. From the Danish-Norwegian in Ibsen’s text, Andersen has made a pure Norwegian text with the use of Norwegian dialects. Andersen’s text of *John Gabriel Borkman* is also reduced in comparison to Ibsen’s text. He chose to divide the text into four relatively short acts, without making a difference in the different scenes. The whole performance lasted about one hour and fifteen minutes. The actors spoke variations of southeast Norwegian dialects, but since it was a part of an international conference, there were also English subtitles when it was performed in Skien in September 2012.

2.1.1 Description of the stage and the props

The performance was divided into four acts, and the performance is played out in two different settings: the living room and Borkman’s room. Three of the acts are played out in the living room. The stage is furnished with a sofa in the middle, being the centre of the stage. The sofa is covered in a light golden silk-like fabric. An armchair is placed in the proscenium. It has a flower printed fabric in a darker colour. Surrounding the sofa and the armchair is lots of clothes, carelessly “thrown” around on the floor, making quite a mess. The walls around the stage are white, with a rugged surface and the whole scene can be described as rugged. The walls are used as a canvas, where Per Manings’ video art is shown between the different acts, used to emphasize different moments during the performance. The stage is characterized by a spartan, rough look. There are no windows, no decorations or personal items like family pictures or anything that can identify the people living there.
One act is played out in Borkman’s room. In this act, the stage is also quite empty. Borkman’s room is not very well-furnished. A working desk is placed on the one side of the stage. It is covered by a mess, containing books, folders, a shoe, an ashtray, thermos and an empty cup. There is also a chair on the stage, which is being moved around during the performance. Borkman looks sick, as well as Gunhild. They actually seem to be dressed in the same “rag-style” and they both look dirty, neglected.

2.1.2 First act

The first act is played out in the living room. As the audience enters the theatre, there is a video of a dog playing on the back wall of the stage. The dog is sleeping and when the audience is seated, the dog barks suddenly and then everything goes “black”. The video disappears, the lights are being turned off, and the stage is no longer visible.

What happens next is that Erhart appears on a video. He is laying on the ground with his face turned to the audience. He looks like he is dead, he shows no facial expressions, and his skin is very pale. At the same time as the video of Erhart appears, we hear the voice of Jørgen Wiig Salvesen (who plays Erhart). He is citing a text from Gerturde Stein. The next thing we see is Gunhild sitting alone in the living-room of the house, while the screen behind her is projecting her son. CocoRosie’s song “Terrible angels” start playing recovering Erhart’s voice. The living room is messy and Gunhild looks sick, her face looks damaged and she is dressed up in rag. The music stops and there is some smoke on the stage. Ella enters the living room, surprising Gunhild. Ella greets Gunhild, while adding that her visit must come as a surprise to Gunhild.

During this first act, while talking with Ella, Gunhild runs to the wall (on the right of the stage when sitting in the audience) and listens as if something is happening on the other side. The sisters are twins so they are the same age; however, Gunhild has grey hair while Ella is perfectly dark-haired. It creates some physical contrast between the sisters. Ella seems self-confident in the way she postures her body: she stands right and moves with parsimony. She sits on the couch without being invited to do so, but we get to know later that it is actually her house. Ella has an open position while seated whereas Gunhild is closed on herself in her armchair, when she does not run everywhere. Borkman is immediately the topic of their conversation. Then comes the topic of Erhart, “også tok du mitt barn fra meg”. While she
accuses her sister of having taken her child from her, Gunhild puts on lipstick. Her face is projected on the walls of the living room and we have a focus on her eye view. It is like we hear her thinking while the audience focuses on her view. She looks completely crazy, the light goes down. Then everything goes back to “normal”. The light comes back, the projection of her face stops.

We then hear a very deafening sound and Gunhild runs against the wall on the right once again. She talks about the “syk ulv” and we hear a wolf howling. Gunhild speaks with many variations in her voice, her sentences are not well constructed and the words not always audible.

The next thing that happens is Fanny Wilton entering the stage. She is shocked by Gunhild’s look, stating “Herregud som du ser ut Gunhild”. Then we get to see Erhart. He seems uncomfortable in the middle of the women. He acts shy. Ella is completely absorbed by Erhart and cannot take her eyes off him. Then Frida comes in, and Ella asks if Erhart and Frida are “kjærester” but it is Gunhild who objects “Nei!” Ella has physical contact with Erhart as she massages his head. All the women are surrounding him. Erhart and Ella’s relationship seems incestuous as she touches him and she kisses him loudly. There is obviously a sexual tension between Fanny and Erhart. We understand immediately that they have a sexual relationship because they touch and kiss in a mutually romantic way during the scene. Gunhild asks if Fanny might be an alternative for Erhart. Ella and Erhart are close to each other in a physical way which Gunhild clearly dislikes.

Then we hear Frida playing the violin. Gunhild seems upset. Erhart walks over to her and starts talking to her like a little child while he is holding her. She tells him: “Ikke glem din store misjon” before he leaves. Suddenly we hear a man’s voice screaming. The song “le fric c’est chic” plays (cash is chic), which Ella and Gunhild are dancing to while half the side wall is being pushed against them, narrowing down the space they are dancing in. Borkman is pushing the wall, which Gunhild was listening to earlier. He pushes it until he appears on the stage. The living room is in this way being replaced by Borkman’s room.
2.1.3 Second act

Frida plays the violin in a very sexually connotated way. Borkman does not seem to care about what Frida is playing but he is focused on her. The light goes back to normal when Borkman starts to talk. The room is not well furnished, looks empty but messy at the same time. The walls are whitish but not clean, old and damaged. Frida sits on Borkman’s knees and then between his legs, they are strangely close and familiar with each other.

Frida starts to sing the song “Fuck you” from Lilly Allen while playing the violin as if it was a guitar. Borkman has like a seizure. He has difficulties breathing. His mouth is projected on the walls of the room. He curses a lot “du er så sjælvg sent ute”, “faen”, “helvete”…

The light goes down and emphasizes the projection on the walls. Ella coughs and comes in, we are back to present time and to reality and the light is back. Ella accuses Borkman, “du har sviktet den kvinnen du elsket, den dyreste du hadde for penger og makt”. To Ella he replies: “du har vært litt dramatisk”. He tries to be funny; she is accusing him but it does not seem like he feels any guilt. Ella smokes and suffocates at the same time. She coughs like someone who is seriously ill. The sound of her breathing is on the speakers and her mouth on the screen. She wants to name Erhart after her, “for når jeg dør, så lever Erhart Rentheim etter meg!”

Gunhild screams from the other side while pushing the wall in direction of Borkman and Ella so that the living room comes back on stage at the same time as Bokrman’s room disappears. Gunhild screams “Aldri i livet!”, it sounds like a response to Ella talking about Erhart. At the same time Erhart’s face is projected on the wall.

2.1.4 Third act

The third act is played out in the living room. Borkman and Ella move to Gunhild’s living room. Erhart comes in. The two women pressure him to choose between them both. He wants to be seen as a grown up, “Mamma, jeg er ikke et barn lenger”. Borkman also pressures him. They all have “a use” for him but no one listens to what he has to say or asks for his opinion. They all say “bli hos meg”. He does not want to be with any of them but they do not listen when he says he does not want to. He suddenly screams “jeg vil ikke, sier jeg!” to be heard. Fanny, who comes in at the same time, says “han blir hos meg”. She is much older than Erhart and is another mother figure to him. Erhart want to leave his two mothers for another one.
Fanny, Erhart and Frida leave. Borkman, Gunhild and Ella remain. None of them get ownership of Erhart. Frida and Erhart come to the proscenium singing “Fuck you” and dancing. Gunhild literally gives her finger.

Later, Borkman has another seizure and then decides to go out. Ella tries to stop him from doing so.

### 2.1.5 Fourth act

The last scene is on screen. It is supposed to be outside the house and a material solution to the outside scene written by Ibsen. We hear sounds of footsteps in the snow. We hear Ella running behind Borkman.

The light comes back. Gunhild is on her way out as well. Ella and Borkman appear above the back wall while the living room is slowly filled with smoke. There is a mouth breathing heavily on the screen under Borkman and Ella. Later Borkman dies, his head and his arms hang there on the wall. Ella comes down. We hear Erhart screaming at the same time.

Frida pushes the wall, so we have Borkman’s room back on the stage. Erhart is pinned on the wall like a butterfly, in a white straitjacket. He screams that he just want to live “jeg vil bare leve!” His face is projected on the screen but there it looks sane and peaceful. Frida leaves and there is a music from CocoRosie. Erhart recites another passage from Gertrude Stein while he is hanging on this wall, unable to move and with his feet not touching the ground: “Og jeg er ung og jeg vil bare leve”. The twin sisters walk through the proscenium with Bokrman’s corpse. Erhart is more quiet, but still moves in spasms.
2.2 A closer look at Anders T. Andersen’s *John Gabriel Borkman* production

I will now analyse the elements described in the first part of the second chapter and look closely at the *John Gabriel Borkman* production of Anders T. Andersen. What makes this house unhomely? I will focus on Andersen’s way of depicting the characters with an in-depth study of Borkman and Erhart. As mentioned previously, I do not want to take a feminist side in this thesis and this is why I chose to focus on main male characters. I will however give a brief word on Gunhild versus Ella, and see how the contrast between the two reinforces the way Andersen pictures them.

2.2.1 Erhart’s madness

I chose to focus on Erhart, as I found Andersen’s Erhart the most relevant for a contemporary staging. He seems quite close to the young generation of our days in his craving for freedom and love. Andersen also emphasises this character by opening and closing the performance with him. He becomes clearly central in Andersen, more than in Ibsen. By doing this, Andersen points out the issues of the young generation in modern society.

Heidegger’s existential foundation, the shocking experience of no longer being yourself and being without a world, is also the fundamental situation in Andersen’s production of *John Gabriel Borkman*. For the characters there are no other options than adapting to reality – or madness. The radical difference between Ibsen’s text and Andersen’s production is at the end of the play. The end in Ibsen’s text can maybe be interpreted as optimistic: Erhart leaves his family with the woman he loves in order to find happiness. The end of Andersen’s production is the madness of Erhart. In the production Erhart has a mental disorder. At the end it is obvious that Erhart can’t reach his goal – so he becomes crazy. It seems like there is no way out.

Andersen’s ending is pessimistic. Everybody is in a sense crazy. We can all end up like Erhart with a “straitjacket” as the result of the impact of society and family on us. The impossibility of being oneself drives us to madness. Society leads to mental disorder. It is absolutely tragic if you question the sense or meaning of your existence.
With Erhart appearing first, there is a focus on the character. The text of Stein gives another dimension to this character, maybe a more poetical dimension. Andersen’s Erhart seems “deeper” than Ostermeier’s Erhart, he is less the stereotype of a nerdy student and has a more philosophical approach to life. Andersen makes him look quite punkish in his dressing style with a jeans outfit and Doc Martens shoes. But more than a punk, Andersen defines him as a hippie who wants to live for love and free.

Andersen’s John Gabriel Borkman is a play about modernity and one of the consequences of modernity is das Unheimliche. Children are a renewal of the family traditions. But Erhart seems to be born on destroyed foundations. Children have to carry the burden of their parents’ mistakes and dysfunctions of society. Both parents and society are a burden preventing the new generation from being totally free, explaining Andersen’s ending. The impossibility of being free results in the impossibility of being able to be “yourself” as a subject free from history. Erhart screams that he just wants to be free and he ends up in a madhouse. From this picture of humanity, I keep asking myself: Are we condemned by nature?

