

## UNPACKING THE FLAT-PACK

The first flat-pack, or ready-to-assemble furniture, was launched by IKEA in 1956. Flat-packs have the advantage to be easy to transport and save on storage costs. They are simple to assemble with the use of basic tools and are typically packaged in a kit form, which contains flat parts, fasteners, screws, fixings and an instruction manual. Selling flat-pack furniture is a cost effective method of conducting business. IKEA has known an exponential world-wide growth since the 1970s. But two of its three largest stores are still to be found in Sweden where it has become a cultural as well as a functional form of inhabiting.

In his essay, *Building Dwelling Thinking*, Heidegger, maintaining *It is language that tell us about the nature of things*, looks back on the use of the word *building* and find that it really meant *dwelling*, and dwelling is what being human is about; humans *are* by dwelling. Thus building is directly related to what it is to be human. Heidegger has much to say about what he calls the Age of Technology and the state of 'harassed unrest' we live in. Writing in 1950s Germany, Heidegger asserts that the *real plight of dwelling* is not the housing shortage but that mortals *must ever learn to dwell*.

The shelter deep in the Scandinavian woods strongly resonates with our longing for an authentic way of life in harmony with nature. As the technology driven modernist's dream has turned to dystopia, we seek once more our salvation in a search for origin and an idealized relationship with nature. Turning away from the mass-produced objects of modern technology, we prefer the assumed authenticity and uniqueness of the handmade craft. The flat-pack *Build Your Own: Scandinavian Loneliness*, teases and plays on these aspirations; satisfying them on the one hand, to better frustrate on the other. The functionality of the flat-pack is turned

into an existential meditation on the meaning of happiness. It is an art object with its promise of uniqueness and yet it imitates the mass-produced ready-to-assemble furniture. The irregularity of twigs is harnessed to the uniformity of the series pointing to the constructed nature of our projections. (de)constructing with scissors and glue our desire for an organic wholeness. Of course the possibility that, as the 7 billionth human being just clocked in, loneliness could quickly become a very sought after commodity, cannot be dismissed either. Loneliness might well just be the new Happiness.

The Stockholm Exhibition in 1930 had a lasting influence on the Swedish Welfare State. Its promotion of modernity, functionalism and technology underpinned the social, political and economic program on which was based Swedish urban planning. In their manifesto *Acceptera*, the architects conceived housing as instrumental in the making of a just and functional society; a social well being between the individual and the collective: *The problem in our times can be stated as: quantity and quality, the mass and the individual. It is necessary to solve this problem in building-art and industrial art.*

Martin Heidegger, *Poetry, Language, Thought*, translator Albert Hofstadter, London: HarperCollins, 1975. Alberto Moreiras, *Harassed Unrest. Notes on Heidegger's Building Dwelling Thinking*.

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*Modern Swedish Design: Three funding Texts*, Lucy Creagh, Helena Kaberg, Kenneth Frampton, Barbara Miller Lane, New York: The Museum of Modern Art, 2008.