The “Punk-hippie” Erhart goes around screaming that he wants to live, "to fuck" and feels he has been suppressed and prohibited from having an adult life. His parents, obviously having mental disorders themselves, have suppressed the kid. Andersen (2014) claims that: “The young Erhart is a hippy. He goes on with two women. His experience of sex and free love is there in Ibsen’s text.” Therefore his mother rejects him – because she feels rejected. She rejects herself and her own son. It is actually the same with Borkman. “The result is that Erhart is obsessed and obsessive – as the son of his parents.”

Borkman is very much a pioneer. In his view and his mission he is an early social democrat who will create jobs and get people out of poverty. Erhart, however, is a pioneer hippy. His plan was to run away without saying goodbye to his parents. He can only do what he wants by cutting all relations and running away. Like Nora, he is dogmatic. In his understanding it will be a corruption of the soul if he had to compromise to free himself. Nothing can be done half way. He is not pragmatic but dogmatic. Erhart does not give himself a chance of true liberation from his parents. He is removing himself from the problem – his parents. But by doing so the problem cannot be solved.
Andersen imagined that Erhart could have ended up as a Casanova, incapable of close relationship. He builds his self in opposition. He needs to leave town to find himself. But do we have to leave a place, make ourselves “homeless”, to later return to that place and be able to dwell? Denial is a prime instinct of the human being. In John Gabriel Borkman denial, the running away from problems is a central theme. The parents are placing the problems and the responsibility outside of themselves instead of having to look at themselves and their situation. Their ideology is: "I will do and say whatever I want as long as I do not have to look at myself".

Erhart associates happiness with love while Borkman gave up the one he loved for money. Fanny Wilton and Erhart’s relationship is “new age”. Andersen means they represent “alternative people”, a young man with an older woman. Andersen tried to transform psychological realism to symbolism.

The child is also thematic in Ibsen. Kari Gisholt (3.3.2011) highlights this point in Varden in her review of Andersen’s production: «Som i «Villanden» og «Lille Eyolf» blir barnet offeret for de voksnes uforstand og selvopptatthet, deres livsloigner, slik Ibsen avslører dem». I see this as a clear connection to Andersen’s pessimistic ending. As baring his parents’ past, Erhart is both a victim of his family as well as a sacrifice.

It looks like the same pattern will only be repeating itself for Erhart, he leaves his biological mother and his surrogate mother for a woman much older than him. Ibsen presented a solution with the young Frida, she was also some kind of back-up but Andersen's Erhart ends up alone and insane. Erhart is presented as gradually more insane as we approach the end of the performance. He has to repeat that he is young and just wants to live and screams it to be finally heard. With Gunhild acting weird and Erhart’s condition at the end, among other elements described, this gave me the picture of a psychiatric hospital. This house could be a madhouse. Erhart at the end seems like he is slowly dying. He maybe does not literally dies but is perhaps a metaphor. Something dies in Erhart. He left with two women but he is alone and stuck at the end, like there is no way out of the house, no way out of the family, no way to freedom.

Borkman, Gunhild and Ella fight for the ownership of Erhart like if he was a thing more than a human. By singing “Fuck you”, Erhart and Frida, the only two young characters of the play,
give their finger to the older ones but Andersen’s ending gives negative connotations to rebellion.

2.2.2 Music and video

Andersen had a great idea for the final scene:

I wanted to lift Borkman up from his living room but it was practically impossible. And then he would die in the air of a heart attack. It turned out good with the video and the sound of the snow. […] This last scene was very difficult. We had to cut down to the essential because of the amount of text. Borkman becomes a man who gives an opening for the sisters. He disappears like a psychosis (Andersen 2014).

The song *Fuck you* from Lilly Allen gives a good picture of rebellion. “There is a contrast between the text and the melody in the song, it sounds happy, it fits with the rebellion”. The music from CocoRosie is a mix of beautiful melodies with something crazy. They catch the human being. Andersen uses music from CocoRosie and their song *Terrible Angels* several times. They play a very strange music with the instruments they use (such as children’s toys) and they use repetitions and transformation of their voices. Their voices are very recognizable as they are full of nuances making them sound less human. They also mix different styles. In only one piece of CocoRosie’s music, you can hear both lyrical classical singing as well beat-boxing. Their music is full of contrasts. Harp plays with children’s cars. *Terrible Angels* has a very strong and strange text. It repeats “If every angel’s terrible, then why do you welcome them?” I see that as all the contradictions in *John Gabriel Borkman*. If something is bad for you, then why do you need it?

Texts from Gertrude Stein were added at the beginning and the end. At the end the text was about a young boy who wanted to make a collection of butterflies. His father says it is a cruel thing to do. But the father kills a butterfly and gives it to the son in the morning. The boy is confused. The father-son relationship is complex. The text from Gertrude Stein is presented when Erhart is hanging on the wall at the end. He is like a butterfly pinned to the wall, a picture that means you can run but you cannot escape.

According to Andersen the challenge with Ibsen is that everything is logical. He calls it the mathematics of Ibsen. But human beings are not like that. We do not associate things like that.
We are more irrational in our way of thinking. Unlike Chekov Ibsen creates his plays in a rational manner. In a manner of speaking, there is no logic in Chekhov’s dramas.

2.2.3 Borkman the animal

Money is shown as more important than love for Borkman with the lyric “le fric c’est chic”. He makes fun of Ella “du har alltid vært så dramatisk” and he explains why and how he chose her sister over her.

Gunhild and Borkman look like homeless people in the way they are dressed up. They have the same style and look like the interior of their house, dirty and messy.

Andersen wanted to scare “the shit out of the audience” (Andersen 2014) with the sudden barking of the dog in the opening. He actually did not find something with a wolf, since Gunhild describes Borkman as a wolf, but he wanted to show something animalistic in Borkman. Andersen therefore kept Ibsen’s text with a slight revision:

FRU BORKMAN. Alltid å høre ham derinne. Helt fra tidlige morgen til langt på natt. – Og så lytt det er her!

ELLA RENTHEIM (varsomt). Kunne det ikke bli annerledes, Gunhild?

FRU BORKMAN (Avvisende). Han har aldri gjort noe forsøk på det.

ELLA RENTHEIM. Men kunne ikke du ta det første skritt da?

FRU BORKMAN (farer opp). Jeg! Etter alt det, han har ødelagt for meg! Nei Takk! La heller han derre ulven fortsette å tasse omkring der inne til han dauer15.

Anders T. Andersen’s idea in the production is that when you live in isolation, you will become an animal – and Borkman is described as a wolf.

15 I refer to Andersen’s text of John Gabriel Borkman
2.2.4 Andersen’s moving wall: creating a house on stage

The actors have to push the moving wall in order to create a new space, a new setting. It creates a surprising effect when it is first used in the performance, when Borkman pushes it between the first and the second act. I, as a spectator, did not notice at first that another room was hidden behind the wall.

The moving wall between Gunhild and Borkman was on the one hand a material solution for the stage\footnote{Andersen pointed out that it was really light so very easy to use by the actors.}, but on the other hand it gave meaning to the whole production: “de ødelegger for hverandre” (Andersen 2015).

Andersen (2015) also underlines that this is a play about dysfunctionality: “de tro voksne er fanget i en rolle”. They are trapped in a role they project on themselves in relation to Erhart but they do not see each other, they do not take each other into account, they do not care about each other. They live in the wrong manner of socialization. They put forward their individual needs, their own psychoses. They are concentrated on their own subjectivity. The rise of the subject is responsible of the decline of the public as already written by Arendt and Sennett\footnote{I will develop this topic in the last chapter}.

Borkman in Ibsen’s text has a large room; it is at the same time an office, a bedroom and a living room. He therefore essentially has no home. The house Rentheim/Borkman is de-structured and structured at the same time: Man against woman. In Ibsen’s text he is on top of the woman, he lives above her. In the performance he is beside which procures Borkman and Gunhild with equivalent powers.

My impression of a madhouse made sense: “Ibsen wrote about a family who lived in isolation for sixteen years, it is boarding on psychiatry” (Andersen, 2014). Ibsen depicted Borkman as a Napoleon-like figure. Andersen did not think this figure is believable today. It is not possible to walk around in white clothes for sixteen years and have perfect hair as he is presented in Ibsen’s text. Gunhild seems really troubled and worried when she runs from one place in the living room to another. She does not always talk really clearly and her eyes move a lot. It is
made obvious when her eyes are projected on the walls. It looks almost like paranoia when she tries to listen to Borkman through the wall.

I also asked the stage director his opinion about Ibsen’s houses: “It is quite clever, very specific in a positive sense the way he is not specific about where he placed the houses. It doesn’t name the town but you always understand where it is. He has a very clear idea so it is easy to treat it and transform it.” Andersen thought that his production was relevant for the house/home topic and claimed that his production had more to do with the family than the society. The working class was not much represented in Ibsen's plays:

We have to find a concept that makes the play relevant today. It is becoming hard to find relevance. Concepts have two functions: when the concepts reduce the play and when the concept frees the play. The text has to be freed. There is a filter between you and the text because it is different times. If it is relevant for human questions, it loses its political potential (Andersen 2014).

Andersen stresses the ambivalence of concepts and working on concepts is inevitable depending on which meaning you want to bring to light.

2.3 Existential dimension in Andersen’s production

In the first chapter, we went through house and home in Heidegger and the function of the uncanny, which is a result of the familiar and unfamiliar. In her master’s thesis, Anette Sorli Andersen used Heidegger thinking of Art to explore Robert Wilson’s Peer Gynt. It is a very interesting lecture of Wilson’s production. It gives a new perspective in the sense that she reads the stage performance, not through a common performance analysis but through Heidegger’s philosophy on Art. Consequently, it provides Wilson’s work with an existential dimension. In this matter, Storli Andersen’s thesis is quite new in relation to performance analysis. Of course, this implies a good understanding of Heidegger, which is not evident in this field. However, Storli Andersen’s work gives a good insight on Heidegger’s philosophy and the link between Heidegger and Wilson’s conception of theatre performance is made clear and relevant. Therefore, I will use her work in this chapter since Heidegger is one of the key figures in this thesis.

In this third part, I aim to bring out some existential dimension in Anders T. Andersen’s production by using Storli Andersen master’s thesis. Based on Storli Andersen’s reflection,
“etter at jeg opplevde hvordan tidsbevisstheten ble forstyrret, har det slått meg at Robert Wilsons teater har mye til felles med Martin Heideggers filosofi” (Storli Andersen 2005, 17), I will attempt to read Anders T. Andersen’s production of *John Gabriel Borkman* through Martin Heidegger and Hannah Arendt. I will explain by Heidegger’s thinking about Art read by Storli Andersen why Anders T. Andersen was provoked by Ostermeier’s production of *John Gabriel Borkman*. According to Andersen, Ostermeier had no sub-text or as I understand, no existential dimension. I will explain why I was intrigued by his production: for me it had an existential dimension and perspective on the home/house-relation.

**Anders T. Andersen’s *John Gabriel Borkman* through Anette Storli Andersen’s reading of Heidegger**

Storli Andersen master’s thesis is a study on Robert Wilson’s *Peer Gynt* and she gives a detailed insight of Wilson’s work. Wilson used contrast, «når Wilson er så opptatt av kontraster, skyldes det at han mener motsetninger konstituerer hverandre. Det er i striden mellom motsetningene spenningen oppstår» (Storli Andersen 2005, 17-18). Wilson believed that opposites constitute one another. Anne-Lise Surtevju (2011) wrote in her presentation of Anders T. Andersen’s *John Gabriel Borkman* production about the same idea when she claimed: “All kunst baserer seg på konflikt. Man forsøker å si noe om det som ikke fungerer.” Ibsen is about conflicts.

The fundamental principle in Heidegger’s theory of Art (Heidegger 2000,79) is the push, *Stoß*: «det støtet Heidegger beskriver fungerer slik at mennesket støtes ut av sin vante omgang med verden på en slik måte at […] det som hittil har syntes å være trygt og kjent, omstøtes» (Storli Andersen 2005,108). The push works as follow: the human being is “pushed” from his habitual place in the world in such a way that things which felt safe and known are being reversed. In other words, *Stoß* is when the familiar is rendered unfamiliar. Without *Stoß*, the work of art is just a work, in other words, it does not have sub-text. Heidegger, according to Storli Andersen, writes that the art can reveal something and bring a meaning to light when he claims that the artist is «en frembringelse som bringer det værende frem i lyset” (Storli Andersen 2005, 108). Heidegger stresses that the nature of the art work in not predefined, not something that exists independently, as it needs a viewer:

> Kunstverket er altså ikke noe selvtilstrekkelig værende. Verken kunst eller sannhet kan skje uten tilværen. Dette understreker igjen hvordan kunstverket ikke kan betraktes

Storli Andersen says here, based on Heidegger, that an artwork is not self-sufficient. Neither art nor truth can occur without Dasein. It underlines that the work of art cannot be considered as an object, as self-sufficient. The work of art comes into being when the Preserver is “kicked out” of his/her normal way of existing by the Stoß. The work of art needs a viewer to become Art. The work of art can become art when it has a preserver who lets the art and the push, or Stoß, take place. Since everything that is known and familiar is made unfamiliar, the art implies ejection (a push). The preserver is ejected from the familiar and homely world, the customary and ordinary.

It is in the conflict between the opposites that the tension occurs, claims Wilson. Storli Andersen sees in Wilson a work of the uncanny and she connects it to the tension between the familiar and the unfamiliar in Heidegger (Stoß): «Her redegjør Heidegger for hvordan støtet fra det hjemlige til det u-hjemlige er en overgang mellom to ulike, men like opprinnelige væremåter for mennesket, egentlig og uegentlig eksistens, henholdsvis som Dasein og das Man» (Storli Andersen 2005, 109). When the familiar and the unfamiliar meet, there is a transition between two different, but originally equivalent ways of being. This is what Heidegger names Dasein and das Man. Dasein is the perfect existence, it means when you are living in accordance with Sein. It is what Storli Andersen calls tilstedeværen in Norwegian.

The tension between the familiar and the unfamiliar was understandable in Andersen’s production. It looked like a house, but it was no home. The force of the production resides in its power of making the audience feeling nearly uncomfortable in front of Andersen’s unhomy house. The spectator is “pushed” from his usual way of thinking of “home”. The impression of dirtiness is not representative of an ideal house. By being distanced from his prior knowledge of “home”, the spectator is able to understand the sub-text: something is

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18 For instance, the spectator or the reader

19 In Being and Time (Sein und Zeit, 1927), Storli Andersen refers to the Swedish translation Varat och Tiden (1992)
wrong in this representation of a house, as it is does not look like a home. This is how I have questioned the nature of home. Why does it have to be associated to positive feelings? Can a home not look like Andersen’s house? This distance from what is known and familiar creates anxiety for the one perceiving it. Anxiety is fundamental in this process of Støß:


Anxiety takes the being (Man) out of what he already knows so that it can really exist (Dasein). Based on Heidegger, the postmodern vision of the subject becomes an example of an unreal existence21 (Storli Andersen 2005, 113). Further on, this leads to a questioning on language, as the subject is structured by language. Storli Andersen then points out the place Heidegger gives to language:

Siden Heidegger er svært opptatt av språket og så vidt jeg kan se forutsetter at mennesket tenker i språk, er det viktig å merke seg at han også viser språkets utilstrekkelighet. Når det gjelder noe virkelig viktig, kan det ikke uttrykkes i språk, men må anes i den påtrengende stillheten som kaster tilværen ut i intetheten – uten å fortelle henne hva hun skal gjøre22 (Storli Andersen 2005, 113).

The inadequacy of language is a very interesting point regarding what we already mentioned on Derrida, as well as questioning the idea of the house before questioning the house itself. There are two main ideas we can pick out from Heidegger’s thinking of language. First, humans think in language, but language is not completely accurate23. This is why Heidegger stresses that something really important cannot be expressed with words but rather in the

20 The world becomes intrusive in this uncanny condition and is no longer neither familiar nor safe. Through the experience of anxiety, the existence is individualized and throwing out of the sheltered man-self. The homely feeling in the confident Man is taken away. The anguish picks the existence out of imminent tasks in a condition where the homely familiarity collapses.

21 «Hos Heidegger har ikke subjektet gått i opplosning, men det har glemt seg selv. Ut fra Heidegger vil dermed det postmoderne synet på subjektet være et eksempel på en ugentlig eksistens»

22 Since Heidegger is concerned with the language and as far as I can see, presupposes that human beings think in language, it is important to note that he also shows the inadequacy of language. Something really important cannot be expressed with the language but must be considered in the intrusive silence, which throws the existence to nothingness – without telling the existence what it should do.

23 What I understand by that is (1) that not every things or sensation or feeling is named by the language (2) Different languages do not use the same signification for a same word (3) Exact translation from a language to another is not possible as languages are not constructed thought the same patterns.
silences. For this reason, Storli Andersen found meaning in interpreting Wilson through Heidegger, as Wilson works a lot with pauses and silences.

I see similarities when Andersen says that there was no sub-text in Ostermeier’s production. He explains that Ostermeier did not present something more than the text. In other words, there was no distance from Ibsen’s text; it did not create something that the text would not create. Andersen gives the example of Ella and Gunhild, “vi skjønner, i Ibsen, at det er mer enn det de sier” (2015) and he stresses that Ostermeier presented the sisters as having a complete banal conversation as if it was literally what they meant in their discourse, as if there was nothing beyond the words. Gunhild and Ella have not seen each other in eight years, and Andersen argues that what the sisters actually talk about cannot be only about superficiality. My interpretation of Andersen is that Ostermeier’s production was only *imaging* the text but not bringing out another meaning, another dimension than the text. In other words, for Andersen, it is obvious that there is meaning beyond Ibsen’s words. Literature is made of words, but it is also the power of words to create mental pictures for the readers. Theatre produces signs and pictures other than the text. The capacity a performance has to create meanings is underlined by Storli Andersen when she writes that she experienced time in a completely different way in Wilson’s production. This is caused by the performance of the actors, especially through long pauses and accelerations in the text. A theatre performance, by giving meaning during the time of the performance, is something completely detached from the text. The performance is not a representation of the text in the sense of an “imaging of the text”.

An example of giving meaning is the way the house is treated in *John Gabriel Borkman*. By putting him on the first floor, Ibsen emphasises Borkman’s Napoleon ego. More than a material problem, Andersen gives in his production a different meaning with having him next to Gunhild and not upstairs. This is also completely relevant for a contemporary production as men and women tend to be more and more equal in modern western society, especially in Scandinavia. This is a clever choice that makes the play accessible to a contemporary audience. The inner structure of the house in *John Gabriel Borkman* is metaphorical – it is not a realistic depiction. It seems impossible in a normal house to avoid the people you actually live with for so many years. In Andersen, characters do not function with each other but

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24 Quotations in Norwegian from Andersen are from the 10th of May 2015.
against each other. Gunhild and Borkman are physically trying to destroy each other by using the moving wall. They need to destroy the other’s space to be able to make their own space. I asked Andersen about the wall he used on stage to separate Gunhild’s room from Borkman’s room on the same floor. He answered that he was actually struggling with “the man upstairs” during the first act. He then decided to remove the stairs in the second act so that Gunhild and Borkman are on same level: “Borkman became a big monster next door instead of upstairs” (Andersen 2014). By putting Borkman upstairs as in Ibsen, the whole family is pressed by him, but when he is next door in Andersen’s production, he is pushing Gunhild's living room and it gives another picture. They are the same forces. Borkman is not walking above them anymore. This perhaps makes them equal because they both push the walls against each other. They are equally guilty of having ruined their own life and Erhart's life. “It is the most dysfunctional family in all of Ibsen's plays. It gives a picture of an infected house” (Andersen 2014). During a phone conversation much later in the writing process25, Andersen and I talked again about this house. Andersen insisted on the fact that “karakterne i John Gabriel Borkman lever på grensen med psykisk sykdom” (Andersen 2015). They have something completely animal in the way they live closed up in this house: “Huset er som et fengsel, eller et bur, hvor de isolerer seg fra skam” (Andersen 2015). Andersen adapted the house, as if it is not something fixed by Ibsen and untouchable.

I understand the same idea when Storli Andersen underlines Wilson’s skepticism to the production of meaning taken out of a work of art (2005, 18). She argued that it is dangerous to fasten an interpretation to a text. It is better to keep an open mind and try not to focus on the work’s meanings. When an interpretation is fastened to a work, it limits the work. The fixed interpretation becomes an obstacle for all the thoughts the text could generate. It does not mean that a piece of work or a text does not have meaning. Wilson claims later that a text is full of meaning but that the text’s potential meanings are limited when the meaning is already attached before the spectator meets with the performance. This idea reduces metaphysical meaning in theatre (text and art). Storli Andersen insists on the metaphysical character of theatre:

[…] det viktigste i teateret er å lytte. Formen og koreografien er bare en ramme, en måte å komme til et annet nivå på. Skuespilleren skal fylle formen, men formen er ikke viktig i seg selv. Formen er bare viktig som en vei til andre måter å tenke og erføre på (Storli Andersen 2005, 19).

She claims that most important in the theater is to listen. The artistic form we use is just a frame, a way to access to something else. Which art form we use in itself is not what matters. She goes on to mention that Heidegger is interested in the function of the work of art but not what it depicts: “Heidegger er opptatt av kunstverkets funksjon og ikke hva det avbilder” (Storli Andersen 2005, 108). This is not the finished product or work of art in itself that matters but the process of creating. This is why we talk about a “work of art”. On this matter, Hannah Arendt (1958) made a distinction between work and labor in _The human condition_. Labor represents the necessities of the human being to maintain itself alive. Work, in Arendt’s sense, is creative and makes us more human because it goes beyond vital needs and stands in opposition to the natural while labor is related to biological necessities. Labor is a process that never ends, it involves efforts and is quickly consumed.

For Arendt, Heidegger’s _Dasein_ in German or what Storli Andersen calls “tilstedeværen” in Norwegian, is equivalent to action. It is the highest degree of existence. Action is the opposite of labor and work. Labor and work represent what you have to do to survive and to make a living. This belongs to the existence Heidegger calls _das Man_. For Arendt, neither work nor labor enables individuals to reveal their identities, to reveal who they are as a distinction from what they are. Labor is assimilated to biological survival. Labor implies repetition and sameness. Labor and work for Arendt – _das Man_ for Heidegger – implies an “unproper” existence. As a living (Seiende from the verb Sein) man has an obligation to fulfil an existence and to truly exist to become _Dasein_. In Arendt’s sense, man has to reach action to be a human being.

Work, however, gives room for individuality, so that each work of art can carry the mark of the maker. But it does not tell us who the creator was. Thus, it is only through action and speech, in interacting with others through words, that individuals reveal who they personally are and can assert their own singular identities. Action is related to speech because they both answer the question of who. It is through them that individuals are able to reveal their identity: “Human plurality, the basic condition of both action and speech, has the twofold character of equality and distinction” (Arendt 1958, 175). In other words, the who is identity and the what is abilities:

The moment we want to say who somebody is, our very vocabulary leads us astray into saying what he is; we get entangled in a description of qualities he necessarily shares with others like him; we begin to describe a type or a “character” in the old
meaning of the word, with the result that his specific uniqueness escapes us (Arendt 1958, 181)

The emergence of the necessary labor (the private) into the public sphere is responsible for the fall of action and thus, the political realm\textsuperscript{26}. Work is artificial (techné) and human (non-animal). Work is public as it creates an objective and common world between humans. This question of objectivity, work created by individuals to function together, is particularly relevant when applied to Borkman who seems to live in autarchy.

It is work and by extent public life that makes men humans. It is important to understand how the situation of Borkman distances him from reality and from any gratifications from his peers. Gunhild dehumanizes Borkman. Somehow, Gunhild embodies the pillar of shame in herself: she reminds Borkman of his mistakes and that he has reasons to be ashamed and to pay for his “humanity”. She embodies the destructive power of women. She is not represented as a good and caring mother and she wants to use Erhart for her own good at the same time. Borkman is animalized from the beginning of the play, when Gunhild defines him as a sick wolf.

Regarding the wolf, Andersen (2015) says that it is not random that Ibsen chose to describe Borkman like that, and not like a bear for instance. Wolves live in herds (ulveflokk) and Borkman is out of the herd – in other words, he is being excluded from his community. Andersen’s idea is supported by Hannah Arendt who claimed that: “A man who lived only a private life, who like the slave was not permitted to enter the public realm, or like the barbarian had chosen not to establish such a realm, was not fully human” (Arendt 1958, 38). In other words we need a public life as well as a public – an audience – to be human. Arendt focused on what differentiates work since human beings need the group both to cover their own vital needs and to express their own excellence:

\begin{quote}
Every activity performed in public can attain an excellence never matched in privacy; for excellence, by definition, the presence of others is always required, and this presence needs the formality of the public, constituted by one’s peers, it cannot be casual, familiar presence of one’s equals or inferiors (Arendt 1958, 49).
\end{quote}

Work is the condition that makes man better than animals. Arendt underlines that the public sphere is more determining that the private one and that one always need his peers in order to

\textsuperscript{26} For Arendt, political and social are different. The political results from action and speech.
reach excellence. The private sphere, according to Arendt, represents our necessities to remain alive and does not differentiate us from animals. This is why Arendt claims that the public is more important than the private. By his forced and later voluntary withdrawal from social life and the public realm Borkman has lost what Arendt describes as “worldly reality”:

The subjectivity of privacy can be prolonged and multiplied in a family, it can never become so strong that its weight is felt in the public realm; but this family “world” can never replace the reality rising out of the sum total of aspects presented by one object to a multitude of spectators. Only where things can be seen by many in a variety of aspects without changing their identity, so that those who are gathered round them know they see sameness in utter diversity, can worldly reality truly and reliably appear (Arendt 1958, 57).

The way I understand Arendt, the privacy of family is never strong enough to have an impact on the public realm. If things are experienced by many in the same way, we can thus talk about “worldly reality” and rely on it. To live an entirely private life and be totally isolated from the public life as Borkman is, according to Arendt, the same as to lose existence, to live as he did not exist: “To live an entirely private life means above all to be deprived of things essential to a truly human life”. Arendt says that the private life actually deprives us of the essence of the human beings, in other words:

[…] to be deprived of the reality that comes from being seen and heard by others, to be deprived of an “objective” relationship with them that comes from being related to and separated from them through the intermediary of achieving something more permanent in itself. The privation of privacy lies in the absence of others; as far as they are concerned, private man does not appear, and therefore it is as though he did not exist. Whatever he does remain without significance and consequences to others, and what matters to him is without interest to other people (Arendt 1958, 58).

A man who is not seen nor heard is deprived of reality and of a relationship with others created by being at the same time related and separated from them through achieving something stable. There is no privacy if there are no others. But at the same time as long as they are present, the private cannot be there as well. The private man does not interest others as long as he has no consequences on them. The withdrawal from the public life, Arendt underlines, “not only destroys the public realm but the private as well”, and:

[…] deprives men not only of their place in the world but of their private home, where they once felt sheltered against the world and where, at any rate, even those excluded from the world could find a substitute in the warmth and of the hearth and the limited reality of family life (Arendt 1958, 58).

Not having a public life has dramatic consequences on the private and without a private life one does not have a place to be protected against the world. This is obviously the situation of
Borkman. He is lonely and deprived of an objective relationship. He is neither a part of a public life that would raise him to a higher humanity nor has he a private life sustaining his basic needs. Frida and Foldal are his only connections to the exterior world, and without them he would live in absolute isolation.

To conclude this part, I would like to stress the contemporary relevance of Andersen’s performance. According to Andersen, Ibsen’s play *John Gabriel Borkman* is more relevant than ever (2014). However, the last act is the least relevant for today’s realism. Andersen argues that the play reflects our time and capitalism and the price you have to pay when your primary concern is to achieve as much as possible. In this sense, Andersen did not want to create a conservative production: “Theatre is an art form not a museum!” (Andersen 2014). This point is also underlined by Anne-Lise Surtevju (3.2.2011): “regissøren mener deler av ‘John Gabriel Borkman’ er utdatert og ekstremt symboltungt, men etter hvert som språket ble modernisert framsto dramaet som det stykket som er minst knyttet opp mot forfatterens samtid.” *John Gabriel Borkman* is also about the choices we make, and what we give priority to in life: «det handler på mange måter om mennesker som går seg bort i danser rundt den gullkalven, sier Andersen, som ønsker seg å flette samtidsrealisme inn i stykket. – det har noe med oss og vår tid å gjøre, og hva man setter i forsetet» (Surtevju 3.2.2011). She wrote a couple of weeks later: «Nå er det Ibsen han vil gjøre tydelig og relevant» (Surtevju 17.2.2011). There is the matter of making Ibsen actual for Andersen, making the theater into something that talks concretely to people. As Hilde Fiskum (2011) points out, Andersen is concerned about making theatre relevant for his time: «Med John Gabriel Borkman er Ibsen fremdeles dagsaktuell med problematiseringen rundt verdivalg i et samfunn styrt av penger og statusjag».

To give a stronger insight to the relevance of the performance, the next and last chapter will focus on modernity and its consequences, mainly on the being, through the changes on the relation between the public and the private sphere. To argue my claim, I will first give a general definition of modernity, and in which it is used in the thesis. I will also focus on house and home in modernity and have a look at the changes it implies, notably in the family. Then I will focus on manhood in modernity to understand also the challenges we face in reading Ibsen in relation to feminist interpretations. And the two last parts will return to home and house in Ibsen.
Chapter 3

From Anders T. Andersen to Sandberg

Si la conscience que j’ai de moi échappe au monde, si, tremblant, j’abandonne tout espoir d’accord logique et me voue à l’improbabilité – d’abord à la mienne propre et, pour finir à celle de toute chose […] – je puis saisir le moi en larmes, dans l’angoisse.
- Georges Batailles, L’expérience intérieure

In the previous chapter, I claimed that Anders T. Andersen’s John Gabriel Borkman production can be interpreted by Heidegger’s concept of das Unheimliche. I did not claim that his staging of John Gabriel Borkman was based on Heidegger as Andersen did not work on the house vs home relation consciously. The existential problem of das Unheimliche, which Sandberg points out in Ibsen's dramas, is not related to Anders T. Andersen’s reading of the play John Gabriel Borkman, but is a result of the structure of modernity.

3.1 Ibsen’s house today: example of Andersen’s John Gabriel Borkman

Ibsen wrote about bourgeois houses, but Andersen’s house has nothing of a bourgeois home, as we can think of bourgeois as being well furnished with expensive furniture, clean and tidy. Borkman and Gunhild live in a dirty and messy house and look like their house.

My claim is that the relationship between house and home says something of the modern human being and this is the reason I will focus on modernity in this last chapter. Ibsen opened the question of our identity in Peer Gynt. The radical changes and development of society in modernity have an impact on human beings and this is what Ibsen tells us in a poetic way.

To explain the uncanny feeling related to Borkman’s house, the most basic reason could be found with the American critic Akiko Busch, explaining what distinguishes a home as:

It occurs to me that the bedroom, the kitchen, and the basement reflect the three basic realms of home: the private and necessary sanctuary, the place of nourishment and
community, the area where things get made. So long as the places we live can accommodate these three very different human activities, it might be called a home (Busch 2003, 24).

If we apply this statement to the Rentheim house, then it is obviously not a home. What made the Rentheim house unhomely in Andersen’s production? It was because it was a dirty and messy house. And Borkman’s room is even less of a home as it makes no difference between the rooms described by Busch. This striking element of the production made the distinction between house and home really understandable for a contemporary audience. What Ibsen expressed in the text is in Anders T. Andersen's production experienced concretely and physically. We can see the uncanniness on the stage. The house in Andersen’s production is presented on one plan only, while there are several floors in Ibsen’s text *John Gabriel Borkman*. We do not know how Borkman feeds himself since he does not go out of his room.

In Ibsen’s texts, the opposition between house and home is recurrent. Either it is directly mentioned in the text or by the action. Although some scholars have written about Ibsen’s characters’ feeling of “home”, there are still some questions unanswered. All of Ibsen’s plays take place in a family house, except *When we dead awaken*, but the opposition between house and home is a central theme in the conversation between the main characters in *When we dead awaken*. Why can Ibsen’s characters not associate the feeling of home to the house they are living in? Can we actually find homes in Ibsen’s plays? Why does Ibsen make this clear distinction between the two? Why is Andersen’s setting significant for the distinction between house and home?

To answer these questions I will try to find a meta-perspective based on Busch’ statement “There is no longer a single pattern or cultural definition for comfort” (2003, 17–18). The definition of home has changed: “the domestic landscape has shifted in recent years in subtle and significant ways reflecting the changing structure of the family” (Busch 2003, 18). It has changed because it is not something fixed, and modernity itself does not have a fixed definition.

The definition and understanding of home no longer includes comfort. Heidegger and Derrida have already placed the unfamiliar in the house. Has home changed because family changed? Or, has family changed because home changed? Sandberg starts his article « Ibsen and the mimetic home of modernity » with the questions:
What is it like to live in a replica home? Can a hearth still be cosy when it is simulated? Is it enough to live in a place that is just like home, which is to say, almost like home? What world view is invoked when one poses questions like these – has something really been lost, and if so, what? Is it possible or even desirable to recover it? (Sandberg 2001, 32)

All these questions about the home leave out the distinction between the house and the home. In my opinion, we will need a definition of the house in order to define the home. What is a place just like home? Sandberg asks if something has actually been lost. A mimetic home

[…] as I [Mark Sandberg] will be using it, the term will refer to a home not experienced as authentic, natural, and grounded, but representational – as a diminished copy that falls short of what used to be. It is a home made strange by the awareness of the people living in it, not by physical changes in its structure (Sandberg 2001, 32).

Sandberg fails to answer “what used to be”, and that is what I am concerned about. If a home is not experienced as authentic, would it be a way to say “unfamiliar”? Then it is what a house is supposed to be according to Derrida. How can a home be a diminished copy? And moreover, a diminished copy of “what used to be”? When was home a home? If the feeling of the uncanny, the unfamiliar, is a way to help us to understand the world better, is the unfamiliar house actually what it is supposed to be?

Sandberg builds a lot of his theories on Vidler's theories. According to Vidler: “the house was no longer a home, ran the refrain, a burden that has since emerged as a principal leitmotiv of postmodernism” (1992, 6). Sandberg seems to have adopted the phrase “no longer” from Vidler, but none of them really explains when the home was actually a home. This is why I question the whole concept of home, before I return to discussing about home and house in Ibsen. By questioning the concept of home, I also agree with Derrida and Heidegger, who emphasize that we have to question the idea of home in order to question the house itself. We need to define the concepts, house and home, before we build theories on these concepts.

My point here is that “home” is an illusion, which builds on what Marx said already in 1844. As quoted in Vidler: “For Marx, individual estrangement had become class alienation. As he noted in the Economics and philosophical Notebooks of 1844, the development of the rent system had rendered ‘home’ a temporary illusion at best” (1992, 4-5). In a materialistic way, you do not need to own a home to have a home. This is why Marx says that home is a temporary illusion.
3.2 House and home in modernity

This idea of home as an illusion has driven this chapter. Marx thought that home did not exist and that the modern times emphasised the myth. From there, I became really curious to research what other philosophers and sociologists have written on this topic.

In the first chapter, I have questioned the concept of “home” as it is used in philosophy through language. As we have seen, Heidegger and Derrida are quite sceptical about the use of different concepts. According to them, there will always be a gap between the ways different people use different concepts, and how we picture them. In this first part of the third chapter, I will turn to how the concepts house and home have been seen in modernity. In my view, it is relevant to discuss house and home within modernity. As I was illustrating by referring to Marx, home as a valid concept was questioned in modern sociology. In order to discuss this further, I will start by defining the term “modernity” as I will continue to use it. Then I will examine how family is considered in modernity, building on Sennett, Giddens and Arendt.

In my perspective, home would be understood in a sociological way as a result of modernity. Richard Sennett is professor of sociology. His book *The fall of public man* (Sennett 1977) examines the imbalance between private and public experience. Tracing the changing nature of urban society from the 18th century to the world we now live in, Sennett discuss the causes of our social withdrawal and asks what can bring us to reconnect with our communities. His study of the imbalance of modern civilization brings an interesting perspective on the relationship between public life and the cult of individuals. Giddens’ sociological approaches offer a new perspective in understanding modernity and post-modernity, terms that he highly criticized. Together with Arendt, I aim to understand house and home in a special context. I will approach modernity in Ibsen drawing on their theories.
3.2.1 Towards a general definition of modernity

In order to start the discussion of house and home in modernity, I have to refine how I am going to use the term in my further discussion.

Marinette Grimbeek, as referred to earlier, has distinguished between the concepts *modernity* and *modernism*:

[...] modernity refers to a period of time in which certain social features can be observed (such as the use of capital, the rise of socialism or increased mechanization), while modernism is an aesthetic category, especially as applied to artistic works from the late nineteenth century until the Second World War, which are generally seen to display some common characteristics, such as a preoccupation with the experience of the individual (which in literature perhaps most famously found expression on the stream of consciousness technique of narration) (Grimbeeck 2007, 17).

While writing on home in *The Master Builder*, Grimbeek discussed the necessity of defining modernity. When it comes to defining modernity through eminent theories, I use Anthony Giddens' *The consequences of modernity* (1990) as one the major sources for my discussion. Giddens brings a new and provocative interpretation of institutional transformations associated with modernity. To answer the question “What is modernity?” the author answers:

As a first approximation, let us simply say the following: “modernity” refers to modes of social life or organization which emerged in Europe from about the 17th century onwards and which subsequently became more or less worldwide in their influence. This associates modernity with a time period and with an initial geographical location […] (Giddens 1990, 1).

To complement further his definition of modernity in relation to our time, Giddens also claims that we are not living in what is called “post-modernity”:

Rather than entering into a period of post-modernity, we are moving into one [a period] in which the consequences of modernity are becoming more radicalised and universalised than before. Beyond modernity, I shall claim, we can perceive the contours of a new and different order, which is “post-modern”; but this is quite distinct from what is at the moment called by many by “post-modernity” (Giddens 1990, 3).

Giddens questions and redefines the concept of post-modernity. He later characterized modernity and the post-modern by their negativity. Placing modernity in time history and presenting it from its “negative” side, Giddens writes:

The modes of life brought into being by modernity have swept us away from all traditional types of social order, in quite unprecedented fashion. In both their extensionality and their intentionality the transformations involved in modernity are more profound than most sorts of change characteristics of prior periods. […] But the changes occurring over the past three or four centuries – a tiny period of historical time – have been so dramatic and so comprehensive in their impact that we get only
limited assistance from our knowledge of prior periods of transition in trying to interpret them (Giddens 1990, 4-5).

Modernity is maybe so significant in history because the changes it led to had more impacts than changes in other periods of time. Giddens also underlines that the knowledge we have of other periods is of little help when trying to interpret the consequences of modernity. Modernity implies such radical changes that it is difficult to relate it to other periods. I see in this a reason why concepts are not something fixed. One of Giddens’ interesting points is that he questions the time we are living in, as many have defined as post-modernity. What is supposed to be fixed in common beliefs – that we live in post-modernity for instance – is deconstructed by Giddens. Post-modernity and home are concepts easily taken for granted. I see post-modernity and home inextricably bound to each other as they are concepts used to draw where, when and how we live. From Giddens’ thinking of modernity – it implies development but it has negative repercussions on individuals – we can come back to Wilson’s thinking that contrasts constitute one another. Things – and concepts – do not exist by themselves. Everything is, and is in relation to something else. The uncanny is what results from the familiar in relation to the unfamiliar. On the one hand, modernity is seen as positive in terms of social changes and technological development but on the other hand, it also has negative consequences for society and the human being as an individual:

On the whole, the “opportunity side” of modernity was stressed most strongly by the classical founders of sociology. Marx and Durkheim both saw the modern era as a troubled one. But each believed that the beneficent possibilities opened up by the modern era outweighed its negative characteristics. Marx saw class struggle as the source of fundamental schisms in the capitalistic order, but at the same time envisaged the emergence of a more humane social system. Durkheim believed he further expansion of industrialism would establish a harmonious and fulfilling social life, integrated through a combination of the division of labour and moral individualism. Max Weber was the most pessimistic among the three founding fathers, seeing the modern world as a paradoxical one in which material progress was obtained only at cost of an expansion of bureaucracy that crushed individual creativity and autonomy. […] To take examples, all three authors saw that modern industrial world had degrading consequences, subjecting many human beings to the discipline of dull, repetitive labour (Giddens 1990, 7-8).

Main modern sociologists observed, before Giddens, that modernity had negative consequences on human beings. They all see modernity and its ambivalent consequences: on the one side, the authority of capitalism means creativity of the individual must be regressed to obtain progress; but on the other side, Marx believed in the possibility of a better social system and Durkheim saw in industrialism a way to create a gratifying social life. Weber was
more pessimistic than Marx and Durkheim, as he could not see something truly positive for the human being coming out of modernity.

The concepts of space and time are central in modernity, as explained by Giddens:

The dynamism of modernity derives from the separation of time and space and their recombination in forms which permit the precise time-space “zoning” of social life; the disembending of social system (a phenomenon which connects closely with the factors involved in time-space separation); and the reflexing ordering and reordering of social relations in the light of continual inputs of knowledge affecting the actions of individuals and groups (Giddens 1990, 16-17).

As with Derrida and Heidegger, Giddens questions the concepts and the words portraying them. As we already mentioned the differences between modernism and modernity, it seems relevant to also dissociate post-modernism from post-modernity.

In a following book, Giddens sticks to his thinking that we are not living in a time of post-modernity but rather, in high modernity. Giddens’ Modernity and self-identity (1991) has been published only one year after The consequences of modernity. This book focuses on the self and the emergence of new mechanisms of “self-identity that are shaped by the institutions of modernity”. The author argues that “the self is not a passive entity, determined by external influences” (Giddens 1991, 2). The author sketches the contours of what he calls "high modernity"—the world of our day—and considers its ramifications for the self and self-identity. The author demonstrates how personal meaninglessness—the feeling that life has nothing worthwhile to offer—becomes a fundamental psychic problem in circumstances of high modernity:

Modern social life is characterised by profound processes of the reorganisation of time and space, coupled to the expansion of disembending mechanisms – mechanisms which prise social relations free from the hold of specific locales, recombining them across wide time-space distances. The reorganisation of time and space, plus the disembeding mechanisms, radicalise and globalise pre-established institutional traits of modernity; they act to transform the content and nature of day-to-day social life (Giddens 1991, 2).

Modernity, one should not forget, produces difference, exclusion and marginalisation (Giddens 1991, 6). The impact of industrial capitalism on public life is also described by Sennett (1977, 130) and his definition of “civility” includes an actual withdrawal from the collective society: “Civility exists when a person does not make himself a burden to others” (Sennett 1977, 269). This understanding of “civility” is opposed by Arendt, who underlined:
“Whether an activity is performed in private or in public is by no means a matter of indifference” (1958, 46). The modern development radically changed the relationships between men and between their private and public roles: “in a relatively short time the new social realm transformed all modern communities into societies of labourers and jobholders; in other words, they became at once centred around the one activity necessary to sustain life” (Arendt 1958, 46). This is what Arendt calls labour. When everyone is always concerned with the same object, to sustain life, their common world is destroyed, Arendt claims, and consequently results in “radical isolation, where nobody can any longer agree with nobody else.” Her further description is almost word for word a description of Borkman and his situation: “men have become entirely private, this is, they have been deprived of seeing and hearing others, of being seen and being heard by them. They are all imprisoned in the subjectivity of their own singular experience” (Arendt 1958, 57-58). Arendt sees the dramatic consequences of labour on society, which for her is more important for a human being than family:

For men cannot become citizens of the world as they are citizens of their countries, and social men cannot own collectively as family and household men own their private property. The rise of society brought about the simultaneous decline of the public as well as the private realm. But the eclipse of a common public world, so crucial to the formation of the lonely mass man and so dangerous in the formation of the wordless mentality of modern ideological mass movements, began with the much more tangible loss of privately owned share in the world (Arendt 1958, 257).

Understood within this context are the results of Borkman’s eager contribution to elevate modern society; both a loss of his public realm as a prisoner because of the betrayal from his close business partner, and his loss of a home as a privately owned share in the world. As an example of a common object, the construction of citizenship is also questioned in this rise of the private within (and in place of) the public. Citizenship, as evolving the existence of a public sphere and a collective identity, seems to be replaced in modernity when humans are being absorbed in their subjectivity and vital needs. In other words, they then privilege labour before work.
3.2.2 Family, the public and the private in modernity

The individual meets several dilemmas that have been emphasised by the radical changes modernity implied. I talked about the production of a common world and it seems like family as our first “social world” follows these changes.

Giddens seems sceptical of modernity and outlines its ambivalence. Even though modernity can conceptualize progress, Giddens points out that modernity also had a side effect:

Modernity, as everyone living in the closing years of the twentieth century can see, is a double-edged phenomenon. The development of modern social institutions and their worldwide spread have created vastly greater opportunities for human beings to enjoy a secure and rewarding existence than any type of pre-modern system. But modernity also has a sombre side, which has become very apparent in the present century (Giddens 1990, 7).

Sennett also gives a negative description of human relations in the modern world:

Human relations in the public world were formed according to the same rules which determined human relations in the family. These rules made little changeable details of personality into symbols; these symbols were supposed to tell everything about the character of a person, but the “data” for these symbols were always going out of focus or disappearing. The family was supposed to be a place in which people could express their personalities; but if they inflated details of family interaction into psychic symbols, they could against desire, against their will be experiencing the instability of social relations all over again (Sennett 1977, 179).

Sennett (1977) presented the sociologist P.I. Sorokin to be “the first to perceive that changes in the city in the 19th Century were linked to basic changes in the family” (177). The understanding that the “family function was a shelter, ‘a refuge’ ”(Sennett 1977, 178) was challenged. This change was also underlined by Arendt:

What concerns us in this context is the extraordinary difficulty with which we […] understand the decisive decision between the public and private realms, between the sphere of the polis and the sphere of household and family, and, finally, between activities related to a common world and those related to the maintenance of life, a division upon which all ancient political thought rested as self-evident and axiomatic (Arendt 1958, 28).

As a result: “The decisive historical fact is that modern privacy in its most relevant function, to shelter the intimate, was discovered as the opposite not of the political sphere but of the social, to which it is therefore more closely and authentically related” (Arendt 1958, 38). Arendt is careful with the terms she uses. It seems here that “modern privacy” replace
“home”. This could be a new definition of home and Arendt also associates this modern privacy to something else, namely the political sphere:

Whether a nation consists of equals or non-equals is of no great importance in this respect, for society always demands that its member act as though they were members of one enormous family which has only one opinion and one interest. Before the modern disintegration of family, this common interest and single opinion was represented by the household head who ruled in accordance with it and prevented possible disunity among the family members. The striking coincidence of the rise of society with the decline of the family indicates clearly that what actually took place was the absorption of the family unit into corresponding social groups (Arendt 1958, 40).

Instead of “home” Arendt uses the term the ‘private realm of the household’ and attaches it to “the sphere where the necessities of life, of individual survival as well as of continuity of the species, were taken care of and guaranteed” (46). This means that the home, the private realm of the household was associated with the necessities of life and the survival of the individuals and the species. In Arendt’s distinction the private realm of the household is ‘labour’ and not ‘action’, which is the condition for the existence of a public realm.

For Arendt both the private and the public realm are disintegrating. Sennett claims on the other hand that the fall of the public man involved a rise of intimacy and narcissism.

In his article «Ibsen and the Ambivalence of Modernity», Helge Rønning (1994) also explains modernity with Giddens:

Modern modes of social life are characterised by their inherent contradictions. They are marked by discontinuities and unevenness of development on different levels and within a variety of frameworks of the smaller and greater society. But more than anything the modes of modernity are dynamic (Rønning 49).

As stressed by Giddens: “The development of technologies is one of the main characterizations of modernity. This development leads to the disappearance of stability (quoted in Rønning 1994, 49)

The portrayal of bourgeois family as a loveless institution which did not fulfil the functions it ideally should, is of course a theme that Ibsen returns to time and again. Instead of being an institution of stability in an unstable society, it is being portrayed as a source of instability in itself. Instead of being a refuge from the world outside, the conflicts of the world seep through the walls of the idyllic homes. The same rules which determine human relations outside the family are at work inside it. All the characters in Ibsen’s plays who try to build homes to avoid the conflicts of the world, end up at vest disillusioned, but usually going under. (Rønning 1994, 59)
Helge Rønning points out the consequences of modernity on the human beings through Ibsen: “There is a strange ambiguity in Ibsen’s dramas in the way he on the one hand seemingly accepts his contemporary society’s self-explanations, and on the other constantly undermines them and portrays them as self-disillusions” (60). Rønning argues that Ibsen understood the changes modernity implies and highlighted their ambivalence in his way of writing and depicting characters. I find Rønning’s article relevant when it states that Ibsen was quite in advance in understanding the world around him. The power of his work is that he understood the changes modernity implied both on the individual, on the family and on society:

Ibsen’s dramas thematise the experience of what Emile Durkheim termed anomy, which signifies the absence of firm boundaries and recognizable rules of conduct. The modern individual feels a sensation of anguishing social disorientation (...). In spite of all apparent changes for the better which society undergoes and which should not be discounted for modernity is an unfinished project, there exists an underlying sense of dissatisfaction, anxiety and disintegration. (Rønning 1994, 64)

I see a certain awareness of this in Ibsen’s plays and I agree with Rønning that modernity is not something finished. However, I would argue that modernity has probably led to more general negative consequences than the opposite. Rønning pointed out that “dissatisfaction, anxiety and disintegration” float back of modernity. Focusing to John Gabriel Borkman, I see four main categories of disorders which are shame, anxiety, narcissism and manhood.

### 3.3 Shame, anxiety, narcissism and manhood in modernity

#### 3.3.1 Shame

In John Gabriel Borkman, shame seems to be quite central in understanding the play. It is referred to in dialogue as a way characters experience the world from their subjectivity. It is also latent in the sub-text – Borkman does not say he is ashamed but has closed himself off from the rest of world. Also, skamstøttet seems to be a project Gunhild is obsessed about.

Gunhild Borkman once had a public life but she is deprived of it when her husband is incarcerated after squandering public money (He 2008, 134). Her shame is associated to the

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27 This term can be discussed; this is why I write it in italic. Shame, anxiety and narcissism can be defined as “emotions” or “feelings” (terms which can also be discussed) while manhood is more a state. Manhood is constitutive to men, not to be confounded with masculinity. A woman can be masculine.
building of the house, which as a consequence of Borkman’s fraud belongs to her sister Ella. This shame of living in her sister’s house bears directly on her self-identity because it, according to Giddens, “is essentially anxiety about the adequacy of the narrative by means of which the individual sustains a coherent biography” (Giddens 1991, 65) or in other words, her fundamental illusion of her own life, her “livsøgn”. “It originates as early as guilt, since it is simulated by experiences in which feelings of inadequacy or humiliation are provoked” (Giddens 1991, 65).

Shame is not connected with the missing ability to cope with their ambitions, but “connects to difficulties individuals have in spearing out their self-identity from their original “onestess” with the caretaking agents,” as with Gunhild in her relationship with her son Erhart, “and with poorly constrained omnipotence”, as Borkman. “Lack of coherence in ideals, or the difficulty of finding worthwhile ideals to pursue” may, according to Giddens, “be as important in relation to shame anxiety as circumstances in which goals are too demanding to be attained” (Giddens 1991, 69). Like many other Ibsen characters, both Gunhild and Borkman have difficulty in finding worthwhile ideals to pursue.

### 3.3.2 Anxiety

However, Giddens (1991) also points out some positive outcomes to modernity. It creates anxiety, but responses to this anxiety lead often to innovations: “Anxiety is the natural correlate of dangers of all types. It is caused by disturbing circumstances, or their treat, but also helps mobilise adaptive responses and novel initiatives” (Giddens 1991, 13). As I wrote in chapter 2, anxiety is a way to reach “proper existence”. Heidegger claims that when the being is put in an unfamiliar situation, it creates anxiety which will bring the being into Dasein. In the same way, modernity leads to the uncanny feeling, itself created on a mode of anxiety, and anxiety allows for finding answers and leads to innovation. In other words, following Arendt, anxiety creates a common world between humans, it creates action. Modernity was also fruitful when it comes to understanding the human “mind”, notably with the birth of psychoanalysis. Something new always comes out of critical situations:

As Freud says, anxiety, in contrast to fear, ‘disregards the object’: in other words, anxiety is a generalised state of the emotions of the individual. How far anxiety will be felt in any given situation, Freud goes on to point out, depends to a large degree on a
person’s ‘knowledge and sense of power vis-à-vis the external world’ (Giddens 1991, 14).

Kierkegaard, as quoted in Giddens’ Modernity and self-identity (1991), also thinks of anxiety in positive terms. Something good comes out of it. “Anxiety in a certain sense comes with human liberty, as Kierkegaard says; freedom is not a given characteristic of the human individual, but derives from the acquisition of an ontological understanding of external reality and personal identity” (Giddens 1991, 47-48). Giddens draws on Heidegger when he claims that “Existence is a mode of being-in-the-world in Kierkegaard’s sense” (Giddens 1991, 48).

### 3.3.3 Narcissism

As I already discussed, Borkman is completely excluded from society. He was first arrested and imprisoned for many years, and then he locked himself up in the house. His human interactions are very limited. He is not contributing to the functioning of the community or society. He does not work, has no family life, no intimate life, no public life. But he used to have a public life. He was the manager of the bank, dealing with the money of his community. He used to be a leader and a powerful man, but he is now a shameful Napoleon. Borkman lost everything. His fame and reputation, the woman he loved, his wife and her trust, his money. He does not own anything anymore.

Shame is by Giddens related to narcissism:

Shame has close affiliations to narcissism, but it is a mistake, as noted earlier, to suppose that self-identity becomes increasingly narcissistic. Narcissism is one among other types of psychological mechanism – and, in some instance, pathology – which the connections between identity, shame and the reflexive project of the self bring into being (Giddens 1991, 9).

Giddens (1991, 68-69) underlines that narcissism “should not be seen as necessarily accompanied by an ideal self that is overbearing in terms of its ambitions”:

> Narcissism, Sennett says, should not be confused with the lay idea of self-admiration. As a character disorder, narcissism is a preoccupation with the self which prevents the individual from establishing valid boundaries between self and external worlds. […] Narcissism stands in opposition to the commitment required to sustain intimate relationships; commitment places restrictions on the opportunities the individual has to sample the many experiences demanded in the search for self-fulfilment (Giddens 1991, 170).

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This means that Borkman’s problem is not necessarily his understanding of himself as a Napoleon who lost his first battle. His problem is his preoccupation with his self, which prevents him from establishing valid boundaries between himself and external worlds. The expression of this problem is his self-imposed imprisonment, his exile from the world and all intimate relations.

“Narcissism depends”, Sennett claims, “on an elementary part of the psychic apparatus going into suspension” (1977, 220). This is “enlightened self-interest” or a “secondary ego function”. To some extent, a person like Borkman can form in his own mind an idea of what he wants, what serves his own interests, and he tests reality in a particular way. The suspension of ego interests has in Borkman’s case grown, as Sennett describes, “into a systematic encouragement of narcissistic absorption by centering social transactions on an obsession with motivation” (1977, 263). Borkman was an actor and a maker, but his isolation from the world where he acted has reversed his function. He is an example of what Sennett describes: “Often against our own knowledge, we are caught up in a war between the demands of social existence and the belief that we develop as human beings only through contrary modes of intimate psychic experience” (263). Borkman’s actions are contrary to what he wants to do – and has to do. Sennett describes this double conflict of narcissism as “the search for gratification of the self, which at the same time prevents that gratification from occurring” (220). Sennett’s double perspective of narcissism is also remarked on by Giddens: “Sennett discusses the rise of ‘narcissist characters disorders’ in relation to his thesis about the demise of public life. As the spheres of public activity shrink, […] the self is called on to assume tasks with which it cannot successfully cope” (Giddens 1991, 170).

3.3.4 Manhood

Shame, anxiety and narcissism have considerable consequences on characters in Ibsen. This conflict of self-recognition is not only a conflict for Borkman, but according to Chengzhou He a conflict for men in Ibsen’s drama: “Ibsen’s men both take advantage of the power rendered them by the patriarchal system, and are at the same time restricted by the prevalent concept of the manly ideal and therefore have difficulty with their self-recognition” (2008, 135). Here He points out the complexity of manhood in Ibsen. He understands this conflict as a result of the modern condition: “In 19th century Europe, the concept of masculinity is closely related to the
condition of modernity. In the era of blooming capitalism, men are drawn into a network of social relations that encourage sets of behaviors we would recognize as typically masculine” (He 2008, 136). He adds that: “Success in work becomes a predominant ideal among the bourgeois men” but he claims on the other hand: “The tension between desire for success in work and family life and fear of failure informs the crisis of masculinity among men” (He 2008, 136). Borkman had or wanted to have success in work. But Borkman did not have a very successful family life. He did not marry the woman he loved. His son was raised by another woman than his wife. He did not have a social life. He lost his job and his family. He had nothing much human left. Chengzhou He presents a series of conflicts and crises for Ibsen’s male figures: “On the one hand, the crisis of masculinity may refer to the position of men, often perceived as being undermined in relation to institutions such as work and family. On the other, the crisis of masculinity refers more precisely to men’s experience of these shifts in position” (He 2008, 136). Ibsen’s men “strive hard for success, and failure in career is considered a threat to their male self-esteem” (He 2008, 136). He points out the conflicts inherent to manhood: “While manhood offers them power, satisfaction and confidence, it can also bring with it emotional autism, emptiness and despair” (138). Manhood, as with modernity, can be seen from different angles and the awareness of both negative and positive sides allows us to understand all their ambivalence.

He (2008, 141) presents this general conflict in relation to John Gabriel Borkman: “For Borkman, love for and by a woman is dear, but not essential to his self-esteem. The necessity of power is the excuse he uses for betraying Ella”. This need to have power is also the reason for Borkman’s isolation and shame and finally his death:

His experience of being out in prison and losing power makes Borkman deeply ashamed of himself. For 8 years, he would not get out of his salon in the day for fear of meeting people. The burden of bourgeois masculinity kills him. For Borkman, to be a man one must have power over others (He 2008, 146).

The opposite position is in He’s interpretation represented by Erhart: “As a man of a new generation, he does not share the same conception of man and masculinity. He actually hates the family atmosphere both with his aunt and with his mother and father. He does not want work but have joy and happiness” (He 2008, 146).
Chengzhou He underlines the dualism of manhood, which is presented as a result of the fall of public man in modernity, the dissolution of the public realm and the private sphere by Sennett, Giddens and Arendt:

In Ibsen’s plays, public masculinity and private happiness are treated as antithetical parts of masculine identity and practice. In fact, the patriarchal society is dominated by a dualism between the public and the private on which masculinity as well as gender is often predicated. For men, it is difficult to reconcile career success and aspiration with emotional warmth and intimacy (He 2008, 146-147).

He also draws a conclusion, which underlines the theories of modernity and the changed human condition in the modern age. Men are not necessarily active and successful, but are also the victims of change, and Borkman is an obvious example:

Ibsen’s portrait of masculinity is an important source for critiquing the usual interpretation of men’s relationship to modernity, emphasizing men’s dominance and capability. Instead, men are in a complex relationship with the capitalist social and economic systems, in which they often become alienated within the capitalist mode of economic production (He 2008, 147).

He even turns the traditional understanding upside down: “Psychologically, the bourgeois men under Ibsen’s pen turn out to be not as confident, brave and autonomous as they used to appear. We are made to believe that it is perhaps men, not women, who are the more insecure and fragile sex” (He 2008, 147) – and based on this new perspective he draws a challenging conclusion:

What Ibsen dramatized so powerfully in his plays is perhaps not so much the “problem of women” as a nineteenth-century crisis of masculinity. The exposition of fragile masculinity, its hopes and its weaknesses is just as thrilling and enchanting as his dramatic representation of modern woman in his prose plays (He 2008, 148).

His conclusion can be supported by Ibsen’s words when the feminist league thanked him. He told them that he just wrote about human beings. But can we really talk about a crisis of masculinity? When were men masculine? I am not claiming that men are not masculine, but I think the problem involves a more conceptual and accurate approach.

As Andersen said that he wanted to present Gunhild and Borkman as equal forces, I believe that both man and woman have to somehow pay the price of their condition – they are both only humans. In John Gabriel Borkman the house is presented as a prison, and both Gunhild, the woman, and Borkman, the man, are trapped in the house. Gunhild seem as enclosed as Borkman. This point in Ibsen is fascinating and stresses the theories on work and private/public spheres, as there is in modernity a separation between work and house, work
being a masculine activity and house a feminine one (He 2008, 136-137). There was a clear separation of genres in modernity: males are participating in the public sphere while women were restricted to the private sphere. This separation is blurred in Ibsen. Genres are not committed to what they are supposed to be committed. And this is where Ibsen was also lucid on the sociological issues imposed by modernity.

The changes in society during modern times led to considerable changes in both the public and the private sphere. Arendt, Giddens and Sennett, major theoreticians of modernity, have already pointed out the complexity of manhood in modernity. Unlike He, I do not agree that the usual interpretation of men in modernity was one of celebration of men’s power. All the sources and references I have been using in this thesis actually claim the opposite. Manhood in modernity has been discussed and shown as much more complex than a stereotype of a perfect masculine man succeeding in all the domains of his life. As we already mentioned, talking about modernity implies defining terms and concepts. As I see it, concepts are not stable entities. In fact, concepts should be placed in their historical context to be fully understood and used as accurately as possible. On the other hand, I am aware that the stability of history itself can also be questioned. Once again, I would like to question the validity of such purposes: “Psychologically, the bourgeois men under Ibsen’s pen turn out to be not as confident, brave and autonomous as they used to appear. We are made to believe that it is perhaps men, not women, who are the more insecure and fragile sex” (He 2008, 147). When “did they use to appear” differently? I would not approach men as fragile but perhaps need to be studied from a different perspective, like home. Everything can be interpreted through different perspectives and I actually believe that one thing is a whole when it is thought of in terms of contradictions. Men are on the one side dominant and capable; on the other side they can appear fragile. On the one side, women can be weak; on the other side they can be manipulative and masculine.

Fredrik Engelstad has in his article «The defeat of failure and the failure of success gender roles and images of the male in Henrik Ibsen’s last four plays» (1994) partly supported He’s conclusion. Engelstad cites Dahlerup (1989) and points out that the emergence of the division between the public and the private sphere is one of the major aspects of the modern breakthrough:

The modern male ceased to be the unquestioned master of the family. The main relationship to his wife and children is supposed to be of love, rather than authority. At
the same time the man is expected to realize himself in his work, through an autonomous occupational career (Engelstad 1994, 391).

Engelstad, however describes John Gabriel Borkman as “obsessed by great plans he is unable to fulfil” (398):

He cannot avoid involving himself in an impossible and inauthentic project; he is the one who secretly is going to develop investment projects to secure his power for ever. He is the only one who really is able to liberate all the slumbering powers of the earth, modernize society and secure happiness for all human beings (Engelstad 1994, 398-399).

By writing on the contradictions of modernity and manhood, I tried to bring to light the ambivalence of Borkman as being just a man. Why should he be the bad one over Gunhild? I think Borkman carries the whole guilt because he is the man and the one who failed with the money but as the man, he was the only one who could actually use the money. Moreover, Gunhild did not fulfill her expectations of motherhood if we see everything as gendered. She did not raise her son, and now she is just interested in him to save the family reputation. Gunhild sees a use in men, first her husband and then her son. She was happy as long as she had an exciting social life thanks to Borkman. Women’s social life depends on men, since they are the ones who work and earn money. When Gunhild expects that of her husband, she could fulfill her woman’s role of motherhood, but she did not.

By changing the function of roles, genres became something more and more complicated to define which has a consequence on the whole structure of the family and in the relationship genres have between them. It happens that all these changes are graspable when we look at the inside of the house, questioning thus the nature of home.

3.4 Ibsen’s existential home

For all the family stories and histories they are carrying, Ibsen’s houses are unheimlich. Beyond the emotional powers related to the house, the materiality of the house is also problematic. The ownership of the house is directly discussed in John Gabriel Borkman.

Sandberg’s metaphor “The architecture of forgetting” (2015, 171) is directly about “the pillar of shame”. Perhaps the building remains and this is why Gunhild wants to raise a monument,
so that the shame she has of Borkman remains in time and so that he pays the price for his mistakes. In Ibsen’s plays we have families in houses, but not in “homes”. Why does Ibsen go on writing about families without a home?

Nora Helmer’s leap in understanding makes her doll-house space inhabitable; Rebecca West’s realization about her past makes her planned conquest of the house at Rosmersholm impossible; Hedda Gabler’s superior sensibilities make the Villa Falk a prison. With few exceptions, in Ibsen’s plays there seems to be no adequate response to modern consciousness; it simply cannot be housed. “Home” for Ibsen is the space of the preconscious subject, a space that does not expand or change readily with shifts in experience and subjectivity (Sandberg 2015, 43-44).

I keep thinking that something is not working. Why is it that these houses are unable to be homes? Why is it Erhart cannot be at home in this house? Is Erhart longing for a home at all? He needs to run away as the house and its inhabitants are actually smothering him. As we have seen it, there is the psychological and the physical home.

Can we long for something we have never experienced? Can Erhart actually long for a home when he has perhaps never had one? Is Erhart’s will to be free just a manifestation of his longing for a home and family roots, which he can connect his self to? Why does Erhart need to leave his parents to accomplish himself? Hedda killed herself in front of the portrait of her father; Rosmer has to leave the family house to free himself and die. As already mentioned earlier in the thesis, leaving a place and distancing oneself could also be a way to understand it better and being able to dwell when returning to it.

Sandberg pointed out the impossibility to talk about home in Ibsen in terms of something fixed and the theatrical issues it involves when he writes:

The question that interests him is how one goes on living in a de-familiarized home: can one do it theatrically, for instance? A follow-up question we in turn might ask of Ibsen’s drama would be: How might we best describe the kind of consciousness that puts the home permanently out of reach (Sandberg 2001, 33).

According to Sandberg, the house has become a prison where modern subjects unwillingly pressured by society are living.

From Nora’s doll’s house to the Alving’s orphanage memorial, from the Ekdals imaginary forest room to John Rosmer’s haunted portrait gallery, from Hedda Gabler’s ill-fitting villa to the master builder’s “homes for people” and John Gabriel Borkman’s upstairs apartment-prison, Ibsen visualizes the pressure on the modern subject in architectural terms (Sandberg 2001, 33-34).
Sandberg talks about the loss of home but did home ever exist? We need to have something before we lose it, it implies a prior condition. “Home” as a concept is an ideology or an illusion, a “feeling” related to the family house, the place we grow up, where we have our family life. Is it possible to ever free ourselves from the primary house? In Ibsen, the new generation – as Osvald and Erhart – have not experienced the family house as the home as it was not the place where they were raised. Erhart has been raised by his aunt, outside of his parent’s home. Osvald was also raised by someone else than his parents and outside of the parental house.

Children are, however, embodying the past of their parents. They carry in themselves a sort of debt that has not been erased even though they were raised and distanced from their parents’ house. In Ibsen, there is the father’s heritage – what could be qualified as “guilt” or “shame” – passed on to the children as they are often presented as the child of their father. Hedda is named after her father by Ibsen while she is married and called Tesman. Osvald inherits his father’s disease which will kill him. The structure of the family is rendered unfamiliar in Ibsen and this is also one of the reasons why Andersen talks about dysfunctional families. This leads to an uncanniness as being originally placed in the house.

Vidler pointed out the uncanniness of houses when he noticed that we find: “Deracinated home of post-industrial society, in the writings of critics of modernity from Gaston Bachelard to Martin Heidegger”(xi). However, we have seen how Bachelard and Heidegger do not talk about the house in the same terms at all. Starting with Heidegger, it became a question of the essence of home in modernity instead of deracinated home.

### 3.5 The symbolic of the house in Ibsen’s drama

Something uncanny belongs to houses. They have a deadly power. “Demeures”, in the sense of houses are, according to Derrida, “graves of the past”: «L'extension à l'habitation, au logement, à la résidence, à la maison, tient d'abord au temps accordé pour l'occupation d'un lieu et conduit jusqu'à la “dernière demeure” où réside le mort » (Derrida 1998, 102). The French word demeure, is mostly translated into “house” in English. The verb demeurer means to dwell and to dwell also means exister (to exist), résider (to reside), habiter (to inhabit). In
demeure we find the root of the verb *mourir* but *demeure* is mostly an old noun still in use to qualify a type of house. Therefore, this old French noun for a house perfectly fits into Ibsen’s houses. *Rosmersholm* for instance, is a house related to its deceased. In *Rosmersholm*, the portraits of the dead ancestors are hanging on the walls as if they were watching the living ones, keeping an eye on them. These portraits symbolize the oppression of old doctrines and thus prevent the minds to grow freely. The link we can make between many of Ibsen's houses reinforces the idea that they have a special meaning for our playwright. Hedda Gabler lives in the Falk Villa, which is often compared with a cage. In one way this is what Rosmersholm is, since Rosmer can't free himself from his family line. The father's portrait in *Hedda Gabler* seems to be a very important detail; it hangs in the living-room and Hedda commits suicide in front of it. Moreover, Hedda carries her father's name even though she is married and thus officially carries her husband's name, Tesman. The dead general's authority still affects the living daughter who soon freely decides to die to escape the life she does not fit in. Rosenvold in *Ghosts* is all about fake dignity and chamberlain Alving's hidden depravity. As mentioned already, children have to sustain their parents’ past, from their father's side to be more precise.

The uncanniness of Ibsen’s houses has been underlined with Marinette Grimbeek’s master’s thesis “Home for Human Beings”. There, she connects the house to the impossibility to host the self. Pessimism and uncanniness are to be found in the houses and the rooms of Ibsen’s writing as a response to the outside world:

In Ibsen’s prose dramas (the twelve plays from *Pillars of society* (1877) to *When we dead awaken* (1899)) he uses the framework developed with the conventional box-stage as a structural element (Nygaard 1992:170). This stage set-up becomes a necessity in the staging of his plays, rather than a restriction imposed on the action by practical concerns. Nygaard emphasizes that “the modern box-stage was the ideal frame to symbolize and distinguish modern individuals in the modern situation: they have retreated and have shut themselves off from the complicated world out there (1997:85) and additionally emphasizes that Ibsen did not try to give an accurate representation of the cluttered bourgeois home of this time on stage, but instead emptied the stage and concentrated on a few people and positions (1992:168,170) (in Grimbeek 2007, 42).

This is the same idea Jean-Pierre Sarrazac (1989) generally expresses in his book *Théâtres Intimes* «Dans les pièces d'Ibsen, malheurs et malédictions sont d'emblée installés dans la maison, au coeur de l'espace intime» (Sarrazac 1989, 20). In other words, the curse is set in the house, at the heart of the intimate space. Derrida claims that the extension of the

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29 To die in French
habitation, to the lodging, to the residency, to the house remains in the time accorded to the occupation of a place and leads to the “last demeure” where the dead resides. As said earlier, according to Gaston Bachelard (1994), the house is supposed to be a comforting space, which makes it a home. But the Ibsenian house appears as nothing but comforting. In La poétique de l’espace Bachelard (1994) discussed the protection provided by the home and wrote «si l’on nous demandait le bienfait le plus précieux de la maison, nous dirions : la maison abrite la rêverie, la maison protège le rêveur, la maison nous permet de rêver en paix» (26). The house protects the dreamer and allows him to dream in peace but in Ibsen, houses appear as nightmares.

Drawing on Derrida’s theory on demeure, Mark Sandberg points out in "The Architecture of Forgetting" (2007, 6) that places we inhabit can never truly be ours because they have a past. They had inhabitants before us and will most likely have others after us. This is why our feeling of being at home in the world is always complex and endangered. Sandberg follows Vidler and understands it as one of the consequences of modernity and the impossibility of the soul to be housed: “Modernity’s perceived substitution of houses for traditional home; nearly every play deploys a contrast between ‘house’ and ‘home’ by juxtaposing modern existence with its imagined origins” (Sandberg 2007, 6). I see it as the whole contraction that makes house a perfect example of uncanniness: we are endlessly trying to make ours places that will never completely belong to us.

On this point, Bachelard gives a positive association to the house. In fact, he writes that it is through the house that the thoughts and memories of human beings can be integrated. House is the incorporation of our dreams. The past, present and the future time provide the house with different dynamic forces. Without the house in his life, the human would be a dissipated being. The house is body and soul. It is the first world of the human being. “Avant d’être «jeté au monde » comme le professent les métaphysiques rapides, l’homme est déposé dans le berceau de la maison”. The native house is physically inscribed in us. It goes beyond the memory. «Elle est un groupe d’habitudes organiques» (Bachelard 1994, 26). Bachelard argues that the original house is constitutive to our being : «A vingt ans d’intervalles, malgré tous les escaliers anonymes, nous retrouverions les réflexes du ‘ premier escalier’, nous ne buterions

30 Dwelling place

31 See precisely the chapters «La maison. De la cave au grenier» and «Maison et Univers»
pas sur telle marche un peu haute. Tout l’être de la maison de déploierait, fidèle à notre être» (32). The house would definitely remain in us but as a securing feeling. «La maison est un corps d’images qui donnent à l’homme des raisons ou des illusions de stabilité. Sans cesse on imagine sa réalité : distinguer toutes ces images serait dire l’âme de la maison ; ce serait développer une véritable psychologie de la maison» (Bachelard 34). The house is constituted of different images and it procures illusions of stability. We always dream up its reality. To discern all these images would be to develop a “psychology of the house”. «Toute grande image simple est révélatrice d’un état d’âme. La maison, plus encore que le paysage, est “un état d’âme”. Même reproduite dans son aspect extérieur, elle dit une intimité» (Bachelard 77). The house is developed as a state of mind more than a landscape. Even when reproduced in her external aspect, the house reveals some intimacy.

By extension, the project of the pillar of shame can appear as a way for Gunhild to integrate her shame of Borkman. As with Borkman, she lives in her reality. The house has powerful connotations to human beings. This is not a random place as it is constitutive of people’s lives. Whether it is associated to negative or positive feelings, it is always a space of integration.

To sum up this last chapter, it appears that anxiety is maybe the most positive outcome of modernity. According to psychoanalysis, sociology and philosophy, first experienced as unfamiliar, anxiety leads to a better comprehension of the world as it gives the human beings the ability to find solutions.
Conclusion

Dans ce drame de la géométrie intime, où faut-il habiter ?
- Gaston Bachelard, *La poétique de l’espace*

The topic of the thesis has been the relation between the concepts ‘house’ and ‘home’ in Ibsen’s drama. My starting point has been Mark Sandberg’s research works on house and home in Ibsen (2001, 2007) and his recent book *Ibsen’s houses* (2015). Sandberg develops the opposition house/home in Ibsen’s work through an interpretation of Ibsen’s dramas in an architectural perspective and explains the relation between architecture and individual as such: “Ibsen is obviously and famously pessimistic about the compatibility of free individuals and architectural structure – that is the reason for all the emphatic dramatic exits, the eternal travellers, and the cornered suicides in his plays” (2007, 5).

Sandberg’s work on house and home in Ibsen has been a great source of inspiration in writing this thesis. I agree with Sandberg in a lot of points, but he explains the contrast between house and home with Freud’s concept *uncanny*. I depart from him by questioning the validity of home through the philosophy of Heidegger and Derrida.

Unlike Sandberg, who only reads the architectural perspective in relation to Ibsen’s drama, I have chosen to study a contemporary theatre performance because I wanted to focus on the concept of house and home in Ibsen from a performance perspective. I studied the relation between the concepts ‘house’ and ‘home’ in *John Gabriel Borkman* based on Anders T. Andersen’s performance of *John Gabriel Borkman* at Teater Ibsen - because the stage design and the use of the space in this production created a clear impression that the house was no home, in the common sense of home as a familiar and comforting space.

By using Heidegger in the study of the performance I wanted to examine the relevance of Heidegger’s philosophy in the study of performances based on Ibsen’s work. In doing so I have followed the principles in Anette Størli Andersen’s master’s thesis (2005) where she applied Heidegger’s philosophy in a study of Robert Wilson’s production of *Peer Gynt*. She did not claim that Heidegger influenced Wilson, but she saw a relevant connection between

In the first part of my thesis, I have supported my claim that Ibsen's works have an existential dimension on the house/home concepts. By using Anthony Vidler (1992), Sandberg and articles (2001, 2007 and 2015) as well as Mark Wigley (1993) and I developed Uncanniness - *das Unheimliche* - in Heidegger’s philosophy, which is the basic kind of Being-in-the-world.

In the second part, I explained by Heidegger why Anders T. Andersen was provoked by Ostermeier’s version of *John Gabriel Borkman*. Andersen found that Ostermeier had no subtext – or in other words – no existential dimension. I then developed why I was intrigued by Andersen’s production because it had an existential perspective on the home/house-relation. Although originally a Freudian concept, I have applied Heidegger's concept of the uncanny (*heimlich/unheimlich*) in a metaphysical perspective with the couple Heidegger and Derrida. I have described how Anders T. Andersen’s *John Gabriel Borkman* production was structurally similar to Heidegger’s concept of *das Unheimliche*. Anders T. Andersen did not work on the house versus home consciously and the similarity to Heidegger’s concept was not a result of Anders T. Andersen’s reading of the play *John Gabriel Borkman*, but a result of the structure of modernity.

In the third and last part, I examined the main changes in modernity and late modernity on the house and home concept based on Richard Sennett, Anthony Giddens and Hannah Arendt. One of the main changes affecting the construction of genres, I developed an interest for the “problematic of manhood” in *John Gabriel Borkman* in a sub-part based on Fredrik Engelstad (1994) and Chengzhou He (2008).

I have argued in my thesis that we can have Ibsen to survive through the house and home concept as it is not something fixed. This means an updating of Ibsen, which further implies a change in the text structure. This is what Andersen did with his production of *John Gabriel Borkman*. 
I have been questioning myself about the relation between house and home since it is present in all of Ibsen’s texts and always appear as an opposition. During my research and writing process, I got more acquainted with Derrida, Heidegger and Arendt’s philosophy and suddenly I started to question my own thinking: Did home ever exist at all? What I took for granted from the beginning turned out to be more complicated than it seemed. I think we have to ask ourselves about the nature of “home” in order to not be lacking a piece of the puzzle to understand Ibsen’s work. If we do not see nor question this distinction between house and home, how can this possibly be staged? Are not we dropping the main setting of Ibsen’s plays, and Ibsen’s existential dimension if we drop the treatment of the house?

The relation between house and home has been discussed thorough the thesis, not as a fixed concept but as links between several domains of research together, such as philosophy, literature, sociology and medicine. Ibsen's characters are oppressed by the society, morality and ethic, and are not at home in their own houses but thrown in the situation where they are faced with the world. As I understand, the house is a place to understand the self – through the uncanny. The house represents a necessary stage for the self to integrate the world.

Referring to Jean-Jacques Rousseau, Hannah Arendt (1958, 39) writes that: “The modern individual and his endless conflicts, his inability either to be at home in society or to live outside it altogether, his ever-changing moods and the radical subjectivism of his emotional life, was born in this rebellion of the heart.” Arendt points out that the modern being never feels familiar in society but cannot live outside of a society at the same time. This is the whole paradox of human beings. We have to adjust to the society, create laws and restrain the individual’s freedom but on the other hand, living outside the society is rendered almost impossible since the individual needs other individual to function as a group. We need a group of other individuals to survive at work, in the family.

Ibsen's fundamental questions about society and human beings are still actual in today's society and this is why I think that Ibsen's theater needs to be read with contemporary eyes through the house and home concept. In Andersen’s production, I experience that the essence of Ibsen's text is not changed. Rather, this is the way of staging that has changed with time and the issues of contemporary society.
Andersen made a clever choice when he modernized the text to make it accessible to a contemporary audience. The changes in society have to be integrated if we want to make Ibsen “our contemporary” and discuss his relevance today. We cannot base our comprehension of the actual world on a definition of home in the 19th century. The big changes in society have an impact on human beings and this is what Ibsen tells us in a poetic way. House and home reveals an existential dimension in Ibsen’s plays.

Andersen’s John Gabriel Borkman does not escape the question of house and home in Ibsen’s work but uses a particular way, a materialistic solution to treat it and bring new meaning by the same time.

Anders T. Andersen’s production of John Gabriel Borkman is a good example of how a modern staging can highlight Ibsen's text in a western contemporary production. It is not purely about illustrating a text, it also about giving an understanding of it through a contemporary reading.
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